

EDUCATION WORKFORCE COUNCIL (EWC) RESPONSE TO THE CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE'S CONSULTATION: WELSH GOVERNMENT'S PROGRESS IN DEVELOPING THE NEW CURRICULUM FOR WALES

About the Education Workforce Council (EWC)

1. The Education Workforce Council (EWC) is the independent regulator in Wales for teachers in maintained schools, Further Education teachers and learning support staff in both school and FE settings, as well as youth workers and people involved in work-based learning.

The principal aims of Council are to:

- contribute to improving the standards of teaching and the quality of learning in Wales;
 - maintain and improve standards of professional conduct amongst teachers and those who support teaching and learning in Wales;
 - safeguard the interests of learners, parents and the public and maintain public trust and confidence in the education workforce.
2. This submission complements evidence previously submitted to the Children, Young People and Education Committee's review of curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales: Implementation (2016)

The role of Pioneer Schools and any opportunities and challenges in their involvement in curriculum design;

3. Research being conducted by **WISERD**¹ (2018) highlights some very positive experiences from pioneer school teachers regarding their involvement in curriculum development, however early discussions undertaken with staff have shown that there were some concerns e.g. around time, removal of high quality teachers from the classroom, and cost of supporting cover for teachers to attend meetings etc. There has also been some concern that the input of key stakeholders is being omitted from the process e.g. pupils, parents, HE subject specialists and business stakeholders. Implementation costs were also a key area of concern, particularly around the Digital Competency Framework which has a pivotal role in the development of the new curriculum.
4. Given that workload was one of the key concerns highlighted via the National Education Workforce Survey² in particular for teachers (78.1% of school teacher respondents and 61.8% of FE teacher respondents found this to be the least rewarding aspect of their job) it is important to ensure that curriculum development activity does not further impinge upon the workload of staff as the development activity gains impetus. Sufficient time needs to be allocated to practitioners to enable them to fully participate in development work in order that it does not impact negatively on learners or their work-life balance.

¹WISERD (June 2018): Pioneers voice their hopes and fears for the new Curriculum for Wales, WISERD (June 2018). Online, available from: <https://wiserd.ac.uk/news/pioneers-voice-their-hopes-and-fears-new-curriculum-wales>

² EWC National Education Workforce Survey, 2017: Available from www.ewc.wales

How the development of the new Curriculum for Wales is aligning with the development of the new national professional learning offer for teachers;

5. The Cabinet Secretary for Education's recent statement³ outlines Welsh Government's commitment to investing significant financial resources into supporting practitioner development. The sum of £24 million, earmarked for the professional learning of both teachers and learning support staff, is being split over two years (£9 million to be distributed via the regional consortia in the first year and £15 million in the second year to be distributed via the local authorities), however, at the present time, it is not clear what the professional learning offer will look like in practice. Such a significant investment, whilst welcomed in principle, if it were to be looked on a per capita basis, this raises questions about whether this is sufficient investment to have a tangible impact. Equally, the fact that this is only a pledge of funding for two years, creates concerns around sustainability.
6. The significant investment in professional learning requires sufficient oversight to ensure stakeholders can be confident that this money is being utilised to best effect, particularly given the increasing funding pressures schools and local authorities are facing. There needs to be sufficient external scrutiny, clear key performance indicators, quality assurance of consortia provision and evaluation of impact. There also needs to be guidelines in place to ensure that money is spent appropriately and that there is a consistent, equitable approach across all consortia areas. With all funded provision delivered by the consortia, there is an inherent danger that professional development offering will become internalised with lost opportunities to learn from outside.
7. Council would also like to see a more holistic approach to developing the education workforce as a whole. Welsh Government afforded additional legislative powers to the Education Workforce Council which means that Wales is in a unique position of having a range of education practitioners all under one regulatory framework, including those in work-based learning, FE, and youth work. Wales now has one of the most comprehensive registers of education practitioners in the world, yet there is concern that opportunities to raise standards across the whole spectrum of education practitioners are being missed. Whilst it is appreciated that that teachers and learning support staff in schools make up the main part of the Register, there are other individuals supporting learners who will be both directly and indirectly involved in the curriculum journey and there needs to be equity in the system to ensure a cohesive and responsive workforce.
8. It is important that Wales learns lessons from previous education reform activity, e.g. the foundation phase in Wales. The 2014 independent report⁴ on the foundation phase found that successful implementation 'relies on all the key players (including head and lead teachers/practitioners, class teachers, teaching assistants, nursery staff, governors, committee members, advisors and inspectors (p.21)).
9. It is recognised that the new suite of professional standards aims to align the expectations of professional learning with the requirements of the new curriculum, but this requires more than financial investment, it also requires a cultural shift with clear, consistent messages coming from Welsh Government about what the expectations are. This is not something which can change overnight and requires sustained activity. The number of learning support assistants in the education workforce in Wales is almost on a par with the numbers of teachers (As at 1 March 2018 35,576 school teachers, 32,662 schools learning support workers), yet the professional standards for this group are currently only at the pilot stage, and have not yet progressed through the formal Welsh Government consultation process. The expectations on this group in terms of professional development and learning are therefore lagging behind.

³ Kirsty Williams, Plenary 13 November 2018 <http://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/5363#A46717>

⁴ Welsh Government: An independent stocktake of the Foundation Phase in Wales – Final report. 2014

Communication with schools and teachers of the curriculum development work being undertaken and the engagement of all schools (not only Pioneer Schools);

10. We know that there is variation between schools in terms of their preparedness for the new curriculum, and this is largely linked to the weakness in the pioneer school model. A recent Estyn report⁵, for example, highlights that some schools made only tentative steps in developing the curriculum as they are awaiting definitive guidance from Welsh Government before committing to deep-rooted change (p.10). Their report illustrated that schools were at very different stages in the curriculum development journey (p.15). It is imperative that where slow progress is being made, that there is sufficient support to move these schools in the right direction and to get them on board with the process.

The preparedness of schools and teachers for delivering the new curriculum and to what extent the concepts of Professor Donaldson's *Successful Futures* review are being tested and carried out already;

11. There is evidence from the National Education Workforce Survey⁶, that some education practitioners were more familiar with the content and recommendations in Professor Donaldson's report 'Successful Futures' than others. Given the timeframes for implementation, it is of concern that 38.6% of school teacher respondents to the survey felt they were 'not very', or 'not at all' familiar with this. Within the supply sector, there was even less familiarity with Donaldson's report with 71.1% of supply teachers respondents indicating they were 'not very' or 'not at all' familiar with the content and recommendations contained within.
12. The supply workforce in Wales constitutes a sizeable proportion of the overall teaching workforce. Data held of the register of education practitioners as at 1 March 2018 indicate that there are more than 4,800 school teachers working on a supply basis which constitutes approximately 14% of all school teachers on the register. It is of paramount importance that the supply workforce is factored in to the communications strategy, professional development offering and developmental work around the curriculum.
13. Evidence from the National Education Workforce Survey⁷ 2017 suggests that education practitioners would value more professional development opportunities around curriculum content and design, which suggests this is either an area where practitioners have not had sufficient support, or because it has recently become a new priority:
 - 35.2% of school teachers who responded to the survey said they would welcome development around curriculum content and design;
 - 39.1% of school supply teachers who responded to the survey said that would welcome development in curriculum content and design;
 - 27.6% of FE teachers who responded to the survey said that they would welcome development around curriculum content and design.
14. It is recognised that following on from previous concerns around the sufficiency of communications about the progress of the new curriculum amongst key stakeholders, efforts have doubled in terms of making improvements in this area e.g. via the curriculum for Wales blog. It is not clear how communications are being targeted at those practitioners in education related roles who are supporting schools to ensure a joined up approach.

⁵ Estyn (May 2018): Curriculum Innovation in Primary Schools. Available from:

<https://www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/default/files/documents/Curriculum%20innovation%20in%20primary%20schools%20-%20en.pdf>

⁶ ibid

⁷ ibid

The steps being taken to ensure that the new Curriculum for Wales complements other Welsh Government priorities, including (but not restricted to) Cymraeg 2050;

15. The scale of curriculum reform in Wales is deliberately bold and ambitious, but there are also a number of parallel reforms being implemented which are having a significant impact upon the education workforce. Wales needs to learn from the experiences of curriculum reform in Scotland. The curriculum reform journey in Scotland has not been a smooth journey, and it must be noted that their reform agenda was less ambitious than the approach being taken in Wales.
16. The register of education practitioners holds valuable information about the Welsh language ability of the education workforce. As at 1 March 2018, 33.3% of registered school teachers indicated that they were Welsh speakers. Whilst this is higher than the general population according to census data, this figure has remained relatively static over several years. In terms of school teachers able to teach through the medium of Welsh, 27.3% have this ability. Again, this figure has shown negligible change over several years despite efforts to upskill the workforce in this area (e.g. via sabbatical schemes, etc.). In order to meet the need for increased demand for Welsh language education provision, there needs to be a clear and focused strategy to ensure there is a sufficient supply of teachers with these skills.
17. It is recognised that there are explicit references to developing Welsh language ability in the new professional standards, but whilst this may act as a lever, there needs to be a range of accessible, cost effective professional development opportunities available to all individuals supporting learners. It must also be considered that there are costs involved in releasing staff from their role, which may present a barrier. The impact on the learner also needs to be considered since releasing staff from their educational setting may have continuity implications.
18. Welsh Government have recently afforded the EWC additional powers to accredit programmes of Initial Teacher Education (ITE). From September 2019, all ITE programmes in Wales will need to be accredited by the EWC. The criteria for ITE⁸ make explicit reference to developing new teachers' understanding of the curriculum including curriculum design and planning. This represents a very positive step which will ensure new teachers entering the workforce are equipped with the skills and knowledge required in this area. Cognisance needs to be given, however, to the fact that existing education practitioners and those responsible for coordinating and overseeing the implementation will have limited experience in curriculum design. It is important therefore that there are suitable development opportunities available and that the impact of the training/development is evaluated to ensure it remains fit for purpose. It is not clear where the expertise is coming from to develop knowledge of curriculum design, given that it is an entirely new approach.
19. Trend data⁹ for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) illustrate that the supply of new teachers is dropping year on year. This is further compounded by the fact that centres are not recruiting to target. A total of 1,910 students successfully completed their programme in 2002/03, compared with 1,033 in 2016/17 which constitutes a fall of 45.9%. Whilst recruitment targets were adjusted in line with a previous oversupply in the system following on from the 'Review of initial teacher training provision in Wales' report¹⁰ (2006), it is important to ensure that there remains a sufficient supply particularly in relation to certain subjects where traditionally it has been difficult to recruit to target. It is becoming difficult to meet ITE targets for Welsh language, for example, which will impact on numbers coming through the system with highly developed Welsh

⁸ Welsh Government (2018) Criteria for the accreditation of initial teacher education programmes in Wales: Teaching tomorrow's teachers <https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-09/criteria-for-the-accreditation-of-initial-teacher-education-programmes-in-wales.pdf>

⁹ EWC: ITET student results (Wales) academic year 2016-2017 (5 year trend). Available from: <https://www.ewc.wales/site/index.php/en/policy-hub/statistics-archive.html>

¹⁰ Furlong, J; Hagger, H and Butcher, C. (2006). Review of Initial Teacher Training Provision in Wales A Report to the Welsh Assembly Government University of Oxford.

language skills. Teaching is competing with other professions for high calibre graduates with Welsh language skills, and often other professions can offer more attractive salaries and reward packages. Whilst attempts are being made to build Welsh language capacity within the existing workforce via various initiatives, it will still need to be complemented with new entrants with sufficient language skills.

20. As the ITE system builds the foundations for new teachers to develop a better understanding of curriculum design, the role of the National Academy for Educational Leadership will be vital in ensuring that existing and future education leaders in Wales are sufficiently equipped to support their staff in meeting the challenges of the new curriculum.
21. The Digital Competence Framework (DCF) aims to underpin the new curriculum, however recent evidence from Estyn¹¹, suggests that some leaders are unsure of when the DCF should be implemented, due to there being no explicit realisation date which ‘...suggests to some that it will be introduced at the same time as the new curriculum, six years after the DCF was first made available. As a result the DCF could lose impetus’ (p.3). The report also expressed a specific concern in relation to secondary schools in that too few digital leads have mapped the provision of the DCF across KS4 (p.15). This means that they are not currently in a position to fully realise the DCF. It is vitally important the systems and frameworks that aim to underpin and support curriculum development are moving at the same pace.

Any other issue stakeholders wish to draw to the Committee’s attention.

22. Wales is keen to develop schools as learning organisations as this is seen to be pivotal in ensuring that they can be responsive to the changing educational landscape and supporting the development of the new curriculum. A recent report by the OECD¹², however, suggests that whilst significant progress has been made by the majority of schools, ‘a considerable proportion of schools are still far removed from realising this objective’. It also suggests that secondary schools are finding it more challenging to develop as learning organisations. The fact that there is variability in the system creates challenges.
23. Much of the activity over recent years in the area of education policy has tended to be very school-centric, yet the education workforce responsible for delivering the curriculum encompasses groups beyond schools. The Education Workforce Council currently has over 1,000 registrants in the youth work sector and more than 2,600 in the work-based learning sector. There are also 2,554 FE learning support workers and 5,844 FE teachers registered with the EWC (as at 1 March 2018).
24. Whilst much of the curriculum development work is being driven by the pioneer schools, it is important to recognise that there is also good practice to be seen outside the pioneer schools. It is of paramount importance to ensure that there is a mechanism to ensure that good practice is identified and that it is easily accessible.
25. Whilst the impending curriculum changes are lauded as a revolution in the way education is delivered in Wales, it will inevitably invite intense scrutiny from key stakeholders, with a need to get it right. Whilst it appears that much work has gone in to the development of the curriculum itself, it is not clear what work has gone in to systematically documenting the ongoing development activity and planning for future evaluation of the curriculum reform process.

¹¹ Estyn (2018) Preparing for the Digital Competence Framework (DCF) Available from: <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports/preparing-digital-competence-framework-dcf>

¹² OECD (2018) Developing Schools as learning organisations in Wales. Available from: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/developing-schools-as-learning-organisations-in-wales_9789264307193-en

26. The political timetable could also have an impact on curriculum reform matters and it is important that there remains a focus on pressing ahead and maintaining momentum throughout this period in order that impetus is not lost.