

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymchwiliad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg i weithredu diwygiadau addysg](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee inquiry into Implementation of education reforms](#)

IER 22

Ymateb gan:

**Response from: Centre for Education Policy Review and Analysis (CEPRA),
University of Wales Trinity Saint David**

Nodwch eich barn mewn perthynas â chylch gorchwyl yr ymchwiliad. | Record your views against the inquiry's terms of reference.

The Centre for Education Policy Review and Analysis (CEPRA) provides a platform for debate and analysis in the field of education policy and was established by Yr Athrofa: Centre for Education, University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD), in August 2018 to support effective policymaking in the Welsh context. The evidence presented below is informed by our extensive work in this area, and is, we believe, reflective of the views of many key partners in the school, college and university sectors.

1. The variation in implementation of *Curriculum for Wales* (CfW) across the country is concerning. Notwithstanding the phased introduction of CfW in different settings, evidence suggests implementation has been patchy, with Estyn's *HMCI Annual Report 2021-22*, the *Independent Review of Leadership* (2022) and the Welsh Government's *Practitioner Survey on Preparations for Curriculum and Assessment Reforms 2022* all warning of inconsistencies in curriculum adoption. These concerns reflect what we have seen/heard during our extensive work with schools on various projects, including e.g. those related to curriculum design/learner progression, initial teacher education (ITE) and professional enquiry/school-based research.
2. This variation appears to stem, at least in part, from a lack of understanding of a) CfW guiding principles and ethos, and b) the practical application of CfW (i.e. curriculum-making). Wales' regional education consortia/local authorities have been designated responsibility for supporting schools/teachers in CfW delivery, but professional learning offers have been inconsistent and of variable quality. A

national professional learning programme has only recently (in late 2022) been made available to all in Wales, albeit it is not clear how and on what evidence this programme was devised (curriculum-making is a contested space, and there is no one preferred approach being championed in Wales). In its recent report on regional consortia/local authorities' support for schools, Estyn (2022) noted insufficient evaluation of professional learning and a lack of 'clear enough success criteria' as hampering early progress.

3. The introduction of CfW marks a sea change in the way teaching and learning happens in Wales' schools, and 'from passive consumers teachers will need to become proactive producers of curriculum content' (Evans, 2021a). This transition should not be underestimated, and will require significant professional development on the part of teachers, whose agentic capacity to develop bespoke pedagogic approaches has been stymied by a more prescriptive national curriculum dating back three decades. Equally important is the time and space necessary for teachers to undergo this professional transformation; teachers should, for example, be afforded ringfenced time to engage in reflective practice and explore the efficacy of the existing research evidence-base. This, on top of the day-to-day operation of schools and settings, brings with it significant funding implications and it is important additional monies designed to free up teachers from activities unrelated to teaching and learning find their way into school budgets. As Stenhouse (1975) argued in a well-known slogan: 'No curriculum change [is possible] without teacher change'.

4. It is widely accepted that creating and implementing curriculum change 'is not an easy task, even for teacher advocates who appreciate and support the change' and that 'part of the problem is that most teachers teach alone in isolated classes without having (or taking) the opportunity to reflect together on their teaching practices' (Handelzalts et al. 2019). Collaboration, particularly at a school cluster level, appears central to the development of more localised curricula that are both coherent and offer a diverse range of learning experiences for learners from all backgrounds. As with professional learning, noted above, the extent to which *all* schools and settings in Wales are engaged in collaborative cluster working is not clear. From our experience of working with schools, there appears to be wide variation in the capacity and willingness of clusters to co-develop new working practices; there are many examples of strong collaborative practices, in which co-construction is necessarily deep and meaningful, yet so too are there instances in which primary and secondary schools have had little or no interaction with one

another. In our view, a more rigorous mechanism for ensuring communication within and between schools should be explored and adopted, so as to ensure a clear line of sight across the compulsory school age range. In many cases, regional consortia/local authorities have helped to broker relationships, though this is not happening routinely across the piece.

5. The professional learning available to schools is vast, and it is difficult for schools to know what to trust and what works. To ensure greater consistency across the system, the Welsh Government should consider how best to validate professional learning materials/resources, so as to build confidence in schools that CfW is being implemented with fidelity to the broader curriculum vision. The National Professional Learning Entitlement, unveiled in summer 2022, made reference to three new levels of validation: accredited, endorsed and recognised. It is not clear, however, how professional learning 'will be recognised within the education profession across Wales' (Welsh Government, 2022) without an effective and trusted kitemarking system. This needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. In addition, we would recommend that differentiated support, for teachers and support staff at various stages in their careers, be considered (and kitemarked) in order to meet all professional learning needs.
6. The potential for variation and/or contradiction in what children and young people learn, dependent on where they live and study in Wales, should be fully explored – and with it, the notion of a 'core curriculum' involving so-called 'powerful knowledge' (Young, 2009) to which all pupils should be given introduction as a matter of course. The balance between prescription and teacher agency is finely trodden, and the flexibility afforded by broad expectations for learning both a gift and a burden (Sinnema et al. 2020). At very least, practitioners require clearer direction as to what leeway they will be afforded when selecting preferred curriculum content and schemes of working. At the moment, these significant decisions are very much open to individual interpretation – and discussion should be had regarding the extent to which pupils will be allowed to learn different things, and to what end.
7. The future of qualifications in Wales – specifically those related to GCSEs and A-levels – remains largely undecided and can be considered an ongoing hindrance to curriculum development, particularly at secondary and college level (secondary teachers and college lecturers being unable to plan effectively their class and

school/college-level curricula, without clarity over how their learners will be assessed at 16 and 18). Particularly relevant in this context is the experience of Scotland, whose curriculum (similar to CfW in design and conceptualisation) has been severely hampered by the 'backwash' from the secondary stage into primary schools, where *'concerns about readiness for subject choice and examination success' have shaped parents' and teachers' perception of what learners should be doing earlier in their education (OECD, 2021)*. The Welsh Government, in collaboration with Qualifications Wales and WJEC, need to make clear their intentions with regards qualifications as a matter of urgency.

8. The funding needed to resource and successfully implement the new curriculum is significant. A report published in 2021 estimated that developing the new curriculum had cost the Welsh Government £159m between 2015-16 and 2020-21 (Audit Wales, 2022). The report anticipated further direct costs of £198.5m between 2021-22 and 2030-31, and identified as a risk 'financial and workforce pressures that could affect schools' ability to realise a high-quality new curriculum'. Given ongoing financial pressures and well-documented strain on the public purse, we call on the Welsh Government to reconsider existing funding allocations and the potential for direct-funding of schools to ensure effective curriculum delivery. The findings of a major review into school spending in Wales (Sibieta, 2020), particularly in relation to the efficacy of the existing local government funding formula, should be revisited in this context.

9. The Welsh Government appears confident that the new CfW will contribute to a narrowing of the long-held and stubbornly fixed attainment gap between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and their more affluent peers (Welsh Government, 2021). Closing the gap remains a key educational priority for the Welsh Government and its education minister (Welsh Government, 2023). However, there remains considerable concern that adoption of a new prescription-lite curriculum that encourages the development of more localised curricula could in fact contribute to a *widening* of the attainment gap, and limit the opportunities some children have to learn new knowledge and skills (BBC Wales, 2019; Taylor et al. 2020; Evans, 2021b). The Welsh Government needs to make clear how it intends to mitigate against the potential for increased subsidiarity to impact negatively on certain cohorts.

10. Changes to the way pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) will be supported, via the introduction of the new Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, are to be welcomed and we would support moves to individualise pupil development plans. These changes are in keeping with the learner-centric approach of the new CfW, and will ensure pupils receive more bespoke care and attention. However, changes in the way ALN are identified could lead to misidentification and improper registration of learners in most need. To mitigate against this, and to ensure consistent application of ALNET in all settings, a rigorous and comprehensive professional learning programme will be required. This is particularly relevant, but not in any way restricted to, Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators (ALNCos). Professional support for ALNCos should be prioritised, and sufficient funding/time allocated to make this happen, as soon as is practicable. Recent changes to the timeline of implementation recognise the significant challenges presented by such significant change, which should be kept under continuous review.

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