



Ms Lynne Neagle AM
Chair
Children and Young People Education Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

11th November 2016

Dear Ms Neagle

Qualifications Wales welcomes the opportunity to offer a perspective on the implementation of the new curriculum. We do this as a party close to the reform process and with a direct dependency on the outcome of the reforms. We are supportive of the aims expressed in Professor Donaldson's review and are ready to work collaboratively with the Welsh Government and others in its implementation. We are represented on the Change Board and also attend various Welsh Government working groups as observers.

Our perspective is offered in good faith to support the process and is intended to help focus the Committee's attention towards areas where we believe greater clarity would help us to assess the impact upon qualifications at 16 and where we believe the risks are greatest.

We would like to make three principal points:

1. **Pioneer Schools Model**

The current model of curriculum development relies heavily upon the work of Pioneer Schools to define and articulate the curriculum. This rightly puts the teaching profession at the centre of the reforms, ensuring that developments are owned by the profession, and are realistic and practical. This approach reflects Recommendation 62 in Professor Donaldson's review, which addresses the need for a balance between national and local ownership, with less central direction than has existed previously.

It is, however, currently not clear to us how the work of the Pioneer Schools will be aggregated, and where there are differences in view resolved, to form a national

curriculum. It is also unclear how the perspective of curriculum experts in Higher Education will be fully integrated with Pioneer Schools' as they work to develop the curriculum, which will be most powerful when it reflects strong collaboration between the teaching profession and experts in curriculum design, and reflects the general needs of employers and wider society. It is our view that the Pioneer School model is a useful and sensible starting point, but this needs to be supplemented by a wider integrated collaboration model with appropriate central leadership.

2. Timescale

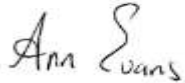
It is proposed that the new curriculum is made available in 2018 and fully rolled out in 2021. Similar developments in Scotland have taken a decade, and implementation is still ongoing. Whilst lessons that could potentially accelerate the process can be learnt from Scotland, it is doubtful that the existing timeline can be achieved without significant risk to successful implementation. It should be noted that many of the lessons that are pertinent to Wales are still being identified in Scotland, particularly in relation to the reform of qualifications. We have a working assumption that, based on the current timeline, any changes to qualifications will be for first assessment in Summer 2024, but in order to validate this assumption we need clarification of how the new curriculum will be implemented – specifically how each year group will be affected from 2021 onwards.

3. Impact on qualifications

Professor Donaldson's review assumes that qualifications will remain largely unchanged. Given that we are currently in the middle of a complex process of qualification reform for GCSEs, we agree with the principle that further reform to qualifications should be minimised otherwise there is a risk that the overhead of change may become too much for schools to manage. However, qualifications should reflect the curriculum rather than define it and we cannot assess the suitability of reformed GCSEs, and the impact on progression to A level, until more information is available: particularly the intended Achievement Outcomes for learners aged 16. We look forward to developing a fuller understanding of how the curriculum is changing, and the principles that will underpin it so that we can assess the impact. If significant changes are required to existing qualifications, or if a new model for qualifications at 16 is needed for Wales, then this will take time. Changes of any significance to existing qualifications take on average two to three years to define and implement, and wholesale changes to the qualifications model will take much longer. We believe that there is a place for vocational and 'general' qualifications in a framework that supports the school curriculum and look forward to developing a better understanding of the curriculum so that we can develop our thinking.

Designing and implementing the new curriculum is a major programme of work that is highly complex and technical. We welcome the general approach that Welsh Government is taking, particularly placing the teaching profession at the heart of the reforms, and look forward to greater clarity being established as the programme moves from the initiation phase into delivery.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ann Evans". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Ann Evans
Chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Philip Blaker". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Philip Blaker
Chief Executive Officer