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Briefing on the Welsh Dimension and International Perspective aspect of the new curriculum, Wales Studies, and the University of Wales Press – Prepared by the Learned Society of Wales

Welsh Dimension and International Perspective (WDIP)

The WDIP working group of the Learned Society of Wales has welcomed attempts made across much of the draft curriculum to ensure that the Welsh Dimension and International Perspective (WDIP) is integral to the design of Curriculum 2022 at the deepest level.

In this context, moments of excellent practice are particularly worth highlighting:

- ‘A guide to Curriculum for Wales 2022’ establishes very clearly that ‘locality, Wales, and the wider world’ are all key perspectives within Curriculum 2022 as a whole.
- The emphasis on ‘the diverse histories, cultures, values and heritage of modern Wales’ is especially welcome – the note of diversity here being of particular value. In parallel to this, the emphasis on learners as ‘global citizens living in a culturally and linguistically diverse society’ articulates appropriately the wider-world requirements of Curriculum 2022, especially with the opportunity that this offers to ‘explore positive relationships based on mutual respect, tolerance and dignity in a diverse society’.

What will WDIP this look like in practice?

Notwithstanding the AoLEs, schools are likely to remain substantially embedded within traditional subject-areas, not least because that’s how teachers are employed and how assessments are set up. There will need to be a balance between cross-curricular topics, and WDIP aspects within particular subject syllabuses.

A topic theme could be a consideration of a local landmark – for example Lido Ponty. In the attached example you will see how the Lido can be used to as a platform for teaching not only local history, but also mathematics and numeracy, science, literacy and oracy, as well as first aid and water safety. This approach could be applied to numerous other locations and landmarks in Wales.

A subject specific approach within Languages, Literacy and Communication, could mean engaging with a version of a tale from the Mabinogi that had been rewritten for 8-11 year-olds and apply creative re-work strategies to that – perhaps getting the students to retell it from a first-person perspective, or from the particular perspective of one of the characters. You might then get the students to turn an international tale into a poem thus letting them have fun with a different sort of adaptation strategy, and also fulfilling the international perspective of learning.

The aim of the embeddedness the Welsh Dimension and International Perspective is that it these approaches become part of students’ everyday experience of learning at school.

Resources

The Society was recently commissioned by Government to undertake an audit of existing resources to support the teaching of WDIP in schools.

The report reveals that there are very many resources which already support the Curriculum Cymreig, which may be seen as a predecessor to the WDIP. However, it is widely accepted that the Curriculum Cymreig has not been appropriately, or consistently, implemented across the sector despite the availability of existing resources¹.

¹ See <https://wiserd.ac.uk/news/curriculum-culture-and-citizenship-education-wales-investigations-curriculum-cymreig>

This highlights that there is insufficient flow-through of existing resources to schools themselves, and thus these resources are under-utilised. Teachers require more guidance about exploring the multiple narratives of Wales and its diverse contexts, and existing resources require appropriate curation. **It is vital that teachers are provided with access to a directory of available resources**, so that they develop their own engagement with the WDIP aspect of the new curriculum.

Wales Studies

Wales Studies is the intellectual exploration of all things relating to Wales and its relations with the wider world. It encompasses all fields that explore the cultural, social, physical and environmental features of Wales, in the full breadth of our national and international contexts. It is research about Wales, for Wales and the world.

Wales Studies remains an emerging field but there is a substantial body of work developing within our universities, research, heritage and cultural organisations. From researching young people's perceptions of their communities, their nation and the Welsh language, to rediscovering forgotten voices in literature; from investigating the continuing legacy of heavy industry to pioneering low-carbon solutions to alleviate climate change, Wales Studies is an educational and cultural resource that remains to be fully realised. Crucially, should be developed further to help project an image of contemporary Wales to an international audience.

Via its Wales Studies Network, the Society is currently working to collect and collate basic data on activity in the field. This will create an evidential basis for conducting a reliable audit of the value of the field. This will be measured in terms that take into account educational, social and political and cultural benefits, as well as economic value.

We are also working to increase recognition of the national and international importance of Wales Studies, including measuring achievements in the field by the highest international standards. This will build opportunities for more secure and robust funding to ensure its continued development.

In November we will formally launch the Wales Studies Network at the Senedd. We will publish a brochure highlighting some of the most interesting research and scholarship in the field, and will announce the winner of our Wales Studies postgraduate poster competition. We are keen to support emerging scholars and will develop networking and training opportunities.

We appreciate the Welsh Government's work to encourage civic mission activity within the HE sector; Wales Studies aligns closely with this, but as yet it is not a core element of this activity. In one of her first speeches as Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams asked "Are Welsh universities rooted and responsible to their region and nation? [...] Our universities must be "of" their place and their people as a first principle." The development of Wales Studies provides an opportunity for universities in Wales to demonstrate that they are 'of' their place and community, working for the benefit of the nation.

University of Wales Press

University of Wales Press (UWP/the Press) is the national academic press of Wales with a mission to support Welsh literature, history, language and culture (Wales Studies) in both Welsh and English languages, which it disseminates internationally. Since its founding in 1922, UWP has published a great number of seminal works within the field of Wales Studies, and has supported the emergence and development of new fields including Welsh writing in English (the study of English language literature from Wales), studies of Welsh politics and political theory, Welsh history, and social science research about Wales. The relatively recent *Safbwyntiau* series is the first of its kind in the Welsh language, covering studies on politics, culture and society in Wales and beyond.

Whilst crucial academic research publications for Wales, the market for these works is often too small to be financially viable, thus the Press relies on additional financial support to continue its mission. This support has historically been received from its parent institution (formerly University of Wales) which continues today.

In 1998/99, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) introduced a much needed publications fund to support the publication of 15 Wales Studies publications each year, which was paid directly to the Press, and the Press publicly announced the full list of titles supported by the fund each year. In 2011, the fund was re-directed to individual Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Wales, allocated according to their QR allocation. Neither the fund itself (totalling £132k in 2011) nor the funding arrangements have changed since 2011.

Since the new arrangement, the Press has received, on average, less than 40% of the annual HEFCW fund paid to HEIs through its publications fund. There is no obligation for HEIs to track or report how the fund is spent so it is unclear how much of the remaining 60% has been assigned to supporting Wales Studies publications.

The impact of the arrangement has been felt keenly by certain individuals and institutions, and many of those in receipt of the fund work hard to make their fund 'stretch'. It is increasingly difficult for early career researchers (often on short term contracts) to publish a monograph, which is often a catalyst for progression in an academic career as they have scarce access to critical publication funds. Independent scholars and researchers from three of the nation's eight institutions (or four out of nine if including the Open University) have no access to the fund whatsoever, resulting in worthy books remaining unpublished in some cases due to financial constraints. Additionally, there is a consistent disadvantage for some institutions with no ability for review in terms of the funding they receive; a lack of transparency for funding awards; and a growing concern/perception that Wales Studies is not viewed as important. Furthermore, it renders the discipline of Wales Studies at a greater risk of wider academic publication challenges such as Open Access.

UWP works closely with academics across Wales, continues to honour its mission, and since 2011 has published an average of 27 Wales Studies titles each year. In contrast, UWP receives a funding contribution from HEFCW via HEIs for an average of 10 of its 27 titles per year, and the funding received per title has decreased by 43%. The financial shortfall from the HEFCW publications fund received by the Press has been met by the Press' parent company, the newly merged University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD). Whilst this has provided a short term financial respite for many of the publications of Wales Studies titles by the Press, it is unsustainable in the longer term.

Recent reviews of higher education funding, research funding and the publishing sector in Wales have each neglected to consider the future of the important contribution of UWP in Welsh academic life, and a review would be both urgently needed and welcomed by all concerned with Wales Studies as a discipline, and the future capability of UWP to enable this through its critical, mission-led work.

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