

Teaching of Welsh History

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 15 Medi 2020
Petitions Committee | 15 September 2020

Reference: RS20/13468

Petition Number: P-05-992

Petition title: We call on the Welsh Government to create a common body of knowledge about Welsh history that all pupils will learn

Text of petition: Welsh history is important to all pupils, as it provides the background of our nation's history and our heritage for everyone going through the education system. There are aspects of Welsh history, such as the Laws of Hywel Dda, the Glyndŵr Rising and the Drowning of Capel Celyn, which belong to every community in Wales. It is therefore concerning that the Welsh Government has decided to reject the recommendation by the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee to create a common body of knowledge for all pupils studying history. It's important to create a Welsh history curriculum where pupils learn about events and matters at a national level, as well as learning about the history of their communities and areas.



1. Background

The current National Curriculum for Wales comprises the core and foundation subjects which are set out in the Education Act 2002. The core subjects at Key Stages 2 and 3 are maths, English, science and in relation to Welsh speaking schools, Welsh. History is **a foundation subject within the national curriculum**. The Welsh Government's **History Programme of Study** (PDF 155KB) (January 2008) sets out the current requirements for history at Key Stages 2 and 3. Beyond Key Stage 3, the WJEC has published specifications for history at **GCSE** and **AS/A level**. These were introduced for first teaching in 2017 and 2015 respectively.

The new age 3-16 Curriculum for Wales will be introduced in all maintained schools and publicly funded nursery settings from September 2022 on a phased basis. The **Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill** was introduced to the Senedd on 6 July 2020. The Bill sets out the four purposes of the curriculum:

- To enable pupils and children to develop as ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives;
- To enable pupils and children to develop as enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work;
- To enable pupils and children to develop as ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world;
- To enable pupils and children to develop as healthy, confident individuals, ready to live fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

The Welsh Government has emphasised that the new Curriculum for Wales will be **purpose-driven rather than content-driven**. Specific learning content is not stipulated in the same way as under the current national curriculum.

The Bill sets out six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs) for the new curriculum and the mandatory elements within them. The AoLEs are:

- Expressive Arts
- Health and Well-being
- Humanities
- Languages, Literacy and Communication
- Mathematics and Numeracy
- Science and Technology.

The mandatory elements within the AoLEs will be English; Relationships and Sexuality Education; Religion, Values and Ethics and Welsh.

History will be taught within the **Humanities AoLE**. The Humanities AoLE also encompasses geography, religious education, business studies and social studies. The new curriculum is non-prescriptive and does not include a list of topics that all schools must teach.

The Bill provides for a 'What Matters Code' to set out key concepts of learning and experience in each AoLE (including Humanities) and that schools' curricula must encompass each of these concepts. The Welsh Government has published 'Statements of What Matters' in the **Curriculum for Wales documentation**. This is intended to provide the 'national approach' which the **Minister for Education says** will ensure consistency for learners.

The **provisional statutory guidance on the Humanities AoLE**, was published in January 2020.

On 22 January 2020, the Petitioner published a blog, **Why I've set up a petition calling for the teaching of a common Welsh history in our schools**.

2. Welsh Parliament action

2.1. Petitions Committee

This is the second petition initiated by Elfed Wyn Jones on the subject of the teaching of history. The Committee considered his first petition, **Change the National Curriculum and teach Welsh history, from a Welsh perspective, in our Primary, Secondary and Sixth form Schools** during 2018. The Petitions Committee heard evidence from, Dr Elin Jones, Chair of the Cwricwlwm Cymreig, history and the story of Wales task and finish group, and Kirsty Williams, the Minister for Education and Skills.

2.2. Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee

During summer 2018, the **Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee** ran a public poll inviting members of the public to select from a list of potential inquiry topics. Forty-four per cent of those who took part in the poll voted for 'Teaching of Welsh history, culture and heritage in schools'. In light of the work being undertaken by the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee, the Petitions Committee closed the petition in November 2018.

The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee's report, **Inquiry into the teaching of Welsh history, culture and heritage** [PDF1.2KB] was published in November 2019 and was debated in **Plenary on 15 January 2020**. The Welsh Government published its **response** [PDF 235KB] on 8 January 2020.

Many of those giving evidence, including Welsh historical societies, spoke of the need for there to be certain events or themes that all learners should know. The Committee recommended that the new curriculum

should include guidance which sets out a common body of knowledge for all pupils studying history. These key events and topics will allow all pupils to have an understanding of how their country has been shaped by local and national events within the context of Welsh, British and international histories.

The Minister for Education rejected the recommendation stating that:

The Humanities AoLE guidance outlines a methodology for selecting content and refers to the need for consistent exposure to the story of learners' locality and the story of Wales, as well as to the story of the wider world, to enable learners to develop an understanding of the complex and diverse nature of societies, past and present.

She also said:

we will be working with practitioners to commission new resources, which refer to key events and topics in the histories of Wales and the world. The flexibility of the new Curriculum will enhance this learning by allowing teachers to deliver lessons in more creative ways better suited to the learners they teach.

2.3. Plenary

During the course of the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee work on history, there was also a Plenary debate, [Teaching the History of Wales on 19 June 2019](#).

3. Welsh Government action

3.1. Task and Finish Group

In October 2012, the then Minister for Education and Skills, Leighton Andrews established a task and finish group, chaired by Dr Elin Jones, to explore and consider the future development of Cwricwlwm Cymreig, the teaching of Welsh history. The group's final report, [Cwricwlwm Cymreig, history and the story of Wales: Final report](#) (PDF 154KB) (September 2013) made twelve recommendations relating to the Welsh dimension in the development of the next curriculum and in relation to the history curriculum in particular. In March 2014, Huw Lewis announced that Professor Graham Donaldson would be undertaking a review of the national curriculum in Wales.

As part of his review, Professor Donaldson considered the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group.

3.2. Estyn review

One of the recommendations on the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee's 2019 report on the teaching of history, was that Estyn should undertake a thematic review of the teaching of Welsh history in schools. Welsh Government officials are currently discussing the remit of this review with Estyn.

3.3 'Communities, contributions and cynefin: BAME experiences and the new curriculum' working group

On **21 July 2020, the Minister announced** that Professor Charlotte Williams OBE, would chair a Communities, Contributions and Cynefin: BAME Experiences and the New Curriculum Working Group. In the first phase of the project, the working group will complete a review of resources currently available to support the teaching of themes relating to BAME communities and cynefin across all parts of the curriculum. It will highlight examples of good practice as well as identifying areas that need further work, The second phase of the project will review professional learning related to BAME communities, their contributions and experiences, and cynefin, across the curriculum. The work of the group will be closely aligned to the Estyn review of Welsh history.

Cynefin in the context of the curriculum is defined as:

The place where we feel we belong, where the people and landscape around us are familiar, and the sights and sounds are reassuringly recognisable. Though often translated as 'habitat', cynefin is not just a place in a physical or geographical sense: it is the historic, cultural and social place which has shaped and continues to shape the community which inhabits it.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.