

Consultation on the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill

Evidence submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) for Stage 1 scrutiny of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill.

About you

Individual

1. The Bill's general principles

1.1 Do you support the principles of the [Curriculum and Assessment \(Wales\) Bill](#)?

Partly

1.2 Please outline your reasons for your answer to question 1.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1500 words)

Thank you for the opportunity to write to the Children, Young People and Education Committee as you consider the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill. My name is Jeremy Jones and I am an MFL teacher with twenty years experience of working in schools in Wales. I would like to make the Committee aware of concerns of teachers regarding the structure of the Bill and its impact on Modern Foreign Languages, current and future language provision and opportunities for our young people in our secondary schools in Wales.

A reading of the curriculum b,y anyone, who is not involved in the actual delivery of languages in our schools, would believe that there is a desire for our pupils to study and experience language learning in our schools. The overarching vision is for our young people to have "universal access to, and acquisition of the experiences, knowledge and skills needed for employment, lifelong learning and active citizenship" and this expectation is eloquently and unambiguously expounded in the AoLE LLC policy statement, which unequivocally promotes "multilingualism, plurilingualism and translanguaging within a bilingual Wales in an international context" (What Matters statement one). By placing languages so prominently in the Language, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning

Experience a marker has been set to support and promote language learning in our schools, both primary and secondary.

The government has promoted language learning with the Education Minister announcing “I want all learners to become global citizens, able to speak to people in other languages”, and has affirmed “We want all our learners to understand the importance of modern languages and the lifechanging opportunities they can provide.” The Welsh government has been equally clear that “the new curriculum for Wales guidance framework is at the heart of our National Mission to raise standards for all, tackle the attainment gap, and ensure all children and young people in Wales are supported to meet their full potential, including in the acquisition of languages and a growing awareness and knowledge of the rich and varied cultures that underpin them.” (xxxxx xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx xxx xxxxxxxxxx x xxxxx xxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxx). This curriculum has been intended to provide the next generation with a firm foundation for a lifelong interest in languages. To many language teachers, this provided reassurances that languages and language acquisition in Wales are valued as we equip our learners for the “multilingual world” with language skills that are “deepened as learners are afforded opportunities to learn multiple languages.” The reality in our schools however, paints a markedly different picture.

The publication of the draft curriculum has already in actuality seen language provision in our secondary schools worsen. Since this time, languages have been further side-lined and, in some instances, discontinued. Some of the reasons for this can be directly related to the impact of the new curriculum. By placing languages in the AoLE LLC (Area OF Learning Experience, Languages, Literacy and Communication), it exists with two subjects – Welsh and English – that are not only statutory but also KPI subjects, i.e. subjects against which a school’s performance is measured by government. As SLTs naturally focus on these mandatory subjects, languages are further downgraded and teachers view the new curriculum with trepidation. Research by the British Council has indicated that as recently as 2019, almost fifty percent of language teachers do not believe that the new curriculum will improve the situation for languages in Wales, with a further twenty nine percent uncommitted (British Council: Language Trends in Wales December 2019). One contributor to the British Council research document sums up the feelings of so many language teachers – “MFL comes a very clear third after English and Welsh – treated once again like a poor relation”. The new AoLE LLC is believed to be causing the further marginalisation of languages through inadequate timetable provision or the removal of GCSE or A-level language courses from learner option choices. The former leads to learners not opting for

languages as they feel less well prepared, the latter leaves our learners with no progression opportunities for further study.

There are further outcomes of the new curriculum that are preventing the success of multi-language learning as set out in the National Mission. A statutory obligation has been placed on primary schools to teach a language and it is clear that meaningful progression must be made – a major challenge in an overcrowded timetable, with limited resources and a dearth of language specialists. In the secondary school setting however, “guidance will be provided for schools, which sets out approaches to school planning and prioritising of languages.” (xxxxx xxxxxxxx). This guidance, this lack of clarity for languages, has led to senior leaders in secondary schools taking the opportunity to look again at what languages they offer. This has led to a reduction of language provision in schools through departmental closures or reductions in timetabled lessons. The loss of language departments is now occurring in the largest cities in the country, with the greatest impact on German, and has led to schools becoming single language schools. These actions are in contradiction to the new curriculum outlined and are not compatible with the keynote of the new curriculum to build a “broad and balanced” curriculum. As primary schools introduce a language to their timetable, there is evidence that secondary schools are abandoning genuine second language opportunities in their schools. This is having a significant impact particularly on opportunities for young people to learn languages such as German in our secondary schools. There are already counties with no German teaching at all; Carmarthenshire currently has only one school and now, in our largest conurbations such as Newport, Cardiff and Swansea, the teaching of German is under severe threat.

The government has recognised that languages have needed support and will point to the creation of the Consortia and the Global Futures agency as the principal organisations to address falling language numbers and promote language learning in Welsh secondary schools. The government is preparing to invest further a significant amount of funding into the Global Futures programme. These organisations however cannot achieve the directives of the National Mission for languages alone. The primary aim of Global Futures when it came into being was “to increase the number of young people choosing to study modern foreign language subjects at Level 2 (GCSE level or equivalent), at Level 3 (A level or equivalent) and at higher education level”. In this regard, the project has not met its remit. In the five years since its inception, numbers at GCSE and A-level have fallen year on year. Over the past five years, there has been a 28% decline in entries for all languages at GCSE, with French and German seeing falls of 35% and 37% respectively over this period. Looking at this in numerical terms, French GCSE entries have fallen from 4810 in 2015 to 3127 in 2019, with a similar picture for German (2016 – 1196 entries/2019 – 634 entries). With

annual drops in GCSE uptake, it is not surprising to see that A-level numbers for all languages are also dire. In 2019, only 314 students studied French for A-level while 77 studied German. This is not a criticism of Global Futures as there are other contributory factors to the decline in uptake, but this cannot and will not be addressed if schools continue to remove languages from the secondary curriculum, create single language learning environments and construct timetabling/option blocks which either dissuade learners and young people from choosing languages or make it impossible for them to do so.

Language teachers are increasingly concerned that this new curriculum is simply accelerating the decline of language provision for our young people. Languages do not have statutory protection and, with greater autonomy now given to Headteachers, language learning opportunities are becoming a lottery, with the risk of languages such as German disappearing from the curriculum in Wales completely. In some cases, a carousel approach to languages has been mooted, but with no means of real progression or opportunity to learn languages to an academic standard. The government has already acknowledged in correspondence, that it is the role of local authorities to ensure the National Mission is met, yet this has resulted in the ad hoc, postcode lottery delivery that we are currently enduring. The government has neither the intention of reviewing the curriculum of any school nor reviewing the progress made by local authorities, thereby removing any checks or balances to safeguard the National Mission.

The government will point to new strategies to promote German, one of our most important trading partners, such as the new International Strategy and plans to address school leaders. It is vital that, while we wait for these plans to be unveiled and undertaken over the next two years, departments do not close, teachers do not leave the profession and timetabling is adequate or we will simply not have the infrastructure to meet the National Mission, Global Futures will not be able to “ensure greater equality of choice and that modern foreign languages are not marginalised” (Global Futures) and the new curriculum, for languages at least, will almost certainly fail our young people.

1.3 Do you think there is a need for legislation to deliver what this Bill is trying to achieve?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

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2. The Bill's implementation

2.1 Do you have any comments about any potential barriers to implementing the Bill? If no, go to question 3.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

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2.2 Do you think the Bill takes account of these potential barriers?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

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3. Unintended consequences

3.1 Do you think there are there any unintended consequences arising from the Bill? If no, go to question 4.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

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4. Financial implications

4.1 Do you have any comments on the financial implications of the Bill (as set out in Part 2 of the [Explanatory Memorandum](#))? If no, go to question 5.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

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5. Powers to make subordinate legislation

5.1 Do you have any comments on the appropriateness of the powers in the Bill for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation (as set out in Chapter 5 of Part 1 of the [Explanatory Memorandum](#)). If no, go to question 6.1.

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

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6. Other considerations

6.1 Do you have any other points you wish to raise about this Bill?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1000 words)

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