

Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill

Video Evidence Transcriptions

This document provides full transcriptions of the evidence given to us in video format to inform our scrutiny of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill. It should be read alongside the [explanation of the video evidence](#).

Parents for Welsh medium education (RhaG), Executive National Director, Elin Maher:

This Bill ushers in an exciting period for education in Wales. It's important that any reform is supported by robust evidence and that the processes within the curriculum bolster provision and accord with the Government's other strategic areas.

But there are two reasons why we are concerned about section 3.2, which makes English a mandatory element. Firstly, we haven't seen any evidence to support the inclusion of English. Secondly, it damages the current process of early-years Welsh immersion, creating a scenario where schools and individual providers could counteract local authority policy through the disapplication of English, as seen in sections 26 and 27.

We understand the principle of including relationships and sexuality education, religion, values and ethics, and Welsh, which are protected under other laws, such as protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and the Welsh Language Measure. English is the majority language in our communities, but Welsh requires purposeful planning, and this is the opportunity for it.

RhAG has collaborated with local authorities and Welsh Government officials on these plans and their operation. The next plans will operate alongside the new curriculum. The importance of continuity provision is one of the fundamental principles of these plans. The regulations for these plans in education, which



have been in force since January 2020, have clearly stated that local authorities are expected to plan purposefully from pre-school through to post-16. This includes both maintained and non-maintained settings, such as 'cylchoedd meithrin'. So, local authorities have an important responsibility for authority-wide policy. We must ensure that the Bill accords with these plans. We therefore ask that English be removed from section 3.2 or that the need for its disapplication be removed by delaying the introduction of English until at least key stage 2.

British Heart Foundation Cymru, Head of BHF Cymru, Adam Fletcher:

BHF has been really impressed by the Curriculum Bill's commitment to health and well-being. We're also pleased to see that first aid and life-saving skills have been added to the guidance for schools. Unfortunately, there's still one major problem: it's going to continue to be a lottery whether young people learn skills such as CPR in secondary school or not. In some schools they do and in some schools they don't. That is why survival rates remain very low in Wales, with less than one in 10 people surviving a cardiac arrest in the community. This is a problem we can solve. By amending the Bill and the guidance, we can ensure that every young person has the chance to learn these proven life-saving skills in the future.

The teaching resources are all available free and bilingually on the hub. The evidence is unequivocal. The WHO recommends that all young people learn CPR in school. Other countries have done this successfully. England and Scotland have now ensured that every young person has a chance to learn CPR in schools because of this evidence. Let's not miss this opportunity and let Wales get left behind. We estimate that if future generations all learn CPR in schools, as many as 200 lives could be saved every year in Wales. Let's end the lottery and ensure that every young person has the chance to learn.

Cymdeithas yr Iaith, Chair of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Education Group, Mabli Siriol:

We are very concerned by the Government's proposal to make English a mandatory element of the curriculum on the face of the Bill, as every school will be expected to teach it from the earliest age, unless they opt out. It will cement the idea that Welsh education is marginal or unusual and that English is the normal language of education, which goes against the Government's own commitment to progressing to Welsh learning as a continuum and the target of a million speakers. It shows a lack of understanding of immersive methods, which are key to the success of Welsh education, and it endangers their

continuation, because governing bodies could change the language of a school, and that undermines strategic planning locally and nationally.

We also know there is no need for legislation to ensure that children are fluent in English. They learn English through the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience. Most of all, there is no educational evidence for the Government's proposal. We also know that not a single body or expert recommended the proposal during the consultation. On the other hand, over 400 learners signed an open letter calling on the Government to change the plans. This will have a negative impact on grass-roots Welsh-medium education and undermine the goal of reaching a million speakers. So, we ask the committee to call on the Government to change the wording of the Bill and these foolish plans.

Welsh Youth Parliament – Emotional and Mental Health Committee, Welsh Youth Parliament Member, Ffion Griffith:

Over the past few years, mental health has become central for our society as we see its significance and impact on all aspects of our lives. This is especially true amongst young people, for whom the pressures of school and social media can lead to anxiety and stress. The Welsh Youth Parliament's Emotional and Mental Health Support Committee believes that teaching is vital to raise awareness and improve understanding of mental health, and the new curriculum offers plenty of opportunities to do this.

The Welsh Youth Parliament believes that more needs to be done to improve young people's confidence and their access to information. It's vital that young people have access to accurate and valid information, as well as opportunities to discuss mental health at school, which can help to end stigma, which is one of the main reasons young people aren't comfortable sharing their problems. It's vital to start these discussions young, and to develop young people's understanding of their mental health as well as their physical health.

We believe there are many opportunities to make connections between mental health and other subjects, to normalise the idea that mental health affects everyone, and, again, to end stigma. To achieve this, there is a need to ensure support for young people and consistency across Wales. A young person's geographical location should not be an obstacle to getting the information or support that they need. We acknowledge that teachers also need support to incorporate mental health into the curriculum, and we believe that there need to be training opportunities for teachers. Mental health can affect every part of

our lives and it's vital that education and awareness play a part in helping young people look after their mental health before it becomes a problem.

Dyfodol i'r Iaith, Chief Executive, Ruth Richards:

Dyfodol i'r Iaith is grateful for the opportunity to share our comments with the committee. In short, we believe that the Curriculum Bill undermines the Welsh language, particularly immersion education, which is the most successful method of ensuring fluency in Welsh. The Bill notes that school governing bodies have the right to opt out of English education for children up to the age of seven. So, teaching in English is the norm and immersion is an exception. Many local authorities are already offering Welsh immersion education as the default or moving towards it.

The Bill should acknowledge that we need to move in this direction, and a clause should be added to make Welsh immersion education the norm. In schools where that isn't yet possible, they should be part of a transformative process moving in that direction. According to the Bill, individual schools are able to go against the local authority's language policy, turning back the clock on years of good work. Wales's foremost language organisations are united in our opposition. I would strongly recommend that the committee rejects the misguided notion that the most effective means of learning Welsh is offered as an exception.

MIND Cymru, Head of Policy & Influencing, Simon Jones:

The new curriculum provides a unique opportunity to place the mental health of all our young people at the heart of their learning and school experience. We wholeheartedly support the Welsh Government's aim to develop a curriculum that meets the academic, social and emotional needs of our young people. The recent experience during the pandemic has clearly highlighted how important schools are in promoting and protecting young people's mental health, as well as acting as a point where problems can be identified early and support put in place.

This experience and the considerable discussions around the impact of the pandemic more generally on the mental health of young people creates the context where ensuring mental health is at the heart of every pupil's experience as something that has become increasingly important. Whilst some positive steps have been taken, we continue to believe that mental health should be placed as a mandatory part of the curriculum, on the same footing as Relationships and Sexuality Education and Religion, Values and Ethics.

This would reflect the views of young people we have spoken to who say there is not enough time in the school day to discuss issues relating to mental health. If this were to happen and be delivered across the curriculum, this would enable and encourage education professionals to think creatively about when a discussion about mental health could be appropriately introduced. This would not only provide more time but would normalise the discussion around mental health as something that can appropriately and safely happen at different points of the school day.

This would reflect the approach of campaigns such as Time to Change Wales, where encouraging conversations about mental health are promoted as a key part of tackling stigma. It has been hugely positive that the Welsh Government has made a strong commitment to making mental health one of its priority areas within the Programme for Government. Making this amendment to the Bill would be realising that commitment within education policy and legislation. Thank you.

Ethnic Minorities & Youth Support Team EYST Wales, Chief Executive, Rocio Cifuentes:

Thank you for the opportunity to present and comment on the proposed Curriculum and Assessment Bill. This proposal and this planned review of the curriculum in Wales comes at a really timely and pivotal moment in Wales and in the world. We have huge challenges facing all of us in Wales at the moment, with the coronavirus, Black Lives Matter, and it's never been more important to equip our young people with the right skills that they need to meet these challenges. So, for those reasons,

we really welcome this proposed Bill and the scale of the changes proposed. We welcome the shift in autonomy to give greater powers to teachers and to schools. However, we would like to balance that with the need to increase the diversity of the teaching workforce. Currently in Wales, less than one per cent of teachers come from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, compared to over ten per cent of the school-age population who are from BAME backgrounds. So, that needs to be balanced if young people and pupils are to have role models who adequately reflect the world.

We also feel that teachers need to be more equipped and resourced and supported and trained to deliver the vision of this new curriculum. Within the current framework, there does not seem to be a great deal of emphasis on how teachers will be supported and how this new vision will be resourced. These concerns have come from the conversations we've been having through EYST,

the Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team, the charity that I head up, with a great number of black and minority ethnic young people across Wales. They very much welcome the Bill but they have some concerns about the diversity of the workforce and equipping the workforce and teachers to really deliver this vision to ensure that everybody can benefit and learn in the best way in the future. Thank you.

Equality and Human Rights Commission, Head of Wales, Rev Ruth Coombs:

While the children's rights impact assessment states that the new curriculum has regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, we were quite surprised that the Bill doesn't have it on the face of it, unlike other pieces of legislation in Wales. We really think it's important to enshrine that right on the face of the Bill, so our recommendation would be that that would be done as it passes through committee stage. We also know that human rights education is crucially important and we recommend that the human rights education is added to the general implications requirement as set out in clause 30 of the Bill.

That would be education about human rights, through human rights and for human rights to give a really holistic approach. We also think that to ensure that the curriculum is suitable for pupils or learners of all ages, all abilities and all aptitudes that particular attention needs to be paid to the different characteristics. Different children with different protected characteristics.

And of course some of those children have intersectional characteristics. It must be taken into account because we know that some learners find it more difficult to access the curriculum. Disabled children, some children from ethnic minorities find it very difficult to access parts of the curriculum, so it's really important they're supported so that they get the same opportunities as their peers. We also know that our school population in terms of staff and pupils is very different, and we would want to see the diversity of the staff matching and meeting the diversity of the children that are attending schools.

As I've said before, equality impact assessments are very important as are child rights impact assessments. So at every step of the process, whether it's a head teacher in partnership with governors, whether it's a local authority working on the new curriculum, both those needs have to be taken into account to ensure maximum accessibility for all learners that share protected characteristics. We're very pleased that we can make a contribution to this Bill's passage. We think it's a really important key moment in the development of the Curriculum for Wales,

and it needs to be fit for the young people of today and the young people of the future. Thank you.

Welsh Youth Parliament - Life Skills in the Curriculum Committee, Welsh Youth Parliament Member, Gwion Rhisiart:

Hello, my name is Gwion Rhisiart and I'm the Welsh Youth Parliament Member for Cardiff Central. I'm also a member of the Life Skills in the Curriculum Committee, whom I will be representing whilst giving this evidence. We released our report on life skills in the curriculum in November 2019, having consulted young people through nationwide surveys and focus groups. The report highlighted inconsistencies within the present curriculum that worried us as a committee, with 84 per cent receiving lessons on internet safety but only 10 per cent receiving lessons on political education.

The low percentage of young people receiving lessons on politics concerns us, considering that 16 and 17 year olds will be able to vote for the first time ever in next year's 2021 Senedd election. We are failing our generation by giving them the right to vote but not educating them on what voting actually entails. This brings us to the new proposed curriculum in the Bill.

The committee's main concern was that it could lead to inconsistencies in the learning experiences of young people across Wales, because so many aspects of the curriculum are left for schools and local authorities to decide. In addition, a lack of funding may further the difference in learning experiences in more deprived areas of Wales. For example, my school, Ysgol Bro Eder in Cardiff, was fortunate to access funding to give every student in the school an iPad to take home and use in their everyday school life.

However, many schools and local authorities will not be able to fund this, and pupils in more deprived areas of Wales won't have the same experiences in areas of the curriculum such as digital literacy, which can incur enormous costs. To prevent this, the new curriculum should present more guidance and essential topics, while still giving schools flexibility to design a curriculum suitable for their students. We cannot let the new curriculum for Wales morph into the tacky present curriculum. Otherwise, we fail in our duty as representatives of young people in Wales.