

National Assembly for Wales

Children, Young People and Education Committee

CYPE(4)–03–17 – Paper 2

Welsh Government

Introduction

1. The purpose of this paper is to set out written evidence on implementation of Qualified for Life its four strategic objectives (listed below) and in particular those areas you have identified in your letter.
 - a. An excellent professional workforce with strong pedagogy based on an understanding of what works.
 - b. A curriculum which is engaging and attractive to children and young people and which develops within them an independent ability to apply knowledge and skills.
 - c. The qualifications young people achieve are nationally and internationally respected and act as a credible passport to their future learning and employment.
 - d. Leaders of education at every level working together in a self-improving system, providing mutual support and challenge to raise standards in all schools.

Strategic Objective 1: An excellent professional workforce with strong pedagogy based on an understanding of what works.

2. Qualified for Life sets out an ambitious policy agenda to drive a step change in learner outcomes across Wales which will need the full commitment of a highly skilled and professional workforce. Professor John Furlong suggested ways to strengthen initial teacher training and education in Wales and attract the best candidates to become teachers. This is crucial in our aim of raising the status of the profession. Many of the recommendations around the governance of ITET revising the professional standards, a revised accreditation process, introducing a new accrediting body and subsequently the future role of Estyn in ITET are inextricably linked and are being developed within the agreed time schedule alongside the New Deal.
3. Other recommendations afford Welsh Government the opportunity to take a broader view, to consider the role of schools and the consortia, including Pioneer schools, in the initial training process, to look at alternative routes into the profession and to consider the effectiveness of the approaches available to support recruitment.
4. Work is on schedule to implement recommendations to revise the Qualified Teacher Standards (part of the wider review of Professional Standards) aligning them to the proposed curriculum changes; evaluating

the effectiveness of the financial incentives; and the work to revise the accreditation criteria and process. The timetable for implementing the reforms and the transitional and planning work required will cover the period to September 2018.

5. Our 'New Deal for the Education Workforce' will support and enable our existing practitioners to plan, develop and renew their practice to meet the opportunities and challenges ahead and in particular to meet the requirements of A Curriculum for Wales: A Curriculum for Life. To support this work a network of New Deal Pioneer Schools has been appointed to work alongside the curriculum and digital framework pioneer schools (mentioned under strategic objective 2 below) to develop a school to school support model for increasing the capacity of the workforce. This network has met twice already to plan its work schedule up to September 2016.
6. The New Deal will be supported by a Professional Learning Model and the Professional Learning Passport (which will enable practitioners to reflect and take responsibility for their career-long development). It is being refined to improve the quality of professional practice. We expect teachers, leaders and support staff to take responsibility for their own professional learning and share knowledge and good practice. Regional consortia, through the National Model of Regional Working are working together to provide a national programme of professional development opportunities.
7. We will be seeking the views of those in the education system in Wales about whether we should develop and enhance the role of the Education Workforce Council (EWC) into a professional body that more closely mirrors that of other professions. However, we will ensure that the Council is given the appropriate time to 'bed in', focussing on their core functions of registration; including the new categories of practitioner before any changes are made. All teachers in schools and FE are now registered with the EWC. All learning support staff will register from April 2016.

Strategic Objective 2: A curriculum which is engaging and attractive to children and young people and which develops within them an independent ability to apply knowledge and skills.

8. Further to the written evidence I provided to the Committee in September 2015 an implementation plan called A curriculum for Wales: a curriculum for life was published on 22 October 2015. The plan sets out how the new curriculum will be developed with education professionals across Wales, with the aim of it being available to settings and schools by September 2018 and used to support learning and teaching by September 2021.
9. We have appointed 106 Pioneer Schools (some of which are working in partnerships) to work with Welsh and international experts to design and develop the new national curriculum for Wales. During the first phase of

development, the focus will be on designing the structure of the new curriculum, before developing the content of the Areas of Learning and Experience.

10. The lead practitioners from the Pioneer Schools focussing on curriculum design and development will engage regularly with schools within their partnerships, clusters and wider networks to ensure that the reforms being introduced are led by the profession in Wales. Working with experts and engaging with children and young people during the development process, the Pioneers will ensure that the new curriculum builds on the recommendations made in Successful Futures and is engaging and attractive to learners in Wales.
11. Successful Futures recommended that a Digital Competency Framework should be developed and this aspect has been 'fast tracked' so as to be available by September 2016. Digital Pioneer Schools were appointed in July 2015 and the development work, led by the Digital Pioneers but working with other stakeholders and experts, is progressing well. Together Pioneer Schools, with the all-Wales partnership and other experts and stakeholders, will build the framework for a curriculum that supports our children and young people to be:
 - Ambitious, capable learners ready to learn throughout their lives;
 - Enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work;
 - Ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world; and
 - Healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.
12. In addition, recommendation eight of Successful Futures states that the expectations for the three Cross-curriculum Responsibilities (literacy, numeracy and digital competence) and wider skills should be embedded within the Areas of Learning and Experience of the new curriculum. The wider skills in Wales comprise:
 - critical thinking and problem solving – marshalling critical and logical processes to analyse and understand situations and develop responses and solutions
 - planning and organising – implementing solutions and executing ideas and monitoring and reflecting on results
 - creativity and innovation – generating ideas, openness and courage to explore ideas and express opinions
 - personal effectiveness – reflecting on and understanding oneself and others, behaving in effective and appropriate ways; being an effective learner.
13. Through the work of the Pioneer Schools and key partners and experts these wider skills, as well as the Cross-Curriculum Responsibilities, will be embedded throughout the curriculum, in the most appropriate way. This will ensure that the new curriculum fosters in our learners the ability to apply knowledge and skills.

14. The new curriculum will include arrangements for describing and signalling learners' progression in relation to a continuum of learning in each Area of Learning and Experience from when a child enters education to the end of statutory schooling. This will include Progression Steps which will provide reference points, providing a 'road map' for each individual child and young person's progress in their learning. Successful Futures recommends that schools should have a duty to provide a curriculum that enables most children and young people to reach, or go beyond, each Progression Step within the broad three-year window.
15. An overarching Assessment and Evaluation Framework will be developed, promoting a focus on the curriculum purposes as the agreed goals of learning and ensuring that assessment arrangements for the new curriculum will give priority to their formative role in teaching and learning in line with the recommendations in Successful Futures.

Strategic Objective 3: The qualifications young people achieve are nationally and internationally respected and act as a credible passport to their future learning and employment.

16. We have implemented all 42 of the recommendations made by the independent Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales.
17. We successfully introduced new GCSEs in English and Welsh (language and literature), mathematics and mathematics-numeracy in September 2015, and the revised Welsh Baccalaureate. In parallel, we accredited a wide range of new WJEC GCE AS/A level qualifications including those for biology, chemistry, physics, computer science, English and Welsh.
18. The introduction of the new GCSEs has been supported through an unprecedented programme of direct guidance and bilingual resources for schools developed by the Welsh Government in partnership with the WJEC, regional consortia, Colegau Cymru, and others. Introduced in the summer 2014, the programme continues to deliver to plan as it moves into support for the new GCSEs being introduced for first teaching in September 2016, including the new suite of science GCSEs. Support includes a wide range of online Sample Assessment Materials (SAMs), Teaching Assessment Materials (TAMs), schemes of work and other curriculum planning tools, alongside direct advice through WJEC continuous professional development sessions and education consortia subject advisors.

Strategic Objective 4: Leaders of education at every level working together in a self-improving system, providing mutual support and challenge to raise standards in all schools.

19. The regional education consortia have a crucial role in the delivery of school improvement; the National Model for Regional Working came into operation in April 2014 and was refreshed to reflect developments and

provide further clarity in November 2015. The core purpose of consortia as outlined in the National Model is to improve learner outcomes for all young people; ensure the delivery of high quality teaching and learning; and to support and empower school leaders to better lead their schools. This is underpinned by a self-improving school system, where school improvement is supported and enabled by schools working collaboratively together. The consortia role is to facilitate and orchestrate this collaborative school to school working and national school categorisation provides a strong focus and drive to support this.

20. We have rolled out the Schools Challenge Cymru (SCC) project as a fast-track support programme for the most challenged schools in Wales, based on the principles of the National Model for regional working. Just over two thirds of the Pathways to Success schools secured improvements in this year's results, some in the double figures, and with several reporting their best ever sets of results. The evaluation is due to complete at the end of the second year of the programme. I have personally visited all SCC schools and a series of SCC support and sharing of good practice events have taken place.
21. The national school categorisation system is undertaken by regional consortia; it is moderated and verified at a national level to ensure consistency of approach. This approach has been co-constructed with key stakeholders and has been developed further during its second year of implementation.
22. The work of the Consortia is kept under review through an integrated cycle of review and challenge sessions. These sessions have clearly set aims and objectives and are undertaken on a termly basis. This process will undergo review in the coming months.
23. Consortia have improved the support and challenge they provide to school leaders. Quality assurance arrangements for consortia challenge advisers have been strengthened, training has been provided for all challenge advisers, and generally consortia know their schools well, with schools reporting that their performance is scrutinised closely and fairly by challenge advisers. This is underpinned by the co-constructed national standards for challenge advisers.
24. We have worked with consortia to support the development of outstanding classroom teachers and middle leaders. We are now piloting the programme in two Consortia ready for national roll out of from September 2016.
25. We have worked with the National Leadership Development Board (NLDB) and consortia to continue to populate the Leadership Development Pathway and encourage school-to-school working. The NLDB's work is available on Learning Wales and new programmes are underway with the Consortia for leaders at all levels.

26. We have freed our leaders to lead by reducing unnecessary bureaucracy, providing greater flexibility over resources with priority given to the front line. Some 11 school and school improvement focused grants were rationalised into a new simplified grant arrangement through the establishment of the Education Improvement Grant for Schools for 1 April 2015.

Legacy Work

27. In relation to your request for updates as part of your legacy work these have been annexed provided in the attached Annexes A – C.

Educational outcomes for children from low-income households-

On 10 April 2015 the Welsh Government provided a written response to the report of the CYP&E Committee *Inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households*. The report contained 12 recommendations, of which 5 were accepted and 7 accepted in principle.

Update: The latest educational attainment statistics (published on 3 December 2015) show that the attainment of learners who are eligible for free school meals (eFSM) in the Foundation Phase continues to rise. In 2014/15 75.1% of eFSM learners achieved the Foundation Phase Indicator, an increase of 2.7 percentage points on the previous year. Whilst the performance of other learners (nFSM) also rose, eFSM attainment improved at a faster rate, meaning that the attainment gap at the Foundation Phase decreased from 16.2 percentage points in 2013/14 to 14.9 percentage points in 2014/15.

In July 2013 the Tackling Poverty Action Plan target was set to reduce the attainment gap at the end of Foundation Phase between eFSM and nFSM by 10 per cent by 2017, which equates to an absolute difference of 16.5 percentage points. We have met and indeed exceeded the target three years early. Attainment has improved for both groups of learners, but we want new targets to focus on improving results of pupils eligible for free school meals more quickly. We have therefore developed more challenging targets to continue this drive in improvement:

- A new national target of 80 per cent of learners aged 7 eligible for free school meals achieving the expected level at the end of the Foundation Phase, as measured by the Foundation Phase Indicator, by 2017; and
- A new national target to reduce the gap in attainment levels between learners aged 7 eligible for free school meals and those that are not eligible for free school meals, who achieve the expected levels at the end of the Foundation Phase, as measured by the Foundation Phase Indicator, by 34 per cent by 2017. This equates to an absolute difference of 12 percentage points.

The addition of a national target for attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals will ensure any reduction in the attainment “gap” is a true reflection of improvement overall. By setting a more challenging target for reduced difference in attainment, we will ensure work focuses on improving results of pupils eligible for free school meals at a faster rate than those not eligible.

We continue to work with consortia and officials to explore further the reasons for any local authorities with large or increasing differences in attainment, and to identify good practice from those local authorities and schools which are performing well.

The Welsh Government continues to recommend the use of evidence-based approaches and the evidence suggests that more schools are adopting this approach. The latest Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) evaluation report, published on 3 December 2015, says that the majority of schools are now using sophisticated data tracking systems in order to tailor the appropriate PDG-funded interventions to learners and to evaluate whether these interventions have had the desired effect. Some case study schools in the 2015 report acknowledge they make greater use of data and evidence in planning PDG spending than in the past.

The evidence base on 'what works' for tackling the impact of deprivation on educational outcomes continues to grow and evolve. We will continue to promote the interventions with the best evidence behind them through our communications campaign with schools.

We continue to monitor the effectiveness of the PDG. The second year report of the PDG evaluation focused on the qualitative findings from 22 case study schools, giving an insight into how schools are making decisions about spending the PDG, the types of activities, and teachers' perceptions of the impact of the grant.

The findings in this report are very positive. Teachers think PDG is making a difference and they report seeing significant improvements among pupils, not just in literacy and numeracy, but also in behaviour, confidence and self esteem. The report also shows that:

- Schools are using sophisticated systems to target tailored PDG support to learners and are correctly identifying the target beneficiaries of the grant.
- Schools using PDG to increase the number and skills of Teaching Assistants (TAs) so they can implement and evaluate PDG interventions. TAs are becoming highly skilled members of the school staff.
- The way schools spend PDG is evolving. Schools that initially invested money in data monitoring systems are now concentrating on the delivery of interventions, on training and employing staff skilled in these interventions.
- Increasingly schools are using the PDG to reach out: engaging with local programmes that complement PDG such as Families First and Communities First, and also engaging with parents so that they can better support their children's' learning.

Evidence from Estyn and from our Raising Attainment Advocate also indicates that the majority of schools are making well-thought through and eligible decisions on how to spend their grant.

Implementation of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 (particularly schools causing concern and school organisation procedures)

(i) Schools causing concern

Update: The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 (SSO) consolidates and reforms the law in relation to intervention in schools causing concern. Provisions within the SSO Act regarding intervention in schools, the issuing of statutory guidance on 'Schools Causing Concern' and intervention within local authorities commenced in February 2014.

Local authorities have a range of interventions that they can use to drive up school improvement. The type of intervention chosen would depend on the specific issue at the school.

We are aware that local authorities are using their powers of intervention, issuing warning notices to schools causing concern and taking action when needed. Officials have carried out exercises in December 2013 and December 2015 gathering information from local authorities on the warning notices they have issued since the commencement of the SSO provisions, whether schools have complied with those notices, and if not, what actions have been taken to address the issues. These exercises are providing Welsh Government with an evidence base of the intervention action taken by local authorities. Officials are in the process of revising the statutory schools causing concern guidance that was issued in February 2014. Following discussions with some local authorities regarding the content of the guidance, officials considered that there was a need to strengthen the guidance and make it more explicit in places. Officials set up a small task and finish group in 2015 consisting of local authority and consortia representatives to consider the guidance and to suggest any revisions that would be helpful to clarify local authority powers of intervention. Officials are currently considering comments and revising the guidance. It is envisaged that the revised guidance will be published at the end of the spring term 2016.

(ii) School Organisation

Update: The school organisation sections of the SSO were fully implemented in October 2013, when all proposals published by local authorities to change school provision had to comply with the Act and the Statutory School Organisation Code ("the Code") that was issued in July 2013. The Code set specific standards and procedures for consultation, publication, and determination of proposals which were significantly more exacting than existed under previous legislation, but also provided for more streamlined decision making. Under the former legislation all proposals that were published and attracted objections were referred to the Minister for determination.

Decisions could take up to 6 months from the submission of papers, and around a year from when proposals were first subject to local consultation. Under the new legislation, almost all decisions are taken locally, and local authorities can make arrangements for their Cabinet to take the decision even when there are objections. Some local authorities have made arrangements referring final decisions to the full Council. The SSO has vastly reduced references to Ministers, and improved the pace of decision making. For example in the last year of operation of the former legislation, from 1 October 2012 to 30 September 2013, 73 proposals were published, 30 of which resulted in objections and had to be referred to Ministers.

Between October 2013 when the new Act came into force, and 30 September 2014, around 50 proposals were published. 18 of these resulted in objections, and only 2 of these required reference to Ministers.

Between 1 October 2014 and 30 September 2015 around 73 proposals were published and 30 of these resulted in objections. Most of these have led (or will lead) to local decisions, exceptions being those affecting the removal of sixth forms, which are being referred to Ministers. Local decisions can often be taken within 1-3 months of the end of objection periods, which has considerably increased certainty at the local level.

Under the SSO a proposal approved or rejected by a local authority can however be referred to the Welsh Ministers for consideration if certain limited parties decide to take this step. These limited parties are

- Another local authority affected by the proposals;
- The appropriate religious body for any school affected;
- The governing body of a voluntary school or foundation school subject to the proposals;
- A trust holding property on behalf of a voluntary or foundation school subject to the proposals; and
- A further education institution affected by the proposals.

Only two such references have been made by the governing bodies of voluntary schools since the SSO came into force. One proposal was rejected because the consultation undertaken by the local authority was flawed in an important respect.

There has been a general improvement in compliance with procedures and the quality of consultation since the SSO came into force. As Welsh Ministers are copy recipients, officials have provided feedback on the compliance of documents and continuous improvement is evident. Estyn is a copy recipient and provides an independent view on proposals which must be considered by local authorities and others before they proceed. Now that local authorities are generally responsible for decision making, those opposing who have no ability to refer the matter to Welsh Ministers have considered taking legal action. Whilst a few such actions have been taken, only one has been successful, effectively quashing a decision to close a school taken by Bridgend local authority.

There is a commitment to review the operation of the SSO and the Statutory Code after 3 years. As implementation of the SSO and Code in respect of school organisation has been monitored on an ongoing basis, officials will be in a position to timetable the review in line with the commitment.

Implementation of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009.

I provided you with an update on 16 July.