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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE:

Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales: Implementation

About NUT Cymru:

NUT Cymru represents primary and secondary school members and is the largest teaching union in Wales. We welcome the opportunity to contribute evidence to the Children and Young People's Committee on Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales.

Areas for consideration:

The work of the Pioneer schools network in designing and developing the new curriculum.

It is somewhat difficult to give a fully informed response on this point as we are not aware in-depth of what work the pioneer schools have specifically done, or what they are going to propose as part of their findings on the curriculum. As is the case for many in the education sector we are still awaiting the devil in the detail. However, it is worth noting that some of those in the pioneer system have stated they were not even aware of that being the case. Many schools were operating as pioneer schools yet their staff, including those leading subject areas, had no knowledge of this expectation being placed upon them. That failure to communicate, irrespective of why it transpired, may have hindered some of the progress that could have been expected to be made.

It was also reported that the initial stages of the pioneer work highlighted one of the key deficiencies of the implementation of a new curriculum, namely that the highly prescriptive nature of the Welsh Government's approach over the past decade has resulted in a certain lack of independent thinking around the curriculum within the profession. Many teachers came to the pioneer experience expecting to be told what to do rather than taking advantage of the freedom a new style of curriculum would afford. That is a failure of the way the system has been operating in the past but undoubtedly one that will have had an impact on the early approach to curriculum design. It is also worth highlighting that some of the feedback received from practitioners in non-pioneer schools was that they were not being informed of the work that is ongoing.

It makes sense in some regards that this work would be kept within the confines of pioneer schools until it is ready to be presented to wider audiences, however there is also a concern that we are not seeing ideas that are developing at least being tested with wider audiences within the sector.

It should be stated that the Welsh Government did acknowledge these concerns at an early stage and hopefully worked with pioneer schools to address them.

The interface with effective professional learning for the education workforce and initial teacher education and training.

This is the key issue for the NUT in ensuring the successful implementation of a new curriculum. As stated in the previous response above there is a lack of critical and independent thinking currently within the profession in relation to curriculum reform as a result of many years of highly prescriptive policies. Clearly the aim of the Welsh Government will be to renew the initial teacher training system following recommendations by the Furlong Report in order to provide those skills for new entrants into the profession. Research capacity within the teaching sector is a new focus of teachers training which is to be welcomed. There will also be teachers at the other end of their careers who have experience of a less prescriptive approach. However, there is a broad bulk of teachers in the middle who need training on curriculum planning and development.

The biggest concern many member have is that there simply does not appear to be any formal links between initial teacher training and school based CPD. Some school leaders have gone so far as to say that they are so unconvinced by the existing quality of ITT provision that they would not seek to access their services for further workforce training.

Governance arrangements for implementation and the role of the Independent Advisory Board, Change Board and Strategic Stakeholder Group.

The decision to keep Professor Donaldson in an important role to ensure his initial thinking is carried through, and that professional bodies like the NUT are on the strategic stakeholder group lists, are welcomed. The proof of how effective these bodies will be is going to be determined by how the concerns and support they give to the Welsh Government is valued through the implementation process. Professor Donaldson received a lot of praise for being so ready to listen to the profession during the formation of his report. The idea of tasking the profession with developing the next stages via the pioneer school process was also widely supported. The curriculum reforms have largely been conducted in a positive and cooperative fashion. If that is continued through the work of these groups then it can be implemented successfully. Naturally if the views of the profession are not listened to during the implementation phase we do risk devaluing all the good work that has been done thus far.

One concern is that the Change Board is tasked with a crucial role, including monitoring progress and risk, and yet there is no representation from the workforce itself. It is difficult to see how first-hand experience of where curriculum reform is working at a classroom level, or where potential concerns could arise, can be voiced without that practitioner input. Given teaching unions and individual teachers/school leaders have been appointed to both the strategic stakeholder groups and the independent advisory board this appears an oversight.

Other issues of concern and/or importance regarding the development of the new Curriculum for Wales.

As noted above training on the delivery of curriculum planning as well as ongoing training is essential. Also there will be major pressures placed on school resources. Overhauling the curriculum and the impact it will have on the wider education system will directly impact on school teaching time and financial expenditure. While money has been made available within the Welsh Government budget for the delivery of the curriculum it will be important to monitor if the provision identified can support the implementation of this radical policy change, especially in light of the fact that there appears to have been a reduction in curriculum funding allocations for 2017/18 proposed in the draft budget agreement published on October 18th.

Further to the financial constraints, although influenced heavily by them, it is also worth cautioning that the timescales seem very short for delivery when compared to the international experience of curriculum overhaul. To have the new curriculum up and running fully by 2021 appears highly ambitious when measured against the time other nations, including Scotland, have taken to get their reforms right. The Welsh Government should prepare to be flexible on those timescales to ensure we do not force through actions before they are ready. Experience of Welsh Government delivery (The Child Development Assessment Profiles/Literacy and Numeracy testing/School banding/The literacy and numeracy framework/Schools challenge Cymru etc.) does not inspire confidence that speed is necessarily a good thing.

Finally, workload has to be a major consideration in terms both of how the changes impact on teachers workloads long-term, and how schools find the time resource for teachers to be able to implement it initially with the pressures on additional planning and training around the curriculum.

Below are some of the comments we have received from members specifically outlining concerns/considerations they raised in relation to the committees questions.

Anecdotal Member Feedback

"The lack of engagement of the workforce in general with the work of pioneer schools is concerning. Even within pioneer schools you would be hard pushed to really observe curriculum review and design if you are not part of working groups. The impact on those who are not part of a self-chosen group is negligible. All would appear rather nebulous.

"The Digital Competence Framework (DCF) is beginning to have an impact as schools are considering how to implement it but there are so many myths out there that are generated e.g. All schools must have a twitter account and teachers /classes should tweet frequently to be able to meet the requirement of the DCF!!! All green schools are doing this allegedly (!!!).

"The lack of knowledge of who the pioneer schools are amongst normal teachers is astounding - the lack of impact is concerning if this is to be a new curriculum for all. I have concerns regarding the quality assurance of pioneer schools and the work they are doing as the lack of subject experts with an overview (i.e. we now have challenge advisors rather than subject specialists) is really concerning"

"The lack of hard information on Welsh Government website / Learning Wales is not helpful to those of us trying to find out more in order to prepare for the changes."

"The fact that nothing comes out in hard copy is an issue - to look at anything schools have print off reams of documentation. This might save money at but is useless for teachers and schools."

"Consortium could be perfectly placed to provide the necessary support and information, but due to ridiculous challenge role the advice strand has disappeared and the staff employed are now not the subject or phase curriculum specialists that schools used to have access to under the former local authority Advisers and Advisory Teachers system. The lack of strategic oversight of anything other than literacy and numeracy (a little bit of science turns up sometimes) has led to a belief that challenge advisers offer nothing to schools if they are in yellow or green category and even for red or amber schools, they only offer to broker support. They are not perceived as capable of giving support or actually knowing anything useful to a teacher."

"We are still expected to implement national tests which are forcing some schools down a much narrower curriculum route in a mistaken assumption that this will raise standards."

"Schools in red and amber categories or estyn follow up categories are under heavy scrutiny to raise standards in a very prescriptive and often in a narrow way. Preparing for a more appropriate curriculum gets pushed way down the priority list by external pressures and these are the very schools where inspiration and innovation are the most necessary."

"The year on year reduction of our EIG (education improvement grant) puts huge strain on our available resources for training."

"The new estyn framework gives licence to inspectors to look at the school's preparations and moves towards Donaldson. This feels a bit worrying as there is not much clarity about what this will actually look like and I'm not sure that estyn inspectors have had enough training or relevant prior experience to be able to make these judgements, especially against such loose criteria."

"Overall I feel that there is a lack of direction and vision in terms of translating the fantastic vision of the Donaldson review into something tangible and that schools are going to be able to take on board. Until we start being asked to assess and measure what's important, this will continue to be the case."

"As a school in the green category we are given the licence to be able to move forward with shaping the new curriculum in our school. That is a positive experience but is not necessarily reflected in the experiences of teachers in "lower" categories.. "

"Although I welcome the recommendations of a new curriculum, I am concerned about a number of areas. I think as someone who has worked within the primary sector for nearly twenty years and has seen so many changes during that time, my greatest concern that there will be a lack of clarity and possibly training (considering the current economic situation) and that some schools will be in the same situation as they were with the Curriculum in 2008 and forever trying to play 'catch up' with colleagues in other schools who had been at the forefront of trialling the new curriculum. I am concerned that history could repeat itself with many schools trying to 'catch up' with pioneer schools. This concern is a real worry with regards to the current climate in terms of scrutiny within

education, ie results, categorisation etc, perhaps some SLT will be reluctant to try new methods etc, because of the huge worry what if it doesn't work, what if standards do not improve?"

"Without a doubt alongside changes in the curriculum, changes will have to be made to teaching training programs, are those whom are in that role fully aware of the skills newly qualified teachers need?"