



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Lynne Neagle AC / AM Cadeirydd / Chair
National Assembly for Wales
Children and Young People's Committee

21 December 2016

Dear Lynne

I would like to thank the Children, Young People and Education Committee for reviewing the implementation of Professor Graham Donaldson's Review report *Successful Futures: Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales*.

I would also like to thank you for your letter dated 8 December which highlights some of your emerging findings ahead of my evidence session on 12 January.

I am committed to ensuring that all children and young people reach their full potential in education. I was fully supportive of Professor Donaldson's *Successful Futures* when it was published in February 2015 and my views have not changed. Our education system must be about providing children and young people with the skills, knowledge and attributes they need for the modern world, to enable them to compete and succeed for their own benefit and for the benefit of Wales.

Education reform is our national mission with the development of a new and bespoke curriculum for Wales and new assessment arrangements. My focus is on ensuring that the education reform programme is implemented well and in a timely way, learning from what works in Wales and across the world. As we take this agenda forward, I am determined that we will keep the child at the centre and develop a broad, balanced, inclusive and challenging curriculum.

My responses to the questions outlined in your letter are detailed below:

Does the Cabinet Secretary have a strategy to ensure that the vision set out in Successful Futures is fully translated into implementation?

On 22 October 2015, the plan to take forward *Successful Futures - A Curriculum for Wales, A Curriculum for Life* was published. The plan sets out the scale of the challenge and breaks this down into eight building blocks, outlining what needs to happen, when and who is involved. The eight building blocks are:

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

- **Embedding the four purposes** of the curriculum fully in the learning and experience of all children and young people in Wales, whatever their school or educational setting.
- **Creating a new curriculum** encompassing Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs), achievement outcomes and progression reference points.
- **Extending and promoting learners' experiences** so that the curriculum is rich as well as being inclusive, broad and balanced.
- **Developing our cross-curriculum responsibilities** by designing a digital competence framework while maintaining momentum in respect of literacy and numeracy.
- **Enabling the Welsh language to thrive** to ensure that those who speak Welsh or acquire the language early can follow all aspects of the curriculum through the medium of Welsh, and those learning the language can progress towards using the language confidently in different contexts.
- **Developing a new assessment and evaluation framework** that prioritises assessment for learning and aligns assessment arrangements with the four curriculum purposes and the achievement outcomes within each AoLE.
- **Building the capacity of all practitioners and leaders**, including the ability to reflect on and evaluate their own practice, to design and create a relevant, challenging and stimulating curriculum, and to apply appropriate pedagogical principles and practice.
- **Establishing a constructive and robust accountability system** that supports the four purposes.

To support delivery, robust governance arrangements have been put in place by my officials, the Pioneer Schools Network has been established, our key partners are working in collaboration and a more detailed timeline has been published for the development of the new curriculum.

There are four key strands to the design and development of the new curriculum. These are: -

- Strand 1 – selection, induction and preparation of the Pioneer Network. The Pioneer Network and the all-Wales partnership to agree their programme of work which will define the timelines for Stages 2 to 4.
- Strand 2 – design of framework and principles for each Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE), including progression reference points and achievement outcomes.
- Strand 3 – developing the content of each AoLE; checking and reviewing with other schools and curriculum experts (taking national and international evidence and research into account) – supported by robust quality assurance processes.
- Strand 4 – Further trialling in Pioneer Schools, refinement of each AoLE (including curriculum and assessment arrangements), development of support (e.g. guidance, resources, professional learning) and preparation for release of AoLEs.

Strand 1 is nearing its completion which has included the development of high level strategic principles for those working on Strand 2 to take account of. This month working groups to design the AoLEs will be established. This will be a few weeks later than the original timeline, however, this reflects the fact that we listened to the sector, identified additional Pioneer Schools to provide breadth within each AoLE and have established the Curriculum and Assessment Group which brings Welsh and international expertise to inform our curriculum and assessment developments.

Building on this and the progress we have made to date I will also be publishing our refreshed vision and strategic plan for education in spring 2017. This will outline clearly our

plans for the next five years, including how we will continue to implement Successful Futures.

How will the Cabinet Secretary ensure that there is clarity as to what the new curriculum and assessment system will actually look like to individual school leaders, teachers and the wider workforce, and how the different elements will all fit together?

As we set out in *A Curriculum for Wales*, we are designing and developing our new curriculum arrangements with practitioners at the centre through Pioneer Schools. The model for this approach was developed and agreed with regional consortia, Estyn, WLGA and Professor Donaldson.

Pioneer Schools working on curriculum design formally started their work in April 2015, following a short series of induction events. Up to now, they and other key partners have been considering high level strategic options and principles; working towards an agreed view of what the overall architecture of the new curriculum should look like. This part of the development process is critical and Professor Donaldson himself has emphasised how important it is that we do not rush this.

A key lesson from the development of the Digital Competence Framework (DCF) is that identifying and agreeing these high level strategic options can take time and that once they have been agreed, progress can be remarkably swift. I'm the first to acknowledge, however, that the development of the DCF was a considerably smaller piece of work than the development of the new curriculum and related assessment arrangements. There are, however, some similarities between both processes and it is important that we recognise and build on the learning gained from the development of the DCF.

As Strand 2 progresses and the curriculum and assessment arrangements are beginning to take shape, we will move to a new phase of engagement to ensure that all our stakeholders, including teachers, leaders and the wider workforce, understand what it is likely to look like and how it will fit together. Working with and through Pioneer Schools and regional consortia we will share documents with schools and stakeholders as early in the development process as possible. We will seek their views on the emerging curriculum structures and assessment arrangements so that our new curriculum is genuinely one which reflects the views and has buy-in from the profession. In that way schools across Wales will have the opportunity to engage with the development of the new curriculum and assessment arrangements.

Reforming the curriculum and assessment arrangements are only one part of our national mission to reform education in Wales. Without good teachers, there cannot be good schools. This is why our refreshed strategy will set out clearly our plans for the next 5 years, and everyone's role within our national mission of improving education in Wales.

What is the Cabinet Secretary doing to ensure that there is sufficient clarity in the role of Pioneer Schools and what is expected from them?

Although the specification that accompanied the application form to become a Pioneer clearly defined, in general terms, what would be required of them, I accept that some Pioneers have, at times, felt unsure of what has been expected of them.

The Pioneer model represents a new approach to curriculum design and one which places a level of responsibility on the Pioneers themselves to lead on aspects of the development process. As a consequence, it has understandably taken time for all involved to understand

their different roles and responsibilities. It has taken time to move away from a top-down approach and to adjust to one that is becoming increasingly co-constructive. I am very appreciative of the hard work of Pioneer Schools and the valuable contribution they are making to the development of a new curriculum in Wales. They are critical to this success of this work.

I think it is also appropriate to acknowledge that the development of the high level strategic principles (Strand 1) includes work, such as research and discussion of critical questions. This type of work is not quite as tangible as the development of the Digital Competence Framework as a defined product.

To ensure that we learn lessons as we develop the new curriculum we are undertaking an evaluation which will provide evidence about how the Pioneer Schools model is working in practice and what improvements could be made. The final report is due at the end of 2017. In addition, the evaluation will look to provide real-time feedback on how the Pioneer Schools model is working during the design and development phase.

As we move into Strand 2 of the development process, that of developing the AoLEs, we will reflect and act on what we have learnt from the Strand 1 and adjust the process accordingly. The objectives for Strand 2 will be discussed and defined with the AoLE practitioners during their first meeting on 17 and 18 January 2017. I would expect Pioneers to feel that they are clearer about what is required of them than may have been the case for Strand 1. I will be asking my officials for early feedback on this.

How can the Cabinet Secretary ensure that the demands on Pioneer schools from their work on curriculum design, including spreading good practice or keeping non-pioneer schools informed of progress, do not adversely impact on their own teaching resources?

The specification accompanying the application to become a Pioneer School set out the anticipated time commitment associated with becoming a Pioneer and the level of funding which would be available to support them. This funding was granted largely to enable schools to ensure appropriate arrangements are in place to release practitioners for up to two days per week to work on curriculum design and development.

Applications to become Pioneer Schools were considered by a National Panel which included representation from Welsh Government, the regional consortia, Estyn and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). The Panel was asked to consider each school's application and comment on their suitability to perform the role. Schools' capacity to become Pioneers, without this additional commitment adversely affecting their existing teaching and learning responsibilities, was considered by the panel.

I appreciate that the Pioneer Schools model is a new way to develop a curriculum and as acknowledged earlier it has taken time for all parties to move to this co-constructive approach. Whilst the benefits make it worth it I understand that it can be difficult to gauge and fully plan for the work involved. With that in mind when Pioneers have been unable to attend meetings because of extenuating circumstances, my officials have done their utmost to be sympathetic and accommodating.

Pioneer Schools have been encouraged to keep partner schools updated on progress in developing the new curriculum. Many have also sought views from partner schools about specific matters through various means. Regional consortia have an important role in supporting Pioneer Schools to enable information, ideas and the latest thinking to be shared with all schools across Wales.

To keep the sector up to date on progress from a national perspective we have used many channels including the website, publishing an overarching narrative about what, why, how and the timescale of the changes being made including two animated explainers; Dysg, twitter, stakeholder newsletters and a blog. In addition regional consortia have held meetings and shared information via their normal channels.

What is the Cabinet Secretary's view on the implementation timetable? Can you provide an update on progress against the first two strands of the Plan for curriculum and assessment design and development (Strategic Design and High level Design)? Are you confident that implementation will meet the timescales set out?

The focus of Strand 1 of the curriculum design process has been on strategic design. To take this work forward, four groups of Pioneers have been working with Welsh and international experts to develop the following aspects of the curriculum framework:

- Assessment and Progression
- Cross-curriculum Responsibilities
- Enrichment and Experiences
- Welsh Dimension, International Perspective and the Wider Skills

These working groups have met regularly since being established in April 2016. Recently they have produced and discussed progress reports with the Curriculum and Assessment Group, who provided feedback. Membership of this Group consists of curriculum and assessment experts and practitioners with Welsh and international expertise. As well as identifying next steps in their work, these progress reports contain proposals and recommendations for Strand 2 working groups to consider when developing each of the six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs) outlined in *Successful Futures*.

As I stated previously the Strand 2 working groups have now been agreed and will meet for the first time at a national event on 17 and 18 January. Representatives from the Pioneer Schools, working with Welsh Government, regional consortia and Estyn will agree how they will take forward the work of developing the following AoLEs:

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

The main focus of Strand 2 will be on developing the structure and scope of each AoLE, before content is developed further at Strand 3. Detailed development plans will be published in due course.

There is no change to the agreed long term timeline set out in *A curriculum for Wales*. I anticipate that as the new curriculum becomes available schools will have some flexibility in determining how and when they begin to use it. Some schools may be ready to start this transition very quickly, others will want to take longer. If that is the case we will consider whether it is appropriate to disapply or modify some or all of the current curriculum requirements to facilitate that at the time. It is too early to say at this stage whether that will be necessary but the issue will be kept under review. However, our aim is that the new curriculum and assessment framework will be used to underpin learning and teaching from September 2021.

How is the Cabinet Secretary working to ensure that all involved in the implementation are clear about what needs to be implemented, by when, and in what form?

As you noted in your letter, this is an iterative process. Our plan *A Curriculum for Wales* contains a section under each building block that outlines what needs to happen, when and who is involved.

This plan will be refined and developed over time. This information will be made available through all our usual channels. My officials will work closely with regional consortia to ensure that information is shared with schools and settings.

As the programme develops my officials will also continue to work with other key stakeholders to ensure that they are clear about progress and next steps.

How will you be monitoring progress over the next few months in particular, which Professor Donaldson described as a ‘very critical period’ in terms of increasing the pace of curriculum design?

To monitor the progress of curriculum design and development, the following governance arrangements have been established:

- **Independent Advisory Group** – chaired by Professor Graham Donaldson – provides expert, independent advice and assurance to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and programme team regarding delivery and direction of travel.
- **Change Board** – chaired by the Deputy Permanent Secretary, Education and Public Services – oversees delivery and co-ordination of the three elements of the reform programme (Successful Futures, Teaching Tomorrow’s Teachers and Professional Learning) across the wider education sector.
- **Strategic Stakeholder Group** – chaired by the Programme’s Senior Responsible Officer – ensures engagement and active participation with a wide range of interest groups and key stakeholders
- **Programme Board** – chaired by the Programme’s Senior Responsible Officer – oversees implementation, manages programme finances and ensures that policy decisions are taken to support delivery

These groups will play a key role in monitoring the progress of the programme in the coming months. The Curriculum and Assessment Group referred to previously will also provide

expert advice and support, considering proposals developed by the Pioneer Schools and offering suggestions on further development work.

In addition, Welsh Government officials will be meeting regularly with regional consortia and Estyn representatives to ensure that the development process is kept on track during this key period.

Can you provide more detail on how the introduction of the curriculum will be phased between 2018 and 2021? Will there be different legislative requirements on different schools, meaning pupils will be studying different curricula? How will this affect the qualifications they take?

As noted in *A Curriculum for Wales, A Curriculum for Life*, the ambition is that schools and settings across Wales will be using the new curriculum to support learning and teaching from September 2021.

During the period between 2018 and 2021 (the non statutory period) it will not be compulsory to use the new curriculum framework. The intention is that the new curriculum framework will become compulsory from September 2021 onwards. The period between 2018 and 2021 will allow schools and settings to gradually familiarise themselves with the new curriculum and assessment arrangements and to plan for its use. It also provides time for practitioners and schools to identify their support needs and to take part in professional learning so that they can realise the benefits of the new arrangements.

This timeframe also provides flexibility for schools and settings to determine how and when they begin to apply the new curriculum framework. As per the current arrangements with the Digital Competence Framework, which has been available since September 2016, there will be opportunities during these three years to provide feedback on the new curriculum framework thus allowing further iterations prior to its full use in 2021.

Currently, there is no plan to make any changes to the current law that would lead to different legislative requirements for different schools in terms of the delivery of the curriculum between now and 2021. However, as noted above, some schools may be in a position to begin using the new curriculum sooner than others. Therefore, this will be kept under review as the policy develops and I may wish subsequently to disapply or modify the requirements of the Education Acts in order to facilitate the use of the new curriculum. As Cabinet Secretary, I will keep the Committee advised of developments in that respect.

As the curriculum is developed my officials will work closely with Qualifications Wales to ensure the qualifications available to young people align with the new curriculum and assessment arrangements.

What is the Cabinet Secretary doing to resolve any tensions or misunderstandings between different approaches to whether the assessment framework needs to be clarified before the new curriculum can be developed?

We have learned from the development and implementation of the *Curriculum for Excellence* in Scotland and from reform in other parts of the world that adding “bolt-ons” and adopting a piecemeal approach to system change does not work.

Curriculum and assessment are interdependent and must be viewed as a package that requires close coordination. Curriculum and assessment, or teaching and learning, are two sides of the same coin; how progress in learning is conceived and represented is influenced by issues relating to *content* and to *structure*. They will be developed together.

As part of learning from other reforms, I have brought together a group of highly regarded experts in curriculum planning and assessment to work alongside and in support of the Pioneer Schools Network. As I stated earlier the members of the Curriculum and Assessment Group have national and international experience of educational reform. Their role is to inform and assist with the design of the new curriculum and assessment framework; to ensure that the new curriculum remains true to the principles in *Successful Futures*; and, to support the implementation of proposed reforms set out in *A Curriculum for Wales: a Curriculum for Life*.

The Curriculum and Assessment Group have worked with the Pioneer Steering Group, which included representation from the four Strand 1 working groups, and have agreed the importance of developing the curriculum and assessment in tandem.

In addition my officials regularly meet the Trades Unions, and work closely with regional consortia on all matters relating to assessment and curriculum. We will ensure that developments are reported through these and the other channels mentioned above as the reform agenda progresses.

How will the Cabinet Secretary ensure that the shift away from using assessment for school accountability purposes and towards using it to inform teaching and learning (as recommended by Professor Donaldson) is put into practice?

Successful Futures sets out some 23 recommendations relating to assessment and accountability. Crucially future assessment arrangements will give priority to using assessment as a means to inform better teaching and learning. This will be a move away from the Welsh Government gathering information about children and young people's performance on a school-by-school basis for accountability purposes.

I recognise there is some way to go to realise the philosophical and practical shift recommended by Professor Donaldson away from using assessment for school accountability purposes and towards using it to inform teaching and learning. My officials will continue to work with and through Pioneer Schools and our expert Groups to take this forward. In addition they will work to find ways to change the perception that the current system inhibits the capacity of schools to get on and innovate, and even to fulfil their role as a Pioneer.

What is the Cabinet Secretary doing to ensure that work on curriculum and professional learning are successfully developed in tandem?

It is important that all teachers and practitioners receive the right support, at the right time. The focus on and development of professional learning is crucial as we design our new curriculum and assessment arrangements to establish a high status education workforce.

Establishing a national approach to professional learning from initial teacher education and taking account of the whole professional career pathway will be essential. This will need to be embedded in a self-improving school system, with evidence-based practitioner research, to develop a professional workforce with the knowledge and skills they need to develop every learner's full potential. Our ultimate aim is to embed a system wide professional

learning culture, building capacity in all schools in Wales to empower every teacher to lead their own professional learning.

To ensure that professional learning opportunities are developed by practitioners for practitioners, a network of Pioneer Schools is leading on the development of a national approach to Professional Learning. This approach will align with career development milestones to ensure access to the highest quality professional learning at all stages of the career continuum.

During the last 12 months the professional learning Pioneers have focussed on identifying immediate pedagogical and leadership requirements that can be taken forward now in readiness for the new curriculum. Initial priorities identified by practitioners include digital competence, leadership development and assessment for learning. Regional consortia are developing plans to ensure that these priority areas are taken forward.

Pioneers are also working together to pilot the new Professional Teacher Standards, develop the professional learning approach for Digital Competence and, with the OECD, to develop schools as learning organisations.

What action will the Cabinet Secretary take to ensure that young people in the current school system are not adversely affected by being caught between two, quite different, versions of curricula.

In *A curriculum for Wales: a curriculum for life* we recognised that some schools may be ready to start using the new curriculum framework earlier than others. The time between the framework becoming available and using it to support learning and teaching provides schools with time to prepare and to mitigate the risk you have identified.

During the design phase of the AoLEs we will work with Pioneer Schools and Qualifications Wales to reflect on what these changes may mean for learners who are part way through a course of study leading to a qualification.

The committee may be aware that there is a well-established approach adopted by the qualifications regulators to maintaining stability in qualifications outcomes when a new GCSE or an A level is introduced. This is known as ‘comparable outcomes’ and the principal aim of the approach is to ensure students taking new qualifications are neither advantaged nor disadvantaged compared to those who took the legacy qualification. We anticipate that such an approach will be adopted when the new qualifications are awarded.

How will the Cabinet Secretary decide what is included in legislation, have you considered what the right balance should be? When will such decisions need to be made?

Our approach to legislation will be based on the principles underpinning *Successful Futures*, the policy that emerges from the work of the Pioneers, including good practice taken from other countries, as well the Welsh Government’s policies on the rule of law and good law. We have begun to look at aspects of legislation to understand the current provisions and their relevance to the reforms. This work will continue as the strands of work led by the Pioneers proceeds.

At this point it is difficult to predict the outcome of the Pioneers’ work and I would be reluctant to speculate on their findings in my reply to the Committee. However, the direction given to us by Professor Donaldson is that legislation should be used lightly, with a preference instead upon the use of guidance where needed to underpin teaching. This

reflects a significant change to the level of direction and prescription provided through the current national curriculum model.

Professor Donaldson's evidence to the Committee outlined the tension that can exist in providing freedom for our practitioners to use their professionalism and creativity to meet the needs all learners, versus the need at times to give certainty through the law. The model outlined in *Successful Futures*, and one we would wish to follow, is based on the principle of subsidiarity. Moving to this system will require a change of mind-set on the part of practitioners and wider stakeholders. Nevertheless, it is an approach to which the sector has shown undoubted enthusiasm that I hope our legislative proposals will satisfy.

We will begin to test aspects of the legislative proposals with the Pioneers and stakeholders as curriculum design work proceeds.

What influence does Wales' performance in PISA have on the development and design of the new curriculum and how much of a factor is this in deciding what children and young people should be learning in school?

The 2014 OECD report on *Improving Schools in Wales* concluded that current assessment and evaluation arrangements are unsatisfactory and *Successful Futures* makes numerous references to that report. It recognises the OECD's findings and acknowledges that '*the disappointing performance of Wales in successive PISA surveys has been and remains a significant driver for change*' (p.10).

The purposes of the new curriculum are set out in terms of the positive outcomes we wish to achieve for our children and young people in their education. It seeks to achieve more than a rise in PISA scores.

In order secure those positive outcomes, however, the new curriculum and assessment arrangements will, as proposed in *Successful Futures*, place a significant emphasis on the application of skills to real life contexts. This will align with PISA, which also tests how well students can apply the knowledge and skills they have learned at school to real-life challenges.

As a consequence of this alignment, I expect that the introduction of the new curriculum and assessment arrangements will have a positive, long term effect on our PISA outcomes.

In the context of curriculum reform, early findings from the OECD's visit in November have indicated that many things now in place are putting Wales on a more promising track. We know from international evidence that major reform takes time to work through the system and those countries that have stuck to the course have reaped the dividends some fifteen years down the line.

How will the Cabinet Secretary ensure that strong, strategic leadership and direction is provided for the development and implementation of the Donaldson recommendations?

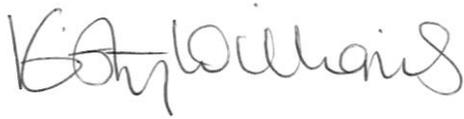
I have made it clear that education reform is our national mission. The goal of this mission is a world-class education system geared to equip our children and young people to thrive amid the challenges and opportunities of the 21st Century.

I believe that we are collectively ready for this challenge and the OECD has recently confirmed to me that we are on the right track and need to continue on this path. In line with this I will be refreshing our strategic delivery plan, *Qualified for Life*, with a view to

publishing a revised document in the spring. It is important that we do this in order to ensure that everything we are doing in education is suitably aligned with and supportive of our reform agenda.

Over the coming months I will be reaffirming and re-emphasising, with all of our key delivery partners, our collective leadership role in delivering the vision that Professor Donaldson provided and that we have all agreed and committed to.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Williams', written in a cursive style.

Kirsty Williams AC/AM

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education