

National Assembly for Wales' Children, Young People and Education Committee Consultation

Provision of textbooks and learning resources for pupils taking reformed general qualifications (GCSEs and A Levels) in Wales

NAHT welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Children, Young People and Education committee.

NAHT represents more than 29,000 school leaders in early years, primary, secondary and special schools, making us the largest association for school leaders in the UK.

We represent, advise and train school leaders in Wales, England and Northern Ireland. We use our voice at the highest levels of government to influence policy for the benefit of leaders and learners everywhere. Our new section, NAHT Edge, supports, develops and represents middle leaders in schools.

The invitation to submit evidence to the National Assembly for Wales' Children, Young People and Education Committee in relation to the consultation focusing on **the provision of textbooks and learning resources for pupils taking reformed general qualifications (GCSEs and A Levels) in Wales** is welcome.

NAHT Cymru will supply both generic and subject specific evidence supplied by school leaders.

Introduction

1. NAHT membership range – Headteachers, Deputy Headteachers, Assistant Headteachers and Middle Leaders across all school sectors. Our newest section, NAHT Edge, includes Heads of Departments, Heads of 6th Forms and Assessment Lead Staff. Therefore, NAHT is well placed to present evidence concerning the provision of textbooks and learning resources for pupils taking reformed general qualifications (GCSEs and A Levels) in Wales.

General views

2. Initial feedback from schools suggested general concern about an apparent disconnect between first teaching of new courses and the timely production of relevant support materials and resources.
3. In terms of shortages of necessary Welsh-medium, or English medium, textbooks or learning resources for pupils in Wales undertaking their GCSEs or A Levels, it is an extremely variable picture.

4. Certain subjects have textbooks available but many of them were not available until a significant period after the start of initial teaching of a new course.
5. This has resulted in some significant frustration from school staff, a loss of confidence in the ability to effectively implement qualification reforms in a timely manner and the need to develop a more open and supportive communication strategy for specific subject areas, particularly during the transition / implementation period

Specific detail:

6. For example, some schools have reported that although Mathematics AS teaching started at the start of the school year, Unit 1 textbooks were not available until January 2018 and Unit 2 not until March 2018 and none are yet available for Units 3 or 4. One school reported that Practice test materials for Mathematics AS are to be published in June 2018 – if this is correct, it will be in the month following the AS examination.
7. A number of subject practitioners have reported that some of the materials that have been published appear to of variable in quality. For example, English Language resources containing high-tariff question examples do not have appropriate mark schemes, or suitable exemplars. Furthermore, subject leaders suggest that the exemplars do not reflect how examiners will actually award marks.
8. Mathematics GCSE first teaching began in 2015 and WJEC textbooks were published shortly afterwards, however, practitioners report errors in the materials and have suggested that the materials appear to be an adaptation of materials from an England-based examination board and not produced specifically for Wales.
9. Geography textbooks for GCSE have been described as overly 'wordy', not making it as easily accessible as it should be for students.
10. Media Studies AS textbooks share both WJEC and Eduqas schemes of work producing significant confusion between the two.
11. Members report that Physical Education, both GCSE and AS texts, are too brief and do not appear to cover the entire course specification.
12. There are a number of subjects where schools continue to report that textbooks and other relevant materials are still not available despite a significant period after first teaching has passed.
13. For example, NAHT have received reports that Mathematics AS Unit 3 and 4, ICT for both GCSE and AS, Media Studies GCSE and Geography A Level, have no endorsed textbooks available yet. This

means that from first teaching, ranging from 8 months ago to a year and 8 months ago (depending upon the specific subject and course), students and staff have not had access to appropriate resources to support study.

14. It is unsurprising, given the above evidence from schools concerning resources and support materials, that there is genuine fear that students will be disadvantaged during their studies. As a result there is also significant danger of student outcomes being affected.
15. Staff believe that in certain subject areas, such as Mathematics, pupils will be facing the unknown regarding how the content will be examined. The perception previously was that the WJEC exams – on the whole – were uniform in the way the content was examined. There is growing concern that neither pupils or staff know what will constitute a certain grade as the grade boundaries are unclear.
16. NAHT evidence suggests that the current situation will have a direct negative impact on pupil outcome. Staff are reporting that they are less confident that they are covering the full content with the required depth, knowledge and understanding needed to fully support their students, due to issues related to support materials and resources.
17. For example, there appeared to be a significant range of issues for ICT, Staff reported that, ‘current Year 12 students are effectively going in blind as no real resources for new specifications have been issued. No new textbook is available yet, nor any exemplar resources. A meeting was held in September explaining the changes but little help was forthcoming despite requests from numerous teachers on the day.’ Very little was able to be offered at that time in terms of support or solutions. In addition, changes to the way controlled assessment samples are to be uploaded (PDF format only, no other formats allowed) will impact on how the student’s work is moderated and this creates a huge administrative task for staff. In addition, students have had to revisit work and produce high numbers of screen shot evidence when marks were previously awarded by viewing the actual products they had created. Changing to this system was confirmed late.
18. In Media Studies some sample assessment materials are available but staff feel that a WJEC endorsed textbook at GCSE would provide clearer guidance for a vastly changed course. The current AS textbook is unclear due to the two schemes of work included and will likely cause candidate confusion.
19. There appears to be a growing disquiet amongst staff as a result of the current situation and confidence that resource issues will be resolved and improved in the future is relatively low in most of the subject areas we have cited in our evidence. History textbooks appear to be

somewhat of an exception with a sense that the materials cover the distinctiveness of the Welsh Curriculum in History particularly well.

Conclusion

20. There appear to be a number of fundamental issues that need to be addressed in order to rebuild the required school / staff confidence. This is true for both the support materials themselves and in staff feeling confident that they are delivering broad coverage, in depth and with full content knowledge for all subject / course specifications.
21. Clearly, textbook and support materials need to accurately and fully reflect the full course specification in every subject. A broad range of exemplar materials are required with accurate and relevant mark schemes. Assessment material samples should reflect expectations required for the final examination so that students understand and are able to aspire to the highest of standards that reflect their true potential.
22. It would have been of great use to all schools to know when all of the resources were to be available and, whilst this may now be the case, ideally, the timetable should have been mapped out to ensure everything was in place prior to first teaching of all reformed subjects.
23. From a school subject staff point of view, regular feedback and communication with the examination board subject lead officers is invaluable and should be an expectation in every subject area, and, at an increased level for all newly reformed examinations.
24. Bringing in such significant changes to qualifications before ensuring all support materials were in place has proven to be unfair for both staff and students. A positive working relationship between WJEC, Qualifications Wales and school-based teaching staff, with regular direct communication must be the overall aim and is clearly in the best interest of students.

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