

Points for presentation to Petitions Committee

The petition states: “We are calling on the National Assembly for Wales to change the Curriculum and teach Welsh history, from a Welsh perspective, in our Primary, Secondary and Sixth form Schools.”

1. The current (2008) Programme of Study for History gives a central place to local and Welsh history, within a broader context. It is itself based on the previous versions of the Curriculum and on the principles of the first reports from 1989 onwards.
2. Freedom has always been given to teachers to interpret these requirements according to the needs and interests of their pupils, the location of the school etc. However, in response to the concerns expressed by teachers that there was too much content in the History Programme of Study, each revision of the Curriculum removed content, but kept the skills of History, as defined since 1988 as Chronological Awareness, Knowledge and Understanding, Interpretations of History, Historical Enquiry and Communication. The 2008 Order placed the main emphasis on enquiry, providing a framework of 'big questions' to structure the teaching approach.
3. Consultation with teachers suggested that GCSE courses and their approach to assessment had a significant influence on the history taught at Key Stage 3, and even in primary schools. It may be relevant here to note that the history of Wales was an option within the GCSE syllabus, although it had been a compulsory element in the previous O Level syllabus. It may be that this was perceived as reflecting its status, and influenced the approach taken to the history of Wales in schools more generally. A new GCSE syllabus for Wales has now been developed, which integrates Welsh history into the wider historical context, but it is too early to say whether this will have any impact on the approach taken to teaching the history of Wales pre-14.
4. Comments by university teachers suggest that the history of Wales as a subject is also at risk in that sector. Reference has been made to new students lacking knowledge and interest in it as a subject, which may reflect their previous experience. The history of Wales is also optional at AS and A2 level.
5. The new National Curriculum currently being developed, based on the recommendations of the Donaldson Report: history will become part of the humanities area, which also includes geography, religious education, business studies etc. It is not clear at present how much space history will have within this new system, nor what sort of history is being considered.

6. Five years have elapsed since the Report on the Cwricwlwm Cymreig and History was published. Although it had a favourable reception, and although the then Minister for Education announced he accepted all its recommendations, I am not aware of any guidance having been given by the Government during these years on the teaching of history, apart from that provided by Professor Donaldson's Report, *Successful Futures* (2015).
7. Unfortunately, although there is an entirely appropriate emphasis in that Report on improving the situation of the Welsh language, there is a disappointing failure to address the cultural, social or historical context of the language (and see my detailed comments on this in the accompanying document, *Donaldson Response Final*).
8. The response to this petition, which resembles the response during the consultation process in 2012–13, suggest that there is a significant degree of public dissatisfaction with what is perceived to be a failure by schools to teach the history of Wales effectively at present. The lack of clear guidance by the Government, together with the passage of time since the publication of the Report on the Cwricwlwm Cymreig and History is likely to intensify this.
9. The lack of any reliable and objective evidence for the history being taught in schools in Wales adds to the problem. Detailed research was done into the sort of Welsh history being taught to pupils 11–16 – but that was twenty years ago. I am not aware of any research into the subject having been done since then, and consequently any discussion of the topic is based on conjecture and personal experience.
10. Because of this lack of objective evidence, and the strong feelings on the subject, there is a danger that history teaching in Wales may become a political issue. Since there is plenty of opportunity in the existing Curriculum to teach the history of Wales, it is not clear why there is so much public dissatisfaction with the current provision. Teaching the history of Wales may possibly be perceived by some teachers – and some politicians too, perhaps – as teaching nationalist propaganda. But developing the skills of enquiry and evaluating evidence is a powerful weapon against such brainwashing. The history of Wales is also much more complex and ambiguous than some believe it to be. Wales has from earliest times been a multi-cultural country, where more than one language was spoken, and more than one religion followed. The proper teaching of history does not provide easy answers, not one version of the past – but it does encourage us to think, to ponder and to ask questions. It gives us the opportunity to understand and accept different ideas and beliefs, to value discussion, the exchange of ideas and the evaluation of assertions – and by doing so, to come to value democracy, not

as something that happens a long way away from us, but as something that developed and exists in our own locality.