

## Political education

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 29 Ionawr 2019

Petitions Committee | 29 January 2019

### Research Briefing:

---

Petition number: P-05-861

Petition title: Make political education a compulsory element of the new national curriculum.

Text of petition: Education should provide young people with the skills and tools that will ensure that they become valued and engaged citizens of the country. Despite the vast advances that have been made by social media and fast-paced news cycles, young people often view politics as a taboo subject, seen as something that is not for the likes of them.

We believe that young people should leave education with a comprehensive understanding of political institutions within the United Kingdom. The Electoral Reform Society report recommended that four key aspects should be taught in school – the parties, democracy, the role of institutions and campaigning.

At present, the Welsh Government has a unique opportunity to lead the way on this matter as it is currently developing its first national curriculum. As one of its four key concepts, the new curriculum aims to produce citizens that are "ethical and informed". It therefore stands to reason that political education should be an essential part of this.

The development of this curriculum provides a unique opportunity for the Welsh Government to revolutionise how it educates its young people, providing citizens that will become the leaders of the future.

#### 1. Current curriculum

Currently, the school curriculum for Wales provides opportunities for young people to understand the principles and system of democracy, including how young people can influence decision making. Schools mostly cover these topics through personal and social education (PSE) and focus on developing 'Active Citizenship', which is one of the five themes within the Welsh Government's non-statutory [PSE framework for 7 to 19-year-olds-Wales](#) (2008).

PSE is a statutory curriculum requirement and forms part of the basic curriculum for all registered pupils at maintained schools who are of compulsory school age. Decisions on the precise content and model of delivery of a school PSE programme lie with head teachers and their governors, working with local authorities and other local partners.

Within the 'Active Citizenship' element of the PSE framework, learners should 'Develop a practical understanding of their rights and of the **links between political decisions and their own lives**'.

At Key Stage 2, learners should be given opportunities to understand '**the importance of democratic decision-making**'. At Key Stage 3, learners should be given opportunities to understand:

- the principles of democracy in Wales, the UK and the EU;
- how representatives, e.g. School Councils, Youth Forums, Funky Dragon, Councillors, AMs, MPs, MEPs, are elected and understand their roles
- how young people can have their views listened to and influence decision-making.

At Key Stage 4, learners should be given the opportunities to understand '**the importance of participating in democratic elections** and the links between political decisions and their own lives'.

The [Education Act 1996](#) requires headteachers, governing bodies and local authorities to **ensure pupils receive balanced views if being taught about democracy and politics**. Section 406 of the Education Act 1996 requires local authorities, governing bodies and head teachers to forbid junior pupils from pursuing partisan political activities at the school. It also forbids the promotion of partisan political views in the teaching of any subject to any pupil. Where activities take place away from the school premises junior pupils are not allowed to take part if they have been arranged by any member of staff in a school or anyone acting on behalf of the school.

## **2. New Curriculum for Wales (to be introduced from September 2022)**

The Welsh Government, working with the education profession, is developing a new curriculum following Professor Graham Donaldson's independent review of curriculum and assessment arrangements and his subsequent report, [Successful Futures](#) (February 2015).

The Welsh Government has adopted the following **four purposes** of the new curriculum as recommended by Professor Donaldson. They are that all children and young people completing their schooling will be:

- Ambitious, capable learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives.
- Enterprising, creative contributors who are ready to play a full part in life and work.
- Ethical, informed citizens who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world.

- Healthy, confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

The Welsh Government has also adopted the **six Areas of Learning and Experience** recommended by Professor Donaldson:

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

The statutory introduction of the new curriculum will be in September 2022. The new curriculum will initially only be introduced in primary schools and Year 7 in September 2022, before rolling into year 8 for 2023, year 9 in 2024, and so on as the cohort moves through.

Before its statutory introduction, the new curriculum will be available for schools to feed-back, test and refine **from April 2019**, before a final version is published for school to access from January 2020.

Pioneer schools are collaborating with the Welsh Government, regional education consortia and experts and advisers through **six Working Groups** – one for each of the new Areas of Learning and Experience. These groups have produced **‘What Matters?’ statements** setting out the latest thinking on curriculum content and key topics.

In their [‘What Matters?’ statement](#), published in December 2017, the Humanities AoLE Working Group identified the following amongst the purposes of this area of the curriculum:

Through understanding and respecting different beliefs and **understanding how to exercise their democratic rights and responsibilities**, pupils will become ethical, informed citizens.

By **developing personal stances** on matters of faith, spirituality, sustainability and social inclusion they will become healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

The group’s statement also proposes that:

Pupils will:

- understand historical, geographical, **political**, economic, religious and societal concepts.
- explore their environment to further develop their sense of place and well-being.
- engage in learning experiences about rights, values, ethics, beliefs, religion, philosophy and spirituality.
- consider, explore and **make informed choices** regarding sustainability and the impact of their actions.

- positively contribute to their community and critically engage with local, national and global issues to become a responsible citizen of Wales and the wider world.

### 3. Expert Panel on Electoral Reform

The report of the Expert Panel on Electoral Reform, [A Parliament that works for Wales](#) (November 2017), in relation to lowering the voting age, said that to ensure that young people are encouraged and supported to exercise their right to vote, any reduction in the minimum voting age should be accompanied by appropriate, effective and non-partisan political and citizenship education. The Panel recommended that:

- The citizenship education put in place to accompany any reduction in the minimum voting age must:
- i Recognise the diversity of settings within which 16- and 17-year-olds may receive education and training, to ensure that those outside traditional school settings are also supported and encouraged to exercise their vote;
  - ii Go beyond simply outlining democratic structures and formal processes, to engage and inform young people about the issues which matter to them;
  - iii Ensure that young people have opportunities to learn about a full range of political opinions in a non-partisan way;
  - iv Be delivered by teachers and educators who have themselves received high quality training in order to ensure that citizenship education is taken seriously, and to avoid both political bias and the perception of political bias;
  - v Be subject to review after a suitable period to ensure its design and delivery met its objectives.

The Minister for Education states in her letter to the Committee that she met the then Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services, Alun Davies and the National Assembly's Llywydd to discuss how to support the Draft Local Government and Elections Bill which intends to lower the voting age in local government elections to 16, and the recommendation of the Expert Panel on Electoral Reform. She said that she will be making a statement on this 'in the new year' (2019).

### 4. Electoral Reform Society, 'Our Voices Heard'

The Electoral Reform Society Cymru co-ordinated a project, [Our Voices Heard](#) in 2018. This sought the views of nearly 200 young people on political education. A list of seven proposals were presented to the Minister for Education in November 2018. These were:

- Statutory lessons on the basics of democracy;
- A independent 'toolbox' to help teachers deliver these sessions in an engaging and non-partisan way;
- The need for time to discuss and debate current affairs in the school day;
- Closer contact between schools and elected politicians;

- A national mock election, running at the same time as the Assembly elections, where young people would be able to ‘practice’ voting and discuss their local candidates;
- The need for ‘real life’ lessons like paying bills, registering to vote and information on taxes to be taught;
- An online resource being made available at election time to give better insight into the candidates standing.

The Minister said in her letter to the Committee that she would be formally responding ‘early in the new year’.

## 5. Petition in the Fourth Assembly

In November 2013, the Petitions Committee considered a petition **calling for political science to made compulsory (P-04-516)** as part of the curriculum in schools. The Committee sought the views of the Minister for Education and Skills who responded (January 2014) setting out the current position and that the curriculum was to be reviewed, The Minister [wrote to the Committee again in March 2014](#) setting out how politics was being delivered through the Welsh Baccalaureate at that time. Following the publication of Professor Donaldson’s Report, the Minister for Education and Skills wrote to the Committee setting out the ways in which stakeholders will be able to contribute to the development of the new curriculum and the petition was closed on 13 September 2016.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.