

## Written Submission for 26 June

### Opportunities afforded by the new draft curriculum for the study of history

1. **Teachers' independence.** Teachers will be free to devise flexible courses unique to their school, meeting the needs and interests of their pupils, across both the traditional Humanities subjects of Religious Education, Geography and History, and the new subjects of Business Studies and Social Studies.
2. **Relevance.** It will be possible to reflect current events in these courses, and to consider how religious, geographical and historical factors influence each other and affect business and society too.
3. **Cynefin.** The concept of *cynefin* will give a focus and a purpose to the new courses. It provides an opportunity to give young people a secure foundation of belonging. This should help them to look outwards at the world around them, and understand how their *cynefin* contributed to the development of Wales and the wider world, and how that world has affected Wales and their own area.
4. **Skills.** There is an appropriate emphasis on the skills of each individual subject (such as enquiry, analysis and the evaluation of evidence) and the structure of the new curriculum provides opportunities to practise these across a range of subject and to apply them in new contexts.
5. **The Welsh language.** The new curriculum gives importance to the Welsh language, and the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience provides opportunities to enrich the study of the language by placing it in its religious, social, geographical and historical context. Students can consider the reasons for its persistence, and implications of living in a bilingual/multilingual country today.

### Challenges to be faced in implementing the new curriculum

1. **Practicality.** The detailed documents that have been published are evidence of the careful and thorough work which has been done over the years since *Successful Futures* was published. But in their size and detail they are painfully reminiscent of the first drafts of the original National Curriculum thirty years ago. That curriculum proved to be too difficult to implement, and it was necessary to simplify it and to shorten it substantially in the years that followed.
2. **Tension between teachers' autonomy and public opinion.** Our tendency in teaching is to keep to the familiar, the safe and that which engages our audience. The GCSE and A level examinations also influence the work of secondary schools. Teachers have a natural desire to provide work and experiences which help candidates to succeed in those examinations. In my view, teachers will need clear and reliable guidance in implementing the new curriculum. Such guidance should make clear its possibilities rather than indicating only one way of interpreting and teaching it. But would the provision of such guidance undermine the principle of giving teachers independence in devising their own courses?
3. **Current difficulties.** The former curriculum gave Welsh history a clear central position in the Programme of Study, but the structure of the draft curriculum does not give it the same status. The criticism of the lack of Welsh history in our schools reflects the experiences of

those who were educated through the former curriculum. If Welsh history did not then receive the attention they perceive as appropriate, what can they expect in future?

### Concerns

1. **Lack of evidence to support debate.** The place of Welsh history in the school curriculum has recently become the subject of public debate, which is a comparatively new development in my experience. But as far as I am aware, there has been no independent review of what is actually taught for at least twenty years. Consequently, it appears that current debate is based on the experiences and personal opinions of individuals and the interests of different organisations. In view of the strong feelings sometimes expressed, and the political aspects of the debate, there is a clear need for an independent audit of the history currently being taught. It might be possible to use the information held by the Welsh Joint Education Committee on option choices at GCSE and A Level as a starting point. The WJEC was also responsible for a survey done between 2008 and 2011 of internal school assessments at the end of Key Stage 3. I worked with a team of subject teachers to moderate the work submitted for history. I do not know what happened to the reports prepared at that time, but I do remember drafting a letter to be sent to those schools which had not submitted any examples of work on some core aspects of the Programme of Study, such as the history of Wales.
2. **The dangers of a debate based on lack of reliable information.** The development and influence of social media show the dangers of debates based on emotion and prejudice. I am afraid that the current debate could have an adverse effect on social cohesion if no objective evidence is available to support statements.