

**Welsh Government
Curriculum for Wales
Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings
16 July 2021**

1. The NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to comment on the consultation on Curriculum for Wales: Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings
2. NASUWT - The Teachers' Union, represents teachers and headteachers in Wales and across the United Kingdom.

GENERAL COMMENTS

3. The NASUWT maintains that securing high outcomes for all children and young people means that action is needed to:
 - a. provide a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum experience fit for the 21st century;
 - b. ensure parity of esteem between academic and vocational pathways and the cognitive, emotional, cultural, creative, ethical and social dimensions of learning;
 - c. require all state-funded schools and colleges to work together to secure a comprehensive curriculum entitlement for all 14 to 19 year-olds;
 - d. equip children and young people to be research-driven problem solvers;
 - e. extend entitlements for all children and young people to high-quality academic and vocational education, coupled with equality

- of access to high-quality, practical, hands-on, work-based learning opportunities;
- f. refocus the accountability system to reflect and support the expectation that all young people should remain in education and training until the age of 18;
 - g. restore the morale of the teaching profession by tackling poor employment practices, including workload, securing professional entitlements and respect for teachers, and refocusing the efforts of teachers and headteachers on their core responsibilities for teaching and leading teaching and learning;
 - h. establish a Masters-level profession and raise the pay of teachers in recognition of the increased knowledge and skills that they bring to the job; and
 - i. ensure access to high-quality professional development for all teachers throughout their careers.¹
4. It is clear that in many respects, the current curriculum framework does not meet these important tests. For this reason, the NASUWT supported the Welsh Government's decision to commission a fundamental review of curriculum and assessment arrangements.
5. In general, the report of the review of the curriculum undertaken by Professor Graham Donaldson, *Successful Futures*, set out a coherent and rational basis for the future development of the curriculum framework in Wales.
6. However, in a range of critical respects, the proposals for the curriculum published by the Welsh Government have failed to reflect many of the key principles articulated in *Successful Futures*.
7. In particular, the recommendation that the curriculum should be developed by the workforce, for the workforce, has not been given practical effect. The exclusion of the voice of the profession has resulted

¹ NASUWT (2013). *Maintaining world class schools*. NASUWT; Birmingham.

in a proposed curriculum model that would, if implemented, generate significant workload burdens for teachers and undermine the ability of schools to secure for all children and young people their entitlement to a broad and balanced range of learning experiences.

8. The NASUWT continues to have profound concerns about current proposals for curricula reform. These concerns relate to critical aspects of the structure and content of the curriculum; its implications for the qualifications system and assessment practice; and the intention to proceed with implementation of the curriculum without a coherent evaluation of its workforce and resource requirements.
9. The NASUWT considers that the current health crisis and the recovery phase that will be necessary is the wrong time to initiate wholesale changes to, not only, the curriculum but also the accountability and assessment framework aligned to it. Space is needed to allow teachers and schools to recover from this time of extreme stress. Progressing at this time could lead to irretrievable mistakes being made.
10. The Union has also called on the Welsh Government to delay the implementation of the new curriculum in the face of the disruption to schools and the education system, stemming from the health emergency owing to the pandemic of COVID-19.
11. Teachers and teaching will remain disrupted for the foreseeable future, and teachers and schools have learnt a whole new way of working online and have poured their efforts into secure blended learning opportunities for pupils. The NASUWT considers that it is entirely unreasonable to place additional burdens on teachers at this time
12. The Union remains clear that in these circumstances, it would not be appropriate to proceed with implementation of the proposed curriculum by the start of the academic year 2022/23.

13. The NASUWT is therefore pleased by the Education Minister's recent decision to postpone the planned roll out of the New Curriculum for Year 7s in September 2022. This was the right decision given that the teaching profession continues to operate at full capacity providing education in the midst of a global pandemic. The Union remains concerned however at the Welsh Government's decision to retain the 2022 roll-out date for primary schools and the decision to require the New Curriculum for Year 7 and 8 to be introduced simultaneously in 2023.
14. The NASUWT is also very concerned regarding the offer of greater "flexibility" to secondary schools in deciding for themselves whether to delay the introduction of the new curriculum. The Union maintains that this is much too vague and leaves too much to the determination of individual school leaders. We are concerned some schools will choose to plough on regardless of whether they are ready for these changes.
15. This is not helped by the decision to make schools which do choose to delay roll out the new curriculum to both years 7 and 8 next year.
16. A universal and unified approach by the Welsh Government would have helped avoid a rushed and disjointed patchwork approach to the new curriculum which risks jeopardising its success, pushing up workload and stress for teachers and sowing confusion for pupils and parents."

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

17. The following comments must be read in the context that the NASUWT continued concerns, set out above, regarding the delay in the implementation of the new curriculum and the associated assessment and accountability frameworks to allow for a period of sustained recovery from the crippling effects of the pandemic.
18. The NASUWT's response is informed directly by serving teacher and headteacher members and also by the work of its representative

committees and consultative structures, made up of practising teachers and school leaders working in the education system.

Separate framework for non-maintained settings

19. The NASUWT is unclear as to why it has been felt necessary to establish a separate curricular framework for funded non-maintained nursery settings. The curricular framework should seek to establish a set of common curricular entitlements for all learners. The nature of this entitlement should not vary according to the particular type of state-funded setting children attend.
20. It should also be noted that all children attending nursery provision, whether maintained or non-maintained, will move on to primary schools in the next stage of their learning journeys. Even though the proposed curriculum draws upon the Curriculum for Wales Framework Guidance, there is a clear risk that differences in the frameworks applicable to maintained and non-maintained settings will hamper transitions and create unnecessary additional complexities and burdens for schools. It should be noted that in other jurisdictions with curricular frameworks for young children, no such distinction is drawn between maintained and non-maintained settings.
21. The union maintains that as a minimum expectation, the Welsh Government should set out a clearer rationale for its proposal to introduce a separate framework for non-maintained settings and should make clear how it expects the risks of this approach identified above will be addressed.

The five developmental pathways

22. The NASUWT welcomes that the document makes clear that the five developmental pathways identified are of equal value and that this principle should be reflected children's learning experiences. In establishing meaningful and holistic learning and development

experiences for young children, it is essential that each pathway is recognised as important and that some are not privileged over others. However, the statements used to illustrate the different aspects of each pathway must be used appropriately by settings. It should be noted in the particular context of early education that assessment of children's progress and achievement often emphasises the observation of their participation in activities that take place throughout the day and that such opportunities can arise in a range of different contexts.

23. It is, therefore, essential that in assuring themselves that the pathways are used to support learning effectively, leaders are guided not to interpret the extensive list of statements under each pathway as crude checklists for which evidence must be gathered and presented for each individual descriptor of learning. Guidance will need to clarify that such practices are especially inappropriate in early learning contexts and serve to distract from effective assessment practice in which practitioners use their professional judgement to understand what pupils know and can do in the context of the curriculum and identify areas for future learning.

The role of the practitioner

24. The NASUWT is not convinced that any meaningful value to the document is added through the role of the practitioner section. The responsibilities of practitioners are set out in their employment contracts and relevant requirements published by the Education Workforce Council. The role of the practitioner in securing effective learning environments is complex and multifaceted, and it is not possible to condense this role into a few short paragraphs in a document of this type. The inevitable consequence of seeking to summarise the professional roles and responsibilities in this way is to misrepresent them and to omit important additional considerations. For example, the document does not refer to the role of practitioners in securing high standards of

behaviour in settings or the expectations they might have in respect of the support and resources they would require to discharge this role.

25. In addition, the Union maintains that some of the assertions in this section are contentious. For example, while it is important that children are respected, it is by no means evident that professional responsibilities are discharged effectively by 'supporting [children's] decisions and choices' in all circumstances. Among other considerations, such an approach could be regarded as inconsistent with settings' responsibility to keep children safe from harm and to prevent them acting in ways that are detrimental to their interests and those of others. It would also be inconsistent with the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which the Welsh Government has attached significant importance in other areas of policymaking.
26. The NASUWT believes that this section not only serves no useful purpose but is also potentially misleading and should be withdrawn.
27. **Engaging experiences and effective environments**
28. While there is little that practitioners would find contentious in these sections, they contain guides for practice that are set out elsewhere in the document. It is not clear why these particular aspects of practice have been selected for inclusion in these stand-alone sections and it is not clear what value would be lost by removing these sections from the document.

Pedagogy

29. Pedagogy in the context of early learning experiences is a highly complex and skilled activity, requiring practitioners to draw upon a wide range of knowledge, understanding and expertise. Although many of the aspects of practice set out in this section are likely to be viewed as important by practitioners, there are many more important dimensions of effective pedagogy that have been omitted. It is not a sensible objective

to seek to include a summary of pedagogic practice in a document of this type as it will be necessarily incomplete and, in any event, it is not clear that it is appropriately located within a document that purports to describe a curricular framework. This section should, therefore, be withdrawn from the document.

Assessment

30. The section on assessment states that 'the temptation for us to rush through skills, knowledge and experiences can have an adverse effect on the next stages of learning'. There is no evidence that practitioners experience such a temptation and the inclusion of this statement will be regarded as incongruous by many and will undermine the extent to which they will consider that the advice set out in the document is serious and sufficiently respectful of their professionalism. Further, while many might not take issue with the statement that 'developing our relationship with the child should be a joyful experience for everyone', it is unclear what relevance it has to establishing fit for purpose approaches to assessment within settings.
31. The NASUWT believes that the straightforward and sensible messages on assessment set out in section 10.3 are sufficient for the purposes of a curricular framework.

Leadership

32. It is not appropriate for a document of this type to include a summary of the principles of effective leadership. These matters are addressed elsewhere, including in contracts of employment, job descriptions and through the requirements and materials produced by the EWC. The summary is incomplete and excludes many critical dimensions of effective leadership in early education settings.

Progression steps

33. The NASUWT's views on the content and structure of the progression steps associated with the Curriculum for Wales have been set out elsewhere. However, in this particular context, it is important to note the incongruous nature of the descriptions of learning in the case of young children. While the rationale for first-person statements is understood, it is evident that the greater proportion of the descriptions at Progression step 1 are written in a way that very few, if any, children in nursery settings would use to articulate their understanding of what they know, understand and can do. The use of such ill-suited terms is not appropriate in a statutory framework. They should be amended so that they more accurately reflect how assessment is most effectively undertaken with young children.



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