

Initial Highlights of the Donaldson Report

The Donaldson Report was published on 25th February 2015. It offers a wide and thorough analysis of education in Wales and makes far reaching and fundamental recommendations. This is a short summary, *but by no means a replacement for reading the full report.*

1. The Curriculum should be based on 4 Key Purposes to develop children and **young people as:**
 - **ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives**
 - **enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work**
 - **ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world**
 - **healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.**
2. The curriculum offers a broad and balanced structure. This structure should comprise '**Areas of Learning and Experience**'. Each of the Areas of Learning and Experience should make distinct and strong contributions to developing the four purposes of the curriculum.

The Review proposes six Areas of Learning and Experience, as follows:

Expressive arts

Health and well-being

Humanities

Languages, literacy and communication

Mathematics and numeracy

Science and technology.

3. Each of these Areas of Learning and Experience should include, where appropriate, both a Welsh dimension and an international perspective in line with the recommendations of the independent review of the Cwricwlwm Cymreig, history and the story of Wales.
4. Having common Areas of Learning and Experience from 3 to 16 should promote and underpin continuity and progression and help to make the structure easier to understand. The approach should help to ensure breadth and encourage appropriate decisions about 'balance' across a child or young person's learning at any time, for **example by removing distinctions between 'core' and 'foundation' subjects.**

5. Schools should provide each young person with experiences that reflect **all** of the Areas of Learning and Experience until the age of 16. Some of these programmes will lead to recognised qualifications but other planned activities may lead to other forms of achievement which may be recognised in different ways.
6. Three cross curricular responsibilities should underpin all subjects: 'The Review therefore recommends that literacy, numeracy and digital competence should be Cross-curriculum Responsibilities for all teachers and people who work with children and young people.'
7. Expectations about pupil progression in these responsibilities would be based upon the existing LNF and a new digital competence progression framework.
8. Schools should identify a member of staff who would lead and support each of the three Cross-curriculum Responsibilities.
9. Wider key skills should be embedded in the 6 Areas of Learning and Experience. They should also be taught from the start of schooling.
10. Welsh remains compulsory from 3 - 16. In Secondary Schools the emphasis should be on speaking. Welsh Medium Schools should support English Medium schools.
11. RE remains statutory until 16, within the Humanities Area of Learning & Experience.
12. MFL should be introduced in Y7, or earlier 'where time and circumstances allow' (languages, Literacy and Communications Area of Learning & Experience)
13. Computer Science should be introduced in the Science and Technology Area of Learning & Experience.
14. Key Stages and Levels should be removed and replaced with 5 Progression Steps. Progression Steps will be reference points and not universal expectations of the performance of all children and young people at fixed points.

15. Progression Steps will take the form of a range of Achievement Outcomes for each Area of Learning and Experience, spanning the components within the Area of Learning and Experience and Cross-curriculum Responsibility.

16. Achievement Outcomes within each Area of Learning and Experience will include embedded literacy, numeracy, digital competences and wider skills as appropriate, as well as elements of the Cwricwlwm Cymreig.

17. The report says that good teaching and learning will:

- Have consistent focus on the overall purposes of the curriculum
- challenge all learners by encouraging them to recognise the importance of sustained effort in meeting expectations that are high but achievable for them
- employ a blend of approaches including direct teaching
- employ a blend of approaches including those that promote problem solving, creative and critical thinking
- set tasks and select resources that build on previous knowledge and experience and engage interest
- create authentic contexts for learning
- employ assessment for learning principles
- range within and across Areas of Learning and Experience
- regularly reinforce Cross-curriculum Responsibilities, including literacy, numeracy and digital competence, and provides opportunities to practise them
- encourage children and young people to take increasing responsibility for their own learning
- support social and emotional development and positive relationships
- encourage collaboration

18. Assessment arrangements should:

- align assessment with the purposes of learning: assess what matters
- be clear about the reasons for assessment and plan in advance for the intended uses of assessment results
- promote the use of a wide range of techniques that are appropriate to their purpose
- engage students in their own assessment
- ensure that reports to parents and carers focus on progress
- be as light-touch as possible and avoid unnecessary bureaucracy

- use assessment evidence systematically and in combination with other evidence to inform school self-evaluation
- address the implications of good assessment practice for teacher capacity
- form a coherent, agreed assessment and evaluation framework with a clear vision and strategy based on all of the above.

19. Schools should create e portfolios of pupils achievement

20. Implications for 3 -11 schools: An extension of the Foundation Phase philosophy and thematic approaches: 'A new focus and a different way of organising and thinking about the curriculum through Areas of Learning and Experience and Progression Steps is intended to reinvigorate education and make learning exciting and relevant for children and young people and teachers.'

21. Implications for secondary schools:

- 'The curriculum in the early years of secondary should be designed in ways that fulfil the expectations of the very many young people who are excited by the move up from primary only to become disillusioned with a curriculum that often lacks conviction and integrity.'
- An extension of the Welsh Bac: 'The new curriculum structure encourages development of these elements of the 'Bac' across the Areas of Learning and Experience and throughout secondary education. In that way the Review proposals should provide a better platform for performance in qualifications.'
- Together with the proposals on structure and assessment, they [the curriculum purposes] signal the importance of sustaining challenge and depth in learning and of applying what is being learned across the curriculum. Teaching and learning approaches will be less constrained by detailed prescription and narrow performance measures.
- An increase in thematic approaches: 'schools could provide a Year 7 programme for a significant part of the school week that develops a wide range of skills through a themed approach, thereby aiding continuity with primary practice.'

22. Implications for Consortia and ESTYN:

- 'Regional consortia and local authorities will need to develop strategies to support their schools through the engagement and implementation and to introduce the accountability arrangements for individual schools that are proposed here. Estyn will need to adjust its inspection programme and possibly its approach to recognise and fit into the implementation phase. This may mean taking on more of a supportive role with schools in the early stages.'
- For the foreseeable future, the regional consortia will have a vital role in monitoring the performance of individual schools and in identifying those schools that need additional support. The relationship should be more of a professional dialogue, expecting schools themselves to become better at self-evaluation and improvement planning.

23. Implications for accountability:

- The new National School Categorisation System, which applies to all schools, provides a potentially helpful basis for helping to promote effective introduction of new curriculum and assessment arrangements. It should have a strong focus on the extent to which schools are establishing the revised curriculum arrangements in a way that is well designed and effectively implemented in relation to the agreed purposes of education.
- **The Review proposes that teacher assessments should not be reported to the Welsh Government.**
- **It is proposed that the Welsh Government should no longer gather school-level data about the performance of all children and young people**
- **The Review proposes that national monitoring of achievement by the Welsh Government should be informed by a rolling programme of sample testing in, for example, literacy (English and Welsh), numeracy, digital competence and science and by reports from Estyn. Such sample assessments, which would only involve some children and young people, would not need to take place every year, and there could be a timetable of such assessments over a period of years with a single topic being assessed each year. Assessments of progress towards meeting the four purposes should be part of school inspections and also reported on by Estyn on a regular basis.**

Full Recommendations

Curriculum definition

1. The school curriculum in Wales should be defined as including all of the learning experiences and assessment activities planned in pursuit of agreed purposes of education.

Purposes of the curriculum

2. The school curriculum should be designed to help all children and young people to develop in relation to clear and agreed purposes. The purposes should be constructed so that they can directly influence decisions about curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

3. The purposes of the curriculum in Wales should be that children and young people develop as:

ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives

enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work

ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world

healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

Curriculum structure – breadth

4. The curriculum 3–16 should be organised into Areas of Learning and Experience that establish the breadth of the curriculum. These areas should provide rich contexts for developing the four curriculum purposes, be internally coherent, employ distinctive ways of thinking, and have an identifiable core of disciplinary or instrumental knowledge.

5. The new national curriculum in Wales should have six Areas of Learning and Experience: Expressive arts; Health and well-being; Humanities; Languages, literacy and communication; Mathematics and numeracy; and Science and technology.

6. Children and young people should have their learning developed across the curriculum through three Cross-curriculum Responsibilities that should be the responsibility of all teachers: literacy; numeracy; and digital competence.

7. A digital competence framework and an accompanying 'Routes to Learning Digital Competence' should be developed and be included as a Cross-curriculum Responsibility.

8. The expectations for the three Cross-curriculum Responsibilities and wider skills should be embedded within the Areas of Learning and Experience.

9. Religious education should form part of the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience, and should remain a statutory curriculum requirement from reception.

Curriculum structure – progression

Progression Steps

- 10. The new national curriculum should be organised as a continuum of learning from 3 to 16 without phases and key stages.**
- 11. Progression should be described in relation to a continuum of learning in each Area of Learning and Experience from when a child enters education to the end of statutory schooling.**
- 12. Progression should be signalled through Progression Steps at five points in the learning continuum, relating broadly to expectations at ages 5, 8, 11, 14 and 16.**
- 13. The initial Progression Steps should take full account of guidance on *Routes for Learning*, which should be reviewed in the new curriculum context.**
- 14. Progression Steps should be reference points, providing a ‘road map’ for each individual child and young person’s progress in their learning and not universal expectations of the performance of all children and young people at fixed points.**
- 15. There should be a duty on schools to provide a curriculum that enables most children and young people to reach, or go beyond, each Progression Step within the broad three-year window.**

Achievement Outcomes

- 16. Achievement Outcomes should be developed for each Progression Step in each Area of Learning and Experience, spanning the components within the Area of Learning and Experience and addressing the Cross-curriculum Responsibilities and wider skills.**
- 17. Achievement Outcomes should contribute clearly to the four curriculum purposes and should have an emphasis on achievement in a broad sense, rather than only narrower measures of attainment. They should include references to relevant experiences which contribute to the curriculum purposes and to which children and young people should be entitled.**

18. Achievement Outcomes should be described from the learner's point of view, using terms like 'I have...' for experiences and 'I can...' for outcomes.
19. All children and young people should make progress along the same continuum, regardless of any additional learning needs they may have, although they may reach and move between Progression Steps more slowly or more quickly than others.
20. There should be a clear brief for the development of the Achievement Outcomes, as indicated in this report.

The Welsh language

21. The Welsh language should remain compulsory up to the age of 16.
22. There should be a renewed focus in schools on learning Welsh primarily as a means of communication, particularly oral communication and understanding.
23. Progression in the Welsh language towards transactional competence at age 16 should be appropriately reflected in the related Progression Steps and Achievement Outcomes.
24. The value attached to the Welsh language by children and young people, teachers, parents and carers and the public should be enhanced by strengthening the focus on its commercial value for the jobs market, the suggested cognitive benefits of bilingualism and its importance in enabling children and young people to achieve a good understanding of the cultural life of Wales in the past and present.
25. Investment in and improvements to provision and the raising of standards should focus on strengthening the language in primary schools in order to create solid foundations for learning in Welsh and other languages in secondary school. There will also be a need for support for secondary schools to enable them to improve and adjust their provision
26. Welsh-medium schools should act as hubs for the Welsh language, to support teachers and practitioners in English-medium schools.
27. Systematic links should be established between schools and outside agencies that can support teaching, learning and the provision of resources in Welsh and modern foreign languages, including further and higher education providers and Mentrau Iaith.
28. Significantly better and more creative use should be made of technology in the teaching and learning of Welsh and also modern foreign languages.
29. The Welsh Government should realign Welsh language qualifications at 16 with the proposed focus on speaking and listening and application in the workplace.
30. Implications for enhancing competence in the Welsh language in the education workforce should be taken forward through the New Deal for the Education Workforce and Professor Furlong's review of teacher education.

Choice

31. Between the ages of 14 and 16, all young people should select courses or undertake activities from each of the Areas of Learning and Experience, hence maintaining breadth and meeting national priorities, including science and health.

Pedagogy

32. All teaching and learning should be directed to achieving the four curriculum purposes.

33. Teachers should apply the pedagogical principles identified in this report when planning their teaching and learning, to ensure that the activities relate directly to the curriculum purposes.

34. Children and young people should have opportunities to learn from expertise and experience from outside the school.

Assessment

35. Assessment arrangements should ensure that all important learning intentions and progression in relation to the four curriculum purposes are covered by relevant and proportionate assessment.

36. Assessment arrangements should be based upon the intentions set out in the Achievement Outcomes at each Progression Step within each Area of Learning and Experience.

37. Assessment arrangements should give priority to their formative role in teaching and learning.

38. A wide range of assessment techniques, selected on 'fit-for-purpose' criteria, should be used to reflect the breadth of the curriculum purposes.

39. Teacher assessment, which allows a wide range of learning to be covered, should remain as the main vehicle for assessment before qualifications.

40. Where the results of assessment are to be used for purposes of comparison, issues of reliability in teacher assessment should be addressed through effective moderation; where the prime purpose of assessment is assessment for learning there is less of a need for reliability between schools.

41. Teachers should use tests as an important part of overall assessment arrangements but the limitations of such tests in covering the full range of desired learning should be recognised.

42. External, standardised testing provides important benchmarking information and should be used in combination with school tests and teacher assessment. Its frequency should be kept to a minimum in view of its impact on the curriculum and teaching and learning.

43. Innovative approaches to assessment, including interactive approaches, should be developed drawing on the increasing potential contribution of digital technology.

44. Both self-assessment and peer assessment should be developed as ways of encouraging children and young people to take greater responsibility for their own learning.
45. Reporting to parents and carers on progress in learning should include contributions from their children in relation to their own achievements and aspirations.
46. Summative reporting to parents and carers should include holistic assessments of achievement in relation to the curriculum purposes, drawing on experience from beyond the formal classroom.
47. Children and young people should develop their own e-portfolio, possibly including 'e-badges', to record key achievements and experiences.
48. Summative reporting at key transition points should be supported by portfolio evidence and face-to-face discussions involving the relevant teaching staff.
49. Increased use of digital media should be explored to help to improve the immediacy of feedback to parents and carers and engage them more directly in supporting learning.
50. Local and national policies and practices for assessment should be carefully designed to be as light-touch as possible, while giving sufficient information to assess progress, and avoid unnecessary bureaucracy.
51. Schools should use teacher assessment of progression systematically, together with other sources of evidence, to inform their self-evaluation for school improvement purposes.
52. Initial and career-long professional learning programmes should include elements that build teachers' capacity to assess the full range of curriculum purposes and Achievement Outcomes.
53. The Welsh Government should establish a comprehensive assessment and evaluation framework in line with the recommendations of this report.

The reform process

54. The revised curriculum and assessment arrangements should be introduced through an agile change strategy that establishes understanding and support, sets a measured pace, builds capacity and manages dependencies, particularly accountability arrangements.
55. Separate and independent evaluation arrangements should be established to monitor the effectiveness of the change structure and the new curriculum arrangements in relation to improvements in the quality of learning and performance.

Leadership and steering

56. The Welsh Government should establish an arms-length structure for day-to-day leadership and steering of curriculum and assessment arrangements.

Elaboration and development of Areas of Learning and Experience

57. Each Area of Learning and Experience should be elaborated in line with the brief provided in this report in order to provide practitioners with easily accessible guidance to help with their planning.

Teacher and leadership capacity

58. An extensive and sustained programme of professional learning should be developed to ensure that the implications of the Review recommendations for the skills and knowledge of teachers and other practitioners are fully met.

59. The longer-term implications of the Review for building teacher capacity should be taken forward in the context of the Welsh Government's New Deal for the Education Workforce and Professor John Furlong's recommendations on teacher education.

60. Priority should be given to developing the leadership commitment, understanding and skills necessary for the proposed reforms to succeed.

System capacity

61. The significant implications of the Review proposals for national and local educational infrastructure should be fully recognised. The Department for Education and Skills, regional consortia, Estyn, Qualifications Wales and universities will need to establish mechanisms for coordination and joint working that recognise the responsibilities and respective strengths of each. ¹¹⁹

National and local ownership

62. The change strategy associated with the Review should apply the principle of subsidiarity, encouraging local ownership and responsibility within a clear national framework of expectation and support.

Legislation

63. The principle of a national curriculum for Wales should be reaffirmed and legislation should define a broad set of duties rather than detailed prescription of content.

64. Where necessary, specific requirements in relation to curriculum and assessment should be described in regulation and guidance, and subject to regular review.

Accountability

65. Accountability arrangements should be strengthened and enhanced in ways that help to embed the new arrangements and drive improvement.

66. Accountability arrangements, particularly inspection, should evaluate and encourage the successful embedding of the curriculum purposes in the day-to-day work of schools and ultimately the outcomes being achieved by children and young people.

67. The school categorisation system should, in due course, be adjusted to reflect the recommendations of this Review.

68. The Welsh Government should no longer gather information about children and young people's performance on a school-by-school basis but should monitor performance in key aspects of the curriculum through annual testing on a sampling basis.