

Successful Futures

Looking at the Curriculum and
Assessment Arrangements in Wales



A summary of Professor Graham Donaldson's report

Introduction



 The review aims to “shape a successful and exciting future” for the children and young people of Wales.

In March 2014 the Welsh Government asked Professor Graham Donaldson to review the curriculum and assessment arrangements in schools in Wales.

Why have a review?

Many good things are happening in Wales and we want to build on these to make sure that children and young people have the best possible education.

This is a summary of the report. Some of Professor Donaldson’s recommendations for the Welsh Government to consider are in the blue boxes.

Curriculum?

In England and Wales everyone has the same curriculum but it can be changed or shaped to meet local needs. So in Wales, for example, Welsh is taught in our schools. Other changes can happen because of:

- new developments in science or research
- businesses and engineering needing new skills
- new technology.

The Welsh Government has always tried to make changes to the curriculum to make sure it fits with what Wales needs.

Assessment arrangements?

These are the tasks and tests set by teachers and exams set by education boards. They help teachers to see how children and young people are progressing and when they need extra help. They also help to show where the school needs to improve.

The report suggests:



‘curriculum’ should mean all the learning experiences and assessments that schools plan.

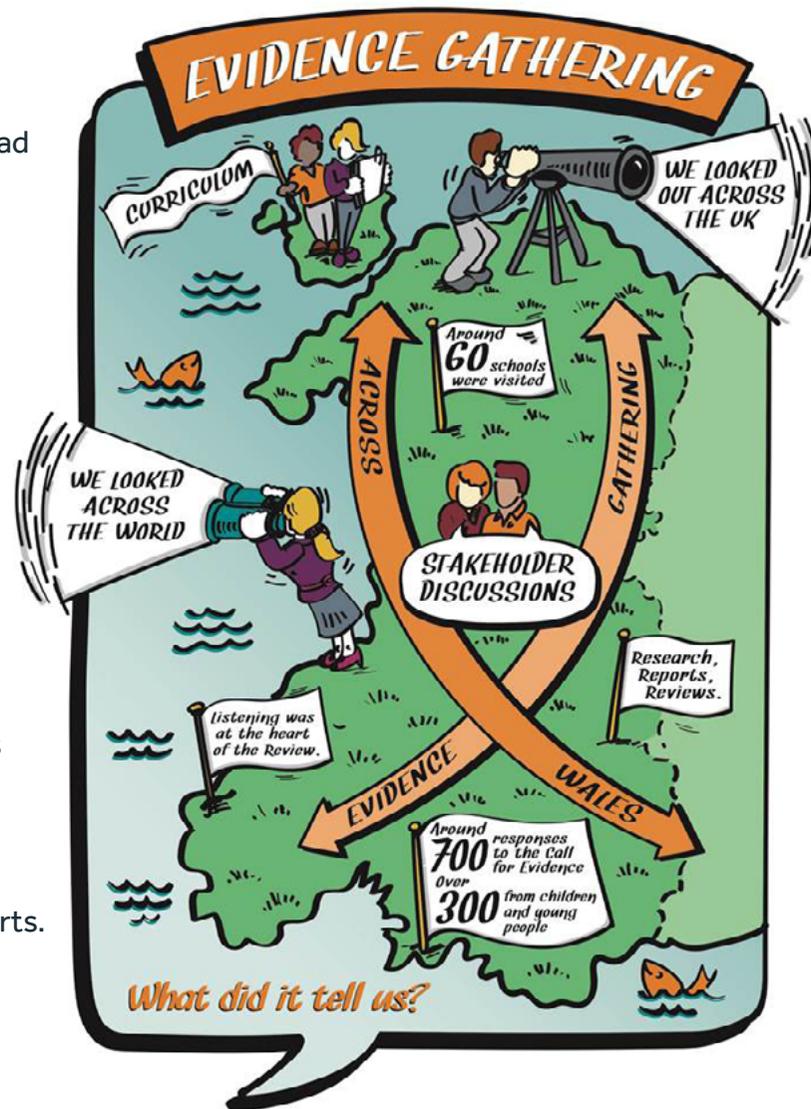
What happened

Professor Donaldson and his team had meetings across Wales for schools to have a say. They had meetings with teachers, headteachers, school managers, staff and professionals. Between March and December 2014 they visited around 60 schools including:

- nursery schools
- primary schools
- secondary schools
- special schools
- and others.

They talked to children and young people, parents and carers, business and community groups and others across Wales.

They looked at Estyn reports, Welsh Government policies and other reports.



The Review also asked people to tell us what was best about education in Wales and what needed to change. Over 700 people took part and 300 of these were children and young people.

What people said

He was told about positive things about:

- Foundation Phase
- National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF)
- Routes for Learning
- new Welsh Baccaulaeate
- Welsh language and bilingualism.

However, teachers told him, for example, that they would like to have more power to make decisions about how to teach and what to teach within the curriculum and that assessment arrangements were not working well to support children's learning.

Children and young people told him they thought the curriculum was already out-of-date especially in technology, software and digital skills.

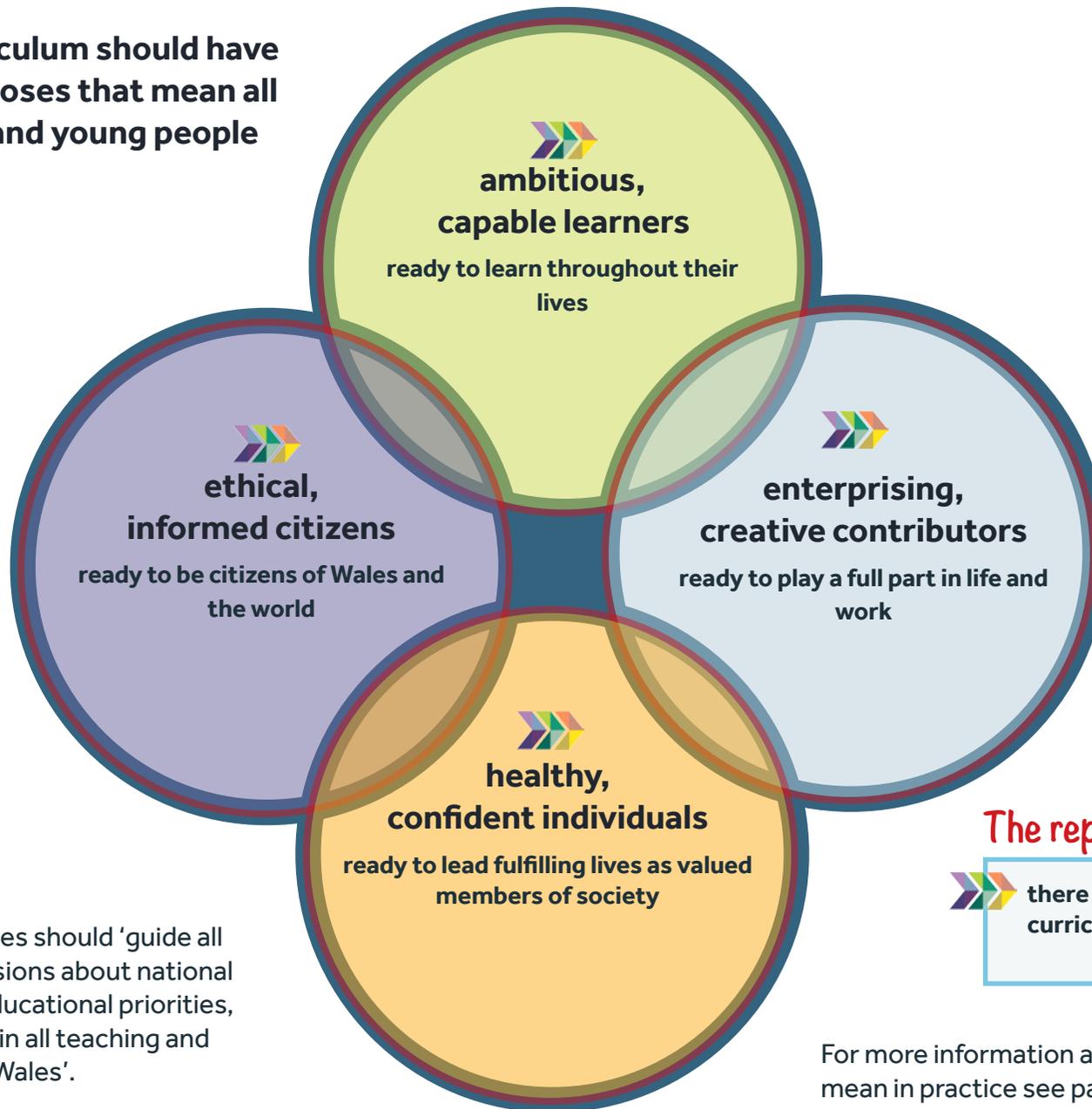
They wanted a greater focus on life skills, personal confidence, basic skills, work skills, career advice and health and well-being.

They also wanted lessons to be fun, interesting and not something that were there just to pass assessments or get qualifications.

The purposes of a new curriculum



The curriculum should have four purposes that mean all children and young people will be:



The purposes should 'guide all future decisions about national and local educational priorities, and underpin all teaching and learning in Wales'.

The report suggests:

 there should be four purposes of the curriculum in Wales.

For more information about what these purposes mean in practice see page 31 of the [full report](#).

Curriculum structure



The report suggests there should be 'six Areas of Learning and Experience'. All six are important and will contribute in different ways to the four purposes.



For more detail on each of these Areas of Learning and Experience go to Chapter 4 in the [full report](#).

How will it work?

These six Areas of Learning and Experience will run from 3 until 16 years of age.

The report suggests:



the curriculum for 3 to 16-year-olds should be organised into six Areas of Learning and Experience and ensure a broad educational experience for all children and young people.

Across the curriculum

The report suggests that literacy, numeracy and digital competence should be the responsibility of all teachers.

These are so important to thinking, learning and life that they should be developed and strengthened across the whole curriculum.

Literacy and numeracy will mean much more than having a basic ability.

Being fully involved in modern society and the workplace already demands increasingly high levels of digital skill and that will only continue in the future.

The report suggests that a digital competence framework should be developed to establish progression in children and young people's learning.

LITERACY
Cross-curriculum

NUMERACY
Cross-curriculum

**DIGITAL
COMPETENCE**
Cross-curriculum

Wider skills

Children and young people need to have a range of 'wider skills' necessary for modern life and work. These include:

- critical thinking and problem solving
- planning and organising
- creativity and innovation
- personal effectiveness.

The report suggests:

opportunities to develop wider skills should be built into all six Areas of Learning and Experience.

Progression Steps

Learning should be a continuous experience, building progressively as children and young people grow and mature.

The report therefore suggests that the way the curriculum is separated into phases and key stages is no longer appropriate.

The report suggests learning should be described through Progression Steps, which each include a range of Achievement Outcomes.

These Progression Steps should be identified within each Area of Learning and Experience. They should be designed in ways that offer space for those who develop skills and knowledge earlier and support for those whose progress is slower.

The report suggests:

- Progression Steps should be set at five points at ages 5, 8, 11, 14 and 16
- Progression Steps should be seen as a personal 'road map' for each child
- Achievements should be described from the child's/young person's point of view, using 'I have ...' for experiences and 'I can ...' for outcomes.

Welsh language

Many people see the Welsh language as a real strength of the education system. However, the place of the Welsh language in the curriculum needs to be strengthened.

The report suggests greater focus on children and young people's ability to speak Welsh confidently in everyday settings, with an emphasis on its increasing role in workplace settings.

Welsh-medium schools employ specialists and have a wide range of available Welsh language resources. They are well placed to act as hubs for the Welsh language and to provide support for English-medium schools.

The report suggests:

- everyone should learn Welsh up to age 16
- there should be a focus in schools on learning Welsh to communicate, in conversation and understanding
- the Welsh Government should make Welsh language qualifications at 16 focus on speaking and listening and using Welsh in the workplace.

Choice

Being able to choose subjects is important and keeps young people interested in learning.

Although young people begin to specialise and make subject choices all young people including those aged 14 to 16 would continue to have experiences and opportunities across the six Areas of Learning Experience as well as continue to develop their literacy skills, numeracy skills, digital competence and wider skills. These include:

- the Welsh language
- health and well-being
- subjects that support the future of the Welsh economy like science
- subjects like RE that achieve some of the four purposes.

Some of these programmes will lead to recognised qualifications but other planned activities may lead to other forms of achievements that may be recognised in different ways.

The report suggests:

between the ages of 14 and 16, all young people should select courses from each of the six Areas of Learning and Experience.

In the classroom

The ambitions for this new curriculum need teachers' professional skill and judgement in selecting the right teaching methods. The report suggests teaching and learning that focuses on:

- the purposes of curriculum
- challenging children and young people to be the best they can be
- giving opportunities for problem solving, creativity and critical thinking
- setting tasks and resources that build on knowledge and skills
- creating real-life opportunities for learning
- encouraging children and young people to take responsibility for their own learning.

The high expectations embedded in the Progression Steps will only be realised through effective teaching that engages children and young people's curiosity and enthusiasm through a blend of teaching and learning approaches.

The report suggests:

children and young people should have opportunities to learn from experts and get experiences outside school too.

Assessment



The report suggests simpler assessment procedures as well as a stronger role for assessment to support learning.

Assessment is important for effective learning and reporting on achievement. Current assessment arrangements are seen as being confusing.

Good assessment needs clear understanding of what is to be learned and ways of gathering evidence about achievement.

Involving children and young people in assessment will encourage them to take greater responsibility for their own learning.

The report suggests the Welsh Government should develop an overall assessment and evaluation framework. It shouldn't depend on external or internal tests which fail to reflect the curriculum.

Arrangements for assessment should be as light-touch as possible.

The report suggests:



assessments should encourage children and young people to take responsibility for their own learning



children and young people should be able to develop their own e-portfolio online, possibly including 'e-badges', to record key achievements and experiences.

Implications



This is a new way of thinking about education.

The report suggests that curriculum development needs schools and teachers to be more directly engaged in shaping the curriculum in ways that meet the needs of their children and young people. Any changes to legislation (law) to make this possible should be used sparingly.

All of this needs excellent and committed leadership at all levels in the education system.

The recommendations aim to provide curriculum and assessment arrangements that will meet the needs and aspirations of education in Wales.

For teachers and school leaders there are major implications for professional development and training. These include the need to extend teachers' abilities in Welsh language, health and well-being, digital skills and computer science, as well as curriculum planning and assessment.

For children and young people the aim is to create a more interesting and challenging educational experience that will help them to thrive and succeed.

For employers it will help to provide well-educated employees with skills for the modern workplace.

For parents and carers it means they can engage more directly in their children's learning.

Conclusion



The Great Debate



To make sure we get this right we want to know your views on the ideas in the report.

For more information please visit our [Great Debate section](#) on the Welsh Government website. There are also some questions to complete online.

Complete the

Get involved!

