

History in the curriculum

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 6 Chwefror 2018

Petitions Committee | 6 February 2018

Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-799

Petition title: Change the National Curriculum and teach Welsh history, from a Welsh perspective, in our Primary, Secondary and Sixth form Schools.

Text of petition: We are calling on the National Assembly for Wales to change the Curriculum and teach Welsh history, from a Welsh perspective, in our Primary, Secondary and Sixth form Schools.

Welsh Government Review of the Cwricwlwm Cymreig and history

In October 2012, an independent task and finish group, chaired by Dr Elin Jones, was established to explore and consider the future development of Cwricwlwm Cymreig, the teaching of Welsh history and the resources available to support that teaching. The [Cwricwlwm Cymreig, history and the story of Wales: Final report](#) (September 2013) made twelve recommendations relating to the Welsh dimension in the development of the next Wales curriculum and in relation to the history curriculum in particular.

The Task and Finish Group found that the current programme of study for history has, from its inception, (at the introduction of the national curriculum in 1989) given appropriate attention to local and Welsh history. However:

the panel's experience suggests that many learners in Wales learn far more about the history of England than that of their own area and country. The task group also believe that not enough attention is paid to the other countries of Britain, and that there is also a tendency to concentrate on a narrow range of topics in the history of Europe and the world.

The group agreed that the programme of study gave explicit priority to the history of Wales in every period studied at Key Stages 2 and 3 (with the exception of the enquiry into recent history at the end of Key Stage 3). However, the evidence available to the panel suggested that, for a variety of reasons, not all schools met the requirements.

Included in the group's recommendations were that:

- In the revision of the national curriculum, the programme of study should be structured so as to provide clear guidance on the relationship between local, Welsh, British, European and world history. The aim should be to provide a sound foundation for learners' historical understanding while expanding their horizons; and
- A proportion of Welsh history should be an integrated and compulsory part of every History GCSE specification offered in Wales.

Professor Donaldson's Review of the National Curriculum

In March 2014, Huw Lewis, Minister for Education and Skills at the time, announced that Professor Graham Donaldson would be undertaking a review of the national curriculum in Wales and that his review would be considering the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group.

In his report on the curriculum, [Successful Futures](#) (February 2015), Professor Donaldson recommended that the new curriculum should be structured around six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLE). In line with the Cwricwlwm Cymreig recommendations, he affirmed that each AoLE should include, where appropriate, both a Welsh dimension and an international perspective.

The six AoLEs, which the Review recommended and which were subsequently set out in the Welsh Government's [Curriculum for Wales: Curriculum for Life](#) are:

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

History will form part of the Humanities AoLE. The Welsh Government published its Plan for curriculum and assessment design and development in June 2016. According to this timescale, the high-level design of the new curriculum was to be completed by June 2017 with the AoLE design to be completed by December 2017. However, during [scrutiny with the Children, Young People and Education Committee in June 2017](#), the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams, said she would keep the timescale under review.

In a [statement on 26 September 2017](#) the Cabinet Secretary announced that the statutory introduction of the new curriculum would be postponed by a year, from September 2021 to 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.

Assembly Business

In answer to an [Oral Assembly Question, on 10 May 2017](#), the Cabinet Secretary, Kirsty Williams said:

History will be included in the humanities area of learning and experience of the new curriculum, and this will give us a new opportunity to ensure that the history platform will have an enhanced Welsh dimension and an international perspective.

She went on to say:

“let me be absolutely clear: there are many, many opportunities within the current curriculum for children to learn about their communities, the effect on international events and how their communities were affected and changed. I know that often there is concern about the content of Welsh history in the GCSE examination, and, often, people express concerns that the papers are about American history, about European history, about the first and second world wars. You will be aware that the new history GCSE will be ready for teaching in September of this year, and, again, there are enhanced opportunities for students to spend more of their time considering their own history and the impact of important international events on that.”

Media articles

In an article on the [BBC Wales website on 9 September 2015](#), Dr Elin Jones, chair of the Task and Finish Group on the Cwricwlwm Cymreig, history and the story of Wales said that pupils are being ‘deprived’ by not being taught about history from a Welsh perspective. She wanted a much greater emphasis on Welsh history and said there is ‘very little evidence’ of it being taught well in schools. Dr Jones said nothing had changed in the two years since the publication of the Group’s report.

The article reported that Dr Jones said that Professor Donaldson’s report on the curriculum failed to place enough emphasis on Welsh history and ‘appears to limit consideration of the Welsh dimension to language and culture only’.

A Welsh Government spokesman said in the article:

Prof Donaldson was absolutely clear that a Welsh dimension should be included in each area of learning and experience. This is in line with Dr Elin Jones’ Cwricwlwm Cymreig report which recommends that a Welsh dimension should be integrated into every subject, where that is relevant and meaningful.

In response to the suggestion that between 10 to 15 per cent of the history GCSE course had content about Wales, the WJEC exam board said things should improve with new courses in 2016.

Gareth Pierce, the chief executive of the WJEC said that while that had been the case, the reformed specification would move towards a position where there will be three taught units and in two of those three, a Welsh perspective would be fundamental.

The WJEC [specification for GCSE history](#) (from 2017) includes details of the Welsh perspective in history:

In following this specification, learners must consider a Welsh perspective if the opportunity arises naturally from the subject matter and if its inclusion would enrich learners' understanding of the world around them as citizens of Wales as well as the UK, Europe and the world.

Specifically, Units 1 and 3 will require candidates to make reference to the impact of historical change on Wales or on a Welsh perspective. Unit 1 assessments will include compulsory questions that require knowledge and understanding of Welsh History. Unit 3 assessments take a thematic approach to historical development. Candidates will be required to draw upon the Welsh context in their responses to specific Unit 3 questions.

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.