

Consultation on the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill

Evidence submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) for Stage 1 scrutiny of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill.

About you

Organisation: Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, Wales

1. The Bill's general principles

1.1 Do you support the principles of the [Curriculum and Assessment \(Wales\) Bill](#)?

Yes

1.2 Please outline your reasons for your answer to question 1.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1500 words)

The RCSLT supports the principles of the bill which will enable schools and settings to build their own curricula for pupils aged 3-16 within a framework of identified skills and learning. We believe this flexibility will be particularly important in allowing schools to provide different support to different learners to meet expectations and tackle different gaps in attainment. This bill should fit closely with the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act in allowing for a broadening of learning, ensuring that pupils with additional learning needs are supported to overcome barriers to learning and achieve their full potential. It is also key that the bill complements the new Welsh Government Speech, Language and Communication delivery plan 2020-22 which seeks to drive improvement in the way in which children in Wales are supported to develop their speech, language and communication skills.

Our members note that whilst increased flexibility for schools is a huge opportunity, it will bring challenges in ensuring quality and standards. This may especially be the case for pupils with additional learning needs as schools will vary in their level of experience of supporting such pupils. Appropriate training for prospective teachers in terms of language development (particularly vocabulary and language structure) is a must. As is ensuring support staff are able to assist teachers in the provision of universal and targeted services

to support language development in schools – a key element of the curriculum. In addition, a continuous focus on professional development by regional consortia and local authorities, strong networks for sharing good practice and good relationships between health and education as envisaged by the ALN legislation will be key in realising the vision outlined in the bill.

We believe that the bill provides clarity about the required elements of the curriculum, including the areas of learning and experience, the cross-curricular skills, and relationships and sexuality education (RSE). We welcome the focus on literacy, numeracy and digital competency as cross-curricular skills but believe it is essential that these key skills areas are underpinned by a focus on oracy. Communication skills are fundamental and the foundation of education. They are strongly associated with academic achievement in both English/Welsh and maths.

UK wide evidence suggests that:

- Children's language skills at age 5 are the most important factor in reaching the expected levels in English and maths at 11, more important than poverty or parental education (Save the Children, 2015).
- Children with poor language at age 5 are six times less likely to reach the expected standard in English at age 11 than those with good language, and 11 times less likely to achieve the expected standard in maths (Save the Children, 2016).

Given that spoken language is the primary medium through which teaching is delivered across all subjects. The ability to express yourself, to understand spoken language and to interact with others is vital in order to access all areas of the curriculum.

We note that the language, literacy and communication area of learning and experience is the main area of learning related to speech, language and communication needs. We welcome that in the remaining areas, the Curriculum for Wales 2022 places a number of key language and communication skills at the core of the descriptions of learning and progression steps and the fact that a speech and language therapist has been invited to be part of working groups. We will be looking for a focus on this area in the What Matters Code to be published by Welsh Ministers as part of the bill.

It is welcome that the bill enables Welsh medium schools and settings to continue to fully immerse children in the Welsh language until the age of 7. However, members have expressed concerns about whether the opt out requirement for headteachers and teaching

bodies is the appropriate way to achieve the goal of supporting early language development.

1.3 Do you think there is a need for legislation to deliver what this Bill is trying to achieve?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

Yes. The RCSLT believe legislation is required to deliver the aims of the bill. This will ensure that statutory duties are placed on settings, schools and pupil referral units to deliver the aims of the new curriculum and promote consistency across Wales.

2. The Bill's implementation

2.1 Do you have any comments about any potential barriers to implementing the Bill? If no, go to question 3.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

Members have raised concerns about the timescales for the implementation of the bill given the huge pressures schools and settings are facing as a result of the pandemic and the sea-change represented by the introduction of the Additional Learning Needs legislation in September 2021. Whilst the legislation should fit together to produce more inclusive learning environments, it will nevertheless place significant additional pressures on schools and settings at a time when they are having to focus on logistical challenges caused by the impact of COVID-19.

As highlighted above, the implementation of the new curriculum will be dependent on high quality teaching and learning and the ability of schools to meet the needs of all learners and support their progress. Professional development and strong leadership will be crucial. Non-maintained settings must also be viewed as an equal in relation to training and development.

2.2 Do you think the Bill takes account of these potential barriers?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

We appreciate that the explanatory memorandum does acknowledge the need to focus on professional learning and fostering strong leadership in schools and settings. It is welcome

that the bill clarifies the role of Welsh Government in supporting the non-maintained sector. It is now crucial that this sector has increased involvement in the development process and trial period moving forwards.

3. Unintended consequences

3.1 Do you think there are there any unintended consequences arising from the Bill? If no, go to question 4.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

Please see comments in response to question 1 on the disapplication of the requirement to teach English in schools up to age seven and the potential impact on the status of the Welsh language.

4. Financial implications

4.1 Do you have any comments on the financial implications of the Bill (as set out in Part 2 of the [Explanatory Memorandum](#))? If no, go to question 5.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

No further comments.

5. Powers to make subordinate legislation

5.1 Do you have any comments on the appropriateness of the powers in the Bill for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation (as set out in Chapter 5 of Part 1 of the [Explanatory Memorandum](#)). If no, go to question 6.1.

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

No further comments.

6. Other considerations

6.1 Do you have any other points you wish to raise about this Bill?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1000 words)

No further comments.

