

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The Curriculum for Wales is the cornerstone of Wales' efforts to shape an education system led by commonly defined, learner-centred purposes. The curriculum is embedded in *Education in Wales: Our National Mission*, an action plan for 2017-21 that falls in line with the Welsh vision for its education system. This vision calls for all children and young people to achieve the four purposes of becoming:

- ambitious, capable learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives
- enterprising, creative contributors who are ready to play a full part in life and work
- ethical, informed citizens who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

Wales' complete reform agenda encompasses five policy areas: curriculum; assessment and evaluation; equity, excellence and well-being; teaching; and leadership. The new curriculum builds around the "four purposes" of education and around "statements of what matters", which describe the big ideas of learning – what is essential for students to learn. It aims to promote holistic learning, for which it is structured around six broad Areas of Learning and Experience with three cross-cutting competencies (literacy, numeracy and digital competency). Progression of learning is acknowledged as a continuum rather than a succession of key standard stages. Schools are given autonomy within a clear national framework to adapt their curriculum to local needs and to enhance teacher professionalism.

The Welsh Government invited the OECD, through its Implementing Education Policies support programme, to provide an assessment of the implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales, review Wales' readiness to implement the new policy, and suggest the next steps for implementation. A specific OECD team gathered for the assessment (Annex A) and built upon years of work on Welsh education policies, undertook study visits (Annex B), performed the analysis and developed a set of recommendations presented in this report.

## Ready for the Curriculum for Wales?

### ***Designing the new Curriculum for Wales***

Wales has successfully mapped out its policy plan to move away from what had become a highly prescriptive national curriculum, to one that focuses on the future, is adapted to learners' diverse needs and puts the teachers and principals back into positions of leaders of learning and teaching. The policy vision is clear and looks to the long term. The new curriculum framework aspires to best practices in terms

of 21st century learning, and gives high levels of agency for all stakeholders. The curriculum reform was developed as part of a wider reform agenda including key complementary policies for its implementation. The Welsh Government and other system leaders have started developing initiatives to support schools with curriculum implementation.

The challenge for Wales at this stage is to remain true to the vision while shifting the perspective of the strategy from being policy-driven to one focused on schools. To ensure the intentions of the new curriculum translate into practice, it is essential for Wales to address several issues, including a lack of deep understanding of what successful realisation of the curriculum might look like in practice, challenges for schools to design their own curriculum, and implications in terms of developing specific capabilities. There is a risk of inequalities increasing due to the challenges that disadvantaged schools can have in implementing the curriculum, which accentuates the need for clarifying resources available for schools.

### ***Building on a strong co-construction process***

Wales' commitment to co-construction has laid a strong foundation for the new curriculum to take root and flourish. Stakeholders throughout the education system are strong advocates for co-construction. Considerable progress has been achieved in dialoguing, collaborating and building trust. Wales should be acknowledged for its efforts to embed co-construction across the system. Wales has also invested in having a clear communication strategy that has ensured progress on developing coherence between the different policy components, and clarity on the vision, establishing a strong basis for education professionals to make the “national mission” their own.

Challenges arise as the process unfolds and the middle tier and schools turn to local design and implementation. As stakeholders' roles evolve, there is a need to review functions and responsibilities, in order to co-ordinate better the system's effort and to clarify what the next stages of the process look like from a school's perspective. Efforts will be needed to help all schools develop the mind-set, skills, capabilities and resources to implement the new curriculum.

### ***Ensuring a conducive policy context***

Wales initiated a shift from what had become a managerial education system to one based on trust and professionalism, which can build on a favourable political and policy environment: governance processes are aligning in support of the curriculum, and many complementary policies are evolving in the same direction. Acknowledging research and previous OECD recommendations, Wales made considerable efforts to bring coherence to its education reform journey, pursuing the curriculum reform at the same time as four additional complementary policies, which include policies to improve the quality and leadership of education professionals, the assessment, evaluation and accountability framework, and equity and well-being across the system. The school improvement infrastructure has been consolidated with local authorities and regional consortia providing school improvement services and supporting schools.

For the curriculum to be effective across all schools in Wales, further coherence of these complementary policies with the curriculum needs to be ensured, as there are risks that these may go in different directions and hamper progress with the Curriculum for Wales realisation in schools. This is the case in terms of the lack of clarity around the accountability framework and the school-leaving qualifications, which risk that misaligned accountability and assessment measures could undermine the curriculum.

## Next steps for the implementation strategy: adopting a school's perspective

Wales has made considerable progress with its current implementation strategy and action plan. It is important to show continuity on this reform journey while acknowledging that the next steps of implementation have to place schools and their communities at the centre. Taking a school's perspective implies holding the vision steady and maintaining the objectives defined in *Education in Wales: Our National Mission*, while making sure there is a shared understanding of what that vision looks like in practice. The next steps of the implementation strategy should prioritise the actions based on what the system, and more specifically schools, need to roll out the new curriculum successfully from 2022. This school's perspective should guide all the suggestions that follow. For the new curriculum to be implemented effectively, the OECD team proposes the following recommendations and actions:

### ***Developing a shared understanding of what the vision looks like in practice***

- Develop a shared overarching vision of what the curriculum implies for practice in schools.
- Define associated operational objectives and indicators to monitor progress towards achieving the vision including the implementation of the curriculum.

### ***Supporting the realisation of the curriculum across all schools in Wales***

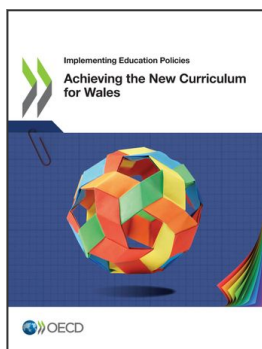
- Organise expert groups that can review the Curriculum for Wales building on the existing framework to ensure that it is internally coherent, well-designed and that it supports depth of understanding; and to consider assessment for learning approaches that are aligned and can gauge student progress.
- Develop knowledge, materials and space for the local and school level to be able to understand and collectively design their own curriculum reflecting the aspirations of the framework.
- Invest in the development of education professionals' capacity to be the main drivers of the curriculum in schools by enhancing their skills and competencies and promoting their collaboration.
- Prioritise equity considerations in provision of professional learning, school improvement services and resourcing to avoid risks of inequalities increasing with curriculum realisation.

### ***Focusing the co-construction process on next steps for schools***

- Clarify and ensure a shared understanding of each stakeholder's revised roles, responsibilities and concrete next steps in the curriculum realisation.
- Sustain the co-construction process over the medium term through system leadership and continued investment in consultation and engagement approaches that have been successful in developing shared ownership of actions and trust.
- Continue with the clear and targeted communication strategy, which can contribute to ensuring alignment, shared purpose and dissemination of knowledge and good practices across Wales.
- Support readiness for change across all schools in Wales by developing collaborative networks that leverage curriculum expertise and resources, with participation from practitioners, Pioneer schools, curriculum and assessment experts, and relevant university experts.

***Consolidating policy coherence around schools***

- Continue to develop the role of regional consortia by enhancing the school improvement service infrastructure, investing in professionals working in consortia across Wales, and guaranteeing alignment in implementation between the curriculum and other policies, including the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Act.
- Set learning about the new curriculum at the core of the Schools as Learning Organisations (SLO) model for the coming years.
- Continuously evaluate policy coherence across (potentially) complementary policies, especially in terms of professional standards and leadership.
- Consolidate an evaluation and assessment framework (including qualifications, accountability, system and school evaluations) and develop a systematic and robust research agenda that align to the new curriculum.



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