

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Consultation on the progress in developing the new Curriculum for Wales



December 2018

About Us

The National Deaf Children's Society is the national charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people.

In referring to deafness, we refer to all levels of hearing loss from mild through to profound. We also include those experiencing a temporary hearing loss.

Response

The National Deaf Children's Society Cymru has been following the progress of the developments of the new Curriculum with interest. In particular, we are keen to ensure the review meets four key objectives:

1. Access to the curriculum
2. Ability to learn British Sign Language (BSL)
3. Continuation of vital data
4. Appropriate consideration of other ongoing issues.

1. Access to the curriculum

Deaf children and young people have particular requirements in accessing the school curriculum. At present, these requirements are often not met and consequently there is an [attainment gap](#) between deaf pupils and their hearing peers. To avoid similar issues in the future, it is imperative that the new curriculum is clearly accessible to this group of vulnerable learners.

The Language, Literature and Communication AoLE presents a number of access challenges for deaf learners. We are pleased that Welsh Government officials recognise this and invited the National Deaf Children's Society Cymru to comment on the draft Achievement Outcomes for this particular AoLE. We have provided a number of comments on how the wording of this draft document should be adapted to take account of the access requirements of deaf learners who are both oral communicators and of those who are first language BSL (British Sign Language). We sincerely hope that these comments will be taken on board.

The National Deaf Children's Society Cymru also acknowledges that there will be access needs for deaf learners (and indeed other ALN types) across the wider curriculum. In particular, deaf learners may face particular challenges in music lessons. To this end, we have recently been discussing with officials the possibility of ALN guidance to sit alongside each AoLE. Such guidance would provide sign posts to relevant and disability-specific information. At present, it is unclear whether the Welsh Government will proceed with such guidance, but we would strongly advise that it does so and would welcome the Committee's support in calling for this guidance.

2. Ability to learn British Sign Language

The Welsh Government acknowledged BSL (British Sign Language) as a language in its own right in January 2004. There is a large and unmet appetite among both deaf and hearing pupils to study BSL as a language option at school. A survey conducted by our Youth Advisory Board showed that 83% of 202 respondents in Wales wanted the opportunity to learn BSL in school (see [here](#)).

The Welsh Assembly Petitions Committee also recently recommended that the Welsh Government take steps to ensure opportunities to learn BSL are provided in schools.

We would welcome a firm commitment from the Welsh Government to ensure the new curriculum enables and encourages schools to offer BSL. We are aware of the potential to develop a BSL GCSE in England in the near future and would wish for the new curriculum in Wales to be open to including BSL as a GCSE option in Wales.

3. Continuation of vital data

We know that deaf learners are facing barriers in reaching their full educational potential. The availability of attainment data on this discreet and vulnerable group of learners is essential in order to measure progress in addressing these barriers. However, proposals within the Donaldson report to move to a sampling method of data collation threatens the availability of this vital data. Indeed, with low incidence needs such as deafness, data is required on a national basis in order to secure statistical viability.

During the progress of the reforms, the National Deaf Children's Society Cymru has regularly raised this issue with officials. Whilst the issue has been acknowledged, we are nervous that no firm resolution appears to have been reached. For this reason, we would welcome the Committee's support in highlighting this point and ensuring it remains on the Welsh Government's agenda.

4. Appropriate consideration of other ongoing issues

The National Deaf Children's Society appreciates the reasoning behind moving towards progression steps, but it must be acknowledged that this move has the potential to exacerbate a predisposition some professionals may have for lower expectations of ALN learners. Indeed, many ALN learners have the potential to achieve on a par with their peers, but require greater levels of support/differentiated learning in order to do so. Although we do not suggest that many professionals would see progression steps as a way to justify slower progress for more vulnerable learners, it is nevertheless a potential which must be safeguarded against. It is imperative that checks and balances are in place to ensure ALN

learners are moving along their progression steps at an appropriate pace. The National Deaf Children's Society Cymru suggests the Welsh Government utilises the reforms around inspection and self-assessment to emphasise and address this point. We would recommend that self-assessment frameworks hold a specific section on ALN to ensure it is placed firmly on the agenda.

With the emphasis being placed on teachers having the freedom to adapt the new curriculum, it is essential that they are able to do so in a way that meets the needs of all of their learners – including those with ALN. The National Deaf Children's Society Cymru has long called for teacher training to include awareness of specific ALN types, including basic deaf awareness. We feel that the curriculum reforms increase the need for such training and would urge the Welsh Government to take this point on board.

We were pleased that schools with hearing impaired resources were included within the Pioneer Schools for developing the curriculum. We would welcome further information and assurances that the opinions of the specialists within these bases are being fully utilised to explore the accessibility of the proposals.

The Committee consultation letter specifically sought views on the involvement of the Education Reform Strategic Stakeholder Group. The National Deaf Children's Society Cymru was not originally involved in this group, but was subsequently invited to join in its capacity as a representative of TSANA (the Third Sector Additional Needs Alliance). We have welcomed this opportunity, but feel disappointed that only one place has been made available for TSANA on this important group. Furthermore, given the size (particularly the Cardiff-based meetings) and nature of the group, we have at times felt that discussion and feedback opportunities within the meetings themselves have been more limited than we would have wished. For this reason, we have sought to email officials outside of these meetings.

Deaf children and young people often tell us that one of the biggest barriers they face is a lack of awareness among both teachers and their peers. In light of this, we would urge the Welsh Government to place disability awareness clearly and firmly on the new school curriculum. The Welsh Government is keen for our young people to become responsible and ethical citizens, and a key part of this is being aware of disability issues. At present, there are "hooks" within the curriculum where disability awareness could potentially be taught, but given the importance of this topic, we would welcome moves to ensure it is a firm requirement.

In addition, it is imperative that among disabled learners themselves, awareness of disability rights is increased. We believe that there should be opportunities within the curriculum to facilitate this.

Further Information

Thank you for taking the time to read this response. If we can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to get in touch at Campaigns.Wales@ndcs.org.uk.