



**WALES
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**RESPONSE TO:
Curriculum for Wales 2022
Consultation**

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The University and College Union (UCU Wales) represents almost 7,000 academics, lecturers, trainers, instructors, researchers, managers, administrators, computer staff, librarians, and postgraduates in universities, colleges, adult education and training organisations across Wales. UCU Wales is a politically autonomous but integral part of UCU, the largest post-school union in the world. It was formed on the 1st June 2006 by the amalgamation of two strong partners – the Association of University Teachers (AUT) and the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) – who shared a long history of defending and advancing educators’ employment and professional interests.

Thank you for providing us with an opportunity to respond to this extremely important consultation. May we begin by explaining that UCU Wales does not have any members working in the pre-16 education sector and, for this reason, we do not feel that we are in a position nor do we think it would be appropriate for us to attempt to provide a detailed response to the consultation document. However we do feel qualified to provide some general observations which we very much hope will be taken into consideration as part of this consultation process.

UCU Wales believes that the draft Curriculum for Wales 2022 guidance and associated documents should be welcomed. The values and ethos underpinning the curriculum - using innovative and creative methods to promote capable and ambitious learners who can become ethical, informed and confident citizens able to contribute fully to society both now and throughout their lives – must be commended. Its vision and purpose is clearly articulated and it has a positive focus upon taking a holistic approach to learning.

We believe that the emphasis placed upon teacher and school autonomy is well intentioned and has many potential benefits, giving the professionals the freedom and flexibility to determine the content of the curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs and demands of pupils within the classroom and school. The commitment to the principle that high quality, broad and balanced education is an entitlement for *all* children is to be applauded and the content of the curriculum has the potential to deliver a better educational experience

for children in Wales. The shift towards a much more pupil-centred approach to assessment along a continuum of learning, and associated shift away from generalised target and performance management type measures, is a positive move. UCU Wales especially welcomes the importance afforded to lifelong learning within the proposals.

We do have some concerns about the proposals, however, and these primarily relate to time and resource issues. These far-reaching and ambitious proposals will require deep rooted culture change within the pre-16 education sector with the teaching profession having to learn and develop new ways of working. While we understand the rationale for the curriculum not being too prescriptive, the absence of detailed guidance and clarity does mean that the teaching profession will need the time and skills to develop what is required. This inevitably has training and personal development as well as additional work implications for staff. UCU believes that insufficient consideration, both in terms of time and resources, has been given to these issues within the draft document(s). If these are not addressed then we have concerns about the prospect of the proposals being fully and properly implemented and, as has been reported elsewhere (Newton, 2019), could consequently result in actually widening the achievement gap between different groups of pupils and not close it.

This is compounded by the fact that the proposals are taking place at a time when the education sector is experiencing significant cutbacks. It has been estimated that there will have been a real terms cut of 9% (or £50 per pupil) between 2009 /10 and 2020/21 should current spending plans remain the same (Sibieta, 2019). Heavy workloads, staff redundancies and financial cutbacks are already placing undue pressure upon the teaching profession and is having a detrimental effect upon morale and their ability to deliver what is currently expected of them, which raises serious concerns about their capacity to implement the new curriculum. While we welcome Welsh Government commitment of an additional £44 million resources for schools to prepare for the new curriculum we would suggest that it is insufficient given the scale of cutbacks taking place and the expectations of the new curriculum. We would find it useful to have a detailed breakdown of how this figure has been costed and its proposed usage.

More specifically UCU Wales believes that the draft new curriculum would be strengthened by providing greater detail about how the curriculum links with post-16 education. While the commitment to lifelong learning is implicit in the document(s), there are differences between the post 16 education teaching methods, content and assessment approaches and what is being proposed in this draft curriculum for pre-16 education. We would also like to take this opportunity to stress the importance of ensuring that information can be shared not only between schools, but also between schools and further education colleges, and particularly in relation to transition. We are concerned that any failure to link pre and post 16 education in a proper and meaningful way could detract from the value of the proposals. It would therefore be beneficial if the draft curriculum document gave greater consideration to this to ensure that learners experience a smooth transition to post 16 education and have the skills and knowledge to succeed in that environment, whatever they decide to do.

Finally, while the usefulness of international comparisons (e.g. PISA) can be criticised for being too narrow it is generally accepted that Wales education system has shortcomings, hence the new curriculum which seeks to address these. While the new proposed assessment process is overwhelmingly positive we would welcome further guidance and clarity about how progress/development at a national level will be measured.

To conclude we would like to reiterate our support for the overall vision, aims and objectives of the new curriculum but in order to secure its implementation and ultimate success we believe that certain issues must be addressed, hence our feedback in this correspondence.