



**Welsh Government Consultation:**

# **Draft Curriculum for Wales 2022**

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Colegau Cymru  
Uned 7 Cae Gwyrdd  
Greenmeadow Springs  
Tongwynlais, Caerdydd CF15 7AB  
Ff: 029 2052 2500  
E: [helo@colegaucymru.ac.uk](mailto:helo@colegaucymru.ac.uk)  
W: [www.colegaucymru.ac.uk](http://www.colegaucymru.ac.uk)

Colleges Wales  
Unit 7 Cae Gwyrdd  
Greenmeadow Springs  
Tongwynlais, Cardiff CF15 7AB  
T: 029 2052 2500  
E: [hello@collegeswales.ac.uk](mailto:hello@collegeswales.ac.uk)  
W: [www.collegeswales.ac.uk](http://www.collegeswales.ac.uk)

## Introduction

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ColegauCymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Welsh Government consultation on the 'Draft Curriculum for Wales 2022'. ColegauCymru is a post-compulsory education charity, representing the thirteen further education (FE) colleges and FE institutions in Wales and exists to promote the public benefit of post compulsory education and learning.

The response below builds on previous consultations responses and new and existing material received from Further Education colleges across Wales.

## General observations

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ColegauCymru remains supportive of the aims of the new Curriculum for Wales. We welcome the steps already taken by the Welsh Government to increase its engagement with the Further Education sector and commend the approach taken by officials to ensure openness and dialogue. However, in order to ensure that engagement and collaboration with the Further Education sector is effective, a significant change in approach is now needed.

At present, engagement with the Further Education sector is via ad hoc meetings with the CEO or Director of Policy and Public Affairs at ColegauCymru, plus invitations to the Colleges Wales Principals' Forum. In addition, a representative from Further Education sits on each of the AOLEs to provide a Further Education perspective as well as specialist input on that particular area. This is unlikely, we believe, to secure the best outcome. While the AOLE representatives provide an important perspective, there is no support or mechanism for them to feed back or convene colleagues across the sector to gain wider views to input, or to necessarily meet to compare experiences across the different AOLEs. ColegauCymru would be happy to facilitate this work but does not have capacity to simply absorb this function effectively.

Those colleges who have a representative on one of the AOLEs generally evidence a higher level of engagement around the new curriculum, suggesting that connection and involvement increase enthusiasm as well as understanding. The roles also create advocates for the changes and benefits set out by the reforms within the wider education community. The Welsh Government would be best advised to undertake activity to make engagement more consistent beyond the six AOLE representative roles.

Additional difficulties have resulted from the fact that in recent months, members of the Welsh Government team leading on the new curriculum and engaging with ColegauCymru

have left. This has made communication disjointed and in some cases has impacted on engagement with the Further Education sector on the important work in progress.

In contrast, in order to prepare the Further Education Sector for the reforms required under the new Additional Learning Needs legislation, the Welsh Government has invested £105,000 per year since 2018 for staff and activity to support this via a 'Transformation Lead'. Significant investment has also been made in four 'Transformation Leads' based in local authorities and covering each Education Consortia area. The Transformation Lead for Further Education works directly with colleges, coordinating preparation activity and training across the sector, while reporting to the Welsh Government. This allows efforts across the education sector more broadly to be streamlined and challenges highlighted and addressed as they arise. This has proved to be a successful model to date and one ColegauCymru would like the Welsh Government to consider in order to truly join up the work being undertaken on the compulsory school age curriculum with post-16 learning.

The current consultation does not adequately consider issues of the transition to post compulsory education, including FE, work based learning or university, and how the new curriculum needs to function here. Likewise, ColegauCymru accepts that the present emphasis is on the reformed curriculum to 16 but argues that greater thought needs to be given to how the changes connect with the post-compulsory sector, and the significant reforms being considered, such as the next stage of consultation on the proposed Commission on Tertiary Education. The discussion also needs to encompass several more imminent areas of change. This includes, for example, the Qualifications Wales review of vocational qualifications in areas such as care, so that findings can be considered to ensure that learners can progress successfully into technical courses after following the new curriculum.

Whilst we accept and welcome the views expressed by officials that an aim of the changes is to aid progression, more attention needs to be devoted to creating a positive transition from compulsory to post-compulsory transition in the short to medium term as well as at the point at which the curriculum changes take effect and impact directly on post-16 learning. In other words, the legislative changes proposed for the general education curriculum must not give rise to a 'big bang' approach to transition into sixth form, FE or HE.

## Section A

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**A1.** When asked about the extent to which the draft Curriculum for Wales 2022 would help children and young people meet the four purposes of the curriculum, colleges tended to strongly agree or agree.

Colleges were supportive of the ambition of the curriculum and felt that it was innovative, providing skills that would fit them for a lifelong journey of personal and professional development.

The need for all stakeholders – whether senior leaders in education settings, industry or parents, learners and communities more widely – to really ‘buy in’ and support the developments was emphasised.

Some concerns were raised regarding how delivery of the ambition will look in practice (for example, is there a minimum required at each progression stage as a benchmark?), and how the document could be interpreted differently. The need for the four purposes to be genuinely recognised rather than simply becoming slogans was emphasised. Perceived barriers to change should not hold up the process.

Further Education colleges noted the need to work in partnership with schools on 14-16 provision to avoid overlap or overload of the curriculum. CPD for staff in FE was highlighted as crucial to ensuring that colleges are ready for 14-16 year old learners entering FE, as well as when post-16 learners who have gone through the new Curriculum reach post-compulsory education.

**A2.** Regarding the ‘What matters statements’, colleges strongly agreed that these summed up the priorities for children and young people’s learning. Some statements were felt to be clearer than others and it was suggested that some need further development. This would be aided by more coherence across the AOLES.

**A3.** Colleges agreed that the guidance could be improved, in particular the assessment regime and links to post-16 curriculum. Some aspects of the guidance were felt to lack detail and it was only where individual colleges had members of staff directly involved in the development that they fully understood the intention of the document.

One college commented on the layout of the document, suggesting that it would be easier to have the planning for learning alongside the achievement outcomes and that a tabular format would be helpful in terms of seeing progression from one step to the next. Parts of the website were difficult to navigate. Signposting or mapping of achievement outcomes across different AoLEs to ensure minimisation of duplication would be helpful.

**A4.** Feedback on the assessment proposals ranged from predominantly moderate levels of support to one 'very supportive'. No college was 'Extremely supportive' which suggests that there is greater work to undertake here.

Much is dependent on the formative assessments in each school. Autonomy was positive but it was felt that more information might be helpful for those finding it difficult to create their own proposals for assessment.

It was felt that the 'What matters statements' could be more cohesive and that the Guidance document on its own was insufficient. More student-facing terminology appropriate to the progression level could be helpful in terms of the achievement outcomes.

The teacher assessment framework was positively received but would need to be actioned consistently. There was a question over whether assessment would be on an equitable level across Wales, especially relevant as post-16 institutions have wide catchment areas.

Queries were raised regarding how the proposals linked to the process developing in post-16 education and how appropriate the new curriculum was, therefore, in preparing learners for post-compulsory education. The question of 'what happens after Progression Step 5?' was raised. For example, if learners have undergone wholesale change in relation to the compulsory curriculum but the current A Level system endures, learners may not be prepared for post-16 learning. There is a lack of guidance or indication of what happens post-16, both for learners who have achieved and those who have not. Qualifications require urgent clarity, both pre and post-16, in light of the proposals.

FEIs need to be involved in the developing assessment process, including relevant discussion groups, to have a clear understanding and a standardised approach to progression steps. Assessments for formative purposes should be given priority, moving away from current practice and Achievement outcomes for each progress step should not be seen as a tick-box exercise

Likewise, teacher practice and professional learning needs to change to incorporate assessment for learning. For example, incorporating assessment methods to become more formative i.e. e-portfolios as they become more integral to teaching and learning.

Monitoring and assessment will be vital in the transition phase between institutions and therefore communication between all educational establishments is crucial. A broader approach will need be taken to the process of ensuring accuracy and consistency in assessment which underlines the need for professional dialogue for post 16 transition or employment pathways.

**A5.** Colleges noted that this line of questioning appeared to be more directed at schools but that there were also implications for FE.

In terms of learner input during compulsory education, one college highlighted that as the new curriculum has been designed with the aim of providing learners with experiences through which they develop skills to make them more independent and confident individuals, it would seem sensible for the learners who will be using assessment strategies to manage and assess their own learning to also become involved in feedback and reflection for parents or carers as far as practicable.

Similarly, parents/carers should be engaged in the new curriculum in order to build support and understanding. Perhaps parent/carer engagement evenings could be organised at schools with learners involved, and examples of work and assessment highlighted. A simple brochure or handout outlining the structure of the new curriculum, the 'What Matters statements', assessment processes, and reasons why these have been created, could be produced in an easy to understand format for those not involved in the education system in a formal way.

The ambition to involve learners and parents/carers in reporting mechanisms is important especially as there is often (but not exclusively) a link between carer/parental engagement and learner success. Consideration must also be given to home-educated learners and how they will relate to progression steps and transition.

There is a need to improve on the current almost standard cut and pasted phrases and feedback on performance that schools often use to feedback on learners. Learners also need to be clear of exactly what they have achieved and not just, for example, 'I have achieved progression step 4'.

Relevant reports also need to be shared when transitioning to colleges and other institutions (e.g. work-based learning). Over cautiousness and misunderstandings around GDPR and data-sharing between institutions should not lead to learners being disadvantaged through post-compulsory education and training providers not having the best information possible about how to prepare to meet the needs of incoming learners.

## Section B

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**B1.** Again, the wording of questions here was very much directed at those actually delivering the new curriculum. Colleges mainly reported that the draft Curriculum for Wales 2022 guidance was 'Moderately helpful', with one opting for 'Very helpful'. Suggestions from colleges included that they might use the guidance to analyse and plan pastoral support and the tutorial programme. Others thought that the guidance needed more development but they would like to pilot it with a cohort of entry-level learners in 2019-20. The document needs to be more engaging to all those who have not been involved in the process to date.

**B2.** In terms of how well the draft Curriculum for Wales 2022 guidance allows for all children and young people to gain a broad range of learning opportunities, the general response was that this was 'Moderately well' to 'Very well'. The ambition was felt to be clear but whether this would actually be delivered across the range of settings was a concern. Likewise, the need for good planning and sound pedagogy, rather than a tick-box exercise, was emphasised. Colleges were enthusiastic and noted the potential for some really exciting work to take place. However, this is dependent on the creativity and confidence of teachers as well as school leadership providing the right kind of operational organisation and resources. There are also implications in terms of PGCE qualifications.

**B3.** There were concerns about the extent to which the draft Curriculum for Wales 2022 guidance allows children and young people to specialise from age 14 in a particular subject. No college rated this as anything higher than 'Moderately well', with one college rating this as 'Not well at all' due to the leap from a broad reaching and innovative curriculum to a more conventional assessment at 14-16 if GCSEs remain as they are at present.

Other colleges raised the issue of the difference between what young people might think that they were specialising in not matching post-16 options, especially in vocational provision.

The college representing Further Education on the maths and numeracy AOLE was confident that relevant topics relating to progression to Level 3 had been incorporated but were less confident about this in relation to AOLEs such as Science and technology and Humanities. These required more clarity as to how learners can specialise from age 14 in order to progress into more specialised areas in post-compulsory study.

More detail on how the new curriculum and qualifications will relate to each other is needed.

**B4.** Regarding flexibility and support, there was no consensus with responses ranging from 'Neither agree nor disagree' to 'Agree' to 'Strongly agree'. Responses noted that practitioners who find the challenge of designing a curriculum exciting could flourish. However, not all teachers fall into this category and many will require extensive, in-depth support, advice and guidance and a range of resources. Sufficient planning time is crucial and teachers still need to maintain specialist knowledge of particular areas to support progression steps 4 and 5.

**B5.** All respondents agreed that the cross cutting skills dimension of the draft Guidance would support learners 'Very well'. The approach was innovative but embedding the approach in the planning documentation and genuine teamwork are vital. Opportunities for cross-curricular skills highlighted in the AOLE working documents could be included in the draft guidance.

There are great opportunities for the post-16 sector to raise awareness of what is available once learners complete compulsory schooling. Schools and the Further Education sector need to work closely.

**B6.** This question is not really applicable to the post-16 sector although CPD was highlighted as vital to success.

**B7.** Some respondents did not comment or score this question as it was not obviously relevant. Others rated this 'Extremely well' or 'Very well' in terms of support for children in the Foundation Phase. The content of AOLEs was suitable for Foundation Phase allowing development in greater depth at later stages.

**B8.** In terms of suitability for learners aged 3-16, respondents thought the draft Guidance did this 'Very well' or 'Moderately well'. It is difficult for post-compulsory providers to



assess at this stage. Careful tracking and monitoring needs to be ensured but there is the risk that appropriate pace might result in 'streaming' by another name.

**B9.** There are serious concerns about the extent to which the draft Guidance will provide a basis to help young people progress beyond the age of 16 with respondents rating this as 'Not well at all'. The example of recent changes to Health and Social Care qualifications and competency frameworks not seeming to be coordinated with these changes was highlighted. There is the risk that the flexibility inherent in the new curriculum could clash with a less flexible approach at post-16.

The issue of what happens after compulsory education does not seem to have been adequately considered. There is a need for post-16 providers to be more closely and consistently involved in order to channel the skills, knowledge and values created by a formative period in the new curriculum into progressing into post-compulsory education, work or training with the same mindset. Learners who have reached progression step 5 should be well-equipped but the readiness of those who do not reach this step is uncertain.

However, one college thought the basis of post-16 progression was covered 'Very well', at least in theory. This was dependent on learners having reached progression steps 4 or 5, when they should then be better prepared to progress to further vocational or academic study. There are concerns about inconsistencies across schools and the potential that learners might not develop sufficient subject specific knowledge.

**B10.** Ratings on how well the assessment proposals promote formative assessment were between 'Very well' and 'Slightly well'. More detail was needed on summative assessment in order to adequately answer this question.

**B11.** Respondents noted that post-16 assessment proposals are not as flexible as the new compulsory curriculum. The need for Further Education and schools to collaborate to understand the assessment that has taken place was emphasised. Comprehensive tracking and monitoring is essential.

**B12.** Collaboration and CPD were felt to be important in terms of making the assessment proposals a reality.

**B13.** The issue of CPD was raised by respondents in many of the previous questions as this is essential for both the new curriculum and for post-16 providers who will be working with learners who have been schooled under the new curriculum.

Pedagogy will need to change and adapt depending on the specific AOLE. The PGCE and associated training programmes will need to be rethought with the new approach integrated at an early stage. Improving and enhancing digital skills is crucial. Schools will need support to lead the cultural change in delivery methods and all education providers will need support to deal with staff who are not able or reluctant to adapt.

Time will need to be set aside for planning the purpose-driven curriculum and CPD needs to be extensive to enhance and broaden teacher knowledge and skills so that they can cover more areas in a different way.

Post-16 providers, including Further Education colleges could be a helpful partner for schools, having different resources and professionals who could share experiences. On 13 November 2018, the Education Minister announced an additional £24 million to support the implementation of the new curriculum over the next 18 months. (NAW Plenary, 13 November 2018, available at: <http://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/5363#A46717>.)

However, it is not clear how much, if any of this resource is dedicated to supporting staff in the post-compulsory education sector prepare for the cohort of learners who will have experienced the new curriculum. Pioneer schools and other schools who have already started to change delivery in line with the new curriculum are starting to produce learners who have studied under aspects of the new system. This means that Further Education colleges will start to receive some of these learners over the coming years, rather than as a single cohort who have progressed their way through the new system by year group. For this reason, it is important that the Further Education sector receives its fair share of resources to begin to prepare now.

**B14.** In terms of the professional learning challenges and opportunities to enact the principles in the assessment proposals, a cultural shift towards flexible, learner-centred delivery and assessment was identified, along with training in formative assessment, questioning skills and the stretch and challenge of learners. The issue of funding, in particular an element of capital funding for digital equipment, was highlighted. Time, planning, staffing and collaboration and sharing of best practice and information was also noted.

## Section C

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**C1.** Detailed comments on specific AOLEs are not offered.

**C2.** The progression steps within the Maths and Numeracy AOLE were generally felt to articulate the proficiencies illustrated in the principles of progression 'Extremely well' or 'Very well'. It was noted that the proficiencies should be highlighted at the top of each progression step to ensure that they are emphasised and not 'glossed over'. Financial literacy must be embedded throughout the new curriculum and mental maths needs to be incorporated into qualifications. Digital technology is important but must not dominate the Maths and Numeracy AOLE nor the Science and Technology AOLE.

**C3.** The Languages, Literacy and Communication AOLE was felt to provide for learners to develop translanguaging skills 'Very well'. The need to increase Further Education staff expertise across all areas of modern foreign languages was noted, as well as ongoing CPD for staff in terms of provision through the medium of Welsh to ensure that learners can progress. This was especially relevant to subject specialisms.

**C4.** Little response was given on the issue of whether the Languages, Literacy and Communication AOLE provided for the development of language acquisition and learning, although one respondent indicated that this was set out 'Very well'.

**C5.** In terms of the Health and Well-being AOLE, respondents were generally very positive about how well the guidance supported a whole-school approach to health and well-being, rating this as 'Very well' or in one case, 'Extremely well'. It was noted that this area lent itself very well to cross-school collaborative projects ranging from healthy diet and sleep to sponsored community events.

### Any other comments or feedback

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Concerns were raised about entry to Further Education regarding different experiences of learners who achieve different learning outcomes. Collaboration is therefore vital to ensure

the progression continuum. It was suggested that a set of principles is required to make transition seamless between organisations and monitoring tracking year to year.

Greater involvement with the Education Consortia was sought by some respondents to enable ongoing collaboration and information-sharing.

The ambitious and creative approach was welcomed. It has the potential to develop our youngsters more holistically, better preparing them for adult life and work. However, its success is dependent on teachers' willingness and ability to fully embrace the concept and adapt their usual approaches. A lot of support and guidance will be required as well as how to manage the issues of staff who are unable or unwilling to adapt.

The impact on qualification and assessment, especially GCSEs, is uncertain although discussions with Qualifications Wales are ongoing. Clarity is needed to ensure colleges can provide the best advice and guidance for progression when learners join.

It is important that the curriculum changes are communicated and understood by learners, parents/carers, teachers, businesses and the wider community. Likewise, while this is a curriculum for Wales, the principle that changes are also happening in England – the new system of numbering rather than letters for qualifications, for instance – may need to be highlighted to certain groups: i.e. that divergence in policy happens as a result of changes actively pursued in England rather than solely in Wales.

In summary, ColegauCymru and the Further Education sector remains positive about the potential of the new curriculum and colleges are enthusiastic about opportunities to collaborate and assist. They are keen to ensure that the transition to post-16 learning or work operates as smoothly as possible. However, this task now needs investment and dedicated resource to ensure the dissemination of information, efficient collaboration and information sharing, and the ability to meet the CPD challenge across the education sector.

Dr Rachel Bowen

**Director of Policy and Development, ColegauCymru**

Rachel.bowen@colgaucymru.ac.uk