

Supporting the Curriculum for Wales by supporting the voluntary sector and volunteering

The value of sector

Learning is most effective when it is integrated throughout a child's life; in schools, families and in the community. The new curriculum recognises this and we welcome the Minister's focus on community schools which would help to link schools with families and communities.

The voluntary sector adds enormously to a child's learning experience. As well as linking schools with communities, voluntary sector engagement in the new curriculum can improve a child's learning and development by offering fresh perspectives and different kinds of experiences than can be provided by schools by themselves. These perspectives and experiences actively support the four purposes and each child's wider educational experience.

Voluntary sector action

Wales Centre for International Action – Peace Schools

In 2021-22, WCIA's [Peace Schools](#) scheme worked with schools across Wales to embed peace and global citizenship in the curriculum. As a result of the programme this year, over 4000 young people developed their global citizenship skills, knowledge and values which also support employability. Participating pupils felt more confident to share their views and take informed action.

Save the Children – Parental Engagement

[Save the Children](#) is working with colleagues in Neath Port Talbot to adapt a whole school CPD training on 'Parental Engagement', focussing on schools located in areas of high-deprivation. School staff will receive training to build confidence in working with vulnerable parents, and parents will be engaged to co-produce opportunities to bring other parents into the school, to support their children's learning. Community engagement is being built into this model in line with the Community Schools framework.

Perceived fragmentation of discussions around implementation

We are concerned that the engagement of the voluntary sector in various elements of the implementation of the curriculum has been inconsistent. Whilst there is voluntary sector involvement in some groups and fora, it has not always been central to the way these groups operate. We are also concerned that these groups have often stalled as a result of the pandemic and therefore voluntary sector voices have been marginalised with regard to curriculum implementation.

For example, a working group was established in 2021 by the Curriculum Stakeholders Forum to look at how the third sector (and others) could produce materials and offer other support to local schools (for example through local staff or volunteers) as they develop their new local curriculum and whether a process could be agreed for recommending/accrediting materials and organisations via Hwb or a similar platform - without limiting the freedom of individual schools to devise their own curricula within the national framework. However, after an initial scoping the meeting the group has

not met again. There is now a separate group looking at resources and a third at community schools. These do not appear to be connected with one another.

Key call: Produce or commission a live directory and matching service of those bodies and resources vital to curriculum implementation that makes it as easy as possible for schools to find appropriate services and resources for curriculum enrichment and third sector bodies can be efficient in their contact with schools. Local Authorities, Hwb or a national implementation body may be well placed to support this.

Volunteering

Volunteering has been associated with a wide variety of benefits for school aged pupils. Increased sense of empathy, cooperation, resilience, problem-solving and community belonging are just some of the [positive character traits](#) developed through participation in voluntary action. [Skills sought by employers](#) have also been linked to volunteering and social action, whilst the positive long-term impacts on [mental health and wellbeing](#) have been well-documented. What is more, a [positive correlation between volunteering and improvement in academic performance](#) has been identified. The benefits of youth volunteering go beyond the individual, as research points to [volunteering as a building block of community cohesion](#), promoting integration, understanding, tolerance and trust.

Young people in Wales play their part in a country that is built on community spirit as [campaigners for the rights of others](#), [advocates for the protection of the environment](#) and the [Welsh language](#) to name but a few. Many contribute to causes they care about as part of school initiatives, whether through courses - the Welsh Baccalaureate, Duke of Edinburgh Awards or though specific extra-curricular activities, such as Eco-Clubs or School Councils. Unfortunately, we are not confident that all young people have access to the same amount and variety of volunteering opportunities. There are no standardised channels of communication between the voluntary sector and schools in Wales on a national level. We see the roll-out of the Curriculum for Wales as an opportunity to establish strong connections between these sectors to ensure integration of voluntary action in the curriculum for every school in Wales.

Voluntary sector action

Volunteering Matters: Ryan's story

“During the summer of 2015, Cara and Amy from [the Sex Matters Too project](#) came into my school to do a volunteer recruitment assembly. They explained how the project works, and I knew this was something I would be interested in doing, so I signed up. I'd like to become a secondary school teacher, so I thought volunteering with the Sex Matters Too project would be a great opportunity to enhance my skills and deliver important information to my peers.

“When I first started volunteering on the project I was nervous about delivering the content and my ability to present workshops to an audience. Through the Sex Matters Too training I was able to overcome this by getting all the information that I needed, and knowing I had the support of Cara and the hub coordinators.

“Recently I was diagnosed with stress-related anxiety disorder, and I have found that through volunteering and delivering workshops I have been able to stay focused, and this has helped me deal with my anxiety.

“Volunteering has provided me with the opportunity to further my skills and push myself as an individual. These opportunities would not have come my way without participating in the Sex Matters Too Project – I have learnt so many things that I can use to further my development in the future.”

Key call: Education officials proactively engage with the upcoming review of volunteering policy to ensure school-based volunteering and other forms of youth volunteering can be strengthened, including within schools.

Resources and enrichment activity

The new curriculum gives schools the freedom to design a local curriculum which is tailored for their pupils. The voluntary sector welcomes this flexibility and we know that we can provide support in schools that enrich their pupils learning experiences. This can be across all of the curriculum’s areas of learning and experience and can range from support in designing lessons to visits and outdoor residential centres.

It’s welcome that the new curriculum empowers schools individually but this can make it more difficult for the voluntary sector as a whole to offer support for schools.

Voluntary sector organisations often attract grant or other funding sources to deliver this curriculum enrichment work which adds value and resource into the school system in Wales. However, some elements are funded by different parts of Welsh Government who sometimes do not fully coordinate with each other. Many such funding streams haven’t been updated since Curriculum for Wales implementation. A coordinated approach, where there is a transparent commissioning and/or granting programme for voluntary sector organisations would be more equitable, and encourage experimentation and innovation to support the curriculum for Wales. It could also provide opportunities for voluntary sector organisations to upskill regarding the new curriculum.

As well as curriculum enrichment within school hours, many voluntary bodies, including faith groups, offer after-school ‘Homework Clubs’ and similar activities, in more or less formal partnership with one or more local schools. If these are to provide the greatest possible benefit to the learners involved, especially when learners from different schools are learning together, a number of the same considerations apply, especially around long-term consistency of support.

Voluntary sector action

Business In the Community - Barclays LifeSkills Programme

The Welsh Youth Parliament released a report in 2019 which found that 89% of adults felt that life skills teaching was not prioritised appropriately in schools. Only 44% of teachers felt that they had the necessary skills/experience to teach life skills. Life skills lessons can be a tool to help address the

negative impact on student wellbeing from COVID-19, with 77% of [Barclays LifeSkills](#) students reporting higher ambitions and aspirations, and 88% feeling more motivated to do better in academic and vocational studies.

Key calls:

- We support the work to improve Hwb so search functions match the curriculum and third sector organisations are given guidance in how to write resources for the curriculum. Third sector engagement in this process remains vital.
- Pool funding and administrative support for curriculum enrichment and resources commissioned or granted by Welsh Government to the voluntary sector. This would enable more strategic commissioning and transparency about the process.
- Welsh Government could co-produce guidance for schools regarding engaging with voluntary sector (and other external) providers, encouraging schools to seek out appropriate support within their *cynefin*. This would encourage co-ordination across clusters and catchment areas, and could include case studies of successful partnerships across a range of AoLEs, types of school, etc.