

Learners to experience new languages at an earlier age – Kirsty Williams

In the new curriculum, Modern Foreign Languages would be included within International Languages. This would also include community languages, classical languages and British Sign Language (BSL).

Learners would experience international languages at an earlier age and there would be clear expectations for their progress while at primary school.

This will build on work with the Global Futures Network, which provides a range of support for Modern Foreign Languages in the curriculum.

Schools would be able to choose which language (s) they would like learners to experience in addition to Welsh and English.

Changes are also proposed to the way that Welsh is taught, with the language remaining compulsory for all learners aged 3-16 – alongside English – but no longer separated into first and second language Programmes of Study.

Under the proposals, all learners will follow the same curriculum and there would be more of an emphasis on improving learners' skills and use of the language.

While it would be up to schools to decide how they approach this, they would need to think about opportunities for learners to listen, read, speak and write in Welsh – this might be through use in different parts of the curriculum or outside the classroom.

Work is already underway with regional consortia and other stakeholders to deliver professional learning in a number of ways, including the Sabbatical Scheme which provides intensive Welsh language training to teachers and teaching assistants.

In the longer-term, qualifications for Welsh, English and International Languages would also change. Qualifications Wales are currently considering how qualifications should change in line with the new curriculum.

Announcing the changes today, the Education Minister said:

“This marks the most dramatic shift in the way languages are taught in Welsh schools since the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988.

“We want all our learners to be citizens of both Wales and the world and that means ensuring that all young people from all backgrounds have an opportunity to develop their language skills – whether that’s in Welsh, English or international languages.

“We know these changes will take time and that’s why we won’t be taking a big bang approach. We’re committed to giving schools the time and resources they need to adjust. That’s why I recently announced £24 million over and above what already goes into curriculum support.”

Professor Sioned Davies, author of a Welsh Government commissioned report into Welsh in the curriculum, said:

“I am very pleased that the Welsh Government is fulfilling the recommendations of my report. Ensuring that the Welsh language is a statutory subject for everyone, and removing the term ‘Welsh second language’ is vital if we are to achieve the goal of a million Welsh speakers.

“The new curriculum, which will bring language learning together into one Area of Learning and Experience, will provide an exciting opportunity for teachers in Wales to develop and share expertise in language learning to give our children and young people the best opportunity to develop communication skills in Welsh and English, and in international languages.

“These are exciting and challenging times. There is a need to ensure time and support for the whole system to develop in order to create the best conditions for the new curriculum to flourish.”

A Curriculum and Assessment White Paper is to be published for consultation shortly. This will set out the proposed changes that are needed to support the introduction of the new Curriculum when the phased roll out commences from 2022.