



Our ref: DC/LA/05293/14

Andrew Selous MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
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22 January 2015

Dear Andrew,

At our meeting in December 2014 I agreed to further outline my views on the potential implications for Welsh learners in reference to the development of Secure Colleges. Following my letter reference IM/05352/14, I am able to provide additional information.

It is important that any changes to youth custody adequately support the needs of young people from Wales and should not negatively impact or disadvantage them in any way. We know a young person's educational experience is a significant factor bearing on the risk of involvement in criminal behaviour and a priority must be to ensure all children and young people, wherever they are from, are supported in the best possible way to meet their individual needs. It is therefore vital that any education provision within a Secure College takes account of the specific needs of Welsh children and young people, including language, cultural, education, resettlement and religious needs. Whilst I appreciate your proposals recognise these differences, it is not clear how you propose to ensure that a young person from Wales, detained in an English Secure College, will receive relevant, suitable and accessible education provision.

The curriculum, qualification system and educational approach in Wales is different to England, and in light of Professor Graham Donaldson's review of the Curriculum in Wales, any structural similarities which currently remain may not exist in the future.

One of the most significant differences is that Welsh is a statutory subject in the National Curriculum for Wales and is compulsory up to the age of 16. Learners follow either the Welsh first language or second language Programme of Study. In addition to studying the Welsh language, learners in Wales have the opportunity to study for qualifications in other subjects through the medium of Welsh; these include GCSE and A level in addition to vocational qualifications.

There are also significant differences to the way we are revising qualifications in Wales. Our programme for revising qualifications here is informed by an extensive body of evidence gathered in the independent Review of Qualifications and subsequent engagement with a range of stakeholders in the development process. For GCSEs and A levels, whilst our schedule for revising these qualifications, subject by subject, aligns closely with that in England in order to minimise transitional issues for learners and practitioners in Wales, the detail of changes we are making differs quite substantially from the changes being made in England. Our approach provides a greater focus on developing skills, particularly literacy and numeracy, and is designed to prepare young people better for work or further study. Further information about the revision of qualifications in Wales can be found at <http://www.qualifiedforlife.org.uk/>.

Key differences for GCSEs and A levels are:

- These and other qualifications in Wales are currently regulated by the Welsh Government. However, in response to one of the recommendations from the Review of Qualifications and subject to the necessary legislation, a new independent regulator, Qualifications Wales, will be established from September 2015;
- Whilst other awarding organisations were invited to express an interest in developing revised GCSEs and A levels to meet Wales' requirements, only the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) has indicated they wish to develop these qualifications. Consequently, for subjects where there are revised or new specifications, only the WJEC specifications will be approved for use in maintained schools and colleges in Wales;
- There are no plans, at present to revise the grading scale for GCSEs in Wales. We are retaining the current A*-C scale, whereas revised GCSEs in England will have a 9 – 1 grade scale;
- Wales has and will continue to retain modular assessment in GCSEs and A levels, where that is appropriate;
- From September 2015 we will implement:
 - New GCSEs in English Language and Welsh Language. Both will have a greater focus on the functional aspects of language with reading, writing and literacy (speaking and listening) skills all counting towards the final grade;
 - Two new mathematics GCSEs, to replace the current GCSE. GCSE Mathematics – Numeracy will cover the mathematics needed for everyday life, and GCSE Mathematics will give young people the mathematical skills they need for further mathematical, technical or scientific study;
 - Revised GCSEs in English Literature and Welsh Literature;
 - 14 revised A levels. The subjects covered will be the same as in England, with the addition of Welsh (First Language) here. We are ensuring the content of A levels in Wales will be similar to England, whilst also allowing for a Welsh dimension, where appropriate. However significant differences in Wales are that we are retaining AS qualifications as a coupled part of full A levels, and practical assessments will also continue to contribute to the assessment of A levels, where appropriate. Both of these plans have been widely welcomed by stakeholders, including Higher Education;


- From September 2016 a further 16 revised GCSEs and 10 revised A levels are scheduled for implementation. These largely mirror the developments in England with the addition of A level Welsh second language;
- From September 2017 there will be a third tranche of revised qualifications. Details of which subjects will be included are yet to be finalised but will include A level and AS Mathematics and Further Mathematics.

Our Welsh Baccalaureate (Welsh Bacc) qualification adds a valuable dimension to the subjects and courses already available to 14 – 19 year old learners. Learners continue to take qualifications such as GCSEs, A levels and vocational qualifications and the Welsh Bacc provides a more rounded education and develops the skills learners will need in future learning and employment. The existing Welsh Bacc is already widely recognised and valued by employers, universities and other Higher Education Institutions. However, following recommendations from the Review of Qualifications, a revised, more rigorous model will be implemented from September 2015.

Complementary to this is the range of vocational programmes and essential skills qualifications designed to provide learners with the knowledge, understanding and skills needed in education, work and life.

Another important consideration is the difference in approach to children and young people with special educational needs (SEN). The new Education Health and Care Plans, which are replacing statements of special educational needs for English learners, are not being introduced in Wales. We are undertaking work on proposals for additional learning needs (ALN) which would result in the replacement of the existing system for supporting learners with SEN with one which was based on ALN. We expect to bring forward a Bill to that effect in the summer (2015).

We are in agreement in general that education provision within a Secure College should deliver a broad and balanced curriculum which allows children and young people to develop and apply a wide range of skills. However, your current proposals for Secure Colleges suggest the curriculum offer should include Department for Education (DfE) approved qualifications. The information above illustrates why this approach will not be suitable, or relevant, to Welsh children and young people.

Yours sincerely,


Leighton Andrews AC / AM
 Y Gweinidog Gwasanaethau Cyhoeddus
 Minister for Public Services

