

# aboutwales

Guidance and information/Civic society network

## Working with schools

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### Why do you want to work with schools?

Civic societies often express an aspiration to work with schools. This generally comes from a worthy assumption that young people can benefit from opportunities to learn about the local built environment and perhaps engage in projects that can improve amenity. However, we are not aware of any recent good examples of liaison with schools. Gone are the days of 'junior' civic societies, and the aspiration once frequently expressed that recruiting in schools could lead to adult membership of a civic society was never found to be successful.

The purpose of this guidance sheet is to explain the context in which modern schools work, and to suggest ways in which civic societies may be able to support schools. The premise is that if any relationship with a school is to be productive, for either side, it is important to understand how the modern curriculum will condition such opportunities. Any successful project has to respond to curriculum needs.

Any relationship between a school and a civic society is

likely to be at arm's length and carefully controlled by the school in the interests of children's protection. While it may be possible to be invited in to talk to children under close supervision, contact with children is likely to be limited to this scenario. In most contacts, criminal checks are required for adults who work as volunteers with young people.

### Understanding the context of schools

We think that civic societies may be most useful to primary rather than secondary schools. At present it is probable that support to secondary schools may be most relevant when it can be linked to Personal and Social Education rather than individual subjects. This is because the curriculum for younger children is less driven by examinations and there are often greater opportunities for children to engage in cross-curricular projects. There are nonetheless some cross-phase curriculum aspects to which societies may be able to offer a contribution.

In all schools, what teachers teach is underpinned by



detailed planning through schemes of work linked to a framework of assessment that supports progression. This means that teachers plan ahead – generally making sure that schemes of work are in place at the start of a school year. Societies need to be mindful that collaborative initiatives may take time to develop, and, indeed, may be met by scepticism on the part of over-worked school staff.

If a civic society is to be perceived as useful, what it offers has to be seen as relevant in the context of teachers' planning. Individual teachers are held

ever more closely to account for their outputs. The system of monitoring, control and accountability within which they work means that external input is unlikely to be welcomed unless it can be integrated easily into a scheme of work and its associated lesson planning.

To make sure you understand the framework within which teachers in Wales operate, and therefore can talk to teachers on the basis of familiarity with the system, there follows an outline of the requirements of the National Curriculum in Wales. This is currently under review<sup>1</sup> by Professor Graham

Donaldson, who will report on his conclusions in January 2015. The government is also due to respond to the findings of a review<sup>2</sup> group led by Professor Elin Jones, which looked at the Cwricwlwm Cymreig (aka the 'Curriculum Cymreig' – practice varies, and the meaning of the term is not transparent) within the Welsh National Curriculum and at the teaching of Welsh history in schools. The Curriculum Cymreig is explained below.

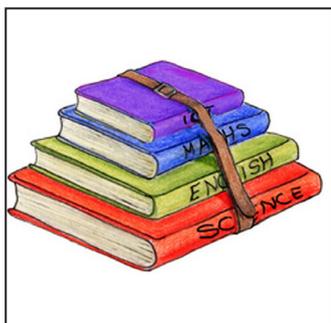
### General curriculum issues

Modern education uses jargon and nomenclature you may be unfamiliar with. Progress through school is organised through Key Stages.

- Key stage 0: Nursery, reception – ages 3-5
- Key stage 1: Infants – ages 5-7 (Year 1-2)
- Key stage 2: Juniors – ages 7-11 (Year 3-6)
- Key stage 3: ages 11-14 (Year 7-9)
- Key stage 4: ages 14-16 (Year 10-11)
- Key stage 5: Sixth Form, Further Education ages 16-18 (Years 11-12)

There are statutory tests for all children in reading and numeracy for learners in Years 2-9.

At Key Stage 2 all children must study English, Welsh, mathematics, science, design and technology, information and communication technology, history, geography, art and



design, music and physical education. At Key Stage 3 they must study these subjects together with one modern foreign language.

### Active learning

There are common elements to the National Curriculum orders for each subject. Teachers must plan their lessons so that they encourage skills in thinking, communication, information technology, literacy and numeracy. Learning should be active not passive, with opportunities for collaborative work, enquiry, and presentation. The new Literacy and Numeracy Framework has recently been put in place for children from 5 to 14. This encourages skills in speaking, listening, reading, writing, numerical reasoning, the use of data, using number and measurement.

In addition, schools need to provide Personal and Social Education, for which there is a very broad non-statutory framework<sup>3</sup>. This can be delivered in form periods, in cross-curricular projects, and through extra-curricular activities. It covers themes such as citizenship and sustainability as well as being intended to support children's social and spiritual development.

### The Welsh dimension

The Curriculum Cymreig requires teachers to provide a Welsh flavour to all subjects and for the whole school ethos to have a Welsh dimension. The 'Curriculum Cymreig helps pupils to understand and celebrate the distinctive quality of living and learning in Wales in the twenty-first century, to identify their own sense of Welshness and to feel a heightened sense of belonging to their local community and

country.' As explained above, the Curriculum Cymreig is under review, as is the National Curriculum. As things stands, anecdotal experience suggests that implementation has been more effective in some schools than others, and that ways of incorporating the Curriculum Cymreig into subjects other than history and geography have not been obvious. However, the emphasis on the experience of living in Welsh communities contributes to opportunities for civic societies and amenity groups to be useful to schools.

For detail information see: Developing the *Curriculum Cymreig*, 2003<sup>4</sup>

### Subject-specific opportunities

Undeniably, civic societies have a number of interests that should coincide with curriculum needs. What follows reflects the jargon-ridden nature of the official documentation. Societies that undertake projects related to local history, changes in townscape, historic buildings, and life in the local community in past times may be in a position to support historical investigations by students.

Societies which have studied local maps and patterns of urban development, and/or are concerned with planning issues and the future shape of towns may likewise be able to find opportunities to support other aspects of teaching and learning.

At Key Stage 2, and even below, local and Welsh history is a significant aspect of the history curriculum orders.

The work teachers plan is likely to be inquiry based, focusing on finding out how people lived locally,

how places changed over time, and what significant events may have happened in the past. Teachers may encourage children to work on timelines, or use number and data through the use of census information. Children will need to talk about, read about, write about and present their findings.

Societies may have resources, or be involved in project work that can be shared with teachers, in a way that promotes children's curiosity about the past, and enables stories to be told about life and work in historical periods. Old (and not very old) photographs and maps represent useful stimuli to learning, enable comparisons between past and present, and support a developing understanding of the passage of time. Children should investigate the surroundings of the school and its locality, and teachers may welcome materials or sources of information that facilitate this process.

Guidance for teachers emphasises the possibilities, particularly in relation to the 19th and 20th centuries, of local sites and buildings, place names, street names, buildings and monuments, and associations with particular events or people. Historical contexts can include suburbs and housing estates and the past within living memory as well as more established settlements or parts of towns, cities and villages. Teachers may want to bring members of the community into



school to share memories or help set up a school museum of memorabilia, documents and photographs. Adults who can talk about the past they have experienced and can communicate an understanding of change in everyday life may be welcomed.

Geography in the primary school promotes inquiries by children which often overlap with the history curriculum and which can benefit from access to comparable resources.

Geography is concerned with places and environments, studied in the classroom and through fieldwork. Children encounter maps and images of places, and as in history, are encouraged to develop thinking, communication, information technology and literacy and numeracy skills through geographical inquiry. They learn about settlement patterns and investigate satellite imagery. They are encouraged to think about place and identity and how this relates to the human and natural landscape. They may discuss issues that affect communities as they change and develop, including their own. In the primary school they study their own locality, what it is like and how it is changing, investigating its character in and out of doors, using maps and other resources. They learn to interpret spatial patterns and to explore natural and human features, for instance, different kinds of buildings. Through fieldwork they observe real places and processes, locating places and features on sketch maps, making and annotating photographs. Geographical issues can be topical – for example, traffic problems or local development proposals.

The intersection with the interests and concerns of

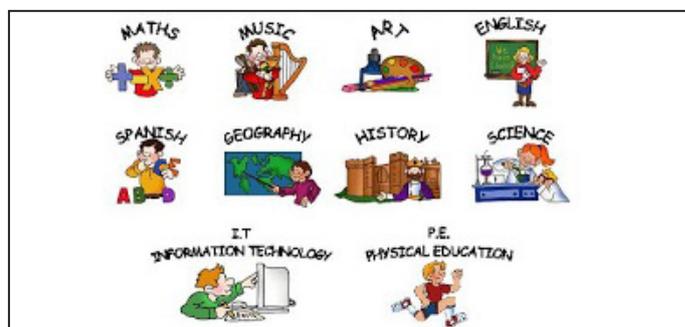
civic societies should be obvious. Again, societies may want to think about whether they have developed resources or are involved in projects or casework, that teachers might make use of or draw on. Some schools have become positively involved in fieldwork that promotes an analysis of local character, and a society that itself has worked on characterisation, perhaps using the Trust's toolkit, may have something to offer as a result.

### **Cross-curricular opportunities**

In primary schools in particular, projects that embrace historical, geographical and other curriculum themes are attractive to teachers. In fact, art, mathematics, design, reading, speaking and writing can all be embraced within a project that engages with the way a settlement has grown up, developed and is changing today.

### **Personal and social education**

During the first decade of the present century, Welsh government was the fore in developing policies for sustainable development. In the case of education this was expressed through the development of an initiative for Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship. Government now regards the initiative as mature, and not requiring top-down action plans. It assumes that EDSGC has become mainstreamed within schools rather than being a standalone agenda. As such, there is useful material available to support teachers and learners in promoting the protection of the environment, the sustainable use of resources, the reduction



of inequalities between different peoples, human rights, and peaceful and harmonious communities. Worthy though this initiative has been, it's approach to environmental problems focused on global issues and the natural environment and downplayed themes relating to local environmental choices and urban living (q.v., Out of classroom learning (2007)<sup>6</sup>, and that this was reflected in initial teacher training and delivery in schools.

However, this should not prevent a discussion with open-minded teachers that focuses on issues associated with urban development and urban living as relevant to sustainability. Likewise, children will grow up to become local citizens, as much as global citizens, with opportunities to participate in a democracy for which issues to do with sustainable land-use, transportation and consumption will be central to political choice.

ESDGC is likely now to be delivered in a school through cross-curricular projects, Personal and Social Education, or both. The PSE framework<sup>7</sup> is non-statutory, but is the basis for the planning of this aspect of the curriculum for ages 7-19, and builds on a Foundation phase framework for three- to seven-year olds. PSE includes education for sustainability, attitudes and values and community participation. It should develop, *inter alia*, self-respect, respect for

others, the celebration of diversity, active citizenship (local, national, global), sustainable development, and preparation for work and adult life. As such it can be embedded in cross-curricular projects and support the Curriculum Cymreig, for example through understanding the nature of communities in Wales and acquiring the skills, values and knowledge to participate in decision-making. The framework is very broad brush, but it is should be obvious that aspects of it could be delivered through projects that focused on local development choices, and local debates that enshrine issues associated with conservation and development.

If a school has recognised these opportunities, there could be a role for a society to support a project through a talk to children, or through helping a teacher to design a role-play. We think that it is this area of the curriculum where secondary schools may find liaison with a civic society useful, and there may be opportunities to engage older children through initiatives such as debates, art and photography projects, and competitions.

### **Bright ideas**

We have avoided citing examples of civic societies which have engaged with schools. This is because we have no way of auditing the quality of delivery or the extent to which these

initiatives were regarded as successful by teachers. A Google search will turn up plenty of examples, but detail is generally lacking as to the content or impact of such projects. The discussion of curriculum areas above should provide the basis for a society which thinks it has something to contribute to initiate contact with a school or schools. In addition, however, the following fairly standard ideas might yield benefits:

- art and photographic competitions
- essay competitions with local amenity or heritage themes
- quizzes, debates and debating competitions
- awards for school-based conservation initiatives
- prizes for good citizenship
- talks to students (be very brave – they can bite)
- role plays on development issues (a planning inquiry, for instance)

### Contacting schools

Civic societies may well be in a position to provide people or resources who can be drawn on by teachers. An approach to a local primary or secondary school may be welcomed, but it must be understood that teachers have schemes of work in place and that modifying these to take account of new resources or approaches means hard work for them and can take time. Teachers work to an annual cycle and what they do nowadays is rigorously line-managed. Societies may well find that responses to an offer are tentative or cautious. Relationships take time to develop.

If you are planning to engage a number of schools through a competition or award scheme, then the

best approach is by letter to headteachers seeking an opportunity to meet. The most successful scheme is likely to be one where heads or nominated teachers are active partners in designing the competition and its award criteria. They will need to be convinced that it relevant to the needs of their pupils.

You might think that a local education authority would be a good port of call. Twenty years ago that could have been the case, at least with a big council such as South Glamorgan or Gwynedd. Modern unitary councils can't afford specialist subject advisers, and the delivery of advisory services now tends to be through consortia. There the emphasis is on data and assessment rather than subject content. However, if you want to engage a number of schools it could be that the local education authority will help you get in touch, or might want to get some publicity out of a success story.

Generally, if you are considering an approach to an individual school, for example to discuss how far resources or people you have can make a contribution to the curriculum, don't think you can turn up and talk to a teacher (still less the head) without an appointment. Find out about the school first (via a council or school website). If you are cold-calling, then you need to talk to the school's administration about the best way of making personal contact.

You will want an exploratory discussion to see if and how you can support the school's curriculum. Don't expect to be received with open arms. Teachers are over-worked and will be wary of even the most well-intentioned

initiative. Moreover, while you will need to meet during the school day or shortly after, teachers don't have much free time, and opportunities will need to be carefully negotiated.

Don't pretend to be a curriculum expert. Unless you teach kids, you are not, and what you remember of schools will be well out of date. Even if you are a school governor your grasp of curriculum and lesson planning will be limited! You are offering to share resources or discuss possibilities for collaboration. You should be sufficiently clued in to ensure that your approach is not naive and could be relevant, but whether or not it matches a school's schemes of work or future plans will be up to them.

Good luck.

### References

<sup>1</sup> Review by Professor Graham Donaldson  
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/curriculuminwales/curriculum-for-wales/?lang=en>

<sup>2</sup> Review by Professor Elin Jones  
<http://learning.wales.gov.uk/docs/learningwales/news/130424-cwricwlwm-cymreig-report-en.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Non-statutory framework for Personal and Social Education  
<http://learning.wales.gov.uk/docs/learningwales/publications/130425-personal-and-social-education-framework-en.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Developing the Curriculum Cymreig, 2003  
<http://www.wasacre.org.uk/publications/wag/opingthecurriculumcymreig.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Education for sustainable development and global citizenship  
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/allsectorpolicies/europeanandinternational/sustainabledevelop/?lang=en>

<sup>6</sup> Out of classroom learning  
<http://wales.gov.uk/dcells/publications/publications/guidanceandinformation/outofclassroomlearning/outofclassroomlearninge.pdf?lang=en>

<sup>7</sup> The PSE framework  
<http://learning.wales.gov.uk/docs/learningwales/publications/130425-personal-and-social-education-framework-en.pdf>

### Curriculum documents

History in the National Curriculum KS2-3  
<http://learning.wales.gov.uk/docs/learningwales/publications/130424-history-in-the-national-curriculum-for-wales-en.pdf>

History Guidance for Key stages 2 and 3  
<http://learning.wales.gov.uk/docs/learningwales/publications/130424-history-guidance-en.pdf>

Geography in the National Curriculum for Wales  
<http://learning.wales.gov.uk/docs/learningwales/publications/130424-geography-in-the-national-curriculum-en.pdf>

Knowledge and understanding of the world  
<http://learning.wales.gov.uk/docs/learningwales/publications/130424-knowledge-and-understanding-of-the-world-en.pdf>

The Personal and Social Education framework (7-19)  
<http://learning.wales.gov.uk/docs/learningwales/publications/130425-personal-and-social-education-framework-en.pdf>