Independent Review of Assessment and the National Curriculum for Wales

06 October 2014

Minister,

In March 2014 you asked me to conduct a fundamental review of curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales from Foundation Phase to Key Stage 4. We have now reached a point in the review at which I thought it would be helpful to provide an update on progress.

The first, and perhaps the most encouraging, point I want to make is my appreciation for the very positive and constructive response there has been to the review from across Wales. I have also had the opportunity to see at first hand many examples of excellent work which is already in place. My team and I have visited 58 schools covering the country, meeting and hearing the views of head teachers, teachers, pupils and, where possible, parents. We have also met an extensive range of organisations and individuals representing a very wide spectrum of Welsh experience and opinion. I have been particularly heartened by the 713 responses to my call for evidence, including over 300 directly from young people from across the age range. The Welsh Institute for Social and Economic Research has undertaken an analysis of the responses and its report is forming an important part of our considerations. We are also drawing on international experience and research as we consider our next steps. Taken as a whole, I am satisfied that we now have a strong evidence base to inform our conclusions and recommendations.

In moving to the next stage in the review, we are developing a set of principles for curriculum design that will serve both to evaluate current practice and to guide and test our proposals for the future. I am attaching a working copy of that framework to this letter.

In line with the principles for curriculum design we are now actively engaged in the following:

- Identifying and articulating the values and purposes which should underpin the curriculum
- Developing the main building blocks/components of the curriculum and considering how they might best be organised to meet our purposes and principles
- Considering the implications of the purposes of the curriculum and revised building blocks for learning and teaching
• Determining the role of assessment in both helping to achieve the purposes of the curriculum and in establishing how far the purposes are being met

• Identifying the implications for teacher and system capacity, methods of accountability and other drivers of educational quality.

It would be premature to present specific conclusions at this stage but it is already clear that, while the evidence suggests a need for significant change, there are many real strengths in Welsh education upon which we can build. My final report is likely to present proposals which will have significant implications for how we frame the purposes of the curriculum, for how we describe and organise its component parts and for how we assess progress in learning.

In moving towards my final report, which will be with you at the turn of the year, I will continue to test my thinking with practitioners and other key individuals and organisations. I will also consider how the report might be taken forward in the longer term, including how we can build the capacity of teachers, schools and the wider system in ways that will help achieve the full benefits of my proposals for the children and young people in Wales.

It might be helpful at this stage for others to see how the work of the review is progressing. With this in mind, I would be more than happy for you to share the content of this letter and attached framework more widely, and in whatever form you felt most appropriate.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Graham Donaldson CB
10 Principles for Curriculum Design

The Curriculum should be:

- **authentic**: rooted in Welsh values and culture and aligned with an agreed set of stated purposes;

- **evidence-based**: drawing on the best of existing practice within Wales and from elsewhere and on sound research;

- **responsive**: relevant to the needs of today (individual, local and national) but also equipping all young people with the knowledge, skills and dispositions for future challenges as lifelong learners;

- **inclusive**: easily understood by all, encompassing an entitlement to high quality education for every child and young person and taking account of their views in the context of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and those of parents and wider society;

- **ambitious**: embodying high expectations and setting no artificial limits on achievement and challenge for each individual child and young person;

- **empowering**: developing competencies which will allow young people to engage confidently with the challenges of their future lives;

- **unified**: enabling continuity and flow with components which combine and build progressively;

- **engaging**: encouraging enjoyment from learning and satisfaction in mastering challenging subject matter;

- **based on subsidiarity**: commanding the confidence of all, whilst encouraging appropriate ownership and decision-making by those closest to the learning and teaching process;

- **manageable**: recognising the implications for and supported by appropriate assessment and accountability arrangements