



The first draft of the new History curriculum for Wales will be published in April 2019, and the Owain Glyndŵr Society is concerned that the stories of Glyndŵr and the Age of the Princes will not be included:

Current Welsh Government Proposals for the reformed Curriculum

In July 2018, the Welsh Assembly was discussing how to raise awareness of Wales's historical sites. At one point, the discussion focussed on Llys Rhosyr, one of the courts of the Princes of Gwynedd. The First Minister at the time, Carwyn Jones, expanded on the theme of publicity, by referring to Welsh History teaching:

“A part of our history that I think has been neglected actually over the years because we know that Welsh History was not well taught in schools for many, many years; and in some ways as a nation we are not well aware of our own history.”

The First Minister concluded by stating that we should encourage “our own people, and others as well, to understand more of our Medieval history.”

We couldn't agree more. Wales's Medieval history, or the Age of the Princes, has been given insufficient recognition in Welsh schools for decades. The same could be said of the Age of the Saints. For a long time, many pupils have left Welsh schools under the erroneous impression that our history started with the arrival of the Industrial Revolution in south and north Wales in the eighteenth century.

We now have an opportunity to rectify the weaknesses identified by the former First Minister. The curriculum to be offered in Welsh schools is being overhauled. It is based on the recommendations of Professor Donaldson and a draft document is due to be published in April 2019. However, if the Welsh Government's current stance prevails, the deficiencies noted by Carwyn Jones will persist.

In a response to the Owain Glyndŵr Society's request for a meeting in support of its submission, the Welsh Government's position was made abundantly clear by an official, but on behalf of the Cabinet Secretary for Education:

“While the Programme of Study for History suggests topics for teaching, the curriculum is non-prescriptive – allowing each school the flexibility to choose the detailed topics, the balance of local and Welsh history ... this in turn is meant to allow teachers to create a scheme of work which is tailored to their learners.”

The response refers to Donaldson's 'Successful Futures' document and its assertion that “a high degree of prescription and detail at a national level inhibits the flow and progression in children and young people's learning and progression.” This theory seems to contradict the view of the First Minister in 2018. It seems perverse that Carwyn Jones should encourage us to learn more about our Medieval history, whilst the Education Department allows schools to pay scant attention to the period, if that is what they prefer.

This flawed philosophy will almost certainly result in the continued ignorance of key events in our history amongst many pupils. Will the history of the Rebecca Riots, highlighting the poverty and iniquities of rural life in early nineteenth century Wales, only be taught in Dyfed Schools? Will Gwynedd schools be the only ones to teach the causes, events and consequences of the longest industrial dispute in British History at the dawn of the twentieth century? Whilst at first sight it is welcome that teachers' views and input is respected, the freedom for every school to decide on the content is flawed. It will result in gaps in knowledge and an incoherent strategy that defies the logic of calling schools from all over Wales to formulate a new curriculum. Why have schools from all over Wales formed a Pioneer Schools group to design a History curriculum if each school can decide its own priorities according to what best suits its pupils?

The current proposals have disappointed the author of a report which, at the time, appeared to be the foundation on which the new History curriculum would be built. In 2013, Dr Elin Jones presented "The Cwricwlwm Cymreig, history and the story of Wales" to the Welsh Government. However, as she made clear to the Owain Glyndŵr Society at our AGM in 2018, she felt that the current proposals were far removed from her ideals. Dr Jones's report emphasised the need to change from an Anglocentric-led approach to one which started with the local and emphasised the Welsh context as a core foundation. This would not and could not exclude taking a wider dimension to many historical events.

One seemingly obvious strategy would be to have timelines in History lessons with key events related to local/Welsh/Rest of Britain/Europe and the World marked on them. There are numerous examples of events in Welsh History which had wider repercussions. Griffith Jones started his remarkable Circulating Schools project in Llanddowror, Carmarthenshire, in the eighteenth century. The scheme spread to almost every corner of Wales. However, his sponsor, Madam Bevan, raised funds for the scheme from contacts in Bath and London. Catherine the Great sent envoys to Wales to discover what was happening. In the 1950's UNESCO considered using a similar scheme in countries where the education system was underdeveloped. Griffith Jones's scheme, centred on Wales, offers an opportunity to study English and Russian society in the eighteenth century as well as the work of UNESCO. However, if a strict "non-prescriptive" approach is adopted, what certainty can we have that pupils beyond Carmarthenshire will learn about this remarkable scheme, which ensured that almost 50% of Welsh people were literate by 1800?

The only way to ensure that key events and episodes in our history, such as Griffith Jones's schools and the Owain Glyndŵr uprising, are taught throughout our schools is to follow a chronological approach and an expectation that certain events and developments cannot be overlooked. Naturally, this would apply to significant events outside Wales. On the other hand, teachers would have the freedom to note local examples, such as coalmines or slate quarries, within key periods such as the Industrial Revolution.

The chronological approach is the one taken by historians, such as Dr John Davies in his masterpiece 'The History of Wales'. He also provides a clearly defined variation to the traditional periods of study, which would reflect Dr Elin Jones's proposal to start from a Welsh perspective. The same chronological strategy was evident in Huw Edwards's series 'The Story of Wales' which was recently repeated on BBC4. As Dr Jones noted, this series would be a valuable resource for schools. The response to the original series had many viewers saying "I didn't know that" and A-Level History students admitting that they learnt more Welsh History in their Welsh Language lessons than in their History

lessons. These gaps in knowledge, and avoidance of teaching Welsh History in History lessons, are likely to continue under the current proposals.

It is also necessary for pupils to understand that historical evidence has changed over centuries. Only a chronological approach will ensure that children understand how evidence, which was once closely linked to archaeology, was superseded by writing and printing, before we arrive at photographs, film, television and on to the digital age. The current Welsh Government proposals do not ensure that this chronological understanding of the changing nature of historical evidence will be taught and understood.

The final decision on the History Curriculum will be taken in 2019, with the Draft proposals due in April. Significant changes are required to the current proposals if we are to avoid the continuation of the “not well taught” assessment which the previous First Minister correctly attributed to History teaching in Welsh schools.



A NEW ENTERPRISE FOR COFIO LLYWELYN

The Cofio Llywelyn Society are hoping to put up a memorial to the men of Llywelyn’s army who died in 1282 by treachery, after coming south to support Llywelyn, where they camped on the present Builth Wells Golf Course.

The Society has the design, and also the support of the Builth Wells Golf Club, but now they need the money – several thousand pounds.

The well-known designer and engraver, Ieuan Rees, has provided this beautiful design:



In the New Year they will organise a Crowdfunding Account but, in the meantime, they can collect cash or they would welcome cheques sent to their Treasurer:

Sybil Davies, 2 Brombil Cottages, Margam, Port Talbot SA13 2SR

or BACS payments to their Business Account:

Account Name 'I Fyddin Llywelyn'

Sort Code 20-58-72

Account Number 73946436

Thank you for your support