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FROM THE PRIVATE SECRETARY
TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR WALES

21 April 1988

APPOINTMENTS IN CONFIDENCE

Dees Paul

NBPM

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NATIONAL CURRICULUM WELSH SUBJECT WORKING GROUP

Thank you for your letter of 15 April. *at Hay*

You will wish to know that the Secretary of State is proposing to announce
... today by means of a Written Parliamentary Answer (copy attached) the
appointment of Professor Gwyn Thomas as Chairman of the Welsh Working Group
for the National Curriculum. The Group's terms of reference (also
... attached) have been amended to take account of the comments of the Prime
Minister and the Secretary of State for Education.

/ I am copying this to the private secretaries of the other members of E(EP).

*Yours sincerely
Jon Shortridge*

J D SHORTRIDGE

Paul Gray Esq
Private Secretary to
The Prime Minister

NATIONAL CURRICULUM: WELSH WORKING GROUP

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. PREAMBLE

1.1 The Government has introduced a Bill in Parliament to establish a National Curriculum for pupils of compulsory school age in England and Wales. The aim is to equip every pupil with the knowledge, skills and understanding to meet the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life. Within the National Curriculum, the Education Reform Bill establishes foundation subjects - maths, English, science, Welsh, modern foreign languages (from 11-16), history, geography, technology, music, art and physical education. The degree of definition and the requirements to be set for each of these subjects will vary but maths, science, English and, in Welsh-speaking schools (as defined statutorily), Welsh, are core subjects and working groups are therefore being established first in these subjects. The Secretary of State for Wales will also be considering, in consultation with the Curriculum Council for Wales and others, what particular provision will be needed to accommodate the other distinctive needs of the curriculum in Wales.

1.2 For the core and other foundation subjects, the Government wishes to establish clear objectives - attainment targets - for the knowledge, skills and understanding which pupils of different abilities and maturities should be expected to have acquired at or near the key ages of around 7, and of 11, 14 and 16. The level of detail of attainment targets and the associated programmes of study will vary between subjects with some (such as music, art and PE) being more in the form of guidelines and those for the core subjects containing most detail. Taken together, the attainment targets and programmes of study will provide the basis for assessing pupils' performance - in relation both to expected attainment, and to the next steps needed for the pupils' development.

1.3 The Government wants attainment targets and the content of what is taught to reflect current best practice and achievement. Both the objectives (attainment targets) and means of achieving them (programmes of study) should

leave scope for teachers to use their professional talents and skills to develop their own schemes of work, within a set framework which is known to all. It is the task of the subject working groups to advise on that framework. The assessment instruments used, including tests, will be developed separately in the light of the working group's recommendations and those of the Task Group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT; see 3b below). The Government have welcomed the broad framework proposed by TGAT for national assessment and testing. The group is invited to take account of this broad framework in its work on attainment targets and the related assessment arrangements at ages 7, 11, 14 and 16.

2. THE TASK

2.1 Against this background, the Welsh working group is asked to submit an interim report to the Secretary of State for Wales by 30 September 1988 outlining:-

a. their provisional thinking about the knowledge, skills, understanding and aptitudes which pupils of different abilities and maturities should be expected to have attained and be able to demonstrate by the end of each key stage ie around the end of the academic year in which they reach the ages of 7, 11, 14, and 16. These should relate both to pupils who are taught Welsh as a first language and those who are taught Welsh as a second language;

b. provisional thinking about the programmes of study through from 5 to 16 which would be consistent with the attainment targets provisionally identified. The Government envisages that programmes of study should cover the full range of linguistic circumstances and be applicable in all parts of Wales.

2.2 In the light of this thinking, the working group should also make recommendations about assessment of performance related to the attainment targets, and in particular what might appropriately be measured by externally set tests rather than by other techniques of assessment.

2.3 By 30 April 1989, the working group is to submit a **final report** to the Secretary of State for Wales, setting out and justifying its final recommendations on attainment targets and the programme of study for Welsh (language and literature).

3. APPROACH

3.1 The working group will be given an indication of approximately how much time they should assume to be available within the curriculum for Welsh. This time will also be intended to cover the teaching of cross-curricular themes to which Welsh can contribute. The working group should consult informally with relevant interests and have regard to the work of the other subject working groups in particular those set up for English and modern foreign languages. Additionally it should take account of:-

- a. the Secretary of State's policy as set out in 'The National Curriculum in Wales';
- b. the broad framework proposed by TGAT for assessment and testing;
- c. the need for attainment targets and programmes of study to reflect cross-curricular themes and subjects;
- d. best practice and the results of relevant research and curriculum developments;
- e. the national and subject criteria for GCSE, taken together with recent work to establish a more objective approach to measuring attainment through the GCSE, which should provide the starting point for recommendations relating to attainment at age 16 and programmes of study for ages 14-16;
- f. the need for continuity and progression throughout compulsory schooling;
- g. the contribution which other subjects taught through the medium of Welsh can make to the learning of Welsh and in particular to the promotion of good standards of written and spoken Welsh;
- h. the need to devise attainment targets and programmes of study appropriate for pupils of different abilities. The working group should give particular thought to the application of attainment targets in Welsh to lower attaining pupils; and

i. the need to establish attainment targets which take account of different language backgrounds and levels of provision in schools.

Welsh Office

April 1988



PQ NO 1399/87/88

HOUSE OF COMMONS

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION FOR ANSWER ON
THURSDAY 21 APRIL 1988

WELSH WORKING GROUP ON NATIONAL CURRICULUM

259 **MR NICHOLAS BENNETT** (Pembroke): To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, if he will make a statement about the Welsh Working Group for the national curriculum.

MR WYN ROBERTS: I am pleased to announce that the professor of Welsh at the University College of North Wales, Professor Gwyn Thomas, has accepted the Chairmanship of the group. Full membership will be announced shortly. A copy of the group's terms of reference has been placed in the Library of the House.

WRITTEN ANSWER

EDUCATION - Policy an EDUCATION Policy
PT18



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File SH
cc BG
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From the Private Secretary

15 April 1988

NATIONAL CURRICULUM: WELSH SUBJECT WORKING GROUP

The Prime Minister was grateful for your Secretary of State's minute of 29 March and the attached draft terms of reference. She has also seen the letter of 13 April from the Secretary of State for Education and Science.

The Prime Minister is content for your Secretary of State to set up the Welsh subject working group along the lines proposed. On the detailed terms of reference, in addition to the comments of the Secretary of State for Education and Science, the Prime Minister has the following comments:

- she wonders whether the second sentence of paragraph 1.2 makes rather too much of the programmes of study and the processes; could this be stated so that it seems less prescriptive on the part of the Government?
- she was not clear of the meaning of paragraph 2.1a, and wonders whether this might best be deleted;
- paragraph 3.1c seems an unnecessary elaboration of 3.1b and might be deleted;
- paragraph 3.1h is subsumed in the basic idea of a working party on the Welsh language, and it might be better to delete it, and to avoid the risk of the group considering their terms of reference to be very large.

The Prime Minister is content with your Secretary of State's proposal to appoint Professor Gwyn Thomas as Chairman of the Working Group.

PAUL GRAY

Jon Shortridge, Esq.,
Welsh Office

Marching out of step

Professor Black's Task Group holds quite a different view of attainment from the Government, argues Donald Naismith

Whatever the Prime Minister's reported disagreements with her Chancellor of the Exchequer over the exchange rate, her alleged differences of opinion with her Secretary of State for Education and Science over standards and how they are to be measured are more important. We cannot do much about international markets. We can, however, decide what kind of education system we want at home.

At the heart of the Government's educational reforms is the re-establishment of the idea that standards of attainment can be identified which pupils of differing ability around the ages of seven, 11, 14 and 16 can aim at with a good chance of success. In the words of the terms of reference of the Subject Working Groups set up by the Government to establish those standards in

science, mathematics and English, "for most foundation subjects the Government wishes to establish clear objectives - attainment targets - for the knowledge, skills, understanding and aptitudes which pupils of different abilities and maturity should be expected to have acquired at or near certain ages".

This is what we were promised. But this is not what we are going to get, because the methods of assessing those targets recommended by the Task Group set up by the Government under the chairmanship of Professor Black proceed from a different concept of attainment, and indeed education, from those who wrote the terms of reference of the Subject Working Groups. As Professor Black rightly points out, assessment is inseparable from good teaching, although if this is so, one might wonder why the job of assessing the attainment targets was not given to the people who were called upon to set them up in the first place - the Subject Working Groups.

The danger is that the system of assessment recommended will become, as most systems of assessment do, the determining feature of the education system itself, particularly in the present case because Professor Black's team has produced not so much a system of measurement as a system of teaching.

This is not surprising as what is proposed is based on the imaginative approaches to learning and teaching pioneered by Professor Black through his introduction of graded assessment of mathematics, techniques which have been successfully extended to other subjects, notably foreign languages and science. Within this approach, pupils are introduced to pre-determined attainment targets through exercises of graduated difficulty when they have demonstrated that they are ready to proceed to the next stage. There is no doubt that these methods have led to better pupil motivation and to higher levels

of attainment, but they suffer, in my view, from two fatal weaknesses as methods of assessment if they are to be in harmony with the Government's mainstream policies.

First, the targets are not identified by reference to what most pupils of differing abilities may be expected to achieve around certain ages: and ability is taken as what pupils show they can do rather than what potential they may have for better performance. A pupil works at his own speed, and although there will, naturally, be encouragement on the part of the teacher and resulting progression over time - indeed it would be surprising if there were not - the way it is intended such progress should be measured will not give answers to the two questions parents ask, namely: how well is my child doing in relation to his or her peers and how well is he or she doing in relation to his or her abilities?

Progress will be seen in terms of value added to stages already reached by the individual rather than in relation to externally established standards expected of most comparable pupils.

Second, the way progress is measured will depend to a large measure on the judgement of the teacher. For most of the purposes of assessment this must be right, as we have already observed. But society does not trust subjective opinion, however it is moderated and from whichever direction it comes. It seeks objective fact as far as possible. And there is the additional danger that the workload of the teacher, in many ways already unrealistically heavy, will be increased unnecessarily by the complexity of the highly individual system of assessment and recording proposed.

The recommendations of Professor Black's Task Force are, therefore, out of step with their marching orders and are inoperable. They fail to distinguish sufficiently between ability and attainment and teachers will not be able to cope.

From the Government's point of view the proposals are little short of disastrous. Without a sense of objective standards parents and others will not have access to the kind of standardized information enabling comparisons to be made, which they need if they are to make an informed choice between the wider range of schools and colleges the Government plans. Without a sense of objective standards schools and colleges will not have the means of establishing the direct managerial link between expenditure and performance which local education authorities failed to achieve and which led to spiralling costs and falling standards.

Above all the Government will not be able to put into circulation a currency of values which can be shared between the education services and society at large, the hallmark of other education systems, particularly those of our economic competitors, and which is necessary to renew confidence in our own.

Whatever the worth of the institutional changes being introduced by the Baker Reform Act they will be useless unless they are underpinned by a clear philosophical understanding of the nature of education and its place in our society. At the moment this is conspicuously missing. The people who wrote the terms and reference of the Subject Working Groups believe there are external standards which should be related to age and ability and which can be universally applied. The people who wrote the Black Report do not, and no amount of wallpapering at the DES can conceal the fact.

It is obviously important that we decide in education whether we should have a fixed or floating exchange rate. Perhaps the Chancellor of the Exchequer should be asking to help.

Donald Naismith is director of education, Croydon

T.E.S 15/4/88

RA - Eudie
Terting
Lb.



cc BG

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The Rt Hon Peter Walker MP
Secretary of State for Wales
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13 April 1988

Peter Walker

NATIONAL CURRICULUM: WELSH SUBJECT WORKING GROUP

WITH PG 3

I support the establishment of a Welsh Subject Working Group, as proposed in your minute of 29 March to the Prime Minister. It is important that a Welsh Group should be operating at the same time as our proposed English Working Group so that the two can exchange ideas as appropriate. We shall need to ensure good working links between the two Groups.

I am content with the terms of reference you propose, except that I believe they should make clear that a modern foreign language is a foundation subject only for secondary pupils (para 1.1); the reference to "aptitudes" in para 1.2 should be deleted as it is not consonant with the definition of attainment targets in the Bill; the reference to TGAT at the end of para 1.3 is now out of date and inappropriate; and your proposed date for final report in para 2.3 - 31 January 1989 - may allow insufficient time for the Group to do its job. As you know, we are proposing end-April 1989 for the English Working Group, which will have rather more of a start than the Welsh Group because of the work done by the Kingman Committee. You may also want to consider whether your Group should be asked for final recommendations relating to the primary phase on an accelerated timescale, as we are doing in the case of the English working Group.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, other members of E(EP) and to Sir Robin Butler.

Kevin
Kenneth

APPOINTMENTS IN CONFIDENCE

PRIME MINISTER

13 April 1988

National Curriculum: Welsh Subject Working Group

Professor Gwyn Thomas is one of the most respected figures in Welsh literary circles as well as one of the most well-known and able academics in Wales today. He would be a first-class appointment as chairman of the National Curriculum Working Group.

Brian Griffiths

BRIAN GRIFFITHS

PRIME MINISTER

13 April 1988

National Curriculum: Welsh Subject Working Group

Terms of Reference

The only comments I have on the paper are all minor:

1.2 The second sentence under 1.2 while strictly accurate tends to make rather too much of the programmes of study and the processes. Is there any way this could be stated so that it seems less prescriptive on the part of government?

2.1a I do not understand what this means - I think it would be best deleted.

3.1c This is subsumed under b. and does not need elaboration in this way.

3.1h This surely is subsumed in the whole idea of having a working party on the Welsh language. To elaborate it in this way invites the group to consider their terms of reference to be very large indeed. I think this would be best deleted.

Brian Griffiths

BRIAN GRIFFITHS

APPOINTMENTS IN CONFIDENCE

PRIME MINISTER

NATIONAL CURRICULUM: WELSH SUBJECT WORKING GROUP MT

Mr Walker's minute of 29 March provides proposed terms of reference for the Working Group on Welsh. He also proposes appointing Professor Gwyn Thomas as its Chairman.

There is a read across to the E(EP) discussion tomorrow which will be considering the groups on English and Technology to which Peter Walker refers. But the objection Brian Griffiths has raised in the E(EP) context to appointing a technology group now does not apply in the case of Welsh - which, in Welsh speaking schools, will be a core subject rather than simply a non-core foundation subject.

Brian Griffiths' two notes attached support the appointment of Professor Thomas and gives some minor comments on the terms of reference. Kenneth Baker's letter of 13 April also gives a few minor comments.

Content to agree to Peter Walker's proposals subject to the detailed comments from Kenneth Baker and Brian Griffiths and to any major developments at E(EP) tomorrow?

RCG.

Paul Gray

13 April 1988

APPOINTMENTS IN CONFIDENCE

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