

PE1711/N

NASUWT submission of 9 August 2019

1. The NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Public Petitions Committee of the Scottish Parliament further to Petition PE1711, considering first aid training for all primary school children in Scotland.
2. The NASUWT is the largest union in the UK representing exclusively teachers and headteachers and is the fastest growing union in Scotland.

GENERAL COMMENTS

3. The Committee, as part of this inquiry, should bear in mind the objectives and structure of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), which set out that pupils from the age of three are entitled to access a Broad General Education (BGE). BGE is underpinned by the four capacities that pupils are expected to develop across all the eight curriculum areas, which include mathematics, sciences and technologies. The structure of CfE deliberately places considerable emphasis on the interconnectedness of the curriculum experience, and making links between subject areas is seen as critical to ensuring that children can progress and achieve in respect of the four capacities.
4. BGE in the early years particularly should, therefore, best be regarded as holistic rather than as a series of disconnected areas of learning. While it is entirely legitimate for policymakers and parliamentarians to consider different aspects of this curriculum, this must be done in a way that respects the foundations on which CfE is structured. Consequently, it is of concern that so much attention seems to be focused currently on different elements of the curriculum. For example, there are many 'initiatives' looking at relatively narrow segments of the curriculum:
 - Read, Write, Count;
 - the First Minister's Reading Challenge;
 - Making Maths Count;
 - Learning for Sustainability; and
 - music education.
5. While all of these initiatives may address important issues, if the current tendency to give special attention to specific elements of the curriculum persists, there is a possibility that the coherence of the overall curriculum will be placed at risk. The BGE was not designed to be viewed in this way. Particular focus on some areas of the curriculum will, because of limited time and resources, lead inevitably to under-emphasis of others.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

NASUWT

The fastest growing teachers' union in Scotland

6. The NASUWT would be concerned were the Government to start specifying mandatory curriculum content, as this is inconsistent with the objectives and structure of CfE, as outlined above.
7. Were basic first aid to be included as an integral part of the curriculum, legislators would also need to be clear that this opens the door to a range of lobby groups who want their particular issue incorporated.
8. In the NASUWT Scotland Big Question Survey, workload was cited as members' top concern, with 80% of respondents highlighting it as a significant issue. The NASUWT Big Question Survey also asked members their top causes of excessive workload and 'curriculum and qualification changes' were in the top five concerns. When the curriculum is being discussed, it is critical that not only the content is considered, but the implications for workload, training and availability of staff.
9. Teachers are already being asked to provide specialist support for the Scottish Government's policy, Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 Approach, which is aimed at ensuring that every child has the opportunity to learn a modern language from Primary 1 onwards, and additionally each child should have the right to learn a second modern language from P5 onwards. Simultaneously, the Scottish Government's Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) strategy aims to build Scotland's capacity to deliver excellent STEM learning, and to close equity gaps in participation and attainment in STEM. It also aims to inspire young people and adults to study STEM, and to provide a better connection between STEM education and training and the needs of the labour market in Scotland. There is no shortage of content for the curriculum and therefore the committee might consider what could be dropped to facilitate the time to cover first aid training.
10. Teachers are currently struggling to secure time out of school for training due to staff shortages, and in-service days are already bulging at the seams covering necessary training on, for example, child protection. There are therefore difficulties in stipulating that training and support will be provided to teachers on first aid without outlining how this would be achieved.
11. The NASUWT is not convinced that it is appropriate to add first aid to the curriculum or for teachers to have to take responsibility for this. There are many other ways of pupils accessing basic first aid without placing this burden and responsibility on schools.
12. The NASUWT believes the Government should consider very carefully:
 - whether the provision of first aid is essential to the curriculum provision;

- if it is acceptable for already overburdened teachers to be expected to take on this responsibility (the NASUWT would oppose them doing so);
 - the liability of schools and individuals associated with this training and the costs associated with this.
13. The school curriculum is not the vehicle through which to address every current concern. The NASUWT is not in favour of this as a mandatory provision.