

# **LIFE SKILLS, SKILLS FOR LIFE.**

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Authors:

***Welsh Youth Parliament Life Skills  
in the Curriculum Committee***

**WELSH  
YOUTH  
PARLIAMENT**

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# COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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# WHO ARE WE?

## **2018 WAS A MOMENTOUS YEAR FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN WALES AS THEY ELECTED THE FIRST EVER WELSH YOUTH PARLIAMENT.**

60 of us were elected over an election period of three weeks in November 2018. 40 of us represent constituencies in Wales and 20 of us have been elected through partner organisations to the Welsh Youth Parliament, comprising of 13 charities and organisations working with a diverse range of young people in Wales.

For the first couple of months, young people across Wales were telling us which issues were important to them. These were grouped under 21 categories ranging from Welsh Language and Culture, to Supporting Vulnerable Youths in Wales. Coming together for the first time in February 2019 was an experience we'll never forget. In the Senedd Chamber we each spoke on the issues which we felt most needed to be addressed. The session came to a close with each of us voting on the top 3 issues on which we wanted to focus during our two year term. These final issues were:

- **Emotional and Mental Health Support**
- **Littering and Plastic Waste**
- **Life Skills in the Curriculum**

Following the vote, we were given the chance to choose which issue we would most like to work on, and 14 of us have since sat and worked on the Life Skills in the Curriculum Committee.

The Welsh Youth Parliament catapults young people into the forefront of influencing and decision making in Wales – the way it should be.

# A NEED FOR CHANGE

## **LIFE SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT TO US AS IT'S OBVIOUS THERE IS A CLEAR LACK OF THEM IN OUR CURRICULUM.**

From financial education informing students on the value of money and on financial concepts such as inflation, mortgages and taxes, to diversity and inclusion lessons - the skills that young people need to develop into responsible, global citizens are critical to our education - and we believe it is a crime to rob young people of this right.

We currently leave school with a handful of skills but no knowledge on how to speak in public, clean, maintain healthy relationships, buy cars, apply for mortgages, road safety, and many other skills that are needed to succeed in life.

We can't survive adulthood or any part of our life if we leave school as A\* robots with no knowledge of the real world. We're going through this education system, our siblings and our kids will go through this system. We want them to feel equipped and able to function as productive adults, who don't feel as though their worth is based on their exam results. We are worth more than this.

If life skills are correctly implemented into the curriculum, the next generation of students will leave school with not only the correct qualifications to succeed in life, but also other abilities and knowledge to make life easier. It is important for us as young people to have an education that will benefit our future.









ALLAN  
←  
EXIT THIS WAY

# THE CONSULTATION

**AS MEMBERS OF THE LIFE SKILLS IN THE CURRICULUM COMMITTEE, WE HAVE STRONG OPINIONS ON WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM, AND PART OF OUR JOB IS TO VOICE THOSE OPINIONS ON A NATIONAL LEVEL.**

However, the other part of our job is to give a platform to other young people's voices in Wales, as they too felt strongly that Life Skills in the Curriculum was an issue that needed our attention.

In our regional meetings, we worked within our committees to come up with our consultation approach. We were given Assembly Research briefings into the work that had already been done, and of course, the latest on the new curriculum developments by the Welsh Government. The introduction of a brand new Curriculum for Wales which focuses on developing well rounded, healthy, informed students is exciting, and our consultation coincided with the Welsh Government's consultation on the draft Curriculum.

To avoid any duplication or confusion between our consultation on the Welsh Government's, we decided that the focus of our consultation would be on gathering a picture of the life skills that were currently being taught in Wales, the way in which they were taught, as well as young people's opinion on the situation. This snapshot of the current provision would allow us to gather any inconsistencies, as well as examples of good practice, to form recommendations which we hope will help shape the new Curriculum for Wales.

We ran two surveys – one for young people between 11-25, and another for adults, including parents, teachers, youth workers, and education professionals. We also met with young people, teachers, and youth workers in our consultation events in Wrexham and Swansea and held focus groups with young people and teachers across Wales over the summer to delve deeper into their views on the matter.

# **A GLIMMER OF HOPE**

**GIVEN THE CURRENT UNCERTAINTY SURROUNDING UK AND WORLD POLITICS, THIS REPORT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT AS THE VOICES OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN WALES WILL HOPEFULLY CUT THROUGH THE POLITICAL TENSION AND WILL PROVIDE A PLATFORM FOR OUR VOICES TO BE HEARD ABOVE THE NOISE.**

It represents the progress of democracy in Wales and shows young people have a voice. It proves the Welsh Youth Parliament's dedication and commitment to making a positive impact on the lives of young people. It shows that young people know what is best for young people and that we have the competency to make an impact.

This report is relevant, diverse, and represents a variety of opinions from people all across Wales and, if our recommendations are taken forward, has the potential to change the lives of young people across Wales and leave a legacy for many years to come.

Once it is published, we're hoping that politicians follow the advice found in it and take practical steps to bridge the large gaps within life skills in schools at the moment. We would like politicians to closely refer to the report to make amendments to the Curriculum for Wales and incorporate vital life skills that are so heavily demanded by young people and educational professionals.

It's a privilege to be a part of the first report as it will set the foundations for many reports to come.







15:58:06



# CONSULTATION FINDINGS

The findings from our consultation split naturally under four themes;

- 1. Current experiences and teaching methods**
- 2. Frequency of Life Skills teaching**
- 3. Who should be teaching Life Skills in schools**
- 4. Striking a balance between Life Skills and exams**

All Welsh Youth Parliament members were given the opportunity to analyse and discuss the results in the last regional meetings, and made recommendations for us as a committee to consider. We as committee members compiled and voted on the final recommendations that are presented at the end of this report.

In the next section you will find the main findings under each theme, followed by our committee's final recommendations.





**1.**

# ***CURRENT EXPERIENCES AND TEACHING METHODS***

***THE FIRST SET OF QUESTIONS IN OUR SURVEYS AIMED TO COLLECT  
A PICTURE OF THE LIFE SKILLS SUBJECTS CURRENTLY TAUGHT IN  
SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES ACROSS WALES.***

Young people were asked which life skills they had been taught up to the age of 18. The results were very inconsistent, with some subjects having been taught to the vast majority of young people (85% of young people had received lessons on Internet Safety, and 84% of young people had been taught Dealing with Bullying 84%), but on the other hand, some subjects had only been taught to a minority; these included Dealing with Grief (12%), Sign Language (11%) and Political Education (10%).

We weren't surprised at all to learn of these results. Many of us have received lessons on Internet Safety on more than one occasion, and we agree that these results show that too much emphasis is put on certain subjects. We were very disappointed to learn that very few young people were being taught Political Education, which is alarming considering that young people in Wales might soon be eligible to vote at 16 years of age. We feel that this reflects the lack of confidence teachers and schools in general have in teaching the subject.

Following on from this question, both young people and adults were asked which life skills they believed should be taught to young people. The subjects most important to young people were Life Saving (74%) and Dealing with Stress (73%), and the subjects most important to adults were Internet Safety (84%) and Sex Education – Healthy Relationships (84%). We were thrilled to learn that Life Saving was in such high demand, as it's an issue that many of us feel very strongly about, and as Emotional and Mental Health Support is another of the Welsh Youth Parliament's issues, it was no surprise that this is an issue important to many other young people across Wales.

By comparing what young people are being taught with what they believe they should be taught, it became clear that young people aren't being taught the subjects that are important to them. To us, this highlights that schools and the Government should listen more to young people when making decisions on their education.

Finally, we asked young people and adults whether they agreed that schools were adequately preparing young people for life as an adult. These results conflicted, with 60% of young people agreeing compared to only 28% of adults. We were very surprised to learn that so many young people agreed with this statement considering the inconsistencies that became clear in previous questions. We felt that this might reflect the fact that what they did receive was of good quality, but they would like to see more. Also, we noted that young people didn't necessarily have the insight into adult life to answer this question effectively, and this may have been the reason for the gap between young people and adults' opinions.

Two recommendations were made many times in focus groups. Firstly, it was mentioned that a national Life Skills specification was needed that outlines what schools should be teaching. Secondly, it was recommended that schools should appoint Life Skills co-ordinators to ensure that every young person receives the same quality of Life Skills education during their time in education. We as a committee agree that these recommendations would help solve many inconsistencies that were highlighted within this theme.

**2.**

# ***FREQUENCY OF LIFE SKILLS TEACHING***

***OUR SECOND SET OF QUESTIONS IN THE SURVEY LOOKED AT HOW OFTEN YOUNG PEOPLE WERE RECEIVING LIFE SKILLS LESSONS IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES.***



The results were mixed, and there was no consistent answer that showed that schools across Wales were approaching the teaching of Life Skills in the same way. However, we were saddened, but not quite shocked to learn that 48% of young people received them once a year or less, or didn't know at all.

On the other hand, the demand for regular life skills lessons was clear, with 72% of young people calling for lessons once a fortnight or more, and 88% of adults. We compared the results from this question with the results of the first, and shockingly, only a quarter of young people were receiving Life Skills as often as they believe they should be.

We also looked at evidence from focus group discussions of possible reasons why Life Skills lessons were taught so infrequently in schools. One conversation in the focus groups suggested that Life Skills are currently crammed into dedicated PSE days in schools. Many of us on the committee have had experiences of PSE days, and we feel that they just aren't taken seriously – pupils see these days as 'days off'.

As a committee, we discussed two possible solutions to meet the high demand for frequent Life Skills lessons.

Firstly, we feel that teaching Life Skills on dedicated PSE days should stop, and these should be replaced by timetabled Life Skills lessons at least once a fortnight. This would ensure consistency, and frequency and, if included into regular timetables, would make it easy for schools to arrange for external organisations to come in and teach certain subjects to year groups. We considered the challenges that this option would bring – mainly the fact that a timetabled lesson would inevitably mean less time for other subjects, however, seeing as the demand for fortnightly lessons is so high, this has to be prioritised.

Secondly, we considered a recommendation that was made regularly in focus groups, which is to incorporate the teaching of Life Skills into other subjects. This includes Financial Education within Mathematics, Sex Education within Biology etc. Given the nature of the new Curriculum for Wales, we feel that this would certainly be an option. There are, of course, many challenges with this approach. We are worried that teachers will continue to prioritise the teaching of their own subject above the Life Skills because of their own curriculum and exam demands. Our other concern is that young people may not be aware that lessons they're being taught within other subjects are, in fact, Life Skills. Out of context, these lessons may not be effective.

Our suggestion, in this case, is that schools adopt a Life Skills logo in order to clearly mark when these lessons are being taught across the curriculum. This would, again, call for a Life Skills co-ordinator to be appointed in schools to map out where these skills would be taught. Schools could also hold reflective sessions monthly to allow young people to consider the skills they've been taught in different subjects.

On the whole, we feel that both approaches are needed – a designated lesson once a fortnight, as well as Life Skills lessons within other subjects. Adopting these approaches would help ensure that the demand for frequent Life Skills education is met.

**3.**

# **WHO SHOULD BE TEACHING LIFE SKILLS IN SCHOOLS**

**ANOTHER SET OF QUESTIONS WE PREPARED IN THE SURVEY AIMED  
AT GATHERING INFORMATION ON WHO WAS TEACHING LIFE SKILLS  
LESSONS IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES.**

The results showed that there was no clear majority for any option, with lessons being delivered by a mixture of form teachers, various teachers, teachers specialising in the subjects, and external staff.

These results once again show an inconsistency in the experience of young people across Wales. As a committee, we were disappointed that only 25% had received lessons by external experts. We believe that external experts can deliver engaging, fresh and insightful sessions based on their expertise which young people would benefit greatly from. Many of these external organisations offer sessions free of charge for schools, colleges and youth groups. Equally, we believe that in order to meet young people's demand for Life Skills lessons once a fortnight, teachers must play a part in the teaching. However, we heard teachers' opinions both in surveys and focus groups, and this gave us plenty to discuss.

We specifically asked teachers in the survey if they felt they had the necessary skills and experience to teach life skills, and the results were once again a mix, with 44% agreeing, 33% disagreeing and the remainder neither agreeing nor disagreeing. We were very concerned that less than half the teachers surveyed would feel comfortable in delivering the lessons. This may even explain the lack of Life Skills currently being taught.

Teachers expressed their opinions in focus groups, with many stating that their main concern was doing a disservice to young people, not being in touch, and getting things wrong. We discussed a few solutions to ensure that teachers would feel equipped to teach the lessons. We agree with a recommendation made by teachers in focus groups that investment should be made in teachers' training to ensure that they're confident to teach the lessons. This would ensure that all newly qualified teachers would naturally adapt to teaching Life Skills as part of their work day to day. We also believe that resources should be on hand to schools to help teachers to effectively teach these lessons. This central resource bank should be compiled by the Welsh Government and should be up-to-date, relevant, and easily accessible to schools across Wales.

On the whole, we feel that consistency is needed, and in order to once again meet the high demand for Life Skills lessons, schools should use specialist external organisations as well as incorporating Life Skills lessons regularly within the school timetable and across the curriculum. External organisations should be used to teach sensitive subjects which need insight and personal experience to be taught effectively, as well as subjects such as Politics which could be influenced by bias. We've learned from teachers we've surveyed that an investment in their development is needed to ensure they have the right tools to deliver the sessions effectively and do justice to the young people.



**4.**

# **STRIKING A BALANCE BETWEEN LIFE SKILLS AND EXAMS**

**IN BOTH OUR SURVEYS AND FOCUS GROUPS, ONE CONSTANT THEME RAN THROUGH ALL OTHERS - THE NEED TO ENSURE A BALANCE BETWEEN THE TEACHING OF LIFE SKILLS AND PREPARING YOUNG PEOPLE TO PASS EXAMS.**

Both teachers and young people noted that one of the main reasons for the lack of Life Skills lessons was the pressure on schools and teachers to secure exam results.

In the survey, we asked young people and adults whether they felt that the teaching of life skills was prioritised appropriately in schools. Only 43% of young people agreed, and only 11% of adults. While discussing these figures, we felt that the percentage of young people was surprisingly high based on our experiences. We feel that schools are currently very reactive when it comes to the teaching of life skills, for example, support strategies for young people would be put in place after a serious incident has occurred.

We considered many teachers' opinions from focus groups who weighed in on the lack of priority given to the teaching of Life Skills. Many of them focused on the over emphasis on exams. Here's what one teacher from Llandudno had to say:

"We still work in an old-fashioned system that teaches pupils how to pass exams rather than preparing them for real life."

We as a committee understand where this comment has come from, and feel alarmed at the prospect that in a few years' time, computers and robots will have been developed to be able to do everything we can do. Schools must do more to develop creative, innovative thinkers and develop skills other than academic ones.

Another teacher mentioned that young people don't take Life Skills lessons seriously when they feel that there is no exam or qualification at the end. We'd hate to see so much investment into Life Skills teaching only for young people's attitudes not to change. As a committee we discussed a solution to this, and that was to develop a Life Skills qualification or certificate to be awarded to young people when they leave school at 16. The Welsh Baccalaureate was raised many times within this discussion, and although this qualification in principle is a skills certificate which sets out to do what we're recommending, we don't feel that it's successfully achieving its aim.

In focus groups, we asked young people to vote on whether teaching young people to pass exams or teaching Life Skills was most important. The results surprised us, as only 38% believed that teaching life skills was more important, 29% disagreed, and the remainder believed that both were as important as each other. Several young people commented that this was a difficult question to answer, as so much pressure is put on them to succeed in exams, and until a change in culture is seen with less pressure placed on schools to secure exam results, both were as important as each other.

As a committee we feel strongly that the Welsh Government and Estyn need to reconsider the way in which schools are judged, with much less focus on exam results, and much more emphasis on student wellbeing and developing young people as individuals.





***OUR  
RECOMMENDATIONS***

- 01.** A consistent, nationwide Life Skills Specification containing all core life skills mapped out across appropriate key stages and taking in to account all learning needs.
- 02.** The core life skills within the specification should be agreed upon by young people and education professionals – their focus shouldn't be solely on teaching young people how to exist, but how to lead a full and healthy life.
- 03.** A life skills coordinator should be appointed within every school. The coordinator would be responsible for mapping the core life skills across the school's curriculum, ensuring that each pupil's experience is consistent and in line with the Life Skills Specification.
- 04.** Appoint a national Life Skills Commissioner to ensure that standards are met and that every young person's experience is consistent in schools across Wales.
- 05.** A specifically dedicated life skills lesson should be taught once a fortnight in every school, but should also be incorporated into other subjects where relevant.
- 06.** Each lesson that focuses on life skills should be clearly marked with a life skills logo – this would enable young people to know when the skills are being taught, and their relevance to life as adults.
- 07.** Schools should hold reflective feedback sessions every month/half term, so that their learning of life skills can be reviewed and reflected upon.
- 08.** Lessons should be interactive and life skills should be taught through workshops which are fun and memorable as opposed to talks and work books.
- 09.** Teachers should take responsibility for their roles as life skills educators, but investment must be made in their training so that they feel confident in teaching the lessons – this should include a section of their teachers' training course, as well as courses for all current teachers.
- 10.** Professionals from external organisations and charities should continue to be utilised by schools in the teaching of more sensitive or specialist subjects where they share their own experiences.
- 11.** The Government should work alongside the Welsh Youth Parliament to create resources to form a national toolbox so that teaching is consistent nationally.
- 12.** Estyn and Government should consider different approaches to the way schools are inspected – focus shouldn't be too heavily on exam results, and should focus more on schools' wellbeing and support strategies and the developing of young people as individuals.
- 13.** Create a core life skills certificate or qualification to be awarded to young people at 16 years of age.







# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**LYNNE NEAGLE AM**  
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**PRINCE'S TRUST**  
**PROMO CYMRU**  
**MEIC CYMRU**  
**CARDIFF MEDITATION**  
**STONEWALL CYMRU**  
**TALK THE TALK**  
**THE MULLANY FUND**  
**WCADA**  
**BIG IDEAS WALES**  
**NORTH WALES POLICE**  
**WREXHAM INFO SHOP**  
**MENTER IAITH FFLINT**  
**RED CROSS**  
**ADTRAC**  
**BARCLAYS**  
**SENEDD YR IFANC WRECSAM**  
**GWE**

**NORTH WALES TRAINING**  
**DENBIGH SCHOOL COUNCILS**  
**PEOPLE PLUS MERTHYR, ABERDARE,  
PORT TALBOT**  
**PORT TALBOT YOUNG CARERS**  
**LGBTQ+ GROUP PORT TALBOT**  
**BRIDGEND YOUTH COUNCIL**  
**KPC YOUTH CLUB PYLE**  
**CAREERS WALES**  
**FLINTSHIRE INTEGRATED YOUTH  
PROVISION**  
**CONWY YOUTH SERVICE**  
**FLINT HIGH SCHOOL**  
**YSGOL GLAN CLWYD**  
**YSGOL MAES GARMON**  
**PRESTATYN HIGH SCHOOL**  
**ST JOHN THE BAPTIST SCHOOL**  
**BISHOPSTON COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL**  
**CALDICOT SCHOOL**  
**YSGOL GYFUN CWM RHYMNI**  
**GOWERTON COMPREHENSIVE**  
**YSGOL GYFUN GWYR**  
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**PONTARDDULAIS COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL**  
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