

THE PRIMARY GEOGRAPHY INTERVIEW

PROFESSOR GRAHAM DONALDSON

Professor Graham Donaldson is a Professor at Glasgow University who has recently carried out a review of the curriculum in Wales as well as teacher education in Scotland. His review has culminated in the *Successful Futures* report, which is deemed to be the most ambitious revision of the curriculum in Wales ever undertaken, and which will see subject areas replaced with six Areas of Learning and Experience.

Could you explain a little about your work to date?

To start with, I have to admit that my background was as a history teacher! After working at various levels in schools in the Glasgow area, I worked nationally and ultimately became head of the Inspectorate for Scotland for eight years. After that, I retired and became a Professor at the University of Glasgow. I have undertaken a review of teacher education in Scotland with all 50 of my recommendations being accepted. I have also done review work for the OECD involving among other things education system reviews in Australia, Portugal, Sweden and Japan.

More recently, I have carried out a review of curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales leading to my *Successful Futures* report. I am the chair of an Independent Advisory Group as part of the overall reforms in Wales and a member of the First Minister of Scotland's international advisory council. I am also currently carrying out a review of the work of Estyn, the Educational Inspectorate in Wales.

Do you see any differences between the educational reforms taking place in Wales and those that have occurred in Scotland?

Let's start with the similarities first. As a start point, both curriculum development



processes started by looking at the purpose of the curriculum. Historically, we have tended to define the curriculum in terms of subjects and content to be covered. However, both Wales and Scotland are looking first at the purposes of the curriculum in order to determine the structures (including subjects), pedagogy and assessment that can best fulfil these purposes. We have identified four purposes of the new curriculum:

- Ambitious, capable learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives
- Enterprising, creative contributors who are ready to play a full part in life and work
- Ethical, informed citizens who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world
- Healthy, confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

Thereafter, in Scotland and Wales, the nature of curriculum and assessment is very different. In Scotland, they have still adopted a system based on levels, whereas

in Wales the system will focus more directly on progression. The Scottish elaboration of 'Experiences and Outcomes' can be seen by some as an assessment tool rather than something that supports the purposes of the curriculum. In Scotland there are eight Curriculum Areas, in Wales there will be six Areas of Learning and Experience. The *Successful Futures* report in Wales went beyond curriculum and assessment to recommending how its proposals should be supported in terms of professional development for teachers and constructive systems of support and accountability.

How essential do you view the role of teachers in developing the new curriculum in Wales?

Absolutely essential. This is where the developments in Wales are very different to those in other countries; the changes are being driven by teachers. There are over 170 Pioneer Schools across Wales who are focussing on curriculum and professional development. These schools are at the heart of developing the new curriculum.

What role do you see geography having in the new curriculum in Wales?

Geography will sit within the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE). All subjects that contribute to make up the AoLE will be essential, but it's about asking professionals to think differently and to think about how subjects support the purposes of the curriculum rather than the subjects alone defining the curriculum. The main focus for teachers is to think about how we can use the expertise that we have across our schools and education settings to support the four purposes of the new curriculum.

Do you see a role for citizenship and global learning to be embedded in the new curriculum?

Absolutely, the four purposes will raise the prominence of these aspects and sustainability and citizenship will be overarching.

What was your most memorable experience at school?

It was a field trip to an outdoor centre on the West coast of Scotland. It brought the learning to life as we went out and carried

out practical activities. Practical and applied learning experiences such as these helped me to see my teachers in a different light and for the teachers to see us in a different light.

Where is the best place you have visited?

My daughter recently bought me a scratch map and it was a privilege to see how many places across the globe I've been fortunate enough to visit, be that professionally or personally. For example, I found the culture and experience of visiting Hanoi in Vietnam particularly interesting and it is certainly somewhere I would like to return to.

However, my favourite place is less exotic – rural France. I enjoy the peace, tranquillity and being away from it all. I always really enjoy embedding myself in the culture there with my family and enjoying family time together.

Reference

Donaldson, G. (2015) *Successful Futures: Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales*. Available at: <https://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/150225-successful-futures-en.pdf> (last accessed 18/7/2018).



Favourite places for Professor Donaldson include Hanoi (Photo © David McKelvey) and rural France (Photo © Anna Grandfield).

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