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Parent & Carer Research Summary Report Curriculum for Wales

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Introduction

This research provides an analysis of parents and carers knowledge and attitudes towards the new Curriculum for Wales. It is intended to inform the ongoing communications campaign by Welsh Government aimed at raising awareness of the new curriculum and supporting parents, carers, and young people through the transition to the new curriculum.

This report is a summary of the final report which focuses on the period from 1st May to 31st August 2022. In total, there have been four reports;

- A baseline report in September 2021
- An interim report in April 2022
- A final report in October 2022
- A summary of the final report (this document) which was published in August 2023

The analysis in this report brings together a range of relevant information and research. This includes primary engagement with parents and carers through a longitudinal panel survey and focus groups. It also draws on social media data and insights to understand narratives and public conversations that surround the new curriculum.

The research considers variation within parental groups, including those from different regions within Wales, the age and school stage of their child(ren), and Welsh language usage.

Within the context of changes brought in by the new Curriculum for Wales, there are a number of national and local considerations in developing communications that actively seek to improve parental engagement and learner outcomes. Key to supporting parental engagement, for example, is the provision of actionable information. This includes information which enables parents and carers to more actively engage in their child's learning.

The Curriculum for Wales arguably presents a unique communications challenge; it is difficult to provide specific, actionable information, such as exactly what a child will be learning, due to the principles of greater subsidiarity and practitioner empowerment. This highlights the importance of the role of schools and settings in providing actionable information that improves parental knowledge and engagement.



Curriculum for Wales



The new Curriculum for Wales provides a more relevant and engaging learning experience for learners, while also preparing them for the challenges of the 21st century.

Teachers and education experts from across Wales worked together to develop the new curriculum framework. It is intended to be more flexible and responsive to the needs of learners, with a focus on developing skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving and creativity, as well as promoting wellbeing and digital literacy.

Every school will design and implement their own curriculum within a national approach that secures consistency for learners across the country, recognising the four purposes of the curriculum as the shared vision and aspiration for every young person. These are to produce:

- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society

All primary schools and funded non-maintained nursery settings in Wales have been required to implement their curriculum since September 2022 for learners up to Year 6. Curriculum for Wales will be mandatory for all Year 7 and 8 learners from September 2023. Secondary schools are then required to roll out their new curricula arrangements on a year-by-year basis through to Year 11 in September 2026.

To ensure the successful implementation phase of the new Curriculum for Wales, it is vital that parents and carers understand what the new curriculum means to support their child's learning and development.

For further information for parents and carers go to:

[Education is changing information for parents, carers and young people - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)

[Education is changing | GOV.WALES](#)

Methodology and Limitations

The key elements of the methodology for this research have been:

- **A three-wave longitudinal online panel survey** of parents and carers with children aged between 0-13 years old living in Wales. Respondents had the option to complete the survey in English and Welsh. The survey response is shown in the table below.
- **Online Focus groups.** Four focus groups were held in August 2022, with three conducted in English and one in Welsh. In total, 16 parents and carers from across Wales gave their time to participate, including parents of children in nursery, primary and secondary settings, and parents of children with additional learning needs (ALN).
- **Social Media analysis** led by Four Cymru. Social listening techniques analysed the audiences and sentiment of online conversations around the curriculum reforms amongst parents.

Panel Survey Response

Research Phase	Sample Period	Sample Response	Unique Respondents
Phase 1	10-17 th Sept 2021	301	301
Phase 2	25 th -29 th April 2022	301	165
Phase 3	2 nd -6 th Sept 2022	301	124

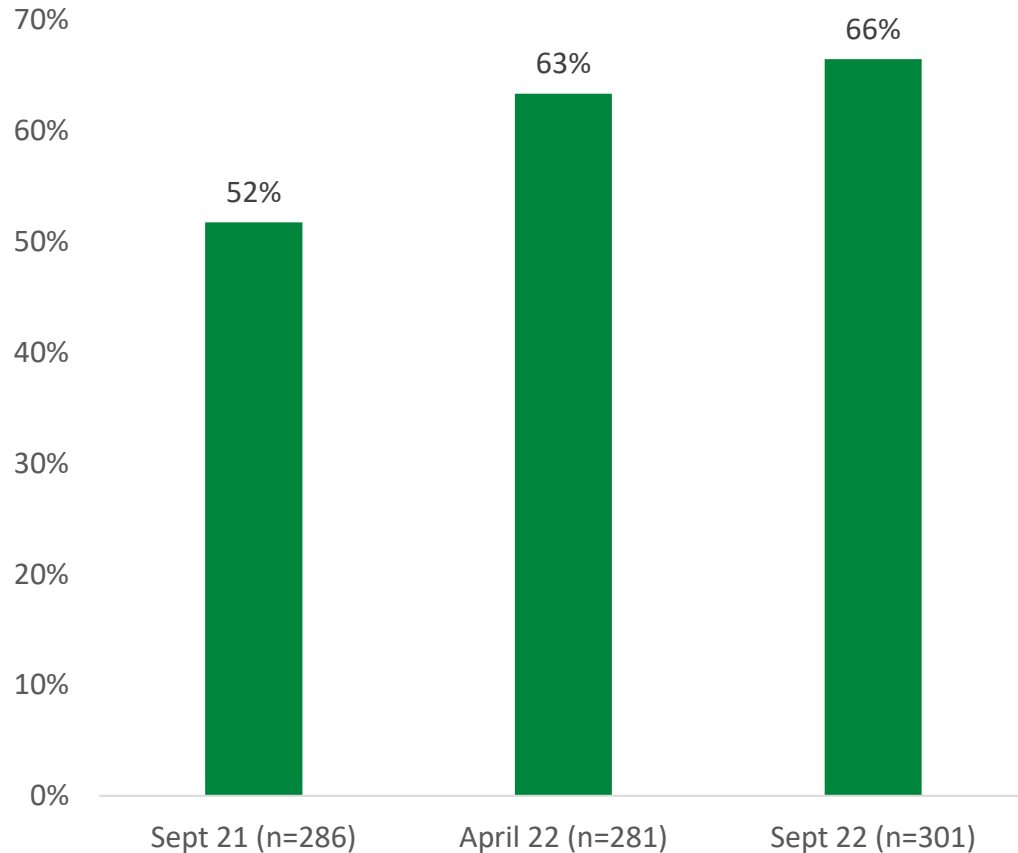
Source: Wavehill Panel Survey 2021-2022 (n=590)

There are several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings of this research:

- The financial incentives offered for online panel surveys means that it is likely the respondents are bias towards lower-income respondents, as well as those who have the digital skills and internet access to respond.
- Respondents are self-selected, which means the sample is non-probabilistic. Whilst we have ensured the respondents are broadly representative of the demographics of the population of parents and carers in Wales (including age, gender and ethnicity) the panel survey did not collect data on income or occupation.
- The participants for the focus groups were recruited through stakeholders working in schools across Wales. These individuals consented to participate in a 1.5-hour focus group on a weekday evening and were compensated for their time with a £20 voucher. This sampling approach means the views may not be representative of all parents and carers in Wales. The findings however do provide a useful insight into the depth of understanding and range of attitudes amongst some parents and carers.
- Any analysis using social media data should be understood in the context of the data source. It is likely that those posting on social media are those with strong opinions on the subject matter, and the data is likely to demonstrate a polarizing effect.

Knowledge and Understanding

Awareness of the changes to the Curriculum is rising



Source: Wavehill Panel Survey 2021 and 2022

The most recent panel data indicated that **awareness of the new curriculum amongst parents and carers continues to broadly increase**. Since September 2021, awareness has steadily increased from just over half (52%) to two-thirds (66%).

Amongst those who said they were aware of the changes, the majority said they had knowledge of how these changes affect their child(ren)'s education in practice. Over half (54%) of these parents said they have a good knowledge of how the changes will affect their child, with over a third (35%) noting they have some knowledge. **Only 12% of these parents said they had no knowledge of how the changes will affect their child.**

In focus group conversations, it was clear that those who were more aware of the new curriculum were familiar with high-level statements about the underlying rationale or focus of the reforms, such as the fact that each school will design its own curriculum. A few parents could identify key features of the curriculum, including the Four Purposes and Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLE). Some parents knew that their child's primary school was starting implementation of the curriculum in September 2022, whilst other parents had limited knowledge and were not aware when their child's school was rolling out the new curriculum.

Parents who knew most about the curriculum appeared to be more detail-orientated and interested in information about specific aspects of the curriculum. One parent who knew less about the curriculum noted they were more interested in the 'why', explaining that they would like to understand more about the reasoning behind the changes.

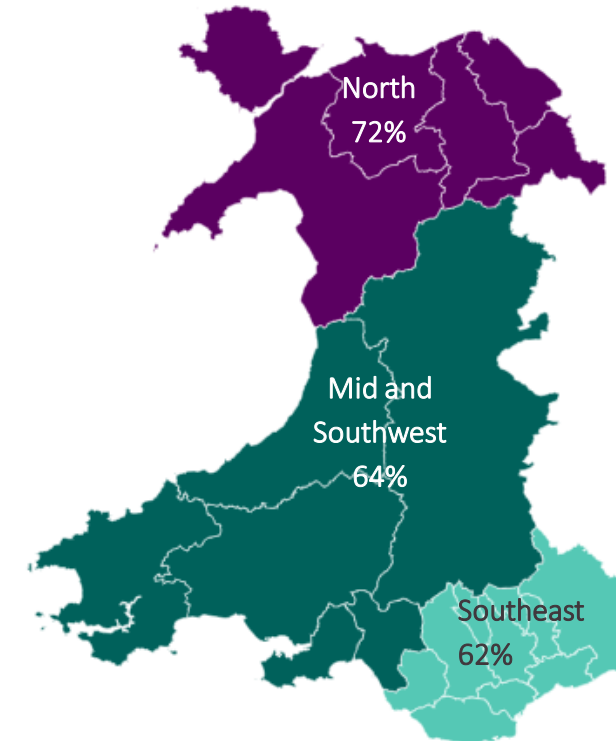
Knowledge and Understanding

School stage appeared to influence parental awareness of the changes, with over three quarters of parents with a child in secondary school (76%) aware of the changes, falling to 70% of parents of a child in primary, and 68% in Nursery. Parents of children in Special schools, Middle schools, EOTAS and other schools had the lowest awareness of the changes at only 56%.

There was variation in levels of awareness of the changes to the curriculum based on regional geography. Overall, 72% of those in North Wales were aware of the changes, whereas 64% of those in Mid and Southwest and 62% in Southeast Wales were aware. The pattern is consistent in terms of depth of knowledge, where 78% of parents in North Wales have a good knowledge of how the changes will affect their child whilst only 31% of parents in Southeast Wales report this to be the case. However, the variation between regions is markedly less pronounced than in April 2022.

People who speak Welsh more regularly tend to be more likely to be aware of the changes – 87% of those who self-reported to speaking Welsh daily were aware of the changes, falling to 81% for those who speak it weekly, 61% for those who speak it monthly or less, and 46% for those who never speak Welsh.

Awareness of changes to the curriculum by region



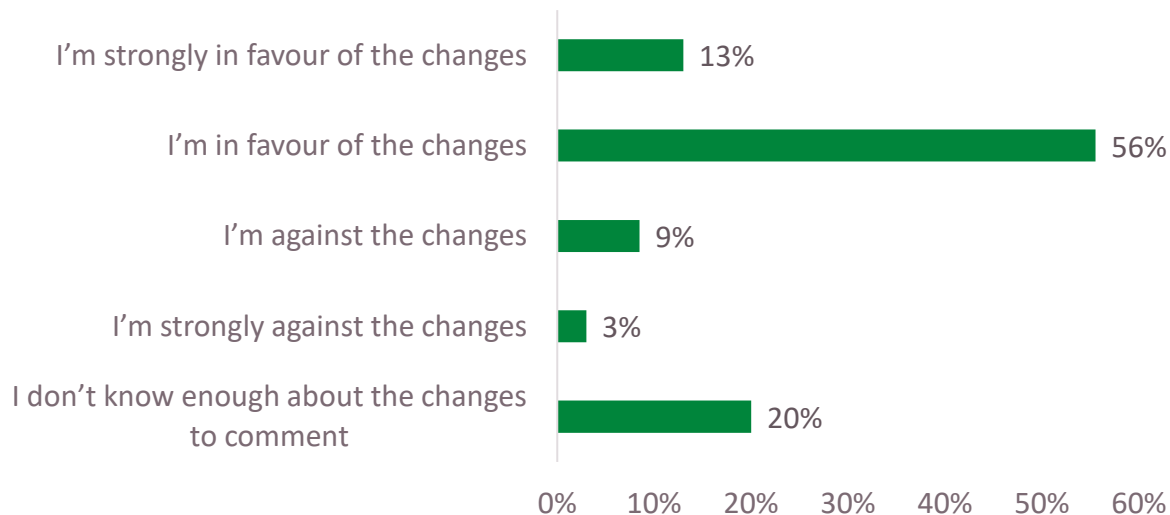
Source: Wavehill Panel Survey 2022 (n=301)

Attitudes and Opinions

Attitudes continue to develop over time, with 69% of parents in the most recent data suggesting they are in favour of the changes, representing a drop from 80% in April 2022. This shift may in part be due to the proportion of parents saying they do not have sufficient understanding of the changes to comment, especially since the stability of negative opinion towards the curriculum at 12% supports this interpretation.

The share of parents and carers who indicated they were strongly in favour of the changes has decreased (-12%), whilst there was a small rise in parents and carers strongly against the changes (+2%).

Attitudes towards the new Curriculum



Source: Wavehill Panel Survey 2022 (n=200)

During group conversations, parents of children in primary school were positive about the flexibility offered for schools to provide a more bespoke curriculum to their pupils. In terms of specific themes, across both English and Welsh focus groups, parents were positive about the inclusion of more local and Welsh history into the curriculum.

Some were positive about the potential opportunity for supporting different learning styles for children, particularly following the disruption to education caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst some parents were concerned about the effect that Covid-19 had on 'academic standards', many noted that mental health/wellbeing and social development were more important to them.

Parents noted they had heard conversations around Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) amongst other parents and on the news but hadn't engaged with the discussions. Some parents agreed that it was a divisive subject, so they understood why it is an area that has been widely discussed, but for those in the focus group it wasn't their primary concern relating to the curriculum. One parent thought that clarity about what was taught at each age and stage was useful for understanding the new RSE content, and that this focus on key school stage was the information they needed on other areas of the curriculum.

Attitudes and Opinions

Parents' and carers' attitudes towards the curriculum vary according to their child's school stage. Around three quarters (76%) of parents of nursery and primary school children are in favour of the changes, with 72% of parents of secondary school children are in favour. Only 63% of parents of children in Special schools, Middle schools, EOTAS and other schools said they were in favour of the changes. However, this may be due to the significant proportion of these parents who said that they did not have enough knowledge of the changes to form an opinion on them.

Evidence of regional variation is present in the attitudes toward the curriculum, with 78% of parents in North Wales are in favour of the reforms compared to only 59% in the Southeast, and 64% in the Mid and Southwest.

Those who speak Welsh daily are the most positive about the changes (89% in favour), which fell to 45% for those who never speak Welsh.

Attitudes by school setting

	Nursery	Primary	Secondary	Other
In favour	76%	76%	72%	63%
Against	16%	7%	24%	3%
Don't know	8%	17%	4%	34%
	n=25	n=59	n=25	n=32

Source: Wavehill Panel Survey 2022 (n=200)



Communication Preferences

The findings on communication preferences suggest that whilst parents have primarily received information from indirect sources such as friends and family, social media, and news media, they consistently want to hear more about the changes from their child’s school or setting and the Welsh Government website. These more trusted sources are key to focused, specific, and meaningful engagement with parents.

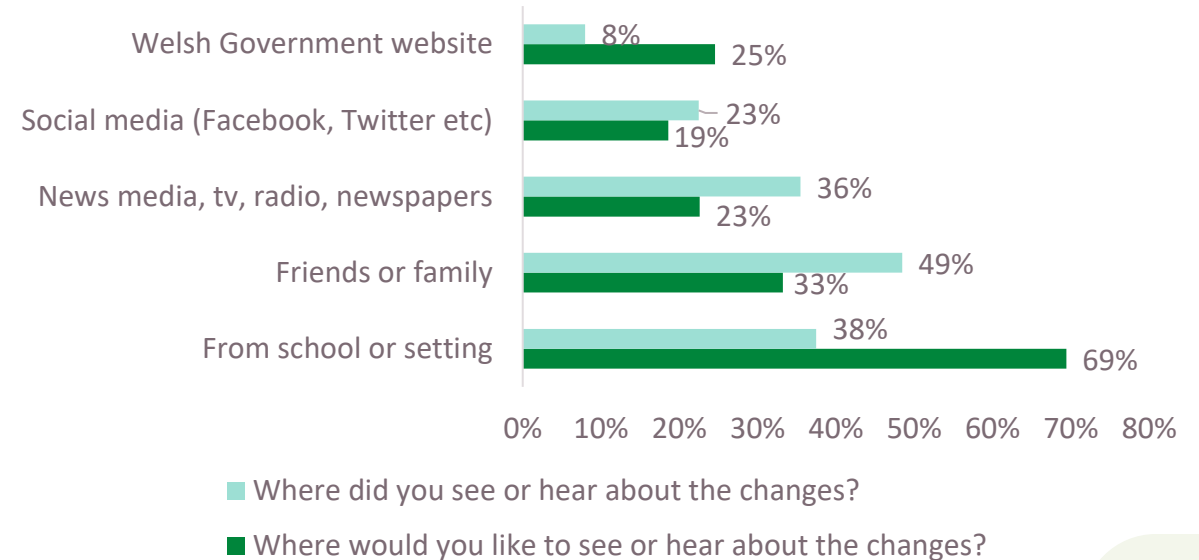
Nearly half the sample (49%) heard about the changes to the new Curriculum in Wales from family or friends, with 38% having heard from their school, 36% from media and 23% from social media. This represents a shift from the picture in April 2022, when 40% of parents had heard on social media and this was the most cited source of information

The percentage of parents who had heard about the changes from their school was consistent with findings from six months ago, which was 37% parents in April 2022 and 38% in September 2022.

Comparing this to where parents suggested they would most like to hear about future planned changes to the curriculum, there is a large demand for information via schools or settings. Over two-thirds (69%) of respondents would prefer to access this type of information via their school, increasing from 54% in April 2022. Only a third (33%) specified friends and family, a quarter (25%) from the Welsh Government website, and 19% would like to hear about the changes from social media.

During focus group conversations most parents said that communication with their school was delivered through specific apps or newsletter style communications, whilst some noted having WhatsApp chats where information was communicated. Some parents noted they use the government website frequently when seeking information, however other focus group attendees said that digital skills were a barrier to engaging with online and social media.

Q: Where did you / would you like to see or hear about the changes?



Source: Wavehill Panel Survey 2022 (n=200)

Information Needs

Whilst 62% of parents said that information on the new curriculum is very or extremely important to them, 4% of parents and carers noted that this information was not at all important to them.

There was geographic variation around information need, where 8% of parents in Mid and Southwest Wales said that information on the curriculum was not important to them, compared with only 2% in Southeast Wales. North Wales held information on the curriculum with the highest importance compared with other regions, with 83% saying information was very or extremely important, compared to 53% in Southwest Wales and 48% in Mid and Southwest Wales.

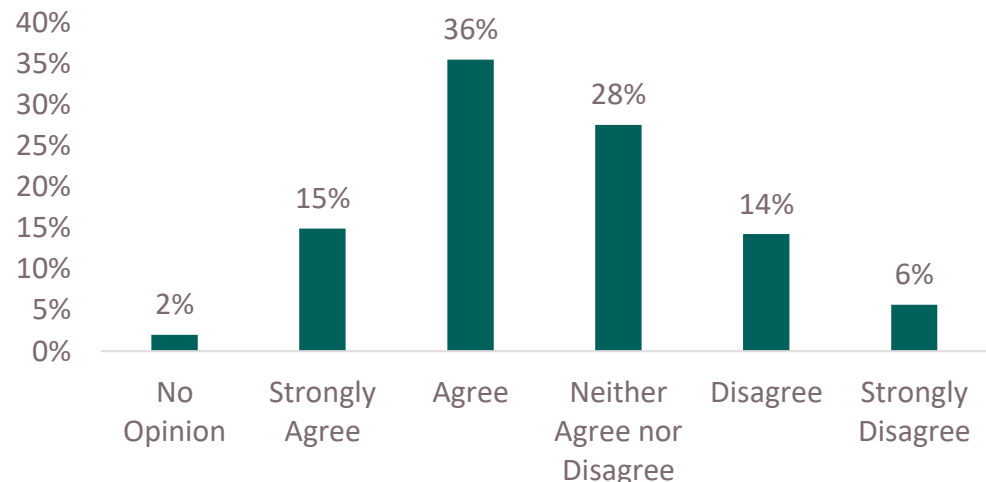
Regarding the type of information sought by parents, 71% of parents want to know about what the changes mean for their children, whilst 67% want information on how to support their child's learning at home under the new Curriculum. Under half of the parents surveyed (41%) want more information on how the changes will affect qualifications and exams, which may reflect the age or school stage of their child(ren).

When asked to compare the utility of information from school and information from broader sources in helping them engage with their child's education, a third of parents (33%) strongly agreed that information from school was important, whilst only 17% felt this way about broader sources of information.

Focus group discussion suggested that for some parents, their information need regarding their child's education centered around their general wellbeing and development as opposed to specific subjects. They identified that they trusted the curriculum was fit for purpose and that it wouldn't change the level of support they were able to offer their child in terms of homework.

One parent noted that when researching the new curriculum, they had felt overwhelmed by the volume of information, and that they needed key facts that were relevant to their child's age and school stage.

Q: To what extent do you agree that you know where to find information to support your child's education?



Source: Wavehill Panel Survey 2022 (n=301)

Social Media Analysis

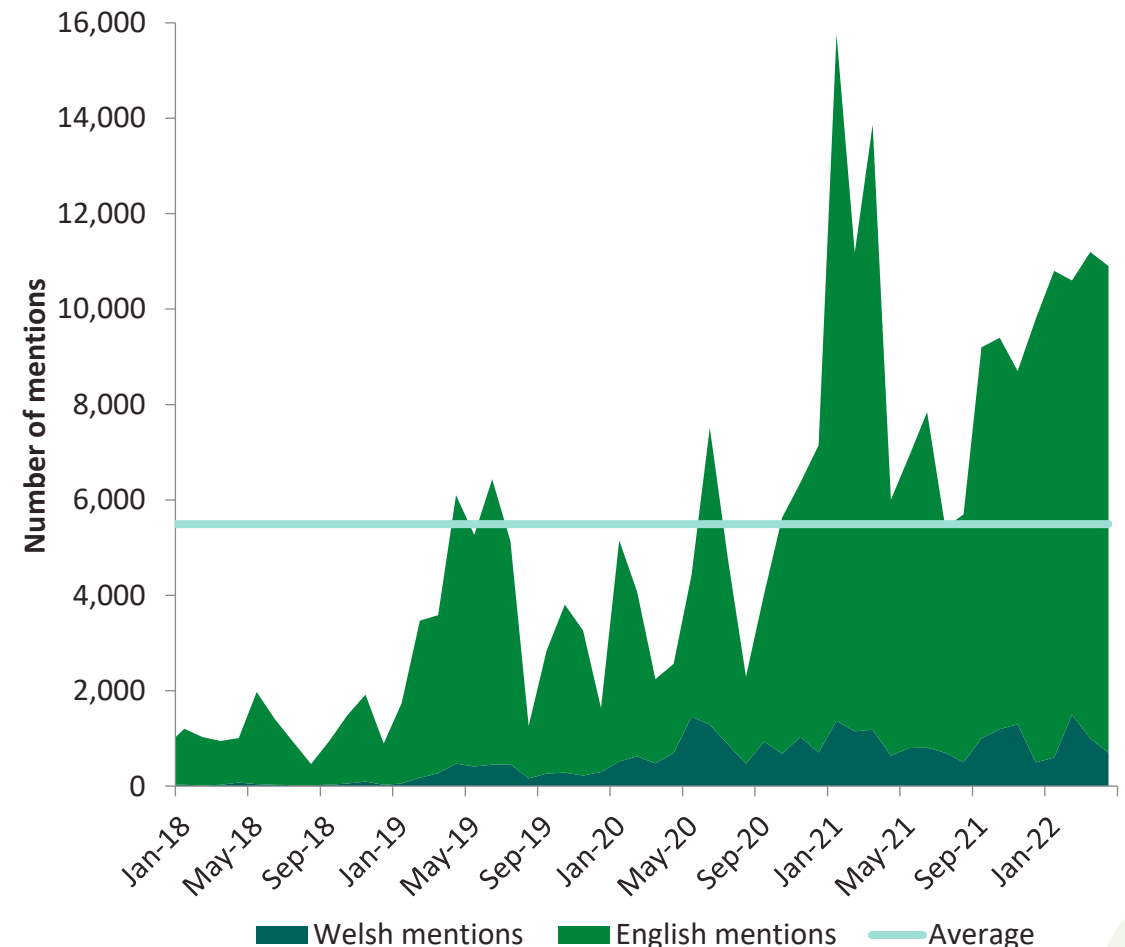
This page summarises the fieldwork conducted by Four Cymru which sought to understand the volume, the sentiment and the audiences relating to online conversation around the curriculum in Wales. This analysis used open-source social media and digital conversations in the UK between 1st January 2018 and 31st August 2022.

The number of conversations generated by parents around the new curriculum continued to rise within the final reporting period. Official trusted accounts, such as the [@WG Education](#) and [@WelshGovernment](#), are the most prominent source of information among parents and carers, the [#holijeremy](#) hashtag was also used to engage with Minister for Education and Welsh Language Jeremy Miles.

Curriculum topics continued to be widely discussed, particularly RSE and Welsh language provision, while peaks in coverage were driven by the launch of the National Music Service and good wishes to learners sitting their exams. Sentiment from parents and carers is mixed, with the proportion of negative conversations slightly increasing since the April 2022, driven in part by a large volume of mentions of RSE.

Parents shared their concerns online regarding upcoming changes due to the new Curriculum, including discussions around progression and qualifications. When talking about the curriculum implementation, reactions have been mixed with some parents praising the change and others sharing their concerns.

Total monthly social conversation 1st January 2018 – 31st August 2022



Source: Four Cymru

Conclusions



The findings of this report demonstrate a link between knowledge and attitudes regarding the curriculum. Parents who knew most about the curriculum also appeared to be more detail-orientated and interested in information around specific aspects of the curriculum. Amongst those parents who knew least about the curriculum, parents were more interested in the reasoning behind the changes. Many parents were unaware of the timeline of the rollout in relation to their child or children's school, which should be addressed as a priority.

Beyond raising awareness of the reforms, the new curriculum presents a complex communications challenge at the national level in reconciling the need for specific and actionable information with the focus of the new curriculum on school and practitioner empowerment. **More open conversations with parents suggest they are responsive to clear broad statements about the content of the curriculum, in particular, if it is disaggregated by their child's school stage.** Where this has been done for RSE, parents were positive that this was the information they required.

For parents and carers in Wales, the variation in both knowledge and attitudes by regional and demographic characteristics indicates that **targeted communications may be useful for improving the overall consensus on the new curriculum.** North Wales has both the greatest knowledge and most positive opinions towards the changes compared to the Southeast, the Southwest and Mid Wales. Parents of children in Special schools, Middle schools, Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) had significantly lower knowledge of the reforms than children in Mainstream Nursery, Primary or Secondary education.

The increase in word-of-mouth information sharing and parent conversations on social media suggests that **conversations around the curriculum are growing.** This provides an opportunity for Welsh Government to support this dialogue. Findings from this report suggest that **communication through trusted sources such as schools continues to be the most critical mode of communication for meaningful engagement with parents,** and that parents also look to local authorities and government websites to seek further information.