

CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

DATE: 14TH JUNE 2016

SUBJECT: REVISED CRITERIA FOR GCSE AND GCE SPECIFICATIONS: UPDATE

A BACKGROUND

The current situation in schools is the availability of different routes in the delivery of RE/RS.

Route 1 – Optional Religious Studies

A significant number of schools offer Religious Studies in the option choices at KS4. Students who choose the subject will then follow an examination spec for Religious Studies and be entered for the full course examination, having received exactly the same time allocation (usually around 10% of curriculum time) as all other optional subjects

Route 2 – GCSE RS accreditation in the statutory Religious Education lesson

Religious Education is a statutory subject which must be taught to all students at KS4. This is where the situation for RE/RS differs from nearly all other subjects (PE is the other exception). Many schools in Wales use the statutory RE lessons to follow a Religious Studies external examination specification with the whole cohort and enter students for this examination – either for a short course or a full course.

Route 1 and 2

A significant number of schools use both routes. This means that if a student has chosen Religious Studies in the options, then that student will still be present in the statutory RE lesson, and so needs to follow a different specification for Religious Studies or they will be following the same lesson content twice. It is possible to do so at present because there are two RS GCSE specifications at WJEC (as well as the availability of specs from examining boards in England). However, with the proposed merging of the two specs into one, this will no longer be an option and it is here that it will have the negative impact.

Meeting between WJEC and NAPRE representatives – 15th April 2016

Present: Gareth Pierce, Alun McCarthy, Lynda Maddocks, Jen Malcolm, Mary Parry

NAPfRE members had requested a meeting with WJEC to discuss the new specifications and pointing out the implications of there only being one specification on schools- especially those schools currently following a combined Route 1 and 2.

Implications for Schools

Affect 1

Schools/ teachers may decide to retain their optional RS and **not accredit** the short course in the statutory lesson. A factor influencing that decision could be the increased rigour in the exam specification/s making it more difficult for candidates to be successful in achieving a GCSE RS accreditation in the statutory lessons. Statutory RE would still have to be provided and this could be subsumed into Welsh Baccalaureate or some other form of provision. This would have a huge affect on entry figures for WJEC and the Board stated that they would contact Estyn asking them to keep a watching brief on KS4 statutory RE provision.

Affect 2

Schools/ teachers may decide to only follow RS in the statutory lessons and the RS option will disappear. This will also have an effect on A and AS level Religious Studies.

Decisions

- WJEC are offering both the short and full course options from a single specification. The WJEC will not be offering an additional RS GCSE specification from September 2017. There had been no call for an additional RS spec in England. However, it will review the impact after two years.
- It is a matter for each school's internal organisational structures to ensure that an optional RS GCSE course and a RS GCSE (short course) for statutory RE lessons can run side by side.
- WJEC will contact schools who appear to provide an organisational structure which allows the GCSE optional full course and the statutory GCSE RS short course to run concurrently with no overlap and where the pupils are not educationally disadvantaged, so that any good practice can be shared with other schools.
- WJEC will contact Estyn to draw attention to the need to keep a watching brief on the provision for statutory KS4 RE to ensure that statutory requirements are met.