

Curriculum for Wales Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) guidance

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| Consultation response form | Your name: Cllr John Taylor Organisation (if applicable): Caerphilly SACRE e-mail/telephone number: tayloj@caerphilly.gov.uk Your address: |
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Responses should be returned by **16 July 2021** to

Curriculum Realisation Unit
Curriculum and Assessment Division
The Education Directorate
Welsh Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

or completed electronically and sent to:

e-mail: curriculumforwales@gov.wales

Question 1 – How well does the guidance explain the scope of RVE and its context within the Humanities Area ?

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|------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| Not well at all | <input type="checkbox"/> | Not well | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Acceptable | <input type="checkbox"/> | Well | <input type="checkbox"/> | Very well | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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Please explain your answer (no more than 250 words).

The (3-16) mandatory nature is clear and option at post 16. However, the legal section needs to be edited and accessible to all. The introduction needs to better reflect what RVE is, and the primary purpose, of supporting ASCs in writing agreed syllabi.

Wales has an opportunity to be inclusive and pluralistic in the approach to RVE. However, the definitions used hinder that objective. The ‘conventional sense’ of the term ‘religion’ is unhelpful and excludes some religious worldviews, e.g. Buddhism or Jainism, who do not have the concept of a supreme being. Does this definition have to be used? There also needs to be reconsideration in relation to philosophical convictions. The use of case law needs explaining clearly to be helpful. The language used is confusing to those unversed in the law.

When you study religious and non-religious worldviews within silos (as is implied in this section) you inevitably exclude some people and their beliefs. To rectify this, we suggest reinstating the term worldviews, which is a subject specific term that is more inclusive.

The guidance should ensure the what matters statements are placed at the centre of school level curriculum design. We do not think this guidance achieves this and needs strengthening. The lenses and learning journeys risk distracting from this and become the focus for teachers of RE.

There has been a shift in thinking around the purpose of the guidance. The original aim was to be non-statutory guidance, adopted/adapted as locally agreed syllabi. If this is guidance, then there is a need to ensure there is no risk to the CfW overarching guidance. For example, no other subjects provide examples (e.g. the exemplar learning journeys). The rationale behind that was that practitioners would see them as something they had to do, and this would distract from subsidiarity and designing innovative school level curricular for their own learners.

Question 2 – Is the guidance, as a whole, clear and helpful for you in your role?

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| Very unclear | <input type="checkbox"/> | Slightly unclear | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Neither clear nor unclear | <input type="checkbox"/> | Slightly clear | <input type="checkbox"/> | Very clear | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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Please explain your answer.

There is not enough emphasis upon the role of the agreed syllabus nor how an ASC might use this guidance when designing their locally agreed syllabi. The relationship between this guidance and an agreed syllabus needs further explanation. Missing from this document is advice on procedures for the first ASCs or on the need for reviews of an agreed syllabus as is currently set out in Circular 10/94.

Please also see the answer to Q7.

Question 3 – Does the guidance offer relevant information to support practitioners when designing their school curriculum for RVE?

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| Not relevant at all | <input type="checkbox"/> | Slightly relevant | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Moderately relevant | <input type="checkbox"/> | Relevant | <input type="checkbox"/> | Very relevant | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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Please explain your answer.

There seems to be a lack of consistency with the approach taken in the rest of the Curriculum for Wales guidance when the 'Lenses' are introduced. Lenses in the CfW guidance refer to subject disciplines. This risks confusion for practitioners.

"The statements of what matters should be used holistically to provide a broad and deep platform to support learners through their humanities educational journey" (Humanities AoLE guidance). Use of the lenses could distract from use of the statement of what matters.

This guidance states that the "guidance considers and identifies some relevant lenses through which to view RVE concepts". However, the Humanities guidance refers to the subject disciplines as 'lenses' stating that "**The disciplines [or subjects] in this Area provide a variety of lenses through which to view the human experience.**" The meaning of the term here is, therefore, not in line with the Humanities AoLE where the subject is the lens through which the concepts are explored. The lenses in this guidance are more like themes or topics including some of the key concepts for RVE outlined in the Humanities guidance.

It is of concern that the lenses may detract from in depth engagement with the statements of what matters during the curriculum design process. Practitioners may then miss the depth and breadth of what really matters in Humanities, instead opting for the easy way out for RVE by picking the few lenses that are on offer here. The addition of these lenses might have a place in non-statutory guidance, but risk undermining the what matters in Humanities if they are included in the statutory guidance. The guidance says that the lenses are not to be seen as topics, however, there is a risk that they will be used as topics. Non-specialists might not go back to the what matters statements as they ought to. In which case the learners would miss so much.

The learning journeys do not convey the flexible approach outlined in the Humanities AoLE guidance: "There is flexibility in how a school may decide to structure its curriculum, such as an integrated, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary or disciplinary approach." Whilst the guidance states that flexibility ought to be built into the school curriculum, they appear to take a disciplinary approach and do not show the interaction of RVE with the other disciplines.

There seems to be a contradiction in terms of providing a clear understanding of what is to be done. The document should be a guide about how to develop a curriculum that includes RVE within the Humanities AoLE, rather than be a provision of support materials. The only place for this is within non-statutory guidance or via additional resources or PL. There is a need to ensure that any materials provided do not oversimplify the statements of what matters for RVE or serve to make school curricular for RVE less challenging or interesting.

Question 4 – Thinking about each section of the guidance, do you feel there are:

- any gaps in information? If so, what should be added?
- any sections that are particularly helpful? If so, in what way are they helpful and to whom?

Introduction

It is good that the mandatory nature of the guidance is set out, but this section could be developed further. We would like to see a brief explanation of what Religion, values and ethics is, its multidisciplinary nature and the benefit learners would gain from receiving their entitlement to RVE. The title of the subject should not be abbreviated in the opening sentence.

It is good that individuals or bodies who would benefit from reading the document are listed. However, there may not be a shared understanding between WG and LAs/SACREs as to the main purpose of this guidance. The organisation of the introduction would benefit from reordering to reflect the process of agreed syllabi being written, then followed by the implementation of those agreed syllabi into local authority schools and settings.

RVE and legislation

It is good that the guidance lays out the legal requirements for mandatory RVE and the expectation that it is delivered in a way that complies with ECHR legislation.

The language and grammar used within this section could be improved so that it can be understood by those outside of the legal profession. The guidance needs to be accessible to the audience outlined in the introduction and to the public. It is important that ASCs and schools understand exactly what ‘have regard’ means in practice and what the consequences are for straying away from this. A full explanation would be helpful.

The examples given about case law provide only a partial picture and they omit more up to date case law that will affect the teaching of RVE. Additionally, how will WG ensure LAs, SACREs and schools are informed if there are changes to case law that influence the provision of RVE in schools? This is particularly important considering there is now no safeguard to schools provided by the parental right to withdraw their children from RVE.

The advice within this section needs to ensure that the non-religious philosophical convictions are relating to systems of beliefs that are analogous to religion. However, that should not mean other non-religious views cannot ever be discussed in lessons, particularly when it is important for learners to be able to voice their own personal worldviews. Also, not all people who hold non-religious worldviews ‘belong’ to an organisation, yet their views might be useful to consider. There is a move away from teaching religion and belief in silos and taking a more pluralistic approach to the study of religion and belief. This would not undermine the study of the principal religions or worldview traditions held within Wales.

SACRE is disappointed that legal language with regards to the term ‘philosophical convictions’ has replaced the academic term ‘worldviews’ in other sections of the document. Worldviews are one of the concepts found within the Humanities AoLE and are of relevance to RVE. One of many examples of this from the Humanities AoLE guidance is a requirement to:

Respond sensitively and insightfully to religious and non-religious worldviews about society, communities and cultures, and understand how these can be interpreted in different times, cultures and places.

It is important, therefore, that the study of the subject is not undermined by legal terminology and that it has the freedom independently of the law (providing that law is not broken). The term 'worldviews' is understood on an international platform. We would request that the Welsh Government view the new animated film *Nobody Stands Nowhere* by Emily Downe, created in partnership with Culham St Gabriel's Trust and Canterbury Christ Church University. This film explains the concept of worldviews and "unpacks the idea of worldviews and invites the viewer to consider how their own unique view of the world might co-exist with other, sometimes quite different, vantage points held by those around them" (Cooling). An exploration of worldviews fits with the emphasis on different perspectives/lenses in the what matters. It is important to Caerphilly SACRE members that the concept of worldviews is not just seen as something for England. This way of exploring Religion, values and ethics is also relevant to our learners in Wales and fits incredibly well with the what matters statements in the Humanities AoLE too.

It would have been better that 'religion' be explored as a concept (with reference to religious worldview traditions and non-religious beliefs such as humanism, atheism and secularism) and that 'values and ethics' included both religious and non-religious worldviews (philosophical convictions). The division of the title of the subject into 'religion' and 'values and ethics' in the legal part of the document is of concern. The term 'philosophical convictions' are not synonymous with 'values and ethics' and this is an interpretation that could cause misunderstanding. The term 'religion' is a concept currently studied in the RE classroom. Here it is taken to mean the different 'religions' that are studied. This gives the impression that this subject expects religions to be taught in silos rather through the exploration of big questions or themes which is also an approach that could be taken. The concept of religion does not necessarily indicate a study of values and ethics as the guidance suggests. The false binary approach to the study of religion and non-religion is unhelpful in pitting people who hold differing opinions against one another. Religious and non-religious worldviews are much more diverse and multifaceted than this document suggests.

There is an assumption in the guidance that the philosophical convictions in case law are non-religious, e.g. philosophical convictions on veganism can be inspired both by religious and non-religious worldviews – so a representative from the Vegan Society may not, in fact, be non-religious. This pitting religious against non-religious philosophical convictions in the guidance sets up a false binary that causes confusion. Religious and non-religious worldviews are much more complex than this guidance advocates for.

With regards to legislation on post-16 RVE the guidance does not say whether a request from a pupil/student to opt in to RVE has to be provided if only one request is made. This will have financial implications for schools and colleges and needs to be addressed.

There is no mention in the legal section of the right of teachers to withdraw from the teaching of RVE. Potentially there could be more requests for this if RVE is taught across AoLEs.

There is a need to clarify what is meant by objective, critical and pluralistic RVE. These terms should be explained. Schools and practitioners need to know exactly what they should or should not be doing to comply with ECHR legislation.

The tone and language of the guidance document needs to be consistent. As it stands it sounds as if the legal section and the rest of the document were written by different authors. Another edit might rectify this. Caerphilly SACRE would suggest that subject specialists are present during this process to ensure that the legal sections do not inadvertently exclude sections of society as has happened with reference to the definition of religion and its failure to address those religions who do not hold a belief in a supreme being (such as some of the Dharmic religions).

The section on RVE in nursery settings is particularly good. As RE was not a statutory requirement under the old system, this section is needed, and a good job has been done to prepare teachers to plan for and to deliver the subject. Much of what is included in this section is also relevant for other learners, yet the richness of the subject as expressed here does not seem to flow through other parts of the document.

There is very little reference in the document to the status of the locally agreed syllabus, nor a reinforcing of the fact that schools need to have regard to it. This should be particularly evident in the Designing your Curriculum and yet there is no mention of it there. Without sufficient reference to the agreed syllabi the position of the LA is undermined, and confusion caused to practitioners.

There are key concepts missing that are present in the Humanities AoLE in the Designing your Curriculum section e.g. "develop an understanding of lived religion and belief through the exploration of the key concepts."

A glossary of terms would be helpful in clarifying any misunderstandings in terms of meaning.

Question 5 – Does the guidance offer all practitioners sufficient support for their planning and teaching of RVE?

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| Insufficient | <input type="checkbox"/> | Somewhat insufficient | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Neither insufficient nor sufficient | <input type="checkbox"/> | Somewhat sufficient | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sufficient | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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Please explain your answer.

This document only partially supports practitioners. In addition to the changes set out in other answers, there is also a need for those providing RVE to see this guidance as part of the big picture of education reform in Wales, including its relationship to all other parts of CfW guidance, Professional Learning and support from SACREs, LAs, regional consortia, etc. If points raised in our other answers are addressed then this would, in part, rectify this.

Question 6 – Is additional support (e.g. professional learning and resources) needed to ensure the successful implementation of this guidance?

If so, please provide more detail.

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| Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> | Not sure | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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Please explain your answer.

There is a definite need for PL, not only for practitioners, but also for SLT, SACREs and other stakeholders. There is a need to ensure that parents understand the nature of RVE as their right to withdraw their children is removed. This will go a long way toward removing the potential for future legal challenges if objective critical and pluralistic RVE is not being taught. Those responsible for providing PL should ensure that they have sufficient subject expertise to support teachers and schools. There is a need for partnerships to be formed so that learners receive high quality RVE. There is also a need to work with ITE providers to ensure that new teachers understand the delivery of objective, critical and pluralistic RVE.

Question 7 – This question is aimed at local authorities and Standing Advisory Councils for religious education (SACs).

Is the guidance a helpful document for developing agreed syllabus conferences?

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| Not helpful at all | <input type="checkbox"/> | Slightly helpful | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Somewhat helpful | <input type="checkbox"/> | Very helpful | <input type="checkbox"/> | Extremely helpful | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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Is the guidance a helpful document for SACs?

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| Not helpful at all | <input type="checkbox"/> | Slightly helpful | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Somewhat helpful | <input type="checkbox"/> | Very helpful | <input type="checkbox"/> | Extremely helpful | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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Please explain your answer.

ADEW and SACREs are concerned that there is a process in place for dealing with complaints against practitioners and schools and guidance from WG on this would be useful.

The checklist in the document seems to have been written for schools to work directly with this document rather than for ASCs to use when designing the locally agreed syllabi. If this checklist is for schools, then there should be reference to the need to have regard to the agreed syllabus. Again, this section undermines the status of the agreed syllabus.

Question 8 – We would like to know your views on the effects that the RVE guidance would have on the Welsh language, specifically on:

- i) opportunities for people to use Welsh
- ii) treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

Supporting comments

Guidance, resources, and Professional Learning all need to be available bilingually with no time delay between the English and Welsh. There are translation issues with the Welsh version that need to be addressed in a bilingual, side by side, editing of both documents. The errors, if not rectified, could show that the Welsh language has been treated less favourably, e.g. the acronym RVE has not been translated into Welsh.

Question 9 – Please also explain how you believe the RVE guidance could be formulated or changed so as to have:

- i) positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language
- ii) no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

Supporting comments

The inclusion of the Welsh word Cynefin is good to see. It is important that learners know why this word was not translated and that sometimes meaning is lost in translation. This was a positive move. During the editing process this consideration needs to be made and the English and Welsh documents ought to be edited alongside one another for that reason.

Question 10 – We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them.

Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to remain anonymous, please tick here: