

Curriculum for Wales: Religion, values and ethics

Consultation response form	Your name: Cllr John Taylor - in consultation with Caerphilly SACRE Members Organisation (if applicable): Chair of Caerphilly Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education e-mail/telephone number: tayloj@caerphilly.gov.uk Your address:
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Responses should be returned by **28 July 2020** to

Arts, Humanities and Well-being Branch
The Education Directorate
Welsh Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

or completed electronically and sent to:

e-mail: RVEConsultation@gov.wales.

Question 1 – Do you agree that religion, values and ethics (RVE) should encompass both religious and non-religious beliefs that are philosophical convictions (in line with the European Convention on Human Rights) as described in the consultation document?

Agree	✓	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments (no more than 250 words)

Good RE is already pluralistic, considering religious/non-religious worldviews. However:

1. 'Philosophical convictions' need defining. 'Worldviews' is the more suitable subject specific term. Philosophical convictions are both religious and non-religious worldviews.
2. Case law should be better explained.
3. Is the RE Framework the guidance? This should have been made available alongside this consultation.
4. Changes to SACREs composition by adding groups representing 'philosophical convictions,' interferes with voting causing inequality. Currently, these representatives sit on Committee A.
5. SACRE asks that consideration of the expertise of respondents, and the complexity of the issues, be assured. During a previous consultation, on the name change for RE, responses from professional RE bodies were given the same weighting as individual responses, regardless of their expertise. It is concerning that decisions relating to academic subjects appear to come down to a public vote. During that consultation, the choice between Religions and Worldviews and RVE were both equally inappropriate, leading to many responders ticking 'Other' instead of the more appropriate Religion and Worldviews. SACRE strongly recommends WG review this choice of name. RVE discourages a focus on worldviews in favour of values and ethics, which may be detrimental to learners and to the new curriculum. Proposals previously put forward were unsound due to lack of WG understanding of the nature of RE. WG needs a comprehensive understanding RE in order to set out proposals in a way that addresses the complex issues surrounding RE in order to achieve well informed responses that are reflective of the nature of this discipline.

Question 2 – Do you agree that agreed syllabus conferences **must have regard** to statutory guidance when they are developing their locally agreed syllabus?

Agree	✓	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments (no more than 250 words)

1. ASCs have always had regard to WG guidance. However, if guidance refers to the RE Framework then it really should have been available alongside this consultation to ensure SACREs could confidently tick this box.
2. SACREs need to be consulted on the status of the RE Framework. Currently the National Exemplar Framework for RE is non-statutory guidance. Will this change with the new RVE Framework? If so, it would signify a shift from local democracy/

responsibility to national. If WG do not consult it would show disregard to SACREs and to the LAs they advise as they who are currently legally responsible for approving the statutory agreed syllables for RE.

3. 'Having regard' needs to be clearly defined. What does it mean in practice? How strong a term is it? What are the consequences of straying away from this? Who will monitor this? The current terminology is to 'teach in accordance with' and this is used for schools of a religious character in these proposals. Why is there a discrepancy in the consistency of this language?
4. Will ASCs and LAs be held accountable for not complying with the guidance? The ASC produces and recommends the locally agreed syllabus, but it is the LA that adopts and implements it. There is a misunderstanding of this document within the consultation document.

Question 3 – Do you agree with our proposal that community schools and foundation and voluntary schools **without a religious character** must be required to have regard to an agreed syllabus in designing and implementing RVE?

Agree	✓	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments (no more than 250 words)

These issues need addressing:

1. Should state 'the locally agreed syllabus' or schools could follow any agreed syllabus. The objective of having AS determined locally is to consider local religion and worldviews, culture, histories, and situations. SACRE advice and the ASC process is critical to ensuring that RE takes account of this.
2. RE should be objective, critical, and pluralistic. It should also be the case in practice in all schools to avoid legal challenges. What will be the process of monitoring that this is the case in all schools? There is a role for SLT, LAs, specialist Advisers, the consortia and Estyn in this monitoring role. Also, SACREs/WASACRE/NAPfRE should advise LAs/schools on how to achieve this.
3. Para 20, What does '*in general, it will be more appropriate for schools to be required to have regard an agreed syllabus*' mean? This is too vague. Are there exceptions? They need to be urgently explained.
4. Schools should have '*some discretion to depart from the Agreed Syllabus*' is a contentious statement that could potentially impinge on learner entitlement to RE/RVE. This is a mandatory element of the curriculum. If the ASCs have had regard to the CfW guidance, there are no circumstances under which schools would need to depart from the AS. Any discretion at school level should be clearly defined in legislation and not left vague. In the new purpose driven curriculum schools have lots of discretion anyway. The statutory nature of the AS has protected RE to date. Prof. Donaldson wanted to protect RE within this curriculum and not undermine it in this way. WG needs to explain this rationale.

Question 4 – Do you agree with our proposal that parents/carers of learners in schools **without a religious character** must no longer be able to request provision of RVE in line with tenets of a particular faith?

Agree	✓	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments (no more than 250 words)

1. This is to do with the parental right to withdraw their child/children from RE. If that has been removed, then this is not a necessary question. This currently rarely happens.
2. This change makes an interdisciplinary approach to curriculum design and implementation more practicable. It will be more difficult to withdraw from an interdisciplinary approach than it is in the current curriculum.
3. WG needs to be aware that, with a (supposed) new approach to RE could cause some parents of faith to feel their personal and institutional worldviews have not been taken into consideration within the curriculum and they may decide to home school their children as a result. Litigation could also be taken if parents feel that their human rights have been taken away. See Human Rights Act 1998, Article 2.

Question 5 – Do you agree with the proposal that voluntary-controlled schools **with religious character** can teach RVE in accordance with the trust deeds of the school or the tenets of the faith of the school **if requested by parents/carers**?

Agree	✓	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments (no more than 250 words)

1. This is very similar to current legislation. However, this should state 'for their own child' so that the wishes of one parent are not imposed on other people's children in these settings.
2. Why has the term 'teach in accordance with' been used here and yet in state-maintained schools without a religious character they have to 'have regard' to an agreed syllabus? Should there be consistency of language to maintain equality of rights for learners?
3. WG would need to provide support to schools in terms of funding for additional PL, resources and teachers to mitigate for this change in circumstances for these schools as currently they can turn down this parental request if they do not have the resources to provide it.
4. The Trust deeds of schools of a religious character require RE rather than RVE to be taught. It is causing concern for schools of a religious character that they would have to depart from the Trust deeds. The establishments were set up under trusts with the purpose of providing religious education. WG needed to further clarify how and why schools should depart from their own Trust deeds.

Question 6 – Do you agree that **voluntary-aided schools with a religious character** should be **required** to teach the agreed syllabus **where a parent/carer requests it** and should not have discretion to refuse to do so?

Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments (no more than 250 words)

1. Parents 'choose' to send children to VA schools. They know a major purpose of education within the school teaching RE according to tenets of faith. Alternative state funded education is available within the catchment area. Surely, human rights are not breached if alternatives are provided? If parents are sending children to the schools for high standards of education, then WG needs to ensure this occurs in all maintained schools. SACRE members are concerned that this may be seen to be a back-door attempt to abolish faith schools.
2. If VA schools have regard to CfW guidance, then they will be ensuring pluralistic RE without this change to legislation. Religious institutions have been in dialogue with WG throughout CfW development. The consultation document seems to assume that RE in schools of a religious character is indoctrination. This is disappointing to some people. Specialist PL and monitoring would help to ensure this is achieved in practice.
3. VA were established with the purpose of providing RE. SACRE members think VA schools should provide RE according to their Trust deeds. This proposal VA schools should provide two different curricula for RVE is impractical and costly (staffing, time, and resources) especially in an integrated curriculum. This would detrimentally affect learners in other curriculum areas as RVE is now integrated. WG must think through practicalities. Has there been a pilot study into the effects this approach may have on learners?

Question 7 – We would like to know your views on the effects that these proposals in relation to religion, values and ethics 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

- i) WG needs to ensure that there are sufficient specialist staff in Welsh medium schools to engage learners in the specialist language surrounding RE/RVE. In English medium education Welsh Government could provide opportunities for learners to engage with RVE specific terminology in the classroom.
- ii) PL should be available through the medium of Welsh for teachers of RVE. Welsh language resources should be developed bilingually and provided at the same time as English medium resources.

Question 8 – Please also explain how you believe the proposed policy on religion, values and ethics in the Curriculum for Wales 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

ITE and PGCE courses need to be provided through the medium of Welsh.

WG needs to ensure that there are sufficient specialist staff in Welsh medium schools to engage learners in the specialist language surrounding RE/RVE. In English medium education Welsh Government could provide opportunities for learners to engage with RVE specific terminology in the classroom.

PL should be available through the medium of Welsh for teachers of RVE. Welsh language resources should be developed bilingually and provided at the same time as English medium resources.

Question 9 – 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.

Consultation period

As the consultation proposes significant changes to RE, SACREs and ASCs, SACRE questions why such an important consultation during the lockdown period. SACREs, the main advisory bodies for RE, have found it difficult or impossible to meet in order to conduct discussion and follow the voting procedures set out in their terms of reference. Welsh Government should be aware that that the lockdown may have had an impact on properly assessing the opinions of the key stakeholders.

Change of name to RVE – Also See Q1

SACRE strongly feels that the name religion values and ethics is unsuitable as a new name. Religion, values and ethics are only part of what is taught in RE. RE is an academic discipline and doesn't just teach children how to become good citizens. WG appear to be muddling RE with Citizenship education showing some lack of understanding of RE as a multidisciplinary subject. Teaching value and ethics are within the purposes of education. They are explored within RE, but also within all other areas of the curriculum. Learners thinking that values and ethics are only related to religion might be entering the grounds of confessional Religious Education. More significantly, the term appears to ignore non-religious worldviews. SACRE would like WG to be on the cutting edge but this term gives the impression that RE is taking a step back in time. It risks diluting the subject and is not representative of the strong and challenging academic field RE/RW is. It certainly does not give the impression that this is an objective, critical and pluralistic' field of study. Caerphilly SACRE put forward the name 'Religion and Worldviews' as an alternative name in the previous consultation as this is representative of the direction of travel RE nationally and internationally. This fully represents the objective, critical and pluralistic aim.

Changes to SACREs and ASCs

SACRE is concerned that the proposed changes to legislation would be detrimental to the work of SACREs. It is alarming that WG have decided to create additional groups on SACREs and to change the name of SACREs (as outlined in the draft Bill) without prior discussion with those SACREs. **SACREs are alarmed that the identity of the group will be removed by removing the**

name of the subject we advise upon. A Standing Advisory Council – on what? It could be on absolutely anything. SACRE members are proud of the subject we advise upon. We need a dialogue with WG about this. We are concerned that WASACRE was unaware of this proposal before the draft Bill was published. Why are WG not consulting with the WASACRE as a key stakeholder representing the SACREs of Wales during a time of significant change to RE, SACREs and ASCs? We are aware that other stakeholders have been in discussion with WG on matters WASACRE were omitted from. **These changes directly affect RE and SACREs and we should have been the first port of call for dialogue and should not have had to attain information second or third hand**

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: