



STANDING CONFERENCE (AGREED SYLLABUS) OF CAERPHILLY STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON MONDAY 14TH
FEBRUARY AT 3.00 P.M**

PRESENT:

Councillor J. Taylor - Chair
Mrs J. Jones (Church in Wales) - Vice Chair

Councillors:

Mrs T. Parry

Representatives of Faith and Belief: Mr M. Gray (The Methodist Church)

Representing Teaching Organisations: Miss H. Bartley (ATL), Mrs T. Lloyd (NAHT), Mrs C. McLaughlan (NASUWT)

Together with:

H. Jones (EAS Curriculum Partner - SACs and RVE), V. Bodenham (School Improvement Officer), M. Wallbank (Senior Solicitor), R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer)

RECORDING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being filmed and would be available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here to View](#). Members were advised that voting on decisions would take place via roll call.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs E. M. Aldworth, A. Collis, Mrs G. Oliver and J. Simmonds, together with Mrs M. Jones (UCAC), Mrs K. McCullough (NASUWT), Mr K. Chamberlain (Humanists Wales), Mrs E. Hawthorn (United Reformed Church), Major P. Hubbard (The Salvation Army) and Mr M. Western (Roman Catholic Archdiocese).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

3. TO CONSIDER THE PREPARATION OF A NEW AGREED SYLLABUS FOR RELIGION, VALUES AND ETHICS

Ms Hayley Jones (EAS Curriculum Partner - SACs and RVE) welcomed Members to the Agreed Syllabus Conference and gave a presentation on the progress made to date in the preparation of a new Agreed Syllabus for Religion, Values and Ethics.

Members were advised of the requirement for local authorities to prepare and adopt a new Agreed Syllabus for RVE, arising from the implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales from September 2022, which will have an impact on the teaching of Religious Education in schools (which will become known as Religion, Values and Ethics, or RVE). Therefore, the purpose of the Agreed Syllabus Conference was for Members to examine statutory RVE guidance from Welsh Government that had been published on Hwb on 10th January 2022, and for Members to consider if they wished to adopt it as the new Agreed Syllabus for RVE for the local authority from September 2022.

It was noted that Welsh Government have been developing their new RVE guidance over the past two years through a process of co-construction that has been supported by practitioners, stakeholders and other experts. The purpose of the RVE guidance is to provide additional support on how RVE can be taught within the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience within schools under the new Curriculum for Wales.

Members were reminded that an Agreed Syllabus specifies what is recommended to be taught in Religious Education within the local authority, and that it should be reviewed no later than the expiry of five years from when first adopted or when it was last agreed that the current syllabus should be continued. Each local authority has a legal duty to convene an Agreed Syllabus conference, review the syllabus and recommend an appropriate syllabus to the local authority to adopt. Standing Conferences must take into account the Curriculum for Wales and RVE supporting guidance when recommending an Agreed Syllabus for adoption by the local authority. Once adopted, all maintained schools and settings are required to have regard to this Agreed Syllabus including schools of a religious character, in their design of the Agreed Syllabus element of their RVE provision.

Members noted the Summary of Legislation within the Curriculum for Wales pages on the Hwb website which contained the key elements and changes applicable to RVE. These included the change of name from Religious Education to Religion, Values and Ethics, and the fact that non-religious philosophical convictions have been considered in the new curriculum, together with some definitions of terms and how this affects different schools and settings. The legislation section gave advice on how the changes to the curriculum affect post-16 learners, and provided information around the legislative changes relating to the roles and legal responsibilities of Agreed Syllabus Conferences and Standing Advisory Councils. Members also noted the key change around the right to withdraw from RVE in the Curriculum for Wales from September 2022.

Standing Conference were then referred to the *Designing Your Curriculum* pages under the Humanities Area of the Hwb website, which contained the guidance applicable to Religion, Values and Ethics, and outlined how RVE should be implemented in school settings. Members noted key areas within the guidance, including the importance of RVE, the purpose of the guidance, the intended audience, and guidance around the preparation of an Agreed Syllabus. It was highlighted to Members that the guidance makes provision for local authorities to adopt or adapt this guidance as their Agreed Syllabus if they wish to do so.

The guidance provided information on how RVE fits in to the Curriculum for Wales, with links to the "Four Purposes" which are the key aims of a school's curriculum. The guidance recognises the need for RVE to be all-encompassing and fit into the wider Curriculum for

Wales and therefore it is of the upmost importance that the new Agreed Syllabus have regard to the Curriculum for Wales.

Members noted the section relating to Spiritual Development and how this affects teachers in the design of the curriculum and how teachers can integrate RVE into their curriculum within the Humanities Area of Learning. The guidance contained examples of how RVE contributes to the Four Purposes and gives practitioners a clear idea of what to include in RVE curriculum design. This includes the importance of asking philosophical questions, the importance of having informed viewpoints and making sure that religious and non-religious philosophical convictions are explored. The guidance also highlighted the importance of practitioners considering the Humanities statements of What Matters, which contribute towards learners realising the four purposes of the curriculum.

The guidance detailed RVE concepts which can be explored by schools and fit in with the curriculum design process. It was emphasised that these concepts are not meant to be prescriptive in nature and can be explored and fitted into school settings to suit pupil needs. These include spirituality, identity and culture, religious beliefs and practices, cynefin, diversity, and symbolism, and these high-level concepts then become the RVE lenses through which to view RVE concepts. There are also seven RVE sub-lenses which make up the RVE disciplinary lens, and will allow schools to devise appropriate creative ideas for content to ensure that they are delivering good quality RVE to pupils and ensure there is a depth and breadth of knowledge within the curriculum. Also integral to the guidance is Learner Progression and Learning Journeys in RVE, which illustrates how a learner may develop their understanding of concepts in RVE through the various interconnected sub lenses, and move from 3-16 education and show progress within RVE.

Ms Jones then summarised the key legislative changes across RVE for Members to consider as part of their Agreed Syllabus Conference. The legal position of Religious Education has not changed, and it will remain mandatory as part of the new curriculum under its new name of Religion, Values and Ethics. Although the name change does not signify a change in the subject, it does however reflect in law that RVE will have to be more pluralistic in nature and this must be reflected in any Agreed Syllabus. It has been recognised that not all people in Wales are religious, and therefore RVE moving forward must be taught in a way that includes both religious and non-religious convictions in schemes of learning and work.

It was explained that RVE will become mandatory for 3–16-year old learners, which means that from September 2022 the age range will be extended and 3-4 year olds will be expected to be taught RVE, which will have a huge impact on the teaching in nursery classes. It is of the upmost importance that that practitioners and schools are fully aware of this requirement and that pupils are provided with this entitlement. With regards to post-16 education within 6th form, the mandatory element of RVE is being removed, and RVE will be optional for these learners, although this does not prevent schools from providing RVE within their timetables if they so wish. However, if individual learners wish to access RVE in schools in cases where it is not being provided, then schools would legally have to provide RVE teaching, and so it is essential that schools clearly consider how they will provide for these pupils in order to avoid any conflict moving forward.

However, the most significant change relating to the RVE guidance is that from September 2022, there will no longer be a right of withdrawal from RVE for learners once the new Curriculum for Wales is implemented in their year group. This will be September 2022 for all learners up to and including year 6, as the Curriculum for Wales will be implemented by all primary schools and settings from this date. Thereafter the phased roll-out of the Curriculum will continue across the remaining year groups (September 2023 for years 7 and 8, September 2024 for year 9, September 2025 for year 10 and September 2026 for year 11) which will mean that the right to withdraw from RVE will be removed on a phased

basis between 2023-2026 for year 7 to year 11 learners. This will have a massive impact on some schools in the way that RVE is delivered, and it is vital that schools are aware of this to avoid any kind of legal challenge from parents, and to ensure that all practitioners involved in delivery of RVE are confident in doing so in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner.

Ms Jones highlighted the main legal requirements for RVE that should be reflected in the Agreed Syllabus. It was noted that The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 replaces the basic curriculum set out in the Education Act 2002 and now places a focus on the position in Wales (instead of Britain), stating that the syllabus must reflect the fact that religious traditions in Wales are mainly Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Wales. However, an additional requirement of the new Act is that the syllabus must also reflect the fact that a range of non-religious philosophical convictions are held in Wales.

It was noted that RVE will still be locally determined and that all 22 local authorities across Wales are currently going through the process to determine their new Agreed Syllabus in time for the rollout of the new Curriculum for Wales in September 2022. Therefore, the aim for Caerphilly is to put forward a locally agreed syllabus which is relevant to their schools and has regard to the new Curriculum, WG guidance on RVE and surrounding elements.

Members were asked to consider that when making a decision on the Agreed Syllabus, it should be noted that Welsh Government guidance not only provides all the legal guidance, but also sets up the expectations of what needs to be included and considered when planning for RVE in the Humanities Area of Learning within the new curriculum for Wales. It ensures a good depth and breadth of disciplinary knowledge is covered in RVE within this integrated curriculum and offers useful guidance and examples for teachers and for learners and outlines the progression steps around RVE. It was therefore explained that if the WG guidance was adopted or adapted as the new Agreed Syllabus for Caerphilly, then this would provide consistency and coherency, particularly if all the other local authorities choose to adopt this guidance, as per the process in 2008 when all authorities adopted the National Exemplar Framework as their syllabus.

Standing Conference were reminded that the Agreed Syllabus is not intended to be a scheme of work for schools, but rather a helpful guide and legal reference point to support schools with the design for their curriculum as appropriate for their learners, and to ensure that RVE is appropriately integrated into the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience. The approach for the Curriculum Framework is based on the principles of subsidiarity and as such each Agreed Syllabus should recognize and reflect the autonomy that each school has in realizing its own curriculum. So one of the intentions of this statutory RVE guidance is to provide the right balance between the central steering of the Curriculum for Wales framework and also the requirements of the locally determined RVE guidance Agreed Syllabus.

Therefore, the statutory RVE guidance has been written as a basis for local authorities to be able to create or use as their Agreed Syllabus as they so wish. Should Standing Conference be minded to adopt the RVE guidance as their Agreed Syllabus, Ms Jones recommended that the next steps would be to set up a working party for Members and Officers to develop a foreword to transform the guidance published by the Welsh Government into the Agreed Syllabus for Caerphilly. The finalised Agreed Syllabus would then be presented to a further meeting of Standing Conference for approval, before being rolled out to all schools before September 2022 to ensure they can implement this Agreed Syllabus.

Ms Jones explained that if Standing Conference were to adopt or adapt the RVE guidance as the Agreed Syllabus, then this would demonstrate compliance with any legislative

changes. The Wales Association of SACREs (WASACRE) are also developing and facilitating professional learning based on the new guidance for RVE and encompasses all the guidance and information that is on Hwb. Should a local authority deviate away from the WG guidance to a great extent and develop their own Agreed Syllabus in silo, then practitioners would need a separate professional learning offer and the local authority would then have to decide how this is managed. It is also important for there to be consistency across each local authority and their Agreed Syllabus in order to provide a consistent approach to the delivery of RVE across Wales. Therefore, adopting the WG guidance as Caerphilly's Agreed Syllabus would provide this level of consistency.

The Chair thanked Ms Jones for her informative presentation and invited questions from Members.

A Member sought clarification on the legal position regarding the compulsory nature of RVE moving forward, given that the parental right to withdraw their child from RVE teaching will be removed from September 2022 and so there will no longer be a right to opt out of RVE.

Mr Mike Wallbank (Senior Solicitor) explained that as Welsh Government have made RVE compulsory from September 2022 by removing the right to withdraw element, there will be no available element of discretion in this process. Therefore, the best course of action to minimise any issues and challenges would be for these changes to be clearly communicated to parents and schools before the changes come into effect. Given that the changes to RVE will result in a more pluralistic form of learning and encompass a wider range of beliefs, as well as including those who are non-religious, it is hoped that this broader spectrum of teaching will be sufficient to convince the majority of people that they do not wish to withdraw from the new RVE learning. It was acknowledged that the specifics of any challenges would not become clear until after the new curriculum is implemented and so all local authorities can do in the meantime is to mitigate any issues to the best of their ability.

Ms Jones added that the best way forward, in her teaching experience, would be for teachers and schools to be open with their curriculum planning and take a proactive approach by consulting with any parents/guardians whose children are currently withdrawn from RVE, in order to explain the nature of the changes around RVE and Humanities and address any potential concerns from parents.

The Members expressed some concerns that making RVE compulsory could increase resistance amongst parents and create a backlash against the subject. Ms Jones emphasised that as RVE will be integrated within the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience, this will naturally fit into the teaching within schools. Many schools will be undertaking an integrated approach where they have Humanities lessons and so it may be the case that pupils are discussing or exploring an item and then this will naturally produce ideas, concepts and conversations around RVE and lead to the exploration of these ideas. So in many cases, it will depend on the RVE approach undertaken by individual schools and how parents and learners respond to this approach.

Following consideration of the presentation and accompanying report from Ms Jones, Members were referred to the recommendations in the report, which asked Standing Conference to note the update on the progress made to date on the Agreed Syllabus in view of the recent WG guidance, and to consider and agree a way forward on the preparation of a new Agreed Syllabus for RVE.

Members were also referred to Section 1.6 of the report, which recommended that Standing Conference adopt the Welsh Government guidance as Caerphilly's Agreed Syllabus, with the inclusion of a foreword which will be relevant to the local authority in delivering RVE, for a working group to then be set up following the meeting for Members

and Officers to finalise the foreword, and for the finalised Agreed Syllabus to be presented to a further meeting of Standing Conference for approval.

It was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report, together with the inclusion of the recommended way forward in relation to the Agreed Syllabus (as set out in Section 1.6 of the Officer's report) be approved. By way of roll call (and in noting there were 7 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions), this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the progress made to date regarding the preparation of a new Agreed Syllabus for Religion, Values and Ethics, in view of the recent Curriculum for Wales framework guidance from Welsh Government, be noted;
- (ii) the Welsh Government framework guidance be adopted as the Agreed Syllabus for RVE, subject to the inclusion of a foreword which will be relevant to Caerphilly County Borough Council as the local authority in delivering RVE, that a working group be set up in order for Members and Officers to contribute to the foreword and finalise the content, and that the finalised Agreed Syllabus be presented to a further meeting of Standing Conference for approval.

Nominations were then sought from Members who wished to join the Working Group. Councillor John Taylor, Mrs Tara Lloyd, Miss Helen Bartley, Mrs Claire McLaughlan and Mr Michael Gray put their names forward. It was confirmed that the Clerk would also email all Standing Conference Members following the meeting to confirm the details of the Working Group, and determine if any further Members wished to put their name forward.

The Chair thanked all present for their attendance and participation and confirmed that Members would be contacted in due course regarding the date of the next Agreed Syllabus Conference.

The meeting closed at 3.36 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 28th March 2022.

CHAIR