

## **Religion, Values and Ethics Consultation: Guidance for Clergy**

On 5<sup>th</sup> May 2020, Welsh Government launched their consultation on “Legislative Proposals for Religion, Values, and Ethics”. The consultation closes on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> July.

A link to the consultation can be found at

<https://gov.wales/legislative-proposals-religion-values-and-ethics>

The notes, which follow, together with a suggested prompt sheet for the completion of the consultation document, outline the position of the Church in Wales as agreed by the Bench of Bishops in June 2020.

We appreciate that this is an exceptionally busy time for clergy, however, your response to this consultation is important for the continued work of our Church schools and the Religious Education that they offer.

If you require any further information or assistance then please contact your Diocesan Director of Education.

### **Observations to note:**

- The questions appear to be simplistic, which hides the complexities of the real issues involved.
- There is a concern that Welsh Government counts the numbers of responses rather than the significance of the organisation submitting the response, so it is important that there are as many responses as possible, which reflect the views of the Church in Wales.
- Ticking the appropriate boxes is important!

**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?

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

- We agree that RVE should encompass both religious and non-religious beliefs.
- We **do not** agree with the definition of philosophical convictions as defined by the ECHR.
- The consultation document references Humanism and Atheism, but the list of possible philosophical convictions referenced in the Appendix risks diluting the subject.
- The use of Atheism in this context is flawed because beyond the assertion that some people do not believe in God, the reasons for this are numerous and varied, with no connection or similarity.
- **The Church in Wales believes that good religious education should be pluralistic in the sense that it should develop a deep respect for all faiths and none.**
- An exclusively secular approach to pluralism in RVE would not prepare children and young people to become ethically informed citizens of Wales and the world, which is deeply multifaith in character.

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

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

- It is not possible to agree with this question, given the lack of clarity with crucial aspects of the wording. The term “must have regard to statutory guidance” requires further definition. It is unclear whether the consultation document is referring to the supporting framework or Curriculum for Wales guidance.

- The supporting framework has yet to be published therefore it is impossible to say whether this will strengthen or weaken the subject.

**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?

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

- It is not possible to agree with this question, given the lack of clarity of the wording.
- The issues listed in Question 2 about *have regard* also apply to this question. Unless the intention is for schools to have due regard, then this proposal constitutes a weakening of the current position where schools must teach “in accordance with” the locally Agreed Syllabus.
- This proposal refers to ‘an’ agreed syllabus. The wording should reference ‘the’ locally agreed syllabus otherwise schools may have the right to follow any agreed syllabus even if it is one from a different Local Authority.
- Given that there are 22 SACREs, each with an ASC, how much more local does this need to be?

**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?

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

- There should be equality of opportunity for all parents. This point is inextricably linked to Question 6. If parents are to have the “absolute” right to request the locally Agreed Syllabus in a VA school, then parents should be able to request provision of RVE in line with the tenets of a particular faith in schools without a religious character, whether they are a primary school or a secondary school.
- Alternatively, if this right is to be removed in schools without a religious character, then there should be no absolute right to request the locally Agreed Syllabus in VA schools.

- This may be seen as an erosion of their rights by members of certain faith groups. There is a lack of understanding of what religion means to many people. If the parental right to request the Agreed Syllabus in VA schools is to be implemented, then the current parental right to request provision of RE in line with the tenets of a particular faith should also be retained and indeed extended to include primary schools.

**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**?

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

- This does not represent a significant change from the current situation.
- The Church in Wales welcomes the proposal that voluntary-controlled schools with a religious character are able to 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.

**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?

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

- This is a significant issue for Church in Wales schools and has the potential to put VA schools in breach of their trust deeds, because they would be having to offer two curricula for religious education one of which might conflict with the tenets of the Church in Wales.
- The introduction of the *absolute right* of parents to request the Agreed Syllabus rather than the current qualified right that they have now is at odds with the removal of parents’ rights to request an alternative RE as referenced in Question 4 above. This raises equality issues in the treatment of Church in Wales schools as, on the grounds of religion, it is setting VA schools very clearly apart from all other schools, where no such absolute right exists.
- This approach is likely to make the subject a cause of division rather than a vehicle to develop empathy and tolerance.

**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**

The Religion, Values and Ethics framework will be available in both the Welsh and English language, which should have a positive impact on the Welsh language.

**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**

Included in 7 above.

**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.

- Concern that the overwhelming assumption of the consultation document is that religious education in VA schools is not pluralistic, yet no evidence has been put forward to support this.
- There is no trust in voluntary aided schools to offer a pluralistic curriculum for religious education. However, it is just as likely that confessional religious education could be taught by a non-specialist teacher in any classroom in any school without a religious character.
- The consultation appears to be an over-complicated solution to the removal of the right to withdraw.
- If the intention of the proposed changes is to avoid legal challenge, it is unlikely to achieve this without greater clarification of philosophical convictions .

