



## Notes to accompany the Church in Wales Religion Values Ethics Consultation

Religion Values and Ethics (RVE) will be the new name for Religious Education in the Welsh Curriculum 2022

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2020-05/consultation-document-curriculumfor-wales-religion-values-and-ethics.pdf>

### ***The consultation covers:***

- The scope of RVE – (must reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain; (b) must also reflect the fact that a range of non-religious philosophical convictions are held in Great Britain)
- The arrangements for Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs) and Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs) - Currently, each Local Authority is required to convene an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) if any representative group on its Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education requests it to do so. The ASC then determines the content of the agreed syllabus or agreed syllabi for RE to be taught in schools maintained by that local authority.
- The expectations for different types of school – Church in Wales schools include: Voluntary Aided schools, Voluntary Controlled schools and some foundation schools. The consultation also covers Local Authority schools (County Primary CP)

### ***1. The scope of Religious Education***

What are philosophical convictions in this context? –

The Consultation Paper paragraph 16 states “it will make it clearer that the philosophical convictions and beliefs that need to be reflected are only those that are caught from time to time by Convention Rights case law and so have a certain level of seriousness, cogency, cohesion and importance under the Human Rights Act 1998”.

A few points to consider here:

Convictions should be chosen on the aims and purposes of teaching and learning of RE – not the subjective nature of case laws. (E.g veganism protected by one tribunal whilst vegetarianism was not).

‘The provision only ensures a ‘right to respect for those convictions’ and not ‘an absolute right to have children educated in accordance with parents’ ‘philosophical convictions’. 104

Quote from - The European Convention on Human rights: A Commentary-by W.A Schabas 2015

So as there are many different philosophical convictions how do you define what should/ should not be taught?

The Consultation Paper states that “beliefs such as humanism or atheism” will be included but that it will be for the Agreed Syllabus Conferences “to determine what should be included in the agreed syllabus” and that guidance will be provided. Currently this guidance is not yet available, NB: the detail within this guidance will be very important – yet it is not available for comment in this consultation?

## ***2. The arrangements for Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs) and Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs)***

Paragraph 17 of the consultation document states: ‘Changes will also be made to the provisions dealing with the membership of SACRES and ASCs to create new groups to represent those who hold philosophical convictions of that kind’.

NB: there are no explicit questions asking for opinion on the make-up of SACRE & ASC in the consultation despite this being a proposed change in legislation.

Traditionally, religious education has been a local matter for the local authority, the Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs) and the Agreed Syllabus Conference. This would work going forward - as the focus in the Curriculum for Wales 2022 is on the context of the school, with each school designing and implementing a unique curriculum that begins with their ‘cynefin’ locality. However, by making RVE a mandatory part of the Curriculum for Wales and developing guidance and policy on this, power moves to the Welsh Government away from the local level. So diminishes the autonomy previously allowed at a local level.

These proposed changes work against the philosophy of the curriculum 2022 rather than with it. Currently a SACRE is made up of representatives of the Local Authority, the Church in Wales, Association of Teachers and representatives of other faith or other Christian groups, and also other interested non-religious groups. The duties of the SACRE include ratifying the Locally Agreed Syllabus – written by the Agreed Syllabus Conference.

See Paragraph 19 ‘Guidance in relation to agreed syllabi 19. We propose making new provision requiring the local authority, SACRE and ASC to have regard to guidance issued by the Welsh Ministers in relation to the curriculum in developing and adopting an agreed syllabus.

## ***3. The expectations for different types of school***

The “Pluralistic Requirement” (paragraph 14 of the consultation document ) and the statement that schools are to “have regard to an agreed syllabus rather than to teach in accordance with it” (paragraph 20) will impact greatly on our Church schools.

Both VA and VC schools will be required “to design their curriculum so that it provides for two alternatives”.

These two alternatives are:

“In voluntary controlled schools, the default will be for “RVE which has been designed having regard to an agreed syllabus but, as now, RVE in line with the trust deeds or tenets of the faith must be provided where a parent requests it”.

In voluntary aided schools, it will be the reverse: “the default for these schools, as now, will be for learners to receive RVE in line with the trust deeds or tenets of the faith of the school. However, where a parent requests RVE in accordance with an agreed syllabus, it must be provided.

This means, all church schools will need to provide the option of both pluralistic RVE and denominational RVE with a parental right to move from whichever is the default in that particular school to the other. Having to plan for two types of RVE provision will have enormous implications for schools. It conflicts with the philosophy of the Curriculum 2022 and could have huge negative impact on the status of our Church schools.

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