

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) held at Remote Meeting on Friday, 19th June, 2020 at 10.00 am

PRESENT:

COUNTY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES:

County Councillor R. John (Chair)
County Councillor T. Thomas

FAITH REPRESENTATIVES:

Revd. Peter Baines
Mrs. S. Gooding
Major N. Pryor
Dr. L. Brown
Mr. A. Szwagrzak
Mrs S. Cave
Dr. A. Daly

TEACHER REPRESENTATIVES:

Mrs. K. Wilding

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Paula Webber	Temporary RE Adviser

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors P.Pavia and A. Webb, Mrs M. Millington, Mrs S. Hamer and Ngakpa Namgyal Chatral.

1. To discuss a consultation response to the proposed legislative changes to the Curriculum for Wales: Religion, Values and Ethics

Members were grateful for the notes provided by Paula Webber in preparation for completion of the consultation response in respect of Curriculum for Wales: Religion, values and ethics. It was agreed that Paula would draft a response based on the notes she had circulated prior to the meeting and to add the points raised in discussion today. The draft response would be considered at the ordinary meeting on 26th June 2020.

It was considered important to complete one box for each question (Agree, Disagree or Neither Agree nor Disagree) to ensure that views are counted especially in summarised analysis in case narrative is disregarded.

The following views and comments were voiced plus comments (relating to Q1, Q2 and Q9) from a teacher representative, unable to attend the meeting, were read out:

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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?*

- Consultation document unclear in terms of philosophical convictions - not a straightforward question.
- Professional learning and guidance would be essential
- Concern expressed about the change of name to RVE contrary to opinions expressed by consultees.
- The requirement for religious and non-religious teaching to be on an equal basis would appear to be contrary to the Education Act 1996, Section 375 (3). Concern about diluting the time spent on religious education. A differing point was that other world views must be included, as some children may have no faith. Agreement that religious education should be pluralistic but without clear definition could go in all directions and focus may be lost. It was questioned what “encompassed” means in this context.
- The 23 views listed should not necessarily have an equal footing with major religions.
- Concern that this point confuses the make –up of SACREs with the content of RE.

Following a vote, there was a majority decision to “Disagree” until the terms of the consultation are better defined.

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

- Parameters of the question are unclear e.g. whether referring to statutory curriculum guidance or non-statutory RE framework. More definition is required.
- If SACREs only have regard for curriculum guidance without the detail in the RE framework, skills and content could be lost.
- It was not agreed that the agreed syllabus conferences must have regard to statutory guidance. This should be a locally agreed syllabus referring to non-statutory guidance to take into account the views of parents, teachers, governors and schools in the local context and hence less prescriptive.
- To agree, consultees should have sight of the draft Bill, statutory guidance and RE framework. The question would have to be better defined. Members felt unprepared to answer the question accordingly.
- Generally, would not expect the detail of the subject to be included in statutory guidance.

It was agreed, by consensus, to “Disagree” based on the grounds expressed.

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?***

- Poorly constructed question (e.g. “an” or “the” agreed syllabus) that can be misconstrued
- Should read locally agreed syllabus otherwise schools (especially those without religious character) would be able to follow any agreed syllabus. Explanation

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needed of how the agreed syllabus can be moved away from, who would monitor this aspect and what would be acceptable reasons for not following.

- Confusing language using both “must be required” and “have regard to”. Concern over implications for SACRE and assumptions being made

By consensus, the decision was made to “Disagree”

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?*

- Disagree – important for schools to respect the child and family’s cultural religious and racial background and allow the current freedom of thought conscience and religion and to maintain respect for faith communities. This could be contrary to the 1998 Human Rights Act article 2 protocol 1.
- Inconsistencies in approach to have parental rights in relation to faith schools but not in non-religious, maintained schools.
- Opinion that the Minister needs to revisit the removal of exemption from RE in view of case law Papageorgiou and Others v. Greece. In Monmouthshire, there is no secondary faith school consequently no freedom of choice.
- Concern that more pupils could be home schooled
- Not good to have a national curriculum with a many opportunities for opt outs.

On being put to the vote, it was unanimously agreed to “Disagree”

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?*

- The Church in Wales is investigating if the change in the name from RE to RVE has an impact on the trust deeds for schools as trust deeds state RE. Trust deeds must be complied with.
- Schools should be allowed to teach in accordance with the tenets of the faith. This should not be “if requested by carers and parents” that could result in whole school opt out if one parent makes a request. Requests should be allowed from the diocese, school, parents (for their own child) and governors

By consensus it was decided to “Agree” subject to the points raised above

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?*

- Concern that there is an assumption that schools with a religious character are indoctrinating pupils. There is no evidence to support this view.
- There was a perception of conflict with Q4 (proposal to remove the rights of parents in a non-religious school to request RVE in line with the tenets of a particular faith) and forceful language that faith schools forceful must teach the agreed syllabus if a parent asks for it.
- Should state locally agreed syllabus
- Inference of a higher level of regard required to agreed syllabus not a locally agreed syllabus for a VA faith schools (maintained schools “have regard to” rather than “in accordance with”).

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- VA schools teach pluralism in terms of broader faith and values; the four purposes “informed citizens of the world”. It would be difficult to deliver two syllabi in VA schools.
- View expressed that VA schools should not be forced into teaching other syllabi. Significant issue for VA schools as this proposal conflicts with trust deeds
- If two syllabi are required there would be a detrimental effect on teacher workload and the need for professional learning. In practical terms, it would be difficult to make this work.

By consensus, there was strong “Disagreement” with this proposal

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?

- Concern was expressed that the word “not” was omitted from the translation.
- Accurate translation is needed
- Very important that Welsh Language is treated in an equitable and proper fashion plus professional learning.
- Support materials must only be issued when available in English and Welsh medium.

Consensus to “Agree”

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.

Comments as for Question 7

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.

- Strong concern about the overwhelming assumption that RE in VA schools is not pluralistic. There is no evidence to support this.
- The consultation exercise has been issued at the wrong time before the availability of the draft Bill, statutory curriculum guidance and draft RE framework.

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- Varying views were expressed on the change of name to RVE with agreement that it did not reflect the views in the previous consultation. It was questioned if there was direct consultation on the decided change of name.
- If there are proposals to review the composition of SACREs, there should be a full consultation before any changes are made. The purpose of SACREs should be confirmed plus where the responsibility lies to add or diminish membership and purpose. It is important that the right information is available to make the right decisions. Rheinallt Thomas' message was received.
- There was a view that the consultation document ignores the role of SACREs and locally agreed syllabi

2. To confirm the date of the next meeting as Friday 26th June 2020 at 10.00am (Remote attendance by Microsoft Teams)

The meeting ended at 12.20 pm