

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) held at Remote Meeting on Wednesday, 24th February, 2021 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
Dr. L. Brown
Mr. A. Szwagrzak
Mrs S. Cave
Revd. J. Greaves

TEACHER REPRESENTATIVES:

Mr. N. Jenkins
Mrs M. Millington

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Sharon Randall-Smith	Head of Achievement and Attainment
Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Paula Webber	RE Adviser (EAS)

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors P.Pavia and A. Webb

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair extended a warm welcome to Revd. J Greaves who joins SACRE representing the Free Church Council (Baptist Church) to replace Revd. P. Baines who retires as a Minister at Easter. Revd Baines was thanked for being a member of SACRE and his contribution, and was wished well for the future.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on Friday, 13th November, 2020 and matters arising

The minutes of the last meeting were confirmed as a true record.

It was confirmed that the annual report was amended and sent off as required.

It was requested that all vacancies are recorded on the Agenda.

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3. Public open forum

No members of the public were in attendance.

4. SACRE Membership update

It was confirmed that the following vacancies exist:

County Council Representation:

2 County Councillor Vacancies – The Conservative and Liberal Democrat Group Leaders have been advised. The Chair will follow up these requests.

Faith Representation:

1 Church in Wales Vacancy – to replace Dr. A Daly – The Church in Wales will advise of a replacement in due course.

1 Hindu Vacancy

1 Jewish Vacancy

1 Muslim Vacancy

1 Sikh Vacancy

Teacher Representation:

1 Teacher Vacancy to replace Andrew Jones

1 potential v-acancy to replace Karen Christofi

2 Co-Opted Vacancies

5. Update from the EAS RE Adviser:

The RE Adviser provided an update supported by a PowerPoint presentation as follows:

- Curriculum for Wales Bill: The Children and Young People Education Committee, in completing Stage 2 made a few amendments e.g. replacing “Great Britain” with “Wales”. Also included is the requirement to reflect that there is a range of non-religious philosophical convictions held in Wales. With regard to membership, it was clarified that non-religious representatives would sit within Committee A if appointed to SACRE. Local authorities are required to have regard to any guidance given by Welsh Ministers when they are appointing persons to a representative group. Local authorities have to take account of the strength of religion and belief in its area when making appointments to Group A. Stage 3, discussion at the Senedd, is on 2nd March 2021 and will be broadcast on Senedd TV. The framework for RVE is in the process of being edited.

A Member asked if there was any amendment to reflect principle religions and views. It was explained that it is to take account of principle religions (including non religious philosophical convictions) without specifically listing them.

- EAS: Digital and blended learning resources are available on the EAS website for RVE. Professional Learning and Humanities Learning Network Schools meetings are continuing successfully. The networking opportunities and sharing of resources are enhanced through holding meetings remotely. Primary schools are seeking professional learning and a playlist of materials is in development. This will be available to all schools. Bespoke support is also available as required. Resources for distance learning on Hwb are promised but are not yet available.

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- GCSEs: These continue to be disrupted and this year will be awarded on a model of centre determined grade based on amended past papers. There will be no examinations. Blended Learning resources are also available from WJEC.
- Estyn: Members were encouraged to use the links in the presentation noting there were no examinations last year and therefore the inability of SACRE to carry out monitoring currently.

A Member asked when SACREs will be consulted on the RVE framework, including the framework for faith schools. It is believed that there are plans to consult on the frameworks but no further details are available.

6. To respond to Qualifications Wales consultation 'Qualified for the future'

Qualifications Wales (QW) is consulting on qualifications for the new curriculum. It proposes to shape the range of qualifications for Humanities:

- To review and reform GCSEs in Business, Geography, History and Religious Studies;
- If feasible, to create a new GCSE in Social Studies; and
- If feasible, to create an integrated GCSE in Humanities.

The RE Adviser highlighted some possible points for discussion:

- Should separate qualifications be available for all five subjects;
- The impact of an integrated GCSE in Humanities on the mandatory requirement to teach Religious Education (RE) at 14-16, and the full course. Religious Education is mandatory until age 16;
- The need for qualifications to be accessible to all learners and to be rewarded for two years compulsory study of RE;
- Should the RE GCSE short course continue;
- If enacted the Curriculum and Assessment Bill would require most publicly funded schools to follow a common agreed syllabus. Would this require amendment to locally agreed syllabi;
- Whilst allowing some publicly funded schools with a religious character to follow a denominational syllabus, would any reformed qualification, intended to support the RVE element of the curriculum for Wales, be flexible enough to support different local approaches; and
- QW has not mentioned consultation with SACREs and local authority.

The questions are:

1. How far do you agree or disagree with our proposals to review and reform GCSEs in Business, Geography, History and Religious Studies?
2. How far do you agree or disagree with our proposal to create a new GCSE in Social Studies, if feasible?
3. How far do you agree or disagree with our proposal to create for a new integrated GCSE Humanities qualification, if feasible?

SACRE Members contributed views as follows:

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- QW admits the combined Humanities qualification is not seem as feasible. There is little support in schools from e.g. History and Geography departments;
- Concern that the RE content of integrated Humanities would be diluted;
- Concern about use of non-specialist teachers to teach the RE element. Adding Social Studies adds to this concern;
- Important to retain the RE GCSE and short course content to cover the agreed syllabus; a qualification is important at the end of a course of study;
- Humanities subjects should be separate. It will be too difficult for students who wish to study further to feel prepared and confident to embark on an A Level course in a subject not studied at GCSE;
- Concern that the content of all component subjects would be diluted;
- Estyn studies show good take up of RE in Wales and good results;
- Both State and Faith schools should have the option to be able to do GCSE if they want according to a denominational approach. In a state school it would be helpful if a student wanted to do a faith school type of GCSE, they should have this option as opposed to the standard GCSE offered in state schools;
- Many schools are developing a Humanities course for younger students in years 7 and 8. More specific skills are required to teach GCSE;
- Regarding the RE short course, there is concern about the NCFE Equality and Diversity qualification (popular in schools) that could be seen as being offered in place of RE;
- An integrated Humanities GCSE would undermine all the component subjects providing insufficient depth as required by the age of 16 and does not prepare students for A Level;
- The five subjects should get a qualification;
- All pupils should study a mandatory short course;
- Applications to study a degree in RE or Theology in English, Scottish and Welsh universities may require a RE GCSE, same for further study of the other component subjects. Humanities would not be sufficient and Welsh students must have the opportunity to be competitive in Wales and the rest of the UK;
- Could a GCSE exam paper have more options to cover denominational options in faith schools, or to allow student denominational choice in other state schools;
- Humanities integrated GCSE should be rejected in favour of retaining the RE GCSE and implement a RE short course that is thematic and covers the agreed syllabus;
- If schools have Humanities in KS3, it is difficult to move to discrete subjects in KS4;
- Providing the option of short courses can potentially spark interest in the full course by students. Having good exam classes allows KS3 students see older students progressing. RE is a good basis for many careers;
- The offer of a Humanities GCSE should be in addition to separate subjects;
- Concern was expressed about the RE element being taught by non-specialist teachers. Would this devalue the qualification and affect university applications;
- Heads want results in areas of specialism to measure departmental performance; and
- SACRE prefers the name to be Religious Studies. Values and ethics should be a contributory part of all subject in the curriculum.

It was agreed that the RE Adviser would prepare a draft response and circulate it to the group for comments.

7. WASACRE update and to note dates of future WASACRE meetings and confirm representation:

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The next WASACRE meeting will be held on 23rd March 2021 (hosted by Caerphilly County Borough Council SACRE). Three representatives may attend. Dr. L. Brown, Mrs S. Cave and CC T. Thomas expressed an interest.

WASACRE has conducted a large survey of teaching staff that has highlighted the need for a national approach for professional learning for RVE. A paper will be submitted to Welsh Government.

It is hoped to launch the new WASACRE website at the 23rd March meeting.

Members were encouraged to follow WASACRE on Twitter and Facebook.

8. To confirm the date of the next SACRE meeting as Wednesday 19th May 2021 at 10.00am

The date of the next meeting was noted. It was agreed that the remote format of the meeting would continue with a view to saving travelling time and staff cover costs.

It was also agreed to hold the occasional physical face-to-face meeting, possibly annually. The hybrid option of having some people joining a face-to-face meeting remotely was also considered.

The meeting ended at 11.25 am