

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Agreed Syllabus Conference held
at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Monday, 28th March, 2022 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: COUNTY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES:

County Councillor P. Pavia (Chair)
County Councillor M. Powell
County Councillor L. Brown

FAITH REPRESENTATIVES:

Lt. N. Pryor
Mrs S. Gooding
Mrs S. Cave

TEACHER REPRESENTATIVES:

Mrs S. Hamer
Mrs. C. Rhodes
Mrs. K. Wilding

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Hayley Jones	Curriculum Partner (SACs and RVE)
Geraint Edwards	Solicitor

APOLOGIES:

Sharon Randall-Smith, Mrs. B. Quinlan, Neil Jenkins and County Councillor T.Thomas

1. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

2. Introduction: Agreed Syllabus Conference

The RVE Adviser and the Legal representative introduced the Agreed Syllabus Conference and its legal framework. It was explained that each representative group would be considering the document in separate breakout groups and then re-joining to provide feedback on proposed amendments.

The new Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 came into force 29th April 2021 and established the Curriculum for Wales.

The new section 375A of the 1996 Education Act requires local authorities to adopt a RVE syllabus. The new Act amends schedule 31 of the 1996 Act to place a duty on the local authority to convene an Agreed Syllabus Conference to prepare the syllabus, specifying its constitution and requiring it to unanimously recommend the syllabus for adoption by the local authority. The Welsh Government can intervene if there is no unanimity.

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One notable change is that there is no right to withdraw from RVE.

Some concerns about errors in the legal summary were raised. It was commented that there is no change to the syllabus containing Christianity as the main tradition and the other principal religions in Wales. The range incorrectly referred to is in the context of non-religious philosophical convictions. Post 16 provisions are correct.

It was suggested that pro-life and manmade climate change should be added to the examples of non-religious philosophical convictions.

A WASACRE statement covered the following points:

- It is important to keep any amendments to the curriculum for Wales guidance to a minimum.
- All guidance including RVE guidance is subject to change.
- Embedded links to parts of the Curriculum for Wales framework on Hwb make the navigation of the RVE guidance interactive and more useful for practitioners. Therefore, replacing or replicating the text and format in hard copy (rewording as our new agreed syllabus) would diminish the effectiveness of its purpose.”
- Caution was also advised about making amendments to the guidance and the legislative summary to avoid confusion. Any issues or local instructions would be better placed at the beginning of the agreed syllabus.
- The legal summary has been written by Welsh Government Legal Services and not by Civil Servants or the teams involved in drafting the RVE guidance. It has been written carefully and specifically by the legal services to reflect the openness of the law and the spirit of the curriculum for Wales.
- All Agreed Syllabus Conferences must have regard to the Curriculum for Wales framework including the legal summaries when they prepare their locally agreed syllabus. It is important that the legislative summary for RVE is not changed to reflect local concerns or opinions.

Concern was expressed that if Monmouthshire doesn't take account of the errors then our statutory obligations in relation to the contents of the agreed syllabus will not be met. If the legal summary is unchanged, there is the possibility of Judicial review.

The Legal representative stated that guidance issued by Welsh Government doesn't take precedence over the legislation. If there is conflict between guidance (including statutory guidance) and what is written in the Act or regulations, the act or legislation takes precedence.

Whilst the agreed syllabus must be reviewed in five years, it can be reviewed earlier if required.

It was confirmed that the Church in Wales and Catholic schools will be publishing additional guidance.

3. Group (Breakout Room) Workshops: Agreed Syllabus (draft attached) (Approx. 1 hour)

Faith representatives, Teacher representatives and LA representatives moved to breakout rooms to privately consider the draft agreed syllabus document before re-joining the main meeting to provide feedback.

4. Short Break

5. Feedback from Group discussions

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Faith Group summarised feedback

- What does “must have regard” mean for practitioners? Should there be an explanation or will practitioners know what this means.
- Cynefin – is more definition required?
- Suggested to add “in Wales, [the UK] and the wider world” wherever mentioned. Consensus that UK should be added.
- **Develop secure values and establish their ethical beliefs and spirituality** through the exploration of religion and non-religious philosophical convictions on a range of issues, which can in turn enable [help] them to form positive relationships based upon trust and mutual respect. Consensus to maintain “enable”
- “In addition, the guidance may also be useful to practitioners, regional consortia, awarding bodies, Estyn, teacher unions, religious organisations, non-religious organisations, parents and carers and other bodies in Wales with an interest in RVE.”
Agreed
- *The reference to philosophical convictions is to philosophical convictions within the meaning of Article 2 of the First Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights;* Is some clarification needed? Agreed the section to be reworded with more clarity whilst keeping it manageable for teachers.
- Some duplication was identified.
- How are principal religions defined? Teachers need to know.
Chair to work with RE Adviser to reword section
- misspelling of Cynefin on p.8
- What is the complaints procedure? How do SACs consider complaints especially as there is no legal power to enforce change. Training would be required.

Teaching Group summarised feedback:

- In terms of context the three representatives present today are all from primary phase, all from Magor/Undy with two from VA schools that follow a faith syllabus - not necessarily balanced.
- Light touch approach to review as teachers are used to reading similar guidance
- What is the difference between to RVE as mandatory and all the other subjects that must be taught? Teachers regard all subjects as mandatory. When learners choose options at secondary, subjects aren't required by law.
- Re: p.6 Audience - Who should have regard to the curriculum” should there be a statement that faith schools have their own syllabus to follow. This might not be well –

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known. VA schools have their own syllabus and VC schools have had the option to choose the locally agreed syllabus or a faith syllabus. Clarification might be needed.

- P.8 sentence “**This will require specialists to teach RVE and specialists to have input in designing RVE within the humanities**” – is that statement relevant to the previous sentence (post 16). In Primary schools, teachers are multi-disciplinary, this statement could be interpreted as specialists are required in primary? If it is the case, what is the definition of specialist.

LA Group summarised feedback:

- Chair to add Foreword
- P.4 where ‘religion’ is referred to it should be noted that we refer to Christianity and other principal religions and where the term “non-religious” is used, we refer to “non-religious philosophical convictions”. Agreed
- Good discussion on the added bullet points - need to refine the two points referring to Article 2 of the First Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights and Principal Religions. Chair and RE Adviser to reword.
- The following point should be made bold:

In accordance with the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 the Agreed Syllabus reflects that:

- **the religious traditions in Wales are in the main Christian while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Wales;**
- **the fact that a range of non-religious philosophical convictions are held in Wales;**
- To note: Schools should take note that Christianity and other principal religions remains the legal requirement in the agreed syllabus under the Education Act 1996 and there is no necessity for a consideration of European Case Law, ~~or different denominations or types of belief within the same religion.~~ Agreed
- Collective worship: Collective Worship is distinctive from, and additional to, curriculum time given to RVE. Collective worship sits outside the curriculum and has its own legal standing and requirements and must be wholly of mainly of a broadly Christian character. Parents may still request that their children are withdrawn from collective worship if they wish.

Next Steps:

- RE Adviser to amend and refine the document. Send out a further document with time to make more amendments. Opportunity for members not here today to make comments.

The Chair thanked everyone for their involvement.

6. Date of next meeting: 26th April 2022

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The meeting ended at 1.30 pm