

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Standing Advisory Council for Religion, Values and Ethics (SAC) held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK on Wednesday, 19th March, 2025 at 3.00 pm

PRESENT: FAITH AND BELIEF REPRESENTATIVES
Rev. J. Greaves

COUNTY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES
County Councillor Martyn Groucutt (Chair)
County Councillor Louise Brown
County Councillor Rachel Buckler
County Councillor John Crook
County Councillor Paul Pavia
County Councillor Angela Sandles

TEACHER REPRESENTATIVES
Charlotte Rhodes

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

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

APOLOGIES:

Sue Cave, Suzanne Gooding and Sharon Randall-Smith

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. To note the record of the previous meeting held on 11th September 2024

The record of the last meeting was confirmed as an accurate record subject to the removal of duplicated names on the list of those present.

Matters arising

- i) EAS slides: At the previous meeting, comments and amendments were invited. CC Brown had sent some comments but had not received feedback to date. The RVE Adviser confirmed that the slides will be amended to reflect the comments received for both the general set and the specific set for Monmouthshire schools. It was agreed that the amended draft slides will be circulated to SAC and that they will be reviewed by the Solicitor.

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4. Membership Update

It was reported that there are vacancies as follows:

Church in Wales
Roman Catholic Church
Free Church (2)
Jewish Faith
Hindu Faith
Buddist Faith
Sikh Faith
Non-religious philosophical conviction
Teacher representatives (6)

Unfortunately, the Head of Achievement and Extended Services was unable to attend the meeting but had provided a brief update that the SAC Membership report to Council has been through Business Cabinet and will be going to the next available full Council. The report includes nominees representing the Free Church Council, Non-Religious Philosophical Conviction and Teachers.

A Member commented that some people who have expressed an interest in joining SAC have, unsatisfactorily, had to wait a very long time to be appointed.

It was agreed that having more Members approved will assist with the future quorum of meetings.

Noting that there is a SAC Recruitment Panel following today's meeting to consider a representative of the Roman Catholic Church, it was urged that the nomination (if approved) could be added to the report.

5. To receive an update from the EAS RE Adviser including:

6. EAS Professional Learning

The RVE Adviser reported on the wide range of professional learning that had taken place over the last term, such as:

- Teaching in RVE: This has consisted of two sessions and has been open to all schools. A few Monmouthshire primary schools attended (including some faith schools).
- Pedagogy: This course looked at different approaches to the new curriculum and considered planning for progression within it. From the course, a RVE group has been established. The first session with primary school teachers takes place in the summer term and will consider what progression looks like. Trellech Primary School and another school have conducted some mini- projects and it is hoped they will provide feedback to show examples of progression. Topics include Christmas, Easter and it is planned to move on to bigger concepts such as forgiveness etc.
- The final Philosophy for Children session has been completed. Many schools have undertaken this training, and it will be interesting to see how it translates to the classroom.
- Work has started on Godly Play from a faith-based approach. In common with Philosophy for Children this focuses on asking the big questions with faith stories of parable as opposed to a generic discussion.

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- There has been some training on updates in RVE for head teachers and briefings for collective worship which have been well attended.
- There has been general network meetings and a start will be made to look at literacy within RVE in the summer term.

7. WJEC Qualifications

The RVE Adviser explained that the new GCSE specification has been published in its entirety by the WJEC. Available on its website, it includes consultation findings, option evening materials to help schools with promotion, sample assessment materials (SAMs) and guidance for teachers. The new specification is for delivery from September 2025.

There are changes to the way questions are asked with e.g. two non-examined elements. The WJEC asserts that the content is similar to the legacy curriculum but there is no teaching about war.

Twelve national Professional Learning events have been held to promote the new GCSE and to provide staff training. There will be further training in the summer term.

Within the specification, schools typically choose Christianity and one other religion. Caldicot Comprehensive School has chosen Christianity and Judaism. Monmouth and King Henry VIII Comprehensive Schools have chosen Christianity and Hinduism. Chepstow School does not offer GCSE RVE.

Schools studying similar choices will work together to share resources.

Regarding assessment, exams will last an hour and 15 minutes and there are two exams. The RVE Adviser provided examples of the range and types of questions. These increase in complexity and the number of marks available. She explained about the non-examined elements.

A SAC Member commented that teachers have raised concerns that they wanted to continue with the legacy GCSE at the same time, and training. It was agreed that SAC needs to think about pressures on teachers in the transition period, especially in view of the small numbers of RVE specialists. Schools, aided by the EAS, across the region and in Wales will be encouraged to network to create and share resources and to discuss and support each other on the non-examined assessment.

Referring to the change in content and focus, a SAC Member asked if the expansion of non-religious perspectives has been flagged as a concern by teachers e.g. human rights issues, LGBTQ plus rights, gender equality, refugee rights etc, also new topics on relationships and family ethics. It was confirmed that no teachers have come forward with any specific concerns yet. Historically, these subjects have always been taught. The information has only been published for a few weeks so teachers will need time to digest the contents and to consider its delivery. It would be useful to revisit the content and delivery at the next meeting.

In response to a question, the RVE Adviser confirmed that the new specification will definitely not be postponed, and the expectation is that teaching will begin in September 2025. The Chair agreed to raise a question at his next meeting with WJEC.

8. Bangor University: Report on the teaching provision of Religion, Values and Ethics in Schools in Wales (April 2024)

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The RVE Adviser explained that Bangor University had produced a report on Teaching RVE in schools in Wales. The report identified some positives such as making RVE mandatory between ages 3-16 and the integration of RVE into the Humanities area of learning and experience providing the opportunity to connect RVE with e.g. History and Geography.

The report also raised concerns such as compliance issues over schools not meeting the minimum legal requirements for RVE teaching across key stages 3 and 4, limited resources including Welsh resources, some challenges in teaching methodologies and support/training given to teachers to make sure the quality of RVE education is adequate.

There were questions raised around whether teachers had a good understanding of RVE now in comparison to the former religious education, in terms of content and how it should be taught.

It was commented that, in some schools, RVE was not taught as a discrete subject but integrated into the broader Humanities curriculum. It was possible that the allocation of time and the importance given to RVE compared to the other Humanities subjects could be diminished.

WASACRE responded with concerns about the way that the survey was conducted accepting that it raised some valid points. It was noted that the scope of the research was based on 45 (mainly) secondary schools in Wales, but there was no clarity about how the schools were selected or how the responses were given. It was further discovered that the report was based on a Facebook survey. It is possible that claims of inadequate RVE provision wasn't aligning with the experiences of other schools and regions.

There was little acknowledgement that RVE in Wales only applied up to year 7 and 8 at the time of the research, yet schools were asked about RVE from year 7 to 9.

It was suggested that professional learning was lacking outside of one specific local authority and only one university was giving high quality RVE support. However, all schools are being supported to network and share resources and opportunities. Events and professional learning offered by EAS and other consortia to schools, including bespoke sessions, were not acknowledged.

(3.43pm - Revd, J. Greaves left the meeting, which was adjourned for 10 minutes. Noting that there was no Faith and Belief representative remaining, the Solicitor checked the terms of reference and the Council Constitution regarding quorum. Whilst the practice of the SAC has been that the quorum requires a member from each representative group (Councillors, Faith and Belief and Teachers), the terms of reference do not actually state that there is a compulsory quorum in terms of there being somebody present from each group. That being so, the generic provision in the Constitution would apply that the quorum of the meeting will be one quarter of the whole number of Members. Given there were a quarter of the whole number of Members present it was agreed to proceed. The SAC may review the terms of reference to clarify quorum requirements for the future).

A Member commented that the report highlighted a lack of specialist teachers and training and asked how we enable all schools to have consistent good quality RVE teaching. The RVE adviser acknowledged that there is work to do to address the concerns identified for example the teaching of some elements of the curriculum such as the religious or the non-religious philosophical convictions elements, especially in primary schools. SAC and local authorities can help promote the help, resources and support available especially from the EAS RVE

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Adviser especially noting that Professional Learning events are not well attended. The RVE Adviser is available to discuss schools' needs.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that the report was commissioned by the National Centre for RE. The report has reached quite a wide audience including Welsh Government, unions, consortia, WASACRE and Church in Wales and feedback has been given. Whilst some valid points are raised, and the report is an attempt to raise the profile of RVE, there is some agreement that the report has been written too early.

9. The Teacher Voice Project: RVE in the Curriculum for Wales

The RVE Adviser explained that there is a new Curriculum for Wales project focusing on Teacher Voice. Teachers working with students ages 3 to 16 across Wales are encouraged to answer a Questionnaire on the implementation, delivery and support they need to ensure that RVE is a positive experience for both teachers and the pupils in schools. It is hoped to obtain a broad and balanced viewpoint.

The study is being led by researchers from St Giles Centre, Bishop Grosseteste University, Cardiff Metropolitan University, Neath Port Talbot Education Support and Llanishen High School working in collaboration with WASACRE and SACs.

Participants are asked to complete a voluntary, anonymous 25 to 30 minutes survey about their experiences with RVE. It is hoped that the findings will be shared with all educational bodies, WASACRE/SACs, local authorities and Welsh Government to support further curriculum development and professional development.

A Member commented that it was noteworthy that the universities mentioned are linked to the executive officers of WASACRE as opposed to a totally independent university and this should be borne in mind when considering outcomes.

It was confirmed that the universities must adhere to a strict code of ethics when undertaking research.

10. Feedback to schools on Census (faith and belief)

A SAC Member noted that there is a view held that Christianity is declining but that, across Wales, 1.4 million people still identify as Christian. Whilst a similar number had no religion, it is not known what those who had no religion believed.

The Member reminded that SACs are locally based and it's important to know that e.g. in Monmouthshire, there are more people identifying as having a Christian faith as opposed to some other local authorities. In relation to non-religious beliefs, it is possible that numbers of people with non-religious philosophical convictions may be exaggerated in the local population. The Member suggested that it was important for schools to know what the actual numbers/percentages are to compare them with the rest of Wales. It was agreed that this information can be sent out to schools.

11. WASACRE Business

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- i. To receive and note draft minutes from the WASACRE virtual meeting November 2024. (attached)

The minutes were received and noted.

- ii. To note dates of future WASACRE meetings and confirm representation:

The date of the Spring Meeting – Virtual on 6th March 2025 , 10.30am was noted.

- iii. Nominations for new members of the WASACRE Executive Committee - Monmouthshire SAC's representative's term of office ending. (Papers attached).

Voting in separate groups, it was resolved to nominate County Councillor Rachel Buckler for election to membership of WASACRE Executive Committee.

- iv. Important information from WASACRE:

- E mail from A.Parry/L.Jones – This was noted.
- Letter to Chair of WASACRE– This was noted.
- Expenditure: WASACRE Conference – June 2024– This was noted.
- Adnodd and Miller Research Correspondence– This was noted.
- SACRE Annual Reports– This was noted.
- Revised Draft Code of Conduct for WASACRE: Members noted the revised draft code of conduct for WASACRE and discussed if it was necessary for WASACRE to have a code of conduct because councillors have their own code of conduct and teachers have professional standards. It was queried if the code of conduct would only apply to faith and belief representatives. It was suggested that any issues would be better dealt with by the person's own local authority and the local SAC as opposed to WASACRE.

The draft code will be considered at WASACRE's AGM in June and feedback from SACs is welcomed prior to the meeting. It was agreed that this feedback should be sent to WASACRE.

12. To consider creating an Action Plan

The establishment of a Forward Work/Action Plan was suggested. This item to be placed on the agenda for the next meeting with a view to setting short, medium and long term goals for SAC. The RVE Adviser agreed to share some examples from other SACs as a basis for discussion.

13. Dates and venues of future meetings:

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Noted.

The meeting ended at 4.47 pm