

# Legislative proposals for religion, values and ethics (RVE)

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?

Disagree

**Supporting comments (no more than 250 words):**

The author of this document confuses the composition of SACRE with the nature of RE, showing an alarming lack of awareness that will lead to misinformed responses. Proposals are vague and lack clarity, agreement it could be detrimental to learners.

SACRE cannot agree until terms, e.g. 'philosophical convictions' are better defined. SACRE needs to fully understand the implications for learners and how they change the nature of RE. To include 23 philosophical convictions within Human Rights case law would dilute the time spent teaching the concept of religion. The requirement for religious and non-religious to be on an equal basis appears contrary to the Education Act 1996, Section 375 (3) (See Q9).

High quality RE is currently pluralistic, exploring religious and non-religious worldviews/ philosophical convictions without need for statutory legislative change. This consultation presupposes RE is not taught in this way without providing supporting evidence. Learners themselves hold religious and non-religious worldviews and have opportunity to express their personal worldviews whilst considering those of others. If RE is to do something 'new' then this document does not clearly define what that is. It is good subject specific PL that is essential, rather than legislative change, to ensure quality objective, critical and pluralistic RE to ensure learners receive their entitlement.

SACRE has a deep concern about the inappropriateness of the name RVE - See Q9 - Please give this serious consideration! An inflated emphasis upon values and ethics that are currently only a part of what RE is concerned with.

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

Disagree

**Supporting comments (no more than 250 words):**

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. If SACREs only 'have regard' for curriculum guidance without the detail in the RE framework, skills and content could be lost. The parameters of the question (and the consultation document) are unclear e.g. does this refer to statutory curriculum guidance or to the non-statutory RE framework? More definition is required.

If this refers to the RE framework then it was not agreed in previous consultations that the agreed syllabus conferences must 'have regard' to it as statutory guidance. It was SACRE's understanding the locally agreed syllabus would be paying regard to non-statutory guidance. This would allow the flexibility to consider the views of parents, teachers, governors, and schools in the local context. SACRE fully understands the concept of subsidiarity and that the RE curriculum will be less prescriptive.

What does 'have regard to guidance' mean legally? This is not explained. There are irregularities found within this consultation - 'must have regard to...', 'required to...' and 'in accordance with...' giving a feeling of inequality. It is confusing for LAs, schools, SACREs and the public and needs clarifying.

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?

Disagree

**Supporting comments (no more than 250 words):**

The question is poorly constructed and does not correlate to the proposal and could lead to misguided responses. It fails to specify the current status of the locally agreed syllabus, which is stronger than the proposed change.

Schools could follow any syllabus if “an agreed syllabus” is not changed to “the locally agreed syllabus.” Explanation needed of confusing language is used throughout the document both “must be required” and “have regard to”.

What does the term ‘in general’ mean within the proposals? What are the exceptions?

Learner entitlement would be weakened. WG needs to explain why an agreed syllabus can be departed from, especially if it has given due regard to the Curriculum for Wales. Who will monitor departures? All learners are entitled to receive RE. Learner entitlement needs to be safeguarded, but this phrase, appears to suggest RE is optional. Schools would not feel obliged to provide RE. SACRE can see no reason to depart from the AS. RE is currently mandatory but is not a statutory part of the curriculum. The reason for making RE a statutory part of the curriculum in Wales is to protect the subject from erosion and learners from leaving school unformed about RE.

Current agreed syllabi offer the opportunity to teach short course RE. This protection offered to would no longer be there as the CFW does not address the learner entitlement to receive a qualification for courses they study. The successful short course ensured further study at A Level.

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

**Supporting comments (no more than 250 words):**

It is 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.

There are inconsistencies in approach within the proposals. How is it fair to have parental rights in relation to schools of a religious character (VA and VC schools) and but not in non-religious, maintained schools? This is contradictory and potentially discriminatory.

This proposal is tied up with legislation concerning the right of withdrawal from RE. If that right is removed, then should this question have been asked? SACRE agree that it is not good to have a national curriculum with opportunities for opt outs. However, it was suggested that the Minister might revisit the removal of the exemption from RE in view of case law *Popageorgiou v Greece*.

In Monmouthshire, there is no secondary VA or VC school, so consequently no freedom of choice to be taught RE in accordance with the tenets of religion that is offered to learners within other local authorities. Therefore, there is inequity. It seems unfair that parents are given rights in some of the proposals and This proposal, removing the right of parents/carers to request denominational RVE in schools without a religious character, does not match the proposal regarding the right of parents/carers to request agreed syllabus RE in schools with a religious character. It could thus be being detrimental to equality.

There is a concern that more pupils could be home schooled should this right be removed.

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?

Agree

**Supporting comments (no more than 250 words):**

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

Schools should be allowed to teach in accordance with the tenets of the faith.

This should not read “if requested by carers and parents” that could result in whole school opt out if one parent makes a request. Requests should be allowed (via the diocese/school/governors) from parents only ‘for their own child’.

The Church in Wales is investigating whether, if the change in the name from RE to RVE, this has an impact on the trust deeds for schools (trust deeds state RE). Trust deeds must be complied with within those schools and therefore the name change is contentious for both VC and VA schools.

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?

Disagree

**Supporting comments (no more than 250 words):**

Strong disagreement with this proposal for these reasons:

There is a misunderstanding – this should state ‘the locally agreed syllabus’.

Parental requests should only be made for their own child.

An assumption has been made that schools with a religious character are indoctrinating pupils. There is no supporting evidence for this view. SACRE members find such assumptions offensive.

Pluralistic RE already takes place within these schools in terms of broader faith, belief, and values.

Schools aim to meet the four purposes and learners become “informed citizens of the world.” Where schools, of any kind, do not comply it is a matter for advisory support, professional learning, quality assurance and inspection, and not for legislative changes.

This proposal is in direct conflict with Q4. The forceful language used within the consultation document with regards to this question is disconcerting.

There is Inference of a higher level of regard required to [the locally] agreed syllabus for a VA schools.

Why is it that VA schools must teach “in accordance with” and yet schools without a religious character should only “have regard to” the AS?

It would be difficult to deliver two syllabi. SACRE is of the view VA schools should not be forced into teaching other syllabi. This proposal conflicts with trust deeds

There would be a detrimental effect on teacher workload. It would be difficult to make this work (especially with an interdisciplinary approach) and would impact negatively upon learners.

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 of Q.6. Accurate translation is needed in all guidance in relation to RE, particularly within the RE supporting framework.
- Very important that Welsh Language is treated in an equitable and proper fashion.
- Professional learning should be via both English and Welsh medium.
- Support materials must only be issued when available in English and Welsh medium to comply with current legislation surrounding the Welsh Language.

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.

- 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.

If the following are done, then both criteria above will be met, and learners would not be disadvantaged in Welsh medium settings.

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- Professional learning should be via both English and Welsh medium.
- Support materials must only be issued when available in English and Welsh medium to comply with current legislation surrounding the Welsh Language.

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:

\* Q1: Every agreed syllabus should reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain - Education Act 1996, Section 375 (3)

Additional comments

The author of this document confuses the makeup of SACRE with the nature of RE, showing a lack of awareness that is alarming. Proposals therefore will be detrimental to learners.

The consultation exercise has been issued at the wrong time. It is important that before the proposals within the draft Bill, statutory curriculum guidance and draft RE framework are available to fully inform the public, teaching professionals, LAs and schools. Without it the consultation is vague and lacks clarity.

There is a strong concern about the overwhelming assumption that RE in VA schools is not pluralistic. There is no evidence to support this.

There was a view that the consultation document ignores the role and purpose of SACREs and of the locally agreed syllabi.

If there are proposals to review the composition of SACREs, as the consultation document indicates, 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.

Monmouthshire SACRE would like to express concern about the name change to RVE which was not supported. The general preference was for it to remain as RE, including the view amongst some major stakeholders, such as the Church in Wales, to retain the name religious education, which may assist in avoiding any conflict or problems with the trust deeds of faith schools.

## Submit your response

Do you live in Wales?

Yes

Do you have a business interest in Wales?

Yes

Please provide the first part of your home postcode, e.g. CF10

NP15

You are about to submit your response. Please ensure you are satisfied with the answers you have provided before sending.

**Name** Wendy Barnard, Clerk to SACRE

**Organisation (if applicable)** Monmouthshire SACRE

If you want to receive a receipt of your response, please provide an email address. Email address

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