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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, 13th March, 2024 at 3.00 pm

PRESENT: COUNTY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES

County Councillor Louise Brown (In the Chair)
County Councillor Paul Pavia
County Councillor John Crook
County Councillor Rachel Buckler

FAITH AND BELIEF REPRESENTATIVES

Sue Cave
Suzanne Gooding

TEACHER REPRESENTATIVES

Charlotte Rhodes

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Sharon Randall-Smith	Head of Achievement and Attainment
Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Geraint Edwards	Solicitor
Hayley Jones	Curriculum Partner (SACs and RVE)

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors Martyn Groucutt and Angela Sandles, Maddie Saraireh and Revd, Jonathan Greaves

1. Welcome and Apologies

County Councillor John Crook was welcomed to his first meeting. Cllr Crook replaces County Councillor Jill Bond who has resigned.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. To note the record of previous meetings:

The record was confirmed as accurate for the following meetings:

- 12th December 2023
- 7th February 2024 (Special)
- 26th February 2024 (SAC Recruitment Panel)

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4. Qualifications

Exploring World Views Course.

SAC welcomed Frances Lee, Business Development Manager, Agored Cymru who presented a detailed overview of the fully accredited Exploring World Views course which enables pupils to gain an equivalent qualification that covers core elements of the statutory curriculum.

SAC Members asked questions covering the following points:

- How the World Views curriculum has been formulated? Experts from other consortia have been consulted on content. More details to be provided by the Head of Product Development.
- Website only provided an outline of the units e.g. Non-religious only provided the example of Humanism when there are a range of non-religious philosophical conviction. It was queried how much flexibility there is to include other examples or if the units are specific areas of study: It was explained that there is a qualification guide for each unit with more specific details. An EQA schedule with the Quality Team and stakeholder panels review what is sufficient.
- Can schools devise their own content: The criteria are a guide and the school is able to apply interpretation.
- Are there examinations: These are evidence-based vocational qualifications.
- There is a problem with the Qualifications Wales GCSE general criteria that doesn't cover the statutory requirements. There is also disappointment that there is no standalone short course GCSE. The new curriculum is to cover Christianity and other principal religions and a range of non-religious philosophical convictions as detailed in the Monmouthshire Agreed Syllabus: The World Views qualification units allow practitioners to look at the agreed syllabus and the new curriculum and e.g. choose a range of non-religious philosophical convictions when planning units. The units are not prescriptive to allow schools to decide how best to design units in line with learners needs and interests. Agored Cymru measures if the evidence is sufficient to meet the necessary standard for the award. It is suggested that schools registering for the full GCSE add all the sizes and levels to their framework to allow pupils that struggle to claim a lower-level qualification.
- How will we know that schools are covering their statutory obligations: The RE Adviser explained that it is difficult to monitor statutory provision in schools. The legacy and new curriculum are not now directly mentioned in Estyn reports and there is only one RE Adviser covering schools in five authorities. It is believed that schools are doing their best to fulfil statutory provision but it should be recognised that the subject may be being delivered by non-specialist practitioners. To support schools with the provision, professional learning is planned to ensure access to resources and training to upskill teachers.

Frances Lee was thanked for her attendance.

RS Examination outcomes:

Sharon Randall-Smith had collected information from 2019 and 2023. The impact of Covid was mentioned to explain the difficulty with comparisons.

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GCSE 2019: 52.8% students sat and achieved a GCSE (full and short courses). The cohort was 799 students.

A/AS Levels 2019: 11.6% (42 pupils) sat an A level and 13% (47 students) sat an AS Level.

GCSE 2023: Cohort was 772. 46.9% sat and achieved a GCSE (full and short course).

The differential in outcomes A*-C between 2019 and 2023 is 3%.

It was noted that Chepstow School was unable to employ a RS specialist practitioner and therefore did not offer a GCSE or A Level course which impacted on the overall figure for the authority.

A/AS Level 2023 - 5% of students sat a RS A Level demonstrating a significant reduction from 2019 and is less than half of the whole cohort. This will be raised with schools at the summer meetings to explore help and support. An update to SAC will be provided in due course.

It was clarified that the decline at A Level is across the authority, and not just Chepstow.

The RVE Adviser explained that there is a decline in numbers coming forward for the initial teacher training to become RVE teachers. It was confirmed that the GCSE entries are static across Wales and short course levels have dropped, which will impact on A/AS Level.

It was explained that short course uptake is a third higher than in 2019 which will hopefully feed into an improvement in future years.

The above information will be reported annually to SAC for monitoring purposes.

SAC Members asked questions covering the following points:

- Some concern was expressed about the Qualifications Wales consultation in which 61% wanted provision of a standalone RS short course. As this view was not considered, there was concern at the implications for other courses.
- It was questioned if representations could be made to support an increase in training for specialist teachers.
- It is important that the subject is taught properly to as many students as possible.
- The RE Adviser felt that primary schools give the subject more curriculum time, whereas secondary schools struggle more due to the amount of change, timetable issues and lack of specialist teachers. It was reported that schools with specialist teachers can partner schools that struggle with provision and this can be arranged via the EAS for any school.
- It is hoped that as the new curriculum settles, that more students will want to take up the subject.

5. Discussion on Current Membership

SAC was reminded that applications for faith and belief vacancies have to be endorsed by the representative body. The Free Church Council represents a range of faiths and applications would require the support of the Free Church Council or church governing body. The non-religious philosophical conviction (NRPC) place represents various types of NRPCs, not one single organisation. The nominee would require endorsement from the representative body but would represent NRPC generally.

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Communication has been received from Humanism UK to request specific representation for Humanism on SAC. Allocation between the various groups is for Full Council to decide when it reviews the Constitution. SAC may wish to form a view on this matter. A Member referred to the recent census and the need to be representative of the residents of Monmouthshire Faith/NRPC groups. This matter to be revisited at a future meeting.

The Vice Chair explained that an e mail will be sent to town and community councils to locally publicise faith and belief (including non-religious philosophical convictions) vacancies from organisations in their area. It was agreed to revisit this topic when responses have been received.

The Clerk was asked to contact current members to ask if they wished to continue as members of the new SAC. If not, their organisation will be able to submit a new nomination.

6. Professional Learning Update

The RVE Adviser updated SAC as follows:

- The EAS has been providing curriculum design visits following up on the curriculum design programme. Ysgol Y Ffin have created good overviews to deliver a broad and balanced RVE curriculum. The RVE Adviser will now sit in on some lessons and will provide feedback to SAC.
- Collaborating with Central South Consortium to create a suite of webinars where practitioners can learn about various world faiths and NRPCs. The webinars are suitable for upskilling all staff in all phases. The webinars include access to other information and resources for further learning.
- Collective worship conversations continue termly with schools sharing approaches and ideas for collective worship. Whilst outside of the RVE curriculum, it is an important part of school life. Members were encouraged to refer schools to share their approaches.
- Anti-Racism training is on 18th April 2024 and the link will be shared for interested members. The purpose is to upskill staff.
- Forward Planning: Philosophy for Children (PfC) planning is ongoing. St. Joseph's High School trialled Virtues and this will be rolled out across the consortium and more training will be provided. Other schools have been undertaking Godly Play training (a version of PfC based on narrative to encourage e.g. "I wonder" questions. More work to follow.
- A working party is being set up to develop resources to cover the gap in GCSE, the non examined/mandatory GCSE to meet schools' needs
- Youth SAC(RVE): Looking to possibly set up a Youth SAC(RVE) and seeking to identify suitable students from Monmouthshire Schools to join a consortium wide SAC(RVE) from September. Also to consider including pupil voice within SAC meetings. Views and ideas are welcomed. A Member suggested contacting St, Mary's RC Primary School, also Undy Primary School. SAC Members would be welcome to participate in projects subject to safeguarding protocols.

7. WASACRE Business:

1. The Draft Minutes of Autumn meeting held on 25th October 2023 were noted.
2. WASACRE Executive Committee: Nominations for new members

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3. WASACRE: The RVE Adviser announced that Monmouthshire will be hosting the Autumn WASACRE meeting and sought a view on if the meeting would be remote or hybrid vis Zoom, refreshments, translation and if there are any ideas to showcase.

8. Any Other Business

It was suggested that SAC could have an update from Church in Wales and Roman Catholic school on RVE curriculum and syllabus, and the GCSE qualifications. The RVE Adviser to advise.

At its next meeting, JAG will be considering the appointment of seven teacher representatives to represent the trade unions. Existing Teacher representatives will continue until JAG has decided. All endorsed by JAG will continue as temporary members of SAC until ratified by Full Council.

9. Dates of meetings 2024/25

The meeting ended at 4.32 pm

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