

Annual Report

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGION, VALUES AND ETHICS

2025-2026



The Annual Report of the Monmouthshire Standing Advisory Council for Religion, Values and Ethics 2025-2026

1. Foreword from the Monmouthshire Standing Advisory Council (SAC)

A Message from Monmouthshire Standing Advisory Council (SAC)

We are pleased to present the Annual Report of the Monmouthshire Standing Advisory Council for Religion, Values and Ethics (SAC) for the 2025-2026 academic year. This report serves as a formal record of our activities and a testament to our ongoing commitment to supporting high-quality Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) education within our schools. The Council extends its sincere gratitude to all education practitioners, leaders, and governors for their unwavering dedication to the learning and wellbeing of children and young people. As schools continue to embed the Curriculum for Wales, your efforts in shaping inclusive, thoughtful, and values-driven learning environments are deeply appreciated. SAC remains committed to supporting educators through expert guidance on curriculum design, pedagogy, and resources. We encourage all practitioners to utilise the Monmouthshire Agreed Syllabus as the primary framework for RVE delivery. We also remain available to provide advice regarding the Daily Act of Collective Worship to ensure it remains a meaningful experience for all pupils.

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Table of Contents

Section 1: Information About SAC

1.1 Duty to Establish SAC

1.2 Composition of SAC

1.3 Membership Update

1.4 Functions of SAC

1.5 Meetings

1.6 Circulation of Report

Executive Summary of Advice Given by SAC

Section 2: Advice on Religious Education / RVE

2.1 Locally Agreed Syllabus

- 2.2 Standards and School Presentations
- 2.3 Specific Advice for Faith Schools
- 2.4 Youth Voice for RVE

Section 3: Advice on Collective Worship

- 3.1 Monitoring and Inspections
- 3.2 Collective Worship Survey
- 3.3 Applications for Determinations

Section 4: Other Issues

- 4.1 WASACRE
- 4.2 Holocaust Education
- 4.3 Curriculum for Wales 2022 (Forward Look)

Appendices

2. SECTION 1: INFORMATION ABOUT SAC

1.1 Duty to Establish SAC

Under Section 390 of the Education Act 1996, as amended by the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021, all Local Authorities are legally required to constitute a Standing Advisory Council for Religion, Values and Ethics (SAC). Monmouthshire formally reconstituted its SAC on 18 May 2025 to replace the predecessor Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE). Crucially, legacy functions of the former SACRE will continue to be exercised by the SAC pending the full phase-out of the pre-Curriculum for Wales 2022 syllabus.

1.2 Composition of SAC

The SAC is composed of three representative groups as mandated by statute:

1. **Committee A:** Christian denominations, other religions/religious denominations, and non-religious philosophical convictions (13 representatives).
2. **Committee B:** Representatives of teachers' associations (7 representatives).
3. **Committee C:** Representatives of the Local Authority (6 representatives). The Council also has the authority to co-opt up to two non-voting members to provide specific expertise or perspectives.

1.3 Membership Update

The 2025-2026 period was marked by significant membership growth and leadership stability.

- **Leadership:** County Councillor Laura Wright serves as Chair, with County Councillor Louise Brown as Vice Chair.
- We welcomed Bev Bannon (RC Church), Tina Bryant, Gareth James, Susan Marles, Phillip Middleton (Humanist), Charlotte Rhodes, Clare Rosato, and Clare Werrett (Church in Wales).
- **Vacancy Management:** Efforts to fill remaining vacancies in Committees A and B remain a priority. SAC has resolved to utilise targeted press releases and direct

communications to unrepresented groups to ensure the Council is broadly reflective of the local community.

Action Item: The Council is currently following up on the administrative circulation of a census regarding faith and belief to further inform membership strategy.

1.4 Functions of SAC

The core advisory functions of the SAC include:

- Advising the Local Authority on RVE delivery, the Locally Agreed Syllabus, and collective worship.
- Recommending reviews of the Agreed Syllabus via an Agreed Syllabus Conference.
- Considering "determinations" to vary the requirement for broadly Christian worship.
- Statutory reporting to the Local Authority and the Welsh Government.

1.5 Meetings

In 2025-2026, the SAC formally decided to realign its meeting schedule to one **per term** (Autumn, Spring, Summer), meeting the constitutional minimum requirements. Meetings were held on a hybrid basis on the following dates:

- 10th September 2025
- 4th March 2026
- 30th June 2026

Governance Continuity: During the March 2026 meeting, the Council reviewed its constitutional arrangements regarding leadership absence. It was determined that while the Chair and Vice Chair provide primary leadership, further provisions for meeting continuity would be revisited should the need for a constitutional amendment arise.

1.6 Circulation of Report

This report is distributed to Headteachers, Governing Bodies, the Welsh Government, Estyn, and WASACRE. It is also available via the Monmouthshire County Council website.

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF ADVICE GIVEN BY SAC

Through the systematic analysis of Estyn inspection reports and school-led evidence, SAC provided oversight on the integration of Spiritual, Moral, Social, and Cultural (SMSC) development, ensuring that statutory RVE requirements are maintained during the transition to the Curriculum for Wales.

Religious Education / RVE Impact: SAC utilised detailed presentations from local practitioners to evaluate on-the-ground implementation. By engaging with schools such as Archbishop Rowan Williams CiW Primary, SAC gathered evidence of how value-driven learning is successfully integrated into the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE).

Teaching Materials: The Council curated and shared several high-quality bilingual resources to support inclusive curriculum delivery:

- **Interfaith Week 2025:** Signposted lesson plans and community engagement materials.
- **Holocaust Memorial Day 2026:** Focused on the theme "For a Better Future."
- **Interfaith Council Junior Competition:** Encouraging community-building in primary settings.
- **Non-Religious Philosophical Convictions (NRPC):** Identifying specific resources to ensure balance and parity within the RVE curriculum.
- **Professional Learning (PL):** Delivered via LASIS, professional learning focused on pedagogical shifts required by the new curriculum:
- **Enquiry-Led Learning:** Collaboration with partner schools to embed enquiry processes.
- **Progression:** Shifting the focus from content-heavy planning to "planning for progression" across ages 3–16
- **Farmington Scholarships 2025-26:** Information regarding free, specialised professional development and research opportunities for RVE teachers was circulated to ensure practitioners are aware of external study support (farmington.ac.uk).

4. SECTION 2: ADVICE ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION / RVE

2.1 Locally Agreed Syllabus

The Monmouthshire Agreed Syllabus remains the mandatory framework. SAC continues to support schools in adapting this framework to local contexts while ensuring statutory compliance with the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021.

2.2 Standards and School Presentations

Archbishop Rowan Williams CiW Primary: Deputy Headteacher Nicky Wheeler provided a comprehensive overview of their integrated RVE model. Key pedagogical insights included:

- **Thematic Delivery:** RVE is not a standalone topic but a "topic driver" within the Humanities AoLE.
- **Pedagogical Tools:** The use of "Understanding Christianity," "Forest Schools," and "Eco Schools" to foster ethical, informed citizens.
- **Governance and Quality Assurance:** The RVE Lead conducted a "**mock Section 50 inspection**" with the Diocesan Director, a high-level governance exercise that ensures standards meet episcopal and statutory requirements.
- **Language of Learning:** The school introduced a unique "staff book club" (also involving parents and governors) where participants reflect on a shared text annually to refine the "language of learning" used when listening to pupils.

Catholic School Guidance (St. Helen's RC Primary): As no local Roman Catholic schools were available to present due to significant workload pressures, SAC reviewed a presentation from St. Helen's (Caerphilly) to provide guidance to Monmouthshire's RC schools. This model detailed the "Knowledge, Worship, Life" pillars of the Religious Education Directory (RED) and the mandatory 10% curriculum time requirement for RE.

2.3 Specific Advice for Faith Schools

SAC provided technical advice on balancing the distinctive faith character of schools with national statutory requirements. In the Church in Wales (CiW) model, there is a high level of alignment with the national RVE curriculum, which is typically integrated within the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience. These schools often draw on CiW diocesan materials and resources such as *Understanding Christianity*. In contrast, the Roman Catholic (RC) model requires greater adaptation, as Religious Education is taught as a faith-based subject presented as truth alongside statutory RVE requirements, using Archdiocese-approved resources such as RED (*"To know you more clearly"*). In terms of curriculum time, CiW schools generally embed RVE within thematic or AoLE planning, whereas RC schools are required to allocate 10% of curriculum time specifically to RE. Finally, in relation to accountability, CiW schools are often benchmarked against Section 50 mock inspections, while RC schools are formally inspected every three years across the areas of Knowledge, Worship, and Life.

2.4 Youth Voice for RVE

The Youth Voice for RVE held its inaugural meeting in alignment with Interfaith Week. The event featured an Interfaith panel where pupils interrogated representatives from various faith and belief groups. Discussions were pupil-led, focusing on contemporary ethics such as Climate Change, the intersection of Science and Religion, and the implications of Artificial Intelligence.

In the Spring Term, the focus transitioned to Humanism in Wales, featuring guest speaker Kathy Riddick. During this term, pupils were tasked with creating complex moral dilemmas that had no simple answers. This task encouraged participants to consider how different ethical principles might change one's response and helped them understand the various reasons behind people's actions.

The Summer Term meeting, held on June 24, 2026, served as a period for reflection and planning for the 2026-2027 academic year. This meeting provided an opportunity to meet new learners and gather ideas for future work. The group decided that a 'Diversity' project would be an effective focus for the next academic year. This project is designed to culminate in a showcase at the end of the year (Summer 2027), where pupils will share and celebrate their project work before reviewing the year's progress.

5. SECTION 3: ADVICE ON COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

3.1 Monitoring and Inspections

SAC continued to monitor Estyn reports for SMSC development. Current reports suggest that Monmouthshire schools are successful in fostering spiritual and ethical skills, with pupils benefiting from reflection time and assemblies that compare diverse beliefs.

3.2 Collective Worship Survey

This section of the Annual Report provides a summary of findings from the *Collective Worship in Monmouthshire Schools Summary Report (2025/26)*. Evidence was gathered from 31 schools, including nearly all primary schools, the Pupil Referral Unit (where Collective Worship is not statutory), and 50% of secondary provision, providing a strong evidence base for current practice.

Collective Worship is well established across the majority of schools and is typically delivered daily or near-daily through whole-school assemblies, phase gatherings, or class-based reflection time. It is commonly led by senior leaders or RVE leads, with most schools using planned themes, although a minority adopt a less structured approach. External contributions from local clergy and community partners are well embedded, particularly in Church schools. Content generally reflects Christian values alongside wider faith traditions and religious festivals, with increasing inclusion of non-religious perspectives through school values and current issues. This inclusive approach is reflected in very low withdrawal rates across the county.

Impact evidence shows Collective Worship is highly valued and contributes positively to pupil wellbeing, moral development, and school community cohesion. Schools report that it provides calm reflective space, reinforces values such as respect and tolerance, and supports spiritual and social development.

However, the SAC identifies several challenges, including space limitations for whole-school worship, timetable pressures (particularly in secondary schools), and variable understanding of statutory requirements. To clarify, the Monmouthshire agreed syllabus states as follows: 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 or mainly of a broadly Christian character. Parents may still request that their children are withdrawn from collective worship if they wish.

To address these issues, key priorities for development include clearer statutory guidance, targeted professional learning for staff and leaders, improved planning resources, strengthened collaborative networks, and enhanced engagement with community and faith partners.

Overall, the report confirms that Collective Worship remains a valued and impactful aspect of school life in Monmouthshire. However, greater consistency and clarity are required to ensure statutory compliance and to further strengthen practice across all schools.

Based on the summary report by S Randall-Smith, 3 June 2026.

3.3 Applications for Determinations

No applications were received to vary the requirement for collective worship to be "broadly Christian in nature."

6. SECTION 4: OTHER ISSUES

4.1 WASACRE

Monmouthshire SAC remains an active participant in the Wales Association of SACREs. County Councillor Rachel Buckler, who is currently a sitting member of the WASACRE Executive Committee (term ending 2028), was unanimously nominated by the Council for the position of County Borough Representatives. This nomination reflects SAC's commitment to contributing to national leadership in RVE.

4.2 Holocaust Education

For Holocaust Memorial Day 2026, SAC signposted schools to bilingual resources from the Jewish History Association of South Wales and HMD Trust. The theme "For a Better Future" was promoted to encourage reflection on human rights and diversity.

4.3 Curriculum for Wales 2022 (Forward Look)

As the new curriculum beds in, SAC has identified several priority areas for the 2026-2027 period:

- **Teacher Voice:** Establishing mechanisms to hear directly from RVE practitioners regarding workload and implementation challenges.
- **Teaching Ethics:** Providing targeted support for the delivery of Ethics within the WJEC GCSE and non-examined assessment (NEA) structures.

7. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Membership List (2025-2026)

Committee, Members

A: Faith & Belief,

Bev Bannon, Roman Catholic Church
Mr. A. Szwagrzak, Roman Catholic Archdiocese
Mrs. S. Gooding, Free Church (Presbyterian)
Rev. J. Greaves, Free Church (Baptist)
Ms. R. Morteo, Church in Wales
Clare Werrett, Church in Wales
Mrs. S. Cave, Bahá'í Faith
Ms. Maddie Sarairoh, Muslim Faith
Phillip Middleton, Humanism (NRPC)

B: Teachers

Charlotte Rhodes, Teachers' Associations
Clare Rosato, Teachers' Associations
Susan Marles, Teachers' Associations
Tina Bryant, Teachers' Associations
Gareth James, Teachers' Associations

C: Local Authority

Cllr Laura Wright, Chair (Cabinet Member for Education)

Cllr Louise Brown, Vice Chair

Cllr Rachel Buckler, Local Authority

Cllr John Crook, Local Authority

Cllr Paul Pavia, Local Authority

Cllr Angela Sandles, Local Authority

Officers

Sharon Randall-Smith, Head of Achievement and Attainment

Wendy Barnard/Richard Williams, Democratic Services Officer (Clerk)

Geraint Edwards, Head of Litigation / Legal Advisor

Hayley Jones, LASIS Curriculum Partner

Appendix 2: Schedule of Meetings**10 Sept 2025**

Welcome to New Members;

Presentation: Archbishop Rowan Williams CiW Primary;

LASIS RVE Professional Learning Update;

Youth Voice for RVE.

Membership recruitment and Census update;

WASACRE Summer Conference feedback;

Review of Spring RVE materials and NRPC resources.

4 March 2026

Realignment of Meeting Frequency;

Constitutional Review (Chair Presence);

WASACRE Vice Chair Nomination;

WJEC Qualifications and SAMs discussion;

Teacher Voice Project initiation.

Youth Voice for RVE

30 June 2026

Appendix 3: Circulation List

- Monmouthshire County Council Members
- Chair of Education Scrutiny Committee
- Regional Director, LASIS
- Welsh Government Education Officer (RVE)
- Headteachers and Governing Bodies of all Monmouthshire Schools
- Principals and Governing Bodies of local FE Colleges
- WASACRE Executive Committee
- Cabinet Secretary for Education, Welsh Government
- National Library of Wales
- Estyn