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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Standing Advisory Council for Religion, Values and Ethics
(SAC)**

Remote Meeting via Microsoft Teams on Tuesday, 30th June, 2026 at 3.00 pm

PRESENT: FAITH AND BELIEF REPRESENTATIVES
Clare Werrett

COUNTY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES
County Councillor Louise Brown
County Councillor Rachel Buckler
County Councillor Paul Pavia
County Councillor Angela Sandles

TEACHER REPRESENTATIVES
Charlotte Rhodes
Clare Rosato

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Sharon Randall-Smith	Head of Achievement and Attainment
Geraint Edwards	Head of Litigation and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Hayley Jones	Curriculum Partner (SACs and RVE)
Richard Williams	Democratic Services Officer
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer

APOLOGIES:

Councillors John Crook and Laura Wright.

G. James, J. Greaves, M. Saraireh, S. Cave B. Bannon, S. Marles

1. Confirmation of the Appointment by Council of the Cabinet Member for Education as Chair of SAC

It was confirmed that Council had appointed the Cabinet Member for Education, County Councillor Laura Wright, as Chair of SAC.

2. Appointment of Vice-Chair

County Councillor Louise Brown was appointed as Vice Chair and chaired the meeting.

3. Declarations of Interest

None received.

4. Collective Worship in Monmouthshire Schools Summary Report Academic year 2025/26

We received the Collective Worship in Monmouthshire Schools Summary Report for the academic year 2025/26.

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A survey of collective worship practices was completed by 31 schools and educational settings across Monmouthshire, a significant increase from the 16 responses received when the findings were last reported. The results indicate that most schools plan and deliver collective worship daily or almost daily, with this being more consistent in primary schools than in secondary schools. Secondary schools reported that practical challenges, such as examinations and timetabling constraints, can make daily delivery more difficult, although they continue to work towards meeting their legal requirements.

The survey found that most schools have policies in place for collective worship, plan provision in advance, and believe they meet the legal requirements. Collective worship is usually led by senior staff, with many schools also making effective use of local clergy and community representatives, particularly in faith schools. Most schools organise worship around themes and values, such as kindness, respect and thoughtfulness, often linking these to key religious festivals such as Easter and Christmas. While a small number of schools take a more informal approach, the majority use structured programmes that support pupils' spiritual, moral and social development.

Responses showed that schools generally reflect Christian values within collective worship while also drawing on other faiths and non-religious perspectives where appropriate. These wider perspectives are often used to enhance learning, support current topics and encourage understanding of different beliefs and cultures. Schools reported that collective worship has a positive impact on pupil wellbeing, moral development and community cohesion, with a strong emphasis on inclusivity, values-based education and respect for diversity.

Despite these strengths, several areas for development were highlighted. Schools identified a need for more professional learning opportunities and clearer guidance on legal requirements. There is also some uncertainty in a minority of schools about the distinction between collective worship and assembly activities, as well as the meaning of collective worship being wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character. In addition, schools expressed a desire for greater access to faith and community representatives to support wider engagement and enrich their provision.

Members welcomed the positive findings but discussed the importance of distinguishing collective worship from Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) education. Members emphasised that collective worship and RVE are separate legal requirements and that any guidance provided to schools should reflect this distinction clearly. Suggestions included promoting existing guidance from Estyn, ensuring the Monmouthshire Agreed Syllabus is more easily accessible through the website relating to SAC, and providing schools with clearer information on the legal framework governing collective worship.

The discussion concluded with recognition of Sharon Randall-Smith's work in leading the survey and supporting the Committee over many years. Colleagues thanked her for her contribution to SAC and its predecessor bodies, acknowledging her commitment and wishing her well for the future as she attended her final meeting before leaving the role.

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5. Teachers Voice Survey undertaken by WASACRE

We received an update regarding the Teachers Voice Survey undertaken by WASACRE.

The Teachers Voice Survey explored how practitioners across Wales have engaged with the new Curriculum for Wales and the introduction of Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE). Although the survey received only 87 responses, which is relatively low for a national survey, it still provided valuable insights into the experiences of teachers responsible for RVE. Overall, respondents were positive about the greater professional autonomy provided by the new curriculum. Around 70% appreciated the flexibility to decide what and how they taught, while around half valued the learner-centred approach. However, many teachers also reported challenges relating to learner progression and curriculum content, indicating that while they welcomed autonomy, they would also appreciate clearer guidance and additional professional learning opportunities.

Teachers generally expressed confidence in delivering RVE. Over 71% felt confident planning and teaching RVE within an integrated curriculum model, and nearly 84% were confident in their school's approach to curriculum design. Around 77% felt confident teaching both religious and non-religious philosophical convictions and delivering RVE in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner. Additionally, 75% were confident in their understanding of the legal requirements surrounding RVE. Significantly, every respondent agreed that RVE is an important part of the curriculum, while 69% felt that the subject was valued within their school. Most schools also reported having a shared curriculum vision and opportunities to experiment with different teaching approaches.

Despite these positive findings, the survey highlighted several barriers. While almost 80% described their schools as collaborative environments, RVE teachers often worked alone when planning lessons. Over 70% believed they would benefit from greater opportunities to collaborate both within and beyond their own schools. The main obstacles identified were limited time, funding, resources and difficulties accessing professional learning opportunities. Teachers reported bringing strong subject knowledge, personal commitment and a learner-centred focus to their work, but many wanted more support in translating the curriculum vision into practical classroom teaching and progression planning.

Members reflected on how these findings mirrored wider concerns about teacher support, progression and training. Potential solutions were discussed, including strengthening local collaboration networks, increasing engagement with headteachers, and creating more opportunities for teachers to share effective practice. Existing support mechanisms, such as consortium network meetings and online resource-sharing platforms, were acknowledged, but concerns remained about teachers having sufficient time to access them. It was suggested making greater use of school cluster meetings, developing local Monmouthshire networks and showcasing examples of successful RVE practice from schools to provide practical models for others.

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A recurring theme was the need for clearer signposting to resources and guidance. SAC Teacher representatives noted that although many materials are available through platforms such as Hwb, locating suitable resources can be time-consuming.

The Committee concluded that stronger communication with headteachers would be crucial in raising the profile of RVE, encouraging staff release for training and collaboration, and reinforcing schools' legal responsibilities. An action was agreed to draft a communication from SAC to Monmouthshire headteachers, highlighting the survey findings, professional learning opportunities, and key guidance on RVE and collective worship.

6. Professional Learning update for forthcoming events

We received a verbal update regarding professional learning for forthcoming events.

Hayley Jones, Curriculum Partner (SACs and RVE), outlined a comprehensive professional learning offer for the next academic year, which will be promoted through upcoming marketplace events. The programme includes webinars on developing Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) subject knowledge, network meetings for both primary schools and GCSE Religious Studies teachers, and ongoing support relating to statutory collective worship requirements. While some of these initiatives have experienced declining participation over time, it was noted that recent collective worship survey work could help renew interest. The availability of bespoke support tailored to individual school needs was also highlighted.

A key focus of the professional learning programme is supporting teachers with the new GCSE Religious Studies Non-Examined Assessment (NEA). Network meetings are being used to develop and share resources, particularly as teachers have found the introduction of the NEA challenging. Having completed one cycle of the assessment, teachers are now focusing on the second NEA and refining resources and approaches based on their experiences.

The offer also includes support for developing numeracy skills within RVE and social studies, alongside training on inquiry-based approaches to learning. These approaches align with the Curriculum for Wales and aim to encourage deeper thinking, effective questioning, and the development of learners' inquiry skills from an early stage. Schools will have opportunities to visit examples of effective practice, observe lessons, review learners' work, and discuss curriculum approaches with staff and pupils. It was noted that while examples are available in other Gwent authorities, it would be welcomed if more Monmouthshire schools shared their practice to provide local examples for colleagues.

Additional opportunities include visits to schools showcasing effective RVE provision and an overview session aimed at governors, School Improvement Partners (SIPs), and other stakeholders who may have responsibility for monitoring RVE and collective worship. There is also an "Inside Out" training programme focused on resilience, wellbeing, and positive relationships, which links closely with RVE themes.

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It was emphasised that the professional learning offer remains flexible and responsive to local authority needs. In addition to scheduled courses, bespoke support to schools is provided, including curriculum design guidance, helping teachers integrate RVE into wider humanities topics, and collaborative planning sessions. Schools were encouraged to request tailored support whenever required.

In response, the Chair welcomed the breadth of the offer but expressed concern that many of the opportunities are based outside Monmouthshire, particularly in Newport and Blaenau Gwent. She suggested that increasing the number of Monmouthshire-based examples and professional learning opportunities would make the provision more relevant and accessible for local schools.

The discussion focused on the GCSE Religious Studies NEA. Teachers have reported significant challenges, particularly in sourcing and preparing appropriate materials for learners. The assessment tasks are not released until only a few months before they must be completed, limiting teachers' ability to plan in advance.

Concerns were noted about the timing of NEA task release have been raised with Qualifications Wales and WJEC. Teachers would prefer to receive the assessment themes before the summer break so they can prepare for the following academic year.

Despite concerns about workload, it was reported that teachers generally feel more confident now that they have completed one full cycle of the NEA. Although the administrative burden remains substantial, teachers have a clearer understanding of expectations. Feedback so far suggests that the NEA provides learners with a more accessible way to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, and there is optimism that the changes will ultimately benefit both teaching and learning.

7. Estyn Update - King Henry VIII School

We received an Eystyn update in respect of King Henry VIII School.

King Henry School recently received a very positive inspection outcome, with Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) specifically highlighted in the report. It was noted that pupils develop their social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding effectively through RVE lessons and dedicated assemblies. While the report identified an area for development in ensuring diversity learning more consistently reflects the Welsh context, the recognition of RVE was seen as a significant achievement and evidence of strong practice within the school.

It was suggested that SAC sends a letter congratulating the school on this recognition and acknowledging the work of the RVE department. Members agreed that this would be a positive gesture. It was noted that, if the school is demonstrating effective practice, there may be opportunities for this work to be shared with other secondary schools across the authority.

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Further discussion focused on the work of the Head of RVE at King Henry VIII School. It was noted that the Head of RVE has been actively developing and refining the RVE curriculum, including curriculum design, lesson structures, medium-term planning and approaches to progression. It is hoped that examples of planning might be obtained that could be shared more widely as models of effective practice.

It was suggested that recognition from SAC might encourage further collaboration with the school and potentially enable the Head of RVE to contribute to future SACRE work. It was proposed exploring funding opportunities through EAS to release the Head of RVE for specific projects that would benefit the local authority while also being shared more broadly across the region. Members agreed that this could be a useful avenue to pursue, provided there was a clearly defined piece of work to commission.

The committee agreed to invite the Head of RVE to attend a future SAC meeting to present his curriculum work and share examples of effective practice.

8. WJEC Draft Specification - Wave 3 qualifications

We received a report by the WJEC regarding Draft Specification - Wave 3 qualifications.

The discussion focused on the draft Wave 3 qualification specifications published by WJEC and their potential links to Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE). It was noted that schools will be able to mix and match modules rather than select specifically RVE-focused options. However, because RVE remains a mandatory part of the curriculum, it was noted that schools should consider incorporating RVE-related modules into their provision. Reviewing the draft specifications, several modules had been identified with strong links to RVE, particularly Faith and Belief in the Community, which directly explores religious and non-religious worldviews through theological and sociological perspectives.

Other modules were highlighted that could support meaningful RVE integration, including Ethical Choices, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Healthy Relationships, Democracy, and Sustainability and Action. These subjects offer opportunities to explore moral reasoning, diversity, rights, responsibilities, stewardship, and ethical decision-making through religious, philosophical, and sociological lenses. It was noted that these topics should not be approached solely from secular subject perspectives, such as geography or citizenship, but should include RVE inquiry and reflection.

It was also noted that even modules not immediately associated with RVE could provide opportunities for meaningful integration. For example, Everyday Law could include discussions on justice, fairness, and morality; Mental Health and Wellbeing could explore questions about humanity, dignity, purpose, and the meaning of life; Food Planning and Preparation could consider religious dietary requirements and cultural diversity; Online Responsibility could examine digital ethics; and Financial Literacy could address poverty, wealth, and social responsibility from both religious and non-religious viewpoints.

To support schools, a curriculum mapping approach was proposed that identifies an RVE lens within whichever qualification modules are selected. This would involve

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mapping theological, philosophical, and sociological inquiry to the mandatory RVE requirements, planning explicit RVE questions within lessons, and providing ways for learners to record evidence of their learning. It was suggested that exemplar units and lesson plans would be particularly valuable, giving schools practical models that can be adapted to local contexts rather than expecting teachers to design everything themselves.

Members acknowledged that one challenge is that the units are optional, and schools may choose modules that do not naturally lend themselves to RVE. It was noted that this could make delivery of mandatory RVE more difficult. However, if schools do not choose modules such as Faith and Belief, they will still be legally required to provide RVE, meaning schools will need to find alternative ways to integrate the content. It was noted that stand-alone, non-examined RVE lessons are unlikely to be attractive to many schools due to competing curriculum demands.

A question was asked how engagement with these qualifications could be encouraged. It was explained that work is being undertaken with James Kent to develop guidance and a roadmap showing how mandatory RVE can be embedded within the Wave 3 qualifications. It was suggested that providing ready-made resources and practical examples would reduce workload pressures and increase the likelihood of schools adopting suitable modules. Since many of these courses may be taught by non-specialists rather than RVE teachers, accessible and adaptable resources will be particularly important.

It was noted that teachers are not reluctant to teach RVE but are often constrained by time and planning pressures. It was noted that previous resources had been successful because they were well-organised and easy to use. Concern was expressed that examination boards do not always fully recognise the mandatory status of RVE. Emphasis was made regarding the importance of communicating this requirement to headteachers and presenting practical solutions rather than highlighting challenges. It was noted that integrating RVE into meaningful qualifications would benefit both schools and learners by ensuring mandatory RVE content is covered while also providing learners with recognised and relevant qualifications.

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

We received the draft Annual Report of the Monmouthshire Standing Advisory Council for Religion, Values and Ethics 2025-2026.

The Committee discussed a shortened version of the annual report, which had been prepared in advance due to ongoing discussions within WASACRE about potential future changes to the report format. It was noted that the changes are still under consideration by the Welsh Government, and no implementation date has been confirmed.

A concern was raised regarding the section on collective worship. It was suggested amending the wording where the report refers to uncertainty around the definition of "broadly Christian." It was considered that the report should instead reflect the legal

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definition of collective worship as being “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character.” It was also suggested removing wording referring to representation from a wider range of faith and belief communities, as it was considered more relevant to the Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) curriculum than to collective worship requirements.

The Committee discussed whether the report should be approved at the current meeting or deferred until the autumn term, as had been the usual practice in previous years. No further comments or amendments were raised by members.

Following discussion, it was proposed and seconded that the report be approved subject to the amendment outlined regarding the collective worship wording.

Members indicated their support and the report was approved unanimously, subject to the agreed amendment.

10. Forward Work Plan

We received the Forward Work Plan.

The Committee discussed the importance of developing a forward work plan for the next academic year to provide clear objectives and accountability. Members agreed that it would be useful to identify specific goals and actions that could be reviewed at future meetings, allowing the Committee to measure progress against an agreed checklist. It was noted that work had not yet begun on creating a formal forward work plan template, although discussions with Sharon Randall-Smith may take place to support this process.

Potential agenda items for future meetings include:

- Revisiting the recent Estyn report.
- Revisit the Teachers Voice Survey.
- Presentation on the humanities Estyn review.

Hayley also highlighted ongoing work taking place behind the scenes involving geography, history, RVE, and curriculum design. She offered to share presentation materials and related resources with members before the next meeting to allow them to review the information in advance.

It was also proposed that draft information intended for schools be shared with the Committee before publication so members could review and comment on it if necessary.

The Wave 3 skills proposals currently remain at a high-level stage, with no definitive drafts yet available. Given the ongoing nature of these developments, members agreed that qualifications and skills updates should remain a standing item for future consideration.

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Members discussed ways of broadening participation in meetings. Hayley suggested inviting more schools and external stakeholders to contribute presentations and share examples of practice from their own settings. It was considered that this would provide valuable insight into what is happening in schools and help generate useful discussion and ideas. Members supported the proposal, noting that increased engagement and dialogue would help spread understanding and strengthen the work of the Committee. Members agreed that greater stakeholder involvement should form part of the forward work plan going forward.

11. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as an accurate record.

12. Next Meeting

23rd September 2026 at 3.00pm.

The meeting ended at 4.32 pm.

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