
Ymateb i Ymgynghoriad / Consultation Response

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Dyddiad / Date:	28/07/2020
Pwnc / Subject:	Legislative proposals for religion, values and ethics

Background information about Estyn

Estyn is the Office of Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. As a Crown body, Estyn is independent of the Welsh Government.

Estyn's principal aim is to raise the standards and quality education and training in Wales. This is primarily set out in the Learning and Skills Act 2000 and the Education Act 2005. In exercising its functions, Estyn must give regard to the:

- Quality of education and training in Wales;
- Extent to which education and training meets the needs of learners;
- Educational standards achieved by education and training providers in Wales;
- Quality of leadership and management of those education and training providers;
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of learners; and,
- Contribution made to the well-being of learners.

Estyn's remit includes (but is not exclusive to) nurseries and non-maintained settings, primary schools, secondary schools, independent schools, pupil referrals units, further education, adult community learning, local government education services, work-based learning, and teacher education and training.

Estyn may give advice to the Assembly on any matter connected to education and training in Wales. To achieve excellence for learners, Estyn has set three strategic objectives:

- Provide accountability to service users on the quality and standards of education and training in Wales;
- Inform the development of national policy by the Welsh Government;
- Build capacity for improvement of the education and training system in Wales.

This response is not confidential.

Response

Introduction

Estyn welcomes the opportunity to comment upon the legislative proposals for religion, values and ethics in the Curriculum for Wales. We have responded to all questions in the consultation and raised some points for further consideration.

Overall we agree that religion, values and ethics (RVE) should encompass both religious and non-religious beliefs, ensuring that RVE is broad, balanced and unbiased in nature.

- We agree with the need for statutory guidance to support the delivery of RVE. The place of this document within the structure of the Curriculum for Wales would need to be clear.
- With the flexibility offered by the Curriculum for Wales and the support of statutory guidance for RVE we do not think there is a need for a locally agreed syllabus. This adds an unnecessary additional level of guidance for schools.
- We would favour a system that protects the integrity of RVE as being appropriate, pluralistic mandatory education of value to all pupils, irrespective of their parents' religious or philosophical views. Some schools provide denominational religious education, and we would prefer that this is understood as being supplementary to the mandatory RVE provision. In these schools, parents should have the right to withdraw their child from this supplementary aspect of RVE, in order that they only receive the mandatory RVE.
- We do not support a parent to a right to request RVE in line with tenets of a particular faith if the school does not normally provide it. This is because there would be significant practical issues and resource implications in delivering this. The outcomes of this consultation may lead to a re-consideration of the need for locally agreed syllabi and the re-purposing of the role of SACRE to support and monitor the teaching of RVE.

Consultation questions

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?

Agree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments (no more than 250 words)

Estyn agrees that RVE should encompass both religious and non-religious beliefs as described in the consultation document. In many schools, this is already the case as reported in the Estyn remit, Religious Education at key stage 2 and key stage 3 (June 2018). *'In many schools, pupils develop their thinking skills well by engaging with a wide range of fundamental human and religious questions that focus on the search for meaning, significance and value in life. They discuss important questions with interest and enthusiasm.'*

In key stage 2, pupils discuss and contribute to philosophical questions through a study of 'big questions'. These questions include, for example, 'Is stealing always wrong?', 'Is everyone capable of being a hero?' and 'Is it right for people to be richer than others?' Through this work, pupils of all ages develop a sound understanding of how to respond to these fundamental questions raised by their own experiences, the world around them and religious beliefs.

In most schools at key stage 3, pupils engage well with fundamental questions. For example, they discuss big questions such as 'Creation or evolution?' and 'What is the purpose of life?' drawing maturely upon their knowledge of different faiths and personal views. Many pupils offer considered reasons for their opinions and listen to the views of others respectfully. In many schools, religious education lessons help pupils to become ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world.

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

Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments (no more than 250 words)

It would be useful for schools to have statutory guidance in relation to the teaching of RVE. This document would support teachers and leaders as they plan for the delivery of RVE within the humanities area of learning and experience. The guidance might also support schools in their understanding of the rationale for the change in name of this discipline. The relationship between any statutory guidance and the Curriculum for Wales would need to be clear.

We believe that RVE should be treated in the same way as other disciplines within the humanities area of learning and experience. For that reason we do not see the need for schools to have additional layers of guidance in the form of a locally agreed syllabi. We believe that the Curriculum for Wales provides enough flexibility and guidance for schools to design their own RVE curriculum.

It is likely to be confusing for schools to have the Curriculum for Wales, statutory guidance and a locally agreed syllabus. Schools will be responsible for determining their own curriculum and not be bound to deliver a locally agreed syllabus as is currently the case. It is therefore hard to see the value of continuing with such an approach, which will take up time and resources that could be invested more usefully elsewhere.

Welsh Government may consider it opportune to review the place and purpose of a Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs). SACREs, and their responsibility to produce an agreed syllabus, have their origins in the 1944 Education Act. Only a handful of SACREs were established under the 1944 Act, but that changed with the Education Reform Act 1988, which made them a statutory requirement. There seems little justification to create 22 locally agreed syllabi once schools are required to deliver the Curriculum for Wales, and have regard to statutory guidance for RVE

If SACREs were no longer required to produce a locally agreed syllabus, they could potentially be repurposed to support schools in designing and implementing RVE, and monitoring school's provision in this area of the curriculum.

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?

Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments (no more than 250 words)

We feel that it would be more appropriate for schools to have the freedom to devise their RVE curriculum using the Curriculum for Wales, without the need to have regard to a locally agreed syllabus. We feel that the time and resources currently used to produce the locally agreed syllabi could be more usefully deployed to support schools in devising their RVE curriculum.

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?

Agree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments (no more than 250 words)

Currently Wales has schools without a religious character that teach RE that is not denominational, and schools with a religious character that teach denominational religious education. The options for the latter, in the maintained sector currently include Church in Wales or Roman Catholic.

In theory, a parent expresses their wish for a particular type of religious education through their choice of school. On that basis, there should be no need for a parent to have a right to request an alternative religious education for their child in any school.

However, there are several reasons why it is not this simple.

Firstly, there are admissions processes which mean that parents cannot be guaranteed a place in their preferred school for their child.

Secondly, in many parts of Wales the nearest school of their preferred denomination, or without a religious character, may be too far away to be a realistic option. For example, Church in Wales secondary phase provision is only available in four local authorities and Roman Catholic provision is only available in twelve local authorities.

Thirdly, all the schools in Wales with secondary provision that teach denominational religious education are English medium, making it impossible to choose a Welsh medium

education in the secondary phase that includes teaches denominational religious education.

Welsh Government could consider the inequity of the current availability of school types and whether or not parents should therefore have a right to request a particular type of RVE. While this inequity would seem to present a strong case for parents having such a right, there is a strong counter-argument that it would not be practical for schools to be making different RVE provisions for different pupils due to the significant additional resources that this would require.

Overall, we would favour a system that protects the integrity of RVE as being appropriate, pluralistic mandatory education of value to all pupils, irrespective of their parents' religious or philosophical views.

The system in Wales means that some schools provide denominational religious education, and we would prefer that this is understood as being supplementary to the mandatory RVE provision. In these schools, parents should have the right to withdraw their child from this supplementary aspect of RVE, in order that they only receive the mandatory RVE.

Despite the equity issues, we think that the practical issues mean that we support the 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.

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	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments (no more than 250 words)

Currently Wales has schools without a religious character that teach RE that is not denominational, and schools with a religious character that teach denominational religious education. The options for the latter, in the maintained sector currently include Church in Wales or Roman Catholic.

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Secondly, in many parts of Wales the nearest school of their preferred denomination, or without a religious character, may be too far away to be a realistic option. For example, Church in Wales secondary phase provision is only available in four local authorities and Roman Catholic provision is only available in twelve local authorities.

Thirdly, all the schools in Wales with secondary provision that teach denominational religious education are English medium, making it impossible to choose a Welsh medium education in the secondary phase that includes teaches denominational religious education.

Welsh Government could consider the inequity of the current availability of school types and whether or not parents should therefore have a right to request a particular type of RVE. While this inequity would seem to present a strong case for parents having such a right, there is a strong counter-argument that it would not be practical for schools to be making different RVE provisions for different pupils due to the significant additional resources that this would require.

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Despite the equity issues, we think that the practical issues mean that we do not support a parent to a right to request RVE in line with tenets of a particular faith if the school does not normally provide it.

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?

Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments (no more than 250 words)

Currently Wales has schools without a religious character that teach RE that is not denominational, and schools with a religious character that teach denominational religious education. The options for the latter, in the maintained sector currently include Church in Wales or Roman Catholic.

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Welsh Government could consider the inequity of the current availability of school types and whether or not parents should therefore have a right to request a particular type of RVE. While this inequity would seem to present a strong case for parents having such a right, there is a strong counter-argument that it would not be practical for schools to be making different RVE provisions for different pupils due to the significant additional resources that this would require.

Overall, we would favour a system that protects the integrity of RVE as being appropriate, pluralistic mandatory education of value to all pupils, irrespective of their parents' religious or philosophical views.

The system in Wales means that some schools provide denominational religious education, and we would prefer that this is understood as being supplementary to the mandatory RVE provision. In these schools, parents should have the right to withdraw their child from this supplementary aspect of RVE, in order that they only receive the mandatory RVE.

Despite the equity issues, we think that the practical issues mean that we do not support a parent to a right to request RVE in line with tenets of a particular faith if the school does not normally provide it.

We have replied 'neither agree nor disagree' because we do not think that an agreed syllabus is required any more, as outlined in our response to previous questions. We do agree that voluntary-aided schools with a religious character should be required to teach RVE in line with Curriculum for Wales and statutory guidance where a parent/carer requests it and should not have discretion to refuse to do so.

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?

Supporting comments

All the schools in Wales with secondary provision that teach denominational religious education are English medium, making it impossible to choose a Welsh medium education in the secondary phase that includes teaching denominational religious education. Around 20% of primary schools with a religious character (42/207 schools) offer partly or fully

Welsh medium education, meaning that a Welsh medium denominational religious education is available to a small proportion of the population in Wales.

The very limited availability of Welsh medium education in a school with a religious character could be viewed as the Welsh language being treated less favourably than the English language and could result in some pupils missing out on opportunities to use Welsh.

If parents do not have the right to choose RVE in line with tenets of a particular faith, then it is possible that some parents would choose to send their child to an English medium school with a religious character instead of a Welsh medium school without a religious character. It may be useful to survey parents about this specific issue, to ascertain what level of demand there may be for a Welsh medium education that includes RVE in line with tenets of a particular faith.

It could be argued this could be mitigated by parents having the right to request RVE in line with tenets of a particular faith. However, we think that it would not be practical for schools to be making different RVE provisions for different pupils due to the significant additional resources that this would require.

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.**

Supporting comments

As outlined in our response to question 7, it is the language medium of schools with a religious character that presents a challenge to opportunities for people to use Welsh, rather than the proposed policy on RVE in the Curriculum for Wales.

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.

In light of these proposals it may be useful for Welsh Government to review the role of SACREs and the need for locally agreed syllabi in the future.

This could be an opportunity to re-purpose SACREs to support schools in their implementation of the Curriculum for Wales and statutory guidance for RVE and then audit / monitor the quality of schools provision.