

Consultation on the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill

Evidence submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) for Stage 1 scrutiny of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill.

About you

Revd. Canon Edward Evans, Chair of WASACRE

1. The Bill's general principles

1.1 Do you support the principles of the [Curriculum and Assessment \(Wales\) Bill](#)?

The WASACRE Executive Committee, working on behalf of the 22 SACREs in Wales, has worked closely with the National Advisory Panel for Religious Education in order to draft this response. Some of the points in this response, therefore, agree with those within the response from the NAPfRE.

Yes. WASACRE agrees that the following key principles for developing legislation to support the new curriculum and assessment arrangements are appropriate and the Executive Committee fully supports them:

- Helping all learners to embody the four purposes;
- All children and young people, including those with severe, profound or multiple learning difficulties, are entitled a high-quality, broad and balanced education throughout the period of statutory education;
- Promoting learner progression; and
- Encouraging stimulating and engaging teaching and learning, which supports learners to make connections across different aspects of their learning.
- However, Executive Committee do have some concerns as outlined below.

1.2 Please outline your reasons for your answer to question 1.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1500 words)

The Executive Committee agrees that these principles should be the driving force of this curriculum in order to ensure that ALL learners receive equal opportunity in having the highest quality education in Wales. It is vital for the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of all learners to be considered, and provided for in all school level curriculum design. The legislation for this is still in effect and through the four purposes can be achieved. However, the Executive Committee feels that SMCMP development should be more explicit in the curriculum guidance rather than just implicit in the four purposes. For example, there is no mention of SMCMP in Chapter 2 or Chapter 3 under 'General Implementation Requirements', and the only mention of it that we can find is in Chapter 4, Part 5 under Post-Compulsory Education in Maintained Schools. The Executive Committee feels that this could cause confusion and risks some schools not embedding meaningful opportunities for SMCMP development within their individual school curriculum.

The majority of the Executive Committee supports areas of learning and experience and the new approach of "What Matters" which they feel will support learners to make connections across different aspects of their learning. However, the Executive Committee feels strongly that RE (RVE) should not be lost within this approach, and providing appropriate and specialised professional learning will be a key factor in ensuring this does not happen.

1.3 Do you think there is a need for legislation to deliver what this Bill is trying to achieve?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

Yes. Otherwise existing legislation will be out of synch with certain aspects of the Curriculum for Wales (2022) approach. However, not all suggested changes are required or appropriate, for example:

- The change of name from RE to Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE);
- The change of SACREs to SACs;
- There are mixed views within WASACRE about VA schools being obliged to offer two RE (RVE) curriculums;

- The broad and vague description of “philosophical convictions” needs further clarification. This is a term used in law, and is not a subject specific term. It has been used here in an incorrect manner. Philosophical beliefs, worldviews or convictions can be both religious and non-religious. We suggest using the term “non-religious worldviews” or “non-religious beliefs”.

Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill Chapter 4, Part 5, section 62 states:

Teaching and learning provided under this section—

- (a) must reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are mainly Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal Religions represented in Great Britain, and
- (b) must also reflect the fact that a range of non-religious philosophical convictions are held in Great Britain.

The Executive Committee has questioned whether this should be ‘Wales and the wider world’ rather than ‘Great Britain’ to reflect the wording of the Curriculum for Wales guidance? This whole section needs to be future proofed to take account of the evolving nature of religion and worldviews in Wales and the wider world, so that this legislation is not outdated from the outset. It is vital that the principal religions in Wales are taken account of in teaching and learning as well as other religions and worldviews within local areas, to support community cohesion. Whilst it is necessary to consider changing the wording, this will need very careful attention so as to avoid unnecessary risk of any negative impact going forward. WASACRE is more than willing to discuss this further with Welsh Government.

2. The Bill’s implementation

2.1 Do you have any comments about any potential barriers to implementing the Bill? If no, go to question 3.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

The new name for the subject (RVE) is misleading and unhelpful. It does not adequately describe the scope of the subject nor reflect the rigorous, academic nature of the subject. The Explanatory Memorandum (9.65 and 9.66) refers to professional bodies representing schools of a religious character and other bodies who do not support this name. In

addition, most other organisations representing Religious Education throughout Wales, the wider UK and Europe also strongly object to this proposed name, as does WASACRE.

Parents losing their right to withdraw their child/ren from RE (RVE) has the potential to cause unnecessary conflict in some schools. Welsh Government needs to raise awareness amongst the public of this change in national legislation and also to plan and implement support for schools who may face challenges.

Imposing on VA schools in particular the duty to provide two curriculums for RE (RVE) will have significant budget and staffing implications for the schools and LAs.

The addition of a separate 'aa' group on Committee A of SACREs will create problems and division. We consider new groups to be unnecessary and divisive. For example, potential conflict may between existing and new groups regarding voting rights.

Funding for professional learning has been reduced this year which is very disappointing and could be disastrous for RE (RVE).

2.2 Do you think the Bill takes account of these potential barriers?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

No.

In the case of the new name (page 152 of the explanatory memorandum) it states that RVE reflects the proper scope of the subject. This is not true at all. The name is misleading and not in line with current UK and European thinking or direction of travel with regard to RE.

In the case of not including the parental right to withdraw across the board in all types of schools, despite the attempt to avoid conflict by imposing on schools with a religious character the duty to offer two RE (RVE) curriculums, the Executive Committee feels that some parents will still have issue with this.

In the case of VA schools having to offer two RE (RVE) curriculums, this will create excess workload and could disrupt the culture and ethos of those schools with a religious character, which in turn could have disastrous consequences including some that may affect the health and wellbeing of learners and staff. Schools with a religious character should, by their very nature, be different. There are varying views held within WASACRE on this issue.

In the case of having 'new groups' on SACRE, with possible voting rights there is the potential for groups representing a minority in the local community have an equal vote as those groups which represent the majority of the community, this will create inequality and could cause conflict between the members of group A and group (aa). This proposal needs to be looked at very carefully to ensure fairness and balance.

In the Explanatory Memorandum p.150-151 the impact assessment advocates the need for Professional Learning for both RE (RVE) *"To ensure a positive impact and to address concerns raised in the responses on the need for high quality RVE and RSE provision we are heavily investing in professional learning."* Funding for professional learning on RE (RVE) should not to be 'lost' within a humanities curriculum. The Executive Committee is concerned that this point will not be addressed given that the finances set aside for PL can be used flexibly by schools, and there has been no ringfencing of money for RE (RVE). There must be direction from Welsh Government on the need for this specialist PL and how the money is to be spent. Given the nature of RE (RVE) is essential that this PL is delivered by specialists and not just lost in the generic training provided on the curriculum. It is essential that all RE (RVE) meets the statutory requirements of the law and without PL this is very much at risk. It is vital that appropriate and specialised PL for RE (RVE) is provided/available for schools in order to ensure that RE teaching and learning is of the highest quality, stimulating and engaging.

3. Unintended consequences

3.1 Do you think there are there any unintended consequences arising from the Bill? If no, go to question 4.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

Yes. Teachers and parents misinterpreting the scope of the subject due to the new name, which could lead to inappropriate teaching and learning at best, and illegal teaching and learning at worst. E.g. indoctrination of a teacher's own perception of the 'right' values and ethics. This could lead to legal challenges against the non inclusion of the right to withdraw.

Some parents may also choose to home school due to the removal of the right to withdraw in schools.

Extra budget implications on schools and LAs due to having to offer two curriculums in VA schools.

Changing the law to require Agreed Syllabus Conferences to have regard to curriculum guidance could undermine local democracy (elected members on SACRE and ASCs).

4. Financial implications

4.1 Do you have any comments on the financial implications of the Bill (as set out in Part 2 of the [Explanatory Memorandum](#))? If no, go to question 5.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

The Executive Committee is concerned that funding has been reduced significantly due to Covid -19 restrictions on education in Wales and that this may have a negative impact on professional learning for RE (RVE) going forward. It is vital that specialist PL for RE (RVE) is provided for schools in order to ensure that RE (RVE) teaching and learning is high quality, stimulating and engaging, that it meets the statutory requirements in law, and to ensure that RE is not lost within an integrated curriculum.

5. Powers to make subordinate legislation

5.1 Do you have any comments on the appropriateness of the powers in the Bill for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation (as set out in Chapter 5 of Part 1 of the [Explanatory Memorandum](#)). If no, go to question 6.1.

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

Table 5.1 section 5.

Powers for Welsh Ministers (WMs) to make Regulations to add, remove or revise the identified areas of learning and experience, mandatory elements and cross-curricular skills.

5.2 The Welsh Government will consult on the content of the subordinate legislation where it is considered appropriate to do so.

These powers outlined above pose a risk to RE (RVE) in that it could be removed as a mandatory element of the curriculum in future, without consultation. The Executive Committee feels strongly that there should be different levels of scrutiny for different changes. For example, if a word needs amending to reflect new or current practice it would be appropriate to do this without consultation. However, removing a mandatory element

of the curriculum must always be consulted upon, regardless of whether the Welsh Government consider it to be appropriate to do so or not.

Is the specific legislation for RE (RVE) and SACRE classed as “subordinate legislation”? If so, what further impact might this power have on such legislation?

6. Other considerations

6.1 Do you have any other points you wish to raise about this Bill?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1000 words)

Welsh Government has stated in the Explanatory Memorandum that *“There will be a need for continued close working with all schools, in particular faith schools which are able to provide learning in line with the tenets of their religion (providing it is pluralistic), to ensure the learning offered in RSE and RE is pluralistic and non-discriminatory.”*

Who will carry out this close working? Who will advise schools? There is a need for both specialist Professional Learning and continued advisory support for RE (RVE) (and not for this reason alone). WG, LAs, SACREs, regional consortia, WASACRE, NAPfRE, CiW, CES, and other relevant bodies need to work collaboratively so that all learners in Wales receive their entitlement to the best possible RE (RVE) within the Humanities curriculum.

It is concerning that the Bill is going through the Senedd before SACREs have had sight of the RE (RVE) supporting framework and the detail it will provide on the implementation of the legislative changes for RE.