

**Consultations on additional Curriculum for Wales guidance – Religion,
Values and Ethics
13 July 2021**

1. The NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to comment on the consultation on additional Curriculum for Wales guidance – Religion, Values and Ethics.
2. NASUWT - The Teachers' Union, represents teachers and headteachers in Wales and across the United Kingdom.

GENERAL COMMENTS

3. The NASUWT maintains that securing high outcomes for all children and young people means that action is needed to:
 - a. provide a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum experience fit for the 21st century;
 - b. ensure parity of esteem between academic and vocational pathways and the cognitive, emotional, cultural, creative, ethical and social dimensions of learning;
 - c. require all state-funded schools and colleges to work together to secure a comprehensive curriculum entitlement for all 14 to 19 year-olds;
 - d. equip children and young people to be research-driven problem solvers;
 - e. extend entitlements for all children and young people to high-quality academic and vocational education, coupled with

equality of access to high-quality, practical, hands-on, work-based learning opportunities;

- f. refocus the accountability system to reflect and support the expectation that all young people should remain in education and training until the age of 18;
- g. restore the morale of the teaching profession by tackling poor employment practices, including workload, securing professional entitlements and respect for teachers, and refocusing the efforts of teachers and headteachers on their core responsibilities for teaching and leading teaching and learning;
- h. establish a Masters-level profession and raise the pay of teachers in recognition of the increased knowledge and skills that they bring to the job; and
- i. ensure access to high-quality professional development for all teachers throughout their careers.¹

- 4. It is clear that in many respects, the current curriculum framework does not meet these important tests. For this reason, the NASUWT supported the Welsh Government's decision to commission a fundamental review of curriculum and assessment arrangements.
- 5. In general, the report of the review of the curriculum undertaken by Professor Graham Donaldson, *Successful Futures*, set out a coherent and rational basis for the future development of the curriculum framework in Wales.
- 6. However, in a range of critical respects, the proposals for the curriculum published by the Welsh Government have failed to reflect many of the key principles articulated in *Successful Futures*.
- 7. In particular, the recommendation that the curriculum should be developed by the workforce, for the workforce, has not been given practical effect. The exclusion of the voice of the profession has resulted in a proposed

¹ NASUWT (2013). *Maintaining world class schools*. NASUWT; Birmingham.

curriculum model that would, if implemented, generate significant workload burdens for teachers and undermine the ability of schools to secure for all children and young people their entitlement to a broad and balanced range of learning experiences.

8. The NASUWT continues to have profound concerns about current proposals for curricula reform. These concerns relate to critical aspects of the structure and content of the curriculum; its implications for the qualifications system and assessment practice; and the intention to proceed with implementation of the curriculum without a coherent evaluation of its workforce and resource requirements.
9. The NASUWT considers that the current health crisis and the recovery phase that will be necessary is the wrong time to initiate wholesale changes to, not only, the curriculum but also the accountability and assessment framework aligned to it. Space is needed to allow teachers and schools to recover from this time of extreme stress. Progressing at this time could lead to irretrievable mistakes being made.
10. The Union has also called on the Welsh Government to delay the implementation of the new curriculum in the face of the disruption to schools and the education system, stemming from the health emergency owing to the pandemic of COVID-19.
11. Teachers and teaching will remain disrupted for the foreseeable future, and teachers and schools have learnt a whole new way of working online and have poured their efforts into secure blended learning opportunities for pupils. The NASUWT considers that it is entirely unreasonable to place additional burdens on teachers at this time
12. The Union remains clear that in these circumstances, it would not be appropriate to proceed with implementation of the proposed curriculum by the start of the academic year 2022/23.

13. The NASUWT is therefore pleased by the Education Minister's recent decision to postpone the planned roll out of the New Curriculum for Year 7s in September 2022. This was the right decision given that the teaching profession continues to operate at full capacity providing education in the midst of a global pandemic. The Union remains concerned however at the Welsh Government's decision to retain the 2022 roll-out date for primary schools and the decision to require the New Curriculum for Year 7 and 8 to be introduced simultaneously in 2023.
14. The NASUWT is also very concerned regarding the offer of greater "flexibility" to secondary schools in deciding for themselves whether to delay the introduction of the new curriculum. The Union maintains that this is much too vague and leaves too much to the determination of individual school leaders. We are concerned some schools will choose to plough on regardless of whether they are ready for these changes.
15. This is not helped by the decision to make schools which do choose to delay roll out the new curriculum to both years 7 and 8 next year.
16. A universal and unified approach by the Welsh Government would have helped avoid a rushed and disjointed patchwork approach to the new curriculum which risks jeopardising its success, pushing up workload and stress for teachers and sowing confusion for pupils and parents."

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

17. The following comments must be read in the context that the NASUWT continued concerns, set out above, regarding the delay in the implementation of the new curriculum and the associated assessment and accountability frameworks to allow for a period of sustained recovery from the crippling effects of the pandemic.
18. The NASUWT's response is informed directly by serving teacher and headteacher members and also by the work of its representative

committees and consultative structures, made up of practising teachers and school leaders working in the education system.

19. **Question 1** – How well does the guidance explain the scope of RVE and its context within the Humanities Area ?

The guidance does not explain the scope of RVE and its context within Humanities well since the remaining Humanities subjects are not present for comparison and for contrast (see section 5). RVE is an equal partner in Humanities, yet its current provision depends on the specific staff skills or the staffing numbers at each centre. This means that the RVE provision across the country will vary dramatically. The lack of detail in setting RVE's context within Humanities will leave its provision open to local interpretation and this will undermine its delivery in Wales as a whole.

20. **Question 2** – Is the guidance, as a whole, clear and helpful for you in your role?

The guidance, as a whole, is too ambiguous and open for wide interpretation. For example, there is no explicit statement that RVE should be equitable to other Humanities subjects in time, staffing and resources. This ambiguity will mean a lot of local interpretation that may not best serve the provisions of the Act in how RVE is then delivered. It may mean a wide range of delivery – from centres correctly providing timetabled weekly lessons on RVE to centres providing tokenistic sessions during activities week at the end of term just so as to “tick the box”.

A further factor to consider is that schools tend to map and arrange their curriculum across perceived common grounds – for example, humanities and business studies. This multiple curricular approach means there are many subjects accessing the same resources and there is a danger that RVE be diluted so as to cater for these other subject areas within the

broader humanities family.

21. **Question 3** – Does the guidance offer relevant information to support practitioners when designing their school curriculum for RVE?

The guidance does offer clear, relevant information to support practitioners when designing their school curriculum for RVE. The Lenses and Learning Journeys appear useful principles.

22. **Question 4** – Thinking about each section of the guidance, do you feel there are:

- any gaps in information? If so, what should be added?
- any sections that are particularly helpful? If so, in what way are they helpful and to whom?

- As mentioned under Questions 1 and 2, there needs to be a more explicit statement of how RVE equitably fits within the Humanities provision rather than the ambiguity that currently exists which can give rise to variable provision across the country.
 - The Learning Journeys are useful to ensure and embed progression through the curriculum.

23. **Question 5** – Does the guidance offer all practitioners sufficient support for their planning and teaching of RVE?

The guidance is useful in its support for their planning and teaching of RVE

24. **Question 6** – Is additional support (e.g. professional learning and resources) needed to ensure the successful implementation of this guidance?

The success of RVE is dependent on the provision not being marginalised in some centres because of staffing capacity; subject specialism; weighting compared to other humanities subjects, for example. It is essential that the provision is consistent across the country – not least so as to enforce the Act.

A fit for purpose scheme of work must be equitable to the other humanities subjects and an aspiration to maintain subject specialism in the delivery of RVE would both require training and CPD. NASUWT would insist that any further consultations on any prospective plans must include the teaching workforce who will be designing, implementing and assessing RVE.

25. **Question 7** – This question is aimed at local authorities and Standing Advisory Councils for religious education (SACs).

- Is the guidance a helpful document for developing agreed syllabus conferences?
- Is the guidance a helpful document for SACs?

- The guidance is a helpful document for developing agreed syllabus conferences as the subject specialists on the SAC can apply the guidance as prescribed.
- The guidance is helpful for SACs since the make-up of SACs vary from lay-councillors, experts, religious nominations to subject specialists – whom are variable in their familiarity with the Act.

26. **Question 8** – We would like to know your views on the effects that the RVE guidance would have on the Welsh language, specifically on:

- opportunities for people to use Welsh
- treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

It is essential that both languages of Wales are given parity so as not to disadvantage learners in either medium.

Historically, there have been issues with parity of resources. There has been a delay in provision of Welsh-language text books in many subjects which has disadvantaged learners who study in their native language. In turn, this has created a workload burden on members who have to improvise to fill in these gaps so that the learners do not suffer because of it. NASUWT would expect this oft-repeated error not occur again.

27. **Question 9** – Please also explain how you believe the RVE guidance could be formulated or changed so as to have:

- 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
- 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.

We refer you to the response to Question 8

28. **Question 10** – 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.

Under section 61 of The Act all learners over the age of 16 will now be able to opt into RVE, where previously there was a requirement for all learners in sixth form to study religious education. This may lead to a situation which sees post-16 RVE provision shrink to an extent that will have staffing repercussions. The guidance can mitigate this potential scenario by ensuring that RVE provision throughout the country is consistent and as robust as it should be (as mentioned earlier.)

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