

Welsh Government

Curriculum for Wales: Religion, values and ethics

28 July 2020

1. The NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to comment on the legislative proposals for religion, values and ethics (RVE) in the Curriculum for Wales Framework.
2. The NASUWT, The Teachers' Union, represents teachers and headteachers in Wales and across the United Kingdom.

GENERAL COMMENTS

3. The NASUWT believes that all children and young people have an entitlement to access a broad, balanced, relevant and engaging curriculum. The Union is clear that all children are entitled to access a common educational entitlement, established by means of a clear statutory national framework.¹
4. The NASUWT notes the principle set out by the Welsh Government that the '*vision for Wales is for a fully inclusive education system where all learners have equity of access to education that meets their needs and enables them to participate, benefit from and enjoy learning*', and that this also meets the tests that the Union has set out.
5. In the view of the NASUWT, public education is a cornerstone of democratic society. It is an essential element in the framework of social rights of children, young people and adults. Public education, in our view, must also be defined by its universality. Public education should encourage personal fulfilment, social responsibility, knowledge, cultural acquisition and skills for life. It should deliver for society's needs for social

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

and economic development, political participation, environmental responsibility and international solidarity.

6. The NASUWT continues to have profound concerns about current proposals for curricula reform.² 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.
7. 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.
8. 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
9. 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. Instead, the Welsh Government should work with the NASUWT and other relevant stakeholders to address the concerns identified by the Union and to develop a realistic strategy for the implementation of reform.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

10. The NASUWT continues to assert that that a continued exercise of a right of withdrawal would deny learners their entitlement to the full range of learning experiences that the new curriculum is intended to secure,

² NASUWT (2019). *NASUWT response to Welsh Government Consultation Curriculum for Wales 2022*. Available at: (<https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/47a240ea-2836-4f3d-b768d6a258e3d217.pdf>), accessed on 14.11.19.

including those aimed at protecting and enhancing their wellbeing and safety.

11. The Union's view remains that no right of withdrawal should apply to any aspect of learning deemed appropriate for inclusion in a mandatory national curriculum framework. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that adherence to this principle in practice is likely to be inconsistent with the provisions of Article 2 Protocol 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).³
12. In addition, the NASUWT offers the observations and comments that follow in relation to the questions posed on the consultation response form.

Question 1 – Do you agree that 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?

The NASUWT has no objection in principle to this proposal. As the consultation document notes, the ECHR, and relevant cases heard by the European Court, has made clear that non-religious beliefs that are sincerely held and are worthy of respect in a democratic society should be afforded equal status to organised religions. It will be important to ensure that clear criteria for the inclusion of philosophical beliefs in curricula frameworks are established and implemented consistently.

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

The NASUWT welcomes the recognition of the important role of agreed syllabus conferences in supporting practice in schools, to ensure that national frameworks and expectations are implemented in a way that take account of local contexts. Currently, it will be important for effective statutory guidance to be produced to guide the work of conferences, particularly in light of the changing scope of the subject proposed by the Welsh Government.

³ See *Folgerø and Others v. Norway*, no 15472/02, ECHR 2007-III.

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?

The NASUWT is clear that national curriculum frameworks should secure a common learning entitlement for all children and young people across Wales in a way that takes account of local and school-level contexts and circumstances.

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?

Implementation of this proposal would be consistent with the basis on which RVE is to be implemented in non-denominational schools. As noted above, no other area of the curriculum is subject to such provision and it is important that consistency of approach is applied in respect of RVE.

Question 5 – Do you agree with the proposal that voluntary-controlled schools **with a 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**?

The position of the Welsh Government is to continue with an education system that includes schools with a religious character. Parents make an active decision to send their children to such schools and do so in full knowledge of the fact that these schools will teach RVE in a way consistent with the tenets of the faith of the school. Consequently, these schools should offer a consistent RVE curriculum that reflects the choices that parents are permitted to make. The NASUWT would oppose any suggestion that schools should be confronted with the organisational burdens of developing and implementing parallel curriculums for children depending on the choices made by their parents in this respect.

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?

As noted above, parents make an active decision to send their children to schools with a religious character. In doing so, they consent to curricular content being consistent with this character, noting that they have the option of sending their children to a non-denominational setting if they would prefer

their children to be educated in this way. It should be noted that currently, notwithstanding that religious education in schools with a religious character reflects this character, the model curricula produced by faith organisations used in these schools is consistent with expectations of learning content and outcomes in place in other schools. Faith organisations are also represented on local conferences. It, therefore, does not follow that teaching RVE in a form that reflects the tenets of these faiths must be fundamentally inconsistent with local syllabuses or national guidance.

Further to the above, establishing a requirement on voluntary-aided schools to teach parallel curriculums for different groups of pupils would create unnecessary and excessive workload burdens for staff and would undermine the ability of schools to secure coherent RVE learning experiences for pupils.

Question 7 – We would like to know your views on the effects that these proposals in relation to RVE would have on the Welsh language, specifically on:

- i) opportunities for people to use Welsh; and
- 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

The NASUWT does not consider that these proposals would have any positive or negative effects on the opportunities for people to use Welsh or to treat the language no less favourably than the English language.

Question 8 – Please also explain how you believe the proposed policy on RVE 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 language no less favourably than the English language; and
- ii) no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the language no less favourably than the English language.

Supporting comments

The NASUWT does not consider that any changes are necessary to impact on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language, or to ensure that there are no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the language no less favourably than the English language.

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.

The NASUWT has no further comments.



Patrick Roach

General Secretary

For further information on the Union's response, contact Neil Butler, National Official for Wales.

NASUWT Cymru
Greenwood Close
Cardiff Gate Business Park
Cardiff
CF23 8RD
029 2054 6080

www.nasuwt.org.uk

nasuwt@mail.nasuwt.org.uk