
Ymateb i Ymgynghoriad / Consultation Response

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Pwnc / Subject:	Consultation on proposals to ensure access to the full curriculum for all learners

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.

Introduction

Estyn welcomes the proposal to ensure access to the full curriculum for all learners. We agree that all children and young people in maintained schools should be required to study RE and RSE in the new curriculum. We believe that it supports the vision of Welsh Government for a fully inclusive education system where all learners have the equity of access to education that meets their needs and enables them to participate in, benefit from and enjoy learning. The proposal also supports the ambitions of the four purposes of the new curriculum for Wales, particularly to develop children and young people as ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world.

Hence, in order to secure the above entitlement for learners, we accept that the current parental right to withdraw from RE and RSE should be removed. The current situation enables parents to take the decision to withdraw their children from attending RE lessons and so prevents a very few learners from benefiting from learning that supports them to develop tolerance, empathy and understanding of different people, cultures and communities – and in understanding their rights and the rights of others. Similarly, withdrawing children and young people from RSE lessons prevents a very few learners from exploring fully a wide range of social, moral, cultural, physical and emotional issues in a safe and supported environment.

Estyn supports:

- the proposal for all children and young people to study RE and RSE.
- removing the parental right to withdraw learners from RE and RSE in the new curriculum.
- a pluralistic approach to the teaching of RE (one that considers all the main world religions and worldviews) that will help to create ethical informed citizens.
- introducing RSE as a statutory cross-curricular responsibility that will help to broaden the learning experience and increase the emphasis given to rights, relationships, equity and emotions.
- the introduction of the new RE supporting framework.
- the proposal of a duty on the Welsh Ministers to issue statutory guidance on RSE in a way that is age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate for learners of varying ages.
- a change to the name for this area of the curriculum to reflect the broader scope proposed in the new curriculum, but that the singular 'religion' (as a concept) should be used in any title, rather than the plural 'religions', which could lead to the discreet teaching of different religions and a focus on differences rather than similarities and connections.

Welsh Government should consider:

- requiring schools to have policies on RE and RSE that set out clearly the school's approach to each and how they communicate this to parents/carers.
- providing schools with clear guidance and support to plan effective teaching and learning in RE and RSE.
- the most effective way to ensure high quality professional learning for RE and RSE, including not only subject/discipline specific approaches, but broader support to help school leaders, teachers and support staff to tackle sensitive and potentially difficult issues.
- how it ensures that any guidance and resources are published simultaneously in Welsh and English to avoid any negative impact on teaching and learning or opportunities for professional learning.

Consultation Questions

Please indicate which of the following stakeholder groups you are responding as:

Child or young person	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parent/carer	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other family member	<input type="checkbox"/>
School, teacher, governor	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other education practitioner	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organisation or representative body	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Individual	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

Question 1 – What implications would there be for learners, parents/carers and schools if all learners were required to receive RE and/or RSE lessons in the new curriculum?

Please use the space below for your comments:

Learners

Overall, learners aged 3-16 will benefit from the change as it gives them all a statutory entitlement to receive RE and RSE.

The teaching of RE in the new curriculum may continue as a discreet subject or may be taught in a more integrated way e.g. within humanities. However schools choose to teach it, pupils will benefit from the pluralist approach to the teaching of RE proposed and from the connections that can be made to other areas of their learning. Pupils' study of RE will help them become ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the wider world.

Where good practice has been identified through inspection and recent thematic review visits to school, this impact can already be seen. In most schools, pupils already 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. (Estyn 2018)

Many pupils feel that religious education helps them to understand similarities and differences between people better and to learn to respect this. (Estyn 2018). These proposals would ensure that all learners can gain these benefits.

In relation to RSE, in our response to the consultation on the draft Curriculum for Wales, we noted the following:

‘Introducing [RSE] as a statutory cross-curricular responsibility will help to broaden the learning experience and increase the emphasis given to rights, relationships, equity and emotions.’

Currently, a very few pupils are withdrawn from either RE or RSE, or both by their parents/carers. There may be negative implications for children whose parents/carers choose to remove their children from education at a maintained school as a result of the change in law, particularly if the parent takes this action against the wishes of their child.

Parents/carers

A very few parents/carers will find the proposed changes to the law challenging because they currently exercise their right to withdraw their child from RE or RSE, usually for religious or moral reasons. It would be helpful if Welsh Government considered a way of communicating clear information about why the right of withdrawal is being removed, what they can expect their children to be learning and how the approach to teaching RE and RSE might differ to their own educational experience.

Welsh Government should consider requiring schools to have policies on RE and RSE that set out clearly the school’s approach to each. It may also be helpful for schools to be required to provide parents with the school’s plans for discrete learning experiences in RE and RSE (although it should be noted that learning experiences in RE and RSE are likely to also occur incidentally across the curriculum). Being able to read school policies and plans on RE and RSE may help to alleviate concerns that parents/carers may have about what is taught or how it is taught if the right of withdrawal is removed.

In the case of RE, it will be particularly important to share with families the issues and topics that will be addressed at a local level to help them understand the pluralistic approach to the teaching of RE. When taught well, RE can play an important role in improving community relationships, as exemplified below from our 2018 report [‘Religious education at key stage 2 and key stage 3’](#).

'In multi-faith areas of Wales, school provision for religious education can play an important part in improving community cohesion. For example, in one Cardiff school, staff feel that the school's religious education work has helped the community to address issues of racism, with pupils educating other members of their family about rights and the need to respect different views.' (Estyn 2018)

'In most schools, religious education helps schools to play a role in strengthening community cohesion. Most pupils have strong views on the importance of tolerance and respect and take these with them into their homes and wider communities. This is most noticeable in multi-faith parts of Wales. In a very few schools, leaders do not have a secure understanding of the opportunities that religious education provides to prepare pupils to live in a diverse society.' (Estyn 2018)

It would also be useful to remind schools of the benefit of effective communication in relation to RSE so that parents and carers gain a good understanding of the breadth and importance of this part of the curriculum. Some schools already provide very helpful sessions for parents/carers that explain the content of the curriculum and how it is taught, and provide opportunities for parents/carers to view curriculum resources and to discuss the content or approach. In our report '[A review of healthy relationships education](#)' we note that:

'A minority of schools invite parents to take part in workshops to view the materials used during SRE [Sex and Relationships Education] lessons. These schools encourage parents to discuss the content and share their views about the resources. This enables these schools to communicate its values for SRE with parents effectively. It also ensures that parents understand the importance of SRE lessons.'

Schools

Schools will need clear guidance and support to plan an RE curriculum that is relevant to their pupils' own locality, but which also reflects the multi-cultural and multi-faith nature of Wales and the wider world.

This need is exemplified in the shortcomings identified in the current teaching of RE from Estyn's 2018 report:

'In a few rural schools, pupils do not have a strong understanding that Wales is a multi-cultural, multi-faith country and believe that people with different religions only live in other countries'. (Estyn 2018)

School leaders and staff need to understand their responsibility for ensuring that pupils receive a high quality pluralistic RE education. It would be beneficial for Welsh Government and regional consortia to consider this as part of their professional learning strategy for the new curriculum. It is also important that Welsh Government take good account of the need for appropriate resources for teaching and learning, such as the RE supporting framework.

Estyn welcomes the proposal of a duty on the Welsh Ministers to issue statutory guidance on RSE in a way that is age-appropriate and developmentally suitable for

learners. It is important that the revised version of Curriculum for Wales provides schools with appropriate guidance to help them understand how RSE fits into the curriculum as a cross-curricular responsibility. Schools would benefit from additional clear and practical guidance about the breadth of what they teach and the approaches they could take to it. For further information on this, please refer to our response to question 2.

Question 2 – What support, information and guidance would be needed if this approach was adopted?

Please use the space below for your comments:

RE

Evidence from Estyn's thematic report on RE in 2018 suggests that support for schools should centre on professional learning. Specifically, this support should focus on the pluralistic approach to teaching RE, subject knowledge and the ability to deal with sensitive issues. This view is supported by the following findings.

'Most teachers have appropriate religious education subject knowledge. However, a minority of teachers fear that they might 'say the wrong thing' when teaching religions other than Christianity, particularly when their knowledge is less secure. As a result, pupils' learning experiences about faiths other than Christianity are more restricted.' (Estyn 2018)

'At key stage 2, in around half of schools, the usual class teacher does not teach religious education. Another member of staff (teacher or teaching assistant) who covers Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time teaches religious education on a weekly basis. In a few schools, teachers routinely leave religious education lessons for supply teachers to teach.' (Estyn 2018)

'In key stage 3, in most schools, a combination of specialist and competent non-specialist teachers teach religious education lessons. In only a few schools are all religious education lessons taught by specialist teachers. In most schools, the comprehensive scheme of work for religious education and ongoing support from the subject leader enable non-specialist teachers to teach the subject competently.' (Estyn 2018)

Professional Learning

'In most schools, teachers have very limited access to professional learning for religious education. Local authorities and regional consortia offer very little specialist professional learning in religious education for teachers or subject leaders. Only a few primary schools and a minority of secondary schools receive support and challenge specifically for religious education from local authorities or regional consortia.' (Estyn 2018)

'Only a minority of secondary schools receive any external support from the local authority or regional consortia. In consortia where there are regular meetings for subject leaders to share resources and develop schemes of work, teachers report that these meetings help them to improve practice in their school. In the few

schools where teachers are part of the local SACRE, they receive the most up-to-date information on the work of the group. However, teachers in a minority of schools make very little use of the information provided by their local SACRE.’ (Estyn 2018)

Documentation

Estyn welcomes the development of the RE supporting framework that is currently being written. We feel that schools will benefit from guidance that supports teaching and learning in RE that is pluralistic and of a high quality.

RSE

Earlier this year, Welsh Government consulted on guidance on Relationships and Sexuality Education. Estyn provided a full response to this consultation, which is relevant for this consultation too with respect to RSE. In summary, we noted that the guidance would benefit from:

- Paying a stronger focus on the concepts of rights, identity, gender, sex, relationships, sexual identity, consent, prejudice, violence and discrimination
- Providing more detail about how a whole-school approach to RSE can be aligned with schools’ self-evaluation and planning for improvement
- Providing more detail about how the new expectations for RSE align to curriculum reform
- Clarifying how schools are expected to design a local curriculum that is consistent with national expectations for RSE
- Clarifying the RSE professional learning offer available to teachers.

In our recent report [‘Healthy and happy: school impact on pupils’ health and wellbeing’](#), we noted that ‘few teachers enter the profession with substantial background training in child or adolescent development, or how best to support children’s health and wellbeing.’ The report recommends that initial teacher education providers ‘should ensure that new teachers are trained to understand child and adolescent development and prepared to support pupils’ health and wellbeing.’

Question 3 – Our proposal is that parents/carers should not be able to prevent their child from having RE or RSE lessons. This will be rolled out from September 2022, for all primary age learners and learners in Year 7 in secondary school (with additional year groups being added each year).

Should the ability of parents/carers to prevent their child from receiving RE and RSE lessons also be stopped under the old curriculum from September 2022? (This would only have implications for learners in Years 8–11 in 2022, Years 9–11 in 2023, and so on.)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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Why do you think that?

We do not have a strong view on this matter.

On the one hand, the proposal to remove the right of withdrawal is connected to the introduction of a new curriculum, which would include statutory RE and RSE. It seems logical, therefore, for the right of withdrawal to remain for pupils following the current curriculum, with the new approach rolling out as the new curriculum rolls out. Otherwise, Welsh Government may need to produce additional guidance relating to the current curriculum as well as guidance for the new curriculum.

On the other hand, evidence from our inspection and thematic surveys suggests that the numbers currently being withdrawn from RE and RSE are very low. Many pupils value what they learn in RE lessons and in sessions that currently cover some of the content and issues in RSE. They feel that they benefit from the contribution it makes to their personal and social development. It also seems a sensible approach, therefore, to remove the right to withdraw for pupils in all year groups from 2022. In order to ease this transition, it would be useful for Welsh Government to provide schools with clear guidelines on how this affects the current curriculum and, importantly, on how to communicate this clearly, but sensitively to parents and carers.

Question 4 – What is an appropriate name for ‘religious education’, to accurately reflect the broader scope proposed in the new curriculum?

No change	<input type="checkbox"/>	Religion, values and ethics	<input type="checkbox"/>	Religions and worldviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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Other (please specify):
Reasons for your choice:

We agree that a change in name is desirable to indicate an important shift in thinking about the teaching of religion in schools, but we do not have a strong view of the alternative term. Both of the terms suggested have their merits, as have alternatives that include ‘philosophy’. Religion and philosophy are distinct, though closely related, study disciplines. They both seek to answer questions about human existence and the purpose of life, for example. Worldviews may be based on religion, philosophy or a blend of the two. Religion and philosophy inform beliefs, values and ethics.

Overall, we support a change to the name for this area of the curriculum so as to reflect the broader scope proposed in the new curriculum. The singular ‘religion’ should be used in the title, and not the plural ‘religions’, to ensure that the emphasis should be on the concept of ‘religion’ that can be exemplified by different religions, rather than focusing on separate religions. The use of the word ‘religions’ may have the unintended consequence of teaching religions discreetly

and possibly focusing on the differences rather than the similarities and interconnections between religious beliefs.

Welsh Government should emphasise the important place of RE within the humanities area of learning and experience (AoLE) in the new curriculum. Arguably, the broader scope of this area is captured in this AoLE sufficiently already. The introduction to the draft humanities AoLE guidance states:

'[Learners] will be asked to consider the impact of their actions and the actions of others, and how these are shaped by interpretations of human rights, values, ethics, religious and non-religious views, and philosophies. Through this they will come to understand, respect and challenge a variety of world views...'

'As they explore their locality, Wales and the wider world, past and present, learners will establish a solid base of knowledge and understanding of geographical, historical, religious, non-religious, business, and social studies concepts.'

'Learners will have the safe space for discussion and reflection which allows time to explore their personal perspectives on religious and non-religious world views, ethical challenges and social inclusion issues. 'What Matters' statements state:

'Learners will explore a range of beliefs and philosophies about the natural world, and how they influence people's interactions with the world.'

'[Learners] will also be encouraged to explore – and develop a tolerant and empathetic understanding of – the varied beliefs, values, traditions and ethics that underpin and shape human society.'

'Questioning and evaluating existing responses to challenges and opportunities will help learners develop as self-aware, informed, ethical global citizens who critically reflect on their own beliefs and values.'

The language in this draft AoLE guidance refers variously to, for example:

- religious and non-religious views
- religious and non-religious worldviews
- religious and non-religious concepts
- beliefs
- traditions
- values
- ethics
- ethical challenges
- philosophies

Question 5 – We would like to know your views on the effects that not including a right to withdraw in the new curriculum 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

We do not expect that removing a right to withdraw in the new curriculum will have a positive or negative impact on opportunities for people to use Welsh. However, further consideration is needed to ensure Welsh-medium RE provision and resources is treated no less favourably than English-medium provision.

Question 6 – Please also explain how you believe the proposed plan 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

We feel that the parental right of withdrawal, whether continued or removed, has no discernible impact, positive or negative, on the use of Welsh. However, further consideration is needed to ensure Welsh-medium RE provision is treated no less favourably than English-medium provision, in particular ensuring that any resources produced to support the teaching of RE are released simultaneously in Welsh and English.

Question 7 – 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.

There is a need for schools to engage with parents on this issue. There will be a requirement for schools to engage with learners and parents to develop their local curriculum and they should ensure RE is explored.

Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to remain anonymous, please tick here: