Report on the teaching provision of Religion, Values and Ethics in Schools in Wales (April 2024)

Research By:
Dr Joshua Andrews
Dr Gareth Evans-Jones
Ms Rachel Healand-Sloan
and Prof Lucy Huskinson

Online accessible version: May 2024

CONTEXT AND AIMS

A central remit of the National Centre of Religious Education for Wales is to provide free academic expertise and pedagogical support in the subjects of philosophy, religion, and ethics to teachers and students from GSCE to Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) levels through a variety of activities including workshops, revision sessions, and Continual Professional Development (CPD) events. Since October 2022, the Centre has received a steady stream of negative reports and feedback from primary and secondary teachers across Wales over the implementation of the new curriculum for Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE).

In Wales, the Curriculum and Assessment Act, which came into being in September 2022, renamed 'Religious Education' (RE) to 'Religion, Values and Ethics' (RVE) with the stipulation that it be a compulsory subject for all students aged 3 to 16. It was subsequently integrated into the Humanities Area of Teaching and Learning.

To clarify the problematic issues received by the Centre and to ascertain potential remedies, the Directors of the Centre, Dr Joshua Andrews, Dr Gareth Evans-Jones, and Prof Lucy Huskinson, and a research assistant, Ms Rachel Healand-Sloan, conducted investigative research using qualitative and quantitative questionnaires circulated to teachers of RVE across Wales. Responses were anonymised. Responses were received from 58 schools across 17 different Welsh counties and boroughs, and from primary and secondary schools, special educational needs schools and those specialising in lifelong learning. 34 responded through the medium of English and 24 through the medium of Welsh.

KEY FINDINGS

Findings revealed systematic challenges in the teaching of RVE in Wales, including issues of legal compliance, with over half the schools in Wales are failing to provide the minimal legal provision of RVE teaching across Key Stages 3 and 4, inadequate resources, and instructional deficiencies.

AIMS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire sought to understand how educational institutions across Wales have integrated RVE into their curriculum for Key Stages 1-3. Specifically, it sought to understand, (1) how teachers perceive distinctions between RVE and RE, in terms of their respective learning outcomes, skills-sets, diverse content, teaching methodologies, aims and objectives; (2) the extent to which the updated curriculum incorporates a variety of distinctive global religions, worldviews, and philosophies; (3) whether RVE is taught independently as a standalone subject or as one of several subjects integrated into a broader Humanities curriculum. Where RVE is taught as part of an integrated Humanities curriculum, additional questions were asked to ascertain the time allocated to teaching RVE compared to the other subjects taught alongside it, and whether there are variations in staffing levels and training opportunities for RVE teachers compared to the other subjects.

The questionnaire also solicited information about the potential impact of introducing RVE at Key Stage 3 on the provision of RE and Religious Studies (RS) at Key Stage 4.

PARTICIPANTS

Questionnaires targeted primary schools, secondary schools, and Special Educational Needs (SEN) educational institutions throughout Wales, covering state schools and those with a religious character, to capture a diverse range of perspectives and experiences. Because responses from primary school educators were relatively few, this dataset was not included in our analysis, but it was considered in our assessments of the wider context of the new provision of RVE.

There were 43 respondents. These were teachers who taught in either secondary schools or schools that taught Key Stage 3, such middle schools. 32.56% respondents taught in bi-lingual schools, 30.23% in Welsh medium schools, and 37.21% were from English medium schools.

Responses were received from teachers in the following counties/boroughs:

- Anglesey
- Bridgend
- Cardiff
- Carmarthen
- Ceredigion
- Conwy
- Denbighshire
- Flintshire
- Glamorgan
- Gwynedd
- Neath Port Talbot
- Newport
- Pembrokeshire
- Powys
- Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Swansea
- Wrexham

Participants were asked to identify their teaching role. A variety of answers were given:

- A newly qualified teacher (NQT)
- Classroom teacher
- Head of RVE
- Head of Humanities
- Senior Leadership Team

As expected, the respondents represented teachers with a broad spectrum of teaching experiences, spanning those who identified themselves as newly qualified teachers to those who had been teaching for up to 36 years.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire includes closed and open-ended questions to enable statistical insights through the collation of quantitative data sets, and exploration of qualitative data that provided us with a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the participant's responses. Participants had the option to complete it in English or Welsh.

Data Collection

Initial contact was established with school administrators, and their co-operation was sought in circulating the questionnaire to relevant teaching staff. Informed ethical consent was obtained from participating schools and teachers to ensure they understood the purpose of the questionnaire, their rights to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality safeguarding measures in place. An open call was also issued on social media, and the respondents were informed of their right to withdraw their answers at any time. Participants were anonymised to encourage fuller and unrestricted responses. The questionnaire was administered electronically to allow for efficient data collection, reduced environmental impact, and to allow teachers and institutions to respond at their convenience within the prescribed deadline.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from closed questions were processed using statistical software to generate descriptive and inferential statistics, providing a quantitative overview of trends and patterns. Open-ended responses were subject to thematic analysis, allowing for the identification and exploration of recurring themes, opinions, and insights.

FINDINGS

This section examines responses to the key questions in turn.

1. Is RVE at your institution a compulsory subject for all students between the ages of 3 and 16?

As noted, it is a legal requirement that RVE is taught in Welsh schools (Curriculum and Assessment Act for Wales 2022). However, our findings reveal a significant proportion of schools are not fulfilling this legal requirement. Only 17 (39.53%) confirmed that RVE was a compulsory subject in their school, while 25 (58.14%) indicated it was not treated as such. One teacher did not provide a response (2.33%).

Discussion

This disparity demonstrates a failure to comply with legal mandates but also suggests there are significant and detrimental implications for the educational development of students. The new curriculum for RVE places a strong emphasis on the need to understand diverse religious beliefs, ethical principles, and societal values. By neglecting to include RVE as a compulsory subject, schools are in effect deskilling their students from vital social skills and denying them opportunities to understand their role as responsible citizens in an increasingly multicultural society in Wales and beyond. RVE plays a crucial role in promoting social cohesion and cultural understanding within Welsh society. Through the exploration of different religious traditions, moral dilemmas, and ethical frameworks, students develop the critical thinking and problem-solving skills required to navigate an increasingly diverse and interconnected world. Failure to provide this educational foundation not only undermines principles of inclusivity and tolerance but also perpetuates ignorance and prejudice.

The reluctance of schools to make RVE compulsory reflects a systemic problem that extends beyond individual institutions. It underscores the need for greater accountability and enforcement of educational standards to ensure all students have access to a comprehensive and inclusive curriculum.

Some respondents also noted that their school has excluded RVE from their Key Stage 4 curricula, which indicates that some schools may fail to fulfil the legal obligation to teach RVE until the end of Key Stage 4. This prompts the need to investigate the future of GCSE qualifications in the subject area.

2. Which religions are studied as part of the new curriculum?

While the new curriculum framework aims to empower teachers to incorporate a broader range of ethical and philosophical worldviews, it is evident that many schools are still primarily focusing on the study of the traditional ‘big six’ religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism). Subsequently, these schools are delivering a RE curriculum rather than embracing the rationale of the RVE curriculum.

The survey results reveal that the study of Christianity has a monopoly on religions studied, with a sizeable 98% of respondents noting its inclusion within their curriculum. The study of Judaism was included in 88% of curricula, and the study of Islam in 84% of curricula. These results reflect traditional trends in Welsh religious education. While dharmic religions are represented, such as Hinduism (72%), Buddhism (70%), and Sikhism (63%), the inclusion of other minority religions, such as Paganism, Humanism, and Bahai is minimal, with only 5% of teachers reporting their study.

The data indicates a lack of significant consideration given to secular and philosophical viewpoints, with only 2% of teachers reporting the study of atheism and non-religious beliefs. This suggests a missed opportunity for schools to diversify their curricula and provide students with invaluable exposure to a broader spectrum of moral and philosophical perspectives.

Discussion

The absence of specific worldviews relevant to local and regional areas of Wales, or those related to staff specialisms is concerning. Despite the flexibility afforded by the new curriculum framework, there is little evidence to suggest that schools are using this opportunity to incorporate the diverse perspectives that may resonate more closely with the lived experiences of their own students and/or with the expertise of their teaching staff.

Our findings highlight a significant gap between the objectives of the RVE curriculum and its implementation in schools across Wales. Most schools appear to be maintaining a narrow and limited view of religion, focusing only on traditional religions, while neglecting the broader mandate of introducing students to a wide range of secular and philosophical viewpoints. Moving forward, it is imperative for schools to embrace the principles of RVE by diversifying their curricula to ensure that students are upskilled and equipped with a more comprehensive understanding of ethics, values, and worldviews.

3. Are there resources available to assist schools to develop and deliver the new RVE curriculum?

Only 18 (41.86%) respondents stated that resources were available to assist schools in developing the new curriculum. 25 (58.14%) respondents indicated resources were severely insufficient and that there were no readily available resources. It was noted that there is only one official textbook and that is in English only.[1]

Discussion

Our findings reveal a concerning lack of support and guidance for teachers. The scarcity of resources poses serious questions about the planning and implementation of the new

[1] Parry, L. and Hayes, J. (2022) Curriculum for Wales: Religion, Values and Ethics for 11-14 years, Hodder Education: London (ISBN-10: 1398348740; 232 pages).

curriculum. Adequate teaching materials are fundamental to ensure adequate development of the subject and its effective instruction within schools.

The fact that only one official RVE textbook has been published, and only in English, for pupils aged 11-14, is wholly inadequate. Moreover, the focus of this handbook is predominantly on different religions, and as such, it fails to address the wider remit and principles of RVE. This is problematic, particularly when a teacher is attempting to plan for its teaching alongside other subjects, such as History and Geography, as part of the mixed Humanities curriculum.

The absence of a Welsh-language version of the textbook further exacerbates the issue and raises significant concerns about the provision of Welsh-medium resources and attitudes towards Welsh-medium education. Despite the legal parity of Welsh and English in Wales since 2011, the failure to publish a Welsh version of this textbook simultaneously with the English version suggests teaching and learning RVE in Welsh is of lesser value than it is in English. Respondents have responded to the English-only textbook with frustration, with one noting that they had personally contacted the publisher, Hodder Education, to request permission to translate some parts of the book. Permission was denied. It has since come to light that Hodder Education have no intention of translating this textbook in to the medium of Welsh.

Despite these challenges, some positive examples of useful sources were mentioned by respondents, notably, by respondents who were based in south-east and south-west regions of Wales, where it was mentioned on several occasions that Swansea's Standing Advisory Council for RE (SACRE) has been consistent and clear in its guidelines for the implementation of the RVE curriculum. Additionally, pedagogical resources that are available on online platforms such as the NATRE website, Humanist websites, and RVE Facebook groups were noted as offering some support to teachers who are navigating the new curriculum.

4. Have the government's guidelines[2] helped you to develop RVE in your school?

More than half of the respondents (23: 53.49%) expressed dissatisfaction with the Welsh Parliament's (WP) guidelines. These respondents found the guidelines ambiguous and potentially misleading. Several noted the guidelines were vague, unclear, and open to radically different interpretations, thereby suggesting the potential for radically different RVE curricula being taught throughout schools in Wales. Some noted that they approach their teaching of RVE as if it were still RE. Others noted they are developing their curriculum to focus more on philosophy and less on religion.

Several respondents felt the terms 'values' and 'ethics' in RVE required clear definitions, and guidance on the topics that ought to be included in the study of values and ethics. Some of

[2] The WP Guidelines are available at: https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2021-05/consultation-document-curriculum-for-wales-religion-values-and-ethics-guidance.pdf

these respondents felt this was of particularly concern for those teaching RVE in special educational needs (SEN) schools.

One teacher acknowledged that the guidelines outlined at the end of the Welsh curriculum document were useful “to some extent”.

Discussion

The WP’s failure to provide a coherent and cohesive vision for RVE has left teachers struggling to interpret and implement the curriculum effectively. This lack of clarity results in varying and contrasting interpretations, which has the potential to lead to disparities in the quality and content of the subject across schools in Wales. This raises questions about whether students across Wales are being adequately prepared for GCSE RE within their Key Stage 3 curriculum, and whether schools are realistically addressing topics of ethics and values in their curriculum or simply reverting to the older RE curriculum. Furthermore, the lack of guidance for SEN schools underscores the need for further research and tailored support in this area.

5. **Have you had the opportunity for professional training to assist you with the new curriculum?**

Among the respondents, 24 (55.81%) indicated they had received some form of training, while 19 (44.19%) reported they had not. A notable discrepancy emerged between English medium and Welsh medium teachers, with a significantly higher proportion of Welsh medium teachers noting they had not received any form of training.

Discussion

The lack of clarity on WP’s guidelines is compounded by the fact that relatively few RVE teachers have received training for the new curriculum. There is an expectation that every teacher should receive adequate training to manage the substantial changes in the curriculum. The lack of training for Welsh-medium teachers is particularly concerning, and this concern is exacerbated with the absence of the Welsh-medium textbook (see above). The lack of Welsh-medium training for RVE undermines the principles of bilingual education and risks alienating Welsh-speaking students both individually and by perpetuating linguistic disparities within the educational system.

There were positive responses from respondents whose schools provided them with training for the new curriculum. Specific initiatives were lauded. These include the efforts of some individuals, such as Jennifer Harding-Richards, an RE Advisor and a member of the SACRE, for Swansea, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire who conducted evening training sessions for teachers in schools across this region to explore different religions and world views. Another initiative mentioned was that of Lat Blaylock, from *RE Today*, who hosts training sessions for teachers, and a conference, StrictlyRE, both of which are targeted at teachers across the UK and require payment to attend (£100+).

One respondent mentioned that the Diocesan Education Department offered some training sessions online (through TEAMS). It is unclear from their response what these involved. Similarly, a respondent from Powys mentioned that educational trips and a working group were available to them to help them tackle the new curriculum, but the details of these are unclear. The initiatives mentioned suggest training opportunities are sporadic and unavailable to many regions in Wales, unless individuals are willing and able to pay for the opportunities available to them online, coming out of England.

It is important to note that the training sessions available to students in Swansea and Carmarthenshire are held in the evenings and weekends. This required teachers to sacrifice personal time, and it inevitably meant some teachers would not be able to attend. Furthermore, these sessions rely on the goodwill of academics with expertise in philosophy, religion, and ethics to contribute to the training sessions. Indeed, members from our Centre have contributed to them.

Some respondents who noted that some training was given to them from within their own institution, described sessions that were unhelpful. Others found them relatively helpful. The consistency and effectiveness of training provided by schools varies substantially.

Given the comprehensive overhaul of the curriculum to include broader philosophical and ethical perspectives, it is concerning that widespread training is not accessible to all RVE teachers to ensure they feel adequately prepared to deliver the new curriculum. It is crucial that gaps in training are addressed. Further research is required to identify the training available for every region across Wales and the feasibility of its costs and timing of its delivery.

6. **Has the new curriculum for Wales benefited RVE?**

25 (58.14%) respondents believe the new curriculum is beneficial in theory and could be effective if carefully developed and applied. 17 (39.53%) stated that the new curriculum was not beneficial, with several noting its lack of coherent vision. A significant number of those who expressed dissatisfaction were from Welsh-medium schools, being 11 respondents. One respondent chose not to answer this question.

Discussion

Respondents acknowledge the potential benefits of the curriculum's broader scope with its capacity for transformative education by encouraging students to explore diverse lived experiences, various religious traditions, and philosophical perspectives, and to reflect more deeply on ethical issues. But respondents also expressed concerns about the inconsistencies and ambiguities that surround the implementation of RVE across schools in Wales. It was noted by some that RVE does not have a coherent identity. This was mirrored in several responses where teachers expressed confusion and difficulties in transitioning from traditional RE curriculums to the broader, and more inclusive framework of RVE. The lack of unified guidance and clarity from the Government on the differences between the two subjects was noted again here by teachers as a key source of the problem.

Ultimately, while teachers recognise the inherent value and potential of RVE, addressing the current gaps in implementation and providing adequate support and guidance are crucial steps towards realising its fuller benefits in Welsh education.

7. How many hours of curriculum time does RE/RVE currently receive in your school?

The hours allocated to the teaching of RVE varies significantly across schools. On average, the time allocated to teaching RVE is one hour per week. However, varying allocations of time were reported. Some respondents noted more favourable circumstances, such as two hours per week, with one respondent reporting an allocation of five hours per week for Year 7 students, followed by two hours per week for students in Years 8 and 9. One respondent noted that RVE was allotted only 15 hours per year as part of a mixed Humanities curriculum.

Discussion

There is considerable disparity in the hours allocated for RVE across schools in Wales. This reinforces inconsistencies in curriculum delivery and poses significant questions around equal opportunities available to students studying RVE in Wales. Where the time allocated to RVE is severely limited and restricted, students are unlikely to be exposed to the diversity of religious perspectives and ethical dilemmas required for the RVE curriculum, and, by the same token, it is likely to lead to superficial understandings and to skewed impressions of the values adopted within society and those upheld in other cultures. A reduction in time-allocation could therefore inadvertently undermine and damage the intended outcomes of the new curriculum.

One respondent highlighted that RVE is taught for only 15 hours per year as part of a mixed Humanities curriculum. This is alarming, since Humanities subjects are collectively assigned 4 hours a week. This means that other subject areas heavily prioritised to the detriment of RVE.

Further research needs to be undertaken to understand whether the shift from a standalone RE curriculum to its integration into a broader Humanities framework has had a negative impact on the aims and objectives and teaching quality of RVE, and, by extension, a reduction in religious literacy, problem-solving skills, critical skills of analysis, ethical reasoning, and moral understanding among school leavers in Wales.

8. Does RVE receive the same amount of time as the old curriculum for RE in Wales?

26 (60.47%) respondents reported that RVE is assigned the same or similar hours as RE had been prior to the transition to the new curriculum. 15 (34.88%) respondents noted it has been assigned fewer hours. 2 did not respond. Two respondents noted that their schools have chosen either to reduce RVE/RE at Key Stage 4 or entirely remove it.

Discussion

The reduction of RVE provision compared to its older counterpart, RE, is widespread. The removal or reduction of RVE from Key Stage 4 is alarming in two respects. First, it directly contravenes the legal requirement that RVE is taught to all students up to the age of 16. Some schools are thereby failing in their legal obligation to provide a comprehensive education to their students by failing to teach them essential content and skills related to inclusivity and tolerance. Second, it deprives students of the opportunity to develop life skills that are crucial for personal and social development.

9. Does RVE need more curriculum time?

32 (74.42%) respondents believe RVE requires a greater allocation of taught hours in the curriculum to ensure it is properly taught to allow students sufficient time to learn its content and skills.

Comments from respondents include:

“We get half the time that History and Geography do in year 7 and 8 and even less in year 9. Yet we are expected to make the same level of progress with the students."

“The only other subjects allocated such a small amount of time are the Arts. As an academic subject RVE should receive similar hours as the other humanities."

"RVE is one of the most relevant subjects we teach students as they will have to understand religion, ethics and philosophy when they go into the real world. Yet despite dealing with such important things, it is given less time than the other humanities."

Discussion

The call for increased time allocation to RVE highlights a perceived deficiency in the current curriculum structure compared to other subjects in the Humanities curriculum. Despite the legal mandate to teach RVE as a compulsory subject, our research suggests that schools may be struggling to integrate it effectively within existing schedules and priorities. This may be exacerbated by competing demands to teach other subjects, by limited resources for RVE, and insufficient training and support for RVE teachers.

Comments from teachers suggest that the widespread desire for more time allocated to RVE may reflect broader perceptions about the increasing significance of RVE in society today, to equip students with the skills required to navigate real-world challenges, complex moral and ethical dilemmas, and to engage constructively with diverse communities.

One respondent noted, "RVE doesn't have a specified 5%, not in the guidance on Hwb."[3] This underscores the lack of clear guidelines given to required time allocation for the

[3] Hwb: the online government repository of resources to support the Curriculum for Wales: https://hwb.gov.wales/resources.

subject, and this, in turn, hampers efforts to situate RVE fairly and sufficiently within the curriculum.

10. Is RE/RVE a standalone subject or part of the Humanities curriculum?

25 (58.14%) respondents reported that RVE is integrated into a mixed Humanities curriculum at their school, and 18 (41.86%) respondents stated it is taught as a standalone subject.

Discussion

Teaching RVE as part of a mixed Humanities curriculum suggests an interdisciplinary approach, where themes of religion, values, and ethics are interwoven with other subjects such as history, geography, and social studies. This approach has the potential to provide students with a more holistic understanding of how religious beliefs and ethical principles intersect with broader societal issues. By integrating RVE into the humanities curriculum, schools may foster a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of different cultural perspectives and moral frameworks.

However, the data we have acquired from the survey suggests this integrative and holistic approach is not being adopted, but, rather, that RVE is side-lined with focus given to the teaching to other subjects represented in the mixed Humanities curriculum. In addition to the ease with which subjects can be side-lined in favour of others, the mixed Humanities approach increases the likelihood that students are being taught by someone who has no specialism in one or more of the subjects studied. This means the depth and quality of the instruction and education may be compromised.

Teaching RVE as a standalone subject offers the advantage of dedicated time and focus specifically on religious education, values, and ethics, and opportunities for deeper, more meaningful discussions and critical reflections on complex issues related to morality, identity, and belief. Both approaches have their merits and drawbacks, and the decision to teach RVE within a mixed Humanities curriculum or as a standalone subject will vary depending on factors such as school resources, curriculum priorities, and pedagogical preferences. Regardless of the approach taken, it is imperative that RVE is taught comprehensively.

The next three questions (10b-10d) sought to provide clarity into the positive and negative aspects to these different approaches to teaching RVE, and whether teaching RVE as part of an integrative humanities curriculum puts severe constraints on teaching it effectively, in terms of time allocated and lack of expertise to teach it.

10b. If RVE is taught as part of the humanities curriculum, does it receive the same amount of time as other Humanities subjects?

65% of the respondents (27 respondents) teach RVE as part of a mixed Humanities curriculum. Of this representative group, 12 respondents (27.91%) indicated that RVE does not receive the same amount of time as other Humanities subjects, whilst 16 (37.21%)

stated the subject was allocated equal time. 3 respondents provided further details on how RVE features within their Humanities curricula as follows. 1 respondent noted that while History and Geography receive three hours per week, RVE only receives two hours per fortnight. Another indicated that History and Geography receive a total of 70 hours of time each for students in Years 7 and 8, while RVE receives only 15 hours within the same timeframe. The third respondent mentioned they are allowed to teach RVE for just half the time allocated to History and Geography for students in Years 7 and 8, with a further reduction to 1 hour every fortnight for students in Year 9.

Discussion

Rates in response were split between 10b and 10c. Responses to 10b confirm that there is a substantial disparity between time allocated to RVE compared to other Humanities subjects and responses provide some insight into the dissatisfaction teachers feel about the disparity. Responses to this question highlight the importance of the teacher's feelings about their subject expertise and confidence in their ability to shape the delivery of RVE. One respondent noted that the allocation of time for RVE within the Humanities curriculum depends on the teacher's own proficiency and enthusiasm for teaching the theme of a unit. This indicates potentially substantial variations in the quality and consistency of RVE instruction across classrooms and raises concerns about the educational experience and outcomes for students.

10c. If RVE is taught as an independent subject, does it receive the same amount of curriculum time as other Humanities subjects?

One respondent noted that RVE as a standalone subject receives 2 hours every other week, compared to 3 hours per week for the standalone subjects of History and Geography. Another respondent noted that RVE receives 1 hour less per fortnight compared to other Humanities subjects and that RVE is not included or mentioned in Year 6 induction days. Several respondents mentioned that RVE receives less teaching time in Years 8 and 9 as a standalone subject compared to History and Geography. Some respondents simply stated "less," indicating a general perception or awareness of RVE receiving less attention or fewer resources compared to other standalone Humanities subjects. One respondent noted that Geography and History both receive double the instructional time of Religion and Ethics in Year 9 when taught as standalone subjects. Some respondents expressed uncertainty about the differences in teaching time between RVE and other Humanities subjects when taught independently of each other. Two respondents note that RVE receives an hour less per week, highlighting there has been a specific reduction in time assigned to RVE compared to other standalone subjects. One respondent noted that there is no difference in teaching time for Year 8 students when RVE is taught as a standalone subject.

Discussion

Like responses for 10b, the information gleaned here confirms the disparities between time allocated to RVE compared to other Humanities subjects and the dissatisfaction teachers feel about this. The fact that RVE is not included or mentioned in Year 6 induction days in

one school suggests that RVE is not receiving the same or similar levels of emphasis or consideration as other subjects during key transitional periods in the education of their students.

10d. Does your school provide training for teachers who do not specialize in subjects to ensure that they can provide the best education for Humanities?

9 (20.93%) respondents said their schools provided training for Humanities teachers who were non-specialists in their Humanities subject. 33 (76.74%) respondents stated that there were no training opportunities available to non-specialists in humanities subjects. One noted that their Head of Department ensured training in History and Geography but not in RVE, because the subject is, to quote, “just opinion, anyway”. One respondent mentioned the necessity for History teachers to step in and teach RVE lessons due to staffing shortages.

Discussion

It is evident from comments of respondents that there is a palpable concern from teachers about the lack of subject expertise among teachers who are tasked with delivering RVE and other Humanities subjects. Some respondents highlighted the substantial differences in content and skills subjects of RVE, History, and Geography, and emphasized the need for specialised training to ensure teachers are properly equipped to manage their differences sufficiently.

Our research highlights the need to prioritise the training of non-specialist teachers tasked with teaching RVE and other Humanities subjects to ensure the integrity of the curriculum is not jeopardised. It is also clear that there needs to be greater recognition of the unique challenges and complexities of teaching RVE to ensure training is appropriately tailored to its pedagogical requirements.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Responses from the survey expose various challenges and opportunities with the teaching of Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) in Welsh schools. Key points underscore the need for comprehensive support, clearer guidance, and ongoing investment to ensure its successful integration into the curriculum. Immediately following the survey, the Centre has received numerous correspondences from teachers who are keen to make additional comments or to express their concerns more forcibly. Below is a summary of key points from the survey and points emphasised within subsidiary correspondence from teachers.

Perception of RVE as a pointless and undervalued subject. RVE tends to be viewed by schools as a mere administrative 'tick box' requirement, rather than an opportunity for transformative education.

Need for training and investment. This includes financial investment and professional development opportunities to upskill teachers and to improve levels of confidence and competence in delivering RVE sufficiently.

Clarity and consistency in the curriculum. There is confusion among teachers and schools about expectations placed on them for teaching the main religions in Key Stage 3, and that the current level of freedom granted to schools on shaping the RVE curriculum can lead to inconsistent provision, and, by extension, detrimentally harm their students' preparations for, and performance in GCSE exams.

Availability of resources and confidence to teach. A recurring theme of our research is the lack of confidence among teachers in delivering sufficient RVE lessons, due to inadequate resources, textbooks, general support and guidance.

Workload and Staffing Issues. There are considerable staffing challenges, with some schools lacking teachers with specialism in RVE, or requiring them to teach multiple subjects. This raises concerns about the quality and consistency of RVE provision across schools in Wales.

Unclear government policies. There is a call from teachers and schools for clear educational policies to protect the status of RVE within mixed humanities curricula, and for greater guidance and support from Government bodies to ensure consistency and coherence in RVE provision.

Assessment and Progression. Linked to issues of ambiguity around the scope and focus of the RVE curriculum, are questions raised by teachers about how best to assess student progression across the RVE curriculum in line with principles of progression and 'what matters' statements. There is a desire for guidance on cross-curricula links and effective assessment methods.

Professional learning and development opportunities. Teachers recognise the need for ongoing professional development to deepen their knowledge and skills in teaching religious and non-religious beliefs.

Update the curriculum to keep it relevant. There is an expressed need to ensure the RVE curriculum is continually reviewed and updated to ensure its relevance and efficacy in meeting students' own expectations, interests, and needs. This includes providing greater context to the topics taught and avoiding unnecessary stretching the content to incorporate irrelevant facts and information.

Positive impact of RVE. Despite the challenges of teaching RVE, several respondents have noted that the curriculum change from RE to RVE has had a positive impact on their student culture and to the teaching and learning environments within their schools.

CONCLUSION

The discrepancy between legal mandates for the teaching of RVE as a compulsory subject in Wales and the actual implementation of this teaching underscores a systemic failure throughout Welsh schools to adhere to the foundational principles of the new curriculum. The disconnection between government policy and educational practice raises fundamental questions about accountability and the enforcement of educational standards.

Overwhelming pressure on teachers, compounded by a substantial and unwarranted lack of resources and guidance on RVE, suggests that the new curriculum has been hastily arranged and implemented irresponsibly in Welsh schools without consideration and foresight into the inevitable problems that have arisen for schools, teachers, and students alike. While there are some 'good news' stories coming out of regions in the South East and the South West of Wales, the overall position suggests that most students are severely disadvantaged by current RVE education practices and the subject is unduly compromised.

The lack of adequate training for non-specialist teachers tasked with delivering RVE exacerbates concerns over the quality and consistency of RVE across Welsh schools. The dearth of RVE subject expertise among teachers, coupled with staffing shortages, and limited training opportunities, poses significant challenges to the successful implementation of the RVE curriculum. Without sufficient support and resources, teachers may continue to struggle to navigate the complexities of teaching RVE effectively, and their students' performance inevitably suffers as a result.

The narrow focus given to the study of traditional religions at the expense of diverse ethical and philosophical worldviews represents a missed opportunity to foster inclusivity and cultural understanding within the curriculum. While the framework for the new curriculum aims to broaden the scope of religious education and to promote skills of analysis and critical thinking, the persistent emphasis on the 'big six' religions fails to move beyond the older RE curriculum, and reflects a tired and sterile approach that inadequately captures the diversity of contemporary society.

These failings call for urgent action to address the status quo. Clear and unambiguous guidelines, comprehensive and freely accessible resources, and robust support mechanisms are essential to ensure the successful implementation of the RVE curriculum.

While most teachers appear to laud the transition from RE to RVE and cite as key the social importance and timely relevance of its subject matter, a prevailing sentiment of apprehension permeates the comments made by teachers throughout the survey, and this continues in the steady stream of correspondence we continue to receive in the Centre from teachers of RVE since the adoption of the new curriculum in Wales.

Proactive measures and initiatives, including targeted professional development, revisions to the curriculum, and enhanced support mechanisms, are essential to ensure the successful implementation of the RVE curriculum, and by extension, to realise the potentials of RVE as a transformative force in Welsh education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We make the following recommendations.

Government clarity in the use of terminology.

The terms, 'Religion', 'Values', and 'Ethics', have caused substantial confusion for teachers, especially with regards to the definition of 'Values' within this framework. Teachers urgently require explicit guidance from the WP to elucidate their meanings, especially the nuanced distinctions between 'Ethics' and 'Values'. Are 'Ethics' and 'Values' meant to be treated synonymously or are they intended to convey distinct meanings within the RVE curriculum? Similarly, are 'Values' in 'RVE' linked to specific kinds of values, akin, perhaps to the 'British Values' initiative in England? Clarity on the definition and meaning of 'Religion', 'Values', and 'Ethics', by explaining their purpose, significance, and alignment with overarching educational objectives is crucial to ensure a uniform understanding across educational institutions and to prevent incongruities in the educational values imparted by different schools in Wales.

Government guidance on content.

While teachers generally appear optimistic about the opportunities that RVE provides for integrating philosophical and ethical worldviews into their curricula, we have identified that many are unable to recognise and select suitable philosophical or ethical theories to incorporate into their teaching plans.

The current literature provided by the WP lacks comprehensive guidance on what constitutes an appropriate philosophical or ethical worldview, offering only limited examples, such as pacifism and ethical veganism. This has led several teachers and schools to hesitate in and sometimes to refrain from adapting their curriculum and choosing instead to revert to the RE curriculum instead of diversifying their curriculum to include a broader spectrum of religious and secular worldviews.

There is a pressing need for clearer guidance on the types of philosophical and ethical worldviews that could be seamlessly integrated into the curriculum. This needs to be supplemented with sample schemes of work circulated to all RVE teachers that serve as practical examples (either for direct implementation into their teaching or as sources of inspiration) that demonstrate effective ways to incorporate philosophical and ethical worldviews into an RVE curriculum.

Through the National Centre for Religious Education, we are well positioned to develop these schemes of work, and to that end, we invite the WP to collaborate with us.

Formally structuring the integrated/mixed Humanities curriculum, Key Stage 3.

Our research has identified that the adoption of a mixed or integrated humanities approach to the teaching of RVE has led to the distinct marginalisation of RVE within the curriculum, with its other subjects (notably, History and Geography) receiving disproportionately more

allocated time. While this is not an issue for all schools in Wales, it is apparent that a substantially high percentage of schools encounter significant challenges in delivering a Humanities curriculum that affords RVE equal time and space alongside other Humanities subjects. The suppression of RVE in the humanities curriculum risks stultifying essential social and analytical skills in students, skills that are vital for academic, social, and personal growth.

It is recommended that the impact of mixed Humanities curricula on GCSE results and A-level results is identified. Our research suggests that a great many students will be taught Key Stage 3 RVE by teachers who specialise in History or Geography, and who lack specialist RVE knowledge. There is a distinct probability that these students may not develop the requisite skills to progress to GCSE RS or A-level RS. By the same token, if these teachers fail to instil enthusiasm for RVE in their students, it could lead to a decline in students opting to take RS at the examination level. Furthermore, given the sensitive nature of some RVE topics, there is a risk that these teachers could inadvertently offend religious groups and compromise the integrity of the subject by presenting ideas inaccurately or introducing inappropriate tasks within their teaching.

Clear guidelines are required to safeguard RVE across educational settings. Given the pivotal role of RVE for preparing students for real life and work within multicultural Wales and beyond, there is strong argument for RVE to be taught only as a distinct and standalone subject. However, if the WAG seeks to continue to allow for the inclusion of RVE in mixed Humanities curriculums, it ought to provide explicit guidelines that specify the structure of these curricula to ensure equitable time is allocated for each subject. Furthermore, schools require clear guidance on whether mixed Humanities curricula should be delivered through distinct units, with each focussed on one Humanities subject, or whether a thematic approach ought to be adopted, where a specific theme is explored from different perspectives garnered from each Humanities subject.

We urge the WP to ensure that Estyn, the education inspectorate for Wales, reviews the delivery of RVE in all schools and establishes a mandate that ensures RVE is not side-lined within the school curriculum. We strongly recommend the WP collaborate with the National Centre for Religious Education to formulate a clear and comprehensive set of guidelines that positions RVE properly, fairly, and effectively within curricula. These guidelines will emphasise the minimum time requirements assigned to RVE across all Key Stages.

The provision of free and easily accessible sessions of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for RVE teachers and non-specialist teachers tasked with teaching RVE.

The teaching of RVE by teachers who have no specialism in the subject areas is concerning, especially when the sensitive nature of its subject matter is considered and the prospect that many non-specialist teachers may inadvertently misrepresent and potentially offend students and others with their lack of knowledge of religious and philosophical ideas, beliefs, and viewpoints. Furthermore, the skills of critical analysis and reflection that RVE teaches requires a degree of sophistication and proficiency that non-specialist teachers may

find challenging. This becomes especially problematic when preparing students for the demands of the GSCE examination in the subject.

Correspondence to our Centre by teachers indicate that the mixed Humanities approach to RVE is starting to impact detrimentally on the professional development of associate teachers, by preventing them from completing their PGCEs due to a lack of opportunities to teach RVE during placements.

Given these concerns, we strongly recommend that the WP discourages secondary schools from adopting a mixed Humanities curriculum at Key Stage 3. An alternative solution would be for the Government to work with the National Centre for Religious Education to establish Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes that are tailored to the needs of non-specialist teachers tasked with teaching RVE. These programmes would provide accessible online training at no cost to schools across Wales.

Online CPD sessions are currently available to teachers with specialism in RVE, but these are expensive, and available only in English and not in Welsh. CPD sessions will need to acquaint current RVE teachers with a diverse array of philosophical and ethical worldviews suitable for inclusion in the new RVE curriculum. They are vital to ensuring teachers possess the requisite subject knowledge to deliver these aspects of RVE meaningfully and accurately. They can help to install confidence in teachers to teach these subjects and help them to avoid common misrepresentation of diverse worldviews. We are well positioned to provide CPD opportunities to ensure the effective implementation of RVE in schools by specialist RVE and non-specialist RVE teachers alike.

Allocation of RVE pedagogical resources.

Our research highlights substantial challenges faced by schools and teachers to identify and access helpful pedagogical resources to aid their teaching of RVE. This is felt most viscerally in Welsh-medium schools where resources are scant, compared to English-medium schools which benefit from resources published in *RE Today* and CPD training sessions (with the caveat that *RE Today* is accessible only to members of the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), and CPD training sessions are often at personal financial cost). The disparity in resources available in English and Welsh has implications for the development of curricula. While some English- medium schools have managed to diversify their curriculums to encompass religious, spiritual, and philosophical world views that had not previously been included in their curricula, Welsh-medium teachers predominantly maintain curricula that mirror the former RE curricula, by focussing on the six major world religions.

To meet these challenges, the National Centre for Religious Education is committed to providing a range of free bilingual resources, including schemes of work, media resources, and CPD opportunities for all schools in Wales. But the Centre requires collaboration with the Welsh Assembly Government to acquire greater clarity on its vision for RVE. This will ensure the resources produced by the Centre align with the Government's goals.

Retention of RVE teachers in Wales.

Our Centre has received worrying correspondence from RVE/RE teachers that explain how the introduction of the mixed Humanities approach in Key Stage 3 has caused them, or their colleagues, to leave their schools in Wales to find teaching posts in RE in England. The common reports and stories we hear in these cases are about their frustration with the marginalisation of RVE in the humanities mixed curriculum adopted by their schools, and how they found themselves, consequently, having to teach History and Geography instead—subjects that they were not sufficiently qualified to teach and felt little enthusiasm for.

It is a cause for great concern if these examples reflect an increasing national trend of RVE teachers relocating to England. This would inevitably exacerbate the shortage of quality teaching of RVE in Wales. The concern is made more pressing when one considers the fact that bursaries of up to £10,000 are now available for those who wish to train as an RE teacher in England, while no such bursaries are available to trainee teachers in Wales. It is probable that more graduates from Wales will opt to enrol in PGCE programmes in England.

While it may not be possible for the Welsh Assembly Government to offer competing bursaries for PGCE RVE/RE to ensure the good quality trainee teachers are kept in Wales, the Government can begin to reduce the detrimental impacts on RVE in secondary schools by utilizing the recommended strategies we outline in this report.

Clear KS4 Guidelines.

Our research reveals that a substantial number of schools have either eliminated or significantly reduced mandatory Key Stage 4 provision for RVE/RE. This decision will inevitably hasten declining numbers of students in Wales who enrol in GCSE Religious Studies (RS). An additional obstacle that will likely contribute to this decline is to the recent decision to eradicate from September 2025 short course GCSEs in the subject. This means that there will no longer be accredited courses in the subject area that can be completed by schools within the time previously allocated to Key Stage 4 RE/RS of one hour per week. While the New Curriculum for Wales removes the legal requirement for schools to teach RVE/RE/RS up to the age of 18, there is an unequivocal legal obligation for secondary schools to provide RVE/RE/RS to students up to the age of 16.

We urge the WP to enforce the compulsory nature of RVE/RE/RS for all students up to the age of 16, by actively promoting and encouraging secondary schools to invite students to engage in GCSE courses in Religious Studies, and by ensuring that Estyn, the Education Inspectorate for Wales, is diligent in its monitoring of RVE/RE/RS provision at Key Stages 3 and 4 during its inspections. Schools failing to meet requirements for delivering RVE/RE/RS across Key Stages 3 and 4, should face due consequences.

Revise the existing proposals to change GCSE Religious Studies (RS).

We have profound reservations about the structure of the current GCSE Religious Studies curriculum, which came into being in 2017, and the nature of proposed changes to it. We

strongly urge that the following considerations are reviewed before the GCSE curriculum is changed. Prior to 2017, the previous incarnation of the GCSE RS adopted a thematic approach, which lent a dynamic quality and flexibility to its structure. By contrast, the structure of the current curriculum is rigid and unnaturally separates religion from philosophy and ethics. The current curriculum comprises two units that examine the beliefs and practices of two religions, and two units that examine the philosophical and ethical teachings of two religions in relation to a specific theme. While the current curriculum encourages academic rigour by fostering skills of analysis and extended writing, it falls short in its seamless integration of religious beliefs and practices with broader philosophical and moral considerations and contemporary social issues to which students can relate. It is perhaps unsurprising that the rigid and abstract structure of the current GCSE has coincided with a notable decline in students sitting RS at GCSE and A-level.

We have reviewed with interests the proposals to revise the current GCSE in Religious Studies. We had hoped there would be a return to a thematic approach to encourage students' meaningful reflection on religious beliefs in connection to philosophical and ethical issues while maintaining its rigorous academic skills. We are disappointed to see the proposals seek to maintain the rigid structure of the current curriculum.

We advocate for the renaming of the GSCE to 'Religion, Values and Ethics' to reflect its content more accurately and to provide a consistent pedagogical narrative across the student's educational experience, given that up to the point of taking the GCSE, students have only encountered RVE in primary school and at Key Stage 3. And we urge the WP to reconsider the proposed changes and are keen to collaborate to develop an approach that fosters student engagement with the ever-evolving educational needs and interests of new student cohorts, while upholding the integrity of the subject.

Final words: the need to look forward.

The new curriculum for Wales holds immense potential for Religious Values and Ethics (RVE), offering teachers the flexibility to craft meaningful schemes of work that familiarise students with diverse religious, philosophical, and moral beliefs within Wales and beyond. It stands as an opportunity to cultivate cultural awareness, challenge stereotypes, and nurture critically thinking and informed global citizens. RVE, under the new curriculum, can empower students to build strong academic foundations, to analyse and evaluate evidence, to formulate opinions grounded in rational arguments, and to develop informed and more objective perspectives, and to cultivate social awareness, respect, and empathy.

The current trajectory for RVE, however, is regressive and departs significantly from its potential. The National Centre for Religious Education is keen to work closely with the Welsh Assembly Government to curtail this downward trajectory and backward-looking approach and to secure the potentially bright future of RVE for Wales. To that end, the Centre advocates the need for further research and investigation into the issues outlined in this report.

There is currently insufficient data regarding the implementation of RVE in primary and SEN environments. While data has been processed from 43 teachers of Key Stage 3 throughout Wales, the Centre intends to expand its investigation through its network of schools to involve more secondary schools. This will lend greater clarity into the emerging issues we have identified in this report.