



Religion, Values and Ethics in Wales

A National Analysis of Secondary School Provision under the Curriculum for Wales

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Executive Summary

This report presents the most comprehensive analysis to date of Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) implementation across secondary schools in Wales under the Curriculum for Wales, focusing on provision during the 2025-26 academic year.¹ Via a national Freedom of Information (FOI) exercise, 195 schools were contacted and responses were received from 135, an overall response rate of 69.2%. Regional response rates were 73.6% in North Wales (39/53), 56.3% in Mid Wales (9/16) and 69.0% in South Wales (87/126). Eleven responding schools had a religious character, all in South Wales.²

The central finding is that the mandatory RVE entitlement is not being secured consistently and the issue is not limited to differences in curriculum design. In North Wales, two responding schools reported no RVE provision across Years 7–11 and seven reported that RVE was not mandatory for all learners in one or both of Years 10–11.³ In South Wales, RVE was absent from the curriculum in 2.3% of schools across Years 7–9, while no RVE was reported by 3.4% in Year 10 and 6.9% in Year 11. These cases sit alongside a much wider pattern in which RVE is reported as present but the time, staffing, structure or continuity required for a coherent and progressively challenging curriculum are not consistently secured.

This distinction between formal and substantive compliance is the report's central analytical concern. Formal compliance may be demonstrated where RVE appears on a timetable, is incorporated within a broader subject area, or is identified within curriculum documentation. Substantive compliance, however, requires consideration of whether learners actually receive regular, coherent and sufficiently developed RVE provision throughout Years 7–11. This includes questions about the amount and regularity of curriculum time allocated to RVE; the continuity of provision between year groups; the expertise and deployment of staff; and the extent to which the curriculum enables progression in learners' knowledge, understanding and disciplinary engagement. Accordingly, the presence of RVE within a school's stated curriculum does not in itself establish that the mandatory entitlement is being realised in practice.

Headline national evidence

Years 7–9 is the most structurally secure phase, but this security is not universal. Identifiable RVE is reported by 37 of 39 North Wales schools (94.9%) in each of Years 7–9; all responding Mid Wales schools report provision; and 97.7% of South Wales schools record provision across Years 7–9. The Key Findings summarise regional presence as approximately 95%, 100% and 98% respectively.

Provision weakens most sharply at Years 10–11. As learners progress through the secondary phase, curriculum time, specialist input and disciplinary coherence often diminish or become more variable. Non-GCSE pathways increasingly depend on alternative qualifications, Welsh Baccalaureate programmes, tutor periods, drop-down days, or provision embedded within Personal and Social Education (PSE) and Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE), which now sit within the broader mandatory Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE). Consequently, RVE is frequently delivered through wider curricular structures rather than as a discrete discipline, raising questions about continuity, depth and progression.

Curriculum time is frequently insufficient. Provision in Years 7–9 nationally averages approximately 1.2 hours per week (around 1.2–1.4 hours in the headline comparison), while provision in Years 10–11 ranges from approximately 0.75 to 1.3 hours per week. However, these national averages mask substantial variation between schools and, in particular, a number of considerably lower allocations. Reported examples include one hour per fortnight, 15–20 minutes per week or per fortnight and, in one summary finding, as little as 20 minutes per term.

¹ For convenience, the sample will hereafter be referred to as secondary schools. Although some surveyed institutions provide education for learners aged 3 to 18, only provision for Years 7 to 11 was analysed. Consequently, these schools are included within the term secondary schools throughout this report.

² For the purpose of this study, Wales was divided into three broad constituencies, comprised of specific local authorities. As such: North Wales (schools in Ynys Môn, Gwynedd, Conwy, Flintshire, Denbighshire and Wrexham); Mid Wales (schools in Powys and Ceredigion); and South Wales (schools in Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Carmarthenshire, Merthyr Tydfil, Monmouthshire, Neath Port Talbot, Newport, Pembrokeshire, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Swansea, Torfaen, Vale of Glamorgan).

³ It should be noted that, at the time of data collection, the Curriculum for Wales had been rolled out to Years 7 to 10. Consequently, these learners were studying RVE, whereas Year 11 learners remained on the legacy curriculum and were therefore studying Religious Education.

Consequently, national averages can give an overly positive impression of the amount of curriculum time which is actually available to RVE in a significant minority of schools.

Access to specialist expertise declines at the point of greatest structural pressure. By Year 9, specialist teaching of RVE reaches 59% in North Wales, 55.5% in Mid Wales and 54% in South Wales; it then falls to 28.2% in Years 10–11 in North Wales, 33.3% (Year 10) and 22.2% (Year 11) in Mid Wales and 47.1% (year 10) and 44.8% (Year 11) in South Wales.

Learner experience increasingly diverges by pathways in Years 10 and 11. GCSE Religious Studies learners typically receive 3–5 hours per fortnight, specialist teaching and a structured disciplinary curriculum. Non-GCSE learners are more likely to experience reduced time, mixed or staffing by educators with other specialisms, and delivery models whose alignment with RVE is variable.

The evidence therefore indicates a system-level problem of entitlement, equity and progression. Strong practice exists and demonstrates how coherent, sustained and intellectually rigorous RVE is achievable within the Curriculum for Wales, but it is not yet a consistent entitlement. The recommendations are consequently directed at clearer national expectations for mandatory provision, curriculum time and progression; stronger protection of RVE in Years 10–11; equitable provision for non-GCSE learners; greater access to specialist subject expertise; clearer expectations for alternative and integrated delivery models; stronger curriculum mapping; and more robust accountability and monitoring.

Five national priorities

- Secure a clear national RVE entitlement by establishing clearer expectations for curriculum time, continuity, progression and identifiable RVE provision.
- Protect RVE at Years 10–11 by establishing explicit expectations to prevent the weakening of curriculum time, progression and disciplinary coherence after Year 9.
- Address divergence between GCSE and non-GCSE pathways by ensuring that mandatory RVE entitlement does not depend on whether a learner chooses GCSE Religious Studies.
- Strengthen access to subject expertise by developing specialist capacity while providing sustained subject-specific professional learning for teachers with other specialisms.
- Clarify appropriate models of delivery by establishing national expectations for the use of alternative qualifications, integrated provision, tutor time, PSE/PSHE and other delivery models.

MANDATORY IN LAW UNEQUAL IN PRACTICE



Key findings from the national analysis of RVE provision in Welsh secondary schools



135 school responses analysed

The evidence is broad enough to show a real national pattern rather than isolated local exceptions.

Years 10 and 11 are the pressure point

Across Wales, provision is usually stronger in Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11 it often becomes weaker, more fragmented, and less specialist.



53.8%

Only 53.8% of responding schools in North Wales showed clearly identifiable structured RVE in Year 10.



0.75 HOURS

Average weekly RVE time in Year 10 in Mid Wales.

In Year 11 it is only 0.81 hours.



22.2%

Specialist teaching in Year 11 in Mid Wales, down from 55.5% in Year 9.

In North Wales it falls from 59% to 28.2%



15 to 20 MINUTES

Some schools report only this much RVE a week.

One schools reported just 20 minutes per half term.

A two tier experience



GCSE learners usually receive 3 to 5 hours per fortnight, specialist teaching, and a structured curriculum. Many non-GCSE learners receive RVE via tutor time, PSE, Welsh Baccalaureate, or other fragmented alternatives instead.

Why it matters



This is not just uneven delivery; it is unequal entitlement. For many learners, especially outside GCSE pathways, progression effectively stops after Year 9.



A mandatory subject should not depend on postcode, pathway, or whether a school can spare a specialist.

Source: 'Religion, Values and Ethics in Wales: A National Analysis of Secondary School Provision under the Curriculum for Wales'. Bangor University and the National Centre of Religious Education for Wales (September 2026).



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1. Context, policy framework and study purpose

1.1. Policy and research context

Since the introduction of the Curriculum for Wales, the National Centre of Religious Education for Wales (NCREW) has maintained a sustained focus on how RVE is understood and delivered in secondary schools. The 2024 NCREW Teacher Voice Survey identified both optimism and concern: teachers broadly welcomed greater conceptual breadth, critical enquiry, disciplinary diversity and engagement with religious and non-religious philosophical convictions. However, reduced curriculum time, weakening subject identity, fragmented Humanities provision, uncertainty about mandatory expectations, and increased reliance on teachers with other specialisms were noted concerns. Fewer than 100 respondents participated in that survey, so the present study moves beyond a small, self-selecting practitioner sample to examine institutional structures and documentary evidence at national scale.

RVE occupies a distinctive position within the Curriculum for Wales. The curriculum is structured across six Areas of Learning and Experience (Donaldson, 2015; Welsh Government, 2022), while RVE is both a mandatory component of Humanities and a mandatory entitlement for learners aged 3–16. The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 removed the parental right to withdraw from RVE and reinforced its mandatory status. Curriculum for Wales guidance positions RVE as academically rigorous, objective, critical and pluralistic, requiring engagement with religious and non-religious philosophical convictions through interpretation, analysis, evaluation and critical reflection. It is therefore not simply pastoral or values-based provision, but substantive intellectual enquiry.

The literature identifies three closely related implementation questions. First, integrated Humanities can support connected learning, but excessive integration can weaken subject specificity, disciplinary knowledge and coherent progression (Beane, 1997; Bernstein, 2000; McPhail, 2018; Kneen et al., 2020). Second, secure specialist subject knowledge supports nuanced theological, philosophical and ethical enquiry, while limited expertise can make complex concepts and sensitive issues more difficult to teach (Ofsted, 2021; 2024). Third, progression requires cumulative development in knowledge, concepts and disciplinary literacy rather than a series of disconnected experiences (Young, 2008; Young and Muller, 2010; 2013; Welsh Government, 2022; Estyn, 2026). Work on worldviews likewise emphasises sustained engagement with the relationships between beliefs, values, identities and human experience (Jackson, 2004; Cooling, 2020; Cooling, Bowie and Panjwani, 2020; Wright and Wright, 2024). Taken together, these concerns provide the framework for examining whether the mandatory entitlement to RVE is being secured consistently across secondary schools in Wales. The analysis that follows therefore considers not only whether RVE is formally present within school curricula, but whether its time, staffing, structure and continuity are sufficient to support coherent and progressively challenging provision.

1.2. Purpose and analytical focus

This study examines how RVE/RE is structured and delivered across Years 7–11; curriculum time; delivery models; progression from Years 7–9 into Years 10–11; staffing by specialists, teachers with other specialisms, and mixed teams; curriculum mapping; alignment with mandatory RVE requirements; regional and structural variation; and implications for policy, curriculum refinement and professional learning. At the time of data collection, the Curriculum for Wales had rolled out to Years 7–10, while Year 11 remained under legacy arrangements. The Year 11 evidence must therefore be interpreted in that transitional context, without treating transition as sufficient explanation for continuing fragmentation or inconsistency.

The report uses the distinction between formal and substantive compliance throughout. Formal compliance concerns whether RVE is reported as present; substantive compliance concerns whether every learner receives a sustained, identifiable, disciplinary and progressively structured educational experience. This distinction is necessary because high reported provision can coexist with very limited curriculum time, non-disciplinary delivery, weak curriculum mapping or unequal access to subject expertise.

2. Methodology

2.1. Design, sample and data collection

The study used a mixed-method, system-level design combining quantitative descriptive analysis with qualitative document analysis. A national FOI exercise targeted all maintained secondary schools in Wales educating learners in Years 7–11. This universal population approach was intended to reduce the sampling bias associated with voluntary practitioner surveys and to provide a stronger basis for identifying national and regional patterns.

Table 1. FOI sample and response profile

Region	Schools contacted	Responses	Response rate	Other response information
North Wales	53	39	73.6%	2 (3.8%) acknowledged without providing data; 12 (22.6%) did not respond; no responding school had a religious character.
Mid Wales	16	9	56.3%	2 (12.5%) acknowledged without providing data; 5 (31.2%) did not respond; no responding schools had a religious character.
South Wales	126	87	69.0%	8 (6.4%) acknowledged without providing data; 30 (23.8%) did not respond; 11 (12.6%) of responding schools had a religious character.
Wales	195	135	69.2%	The remaining schools, 60 (30.7%), did not provide data.

For analysis, Wales was grouped into three broad regions: North Wales (Ynys Môn, Gwynedd, Conwy, Flintshire, Denbighshire and Wrexham); Mid Wales (Powys and Ceredigion); and South Wales (Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Carmarthenshire, Merthyr Tydfil, Monmouthshire, Neath Port Talbot, Newport, Pembrokeshire, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Swansea, Torfaen and Vale of Glamorgan).

Schools were asked for five areas of evidence: curriculum structure (discrete RVE, Humanities, or other integration); curriculum time across Years 7–11; curriculum maps or plans showing the RVE lenses and statements of what matters; staffing by subject specialists and teachers with other specialisms; and internal policy or guidance explaining how the mandatory requirement was met. Requests were sent through official school contact channels. Schools had 20 working days to respond under the Freedom of Information Act 2000; responses received after 18:00 on 24 April 2026 were excluded to allow sufficient time for analysis.

2.2. Analysis, standardisation and limitations

Quantitative analysis used frequency analysis, descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation to examine provision, curriculum time, staffing and delivery models. Qualitative analysis combined inductive thematic coding with deductive coding against the Welsh Government RVE Guidelines, drawing on curriculum maps, policy documents, narrative responses and supporting materials. The five recurring themes were interpretations of mandatory provision; structural challenges in Years 10–11; alternative and non-disciplinary delivery models; barriers to progression; and staffing and capacity.

Schools reported curriculum time in different formats. To enable comparison, allocations were converted to hours per week. Where a standard lesson of approximately 50 minutes was specified, it was coded as one timetable hour (60 minutes); fortnightly allocations were divided by two; and termly allocations were divided by the number of teaching weeks in the school's termly framework. The resulting figures are therefore standardised measures of timetabled provision rather than precise measures of contact time.

A minority of schools omitted requested information, so totals vary slightly between analyses. The study relies on self-reported institutional data and documentary evidence rather than direct classroom observation; presentation bias is possible and incomplete returns may understate variation. These limitations require cautious interpretation of individual percentages and averages. Nevertheless, a standardised FOI request, population-level coverage, documentary evidence and triangulation between

quantitative and qualitative sources provide a robust basis for system-level analysis. Individual schools are not identified, and access to the compiled datasets was restricted to the named report researchers.

3. National findings: entitlement, progression and equity

The evidence is presented thematically rather than through three separate regional narratives. This reduces repetition while retaining the full regional evidence and makes the system-level implications clearer. Across Wales, the same underlying pattern recurs: RVE is widely reported, but presence does not guarantee a coherent, cumulative, sufficiently resourced and disciplinarily robust entitlement.

3.1. Mandatory entitlement: reported presence does not guarantee coherent provision

Years 7–9 is the most structurally secure phase, but even here provision is not universal. The concern becomes sharper in Years 10–11, where formal presence can mask partial, fragmented or substantively inadequate provision. The most serious evidence is the complete or effective absence of RVE for some learners despite its mandatory status.

Table 2. Provision and entitlement by region and phase

Region / phase	Provision evidence	Evidence of absence, fragmentation or reduced entitlement
North Wales, Years 7–9	• Year 7: Discrete RVE: 61.5%; Humanities: 33.3%. • Year 8: Discrete RVE: 74.5%; Humanities: 20.5%. • Year 9: Discrete RVE: 92.3%; Humanities: 2.6%. • Years 7–9 overall: Combined discrete and Humanities provision is 37 of 39 schools (94.9%) in each year.	• Years 7–9 overall: No mandatory RVE provision is reported by 5.1% of schools.
North Wales, Years 10–11	• Year 10: Mandatory RVE is reported by 87.2% of schools. • Year 11: Mandatory RVE is reported by 82.1% of schools.	• Year 10 overall: No mandatory RVE provision is reported by 12.8% of schools. • Year 11 overall: No mandatory RVE provision is reported by 17.9% of schools.
Mid Wales, Years 7–9	• Year 7: Discrete RVE: 77.7%; Humanities: 22.2%. • Year 8: Discrete RVE: 88.8%; Humanities: 11.1%. • Year 9: Discrete RVE: 88.8%; Humanities: 11.1%. • Years 7–9 overall: Overall RVE is reported by 100% of the responding schools.	• Years 7–9 overall: Integrated Humanities models introduce variability, and curriculum mapping is often implicit rather than explicit.
Mid Wales, Years 10–11	• Year 10: RVE is reported by all responding schools. • Year 11: RVE is reported by all responding schools.	• Years 10–11 overall: High reported presence masks reduced time, declining specialist teaching and use of fragmented or non-disciplinary models; formal provision therefore does not establish substantive equivalence.
South Wales, Years 7–9	• Year 7: Discrete RVE: 77%; Humanities: 20.7%. • Year 8: Discrete RVE: 82.8%; Humanities: 14.9%. • Year 9: Discrete RVE: 89.7%; Humanities: 8%. • Years 7–9 overall: Overall provision is 97.7%.	• Years 7–9 overall: No mandatory RVE provision is reported by 2.3% of schools.
South Wales, Years 10–11	• Year 10: Mandatory RVE provision is reported by 96.6% of schools. • Year 11: Mandatory RVE provision is reported by 93.1% of schools.	• Year 10 overall: No mandatory RVE provision is reported by 3.4% of schools. • Year 11 overall: No mandatory RVE provision is reported by 6.9% of schools.

The Key Findings from Table 2 above can be summarised as Years 7–9 RVE being present in 94.9% of schools in North Wales, 100% in Mid Wales and 97.7% in South Wales. These headline figures are important, but they should not obscure the reported absence of provision in a small number of schools or

the distinction between identifiable disciplinary RVE and provision embedded in broader structures. Regional formal-compliance rates should also be read alongside county-level variation.⁴

3.2. Curriculum time and progression weaken most sharply after Year 9

Curriculum time is a central mechanism through which formal entitlement becomes, or fails to become, a substantive educational experience. Across Wales, the strongest pattern is a break between the more secure Years 7–9 foundation and Years 10–11. In some schools, allocations become too limited or episodic to sustain enquiry, conceptual depth and cumulative progression. This is evidenced in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Curriculum time and progression

Region	Years 7–9	Years 10–11
North Wales	• Year 7: 1.21 hours per week. • Year 8: 1.26 hours per week. • Year 9: 1.25 hours per week. • Years 7–9 overall: Average time rises across Years 7–9.	• Year 10: 0.85 hours per week. • Year 11: 0.76 hours per week. • Years 10–11 compared with Year 9: A reduction of approximately 32–39%.
Mid Wales	• Year 7: 1.33 hours per week. • Year 8: 1.21 hours per week. • Year 9: 1.36 hours per week. • Years 7–9 overall: 1.21–1.35 hours per week.	• Year 10: 0.75 hours per week. • Year 11: 0.81 hours per week. • Years 10–11 compared with Year 9: A reduction of roughly 40–45% from Year 9.
South Wales	• Year 7: 1.37 hours per week. • Year 8: 1.41 hours per week. • Year 9: 1.46 hours per week. • Years 7–9 overall: Average discrete RVE time ranges from 1.37 to 1.46 hours per week.	• Year 10: 1.20 hours per week. • Year 11: 1.26 hours per week. • Years 10–11 compared with Year 9: This is only a modest reduction from Years 7–9.
National headline	• Years 7–9 overall: Approximately 1.2 hours per week; headline comparison approximately 1.2–1.4 hours.	• Years 10–11 overall: Headline comparison approximately 0.75–1.3 hours.

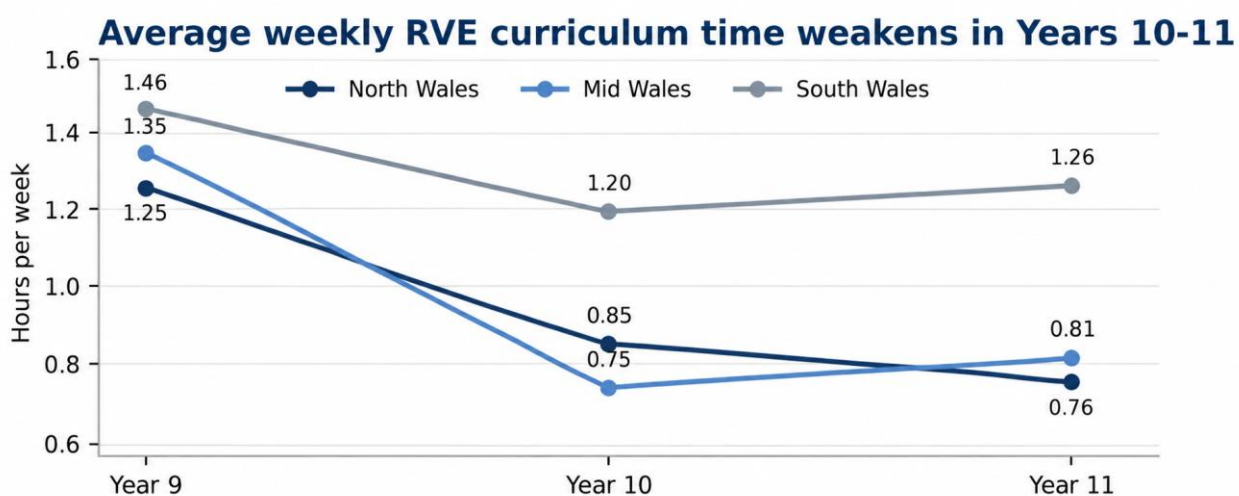


Figure 1. Average weekly RVE curriculum time in the later secondary phase, using exact values stated in the report.

⁴ It should be noted that, although these regional figures suggest a high level of formal compliance with the mandatory provision of RVE in Years 10 and 11, county-level analysis reveals considerable variation, with compliance rates falling to as low as 70% in some counties.

Figure 1 above clearly identifies the educational significance of these reductions as distinctively cumulative. Progression in RVE depends on learners revisiting prior knowledge, developing conceptual understanding and engaging in sustained disciplinary enquiry. Where provision is reduced to brief tutor periods, rotational blocks or isolated events, learning becomes episodic. The problem is therefore not simply fewer minutes: it is the loss of the conditions through which knowledge and disciplinary understanding can build across the 11–16 continuum.

3.3. Access to specialist subject expertise is uneven and often declines at Years 10–11

Staffing patterns reinforce differences in curriculum structure and pathway. Across regions, specialist expertise is concentrated disproportionately in GCSE Religious Studies, while alternative, integrated and pastoral provision is more likely to involve mixed teams or teachers with other specialisms. Table 4 exemplifies this trend.

Table 4. Specialist, mixed and other-specialism staffing

Region	Years 7–9	Years 10–11
North Wales	• Year 7: Specialist teaching: 38.5%; mixed: 51.3%; teachers with other specialisms: 5.1%. • Year 8: Specialist teaching: 46.2%; mixed: 46.2%; teachers with other specialisms: 2.6%. • Year 9: Specialist teaching: 59%; mixed: 33.3%; teachers with other specialisms: 2.6%.	• Year 10: Specialist teaching: 28.2%; mixed: 38.5%; teachers with other specialisms: 20.5%. • Year 11: Specialist teaching: 28.2%; mixed: 30.8%; teachers with other specialisms: 20.5%.
Mid Wales	• Year 7: Specialist teaching: 44.4%; mixed: 44.4%; teachers with other specialisms: 11.1%. • Year 8: Specialist teaching: 44.4%; mixed: 44.4%; teachers with other specialisms: 11.1%. • Year 9: Specialist teaching: 55.5%; mixed: 33.3%; teachers with other specialisms: 11.1%.	• Year 10: Specialist teaching: 33.3%; mixed: 44.4%; teachers with other specialisms: 22.2%. • Year 11: Specialist teaching: 22.2%; mixed: 44.4%; teachers with other specialisms: 33.3%.
South Wales	• Year 7: Specialist teaching: 50.6%; mixed: 35.6%; teachers with other specialisms: 3.4%. • Year 8: Specialist teaching: 51.7%; mixed: 34.5%; teachers with other specialisms: 3.4%. • Year 9: Specialist teaching: 54%; mixed: 33.3%; teachers with other specialisms: 2.3%.	• Year 10: Specialist teaching: 47.1%; mixed: 31%; teachers with other specialisms: 6.9%. • Year 11: Specialist teaching: 44.8%; mixed: 32.2%; teachers with other specialisms: 6.9%.

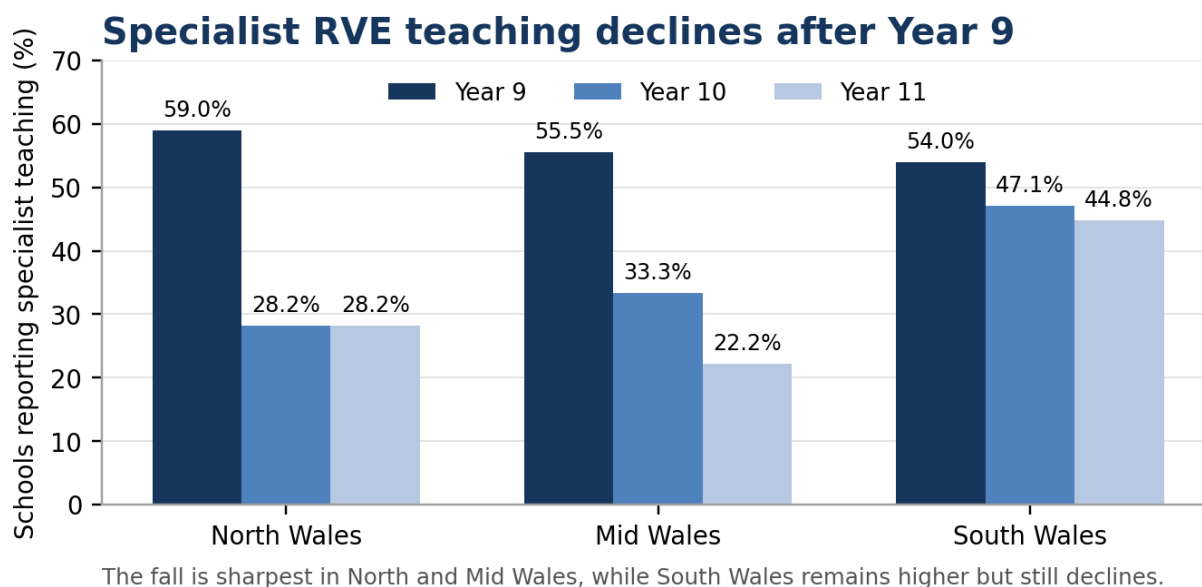


Figure 2. Specialist RVE teaching in Years 9–11 by region.

This pattern matters because the later secondary phase is where curriculum structures are already under greatest pressure. Reduced specialist involvement can therefore coincide with reduced time and more fragmented models. It is not evidence that teachers with other specialisms cannot teach RVE effectively; it is evidence that access to subject expertise is not distributed equally across pathways or learner groups, and that sustained subject-specific professional learning is consequently necessary.

3.4. GCSE and non-GCSE pathways are producing materially different learner experiences

A consistent national pattern which has emerged is a bifurcation in Years 10–11. As Table 5 below demonstrates, learners choosing GCSE Religious Studies typically receive 3–5 hours per fortnight, predominantly specialist teaching and a structured disciplinary curriculum. This supports progression, but it remains a minority pathway and cannot constitute the mechanism through which a universal mandatory entitlement is secured. With the exception of one school (2.7%) in North Wales, only schools in South Wales report full-cohort entry for GCSE Religious Studies. In this region, 20.7% of Year 10 learners and 23% of Year 11 learners are entered for the compulsory full-course GCSE in Religious Studies. This pattern is distinctive to South Wales (where 11 responding schools were of a religious character) and is not reflected in either North or Mid Wales, where full-cohort entry for the qualification is only reported once. This suggests a clear regional difference in the way mandatory RVE is delivered across Wales. For the majority of learners who do not follow the full-course GCSE pathway, schools instead provide alternative qualifications or non-qualification routes. These pathways are often delivered with substantially less curriculum time and may offer a less rigorous or less systematically developed programme of study than the GCSE route, raising important questions about the consistency and quality of the mandatory RVE entitlement.

Table 5. Alternative qualifications and non-disciplinary delivery in Years 10–11

Region	Alternative / non-GCSE pathways	Non-disciplinary delivery models	Specific Areas of Concern
North Wales	• Year 10: Agored Cymru Exploring Worldviews: 23.2%; NCFE Equality and Diversity: 15.4%; discrete non-qualification pathways: 7.7%. • Year 11: Agored Cymru Exploring Worldviews: 20.5%; NCFE Equality and Diversity: 15.4%; discrete non-qualification pathways: 10.3%.	• Year 10: Welsh Baccalaureate: 12.8%; PSE/PSHE: 5.1%; tutor time: 12.8%; drop-down days: 5.1%. • Year 11: Welsh Baccalaureate: 10.3%; PSE/PSHE: 5.1%; tutor time: 15.4%; drop-down days: 5.1%.	• In schools which use the tutor time model RVE provision was reported as being 15-20 minutes per week/fortnight. • One school reported completing Agored Cymru Exploring Worldviews in 20 minutes per half term of dedicated teaching in a tutor-group rotation.
Mid Wales	• Year 10: Agored Cymru Exploring Worldviews: 22.2%; NCFE Equality and Diversity: 11.1%; discrete non-qualification pathways: 44.4%. • Year 11: Agored Cymru Exploring Worldviews: 22.2%; NCFE Equality and Diversity: 11.1%; discrete non-qualification pathways: 44.4%.	• Year 10: Tutor time: 22.2% • Year 11: Tutor time: 22.2%	• In schools which use the tutor time model RVE provision was reported as being 15 minutes per week.
South Wales	• Year 10: Agored Cymru Exploring Worldviews: 13.8%; NCFE Equality and Diversity: 10.3%; discrete non-qualification pathways: 34.5%. • Year 11: Agored Cymru Exploring Worldviews: 12.6%; NCFE Equality and Diversity: 9.2% discrete non-qualification pathways: 31%.	• Year 10: Welsh Baccalaureate: 4.6%; PSE/PSHE: 6.9%; tutor time: 8%; drop-down days: 2.3%. • Year 11: Welsh Baccalaureate: 3.4%; PSE/PSHE: 6.9%; tutor time: 8%; drop-down days: 2.3%.	• In schools which use the tutor time model RVE provision was reported as being 15 minutes per week.

The qualifications and alternative pathways identified above vary considerably in their capacity to provide the depth, continuity and disciplinary coherence required for substantive RVE provision. Agored Cymru Exploring Worldviews has potential to support RVE where it is delivered discretely, with sufficient curriculum time, coherent implementation and specialist input, and where it engages with the statements of what matters. That potential is weakened when delivery is rotational, time-limited or fragmented. NCFE Equality and Diversity addresses themes such as identity, rights, justice and human rights, but it does not systematically engage theological and philosophical enquiry or religious and non-religious philosophical convictions. When used as a substitute for disciplinary RVE, it therefore produces a narrower, more thematic curriculum.

Tutor time, PSE/PSHE, Welsh Baccalaureate, pastoral programmes and collapsed-timetable or drop-down days can overlap with RVE themes, but they are structurally weak when used as the primary delivery mechanism. Short or irregular sessions are easily displaced by administrative priorities, are frequently delivered by teachers with other specialisms and do not reliably allow knowledge to accumulate. Drop-down days can be intensive but focus on isolated themes, lack continuity and prioritise coverage over progression.

3.5. Curriculum mapping

Curriculum mapping is notably uneven. In North Wales, 22 schools (56.4%) reported mapping that was incomplete, in development, unavailable or not supplied through the FOI response. Mid Wales similarly shows limited explicit progression frameworks, while in South Wales, many schools refer to schemes of work but few provide fully codified progression frameworks. Without explicit sequencing of knowledge, concepts and disciplinary understanding, progression becomes dependent on delivery context rather than coherent curriculum design. This creates a risk that learners encounter RVE as a series of disconnected topics or experiences rather than as a cumulative programme in which prior learning is revisited, extended and made progressively more complex. It also makes the quality of provision more reliant on individual teachers, departments or year-group arrangements, increasing the likelihood of inconsistency both within and between schools. In practice, this can lead to repetition of similar themes across different year groups, gaps in substantive knowledge, and insufficient development of the theological, philosophical and ethical forms of enquiry that RVE is intended to foster. Where curriculum maps do not clarify what learners are expected to know, understand and be able to do over time, it becomes more difficult to demonstrate that the mandatory entitlement is being delivered with sufficient coherence, depth and progression across Years 7–11. The absence of clear mapping also limits schools' capacity to evaluate progression systematically, identify weaknesses in provision and ensure that all learners receive an equivalent entitlement regardless of class, teacher or pathway.

3.6. School context further widen variation

South Wales also permits a sensitivity analysis of school context because the regional sample includes 11 schools with a religious character. Removing these schools leaves 76 of the 87 responding schools. The purpose of the analysis summarised in Table 6 is not to rank school types, but to test whether sample composition affects reported provision, curriculum time and staffing.

Table 6. South Wales sensitivity analysis: schools with a religious character

Indicator	Full South Wales dataset	Excluding schools with a religious character	Interpretation / subgroup evidence
Discrete RVE prevalence	• Year 7: 77%. • Year 8: 82.8%. • Year 9: 89.7%. • Year 10: 87.4%. • Year 11: 83.9%.	• Year 7: 76.3%. • Year 8: 81.6%. • Year 9: 89.5%. • Year 10: 86.8%. • Year 11: 82.9%.	Very little change: high reported RVE presence cannot be attributed simply to schools with a religious character.
Average weekly discrete RVE time	• Year 7: 1.37 hours. • Year 8: 1.41 hours. • Year 9: 1.46 hours. • Year 10: 1.20 hours. • Year 11: 1.26 hours.	• Year 7: 1.25 hours. • Year 8: 1.29 hours. • Year 9: 1.37 hours. • Year 10: 1.05 hours. • Year 11: 1.11 hours.	Schools with a religious character raise regional curriculum-time averages to varying degrees.
Specialist teaching	• Year 7: 50.6%. • Year 8: 51.7%. • Year 9: 54%. • Year 10: 47.1%. • Year 11: 44.8%.	• Year 7: 44.7%. • Year 8: 46.1%. • Year 9: 48.7%. • Year 10: 39.5%. • Year 11: 38.2%.	The staffing difference is larger than the prevalence difference. Mixed teams and teachers with other specialisms make up a larger share of the remaining dataset.
Full Cohort GCSE entry	• Year 10: 20.7%. • Year 11: 23%.	• Year 10: 6.5%. • Year 11: 8.1%.	There is a significant change in the percentage of schools offering full cohort entry into GCSE Religious Studies when the schools with religious character are excluded. This demonstrates a considerable difference in the emphasis placed on full cohort GCSE entry between schools that have a religious character and those that do not.

These subgroup findings require caution because the sample is small and the specialist-teaching comparison is derived from aggregate rather than individual school analysis. They do not show that religious character determines quality. They do show that headline regional averages can obscure substantial differences in resourcing and specialist access. The wider point applies nationally: variation occurs not only between schools but within them, where learner groups may receive different curriculum pathways, different amounts of time and different levels of subject expertise.

3.6. Overall national finding

Five system-level findings emerge:

- i. RVE is widely reported, but presence does not guarantee coherent provision.
- ii. Years 7–9 is the most structurally secure phase, with specialist teaching by Year 9 at 59% in North Wales, 55.5% in Mid Wales and 54% in South Wales.
- iii. The transition into Years 10–11 is the principal pressure point, bringing reduced or more variable time, declining specialist involvement and more diverse delivery models.
- iv. Learner experience increasingly diverges between GCSE and non-GCSE pathways.
- v. Access to specialist subject expertise is unevenly distributed.

The regional expression of these pressures differs. North Wales shows the clearest gap between reported mandatory provision and clearly identifiable, structured RVE in Years 10–11, including complete or effective absence in a small but significant number of schools. Mid Wales is strongly transitional: Years 7–9 are comparatively secure, but curriculum time and specialist teaching decline sharply in Years 10–11. South Wales retains higher reported provision and more stable headline time, but those averages conceal significant variation between school contexts and pathways. In all three regions, the central issue is whether a continuous, coherent and progressively challenging entitlement is secured for every learner, not simply whether RVE appears somewhere in a school's curriculum structure.

4. Recommendations

The recommendations follow directly from the evidence above. The extent of variation suggests that local interpretation, without clearer national perimeters, may be insufficient in ensuring consistent access to mandatory entitlement. The priority is not to prescribe a single curriculum model, but to establish the national conditions within which local curricular flexibility remains compatible with continuity, progression, disciplinary integrity and equity.

4.1. Clarify the meaning of mandatory RVE and the minimum national entitlement

- Welsh Government should clarify the national expectations for mandatory RVE entitlement, specifying what learners should experience in practice as well as how provision is recorded.
- Guidance should establish minimum expectations for curriculum time; continuity from Years 7–11; a clearly identifiable curriculum rather than provision that is only implicit or embedded; and evidence that the mandatory entitlement reaches all learners.
- This is necessary because the study identifies both reported absence and a wider gap between formal and substantive compliance.

4.2. Establish indicative national expectations for curriculum time

- Indicative national expectations should ensure sufficient time for depth of learning and sustained enquiry and should distinguish core mandatory RVE from optional qualifications.
- The evidence includes later-phase averages of 0.75 hours (Year 10) and 0.81 hours (Year 11) per week in Mid Wales, 0.85 (Year 10) and 0.76 (Year 11) in North Wales, provision of one hour per fortnight in many settings and substantially smaller allocations in some schools.
- A mandatory entitlement cannot be made meaningful without sufficient protected curriculum time.

4.3. Strengthen progression, continuity and curriculum mapping

- National guidance should require schools to demonstrate how learning builds cumulatively across the 11–16 continuum and how Years 10–11 extend knowledge and conceptual understanding developed in Years 7–9.
- Schools should show clear sequencing through curriculum maps or equivalent planning, linked to self-evaluation and improvement planning.
- This responds directly to the widespread break in progression after Year 9 and to incomplete or implicit mapping, including the 22 North Wales schools (56.4%) whose mapping was incomplete, in development, unavailable or not supplied.

4.4. Protect RVE in Years 10–11 and address divergence between GCSE and non-GCSE pathways

- National guidance for Years 10–11 should be redeveloped to secure equitable learner experience regardless of pathway.
- Mandatory RVE entitlement should not depend on whether a learner chooses GCSE Religious Studies.
- Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales should explore a nationally recognised pathway for learners not taking the full GCSE course, including the feasibility and value of a GCSE Short Course or equivalent model. The evidence for this recommendation is the consistent bifurcation between sustained, specialist-led GCSE provision and weaker or more variable alternatives for non-GCSE learners.

4.5. Establish national criteria for alternative qualifications and programmes

- Years 10–11 qualifications and programmes used to support mandatory RVE should be assessed against national criteria requiring alignment with RVE disciplinary knowledge and conceptual depth, explicit engagement with religious and non-religious philosophical convictions, coherent implementation, and demonstrable learner progression.
- Agored Cymru Exploring Worldviews can meet important elements of RVE where time, structure and specialist input are sufficient; NCFE Equality and Diversity does not systematically address

theological and philosophical dimensions and should not be assumed to provide an equivalent disciplinary entitlement.

4.6. Clarify the appropriate use of tutor time, PSE/PSHE and integrated models

- National guidance should state that tutor time, pastoral provision, drop down days days, PSE/PSHE, Welsh Baccalaureate and comparable integrated models may support RVE but should not ordinarily be its primary delivery mechanism.
- Core provision should be planned, sequenced, identifiable and sufficiently sustained to support progression. This responds to evidence of allocations as limited as 15 minutes, 15–20 minutes per fortnight, 20 minutes per half term and 20 minutes per term, and to the structural weaknesses associated with short, irregular and easily displaced sessions.

4.7. Strengthen specialist capacity and subject-specific professional learning

- A national strategy should increase recruitment into RVE teaching, improve the visibility of the subject and expand sustained subject-specific professional learning.
- Because teachers with other specialisms will remain an important part of delivery, professional learning should address subject knowledge, disciplinary approaches, curriculum design and the handling of complex and sensitive content. Crucially, this professional learning should be made available at no cost to schools, so that access is not dependent on individual school budgets or local capacity.
- The sharp falls in specialist teaching in North and Mid Wales, and the wider concentration of specialists in GCSE pathways, make this a matter of learner equity as well as workforce development.

4.8. Strengthen accountability, inspection and self-evaluation

- Reported provision should not be treated as sufficient evidence that the mandatory entitlement is secured.
- Estyn inspection and thematic review should give sufficient attention to curriculum coherence, progression, curriculum time, teaching quality and the experience of non-GCSE learners. Schools' self-evaluation should similarly distinguish the presence of RVE from the quality, continuity and disciplinary substance of provision.

4.9. Disseminate effective practice and establish ongoing national monitoring

- Strong models exist but are not shared systematically. A national mechanism should identify and disseminate effective RVE practice through case studies, professional networks and school-to-school collaboration.
- This study should also provide a baseline for ongoing national monitoring combining quantitative measures of curriculum time, delivery model, staffing, learner pathway and progression with qualitative case studies. Sustained monitoring is necessary because some Year 11 weaknesses reflect legacy arrangements being phased out, but continuing fragmentation and inconsistency cannot be explained by transition alone.

Taken together, these recommendations align with Estyn's emphasis on clear curriculum intent, equitable learner entitlement, curriculum breadth and balance, coherent progression, subject knowledge and teaching quality, robust self-evaluation, impact on learner understanding and continuous system improvement.

5. Conclusion

The evidence shows that the Curriculum for Wales has enabled innovation, conceptual breadth and flexible approaches to RVE, and that strong provision is achievable. It also shows, however, that the mandatory entitlement is not yet secured consistently across Wales. In a small but important number of schools, RVE is reported as entirely absent or not mandatory for all learners. More widely, apparent formal compliance coexists with reduced curriculum time, fragmented delivery, weak progression, limited curriculum mapping and unequal access to specialist expertise. The presence of RVE on a timetable, within a Humanities programme or in curriculum documentation cannot therefore be assumed to demonstrate that the mandatory entitlement is being realised in practice. The central concern is the gap between formal compliance and substantive compliance: between provision that can be identified administratively and provision that gives learners sustained access to coherent, rigorous and progressively challenging RVE.

The most significant system-level weakness is the transition into Years 10–11. For many learners, particularly those outside GCSE Religious Studies pathways, the more coherent provision established in Years 7–9 is not sustained. Instead, learners may move into alternative qualifications, thematic programmes, pastoral provision, or substantially reduced allocations of curriculum time. The result is an emerging two-tier pattern in which some learners receive sustained, specialist-led and disciplinary RVE, while others receive provision that is more limited in time, depth, continuity or disciplinary scope. This raises a fundamental question of substantive entitlement: a curriculum may remain formally compliant because RVE is nominally present, while the educational experience provided may be insufficient to secure the depth, progression and intellectual challenge envisaged by the Curriculum for Wales. Mandatory status is therefore necessary but insufficient on its own. The entitlement must be made substantive through (i) adequate curriculum time, (ii) continuity across year groups, (iii) coherent progression, (iv) appropriate disciplinary content and (v) meaningful access to specialist expertise.

The national task is not to invent an entirely new model. Effective practice across Wales already demonstrates that coherent, sustained and progressively challenging RVE is possible within the Curriculum for Wales. The challenge is to ensure that such provision is not dependent on individual schools, departments, staffing arrangements or qualification choices. Stronger national expectations, improved professional capacity and clearer mechanisms for monitoring provision are required if formal compliance is to translate consistently into substantive entitlement. The measure of success should therefore not simply be whether schools can demonstrate that RVE is present, but whether every learner receives an RVE curriculum of sufficient depth, coherence, continuity and quality to fulfil the mandatory entitlement in practice.

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