

Consultation on the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill

Evidence submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) for Stage 1 scrutiny of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill.

About you

Organisation: Bible Society/Cymdeithas y Beibl

1. The Bill's general principles

1.1 Do you support the principles of the [Curriculum and Assessment \(Wales\) Bill](#)?

Partly

1.2 Please outline your reasons for your answer to question 1.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1500 words)

The Bill has our qualified support. We support the general principles of the Bill, but we note that some of the proposals within the Bill would, if implemented, bring about some unwanted effects which can be prevented through suitable amendments.

The Bill's overall aim is laudable and the four purposes are appropriate. In an increasingly religious world, developing religious literacy about religious and non-religious worldviews is a crucial part of young people's education and to their wellbeing and success in their future adult lives. We therefore welcome that Religion, Values and Ethics will be a mandatory part of the curriculum.

However, there are features within this Bill which are potential barriers to its success, and which risk that learners in Wales do not learn about religious and non-religious worldviews as well as they might, or even that what they learn does not properly equip them for life in their cynefin and the wider world. These are outlined in response to question 2 below.

1.3 Do you think there is a need for legislation to deliver what this Bill is trying to achieve?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

Yes

2. The Bill's implementation

2.1 Do you have any comments about any potential barriers to implementing the Bill? If no, go to question 3.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

There are several features of the proposed legislation which are likely to have the effect of weakening teaching and learning about Religion, Ethics and Values in Wales, rather than of strengthening it.

The expectation that voluntary-aided schools with a religious character must plan, resource and teach two distinct RVE curriculums is highly onerous and has serious implications for teacher workload, most especially as the burden for achieving this appears to simply be placed directly onto the schools themselves. This measure therefore risks undermining the quality and provision of RVE in those schools.

That voluntary-aided schools with a religious character must teach 'in accordance' with an agreed syllabus stands out very sharply against the Bill's preference for 'having regard' in all other respects, and carries the unfortunate implication that voluntary-aided schools with a religious character need to be held to a higher level of accountability as to how they deliver RVE than do other schools. There seems to be no good educational reason why different types of school which use their local agreed syllabus should do so in different ways.

The thinking which underpins these two proposals, as it was expressed in the documentation supporting the earlier consultation on 'Legislative proposals for religion, values and ethics', assumes that there is a sharp distinction between 'denominational' and 'pluralistic' RVE (with the distinctive features of pluralistic RVE understood as being that it is 'balanced in its content and manner of teaching' and that it reflects 'the range of different religions, non-religious philosophical convictions or worldviews which are held by people in Wales and Great Britain.')

It makes the further assumption that the way that RVE is taught in schools with a religious character will not be pluralistic in these ways, but that

RVE originating from an agreed syllabus will be. This is an over-simplistic way of looking at a highly complex area, and no supporting evidence seems to have been offered for these assumptions. This is not a secure basis for determining how RVE is taught in schools in Wales.

That all Agreed Syllabus Conferences would only need to have regard to what the legislation sets down for RVE, and that most schools would in turn only need to have regard to the Agreed Syllabus, carries a significant risk of weakening the position of RVE in the curriculum and reducing the quality of provision for students. The experience of Religious Education in schools in England, where the weakening of the requirement for schools with academy status to teach in accordance with an Agreed Syllabus is widely blamed for severe impacts on the amount and quality of RE being taught in those schools (cf. NATRE reports 2018 and 2019), should caution against weakening the requirement to teach in accordance with an Agreed Syllabus in schools in Wales.

Some aspects of the Statements of What Matters for the Humanities AoLE are likely to be barriers to good teaching and learning in RVE. The AoLE does not differentiate in how it frames religious and non-religious beliefs as areas of study. It talks about religious beliefs and non-religious beliefs alike in terms of 'interpretations', 'opinions' and what is 'valid', and frames all events and experiences as things which are 'perceived, interpreted and represented'. That religious beliefs and experiences are subjective human constructions is one of the ways in which they are explained or understood, but it is by no means the only way. If, by following the lead of the Humanities AoLE, schools were to present religion and belief only as ideas which are constructed, that would not lead to an RVE curriculum which meets the test of being pluralistic 'in its manner of teaching'.

2.2 Do you think the Bill takes account of these potential barriers?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

In its present form, the Bill does not address or mitigate these potential barriers. In each case, it should be possible for it to be amended so that they do not come about.

- Simplify and strengthen Schedule 1, so that both Agreed Syllabus Conferences are required to devise the local agreed syllabus in accordance with the legislation, and that schools which teach from their local agrees syllabus must teach in accordance with it.

- Remove the requirement for voluntary-aided schools with a religious character to provide two RVE curricula.
- Amend the Statements of What Matters in the Humanities AoLE so that it refers to 'interpretations and worldviews' instead of only 'interpretations', 'opinions and beliefs' instead of only 'opinions' and 'the factors which make an interpretation valid, and the factors which make a worldview make sense to a believer' instead of only 'valid'.

3. Unintended consequences

3.1 Do you think there are there any unintended consequences arising from the Bill? If no, go to question 4.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

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4. Financial implications

4.1 Do you have any comments on the financial implications of the Bill (as set out in Part 2 of the [Explanatory Memorandum](#))? If no, go to question 5.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

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5. Powers to make subordinate legislation

5.1 Do you have any comments on the appropriateness of the powers in the Bill for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation (as set out in Chapter 5 of Part 1 of the [Explanatory Memorandum](#)). If no, go to question 6.1.

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

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6. Other considerations

6.1 Do you have any other points you wish to raise about this Bill?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1000 words)

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