

Ensuring access to the full curriculum

Consultation Analysis

January 2020

Wavehill: social and economic research

- Wales office: 21 Alban Square, Aberaeron, Ceredigion, SA46 0DB (registered office)
- West of England office: 2-4 Park Street, Bristol, BS1 5HS
- North of England office: Milburn House, Dean Street, Newcastle, NE1 1LF
- London office: 52 Cecile Park, Crouch End, London, N8 9AS

Contact details:

Tel: 01545 571711
Email: wavehill@wavehill.com
Web: www.wavehill.com
Twitter: @wavehilltweets

Report authors:

Llorenc O'Prey
Tony Jones
Sarah Usher
Eddie Knight
Cherry Davidson
Andy Parkinson
Endaf Griffiths

Any questions in relation to this report should be directed in the first instance to Llorenc O'Prey (llorenc.oprey@wavehill.com)

Date of document: January 2020

Contents

Executive Summary	1
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Responses	2
1.3 Analytical Approach	3
2 Children and Young People’s Perspectives.....	5
2.1 Relationships and Sexuality Education	5
2.2 Religious Education	6
2.3 Parents of children in year 8 and above should not be able to stop their child having RE or RSE lessons from September 2022	7
2.4 Impact on the Welsh language	7
3 Impact of the Proposals.....	8
3.1 Informing Children and Young People	8
3.2 Appropriateness of Provision	9
3.3 Promoting Tolerance.....	11
3.4 Improving Well-Being.....	12
3.5 Ensuring the Rights of Parents and Carers	13
3.6 Ensuring the Rights of the Child	14
3.7 Teaching and Learning	15
4 Information, Guidance and Support	17
4.1 Clarifying the Content of Teaching	17
4.2 Opportunities for Dialogue.....	18
4.3 Additional Pastoral Support	19
4.4 Supporting Teachers	19
4.5 Opposition to the Proposals.....	21
5 Timing of the Reforms	23
5.1 Phased Introduction.....	23
5.2 2022 Introduction	24

6	Renaming Religious Education.....	26
6.1	The Importance of Continuity	26
6.2	Renaming RE.....	26
7	Implications for the Welsh Language.....	28
7.1	Impact on Welsh Language Usage.....	28
7.2	Welsh Language and Education.....	29
8	Conclusions	31
8.1	Areas of Consensus	31
8.2	Sensitivity and Appropriateness of Provision.....	31
8.3	Broad and Balanced Education.....	32
8.4	Balancing the Rights of the Child and the Parent	32
8.5	Sensitive Responses	32
8.6	Multiple Interpretations of the Proposals.....	32
8.7	The Importance of Information and Communication	33
	Appendix 1: Consultation Questions.....	34

Executive Summary

This report summarises an independent analysis of responses providing feedback on the proposals surrounding Religious Education (RE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in the consultation 'Ensuring access to the full curriculum'. The analysis is intended to inform the ongoing development of the proposals.

Consultation Responses

Respondents were offered a range of opportunities to feed back their views and perspectives on the proposals. The Welsh Government received 1,660 responses online, via email and via post. Parents and carers were also invited to attend focus groups, in which 65 parents contributed their thoughts and perspectives.

In order to understand the issues and themes raised by respondents, in October 2019 the Welsh Government commissioned Wavehill, an independent research organisation, to conduct an analysis of the responses. The analysis set out to understand and map the range of views and perspectives held by respondents with regard to the proposals surrounding RE and RSE.

Impact of Proposals

Respondents offered a diverse range of potential impacts surrounding the proposals. For those broadly in support of the proposals, respondents raised a number of potential benefits of delivering RE and RSE, including:

- Informing children and young people, giving them the knowledge and skills with which to understand and connect with different people, communities, traditions, faiths and worldviews.
- Promoting tolerance, that a pluralistic and neutral education would promote positive engagement with, and understanding of, difference.
- Improving the well-being of learners, including their social, emotional and physical development.

For those respondents broadly opposed to the proposals, they tended to focus on the appropriateness of the provision. From these perspectives, respondents often raised the perceived disconnect between the values held by parents and carers and the content and provision, especially regarding sex and relationships.

Furthermore, a significant area of concern was the perceived erosion of the rights of parents and carers contained within the proposals. From these perspectives, parents and carers felt as though they have a primary role to play in the moral, social and spiritual development of their children. Some respondents felt that the proposals, specifically the opportunity to opt out of certain provision, could potentially undermine or weaken this role.

Conversely, some respondents also cited the rights of the child to a balanced and wide-ranging education as being important in the debate surrounding access to the curriculum. From these perspectives, the rights of parents and carers to determine and shape their children's education must be balanced with the rights of the child to an education.

Information, Guidance and Support

A key theme from respondents was the importance of clarifying and communicating what would be taught in RE and, in particular, RSE. Many respondents, including those who were broadly supportive of and opposed to the proposals, believed that if the proposals were to be introduced it would be important to ensure that parents and carers were fully informed of the content of teaching and when these lessons would take place.

It was suggested in responses that fully informing parents of the content of lessons could address concerns that parents may have with regard to the appropriateness of what is being taught. This finding was confirmed in conversations with parents and carers in focus groups. Where parents expressed concerns when they were provided with clarification including examples of what might be taught, they tended to soften their opposition to the proposals.

Timing of the Reforms

Respondents were asked if they felt that the proposals should be introduced across all age groups from September 2022, or whether they should be phased in line with the introduction of the new curriculum.

Those offering the view that there should be a phased introduction in line with the implementation of the new curriculum tended to do so because they did not want to see the introduction of the proposals at all.

Those who responded that the curriculum should be introduced from September 2022 highlighted the benefits that schools, learners and society would gain, including consistency for schools and less disruption and confusion caused by some pupils following the curriculum, while others do not.

Renaming Religious Education

Moreover, respondents were asked for their views on the appropriate name for RE to accurately reflect the broader scope proposed in the new curriculum. A widespread feeling amongst respondents was that they felt that RE should be renamed Religion, Values and Ethics. Reasons for this included the idea that teaching morals and ethics is important, and that the title of the subject should reflect the more expansive focus. In addition, many indicated that worldviews would encourage engagement with a broader range of opinions and beliefs.

Implications for the Welsh Language

No significant issues were raised in connection with the proposals and their impact on the Welsh language.

Conclusions

What connects the majority of respondents is the belief in the importance of promoting children's social, emotional and moral development, as well as supporting their broader well-being. Both those broadly supportive of and those opposed to the proposals were united in their wish to ensure that children and young people are not exposed to values, beliefs or ideas that they feel contradict or undermine their development and well-being.

Where there are differences of opinion, these tended to focus on either:

- Concerns surrounding the **appropriateness and sensitivity of provision**; or
- The importance of receiving a **broad, balanced and informed** education.

Within these two distinct viewpoints, there was considerable diversity in the substantive issues and emphasis of responses. Viewpoints were often strongly held and expressed, highlighting the importance placed by many respondents upon children and young people's social, emotional, spiritual or moral development.

It was felt amongst respondents both broadly in favour of and opposed to the proposals that information and communication were key. It was suggested in responses that fully informing parents of the content of lessons could address concerns that parents may have with regard to the appropriateness of what is being taught in the classroom.

1 Introduction

This report summarises an independent analysis of responses providing feedback on the proposed reforms to Religious Education (RE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). Children and young people, parents, teachers and broader stakeholders (including faith groups) were asked for their views on the proposals. The views and perspectives are intended to inform the continued development of the proposals before the new *Curriculum for Wales 2022* is rolled out in classrooms across Wales.

1.1 Background

In partnership with teachers, practitioners and schools, the Welsh Government set out to review the curriculum. Within *Our National Mission: A Transformational Curriculum*, as well as drawing on the views and perspectives of the educational community, including young people and parents, the review sought to communicate a vision of the future for education from the Foundation Phase to Key Stage 4. This culminated in the development of the *Curriculum for Wales 2022*, which seeks to transform teaching and learning in classrooms. The new curriculum aims to support all children and young people in becoming:

- Ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
- Enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- Ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- Healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

As part of the proposals, RE and RSE would play an important role within the purpose-led curriculum, supporting all learners in progressing towards the four purposes.

Within the new curriculum, for example, RSE aims to support young people in establishing and maintaining respectful and fulfilling relationships throughout their lives. These may include family relationships, friendships, professional relationships, and sexual relationships. Moving beyond simply a focus on sex education in the current curriculum towards a broader exploration of relationships also reflects international trends including international guidance on sexuality education developed with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Through RSE, children and young people will receive age-appropriate, neutral and accurate information helping them to successfully and safely navigate the social world in which they live.

In proposals for the new curriculum, RE will form part of the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience. The provision is intended to reflect the historical and contemporary relationship in Wales with philosophical and religious views, including non-religious beliefs. The aim would be to help learners to develop respect for and understanding of different forms of religion and worldviews over time and in different societies. The RE framework itself is being developed by a group of RE practitioners and teachers, academics, and representatives from Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) and the National Advisory Panel for Religious Education (NAPfRE).

In supporting all children and young people in progressing towards the four purposes, ensuring that all learners have access to consistent and balanced RE and RSE provision is seen as key. On this basis, the Welsh Government believe that there is a strong case for all school learners to be guaranteed access to RE and RSE.

Therefore, the Welsh Government consulted on proposals not to include a right to withdraw from RE and RSE in the new curriculum for Wales and for these lessons to be made compulsory for all pupils.

The Welsh Government were keen to explore people's views and perspectives on the proposals. In October 2019, the Welsh Government reached out to children and young people, parents and carers, teachers and the broader community to explore their views.

The consultation specifically sought respondents' views on the practical implications of the proposal to ensure access to the new curriculum.

1.2 Responses

The proposals were put forward for public consultation and views on the proposals were invited between October and November 2019.

Respondents were offered a range of opportunities to feed back their views and perspectives on the proposals, including online, via email and post, and in person. The Welsh Government received 1,660 responses online, via email and through the post. Of these responses, a significant proportion were received from parents, carers or family members. Faith groups from across Wales also contributed their views, as did third sector and public sector organisations with an interest in education and RE and RSE provision. Furthermore, responses were received from practitioners, teachers, senior leaders, and governors.

A number of similar submissions were received that suggested coordinated campaigns. These included multiple identical responses or responses based on similar key arguments with only marginal changes to the text. These included:

- Five different campaigns offering religious perspectives and viewpoints on the proposals; and
- Humanists requesting that humanism play a more prominent role in Religious Education.

Children and young people as well as parents and carers were also invited to attend focus groups. These sought to explore their views in more detail. The children and young people's focus groups were organised and run by Dynamix, a specialist research organisation that draws on creative and participatory approaches to exploring people's views.

The focus groups aimed at parents and carers were organised and run by Wavehill staff. These were conducted in schools across Wales, including schools with a religious character and with parents of children and young people from specific backgrounds or faiths. Eight groups were held in total, wherein 65 parents and carers offered their views and perspectives. These included parents and carers of children and young people at four primary schools, three secondary schools, and one Additional Learning Needs (ALN) setting. Protected characteristic groups included schools with a religious character and one that educated many children and young people from the traveller community.

Focus group participants were first asked the questions that appeared in the consultation. They were then asked questions that sought to explore and confirm emerging themes, including from online responses. The themes and perspectives raised by participants mirrored the issues raised by respondents who contributed their views online or by post. This is important, serving to validate and confirm viewpoints and perspectives raised across the consultation. These issues are communicated in the subsequent sections.

On the whole, participants of focus groups tended to be more positive towards the proposals than those responding online and by post. Whilst there were objections and clarifications, participants tended to focus more on the positive implications of the proposals. There could be a number of reasons for this. Participants may have moderated stronger, more negative views towards the proposals within discussions where they felt they may be unacceptable to the broader group. It may also be possible that the views and perspectives of the broader responses may not accurately reflect the broader community of parents and carers in Wales. A further finding from focus groups is that knowledge and understanding of the proposals is generally low, and that in some cases there are misunderstandings. These issues are explored in more depth throughout the report.

1.3 Analytical Approach

In order to understand the issues and themes raised by respondents, in October 2019 the Welsh Government commissioned Wavehill, an independent research organisation, to conduct an analysis of the responses. The analysis set out to understand and map the range of views and perspectives held by respondents with regard to the proposals surrounding RE and RSE.

Responses generated a range of qualitative information. The online questionnaire, for example, posed a number of questions asking respondents for their views surrounding the potential impact of the proposals. In order to make sense of the perspectives expressed by respondents, the authors conducted a detailed content analysis. This approach systematically examines each response, highlighting the themes and issues that are raised.

There are a number of limitations with regard to this analysis that are important to note. The respondents who contributed their views and perspectives are not necessarily representative of the wider community of parents, teachers, or the broader public as a whole. Together, therefore, the responses should be considered to provide an indication of the views, sentiments and opinions of the community at large, rather than being a definitive statement.

Because of the high likelihood of self-selection, we have not sought to count how many respondents held a particular view. The approach taken has been qualitative, with the aim being to communicate an understanding of the range of key themes and issues raised by respondents as well as the reasons for holding particular views. Such information includes potential areas of agreement and disagreement between the different groups of respondents.

Interpretation of the balance of opinion must also be considered in the context of the questions asked, as not every respondent answered all of the questions, nor did every respondent provide enough information to expand on their views accurately. In this respect, qualitative terms are only indicative of opinions that are relative to questions on the basis of those who responded. Therefore, they cannot be assumed to relate numerically back to the total number of people and organisations that responded, or to the educational community.

Together, this analysis should only be interpreted to offer the range of views held by respondents, and not the prevalence of views held by the community as a whole.

2 Children and Young People's Perspectives

This section presents a summary of a separate analysis of children and young people's perspectives towards the proposals. Twenty focus groups were delivered by Dynamix with children and young people across Wales from 8 - 28 November 2019. Ten groups were held in Primary schools, eight in Secondary schools and two protected characteristic groups.

A total of 279 participants provided feedback through the focus groups and the online survey.

2.1 Relationships and Sexuality Education

Analysis of the responses given by participants in the consultation show that RSE is a difficult subject for learners to talk about making a lot of learners feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. However, they also saw that this subject was about making friends and developing healthy relationships. The main thing that learners currently get from RSE lessons is learning about their own bodies, how they relate to others, staying safe and bullying.

It was felt that there could be both positive and negative effects of the changes on learners, parents/guardians/carers and schools. The consistent theme from these discussions was that these changes could lead to more informed and more tolerant learners and school environment, which could positively affect parents by ensuring that this is talked about in schools which may take the pressure off parents to have the conversations at home. It was felt that consistent learning for all in this area would result in learners being more informed as they became adults and that it would help to create a better understanding and tolerance.

Analysis of results shows that the most negative effect could be on parents as it would remove their choice on how their children would learn about RSE. Those from Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities felt that making this compulsory would have a huge impact on learners as they could be removed from education by their parents. Children and young people in this community felt highly embarrassed by this subject and were strongly against learning in this area. The sense of embarrassment and feeling uncomfortable about this area of learning was shared across all groups. It was also felt that these changes would negatively affect schools by having to deal with parents' complaints and that there would need to be training to ensure that lessons were well informed and age appropriate. Participants felt that making this learning compulsory may lead to poor behaviour amongst pupils and could increase incidents of bullying which would have an impact on the schools as they will have to deal with this behaviour from pupils.

To support these changes it was suggested that parents need to be kept informed of what is going on. This needs to be communicated in a variety of ways including email, text, letters, newsletters and face to face meetings. Information should be provided on what is being taught in RSE and when. Teachers would need the right training and lessons should be customised to meet different needs and abilities. Involving learners and parents in discussions will also help the transition.

2.2 Religious Education

Conversations on RE with learners was more straightforward than RSE. Learners had a clear understanding of what RE was about and what they currently learn in this area. It was clear that learners saw RE as including learning about all religions with a strong focus on Christianity throughout the responses given. Learning in RE also included learning about people, history and customs. It was felt that learning about religions and people helps to reduce racism and bullying. Opinion was split amongst some learners – with half being interested in this area of learning or and half not. Learners objections to learning in this area was also seen as being the most negative effect of making learning RE compulsory.

It was also felt that learners should have a choice whether they attended these lessons or not. However, it was clear from the focus groups that studying RE would make learners more informed and tolerant. This would also have a positive effect on parents as they would be happy to know their children are learning about other religions and that they would learn about respect. It was felt that the school environment could improve through learners being more informed and therefore more tolerant and as a result there could be less bullying.

However, analysis of the results shows that learners felt that this would have a negative effect on parents/guardians/carers who have a religious belief and would not want their children learning about other religions at school. Schools may be negatively affected by these changes as it could cost money to implement and additional training would be needed for teachers. It was felt the impact of learners and parents' objections to these lessons becoming compulsory, could also affect schools as they would have to deal with disruptive behaviour in classes and complaints from parents. It was suggested that people with different religious beliefs, cultures and from countries outside of the UK should be invited to speak to learners as part of their education and that RE should include learning about non-religious beliefs.

The suggestions made for changing the name of Religious Education in the new curriculum were not widely supported. The use of the term 'ethics' caused confusion for many participants in the consultation. The majority (59%) of participants in the consultation voted for new suggestions for what RE is called in the new curriculum. Over 50 new suggestions were put forward by participants the majority of which supported continuing to use the term 'Religion' with the inclusion of worldwide culture, friendship, social skills.

To support these changes, it was suggested that parents should be kept informed through multimedia channels such as social media, email, letters leaflets, TV and videos. This should also include opportunities for face to face discussions and involving both parents and children in decision making. Training for teachers was also seen as something that would help make these changes work. As well as support for learners in school.

2.3 Parents of children in year 8 and above should not be able to stop their child having RE or RSE lessons from September 2022

The majority of participants in the consultation felt that these changes should apply to learners in year 8 and above from September 2022 as well as those in year 7 as there needs to be consistency of approach across all ages. It was also commented that parents should not be able to remove their children from these lessons and it should be the learner's choice. However, comments were made about the appropriateness of making these lessons compulsory for younger children.

2.4 Impact on the Welsh language

The majority of participants felt that these changes would not impact on opportunities for people to use Welsh or treating the Welsh language equally to English. It was felt that as long as the right resources were provided bilingually, these changes could broaden the use of Welsh by introducing new vocabulary. Those in Welsh speaking schools supported this as they felt they would continue to have their education in Welsh anyway. However, it was highlighted by one participant that there needed to be investment into bilingual resources which are not currently available for GCSE RE studies.

The majority of participants felt that there may be changes that could be made to the plan to increase the chances for people to speak Welsh and treat the Welsh language the same as English. Again, this related to the availability of resources in RSE and RE in Welsh. Some participants also commented that there needed to be more availability of Welsh language education.

3 Impact of the Proposals

As questions in a yes/no response on the principles on having the right to withdraw had already been asked in the preceding White Paper, the purpose of this consultation was to get further views on what the implications would be if the right to withdraw is not included in the new curriculum. As such, the consultation did not explicitly ask respondents whether they support or object to the proposals overall.

However, to help understand the balance of the opinion against views expressed in the previous White Paper where 89 percent of responses were against the proposal to remove the right to withdraw, we have for the purpose of this report sought to get a flavour of the positive and negative feeling to the responses to the consultation. Question 1 of the consultation sought views on the implications for learners, parents and carers, and schools if all learners were required to receive RE and/or RSE lessons in the new curriculum.

The responses to question 1 where respondents expressed viewpoints that highlighted explicitly and wholly positive or negative implications were analysed. The most common response was negative, with 991 recorded cases (60 percent); 349 were conditional, expressing both positive and negative implications (21 percent); and 320 were found to be positive (19 percent). However, there is a caveat to this data as the consultation did not explicitly ask respondents whether they support or object to the proposals overall. This analysis may therefore overestimate opposition to the proposals, including those respondents that are not wholly against the proposals but chose to raise particular concerns and implications.

Respondents were asked for their views on the possible implications of the proposals for learners, parents and carers, and for schools more broadly which are as follows:

3.1 Informing Children and Young People

A key idea linking more positive responses was the important role that RE and RSE play in providing children and young people with access to information that enables them to navigate the world around them successfully. From these perspectives, RE offered learners important insights that could help them to understand and connect with different people, communities, traditions, faiths or worldviews:

Children are already very aware. So my daughter, my eldest daughter is seven. She has a friend who is... she never actually mentioned a religion. I knew she was Hindi because she mentioned lots of different Gods. And they have conversations in the playground. So she came home and she said, you know, 'well we believe in one God and they believe in lots of Gods and how is that possible?' And so we did, we had a very open conversation about religion and, so, I think children are already very aware of it...

They're already very aware of the media and what they see and how certain religions are stereo-typified... I don't know, I can't think of the word. And, so, I think children do need information to make their own decisions.

Parent/Carer

These perspectives were often framed by concerns surrounding information and ideas to which children and young people are exposed outside of the classroom and away from the family. From this perspective, parents and carers felt that RE and RSE were important in providing balanced and impartial information that can protect and empower children and young people:

Young people have access to some really disturbing media regarding sex these days and that should be balanced with proper sex education in school... Being able to identify signs of good and bad relationships is essential to arm young people with knowledge to understand when some relationships cross a line.

Parent/Carer

Another strand of thought was the potential for RE and RSE to support the social, emotional and cognitive development of children and young people. From this perspective, RE and RSE are not simply concerned with communicating information, but also with giving children and young people the means by which to thrive:

The National Society is a passionate supporter of the importance of Religious Education (RE) as an essential component of a broad and balanced curriculum that prepares learners for life in modern Britain... Learners have a right to expect a curriculum that protects, informs and nurtures all pupils... RSE should ensure that children are able to cherish themselves and others as unique and wonderfully made, keep themselves safe and able to form healthy relationships where they respect and afford dignity to others. It will provide pupils with the knowledge that will enable them to navigate and contextualise a world in which many will try to tell them how to behave, what to do and what to think. It will help them to develop the skills to express their own views and make their own informed decisions.

The National Society for the Promotion of Education

3.2 Appropriateness of Provision

A prominent area of concern expressed by respondents who were broadly opposed to the proposals was the appropriateness of the provision. From this perspective, RSE appears to have received greater attention from respondents. Many appear to focus their concern upon the disconnect between the values held by parents and carers and the perceived focus on content and provision, especially regarding sex and relationships:

I am a grandmother/carer and I am very concerned about these mooted changes. Home values are very important to my family and for the children to have and enjoy the innocence of childhood. RSE would present ideas which may conflict with our home values and cause confusion and disunity at a time in childhood where foundations are being taught.

Parent/Carer

The age appropriateness of RSE provision was often raised by respondents. Parents and carers citing this issue often drew on concerns surrounding well-being, including the sexualisation of children and young people. From this perspective, RSE could exacerbate, rather than address, these concerns:

I think it would be great for Religious Education to be taught to all children, to learn more about our society. However, I have serious concerns of the content of the sexuality education and the ages of which it will be taught. As a parent of an early years child, I do not want my child exposed to matters which she is not mature enough to understand or even needs to know about at such a young age.

Parent/Carer

Closely aligned with concerns surrounding the appropriateness of the provision, respondents broadly opposed to the reforms felt that teaching could potentially be incompatible with the views and perspectives of the family. These responses sought to ensure that the proposals maintain cultural and religious sensitivity, especially surrounding the wishes and beliefs of the family. Moreover, these concerns tended to centre on RSE provision:

I am concerned that my children would be taught principles that contravene our family's faith in God, and the Christian principles set out in the Holy Bible. Our children will be taught in the home regarding relationships and sexuality, in accordance with our personal beliefs. Forcing this curriculum and its teaching on all learners is an abuse of human rights with regard to the ability of every person in this country to freely practise their faith and beliefs.

Parent/Carer

This perspective was strongly felt by some in the Muslim community:

These are very sensitive, personal areas and whilst in an ideal scenario, teachers will have a healthy dialogue with parents and consensus will always be reached, what happens if they cannot agree? As a Muslim parent, I rarely withdraw my child, but it has always been comforting to know that my right exists should I ever feel a lesson is not right for my child... I feel the right to withdraw has always been a great way to acknowledge and accommodate the diversity of learners/communities and respect their backgrounds... If parents ever have concerns about the quality of teaching in such a sensitive area, they should feel safe in the knowledge that they can remove their children from that class if needed.

Parent/Carer

There were more specific concerns surrounding the perception that RSE would promote same-sex relationships. Some respondents felt that this provision was contradictory to religious teaching. Others felt that this could be potentially confusing for children. From this perspective, respondents often cited concerns surrounding gender transitioning and the perceived negative impact that it can have on young people:

Both RE and RSE are susceptible to being taught from a strongly ideological position. For the most part, this is rarely a problem in RE from my experience, though it could be and, hence, I would want a Jew or Muslim parent to have the freedom to pull their child out of a Christian class. The RSE curriculum, however, is far more susceptible due to the very strong agenda being pushed from certain quarters at the present time. Queer theory, in particular, is a concept that has no basis in science, though it is being pushed as if it has. The implications for young people are especially significant, as they are impressionable. Young people need support as they navigate an increasingly complex and scary world. They do not need to be taught a theory that would unsettle them even further and even lead to them making irreversible changes to their bodies when they are not at an age to be able to make a wise judgment.

Parent/Carer

3.3 Promoting Tolerance

Another theme offered by those broadly in support of the reforms was concerned with the role of RE and RSE in promoting tolerance in society. Respondents often expressed that pluralistic, neutral and critical education could promote positive engagement with, and understanding of, difference:

If we still feel that understanding, tolerance, diversity, empathy and curiosity are values important for individual growth and a healthy society, having education in the wide variety of relationships, expressions of sexuality, belief systems and ethical viewpoints that exist is vital. Having these experiences as a part of the formal education system will permit a wider understanding on these points and allow people to better interpret experiences during their lives resulting from these things.

Individual

These sentiments were also reflected by some in the educational community who felt that promoting tolerance also has important implications both inside and outside of the school gates:

A broad and balanced curriculum. A cohort of respectful and open-minded young learners. A calmer and more caring learning environment. Children who understand and appreciate each other. Less racism. Less teen pregnancy. More understanding of their own bodies. Helping to fight against stereotypes.

School, Teacher, Governor

3.4 Improving Well-Being

What is more, proponents of the proposals emphasised the potential for RE and, in particular, RSE to support children and young people's social, emotional and physical development and well-being. Respondents drew on a range of potential benefits. The NSPCC, for example, highlighted the role of RSE in developing children and young people's awareness of abusive or inappropriate behaviour:

NSPCC Cymru/Wales supports the proposal not to include the right to withdrawal from Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in the new curriculum... We believe it is best delivered as part of a whole-school approach where it is embedded across the curriculum and in wider school policies, ethos, behaviours and communications. Ensuring access to the full curriculum for all learners brings an important opportunity for children in Wales, for the first time, to be consistently taught about how to recognise what constitutes abuse or inappropriate behaviour and how to raise any worries or concerns with a trusted adult...

NSPCC Cymru/Wales

This issue was confirmed by the Internet Watch Foundation, an organisation that monitors and reports images and videos of child sexual abuse. The organisation responded in order to highlight that recent increases in online child sexual abuse supported a more open and informed dialogue with children and young people in respect of relationships and online safety:

Since 2012, our analysts have noted a significant rise in the number of self-generated sexual images and videos of children that they are assessing and actioning for removal. Increasingly, children are being groomed, tricked and coerced into performing sexually over a camera... With platforms and devices evolving at an unprecedented rate, children must be equipped to navigate the digital world safely. This problem is only getting worse, as each year our analysts identify more material of this nature... As the online and offline worlds become increasingly intertwined, it is critical that children understand the nature of online relationships and how these can be exploited.

The Internet Watch Foundation

Meanwhile, other respondents highlighted the role of RSE in helping young people to make more informed and healthy choices regarding relationships and intimacy. This perspective also often drew on the perception that conversations at home were not always helpful in informing or guiding children and young people:

The need for the better development of emotional intelligence within our education system and society has been frequently emphasised. The provision of an age-appropriate RSE curriculum is an essential ingredient for every child to develop their emotional intelligence. Whilst some will argue that Relationships and Sexuality Education is best taught at home, we know from evidence that (a) in very many cases this is not done or is done very badly and (b) discussing this in an age-appropriate way with a peer group adds a necessary dimension to every child's education.

Parent/Carer

3.5 Ensuring the Rights of Parents and Carers

A significant area of concern amongst parents and carers was that of a perceived erosion of their rights contained within the proposals. From this perspective, parents and carers felt as though they have a primary role to play in the moral, social and spiritual development of their children. Some respondents felt that the proposals, specifically the opportunity to opt out of certain provision, could potentially undermine or weaken this role:

Parents are the primary and best educators of their children and they know when their individual child is ready to receive sensitive information. These subjects are not primarily factual and information should be presented in a manner that is in accordance with family, ethnic, cultural beliefs. The rights of parents should not be removed by eroding their right to absent their child if they feel it is right to do so.

Parent/Carer

These sentiments often drew on the ability of parents and carers to judge whether or not information and subject matters were developmentally appropriate and sensitive to the beliefs of the family:

Learners don't all learn at the same pace and are not all at the same level of understanding when it comes to English and maths — let alone social skills and relationship education. Parents know their children best and can therefore provide the required level of information in a suitable manner to fit the child specifically and their home beliefs and moral values.

Parent/Carer

For different reasons, ensuring the rights of parents was also strongly expressed by both those of faith as well as atheists and humanists. Those of faith tended to focus their objections to the proposals on the basis of what they believed would be taught in RSE:

I would not wish any of my children to attend the RSE classes. My reasons would be based on my religious beliefs, as I am very much opposed to the content of the curriculum as proposed. This is an area of social behaviour which I recognise some may and do find acceptable. I do not, and would therefore withdraw any member of my family from a class in which this was being taught.

Parent/Carer

On the other hand, those of no religion, such as atheists and humanists, tended to object on the grounds that they wished to opt out of RE and broader provision of a religious character:

I fear that these changes would allow our church schools to teach their faith without limits.

Parent/Carer

Although RE can be taught in a way which is similarly objective, this is not the case in faith schools, which, by law, follow separate syllabuses that are produced by religious bodies and consider the subject through a religious lens. In the event that the right to

withdraw is removed, this means that children who come from non-religious families or those with religious beliefs that are different from the school will be forced to attend lessons that are effectively designed to indoctrinate them into a religious perspective they do not share.

Parent/Carer, Campaign

Furthermore, some in the educational community held reservations surrounding the removal of parental opt-out. From these perspectives, the removal of opt-out could adversely impact upon the positive relationships between schools, teachers, parents and carers:

The proposals to remove the parental right of withdrawal would have a detrimental effect: they attack the right of parents to primacy in the education of their children, a fundamental principle of the Catholic view of education.

School, Teacher, Governor

There are people who, for religious reasons, or who actually genuinely have good reasons why — good moral reasons for themselves and for their children — why they would want to opt out... For some people, [the proposals are] just gonna be an absolute turn-off and what we really need is parents engaging with education so that they're supporting their children's learning. Whereas if we create a situation where actually more and more parents feel like school is the enemy, I think there is a genuine risk that there would be significant — it would be a tiny percentage statistically — small number who would potentially withdraw their children from school completely in the event that there was no opt-out. So, I do hope that a more flexible approach can perhaps be constructed on this.

School Governor

There were concerns from some respondents that the removal of opt-out could lead to parents withdrawing their children altogether from mainstream schooling:

A further concern, specific to the withdrawal clause itself, is this: parents who wish to withdraw their child from RE lessons for what they feel are genuine reasons of religious belief/a specific worldview may well, if they can no longer invoke the clause, opt instead to withdraw from the school altogether (maybe to be home-schooled).

Individual

3.6 Ensuring the Rights of the Child

Conversely, some respondents also cited the rights of the child to a balanced and wide-ranging education as being important in the debate surrounding access to the curriculum. From these perspectives, the rights of parents and carers to determine and shape their children's education must be balanced with the rights of the child to an education:

It does seem to be an anomaly that learners can be withdrawn from an academic subject like RE and not from any other academic subject. Indeed, in some of those subjects the same topics and concepts would be addressed in a similar way to RE. Learners should have access to the full curriculum... Certainly, learners who are

withdrawn from RE in the Curriculum for Wales would be detrimentally affected, especially if the links and interdependencies within and between [Areas of Learning and Experience] are considered. It would also be much more impractical in the new curriculum for schools to manage withdrawal from RE if legislation is not changed.

Individual

3.7 Teaching and Learning

Respondents also highlighted the potential positive and negative impact of the proposals on teaching and learning. These themes mirrored some of the views and perspectives of the educational community upon the broader *Curriculum for Wales 2022* guidance materials. Respondents, for example, view the nature of the curriculum — with an emphasis on promoting cross-curricular learning — as having the potential to make the subject and teaching more relevant and engaging:

The Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC) is strongly supportive of all learners being required to receive RE lessons in the new curriculum (although we do not think that now is the time to remove the parental right of withdrawal from RE...). RE forms a vital part of a broad and balanced curriculum and is an important part of preparing all pupils in Wales for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life. The REC notes the plans to include RE within the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE) and for there to be a separate RE framework within this AoLE. We believe that there are potential benefits to RE being more closely integrated into the wider curriculum, but that there are also risks. We believe that in order for RE's integration into the Humanities AoLE to be successful it will be vital that clear steps are taken to ensure that schools adhere to the RE framework and that the distinctive contribution of RE is not lost.

The Religious Education Council of England and Wales

Respondents did raise concerns surrounding the challenges of delivering RE and RSE as outlined in the proposals. As with the previous RSE consultation and the broader consultation on *Curriculum for Wales 2022* guidance, some expressed concerns with respect to the potential impact on practitioner workloads of implementing RE and RSE, including across Areas of Learning and Experience. Moreover, it was felt that there were challenges regarding effectively teaching RE and RSE as well as promoting cross-curricular learning:

Many teachers lack confidence in these areas, though, so ongoing professional learning opportunities will be necessary, especially around handling sensitivities and conflicts of opinions.

School, Teacher, Governor

Concerns were also raised regarding the need to ensure balance and impartiality in the teaching of RE. Respondents felt as though it was important that young people were presented religions and worldviews in a balanced and sensitive way:

The essential message behind this teaching should be that there must be no indoctrination of any kind. This should not mean that representatives of various faiths should not be

asked to speak to classes about their religion and beliefs, but this should include people from more than one religion and those with no religious beliefs.

Parent/Carer

4 Information, Guidance and Support

Respondents were then asked what support, information and guidance would be needed if the approach contained in the proposals were to be adopted. This sought to explore the practical steps that the Welsh Government and the educational community could take to address any concerns held by respondents.

4.1 Clarifying the Content of Teaching

A key theme from respondents, including those who were broadly supportive of and opposed to the proposals, was the importance of clarifying and communicating what would be taught in RE and, in particular, RSE. Many respondents believed that if the proposals were to be introduced, it would be important to ensure that parents and carers were fully informed of the content of teaching and when these lessons would take place:

If my children learn something in school, I need to know what they're learning and how I can help support them further. Online resources such as factsheets would help.

Parent/Carer

Parents would need to be fully informed of what and how the elements would be taught to alleviate concerns that content might challenge their own values or beliefs or be inappropriate for the age of the child.

School, Teacher or Governor

Furthermore, it was suggested in responses that fully informing parents of the content of lessons could address concerns that parents may have with regard to the appropriateness of what is being taught. This finding was confirmed in conversations with parents and carers in focus groups. Where parents expressed concerns when they were provided with clarification including examples of what might be taught, they tended to soften their opposition to the proposals. This was particularly relevant to concerns surrounding the age appropriateness of the provision, specifically the view that RSE would be uniformly introduced from the age of 3 or above:

Parents should be made aware of what is covered in the lessons so that they can feel comfortable and understand that it is age-appropriate.

Other

I think some communities have a misunderstanding of what this element of the curriculum actually covers. I myself am Muslim and there is a lot of confusion and scaremongering in the community. I think closer links and education within local mosques should be included.

Parent/Carer

What is more, some respondents felt as though it was important that materials and content of lessons be consulted upon by experts, fact-based and not influenced by scientific evidence and effective practice. Many stated that it was important to be aware of this information prior to the teaching of RSE lessons in order to ensure that parents are prepared to answer questions that their child may have and in order to support their child's learning at home.

4.2 Opportunities for Dialogue

Alongside more information, some respondents highlighted the importance of creating opportunities for parents and carers to discuss with teachers and school leaders any questions or concerns that they have with respect to the provision. Some respondents felt that the adoption of these proposals could compromise the relationship between schools, parents and carers. By ensuring open dialogue between parents and the school, respondents felt that this could help to ease concerns in relation to the teaching of RE and RSE:

We have the example of schools in some parts of England suffering serious breakdowns in the relationship between themselves and the communities they serve.

School, Teacher or Governor

It would be important to be clear with parents, particularly those from more closed cultures, as to what age-appropriate material will be covered. This is to try and avoid the issues experienced at a number of schools in Birmingham, for example.

Individual

In the 50 Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Cardiff, no parents currently withdraw their children from Religious Education or RSE lessons. However, that is through clear communication, and often tailored individual conversations between headteachers or other school staff and parents, so that the families have a very clear understanding of what teaching and experiences are being offered to their children during these sessions. It is a fundamental principle of Catholic education that parents are the primary educators of their children, with schools working in partnership with families to ensure they are supporting parents in their role. The removal of this parental right to withdraw their children from RE and RSE would undermine the trust that has been established with parents.

Organisation

A number of respondents highlighted existing effective practice in communicating with and involving parents and carers in their children's education:

There has always been a strong tradition of working closely with parents (and the community) to deliver outstanding practice.

School, Teacher, Governor

4.3 Additional Pastoral Support

Respondents also suggested that there may be a need for additional pastoral support offered to children and young people in order to help them to navigate any questions or issues that they face with respect to RE and RSE. Some respondents suggested that as a result of the removal of the right to withdraw there will be an increase in students needing to talk about and discuss issues that may have been raised during RSE classes, and felt that it was important to have support structures in place to help young people with any concerns that may arise:

There should be somewhere for the pupils to go when they have further questions about the topics discussed without fear of someone finding out what the pupils wanted to talk about.

Unidentified

School buddying systems, peer support, safeguarding leads, and school nurses need to be made available for any advice or support needed in a school setting, together with signposting to national organisations, e.g. Childline, NSPCC...

School, Teacher, Governor

4.4 Supporting Teachers

Some respondents felt that the proposals had implications for teachers and schools. There was broad recognition of the challenges of delivering effective, sensitive and engaging teaching across RE and RSE. From these perspectives, teachers would require a range of support, including guidance and training:

Teachers would need to know how to handle difficult questions, too, with training on the correct terminology to use, and how to help any child that appears to struggle and/or have issues (such as recognition of an unhealthy relationship at home) with the information. It would perhaps be useful to provide information to all the pupils of outside help they can contact safely (e.g. Childline), [something] that was available in the school rather than sent home with them.

Parent/Carer

Another theme emerging from the responses was the importance of consistency in teaching within and across schools. Respondents felt as though it was important to set out a clear framework or syllabus highlighting the substantive content and tone of provision. Schools having unambiguous guidance in respect of the curricula, it was argued, would reduce variation between schools in what and how RE and RSE were being taught. Without such clear guidance, there would be the potential for schools to interpret the curricular content differently and provide vastly differing experiences from school to school. Such consistency in teaching across schools becomes even more important when the parental right to withdraw is removed, as, in effect, parents may be losing the right to withdraw from differing curricula.

It was argued that the clear guidance would also address concerns raised by some respondents in relation to teachers promoting their own viewpoint during delivery or schools

promoting a specific agenda over another. Some suggested that having a clearly set-out framework for the content of RE and RSE curricula would reduce the scope for schools to teach certain topics in a way that may be seen to promote one viewpoint over another or for schools to avoid teaching certain topics:

There would need to be clarity for staff so that they are fully aware of how each element should be taught to ensure no staff views are implied.

School, Teacher or Governor

Clear guidance on the curriculum content and how it should be taught, to avoid dilution and potential for aversion from the intended outcome.

Parent/Carer

The adoption of a clear framework could address some of the concerns raised amongst the responses regarding how appropriate the RSE content would be for children, especially in the primary age range. Furthermore, schools and teachers suggested that it was important for the Welsh Government to communicate effectively with parents with regard to the implementation of the proposals, so as to divert negative reactions away from individual schools. One school with a significant number of learners from the Muslim community, for example, expressed concern that the proposals could have a significant impact on the relationships between teachers and parents and carers:

Because of the almost certain opposition of a considerable number of parents, there is a possibility of disruption and non-compliance. This would place an unfair burden on the Senior Leadership Team and the staff as a whole in regard to the day-to-day running of the school. This would place a real strain on the school–parent relationship.

School, Teacher or Governor

It was argued that ensuring that parents knew that the teaching of RE and RSE, along with the removal of parental opt-out, was statutory and not a decision made by the individual school would remove the potential for conflict between schools and parents and carers:

With regards to RSE, the curriculum would be need to very prescriptive to ensure consistency across schools and to provide clear guidelines and boundaries stating the content to be taught within each year group. Schools would need these lessons to become statutory so that parents are not under the illusion that this is a school-based decision.

School, Teacher or Governor

The Welsh Government should provide comprehensive guidance on the subject which outlines the content that will be taught alongside clear expectations about when each topic should be covered.

Individual

Comprehensive guidance, in statute, which would explicitly set out what is to be taught so there are no illusions, misunderstandings or aggro about what is being taught to children.

School, Parent or Governor

Some respondents felt that it was important that ongoing monitoring of the quality of teaching of RE and RSE be carried out in order to ensure that teaching is aligned fully with the proposals and that there is a balanced approach to the teaching of the subjects.

What is more, respondents made reference to the fact that teaching RSE is a sensitive subject and that specific training and clear guidance on how to teach the subject should be made available. This would help to ensure that practitioners and teaching staff deliver lessons in a sensitive and careful manner. This includes showing an awareness of and sensitivity to cultural and religious beliefs when teaching RSE. Respondents suggested that there is a need for a structured approach to the teaching of RSE in order to ensure age appropriateness and that teachers are following an agreed programme of study supported by high-quality resources. Some respondents suggested that the teaching of RE and RSE should be undertaken by specialist teachers in order to ensure high-quality teaching and consistency in teaching.

In order to address this, respondents suggested that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) would need to play an important role. This would give teachers greater confidence in delivering content across RE and RSE. Although respondents highlighted the need for teacher training, few respondents fully expanded on what specific training and support would be needed:

They must be comfortable delivering the subject matter in a neutral, non-judgmental way that emphasises acceptance/tolerance, that there are seven billion people on the planet and it would be really dull and weird if we were all the same.

Individual

4.5 Opposition to the Proposals

Respondents who were broadly opposed to the proposals often used the opportunity presented by this question to rearticulate their objections. From this perspective, no amount of support, information and guidance would alleviate their concerns. A number of responses to this question reaffirmed the belief that the removal of parents' right to withdraw their child from RE and RSE lessons was wrong and that they did not support the proposals. Furthermore, responses eluded to the belief that no amount of guidance or information would make the proposals right:

I cannot think of any support, information or guidance that could be given that would overcome the basic objections of parents who do not wish their children to be taught these subjects.

School, Teacher, Governor

I don't agree with this suggestion, so I don't have anything to add in this section.

Individual

There were also responses which disagreed with the proposals but, nevertheless, provided an answer stating what guidance and information would be needed. Often this was caveated with a statement outlining that they did not agree with the planned approach, especially surrounding the removal of parental opt-out. Of these types of responses, there were a number of common themes which were cited in defence of parents' right to withdraw; these were broadly in line with those arguments in the previous question. These included that the removal of the parental right to withdraw children from RE and RSE lessons would be at odds with the religious views of parents and families; that the proposals would bypass the rights of the parent to choose which religion their child followed; the belief that teaching of RSE was inappropriate for children of primary school age; that it was the parents' responsibility to teach their children about matters in relation to RSE; and disagreement with the proposals to teach children about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Plus (LGBTQI+) matters and about same-sex relationships:

Individual schools should have the right to decide how they deliver this teaching. It should be perfectly acceptable for Catholic and Christian schools to only teach RSE from a Biblical viewpoint.

Individual

Parents should receive information well in advance of lessons and receive sample curriculum. It would also be good to allow parents to sit in on classes and have consultation meetings with staff. After this they should [continue to] have the right to remove their child if necessary.

Individual

It is doubtful that you could in any way prevent or protect children from coming into conflict with their parents when the teaching they receive in school directly contradicts parental values.

Other

I do not think any information or assurance would suffice if this approach were adopted, as parents would rightly suspect that their rights were being trampled upon in order that their children could be indoctrinated.

Other family member

Additionally, there were some responses which suggested that should the right to withdraw be removed, this would result in parents removing their child from school. This would be in order to be electively home-educated or keep their child at home when these lessons were due to be taught:

If this approach goes ahead I will remove my child hence no comment needed for this question.

Parent/Carer

5 Timing of the Reforms

Respondents were then asked if they felt that the proposals should be introduced across all age groups from September 2022. The Curriculum for Wales will be rolled out in secondary school from year 7. This is to ensure continuity of the approach for individual learners at a critical time. The Welsh Government are considering whether removing the ability to opt out will be introduced for all learners in 2022, or gradually as the curriculum is rolled out in secondary schools.

5.1 Phased Introduction

Those offering the view that there should be a phased introduction in line with the implementation of the new curriculum tended to do so because they did not want to see the introduction of the proposals at all. From this perspective, simply removing the right to withdraw was objectionable on either religious, cultural or moral grounds. Respondents often felt the removal of the right to withdraw to be in conflict with their rights as parents:

Because you're restricting religious freedoms of families, this should not happen in a democratic nation. People have given their lives for freedom of speech and expression of their religious convictions. As I've previously said, children should be taught to be kind to all, but not indoctrinated with beliefs contrary to those held by the family.

Other Family

An area of concern for those opposed to removing the right to withdraw for all students in 2022 was that of the negative effects that this proposal could have, including a rise in student absenteeism, a breakdown in the relationship between school and family, and a negative impact on the education of students:

If a legal mechanism is put in place to try and force children to attend certain lessons against the wishes of the parents, then parents will find other ways such as faking illness or other forms of absenteeism, which will have a detrimental impact on the child's education in all curriculum areas and will destroy the trust necessary in parent-school relationships. At its extreme it could lead to forms of civil unrest, such as that seen recently in Birmingham, or even alienate entire communities.

School, Teacher, Governor

Some respondents offered practical challenges in implementing the proposals as a reason for rolling out the proposals gradually. A common theme driving this perspective was the need to ensure that RE and RSE courses were delivered successfully and that enough time was available to engage and discuss the changes with parents so as to ensure understanding and counter misinformation:

We believe that this level of change needs to be rolled over a longer period of time to allow the diverse communities involved to better understand the rationale behind the proposals. We fully accept the principle behind the proposals but feel that work within the community to reach a common understanding and acceptance will take more than two years to achieve.

School, Teacher, Governor

Other unsure respondents also discussed the time needed to introduce a new curriculum and the need for sufficient time for governmental guidance, professional development and the setting-up of effective monitoring and reviewing processes:

Time is needed to embed any new proposal. Non-statutory guidance could, however, provide schools with materials that would encourage parents who might think of withdrawing their child to reconsider.

Individual

Meanwhile, others highlighted the need for time so as to ensure that parents and carers were on board with the provision, clarifying content and allaying parental concerns:

Because the changes under the new curriculum are likely to be an important factor in ensuring that parents feel confident that the content of the RE and RSE lessons will be different and more broadly based, simply limiting their freedom of choice when there is no change to the content of the curriculum is likely to be counterproductive and result in a greater backlash.

Other

5.2 2022 Introduction

Those who responded positively to the proposal for all students to be able to access the whole curriculum in September 2022 highlighted the benefits that schools, learners and society would gain from this simultaneous rollout. The benefits including consistency for schools and less disruption and confusion caused by some pupils following the curriculum while others do not:

To ensure a standardised approach and to avoid confusion within the teaching profession and with parents. Otherwise, in primary schools, some parents would be able to withdraw their children and other parents would not have the right to withdraw. This could also happen within families, depending on their children's ages.

School, Teacher, Governor

Those who suggested that learners should have access to the whole curriculum from September 2022 often highlighted the positive impacts in terms of society becoming more tolerant through all students having a greater understanding of different cultures and beliefs:

Where we allow children only to be exposed to a single set of beliefs or ways of thinking, we risk damaging that common understanding and increase prejudice as children grow up. If children are exposed to a whole range of identities and beliefs in a

way that they see the value of those identities and beliefs to those who follow them, then they will become far more accepting of people of different faiths, different social backgrounds, different sexual preferences and gender identities, etc. Allowing parents to keep children away from certain ideas damages the children and it is the duty of the education system to educate, not to uphold the prejudices, conscious or unconscious, of their parents.

Individual

Mirroring the responses to other questions, a number of respondents highlighted the positive impact that the September 2022 rollout would have on all children and young people in terms of mental and physical health and well-being. The need for all learners to have access to accurate, unbiased information was noted amongst some respondents. Meanwhile, others noted that the curriculum would allow students to be able to make more informed choices, improving safeguarding and promoting healthier relationships whilst also reducing loneliness and bullying by increasing awareness amongst students:

Children will learn about these things, if not from teachers or family members, then from their own sources (such as friends). They may also learn the hard way. It's far better to ensure they are receiving accurate information and to encourage them to feel able to talk about such things without fear of embarrassment or negative consequences. Teaching children how to recognise healthy and unhealthy relationships can save them in so many ways — help them to form healthy attitudes, to avoid toxic relationships, and to perhaps avoid becoming the source of a toxic relationship; this also applies to the acceptance of those in different religions. Children become adults and make their own choices. Surely, it's best to give them as much information as possible for them to make well-informed choices that are truly their own. Not allowing opting out may also bring to light cases of unhealthy relationships, even abuse, in the home. For these children, it's important that they learn that their circumstances are not normal and that something can be done. Teaching children RSE isn't just informative — it's a safeguarding measure.

Parent/Carer

Furthermore, some respondents felt that maintaining the right to withdraw for a longer period of time from RE and RSE for some would devalue the subjects and would send the wrong message to students and parents that studying these areas was not as important as studying other subjects. Moreover, by delaying the right to removal it was noted that it encouraged a belief in parents that these subjects were not beneficial to students or were controversial:

Nid oes gan rieni hawl i dynnu disgyblion o unrhyw wers arall. Dibrisio'r pwnc drwy roi'r cynnig yma i rieni. Nid pwrpas Addysg Grefyddol yw gwneud disgyblion yn grefyddol, ond yn hytrach rhoi'r sgiliau iddynt allu meddwl dros eu hunain.

Parents do not have the right to pull students from any other lessons. You are devaluing the subject by offering this to parents. The purpose of RE is not about making students religious but about giving them the ability to think for themselves.

School, Teacher, Governor

6 Renaming Religious Education

Respondents were also asked for their views on the appropriate name for RE to accurately reflect the broader scope proposed in the new curriculum.

6.1 The Importance of Continuity

For a variety of reasons, many respondents recommended that the name Religious Education should remain. They believed that there is no issue surrounding the name, as it is teaching religion specifically, with other lessons teaching values and ethics. Meanwhile, others suggested that changing the name would give less time for teaching religion, specifically Christianity. This would lead to a reduced understanding of and engagement with religion, which respondents felt would be detrimental. Some respondents with this view indicated that Christianity is the main religion in Wales; thus, it is a part of Welsh heritage and culture and should be given significant focus when discussing religion:

...proposing a change in name from Religious Education to Religions and Worldviews or other names and the curriculum will weaken the identity of Wales as holding Christian values... Including more worldviews decreases the time spent learning the moral teachings of the accepted.

Organisation

I think this should stay the same, but it is important that whatever name is chosen, children should receive a rounded view of religions, including an understanding of atheism. It is important that traditional religious values are not devalued in favour of a more pluralistic view.

Individual

6.2 Renaming RE

In the consultation, we asked respondents on what would be the appropriate name for 'religious education' to accurately reflect the broader scope of the new curriculum. The breakdown of the responses to question 4 of the consultation in relation to whether the subject should be renamed have been analysed as follows:

- 38% (606 responses) of respondents explicitly stated they did not want to see a change in the name of RE;
- 55% (875 responses) suggested RE should be renamed;
- 7% (103 responses) did not offer any views towards the renaming.

Of the 875 respondents who agreed that the name should change, the popularity of each of the suggested names are as follows:

- the most common response was Religion, Values, and Ethics, which was selected by 377 respondents, or 43% of those who agreed the name should change;

- Religions and worldviews was supported by a total of 231 respondents or 26% of those who agreed the name should change;
- 267 respondents offered other potential names. In total, 151 unique suggestions were put forward, or 31% of those who agreed the name should change.

Of those who felt that renaming RE was important, respondents offered a diverse range of suggestions and combinations. These included terms such as 'philosophy', 'spirituality', 'faith', 'beliefs' and 'Christianity'. The most common terms cited were 'ethics' and 'worldviews'. A widespread feeling amongst respondents was that they felt that RE should be renamed Religion, Values and Ethics.

Reasons for this included the idea that teaching morals and ethics is important and that the title of the subject should reflect the more expansive focus. In addition, many respondents indicated that worldviews would encourage engagement with a broader range of opinions and beliefs:

The term 'religion' on its own is loaded with misconceptions and old-fashioned views on education. 'Worldviews' incorporates a limitless bank of resources and information; when coupled with religion it can provide a guide.

Educational Practitioner

It explains clearly that this is a worldwide subject and they are viewpoints of everyone. This would reduce the stigma. It would also enable worldwide views to be discussed outside of religion.

Organisation

7 Implications for the Welsh Language

In conclusion, respondents were asked if the proposals would have an impact on the Welsh language, including on opportunities to use the Welsh language and treating it no less favourably than the English language. Compared to other questions, respondents, on the whole, tended not to offer views and perspectives on the impact of the proposals on the Welsh language.

7.1 Impact on Welsh Language Usage

Of the respondents who did offer their thoughts, the majority felt that there would be no impact on the Welsh language if the right to withdraw were removed. Many felt that there was no discernible link between the proposed approach and the usage and learning of the Welsh language:

I can't see that this will have any impact on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language.

Organisation or Representative Body

Some felt that they were not in a position to comment on the issue due to not speaking the Welsh language themselves:

I don't wish to comment on this, as I am not a Welsh speaker, so those who are can make a far more informed opinion than me.

School, Teacher, Governor

Meanwhile, others felt that the proposed changes to RE and RSE would provide more opportunities for students to use the Welsh language, and that bilingual lessons could foster greater understanding and widen the terminology of students.

Children would have more opportunities to use Welsh language in those lessons.

Parent/Carer

For those who responded positively and offered more detail there was a focus on the need for high-quality Welsh language resources and professional development in order to ensure that students had a good learning experience and that the new curriculum would be a success:

Dylai pob ysgol fod yn sicrhau hyn eisoes ond gellid cynhyrchu rhagor o adnoddau mewn Cymraeg yn y meysydd o dan sylw gan mai mewn Saesneg mae'r mwyafrif ar hyn o bryd.

All schools should have ensured this already, but more Welsh language resources need to be produced in these areas that are being discussed, as the majority are in English at the moment.

School, Teacher, Governor

7.2 Welsh Language and Education

Many responses which indicated a positive or negative effect on the Welsh language mainly made broader points in relation to the debate surrounding the use of the Welsh language in education. Some respondents referred to the positive aspect of compulsory Welsh language teaching in schools, for example, and felt as though it was beneficial for learners to be exposed to both English and Welsh. These responses typically referred to the fact that learning Welsh in schools contributed to the continued upholding of Welsh heritage, culture and values:

I am in support of promoting teaching of the Welsh language, preserving an important part of Welsh culture. The teaching of another language at an early age is always of benefit for cultural and brain development.

Parent/Carer

The Welsh language is just as important as English. Learning Welsh is important to our family. Coming from England myself, I think learning the language and culture of the place you live is extremely important.

School, Teacher, Governor

Another common theme was concerned with the importance of choice for parents to select in which language their children are taught. Respondents felt that it was important that the option was available for parents to elect for their children to be taught in either Welsh or English. Some believed that learning to speak Welsh in schools should not be compulsory and should be solely the choice of the parents:

People should opt to learn Welsh if they wish, but there should also be an opt-out if they do not.

Parent/Carer

It will come to individual choice and everyone should have the right to choose.

Parent/Carer

On the other hand, there were responses which argued against Welsh language provision in schools. These arguments commonly referred to the fact that English is a much more widely spoken language and is used extensively worldwide:

The English language is an international language. It is the main language used in commerce, science and general communication all around the world. It is unlikely that the same would apply for the Welsh language.

Other Family Member

English is the language of the world. Welsh is a minority language with little value outside Wales.

Other Family Member

Some respondents felt that whilst they were supportive of the Welsh language, they felt that it was vital that language choice remained and that the new curriculum allowed students to communicate and learn in a language in which they felt comfortable:

Education should be made available in both Welsh and English, as desired by the parents and the child. In my experience, learning through the medium of Welsh is fine until A Level, when some papers are not available in Welsh. If we are to continue to support our children and the Welsh language, all education in Wales must be taught bilingually so as not to disadvantage our young people in further education and the workplace.

Parent/Carer

8 Conclusions

Respondents offered a diverse range of viewpoints and perspectives on the proposals. These included debates surrounding the role of faith in education, through to balancing the rights of the child with those of parents and carers. Here we seek to summarise some of the key themes emerging from the analysis.

8.1 Areas of Consensus

What connects the majority of respondents is the belief in the importance of promoting children's social, emotional and moral development, as well as supporting their broader well-being. Both those broadly supportive of and those opposed to the proposals were united in their wish to ensure that children and young people are not exposed to values, beliefs or ideas that they feel contradict or undermine their development and well-being.

Where there are differences of opinion, these tended to focus on either:

- Concerns surrounding the **appropriateness and sensitivity of provision**; or
- The importance of receiving a **broad, balanced, and informed** education.

Within these two distinct viewpoints, there was considerable diversity in the substantive issues and emphasis of the responses. Viewpoints were often strongly held and expressed, highlighting the importance placed by many respondents upon children and young people's social, emotional, spiritual or moral development.

8.2 Sensitivity and Appropriateness of Provision

A key theme emerging from the responses was that of those that sought to ensure that the proposals maintain cultural and religious sensitivity in provision, especially to the wishes and beliefs of the family. From this perspective, parents and carers felt that they played an important role in the social, moral and spiritual development of their children. Some parents felt that the proposals, specifically the opportunity to opt out of certain provision, could potentially undermine this role.

From these perspectives, RSE appears to have received greater attention from the respondents. Many seem to focus their concern upon the disconnect between the values held by parents and carers and the perceived focus on content and provision, especially regarding sex and relationships. The age appropriateness of RSE provision was often raised by respondents. Parents and carers citing this issue often drew on concerns surrounding well-being, including the sexualisation of children and young people. From this perspective, RSE could exacerbate, rather than address, these concerns.

8.3 Broad and Balanced Education

There were also a broad constituency of respondents who were broadly in favour of the proposals. Those who express support for the proposals appear to focus their reasoning upon the importance of learning about RSE for learner well-being, as well as a balanced and open examination of faith in society. Respondents offered a wide range of potential benefits for children, young people, and society more broadly, including promoting understanding and tolerance. Moreover, there was a focus on the health and well-being of children being improved by giving them better information and reducing isolation and bullying, as well as safeguarding them from predatory behaviour online.

8.4 Balancing the Rights of the Child and the Parent

Respondents often cited the rights of children or parents and carers in presenting their case. A significant area of concern amongst parents and carers was that of a perceived erosion of their rights contained within the proposals. From this perspective, parents and carers felt as though they have a primary role to play in the moral, social and spiritual development of their children. Some respondents felt that the proposals, specifically the opportunity to opt out of certain provision, could potentially undermine or weaken this role. Conversely, some respondents also cited the rights of the child to a balanced and wide-ranging education as being important in the debate surrounding access to the curriculum. From these perspectives, the rights of parents and carers to determine and shape their children's education must be balanced with the rights of the child to an education.

8.5 Sensitive Responses

There were a small number of responses that were explicitly or implicitly homophobic and transphobic. These responses objected to the proposals surrounding RSE, specifically the inclusion of LGBTQI+ relationships. Furthermore, there were a small number of respondents who hold an isolationist approach to RE. These respondents believe that their own religion is the only true religion and that it should be the only one taught.

8.6 Multiple Interpretations of the Proposals

What is clear from the responses is that there are multiple understandings of the intent and substantive content of the proposals. In some cases, there are interpretations that may not accurately reflect the spirit or intention of the proposals. There was particular opposition to RSE being taught to younger children, for example. This may stem from the perception that provision would be delivered uniformly across age groups:

It is understandable that when children reach of a certain age, for example, in secondary education, children have the ability to think on their own and make decisions for themselves. But it is absurd that the curriculum is offering children of primary age from the age of 4/5 to learn about relationships and sex education.

Parent/Carer

For younger children at the Foundation Stage, RSE will include developmentally appropriate content. At the age of 5, for example, children currently in the Foundation Phase learn about relationships with parents, family and friends. They do not explore issues surrounding romantic relationships.

The presence of multiple interpretations does suggest that awareness and knowledge of the aims and focus of the proposals are generally low. What is more, it is possible that some respondents may have drawn on misinformation or broader debates and media narratives in forming their opinions on the proposals. This is reflected in some of the most critical voices across responses that object to the proposals on the basis that they have understood them to promote homosexual lifestyles and question heteronormative and clearly defined, biological gendered identities.

8.7 The Importance of Information and Communication

It was felt amongst respondents both broadly in favour and opposed to the proposals that information and communication were key. It was suggested in the responses that fully informing parents of the content of lessons could address concerns that parents may have with regard to the appropriateness of what is being taught. This finding was confirmed in conversations with parents and carers in focus groups. Where parents expressed concerns when they were provided with clarification including examples of what might be taught, they tended to soften their opposition to the proposals. This was particularly relevant to concerns surrounding the age appropriateness of the provision, specifically the view that RSE would be uniformly introduced from the age of 3 or above. This finding suggests that where there is opposition to the proposals that are not strongly held, this may be reduced through information and effective communication. Some in the educational community suggested that there are current practice examples of effective engagement with parents and carers that could highlight how this could be achieved in practice.

Appendix 1: Consultation Questions

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

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

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

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

Why do you think that?

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

Question 5 – We would like to know your views on the effects that not including a right to withdraw in the new curriculum would have on the Welsh language, specifically on:

- i. opportunities for people to use Welsh
- ii. treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

Question 6 – Please also explain how you believe the proposed plan could be formulated or changed so as to have:

- i. positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language
- ii. no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

Question 7 – We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them.



Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

This document is also available in Welsh.

© Crown copyright 2020

WG39803

Digital ISBN 978 1 83933 824 3