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# Analysis of Consultations on Additional Curriculum for Wales Guidance

April 2022



## Wavehill: social and economic research

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# 1 Introduction

This report presents a summary of the views and perspectives held by respondents with regard to draft guidance and documentation that surrounds the Curriculum for Wales. In order to support settings and schools in engaging with elements of the new curriculum, practitioners and stakeholders have been co-designing the following draft guidance and documentation:

- [Religion, Values and Ethics](#)

In understanding how helpful and clear these documents were, the Welsh Government sought the views and perspectives of the educational community. Each element of the guidance and documentation was put to consultation. The feedback and perspectives have informed the continued development of the documents and guidance, before the Curriculum for Wales is rolled out to settings and schools in September 2022.

Respondents' views towards each element of the draft guidance are explored in this report. This includes a summary of the responses, followed by a detailed examination of the views and perspectives expressed by respondents.

## 2 Religion, Values and Ethics

The consultations sought the views and perspectives of practitioners and broader stakeholders with regard to the draft Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) Guidance.

### 2.1 Executive Summary

Respondents were consulted on the draft Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) guidance. The draft RVE Guidance is intended to support those engaged in the design and delivery of RVE in settings and schools across Wales. In total, 127 respondents kindly contributed their views towards the draft guidance. A further 28 practitioners and broader stakeholders attended a series of workshops exploring their views in more depth.

There were significant numbers of campaign or coordinated responses to the consultation. Moreover, there were differences in the general sentiments expressed by respondents across different methods of engagement. This suggests that there may be differences in the substantive opinions of those responding to the consultation, compared to practitioners and other relevant stakeholders.

#### Findings

Overall, the draft guidance was considered by many respondents to be a valuable starting point for engaging with the new RVE curriculum. There was general support for the overall sentiment and orientation of RVE and the Curriculum for Wales as a whole. From these perspectives, respondents often highlighted the importance of RVE, including in supporting the moral and spiritual development of learners.

Respondents highlighted a range of areas in which they felt that the draft guidance was helpful. These tended to include content and information that support readers' interpretation of what RVE looks like in practice. Elements such as the checklist for schools and settings, as well as the learning journey examples, were generally well received. These provided readers with links between the more conceptual elements of the new RVE curriculum, including some of the pedagogical principles underscoring the approach, and what teaching and learning look like in practice.

Respondents also offered a range of suggestions on where the guidance could be strengthened. These tended to relate to three overarching themes:

- **Tone:** including in the language of the opening section outlining legal precedents and statutory obligations, which many found to be difficult to understand. This was in contrast to later sections, which many found to be accessible and engaging.
- **Structure:** Some felt that navigating the document and identifying relevant information could be improved. Suggestions included greater use of signposting at the top of the document, including in outlining sections that may be relevant to different audiences, e.g. by distinguishing information that supports planning and coordination,

and sections that support design and delivery. This effectively communicates the RVE curriculum to a range of relevant audiences with differing needs, including practitioners and SACs.

- **Detail:** including greater depth in certain places to help practitioners, senior leaders, and other stakeholders to understand and respond to the curriculum in practice. This included more explicit links between the RVE Guidance and other elements of the Curriculum for Wales Framework, such as the four purposes and the Humanities AoLE. Others felt that additional elements such as the inclusion of a glossary of terms would be helpful, including in correctly interpreting and applying some of the concepts or ideas within the curriculum.

Respondents also highlighted a range of practical considerations relating to the RVE curriculum in practice. Amongst others, these included the importance of signposting bilingual materials, training and support either within the guidance itself or more broadly. This was felt to be important in supporting all practitioners, senior leaders, governors, and other stakeholders in engaging effectively with RVE.

It was felt by many that the draft guidance provided a valuable starting point. Strengthening the draft guidance to include a more accessible, detailed account was considered to be important in helping them to embed RVE in settings and schools effectively.

## 2.2 Background

The draft RVE Guidance is intended to support those engaged in the design and delivery of RVE in settings and schools across Wales. It seeks to communicate the scope of RVE and the expectations placed on settings and schools. Primarily, the document sets out to inform the development of a locally agreed syllabus, and to help practitioners, local authorities, and Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs) to interpret and act on the new curriculum.

The draft guidance was co-designed with practitioners and in consultation with a diverse range of stakeholders. The development of the RVE Guidance forms part of the broader reforms to education contained within the Curriculum for Wales. In the spirit of the Curriculum for Wales, the RVE Guidance seeks to develop a more integrated approach to learning, and provides practitioners with greater opportunities to embed RVE across the curriculum. RVE will form part of the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE).

For more information, the draft guidance can be accessed [here](#).

## 2.3 Responses

Between May and July 2021, respondents were invited to submit their views. Respondents were offered a range of opportunities to feed back their views and perspectives on the proposals, including through online or emailed submissions, or in person through participation in workshops. Together, 127 respondents kindly took the time to submit their views within formal submissions to the consultation. These included responses from a diverse range of people and organisations with an interest in education and RVE.

Sensitivity analysis found that 47 responses contained over 80 per cent of their substantive content that was identical to that of other submissions. There were a further 12 apparent coordinated responses that did not include an identical narrative within their responses but articulated the same set of points. This suggests that there was a very high prevalence of campaign or coordinated responses to the consultation (37 per cent).

Network analysis found that campaign and coordinated responses to the consultation originated from three distinct groups. These included 29 responses from those wishing to see humanism more prominently within the guidance. A further 13 identical responses were received from those wishing to see clarity surrounding the inclusion of non-religious beliefs and who advocated for a stronger role and recognition of religious beliefs within the teaching of RVE. On the whole, campaign and coordinated responses tended to express greater opposition to the general sentiment and direction of the proposals contained within the RVE Guidance. For different reasons, they also tended to look less favourably towards the clarity and value of the guidance.

### Workshops

In order to further understand the views and perspectives of practitioners and broader stakeholders, five workshops were convened to generate more open discussion. These included workshops with practitioners and senior leaders from primary and secondary settings and schools. A further workshop was held with a faith forum, which included representatives from a diverse range of faith groups with an interest in education. Together, 28 people very kindly gave their time to attend a workshop. The views and perspectives of participants are included in the following analysis.

## 2.4 The Representative Nature of Respondents

There were differences in the general sentiments expressed by respondents across different methods of engagement. In more open conversations with practitioners and senior leaders, for example, participants were generally positive towards the reforms and the guidance in particular. Only minor reflections were offered on how the guidance could be improved, including in tone, detail and structure. Whilst a diverse range of perspectives were expressed within more formal responses (online and via email), the general sentiment was more mixed with significant pockets of concern, including around issues raised by campaign or coordinated responses.

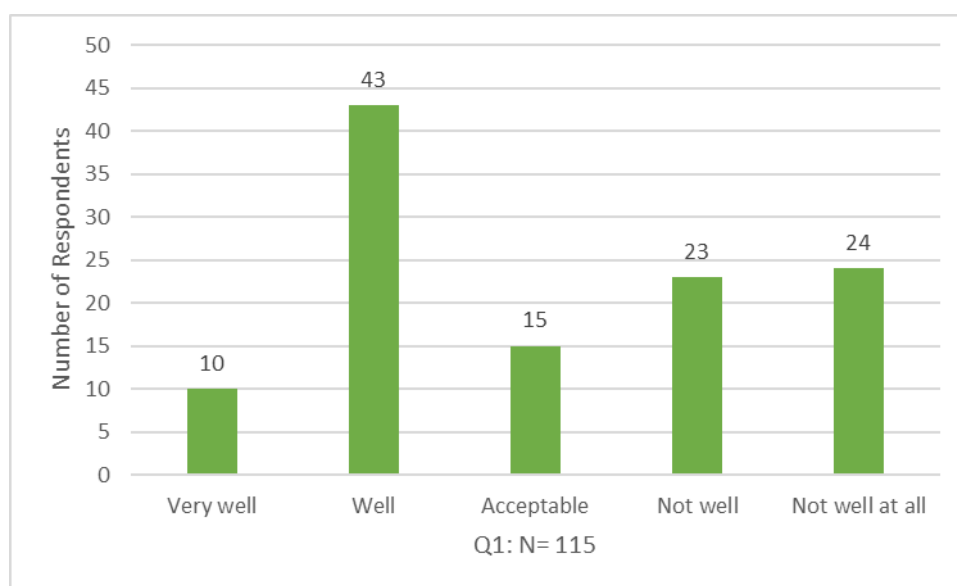
Such variation in the content and sentiment of feedback may suggest that there are qualitative differences in the backgrounds and motivations of respondents across different methods of engagement, and between respondents and the general population of practitioners and schools as a whole. Because of the high likelihood of self-selection, the consultation may overrepresent those with stronger views on the subject. It may consequently also underrepresent the views of certain practitioners and schools that will be interpreting and delivering the RVE curriculum. Together, therefore, this analysis should be considered as giving an indication of the views and perspectives of respondents with respect to the guidance, rather than a definitive account of the views of all stakeholders across Wales.

## 2.5 Scope of RVE

Respondents were first asked for their views surrounding the clarity of the draft guidance in communicating the scope of RVE and its context within the Humanities AoLE.<sup>1</sup>

### General Perceptions

Overall, 46 per cent of respondents felt that the draft guidance communicated the scope of RVE well or very well:



### Key Themes

#### *Clear Scope and Rationale*

In expanding on their views, a key theme raised by respondents included the perception that the draft guidance clearly set out the vision and purpose of the new RVE curriculum. From these perspectives, respondents often highlighted the importance of RVE, including in supporting the moral and spiritual development of learners. This theme was reflected in more open conversations with practitioners and senior leaders within workshop settings. Participants often expressed positive perceptions of RVE and the Curriculum for Wales as a whole, welcoming the general sentiment of the proposals (including in seeking to move away from prescriptive curricula):

*The guidance explains what the scope of RVE is [within] humanities and its importance in our schools. [It] puts forward a [clear] argument for its importance and what topics fall under it.*

Respondent

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<sup>1</sup> How well does the guidance explain the scope of RVE and its context within the Humanities AoLE?

*The scope is well outlined. It provides detail and flexibility for schools to interpret and deliver.*

Respondent

*The explanation of using “lenses” for learning is very detailed and useful. The guidance provides an explanation of the thinking behind these developments and the meaning of the key concepts of “religion”, “values” and “ethics” in context of the curriculum developments. The clarity of the statutory guidance is useful in supporting RVE departments in discussing these changes with [the senior leadership team].*

Respondent

### Greater Detail

Others highlighted that they felt that the guidance could be strengthened by providing greater detail surrounding the scope of RVE. This included further information and clearer connections between RVE and the Curriculum for Wales more broadly, including the four purposes and the Humanities AoLE. From these perspectives, greater detail would help practitioners and broader stakeholders when engaging with curriculum design and planning, and in teaching and learning:

*Although RVE is discussed in detail, there isn’t reference to the other disciplines within the Humanities AoLE, meaning RVE still seems to “stand alone” as an area. There are limited links to the what matters statements and principles of progression, but these are not the clearest. The guidance could give a better description of what an objective, critical and pluralistic approach to RVE means.*

Respondent

*[The draft guidance] is written in the spirit of the new curriculum. The section on the lenses is reassuring and provides breadth for RVE teachers when designing their curriculum; however, teachers will need to be aware that the content and pedagogy should be relevant for each age/stage. This could be done by directly making reference or linking to the descriptions of learning for the Humanities AoLE.*

Respondent



## Depth of Engagement with RVE

Some felt that the perceived broadening of the scope of RVE to include values and ethics could lead to a dilution of teaching and learning in practice. The breadth of the RVE curriculum could present challenges in encouraging meaningful engagement from both practitioners and learners. From these perspectives, there were concerns that the expansion of RVE may limit what could be realistically achieved within the classroom or setting:

*The scope covered in the guidance is broad. It includes aspects in the curriculum that are not currently taught. [Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education] members are concerned that this inclusion may water down RVE, resulting in a curriculum without sufficient depth as teachers try to cover the opportunities, aspects to be included in curriculum design, and the “lenses” section of the guidance.*

Respondent

*There is too much emphasis upon the diversity terms in the guidance, as the aim should be about teaching efficient and effective religion, not in drowning the subject to the extent that it becomes too superficial because of the range of things taught.*

Respondent

There were further aspects of the theme of ensuring meaningful engagement with RVE. Whilst some respondents welcomed the inclusion of non-religious beliefs, some felt that greater clarity and precision within the guidance would be valuable, more especially in embedding non-religious convictions more effectively into teaching and learning:

*The guidance should give clear reference to the Council of Europe Signposts Policy and Practice for teaching about religious and non-religious views.*

Respondent

Others highlighted that the draft guidance could include more explicit reference to certain non-religious convictions, including humanism, atheism and agnosticism. From these perspectives, this would ensure that they were covered more meaningfully within teaching and learning:

*I am concerned that the stating of certain religions having certain values is not broad enough. The syllabus must explain that those values are not confined to those faiths, but many other faiths, which may not fall into the chosen definition of a “religion” and to non-religious groups, with humanism as an example. Without humanism being named specifically, the learners may never realise that such a philosophy exists.*

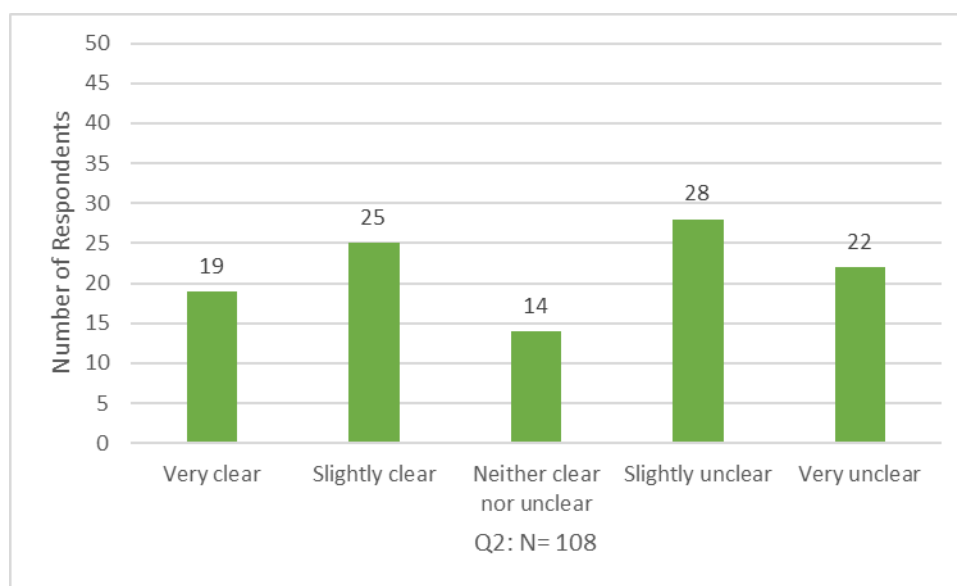
Respondent

## 2.6 Clarity of the Guidance

Respondents were then asked whether the draft guidance was clear and helpful to practitioners.<sup>2</sup>

### General Perceptions

Overall, 46.2 per cent of respondents felt that the draft guidance was unclear or very unclear, whilst 40.7 per cent felt that it was either clear or very clear:



### Key Themes

#### *Clarity of Communication and the Legislation Section*

A significant proportion of respondents who felt as though the guidance could be clarified focused their attention on the section outlining legal precedents and statutory expectations. Within more open conversations, practitioners and senior leaders tended to express the opinion that whilst the draft guidance set out the expectations placed on schools, it was difficult to understand the legal precedents and statutory expectations set out within the guidance. Some felt that the more formal tone and technical language within the RVE and the legislation section of the guidance were difficult to follow. It was often highlighted that as readers moved through the document towards a more conversational tone, they found it to be easier to understand and engage with:

*Readers require a lot of prior knowledge and its status in law for this guidance to make sense — it is unlikely to be useful to [either] many practitioners involved in RVE in schools [or] those designing agreed syllabi who are not directly involved in teaching or leading RE [...]. Inaccurate and potentially misleading [references] to locally agreed syllabuses ‘recommending’ what should be taught in RE/RVE are unhelpful. Currently,*

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<sup>2</sup> Is the guidance, as a whole, clear and helpful for you in your role?

*it is the case that the legal requirement is to teach in accordance with the locally [agreed] syllabus. This is changing to 'with regard to' [...]. Clarity is needed around what this change actually means [for schools and settings].*

Respondent

Suggestions on where the section on RVE and legislation could be strengthened included greater use of non-technical language and a clearer indication of how the legal expectations impact on different stakeholders. Some understood that the draft guidance was seeking to speak to a diverse range of audiences, including practitioners and senior leaders, local authorities, and SACs, amongst others. From these perspectives, each audience may have different expectations placed on them and it would be useful to clarify these more fully within the draft guidance.

Underscoring some of these views was confusion as to what the expression 'have regard to' within the draft guidance means in practice. For some, the qualitative nature of the provision was potentially open to interpretation or misunderstanding:

*Guidance is unclear/silent about the relationship between this guidance and the agreed syllabus and what exactly schools have to 'have regard to'. It could be read as needing regard to this guidance, the wider statutory guidance, or the agreed syllabus, thus giving schools and settings three different documents to work to.*

Respondent

Clarification with respect to the role of and relationships between agreed syllabi and the new RVE curriculum was also considered to be valuable by some, including in understanding the relevance of the guidance in supporting schools and settings. Furthermore, some asked for clarification surrounding the additional requirements for voluntary-aided schools. Together, these suggestions were felt to make the guidance clearer, especially in communicating some of the more technical expectations of the RVE curriculum upon settings and schools.

### *Greater Detail*

Beyond the section on RVE and legislation, some respondents raised other elements of the draft guidance that could be expanded and clarified. As mentioned previously, respondents offered suggestions including strengthening the links between RVE and other elements of the new curriculum, including the overall Curriculum for Wales Framework.

Underscoring some of these perspectives was the volume of information surrounding the Curriculum for Wales more broadly. A view expressed in open conversations with practitioners, especially nursery practitioners and primary school teachers, was the volume of information and guidance that some felt to be difficult to manage. From these perspectives, clearer links between different guidance would be valuable in helping them to navigate and understand all of the documentation, and in coherently embedding RVE within the broader curriculum:

*Teimlwn fod y canllawiau'n glir ac yn gymorth i ymarferwyr ac athrawon mewn lleoliadau a gyllidir nas cynhelir. Byddai cysylltu'r ddogfen honno gyda chanllawiau 'Cwricwlwm i leoliadau a gyllidir nas cynhelir' a'r 'Canllawiau Agor Llwybrau Cwricwlwm i Gymru' yn ei chryfhau ymhellach.*

*We feel that the guidance is clear and helps practitioners and teachers in non-maintained funded settings. Linking that document with the curriculum for non-maintained funded nursery settings and Enabling Pathways guidance would strengthen it further.*

Respondent (translated from the original)

Some respondents also highlighted the importance of developing clarity and understanding not only through the draft guidance itself but also through broader guidance, resources and support (including continuing professional development). From these perspectives, the draft guidance should be viewed within a broader network of resources and information that support practitioners and other stakeholders in engaging with RVE:

*The intended interactive online version of the document, with the use of links and "dropdown" items, will make it easy to navigate and integrate within the broader Curriculum for Wales Framework. It will not be seen as a "standalone" document. This is really important in ensuring that RVE is very much integrated into the new curriculum approach and the aspirations of the four purposes. The guidance as a whole is very open, allowing practitioners and settings to design their curriculum in ways that make sense for their learners. The same flexibility is present for [Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education], as they provide any additional support helpful for schools in their local area. We envisage that there will be a need for supporting documents to also be added over time as a professional support for practitioners in line with a programme of professional development.*

Respondent

## Glossary of Terms

Some respondents also highlighted that it may be useful to include a glossary that has appeared in previous iterations of the guidance but which includes such terms as non-religious and religious beliefs, lenses, pluralism, and objectivity. From these perspectives, clearer definitions could support the development of a shared understanding within and across settings and schools. Moreover, some highlighted that it may be valuable to include a glossary that has appeared in previous iterations of the draft guidance:

*My role is as a [local authority] member on [Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education], now [Standing Advisory Councils]. I believe that the draft RVE Guidance already adequately states [that] teaching should be critical, objective and pluralistic and this does not need emphasising or repeating. However, it may be worth simply explaining that [such an] objective means that it is taught in an objective way and a*

*critical but non-judgemental way, i.e. this is what this religion or belief believes, and pluralistic [means] simply plural and more than one viewpoint.*

Respondent

*The lenses help to explain the main concepts, and the learning journeys may inform thinking when schools are beginning to plan their RVE curriculum. However, the following sections require additional clarification and may be open to misinterpretation: Meaning of Religion — this section was confusing and the definition of the meaning of religion is inaccurate — [and] Meaning of Non-Religious Philosophical Convictions. The examples from case law are confusing and will not assist practitioners when planning and developing the curriculum.*

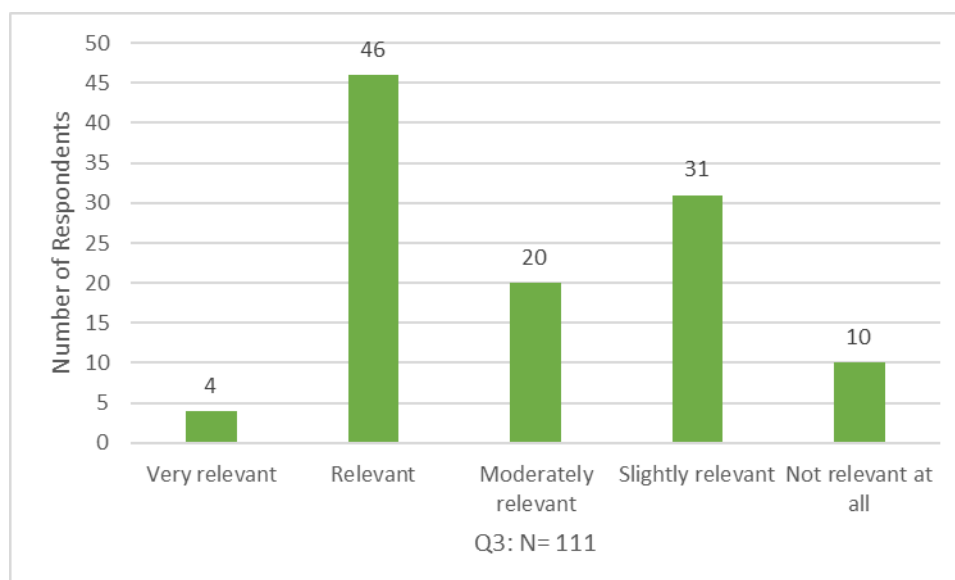
Respondent

## 2.7 Designing the RVE Curriculum

Respondents were then asked whether they felt that the guidance was valuable in supporting their engagement with RVE, including in designing the curriculum within their setting or school.<sup>3</sup>

### General Perceptions

Overall, 45 per cent of respondents felt that the draft guidance offered relevant or very relevant information with which to support practitioners when designing their school curriculum:



<sup>3</sup> Does the guidance offer relevant information to support practitioners when designing their school curriculum for RVE?

## Key Themes

### *Supportive and Relevant*

Those respondents offering more positive perceptions found that the draft guidance provided a useful starting point in considering the RVE curriculum. In more open conversations, practitioners and senior leaders looked to guidance to provide a reference point in curriculum planning and design. From these perspectives, the draft guidance was valuable in understanding the breadth and scope of RVE. Moreover, some expressed the importance of RVE in education, as well as excitement surrounding the emphasis on greater practitioner agency with curriculum design contained within the proposals. These issues were also highlighted by respondents to the online consultation:

*The guidance demonstrates how RVE supports four purposes. The lenses give clear contexts for learning. There are clear links to statements of what matters. Progression is explored. Experiences to support learning are identified. The guidance points to a starting point for schools to start planning their curriculum. The learning journeys provide a discussion starter as exemplification of a possible approach to planning and developing learner experiences in RVE.*

Respondent

### *Importance of Broader Support*

Alongside the draft guidance, respondents tended to also highlight the importance of broader support in understanding and embedding RVE effectively within teaching and learning. This included through professional development and other materials and resources that would help settings/schools and other stakeholders to plan and implement the RVE curriculum:

*The Designing your Curriculum section includes relevant information to support practitioners. The inclusion of the lenses and example learning journeys for each lens is welcomed and very supportive. We believe it is essential that schools and education professionals have access to high-quality training to ensure that they can deliver the new RVE curriculum.*

Respondent

### *Greater Detail*

Again, some respondents restated the importance of further information within elements of the draft guidance. This (again) included greater links with other aspects of the Curriculum for Wales. Some respondents went further, including those who felt that greater local discretion and a lack of specificity within the proposals could lead to variable teaching across settings and schools. From these perspectives, greater detail would be valuable in ensuring coverage and depth within RVE across all settings and schools. As one respondent explained, further detail would provide practitioners and other stakeholders with a firm basis for exploring RVE:

*I am fully aware that subsidiarity is a pillar of the Curriculum for Wales; hence, Welsh Government believes it is being wise in producing guidance which is as non-prescriptive as possible in relation to RVE, in line with other subjects in the Humanities AoLE [...]. While I do not think that it is appropriate for the statutory guidance to recommend a list of religions and non-religious philosophical convictions to be taught in schools at certain stages of a child's education [...] the guidance should, in very broad strokes, explain what is meant by and what is expected in relation to teaching the 'other principal religions represented in Wales' [...]. It is unfair to leave all of these hugely controversial questions for schools to grapple with, sometimes with non-specialist teachers trying to do their best with very little knowledge or expertise. The guidance really should set out possible reasonable rationales to guide schools in their curriculum choices for RVE to ensure fair coverage of faiths and worldviews, and this guidance is needed for [Standing Advisory Councils] and [Agreed Syllabus Conferences] also, to enable them to design appropriate syllabi.*

Respondent

It was also expressed that the lack of specificity may also increase duplication and work for practitioners and other stakeholders:

*The second half of the framework provides the high-level principles which underpin RVE, but it leaves [Agreed Syllabus Conferences] and schools a lot of work to do to translate those principles into a curriculum. Even when read closely and alongside the humanities statements of what matters, the framework is still rather unclear on what the 'appropriate depth, breadth and quality of learning' (specified in the last bullet point on p.22) that schools are supposed to achieve would look like in practice. More exemplification would be useful, especially indicative examples of suitable content to teach in order to achieve the desired learning outcomes.*

Respondent

## 2.8 Strengthening the Guidance

In supporting the strengthening of the draft guidance, respondents were asked whether there were any information gaps, as well as any sections that they found to be particularly useful.<sup>4</sup>

### Helpful Elements

Respondents offered a diverse range of views and perspectives on what they found to be helpful within the guidance.

### *Checklist for Schools and Settings*

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<sup>4</sup> Thinking about each section of the guidance, do you feel there are any gaps in information? If so, what should be added? Are there any sections that are particularly helpful? If so, in what way are they helpful and to whom?

Respondents, including practitioners and senior leaders in workshops, expressed that they found the checklist to be valuable. This format helped readers to reflect on what they needed to think about when engaging with RSE, including for planning and curriculum design.

### Example Learning Journeys

Similarly, respondents often cited the value of exemplars. Many found that they helped them to visualise the curriculum in practice and think about supporting learner progression. The exemplars offered concrete examples of the links between different elements of RVE and the curriculum more broadly, including what matters statements and descriptions of learning.

### Lenses in RVE

Respondents found the breakdown of lenses to be helpful in supporting curriculum design and for teaching and learning. Others, however, expressed that they had not fully understood the concept as it was applied within the draft guidance.

### Spiritual Development

This was found to be useful for practitioners. Some even expressed that this section should be shared more widely with practitioners across educational settings and schools, as it was felt to have broader implications in supporting learners, not just for RVE itself:

*The section on spiritual development was particularly good and would be of benefit to all within an education setting — I whether there would be a link to this within Hwb to share across the curriculum as a whole and not only within the RVE guidance.*

Respondent

### Other Elements

Respondents raised a range of other factors or elements that they found to be helpful. Some respondents, for example, welcomed the relatively short length of the document, as well as the accessible language tone of the draft guidance, especially towards later sections:

*The early years section in tone and explanation is viewed as being really good; there were aspects within the section [that] were of use and beneficial to the whole of the range. Within sections 3–5 the language is clear and user-friendly. RVE teacher specialists will be familiar with the phraseology and terminology.*

Respondent

### Additional Information

Where additional information was highlighted by respondents, this tended to restate suggestions surrounding greater detail and clarity within certain elements of the draft guidance.



## Glossary

Again, some respondents often reported that more clarity surrounding certain terms or concepts would be welcomed. Some also highlighted that they would welcome the reintroduction of a glossary within the guidance to support interpretation.

## Links to Other Guidance

Respondents also highlighted the potential value of including links to other Curriculum for Wales guidance. These included references and links to additional learning needs and the ALN framework within this guidance. This would help readers to make connections with other elements or considerations in engaging with RVE:

*We feel that the guidance explains the scope of RVE well and the section entitled Education in Funded Non-Maintained Settings is of great value in explaining the scope of RVE to local authorities working with practitioners and teachers working in funded non-maintained settings. It would be helpful to have explicit mention of “A curriculum for funded non-maintained settings” guidance in this section and, vice versa, to see the RVE guidance reflected in “A curriculum for funded non-maintained settings” guidance and in the Curriculum for Wales Enabling Pathways guidance.*

Respondent

## Further Resources and Support

Some highlighted that it would be valuable to signpost, either within the draft guidance or more broadly, broader resources and support that are available regarding RVE, which included the importance of good-quality, accessible professional development opportunities:

*The checklist on p.22 is particularly helpful for schools but must be underpinned by sufficient [continuing professional development] and prepared resources for practitioners. Significant changes have been made to the subject with the addition of values and ethics and the curriculum structure in which it sits. With philosophical convictions now a part of the curriculum, [provisions] must be made to resource and train our teachers and these must be created in both languages and by experienced, knowledgeable individuals.*

Respondent

It was also felt that broader resources, including potential learning materials, would be valuable in supporting teaching and learning:

*Nursery practitioners felt that the learning journeys linked well with what we are trying to teach the children through the curriculum and what they then go on to in school. Pairing these examples with relevant links and resources to empower teachers to deliver these discussions and activities with confidence will be vital going forward.*

### Greater Detail

Across different elements of the draft guidance, some respondents (again) restated the importance of greater specificity. This included a diverse range of suggestions, including but not limited to:

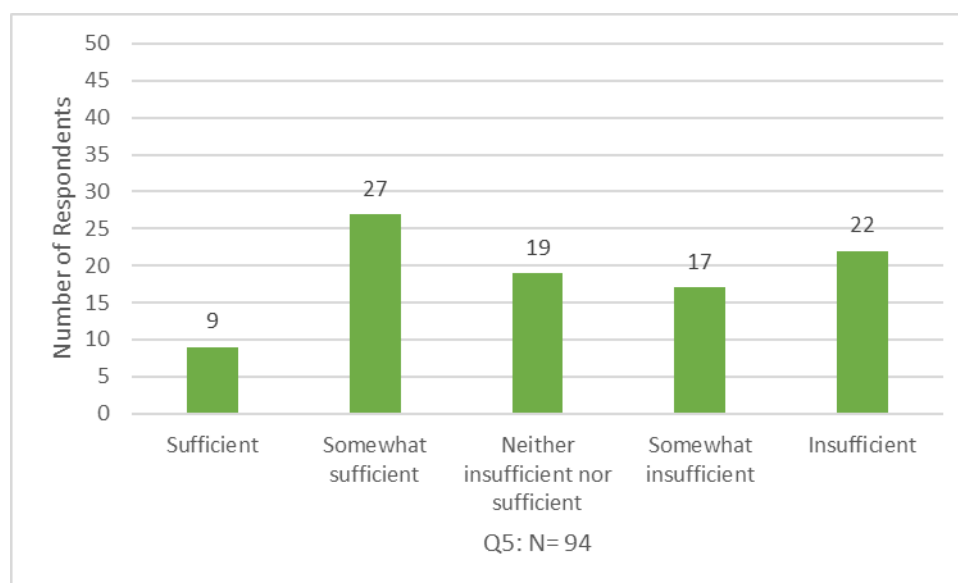
- Referencing or supporting special schools to help them to engage effectively with RVE.
- Greater reference to remind practitioners to include the Welsh context in examples of faith and belief.
- Further detail on how the RVE curriculum in schools of a religious character is to have regard to the agreed syllabus.
- Further exemplar material for the learning journeys, especially in schools of a religious character.
- Further clarification surrounding the legal conventions supporting RVE, including the rights of parents.
- Further guidance in supporting parental engagement surrounding RVE.

## 2.9 Teaching and Learning

In acting on the guidance, respondents were asked whether they felt as though the draft guidance was valuable in supporting the planning and teaching of RVE.<sup>5</sup>

### General Perceptions

Together, 41.4 per cent of respondent felt that the draft guidance provided all practitioners with insufficient information to support the planning and teaching of RVE:



<sup>5</sup> Does the guidance offer all practitioners sufficient support for their planning and teaching of RVE?

In more open conversations and in responses, more negative perspectives were informed by the importance of greater detail and specificity within the draft guidance. Further reflections included practical considerations in engaging with RVE, especially for non-specialist practitioners who are less familiar or confident with leading discussions with learners.

## Key Themes

### *Positive Responses*

Of the 38.2 per cent of respondents who offered more positive perspectives, these tended to focus on the importance of RVE within the curriculum. Furthermore, they tended to welcome the greater subsidiarity offered within the proposals:

*It is great that Wales is less prescriptive and trusts its schools to adapt and develop their own curriculum based on their own context using these guidelines.*

Respondent

### *Greater Detail*

Those respondents offering more negative perspectives tended to highlight the importance of greater detail and specificity within the guidance, including with respect to what should be taught. From these perspectives, some were expecting or would value a more prescriptive orientation of the new RVE curriculum, including more detailed syllabi:

*I think it could offer more structure on how to deliver the learning experiences for learners at school and how to support children at home.*

Respondent

This issue was felt to have broader implications, including in better supporting practitioners' engagement with RVE:

*The contribution that RVE is intended to make to the four purposes is set out in a rather rhetorical way, but there are no concrete examples to guide [Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education], [Agreed Syllabus Conferences], and schools on how this will look in practice — the learning journeys examples are overly generic and it is questionable whether they align with progression steps for the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience in their current form.*

Respondent

### *Practical Considerations*

Aligned with the theme of greater specificity, some respondents also cited broader practical considerations that may impact on practitioners' ability to engage with RVE effectively. This was especially apparent in more open conversations in which more experienced and specialist practitioners felt that they had the resources, understanding and confidence with which to

engage with the draft guidance. They were concerned that further support would be required for more inexperienced or non-specialist teachers.

Other practical challenges included limited time, not only in engaging and designing the RVE curriculum but also in teaching. Some felt that the timetable was already stretched and that this may present challenges in what could be reasonably achieved with learners.

## 2.10 Further Support

Respondents were also asked for their views on any additional support that they would need in order to engage with RVE successfully.<sup>6</sup>

### General Perceptions

Almost universally, 94.9 per cent of respondents agreed that additional support was needed in ensuring the successful implementation of the RVE Guidance. Only two respondents felt that additional support was unnecessary.

### Key Themes

#### *Professional Learning*

A key theme raised by respondents was the importance of good-quality training and professional learning opportunities. From these perspectives, these should be made available to all, including tailored training for non-specialist practitioners, governors, and senior leaders. Moreover, these included training opportunities for all settings, including nurseries and primary, secondary and special schools:

*Thorough and robust professional learning is urgently needed. All teachers requiring this should be released from school to engage with it. This guidance should be [a] reference point for those providing this professional learning, but is not adequate for this purpose in its current state. This professional learning needs to extend to [Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education] members, school leaders, governors, and all humanities teachers and leaders, as well as those specifically charged with teaching RVE.*

Respondent

*Extensive and expert training is urgently needed for school leaders to help them not only [to] ensure that statutory requirements are met but also to elucidate and exemplify good practice in RVE, which makes specific reference to faith, belief and practice.*

Respondent

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<sup>6</sup> Is additional support (e.g. professional learning and resources) needed to ensure the successful implementation of this guidance?

## Professional Dialogue

Alongside professional learning, some highlighted the potential role and importance of professional dialogue both within and across settings and schools. Finding opportunities to get together to share learning and ideas was considered to be valuable in building the knowledge, skills and confidence with which to engage with RVE. It could also encourage greater consistency across settings and schools:

*Good-quality professional learning and associated resources are essential for the successful implementation of this guidance. It will be helpful to see examples of the work produced in pioneer schools and to regularly liaise with practitioners across our authority/other parts of Wales to ensure consistency.*

Respondent

## Time

Within more open conversations with practitioners and senior leaders, some expressed that relatively little of the timetable was given to RVE within the existing arrangements. This presented barriers to what could be realistically achieved with learners. Insufficient time, from these perspectives, may present barriers to achieving the aspirations of the new RVE curriculum more generally.

## External Resources

Another key theme included the importance of learning resources and materials in supporting learning. From these perspectives, high-quality resources would be valuable in supporting effective teaching and learning. It was also considered to be valuable to quality-assure resources and support their dissemination:

*There is a need to map and quality-control external resources and support so [that] schools can easily access what they need. Also needed is guidance on some of the more challenging current topics and consistency across AoLEs on these points — some specific Hwb lesson plans might be useful on these key topics. The international context is important here — pupils are not just exposed to materials and ideas from Wales. Exploring how norms differ over time and [places] and exploring where relationship/sexual rights are not upheld both domestically and internationally [help] with critical thinking and exploration of these issues.*

Respondent

*Schools don't know what they don't know and, as such, there is a danger that good, relevant RVE links may be overlooked by non-specialists. Training is required to support an understanding of the curriculum, but there also needs to be a bank of good resources that schools can draw on as they identify the content that will exemplify the opportunities and lenses in the guidance linked to their own curriculum development.*

## Welsh Language Support

Another factor was the importance of Welsh language materials, training and support. In more open conversations, one practitioner discussed the challenges of developing and translating their own materials in supporting teaching and learning. From these perspectives, ensuring the availability of RVE textbooks, resources, and other materials in Welsh that align with the new curriculum would be welcomed.

## 2.11 Standing Advisory Councils

Those respondents responding as members of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs) were invited for their views towards the draft guidance.<sup>7</sup>

### Developing Agreed Syllabi

Members of SACs were first asked whether they felt that the draft guidance was helpful in developing Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs). Generally, respondents felt that the draft guidance was only slightly helpful (40.4 per cent). A further 30.9 per cent of respondents felt that it was somewhat or very helpful.

### Supporting SACs

Members of SACs were then asked whether they felt that the document was helpful overall. Similar responses were found, with 36.5 per cent only finding it to be slightly helpful and 34.1 per cent somewhat or very helpful.

### Key Themes

In unpacking these views, many cited similar issues to those raised previously in the consultation. These included the importance of greater depth and clarity within the draft guidance to support the development of an ASC and in the work of SACs more broadly.

### *Greater Depth and Detail*

New aspects of the general theme of greater depth and detail emerged, however. These included more specific guidance on how SACs should develop an ASC, including in providing support to settings and schools:

*It will certainly be used as a starting point, but we would like to support our schools and practitioners with greater clarity and understanding of what RVE is and its purpose/contribution to the Humanities AoLE and the new curriculum as a whole. We*

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<sup>7</sup> This question is aimed at local authorities and Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs). Is the guidance a helpful document for developing Agreed Syllabus Conferences? Is the guidance a helpful document for SACs?

*do not wish to develop a prescriptive agreed syllabus for our schools, but would like a document that [not only] has regard for the framework and curriculum but also gives practical support and resources for our practitioners. This is a real vision of ours as we move to post-pandemic education and an awareness that practitioners will need as much practical support as we can give in co-constructing their curriculum.*

Respondent

Others felt that greater clarity could be provided on the function and responsibilities of SACs in relation to schools:

*How will [Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education] know how to advise support on any complaints that come into our schools — there is no assistance on forming a policy and guidance on how to respond. I feel that the guidance does not have enough clarity on how to develop a locally determined agreed syllabus to sit alongside this guidance. What in essence will the new agreed syllabus look like? How [do] non-RVE specialists on the [Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education] make use of and interoperate the guidance? There is little assistance within the guidance for [Agreed Syllabus Conferences] as they are developing the first agreed syllabus. And how can they aim to achieve consistency of standard and detail across Wales?*

Respondent

This linked to further calls for clarification in respect of the constitution of SACs, including measures with which to ensure that they include balanced representation. From these perspectives, it would be valuable to explore the proposed statutory guidance surrounding the constitution of SACREs. It was also felt to be important to clarify the respective roles of SACs alongside other partners, including local authorities and regional consortia:

*The relationship between [regional] consortia, [local authorities] and their [Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education] will need to be defined. If the guidance is adopted as an agreed syllabus, is it the responsibility of the [local authority] or the consortia to ensure teachers understand it within the context of their own settings?*

Reference

### Ensuring Consistency

Further clarification was also on whether SACs should work towards ensuring a level of consistency across ASCs. From these perspectives, respondents were themselves looking towards the guidance to provide greater specificity, including further guidance, to support the development of ASCs. This was felt to be valuable to ensure that 22 unique approaches emerge across Wales:

*Reference to the agreed syllabus (including its status) and the need for [Agreed Syllabus Conferences] to recommend to the local authority needs to be included. What*

*will an agreed syllabus look like? Where can Agreed Syllabus [Conferences] get guidance/assistance from to ensure consistency?*

Respondent

*This is only a guidance document and there would be little point in adopting this as an agreed syllabus, as it does not contain a syllabus or even a framework for a syllabus. There is no mention here [of] which religions, apart from Christianity (the legal reference), or non-religious philosophical convictions need to be taught and what the possible weightings might be at each progression stage.*

Respondent

## 2.12 Welsh Language

Finally, respondents were asked a series of questions relating to the implications and impact of the draft RVE Guidance upon the Welsh language.<sup>8</sup> They offered a diverse range of considerations.

### *Positive or No Impact*

A key theme included the view that the draft guidance would have either positive or no discernible impact on the opportunities for practitioners and learners to use Welsh:

*I believe that the RVE Guidance would have no negative effect on the Welsh language; in effect, it could have [a] positive effect, as within the whole [Area of Learning and Experience] there is a need to consider the local area and Wales.*

Respondent

### *Importance of Welsh Language Materials and Support*

A key caveat offered by respondents was the importance of Welsh language materials and support, including training. The availability and timing of Welsh language materials and guidance were also considered to be important. It was regularly cited that there have been delays in releasing Welsh language materials:

*It is essential that all Welsh-medium information, resources, and professional learning [are] produced and shared at the same time as the English-medium [ones]. It is not*

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<sup>8</sup> Question 8 – We would like to know your views on the effects that the RVE guidance would have on the Welsh language, specifically on: i) opportunities for people to use Welsh ii) treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language. What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated? Question 9 – Please also explain how you believe the RVE guidance 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.



*acceptable today for Welsh-medium [settings] to have to wait a minimum of a year longer than their English-medium counterparts.*

Respondent

### *Embedding Welsh in Draft Guidance*

A more peripheral suggestion included the possibility of weaving Welsh more firmly within the English materials and guidance. This included the development of bilingual resources and the inclusion of bilingual glossaries:

*The Welsh language can provide a deeper understanding of religion and belief in their cynefin and in Wales, e.g. the meaning of place names around Wales [and] literature. Glossaries including the Welsh and English meanings bilingually may support a greater understanding of one's own cynefin.*

Respondent

### *The Initialism RVE*

Finally, a few respondents highlighted that they felt that use of the initialism “RVE” in Welsh documents was incorrect. From these perspectives, the initialism should reflect the Welsh:

*It was disappointing (to say the least) that in the Welsh version of the guidance and within the questions on the consultations [the] name of the subject was [noted] as “Crefydd, Gwerthoedd a Moeseg (RVE)” and not “Crefydd, Gwerthoedd a Moeseg (CGM)”. Is there a specific reason for this? This must be amended and corrected in the final guidance.*

Respondent

## 2.13 Conclusions

Across responses, both within formal submissions and through workshops, respondents raised a diverse range of views and perspectives. These included views towards the guidance itself, as well as broader observations that reflected public debates surrounding religion, education, nation, belonging and multiculturalism.

Apparent within responses were multiple readings of the draft guidance itself, the broader context from which it and the new curriculum emerged, and the implications for young people and for society. Many responses were explicitly and implicitly informed by *a priori* or philosophical positions. These included differing views on the role of the state in religious education. They also included differing interpretations of the precise nature and extent of rights and freedoms in the context of religion and education. These underlying perspectives, in part, informed the ways in which respondents read and interpreted the guidance.

There was debate, for example, surrounding the parameters of RVE. This included conceptual objections to the precise definition and operationalisation of non-religious philosophical convictions. The perceived expansion of the subject to include philosophical convictions was seen to be problematic by some. This included the perception that a broadening of the focus to include non-religious philosophical convictions may serve to dilute the attention that should be paid to religions.

Conversely, some respondents felt that the balance between religious and non-religious beliefs had not been achieved within the draft guidance. This included perspectives which held that the approach overall and guidance gave religious beliefs too prominent a role. Going further, some expressed the view that any religious influence is inappropriate in an educational context.

### Views towards the Guidance

Overall, the draft guidance was considered to be a valuable starting point by many respondents. In more open conversations with practitioners and senior leaders, there was general support for the overall sentiment and orientation of RVE and the curriculum as a whole. This tended to centre on the recognition placed within the curriculum on practitioners and schools in shaping and delivering the curriculum. Some expressed excitement towards the new RVE curriculum, for example, viewing it as an opportunity to refresh and enliven the curriculum for their learners. These sentiments were also expressed through online responses.

Respondents highlighted a range of areas in which they felt that the draft guidance was helpful. These tended to include content and information that support readers' interpretation of what RVE looks like in practice. Elements such as the checklist for schools and settings, as well as the learning journey examples, were generally well received. These provided readers with links between the more abstract and conceptual elements of the new curriculum and what teaching and learning look like on the ground.

Some respondents also cited a range of broader considerations relating to the RVE curriculum in practice. These centred on four distinct but interlinked issues:

1. Differing interpretations and operationalisations of the RVE curriculum within and across schools and settings.
2. Potentially simplistic interpretations and teaching of RVE with a focus on the transmission of an expanded body of knowledge and information (e.g. world religions and non-religious views). Such an approach could undermine more critical engagement with the material, including, for example, in supporting hermeneutics.
3. The ability of the educational community as a whole to engage with the RVE curriculum, especially those who may not be as confident in their knowledge and ability to teach the subject effectively.
4. The limited emphasis on and priority given to religious education, including in resources and time, within the existing arrangements. These may present barriers to achieving the aspirations of the new RVE curriculum more generally.

The focus on the curriculum in action by many respondents suggested that many were going beyond the document itself to consider what the curriculum meant for them, their colleagues and in practice. Together, this suggested that many respondents were considering the potential barriers to realising the aspirations of the new curriculum, including in support of positive and effective pedagogical and curricular change.

This practical perspective tended to inform views and perspectives towards the draft guidance, especially from practitioners and senior leaders. From responses, there was an apparent continuum between those who welcomed flexibility within the approach and were more likely to find the guidance to be helpful and those who were looking towards the guidance to provide more structured syllabi. Those looking for greater specificity tended to find the guidance to be less helpful.

Overall, the majority of suggestions on whether the draft guidance could be strengthened related to three overarching and interlinked themes:

- **Tone:** including in the language of the opening section outlining legal precedents and statutory obligations, which many found to be difficult to understand. This was in contrast to later sections, which many found to be accessible and engaging.
- **Structure:** Some felt that navigating the document and identifying relevant information could be improved. Suggestions included greater use of signposting at the top of the document, including in outlining sections that may be relevant to different audiences, e.g. by distinguishing information that supports planning and coordination, and sections that support design and delivery. This effectively communicates the RVE curriculum to a range of relevant audiences with differing needs, including practitioners and SACs.
- **Detail:** including greater depth in certain places to help practitioners, senior leaders, and other stakeholders to understand and respond to the curriculum in practice. This included more explicit links between the RVE Guidance and other elements of the Curriculum for Wales Framework, such as the four purposes and the Humanities AoLE. Others felt that additional elements such as the inclusion of a glossary of terms would be helpful, including in correctly interpreting and applying some of the concepts or ideas within the curriculum.

Addressing these issues, many respondents suggested, would help practitioners, settings and schools to engage more effectively with the new RVE curriculum.

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