

**Faith Communities Forum
Minutes of the Meeting on 2 November 2015
Harlech Room, Cathays Park**

Present:

First Minister	Chairperson
Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty	Deputy Chairperson
Aled Edwards	Churches Together in Wales
Gethin Rhys	Churches Together in Wales
George Stack	Archbishop of Cardiff
Carol Wardman	Church in Wales
Peter Richards	Free Church Council of Wales
Jim Stewart	Evangelical Alliance Wales
Elfed Godding	Evangelical Alliance Wales
Stanley Soffa	South Wales Jewish Representative Council
Lisa Gerson	South Wales Jewish Representative Council
Nirmala Pisavadia	Hindu Council of Wales
Nordzin Pamo	Buddhist Council of Wales
Christine Abbas	Bahá'í Council for Wales
Viv Bartlett	Bahá'í Council for Wales
Ahmed Darwish	Muslim Council for Wales
Surinder Channa	Sikh Faith
Alan Bayes	Interfaith Council

Officials in attendance:

Kate Cassidy	Director, Communities and Tackling Poverty
Brett Pugh	Director, School Standards and Workforce
Jo Glenn	Fairer Futures Division
Andrea Adams	Fairer Futures Division

Apologies:

Archbishop of Wales, Dr Barry Morgan	Church in Wales
Saleem Kidwai	Muslim Council for Wales
Naran Patel	Hindu Council of Wales

Welcome and Introductions

1. The First Minister welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Minutes of Previous Meeting

2. Minutes of the previous meeting were circulated to members in advance of the meeting. The minutes were agreed for accuracy.

Action Points from last meeting

3. A summary of the action points from the last meeting together with updates was sent to members in advance of the meeting. These were noted.

Matters Arising

Public bodies to be aware of faith festivals affected by the lunar calendar

4. At the last meeting the First Minister had said Education officials will produce a paper about the arrangements in schools in Wales for religious festivals. This is covered under Item 2.

Item 1. Syrian Refugee Crisis – Lesley Griffiths AM, Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty.

5. The First Minister said Immigration policy is not, devolved to the Welsh Government, however, as a Government and a nation, we stand ready to welcome and support the refugees we are asked to resettle in our communities. Faith communities have been at the forefront of public campaigns to welcome refugees.
6. The Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty updated the Forum about the work being done in Wales to resettle Syrian refugees. On the 17th September, the First Minister chaired a Summit where representatives from key Public Services and the Third Sector attended and signalled a clear willingness to work together to provide a positive welcome and a safe haven to Syrian refugees relocating to their new homes in Wales.
7. The UK Government has committed to accepting 20,000 Syrian refugees over 5 years, though a specific number for resettlement to Wales or funding arrangements is yet to be agreed.
8. Following the Summit the Welsh Government gave a commitment to establish a new Welsh Government-led Syrian Refugee Taskforce to coordinate efforts to ensure Wales is ready to play its full part in the resettlement programme. The Minister will chair the first meeting of the Taskforce on 19 November. It was noted Aled Edwards is a member of the Taskforce.
9. The Taskforce itself will be supported by an Operations Board, which is comprised of leaders and decision-makers across Public Services and the Third Sector. This Board is chaired by Sarah McGill, Director for Communities, Housing and Customer Services at City of Cardiff Council and it met for the first time on 5 October.
10. The Minister noted many of those who will be relocated to Wales under the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme are likely to be severely disabled or suffering significant and ongoing trauma. They will be provided with 5 year humanitarian protection to allow them to start to rebuild their lives.
11. The Minister explained the Operations Board will consider how members of the public can support the response in Wales. The Board has decided

communications is one of its priorities and will be working to ensure clear messages are given to the public so there is a full understanding of how the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme is being implemented. There would be a learning event in Wales to prepare Local Authorities for their involvement in the Scheme.

12. The Minister explained she had been in discussions with the Minister for Syrian Refugees and would meet with him on 16 November. She was particularly keen for the UK Government to provide clarity on funding.
13. The Minister is aware of the positive statements which have been made by many faith groups in Wales and she will continue to update the Forum as matters develop.
14. In discussion the following points were made:
 - Although this is not a devolved matter, faith communities want to get involved. They noted the processes in place for the resettlement of Syrian refugees but there was a greater challenge with rising numbers of spontaneous arrivals.
 - Muslim communities want to get involved, to support refugees to integrate into the communities.
 - Some refugees may suffer from mental health issues caused by their traumatic experiences during the past few months. They will need to be supported.
 - Foreign policy was not devolved to Wales but ending the war in Syria was key to resolving the issues underlining the refugee crisis.

Item 2. Religious Education in Wales – John Pugsley, Education and Public Services Group.

15. Following the meeting of the Faith Forum on 20 April 2015, officials in the Department for Education and Skills were asked for information on the current position in Wales regarding time off for religious festivals and consideration of guidance that could be provided and if different faiths are recognised in Wales to the rest of the UK.
16. In guidance laid down by the Welsh Government in its *All Wales Attendance Framework*, a child shall not be taken to have failed to attend where the absence occurred on a day exclusively set aside for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parents belongs.
17. Welsh Government guidance on school attendance codes was revised in 2010. This guidance is currently scheduled for review in 2016 when a consultation will be undertaken. Education officials would like faith groups to be involved in the 2016 consultation.
18. The advice published by the Welsh Government is consistent with guidance issued by the UK government for use in England, which states

schools must treat absence as authorised when it is due to religious observance. Some Local Authorities in England produce a faith calendar for schools. Currently there is no list or calendar of days set aside for religious observance produced by any of the Welsh SACREs.

19. In discussion the following points were made:

- Forum members will provide Education officials with key religious festival dates from across the different faith communities.
- Examination dates do not take into account religious festivals.

Action point : Education officials to produce a calendar for religious observance for Forum members to consider by first week of December 2015.

Item 3. Curriculum changes to Religious Education in Wales - Karen Cornish, Education and Public Services Group

20. Huw Lewis AM, Minister for Education and Skills made an announcement in the Senedd on 30 June accepting all of the recommendations in Professor Donaldson's report *Successful Futures: Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales*. Following the statement, the Minister for Education and Skills wrote to Forum members in September inviting the Forum to nominate a representative to sit on the Strategic Stakeholder Group (SSG), a key group within the governance arrangements being put in place to take forward the vision set out in Professor Donaldson's report. The first meeting of the SSG will take place in early December

21. Professor Donaldson's report, *Successful Futures*, recognises the integral role Religious Education plays in enabling learners to develop respect and understanding for other cultures. He recommends Religious Education remains a statutory curriculum requirement from reception onwards as part of the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience (recommendation 9). The Welsh Government published its plan *A curriculum for Wales, a curriculum for life* which sets out how it will take the recommendations in *Successful Futures* forward on 22 October.

22. The regional education consortia were invited to work with their schools across Wales – primary, secondary, special and faith – to apply to be Pioneer Schools. Pioneer schools will work as part of an all-Wales network to lead and shape the detailed design and development of the new curriculum for Wales. The successful schools will be announced in the near future (Pioneer schools were announced on 5 November – details are on the Welsh Government website).

23. Currently Religious Education is part of the basic curriculum. The *National Exemplar Framework for Religious Education for 3-19 year olds in Wales*, published in 2008, complies with the legal obligations (contained within the

Education act 1996 and Education Reform Act 2002) for a locally agreed syllabus.

24. Across the curriculum, from Foundation Phase through to age 19, learners are given opportunities to engage with Religious Education. Through engaging, practical, integrated activities children can learn more about themselves, other people and the world around them and develop an understanding of their rich cultural and religious heritage in Wales. This stimulates them into raising and investigating deep questions that relate to their personal experiences, religion and life in general, thus building on the skills, knowledge and understanding.

25. Religious Education in the 21st century should encourage pupils to explore a range of philosophical, theological, ethical, and spiritual questions in a reflective, analytical, balanced way that stimulates questioning and debate.

26. Religious Education has a vitally important role to play in supporting learners to explore their personal beliefs and values in our 21st century, multicultural society. In his report Professor Donaldson has recognised the integral role Religious Education plays in enabling learners to develop respect and understanding for other cultures. Education officials are considering how Religious Education, philosophy and ethics might be strengthened within the context of the new Humanities Area of Learning and Experience.

27. The Pioneer Schools network will work with experts to shape the new curriculum, which of course includes Religious Education. The Pioneer Schools are being identified and will be working over the coming weeks to agree their programmes of work (update – Pioneer Schools have been announced and will formally start working together from January 2016).

28. Meaningful engagement with faith communities will be essential as this process develops. Faith, denominational and other wider interest groups will have an important role to play.

Action points:

- Forum to put forward one member to join the Strategic Stakeholder Group.
- Forum members will be sent the link to the document a curriculum for Wales: a curriculum for life.

Item 4. A Statistical Focus on Religion in Wales 2011 Census- Sue Leake and Rebecca Armstrong, Knowledge and Analytical Services.

29. A person's religion is important in defining characteristics of identity. Data on religious affiliation can be combined with ethnic group, national identity and other characteristics to provide a detailed picture of the society we live and how it is evolving. There are multiple factors which drive changes in religious affiliation including growth, migration, changes in willingness to report no religion and awareness of the question.
30. The statistical bulletin "A Statistical Focus on Religion in Wales, 2011 Census" is an in-depth analysis of the 2011 Census data about religion in Wales and explores certain characteristics relating to these religious groups including Ethnicity, National Identity, Country of Birth, Age, Sex, Household Composition, Geographical Distribution, Housing Circumstances, Health, Education and the Labour Market. 'What is your religion?' is the only voluntary question in the Census. The question was first included in the national Census in 2001. The Census does not currently reference the Church in Wales in the question about religion.
31. Christianity is still the largest religion in Wales, although the proportion of population identifying as Christian has decreased by 14.3% since the last Census in 2001. Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist populations have nearly doubled since 2001.
32. There has been a considerable increase of 13.6% in those stating 'no religion' since 2001. The 2001 Census offered the option to record 'none' in terms of religious affiliation, in the 2011 Census this was changed to a 'no religion' option. The changes in Christian population and those reporting no religion were also seen in England although not as pronounced.
33. Some analysis was presented of where the highest proportions of religious groups were located in Wales and of the differing demographic profiles of the groups.
34. The Welsh Government actively encourages feedback and comments from users. Comments should be emailed to stats.inclusion@wales.gsi.gov.uk.

Action Point: Secretariat to email the link to the full report to the Forum.

Item 5. Any Other Business

Unrepresented Faiths - Aled Edwards

35. The Interfaith Council of Wales had previously appointed someone to represent unrepresented faith groups on the Council. Since resigning from the role in 2010, the vacancy was not been filled. Aled raised the issue with the Forum to explore the idea of appointing someone to represent the unrepresented faith groups on the Faith Communities Forum.

36. The First Minister invited the Forum to produce a paper with their conclusion for the next meeting. The First Minister reminded the Forum the current Terms of Reference will need to be updated to reflect any changes.

Action Point: Forum to produce paper for discussion at next meeting.

Date of Next Meeting

37. Next meeting will be on 8 June 2016 in Conference Room 21, Ty Hywel, Cardiff Bay at 10:30am – 12:00pm.