

**Faith Communities Forum**  
**Seminar Rooms 1&2, Pierhead Building, Cardiff Bay**  
**10:00-11:30 on 13 November 2019**

**Minutes**

**Present:**

Mark Drakeford AM, First Minister  
Jane Hutt AM, Deputy Minister & Chief Whip  
Kirsty Williams AM, Minister for Education  
John Davies  
Aled Edwards  
Gethin Rhys  
Rheinallt Thomas  
Viv Bartlett  
Christine Abbas  
Naran Patel  
Radhika Kadaba  
Nor'dzin Pamo  
Lawrence Kahn

Melody Odey

Chair  
Deputy Chair (**Chairing**)  
Welsh Government  
Archbishop of Wales (Church in Wales)  
Churches Together in Wales  
Churches Together in Wales  
Free Church Council of Wales  
Bahá'í Council for Wales  
Bahá'í Council for Wales  
Hindu Council of Wales  
Hindu Council of Wales  
Buddhist Representative  
South Wales Jewish Representative  
Council  
South Wales Jewish Representative  
Council

**Apologies:**

Philip Manghan

Sam Pritchard  
Sian Rees  
Meraj Hasan  
Saleem Kidwai  
Taikyo David Morgans  
Joga Singh  
Gurmit Singh Randhawa

Representing the Catholic Archbishop of  
Cardiff  
Evangelical Alliance Wales  
Evangelical Alliance Wales  
Muslim Council of Wales  
Muslim Council of Wales  
Buddhist Council of Wales  
Sikh Council of Wales  
Sikh Council of Wales

**Welsh Government Officials:**

Alyson Francis, Deputy Director, Communities  
Amelia John, Deputy Director, Futures & Integrated Policy Making  
Karen Cornish, Deputy Director, Children and Families  
Uzo Iwobi, Specialist Advisor for Equality  
Emma Bennett, Head of Equality  
John Davies, Equality Branch  
Hannah Fisher, Equality Branch  
Robin Grossmann, Equality Branch  
John Pugsley, Curriculum Division

1	<p><b>Item</b></p> <p><b>Welcome and Introductions</b></p> <p>The Deputy Minister and Chief Whip welcomed the members, and asked everyone to introduce themselves.</p> <p>The Deputy Minister spoke about recent faith-related activities and events she and the First Minister have attended. These included, amongst others, opening the Anglican Interfaith Commission meeting at the Pierhead building, the visit to Voices of South Wales Jewish Community exhibition at St Fagans and the Jewish life in Bangor exhibition in the Pierhead building this week, together with events celebrating the anniversary of the Birth of Mahatma Gandhi and Diwali celebrations.</p> <p>The Deputy Minister also mentioned a successful meeting with Imams from across South Wales earlier in the week regarding security for Places of Worship, and efforts to use the Welsh Government's Communities Facilities Programme (CFP) to widen access to Places of Worship, which Mosques want to do.</p> <p>The Deputy Minister stated how much she had enjoyed the Candlelit Interfaith Walk on Monday in Rhiwbina and how impressed she was by the Interfaith Choir. She found it a wonderful event including over 100 people of various faiths and said she hoped more walks such as this could take place across Wales next year.</p>
2	<p><b>Minutes of the Last Meeting and Action Points</b></p> <p>The Minutes of the last meeting were agreed by all. The Deputy Minister stated that the remaining outstanding action should be addressed at the next meeting of the Hate Crime Criminal Justice Board in January.</p>
4	<p><b>Item 1 - New Curriculum (update on Access to the Full Curriculum Consultation).</b></p> <p>The Deputy Minister spoke about the proposals currently out for consultation, and introduced the Minister for Education.</p> <p>The Minister said she was grateful for the invitation to meet Faith leaders in Wales. She explained the basis for the current consultation and the ongoing work to re-design a Welsh curriculum, referencing the basis for which was the "Successful Futures" report, written by Professor Graham Donaldson and published in 2014. This proposes a "purpose-led" curriculum based on 6 areas of learning and experience, with an additional focus on the Health and Wellbeing of young people</p> <p>The Minister went on to outline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• work to develop an education system that gains public confidence;</li> <li>• the need to close the attainment gap in Wales;</li> <li>• a forthcoming Bill to ensure that the Welsh and English Languages and Religion be included in the curriculum by law;</li> <li>• the proposal to change what is currently referred to as "Sex Education" to "Relationships and Sexuality Education" which will have an enhanced focus on relationships.</li> </ul>

- the proposal regarding the right of children to access the full curriculum;
- the proposal to change what is currently referred to as “Religious Education” to “Religions and Worldviews”. This change takes into consideration the Human Rights Act, which requires that religious views, and views analogous to religion, are viewed equally. It was noted the Commission on Religious Education in England also suggested the name “Religion and Worldviews”.

The Minister reminded the group the consultation closes on the 28th November 2019 and emphasised that the Welsh Government is keen to hear a range of views.

The Deputy Minister thanked the Minister for Education and invited comment:

Rheinallt Thomas (RT) expressed some concern regarding the proposed change of “Religious Education” to “Religion and World Views”. He stated the term “world views” is not widely accepted and is amorphous and vague. He raised concern that the change was possibly driven mainly by a non-faith based agenda and commented that one of the considerations for such a change is a report from a Commission in England which did not include Welsh consultation.

Rheinallt noted some errors in the Welsh language translation of the consultation document and suggested that these mistakes included interpretations of language that were incorrect and could be misleading.

He went on to suggest it is potentially problematic that the proposed changes to Sex Education and Religious Education are being consulted on together. He explained there is strong support for the changes around Sex Education within the organisations he represents but some strong challenges relating to Religious Education.

Christine Abbas noted that parents have the main responsibility for their children and may have different views on the definition of relationships to the schools their children attend or to those of the Welsh Government. She asked if schools might have to consult with individual parents.

Nor’dzin Pamo advised that most Buddhists in Wales have come to Buddhism as adults, and so wholeheartedly supports all religions being taught at school so that children see choice related to religion.

Radhika Kadaba supported teaching all religions at school to promote tolerance and agreed with making it compulsory. As a parent she taught her own children about their faith at home and also referenced the teaching of moral science in Indian schools, which teach students morals and values, as good practice.

The Minister for Education:

- apologised for the translation errors in the consultation document
- emphasised that the Welsh Government did not seek to diminish the rights and responsibilities of parents as primary educators of children but acknowledged that not all parents are in a position to offer this education or fulfil all of their children’s educational needs with regards to this
- agreed we need to create spaces where children learn to be tolerant and respectful

- noted the professionalism of teachers; bound by their own code of practice, who routinely provide factual information to children without straying into indoctrination
- reminded the group of the dangers children may face online. We will not keep them safe by keeping them ignorant, we need to educate them at school and at home

The Minister also clarified the reason that Relationship and Sexuality Education and Religious Education are being considered as part of the same consultation is that these are the only two areas where parents hold a right to withdraw their children from relevant lessons.

The Deputy Minister invited any further comments.

Aled Edwards said he was grateful for the Minister's response and noted to dates the lack of animosity around this issue compared to elsewhere in UK. He reminded the group that hard work around this issue would be needed to continue to support this positivity. In communities where a traditional view of family is held, he advised it was important to carefully mitigate negative messages around:

- family responsibility
- the subtleties around age appropriateness
- how communities can have a voice in messaging within schools

Aled informed the meeting that some women at a recent mosque event suggested an ongoing consultative process to ensure that their faith values were not undermined in relevant lessons.

The Archbishop of Wales also thanked the Minister and spoke of the need to find middle ground in these debates and the importance of relationships was common to all faiths. His only comment on Relationship and Sexuality Education is that the moment you put "sex" or "sexuality" in a title it can potentially be seen to undermine traditional views.

Viv Bartlett said that the 6 objectives are wonderful but asked if there is a vision of something more integrated, and proposed a consultation on the overall vision, suggesting one of World citizenship.

The Minister for Education responded:

- There is a commitment to continued dialogue and reassurance
- World citizenship runs through curriculum
- We are not starting from scratch but building on excellent work in existing schools

The Archbishop of Wales suggested that whilst the forum had today discussed the education of children, in actual fact the work to come related to the education of parents and the offer of reassurance to those who feared indoctrination or being undermined.

The Deputy Minister thanked the Minister for Education, and reminded the forum of the consultation dates.

The Minister thanked attendees once more and left the meeting.

**Action 1: All members to respond to the Curriculum consultation and to encourage others to do so.**

5 **Item 2 Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Bill**

The Deputy Minister introduced this agenda item and provided information to the forum on the Welsh Government's position on this Bill, which further protects children's rights in Wales. If the Bill is enacted the defence of reasonable punishment will no longer be available within Wales to parents or those acting in loco parentis, as a defence to a charge of common assault or battery. The intended effect of the Bill, together with raising awareness and support for parents, is to bring about a further reduction in the use and tolerance of the physical punishment of children in Wales.

The Deputy Minister acknowledged the contribution of many of those in the meeting who helped to shape the Bill in getting it to this stage.

The Deputy Minister invited Karen Cornish, Deputy Director of Children and Families, to give an update.

Karen gave a brief update on progress and implementation followed by a short video. She explained that the Bill is a long standing commitment with the overarching aim to protect children's rights, providing them with equal protection from assault as adults.

Karen explained that as part of the Bill's progress through the Assembly it had been amended at Stage 2 to allow for a two year period between Royal Assent and commencement (If the Bill is passed). This will allow time for a range of activity to take place including an awareness raising campaign, information and advice for professionals and support for parents.

The presentation and video will be sent to forum members with the Minutes (20191104 Wales Bill Presentation for Faith Forum). Karen also said she would be happy to share a regular newsletter on the Bill with the forum. Individuals who would like to be kept regularly informed of developments surrounding the proposed Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Bill can register for the newsletter here [https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKWALES\\_CY/subscriber/new?topic\\_id=UKWALES\\_CY\\_95](https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKWALES_CY/subscriber/new?topic_id=UKWALES_CY_95)

[https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKWALES/subscriber/new?topic\\_id=UKWALES\\_188](https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKWALES/subscriber/new?topic_id=UKWALES_188)

- A copy of the Bill explainer video can be found here:

<https://gov.wales/abolishing-defence-reasonable-punishment-children-overview>

[https://llyw.cymru/diddymu-amddiffyniad-cosb-resymol-ar-gyfer-plant-trosolwg?\\_ga=2.42079653.1413512046.1573646481-49142690.1568709282](https://llyw.cymru/diddymu-amddiffyniad-cosb-resymol-ar-gyfer-plant-trosolwg?_ga=2.42079653.1413512046.1573646481-49142690.1568709282)

- The public attitudes to physical punishment of children: baseline survey, 2018, can be found here:

<https://gov.wales/public-attitudes-physical-punishment-children-baseline-survey-2018>

[https://llyw.cymru/agweddau-cyhoeddus-gosbi-plant-yn-gorfforol-arolwg-llinell-sylfaen-2018?\\_ga=2.267713609.61596426.1573647089-585504540.1567593466](https://llyw.cymru/agweddau-cyhoeddus-gosbi-plant-yn-gorfforol-arolwg-llinell-sylfaen-2018?_ga=2.267713609.61596426.1573647089-585504540.1567593466)

- Individuals who wish to receive copies of Parenting Give it Time resources, please e-mail [Parenting@gov.wales](mailto:Parenting@gov.wales)

The Deputy Minister explained the Welsh Government is at the final stages of taking the Bill through the Assembly and thanked the forum members again their role during the consultation. She invited comment.

Gethin Rhys stated he regretted that places of worship are mentioned in the Welsh Government's video as an unregulated setting in relation to this Bill. Whilst he understood why this was the case, church safeguarding measures are designed to ensure children are safe. He explained that their inclusion inferred suspicion which did not acknowledge ongoing safeguarding work.

**Action 2: All members to consider ways they can work with officials should the Bill pass, to share the video and sign up to the newsletter**

### 6 Item 3 – Strategic Equality Plan – objectives

The DM introduced this agenda item and stated the following:

- the Welsh Government is committed to a fairer society where people don't face discrimination
- the strategic equality objectives must be updated by March 2020, for use over the next 4 years
- a workshop was held the day before (12/11/19) which brought together various fora to contribute to the consultation. The aim of this event was to engage smaller organisations; following feedback that some of these organisations were not resourced to provide formal written consultation responses
- the strategic equality plan cuts across all of the Welsh Government's work.

Gethin had attended the workshop and said it was very useful with general agreement on long term aims. He highlighted general feedback for practical steps and detailed actions to be included and stated that some of the aims were very ambitious within a 4 year timescale.

Emma Bennett added:

- there was good representation at the workshop from different fora and lots of feedback
- there was common feedback about adding detail and actions, but the purpose of the consultation was that objectives and long term aims first needed to be consulted upon and agreed before the supporting actions could be identified and confirmed
- the approach would focus on the most disadvantaged
- if anyone wants to channel feedback into the consultation, then to please do so

The Deputy Minister reminded forum members there is still time to provide feedback before the consultation ends on 19 November.

The Deputy Minister reminded the group that the commencement of the Socio-economic Duty is very important, particularly in relation to the Strategic Equality Plan. Poverty blights many people's lives but it is not a protected characteristic. The Deputy Minister also recognised Living Wage week (commencing 11/11/19) and stated that we must tackle poverty at all levels. She acknowledged that there is also plenty more to do in terms of race and disability, but lots of progress is being made.

The Archbishop of Wales recognised the synergy between this discussion and the issues raised earlier in relation to religious and relationship education; if we got those right, many issues to do with equality would be solved.

The Deputy Minister thanked the Archbishop for his remarks and referenced some of his useful writings around this subject which were published in the Western Mail.

The Deputy Minister noted that the First Minister needed to leave the meeting. The First Minister thanked the members for the chance to listen to the important conversations which had taken place today. He stated there are challenges that the Welsh Government must address but he stressed that the Government "want to take people with us". The First Minister emphasised the importance of the forum and expressed the value of the work underway. He emphasised that, even when the subject was complex it is always better to talk to each other and to give time to discussions, no matter how difficult they are.

The First Minister left the meeting.

**Action 3: All members to respond to the Strategic Equality Objectives consultation (if they have not already done so) and to encourage others to do so.**

#### 7 **Item 4 – Membership and Structure**

The Deputy Minister explained that there have been recent requests around membership and suggested it was timely to review the Terms of Reference of the forum and to consider the membership. She suggested that a workshop be convened in the new year to review the current Terms of Reference and consider membership requirements.

The Deputy Minister invited brief comments from the group at this stage but noted that some members of the forum were not in attendance.

Aled Edwards reflected that he, Naran Patel, and the Deputy Minister are the only remaining members of the original forum. He thought it would be worthwhile to reflect on its original purpose, which was to represent, in reasonable size and proportion, the world faiths and religious groups in Wales. The forum's brief was to encourage faith communities to relate to one other and stressed the forum was never designed to be a body representing all religions and beliefs.

The Deputy Minister explained that recent requests to join the forum had been received from another Muslim organisation and from Humanists Wales.

Viv Bartlett noted there is a difference between the Interfaith Council and the Faith Communities Forum. The Interfaith Council is now considering membership before its constitution is ratified. The Welsh Government is not bound by the constitution of the Interfaith Council regarding the membership of the Faith Communities Forum, but would it be possible to expand Forum membership to include more diversity, to help integration in Wales? In particular, it would help the integration process if representation from the black churches could be included.

Laurence Kahn suggested that when the Interfaith Council's constitution is revised, the forum could consider this work as a learning opportunity for its own Terms of Reference and membership.

Christine Abbas suggested any future forum Terms of Reference require a commitment to interfaith work from all its members. The Deputy Minister agreed this was a useful starting point for discussions.

The Deputy Minister explained that details for the workshop would be shared in due course and recognised that the Welsh Government would need to be measured in relation to group structure.

**Action 4: Welsh Government officials to make arrangements for a workshop on the forum's Terms of Reference and membership for the new year.**

7 **Any Other Business**

**Civil Society Forum to support the implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations Act by Welsh Government**

The Deputy Minister informed the group that the Welsh Government is developing a Civil Society Forum. She introduced Amelia John, Deputy Director, Futures and Integrated Policy Making to provide some detail on this work.

Amelia explained that her team supports colleagues across Welsh Government to embed the Well-being of Future Generations Act and improve policy making. The Act includes the duty on Welsh Government and public bodies to involve the diversity of people in Wales in policy making and delivery, which supports the involvement duty in equality legislation.

The Deputy Minister has asked Amelia and officials in her team to explore options for establishing a Civil Society Forum to inform and support Welsh Government's work. The intention is to avoid duplication with other fora and the team is working with the WCVA and Third Sector Partnership Council to explore what its role might be in bringing together private, public and third sector organisations and facilitating conversations and an exchange of ideas.



	<p>Officials would welcome the involvement of members of the forum or members of the communities they represent, and Amelia encouraged any member to contact her or the team about the Civil Society work. She also said that she would be happy to attend future forums to provide further updates.</p> <p>Gethin Rhys said he would be attending a meeting between the Well-being of Future Generations Commissioner and Third Sector Partnership Council in the afternoon. He advised he would reference the conversation on the Civil Society Forum today and be conscious of duplication between the various groups.</p> <p><b><u>Interfaith Walk</u></b></p> <p>Christine Abbas thanked the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip for taking the time to attend the candlelit walk and interfaith evening, showing sincerity in wanting to be with faith communities and treating all groups equally. Christine encouraged the Deputy Minister to continue to talk about the vision for interfaith work in Wales, to see it spread.</p> <p>The Deputy Minister said the event was very enjoyable and that she looked forward to seeing the Interfaith choir again. She stated that Rhodri Morgan was First Minister when this forum was founded, and she was the Equality Minister then too. The important thing about groups such as this one is the relationships they build. People could divide or come together, and in Wales we came together and have done so successfully.</p>
8	Close

### **Actions**

**Action 1: All members to respond to the Curriculum consultation and to encourage others to do so.**

**Action 2: All members to consider ways they can work with officials should the Bill pass, to share the video and sign up to the newsletter**

**Action 3: All members to respond to the Strategic Equality Objectives consultation (if they have not already done so) and to encourage others to do so.**

**Action 4: Welsh Government officials to make arrangements for a workshop on the forum's Terms of Reference and membership for the new year.**