

## The CoRE and its relevance to Wales: A paper for discussion

### Is the CoRE relevant to Wales?

- This is a **large scale empirical study** of RE in England that offers recommendations for the future of RE;
- If we value RE in Wales then we cannot ignore the outcomes of the Commission as we share the **same statutory legal requirements for RE with England**;
- The Commissioners believe that **'the future of Religious Education (RE) is in the balance'** and that **'A timely intervention is necessary** if RE is to continue to make its significant contribution to pupils' education.' Wales would be short sighted to ignore this warning from it's neighbour;
- The Commission raises the **need for RE to reflect contemporary society** as things have changed both locally and globally since the 1944 Education Act, which is also the case in Wales; and
- Wales can **learn from the recommendations** made by the CoRE interim report and use these to inform the current development of the new curriculum. It may also decide that a similar commission is needed for RE in Wales in order to obtain the full picture from a Welsh context.

### What is RE? The view of the Commissioners

- 'RE remains a **vital academic subject** for education in the 21st century. Studying RE gives young people the knowledge, understanding and motivation they need to **understand important aspects of human experience, including the religious, spiritual, and moral**. It gives **insights into the arts, literature, history, and contemporary local and global social and political issues**. It provides them with a space in the curriculum to **reflect on their own worldview and to engage with others whose worldview may be different**. The young people that we have spoken to have told us that RE enables them to have **better friendships** and to **develop greater respect and empathy for others**. Understanding **religious and non-religious world views** and their **impact** on individuals, communities and wider society, has never been more **essential** than it is now. RE is **highly valued by many employers**, who increasingly understand that **in a globalised world, understanding others' worldviews and their impact on people's lives is essential to success**.' P3

### Points to note from the Executive Summary (*Comments for Wales*)

*Some positives:*

- RE is central to good local, national and global citizenship; **reference to Donaldson's 'Ethical and informed citizens of Wales and the world'**
- 'The British model of RE is highly regarded and has earned international esteem'; **Wales needs to be building on this and strengthening it**
- The high level of examination entry at GCSE and A level needs to be safeguarded; **The same for Wales** and
- Local and national support networks for teachers are of particular note in England. **Same is true in Wales and these can and should be developed further**

*Some negatives:*

- Examination entries fell for the first time in 2017, and many who gave evidence saw this as a sign of further decline in years to come; **New specifications have made this a concern for Wales also**
- RE has suffered from a policy environment that has not encouraged headteachers to regard it as a high-status subject; **Is this the same for Wales?**
- There are insufficient processes to hold schools to account for their provision of RE; **Does Wales have these processes in place?**
- Teachers are not always clear on the purpose of the subject and many lack the subject knowledge necessary to teach about sensitive and crucial issues with skill and nuance; **Is this true of Wales?**
- Locally agreed syllabuses are variable in quality; **Not as in Wales currently- what about the new curriculum?**
- The omission of RE from key performance indicators' published by DFE; **The same for Wales**
- There has been diminishing access to adequate training and support for teachers especially at primary level; **What is the level of access to training in Wales?**
- The quality of RE is variable across schools. Low standards predominate across too many schools, with increasing numbers of schools not meeting the basic legal requirement; **WASACRE has noted in the past that there has been anecdotal evidence to suggest this to be the case in Wales also**
- Religion is often presented in an essentialist mode that fails to help pupils understand the complexity, diversity and historicity of religious ideas, institutions and practices. (especially in relation to the Dharmic traditions); **Is this true in Wales?** and
- **RE faces a perilous future without strategic, urgent intervention.**

## **The Commissioners' initial recommendations**

### **1. A national entitlement for RE**

- This would set out the aims and purpose(s) of RE and what all pupils should experience in the course of their study of the subject;
- The national entitlement should be introduced through non-statutory guidance as early as possible with a view to it ultimately becoming statutory, either to supplement or replace the current legislation on agreed syllabuses;
- The national entitlement provides a reinvigorated vision for RE for all pupils in the future, drawing on the very best of the RE that we know happens in some schools;
- It seeks to be a basic statement of what all pupils are entitled to, but is not a national syllabus or curriculum; and
- Schools will need guidance and support to translate this entitlement into curriculum planning and we are reviewing where this guidance and support should come from.

### **2. Holding schools to account for the provision and quality of RE**

- Schools should be required to publish details on their website of how they meet the national entitlement for RE;
- Inspection frameworks should be revised to ensure that inspectors monitor whether schools meet the national entitlement for RE;
- The DFE should either monitor, or give SACREs or other approved bodies the power and resources to monitor, the provision and quality of RE in all schools, including free schools, academies and schools of a religious character;
- Schools should provide for those key Stage 4 pupils who are not taking the GCSEs in religious Studies; and

- There should be a consultation on the possibility of a revised qualification for these pupils to ensure that their work can be accredited.

### 3. A national plan to improve teaching and learning in RE

The Commission makes recommendations for improving teacher subject knowledge and confidence and will consult on how this can best be achieved. These include suggestions such as:

- a. A minimum of 12 hours devoted to RE in primary initial teacher education (ITE) courses;
- b. All primary trainees should be given the opportunity to observe RE teaching in a leading primary school;
- c. Teachers' Standards - the requirement that teachers 'demonstrate a good understanding of and take responsibility for the sensitive handling of controversial issues, including thoughtful discussion of religious and non-religious worldviews where necessary.';
- d. Restore funded Subject knowledge enhancement (SKE) courses;
- e. Restore parity of bursaries for RE with those for other Shortage subjects;
- f. Consider funding of grassroots teacher networks;
- g. SACREs and local authorities should review existing good practice in developing and sustaining these grassroots networks and start their own if such a network does not exist in their local area;
- h. University performance measures to credit universities for engagement with schools, including the provision of CPD and resource materials; and
- i. University staff conducting research in RE should contribute to grassroots networks, lead teacher development days, develop resource materials or become SACRE members.

### 4. A renewed and expanded role for standing advisory councils on religious education (SACREs)

- SACREs can have an important role in promoting and supporting RE and in promoting good community relations more broadly;
- Consideration should to be given to adding the promotion of improved community relations to the remit of SACREs and make proposals for the securing of resources for their work; and
- Consideration of the composition of SACREs with a call to ensure that they are fully representative, with representatives of non-religious worldviews as full members.

### Areas for further consultation

- Identification of bodies that would be best placed to translate the entitlement into detailed programmes of study and how best to support schools to plan their curriculum in line with the entitlement;
- The development of a national set of programmes of study compliant with the entitlement to provide consistency across localities; **This is what we have in Wales currently**
- Whether the entitlement statement replace or supplement the current legislation on agreed syllabuses;
- Whether the entitlement should specify a number and range of worldviews, or a minimum time to be spent on one worldview;
- Suggestions on alternative names which fit the entitlement and the renewed vision for the subject;
- Views on the most appropriate mechanisms for holding schools to account for the provision and quality of RE at both primary and secondary level; **WASACRE has met with Estyn regarding this issue**

- Views on how effective a revised qualification at key Stage 4 for those not taking full Course GCSE RS would be and what demand there would be for such a qualification;
- The government should publicly highlight and reaffirm the important role of SACREs in supporting and resourcing RE;
- Whether the role of SACREs should be expanded to include a duty to advise on all matters relating to religion and belief in schools;
- Consider ways of securing funding to resource SACREs adequately; **Questions are being raised about this across Wales**
- Consider the composition of SACREs and the law should be changed to include representatives of non-religious worldviews as full members; **Conversations have begun in WASACRE and WG has been asked to clarify**
- The government should publish all SACRE annual reports publicly on a dedicated website; **WASACRE and WG already do this**
- Views on what the duties of SACREs should be in relation to promoting good community relations, beyond matters relating to religion and belief in schools;
- How the composition of SACREs should be adapted to be fit for purpose in a changed social and educational landscape. In particular whether the committee structure should be changed or abolished;
- Views on which groups and organisations should be represented on SACREs. Evidence on the number of pupils being withdrawn from RE and the reasons given, where these are given, as well as whether the number of cases and reasons given have been changing over time; **WASACRE is looking into this**
- The most effective ways to manage the right of withdrawal in practice; **Wales have this now**
- Whether it is desirable to look to adopt an overall approach to the design of the RE curriculum in every school so that it is sufficiently 'objective, critical and pluralistic' as to render it capable of being compulsory without the right of withdrawal;
- Views on what should be included in the national plan for RE beyond the recommendations set out above;
- How the national plan might best be implemented; and
- Views on the kinds of research which would be most helpful for re teachers to engage with, and what mechanisms would support this.

#### **Questions for WASACRE to consider**

1. Are the outcomes of the interim report relevant to Wales?
2. Do members agree with the recommendations in the report?
3. What do members want Welsh Government to do?
4. What action, if any, should WASACRE take now?
5. Should Wales initiate its own commission on RE?