

## Notes on Qualified for the Future: The Right Choice for Wales Consultation

The latest consultation on qualifications at age 16 will be discussed in our next meeting. Please read the notes below, which have been prepared by our RE Consultant, Angela Hill, as a starting point for our discussions.

Thank you.

You will find the full consultation here:

[qualified-for-the-future-the-right-choice-for-wales-consultation.pdf \(qualificationswales.org\)](#)

SACRE is only concerned with the matters relating to Religion Values and Ethics (RVE)/Religious Studies (RS) on pages 22-26.

### Overview

Welsh Government proposes to introduce the new Curriculum for Wales in stages; from September 2022 it will apply to all learners in Year 7 and below. This timeline would mean that the first full cohort to experience the new Curriculum for Wales will start Year 10 in September 2025 and finish Year 11 in summer 2027. Our aim is for schools to be able to offer these learners the right choices about the qualifications they will be studying when they reach Year 10.

The consultation seeks views on the future range of subjects that should be available as GCSEs and which other made-for-Wales qualifications should be available alongside them.

#### Already decided:

Qualifications for 16-year-olds should still be called GCSEs, but that the content and assessment of GCSE qualifications should change to meet future needs.

#### Who should respond?

Anyone with an interest in the education of young people in Wales. This includes learners, parents, carers, learning providers and employers.

#### What is the deadline for responses?

9<sup>th</sup> April 2021

#### What should SACRE discuss and respond to in this consultation?

The consultation covers the whole curriculum. As a SACRE we are only concerned with proposals relating to Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) or Religious Studies (RS) as the GCSE is currently named. RVE will be part of the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE), so we will need to focus any discussion on its place within this AoLE.

Members of SACRE are strongly encouraged to respond as private individuals.

The proposal relating to Humanities including RS (or RVE) can be found on pages 22 to 26 of the document. Please read these pages carefully.

Here is a summary of what is being proposed:

1. Review and reform GCSEs in Business, Geography, History and Religious Studies.
2. If feasible, create a new GCSE in Social Studies (at present this is understood as an amalgam of sociology and psychology).
3. If feasible, create a new integrated GCSE in Humanities. Qualifications in disciplines related to this Area will continue to be available to schools and learners, provided they meet our guiding principles and do not duplicate the main made-for-Wales qualifications in this Area.

## Advice Notes for SACRE Members

### Why is this important?

There is a compelling argument to for RVE/RS to be included as a compulsory element within the suite of age-16 GCSE qualifications.

There are specific challenges for RVE in the New Curriculum in Wales. If a good resolution can be found to offer a suitably rigorous and engaging GCSE in RVE/RS which is compulsory for all learners in Wales, then this could ensure that RVE will retain a secure place on the curriculum, not only at 14-16, but throughout primary and secondary education, leading up to it.

Crucially, compulsory entry to GCSE RVE/RS will enable SACREs to fulfil their role to assist local authorities to monitor standards.

In England, subject-level 'deep dives' in the Ofsted Inspection Framework are enabling SACREs to deal with non-compliance and to monitor standards in RE. With the new, integrated approach to the curriculum in many schools in Wales, it is totally unfeasible that the Estyn Inspection framework will scrutinise subjects. A compulsory GCSE-level qualification in RVE/RS in Wales will ensure full access to the curriculum, avoiding non-compliance particularly at Key Stage 4 and supporting Key Stage 3 (as eventually pupils will be 'doing the exam'). A proper, GCSE-level qualification in RVE is absolutely necessary to ensure compliance and avoid schools teaching other courses which do not properly meet statutory requirements.

In removing the parental right to withdrawal, and retain RVE as a compulsory element of the curriculum, the Minister has made a commitment to ensuring full access to RE for every learner in Wales. As such, it could be argued that every learner should have fair access to have their study of RVE acknowledged as a GCSE qualification. This could be as a full GCSE in RVE/RS or as a GCSE which is half RVE/RS, combined with another Humanities Subject. A school's option columns, if offering two Humanities, could look something like this:

Option Box A 120-140 guided learning hours -3x50 or 3x60 mins pw over 2 years	Option Box B 120-140 guided learning hours -3x50 or 3x60 mins pw over 2 years
RS/RVE	RS/RVE
History	Humanities (RS/RVE+Geography)

Geography	Humanities (RS/RVE+History)
Social Studies	Humanities (RS/RVE+Business Studies)
Business Studies	<b>NO RS/RVE+ SOCIAL STUDIES AS SS IS ALREADY MULTIDISCIPLINARY</b>
RS/RVE	History
RS/RVE	Geography
RS/RVE	Social Studies
RS/RVE	Business Studies

Whilst two Humanities subjects could be successfully combined in one GCSE, SACRE members should consider whether more subjects could realistically be combined into a single GCSE. Doing so may reduce the disciplinary and substantive depth and rigour of the GCSE and place pressures on schools and teachers in terms of having sufficient expertise to teach a number of disciplines at GCSE. I would argue that there would almost certainly be an element of non-specialist teaching in any GCSE which combines more than two disciplines.

It should also be kept in mind that there was in fact a ‘Humanities’ GCSE which was discontinued in the 2016 reforms, as it was seen to lack depth and rigour.

### Points to consider from the consultation document

*Blue font indicates points that are taken from the consultation document.*

*Red font indicates possible issues arising from these points which SACRE members may wish to discuss or include in our consultation response.*

The proposals state that a school’s Curriculum should offer learners aged 14 to 16 a choice to specialise more in some Areas than others, while still ensuring that they experience some learning in each Area.

It could be argued that as RVE is the only compulsory subject within its AoLE, and at 14-16 there should be opportunities to specialise, there should be a GCSE in RS/RVE as that it should be mandatory, and equivalent in content and challenge to the GCSE RS in England, in order to ensure portability. A broad GCSE in Humanities would not give sufficient opportunities for pupils to specialise.

The consultation states that it will be up to schools to select the qualifications they want to offer based on their School Curriculum and the needs of their learners.

It could be argued that if pupils must study RVE to 16 in the new curriculum, then they should have fair access to a qualification that recognises that study and is of equal value to its counterpart in England and the rest of the UK – this would entail a GCSE-level qualification.

GCSEs are sometimes described as academic qualifications, with more emphasis on theoretical knowledge and less opportunity to develop practical skills. There is a perception that they are aimed solely at supporting progression to further study at A level. This is a perception we want to change. GCSEs can be designed to assess different kinds of knowledge and skills and to support broad progression along academic, technical and vocational pathways.

This sounds benign and uncontroversial as set out, but it could have worrying consequences for qualification portability as England is moving increasingly towards knowledge-based learning in discursive subjects like RS (the consultation text goes on to explain that subjects like music and art have a large skills-based evidence required for assessment, and it seems to imply that skills may feature in other subjects as well). Of course, GCSE should not *solely* prepare pupils for A Levels, but they should do this effectively, in addition to other educational goals.

Where we propose, in some cases, that qualifications in closely related subjects should be combined, this is not intended to reduce choice. In the Areas where we propose combining existing qualifications most learners at present take several qualifications in similar or closely related subjects. Creating new, more consolidated qualifications in these Areas would give schools more flexibility to reflect the breadth and balance of their School Curriculum in the combinations of qualifications available to learners.

This indicates a possibility of a Humanities GCSE with RVE content tagged on. RVE is compulsory, so how would this work? If we feel that it is desirable to retain a GCSE-level qualification in RVE/RS, should we consider how to capitalise on RVE's compulsory status?

## Current Provision in Humanities

In this Area at present, there are four made-for-Wales GCSEs available to schools. These are:

- Business
- History
- Geography
- Religious Studies (footnote: Available as both a full course and short course GCSE. The full course is similar in size to other GCSEs, the short course covers half the content of the full course).

These qualifications were all reformed in 2016/2017. **Our research and engagement with teachers indicates that these new specifications are seen as content-heavy and challenging to deliver in the time allocated within schools to teach these subjects.**

Equivalence of RVE/RS with other subjects: It is certainly the case that RS GCSE is not suitable for delivery in a reduced number of guided learning hours, but as a GCSE subject it needs to be equivalent with other Humanities subjects. If schools attempt to deliver the GCSE in fewer guided learning hours than recommended, this cannot be regarded as a fault of the GCSE's design.

Is there an implication that Humanities GCSEs in Wales are to be dumbed down, rather than there being a push to raise standards? Should an RVE/RS GCSE be designed to fit in with a lower number of guided learning hours given to it in some schools? How could such a qualification be deemed equivalent with other GCSEs?

There are real concerns to be addressed regarding the potential damage the prospects of young people in Wales if Humanities GCSEs are in any way dumbed down or perceived to be dumbed down in Wales. The subsidiarity (schools designing their own curricula) and integrated approach to the curriculum might necessitate a dumbing down, as these features of the New Curriculum for Wales may well mean that pupils will not be beginning GCSE from even a broadly common starting point.

A key question is how far we should advocate for continuation of a discrete 'RS' GCSE, albeit maybe with a different name. Short course is still under discussion.

Should SACRE consider the prospect of many schools making a Humanities GCSE compulsory in which a very small amount of RVE is included. This would be damaging for other Humanities subjects as well. Even if discrete subjects are available, schools might not offer them and if they do, pupils may not take them.

## The Questions for SACRE

There are three questions which concern SACRE, which will be discussed in the Spring SACRE meeting.

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to review and reform GCSEs in: Business, Geography, History and Religious Studies?

Please choose one option in each row

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Business	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Geography	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
History	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religious Studies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please explain your answer below. Your answer can be up to 1,000 words long.

Please enter your response below

0 of 7500 characters used

There is insufficient detail about what 'reform' means to comment on this.

**How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to create a new GCSE in Social Studies, if feasible?**

**i** Please choose one of the following options

Strongly agree

Tend to agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Tend to disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

**Please explain your answer below. Your answer can be up to 1,000 words long.**

**i** Please enter your response below

0 of 7500 characters used

Social Studies is envisaged as Psychology and Sociology, primarily – already two disciplines. It may not be in the best interests of RS/RVE to be incorporated in Social Studies. The proposals do not make clear whether this is an intention.

**How far do you agree or disagree with our proposal to create a new integrated GCSE in Humanities, if feasible?**

**i** Please choose one of the following options

Strongly agree

Tend to agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Tend to disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

**Please explain your answer below. Your answer can be up to 1,000 words long.**

**i** Please enter your response below

0 of 7500 characters used

Attempting an amalgam of the many subjects that make up the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience would likely not allow enough depth to properly constitute GCSE learning, and certainly would not be comparable with England. Teachers may not have the breadth of skills or depth of knowledge to teach across all Humanities for GCSE – there will be elements that must be taught by non-specialist teachers – this is not in the interests of pupils or the profession. RS/RVE plus 1 other Humanities subject could be successfully combined. It is desirable, I would argue, that RVE plus 1 other as RVE to be compulsory at 16, unlike the other humanities and pupils can then choose a second full discrete GCSE in another Humanities subject or they can choose full, discrete RS/RVE and another full, discrete Humanities. The minimum obligation upon schools is to offer RS/RVE as half of a GCSE alongside another Humanities subject.