



Cytûn – Churches together in Wales

Briefing on the Schools Curriculum for Wales 2022

On 28 January, the Welsh Government published its new *Curriculum for Wales* to be introduced in schools from September 2022. Cytûn has provided representation for faith communities throughout the process of preparing this curriculum, by being part of the Curriculum Strategic Stakeholders' Group (representing the Faith Communities Forum), the

Education strand of the Third Sector Partnership Council (representing the Inter-faith Council for Wales), by many direct meetings with Welsh Government officials (some jointly with the Free Church Council for Wales, the Church in Wales, the Catholic Education Service and/or Welsh Humanists), by convening an inter-faith meeting with the Education Minister to discuss Relationships and Sexuality Education, and most recently by membership of the Faith/BME Community Involvement Group.

Throughout the process, the Church in Wales and the Catholic Education Service, as providers of schools within the maintained system, have used their own channels of communication with Welsh Government also. Recognising the diversity of views within our membership regarding the provision of denominational education, Cytûn does not seek formally to represent the views of these denominations in their role as providers of education.

The aim of this paper is to summarise the 500 pages of [curriculum documentation](#) which have been issued by Welsh Government as the basis for Curriculum 2022. This summary is necessarily extremely selective! Words in italics are quoted directly from the document [Curriculum for Wales guidance](#).

The guidance *aims to help each school develop its own curriculum* (p. 4). *A school's curriculum is everything a learner experiences in pursuit of the four purposes* [see below]. *It is not simply what we teach, but how we teach and crucially, why we teach it.* (p. 5) This is very different from the prescriptive model used by the current curriculum (1988 and later revisions). A Curriculum and Assessment Bill is proposed for introduction in the Senedd in 2020; the guidance will be updated if the Senedd changes the Bill.

If agreed, the Bill will specify the **Four Purposes** of the curriculum (p. 11) *to enable learners to develop as:*

- *ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives*
- *enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work*
- *ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world*
- *healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.*

All maintained schools and funded non-maintained nursery settings must adopt a curriculum. An adopted curriculum must meet the following general requirements.

- *Enable learners to make progress towards the four purposes.*
- *Be broad and balanced.*
- *Be suitable for learners of differing ages, abilities and aptitudes.*
- *Provide for appropriate progression for learners and includes a range of provision to ensure this (linked to ages, abilities and aptitudes).* (p. 12)

*The following **six areas of learning and experience** must be reflected in the adopted curriculum.*

- *Expressive Arts.*
- *Health and Well-being.*
- *Humanities.*
- *Languages, Literacy and Communication.*

- *Mathematics and Numeracy.*
- *Science and Technology.*

*The Welsh Ministers will be required to issue a code setting out the **statements of what matters**. All the elements set out in the statements of what matters code must be covered in each school and funded non-maintained settings' curriculum.*

*The following will be **mandatory curriculum elements**. (p. 12)*

- *Religion, values and ethics.*
- *Relationships and sexuality education (RSE).*
- *Welsh.*
- *English. (except that, headteachers and providers of funded non-maintained nursery education will have discretion over whether and to what extent they introduce English to learners up to the age of 7 for the purpose of supporting learners to gain fluency in Welsh.) (p. 13)*

*Literacy, numeracy and digital competence will be **mandatory cross-curricular skills** and must be embedded in any adopted curriculum. (p. 13)*

*The Welsh Ministers will be required to issue a **progression code** setting out the way in which progression must be reflected in an adopted curriculum. A school's curriculum will need to reflect the principles of progression set out in the code. (p. 13)*

*For **learners aged 14 to 16**, a school must design a curriculum that ... provides:*

- *choice for learners in the other learning they will undertake, but in such a way that ensures all learners still undertake some learning in each Area*
- *include other elements which the school requires all learners (or some groups of learners) to undertake. (p. 14)*

and Welsh Ministers will be able to add more specific requirements for this age group.

It is important to note that it is proposed that Welsh Ministers will be able later, by regulation, to alter the specified areas of learning and experience, statements of what matters, mandatory curriculum elements, mandatory cross-curricular skills, the progression code and the national arrangements for 14-16. This would give considerable scope to future Welsh Governments to change quite fundamentally the way the new curriculum operates without needing to amend the primary legislation.

The Curriculum for Wales Framework encourages schools to build their own vision for their learners within the context of the four purposes and the learning defined at a national level. It provides the space for practitioners to be creative and to develop meaningful learning through a range of experiences and contexts that meet the needs of their learners (p. 21)

Amongst the design principles recommended by Welsh Government (p. 21) are that each school should develop a curriculum to:

- *reflect the diversity of perspectives, values and identities which shape your locality and Wales and develop understanding of the wider world*
- *build in co-construction with learners, their families and the wider community*

This means that the principal opportunities to contribute to the school curriculum will, from 2022, be at local level. Involving the wider community in curriculum development will be a requirement of all schools. *Schools' curricula should also recognise and reflect the needs and contexts of the communities within and beyond the school. Practitioners should also seek to collaborate and draw on a range of experts and stakeholders who can contribute to learning, providing learners with distinct and enriching experiences. (p. 49)*

Therefore, local churches who wish to offer to contribute through schools to the educational, moral and spiritual development of the children of their area and to offer their buildings and expertise to enhance the curriculum will need to develop relationships directly with their local schools.

The curriculum places a particular emphasis on education being rooted in the *cynefin* (locality in the deepest sense) of the school itself. *Confidence in their identities helps learners appreciate the contribution they and others can make within their different communities and to develop and explore their responses to local, national and global matters. It also helps them to explore, make connections and develop understanding within a diverse society. This also recognises that Wales, like any other society, is not a uniform entity, but encompasses a range of values, perspectives, cultures and histories: that includes everybody who lives in Wales.* (p. 30) Churches will have a special contribution to make to help pupils understand the religious history and identity of their *cynefin*, and Welsh language congregations will be able to contribute especially to pupils' linguistic understanding. *All learners should have appropriate pathways for learning Welsh and English to enable them to develop the confidence to use both languages in everyday life. ...Access to both languages helps unlock Wales's rich and unique literatures, geography, democracy, history and culture. To have knowledge, experience and an understanding of these supports learners to be active and successful citizens in contemporary Wales.* (p. 30)

Cytûn has contributed to the development of all aspects of the Curriculum 2022 Framework. There are, however, two areas in which we have taken a particular interest and which have been of particular concern to many members of churches and other faith communities.

Relationships and sexuality education will become mandatory for all pupils. Cytûn has been invited to be part of the Faith/BME Involvement Group which will be a sounding board for those developing the detailed national level guidance that is proposed for schools. This area of the curriculum will be subject to much greater specification than other areas, rather than being largely locally determined.

Religious education will be renamed **Religion, values and ethics** and will become mandatory for all pupils as part of the **Humanities Area of Learning and Experience**. *It is important that learners have opportunities to discuss and explore their personal perspectives on religious and non-religious worldviews, ethical challenges and social inclusion issues.* (p. 99)

The 'What matters' statements for Humanities are as follows (pp 100-102):

- *Enquiry, exploration and investigation inspire curiosity about the world, its past, present and future.*
- *Events and human experiences are complex, and are perceived, interpreted*
- *Our natural world is diverse and dynamic, influenced by processes and human actions.*
- *Human societies are complex and diverse, and shaped by human actions and beliefs.*
- *Informed, self-aware citizens engage with the challenges and opportunities that face humanity, and are able to take considered and ethical action.*

In this Area of Learning and Experience, as in all others, each 'What matters' statement is linked to a series of progression steps, corresponding very roughly to average expected attainment at ages 5, 8, 11, 14 and 16. To give an example drawn from the third 'What Matters' above (Our natural world is diverse and dynamic...) (p. 108):

PS 1: *I can recognise why places are important to me.*

PS 2: *I can describe how places, spaces, environments and landscapes are important to different people and for different reasons.*

PS 3: *I can describe and give simple explanations on how and why some places, spaces, environments and landscapes are especially important to different people and for different reasons.*

PS 4: *I can understand and explain how significant places, spaces environments and landforms in the natural world are associated with economic, historical, political, and religious and non-religious beliefs and practices.*

PS 5: *I can evaluate the extent to which economic, social, political, cultural, religious and non-religious beliefs, practices and actions have led to changes to the natural world.*

The specific guidance for Religion, values and ethics says:

School curriculum design should:

- *develop an understanding of the discipline and its value*
- *provide rich contexts for learners to be curious, to explore ultimate questions, and to search for an understanding of the human condition, as well as providing opportunities for learners to reflect, and to experience awe and wonder, in a range of meaningful real-world contexts*
- *develop rich contexts for enquiry into the concepts of religion, worldview, secularity, spirituality, life stance, identity and culture to develop learners' well-rounded understanding of religious and non-religious worldviews*
- *provide rich contexts for engaging with concepts of belief, faith, truth, purpose, meaning, knowledge, sources of authority, self, origin, life, death and Ultimate Reality which enables learners to develop an understanding of personal and institutional worldviews about the nature of life and the world around them*
- *develop rich contexts for exploring the concepts of identity, belonging, relationships, community, cynefin, diversity, pluralism and interconnectedness which can enable learners to gain a sense of self and develop spirituality*
- *explore the concepts of equality, sustainability, tolerance, freedom, prejudice, discrimination, extremism, good and evil which can give learners an insight into the challenges and opportunities that face societies*
- *reflect the concepts and contexts of religiosity, practice, ritual, tradition, worship, sacredness, symbolism and celebration to develop learners' understanding of lived religion and belief*
- *provide rich contexts for exploring the concepts of ethics, morality, justice, responsibilities, authority, humanity, rights, values and social action*
- *develop an understanding of lived religion and belief through the exploration of the key concepts. (p. 121)*

Despite the reference here to “school curriculum design”, Cytûn has received reassurance from Welsh Government that the role of county Standing Advisory Councils for RE and Agreed Syllabus Conferences will remain as part of the new curriculum. Welsh Government will consult on new Supporting Framework Guidance for Religion, values and ethics in the spring.

The documentation also includes guidance on using the curriculum framework with pupils with Additional Learning Needs, in Pupil Referral Units, in non-maintained nursery settings, in home schooling, and other circumstances.

I would urge all member churches and organisations of Cytûn to begin now to consider how they wish to encourage local congregations and branches to engage with their local schools, and to offer guidance on how they might respond to approaches from local schools, as we have much to offer to enrich this new curriculum in pupils' *cynefin*.

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