



Cytûn – Churches together in Wales

Briefing on the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill 2020 and the Schools Curriculum for Wales 2022

On 6 July 2020, Welsh Government published the [Curriculum and Assessment \(Wales\) Bill](#), together with a suite of [background documents](#). The Bill is intended to provide the legal underpinning for the new [Curriculum for Wales](#), published in January 2020 for introduction in schools from September 2022. The Government is still currently intending that introduction begin in 2022, although in [evidence to a Senedd Committee](#) on July 14, the Education Minister, Kirsty Williams MS, indicated that she has not ruled out a delay due to the disruption caused by Covid-19.

The Children, Young People and Education Committee of the Senedd (Welsh Parliament) is currently scrutinising the Bill, and will compile a report offering their comments and possible amendments to the Bill by December 4 2020. The Committee is [inviting written submissions](#) from the public until **September 29 2020**. The Committee has also published a [survey for children and young people](#). Responses to the survey are required by September 13.

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/BAME 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 64 pages of the Bill and 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 and page references are quoted directly from the document [Curriculum for Wales guidance](#). The Senedd Research Service has published a very useful [briefing paper](#) about the Bill, and readers interested in the legal details are encouraged to turn to that briefing.

Developing a local curriculum for each school

The Curriculum 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). The guidance will be updated if the Senedd amends the Bill. This paper is based on the Bill as introduced in July 2020.

The shape of the curriculum

The Bill specifies 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.[In this context, “adopt” means “draw up an adopt”]. 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.

The Bill gives Welsh Ministers the power to alter, by regulation, 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*

Opportunities for local churches and Christian organisations

This pattern of each local school developing its own curriculum to be introduced (on the current timetable) from September 2022, means that the principal opportunities to contribute to the school curriculum will 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 today's religious identities in 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).

This said, all local schools will also be looking also for resources and materials from beyond their local area, especially in nurturing pupils' understanding of national and global matters and their ability to respond to them. There are opportunities, therefore, for national and international organisations to develop appropriate materials for schools to help them with this work – either by offering resources in advance to help them draw up their curriculum, and/or by responding to the requirements of schools once their curriculum content is known.

Particular subjects of special interest to churches

Cytûn has contributed to the development of all aspects of the Curriculum 2022 Framework and Christians will be committed to the development of the whole curriculum. 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 as part of the [Health and Well-Being](#) Area of Learning and Experience. Clause 24(2) of the Bill requires that the provision in this subject *must be developmentally appropriate for pupils*. Cytûn is part of the Faith/BAME Involvement Group which is a sounding board for those developing the detailed national level guidance for schools which will be published in due course. This part 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).*

The Bill was published prior to the conclusion of a consultation period on the exact pattern of compiling and approving individual schools' syllabi for Religion, Values and Ethics. Welsh Government has promised that the conclusions of the consultation will feed into amendments to the Bill. The Senedd Committee has already written to the Education Minister asking a number of specific questions about this matter and she has replied. This correspondence, along with other documents relating to the Bill, can be seen [here](#).

The process currently contained in Schedules 1 and 2 of the Bill regarding the drawing up of schools' curricula for Religion, Values and Ethics is as follows:

1. Welsh Government will publish **statutory guidance for local authorities regarding the agreed syllabuses** for Religion, Values and Ethics.
2. Each local authority must convene an **agreed syllabus conference** to draw up the agreed syllabus with regard to Religion, Values and Ethics for the maintained schools in its area. The Bill changes the composition of Agreed Syllabus Conferences to include four committees (each of which has a single vote, cast as a block):
 - A committee representing the religious denominations of the area, as determined by the local authority;
 - A new committee representing "such non-religious philosophical convictions ... as, in the opinion of the authority, ought to be represented";
 - A committee representing the Local Education Authority;
 - A committee of representatives of teachers' organisations.

The four committees must be unanimous for a syllabus to be adopted; if they are unable to agree, Welsh Government *shall appoint a body of persons appearing to the Welsh Ministers to possess relevant experience to prepare a syllabus of Religion, Values and Ethics* (Schedule 2 para 26(9)).

The agreed syllabus must:

(a) reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain, and (b) also reflect the fact that a range of non-religious philosophical convictions are held in Great Britain.

3. Schools will then draw up their own syllabus/syllabi, as follows:

Community schools and foundation and voluntary schools without a religious character:

These schools will design their curriculum for Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) having regard to the locally agreed syllabus (rather than teaching in accordance with the agreed syllabus for Religious Education, as at present).

Foundation and voluntary controlled schools which have a religious character (VC schools):

These schools will need to make provision for denominational RVE and also RVE having regard to the agreed syllabus. The default arrangement for these schools will be for learners to receive RVE designed having regard to the agreed syllabus, but RVE that accords with the school's trust deed or faith tenets (denominational RVE) must be provided where a parent requests this. (This is a change from the current situation, where a VC school needs only to consider a request for denominational provision).

Voluntary aided schools which have a religious character (VA Schools): These schools will need to make provision for denominational RVE and also RVE that accords with the agreed syllabus. The default arrangement for these schools will be for learners to receive RVE that accords with the trust deeds or faith tenets of the school (denominational RVE). However, if a parent requests RVE that accords with the agreed syllabus, it must be provided. Note that in the case of a VA school, the provision must accord with the agreed syllabus, rather than be designed having regard to the agreed syllabus. (This is a change from the current situation, where a VA school need only consider a request for provision that accords with the agreed syllabus). These will be the only schools required to teach RVE that accords with the locally agreed syllabus.

These changes in the position of VA schools with regard to Religion, Values and Ethics has caused considerable concern on the part of the [Catholic Church](#) and the Church in Wales – the only two religious bodies which currently provide schools of this kind in Wales.

Assessment

Although the word 'Assessment' appears in the title of the Bill, there are few references to the subject within it. [Draft guidance for assessment](#) was published in January 2020.

Section 58 of the Bill gives power to Welsh Ministers to make regulations regarding designing, implementing, evaluating, reviewing and providing information regarding assessment arrangements. These regulations would be made under the Senedd's negative procedure for subordinate legislation – that is, the Senedd would need specifically to vote against them for their not to be agreed, and there would be no mechanism for amending them on the floor of the Senedd. It is likely that the events of August 2020 regarding the assessment of pupils aged 16-18 years old will raise questions regarding the lack of attention to this matter on the face of the Bill and the lack of a role for the Senedd in future assessment arrangements.

Other matters

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.

Conclusion

I would urge all member churches and organisations of Cytûn to consider responding to the [Senedd Committee consultation](#) to express their views. More importantly, however, is that this is the time for our members to begin 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*.

Gethin Rhys 24.08.2020

Cytûn: Eglwysi ynghyd yng Nghymru | Cytûn: Churches together in Wales

Registered office: Hastings House, Fitzalan Court, Cardiff CF24 0BL

Working at home. Mudol/Mobile: +44 (0)7889 858062

Mae Cytûn yn gwmni cofrestredig yng Nghymru a Lloegr | Rhif: 05853982 | Enw cofrestredig: "Cytûn: Eglwysi Ynghyd yng Nghymru/Churches Together in Wales Limited" | Mae Cytûn yn elusen gofrestrdig | Rhif: 1117071 |

Cytûn is a registered company in England and Wales | Number: 05853982 | Registered name: "Cytûn: Eglwysi Ynghyd yng Nghymru/Churches Together in Wales Limited" | Cytûn is a registered charity | Number: 1117071