

Concerns over the future of Religious Education in Wales

Welsh Religious Education shake-up 'may appal some'

By Max Evans Reporter, BBC Wales News 5 August 2015

Proposals to "rename" Religious Education in Wales have raised concerns from faith groups.

Education and Skills Minister Huw Lewis told the Senedd he would support plans to rebrand the subject as "religion, philosophy and ethics" last month.

The Welsh government said a new curriculum could help "develop respect and understanding for other cultures".

But what difference would the potential shake-up make to how Religious Education (RE) is taught in schools?

The government is **looking at a revamp** of the curriculum for all subjects, in line with recommendations made by **Professor Graham Donaldson in his Successful Futures report**.

Mr Lewis said the potential changes to RE could encourage pupils to also consider "ethics and citizenship" and "what it means to be a citizen of a free country".

The move has been welcomed by the Humanist Society, which represents non-religious people. But faith groups have criticised the proposal with Rhainallt Thomas, former head of the National Religious Education Centre, claiming there will be a campaign against it.

Former Cardiff head teacher and Methodist lay preacher, David Kitchen, told BBC Radio Wales: "Some people will be appalled because they will see it as dilution".

However, he said the repositioning of RE could be "interesting", pointing to the clear link between the big questions in philosophy and religion.

"The problem will be there is an enormous territory," he added. "You could have something that's woolly and flaccid and, frankly, a bit dull."

Challenge

The education minister said schools needed to "rise to the challenge" of improving community cohesion, when outlining his vision to the Senedd in mid July.

In response to a question about tackling extremism, Mr Lewis said: "My proposal...my contention would be that we rename the RE curriculum and transform it into the religion, philosophy and ethics element of the curriculum".

He said there would be an "an explicit commitment to allowing children to ponder ideas around ethics and citizenship and what it means to be a citizen of a free country".

But Saleem Kidwai, secretary general of the Muslim Council of Wales, said only effective RE teaching could create a "better understanding" of the "similarities and values" of different faiths.

He said positioning RE alongside the other suggested subjects would not be helpful.

"Ethics and philosophy are part of my religion. So, if religion is taught properly then it will encompass all of those things," he added.

"The same goes for the Jewish and Christian community and other faith communities."

The teaching of RE is currently a statutory curriculum requirement for pupils from reception onwards, as part of humanities. It would remain so under the recommendations.

The Welsh government has invited schools to apply to become "pioneer" institutions, which will help to shape the "detailed design and the development of the new inclusive curriculum" across all subjects.

"These schools will draw in experts to help them shape all aspects of the new curriculum, including statutory Religious Education, philosophy and ethics within the humanities area of learning and experience," a spokesman said.

It is expected the new curriculum will be in place in seven to eight years.

Welsh Government wishes to replace 'Religious Education' subject in schools with 'Religion, Philosophy and Ethics' British Humanist Association August 3rd, 2015

Taking questions in the Senedd, the Welsh Minister for Education and Skills, Huw Lewis, has announced that he wants to see a transformation of the way in which Religious Education is taught in Wales. Under the new proposals, and in a significant break from the current system, the subject would be renamed and incorporated into a new 'Religion, Philosophy and Ethics' syllabus. The British Humanist Association (BHA), who called for a broadening of the subject in its response to the Welsh curriculum review last year, has welcomed the announcement and looks forward to seeing further details as they are released.

In his independent review of the Welsh curriculum published earlier this year, Professor Graham Donaldson claimed that producing 'ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world' should be one of the curriculum's primary purposes, an assertion which the Education Minister echoed in his comments in the Senedd.

Responding to a question on the need to tackle extremism in schools, the Education Minister stated that schools in Wales needed to 'rise to the challenge of community cohesion', and the transformation of Religious Education (RE) was an important means of achieving this. Outlining his proposals, Mr Lewis stated that he wants to 'rename the RE curriculum and transform it into a religion, philosophy and ethics element of the curriculum', which would contain 'an explicit commitment to allow children to ponder ideas around ethics and citizenship and what it means to be a citizen of a free country'.

Whilst further details are yet to be released, the proposed change represents a significant shift in the way RE is administered in Wales, and could signal a move towards the more thematic and values-led approach that the BHA has long campaigned for.

Reacting to the news, Chair of the Wales Humanists Ben Morris, said 'Whilst it's too early to tell what exactly a "Religion, Philosophy and Ethics" subject would look like, we certainly welcome the Welsh Government's intent. Religious education that's inclusive and focuses on shared values and common answers to difficult moral questions would be a powerful driver of community cohesion in Wales, so we hope the Government follows through on its intent in whatever changes it chooses to introduce.'

BHA Education Campaigner Jay Harman added, 'In our response to Professor Donaldson's review of the curriculum earlier this year, we wrote that "young people have the right to form their own opinions about the bigger questions in life and so should receive impartial education about religious and non-religious beliefs". Philosophy and ethics have long been neglected in schools, and it's tremendously encouraging to know that the Welsh Government is of exactly the same opinion. We're glad that they have chosen to take these comments on board.'

'With so little detail available, we must avoid too much speculation about what these changes may mean in practical terms. What we don't want to see, of course, is any kind of dilution in how thoroughly children are taught about the beliefs, religious or otherwise, of others, since such education plays a vital role in contributing to community cohesion and to literary, historical, and cultural education. But there is no indication that this will be the case, and the indication that the changes will further encourage pupils to personally grapple with important ethical and philosophical issues can only be welcomed.'

Wales is poised to scrap Religious Education lessons in its schools, it has been revealed. *Independent*

Instead, the Welsh Government's Minister for Education and Skills Huw Lewis, argued it should be renamed to focus on the teaching of "religion, philosophy and ethics".

Mr Lewis told Senedd, the Welsh Parliament, that he wanted to see a transformation of the current religious education curriculum to help combat extremism.

"My contention would be that we rename the RE curriculum and transform it into the religion, philosophy and ethics element of the curriculum - where there is an explicit commitment to allowing children to ponder ideas around ethics and citizenship and what it means to be a citizen of a free country," he added.

It follows a Government commissioned review of the curriculum in Welsh schools by Professor Graham Donaldson, a former chief inspector of schools in the principality, who urged that pupils in Welsh schools should be "ethical, informed citizens of the world".

It also comes after a major report on the English education system - compiled jointly by former Education Secretary Charles Clarke and religious education experts Professor Linda Woodhead from Lancaster University - urged a radical overhaul of religious education in English schools.

The report recommended that religious instruction should be banned from schools and become the preserve of Sunday schools, madrassas and the home - and that legislation compelling schools to hold a daily act of "predominantly Christian" worship should be scrapped.

Instead, the duo argue that the emphasis should shift away from merely religious education with pupils being taught religious and moral education as well.

The move in Wales emerges from a desire to combat extremism and radicalisation in schools with Mr Lewis arguing that they must "rise to the challenge of community cohesion" through reforming religious education.

The Welsh move has been welcomed by Accord, the campaigning group which aims to end religious discrimination in schools. Rabbi Dr Jonathan Romain, its chairman, said: "This is a welcome development. Challenging young minds to explore ethical options is an important educational role.

"The Minister should not stop there, though, but ensure that all state schools pursue a broad RE syllabus and that faith schools in particular should ensure their pupils are informed about a broad range of religions and beliefs in society at large, not just their own one."

The British Humanist Association also gave a guarded welcome to the Minister's statement. BHA education campaigner Jay Harman said: "Philosophy and ethics have long been neglected in schools and it's tremendously encouraging to know that the Welsh Government is of the same opinion.

"With so little detail available, we must avoid too much speculation about what these changes may mean in practical terms. What we don't want to see, of course, is any kind of dilution in how thoroughly children are taught about the beliefs - religious or otherwise - of others since such

education plays a vital role in contributing to community cohesion and to literary, historical and cultural education.”

RE will be renamed, with a minister saying there should be a commitment to allowing children to consider ideas around ethics and citizenship. *BBC online*

Religious education is set for a revamp in Wales in a bid to help tackle extremism.

Education Minister Huw Lewis says religious education will be renamed “religion, philosophy and ethics”, with an explicit commitment to allow children to consider ideas around ethics, citizenship and what it means to be a citizen of a free country.

Mr Lewis said young people need space and time within the school curriculum to consider the issues of faith and citizenship – and the meaning of freedom.

It follows a review of the curriculum in Welsh schools by Professor Graham Donaldson, a former chief inspector of schools, who urged pupils to be “ethical, informed citizens of the world”.

“We need to transform our current religious education curriculum,” said Mr Lewis.

“My contention would be that we rename the RE curriculum and transform it into the religion, philosophy and ethics element of the curriculum, where there is an explicit commitment to allowing children to ponder ideas around ethics and citizenship and what it means to be a citizen of a free country.

“I think to be reactive is not enough. We really need to allow young people the space and the time, within the school curriculum, to consider fundamental issues of faith and of citizenship and of the meaning of freedom.

“That is why, I think, we do need to consider change, through Donaldson, in the current religious education curriculum.”

'Dilute religious education'

Mr Lewis made the comments in the Assembly earlier this year. Darren Millar, Tory AM for Clwyd West and the chairman of the Assembly’s Cross Party Group on Faith, said he was “alarmed” to learn of the plans.

He said: “I am concerned that these proposals are likely to result in a much diluted religious education curriculum which fails to recognise the increasingly important contribution RE makes to addressing challenges around citizenship, extremism and intolerance in 21st century society in Wales.”

Plaid Cymru AM Simon Thomas said: “We know that pupils educated through the system in Wales have ended up radicalised and as terrorists with ISIS.HS

“I am pleased the Minister has responded to me with some urgency, but we cannot wait for the Donaldson curriculum reforms and we must support teachers now to recognise and be confident in dealing with the signs of radicalisation and extremism among pupils”.

A spokesperson for the Welsh Government said: “On June 30, the Minister for Education and Skills announced his support for the development of a new curriculum by accepting, in full, the recommendations contained within the Successful Futures report by Professor Graham Donaldson.

“In his report Professor Donaldson recognised the integral role that religious education plays in enabling learners to develop respect and understanding for other cultures by recommending it

remain a statutory curriculum requirement from reception onwards as part of the humanities area of learning and experience.

“The Welsh Government has invited consortia to work with their schools across Wales – primary, secondary and special – to apply to be Pioneer Schools, leading and shaping the detailed design and the development of the new inclusive curriculum for Wales.

“The Minister will be looking to them, along with Welsh Government to draw in experts to work with them to shape all aspects of the new curriculum, including statutory religious education, philosophy and ethics within the humanities area of learning and experience.

“These Pioneer Schools will be identified over the summer and they will come together during the autumn to agree their programme of work.”

Gethin Rhys – Swyddog Polisi CYTUN / CYTUN Policy Officer

Digwyddais fod yn y Cynulliad heddiw pan gyhoeddodd Huw Lewis y bydd Addysg Grefyddol yn y Cwricwlwm Cenedlaethol yn cael ei "drawsffurfio" i fod yn Grefydd, Athroniaeth a Moeseg. Fe wnaed y cyhoeddiad ar ganol amser cwestiynau ac nid oes manylion pellach ar gael hyd yma. Rwy wedi ysgrifennu heno at Huw Lewis yn gofyn am gael gwybod mwy.

Gallwch weld y cyhoeddiad yma - <http://www.senedd.tv/Meeting/Archive/e6e9b0f9-1230-424b-b6db-cdcb67af7da5?autostart=True> trowch i 01:08:55 am ryw funud

Mae'n werth gwyllo os dim ond i weld Darren Millar, sy'n eistedd y tu ol i Huw Lewis wrth iddo gyhoeddi. Mae ei wyneb yn bictiwr!

I happened to be in the Assembly today, and while I was there Huw Lewis announced that RE in the National Curriculum is to be "transformed" into Religion, Philosophy and Ethics. This announcement was made in the middle of question time and there are no further details currently available. I have written tonight to Huw Lewis asking to know more.

You can see the announcement here - <http://www.senedd.tv/Meeting/Archive/99fa0969-0150-4a5b-ad13-386f590b5fb8?autostart=True> at 01:08:55 for about 1 minute

It's worth watching if only to see Darren Millar, sitting behind Huw Lewis as he announces this. His face is a picture!

Clwyd West AM Darren Millar, Chair of the Assembly's Cross Party Group on Faith

Clwyd West AM Darren Millar is urging the Welsh Government to scrap its plans to abolish Religious Education as a stand alone subject in schools.

During questions in the Senedd earlier this month, the Education Minister announced the abolition of Religious Education as a stand alone subject and the development of a wider subject curriculum which will now include philosophy and ethics.

Darren, who is also Chair of the Assembly's Cross Party Group on Faith, said:

“I was alarmed to learn of plans by the Welsh Education Minister to change the way in which Religious Education will be delivered as part of the National Curriculum in Wales.

“I am concerned that these proposals are likely to result in a much diluted religious education curriculum which fails to recognise the increasingly important contribution which RE makes to addressing challenges around citizenship, extremism and intolerance in 21st century society in Wales.”

In response to the announcement Darren sought to determine what engagement there had been with faith communities in relation to the proposals.

He added:

“It is extremely disappointing that the Welsh Government has failed to engage or consult with faith communities about the proposed changes to the RE curriculum. It is important that such stakeholders have a say when changes like these are proposed.

“I urge the Minister to rethink these plans, go back to the drawing board and listen carefully to the views of faith groups before imposing any changes on what is an increasingly popular and important part of the national curriculum.”

Jim Stewart

Public Affairs and Advocacy Officer / Swyddfa Materion Cyhoeddus ac Eiriolaeth

Huw Lewis AM, Welsh Government Minister for Education and Skills, made a sudden announcement during questions in the Senedd on 15 July 2015 that he would be radically changing the way in which Religious Education will be delivered in Wales as part of the National Curriculum.

RE will be abolished as a stand-alone subject and will instead develop into a wider RE curriculum that will include philosophy and ethics.

There had been no consultation with faith groups prior to this announcement and there are real concerns that the plans, once implemented, will result in a much diluted RE curriculum which fails to recognise the increasingly important contribution that RE makes in addressing issues (e.g. citizenship, intolerance, extremism) in 21st century Wales.

As people of faith (and others who support the positive contribution of faith) we also need to guard against the erosion of faith in public life in principle.

In the first instance, please write to the Minister asking for consultation with faith groups on this issue, highlighting the increasing importance and relevance of RE as a stand-alone subject. Our hope is that he will abandon his plans and that RE will continue to be a stand-alone subject as part of the National Curriculum.

Yn dilyn erthygl eang ei gorwelion ar faterion Addysg Grefyddol ac Addysg Gristnogol gan Carys Moseley (yn rhifyn 4ydd 0 Fedi o'r 4 *Tudalen*), hoffwn fanteisio ar y cyfle i ganolbwyntio yn fyr yma ar y drafodaeth benodol y dyddiau hyn ar ddyfodol Addysg Grefyddol yn ein hysgolion.

Does dim dwywaith i ddatganiad Huw Lewis, Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau L1ywodraeth Cymru, dros yr haf gynhyrfu'r dyfroedd pan ddywedodd yn y Senedd yr hoffai newid teitl pwnc Addysg Grefyddol i 'Grefydd, Athroniaeth a Moeseg', Beth yn union mae hyn yn ei olygu?

Llai o amser i addysgu am grefyddau a'r grefydd Gristnogol yn benodol? Agenda mwy seciwlar yn ein hysgolion? Pa athroniaeth a moeseg fydd yn cael ei addysgu a chan bwy? **Dileu CYSAGau sirol** os bydd 'Ysgolion Arloesi' yn penderfynu'r cwricwlwm?

Mae Huw Lewis wedi derbyn yn llawn argymhellion yr adroddiad *Dyfodol Llwyddiannus* gan yr Athro Graham Donaldson. Mae'r adroddiad hwn yn un cadarnhaol a phellgyrhaeddol ac am sicrhau agenda heriol a chyffrous i'r sefydliad addysg yng Nghymru yn ystod y blynyddoedd nesaf. Darllenais gyda chryn foddhad am y rôl gadarnhaol y gall Addysg Grefyddol ei chynnig i'r cwricwlwm ysgol o ran sicrhau bod disgyblion yn datblygu'n wybodus am ddadleuon crefyddol a moesol mewn cymdeithas a'r cyfraniad y gall y pwnc hwn ei gynnig i hyrwyddo cydlyniad cymunedol. Braff yw nodi'r datganiadau hyn am werth Addysg Grefyddol fel pwnc. Ond yn dilyn ei ddatganiad, mae dehongliad Huw Lewis o gynnwys Addysg Grefyddol yn codi consyrn gwirioneddol.

Mewn ymateb i lythyr a anfonais at Huw Lewis yn dilyn ei ddatganiad, braff oedd darllen fod Mr Lewis, *'yn cydnabod y rôl hanfodol sydd gan Addysg Grefyddol i'w chwarae wrth alluogi dysgwyr i feithrin parch a dealltwriaeth at ddiwy/liannau eraill ac yn 'argymell y dylai barhau'n un o'r gofynion cwricwlaidd statudol o'r dosbarth derbyn ymlaen yn rhan o'r Maes Dysgu a Phrofiad Dyniaethau'*. Hefyd, *'bydd gan grwpiau ffydd, enwadol a grwpiau eraill diddordebau ehangach swyddogaeth bwysig yn rhan o bartneriaeth Cymru gyfan a fydd yn cefnogi ac yn sail i'r broses o gynllunio a datblygu y cwricwlwm newydd*. Braff gweld felly y bydd rôl hanfodol gan randdeiliaid wrth i'r broses hon fynd rhagddi.

Wedi dweud hyn, mae ein consarn ynghylch y cynllunio manwl y bydd angen ei wneud o hyn ymlaen a bydd cael atebion j'r cwestiynau a nodwyd uchod yn sylfaenol bwysig er mwyn i ni ddeall bwriadau Huw Lewis ar gyfer y pwnc.

I'r perwyl hwn, anfonais aillythyr ate yn ddiweddar yn gofyn am atebion i'r cwestiynau hyn ac edrychaf ymlaen at dderbyn ei atebion.

Yn y cyfamser, rwy'n deall y bydd swyddogion CYSAGau Cymru yn cyfarfod Huw Lewis ar ddiweddd mis Medi i drafod lie Addysg Grefyddol yn y cwricwlwm newydd. Rydym ar ddeall hefyd fod Huw Lewis am fanylu ar ei syniadau a'i fwriadau yn ei ddatganiad yn yr hydref, Gyda hyn mewn golwg **mae'n bwysig fod pob CYSAG sirol ac aelodau'r Cynghorau hynny** ledled Cymru yn ogystal ag aelodau'r enwad yn trafod ac yn dilyn yn fanwl y datblygiadau hyn ac yn ymateb yn ofalus ac yn ddiffuant yn ôl y gofyn.

Vaughan Salisbury,
Swyddog Addysg, Adran Eglwys a Chymdeithas, EBC.