

Major reform of teaching on religion and belief passes in Wales

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Legislation which will substantially reform the teaching of religion and belief, including by requiring coverage of secularism as a key concept, has passed its final parliamentary vote in Wales.

The Senedd has today voted to pass a bill which provides the legal framework to introduce a new skills-based curriculum in all schools in Wales.

The National Secular Society, which has strongly [lobbied ministers in Wales over curricular reform](#), has welcomed some significant changes introduced by the bill.

These include:

- Replacing religious education (RE) with religion, values and ethics (RVE), a new subject which will fit in a humanities section of the curriculum.
- Introducing statutory relationships and sexuality education (RSE) in all schools, under a health section of the curriculum.
- Explicitly requiring RVE to cover secularism as a key concept and include non-religious worldviews alongside major religions.
- Requiring faith schools to provide families with the option of RVE according to the locally agreed syllabus, which is more pluralistic than the faith-based alternative.

Ongoing NSS concerns

But the NSS also warned that the bill represented a missed opportunity in other regards, noting that:

- Some faith schools will continue to be able to teach faith-based RVE, meaning they are likely to face practical difficulties in running two syllabuses and undervalue the locally agreed option.
- Ending parents' right to withdraw children from RVE may lead to legal challenges where the subject is insufficiently pluralistic and objective.
- The RVE syllabus will continue to be determined by local bodies, known as SACREs or ASCs, where representatives of faith and belief groups hold significant influence.
- Faith schools will continue to teach RSE from a faith-based perspective. NSS research has shown this has led to inaccurate, shame-based or incomplete coverage of issues deemed 'controversial' by some religious groups.
- The curriculum reform does not address the legal requirement on all schools in Wales to hold a daily act of broadly Christian collective worship, despite [recommendations](#) from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

NSS comment

NSS head of education Alastair Lichten said: "This landmark piece of legislation will give pupils across Wales access to a more objective way of learning about religion and belief.

"But government concessions will mean religious groups' interests continue to enjoy a privileged input into this subject area – and to shape the way it's taught in many faith schools.

"All children should be entitled to an impartial and pluralistic education on religion and belief. Policy makers across the UK should work to make this a reality.

"We also welcome the Welsh government's move to make relationships and sexuality education statutory. This represents a significant step forward for children's rights."

Notes

- Ministers will consult on and agree statutory guidance by September 2021 to allow the new curriculum to come into effect in September 2022.
- Religious interest groups unsuccessfully lobbied against several of the changes in the bill, including the inclusion of secularism and non-religious worldviews on the curriculum.
- The NSS [campaigns for](#) all children to have an entitlement to a pluralistic and objective education on religion and belief.

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