



The Vegan Society response to Curriculum for Wales Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) guidance

Question 1 – How well does the guidance explain the scope of RVE and its context within the Humanities Area ?

Not well at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not well	<input type="checkbox"/>	Acceptable	<input type="checkbox"/>	Well	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Very well
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There is significant scope for improvement. The human rights framework requires a plural, critical and objective teaching and learning environment and looks to protections afforded under Article 9, (the right to freedom of thought, belief, and religion) of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

But the Guidance should also reference the case law developing under the Equality Act 2010. RVE must also be taught in accordance with the principles of Article 18 (freedom of thought, conscience, or religion) of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

The Human Rights Committee states, the right to freedom of thought, conscience, or religion ‘is far-reaching and profound; it encompasses freedom of thought on all matters, personal conviction and the commitment to religion or belief’ (General Comment 22). The ECHR is maintained in the light of the ICCPR. The principles for deciding case law related to the protected characteristic ‘religion or belief’ under the Equality Act 2010 look to Article 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights. Those delivering RVE must be mindful of the many non-religious philosophical beliefs which can, or have already been ruled to, meet the Grainger criteria (codified in the Equality Act) as protected beliefs.

The RVE guidance also says that "Understanding the concept of religion will enable learners to build a well-rounded understanding of religion, and the significance of the different ways that it is defined." This includes e.g. religious motivation for veganism, which may not include any reference to any ‘supreme being’.

Question 2 – Is the guidance, as a whole, clear and helpful for you in your role?

Very unclear	<input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly unclear	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither clear nor unclear	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Slightly clear	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very clear	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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There are some significant points which lack clarity and consistency, including the basis of what constitutes a protected form of belief in human rights and equality law.

The use of ‘living things’ in the Guide is contradictory to the desired learning outcomes. Non-human animals are living, sentient beings – not ‘things’. By properly including and understanding the protected philosophical belief of veganism in planning and delivery of the RVE curriculum, everyone involved will come to appreciate this vital distinction.

Question 3 – Does the guidance offer relevant information to support practitioners when designing their school curriculum for RVE?

Not relevant at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly relevant	<input type="checkbox"/>	Moderately relevant	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Relevant	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very relevant	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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The Guidance does not ground the importance of RVE in the origin of the primacy of the human right to freedom of religion or belief. The principle entrenched in the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) that Article 18 protects ‘theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief.’

It could help practitioners to understand the view of the Human Rights Committee that ‘[t]he terms “belief” and “religion” are to be broadly construed. Article 18 is not limited in its application to traditional religions or to religions and beliefs with institutional characteristics or practices analogous to those of traditional religions. The Committee therefore views with concern any tendency to discriminate against any religion or belief for any reason, including the fact that they are newly established...’

These include relevant foundational principles are needed in the Guidance to support practitioners when designing their school curriculum for RVE.

Question 4 – Thinking about each section of the guidance, do you feel there are:

- any gaps in information? If so, what should be added?
- any sections that are particularly helpful? If so, in what way are they helpful and to whom?

1. The Introduction:

The Introduction could be more explicit that the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) highlights that the teaching and learning environment should be critical, plural and objective. Also, it should be explicit that under A2P1 “the state shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching is in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions”.

2. Law:

The meaning of non-religious philosophical convictions should be that of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). The five-stage test applied under British equality law (Grainger) is drawn from the case law of the ECtHR. Since the development of British equality law aligns with the liberal approach of the ECtHR it is important that this limitation to the meaning of ‘non-religious philosophical convictions’ is removed. Including the case outcomes under British equality law would support the development of a curriculum that ‘reflects the fact that a range of non-religious philosophical convictions are held in Wales’. However, it must be pointed out that to comply with A2P1, state respect for a critical and plural teaching and learning environment imposes a requirement to look more broadly to emerging secular positions as well. Not all those with potentially qualifying beliefs will be heard in court.

3. Purpose:

The Guidance contains various references to connections and relationships with the ‘natural world’. However, it does not adequately explain an important element of teaching RVE which is the need for citizens to deal with prejudice and oppression. We have an ethical create a more just and anti-oppressive society not only for human beings but for all living beings.



4. Spiritual development

In this section ‘connection to self in relation to others’ is distinct from ‘connection to the wider or natural world’. This section on spiritual development should consider self and otherness IN the context of the wider natural world to address the anthropocentric privilege inherent to some beliefs. This is important given that veganism is a protected as a non-religious philosophical belief. Our human spiritual development in relation specifically to non-human animals is very important for many young people & adults.

5. Curriculum development

This section refers to prejudice once and it is the only reference to prejudice in the entire guidance. Eradicating prejudice and oppression is a vital, fundamental value of RVE in education. Eliminating prejudice and oppression should feature in all sections of the Guidance.

Also, the Guidance needs to be explicit about the distinctions between individual prejudice and systemic oppression. If an individual is prejudiced against another individual, they can cause harm. However, if their prejudices are back up by systemic and institutional power, that harm can be greatly magnified. This is starkly illustrated by the systemic power which humans wield over non-human animals – especially those animals not granted the special designation of ‘pet or companion animal’, but relegated to the classes of ‘livestock, pests or wild animals’. Our current human supremacy towards non-human animals is killing young, and maiming, billions (sic) of non-human animals each year

This section of the Guidance does not ask practitioners to reflect on how their own learning, experience and beliefs impact on their delivery of RVE. The Guidance for teaching RVE inappropriately refers to ‘living things’ multiple times. In an example learning journey, the guide states that ‘[t]his journey is also about responsibilities and interconnectedness. At the early stages of their learning journey, learners begin to be aware of connections between their own lives and the lives of other people, the natural world and living things.’

In curriculum design, more appropriate vocabulary with which to discuss responsibility and interconnections would be ‘living beings’, ‘sentient beings’, and ‘other life forms’. This is particularly significant and important given the human concern for other forms of life, the protected status of veganism, the rights of parents to a teaching and learning environment that is respectful of their moral values, and the likelihood that vegan pupils will study RVE.

Question 5 – Does the guidance offer all practitioners sufficient support for their planning and teaching of RVE?

Insufficient	<input type="checkbox"/>	Somewhat insufficient	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither insufficient nor sufficient	<input type="checkbox"/>	Somewhat sufficient	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sufficient	<input type="checkbox"/>
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The Guidance does not explain that practitioners need to be self-reflexive and reflective in discharging their responsibility about RVE to young people. There is a need to acknowledge and dismantle unconscious, unintentional and inadvertent bias, and particularly, entrenched dominant opinions. This is critical to enable learners to identify opportunities where appropriate moral action is needed in their communities, Wales and the wider world.



Question 6 – Is additional support (e.g. professional learning and resources) needed to ensure the successful implementation of this guidance?

Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>
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A nuanced, accurate understanding of belief systems which we do not ourselves hold, profess or follow, requires extensive study with and guidance from the communities of those who do. For example, The Vegan Society, and Vegan Inclusive Education can provide such information about veganism.

Question 7 – This question is aimed at local authorities and Standing Advisory Councils for religious education (SACs).

Is the guidance a helpful document for developing agreed syllabus conferences?

N/A

Question 8 – We would like to know your views on the effects that the RVE guidance would have on the Welsh language, specifically on:

- i) opportunities for people to use Welsh
- ii) treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

Supporting comments

There are many belief systems where nuanced resources by practitioners of these beliefs are not yet available written in or translated into Welsh.

Question 9 – Please also explain how you believe the RVE guidance could be formulated or changed so as to have:

- i) positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language
- ii) no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

No comment

Question 10 – We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them.



We need to emphasise that valid, protected religious beliefs do not in fact have to include belief in or veneration of any supreme being, and the Guidance errs on this point (Section 2 RVE and legislation, 'Meaning of Religion', no page numbers given).

In 'Changes to the constitution of Agreed Syllabus Conference and SACREs', the Guidance clarifies that "The Act provides for the appointment of persons who represent holders of non-religious philosophical beliefs in the same way as they permit the appointment of persons who represent holders of religious beliefs."

Although this is at the discretion of Local Authorities, we argue that the significant rise in people professing, practicing or exploring veganism means that the Standing Advisory Councils for RVE (SACs) must include appropriately qualified vegan experts. The Vegan Society can advise on such persons. This is because the protected philosophical belief of veganism robustly challenges significant dominant beliefs within current Welsh society e.g. the property status of non-human animals. We look forward to seeing such provisions in due course: "Separate statutory guidance will be provided in respect of the constitution of SACREs (SACs)".

We note that "Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others."

The beliefs that humans have any right to hold as property non-human animals, or that non-human animals have no right to bodily autonomy or self-determination, are not protected beliefs. Veganism opposes these opinions, and argues that bodily autonomy, self-determination and allied rights should not be limited by species to human animals alone. This is in accordance with the widely held ethical belief, that it is wrong to cause harm – and in particular, suffering to sentient beings – unnecessarily. As humans do not need to use animals e.g. in farming for food, since sustainable, nutritious plant-based vegan diets are well understood, farming animals is definitively unnecessary harm. Therefore, we argue that for the protection of public health, morals and the protection of the rights and freedoms of non-human animals, it is important that veganism is included in every RVE syllabus.