

Dear Kirsty Williams, Cabinet Secretary for Education

Conwy and Denbighshire SACREs recently received a presentation from the Conwy and Denbighshire Lead Practitioner for Religious Studies. I am writing to share some of the members' points that were discussed as a result of presentation. The presentation consisted of an explanation as to the work of the Lead Practitioner, the points that were discussed by Religious Studies teachers in Conwy and Denbighshire and a list of their concerns.

Firstly we would thank Welsh Government for funding the Lead Practitioner programme. Members were pleased that it has enabled RE teachers to discuss, plan and share resources for the new WJEC specification that will be taught from this September. A conference in Llandudno brought Religious Studies teachers from across the GwE region and gave them an opportunity to discuss the new specification. It also provided an opportunity for teachers to share their concerns from across the region. Local groups made up of teachers from two local authorities have been able to plan Schemes of Work as well as create and share resources.

During the presentation it was brought to the members' attention that:

- The WJEC text book for the specification to be taught in September had not yet been published. There are a few schools in Conwy and Denbighshire that do not have a Religious Studies specialist and as such the need for a text book is paramount. The EDUCAS text book has been available for a year!
- The cost of the resources is more than many schools can afford. To provide enough text books for pupils to share one between two will cost a school over £700 (presuming that the school timetables 3 classes to be taught at the same time).
- Although the specification is for first teaching in September 2017, the Welsh version of the text book will not be ready until well into the academic year. SACRE members are concerned that:
  - o Teachers in Welsh medium schools are translating resources, taking up a large amount of time, time which could be spent planning and supporting our students to improve their standards.
  - o The late release of the Welsh language resources may contravene Welsh Government policy on the promotion of a bilingual Wales.
- Planning and preparation time as a result of year 11 leaving after their exams is an important time for Teachers to plan for the next academic year. The lack of the text book and support materials has hindered teachers preparing for the new specification.
- Many Religious Studies teachers in Conwy and Denbighshire report that the increase in content for the new specification will mean that pupils spend more time learning facts for the exam rather than adhering to many of the aspects that are laid out by the Agreed Syllabus including self-reflection and an understanding of the impact faith can have on individuals and communities.

Members of SACRE are concerned for the wellbeing of Conwy and Denbighshire Religious Studies teachers and the standards of Religious Studies achieved by pupils in Conwy and Denbighshire. In response to this letter please can you:

1. Inform SACRE as to why there has been an increase in the amount of content that will be taught in the same amount of time as the previous specification.
2. Reassure SACRE that the Lead Practitioner programme is supported financially to continue the valuable work started this year.
3. Place pressure on publishers of the Welsh language text book accompanying this specification to release it at the same time as the English version?
4. Provide schools with financial assistance so that they will be able to purchase enough text books once they are published.

Yours Sincerely

*Phil Lord*

On behalf of Conwy SACRE