

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE NEW CURRICULUM

THE PURPOSE OF THE GUIDANCE

The purpose of this guidance is **to support those with curriculum responsibility for RE** to use the non statutory National Curriculum Framework for RE (NCFRE) in designing their curriculum.

Effective curriculum design needs a vision about the overall shape and purpose of the project in order to construct a coherent and progressive pattern of learning. Once the design has been completed it can be used by teachers to develop more detailed planning in ways that fit in with **the statutory requirement in different contexts**

(http://www.reonline.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/RE_Review_Summary-Curriculum-Framework.pdf) such as the syllabus produced by local agreed syllabus conferences, dioceses and academy trusts.

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The RE curriculum is set locally, not nationally. Broadly speaking, it is set for community and voluntary controlled schools by local agreed syllabus conferences, advised by local SACREs, and by governing bodies in the case of academies, free schools and voluntary aided schools.

1. WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO ACHIEVE IN RE?

The **National Curriculum Framework for RE (NCFRE)**

(http://www.reonline.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/RE_Review_Summary-Curriculum-Framework.pdf) contained a statement of the purpose of study and general overviews or summaries for the subject, for pupils aged 4-19. The summaries and key stage 'requirements'¹ provide the broad starting point for this guidance on curriculum design.

The NCFRE does not include detailed guidance about the content of the RE curriculum. What follows provides guidance about possible ways of identifying the content for each key stage and exemplifying ways in which this content might be translated into the design of the curriculum.

The approach which follows will provide ideas for developing a well-designed curriculum compatible with the proposals in the NCFRE. The intention is to:

¹ The NCFRE uses the word 'requirements' to denote those elements of curriculum content which are the basic essentials of a broad, balanced and coherent RE curriculum. Although they are not requirements in the statutory sense, they are considered vital in any programme that promotes religious literacy.

- provide the building blocks of a well-designed curriculum, giving a coherent structure and rationale for each element included
- provide a common approach to curriculum design, which means ideas can be shared easily by different schools.
- provide ideas which are compatible with the guidance in the NCFRE.

The question of which religions and non-religious worldviews to include at each key stage has been left outside the scope of this document, since this is a choice made by agreed syllabus conferences, schools or other curriculum designers, within the context of the legal requirements.

The question of pedagogical approaches to RE is also left outside the scope of this document. This will be a matter for curriculum designers and schools to determine. Different pedagogies could be used for different units as appropriate. (see <http://www.reonline.org.uk/knowning/how-re/>)

2. HOW DO WE ORGANISE LEARNING?

WHAT MIGHT A WELL-DESIGNED CURRICULUM FOR RE LOOK LIKE?

In this section, three **principles of design** are offered, relating to:

- Clarity of purpose
- Balanced areas of enquiry
- Progression in pupils' learning

Design Principle 1: Being clear about the purpose of RE

An effective RE curriculum is designed around a set of aims and purposes shared by the teaching team and the school's leadership, and broadly acceptable to, and supported by, parents and students. Taking time to ensure that the rationale for the subject is clearly understood can underpin effective planning. In the NCFRE, the purpose of RE is expressed in the purpose statement and the three aims, namely that in order to be religiously literate, all pupils:

- know about and understand a range of religions and worldviews²;
- express ideas and insights about the nature, significance and impact of religions and worldviews;
- gain and deploy the skills needed to engage seriously with religions and worldviews.

Design Principle 2: Balancing areas of enquiry/content

An effective RE curriculum will incorporate a balanced and coherent suite of enquiries/content, built around the key areas of knowledge and understanding that lie at the heart of the subject. As pupils move through the RE curriculum they should gain greater understanding and command of this core subject matter of religious education.

In these guidelines three different areas of enquiry/content are proposed as a basis for a well-designed curriculum:

- **Investigating the nature of religion and belief** e.g.

² The phrase 'religions and worldviews' is used in this document to refer to Christianity, other principal religions represented in Britain, smaller religious communities and non-religious worldviews such as Humanism. The phrase is meant to be inclusive, and its precise meaning depends on the context in which it occurs e.g. in terms of belief, practice or identity.

- o What is religion? What is a worldview?
- o How do beliefs inform moral choices?
- o What do we know about religion and worldviews in our local community?
- o How can people find happiness in life?
- o Is there life after death?
- o What is the relationship between religion and spirituality?
- **Investigating Christianity** e.g.
 - o What do Christians believe?
 - o Why do Christians call Jesus 'Saviour'?
 - o What can we find out about Christianity by visiting our local church?
 - o How important are the differences between Christians?
- **Investigating other religions and worldviews** e.g.

Similar types of question to those about Christianity but related to the other religions and worldviews specified for the key stage, including their diversity.

These different areas can be studied separately or combined into units of work which integrate the different enquiry areas/content. For example:

- Material on key teachings from the religions and worldviews chosen in areas 2 and 3 could be combined in a unit on 'How do (choose 2 examples) work against injustice and inequality?'
- A unit on 'What can we find out about religion and belief in our local community?' could include the religions and worldviews selected for study in that key stage but also introduce pupils to a wider diversity of other religions and worldviews
- A unit from area 1 on 'Is there life after death?' would draw ideas from the main religions and worldviews selected for study at the key stage as well as other religions and worldviews.

Design Principle 3: Incorporating a model of progression

An effective RE curriculum builds in clear and visible progression, showing pupils, teachers and parents how to make progress in RE. In the NCFRE, the key drivers of progression are all related to the three aims, and they are spelt out in the statements at the start of each key stage. They involve: *extending and deepening knowledge (eg through increasing use of subject-specific vocabulary); asking questions and expressing views (eg with reasoning, examples and relevant material)*. This means that generally through the key stages:

- The study of specific religions and worldviews should become deeper and more comprehensive
- Vocabulary should become wider, more abstract and used more competently
- Enquiries, concepts, content and source materials should become more challenging and complex, and concepts integrated into a coherent narrative in relation to the matters studied.
- Pupils should become more challenging and perceptive in the questions they ask.
- Pupils' responses should become more complex and more closely identified with the material and sources they are studying.

Whatever units are chosen, the sequence of units should give a clear sense of a 'learning journey' within a year, within a key stage and across phases.

DECIDING HOW TO ORGANISE THE CURRICULUM

Those responsible for constructing syllabuses can provide freedom for individual schools to decide how to organise their RE curriculum. They should, however, advise schools to ensure that provision is clearly focused on an agreed purpose and set of aims, offers a balanced set of enquiries and identifies clear progression outcomes. This section interprets the design principles for the primary and secondary phases. In special schools the curriculum will be designed to take account of the particular needs of the pupils concerned. Guidance for special schools is available here ([LINK 7 TO SPECIAL SCHOOLS GUIDANCE DOC TO BE PRODUCED SPRING 2015](#)).

Organising RE in primary schools

Schools should ensure that topics are studied in suitable depth and that therefore not too many topics are introduced in a term, a year or a key stage. A concern raised by Ofsted³ is that when a school tries to incorporate too many very short topics, this can tend to fragment pupils' learning. Instead, it is possible to use a variety of models of delivery including:

- some specific major RE units taught intensively as a block over two or three weeks
- a timetabled weekly slot for discrete RE
- some cross-curricular units with RE linked to other areas of the curriculum – e.g. 'Religion and belief in our community' linked to wider local study
- Occasional 'off-timetable' focus days on a selected topic

³ Ofsted (2013) 'Religious education: realising the potential'

Organising RE in secondary schools

Doing 'few topics in depth' rather than many at a superficial level is also a good principle for RE in secondary schools. Schools will also need to consider the relationship between their KS3 curriculum and examination specifications chosen for study at KS4 and beyond.

Where RE is integrated or linked to a wider humanities provision or to any other area of the school curriculum, it is crucial that the design principles recommended in these guidelines are taken into account to ensure the RE is not lost in the process.

Schools may also wish to consider additional activities to enrich the RE provision, for example off-timetable days on topics such as Holocaust Memorial Day.

FRAMING UNITS AS ENQUIRY QUESTIONS

This guidance uses key questions as the main way of framing units of work. Such an approach is useful in encouraging an enquiry-based approach to learning. It is not, however, the only way of framing units of work and should not be seen as a required template.

If a school decides to use enquiry questions as the title for units, the following points may be helpful.

- a. The title questions need to be clearly accessible for the age of the pupils, enabling them to join in the process of deciding what the question means and how it might be investigated.
- b. Each question should focus simply on the object of study, avoiding unnecessary complexity.
- c. They should be 'big' questions that take the pupils to the heart of the subject and are of long standing significance.
- d. Sequences of questions should enable pupils to see a learning journey and identify how any topic is building on previous learning by advancing their progress in the subject.
- e. Questions should be rooted in the core beliefs and commitments of the main religion(s) or worldview(s) being studied.

DESIGNING THE CURRICULUM FOR EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

"Pupils should encounter religions and worldviews through special people, books, times, places and objects, and by visiting places of worship. They should listen to and talk about stories. Pupils can be introduced to subject-specific words and use all their senses to explore beliefs, practices and forms of expression." (NCFRE p16)

Whilst no subject in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is usually taught discretely, religious education nonetheless has an important role to play, and is a legal requirement for all pupils on the school roll, including all those in the reception year.

Within the seven strands of the EYFS it is expected that educational programmes will provide activities and experiences which will "guide children to make sense of their physical world and their community through opportunities to explore, observe and find out about people, places, technology and the environment." (Statutory Framework for Early Years Foundation Stage)

An RE curriculum for the Early Years should ensure that children have opportunities to find out about aspects of the following from Christianity and a range of different religions and worldviews:

- Stories, poems, prayers and songs
- Festivals and celebrations
- Artefacts and places of worship, visitors and videos
- Their own ideas and questions about religion, belief, truth and right and wrong.

As all of the strands of the EYFS are interwoven, children may share their thoughts, ideas and feelings "through a variety of activities in art, music, movement, dance, role play and design and technology. " Effective RE will contribute to young children's understanding of the world in which they live and help them to develop a positive sense of self.

DESIGNING THE CURRICULUM FOR KEY STAGE 1

"Pupils should develop their knowledge and understanding of religions and worldviews, recognising their local, national and global contexts. They should use basic subject-specific vocabulary. They should raise questions and begin to express their own views in response to the material they learn about, and in response to questions about their ideas" (NCFRE p18).

A balanced curriculum would include:

- a. **Learning about the place of religion and belief in their local community** – recognising diversity and the influence of those religions and worldviews, and exploring questions about the meaning, purpose and value of life
- b. **Learning about key features of Christianity** (selected from key beliefs, teaching and values behind celebrations and commemorations, patterns of worship, places of worship, and stories) exploring their significance for Christians
- c. **Learning about key features of at least one other religion or non religious worldview** (selected from key beliefs and, in the case of religion, teaching and values behind celebrations and commemorations, patterns of worship, places of worship, and stories) exploring their significance for followers of that religion or worldview.

Exemplars of curricula developed for different school contexts will be developed in 2015.

DESIGNING THE CURRICULUM FOR KEY STAGE 2

"Pupils should extend their knowledge and understanding of religions and worldviews, recognising their local, national and global contexts. They should be introduced to an extended range of sources and subject-specific vocabulary. They should be encouraged to be curious and to ask increasingly challenging questions about religion, belief, values and human life. Pupils should learn to express their own ideas in response to the material they engage with, identifying relevant information, selecting examples and giving reasons to support their ideas and views" (NCFRE p21).

A balanced curriculum would include:

a. Learning about the nature of religion and belief exploring questions about the nature, truth, meaning and value of religion and belief

Examples

This could include being taught about:

- ways in which people describe their spiritual experience
- what is meant by belief including study of non-religious beliefs
- different ways in which religions use kinds of language to express ideas about, e.g. God, creation, the afterlife
- the place of religions and worldviews in the local community
- questions such as 'How do we know what is true?' and 'How do we know what is the right thing to do?'

b. Learning about Christianity, focusing on the way in which beliefs, practices and ways of life link together, recognising diversity of interpretation.

Examples

This could include being taught about:

- the main beliefs of Christians and some of the different ways in which these are interpreted;
- the Bible and other key sources of authority for Christians;
- the life and significance of Jesus as a key figure for Christians;
- ways that different groups of Christians and individuals express their beliefs in terms of worship, celebrations, festivals, places of worship, poetry and art;
- the influence Christianity has on the way individuals live their lives;
- the impact of Christianity in the local community and the wider contemporary world.

c. Learning about at least two other religions and/or worldviews, focusing on the way in which beliefs, practices and ways of life link together, recognising diversity of interpretation.

Examples

This could include being taught about:

- the main beliefs of the religion or worldview and the diversity of ways in which these are interpreted
- the key sources of authority within the religion or worldview
- study of the life and significance of a key figure(s) in the religion or worldview
- ways that different groups and individuals express their beliefs e.g. in the case of a religion, in terms of worship, celebrations, festivals, places of worship
- the influence which the religion or worldview has on the way individuals live their lives
- the impact of the religion or worldview in the local community and the wider contemporary world

Exemplars of curricula developed for different school contexts will be developed in 2015.

DESIGNING THE CURRICULUM FOR KEY STAGE 3

'Students should extend and deepen their knowledge and understanding of a range of religions and worldviews, recognising their local, national and global context. Building on their prior learning, they learn to appreciate religions and worldviews in systematic ways. They should draw on a wide range of subject-specific language confidently and flexibly, learning to use the concepts of religious study to describe the nature of religion. They should understand how beliefs influence the values and lives of individuals and groups, and how religions and worldviews have an impact on wider current affairs. They should be able to appraise the practices and beliefs they study with increasing discernment based on analysis, interpretation and evaluation, developing their capacity to articulate well-reasoned positions' (NCFRE p24).

A balanced curriculum would include:

a. Learning about the nature of religion and belief, exploring questions about the nature, truth, meaning and value of religion and belief

Examples

This could include being taught about:

- what is meant by belief including study of non-religious beliefs
- the relationship between beliefs, teaching and ethical issues
- different ways in which people describe their spiritual experience
- the ways in which religions use kinds of language to express ideas about, e.g. God, creation, the afterlife
- how religion and belief may play a vital part in people's identity
- the place of religions and worldviews in the local community
- the place of modern media in relation to religion and belief
- questions such as 'What do religions and non religious worldviews say about the purpose and destiny of human existence?'

b. Learning about Christianity: in-depth and systematic study of the key theological ideas and the diversity of ways in which these are expressed.

Examples

This could include study of:

- the key Christian beliefs including Creation, Fall, Salvation, Incarnation, Resurrection, Redemption and how these relate to the concept of the Trinity
- how these beliefs are represented in and the Bible and other sources of wisdom (including the arts)
- the differences in interpretation of these beliefs across the diversity of Christianity
- how these beliefs impact on the expression of Christianity in individual and community life

c. Learning about at least one other religion and/or non religious worldview: an in-depth and systematic study of the key ideas and beliefs and exploring a diversity of ways in which these are expressed.

Examples

This could include study of:

- the key beliefs and ideas of the religion(s) and worldviews
- how these beliefs are represented in religious texts and other sources of wisdom (including the arts)
- the differences in interpretation of these beliefs across the diversity of the religion or worldview
- how these beliefs impact on the expression of the religion or worldview in individual and community life

Exemplars of curricula developed for different school contexts will be developed in 2015.

3. HOW DO WE KNOW HOW WELL OUR PUPILS ARE PROGRESSING?

A number of models of assessment are developing. This section (to be completed Spring 2015) will build on emerging practice, making links back to the NCFRE and taking account of the following points:

- Cross-phase collaboration across subjects and schools is crucial.
- New approaches to assessment must be more integrated with changes to curriculum planning
- Many innovative schools are moving towards a command or competency model of assessment using language such as 'Emerging/Developing/Secure/Exceeding' to describe pupils' success in relation to the defined 'content' of the curriculum
- Planning and teaching needs to include clear 'progression objectives' so that pupils and teachers have real ownership of the goals of the learning
- Solo taxonomy models are proving worthy of further exploration – they are adaptable to the needs of different subjects but also offer a common approach so good practice can be shared across subjects
- Bloom's taxonomy is useful in helping to extend thinking skills and improve questioning for assessment but NOT to devise a new set of levels
- New ways of designing points systems for tracking progress across cohorts and linked to the 'command' model (not dissimilar to the approach used in EYFS) are being developed. These have the virtue of being much more directly related to what pupils are actually learning and are not reliant on disembodied level statements.

The guidance will draw on a number of reports:

1. The NAHT report on Assessment

<http://www.naht.org.uk/welcome/news-and-media/key-topics/assessment/assessment-commission-resources/>

2. *Beyond Levels: alternative assessment approaches developed by teaching schools* (National College of Teaching and Leadership September 2014)

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/349266/beyond-levels-alternative-assessment-approaches-developed-by-teaching-schools.pdf

3. 'The Framework for the National Curriculum – A report by the Expert Panel for the NC review' Dec 2011

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175439/NC-Expert_Panel_Report.pdf

4. Tim Oates' YouTube presentation on assessment and levels at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-q5vrBXFpm0>