A CONVERSATION about CONTEXT and OVERVIEW

Why is this resource needed?

Since the Ofsted: Realising the Potential (2013) and Church of England: Making a Difference? (2014) reports there has been a renewed focus on the purpose of RE and in particular the nature of the RE curriculum itself. This has largely focused, within a Church of England context, on the lack of development of theological literacy in religious education. However, this has been set within the wider of context of a new emphasis on developing pupils’ religious literacy more broadly. The publication of Understanding Christianity (2016) was a direct response to the lack of theological literacy seen in schools, however the roll out and use of this publication by many schools also has implications for the wider religious education curriculum. With a resource that particularly promotes theological literacy, there is a danger that the curriculum becomes unbalanced and that other important elements such as philosophy and the human/social sciences are sidelined. This resource aims to acknowledge the place of Understanding Christianity (2016) and similar theological approaches, whilst ensuring the RE curriculum is balanced.

What are we trying to achieve?

This resource is primarily for advisers to use with teachers to help them develop a balanced RE curriculum that supports pupils’ religious literacy. The resources provided can be used with teachers working in any phase. We are trying to achieve a balanced curriculum that enables pupils to hold balanced and informed conversations about religion and belief. Implicit within this is the study of a range of religions, belief systems and worldviews.

What broader issues and publications have we considered?

In the last three years there have been a number of publications which have influenced our thinking. These include:

RE and Good Community Relations, APPG on RE (2014)

A New Settlement, Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead (2015)

RE for REal, Adam Dinham and Martha Shaw (2015)


State of the Nation, NATRE (2017)

Religious Education for All, Commission on RE (2017)

These reports highlighted in particular confusion over the purpose of RE, as well as the importance of children and young people developing secure religious literacy.
Others have written about the lack of balance (see for example, Brine 2016\(^1\)) and about the importance of including the theological (see for example, Moulin 2015\(^2\)).

In 2016 a revised Statement of Entitlement for RE\(^3\) was produced by the Church of England Education Office which referred for the first time to religious and theological literacy. A new SIAMS schedule (2018) also draws attention not only the effectiveness but to the impact of religious education on the lives of young people.

Changes have also taken place with regard to Key Stage 4 and 5 courses for GCSE and A level which will impact on lower key stages. Providing tools to help teachers ensure balance and also effective preparation for these examinations is required more than ever before.

Finally, in the last few years secondary RE teacher recruitment has been increasingly challenging. Despite the success of the ‘Beyond the Ordinary’ Campaign recruitment to teacher training courses remains difficult for many providers. Increasingly Initial Teacher Training providers are looking to a broad range of disciplines from which to recruit candidates. These include theology, philosophy, religious studies and other human/social sciences such as anthropology and sociology. By promoting a balanced curriculum we are acknowledging the contribution of all these disciplines to religious education in schools, and valuing the input that all teachers can have to an understanding of the subject.

**What process have we used to develop this resource?**

The starting point for this resource was a paper entitled ‘Rethinking RE: A Conversation about religious and theological literacy’ (June 2016)\(^4\). This paper was a collaborative piece of work which developed the notion of religious literacy through a balancing of theology, philosophy and the human/social sciences.

As a result of this paper, we began a consultative process through an online survey and professional conversations with a range of RE professionals including advisers, teachers and those working in higher education. This included interviews with academics working in Theology, Religious Studies and Philosophy departments, primary, middle and secondary teachers of RE, and members of RE professional associations including NATRE, AULRE and AREIAC. Face-to-face consultation also took place via a range of training events, including the joint conference, Words Beyond Words in 2016. The majority of this focused consultation took place in Autumn 2016 and Spring 2017. This process helped us to redefine and reshape our thinking.

In addition to this, the consultative process reaffirmed our view that this resource should be a pragmatic response to a particular issue i.e the lack of balance in the curriculum. The resources have

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\(^1\)http://www.reonline.org.uk/news-going-deeper-but-in-which-direction/
been developed through conversation with one another as RE professionals. They have been trialed with teachers in our own Dioceses in both Primary and Secondary settings.

**What does this resource contain?**

- A definition of the purpose of RE
- Key Principles for balanced curriculum design, including definitions of the three key elements
- An audit with self-evaluation questions to examine a current RE curriculum
- An annotated long term curriculum plan for KS1 and 2 with amendments to ensure balance
- An annotated long term curriculum plan for KS3 with amendments to ensure balance
- An animation available at: https://youtu.be/6NTW2bsFTLY

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