



A Welsh Government commission

**Religious Education:
supporting the early stages of the process of developing
the Humanities' AoLE**

**produced by a WASACRE and NAPfRE
working group**

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A discussion document for the Humanities' Group

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1 Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of this paper are to provide, as requested by the Welsh Government, a brief paper for Religious Education outlining:

- the core knowledge/concepts and associated skills and competencies deemed essential for all pupils to learn in the discipline;
- progression for the above, and an indication of what pupils should learn/experience relating broadly to expectations at ages 5, 8, 11, 14, 16;
- suggested ‘what matters’/’big ideas’ key concepts for Religious Education presented in the form of questions (building on the above);
- how the cross-curriculum responsibilities, wider skills, and Welsh dimension/international perspectives can be embedded in relation to Religious Education.

Throughout, links to the ‘four purposes’ have been considered.

The purpose of this paper is to ‘stimulate discussions within the Humanities’ pioneer group rather than present definitive proposals for the group to consider’.

2 What matters in Religious Education?

The three areas outlined below provide an overview of 'What Matters In RE'. The three areas are naturally interrelated and in teaching and learning this will be evident at all times.

In Religious Education, it is important to ensure that the reality of expression of belief in contemporary society is acknowledged and this will include both the positive and negative impact of religion in today's world. It is also important that Religious Education reflects and explores the extent of diversity apparent in religious beliefs and practices as illustrated by individuals, families and communities. Change over time in terms of interpretation of teachings must also be reflected as well as the differences of interpretation and practices evident in different countries and cultures.

Awareness of life experience and questions raised

It is important that children and young people make sense of their experience of the natural world and human relationships, recognise that for some there is a spiritual side to life, and be sensitive to the issues and questions that these experiences raise. In the process they should become aware of the difficult and ultimate (philosophical and ethical) questions that confront all human beings, for example about right and wrong, suffering and death and the meaning and purpose of life. They should consider various religious and non-religious responses to such questions and issues.

Beliefs, teachings and practices

It is important that children and young people develop a secure knowledge and understanding of the beliefs, teachings and practices of Christianity and the other principal world religions represented in Wales. They should develop a conceptual framework which helps them to understand religion in general and the specific religions they are studying. They should know about: the key beliefs of specific religions; sources of authority, especially sacred writings, stories, key historical figures and contemporary religious leaders; ways in which people worship, their rituals and how they celebrate their faith; lifestyles that derive from religious belief and the nature of the local and broader religious communities. They should become increasingly aware of the use of symbolism in religion and of non-literal ways in which religious faith is expressed. They should identify similarities and differences across and within religions and be knowledgeable about shared values and diversity. They should make and understand links between beliefs, teachings and practices and understand how these impact on the lives of individuals, the local community and wider society.

Exploration and personal response

It is important that children and young people develop skills that will enable them to explore religion and human experience and be able to respond to contemporary issues of relevance to their lives and the world today. They should ask questions, research and critically evaluate religious and non-religious sources and learn to develop informed and considered responses. They should explore and reflect on the spiritual side of life that is recognised by some people. They should be able to reflect on their own beliefs, values and actions in the light of their

studies and express and justify their own feelings and opinions. In addition, they should be able to respond critically, yet empathetically, to the beliefs, values and actions of others. They should express their responses in a variety of creative ways, using a range of media and positive action. Pupils should develop attitudes of open-mindedness, empathy, and respect where appropriate, when engaging with the viewpoints and lifestyles of others.

3 Core Knowledge, Skills and Competencies in Religious Education

The knowledge, skills and competencies for Religious Education set out below reflect in broad terms the three areas which encompass ‘What Matters In RE’. The first and second areas, *Awareness of life experience and questions raised*, and *Beliefs, teachings and practices*, include the core knowledge and related competencies that children and young people in Wales need to have. The third area, *Exploration and personal response* includes the specific skills that all young people in Wales will develop whilst studying Religious Education and which will support them in gaining the core knowledge and related competencies deemed essential in RE. Together these areas will support children and young people in Wales in achieving some of the characteristics of the Four Purposes

Awareness of life experience and questions raised

Children and young people will gain knowledge of

- the natural world
- human relationships
- the non-material/spiritual

and competency in:

- drawing on their own experiences and on a variety of religious and non-religious responses to make sense of the world and human relationships
- asking, discussing and considering difficult and ultimate questions
- recognising and appreciating the non-material/spiritual side of life

Beliefs, teachings and practices

Children and young people will gain knowledge of

- key beliefs
- sources of authority
- ways in which people live and worship
- symbolism and non-literal forms of expression
- similarities and differences across and within religions
- impact of religion

and competency in:

- recalling, describing and explaining religious beliefs, teachings and practices
- describing and explaining the similarities and differences across and within religions
- analysing and interpreting layers of meaning/symbolism
- explaining how religion impacts on the lives of individuals, local communities and wider society
- making and understanding links between beliefs, teachings and practices

Exploration and personal response

Children and young people will develop skills in:

- carrying out investigation
- interrogating evidence
- discerning relevance and value of sources
- recognising, exploring and reflecting on the spiritual side of life
- expressing and justifying their own feelings and opinions
- demonstrating how what they have learned has impacted on their own beliefs, values and actions
- appreciating, empathising with, and evaluating the viewpoints of others
- expressing responses in a variety of ways

4 What Matters in RE - Spiritual Development

Religious Education lends itself to providing opportunities for the spiritual development of children and young people, thus leading to higher self-esteem, aspiration and critical awareness. It is impossible to measure spiritual development in terms of progression; however, good Religious Education should be rich in opportunities for spiritual development. This occurs when we pay attention to the detail of the world around us, developing a conscious awareness of self, other people, the world or universe. Spirituality can, but does not necessarily, involve religion. It is about engaging the heart in everyday life within the local and global community. Spiritual development is accompanied by moral development as a result of a growth of awareness of self in relation to others.

Whilst engaging with the three areas as outlined in ‘What Matters In RE’, children and young people will have opportunity for spiritual development by:

- making sense of their experience of the natural world and human relationships;
- recognising that, for some, there is a spiritual side to life, and becoming sensitive to the issues and questions that these experiences raise;
- developing awareness of and reflecting upon the difficult and ultimate questions that confront all human beings;
- gaining knowledge and understanding of the beliefs, teachings and practices of others and becoming conscious of self, other and the world;
- exploring how religion impacts on the lives of individuals, the local community and wider society;
- responding to contemporary issues of relevance to their lives and the world today;
- reflecting upon their own beliefs, values and actions and expressing and justifying their own feelings and opinions;
- responding critically, yet empathetically, to the beliefs, values and actions of others; and
- developing attitudes of open-mindedness, empathy, and respect where appropriate, when engaging with the viewpoints and lifestyles of others.

Spiritual development occurs when pupils are given the opportunity to:

- engage their hearts and live fully;
- develop creativity and use their imagination;
- ask, consider and discuss the big ultimate questions;
- stop, think and reflect;

- develop aspirations;
- create a sense of belonging in the wider local and global community;
- develop self-awareness and awareness of the needs of others;
- experience compassion and help others e.g. through charity work;
- show empathy and consideration for others;
- develop a voice and listen with respect to the voices of others;
- talk about themselves in relation to others, the world and/or God;
- form good relationships;
- look after the environment and show concern for the world around them;
- listen to stories past and present, including the stories of those around them;
- experience awe and wonder or be amazed by things;
- experience the natural world;
- create meaning and purpose; and
- experience that which is beyond the mundane and material and in the arts.

5 Religious Education and the Four Purposes

Ambitious, capable learners

In Religious Education children and young people will have the opportunity to build up a sound body of knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other principal world religions and beliefs through enquiry, exploration and evaluation. They will be provided with opportunities which focus on the intellectual challenge of carrying out research, critically evaluating evidence, critical and intuitive thinking, justifying opinions and theories, and developing and interpreting alternative explanations. Children and young people will also develop their communication skills effectively when expressing their own opinions and ideas, alongside those of others in different forms and settings.

Enterprising, creative contributors

In Religious Education children and young people will be encouraged to think creatively to reframe and solve problems especially in relation to difficult questions such as, *Is world peace achievable?*, *Is it ever right to take a life?*, and *Can poverty ever be eradicated?*. They will be encouraged to express their ideas and emotions in a variety of ways and using different technologies, and will be expected to give of their energy and skills within and outside the classroom so that other people will benefit. Children and young people will be motivated to grasp opportunities to learn about the cultural and religious diversity of those around them and the importance of this for productive relationships and preparation for life outside and beyond school.

Ethical, informed citizens

In Religious Education children and young people will have the opportunity to develop the ability to discern, to challenge bias and to make value judgements when faced with complex and conflicting information. They will engage with a wide variety of contemporary issues such as wealth, equality, human dignity, peace and conflict. Through the study of religious and non-religious attitudes to these issues they will be able to form their own views and understand those of others. They will also, through the study of the principal world religions and worldviews, become knowledgeable about their culture, community, society and the world, now and in the past. Exploration of shared values and attitudes will encourage children and young people to respect the needs and rights of others, as members of a diverse society.

Healthy confident individuals

In Religious Education children and young people will be given the opportunity to consider a possible spiritual side of life and respond to moral issues. This will help them to develop personal integrity, conscience and responsibility, and will contribute to them establishing possible spiritual and ethical beliefs. Through the study of religious beliefs, teachings and practices they will be able to develop a resilience and empathy in relation to religious standpoints, which can be applied to different contexts. Children and young people will experience challenge in Religious Education when exposed to the beliefs, teachings and

practices of others and will learn to develop reasoned and considered responses, appropriate for school and wider society contexts.

6 An example outline of progression in Religious Education

Progression steps	
Age 5	<p><i>Awareness of life experience and questions raised</i> Pupils talk about aspects of their own and others' everyday life e.g. family, homes, rules, right and wrong, happy and sad times, celebrations, communities and groups to which they belong. Pupils explore and experience the natural world, display curiosity and show care and concern for living things and the environment.</p> <p><i>Beliefs, teachings and practices</i> Pupils experience first-hand, aspects of religion and belief through engagement with stories, artefacts, people and places. They enjoy new experiences, language and vocabulary. They recognise that some things are special to themselves and others and these may be the same or different e.g. times, people, places.</p> <p><i>Exploration and personal responses</i> Pupils talk about and communicate their thoughts and feelings about their own and others' experiences.</p>
Age 8	<p><i>Awareness of life experiences and questions raised</i> Pupils ask questions and listen to the views of others in order to develop their understanding of their own and others' everyday life experiences, e.g. Why do we have to do this? How should we treat other people? Pupils ask questions about the universe and the beauty and cruelty of nature, e.g. How and why did the world come to be? Why do bad things happen? Should we look after living things and the natural world?</p> <p><i>Beliefs, teachings and practices</i> Pupils will engage with aspects of religion and belief, consider what they have learnt and how this might relate to their own lives and experiences. They will understand the importance of some stories, times, people and places within different religions and how these influence some people's lives. They recognise the similarities and differences between aspects of different religions and are also aware of diversity within religions. They can recognise some religious symbols and offer simple explanations of what they mean.</p> <p><i>Exploration and personal responses</i> Pupils describe their thoughts and feelings about their own and others' experiences. They carry out simple investigations and use evidence from different sources in order to consider the questions raised.</p>
Age 11	<p><i>Awareness of life experience and questions raised</i> Pupils ask and consider moral questions relating to human relationships (e.g. relating to right and wrong, fairness, forgiveness), and know of religious and non-religious moral codes of behaviour. Pupils ask and consider difficult questions to which there are no universally agreed answers, e.g. questions about God/Ultimate Reality, the universe, the natural world, meaning and purpose of life. They have knowledge of different religious and non-religious responses to these questions and are aware of different interpretations within religions, e.g. pupils are familiar with some religious and non-religious narratives about the origins of the universe and recognise that there are different interpretations of these stories.</p>

	<p><i>Beliefs, teachings and practices</i> Pupils describe and explain aspects of religion and belief. They are able to make links between beliefs and practice and understand the impact religion has on people's lives. Pupils are able to make connections with their own life experiences and those of others. They identify and describe similarities and differences across and within religions. They also know that within a religion there is much diversity which can be evident through different interpretations of teachings, practices and different levels of commitment.</p> <p>Pupils understand and explain the meaning and significance of a range of religious symbolism, e.g. artefacts, actions, stories and language.</p> <p><i>Exploration and personal responses</i> Pupils carry out investigation in an open-minded way. They critically use evidence and discern relevance of religious and non-religious sources. They express and begin to justify their feelings and opinions, and explain in simple terms how they differ from those of others. Pupils begin to show an appreciation of and empathy with the viewpoints of others.</p>
Age 14	<p><i>Awareness of life experience and questions raised</i> Pupils ask and debate moral and ethical questions relating to human relationships and experience e.g. questions relating to prejudice and discrimination, justice and equality, freedom, rights and responsibilities. They understand how different interpretations of religious and non-religious teachings/guidance can influence people's decision making on ethical issues within contemporary society. Pupils ask and debate ultimate questions, e.g. questions about suffering, life after death, existence of God, existence of a soul, what makes us human. They know and understand a range of different religious and non-religious responses to these questions.</p> <p><i>Beliefs, teachings and practices</i> Pupils describe and explain in depth, their knowledge of a variety of religions and beliefs. They understand the impact of people's religion and belief, now and in the past, upon themselves, other individuals, local and global society. Pupils have knowledge and understanding of the diversity within and across religions and appreciate the challenges of commitment and expression of faith in contemporary society. Pupils analyse and interpret layers of meaning in religious expression, e.g. literature, art, dance, rituals.</p> <p><i>Exploration and personal responses</i> Pupils carry out investigation and interrogate evidence in order to formulate their own reasoned viewpoint. Pupils discern relevance and detect bias within religious and non-religious sources. They express and justify their feelings and opinions and reflect on how what they have learned has impacted on their own beliefs, values and actions. Pupils appreciate, empathise with and evaluate the viewpoints of others, and express their own considered responses in different ways.</p>
Age 16	<p><i>Awareness of life experience and questions raised</i> Pupils investigate ultimate philosophical and ethical questions from a variety of religious and non-religious perspectives, including some philosophical schools of thought. They understand that such questions are complex and answers are often</p>

	<p>partial and inconclusive. For example, are ethical rules absolute for all time, or should they be relative to circumstance, context and development in society over time?</p> <p><i>Beliefs, teachings and practices</i> Pupils describe and explain their detailed knowledge and clear understanding of religion and beliefs. Pupils critically evaluate specific aspects of religion and beliefs and consider the different interpretations of religious teachings and the impact of these upon themselves, other individuals, local and global society. They have knowledge and a clear understanding of the vast expression of diverse views across and within religions. Pupils give examples of this in a variety of contexts. Pupils analyse, interpret and evaluate layers of meaning in religious expression, e.g. literature, art, rituals, dance and music.</p> <p><i>Exploration and personal responses</i> Pupils carry out in-depth investigation, interrogate a wide range of evidence and will detect bias accurately, including in social media. They will select reliable and valuable evidence in order to formulate their own reasoned viewpoint. They express and justify their feelings with maturity, demonstrating clearly how what they have learned has impacted on their own beliefs, values and actions. Pupils appreciate, empathise with and evaluate the viewpoints of others in order to draw their own reasoned conclusions and develop positive attitudes. They express these responses in a variety of ways.</p>
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NB. Concerns

Whilst this paper follows the format requested by the Welsh Government, and therefore refers to specific ages in relation to progression, the view of the authors is that progression should be based on developmental phases rather than age.

7 An indication of what pupils will learn/experience in religious education

What should pupils experience at ages 5, 8, 11, 14 and 16?

Enrichment and Experiences – A Definition

A style of teaching and learning that actively engages children and young people, and encourages independent and individual thinking and responses. Pupil voice, fun, relevant and real-world learning resources lie at the heart of creating an environment where the desire to learn comes from individuals themselves. The underpinning principle is that learning becomes more valued and enjoyable when content and process are learned in the context of real and present problems to be solved and questions to be answered. An enriched education is created by any activity that makes learning more meaningful, substantial, or rewarding and thus improves the educational experience of the individual.

Enrichment and Experiences Working Group

Strand 1, Interim Report, January 2017

Religious Education should be a multi-sensory experience. Children and young people should experience the wonder and mystery of the natural world. As they explore how people choose to express their religion and belief, they will encounter the sights, smells, and sounds, tastes and textures of worship, festivals and celebration. Meaningful engagement with religious communities can be enjoyable and memorable.

Good Religious Education uses places of worship within the local community and/or further afield as a starting point to teach concepts such as worship, commitment, rites of passage and celebration. Speaking to faith representatives, observing acts of worship, religious festivals and celebrations, and participating in cultural activities help all children and young people to learn about the impact of religion and belief on individuals and society. Working in partnership with local faith communities may contribute to community understanding and cohesion.

Experiential learning gives young children opportunities to engage in role-play activities or to participate in activities concerning celebrations and worship. Simulation-based learning gives children and young people opportunities to consider how religion and belief influence people as they respond to ethical dilemmas, solve real and present problems or deal with meaningful tasks. Using stilling exercises and providing opportunities for children of all ages to experience meditation techniques relevant to learning in Religious Education can contribute to developing healthy confident individuals and support positive mental and emotional well-being.

Creative learning gives children and young people the opportunity to consider how musicians, writers, artists and dancers express their religion and belief in art. By working with artists in residence or participating in creative projects, they will learn to express their personal responses to religion and belief and spirituality through the arts.

Good Religious Education ensures that all children and young people feel engaged in and have ownership of their learning. By responding to religion in the news and media, their Religious Education will be relevant to their lives. They will learn to make choices as they develop lines of enquiry, select resources and explore ways of sharing their knowledge and understanding of the impact of religion and beliefs with other audiences. Their Religious Education will help them engage with contemporary issues and may/should inspire them to be ethical, informed citizens who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world.

Suggestions for learning experiences in Religious Education at ages 5, 8, 11, 14, and 16 can be seen in Appendix 1

8 Consideration of cross-curriculum responsibilities, wider skills, Welsh dimension and international perspectives within Religious Education

Within Religious Education there are numerous opportunities for embedding cross-curricular responsibilities, wider skills, Welsh dimension and international perspectives.

Cross-curricular responsibilities

Literacy

In Religious Education children and young people will develop their speaking and listening skills as they explore ultimate questions, reflect on ethical and moral issues and clarify their own thinking. They will learn to pose a range of questions as they talk to members of faith communities and work with others to follow lines of enquiry. They will learn to explain their own conclusions, opinions and beliefs, by following a logical line of argument, drawing on evidence and presenting sound reasons. They will show that they can listen to others and take account of their points of view, their culture and their faith.

In Religious Education children and young people will learn to read accurately as they retrieve and interpret information from a wide range of sources in order to learn about religion and the impact of beliefs, teachings and practices on people's lives. They will develop the ability to decode and interpret the symbolic and metaphorical language of religious texts and visual art. Consequently, they will learn how language is used within a range of contexts and for a variety of purposes.

In Religious Education children and young people will learn to use a range of non-fiction forms of writing for a variety of purposes. They will acquire a vocabulary of religious terms and will communicate their knowledge and understanding of religious and non-religious beliefs competently and with increasing complexity and accuracy. They will learn to express their own possible spirituality and personal sense of meaning in a variety of creative forms of writing.

Numeracy

In Religious Education children and young people will develop an understanding of shape, pattern, distance, time and money as they learn how beliefs, teachings and practices impact on people's lives. They will learn how to interpret and critically evaluate data in texts, diagrams and graphs, and develop their own data-handling skills as they explore people's attitudes and opinions about ethical and moral issues.

Digital competency

In Religious Education children and young people will learn to be responsible and safe when searching for information online and will be able to evaluate the validity and reliability of their search findings. They will use a variety of online sources and will learn to recognise language that could be deemed to be offensive. They will be astute and sensitive while using email, social media and video links collaboratively to learn about people's religious beliefs

and practices. They will learn how to collect and interpret data, in order to identify patterns and trends relating to religious practices or people's opinions on ethical and moral issues. They will show an understanding of purpose and audience as they use a range of software and media to communicate their own knowledge, understanding and personal responses.

Wider skills

In Religious Education children and young people will **work with others** as they plan investigations involving gathering and utilising a range of religious and non-religious sources in order to explore different responses to ultimate questions and aspects of religion and belief. They will develop their own **personal effectiveness** as important members of a team who are relied upon to contribute by organising and carrying out investigation. They will also develop this skill as individual learners who are required to evaluate, justify and express their own considered responses in a variety of ways, developing positive attitudes and using positive action.

In Religious Education children and young people will hone their **problem solving** skills when responding to contemporary issues. They will learn to discern the relevance and value of sources when exploring these issues and investigating ultimate questions. They will critically evaluate sources and the viewpoints of others in order to draw their own reasoned conclusions.

Welsh dimension and international perspectives

Religious Education is a subject that has always incorporated and responded to local and national issues and perspectives. SACREs (Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education) in each local authority are locally determined and able to support important aspects of the Welsh dimension in relation to Religious Education.

Religious Education offers children and young people the opportunity to appreciate the shape and significance of the rich Christian heritage and diverse range of religions and beliefs evident in Wales, both past and present, and how these impact on life in Wales today. This may contribute to social cohesion, cultural and religious awareness, cooperation and understanding within society and individual communities.

Religious Education is concerned with investigating challenging questions and issues of global significance, which are explored from religious and non-religious perspectives. For example, natural areas relevant for Religious Education include: political decision making, exploitation and justice, social freedom and responsibility, human rights, economic ethics, and relationship responsibilities and dynamics between Wales and others parts of the world.

References

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Donaldson, Professor G (2015) *Successful Futures; Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales* Welsh Assembly Government

Enrichment and experiences working group (2017) *Strand 1, interim report*

Appendix 1 Suggestions for learning experiences in Religious Education at ages 5, 8, 11, 14, and 16

At 5 years old	At 8 years old	At 11 years old	At 14 years old	At 16 years old
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role play • Persona dolls • Natural world • Storyteller • Visits to special places within the school or local community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role play • Persona dolls • Natural world • Storyteller • Theatre in Education, e.g. <i>“In Character”</i> • Artist in Residence • Speaking to and working with faith representatives • Visit to a place of worship • Observing or recreating* a celebration or festival • Religious artefacts • Circle time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role play • Natural world • Storyteller • Theatre in Education, e.g. <i>“In Character”</i> • Artist in Residence, e.g. <i>Spirited Arts, Into Film</i> • Speaking to and working with faith representatives • Using a digital/virtual learning platform, e.g. <i>virtual tour of a place of worship</i> • Visit to a place of worship • Visit to a gallery library or museum, e.g. <i>religious art and artefacts, sacred books</i> • Observing or recreating* a celebration, festival or pilgrimage • Religious artefacts • Solving a mystery • P4C 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural world • Storyteller • Theatre in Education • Artist in Residence, e.g. <i>Spirited Arts, Into Film</i> • Speaking to and working with faith representative • Debating ethical and moral issues with a panel of visitors • Using a digital/virtual learning platform, e.g. <i>Face to Faith, True Tube</i> • Visit to a place of worship • Visit to a gallery, library or museum, e.g. <i>religious art and artefacts, sacred books,</i> • Observing worship, a religious celebration, festival or pilgrimage, e.g. <i>Labyrinth Adventure</i> • Religious artefacts • Solving a mystery • Dilemma based, problem solving activities or simulations, e.g. <i>Mock trials, conferences, parliaments, truth and reconciliation commissions</i> • P4C 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural world • Storyteller • Theatre in Education • Artist in Residence, e.g. <i>Spirited Arts, Into Film</i> • Speaking to and working with faith representatives • Debating ethical and moral issues with a panel of visitors • Using a digital/virtual learning platform, e.g. <i>Face to Faith, True Tube</i> • Visit to a place of worship • Visit to a gallery, library or museum, e.g. <i>religious art and artefacts, sacred books</i> • Observing worship, a religious celebration or festival • Religious artefacts • Solving a mystery • Dilemma based, problem solving activities or simulations, e.g. <i>Mock trials, parliaments, conferences truth and reconciliation commissions</i> • P4C