



RE REVIEW DISSEMINATION EVENT: Bristol

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I. Purpose of Study p.14

Several recent reports (eg Ofsted 2007,2010, 2013 and the large research project from Glasgow University 2008-13) have claimed that there is confusion about what RE is trying to achieve. In part this represents real disagreement (for example between those whose main priority is faith development and those whose main priority is understanding a multi-faith society). In part it is perhaps because RE is often taught by untrained teachers who may be conscripts and themselves unsure why they are doing it (see APPG report).

However there is a large measure of agreement among those professionally involved in RE. I've been teaching RE/RS at various levels for 36 years and should know why I'm doing it by now. RE is about understanding others, working out your own beliefs, values, practice and identity, drawing upon the rich heritage of religious and non-religious worldviews to help address the pressing issues of our days (eg social justice, equality, wealth and poverty, the environment) and learning to discuss religious and ethical matters in an informed and articulate way (religious literacy). Who could disagree with that?

Turning to the 'Purpose of study' section on p.14 there is a stress on

- Addressing challenging or ultimate (or 'big' as some year 12s preferred) questions and different answers
- Knowledge and understanding of a range of 'religions and worldviews' (not an ideal phrase but our agreed way of including everyone, religious or not)
- Pupils developing their own ideas, values and identities
- Learn to articulate clearly and coherently their own ideas and respect others

This paragraph stresses RE as intellectually rigorous, not an 'easy subject', and that religion is not just about beliefs but about who we are and what we do.

Aims

This section turns this general statement of purpose into a series of curriculum aims, for pupils to:

- A. **know and understand religions and worldviews** – beliefs and practices, sources of wisdom, action and expression nb internal diversity
- B. **be able to explain the importance and impact of religions and worldviews** – the difference made to people’s lives, how people express their commitment and the pupil’s own views on issues, what is religion anyway.
- C. **gain the skills needed to engage with religions and worldviews** – including developing their own ideas on the big questions, working out how to live positively with differences and articulate moral issues.

2. **Challenges to the success of RE at a national level p.31**

Work on this Review has been taking place at a time when there has been a lot of pressure on RE as a subject at all levels of education. See p.31

- i) Loss of status caused by not being counted as a Humanities subject for the EBacc list of crucial subjects, by reduction in importance of short course GCSEs and by not including A level RE as a ‘facilitating subject’ for getting a place at a ‘Russell Group’ university (24 established research universities eg Bristol)
- ii) Cut in number of training places for secondary RE and 50% of teachers unqualified
- iii) No bursaries for RE PGCEs
- iv) Not included in the National Curriculum Review and thus no funding for our Review
- v) Cuts in Local Authorities and therefore for SACREs and Advisers and locally provided CPD.
- vi) Decreased input on RE in primary ITT – may only be a couple of hours
- vii) Lack of continuity between Agreed syllabus RE and GCSE/A level exam RE. The issues of stress on Philosophy and Ethics leading to neglect of religions.
- viii) Complexity of diverse types of schools which affects RE more than other subjects eg faith-based schools – can be confusing

The good news is that Ofsted and research shows that there are many brilliant RE teachers doing great things. My own first year university students are often inspired by excellent teachers and certainly ask good questions.

3. **Who can monitor the success of RE? p.33**

How we will know whether RE improves as Ofsted will no longer focus on subjects and SACREs have no resources to do this. We can ask schools to monitor themselves, and provide toolkits. However the Review p.33 suggests that RE research might help.

4. Challenges to Researchers

The research career pathway teacher to PGCE tutor to university researcher is threatened by the decline in university based ITT. There is world-class research in journals such as *British Journal of Religious Education* and the *Journal of Beliefs and Values*. Other countries look up to RE in the UK as a model. However teachers tend not to know about existing research or think it unconnected with the classroom.

- i) researchers need to produce more accessible and relevant research
- ii) teachers need to realise that research is relevant and avoid anti-intellectualism – my third year degree students review articles and agree that they find much that is of direct use to the classroom teacher (eg Arweck on children from mixed faith families, Moulin on religious children in the classroom)
- iii) I'd like to end with a challenge for the classroom teachers here. You will have to do the research – do an MA such as Warwick's distance learning packages, apply for a Farmington Fellowship which can be school based, write something for *RE Today* or *Resource* about what works in your classroom, contribute to *RE-Online*.