

What's Changed and Why

Why a new approach to assessment and teaching in RE?

Context:

For the 'Commission on Assessment without Levels', the successful implementation of the new national curriculum requires "a radical cultural and pedagogical change, from one which has been too dominated by the requirements of the national assessment framework and testing regime to one where the focus needs to be on high-quality, in-depth teaching, supported by in-class formative assessment." They believed that the pressure generated by the use of levels in the accountability system led to a curriculum driven by attainment targets, levels and sub-levels, rather than the programmes of study.

One of the key problems with levels was that although levels were intended to define common standards of attainment, the level descriptors were **open to interpretation**; they are **opaque abstract and understanding is not specified**. This meant that **different teachers could make different judgements**. Teachers receiving new pupils frequently disagreed with the levels those pupils had been given by previous teachers.

Levels did not lend themselves to assessing the underpinning knowledge of a concept. For example, using certain vocabulary in written work was indicative of a level, but did not necessarily provide evidence of conceptual understanding. What is required is **clarity**, so that **schools can use their own assessment systems to support more informative and productive conversations** with pupils and parents. They can ensure their approaches to assessment enable **pupils to take more responsibility** for their achievements by **understanding where their strengths are and what they need to do to improve**, and by encouraging active involvement in self-assessment.

The commission believes that assessment and pedagogy has to be inextricably connected. To achieve this the new national curriculum puts greater emphasis on the **specific knowledge** pupils should acquire by the end of each key stage and requires **greater depth and detail of learning**. They believe that:

- Pupils need to be studying **fewer things in greater depth**. For them this is what **mastery** means- denoting a "**focus on achieving a deeper understanding of fewer topics and encouraging deep thinking**".
- There needs to be a high degree of **specificity**: connecting what is taught and expected outcomes to achieve curriculum cohesion.
- Pupils need to be "**next stage ready**". The teachers in the next phase of education have to be confident about what has been mastered, so that progression can be truly developmental.
- Pupils need to master and spend more time on the **big ideas** in a subject. Teachers need to spend more time using **formative assessment** to ensure there are no gaps in a child's understanding of these big concepts.

Ofsted have been working with the Commission and this collaboration is evident in the new framework:

"As part of pupils' **progress**, inspectors will consider the growth in pupils' security, breadth and depth of knowledge, understanding and skills." Ofsted Handbook, 2015

What did this look like in RE?

There is no consensus on what this should look like in RE, but we know that assessment in RE needs a

radical rethink. In the latest Ofsted thematic report into RE, **in 6 out of 10 primary schools, RE provision was judged as 'less than good' by Ofsted. In 1 out of 3 primary schools assessment in RE is 'inadequate'.**

The Somerset Approach:

1. **Core Ideas/Essential Knowledge:** The Science National Curriculum is a very good model on which to base our approach to assessment without levels. In accordance with the recommendation of the Expert Panel Report, the Science NC document requires schools to focus on the essential knowledge and concepts that unlocks the subject for pupils. In RE this would mean exploring the key themes of a religion; the beliefs which make that religion unique. In doing this we would ensure that pupils understanding is balanced, but also secure. This *does not mean teaching all members of a religion believe the same thing*. On the contrary, for example, in Christianity our faith representatives have told us that atonement is central to pupils understanding of Christianity. In practice this means exploring the *different* interpretations of *theatonement*. We need, to use an analogy from Alan Brine, the former HMI for RE, lay a foundation not lay bricks in a random order.
2. **Specificity:** Like the Science curriculum the requirements need to be specific and not vague or opaque. Moreover, they need to be developmental. We have to be very clear about what we want students to know and understand about religions/world viewpoints by the time they leave compulsory education.
3. **Fewer things in greater depth:** We do not need to be specific about the whole syllabus, but the core beliefs. We need to give teachers time and opportunity to ensure that students have mastered these difficult concepts and not feel obliged to cover lots of topics. This is the problem being identified by the Commission: too often progression is measured in studying something *different* rather than in *more depth*. We need to identify the big ideas in each religion in the syllabus and then specify exactly what this means and looks like by the end of each 2 year cycle (end of KS1; early KS 2 and end of KS2 etc.). Schools may need to take longer than this if assessment identifies gaps in the pupils' mastery of these big concepts- but that is the point, not labelling students but making sure they are secure in these key concepts.
4. **Minimum requirements:** The addition needs to be minimal and not add to school's burden. The emphasis is less things in more depth. As it says in the science programmes, "it is also vitally important that they develop secure understanding of each key block of knowledge and concepts in order to progress to the next stage".
5. **Review exemplars:** While it is up to schools how best to teach these core ideas, there is a need to provide trialed exemplars which demonstrate how these challenging concepts could be approached in schools. Moreover, there needs to be exemplars demonstrating the assessment tasks to ensure that pupils have achieved a secure understanding. This will be a major area of the work being undertaken.
6. **Moderated materials:** A corollary of this is an ethic of excellence. We need to provide a bank of student work which exemplifies what children at a given age can do. These can be shared with pupils to *raise expectations* and *challenge*. They will also provide examples of for staff to moderate.

What does this look like?

We have been working with faith representatives and teachers and have produced some draft proposals which we are sharing with schools for feedback:

For example, in **Christianity** we have identified “Core Themes”. One of the Core themes is **Salvation**.

At Key Stage 1 pupils will be taught to:

- Recall stories from the Bible associated with the last eight days of Jesus’ life, **including** (a) his entry into Jerusalem, (b) the Last Supper, (c) his arrest, (d) crucifixion and (e) resurrection. (AMV units 2,3,9) Identify these stories with the religion of Christianity, who are collectively called Christians and know that they are from the Bible.
- Recognise **the order** of the key events in the Biblical narrative.
- Raise and suggest answers to relevant questions in response to their enquiry into the Easter story.

- Know the meaning of the terms ‘Christianity’ and ‘Christian’ and be able to apply the terms accurately.

Once this is secure then pupils are able to access the next Key Stage:

At Lower Key Stage 2

- Recognise that Christians refer to Jesus as ‘the Saviour’ or as ‘my Saviour’.
- Explain the Christian Salvation story and that it makes four main claims:
 1. God created a perfect the world.
 2. Humanity went wrong.
 3. To save humanity God had a salvation plan.
 4. God enters into the world as Jesus Christ who saves humanity.

- Recall the key features of the story of Adam and Eve’s disobedience and fall - that Adam disobeyed - that things were spoiled because of this - and it’s central message - that sin has messed up our world. (Gen. 3 v 1-24) The word sin means to “miss the mark”; i.e. not being the best we can be (doesn’t mean being naughty) or not giving God priority in life. (AMV unit 1,3,4,6,7)
- Recall the key features of the story of Zacchaeus:
 1. Understand the context of the story; Zacchaeus is an outcast because he is seen as a greedy, corrupt traitor. Now he is sorry. He wants to make up for his bad deeds and live a better life. (AMV units 2,3,3)
 2. Understand the message of the story - that Christians believe Jesus came to forgive and rescue everyone. No one is too bad - or too good.

- Recall the story of Jesus death on the cross. Understand that Christians believe that because Jesus died they can be forgiven by God. (AMV units 2,3,4,5,6,7,8)

So in conclusion, we propose to base our approach on the science NC programme, which requires pupils to develop essential knowledge and understanding. We wish to propose minimal programmes for assessment, which schools can decide how to deliver. We have **started with the religion** and tried to provide pupils with an **understanding of the core beliefs** of each religion. In this was we wish to avoid misrepresentation and ‘do justice’ to the religion.

We are developing exemplars which have been written and trialed by staff and which can be adapted by schools. We also wish to build up a bank of pupils’ work, which schools can use for moderation purposes

as well as raising expectations of staff.

We have built on the work of Dilwyn Hunt, Chair of AREIAC, who has been trialing this approach for some time with schools. Dilwyn was asked to talk about this approach in the keynote address at the Culham St Gabriel 2015 Conference: "Energizing RE". He was also one of the presenters at the NASACRE and AREIAC course on RE without levels, which Culham sponsored.