



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



From the Church of England Education Office

RE: A Curriculum Framework for Religious Education in England
The Religious Education Council of England and Wales October
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Background

1. The RE Council's review of RE in England¹ was carried out in response to the extensive review of the National Curriculum by the DfE from 2011 to 2013. Although the review had the support of government ministers it received no central funding or assistance; it was funded by donations and grants from its member bodies and other trusts.
2. The review was undertaken by a steering group that reflected a wide range of professional and religious interests, including representatives of the Church of England. Widescale and open consultation was carried out at various stages in the process.
3. The final report of the review was published in October 2013. This included two elements:
 - a. A non-statutory national curriculum framework for RE (NCFRE) which complements the programmes of study provided by the DfE for the subjects in the national curriculum;
 - b. An analysis of the wider context in which RE finds itself, including the opportunities and challenges that face the implementation of the new curriculum framework.

The legal position for church schools

4. It is important to be clear that the Review has no authority to make changes to the legal position that determines the responsibilities for decision making about RE in church schools. Indeed the report is quite explicit about this at a number of points (see pages 7 and 11).
 - In **Voluntary Aided** schools the governors remain responsible for ensuring that RE takes place in accordance with the tenets of the Church of England; in practice, most follow a diocesan syllabus or guidance.
 - In **Voluntary Controlled** schools the statutory document is the Agreed Syllabus of their Local Authority.
 - The situation in **Academies** is slightly more complicated: in Academies that were previously VA schools the funding agreement maintains the arrangements in VA schools as outlined above. In Academies that were previously VC schools the funding agreement requires that they arrange for RE in accordance with the general requirements for agreed syllabuses ('in the main Christian whilst taking account of the other principal religions') unless any parents request that their children receive RE in accordance with the tenets of the school's faith. In practice, many Academies have chosen to continue to follow the LA agreed syllabus but they don't necessarily need to.

The REC Framework for RE

5. The Chief Education Officer welcomed the REC framework noting the level of participation encouraged by the Rec of its member bodies, of which the Church of England Board of Education an

¹ The Review can be accessed online at www.religioueducationcouncil.org.uk/re-review-report

National Society are two. The RE Council is committed to keeping the faith communities and RE professional bodies in dialogue and to bringing together sometimes widely divergent views into a common statement. While there may be some inadequacies in the final document it is an honourable attempt to raise the bar in relation to a new statement of aims for RE and a revised statement of expectations of what pupils should achieve.

6. How the document will now be used is uncertain, although work is beginning on the subject specification for GCSE RE which will reflect the REC Framework in some way and on support materials also related to the Framework. The Church of England will be represented on both those exercises.

Religious Education in Church Schools: A Statement of Entitlement

7. In drawing up a detailed curriculum and programme of study for RE a church school also needs to take careful note of the Statement of Entitlement² produced by the National Society. This addresses the key issue of the proportion of curriculum time that should be spent on teaching Christianity. The expectation remains that this will be at least two thirds of curriculum time in KS 1-3, and a significant and substantial part of any public qualification in KS 4. This position was made clear and was accepted throughout the process that produced the NCFRE within the RE Review.

8. Although the Church of England would always expect Christianity to form the heart of the RE curriculum, diocesan syllabuses have included teaching about the major world faiths for decades. This is an important part of preparing young people for their role as world citizens.

9. The REC Framework outline helpfully reiterates that the outcomes and competencies expected to be gained through RE should be delivered through detailed and systematic study of a limited number of world faiths of which Christianity will always take up the greater part. The Framework recommends that pupils in KS1 should study Christianity and one other faith; in KS2 Christianity and two other faiths; at KS3 Christianity and at least two other faiths. This is consistent with the Statement of Entitlement and would enable dialogue between Agreed Syllabus RE and Diocesan Syllabus RE if necessary.

10. The references in the REC Framework to the teaching of 'other world views' has been the cause of some controversy. The Church of England response to an early draft vigorously complained about the number and placing of such references. Nevertheless it is possible to read the REC Framework as suggesting some sort of parity between religious and non religious world views, such that for every faith studied there should be a non faith also included. This is not the intention of the drafters of the REC Framework.

11. In Church of England schools it will be part of good practice in addressing certain topics, particularly moral and ethical issues, that reference to non religious approaches will be part of the discussion and exploration. It is not expected that non-religious world views will form part of the RE syllabus as a systematic study.

Statutory basis for RE

12. The REC Framework's invitation to a wider discussion about the statutory arrangements for RE is welcome. Local determination has been a mixed blessing for nearly two decades and is seriously compromised now. For VC schools this may result in increasingly outdated syllabuses getting in the way of improving RE and so the publication of *The Christianity Project* materials will be the opportunity to bring VC and VA RE onto a firmer footing.

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² See link from <http://www.churchofengland.org/education/national-society/teaching-learning/religious-education.aspx>

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