

## **Leeds Agreed Syllabus Conference Thursday 21 September 2006**

### **The identification of the religions to be studied in the Leeds Agreed Syllabus 2006**

**(Revised paper following discussion at Conference 13  
July 2006)**

#### **Legal requirements and national guidance for Agreed Syllabuses on Religious Education**

The Education Act 1996 in Section 352 (3), re-inforces the requirement of the Education Reform Act 1988 (Section 8 (3)) that any new agreed syllabus adopted after 29 September 1998 shall 'reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.' DFE Circular 1/94 sets out this requirement, as quoted above, in para 31.

D FE Circular 1/94, para 33 states,

' A syllabus which is to meet the statutory requirements must give sufficient particulars of what is to be taught for it to be clear that the teaching carried out in pursuance of that syllabus would be consistent with the requirement given in paragraph 31. It is not enough simply to say that the teaching might be capable of meeting these requirements. It is in this respect that the syllabuses analysed by NCC \* were found to have fallen short of what was required.'

\*NCC – The National Curriculum Council (NCC) later became the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) identified a number of locally agreed syllabuses which fell into this category.

'The effect of the provisions in the 1988 Act is that a syllabus must be based on both Christianity and the other principal religions represented in this country, and on their religious traditions, practices and teaching. The syllabus should indicate at what ages and stages the particular subject matter in relation to each religion should be taught. This does not however mean that all religions have to be taught in equal depth or that all of them have to be taught at each key stage'. DFE Circular 1/94, para 34

In par 35 it states,

‘As a whole and at each key stage, the relative content devoted to Christianity in the syllabus should predominate. The syllabus as a whole must also include all of the principal religions represented in this country. In this context, the precise balance between Christianity and other religions should take account both of the national and local position’.

The development of the Non-statutory National Framework for RE (QCA 2004) has provided more detailed guidance.

It states,

‘The national framework affirms the legal basis of religious education and gives non-statutory guidance for ASCs and faith communities to consider in determining which religions are to be studied. It is important to make sure the legal requirements for religious education are met and that the religious education curriculum is broad and balanced.

To make sure the requirements are met and the curriculum is broad and balanced:

- Christianity should be studied throughout each key stage
- The other principal religions represented in Great Britain (here regarded as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism) should be studied across the key stages. It is important that ASCs and schools ensure that by the end of Key Stage 3 pupils have encountered all of these five principal religions in sufficient depth.

It is also essential that religious education enables pupils to share their own beliefs and ideas without embarrassment or ridicule. Many pupils come from religious backgrounds but others have no attachment to religious beliefs and practices. To ensure that all pupils’ voices are heard and the religious education curriculum is broad and balanced, it is recommended that there are opportunities for all pupils to study:

- Other religious traditions such as the Baha’i faith, Jainism and Zoroastrianism
- Secular philosophies such as humanism.

Pupils should also study how religions relate to each other, recognising both similarities and differences within and between religions. They should be encouraged to reflect on:

- The significance of inter-faith dialogue
- The important contribution religion can make to community cohesion and the combating of religious prejudice and discrimination.

‘The specificity of content, both in terms of religions and beliefs studied and themes, is the legal responsibility of the Agreed Syllabus Conference’

(Non-statutory National Framework for RE page 12)

‘In taking decisions about which religions are to be studied and when, local needs and circumstances should be taken into account. The framework places an emphasis on the national and global dimensions of religion, as well as the local context of religious education’.

(QCA guidance, ‘Using the non-statutory national framework for religious education’ 2005)

## **Requirements of the Leeds Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education (Revised 1996)**

The requirements as set out in the Leeds Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education (Revised 1996), page 4, are:

**For 4-7 Year Olds the Programmes of Study refer to using ‘Christianity and one other religion’.**

**For 7 -11 Year Olds the requirement is to follow the Programmes of Study ‘using Christianity and two other religions’.**

In addition to the stated requirements schools may also continue to draw on ‘relevant aspects of other faiths’ which they feel are particularly appropriate to their individual schools. Reference to relevant aspects of other faiths has been included in order to ensure that in schools where several religions are represented within the school community, any significant aspects, including festivals, may be recognised and explored.

**For 11-19 Year Olds the Programmes of Study ask that’ within Christianity and at least two other religions and philosophies’,** students should have the opportunity to study, explore and investigate aspects of the Broad Outlines

By the time students finish compulsory education they should have had the opportunity to broaden their knowledge and understanding of Christianity and the other principal religions. In order to ensure that pupils receive a broad and balanced RE programme primary and secondary schools are encouraged to share information regarding the religions and relevant aspects of other faiths selected for study by individual schools.

## **Monitoring and Review of the Leeds Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education**

Monitoring of the implementation of the Leeds Agreed Syllabus from 1996 to 2005, has indicated that there is a significant difference in the breadth of religions studied in schools. By current definition it would be possible for:

- a pupil to be learn about Christianity at each key stage and, for example Judaism at Key Stage 1, then Judaism and Islam at Key Stage 2, then at Key Stage 3 again Judaism and Islam.
- A pupil in another school may for example in addition to learning about Christianity at each key stage, learn about Judaism in Key Stage 1, Islam and Hinduism at Key Stage 2 and then Buddhism and Sikhism at Key Stage 3.
- A pupil in another primary school may be encountering aspects of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism through learning based on themes such as sacred writings, worship, symbols, festivals.
- Secondary schools report the difficulties they encounter when planning RE for pupils in Year 7 who come from a number of schools, with significantly different experience, knowledge and understanding of RE, including different 'gaps'.

On 25 October 2005 I had a meeting with Graham Langtree, QCA Religious Education Adviser, at QCA, Piccadilly, London, to discuss the development of the new Leeds Agreed Syllabus and the issues surrounding the identification of which religions to be studied at each key stage. On return I reported back to the Leeds AS Conference the outcomes of that discussion. I have also explored ideas with teachers through the programme of RE Network meetings held throughout this year.

In order to ensure that all pupils encounter all five principal religions in addition to Christianity in sufficient depth by the end of Key Stage 3, it would be useful for all pupils to have 'encountered' each of the principal religions by the end of Key Stage 2. This would provide a secure basis for pupils to build on when they enter the secondary phase of learning. It would provide a similar entitlement for all pupils, irrespective of the individual primary school attended. Many primary schools have mixed age classes and often plan schemes of work on a 2 year cycle or 'rolling programme'. A model as follows would fit well with a 2 year cycle of planning.

Key Stage 1	Christianity and one other religion
Lower Key Stage 2	Christianity and two other different religions
Upper Key Stage 2	Christianity and two other different religions

**Schools would, in addition, also be able to include 'relevant aspects of other faiths' to reflect and celebrate their local community.**

## **The identification of the specific religions to be covered at each key stage**

- (a) The Agreed Syllabus can identify and require schools to follow specific religions at each key stage
- (b) The Agreed Syllabus may recommend which religions could be studied at each key stage
- (c) The Agreed Syllabus may prefer to leave the choice to schools, but should specify the number to be covered at each key stage

Additional options proposed at Conference July 13 2006

- (d) Schools should be required to cover all 6 principle religions
- (e) Schools should be allowed to choose the religions to be taught at some key stages
- (f) Schools should be able to decide the religions to be taught according to the local environment.

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