



RE Newsletter

Spring 2017

Issue 34

Chair's Report

I love the start of spring, when you start to notice the blossom in the hedgerows, the first flowers in the garden and the longer days. It gives me a real sense of hope for the longer, warmer days to come and a farewell to the frosty nights and short days of winter. It encourages us to look ahead and see what is before us. In the world of RE we are excitedly awaiting the commencement of the revision to the Bedfordshire Agreed Syllabus. The good news is that the three Local Authorities of Luton, Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough have agreed once again to work together to produce a brand new syllabus, which recognises not only the changes to the RE curriculum since 2012, but also the assessment without levels approach that the 2014 curriculum introduced. This time the Diocese of St Albans has also generously sponsored the revision and this has made it possible to ensure that we, using RE Today as our consultants, will be able to once again produce a syllabus fit for purpose, able to support RE teachers and deliver high quality outcomes for pupils. It is anticipated that the completed syllabus will be ready to launch in 2018.

Sarah Payne, RE Subject Leader at Woodland Academy in Flitwick led a fantastic day on 'Active Learning in RE' at The Forest Centre, Marston Moretaine in February. This was very well received and also very well supported by schools across the region. We, as the RE

Society Steering Committee, are always happy to receive suggestions for RE professional development. Please get in touch if you have ideas about what would support your RE teaching.

Many of our community as well as our church schools have been taking up opportunities to train on the 'Understanding Christianity' resources. I have been fortunate enough to go into some schools and see the units being taught, along with some amazing creative work that pupils have produced. It is hoped that through the support of Jane Chipperton, the Diocesan RE Adviser, there may be opportunities to run some training courses for more non-church schools in the future.

In the summer term, we are organising a visit to the Queens Park Faith Tour. This will be a twilight meeting, from 4pm until 7pm. During those three hours, we will visit a Christian church, a mosque and a gurdwara. If you haven't experienced this tour, this will be a wonderful opportunity, so look out for the poster advertising the visit for teachers and support staff in the latter part of the summer term.

As the term closes, I wish you a very happy Easter and hope that you all find time for rest and refreshment in what has been a very busy, hectic term.

Best wishes,
Judy

RE Society Logo competition

You may have noticed that we have changed our logo! We had some great entries from schools in Bedfordshire. The winner entry and runners up can be seen below. All received amazon vouchers.



Alice (Woodland Middle)



Leena (Woodland Middle)



Isabelle (Woodland Middle)



Millie (Woodland Middle)



Lauren (Woodland Middle)
Winner!



Dominika (Putnoe Primary)



Sway (Houghton Conquest Lower School)

The winning entry from Lauren at Woodland Middle School Academy, Flitwick, was then used to produce our new logo, which can be seen on our twitter account @BedsRESoc



Agreed Syllabus Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Luton

Work will begin soon on the new RE Agreed Syllabus. The process of SACRE discussions began a year ago and it was recently agreed that the three LAs would once again work together with RE Today to revise the current syllabus.

There will be an RE survey sent to all schools. There will also be a meeting of heads and teachers from the three SACREs so that RE Today have enough information to review, develop, rewrite and prepare the syllabus for publication next year. This will include work on EYFS, 5-14s, ensure continuity with the old syllabus and the ability to incorporate all recent National Curriculum structures and best practice revisions. It will include revised assessment guidance and teacher guidance about teaching religions, British values and other related updating work.

There is also a plan to make the new syllabus compatible with the programme 'Understanding Christianity' (which will, in future, link to projects on 'Understanding Islam' and 'Understanding Hinduism'). Revised versions of the question-led enquiry units written to follow the 2012 syllabus will be available to schools. We will keep you updated as the work develops.

Understanding Christianity

www.understandingchristianity.org.uk

'Understanding Christianity' is a set of comprehensive materials, linked to training, offering a clear and coherent approach to teaching and learning about Christianity in RE for pupils aged 4-14. It is compatible with the Agreed Syllabus for RE. Several community and church schools in Bedfordshire have already trained and are using the resource.

The resource was written by the RE Today advisory team, in collaboration with more than 30 expert teachers and academics, and has been trialled in over 50 schools.

Teachers attending the course will:

- Be able to use this excellent and innovative resource package for better learning about Christianity in primary schools
- Consider the place of concepts, creativity, theology and textual learning in RE through exploring inspiring examples of teaching and learning ideas
- Develop their own skills as a teacher of RE by using this major new, fully-resourced approach.



Understanding Christianity frieze

What they say:

'The general feeling from my staff is that the resources and planning have captured the children's imagination, created enthusiasm and deepened their understanding'.

'Understanding Christianity has given me the confidence to deliver fun and engaging RE. Our early years children have really grasped the concepts so far and have shown a much deeper understanding than I would have expected at such a young age.'

For more information and details regarding Understanding Christianity training please contact Ruth Garman on:

rgarman@stalbens.anglican.org



Understanding Christianity course at Clapham

Have you joined Beds RE Society?

All you need to know is here:

<http://www.beds-re-resources.org.uk/resbl.htm>

Bedfordshire RE Society is on twitter!

@BedsRESoc

So please follow us!

Bedfordshire GCSE and A level teacher day Bridging the gap - moved to May 4th

The day will be for teachers of GCSE (am) and A level (pm) and will focus on helping students to develop their ability to meet the demands of the different specifications in term of academic literacy. This will involve – in relation to each phase:

- Writing academically
- Developing reasoned arguments
- Selecting relevant information
- Referring to sources of authority
- Explaining key ideas
- Learning technical vocabulary
- Using writing structures and frames as differentiation.

Delegates will also consider student style answers in order to recognise high quality responses to examination question.

Deborah Weston is a highly experienced teacher and trainer who is Director of Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development at Mulberry School for Girls, London. She is a member of the executive of NATRE, Company Secretary of the RE Council of England and Wales and advises three local authorities on a regular basis.

£40 all day

£20 half day

Bring your own lunch. Light refreshments provided.

Course bookings through Ruth Garman on:
rgarman@stalbans.anglican.org

Commission on Religious Education. Report on first evidence gathering session Grey Coat Hospital School, Thu 23 Feb 2017

The Commission on Religious Education has been established to review the legal, education and policy frameworks for Religious Education, by a wide-ranging, inclusive and evidence-based process designed to inform policy makers about these areas.

The ultimate aim will be to improve the quality and rigour of religious education and its capacity to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.

<http://www.commissiononre.org.uk/report-on-first-evidence-gathering-session/>

The collecting of evidence and views on religious education in England got off to a good start at Grey Coat Hospital School in London on Thursday 23rd February. Commissioners Malcolm Evans, Anthony Towey, Denise Cush, Emma Knights (first half) and Juliet Lyal (second half) heard presentations from the following organisations: the Catholic Education Service, the British Humanist Association, the Church of England National Society, RE Today, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís, Christian Concern, and the following individuals: Fiona Moss, Deborah Weston, Dilwyn Hunt, Patricia Hannam and Andy Lewis, all well known in the RE world. Some presenters were invited by the Commission and others volunteered. The Commission will be inviting many more presenters to future sessions and also welcomes future volunteers. We also heard from seven students from Grey Coat Hospital School, who shared their own views on religious education in an impressively articulate fashion.

Many important issues were raised and useful evidence provided. One area that everyone who presented was agreed on is the need to improve recruitment and training for RE teachers. For decades RE has been taught by fewer specialist teachers at secondary level than other subjects, and training for primary teachers in religious education has declined to a completely inadequate few hours. A second area that was strongly supported by presenters was the need for accountability. In a situation where schools are judged on some criteria rather than others, RE is bound to be neglected if no-one is checking; it is becoming 'a casualty of accountability'. This was considered particularly important in relation to academies and free schools, as statistics demonstrate a relative neglect of RE.

Many presenters were in favour of doing away with the right of withdrawal that gives the impression that religious education is confessional and deprives some pupils of an important part of their education, though there are reservations connected to human rights legislation. There was also a considerable agreement among presenters that content should include Christianity, other religions both large and small, non-religious worldviews, and philosophical and moral issues, though there is disagreement about the relative time spent on each of these elements, and whether depth of learning can only be achieved by limiting the religions/areas studied. It was interesting that the students themselves mostly argued for increased diversity in the religious/non-religious traditions studied from the early years onwards, for impartial presentation, and for philosophy and ethics also to diversify from its current focus on the views of 'white males'. There was disagreement among students about how far Christianity should be privileged.

Although it is often claimed that a problem in RE is that the aims and purpose are unclear, there was actually agreement among these presenters that there is a variety of aims and purposes. When prioritising, there seemed to be considerable agreement about RE as an academic subject which enables pupils to understand the diversity of religious and non-religious worldviews, the place of Christianity in British history and culture, and space to reflect upon and develop their own beliefs, values, practices and identity.

On the possibility of changing legislation, in particular whether syllabuses should continue to be locally determined or whether some statutory national requirement should replace them, arguments and evidence on both sides were presented. This issue was separated from the continued existence of SACREs, with more agreement on their useful role in local communities. However, the uneven quality of SACRE provision and support from Local Authorities under increasing pressure was raised. The idea of some sort of national

baseline entitlement for pupils, in all types of state-maintained schools, that could then be augmented and adapted by whoever is writing syllabuses gained quite a bit of support, but there is anxiety about what this might be, who would be responsible for designing it, and whether it would be appropriate to spell out content.

The possibility of a new name for the subject, avoiding current preconceptions, was raised by several presenters. Other matters included the sharp decline in short course GCSE, meaning that over 100,000 fewer pupils in 2016 when compared with 2010 gained a 16+ qualification in RE. On the positive side, A level entries are rising. The negative consequences of RE being excluded from the EBacc, and the desirability of a new body that could draw together RE researchers and practitioners were also raised. We were asked to sympathise with the plight of the secondary RE teacher who might be coping with a new GCSE syllabus, a new A level syllabuses and a new Agreed Syllabus in the same year. Glimpses into RE teacher social media revealed the variety of topics that teachers are including in the brief time given for the subject.

Overall, it was a very interesting and useful day, which clearly demonstrated the RE skill of being able to discuss controversial issues in a civilised and respectful manner, not devoid of humour. In spite of some disagreements, it was very encouraging to see the passionate enthusiasm of so many people for our amazing subject.

The Commission plans to run more of these sessions in different parts of the country, and welcomes contributors.

Denise Cush

Recently retired as Professor of Religion and Education, Bath Spa University, Deputy Editor of the British Journal of Religious Education, and once upon a time RE teacher and trainer of both primary and secondary teachers.

Teaching Islam Conference

Friday 21st April 2017 12.30 – 3.45

The conference will be held at St Albans High School for Girls. The purpose of the day is to explore the more challenging areas of the Muslim faith and enhance teachers' subject knowledge. There will be time for a question and answer session and the sharing of good practice. The event will be chaired by Waqar Ahmad Ahmedi, author of three GCSE textbooks on Islam, and joint author of *The Oxford Teacher Handbook for GCSE Islam*. He will be sharing his enthusiasm and expertise, drawing on his own outstanding practice as a Religious Studies teacher.

<https://waqarahmedi.wordpress.com/@WaqarAhmedi>

The conference will be desirable to those teaching Islam at GCSE or A Level, addressing some shared content of the new specifications. Additionally, it will likely be of interest to those teaching Islam at any level who seek to be able to answer all manner of challenging questions.

This event is completely free of charge and more than one teacher from a given school is welcome to attend. Places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis. To book a place please contact Hazel Harper on harperh@stahs.org.uk

Resource Centres

Holywell Lodge Resource Centre

The resource centre based at Holywell Lodge, St Albans, AL1 1HE, has a wide range of items available to borrow and use in your schools. You will find collections of artefacts covering the six major world faiths, ideal for classroom displays, as well as resources for children to handle and explore. The Centre also houses, godly play boxes, storybags, big books, puppets, posters, CDs, DVDs and a large selection of books providing material for collective worship and RE.



We are beginning to catalogue the contents of the Centre and the following page on our website will be added to regularly:

www.stalbans.anglican.org/schools/holywell-lodge

To ask about availability or to enquire about resources that we may have for a specific topic, please contact Ruth on

rgarman@stalban.anglican.org

Bedfordshire Resource Centre

St Mark's Church and Community Centre
Calder Rise, Bedford MK41 7UY

We are in the process of updating our website, but please be aware that there are resources to borrow and download via

<http://www.beds-re-resources.org.uk/downloads.htm>

Also: <http://www.beds-re-resources.org.uk/resbl.htm>

SPIRITED ARTS

Get involved in this year's competition!

In its 14th year, this competition has attracted over 300,000 participants averaging 2,000 entrants per year since 2004. Hundreds of UK schools get involved, and we get entries coming from as far a field as Cyprus and Australia, Indonesia and South Africa.

The annual competition starts at the beginning of every school year and runs through to 31 July, in order to enable teachers to incorporate the art competition into their RE lessons. Many schools have an 'Art in Heaven' unit of work, or a special learning RE/arts week.

Judging by RE Today Advisers and students, takes place in August and winners are announced in the new academic year.

We are looking forward to another year of wonderful, inspirational and unique artwork from your pupils. For more information visit <http://www.natre.org.uk/about-natre/projects/spirited-arts/spirited-arts-2017/> or if you have further questions by emailing chelsey@natre.org.uk



2016 Spirited Art entries from St Michael's Primary School, Bishop's Stortford

Social Media

There is a vibrant RE community on twitter and Facebook which you may wish to join! Both national and regional messages, TeachMeets and training are posted regularly and online debates take place alongside monthly RE blogs!

If you have not yet joined, here are some suggestions:

Facebook RE

Save RE
RE Teachers Forum
RE East
NATRE

Blogs

www.BlogSyncRE

Twitter

@Mary Myatt
@kathrynfenlodge (Kathryn Wright)
@JChipperton
@iTeachRE (Andy Lewis)
@j_Lyal
@NATREupdate
@REQualityMark
@RECouncil
@RE_Today
@threefaiths
@reonline_tweets
@TrueTube
@RE:quest
@3FFSchools
@HolocaustUK
@TalkingDonkeyRE (Andy Lewis)
@RedhillRE (Redhill RE)
@FaithDebates
@HodderRE
@ArticlesFaith
@Face_to_Faith
@HolocaustCentUK
#BlogSyncRE