

RE for Real: A consultation on what works and what needs to change
Birmingham, 4th February 2015



Student discussion sticky notes

Q1. What knowledge, understanding and experience of religion do you need in the real world of today?

Responses have been grouped under emerging themes, ranging from the most to the least common.

There was much focus on why we need this knowledge & understanding. This centered around the following themes:

- Not discriminating or offending others;
 - You need to know about their religion as you don't want to end up offending them or to avoid racism.
 - You need to know what other religions believe and the rules of the religion so then you don't offend anyone. Knowing other religions will help you talk to people who are not the same religion so then you cannot discriminate.
 - In the real world you need to know about each other's religions as it can cause racism and discrimination. This can cause riots and violence.
 - I think everybody needs a general understanding of each religion as some people have set ideas of certain religions based on religious extremists presented in the media. If everyone had a general idea of each religion people might get along easier so there is less discrimination.
 - I think that understanding and knowledge of religion is important because then we can be more cautious so that people don't get offended.
 - You need to know the differences between religions in order to not offend or discriminate.
 - Basic views so that you understand others' opinions and don't offend each other.
 - Basic understanding so that you don't cause offence to religious people
 - They need to learn more knowledge and understanding about different religions because at the moment people are discriminating against others just because of your colour/symbols etc.
 - You need to understand their religions to know the boundaries, ways to not behave around certain groups.

- Knowledge – what not to do or say in front of people with strong religion, not causing offence
- I think it is important to know and understand about religions and cultures because it helps stop confusion, offence and stereotypes

- Understanding others;
 - We need to know about and understand religion, as if we don't we can't cater or allow for the vast majority of the world's population. This will lead to people feeling left out, which will result in hate crimes
 - You need the base knowledge of main religions to be able to understand how to respect and treat people of other religions in the wider world
 - We need to understand that people have different religions and beliefs and we have to respect them
 - To understand where people are coming from
 - Helps you understand more about other religions and backgrounds

- Respecting others;
 - Respect other religions
 - Help you understand the lives that other people live so that you can respect their choices
 - I think that we need to know all the religions that are out there, and understand that viewpoints on that religion. So that we can respect people for who they are
 - Individuals need to acknowledge that there are other various religions other than their own and all religions need to be accepted as neither right or wrong
 - To understand that each religion is different so there will be similarities and differences therefore we should keep respect and tolerance with one another as everyone's views are different and that's how we learn and open up to it

- Getting on with others
 - Society needs experience and knowledge to live in harmony with other communities so we understand their viewpoints and feeling of their beliefs and practices.
 - The boundaries of the different religions, this creates a better understanding of other people, having an insight into a range of different religions means people know what to say and how to behave around those with different cultures. It creates talking points between religions.
 - You need to be able to understand relationships between religions and how to overcome those differences between religions in order for everyone to get along.
 - People can get along with each other
 - In the modern world we need to learn about society and what is wrong. We need to learn from the viewpoint of another religion. We need

experience to live in harmony. We need to understand what they are doing.

- Is it more about engaging pupils in understanding and knowledge which will equip them to be able to start to deal with the real world?

Diversity of and within religions

- I think we need to learn more about other religions and not just Christianity.
- Phenomenon of a breadth of religions should be reflected but taught within a critical framework.
- Not all people believe in the same things in religion. E.g. Some Sikhs eat meat
- Whose 'real' world? The plurality of responses that this would illicit begs the question what do we mean by the real world? And does this then change the way we consider what knowledge and understanding and experience of religion is required?
- Learn about other religions in depth
- Learn to be able to differentiate between religions and sub-religions
- Broad and balanced basic knowledge of religions and non-religious beliefs. Less deep theological study.
- Range of beliefs within a religion
- Focus on 2 religions at GCSE very limiting
- A-level should be more diverse (not focus on Christianity)
- Diverse views should be taught
- To know about all religions and not just one. In the real world you need to understand other religions.
- The people who discriminate against religion because of extremism etc need to understand that extremists are only a small minority group and do not represent their whole religion.
- We need to understand other religions so that we can compare different faiths.

Beliefs and practices

- Basic knowledge, understanding – leads to good people skills
- In the world you need now the differences between different religions. For example, their beliefs and the religious items they wear. That all people are equal and are brought up in different faiths. Key beliefs.
- What makes each religion unique? How do they stand out? This will only happen if we know the basics of religion.
- The actual religion needs to be taught rather than what is taught in the media as its been seen that the views of the media does create many issues..
- Talk about different religious practices e.g. food
- Knowledge of different celebrations/festivals
- Culture/traditions
- What some religions allow. What some religions 'restrict' people to do.
- I think you need to know the main religions in the world and the religious practices that they take part in.

- Different foods and practices
- Philosophy

Lived Identity

- Students need to know what the religions and beliefs are. Some of the religions, people will live out the faith others may live out certain parts of the faith.
- Both practices and individuals. Certain practices such as no drinking etc. but individuals are different and have different views on a religion.
- Concept of lived religion
- What is the actual experience of living a set of beliefs?
- The knowledge, understanding and experience of the everyday reality of religion in society. The fuzziness and blurriness of everyday religiosity – how it is lived and negotiated. How religion changes and transforms.
- The morals which are formed by religion which help someone live their life and make choices
- It should be known that religions are used for teachings and values. However, some individuals use it simply for identity.

Religion in society

- Local & national tension, complicated further by globality
- History of religions
- Religion in politics
- Focus on positive and negative
- Religion in the media
- If you're aware of the rules etc. you can understand things that are currently happening in the news etc.
- More on extremism (Not just Christian and Muslim)
- Separation between religion & extremism

Focus on experience

- Experiential RE (e.g. faith visits) are key.
- In the real world today you need to experience different backgrounds as today social media takes over other views. You also kind of need to dig for extra knowledge so you have a picture in your mind and your own opinion of a religion.
- To put yourself in another person's shoes. E.g. visit a mosque, Gurdwara etc.
- To be accepting of other religions as socializing with other religions can provide opportunities when it comes to things like jobs.
- One would hope for diversity, equality and positive representation in the media; but as there isn't then experience through breadth of literature, socializing and media choice is imperative.

Challenges

- Teaching to exams
- Time constraints
- Teacher subject knowledge

- Governors in faith schools can be hindrance
- Ethical and philosophical viewpoints might lead to superficial approach to RE.

Theology

- Hold onto distinct religions – i.e. holy scripture to give deeper meaning value and academic purpose – skills
- Breadth and depth of discussion on religious tenants of faith. Theological route is required in terms of scripture and text needs to be taught and contextualized.

Commonalities:

- Even though they have different religions, some of the things they believe in are kind of similar
- Should highlight similarities more than differences

Moral values

- The basic morals that different religions teach because it can help you lead a better more respected life.

Ethics

- Learning about ethics as a theme , not tradition by tradition
- Medical ethics

Religion as a concept

- Focus more on the religious concept

Q.2 What is the most important and effective part of learning or teaching in RE for you?

There was much similarity between the responses, with a focus on the following:

- Debate and discussion. This was often linked to exploring moral issues.

Alongside this, often mentioned were;

- the ambiguity – no right or wrong answer
 - exploring divergent view points
 - listening to others
 - developing and articulating your own opinion
 - articulating your own and other's views
 - challenging what they and others believe
 - time and safe space to question
 - personal reflection
- Practical knowledge about religion and belief

- Learning a broad range of religions
- Comparing religions
- Respecting other people and their beliefs
- Experiential /interactive learning – most often cited examples were:
 - Trips – helps you get a visual understanding
 - Visitors; create deeper levels of meaning & make religions accessible
 - Creative work
 - Videos – visualizing topics
 - Learning from students themselves; ‘Its good when other students can educate you about their religion and belief’
- The teacher – in terms of:
 - Subject knowledge
 - Non bias
 - Confidence
 - Questioning

Other, lesser mentioned elements included:

- Relevance - relating learning to modern day
- Big questions/philosophy
- Relating learning to own experiences
- Challenge and stretch – developing higher order skills of analysis
- Theological enquiry
- Exploring religion as a concept

Q.3 What needs to change in the formal RE curriculum and what needs to change in the way religion is handled in the rest of school life and the curriculum?

Responses are summarized in 3 areas:

Content

- Choice over which religions to study
- More variety of religions studied
- More than one religion at A-Level
- Diversity within traditions
- Include smaller religions
- Address the controversial e.g. homophobia, extremism & violence in religion, negative Christian history
- Focus on modern day
- Learn about the history of religions
- More morals
- More religion
- Remove unrelated topic from the curriculum e.g. the environment

Delivery

- Less abstract - more about meaning
- Make lessons more interactive
- More visits to religious landmarks etc.
- Meet people from other faiths – discuss with others their actual opinion
- Encourage living religions – not superficial, textbook RE
- Not put religious communities into neat boxes
- Coursework at GCSE
- Better textbooks – not stereotypical
- Primary indoctrinates
- Learning should be distributed throughout the curriculum

Structure

- Law requiring acts of worship should be abolished (difficult red herring to the RE debate)
- RE should never be confessional
- Academies and free schools y follow a locally agreed syllabus (unless faith based?)
- MacDonaldisation of RE – content as exam board led
- Change the name
- Better CPD
- Increased professional freedom and autonomy
- Less Diocesan interference- and inspections
- Less governor interference
- Better progression from primary to secondary RE
- Get RE into the National Curriculum
- SMSC focus on RE and British Values misses the point
- Improve status
- More specialist teachers
- Need non-bias teachers
- Too much external control – influence of other agendas