

KS3 Religious Education: Chief Moderator Report 2012

Main messages for school departments

Range of evidence:

Some 156 schools provided evidence for this final phase of the RE Central Moderation. The majority of these had clearly read and taken account of the Chief Moderator's Report of 2011, and the evidence received by moderators had fewer examples of the issues identified in that Report. However, there were a significant number that provided evidence that did not reflect the characteristics of the level descriptions, and some where the evidence implied that the department had not used the National Exemplar Framework, but had confined themselves to a consideration of the level descriptions and nothing else. This resulted in some schools providing evidence that did not take into account all of the strands of the levels, or which did not demonstrate the three inter-related core skills that are clearly stated within the Framework and reflected in the level descriptions. In addition, the Guidance document published by DfES includes very specific information and direction concerning these aspects.

Some of the overall issues noted by moderators in this final phase were samples that:

- failed to demonstrate learners engaging with fundamental questions;
- confused personal responses to fundamental questions and the third core skill of personal expression;
- had a minimal range of tasks/assignments across the four levels;
- did not contain any evidence for Level 7.

Presentation of sample evidence including teachers' commentary:

Again this year many departments had followed the WJEC Guidance and advice given to schools. There was clear evidence of the use of the WJEC commentary form, with many completing this with good quality detailed information, and careful cross referencing within learners' work using a variety of methods (numbers, colour coding, and/or annotation). Some departments did not include a master copy of these methods – although a large number were based on the exemplar materials sent to schools, so moderators were easily able to work out the system. Overall there was a vast improvement on the previous year, and there were many examples of good practice in presenting clear evidence of the department's understanding of the level descriptions. A notable feature was the number of departments who used the teacher commentary to explain how a particular piece of work could have been improved further, or how it could have met some characteristic of the level description in question. These approaches do show the department's understanding of the level descriptions.

However, there were samples that:

- did not identify the precise location of the characteristics in the sample, but only noted on the cover sheet that the material did contain the evidence, or perhaps at the top of a page in the learners' work;
- provided minimal information on the Cover Sheets – which did not help moderators in being able to see the department's understanding of the level descriptions;
- used criteria, (or their own re-worked versions of the level descriptions) that did not actually reflect the wording and characteristics of the level descriptions from the *National Exemplar Framework for RE for 3 to 19 year-olds in Wales*, although this was less evident than the previous year;

- provided far more evidence than was required. For example, some schools provided between 12 and 35 pieces of work for each of the levels. This was unnecessary work for the department, and unhelpful for moderation

Understanding of the characteristics of the level descriptions:

One of the main issues emerging from the sample evidence reviewed by moderators this year was the misunderstanding of fundamental questions. There were many departments that did realise that not all religious or moral/ethical questions are necessarily fundamental questions, and their samples demonstrated clear understanding of the core skill of Engaging with fundamental questions. However, there were many samples that demonstrated examples of learners discussing or responding to religious and moral questions – but not fundamental questions, nor any sense of engaging with them (i.e. exploring, delving, considering, evaluating).

The *National Exemplar Framework for RE for 3 – 19 year-olds in Wales* states clearly that fundamental questions:

“are human and religious questions that focus on the search for meaning, significance and value in life. They have a profundity and intensity that underpins any aspect of study in religious education.” (page 20)

In the *Religious education: Guidance for Key Stages 2 and 3* document published by The Department for Education and Skills (DfES), a further helpful definition is given for fundamental questions:

“Fundamental questions are all-encompassing – they might include ultimate questions (that relate to the essentials of existence and do not have conclusive answers), religious questions (that relate to specific religious/theological/philosophical/ethical concepts) and human questions (that relate to making sense and finding purpose in normal daily living). Each of these questions will focus on the profound and are essential if learners are to engage fully with any aspect of study in religious education.” (page 8)

Possibly a contributory factor to this misunderstanding was the number of samples that included tasks or learners’ responses to questions that were not worded as fundamental questions, but which, with some amendment would have enabled the learners’ responses to have been evidence of engaging with a fundamental question. There were a significant number of samples that had either closed questions, or questions about religious beliefs, teachings and practices purporting to be evidence of this first core skill.

A second issue is the number of departments that seemed to confuse aspects of engaging with fundamental questions in terms of:

- ‘discuss their own and others’ responses’ [Level 4],
- ‘express and justify ideas and opinions’ [Level 5], and
- ‘develop appropriate responses’ [Level 6]

with the characteristics of the third core skill of Expressing personal responses. In this latter area, the characteristics are quite different and refer to:

- ‘explaining in simple terms how their own feelings, actions and opinions differ from those of others’ [Level 4],
- ‘explain how their own feelings actions and opinions affect their own lives and describe how those of others similarly affect their lives’ [Level 5], and
- ‘explain the relationship between their own beliefs and actions, and also explain the relationship between other people’s beliefs and actions’ [Level 6].

Departments which had looked closely at these characteristics were able to demonstrate their understanding clearly. However, there were many samples that identified simple expressions of viewpoints, ideas or opinions as evidence of this third core skill. For Level 7 there is reference to '*drawing balanced conclusions*' and there were many samples where this was not demonstrated in the evidence provided for Level 7. Many samples also did not contain explanations of how beliefs and actions of others affected their lives [Level 5]. Likewise, for Level 7, many samples did not demonstrate evidence of any consideration of the implications of beliefs and actions but rather just descriptions of these and the impact they had on believers.

The second core skill of Exploring religious beliefs, teachings and practices was evidenced much more consistently this year, and where schools did not demonstrate the criteria of the level descriptions, it was largely because of the absence of teachings, or sometimes one of the other aspects. This issue was clearly highlighted in the Chief Moderators Report for 2011, and there was clear evidence that many departments had taken account of this matter. However, there were still samples that seemed to assume that this core skill is demonstrated by any comment, description or account by learners of anything to do with religion.

Also in this second core skill, the characteristics of the level descriptions have clear distinctions between them. For example, Level 5 requires the **making** of '*links between religious beliefs, teachings and practices studied*', whereas Level 6 requires the '**use of their understanding of the links between religious beliefs, teachings and practices investigated to consolidate their understanding of religion and** to explain differing religious viewpoints.' There were many samples that did demonstrate these characteristics clearly, or that used the teacher commentary or annotation to accurately explain what could have been added to ensure the work did meet the characteristic. This clearly demonstrated the department's understanding of the level descriptions. However, there were many samples that provided evidence for Level 6 that did not move beyond the Level 5 characteristics, and sometimes were more akin to descriptions of the links between religious beliefs, teachings and practices.

In respect of Level 7 characteristics for this second core skill, there were many samples that demonstrated the characteristics clearly:

they 'apply a wide range of religious concepts to a variety of beliefs, teachings and practices. They accurately explain and justify the reasons for the range of viewpoints held by religious people.'

However, there were significant numbers of samples that failed to demonstrate these characteristics. Frequently, there was no evidence of the **application** of a **wide range of religious** concepts. Sometimes there was evidence of a concept or two, but not always religious ones. The most common issue here was the application of concepts to '**a variety of religious beliefs, teachings and practices**'.

Many samples for this level contained evidence of learners' work that showed masterful use of language and expression, clear understanding of religious beliefs, teachings and practices, and sometimes clear descriptions of differing religious traditions, but these qualities do not actually reflect the specific characteristics for Level 7. Moderators found, and wish to acknowledge, examples of high quality learners' work provided by some schools, but which nevertheless did not demonstrate the department's understanding of the specific characteristics of the Level 7 description.

One other issue was identifying similarities and differences within and across religions. Once again, the level descriptions have clearly defined characteristics between the levels, so that Level 4 requires learners to '*identify the similarities and differences within religions*',

whereas Level 5 requires learners to ‘*identify the similarities **and** differences within **and** across religion.*’ Many schools did provide evidence of these characteristics clearly, and sometimes this was done via teacher commentary or annotation. Commentary was also used to point out the absence of one element, noting that had this been included the characteristics would have been demonstrated. As stated before, this approach does demonstrate that the department understands the level descriptions. However, many samples for Level 4 tended to demonstrate evidence of learners identifying differences within religions, but not similarities. For Level 5, many samples contained similarities and differences **across** religions, but not **within** religions.

Despite the Chief Moderators Report for 2011, and the details in the WJEC Administrative Guidance, there were still a number of departments that provided only two or three tasks across the whole sample – the same task for each of the four levels. This meant that for some of these samples, there was no evidence for whole strands of the characteristics in some of the levels because the tasks did not enable those characteristics to be demonstrated.

It is important to reiterate that the WJEC Guidance notes that the materials ‘*selected by each department should reflect the broad range of contexts and types of activity/outcomes that characterise normal classwork and out of class activities.*’ (page 3). It also states that ‘*the generation and selection of sample evidence should not require additional work by learners or non-routine teaching or learning experiences.*’ (page 4). In addition, there is the statement that the sample evidence ‘*may be sourced from individual learner portfolios, departmental folios, and/or other sources of learners’ work from the school.*’ (page 5). There is no expectation that work should be specifically produced for the external moderation or that the sample evidence must come from the current term or the current cohort of learners.

Key messages for schools:

- Study carefully the issues raised in the external moderation report for the department, and the comments in the Chief Moderator’s Report, in order to develop and enhance the department’s understanding of standards within religious education.
- Look at the detail for Key Stage 3 and the level descriptions in the *National Exemplar Framework for religious education for 3 to 19 year-olds in Wales*¹ and where necessary relate these to the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education.
- Look at and discuss as a department the DfES *Religious education: Guidance for Key Stages 2 and 3 Key messages for planning learning and teaching* and the accompanying *Exemplifying learner profiles at Key Stages 2 and 3 in religious education: Additional Guidance* and determine how the department’s scheme of work and its teaching and learning activities and tasks may be enhanced further.
- Select a sufficient variety of tasks that enable all the characteristics of the level description and the breadth of the three inter-related core skills to be clearly evident.
- Ensure the selection of tasks and activities demonstrate learners engaging with fundamental questions, rather than just responding to some religious or moral questions.
- Select appropriate evidence of learners expressing personal responses, in accord with the characteristics in the level descriptions for that core skill.

¹ Most, if not all SACREs in Wales have adopted or adapted the National Exemplar Framework as their locally agreed syllabus for religious education.

Possible implications for teaching and learning, assessment and departmental standardisation:

- Ensure that the tasks and activities learners engage in during their course of study enable them to develop the skills as outlined in the *National Exemplar Framework for religious education for 3 to 19 year-olds in Wales*;
- Choose tasks and wording of questions/activities that enable learners to fully engage with fundamental questions, and to develop the appropriate responses as defined in the characteristics of the level descriptions for this core skill;
- Give appropriate direction to learners so that they are able to distinguish between religious beliefs, teachings and practices, and which help them to understand and recognise the way that these inform and affect each other, and together relate to fundamental questions experienced in life and religion, and to the personal expressions of themselves and others;
- As part of departmental considerations for on-going standardisation and the reaching of a common understanding of the level descriptions, consider the progression from one level to another in terms of the specific characteristics for the different strands within the level descriptions.

Chief Moderator for RE

June 2012