

# Assessment and Progression in Religious Education

## Part 2: A New Framework for Assessment in RE

### Introduction

Part 1 of this guidance provides a vision for a new assessment framework for RE that is based on the three aims of the RE curriculum provided in the 2013 [National Curriculum Framework for RE](#) (NCFRE) and the objectives of GCSE Religious Studies.

In brief, this framework brings together the aims and objectives to form the following focuses for assessment:

1. Knowledge and understanding of religious and non-religious worldviews;
2. Analysis and evaluation of important questions and experiences of life in relation to religious and non-religious worldviews.

In Part 2, these focuses are unpacked in terms of benchmark expectations for pupils as they make progress in their RE learning. A new model for RE assessment and progression is presented here, that balances the requirements for knowledge, understanding AND skills. It aims to provide an approach that is clear, straightforward and manageable and that will provide pupils, teachers and parents with information about a pupil's attainment in RE and what needs to be done next for progress to be made.

Part 2, therefore provides additional notes on:

- 'Big Ideas' and 'concepts' in RE and in religious and non-religious worldviews;
- Using benchmark expectations in RE;
- Short-term, medium-term and long-term planning;
- Recording and communicating judgements;
- Proposed expectations in RE for 7, 11, 14 and 16 year olds.

### 'Big Ideas', 'Areas of Enquiry' and 'Concepts' in RE and in Religious and Non-Religious Worldviews

In order to provide direction for assessing pupils' progress in RE it is important to have an idea of where their learning is going. In other words, we need to identify the overarching ideas that pupils should encounter in their RE that will enable them to engage with and understand the power of religion and belief in people's lives.

Some examples of key words in the whole field of religious education are: authority, belief, belonging, community, communication/expression, diversity, experience, identity, knowledge, certainty, life, purpose, religion, practice, ethics and truth. If pupils are developing their knowledge and understanding of such terms and are learning to engage in productive enquiries about them, then we can be confident that they are moving in the right direction.

More specifically, where pupils are investigating and interpreting **concepts** used in particular traditions, they will be building their detailed knowledge and

understanding of theological and/or philosophical ideas that will help them to analyse and evaluate some of the questions and experiences of life.

It will be a matter of debate as to which concepts are held to be 'central' or at the 'core' of any particular tradition, and it will be important to recognise the diversity of emphasis within them.

## **The Framework**

The following table provides a set of concise descriptions of what pupils are expected to know and be able to do at specific points in their studies in religious education. These 'learning standards' do not describe any particular teaching practice or pedagogy. Nor do they describe any particular RE curriculum. Instead, they relate to:

- the three aims of the RE curriculum in the NCFRE and
- the assessment objectives set by Ofqual for GCSE religious studies.

It is important to know what progress in these aims and objectives looks like in order to support pupils' learning and to gauge how well they are doing in RE and how best to advise them on how to improve.

The descriptions here are in effect broad indicators of progress – signs of pupils 'getting better' at RE. Teachers should also have a grasp of the details of the RE syllabus being followed in their school, its aims and purpose as well as the content for the key stages. These will usually be set out in the programme of study.

Finally, teachers need an understanding of progression and assessment and its relationship to planning, teaching and achievement, in order to construct a system that works in their school. Definitions of key terms are included in Part 1 of this guidance.

## **Benchmark expectations**

By combining elements of knowledge and understanding of religious and non-religious worldviews with the interpretation, analysis and evaluation of questions and experiences of life, teachers can gain a clear view of what they expect pupils to achieve.

These provide a way to map out progression when planning. They can help promote a shared understanding and a common language about achievement in RE. This will enable teachers to make end of key stage judgements about pupil attainments.

The benchmark expectations can also be used as guidance when writing mark schemes. They can be used or modified to set standards in your school, and shared with parents and pupils. The benchmarks can be adapted to show expectations for each year group, e.g., 'pupils are doing well in RE in year 5 when they know and understand... and can recall...' and personalised by relating them to your curriculum plan, e.g., by adding points of belief, practice and forms of expression (such as stories) from specific traditions being studied and specific skills being demonstrated.

## **Planning**

The advantage of using the big ideas / areas of enquiry in planning the RE curriculum, is that it provides a clear structure for pupils to revisit these elements and build on previous achievements. Thus, a 'spiral' curriculum can be planned so that pupils can deepen their knowledge and understanding of the traditions being studied by looking, e.g., at a familiar story from a different perspective.

The benchmark statements can be used to inform and set expectations for pupils' achievement and *assessment criteria* in the individual teaching units. These won't use the same general or abstract language, but will *contextualise* the expectations into a mark scheme or assessment criteria that will make sense to pupils, i.e., they will provide pitch. This provides the basis of planning assessment opportunities and shows how benchmark expectations develop in practice.

## **Using the framework**

In order to create a manageable assessment system in your school it is helpful to consider the three familiar levels of assessment thinking: short term, medium term and long term.

### **Short term (day-to-day)**

The benchmark expectations for RE are not for sharing directly with students and are of limited use in making day-to-day assessment. However, an understanding of the progression shown in the expectations is essential underpinning for assessment for learning. Progress can be shown on a day-to-day basis, even if assessment information is more informal and ephemeral in nature.

Formative strategies such as better questioning (challenging questions, rich questions); feedback (including formative marking, with opportunities for students to respond and improve their work) and effective self- and peer-assessment require teachers and students to understand progress in these terms.

### **Medium term assessment (periodic)**

Pupils should have the chance to demonstrate their achievement through more formal periodic assessment, typically towards the end of a unit of work. Here, assessing using the criteria for the unit can be used formatively to identify broad progress, strengths and weaknesses and to identify curriculum targets, as well as summatively to monitor progress towards the expectations benchmarks.

A 'mixed economy' of assessment opportunities can be built in to test a range of pupils' capabilities and different aspects of achievements in RE. This might include short tests of specific knowledge, more developed enquiries to assess conceptual understanding and skills, and perhaps occasional synoptic assessment, such as problem solving or decision-making exercises at the end of a year or key stage. These can focus on the extent to which pupils can apply skills, link ideas together and move from the particular to the general, so demonstrating their progress as RE thinkers. These assessment opportunities will draw upon the benchmark expectations.

### **Long term assessment (transitional)**

The benchmark expectations help set a national standard so that schools can be secure in their judgement for monitoring and reporting purposes.

### Recording and communicating the judgement

Teachers will be asked to report periodically on pupils' progress. The NAHT suggests a system of *working towards / met / exceeded* the expected standards to make judgement about attainment in the long term. This will mean a significant shift from the previous use of levels. If tasks and criteria are planned and written with the benchmark expectations in mind they will become more demanding across the year and key stage.

Thus, pupils who continue to meet expectations throughout a year will inevitably show that they are making progress.

Table 3 Monitoring progress at different time scales

<b>Scale/Focus</b>	<b>Practice for example</b>	<b>Progress and standards</b>
<b>Short-term</b> Day-to-day	Assessment for learning e.g. questioning, formative feedback/response	Evident in teaching and learning, in pupils' ongoing work, response to feedback, etc.
<b>Frequent</b> Basic knowledge and skills	Short test, identified piece of Homework. More in-depth marking	Progress check can give you a number
<b>Half/termly</b> Conceptual, procedural knowledge	Short research task, problem-solving exercise, etc. Access to work at particular standards, e.g. display. Peer/self- assessment	Criterion marking and feedback Linked to age-related expectations
<b>Long-term</b> (Year/Key Stage) Substantial conceptual development	A major piece of work, e.g. enquiry, decision making exercise, extended writing End of year: perhaps synoptic, drawing learning together	As above, plus an opportunity to develop portfolio of RE work exemplifying and sharing standards and illustrating progress

# The Framework of benchmark expectations in religious education

## Knowledge and understanding

- making greater sense of religious and non-religious worldviews by organising and connecting their knowledge and understanding with questions and experiences of life;
- working with more complex information, and with increasing facility with technical vocabulary, about religious and non-religious worldviews, including the impact of people's beliefs, ways of life and forms of expressing meaning on important questions and experiences of life.

### Expectations. Pupils:

by age 7	by age 9	by age 11	by age 14	by age 16
recall some of the beliefs, stories, symbols, artefacts and practices of different religious and non-religious worldviews, recognising some similarities and differences and saying something about how and why they may be important for many people, especially in the local area.	describe what believers might learn from the significant texts/writings and other arts being studied; describe some of the rules and guidance used by believers and how that might be applied in working with others from different traditions, both locally and more widely; describe the importance of key texts/writings in the tradition being studied and give an example of how they may be used.	make some links between some texts, stories and symbols and guidance on how to live a good life; describe and compare different ways of demonstrating a commitment to local, national and global traditions of religion and belief, including through celebrations; describe and compare different ideas about the meanings of life and death from the traditions being studied with reference to key texts.	describe and compare different local, national and global expressions and interpretations of religious and non-religious worldviews, explaining how and why people express their views in a variety of ways; suggest reasons for similar and different interpretations of scriptures and other important texts, and offer explanations as to why some people are inspired to follow a particular religious or philosophical path.	demonstrate a broad and deep knowledge and understanding of specific religions and worldviews including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• key beliefs, practices and sources of authority;</li> <li>• their influence on individuals, communities and societies;</li> <li>• similarities and differences within and/or between them;</li> </ul> explain the significance of key religious and philosophical concepts in relation to important questions and experiences of life.

## Analysis and evaluation

- increasing the range and accuracy of investigative and evaluative skills, and advancing their ability to select and apply their knowledge and understanding of religious and non-religious worldviews to important questions and experiences of life.

### Expectations. Pupils:

by age 7	by age 9	by age 11	by age 14	by age 16
investigate features of religious and non-religious worldviews by asking their own questions about them; talk about what is important to them and to other people with respect for feelings and provide a good reason for the views they have and the connections they make.	investigate different ideas about God and humanity; ask important questions about the practice of faith and compare different possible answers; express their own ideas about how to lead a good life, recognising that others may think differently, and provide good reasons for the views they have and the connections they make.	investigate and make links between some stories and symbols from religious and non-religious worldviews and their guidance on how to live a good life; describe and compare how key events are remembered and/or celebrated in different traditions and how people may demonstrate their commitment to such traditions, providing good reasons for the views they have and the connections they make whilst recognising that others may think differently.	investigate different views on how faith may play a vital part in people's lives and identity, recognising a diversity of views on the place of religion in the media and wider public life; ask questions about the meaning and purposes of religion and suggest answers in relation to the search for truth; use reasoning and examples to express insights into the relationships between beliefs, teachings and ethical issues whilst recognising that others may think differently.	plan and undertake independent enquiry in which skills, knowledge and understanding are applied to investigate questions arising from their study of religious and non-religious worldviews; use a range of intellectual and communication skills, including the formulation of arguments, and some synthesis and critical evaluation of evidence; express insights into the significance and influence of different perspectives whilst recognising that others may think differently.