

Materials used to teach about World Religions in Schools

Executive summary

Introduction

This study was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and carried out during the academic year 2008-9 by the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit to investigate the materials used in schools to teach about world religions as part of Religious Education (RE). The religions specified by the DCSF for this study are those identified in Religious Education: The Non-Statutory National Framework (QCA 2004), which offers guidance to Agreed Syllabus Conferences, namely Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. The Non-Statutory National Framework (reflecting many local Agreed Syllabuses for RE) includes the attainment targets 'learning about' and 'learning from' religions.¹

The study includes an evaluation of the published materials readily available, consideration of the contextual and pedagogical factors that influence their selection and use in schools and classrooms, and the materials' contribution to learning. A particular focus has been on their contribution to education for community cohesion both in terms of their ability to enhance young people's understanding of the principal religions in British society, and in terms of the messages these materials may convey about inter communal, particularly inter religious, harmony and cooperation.

Investigation of the nature and contexts of their use have widened the study to encompass a broader understanding of the character of RE in a wide range of English schools (including maintained and independent, primary and secondary) and the schools' varied responses to the community cohesion agenda. The study takes into account diversity within the education system that means different schools take different approaches to RE and community cohesion while respecting the principles of tolerance and respect for religious difference required by both.

¹ The research questions were:

1. What materials (books, ICT resources and other materials) are available to maintained and independent schools for teaching about and learning from world religions?
2. What materials are schools using in practice to develop an understanding of world religions?
3. What is the content/nature of these materials used by schools and how does this relate to current school regulations (in particular the duty on maintained schools to promote community cohesion and the independent school standard to assist their pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures)?
4. How are these materials used by teachers in the classroom to enhance learning and to promote community cohesion? How could their use be improved?
5. What are the key factors for schools to consider when determining which materials should be used to teach world religions?

Methodology

The study was divided into 3 inter-related strands.

Strand 1: A three phase review of materials

- Phase 1 consisted of an audit of available books (produced since 2000) and ICT materials used to teach RE in schools (published separately, Hayward and Hopkins 2010). In addition, a review of a sample of available materials was conducted by experts drawn from academia (one for each religion), professional RE specialists (one for primary, one for KS3 and one for KS4 and post-16) and faith group consultants (one for each religion).
- Phase 2 comprised a review of additional materials by the experts and consultants, including materials identified in the qualitative case studies and the quantitative survey.

- Phase 3 consisted of an analytical review of the Phase 1 and 2 reports from the experts and consultants in order to identify issues and recommendations. This was conducted by group coordinators and an ICT expert.

During Phase 1 and Phase 2 the total resources reviewed were:

Primary (KS1/2) - 43 Books, 30 Websites

Lower secondary (KS3) - 37 Books, 32 Websites

Upper secondary (KS4) - 21 Books, 30 Websites

Strand 2: Qualitative Case Studies

These included interviews with teachers and groups of pupils, pupil focus groups, lesson observations and a review of school policy documents. They were conducted in 10 primary schools and 10 secondary schools. These were selected from a variety of school types (including maintained and independent schools and schools with or without a religious character), across the government regions, and including urban and rural settings. The ten primary schools included two independent schools. The secondary schools included one independent school and one Academy. The rest were maintained of one type or another. Half the case study institutions were schools with a religious character. Of these schools with a religious character, 4 were voluntary aided primary (2 Church of England, 1 Roman Catholic, 1 Jewish), 1 independent Muslim primary, 4 voluntary aided secondary (1 Church of England, 1 Roman Catholic, 1 Muslim, 1 Jewish) and 1 Christian Academy.

Strand 3: A Quantitative Survey

This consisted of a postal and online survey involving a nationwide random sample of 2,723 schools of all types. From the primary and secondary schools, responses were received from all types of schools (including Community, Voluntary Controlled and Voluntary Aided schools to independent non-denominational schools and independent schools with a religious character - e.g. Muslim schools and an independent Jewish school). In view of the low response rate (23%) we are not able to report on each category of primary school and secondary school as had been the original intention. Although we recognise that this sample is not nationally representative of schools the discussion of the survey findings presents an overview of the findings from the primary sector and the secondary sector followed by a discussion in the narrative following certain tables whenever significant differences emerged between three routinely conducted comparisons. The routinely conducted comparisons are 1) maintained schools and independent schools; 2) all schools with a religious character and all schools without a religious character; and 3) maintained schools with a religious character and maintained schools without a religious character (as specified by the DCSF).

Key Findings

- There is a wide range of religious education materials to support teaching about the six principal religions, particularly for Key Stages (KS) 1, 2 and 3.
- Books were used as teacher resources in all Key Stages and as sources of pictures and text.
- The survey and the case studies show that teachers draw heavily on web resources and DVDs from the UK and elsewhere. Teachers make creative use of ICT in their lessons using a large amount of material not specifically produced for religious education purposes.
- The promotion of community cohesion is rarely addressed explicitly in RE materials but is dependent on teachers drawing out community cohesion messages from the content of the RE lesson.
- Case studies showed that school responses to the community cohesion agenda are various including learning about differences, transforming life chances, community partnerships and social action. In different schools links are made between RE and all of these areas.
- Much of the material used in RE lessons is generated by the teachers themselves using a

mixture of electronic, print and other resources many of which were not specifically produced for RE purposes.

- The development of personal and social values, of positive attitudes towards those of other religions, and of critical thinking, was given higher priority in religious education than knowledge about religions by the majority of teachers in the case study schools.
- Religious learning in schools has various forms and expressions other than formal RE. There are opportunities (at some schools more than others) to learn about religions through cross-curricular themes, use of visits and visitors, local partnerships (e.g. with parish churches or other schools) and collective worship.
- Reviewers of materials pointed out that the value of RE materials for increasing understanding of the six principal religions is often compromised by inaccuracy, imbalance and lack of depth in their portrayal.
- Reviewers suggested a number of criteria for teachers to assess the representation of religions to ensure that their integrity is respected and that student understanding is enhanced. These included ensuring: accuracy in the portrayal of the religion; recognition of each religion's complexity and internal diversity; acknowledgement of the spiritual / numinous; a sense of the religion as living and contemporary.
- Reviewers suggested that books should establish points of contact with their intended readers in the following ways: use contemporary issues and reliable sources to engage pupils; offer a variety of source materials with which pupils of different abilities might engage, e.g. invite interaction with the text and pictures; provide sufficient contextual information for stories and pictures; enhance accessibility through clear design; provide a balance between learning about and learning from religions.
- The availability of many free web-based resources means that teachers and students need to be able to become critical evaluators of materials and assess them for authenticity, content, ease of navigation and provenance.

Findings from each Strand

Strand One - review of RE materials

In order to engage with the research questions, school books and websites were sampled by the review co-ordinators and reviewed by the academic and professional experts and faith consultants in two phases. In a third phase, review co-ordinators and the project's IT specialist analysed the reviews and wrote findings which were incorporated into the final project report. The following is a selection of findings based on reports, firstly from professional RE experts and secondly from academic experts and faith consultants.

Print materials: RE professional perspectives

Information books at KS1 and KS2 provide content for 'learning *about* religion' (having an accurate knowledge and understanding). 'Learning *from* religion' (gaining insight through reflection and discussion) objectives are dependent on the teachers' interpretation of the sources for their pupils. Story books address ethical issues which are less prominent in the information books.

Books for KS3 variously demonstrate awareness of recent initiatives in RE. Most of them successfully balance 'learning *about*' and 'learning *from*', achieving this in a number of ways, and most convincingly when these twin aspects of RE are well integrated in the learning process.

At KS4, books related primarily to examination requirements. The reviewer found that some offered opportunities for 'learning *from* religion' if the teacher identified and developed these, but the books themselves did not do this.

The reviews of books at each Key Stage point to the importance of the RE teacher's insight in making fullest use of available books. The differences among books for the different Key Stages, however, suggest that teachers at Key Stages 1 and 2 especially (where many teachers

are nonspecialists), require a professional understanding of RE to guide both their selection of books and their use of them, since this is not usually built into the books themselves; While KS1 and 2 books were often designed for independent learning, KS3 books reflect the 'traditional' shift to a 'textbook' in secondary schools. The trend towards packaged learning may account for the relatively low scoring of KS3 books in relation to independent learning.

At KS4 books were focused on conveying information, asking questions, the development of concepts and setting tasks; the prominence of these four concerns is indicative of most of the books' status as examination texts.

Text emerged as an area of concern across the Key Stages. Problems included for example: font size; density of text; long paragraphs; quantity and complexity of text; design and layout which makes text hard to follow; level of literacy demanded by texts.

Visuals were commonly used as illustration of the text. Where problems emerged they tended to relate to matters of gender, colour (failure for example to show Christianity as a global faith), stereotype, or a poor or insensitive choice of visual and/or caption. Across the Key Stages it was clear that visuals are rarely employed to promote pupils' learning; books often fail to use them at all.

At KS1 and KS2 positive contributions to community cohesion were seen in the capacity of stories to explore shared values and provide insight into matters of concern to communities and in the value of books which allow pupils to engage with their contemporaries 'on the page'.

At KS3 and KS4 issues identified as controversial within and among religions tend to be those commonly addressed in GCSE courses relating to ethical and moral issues (e.g. euthanasia); additionally attention was given in some to divisions within individual religions, whilst a further area related to selected social and political issues. At present it would seem more common for textbooks to consider issues which may be examined from the perspective of different faiths, rather than those issues where the roots of controversy lie between or among religions themselves (e.g. the use of images in worship).

Websites

The audit shows that there are two types of resources that are useful for RE: those that could be used by the teacher for leading learning in the classroom, and those that could be used by the pupils for independent learning.

Currently, many websites are still, in effect, books in an electronic form. More engaging and attractive sites use video and audio materials, offer interactivity and engagement with the current traditions and lives of practitioners. Some sites produced by some religious groups had a proselytising agenda that teachers and students need to be aware of. Though a few sites are being developed which aim to foster independent learning, not many are useful to students without guidance from the teacher.

Of the websites reviewed, over half had no activities on their sites. Many of the creators of the websites appeared not to be educators. Activities for pupils were most likely to appear on websites produced by schools or by the educational branch of religious organisations. The picture is better for those sites aimed at younger children where a wider range of materials was shown and there was a greater understanding of learning styles.

Some resources offer reflective teaching and learning ideas which might contribute to pupils' spiritual development, but in more 'confessional' sites these experiential activities (including elements of worship and meditation) may be inappropriate for use in RE in community schools or with children from a variety of religion and belief backgrounds.

Academic and Faith consultant perspectives

In many cases RE books and series give an immediately positive message about the religions

being presented. The books generally show an interest in broadening young people's knowledge of religions and promoting positive attitudes of respect towards those religions. Nevertheless the number of errors and points at which criticisms can be made in the coverage of religions (of some more than of others) is concerning. The lack of attention to detail and accuracy was felt by the reviewers to also be problematic because it did not present a positive model of scholarship to young people. They felt that it indicates a carelessness about other people's beliefs and practices which would not be helpful to community cohesion. Many of the resources fell short in conveying a real sense of the deeper significance and power of religion in the lives of the believer, without which it is difficult for the young people to get a full sense of the influence and motivating force of faith in the lives of people of religion in the society in which they live. Inaccuracies suggest a need for authors and publishers to consult with experts, academics and knowledgeable practitioners.

External influences (for example, syllabus and examination requirements and the influence of other religious and non-religious perspectives) rather than the internal logic of the religions often structure their presentation in RE materials, supplying different emphases than would have come from the religions themselves, and underplaying important elements.

Particular issues of concern emerged which were specific to each religion examined:

- The content and quality of the presentation of *Islam* was seen to be helpful in conveying a rich and attractive picture of Islam as a living religion that has a place in British society as well as in the wider world. However, accounts of the religion were sometimes rather simplistic.
- There were a large number of inaccuracies in the portrayal of *Hinduism*. Though the portrayal of the religion was often described by the reviewers as attractive, carelessness over details and confusion about Hindu beliefs and teaching were real issues, for example an attempt to explain Hindu thought with the terms '*henotheism*' and '*pantheism*' was considered to be misleading.
- *Sikhism* received a rather superficial, descriptive treatment focusing on the externals of the religion more than on the religion's power for transformation in the lives of the individual or its contribution to wider society.
- The relative weight given in the materials to minority white British and to majority migrant communities was an issue in the portrayal of *Buddhism*. The position of Buddhism as a non-theist tradition meant it could be drawn into the current theist v atheist debate in a way that could lead to misinterpretation.
- The inadequate coverage of *Judaism* in thematic texts and series was noted. A particular issue was the failure of many of the resources to engage with the long tradition of Jewish thought over the last 2000 years. Instead the religion all too often comes across as the Old Testament religion that preceded Christianity.
- In several resources *Christianity* came across as the default religion, a fact that gave Christianity both too much assumed presence and too little actual attention. There were implicit assumptions in some of the resources, that they were addressing students with a Christian background. Non-Christian religions were often presented through a Christian lens. At the same time reviewers noted a reluctance to engage with the real core of the Christian faith such as Christian belief in Jesus as God incarnate.

From the reviewers' comments, it is possible to identify a number of qualities that they value in religious education materials. These included representations of religion that are accurate, coherent, comprehensive, authentic; they present religions as internally diverse, numinous and transformative, living and contemporary with contributions to make to present society; they are intellectually challenging, show respect for different religions, treat them fairly and emphasise the relationship between them.

Case Study Findings

The case studies covered 20 schools (primary and secondary), 10 of them with a religious character. The common characterisation of schools as either 'faith' or 'non-faith' was found not to be a straightforward indicator of the place of religion within those institutions. The situation is complicated by a number of factors, such as history, community and demography.

A variety of RE approaches and pedagogies were seen to be used (often in combination) including those focusing directly on world religions, scriptural approaches (concentrating on religious text and story), experiential approaches (focusing on visits and the use of artefacts, for example), and philosophical and ethical approaches (especially at GCSE level). Teachers and schools mix different approaches, within lessons or across the school.

The selection of materials was influenced by the particular RE pedagogies being used: for example experiential approaches in the primary school might require a greater use of religious artefacts; scriptural approaches require a choice of key texts and stories; world religions approaches require more information-based material, while philosophical and ethical approaches draw on current materials from the media (television and newspapers).

In RE the faith of pupils is often a major influence on the selection of themes and content for the lessons, though there was some evidence of minority religious positions in the school being overlooked.

The teachers in the case study schools were not only concerned with specific issues to do with RE; they also had more general educational concerns when choosing and using resources. These had important implications because teachers then tended to generate their own materials - to 'mix and match'. If teaching materials are teacher-generated, there are significant implications in terms of teacher knowledge, expertise, and training. Six broad themes emerged: methods of learning; literacy; information and communications technology (ICT); examination requirements; and expertise of staff. They were considered in turn.

With regard to *methods of learning*, across the case studies, several teachers and departments had adopted a general pedagogical approach and applied it to RE. This could be an interdisciplinary strategy such as the promotion of thinking skills as required by the National Curriculum. Examples of the influence of thinking skills in teachers' compilation of 'mix and match' RE materials are the use of de Bono's 'thinking hats', and the use of a range of mind maps downloaded from a thinking skills website. An alternative approach was for schools to produce their own materials in order to match a theory of learning or particular learning strategies. During the course of a lesson on Buddhism at one secondary school, a number of different learning strategies (mind-mapping, card sort, analysing text, group discussion, creative writing) were used employing visual, aural and kinaesthetic learning styles. Most of the material used had been prepared by the teachers, the only exception being an end of topic quiz from an interactive whiteboard programme.

Several of the schools showed a concern to introduce *creativity* into their religious education teaching. Some teachers emphasised the importance of creativity as a criterion for the selection of materials, and also drew on materials and/or techniques from art, craft, music and drama.

With regard to *literacy*, a critical issue in the selection and use of resources was the appropriateness of the language used for the pupils. This was vital when English was not the pupils' first language. One co-ordinator had difficulty in finding resources that were appropriate for pupils whose reading levels were below their chronological age. Simple texts might be available but they often could not be used comfortably with older children, because the style was too immature. There was also an issue over differentiation. At one secondary school, the head of department relied on a particular series, written to meet the needs of less able 11 to 14 year olds, but this was regarded as a stop-gap until home-produced differentiated material could

be written. For some teachers the question was not so much how to find material that was readily accessible for their students in terms of their existing levels of literacy, but how to find material that would support pupils' language development.

One important element in teachers' selection and use of materials is ICT. The internet and software packages were a source of information for teachers. The internet was also important as a vehicle for delivering lessons, through access to websites and software, and particularly through teachers' own power point presentations. The presence of ICT facilities in the classroom opened up many possibilities for resourcing RE and made much varied material (e.g. video clips) readily available, enhancing teachers' independence in selecting materials. In addition, teachers wanted to encourage the development of ICT skills in RE lessons. This could simply be through the use of laptops for presentations, but could be more complex. At one primary school, the Year 6 teacher used the interactive whiteboard to share Sikh and Muslim stories, sourced from different websites.

Examination requirements in secondary schools, was an important factor influencing selection and use of materials for RE. On the one hand, teachers had freedom to choose from a range of syllabuses, so they could select the most suitable, whether a scriptural approach, world religions approach or a philosophy and ethics approach (few syllabuses were chosen drawing on any more than two religions). On the other hand, this choice could be constraining. Teachers had an eye to results, vital in an often marginalised subject, and crucial to building up sixth form numbers. Some schools felt constrained to purchase sets of the 'official book' written by the chief examiner: *'He's the chief examiner. He writes the syllabus and writes the questions, and edits the textbooks. It is therefore sensible to buy it and use it...However, it doesn't allow for creativity - it's functional but not inspiring...'*

With regard to expertise of staff, many non-specialists were found to be teaching religious education². Of these, most interviewed or observed were highly committed to the subject, and had clear views on resources and pedagogy. Nevertheless, many heads of department and coordinators recognised that they had to meet the needs of non-specialists, often teaching their main subject as well, and only teaching religious education temporarily; this had an impact on the choice of materials. In order to help non-specialists in one secondary school, a published scheme for Key Stage 3 was purchased plus the exam board's approved textbook for GCSE. Even for experienced teachers, there were still issues of expertise: in gaining the skills in judging and using materials and in finding time to familiarise themselves with all the resources available. Local RE specialist advisers provided valuable guidance for teachers in the classroom and helped to address the issues of lack of specialism.

In conclusion, there is evidence from the case study schools that general educational developments and cross-curricular strategies have contributed to the quality of learning. The employment of tools for thinking can lead to a more detailed engagement with religious education materials and issues; creative approaches reflect the fact that response to religion in people's lives is often practical, active and artistic; developments in ICT enable students to explore interchanges between religion and popular, contemporary culture. Learning is enabled and enhanced when the content is accessible and engaging and attention to pupils' learning needs is found to be important here, as with the focus on literacy levels and concrete learning for younger children. Even the pressures of examinations can act as powerful motivators for teachers and students. Thus teachers see some of these other issues as supportive of teaching and learning on world religions, by being innovatively harmonised with religious education. They wanted to combine these strategies creatively, to deliver broader, richer lessons that connected with other aspect of learning. However, there are also indications that some of these influences

can impede effective teaching on world religions, most obviously the need to cater for nonspecialist teachers and a restricting anxiety to guide pupils towards the 'right' answers in examinations. Both of these concerns influence the selection of lesson materials. Even the repertoire of teaching methods observed has potential to impede as well as to enhance learning if an interest in the development of thinking skills or ICT skills, for example, diverts the lesson away from its focus on the specific skills and content of religious education.

Comments on RE and its purposes from pupils often reflected the approaches adopted by their teachers and the criteria used in the selection and use of resources; thus there was an emphasis on the development of attitudes of tolerance and respect for others, on the free expression of one's own opinions and beliefs and a consciousness of the current pedagogical interest in learning styles. There were variations between the Key Stages with a greater interest in story among the primary age students, in examination requirements among older students, and references to the religious motivations and meanings from the children in 'faith' schools.

For older secondary students examination success was a prime consideration in their judgement of the value of different religious education resources. For some, the criterion against which they evaluated materials was not so much ability to enhance learning as ability to enhance potential to succeed at this level. Among GCSE candidates there was often a preference for resources that organise the material for revision purposes and help them to remember, and to structure examination answers. Often it was the teachers who had done this for the students in the selection and adaptation of material and production of revision aids and guides. This trend towards reliance on teachers may have implications for the students' development as independent learners and their eventual ability to study at university level. Many of the younger pupils expressed enthusiasm for books and in particular for stories from the religious traditions. There was negativity expressed by some secondary students towards book learning and the interpretation of religious education as a non-academic subject. A clear message was given that the young people particularly appreciated direct contact with difference in their learning, rating highly opportunities to learn from others about their views and lives. Electronic resources were also appreciated by pupils as giving them more direct access to 'real life'.

Though some of the materials were evaluated positively by students for their representations of their religions, there were some criticisms. Some voices were found to be poorly represented or missing. The representation of the lives of Christians was particularly criticised by the young people with evangelical Christians in particular finding that their perspectives were not included in resources or lessons. There was also a tension between a student-centred concept of learning whereby the young people felt that the resources should represent their own experiences and interpretations of their faith and one that seeks to present a wider tradition and its core teachings. A question for educators and producers of resources is what the balance between these should be.

Community Cohesion

Although Community Cohesion principles are often not explicitly stated in materials, policies and RE lessons, teachers and school leaders recognised social and citizenship imperatives for learning about different faiths. At some of the 'faith schools' the argument for doing so was strengthened by religious imperatives.

Responses to the community cohesion agenda were varied including learning about differences, developing the idea of community within the school, striving to transform the life chances of disadvantaged pupils and engaging in partnerships and social action in the community. For the Case Study schools, in all of these areas RE and other forms of religious learning played a part,

for example, through visits to schools by members of religious communities and through collective worship.

Survey Findings

The survey enabled the research project to take a broad overview of what is happening across a wide range of primary schools and secondary schools within both the state-maintained and independent sectors. However, the intention of the research group to report separately on each of the major categories of schools was not viable. This was due to the poor response rate. Nonetheless, this approach was particularly helpful in addressing three of the key research questions posed by the project. A total of 362 primary schools and 301 secondary schools participated in the survey.

The first question concerned identifying what materials are available for schools to use in religious education. The survey findings emphasise the importance of non-print forms of materials in two senses. First, teachers drew attention to the key importance of individuals within the local faith communities who visit schools and contribute to RE lessons. For example, 77% of primary schools report that the Christian faith community contributed to RE and 23% report that the Muslim community contributed to RE, while 70% of secondary schools report that the Christian faith community contributed to RE and 30% report that the Muslim community contributed to RE. Within the primary sector the Hindu community participated more in schools with a religious character when compared with schools with no religious character. Within the secondary sector Christian and Islamic communities contributed more in schools with a religious character when compared with schools with no religious character. Looking only at maintained schools, a similar pattern was found in the contribution of Christian and Islamic communities.

Second, teachers are drawing heavily on the web to generate resources for their classroom teaching. Particularly in the primary sector, teachers are not distinguishing between websites originating in the UK and elsewhere in the world when searching for resources to support their classroom teaching. Thus, 21% of teachers in the primary sector agree that UK websites and non-UK websites are very useful. One main difference emerged between maintained schools and independent schools in the primary sector. Independent schools are significantly more likely to report finding UK websites as very useful (29%) compared with maintained schools (18%). The second question concerned identifying the ways in which the materials were used to fulfil the different aims specified within religious education and the specific aim concerned with community cohesion. The survey strand demonstrated that teachers conceptualise the aims of RE in a variety of ways and that promotion of community cohesion is not conceptualized generally as top priority among these aims. Although the survey strand does not itself tell us how this situation could be improved, it underscores the view that there is room for improvement.

The third question concerns identifying the key factors that determine which resources teachers decide to use. The survey strand demonstrates that there are two main factors influencing teachers' choice of materials at primary level. The first factor is the individual teacher's own personal and professional judgement. The second factor is the price of the materials. This latter factor is crucial in an environment in which budgets are often clearly limited for this area of the curriculum. The survey strand demonstrates that there are two main factors at secondary level. First, it is the individual teacher's own personal and professional judgement and second it is the recommendation by the exam board. Taken together, the answers offered by the survey strand show the crucial role of the RE subject leaders within individual schools in evaluating and employing resources creatively and in informed ways.

At the same time, the survey strand draws attention to some weaknesses in the way in which RE subject leaders have been prepared for this responsibility. On the one hand, there are many RE subject leaders who have been professionally trained (71% in the primary sector and 89% in the secondary sector) for this specialist area of the curriculum and who have maintained their involvement in appropriate continuing professional development (65% in the primary sector and 45% in the secondary sector). On the other hand, there are a number of RE subject leaders who have not had the benefit of professional training and qualifications in the fields of religious studies or religious education (29% in the primary sector and 11% in the secondary sector) and who have not taken opportunities for recent continuing professional development within this subject area (36% in the primary sector and 55% in the secondary sector have undertaken no CPD in RE during the last 12 months). This may prove to be a crucial observation in helping to identify an area for further concern and investment.

General Conclusions

The research project was predicated on the understanding that community cohesion objectives are served by increase in knowledge of the beliefs, practices, motivations and values of people of the six principal religious traditions in British society. The fact that schools of all types, independent, maintained, with or without a designated 'religious character', include a variety of religions in their curriculum is very positive, as is the existence of a wide range of materials available to support them.

However, the findings from the project suggest a need for active measures to ensure that 'learning *about*' religion and religions retains a prominent place in the school RE curriculum and that the information pupils receive about religions is accurate, balanced and comprehensive in order to meet the attainment targets expressed in local agreed syllabuses and the National Framework for Religious Education.

At the same time the findings show a number of different approaches to community cohesion taken by schools and means by which they too can support greater understanding of the way religion influences people's lives and society.

Recommendations

- Schools should recognise in their policy, practice and self assessment that an increase in knowledge about different religions is an important part of education for community cohesion.
- RE policy makers need to investigate the move away from studying religions to issuesbased approaches and explore ways in which learning about religions might be renewed in upper secondary education.
- Given the current emphasis on practice, histories and moral teachings, RE teachers and producers of RE resources should ensure that pupils also learn about the spirituality and / or theology of religions.
- RE teachers should be aware of the presence of minority, and sometimes hidden, religious positions within their classes
- Meetings between teachers, RE advisers, university academics and scholars from the religious traditions should be facilitated to identify ways of working together to support the development of teacher subject knowledge.
- Initial teacher education and continuing professional development opportunities should be provided to enhance subject knowledge of specialist and non-specialist teachers.
- Training opportunities should be extended for faith community members who visit schools or host visits from pupils.
- Advisers of community and faith sectors should consult together at a local level with teachers of both sectors so they can support each other in developing RE.

Publishers, authors and designers of websites should work with academics and faith consultants to ensure the accuracy, balance and appropriateness of the representation of religious traditions in their materials.

- Publishers, authors and designers of websites should promote community cohesion by supplying examples from religions of communal living, positive social involvement and collaborative action between different faith communities.
- School leaders and RE teachers should develop community partnerships between the school and local faith communities, particularly those with an orientation towards social action, so that pupils can learn about the role of religions in society. SACREs and RE advisers should offer guidance on this.