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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT
ON *PROPOSALS FOR A REVISED
CORE SYLLABUS FOR GRANT-
AIDED SCHOOLS IN NORTHERN
IRELAND*

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of Education is carrying out an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on *Proposals from the Four Main Churches Leaders for a revised Core Syllabus for Religious Education (RE) in Grant-Aided Schools in Northern Ireland*.

Under the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) 1989, the Department specifies a core syllabus, prepared by a drafting group, for the teaching of RE in schools in Northern Ireland. The core syllabus should ensure consistency in RE teaching and contribute to the spiritual and moral development of young people and to mutual understanding among those from different backgrounds.

The Church Leaders were asked to review the Core Syllabus in 2002 and to consider including world religions. They submitted their final proposals to the Department in January 2005. In assessing the potential equality impacts of the *Proposals*, the Department considered a range of information, including:

- Findings of its survey on the number of pupils withdrawn from RE;
- School census data showing the religious backgrounds of school pupils;
- Requests for world religions to be included in the Core Syllabus, particularly from groups representing religious minorities;
- The views of young people as expressed in the Life and Times Survey, including the finding that they wanted to learn about other religions.

The Department's initial assessment is that the *Proposals* may have positive impacts because they will introduce pupils to the idea of diversity and respect for others, World Religions is included at Key Stage 3 and pupils will have to study the Christian Church from both a Catholic and Protestant perspective at Key Stage 4. There may, however, be adverse impacts on pupils from non-Christian backgrounds because World Religions is only included at Key Stage 3.

The Department has considered mitigation and alternative measures that may better promote equality of opportunity, including:

- The right for parents to withdraw their child from RE lessons;
- Alternative forms of provision for pupils from minority backgrounds;
- Making greater provision outside of the core syllabus for world religions;
- Extend the coverage of world religions in the Core Syllabus;
- An inclusive approach to producing resources for the RE Core Syllabus.

The Department is seeking the views of the public on the possible impacts of the *Proposals* and on possible mitigations and alternatives. We will then analyse the responses before making decisions and publishing our response to the consultation.

2. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT ON PROPOSALS FOR A REVISED CORE SYLLABUS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN GRANT-AIDED SCHOOLS

Equality Impact Assessment

2.1 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires the Department of Education, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:

- People with different religious beliefs;
- People from different racial groups;
- People of different ages;
- People with different marital status;
- People with different sexual orientations;
- Men and women generally;
- People with or without a disability;
- People with or without dependents;
- People with different political opinions;

2.2 In addition, but without prejudice to duty above, the Department should also have due regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between people with different religious beliefs, different political opinions or from different racial groups.

2.3 The Department's Equality Scheme includes a commitment to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on the *Proposals for a Revised Core Syllabus for Religious Education in Grant-Aided Schools in Northern Ireland*. The Department of Education has launched this public consultation to give you an opportunity to comment on the possible impacts of the *Proposals*.

3. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Legislative Background (see also Appendix I)

3.1 Religious Education (RE) is compulsory for all pupils in grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland, although parents have the right to withdraw their child if they wish. The Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 requires:

- Schools to provide RE in accordance with a core syllabus specified by the Department of Education.
- The core syllabus to set out certain “core matters, skills and processes” to be included in the teaching of RE.
- The Department to specify a core syllabus that has been drafted by a group of “persons having an interest in the teaching of religious education in grant-aided schools.”

Core Syllabus for Religious Education

3.2 The Department of Education specified the current Core Syllabus, which had been agreed by the four main Christian churches in Northern Ireland (i.e. Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist), in 1996. All grant-aided schools have to deliver the Core Syllabus to all their pupils (i.e. from 4 to 16) and it should take up around half of the teaching time devoted to RE. It is up then up to schools as to what additional religious education they provide. In controlled schools, RE should be undenominational (i.e. not specifically related to a particular tradition) and based on “an authoritative version of the Holy Scriptures”. Schools can get

advice and teaching support from the RE advisors in their Education and Library Board's Curriculum Advisory and Support Services (CASS), from the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) or from the NI Council for Integrated Education (NICIE).

Purpose of a Core Syllabus

3.3 The aim of the statutory curriculum is to develop young people as individuals and prepare them for life. This includes a young person's spiritual and moral development, where RE plays arguably the most important role. RE also has a role in promoting tolerance and mutual understanding among the different groups in society.

3.4 A core syllabus for RE ensures some consistency in what pupils are taught so that every pupil acquires a basic level of knowledge and understanding of RE. As it specifies only a common core, it also allows schools to provide RE in a way that is consistent with the ethos of the school and the interests of the community it serves, for example, many Catholic-maintained schools use RE lessons to prepare pupils for the sacraments.

Request for Review of the Core Syllabus

3.5 In 2002, the then Minister for Education asked the Leaders of the Four Main Churches to review the Core Syllabus in light of equality and human rights obligations (arising from Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the Human Rights Act 1998) and the increasing religious and cultural diversity of the Northern Ireland population. The terms of reference for the review included a specific requirement to consider the inclusion of other world faiths as part of the Core Syllabus.

The Review Process

3.6 The Four Churches established a Steering Group comprising representatives of the Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist churches to oversee the review. A Working Party, which included RE teachers, RE advisors from the Education and Library Boards and CCMS, and representatives of teacher training institutions and an advisory sub-group on World Faiths were set up to carry out the review (see Appendix II).

3.7 The Working Party met on several occasions between April 2002 and May 2003 and it also held meetings with representatives of CCEA and DE. It put its proposals out for public consultation between September and November 2003. The proposals were then finalised and submitted to the Churches' Leaders. The Leaders of the Four Churches wrote to the Minister with responsibility for Education in January 2005 with their *Final Draft Proposals for a Revised Core Syllabus for RE in Grant-Aided Schools in Northern Ireland*.

Overview of Proposed Revised Core Syllabus for Religious Education

3.8 The Church Leaders have proposed a Revised Core Syllabus for Religious Education with the following Learning Objectives at each Key Stage:

- **Learning Objective 1: The Revelation of God**
Pupils should develop an awareness, knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the key Christian teachings about God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, about Jesus Christ, and about the Bible; and develop an ability to interpret and relate the Bible to life
- **Learning Objective 2: The Christian Church**
Pupils should develop a knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the growth of Christianity, of its worship, prayer and religious language; a growing awareness of the meaning of belonging to a Christian tradition, and sensitivity towards the belief of others.
- **Learning Objective 3: Morality**
Pupils should develop their ability to think and judge about morality, to relate Christian moral principles to personal and social life, and to identify values and attitudes that influence behaviour.

The following Learning Objective has been proposed for Key Stage 3 only:

- **Learning Objective 4: World Religions**
Pupils should be given an introduction to two world religions other than Christianity in order to develop sensitivity towards the religious beliefs, practices and lifestyles of people of other religions in Northern Ireland.

3.9 The choice of religions to be studied is a matter for the school and the Churches suggest that the study of other world faiths should only require a modest amount of teaching time in each year of Key Stage 3 (i.e. Years 8, 9 and 10).

3.10 The full subject content of each Learning Objective at each Key Stage is set out in the *Proposals* document¹.

3.11 The *Proposals* also include a set of non-statutory Learning Outcomes in relation to each Learning Objective. These are intended as guidance for teachers and are a combination of practical activities and things that pupils should be able to understand. The Learning Outcomes are set out in full in the *Proposals* document.

¹ The bible references listed in the *Proposals* document can be looked up in versions of the Bible, such as the New International Version, the Good News Bible, the International Children's Version, the Revised Standard Version or the Jerusalem Bible, which can also be found online.

4. DATA COLLECTION: THE CORE SYLLABUS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

4.1 In carrying out this EQIA, the Department considered a range of quantitative and qualitative data on religion and education in schools in Northern Ireland.

Religious Background of Population

4.2 The vast majority of the Northern Ireland population are Christians but NI is also a changing society with a small but growing minority population. The Core Syllabus will directly affect the pupils it is taught to. The 2004/05 school census shows that most pupils are from Protestant or Catholic backgrounds. A small number are from Non-Christian backgrounds, attending mostly integrated and controlled schools, and there are more pupils from Non-Christian backgrounds in primary than in post-primary schools. It is also worth noting that there are more pupils whose religious background is Unknown or Not Recorded than there are from Other Christian and Non Christian backgrounds.

Religious Background of Pupils by Management Type 2004-05

Primary (P1 to P7) – total 163,220 pupils

Religion	Controlled	Voluntary	Catholic Maintained	Other Maintained	Controlled Integrated	GM Integrated	Total
Protestant	78.96%	67.18%	0.48%	20.77%	52.78%	36.75%	40.64%
Catholic	4.22%	11.08%	97.85%	68.36%	29.02%	43.50%	49.40%
Other Christian	2.60%	4.42%	0.11%	0.79%	3.39%	3.90%	1.50%
Non Christian	0.50%	1.54%	0.16%	0.20%	0.91%	0.95%	0.37%
None recorded/ Unknown	13.73%	15.78%	1.40%	9.89%	13.90%	14.91%	8.09%

Post-Primary (Year 8 to 12) – total 127,119 pupils

Religion	Controlled	Voluntary	Catholic Maintained	Other Maintained	Controlled Integrated	GM Integrated	Total
Protestant	84.75%	29.99%	0.45%	0.00%	66.01%	40.43%	41.58%
Catholic	2.65%	61.51%	99.14%	90.65%	17.66%	46.38%	50.48%
Other Christian	3.48%	1.84%	0.14%	0.00%	3.55%	6.11%	2.17%
Non Christian	0.20%	0.32%	0.07%	0.00%	0.76%	0.80%	0.24%
None recorded/ Unknown	8.92%	6.35%	0.19%	9.35%	12.02%	6.29%	5.53%

Total School Population (Compulsory School Age) – total 290,339 pupils

Religion	Controlled	Voluntary	Catholic Maintained	Other Maintained	Controlled Integrated	GM Integrated	Total
Protestant	81.07%	32.10%	0.47%	17.46%	59.38%	39.00%	41.05%
Catholic	3.65%	58.64%	98.28%	71.91%	23.35%	45.26%	49.88%
Other Christian	2.92%	1.98%	0.12%	0.66%	3.47%	5.25%	1.80%
Non Christian	0.39%	0.39%	0.13%	0.17%	0.84%	0.86%	0.31%
None recorded/ Unknown	11.97%	6.89%	1.00%	9.81%	12.97%	9.62%	6.97%

Views on the RE Core Syllabus – Protestants and Catholics

4.3 Approximately 91% of pupils are from Protestant or Catholic backgrounds. The agreement of a Core Syllabus by the Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches, first introduced from 1993, was therefore widely seen at the time as a welcome development.

4.4 The Core Syllabus should therefore provide a common core RE teaching that is suitable for most pupils. It should also play a role in improving understanding and relations between the Protestant and Catholic communities. For example, research carried out by Dr Paul Connolly of the University of Ulster found that children as young as 2 and 3 years old were developing sectarian attitudes. This work followed University of Ulster research that found 10 and 11 year olds to have definite sectarian attitudes.

Views on RE – Non-Christians and other Interested Parties

4.5 Barnes (2005) has argued that the RE Core Syllabus is concerned only with the Protestant and Roman Catholic faiths, to the exclusion of others. Religious groups and political representatives have made requests (either in Parliamentary Questions to the Minister or letters to the Department) for the Core Syllabus to reflect greater religious diversity and to provide for children from non-Christian backgrounds.

4.6 Prior to the launch of the EQIA, Departmental officials held meetings with representatives of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY), the Inter-Faith Forum, the Bahá'í Council, the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) and Dr Philip Barnes (senior lecturer in RE at Kings College London). It also invited written feedback from the CASS RE Advisors. Some of the views expressed included:

- The *Proposals* are “mainly” Christian and also reflect elements of Judaism.
- The *Proposals* are “entirely” Christian in content and are exclusive of other religions. Representatives of minority religious groups were excluded from the drafting of the *Proposals*, which are patronising towards non-Christians and are exclusive in their use of the term and language of “other”. The *Proposals* provide for essentially Christian education, rather than religious education in the sense of education and understanding about religion(s).

- Those from minority religious backgrounds want teaching about their faith included as part of the statutory core. They are also keen to learn about Christianity and other religions.
- World Religions should be taught for educational reasons and it should be left up to schools to decide the religions they teach, as suits the needs of their pupils – it would not be possible for all religions to be taught.
- It is not enough to include World Religions only at Key Stage 3 – the content at Key Stage 3 should be increased and World Religions should be an integral part of the Core Syllabus at all Key Stages. Children should be introduced to religious diversity and encouraged to form positive attitudes about other religions from an early age as better results can be achieved.
- The study of other faiths should begin at Key Stage 3 and extended into Key Stage 4. This would enable pupils to develop a secure understanding of Christianity before studying other faiths in detail. Barnes also suggests that World Religions is left to post-primary; it could be introduced at primary level where appropriate but it should not be compulsory.
- There is an opportunity to introduce Key Stage 2 pupils to other religions (rather than study them in any detail) through *Learning Objective 3: Morality*, which includes opportunities for pupils to develop respect for those from differing cultures and faiths.
- RE can make an important contribution to promoting diversity and reducing sectarianism.
- Barnes points out that multi-faith religious education is not enough on its own to challenge intolerance and discrimination and it has not had this effect in England, where the population is more diverse than in NI (Barnes 2005).
- RE lessons would be an ideal opportunity to share beliefs, traditions etc, which can help schools to promote good relations and counter any prejudices and bullying on the grounds of religious difference. This is not possible if children from non-Christian backgrounds withdraw.
- The *Proposals* are even exclusive of some forms of Christianity, for example they overlook the diversity within Protestantism.

Withdrawals from Religious Education Lessons

4.7 Groups involved in the pre-consultation meetings advised that some parents from minority backgrounds are dissatisfied with what is taught in RE and consequently withdraw their children from RE lessons. They were concerned that these children may feel excluded as a result.

4.8 To get an indication of the level of dissatisfaction with the current provision for RE and the possible scale of any impacts of the *Proposals* (and in the absence of any officially collected data) the Department surveyed 80 primary and 70 post-

primary schools during November 2005 to find out how many pupils were withdrawn from RE lessons at the request of their parents during the 2004/05 school year. A total of 141 schools with 48,776 pupils took part in the survey, including 77 primary schools with a total of 14,434 pupils enrolled and 64 post-primary schools with 34,342 pupils. A summary of the survey results can be found at Appendix III.

4.9 There were pupils withdrawn from RE lessons in 23% of schools, including 21% of primary and 27% of post-primary schools. In the majority (70%) of these 33 schools, there were only 1, 2 or 3 pupils who had been withdrawn from RE, less than 1% of the total number of pupils enrolled in the school.

4.10 Overall, 0.19% of pupils had been withdrawn from RE, a total of 94 pupils in all 141 survey schools. This included 0.39% of primary school pupils (57 in 16 of the 77 schools) and 0.11% of post-primary pupils (38 pupils in 17 of the 64 schools).

4.11 With the exception of one instance where Roman Catholic pupils were withdrawn from RE in a Grant-Maintained Integrated school, the withdrawn pupils tended to be from Protestant, Non-Christian and Other/No Religious backgrounds and to attend controlled or integrated schools.

4.12 Most (78.8%) of the schools where there had been pupils withdrawn from RE kept a record of the reason why the pupil was being withdrawn.

4.13 The pupils withdrawn from RE lessons tended to:

- Take part in supervised activities or private study (54%);
- Go to the library (1%);
- Attend another class (13%); or
- Stay in the RE class but not contribute/do other work (5%);

In one instance (where Roman Catholic pupils attending a Grant-Maintained Integrated school had been withdrawn from RE), separate RE provision was made.

4.14 The results of this survey suggest that there are only a few cases where parents feel so dissatisfied with a school's RE provision that they withdraw their child from RE lessons. The survey has also shown that, although Non-Christians are considered to be the group most affected by RE provision, there were more withdrawn pupils from Unknown/Other religious backgrounds and a high number of withdrawn pupils from Christian backgrounds, including Protestant, Catholic and Other Christian. These results suggest that although any negative impacts are very small, they affect people from a range of religious backgrounds. However, during pre-consultation, the Inter-Faith Forum suggested that many parents are not aware that they have the right to withdraw their child from RE.

The Position of RE in the Curriculum

4.15 It has been recognised that the introduction of the Core Syllabus has played an important role in raising the profile of RE and in securing the position of RE as part of the curriculum in schools.

4.16 There have, however, been criticisms that the Core Syllabus is content-heavy, unchallenging, repetitive and overly prescriptive, which is at odds with the greater flexibility and the emphasis on developing skills in the revised curriculum (Barnes).

During the pre-consultation it was suggested that there should be clearer links between RE and the rest of the statutory curriculum and that there is a need for awareness raising, training and resources to be provided for CASS staff and for teachers to support them in teaching about world religions.

4.17 The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) does not inspect RE in the same way as other subjects; inspection is at the invitation of the chairman of the Board of Governors of a school. (This is considered by some to have equality implications as many Boards of Governors are chaired by ministers or priests belonging to a particular denomination). However the ETI commented in its *Evaluating Religious Education* report (2000) that the organisation of the curriculum for RE can be considered “good” when:

- The school’s programme, particularly in post-primary schools, includes reference beyond the Core Syllabus for the subject, for example, to other belief systems, faiths and world religions;
- All pupils, regardless of gender, ability or religious belief, experience a programme which is sensitive to the diversity of religious and cultural experience within the school and wider community.

Provision of Education About Other Religions

4.18 The groups involved in the pre-consultation meetings highlighted the variability in practice among schools as to how inclusive they are, the provision they make for children from minority religious backgrounds and their ability to deal sensitively with their needs. Provision often depends on the number of young people of a particular religious background who attend the school and on the interest and initiative of individual schools and teachers.

4.19 Some schools make little or no provision relating to other faiths but some are providing education about other world faiths as a matter of best practice, with support from the CASS, CCMS or NICIE RE officers. Some schools even invite parents from different faith backgrounds into the school to talk to pupils about their religion and feedback has indicated that pupils have been enjoyed these sessions.

4.20 The Department is also aware of anecdotal evidence of schools seeking advice from CASS and CCEA on how to go about introducing education about other religions as part of their RE programme. It has been suggested that one reason why schools find it difficult to incorporate teaching about world religions into their RE programme is because of the limited provision for world religions at GCSE, A-Level and in initial teacher training courses, even courses in which RE is the specialism. For example, a survey of 171 student teachers in Stranmillis and St Mary’s University College (carried out by Dr Norman Richardson of Stranmillis University College in 2003) found moderate to high awareness among students of Christianity but poor to moderate awareness about world religions. The survey also found that student teachers were generally interested in, and had positive attitudes towards, religious diversity issues but the strength of these views depended on their previous opportunities at school and in teacher education to learn about other religions.

Views of Young People on Religion and Education

4.21 The Northern Ireland Young Life and Times Survey sought the views of young people (aged 12-17) about religion and education in the 1999 and 2004 Surveys. In

2004, 84% of young people surveyed regarded themselves as belonging to a particular religion. Of these, 43% declared themselves Protestant, 54% Catholic and 5% declared themselves as Other. Overall, religion is important to a majority of young people. It is slightly more important to females than males and more important to Catholics than Protestants:

Group	Very Important – Important	Neither Important or Unimportant	Unimportant – Very Unimportant
ALL	65%	23%	11%
Male	62%	25%	12%
Female	66%	22%	9%
Protestant	59%	27%	12%
Catholic	71%	19%	10%

4.22 In 1999, the Life and Times Survey asked questions about the teaching of religious education at post-primary level. It is interesting to note that 58% of young people thought that religious education should be taught in schools (however, young people surveyed as part of the NI Curriculum Cohort Study felt that RE was one of the least enjoyable and least relevant subjects). While more people agreed/strongly agreed that post-primary pupils should study Protestant and Catholic beliefs, around 20% more were in favour of pupils studying religious beliefs in general and the festivals of all religious groups. This would perhaps suggest that young people would welcome a broader RE curriculum that goes beyond Christianity and the Protestant and Catholic traditions.

Secondary Pupils should study...	Strongly Agree – Agree	Neither	Disagree – Strongly Disagree
Protestant Beliefs	43%	20%	32%
Catholic Beliefs	41%	19%	35%
Religious Beliefs in General	61%	19%	13%
Festivals of all Religions and Ethnic Groups	61%	18%	16%
None – religion should be left to parents and churches	18%	16%	58%

(The views of 12-17 year olds were obtained as part of the full NI Life and Times Survey. In terms of religious background, 44% declared themselves Catholic, 39% Protestant, 7% None, 5% Other Christian background and 1% Muslim).

The Views of RE Teachers

4.23 As part of the review of the Core Syllabus, the Working Group carried out a survey among RE teachers in primary, post-primary and special schools. It found teachers to be generally in support of the Core Syllabus and its contribution to the development of RE in schools, however, they expressed a need for more training and resources. Many believed that the Core Syllabus furthered the work of mutual understanding among Christians in Northern Ireland. Some post-primary RE teachers felt that change was needed to reflect the world in which pupils live, with a general acceptance that other faiths should be included in RE teaching.

Curriculum Review

4.24 The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) consulted widely during its review of the statutory Northern Ireland Curriculum. Although RE was not part of the review, some people commented that RE should remain part of the legal curriculum. While some believed RE should have a strong emphasis on the Christian tradition, others considered that more detail should be given to comparative religions.

RE Developments in the rest of the UK

4.25 As with NI, RE is compulsory but parents have the right to withdraw their children from it. Separate curricular provision is made for RE in the rest of the UK and guidelines for RE have recently been revised.

England

4.26 Each Local Education Authority's (LEA) Agreed Syllabus Conference draws up its own local RE syllabus. To support LEAs and ensure pupils have consistently high quality RE teaching, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) jointly launched *The Non-Statutory National Framework for Religious Education* in October 2004. The *Framework* clearly links RE to other areas of the National Curriculum. It includes:

- Christianity;
- Morality; and,
- to ensure breadth and balance, education in sufficient depth about:
 - the five other principal religions in the UK (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism);
 - reference to other locally significant religious traditions (e.g. Bahá'í, Jainism, Zoroastrianism); and
 - reference to secular philosophies (e.g. humanism).

4.27 The number of religions and the depth of study at each key stage are left for local decision through each LEA's Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE). The Education Act 1996 required LEAs to establish SACREs, which include local representatives of the Church of England, other Christian and non-Christian religions, RE teachers and community representatives, such as local councillors. Their role is to:

- provide advice on the RE curriculum (as set out in the locally-agreed RE syllabus determined by the LEA's Agreed Syllabus Conference);
- provide teaching support;
- provide advice on collective worship in schools;
- monitor inspection findings relating to RE; and
- deal with any complaints relating to RE and collective worship.

Scotland

4.28 The *Guidelines for Religious and Moral Education* were published in 1992 to support schools in drawing up their curriculum for Religious and Moral Education (RME). The *Guidelines* advise that RME should include:

- Christianity –
 - Celebrations, festivals, ceremonies and customs;
 - Sacred writings, stories and key figures;
 - Beliefs

- Sacred places, worship and symbols
- Moral values and attitudes;
- Other World Religions – the same topics as Christianity for at least 2 other religions;
- Personal Search – the natural world, relationships and moral values, ultimate questions.

In a “satisfactory” RME programme, all three areas should be covered but the balance between them is a matter for individual schools. Links can be made between these areas and between RE and other areas of the curriculum.

Related Developments in Northern Ireland – Good Relations

4.29 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) complements legislation that prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, gender, sexual orientation, disability and, from 2006, age. Section 75 places a duty on public authorities to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and good relations within the community.

4.30 Legislation was introduced in September 2004 to deal with crimes motivated or aggravated by hatred based on race, religion, disability or sexual orientation and “*A Shared Future: Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland*” was launched in March 2005. The overall aim is to create a society where there is a culture of tolerance and respect for diversity, including mutual understanding between the different faiths and cultural backgrounds in Northern Ireland. The *Strategic Framework* includes an action for all schools to ensure that, through their policies, structures and curriculae, pupils are consciously prepared for life in a diverse and inter-cultural society and world. This will partly be achieved through the inclusion of Local and Global Citizenship in the NI Curriculum; however, RE can also make an important contribution.

MORAL ISSUES AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

4.31 In addition to the Christian religion, the Core Syllabus includes education about Christian morality. RE can therefore contribute to the moral development of young people and can complement or form part of the Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) programme provided by schools because many of the same topics are covered, e.g. reproductive issues, relationships, drugs. This enables a cross-curricular approach to the teaching of such sensitive issues.

4.32 However, the Core Syllabus has been criticised for being out of touch with the experiences of pupils and ignoring the challenges and life choices faced by young people.

Sexual Orientation

4.33 A person’s sexual orientation is a sensitive issue and the Department does not collect this information as part of its normal data gathering exercises. As a result, not much is known about the experiences of those young people who are confused about their sexuality or who realise that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT), particularly in relation to Religious Education. In 2003, the Department commissioned YouthNet to carry out research into the needs of young people under 25 in Northern Ireland who identify as LGBT. The research included a

questionnaire, (completed by 362 young people through youth, community and gay organisations) and focus groups, involving 25 young people. Key findings included:

- 86% of respondents were aware of their sexual orientation while at school, with 44% bullied as a consequence.
- The most common age for young people to first identify themselves as LGBT was between 10 and 17. 53% of respondents first “came out” when they were between 14 and 17 and 27% first came out between the ages of 18 and 21.
- The average age for men to realise they were LGBT was 12 years and the average age for coming out was 17.
- The average age for women to realise they were LBGT was 13 years and the average age for coming out was 18.
- Respondents related negative experiences in school and felt that the curriculum did not reflect their lives or feelings. Some classes and teachers reinforced the idea that homosexuality was “wrong” and homosexuals would “burn in hell”.

4.34 These results would seem to suggest that, while school-age pupils are below the legal age of consent for homosexuals, the impact of RE on those of different sexual orientations has to be considered and further information is required for this purpose.

Other Affected Groups

4.35 The Department does not have evidence on the affects of RE on young people in relation to their age, gender, marital status or family situation, their sexual orientation, whether or not they have dependents or whether or not they have a disability. Responses relating to these Section 75 categories would be particularly welcomed as part of the EQIA.

5. ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS

AGE

5.1 The Core Syllabus includes the same 3 Learning Objectives at every Key Stage. The *Proposals* are sub-divided by Key Stage to enable pupils in each year group to be taught in a way that is suited to their age and increasing maturity.

Key Stage	Year Groups	Ages
Foundation	1-2	4-6
Key Stage 1	3-4	6-8
Key Stage 2	5-7	8-11
Key Stage 3	8-11	11-14
Key Stage 4	11-12	14-16

5.2 *Learning Objective 4: World Religions* only appears at Key Stage 3. This will ensure provision for Non-Christian pupils and help to improve understanding and tolerance between pupils from different backgrounds. Younger children may benefit if World Religions was also included at Key Stage 2, given that there is a higher percentage of pupils from Non-Christian backgrounds in primary schools than in post-primary schools (0.37% compared to 0.24% of pupils), there is a higher proportion of pupils withdrawn from RE in primary than in post-primary schools (48.1% compared to 15.8%) and research has found that children form attitudes towards others from an early age. However, the number of pupils that may be affected is very small, only 0.31% of all pupils (0.37% of primary school pupils) are from Non-Christian backgrounds, and the *Proposals* provide opportunities for the ideas of religious diversity and tolerance to be introduced at Key Stage 2 through *Learning Objective 3: Morality* in a way that suits the needs of the school and its pupils (see also para 5.11 below).

5.3 Older pupils may also benefit if World Religions was extended to Key Stage 4. For example, there would be statutory provision for those from Non-Christian backgrounds, although only 0.24% of the total enrolled in post-primary schools are from Non-Christian backgrounds. It would provide progression from learning at Key Stage 3 and, because all pupils of this age, regardless of their religious background, should be more able to understand, compare and contrast different religions, extending *World Religions* to Key Stage 4 could also help to promote greater understanding and improved community relations. Indeed, 61% of young people (aged 12-17) responding to the Life and Times Surveys thought that post-primary pupils should study religious beliefs in general and the festivals of all religions and ethnic groups.

5.4 The *Proposals* include a requirement for pupils at Key Stage 4 to study *Learning Objective 2: The Christian Church* from both a Protestant and a Catholic perspective, which could help to promote mutual understanding between the two traditions.

RELIGION

Christians – Church of Ireland, Presbyterian, Methodist, Roman Catholic

5.5 Northern Ireland is an overwhelmingly Christian country (93% of pupils are from Christian backgrounds) and to reflect this, the content of the *Proposals* is mainly Christian. The *Proposals* have been agreed by the leaders of the Four Main Churches in Northern Ireland (Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist) and should therefore be appropriate for the vast majority (91%) of pupils.

5.6 The Department's survey found that a very small number (0.19%) of pupils were withdrawn from RE in 2004/05. Of these, 18% were from a Protestant background and attended mostly controlled schools, where, by law, RE has to be undenominational. The Department would therefore welcome views on any potential impacts of the *Proposals* on Protestants and on pupils in controlled schools.

5.7 The requirement to study *The Christian Church* from both a Protestant and Catholic perspective at Key Stage 4 should contribute to promoting mutual understanding and good relations. There may be a different impact for younger pupils, as this is not a requirement at earlier Key Stages where, because pupils' attitudes are developing, its benefits on community relations may be greater, (particularly in light of Connolly's findings that children as young as 2 and 3 had sectarian attitudes). However, the requirement to study the Christian Church in this way may not be appropriate for some younger pupils and the *Proposals* include provision for pupils to develop respect for others and to be introduced to the idea of religious diversity at primary school.

Other Christian Denominations

5.8 The 2004/05 school census showed that 1.8% of pupils belong to other Christian denominations and the survey found that 10.6% of the pupils withdrawn from RE were from Other Christian backgrounds. While the Core Syllabus may not provide directly for their particular beliefs and traditions, there are practical limits on what it can include. RE in controlled schools has to be undenominational and the Core Syllabus can be delivered in a way that suits the ethos of the school and the needs of its pupils and therefore it should accommodate their Christian tradition. The Department would, however, welcome views from those belonging to other Christian denominations on any potential impacts of the *Proposals*.

Non-Christians

5.9 The *Proposals* include a new *Learning Objective 4: World Religions* at Key Stage 3 to take account, not only of equality and human rights obligations, but the increasing religious diversity of the local and global community that children and young people are part of. This will ensure statutory provision for pupils from a Non-Christian background and give all Key Stage 3 pupils the opportunity to learn about other religions, which could contribute to greater understanding and tolerance.

5.10 The number of pupils from Non-Christian backgrounds is very small (0.3% of the total number of pupils). The Department's survey found that 23% of the 0.19% of all pupils withdrawn from RE were from Non-Christian backgrounds. This included 48.1% of the 0.39% of pupils withdrawn from RE in primary schools and 15.8% of the 0.11% of pupils withdrawn from RE in post-primary schools. Feedback from pre-

consultation meetings has indicated that there could be adverse impacts on pupils from Non-Christian backgrounds because World Religions is only present at Key Stage 3 and the content is limited, i.e. the groups felt that adequate provision had not been made for older or younger pupils, where the higher proportion of withdrawals among pupils from Non-Christian backgrounds could indicate a need for more suitable provision. There may also be negative impacts because *Learning Objective 3: Morality* requires pupils 'to relate Christian moral principles to personal and social life' [emphasis added] and some of the activities suggested under Learning Outcomes (e.g. taking part in various services and prayer) may not be appropriate.

5.11 On the other hand, the *Proposals* provide opportunities to introduce pupils to other religions. For example, *Learning Objective 2: The Christian Churches* requires pupils to develop 'sensitivity to the beliefs of others.' At Key Stage 2, *Learning Objective 3: Morality* includes a section on 'Respect for Others', where pupils should have opportunities to:

- Be aware of and have respect for differing cultures and faiths; and
- Explore how they can welcome and include people from other countries.

5.12 The *Proposals* are for a core teaching for RE only. Schools are free to build upon this and to determine the content of the rest of their RE provision, as suits the needs of the school and its pupils, for example schools may make additional provision for teaching about other religions represented among their pupils. Schools will also be able to make links to the new requirement to provide Citizenship education, where pupils will learn about issues such as diversity and inclusion.

5.13 The Department has noted survey findings that young people think that RE is one of the least relevant subjects (Cohort Study) and that a majority (61%) would like to learn about other religions (NILTS). It would particularly welcome the views of young people from all religious backgrounds, and their parents, on the impacts of these *Proposals*.

No Religious Belief

5.14 The school census shows that, after Protestants and Catholics, there are more pupils whose religion is either Unknown or Not Recorded (6.97%). The Department's survey also found this to be the group with the highest number of withdrawals from RE (30% of overall withdrawals, including 26% of primary and 34% of the post-primary withdrawals). The difficulty in assessing the impact of the *Proposals* is that this group could include pupils from various Christian and Non-Christian backgrounds, as well as those from secular or other traditions (e.g. humanism, atheism) or with no religious beliefs at all. The *Proposals* may have a different impact on the latter groups and the Department would therefore welcome their views.

RACIAL GROUP

5.15 There are non-Christian religious groups such as Jews and Sikhs who are recognised through case-law as racial groups and who are therefore protected by anti-discrimination legislation. As discussed at para 5.9, the *Proposals* include a new *Learning Objective 4: World Religions* at Key Stage 3 and Judaism and Sikhism are two of the religions the working group suggested for teaching. There are also opportunities through *Learning Objective 3: Morality* to introduce pupils to religious and racial diversity and to promote good relations between people from different

religious and racial backgrounds. However, as at para 5.10, some of the groups involved in the pre-consultation believe that the *Proposals* have an adverse impact, as they don't make adequate provision for children from other religious or ethnic minority backgrounds.

5.16 Irish Travellers are also considered to be a racial group. The Government has already addressed Travellers' issues in its response to the report of the Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group on Travellers. There was no reference in this report to RE. The impact of the *Proposals* may be different on Travellers because of the attendance patterns and participation rates of Traveller children in education. There may also be impacts through the content of *Learning Objective 3: Morality*, e.g. on the family and marriage. The Department would welcome the views of the Traveller community on RE in schools in NI.

GENDER

5.17 The requirements and opportunities of the statutory curriculum, including the core syllabus for RE, apply equally to boys and girls. The Department does not consider that the *Proposals* would have an adverse impact on pupils because of their gender, even though boys and girls in Key Stages 3 and 4 may have different views on the Bible's teachings on gender roles, which is part of *Learning Objective 3: Morality*.

MARITAL STATUS

5.18 The *Proposals* apply to the Core Syllabus delivered to pupils of compulsory school age, i.e. up to 16 years; therefore the Department does not think that this category is relevant to this particular EQIA. However, the content under *Learning Objective 3: Morality* on marriage, adultery, divorce, remarriage and pre-marital sex, may have indirect impacts on young people as a result of the marital status of their parents, e.g. if their parents are co-habiting, separated, divorced or re-married.

DISABILITY

5.19 The *Proposals* would apply to all pupils and to all grant-aided schools, including pupils with special educational needs and special schools. Provision is made within the education system for pupils with special educational needs and the Department does not believe that the *Proposals* would affect pupils who have a disability adversely.

DEPENDENTS

5.20 The Department has identified two groups of young people with dependents for this EQIA. There are young people who have responsibility for caring for another person, e.g. a parent, sibling or other relative. The Department does not think that the content of the *Proposals* would have a different or adverse impact on young carers.

5.21 There are also young people, usually girls, who are school-age parents with responsibility for a child of their own. Around 1,500 teenage girls give birth each year in Northern Ireland². The *Proposals* may have a different impact on school-age parents through the content on pre-marital sex and the family (*Learning Objective 3:*

² www.nisra.gov.uk

Morality). However, any impacts may depend on whether or not the young parent, particularly the mother, stays on at school after the child is born.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

5.22 The Department recognises that a person's sexual orientation is a very sensitive and private issue, particularly in relation to young people. The *Proposals* are for RE for young people up to the age of 16. The legal age of homosexual consent in NI is age 17 and the Civil Partnership Act (2004) allows people over the age of 16 to form a same-sex civil partnership, with the consent of the appropriate person/body if under 18. However, the Department is aware, through Youthnet's research, that young people under the age of 17 may be confused about their sexuality or may identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transsexual. The *Proposals* (particularly the content at Key Stage 4 under *Learning Objective 3: Morality* on relationships and sexuality) may have a different impact on these young people and the Department would welcome comments from them.

POLITICAL OPINION

5.23 While recognising the close links between religion and political opinion/identity in Northern Ireland, the Department does not think that the *Proposals* would affect young people adversely as a result of their political opinion.

6. CONSIDERATION OF MITIGATION AND ALTERNATIVES

Introduction

6.1 The Department's initial assessment is that the *Proposals* may have positive impacts because they include provision for:

- Pupils to develop respect for each other;
- Pupils to be introduced to the idea of religious diversity and develop respect for differing cultures and faiths;
- Key Stage 3 pupils to study two World Religions; and
- Key Stage 4 pupils to study the Christian Church from both a Protestant and Catholic perspective.

6.2 A policy screening exercise and pre-consultation meetings indicated that the *Proposals* may have adverse impacts on pupils from Non-Christian or other minority backgrounds. However, census data showing that only 0.3% of pupils are from Non-Christian backgrounds, and survey data, showing that only 0.19% of pupils had been withdrawn from RE in 2004/05, suggest that any negative impacts of RE may be very small in scope.

6.3 The Department is keen to ensure that its policy, i.e. the *Proposals for a Revised Core Syllabus for Religious Education*, is in line with its duty to promote equality of opportunity in order to:

- prevent pupils, regardless of their religious background, feeling excluded or less favourably treated; and
- create opportunities to improve understanding, tolerance and relations between people from different religious backgrounds.

It therefore has to consider measures to mitigate any adverse impacts and alternatives that might better promote equality of opportunity.

Measures Considered

Right to Withdraw

6.4 Parents already have the legal right to withdraw their child from RE lessons and schools could provide any pupil withdrawn from RE with more suitable RE teaching.

Alternative Forms of Provision for Pupils from Minority Backgrounds

6.4 In its consultation document, the Working Group suggested that schools could make provision for pupils from Non-Christian backgrounds through the use of distance-learning and ICT and by enhancing access for teachers or leaders from their particular background.

Make Greater Provision for World Religions Beyond the Core Syllabus

6.5 More schools could be encouraged to use the RE time that is not taken up by the Core Syllabus to teach other religions.

6.6 The revised curriculum will provide greater flexibility to enable schools to tailor their curriculum to better meet the needs of their pupils. It will introduce a new requirement for schools to provide Citizenship education, which will address issues

such as diversity. Schools could make useful links between Citizenship and RE to more easily facilitate education about other religions.

Extend Coverage of World Religions in the Core Syllabus

6.7 The Department could ask the Churches Leaders to revise their *Proposals* to extend *Learning Objective 4: World Religions* to Key Stage 2 and/or 4.

Produce New RE Resources

6.8 A project group could be set up to produce high quality resources for use in teacher training and in classroom teaching of RE. The group could include representatives of the four main Christian Churches, other Christian and non-Christian religions, RE teachers and education professionals, e.g. from teacher-training institutions, CCEA and the ETI. The resources could cover the topics in the Core Syllabus and beyond, e.g. greater coverage of world religions, and would be tailored to Northern Ireland. This could contribute to RE lessons that pupils find more relevant and engaging, that accommodate pupils from a broader range of religious backgrounds and that help to promote mutual understanding.

Other Considerations – International Obligations

6.9 The Department is also aware that the UK has signed up to a number of international agreements on human rights, education and respect for religious and other minorities. It considers that these obligations could best be furthered by the measures discussed at paras 6.5, 6.6, 6.7 and 6.8 above. The key agreements include:

- European Convention on Human Rights;
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- The Council of Europe Framework for the Protection of National Minorities.

Further details on these agreements can be found at Appendix IV.

Public Consultation on Mitigations and Alternatives

If consultees think that the *Proposals* would be likely to have any adverse impacts, the Department would welcome suggestions on mitigations and alternatives that might better promote equality of opportunity.

7. FORMAL CONSULTATION

7.1 The Department of Education wishes to consult as widely as possible on the potential equality impacts of the *Proposals for a Revised Core Syllabus for Religious Education in Grant-Aided Schools in Northern Ireland* and the alternatives outlined in section 6. Officials have already held preliminary meetings and invited written feedback from some interested parties. During the formal 12-week consultation period, the Department will:

- Issue this consultation document, along with a copy of the *Proposals* and a consultation response form, to schools, religious groups, educational interests, Section 75 groups and to any members of the public upon request.
- Place advertisements in the *Belfast Telegraph*, *News Letter* and *Irish News* to tell members of the public about the consultation and how to respond.
- Put a copy of the consultation documents on DE's website and the Consultation NI website, along with an on-line consultation response form.
- Issue a summary of the *Proposals*, a questionnaire for pupils in P5, 6 and 7 (Key Stage 2) and a questionnaire for pupils in Years 8, 9 and 10 (Key Stages 3 and 4) to schools and umbrella groups and publish them on DE's website, along with an online response form.
- Make consultation documentation available in alternative formats for those who require it.
- Arrange consultation meetings upon request with individuals or representatives of particular interest groups, taking account of any special requirements they may have.
- Deal with any queries in a prompt manner.

7.2 The consultation is being co-ordinated by Curriculum & Qualifications Branch and the closing date for responses is 31 May.

8. DECISION BY THE PUBLIC AUTHORITY (DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION)

8.1 The Department of Education will analyse the responses to the consultation and consider the findings of the EQIA before making any decisions on the *Proposals*.

9. PUBLICATION OF RESULTS OF EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1 The results of this EQIA will be published when decisions are announced. A copy of the results document will be sent to those who respond to the consultation and will be posted on the Department's website. It will be made available in alternative formats where requested.

10. MONITORING FOR ADVERSE IMPACT IN THE FUTURE AND PUBLICATION OF THE RESULTS OF SUCH MONITORING

10.1 The Department will establish a process to monitor the future impact of the Core Syllabus for RE on relevant groups. This will be reviewed on an annual basis and the results will be published on the Department's website. If this monitoring reveals any adverse impacts or opportunities to promote greater equality of opportunity, the Department will ensure that the policy is revised.

11. REFERENCES

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MAIN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION LEGISLATION AFFECTING GRANT-AIDED SCHOOLS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

**Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986
[Articles 21–23, as amended by the 1989, 1993 and 1996 Orders]**

Article 21: Religious education in controlled and voluntary schools other than nursery and special schools

(1) Subject to the provisions of this Article, religious education shall be given in every grant-aided school other than a nursery school and the school day in every such school shall also include collective worship whether in one or more than one assembly on the part of the pupils in attendance at the school.

(2) In a controlled school, other than a controlled integrated school, the religious education required by paragraph (1) shall be undenominational religious education, that is to say, education based upon the Holy Scriptures according to some authoritative version or versions thereof but excluding education as to any tenet distinctive of any particular religious denomination and the collective worship required by paragraph (1) in any such school shall not be distinctive of any particular religious denomination.

(3) Subject to paragraph (3A), in—
(a) a controlled integrated school;
(b) a grant-maintained integrated school; and
(c) a voluntary school,

the religious education and collective worship required by paragraph (1) shall be under the control of the Board of Governors of the school and that religious education shall be subject to such arrangements for inspection and examination as the Board of Governors thinks fit.

(3A) In a grant-aided school the religious education required by paragraph (1) shall include religious education in accordance with any core syllabus specified under Article 13(1) of the 1989 Order.

(4) Religious education and collective worship required by paragraph (1) shall be so arranged that—
(a) the school shall be open to pupils of all religious denominations for education other than religious education;
(b) no pupil shall be excluded directly or indirectly from the other advantages which the school affords.

(5) If the parent of any pupil requests that the pupil should be wholly or partly excused from attendance at religious education or collective worship or from both, then, until the request is withdrawn, the pupil shall be excused from such attendance in accordance with the request.

(6) No payment from public funds in respect of a pupil shall be varied by reason of his attendance or non-attendance at religious education or collective worship.

(7) Ministers of religion and other suitable persons, including teachers of the school, to whom the parents do not object shall, subject to paragraph (8), be granted reasonable access at convenient times to pupils in any grant-aided school other than a nursery school for the purpose of giving religious education, whether as to tenets distinctive of a particular religious denomination or otherwise, or of inspecting and examining the religious education given in the school and education given by virtue of this paragraph may be in addition to that provided under paragraph (1).

(8) Paragraph (7) shall not, without the consent of the managers of the school, apply to a voluntary school in existence immediately before 1st October 1973 which was not at that date required to give such access as is referred to in that paragraph and where a pupil has been wholly or partly excused from attendance at religious education in any voluntary school to which such access is not granted, such pupil may be withdrawn from the school during such periods as are reasonably necessary for the purpose of enabling him to receive religious education of which his parents approve.

(9) The Department shall make such regulations as it considers necessary for securing that the provisions of this Article relating to religious education are complied with in all grant-aided schools other than nursery schools, and in particular such regulations may contain provisions with respect to—

- (a) the times during which any religious observance may be practised or any religious education may be given;
- (b) the times during which pupils may be withdrawn from the school so that they may receive religious education in accordance with the provisions of paragraph (8);
- (c) the making of arrangements for religious education in schools;
- (d) the amount of time which may be allotted in the time-tables of schools to religious education.

Article 22: Duties of teachers in controlled schools as to collective worship and religious instruction

(1) Subject to the provisions of this Article, the teachers in every controlled school other than a controlled integrated school or a nursery school, if so requested by the board which controls the school, shall conduct or attend collective worship in the school and give undenominational religious education in the school but a teacher in a controlled school shall not be required to give religious education other than undenominational religious education.

(2) A teacher who has, under paragraph (1), been required to conduct or attend collective worship or give undenominational religious education, may make a request to the Board of Governors of the school in which he is serving to be wholly or partly excused from conducting or attending such worship or giving such education or both from conducting and attending such worship and giving such education and at the same time furnish to the Board of Governors for submission to the board which controls the school a statutory declaration that his request to be so excused is made solely on grounds of conscience.

(3) Where a teacher makes a request under paragraph (2) and furnishes the statutory declaration required by that paragraph, the teacher shall, until the request is withdrawn, be excused in accordance with the request and whilst he is so excused shall not receive less emoluments or be deprived of, or disqualified for, any promotion or other advantage by reason of the fact that he does not conduct or attend collective worship or give undenominational religious education.

Where a board is wholly or partly unable to arrange that the teachers in a school conduct the collective worship or give the undenominational religious education which it is required to provide in the school in accordance with the provisions of Article 21, the board may, for the purpose of fulfilling its obligations under that Article, advertise for and appoint a teacher to conduct such collective worship or give such religious education.

Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989

[Articles 5(1)(a), 12, 13 and 33 as amended by the 1993,1996,1997 and 1998 Orders]

Article 5: The curriculum

(1) The curriculum for every grant-aided school shall—

- (a) include provision for religious education for all registered pupils at the school;

Article 12: Religious education

(1) The religious education for which provision is required by Article 5(1)(a) to be included in the curriculum for any particular grant-aided school shall be religious education of the kind required by such of the provisions of Article 21 of the 1986 Order as apply in the case of that school.

(2) In Articles 21 and 22 of the principal Order for the word "instruction " wherever it occurs there shall be substituted the word "education ".

Article 13: Core Syllabus for Religious Education

(1) Subject to paragraph (4), the Department may by order specify a core syllabus for the teaching of religious education in grant-aided schools, that is to say a syllabus which—

- (a) sets out certain core matters, skills and processes which are to be included in the teaching of religious education to pupils in such schools, but does not prevent or restrict the inclusion of any other matter, skill or process in that teaching; and
- (b) is such that the teaching in a controlled school (other than a controlled integrated school) of any of the matters, skills or processes set out in that syllabus would not contravene Article 21(2) of the principal Order.

(2) In Article 21 of the principal³ Order after paragraph (3) there shall be inserted—
"(3A) In a grant-aided school the religious education required by paragraph (1) shall include religious education in accordance with any core syllabus specified under Article 13(1) of the 1989 Order".

Para. (3) repealed by the 1996 Order

³ The term "principal Order" refers to the 1986 Order.

(4) The Department shall not specify a core syllabus under paragraph (1) unless a draft of that syllabus—

(a) was prepared by a group of persons ("the drafting group") appearing to the Department to be persons having an interest in the teaching of religious education in grant-aided schools;

(b) was published, in accordance with directions given by the Department, together with a notice inviting representations to be made before a specified date not being less than four weeks from the date of publication;

(c) was revised, if necessary, by the drafting group, after considering all representations made in accordance with the notice mentioned in sub-paragraph (b); and

(d) was submitted to the Department by the drafting group together with—

(i) a report by that group on the nature of representations made in accordance with the notice mentioned in sub-paragraph (b) and on the extent to which, and the manner in which, account has been taken of those representations in the draft submitted to the Department; and

(ii) any other information which the Department may request.

(5) Paragraphs (1) and (4) apply with appropriate modifications to amendments to, or a revision of, an existing core syllabus.

(6) Paragraph (5) of Article 7 shall apply to an order under paragraph (1) as it applies to an order under paragraph (1)(a) of Article 7.

Article 33: Complaints

(1) Every board shall, in accordance with regulations under paragraph (3), appoint a tribunal (in this Article referred to as a complaints tribunal) to hear and determine any complaint made on or after the coming into operation of this Article which is to the effect that the board or the Board of Governors of a relevant school—

(a) has acted or is proposing to act unreasonably with respect to the exercise of any power conferred or the performance of any duty imposed on it by or under—

(i) this Part;

(ii) Articles 148 and 149 (in the case of a board only);

(iii) any other statutory provision relating to the curriculum for grant-aided schools; or

(iv) any statutory provision relating to collective worship in grant-aided schools; or

(v) Article 46A of the principal Order;

(b) has failed to discharge any such duty.

Education (Northern Ireland Order) 1996 **[Articles 25 and 33]**

Article 25: Religious education in special schools

(1) Article 21 of the 1986 Order (religious education in grant-aided schools other than nursery or special schools) shall apply in relation to special schools as it applies in relation to ordinary schools.

(2) Accordingly—

(a) in paragraphs (1) and (7) of that Article the words "or special" and in paragraph (9) of that Article the words "and special" shall cease to have effect;

(b) in Article 22(1) of the 1986 Order the words "or special" shall cease to have effect; and

(c) in Article 12 of the 1989 Order (which provides for the kind of religious education to be included in the curriculum of a school) for paragraph (1) there shall be substituted—

" (1) The religious education for which provision is required by Article 5(1)(a) to be included in the curriculum for any particular grant-aided school shall be religious education of the kind required by such of the provisions of Article 21 of the 1986 Order as apply in the case of that school."

Article 33: School Inspections

For Article 102 of the 1986 Order there shall be substituted the following Articles—

"Inspection of educational and other establishments by Department

102. —

(1) Every relevant establishment shall be open at all reasonable times to inspection under this Article.

(2) In this Article and Article 102A "relevant establishment" means—

(a) a school;

(b) a college of education;

(c) a grant-aided institution or establishment; or

(d) an institution or establishment which is established, maintained or managed by a board or the activities of which are organised by a board.

(3) Inspections under this Article shall be conducted by—

(a) inspectors appointed by the Department; or

(b) other officers of the Department.

(4) Inspectors conducting the inspection of an establishment under this Article may be accompanied and assisted in the inspection by a lay person assigned for the purposes of that inspection under Article 102A.

(5) It shall be the duty of inspectors to promote the highest standards of education and of professional practice among teachers in relevant establishments which provide education by—

(a) monitoring, inspecting and reporting on the standard of education being provided in those establishments and the standards of professional practice among teachers on the staff of such establishments;

(b) advising the Department on any aspect of the curriculum of any of those establishments which the Department may refer to them or on which they think advice is appropriate.

(6) It shall be the duty of inspectors to monitor, inspect and report on the nature, scope and effect of advisory and support services provided by boards under Article 29 of the 1989 Order in relation to the curricula and staff of grant-aided schools.

(7) The functions conferred by this Article on inspectors shall not be exercisable in relation to any provision for religious education included in the curriculum of a school under Article 5(1)(a) of the 1989 Order except with the agreement of the Board of Governors of the school.

(8) The Department may give directions under Article 101 for the purpose of remedying any matter referred to in a report under this Article.

Statutory Rule 1996 No. 351: Curriculum (Core Syllabus for Religious Education) Order (Northern Ireland) 1996

(Made on 29 July 1996 to come into operation on 1 September 1996)

WHEREAS a draft of the core syllabus specified in the following Order complies with the requirements of Article 13(4) of the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989;

NOW THEREFORE the Department of Education, in exercise of the powers conferred on it by Article 13(1) and (6) of the said Order, and of every other power enabling it in that behalf, hereby makes the following Order:

Citation and commencement

1. This Order may be cited as the Curriculum (Core Syllabus for Religious Education) Order (Northern Ireland) 1996 and shall come into operation on 1st September 1996.

Interpretation

2. In this Order—

"the Document" means the document published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office entitled "Core Syllabus for Religious Education".

Application

3. The provisions of this Order shall apply in respect of pupils in the first, second, third and fourth key stages.

Specification of a core syllabus for religious education

4. The contents of the Document are hereby specified as the core syllabus for the teaching of religious education in grant-aided schools.

5. The contents printed in italics in the Document are for illustrative purposes only, and do not form part of the provisions which have effect by virtue of this Order.

Revocation

6. The Curriculum (Core Syllabus for Religious Education) (No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 1993 is hereby revoked.

RE CORE SYLLABUS STEERING GROUP AND WORKING PARTY 2002-03

Steering Group Members

NAME	ORGANISATION
Dr A Donaldson	Nominated Working Party Co-Chairperson
Mr F Donnelly	Diocesan Adviser, Down and Connor
Rev A Farquhar	Auxiliary Bishop, Down and Connor
Rev Dr J B Glenny	Secretary of the Northern Ireland Executive of the Methodist Board of Education
Very Rev Dr RSJH McKelvey	Dean of Belfast, (Former Secretary to the Church of Ireland Board of Education NI)
Rev I W Ellis	Secretary to the Church of Ireland Board of Education NI
Most Rev J McAreavey	Bishop of Dromore
Fr M O'Hagan	Diocesan Adviser, Down and Connor
Fr D O'Loughlin	Diocesan Adviser, Archdiocese of Armagh
Rev Dr RFS Poots	Deputy Clerk (Retired) of the General Assembly, The Presbyterian Church in Ireland
Mr T J Shaw	Nominated Working Party Co-Chairperson
Rev Dr D J Watts	Clerk of the General Assembly, The Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Working Party Members

NAME	ORGANISATION
Dr Aidan Donaldson	Co-Chairperson
Mr Tom Shaw	Co-Chairperson
Mr. Philip Artherton	St. Brigid's Primary School
Ms. Heather Boland	Methodist College
Mr. Liam Boyle	St. Colman's High School
Mrs. Jennifer Campbell	Christie Memorial Primary School
Mr. Frank Donnelly	Diocesan Adviser, Diocese of Down and Connor
Rev Dr. Paul Fleming	St. Mary's University College, QUB
Mr. Philip Hewitt	RE Adviser, North Eastern Education and Library Board
Rev. Paul Hooper	RE Adviser, South Eastern Education and Library Board
Mr. Dominic Kealey	Our Lady and St. Patrick's Grammar School
Mrs. Brenda Leathem	Drumcree College
Ms. Mary Martin	St Gemma's High School
Ms. Brigid Mc Auley	St. Joseph's Primary School
Mrs. Gillian McDonald	Glenlola Collegiate
Fr. Martin O'Hagan	Diocesan Adviser, Diocese of Down and Connor
Fr Declan O'Loughlin	Diocesan Adviser, Archdiocese of Armagh
Mr. Richard Ross	North Coast Integrated College
Mrs. Joyce Smith	Clondermot High School
Mr. William Terrett	Carrickfergus Grammar School
Mr. Tom Vance	Stranmillis University College, QUB
Mr. Tom Wilson	Abbots Cross Primary School

World Religions Advisory Subgroup

NAME

Mrs. Regina O'Callaghan
Mr. William Burnison
Mr. Pascal Canavan
Ms. Francine Magill
Ms. Joan Wilson

ORGANISATION

St. Mary's University College, QUB
Retired Inspector of Schools
St Ciaran's High School
Malone Integrated College
Drumragh Integrated College

**RESPONSES TO NOVEMBER 2005 SURVEY OF PUPILS WITHDRAWN FROM RE
AT THE REQUEST OF THEIR PARENTS IN 2004/05**

Withdrawn Pupils as % of Total Number of Pupils Enrolled

	No of Schools in Survey	Schools with Pupils Withdrawn		Total Enrolment	Withdrawn Pupils	
		No	%		No	%
Primary	77	16	20.8	14,434	57	0.39
Post-Primary	64	17	26.5	34,342	38	0.11
Total	141	33	23.4	48,776	94	0.19

**Pupils Withdrawn as % of Enrolment Number of School and Schools in Survey
with Withdrawals**

	Enrolment Number	Schools by Withdrawn pupils as % of Enrolment number					Total with Withdrawals	Schools in Survey
		<1%	1-2%	2-3%	3-4%	>4%		
Primary	14,434	7	3	1	1	4	16	77
%		43.8	1838	6.3	6.3	25	20.8	
Post-Primary	34,342	16	0	0	0	1	17	64
%		94.1	0	0	0	6.3	26.5	
Total	48,776	23	3	1	1	5	33	141
%		70.0	9.1	3.0	3.0	15.2	23.4	

Withdrawn Pupils by Religion and Management Type – Overall

Sector	Protestant		Catholic		Other Christian		Non- Christian		Other/ Unknown/ Not Recorded		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Controlled	15	16.0	2	2.1	5	5.3	12	12.8	12	12.8	46	48.9
Maintained	2	2.1	2	2.1	1	1.1	2	2.1	3	3.2	10	10.6
Controlled Integrated	0	0	0	0	1	1.1	2	2.1	8	8.5	11	11.7
GM Integrated	0	0	13	13.8	1	1.1	1	1.1	3	3.2	18	19.1
Other Maintained	0	0	0	0	2	2.1	2	2.1	2	2.1	6	6.4
Voluntary	0	0	0	0	1	1.1	3	3.2	0	0	4	4.3
Total	17	18.1	17	18.1	10	10.6	22	23.4	28	29.8	94	100

Withdrawn Pupils by Religion and Management Type – Primary

Sector	Protestant		Catholic		Other Christian		Non-Christian		Other/Unknown/Not Recorded		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Controlled	6	10.5	0	0	4	7.0	8	14.0	2	3.5	20	35.1
Maintained	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Controlled Integrated	0	0	0	0	1	1.8	2	3.5	8	14.0	11	19.3
GM Integrated	0	0	13	22.8	0	0	1	1.8	3	5.3	17	29.9
Other Maintained	0	0	0	0	2	3.5	2	3.5	2	3.5	6	8.8
Voluntary	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	5.3	0	0	3	5.7
Total	6	10.5	13	22.8	7	12.2	16	48.1	15	26.3	57	100

Withdrawn Pupils by Religion and Management Type – Post-Primary

Sector	Protestant		Catholic		Other Christian		Non-Christian		Other/Unknown/Not Recorded		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Controlled	9	23.7	2	5.3	1	2.6	4	10.5	10	26.3	26	68.4
Maintained	2	5.3	2	5.3	1	2.6	2	5.3	3	7.9	10	26.4
Controlled Integrated	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
GM Integrated	0	0	0	0	1	2.6	0	0	0	0	1	2.6
Other Maintained	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Voluntary	0	0	0	0	1	2.6	0	0	0	0	1	2.6
Total	11	28.9	4	10.5	4	10.5	6	15.8	13	34.2	38	100

Alternative Provision Made for Pupils Withdrawn from RE Lessons

Provision	Primary		Post-Primary		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Supervised Activities/Study	20	35.1	31	81.6	51	54.2
Go to Library	0	0	1	2.6	1	1.1
Go to another classroom	9	15.8	3	7.9	12	12.8
Stay in RE class but do not participate	3	5.3	2	5.3	5	5.3
Other	14	24.6	1	2.6	15	16.0
Unknown	11	19.3	0	0	11	11.7
Total	57	60.3	38	40.4	94	100

KEY INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS – HUMAN RIGHTS, EDUCATION AND RELIGION

European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)

As a result of the Human Rights Act 1998, these rights are enforceable in NI courts and all NI legislation has to be compatible with the ECHR.

- Article 9 provides for freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the right to manifest religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance. *(This right is also enshrined in the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights).*
- Protocol 1 Article 2 provides the right to education and the state has to respect the right of parents to ensure that the education and teaching of their child is in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions. *(The UK has accepted this Article subject to a reservation that it respects this right only so far as it is compatible with the provision of efficient education and the avoidance of unreasonable expenditure).*

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

- Article 2(1) requires states to respect and ensure the rights of all children, regardless of their background.
- Article 14(3) gives children the right to manifest their religion or beliefs, subject only to any legal limits needed to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.
- Article 29(1) states that the purpose of a child's education is to develop their respect for their parents, their cultural identity, the country they live in and originate from and for people from other cultural traditions. Education should also prepare them for life in a free society and a spirit of tolerance, equality and good relations among people from all backgrounds.

UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

- Article 13 states that education should enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups.

Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

- Signatories have agreed to promote the conditions necessary for their national minorities to maintain and develop their own culture. This includes appropriate measures through education to foster knowledge of majority and minority cultures and the promotion of equal opportunities for minorities to access education, including appropriate access to textbooks. States should also encourage tolerance and mutual understanding among all their citizens.

IF YOU REQUIRE THIS DOCUMENT IN ANOTHER FORMAT PLEASE CONTACT:

CURRICULUM & QUALIFICATIONS BRANCH
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
RATHGAEL HOUSE
43 BALLOO ROAD
BANGOR
BT19 7PR

TEL: 02891 279581

FAX: 02891 279100

EMAIL: reeqia@deni.gov.uk

YOU SHOULD READ THIS DOCUMENT ALONG WITH THE:

*PROPOSALS FOR A REVISED CORE SYLLABUS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
IN GRANT-AIDED SCHOOLS IN NORTHERN IRELAND*

AND

THE CONSULTATION RESPONSE BOOKLET

YOU MAY ALSO BE INTERESTED IN THE CONSULTATION RESPONSE
BOOKLETS FOR PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY PUPILS

ALL THESE DOCUMENTS ARE AVAILABLE FROM THE ADDRESS ABOVE AND
ARE ALSO ON OUR WEBSITE: WWW.DENI.GOV.UK