

RE: Chief Moderator Report 2011

Main messages for school departments that will be submitting their sample evidence in the school year 2011/12.

Range of evidence:

In this first full phase of the KS 3 Moderation for RE there was evidence that some of the messages given at the information meetings had been taken up by some schools. Evidence received by moderators demonstrated that a number of schools followed the WJEC guidance document, in the sense that attempts had been made to provide evidence of the three core inter-related skills (of Engaging with fundamental questions, Exploring religious beliefs, teachings and practices, and Expressing personal responses) and of the elements of the characteristics of the level descriptions.

However there were some samples that:

- included tasks that were unlikely to show understanding of the characteristics of the level descriptions because the nature of the tasks simply did not equate with the skills of the *National exemplar framework for religious education for 3 to 19 year olds in Wales* from which the level descriptions come;
- suggested the school had not followed the WJEC guidance document and offered examples of just one task/assignment through all of the levels, and with the minimum number of examples for each level. It is unlikely that the same task would cover all the elements of the characteristics of the level descriptions for all four levels;
- had the same two tasks/assignments repeated through all of the levels (again with the minimum number of samples for each level) – it is unlikely that such a limited range of tasks across all four levels could demonstrate all of the elements of the characteristics of the level descriptions for all four levels;
- contained very small amounts of material, sometimes two or three tasks with a total of just four or five sides of paper for just one level; such a small sample does not evidence clearly the characteristics of the three core inter-related skills and elements of the level descriptions;
- included assessment tests for their evidence. These tests by their very limited nature often do not demonstrate sufficient characteristics of a level description. The schools which submitted a greater number of samples with at least four or more tasks were much more successful in demonstrating their understanding of the characteristics of the level descriptions.

Presentation of sample evidence including teachers' commentary:

There was evidence in this phase of some schools having followed the WJEC Guidance and advice given to schools in the information meetings. The use of the WJEC commentary form, completed fully in terms of background information to the task and the kind of resources used, aided moderation. There was also much improvement in the identifying of where the evidence for the characteristics of the level descriptions could be found in the sample – many using a numbered grid system, or some sort of colour coding, and many helpfully included master copies of such grids.

However there were samples that:

- did not identify the precise location of the characteristics in the sample, but only noted on the cover sheet that the material did contain the evidence;
- contained examples of learners' work that had been evaluated and annotated independently by different teachers using different criteria. The expectation in the

WJEC Guidance Document is that the sample demonstrates the department's *collective* understanding of the characteristics of the level descriptions.

Understanding of the characteristics of the level descriptions:

The three core skills of the *National exemplar framework for religious education for 3 to 19 year olds in Wales* are clearly stated as being inter-related. This means that learners would be 'Engaging with fundamental questions' that relate to their 'Exploring of religious beliefs, teachings and practices' and which together impact on their 'Expressing personal responses', and also in other directions too.

For example, in considering religious beliefs, teachings and practices about something, learners should be given opportunities to consider their own and others personal responses to those beliefs, teachings and practices, and how these all inform, challenge and generally relate to fundamental questions that arise from their studies and from life experiences. Understanding this is critical to ensuring that learners are provided with opportunities to consider this cyclical inter-relationship.

- Some samples contained learners' responses to fundamental questions that were totally discrete and unrelated to the evidence for religious beliefs, teachings and practices in the sample for that level. These in turn also had no links or association with the evidence of learners' personal responses – thus making the three inter-related core skills totally independent of each other and free standing, sometimes not even related to religion at all.

It was also clear from the external moderation that there is a need for schools to look carefully at the progression from one level to another for each of the strands within the level. This is vitally important in ensuring that the evidence in the sample adequately demonstrates understanding of the strand within each of the levels. For example, the level description for Level 4 includes the statement: "*describe and begin to explain some of the basic religious beliefs, teachings and practices investigated*" and the same strand for Level 5 states: "*make links between the religious beliefs, teachings and practices studied.*" Level 6 requires learners to: "*use their understanding of the links between religious beliefs, teachings and practices investigated to consolidate their understanding of religion.*" The same pattern is also true of other strands within the level descriptions.

- Some samples, including the teacher commentaries, showed progression from one level to another in terms of greater detail or the use of more complex language. In other words they saw Level 4 as 'basic description', Level 5 as 'more detailed description' - perhaps with some explanation, and Level 6 as more complex and detailed descriptions. Such progression does not accord with the level descriptions and would indicate a lack of understanding of the characteristics as they are described in the *National exemplar framework for religious education for 3 – 19-year-olds in Wales*.

Also, a large number of samples did not seem to distinguish between religious **beliefs** (the things held to be true), religious **teachings** (the authoritative basis of beliefs as stated in sacred writings or by religious leaders) and religious **practices** (the out-workings or practical expressions of beliefs/teachings in ritual, worship, lifestyle, response to life and fundamental questions, etc). Each of the three informs and affects the others in an inter-related and dynamic way.

- Some samples did not actually include any teachings at all, though the teacher commentaries implied that they did; there were examples of beliefs and practices, but not teachings. It is vitally important that schools recognise the phrase "religious

beliefs, teachings and practices” is not a generic term meaning ‘anything to do with religion’.

A similar issue stems from the third core skill, where the progression within the level descriptions requires more than just a simple statement of personal opinion. For example, for Level 4 the wording of the level description states: “explain in simple terms how their own feelings, actions and opinions differ from those of others” whereas Level 5 has additional expectations, and is worded as: “explain how their own feelings, actions and opinions affect their own lives” and “describe how those of others similarly affect their lives”. This is taken yet further in Level 6, where the strand has two aspects: “consider the implications of their own beliefs and actions” and “compare these to other people and draw balanced conclusions.”

- Some samples identified learners’ conclusions as evidence of this later aspect of Level 6, but the statements made by learners were not balanced, did not arise out of the investigations into fundamental questions and/or the religious beliefs, teachings and practices investigated, and sometimes were rehearsing uninformed prejudice and stereotyping; these cannot be indications of appropriate understanding of the level descriptions. Also,
- some samples contained expressions of personal viewpoints that were just the learners’ own opinions – there was no reference or description or evaluation of others viewpoints or of differing viewpoints – the level descriptions require more than just a personal expression of own opinions.

As stated after the pilot moderation, these are critical distinctions, and schools are advised to consider carefully these distinctions, and to select appropriate material that demonstrates their understanding of them.

It was also evident this year – as referred to in the section on presentation of sample evidence above – that in a number of schools samples of pupil work for a level were submitted by different teachers but annotated and evaluated independently. Such an approach does not demonstrate the department’s collegiate understanding of the characteristics of the level descriptions.

There was also evidence in some samples of teachers marking (or accepting) clearly inaccurate information as correct. This does not indicate a clear understanding of standards as exemplified in the level descriptions. Internal cross-moderation of the sample would help avoid such issues.

Key messages for schools:

- Study carefully the WJEC Guidance Document about the sample material, and ensure sample evidence includes a teacher commentary that provides the appropriate background information and the precise location of evidence within the sample;
- Look at and discuss as a department the Welsh Government’s *Religious education: Guidance for Key Stages 2 and 3 Key messages for planning learning and teaching* and the accompanying *Exemplifying learner profiles at Key Stages 2 and 3 in religious education: Additional guidance*;
- Select a sufficient variety of tasks that enable all the characteristics of the level description and the breadth of the three inter-related core skills to be clearly evident;
- Ensure that there is sufficient evidence of religious beliefs, religious teachings and religious practices, the inter-relationship between them, and the specific aspects of the level description concerned;

- Give clear evidence within the sample that the department **collectively** understands the progression from one level to another for each of the strands.

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

- Ensure that the tasks and activities learners engage in during their course of study enable them to develop the skills as outlined in the *National Framework for religious education for 3 to 19 year olds in Wales*;
- Enable learners to understand the distinctions between religious beliefs, religious teachings and religious practices, and the way these inform and affect each other, and together relate to fundamental questions experienced in life and religion, and to personal expressions of themselves and others;
- As part of departmental preparations and considerations for standardisation, consider the Welsh Government's guidance documents for RE (referred to above) and discuss the detailed wording of the level descriptions to reach a common understanding of what they mean, and discuss the issues in the 'key messages for schools' and 'implications for teaching and learning' stated above.

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