

CASE STUDIES ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Intellectual output 3

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1



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READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

INTRODUCTION

In this document, we present a set of case studies from the five participant countries. In each report, we offer an overview of the religious landscape in each country. This is relevant as Religious Education (RE) has not developed and does not exist in a vacuum – for each country, school RE is inextricably bound in its societal context. Following each country’s overview, the organisation of school RE and teacher education is presented. Current developments as well as challenges and perspectives are presented. We conclude with a comparative section, in which we present an account of what we have identified as the main similarities and differences between the countries. Here we suggest how countries might learn from each other. It is important to note we do not consider that learning from each other need equate to the transfer of practice – our experience on the project has been that considering distinct ideas and practices from distinct contexts has been highly valuable in stimulating fresh thinking about our own local practices.

While reading the case studies, it becomes clear that all countries have become more secular and religiously diverse over a similar period of time, and are finding ways to respond to their changing situations. Whereas in Austria and Germany a major challenge is how a further development of the confessional RE approach can be organised, the other countries struggle more and more to explain why a secular society needs RE in school at all. Differences and blind spots also emerge, especially regarding the official and customary relations of the churches and other religious communities with the State. The Austrian society is very much influenced by the Catholic Church, which is a major player in politics and society. It is self-evident that RE teacher education is built upon the specific theologies and RE is not only about ‘learning about religion’, but also ‘learning from and through religion’. England is a country that still has an official state church. However, this has become decreasingly influential on day-to-day life for many of those living in England. Approximately one third of schools in England are “of a religious character”. A number of religions are represented, but the majority of such schools are Christian. The law states that RE in England must reflect the fact that religion in Britain is in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the other main religions in the country. Schools of a religious character can prioritise one religion but must recognise the diversity of religion and belief in the country.

The situation in Germany is moulded by the reformation and the inner German separation. Therefore patches of mainly Catholic, Protestant or non-confessional population can be found. Each group represents about a third of the population. RE is mainly confessional and RE teachers are trained at university in RE as part of their general teacher education for primary school and as one subject for secondary schools. In some areas trained theologians also teach RE. A main aim of RE is to provide orientation in a specific religious tradition linked in a dialogical way to other confessions or religions. RE also provides competences concerning plurality and existing diversity. So learning about, from, and through religion are integrated aims. Also, the contribution of RE concerning democracy and human rights is discussed.

In Scotland, though the Presbyterian Church of Scotland was instrumental in setting up RE in schools, this is no longer the case. Non-denominational schools deliver a non-confessional approach. The

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

Catholic minority has the right for its own RE. Secularisation is also very evident in Scotland. Therefore apart from Catholic RE the other Churches and religious communities do not play a direct role in RE teacher education, though they may be consulted about developments within the subject.

And finally Sweden, which sees itself as one of the most secular countries in the world, but until recently had an official state church. Similar to England, the Church has a closely-intertwined history with the State, but does not play a role in most of the lives of Swedes anymore. Therefore RE has only a minor role in school.

Here follows the case studies, which present each country in greater detail.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

AUSTRIA

1. Religious landscape

The Austrian legal system is religiously neutral. This precludes any identification of the state with a specific church or religious community (known as the principle of religious neutrality). The tasks and objectives of the state are exclusively worldly and non-spiritual (principle of secularity). The principles governing the relationship between state and church are laid down in a number of different enactments. The relationship to the Catholic Church is specified above all by the Concordat of 1933 and several further laws that regulate the relationship between the Austrian state and the Holy See in different areas. The Roman Catholic Church enjoys special rights in so far as the Holy See is subject to international law. Statutory acts also regulate the state’s relationship to other churches and religious communities: The Protestant Churches in the *Protestantengesetz* of 1961, the Orthodox Church in the *Orthodoxengesetz* of 1967, the Jewish Religious Communities in the *Israelitengesetz* of 1890 and the Islamic Religious Community in the *Islamgesetz* of 1912 as amended in 2015. The relationship to the other legally recognized churches and religious communities is regulated on the basis of the Recognition Act of 1874 and the Oriental Orthodox Churches Act of 2003.

The status of all legally recognized churches and religious communities furthermore involves certain guarantees laid down in Article 15 of the Basic Law on the General Rights of Citizens: the right to practice communal public worship, arrange and administer ‘internal’ affairs autonomously, and retain possession and enjoyment of institutions, endowments and funds. In addition to the right to found private confessional establishments for instruction and education and provide religious education in state schools.

Legally recognised churches and religious communities in Austria are public corporations as they perform functions of public interest. In addition to their religious obligations they also facilitate social, societal and cultural functions that benefit the public at large, and are therefore supported by the state. Today there are 16 legally recognized churches:

- Armenian Apostolic Church
- Buddhist community
- Catholic Church
- Coptic Orthodox Church
- Eastern Orthodox Church (Russian, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, and Bulgarian)
- Free Christian Churches
- Islamic community
- Islamic-Alevi Community
- Jehovah’s Witnesses
- Jewish community
- Methodist Church of Austria
- New Apostolic Church
- Old Catholic Church
- Protestant churches (specifically “Augsburg” and “Helvetic” confessions)
- Syrian Orthodox Church
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

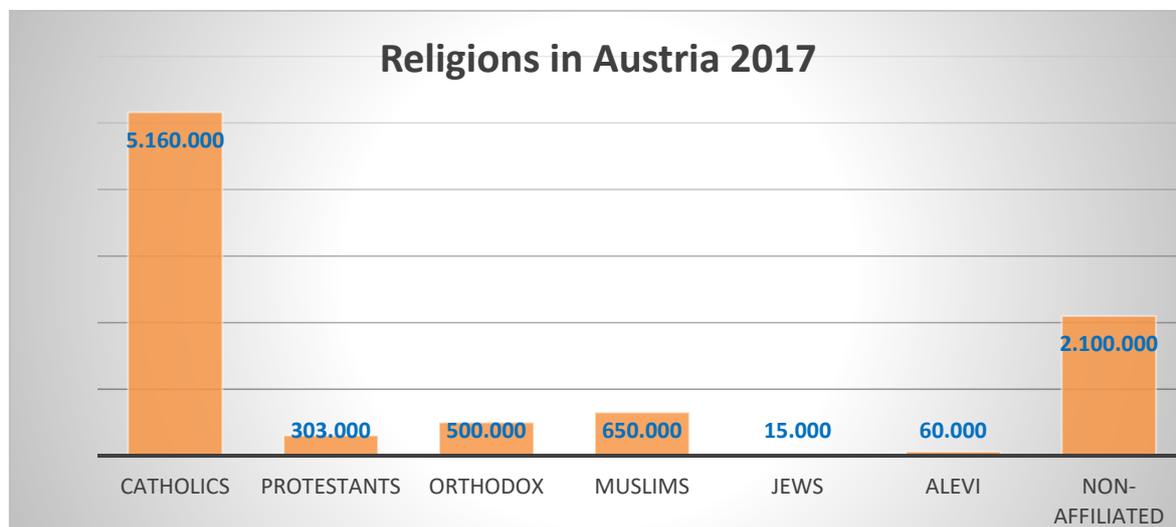
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However, there are great differences in the number of members each religious (or non-religious) group has.

In addition to the churches and religious communities recognized by state, confessional communities that are not corporate bodies under public law are endowed with a legal personality and are entitled to bear the designation “state-registered confessional community”. Conditional on the fulfilment of the legal requirements, legal recognition as a religious community may be granted after twenty years of existence and ten years of registration as a confessional community, provided several further conditions are met. Officially registered confessional communities in Austria have had legal status since 1998. Now there are eight recognized communities:

- Alt-Alevitische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich
- Baha’i - Religious Community in Austria
- Christian Movement for Religious Renewal in Austria
- Hindu Religious Society in Austria
- Islamische-Schiitische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich (Schia)
- Church of the Seventh-day Adventists
- Pfingstkirche Gemeinde Gottes in Österreich
- Unification Church in Austria

Austria has a population of 8.7 million. According to 2017 estimates (the last census was carried out in 2001), membership in major religious groups is as follows:

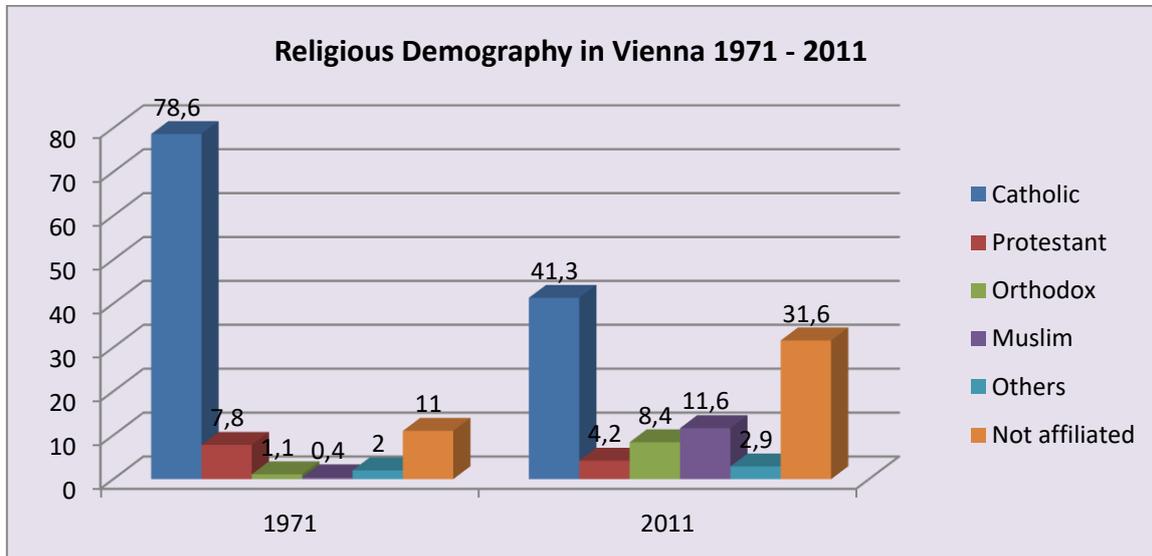


Source: Numbers based on Die PRESSE (last accessed 04.08.2017).

According to a Vienna Institute of Demography study, the country has witnessed a steady decline in religious affiliation over the past 40 years. The study cites general religious apathy and an increasingly secular worldview as the main reasons for this decline. One notable exception to this trend is the Muslim community, which, given the recent influx of refugees and immigrants from predominantly Muslim countries, is expected to continue to increase in proportion to the population. The study estimates that by 2051 Muslims will make up 18 percent of the population.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“



Source: Numbers based on Yearbook of International Religious Demography 2014.

2. Religious Education (RE)

Austria’s legal framework reflects the fact that religious diversity is both not seen as a private matter and is visible in schools. However, the socio-religious background indicated above significantly influences the conception as well as the current discussion of RE. It is a compulsory and confessional subject in all public schools except most of the trade schools, where it is optional. The number of lessons is two per class each week with a minimum of ten attendants (fewer pupils lead to a reduction to one lesson). Many schools merge pupils of one or more levels in multi-age classrooms to reach the minimum number of attendees. This means that the subject is often seen as less important in comparison to, for example, mathematics or languages.

Furthermore, parents have the right to withdraw their children from RE within the first five school days. Pupils over the age of 14 can opt out themselves. According to the law opting out may only take place on grounds of conscience, but in practice it is evident that there are other reasons for not attending: inconvenient time-tables, lack of interest etc. The number of pupils attending RE has dropped in the last few years whereas children without affiliation has significantly increased. These pupils can enrol for the RE of a Christian denomination in the form of an optional subject.

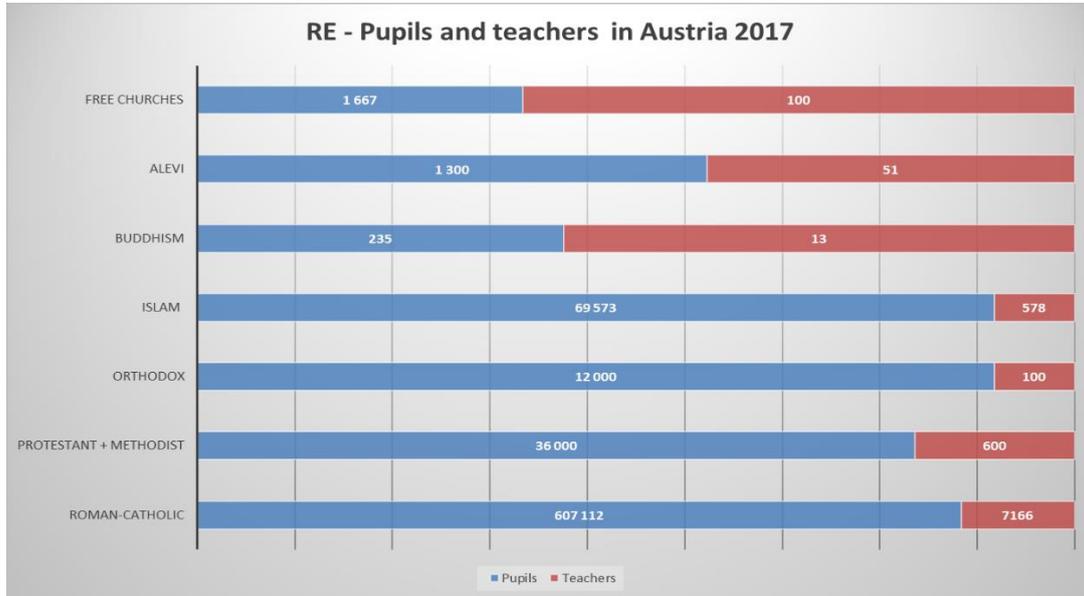
By act of law, every religious community is treated equally. RE is given separately for Catholic, Protestant, Old Catholic, Free Churches, Orthodox, Muslim, Alevi and Jewish pupils, each with its own syllabus. Generally, Roman Catholic and Protestant RE is offered; Islamic, Alevi, Free Churches, Orthodox, Jewish and Buddhist lessons take place in schools with a significant number of respective pupils. Since 2003, the RE of the Evangelical Church A.B and H.B. is compulsory for children who are members of the United Methodist Church.

In 2017, the distribution of pupils among RE classes and the number of teachers varied a lot depending on the affiliation of pupils. Whereas the more mainstream religious communities have a high pupil-

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

teacher ratio, the smaller communities have a significant amount of religiously affiliated teachers for pupils of the same affiliation.



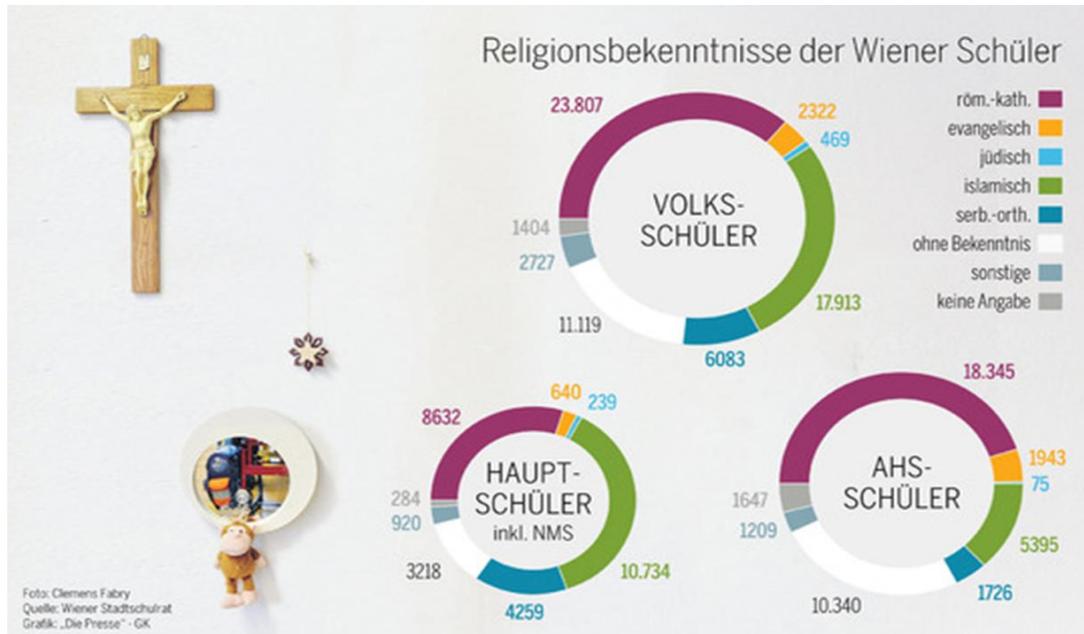
Source: Numbers based on DER STANDARD (last accessed 18.04.2017).

The following chart shows that Muslim students now outnumber Roman Catholic students in New Middle and Lower Secondary schools (“Hauptschüler”) in Vienna. However, due to the Austria-specific dual school system at this level (Lower Secondary and Grammar schools running parallel), this trend reflects another phenomenon: In Vienna and other large cities, children from educationally and socially disadvantaged families or a migrant background rather attend Middle Schools than the more prestigious Grammar schools.

The data also indicate that Muslim students are on the verge of overtaking Catholics in Elementary schools (“Volksschüler”) as well, which provides empirical evidence of a massive demographic and religious shift underway in Austria, which has traditionally been seen a Roman Catholic country:

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“



Source: Vienna Board of Education 2016. The graph documents the percentage of different beliefs of pupils and students in Vienna in the three main types of schools.

In terms of content of RE, the focus lies on the respective religious tradition and value education linked to it. For example, the Catholic curriculum states: “The pupils, their lives and their faith are at the heart of RE. Therefore, the RE curriculum deals both with human life and the Christian faith, as it has developed over the course of history and as it is lived in Christian communities”.¹ Nonetheless, learning about other religious traditions is also part of the curriculum. Some schools offer multi-faith school services in the beginning and/or end of the term and pupils from all faiths are exempted from class to celebrate their high religious festivals (e.g. Eid al-Adha, Passover, Good Friday).

3. How RE teacher education is organized

Up to 2015, the Austrian University Colleges of Teacher Education (UCTEs) used to offer teaching qualifications for RE in primary and lower secondary compulsory schools as an individual subject. In the academic year 2015/16 a new form of training for primary school teachers was implemented that has replaced the education of a ‘classical’ RE teacher. Every student must study for a primary school teaching diploma and in the 3rd or 5th semester students can opt for the additional field of ‘Religious Education’. In other words: Primary school teachers who are qualified to teach confessional religion as well.

Education for lower and upper secondary level is organized in form of a cooperation between UCTEs and universities. Here students choose the specific subjects (in general two) they want to teach. For RE they can study Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and Islamic Religious Pedagogy, where the goal is a

¹ Interdiözesanes Amt für Unterricht und Erziehung (2013). Lehrplan für den katholischen Religionsunterricht an der Volksschule. Vienna. URL: http://www.schulamt.at/attachments/article/130/VS_LP_2014.pdf (last accessed 03.04.2018).

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

philosophical-theological and pedagogical education in form of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

The length of a teacher training study programme is at least four years up to the Bachelor and another one to one and a half years up to the Master. The teaching diploma is awarded after the successful completion of the entire course of study. The basic structure of the bachelor's and master's degrees is standardised. The curriculum includes lectures on the fundamentals of general educational studies, elementary and primary education and methods, as well as contents referring to the chosen subjects. Moreover, personal study focuses can normally be set in the areas of inclusion, special and curative education, social education, career guidance, multilingualism, or media education. Specialisation in inclusive education must always be offered.

Teacher Training at Kirchliche Pädagogische Hochschule Wien/Krems

In 2007, the Archdiocese of Vienna established the University College of Teacher Education Vienna/Krems (KPH) and maintains it together with the Diocese of St. Pölten and the Protestant, Greek-Oriental, Oriental-Orthodox and Old-Catholic Churches of Austria. It also offers Islamic and Jewish Religious Education as an eligible special subject within the general curriculum. This ecumenical and interfaith cooperation makes it a unique educational institution in Europe.

Moreover, with its five campuses in Vienna and Lower Austria it is Austria's largest private university college of teacher education. Based on a balanced curriculum of initial teacher training, professional development, in-service training and further education, the KPH offers opportunities for teachers to acquire qualifications and professionalization in order to be able to meet the challenges in the fields of general pedagogy and religious education.



The mission statement is based on the following principles:

- Our basis is the Christian understanding of the human being
- Reflecting diversity is our strength
- Promotion of talent is our passion
- Responsibility is our key concept
- Mutual acceptance and esteem mark our organisational culture

The college offers a four-year training programme for the teaching diploma for Primary Schools and in cooperation with the University of Vienna as well as other University Colleges for New Middle Schools and Lower and Upper Secondary Schools. Students can choose religion as their focal point (primary level) or as an ordinary subject.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

4. Current developments

A while ago, some schools established the subject *Ethics* as a pilot project to offer an alternative to RE. Pupils can then decide whether to attend RE or Ethics. If it is offered, those not attending any RE, or who are officially religiously unaffiliated must choose Ethics. However, due to the high costs of this education scheme, Ethics has not yet been offered in many schools and still runs as a school pilot project.

Traditional Catholic and Protestant education has faced competition in recent years from increasing numbers of Orthodox and Muslim pupils, especially in metropolitan areas, which has led to a significant increase in the corresponding RE lessons.

Since 2003 a few Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic teachers in Vienna have organized their religion lessons on a *joint confessional-cooperative* basis ‘as an experiment’ (KOKORU). Now, a new approach called *dialogical confessional RE* (dk:RU) is being developed and tested in selected schools in Vienna. In this context, RE is the joint responsibility of the Christian churches and a teacher from one of the main Christian denominations teaches the complete group of Christian pupils in a class.

5. Challenges and perspectives

The multi-cultural and multi-faith situation in an increasing number of schools brings up questions like

- How to organise school life that attends to the respective needs?
- How to celebrate religious feasts during a school year – together or separate?
- Should there be no religious symbols in the classrooms at all or one for each group present?

In some cases, efforts to find sufficient resources and better conditions for one's own subject have created a rather unfavourable starting position for RE, as can generally be observed that the relevance of the subject depends very much on the goodwill of the respective school and the existing school climate. Moreover, societal and political initiatives declaring that ‘religion is a private affair’ see no justification for a state-funded teaching of religion and even a concordat can be changed.

Especially in metropolitan areas, the shrinking number of Catholic and Protestant pupils and the increase in Orthodox and Muslim children has led to a noticeable reduction or expansion of the respective religion lessons. In addition, there are newly recognized smaller religious groups that can offer their own lessons. Where there are not enough pupils of one denomination per class, pupils from several classes are brought together in small groups. All this makes it increasingly difficult to organise a convenient timetable.

Many wonder whether this means the end of denominational teaching by denominational teachers. Or more specifically, the end of learning *from* religion and a shift towards learning *about* religion. Another major question is whether there will be enough RE teachers and pupils in the future for a strict denominational splitting. Similarly, a solution is needed as to what should happen to students without denominational affiliation or those who have withdrawn. While one group has their religious education, the others have a free period, come later or leave earlier. This seems to call for the nationwide implementation of compulsory Ethics lessons.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

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READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

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READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

ENGLAND

1. Religious landscape

Perhaps the earliest evidence of religion in England is the iconic Stonehenge built by the ancient Neolithic people of the island nation. In the Iron Age, the Celtic people, known as the Britons, inhabited England and their pagan worship is well documented. The Roman conquest, which had begun in 43 CE, ended with the Anglo-Saxon settlement of peoples from diverse European origins. Early Christianity was introduced in England by Romans arriving in Britain to trade and live. During this time, the religion was one of many cults and traditions; however, its rejection of the Roman gods led to prolific persecution of many Christians. In the early 4th Century, following the Roman Emperor Constantine’s conversion to Christianity, the Christianity was tolerated throughout the Roman Empire, although it was yet to be nationally established in England. After the departure of the Romans, the Angles, Saxons and Jutes invaded England and Christianity survived through missionary activity and monasteries in the neighbouring countries of Wales, Ireland and western Scotland where St Columba played a key role in bringing a Celtic brand of Christianity to England.

In 597CE, Augustine was sent to England by the Pope to institute Christianity as the national religion. The arrival of Roman Christianity from mainland Europe sought to supersede the existing Celtic Christianity. In 664CE King Oswiu called a Synod in Whitby in order that a decision could be made with regards to the supremacy of Celtic or Roman Christian traditions and we know from Venerable Bede’s descriptions in, ‘Ecclesiastical History of the English People’, that there were considerable internal conflicts in Christianity.

The Dark Ages threatened to destroy the Christian Church. In 878CE, King Alfred was victorious over the invading Vikings and he enabled Christianity to spread throughout England, which, in the 10th Century, led to the nobility building chapels for their workers to attend. This would sow the seeds of the parish system, which is still in existence today.

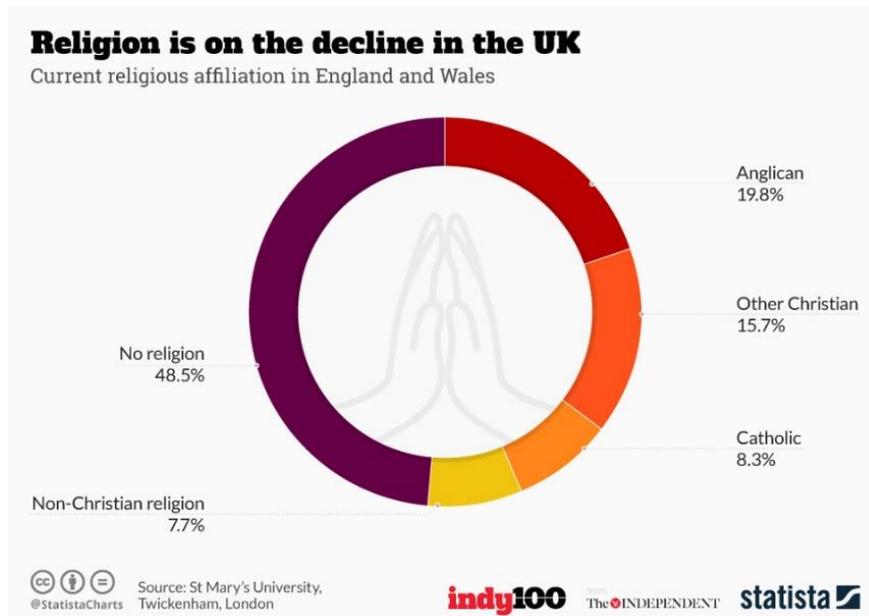
Following the Norman Conquest in 1066CE, William the Conqueror set about a building programme of churches throughout England that supported monastic traditions and municipal life. By this time, the links between church, monarchy and the state were firmly established.

Following the Reformation in Europe, the Church of England became established as a state church in 1531. The 16th Century proved to be a challenging time for many Christians in England as Catholics were persecuted and driven underground. In 1605CE, Guy Fawkes led a small coup against the throne by plotting to blow up Parliament, an event which is still recalled today on 5th November.

With the execution of King Charles I in 1649CE following the English Civil War, Oliver Cromwell attempted to establish a Puritan style of worship in the Church of England which resulted in ensuing conflicts between Catholics and Protestants during the late 17th Century.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“



Source: <https://www.statista.com/chart/4902/religion-is-on-the-decline-in-the-uk/> (last accessed 01.02.2018)

As an island nation, England has traded with countries and people throughout the world. This has ensured a diverse population, which continues today in the 21st Century. The 2011 census made clear that England (and Wales) cannot be described as a Christian country anymore. However, it is not per se a multi-religious society either. The biggest group, with almost 50%, are the people who stated that they have no religion at all. This is followed by the Christian group, which is denominationally fragmented and makes up 43.8%. That leaves 7.7% of the population, who stated a different religion. The 4.4% Muslims, 1.3% Hindus and 0.4% Jews of the society are mainly living in major cities such as London, Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham.

The shift from a country that is heavily influenced by the Church of England to a mainly secular country shows itself in educational reform, especially regarding the neutral position of Religious Education.

2. Religious Education (RE) in England

RE must be taught in all state-funded schools in England and is compulsory for all school-aged pupils (5 to 18 years). RE sits outside the National Curriculum as part of the basic curriculum. Along with sex education, parents/carers have the legal right to withdraw their children from RE. These are the only two aspects of the curriculum for which parents/carers have this right. No reason has to be given for withdrawal from RE. A pupil aged 16 or over can exercise this legal right on their own behalf.

RE (formerly known as Religious Instruction) has been a legal requirement in schools since the Education Act of 1944. The aim of the subject was to nurture pupils in Christianity, with a particular emphasis on Christian morality. This initiative was intended to protect society from the threat of malign political movements, such as fascism, that had dominated the Second World War and to repair post-war morale. In a subsequent review of the history of RE, Cox and Cairns asked whether the

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Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

government that formulated the Act was “legislating for a society that had ceased to exist”¹ due to the decline in church attendance. As Parsons highlights, by the 1940s “Christianity had already ceased to have a prior, determining hold upon the affections of the majority of the British population.”² Indeed, the 1944 Act might be described as leaving teachers with an unrealistic task.

The 1960s was a decade of change. Many families immigrated to Britain from Pakistan, India and what is now Bangladesh and pupils from different faith backgrounds began joining schools in England. The changing demographic of school pupils presented new challenges for RE, as Cox and Cairns note:

“Were they [non-Christians] to be taught Christianity like the others [...] or were they to be educated in the faiths which were being practised in their homes? [...] was there not needed some inter-faith education, so that the [...] Christian native population could understand and sympathize with the religious beliefs of their new schoolfellows, and so that the followers of the newly arrived religions could understand each other and the indigenous population?”³

Non-confessional, multi-faith RE was, arguably, introduced officially in 1971, with the publication of Schools Council Working Paper 36 (Schools Council 1971). This was influenced by the phenomenological approach to the study of religions and the work of Ninian Smart. In 1975 a syllabus for religious education was drawn up in Birmingham, the first to describe its content in terms of six religions (and therefore was the first multi-faith syllabus). It was also the first syllabus to introduce the study of non-religious life stances such as humanism. Other ‘locally agreed syllabi’ followed suit in the late 1970s and 1980s.

The Education Reform Act of 1988 made the teaching of both Christianity and other world faiths a legal requirement, stating that syllabi “shall reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.”⁴ The 1988 Act also changed the name from ‘Religious Instruction’ to ‘Religious Education’ – recognising that the emphasis was now learning about religion rather than from religion.

The National Curriculum was introduced in 1988, but it did not include the subject of RE. Instead, RE stood alone as part of the ‘Basic Curriculum’. The legal requirement stated that:

“Every state-funded school must offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based, and which:

- promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils, and prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life [...]

All state schools [...] must teach religious education [...]. All schools must publish their curriculum by subject and academic year online.”⁵

¹ Cox and Cairns 1989, 4.

² Parsons 1994, 169.

³ Cox and Cairns 1989, 18.

⁴ UK Parliament 1988, 6.

⁵ Department for Education 2013, 4.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

The responsibility for RE lies with each local authority that is required to provide an *Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education*. Local Authorities are mandated to form a Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE), composed of councillors, teachers and faith representatives, whose remit is to support and advise on RE in schools in the local authority.

In the 21st Century there are a number of categories of state funded schools; these include, community schools, academies, free schools and schools with a religious character. All maintained schools are obliged to follow the National Curriculum from the age of 5 to 18. This obligation includes the teaching of RE, albeit with parents and pupils over the age of 18 maintaining their right to withdraw from the subject.

From the age of 14-16 the vast majority of pupils, study for GCSE examinations (General Certificates of Secondary Education). Since 2016 the GCSE Religious Studies exam demands a study of two different religions and expect pupils to know about diverse beliefs and practices within each of those two faiths. There is also an expectation that schools deliver some form of RE for all pupils when the programmes for public exams begin (from the age of 14) in order to meet the expectation that RE is taught until the age of 18. This may take place through, for example, *off timetable* activities, workshops, assemblies, visits or visitors.

Schools with a religious character (often referred to as faith schools) in the state sector are associated with a particular religion. As with non-faith schools, they teach the National Curriculum. The governing body determines what is taught in religious education, in accordance with the school's trust deed. This generally means that the main focus of RE will be on the designated religion of the school. However, as noted above, since 2016, pupils will be expected to study at least two different religions when studying for their GCSE Religious Studies exam.

3. How RE teacher training is organised

In the past, education and training for RE teaching was traditionally provided by colleges of education (many church-related), and university departments of education and schools. Training took both concurrent and consecutive forms. Students were able to complete an academic study of religious studies alongside their training to teach in school – a Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree. Alternatively, they completed a degree in the subject and followed this with an additional year of professional studies, a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE).

In recent years teacher training in all subjects has changed. Although the PGCE programme still exists, colleges of education have disappeared and teacher training programmes are now largely based in universities. A number of new training programmes have been established alongside the PGCE course including giving some schools a greater opportunity in the training of teachers.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

Teacher Training at University of London

The Institute of Education was founded in October 1902 by Sidney Webb as the London Day Training College (LDTC), under the joint auspices of the University of London and of the London County Council. In 2014, the Institute and UCL merged to create a new institution with over 35,000 students, the biggest higher education institution in London.

The PGCE Religious Education programme prepares RE student teachers to teach pupils aged 11-16. The Secondary PGCE consists of three core modules: two Master’s-level (total of 60 credits) modules, which are assessed through written assignments, and the Professional Practice module, which is assessed by the observation of practical teaching in placement schools. Successful completion of the course will result in the award of a Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE).

Most time (120 days) will be spent in schools, working with RE mentors who support the student teachers through their two school placements. The Professional Practice module is assessed through the placements, associated tasks and a portfolio.



17

4. Current developments

As RE evolved and developed into RE in the latter part of the 20th Century, different approaches to the teaching of religious education began to evolve. These approaches or pedagogies are not enforced but are adapted by the teacher as s/he enables the pupils to access the RE curriculum.

“For the past ten years, and in line with commitment to ‘inclusive education’, the government has been promoting teaching about and for diversity – social, ethnic/cultural and religious. Schools must provide for the needs of the students from diverse backgrounds and reflect this diversity in teaching content and resources. However homogeneous the school population, schools must also promote knowledge, understanding of and respect for diversity and celebrate this when appropriate. In order to qualify, all teachers trained within this period have been required to demonstrate an ability to provide for the needs of the students from diverse backgrounds and to reflect and promote respect for diversity in their subject teaching.”⁶

5. Challenges and perspectives

In 2013, an inquiry into the status of RE an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Religious Education published a document *RE: The Truth Unmasked. The supply of and support for Religious Education teachers*. The inquiry focused on four areas: (1) supply of primary RE teachers, (2) supply of secondary RE teachers, (3) support for teachers of RE and (4) contributing factors. The findings of the inquiry noted that the majority of teachers in primary schools had little or no training in teaching RE. The report also found that over 50% of teachers teaching RE in secondary schools did not have a relevant

⁶ Everington 2009, 30.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

qualification or appropriate expertise and that continuing professional development (CPD) was underfunded and not easily accessible.

The Conservative-led Coalition government (2010-2015) introduced some radical changes in education. These included the establishment of free schools and academies, who were not obliged to follow the RE locally agreed syllabus. This decision, along with the government’s ambition, is to see 90% of GCSE pupils choosing English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects (which do not include Religious Studies) has had a detrimental effect on the status of RE. Furthermore, there has been a recent inquiry by the Religious Education Council, National Association of Teachers of Religious Education and RE Today into the national legal provision of RE. This inquiry revealed that a significant number of schools in England do not deliver non-examined RE to pupils.⁷

This means that RE in England shows a twofold picture. On the one hand, it provides excellent material for preparing pupils to live in a culturally and religiously diverse society and the Department of Education has high standards for its teachers. On the other hand, not enough training as well as financial aid is given to meet these standards in the subject of RE. In addition, the number of places for students to train as RE specialists has been drastically cut and bursaries eliminated. Consequently, several universities have withdrawn as providers for RE training.

The challenges faced by the subject of RE in the 21st Century have not gone unnoticed. The All Party Parliamentary Group was established in 2012 to “provide a medium through which parliamentarians and organisations with an interest in religious education can discuss the current provision of religious education, press for continuous improvement, promote public understanding and advocate rigorous education for every young person in religious and non-religious world views.”⁸ This group, along with publications such as *A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools* written by Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead following a series of public debates, has helped to raise the issues that RE faces and presents in schools.

18

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⁷ The State of the Nation: A report on Religious Education provision within secondary schools in England, NATRE.

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READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

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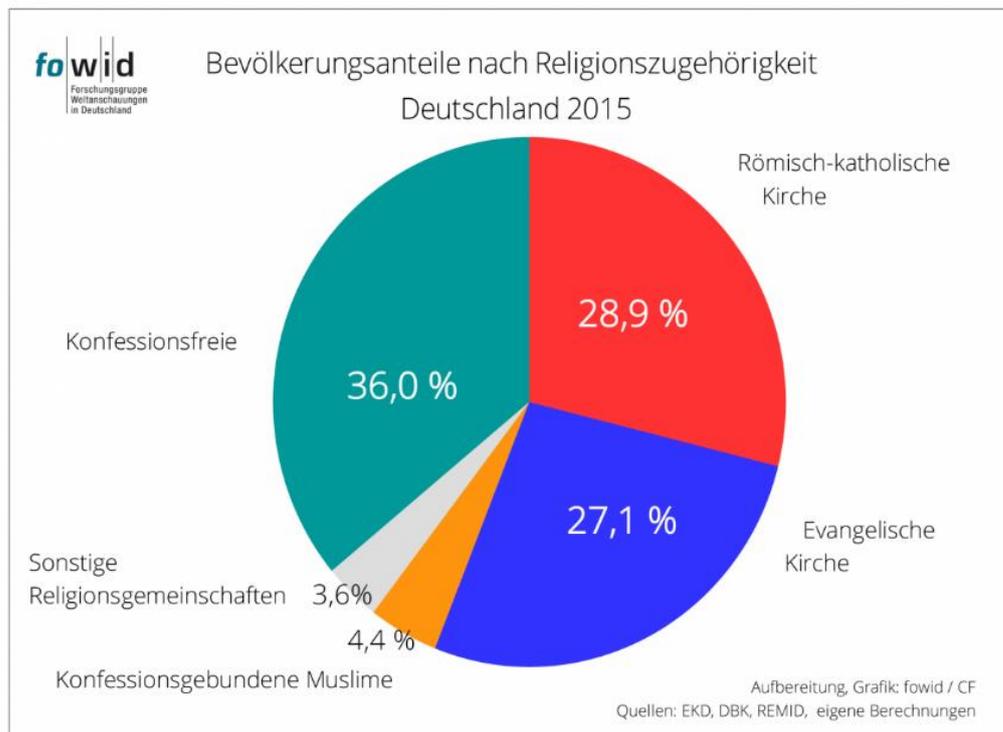
READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

GERMANY

1. Religious landscape

In 2017 Germany celebrated the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the reformation. This marked a liberation from commercialised indulgence and some other problematic Church practices. Indeed, Luther’s Ninety-five Theses, the protests against these Catholic practices, and some conflicts between Catholics and Churches of the Reformation (Protestants) had their roots in Germany. This turbulence brought the German Peasants' War and the Thirty Years' War, which ended with the Peace of Westphalia (1648). On the basis of the principle *cuius regio, eius religio* ("whose region, his religion") a more or less functioning German Empire could be built. This resulted in Germany becoming a country with small patches of different mono-religious societies. Even though the German Empire grew more together over the years and became one nation in 1871, it was still quite common that Protestants and Catholics lived in parallel societies and did not interact. This meant, for example, that there were no inter-denominational marriages and there were even fences across schoolyards to separate Protestant and Catholic pupils until the first half of the 20th Century.¹



Source: <https://fowid.de/meldung/religionszugehoerigkeiten-deutschland-2015> (last accessed 31.01.2018)

However, the second half of the 20th Century has brought many changes. Two main trends can be observed: religion has become a question of a more individual choice and less a non-negotiable confession as well as more people losing interest in religion completely. The current religious

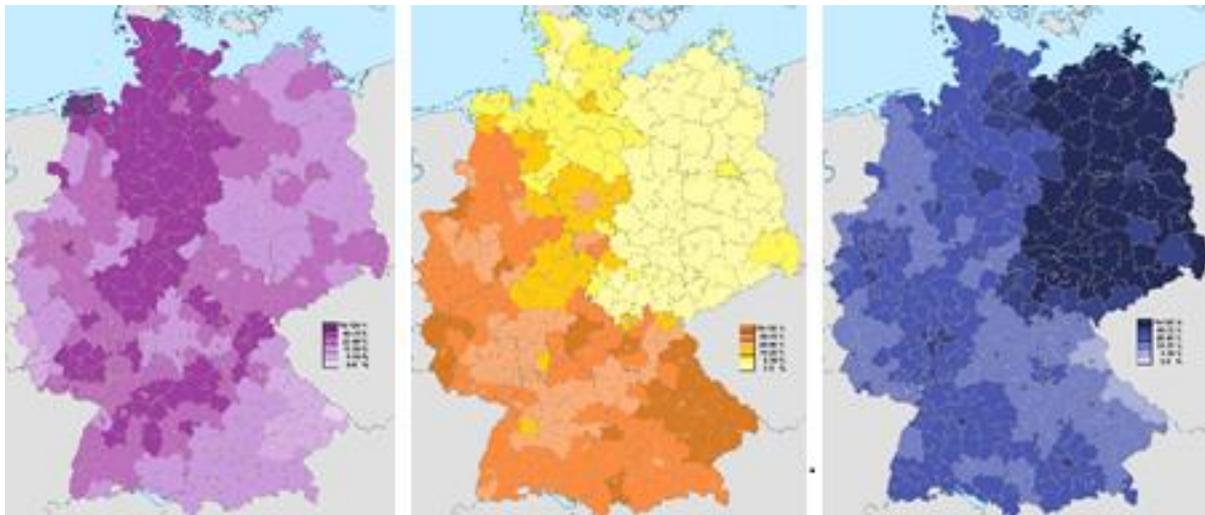
¹ Großbölting 2013, 32.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

landscape² in Germany is that approximately 30% of the population belong to Protestantism (blue), 30% to Catholicism (red) and 30% is without any religion (green). Furthermore, about 5% of the population is Muslim (orange) and other religious groups, e.g. Orthodox Christians, Buddhists, Hindus or Jews make up together the last 5% of the population.³

The South and West of Germany are predominately Catholics, the North Protestant and the majority of people in the East of Germany, not least because of the anti-religious policy of the former GDR regime, have no religious affiliations.



Purple – Protestant; Orange – Catholic; Blue – no affiliation

Source: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religionen_in_Deutschland (last accessed 31.01.2018)

2. Religious Education (RE)

Regarding the legal situation, the general conditions for Religious Education (RE) are laid out in the Basic law. Three Articles are crucial:

- The separation of state and religion, which is determined in Art. 140. This separation includes elements of association and areas of cooperation. This is primarily on a contractual basis with the state and defines the arrangements for RE in schools.
- Religious freedom based on Art. 4 of the Basic Law. This guarantees freedom from religion but also freedom for religion. On these grounds, legal space exists for religious communities and churches to play an active role in the public sphere including the education system. On the other side, this Article is also fundamental for the right to opt out from confessional RE.
- RE is the only subject in school guaranteed by the Basic Law. Art. 7.3 states: *Religious education is an ordinary subject in public schools [...]. Regardless of the regulatory law of the state, RE will be taught according to the principles of the religious communities. No teacher can be obliged to teach RE against their will.*

² See chart above.

³ Rothgangel & Ziebertz 2016.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

This specific legal situation has historical backgrounds: With the establishment of the Weimar Republic, the first democratic system in Germany, in 1919 the *Weimar Schulkompromiss* (Weimar school compromise) took away the responsibility for the education system from the Churches completely. Schools were now organised by the state, but the Churches were given the right to organize confessional RE. This resolution was adopted into the laws of the Federal Republic of Germany, for the experience of the Third Reich showed the necessity of preventing the state to use subjects like RE for their own ideology.

In conclusion, RE is guaranteed in Germany as a regular subject in public schools organized in cooperation between the state and the religious communities (*res mixta*). Two lessons are usually taught a week, as is the case with subjects such as history or physical education. The state is generally responsible for schooling and the religious communities are responsible for the content of the RE curriculum and for the acknowledgement of RE teachers. Since the 16 German federal states (*Bundesländer*) have the main responsibility for education, the agreements for RE are made on this level between the religious communities and the respective federal state authorities. Religious communities, accepted by the states as partners to offer RE, are primarily the Protestant and Catholic Church. Furthermore, some Islamic associations are partners for Islamic RE as well as the Jewish community, the Orthodox and New Apostolic Church, Mennonites, Old Catholics and Buddhists. However, RE for religious minorities is only offered at a few schools in Germany, for the minimum number of pupils needs to be – depending on the area – between five and eleven.

On an international level, the German system is often called confessional, but the term “confessional” can be easily misunderstood, seen as old-fashioned, near to indoctrination, and not adequate for RE nowadays. A narrow understanding of the word nurtures the stereotype that confessional RE has the aim to introduce pupils and students into a single faith tradition by a faith-based teacher with mono-faith oriented material. It seems therefore more adequate for the German context to speak of a denominational approach to RE, which will also be the term of choice for this text, to express the situation that the churches are partners of the state for cooperation in RE.

“[This] does not include the understanding that religious education should teach or indoctrinate children and adolescents into a certain denomination, religion or belief. It also does not necessarily presuppose that the students participating in a certain program actually belong to a certain denomination or religion. It simply means that the perspective, from which it is taught, is openly admitted and clearly defined.”⁴

Even though the German basic law provides a general frame for RE, many decisions regarding the organisation of RE lies, as stated above, with each of the federal states. Therefore, nuances and different types of RE exist in different areas of Germany. Four out of the 16 federal states in Germany have even organised RE in completely different ways than the others. The denominational approach is established in those federal states where it already existed on January 1, 1949 (date of validation of the Basic Law). The city-state of Bremen has had already established (in 1947) “Education in Biblical history” based on general Christian principles and not bound to any particular denomination. It has

⁴ Schweitzer 2011, 177.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

been renamed Religion as late as 2014.⁵ The federal states of Brandenburg and Berlin also refer to this so-called “Bremen clause” for justifying a voluntary confessional RE under responsibility of the religious communities (Berlin) and the subject of LER: Lebensgestaltung-Ethik-Religionskunde (“life choices, ethics, and religious studies”), which is obligatory for all students (Brandenburg).

The situation in the city state of Hamburg is according, “to the accounts of those responsible for Religious Education, [that] there are 106 different religious communities in Hamburg now, and 247,000 non-Germans from 185 countries with 100 different languages.”⁶ Consequently, Hamburg looked for a new way to teach RE. The subject “Religious Education for all” was established, which is the sole responsibility of the Protestant Church. In recent years, a process has started to involve Islamic groups and the Jewish community more in questions regarding the content of the subject. This means that the official form of denominational teaching is preserved with adapting the contents to the demographic situation.

For pupils not belonging to a faith community and for those who want to opt out from denominational RE due to conscientious objection, the different federal states offer alternative subjects, mostly called ethics (“Ethik”) or philosophy (“[Praktische] Philosophie”) or values and norms (“Werte und Normen”) in some federal states.

3. How RE teacher education is organized

The main route to become an RE teacher in Germany is by studying at a university. This is independent from the school type the teachers are trained for; for example, primary school, secondary school, or gymnasium. Students typically study two subjects together with specific educational courses. In the German context, the specialization in only one subject – which also implies considerable organizational difficulties and a narrowing of the pedagogical spectrum – remains unusual. German RE teachers of all denominations study religious education at theological faculties and not at departments of religious studies. The only exception is the University of Bremen, which operates according to the non-denominational RE in the federal state and offers an RE teacher course that is strongly based on religious studies.⁷

The theoretical studies at universities include in general one short and one longer school placement (three resp. twelve weeks) to gain practical experience. The exam consisted in Germany of a first state exam, but following the Bologna process, the studies are now mainly completed with a *Master of Education* degree. Looking for example at the University in Tübingen, of the 300 ECTS points needed to become a Gymnasium teacher, 109 credit points fall on each subject (including didactics of the subject), 45 credit points for educational sciences, 16 credit points for school placements and 21 credit points for writing the Bachelor or Master thesis.⁸ After the theoretical studies, teachers are placed in schools for 1.5 to 2 years for their practical teacher training. Parallel to teaching at a school they visit

⁵ Rothgangel & Ziebertz 2016, 120.

⁶ Meyer-Blanck 2014, 153.

⁷ Lott & Schröder-Klein 2009.

⁸ Universität Tübingen 2018.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

teacher-training institutes and specialised teacher trainers observe their lessons in school. The final examinations (so-called second state exam) consist of the presentation of lessons, a thesis and oral exams on methodology in two subjects, pedagogy and school related law.

Even though this is the classical way to become an RE teacher, there are at least three more possible routes and they will be briefly explained here. (1) One option is to attend a church-run university college. These colleges have specialized Religious Education courses with degrees that are accepted in many areas of Germany for teaching in a school. (2) In some areas of Germany it is also possible to teach RE if you have become a full-time theologian, that is, a pastor for the Protestant Church or priest for the Catholic Church. Some Regional Churches even require that pastors in training not only work in parish churches, but are also trained as RE teachers. (3) Another way to become an RE teacher is through post-qualification courses. This means that teachers who are already trained for other subjects can get an extra qualification for RE. Often these courses are completed while the teachers are already working as teachers. Church-run pedagogical institutes offer most of these qualification courses.

Regardless of the route taken to become a RE teacher, it is implied that future RE teachers need the acknowledgment of their faith community (although academic exams are conducted by state commissions). For Catholic RE teachers this is called the *missio canonica*, for Protestant RE teachers the *vocatio* and for Islamic RE teachers the *ijaza*.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

Teacher training at the Staatliches Seminar für Didaktik und Lehrerbildung in Tübingen

The regular way of teacher education at the seminar in Tübingen, starts with five year university studies of two academic subjects. This leads to an 18-month “Referendariat” which introduces future teachers to teaching, linking theory and practice. The “Staatliche Seminar für Didaktik und Lehrerbildung” (Gymnasien) in Tübingen is a Higher Education Institute which is fully funded by the federal state of Baden-Wuerttemberg. It is the second largest in the federal state and is along with eight similar institutions responsible for an 18-months professional preparatory course for future Gymnasium (grammar school) teachers. Students who prepare for teaching in other types of schools are assigned to different teacher training institutes.



The staff of the Tübingen Seminar consists of around 100 teacher educators covering more than 20 different subject areas. At present (January 2018) about 500 teacher trainees (“Referendare”) are being prepared for teaching. 120 of these have – in addition to a second or even a third subject – either the subject Catholic Religious Education, Protestant Religious Education or the alternative subject ethics/philosophy. Courses for Jewish Religious Education are offered at the partner institution in Heidelberg with courses for Islamic

Religious Education offered at the partner institution in Stuttgart.

All trainees coming to a “Seminar” have completed their university studies with a Masters degree or equivalent (a prerequisite for admission) and are appointed as civil servant candidates for their time at the institution. In addition to the courses they have to take at the Seminar, the trainees are assigned to more than 40 different grammar schools in the Tübingen area for teaching practice guided by experienced mentors. Our instructors visit their trainees in their lessons several times for analysis and guidance. Being a “didactic centre” by status, another important part of the seminar's work is in-service training, the development of teaching materials and school-based pedagogical research. A large proportion of the staff also lectures at the University of Tübingen.

Syllabuses, modules, standards for evaluation and detailed information about the organization of the “Referendariat” can be found in German language on the website of the Tübingen Seminar.⁹ The professional standards of the Tübingen Seminar coincide with federal and competency-based national standards. E.g. for Protestant Religious Education, the teacher training takes into account the proposals of a national expert body.¹⁰

In conclusion, the German system of teacher education is based on three phases of teacher education: academic studies leading to the “Referendariat” in the first and second phase, followed by a “third phase” of professional induction, which should encourage a continuous professional training (CPT).

⁹ www.seminar-tuebingen.de

¹⁰ Kirchenamt der Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland 2008.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

4. Current developments

To further dialogue between pupils of different denominations and ecumenical learning, some federal states have started implementing models of confessional-cooperative RE, especially Baden-Wuerttemberg and Lower Saxony and – starting in 2017 – parts of North-Rhine Westphalia. The concept aims to bring together pupils and teachers of different denominations. There are four different types of realization: (1) Denominational groups, but intensive communication about the content and maybe once in a while a shared project. (2) Denominational groups, but rotation of the teachers in a certain pattern. (3) Mixed groups with rotation of the teachers in a certain pattern. Last but not least (4) mixed groups that are team-taught by teachers of different denominations.¹¹ Where this model of cooperation truly works, learning processes are stimulated, which would be possible neither in a merely denominational approach nor in a single subject *for all*.¹² For this reason, the Protestant as well as the Catholic Church have expressed their support for this concept and it is becoming a new model of denominational RE in different areas of Germany.

However, even in favourable cases of successful denominational cooperation the challenge remains that growing parts of the German population are without religious affiliation. So even though Ethics is conceived as an alternative for pupils opting out from RE for conscientious reasons, it has become a profiled subject from which youth with religious upbringing can benefit as well as youth with non-religious background. Curricula and textbooks for Ethics are also increasingly flourishing in quality and distinct profile. In this context the question why the interesting and often very controversial discourse on “God and the World” should not be pursued between “religious” and “non-religious” pupils can be brought up. The philosopher Jürgen Habermas has pointed out on various occasions that a debate like this is necessary and overdue for modern societies.¹³

This calls for cooperation not only between RE of different confessions, but also between RE and Ethics. One way to implement a culture of discourse could be by following the proposal made by the Protestant Church of Germany in as early as 1994 to establish a *school subject group* (Fächergruppe) consisting of the different denominational groups of Religious Education and the subjects *Ethics* and *Philosophy*. An organized way of alternating between joint and separated teaching sequences could take account of “Identity and Dialogue” equally. In separated lessons pupils could get a better understanding of their own faith traditions, in joint lessons the different groups could learn to communicate their views of life with perspectives of pupils brought up in a different tradition as well as to understand and respect different positions and arguments. Pupils can therefore experience difference and diversity as enrichment and not as menace resp. threat.¹⁴ The model of the school subject group is present in relevant discussions today and the Protestant Church of Germany states the maxim of educating young people to gain “the competence to deal with plurality”.¹⁵

¹¹ cf. Biesinger, Schweitzer & Boschki 2015.

¹² Schweitzer & Biesinger 2002.

¹³ Habermas 2005.

¹⁴ Kirchenamt der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland 2013.

¹⁵ Ibid. 2014.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

Finally, it should be mentioned that Islamic RE becomes more and more established in the German school system. After discussions about the implementation for now over 40 years, the current status is that two federal states have Islamic RE as a proper subject, seven have some form of Islamic RE, and only four have no form of Islamic RE. Three states have in general non-denominational forms of RE. It is possible to study at three universities in Germany to become an Islamic RE teacher, but more are planned.

5. Challenges and perspectives

As it can be seen by the didactical development, the most pressing challenge for RE in Germany is the trend towards constantly increasing religious diversity. The administration is confronted with organisational problems, for the student body in many schools consists now of many small groups with different denominational backgrounds. Furthermore, it raises a fundamental question during a time in which inclusion is discussed with emphasis: whether pupils should be split up into groups in a subject that specifically deals with values, norms, and different views of reality and life. Even the argument that denominational RE would facilitate a deeper understanding of the religion one has been brought up in, seems to be losing ground. Many Christian pupils as well as their parents are quite distanced to their denominational traditions and the institution *church*, although they have been formally baptized according to a Protestant or Catholic liturgy.¹⁶ The developments towards confessional cooperative forms of RE and further on the religions cooperation forms are increasingly important.¹⁷

Next to the challenges of increasing plurality, a shift towards economically exploitable results of education affects the discussions in Germany. Comparative studies like PISA fuel this trend. One of the consequences following the mediocre performance of German pupils in the comparative study is a new focus from educational professionals on *outcomes* concerning competencies.¹⁸ Regarding RE, especially notable is to teach *capability for pluralism*. This approach to organise the subjects through defining competencies not only helps to improve the quality, but also to communicate to the public the relevance of denominational RE in the public school system. A subject as RE has to justify itself time and time again, for at a first glance it is not contributing to the process of producing effective workers. Especially in the context of RE in vocational training schools, which is financed among others by the German industry, this is a central issue.

Another key challenge is linking theory and practice. Every year many theoretically well-elaborated and sophisticated publications on the didactics of religion are published, but these publications are not read or even perceived by teachers or teacher educators. Experts seem to write for experts, and this often only within the bounds of one's own discipline. There are strong efforts to strengthen empirical approaches, but the academic insights and impulses hardly or never reach the classroom. On the other hand, academic theory often offers little help for dealing with concrete didactical and pedagogical

¹⁶ Schröder 2014.

¹⁷ Lindner et al. 2017.

¹⁸ Feindt et al. 2009.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

problems in schools. Therefore new ways to further dialogue between teachers and the research of RE are developed, e.g. joint conferences, websites, videos, teaching material.

Key documents

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Sekretariat der Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (2017). *Lehrpläne*. URL: <http://www.kmk.org/dokumentation/lehrplaene/lehrplandatenbank.html> (last accessed 26.01.2018).

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READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

SCOTLAND

1. Religious landscape

With reference to the Declaration of Arbroath¹ (1320) Scotland sees itself as “generous, open, vibrant and plural.”² Nevertheless Scotland can be described as a largely Christian and post-Christian country. For the Scottish society was for a long time mainly influenced by the (national) Church of Scotland, which most belonged to. Mostly through immigration from Ireland in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th Century, a growing minority belonged to the Catholic Church. This picture started to change at the end of the 20th Century. Nowadays not even a third still belongs to the Church of Scotland. About 15% is Catholic and 6% belong to other Christian religions.

The Church of Scotland has recently been superseded in numbers by people without any religious affiliation and this group makes up almost 50% of the population now. People with other religions like Jews, Hindus or Muslims are only 2.5% of the population, whereby Muslims is by far the biggest group with 1.4%. Scottish census data, which has included questions on religiosity since 2001, charts clearly a move away from majority Christian affiliation:

	2001 ¹		2011		Change in number: 2001 to 2011
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
All people	5,062,000	100.0	5,295,000	100.0	233,000
Church of Scotland	2,146,000	42.4	1,718,000	32.4	-428,000
Roman Catholic	804,000	15.9	841,000	15.9	37,000
Other Christian	347,000	6.9	291,000	5.5	-56,000
Buddhist	7,000	0.1	13,000	0.2	6,000
Hindu	6,000	0.1	16,000	0.3	11,000
Jewish	6,000	0.1	6,000	0.1	-1,000
Muslim	43,000	0.8	77,000	1.4	34,000
Sikh	7,000	0.1	9,000	0.2	2,000
Other religion	8,000	0.2	15,000	0.3	7,000
No religion	1,409,000	27.8	1,941,000	36.7	532,000
Religion not stated	279,000	5.5	368,000	7.0	89,000

Source: <http://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/censusresults/release2a/StatsBulletin2A.pdf> (last accessed 01.03.2016)

Especially in those areas like Aberdeen, where the Church of Scotland experienced little overt religious antagonism, the Presbyterian identity had little sense of otherness to face the rapid secularisation.³

¹ “Therefore it is, Reverend Father and Lord, that we beseech your Holiness with our most earnest prayers and suppliant hearts, inasmuch as you will in your sincerity and goodness consider all this, that, since with Him Whose vice-gerent on earth you are **there is neither weighing nor distinction of Jew and Greek, Scotsman or Englishman**, you will look with the eyes of a father on the troubles and privations brought by the English upon us and upon the Church of God.” (Declaration of Arbroath 1320).

² Conroy 2014, 233.

³ Cf *ibid.*, 236.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

2. Religious Education (RE)

The Scottish Education Act of 1872 created a national system of compulsory elementary schools. Prior to this, the churches had financed the Scottish parish school system. However, the churches could no longer support the burgeoning school populations of the late 19th Century and the state intervened. This legislation effectively sanctioned the creation of a secular school curriculum with religious instruction as an appendix. The 1872 Act also furnished schools with a statement of support for Religious Instruction and Religious Observance. It also provides the first mention of a conscience clause for parents giving them the right to withdraw their child from Religious Instruction. To this day, the 1872 act provides the legislative framework for RE in Scottish schools.

As far as Roman Catholic schools are concerned, these were first founded in the early 19th Century to meet the needs principally of immigrating Irish Catholics, mainly in the areas of the industrial west of Scotland. The numbers of voluntary catholic schools increased towards the end of the 19th Century. The catholic schools rejected the 1872 Act's attempt to create centralised control of policy out of fear that the denominational nature of their schools would be eroded. In 1918, however, the catholic schools came under state control, mainly as a result of financial need, but also reassured that they would maintain theological autonomy.⁴

A number of events and trends led to a perceived crisis in Scottish Religious Instruction in the 1960's. Until this point Religious Instruction was carried out by non-specialist teachers in primary and secondary schools and was firmly centred on Bible reading.⁵ The incongruity of RE provision, as it existed at the time, came to a head for four main reasons (as identified in the Millar Report⁶):

1. Educational insight into the appropriateness of Bible lessons for children as young as five;
2. The rise of secularisation to unarguable levels in teachers, pupils and society at large;
3. The emergence of a multifaith society, and
4. 20th Century Biblical scholarship and theology.

The report of Millar's Committee questioned the situation where RE remained mandatory but where there was no inspection and no teaching qualification or certification for pupils. Millar thought this contributed to the "malaise of religious education." That is, RE had not been able to keep pace with developments elsewhere in the curriculum and "in the attitude of our society to religious belief."⁷

The Millar Report can be summarised as recommending educational, non-confessional, inspected RE delivered by specialist staff. It also acknowledged that in advocating non-confessional RE, on the grounds of respect for freedom of thought and because of the multi-faith society, that there is a tension between this and the continuation of acts of worship in schools. Given the statutory restrictions placed on Millar Committee this is understandable. However, the uneasy relationship between RE and Religious Observance (corporate acts of worship in schools) continues to be

⁴ McKinney 2008; Kenneth 1972.

⁵ Scottish Education Department 1972.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.,6.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

problematic. In some schools to this day the two are conflated and in other schools Religious Education staff continue to feel undermined by the persistence of acts of worship.⁸

In 1987, as with other subjects, a committee was formed to create a new national curriculum for Religious and Moral Education (RME). This was to become the Review and Development Group for 5-14 Curricular Guidelines for RME.⁹ This represented the move to a national curricular model for the subject and the formal recognition of firstly a *Personal Search* approach (see below), and secondly, within non-catholic schools, Moral Education within the subject. Separate national guidelines were produced for non-denominational RME and denominational (Catholic) RE. At present approximately 15% of schools in Scotland are Catholic, although many of their pupils may be from non-Catholic backgrounds.

From 1999 Scottish secondary schools have been offering Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (RMPS) single units from the national qualifications suite, rather than courses, down the school at secondary third and fourth year during mandatory RE time, which is typically an hour a week.¹⁰ In 2010 across Scotland 35,595 RMPS units were offered discretely in Scottish schools, predominantly in third and fourth year core RE time, rather than as an elective.¹¹ The majority (25,503) of these concern morality and values. Only 4,820 of the total units concerned the study of a selected world religion. The remaining units (5,272) cover material such as the relationship between religion and science, the nature of belief and the existence of God. This increase in certificated provision in RE may be part of a drive to enhance the credibility of RE in schools. The prevalence of units dealing with moral philosophy, philosophy of religion and philosophy of science (30,775 out of 35,595) is evident here and may reflect on teachers' perceptions that such content may sit better with an increasingly secular pupil population. The desire, by some non-denominational RE teachers to rebrand the subject RMPS may also be born of this perception.

33

3. How RE teacher education is organized

Official RE teacher education started quite late in Scotland. The first Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) qualified secondary teachers were graduating from Scotland's colleges of education in the beginning of the 1970s. Since the last decade of the 20th Century initial teacher education (ITE) has taken place at Scottish Universities. Prior to this ITE took place at colleges of education. These colleges merged with or became faculties/schools of Education at the universities of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Stirling, Strathclyde and West of Scotland. Additionally, the University of the Highlands and Islands has since 2013 offered training for primary teaching.

In Scotland ITE can take the following forms:

1. Primary Teaching – a four year undergraduate degree (Master of Arts, MA)

⁸ Scottish Executive 2005.

⁹ The Scottish Office Education Department 1992.

¹⁰ Scottish Qualifications Authority 2010.

¹¹ Ibid.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

2. Primary Teaching – a one year graduate diploma following a first degree (Professional Graduate Diploma in Education, PGDE)
3. Secondary Teaching – a one year graduate diploma following undergraduate study in a subject (Professional Graduate Diploma in Education, PGDE)
4. Secondary Teaching – a four year undergraduate degree with concurrent subject based inputs (Master of Arts, MA)

ITE for primary teaching (ages 3-12) includes RE inputs as part of a suite of inputs on the eight areas of the current Scottish curriculum. These will typically attempt to address the need for subject content knowledge (of which many primary students will have very little) and develop effective pedagogical approaches to RE. In addition to core inputs on RE as a curricular area, some universities will offer electives in areas germane to RE teaching which allow them to explore techniques such as Philosophy for Children, Citizenship education, the use of fieldtrips and inter-disciplinary learning in areas linked to RE such as Health and Well-being.

As part of their degree or diploma primary students have to spend a stipulated time on placement in schools. They are assessed by their placement school and a visiting university tutor. These visits will not target RE, or any particular area of the curriculum for assessment, though it may be an RE lesson that a visiting tutor observes as a means to looking at the overall competence of the student teacher.

34

Teacher training at the University of Aberdeen



The University of Aberdeen was founded in 1495; it is the third oldest University in Scotland and the fifth oldest in the UK. The University of Aberdeen has 16,000 students, representing 120 nationalities.

The School of Education provides a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and a portfolio of professional learning courses and opportunities. There is a strong emphasis on research, both for publication and to inform course development and delivery. Teacher Professional Learning and Development is a key research and development theme for the School of Education at many levels and in several contexts, involving local, national and international partnerships with many agencies and organisations.

The School of Education has particular expertise in online and blended learning, offering students from around the world opportunity to engage in research and learning. Religious Education is taught within Initial Teacher Education at the School of Education with inputs for primary and secondary student teachers, as well as on-going professional learning and research supervision for qualified teachers. At the University of Aberdeen, where the fourth year of the undergraduate degree and the one-year graduate diploma are aligned, students from both cohorts get the same curricular inputs.

Graduates in a range of subjects can apply to teach RE in Scottish secondary schools. These include Religious Studies, Theology, Divinity, and Philosophy. Applicants must have 80 degree credits in these

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

areas as part of a single degree. The application of these guidelines does vary between ITE institutions, where the subject leaders for RE training, may have differing views on relative merits of, for example, credits in philosophy to becoming a teacher of RE. In a related development new guidance on entry to RE teacher training was created (General Teaching Council [Scotland] 2013) for those who wish to teach in the minority denominational sector which placed emphasis on Divinity and Theology, arguably in a bid to maintain the Christian focus of RE in that sector.

In the one year, PGDE student teachers will spend 18 weeks on campus and 18 weeks in placement schools. Whilst on campus their time is divided into (1) the study of issues of generic professional requirement, and (2) subject specialist inputs which introduces approaches to the teaching of RE in secondary schools, familiarisation with the curriculum, and, to a certain extent, subject content knowledge. Secondary students of RE are assessed by their specialist RE tutor while on placement in schools during an observed visit.

There is also some variation in how these models are applied across ITE institutions. For example, the University of Aberdeen has developed an 18 months part-time model of the one-year graduate diploma in a bid to address teacher shortages and allow wider access to teacher training. All applicants for ITE must, as essential pre-requisites meet certain requirements for numeracy, literacy, and, for secondary subjects, have degree credits germane to the subject they wish to teach.

35

4. Current developments

The latest national initiative is the Curriculum Review (A Curriculum for Excellence 2005 - present). RE has one of several subject review committees currently looking at the national curriculum. *RME* has been acknowledged as one of eight *Curriculum Areas* that should inform curricular planning.¹² *Curricular experiences and outcomes* were created for Catholic and non-faith RE in 2008, though it should be noted that, despite this separation of provision at core level, children from Catholic and non-faith schools are presented for the same national qualifications and that this has been the case since the creation of RE certificates in the 1980's.

In many respects the evolution or development of the majority (85%) non-denominational RE in Scotland makes a great deal of sense. Prior to the Millar Report Scottish RE was mono-religious; effectively Christian Instruction. Increasingly through the 1970's and in the creation of national curricula for RE in the 1980's it became multi-religious. Finally, it became more dialogical and concerned with the rational consideration of religious claims. So much of the history of approaches to non-denominational RE in Scotland are captured in the development of a *Personal Search* approach as an attempt to ground the subject in the life world of pupils. Both as a means to develop understanding and empathy, but also as a tool to develop an integrated and thoughtful personal approach to life in the pupils.

¹² Learning and Teaching Scotland 2006, 14.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

Of the 15% of Scottish schools which are denominational, the vast majority are Roman Catholic. As such the Catholic church has a degree of influence over the appointment of teachers, and the shape of the curriculum. The Scottish Catholic Education Service offers guidance and resources for teachers, educationalists and pupils. Within Religious Education Roman Catholic (RERC) guidance, it is imagined that RE is at the centre of the life of the school community which is envisaged to be a community that nurtures and preserves catholicity.

Therefore the curriculum is centred on an understanding of the Catholic faith and the development of a loving relationship with others and God. As well as these catechetical aims the RE curriculum also aims to allow children to consider other religious traditions. As stated above, when pupils study RE for national certification the suite of options and qualifications are the same for all pupils, whether from a non-denominational or denominational school.

5. Challenges and perspectives

It is evident in the Standards and Quality in RME Report¹³ that there was a lack of clarity with regard to what a *Personal Search* constitutes; which indicated that in some RE departments there was too much emphasis on subject content about religions, and little attempt to integrate it with the views of pupils.

In 2001 Learning and Teaching Scotland¹⁴ published *Effective Teaching of Religious Education: Personal Search*. The intention behind this document was to provide a philosophy for a Personal Search approach as well as exemplification for teachers. The authors, Kincaid and McVeigh (both RE teachers at the time) make it clear in their introduction that this document was published in response to the aforementioned critical reports into RE by the Inspectorate. Kincaid and McVeigh's stated aim is to "provide some practical guidance for teachers on dealing more effectively with the Personal Search aspect of Religious and Moral Education."¹⁵ The document goes on to discuss these critical reports in more detail. The rationale for the document is grounded in the realisation that "HMI inspections over the last five years have revealed that teachers are experiencing difficulties with the Personal Search aspect of 5-14 Religious and Moral Education. Many programmes, say HMIE, both at primary and secondary level, do not cover this area satisfactorily, resulting in a lack of pupil attainment."¹⁶

According to Kincaid and McVeigh Personal search is a method through which pupils can discover and develop their own beliefs and values, involving pupils in coming to their own conclusions by developing skills in critical thinking and evaluation. They argue that a central aim to RE, and one that is found in

¹³ Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education 2000.

¹⁴ Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS or LT Scotland) was a non-departmental public body of the Scottish Government, formed by the merger of the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum (SCCC) and the Scottish Council for Educational Technology (SCET). It was the main organisation for the development and support of the Scottish curriculum, and was at the heart of developments in Scottish education until its merger with Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education to form Education Scotland in 2011. The role of LTS was to provide advice, support, resources and staff development to enhance the quality of learning and teaching in Scotland, combining expertise in the curriculum 3–18 with advice on the use of ICT in education.

¹⁵ Kincaid & McVeigh 2001, 3.

¹⁶ Ibid.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

the aims of the RE curriculum, is to allow pupils to come to their own conclusions through a process of critical evaluation and personal discovery.

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Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

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READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

SWEDEN

1. Religious landscape

Sweden is often described as a very homogeneous nation historically, but this is not a completely accurate description.¹ There have always been different and mixed populations in the geographical area that we now term Sweden. Since historical times the Sami people, an indigenous group, and later the Roma people and the travellers have been represented, as well as national groups such as Germans, Walloons, the Dutch and Scots. Having said this, it is unambiguous that Sweden has changed demographically, especially since the Second World War. Today every sixth person living in Sweden has a heritage from another country. The population is currently increasing in Sweden, mostly due to immigration, and it currently stands at just over 9.8 million inhabitants.²

Sweden declared itself as a *multicultural society* in 1974 on the three cornerstones of equality, freedom of choice and partnership³, and from then on a multicultural policy has been written up in Swedish educational policies. Unfortunately, the concepts of *multiculturalism* and *intercultural* have increasingly become associated with *immigrant pupils* and cultural differences⁴, and a pedagogy for segregated schools. The three cornerstone concepts that underlie the Swedish *multicultural* policy are still valid while changing demographic patterns influence cultural and religious patterns.

Historically, Christianity slowly took over from Nordic religious beliefs in Sweden from the 9th Century onwards. According to historical sources, a French Benedictine monk called Ansgar was sent to Sweden in 829, but he had little success in converting the Swedes. A Swedish king named Olof Skötkonung became a Christian in 1008 and contributed to Sweden's subsequent Christianization. Even though Swedes, the so-called Vikings and seafarers, had prepared the ground for new religious patterns, it was a long time until Swedes were converted, and paganism continued in Sweden. Nevertheless, by the middle of the 12th Century, Sweden had become more or less a Christian country.⁵

In the middle of the 16th Century, Sweden became part of the Lutheran Reformation and broke off from the Catholic faith. Full religious freedom was not stated in Swedish law until 1951⁶, and until 2000 Sweden had a national church which embraced most Swedish-born people. The Church of Sweden was then declared a *faith-community* like the *free churches*, Roman Catholics, Jews and Muslims. In 2015, 64% of Swedish citizens still belonged to the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church.⁷ The fact is that Sweden and Norway currently are the Nordic countries without state churches, as Denmark, Iceland

¹ von Brömssen 2012, 228.

² Statistiska centralbyråns 2015.

³ Regeringens proposition nr 26 1975, 69.

⁴ Gruber & Rabo 2014, 59.

⁵ Nilsson 1996.

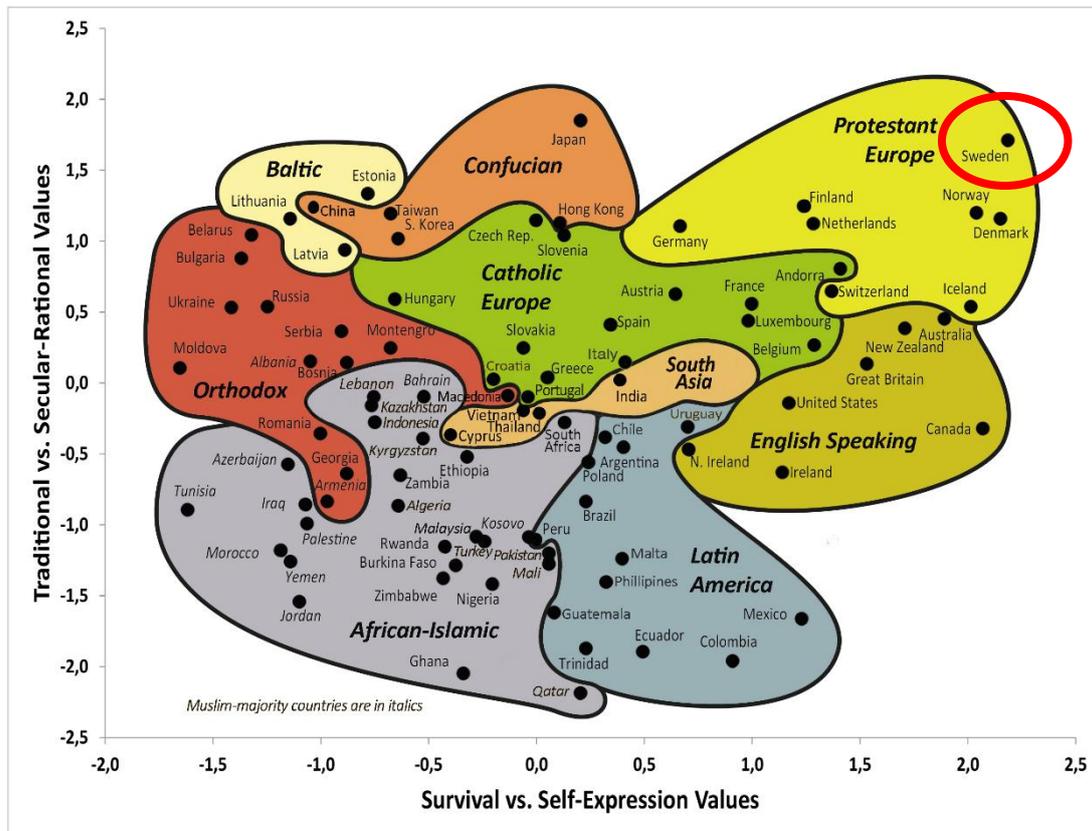
⁶ In 1860 conversion from the Lutheran State Church was legalized, but only on the condition on entering another religious congregation (Svanberg & Westerlund 2008).

⁷ Svenska kyrkan 2017.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

and Finland have retained theirs. The most common behaviour when it comes to a *Swedish* citizen in relation to *official* religion is to belong to the Swedish Church and to participate in church services on special occasions. This is sometimes called the “Nordic paradox” and has often been explained as the outcome of a spirit of a civil religiosity, which makes the church a symbol of the nation and of national culture.⁸



Source: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp> (last accessed 29.01.2018).

Today, Sweden is often described as one of the most secularized countries in the world with a population that holds very *modern* and rational views, in addition to a high level of self-expression (cf. Inglehart-Welzel Cultural Map above). The issue of religion and religiosity is complex, however, and the secularization described in research is understood as a change in relation to institutionalized religion, rather than an estrangement from religion. Religion today emerges in new arenas and in many different forms; indeed, it changes, moves and has always been hybrid and a result of bricolage.⁹

⁸ Sundback 2007.

⁹ Altglas 2014.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

2. Religious Education (RE)

The brief sketch of religious changes described above has, of course, had implications for Sweden as a nation when it comes to culture, feelings of belonging, citizenship and also for education which, in Sweden, as well as in many other parts of Europe, began as the Church's initiative.¹⁰ By the Middle Ages an informal education was organized by priests, with the aim of educating people in basic Christian understanding like praying Our Father, the Ten Commandments and the Creed.¹¹ After the Reformation, education was intensified, especially when it came to learning Luther's Small Catechism¹², which went on until the 20th Century.

Even though church and school were closely intertwined, tensions arose concerning organization and implementation of public education. This was partly due to new professionals being educated and state interventions in schools, such as the introduction of inspectors in 1861, while government-paid teacher salaries, the creation of a national curriculum and qualifications of teachers were debated.¹³ One sign of these tensions was that parliament decided in 1909 that the responsibility for school affairs in larger cities would be transferred from parish school boards to the city councils.¹⁴

Not only the organisational form, but also Religious Education as a subject, has changed considerably since public schooling started. Religious Education, named "Religious Knowledge" in the current Swedish curriculum is a compulsory school subject through all grades from the first year in primary school to upper secondary school. It can be described as an "integrative model"¹⁵, where education *about* and learning *from* different religions, worldviews and ethics take place in religiously mixed classrooms. There are no opt-out possibilities as the subject is regarded as any other school subject within the curriculum. The subject is described as non-denominational and neutral in a Swedish discourse. Another critical description would be that it is still significantly informed by the Swedish Lutheran Protestant culture, even *marinated* in Lutheranism. The latter can, for instance, be seen in the way 'religion' is described as *faith*, and Protestantism being an example par excellence of the category, described in liberal democratic terms, whereas other religions might be described in part through particular problems (the phenomena of extremism largely discussed under the heading Islam, for instance).¹⁶ It is, however, up to the teacher to plan how much time is allocated to different content in RE; meanwhile, there are few teaching hours for RE in the Swedish system. After nine years of compulsory schooling, students will have about 220 lessons in RE which means about one hour of RE

¹⁰ Green 2008.

¹¹ Hartman 2012, 24.

¹² Luther's Small Catechism was translated into Swedish 1531 and was the most used teaching material in Sweden (Hartman 2012, 26).

¹³ Green 2008, 339; Hartman 2012, 54-57.

¹⁴ Green 2008, 346.

¹⁵ Alberts 2007.

¹⁶ Berglund 2013, 166.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

every fortnight.¹⁷ In the upper secondary school about 30-35 hours are usually allocated to RE in the compulsory course.

Since 2011/12, in many school subjects there are national tests in the years 3, 6 and 9 of compulsory schooling. This assessment includes the social science branch where RE is situated. It is argued that national tests will serve “as a support for the teacher and contribute to equal assessment and grading in school”¹⁸, but testing can also be seen as a reflection of three interrelated policy technologies: “the market, managerialism and performativity” as argued by Stephen Ball.¹⁹ The ever increasing testing in Swedish schools has been controversial since it takes a lot of time from teaching, as argued by many teachers. Furthermore, since spring 2016 there has been national testing in year 9 in only one of the social science subjects and teachers do not know in advance which subject will be tested.²⁰

3. How RE teacher education is organized

In 1977 teacher training colleges were transferred into university structures in Sweden with the aim of deepening the knowledge, raising the academic level and bringing about continuous educational development. It was especially the requirement to conduct research that challenged teacher education. Later the concept of *proven experience* was added into the regulations of teacher education. This has resulted in disagreement between the different departments involved in teacher education on how to organize a teacher education system based on both science and proven experience required by the Act of Higher Education.²¹

Teacher education is located in universities and university college departments in Sweden. How such teacher education courses are constructed differs, as universities are free to develop courses out from goals in central policies for teacher education. However, teacher training courses always include general educational studies, subject studies and didactics of the subject as well as in-service training.²²

¹⁷ Skolverket 2018b; cf Osbeck & Skeie 2014, 240.

¹⁸ Skolverket 2018a.

¹⁹ Ball 2003, 215.

²⁰ Skolverket 2018a.

²¹ Hartman 2012, 218-235.

²² Cf Osbeck & Skeie 2014, 254-256.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

Teacher training at Karlstad University



Karlstad University (KAU) is one of Sweden’s young and dynamic universities, located at the beautiful lake Vänern in the western part of the country. Currently Karlstad University offers a wide range of programs in humanities and fine arts, social and economic sciences, natural sciences, engineering and technology, health care and teacher training. **Teacher training** has a long history in Karlstad – longer than KAU’s status as a university, in fact. Teacher education

thus lies at the core of the university. It enjoys a good reputation and many teachers have received their basic training there. The field of religious education is an essential part. In the university’s early days, KAU developed an RE-didactics based on *the stories* found in the various religious traditions.

A unique feature of KAU’s religious education is its international connections, enabling students to study both in Jerusalem and Varanasi, India. The “India program” has been running for more than 25 years, and through it many teacher students and scholars of religion have acquired knowledge and experiences that they have found invaluable in their practice.

43

There are different paths to take, depending on whether it is to become a primary or secondary school teacher. Primary teachers (7-9 year old pupils) and middle school teachers (10-12 year old pupils) teach a range of subjects and therefore their time for each subject is limited. Religion as a subject is often combined within teacher education courses with studies in geography, history and civics and can be taught separately, or in inter-disciplinary courses. This route into teacher education is based in a profession-oriented teacher training with long traditions from the early Elementary School in public education.²³ Currently teacher students study for four years to become this kind of teacher in Sweden and within these four years the subject of RE is studied for about six weeks.

Students aiming to become teachers at secondary or upper secondary schools, usually study at departments of Religious Studies. This is traditionally the second route into education, which has its roots in subject-oriented studies within university departments. Teachers aiming at teaching pupils from grade 7-9 (13-15 years old pupils) study for four and a half years and specialize in three subjects lasting for 1.5 and 0.75 years. One of these subjects can be Religious Studies combined with some other social science subject or a language, if specializing within the field of Social Science. Teachers aiming to teach at upper secondary school (16-19 years old pupils) study Religious Studies for three or four semesters (i.e. 45-90 ECTS). Such university courses are constructed within the university departments, they are oriented towards the policies for teacher education, but can be constructed

²³ Ibid.; Hartmann 2012, 19.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

rather differently as departments are free to design content for their courses. In some university departments student teachers study within a general Science of Religion course while at other universities such courses are specifically for student teachers. This is often related to how many students there are in different programs.²⁴

At the moment there are more than twenty departments of Science of Religion in Swedish universities and university colleges. To some extent this is a consequence of RE being a compulsory subject in Swedish schools; the need for teachers is high. However, a national evaluation in 2004 highlighted that far from all RE teachers were formally trained in RE.²⁵ One reason could be that teachers were, for a period of time, allowed to teach all subjects in the domain of social science in school, but most teachers had only training in two or three subjects.

4. Current developments

In the present curriculum from 2011 (“Curriculum for elementary school, preschool class and leisure center 2011”) there is a swing back to a descriptive-analytic perspective in RE with less focus on existential and personal issues.²⁶ Furthermore, it is a subject often described as needed to enhance intercultural understanding²⁷ and thus puts a normative claim to the study of RE. This is articulated in the Swedish syllabi: “In today’s society, characterised by diversity, knowledge of religions and other outlooks on life is important in creating mutual understanding between people.”²⁸

The aims of the subject and core content for teaching show a broad subject with its knowledge base in both Social Science and Humanities, where world religions, worldviews, how they are expressed and formed as identities, as well as ethical models and values are the core content in the subject.²⁹ In primary education there is a focus on the local community and narratives. Higher grades are focussed on key issues in different religions and worldviews, as well as on ethical models and the forming of identities in relation to religion, gender, ethnicity and class. Internal variations in religions are now stressed, as research shows that when religions are grouped together there is a danger of stereotyping.³⁰

During the construction of the Curriculum and the Syllabi for RE in 2010-2011 there was a hot debate about whether Christianity should be included in the concept of *world religions* or written apart as “Christianity and other religions”. The expert group in the National Board of Education wanted to equate Christianity with the other so-called *world religions*. However, the government decided that Christianity *should* be singled out and that “the other world religions, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism,

²⁴ Cf Berglund 2013, 179-180.

²⁵ Sjöborg 2013, 73.

²⁶ Cf Osbeck & Skeie 2014, 247-258.

²⁷ Coulby & Zambeta 2008; Jackson 2004; Jackson et al. 2007; Jackson 2014; Leganger-Krogstad 2011; Sjöborg 2012; Sjöborg 2013, 69-70; UNESCO 2013.

²⁸ Skolverket 2011, 176.

²⁹ Cf Kittelmann Flensner 2015, 42-44.

³⁰ Berglund 2014, 168; Otterbeck 2005; Skolinspektionen 2012.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

Buddhism”, should be mentioned separately.³¹ The argument for the singling out of Christianity was that it was a part of the Swedish culture and history. A number of lobby groups worked for the Christian exceptionalism and the politicians listened more to public opinion than to subject experts at this time.³² The controversial issue of separating Christianity or not from the concept of *world religions*, is linked to the earlier much-debated issue of the formulation of “Christian tradition and Western humanism” that is articulated in the Curriculum forming the “Fundamental values and tasks of the school”.³³ The passage describing the core values of Swedish education is formulated in this way:

“The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are the values that the school should represent and impart. In accordance with the ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism, this is achieved by fostering in the individual a sense of justice, generosity of spirit, tolerance and responsibility. Teaching in the school should be non-denominational.”³⁴

Therefore, school curricula are neither neutral nor innocent, but negotiated and can be seen as hybrid political documents. There is always “politics of knowledge behind every curriculum that includes and excludes knowledge, cultural experiences and outlooks” as stated by Wahlström and Sundberg.³⁵

5. Challenges and perspectives

Even though the official curriculum states that one aim of RE is to further intercultural understanding, it is debated and is so far not underpinned by significant research in Sweden. Instead, research shows that a secularist discourse is strong in Swedish classrooms and in pupil’s talk about religion, thus often constructing religion and religious followers as the *other*; as traditional, non-modern and non-rational in both thinking and behaviour.³⁶ As young people in Sweden live in a cultural context where individual autonomy and freedom are central values, religions and more collectivistic values seem odd and out of place. Autonomy and freedom are even discussed as sacred in a Swedish context³⁷ and upheld by both young people from the majority culture and from minorities, as confirmed by Sjöborg in his study.³⁸ Students who have strong beliefs can, at times, feel like they are described as strangers, according to Holmqvist Lidh. They do not recognize themselves in the picture of *religious adherents* and religious traditions that is painted by teachers in Swedish classrooms.³⁹

³¹ Cf Gruber & Rabo 2014, 61.

³² Carlson & von Brömssen, forthcoming.

³³ Skolverket 2011, 9.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Wahlström and Sundberg 2012, 347.

³⁶ von Brömssen 2003; Kittelmann-Flensner 2015; Holmqvist Lidh 2016.

³⁷ Esmer & Pettersson 2007.

³⁸ Sjöborg 2013, 80.

³⁹ Holmqvist Lidh 2016.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

It is known from earlier studies that RE is one of the least appreciated subjects in the Swedish compulsory school and that pupil's knowledge is quite fragmentary.⁴⁰ Several studies during the 1960s showed that pupils perceived the subject as boring.⁴¹ Research also show that pupils are not given the possibility to discuss worldviews and ethics as much as they would like to do, or as the curriculum stipulates⁴² and that teachers fail to connect to the current religious diverse situation in society.⁴³

As stated above, young people in Sweden consider themselves *modern*, rational and critically thinking people and an atheist position is seen not only as a natural but also a neutral position. Within such a secularist discourse religion is viewed as backwards, old fashioned and a traditional way of living, which is not particularly desirable.⁴⁴ It is, however, interesting to note that pupils with a connection to organized religion bring another and more positive attitude towards RE in school,⁴⁵ although it might be difficult to articulate such a standpoint in the overwhelmingly Swedish secularist classroom.⁴⁶ Another interesting research result is that pupils get their knowledge about religion from media (65%), friends (64%) and school (59%). Those pupils, particularly, who position themselves as non-religious gain their knowledge from the third most frequent source of information, that is, from school,⁴⁷ which points to the importance of learning and discussing such content in school.

The subject itself has been debated ever since the beginning of the 1900s, as can be seen from this short description.⁴⁸ Some voices in the debate argue for RE as an optional subject, or split in parts on history, civics and philosophy or constructed as an even broader subject with the name Cultural History.⁴⁹ It is fair to say that the subject continues to be debated and questioned while struggling to establish its identity. This is discussed, just to take an example, in a document from the Swedish National Board of Education in 2007 where it is stated that religious education “should be a topic of the times, but in reality it is rather a subject in crisis, where possible opportunities are not exploited.”⁵⁰ Given the potential that RE has, continuous support must be given to implement the subject in everyday school life.

46

⁴⁰ Jönsson & Liljefors Persson 2006.

⁴¹ Kittelmann Flensner 2015, 35.

⁴² The Swedish National Agency for Education 2012.

⁴³ Jönsson & Liljefors Persson 2006; cf von Brömssen 2003; Sjöborg 2013, 73.

⁴⁴ Kittelmann Flensner 2015; cf von Brömssen 2003; Sjöborg 2013.

⁴⁵ Sjöborg 2012.

⁴⁶ Kittelmann Flensner 2015.

⁴⁷ Lövheim & Bromander 2012.

⁴⁸ Cf Kittelmann Flensner 2015.

⁴⁹ All these arguments were found when searching on the internet about religious education in Sweden (“religionskunskap i Sverige”) (10.04.2016).

⁵⁰ von Brömssen 2012, 134.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

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READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

COMPARISON

The comparative chapter emphasises divergences and convergences in the development of Religious Education (RE) in Europe. Comparing RE in different contexts firstly underlines the embeddedness of each approach in its own context and secondly the influence of developments that happens across Europe and affects all of the existing approaches to RE. The text is complemented by an overview on RE and RE teacher training in the five participating countries, available at:

<http://www.readyproject.eu/uploads/files/1495698646REandREteachereducationAREADYOverview29.11.1.pdf>

Comparative perspectives

Comparison of different approaches is becoming increasingly relevant. The focus of our project was to elaborate how existing Religious Education can deal with diversity in society and in the classroom. The encounters between student teachers, teacher trainers and multipliers as well as the members of the consortium provided space for dialogue and exchange about different perspectives, models and historical developments that could promote mutual understanding. It became clear that elements of a systematic model for comparative studies, proposed by Oddrun Bråten (Bråten 2013), provides guidance for such initiatives. She differentiates between three general dimensions: Supra-national, national and subnational processes and she connects these dimensions with four levels of the curriculum: 1. societal, 2. institutional/school based, 3. instructional, 4. experiential. The society, the organisation of schooling, the pedagogy and methods of teaching and the learning processes of the students matter and are somehow intertwined when it comes to Religious Education. It may help to identify the impact of these dimensions and elements when it comes to the complex initiative of comparison. For READY, the comparison happened between the student teachers and the teacher trainers during study visits, international and national, and also in the working processes toward the intellectual outputs of the project. The meetings of the consortiums were always a source of inspiration and exchange. Now this comparison between different national cases studies adds another element of exchange and dialogue. It identifies some common and some different elements of the national perspectives on RE.

Firstly, in all participating countries of the READY project there is a subject of Religious Education in school. This is common with most of the countries in Europe. The few exceptions (e.g. France, Montenegro, Albania, parts of Switzerland) argue that the strict separation of state and church (religion) includes also a separation of religion from public education. This is not the case in the five countries participating in the READY project.

Secondly, a debate is taking place about the current situation and the future development of RE in all countries. This is because of changes in the education system. A main trend is the dominance of a neoliberal perspective on education. This comes along with a marketization of education, the focus of outcomes on employability and an emphasis on “teaching to the test” and less on content and dialogue (cf. Fancourt 2017). In many contexts, this creates the *danger of a marginalisation* of the subject

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

Religious Education. In our project, this was reported especially for England and Sweden. What does this mean? It means that less emphasis is given to RE as an ordinary subject compared to other subjects of the school curriculum. It means that the conditions and criteria of and for the subject differs concerning their value and place in the curriculum or their time in the day schedule.

In other contexts, such as in Germany and in Austria, the existing confessional approaches to RE have become less plausible. The main reason for that is the fact the premises for this type of RE have changed.

Context matters

The context shapes the existing models. Dimensions that influence the models are: the religious landscape, the existing state – religion/church relations with a range between the poles of state churches and a strict separation of state and religion; the image of religion in society; the organisation of the education system; history and politics; and also the pedagogical models and the attitudes of teachers. With Austria we have a mainly Catholic dominated country with increasing diversity especially in the big cities, in Germany members of the Catholic or Protestant Church include about 45% of the population, whereas more than 34% do not belong to any religious community. Sweden, as a former Lutheran dominated country, is a mainly secularized country today.

51

Convergences and divergences

The vast majority of existing RE approaches are characterized by an educational profile. In some contexts, theology is a discipline that goes along with education, in other contexts religious science has a leading function. What is needed is more empirical research about the effectiveness of the subject and about its potential to encourage transformation. The orientation on the lifeworld and the context of the students become a dominant principle in the different approaches to Religious Education. This principle leads to the following questions concerning the teaching: What is the role of religion in society and in the public sphere? How can education support orientation of students in a plural society? How can lived and taught religion be an issue in teaching on an equal level? The aim of basic knowledge and related attitudes towards religion (*religious literacy*) should encourage students to deal with their own and with other religious perspectives in a constructive way and to gain competence for dialogue. This includes the promotion of hermeneutical, ethical and intercultural competences as well as interreligious competence, and also the competence to deal with plurality.

Challenges

- *Marginalisation of RE* (e.g. England and Sweden)

In many countries, RE has been given a marginalised status in the curriculum. In England the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in Religious Studies cannot be counted for the English Baccalaureate, local authorities cuts have led to the reduction of local support for RE and the number of new trainee teachers has been slashed (cf. REC, 2013, p. 7). In most Swedish schools RE is taught just one lesson per fortnight.

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

- *Globalisation of religion*

Today we experience a shift in the perception of and in the concrete shape of lived religion. Former strange religions become neighbour religions. Contexts are religiously more coloured and diverse. Lived religion becomes globalised. ‘Glocal’ religion phenomena come up e.g. due to the presence of migrants and refugees in many countries, for whom religion is a central value in life. The recognition of such developments nurtures the view that also a wider perspective is needed for Religious Education. “When religion becomes globalised, RE cannot stay as it is”. (Simojoki 2012, 251) The coexistence of multifarious globalised religions should be a focus of RE.

- *Relativism and fundamentalism*

Religious Education should help to deal with fundamentalism and relativism, both phenomena of an increasing plural society (cf. Schweitzer 2015). Relativism stands for that everything has the same value, existing ambiguities are belittled, so that they are no longer seen as disruptive but as enriching options. The danger of a fundamentalist position is that existing ambivalences of a culturally and religiously manifold situation are ignored and one exclusively identifies with a single position or perspective.

- *Functionalisation of RE and expectations of different stakeholders to RE*

RE is an area where politics and pedagogy are closely related. In some countries, active citizenship education is linked with RE (e.g. England), while in others the demand that RE should contribute to social cohesion is obvious. Teachers and academics need critical tools to analyse these tendencies and to resist a concept of education that is too much oriented on economic needs. Also parents have high expectations. They expect that school can compensate for a missing ethical-religious education at home.

- *Europeanisation (economisation) of education*

A Europeanisation of education (geared to economic needs and aims such as *employability, flexibility, mobility*) can jeopardise Religious Education. There is a need to critically discuss this limited concept of education and stick to more holistic concepts (cf. Schreiner 2012).

Perspectives

- *Common criteria / standards? How can an international knowledge transfer in RE be organised?*

The existing variety of approaches and the differences in national and regional contexts as indicators suggest that there will be no common European approach to RE in the near future. However, the issue of common guiding principles and standards of RE should be discussed further. Criteria are the quality and the contribution of RE to general education.

- *Encounters and dialogue*

READY – Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of and approaches to teacher education in the context of „Education and Training 2020“

The need for more dialogue and exchange about Religious Education in Europe does not include the need to agree on anything, the least on values. It has been the experience of the READY project that there is no need to try to convince the other about the “better” quality of one’s own approach. Following the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, a conversation is a metaphor for embarking on the experiences and ideas of others. This has a value in itself. “Conversation doesn’t have to lead to consensus about anything, especially not values; it’s enough that it helps peoples get used to one another.” (Appiah 2007, 85)

- *Need of collaboration*

The need of collaboration, irrespective of the existing approaches, is expressed in the following quote. Denise Cush states: “However, whatever approach is taken to the place of religion in education, it must be agreed that in today’s world it is an urgent necessity that our children and young people learn about the beliefs, values, practices and identities of the people that they will be interacting with, that they learn to respect but also to think critically about the various faiths and beliefs they will come across, and that they have access to ideas, values and customs that they can draw upon (or critique) in transforming their own lives and those around them for the better.” (Cush 2011, 82) 6

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