

Issued to the Chief Inspector  
14 Jan '99

## Religious Education in the Junior Certificate

### Briefing Note in relation to likely concerns of Episcopal Conference

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#### 1. The Work of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment on Religious Education for assessment and certification.

##### 1.1 the establishment of the course committee

Early in 1994 a course committee was established with the brief to prepare syllabuses for Religious Education which could be assessed in the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations. These syllabuses were to be optional. The membership of the committee reflected the same representative pattern as other subject areas. A full list of members is attached. In addition, representatives of the four main Christian churches were also included, as was a representative of the National Parents Council.

##### 1.2 the issues paper

The first work undertaken by the committee was to circulate an Issues Paper setting out previous initiatives in Religious Education for assessment and certification, legal and constitutional points, international practice and suggesting broad aims and framework for the development of syllabuses for an Irish context.

##### 1.3 responses to the paper

There was a general welcome for the NCCA's initiative in Religious Education. The Episcopal Commission on Catechetics welcomed the 'spirit of the proposal', stressed the 'formative dimension of Religious Education' and said that this dimension could be 'enriched and complemented' by the new syllabuses.

## 2. The Consultative Process

### 2.1 the draft syllabuses

Since the circulation of the Issues Paper in 1994, exploring the possibility of the introduction of Religious Education as an optional subject in the public examinations, the course committee has

- met 32 times - the representative of the Episcopal Conference attended almost all of these meetings and was an active member of the working group on the Leaving Certificate syllabus
- engaged in two phases of consultation
  - on the initial drafts, which included a series of regional meetings, to which diocesan advisers were invited
  - on the redrafts which were prepared in the light of the responses to the first consultation

In both cases the Episcopal Conference was invited to respond and availed of the opportunity to do so.

### 2.2 informal meetings

In addition to this consultative process, members of the executive of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the Chairperson of the Religious Education course committee have met Bishops Murphy and Murray on two occasions, and a further meeting is planned shortly to update them on plans for implementation. These meetings were part of the NCCA's commitment to consult widely during the preparation of the syllabuses. Meetings were held with other bodies including the Church of Ireland Board of Education and the National Parents Council.

### 2.3 diocesan briefings

The Education Officer has met with the Diocesan Advisers for Religious Education a number of times in the course of the process and has responded to invitations to meet with teachers of Religious Education organised at diocesan level. In some cases, the local Bishop attended the meeting.

### 2.4 the final syllabus

Following the unanimous approval of the syllabus for Junior Certificate by Council, final copies were sent to all committee members, including the representative of the Episcopal Conference.

### 3. The nature of the new syllabuses and their relationship to existing programmes.

#### 3.1 optional syllabuses

These syllabuses are **optional**. Schools may continue in offering current syllabuses. Other schools may choose to offer the new syllabuses to all or some of their students.

#### 3.2 catechetical programmes

The aims of the syllabuses make it clear that they are not designed to meet the 'faith formation' or 'catechetical' requirements of any religious denomination. However, many schools intend using them as a support for such work in school, particularly at Junior Certificate level. The syllabus for Junior Certificate has been designed to offer this flexibility. The Episcopal Conference has commissioned work on guidelines in this regard and the NCCA's education officer has briefed the working group and met with the author on a number of occasions.

#### 3.3 scheduling in senior cycle

At Leaving Certificate level, it is likely that fewer schools will offer the syllabus and fewer students will take it. Over recent months the Education Officer has been discussing timetabling options at senior cycle for Religious Education and these will be included in the Teacher Guidelines for Leaving Certificate. Ultimately, as in the case of every other subject - whether assessed in the public examinations or not, scheduling and allocation of time is a matter for the school.

### 4. The content of the new syllabuses - future changes

Any future revision of the syllabuses would be the responsibility of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. Such work would proceed through the Council's enabling structures and would involve consultation with the relevant bodies, including the Episcopal Conference. It would be hoped that the expertise made available to the Council by the bishops in the form of their representative on the course committee would continue.

Hence the possibility of a Minister restructuring the subject to include RSE for example does not arise.

## 5. The examination

### 5.1 setting and marking

The setting of examinations, and their grading, is the responsibility of the Department of Education and Science. What will be assessed is the range of aims and objectives set out for each section of the syllabus. A student's religious faith will not be the subject of the examination.

### 5.2 draft sample questions

The Teacher Guidelines for Religious Education will contain draft sample questions and answers to highlight that the criteria for assessment arise from the objectives of the syllabus sections concerned.

## 6. The phased introduction.

Schools will not be asked to introduce the syllabus in 2000. Schools will be invited to do so. While it is intended that about 50 schools offer the Junior Certificate syllabus in 2000, far more will apply to do so. The selection of a small number will enable the in-career support to be tailored to meet the variety of needs of teachers of Religious Education at junior cycle.

## Course Committee Membership (Junior and Senior Cycle)

Chairperson	Noírn Hynes replaced Sr. Pat Murray	Joint Managerial Body
	Sr. Mary Glynn	Association of Community Schools
	Ann Walsh	Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland
	Bernadine O'Sullivan	Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland
	Rev. Graham Hamilton	Board of Education of the Methodist Church
	Linda Clarke	Church of Ireland Board of Education
	Prof. Dermot Moran	Committee of the Heads of Irish Universities
	Prof. Séan Freyne	Committee of the Heads of Irish Universities
	Gabriel Ó Mairtín	Department of Education and Science
	Seán Mac an Tánaiste	Department of Education and Science
	Rev. Dermot Lane	Episcopal Conference
	Brendan McDermott	Irish Vocational Education Association
	An t-Oll. Éustás Ó Héadain	National Council for Educational Awards
	Gerry Farrell	National Parents' Council (post-primary)
	Dr Kenneth Milne	NCCA
	Rev. Terence McCaughey	Presbyterian Church in Ireland
	Ellen Fleming	Religion Teachers' Association
	Patricia O'Mahony	Teachers' Union of Ireland
	Una Killoran	Teachers' Union of Ireland