POLICY:

# RELIGION AND EDUCATION

SEPTEMBER 2003

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# National Policy on
# RELIGION AND EDUCATION

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## Minister's foreword

I have great pleasure in publishing this Policy on Religion and Education, as approved by the Council of Education Ministers on 4 August 2003. The Policy is necessary and overdue to give full expression to the invocation of religion in our Constitution and the principles governing religious freedom.

As a democratic society with a diverse population of different cultures, languages and religions we are duty bound to ensure that through our diversity we develop a unity of purpose and spirit that recognises and celebrates our diversity. This should be particularly evident in our public schools where no particular religious ethos should be dominant over and suppress others. Just as we must ensure and protect the equal rights of all students to be at school, we must also appreciate their right to have their religious views recognised and respected.

We do not have a state religion. But our country is not a secular state where there is a very strict separation between religion and the state.

The Policy recognises the rich and diverse religious heritage of our country and adopts a co operative model that accepts our rich heritage and the possibility of creative inter-action between schools and faith whilst, protecting our young people from religious discrimination or coercion.

What we are doing through this Policy is to extend the concept of equity to the relationship between religion and education, in a way that recognises the rich religious diversity of our land. In the Policy, we do not impose any narrow prescriptions or ideological views regarding the relationship between religion and education. Following the lead of the Constitution and the South African Schools Act, we provide a broad framework within which people of goodwill will work out their own approaches.

The Policy is neither negative nor hostile towards any religion or faith and does not discriminate against anyone. Rather it displays a profound respect towards religious faith and affirms the importance of the study of religion and religious observances,

Professor Kader Asmal
Minister of Education

## Introduction to the Policy on Religion and Education

1. In this document we set out the policy on the relationship between religion and education that we believe will best serve the interests of our democratic society. The objective is to influence and shape this relationship, in a manner that is in accordance with the values of our South African Constitution.[1] In recognising the particular value of the rich and diverse religious heritage of our country, we identify the distinctive contribution that religion can make to education, and that education can make to teaching and learning about religion, and we therefore promote the role of religion in education. In doing so we work from the premise that the public school has an educational responsibility for teaching and learning about religion and religions, and for promoting these, but that it should do so in ways that are different from the religious instruction and religious nurture provided by the home, family, and religious community.

2. We do so also in the recognition that there have been instances in which public education institutions have discriminated on the grounds of religious belief, such that greater definition is required. In many cases pupils of one religion are subjected to religious observances in another, without any real choice in the matter. The policy is not prescriptive, but provides a framework for schools to determine policies, and for parents and communities to be better informed of their rights and responsibilities in regard to religion and education. The policy genuinely advances the interests of religion, by advocating a broad based range of religious activities in the school.

3. In clarifying the relationship between religion and education, we might consider four possible models for structuring the relationship between religion and the state:

   A *theocratic* model identifies the state with one particular religion or religious grouping. In some cases, this model has resulted in a situation in which the state and religion become indistinguishable. In a religiously diverse society such as South Africa, this model clearly would be inappropriate.

   At the other extreme, a *repressionist* model is based on the premise that the state should act to suppress religion. In such a model, the state would operate to marginalise or eliminate religion from public life. In a religiously active society such as South Africa, any constitutional model based on state hostility towards religion would be unthinkable. We reject both the theocratic model of the religious state, such as the 'Christian-National' state in our own history that tried to impose religion in public institutions, as well as any repressionist model that would adopt a hostile stance towards religion.

   A modern secular state, which is neither religious nor anti-religious, in principle adopts a position of impartiality towards all religions and other worldviews. A *separationist* model for the secular state represents an attempt to completely divorce the religious and secular spheres of a society, such as in France or the United States. Drawing strict separation between religion and the secular state is extremely difficult to implement in practice, since there is considerable interchange between religion and public life. Furthermore, a strict separation between the two spheres of religion and state is not desirable, since without the

[1] The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996)

commitment and engagement of religious bodies it is difficult to see us improving the quality of life of all our people.

In a *co-operative* model, both the principle of legal separation and the possibility of creative interaction are affirmed. Separate spheres for religion and the state are established by the Constitution, but there is scope for interaction between the two. While ensuring the protection of citizens from religious discrimination or coercion, this model encourages an ongoing dialogue between religious groups and the state in areas of common interest and concern. Even in such exchanges, however, religious individuals and groups must be assured of their freedom from any state interference with regard to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, and opinion.

4. In regard to the relationship between religion and public education, we propose that the cooperative model which combines constitutional separation and mutual recognition, provides a framework that is best for religion and best for education in a democratic South Africa.

5. Under the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion, the state, neither advancing nor inhibiting religion, must assume a position of fairness, informed by a parity of esteem for all religions, and worldviews. This positive impartiality carries a profound appreciation of spirituality and religion in its many manifestations, as reflected by the deference to God in the preamble to our Constitution, but does not impose these.

## Background to the policy on Religion and Education

6. This Policy for Religion and Education is the result of many years of research and consultation. This commenced with the National Education Policy Investigation of the early 1990s, was taken further in the National Education and Training Forum during the transitional period of 1993-1994, and in the extensive consultations around the South African Schools Act, prior to 1996. It was further developed by the Ministerial Committee on Religious Education in 1999, and the Standing Advisory Committee on Religion and Education, established for this purpose in 2000. Reviewing the progress made in all of this work, we see an emerging consensus about the relationship between religion and education.

7. This policy links religion and education with new initiatives in cultural rebirth (the African Renaissance), moral regeneration, and the promotion of values in our schools. Religion can play a significant role in preserving our heritage, respecting our diversity, and building a future based on progressive values.

8. To achieve these goals, the relationship between religion and education must be guided by the following principles:

   - In all aspects of the relationship between religion and education, the practice must flow directly from the constitutional values of citizenship, human rights, equality, freedom from discrimination, and freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, and opinion.

   - Public institutions have a responsibility to teach about religion and religions in ways that reflect a profound appreciation of the spiritual, non-material aspects of

life, but which are different from the religious education, religious instruction, or religious nurture provided by the home, family, and religious community.

- Religion Education should contribute to creating an integrated and informed community that affirms unity in diversity.

- Teaching about religion, religions, and religious diversity needs to be facilitated by trained professionals, and programmes in Religion Education must be supported by appropriate and credible teaching and learning materials, and objective assessment criteria.

## The Context

9. South Africa is a multi-religious country. Over 60 per cent of our people claim allegiance to Christianity, but South Africa is home to a wide variety of religious traditions. With a deep and enduring indigenous religious heritage, South Africa is a country that also embraces the major religions of the world. Each of these religions is itself a diverse category, encompassing many different understandings and practices. At the same time, many South Africans draw their understanding of the world, ethical principles, and human values from sources independent of religious institutions. In the most profound matters of life orientation, therefore, diversity is a fact of our national life.

10. Our diversity of language, culture and religion is a wonderful national asset. We therefore celebrate diversity as a unifying national resource, as captured in our Coat of Arms: !Ke E:/Xarra //ke (Unity in Diversity). This policy for the role of religion in education is driven by the dual mandate of celebrating diversity and building national unity.

## Values

11. This policy for the role of religion in education flows directly from the Constitutional values of citizenship, human rights, equality, freedom from discrimination, and freedom for conscience, religion, thought, belief, and opinion. By enshrining these basic values, the Constitution provides the framework for determining the relationship between religion and education in a democratic society

12. Our Constitution has worked out a careful balance between freedom for religious belief and expression and freedom from religious coercion and discrimination. On the one hand, by ensuring that "Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, and opinion", the Constitution[2] guarantees freedom of and for religion, and citizens are free to exercise their basic right to religious conviction, expression, and association. On the other hand, by ensuring equality in the enjoyment of all the rights, privileges, and benefits of citizenship, the Constitution explicitly prohibits unfair discrimination on grounds that include religion, belief, and conscience. Protected from any discriminatory practices based on religion, citizens are thereby also free from any religious coercion that might be implied by the state.

[2] Sections 15(1) and (2) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa

13. The South African Schools Act (Act 94 of 1996) upholds the constitutional rights of all citizens to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion, and freedom from unfair discrimination on any grounds whatsoever, including religion, in public education institutions.

14. Within this constitutional framework, public schools have a calling to promote the core values of a democratic society, through the curriculum, through extra-curricular activities, and in the way that they approach religious festivals, school uniforms and even diets. As identified in the report of the ministerial committee on values in education, these core values include equity, tolerance, multilingualism, openness, accountability, and social honour. Our policy on religion in education must be consistent with these values, and the practices of schools may be tested against the following national priorities:

    *Equity*: The education process in general, and this policy, must aim at the development of a national democratic culture with respect for the value of all of our people's diverse cultural, religious and linguistic traditions.

    *Tolerance*: Religion in education must contribute to the advancement of inter-religious toleration and interpersonal respect among adherents of different religious or secular worldviews in a shared civil society.

    *Diversity*: In the interest of advancing informed respect for diversity, educational institutions have a responsibility for promoting multi-religious knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of religions in South Africa and the world.

    *Openness*: Schools, together with the broader society, play a role in cultural formation and transmission, and educational institutions must promote a spirit of openness in which there shall be no overt or covert attempt to indoctrinate pupils into any particular belief or religion.

    *Accountability*: As systems of human accountability, religions cultivate moral values and ethical commitments that can be recognised as resources for learning and as vital contributions to nation building.

    *Social Honour*: While honouring the linguistic, cultural, religious or secular backgrounds of all pupils, educational institutions cannot allow the overt or covert denigration of any religion or secular world-view.

## THE POLICY

### Application

15. The policy covers the different aspects of Religion Education, Religious Instruction and Religious Observances, and is applicable in all public schools. The spirit of the policy, which is to embrace the religious diversity of South Africa, must also be applied at other levels of the education system, including District, Provincial and National level gatherings.

16. Citizens do have the right, at their own expense, to establish independent schools, including religious schools, as long as they avoid racial discrimination, register with the

state, and maintain standards that are not inferior to the standards of comparable public educational institutions.[3] Similarly, Section 57 of the Schools Act provides for "Public Schools on Private Property with a recognised religious character", which also have the right to specify a religious ethos and character, subject to an agreement with the provincial authorities.[4] In both such institutions the requirements for Religious Instruction and Religious Observances would not be prescribed by this policy. However in maintaining the curriculum standards with respect to Religion Education, both independent schools and public schools on private property with a recognised religious character[5] are required to achieve the minimum outcomes for Religion Education.

## Religion Education

17. Religion Education is a curricular programme[6] with clear and age-appropriate educational aims and objectives, for teaching and learning about religion, religions, and religious diversity in South Africa and the world. The study of religion must serve recognisable educational goals that are consistent with the aims and outcomes of other learning areas, and like other learning areas in the curriculum, programmes in Religion Education must contribute to developing basic skills in observation, listening, reading, writing, and thinking.

18. Religion Education may also be justified by the educational character of the programme, which includes the common values that all religions promote, such as the human search for meaning and the ethic of service to others, and by the desirable social ends, such as expanding understanding, increasing tolerance, and reducing prejudice. Religion Education is justified by its contribution to the promotion of social justice, and respect for the environment, that can be served by this field of study within the school curriculum.

19. Religion Education, with educational outcomes, is the responsibility of the school. Religion Education shall include teaching and learning about the religions of the world, with particular attention to the religions of South Africa, as well as worldviews, and it shall place adequate emphasis on values and moral education. In this, we re-assert the policy of the Revised National Curriculum Statement to offer education about religions for the purposes of achieving "religious literacy". Religion Education is therefore an educational programme with clearly defined and transferable skills, values and attitudes as the outcomes. It is a programme for teaching and learning about religion in its broadest sense, about religions, and about religious diversity in South Africa and the world. Religion Education should enable pupils to engage with a variety of religious traditions in a way that encourages them to grow in their inner spiritual and moral dimensions. It must affirm their own identity, while leading them to an informed understanding of the religious identities of others.

20. The full development of our children is fundamental to the education process. Outcomes Based Education and the National Curriculum Statements for General and Further Education and Training are geared to develop the cognitive, social, emotional, physical, spiritual and ethical dimensions of pupils. The unique characteristics of the various learning areas, learning fields and subjects position each to provide more

[3] Section 29(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa
[4] In terms of Section 14 of the South African Schools Act
[5] As provided for in Section 57 of the South African Schools Act
[6] National Curriculum Statement for Grades R-9 (Schools); 2002

emphasis on particular dimensions of pupil development. The Life Orientation learning area, through programmes like Life Skills, Religion Education and Social Responsibility, is well positioned to impact on the ethical and moral dimensions of pupil development. Programmes for Religion Education should purposefully pursue the moral and ethical development of pupils, whilst they learn in a factual way about the various religions and beliefs which exist.

21. When we provide our pupils with educationally sound programmes, they will gain a deeper and broader understanding of the life orientations, worldviews, cultural practices, and ethical resources of humanity. As they develop creative and critical abilities for thinking about religion and religions, pupils will also develop the capacities for mutual recognition, respect for diversity, reduced prejudice, and increased civil toleration that are necessary for citizens to live together in a democratic society. Learning about themselves while learning about others, pupils will surely discover their common humanity in diversity, and be both affirmed and challenged to grow in their personal orientation to life.

22. Confessional or sectarian forms of religious instruction in public schools are inappropriate for a religiously diverse and democratic society. As institutions with a mandate to serve the entire society, public schools must avoid adopting a particular religion, or a limited set of religions, that advances sectarian or particular interests. Schools should be explaining what religions are about, with clear educational goals and objectives, in ways that increase understanding, build respect for diversity, value spirituality, and clarify the religious and non-religious sources of moral values. We owe this to our pupils, as well as to parents, citizens, and taxpayers.

23. Unlike a single-faith approach to religious education, which provides religious instruction in one religion, and unlike a multiple single-faith approach, which provides parallel programmes in religious instruction for an approved set of religions, a multi-tradition approach to the study of Religion Education does not promote any particular religion. It is a programme for studying about religion, in all its many forms, as an important dimension of human experience and a significant subject field in the school curriculum.

24. In clarifying the role of religion in public education, we seek to realise the benefits of a coherent education programme in the study of religion. An open, plural, historically informed, intercultural and interdisciplinary study of religion in public schools is consistent with international developments, and it is also a model gaining popularity and relevance throughout Africa. This approach engages religion as an important human activity, which all pupils should know about if they are to be deemed to be educated.

25. Instead of promoting a religious position, a programme in Religion Education pursues a balanced approach to teaching and learning about religion. Religion Education can provide opportunities for both a deeper sense of self-realisation and a broader civil acceptance of others. It can balance the familiar and the foreign in ways that give pupils new insights into both. It can facilitate the development of both empathetic appreciation and critical analysis. It can teach pupils about a world of religious diversity, but at the same time it can encourage pupils to think in terms of a new national unity in South Africa. By teaching pupils about the role of religion in history, society, and the world, a unified, multi-tradition programme in the study of religion c-an be an important part of a well-balanced and complete education.

26. With respect to the kinds of thinking that can be facilitated, a programme in Religion Education provides an opportunity for pupils to develop a disciplined imagination that will empower them to recognise a common humanity within religious diversity. Religion Education creates a context in which pupils can increase their understanding of themselves and others, deepen their capacity for empathy, and, eventually, develop powers of critical reflection in thinking through problems of religious or moral concern. Like basic educational skills such as reading comprehension or writing ability, these styles of thinking are transferable skills that are potentially relevant to any occupation or role in life. They represent purely educational grounds for developing a programme in Religion Education.

27. In addition to developing basic and transferable skills, a programme in Religion Education must also identify the fundamental structure of knowledge in the subject field. The term 'religion' can be defined broadly to refer to beliefs and practices in relation to the transcendent, the sacred, the spiritual, or the ultimate dimensions of human life. Or it can be defined more narrowly as a term that embraces the many religious traditions, communities, and institutions in society. In either case, religion is an important aspect of human endeavour that pupils should learn about — both the general and the specific understandings. A programme in Religion Education must identify for pupils, and explore in a critical fashion, this significant and relevant field of knowledge.

28. In the process of exploring a field of knowledge, a programme in Religion Education develops ways of knowing that are consistent with constitutional guarantees of human and civil rights to freedom of religion, thought, and conscience. Religion Education allows for a free exploration of religious diversity in South Africa and the world, and is therefore consistent with and indeed promotes the freedom of religion. It does not seek to impose a unified, syncretistic or state religion, and does not proceed from or advance any of these positions. It is about a civic understanding of religion, which is compatible with all major religious traditions. The policy is about the equality of all religions before the law; whether all religions are equal and true in a religious or philosophical sense falls outside of the scope of this policy.

## Key Features of Religion Education

29. Firstly, Religion Education is educational. Knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the full extent of our rich and textured religious diversity should be reflected in the learning programmes of our schools. Religion in our education system could serve to promote particular interests, based on the still common conviction that the problems of our society stern from a loss of religious belief, which can only be corrected through one particular interpretation of spirituality. By contrast, we could reject any place for religion in education, by arguing that the mutual acceptance of our common humanity is the only solution for societal harmony. We believe we will do much better as a country if our pupils are exposed to a variety of religious and secular belief systems, in a well-informed manner, which gives rise to a genuine respect for the adherents and practices of all of these, without diminishing in any way the preferred choice of the pupil.

30. Second, Religion Education is education about diversity for a diverse society. As apartheid barriers dissolve, the classroom will increasingly become a space of linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity. Schools must create an overall environment – a social, intellectual, emotional, behavioural, organisational, and structural

environment - that engenders a sense of acceptance, security, and respect for pupils with differing values, cultural backgrounds, and religious traditions. Schools should also show an awareness and acceptance of the fact that values do not necessarily stem from religion, and that not all religious values are consistent with our Constitution. By teaching about religious and secular values in an open educational environment, schools must ensure that all pupils, irrespective of race, creed, sexual orientation, disability, language, gender, or class, feel welcome, emotionally secure, and appreciated.

31. Third, Religion Education is education not only about valuing traditions but also about the traditions and histories of values. Religions are an important, although not an exclusive source of moral values. We are all concerned about the general decline in moral standards in our country, and the high rates of crime, and the apparent lack of respect for human life, are worrying factors in this regard. We find ourselves in need of moral regeneration. For this to happen, the commitment of all people of good will is required. As systems for the transmission of values, religions are key resources for clarifying morals, ethics, and building regard for others. Religions embody values of justice and mercy, love and care, commitment, compassion, and co-operation. They chart profound ways of being human, and of relating to others and the world. Moral values are not the monopoly of religions, much less the exclusive property of any one religion. However, when Religion Education is given its rightful place in our education system, the important process of imparting moral values can be intensified through teaching and learning about religious and other value systems.

32. As a programme for both integration and specialisation, Religion Education will be introduced into various learning areas and subjects, especially Life Orientation, in both General and Further Education and Training. The teaching of Religion Education is encapsulated in the relevant outcome and assessment standards showing how the outcome is to be achieved in the Life Orientation learning area.

33. A new subject called Religious Studies shall also be introduced in the FET band for matriculation (or FETC) purposes, as an optional, specialised, and examinable subject, with a possible career orientation towards teaching, social work, community development, public service, and related vocations. This curriculum is still in development, and other subjects of religious specialisation, may be included from Grade 10-12.

## The Teaching of Religion Education

34. As an educational programme, Religion Education requires the training, commitment, and enthusiasm of professional educators. The teaching of Religion Education in schools is to be done by appropriately trained professional educators registered with the South African Council of Educators (SACE). Representatives of religious organisations who are registered with SACE could be engaged, and as with other learning areas, occasional guest facilitators from various religions may be utilised, provided that this is done on an equitable basis. Such guest facilitators need not be registered with SACE, since they and the class remain under the authority of the teacher. Religious organisations are therefore encouraged to explore ways in which schools, especially poorly resourced schools and those in remote areas, could also have access to such guest facilitators.

35. The teaching of Religion Education must be sensitive to religious interests by ensuring that individuals and groups are protected from ignorance, stereotypes, caricatures, and denigration. Professional educators will have to develop programmes in Religion Education that serve the educational mission of public schools in a democratic South Africa. Curriculum 2005 and the Revised National Curriculum Statement for Schools (Grades R -9) assumes that any educator, regardless of his or her personal religious orientation, is called upon to teach in a pluralistic public school in which pupils can be expected to belong to different religions. If called upon to do so, professional educators must accommodate this reality, in an impartial manner, regardless of their personal views. However, the utilisation of teachers in a school is managed by the school, and as with any other learning area, should take account of the interests, capabilities and sensitivities of each teacher.

36. The outcomes identified for Religion Education fit with the competences required of all teachers in public schools. The Norms and Standards for Educators[7] require all teachers to have the skills, values and attitudes related to a Community, Citizenship, and Pastoral Role. This includes the responsibility to "practice and promote a critical, committed, and ethical attitude towards developing a sense of respect and responsibility towards others." Religion education is therefore not the mere technical transmission of factual information; its comprehensive role is demonstrated in the teacher's reflexive, foundational, and practical competency to facilitate learning by:

    - Reflecting on ethical issues in religion, politics, human rights, and the environment.

    - Knowing about the principles and practices of the main religions of South Africa, the customs, values, and beliefs of the main cultures of South Africa, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

    - Knowing about ethical debates in religion, politics, economics, human rights, and the environment.

    - Understanding the impact of class, race, gender, and other identity-forming forces in learning.

    - Showing an appreciation of, and respect for, people of different values, beliefs, practices, and cultures.

    - Being able to respond to current social and educational problems with particular emphasis on the issues of violence, drug abuse, poverty, child and women abuse, HIV/AIDS, and environmental degradation.

    - Demonstrating caring, committed, and ethical professional behaviour and an understanding of education as dealing with the protection of children and the development of the whole person.

37. There is legitimate concern about the widespread 'religion illiteracy' found among teachers, who call for and deserve the support that will enable them to deal with religion in the classroom. Teachers do need access to textbooks, supplementary materials, handbooks, guidelines for teaching methods and student assessment, and

[7] Government Notice #82 published in Government Gazette 20844 of 4 February 2000

in-service training, that will allow them to build and sustain their professional competence and recognition as teachers in the subject. Guidelines and resources will be made available to assist teachers in dealing with issues of religion in the classroom, and religious organisations will be requested to assist in the training of teachers. In view of the serious backlog of trained religion educators, this aspect is also to be addressed in training serving teachers for the implementation of the Revised National Curriculum Statement.

38. Notwithstanding the difficulties, many teachers have already found creative ways to integrate the study of religion. Some have focused on the term 'religion' as an example of how concepts are formed in society more generally. In other cases, teachers have found creative, sensitive, and educationally responsible ways to include religious materials and perspectives in other learning areas, and the value of religion has been recognised for the teaching of themes in history, world history, language and literature, including the teaching of sacred texts as literature, art and art history, music, health education, and even science education.

39. Teachers can be assisted in developing effective teaching methods for Religion Education. International guidelines for meeting the challenges and avoiding the pitfalls of teaching Religion Education are available, which encourage teachers to adopt as a basic principle the distinction between teaching and preaching. A Religion Education lesson requires the same pedagogical standards of clarity of purpose, communication, interest, and enthusiasm, that represent effective teaching in other areas of the school curriculum.

40. Some teachers will adopt a cognitive approach to the subject, preferring a method of elucidation, designed to clarify the meaning of religious beliefs and practices in their contexts. In this method, pupils not only learn about the variety of religions, but they are enabled to make free and informed choices about religion in their personal lives. Other teachers may emphasise the more affective dimensions of the subject, and adopt an interactive approach to teaching that attempts to involve pupils in an exploration of the meaning and significance of religion.

41. Since Religion Education must be facilitated by trained and registered teachers, Higher Education Institutions are called upon to provide appropriate training for prospective teachers by introducing suitable courses in the study of religion and religions as part of teacher education programmes. Such teacher education programmes in the study of religion and religions should be of two types:

    - General basic training in the study of religion, with attention to both content and teaching methods, applicable to all prospective and serving educators in both the GET and FET bands; and

    - Specialised training for Religious Studies teachers in the FET band.

42. With Religion Education as part of a formal, examinable learning area of the curriculum[8] cooperation between universities and schools goes well beyond training teachers. The academic community can help to advise on the coherence and integrity of the study of religion as a field of study, where, as in any field, differences in theory and method can be found. Greater interest and involvement in teacher education by

[8] National Curriculum Statement and Assessment Standards for Life Orientation

departments of Religious Studies is necessary to translate the study of religion into a viable academic programme.

## Learning Religion Education

43. Learning about religion, religions, and religious diversity serves important educational outcomes. The National Qualifications Framework has articulated a vision for education in South Africa in support of a "prosperous, truly united, democratic, and internationally competitive country with literate, creative, and critical citizens leading productive, self- fulfilled lives in a country free of violence, discrimination, and prejudice". This statement of educational purpose calls for the empowerment of pupils through literacy, creativity, and critical reflection.

44. The Revised National Curriculum Statements of Curriculum 2005 understand literacy to include cultural literacy, ethical literacy, and religion literacy; creativity to include developing capacities for expanding imagination, making connections, and dealing with cultural difference and diversity; and it understands critical reflection to include comparison, cultural analysis, ethical debate, and the formulation and clarification of values. These capacities are captured in the outcome statements and assessment standards of the curriculum, and are obligatory for all pupils.

45. Religion Education provides a programmatic focus for some of these educational outcomes. The Learning Area statement for Life Orientation directs that pupils should develop the capacity to respect the rights of others and to appreciate cultural diversity and different belief systems. In the Foundation Phase, pupils may learn about the differences and similarities in symbols, diet, clothing, sacred space and ways of worship of a range of belief systems, while in the Intermediate Phase this is taken further through learning about values, festivals, rituals, customs and sacred spaces of different belief systems. In the Senior Phase they learn about how spiritual philosophies are linked to community and social values and practices. Opportunities and possibilities for further development of the principles and practices related to religion education are also found in other learning areas.

## Materials for Religion Education

46. Teaching materials for Religion Education in the General and Further Education and Training bands shall be developed as a matter of urgency through the collective effort of provincial authorities, learning area committees, tertiary institutions, publishers, materials developers, religious bodies and researchers in religion education.

47. As a call to action, Tirisano requires the combined efforts of everyone involved in education to work towards preserving our heritage, respecting our diversity, and building our capacity for the future, and to this end we invite representatives of religious organisations to voluntarily contribute to the development and distribution of suitable materials for use at all ages. The Standing Advisory Committee for Religion in Education will advise on the procurement of Learning and Teaching Support materials, to ensure that only credible texts with correct information are used.

## Contents and Assessment of Religion Education programmes

48. Despite the significant attention paid to Religion Education, it is only a small component of one out of eight Learning Areas that are studied in the General Education and Training band. A learning programme in Religion Education, if offered as a discrete module, would constitute no more than a few lessons in each year. However the principle of curriculum integration would suggest that the matter would not usually be dealt with in such a way. The relevant Assessment Standards for the Religion Education aspect of the National Curriculum Statement (Grades R-9) are attached as an Appendix.

49. The Department of Education will establish representative voluntary bodies to develop illustrative learning programmes in Religion Education for different levels. While firm on the principles and parameters of Religion Education, which require attention to the rich variety of religions in South Africa and the world, any learning programme must allow space for dealing with local and regional concerns, and be in accordance with the ethos of the school.

50. Like any other learning programme, Religion Education must be developmental in design. The reality of religious diversity is already to be found in the majority of schools in South Africa, and most pupils are exposed to it from a very young age. Research has concluded that Religion Education can be introduced at an early age, in ways that are appropriate to the development of pupils. With an age-appropriate emphasis placed on living together, and without any overt or covert pressures, religion education can start at a very early stage. Pupils in the Foundation Phase could begin a study of religious diversity by exploring the more tangible forms of religion, the observable aspects of religious diversity found in churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and other places of gathering for religious life.

51. In the Intermediate Phase, pupils should begin studying the basic component phenomena of religion, such as stories, songs, sacred places, founders, rituals, and festivals, with illustrations drawn from various religious traditions and communities in South Africa and the world. In the senior phase programmes in Religion Education could introduce the integration of these component parts of religion as a forerunner to a Religious Studies programme in the Further Education and Training band.

52. A programme of Religious Studies should introduce pupils to the kinds of critical thinking about significant issues of personal morality and social ethics that are often associated with religion. If the structure of knowledge in the field is organised in this way, or in some other developmentally coherent way, the study of religion can be an important subject for cultivating significant knowledge and skills within the total curriculum.

53. A Religion Education programme does not assess a student's faith. Religion Education must be tested, examined, and assessed by the same methods used in other Learning Areas. Religion Education has to teach pupils the same abilities in observation, reading, writing, and thinking that apply in other areas of the curriculum. Accordingly, assessment of student performance must be conducted on the same basis as other learning areas, in relation to the prescribed Assessment Standards, which show how the outcome is to be achieved and measured in the different grades and phases.

## Religious Instruction

54. Religious instruction is understood to include instruction in a particular faith or belief, with a view to the inculcation of adherence to that faith or belief.

55. Religious instruction of this sort is primarily the responsibility of the home, the family, and the religious community, and more needs to be done to strengthen this role, in place of the school. Religious Instruction would in most cases be provided by clergy, or other persons accredited by faith communities to do so. Religious Instruction may not be part of the formal school programme, as constituted by the National Curriculum Statement, although schools are encouraged to allow the use of their facilities for such programmes, in a manner that does not interrupt or detract from the core educational purposes of the school. This could include voluntary gatherings and meetings of religious associations during break times.

56. Schools currently make provision for important holy days, in regard to the setting of examinations and tests, to ensure that pupils are not prejudiced by their attendance at religious observances. Similarly, the possibility of a "release time" for pupils to attend Religious Observances or Instruction off the school property may be considered by schools, but in each case provision must be made to catch up any loss of teaching and learning time.

57. This policy encourages the provision of religious instruction by religious bodies and other accredited groups outside the formal school curriculum on school premises, provided that opportunities be afforded in an equitable manner to all religious bodies represented in a school, that no denigration or caricaturing of any other religion take place, and that attendance at such instruction be voluntary. Persons offering Religious Instruction would do so under the authority of the religious body, and would not be required to be registered with the South African Council for Educators.

## Religious Observances

58. In accordance with the Constitution, the South African Schools Act, and rules made by the appropriate authorities, the Governing Bodies of public schools may make their facilities available for religious observances, in the context of free and voluntary association, and provided that facilities are made available on an equitable basis.

59. There are various types of religious observance implied in this instance:

- voluntary public occasions, which make use of school facilities, for a religious service on a day of worship or rest;[9]
- voluntary occasions when the school community (teachers and pupils) gather or a religious observance;[10]
- observances held in a voluntary gathering of pupils and/or teachers during a school break; and

[9] Section 15(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa

[10] Section 7 of the Schools Act and Section 15(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa

- an observance which may be ongoing, and entail other dimensions such as dress, prayer times and diets, which must be respected and accommodated in a manner agreed upon by the school and the relevant faith authorities.

60. Voluntary religious observances in which the public participates should be encouraged. Although such religious observances take place on the school property, they are not part of the official educational function of the public school.

61. School Governing Bodies are required to determine the nature and content of and religious observances for teachers and pupils, such that coherence and alignment with this policy and applicable legislation is ensured. It may also determine that a policy of no religious observances be followed. Where religious observances are held, these may be at any time determined by the school, and may be part of a school assembly. However an assembly is not necessarily to be seen as the only occasion for religious observance, which may take place at other times of the day, and in other ways, including specific dress requirements or dietary injunctions. Where a religious observance is organised, as an official part of the school day, it must accommodate and reflect the multi-religious nature of the country in an appropriate manner.

62. Appropriate and equitable means of acknowledging the multi-religious nature of a school community may include the following:

    - The separation of learners according to religion, where the observance takes place outside of the context of a school assembly, and with equitably supported opportunities for observance by all faiths, and appropriate use of the time for those holding secular or humanist beliefs;

    - Rotation of opportunities for observance, in proportion to the representation of different religions in the school;

    - Selected readings from various texts emanating from different religions;

    - The use of a universal prayer; or

    - A period of silence.

    Other forms of equitable treatment may be developed which are consistent with this policy and applicable legislation. Where the segregation of pupils is contemplated, a school must consider and mitigate the impact of peer pressure on children, and its negative influence on the willingness of children to be identified as "different".

63. A school assembly has the potential for affirming and celebrating unity in diversity, and should be used for this purpose. Public schools may not violate the religious freedom of pupils and teachers by imposing religious uniformity on a religiously diverse school population in school assemblies. Where a religious observance is included in a school assembly, pupils may be excused on grounds of conscience from attending a religious observance component, and equitable arrangements must be made for these pupils.

64. Since the state is not a religious organisation, theological body, or inter-faith forum, the state cannot allow unfair access to the use its resources to propagate any

particular religion or religions. The state must maintain parity of esteem with respect to religion, religious or secular beliefs in all of its public institutions, including its public schools.

65. This policy provides a framework within which Religious Observances could be organised at public schools. Schools and teachers should take cognisance of the opportunities that the framework offers for the development of ethical, moral, and civic values. The policy does not prescribe specific ways in which religious observances at public schools must be organised, and encourages creative and innovative approaches in this area. It is our hope that schools will make use of these opportunities.

## Conclusion

66. This policy firstly establishes a broad, religion-friendly basis for Religion Education, taken care of by professional teachers. It also encourages the equitable practice of Religious Observances at school, and the involvement of clergy in the extra-curricular Religious Instruction of pupils, and as guest facilitators for Religion Education. In this manner the complementary, cooperative principle as regards the relationship between the state and organised religion is given substance in education, and optimised in the best interests of both spheres.

67. Our country has sufficient expertise and energy to meet the challenge of developing a distinctively South African approach to Religion and Education. As a matter of priority, we must deploy our intellect, imagination, talent, and human capacity in the work of creating and sustaining the relationship between Religion and Education.

68. Religion can contribute to creating an integrated educational community that affirms unity in diversity. In providing a unified framework for teaching and learning about religion, religions, and religious diversity, this policy on Religion and Education does not suggest that all religions are the same. Nor does it try to select from different religious traditions to try and build a new unified religion. The policy is not a project in social or religious engineering designed to establish a uniformity of religious beliefs and practices. The policy does not promote religious relativism, religious syncretism, or any other religious position in relation to the many religions in South Africa and the world. By creating a free, open space for exploration, the policy demonstrates respect for the distinctive character of different ways of life.

69. Like the public school, the policy on Religion and Education is designed for diversity. As we overcome the entrenched separations of the past, we are finding new ways to celebrate our different linguistic, cultural, and religious resources. We must move decisively beyond the barriers erected by apartheid; beyond the shields provided by ignorance of the other, which invariably breeds suspicion, hatred and even violence. It is time for all people of goodwill to know and understand the diversity of religious and other worldviews that are held by their fellow citizens. Every child has the right to quality education in this most important area of human development and social relations. By working together, everyone involved in education - teachers and pupils, principals and administrators, trade unions and professional associations, parents and communities - can benefit from the inter-religious knowledge and understanding cultivated through Religion and Education.

70. Our policy for religion in education, therefore, is designed to support unity without uniformity and diversity without divisiveness. Our public schools cannot establish the uniformity of religious education in a single faith or the divisiveness of religious education through separate programmes for a prescribed set of faiths. Neither course would advance unity in diversity. In any event, as we have established, our schools are not in the business of privileging, prescribing, or promoting any religion. Schools have a different responsibility in providing opportunities for teaching and learning about our religious diversity and our common humanity.

71. Although the goal of unity in diversity must be achieved within the formal learning programmes of the curriculum, our policy also has clear implications for the role of religion in the broader life of a public school. In particular, our policy clarifies the role that might be given to Religious Observances, and to Religious Instruction. This policy for Religion and Education upholds the principles of a cooperative model for relations between religion and the state, by maintaining a constitutional impartiality in the formal activities of the school, but encouraging voluntary interaction outside of this.

DEFINITIONS

*Religion* is used to describe the comprehensive and fundamental orientation in the world, mostly with regard to ideas of divinity, spiritual and non-secular beliefs and requiring ultimate commitment, including (but not restricted to) organised forms of religion and certain worldviews, as well as being used collectively to refer to those organisations which are established in order to protect and promote these beliefs.

*Confessional or sectarian approaches* are used to describe those approaches to religion which take as a starting point a particular set of beliefs, or a particular perspective informed by these beliefs, and advance a position that is narrowly based on these beliefs and perspectives.

*Religion Education* describes a set of curriculum outcomes which define what a pupil should know about religion. Further definition is provided in paragraphs 17 to 19 of the policy.

*Religious Observances* are those activities and behaviours which recognise and express the views, beliefs and commitments of a particular religion, and may include gatherings of adherents, prayer times, dress and diets.

*Religious instruction* refers to a programme of instruction which is aimed at providing information regarding a particular set of religious beliefs with a view to promoting adherence thereto.

*Religious Studies* is a subject which is being proposed for the Further Education and Training band (Grades 10-12), in which pupils undertake the study of religion and religions in general, with the possibility of specialisation in one or more in that context.

*The School Day* entails that portion of each day in which it is compulsory for teachers and pupils to be at school. The seven hours of contact time that is expected of teachers is part of the school day, but the latter also includes breaks and compulsory activities, including assemblies, designated extra —mural activities and possible disciplinary sanctions. No pupil or teacher may be absent from school during the school day, without permission.

# Appendix to the Policy on Religion and Education

## The National Curriculum Statement and Religion Education.

Religion Education forms one part of the Life Orientation Learning Area of the National Curriculum Statement. This Learning Area has five broad Outcomes:

- Health Promotion
- Social Development
- Personal Development
- Physical Development and Movement, and
- An Orientation to the World of Work (Senior phase only).

Religion Education is contained within Outcome 2, in relation to Social Development, which requires that:

> *The learner will be able to demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to constitutional rights and responsibilities, and to show an understanding of diverse cultures and religions.*

The Assessment Standards for this part of the Learning Area are as follows:

| Grade | We know this when the learner |
|---|---|
| Grade R | Identifies and names symbols linked to own religion. |
| Grade 1 | Matches symbols associated with a range of religions in South Africa. |
| Grade 2 | Describes important days from diverse religions. |
| Grade 3 | Discusses diet, clothing and decorations in a variety of religions. |
| Grade 4 | Discusses significant places and buildings in a variety of religions. |
| Grade 5 | Discusses festivals and customs from a variety of religions. |
| Grade 6 | Discusses the dignity of the person in a variety of religions. |
| Grade 7 | Explains the role of oral traditions and scriptures in a range of the world's religions. |
| Grade 8 | Discusses the contributions of organisations from various religions to social development. |
| Grade 9 | Reflects on and discusses the contributions of various religions in promoting peace. |