

Tapu

Religious Studies Teachers Association
of Aotearoa New Zealand



Newsletter (7) July 2014

God is that
to which
your heart
clings and
entrusts
itself.

Martin Luther
King

Welcome

We welcome to our mailing list Sharon Ross Ensor, who this year has taken up national responsibility for Religious Education in Presbyterian schools, and Anne van Gend, who has similar responsibility for Anglican schools. Sharon is based in Wellington, and Anne is based in Havelock North. We have enjoyed meeting them both, and know that they will follow the association, and Religious Studies, with interest.

A Definition

In a recent email to a senior secondary school student who was looking at teacher training options, Chris Duthie-Jung (NCRS) made the following point:

Religious Studies in NZ at the tertiary level usually refers to the external or phenomenological study of religion - i.e. it is a look at all sorts of religion but from outside.

Therefore Religious Studies achievement standards do not have to be used simply in Religious Education programmes—some schools, for instance non-Church schools, use Religious Studies standards in Sociology or History courses, for instance.

For those teaching Religious Education in Church schools a qualification in Theology or Religious Education is likely to be the most useful preparation for subject teaching, though Religious Studies programmes can be of great interest, and of some use. Most universities, in their programme of teacher training, also have a Catechetical Studies course available. This is run by staff trained by The Catholic Institute, but access to it is not restricted to people who wish to teach in Catholic schools.

Teachers in non-Church schools would find Religious Studies courses in universities very useful.

Schools which teach Religious Education will have a faith-specific curriculum, and will teach more than what is needed for particular Religious Studies achievement standards.

Religious Studies Exemplars

Understandably, some of you have asked why the Association does not provide Religious Studies exemplars. The answer is, regrettably, very simple. NZQA has responsibility for any exemplars, and in fact it does not wish to provide exemplars as these are then open to misuse.

PTO

NZQA believes that exemplars make particular standards unfit for use, because “model answers” have been provided. It says that teachers should read the moderators’ reports, paying attention to the occasional 3-4 line chunks from particular assignments.

Once again, we would suggest that you contact a school near you to ask them what they are doing, to get advice, and to share work with them. Or perhaps you could phone and ask another local school if they would like to consider some peer review.

Religious Studies Achievement Standards and Literacy Credits

You will probably be aware that NZQA sent out a message deleting some of the Religious Studies Achievement Standards from the list of Standards which “count” for literacy credits.

NCRS is taking this up with NZQA on behalf of the Association, and on behalf of any schools using Religious Studies Achievement Standards. We will keep you updated.

Scholarship in Religious Studies

The scholarship lists were up for revision earlier this year, with a pretty short time frame for applications. Some teachers asked that we put forward a case for including Religious Studies in the list. At the time of the review of the Religious Studies Achievement Standards in June 2013 there was no consensus around having external examinations (required for Scholarship). While there is currently anecdotal evidence that some schools want Scholarship, other schools are not interested. We chose to go slowly, to give everyone time to further embed the Version 2 Standards, and the two new Standards. and wait for the next round of revisions, which we believe will be in 2016. Although some schools have very well qualified staff, others are still building up the qualifications of their teachers and departments’ confidence in task writing and marking. we believe that going a little bit more slowly will benefit the subject area. Individual teachers or schools were able to put in an application.

We will be investigating the potential benefits of gaining Scholarship in Religious Studies as an option, and will ensure that we keep you informed. We will be encouraging you to indicate your interest in the 2016 Achievement Standards review, in order to send a clear message at that point that the sector wants and can support Scholarship. Consultation on Scholarship will need to happen with every school that might be interested, including schools which may not currently be on the mailing list of the association.

It is all a matter of readiness—we are not yet well

positioned to action a thorough and well thought through application. By 2016 we will be in a very different position.

Chris Duthie-Jung is fronting this work. Contact him at c.duthie-jung@tci.ac.nz if you want to follow up on this.

Subject Association Forum

Once again, we thank PPTA for organising this forum, which continues to be very valuable. There is no other way in which the voice of all subject teachers can be heard.

The matter of supporting material for Achievement Standards was raised, and teachers noted that so much of their work ends up being extra and unpaid—the generosity of teachers working to provide information that will be used across schools is considerable, and perhaps it is not always appreciated. Local subject associations thrive in some areas, and for some subjects, but not everywhere and for all subjects.

We are aware that a quarterly newsletter is an inadequate form of communication. Soon Network for Learning’s Pond will be up and running (currently it is available, as I’m sure you know, in a germinal form, but much more subject input will begin in a few months, when the initial bugs have been ironed out). Then there will be much scope for sharing information. We expect that there will be an area for Religious Education and/or Religious Studies. Some defining work is going on.

Again, Chris Duthie-Jung, c.duthie-jung@tci.ac.nz, is the contact for this.

A thought for the day from the Buddha:
“Teach this triple truth to all: A generous heart, kind speech, and a life of service and compassion are the things which renew humanity.” It is salutary how these thoughts are echoed in all the world’s great religions.

