

Recognition of Qualifications to Teach Catholic Religious Education in Catholic Primary Schools in the Island of Ireland

Introduction

The Certificate programmes in Catholic Religious Education and Religious Studies provided by a number of Centres in Ireland (North and South) and recognised by the Episcopal Conference (Section C), offer pre-service and qualified teachers foundational knowledge and skills for communicating the Catholic faith to children in Primary schools. These programmes enable schools and their teachers to address the many spiritual and religious opportunities and challenges facing pupils in contemporary Ireland.

The programme presents a summary of the Catholic faith which enables teachers to teach it in a child-centred, developmentally appropriate manner while simultaneously exploring issues surrounding Catholic identity, inter-culturalism, religious diversity and the importance of promoting respect for all pupils.

In outlining its Specific Aims, the 1999 Curriculum states that one of its purposes is to “*enable children to develop spiritual, moral and religious values*” (p.34). The Curriculum also emphasizes that among its general objectives it intends to develop a knowledge and understanding of the pupil’s “*own religious traditions and beliefs, with respect for the religious traditions and beliefs of others*” (p. 36). Religious Education makes a significant contribution to the holistic development of the primary school child and enables the child to develop ethically, spiritually and religiously. The 1999 Curriculum also states:

“In seeking to develop the full potential of the individual, the curriculum takes into account the child’s affective, aesthetic, spiritual, moral and religious needs...Religious education specifically enables the child to develop spiritual and moral values and to come to a knowledge of God” (p. 58).

Reflecting the provisions of the Irish Constitution, especially articles 42 and 44, as well as the 1998 Education Act, the Religious Education Programme will be taught in accordance with the characteristic spirit or ethos of the school. Catholic Religious Education nurtures the faith of children and is grounded in the person of Jesus Christ, in scripture and in the teaching of the Catholic Church (CCC5). It aims to initiate children into the fullness of Christian life and to enable them to flourish as human beings. Catholic Religious Education explicitly supports and supplements other programmes in the school curriculum such as SPHE, RSE and Intercultural Guidelines (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Irish National Teachers’ Organisation, Department of Education and Skills). The Religious Education Programme is taught in a manner that complements other curricular areas such as SESE (History, Geography, Science), Visual Art, Music, Drama, Literature and SPHE. It also seeks to acquaint students with the inclusive, ecumenical and interreligious perspectives of the Second Vatican Council.

In this way the Religious Education programme in Catholic schools plays a pivotal role in the integration of all subjects in the primary school curriculum by promoting the holistic development of pupils: physical; ethical; spiritual; religious. This is done in a manner that mirrors the provisions of the Irish Constitution, the Rules for National Schools, the 1998 Education Act, and the CPSMA Handbook.

The word Catholic comes from the Greek adverbial phrase *kath'holou*, and means 'according to the whole', with connotations of inclusivity, universality and completeness. Accordingly Catholic education seeks to promote knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition while it simultaneously acknowledges, welcomes and accommodates pupils of other faiths and other traditions. The Catholic school is committed to the promotion of equality, respect and inclusivity as well as serving the needs of those on the margins of society. It also recognizes that faith is always a free act and cannot be imposed. In addition it respects the right of every child to religious freedom and choice which has its foundation in the dignity of the human person (*Dignitatis Humanae* Par 2). The Catholic school particularly acknowledges that parents are the primary educators and therefore seeks to respect their wishes.

In Catholic schools Religious Education integrates the many branches of learning within the 1999 Curriculum into a multi-coloured mosaic; it embraces diversity as a Christian and educational value; it fosters respect for differences in culture and religion on the basis of the dignity of every human being, and it explicitly promotes a spirit of fairness, a concern for all who are in need, and the value of forgiveness in relationships.

General Principles:

- Religious Education is a curriculum area in the Primary School Curriculum, both in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland.
- Religious Education and ethical formation contributes to the integrated learning that is encouraged across the curriculum for Primary school children.
- In both jurisdictions the content of the curriculum for Religious Education remains the responsibility of the different Church authorities/patron bodies.
- The academic freedom of the various Universities and Colleges of Education providing teacher education programmes is an important value, allowing Colleges to determine how they respond to the requirement to address Religious Education as part of their B.Ed. (or equivalent qualification) and whatever Certificate (or equivalent qualification) they make available in Theological or Religious Studies.
- The study themes below, required to teach Religious Education in a Catholic School, are to be considered interactive and complementary rather than isolated and should be studied in a manner that encourages integration.
- The requirements set out below are effective from September 2011 forward, without prejudice to those who qualified as primary teachers prior to this date in any of the approved centres listed in Section C of this document.

A/ Undergraduate:

For a teacher with an initial teacher education degree to be recognised to teach in a Catholic school they should have 120 contact hours* in the area of Religious Education, to include an exploration of Catechesis and Catholic Religious Education, (hours of Religious or Theological subjects, in the B.Ed. or other degree), and of Religious or Theological Studies (taken in an additional Certificate). The prescribed areas for study include:

I. Religious Education:

Demonstrate knowledge, understanding and appreciation in a manner that indicates a professional approach to:

1. The rationale and aims of Religious Education in Catholic Primary schools in Ireland, including an understanding of the development of the child's linguistic, psychological, spiritual, ethical and moral readiness to engage progressively with their religious tradition
2. The Religious Education and ethical formation of Catholic pupils as set out in the *National Directory for Catechesis* and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
3. The current syllabus/curriculum in Religious Education designated by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference
4. The programme(s) and/or materials approved for use in Catholic Schools
5. The vision of the person, community and civil society embraced by the Catholic Church including the distinctive features of Catholic Education
6. Short and long term planning for the teaching of Religious Education in Catholic Primary schools in the Island of Ireland.

II. Theology:

Demonstrate knowledge, understanding and appreciation in the following fields of study:

1. God; Faith, Creed and Trinity
2. Jesus Christ and discipleship
3. Scripture
4. Prayer, Sacraments and Liturgy
5. Ethics, Social Justice and Spirituality and Human Rights
6. Church and Mission, Ecumenism and Inter-religious Dialogue

These themes allow for inclusion of many current issues, such as social justice, peace and reconciliation, gender, ethics, ecology, equality, disability, sexuality, racial, cultural and religious diversity, citizenship.

** The hours enumerated in this document are the number of hours recognised by the Catechetics Council. However some centres of provision offer more than the stipulated hours and this is to be encouraged.*

B/ Postgraduate:

For postgraduate students to be recognised to teach in a Catholic school in Ireland they should have 50 contact hours* at postgraduate level in the area of Religious Education, to include exploration of Catechesis and Catholic Religious Education and Religious or Theological Studies (hours of Religious or Theological subjects, in the Graduate Diploma. or other degree). Areas to be studied should include:

I. Religious Education:

Demonstrate knowledge, understanding and appreciation in a manner that indicates a professional approach to:

1. The rationale, aims, and short and long term planning involved in Religious Education in Catholic Primary schools in Ireland
2. The *National Directory for Catechesis*, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the syllabus/curriculum in Religious Education designated by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference and the programme(s) and/or materials approved for use in Catholic Schools
3. The vision of the person, community and civil society embraced by the Catholic Church including the distinctive features of Catholic Education.

11. Theology

Demonstrate knowledge, understanding and appreciation in the following fields of study:

1. God; Faith, Creed and Trinity
2. Jesus Christ and Scripture
3. A minimum of one of following four modules (depending on the Provider and its resources):
 - Prayer, Sacraments and Liturgy
 - Spirituality and Morality
 - Church and Mission and Ecumenism
 - World Religions

** The hours enumerated in this document are the number of hours recognised by the Catechetics Council. However some centres of provision offer more than the stipulated hours and this is to be encouraged.*

C/ Qualifications

The Catechetics Council currently recognises the following providers of this programme in Religious Education, or its equivalent, as outlined above:

- Froebel Certificate in Religious Education
- Coláiste Mhuire, Marino Institute of Education Certificate in Religious Education
- Saint Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Certificate in Religious Studies
- Mary Immaculate College Certificate in Religious Education
- St. Mary's University College, Belfast, Certificate in Religious Education
- University of Coleraine, Certificate in Religious Education
- St. Angela's College, Sligo.

To ensure that the highest academic standards prevail, all Certificate programmes will be reviewed by suitably qualified external examiners, appointed in accordance with the academic procedures in each of the respective Colleges. In the case of new or reaccredited programmes, an independent assessor, nominated by the Catechetical Council, should be consulted and may advise on changes to ensure conformity with the requirements of this document. The external assessor will report to the Catechetics Council on completion of the consultation.

It is envisaged that this Certificate should be located on Level 7 of the NQAI framework, Special Purpose Certificate Award (24-30 Credits). Further consultation and dialogue needs to take place in this regard.

Institutions wishing to apply for recognition of their programmes, must send details of their programmes (course outlines, learning outcomes, contact hours, and bibliographies) to the **Council for Catechetics of the Irish Episcopal Conference**.

For further information please contact:

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