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## GOVERNMENT NOTICE

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### DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

No. 916

23 June 2003

#### NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY ACT, 1996 (NO. 27 OF 1996)

#### CALL FOR COMMENT ON THE DRAFT NATIONAL POLICY ON RELIGION AND EDUCATION

The Minister of Education hereby publishes draft national policy on Religion and Education in terms of section 3(4) of the National Education Policy Act, 1996 (No. 27 of 1996).

Comments are invited from interested parties on the draft policy in the Schedule and should reach the Department not later than 18 July 2003.

Comments should be directed to the Director-General, Private Bag X895, Pretoria, 0001, for attention: Ms Sue Opperman. The comments may also be faxed to (012) 323 4751 or sent by E-mail to [Opperman.S@doe.gov.za](mailto:Opperman.S@doe.gov.za).

The name, address, telephone number and fax number of the person, governing body or organisation responsible for submitting comments must also be provided.

**PROFESSOR KADER ASMAL, MP  
MINISTER OF EDUCATION**

**Draft Policy on  
RELIGION AND EDUCATION**

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## **Introduction by the Minister of Education**

There has been much debate about this policy on Religion and Education. This is inevitable, and constitutes a healthy dialogue. We should be proud that as South Africans we can debate religious matters in a civilised manner, and without threats. In the end, I believe we have reached a level of consensus about the relationship between religion and education. It is not a complete consensus, and it is unlikely to ever be, given the extreme positions of some on either side of the debate. There are those who would wish every school to be a church school, and there are others who have argued for the complete exclusion of religion from schools, as in the United States and France. Neither of these can be accommodated.

The policy must be an unfolding one; one that takes shape in communities, and over time. History has shown that religious determinism has never succeeded, and nobody should ever try to take away or replace a person's religion. But that is not the issue in this policy. What we are doing through the policy is to extend the concept of equity to the combination of religion and education, in a way which celebrates the religious diversity of our land. We do not impose any narrow prescriptions; the policy is a broad framework within which people of goodwill will work out their own approaches.

Because of the significant interest in this policy, there has been an unparalleled process of consultation. We have spoken with religious leaders of all persuasions, through the Ministerial and Advisory Committees on Religion, as well as with the President's National Religious Leaders Forum. We have consulted key constituencies in education, such as the unions, and school governing body associations. And we have spoken with the public, through many media debates. This is the final stage of formal consultation with the public.

In the absence of a framework on Religion and Education, some things have indeed gone wrong, and children have been unfairly discriminated against on the basis of religious beliefs. This is unacceptable, and therefore we are keen to put in place the policy without further delay, to ensure that our educational institutions attend to the spiritual dimensions of our society.

This policy has been now approved by the Council of Education Ministers for public release. I therefore commend to you this policy, which I trust will bring greater conceptual clarity and

certainty within the public debate. By gazetting the policy, I hope it will be widely read and discussed, to the benefit of all involved, especially our children.

I therefore invite comments from the public, all of which will be seriously considered. I ask that they be brief and to the point, and also that any arguments accept as a basis that we live in a democratic state, which has adopted a view of the world in its Constitution.

If you do decide to respond to the policy, and make some suggestions for changes, which I would welcome, I ask that you ensure you know exactly what the policy proposes, before you make your voice heard. Comments which show a lack of knowledge about the policy are not helpful.

I look forward to the final adoption of this policy, and to a more equitable approach to religion in all our education institutions.

Professor Kader Asmal, MP

Minister of Education

20 June 2003

## 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. In recognising the particular value of the rich and diverse religious heritage of our country, we identify the distinctive contribution that education can make to teaching and learning about religion, and 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 children 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 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 substantial communities of faith. This positive neutrality carries a profound appreciation of spirituality and religion in its many manifestations, as reflected by the

deference to God (also referred to as Nkosi, Morena, Mudzimu and Hosi) in the preamble to our Constitution<sup>1</sup>.

### **Background to the policy on Religion and Education**

6. This Policy for Religion and Education is the final result of many years of research and consultation. This commenced with the National Education Policy Investigation of the early 1990s, was discussed 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 Ministerial Workgroup on Religious 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 now 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 civic values.
8. To achieve these goals, the relationship between religion and education must be guided by the following principles:
  - Policy for the role of religion in education in South Africa 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 spirituality, 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 community that affirms unity in diversity.

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<sup>1</sup> The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996)



- Teaching about religion, religions, and religious diversity needs to be facilitated by trained professionals, and programmes in Religion Education must be supported by appropriate teaching materials and 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 variety of religious traditions, including Christianity, indigenous African, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Rastafarianism, Bahai, and others that have established strong and vibrant constituencies. 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<sup>2</sup> 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 the state<sup>3</sup> from unfair discrimination on grounds that include religion, belief, and conscience. Protected from any discriminatory practices based on religion, citizens are thereby free from any religious coercion that might be implied by the state.

13. The South African Schools Act<sup>4</sup> 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 core values of a democratic society. 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, are responsible for 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 learners into any particular belief or religion.

<sup>2</sup> Section 15(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996)

<sup>3</sup> In Section 9(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996)

<sup>4</sup> Act 94 of 1996

*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 learners, 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.
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<sup>5</sup>. In 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<sup>6</sup> are required to achieve the minimum outcomes for Religion Education

### **Religion Education**

17. Religion Education is an existing curricular programme with clear 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 objectives of other learning areas, and like other learning areas in the curriculum, 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,

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<sup>5</sup> Section 9(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996)

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 learners 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, and ethical dimensions of learners. The unique characteristics of the various learning areas, learning fields and subjects position each to provide more emphasis on particular dimensions of learner 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 learner development. Programmes for Religion Education should purposefully pursue the moral and ethical development of children, whilst they learn in a factual way about the various religions, beliefs, world-views and philosophies which exist.

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<sup>6</sup> As provided for in Section 7 of the South African Schools Act

21. When we provide our learners 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, learners 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, learners 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 learners, 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, 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, like politics, economics, or literature, which all learners 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 learners new insights into both. It can facilitate the development of both empathetic appreciation and critical analysis. It can teach learners 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 learners about the role of religion in history, society, and the world, a unified, multi-tradition programme in the study of religion can 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 learners to develop a disciplined imagination that will empower them to recognise a common humanity within religious diversity. Religion Education creates a context in which learners 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, like politics, economics and literature, is an important aspect of human endeavour that children should learn about. A programme in Religion Education must identify for learners, and explore, a 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.

#### 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. Until now, religion in our education system has largely served to promote sectarian religious interests, based on the conviction that the problems of our society stem from a loss of religious belief that could only be corrected if one particular truth was accepted as the norm. By contrast, others have rejected any place for religion in education by arguing that the mutual acceptance of our common humanity was the only solution for societal harmony. We will do much better as a country if our learners are exposed to a variety of belief systems, in a well-informed manner, that gives rise to a genuine respect for adherents of these various belief systems.
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 learners 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. By teaching about religious and other values in an open educational environment, schools must ensure that all learners, 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 traditions 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 shall be developed in both General and Further Education and Training. Religion Education shall be introduced into various learning areas and subjects, especially Life Orientation, in each of these bands. The teaching of religion education is encapsulated in an appropriate outcome and assessment standards showing how the outcome is to be achieved in the Life Orientation learning area.
33. Religion Education in the form of a new subject called Religious Studies, shall also be introduced in the FET band for matriculation purposes, as an optional, specialised, and examinable subject, with a possible career orientation towards teaching, social work, community development, public service, and related vocations.

#### 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 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. Religious organisations are therefore encouraged to explore ways in which poorly resourced schools, especially 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, and 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 learners can be expected to belong to different religions. Professional educators must accommodate this reality, regardless of their personal views.

36. The outcomes identified for Religion Education fit with the competences required of all teachers in public schools. The Norms and Standards for Educators<sup>7</sup> 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

<sup>7</sup> Government Notice #82 published in Government Gazette 20844 of 4 February 2000

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 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 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, learners 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 learners 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 a distinct, examinable subject in the curriculum, 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 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 learners 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. All of these are captured in the outcome statements and assessment standards of the curriculum.

45. Religion Education provides a programmatic focus for some of these educational outcomes. The Learning Area statement for Life Orientation directs that learners should develop the capacity to respect the rights of others and to appreciate cultural diversity and different belief systems. In the Foundation Phase, learners 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 GET and FET bands shall be developed as a matter of urgency through the collective effort of provincial authorities, learning area committees, tertiary institutions, publishers, materials developers 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.

### 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.
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.
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 learners 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 learners. 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. Learners 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, learners 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 disciplined study of a variety of religious traditions in the Further Education and Training band.
52. Finally, at senior secondary level, courses in Religion Education can introduce learners 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, Religion Education 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 learners 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. Religious instruction would in most cases be provided by clergy, or other persons accredited by the faith communities to do so. Religious Instruction cannot be part of the formal school programme, 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 business of the school.
56. This policy encourages the provision of religious instruction by religious bodies outside the formal school curriculum on school premises, provided that such opportunity be available 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.

### **Religious Observances**

57. In accordance with the Constitution and the South African Schools Act, the Governing

Bodies of public schools may make their facilities available for religious observances, such as worship, prayer, religious singing, and devotional scripture reading, in the context of free and voluntary association, and provided that facilities are made available on an equitable basis to all who apply.

58. There are two types of religious observance implied in this instance:

- public occasions, which make use of school facilities, for example for a Church service on a Sunday<sup>8</sup>; and
- occasions when the school community (teachers and pupils) gather for a religious observance<sup>9</sup>.

59. 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 business of the public school.

60. Religious observances for teachers and pupils may be held 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. Where a religious observance is organised, as an integral part of the school day, it should acknowledge and reflect the multi-religious nature of South African society in an appropriate manner. School Governing bodies would be required to determine the nature and content of such observances such that coherence and alignment with this policy is ensured.

61. The use of a universal prayer and selected readings from various religious texts could be considered an appropriate and equitable means of acknowledging the multi-religious nature of South Africa, and an example of an optional common universal prayer for use at school assemblies is attached. Other forms of equitable treatment may include the rotation, in fair proportion to the representation of different religions in the school.

62. Where a religious observance takes place outside of the context of a school assembly, it may be possible to separate children by religion, with equally supported opportunities for

<sup>8</sup> As envisaged in Section 15(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996)

<sup>9</sup> As envisaged in Section 7 of the Schools Act and Section 15(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996)

observance by all faiths, and appropriate use of the time for non-believers. Such an approach must take cognisance of the impact of peer pressure on children, and its possible influence on the willingness of children to be identified as “different”.

63. Within an assembly context, although learners from different backgrounds could be excused under a “conscience clause”, the fact that anyone feels obliged to invoke such a clause indicates that the school has already violated their freedom of conscience by including specific religious observances in its assembly. Public schools cannot violate that freedom by imposing religious uniformity on a religiously diverse school population in school assemblies. Like the rest of the school’s learning programmes, the assembly has the potential for affirming and celebrating unity in diversity, and should be used for this purpose.
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 establishes a broad, religion-friendly basis for Religion Education, taken care of by professional teachers. It encourages the equitable practice of Religious Observances at school, as well as the involvement of clergy in the extra-curricular Religious Instruction of learners. 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. We are convinced that our country has sufficient expertise and energy to meet the challenge of developing a distinctively South African programme for Religion Education. As a matter of priority, we must deploy our intellect, imagination, talent, and human capacity in the work of creating and sustaining Religion Education.
68. Religion Education can contribute to creating an integrated school 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 learners, 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 life of a public school. In particular, our policy clarifies the role that might be given to Religious Observances, and to Religious Instruction. Our policy for Religion and Education upholds the principles of a cooperative model for relations between religion and the state, by maintaining a constitutional separation in the formal activities of the school, but encouraging voluntary interaction outside of this.
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