



What are some design features of the new Religion Curriculum?

Revised Overarching Goal for Religious Education

Under the new curriculum the overarching goal of Religious Education remains more or less the same but with some slight nuancing. The goal seeks to be faithful to the Catholic Christian tradition in ways that are sensitive to local contexts and the ecumenical and multifaith realities of contemporary Australia. The revised wording reads: *to form students who are literate in the Catholic and broader Christian tradition so that they might participate critically and effectively in faith contexts and the wider society.*

New Times, New Titles

Consistent with the terminology used in the Australia curriculum, our new curriculum will be referred to as the Religious Education Curriculum and will comprise three parts. The first is the *P-10 Religion Curriculum*. It will include strand and sub-strand based content descriptors, elaborations, achievement standards, units of work and resources for each year level. The second part is called *Senior Secondary Courses in Religion*. The courses mandated for use in the senior years in this archdiocese are *Religion and Ethics* and *Study of Religion*. The third part is the *Religious Life of the School* (RLOS) source documentation, which includes a range of online resources incorporating four components of RLOS.

Design of the Content Descriptions

The content descriptions for the Religion Curriculum will specify religious knowledge, deep understandings and skills under the four strands and selected sub-strands for each year level. Within the new Religion Curriculum, religious knowledge is about developing a familiarity with facts about religious matters, which are learned through study, observation and personal experience. Deep understanding is about developing a capacity to distinguish and make critical judgements between and about things. For example, a basic religious understanding involves a capacity to discern which course of action is right or wrong and also why this is true within the context of a specific faith tradition. In religious terms, we refer to deep understanding as a way of emphasising the importance of wisdom. Skills relate to the students' capacity to apply religious knowledge and deep understanding in a range of religious and secular contexts.

Core Content and Looping Detours

A feature of the learning resources to be produced for each year level will be an inquiry-based approach focused on a "fertile question" for each unit. Core content mandatory for all students will be specified and elaborated. Each unit will be sequentially organised and will include a series of *looping detours* that allow teachers and students to explore topics in depth or divert to other associated topics of interest to students. The pedagogical framework will be supported with a wide range of learning strategies that are systematically introduced throughout the years of schooling.



The New Religion Curriculum Archdiocese of Brisbane

Strategic Plan 2011-2015





Overview

The *RE and the Australian Curriculum: Strategic Plan and Discussion Paper* (May 2010) was prepared by the Principal Education Officer Religious Education and used in a broad-ranging consultation with school leaders, representatives from Queensland dioceses, Religious Education specialists, Brisbane Catholic Education Office senior staff and members of the Brisbane Catholic Education leadership team. The Catholic Education Council endorsed the paper on 25 July 2010.

The *Archdiocese of Brisbane, Religious Education Guidelines* has provided outstanding support to religious educators since their release in 1997 and ongoing development (1997-2008). Evidence from the external cyclic reviews and Religious Education Religious Institute School Visitation process indicates a generally high quality of Religious Education programs in the schools and colleges of the Archdiocese.

The focus of the strategic plan and discussion paper was the reorganisation of the Religion Curriculum for the schools of the Archdiocese of Brisbane in response to the introduction of the Australian curriculum and the changing demographics in the Catholic and ecumenical schools of this Archdiocese. This revised paper (February 2011) also provides data from the consultations held with Archdiocesan secondary schools and colleges with a particular focus on *Senior Secondary Courses in Religion*, specifically *Religion and Ethics*.

This paper has been organised around ten key questions.



Why reorganise the Religion Curriculum?

The strategic plan and ensuing consultations identified seven (7) reasons for the reorganisation of the Religion curriculum. They are:

- the need to update the scope and focus of the current *Statement on Religious Education (1997)*;
- the difficulty experienced by many teachers in adequately translating the theological statements of the current syllabus into appropriate educational content;
- changing demographics of students, parents and staff in schools since the production of the current guidelines;
- the need to enhance the strategic support and resourcing offered by BCEO for senior secondary religion courses;
- the introduction of the Australian curriculum and the need to align our directions with it;
- the introduction of ecumenical schools into the BCE community of schools; and
- the lack of provision for online learning and the need to review and enhance the pedagogy of the current resources.



What are the challenges impacting on contemporary RE?

Available data indicates that the demographics that apply to the students, parents and staff of our schools has changed significantly since the release of the current curriculum in 1997. These include:

- enhanced accreditation and eligibility processes for teachers of Religion;
- increased numbers of teachers with post-graduate RE and/or Theology qualifications;
- significant numbers of Year 8 students coming from schools other than Catholic;
- low levels of parish affiliation by many Catholic parents and students;
- increased numbers of students and families who claim no religious identity;
- a pervasive secularisation in the broader Australian community;
- increasing numbers of graduate teachers with no preservice RE units; and
- proposed changes to the structure of schooling in Queensland



What were the outcomes of the system-wide consultation regarding Senior Secondary Religious Education?

Group consultations were held with secondary/P-12 principals and APREs at gatherings in the North and South School service centres. A number of key messages resulted which included:

- a strong consensus that the proposed *Religion and Ethics* course would greatly assist schools in the delivery of quality Religious Education in the senior secondary years;
- strong support for the proposal that the course be delivered to schools in an online mode with access to all materials by students and teachers;
- strong support for developing resources that could be used in online modes and in response to the current rollout of laptops for students;
- strong support for the inclusion of design elements in the new course that would better meet the needs of VET students; and
- strong support for aligning key topics and strategies in *Study of Religion (SOR)* with the new BCE *Religion and Ethics* course.

School leaders, in group consultations, identified a number of challenges in providing quality Religious Education particularly at the senior secondary level. They included:

- insufficient theological background by some teaching staff in teaching *Religion and Ethics*;
- inconsistency in the way some schools approach the teaching of *Religion and Ethics* (i.e. not enough academic rigour in some school programs, too demanding in others);
- difficulty in finding teachers who want to teach Religion and Ethics or have the confidence to do so; and
- insufficient professional learning opportunities provided for both *SOR* and *Religion and Ethics* teachers.

Schools visits were undertaken to secondary and P-12 schools. The Principal Education Officer Religious Education or the Project Officer Senior Secondary RE met with school leaders from 22 schools. Consultations with representatives from RI schools will take place in March 2011. Key messages received during these visits included:

- Most students who undertake *Religion and Ethics* do so because they are undertaking an industry pathway. This has implications for the way teachers teach the subject and for ways students engage with the subject.
- Some OP students undertake *Religion and Ethics*. This is mostly in schools that encourage diverse pathways and course offerings for students.
- Most schools currently offer *SOR* and *Religion and Ethics* in years 11 and 12 and intend to maintain that arrangement.
- A number of schools were also interested in using the new *Religion and Ethics* course for Year 10 students as a way of adding rigour and vitality to existing programs.
- There is widespread satisfaction across the vast majority of schools in *Religion and Ethics*.
- Staff were generally enthusiastic and positive about the place of *Religion and Ethics* in the mix of senior secondary courses.
- *Religion and Ethics* teachers want activities that can be completed in one lesson with the facility for students to undertake work online as well.
- Currently many *Religion and Ethics* students do not have the same level of access to computers as other students, particularly *SOR*.
- Schools value the capacity of *Religion and Ethics* to make links with the Religious Life of the School Guidelines.



How will the new *Religion and Ethics* Course for senior secondary students be designed?

The new 12 topic *Religion and Ethics* course for Years 10-12 has been designed to comply with the existing QSA Study Area Specification (SAS) for Religion and Ethics. The online rollout commenced in January 2011. The course has been designed after a lengthy consultation process with secondary and P-12 principals, secondary and P-12 APREs, Religious Education specialists and staff from ACU National School of Religious Education. The course is in an entirely online format. The home page for the new course is provided below.



What principles should guide the design and development of the new Religion Curriculum P-12?

Ten (10) principles will guide the design and development of the Religion Curriculum P-12. They are:

- The classroom teaching and learning of Religion should reflect the philosophy, content focus, structure, academic rigor and assessment and reporting modes used in other curriculum areas.
- The content should reflect a Catholic Christian worldview that integrates faith, life and culture.
- The design and development needs to build on the best practice in Religious Education currently being enacted in the schools and colleges of the Archdiocese.
- The design and development should continue to align with a reconceptualist approach to Religious Education (learning *about* religion and learning *from* and *through* religion).
- The framework should bring into closer alignment the two dimensions of Religious Education - classroom teaching of religion and the religious life of the school.
- The pedagogical direction should reflect an inquiry-based approach to learning that aligns closely with the Australian History and English curriculum.
- The aim of Religious education should be adjusted to better reflect the reality of most schools.
- Core content needs to be presented in a clear, precise way, written in plain English and expressed using educational rather than exclusively theological language.
- Where possible, content should embrace an ecumenical perspective.
- The structure and presentation of material should resemble the Australian curriculum and build on the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*.



How will the Religion Curriculum P-12 be organised?

The Religion Curriculum will be organised around four overlapping age bands to align with the Australian curriculum. They are:

- Ages 5-8 (Prep-2) to be known as the *Early Years Religion Curriculum*
- Ages 8-12 (Years 3-6) to be known as the *Primary Years Religion Curriculum*
- Ages 12-15 (Years 7-10) to be known as the *Middle Years Religion Curriculum*
- Ages 15-18 (Years 11-12) to be known as the *Senior Secondary Courses in Religion*

Content for the classroom teaching and learning of Religion will be organised around four strands with three sub-strands for each. In many cases the existing strands and sub-strands have been renamed and refocused to better reflect the changing needs of the contemporary Religion classroom. The new strands and sub-strands are:

- Sacred Texts (Old Testament; New Testament; Spiritual Writings and Wisdom)
- Beliefs (God, Jesus, Spirit; Human Existence; Religions of the World)
- Church (Liturgy and Sacraments; Communion and Community; Church History)
- Christian Life (Moral Formation; Mission and Service; Prayer and Spirituality)

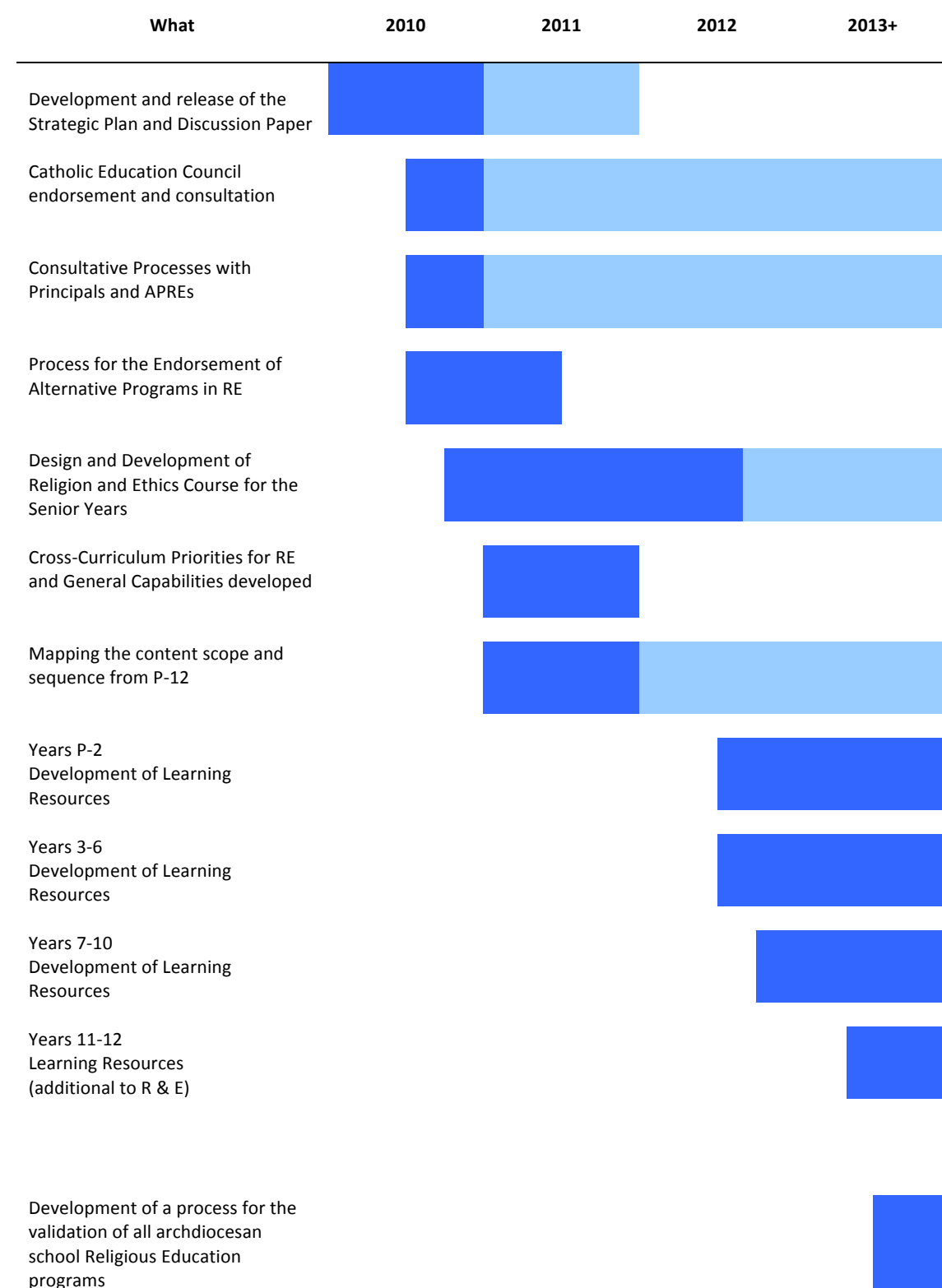
The structure of the Religious Life of the School source document will remain unchanged with four components and three elements for each. They are:

- Religious Identity and Culture (Ethos and Charism; Authentic Christian Community; Sense of the Sacred)
- Prayer and Worship (Christian Prayer; Celebrating Liturgy and Sacraments; Ritualising Everyday Life)
- Evangelisation and Faith Formation (Living the Gospel; Spiritual Formation; Witness to the Wider Community)
- Social Action and Justice (Justice in the School Community; Action for Justice; Reflection on Action for Justice)



What is the proposed timeline?

The expected timeline for the design and development of the Religion Curriculum is described below.



What are the staffing implications and consultative processes?

The project will be led and managed by the Religious Education Team within the Office of the Executive Director. Staff allocated to the project and their roles are listed below.

BCEO Dutton Park Staff

- | | |
|---|---|
| • Principal Education Officer Religious Education | Leadership of the Religion Curriculum Project |
| • Senior Education Officer Religious Education | Management of the Religion Curriculum Project |
| • Project Officer Senior Secondary RE | Management of the Religion and Ethics Project |
| • Senior Education Officer ResourceLink | Management of learning resources production |
| • Education Officer ResourceLink | Learning resources production support |

Curriculum Design and Development Committee

- Principal Education Officer Religious Education
- Senior Education Officer Religious Education
- Project Officer Senior Secondary Religious Education
- Education Officers Religious Education (North and South School Service Centres)

Archdiocesan Reference Group

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| • Deputy Executive Director | Chair |
| • Principal Education Officer Religious Education | Deputy Chair |
| • Senior Education Officer Religious Education | Executive Officer |
| • Congregational Leaders' nominee | Member |
| • Priest's Council Representative | Member |
| • BCE Principal (Primary) | Member |
| • BCE Principal (Secondary) | Member |
| • Religious Education North Schools | Member |
| • Religious Education South Schools | Member |
| • ACU School of Religious Education | Member |



What is the implementation timeline for schools?

