



Great Learning in RME.... Learners say....

'RME helps me to understand myself better and to understand others better'

'In RME I have a safe place to develop my own beliefs and to question them'

'In RME we ask difficult questions and work out how people try to answer them'

'I used to think that RME was just for religious people, but thinking about beliefs and values and exploring how people put these into practice is for everyone'

'People sometimes think that there are no religious young people in schools, but I am one, and RME helps me to deepen my understanding of my own beliefs'

'How exactly can anyone understand the world if they don't learn about religion, beliefs and values?'

'I think most adults' understanding of RME is about thirty years out of date!'

'Go on, think of a topic we don't explore in RME – bet you can't'

'Sometimes people think a subject is only worth it if it's good for a job – really – is that all school is for?'

'RME – Life, the universe everything, and all in one class'





1. GREAT LEARNING?

Great Learning in RME means different things to different people. It happens in different shapes and in different places. But it's central to, and possible, in all learning environments. Great Learning might be the point where learners really do want to learn and where their motivation for learning comes as much, if not more, from internal drive as it does from external reward. Arguably, Great Learning is where learning takes place for its own sake, perhaps where learning is unpredictable, sometimes messy, and takes on unexpected, new and exciting directions. Great Learning in RME can be the means by which learners find their place in society, and it is through Great Learning that learners might even transform society, towards a future world which is the best possible place for all to live. Learning matters because it is the way to make our world a better place. Great Learning matters because it is where education comes alive. Great Learning is central to RME.

2. HOW DO WE KNOW WHEN LEARNING IS 'GREAT' IN RME?

Learning takes many forms and meets learners' varied needs in many different ways. Great Learning in RME needs space, space where learners and teachers come together to learn **collaboratively**. This might mean that practitioners develop learning strategies alongside learners, and **co-create learning** environments which are rich, varied and exciting. This means thinking about learning, about new ways of bringing it to life, and about finding new ways of recognising its impact. There are challenges and opportunities here to create learning spaces which ensure everyone can grow the dispositions and skills which are so vital to life in the 21st century.

Across the world, education systems are recognising that approaches to learning need to change to address the needs of an ever-changing world – all of which requires Great Learning. Measuring when Great Learning takes place in RME isn't easy. It needs a range of approaches, some of which are available to us currently, and it also means finding new ways of measuring the effectiveness of learning – ways which may yet lie undiscovered. Great Learning requires collaboration between learners, practitioners and wider communities. It might provide a means by which education systems around the world will be able to engage in deep conversations about the nature of learning and how we know when learning is at its very best.

“Young people engaged in higher order thinking about the parable under consideration. This led to in-depth analysis and critical evaluation of the parable's message and young people were able to identify a range of messages contained in the parable and apply these in a modern context.”

Of course, Great Learning in RME is perhaps best recognised by learners themselves – “When I want to learn, not just because I have to” and “When you can understand something in a way which makes you look at everything differently”. Other learners have said that Great Learning is something which “Is sometimes difficult to measure but can definitely be experienced” and; “Great Learning is when you see that one thing is really linked to another”. Parents have also expressed views about Great Learning where “I know my child is experiencing Great Learning by the questions he asks and the way he asks them; he has a hunger for knowing and understanding which comes from Great Learning experiences”.

“In a lesson about the ‘power of prayer’ young people listened to the views of others, then skilfully and sensitively challenged these views. This led to deep insights about the role of prayer in people's lives.”



3. WHAT IS INVOLVED IN GREAT LEARNING?

Great Learning in RME involves learners' thinking skills, emotions and engagement with a range of complex ideas. It is where individuals take control of their learning, enabling them to think critically, respond sensitively and act ethically. It involves individuals understanding themselves and others, and finding their place in the world. This is very **personal** – it may mean different things to different people. This may be its strength – Great Learning in RME is not 'one-size-fits-all', but something which means that, for every individual, learning matches needs and aspiration for the future. It may involve the learner in *deepening* her/his understanding of her/his own beliefs, values and actions. This may be through developing a better understanding of one's own beliefs, values and actions, or through responding to challenges presented by the beliefs, values and actions of others and the world's religions and belief systems. RME can give learners a real understanding of themselves and their place in the world through responding meaningfully to it.

Great Learning is also **situational** because learning is linked to the time and place where it happens. Creating the circumstances for Great Learning in RME is an exciting challenge because it means creating the right environment to help learners understand beliefs and values in an ever-changing world.

Great Learning is also **interpersonal**. It involves communication between learners – challenging and being challenged. RME means learning *about* and *from* others in an inclusive way, not least by engaging with the world's religions and belief-systems.



4. WHAT ARE THE KEY FEATURES OF GREAT LEARNING IN RME?

Great Learning in RME involves different approaches, including many of the following:

“Children were exploring Muslim perspectives on the importance of providing for those in need through charity. Children immediately wanted to do something for charity and started to plan accordingly.”

Active learning in RME engages and challenges learners, encouraging them to see and act differently. This means doing things with their learning, interacting with it, exploring, questioning, debating, hypothesising, evaluating and learning from the experience. Great Learning means questioning how one sees the world and that can lead to action. In RME, for example, exploring the story of the prodigal son will involve thinking about forgiveness and how that relates to one's own attitudes. Learning about zakat will mean thinking about the importance of charity and reflecting on one's own empathy towards others.



“Learners quickly grasped that it was important to understand both how a Buddhist meditates as well as why.”

Collaborative learning in RME requires learners to contribute to a shared learning experience where everyone's contributions are valued. Every individual will have an important role to play, developing their own skills and dispositions, including the confidence to contribute to shared learning. In RME, for example, 'well known' stories can be examined for their relevance today and, by listening to the views of others, can lead to different ways of interpreting these stories. For example, the story of Noah is used in many learning situations to good effect. But this story can be a powerful way to think about issues such as justice and fairness or anger and forgiveness, and indeed it can support deep thinking about people's beliefs about divine beings.

Independent and interdependent learning in RME happens in quiet and reflective environments as well as busy and active ones. It can be independent, involving personal responses to learning. It can also be interdependent, where learners reach understanding together. Great Learning means seeing the bigger picture and one's place in it. In RME, learning may be active, engaging and noisy and social but it can also be quiet, reflective and individual.

Focused learning in RME has **depth**, engaging thoughtfully with learning in meaningful ways. **Deep learning** involves understanding learning and its consequences, recognising it is about curiosity, experimentation, thoughtfulness, reflection, and making links. Deep learning in RME means drawing meaning from complex and often conflicting ideas and views, often including a real understanding of the meaning of religious practices.

Skills in RME may be **practical** – the ability to turn an idea into reality. Skills can also be **cognitive** – approaching ideas from unusual directions, leading to new ways of thinking. For example, religious experience is often explored through individual stories, and sometimes complemented through more scientific ways to analyse these. **Literacy** skills are key – understanding through word and communication, for example; **numeracy** helps to understand patterns, for example; **health and wellbeing** means understanding oneself and others. Skills may be **physical, mental**, or involve applying **leadership and enterprise**, all of which can help learners understand and act on learning. In RME, there are many stories which can help develop literacy skills. Numeracy can be developed through using statistics to explore, for example, the changing religious patterns and beliefs of people in Scotland over time. RME can help learners explore different leadership approaches, and to challenge leaders and their followers. RME challenges learners to think critically about ethics. This can help them to understand complex choices, and, over time, help them to participate in democratic choices in an informed way.

Knowledge development is key to learning in RME because it underpins effective **application** in a wide range of real life situations. For example, all religions and belief-systems have a version of the golden rule – which states that we should treat others as we would wish to be treated – many learners will want to reflect on how important this idea is in their own lives.

“By exploring the global coffee trade and the philosophy of Fair Trade, children were not only learning about the importance of enterprise, they were also learning about the importance of ethical enterprise.”



Let's talk about... Great Learning in RME



The [RME Principles and Practice Paper](#) and the [RME CfE Experiences and Outcomes](#) have set a very positive context for Great Learning in RME. They give practitioners and learners the space to develop learning experiences and programmes most suited to their circumstances, based on the recognition of religion and belief-systems as important expressions of human experience. They stress that children and young people can learn *from* religion and belief-systems as well as learn *about* them. These papers highlight learning about and from Christianity, world religions selected for study, and other traditions and belief groups, which can help learners think about the nature and purpose of life in their own way. RME helps learners to understand diversity and develop respect for others. It also helps learners put their own beliefs and values into action in positive ways.

Beliefs

Central to RME is exploring beliefs. How do these develop in individuals, groups, cultures and societies? How do beliefs change over time, and are there 'core beliefs' which all people share? Are there beliefs which are shared by all cultures and throughout time? Are some beliefs true and others false? How do we judge if a belief or a belief-system is true – and should we? What might we take into account when doing this? How is an individual's beliefs decided by her/his upbringing, environment, family, culture – and how far should those beliefs be challenged, evaluated and put to the test? And what about the beliefs of others – should these be probed and examined? How can we help learners to understand the beliefs of others and support them in developing their own views about these beliefs? Importantly, at what stage should we expect a learner to critically evaluate their own beliefs and the beliefs of others?

Values and Issues

Equally central to RME are values and issues. What are shared human values and how do they develop? How are values linked to our beliefs? What makes us put our values into action – or not? How do our values affect our actions? What important issues face humanity today and how do we help learners understand and respond to those issues? How do we help learners to understand when some claim they are right and others are wrong? Are values linked to time, place and situation, or are there absolute values – things which are always right or always wrong? Learners live in a complex changing world – are there ways to help learners deal with change by drawing upon their values?

Practices and Traditions

RME also explores ways in which humans express their beliefs and values through their practices and traditions. From religious and cultural artefacts, ritual and ceremony and personal and public practices, humans express themselves in a variety of ways. What do these practices tell us about those who practise them and the beliefs and values they have? What do these practices say about human society and culture, and the role of religion and beliefs in society? Should we critically assess the practices and traditions of religions and belief groups? What can we learn about ourselves and others through the practices we engage in and the traditions we follow?

“Learners were aware that some religions claimed they were true and that others were false. These learners were developing the skills to evaluate these claims.”



5. LET'S TALK ABOUT GREAT LEARNING IN RME

In moving forward with Great Learning, it might be helpful to work through the following activities in collaboration with other practitioners, learners and parents. Just like effective RME, there are unlikely to be right and wrong answers to these questions. They are designed to enable practitioners to challenge assumptions, share practice and keep RME fresh in an ever-changing world:



Activity 1

What does Great Learning in RME look like?

In dialogue with others...

- Describe the best RME lesson you have ever seen/delivered/participated in and then consider:
 - What made this lesson so good?
 - How do you know that this lesson worked for all learners who experienced it?
 - Was the outcome of this lesson recorded or assessed?
 - Could this lesson be repeated?
 - How could this lesson be adapted for a different context/group of learners?
 - Could anything have made this lesson better?
- Below are some words/phrases which may be used to describe Great Learning in RME. In collaboration with others, order them from the most to least important in relation to their contribution to Great Learning in RME – no equal placings and be prepared to justify your choices!

• Engaging	• Personal	• Skills-based
• Fun	• Collaborative	• Emotive
• Exciting	• Reflective	• Controversial
• Challenging	• Achievable by all	• Relevant
• Thought-provoking	• Meaningful	
• Active	• Knowledge-based	
- Choose a typical area of study covered in RME – perhaps one out of your comfort zone! Use the outcome of your discussions about the two activities above to design a completely new approach to this topic which would lead to Great Learning in RME. Perhaps this could be done in collaboration with learners for an added perspective on Great Learning.
- It can often be thought that Great Learning refers only to those magic moments which come along when everything comes together in just the right way. However as an educational community we work towards every lesson every day being an example of Great Learning. What conditions and circumstances do we need to put in place as a profession to ensure that Great Learning happens in every lesson every day? Ideas could be set out on a graffiti wall for reflection.



Activity 2

How does Great Learning in RME help learners to see things differently?

1. Choose a topic area which is covered in RME by all (or the majority) in your group. Individually, sketch how you approach this topic. What are your aims when dealing with this topic and how do you achieve those aims? Once you have completed this individually, bring your ideas together to the group and identify common approaches. Now think again about your approaches. How might your approaches look different if they had been devised (or commented upon) by:
 - a. A pupil?
 - b. The conductor of an orchestra?
 - c. A parent?
 - d. A plumber?
 - e. A geographer?
2. Imagine you meet one of your pupils 10 years from now. You know they loved RME when they were at school and got a lot out of it. What would you expect to be the legacy for this person of their RME experience? Now think about your current pupils. How is your RME building this legacy in them for the future?
3. Choose the top news story for today. If 'RME literacy' means having an understanding of contemporary issues through being able to draw upon learning in RME, how would you approach this in RME to help your pupils understand this news item with 'RME literacy'?
4. What changes do you expect to see in learners, in your school, in your community and in society generally as a result of Great Learning in RME?



Activity 3

What are the consequences of Great Learning in RME?

1. Individually, and then in your group, describe three consequences of Great Learning in RME. How much agreement is there within your group about these? What common answers arise?
2. The following are potential consequences of Great Learning in RME (and may cover some of your responses in activity 1 above). Rank these in your group from most to least important.
 - A happier society
 - Happier individuals
 - Greater awareness of religion
 - Greater awareness of the nature of morality
 - A more contented society
 - Greater harmony between different cultures
 - Better understanding of religion and beliefs
 - A more inclusive society
 - A more tolerant society
 - Deeper self-knowledge in individuals
 - Deeper knowledge of others by individuals
 - An increased awareness of the place of [insert a religion or belief-system here]
3. Imagine there was no such thing as RME in schools. How would schools be different? What difference would this make to the learning experiences of children and young people?
4. Great Learning has to ensure that individuals are fit for an ever-changing world – in fact, for a future which cannot be predicted. How can Great Learning in RME best equip learners for the future?



Activity 4

How can Great Learning in RME involve other curricular areas and the 'responsibilities of all'?

1. In your group, discuss any examples of interdisciplinary learning (IDL) which have taken place in your establishment.
 - a. What motivated this IDL?
 - b. How far was RME the driver of or a participant in this IDL?
 - c. How was the contribution of RME to this IDL activity evaluated and what changes in IDL/RME ensued as a result?
 - d. How important is the role of specialist knowledge and skills in IDL?
 - e. How far does your group agree that IDL is the 'best way to approach learning'?
2. In what ways does/can RME contribute to health and wellbeing, literacy and numeracy? What examples of such contributions are there, and how can we access exemplification of this? Does your group think there are any situations where RME can make a unique contribution to health and wellbeing, literacy and numeracy?
3. For the following IDL-type topics, discuss how RME might contribute – you could produce a mind-map of your group's discussions (feel free to add any ideas).

a. Economic inequality	f. The football world cup (or similar international sporting events)
b. Water	g. World War 1
c. Shakespeare	h. Scottish heritage
d. Space exploration	i. Holocaust Memorial Day
e. Modern art	j. Food around the world
4. Here are three topic areas which may be included in work linked to the 'responsibilities of all'. For each one, discuss – with examples where possible – how RME would/can/does contribute to each.
 - HWB: Relationships
 - Numeracy: Financial literacy
 - Literacy: Extended writing



Activity 5

How can beliefs, values and attitudes be supported and challenged through Great Learning in RME?

1. Supporting children and young people's own beliefs and values:

Discuss the following case study in your group and consider your responses and actions in relation to your RME programme. You can choose what age and stage of learning 'Christopher' is currently in according to your own learning and teaching context.

Christopher is a Christian. He has confidently informed you that he would like his time in RME to help him explore his own Christian beliefs and values and to help him deepen those beliefs and values. His big brother is a year ahead of him in school and has informed Christopher that "RME in this school won't do anything to help your beliefs". Christopher has just told you what his big brother has said. Based on your own RME programme, how would you respond to Christopher?

2. Supporting parents' beliefs and values:

Discuss the following case study in your group and consider your responses and actions in relation to your RME programme. You can choose what age and stage of learning 'Alison' is currently in according to your own learning and teaching context. You receive this letter from parents:

Dear RME Teacher

As you'll know, Alison has just joined your RME/Primary class. We'd like to inform you that ours is a Humanist family. We do, however, understand that Alison has the right to learn about religion and beliefs, and to make her own mind up about these things when she is old enough to do so. However, we are keen that she gets a balanced education in RME – so that she learns about our beliefs in the same way that she learns about the beliefs of others, and hope that you can reassure us that this will be the case.

Yours...

3. As well as supporting children and young people's beliefs and values, it is also likely that in RME these beliefs and values may have to be challenged on occasion. Discuss with colleagues what you think are the beliefs/values most likely to involve an element of challenge for children and young people. How does your RME programme sensitively but effectively challenge these beliefs and values?
4. Similarly, parental beliefs and values may also involve an element of challenge in RME. Discuss as for the previous activity. How far is it the responsibility of RME to put parental beliefs and values under scrutiny and what issues does this raise?



Activity 6

In what ways is Great Learning in RME central to children and young people's learning experiences?

1. On moving to a new establishment, you find, to your surprise, that there is no such thing as RME in the curriculum. You challenge your new head teacher (or Education department) about this to which you receive the response that there's 'no real need for RME here'. You disagree and prepare your case to convince your head/Education department otherwise. You are given a 15 minute slot to make your case.
2. The following are possible 'reasons for doing RME'. In your group, discuss these 'reasons' and consider which are the most to least crucial in supporting the place of RME in a child/young person's curriculum – add any you think have been missed.
 - A way to secure nationally recognised qualifications
 - Developing important life skills
 - Preparing a child/young person for the workforce
 - Broadening a child/young person's outlook on life
 - Supporting the transmission of culture and tradition
 - Challenging accepted views of society
 - The development of a child/young person's 'character'
 - Developing and extending thinking skills
 - Supporting a critical and analytical approach to life
 - Supporting a reflective approach to life

