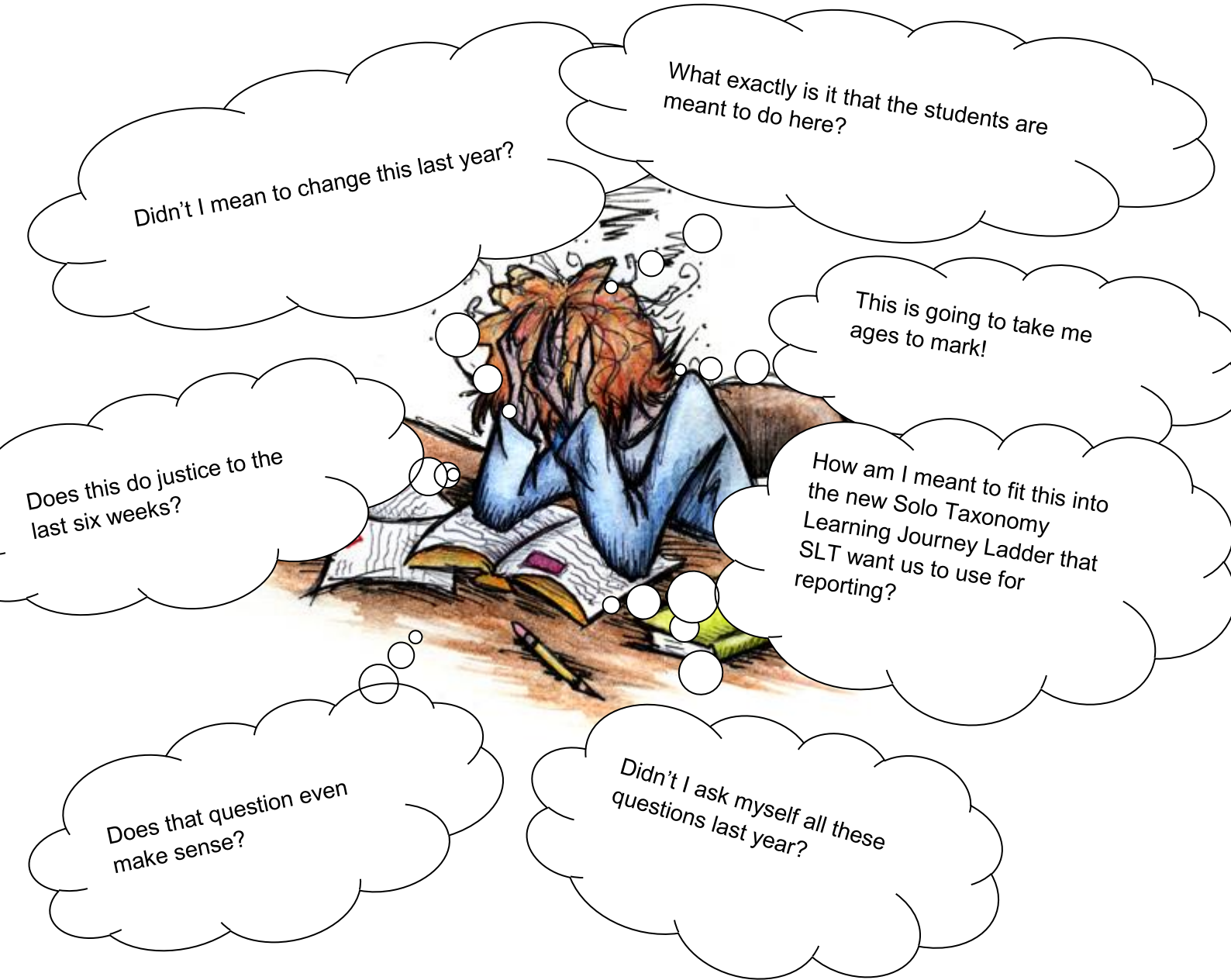


# It's Assessment Week! So what now?

Four of your Year 8 classes have finished the topic. You look at what you did last year and you groan.



*This is a step by step guide for your department. Much to my horror I quickly realised that this was not about simply changing assessment, this was about curriculum change. But don't let that put you off. The key with this change is to find strength with your colleagues, to stop, take a step back and to discuss and to eat cake in the process - hence the theme.*

# Step 1: The Signature Bake

Go back to basics. What does Religious Education mean in your school? What is its purpose, its signature? I am not a universalist when it comes to the purpose of RE, RE is tied to your school's ethos and whether it is faith or non-faith. To decide your signature style:

## Task 1: Purpose of RE in your school

- Spend a department meeting reading
  - <http://www.reonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/REthinking-RE-A-Midrash-June-2016.pdf>
  - <http://www.reonline.org.uk/news/new-guidance-assessment-in-re/> Part 1
  - [http://resubjectreview.recouncil.org.uk/media/file/RE\\_Review\\_Summary.pdf](http://resubjectreview.recouncil.org.uk/media/file/RE_Review_Summary.pdf)
  - <http://www.understandingchristianity.org.uk/teachers-and-schools/>
  - <http://www.reonline.org.uk/knowing/why-re/>
- Brainstorm your ideas and pick a maximum of 3 (any more makes too complex a vision).
- Make sure you all 'buy in' to this idea. It's important to do this together.
- Communicate this message to SLT so they have a clear idea of what you offer.
- Make sure students have 'buy in' and a clear sense of purpose. Share this with them - put it on posters, on folders etc.

## Task 2: What are the key skills you wish to develop as a department

- Make sure this is connected to your vision as a department.
- Think about what skills are relevant at GCSE e.g. interpretation and extended writing.
- Take into account previous objectives such as AT1 and AT2.
- Be wary of AT2, 'learning from', this demands further clarification:
  - What kind of 'learning from' are you aiming for? Do you want to see personal reflection or impersonal reflection?
  - If it is the former, you will need to find a way of measuring personal progress and it is worth looking at Lat Blaylock's model or talk to your PSHE department.
  - If it's the latter, look into Hunt's work ([reonline.org.uk/news/attainment-target-at-2-learning-from-religion/](http://www.reonline.org.uk/news/attainment-target-at-2-learning-from-religion/))

## Task 3: Decide on your 'take aways'

What concepts do you want students to 'take away' at the end of each year? What are the crucial content/concepts? These are the key to surviving this change and using it to become stronger. The government has discarded a system that was built solely on skills, suggesting it was hard to measure progress and give good feedback and that children at the age of 5 can use skills of description and evaluation rendering those 'higher skills' bogus. It is the content that students are describing and evaluating which gets harder as they go through school.

- Keep it simple, these 'take aways' should be a firm understanding of a few concepts. Think 'fewer things in greater depth', the government's new mantra.
- Focus on 3 key concepts per religion e.g. Christianity: incarnation, forgiveness, creation.
- Consider what concepts could be studied through other religion e.g. incarnation could be studied through Rastafarianism as well as Christianity.
- Ensure every RE member of staff knows these 'take aways' are.
- Share these 'take aways' with your students.
- Get in contact with your primary schools and ask what RE they do. If you are concerned the reality could be negative, it is still worth getting in touch because a) you might be wrong, b) making that connection and expressing interest shows learning is acknowledged and progressed, c) it might be the encouragement that teacher needs.

## Step 2: The Technical

Once you have decided on your signature style of RE, you need to work these into a Key Stage plan. See below for an exemplar you can use with your department. To simply change the assessments at the end of a module is not going to be enough. My suggestions for your Key Stage plan are:

- Always keep in mind your 'signature' style/vision of RE and think of the 'take aways' and skills you want students have.
- Assign a concept or skill per scheme of work. Each scheme of work does not have to be limited to this but students should 'take away' a secure understanding of this concept or this skill. In lessons which do not contribute to this directly, try maintain focus with one of the other skills/concepts you want to develop.
- Consider how this links to your school's reporting structure. When you have filled in your Key Stage 3 plan, you can also be sure to report whether a student is on track whatever model your school uses. If this is a form of:
  - o Skills model (e.g. Bloom's/similar to old levels) then you are able to measure this more accurately as you are now relating this to core content.
  - o Knowledge/content model (mastery model) - you have decided on key concepts but you have also decided on skills that students should be developing. You have ensured they are not simply parrots and that they are equipped for the GCSE.
  - o A mixture of both skills and content. You have that mix in your key stage plan. You will be able to report on the combination and whether students are emerging, secure or developing their knowledge of key concepts and their ability to use the RE skills you decided on.

The three aims of RE							
By the age of 14 pupils should:							
Skills:		1	2	3	4	5	6
Key Concepts:		1	2	3	4	5	6
Year	Term	Theme/enquiry question	Religion	Concept	Skill	Assessment opportunity	
7	1 & 2						
	3 & 4						
	5 & 6						
8	1 & 2						
	3 & 4						
	5 & 6						
9	1 & 2						
	3 & 4						
	5 & 6						

## Step 3: The Showstopper

Now for the assessments themselves. My thought is that, once you have your Key Stage 3 plan in place and a clear sense of direction, you can be creative. Whatever kind of assessment you do keep in mind:

1. It is clear that the government wants us to cover more 'content' - remember those 'take aways' – so some sort of knowledge check is needed.
2. Think of the skills you agreed upon as a department, make sure there is one present.
3. Consider what style of reflection you are using, personal or impersonal. For further details see exemplar questions in point 8 below.
4. Evaluation is a skill needed at GCSE and in RE in general. Students can only really achieve this through extended dialogue – written or verbal.
5. Enquiry-led learning is at the heart of all good assessment
6. Ensure that there is a meaningful chance for self and peer assessment. This has been shown to have a uniquely positive effect on all learners from all backgrounds.
7. Keep in mind what sort of feedback you are going to give the students. Make sure you are asking them to complete a task which builds on their previous learning and leads towards those end of Key Stage goals you agreed. Make sure whatever feedback you give them is student friendly and will not be bogged down in level descriptor talk. Leading with content is one way to do this; if a student does not have a secure understanding of a concept it is clear they need to revisit it.
8. Taking into account points 1,3 and 5 think carefully about your questions. I would argue they should be:
  - a. clear
  - b. demand secure knowledge of content
  - c. Not simply empirical

'*Who inspires you?*' is a personal question which demands a personal answer and a potentially simplistic one at that. If the student wrote '*my mum*' they would be answering the question. Instead '*Was Jesus an inspirational person?*' demands secure knowledge of Jesus, evaluation and some personal reflection on why he may have been inspirational to different people. '*Why was Jesus an inspirational person to Christians?*' demands secure knowledge of Christianity, key concepts like incarnation, and impersonal reflection which ask a student to empathise with a religious feeling.

An empirical question might be '*What is more important, A) God's all-loving nature or B) God's all-powerful nature?*' this demands knowledge of God's attributes but could be resolved by a poll of say 10 Christians, 6 say A 4 say B. Question solved. '*Do you think God can exist with all the evil in the world?*' is a personal a question. You may get answers which simply states '*Well I don't believe in him so I don't see the problem*'. A better question might be '*How did Jews come to terms with the nature of God during and after the Holocaust?*' This demands secure knowledge of God's attributes, an understanding of Holocaust Theology and a degree of impersonal reflection – a term I am using to mean empathy with religious feelings.

**By putting these three steps into practice you should be able to develop a secure Key Stage plan and assessments which will ensure progress and a sense of purpose in your unique department. Star bakers all around!**