

Minutes of the first REMC meeting, 30-31 January 2008

Information on the national systems

There were very useful presentations on the national educational systems in Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Malta and Scotland. These presentations can form the basis for country notes on each of the systems and a framework for these notes was agreed.

Template for the country notes: The template for the country notes is given in Annex 1 below. Each country note should be approximately 15-20 pages in length.

Partners involved: HIVA, DU, UCD (in collaboration with ESRI), UOM, UEDIN.

Deadline: Friday, 28th March 2008

The review of the literature

It was agreed that each national team would provide an overview of existing relevant research in their country and that this would feed into an overall review of the literature co-ordinated by Bert Roebben. This review of the literature should be structured around two sets of topics:

- Religion and society; and,
- Religion and schools.

A checklist is given in Annex 2 of some of the topics that could be included within the overall framework. As well as highlighting findings from existing research, it would be helpful to include gaps in previous research at the national level.

As well as integrating the national-level literature reviews, DU will include additional material on religious socialisation and on comparative research on religion and schooling.

Partners involved: DU, HIVA, ESRI (in collaboration with UCD), UOM, UEDIN.

Deadline 1: 14th March for circulation of national-level reviews to Bert and Anna.

Deadline 2: Compilation of overview of existing literature by 30th April.

An overview of the European situation

Jaap Dronkers gave a useful presentation on the availability of comparative European data on religion and schooling. There appears to be a scarcity of such data, especially relating to the primary school level. However, there are some data sources which could inform the work of the project:

- Surveys, such as the European Values Survey, the European Social Survey and Eurobarometer, collect some information on religious attitudes and practices and should be used to describe the degree of variation across Europe, and how our case-study countries fit into this picture.
- Secondary documents (such as Eurydice reports) can be used to develop a typology of European systems in terms of the place of religion within them.
- The PISA survey provides the only cross-national data on students, albeit at secondary level. It could usefully be explored to analyse the non-cognitive characteristics of students attending different types of school.

Action: EUI is to compile a brief document giving an overview of religious practice and attitudes by education, social class, and age across European countries.

Deadline 1: Friday, the 28th of March.

Deadline 2: Typology of schooling systems by end of August.

Conceptual framework

There was an initial discussion of the conceptual framework to be used in the study. It was agreed that social identity would form the core of such a framework and that we should emphasis it as a dynamic process, involving active agents, albeit operating within some constraints.

Action: ESRI, UCD and UEDIN are to collaborate on developing a draft conceptual framework by late March. This will comprise a short document which will be revisited and refined in the course of the project.

Proposed methodology

It was agreed that the fieldwork would involve:

- Key informant interviews
- Interviews with schools, teachers, parents and children.

The importance of implementing rigorous ethical procedures was emphasised, especially informed consent forms signed by all respondents (adults and children).

Action: UEDIN to circulate consent forms they have previously used; ESRI to circulate consent forms used for on-going longitudinal study.

The potential difficulty in contacting parents was discussed. It was felt that the best solution was to adopt a range of possible approaches, including writing to parents,

making personal context through the schools, and making contact through religious groups, depending on the context. Religious affiliation should be based on what parents themselves report.

A good deal of discussion took place on the parameters of the fieldwork. The following was agreed:

1. Four or five schools should be targeted per country. Within each of these schools, 3-4 staff members should be interviewed. These could include the principal, class teachers, specialist religion teachers or Ministers attached to the school, members of the board of management.
2. We are seeking to identify groups of parents and children across five categories: Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, other religion and no religion.
3. The balance of numbers across these categories may vary from country to country. However, all of these categories should be included in each country. Within each country, a minimum of 20 parents should be interviewed across the categories along with 20 or more children (focus group interviews may allow us to include more children). An effort should be made to roughly balance the gender of selected students.
4. It would be helpful to pilot the interviews, especially to determine whether group or individual interviews work best with the children.

Action: ESRI and UCD to draw up a draft interview schedule for parents based on the topics raised in the discussion. This will be circulated for discussion and HIVA will also have an input into designing the children's schedules.

Advisory groups

It was agreed that each national team would try to identify relevant organisations to take part in their national advisory group. This could include organisations such as inter-faith councils, Church representatives, teacher unions, parents' groups, children's rights commissioners etc. The role of the group would be act as potential gate-keepers in accessing particular schools (or individuals) and as a means of disseminating the project findings. Partners should aim to have a minimum of two meetings with their national groups over the course of the project.

Action: The ESRI is to draft a letter which could be circulated to these groups.

Budgetary procedures

It is important that each partner compile time sheets indicating the amount of time they have spent on the project. It is acceptable for this to represent more time than is budgeted for. Partners should also retain copies of receipts for travel etc.

Action: ESRI is to circulate a template time sheet based those used in existing European projects.

Project website

The ESRI would be able to add a page to their existing website which would describe the project, the partners and provide links to the participating institutes. An example of such a site is available at:

http://www.esri.ie/research/current_research_projects/dynreg/?

Action: ESRI is to investigate what would be possible in terms of layout, graphics etc. on the website, and also whether it would be possible to have some of the site with restricted access for project members only. 'New' project members are to send a brief biography to ESRI for inclusion on the website.

Schedule of project meetings

2-3 September, 2008	Edinburgh
6-7 April, 2009	Florence
18-19 June, 2009	Leuven
1-2 October, 2009	Malta

Annex 1: Template for country notes

1. Historical context: brief outline of development of educational system and place of religion within it; ownership of primary schools historically
2. Legal and constitutional framework: role of religion; separation between Church and State; position within equality and human rights framework
3. Primary school structure: school sectors; management and funding structures; degree of school choice; role of school in local community (links)
4. Curriculum for religious education: whether taught in and/or outside schools; role of preparation for sacraments; focus of religious education (e.g. doctrinal); main bodies involved in writing the curriculum; degree of flexibility across schools in curriculum
5. Teacher preparation: nature of teacher education; profile of teachers

Annex 2: Checklist of topics for review of literature at national level

1. Religion and society

- Religious identity and practice
- Changes in the relationship between religion and society (modernisation/ secularisation theses)
- Religious socialisation (especially within the family); transmission of religious and moral values
- Religion and social differentiation: the interaction of religion and social class, education, gender, nationality and ethnicity

2. Religion and schools

- Parental choice of school and selectivity among schools
- Policy debate: place of faith schools; separate v. comprehensive provision
- Religious education provision
- Teachers: as a profession; teacher preparation and training; influence as role models; profile of teachers (especially religious background)
- School outcomes and processes, both cognitive and non-cognitive