



# TEACHERS' ENTERPRISE IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

## WHY and HOW the Teachers' Enterprise in Religious Education developed and led to the publication of The Way, The Truth & The Life Series

In January **1993**, I was appointed Religious Education adviser for secondary schools in Westminster by Bishop Vincent Nichols. While being a specialist in RE, I had been teaching modern foreign languages and was well used to curriculum initiatives, a clearly defined syllabus with a choice of programme and resources to deliver it. In little or no time, I discovered that I was now in a situation where there was no syllabus for Religious Education in Key Stage 3. Teachers were hampered by a lack of resources.

This was also a time of momentous change in the **national curriculum** in England & Wales with greater emphasis being placed on the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers were being challenged to look at how effectively they delivered the curriculum and to assess the outcomes. Since the whole curriculum was being subjected to this rigorous scrutiny, it seemed appropriate to apply the same criteria to Religious Education.

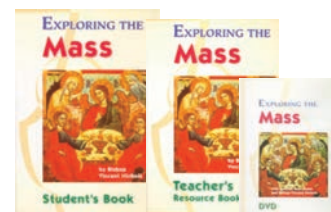
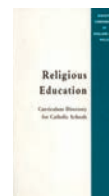
In **1996**, the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales published the **Religious Education Curriculum Directory**. It provided an overview of what should be taught cross referenced to the Catechism of the Catholic Church and scriptures. While it was welcomed, it served to highlight the need for appropriate resources and strategies to support and enhance teachers' knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith.



Bishop Vincent gave me a copy of the RECD with the instruction to deliver it!

This led to the development of the Teachers' Enterprise in Religious Education with the mission: **'Teachers supporting Teachers'**.

Our first step was to ask Bishop Vincent Nichols to make a video 'Exploring the Mass' which he did with Cardinal Basil Hume – we had a Student's and a Teacher's Book to accompany it. These resources proved to be very popular with schools.



The Teachers' Enterprise began with a distinctive model of consultation and collaboration and with teachers. We began by producing a syllabus. It was developed by a small group, in six sessions working from 7.30 am

– 9.30 am. It had six modules for each year with two attainment targets and six Key Learning Objectives for each half term. The content was based on REVELATION – LIFE IN CHRIST – CHURCH – CELEBRATION.

Eighteen secondary schools opted to contribute to the project and took a module each to develop. Before long teacher-led in-service proved to be extremely popular. Approximately 50-60 teachers crossed London after school in the evenings to attend six teacher-led INSETS presenting their resources for our new syllabus. Teachers could see that what they were doing actually worked. Rather than operating in isolation, they were sparking ideas off each other and were eager to share their expertise. While there was tremendous enthusiasm and creativity, the downside was an overuse of black and white worksheets for RE, while other curriculum subjects had colourful textbooks.



Soon the need for a theological adviser was recognised to ensure that there were no doctrinal errors in the resources. Mgr. Michael Keegan was most willing to take on that role. He even made it possible for groups working on the project to stay for a week at the Beda College in Rome where he gave them intensive study sessions on the theology embedded in the syllabus. His enthusiasm for his subject was infectious and all the teachers were full of praise for his input, and returned home enlightened and enthused.

## Creation of the first edition: The Way, The Truth and The Life

At this point, the Teachers' Enterprise had very little expertise in curriculum development or writing a book, let alone publishing and marketing. All we had was a conviction that the need was great so we placed **absolute trust in God**. However, we were still worksheet based which was not ideal!

Should it be a book or booklets and if so what should be the title? I spent a long time one evening in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in our little convent chapel pouring out the difficulties. Eventually, I went to bed and firmly resolved to leave all in the hands of God.

At 2.30 am I woke up, the way ahead was crystal clear – it was to be textbooks for each year group with the title: The Way, the Truth & the Life.



That morning when I went to Mass, to my astonishment the gospel reading was from John 14 "I am the Way, the Truth & the Life". I understood why it would be appropriate as a title:

- **Jesus shows us the WAY to lead a good and happy life;**
- **Jesus tells us the TRUTH about God;  
(He is God, human and divine);**
- **Jesus gives us new LIFE in the Sacraments.**

That same day a cheque of £2,000 arrived from my Provincial Superior to start us off! The Lord had answered my prayer (as He has many times since!)

The enthusiasm and support from the teachers was great, CTS became our publisher and within two years the first edition was ready. The sales figures were high and KS3 students and teachers were very happy with the new resource.



I must stress again that the involvement of classroom practitioners at each stage was and continues to be a key element of the project.

## Primary Heads

**2001** – As soon as THE WAY, for Year 7 was published, some of the primary head teachers, having seen it, expressed a keen desire to get involved in the production of the series for their schools. However about this time Monsignor Michael Keegan died and Bishop Vincent was appointed Archbishop of Birmingham! I felt quite alone.

I went to Rome for an eight day Directed Retreat - a period of spiritual discernment with Fr Herbert Alphonso SJ, and returned with a conviction that it was the will of God for this project to include the primary schools. Fr Alphonso agreed to become our new Theological Adviser.

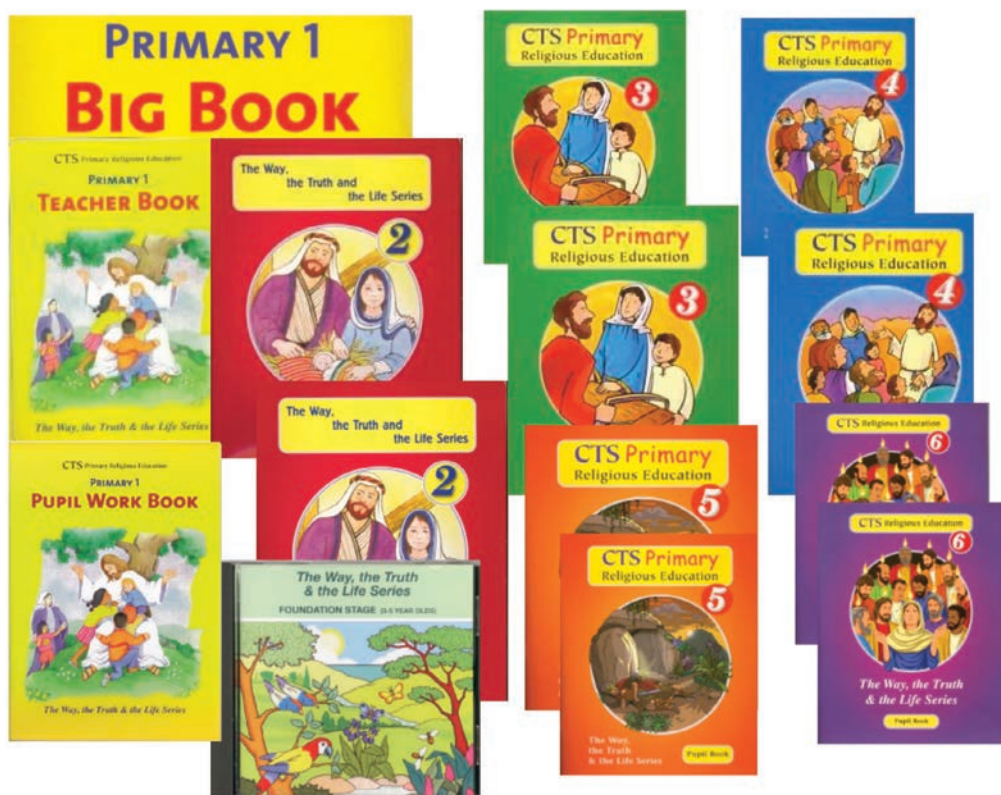


Once again, we started with a clearly defined syllabus for EYFS & KEY STAGE 1 and another for KEY STAGE 2.

A time of hectic activity followed. Editorial groups of primary & secondary teachers helped at every stage of development; often criticising our efforts, sending us back to square one.



By 2006 the Primary Series was completed and published. Its success lay in the fact that we relied totally on God's help and teachers' expertise in the classroom.



## Sales

The demand for Key Stage 3 Books was excellent and they sold very well in many dioceses. However, sales of the new Primary Series were slow. While schools who bought the new primary books were very happy with them, many were reluctant to take the leap away from the scheme they had been using for years. CTS suggested sending free samples of the books at random to schools across the country. Once teachers saw the books, orders flowed in. The diocese of Lancaster was the first to officially recognise and encourage schools to use WTL, then Leeds, Salford, Shrewsbury. Eventually schools in Southwark, East Anglia and Westminster were free to choose it if they wished.

## Feedback



Terence Copley, University of Exeter wrote a review on WTL secondary books for the **Times Education Supplement**:

*'The Way, the Truth and the Life is challenging; we are presented with Catholicism as a world Church, open to truth in other religions, wanting its young people to engage with and discuss the big issues, and not sweeping their questions and criticism under the carpet'.*



## Archbishop Vincent Nichols at the launch of Teacher's & Pupil's Books 5



Archbishop Vincent Nichols: "I must confess that when I asked the schools to get together and work together on their classroom standards, I honestly didn't think that we would end up with a published product of such high standard. But here it is. It is a great resource entirely developed by teachers themselves after thorough research and I trust that the Catholic community in this country will be the richer for it".

### Feedback From Schools

There were a few negative responses but overall the comments were very positive. Teachers described the books as 'exciting', 'helpful', 'imaginative' and 'manageable'

**"The WTL has been very inspirational for me. As a teacher, it provides all that I need to know and how to pass it on to the pupils."**

**"The children have gained a deeper understanding of our Faith compared to anything I've ever known in 19 years of teaching at this school. On a personal note, it has led me to becoming a Catholic myself and deepened my own relationship with God. For that – 'Thank You!!'**

**"To all the teachers who contributed to the WTL scheme: it demonstrates that you have all been in the front of classes and you know how it feels to be looking for material to supplement topics. Here, not only are the lessons well planned, well mapped out with progression and assessment but there are opportunities for children not only to learn but to experience the faith in so many ways. Thank you all and God bless."**

## The Doctrinal Content

The series is based on the belief that God is always the initiator in the history of our creation and redemption.

It focuses specifically on REVELATION – LIFE IN CHRIST – CHURCH & CELEBRATION from the Curriculum Directory which is based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Scriptures.

**Revelation** in the strict sense of the word remains the starting point for the delivery and presentation of the specifically religious content for it takes the person beyond the scope of their own experience, challenging and transforming it.

This is a powerful statement and a challenging one to translate into a level of understanding for pupils. Basically, revelation must transform our lives. Revelation sheds light on experience, not vice versa. The parable of the Good Samaritan is an example of this. When pupils study this parable they discuss and think about treating everyone in their family and friendship circle with love and compassion. This can be challenging, but if they and the whole world acted as Good Samaritans what a transformation there would be!

## Pedagogical approach



The pedagogical approach makes clear connections between the truths of faith and the pupils' own experiences of life.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

## Living The New Commandment

John 13:34-35



**Good classroom practice**, which is evident throughout the scheme, means focusing on the **message** of the scripture text.

- What message has the story **for us** today?
- What must **we do** with the message?
- How do **we relate** it to the **here** and **now**?

### Each of the Teacher's Books contains:

- Introduction by Cardinal Vincent Nichols.
- Overview of the Syllabus – *so that teachers can see at a glance the content in other books – what pupils have covered in previous years and what they will be covering.*
- Methodology.
- Notes for users – guidance on effective teaching and learning.
- Key content from the Religious Education Curriculum Directory – *teachers can be reassured that they are covering the required content.*
- Theological notes from the Catechism of the Catholic Church for each module.
- Specific guidance for teaching each of the Key Learning Objectives for each week with 'Starting Points' additional activities, links to PPPs and 'Plenaries'.
- Worksheets to photocopy – very good for homework.
- Guidance on Assessment with tasks – also guidance on marking tasks.

In addition, with the support of the CD ROMS & DVD ROMS teachers are encouraged to use the very best pedagogical approaches to engage pupils in a multisensory way. A CD ROM '**Assessment for Learning**' and another on the **Catholic Approach to Other Faiths** for Primary Schools were published to further enhance the range and quality of resources available. All books and CD ROMs have the *Nihil Obstat* and *Imprimatur* so teachers can use them, confident that they are free from doctrinal error.



## Second Edition

By 2009, we realised that we needed to update the whole series. Expectations in terms of content and presentations were much higher. Many classrooms had become multimedia centres. At this point, we made the decision to become our own publisher and Redemptorists took on the distribution of the books.

The needs that were identified ten years earlier for appropriate resources to support and enhance teachers' knowledge and understanding of the Catholic Faith were now greater. Many primary schools have difficulty in finding teachers with a qualification in Religious Education. Our recent in-service sessions have identified teachers of other religions and self-declared agnostics and atheists who have to teach Religious Education and genuinely want to do it well. It makes the Teacher's Book essential reading.



Between 2009 – 2018 the second edition of all WTL Pupil and Teacher Books for 3-14 years were published and each year group has a CD ROM or a DVD ROM with a wide range of additional resources: Power Point presentations, SMART and or Promethian notebooks, some audio recordings, videos, worksheets and assessment tasks.

## WTL Series Second Edition





## A CD Rom on Formative Assessment

was published with:

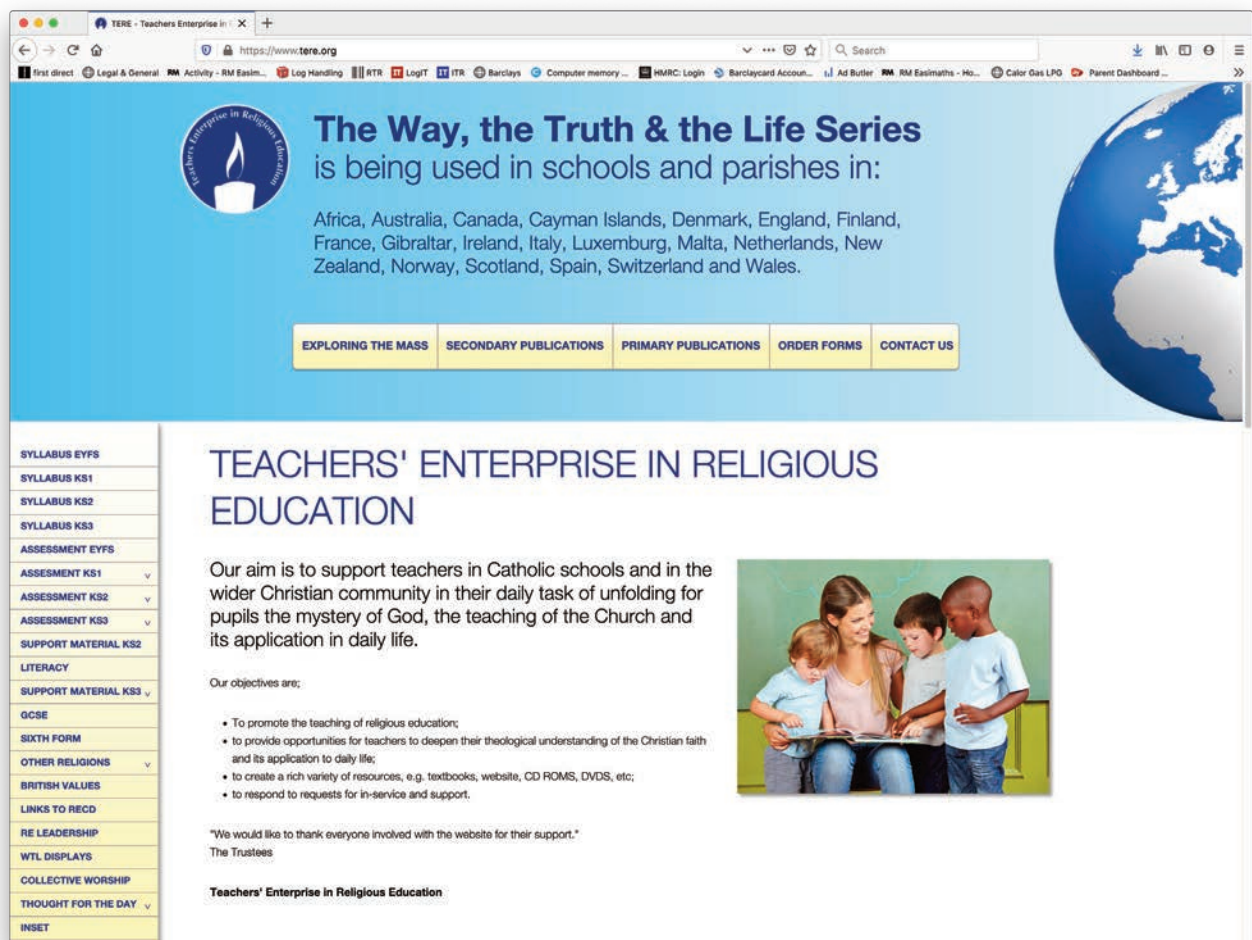
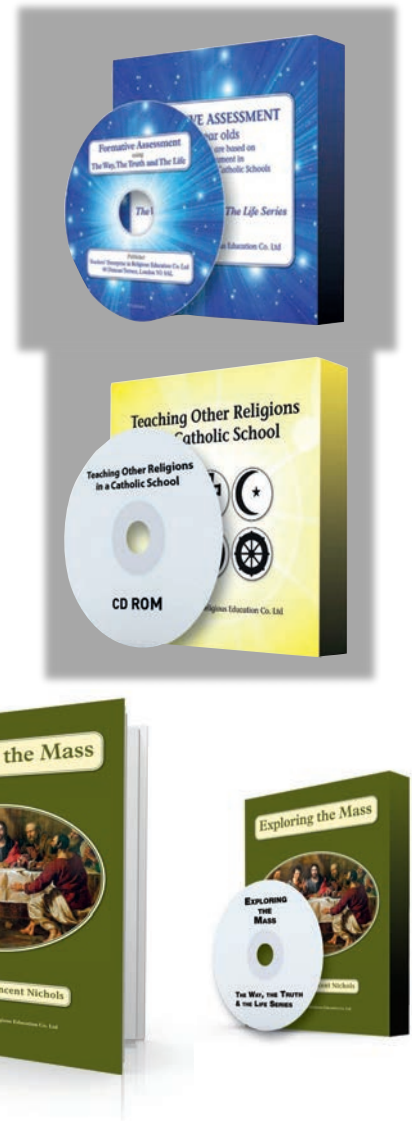
- guidance on need for Assessment and the pitfalls;
- over 100 tasks with success criteria;
- pupils' exemplification material.

**Another CD ROM: Teaching other Religions in a Catholic School** – was published for **Key Stages 2 and 3**. It provides a wide range of resources for Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism and also the Catholic approach to each of the religions. Its use is flexible, so teachers can use it to meet their own diocesan requirements.

Finally, we completed the second editions with a DVD of **'Exploring the Mass with Cardinal Vincent Nichols & Year 8 students'** and a textbook to accompany it.

**Our Website: [www.tere.org](http://www.tere.org)**

In 2019, our website was updated and extended.



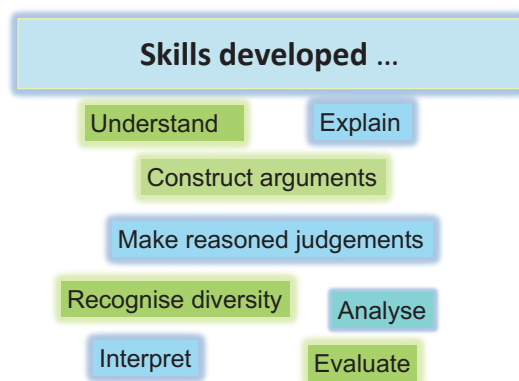
## Latest additions

**Progression in Higher Order Thinking** focusing on the pictured SKILLS.

**End of Module tests based on the GCSE for Key Stage 3.**

**Age-related Standards & Skills** mapped to *The Way, The Truth & The Life* are also on the website.

**Details of all** the resources are on our website.



## In-service for Teachers

When the Teachers' Enterprise began, its objective was to provide resources which teachers could use with confidence knowing they were delivering the Curriculum Directory, resources which pupils would enjoy and find stimulating. We feel that objective has, for the moment, been achieved.

Now our focus is on INSET for primary schools. While there has always been a demand for In-service, the need now is greater due to the number of teachers with little or no knowledge of the Catholic faith. Most of our training is for class teachers of specific year groups.

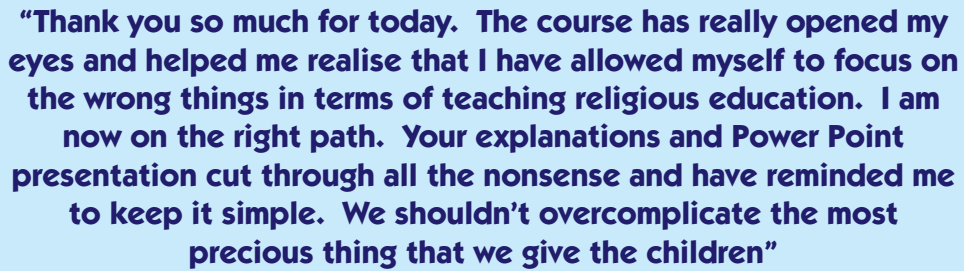
Teachers have the opportunity to meet colleagues from other dioceses and share experience of good practice. Participants are encouraged to bring class books or individual work samples so that everyone can see how the WTL scheme is being put into practice.

We feel it is vital to take time to explore the theological knowledge that teachers will need at their own level for the coming modules. Then we look at assessment in whatever form it currently takes. We always ask for a short evaluation so that we can plan for future. Teachers' responses are overwhelmingly positive.

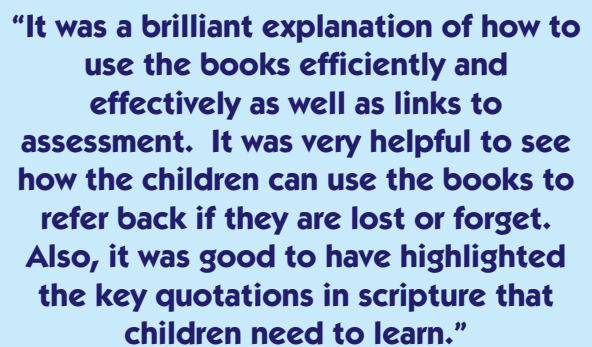
Here are a few:

**"Thank you for this amazing introduction to using 'The Way, the Truth & the Life' programme. I feel more confident in going back to school and teaching it. The higher order thinking questions are excellent."**

**"It was good to explore the wide range of texts, modern day saints as well as the Old Testament and the range of sources the scheme covers. The child friendly layout and pitch is an instant hit. I thought the way the Trinity and the New Covenant were explained was brilliant. It inspired and instilled in me much confidence."**



**"Thank you so much for today. The course has really opened my eyes and helped me realise that I have allowed myself to focus on the wrong things in terms of teaching religious education. I am now on the right path. Your explanations and Power Point presentation cut through all the nonsense and have reminded me to keep it simple. We shouldn't overcomplicate the most precious thing that we give the children"**



**"It was a brilliant explanation of how to use the books efficiently and effectively as well as links to assessment. It was very helpful to see how the children can use the books to refer back if they are lost or forget. Also, it was good to have highlighted the key quotations in scripture that children need to learn."**

## **The Future**

We will continue to ensure that RE has meaning and purpose for young people not only now but in the future.

We will aim for Religious Education to continue to be academically rigorous, enriching and enjoyable.

We will continue to have projects for pupils to share their learning with parents.

For the senior management and visitors, we will encourage the use of '**deep dive**'. For example, for the head, deputy or visitor to ask pupils questions on something specific that they know has been covered, e.g. **YEAR 4 on WTL Book 4:**

- *What evidence do you have to show that Jesus is truly God and truly human?*

Or a **general question**:

- *What are the most important points you have **learnt about your faith** in the last six weeks?*
- *Can you give me an example of how you are able to put your **beliefs into practice**?*
- *How are your RE lessons **giving meaning and purpose** to your life?*

While our recent focus has been mainly on primary, we are aware that we need to pick up on Key Stage 3. Of course, the whole programme will be assessed in the light of the new Curriculum Directory.

From the beginning of the project, we have been conscious that the Lord has been with us. The way hasn't always been easy, but we have received tremendous support from colleagues and theological advisers: Mgr Michael Keegan, Fr Herbert Alphonso SJ and currently Fr Byran Lobo SJ, Gregorian University, Rome.



We continually thank God for the success of **"The Way, The Truth and The Life"** which has spread further than we hoped or dreamed.

## **The Way, The Truth & The Life is now used in ...**

**South Africa**

**Australia**

**Canada**

**Switzerland**

**Malta**

**Spain**

**Italy**

**Norway**

**Denmark**

**Finland**

**France**

**Gibraltar**

**Ireland**

**Scotland**

**Netherlands**

**Wales**

**Luxemburg**

**Cayman Islands**

**New Zealand**



Presentation by Marcellina Cooney CP,  
Betty Conboy and Angela Edwards at  
ATCRE Conference 8 February 2020