Giving it! How charitable is Britain?

Ten ways to use charity data in exploring the themes of money and religion.

This piece of work, adaptable across a wide age range, suggests how learning about charities might enable your pupils to think for themselves about their own values and attitudes with regard to money. It is based on the table of the top ten charities in the UK, by voluntary income. Guessing and speculation skills are used in this work – RE needs more of these, and better ways to use the real data of modern Britain.

Which charity?	What do they do?	How much money was given in a year? (Figures, in £millions, are from 2007)
1. **Cancer Research UK** www.cancerresearchuk.org	Searches for treatments and a cure for cancer through medical work	**£297m**
2. **Oxfam** www.oxfam.org.uk	Aids all those suffering and in poverty worldwide, working in over 70 of the world's poorest nations.	**£176m**
3. **The British Red Cross Society** www.redcross.org.uk	Provides emergency assistance to people in crisis both in the UK and internationally.	**£115m**
4. **The Royal National Lifeboat Institute** www.rnli.org.uk	Runs lifeboat and rescue stations to save lives at sea on the UK's shoreline.	**£104m**
5. **Save the Children** www.savethechildren.org.uk	Works internationally and in the UK to provide for children who suffer and build up their chances in life.	**£95m**
6. **Macmillan Cancer Support** www.macmillan.org.uk	Provides medical and practical support for those living with cancer in the UK	**£91m**
7. **National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children** www.nspcc.org.uk	Acts and campaigns to stop cruelty to children in 180 community projects around the UK	**£90m**
8. **Christian Aid** www.christianaid.org.uk	Works in 50+ of the world's poorest countries to give people of all religions and none better chances in life	**£88m**
9. **The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals** www.rspca.org.uk	Works in the UK to stop animal cruelty and promote kindness to living creatures.	**£88m**
10. **The Salvation Army** www.salvationarmy.org.uk	A Christian church and a social action agency that supports people who are homeless, in need or in trouble in the UK.	**£87m**

Ten ways to use this data for good RE:

1. **Guess the top ten.** Begin by asking pupils to brainstorm the charities they have heard of in small groups, then to guess which ones were given the most money in a year in Britain. Some charities are prominent, but small, others are large, but not very visible to pupils. See which team guessed the most from the top ten (3 or 4 is a good score!). This activity makes your pupils curious and interested in the data.
2. **What does each charity do? Who does the charity help?** Ask pupils to match the charities to their activities – you could use the table above, cut into 30 pieces. Can they reassemble the data?
3. **Add it all up, and divide it all out.** Get pupils to estimate what percentage of wealth someone has to give if they are to be classed as a generous person. If they got £23 000 a year, how much might they give away? How much did the 10 charities receive from voluntary income and donations? (it is £1231million pounds). Given that there are 60 million people in the UK, and the per capita average income is £23 300, should we say that an average charitable gift of £20.51 to these top ten charities is generous, or mean? It is less than 0.1% of 'our' averaged income.
4. **Local or global?** Ask pupils to think about whether the British are generous to people at home or worldwide. If they add up the donations , they will see that 6 of these ten charities work in the UK (one with animals). Two work in UK and globally, and two work in the poorest nations of the world. Ask some questions about this, and what it says about our generosity. Are people more likely to be generous if they think they might also benefit from the charity they support? Does this matter?
5. **Weighing up the websites:** ask teams of three pupils to look at the websites for each of the ten charities. Book a computer room, or use an after school club, or set this for homework. They must give a 90 – second report on what they found out, including a 'star rating' for whether the site is educational and child friendly.
6. **Religious charities?** Two of the charities are explicitly religious. Both Christian Aid and the Salvation Army help anyone in need, not just Christians. 5 of the other charities were also started by Christian people, but are now 'religion neutral'. The RSPCA is one of these. There are some quite large charities from other religions too, but none in the UK top ten. What can we learn about religion and charity? Do religious people give away money more easily than others?
7. **Following the teaching of faith?** Islam teaches: 'He is not a believer who takes his fill while others starve.' The Buddha said: 'misers go not to the heavens. The generous find joy in higher worlds.' Jesus taught 'God loves a cheerful giver.' How should followers of religion behave with regard to charity? What about the non-religious?
8. **Who would you support?** Which of the ten charities would pupils be happiest to give money to? Which one would they like to work for when they are grown up? Would they leave a legacy to one of the charities in their will? (Cancer Research receives nearly half of its income from legacies [why?]).
9. **Creating a viral marketing campaign.** Ask groups of three pupils to devise a Youtube-style clip that would encourage people to give to, or to work for, one of the ten charities. Many of the charity websites show their current offerings – can your learners improve on these? Do the charities need new logos? Are any of them cool?
10. **Think about generosity:** if everyone gave like the Muslims – 1/40th of their money to those less fortunate, what would change? What if everyone gave 10% of their money to help the poor, as some Christians and Jews do?