

'THEOS

Why RE Matters

The Theos team



Introduction



Where can young minds reflect critically on their own assumptions about the world, and better understand the different worldviews of those with whom they live and work? Where can they engage academically with the most pressing ethical issues facing society, while also finding resources to develop their personal spirituality? Where can they gain confidence and familiarity with the key texts, ideas, and rituals that have historically shaped (and continue to infuse) UK culture, while also understanding the influences at the deep roots of other cultures?

Religious education offers all these possibilities and more – and fostering such vital skills has arguably never been more important.

After all, faith and belief are significant elements in many of today's biggest headlines across the world, while higher levels of immigration to the UK have brought far greater religious diversity at home. At the same time, levels of religious affiliation are declining among the existing population. It is now much more likely that you will have a profoundly different worldview from the person sat next to you – whether on the bus, in the office, or in the classroom – than it was even ten years ago; it is also increasingly likely that an understanding of what it means to have a religious worldview at all will need to be taught somewhere outside the home.

And yet, religious education is a subject facing serious challenges. While some schools provide excellent RE, others neglect it in the school timetable. In England, all state-funded schools have a statutory duty to teach religious education to all their pupils (apart from those whose parents have exercised their right to withdraw their children from RE classes). RE occupies an unusual place in the school curriculum: it is included in the basic curriculum, but not the national curriculum, and the arrangements for which syllabus each school follows depends on the type of school.¹ In Wales, Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) is mandatory for all learners from ages 3 to 16.² In Scotland, Religious and Moral Education (in non-denominational schools) and Religious Education (in Roman Catholic schools) are mandatory for all pupils attending primary and secondary education.³

However, many schools are not meeting their basic obligations. As of November 2023, 15% of English secondary schools did not teach any RE in Year 11.⁴ While every pupil in England, Wales and Scotland has an entitlement to RE, in practice provision for good RE is unequal – and, as we explore below, the most disadvantaged pupils often receive the worst deal. Ofsted's recent subject report for RE (2024) also highlighted a lack of agreement on how the subject

should be approached – including what the actual content of an outstanding religious education should be – even among those committed to providing it.⁵ This ambiguity is made worse by the lack of an agreed body of learning for the subject.

So too, the numbers of students opting to study religious studies or theology beyond school-level are dwindling – which in turn limits the availability of subject specialists to teach the emerging generation. At university level, there were around 6,500 fewer students on theology and religious studies courses in 2017/18 than there were in 2011/12, and many excellent religious studies and theology departments are closing.⁶ In 2021, over half (51%) of those teaching RE lessons spent the majority of their timetabled hours teaching a different subject.⁷

The confluence of all these trends should worry us all. Pro-active championing of high-quality religious education could not be more urgent, yet the various challenges facing RE pose a threat to the very existence of the subject in future – and risk a disastrous deficit of religious literacy in the UK.

More needs to be done to ensure that every member of society receives a high-quality religious education. This short publication makes the case for a bold and enthusiastic embrace of high-quality RE as a priority area in our educational landscape, according to six key arguments. A series of reflections in support of RE from key figures in our common life are offered throughout. There simply could not be a better time for educators and policymakers – indeed, for all of us – to make a renewed commitment to the subject. And Theos believes the fruits of this labour will be felt not only in the formation of individuals and communities, but in the building of a more humane, compassionate, and understanding society.

“One of the most dangerous assumptions among policymakers is the belief that faith is declining, or that it is simply a dark and obscure aspect of society. I’d argue that on the contrary faith is becoming more important around the world, whether directly or through the way that it is used. We won’t understand society unless we understand the role that faith plays in people’s lives and why it remains such an important and complex force.”

Sir Philip Rutnam, Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office (2017-20)

“Two things are happening at once in the UK, as they are in most of modern Europe. On the one hand secularization persists, eroding not only religious activity as such but the knowledge and sensitivities required to understand this. On the other, growing religious diversity, driven by immigration, has propelled religion back into the public sphere at precisely the moment that it drains from private lives. The result all too often is an ill-informed and ill-mannered conversation about complex and difficult issues. Raising the profile of RE at every level of the school system offer is a no brainer: first in raising the religious literacy of students and staff, and second in nurturing the digital wisdom necessary to navigate this rapidly changing scene.”

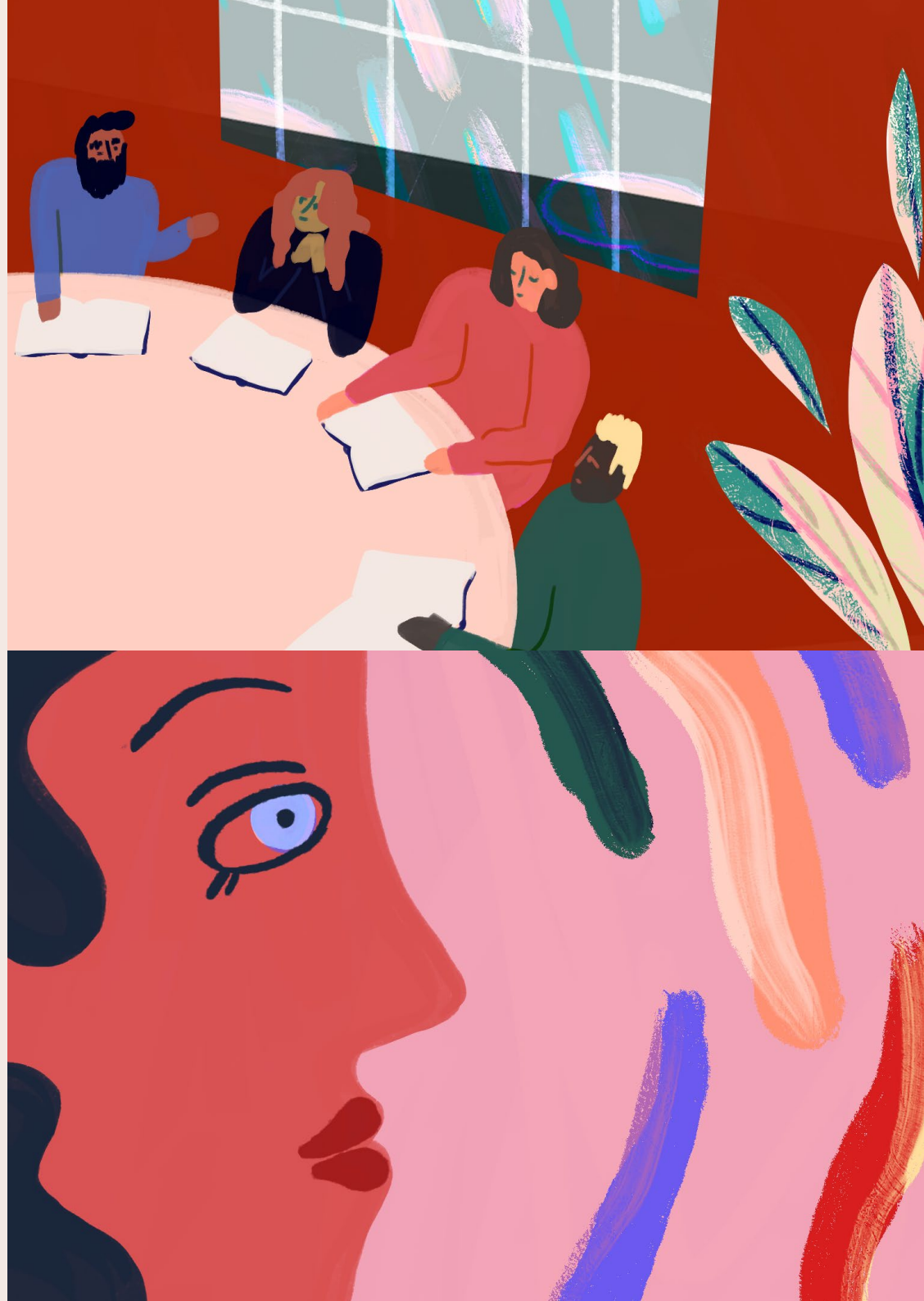
Grace Davie, Professor Emeritus of Sociology, University of Exeter

What do we mean by “religious education”?

Religious education in the UK has dramatically changed over the last 70 years. The focus of the subject in the mid-20th century was primarily on Christian instruction. As the population became more religiously diverse from the 1950s onwards, this focus began to shift to a “world religions” paradigm aimed at teaching accurate knowledge of different belief systems – and then shifted again in the early 21st century, to a focus on “sound personal development”.⁸ In the wake of 9/11, “helping students to make wise, educated, balanced and beneficial choices in matters of religion and belief became centre stage.”⁹

More recently, there has been increasing momentum to reimagine the subject again – this time as “Religion and Worldviews Education”. The focus here is on the diverse lived experiences of adherents to different worldviews, combining both factual and experiential knowledge, rather than an institutional or purely knowledge-based focus. The intention is to reshape the subject “away from a focus on gathering information about the ‘world religions’ towards gaining an understanding of how worldviews work in human experience, including pupils’ own.”¹⁰ Motivations for this shift include a recognition of the diversity of belief even within a single faith or belief system, and the impossibility of meaningfully covering the many different faith and belief identities in the UK – including non-religious ones – in the time available for the subject.¹¹

This publication uses the widely-understood term “religious education” for clarity. This is not intended as an argument for any particular subject approach. Nonetheless, Theos is supportive of a religion and worldviews approach as it is set out in our recent report, *Worldviews in Religious Education*, as well as in our widely-used animation, *Nobody Stands Nowhere*.¹²



1. Building critical thinking and powerful knowledge

Oxford recognises that high-quality religious education can equip students with the tools they need to assess the credibility of ideas, to reconsider their initial thinking, and to build layers of complex understanding over time.¹³ Good RE builds critical thinking by helping students to distinguish between impersonal and personal evaluations of new ideas, and to bring multiple lenses in their own evaluation of concepts or events. It teaches both “substantive knowledge” (e.g. knowledge of different religious systems, and of the complexity and range within these systems) and a deeper awareness of different “ways of knowing” (e.g. the significance of different sources giving rise to different questions being asked, or different interpretations of the answers).¹⁴

The sociologist Michael Young and educationalist David Lambert define knowledge as “powerful” if it “predicts, if it explains, if it enables you to envisage alternatives” – that is, if it enables you to go beyond your own experience.¹⁵ The knowledge gained through RE can indeed be “powerful”. It can encourage a student’s empathy, imagination, compassion, and citizenship. It may give a future employer the awareness they need to make fair provision for religious colleagues in their workplace. Or it may help someone to understand when their neighbours are likely to be celebrating a religious festival and why. These applications of RE are explored further in the sections below.

Of equal importance, much of Western history and culture has been profoundly shaped by religious sources, texts and ideas. This is especially (though not only) true of Christianity, and within that, the Bible. Simply put, some basic theological and biblical understanding is a prerequisite for the serious study of many other disciplines – and indeed, for a well-rounded understanding of how and why British culture has formed as it has. How might a student begin to understand the history of the Reformation without some grasp of core ideas in Christian theology? And how might they make sense of the difference between Church of Scotland and Catholic expressions of Christianity without this background? How might someone’s reading of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, or Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, be enriched or diminished by their level of familiarity with biblical allusion? How might their understanding of the Crusades, or the British Empire, or the Troubles, or constitutional history, be informed by a knowledge of religious differences and dynamics?

More broadly, many of the general arguments in support of humanities education also apply to RE. As the National Foundation for Educational Research noted in August 2024, post-16 take-up of arts and humanities subjects has declined considerably in comparison to STEM and social science subjects in recent years; strikingly, only 38% of AS- or A-Level students studied a humanities subject in 2021/22 compared to 56% in 2015/16.¹⁶ We are experiencing the rapid decline of arts and humanities education in the UK, and the British Academy has been especially vocal in making the case for continued investment in what it calls “SHAPE” subjects (Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy). This is critical both to maintain the general diversity of skills in the UK workforce, and to ensure the specific skills associated with an arts and humanities education continue to enrich British society.¹⁷ A serious strategy for RE is part of the sustainable future of the arts and humanities.

“The case for serious and professional study of religious traditions is stronger than it has ever been. It is not only a matter of understanding the roots of a variety of tensions and conflicts in the contemporary scene, from Ukraine to Pakistan, from Gaza to Myanmar; it is also to do with the crisis of values in Western democracy, the question of how to define justice and human dignity, the imperative of truth-seeking, and much else besides. Exploring the alternatives to both a vacuous individualism and an aggressive new tribalism is an imperative for any humane and intelligent future.”

The Rt Revd & Rt Hon Dr Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury (2002-12)

“My deeper connection to, and understanding of, faith has profoundly expanded my compassion and sense of hope and love for humanity, especially in today’s increasingly challenging and ever-changing world. This journey has allowed me to maintain a strong sense of optimism and a hopeful outlook for the future. Good-quality RE gives all young people the opportunity to begin their own journey of discovery.”

Zara Mohammed, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain

2. Supporting personal development

The idea that education is about the personal development of pupils, and that RE has a key role to play here, is well established. In England, the National Curriculum framework document sets out an expectation that all schools will offer a curriculum that “promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils”.¹⁸ In Wales, the Curriculum for Wales recognises the importance of personal and spiritual development in helping students to become “healthy, confident individuals, ready to live fulfilling lives as valued members of society”.¹⁹ Schools place high value on the personal development of their students.²⁰

As a subject, RE is well-placed to support these aims. For example, in local Agreed Syllabuses it is commonplace to find aims for RE focus on personal and spiritual development, helping students to develop an aptitude for dialogue, to disagree respectfully, to gain an awareness of their own and others’ identities, and to look beyond themselves.²¹ The aims of RVE in Curriculum for Wales include an “awareness of self in relation to others... creativity and going beyond the everyday; exploration of ultimate questions and contemplation of meaning and purpose.”²²

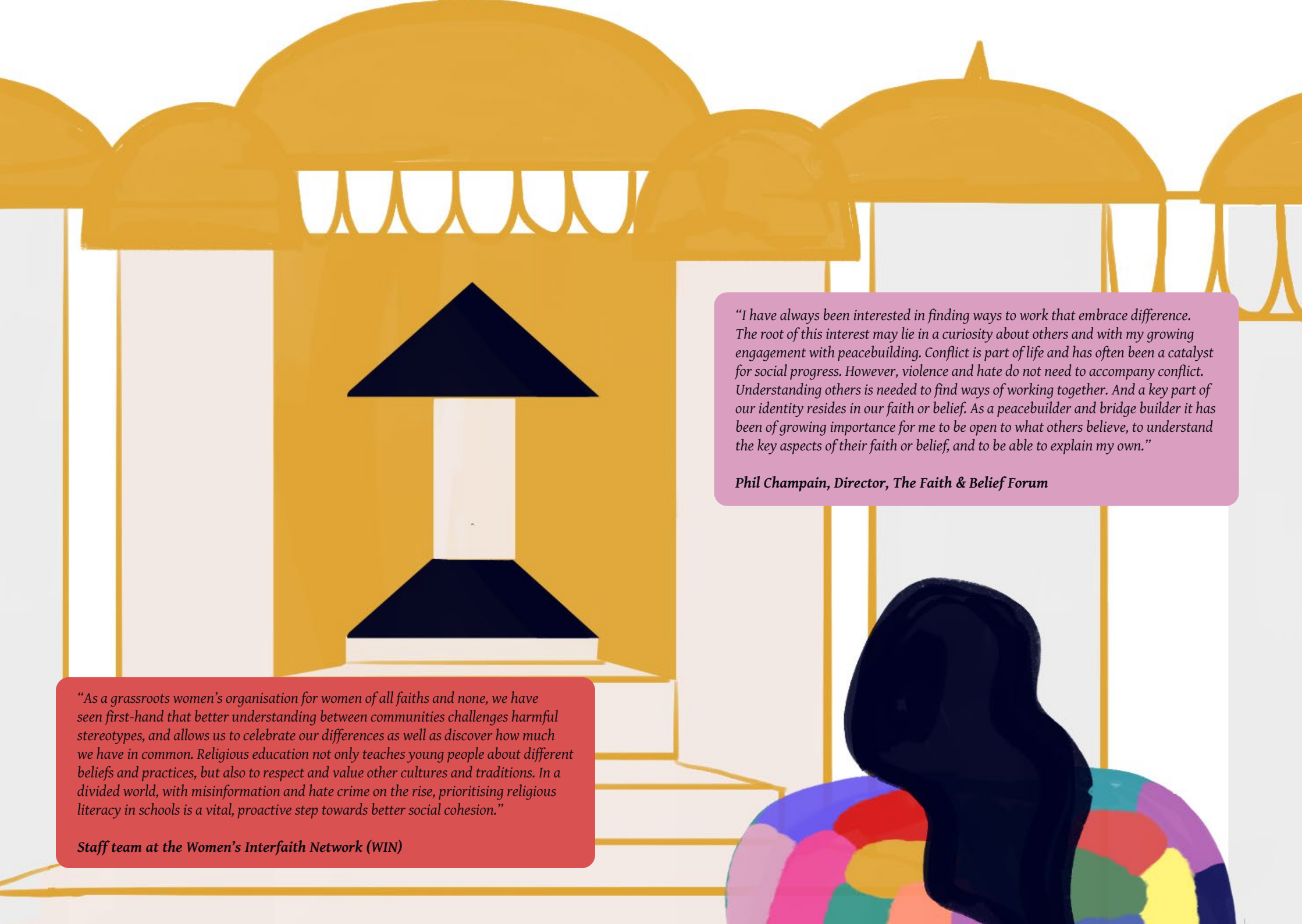
Recent Ofsted reports into RE also recognise that it can make a significant contribution to student’s personal development, especially when the student’s personal reflections are grounded in a good level of understanding and are accompanied by an awareness of their own perspectives.²³ The 2024 Ofsted subject report for RE noted how one school “skilfully wove in the opportunity for pupils to develop their personal knowledge once they had secured... component knowledge”, with a student commenting, “I don’t think my views have changed, but it’s given me the opportunity to see the world from a Christian perspective, and I can see the possibility for how there could be a God. So, I think it’s brilliant to be able to see another point of view.”²⁴

The religion and worldviews approach particularly emphasises that each pupil – religious or not – has a personal worldview of their own. This is understood as the way in which each person will “encounter, interpret, understand and engage with the world”.²⁵ In this approach, one of the purposes of RE is to help the students reflect on and make sense of their own worldview, recognising the possibility that it might affect their approach to learning or change as a result of their studies.

The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues’ framework for character education in schools identifies four “building blocks of character”: intellectual virtues (e.g. curiosity, reflection), moral virtues (e.g. compassion, honesty), civic virtues (e.g. community, neighbourliness), and performance virtues (e.g. motivation, resilience).²⁶ Good RE can provide opportunities to develop in all these areas. Students might encounter examples of religious leaders whose empathy and perseverance inspire them, or explore sacred texts with centuries-old teachings about integrity and service to others. They might think deeply about philosophical questions that require the humility to recognise they don’t have all of the answers, or reflect on the sense of belonging held by a member of a religious tradition and what that means for their sense of community. RE creates spaces where students can learn from religious and non-religious texts, beliefs, practices, achievements and failures – and allow what they learn to develop their own spiritual and moral understanding.

“If I was going to be a little flip I’d say that having gone to Catholic school in Canada, my religious education means I can read and make sense of books by James Joyce and Graham Greene. But more significant, if not entirely different from being able to wrestle with sometimes challenging literary works: before I was the Director of the Sandford St Martin Trust, I was a journalist and, over the course of my career, I travelled around the world and was responsible for reporting on stories concerning people who sometimes had very different beliefs and world views from my own or from what I had experienced before. The religious education I received might have been through a Canadian and through a Catholic lens but it was also outward-looking and not limited to Christianity or even to Canada. What it encouraged me to be was curious and it taught me that, beyond tolerance alone, there is great value in listening, learning and engaging. Good skills for a journalist but really good skills for anyone.”

Anna McNamee, Executive Director, The Sandford St Martin Trust



“As a grassroots women’s organisation for women of all faiths and none, we have seen first-hand that better understanding between communities challenges harmful stereotypes, and allows us to celebrate our differences as well as discover how much we have in common. Religious education not only teaches young people about different beliefs and practices, but also to respect and value other cultures and traditions. In a divided world, with misinformation and hate crime on the rise, prioritising religious literacy in schools is a vital, proactive step towards better social cohesion.”

Staff team at the Women’s Interfaith Network (WIN)

“I have always been interested in finding ways to work that embrace difference. The root of this interest may lie in a curiosity about others and with my growing engagement with peacebuilding. Conflict is part of life and has often been a catalyst for social progress. However, violence and hate do not need to accompany conflict. Understanding others is needed to find ways of working together. And a key part of our identity resides in our faith or belief. As a peacebuilder and bridge builder it has been of growing importance for me to be open to what others believe, to understand the key aspects of their faith or belief, and to be able to explain my own.”

Phil Champain, Director, The Faith & Belief Forum

3. Fostering stronger communities

The UK is becoming more diverse in many ways, and this includes increased religious diversity. While a shrinking proportion of the UK now identifies as Christian, the number of people describing themselves as Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist have all grown in the last decade. For example, those identifying as Muslim in the England and Wales census rose from 2.7 million in 2011 to 3.9 million in 2021. The percentage of Hindu respondents rose from 1.5 in 2011 to 1.7% in 2021. Smaller religious groups like Shamanism are among the fastest growing identities.²⁷

Diversity within religious identities is also rising, as migrant communities bolster minority religious groups and denominations. This is true of Christianity too: the fastest growth in Christian churches in recent years has been among black majority Pentecostal traditions and Chinese-heritage congregations.²⁸

At the same time, non-religiosity is also on the rise in the UK. The 2021 census found that 37.2% of the population across England and Wales did not affiliate with any religion, up 12% from the 2011 census, while other studies have estimated that over half the UK population – a majority – is non-religious.²⁹ With particular reference to younger people in the UK, in 2018 over half (59%) of those aged 16-29 said they “never” attended religious services of any tradition, and only 7% attended weekly.³⁰

Notably, however, the Woolf Diversity Study 2024 found that in England and Wales, religious diversity is more divisive than ethnic diversity.³¹ Increasingly, then, ensuring strong, resilient and compassionate communities will demand strong religious literacy – and this begins in the classroom.

Good RE promotes stronger communities at all levels: within the school, within the local community, within the UK as a national community, and in terms of understanding of the significance of religion within the global community.³² It has a vital role to play in fostering stronger community relations, grounded in mutual respect and understanding among young people.³³

The importance of RE in this regard is heightened by recent strains on community interfaith work. In the last eighteen months alone, the closure of the Inter Faith

Network and the conflict in the Middle East have both had an impact on community tensions in the UK. Antisemitic and Islamophobic hate crimes, and religiously-motivated community tensions, have risen – in particular in the aftermath of October 7th 2023 and during the summer of 2024.³⁴ Forthcoming Theos research into the aftermath of the 2024 riots highlights the role that schools, including faith schools, can play in encouraging cohesion even in fractured communities.³⁵

Finally, religious dynamics vary hugely from place to place. For example, the percentage of residents within a local authority who identify as Christian ranges from 66.6% in the ‘most Christian’ area to 22.3% at the other end of the scale. The adult Muslim population of local authorities ranges from 0.2% to 39.9%. For those of no religious identity, it varies from 10.6% to 56.7%. The proportion of a local population who are Jewish ranges from <1% in over 300 authorities, to 17% in the most Jewish area.³⁶ The religious dynamics of the average classroom will therefore vary significantly from place to place – and well-resourced RE can be tailored from school to school to meet local need.

“For our diverse UK society to flourish and its citizens to work for the common good, it is vital to give attention to what is taught and learnt about religion and belief. Religious Education is essential because it is in schools and colleges that we have the best and earliest chance of breaking down ignorance and developing individuals who will be receptive of the ‘other’, asking difficult questions without fear of offending. This is vital for the fruition of a vision for a fairer, more cohesive society. A key element is to avoid the tendency to view the topic through a lens of security and counter-terrorism. RE should go beyond just knowing about different religions and beliefs but should engage students in an interactive process of building relationships based on awareness, honesty, dialogue and trust.”

Dr Ed Kessler MBE, Founder President of the Woolf Institute

4. Preparing for the workplace

While we typically choose our friends and social circles, we have far less control over who we interact with in the workplace. As religious diversity in the UK increases, colleagues must be willing and able to collaborate effectively with one another despite holding different worldviews and beliefs.

In a typical office environment, a team member may need a quiet space for daily prayers. Another might have dietary requirements at staff events. Others may hold different views about appropriate workplace behaviour or communication styles. Some 61% of UK adults think it is important to understand the beliefs and worldviews of others in the workplace³⁷ – and while accommodation of religious requirements alone is important, fostering authentically inclusive and welcoming workplaces requires a deeper understanding of how worldviews, religious or otherwise, shape people’s perspectives, priorities, and practices. Comprehensive religious education plays a vital role in preparing future workers to navigate this complexity and build such working environments.

Early exposure to worldview diversity contributes to building core competencies, including the ability to recognise and accurately represent other’s perspectives, navigate competing truth claims and value systems constructively, communicate in a respectful manner, even when differences come to the fore, and apply ethical reasoning in complex situations.³⁸ Conversely, the cost of religious illiteracy is high as workplace diversity increases: misunderstandings about colleagues’ beliefs and/or insensitive handling of religious differences can fracture team relationships, diminish productivity, and even lead to discrimination claims. Quality religious education can help prevent such problems by fostering the deep understanding needed for genuine workplace inclusion.

“High quality Religious Education helps young minds to respect and engage meaningfully with the richness of different worldviews in our society. It helps foster and sustain cohesive communities. Done well, it goes way beyond ‘simple’ religious literacy and builds the foundations for resilience, forging a sense of shared identity and community, whilst building on our rich ancestries and unique differences. In a world increasingly defined by individualism and difference, RE offers an alternative path.”

Professor Javed Khan OBE, Managing Director, Equi

“In today’s interconnected, multi-faith, and multicultural world, divisions and misunderstandings about the ‘other’ can lead to conflict and tension. It is, therefore, crucial to understand and respect diverse beliefs to foster a peaceful society. One effective way to achieve this is through studying faith and belief academically. It enables students not only to gain religious literacy but also to develop analytical and reflective skills. These academic tools foster a deeper understanding of how beliefs shape identities, cultures, and communities. Through this academic approach, young people learn to navigate differences with curiosity and respect rather than suspicion or fear. They will carry these skills throughout their lives, whether in personal relationships or their careers—in government, healthcare, social work, education, or beyond. This academic foundation will help them address challenges and work to creating a stronger, cohesive and more resilient world in which everyone is respected and thrives.”

Professor Jagbir Jhutti-Johal OBE, Professor of Sikh Studies at the University of Birmingham

5. Supporting disadvantaged pupils

As noted above, the study of RE fosters “powerful knowledge” that enables students to imagine alternative worldviews and ways of doing things. Yet provision of RE is patchy at best – and it is often the least advantaged pupils who suffer most from unreliable subject provision.

Research shows that disadvantaged pupils are less likely to be entered in for GCSE RE.³⁹ Yet where RE is offered, disadvantaged pupils are on average twice as likely to choose to study RE at A-level.⁴⁰ And where pupils choose to study RE at A-level, the attainment gap was the third smallest of all subjects, highlighting RE as more egalitarian than, for example, geography or history in the humanities.⁴¹ This in turn also improves their access to higher education.

In other words, unreliable provision of RE tends to widen the attainment gap: disadvantaged young people are made even more disadvantaged by the neglect of RE.

Schools that are serious about improving outcomes for their disadvantaged pupils should look carefully at their RE provision – particularly at Key Stages 4 and 5, as the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education warns.⁴² With education in the UK already performing poorly in tackling inequality, we cannot afford to provide RE as an afterthought.⁴³

“My theology degree from Birmingham was the foundation of my career. It introduced me to theological concepts that have informed every aspect of my life. It also put me on an amazing worldwide journey through the BBC – eventually becoming Head of Religious Broadcasting and in the last 15 years has introduced me to wonderful people from across the faiths with whom I work on many projects aimed at improving religious literacy. Religion is the most misunderstood yet one of the most important influences on society. Ignorance or apathy towards it is not only highly dangerous but it also misses out on so many riches of insight, culture and relationships. Religious Education is the way to make it asset and not liability – we diminish it at our peril.”

Michael Wakelin, Executive Chair, Religion Media Centre

“Our faith and beliefs, whether Religious or Secular, shape who we are and the actions we take. The more exposure we have to different religions and beliefs, the more we are able to understand (and empathise with) one another and find guidance for our own morals and value systems. In short, a good Religious Education is essential to good social cohesion. My own religious education opened my eyes to what religion can offer; a place to examine some of life’s biggest and most challenging questions and to understand the communality of our shared human experience. To engage students in Religion and Belief via the philosophical aspects of faith can open doors in the mind we didn’t even know were there.”

Daisy Scalchi, Head of Religion & Ethics, BBC Television

6. Promoting freedom of religion and belief

Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) is a recognised right in the United Nations Declaration (Article 18) and the European Convention on Human Rights (Article 9). These rights were established in recognition of the need to defend freedom of individual conscience. They protect freedom of religious and non-religious thought and practice, as well as the freedom to change religious beliefs.

The Pew Research Forum has shown that religious freedom is diminishing internationally. Their “Government Restrictions Index” level was 3.0 in 2021 (the latest year for which figures are available), up from 2.8 in 2020. This was the highest global median score since the Pew Forum began tracking religious freedom in 2007.

As above, while levels of religious affiliation are declining in the UK population, the UK is ever more religiously diverse. A recognition of FoRB rights fosters a culture of respect for religious pluralism. High-quality religious education can support awareness of religious thought and practice amongst the majority non-religious population and religious population alike. It is the main way in which FoRB principles can be recognised and promoted.

For example, the Religious Education Council’s National Content Standard identifies the importance of the Toledo Principles for shaping the content and teaching of RE.⁴⁴ A Culham St Gabriel’s primary school project worked with primary school teachers in England to develop classroom lesson plans to explore FoRB principles, explicitly engaging with questions of freedom and restrictions on freedom.⁴⁵

FoRB will be an especially important theme for diaspora communities, who may have fled religious persecution, or may be seeking to understand issues around religious freedom in the United Kingdom. Equally, public services, institutions or processes should seek to incorporate FoRB thinking so that they can serve people from different backgrounds effectively.

It is important to state that parents have the right to withdraw children from Religious Education, and that this may be done in support of their FoRB for the child or family in question.

“There has never been a stronger case for educating Britain’s schoolchildren about the range of religions and belief systems that exist today both in this country and around the world. As they grow up, children need to be supported as they explore their own beliefs and attitudes and seek to understand and respect those of others. The quality of religious education has become lamentably low and needs urgently to be strengthened. Why RE Matters makes its important case powerfully and clearly. It needs to be heard.”

Charles Clarke, Secretary of State for Home Affairs (2004-2006) and Secretary of State for Education and Skills (2002-2004)

“Approximately 85% of the population of our world identify with a religious belief of some kind. We therefore cannot teach our children about humanity without teaching them about religion. More importantly, in a world that is increasingly interconnected and diverse, religious education provides a critical foundation for mutual understanding and respect. Far beyond simply learning the cultures and traditions of others, it equips us with empathy, ethical insight, and an appreciation for the profound values that shape human experience. Religious literacy enables us to engage deeply with those from all walks of life, fostering communities that are both inclusive and compassionate. As we face complex global challenges, religious education stands as a powerful tool to build bridges and inspire our shared humanity.”

Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis KBE

Footnotes

Introduction

- 1 Some schools must use their local Agreed Syllabus, others may either adopt an Agreed Syllabus if they wish or develop an equivalent curriculum of their own, while some types of school that have a religious designation teach RE as it is specified in their trust deed.
- 2 HWB, "Summary of legislation", hwb.gov.uk, (2020). Available [here](#). In Wales, community, foundation and voluntary schools without a religious character use their locally agreed syllabus, and schools that have a religious character use either the agreed syllabus or provide RVE that is in line with the schools' trust deed. There is not a parental right of withdrawal in Wales.
- 3 Scottish Government, "Curriculum for Excellence: religious and moral education", gov.scot, (2011). Available [here](#). There is a parental right of withdrawal in Scotland.
- 4 NATRE, School workforce census November 2023 (2024), 1. Available [here](#).
- 5 Ofsted, "Deep and meaningful? The religious education subject report", Gov.UK, 17 April 2024. Available [here](#).
- 6 British Academy, Theology and Religious Studies provision in UK Higher Education (2019), 1-4. Available [here](#).
- 7 Nick Gibb, "Teachers: Working Hours", Written questions, answers and statements: UK Parliament, 6 January 2023. Available [here](#).
- 8 Trevor Cooling, Bob Bowie, and Farid Panjwani, Worldviews in Religious Education (2020), 20-29. Available [here](#).
- 9 Ibid. 23.
- 10 Stephen Pett, Developing a Religion and Worldviews approach in Religious Education in England: A Handbook for Curriculum Writers (2024), 12. PDF available [here](#).
- 11 "In most cases, where the curriculum tried to cover many religions, like equal slices of a pie, pupils generally remembered very little. In cases where the curriculum prioritised depth of study, pupils learned much more." Ofsted, "Deep and meaningful?"
- 12 Emily Downe, "Nobody Stands Nowhere", YouTube, 13 May 2021. Available [here](#).

1. Building critical thinking and powerful knowledge

- 13 Ofsted, Religious education: realising the potential (October 2013), 24. Available [here](#).
- 14 Ofsted, "Deep and meaningful?"
- 15 Michael Young and David Lambert, with Carolyn Roberts and Martin Roberts, Knowledge and the Future School: Curriculum and Social Justice (2014), 7, 74.
- 16 Michael Scott, Jenna Julius, Sarah Tang and Megan Lucas, Subject choice trends in post-16 education in England (2024), 17.
- 17 See, for example, "SHAPE Skills", British Academy, ongoing, available [here](#); "This is SHAPE", British Academy, available [here](#).

2. Supporting personal development

- 18 Department for Education, The national curriculum in England: Framework document (2014), 5. Available [here](#).
- 19 HWB, "Developing a vision for curriculum design", Hwb.gov.wales. Available [here](#).
- 20 NatCen Social Research & the National Children's Bureau Research and Policy Team, Developing character skills in schools (2017), 6. PDF available [here](#).
- 21 See, for example: Gloucestershire Agreed Syllabus for RE, 2017-2022, PDF available [here](#); Living Difference IV - The Agreed Syllabus for Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton (2021), PDF available [here](#); Awareness Mystery Value 22, available [here](#); Widening Horizons: The Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education in the London Borough of Hounslow 2022-2026, PDF available [here](#).
- 22 HWB, "Humanities: 5. Designing your curriculum", Hwb.gov.uk, January 2022. Available [here](#).
- 23 Ofsted, Religious education: realising the potential (October 2013), 4, 34. Available [here](#); and Ofsted, "Research review series: religious education", gov.uk, 12 May 2021. Available [here](#).
- 24 Ofsted, "Deep and meaningful?"
- 25 Pett, Developing a Religion and Worldviews approach, 15.
- 26 Jubilee Centre, The Jubilee Centre Framework for Character Education in Schools: Third Edition (2022), 9. Available [here](#).

3. Fostering stronger communities

- 27 Office of National Statistics, "Religion, England and Wales", ONS, 29 November 2022. Available [here](#); Scotland's Census, "Scotland's Census 2022 - Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion", Scotland's Census, 21 May 2024. Available [here](#).
- 28 Yinxuan Huang, Chinese Christianity in Britain: A Book of Ten Vignettes (2023), 3. Available [here](#); Peter Brierley, UK Christian Statistics No 4: 2021 Edition (2021), 6, 65 (article 1, section 9.9).
- 29 Office of National Statistics, "Religion, England and Wales"; John Curtice et al. (eds.), British Social Attitudes: The 36th Report (2019), 5. Available [here](#).
- 30 Stephen Bullivant, Europe's Young Adults and Religion (2018), available [here](#).
- 31 Julian Hargreaves, Carla Branco and David Izamoje, Woolf Diversity Study Report 2024 (2024), 7. Available [here](#).
- 32 Alan Brine, "Religious Education and Community Cohesion", RE:ONLINE, 11 December 2012. Available [here](#).
- 33 Shelley McKeown Jones et al. Building community relations through research informed educational practice in schools (2023). Available [here](#).
- 34 Rajeev Syal (2024). "Religious hate crimes at record levels in England and Wales, official figures show", The Guardian, 10th October. Available [here](#).
- 35 Hannah Rich, Church Responses to the August 2024 Riots (Forthcoming, 2024).
- 36 Office of National Statistics, "Religion, England and Wales".

4. Preparing for the workplace

- 37 Culham St Gabriels, "Public Perception", 2021. Available [here](#).
- 38 Adam Dinham and Martha Shaw, "Religious literacy through religious education: The future of teaching and learning about religion and belief", Religions, 8 (2017), article 119; Robert Jackson, Signposts: Policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious worldviews in intercultural education (2014).

5. Supporting disadvantaged pupils

- 39 NATRE, A report on the characteristics of schools in relation to provision and standards in Religious Studies at GCSE with a focus on ethnicity and free school meals (2019), 4. Available [here](#).
- 40 Natasha Plaister, "Do disadvantaged students choose different subjects from their peers at Key Stage 5?", FFT Education Datalab, 1 April 2022. Available [here](#).
- 41 NATRE, "Research suggests Religious Studies at GCSE and A level supports 'levelling up'". Available [here](#).
- 42 NATRE, "Research suggests Religious Studies at GCSE and A level supports 'levelling up'" (2022). Available [here](#).
- 43 Imran Tahir, "The UK education system preserves inequality - new report [Comment] The Conversation", IFS, 18 August 2022. Available [here](#).

4. Promoting freedom of religion and belief

- 44 Religious Education Council of England and Wales, National content standard for Religious education in England (2023), 25. Available [here](#).
- 45 Josh Cass and Kathryn Wright, Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB): Primary FoRB Project (2023). Available [here](#); Josh Cass and Kevin O'Grady, Surveying the freedom of religion or belief and education landscape - a review (2024). Available [here](#).

Recent Theos reports

Growing Good: Growth, Social Action and Discipleship in the Church of England

Hannah Rich

Faith and Belief on Campus: Division and Cohesion

Simon Perfect

A Torn Safety Net: How the cost of living crisis threatens its own last line of defence

Hannah Rich

More: The problem with productivity

Nick Spencer, Hannah Rich and Nathan Mladin

Working Five to Nine: How we can deliver work-life integration

Paul Bickley

Ashes to Ashes: Beliefs, Trends, and Practices in Dying, Death, and the Afterlife

Marianne Rozario

The Church and Social Cohesion: Connecting Communities and Serving People

Madeleine Pennington

Data and Dignity: Why Privacy Matters in the Digital Age

Nathan Mladin

