



# Religion and Worldviews in the Classroom: developing a Worldviews Approach

## A Draft Resource for curriculum developers

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Version 1.2

# Contents

Foreword	1
<b>1</b> The purposes of this Handbook	2
<b>2</b> Outline and rationale for this development	5
<b>3</b> What do people mean by ‘religion’?	7
<b>4</b> What do people mean by ‘worldview’?	8
<b>5</b> The value of worldviews in terms of content and approach	12
<b>6</b> Subject knowledge in school and community contexts	14
<b>7</b> Selecting content	16
<b>8</b> Purposes for RE in a religion and worldviews approach	17
<b>9</b> Revised National Statement of Entitlement	18
<b>10</b> Developing pupils’ personal worldviews	22
<b>11</b> Making good progress: models	24
<b>12</b> Fulfilling the National Statement of Entitlement	25
<b>13</b> Connecting the NSE with current practice	26
<b>14</b> Applying disciplinary methods	28
<b>15</b> How to use the NSE to develop a syllabus	29
<b>16</b> Using the NSE to develop questions and construct units of work	34
<b>17</b> To what extent is this new?	40
<b>18</b> How does this approach relate to GCSE?	41
Appendix 1. Making good progress: three models	42
Endnotes	46
Acknowledgements	48

## Acronyms:

**ASC:** Agreed Syllabus Conference

**CoRE:** Commission on RE

**CoRE report:** *Religion and Worldviews: The way forward*, report published 2018, following the two-year independent commission set up by the REC

**DfE:** Department for Education

**MAT:** Multi-academy trust

**NSE:** National Statement of Entitlement (see p. 20)

**OFSTED:** Office for Standards in Education

**REC:** Religious Education Council of England and Wales

**SACRE:** Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

# Foreword

This draft Handbook is the outcome of the first phase of a three-year project on behalf of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC). The aim of the project is to take the idea of a Religion and Worldviews approach, as advocated by the Commission on Religious Education’s final report, and see what it looks like when applied to a syllabus or curriculum.

The Handbook is provisional in its current form. Its primary purpose is to inform three framework-writing teams over the next 18-24 months. These teams have been appointed by the REC, after an open tendering process. They comprise team leaders, teachers and others involved in education (such as members of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education [SACREs], curriculum leaders in multi-academy trusts [MATs], academics, teacher trainers and advisers). Their task is to apply the draft Handbook to the creation of a framework for RE for their own specific contexts. Using the new religion and worldviews approach, as described in the draft Handbook, the frameworks will set out, for example, choices as to content selection at each key stage to enable teachers to apply a religion and worldviews approach in their own schools.

This is a project, not a consultation. The independent Commission on RE 2016-2018 (CoRE), set up by the REC, was an extensive consultation and this project is a further step in the direction set out by the Commission’s final report, *Religion and Worldviews: the way forward*. The draft Handbook will be used by the framework-development teams, but it will also be tested by that process. A final amended Handbook will be published in spring/summer 2024, along with three exemplar frameworks that illustrate how the Handbook can be interpreted and applied in different ways to suit different contexts. These frameworks will be accompanied by sample units of work and pupil responses. The project materials will be freely available to support and inform SACREs, MATs, dioceses and other parties interested in developing syllabuses and curricula for their contexts.

We are mindful of the interest in the RE community around this next step towards an education in religion and worldviews, and so are making this draft Handbook publicly available. We hope to generate interest and to learn from how it is received, so as to support the development of the best version by the end of the project. If you would like to comment, please email [info@religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk](mailto:info@religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk).

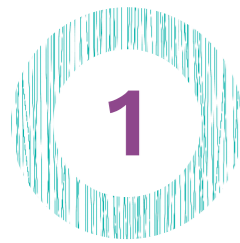
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May 2022

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# The purposes of this Handbook

In 2018, the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC) published the report from the independent Commission on RE (CoRE), the result of a two-year consultation, which sets out a vision for a change in RE to a 'religion and worldviews' approach<sup>[1]</sup>. This report has stimulated wide interest, dialogue and debate among diverse members of the RE community and beyond<sup>[2]</sup>.

Subsequently, the REC published an academic literature review into the term 'worldviews' in relation to religion in academic disciplines<sup>[3]</sup>. There followed a series of conversations between academics from different disciplinary areas, responding to the CoRE report and the literature review. These conversations were recorded, interpreted and written up as a set of discussion papers<sup>[4]</sup>.

The REC is currently running a three-year project, supported by the Templeton World Charity Foundation, to develop guidance for syllabus writers and curriculum developers for implementing a religion and worldviews approach. This draft Handbook is the outcome of the first phase of this project.

- It takes forward the vision of the CoRE report, building on the rich traditions of religious education in Britain.
- It provides an updated vision of the subject which approaches it from the perspective of worldviews, to help pupils make sense of the diverse, complex world around them, in relation to religion, religions and non-religion.
- It reimagines the subject, so that it is more inclusive of and relevant to children and young people, whose worldviews may range across the secular and/or religious.
- It examines the claim from the CoRE report that 'everyone has a worldview', recognising that 'no one stands nowhere' and that everyone encounters the world from their perspective, with their assumptions, experiences and context.
- It accommodates the idea that 'worldviews' include religious and non-religious, organised and individual worldviews, plural, diverse and changing.
- Looking through this worldview 'lens' shifts the focus in the classroom from the experience of a minority of people who identify as religious in the UK to the study of a universal human experience as it encounters religion, belief and practice.

This approach means enabling all pupils to become open-minded, critical participants of public discourse, who make academically informed judgements about important matters of religion, belief and practice which shape the global landscape. It is a subject for all pupils, whatever their own family background and personal worldviews.

This reshaped subject seeks to reflect the current and future needs of pupils, such as in relation to, for example, diverse identities in a multi-religious and multi-secular world, and matters of justice (e.g. climate, race, equality). It supports the application of current developments in religious education, such as ways of knowing, multidisciplinary approaches and hermeneutics.

## The purposes of this Handbook are to:

- present a 'national statement of entitlement' (NSE):

At the heart of this draft Handbook is the NSE (see pp. 18–19), which sets out a clear description of an education in religion and worldviews to which all pupils have an entitlement. This NSE can be used to inspire and guide curriculum development, setting out expectations and a benchmark against which schools' quality of provision can be evaluated.

- equip syllabus and curriculum developers:

This draft Handbook gives a rationale for the religion and worldviews approach, including the NSE, and then provides guidance on how to apply these to the development of a syllabus/curriculum. It recognises that there are flexible ways of doing this that will reflect the context and setting of local authorities, dioceses, multi academy trusts [MATs] and schools.

- set out the nature of a religion and worldviews approach:

This draft Handbook builds on a great deal of development in the subject of RE over decades, and sets out the rationale for its ongoing development, reshaping and reorientating the subject for future decades. An education in religion and worldviews examines the field of study through a worldviews approach, supporting pupils to reflect on and develop their own worldviews, and to make sense of the diverse, complex world around them in relation to religion. It promotes understanding of the diverse and plural nature of worldviews and equips pupils to develop the skills to explore ways of knowing about religion, religions, and religious and non-religious worldviews.

[NOTE: The draft Handbook is primarily written for the framework development teams (see section 1.2 below); this section outlines the purpose of the final Handbook.]

## 1.1. Who is this Handbook for?

**This Handbook is primarily written to assist those of us who are developing syllabuses and curricula for RE** with a religion and worldviews approach, including local authorities, SACREs, agreed syllabus conferences and curriculum leaders in MATs.

**It is intended to be relevant to schools in England**, including community maintained, academies and free schools with, and without, religious character.

**It is intended to be of use to a wide range of people involved in the subject**, including those of us with responsibility for the subject in schools both with and without a religious character, school leaders and governors, subject leads and teachers in primary and secondary phases, trainee and early career teachers, their tutors and mentors, inspectors and advisers, examination boards and resource developers.

**It is intended to be helpful to people with different worldviews**, ranging across religious and non-religious, to understand how an education in religion and worldviews approaches and handles organised and individual worldviews.

**It is hoped that it will be of interest to parents, pupils and the wider public**, to inform them of the content and purposes of the subject.

## 1.2 Next steps from this draft Handbook

Phase 2 of the REC project will create exemplar frameworks in the form of case studies to model diverse ways of fulfilling the NSE and of approaching an education in religion and worldviews. Phase 3 will create exemplar units of work and some pupil responses to illustrate these models and how they fulfil the NSE.

The REC has appointed (May 2022) three teams of school-linked groups to take the vision and practical guidance of the NSE and the draft Handbook and apply them to their own contexts.

This will illustrate how the NSE, and its associated philosophy, translates into a syllabus and curriculum for schools in a specific context. The aim is to equip and inspire other syllabus writers and curriculum developers to use the NSE to develop their own documents for use in their own schools. The published frameworks will outline the process taken, including challenges and how these were addressed, as well as the exemplar framework for each context. Lessons learned in this process will be used by the project leader to adjust and amend the draft Handbook prior to publication of the final Handbook at the end of the project in spring/summer 2024.

## 1.3 Key terms

The draft Handbook will refer to **religious education (RE)** as the term that is currently in use in legislation and guidance. The Commission on RE recommendation that the subject be officially renamed “Religion and Worldviews” would require legislation, whereas this draft Handbook is encouraging a shift in approach that can happen regardless of legislative change. However, this does not prevent schools from renaming the subject as suits their context or needs.

The phrase **‘religion and worldviews’** is not intended to imply a list (‘examples of religions plus non-religious worldviews such as humanism, secularism, etc.’), not least because the term worldviews encompasses religious and other perspectives on life. Instead, it denotes a relationship between religion and worldviews, to be explored in the subject of RE. The **worldviews approach** presented in this draft Handbook is sometimes described as **‘an education in religion and worldviews’** as a way of delineating the scope of the subject. This includes matters and questions raised by the study of religion, acknowledges that the nature of worldviews is itself explored and interrogated within the subject, and that the subject entails the study of worldviews in relation to religion and non-religion.

The draft Handbook uses the term **‘worldviews’** to include **religious and non-religious worldviews**, recognising that these terms are themselves not binary: there is a fluidity and flexibility between religion and non-religion, and an individual or personal worldview may well incorporate aspects of both. ‘Non-religion’ is itself complex and stands in relation to religion and to secularity in different ways<sup>[5]</sup>.



# Outline and rationale for this development

## 2.1 Why do we need a change?

The move towards an education in religion and worldviews is not just a change of name. It encompasses an adjustment in the way that content is selected and how it is approached within the subject.

There are many elements in play here, including:

### Scholarly understandings

Academic study of religion is increasingly recognising the limitation of the ‘world religions paradigm’ – the idea that there are six major world religions, and lots of minor ones, and that they have a set of core beliefs and practices that we can neatly package up and present in lessons. Scholars point out the contested nature of the term ‘religion’. They note the contrast between teachings of traditions and how these are experienced and lived out in people’s lives.

They point to the complex reality of lived religion, which is less neat and tidy, more fluid, and always tied to particular contexts. It is time for pupils to have a more realistic encounter with the world of religion and belief.

### Demographics: the rise of non-religiousness

In terms of Census data, in 2001, 15.5% of England and Wales said they had no religion. By 2011 this increased to 25%. British Social Attitudes Surveys from 2016 on have regularly indicated that this is just over 50%. The 2014 and 2016 European Social Surveys show that among young people in the UK (aged 16-29) 70% say they have no religion, and this will be the experience of many teachers of pupils under age sixteen. Recognising the wider global picture of the rise of religion, in contrast with the picture in the UK, Europe and north America, the study of ‘non-religion’ (by many names) is an increasingly important scholarly field and it needs to be part of the school study of religion.<sup>1</sup>

### Content selection

The increased complexity and scope of the field of study, as set out in the above paragraphs, also increase the challenge of content overload. It is simply not possible to study everything, and so decisions have to be made on content selection. Making such decisions on the basis of numerical or cultural dominance is problematic, and a new rationale needs to be provided.

### Equality of provision

Across the UK, there are many examples of excellent RE provision and practice, but also evidence of too many schools not meeting their statutory requirement, nor providing all pupils with their entitlement to high quality RE. In part, the shift to a religion and worldviews approach is to reinvigorate the subject, to reinforce its importance as part of children and young people’s education in a multi-religious and multi-secular world, and to reinspire those schools currently neglecting the subject.

<sup>1</sup>The final Handbook will include up to date data, such as the 2021 Census data, when available.

## 2.2 How does a worldviews approach address these developments?

The idea of **worldviews** offers an approach that revitalises the subject, taking account of scholarly developments and demographic changes. A worldviews approach accommodates the study of the fluidity within and between religious traditions, and the diversity of identities and ways of living and thinking among the non-religious. It also places the development of pupils' perspectives and assumptions within the academic processes of the subject. Their perspectives matter: they affect pupils' engagement and encounter with the content of the subject. Pupils need opportunities to recognise, reflect on and develop their personal worldview, and to understand how their worldview provides a lens through which they encounter those of others.

The aims of this move towards an education in religion and worldviews, therefore, include the following:

To present a reimagining of RE so that it is more inclusive of, and relevant to, children and young people, whose own worldviews may range across the secular and/or religious, by drawing on relevant scholarly insights.

To provide an academically updated vision of the subject which approaches the study of religion from the perspective of worldviews – incorporating religious and non-religious worldviews, individual and organised, plural and diverse – to help pupils make sense of the diverse, complex world around them, in relation to religion.



## What do people mean by 'religion'?

On the one hand, the term 'religion' functions quite easily – we generally know what we mean when we talk about religions, or when we say something or someone is religious. On the other hand, the term is contested, with much debate and many theories.

Some definitions:

- focus on beliefs, such as belief in a deity and a supernatural dimension to existence
- focus on the ways of thinking and living of adherents
- look at the function religions play within communities and societies
- allow for a divine origin of religion and the reality of a transcendent Being and realm
- see religion as a human construct, inextricably linked with culture

So we are not able to pin 'religion' down to a single use – nor do we want to. Any account of religion is inevitably tied to a context, and any definition of religion is likewise going to arise from a context or school of thought with its own assumptions. As with many other contested terms (such as democracy, politics, culture) the term 'religion' cannot simply be taken as a neutral description of the way the world is<sup>[6]</sup>.

Part of the argument for seeing 'religion' as the focus of study for our subject is because it draws attention to the contested nature of the subject content. Instead of only studying examples of 'religions', the subject includes studying the nature and implications of the term itself. This brings into focus some of the challenges raised by scholars involved in studying religion, such as:

- the role of the European context – specifically applying a Protestant Christian worldview – in the development and categorisation of the term 'religion', such that it was seen as the norm against which all other 'religions' were classified, setting up a kind of hierarchy

- how this is embedded in the 'world religions paradigm', where religions are seen as separate entities, with a core set of common and comparable characteristics (reflecting the characteristics of Protestant Christianity)
- how the 'world religions paradigm' privileges organised or institutional religions and, in particular, those with established orthodoxies and doctrines, hierarchies and power
- how developments in (post-)secularity increasingly blur the boundaries between religion and non-religion, where 'religious' people may believe, belong or behave in 'non-religious' ways, and 'non-religious' people accommodate 'religious' aspects to their worldviews and ways of living.

The religion and worldviews approach takes account of the significant religious traditions in their changing contexts, balancing organised expressions alongside lived experiences of individuals and communities. A simple illustration might be a shift in language from a study of Islam, Buddhism and Christianity to a study of Muslims, Buddhists and Christians. This still requires rich encounters with traditions, such as their ancient roots and contemporary expressions, their core beliefs and teachings, great works of literary and artistic achievement alongside acts of service, justice, courage and resistance, and the varied impact they make on individuals, societies and the world – including some of their darker legacies. The worldviews approach allows these encounters to be selected to illuminate and illustrate how ideas, beliefs and practices arise, recognising how they are all shaped and reshaped by their contexts – including historical, geographical, social, cultural, political, and theological, for example.



## What do people mean by ‘worldview’?

There are many definitions of ‘worldview’. Alongside religion, it is another term that sparks debate. Fundamental to the worldviews approach advocated in this draft Handbook is the idea that everyone has a worldview – or at least, the idea that ‘no one stands nowhere’ – everyone experiences the world from their own context, experience and perspective.

### This does **NOT** mean:

- that everyone has a ready set of coherent responses to a set of ultimate questions about life, the universe and everything. A person’s worldview may be unconsidered and even unconscious, drawing on a wide variety of influences, and containing contradictions.
- that only people with a religious worldview have a worldview. As part of a religious community’s nurture, religious people may have consciously learnt about and practised their tradition, and may have a considered worldview that reflects this; or they may have unconsciously absorbed ideas and ways of living and being that have shaped and coloured their worldview, so that it is recognisably a religious worldview. Non-religious people – sometimes in transparent and deliberate ways, and sometimes unconsciously – will also have absorbed ideas and ways of living and being from their own context, which may have had secular or religious influences, to different degrees. These will shape the way non-religious people encounter, view, and live in the world.

### This draft Handbook’s entry-point definition is:

**‘Worldview’ describes the way in which a person encounters, interprets, understands and engages with the world.**

- This encompasses a person’s beliefs, attitudes, identities, assumptions, intentions, values, hopes and ways of being in the world.
- It will affect, and be affected by, a person’s thoughts, emotions, experiences, encounters, desires, commitments, actions and reactions; much of this is individual, but much will be shared too – people are not islands.
- A person’s worldview will be influenced by their context, in terms of time, place, language, sex, gender, the communities that surround them, ethnicity, nationality, economics, history, class, access to political power etc. (Some contextual influences will be obvious and recognised; some will not.)
- It will change as a person grows and faces new experiences, encounters new people and situations, and engages in learning new knowledge. (Some changes may be conscious and deliberate, some may not.)
- This means a person’s worldview may be visible or invisible to the individual, but it will show up through their words, attitudes and actions.
- A person’s worldview affects how they interpret the world around them, as they try to make sense of the world they encounter.
- A person’s worldview is about more than religion, even if they are an adherent.
- It might be better to say that a person *inhabits* a worldview rather than *has* one.

## 4.1 Organised and institutional worldviews

The definition above applies to individuals and their personal worldviews, recognising that people are not isolated beings but connected to communities, culture and context.

The CoRE report also identified ‘organised’ worldviews as ‘shared among particular groups and sometimes embedded in institutions’, adopting the term ‘institutional’ worldviews for the latter.

The way a worldview might be seen as ‘organised’ or ‘institutional’ will differ. There are global institutions such as the Roman Catholic Church, and the teachings and practices of which might present a Roman Catholic ‘institutional worldview’. The Ismailis might be another example of a global ‘institutional worldview’, with the central authority of the Imam manifested in institutional structures across different nations. Other Muslim groups, while still ‘organised’ might have less tight structures, with variation in practice even within a single local community. The terms organised or institutional worldview describe the way a group or tradition or institution presents itself to the world.

A world religions approach to RE has tended to see the institutions representative of each religion as the focus of study. The religion and worldviews approach explores how communities and individuals interact with these organised or institutional worldviews – how people experience them, and their impact on people’s lives. For some:

- the scope and riches of their tradition are not captured in the austerity of the term ‘institutional worldview’ – instead they experience it as spiritual, dynamic, creative and life-enhancing, for example
- the institution gives a sense of community and identity, without their necessarily subscribing to the institution’s beliefs and practices
- an organised or institutional worldview may have negative effects, oppressing and limiting their identity and personhood

This kind of interaction is what is being explored through examination of community or individual worldviews.

## 4.2 Studying religion and worldviews

This draft Handbook builds on the understanding of worldviews presented in the CoRE report.

The OFSTED 2021 *Religious Education Research Review*<sup>[7]</sup> outlines three types of knowledge that pupils should make progress in:

- **substantive knowledge:** this includes knowledge about religious and non-religious traditions, e.g. core concepts, truth claims, teachings and practices, behaviour and responses of adherents, wider concepts such as spirituality and secularity, and how worldviews work in human life
- **ways of knowing:** this is where pupils learn ‘how to know’ about religion and non-religion, incorporating methods from academic disciplines
- **personal knowledge:** pupils build an awareness of their own presuppositions and values about the religious and non-religious traditions they study, and of the lived experience of adherents.

The study of the relationship between religion and worldviews is thus a core element of the **substantive content** of the subject.

This substantive content includes **organised/ institutional/ community/ individual worldviews**. These range from precise credal expressions and central teachings to the complex fluidity of individual worldviews within wider traditions.

The methods used to explore, examine and engage with religion and worldviews form part of ‘ways of knowing’.

**Note** that when this draft Handbook refers to **personal worldviews**, it refers to pupils’ personal worldviews. This connects with OFSTED’s terminology of ‘personal knowledge’. This is a shift from the CoRE report, where personal worldviews referred both to the substantive content of individual worldviews within wider traditions *and* to pupils’ worldviews. This adjustment in the draft Handbook is intended to ensure that when studying *individual* worldviews of adherents in relation to organised/institutional worldviews, no assumptions are implied about pupils’ personal worldviews.

## 4.3 Points to note

### Religion and worldviews

- A religion and worldviews approach examines the dynamic between these terms.
- Part of that dynamic allows for encounter with, and study of, diverse voices and the experiences of individuals within wider 'organised' worldviews. Thus, the individual worldviews of adherents within such organised worldviews come under the content to be studied.

### Organised and individual worldviews

- Some organised worldviews may be expressed through widely approved doctrines and practices, set out by official hierarchies, e.g. Christian creeds and catechisms; the Rehat Maryada in Sikh traditions. Some 'organised' worldviews may be embedded in institutions, e.g. the Roman Catholic Church.
- Individuals within these traditions may have an individual worldview that reflects these widely approved teachings to a greater or lesser extent.
- Some involvement with an 'organised' worldview may take the form of devotion by a group to a particular guru or saint, e.g. A C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, founder of ISKCON.
- Some individual worldviews may weave together influences from diverse streams (e.g. be a practising Anglican, with a preference for Celtic Christianity and interest in Zen Buddhism, married to a pagan, and integrating pagan festivals and sensibilities into their living and being).
- Some may have left their religious upbringing behind but retain at least a trace of a religious worldview (e.g. brought up a Catholic, left it all behind in teens and living as non-religious but still practising fasting during Lent).
- In a country like the UK, people may absorb Christianity *and* a secular, liberal worldview, as part of the air they breathe. Weeks and years are shaped by Christian festivals and observances; Christian ideas underpin law, morality, sanctity of life, the legislature, the monarchy. However, the media, TV, film, popular culture, education – much of this presents a secular perspective as the default worldview.

### Religious worldviews

- Note that some religious worldviews incorporate the idea of divine revelation – a divine being has communicated the truth about the way the world is and how people should be. People holding these religious worldviews may believe in this kind of revelation, and part of their way of living and being involves adherence to the divine path, a participation in the deity's on-going purpose, a celebration of the goodness, wisdom and mercy of the deity, and/or fear of divine judgment.
- Other traditions may see the idea of the divine as part of a human construct, a powerful metaphor, a transformative idea that motivates and illuminates ways of living, offering wisdom from the ages, refined through experience, conversation and debate, to guide actions.
- Some people within a religious tradition may seek to live in accordance with a sense of cosmic order and truth, and to ever-deepen their sense of connectedness to all life.
- Some people within a religious tradition may say that their own worldview is beside the point – the truth of divine revelation is true regardless of whether their individual worldview lines up, or their way of living matches the moral ideals of their tradition.
- Many people will vigorously defend their worldview because they believe it to be true. The philosopher Michael Polanyi described this as holding beliefs with "universal intent". Beliefs matter to people because their identity is tied up with them.

## 4.3 Pupils' personal worldviews

Demographic data suggests that, across Britain, most pupils are not part of organised religious traditions, although that does not rule out echoes of religious influences upon their worldviews.

The worldviews approach brings pupils' personal worldviews into play within the study of religion. From the early days in primary school, developing pupils' personal worldviews includes a growing self-awareness of how your autobiography affects your worldview, and how it shapes your encounters in life.

In RE, a religion and worldviews approach involves helping pupils to develop their personal worldview in conversation with the content and methods of study in the subject. As they move through their education, it helps them to make judgements about the content studied, the methods used, and their own perspectives, in the light of evidence and argument. This draws pupils' attention to ideas of critical scholarly 'positionality', as practised in academic study at undergraduate level and beyond.

### Intellectual virtues

The development of pupils' personal worldviews thus involves developing some intellectual virtues, such as

- intellectual curiosity
- some humility about the certainty of their own conclusions
- a willingness to learn from others
- developing the habit of careful listening before responding or making judgements, as they recognise the interplay between their own worldview and the worldviews of others in interpreting content
- being prepared to change their mind and adjust their worldview in the light of new encounters, knowledge and experiences.

The development of these intellectual virtues arises (in part) from the modelling of these virtues in the way pupils are taught. The ways that questions are raised and addressed in the classroom, and how the content is handled, will exemplify the kind of openness, humility, curiosity, even-handedness, accuracy, fairness, willingness to be challenged and self-awareness, that the subject wants to promote.

## Personal transformation

The subject, as with all school subjects, includes the possibility of personal transformation. The pupil engages with learning about ways of thinking, living and being that are outside of their own experience. The inclusion of pupils' personal worldviews within the educational process draws attention to the possibility that the learning experience might change them, and offers opportunities to reflect on how.

The centrality of pupils' personal worldview development is driven by the entitlement of all children and young people to understand human experience and the way things operate in their own and others' worlds. It is, therefore, part of the identify formation of pupils. They are given opportunities to examine the sources of their own worldviews, and the impact of their contexts on these.

Through the classroom encounters, pupils will develop awareness of how their own worldviews relate with the varied worldviews of others. They will have opportunities to grasp how their worldviews have a bearing on their understanding of, and engagement with, curriculum content. Recognising that this also applies to others is a valuable preparation for life in a world of diverse viewpoints.

While personal worldviews extend beyond matters of religious belief, study of religion (and non-religion) offers opportunities to examine important existential and ethical questions. These include questions around meaning, purpose and truth, identity, diversity, morality, values and commitments, and the accumulated knowledge and understanding arising from centuries of religions and philosophies addressing such questions.

## 5

## The value of worldviews in terms of content and approach

### 5.1 What is a worldviews approach?

A worldviews approach focuses on how religion(s) and worldviews (religious and non-religious) work, and how we can best go about studying them. It includes all pupils in the enterprise of interrogating the sources of their own developing worldviews and how they may benefit from exploring and engaging critically with the rich and complex heritage of humanity.

The worldviews approach encourages an engagement with some of the scholarly concerns outlined in sections 3 (p. 7) and 4 (p. 8). It self-consciously explores the relationship between the teachings and doctrines of organised worldviews and the beliefs, practice and experience of adherents – what is sometimes called ‘lived religion’.

Of course, any presentation of religion is going to be a limited representation – particularly within the constraints of the classroom time for the subject. But given the impossibility of teaching the totality of six major ‘world religions’ in their diversity, alongside the many other living traditions and the complex web of non-religious worldviews, this approach offers a way of inducting pupils into the study of religion and worldviews, to empower them to be able to handle questions around religion(s), and religious and non-religious worldviews for themselves, within and then beyond the confines of the classroom.

This approach explores the real religious landscape<sup>[9]</sup>. It is an educational project – an attempt not to stand outside the worldviews of others but to understand what being inside is all about, recognising that we do this from a particular perspective or worldview ourselves.

This approach draws on hermeneutical understandings, recognising that the encounter between every individual pupil and the subject content takes place in a context, and that is affected by the

worldview of the learner. The approach therefore draws on pupils’ interpretive skills and awareness of how their worldview affects these encounters. At the heart of a worldviews approach is the notion that every human being is an interpreter, and that this subject is teaching them to be ‘wise interpreters’ of life. Zen or humanist or Salafist or secularist approaches to being wise interpreters would be very different. As pupils grow in self-awareness of their assumptions, they are better able to identify, interpret and understand the worldviews of others.

### 5.2 Advantages of a worldviews approach

- It takes account of the contemporary place of religion, belief, and practice locally, nationally and globally.
- It draws on developments in, for example, academic theology, philosophy, history, education, and the study of religion.
- It addresses the increase in non-religious worldviews in the secular west, within the wider context of the global growth of religion.
- It takes account of sociological categories, such as the spiritual but not religious, and people ‘believing without belonging’ or ‘believing in belonging’, and of the questioning of the category of ‘religion’ across many disciplines.
- It allows for sensitivity around diversity, identity, and legacies of power, for example, while equipping pupils to be able to take part in dialogue with better understanding of the worldviews of others.
- It is inclusive, in that it is based on the idea that everyone has or inhabits a worldview – so learning about any organised or individual worldview offers scope for learning about one’s own.
- It equips pupils for reflecting on, and making choices about, the development of their personal worldview in the context of a complex world.

### 5.3 What a worldviews approach is *not* doing

There are some potential misunderstandings to address here.

A worldviews approach does not simply take the world religions paradigm and extend it by adding worldviews – whether smaller religious traditions such as the Bahá’í Faith or Paganism, or indigenous traditions, or a range of non-religious worldviews treated as ‘religions’. In this draft Handbook, the approach is centred around the NSE. Pupils are entitled to understand worldviews as set out in that Statement, and the selection of content needs to enable that. The NSE attempts to reduce the challenge of content overload by clearly specifying the scope of the subject.

The approach is not reducing the place of religion within the subject. The dynamic relationship between religion and worldviews cannot be explored without examining religion and religions.

The approach is not arguing that, since everyone has a worldview, this leads to relativism, with all worldviews having equal value. Instead, the substantive content includes the relationship between organised and individual worldviews. This allows for a focus on the beliefs, teachings and practices of religions as well as individual responses within these broader traditions. The personal worldview of the pupil is always the perspective from which the learning is done; how this affects learning is brought into focus within the classroom.

Incorporating pupils’ personal worldviews is not solely about pupils expressing opinions (of course they will have opinions, and these can become informed opinions). The subject aims to support pupils in making informed judgements based on reliable evidence and sound argument, in relation to religion and worldviews.

The statement that ‘everyone has a worldview’ does not mean that everyone identifies with an organised worldview. Some may, of course – and globally, statistics suggest that most people have some sort of identification with an organised worldview of one or more kinds. However, someone’s rejection of, or indifference towards, such organised worldviews is part of their own worldview.

There are ways of understanding worldviews as totalising systems of thought, where to have a worldview is to be able to offer coherent answers to a set of questions that indicate a view on existence, knowledge, meaning, purpose, ethics and behaviour. Some scholars present organised worldviews as being able to offer such a set of answers to ‘worldview-framing’ questions, and these are legitimate areas of study<sup>[9]</sup>. The CoRE report and this draft Handbook have a wider understanding of worldviews, such that it indicates the way in which everyone experiences the world from within their own context and experience. As mentioned before, religion may or may not be influential in this way of experiencing the world.

The reframing of RE as an education in religion and worldviews does not imply that religious and non-religious worldviews are studied in equal measure. ‘Worldviews’ here does not function as solely representing non-religious worldviews (see Section 1.3 above).





# Subject knowledge in school and community contexts

The Commission on RE's final report, *Religion and Worldviews: the way forward*, argued that a response was needed to the challenges faced by the subject, and teaching, of RE. For example:

- the challenge of ever-expanding content to reflect the diversity of worldviews in the UK and beyond, including the rise in non-religiousness
- the challenge of inconsistent provision, including widespread non-compliance with statutory requirements for RE
- the lack of a clear benchmark statement of what constitutes high quality provision, resulting in inequalities in the breadth and depth of pupils' study
- the lack of consistency of approach across schools either with, or without, a religious character

The draft Handbook takes the next step to address these challenges. It revises the original NSE from the CoRE report, and offers a set of organising principles to guide selection of content, to provide a basis for developing syllabuses and curricula, and indicates possible approaches for study. These include examining how worldviews work and introduce different methods to encourage pupils' critical resources for the academic study of religions and worldviews. The NSE gives the basis for mapping progression and showing how later work builds on foundations laid by earlier work.

While it seeks to set a standard across all types of schools, the NSE is flexible in its application, allowing for local creativity and local agreed syllabuses, and including guidelines for dioceses and other religious foundation settings, and curricula for MATs.

## 6.1 School knowledge about religion and worldviews

Teachers and other educationalists<sup>[10]</sup> acknowledge the difference between the kind of knowledge used and created by academics and professionals (e.g. laboratory researchers at the CERN Large Hadron Collider) and the knowledge transmitted

and examined in the classroom (e.g. school physics). For example, 9–11-year-olds learn that gravity is a force. 14–16-year-olds learn that gravity is not a force but a force field. At university, they learn that it is a force field *theory*. This has several implications for an education in religion and worldviews:

- school knowledge about religion and worldviews is not the same as university knowledge; it necessarily involves simplification and selection, which may include teaching some ideas about religion and worldviews that are not wholly accurate but are sufficient at the stage of pupils' learning. That means teaching some ideas about religion and worldviews which are appropriate for the stage of pupils' learning and will become more complex and accurate as they mature in their thinking. For example, primary pupils might learn that karma means 'you reap what you sow'; good actions gain good karma, bad actions earn bad karma. Secondary pupils might learn that understanding of karma differs significantly by tradition, such as the Bhagavad Gita's teaching that, rather than balancing positive and negative karma, only 'desireless actions' that do not result in karma will cut the ties from the wheel of life, death and rebirth (samsara). At university, students might learn that karma may not refer to personal moral consequences, rather to a more generalised ontology of causal connections.
- an additional layer of complexity is that school knowledge about religion and worldviews is not necessarily identical with faith/worldview community knowledge either.

## 6.2 The relationships between school subject and worldview communities

While it is essential that the substantive content about religious and non-religious worldviews is accurate and fair, this is not the same as presenting the content as the worldview communities would present it.

The school subject of RE – an education in religion and worldviews – is not nurture into any particular worldview. Rather, it equips pupils for an educational endeavour that enables them to understand worldviews – to understand how people engage with the content of religions, aware of a range of responses from those inside and outside the traditions themselves, including lived realities and scholarly perspectives, and how this study illuminates their own worldviews – and how their own worldviews, in turn, illuminate their studies.

This approach will include understanding some of the mainstream teachings or 'orthodoxies' of different traditions, and their varying impact on people within these traditions; input and information from faith and worldview communities will be essential for this. In addition, the subject will also include examining the nature of religion itself, different ways in which it is understood, the implications of privileged voices within these structures, and the findings of scholars within and outside these traditions. For example, adherents within religious traditions may be unaware of critical scholarly material on their traditions (such as biblical scholars questioning the authorship of letters said in the text to be by the apostle Paul; or proposed analyses of Meccan and Medinan surahs by scholars in Islamic studies).

The selection of such material is an educational decision, which needs to be transparent. The NSE offers a set of criteria upon which to base selection, for a syllabus or curriculum. A school's context gives an additional set of criteria. In the language of OFSTED in England, but applying beyond, schools need to think about the appropriate intent behind their curriculum when selecting content, as fitting their school situation.

Part of the educational purpose of a worldviews approach is for pupils to be able to consider who might legitimately represent mainstream and minority voices of a tradition, and why. Pupils will examine the relationship between a range of voices representing the tradition or community and the individual voice of the adherent. Care will need to be taken with the sensitivities of children from families whose traditions are being studied. Research shows the challenge experienced by pupils who encounter a mismatch between the characterisations of the organised worldview presented at school and their own lived experience<sup>[11]</sup>.

Part of the role of the worldview communities is to be able to support this educational project, such as by providing a range of voices, with an acknowledgement of where the voices sit within the communities.

## 6.3 Implications

The relationship between worldviews community knowledge, the academic community and the RE community reflects the different constituencies they serve. Bearing this in mind, along with the history, tradition and modern expressions of different worldviews in England, this draft Handbook proposes that the priority of content selection and curriculum construction must be around the NSE.

The draft Handbook recognises the need for a partnership between the school subject communities and the faith/worldview communities, not least for the accurate and fair presentation of variety within traditions. However, communities' aspirations for representation, even advocacy, must be in the service of the curriculum subject, rather than the curriculum serving the communities<sup>[12]</sup>.

## 6.4 Schools with a religious character

The NSE offers a benchmark for a high-quality education in religion and worldviews. The REC project offers this to those responsible for RE in schools with a religious character, to guide on the teaching of religion and worldviews. It does not prevent such schools from teaching their own worldview traditions in other ways, in addition to this approach.



## Selecting content

It is vital that syllabus writers and curriculum developers make wise decisions on the selection of knowledge for a curriculum. Time for RE is limited, and the worldviews approach is intended to avoid a proliferation of content, not least because of the impossibility of comprehensive coverage of the diversity of religious and non-religious traditions. The criteria for deciding content include the following:

1. The NSE must frame the intent behind the content selection. The treatment of that content then contributes to the progression of understanding of the elements in the NSE, and the links between them.
2. The legal requirement operates, which is that RE 'shall reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain' (Education Act 1996 Section 375).
3. Good practice in RE, as well as European and domestic legislation, has established the principle that RE in schools without a religious character should be inclusive of both religious and non-religious worldviews. Schools should ensure that the content and delivery of the RE curriculum are inclusive in this respect (noting that this does not imply equal time between religious and non-religious worldviews).
4. Local context is important, including school character, local community character, pupil knowledge and experience, teacher knowledge and experience. Local context also includes the history of local areas, allowing opportunities for local studies that connect teaching and learning with the geographical and historical background.
5. Pupils need to gain 'collectively enough' or 'cumulatively sufficient' knowledge (OFSTED 2021), not total coverage. In this Handbook, 'collectively enough' needs to relate to the NSE, with its three broad strands of *content*, *engagement* and *position*.
6. All religious and non-religious worldviews studied must have fair and accurate representation.
7. Schools should be able to give a clear account of their curriculum choices and carefully consider how they will enable the construction of a coherent curriculum for pupils.

### 7.1 Implications of this model

A wide range of content could be selected to enable pupils to understand religion and worldviews in the way set out in the NSE. The move to a religion and worldviews curriculum gives great flexibility and freedom in this regard.

The selection of content is no longer driven by the 'world religions paradigm'. The world religions are 'social facts', and the Education Act still requires that RE 'shall reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain'. However, an education in religion and worldviews includes these traditions as well as developing pupils' awareness of the causes and functions of that paradigm and its effects. This is part of the self-awareness of the approach – it examines the assumptions and perspectives at play.

### 7.2 Principles for selection

The above criteria offer some guidance to shape and limit the extent of the

curriculum. Alongside that we might add 'fewer things in greater depth' as a principle. A current research project at the University of Strathclyde<sup>[19]</sup> is looking at some principles for 'pedagogical reduction', so that syllabus writers and curriculum developers can choose content wisely, in ways that illuminate and expand pupils' understanding of religion and worldviews. As that project bears fruit in the next two years, this Handbook and framework project will look to draw on its insights for the development of the example frameworks. (See sections 15 and 16 below for more on content selection.)

### 7.3 Curriculum planning

Content selection for a syllabus or curriculum needs to provide pupils with the foundations for learning about religion and worldviews through their schooling. Current good practice emphasises the critical focus on how early learning prepares for later learning, to create a coherent narrative across the curriculum.



## Purposes for RE in a religion and worldviews approach

The key purpose for RE in a religion and worldviews approach is for pupils to understand how worldviews work in human experience, including their own, through the study of religion and belief.

This incorporates several other purposes for the subject, drawn from the rich traditions of RE and the wider purposes of education. This education in religion and worldviews will help pupils to examine:

- diverse understandings of the world presented by worldviews (religious and non-religious)
- relationships between beliefs, teachings, forms of expression and lived experience
- questions of meaning, purpose and truth, how these questions may be posed, addressed and understood differently within disciplines and worldviews
- the concepts, language and ways of knowing that help organise and make sense of religion and worldviews
- how their own worldview shapes their encounters with the world, and how their context, experiences and study can shape their worldview.

The worldviews approach seeks context-appropriate expression of the key purpose statement. It is not trying to impose a one-size fits all model but recognises the need for diversity of implementation to fit the varied contexts of schools.

### 8.1 Purpose statements

A worldviews approach to RE will:

- introduce pupils to the rich diversity of religion and non-religion, locally and globally, as a key part of understanding how the world works and what it means to be human
- stimulate pupils' curiosity about, and interest in, this diversity of worldviews, both religious and non-religious
- expand upon how worldviews work, and how different worldviews, religious and non-religious, influence individuals, communities and society
- develop pupils' awareness that learning about worldviews involves interpreting the significance and meaning of information they study
- develop pupils' appreciation of the complexity of worldviews, and sensitivity to the problems of religious language and experience
- induct pupils into the processes and methods by which we can study religion, religions and worldviews
- enable pupils, by the end of their studies, to identify positions and presuppositions of different academic disciplines and their implications for understanding
- give pupils opportunities to explore the relationship between religious worldviews and literature, culture and the arts
- include pupils in the enterprise of interrogating the sources of their own developing worldviews and how they may benefit from exploring the rich and complex heritage of humanity
- provide opportunities for pupils to reflect on the relationship between their personal worldviews and the content studied, equipping them to develop their own informed responses in the light of their learning.

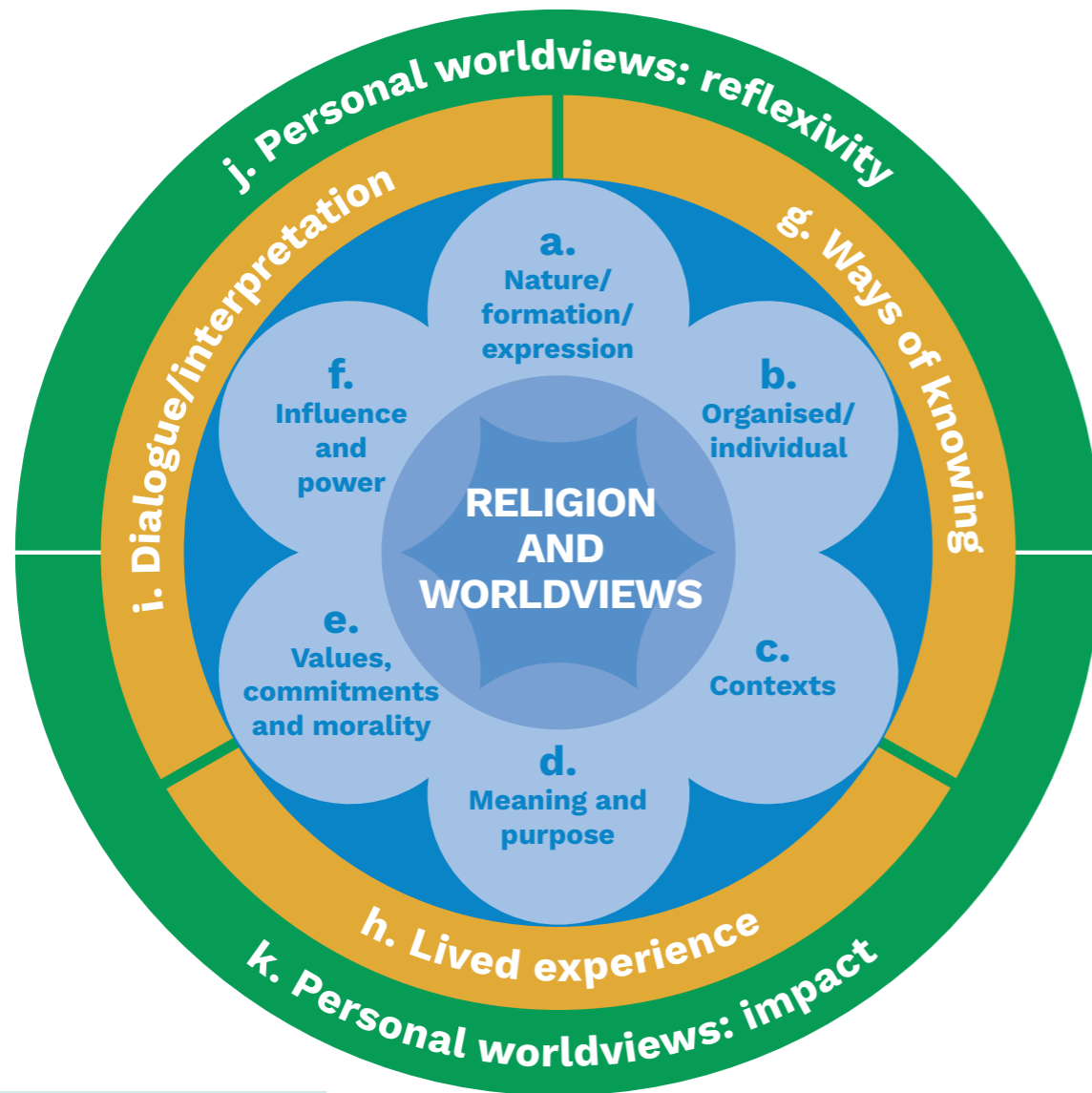
# 9

## Revised National Statement of Entitlement

The national statement of entitlement (NSE) indicates that children and young people in schools, whatever their context, are entitled to an education in religion and worldviews that:

- reflects the changing religious and secular diversity of the UK and the world
- is inclusive of, and relevant to, children and young people, whose worldviews may range across the secular and/or religious
- approaches the subject from the perspective of worldviews (incorporating religious and non-religious worldviews, personal and communal, individual and organised, plural and diverse) to help pupils navigate the diverse, complex world around them, in relation to religion and belief

The place for this education in religion and worldviews is the subject currently called Religious Education in legislation in England.



NOTE that wherever the NSE refers to worldviews, it means religious and non-religious worldviews.

Key:  
**Content**  
**Engagement**  
**Position**

To meet this entitlement, pupils must be taught to understand the nature of worldviews, in relation to religion and belief, including:

CONTENT	
Core statements	Expanded statements
<b>a. Nature/formation/expression</b> What is meant by worldview and how people's worldviews are formed and expressed through a complex mix of influences and experiences	The nature and variety of worldviews, and how people's worldviews are formed through a complex mix of influences and experiences, including (for example) rituals, practices, texts, teachings, stories, inspiring individuals, the creative arts, family, tradition, culture, and everyday experiences and actions. How these may also act as ways of expressing and communicating worldviews.
<b>b. Organised/individual</b> How people's individual worldviews relate to wider, organised or institutional worldviews	How people's individual worldviews relate to wider, organised or institutional worldviews (e.g. how individual worldviews may be consciously held or tacit; how individual and organised worldviews are dynamic; how individual worldviews may overlap to a greater or lesser extent with organised worldviews)
<b>c. Contexts</b> How worldviews have contexts, reflecting time and place, and also changing; how they are highly diverse and often develop in interaction with each other. (This applies to organised worldviews as well as to individual worldviews.)	How worldviews have contexts, reflecting their time and place, shaping and being shaped by these, maintaining continuity and also changing; how they are highly diverse and often develop in interaction with each other. (This applies to organised worldviews as well as to individual worldviews.)
<b>d. Meaning and purpose</b> How worldviews may offer responses to fundamental questions raised by human experience	How worldviews may offer responses to fundamental questions raised by human experience, such as questions of existence, meaning, purpose, knowledge, truth, identity and diversity. How worldviews may play different roles in providing people with ways of making sense of existence and/or their lives, including space for mystery, ambiguity and paradox.
<b>e. Values, commitments and morality</b> How worldviews may provide guidance on how to live a good life	How worldviews may provide a vision of, and guidance on, how to be a good person and live a good life, and may offer ideas of justice, right and wrong, value, beauty, truth and goodness. How individuals and communities may express their values through their commitments.
<b>f. Influence and power</b> How worldviews influence, and are influenced by, people and societies	How worldviews influence people (e.g. providing a 'grand narrative' or story for understanding the world) and influence the exercise of power in societies (e.g. on social norms for communities, or in relation to conflict or peace-making). How society and people can also influence and shape worldviews.

ENGAGEMENT	
Core statements	Expanded statements
<b>g. Ways of knowing</b> The field of study of worldviews is to be explored using diverse ways of knowing.	The field of study of worldviews is to be explored using diverse ways of knowing. Questions and methods should be carefully chosen, recognising that there are different understandings of what knowledge is deemed reliable, valid, credible, truthful etc.
<b>h. Lived experience</b> The field of study of worldviews is to include a focus on the lived experience of people.	The field of study of worldviews is to include a focus on the lived experience of people (e.g. religious, non-religious, embodied, diverse, fluid, material, experiential) in relation to local and global contexts, recognising the complex reality of worldviews as they are held, shared and expressed by people in real life.
<b>i. Dialogue/interpretation</b> The field of study of worldviews is to be encountered as a dynamic area of dialogue and debate.	The field of study of worldviews is to be encountered as a dynamic area of dialogue and debate, and one which engages with practices of interpretation and judgement within and between religious and non-religious communities.

POSITION	
Core statements	Expanded statements
<b>j. Personal worldviews: reflexivity</b> Pupils will reflect on and potentially develop their personal worldviews in the light of their study.	Pupils will come to understand their own worldview in greater depth, and how it relates to the worldviews of others, becoming more reflective and reflexive. As they develop this awareness of their positionality in relation to that of others, they will make informed judgements on how (far) this understanding prepares them for life in a diverse world
<b>k. Personal worldviews: impact</b> Pupils will reflect on how their worldviews affect their learning	Pupils will develop their understanding of how their encounters with the subject content of RE are affected and shaped by their worldviews, whether conscious or not, and that this is also true for everyone else. They will reflect on how (far) their learning may have an impact on their worldview.

All pupils are entitled to receive an education in religion and worldviews in every year up to, and including, year 11. Post-16 students, including those in Further Education, should have the opportunity to study religion and worldviews during their post-16 course of study.

Teaching must promote openness, respect for others, objectivity, scholarly accuracy and critical enquiry.

In line with the DfE Teachers' Standards, pupils are therefore entitled to be taught by teachers who:

- have a secure knowledge of the relevant curriculum area
- foster and maintain pupils' interest in the subject
- can address misconceptions and misunderstandings and handle controversial issues
- demonstrate a critical understanding of developments in the study of religion and worldviews
- promote the value of scholarship

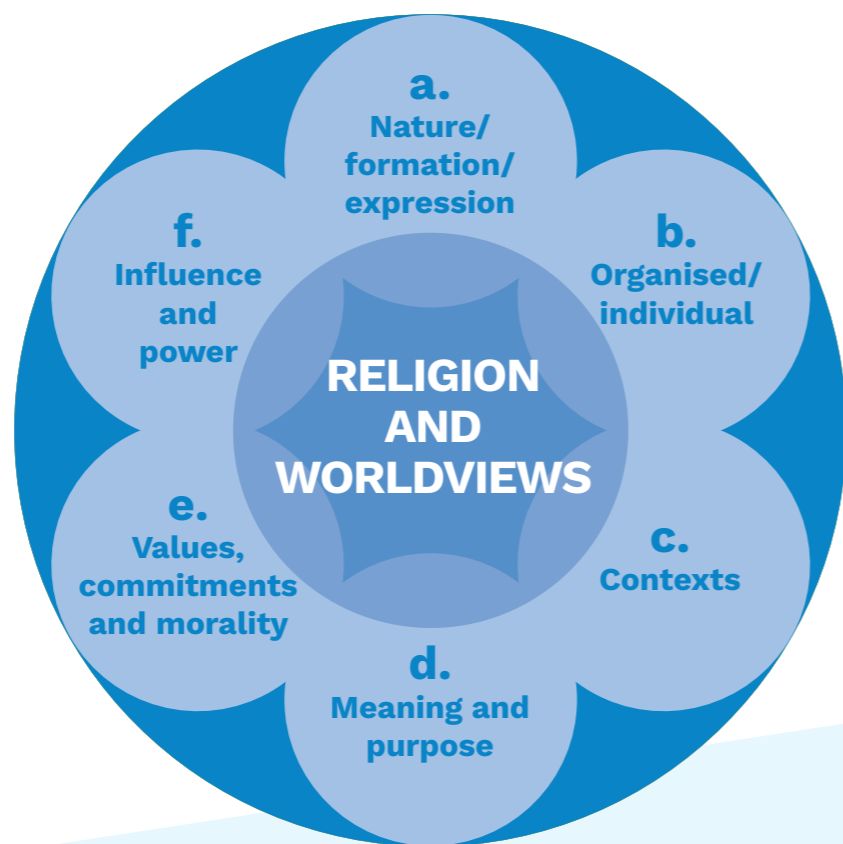
For all pupils to have equal access to high quality education in religion and worldviews, the subject must be given adequate time and resources commensurate with the place of the subject (RE) as a core component of the curriculum.

Schools are required to publish information about their RE curriculum on their website. Schools should include a detailed statement about how they meet the NSE and ensure that every pupil has access to it through the curriculum, lessons and wider experiences they provide.

*This national statement of entitlement provides a shared vision for the subject that will be interpreted for, and applied in, a variety of different contexts by syllabus writers and curriculum designers.*

# Thinking it through

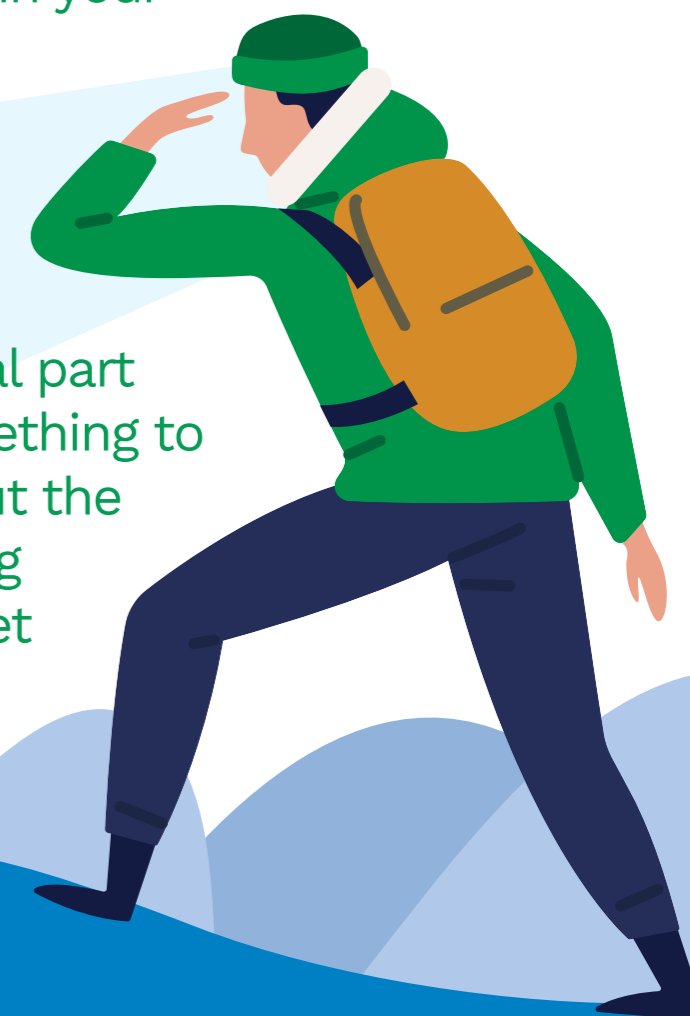
The NSE presents a realm of religion and worldviews to explore (content strand, NSE a-f).



As with any exploration, you need to prepare; you need to choose the right tools for the job and a suitable route (engagement strand, NSE g-i).



But your exploration is always going to be undertaken from your own perspective – i.e., from within your own worldview (perspective strand, NSE j-k). Awareness of how this affects your exploration, and how your journey affects your own worldview, is an integral part of the exploration, and something to draw attention to throughout the journey – not just something to reflect upon when you get back home.



NOTE that wherever the NSE refers to worldviews, it means religious and non-religious worldviews.

## 10

# Developing pupils' personal worldviews

**The development of pupils' personal worldviews is integral to an academic worldviews approach.**

## It involves:

- enabling pupils to reflect on and articulate their worldviews and the sources of these, so that they can engage in well-informed dialogue in relation to religion and worldviews (while recognising they might also do this in relation to English literature, geography, science or PE, for example)
- drawing pupils' attention to their worldviews and bringing them into well-informed dialogue with the worldviews of others
- developing their reflexivity – their reflection on and self-awareness about the learning process
- using this reflexivity to understand and explain how their personal worldviews both affect their encounter and engagement with the content of religion and worldviews, and also how these encounters may influence their worldviews
- recognising and reflecting on how other people are also influenced by their personal worldviews in how they respond to religion and worldviews
- developing their understanding of the role of interpretation in their own knowledge growth.

## Developing pupils' personal worldviews may include the following:

- the ability to apply disciplinary, dialogical and hermeneutical skills
- the acquisition and creation of personal knowledge, arising through the interpretative action of engaging with the content of religion and worldviews
- the development of academic virtues, such as curiosity, intellectual humility, willingness to learn from others, and careful listening before coming to judgement.

Note that the subject will provide experiences, opportunities and encounters with diverse people and content exemplifying something of the richness of worldviews, wisdom, lived religion/nonreligion, artistic expression, human creativity and ingenuity, culture, philosophy, ethics, etc.

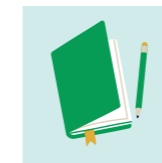
The encounter with the rich diversity of human experience gives pupils space and tools for reflecting on their own worldviews, and to recognise how their worldview affects their interpretation of, and engagement with, the world. Pupils can reflect on how this applies to everyone else too, and what that might mean for listening to, and living with, others.

Not all effects and impacts of this on pupils can be known or examined, and for some school contexts (such as those with a religious foundation) syllabus writers may look to identify aspects of moral and spiritual development more closely.

## 10.1 How to develop pupils' personal worldviews

It is important to note that the *position* strand of the NSE (statements j-k) indicates that pupils are always encountering the content and processes of the subject from the position of their own worldview. This means that developing personal worldviews is not simply a matter of getting to the end of a unit of work and reflecting on their own ideas (see illustration on p. 21). Instead, pupils should have their attention drawn to their position in relation to their studies at different times within a unit of work. There is not a set requirement for this – and it should not become a tick-boxing exercise. Depending on the content, it might be appropriate to reflect on pupils' worldviews at the beginning, middle and end of a unit, asking pupils whether and/or how their ideas are changing or have changed.

### Strategies for this include:



#### FREE-LISTING <sup>[14]</sup>

This is an ethnographic method that collects data that shows salience of terms; for example, asking pupils or interviewees to list the first words that come to mind when they think about the term 'religion' or 'non-religion' or 'God' or 'truth'; then gathering the lists and analysing for salience – that is, for rank and frequency. This can indicate personal worldview perspectives before studying religion, non-religion, God, truth etc.



#### MIXING DESK ANALOGY <sup>[15]</sup>

This involves drawing up a diagram showing that elements of a person's worldview will have different relevance or importance in different contexts, such as when facing challenges, or at different times in life; see p. 37 for an example of a mixing desk applied to planning.



#### SNOWFLAKE <sup>[16]</sup>

This is a diagram that allows pupils to respond to different statements, according to how far they agree or disagree; this visual presentation allows them to see immediately where they agree or disagree with another pupil's responses. Pupils discuss similarities and differences and present their reasons for their responses, applying their learning. The statements can indicate aspects of a pupil's worldview and be revisited at different stages of a unit or units of work to note any changes and continuities.



#### EXPRESSING IDEAS

Pupils might be asked to respond to stimulus material in different ways, expressing ideas through art, poetry, reflective writing, or even through taking action. These can indicate the nature and impact of pupils' personal worldview, with opportunities to revisit and reflect at different points later in the unit of work or a subsequent one.

One research project on metacognition and worldviews from Exeter University has developed a Worldview Question Framework (see Larkin et al<sup>[17]</sup>). This works as a place for personal reflection for pupils on their own worldview. Pupils respond to a variety of questions on themes including personal identity, ultimate and existential questions, ontological and epistemological questions (i.e. about the nature of existence and of knowledge). Pupils respond to questions in the light of their learning, and reflect on how their answers might change as they learn more. The research project highlights opportunities for development of this approach.



# Making good progress: models

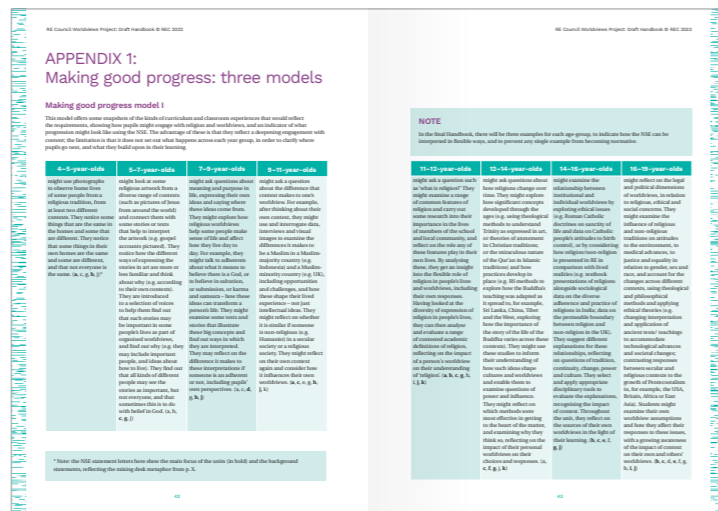
The NSE is intended to set a direction and a benchmark for an education in religion and worldviews, although there is no single correct way to deliver it. Appendix 1 offers three possible models, based on the NSE, for the framework development teams to consider and test.

There are a number of ways in which people understand what progression means.

- Pupils might make progress in terms of knowing more and remembering more. The precise knowledge pupils understand, handle and recall will depend on the context, and the NSE offers a set of criteria for selection, to be applied by a syllabus and a curriculum. It is not a simple case of setting out a range of generic stages of knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Progress might be shown in terms of how pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills extend, for example, from simple to more complex understanding, from local to global contexts, encountering increasing contestation and controversy, and/or making richer links between elements. The precise content selection will depend upon the syllabus and/or curriculum context.

- There is current interest in the idea of the curriculum itself as the progression model, whereby the curriculum models the progression, and pupils make progress insofar as they can understand and do what the curriculum sets out. Progress is not to a set of external criteria against which the pupils are measured. Instead, the curriculum has been written in such a way as to embody the pupil progress intended, based on the NSE. (Note that, the idea of the curriculum as a progression model could be a 'knowing more and remembering more' model as the curriculum sets out a series of knowledge building blocks. Progression will be achieved when the building blocks are known, recalled and understood.)

The examples in Appendix 1 (see pp. 42–45) offer some possible progression models that might be developed for the different frameworks initially, and syllabuses eventually. What is lacking in these examples is the kind of detail of subject content around which progression needs to be built. The frameworks, with their particular contexts, will identify content in ways that generic examples cannot.



# Fulfilling the National Statement of Entitlement

## 12.1 The Law

The Law in England states that RE must be provided for all registered pupils in each school year in maintained schools and academies, including those in Reception classes and sixth forms, unless withdrawn by their parents, or, in the case of students over 18, by themselves<sup>ii</sup>.

## 12.2 National guidance

The NSE sets out an entitlement for all pupils for RE in terms of an education in religion and worldviews.

This NSE aims to establish a shared vision for the subject of RE, revitalised through a worldviews approach. It is intended to guide and assist those of us responsible for developing syllabuses and curricula for RE.

Teaching must promote openness, respect for others, objectivity, scholarly accuracy and critical enquiry.

In line with the DfE Teachers' Standards, pupils are therefore entitled to be taught by teachers who:

- have a secure knowledge of the relevant curriculum area
- foster and maintain pupils' interest in the subject
- can address misconceptions and misunderstandings and handle controversial issues
- demonstrate a critical understanding of developments in the study of religion and worldviews
- promote the value of scholarship.

For all pupils to have equal access to high quality education in religion and worldviews, the subject must be given adequate time and resources commensurate with the place of the subject (RE) as a core component of a 'broad and balanced curriculum'.

## 12.3 Good practice

The Handbook recommends that schools publish a detailed statement about how they meet the NSE and ensure that every pupil has access to it through the curriculum, lessons and wider experiences schools provide.

Schools should be clear about the level of subject knowledge and expertise required for teaching this subject and establish the level of subject expertise present among their teachers. All teachers need CPD to develop their thinking and practice. Recognising that primary initial teacher education, for example, routinely gives three hours or less of training on RE, and that much secondary RE is taught by teachers with other specialisms, underlines the imperative need for schools to have a systematic plan to enable teachers to engage in sufficient, expert led CPD. Those who are not sufficiently qualified need urgent support with extending subject and pedagogical knowledge and understanding.

Schools are required to publish information about their RE curriculum on their school website. Schools should include a detailed statement about how they meet the NSE and ensure that every pupil has access to it through the curriculum, lessons and wider experiences they provide.

<sup>ii</sup>Education Act 2002, sections 78 to 79; Education Act 2002, section 1A.

## 13

## Connecting the NSE with current practice

The NSE sets out a worldviews approach to the selection of content and of teaching and learning approaches. There are resonances between this approach and current models of RE. For example:

### 13.1 OFSTED

In England, the OFSTED religious education research review (2021<sup>[18]</sup>) sets out three types of knowledge:

- ‘substantive’ knowledge: knowledge about various religious and non-religious traditions
- ‘ways of knowing’: pupils learn ‘how to know’ about religion and non-religion
- ‘personal knowledge’: pupils build an awareness of their own presuppositions and values about the religious and non-religious traditions they study

The NSE approach reflects these three dimensions:

- Statements a-f (Content) fit with the category of substantive knowledge
- Statements g-i (Engagement) fit with the category of ways of knowing
- Statements j-k (Position) fits with the category of personal knowledge.

(Note that key to the NSE is how its three elements intertwine. It is not a list but a process of engagement between the pupil and the world via the subject content.)

### 13.2 Freathy et al, Exeter

The RE-researcher’s model (2015) similarly sets out three elements of RE:

- Representation: the object of study; what is to be known about religion(s) and worldview(s)
- Research: learning about and applying methods and interpretations
- Reflect: the learner evaluates their own worldviews, in the context of the study of religion(s) and worldview(s)

As with the OFSTED model above, the NSE statements connect with these elements.

The work at Exeter University has included involvement in the ‘Big Ideas’ project (see section 13.4 below), as well as expanding on the RE-researchers model as applied to worldviews, big ideas *in* and *about* religion(s) and worldview(s), and metacognition.<sup>[19]</sup> There are strong resonances with the worldviews approach in this draft Handbook.

### 13.3 Big Questions in Classrooms

A research project on multidisciplinary approaches in religious education was undertaken by RE Today Services (2019-2022) as part of the Templeton World Charity Foundation *Big Questions in Classrooms* programme.

In their research project, *Challenging Knowledge in Religious Education*<sup>[20]</sup>, RE Today created a series of resources for teachers to introduce and embed disciplinary approaches in upper primary and secondary school RE. They built on the work of Freathy et al, and base their resources on three elements that connect with the NSE:

- Object of study: the substantive content of religion(s)/worldviews; factual, conceptual and theoretical knowledge
- Methods of study: learning about and applying the intellectual tools and methods used to establish that knowledge
- Subject: the learners recognise their worldviews and how these affect their understanding about religion(s)/worldviews

### 13.4 Big Ideas

The ‘Big Ideas’ approach developed by Barbara Wintersgill and colleagues establishes six ‘big ideas’ as criteria for the selection of content for RE.<sup>[21]</sup> It was influential in the direction of the CoRE final report, and that document’s original Statement of Entitlement (2018). The Big Ideas themselves do not include the element of personal worldviews set out in the CoRE report and this draft Handbook, but while statements a-f in the revised NSE in this document are not the same as the Big Ideas, the influence of the Big Ideas project sits behind the NSE.

## 14

## Applying disciplinary methods

The NSE requires that content should be approached in a variety of ways, including applying different ‘ways of knowing’ (cf. OFSTED). This allows for the application of methods, for example those from theology, philosophy and from within the academic study of religion. Such disciplinary areas are valuable in helping pupils to understand how the study of religion and worldviews can be undertaken in different ways.

For younger age groups, drawing on a variety of methods is sufficient, noting with pupils that different methods handle content in different ways and should be evaluated appropriately. The use of methods and disciplines helps pupils to learn how, for example:

- you can ask different questions about the same content
- answering these questions will require different kinds of methods
- the findings might be interpreted appropriately in different ways
- evaluation of the findings will require a set of tools appropriate to the methods and disciplines
- all the above are affected by the context of the learner/researcher and their personal worldview.

As pupils make progress through the school, they should be taught how disciplines construct different types of knowledge. This means that there are particular assumptions behind the various disciplines, and different types of question being addressed within them.

To apply a worldviews approach is not a matter simply of selecting a method; good curriculum planning entails being clear about the type of knowledge that is being constructed within any given module or unit. For example, the theistic assumptions of theology and the naturalistic assumptions of sociology and anthropology affect how scholars practise the discipline, as well as the relationship of the knowledge created in these disciplines to the worldviews of the adherents within traditions.

**Within a worldviews approach, pupils should, for example:**

- be helped to recognise the different authoritative weight of a ‘sacred’ text for adherents in that tradition, and for those outside the tradition for whom it is not ‘sacred’, and some implications from this
- explore how and why such texts are interpreted and applied differently, looking at a range of perspectives and contexts
- examine how a worldviews approach questions some categories within ‘religion’, such as, for example, how far a focus on texts is appropriate in different traditions
- learn to recognise that a single voice from a tradition will not be representative, and consider whether and how a tradition could be represented
- learn that any adherent’s perspective will indicate a relationship between ‘orthodox’ or mainstream teachings and individual practice; for example, a theologian’s perspective will differ from a sociologist’s and from a layperson’s
- consider whose voices are chosen within lessons, why, and what implications there may be
- have opportunities to test whether, for example, survey data is reliable, such as by investigating the questions asked, the sample size and range, who was asking whom and why, and how the data was presented.

**See Making good progress II, Appendix 1, p. 44, for suggested ways of making progress in disciplinary knowledge.**

## 15

## How to use the NSE to develop a syllabus

A syllabus construction process requires a philosophy before it requires a checklist process or set of planning steps. The NSE shapes the philosophy, setting out the nature of the engagement between pupils and the content in an education in religion and worldviews.

This section includes some provisional steps for planning, some principles to bear in mind, and a set of questions to be able to answer after planning. Note that the primary purpose of this guidance within the draft Handbook is for the framework development teams. The guidance will be revised in the light of the experience of developing frameworks and published in the final Handbook at the end of the project in 2024.

### 15.1 Steps for devising your syllabus

- 1 Whether starting a syllabus from scratch, or building on one already in place, **start with the NSE.**
- 2 You might want to put it in the centre of a large piece of paper/interactive whiteboard screen.
- 3 It would be useful to annotate the NSE to show some connections that you see across statements and strands. Note how some statements can be broken down into smaller parts. Note how some might be used to add a dimension to another (e.g. NSE b could add a dimension of comparison between organised and individual worldviews to another statement).
- 4 Your annotations could include examples of content/concepts from religious and non-religious worldviews that you might use to enable pupils to grasp the statements – to understand how worldviews work.
- 5 As you annotate, you might use concentric circles around the NSE – indicating your initial thoughts about how to go deeper into a statement/strand, giving a sense of progression across the age range, and allowing pupils to revisit content. It is important to reflect on local contexts: where do these offer rich opportunities for exploring elements of the NSE?
- 6 Note the gaps – what areas are left out, or are covered in less detail? Might this be because they are not part of your current RE practice, or maybe cover an unfamiliar area of subject knowledge? How might you address those?
- 7 It would be helpful to break down the content component of your annotated overview into segments (four or five, perhaps). These could be vertical segments – showing a way that understanding of an NSE statement or statements might be developed as pupils move up through the school. This is to ensure that earlier learning prepares for later learning, and later learning builds on earlier learning. It is also to create a structure for the syllabus, to enable breadth and balance.
- 8 Some segments may work across all age groups, and some may be more suited to older pupils: consider where these segments might be phased in as pupils move through the school.
- 9 You could devise exemplar questions that could be used for different age groups to unlock the content – or adapt examples from your current syllabus. Note that a worldviews approach will shape questions differently to a world religions approach: don’t just assume questions can transfer straight from one to the other.
- 10 Reflect on the balance of the *engagement* strand statements from the NSE across your questions. How well do your questions indicate the kind of methods (disciplines with older pupils) that are needed to find out suitable answers?
- 11 It is important to draft a key stage outline or long-term plan, populated by your example questions. Check for clarity in terms of how the plan deepens pupils’ engagement with the strands of the NSE, via your chosen segments, balanced across the school year and across age groups.
- 12 You might like to test your syllabus design by choosing a sample of key questions from different phases and drafting some units of work to see how the questions open up the strands of content, engagement and perspectives. Consider a range of case studies that give pupils an insight into the way worldviews work in different contexts.



## 15.2 Principles to bear in mind when developing a syllabus

### Using the NSE

- The NSE maps out the knowledge and understanding of how worldviews work in human life that students need to gain if they are both to know how to study this academic subject and to understand the relationship between religion and worldviews.
- The NSE is intended to function “less as a perimeter that restricts, but ‘an aperture: a space through which the world can be seen’”.<sup>[22]</sup>
- The NSE provides a structure and criteria for content selection, to avoid content overload.
- The NSE is not a list, nor is it a checklist. The statements relate to each other, and the boundaries are not fixed.
- The worldviews approach is not about studying a list of religious and non-religious worldviews in separate containers. The focus is on the human experience of interacting with the religious and non-religious domain.
- Syllabuses and schools should not simply assume that they are already doing a religion and worldviews approach as set out in this draft Handbook. Many teachers have been examining diversity and applying different disciplines. However, in a religion and worldviews *curriculum*, the focus is on the development and construction of pupils’ personal knowledge, through facilitating their interaction with the content as set out in the NSE, while seeking to understand the worldviews of others.
- A syllabus should make judgements about the balance between the different elements of the NSE, according to the context. All units need to include something from each of the three elements of the NSE (content, engagement, position), balanced appropriately.
- The NSE statements are not intended to be covered separately by unit/term. The bigger picture needs to emerge across topics and across school phases, so that the curriculum develops for pupils aged 4–19.
- The different statements can be broken down and units can focus on a part. For example, NSE d could be broken down to ask ontological questions about existence or origins, such as:

*Is there a God or a higher being, force or power? Is this life it, or is there life after death? What exists and what does not exist? What is real and unreal?*

Similarly, a unit could use NSE d and focus on epistemological questions of knowledge and truth, addressing questions such as:

*What is true and false? What is fact and fiction? How do you know? What source(s) do you use to decide? What is knowledge? What is belief? What is opinion? What is faith?*

### Organising syllabus/curriculum content

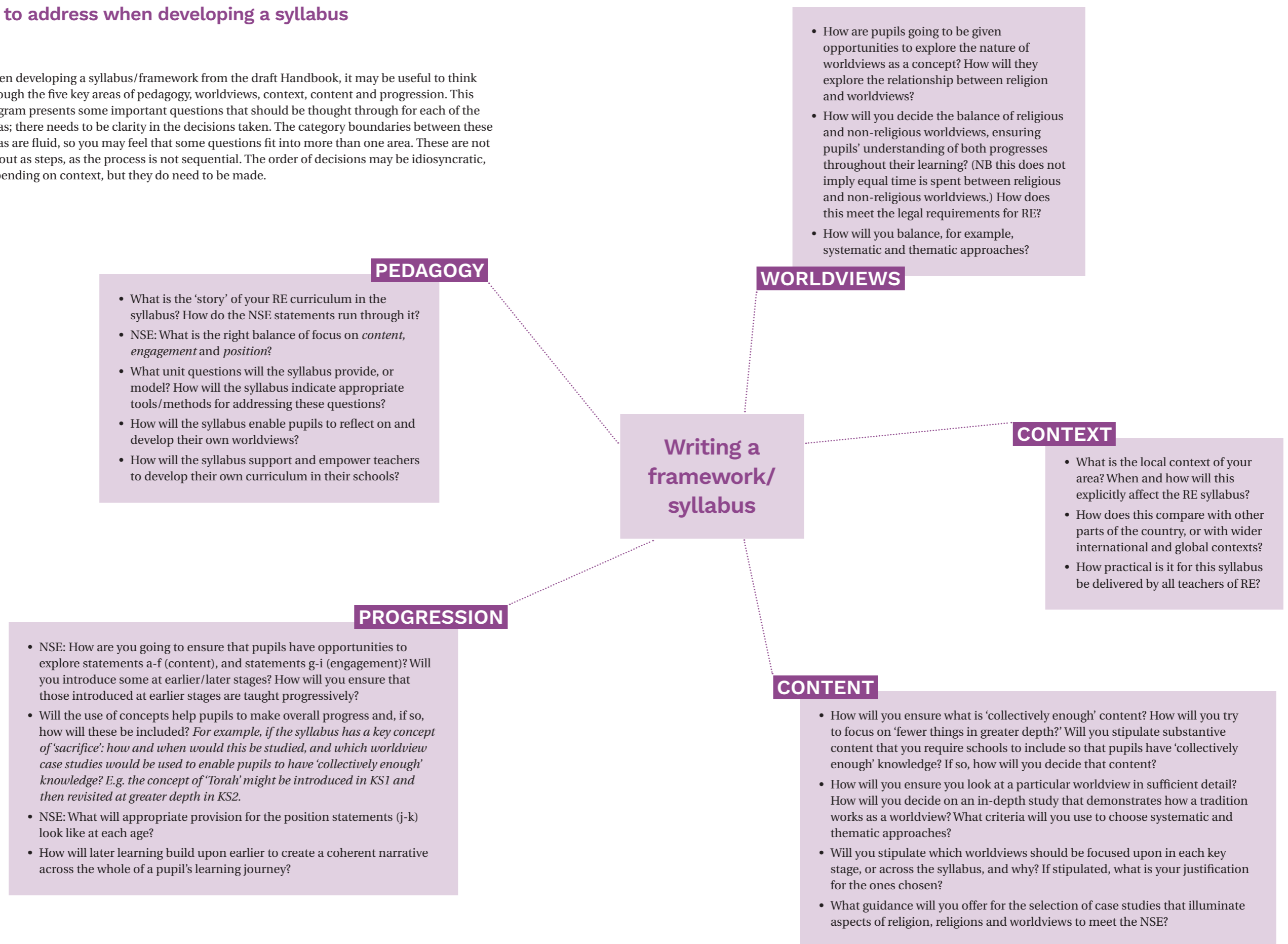
- Systematic study of an organised worldview (a religion, for example) can be undertaken, but constructed in such a way as to illustrate and explore the elements of the NSE.
- Organised worldviews can be examined through case studies, which illuminate the elements of the NSE as well as the worldview itself. Such case studies should ideally be microcosms, where focusing on the particular reveals key characteristics or qualities of the wider worldview.<sup>[23]</sup>
- A syllabus should support teachers to select engaging material that is appropriate to the pupils in their own RE classrooms. This should make good use of creative expressions, lived experience and material religion as well as texts and teachings.
- As they make progress in the subject, it is helpful to build pupils’ expertise in a variety of disciplines (NSE g), but it is not necessary to place equal emphasis on each. (See Making good progress model II, Appendix 1, p. 44.)

### Questions and contexts

- Enquiry questions are powerful ways to drive the use of the approach. Setting rich questions is one way of addressing the challenge of content overload – the questions can identify a route through the content, and different kinds of questions indicate the best methods and/or disciplines, and appropriate evaluative processes.
- Contexts can influence choices of questions. These might include how a question will contribute to future learning. This might be preparing pupils to be able to welcome some visitors or to go on some visits; or to give them a nuanced awareness of diversity in a particular worldview in preparation for GCSE, along with the critical skills to handle varied questions.
- The local context can help to shape or give a flavour to a syllabus. For example, the diversity of Tower Hamlets, within the wider diversity of London. Compare that with Norfolk and the East of England, where census data identifies Norwich as the most non-religious city, and history indicates East Anglia as a place of occasional rebellion, with notable challengers of the status quo (see, for example, 1075 and 1549 CE). And Cornwall/Kernow, with its Celtic Christian influence, Cornish language (Kernewek) and a local desire for political independence. This means that context is not just about relative size of different religions/worldviews but about the pulse of the local community.
- Comparison with national and global contexts is also important. The largely secular environment of Britain and Western Europe is not typical in global terms.
- Note how the syllabus writer or curriculum developer’s own worldview will influence the choices made. It is important to ensure that you are as aware of your own position as you are expecting your pupils to be! Be reflexive about your choices. You might ask questions such as: Are you developing a curriculum in your own image? Have you overemphasised critical or uncritical perspectives? Are all your questions or case studies from your comfort zone, or are you stretching and challenging your own perspectives? Are there spaces for scholars from within and outside different worldviews? Are your sociologists or theologians or philosophers all white European men? If so, make some changes!
- Note also how a teacher’s worldview will influence their choices, including choice of questions, examples and case studies used, resources selected, use of language in the classroom, and responses to pupils. It is important to raise teachers’ awareness of this as part of training and implementation of the new syllabus/framework.

### 15.3 Questions to address when developing a syllabus

When developing a syllabus/framework from the draft Handbook, it may be useful to think through the five key areas of pedagogy, worldviews, context, content and progression. This diagram presents some important questions that should be thought through for each of the areas; there needs to be clarity in the decisions taken. The category boundaries between these areas are fluid, so you may feel that some questions fit into more than one area. These are not set out as steps, as the process is not sequential. The order of decisions may be idiosyncratic, depending on context, but they do need to be made.



# 16

## Using the NSE to develop questions and construct units of work

### 16.1 Developing questions

Enquiry questions are powerful ways to drive the use of the worldviews approach. Setting rich questions can address the challenge of content overload – the questions can identify a route through the content, and different kinds of questions indicate suitable methods and/or disciplines, and appropriate evaluative processes. Such questions will increase in complexity and sophistication as pupils move through the school.

In the grid below are some examples of common questions explored in RE, in world religions paradigm mode. Following these examples are some reflections about the features of these kinds of questions, along with some suggestions for how a question might reflect a worldviews approach.

<b>EYFS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What happens at a wedding or when a baby is born?</li> <li>• What happens at a festival?</li> <li>• What can we learn from stories from different religions?</li> </ul>
<b>KS1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why are some stories/places sacred?</li> <li>• What festivals are important in Judaism and Islam?</li> </ul>
<b>LKS2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do different religions teach about God?</li> <li>• What is the sacred text in Islam and how is it used?</li> <li>• What do religious codes say about right and wrong?</li> </ul>
<b>UKS2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do Christians believe about Jesus?</li> <li>• Why do people go on pilgrimage and what impact does it have?</li> <li>• What are the key beliefs and values of Sikhism and how are these expressed in the Gurdwara?</li> </ul>
<b>KS3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does Islam/Hinduism teach about life after death?</li> <li>• Is there a God? What and why do people believe?</li> <li>• Are religions sources of peace or causes of conflict?</li> </ul>

### Note some key features of ‘world religions’ questions:

- the focus tends to be on the communication of information, transmitting a form of settled knowledge (‘textbook’ information)
- they tend to be abstract and context-free, as if there are answers that might apply universally
- the answers may contain diversity, but the implication is that there is a form of correct answer.

### A worldviews approach is looking more for questions that:

- include an interpretive element (e.g. how do these people understand and apply this?)
- offer a clear context (e.g. how do these two people/groups respond at an identified time and place, and why?)

- recognise that there are different answers that are valid (e.g. different individuals, groups, or traditions may have different responses, and that these may change across time and place)
- include an evaluative element, recognising that different answers may be acceptable in different contexts.

You might consider how in Maths, pupils learn *how* to answer questions – the emphasis is on the methods used, the working, not just the answer. For example, pupils learn to become more systematic, they choose ever more concise written methods, and they learn reasoning skills to unpick questions. The same applies in a worldviews approach: pupils learn *how* to make judgements in RE – they show the process they go through in order to find some answers, and they choose appropriate methods to evaluate the reliability, validity, truth or credibility of those answers.

### Acknowledging that a question cannot do everything, some worldview-approach questions might look like the following, for example:

<b>EYFS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do different people welcome a new baby into the world?</li> <li>• How do different people celebrate Christmas/Easter in our community? Around the world?</li> <li>• What stories are important in our school community?</li> </ul>
<b>KS1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why is the story of Rama and Sita special or sacred to Hindus in Britain and India, and what do they learn from it?</li> <li>• How do Jews/ Muslims in our area celebrate Hanukkah/Eid and why are they special times?</li> </ul>
<b>LKS2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where do Muslims/Christians find out about God, and do they all agree what God is like?</li> <li>• What role does the Qur’an play in the lives of at least three Muslims, and why?</li> <li>• What is the ‘golden rule’, where is it from, and how is it put into practice by people from different worldviews?</li> </ul>
<b>UKS2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How and why does the life and teaching of Jesus influence the lives of Christians and their communities today?</li> <li>• What is the role and impact of the Gurdwara on the lives of Sikhs and on local communities in our area/Britain? Do Sikhs experience the Gurdwara differently in different cultures?</li> </ul>
<b>KS3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who believes in life after death, who doesn’t, and what difference does it make?</li> <li>• How have different Christians understood the idea of Jesus as God? How is Jesus viewed in other worldviews?</li> <li>• How have Christians, Muslims and Buddhists played a role in conflict and peace in the 21st Century?</li> </ul>

Note that there is some value in the kinds of answers given to the ‘world religion paradigm’ questions set out above. There are mainstream or ‘orthodox’ responses that often represent an organised or institutional worldview’s position, and many people’s individual worldviews align with those mainstream positions. However, a worldviews approach does not stop there; it explores how worldviews work in people’s lives, which may include how individuals’ worldviews relate to the ‘orthodox’ views. As pupils progress through their schooling, they should also have opportunities to explore how and why these views become ‘orthodox’, and the implications in terms of power. For example, there may be an assumption that the literate and theological presentation of a worldview takes precedence over the everyday practice of individuals and communities. This is an assumption to explore in lessons.

### Disciplinary questions

Enquiry questions can also indicate the kind of methods or disciplines that might appropriately be used to work out answers.

For example:

#### What difference does it make if Christians believe that God is holy and loving?

This theological question allows pupils to examine Christian understandings that balance biblical ideas of God as a holy, transcendent, just judge who hates sin, while also being seen as an immanent loving father (or mother). A unit could involve interpreting biblical texts and examining voices from Christian tradition, talking with Christians to find out how far they balance these contrasting views and what impact believing in this kind of God has on their lives, and reflecting on how far pupils’ own worldviews tend towards love and/or justice in how they respond to people.

#### What is the role and impact of the Gurdwara on the lives of Sikhs and on local communities in your area/Britain?

This question might draw on sociological survey data on how many Gurdwaras there are in Britain, where, when and why they were built, and how Sikhs use and value the Gurdwara; it might examine case studies from specific local or regional Gurdwaras, with interviews with Sikhs and people who live near the Gurdwaras; it might draw on some texts from the Adi Granth as to the early importance of the langar. Pupils draw on the range of data to come up with conclusions in response to the key questions, evaluating the sources and methods as they do so.<sup>[24]</sup>

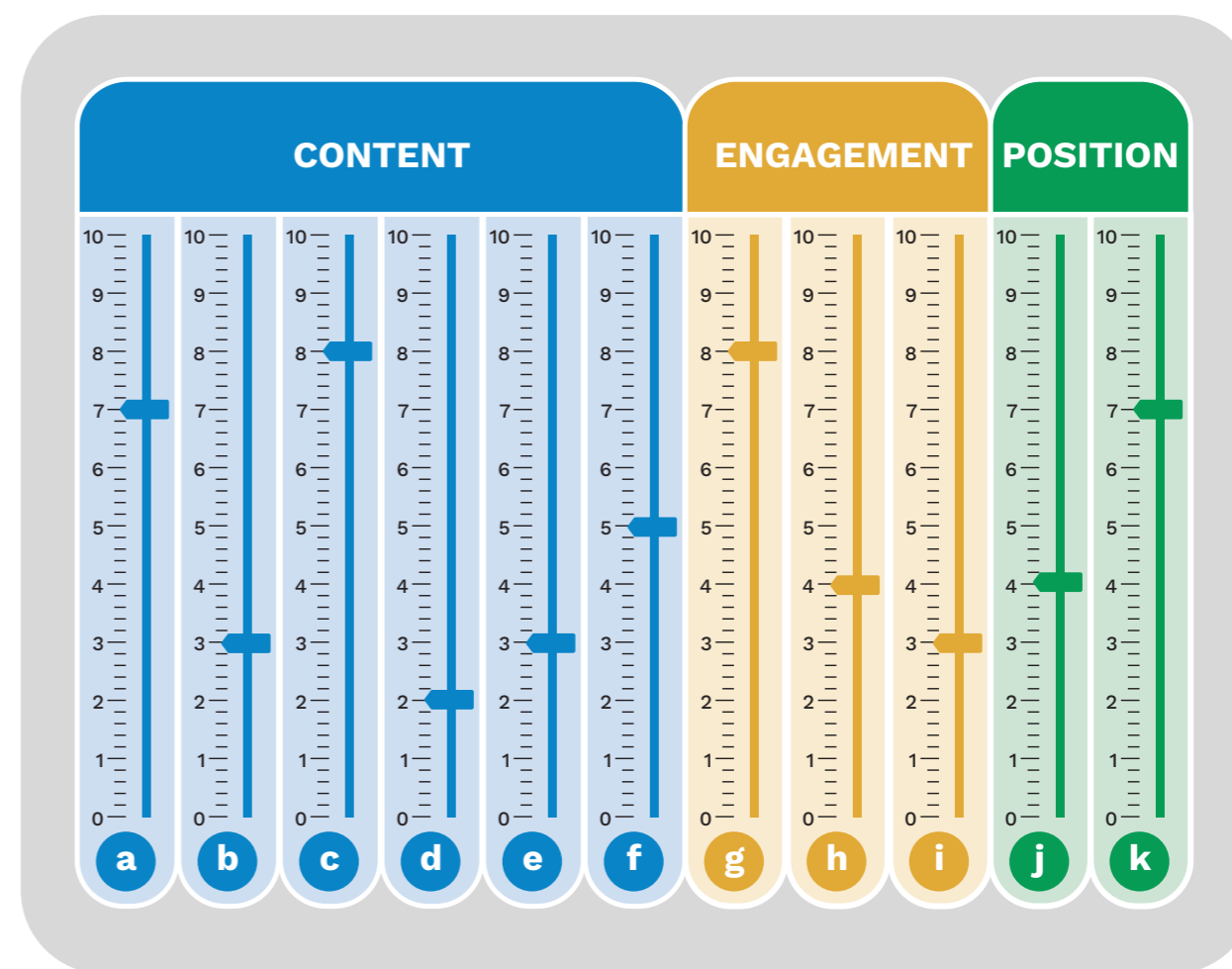
## 16.2 Using the NSE to shape questions

The NSE offers eleven statements, to be understood as being in relationship with each other. Units of work can focus on a particular *content* statement, alongside one each from the *engagement* and the *position* strands. However, selecting a single statement does not mean that the others are irrelevant. You might consider the metaphor of a mixing desk, below.

In music, a mixing desk takes all the inputs from a band or orchestra and balances them, fading up a particular instrumental or vocal line (or lines) so that it comes to the fore in the mix. While this happens, it does not mean that the other inputs stop – they continue, and their turn in the spotlight comes at other points.

The NSE functions in a similar way. A unit might draw attention to a particular NSE content statement, or it might fade up two or more. For example, a unit might raise a question of meaning and purpose (NSE d) and examine how this is addressed differently in mainstream doctrines and in individual ways of thinking and living (NSE b). The unit may also use examples that show different contexts (NSE c), and while teachers may point this out – and pupils may spot it too – it is not the particular focus of the unit.

Likewise with the engagement strand: emphasis may be placed on a disciplinary approach (NSE g) while also using examples from lived experience (NSE h); this element is noted but plays in the background.



### 16.3 Constructing units of work

Below is a sample process that might be used to shape a unit using the worldviews approach.

Steps/components	Example 1: KS1	Example 2: upper KS2	Example 3: KS3
Age range: look at what pupils already know, and where you want them to go next	Pupils have encountered the idea that many religious adherents express their worldview through prayer and ritual (NSE a); this unit focuses on Muslims. They will later explore the relationship between individual and organised Muslim worldviews (NSE b)	Pupils have explored how a Christian worldview may be influenced by seeing a ‘big story’ of God’s involvement with humanity (NSE f); this unit reflects on what that might mean in specific examples. They will later explore NSE c in other contexts, e.g. Christian majority/ minority countries.	Y7-8. Pupils have examined some features of religion and their influence in people’s lives. They are going on to explore the relationship between religion, spirituality and secularity in the UK and India.
Choose the particular focus from the NSE, balancing the three elements appropriately (content; engagement; position)	<p><b>NSE a: nature</b></p> <p><b>NSE h: lived experience</b></p> <p><b>NSE k: personal worldviews: impact</b></p> <p><i>Note:</i> these are the key statements for the unit, but NSE c (how mosques do not all look the same) and NSE d (how mosques indicate the idea of submission to God) are also part of this unit.</p>	<p><b>NSE c: contexts</b> (focus on change and continuity)</p> <p><b>NSE h: lived experience</b></p> <p><b>NSE j: personal worldviews: reflexivity</b></p> <p><i>Note:</i> these are the key statements for the unit, but NSE a (how ritual may shape and express worldviews) and NSE g (using a historical lens) are also part of this unit.</p>	<p><b>NSE a: nature</b></p> <p><b>NSE i: dialogue/interpretation</b></p> <p><b>NSE j: personal worldviews: reflexivity</b></p> <p><i>Note:</i> NSE b (organised/individual) and NSE c (contexts) are also part of this unit.</p>
Identify an appropriate topic from the syllabus	The mosque for Muslims	Christian pilgrimage: Walsingham as England’s Nazareth	The nature of religion and worldviews
Design a question to examine the topic and open up the NSE focus	How is a local mosque important for some Muslims? Why?	Why might Christians have made pilgrimage to Walsingham in Medieval times and why might they make a pilgrimage today?	In what ways might a worldview be religious and/or non-religious?
Choose the best method(s) or discipline to answer the question	Methods: use photographs of a variety of mosques; visiting a mosque; talking with some Muslims at the mosque and in the classroom.	Discipline: history Method: sources and interviews	Discipline: religious studies Methods: data from surveys and interviews; analysis of definitions of religion and their applicability and interpretation in varied countries/cultures.
Identify moments for bringing pupils’ personal worldviews into focus, to examine the interaction with the content, its impact on pupils’ worldviews and the impact of pupils’ worldviews on their study.	Impact of pupils’ worldview explored through looking at their expectations before the visit. Talking about what they think will be important about the mosque, and then comparing their ideas after the visit and their conversations.	Reflexivity explored through reflections on testimonies. How do Medieval and contemporary voices affect/challenge their personal worldviews? How do pupils’ own worldviews affect how they encounter these voices?	Reflexivity explored through pupils’ accounts of the sources and influences on their personal worldviews. How clear/blurred are the lines between religious and non-religious worldviews in data, in studies and in their own lives?
Identify sources, examples, case studies and learning activities	Identify sources, examples, case studies and learning activities <sup>[25]</sup>	Identify sources, examples, case studies and learning activities <sup>[26]</sup>	Identify sources, examples, case studies and learning activities <sup>[27]</sup>

## 17

## To what extent is this new?

The worldviews approach is not entirely new. It emerges from within the rich history of religious education in the UK. These brief references to the work of some of RE's greatest recent scholars are simply designed to remind readers that the current turn to an education in religion and worldviews has its roots in the intellectual traditions of the subject.

From the **interpretive RE approach** of Robert Jackson, for example, it draws on the idea of ethnography and lived experience, identifying contextual individual and communal worldviews within wider organised/institutional worldviews, and the importance of interpretation for all learners – adherents in understanding their own tradition(s) and for outsiders looking into the tradition. The skills of attentive listening to other voices, dialogue and reflexivity in responding to the worldviews encountered are vital for the success of worldviews approaches in education.

From the **human development RE model** of Michael Grimmitt, for example, it emphasises the importance of the interaction between the 'life-worlds' of the pupil and the 'life-worlds' of the religious (or non-religious) adherent. The worldviews approach recognises the power and significance of learners identifying their own positionality in relation to the worldviews they study. A worldviews approach accepts and embraces the idea that 'everyone stands somewhere' and pupils' studies of worldviews will be deepened where they are able to learn from the worldviews they encounter.

From the **critical realist RE model** of Andrew Wright, for example, worldviews approaches connect to the emphasis on the importance of a clear understanding of the epistemic assumptions of worldviews and of learners. The critical realist emphasis on truth-seeking and on philosophical considerations about the nature of truth, knowledge, belief and evidence, draw attention to the ways in which different worldviews claim to describe the reality of the human condition. Members of different communities (including religions) may see their worldview as a shared vision of the truth about humanity.

## 18

## How does this approach relate to GCSE?

While numbers of GCSE candidates in England for both full and short courses have declined, this qualification remains the major defined vision for a 14-16 RS / RE curriculum: nearly 300,000 candidates, around half the cohort of 16-year-olds, take these courses. In devising a syllabus, it is important to consider how far these qualifications accommodate the fresh directions of religion and worldviews, and where they may need change or possible radical development.

Current GCSE Religious Studies specifications, which date from first examinations in 2016, allow for diversity: students study two different religions and learn extensively about the internal diversities of the religions on the syllabus (e.g. a Catholic Christianity paper states: "Catholic Christianity should be studied in the context of Christianity as a whole, and common and divergent views within Catholic Christianity").

It is clear, however, that there is still a central, if not fundamental, difference in approach between the current exam specifications, which work from a world religions paradigm, and the worldviews approach set out in this draft Handbook. However, if pupils have had an education in religion and worldviews up to age 14, they would be able to examine critically the particular, contextual presentation of religion(s) within the specification and offer richly nuanced responses to questions.

It has been the practice of the Department for Education (DfE) and, under its influence, the Examination Awarding Bodies, to use contemporary academic and professional thinking in setting the specifications for RS qualifications. For example, the 2013 REC's National Curriculum Framework for the subject, which followed the National Curriculum orders for other subjects, was central in determining the Assessment Objectives in the current GCSE specifications. These specifications emphasise the acquisition of a rich knowledge of two religions, and the processes of critical thinking. Candidates learn about the internal diversity of religions, and develop reasoned responses from their own perspectives to evaluation questions.

In the light of this, it seems wise for religion and worldviews syllabus writing to balance its alertness to current structures and requirements with ambitious attention to future possibilities of a 14-16 religion and worldviews curriculum which uses the NSE as its starting point.

# APPENDIX 1: Making good progress: three models

## Making good progress model I

This model offers some snapshots of the kinds of curriculum and classroom experiences that would reflect the requirements, showing how pupils might engage with religion and worldviews, and an indicator of what progression might look like using the NSE. The advantage of these is that they reflect a deepening engagement with content; the limitation is that it does not set out what happens across each year group, in order to clarify where pupils go next, and what they build upon in their learning.

4–5-year-olds	5–7-year-olds	7–9-year-olds	9–11-year-olds
might use photographs to observe home lives of some people from a religious tradition, from at least two different contexts. They notice some things that are the same in the homes and some that are different. They notice that some things in their own homes are the same and some are different, and that not everyone is the same. <b>(a, c, g, h, j)*</b>	might look at some religious artwork from a diverse range of contexts (such as pictures of Jesus from around the world) and connect them with some stories or texts that help to interpret the artwork (e.g. gospel accounts pictured). They notice how the different ways of expressing the stories in art are more or less familiar and think about why (e.g. according to their own contexts). They are introduced to a selection of voices to help them find out that such stories may be important in some people's lives as part of organised worldviews, and find out why (e.g. they may include important people, and ideas about how to live). They find out that all kinds of different people may see the stories as important, but not everyone, and that sometimes this is to do with belief in God. <b>(a, b, c, g, j)</b>	might ask questions about meaning and purpose in life, expressing their own ideas and saying where these ideas come from. They might explore how religious worldviews help some people make sense of life and affect how they live day to day. For example, they might talk to adherents about what it means to believe there is a God, or to believe in salvation, or submission, or karma and samsara – how these ideas can transform a person's life. They might examine some texts and stories that illustrate these big concepts and find out ways in which they are interpreted. They may reflect on the difference it makes to someone is an adherent or not, including pupils' own perspectives. <b>(a, c, d, g, h, j)</b>	might ask a question about the difference that context makes to one's worldview. For example, after thinking about their own context, they might use and interrogate data, interviews and visual images to examine the differences it makes to be a Muslim in a Muslim-majority country (e.g. Indonesia) and a Muslim-minority country (e.g. UK), including opportunities and challenges, and how these shape their lived experience – not just intellectual ideas. They might reflect on whether it is similar if someone is non-religious (e.g. Humanist) in a secular society or a religious society. They might reflect on their own context again and consider how it influences their own worldviews. <b>(a, c, e, g, h, j, k)</b>

\* Note: the NSE statement letters here show the main focus of the units (in bold) and the background statements, reflecting the mixing desk metaphor from p. X.

## NOTE

In the final Handbook, there will be three examples for each age-group, to indicate how the NSE can be interpreted in flexible ways, and to prevent any single example from becoming normative.

11–12-year-olds	12–14-year-olds	14–16-year-olds	16–19-year-olds
might ask a question such as 'what is religion?' They might examine a range of common features of religion and carry out some research into their importance in the lives of members of the school and local community, and reflect on the role any of these features play in their own lives. By analysing these, they get an insight into the flexible role of religion in people's lives and worldviews, including their own responses. Having looked at the diversity of expression of religion in people's lives, they can then analyse and evaluate a range of contested academic definitions of religion, reflecting on the impact of a person's worldview on their understanding of 'religion'. <b>(a, b, c, g, h, i, j, k)</b>	might ask questions about how religions change over time. They might explore how significant concepts developed through the ages (e.g. using theological methods to understand Trinity as expressed in art, or theories of atonement in Christian traditions; or the miraculous nature of the Qur'an in Islamic traditions) and how practices develop in place (e.g. RS methods to explore how the Buddha's teaching was adapted as it spread to, for example, Sri Lanka, China, Tibet and the West, exploring how the importance of the story of the life of the Buddha varies across these contexts). They might use these studies to inform their understanding of how such ideas shape cultures and worldviews and enable them to examine questions of power and influence. They might reflect on which methods were most effective in getting to the heart of the matter, and examining why they think so, reflecting on the impact of their personal worldviews on their choices and responses. <b>(a, c, f, g, j, k)</b>	might examine the relationship between institutional and individual worldviews by exploring ethical issues (e.g. Roman Catholic doctrines on sanctity of life and data on Catholic people's attitudes to birth control), or by considering how religion/non-religion is presented in RE in comparison with lived realities (e.g. textbook presentations of religions alongside sociological data on the diverse adherence and practice of religions in India; data on the permeable boundary between religion and non-religion in the UK). They suggest different explanations for these relationships, reflecting on questions of tradition, continuity, change, power and culture. They select and apply appropriate disciplinary tools to evaluate the explanations, recognising the impact of context. Throughout the unit, they reflect on the sources of their own worldviews in the light of their learning. <b>(b, c, e, f, g, j)</b>	might reflect on the legal and political dimensions of worldviews, in relation to religious, ethical and social concerns. They might examine the influence of religious and non-religious traditions on attitudes to the environment, to medical advances, to justice and equality in relation to gender, sex and race, and account for the changes across different contexts, using theological and philosophical methods and applying ethical theories (e.g. changing interpretation and application of ancient texts/ teachings to accommodate technological advances and societal changes; contrasting responses between secular and religious contexts to the growth of Pentecostalism in, for example, the USA, Britain, Africa or East Asia). Students might examine their own worldview assumptions and how they affect their responses to these issues, with a growing awareness of the impact of context on their own and others' worldviews. <b>(b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j)</b>

## Making good progress model II

This offers an example of what progress might look like using the NSE. The focus here is on making progress in terms of the process of engagement (NSE statements g-i, how pupils examine and engage with the content – incorporating ‘ways of knowing’). Syllabuses themselves will need to develop their own outcomes, dependent upon the kinds of questions and content they set out.

<b>5-7s</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask questions; find things out using e.g. observation, interviews, interpreting stories and texts, using data and recognising where it comes from; recognise that sometimes people give different answers to questions</li> </ul>
<b>7-9s</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As above, also ask questions and consider the best ways to find answers. Use the methods above with awareness of (for example) organised teachings and individual lived experiences; historical/ contemporary contexts</li> <li>weighing up how sufficient sources are (e.g. one interview or six; one quote or an extended passage; one example or several)</li> <li>recognise that people disagree, and some answers leave space for mystery and wonder</li> </ul>
<b>9-11s</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As above, but also recognising different questions can fit with subject disciplines, including (for example) theology, philosophy, a social science</li> <li>awareness of basic assumptions of these (e.g. ‘insider/ outsider’ perspectives)</li> <li>examine beliefs, teachings, ways of living with a range of methods (e.g. experiment, interview, qualitative and quantitative data)</li> <li>basic evaluative methods (e.g. reliable methods/ sources/ findings; generalisable conclusions; coherence with tradition etc.)</li> <li>recognise that some important questions leave space for mystery and paradox</li> </ul>
<b>11-14s</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As above but also reflecting on different ways that disciplines construct knowledge, aware of assumptions</li> <li>using content from different methods, or applying these appropriately to investigations, examining beliefs, teachings and lived experience (e.g. using hermeneutical approaches to texts; interpreting artistic forms of expression; case study, discourse analysis, experimental method, ethnography, surveys)</li> <li>awareness of the place of dialogue, debate and disagreement in construction of knowledge</li> <li>application of specific evaluative tools</li> <li>awareness of non-western ways of knowing</li> <li>awareness that <i>‘even if all possible scientific questions be answered the problems of life have not been touched at all’</i> (Wittgenstein).</li> </ul>
<b>14-19s</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As above, but also selecting and applying these disciplinary ways of thinking to increasingly challenging issues, both contemporary and in the past               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>within</b> religious communities (e.g. how theology responds to changes in prevailing cultures, such as questions around gender and sexuality; the impact of critical realism and non-realism on debates about God in Christianity)</li> <li><b>between</b> communities (e.g. relationships between atheism, secularism, Humanism, non-religion, and religion; religion in India or China compared with religion in UK)</li> <li>and <b>beyond</b> religious communities (e.g. dialogues and debates about the nature of religion, its place in societies and cultures, its roles in relation to prejudice, equality and justice, in politics, in colonialism and national identities etc.) recognising the roots of such debates and the range of ways of handling them</li> </ul> </li> <li>appreciating that many questions remain unresolved, and will themselves reflect different worldviews.</li> </ul>

## Making good progress model III

The paragraphs below offer descriptions of the kind of learning that an education in religion and worldviews as set out in the NSE might look like at each phase. It is indicative rather than restrictive: it is not intended to limit pupils’ learning only to the examples described within an age range. It is a spiral process, where progress will fluctuate, and will involve building on earlier learning and experiences. It includes an element of creativity and engagement in terms of the teaching and learning strategies that are implemented.

<b>4-5s</b>	Children begin to hear and use the language of religion and worldviews. They experience, through all their senses, ways in which people explore and express meanings using symbols, stories, rituals and in other ways. They take part in enjoyable, creative learning experiences related to religion and worldviews, and begin to think about where and how their lives are similar and different to those they encounter in RE.
<b>5-7s</b>	Children gather a rich knowledge of different worldviews, including religions, and learn that we are all different. They find out lots about the varied ways human communities celebrate, share stories, understand big ideas and think about what is good and bad. They take part in enjoyable, creative, varied and challenging learning experiences related to religion and worldviews, noticing where their own experience overlaps with the worldviews they encounter, and where their worldviews are different.
<b>7-9s</b>	Pupils begin to identify what a worldview is and how it works. They gather, understand and deploy a rich knowledge of a range of different worldviews. Learning about diversity, they recognise that we each have a worldview, shaped by our families, communities and wider society. They find out how some key examples of religious worldviews teach their ideas and express their visions in practice. They take part in creative learning experiences that deepen their understanding of how religions and worldviews are practised in our communities today and how they draw on ideas from the past and from around the world. They begin to identify aspects of their own worldviews and how they relate to the worldviews of others.
<b>9-11s</b>	Pupils begin to understand what worldviews are, that they affect how we experience the world, and that we can study a range of different worldviews using varied methods, such as through sociological enquiry or textual study. Learning more about diversity, they apply ideas about how our own worldviews are shaped by our families, communities and wider society to different examples. To explain what matters in religion, they use a growing rich knowledge of the ways key examples of religious worldviews teach their ideas and express their visions in practice. They are involved (sometimes as planners) in creative learning experiences that deepen their understanding of varied ways in which religions and worldviews are practised in our communities today and how they draw on ideas from the past and from around the world. They recognise some sources of their own worldviews and identify how someone’s worldview affects how they understand and experience the world, in RE as well as in wider life.
<b>11-14s</b>	Pupils apply the insight that all our experiences are affected by our worldview, and use different methods to research and explain different dimensions of the religion and worldviews curriculum, so that they can describe, explain and analyse religious and non-religious ideas and practice. They make skillful and insightful comparisons between a range of different perspectives on big questions about theology, philosophy and society. They learn, by methods of dialogue and listening, to navigate diversity in relation to religion and worldviews with increasing skill. They participate in challenging experiences of debate, dialogue, imagination, encounter and challenge in relation to big ideas and questions, drawing on their own worldviews and reflecting on the worldviews of others to come to informed judgements on contested matters.
<b>14-19s</b>	Students deepen their understanding of the role that worldviews play in how we interpret our encounters in life, and apply this as they continue to expand and deepen their growing rich knowledge of religion and worldviews. They consider, and appropriately deploy and evaluate, a range of disciplinary methods by which religions and worldviews are studied. They apply these different methods to the religions and worldviews they study in increasing depth. They respond to the challenges, dilemmas and controversies raised by religion and worldviews in contemporary society, locally and globally, drawing on their awareness of how worldviews affect and shape their encounter with the content of RE, and how the content shapes their worldviews. They research and evaluate creative insights offered by different communities into the human condition.



# Endnotes

1. *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward*, REC 2018, available [www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/worldviews/](http://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/worldviews/)
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5. See, for example, the work of the Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network, and Lois Lee, *Recognizing the Non-Religious, Reimagining the Secular*, OUP (2015)
6. See p. 31 in Hedges, P (2021) *Understanding Religion: theories and methods for studying religiously diverse societies*, University of California Press.
7. OFSTED Research review series: religious education (2021) [www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-review-series-religious-education/research-review-series-religious-education](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-review-series-religious-education/research-review-series-religious-education)
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10. See, for example, Christine Counsell's blog <https://thedignityofthethingblog.wordpress.com/2018/03/27/in-search-of-senior-curriculum-leadership-introduction-a-dangerous-absence/> and Rosalind Walker on school science knowledge: <https://rosalindwalker.wordpress.com/2018/01/14/the-nature-of-school-science-knowledge/#more-357>
11. Moulin, D (2011) "Giving voice to 'the silent minority': The experience of religious students in secondary school religious education lessons", *British Journal of Religious Education* 33 (3), 313-326
12. This is a controversial point and will need further discussion and reflection. The relative role of educationalists and members of faith communities in the selection of content for RE has oscillated over the decades.
13. 'After Religious Education' is led by David Lewin, University of Strathclyde <https://pureportal.strath.ac.uk/en/projects/after-religious-education-curricula-principles-for-education-in-r>
14. This is a method used in social science research. I encountered it in the Understanding Unbelief project, and have used it in resources supporting that project (<https://research.kent.ac.uk/understandingunbelief/research/public-engagement-projects/understanding-unbelief-in-the-re-classroom/>); also in resources developed for the Challenging Knowledge in RE research project from RE Today: e.g. *Investigating God* ed. Fiona Moss for primary and *Studying God* for secondary.
15. See also the examples using the mixing desk analogy for pupils' personal worldviews developed in *Investigating Worldviews* (for primary) and *Studying Worldviews* (for secondary), also part of the Challenging Knowledge in RE research project from RE Today.
16. This strategy was originally developed by Sarah Northall, formerly Head of RE at Chipping Norton Secondary School. See it in basic form in *More than 101 great ideas* ed. Rosemary Rivett, and applied to ideas of God using the discipline of psychology in *Investigating God* ed. Fiona Moss for primary and *Studying God* for secondary, all published by RE Today.
17. S Larkin, R Freathy, J Doney and G Freathy *Metacognition, Worldviews and Religious Education: A Practical Guide for Teachers*, Routledge (2020)
18. OFSTED Research review series: religious education (2021) [www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-review-series-religious-education/research-review-series-religious-education](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-review-series-religious-education/research-review-series-religious-education)
19. See for example:  
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20. See project publications for primary schools: [www.natre.org.uk/resources/termly-mailing/bqic-primary-big-questions-big-answers/](http://www.natre.org.uk/resources/termly-mailing/bqic-primary-big-questions-big-answers/) and for secondary schools: [www.natre.org.uk/resources/termly-mailing/bqic-secondary-challenging-knowledge-in-re/](http://www.natre.org.uk/resources/termly-mailing/bqic-secondary-challenging-knowledge-in-re/)
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22. See David Lewin, 'Religion, Reductionism and Pedagogical Reduction' in G Biesta and P Hannam (Eds), *Religion and education: the forgotten dimensions of religious education?* Brill 2020 David Lewin is quoting from Robert Macfarlane's *Introduction to Nan Shepherd, The Living Mountain* (Canons, 2014)
23. See David Lewin, as above.
24. One way of addressing this question, using this approach as outlined, can be seen in *Investigating How We Live*, ed. Fiona Moss, RE Today 2022.
25. For example, *Picturing Islam, Picturing Muslims* (2019) S Pett and L Blaylock, RE Today
26. See Adam Robertson (2022) "A journey to 'England's Nazareth'" in *REtoday*, 39:2, 26-27
27. See, for example, *Studying Religion* (2022) ed. S Pett, RE Today

# Acknowledgements

The REC's project "*Religion and Worldviews in the Classroom. Syllabus building: principles, tools and exemplification*", is supported by the Templeton World Charity Foundation.

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Thanks to the many teachers, advisers and academics who have given time and valuable advice during phase 1 of this project.

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This publication was made possible through the support of a grant from Templeton World Charity Foundation, Inc. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of Templeton World Charity Foundation, Inc.

The project was also enabled by the Westhill Foundation with a grant supporting the Expert Advisory Group meetings.

