



Developing a Religion and Worldviews approach in Religious Education in England

A Handbook for curriculum writers

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Handbook written by Stephen Pett, RE Today

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**The Handbook and related resources are available at
www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/RWApproach**

Acronyms/abbreviations:

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

NCS: National Content Standard for RE (England)

NSE: National Statement of Entitlement

Ofsted: Office for Standards in Education



REC: Religious Education Council of England and Wales

RW: Religion and Worldviews

SACRE: Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

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This print booklet is an extract, showing the first 24 pages of the Handbook. The contents pages below show the full extent of the Handbook, available at www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/RWApproach

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Foreword

This Handbook is the outcome of a three-year long project on behalf of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales.

The project builds on the religion and worldviews approach, advocated by the independent Commission on Religious Education (2018), offering an approach to religious education which is academically rigorous, multi-disciplinary, and which draws on the lived experience of those who inhabit both religious and non-religious worldviews. It draws on the best that religious education has traditionally offered and brings this into dialogue with contemporary academic approaches, resulting in a new level of challenge and engagement for students.

At the heart of the Handbook is the National Statement of Entitlement which aims to establish a shared vision for the subject, and to lay the foundations for building a curriculum. The National Content Standard for RE for England, which is built around the National Statement of Entitlement, provides a benchmark for high-quality religious education and should be read alongside the Handbook.

The Handbook has been developed thanks to the expertise of the Project Director, Professor Trevor Cooling, and the Project Leader, Stephen Pett, both of whom have worked tirelessly to bring it to this point. Its principles have informed the work of three teams whose members included teachers, curriculum leaders, teacher educators and academics, and who have written three exemplar curriculum frameworks, accompanied by sample units of work, for use in their distinct contexts. These frameworks are published separately and we hope they will inspire others, in different contexts, to develop their own curricula using a religion and worldviews approach. These might include Academy Trusts, Agreed Syllabus Conferences and those with responsibility for the religious education curriculum in schools with a religious character. Whilst the principles may be applied in a wide range of settings, the Handbook, the National Statement of Entitlement and the National Content Standard for RE have been written primarily for those within the education system in England.

The Religious Education Council of England and Wales embraces a vision that every young person should experience an academically rigorous and personally inspiring education in religion and worldviews. This Handbook is a resource which can bring us closer to achieving the vision, and the REC Board is pleased to endorse it.

Sarah Lane Cawte
Chair, RE Council

“ **The Religious Education Council of England and Wales embraces a vision that every young person should experience an academically rigorous and personally inspiring education in religion and worldviews.** ”

Introduction

This Handbook represents the culmination of a three-year project carried out on behalf of the RE Council of England and Wales (REC).

It takes forward the vision from the independent Commission on RE (CoRE 2018) and offers guidance for applying that vision to the classroom, building on the strong traditions of religious education (RE) in Britain. It takes into account research commissioned by the REC (Benoit et al. 2020; Tharani 2022) and other work done around worldviews and RE. It responds to extensive feedback received on the first draft (Pett 2022).

This Handbook offers a toolkit for developing the Commission's vision of a religion and worldviews (RW) approach to developing curriculums for religious education (RE). It is offered as a resource for those who wish to use it. It is not a policy statement.

At the heart is a National Statement of Entitlement (NSE). This provides a pedagogical tool for curriculum developers. It supports the selection of content and of appropriate teaching and learning approaches to enrich and deepen pupils' scholarly engagement with religion and worldviews.

The Handbook is accompanied by three frameworks which give examples of how the Handbook and NSE have been interpreted and put into practice in particular contexts. These frameworks were developed by three teams, selected for the quality of their proposals by the REC Board in an open tendering process, representing three distinct contexts. These frameworks and their accompanying units of work are offered as examples to promote thinking by curriculum developers as to processes they might use in their own situations.

The frameworks take the shared vision of the NSE and accompanied guidance, and express it in different ways in different contexts. They affirm the application of local autonomy in developing local curriculums on the basis of a shared national vision.

A significant step but not the final word

The development of religious education towards an RW approach has been part of the national conversation in RE since at least 2017, when the first draft of the Commission on RE's report came out. The conversation has been wide-ranging, with debates about the value or wisdom of such a development, and with both strong advocates and critics publishing responses ranging from social media posts through to academic journals. Research projects are on-going at the time of writing and papers have been published that explore aspects, such as how teachers might make decisions on how to select content (Lewin et al. 2023), what it means to develop pupils' personal worldviews (Plater 2023, Flanagan 2021), and the worldviews of people who are non-religious (Wright and Wright 2024; Strhan et al. 2024; van Mulukom et al. 2022).

This Handbook is part of that conversation. It builds on a great deal of development in RE over decades, and sets out a rationale for its on-going development, reshaping and reorienting the subject for future decades. This Handbook is not, of course, intended as the final word on the subject. It is intended to provide some clarity around the approach and guidance on how to implement it in a curriculum. The NSE itself sets out expectations and a benchmark for an education in religion and worldviews, and is indicative of the breadth, depth and ambition it has for teaching curriculum content about religious and non-religious worldviews. This is further developed in the RE Council's National Content Standard for RE in England.¹ The NSE is not intended to set out an exclusive or finally definitive position with regard to worldviews; rather, it is a pedagogical tool to assist curriculum developers and teachers in their task of enabling pupils to understand how worldviews work in human lives, including their own.

The Handbook sets out practical steps for developing a religion and worldviews curriculum as well as offering a rationale and a commentary on how we have responded to feedback and considered some of the challenges arising from the approach. The three frameworks and accompanying units of work give evidence of the flexible way in which the NSE can be interpreted and applied to suit different contexts. While there may be differences of opinion over these frameworks, we argue that this is healthy, given the variety of approaches there are to teaching RE.

We recognise that there are resourcing and training implications from this new direction for RE, and that to equip classroom teachers to use this approach requires the kind of national plan called for in the CoRE report, and by the REC subsequently.

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Legal context

The legal requirements governing RE were set out in the Education Reform Act of 1988 and confirmed by the Education Acts of 1996 and 1998. RE is a statutory subject and part of the basic curriculum.

RE must be provided for all registered pupils in maintained schools and academies, including those in Reception classes and sixth forms (Education Act 2002, Sections 78 to 79).

The content of RE in maintained schools is determined at local authority level. The Local Authority must establish an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) to produce and recommend a syllabus. Each local authority must convene an ASC to review its agreed syllabus at least every five years. An agreed syllabus should 'reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian while taking account of the teachings and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain' (Education Reform Act 1988, Section 8(3)).

In community, foundation and voluntary controlled (VC) schools with a religious character designation, RE must be provided in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus. RE in voluntary aided (VA) schools with a religious character must be provided in accordance with the trust deed of the school and the wishes of the governing body.

Academies must provide RE in accordance with their funding agreements. The Funding Agreement requires that academies with a religious character provide RE in accordance with the tenets of their faith.

Academies that do not have a religious character must arrange for RE to be given to all pupils in accordance with the requirements for agreed syllabuses, that is, a curriculum which reflects 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 Reform Act 1988 8(3)). Academies are not, however, required to follow any specific locally agreed syllabus. They are accountable for the quality of their curricular provision.

Who is this Handbook for?

The Handbook is primarily written to assist those who are developing syllabuses and curriculums for RE with a religion and worldviews (RW) approach, including local authorities, Standing Advisory Councils on RE (SACREs), Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs), dioceses, and curriculum leaders in multi-academy trusts (MATs) and other academy trusts.

It is intended to be relevant to schools in England, those with and without religious character, including community maintained schools, academies and free schools, and independent schools wishing to establish a curriculum of ambition for RE.

It is intended to be of use to a wide range of people involved in the subject, including those 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, individual and personal 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.

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

Handbook structure

The Handbook is divided into four sections. Each section is intended for a specific audience, which means that some material is repeated between sections, since it is relevant to different audiences, and some material is amplified and expanded in different sections.

SECTION	CONTENT	INTENDED AUDIENCE
A. Overview 	<p>This is intended to give the overview of the RW approach, its key features, including the National Statement of Entitlement (NSE), and a brief rationale.</p>	<p>Head teachers, governors, leaders of MATs and other academy trusts, SACREs, ASCs, dioceses and others who are interested in these developments, including teachers, parents and pupils.</p> 
B. Toolkit for developing a religion and worldviews approach in RE 	<p>This section has a more practical focus, clarifying some definitions, offering both a commentary on the NSE and some practical advice for taking the NSE and applying it in different contexts. Examples are given of RW approach questions.</p>	<p>The syllabus developer, curriculum leader, or subject leader who wants to apply an RW approach in their SACRE, ASC, diocese, MAT or school context. It is also relevant to teachers, subject leaders, trainee and early career teachers.</p> 
C. A religion and worldviews approach: rationale and explanations 	<p>This section offers some of the background to the move to an RW approach, offering a more detailed rationale, expanded definitions and explanations, and some engagement with academic responses.</p>	<p>Curriculum leaders and syllabus developers, members of SACREs and ASCs, academics and other commentators, inspectors and advisers, examination awarding bodies and resource developers.</p> 
D. Frameworks 	<p>Three frameworks based on the NSE and the draft resource (2022), exemplifying three ways of applying an RW approach to the development of a curriculum in three specific contexts.</p>	<p>These are intended to be of interest to all parties, particularly syllabus developers, curriculum writers, teachers, inspectors, advisers and resource developers.</p> 

Key terms and how we use them

Some of the key concepts we are dealing with in RE are complex and contested. Wittgenstein once remarked that ‘problems arise when language goes on holiday’ (Wittgenstein 1967), and so this section sets out how we are using these key terms in the context of advocating an RW approach.

RELIGION	This is a contested conceptual category, to be examined in the classroom. Definitions of religion vary. Some focus on beliefs, such as belief in a deity and a supernatural dimension to existence; some definitions start from the idea of the divine origin of religion; some argue that religion is a human construct, inextricably linked with culture; some definitions focus on the ways of thinking and living of adherents; other definitions look at the function religions play within communities and societies. We use the term to accommodate this diverse range of meanings, open to debate in the classroom.
RELIGIONS	These are instances of religion, and the term can be taken as ‘multi-aspectual traditions’, (O’Grady 2023) usually with some relationship to the idea of the sacred, included in the curriculum on grounds of historical influence. Religions can be explored as social facts as well as having their truth claims examined and weighed up, their teachings and traditions studied and the lived experience of adherents explored.
WORLDVIEW	This is another contested term. We intend the term to be more inclusive than the category of ‘religion’ or religiousness. At the very least, worldview incorporates the non-religious. Religions may be seen as examples of worldviews.
WORLDVIEWS	These are identifiable instances of worldview, and can be understood at the level of the organised or sometimes institutional, the individual and communal, and in this context, the personal worldviews of pupils. These include both religious and non-religious worldviews. None of these pairings (organised/institutional, organised/individual, religious/non-religious) is intended to be a binary – clearly there are overlaps and fluid borders.

RELIGION AND WORLDVIEWS (RW)	<p>We use this term to describe the approach advocated by this project.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – It is a religion <i>and</i> worldviews approach in contrast with a ‘world religions paradigm’ approach. – It is a <i>religion</i> and worldviews approach to examine the relationship of worldviews to religion. – It is a religion and worldviews <i>approach</i>, including selection of content but also encompassing the ways of engaging with this content and bringing into focus the position of those studying.
NON-RELIGION	<p>We use the term ‘non-religion’ as an object of study, a category emerging in academic discourse. Scholars use the term in different ways, for example, non-religion is ‘a descriptive term for a certain group of understudied phenomena and not ... an analytical term aiming to draw clear boundaries between religion and non-religion’ (Quack 2014), and ‘Non-religion is any phenomenon – position, perspective, practice – that is primarily understood in relation to religion but which is not itself considered to be religious.’ (Lee 2015).</p>
SECULAR	<p>This is a contested term with many meanings.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. In common usage, this is often used as a synonym for ‘non-religious’. b. In US contexts it tends to be used in opposition to religion, often seen as antagonistic to religion. c. In the UK it commonly refers to a space or attitude where religion is not a primary concern, has little relevance or significance. Lois Lee describes secular as ‘phenomena – objects, spaces, people, and practices – for which religion is no more than a secondary concern, reference point, or authority’ (Lee 2015). d. This UK usage also describes a more political sense of a public square that does not privilege any variety of religion or worldview. e. It is also more narrowly connected to an argument for separating religious institutions from the apparatus of the state. <p>In this Handbook we generally refer to sense c) when using ‘secular’, unless otherwise specified.</p>

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A. Overview:

introducing a religion and worldviews approach

Content

This is intended to give the overview of the RW approach, its key features, including the National Statement of Entitlement (NSE), and a brief rationale.



Intended audience

Head teachers, governors, leaders of MATs and other academy trusts, SACREs, ASCs, dioceses and others who are interested in these developments, including teachers, parents and pupils.



A1 What is a religion and worldviews approach?

A religion and worldviews (RW) approach offers a new way of handling religious and non-religious beliefs and ways of living in the RE classroom, representing a significant shift in the subject. It reshapes the subject away from a focus on gathering information about the ‘world religions’ towards gaining an understanding of how worldviews work in human experience, including pupils’ own. On the understanding that ‘everyone has a worldview’, this means that the subject helps pupils to understand ‘organised’ and ‘personal’ worldviews, as a way of increasing understanding of the world and of themselves, and how they might act in the world. Integral to the approach are ways of engaging with examples of religious and non-religious worldviews, equipping pupils with the ability to make scholarly judgements about them. At the heart of the approach is the National Statement of Entitlement (NSE) that aims to equip curriculum developers for introducing pupils to an academically rigorous, scholarly approach to the study of religion and worldviews.

The significance of this development is that ‘the relationship between the pupil and the content studied becomes more than simply mastering knowledge or retaining information. Rather it becomes an interpretive experience with a focus on understanding how people (those studied and those in the classroom) both shape and are shaped by their encounter with the substantive knowledge specified in the curriculum.’ (Cooling, 2024)

The 2018 independent Commission report offered a new vision of RE (CoRE, 2018). While it has deep roots in past and current RE pedagogy (see Section C6 for details), the RW approach outlined in this Handbook advocates a new approach. It is a new engagement, or perhaps a re-engagement with RE’s subject matter, a change to how sometimes familiar content is approached. The key focus is on the role worldviews

play in people’s lives. This RW approach looks at worldviews:

- a. as objects of study
- b. as part of *how* we study them
- c. and as part of the experience of those doing the studying.

a. Worldviews as objects of study:

The subject continues to explore organised worldviews:

- with rich histories and traditions that change and grow (and decline)
- with doctrines, texts, rituals, creative expression, spirituality, ethics and philosophical constructs
- often with institutions that carry on their traditions and guide people’s living today
- with various responses to big questions on the purpose and meaning of life, and questions of ultimate reality, truth, morality, justice.

These show a weight of tradition, which has long been the traditional focus of RE. However, this RW approach is balanced with the study of ‘individual worldviews’. The approach explores the place that individuals have within these organised worldviews, often as part of local or wider communities. It recognises, of course, that none of us is individual in the sense of being entirely isolated and that, therefore, our worldviews tend to be shared or communal. The approach considers the way that individuals’ lived worldviews do not always reflect the orthodox teachings or practices of the traditions – but that they are nonetheless part of the wider tradition.



b. Worldviews as part of how we study them:

This RW approach does not see pupils as passive recipients of ‘textbook’ chunks of knowledge. This approach is not simply about accumulating content about a range of different organised religious and non-religious worldviews. Rather,

- an RW approach is about the exploration of human engagement with these religious and non-religious traditions
- it is about how humans make sense of, respond to and act in the world
- it is about how they make sense of their experience through worldviews, with particular reference to the place and influence of the traditions studied.

If it is not the passive reception of chunks of stuff, then what does this mean in relation to how pupils study? An RW approach draws attention to the process of engagement, to the process of encounter between pupils and the subject content, asking:

- What are the questions we want to ask? What are the questions that other people ask (e.g. adherents, scholars etc.)? Why is it important to ask these questions?
- What are the best ways of finding out the answers?
- How will we explore that relationship between the teachings/traditions and the everyday lived practice?
- How do we as RE students participate in that process of interpretation of the world and experience that is part of different organised, individual or communal worldviews?

A personal ‘worldview’ describes the way in which a person encounters, interprets, understands and engages with the world.

► *See Sections A3, B3 and C2 for more detail.*

c. Worldviews in relation to the experience of the pupils doing the studying:

Recognising that organised worldviews all have their own context and that we do too, so teachers and pupils bring their autobiography to their studies.

As scholars doing research have to consider how their own assumptions might affect their studies, so the RW approach draws attention to the personal worldviews of pupils, and how they affect and are affected by their studies.

The RW approach is not just a cognitive endeavour. To understand how worldviews work is to see that they encompass beliefs and stories, but also hopes and fears, values and convictions, intentions and desires, creativity and imagination, and the experience of living in our own bodies, our own identities, in our own physical and communal and global contexts.

An organised worldview can be understood as ‘a view on life that has developed over time as a more or less coherent and established system with certain (written and unwritten) sources, traditions, values, rituals, ideals, or dogmas ... [it] has a group of believers who adhere to this view on life’. (van der Kooij et al. 2013).

► *See Sections A3, B3 and C2 for more detail.*



A2 What is the purpose of an RW approach?

The RW approach adopted here seeks to embody the vision developed by the Commission on RE (2018). This recognised the truth that ‘everyone has a worldview’ or, to put it another way, ‘nobody stands nowhere’. This vision seeks to engage all pupils in a personally relevant and engaging study of influential religious and non-religious worldviews in a way that enables them to embrace an academically rigorous understanding of their own personal worldview development. Such an approach offers an inclusive experience of religious education for all pupils, irrespective of their background or personal worldview. It puts the pupils’ educational outcomes at the centre of RE.

The RW approach seeks the following outcomes for pupils (in no particular order of priority):

1. They have a good understanding of how worldviews (religious and non-religious) work in human life, including knowledge about organised worldviews, their teachings and traditions as well as the lived experience of adherents.
2. They emerge from their schooling with the scholarly skills and attributes to be lifelong learners in religion and worldviews.
3. They become wise interpreters in their encounters with other people and in their treatment of their own worldview, recognising how their personal worldview both shapes and is shaped by their encounters.
4. They learn how to be skilled navigators of the worldview diversity that they will encounter in school and in adult life.
5. The experience of RE makes a positive contribution to their personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
6. They are inspired by the study of religion and worldviews as a way of understanding the world, to be curious, creative and thoughtful.
7. They are equipped with skills of dialogue and self-reflection, so as to be able to deal with the challenge of differences of opinion on controversial issues, and able to do so in a positive way that seeks to live well with others.
8. They are equipped to function as contributing citizens and as active participants in a diverse nation and beyond.

► *For more on purposes of RE and an RW approach, see Section B1.*



A3 What do we mean by ‘religion’ and ‘worldviews’?

The term ‘religion’ is a complex and contested term. The complexity of the term ‘religion’ allows for rich dialogue and debate about its nature in relation to beliefs about god(s), the divine, the supernatural and/or the transcendent; its function in communities and societies; its origins in the divine or in human culture; the relationship between believing, belonging and behaving. ‘Religions’ are instances of ‘religion’, and relate to the term in different ways.

The term ‘worldview’ is also a contested term, with a shorter history than ‘religion’ but one no less complex. This Handbook builds on the idea that we can consider worldviews from different positions. Two understandings drawn from the academic literature have shaped the project’s approach:

A person’s **personal worldview** describes and shapes how they encounter, interpret, understand and engage with the world. A person may have a coherent and considered framework for answering questions about the nature of ultimate reality, knowledge, truth and ethics, or they may have never given such questions much thought – but they still have a worldview, including the beliefs, convictions, values and assumptions that influence and shape their thinking and living.²

An **organised worldview** can be understood as a ‘more or less coherent and established system with certain (written and unwritten) sources, traditions, values, rituals, ideals, or dogmas’ (from van der Kooij et al. 2013).

An RW approach does not see personal and organised worldviews as a binary but explores the complex relationship between them. Individuals within organised traditions may be more or less orthodox in their beliefs and practices, or in their engagement with theological or philosophical discourse, or in their day-to-day practice, or in their identification with that worldview.

An RW approach looks at the relationship between individuals and the organised worldviews to which they may belong, as well as using this exploration to give pupils opportunities to reflect upon their own personal worldviews.

► *See Sections B3 and C2 for more detail.*

A4 Why is this change needed?

The move towards an education in religion and worldviews is not about a change of name. It encompasses an adjustment in the way that content is selected and how it is approached within the subject, with the outcomes for pupils the first priority. There are several dimensions to this shift towards an education in religion and worldviews.



A critique levelled at religious education over past decades has been its over-emphasis on what is known as the ‘world religions paradigm’ – the idea that there are six major world religions, and lots of minor ones, and that they have a comparable set of core beliefs and practices that we can neatly package up and present in lessons. This approach is seen as distorting by imposing a particular model (deriving from Protestant Christianity) onto diverse traditions. Academic study has largely moved on from this paradigm, and now studies not only the formal/doctrinal aspects of religion and non-religion but also the fluid lived reality of adherents within these traditions, as well as the interplay between orthodoxy and lived experience. The study of religion and worldviews in schools needs to catch up with these academic developments.



Another dimension is the changing demographics globally (an increase in people affiliated to religions) and nationally (a significant increase in people identifying as non-religious, including a growing majority of young people in the UK). The picture is not simple, of course; many young people in the UK see themselves as ‘spiritual but not religious’; for some, their non-religious worldviews embrace beliefs in supernatural phenomena and spiritual practices (Bullivant et al. 2019); for some it is the organised nature of religious worldviews that they are rejecting. Being non-religious is increasing in the UK, so the study of non-religion and non-religious worldviews is an increasingly important academic field, and it needs to be part of the school study of worldviews.



A third dimension is the challenge of content selection for teachers, as the increased complexity and scope of the field of study, combined with the impossibility of teaching everything about religion and non-religion, lead to the danger of content overload. A new rationale for content selection is needed.



A fourth dimension is the educational benefit for pupils from studying RE with an RW approach. This includes introducing pupils to the rich diversity of religion and non-religion as part of understanding how the world works and what it means to be human; enabling them to understand the complex ways in which worldviews work in human life, including their own; inducting them into scholarly processes, virtues and methods with which we can study religious and non-religious worldviews; and including pupils in an exploration of the influences on their own worldviews so that they can better understand and contribute to their community, to society and to the world.



A fifth dimension is that across the UK there are many examples of excellent RE provision and practice, but also evidence of too many schools that are neither meeting their statutory requirement nor providing all pupils with their entitlement to high quality RE. In part, the shift to an RW approach is to reinvigorate the subject, to reinforce its importance as part of children's and young people's education in a diverse religious and non-religious world, and to reinspire those schools currently neglecting the subject.



A5 How does an RW approach work?

The concept of worldviews offers an approach that revitalises the subject, taking account of academic developments around the understanding and study of religion and non-religion.

An RW approach accommodates the study of the fluidity within and between organised religious traditions; the diversity of identities and ways of living and thinking among both religious and non-religious people; and the relationship between religious and non-religious worldviews.

It also places the development of pupils' own position and assumptions within the academic processes of the subject. Their perspectives matter: they affect pupils' engagement and encounter with the content of the subject; they might reasonably expect their education to help them develop healthy, scholarly perspectives so that they can better understand and contribute to their community, to society and to the world. Pupils need opportunities to recognise, reflect on and develop their personal worldview, and to understand how their own worldview operates as a lens through which they encounter those of others.

This approach means enabling all pupils to become open-minded, well-informed, critical participants in public discourse and society, thus equipping them to make academically informed judgements about important matters in relation to religion and worldviews which shape the global landscape. They will have opportunities to consider how they might also shape that landscape. The approach sets out a subject for all pupils, whatever their own family background and personal worldviews. It supports them in not only understanding and responding to the world in which they find themselves but also considering the world as they would like it to be. It supports them in learning to live well together in a diverse society.

RE, like all education, has transformational intentions. Learning changes the learner. The approaches to the subject which are developed here, taking into consideration the long-standing debates about the ways in which RE may be legitimately transformational, reinforce the value of studying religion and worldviews for all children and young people. They aim to equip pupils with the scholarly knowledge, understanding and attributes that enable them to flourish as adults in, and contribute positively to, a society where matters of religion and worldviews are contentious and challenging.

The history of the subject includes varying emphases on, for example, edification, learning from religion, personal development including spiritual, moral, social, cultural development (SMSCD), the deconstruction and reconstruction of worldviews, and the human search for personal meaning. An RW approach carries this debate forward, and can provide pupils with vital opportunities to develop reasoned accounts of their own worldviews.



A6 Introducing the National Statement of Entitlement and its role

The key mechanism for supporting an RW approach is the National Statement of Entitlement (see Section B2 below). The NSE sets out:

- a benchmark for standards in a religion and worldviews curriculum about how worldview(s) work in human life (see also the National Content Standard for RE in England³)
- a pedagogical tool for the selection of content and of appropriate teaching and learning approaches to enrich and deepen pupils' scholarly engagement with religion and worldviews.

The NSE has three interrelated elements, divided into eleven strands. The elements comprise **content, engagement** and **position**. Each strand is set out in a brief 'core statement' and an expanded statement (see p. 28–29). The core statements are given below.

Note that wherever the NSE mentions worldviews, it signifies religious and non-religious worldviews.

Notes:

- 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. This is exemplified by the three frameworks produced in response to the NSE.
- The NSE offers a benchmark around which the RE community can gather and agree, and as such has been embedded in the RE Council's National Content Standard for RE in England (2023). While this is not statutory, it has widespread agreement from education and RE professionals as well as faith and belief communities.
- The wider context for the NSE is that schools will give sufficient time and resources to the subject and to the equipping of specialist teaching. (See Section B2.1)

Legal requirements

Note that in applying the NSE, the legal requirement still 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).



The NSE core statements:

CONTENT		
<p>a. Nature/formation/ expression</p> <p>What is meant by worldview and how people’s worldviews are formed and expressed through a complex mix of influences and experiences.</p>	<p>b. Organised/individual</p> <p>How people’s individual worldviews relate to wider, organised or institutional worldviews.</p>	<p>c. Contexts</p> <p>How worldviews have contexts, reflecting time and place, are highly diverse, and feature continuity and change.</p>
<p>d. Meaning and purpose</p> <p>How worldviews may offer responses to fundamental questions raised by human experience.</p>	<p>e. Values, commitments and morality</p> <p>How worldviews may provide guidance on how to live a good life.</p>	<p>f. Influence and power</p> <p>How worldviews influence, and are influenced by, people and societies.</p>
ENGAGEMENT		
<p>g. Ways of knowing</p> <p>The field of study of worldviews is to be explored using diverse ways of knowing.</p>	<p>h. Lived experience</p> <p>The field of study of worldviews is to include a focus on the lived experience of people.</p>	<p>i. Dialogue/ interpretation</p> <p>The field of study of worldviews is to be shown as a dynamic area of debate.</p>
POSITION		
<p>j. Personal worldviews: reflexivity</p> <p>Pupils will reflect on and potentially develop their personal worldviews in the light of their study.</p>	<p>k. Personal worldviews: impact</p> <p>Pupils will reflect on how their worldviews affect their learning.</p>	



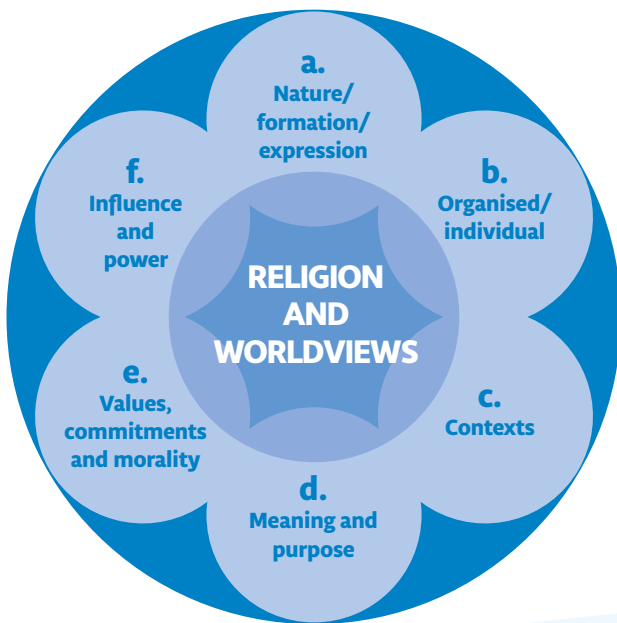
Thinking through the NSE

While it is set out as a list, the NSE is not intended to function as one. The three elements are integrated. The relationship between content, engagement and position might be explained in this way:

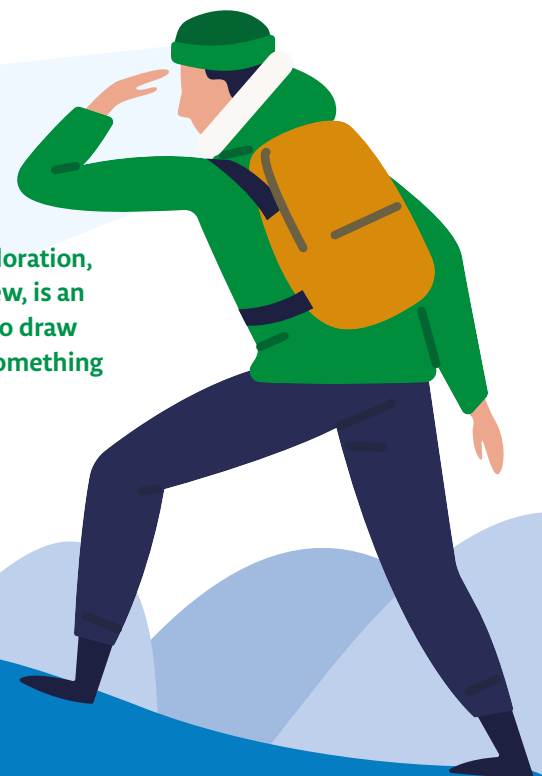
The NSE presents a realm of religion and worldviews to explore (content strands NSE a-f).



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



But your exploration is always going to be undertaken from your own position – i.e., from within your own worldview (position strands 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.



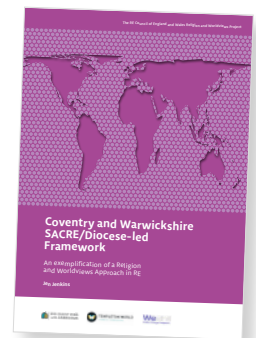
A7 Introducing the frameworks

In 2022, after an open tendering process, three framework teams were selected by the REC to participate in this project. Their task was for each to develop a framework for an RW curriculum, based on the National Statement of Entitlement (NSE) and the guidance offered in the Draft Resource (REC, 2022), accompanied by sample units of work and examples of pupil responses. The purpose was to test the NSE and the guidance, and to demonstrate ways in which these could be interpreted and applied in different contexts.

The three frameworks are exemplars but not templates. They all reflect specific contexts and have applied the NSE accordingly. As such, they exemplify a process that other SACREs, MATs or schools might follow to apply the NSE and accompanying guidance when developing a curriculum for their own contexts.

SACRE/Diocese-led Framework

This team, led by adviser Jen Jenkins, worked to create a framework for a locally agreed syllabus for two SACREs, Coventry and Warwickshire. Working with the Diocese of Coventry and the members of the two SACREs, the team took account of the contrasting nature of diverse, urban Coventry and predominantly monocultural, suburban and rural Warwickshire. This draws on the particular connection between Coventry and other parts of the world in relation to reconciliation and peace-making. The selected units of work show the progression along one of the framework’s key concepts from 4 to 14.



MAT-led Framework

This team, led by Subject Specialist Lead Nikki McGee, worked within the Inspiration Trust MAT, seventeen academies in Norfolk and north Suffolk. Their particular context includes the application of a particular approach to knowledge in their curriculum, and their framework reflects that, as well as the geographical, historical and religious/non-religious context of East Anglia. The RE context includes the Norfolk 2019 agreed syllabus’s use of the disciplines of theology, philosophy and human and social sciences. These disciplinary strands are embedded in the Trust’s RE curriculum, and can be seen in, for example, the emphasis of philosophical questions and methods in their Framework. The selection of units shows progression along one strand of the curriculum from 4 to 14.





Teacher-led Framework

This team, led by Gillian Georgiou, comprised teachers across the country, in different contexts: primary and secondary, community, Church of England, academy, urban, suburban and rural. It addressed the challenge: what do you do to introduce an RW approach when you already have a syllabus or curriculum in place? In response, its framework is set up to allow the curriculum leader or teacher to address a series of questions about the unit they are teaching, so as to apply an RW approach to existing units. The framework is in two forms – one at the curriculum level and one at the unit level. The units of work are selected to show how the framework can be applied in a range of school and curriculum contexts.

Note:

Both the SACRE-led and Teacher-led Frameworks are written to offer examples for those in community schools, foundation schools, schools with a religious character, academies and free schools.





A8 What do schools need to do?

- The Handbook, with its three exemplar Frameworks and accompanying units of work, has been produced to support curriculum developers to create a curriculum that fits their context.
- Section B (see below) gives a series of steps for developing an RW approach curriculum in a school's context, applying the NSE and associated guidance. How schools use this will depend on whether they are at the stage of starting from scratch or adapting a current RE curriculum.
- The Teacher-led Framework offers an example of how to do this at the unit level and at the curriculum level, in a context where there is already a syllabus or curriculum in place. The SACRE/Diocese-led and MAT-led Frameworks offer examples of how these teams created new curriculum approaches, while drawing on the lessons learnt from their previous syllabus/curriculum.

‘ How schools use this will depend on whether they are at the stage of starting from scratch or adapting a current RE curriculum. ’

Endnotes

- 1 <https://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/resource/national-content-standard-1st-edition-2023/>
- 2 See the animation, Nobody Stands Nowhere [www.theosthinktank.co.uk/comment/2021/05/12/worldviews-film]
- 3 <https://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/resource/national-content-standard-1st-edition-2023/>

