

REforREal

THE FUTURE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING ABOUT RELIGION AND BELIEF

“ At the moment it is too diverse and too unpredictable.

1

There is overwhelming support for including religion and belief learning in something like a national curriculum, but also a concern to maintain school-level local flexibility. Recognising that more and more schools are not subject to the national curriculum, we propose that a statutory **National Framework for Religion and Belief Learning** should be developed, and be applicable to all schools, balancing shared national approaches with school level determination.

“ We’re supposed to be doing RE and then we’re doing global warming.

“ It’s very confused. One of the issues in RE generally is it isn’t a thing. It’s a strange collective of subjects, which, depending what your own background is, you come at from your own way...

2

Leading from this, since SACREs currently play a leading part in religion and belief learning, there is an urgent need for review of their role, and the role of others, such as professional bodies, local education authorities, schools themselves, and other experts, in the forming of learning. This should inform and result in the appointment of **a national panel to develop the framework**.

“ [We should have it] to the end of year 11 because it’s important in terms of empathy and tolerance, and because people aren’t naturally going to go away and explore a faith that is different to theirs

“ If you don’t carry on until 16, you’re going through such a change, developing your own identity... [you’re] not able to become well-rounded individuals.

3

The National Framework panel should consider and make recommendations about i) the **purpose**, ii) the **content** and iii) the **structures** of teaching and learning. It should also consider and make recommendations about the relationship between learning inside RE, outside in other subjects, and in the wider life of schools, especially in relation to the Act of Worship, and the right to withdraw.

“ A choice, academic version as well as an awareness, social version.

“ I think that dedicated RE time is crucial for our students to get a better understanding of the world.

“ They need to know about Jihadi John, and that sort of thing.

“ ...if you work in education or health sector, understanding about religious beliefs in our society today is very important.

“ You’re not going to meet a Christian and start talking about how Jesus was born, or Adam and Eve... you should learn more about what people do in everyday lives.

4

There is strong support among these participants for compulsory religion and belief learning to at least the end of Key Stage 4 (age 16). We recommend that religion and belief learning should be a **compulsory** part of the curriculum to age 16, and consideration should be given to what, if anything, happens in post-16 learning.

Leading from this, the panel should consider the related question of appropriate progression pathways and connections between education in primary, secondary, FE, HE and in to CPD.

5

Based on these research findings, we recommend that suggested content should reflect the **real religious landscape**, as revealed by cutting edge theory and data, and should always include

- The study of a broad range of religions, beliefs and non-religion
- Exploration of religion, belief and non-belief as a category
- Exploration of the changing religion and belief landscape and its impacts on contemporary society
- A focus on contemporary issues and the role of religion and belief in current affairs and controversies
- A focus on the relevance of religion and belief for workplaces and working life
- Exploration of religion and belief as lived identity as well as tradition

“ Beliefs and practices are important, but it needs to be coupled with the sociological; the changing nature of religion.

“ It should be an option like history or geography.

6

Our findings suggest two possible settings for religion and belief learning: a distinct, separately timetabled, religion and belief subject (specific learning); and the incorporation of aspects of religion and belief learning into other subjects, especially PSHE, Citizenship and Careers Education (distributed learning). We recommend that the process of producing a National Framework for Religion and Belief Learning should determine the **mix, content and location of religion and belief learning** specific to RE, and that which takes place in a **distributed way in learning outside of RE**. A particular task is to clarify which issues are core to the academic study of religion and belief, which elements are vocational or formational, and which overlap but are not really about religion or belief at all. This should serve as a basis for clarity about where each should be learnt.

“ In order to understand religion properly you need to have specialist teachers.

“ [In lower school] you learn enough to be respectful, you don’t need the detail and to remember it all for exams.

“ You have that nervousness about saying it in the wrong way: Am I being racist or stereotypical or prejudiced?

7

The findings show that there is also strong support for a specific optional GCSE Religious Studies for those wishing to pursue academic specialism. We recommend that **GCSE Religious Studies** should remain as an **optional** subject for schools, and consideration should be given to clearly demarcating the boundary between academic study of the real religious landscape, and other religion and belief learning associated with SMSC (spiritual, moral, social and cultural development) outside of the GCSE.

“ Some teachers can’t really teach RE.

“ What might help that is if they stopped calling it RE. Because for such a long time it was just Christianity and so people perceive it as that.

8

The combination of compulsory religion and belief learning and a subject-specific GCSE implies the need for the continuation of both specialist and non-specialist teachers of religion and belief. There should be **continued investment in Initial Teacher Training** for subject-specialist RE teachers.

“ They’ve got a very negative attitude because it is named RS.

9

Leading from that, our findings also reveal a lack of confidence among many non-specialist teachers. There should be **increased investment in continuing professional development** for non-specialist teachers of religion and belief.

“ Too many connotations with how the older generation were taught it and it has too much baggage. So first I would go for a name change.

10

Within the study there is concern in all groups about the **status and name** of RE. The combination of distributed religion and belief learning, alongside a specialist optional GCSE, suggests that the name of one or both approaches should be carefully revisited to reflect the distinctions. We recommend that the process of producing a National Framework should include a review and decision on the name or names of religion and belief learning in schools.