

## Religious Education Teachers and Character

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# RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHERS AND CHARACTER:

## PERSONAL BELIEFS AND PROFESSIONAL APPROACHES

RESEARCH REPORT

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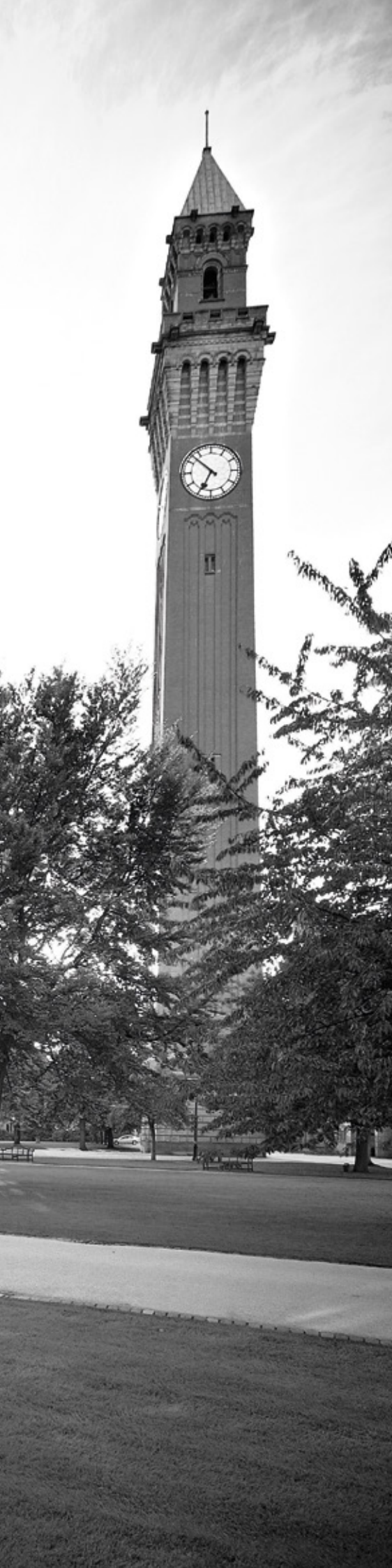
# Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues

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With its focus on excellence, the Centre has a robust, rigorous research and evidence-based approach that is objective and non-political. It offers world-class research on the importance of developing good character and virtues and the benefits they bring to individuals and society. In undertaking its own innovative research, the Centre also seeks to partner with leading academics from other universities around the world and to develop strong strategic partnerships.

A key conviction underlying the existence of the Centre is that the virtues that make up good character can be learnt and taught. We believe these have been largely neglected in schools and in the professions. It is also a key conviction that the more people exhibit good character and virtues, the healthier our society. As such, the Centre undertakes development projects seeking to promote the practical applications of its research evidence.





# Religious Education Teachers and Character:

## Personal Beliefs and Professional Approaches Research Report

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# Foreword

In 2016, the Religious Education Council for England and Wales invited me to chair a Commission on Religious Education. Fourteen commissioners, supported by the Religious Education Council, met for two years and we produced our report in 2018.

The background to our discussion included a working group that met in 2004 under the leadership of Charles Clarke, the then Secretary of State for Education, and included representatives of all the religious traditions and of the various national organisations that support Religious Education (RE). The group proposed a Non-Statutory National Framework for Religious Education, written mainly for Local Education Authorities (LEAs), Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs) and Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs), but also intended to be of use for the denominational authorities and to inform religious and secular communities about the scope of RE. The level of consensus we found between the various parties in the process of developing the National Framework was surprising and encouraging. And it has been influential.

Now it was felt, we needed to build on that work and give careful consideration to the various impediments that prevented RE from flourishing. Even in 2004, it was clear that many LEAs with their SACREs and ASCs had no personnel to give active support to RE. Even so, there are many excellent RE teachers, although quite a high proportion of secondary schools include no RE teaching. And too many RE teachers have inadequate preparation or support. Could we offer a clear perception of the purpose of RE that somehow transcended local determination and set a coherent view that would, amongst other benefits, enable resources more readily to be provided for the subject? Could we envisage some body at a national level that would be responsible for giving direction to the RE curriculum? And would such a body conflict with the rights in law of the churches and other bodies responsible for denominational schools? Could there be support for RE from the local faith communities in every area without falling into the traps of formality and the complications of SACREs with their local authority committee and the dominance of the Church of England?

The Commissioners represented a wide range of attitudes from different religious and non-religious worldviews. We received a great deal of evidence through meetings held with RE practitioners and through surveys and by other means. Debate was often very lively and from time to time quite sharp. It was felt to be a considerable achievement of the Commission as a whole that we produced a unanimous report. The broad lines of our recommendations follow.

We proposed that the name of the subject should be changed to 'Religion and Worldviews'. For the first time, this would mean that there would be explicit space in the subject for non-religious worldviews to be addressed seriously.

We proposed a National Entitlement to the study of Religion and Worldviews that should become statutory for all publicly funded schools up to and including Year 11. Post-16 students should have the opportunity to study Religion and Worldviews during their course of study. We proposed nine elements to the entitlement, which included understanding key concepts including religion, secularity, spirituality and worldview and that worldviews are complex, diverse and plural. There should be a study of ritual practices but pupils should also be taught how worldviews may offer responses to fundamental questions of meaning and purpose, and the roles worldviews play for individuals and societies including their influence on moral behaviour and social norms. We insisted that teaching must promote openness, respect for others, objectivity, scholarly accuracy and critical enquiry.

We were concerned that much Initial Teacher Education (ITE) for RE teachers without a separate academic qualification in the subject might be very minimal and recommended that there should be a minimum of 12 hours of contact time for the subject for all forms of primary ITE including school-based routes. We proposed that bursaries should be available for the subject at parity with other shortage subjects and that there should be funded Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for the subject over the first five years.

We proposed, in place of SACREs, Local Advisory Networks (LANs) for Religion and Worldviews, to include: teachers of Religion and Worldviews from all phases including higher

education, school leaders and governors, ITE and CPD providers, school providers including the local authority, multi-academy trusts, the dioceses etc, and religion, belief and other groups, that might include local museums and galleries, as well as religion and belief groups. We recommended that each LAN should produce an annual report to the Department for Education (DfE) and the local authority.

We proposed a national body of up to nine members to include teachers that would propose non-statutory programmes of study for Religion and Worldviews that should be ratified by the DfE. These programmes of study should be at a similar level of detail as History and Geography in the National Curriculum.

The full recommendations can be found in the final report published in September 2018 entitled *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward, a National Plan for RE*.

We were convinced that this would offer a fresh start for a subject that is of fundamental importance for all pupils and students as part of their preparation for adult life in a diverse and often confusing national community. We recognised that new legislation would be needed in due course to give effect to our proposals but that, in the meantime, much progress could be made in an informal manner. It was disappointing that the then Secretary of State indicated quickly his lack of support for the breadth of our proposals but a later meeting with the Minister of State offered more hope.

There seems to be good support for the results of our two years' deliberation. I remain hopeful that the broad arguments we proposed will eventually dramatically improve the teaching and support for this vital subject.

This excellent report on the attitudes of RE teachers builds on much of the above and, itself, holds out considerable hope for the future, particularly in its linking of the life of the RE teacher and the role of the teacher as character educator.

**The Very Revd Dr John Hall,**  
Dean of Westminster  
Chair of the Commission  
on Religious Education



# Executive Summary

Since the implementation of the 1870 Education Act, RE has been a significant part of the state-funded school curriculum in the UK. Major subsequent landmarks include the 1944 Education Act and the 1988 Education Reform Act, the latter significantly requiring RE to include the teaching of Christianity, as well as the principal world religious traditions represented in Britain; yet it is widely acknowledged that RE is currently in a state of crisis.

Despite its compulsory status in law, many secondary schools omit it from the curriculum. As religious affiliation is declining in society, questions have been asked as to the relevance of the subject for today's world, leading to ongoing debates among educators and stakeholders about its aims and purpose. This report provides a timely contribution to the current debate by presenting the findings of a mixed-methods study of RE teachers' worldviews and their approaches to promoting pupils' character growth in RE.

Underlying the conceptualisations and research orientation of this study are recent UK Government emphases on pupils' character development, as defined by Ofsted. While the curriculum as a whole should develop pupils' character, the focus of the new agenda on the cultivation of virtue, wise reflection and good conduct has particular relevance for RE. This report provides insights into the neglected role of RE teachers' own characters and shows how this may in turn influence the character development of pupils.

## The Study

Drawing on the previous work of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, this study comprised interviews with RE teachers (n=30) and a survey of RE teachers (n=314). Participants included those working in schools – academies, community schools and independent schools – with a specific designated religious foundation ('faith schools') and in schools of different kinds which had no religious foundation ('non-faith schools'). The qualitative and quantitative evidence generated by these methods confirmed the importance of personal experiences and beliefs in the consolidation of RE teachers' professional

commitment and purpose in all kinds of schools. Sometimes profound, and located in a variety of worldviews and life stances, RE teachers' life experiences and worldviews informed and motivated them to seek to inspire pupils and cultivate pupils' characters.

## Key Findings

RE teachers were found to be dedicated to their subject and to aiding pupils' personal development. They expressed strong support for the contribution RE can make to pupils' character formation, as well as the positive impact that teaching the subject can have on tolerance and social harmony. These motivating factors were found to be integral to RE teachers' self-understandings. Their inspiration derived from their own beliefs and orientations, which were diverse and varied, but were unavoidably related to their personal experiences outside the classroom. Together, the quantitative and qualitative data support four main conclusions:

### 1) Personal worldviews informed RE teachers' approaches in the classroom:

RE teachers working in faith and non-faith schools were found to have a diverse range of personal worldviews – from atheism to theism, and all positions in between – but each kind of worldview supports a particular vision of what RE should be, and therefore generates an individual's motivation to be an RE teacher.

### 2) RE teachers were found to have fair and tolerant views of other religions and worldviews:

RE teachers who did or did not have a religious faith, in faith and non-faith schools, were found to have a fair and tolerant approach to religious diversity. However, this study's findings suggest that RE teachers that have a religious faith were more open to interreligious dialogue and learning from other religions.

### 3) There was strong agreement among RE teachers that RE contributes to pupils' character development:

RE teachers of diverse worldviews in all kinds of schools believed RE contributes to character education, and RE teachers should act as role models for their pupils.

### 4) RE teachers that have a religious faith were more likely to think religions promote good character:

There were significant differences in perspectives between RE teachers who reported belonging to a religion, and those who did not. The former were found to be more likely to think that religious traditions provide a source of good role models; they were also more likely to care about their impact on pupils' religious beliefs and to believe pupils emulate their religious views.

## Implications

The findings of this study confirm the importance of teachers' personal beliefs and experiences to their professional lives. It is proposed that more opportunities be made available for RE teachers to further reflect on their own worldviews and consider the implications of their personal views for practice. Professional literature and guidelines about RE could be revised to sensitively advise teachers on the best ways to incorporate their own commitments and orientations in their approach to religions in the classroom; these should acknowledge the diversity of teachers' personal worldviews.

Given the widely held belief found among participants regarding the contribution of RE to pupils' character development, this report provides evidence to suggest that schools and LEAs should develop coherent rationales and syllabi for RE lessons to create further opportunities for developing character. This would strengthen the provision that RE can make in schools, and also help cultivate the character growth of pupils of all faiths and those of none, through RE.

# 1 Purpose of the Report

RE remains a mandatory part of the basic curriculum in all maintained secondary schools in England and Wales, including those of no specific religious designation (HMSO, 1870; 1944, Great Britain 1988; 1996; 2002; 2011).

The supply of suitably qualified and critically engaged, committed specialist teachers is therefore of paramount importance, and given the high levels of professional skill and cultural sensitivity, these teachers can sometimes feel undervalued by a changing educational landscape (Moulin, 2012). As it is not included in the English Baccalaureate, for instance, RE is occasionally given more limited curriculum at Key Stage 3 (school years 7–9) and Key Stage 4 (school years 10–11) than its importance as a subject would seem to warrant. The Commission on Religious Education found, for example, that in 2016, 23.1% of all secondary schools offered no RE at Key Stage 3, and 33.4% offered no RE at Key Stage 4 (CoRE, 2018). Due to the lack of subject specialists, where RE is taught, it varies much in quality. The most recent official data show that only 45.9% of the estimated 14,630 secondary RE teachers in England have a relevant post-A Level qualification (DfE, 2019b: Table 12). It is noted here that official data may give a false impression about the real numbers of RE teachers. Lloyd (2013) argues the *Schools Workforce Census* does not state how much curriculum time non-specialist RE teachers are allocated compared to specialists, and the criteria for subject specialism itself may not accurately represent the knowledge required to teach the subject.

Recent data also show that recruitment of specialist RE teachers to the profession is not occurring in high enough numbers. Provisional figures for the academic year 2018/2019 show that recruitment only reached 58.3% of the target number of RE teachers, amounting to a shortfall of 268 teachers (DfE, 2018b; Great Britain, 2019). These current figures form part of a downward trend. According to the *Initial Teacher Training Census*, which records the numbers of teachers entering and leaving the profession, since 2013/2014, recruitment targets for RE teachers have been repeatedly missed (DfE, 2013; 2014; 2015;

2016; 2017; 2018a). Added to these problems, it is argued that the diversity of religious beliefs in contemporary society – including the increasing number of those who have no religious affiliation – mean that the content of the RE curriculum needs reconsideration and overhaul. Most recently, this has led to a call for its rebranding as ‘Religion and Worldviews’ Education (CoRE, 2018).

The RE taught in schools of no designated religious foundation today is the result of a process of evolution from ‘undenominational’ Christian education, as assumed in the 1870 and 1944 Education Acts, to the study of the major world religions, first enshrined in law in 1988. Consequently, research has often been focussed on developing pedagogical approaches for delivering multi-faith RE in a plural society. Ongoing innovations have been influenced by wider intellectual trends, including the religious studies movement, the application of ethnographic methods and postmodernist philosophy.

The focus on theoretical discussions about how religion may be accommodated in the classroom have meant the motivations and approaches of individual teachers have been relatively ignored by researchers – with few empirical studies being conducted about RE teachers (cf. Conroy *et al.*, 2013). This report addresses this gap by examining data generated through mixed-methods, enabling exploration of the relationships between teachers’ personal and professional lives, and the processes of character formation among teachers.

The study comprised two phases. For the first, interviews were conducted with 30 RE teachers from a variety of secondary schools. The analysis of the interview data informed the construction of a second phase – an online questionnaire, returned by 314 participants. Data generated in the first phase of work provided insights into the formation of the moral motivations of RE teachers, and how their beliefs about the subject related to their personal experiences. The second phase enabled further examination of the relationships between teachers’ personal orientations towards religions, and their professional approach.

Researching the relationships between RE teachers’ personal and professional lives is necessary and timely. Despite the contested nature of the subject, and the perhaps obvious possibility of teacher bias in the representation of religions in the classroom, few studies have been undertaken to consider what aspects of RE teachers’ personal beliefs and orientations have a significant bearing on their practice. Previously, religious identification and religious practice have provided some contextualisation for understanding teachers’ personal commitments and motivations. It was originally assumed in an educational system promoting a broad, undenominational Christian education that RE teachers would have some connection or sympathy with the Christian tradition. Yet as religious practice and identification is decreasing, teachers’ personal, moral and religious positions are likely to be more nuanced and individualised than in the past. Furthermore, as ‘religious’ education is increasingly associated with ‘worldview’ education, an extended range of issues and their respective positions are relevant.

Addressing these challenges, this report makes an empirical contribution to the ongoing debates about RE, giving insights into the relationships between RE teachers’ personal beliefs and commitments and their approaches to educational practice. This enables greater understanding of RE teachers’ approaches to religions in the classroom, their perceptions of the subject’s moral aims, and their efforts to cultivate pupils’ character development.

# 2 Background

## 2.1 A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Debate about the personal commitments of RE teachers and their role in cultivating good character dates to the 1870 Education Act. While the notion of education without 'religion' (ie, Christianity) went against Victorian sensibilities, the newly enfranchised nonconformist lobby ensured that educational reform would not result in the Established Church controlling RE in the new locally determined 'board schools'. Consequently, the 1870 Act included the amendment, advanced by the ecumenically minded William Cowper-Temple, that 'no religious catechism or religious formulary which is distinctive of any particular denomination' be taught in board schools (Education Act, 1870 § 14). Hansard records a characteristically colourful exchange on this matter between the Liberal Prime Minister Gladstone and his Conservative adversary, Disraeli, who lamented that this 'undenominational' principle would lead to 'inventing and establishing a new sacerdotal class' (HC Deb. 16 June 1870).

Disraeli, a High-Church Anglican who retained a life-long identification with his Jewish heritage<sup>1</sup>, argued that if ministers of religion could not be expected to determine what should be taught in RE, it was too high an expectation of school teachers to be able to do so. The Bible needs explanation and cannot be communicated without interpretation – something which requires not only the authority of an established theological tradition, but also a great deal of learning. Given the importance of religion to the preservation of the nation's moral character, continued Disraeli, the 'new sacerdotal class' would therefore hold too grave a responsibility in terms of its potential effect on future generations – even if it were possible to find school teachers appropriately equipped for the task.

In the hundred and fifty years since this debate, the question as to whether RE teachers' personal understanding of, and commitment to, a religion matters or not in the classroom, has been recurrent. This is well illustrated by the arguments of prominent religious educators

who, from the late 1960s onwards, advanced a new kind of RE that was not 'religious' in its aims but 'educational' – a basic assumption of all subsequent pedagogical innovation. For example, the influential religious educator Michael Grimmitt (1981) proposed that teachers' religious commitments could be indoctrinatory, if RE were conceived as a process of religious nurture. When considered as education 'about' religions, however, teachers' commitments were not problematic so long as these were integrated into the secular, instrumental and 'professional' process of RE. Debates concerning the extent to which RE should contribute to pupils' moral development, and how this may take place, have been inextricably linked to these developments. Since the 1960s some have argued the subject is morally neutral, others that it is essential for developing the moral qualities in pupils necessary for a tolerant and inclusive society (Moulin-Stožek and Metcalfe, 2018).

## 2.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Terence Copley (2008), reflecting on the evolution of RE in the latter half of the twentieth century, observed that one of the greatest achievements for the subject was the creation of a professional community that could survive the inevitable demise of the churches and Sunday school movement. Parker *et al.* (2016) argue this historical and institutional process necessitated the development of subject-specific pedagogical methods that established a suitable stance towards epistemological and ontological issues arising in the study of religion. This was achieved by the establishment of pedagogical models that sought to fit, and give credibility to, religion in an otherwise secular education system (Grimmitt, 2000). One far-reaching corollary of these developments was the idealisation of the teacher as facilitator. According to the rationale of the new RE, the identification of the teacher with a religion, or the students' identification with the teacher, were potentially confounding factors, as opposed to desirable in the outmoded process

of religious nurture (Grimmitt, 1981). On this view, which has since gained general acceptance, teachers' personal views and experience may inform RE, but it is the pedagogical process itself that is paramount, and teachers' impartiality is crucial to it (Jackson and Everington, 2016).

## 2.3 RECENT RESEARCH ABOUT RE TEACHERS

Small-scale empirical studies have exposed some of the challenges and complexities for teachers to maintain impartiality, which have been expressed by the metaphor of a 'tightrope walk' (Copley, 2005: 128). RE teachers have to consciously manage their personal identities in order to negotiate their professional role – including the perennial question as to what extent these should be shared or revealed to students explicitly (Gravel, 2018; Sikes and Everington, 2001; 2003; 2004). For some teachers, this appears to have necessitated challenging pupils' mistaken ascriptions of their religious affiliation by declaring their atheism (Sikes and Everington, 2004). More recent research also suggests that over time, trainee teachers have become more inclined to share their personal beliefs (Everington, 2016). It should be noted that this kind of openness must be negotiated carefully as overt proselytisation contravenes formal legal guidance on the interpretation of the undenominational principle (DfE, 1994). In her studies of trainee RE teachers, Everington found that changing views about the mission of RE appeared to be linked to fluctuating emphases in the stated purposes of RE, confirming findings of comparative studies in several European countries that showed teachers' social context informed and motivated their professional practices (Everington *et al.*, 2011). Personal circumstances – such as family background, travel, religion and higher education – impact on RE teachers' knowledge, motivation and approach to the subject (Everington *et al.*, 2011; Heimbrock, 2017).

Parker *et al.* (2016) make a distinction between historical processes of institutional and

<sup>1</sup> Disraeli famously described his religion to Queen Victoria as the 'blank page between the Old and the New Testament' (Blake, 1966: 504).



collective professionalisation and individual professionalisation; the latter being concerned with the ways by which individuals assume the role of religious educator, the former being the structures that impose upon, and enable, the means to do so. While small-scale interview studies go some way to exploring the experiences of ITE in this regard, the relationships between professional identity and individuals' personal motivations and commitments have largely been neglected in order to concentrate upon the 'professional' negotiations of identity necessary for the performance of teaching. In exploring RE teachers' lives more generally, rather than considering how personal identities are managed in the classroom, the study presented here was concerned with formation of individuals' motivations and commitments, that is, how professional identities are formed by personal factors, particularly religion, moral and ethical beliefs, and/or worldview. This task draws inspiration from theoretical literature that has, in recent years, begun to critique the 'neutral' religious studies approach to RE (I'Anson, 2010). One outcome of this turn has been a call for the 'return of the teacher' – that is, to renew focus on the teacher's role and overcome simplistic models that conceive teachers as merely 'facilitators' or 'indoctrinators', and let them teach (Biesta and Hannam, 2016).

## 2.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

This report is concerned with understanding RE teachers' worldviews – including their religious and moral commitments – and how they impact on their professional work. These issues are important because the general religious and educational background in which RE operates has changed considerably since its reformulation as a post-confessional subject, and even more since the creation of its extant legislative framework in the Victorian period. Survey data from England show a rise in the number of individuals with no religious identification, who now form the 'cultural majority' (Woodhead, 2016). At the same time, and most likely indicative of this demographic

shift, there is renewed undermining of the institutional status of RE and of its workforce (Conroy, 2016; CoRE, 2018).

In response to the challenges facing RE, religious educators have called for the subject to include 'worldview education' in order to capture the gamut of positions and beliefs – ethical and otherwise – that distinguish present-day individuals from each other (CoRE, 2018; Jackson, 2014; Freathy and John, 2018). The inclusion of secular belief systems in RE is in reality a *fait accompli*. However, the new attention attracted by the term 'worldview' raises afresh the perennial question of whether teachers' own worldviews have, or should have, a role to play in the RE classroom.

The use of 'worldview' erodes simple ascriptions of (religious/non-religious) identity, allowing for more nuanced engagement with the intersections between teachers' personal and professional lives. In 1870, contestation was primarily over differences in the interpretation of scripture and their implications for denominational affiliation. In 1980, commitment was primarily categorised by affiliation to a religion, denomination becoming less important (Hulmes, 1979). Whereas in both eras, different positions were part of opposing comprehensive ethical frameworks (often attached to different political and social movements, eg, chapel vs. church, or liberal Christianity vs. liberal humanism), the point of disagreement was over 'religion', ie, over the interpretation of the central text of Christianity or the central truth-claims of its revelation. 'Worldview', on the other hand, as it is understood in this context is about the world and one's understanding of it – thus encapsulating a range of possible positions and orientations of which one can form a 'view' (CoRE, 2018). It is perhaps unsurprising that recent empirical research found 'worldview' to be a confusing concept for teachers, lacking a coherent framework (Everington, 2019). It is also of note that these issues are pertinent to RE in other European contexts beyond England and Wales (Heimbrock, 2017). Anachronistic though his language may be, the recent turn to 'worldview' is reminiscent of the

points originally raised by Disraeli in the debate about the 1870 Act: What are the worldviews of the now long established 'sacerdotal class'?; How may such worldviews impact on the teaching of RE?; And what impact may they have on RE teachers in their capacity as character educators?

## 2.5 RESEARCH GOALS

As this is one of few empirical studies of RE teachers undertaken that uses both qualitative and quantitative methods, this report makes a relevant contribution to the research and practice of RE. The overall research questions that guided this study were:

- 1) *How do RE teachers' personal beliefs and worldviews relate to their professional motivations?*
- 2) *How do RE teachers negotiate religious diversity?*
- 3) *What do RE teachers think about RE and pupils' character development?*
- 4) *What differences in beliefs about pupils' character development are there between RE teachers holding different worldviews?*

In addition to its contribution to the research literature regarding worldviews of RE teachers, the empirical examination of these questions also has practical import. The research questions pertain to the tasks of teacher education and in-service professional development, and to realising RE's potential contribution for pupils' character growth. They therefore inform the continuing political debate over RE that has sporadically ensued since the subject's inception in the Victorian period.

“AN ACADEMICAL SYSTEM WITHOUT THE PERSONAL INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS ON PUPILS, IS AN ARCTIC WINTER; IT WILL CREATE AN ICEBOUND, PETRIFIED, CAST-IRON UNIVERSITY, AND NOTHING ELSE.”

 St. John Henry Newman

# 3 Methodology

## 3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study explored the lives of RE teachers using a mixed-method design, comprising an interview phase followed by a survey. This approach allowed for inductive inferences to be made from the interviews, which could be then substantiated through the deductive testing of preliminary hypotheses with the construction of the survey instrument. For each phase, a separate non-probabilistic sample of practising RE teachers who taught RE as their main specialism was recruited through professional organisations and advertisements, including social media.

The first, qualitative phase of the study was inspired by the narrative identity paradigm (McAdams, 1996; 2013; McAdams and Guo, 2015). This uses semi-structured interviews to explore participants' self-understandings of the development of the course of their lives. In addition to standard questions used in this paradigm, the interview schedule also included questions about teachers' perspectives on RE and character development.

The second, quantitative phase, was designed drawing on initial analyses of the interviews and employed measures of religious practice and style, as well as individual items about RE teachers' perceptions of character education. The data generated from these questions allowed for analyses of the relationships between RE teachers' worldviews, their perspectives on character education and their professional motivations.

The two phases were closely connected; findings from the interviews informed the construction of the questionnaire, and analyses of the survey data informed the analyses of relevant qualitative examples. As both phases worked together to inform and support the researchers' growing theoretical understanding of the lives of RE teachers, the findings from both phases are analysed and presented together thematically in this report. Before moving onto these findings, how the two phases were conducted and integrated with each other is described in more detail.

## 3.2 PHASE ONE: QUALITATIVE METHODS

### 3.2.1 Interview Participants

Participants (n=30) interviewed were selected in order to provide a diverse sample of RE teachers working in different kinds of secondary schools, with different worldviews and backgrounds. This purposive, non-representative sample offered the opportunity to explore the perspectives of teachers working in varied institutional contexts who identified with a range of religious and/or ethical beliefs (see Appendix 1 for interview participants' characteristics).

All interview participants were subject specialists in RE and possessed a first degree and teaching qualification. The majority of participants (n=23) had at least one degree in theology or religious studies. The majority (n=21) also had ten or more years' experience in teaching. While most participants worked at schools of no specific religious foundation, such as academies and comprehensive schools (n=18), a large proportion worked in schools affiliated to one of the Christian denominations (n=11) and the Religious Society of Friends (n=1), with eight participants working at fee paying (independent) schools. As the qualitative component of a mixed-method study, this purposive sample is not representative of RE teachers working in different kinds of schools nationally, but provided different kinds of contrasting cases for analysis.

Interview participants' self-reported worldviews can be summarised in four basic categories: atheist (n=6); agnostic (n=5); spiritual/theist (but no religion (n=5)); and identification with a religion (n=14). Of those that stated a religious identification, Christians (n=12) were the highest proportion. One participant identified as Muslim and another participant as Quaker, Religious Society of Friends. Three participants narrated an upbringing with either some connection to Sikhism, Judaism or Hinduism respectively, but explained they had no current strong identification with the tradition of their family backgrounds.

Concerning their religious or spiritual practice, ten participants reported no regular religious or spiritual practices, while 18 stated praying regularly. These characteristics demonstrate the complexity and fluidity of religious belief and practice, the two not necessarily overlapping in individual cases.

### 3.2.2 Interview Schedule

The interview schedule (see Appendix 2) was constructed in the tradition of narrative identity research (McAdams, 1996; McAdams and Guo, 2015). This method treats the narrations of participants' life stories as a valuable way to understand their self-understandings and motivations. According to this conceptual framework, it is not the events in a person's life that are to be considered as such, but their sense-making in relation to them and how this informs their motivations and actions. This method differs from previous interview studies of RE teachers that have tended to use unstructured interview schedules (Sikes and Everington, 2001). The narrative identity paradigm provided an established theoretical framework that further contributed to the existing literature about RE teachers' life stories.

Participants were invited to choose and describe important moments in their lives by imagining and reflecting upon 12 life-story scenes, including 'high points', 'low points' and 'turning points'. For each scene, participants were asked to describe their feelings; what led up to the scene; why it was important; and, the impact it had upon them. Participants responded to these prompts by narrating vignettes which related to all of life's varied joys, challenges, fears, hopes and meanings. One advantage of this approach was that it offered a nuanced and sensitive means of capturing individualised and complex worldviews, and understanding their impact on professional practice and motivations.

### 3.2.3 Interview Analysis

In total, 30 interviews were conducted, ranging between 67 to 205 minutes. These were audio recorded, transcribed and coded for themes of specific relevance to the project's research goals using the software programme NVivo.

This enabled detailed, targeted and auditable analyses of key themes in the narration of participants' life stories and analyses of their perspectives on character education. First, themes used in narrative identity research were identified (McAdams and Guo, 2015): sensitivity to suffering (participants report a story showing their empathy); moral steadfastness (participants narrate a story indicating the perseverance of their beliefs and values); redemption (hope – a narration of a course of events that ran from bad to good); pro-social goals (service – stating a desire to help others); and, meaning-making (reflecting on the impact of an event or story on the self). In addition to these themes, by exploring participants' perspectives on character education, three further themes were identified in RE teachers' narrative identities: stories showing the desire or experience of turning to God; stories showing the desire or experience of turning away from God; and the reported effect or process of personal events having a direct impact on the teaching of RE.

Interviews were designed to encourage participants to reflect on their lives, but some life scenes were reported with greater reflection than others, indicating that some participants considered and reported the impact of life events on their identity more than others. Reflecting on the meaning and implications of life-story scenes (meaning-making) in this way also seemed to be associated with life-story scenes reported to have a direct influence on approaches to RE. While one third of participants reported no current religious practice, belief or experience, those who narrated scenes in their lives that moved 'toward God' also narrated episodes featuring sensitivity to suffering and pro-social goals. Perhaps unsurprisingly, moving toward God was narrated by those participants stating higher religiosity, demonstrating the influence of worldview on participants' meaning-making and narration.

Initial analyses of the interviews informed the construction of the subsequent questionnaire. The purpose of the quantitative data was

to explore several hypotheses drawn from the interviews relating to the original research questions of the study, namely: (1) How are teacher worldview and moral purpose related?; (2) What different kinds of approaches to religious diversity are there among RE teachers?; and, (3) How do teachers' perspectives on pupils' character development relate to their religion/worldview? Once suitable measures and items for these purposes had been selected (see below), quantitative findings were then compared with qualitative illustrations, choosing individual examples from the interview study to enrich the presentation of the same themes which had been corroborated using tests for statistical significance in the survey data. As each life story interview transcript was unique and highly idiographic, in this report these data are represented with a summary of individual RE teachers' lives when relevant to the key findings of the study.

### 3.3 PHASE TWO: SURVEY METHODS

#### 3.3.1 Survey Participants

The *Schools Workforce Census* estimates there were 14,630 RE teachers working in faith schools and non-faith schools in England during the academic year 2018/2019<sup>2</sup>. Only 6,715 of these RE teachers were considered subject specialists, according to the DfE's definition of holding a relevant post-A level qualification. For the survey, the aim was to recruit at least 400 RE teachers with a relevant qualification to ensure a varied sample which reflected the total number of specialist RE teachers. Invitations to answer the online questionnaire were sent to RE teachers through professional organisations and institutions, such as LEAs, multi-academy trusts, online professional communities and social media groups. Over 60 days (May–July 2019), 495 participants agreed to take part and returned at least partial responses online. Only cases who answered 15.0% or more of the questions were retained, leaving a total sample of 314 (4.7% of the real world population of subject specialists). Of these, 309 were teaching RE in a secondary school

in England at the time. Another five responses were included in the dataset from RE teachers who either worked in Scotland, as primary RE teachers, or were very recently retired.

For the total retained sample of 314 RE teachers, ages ranged from 22 to 63 with a mean of 40.6 years (SD=10.1); 75.2% were women – reflecting the real world gender distribution of RE teachers. The majority of participants either reported themselves as Christian (52.5%) or of no religion (42.7%). The remaining 4.8% comprised two Buddhists, two Hindus and two Sikhs, three Muslims, and six participants reporting other religion. Of those who stated Christian, the largest groups were Roman Catholic (22.0% of the total sample) and Anglican (18.8% of the total sample).

Half of the participants worked in academies (51.3%). The next two most common kinds of schools were local authority maintained schools (26.1%) and independent schools (12.4%). Of all kinds of schools, 68.2% had no specific designated religious foundation. Of the remaining schools with a specific designated religious foundation, the largest share were Roman Catholic (16.9% of the total sample), followed by Church of England (12.1% of the total sample).

Participants' experience of teaching RE ranged from less than one year to 39 years (mean 13.5 years; SD = 9). While all taught RE as their subject specialism, two thirds (67.0%) also held an additional responsibility, such as Head of Department or Faculty (43.9% of the total sample). Most participants rated the overall quality of their schools as either good or outstanding (86.3%) and were either satisfied (51.6%) or very satisfied (22.3%) with their job. However, most participants also reported being stressed or very stressed (65.3%), with 44.6% of participants stating they had suffered from a work-related mental health problem. These statistics are broadly comparable with the profession as a whole (Education Support Partnership, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> This was the most recent official estimation at the time of writing and is based on the census date of November 2018 (DfE, 2019b, Table 12). It is inferred from a sample of secondary schools, grossed and weighted to ensure that the totals present a 'representative, national picture' (DfE, 2019a: 23).

### 3.3.2 Survey Measures and Items

Analyses of the interviews informed the construction of the survey instrument, which was designed to explore the relationships between teachers' personal and professional lives and test any emerging hypotheses (stated above). Questionnaire items for recording teachers' personal and professional profiles included: age; gender; the type of school in which they worked at the time of completing the survey; professional training; years teaching; management and other responsibilities; overall quality of school; stress and work-related mental illness. A series of statements were generated to assess teachers' perspectives on character education measured on a 5-item Likert scale (Appendix 3). As these items were included at the end of the questionnaire, some participants did not return answers to them and this consequently resulted in the analysis of a smaller sub-sample of 219 respondents. To explore teachers' worldviews and religious beliefs and practices, the following multiple-item scales were employed with the sample as a whole.

#### 3.3.2.1 Religiosity

Participants were asked to which religion they belong, if any. They were also assessed on a 5-item scale for religiosity (frequency of private reading of scriptures, frequency of private prayer, certainty of feeling life is guided by God, certainty of religious experience and frequency of attendance at a place of worship).

#### 3.3.2.2 Moral Purpose for Teaching (Care for the Next Generation)

Moral purpose for teaching was conceptualised with the construct of 'generativity' – the virtue of caring for the next generation first identified by the famous psychologist of identity, Erik Erikson (McAdams *et al.*, 1993; McAdams, 2013). This was assessed using the 20-item Loyola scale (McAdams and de St. Aubin, 1992). Example items include statements such as 'I have important skills that I try to teach others' and 'I feel as though I have made a difference to many people' (1992: 1015). This scale has

the advantage of being conceptually congruent with the approach used in the interviews.

#### 3.3.2.3 Religious Style

As RE teachers – of all faiths and of none, in faith schools and non-faith schools – routinely teach more than one religion to religiously diverse cohorts of pupils, the questionnaire included three measures of inter-religious style. Teachers' religious styles were explored using Streib *et al.*'s (2010) constructs of *truth of texts and teachings* (a more conservative religious style, emphasising the exclusivity of one's own religion); *fairness, tolerance and rational choice* (a tolerant and fair-minded way of resolving differences in religion/worldview); and, *xenosophia, inter-religious dialogue* (a love for learning from other religions). Each of these constructs, measured with five items, represents a different way of approaching religions and religious diversity – a key theme of participants' concerns in the interview data.

#### 3.3.3 Survey Analysis

Data generated by the questionnaire were analysed using the programme SPSS. As interview data suggested that there were differences in approach between teachers working in faith schools and non-faith schools, and also between those with a stated religion and those with no religious affiliation, participants were split between three naturally occurring groups. The first (n=134) contained teachers with no reported religion working in non-faith schools and included a smaller proportion (n=17) of teachers without a religious faith who worked in faith schools. The second (n=97) comprised teachers that have a religious faith working in non-faith schools. The third group was for teachers that have a religious faith working in a faith school (n=83). An ANOVA with post-hoc tests between the groups was then run on the multiple-item variables of religiosity, moral purpose in teaching, and each of the religious styles. As the questions for perspectives on character education consisted of single item ordinal variables, Kruskal-Wallis tests tested for significant relationships between the same groups.

### 3.4 LIMITATIONS

The first phase explored important issues in RE teachers' lives in an open manner, while the secondary phase provided the transparency, reliability and replicability offered by quantitative methods with a large enough sample to run robust statistical tests. The study is limited, however, on account of the sampling which was, for both qualitative and quantitative phases, non-probabilistic and dependent on participants' self-selection. There may be bias in both samples, which comprise RE teachers who volunteered in response to advertisements in particular venues. They therefore may be more committed, better networked and more enthusiastic than teachers who did not respond to advertisements to participate in the study.

### 3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study was subject to the ethical review procedure of the University of Birmingham. Participation was voluntary and subject to informed consent. Participants were free to withdraw from the study without stating their reasons. Questionnaire data were anonymous. Interview participants and their schools are referred to by pseudonyms and care has been taken to avoid data that may make them recognisable in this report.

“UNLESS KNOWLEDGE IS TRANSFORMED INTO WISDOM, AND WISDOM IS EXPRESSED IN CHARACTER; EDUCATION IS A WASTEFUL PROCESS.”

☸ Sai Baba

# 4 Findings

## 4.1 RE TEACHERS' PERSONAL WORLDVIEWS AND THEIR PROFESSIONAL MOTIVATIONS

The RE teachers that participated in both phases of the study reported a diverse range of personal worldviews, a large proportion of which were secular (42.7% of the sample stated they did not belong to any religion). However, interview data suggested that various kinds of personal non-religious worldviews can support the overall motivation to work as an RE teacher and help shape an individual's vision of the subject's aim and purpose. Reported pathways between life experiences, worldviews and approaches to RE were unique to each participant and also highly complex. Richard's story (below) is a good example of the perhaps unlikely and wide range of influences in RE teachers' lives that were reported to motivate and inform their work.

### Richard's story: the atheist, anarchist punk rock RE teacher

“The big turning point for me was me and my best friend in a shed... late at night when we were teenagers with a little Fisher-Price tape recorder listening to Green Day's *Insomniac* Album.”

Richard explained how his passion for issues of justice were inspired by his love of punk music. He did not report any religious beliefs or practices, but described a clear and enduring set of ethical and political principles, including veganism and abstinence from alcohol. Richard hoped teaching RE made a small contribution to making the world a better place, helping the next generation to be 'able to think better' on important moral and political issues.

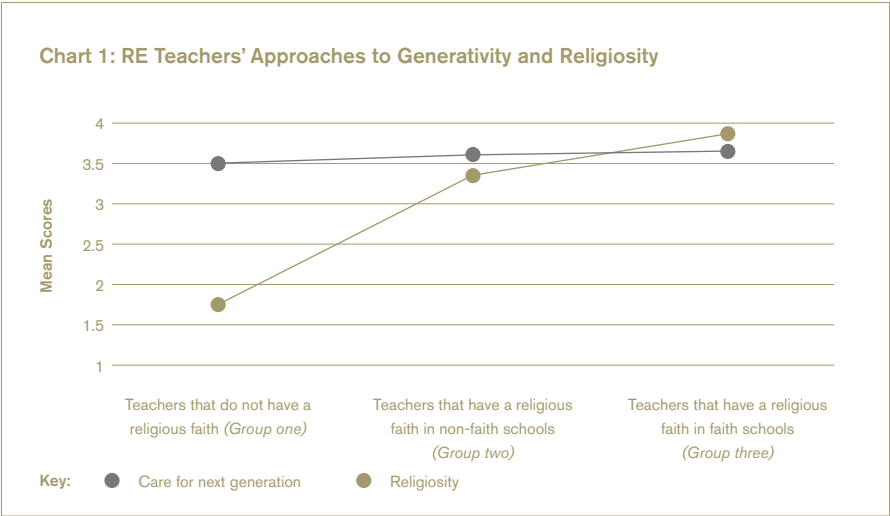
Richard, 36, 'Straight edge punk rock anarchist atheist', no reported religiosity, state-funded grammar school

Despite the wide range of life experiences reported to have made a difference to the way teachers went about teaching RE, some stable relationships and patterns were observed in the interview data. From these it was hypothesised that RE teachers' professional motivations were often related to their stated concern for society and their care for the next generation. It was also speculated that these pro-social goals were related to their personal religious beliefs, which appeared to be stronger and more prevalent in teachers working in faith schools. Using the survey data, statistical tests were therefore conducted of the differences in the average scores of religiosity and care for the next generation between teachers without a religious faith (Group 1), teachers that have a religious faith working in non-faith schools (Group 2), and teachers that have a religious faith working in faith schools (Group 3).

Chart 1 compares the mean scores in religiosity and care for the next generation across the three groups of teachers. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the levels of religiosity. As expected, the analysis showed a significant difference in religiosity between groups ( $F(2,273) = 181, p < 0.001$ ). Post-hoc comparisons indicated that the mean score for Group 1 (mean = 1.76, SD = 0.59)

was significantly different than Group 2 (mean = 3.3, SD = 0.99) ( $p < 0.001$ ) and Group 3 (mean = 3.9, SD = 0.85) ( $p < 0.001$ ). This was also the case when comparing Groups 2 and 3 ( $p < 0.001$ ). Care for the next generation was assessed using the same method ( $F(2,311) = 8,196, p < 0.001$ ). Here, the post-hoc comparisons showed that the mean score for Group 1 (mean = 3.48, SD = 0.45) was significantly different than Group 3 (mean = 3.73, SD = 0.45) ( $p < 0.001$ ). However, no statistical differences were found between Group 2 (mean = 3.60, SD = 0.48) and Group 3 ( $p < 0.057$ ) and 2 ( $p < 0.387$ ). These findings show that teachers in faith schools are more religious, but are also more likely to score higher on a measure of care for the next generation than teachers in non-faith schools.

Kirsty's story gives a relevant qualitative example to help understand these quantitative findings. A highly religious RE teacher in a faith school, Kirsty explained how her faith, which had been supported by working in Christian schools, motivated her to work for transcendent goals. Teaching RE was a vocation, not a job.





### Kirsty's story: religious conversion and the vocation of teaching

*“I was a vehement atheist; I'd almost call myself a militant atheist at the time. I'd read all the popular stuff about atheism. And I had a dream, and this came out of nowhere... when I woke up, the thought just popped straight into my head that that was God.”*

Kirsty was brought up in a Catholic family but did not continue practising or believing in adolescence. After the dream-experience, she began exploring Christianity, eventually identifying with the Anglican Church. As part of this journey, she taught in Church schools which confirmed to her the worth and importance of Christianity, both personally and professionally. She explained that her Christian faith inspired and gave meaning to her work. It had profound meaning and purpose:

*“If I didn't have the faith that I've got, would I really invest as much of myself into the job as I think I do? Probably not... There is part of me that says, “No, this isn't just your job; you have to do this properly.”*”

*Kirsty, 30, Anglican, very high reported religiosity, Church of England middle school*

Interview data indicated that RE teachers with no religion also had strong ethical and moral principles that informed their approach to teaching, which prompted further exploration of the differences between these groups. Before considering these differences in more detail in Sections 4.3 and 4.4, in Section 4.2, this report first examines how teachers' worldviews affected their approaches to religious diversity, another key concern of the interview participants.



### 4.2 RE TEACHERS' APPROACHES TO RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

How RE teachers negotiate religious diversity, including non-religious worldviews, was an important feature of the study. All of the participants surveyed reported teaching more than one religion in RE. Participants in interviews explained they taught diverse cohorts of pupils. Furthermore, as interview participants were often concerned with the pursuit of truth and meaning, the personal encounter of different religions or opposing secular worldviews, was a key theme in their life stories.

The survey explored differences in teachers' approaches to religious diversity by including measures of inter-religious style (Streib *et al.*, 2010). A conservative religious style

emphasises a belief in the more or less immutable truth of one's own tradition. A fair, tolerant and rational style centres on the use of reason to negotiate competing truth claims and positions. These two styles may be compared with a third religious style that positively embraces religious diversity and interreligious encounter as the means to pursue non-mutually exclusive religious truths – a love for learning about other religions ('xenosophia'). Given that a conservative religious style would be more relevant to those affiliated with a religious tradition, it was predicted that teachers without a religious faith would score lower on this measure than those reporting affiliation with a tradition. It was also hypothesised that because of the nature of their work, RE teachers in all groups would return high scores for a fair, tolerant and rational approach to religious diversity and also for a love for learning about religious diversity.

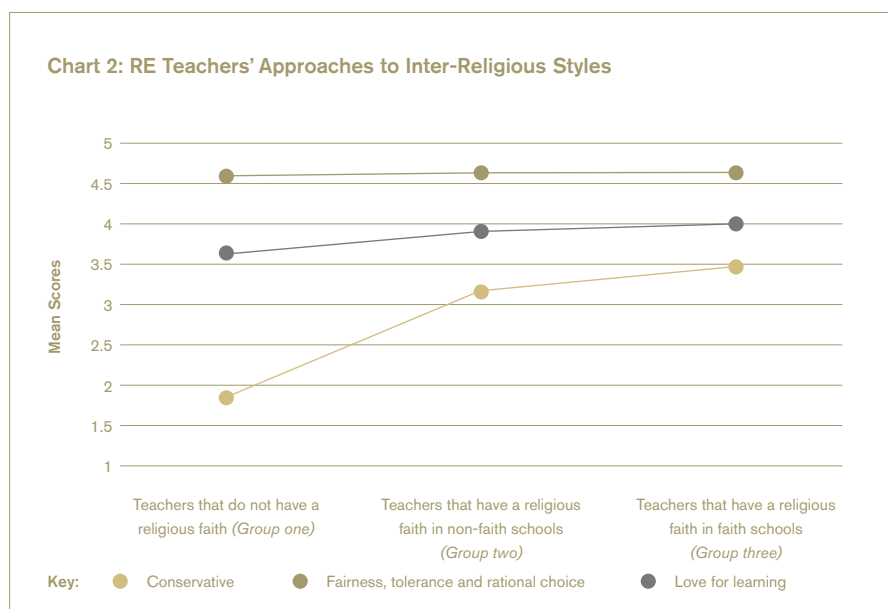


Chart 2 compares mean scores of inter-religious styles between groups of teachers using the three different measures described above. A one-way ANOVA analysis showed a significant difference in conservative style between the three groups of teachers ( $F(2.273) = 123, p < 0.001$ ). Post-hoc tests showed that the mean score of Group 3 was significantly different than Group 2 (mean = 3.46,  $SD = .71$ ) ( $p = 0.022$ ) and Group 1 (mean = 3.14,  $SD = .93$ ) ( $p < 0.001$ ). Significant differences were also found when comparing Group 1 and Group 2 ( $p < 0.001$ ).

For fairness, tolerance and rational choice, there was no statistical difference between groups ( $F(2.273) = .296, p = 0.744$ ). Remarkably, mean scores of each group were almost identical (teachers without a religious faith: mean = 4.56,  $SD = .34$ ; teachers that have a religious faith in non-faith schools: mean = 4.59,  $SD = .40$ ; teachers that have a religious faith in faith schools: mean = 4.60,  $SD = .39$ ). This finding demonstrates the importance to RE teachers in all contexts of fair deliberation and evaluation of religious truth claims – a personal and professional assumption which was also articulated by interview participants of all faiths and none.

Interestingly, and contrary to prediction, the trend for love of learning about other religions followed the same pattern as conservative religious style. Teachers that have a religious faith were more open to learning from other religions than their non-religious colleagues. The overall ANOVA model showed significant differences between groups ( $F(2.273) = 6.619, p = 0.002$ ). Looking at their pairwise comparisons, the mean score of Group 1 (mean = 3.62,  $SD = .70$ ) was significantly different than Group 3 (mean = 4,  $SD = .66$ ) ( $p = 0.001$ ) and 2 (mean = 3.93,  $SD = .74$ ) ( $p = 0.005$ ). No statistical differences were found between Group 2 and Group 3 ( $p = 0.809$ ). This finding suggests that religious RE teachers have an inclusivist approach to religious diversity, which lends itself to a general acceptance of religious truth claims. Teachers stating affiliation with no religion on the other hand, though having a fair, tolerant and rational approach to religious diversity, presumably find it more difficult to accept any religious truth, general or otherwise, and therefore find interreligious engagement less meaningful in their own pursuit of truth.

The interview data support this interpretation. A point of view common among teachers that have a religious faith was a positive and inclusive attitude to religions other than their own. This often informed their desire to teach more than one religion at school. John's example (below) illustrates how Christians with high self-reported religiosity working in Christian faith schools were supportive of multi-faith RE, and how their attitudes towards religious diversity went beyond 'educating about other religions' to a personal position of 'xenosophia'.

#### John's story: including other religions in a faith school

*“I like the general teachings of Buddhism and on self-development.”*

John came from a Catholic family, worked at a Catholic school, and had a high reported religiosity. He considered becoming a lawyer or a geographer, but had a sense that his vocation was to teach RE. As part of his life-long pursuit of his own spirituality, he explained he had, at one time, become interested in meditation and Buddhism. He went on to explain how learning about other religions was also an important part of RE because the subject was about 'making students more human', 'making the kids better'. This could be achieved by studying the world religions as well as taking a more traditional 'Catholic approach'.

*John, 33, Catholic, high reported religiosity, Catholic school*

### 4.3 RE TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTION OF RE TO PUPILS' CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

In interviews, RE teachers who did or did not have a religious faith narrated belief in RE's contribution to pupils' character development; this belief could be supported by divergent worldviews. For example, Howard, a Humanist, believed that learning about religions, a *bona fide* academic discipline in its own right, enabled pupils to learn about humanity and develop critical thinking skills. The similarity of this vision of RE, offered by a non-religious teacher, is not that distinct from the view presented by John, a practising Catholic (Section 4.2, above): both believed in the worth of studying religions to learn about humanity. However, for Howard, while RE promoted character development, it was not unique in this regard, but one subject among many doing so.

#### Howard's story: the Humanist RE teacher

*“The good life is the virtuous life, to think critically about your values and what is going to promote happiness for you and others, and try to as far as possible, live by those.”*

Howard explained how he was brought up Catholic, but during adolescence and early adulthood he gave up religion to explore other worldviews and positions. As part of this process, Howard concluded that moral principles could be supported by a non-religious view. In fact, they were better supported by rational thought. RE contributed to pupils' character development by encouraging pupils to think critically, but this was only a corollary of its main purpose to make an objective, academic study of religions.

*“... I'm fascinated in teaching people about religious traditions that they might not be aware of ... I think it's still important because it makes up what it means to be human.”*

*Howard, 38, Humanist, no reported religiosity, independent girls' school*

Given the common belief in RE's contribution to character development among the diverse sample of interview participants, the research team were interested in exploring differences in responses among a smaller sub-sample of participants (n=219) who answered several questions about RE and character formation at the end of the questionnaire. These quantitative data supported the study's qualitative findings.

There was a general belief across the sub-sample that RE promoted pupils' character development (Table 1). When analyses were conducted comparing responses between groups, the study found strong support for the statement: 'RE contributes to pupils' character development'. In Group 1 (teachers without a religious faith, n= 89), 96.6% of participants, agreed or strongly agreed, and in Group 2 (teachers that have a religious faith in non-faith schools, n = 68) and Group 3 (teachers that have a religious faith in a faith school, n= 62), the percentages were 98.5% and 98.4% respectively.

Table 1: Teachers' Perspectives on the Contribution of RE to Pupils' Character Development (n=219).

(n=219)	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
RE contributes to pupils' character development	0.0%	0.0%	2.3%	38.3%	59.4%
RE teachers should model good character for their pupils	0.0%	1.4%	4.1%	38.8%	55.7%

A similar trend was observed for the statement: 'RE teachers should model good character for their pupils' (Group 1: 92.2%; Group 2: 95.6%; Group 3: 96.8%), indicating a widely-held assumption that teachers' own behaviour was important to cultivating pupils' character development. Kruskal-Wallis tests showed that there was no statistically significant difference in the rank ordered distribution of both statements across the three groups of teachers (Statement 1;  $\chi^2(2) = .711$ ,  $p = 0.701$ . Statement 2:  $\chi^2(2) = 2.12$ ,  $p = 0.345$ ).

*“THOSE WHO EDUCATE CHILDREN WELL ARE MORE TO BE HONOURED THAN THEY WHO PRODUCE THEM; FOR THESE ONLY GIVE THEM LIFE, THOSE THE ART OF LIVING WELL.”*

 Aristotle

#### 4.4 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RELIGIOUS AND NON-RELIGIOUS TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT PUPILS' CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Despite the overall shared belief in the contribution that RE can make to character development, interviews revealed differences in the reasons teachers that have a religious faith, and teachers without a religious faith, gave for these views. These differences could be explained by participants' beliefs about the role of *religion* in promoting character as opposed to *Religious Education*. The former is a belief in the efficacy of religious traditions promoting good character through their teachings and practices. The latter is the belief that it is the opportunity for critical inquiry offered by RE that promotes character development, not the content of 'religion' itself. Charlotte and Emily's stories give good illustrations of how personal worldviews relate to divergent beliefs about the role of religion in promoting character development and to the nature and purpose of RE.

##### Charlotte's story: the virtues make Christian education possible

*“Religions give ethical direction.”*

Charlotte believed that moral education and confessional RE complemented each other. When RE was separated from character education, it became less focussed on real life. Her school's virtue programme therefore supported RE as well as character development.

*“I think for us, our experience is that [RE] integrates religion, and ethical education all at once. They could be done separately, but when they are done together they are enriching. Otherwise religion can become a little bit esoteric and not very feet on the ground.”*

*Charlotte, 52, Catholic, high reported religiosity, Catholic girls' independent*

##### Emily's story: having a religion doesn't mean you have character

*“I don't think just because you're religious you're going to have character. Or because you're not religious you won't have character.”*

Emily had come from a strong Christian family background and was for some time a practising Christian. She was now public about not believing in God, a view she sometimes shared with pupils. She believed that RE made a difference to pupils' lives and could promote character, but she did not believe being 'religious' necessarily promoted good character. RE promoted understanding of different groups of people – a task that would hopefully contribute to 'world peace'.

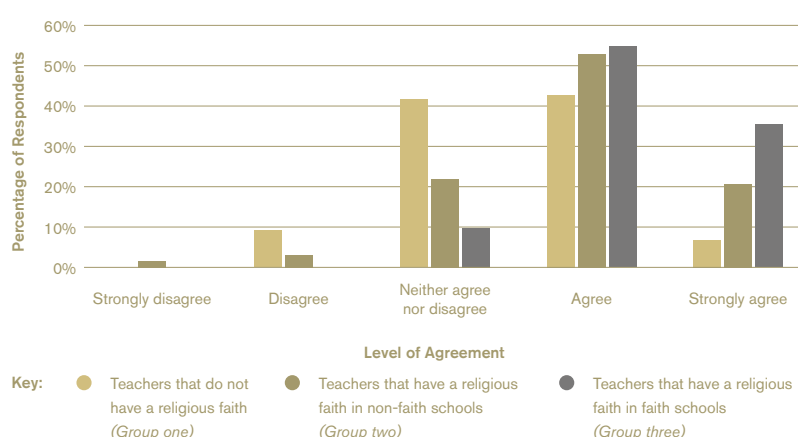
*Emily, 36, atheist, no reported religiosity, comprehensive*

As Charlotte and Emily's stories illustrate, the interview data exposed some fundamental differences in the way teachers approach RE. Those interviewees who have a religious faith working in faith schools articulated support for the contribution of religious traditions to character development, whereas teachers who do not have a religious faith working in non-faith schools did not. It was therefore hypothesised that responses to survey questions about the role of religion in character education ('Religious traditions are a source of good role models for students', 'Students emulate my religious beliefs' and 'It does not matter what pupils believe as long as they become people of goodwill') would be answered differently across the three groups. It was predicted that teachers that have a religious faith would be more likely to agree, or strongly agree, with the first two statements than those who do not, and that teachers that have a religious faith in faith schools would be more likely to agree than teachers that have a religious faith in non-faith schools. This was expected because these

teachers, although reporting an affiliation with a religion, had already chosen to work in the non-faith school sector and were perhaps therefore more amenable to RE with no specific religious foundation. For the third item, 'It does not matter what pupils believe as long as they become people of goodwill', the prediction was that teachers that have a religious faith would respond negatively as they would be predisposed to be concerned if a student did not come to hold religious belief. As with the other items, it was hypothesised that there would be a difference between teachers that have a religious faith in faith schools and teachers that have a religious faith in non-faith schools; those who have a religious faith in faith schools being expected to hold stronger views.

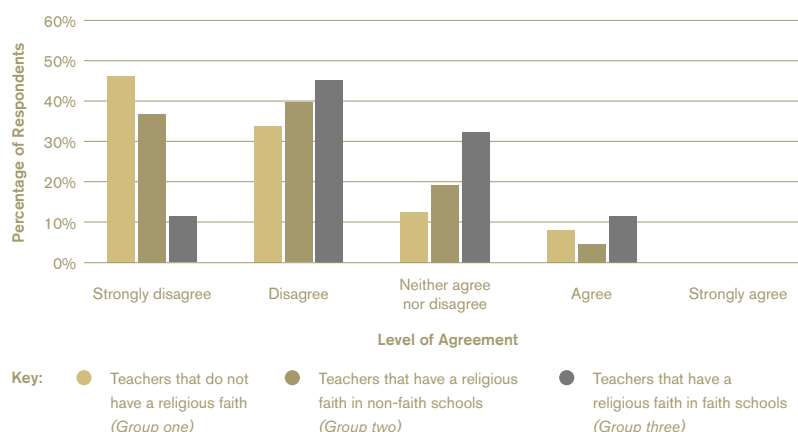
The study explored the differences between the groups for each item using a Kruskal-Wallis test. As predicted, teachers that have a religious faith responded favourably to the first two items and less favourably to the third item. For the item 'Religious traditions are a source of good role models for students' (Chart 3), there was evidence of statistically significant differences between groups ( $\chi^2(2) = 37.35$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Dunn's pairwise tests were carried out using the Bonferroni correction, which showed these differences arose between Groups 1 and 2 ( $p = 0.002$ ), Groups 1 and 3 ( $p = 0.000$ ), and Groups 2 and 3 ( $p = 0.028$ ). The mean ranked scores of Group 1 were 83.53, compared to 115.39 for Group 2 and 142.08 for Group 3.

**Chart 3: Participants' Responses to the Statement 'Religious traditions are a source of good role models for students'**



The hypothesis was also supported for the item 'Students emulate my religious beliefs' ( $\chi^2(2) = 20.44, p < 0.001$ ) (Chart 4). The mean ranked score of Group 1 was 95.05, compared to 103.48 for Group 2 and 138.61 for Group 3. Pairwise comparisons confirmed differences between Group 1 and Group 3 ( $p < 0.001$ ), and between Group 2 and Group 3 ( $p = 0.03$ ). These data confirm the findings from interviews and suggest RE teachers that have a religious faith are more likely to consider 'religion' a positive factor in pupils' character development than their non-religious colleagues, and that this may be transmitted via role modelling – indicating divergent views on the exact nature of role modelling between religious and non-religious teachers.

**Chart 4: Participants' Responses to the Statement 'Students emulate my religious beliefs'**

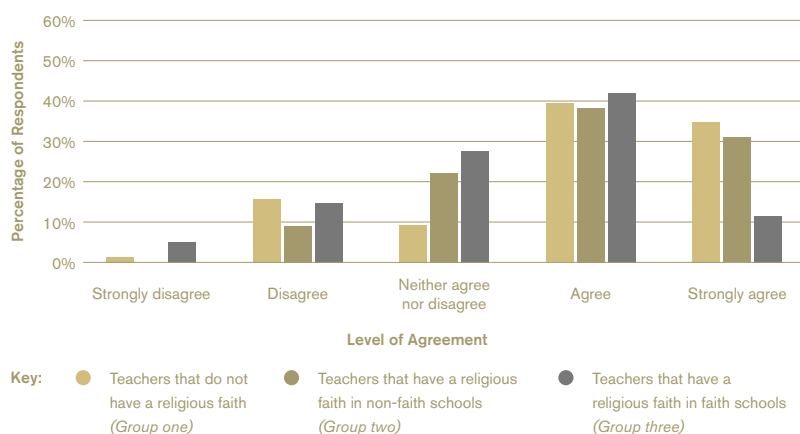






In order to test this hypothesis further, a similar analysis for the item 'It does not matter what pupils believe as long as they become people of goodwill' was then conducted. Considering the differences in the aims and purposes of teaching RE in faith and non-faith schools, it was predicted this would be an inverse trend when compared to the previous two items: the non-religious teachers would be more likely to strongly agree or agree and the other two groups less likely to agree – with religious teachers in faith schools being the lowest scoring group. Again, there was a statistical difference between groups ( $\chi^2(2) = 11.50$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ); Chart 5 shows the differences that occurred between Groups 2 and 3 ( $p = 0.02$ ) and Group 3 and Group 1 ( $p = 0.004$ ). As predicted, contrary to the previous items, the mean ranks showed a decreasing trend: Group 1 (120.02), Group 2 (116.89) and Group 3 (88.06). These findings confirm the common-sense assumption that teachers in faith schools are more likely to care if their pupils develop religious faith, but also include the more revealing finding that teachers that have a religious faith in non-faith schools have a different approach to their colleagues in the same kinds of schools. Even though they work in a non-confessional context, teachers that have a religious faith in non-faith schools are more likely to care about the religious beliefs of their pupils.

**Chart 5: Participants' Responses to the Statement 'It does not matter what pupils believe as long as they become people of goodwill'**



‘REAL RELIGION IS ABOUT, DEVELOPING REAL CHARACTER; CHARACTER OF COMPASSION, CHARACTER OF HUMILITY, THE CHARACTER OF DETERMINATION TO GROW IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES.’

 *Radhanath Swami*

Participants' responses to these three survey items about character development confirm the qualitative findings and suggest there is a marked difference between the way teachers that have a religious faith, and teachers that do not, conceptualise RE's contribution to pupils' character development. The former see something of intrinsic worth in religions, particularly their ethical and spiritual teachings that make a unique contribution to pupils' character development. The latter, on the other hand, see RE's value primarily in the *educational* benefits of the study of more than one religion and/or worldview in terms of developing critical thinking and positive attitudes to diversity.

While all kinds of RE teachers believe RE aids pupils' character development, and this happens in part by their action as role models, RE teachers that have a religious faith, including those in non-faith schools, see an intrinsic value in religions for the cultivation of pupils' characters. This may be promoted in their capacity as role models whereby pupils may emulate their religious beliefs. Non-religious RE teachers, while believing they should act as role models, do not believe that they act as role models for pupils' beliefs.



# 5 Discussion

This study set out to explore RE teachers' worldviews and their approaches to character development. It found RE teachers held a diverse range of professional perspectives about pupils' character development and held an even more varied assortment of personal worldviews. These ranged from strong atheism to strong theism – and an array of positions in between. It also found RE teachers' professional approaches are, in part, shaped by their personal experiences and commitments.

In interviews, participants reported the impact of key moments in their lives on the formation of their characters and, crucially, salient life experiences that motivated their professional vocation to teach RE. Despite the variety of perspectives, each individual's story showed how his or her worldview informed and infused his or her approach to RE – playing an important role in their overall drive to teach.

Using a larger sample, the survey findings corroborated those of the interview phase. The quantitative data suggest there are significant differences in teachers' approaches to RE. These differences exist not only between teachers working in faith schools and non-faith schools, but also those religious and non-religious teachers working in non-faith schools who differ in their personal worldviews.

These findings are relevant to ongoing debates about RE, including the proposed National Entitlement for the subject (CoRE, 2018). Earlier, this report identified some of the principal challenges the subject faces: (1) the varying provision and increasing non-compliance with the statutory obligation to provide RE in secondary schools; (2) the training and retention of specialist RE teachers; and (3) the uncertainty over the purpose and relevance of the subject given the increasing prevalence of non-religious worldviews in society as a whole. Researching RE teachers' views is vitally important to understanding these issues. The establishment of a professional workforce that could develop the subject has been crucial to maintaining its place in the curriculum (Copley, 2008; Parker *et al.*, 2016). This report therefore considers the findings of the study in respect to each of these three issues.



## 5.1 MEETING THE STATUTORY OBLIGATION FOR RE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

RE teachers are responsible for articulating and promoting the subject in their schools. Their personal vision of the subject is therefore crucial to the quality of provision and influential in decisions about their school's commitment to the subject. Perhaps the most important finding of the present study in this respect is that, despite the variety of individual visions of the subject's meaning and purpose, the contribution of the subject to pupils' character development was considered important by the majority of the study's participants.

Regardless of their personal worldviews, teachers observed that RE gave pupils a unique opportunity in the curriculum to consider moral and ethical problems. However, pupils' character development was not the only educational aim reported by teachers. There are therefore good reasons to be cautious

about reducing the aims and purposes of the subject to one single outcome – not least because RE teachers had different views about the means by which RE contributed to pupils' character development. Even so, these findings suggest the role of RE in promoting pupil's character development should arguably gain more attention in schools where opportunities for reflection and discussion on moral and ethical issues are otherwise scarce. Recent changes in the Ofsted guidance for inspection that stipulate schools should provide opportunities for pupils' character development give an opportunity for RE teachers to reanimate and rearticulate one important dimension of the subject's contribution to a well-rounded secondary education (Ofsted, 2019).

## 5.2 TRAINING AND RETAINING SPECIALIST RE TEACHERS

In interviews, the challenges inherent in teaching RE came to the fore. Of particular interest were the personal implications of negotiating and interrogating the competing truth claims of different religions and worldviews with pupils on a daily basis. The intense experience of this 'tightrope walk' as Copley (2005) described it, has perhaps been underestimated by influential religious educationists who, on the whole, have advanced the view that teachers can and should be impartial (eg, Grimmitt, 1981; Jackson 1997; 2014).

The empirical findings presented here suggest common assumptions about RE teachers' personal beliefs and their professional practice should be re-evaluated. The relationship between the personal and the professional should be given more credence. This study's empirical findings support the theoretical arguments of several scholars who have, over the years, contended that teachers' impartiality may not be the only way of ensuring RE is sensitive to the changing needs of young people, the diversity of contemporary society and the otherwise secular education system (eg, Hulmes, 1979; l'Anson, 2010; Biesta and Hannam, 2016).

These findings suggest that not only do RE teachers' personal worldviews have a role in the formation of their approach to the subject, but their experiences of teaching have a role in the formation of their personal worldviews. One implication of this is that RE teachers need more opportunities to reflect deeply on the meaning and purpose of the subject in the context of their own worldview and to then integrate this into a coherent and appropriate rationale for the subject in their own school context. Finding ways to facilitate this process would likely be of benefit to the quality of teaching and the well-being of the teacher – essential to the recruitment and retention of motivated and committed subject experts.



## 5.3 DOES IT MATTER WHAT RE TEACHERS BELIEVE?

In exploring RE teachers' personal beliefs, the suitability of the term 'worldview' rather than 'religion' when describing teachers' views was an important finding. The inclusion of non-religious worldviews is one of the principal recommendations of the CoRE report and has gained considerable traction in the RE community (Jackson, 2014; Freathy and John, 2018). While more than half of survey participants identified themselves as belonging to a religion (which was for the majority, Christianity), it was clear in interviews that there were many different ways of understanding such belonging, which also often shifted or developed over time. Moreover, the significant proportion of teachers who do not identify with a religion would also seem to have multifarious ways of defining their metaphysical, ethical and practical orientations. As a broader concept, 'worldview' encapsulates a more diverse and individualised spectrum of religious and non-religious positions than other categories such as 'religion', 'belief' or 'spirituality'.

Throughout RE's history, debate has arisen over the question of whether RE teachers' own beliefs matter (Copley, 2008). As explained earlier in this report, Disraeli was among the first to question what impact RE would have on the next generation's moral character, given that it would not be taught in regard to any specific religious (denominational) tradition or under any particular religious authority. In the contemporary multi-faith context, this study has gone some way to consider this problem empirically and to some extent shows Disraeli's pessimism was misplaced. This study finds that teachers of all faiths and none believed RE contributes to pupils' character development; this study also discovered that RE teachers' motivations to care for the next generation stemmed from all kinds of personal experiences and worldviews – religious and otherwise. Nevertheless, teachers that have a religious faith and teachers that do not have a religious faith held different conceptions of the aims and purposes of RE and its role in character formation. Teachers without a religious faith were less likely than their religious counterparts to think religions (as opposed to Religious *Education*) promoted pupils' character development.

For non-religious RE teachers, it is the instrumental benefits brought by the study of religions that give RE its moral value, not religions themselves.

Belonging to a religion is likely a motivating factor in many RE teachers' professional lives, whether they work in faith or non-faith schools. It should be noted that participants in this study who belonged to a religion were in the main Christian. However, there was no evidence that such personal religious identifications lead to bias or inappropriate proselytisation in increasingly secular or diverse contexts. On the contrary, this study's findings show that religious RE teachers scored higher than non-religious RE teachers in measures of care for the next generation and for love of learning about religious diversity. These statistically significant results support inferences drawn from interview data that suggest having a religious faith can motivate a fair and inclusive exploration of diverse religious and non-religious worldviews in a manner respectful to pupils of all faiths and none.

Religious teachers were inclined to believe that there was a universal morality shared by religions. This theological stance is arguably located in a particular kind of religious style. According to this view, the study of 'religion' as a broad category by virtue of its unique, ethical and transcendent nature, provides opportunities for pupils' character formation. This view – held by teachers in faith and non-faith schools – represents a multi-faith development of the original undenominational principle of the Victorian settlement and reflects the assumptions of some prominent religious educationists. According to this approach, despite doctrinal and cultural differences in wider society, RE can deliver important and shared moral lessons to diverse stakeholders.



Arguably, however, this kind of inclusive theology is not representative of religious communities, which usually comprise adherents professing a wider spectrum of approaches to religious diversity, including theological exclusivism (Moulin-Stożek and Metcalfe, 2018).

Nevertheless, differences between teachers' worldviews and their perspectives on the nature and purpose of the subject did not mean individual teachers were confused over the subject's meaning and purpose. All the teachers interviewed were able to articulate sound rationales for the subject which could be located in their personal worldviews. Rather than presenting challenges to the subject's coherence, this report speculates that, a diverse workforce of RE teachers with a range of religious and non-religious worldviews strengthens RE at a time when there is clear evidence of increasing secularisation, particularly among secondary school age pupils (Woodhead, 2016).

RE serves pupils and communities of all religions and none and is taught by teachers of all faiths and none. The findings presented here suggest that, regardless of their personal worldview, RE teachers are committed to fairly accommodating the diversity of their pupils' worldviews in the classroom. However, more research is needed to understand how teachers' own worldviews may be appropriately integrated with their professional practice in particular contexts. This is crucial as the present study only explored data generated with teachers; it did not include observations of teaching in the classroom or the perspectives of pupils.



# 6 Conclusion

This research found strong agreement among RE teachers that RE contributes to pupils' character development.

While not homogenous or straightforwardly driven by the religious / non-religious designation of the school, the study also found some nascent correlation between RE teachers' worldviews and attitudes to pupils' character formation. In other words, RE teachers' life experiences and outlooks on life seem to shape their attitudes and approaches not only to their subject teaching but also to the character formation of those they teach. These findings suggest a value in paying greater attention to character within RE – for example, in syllabi, school curricular and teacher education.

The study also evidences the existence of a complex and important interaction between RE teachers' worldviews and their attitudes to, and understandings of, teaching and learning the subject. The findings suggest that the model of the impartial RE teacher is not only an impossible goal, but is also, perhaps, an undesirable one. The study found no evidence of unthinking and unreflective RE teachers forcing their own worldviews upon pupils, whether in faith schools or not. In addition, the official religious designation of the school, although clearly relevant, is not the only important factor that determines the way RE teachers think and go about their work. Rather, RE teachers had different ways of thinking about religious diversity and non-religious worldviews and held differing perspectives about promoting pupils' character development that were highly individualised and in every case related to personal experiences in RE teachers' own lives.

These experiences made the RE teachers in this study sensitive to salient complexities and issues about religions and worldviews and, in turn, motivated them to be fair and tolerant of diverse religious and non-religious worldviews.

Instead of a 'thin' conception of the professional identity of RE teachers which masks or excludes their religions or worldviews, the teachers in this study evinced a 'thick' conception of their professional identity connected to their different modes of thinking about broader societal questions involving religions and worldviews, including those concerning cultural and religious diversity. Given this, it is important that RE teachers be provided space and scope to engage in professional reflection and dialogue about their personal experiences and worldviews, particularly regarding how these shape their teaching practices. In the present context, which has moved away considerably from the sectarian divisions of the Victorian era, the more open concept of 'worldview' may offer a useful frame for further research on the professional identity and practice of RE teachers, including how they conceive and approach developing pupils' character.

As the present study comprised data generated with teachers only, one area of suggested further research is to explore key elements of the findings presented here by triangulating teachers' perspectives with data about pupils' character development or with observations of teaching episodes in RE classrooms. This would help illuminate these issues further, providing empirical insights into how the worldviews of RE teachers influence and shape practices used to develop pupils' character.



# Research Team and Advisory Board

## Research Team

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Professor James Arthur OBE, M.Sc., D.Phil. (Oxon) is Director of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, and is the Chair of the Society for Educational Studies. James was Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Staffing at the University of Birmingham (2015–19), and was Head of the School of Education at the University of Birmingham (2010–15). James was made an Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to education by Her Majesty The Queen on 4 May 2018.

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Daniel Moulin-Stožek (né Moulin), M.Sc., D.Phil. (Oxon) FHEA was a Research Fellow at the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, University of Birmingham (2017–19). He is currently University Lecturer in the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge.

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- The Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants (AREIAC)
- The Association of University Lecturers of Religious Education (AULRE)
- The Catholic Education Service (CES)
- The Commission on Religious Education (CoRE)
- Culham St Gabriel's Trust (CSGT)
- The UK Government's Department for Education (DfE)
- The Farmington Institute
- Local Education Authorities across England and Wales (LEAs)
- The Church of England's National Society for Promoting Religious Education
- The National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE)
- The Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC), including its numerous members, representing professional and faith community organisations
- RE Today (editors and board members)
- Standing Advisory Boards of Religious Education (SACREs).

‘IN THE COURAGEOUS  
STANDING OF UNCERTAINTY,  
FAITH SHOWS MOST VISIBLY  
ITS DYNAMIC CHARACTER.’

 *Paul Tillich*

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Interview Participants' Basic Characteristics

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Self-identification	Religiosity <sup>3</sup>	School type
Jane	54	F	Christian	High	Boys' Independent
Palvinder	26	M	Non-practising Sikh/theist	Low	Voluntary Controlled Catholic
Alexander	36	M	Agnostic	None	Academy
Michelle	42	F	Quaker, Religious Society of Friends	Moderate	Independent Quaker, Religious Society of Friends
Chloe	33	F	Catholic	High	Catholic Academy
John	33	M	Catholic	High	Catholic School
Kirsty	30	F	Anglican	Very high	Church of England Middle School
Jennifer	29	F	Catholic	Moderate	Catholic Academy
Sophie	54	F	Catholic	High	Catholic Academy
Louise	31	F	Agnostic	None	Free School
Emma	45	F	Atheist	Low	Independent Church of England
Natasha	42	F	Agnostic	None	Selective Secondary
Charlotte	52	F	Catholic	High	Catholic Girls' Independent
Emily	36	F	Atheist	None	Comprehensive
David	59	M	Church of England	High	Independent Church of England
Rebecca	45	F	Other Worldviews [Fluid worldviews]	None	Independent
Kimberly	47	F	Theist	Low	Comprehensive
Robert	58	M	Spiritual with Semi-Quaker views	Moderate	Voluntary Aided Church of England
Howard	38	M	Humanist	None	Independent Girls'
Andrea	34	F	Agnostic	None	Independent (Christian foundation)
Richard	36	M	Straight Edge Punk Rock Anarchist Atheist	None	State-funded Grammar
Abigail	38	F	Catholic	High	Selective Boys' Grammar
Bethany	29	F	Atheist	None	Academy (Former Grammar)
Nathan	28	M	Atheist	Low	Comprehensive
Maureen	50	F	Catholic	High	Girls' Grammar
Nandini	48	F	Spiritual	Low	Comprehensive
Asha	24	F	Muslim	Very high	Comprehensive
Benjamin	44	M	Christian	High	State-funded Middle School
Samuel	46	M	Christian	High	Academy
Ian	28	M	Humanist Agnostic	None	Academy

<sup>3</sup> Interview participants' religiosity was calculated as a mean score of belief and practice across 8 dimensions: (1) belief that life is being guided by God; (2) belief in or experience of God; (3) narrated religious experience; (4) regular prayer or spiritual practice; (5) regular attendance at a place of worship; (6) religious salience (states religion is important); (7) regularly reading scriptures; and (8) narrated identification with a religious tradition as a choice. A mean score of 0 is treated as 'none'; low, 0.1 -.25; moderate, .26 -.5; high, .51 -.75; and .76 -1, very high). A shortened version was used with survey participants, this included (1), (3), (4), (5) and (7), assessed on a 5-item Likert Scale (see 3.3.2.1).

## Appendix 2: Summary of Religious Education, Worldview and the Life Story Interview Schedule

The overall design of this interview schedule was based upon the Foley Centre's (2005) *Faith, politics and the life story interview*.

This interview is about three things: your personal worldview, your professional values and the story of your life. Obviously, to understand all these things we will have to speak for some time, about two hours – are you happy with that? Also to keep a record, I will audio record it but this will be kept secure and only members of the research team will listen to it. Due to the focus on unique life events, the information that you provide cannot be fully anonymous. However your responses will be treated confidentially. This means that all of your personal information will be coded during the analysis and any findings published in the report will be general and will not refer to individual participants or schools. This study is unconnected with your employer or any other professional organisation. It is for research purposes only. At any time, you can withdraw from the interview and study, skip a question, and/or request the audio recorder to be switched off. Do you have any questions?

We are interested in how teachers of religious education understand the relationship between these three things. What role, for example, does your worldview, religious or spiritual life, play in the way you approach religious education? How would you say that you have developed or changed over time with respect to your worldview and your professional life? Have certain events or things that have happened in your personal life had an impact on your worldview values, and commitments, or your professional life?

### Life story

For this section of the interview, questions were adapted from the Foley Centre's (2005) *Faith, politics and the life story interview*, with questions for eight scenes:

The interview begins with the life story. I am going to ask you first of all to think about your life as if it were a book or a play, containing chapters, scenes, main characters, and so on. We will focus in briefly on what you believe to be a few key scenes or episodes in your story – some high points, low points, and turning points, for example. The purpose of the first part of the interview is to compose a very brief autobiography for you by highlighting a few critical scenes in the story.

- Scene #1: High point
- Scene #2: Low point
- Scene #3: Turning point
- Scene #4: Positive childhood memory
- Scene #5: Negative childhood memory
- Scene #6: Adolescent memory
- Scene #7: Adult memory
- Scene #8: Idealised future scene

### Worldview

For this section of the interview, questions were adapted from the Foley Centre's (2005) *Faith, politics and the life story interview*, with a focus on worldview, as opposed to faith in order to include non-religious worldviews.

The second part of the interview focusses on your personal worldview/religious and/or spiritual beliefs and practices. Here I am also going to ask you to think about things in story terms – to imagine your worldview/religious or spiritual life as if it were a story developing over time. I will ask you to identify a few key scenes in the story. But I will also ask more basic, factual questions about your personal worldview, so that I can better understand your beliefs, values, and practices.

- Overall orientation: Beliefs and values. Let us then begin by considering your worldview in general. Please describe your overall approach to life. What are your basic beliefs and values?
- Practices. Worldview involves things we believe, but it also involves things we do, in religion, these are things such as worship,

prayer, liturgy, singing, meditation, witnessing, and so on. You have already told me a little bit about your beliefs and values. Now please describe any spiritual, religious or other practices in your life. What do you do that affirms your worldview or puts your worldview into action? Why do you do these things?

- Prayer. Do you ever pray? [If participant says 'no', ask why. Then proceed to next question]. When and under what circumstances do you pray? If it is okay with you, I would like you to give me an example of a prayer. Tell me what you might 'say'. Please narrate the prayer to me. Why might you offer that particular prayer? [If the participant is not comfortable doing this, then ask him or her simply to tell you what he or she prays about].
- Beginning scene.
- High point scene.
- Low point scene.
- Continuity and change.

### Religious Education

For this section of the interview, questions were adapted from the Foley Centre's (2005) *Faith, politics and the life story interview*, with a focus on religious education as opposed to political participation.

As promised, the third and final part of the interview focusses on religious education. We want to understand how teachers' professional approaches and attitudes are related, if at all, to their worldview, religious and spiritual values and to their life stories overall.

- Overall orientation: Approach to religious education. How would you characterise your overall orientation to RE? What is the aim of the subject? Please describe your approach in some detail.
- Do you think your personal beliefs should affect your professional work?
- Does multi-faith RE resonate with your personal beliefs?
- Do you think being an atheist is an advantage in teaching RE?

*Continued overleaf*



- Please describe how your approach to RE was formed and how it may have changed. How might it change in the future?
- Do you think your professional training has prepared you to be a good RE teacher?
- In what ways have you contributed to innovation in RE? Do you usually get involved with curriculum development or in collaboration with other RE teachers? Describe any involvements and activities in your life that you consider to be part of improving religious education.
- Do you think RE should promote the development of religious faith in pupils?
- Do you think teachers praying for pupils in their personal prayers is a good thing?
- Is it sometimes appropriate to pray in the classroom?
- Do you think it is important for teachers to share their religious beliefs with their pupils?
- And do you think people's religious beliefs contribute to the building of character?
- Do you think RE contributes to pupils' character development?
- What about wisdom? Does religion have anything to offer here?
- How, if at all, does your worldview – that is your worldview, religious and/or spiritual beliefs, values, and practices – influence your approach to RE? Please describe in detail what you see to be the relationship between your worldview and your professional life.



## Appendix 3: Summary of Religious Education Teacher Worldview and Character Education Questionnaire

### QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

#### Voluntary informed consent:

- I confirm I am over the age of 18 and I would like to take part in this study. I understand my participation is voluntary and I can withdraw at any time, and without stating a reason.

#### Demographic questions:

- I currently work as a teacher of RE in an English or Welsh secondary school, middle school or sixth form (teaching students in the 11–18 age range)
- Does the school in which you currently work have a specific designated religious character?
- In what kind of secondary school do you currently teach?
- How would you rate the overall quality of your school?
- How would you rate your current job satisfaction?
- How would you describe your current level of work-related stress?
- What is your date of birth?
- What is your gender?
- To what religion, if any, do you belong?
- What higher education qualifications do you have?
- In what year did you first start teaching RE in secondary school?
- Do you have any leadership or management responsibilities?
- Do you think you have ever had a work-related mental health problem?

#### Religiosity items:

- Do you read holy scriptures by yourself (eg, Bible, Qur'an, Vedas)?
- Do you pray by yourself?
- Do you feel that your life is being guided by a god or gods?
- Have you ever had something you would describe as a 'religious experience'?
- How often, if at all, do you attend a place of worship (eg, church, mosque, temple, etc)?

#### Teachers' perspectives on RE and pupils' character development:

- RE contributes to pupils' character development
- RE teachers should model good character for their pupils
- Students emulate my religious beliefs
- Religious traditions are a source of good role models for students
- It does not matter what pupils believe as long as they become people of goodwill

Loyola scale of care for the next generation (20 items)  
(see McAdams *et al.*, 1993).

Religious style (15 items) (see Streib *et al.*, 2010).

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