



Introducing  
Religion &  
Worldviews

# Introducing Religion and Worldviews in Secondary Schools

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## Teacher Handout



Welcome to the 'Introducing Religion and Worldviews' training pack for secondary school teachers.

This handout has been designed<sup>1</sup> to accompany you, alongside the PowerPoint slides, as you attend the training and reflect on how you can (further) adopt a Religion and Worldviews (R&W) approach in the Religious Studies (RS) classroom.

The aims of the training are:

- To have a better understanding of the Religions and Worldview (R&W) approach in RS,
- To assess where your curriculum already touches on and follows a R&W approach and where there might gaps,
- To understand the benefits of adopting a R&W approach and how this can strengthen the teaching of religion and non-religion in schools,
- To start thinking about classroom practice that is anchored in a R&W approach.

Before you undertake this training, we suggest that you start reflecting on your own experiences of RS, for example:

- What was RS like for you as a student?
- What did you learn?
- What did you wish you had learnt?
- What was your teacher training like when it comes to RS?
- How do you feel about teaching RS today?

Reflecting on your own experiences will enable you to start looking at RS as a subject that is on a journey – one that seeks to mirror the changes in our plural society.

During the training, you will be introduced to key documents, such as the [CoRE report](#) (a report led by a Commission on RE in 2018, which coined the 'Religion and Worldviews' phrase) or '[Worldview](#):'

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<sup>1</sup> This pack was co-designed by Dr Céline Benoit, Dr Tim Hutchings, Dr Rachael Shillitoe, Alisha Hussain, Attiyya Hussain, Vicki Donoghue, Toni Woodward.

The team is grateful to the Advisory Board for their guidance and feedback.

Special thanks go to the Coventry & Warwickshire REC / local Agreed Syllabus writing team, led by Jennifer Jenkins, for sharing material and resources.

[A Multidisciplinary Report](#). We do not expect you to engage with these documents (unless you were interested in them) - these are only mentioned by way of context, as we explore the journey on which RS finds itself.

Instead, you might find the following material more relevant to RS teaching:

- [The Handbook for Curriculum Writers](#)
- [The \(draft\) National Content Standard for Religious Education in England](#) pp. 6-11 (NB: only refer to this document if based in England)

You will find that a R&W approach to RE can be interpreted in different ways – though all sharing the same core values, which will be explored throughout this training. Examples of what a R&W approach might look like in an RE scheme of work include the free resources below:

- [Teacher-led Framework: a resource for RE teachers and leaders](#) (led by Gillian Georgiou)
- [Coventry and Warwick SACRE / Diocese-led Framework: An exemplification of a Religion and Worldviews Approach in RE](#) (led by Jennifer Jenkins)

Due to time constraints, the training will focus mostly on what a R&W approach is (and isn't) in the classroom, and as such might not always offer enough time to look at classroom activities. Below we provide examples with which you can engage at your own pace, in your own time. Further resources are available online, (though these may not be freely available to all):

- [Investigating Worldviews](#) (NATRE)
- [Exploring non-religious worldviews](#) (REToday)

After your training (whether it was a day-long INSET day, or a series of twilight sessions), we invite you to consider what you have learnt, and reflect on how that learning might affect the way you approach RS and teach the subject. To support you, you will be provided with a summary infographic (with hyperlinks), as well as the glossary and further resources that can be found below. This is not an exhaustive list – you might find other resources that are more suitable to your own local context. Similarly, you may not want to engage with all the suggested resources listed - these are suggested to support you where needed.

## Glossary

We suggest engaging with this section as you go through the training, or after, rather than before.

This training focuses on the pedagogical shift in the RS classroom as we transition away from the World Religions Paradigms towards a Religion and Worldviews approach. Below are proposed definitions of some of the key terms discussed during the training:

- **Religion:** The term 'religion' is a complex and contested term. The complexity of the term 'religion' allows for rich dialogue and debate about its nature in relation to beliefs about god(s), the divine, the supernatural and/or the transcendent; its function in communities and societies; its origins in the divine or in human culture; the relationship between believing, belonging and behaving. 'Religions' are instances of 'religion', and relate to the term in different ways ([The Handbook for Curriculum Writers](#), p. 15).
- **World Religions Paradigm (WRP):** To be classified as a religion by Western societies, a tradition has needed to share a number of aspects with Christianity, including scriptures, a churchlike organisational structure with a priesthood, a belief in one or more divine powers, and a doctrinal system (Smith, 1964; Dubuisson, 2003). As Dubuisson states, '[t]he West not only conceived of the idea of religion, it has constrained other cultures to speak of their own religions by inventing them for them' (2003: 93). This ethnocentric, Christianity-centred approach is the foundation of the WRP, which has been influential in the teaching of RS.

If you would like to read more about this, please see pp.7-8 of ["Worldviews: A Multidisciplinary Report"](#).

- **Personal worldview:** A person's personal worldview describes and shapes how they encounter, interpret, understand and engage with the world. A person may have a coherent and considered framework for answering questions about the nature of ultimate reality, knowledge, truth and ethics, or they may have never given such questions much thought – but they still have a worldview, including the beliefs, convictions, values and assumptions that influence and shape their thinking and living ([The Handbook for Curriculum Writers](#), p. 15).

The short animated film, [Nobody Stands Nowhere](#), can be a good way to help make sense

of the concept of personal worldview.

The Handbook for Curriculum Writers suggests updating this language. The Handbook (p.36) proposes using “personal worldview” to refer to the worldviews of pupils and “individual worldview” to refer to the worldviews of the people we study in RS. We encourage pupils to reflect on their own personal worldview, but in our case studies we analyse individual worldviews. This distinction is meant to reassure pupils and parents that the purpose of RS is not to analyse pupils or to make pupils change their own worldviews. We recommend discussing this with other teachers in your own context to decide if this extra terminology is helpful to you.

- **Communal worldview:** The shared worldview of a family or a faith community (e.g. belonging to a local place of worship) where people often share some similar beliefs, ideas or actions ([Coventry City Council, 2024](#)).
- **Organised worldview:** A set of beliefs, ideas, rituals and practices that form a recognisable worldview with familiar characteristics. These are often taken from a sacred text or as a result of a long-held tradition (e.g. a religion) but can also be nonreligious in nature (e.g. Humanism) ([Coventry City Council, 2024](#)).
- **Institutional worldview:** The CoRE report uses the term ‘institutional worldview’ to describe organised worldviews shared among particular groups and embedded in institutions. These include what we describe as religions (e.g., the Catholic Church) as well as nonreligious worldviews ([CoRE, 2018](#)). Broadly speaking, the term organised worldview is preferred to institutional worldview as it is more flexible and includes organised worldviews that are not embedded in institutions.

**NB:** A R&W approach does not see personal, communal, and organised worldviews as separate entities. Instead, the aim is to explore the complex relationship between them. Individuals within organised traditions may be more or less orthodox in their beliefs and practices, or in their engagement with theological or philosophical discourse, or in their day-to-day practice, or in their identification with that worldview. A R&W approach looks at the relationship between people and the

organised worldviews to which they may belong, as well as using this exploration to give pupils opportunities to reflect upon their own personal worldviews (adapted from [The Handbook for Curriculum Writers](#), p. 15).

In this training, you will hear the speakers talk about disciplines and/or disciplinary lenses that might be used in the RS classroom to help you adopt a Religion and Worldviews approach. Below are suggested definitions of Human and Social Sciences (HSS), Philosophy and Theology as these tend to be the dominant disciplines that shape RS in secondary schools.

- **Human and social sciences:** The human/social sciences enable pupils to grapple with questions about the lived and diverse reality of religion and worldviews in the world. It explores the diverse ways in which people practise their beliefs. It engages with the impact of beliefs on individuals, communities and societies. Pupils will investigate the ways in which religions and worldviews have shaped and continue to shape societies around the world. This approach can promote better understanding of the ways in which religion and worldviews influence people's understanding of power, gender, compassion, and so on. It also enables pupils to consider the nature of religion itself and the diverse ways in which people understand the term 'religion' (Norfolk Agreed Syllabus, 2019).
- **Philosophy:** Philosophy enables pupils to grapple with questions that have been raised and answers about knowledge, existence and morality. It is about finding out how and whether things make sense. It deals with questions of morality and ethics. It takes seriously questions about reality, knowledge and existence. The process of reasoning lies at the heart of philosophy. Philosophy is less about coming up with answers to difficult questions and more about the process of how we try to answer them. Studying the works of great philosophers is part of developing an understanding of philosophy. It uses dialogue, discussion and debate to refine the way in which we think about the world and our place in it. Philosophy contains three fields of enquiry which are applicable to a balanced framework for RS. These are metaphysics, logic and moral philosophy (Norfolk Agreed Syllabus, 2019).
- **Theology:** Theology enables pupils to grapple with questions that have been raised by religions and worldviews over the centuries. It looks at where beliefs come from, how they have changed over time, how they are applied differently in different contexts and how they

relate to each other. It involves investigating key texts and traditions within different religions and worldviews. It explores the ways in which they have been used as authoritative for believers and the ways in which they have been challenged, interpreted and disregarded over time. It assesses the key beliefs of religions and worldviews as well as exploring the significance of experience on the claims made by religious and nonreligious people (Norfolk Agreed Syllabus, 2019).

These definitions are drawn from the [2019 Norfolk Agreed Syllabus](#), which also provides examples of how different disciplinary lenses might be used in the RS classroom. Remember that while these are the main disciplinary lenses used in RS, there are other disciplines that might inform RS.

Other useful key concepts used during the training include:

**Decolonising:** Decolonising the RS curriculum involves re-evaluating and reshaping educational content to include diverse perspectives (including voices that have been traditionally silenced or marginalised by colonial influences), and by moving away from the study of (non)religion through a Western Christian lens. The aims are to address biases, omissions, and power asymmetries by incorporating historically underrepresented viewpoints (this includes organised worldviews that have traditionally been ignored by the World Religions Paradigm, as well as personal worldviews that have traditionally been framed as not valid if they differed from what was taught through the World Religions Paradigm).

**De-essentialising:** Essentialising is the idea that certain groups/communities have inherent, unchanging characteristics that define their identity. It is, for example, saying things like “all Muslims pray five times a day”, or “all Christians go to church on Sundays”. By suggesting these traits are fundamental to what someone is can be damaging - what if one of your pupils is a Muslim but does not pray five times a day? Or one of your pupils identifies as Christian but does not go to church? This would make RS an alienating space since it does not acknowledge how lived experiences of (non)religion may vary. De-essentialising RS means adopting a Religion and Worldviews approach by moving away from oversimplified, stereotypical, and biased representations of complex (non)religion identities.

**Embodiment:** Embodiment emphasises the sensory, emotional, and physical experiences,

enabling us to move away from an approach that just focuses on the cognitive (i.e., beliefs, or sets of ideas we have in our heads). Embodiment allows us to acknowledge the importance of the body and the affect in RS, and how we experience and live (non)religion through bodily sensations.

**Positionality:** Pupils will develop an understanding of their own positionality in the world through RS as they reflect on how their personal worldview influences, and possibly biases, their understanding of the world (adapted from Coventry City Council, 2024).

**Reflexivity:** Reflexivity is a type of learning through which an individual explores their own experiences as a learner to become more conscious and self-critical (adapted from Coventry City Council, 2024).

**Reflectivity:** Reflectivity, or the act of being reflective, encourages pupils to think about what they have read, watched, listened to, learned and encountered so that they can relate their learning in the RS lesson to their own lives and begin to make meaning from it (adapted from Coventry City Council, 2024).



## Further reading, guidance, and resources:

- Culham St Gabriel's Trust (CSTG) provides a series of short courses, including 'Introduction to a Religion & Worldviews approach', and 'Digging deeper into a Religion & Worldviews approach'. Short courses can be accessed here: <https://courses.cstg.org.uk/>. The Open University also has a [free course, entitled 'An Education in Religion and Worldviews'](#).
- The Education Board of the Diocese of Coventry hosts a number of resources on Christian Advocacy, which adopt a Religion and Worldviews approach, and refer to the different disciplinary lenses. The resources can be found here: <https://coventrydbe.org/resources/> (Scroll down to the logo; the resources are Open Access, except the mood boards which are password-protected. The password can be found in the teacher handbook).
- The 2019 Norfolk Agreed Syllabus for RS was one of the first locally agreed syllabuses to adopt disciplinary lenses in RS. The document can be accessed here: <https://www.schools.norfolk.gov.uk/media/13960/download/pdf/norfolk-religious-education-agreed-syllabus-2019.pdf>
- The 2024 Warwickshire and Coventry Agreed Syllabus for RS adopts a Religion and Worldviews approach and also makes use of the different disciplinary lenses. While the document is not Open Access, some resources are, including 'Introducing Religion and Worldviews to Pupils' for EYFS, KS1, KS2, and KS3. The documents and PowerPoints can be accessed here: [Introducing Religion and Worldviews to Pupils – Coventry City Council](#)
- The Religious Education Council for England and Wales (REC) has commissioned a number of resources, including exemplar frameworks. These can be accessed here: <https://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/rwapproach/> and <https://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/resources/advice-for-teachers-others/>.
- The Theos Think Tank animated film "Nobody Stands Nowhere" by Emily Downe, and created in partnership with Culham St Gabriel's Trust and Canterbury Christ Church

University. The film unpacks the idea of worldviews and invites the viewer to consider how their own unique view of the world might co-exist with other, sometimes quite different, vantage points held by those around them. The video can be accessed here:

<https://youtu.be/AFRxKF-Jdos>

- The video “Welcome to a Religion and Worldviews approach” captures teachers’ voices, and summarises the way RS has evolved, as it adopts a W&R approach. The video can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/644860244/64c04865c9>
- Short films (REOnline) explaining the handbook and exemplar frameworks can be accessed here: <https://www.reonline.org.uk/leadership/religion-and-worldviews-approach/>
- The videos used in this training can be accessed here:  
[https://mediaspace.nottingham.ac.uk/playlist/dedicated/1\\_naaf156b/1\\_qdl2vxca](https://mediaspace.nottingham.ac.uk/playlist/dedicated/1_naaf156b/1_qdl2vxca)

Please leave feedback/comments about the resources by clicking [here](#) or scanning the QR code below:



First published 2025

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Video resources were funded by Culham St Gabriel's Trust. This training package was funded by the ESRC.