

Promoting the Exploration of Religion and Worldviews in Schools – Fostering Coherency and Diversity

Baseline Report 1: Setting the Context



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Contents

Introduction	2
Baseline Reports	2
Pre-2015 Reports	4
Key Reports pre-2015	5
Key Themes pre-2015	6
Key Questions raised by pre-2015 reports	6
2015-2018 Reports.....	7
Key Reports 2015-2018.....	7
Key Themes in 2015-2018 reports.....	9
Key Questions raised by 2015-2018 reports.....	9
2018-2020 Reports.....	10
Key Reports 2018-2020.....	12
Key Themes in 2018-2020 reports.....	14
Key Questions raised by 2018-2020 reports.....	14
Reports which focus on TRS at the university level	15
Key Reports about TRS at university	16
Key Themes from university level reports	17
Key Questions from university level reports.....	17

Introduction

Promoting the Exploration of Religion and Worldviews in Schools - Fostering Coherency and Diversity is a project undertaken by The Faith and Belief Forum, The Open University and Inform, with funding from Culham St Gabriel's. The project aims to educate people outside the classroom about the importance of teaching Religion and Worldviews inside the classroom.

The project seeks to better align attitudes of key stakeholders within the education sector, but 'outside the classroom' to the critical importance of good teaching of Religion and Worldviews (RW) inside the classroom. The target groups include parents and local stakeholders, headteachers, school governors, CEOs of MATS as well as civil servants at both local and national levels who have roles in advising and implementing education policy. We will produce resources to help teachers and teacher educators advocate for the crucial importance of a Religion and Worldviews curriculum to school leadership and to parents.

The project will take place over 18 months from February 2021 to June 2022. It has three phases:

In phase 1, we will establish a steering group and conduct baseline research reporting on current opinions on Religion and Worldviews as a subject as well as exploring attitudes to religion in today's Britain that impact schools and government policy.

In phase 2, through a series of roundtable discussions, this project will identify key challenges and insights relevant to promoting a shared vision of Religion and Worldviews education, producing support material and networks required for responding to the challenges identified.

In phase 3, we will produce resources aimed at targeting the challenges identified through insight reports, online resources developed by The Open University, as well as cementing enduring networks.

Baseline Reports

We will produce two baseline reports as part of phase 1 of the project. *Baseline Report 1: Setting the Context* (this report) and *Baseline Report 2: Gauging Public Perception* (to be published in Autumn 2021).

Baseline Report 1 provides an overview of the existing reports relative to both Religious Education (RE) and to the perception of religion in public life more generally. Whilst the focus is on policy reports and those written by think tanks and RE professional organisations, mention will also be made of relevant academic work and of policy developments. The focus of the report is on England only.

The baseline reports in general focus on the period 2015-2020 as a manageable five-year period for data collection, and with 2015 significant as the year in which three influential reports were published (see below). However, this context-setting report will also reference relevant pre-2015 reports and policy developments.

Reports will be organised into three chronological periods:

- 1) Reports written before 2015 which point towards a growing crisis in RE
- 2) Reports written in the period 2015-2018 which call for significant changes in RE

- 3) The Report of the Commission on RE (CoRE) in 2018 and subsequent reports which focus on the implementation of its recommendations, including the new vision of Religion and Worldviews (RW).

This part of the report will end with a fourth section focusing on RE/RS (Religious Studies) at the university level, including British Academy reports on Arts, Humanities and Social Science students, and on the status of TRS (Theology and Religious Studies), as well as reactions to these reports.

Whilst it must be recognised that many Arts and Humanities subjects, at both school and university level, are struggling with similar issues to RE, including exclusion from the EBacc (Art and Music) and lack of teacher investment and training, this report focuses only on RE.

Pre-2015 Reports

In the five years prior to 2015 there were a number of educational policy developments which had a detrimental effect on RE. These include:

- RE was not included in the EBacc, introduced in 2010 as a new performance measure for schools' 'core' academic subjects (English, Maths, Sciences, a language and History or Geography). The implication is that RE, alongside creative subjects such as Art, Music and Drama, are not considered 'core' academic subjects. The current Conservative government aims for 90 per cent of students to study the EBacc by 2025,¹ suggesting a further neglect of RE.
- RE was not included in the review of the national curriculum, undertaken by the Coalition government, in 2011-2013. This was because of RE's unique status as a compulsory but non-national curriculum subject determined, in state schools, by locally agreed syllabuses with input from SACREs (standing advisory council on RE).
- There has also been an increase in types of schools operating in England since 2010, with different provisions for RE. These include Academies (first introduced by Labour in 2000 but increasing after the Coalition government's Academies Act 2010) and Free Schools which are outside the remit of SACREs.
- There have been calls for a national strategy for RE since at least the early 2000s – with the development of the National Framework by the Department for Education and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in 2004. However, Ofsted (2007) found the Framework was not being used coherently and suggested it become statutory with RE as a national curriculum subject. The Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC) published a new non-statutory national curriculum framework for RE in 2013.
- In 2007, a duty was placed on schools to promote community cohesion. RE has been seen as an important site for implementation of this duty.
- At the end of 2014, schools were given a new duty to 'embed' the Fundamental British Values (FBVs) in their work, and for Ofsted to inspect this. FBVs are primarily the remit of SMSC (Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development), which inevitably has an overlap with RE.
- Between 2013-2015, bursaries for RE teachers were removed. Whilst they were reinstated in 2015, they will be removed again from September 2021.²

Reports in this period paint an increasingly gloomy picture of the state of RE despite recognition that it has a vital role to play in social cohesion, good community relations and education in diversity (the term religious literacy is not much used in this period).

Reports from both Ofsted and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education describe the structural barriers to good RE teaching including a lack of qualified RE teachers, a lack of access to CPD (continuing professional development), ad hoc support from SACREs due to funding problems, and questioning the effectiveness of the locally determined syllabus. However, the narrative of community cohesion is intricately tied to the SACREs – with the interaction between school and SACRE seen as an expression of community cohesion.

¹ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn06045/>

² <https://www.natre.org.uk/news/latest-news/removal-of-the-bursary-for-those-training-to-be-secondary-teachers-of-re/>

Ofsted (2010) questioned whether there is sufficient clarity about what constitutes learning in RE (p.42). This contributes to uncertainty about how to assess pupil’s progression. It notes that some teachers of RE are uncertain about what they are trying to achieve in the subject. This can lead to a focus on information gathering rather than developing student’s skills of enquiry. These concerns are stated more strongly in Ofsted (2013).

As a result of the detrimental policy developments and the structural barriers outlined in Ofsted and APPG reports, the REC undertook its own review of RE in 2012-13. This review called for a new non-statutory national curriculum framework for RE, which includes a new statement of purpose for RE (p.14).

There was also academic focus on RE in this time period with the Religion and Society Programme (2007-2013) funding a large multi-disciplinary research project, *Does Religious Education Work?*³ This project states that RE is a subject different to all others on the curriculum and that this has both positive and negative implications, the latter including a range of confusions and contradictions.

Key Reports pre-2015

Name of Report	Author/Organisation	Year Published	Key Points
<i>Making Sense of Religion</i>	Ofsted	2007	“Some progress has been made in enhancing the provision for religious education (RE) in recent years”. “Pupils’ achievement has improved.” World events have “raised the profile of religious education significantly and schools have new responsibilities to promote community cohesion.”
<i>Transforming Religious Education</i>	Ofsted	2010	RE provision in many schools is no better than satisfactory. “There is an urgent need to review the way in which the subject is supported”, including whether current statutory arrangements for local determination of the curriculum are effective and whether there is sufficient clarity about what constitutes learning in RE.
<i>Religious Education: Realising the Potential</i>	Ofsted	2013	The potential of RE – to promote social cohesion and the personal development of students – is not met in the majority of schools. Identifies 8 key challenges and provides recommendations.
<i>RE: The Truth Unmasked</i>	APPG on RE	2013	Focuses on the supply of and support for RE teachers, concluding that both supply and support are inadequate. Eg. 50% of teachers of RE in secondary schools had no RE qualification.

³ Published as James C. Conroy et al (2013) *Does Religious Education Work?: A Multi-dimensional Investigation*. London: Bloomsbury. See also David Lundie (2018) ‘Is RE still not working? Reflections on the Does RE Work? project 5 years on’. *British Journal of Religious Education*, pp. 348-356.

<i>A Review of Religious Education in England</i>	RE Council	2013	<p>Calls for a new non-statutory national curriculum framework for RE and considers some of the opportunities and challenges around implementing this.</p> <p>The report contains the suggested national curriculum framework, as well as a statement of purpose for RE.</p>
<i>RE and Good Community Relations</i>	APPG on RE	2014	<p>Focuses on the role of RE in producing a cohesive society, although recognises that promoting good community relations is only one aspect of RE.</p> <p>RE can help fill the 'religious literacy gap'.</p>

Key Themes pre-2015

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RE's exclusion from the EBacc. • Community cohesion – and the role of RE in implementing this duty. • SACREs also seen as an expression of community cohesion at the same time as the effectiveness of local syllabuses was beginning to be questioned. • Lack of RE teachers and lack of adequate training. • Lack of clarity about the purpose of RE. • Increasing calls for a new non-statutory national curriculum framework for RE.

Key Questions raised by pre-2015 reports

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there still a lack of clarity around what should be included in RE? • Do students still think RE is about 'a matter of opinion'? (Ofsted 2007). • Is the supply and support of RE teachers still inadequate? • Should RE be a national curriculum subject? • Where would this leave SACREs and their members? • How is the unique status of RE a barrier to RW implementation? • Will there be more or less withdrawal of children from RE if it moves to RW?
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2015-2018 Reports

2015 saw the publication of three significant reports (the final report of the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life (CORAB), Clarke and Woodhead’s *A New Settlement* and Dinham and Shaw’s *RE for Real*). These reports share a framework of religious literacy – a call for greater religious literacy in order to support community cohesion. They suggest that religious literacy should begin in the classroom as a space where students are exposed to diversity and where ignorance can be ‘broken down’ (CORAB 2015: 36). The APPG on RE (2016) agreed that school-based RE is central to improving religious literacy but it also suggested that some of the current failings around religious literacy are attributable to the poor provision of RE in schools. However, subsequent policy publications around community cohesion and education, including *The Casey Review: A review into opportunity and integration* (2016) and *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper* (2018), move away from religious literacy to focus more on the promotion of FBVs and promoting integrated schools through admissions and mixing and twinning initiatives.

The academic reports of this period make a strong claim for the RE curriculum to reflect the ‘real’ religious landscape of the UK, most notably the increasing rise in ‘religious nones’ – those who have no religion (52% of the UK population according to the British Social Attitudes Survey 2019). As the rise in religious nones has been noted as generational (BSA 2019), there are increasing numbers of young people who are not religious. They need a good understanding of how the RE curriculum is also relevant to them.

It was in this period that the Commission on RE (CoRE) was established by the RE Council of England and Wales in order to review the legal, education and policy frameworks for RE and make recommendations for improvement. CoRE published an interim report in 2017, *Religious Education for All*, which identified a number of challenges to RE and made recommendations, including a national entitlement and a national plan. *The State of the Nation: A report on Religious Education provision within secondary schools in England* (2017) noted that a significant number of secondary schools (28%) gave no curriculum time to RE provision.

In this period, public policy suggestions and those of academics and RE professionals were generally in line. The central narrative was around the need to increase religious literacy in order to increase community cohesion; that schools were a good place to do this, especially the RE classroom; but that in order to do this well, there must be significant changes to RE. These reports differ from those in the earlier period in their call for a statutory, as opposed to a non-statutory, national curriculum framework for RE.

Key Reports 2015-2018

Name of Report	Author/Organisation	Year Published	Key Points
<i>Living with Difference: community, diversity and the common good</i>	The Woolf Institute for the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life (CORAB)	2015	Chapter 4 is dedicated to how community cohesion can be supported through education. It first identifies four challenges facing RE in schools. It goes on to call for a “statutory entitlement for all schools within the state system for a subject dealing with religious and non-religious worldviews” (p.37).

			It suggests that the REC 2013 proposal should be the way forward and RE should be included as a humanities subject in the EBacc.
<i>A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools</i>	Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead for Westminster Faith Debates	2015	It makes specific recommendations around the RE curriculum including: that RE be renamed 'Religious and Moral Education'; that local agreed syllabus conferences be abolished and RE have a national curriculum; that if the national curriculum is adopted, parents' right to withdraw children from RE should be abolished. It also makes recommendations around the Act of Collective Worship and faith school admissions and employment.
<i>RE for REal: The Future of Teaching and Learning about Religion and Belief.</i>	Adam Dinham and Martha Shaw for Faiths and Civil Society Unit at Goldsmiths, University of London.	2015	10 specific recommendations including: that a statutory National Framework be developed; this should be compulsory to age 16; the role of SACREs should be reviewed; the content of the curriculum should reflect the real religious landscape; GCSE Religious Studies should be demarcated from Citizenship and SMSC; the name of RE should be reviewed (they use the term 'Religion and Belief Learning').
<i>Improving Religious Literacy: A Contribution to the Debate.</i>	APPG on RE	2016	It makes ten recommendations for the DfE focusing on teacher training, but also on time spent on RE and a recommendation that RE is included as a humanities subject in the EBacc (p.23-24). It calls on the government to do more to improve RE "as part of a long-term strategy to improve religious literacy" (2016: 8).
<i>Religious Education for All</i>	Commission on RE (interim report)	2017	Identifies challenges to RE including: its need to reflect the real religious landscape; inconsistency in the quality and provision of RE; the current framework of RE determined by locally agreed syllabuses is not fit for purpose; the policy environment means that head teachers do not consider RE a high-status subject; there is diminishing access to training and support; the quality of RE varies across schools. 4 recommendations: 1) A national entitlement for RE 2) Holding schools to account for the provision and quality of RE 3) A National Plan to improve teaching and learning in RE 4) A renewed and expanded role for SACREs.

<p><i>The State of the Nation: A report on Religious Education provision within secondary schools in England.</i></p>	<p>RE Council, NATRE and RE Today</p>	<p>2017</p>	<p>Focuses on the extent to which schools in England meet their statutory requirements to teach RE. It found that provision varied by type of school, with schools with a religious character offering the most provision and academies least (with schools following a local syllabus falling in the middle). It makes 15 specific recommendations for the DfE, school leaders, Ofsted and parents/carers.</p>
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Key Themes in 2015-2018 reports

- The importance of religious literacy – as an end in itself or for community cohesion.
- The need of RE to reflect the ‘real religious landscape’, especially the rise of ‘religious nones’.
- Not all schools are fulfilling their legal duty to teach RE.
- A move from calls for a non-statutory national curriculum framework for RE to a statutory one.
- Commission on RE established and called for a National Entitlement and a National Plan.

Key Questions raised by 2015-2018 reports

- Is the aim of increasing religious literacy a useful way of thinking about RE?
- How is RE impacted by government duties to teach FBVs and to prevent radicalisation?
- How does RE overlap with SMSC and Citizenship?
- Is RE being taught in other lessons instead of a dedicated lesson? (as the Association of School and College Leaders stated in response to *State of the Nation*).
- How should the curriculum incorporate the rise of ‘religious nones’? – what particular challenges and benefits does this bring?

2018-2020 Reports

This period is marked by the publication of the final report of the Commission on Religious Education, *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward. A National Plan for RE*, published in September 2018 (henceforth referred to as CoRE 2018). The report proposes a national plan with three elements:

- 1) a new vision reflected in the new name 'Religion and Worldviews'.
- 2) a statutory National Entitlement applied to all schools and subject to inspection.
- 3) sustained investment in teacher education and development combined with a re-envisioning of the structures of local support.

Subsequent reports and events are in conversation with CoRE as the benchmark for the new plan, curriculum, and proposed name.

Professional RE organisations, think tanks with an interest in the public role of religion, and academics with an interest in RE have held numerous events and produced different materials following CoRE 2018. These reflect on the best way to implement its recommendations. These include Theos's briefing paper, *The Future of Religious Education in England and Wales: Debating Reform* (2018), based on a series of roundtables which debated existing reports and set out further recommendations. Participants at the roundtables had noted a mismatch between RE professionals' views and those of the general public on the value of RE and the paper suggested that the Department for Education should take steps to address the misconceptions about the value and aims of RE (p.8).

Academics have also been involved in events further debating the CoRE recommendations, such as the 'Worldviews in RE and RS Panel' at BASR 2020 organised by Dr Wendy Dossett⁴ and 'The New Worldview Paradigm in RE: Implications for the Nonreligious?' (December 2020), part of the Understanding Unbelief programme at the University of Kent.⁵

In 2020, the RE Council, recognising the lack of clarity around the term worldviews (and academic criticism of the term as being linked to colonialism), commissioned two pieces of work: a literature review of the term worldview in different academic disciplines, *Worldview: A Multidisciplinary Report*, and a series of discussion papers based on roundtables with academics held over the summer of 2020, *The Worldview Project: Discussion Papers*. These are complemented by the Theos report, *Worldviews in Religious Education* (2020), which seeks to address some of the criticisms that have been levelled against CoRE through further exploration of the potential of worldviews as both a concept and an approach. The report argues that personal worldviews should be at the heart of this new RE, with a focus on lived experience over institutional prescriptions, and that learning how to interpret information should take precedence over acquisition of information (p.8-9).

The reports noted above state that there has been resistance to implementing CoRE both from:

- a number of religious groups who are concerned about the potential dilution of RE through the inclusion of non-religious worldviews and exploration of the categories religion and worldviews, including the Catholic Education Service and the Board of Deputies of British Jews (see special interest groups section in this report).

⁴ Available at <http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/religious-studies/?p=1144>

⁵ See <https://www.kent.ac.uk/events/event/46876/the-new-worldview-paradigm-in-re-implications-for-the-nonreligious>

- from government who have stated that they are not in a position to implement the recommendations, see, for example,
 - Damian Hinds MP response to CoRE⁶
 - the House of Lords debate, 17th December 2018⁷
 - The House of Commons briefing paper, *Religious Education in Schools (England)*, 10th October 2019.

The terminology of religious literacy is largely absent post CoRE 2018, which recognises the importance of this field without directly using the term. Numerous academics are continuing investigation of the religious literacy theme, however, including Martha Shaw (2019),⁸ Gert Biesta, David Aldridge, Patricia Hannam and Sean Whittle (2019)⁹ and Patricia Hannam and Gert Biesta (2019).¹⁰ Other academics have questioned the religious literacy framework altogether. Russell T. McCutcheon (2020),¹¹ for example, whilst not talking about RE per se, argues that religious literacy is a political project which does not interrogate the constructed category of religion itself.

The theme of religious literacy is also found in reports and initiatives focused on religion in the workplace, such as the *McKenzie- Delis Packer Review* (2020). These reports tend to be framed around discussion of the nine protected characteristics of the Equality Act (2010), of which religion and belief is one. They also note the positive implications of diverse workplaces, and are relevant to discussions about the importance of RE as they highlight the increased need for people to be religiously literate in the workplace.

RE professional's organisations have continued to highlight how current government policies have a detrimental impact on RE. NATRE, for instance, has explored the DfE's School Workforce Census to show that provision of RE at key stage 4 reduced between 2015 and 2016¹² and again between 2018 and 2019.¹³ NATRE attributes this in large part to the exclusion of RE from the EBacc. Academic research has argued that schools' neglect of RE to focus on other EBacc subjects is counterproductive as these schools are not significantly higher in league tables (see David Lundie and Mi Young Ahn 2019).

⁶ <https://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Letter-to-The-Very-Reverend-Doctor-John-Hall-from-Rt-Hon-Damian-Hinds-MP...-1.jpg>

⁷ <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2018-12-17/debates/A497B8C8-9BE9-4975-95E3-91F4748A98AC/ReligiousEducation?highlight=%27religious%20education%27#main-content>

⁸ Shaw, M (2019) 'Towards a Religiously Literate curriculum – Religion and Worldview Literacy as an Educational Model', *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 41(2): 150-161.

⁹ See *Religious Literacy: A Way Forward for Religious Education?*

¹⁰ Hannam, P and Biesta, G (2019) 'Religious education, a matter of understanding? Reflections on the final report of the Commission on Religious Education' *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 40:1.

¹¹ McCutcheon, R. T (2020) 'Religious Literacy and Our Pre-Critical Past', *e-Rhizome*, vol 2 (2): 81-91.

¹²

<https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Free%20Resources/NATRE%20Report%20on%20the%20provision%20for%20RE%202018.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Free%20Resources/NATRE%20SWF%20report%20-data%20pub%202020%20.pdf>

Key Reports 2018-2020

Name of Report	Author/Organisation	Year Published	Key Points
<i>A New Settlement Revised: Religion and Belief in Schools</i>	Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead for Westminster Faith Debates	2018	This states that the legal requirements around RE, marking it off as a unique subject, are outdated and a hindrance: a change in law is required. Their main argument is for an agreed national syllabus (and hence for the abolishment of the locally-determined syllabuses; SACREs should provide support and resources for local schools but the curriculum should be set by a new National Advisory Council).
<i>Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward. A National Plan for RE</i>	Commission on RE (final report)	2018	Proposes a national plan with three elements: 1) a new vision reflected in the new name 'Religion and Worldviews'. 2) a statutory National Entitlement applied to all schools and subject to inspection. 3) sustained investment in teacher education and development combined with a re-envisioning of the structures of local support.
<i>The Future of Religious Education in England and Wales: Debating Reform</i>	Theos	2018	Summarises roundtable discussions held in 2017 and analyses the three reports: State of the Nation, A New Settlement Revised, and CoRE. It also sets out additional recommendations.
<i>Religious Education in Schools (England)</i>	House of Commons Briefing Paper by Robert Long, Philip Loft and Shadi Danechi	2019	Sets out the rules and regulations around RE in state-funded schools in England, as well as the government response to CoRE and to some of the other key reports. It states that the government will not be undertaking any further reforms to the curriculum (p.8).
<i>GCSE Religious Studies: At a Crossroads. Mapping the impact of change in England 2017-18</i>	David Lundie and Mi Young Ahn	2019	Notes a fall in the number of students taking Religious Studies GCSE between 2017 and 2018, especially in schools without a religious character, and notes that it is schools which have a higher number of students on free school meals which are dropping RS GCSE. Hypothesises that a reason for this is a focusing on EBacc subjects. However, schools which dropped RS GCSE did not have significantly higher attainment figures for EBacc subjects (p.4, 9).
<i>Religious Literacy: A Way Forward for Religious Education?</i>	Gert Biesta, David Aldridge, Patricia Hannam and Sean Whittle for Culham St Gabriel's	2019	Seeks to "provide further clarity about the idea of religious literacy, both as an aim for religious education and as an organising principle for curriculum, pedagogy and assessment" (p.4).

			It reflects on the wider issues and implications around religious literacy rather than providing any definitive answer as to whether it is the way forward.
<i>Worldview: A Multidisciplinary Report</i>	Celine Benoit, Tim Hutchings and Rachel Shillitoe for the REC	2020	A literature review of the term worldview in different academic disciplines.
<i>The Worldview Project: Discussion Papers</i>	Amira Tharani for the REC	2020	A series of discussion papers based on five roundtables with 13 academics held over the summer of 2020. The papers focus on: worldview as both a concept and an approach; understandings of worldview in the classroom; academic rigour and disciplinary knowledge; and worldviews and power, exploring key issues.
<i>Worldviews in Religious Education</i>	Trevor Cooling with Bob Bowie and Farid Panjwani for Theos	2020	This report responds to the criticisms of CoRE, further develops the idea of “worldview” and explores its implications for the classroom.
<i>Cohesive Societies: Faith and Belief</i>	Theos for the Faith and Belief Forum	2020	This report seeks to balance the securitisation of cohesion by focusing on “different ways in which faith and belief interacts with societal cohesion” (p.3). Whilst RE is not mentioned specifically in the report, the Faith and Belief Forum’s School Linking programme is provided as a case study of a practical intersection between faith and social cohesion (p. 40).
<i>How We Get Along: The Diversity Study of England Wales 2020</i>	The Woolf Institute	2020	The results of a two-year study which included surveys of more than 11,000 adults in order to gain a picture of personal attitudes to diversity. The headline findings of the report are generally positive although religious diversity is valued slightly less than ethnic diversity.
<i>McKenzie-Delis Packer Review</i>	DIAL Global in association with Ipsos MORI, the United Nations GC and UpReach	2020	A survey of 79 companies about diversity and inclusion in the UK workplace, in order to create a diagnostic tool kit for best practice. In terms of religion, 87% “of participating organisations recognise the benefits of a diverse workforce that includes a wide range of religions or beliefs” (p.75).

Key Themes in 2018-2020 reports

- Publication of CoRE final report – most reports of this period are in conversation with this:
 - Explore the proposed name change and the term ‘worldviews’
 - Stress the importance of personal worldviews / lived experience
 - But resistance to CoRE – especially from some religious groups and from government.
- Religious literacy absent from these reports but still explored by academics and in Diversity and Inclusion in the workplace reports.
- Schools still not fulfilling their legal duty around teaching RE, likely because of its exclusion from the EBacc.

Key Questions raised by 2018-2020 reports

- What are the main points of resistance to CoRE recommendations?
- What could encourage a governmental policy change?
 - Evidence of more support for the change from parents?
 - Or is this not so important as change implemented in the classroom? (legislation can ‘catch up’ – as it did with teaching the ‘world religions’ paradigm in the 1970s).
- What are religious groups’ concerns?
- What do RE teachers think is the purpose of RE?
- What do parents think is the purpose of RE?
- Could the government be encouraged to include the new RW vision in the EBacc?

Reports which focus on TRS at the university level

In thinking about the public understanding of RE and how best to promote CoRE's recommendations, it is useful to engage with how RS (Religious Studies) is taught at the university level. TRS-UK (Theology and Religious Studies in Higher Education) is the main organisation providing this valuable linking work and, through its schools engagement programme, it seeks to "improve the perception of TRS and RE within education more widely".¹⁴ It provides numerous resources for both RE teachers and students and has created a video series of TRS graduates discussing the ways in which their degrees have been invaluable in their varied and successful careers.¹⁵ TRS-UK claims that "Graduates in TRS have among the highest employment rates of all students",¹⁶ that graduate employers appreciate their understanding of a breadth of methodologies and that they are well suited to careers which require further training as well as careers in government, social work and the third sector.¹⁷

These claims build on a number of British Academy (BA) reports which focus on the positive contributions of Arts, Humanities and Social Science (AHSS) university students (which includes TRS students). These include *The Right Skills: Celebrating Skills in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* (2017) and *Qualified for the Future: Quantifying demand for arts, humanities and social science skills* (2020).

However, there is also a BA report which has proved to be more controversial. In 2019, the BA produced *Theology and Religious Studies Provision in UK Higher Education* as a pilot study of a small discipline within its remit. The report assesses the health of the subject and its findings are overwhelmingly negative including that there is a downward trend of enrolment on TRS courses since 2012; that the changes to fees and funding from 2012 have contributed to this trend but TRS has not 'bounced back' like other humanities subjects; that whilst 64% of TRS undergraduates are women, TRS staff are predominantly white, male, and ageing; and that the teaching of religion is now dispersed and less likely to be housed in specific TRS departments. Needless to say, there has been a backlash from TRS academics. In January 2021, the BASR (British Association for the Study of Religions) published its own report, *BASR Response to the 2019 British Academy Report*, which provides a number of counterclaims. Its main argument is that "in eliding Theology and RS, the BA Report has critically misrepresented RS" (p.4) and has, in fact, damaged it further. Subsequent commentary in the Catholic magazine, *The Tablet*, criticised the BASR report's negative portrayal of Theology.¹⁸ The disciplinary identities of Theology and Religious Studies at the university level remains a contested field. The impact of these debates and disagreements when bringing school-based RE into closer alignment with the university level should be recognised. Parallel concerns about a theological versus a more sociological approach can be seen in some of the concerns around CoRE recommendations, especially amongst some religious stakeholders such as the Catholic Education Service.

¹⁴ <https://trs.ac.uk/teachers-of-re/overview/>

¹⁵ <https://trs.ac.uk/studying-trs/graduate-videos/>

¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/TheologyandReligiousStudiesUK>

¹⁷ <https://trs.ac.uk/academics/what-can-i-do-with-a-degree-in-trs/>

¹⁸ <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/13893/religious-studies-in-danger-of-becoming-invisible-> and <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/blogs/1/1728/why-firm-statistical-evidence-must-underpin-decisions-about-the-future-of-theology-and-religious-studies>

Key Reports about TRS at university

Name of Report	Author/Organisation	Year Published	Key Points
<i>The Right Skills: Celebrating Skills in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences</i>	BA	2017	Identifies three core sets of skills which AHSS students develop: “communication and collaboration; research and analysis and; attitudes and behaviours characterised by independence and adaptability” (p.9). The report argues that AHSS students make significant contributions to the economy and to society and that they will increasingly do so in the future. It argues that “The UK must recognise and invest in these high-level skills” (p.12).
<i>Theology and Religious Studies Provision in UK Higher Education</i>	BA	2019	A pilot study which assesses the health of TRS and which reaches concerning conclusions including that TRS is at a ‘critical junction’ having experienced a reduction in the number of students by one-third since the 2012 fees and funding reforms in England.
<i>Qualified for the Future: Quantifying demand for arts, humanities and social science skills</i>	BA	2020	Builds on the 2017 report by providing quantifiable evidence (in the form of analysis of the Labour Force Survey) for the benefits of AHSS skills. Key findings are that AHSS students are highly employable (88% in employment); they underpin key sectors of the UK economy, including the fastest growing areas; and AHSS students have the skills that employers need now and in the future (p.5-6).
<i>BASR Response to the 2019 British Academy Report</i>	BASR	2021	Provides a counter-argument to the BA Report. Argues that the BA report shows a misunderstanding of RS and it is damaging to elide it so strongly with Theology. It argues that RS has been ‘side-lined’ by Theology when it is actually RS which attracts students (p.22). It calls for a stronger RS identity.

Key Themes from university level reports

- AHSS students, including TRS graduates, have high employment rates.
- The British Academy has taken a negative view of the health of TRS as a university subject.
- The BASR has criticised this view, and the eliding of Religious Studies with Theology.
- Concerns around different disciplinary approaches to studying religion also play out in concerns around CoRE (e.g. the Catholic Education Service).

Key Questions from university level reports

- How do we ensure that RE at school and RS at university are in alignment?
 - Is this a realistic and desirable goal?
 - Is RW the best way forward?
 - How does RW relate to de-colonialising the curriculum?
 - How does RW relate to lived religion and the turn to practice, embodiment and affective dimensions?
 - How does it relate to debates over the value and goals of religious literacy?
- How do we further promote the positive contributions/employability of TRS students?
- How do we promote the skills learnt in RE/RW as essential for the workplace?
 - What are the essential skills? - Valuing diversity? Methodologies/critical thinking?
- Will concerns and misunderstandings about the relationships between Theology and RS play out in RW?
- Is the conflation of theological and sociological/ social historical approaches damaging to subject understanding and its perceived relevance?
- Can RW be communicated in a way that improves the situation?