

**Worldviews and RE Syllabuses Kate Hinton**

**What is Meant by Worldviews**

The English word ‘worldview’ is a translation of the German term *weltanschauung* which is associated with German philosophers such as Kant and Hegel. It can be described as a philosophy of life or an approach to life. Others describe it as a lens to make sense of the world or a model of the world and our place in it.

It has been proposed that a worldview encompasses answers to very basic and universal questions now linked to six main branches of philosophy

* What do I know? (epistemology)
* How do I know it? (logic)
* Where do we come from? (metaphysics)
* What is good? (ethics)
* What is beautiful? (aesthetics)
* How do we act? (political philosophy)

Drawing from a number of sources, and summarised in several publications / websites, a world view should seek to:

explain the nature of the world; give us direction; tell us what to value; tell us how to act; explain what we can know; provide consistency and coherence to the story we tell ourselves; incorporate facts that we encounter; explain how things function; tell us why we are the way we are; yield insights into our feelings and emotions; tell us how to organise politically; help us choose future paths; uncover the origins of the universe and life itself; give us meaning and purpose; answer questions about gods and other mysteries; tell us what is good, what is truth, and what is beauty; help us feel less terrified of death; shed light on our joys and sorrows; guide us through our darker hours.

**Personal and Institutionalised Worldviews**

It is widely recognized that every individual has a personal worldview, although it may often be held unconsciously and only brought to the surface in times of crisis or uncertainty. Many worldviews are organized and shared among particular groups and sometimes embedded in institutions and their associated practices.

Hence the distinction between personal and institutional worldviews.

Personal worldviews may well draw extensively from institutionalised views but are also likely to be influenced by family, friends, sense of identity, social and justice contexts, stories in books and on screen, education, plus direct life experience.

Personal views are not fixed and individuals may change their worldview over time in the light of experience and reflection. This may mean that they also change their religious beliefs and affiliations.

In the context of teaching and learning about RE, it is the personal worldviews which particularly need to be articulated by both teachers and pupils.

**Why Worldviews Now**

The importance of worldviews became increasingly clear during the 20th Century, partly because of the increasing contact between cultures and the increasing amount of information, as well as mis-information, readily available to us.

Recent reviews of the RE curriculum in England and Wales, particularly the *CORE Report 2018 Religion and Worldviews*, recognize that it needs to reflect the contemporary society, including the diversity of religious beliefs and the increased interaction between people of different religions/worldviews. Additionally, the fact that a great many people (maybe as many as 50% of the British population) identify as not belonging to a religion presents a rather different context.

**How are Worldviews Categorized**

There is some variation in the way worldviews are categorized and which are appropriate to study. This usually includes:

* the main institutional religions - Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism
* non-religious worldviews which address philosophical questions as listed above, such as Humanism, Confucianism, existentialism

**NB** Atheism, agnosticism, and political belief systems are not included here as worldviews, since they do not address the philosophical questions above. They may, however, be studied as important concepts of a different kind.

A fuller diversity of religious and non-religious worldviews may also draw from:

* globally important beliefs and worldviews, some ancient, some living, from China, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, African countries, the Americas.

**Implications for Curricula**

The worldview approach is seen as representing a paradigm shift or a reframing of the curriculum rather than the adding of a lot more content, although some additional content is likely to be needed in relation to non-religious worldviews which have rarely been included in the past.

Increasing numbers of syllabuses in the North East, as well as nationally (over 90%), now include Humanism as the main example of a non-religious worldview. The Newcastle syllabus is one such example.

**Newcastle Agreed Syllabus**

**Religion and Worldviews | A Journey of Discovery**

The title in itself indicates the shift towards a worldview approach and this is made clear in all the requirements of the syllabus such as:

‘Programmes of study must reflect the different ways in which religions and worldviews can be understood, interpreted and studied, including through a wide range of academic disciplines, and through direct encounter and discussion with individuals and communities who hold the worldviews. Programmes of study must reflect the complex, diverse and plural nature of worldviews.’

The syllabus requires specific religions and non-religious worldviews to be taught at different Key Stages, as well as others that may be taught. Humanism is compulsory at KS2 and KS3.

Throughout the syllabus the term ‘religions and worldviews’ is used. There are repeated requirements to make comparisons between them, rather than to teach them all separately, and to draw out the significance of particular beliefs and practices in terms of their contribution to a worldview.

**Ofsted Research**

In a recent Ofsted Research Review of religious education three types of knowledge are identified as the pillars of progression:

The evolution of society’s religious and non-religious landscape highlights that it is all the more important for pupils to build up accurate knowledge of the complexity and diversity of global religion and non-religion.

‘Getting better’ at RE both at primary and secondary level comprises knowing more and remembering more of these pillars as they are set out within the RE curriculum:

* first, ‘substantive’ knowledge: knowledge about various religious and non-religious traditions
* second, ‘ways of knowing’: pupils learn ‘how to know’ about religion and non-religion
* third, ‘personal knowledge’: pupils build an awareness of their own presuppositions and values about the religious and non-religious traditions they study

In high-quality RE curriculums, these 3 types of knowledge are not artificially separated from each other. For example, when subject leaders plan a sequence of specific content and concepts for pupils to study, they also need to consider the most appropriate methods that pupils need to know to study that content.

**Implications for Teachers**

In order to make this paradigm shift, teachers need to:

* be well informed about the range of religions and worldviews that are included in the syllabus they teach
* be aware of and articulate their own worldview
* limit the influence of their worldview on their teaching
* know how to encourage pupils to reflect on worldviews and articulate their own.

There is no one way to go about this and individual teachers can select an approach that feels comfortable for them.

The philosophical questions in the first paragraph above provide plenty of opportunities for self-reflection. The sources listed below also provide questions and ideas as ways of exploring and articulating personal beliefs.

**Sources**

CORE Report 2018 Religion and Worldviews

<https://www.commissiononre.org.uk/final-report-religion-and-worldviews-the-way-forward-a-national-plan-for-re/>

Newcastle Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education 2020-25

<https://www.servicestoschools.org.uk/Services/1605>

Ruth Flanagan NASACRE Virtual training session (PPT presentation)

<https://nasacre.org.uk/file/nasacre/1-261-workshop-g-worldviews-nasacre-may-2021-participant-view-ruth-flanagan.pdf>

Humanists UK Guide to non-religious worldviews (brief paper)

<https://understandinghumanism.org.uk/teaching-about-humanism/what-is-and-isnt-a-worldview/>

Ed Gibney What Can Evolution Teach Us About Humanism? (PPT Presentation)

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335603101_What_Can_Evolution_Teach_Us_About_Humanism>

Nobody Stand Nowhere Short animation about worldviews from Theos <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AFRxKF-Jdos>

Trevor Cooling World views in Religious Education (short video)

<https://www.reonline.org.uk/research/research-of-the-month/what-does-the-shift-to-worldview-mean-for-teachers/>

Ofsted Research Review Series - Religious education (lengthy report)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-review-series-religious-education/research-review-series-religious-education>

Julian Baggini How the World Thinks (whole book) [World of Books](https://www.wob.com/en-gb/books/julian-baggini/how-the-world-thinks/9781783782307?gclid=CjwKCAiApfeQBhAUEiwA7K_UHwDCu_7xegFV75e_mCRO76F11bb4o2q0q7rMMTfBTOeVi5Ub2FwDWBoCAkgQAvD_BwE)