

REFORMING RE¹

POWER AND KNOWLEDGE IN A WORLDVIEWS CURRICULUM

This book is a series of reflections on the Commission on Religious Education (2018)²

The commissioners made 11 recommendations, which are below:

THE COMMISSION ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION³

1. A name change to Religion and Worldviews (R&W).
2. A National Entitlement statement, describing pupils' entitlement to curriculum content offered by qualified teachers, which should become statutory for all publicly funded schools.
3. Non-statutory programmes of study, interpreting the National Entitlement, to be written by a national body of professionals, including practising teachers.
4. A legal amendment to remove the requirement on local authorities to produce agreed syllabuses.
5. When GCSE and A level specifications are next reviewed, this should be done in the light of the National Entitlement.
6. All initial teacher education for R&W should be based on the National Entitlement and should have a feasible amount of time allocated as a minimum.
7. Funding for professional development to deliver the National Entitlement.
8. **A legal amendment to SACREs into Local Advisory Networks for R&W, with a more inclusive composition and a wider remit.**
9. Ofsted and faith-based inspections should report on whether schools are meeting the National Entitlement.
10. A reconsideration of the impact of school performance measures such as the EBacc.
11. A review of the right of parents to withdraw their child from RE.

The contents of **REFORMING RE⁴ POWER AND KNOWLEDGE IN A WORLDVIEWS CURRICULUM**

¹ Chater, Mark, *Reforming RE Power and in a Worldviews Curriculum*. Woodbridge, John Catt, 2020.

² Commission on Religious Education (2018)

³ Commission on Religious Education (2018) *Religion and Worldviews: the way forward. A national plan for RE*. London: RE Council.

⁴ Chater, Mark, *Reforming RE Power and in a Worldviews Curriculum*. Woodbridge, John Catt, 2020.

Structure

There are:

- 11 contributors.
- 14 chapters:
- Part 1 *The Fall of RE*, 5 chapters,
- Part 2 *The Rise of Worldviews* 9 chapters
- In Part 1 The contributors agree with the general statements made in the Forward
- In Part 2 There is no general agreement about the solutions to the problems raised.

Forward⁵

‘There is a huge mismatch between statutory expectations for Religious Education and classroom realities.’

‘RE in English schools is in a lamentable state, and this book explains why and how change can happen.’

‘Most worrying situation pupil entitlement: a quarter of secondary schools reported in 2018 that they provided no dedicated curriculum for the subject, 800,000 pupils not receiving legal entitlement to learn about religion and worldview’

PART 1 THE FALL OF RE

Challenge 1: Address the failure to create a credible academic rationale.

Challenge 2: Liberate the subject from the political and economic control of belief communities and other producer interests.

Challenge 3: Ensure the subject’s design is both broad and deep, managing its complex and contested content effectively while creating space for neglected areas.⁶

PART 2: THE RISE OF WORLDVIEWS

⁵ Mary Myatt, *Reforming RE*

⁶ Alan Brine and Mark Chapter 1, *How did we get here?* p.21

The history of RE: the foundational history of RE is the Butler Act (the 1944 Education Act) where it says, ‘a measure of avowedly Christian stewardship: advanced by a Christian minister, passed by a Christian parliament, directed towards the goal of creating a truly Christian population’.⁷

From the beginning, academic expectations were not set. RE was never an academic or critical intellectual project. The original aim of Religious Instruction was to mature children into Christianity.⁸

What do we mean by worldviews?⁹

Immanuel Kant¹⁰ is credited with coining the word weltanschauung, arguably it is from the Berlin philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833 - 1911) that we derive the strongest roots of ‘worldview’ as an epistemological and hermeneutic concept. Dilthey built upon Kant’s ideas about identifying certain objective knowledge and applied it to the social and human sciences. Since knowledge in the human sciences necessarily uses interpretation, Dilthey believed that it must take account of its context in history and culture. Thus he came to the theory that one must stand outside of one’s own worldview and one’s own inherited assumptions, seeing and naming them as one perspective among others. It is mainly to him that we owe the idea of a worldview as a comprehensive account of our existence and of the world, a constructed belief system, one among several.¹¹ His ideas went on to influence early phenomenology as well as psychoanalysis.¹²

I chose the previous two extracts from the book to illustrate the tension, which the book reflects, between faith and reason. The first view gives priority to faith; in the second view reason is first. The book argues that RE should join humanities in the search for understanding through detached reason. It is reflecting our time and culture.

Below is an extract from chapter 13

SACREs must change or fade away

⁷ Green, S. J. D. (2000) ‘The 1944 Education Act: a Church-state perspective’. *Parliamentary History* 19 (1), p. 149.

⁸ Ibid, p.161.

⁹ Mark Chater and Luke Donnellan Chapter 7, *What do we mean by worldviews?* p.115

¹⁰ Immanuel Kant, Prussian philosopher (1724 - 1804).

¹¹ Makkreel, R. and Rodi, F. (eds.) (2010) *Wilhelm Dilthey: selected works, volume 2: understanding the human world*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

¹² Mark Chater and Luke Donnellan Chapter 7, *What do we mean by worldviews?* p.116.

In the commissions vision of the future (Recommendation 8), SACREs would become Local Advisory Networks for Religion and Worldviews (abbreviated to LANs). The LAN would no longer be required to convene agreed syllabus conferences and develop locally agreed syllabuses; but they would be encouraged to develop programmes of study and supplementary materials for use within and across their local authority boundaries, preferably within the parameters provided by a statutory national programme.¹³

As well as the change of name and duty regarding syllabuses, the Commission has also proposed a highly desirable end to the SACRE system of having four groups that each have a single vote on a SACREs decisions. One of the groups is reserved for Church of England representatives, who thus have a veto over any decisions. Another is for all the other religious communities in the area; however many there may be, they still have only one vote between them! A third group is for teachers' associations, and final one is for the local authority. Instead it is proposed that the new LAN consists of five groups:

- teachers of R&W from all phases, including higher education
- school leaders and governors
- ITE and/or CPD providers
- school providers including local authority, multi academy trusts, dioceses, etc.
- religion, belief and other groups that support RE in schools or wish to do so (this might include local museums and galleries as well as religion and belief groups).

Although the Commission does not propose a new system of voting on any decisions made by LAN, an immediate consequence of the new structure would be to end the Church of England's privileged position on SACREs. In addition, the proposal to change membership of the 'other religions' group to 'religion, belief or other group that supports RE in schools' means that non-religious Humanists can be included as a matter of course, rather than having to resort to technical and legal arguments for inclusion on the grounds of equality.¹⁴

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¹³ Commission on Religious Education (2018) *Religion and Worldviews: the way forward. A national plan for RE*. London: RE Council. p.17

¹⁴ Chater, Mark, *Reforming RE Power and in a Worldviews Curriculum*. p. 209.