



Worldviews, religious literacy and interfaith readiness

Bridging the gap between school and university

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Who is this briefing paper for?

This briefing is aimed at a professional readership, particularly those working in the education sector – in schools, colleges and universities – and responds to questions these parties might have about how young people are suitably prepared to learn about, and form attitudes towards, those who are different from themselves.

Acknowledgements

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Findings at a glance

In this briefing, we present findings from academic research that explores the relationships between UK university students' religious literacy, their experiences of religious education (RE) at school, and what we call their 'interfaith learning and development', a multidimensional concept representing students' ability to engage with, and relate across, religion and worldview difference. This research represents the first step in exploring how different types of RE might prepare students for the challenges of university, in which they are often faced with a variety of identities different from their own. This briefing is based on data collected from a national sample of UK university students and revolves around four key questions. A brief response to each is below.

What are UK university students' levels of religious literacy and how do they relate to student experiences of worldview engagement in the school RE classroom?

Framing 'religious literacy' as factual knowledge about the world religions to mirror traditional religious education curricula, we found that just under a third of UK university students have 'low' levels of religious literacy, just under two thirds 'medium' levels, and just over one in ten 'high' levels. Two aspects of worldviews-style engagement in the school RE classroom – talking about your own religious or non-religious worldview, and learning to recognise diversity within religious and non-religious traditions – positively correlate with higher levels of factual knowledge about religion at university. However, **further research is required to better understand how current RE frameworks and worldviews-style learning might coexist or enrich one another.**

Do students with higher levels of religious literacy show more evidence of interfaith learning at university?

Religious literacy is linked to important social outcomes. Namely, students with higher levels of religious literacy have a more developed ability to a) negotiate their own worldview commitments in relation to those that are different, b) proactively engage with others across a range of different worldviews, and c) develop positive attitudes towards those representing a variety of religion and worldview groups. Simply put, **knowing more about religion makes young people better equipped to relate to others who are different from themselves while they are students at university.**

What aspects of worldview-style engagement do university students report experiencing in the school RE classroom?

Over half of our students said they had engaged with worldview-style RE while at school, with proportions increasing as students study RE for longer. Among students' reported experiences of worldview-style engagement in the RE classroom, more reported experiences of learning (e.g. 'I learnt that worldviews can be religious or non-religious'), than experiences of self-expression (e.g. 'I talked about my personal religious or non-religious worldview'). **Less than two thirds of respondents felt their worldviews were respected in the RE classroom;** further research is needed to explore why this might be.

Does worldview-style engagement in the RE classroom prepare students for the challenges of relating to others different from themselves at university, and to what extent?

Different aspects of worldviews-style engagement in the RE classroom relate to distinct yet interlocking measures of 'interfaith readiness' upon entering university. In brief, students who a) recognise the internal diversity of religious and non-religious worldview perspectives held by others in the classroom, b) talk about their personal religious or non-religious worldviews, and c) learn about the internal plurality within religious and non-religious worldviews, enter university better prepared to engage across difference than those who do not.

The context

Interfaith engagement and connecting across religious differences are a daily reality for university students in the United Kingdom. According to recent figures gathered by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (2021-22), approximately 2.86 million people are studying at UK universities. Recent nationally representative research (Peacock et al. 2023) tells us that just under half of students (48%) identify as 'non-religious', and just under a third (32%) as 'Christian' (encompassing a range of denominations). The remaining 20% range across the Muslim (8%), Hindu (3%), Buddhist (1%), Sikh (0.7%), and Jewish (0.6%) faiths, as well as other religious traditions and identities.

In keeping with the Equality Act, all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are legally required to ensure equality of provision for all students and ensure none are discriminated against on the basis of religion or belief. However, the quality of institutional support varies massively across the sector. Recent tensions surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict, radical on-campus Muslim groups, and the conservative proclamations of evangelical Christian students are just some examples that illustrate the power of religious identities to divide and provoke conflict within university contexts. It is only by understanding how interfaith encounters happen that we can manage them in a way that fosters respect and mutual learning, rather than division and hostility.

While research into religion in campus life has been growing, little has been done to examine the transition young people go through as they move from school to university. How are their pre-university religious commitments challenged by campus life? How do the models of religion taught at school translate into the university experience, and how does the experience of school-based religious education (RE) prepare young people for the religious diversity of university life? Debates about RE have in recent years revolved around proposals to change the curriculum from one based around world religions, to one based around worldviews, reflecting the more complex and fragmented range of

orientations to religion within the contemporary UK, perhaps especially among younger generations. Many do not profess any 'religion' as such, but they do view life through a distinct worldview that includes moral values.

Debates about worldviews education have raised the question of whether it is more desirable to teach RE in terms of knowledge-based learning (e.g. facts about world religions) or in terms of worldviews, i.e. through the appreciation of different perspectives from among a wider spectrum than world religions as traditionally understood. One angle yet to be addressed is how different styles of RE prepare young people for the challenges of higher education, including the faith diversity of the 21st century university campus. We are the first researchers to explore this question, and the present briefing outlines how our findings provide some answers to it.

Our project, *Building Positive Relationships among University Students across Religion and Worldview Diversity*, explored students' interfaith learning and development upon entering, and during, university. This briefing forms part of this project, focusing on the influence of students' experiences of religious education in school prior to transitioning to higher education. We draw upon this empirical data to respond to four key questions:

1. What are UK university students' levels of religious literacy and how do they relate to student experiences of worldview engagement in the school RE classroom?
2. Do students with higher levels of religious literacy show more evidence of interfaith learning at university?
3. What aspects of worldview-style engagement do university students report experiencing in the school RE classroom?
4. Does worldview-style engagement in the RE classroom prepare students for the challenges of relating to others different from themselves at university, and to what extent?

The research

The *Building Positive Relationships among University Students across Religion and Worldview Diversity* project ([download the project's final report here](#)) was modelled on a previous study undertaken in the USA, known by the acronym IDEALS (Interfaith Diversity Experiences and Attitudes Longitudinal Survey)¹; we refer to our own project as 'IDEALS UK', for short. The aim was to conduct the UK's first national study of worldview diversity among university students, taking stock of the facts of diversity, the consequences of diversity, and how this diversity contributes to students' formation as citizens.

We collected data through surveys, interviews, focus groups and observation. This briefing is based on the project's survey data. We conducted two surveys covering 133 UK universities spanning England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Drawing on a nationally representative sample of students, 4,401 were surveyed in Autumn 2021 and 4,618 one year later. The student sample included a proportionate distribution of undergraduates and postgraduates; full-time and part-time students; and home and international students. Each survey represents a snapshot of university life at that time. 1,000 students completed both surveys, and so provided us with data we can use to trace change over time.

The aim was to discover students' attitudes and experiences of religion and worldview diversity and identify best practice for interfaith learning on campus. We asked questions about pre-existing beliefs and values, and students' interfaith experiences at university. Importantly, we included questions aimed at measuring students' religious literacy and establishing the extent to which students have engaged in worldviews-style religious education prior to enrolling at university.²

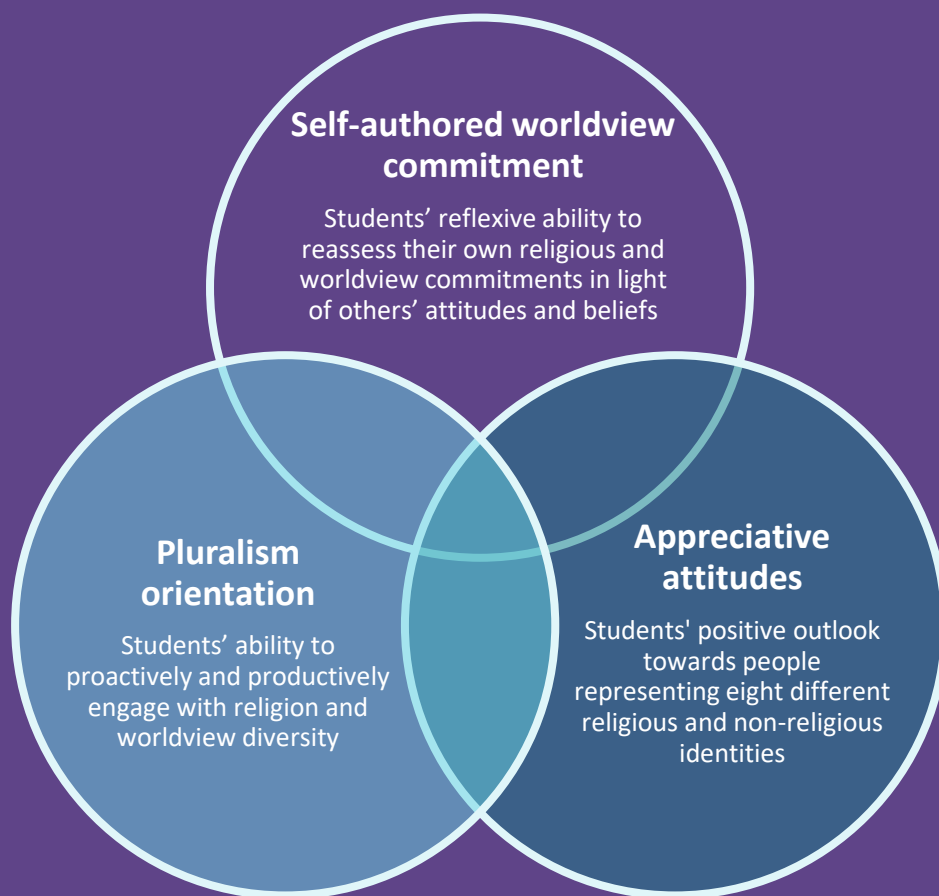
In this briefing, we explore the relationships between students' religious literacy, their experiences of RE at school, and what we call their 'interfaith learning and development' at university. We measured the latter by asking students to respond to 58 different statements. Their responses were used to classify their perspective in terms of three concepts:

1. Self-authored worldview commitment: This is a measure of students' reflexive ability to reassess their own religious and worldview commitments in light of others' attitudes and beliefs. An example statement is 'I have had to reconcile competing religious and non-religious perspectives before committing to my current worldview'.
2. Pluralism orientation: This is a measure of students' ability to proactively and productively engage with religion and worldview diversity. This measure consists of 22 statements representing students' orientation towards global citizenship, goodwill towards others of different worldviews, appreciation of interreligious commonalities and differences, and commitment to interfaith leadership and service.
3. Appreciative attitudes: This measure reflects whether students have a positive outlook towards, and feel a sense of commonality with, people representing eight religious and non-religious identities (Atheists, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, and 'religious people' in general). We also asked students to what extent they agree that people from each of these religion and worldview groups make positive contributions to society and are ethical as individuals.

¹ IDEALS (Interfaith Diversity Experiences and Attitudes Longitudinal Survey) was a multi-university study led by Matthew Mayhew and Alyssa Rockenbach at Ohio State and North Carolina State Universities respectively, and aimed to cultivate interfaith learning and development among US-based students. Over 20,000 students participated in the study from 122 US colleges and universities between 2015-19. For more information, see <https://ifyc.org/ideals>. Mayhew and Rockenbach were both Co-Is for our UK-based project.

² Throughout the report, we talk about findings that our analysis has shown to be 'statistically significant'. By this, we mean that we can be at least 95% confident that our findings have not occurred by chance.

'Interfaith learning and development': A multidimensional concept



We presented students with the following definition of 'worldview', adopted from our project's predecessor in the US:

The term 'worldview' describes a guiding philosophy or outlook on life, which may be based on a particular religious tradition, spiritual orientation, non-religious perspective, or some combination of these. For example, you might be a socialist, a vegan, a Muslim, a feminist or an atheist. Worldviews are perspectives that guide the way we live our life and affect our decisions, the relationships we build, etc. You can think of your worldview as the lens that makes up how you view the world.

We recognise the contestation around defining and operationalising 'worldview' as a concept, and are mindful of the live debates about its usefulness within the context of RE in schools. Our preference was to opt for the most all-encompassing definition in order to underline its inclusivity. It was, we felt, important to endorse and work with an

understanding that includes all human experience in order to ensure the enfranchisement of our survey respondents, and to avoid any risk of particular groups being viewed as privileged within the study.

The following two sections present our research findings. In the next section, we report on university students' levels of religious literacy, explore to what extent these are connected to worldviews-style engagement RE at school, and respond to the question of whether better factual knowledge about religion relates to greater interfaith skills at university. In the second section, we explore the aspects of worldviews-style religious education university students reported experiencing at school, before considering how these experiences influenced students' willingness to learn more about religion and worldviews after leaving school, and prepared students for the religion and worldview diversity of university life. The report closes with key questions for consideration and reflection.

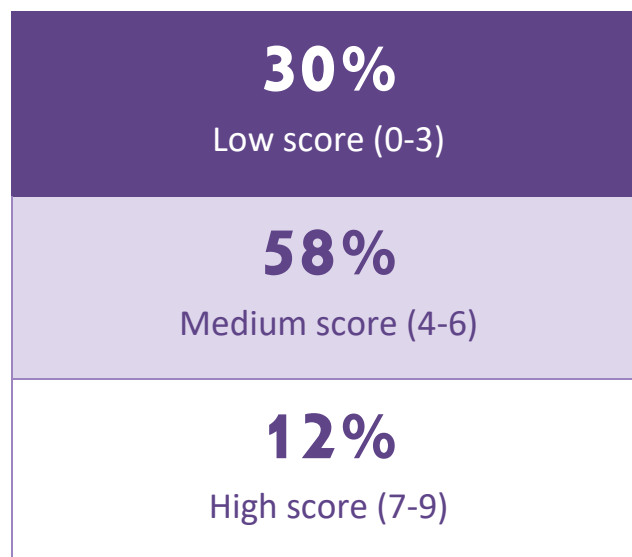
Religious literacy as appreciative knowledge

In our second survey (Autumn 2022), we established UK university students' levels of religious literacy. Mirroring our project's predecessor in the US, we view religious literacy as 'appreciative knowledge', or factual knowledge about different religious traditions that can act as a foundation for understanding; these facts represent "information students might retain as a result of appreciating worldview differences" (Mayhew and Rockenbach 2021: 4).

We asked all students to respond to the following nine statements, telling us if they believe them to be true or false:³

- Muslims believe that the Qur'an was revealed to Mohammed by an angel
- Buddha means 'enlightened one'
- Hindus believe in reincarnation
- King Solomon was the son of King David in the Bible
- Jews worship Moses as divine
- The Qur'an is written in Arabic
- The holiest part of the Jewish Bible is called the Torah
- Christians believe that Jesus was resurrected on Good Friday
- The Immaculate Conception refers to the belief that Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus

After excluding international students from our analysis⁴, on average, students responded correctly to between four and five statements. Just under a third received a score of three or below (what we call a 'low' score), just under two thirds scored between four and six (a 'medium' score), and the remainder – just over one in ten students - responded correctly to between seven and nine statements (a 'high' score).



As can be seen in Chart 1, more than seven in ten students responded correctly that the statements 'The Qur'an is written in Arabic' and 'Hindus believe in reincarnation' are true (77% and 71%). Fewer than a third of students, however, gave correct responses to the statements 'Christians believe that Jesus was resurrected on Good Friday' (31%), 'Jews worship Moses as divine' (24.8%) and 'The Immaculate Conception refers to the belief that Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus' (8.8%). Students were also given the option to respond with 'don't know'; more than half (52%) responded as such in response to the statement 'King Solomon was the son of King David in the Bible'.

It is difficult to speculate as to why students might do better on some questions than on others, especially as the results below do not follow any obvious pattern. It is worth underlining, though, how few fall into our 'high score' category – barely 1 and 10 students, by this measure, have high levels of religious literacy.

³ We adopt the statements used by Christian think tank Theos, as part of their 2020-2022 'Religion and Science' project. This religious literacy scale was integrated into a YouGov-conducted survey of over 5,000 UK adults. If their general public results are published, we will be able to compare our findings to identify what differences, if any, exist among the university population.

⁴ We chose to exclude international students from this analysis in order to restrict it to those students who experienced RE in UK schools.

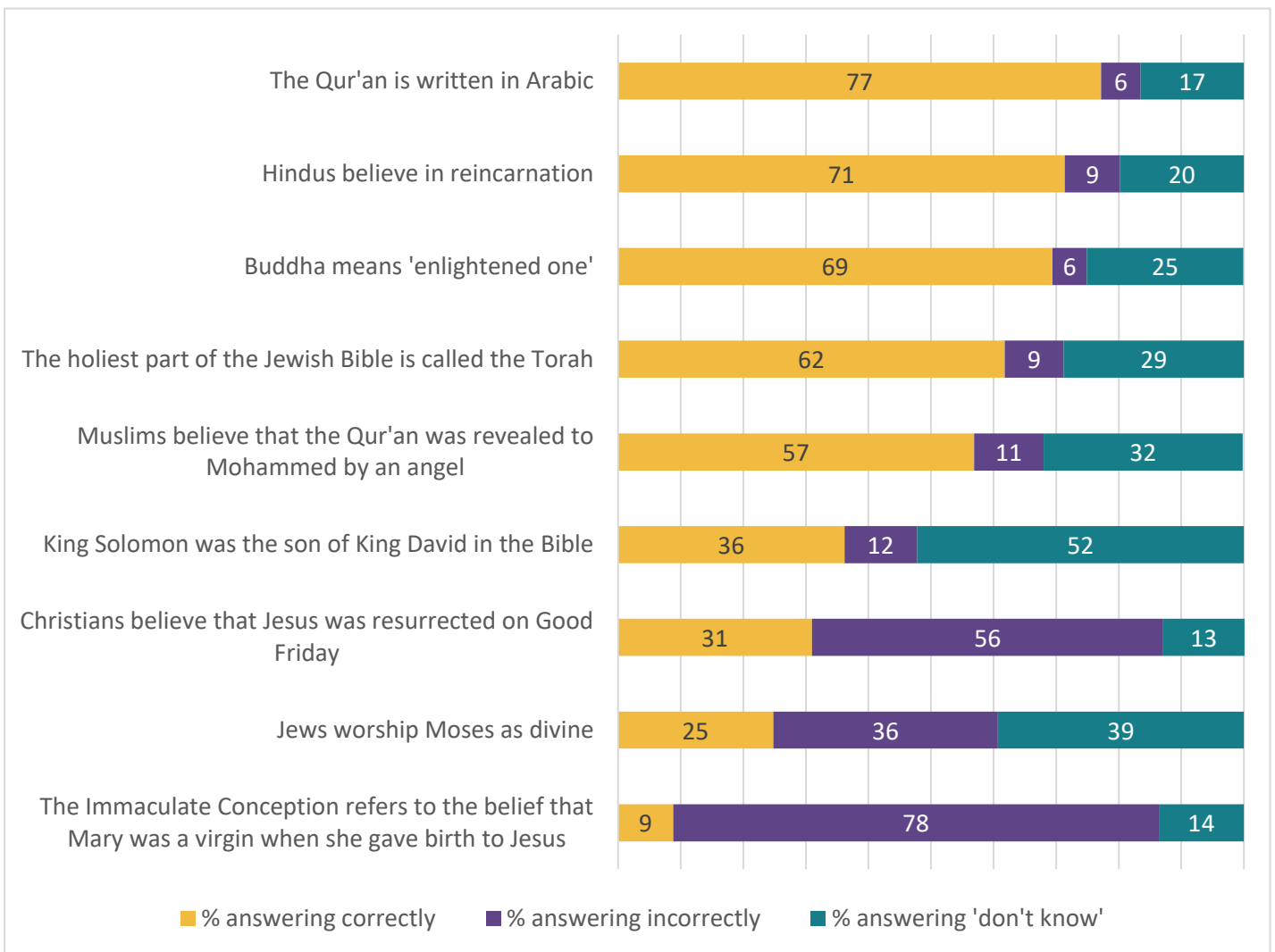


Chart 1: The % of students who responded correctly, incorrectly, or 'don't know' to nine religious literacy statements

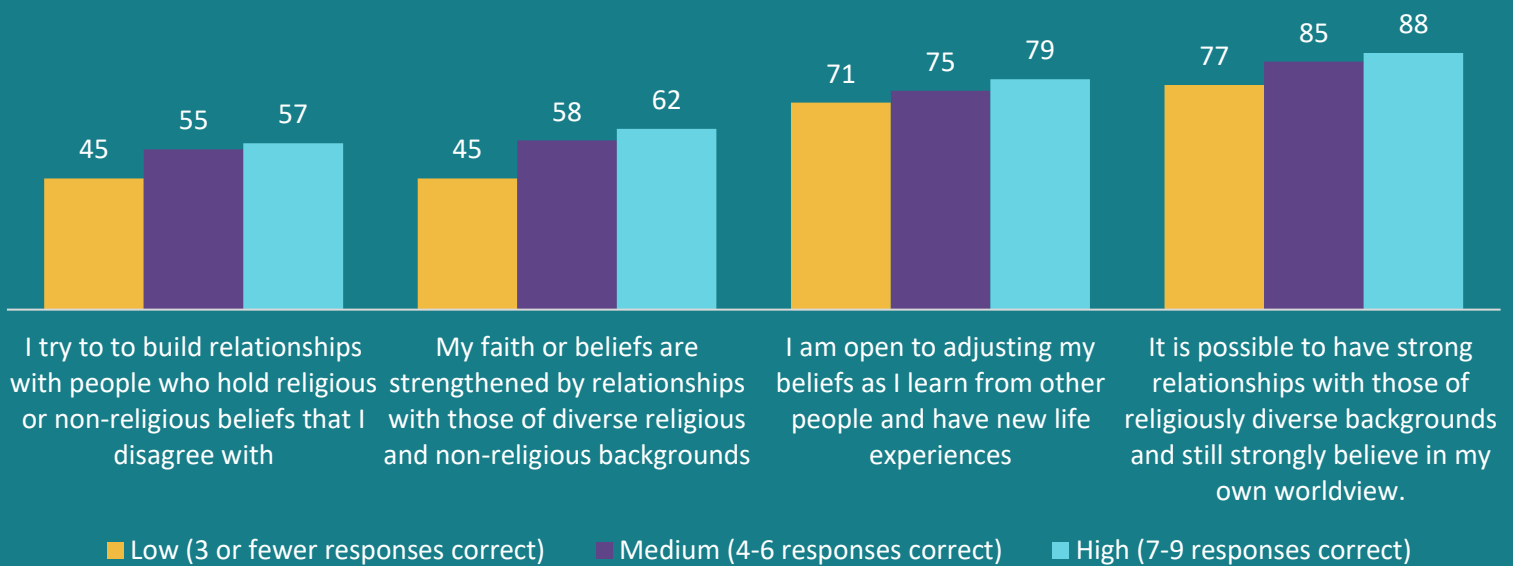
Having established students' general levels of religious literacy, we wanted to know how, if at all, these levels relate to students' ability to engage with others with different worldviews at university. We explored the correlation between religious literacy (on a scale measuring the number of statements students correctly identified as true or false) with students' 'interfaith learning and development' scores, using the threefold set of concepts of (a) self-authored worldview commitment, (b) pluralism orientation, and (c) appreciative attitudes, outlined above (see p. 5).

We discovered that religious literacy has small but significant positive associations with all three key learning and development outcomes. In other words, higher levels of factual knowledge relate to an

increased ability among students to a) reflexively position their own religion and worldview commitments in relation to those that are different; b) proactively engage with others across a range of different worldviews in a plural society; and c) generate appreciative attitudes towards those representing a variety of religion and worldview groups. Simply put, **knowing more about religion makes young people better equipped to relate to others who are different from themselves while they are students at university.**

The strongest positive associations can be seen in relation to students' pluralism orientation. We measured pluralism orientation by asking students to respond to 22 statements, four of which can be seen in Chart 2.

Chart 2: % of students 'agreeing' or 'strongly agreeing' with four pluralism statements, in relation to their religious literacy score



As is clear from the chart above, scores for each of these pluralism statements – i.e. the proportion of respondents agreeing with them – increase in line with whether students achieved low, medium or high scores on our religious literacy test. It appears that those who have a stronger knowledge base about religion are most likely to report a positive orientation to religious diversity as an aspect of their life experience. It will be interesting to explore the direction of influence here, whether knowledge generates a positive orientation to pluralism, or whether engagement with pluralism generates higher levels of religious knowledge.

The question remains, then, as to the extent to which levels of religious literacy at university were influenced by experiences of learning students had when they were at school. We explored this issue in our research via a different set of questions. Given recent debates among education researchers and practitioners around the proposed move to a 'religion and worldviews' RE curriculum, we wanted to know what relationship, if any, exists between students' (self-reported) worldviews-style engagement in the RE classroom at school, and their levels of religious literacy during university. Drawing on the Commission on RE's proposed learning outcomes for a 'Religion and Worldviews National Entitlement (CoRE 2018: 11-13), we asked students to what extent they agreed with the following statements:

"During RE lessons...."

- I studied alongside classmates who held a range of religious and non-religious worldviews
- I talked about my personal religious or non-religious worldview
- I felt that my personal worldviews were respected
- I learnt that worldviews can be religious or non-religious
- I learnt that religious and non-religious worldviews are shaped not just by tradition but by the choices people make
- I learnt about the complex nature of religious and non-religious worldviews
- I learnt to recognise diversity within religious and non-religious traditions

We found that agreeing with just two of these statements has a small but significant positive relationship with students' levels of religious literacy. Namely, during RE lessons, **a) talking about one's personal religious or non-religious worldview, and b) learning to recognise diversity within religious and non-religious traditions, positively relate to students' levels of religious literacy at university.**

In other words, our data do not paint a clear picture when it comes to tracing a relationship between worldviews-style RE and levels of religious literacy reported at university. Talking about one's own worldview (whether religious or non-religious) has a positive relationship with higher levels of knowledge about religion, as does learning about diversity within religious traditions. But there was not a clear positive relationship discernible with the other statements we included in the survey. Perhaps this is not surprising; we are dealing with a complex set of human experiences and it is not always possible to trace clear correlations between them. Moreover, and as the literature on the topic has demonstrated, there are different kinds of 'religious literacy', encompassing fact-based knowledge, critical awareness, comparative appreciation of difference, and other ways of conceptualising the learning outcomes associated with religious education.

Of course, when looking at almost 4,000 students, many of whom will have been at university for a number of years, we know that students' school experiences won't necessarily be the primary source of their knowledge about religious practices and traditions by this point. Indeed, 44% of students with 'high' levels of religious literacy 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with the statement 'Religious education in school is the main source of my knowledge about religions and worldviews'. In contrast, just 30% of those with 'low' levels of religious literacy disagreed. There are clearly many other factors at play in shaping these emerging patterns, including life experience outside of formal education, which itself will be framed by highly variable levels of religious diversity within different regions of the UK. The university experience itself can be a major source of religious learning, both formally within degree programmes of Theology, Religious Studies or a teaching qualification in RE, for example, or more informally, via interaction with friends and fellow students from different religious faiths. What is undeniable, however, is that prior knowledge about religion has a significant influence on university students' orientation to religious diversity once they are students in higher education.

In summary:

- Our findings in this section reinforce the claim that it matters what students learn; learning factual information about religions in the pre-university RE curriculum has important social consequences.
- The findings further support our positioning of religious literacy as 'appreciative knowledge', i.e. knowing about world religions is associated with positive attitudes towards religious diversity while at university.
- Some of the forms of worldviews-style school RE engagement we consider in the research have small but significant positive relationships with students' religious literacy, suggesting the former could be an effective learning route to the latter. However, it is impossible to draw clear connections with particular worldviews-style learning outcomes adopted within RE in UK schools.
- There is a need for further research that explores how learning via RE interacts with other forms of worldview engagement – including family-based faith practice and the religious landscape of the locality – as both will inevitably feed into what students take with them to university.

Worldviews-style religious education and students' interfaith readiness

This section of our briefing turns to the subject of worldviews-style religious education and its consequences for how young people engage with religious diversity once they arrive at university. An approach to RE that foregrounds the notion of 'worldviews' has been the subject of lively debate in recent years, although adoption of this approach is so recent that we do not yet have evidence-based insights into its long-term impact on students' learning. Does it foster a greater openness to religious diversity? Does it generate stronger skills in empathy than curricula that are oriented around more traditional religious concepts or which privilege 'factual knowledge' over interpersonal understanding?

We began to explore these questions, by asking respondents to Autumn 2022 survey about their experience of RE at school and relating this to their perspectives and experiences as university students. Our aim has been to trace possible relationships between the two.

We asked student respondents to what extent they agreed with the following statements about their experience of worldviews-style engagement in the RE classroom prior to attending university. Chart 3 shows the proportion of students who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with each worldviews-related statement, broken down by whether individuals attended a secondary school with or without a religious character.

Chart 3: The % of students who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they experienced worldviews-style education in the school RE classroom

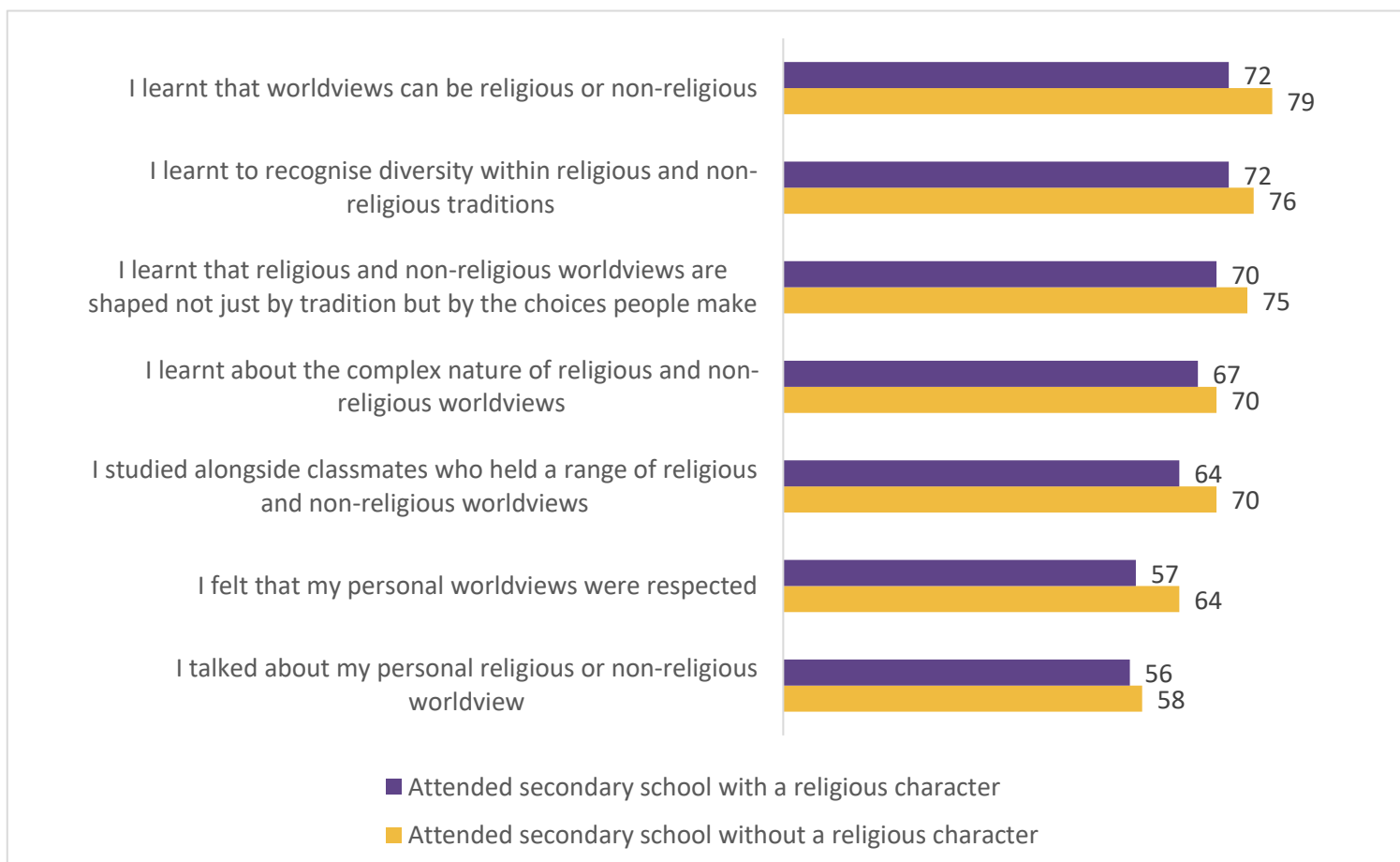


Chart 3 underlines how worldviews-style engagement has become widespread and popular within the RE classroom. Closer analysis reveals that these measures of engagement increase for most statements in line with the level of RE studied, e.g. those who study RE at A level are more likely to have engaged in this way than those who only studied the subject up to GCSE level, and those who study GCSE more likely than those who stop studying RE after year 9.

A notable finding is that on all counts, students who attended a school without a religious character were more likely to report engagement with worldviews-style RE. This is perhaps not surprising, as schools with a religious character – the majority of which are Church of England or Roman Catholic schools – have far more control over their RE curricula. As such, they might be expected to retain a greater focus on more traditionally conceived approaches to the subject, aligned in various ways with their denominational identities. That said, the fact that levels of engagement with worldviews still make up a clear majority of responses in each case – for both religious and non-religious schools – suggests this style of RE has become – or at least is becoming – normative across the education sector. Whether this can be ascribed to an intentional development of ‘worldviews’-style RE classes, or is more to do with worldviews-style engagement becoming more meaningful within our broader culture and so more appealing to students and teachers, is unclear. The likelihood is that it is a combination of the two.

It is notable that students agreed in greater proportions with statements that had to do with learning outcomes, and in lesser proportions when the statements concerned the place of their own

worldview within the RE classroom. Less than two thirds of respondents felt their worldviews were respected and even fewer said they had spoken about their own worldview – whether religious or non-religious – in the context of RE. The latter may arguably be attributed to learning styles and different levels of confidence among pupils, but the former raises interesting questions about how young people perceive their own worldview is handled in RE lessons. Further research will need to explore what is going on here in greater detail.

One final point on Chart 3 is worth noting, and this has to do with the distinctive consequences of attending different types of religious school. Specifically, attending Catholic-ethos secondary schools had a negative relationship with agreeing with every statement listed above. In other words, students from Catholic secondary schools are less likely to self-report engaging in worldview-related RE in the classroom than those from non-Catholic schools in every respect. So, if our earlier suggestion is correct – that worldviews-style thinking carries cultural resonance in a way that appeals to many students and teachers – then it is in Catholic schools that this trend is resisted most effectively. Why and how this takes place is something for future research.

Thinking about students’ transitions from school to university, we asked them to what extent they agreed with the statement, ‘based on my experience of RE in school, I am more open to learning about other worldviews at university’. A clear majority of students (59%) ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with this statement, while just 15% ‘disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’. Just over a quarter (27%) ‘neither agreed nor disagreed’.

“Based on my experience of RE in school, I am more open to learning about other worldviews at university”

3%	12%	27%	43%	16%
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

When we explored this statement in relation to worldviews-style religious education at school, **multiple types of worldview engagement are positively correlated with students' openness to learn more at university.** Two are pedagogical: learning about the complex nature of religious and non-religious worldviews, and learning to recognise diversity within religious and non-religious traditions. The other, talking about personal religious or non-religious worldviews in the RE classroom concerns the social dynamics of the classroom and the extent to which the personal worldviews of pupils are accommodated within it. Put another way, if engaging with RE via the concept of 'worldviews' carries benefits for 'interfaith readiness' at university, then it appears to do so because of its impact on *what* students learn and on *how* they learn it.

In an attempt to examine 'interfaith readiness' in more specific detail, we focused our analysis on first year undergraduates, who we surveyed upon enrolment at university in autumn 2022 (i.e. those with the most recent school experience) and looked at their baseline levels of interfaith learning and development. We wanted to know: do students' self-reported worldview engagement in the RE classroom correlate with high levels of readiness to engage across religious and worldview diversity when starting university?

Recognising that 'interfaith learning and development' is itself a multidimensional concept (for a reminder of how we define and measure this, please see page 5), we can see that different types of worldview engagement in school have significant relationships with new university starters' preparedness to engage across difference in distinct ways. Three key points are worth underlining:

1) Students who talked about personal religious or non-religious worldviews in the RE classroom at school enter university with a greater reflexive ability to negotiate their own worldview commitments in light of those who are different from themselves.

As an example, one of the statements we ask students to respond to in our survey is, 'I have

thoughtfully considered other religious and non-religious perspectives before committing to my current worldview'. Among those who said this was an 'extremely' or 'very' accurate description of their own experience, the majority (59%) said they had talked about their own personal worldview – whether religious or non-religious – in the context of the RE classroom. This proportion falls to 26% among those for whom this statement was a 'moderately' accurate description, and to 15% for those for whom the statement was 'slightly' or 'not at all' accurate.

2) Students enter university with a greater ability to constructively engage with worldview diversity if they report having:

- a. **Studied alongside RE classmates who hold a range of religious and non-religious worldviews,**
- b. **Learnt during RE lessons that worldviews can be religious or non-religious, and**
- c. **Learnt during RE lessons to recognise diversity within religious and non-religious traditions**

This aspect of interfaith readiness, what we call 'pluralism orientation', can be broken down into further categories to reveal the intricacies within this relationship. For example, studying alongside classmates who hold a range of religious and non-religious worldviews is most strongly linked to students' belief in the capacity of interfaith leadership to achieve real world change; they are more likely to agree with statements including 'we can overcome many of the world's major problems if people of different religious and non-religious perspectives work together'.

3) Students who reported learning during RE that religious and non-religious worldviews are shaped not just by tradition but by the choices people make are more likely to start university with higher levels of appreciation towards those holding different religious perspectives.

We asked students whether they felt that people from eight religion and worldview groups are a) ethical people, b) make positive contributions to society, c) are people with whom they have things in

common, and d) are people towards whom they have a positive outlook in general. Students who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that their RE experience taught them of the importance personal choice entered university with higher levels of appreciative attitude towards atheists, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims and Sikhs than those who did not.

It is promising that different aspects of worldview engagement in the RE classroom correlate with students' readiness to engage in, and build relationships across, worldview difference upon entering university. We know from this and other research that students' interfaith learning outcomes are multiple and interconnected (Peacock et al. 2023); were RE curricula to change to be based on worldviews, this would require a considered and multifaceted approach to fully equip students with the interfaith readiness required to face the challenges of university life.

In summary:

- Over half of our students said they had engaged with worldview-style religious education while at school. Proportions increased as students studied RE for longer, but across the board proportions were slightly higher among students who studied at a school without a religious character. The relationship between curricular decisions about RE and school ethos would be an interesting avenue for future research.
- Three aspects of worldview engagement in the RE classroom are associated with students' agreement that they are 'more open to learning about other worldviews at university': learning about the complex nature of religious and non-religious worldviews, learning to recognise diversity within religious and non-religious traditions, and talking about personal religious or non-religious worldviews. This is promising, but raises questions about the type of worldview engagement that most effectively encourages students to maintain this interest beyond school.
- First year students' baseline measure of 'interfaith readiness' appears to be connected to their worldviews-style experiences of RE in different ways. This style of RE offers distinct interfaith learning opportunities, but the evidence supports the value of a combination of worldview engagement opportunities, those that are pedagogical in nature as well as reflective/interactive, if students are to be appropriately prepared to engage across difference when they enrol at university.

What next?

A number of questions arise from our consideration of this national data based on students' experiences. The following we hope will be especially useful to education professionals as they consider the possible consequences of adopting different approaches to RE:

- 1 A worldviews approach to RE appears fosters greater religious literacy in some cases, but this potential is not fully realised. How might teachers develop their approach to RE so that it can be?
- 2 Given the clear benefits for the development of interpersonal skills, how might reflection on pupils' own worldviews be better integrated into the RE classroom?
- 3 Do these benefits support the case for more worldviews-style engagement into RE curricula? If not, what might be compelling counter-arguments?
- 4 How might teachers justify their development of RE curricula with reference to the potential benefits to pupils in preparing them for future encounters with religious diversity? How might RE play a role in preparing young people for the experience of university?

References:

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