

# Pan Berks Syllabus Version 15: Judaism Response

Joint submission on 4 November 2024 by

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We appreciate that significant progress has now been made on the syllabus, but the draft under consideration is not close to being finished.

The Judaism content has been revised drastically compared to our original recommendations (which we were assured would be adopted). We understand some of the changes may have been necessary, particularly to KS2 for which we had requested a follow-up meeting so that this could be edited down and given a better focus. However, we were not consulted on any of the recent changes, as we expected we would be. We are particularly offended that references to the Jewish people as the Children of Israel, and to the historical roots of Judaism in Judea (Israel), have all been removed.

As discussed at our meeting with you in July, we would like to create an appendix to the syllabus giving detailed guidance for the teaching of Judaism such as lesson plans, beyond that located in the syllabus. Please advise on the process for this.

In future, to avoid mistakes that are inevitable when outsiders super-impose their understanding of a tradition in which they have no lived experience (colonisation), it is crucial that SACRE Hub meetings regarding **syllabus decisions always include a representative of each faith group in group A** (agreed by the other representatives for that faith). We are surprised that such an obvious necessity has heretofore been ignored.

A number of other problems also remain with the new draft.

1. You utilise an out-dated definition of worldviews that fudges the important distinction between personal worldviews and organised worldviews. The 2024 REC framework agrees with us that it is not appropriate to treat religions as viewpoints, and we ask you to conform to this up to date best practice rather than utilising advice from 2018 that is already 6 years old.
2. Various parts of the syllabus appear to have been revised in a hurry and do not make sense. This includes inconsistency between the statutory content and the appendices.
3. The syllabus still contains a number of instances in which students are asked to make judgments about religions, or teachers are encouraged to treat RE as a truth-seeking activity.
4. A number of the changes to key questions have made these questions less nuanced and reductive.
5. Scarce RE class time is still being wasted conducting “surveys” and on age inappropriate (often post-modern) intellectual exercises that do not involve actual subject content about actual religions or nonreligious worldviews. It is bad pedagogy to convey disciplinary knowledge out of its proper context, as an abstraction.

## Judaism Content

### Key Stage 1

Good: We like the question about things remembered on Shabbat etc. Also the discussion of a “Jewish way of life”. These are improvements on the original questions.

Bad: The excessive focus on the life of Abraham, at the expense of understanding the historical origin of Judaism in Judea, and at the expense of understanding why Jews are called the “Children of Israel” – that Jacob’s name became Israel, and his children therefore became known as the “Children of Israel” and also the “Twelve Tribes of Israel” of which the most important was Judah (which is why we are now known as Jews).

Although Jewish tradition starts our story with Abraham, historically Judaism as understood today began in the place then known as Judea, where the State of Israel is located today. Abraham’s story is a biblical story, not a historical story by the standards of the social sciences. Jews, Christians and Muslims typically view Abraham as a historical figure, but **those from other faiths and traditions will not share that belief**. Jews remember the Abraham story because it tells us who we are (children of Abraham) and what God wants from us. But Judaism began in Judea, where Jews lived in ancient times.

Please substitute as follows for the first two questions.

We have moved the Exodus story details to the section on Passover, where they really belong. There is no need to discuss theological issues such as whether the Torah was dictated by God, in KS1. That should be in KS2. The Torah is holy to Jews, no matter how we may have different beliefs on where the Torah came from.

We note that your Christianity content for KS1 does not include a discussion of how some Christians understand that the gospels were written long after Jesus’ death and are polemical rather than historical. Or that not all Christians celebrate Christmas as the December date is pagan in origin. There is no need to do that sort of thing in Judaism when you do not do it in Christianity. Keep it simple please. We all agree that the Torah is holy to Jews and teaches us how to live a good life. That is what 7 year olds need to learn.

<p>What is Judaism and where does it come from?</p>	<p><b>Judaism</b> is the religion of the Jewish people, passed down through the generations (an ethno-religion). Judaism originated in an ancient place called <b>Judea</b>, also called the <b>Land of Israel</b>. The Jewish story begins with the <b>patriarchs</b> or forefathers (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) and <b>matriarchs</b> or foremothers (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah). <b>Abraham</b> realised there is <b>one God</b> and made an agreement (<b>covenant</b>) with God. Abraham agreed to promote holiness and integrity in the world, and God promised to make Abraham a great nation in the land of Canaan (now Israel). Abraham’s grandson was Jacob. <b>Jacob</b> earned a new name (<b>Israel</b> = God wrestler). His descendants became the <b>Children of Israel</b>. Later, after they were freed from Egypt (see below), the Children of Israel (<b>Israelites</b>) made another covenant with God at <b>Mount Sinai</b>. They received the <b>Torah</b> and agreed to keep the <b>613 mitzvot</b> (commandments). Judaism became an international religion after most Jews were forced out of Judea / Israel by ancient empires (the <b>diaspora</b>), but about half of Jews live in Israel today. Judaism emphasises <b>practice over belief</b>.</p>
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<p>What important things are remembered at Shabbat and Rosh Hashanah or Pesach?</p>	<p>Jews remember stories, people and places – this will follow on from the unit above.</p> <p>Jews remember core stories through practice in daily life and festivals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>God’s creation</b> of the world is remembered and observed through <b>Shabbat</b>, obeying God by resting once a week.</li> <li>• The <b>Exodus</b> from Egypt is commemorated on <b>Passover</b>. Jews remember how the Children of Israel (Jacob’s family, also called <b>Hebrews</b>) settled in Egypt, became slaves for 400 years, and were redeemed by God and brought through the wilderness to the land of Israel.</li> </ul> <p>At the Passover Seder, Jews are encouraged to see it as if each personally was freed from Egypt. This is a statement of identity as part of the <b>Jewish People</b>.</p> <p>The Exodus is also remembered every Shabbat as everyone deserves a rest (even animals).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Rosh Hashanah</b> (the Jewish New Year) is also the "Day of Remembering. Jews remember God’s <b>covenant with Noah</b> (rainbow) and the <b>Akeida</b> (Binding of Isaac) when God tested Abraham. We blow a <b>shofar</b> (ram’s horn) to remind us to repent for our sins and to remind God of the Akeida.</li> </ul> <p>God remembers our actions in the past year and judges us.</p> <p>We pray to be inscribed for a “good and sweet year”.</p>
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## **Key Stage 2**

We did indicate at our meeting that Key Stage 2 needed work and we needed to have another meeting to discuss this content, so that key matters are highlighted and additional details are in an appendix. This meeting did not happen.

You have changed the key questions in a way that is unhelpful and you have edited down the content without consulting us. We understand that the content did need editing down, but that should have been done in consultation with us.

As with KS1, you have removed all reference to the Children of Israel and the Land of Israel. We find this deeply offensive and antisemitic, an erasure of our connection with our ancestral home and name.

The first question for Judaism (regarding texts and traditions) is shorter and less helpful than the similar questions for other religions. Please revert to question that we recommended in our original feedback, which works well and is parallel to that for the other religions covered.

The second question in the detailed content does not match that in the statutory content. On page 12, you have “What might it mean to be Jewish in different parts of the world?” Then on page 27, you instead have “What might it mean to be Jewish in different branches of Judaism?” The latter is not a good question, and we recommend instead a slightly generalised version of the (better) question from page 12.

We understand that you want to discuss different branches of Judaism, but as the Judaism content is so limited, this is best included within the other content as needed, rather than being a key question. The commonalities of practice between different communities are far more important than the differences. Also the diversity of practice in Judaism is not just between “movements” as there are Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Mizrachi, etc. communities with different traditions (*minhag*). It is wrong to

classify Jews as either orthodox or progressive. Non-orthodox Jews often pray in Hebrew, as there is a lot of diversity there. We suggest a question similar to that you utilise for Islam in KS2.

No it is not correct that our texts and traditions are a religious guidebook on how to live only for some Jews (unless you are talking about Jews who actively reject Judaism or don't know they are Jewish?). We differ in how we interpret those traditions and in *how* we practice. Saying this is like saying that *some* Christians believe in emulating Jesus and living by his example, but some view Jesus as just a historical figure and do not emulate his actions.

Please substitute as follows. Note that we have made sure that the total amount of content is no more than you have now.

<b>Judaism</b> (Core unless Islam is taught)	
<p>What do Jews learn about God and human life from their sacred texts and traditions?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jews learn how to live a good life from the Hebrew Bible (primarily the <b>Torah</b>), as well as from Rabbinic texts</li> <li>• <b>Rabbinic</b> interpretation of law allows Judaism to adapt to a changing world, a living tradition.</li> <li>• <b>Unity of God</b>: Not allowed to split God up or worship God through anything such as objects or people – Exodus 20 (Decalogue)</li> <li>• <b>Shema</b>: commandment from the Torah to love God</li> <li>• Human beings are <b>created in the image of God</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Golden Rule</b> and <b>Sanctity of Human life</b> (see below)</li> <li>• Love of <b>Torah</b> (Five Books of Moses, first and most important part of the Tanach / Hebrew Bible)</li> <li>• Torah as a <b>covenant</b> between God and the Jewish people: <b>613 mitzvot</b> for Jews, just <b>7 Laws of Noah</b> for other nations.</li> <li>• <b>Action precedes belief</b> (<i>Na'aseh Venish'mah</i>)</li> <li>• Most <b>Jewish festivals</b> have their origins in the Torah</li> <li>• Judaism accepts converts but <b>does not seek converts</b>.</li> <li>• Focus on living <b>a good life in this world</b>; less on the next life.</li> <li>• Importance of <b>Jerusalem</b> and the land of <b>Israel</b> (historical homeland). Prayers point towards <b>Temple Mount</b>.</li> </ul>
<p>What does it mean to live a Jewish life and how does this vary among different Jewish communities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use case studies from the Jewish Museum inclusive Judaism resource (and other sources) to explore Judaism. A selection of the following concepts can be explored:</li> <li>• Judaism is a <b>family</b> religion (passed down the generations). People do not usually <i>choose</i> to be Jewish; something you are from birth. Obligation to <b>teach your children</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Synagogue</b> worship / reading the Torah: Variation between communities / movements esp with regard to <b>women</b>.</li> <li>• Life cycle events eg. bar / bat mitzvah, brit milah, marriage.</li> <li>• Clothing: tefillin, <b>tallit</b>, <b>kippah</b>, women's hair covering</li> <li>• Jews express their <b>identity</b> and express their faith in God by <b>practicing Judaism</b> (at home and in the synagogue) and observing <b>mitzvot</b> (commandments).</li> <li>• Interpretations of Jewish law differ between communities.</li> <li>• work and rest / holiness of time (<b>Shabbat</b> and festivals)</li> <li>• <b>Jewish calendar: lunar / solar</b>: This is why Jewish festivals have different dates each year on secular calendar</li> <li>• <b>Kosher food</b> (separating milk and meat, special rules for Passover, shechita / prohibition on eating blood)</li> <li>• The Jewish home and putting up a <b>mezuzah</b></li> </ul>

<p>What influences the way Jewish people respond to local and global issues of social justice?</p>	<p><b>Tzedakkah</b> (Charity) means being righteous</p> <p><b>Golden Rule:</b> Love your neighbour, who is, like you, created in the image of God (Leviticus). Do <i>not</i> do to others as you would <i>not</i> want them to do to you (Rabbi Hillel’s way of teaching this).</p> <p><b>Sanctity of human life</b> takes priority over almost all mitzvot.</p> <p><b>Kindness</b> to animals e.g., feed pets first.</p> <p><b>Jewish ethics: honesty</b> in business, prohibition of <b>gossip</b></p> <p><b>Holiness Code (Leviticus chapter 19) includes</b></p> <p><b>Do not oppress</b> the stranger. (Remember what it was like to be a stranger. Remember what it was like to be a slave.)</p> <p>Duty <b>not to stand idly by</b> the blood of your neighbour (good neighbour law). Do not place a stumbling block in front of the blind. Pay <b>workers</b> promptly so they don’t suffer poverty.</p> <p>Workers and even animals rest on <b>Shabbat</b>.</p> <p><b>Taking care of</b> widows, orphans, stranger (<b>vulnerable groups</b>) leaving some of the harvest for the poor. As illustrated in the Book of Ruth. No profiteering.</p> <p>Limits to personal autonomy as the <b>body belongs to God</b>.</p> <p><b>Tu BiShvat</b> – festival of <b>trees</b>, date significant to environmentalists</p> <p>Bal tashchit (do not waste resources) Deuteronomy 20:19-20</p> <p><b>Partnership</b> between God and Humanity – It is up to human beings to take care of the world. <b>Tikkun Olam</b></p>
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**General Content: What we like:**

1. The non-religious worldview content for KS1 is much improved – less overly intellectualised, more connected with life experience. This is the sort of thing we need in an RE syllabus.
2. You acknowledge the Jewish origin of the Bible for Christians (page 22).
3. The beginning activity (core question) for year 5 is better. The most problematic elements have been removed, although the focus on personal worldviews rather than on subject content is still a questionable allocation of scarce RE class time.

**What Needs Improvement (General Content)**

1. **Confusion between personal worldviews and organised worldviews** On page 4, you reference the CoRE report and give a definition of a “worldview”. This is outdated guidance. The new 2024 RE Council Worldviews Handbook distinguishes on page 15 between two kinds of worldviews. Personal worldviews are viewpoints, but organised worldviews are not.

A person’s **personal worldview** describes and shapes how they encounter interpret, understand and engage with the world. A person may have a coherent and considered framework for answering questions about the nature of ultimate reality, knowledge, truth and ethics, or they may have never given such questions much thought – but they still have a worldview, including the beliefs, convictions, values and assumptions that influence and shape their thinking and living.

An **organised worldview** can be understood as a ‘more or less coherent and established system with certain (written and unwritten) sources, traditions, values, rituals, ideals, or dogmas’ (from van der Kooij et al. 2013).

These definitions have their faults (in particular the inexplicable omission of faith – no dogma is not the same thing). However, you should at the very minimum include both these definitions

in order to be up to date. Teachers also need training so that they understand that the word “worldview” has no agreed meaning and that organised worldviews are not actually views of the world at all.

We would prefer that the term “framework for life” be used in place of “organised worldview” as using the word worldview to mean two such completely different things is bound to cause confusion. The language is confusing because the REC has now realised that it was incorrect to equate religions with views of the world (as we have been arguing for months) but the language of worldviews is now entrenched. Trevor Cooling has confirmed this.

2. On page 49 for KS3, you again provide an (outdated) definition of worldview that corresponds only to personal worldviews. You also fail to offer any suggested definitions of religion, which may leave teachers and students believing that religions are not in themselves worth understanding (unless they offer a viewpoint). Ninian Smart’s phenomenology is highly contested and steeped in post-modernism. It is not pedagogically appropriate to 11 year-olds.

It would be somewhat helpful here, again, to include both of the 2024 definitions (of a personal worldview and separately an organised worldview) and then students could be asked whether it is helpful to describe religions as religious organised worldviews. Again, these definitions have their faults, but at least they acknowledge that religions are not just organised views of the world.

3. The entire sequence of lessons (lessons 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 on pages 48-51) for year 7 is focused on either personal worldviews (incorrectly called just worldviews), or on religions and organised worldviews incorrectly equated with sets of propositional beliefs, or on abstract academic content that would be better suited to university classes on postmodern theory. There is no real content here -- no learning about religions as sets of cultural practices, rituals, ways of life – any of the content included in the new REC definition of organised worldviews (frameworks for life). There is no content here on why it is important to study the faiths of different communities – for example to build mutual understanding and social cohesion. This content must be marked as tentative, to be updated for 2026 with lessons are pedagogically age appropriate and reflect the diverse qualities of the actual religions to be taught.
4. Year 6 core question. (p. 25) *How well does faith help people to cope with matters of life and death? Why is the word “well” included here? You are asking students to make a judgment on how well faith in general does this job. This is divisive and inappropriate in RE. What kind of faith belief are they meant to judge here? After all, some beliefs may help and others may not, as beliefs are very diverse.*

Perhaps you really want them to explore the role that faith or nonreligious teachings can play in helping people cope with mortality? If so, make that the question. **Don’t ask them to make a judgment.**

A better question would be *“How does having faith in someone or something help people cope with matters of life and death?”*

The activity can explore the impact that having faith in something bigger than yourself (such as God or humanity) can help people cope with mortality and suffering. Explore how having faith *in* something differs from a belief *that* something is true, and how being faithful helps people to cope with adversity.

The activity laid out on pages 47-48 shows promise and acknowledges that even “nonreligious” people may have faith, but you unhelpfully ask them again “how well faith helps” rather than just asking them to explore the ways that faith can help.

5. KS3 Philosophy. P. 37. You have a revised question “*Is there a God and how do people think they know?*” As we already pointed out, such questions are biased, as they insinuate that God is a factual claim that requires evidence. However, as the previous question at least also asked “does it matter”, it was better than the new version. Since God’s existence is not provable or disprovable using “evidence”, the only worthwhile element in this exercise was to discuss how belief in God matters, whether it makes a difference to us whether we do or do not believe in God. For example, whether belief in God is necessary for morality.

A better, more balanced question would be as follows:

*What does it mean to believe in a God, how does such belief matter, and do we need a reason to believe (or not to believe) in God?*

This would allow discussion of the fact that some people use arguments to prove that God exists, and some people find such arguments to be pointless as they view belief as something that is based on faith. One could also discuss the problem of proselytising or evangelism: That some people seek to persuade others that God exists or does not, to convert them to their religion or worldview. That we don’t allow proselytising in RE, as RE is not about whose religion or worldview is correct. This would be a good opportunity to discuss the distinction between faith and dogma, and whether a person can have faith (or not) without claiming that those with other beliefs are wrong.

Your content includes the following text, which is incoherent:

*Secular and cultural Jews – In Judaism all the Israelites heads the word of God, and it has been passed down. Group experience or revelation.*

We do not know what you meant by this but are happy to discuss what you meant to say, to formulate alternative language that makes some sense.

6. KS3 Philosophy. P. 38. You have a revised question “Who decides what is meant by a just and fair world?”. This is again worse than the question in the previous draft: “What do we mean by a just and fair world and who decides?” The question also does not match the content you have suggested, which (correctly) includes a discussion of what we mean by justice and morality. A better question would be “*How have religions or nonreligious worldviews inspired people to create a just world? Can religions or nonreligious worldviews also do the opposite and why are both possible?*” This can include discussion of religiously repressive regimes (the Inquisition, the Taliban) as well as Soviet Communism, so that students discuss what the common qualities are of religions or worldview that promote justice and fairness. For example, respect for individual rights and the rule of law.

The Judaism content here also needs editing. Please substitute:

**Judaism:** Concept of tzedakah (charity = justice); Maimonides’ 8 Levels of Charity. Ethical behaviour (see UKS2). 7 Laws of Noah for all humanity include ◦ respect for rule of law ◦ sanctity of human life ◦ sanctity of family life ◦ respect for property rights ◦ no cruelty to animals.

7. You continue to recommend time-wasting survey activities for all key stages. Such activity should be moved to social studies and should not occupy scarce RE class time that is needed

to teach actual subject content.

8. We had complained about recommendations that students be able to justify their religious beliefs, as this is inappropriate in RE. (Beliefs based on faiths do not require justification and asking for this is abusive, particularly to children from minority communities who may lack the knowledge to defend their beliefs.) We note that the word “justify” has now been replaced with the word “articulate” on pages 56, 58, 61, but this change of wording is (1) confusing and (2) does not change the meaning of the recommendations. You are still talking about reasons and evidence, arguments and counterarguments for religious beliefs.

**Reasons and evidence are required only for beliefs for which one seeks to persuade others.** This could be relevant if students are discussing public policy questions (such as legality of abortion, gay marriage etc.), but not with respect to religious beliefs unless it is to counter attempts to proselytise others. But proselytising does not belong in an RE classroom anyway, so what is the goal here?

In place of these inappropriate (and possibly unlawful) recommendations, we suggest the following be included in disciplinary knowledge, in an age-appropriate manner across the key stages:

- *Pupils will know that people adhere to beliefs and practices for a variety of reasons.*
- *Pupils understand that people will sometimes seek to persuade others to agree with their beliefs and practices (proselytising, evangelism).*
- *Pupils understand that an RE classroom is a safe space where proselytising is not allowed. We are not here to change anyone’s beliefs, but to understand and respect difference.*
- *Pupils understand the value of curiosity about the religious beliefs and practices of themselves and others.*
- *Pupils understand that some religions (such as Judaism and Hinduism) do not proselytise.*
- *Pupils understand that religious beliefs and practices are often based on faith and do not need a “reason” or “evidence” to be valid and respected.*
- *Pupils understand that having faith does not always mean a person is irrational or thinks others’ beliefs or practices are wrong.*
- *Pupils understand the difference between faith and dogma, and why religious people may find the word dogma to be offensive.*

Note that teachers need to be trained to resist the temptation to treat RE as a truth-seeking exercise, as such activities involve a significant risk that a teacher’s own views will bias the conclusions of students. (Nobody stands nowhere.) RE is there so that children can learn about each other’s religious or nonreligious beliefs, practices and values so as to build mutual respect for difference. We are not trying to work out who is “right”.

9. EYFS page 15. You reference the “Old and New Testaments”. Please replace this with “Hebrew Bible / Torah, the Christian New Testament” Referring to the Hebrew Bible by the Christian terminology (Old Testament) is assuming a Christian supersessionist theological position – that Judaism (the Old religion) has given way to Christianity (the New and improved religion).

It should be part of the KS1 curriculum to explain what the Bible is, that the Torah is the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, and that Christian bibles are made up of what they call the Old Testament (containing the books of the Hebrew Bible) and the Christian New Testament. That the term “Old Testament” is a Christian term for what Jews call the Hebrew Bible, and why this terminology is offensive to many Jews.