

Judaism response to the Pan-Berkshire Syllabus Proposal (v10)

Joint submission on 18 July 2024 by

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This document provides an update to feedback and criticism already submitted by Dr. Shira Solomons and Rabbi Zvi Solomons last month. It is the product of consultation between the Jewish SACRE representatives in Group A on five of the six local authorities currently working together on the proposed 2025 Pan Berkshire RE Syllabus. We have not been able to make contact with a Judaism representative on Maidenhead SACRE, as we understand that one is in the process of being appointed.

We provide some general criticisms of the approach adopted by the syllabus (sections II and III) and a list of changes that we consider necessary for the syllabus to be acceptable (section IV).

Several appendices provide more detailed observations on specific items in the syllabus (Appendix D) as well as what changes can be made to the core and key questions (Appendix A), the Judaism content (Appendix B), and Philosophy content (Appendix C), to make the syllabus acceptable.

I. SUMMARY / INTRODUCTION

We recognise that the current draft of the syllabus (v10) has attempted to address some of the criticisms we made in June, and that some references have been added to acknowledge Jewish identity. In Appendix A and Appendix B, we recommend further adjustments to the key questions, in line with those proposed by our Hindu colleagues, with whom we have been working closely so that our requests are mutually consistent. We are reasonably confident that the KS1 material for Judaism can be made usable if our advice is followed. We are far less confident about UKS2 as the key questions are far too broad and lack focus. A thematic approach would be far better and more conducive to learning and foster mutual understanding between pupils who adhere to different religions and life frameworks. The core questions for UKS2 are also deeply flawed.

Our main concern is with the overall framework and the core questions in this syllabus, which are biased towards a particular view of the world, which makes the syllabus fail to meet legal requirements of impartiality. Unfortunately, rather than allaying our concerns, the recent additions to the appendices have made matters even worse.

We are concerned that the core questions in this syllabus encourage debate over whether religion is good or bad, and that children are being taught that religious “worldviews” are like philosophical propositions, to be proved true or false (examined based on evidence). There is an excessive focus on a very narrow form of belief (propositional belief) and an utter neglect of faith, which is core to all religions (even those that are nontheistic). The result is an uninspiring syllabus that lacks nuance.

Moreover, a bias against religion in general and an overall assumption of a humanist worldview is implicit in the core questions and the associated activities in the appendix. Activities that ask children to justify their beliefs are inherently discriminatory against minorities and constitute a safeguarding violation and an infringement on the right of parents to raise their children in the faith of their choosing without worrying about indoctrination in RE at school. If this fault in the syllabus is not dealt with, large numbers of children from religious minority communities will likely be withdrawn from RE, which will be very harmful to social cohesion.

Rather than encouraging theological debate over whether religion is good or bad or teaching children that religious “worldviews” are like philosophical propositions to be proved, we argue that core questions in RE should address general issues common to all human beings, so that learning how these issues are addressed by different religions and nonreligious life frameworks helps children understand the relationship between religions and the values we have in common.

We believe that the problems with this syllabus stem primarily from a determination to interpret every religion as being a kind of “organised religious worldview”, rather than understanding religions on their own terms - as shared frameworks for life based on faith in a tradition. The term “worldview” is lacking in rigour, as it is used to mean many different things at once (it is an all-encompassing term that apparently includes religions, yet it also means a point of view to be debated, and also a personal philosophy of life). This un-rigorous language allows biases to insert themselves into the learning without being noticed, which again conflicts with the legal requirements of impartiality.

Finally, we are very concerned that Humanism is prioritised over all the minority religions in this syllabus, and that schools can elect to teach Judaism only in KS1. Given the explosion in antisemitism in the past year, it is crucial that schools provide meaningful instruction about Judaism to children above the age of seven.

II. MAJOR CONCERNS

1. An Excessive focus on (Propositional) Belief

The syllabus incorrectly treats **religions as worldviews**. Judaism is not a worldview. It is an ethno-religion, and a religion and a worldview are different things. Religion (including Judaism) is more than a collection of views held in common by a group of people (an organised worldview). Judaism is a way of life. Jews are a people, a very extended family (the *Children of Israel*). A core religious idea in Judaism is *na'aseh vanish'mah* (we will do and then we will understand, Exodus 24:7). Practice comes before belief or understanding. Therefore, the framework of this syllabus in treating belief (viewpoint) as primary is not compatible with teaching Judaism authentically.

The current revised draft does refer to religions along with worldviews in some places, but whereas the concept of a worldview is defined, the syllabus never explores how religions and worldviews are distinct phenomena. Rather, the term “religion” is always just a way of saying “religious worldview” or “organised religious worldview”.

As one example, the first core question for year 1 is “what are religions and worldviews and how do we learn about them?” We note that the words “religions and” have been added in the most recent draft in response to earlier criticism, but the content of the activity includes a definition of worldviews but no attempt to explore what religion is, surely a necessary route to understanding. Moreover, one cannot argue that the definition of “worldview” provided to pupils is broad enough to include religions, as it understands worldviews to be based on propositional beliefs or points of view (as opposed to faith, explained below).

On page 29 (12.1.1), teachers are instructed to tell children “*a worldview is a way of looking at the world from a particular group of people. Explain that these are different shared views and that they have a religious or non-religious belief as their basis.*” The message of such teaching will be that children will **understand religion to be a subcategory of worldviews and therefore as something based on a certain shared viewpoint (propositional belief)**.

Again and again, the syllabus subsumes religions under the worldview framework and therefore erases all the distinct characteristics of religions that distinguish them from worldviews and that make religion inspiring and meaningful. This happens so often it is tiresome to list all the page numbers. This is inappropriate and offensive to Jews, Hindus and (arguably) many or most religious people.

A thorough revision is needed of the entire syllabus to remove unconscious bias that assumes religions are simply religious worldviews. This needs to be addressed both where the mistake is explicit and when the false assumption is implied through the questions asked and other content.

We note that you have added some references to the Jewish ethnicity in the details for Judaism, which we appreciate, but which needs improvement. You have also added some references to tradition passed down the generations, which is helpful. (See below for details on how to change wording.) But as the core *questions* in the syllabus still ignore the importance of belonging and identity, these additions look out of place. **The problem is not just with one or two specific items of content, but with the general framework, which looks at religions through a Christo-centric, secular humanist lens, rather than understanding non-Christian religions on their own terms.**

We find this approach ironic, as the academic arguments behind the worldviews approach emphasise the importance of “decolonising RE”. You recommend an activity for Year 7 that encourages them to understand that an outsider cannot really understand a religion and you pay lip-service to opposing “colonialism” (p. 39 / 12.1.7). Yet you are classifying Judaism and other religions as worldviews, something that an insider who has lived experience of religious practice would never do. **This is a recolonisation under the guise of decolonisation.**

We are concerned that this focus on constantly asking the children to label, assess and justify their own beliefs and those of their families and their communities outside school **will encourage families of minority religions to remove their children from RE**. For families of the majority view – secular Christianity – this may be an interesting and informative exercise. For minority families, this is hostile. In schools with a large minority cohort, this will be disastrous.

The whole curriculum is built upon a secular position that understands religions as views of the world held jointly by individuals (organised worldviews), rather than as living traditions that bind people together into communities through faith and traditional practices (religions). This bias shows itself over and over again (see enumerated items in appendix D), but particularly in the core question for year 5 that shockingly assumes that religion is always an individual choice, and the appendices with classroom content that encourage children to develop their own personal worldviews (as opposed to following the religious upbringing in which they are being raised at home).

One might perhaps give the benefit of the doubt, that this concept of a personal “worldview” perhaps could charitably be understood not to mean a personal religion or nonreligious life framework different from that being taught at home. However, in the recommended activities, year 5 children are actually encouraged to consider that religion can sometimes be harmful (but of course not that nonreligious life frameworks can be harmful). This topic is of course also not age appropriate for 9-year-olds (even if it contained the opposite question as well) and its inclusion risks forcing whole communities to withdraw their children from RE, which would cause enormous harm to social cohesion.

The bias in this and other activities also breaches legal requirements. More on that further down.

2. Bias in favour of Humanism and against other non-Christian Religions

Humanism is prioritised over all the minority faith traditions. It is unclear who made this decision and with what authority. Humanism is mandatory in all key stages, whereas Judaism (and Hinduism) may be taught only in KS1. We appreciate that Humanism needs to be included as a contrast to the religions and faith traditions studied, so that religious children understand you can be a good person without believing in God. But surely KS3 would be sufficient for this purpose, as in any case teachers are meant to teach that different people are free to have different beliefs. All that is needed in the other key stages is an acknowledgment that some people are not religious or may subscribe to a nontheistic religion such as Buddhism, and that they should be respected.

An organised “worldview” (one that is not necessarily agreed with by all nonreligious children) is unnecessary to convey this inclusive message especially as Humanism does not encompass other nonreligious life frameworks such as veganism and environmentalism. There is, indeed, a very real danger that pupils may be led to believe that Humanism is the only legitimate non-religious life framework.

We are particularly concerned about the lack of mandatory coverage of Judaism beyond KS1. How are pupils meant to understand Christianity and its Jewish roots if their understanding of Judaism does not go beyond that of a 7 year-old? Just as one example, in the syllabus (page 15, 7.2), pupils are taught Jesus’ teaching to love God and love your neighbour and the 10 commandments, but not that these teachings originate from Judaism (Jesus quoted the Hebrew Bible as he was Jewish). This is a distortion of Christianity through lack of teaching about Judaism.

More seriously, given the explosion in antisemitism amongst university-age young people in Britain as well as that experienced by Jewish children in Berkshire schools in recent months (We can document this if required), it is extremely important that Judaism is taught to older children. Frankly, failing to teach Judaism beyond KS1 makes Jewish children unsafe.

It would be a more balanced curriculum if all non-Christian faiths and nonreligious life frameworks alternated throughout the key stages. So in upper KS2 it would make more sense to include Judaism and Hinduism as mandatory, as these are not mandatory in lower KS2. We also note that Sikhi is mandatory only in lower KS2 and is not covered in KS3 whereas Islam and Humanism are mandatory in KS3. The syllabus should highlight this fact so that teachers know to prioritise Sikhi as well as Judaism and Hinduism.

You do see fit to remind teachers not to spend too much time on Buddhism in Upper KS2 because it is covered in KS3, yet you do not make the same observation about Humanism in KS1, LKS2, or UKS2. Why? Again, this shows bias. Again, we question how there is time available to cover Humanism in lower KS2 at all, while it is considered sufficient for Buddhism to be covered only in KS3. Who made this decision and why?

3. An absence of Faith / Failure to explore what Religion is

It is particularly shocking that, despite hyper-fixating on belief, the syllabus says nothing whatsoever about faith, and why faith matters to people. The word “faith” is used in the syllabus as a synonym for a religion (much as previous drafts did with the word tradition). In all the activities designed for pupils to examine what religions are and what worldviews are, there is no discussion of what faith actually is, or how consciously having faith and being faithful to a Tradition are the essential qualities that differentiate religions (including nontheistic religions such as Buddhism) from nonreligious life-frameworks such as Humanism.

By neglecting faith, the syllabus leads pupils to believe that religions differ from nonreligions due to the nature of the *things* that religious people believe (a supreme being etc.). When year 5 are asked why some people “choose” to follow a religion, they are led to think that religion means believing *something*. Year 7 are told (p. 37 / 12.1.7) what a worldview is, but do not explore what religions are except through a vague multidimensional lens that no 11-year-old could understand (or arguably even their teachers). Again, Year 1 (p. 30 / 12.1.1) are told to consider “the *things* that people might believe” but not how religious believing is a different *action*.

We support a more rigorous RE syllabus which would help pupils appreciate that religious belief (**faith**) in anything is **a different way of believing, not a belief in a different thing**. This is the fundamental distinction between **believing that** compared to **believing in**. Believing in means **being faithful** to a teaching or a practice or being, so that this teaching or practice or being is embraced religiously. Jews express our faith by practicing Judaism faithfully, not by believing very confidently *that* this or that claim is true. *Jewish faith is primarily an action.*

Faith works similarly in other religions, even if the object or expression of faith is different. One can have faith without believing any particular theology to be *correct*, and one can have faith without believing in a supreme being (such as for example in Buddhism, or for those who are *faithfully* committed to a “secular” value such as veganism). It is important for any RE syllabus to include instruction that helps nonreligious children (those who do not have faith) to understand the experience of those who do have faith, and to explore whether some of their “secular” beliefs are in fact held religiously. This would build mutual understanding rather than emphasising difference.

Even when the syllabus deals with “ways of knowing” in KS3 (p. 37 / 12.1.7), there is no mention of the role of faith as a religious *activity*. Faith is just a synonym for a religion. On page 39, with respect to “ways of knowing”, the syllabus actually talks about sources of authority and “what we believe” – again belief viewed as being propositional (believing that this or that is true). The closest that it comes to an acknowledgment of faith and of the sort of belief that comes from religious experience is by discussing individual “truth” and the insider / outsider problem (p. 38). But that is again to do with positionality and biases, which is important, but relates to propositional knowledge.

In fact, the syllabus actually mentions “belief in God” as a proposition that one can “justify” by texts, as if this is something factual (p, 47). This word usage demonstrates an extraordinary lack of understanding of what “believing in” really means for religious people. This is ironically a good illustration of the insider / outsider problem and the risks of unconscious bias when positionality is ignored.

We understand that there is academic literature (Ninian Smart) that “problematizes” religion and questions whether any religion can be defined accurately and rigorously. But the fact that the concept of a religion or a faith is understood differently by different people should not lead us to erase religion or faith as concepts worthy of understanding and instead talk about “worldviews” instead, which itself is not a rigorous concept and which is, more importantly, the wrong concept to understand religions. At least when we discuss religion and faith and understand their ambiguities, we are being intellectually honest.

This neglect of faith is offensive to all religious people, not just Jews. **The syllabus is written from a particular viewpoint and presents opinion as fact**, when by law the syllabus must be impartial and objective.

4. Is “Worldviews” the only way?

There is a perception that the “religion and worldviews” approach has been imposed on us from on high, and we have to conform to it. The Wokingham SACRE were informed that this is “the way RE is going” and if we do not conform then we will be behind the times. But we need to remember that not every bandwagon from academia makes for good practice in the classroom. The “whole word reading” fiasco comes to mind – a policy imposed on schools across the USA, resulting in a generation of illiterate inner-city children.

In fact, the worldviews framework has no government support and is not government policy. A private members bill in 2023 to redefine RE as religion and worldviews was not passed, significant objections have been raised, and this approach remains controversial. It has not been tested in the classroom and it is reckless to introduce it across the board.

Moreover, by describing religions through a Christo-centric secular worldview that understands religions as philosophical beliefs rather than as living traditions based on faith, this syllabus violates the legal requirements for RE that **“The State must take care that information or knowledge included in the curriculum is conveyed in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner. The State is forbidden to pursue an aim of indoctrination that might be considered as not respecting parents’ religious and philosophical convictions.”**¹

We need an RE syllabus that is not over-focused on philosophical beliefs. RE should explore cultural traditions in different religious communities and the way that believing, behaving and belonging all impact each other, rather than treating behaviour and belonging as being products of a worldview (beliefs). RE should explore the importance of faith in the lives of both religious and nonreligious people and aim to foster **understanding of and respect for other people who approach life differently**², rather than expecting that all belief systems can be reduced to philosophical propositions.

Nonreligious frameworks for life such as humanism may be included as a complement to the study of religions, but we must not reformat the rest of RE so that religion and nonreligion are taught as if they are all worldviews, just because humanism is best understood as a worldview. If we try to do that, our teaching of religion is impoverished, and pupils will be misled and indoctrinated against religion, which is against the law.

Rather than one-size-fits-all we must be inclusive of pluralistic views of religion and belief.

5. **Believing, Behaving, Belonging is a more inclusive framework for RE**

The syllabus currently in use (2018-2023) has a framework of **believing, behaving and belonging**. This proposed syllabus lumps all matters of behaviour, history, and identity into a single category: **History and Social Sciences (HSS)**. Belief is split between Philosophy (**Ph**) and Theology (**Th**). This proposed framework leads to an obsession with theology, which is divisive. It also neglects both the action and identity – based aspects of religion, which are key to both Judaism and Hinduism, which are not theological religions like, say, Protestant Christianity or Humanism, which are defined primarily by belief. Islam and Catholicism fall somewhere in the middle and their teaching is also cheapened by neglecting the lens of identity/belonging.

The 2018-2023 syllabus made real progress in making RE less Christo-centric, not by teaching Christianity less (which we would oppose), but by avoiding an excessively

¹ European Court of Human Rights, 1976. *Kjeldsen, Busk Madsen and Pedersen v Denmark*
<https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre#%7B%22itemid%22:%5B%22001-57509%22%5D%7D>

²As required by Fundamental British Values guidance:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/380595/SMSC_Guidance_Maintained_Schools.pdf page 5

Protestant Christian lens when studying minority faiths. This proposed worldviews framework is a backwards step, so that RE yet again focuses excessively on belief, and a very narrow form of belief at that (see above). This approach is outdated pedagogy. It also takes sides on the most fundamental philosophical divide that exists today regarding religion (mentioned above), so that it assumes that the individualistic secular approach is valid (the focus on the personal worldview).

This “worldviews” syllabus proposal contains no core questions that explore the importance of faith, religious identity, culture, and tradition as practice handed down from one generation to the next something. Even worse, as already explained, many of the core questions take an explicitly secular humanist point of view

The more recent revisions to the Judaism sections (adding some reference to identity) do not fix these problems, as they affect *all* religions. We need a consistent syllabus that does not look patched together. It must have a coherent structure, and worldviews will ensure that it does not.

6. A Better way forward

We argue that a better framework for the syllabus would be to shift away from an excessive emphasis on propositional belief and pure logic. Instead, the syllabus should take a thematic approach, looking at the role of religion and nonreligious life frameworks in different aspects of human life. Religions and life frameworks are, after all, structured ways of understanding the human experience.

The added advantage of such an approach would be to make the syllabus less chaotic, so that pupils would retain knowledge better. Currently although key questions are often parallel between religions, there is little attempt to draw connections between religions, except through core questions which are excessively philosophical. They thus lack cultural depth as well as being deeply problematic for reasons explained above. Looking at common human experiences across religions would foster mutual understanding, as opposed to the discussion of theological differences, which is divisive. Our human brains are after all designed to notice change and difference, whereas we need to have similarities pointed out to us.

It is widely recognised by teachers that pupils learn best when, rather than being bombarded with loosely related facts, they develop knowledge and understanding through experience. A focus on propositional belief is bad pedagogy. With respect to RE, pupils respond best to real engagement with religious practices that make the subject come alive, rather than learning and logically analysing theological propositions. This is true not only for young children, but even for older children and teenagers. A thematic approach would allow learning that is designed for children, not a child’s version of a university theology class.

Aspects of human life to explore could include:

1. Time. Different traditions have different calendars. The year 0 or year 1 for different religions relates to historical events important to that religion. Why the term A.D. in dates is often offensive to Jews (and probably also Muslims). There can be a link with science as the word month comes from the moon and traditional solar-lunar calendars add leap months to keep in line with the seasons (except in Islam – why would this be?). That children may have more than one birthday on different calendars. Many religions have festivals on the full moon or the new moon. The origin of the week and why Christianity and Judaism have different days of rest. Why the date of Easter changes every year and how it relates to Passover.
2. Food and dietary laws. How the rules for what Jews, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and other religions differ and why. The role of dietary rules in cultural identity.
3. Sacred texts. What books are important for different religions. How the Hebrew Bible was adopted by Christianity, which calls these books the “Old Testament” and why the term “Old Testament” is offensive to many Jews. That the Kor’an repeats many of the same stories (slightly differently) that were originally in the Torah or Rabbinic texts. Similar textual relationships between Dharmic / non Abrahamic faiths?
4. Approaches to mortality, including rituals to do with death and mourning, as well as finding meaning.
5. Other life events (birth, coming of age, marriage, parenthood, illness) in different religions and life frameworks.

Note that discussing mortality (item 4 above) would be far superior to the core question proposed for year 6, which views death only through the lens of propositional belief and therefore is not meaningful for life frameworks such as Judaism and Humanism, which focus on this life.

III. OTHER GENERAL CONCERNS

7. Liberalism must not be taught as an aspect of Humanism

We are concerned that the idea of the importance of liberty is being taught (page 23, 9.2) as an aspect of humanism specifically and not as an enlightenment value that can all share whatever our religion. Certainly, liberty is a value that we hold dear as religious Jews. In fact, it is a value that underpins the very teaching of RE (that pupils are not being told what they have to believe, that religious coercion is wrong). The study of Humanism should include teaching how religious humanists share many of the political values espoused by secular humanists as these traditions have influenced each other

in the West. Otherwise, pupils might get the false impression that belief in God is incompatible with Liberalism or that Liberalism is a nonreligious worldview.

It would be useful in KS4 philosophy to have a conversation about what the purpose is of learning about religions different from our own. What is the difference between disagreeing with another faith or nonfaith, versus criticising them (which implies that they are wrong)? How do religious or nonreligious people avoid judging those whose beliefs or practices are different from their own so that we can live together in peace? This could emphasise the importance of learning about difference without always judging, the value of humility in our own beliefs and the difference between faith and factual belief. These are liberal values, necessary for democracy to function in a diverse society. These are also complex ideas that pre-teens are not ready to tackle.

It would also be useful in KS4 to have a conversation (in philosophy) about the core distinction between secular humanism and all religious traditions, which has to do with whether human beings are best understood solely as separate individuals seeking self-actualisation and self-understanding based on science and reason alone (the secular humanist position), or whether human beings are embedded in culture and community and (in addition to utilising science and reason) also look to tradition and the wisdom of sages / prophets / rabbis / gurus / church fathers etc. for guidance on how to live the best life (the traditional religious position). Both positions are compatible with political liberalism, and in fact it is illiberal to impose one or the other of these positions on others.

These debates are of course **not** age-appropriate for primary school RE and we argue they are not even age appropriate for KS3, which should focus on teaching knowledge of religions and nonreligions without judgment. It is crucial to remember that an RE curriculum has a duty not to take sides in this fundamental human debate over the source of meaning in human.

Rather than having philosophical discussions that risk unconscious proselytising by primary teachers who often lack any RE training, **teachers should model liberal values** and emphasise that we are learning *about* Christians, Jews, Muslims, non-religious people – what they believe and how they live, and about the common values that cut across communities. Religious beliefs must not be presented as facts. Teachers should also remind pupils that it is inappropriate for *anyone* to disparage another person's religious or non-religious way of life in an RE class. That is much more effective at inculcating liberal values and mutual respect than abstract conversations about moral philosophy or teaching abstract principles such as the insider / outsider problem.

IV. SUMMARY OF NECESSARY CHANGES

If a revised version of this proposed syllabus is to be acceptable, then major changes are needed. The balanced framework of believing / behaving / belonging must be restored. This was a major improvement in the 2018-2023 syllabus and its removal has been a backwards step.

At minimum, to satisfy the legal requirement of impartiality, we expect:

- (1) The syllabus must not treat religions and faith traditions as "worldviews". This needs to be addressed both where the mistake is explicit and when the false assumption is implied through the questions and other content.
- (2) The syllabus must contain key questions and core questions for each key stage that are not heavily biased towards the priorities of some religions or nonreligious life frameworks over others. Below, some suggested changes to the key questions are suggested, illustrating the bias in the current proposal.
- (3) The syllabus must explicitly acknowledge that not all religions or faith traditions are defined primarily by a belief system or world view, but that practices, inherited traditions, values and ethnic / cultural identity are more important than propositional belief in many communities (which is why, for example, Jews with widely varying world views can nevertheless worship together and share a common identity as part of the Jewish People, a fact recognised in UK law).
- (4) The syllabus must acknowledge that faith is the key concept that all religions have in common and help pupils to understand the role that faith plays in people's lives. To foster mutual understanding, this should include an exploration of the role of faith in nontheistic religions such as Buddhism and even in the lives of those who describe themselves as "non-religious" (such as faith in democracy, being faithful in marriage, faithful practice of veganism).
- (5) The syllabus must not treat minority religions as less important than Humanism.
- (6) The study of Judaism must acknowledge the fact that Jews are a minority ethnic group (not a race) with a shared history (the Jewish People), originating in ancient Judea and Israel.
- (7) The syllabus must not treat identity as something that is necessarily individual rather than relational (group identity). The syllabus should address identity as it emerges from history, religious practice, and ethnicity for those religions in which this is important. Again, this does not affect Judaism alone.
- (8) The syllabus must not encourage pupils (explicitly or implicitly) to ask which religion or worldview is "the correct one" or encourage pupils to judge religious beliefs or practices.

Rather, it should emphasise the importance of understanding that different life frameworks (whether religious or not) express many of the same values and human experiences. Pupils should also learn to respect difference and learn how to listen without judging others.

(9) The syllabus should not waste time on age-inappropriate intellectual exercises based on critical theory that do not provide actual knowledge to pupils about religions or nonreligious life frameworks.

(10) The syllabus should not waste scarce class time on surveys and other activities that are properly part of social studies and not RE.

(11) The sections in this syllabus devoted to “philosophy” contain so much bias and potential indoctrination that they are in most cases not fixable and should be removed from KS1 and KS2.

KS3 Philosophy could be retained but shifting the focus. (See appendix C below.)

A change of framework is needed.

The following alternative questions / themes would be more appropriate:

- BF = Belief / Faith
- AB = Action / Behaviour (includes ritual, celebrations, lifestyle, practical morality)
- HI = History / Identity (includes belonging, family, relationships, individual identity)

APPENDIX A. KEY AND CORE QUESTIONS: IMPROVEMENTS AND REMOVING BIAS

Below are some examples of the core questions and key questions in this syllabus, and alternative key questions which would not create as much of a bias towards theologically focused religions and life frameworks. We also recommend alternatives that are simply more open and adaptable so constitute better pedagogy. Notes are given in italics to explain the need for the revisions and suggest when larger changes are needed.

Note that we have consulted our Hindu colleagues on these suggestions, so that they are suitable for both religions. Our aim is to make suggestions that will be suitable across the range of religions as well as in many cases for nonreligious life-frameworks such as Humanism.

We have done our best to suggest modest changes. However in the case of KS2, more radical changes should be considered, as the framework here is chaotic and not well designed for learning. The key questions amount to asking “What is Judaism?”

A thematic question framework would be far more effective to help pupils to gain real knowledge and gain understanding of what different religions and nonreligious life frameworks have in common.

Proposed question	Substitute
EYFS: What does it mean to be kind?	Why is it important to be kind?
<i>Most religious traditions have some equivalent of the teaching in Genesis that human beings are created in the image of God and are therefore worthy of respect. Teach this as the ethical source of the stories and then you have a coherent religious lesson with universally meaningful moral content.</i>	
Y1: How do Jewish people think about God and themselves? Where do these ideas come from?	What beliefs and values are most important to Jews and where do these come from?
The original is an improvement on v7, but the alternative is more nuanced and adaptable to other faiths. Not all beliefs are about God or ourselves.	
Y1: How does remembering contribute to a Jewish sense of identity?	What do Jews remember (people, places, things, stories) and how does this relate to Jewish identity?
<i>Again, this is an improvement on v7, and the mention of identity is nice, but identity informs how we remember as well as remembering informing identity, so the wording needs adjusting.</i>	
Y1: What and how do Jewish people celebrate and why?	What and how do Jews celebrate / practice and why?
<i>The practice of Judaism is as important as celebrations. Again, this adapts to all religions.</i>	
Y1: Why do many Jewish people go to the synagogue?	What is the role of a place of worship for Jews?
The revised question is more open, and adaptable to other faiths. It allows for the effect of synagogue life on identity.	

LKS2: How do we learn about beliefs from the way that people behave?	How do people express their beliefs and values through actions?
LKS2: What do texts and stories reveal about peoples' beliefs and worldviews?	How do people learn beliefs and values from texts and stories?
<i>Texts do not reveal beliefs that were already there. Texts are how religious people learn what is important. The practice of telling stories changes us and teaches us who we are.</i>	
LKS2 or UKS2	How does family, community and practice influence religious identity and what people believe?
UKS2:	How might beliefs, community, and religious practice shape a person's identity?
<i>As the syllabus stands, there are no core questions that consider how practices affect beliefs, identity or belonging. This means that additions related to such causation look out of place. There needs to be a key question that invites such discussions.</i>	
Year 5: Why do some people choose to follow a religion and others do not?	Why do some people follow a religion and others do not? OR better How do people live a meaningful life?
<i>The proposed question assumes that whether people follow a religion is always due to a choice. Many people follow a religion because they were raised that way, and it is part of their identity. Again, the syllabus assumes that belief is primary rather than being a product of identity. The focus is excessively on the individual choice. Note that the material in the appendix related to this question aggravates the problem and inappropriately encourages children to question their religious upbringing.</i>	
<i>Advice was sought from Jewish teachers and one suggested that the original question and the rephrasing are both too convoluted for year 5. Better just to ask how to live a good or meaningful life, which is general enough to allow discussion of how some people practice religions and others do not and how both ways of life are valid.</i>	
Year 6: Does a belief in life after death make a difference to how a person lives now?	How do people cope with mortality and grief and find meaning after loved-ones die?
<i>Although Jews do believe in some sort of afterlife, we do not emphasise this but focus on this life. A more general question allows discussion of life after death if that is important in a religion or life framework but is also more inclusive of Judaism and those without a religion. It is still an odd topic choice for KS2.</i>	
UKS2: What do different people learn about God and human life from their sacred texts and tradition?	What do Jews learn about God and human life from their sacred texts and tradition?
UKS2: How do different people practise their faith in worship, at home and in the community?	How do different Jews practise their faith in worship, at home and in the community?
<i>We appreciate the removal of the word "believers", but why say "different people" here, when members of other faiths are called Christians, Muslims, Hindus etc. Just call us Jews please.</i>	

APPENDIX B. JUDAISM CONTENT REVISIONS

Judaism KS1	
<p>What beliefs and values are most important to Jews and where do these come from?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God is One (not allowed to split God up or worship God through images or people), • observing mitzvot (613 commandments) • love of Torah (first five books and most important part of the Tanach / Hebrew Bible), • work and rest / holiness of time (relate to Shabbat and festivals), • Judaism is a family religion (passed down the generations). People do not usually <i>choose</i> to be Jewish; it's just something you are from birth. • The Jewish People. Jews express their identity and show their faith by practicing Judaism (celebrating festivals and Shabbat, keeping kosher, etc.)
<p>What do Jews remember (people, places, things, stories) and how does this relate to Jewish identity?</p>	<p>Jews remember core stories through practice.</p> <p>(1) God's creation of the world – observed through Shabbat. We copy God by resting once a week.</p> <p>(2) Redemption (exodus) from Egypt) – observed through Passover. Jews live Passover as if we each personally left Egypt. This is a statement of identity as part of the Jewish People. Exodus is also remembered every Shabbat.</p> <p>(3) Receiving the Torah (revelation at Sinai / Decalogue “ten commandments”) – remembered whenever we do mitzvot and say the Shema, put on tefillin, put up a mezuzah</p> <p>Jews remember the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac Jacob) and matriarchs (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah) because they are how the Jewish family started. Jews are the Children of Israel (Israel = Jacob), a nation / ethnicity / identity</p> <p>Jews remember our ancestral home the land of Israel / Judea / Jerusalem – observed through Chanukah.</p>
<p>What and how do Jews celebrate / practice and why?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reciting the Shema (statement of faith in one God, commitment to mitzvot); • Jews observe Shabbat and festivals and practice mitzvot • Shabbat (family time, rest, oneg = delight) • Shabbat and Passover commemorate memories (see above) • Jewish calendar: lunar / solar, Jewish festivals (Passover, Yom Kippur, Chanukah, Simchat Torah) have different dates each year on the secular calendar because they are based on dates in the Jewish calendar. • Observance at home as well as in the synagogue. • Kosher food, and special Passover rules to remember the story of matzah.
<p>What is the role of a place of worship for Jews?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synagogue as a place of learning and community, as well as worship. • Reading the Torah scrolls. The role of Torah in Jewish life how Torah scrolls are stored and handled. • Role of the rabbi in the synagogue and as teacher • Synagogue customs vary between communities • Hebrew as the primary Jewish language of prayer worldwide (language of ancient Jews / the Hebrew Bible / the modern State of Israel) • God understands all languages, so Jews often pray in the language of their country. • Jews pray towards Jerusalem / Temple Mount (holiest place for Jews).

Judaism UKS2

What do **Jews** learn about God and human life from their sacred texts and tradition?

- **God is One** (not allowed to split God up or worship God through anything such as objects or people)
- **Action precedes belief** (*Na'aseh Venish'mah*)
- **Shema**: commandment from the Torah to love God
- Human beings are **created in the image of God** foundation of morality – treating other human beings decently
- **Golden Rule**: Love your neighbour, who is, like you, created in the image of God (Leviticus). Do *not* do to others as you would *not* want them to do to you (Rabbi Hillel's way of teaching this).
- love of **Torah** (Five Books of Moses, first and most important part of the Tanach / Hebrew Bible)
- **613 mitzvot** for Jews, just **7 Laws of Noah** for other nations.
- **Sanctity of human life** takes priority over almost all mitzvot
- **Teshuvah**: Repentance and forgiveness. High holy days and **Yom Kippur**. Judaism teaches that we must say sorry to the person we wronged and only then to God. Balance of good and bad deeds (no one is expected to be free of sin).

- Judaism is a **family** religion (passed down the generations). People do not usually *choose* to be Jewish; it's just something you are from birth. Obligation to **teach your children**.
- **The Jewish People** started with the **Patriarchs** (Abraham, Isaac Jacob) and the **Matriarchs** (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah)
- Being Jewish is an ethnicity with a religion on top
- The righteous of all nations have a place in "the world to come". Jews **do not seek converts** (converting is difficult).
- Focus on living a **good life in this world**, not on life after death; various beliefs about "the world to come"
- **Covenant** with God (agreement and special relationship):
 - between God and Abraham (akeidah, brit millah)
 - Between God and Israel (Exodus from Egypt, Revelation at Mount Sinai, laws to govern life in the land of Israel)
- Importance of **Jerusalem** and the land of **Israel** (historical home of the Jewish People)
- Living as a Jew in the **Diaspora**. Ancient yearning to return to Zion (can be found Psalms, Lamentations)
- Teachings of the **Sages**, **Rabbinic** interpretation of law allows Judaism to adapt to a changing world, stories from **Midrash** help explain gaps in the biblical text, a living tradition.

How do different **Jews** practise their faith in worship, at home and in the community?

- observing **mitzvot** (commandments) that guide every aspect of life
- Jews express their **identity** and express their faith in God by **practicing Judaism** (at home and in the synagogue)
- Reciting the **Shema** (statement of faith in one God, commitment to mitzvot) and wearing **tefillin**;
- **Remembering** core stories through practice.
 - Passover as reliving the Exodus every year.
 - Shabbat as reliving Creation every week (and the Exodus).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Studying Torah as reliving Revelation at Sinai every day ○ Celebrating Chanukah to remember the Tabernacle / Temple in Jerusalem ○ Face East when we pray to remember Jerusalem / point towards Temple Mount ● work and rest / holiness of time (relate to Shabbat and festivals), ● Jewish calendar: lunar / solar, Jewish festivals have different dates each year on the secular calendar because they are based on dates in the Jewish calendar. ● Shofar on Rosh Hashanah to wake us up to do Teshuvah ● Kosher food (separating milk and meat, special rules for Passover, shechita / prohibition on eating blood) ● The Jewish home and putting up a mezuzah ● Observance at the synagogue and reading the Torah ● rabbi as teacher and synagogue leader ● Life cycle events such as bar / bat mitzvah, brit milah, marriage ● Jewish ethics: mitzvot related to honesty, gossip ● Tzedakkah (Charity) means being righteous
<p>How do the sacred texts and other beliefs influence the way people respond to local and global issues of social justice?</p>	<p>Holiness Code (Leviticus chapter 19) includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Do not oppress the stranger. ● Pay your workers promptly so they don't suffer poverty. ● Laws of speech (not to spread gossip and to criticise in private) - relevance to cancel culture ● Duty not to stand idly by the blood of your neighbour (good neighbour law) ● Kindness to animals. Duty to relieve suffering, even on Shabbat. ● Fair measures, honesty in business ● Taking care of widows, orphans, stranger (vulnerable groups) ● leaving some of the harvest for the poor. As illustrated in the Book of Ruth ● Love your neighbour who is, like you, created in the image of God. No profiteering. <p>Human beings created in the image of God.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Limits to personal autonomy as the body belongs to God. ● Sanctity of human life. Can break Shabbat to save life. <p>Charity / Tzedaka = righteousness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maimonides 8 levels of charity; giving generously ● Mitzvah Day and Jewish charities <p>Tu BiShvat – festival of trees, date significant to environmentalists, symbolism of trees (Torah is the “Tree of life”).</p> <p>B'al tachit (do not waste resources) Deut 20:19-20</p> <p>Shabbat as a day not to exploit the environment (not even to pick flowers). Employees and even animals must rest on Shabbat.</p> <p>Partnership between God and Humanity – It is up to human beings to take care of the world.</p> <p>Tikkun Olam Perfecting the world under the Kingship of God</p> <p>Traditional Jewish response to Theodicy: Don't try to explain evil. Respond to evil by doing good and you will improve yourself too.</p>

APPENDIX C. KS3 Philosophy (pages 25-26 / 9.2)

General observations:

1. The philosophy sections in KS1 and KS2 are badly constructed and should be removed. Philosophy is best taught as a separate topic from RE, particularly in primary school. If it is linked with RE, it should be restricted to discussions of non-theological questions, such as right and wrong, British values etc and safeguards should be in place to protect against unwitting indoctrination by teachers who are unaware of their own biases.

People may bring religious views into their arguments, but it is inappropriate to argue over which religious position is the correct one.

Pupils need to learn to formulate coherent arguments and think critically about all sorts of things (politics, science, etc.). If this criticism is solely applied to religion, this constitutes a bias in favour of Humanism, for which critiquing religion is an essential part of their practice.

2. We understand that you feel that philosophy should be an element in KS3. To be suitable and to satisfy the legal requirement of impartiality, the focus must shift from theology, as this may mean that children in minority faiths find their religions undermined by others. **We never question the validity of someone else's faith at school.** That violates the social contract between the school and parents, that allows parents to feel safe letting their children participate in RE.
3. Discussing proofs of the existence of God is too advanced for KS3. Such high philosophy should be reserved for A level philosophy. Again, this approach views religion through a Humanist lens, which considers evidence and reason as the only valid basis for a life framework. This ignores the importance of faith. Again, this secular approach to religious life frameworks violates legal impartiality requirements and constitutes indoctrination.
4. It is far more useful to discuss how some people find a moral compass with and without faith or a religious foundation. In this way, both religious and nonreligious approaches to life could be given equal weight. One could look at Kant's categorical imperative, and whether this can be argued for without starting from any religious first principles.
5. One could also explore the fact that some religious people seek "evidence" for their beliefs (for example by witnessing miracles), but that many religious people view such quests for "evidence" as misguided and "superstitious". People see what they want to see to validate their existing faith (confirmation bias).

You could also discuss how some people have personal religious experiences that give them personal faith (such as the Christian experience of being born again and feeling personally “saved”), but this is not “evidence” that could convince another person.

6. Another useful topic for philosophy would be the interaction between Science and Religion, and what to do when they apparently are in conflict. This could include learning about the difference between fundamentalist interpretations of the Creation story in Genesis (which exist across the Abrahamic faiths), as opposed to less literal approaches. That a text can mean different things to different people. This could include discussing the view of the 12th century Jewish philosopher Maimonides, who taught that if Torah and Science appear to be in conflict, then you are misunderstanding the Torah. Pupils should learn that most religious scholars across faiths teach that scientific knowledge and religious knowledge are different things that serve different purposes.

Suggested questions for KS3 Philosophy:

1. In the Brothers Karamazov by Fyodor Dostoevsky, Ivan says “If there is no God, then everything is lawful.” Is Ivan right? If not, what is the basis of morality for those who do not believe in God? Can we base morality on science and reason alone?

Sources can include: Golden rule based on “Love your neighbour, who, like you, is created in the image of God” (Hebrew Bible). Kant’s categorical imperative which may possibly be justified by secular arguments only. Also Kant’s proof of the necessity of belief in God (as a first principle.)

2. Is science and reason sufficient to work out how to live a good life? What other sources of understanding exist within religious traditions? Are the scientific / rational and the religious approaches to understanding in conflict, or do science and religions ask and answer different questions so that they complement each other?
3. Is freedom an absolute good? Why do some people find meaning living by often restrictive religious rules and do such rules always make you less free? How can living by rules give us freedom? Why do some people choose to become religious when they were not raised that way? Why do others do the opposite?

Sources can include: “Let my people go that they may serve me.” (Exodus) Jewish idea that the Israelites were totally free only when they received the Torah, because without rules to live by, people find other things to enslave them (false gods, fads, cults). There must be teachings from Christianity, Islam, Hinduism etc. that provide wisdom on this.

4. Is equality an absolute good? The Golden rule says to “love your neighbour” but does that mean loving every human being equally? May we love our families more?

Is it morally wrong to prioritise your community or country? Do I need to give up all my wealth if poor people exist in the world? Is it wrong to have an ethnic identity?

Sources can include: “It is easier to love humanity as a whole than to love one’s neighbor.” (Eric Hoffer) , *The Gospel of Wealth* (Andrew Carnegie) “Charity starts at home.”

This can include discussion of poverty and how most life frameworks include an obligation to take care of the weak and vulnerable. Also discussion of socialism, communism, Stalinism and Maoism (that extreme attempts at equality can result in disaster). That creating absolute equality is not possible in practice, and this creates real life moral dilemmas for governments. Critical analysis of John Lennon’s song *Imagine* – what would a world with no countries be like?

Many religions contain wisdom on the dilemmas posed here. Judaism emphasises one’s duty not to oppress the stranger, but also one’s particular duty to those in one’s community. Universalism and particularism as competing values.

5. Also see observations in section III (7) on Liberalism and the difference between disagreement and criticism. Also the distinction between secular humanism and religious life frameworks that place less emphasis on the individual. Page 11 above.

Philosophy to be covered separate from RE (in maths, PSHE, social studies)

1. What are the elements of a coherent argument? How do you spot specious reasoning? Learning about the importance of well-defined words and examples of political rhetoric that makes incorrect conclusions appear plausible through manipulating language. Words should mean the same thing at all points in an argument.
2. When should we believe factual claims made by others? How do we analyse claims to work out which claims are plausible, and which are not. How can survey data be biased by asking questions one way or the other or because of sample bias? Look at news headlines and learn how to spot misleading claims and what questions to ask. BBC More or Less is a good programme to explore this.

Specific points:

- *What do we mean by a just and fair world and who decides?* (page 25)

This entire section is chaotic, mixes things from different religions together randomly in a Christo-centric manner. It needs serious untangling. What is the purpose of this section. It needs to be more focused. Omitted here is the idea of human beings created in the image of God, which would seem most relevant.

You include: *Consider Justice in the Old Testament and what that meant*

Where? There are a massive range of issues and consequences in the Torah.

There is a mistaken old-fashioned Christian theological idea that Judaism is about strict Justice and Christianity is about love. The term “Justice in the Old Testament” raises Jewish hackles. The Tanach (Hebrew Bible) contains much about how God is a God of love. The Jewish sacred texts are being treated from a purely Christian perspective, without respecting their Jewish nature.

You include: *Noah’s Ark*

What part of this story? Destruction of all life? Behaviour of Noah’s family afterwards? The 7 Noahide laws?

You include: *Genesis 3 – introduce the concept of Original Sin.*

Why is this in a section that is otherwise about Judaism (next to discussion of “Tzedakah”? The concept of original sin does not exist in Judaism. We say every morning “My God the soul that you placed in me is pure.”

How is this relevant to social justice anyway?

You continue: *Climate and environmental justice.*

Is this still in reference to the Torah? Then give a Jewish view. (Deuteronomy 20:19-20 and others) Or clarify that this is a Christian view.

You continue: *Social justice*

No discussion of where this comes from. The commandment to “Love your neighbour” comes from the Torah (Judaism) – Leviticus. A fundamental guiding principle of Judaism has been colonised and appropriated. The source in Judaism must be acknowledged.

APPENDIX D. OBSERVATIONS / CORRECTIONS

1. Key questions from the current (2018-2023) syllabus

Below are some key questions from the current syllabus that deal with matters of identity and belonging and practice in a way that is lacking in the proposed syllabus. This is particularly notable in upper KS2.

KS1: Why are religious celebrations important to some people but not to others?

Lower KS2: Recognise how religious identity can be shaped by family, community and practice.

Upper KS2:

1. Explain how beliefs, practices and community can support or determine responses to matters of life and death.
2. How might beliefs and community shape a person's identity?

KS3: Is there more than one way to be spiritual?

2. Observations (aside from identity):

- a. Page 7 / Section 3. The Purpose of Religious Education. This does not mention the **importance of developing pupils' tolerance of and acceptance of views that may differ to theirs**. Yes you do mention *introducing* pupils to the diversity of religion and nonreligion, but there is a difference between telling pupils that diversity exists, and teaching pupils the value of mutual respect. This omission conflicts with our schools' responsibilities to actively promote the fundamental British Values of *individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs*.³
- b. Page 14 / 6.2. Humanism. The syllabus should acknowledge that moral principles in Humanism are held in common with Judaism and many other religions. For example, the Golden Rule, and responsibility to protect the weak. You do acknowledge this commonality on page 16 (LKS2) but not on page 14 (KS1).
- c. You mention the "Old Testament" in your Year 7 guidance (9.2). On page 21 with respect to Christianity, and more problematically on p. 25 in the section on Philosophy which is meant to cover multiple religions. The detailed guidance for Christianity should teach pupils that the term "Old Testament" is specifically Christian terminology for their arrangement of the Hebrew Bible, which originates in Judaism; also why the term "Old Testament" is offensive to many Jews (as it implies that Judaism is "old" and in need of replacement by Christianity which is "new"). It is inappropriate to use the term "Old Testament" outside of its Christian context.

3

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/380595/SMSC_Guidance_Maintained_Schools.pdf page 5

- d. Page 23 / 9.2 In Humanism: *“Humans responsible for solving world problems through justice and social activity. No afterlife, so justice must occur in this life. One life, so take personal responsibility to make it a good life.”*

These are core concepts in Judaism as well, which must be acknowledged here, as Judaism is not covered at all in KS3. Teaching these ideas only in relation to Humanism informs pupils (incorrectly) that they are not relevant in faiths.

One solution would be to include this in section 9.2 *What do we mean by a just and fair world and who decides?*

- e. Pages 33-25 / 12.1.5.

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE CHOOSE TO FOLLOW A RELIGION AND OTHERS DO NOT?

This activity very inappropriate and raises safeguarding concerns.

9 year olds do not have choice in this matter. They are led by the adults around them, whether at home or at religion school (church, synagogue etc.).

These questions are asking children to disclose something they may not understand or feel ready to disclose.

This section spotlights children from minority religions. When there is only one child from a minority religion in a class, the teacher’s unconscious bias often places them in the position where the child is expected to be the expert and support the teaching. This is inappropriate

- *‘Rank/sort the reasons for believing or not and explain why they think some of these reasons are better than others.’*

Once this discussion moves beyond discussions such as “I believe it will be sunny tomorrow” or “Arsenal are better than Liverpool”, and into religious beliefs, it becomes inappropriate.

This is asking children to justify their religions. This is asking children to make value judgements on other people's religions, which may lead to oppression towards minorities.

This conflicts with 12.1.3, Year 3, Discuss how own perceptions might influence our attitudes and by finding out more about other faiths and beliefs we can become more tolerant towards others with different religions and worldviews.

One of the stated purposes of Religious Education (page 7) is to “develop pupils’ appreciation of the complexity of worldviews, and sensitivity to the problems of religious language and experience.” It is not to teach children to judge people’s religious views – especially not when the children are not as yet old enough to have detailed knowledge or understanding of even their own religion, let alone that of others.

- *Look at a faith not planning to study. Are all the impacts on daily life that they mention positive?*

How can they ask children to make this value judgement? For example, does anyone other than a practicing Jew, or, possibly, someone who has studied Judaism in depth, actually think that the dietary restrictions of Kashrut or the rules of Shabbat have a positive impact on daily life? Do they have the knowledge or experience to make that sort of judgement? The insider / outsider problem is again ignored.

- *Is it OK to question an authority in a place of worship or disagree/disobey*

This is a very Christian-centric question. Will the teachers be aware that it is pretty much irrelevant in Judaism? Judaism is essentially non-hierarchical.

Rather than a question on questioning authority, discussion of the value of following rules, or on the values an authority figure should embody, might be more appropriate.

If children need training in spotting possible abuse by adults in authority, the place for such training is PSHE not RE, as this sort of abuse can occur in any environment, not only those that are “religious”. Placing such training in RE indicates that children should view religious leaders as particularly suspicious compared to other leaders, which again is a biased approach, and illegal.

f. Pages 35-36 / 12.1.6. HOW DOES BELIEF IN LIFE AFTER DEATH MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO THE WAY PEOPLE MARK A PERSON’S DEATH?

This is another Christo-centric question. Why the assumption that religion means believing in life after death? Judaism does not have a concept of hell or even a consensus on what happens after death. We Jews have a concept of *Olam Haba* (the World to Come), but this is a very vague idea that can mean many different things. The idea is not well developed because our focus is on this life.

It would be far more inclusive to have a more general question about how different religions or life frameworks help people to deal with mortality, and the different rituals or ceremonies that people have to mourn the dead and cope with grief.

- *Explore a variety of beliefs about life after death, ensuring to cover at least one Abrahamic, and one Dharmic tradition.*

We should bear in mind that the three Abrahamic religions have three very different views on what may or may not happen after death; so you cannot assume that the views of one are the same as the views of another just because they are Abrahamic. (Even within religions, different sects will have a different approach on these matters.) In some ways they may be as different from each other as they are from a

Dharmic religion. Better to explore the range of beliefs about life after death and examine similarities and differences.

- *Consider what might be the impact of these beliefs and then find out what believers say the impact is.*

Again, the Christian-centric perspective that belief defines membership of a religion. It would be much more inclusive and accurate to say ‘...and then find out what **COMMUNITY MEMBERS** say the impact is.’

- g. Page 42 / 12.2. EYFS. “ideas that we call religions and worldviews”. Religion is not an idea!
- h. Page 42 / 12.2. EYFS. “People have different ideas about right and wrong.” Why not teach pupils that there are common values that we share across different religions in the UK? Like kindness. Why emphasise difference? We have very different practices and theologies but common values.

Similarly on page 42, “People have different ideas about what is special or sacred.” Yes true, but **why not focus on what makes something sacred, and the common human experience of sacredness that we share.**

This is an example of how the focus on belief is divisive.

- i. Why are KS1 wasting scarce RE time doing surveys when they could be learning about other religions? (p. 43 / 12.2) Let them do that in social studies!
- j. KS1. P. 42 / 12.2. Why is all the believing about God? Jews believe in performing mitzvot and that personal religious belief / understanding results from our actions. *Na’aseh venish’mah*. Most important Jewish principle. Judaism is a religion that focuses on law and de-emphasises belief. Jews show faith by doing, not primarily by believing.
- k. P. 43 / 12.2. Are we really asking KS1 children to justify their religious beliefs using logic? This is a very secular approach and leaves no room for faith. This is the opposite of progressive and inclusive. It is regressive and divisive.
- l. Again p. 45 / 12.2. LKS2 are being asked to justify their religious beliefs using logic. This is wrong. Beliefs often come from experience or from faith. Pupils should not need to justify their faith to others or be asked give reasons for their religious beliefs. The goal should be to understand why others believe, behave and belong differently.
- m. Why are LKS2 wasting scarce RE time doing surveys? This is not social studies. It is RE! (p. 44 / 12.2)
- n. P. 46 / 12.2. A person’s worldview will affect how they respond to current issues. Surely it makes more sense that if you want to know what a person believes, look at

how they behave? Why treat the worldview (belief) as a primary cause? And why assume that it isn't life experience that helps a person develop new views on this or that?

Why assume that a person will change their religious beliefs because they interact with people from other religions? These are not political opinions. This is faith. The whole point of faith is that you are faithful to it.

If you are using the word "worldview" as a synonym for religion, then you must distinguish between the way that a person's opinions on this or that change as they are exposed to opposing views, and the way a person's understanding of their own faith may mature as they grow up and experience life. **Different religions are not opposing viewpoints. The point of learning about other religions is *not* to make a child change their religious beliefs or to help a child work out his or her own "personal worldview".** Any attempt to influence a child's religious beliefs or to encourage them question the faith in which they are being raised is inappropriate and illegal.

- o. Again, what on earth are pupils doing wasting scarce RE time looking at survey data??? That should be done in social studies. (p. 46 / 12.2)
- p. Again on page 46 / 12.2, pupils are encouraged to debate worldviews, which means they are encouraged to suggest that their friends religious views are wrong. Unless you are using the word "worldviews" to mean something other than religion. (This is the problem with using a word without the meaning being clear.)

Discussing and arguing about morality and ethics is fine, but this is being confused with theological disputation, which is completely inappropriate in primary school RE. With the greatest of care, you may be able to have some discussions of this sort at KS4 (with prior notice to parents), and certainly it is fine for an A level course, but not for pre-teens! You are treating religions as if they are positions in a big debate. This is divisive and risks forcing parents to withdraw their children from RE.

- q. Again page 48 / 12.2 (KS3), there is a focus on reason and epistemological questioning. Why? Debates within RE should be restricted to practical questions of ethics (such as approaches to abortion). Theological disputation has no place in RE as it is divisive. Children should focus on understanding each other, not on converting each other.

3. Identity and belonging in this syllabus

- a. In the May version of the syllabus (v17 AH), identity was not mentioned at all except for some in appropriate references to "gender identity". As promised, the references to gender identity have been removed, but in their place is the word identity on its own in a number of places where it is unclear what it means. In Year 7 key questions (section 9.2), you simply removed the word gender and left identity on its own. This substitution of "identity" for what had been "gender identity" occurs on pages 22

(Buddhism) and 24 (Islam). It makes no sense. We had been told that this would be changed from “gender identity” to just “gender” (meaning biological sex).

- b. We note that you have added identity to the Judaism sections (pages 12 / 6.2 and 31 / 12.1.3). This is an improvement. The activity on page 32 / 12.1.4 is promising, but it remains incorrect to view texts as expressing a worldview. The core question needs revision.
- c. Page 33 / 12.1.4. You acknowledge that “*Jewish people who do not believe in God follow the teachings and the practice, because it links to their identity*”. We welcome this acknowledgement of the importance of identity, but identity is not the only reason Jewish people who do not believe in God may follow the teachings and the practice. Many follow the teachings because they are good guidance in life, and the practice enhances their lives.
- d. The page on the purpose of Religious Education makes no mention of learning about the role of religion in a person’s developing sense of identity and belonging.
- e. In section 12.2 (pages 41 – 48), you outline the subject knowledge separating this between believing, living and thinking. (Living has replaced belonging and behaving in the 2018-2023 syllabus.)
 - i. EYFS does a decent job.
 - ii. KS1: identity and belonging are totally missing. P. 43. “People gather in communities to worship and celebrate shared beliefs.” That is not all that happens when we worship. Worship helps to build community and common identity / belonging. Prayer is one way people show that they care about each other.
 - iii. LKS2. Identity and belonging are within Living, which is correct, but nothing about how our actions affect our sense of identity or our beliefs. Actions and rituals demonstrate beliefs. That is not how all religions work.
 - iv. UKS2. No mention of identity or belonging. NONE! The “living” content focuses on belief and sociological research. There is no actual learning about religious practice.
 - v. KS3. Good: Identity is acknowledged to affect belief.
BAD: “*identify with* organised worldviews” What does this mean? You mean they may *belong to a religious group*, due to upbringing or ethnicity, even if they do not share orthodox beliefs of the group. Again, this assumption that people are always choosing to belong, that religious identity is a choice for children, and that religion is primarily about belief (“worldview”).