

Worcestershire SACRE Agreed Syllabus review 2024

Background

The Worcestershire Agreed Syllabus for RE runs from 2020-2025. It is a legal requirement for Local Authorities to review its syllabus every five years. We have to set up an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) to advise SACRE, and for SACRE to inform the LA of its recommendation. We need to begin the review spring 2024, so as to be ready for a launch summer 2025, and implementation from September 2025.

The need for a high-quality syllabus

The provision of a clear, well-structured, up-to-date and professional agreed syllabus is probably the single most important function of SACRE. Combined with ongoing implementation training and resources, a new syllabus offers the potential to raise achievement in RE in all local schools. It is also essential to consider how this relates to new inspection requirements, to developments in assessment and in teaching and learning, the Commission on RE report (CoRE) and its recommendations with regard to its 'Statement of Entitlement' and the change to a 'Religion and Worldviews' approach, and other associated educational change.

Ofsted's subject specialist RE reports 2010 and 2013 highlighted the need for syllabuses to:

- be clear about expected knowledge and understanding about religion(s) and belief(s)
- support and empower teachers to plan effectively
- offer coherent progression across ages and key stages
- support clear and focused assessment, useful for raising standards.

Implications of the 2019 Ofsted Framework

The 2019 Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (EIF) places great emphasis on curriculum planning. It asks schools what the thinking is behind their curriculum plan for the school – their **intent**. It then examines how they **implement** it – including a context and narrative for its implementation in the school. And then it examines the **impact** of their curriculum on pupils. An agreed syllabus needs to be able to support schools in all three. It needs to have a good rationale for its structure; it needs to be operable in diverse school settings; it needs to show schools how they can see what impact the syllabus is having on pupil achievement.

Ofsted Research Review 2021

Ofsted's RE research review talks about what RE means by 'knowledge'. It describes three kinds of knowledge: **substantive knowledge** (concepts, teachings, practices, ways of living); **'ways of knowing'** or 'disciplinary' content (the methods of study) and **personal knowledge** (pupils' own worldviews).

Commission on RE: Religion and Worldviews 2018

The 2018 Commission report (CoRE) is prompting a widespread discussion over the meaning of 'worldviews' – both 'organised' and 'personal' – and the implications of using this idea within RE.

RE Council of England and Wales: religion and worldviews project 2024

The REC religion and worldviews project comes to a close in May 2024 with the publication of a Handbook for curriculum writers looking to apply a 'religion and worldviews approach', along three Frameworks that give examples of how the Handbook model is applied in different contexts. At the heart of the Handbook is a National Statement of Entitlement (NSE), as a pedagogical tool to guide syllabus and curriculum writers. This NSE is the basis of the REC's new proposed [National Content Standard](#) .

Worcestershire syllabus 2020-2025

RE Today developed the current syllabus with the above issues in mind, anticipating the Ofsted EIF demands with our focus on a spiral curriculum, clarity on core concepts, guidance on short, medium and long-term planning, clear learning outcomes and progression.

The syllabus includes substantive, disciplinary and personal knowledge, but it is not explicit for teachers without some guidance. Again, it is possible to identify personal and organised worldviews in the syllabus, but teachers will need guidance on this.

Options

We have three options:

1. Re-license with RE Today, to their updated syllabus, for the next five years.
2. Look at alternative syllabuses available
3. Move to a 'religion and worldviews' approach syllabus.

A fourth option might be to write a new syllabus ourselves. However, this is not a serious solution given the challenge of funding such a major undertaking.

1. Re-license with RE Today, to their updated syllabus, for the next five years.

This is the simplest arrangement. We just recommend to the LA that we re-license the syllabus around for another five years.

RE Today is working on an updated version of the current syllabus, with some additional guidance material, some tweaks to language, and some amendments to units. See the appendix for a full list of amendments in the updated syllabus

Advantages:

- Current syllabus is strong and successful
- Pupils are beginning to reap the benefits of the continuity of the spiral curriculum
- Many schools have invested in planning and resources and won't appreciate another change
- Its connection with the Understanding Christianity resource allows for extended progress for pupils
- More community schools could access Understanding Christianity training and resource
- The update offers guidance on 'ways of knowing' (Ofsted), disciplines, and worldviews

Disadvantages:

- The RE world keeps moving! The syllabus is not applying a religion and worldviews (RW) approach, which is the cutting edge of RE teaching at the moment.

2. Look at alternative syllabuses available.

Other local authorities make their syllabuses available for a cost. For example:

Norfolk 2019 syllabus, the first local agreed syllabus with an explicit focus on disciplinary approaches. Content is studied in one of three strands – theology, philosophy or human/social sciences. We would need to ask Norfolk what their charges are. Cumbria SACRE adopted this in 2023, with some tweaks.

Hampshire's 'Living Difference IV' is a conceptual and enquiry-based syllabus with a long history. It has been well supported by specialist advisers for decades. Costs are given on their website.

Advantages:

- Norfolk's disciplinary approach definitely meets the Ofsted requirements for helping teachers and pupils to understand 'ways of knowing'.
- Hampshire has a long pedigree and many teachers in the county love it. It is used by a few neighbouring LAs, and some London Boroughs.

Disadvantages:

- Norfolk's disciplinary model is demanding and would require significant training to get teachers to use it well. This is also already 5 years old, and presumably a review is underway.
- Hampshire's model is also significantly different to the current Worcestershire model and would require specialist training, initially from a Hampshire adviser, but then on-going.

3. Move to a 'religion and worldviews' (RW) approach syllabus

The REC's Handbook includes a guide on how to develop an RW approach syllabus, and it would be based on the National Statement of Entitlement. Some syllabuses are either in the pipeline or available already, for example:

- RE Today is working on a syllabus that embraces the RW approach for 2025.
- Coventry and Warwickshire 2024: this is based on the framework developed as part of the REC Worldviews Project over the past three years. As such, it is pretty cutting edge. It is sophisticated and detailed, with units of work for all key questions.

Advantages:

- An RW approach would implement the most recent developments in the RE community

Disadvantages:

- The challenge again is that it is a very significant change, requiring committed support for teachers and committed buy-in from teachers too.
- Not everyone agrees with the RW approach, although some may find the new Handbook offers a clearer idea of what it looks like in practice.

Costs:

There will be some cost implications for these choices.

Option 1. RE Today have a licence fee per school. They will offer a discount on the full licence costs to keep them very close to the 2020 cost.

Option 2. Costs for Norfolk will need to be ascertained. Hampshire has a price list on its website.

Option 3. Costs for Coventry and Warwickshire will need to be ascertained. RE Today's syllabus licences are likely to include a discount, but not as much as for option 1.

If SACRE is so minded, there are ways to mitigate these costs.

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Appendix: Adaptations/amendments for the Worcestershire syllabus update

- Updating the language from 'religion and belief' to 'religion and worldviews', in line with CoRE
- Updating language from 'religious and non-religious beliefs' to 'religious and non-religious worldviews' (e.g. p.8)
- Adjusting language (e.g. Hinduism to Hindi traditions p. 12)
- Making non-religious worldviews, specifically Humanism, more visible:
 - E.g. in worldviews to be taught (p.12)
 - Revise some non-religious units to have more visible Humanism, e.g. U2.10,
 - Amend U2.11 to become 'What does it mean to be Humanist in Britain today?' including some of the reasons for and against belief in God as part of this
 - Amend 3.13 What difference does it make to be non-religious in Britain today? to include some more specific study of Humanism but also more recent data on non-religiousness/Nones.
- Update EYFS using DfE 2020 EYFS Profile page 24
- Taking opportunities to add additional examples showing more diversity in the impact sections of units (e.g. Unit 1.2 some more global and local examples of Christian harvest celebrations, prayer, grace etc.)
- Scope for the county to add a few more examples of more local places in some of the units
- Updated demographics to 2021 Census
- Adjust p.147 long-term plan

Additional pages:

- Insert pages on developments in RE since last syllabus, ie CORE report, Ofsted EIF, Ofsted Research Review, Religion and Worldviews approach Handbook 2024
- Pages on curriculum design in RE and creating a coherent curriculum
- Additional page giving intro to ways of knowing – how disciplines are found within the syllabus
- An example of making progress in terms of methods/disciplines – from REC Draft Resource p44
- Update on National Statement of Entitlement/Subject Content Standard, and connections with syllabus.
- Adding three optional units as appendix 1:
 - L2.13 How do people from religious and non-religious communities celebrate key festivals? a unit that is explicitly multidisciplinary
 - U2.13 What can be done to reduce racism? Can religion help?
 - U2.14 What do religious and non-religious worldviews teach about caring for the Earth?
- Appendix 2 – cultural capital and RE
- Appendix 3 – more detail on assessment, achievement and progress
- Appendix 4 – RE in special schools – more detailed guidance
- Appendix 5 – progression in language – vocabulary across the syllabus

Forewords, intro and cover also updated