

The top section of the cover features a light green background with several faint, stylized religious symbols. On the left is a cross, in the center is a six-pointed star with circular ends, and on the right is a yin-yang symbol.

# **BIG IDEAS**

FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

**Edited by Barbara Wintersgill**



# **BIG IDEAS** FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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# **BIG IDEAS** FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

## **PREFACE**

During 2014–15 I was privileged to be involved in Learn Teach Lead RE, working with teachers in the South-West of England to develop new approaches to assessment. I was particularly interested in the work of Lorin Anderson and David Krathwohl, and am indebted to Lorin for introducing me to work of Jay McTighe and the late Grant Wiggins.

Although Wiggins and McTighe worked in a very different educational situation, much of what they had to say about the curriculum could have been directed specifically towards the situation of Religious Education (RE) in England, even though RE was almost the only subject they never mentioned. They stressed the centrality of *understanding* as the prime object of education and the importance of students' ability to *transfer* their learning to situations outside the classroom. They also called for students to achieve a *deep and sophisticated* understanding, which was incompatible with a curriculum that tried to cover too much information. This of course resonated with the influential work of Tim Oates and the National Curriculum Review group in England. Wiggins and McTighe referred to the 'twin sins' of activity-focused teaching and coverage-focused teaching, neither of which "provides an adequate answer to the key questions at the heart of effective *learning*: What is important here? What is the point? Put simply ... the problem is that in both cases there are no explicit big ideas guiding the teaching and no plan for ensuring the learning".<sup>1</sup>

Wiggins and McTighe raised the possibility that identifying 'big ideas' might be part of the solution to many of our concerns about the quality of RE. Turning to the UK, my search for examples of big ideas in other subjects was unfruitful with the notable exception of some exploratory work in geography and two publications by Wynne Harlen and colleagues, describing the development of big ideas in science education. Once again, words directed at a different context appeared to speak directly to the RE situation:

*We find, at least in developed countries across the world, a decline in young people taking up studies in science and other signs of lack of interest in science. Students are widely reported as finding their school science not relevant or interesting to them. They appear to be lacking awareness of links between their science activities and the world around them. They 'don't see the point' of studying things that appear to them as a series of disconnected facts to be learned. In practice, the only point that they can discern is that they need to pass examinations<sup>2</sup>.*

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<sup>1</sup> Wiggins, G. McTighe, J. (2005) *Understanding by Design* (2nd ed). Alexandria VA. ASCD p3.

<sup>2</sup> Harlen, W. (2010). *Principles and Big Ideas of Science Education*. Association for Science Education. p1.

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After a year of research, initial development work and introductory papers, I was convinced that the development of big ideas for RE should be attempted, difficult and controversial as the task would inevitably be. During that year, Alan Brine and Linda Rudge were invaluable sounding posts and critics.

I am grateful to Rob Freathy and the University of Exeter's Graduate School of Education for adopting the project and to the St Luke's Church College Foundation for funding an initial seminar, which made it possible to invite colleagues from other universities to form a development group.

In October 2016, the development group met for three days at a remote farm on Dartmoor with the aim of identifying a small number of Big Ideas that would guide the selection and sequencing of content in RE and would further students' understanding and enjoyment of the subject. The participants come from widely differing academic backgrounds, including theology, religious studies, philosophy, sociology and the history of education, and have different professional interests including teacher education, research and school inspection. What they have in common is a passion for religious education and a commitment to raising the quality of RE provision in England.

The brief profiles of the participants given at the end of the report indicate the range of expertise they brought to the seminar. I cannot thank them enough for the enthusiasm with which they embraced this project and their willingness to give up their time to come to Devon and continue to offer the benefit of their wisdom as the work unfolded over the succeeding months. My particular thanks go to Michael Reiss, a member of Wynne Harlen's science working group, who has been a constant source of wisdom and encouragement and who chaired the Dartmoor symposium.

**Barbara Wintersgill – September 2017**

# BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

## 1 PRINCIPLES OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

### Why principles?

- 1.1. For many decades, it has been customary to preface RE curriculum documents (local and national) with lengthy introductions. These include, as a minimum, lists of aims, objectives, skills, attitudes, concepts and, more recently, references to religious literacy. Introductions may also include papers explaining the value of RE in promoting government initiatives, such as 'every child matters' and 'community cohesion'. Some of these introductions are longer than the syllabus itself and occasionally they read more as apologia for the subject than materials that will improve teaching and learning. The preamble to the non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education (2004) ran to 12 pages; the Religious Education Council of England and Wales' (REC) RE Review (2014) to 11 pages. Introductions to agreed syllabuses can total over 20 pages.
- 1.2. HMI subject inspections frequently revealed that few teachers read any material in their statutory syllabus beyond the specific programme of study for the age group they taught<sup>3</sup>. Taking note of this, the first challenge we set ourselves, before developing Big Ideas, was to produce a one-side summary of what our subject should be in the 21st century. The result, *Principles of Religious Education* is included on the following page.

### A note on terminology

- 1.3. One of the issues to face the team was to find a term to describe belief systems and philosophies that are not generally recognised as 'religious'. In order to conform to the policy of the REC we have used the phrase 'non-religious worldviews'. We found the phrase to be lengthy and occasionally clumsy, interrupting the flow of the text, which is particularly apparent when reading the text aloud. In addition, the debate identified in the Big Ideas about the nature of religion not infrequently makes the boundaries between 'religious' and 'non-religious' fuzzy. We are continuing to search for a briefer term.

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<sup>3</sup> Since 1989 the 5-16 curriculum in schools in England, Northern Ireland and Wales has been divided into four key stages, covering 9 years (Ys): Key Stage 1 (Y1-2: age 5-7), Key Stage 2 (Y3-6: age 7-11), Key Stage 3 (Y7-9: age 11-14). Students at Key Stage 4 (Y10-11:14-16) and those in the 6th form (Y12-13: age 16-18) follow examination syllabuses. Primary schools generally include Y1-6 and secondaries Y7-11. Some students stay in school 6th forms for Y12-13 while others go to colleges.

## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

**Table 1 Principles of Religious Education**

School aims	Schools should, through their RE programmes, aim systematically to prepare students for the spiritual and intellectual challenges of living in a world with diverse religions and beliefs as well as non-belief.
Purpose	The main purposes of RE should be to enable students to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ understand the ideas, practices and contemporary manifestations of a diversity of religions and non-religious worldviews;</li> <li>■ understand how religions and beliefs are inextricably woven into, and influenced by, all dimensions of human experience;</li> <li>■ engage with questions raised about religions and beliefs, including questions about meaning and purpose in life, beliefs about God, ultimate reality, issues of right and wrong and what it means to be human;</li> <li>■ understand some of the main approaches to the study of religions;</li> <li>■ develop their own beliefs, ideas, practices, values and identities;</li> <li>■ develop the motivation, understanding and skills to make enquiring into religious questions a lifetime activity;</li> <li>■ flourish as responsible citizens of changing local, national and world communities with diverse religions and beliefs.</li> </ul>
Goals	RE should aim to develop in students the ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ use terms such as 'religion', 'religious', 'non-religious' and 'secular' appropriately whilst understanding their contested nature;</li> <li>■ develop knowledge and understanding of a range of religions and beliefs;</li> <li>■ discern and analyse connections between religions and beliefs and social, economic, political and cultural life;</li> <li>■ make informed comments about religious issues and about the religious dimensions of personal, social, political and cultural issues;</li> <li>■ understand the rationale and consequences of some of the main approaches to the study of religions and non-religious worldviews;</li> <li>■ articulate clearly and coherently their personal beliefs, ideas, values and experiences while respecting the right of others to differ;</li> <li>■ carry out enquiries into the world of religions and beliefs;</li> <li>■ reflect, communicate and act in an informed, intelligent and sensitive manner towards those who profess religions and beliefs and also towards those with no expressed beliefs.</li> </ul>
The benefits of RE	RE makes a unique contribution to students' learning by teaching them about contemporary religions and non-religious worldviews. It is uniquely placed to create greater understanding and tolerance between people of all religions and non-religious worldviews and thereby to improve relationships in society/communities. It contributes to the development of students' ideas, values, practices and identities.
Using Big Ideas to define the scope of RE	The scope of RE can be defined by identifying a limited number of Big Ideas to pervade and organise the RE curriculum and students' learning. The Big Ideas reflect the purposes and goals of RE.
Progression through Big Ideas	There should be a clear progression towards the goals of RE, with a clear indication of benchmark expectations at key points based on students' abilities to grasp the Big Ideas.
Learning experiences	Learning experiences will reflect a view of inquiry that is explicit and has been demonstrated to be effective.
Curriculum activities design	The design of the curriculum should ensure that students are provided with coherent, progressive and systematic opportunities to address and revisit the Big Ideas of RE.
Assessment	The formative assessment of students' learning and the summative assessment of their progress apply to all cognitive goals.

# BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

## 2. FOUR BIG QUESTIONS

- 2.1. The project 'Big Ideas in Religious Education' was developed in response to four questions that arise in education generally, and in RE specifically.
- 2.2. The first question arose out of the advice given to the 2013 National Curriculum Review group by Tim Oates that students need to study fewer things in greater depth in order to secure *deep learning* in the *big ideas* in the subject. Assessment should be transformed to focus on whether they have understood these key areas of knowledge and skills rather than whether they have reached a particular level.

The question arising from this advice was: ***If the content of the RE curriculum is to be reduced, on what principles or criteria should we decide what content is included?***

- 2.3. In response to Oates' advice, in 2014 the government informed schools that they would no longer be expected to use the eight-level scale as the basis of assessment. The level descriptions attached to the eight levels had for many years defined progression in RE. They also influenced the choice of content for each age group in many syllabuses.

This raised the question: ***On what principles or criteria should we decide how the selected content should be sequenced for ages 5-18?***

- 2.4. Ofsted has been concerned for many years that students are not learning well enough in RE. In too many schools, standards are too low and provision is not good enough. Two of the key features of this underachievement are that many students do not remember what they have learnt in RE lessons and are unable to make the connections in their learning which are necessary to seeing the big picture in RE.

This generated the question: ***How might the RE curriculum be presented in a more coherent way?***

- 2.5. Inspectors also found that although RE has gained popularity where it is well taught, many students find the subject irrelevant in today's world.

This generated the question: ***How might we make RE more engaging for young people growing up in the 21st century?***



### 3. THE PROBLEM WITH SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE IN RE

- 3.1. The last three decades have seen extensive development work on several aspects of RE, notably defining learning in terms of level descriptions, assessment and the subject's contribution to students' spiritual development and to social cohesion. In contrast, the question of subject content had been given little consideration between the publication by the Schools' Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) of the Model Syllabuses in 1994 and the Church of England's guidance on teaching Christianity in 2016.

#### Criteria for the selection of content

- 3.2. The only non-negotiable criterion for the selection of content (at present) is the legal requirement. An agreed syllabus and RE curricula for academies<sup>4</sup> without a religious character should "reflect the fact that the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain".<sup>5</sup> This leaves considerable room for manoeuvre in the choice of specific content.
- 3.3. Syllabus makers and teachers, who develop schemes of work, are faced with the challenging task of covering this large quantity of content often in less than an hour a week. Agreed syllabuses have responded to the problem in different ways. Some have included a huge amount of content, others very little. Some specify which religions have to be taught to each age group, others do not. In any event, teachers are usually given considerably freedom to decide what content to include and what to exclude.

#### Problems with sequencing content

- 3.4. It is not difficult to analyse a selection of syllabuses and school schemes of work in order to answer the question 'What content is included?'. But when we change the question to 'On what criteria has specific content been included or excluded?' the answer is more elusive. The criteria employed by agreed syllabus conferences (ASCs) for selecting and sequencing content are not always fully explained, but they appear to include the intention to:
- i. reflect one or more of the university disciplines that have a religious dimension, e.g. theology, religious studies, Biblical studies, and sub-disciplines, notably sociology of religion, philosophy of religion, psychology and anthropology;
  - ii. reflect one or more academic theory of RE, such as Smart's dimensions of religions, Jackson's interpretive approach or Wright's religious literacy;
  - iii. show equal respect to all named religions by giving the same level of detail to each;
  - iv. include material most familiar to teachers;
  - v. illustrate answers to key questions;
  - vi. reflect current priorities, e.g. greater attention to Islam than was once the case;
  - vii. include the content identified by religious groups;
  - viii. emphasise the subject's contribution to community cohesion;
  - ix. contribute to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- 3.5. The result is the current fragmentation of RE across the country, with no common aims or content for the subject.

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<sup>4</sup> Academy schools are state-funded schools in England which are directly funded by the Department for Education and independent of local authority control.

<sup>5</sup> Education Act 1996, Section 375 (3).

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### **Problems with coherence and continuity**

- 3.6. The content of the RE curriculum generally lacks coherence and continuity. For example, biblical work is most commonly seen only with students aged 5-11, although it has been re-introduced in some syllabuses for older students. The study of religious questions, issues, beliefs and values (popularly known as philosophy and ethics), previously the province of students aged 14-18, is now creeping into the RE curriculum for 11-14 year olds. The study of different religions, which was once the core of RE for 5-14 year olds, is increasingly being limited to students aged 5-11.
- 3.7. From the point of view of a student working through an RE programme from Years 1-11, the subject must often be very confusing. How do students build on what they have learnt about three or four religions in primary school as they embark on a 'philosophy and ethics' course, or even a gospel study, in Year 7? What do students in Years 1-2 learn from Bible stories that will help them make sense of non-Christian religions in Years 3-6? How can students use their learning about Judaism when they were in Y2 for making sense of Buddhism in Y7-9? Even more challenging for the secondary school teacher is trying to build on the previous experiences of students who have studied a wide range of different religions and topics in primary school.
- 3.8. At school level, RE topics may veer on a half-termly basis between aspects of different religions (e.g. pilgrimage), episodes from the life of Jesus (e.g. Holy Week and Easter), exemplars of a faith (e.g. Mother Teresa), a moral issue (e.g. abortion) and so on. Students regularly experience this jumble of what can appear to be unrelated topics and disconnected facts with no common thread or conceptual 'pegs' to help them make sense of them all. It is hardly surprising inspectors have found that so many students have not only forgotten what they learnt the previous term but have no memory of what they learnt in the lesson just observed.
- 3.9. It is time to question the traditional inclusion of specific content, particularly in relation to Christianity which has a longer curriculum history than other religions. Why is the parable of the Good Samaritan so often taught to the exclusion of other teachings of Jesus? Why are the creation stories and other Genesis narratives such as Noah's ark taught to 5-6 year olds, who are not yet able to appreciate the differences between history, fact, fiction, myth etc? Is it because in the 1950s RE, like history, was taught chronologically? But today the effects are to sow the seeds of rejection of things religious in many students once they encounter scientific theories about the origins of the universe, and to implant the long-term and often fixed misunderstanding that 'all Christians believe that God created the world in six days'.

### Time for radical change

- 3.10. Any principle for prioritising and organising content needs to:
- i. provide criteria for the selection of content from the vast amount that is available;
  - ii. provide a structure which enables students to understand the 'big picture' behind the content which otherwise too often seems disconnected;
  - iii. provide criteria for the sequencing of content from age 4-16;
  - iv. address concerns about the relevance of RE by focusing on issues related to religions and non-religious worldviews in the complex world which students inhabit today and will for the rest of their lives.
- 3.11. **Why Big Ideas?**
- 3.12. If Wiggins and McTighe<sup>6</sup> first raised the possibility that a Big Ideas approach to curriculum planning could be a way forward for RE, then Wynne Harlen's science publications confirmed it. Harlen's description of the situation addressed by the science group<sup>7</sup> mirrored so closely that faced by RE professionals that an investigation into Big Ideas theory was inescapable.
- 3.13. The following table shows how Big Ideas theory offers a potential solution to the problems and questions identified in Section 2:2-5. The close parallels in purpose were too close to be ignored.

Problem	Question	Characteristics of Big Ideas
Content overload	On what principles or criteria should we decide what content is included?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Criteria for the selection and prioritising of subject knowledge in the curriculum</li> </ul>
The disappearance of the eight-level scale as the basis of progression	On what principles or criteria should we decide how the selected content should be sequenced for all age groups?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capable of differentiation so that they may become the basis of progression</li> </ul>
Students don't get the big picture	How can subject knowledge in the RE curriculum be presented in a more coherent way?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Memorable</li> <li>• Make sense of lots of otherwise confusing information/ experiences and isolated facts</li> <li>• Act as lenses which, when used to 'view' content, helps to clarify it</li> </ul>
Many students do not see the value of the subject	How can we make RE more relevant to young people growing up in the 21st century?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transferable to events outside the classroom</li> <li>• Have long term relevance</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in full in the Preface.

## **BIG IDEAS** FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

### **4. IDENTIFYING A PRINCIPLE FOR PRIORITISING CONTENT: BIG IDEAS**

- 4.1. The principle of **Big Ideas**<sup>1</sup> has become the foundation of the curriculum in many states in the USA, Australia and elsewhere. The theory of the use of Big Ideas in the curriculum was developed particularly by Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins. In England, although the term is often used, Big Ideas in an educational context have been slow to take root, probably because they were not included in the National Curriculum.

#### **What Big Ideas are *not***

- 4.2. The most important feature of Big Ideas in an RE context is their flexibility. The lack of agreement between RE professionals over the nature and purpose of the subject, which is legendary in educational circles, has plagued many attempts to find common ground in the subject. But this is where Big Ideas prove to be particularly advantageous. For they are not a philosophy of education; they do not presume any particular pedagogy; they do not prescribe any specific content; they are *not* themes or concepts found in individual subjects; they are *not* intended to be a prescriptive programme and they do *not* assume which or how many religions and non-religious worldviews are being studied. This makes them adaptable to many styles of syllabus and schemes of work.
- 4.3. Big Ideas must not be confused with the cross-religion themes that formed a popular basis of planning the RE curriculum in the 1980s. Those themes, such as worship, pilgrimage and sacred texts, were based on what were claimed to be common features of religions. These were rightly criticised for attempting to create an unrealistic list of key characteristics of all religions, which failed to take account of the significant differences between them. Big Ideas do not claim to represent key themes in religions but rather are overarching ideas that young people need to *understand from* their study of religions and non-religious worldviews if their religious education is to have meaning and relevance to their lives during and beyond their schooldays.

#### **What are Big Ideas?**

- 4.4. Big Ideas are generalised summaries of what we want students to understand by the end of their RE in school. They are common destinations, which can be reached by many alternative routes. Because Big Ideas describe what we want students to understand, they frame the questions that lead to that understanding. They are unable to do this without contexts provided by content (See sections 11–12). It is therefore unlikely that students will ever encounter a unit of work with the name of a Big Idea as its title, but in every unit of work the learning outcomes will be defined in relation to them.
- 4.5. Big Ideas perform a similar role in students' learning as concepts in that they are 'pegs' on which students can hang the myriad pieces of knowledge they acquire over the years of RE study in order to make sense of them. For example, students learning about the creation stories in Genesis will probably 'hook' them to Big Idea 5 and Big Idea 6. This takes them way beyond the customary activity of illustrating the six days of creation to an understanding that in Judaism and Christianity these stories should not be learnt in isolation but understood as the beginning of grand narratives that explain theories of the origin and destiny of the universe and where humanity stands in those narratives (BI6).

### Characteristics of Big Ideas

- 4.6. The simplest point to grasp about Big Ideas is that they determine learning outcomes in terms of what students should understand.
- 4.7. **Big Ideas are:**
- i. **criteria for the selection and prioritising of subject knowledge in the curriculum.** If Big Ideas summarise what students' understanding should be, the content selected must enable students to achieve that understanding.
  - ii. **transferable to events outside the classroom.** An essential indicator of understanding is the ability to transfer learning to new settings. Religions and non-religious worldviews can only be properly understood when students recognise them as important elements of 21st century life.
  - iii. **memorable.** If Big Ideas are to have this life-long impact they must be summarised in headlines that are short enough to be remembered but focused enough to act as reminders of their full significance.
  - iv. **capable of differentiation so that they may become the basis of progression.** Big Ideas can be expressed at increasing levels of complexity and sophistication to describe the understanding expected of different age groups.

#### **They should also:**

- v. **have long term relevance.** Big Ideas reflect situations for the foreseeable future so that students will take from their school days understanding of religious and non-religious beliefs, practices and values that will help them understand their personal quest for meaning and the world in which they live.
  - vi. **make sense of what might otherwise be confusing information/experiences and isolated facts.** An important contributor to understanding is the ability to 'join up the dots', to see how the many different beliefs, practices and values of religions and non-religious worldviews relate to each other. Big Ideas help make these connections.
  - vii. **act as lenses which, when used to 'view' content, help to clarify it.** When used as a 'lens' through which to view a mass of possible content, Big Ideas illuminate what is relevant to RE and hide what is not.
  - viii. **taken together, express the core or central concerns of the subject.** The essential test of subject knowledge is that as well as meeting the above criteria it reflects what is central to the subject, not what is peripheral.
- 4.8. We have identified six Big Ideas for RE. Between them, they provide contexts for understanding all the essential content in the RE curriculum and much of the information that students will acquire throughout and beyond their school life. Each of the Big Ideas has a short, memorable title, which works on the memory in the same way as cards prepared for examination revision or job interviews. If we remember the heading on the card, there is a good chance that we will remember what it is about. As today's students live their lives beyond school their memory of the Big Ideas of RE will be nudged when they encounter religious phenomena or ideas. For example, media reports of new attacks by *ISIS* would jog memories of Big Idea 6, which would remind students that no individual or group speaks or acts for everyone in the religion to which they are affiliated. Therefore, our students should know not to assume that all Muslims sympathise with *ISIS*. Some people are surprised to see bishops among the members of the House of Lords. Big Idea 5 would remind them that their presence should be understood in the context that in the United Kingdom, as in many other countries, religions and religious leaders have political power and influence.

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### **What's new about Big Ideas?**

- 4.9. The thinking within these six Big Ideas are not new to RE. What is new is the way Big Ideas help teachers to see how ideas and areas of understanding previously reserved for older students relate to content introduced with younger children. Examples of this include understanding that religions have a powerful impact on communities at local, national and international levels (BI5) and that individual narratives need to be identified in the context of grand narratives if they are to be understood (BI6)<sup>8</sup>. Big Ideas as planning tools are different from anything encountered by teachers of RE to date. Most syllabuses require teachers to put together a scheme of work drawing on several lists of items. For example, the non-statutory framework for RE presented teachers with a list of 'knowledge, skills and understanding', which related to the two attainment targets, a 'breadth of study', listing the content in terms of religions/non-religious worldviews, and any themes they must include. It was left to teachers to make any connections between these items.
- 4.10. It is not unusual for content to be expressed alongside skills or processes, for example, 'Recognise some different symbols and actions which express a community's way of life, appreciating some similarities between communities' or 'Explain and interpret ways that the history and culture of religions and worldviews influence individuals and communities ...'. In these, as in other instances, it is not clear why a specific process has been attached to a particular area of content. Why should students not 'explain and interpret different symbols ...' and 'recognise ways that history and culture ...'? Big Ideas mark a separation of subject knowledge from learning processes, leaving teachers to decide how to juxtapose these elements.
- 4.11. Big Ideas are limited in number and apply across Years 1-11, thus providing a basis for progression and continuity. Unlike concepts, they are not expressed in a single word or short phrase, but are set out in the format of a headline accompanied by an explanatory narrative, which explains the connections between a number of ideas. These narratives are presented below for students aged 5-7, 7-11, 11-14 and 14-16 summarising the understanding that we expect of each age group.

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<sup>8</sup> See also Pett, S. (ed) (2016). *Understanding Christianity*. Birmingham. Christian Education.

## 5. IDENTIFYING BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

### Approaches to the task

- 5.1. The question 'what are the Big Ideas in RE?' is not the same as 'what are the most important ideas in RE?'. The second of these questions is likely to invite 'topical' responses, relating to the most desirable themes and subject matter in the RE curriculum. Twelve people could come up with a long list of answers, many of them in direct opposition to each other. The most reliable way to identify Big Ideas is to begin, not with theories about RE (which are many and varied), but with the characteristics of Big Ideas, which are few in number and generally agreed.
- 5.2. Central to Big Ideas are the concepts of transfer and relevance. If young people are to engage with RE, they have to see that it has some relevance for their lives, whether or not they regard themselves as 'religious'. 'Relevance' in this context refers to the world in which young people are growing up today. It is not a call for a return to 'relevance' as it was understood in the 1960s and '70s, when, in order to be 'relevant', RE had to focus on matters within the personal experience of teenagers: hence the popular description of RE at that time as 'sex 'n drugs 'n rock 'n roll'. 'Relevance' in the context of Big Ideas is closely related to 'transfer'. A 'relevant' idea is one that young people can apply to a wide range of situations in the contemporary world in order to make sense of them. In order to do so, they need to be able to transfer what they have learnt in the classroom to other subjects and to situations beyond school. Therefore, we began by asking, 'when today's students leave school, what issues and debates relating to religion and spirituality are they most likely to encounter during their lives?'
- 5.3. The following table sets out the issues and debates identified and some of the indicative questions arising in relation to them which have been used to generate the Big Ideas set out in Section 6.

Issues/debates	Indicative questions
The origin, destiny and purpose of the universe and everything in it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Did the universe come into being by chance, or is there a designer/creator?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is there a grand plan and purpose for the universe? If so, where do I fit in?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is time linear or cyclical?</i></li> <li>• <i>What is the ultimate reason and meaning of all reality?</i></li> <li>• <i>Does anything exist beyond that which can be experienced with the physical senses and verified by science?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is it possible to accept scientific and religious views of reality without watering down one or the other?</i></li> </ul>
The place of human beings in the universe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Do our lives have a purpose, and if so, what is it?</i></li> <li>• <i>Are people naturally imperfect?</i></li> <li>• <i>Do people need liberating, and if so, what from?</i></li> <li>• <i>What is the path to salvation?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is there life beyond death?</i></li> <li>• <i>What is my big picture of the world and where I fit in?</i></li> </ul>
Personal spirituality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What is spirituality?</i></li> <li>• <i>Do human beings have a soul or spirit?</i></li> <li>• <i>How can we explain experiences that are sometimes described as 'mystical' or 'religious'?</i></li> <li>• <i>Why are some people attracted to religions while others reject them?</i></li> <li>• <i>Do some people have a heightened awareness of the spiritual?</i></li> </ul>

## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

<p><b>Expressing our deepest thoughts and feelings</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What are the hardest things to put into words?</i></li> <li>• <i>What can we express through art, music or dance that we can't put into words?</i></li> <li>• <i>Where does human creativity come from?</i></li> <li>• <i>What is the difference between taking stories and texts literally and interpreting them?</i></li> <li>• <i>Why do so many non-religious people appreciate religious art and music?</i></li> <li>• <i>Should religious music and works of art only be heard and seen in the places of worship for which they were created?</i></li> <li>• <i>If sacred texts are meant to be revealed by God, are liberal interpretations of scriptures tenable?</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Moral issues and how to resolve them</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How can we know what is right and wrong?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is there anything that is right or wrong under all circumstances?</i></li> <li>• <i>Who has the authority to tell us what is right and wrong?</i></li> <li>• <i>Are 'doing the right thing' and 'obeying the law' the same thing?</i></li> <li>• <i>What is the best way of deciding on the right course of action?</i></li> <li>• <i>Why should we bother to live a 'good' life? Why not be bad?</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>The nature of religion</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What is religion?</i></li> <li>• <i>What is a non-religious worldview?</i></li> <li>• <i>What is 'holiness'?</i></li> <li>• <i>Does a worldview have to include belief in God to be called a religion?</i></li> <li>• <i>Do all members of a religion believe and do the same things?</i></li> <li>• <i>Why are religious converts often so passionate about their faith?</i></li> <li>• <i>Since there are so many religions and sub-groups within religions, how do we know which one has got it right?</i></li> <li>• <i>How do people's understanding of the nature of truth claims in their tradition affect their attitude to other people who disagree with them?</i></li> <li>• <i>If religious truths are revealed by God, how can they change?</i></li> <li>• <i>Aren't religions watered down if they try to change with the times?</i></li> <li>• <i>How should groups resolve their differences?</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>The power and influence of religions: religious conflict</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Is religion a thing of the past?</i></li> <li>• <i>Should religions be involved with politics?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is it true that religions only cause hatred and violence?</i></li> <li>• <i>If religions didn't exist, would we have to invent them?</i></li> <li>• <i>What have religions ever done for us?</i></li> <li>• <i>Do highly developed, sophisticated societies need religions?</i></li> <li>• <i>What are the advantages and challenges of a multi-faith society?</i></li> </ul>

5.4. The extended discussion of this process led to the selection of the following list of Big Ideas. The narratives provided here are overviews of the scope of each.



### 6. SIX BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

#### BIG IDEA 1 CONTINUITY, CHANGE AND DIVERSITY

*Religions and non-religious worldviews involve interconnected patterns of beliefs, practices and values. They are also highly diverse and change in response to new situations and challenges. These patterns of diversity and change can be the cause of debate, tension and conflict or result in new, creative developments.*

#### BIG IDEA 2 WORDS AND BEYOND

*Many people find it difficult to express their deepest beliefs, feelings, emotions and religious experiences using everyday language. Instead, they may use a variety of different approaches including figurative language and a range of literary genres. In addition, people use non-verbal forms of communication such as art, music, drama and dance that seek to explain or illustrate religious or non-religious ideas or experiences. There are different ways of interpreting both verbal and non-verbal forms of expression, often depending on a person's view of the origin or inspiration behind them. The use of some non-verbal forms of communication is highly controversial within some religious groups, particularly their use in worship or ritual.*

#### BIG IDEA 3 A GOOD LIFE

*Many religions and non-religious communities strive to live according to what they understand as a good life. Their members share an understanding as to the sort of characteristics and behaviours a good person will seek to achieve, as well as dealing with what is, or is not, acceptable moral behaviour. People have different ideas about how and why we should lead a good life. The ideal is usually presented in the lives and character of exemplary members. There may be considerable agreement across different religions and non-religious worldviews on some matters, and considerable differences on others. Also, there are often major disagreements over the interpretation and application of moral principles between members of the same religion or worldview.*

#### BIG IDEA 4 MAKING SENSE OF LIFE'S EXPERIENCES

*Many people have deeply felt experiences, which they may refer to as being religious or spiritual or simply part of what it means to be human. These experiences may result in people undergoing transformative change and on rare occasions the experience of a single person has led to the formation of a new religion or worldview. Through religious rituals and other practices, people sometimes experience a deep connection with God or gods, nature, their own consciousness or with each other. This can give them a heightened sense of awareness and mystery. Many people find that belonging to religious or non-religious groups with others who share their beliefs, values and traditions gives them a sense of identity and belonging.*

#### BIG IDEA 5 INFLUENCE, COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND POWER

*Religious and non-religious worldviews interact with wider communities and cultures. They affect the way communities have come to identify themselves over time by shaping their traditions, laws, political systems, festivals, values, rituals and the arts. The patterns of influence vary significantly in different communities and at different points in time. Some communities are influenced predominantly by one religion. More diverse and plural communities are influenced by several religious and non-religious worldviews. Their appeal to a highly respected authority or vision, whether religious or non-religious can lead them to make positive and life-changing contributions to their communities. It can also give them considerable power, which may lead to both positive and negative outcomes.*

#### BIG IDEA 6 THE BIG PICTURE

*Religions and non-religious worldviews provide comprehensive accounts of how and why the world is as it is. These accounts are sometimes called 'grand narratives'. They seek to answer the big questions about the universe and the nature of humanity such as 'Does anything exist beyond the natural world?', 'Is there life beyond death?', 'What is the path to salvation?' and 'Do we have one physical life or many?'. These narratives are usually based on approaches to life, texts or traditions, which are taken to be authoritative. People interpret and understand these traditions in different ways.*

## **BIG IDEAS** FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

### **7. PROGRESSION THROUGH UNDERSTANDING BIG IDEAS**

#### **Principles of progression**

- 7.1. In order to make progress in RE, students add to their understanding as they extend their use of subject-specific vocabulary and encounter the same concepts in the contexts of different religions and worldviews. In particular, they learn at greater depth, which is reflected in:
  - i. increasing the level of detail;
  - ii. moving from local to global contexts;
  - iii. making increasing links between smaller ideas;
  - iv. including exceptions and contrasts;
  - v. moving from simple to complex and controversial ideas.
- 7.2. Both the Big Ideas and the previously popular level descriptions are learning outcomes, but whereas the levels describe what students should be able to do, the Big Ideas describe what students should *understand*. Within these descriptions of understanding are implied skills such as identifying, making links, making comparisons and evaluating. Teachers will decide which aspects of each Big Idea are accessible to students of different year groups.
- 7.3. Big Ideas are not equally accessible to all age groups. BI6, for example, consists entirely of abstract concepts, which are difficult for younger children to grasp. BI1 includes the vexed question 'what is religion?' for older students but there are plenty of opportunities for younger students to enquire into the concrete features of religions in the world around them. We would not therefore expect students to make progress in grasping each Big Idea at the same rate.
- 7.4. The understanding expected of 14-16 year olds is intentionally high. In the light of concerns raised by HMI regarding the lack of challenge in many RE GCSE courses it is important to provide students with expectations that build on their learning in Years 7-9 and also prepare them for the challenge of 6th form work. We recognise that some of the understanding expected of 14-16 year olds could be appropriate for 6th form students taking non-examination RE courses.

### **8. DESCRIBING PROGRESSION TOWARDS IN UNDERSTANDING THE BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

- 8.1. The following narratives describe how students' grasp of the Big Ideas develops from Year 1 to Year 11. [The Big Ideas are set out by age group in the appendix on page 54].

## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

### BIG IDEA 1 CONTINUITY, CHANGE AND DIVERSITY

*Religions and non-religious worldviews involve interconnected patterns of beliefs, practices and values. They are also highly diverse and change in response to new situations and challenges. These patterns of diversity and change can be the cause of debate, tension and conflict or result in new, creative developments.*

#### 5–7

We are surrounded by distinctive things that are often called 'religious' or 'holy'. These include buildings, festivals and celebrations, rituals, books, acts of worship and symbols. These are usually different for each religion and non-religious worldview. Within the same religion or non-religious worldview people may believe different things and practise in different ways.

#### 7–11

The names 'religions' or 'non-religious worldviews' are given to systems of belief, practices and values which share some common features, such as beliefs, values, places of worship, festivals, pilgrimages, rituals, texts and symbols. All the elements of each religion or non-religious worldview are closely connected and can only properly be understood in relation to each other. Each religion and non-religious worldview is made up of several groups of people who often believe different things and practise in different ways. For some people their religion or worldview is more important to them than it is for others. Religions and non-religious worldviews change over time; sometimes as a result of historical events or technological developments or as a result of people moving from country to country and taking their traditions with them.

#### 11–14

There are a number of features that constitute a religion or non-religious worldview which can only be understood in relation to each other. Such features need to be understood in the context of their historical and cultural settings and the messages and lived experiences of the community being studied. Many people in the world belong to a religion; many others subscribe to non-religious worldviews; many others do not identify with any belief group. Religions and non-religious worldviews tend to be made up of several smaller groups. They usually share core beliefs and practices but there can be many differences between them. As a result, it is important that we do not make assumptions about all members of a religion on the basis of one group or individual. Most people recognise that religions do not stay the same; they change as a result of a number of factors, such as political and cultural differences, disagreements about ideology and authority, changes in population, the intervention of an influential person or group with a new interpretation of the religion – often several of these. Some think religions and non-religious worldviews must adapt to the times. Others believe there is one eternal truth for all time and that therefore their religion or

non-religious worldview cannot change. Sometimes people who do not agree with the decisions their leaders have made break away and set up a new group. There are important differences in beliefs, values and practices between religions and non-religious worldviews. There are also close connections between some religions and non-religious worldviews for historical and cultural reasons.

#### 14–16

There is no consensus about the meaning of the word 'religion' or how it may be clearly distinguished from a non-religious worldview. Religions and worldviews are often understood as multi-dimensional, where the main elements are doctrinal/philosophical, ritual/practical, mythological/narrative, ethical/legal, experiential/emotional, social/institutional, material/symbolic and economic/political. Some argue that they are best studied as whole systems of beliefs, practices and values; others as lived realities in individual communities. No religion or non-religious worldview is monolithic. Rather, they are diverse. Some people believe that there can only be one truth, and there can only be one true version of a religion, not several. Others value diversity and respect each other's right to difference. During the 20th and 21st centuries religions and non-religious worldviews have been challenged to give their response to many issues, particularly those involving gender, sexuality, marriage, roles of men and women, the environment and the role of religion in education. They have also been challenged from other schools of thought such as science, philosophy, history and sociology, as well as the media, in addition to being challenged by each other. Religious groups and individuals have responded differently to these challenges. They may ask whether their differences allow them to work and live together in mutual respect and tolerance or whether their differences make such co-operation impossible. Awareness of a wider range of religions and non-religious worldviews can deepen, challenge or change people's views and commitments. Some people believe there can only be one truth, that only one religion can be true and that there can only be one true version of a religion, not several. Others believe truth may be found in many different religious and non-religious traditions. However, people may respect each other's right to difference, whatever their beliefs about truth. In response to religious plurality, many religious and non-religious groups are now involved in inter-faith organisations at local, national and international level, often with the purpose of working together for a cause.

## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

### BIG IDEA 2 WORDS AND BEYOND

*Many people find it difficult to express their deepest beliefs, feelings, emotions and religious experiences using everyday language. Instead, they may use a variety of different approaches including figurative language and a range of literary genres. In addition, people use non-verbal forms of communication such as art, music, drama and dance that seek to explain or illustrate religious or non-religious ideas or experiences. There are different ways of interpreting both verbal and non-verbal forms of expression, often depending on a person's view of the origin or inspiration behind them. The use of some non-verbal forms of communication is highly controversial within some religious groups, particularly their use in worship or ritual.*

#### 5–7

People have developed several different ways to express their beliefs and feelings, such as using words in different ways when writing about spiritual or religious things in stories, poetry and drama. People also use symbols, art, music, drama and dance to express their beliefs and to tell their favourite stories. Some people believe that it is wrong to use certain forms of non-verbal expression. People may learn different things from these stories and symbols and might not agree about their meaning.

#### 7–11

People often cannot find the words to express their feelings and beliefs. They often use imagery, for example symbol, metaphor, simile, analogy and allusion, to interpret their religious or spiritual experiences and beliefs. People also express and communicate beliefs and experiences without words: through art, artefacts, symbols and icons; through dance, drama and symbolic gestures; and through music and ritual. There are different views as to which forms of non-verbal communication are appropriate to use, particularly in a religious context. All of these forms of expression not only provide a means of expressing complex ideas, they are also vehicles for learning, wisdom and inspiration and important evidence for those who want to understand the beliefs, ideas and values of others. Nevertheless, people find different meanings in all these forms of expression.

#### 11–14

People have used many methods to express their most profound beliefs and experiences. Sometimes this is in verbal form, and is communicated either orally or in writing. Non-verbal forms of communication may be used to communicate complex issues and make connections to key ideas, beliefs and practices. Different styles of non-verbal forms of communication, such as portraits, calligraphy, icons, sculptures, abstract, geometric and decorative arts and artefacts, may be used to express different aspects of religious or non-religious ideas or experiences. The extent to which these non-verbal forms of expression are used varies from religion to religion and between people of the same religion or non-religious worldview. The aim of some pictures, songs

and choral music is often to remind people of important events, myths and stories in their tradition. They are also evidence of the faith of the community for which they were created. Both verbal and non-verbal forms of expression can be challenging to interpret and often raise further questions. The interpretation will depend in part on what is believed about the origins and inspiration behind them.

#### 14–16

It is very difficult to describe metaphysical or abstract concepts using everyday language, particularly in religions, which frequently refer to ideas beyond our ordinary understanding such as God, nirvana, soul and heaven. In attempting to express the inexpressible, people have used what philosophers call 'religious language'. People of all religions and non-religious worldviews have developed technical terms to express what they believe. They also use everyday language through metaphor and analogy. Non-verbal forms of communication may have an explanatory power of their own. Some pictures, songs and choral music can remind people of important events and stories in their tradition. Other works have less obvious meanings and require more interpretation. Many musical compositions and works of art were originally created to inspire or aid devotion or commitment. Today, these works are available in a wider range of contexts. Whether displayed or performed in a religious building to inspire worship or made available to the wider public in a concert hall or gallery, they can inspire people to reflect on spiritual ideas and ask important questions. Each religion and non-religious worldview and many different groups within the same religion or worldview differ in the extent to which the use of some or any forms of art is compatible with their beliefs and practices. The uses of some forms of non-verbal expression can lead to debate within different groups. There are many ways of understanding verbal and non-verbal expressions of beliefs, experiences and commitments. They may be interpreted through studying the original purposes of the authors or artists, but also by studying the different meanings they may have for people today. Some forms of expression, such as sacred texts, are believed to be divinely inspired and may be interpreted in that light.

### BIG IDEA 3 A GOOD LIFE

*Many religions and non-religious communities strive to live according to what they understand as a good life. Their members share an understanding as to the sort of characteristics and behaviours a good person will seek to achieve, as well as dealing with what is, or is not, acceptable moral behaviour. People have different ideas about how and why we should lead a good life. The ideal is usually presented in the lives and character of exemplary members. There may be considerable agreement across different religions and non-religious worldviews on some matters, and considerable differences on others. Also, there are often major disagreements over the interpretation and application of moral principles between members of the same religion or worldview.*

#### 5–7

Most religions and non-religious worldviews introduce children to stories from the lives of their exemplary people as examples of the qualities and characteristics they might try to achieve. They also teach about specific actions that are right and wrong and about good and bad attitudes. This guidance can help people treat each other fairly and live together without upsetting or hurting each other or damaging the environment.

#### 7–11

Religions and non-religious worldviews provide guidance for their followers on how to live a good life. Moral teachings come in many forms including songs and poems, codes of conduct and rules, proverbs and wisdom sayings and stories, including stories about people from the distant past or from recent times who set a moral example to their followers. It may be their particular actions or behaviour that inspire others or it may be their teachings that their followers apply to their lives. Many religions and non-religious worldviews also have codes of behaviour or sets of rules which tell people what actions are right and wrong and what their duties are. In many cases a balance is struck between advocating specific behaviours and guiding people to judge what is the right thing to do in a given situation and to act for the right reasons. There are different ideas about why people should aim to live a good life. Some believe it is the will of God, others that it is for the good of everyone, or for the good of the whole world. There is considerable agreement over desirable virtues and qualities and what is right and wrong, good and bad, across religious and non-religious groups. However, there are also important disagreements between and within groups.

#### 11–14

People have different ways of approaching moral issues. Some prioritise developing the virtues, personal qualities and characteristics that would make them a 'good' person – someone who would live by these virtues and act on them when encountering moral challenges. Many people turn to religions and non-religious worldviews for guidance and personal examples of the virtues and qualities they should aspire to. Some people consider how their actions affect other people; some think that if they follow rules and codes of conduct they will do the right thing. It is very difficult to live a good life, even for people who try to follow the rules and guidance provided by their tradition. This is partly

because the guidance from any tradition, religious or non-religious, does not extend to every situation with a moral dimension that face people. So, we have to do our best by asking questions like 'what would be the best outcome from this situation?' or 'what might a person who is recognised as 'good' have done in this situation?' or 'what does this rule about right and wrong suggest I should do in this situation?'. Some religions and non-religious worldviews have different expectations for different groups of people. Some distinguish between rules revealed by God, those developed as a result of reasoned human reflection, those that are customs and traditions developed by community leaders over many years, and those that reflect the nature of the world.

#### 14–16

Religious and non-religious groups agree on some moral issues and disagree on others. They may have different reasons for their views and they may disagree with each other and among themselves about how to interpret their ideas of right and wrong, good and evil, and how to apply these ideas to difficult moral questions of today. People have different theories, which may be religious or non-religious, about how and why we ought to live a good life. Some teach 'virtue theory'. They say that in order to lead a moral life we should concentrate on developing a good character and good personal virtues such as generosity and compassion, which would then make us behave generously or compassionately. Others teach deontological theories. They say that the way to lead a moral life is to do one's duty or to follow the rules which tell us what is good or bad, right or wrong. A third group teach consequentialism. They say that we ought to act in the way that brings about the best overall results, no matter what those acts are. When people discuss contemporary moral issues from these perspectives, they may come up with very different answers. One of the big moral questions which is relevant for religious and non-religious worldviews alike is whether or not there are unchanging moral rules. Are there rules that apply to all people and at all times, irrespective of culture and regardless of circumstance, or does right and wrong depends on context and circumstance? Many moral conflicts result from clashes between these two points of view. This is partly because ideas about morality are closely connected to a group's core teachings about Ultimate Reality, what it is to be human and how we should relate to our planet. Various religious and non-religious organisations have tried to identify rules and principles that should apply universally.

## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

### BIG IDEA 4 MAKING SENSE OF LIFE'S EXPERIENCES

*Many people have deeply felt experiences, which they may refer to as being religious or spiritual or simply part of what it means to be human. These experiences may result in people undergoing transformative change and on rare occasions the experience of a single person has led to the formation of a new religion or worldview. Through religious rituals and other practices people sometimes experience a deep connection with God or gods, nature, their own consciousness or with each other. This can give them a heightened sense of awareness and mystery. Many people find that belonging to religious or non-religious groups with others who share their beliefs, values and traditions gives them a sense of identity and belonging.*

#### 5–7

Some people have amazing, puzzling or mysterious experiences that make them ask big questions about life. Others find deep spiritual meaning in everyday experiences. There are many stories about people's experiences and encounters that have made them change their lives. Some people find that belonging to religious or non-religious groups which share their beliefs, values and traditions gives them a sense of identity and belonging.

#### 7–11

Many people have amazing, puzzling or mysterious experiences with the wonders of nature, other people, the arts, or with a power above or beyond the material world. These encounters may be highly affecting, changing their lives in a positive way and sometimes giving them a sense of destiny. Some people account for these experiences by saying that humans have an inner consciousness or spiritual nature. Certain individuals throughout history are said to have had extraordinary insights into the meaning of human life and have passed those insights on to others. In many cases their experiences have had a major impact on religions and non-religious worldviews or have even led to a new one. Many people find that religious rituals and other practices provide opportunities for them to make connections with God or gods and each other, or with what is most important to them. When practised in community with others, these experiences may give them a deep sense of identity and belonging.

#### 11–14

Many people find profound meaning at some points in their lives in mystical, religious, spiritual or peak experiences. These experiences may be prompted by encounters with the wonders of nature, beautiful works of art or music or with tragic events. Some people believe these experiences are capable of putting them, or others, in touch with a greater power or powers or with other realms of existence and provide insights into the world and their place within it. Some individuals and groups say experience of religious rituals and other practices help them make a connection

with God or gods and with each other, or with what is most important to them. The experiences of a few key people are believed to have given them extraordinary insights into the nature of reality. They hold important and different places within one or more religions or non-religious worldviews. Some believe these experiences are related to a spiritual dimension of human beings, which may or may not be associated with religion. Others deny humans have a spiritual nature, believing that a human being is no more than a complex, highly evolved animal. Whether they see themselves as spiritual, religious or not, many people get a sense of identity from belonging to the same group as others who believe the same things, see the world in the same way, and have the same values. This can develop strong feelings of identity, belonging, loyalty and commitment.

#### 14–16

Some believe that consciousness is the key feature of being human. It is believed by some to be God-given, constituting people's spiritual nature, which marks them out from the rest of the animal world and enables them to think beyond their ordinary experience. Some people regard their spirituality as the inner personal dimension of being religious, while others see themselves as spiritual rather than religious because they do not identify with traditional religious institutions or beliefs. There are also people who do not identify with religion or spirituality. A few individuals are believed to have had exceptional experiences that have resulted in insights into the meaning and purpose of life which they have communicated to others. This can lead to the formation of new religions and non-religious worldviews, something which is still happening today. People from different religions and non-religious worldviews might disagree about the origin and meaning of religious, mystical, spiritual or peak experiences. Some find religious rituals and other practices may enable them to experience a deep connection with God or gods, nature, their own consciousness or with each other. Membership of groups with whom they share beliefs, values and traditions often gives people a heightened sense of awareness, mystery, identity and belonging, and bring about a transformation in their lives.



## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

### BIG IDEA 5 INFLUENCE, COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND POWER

*Religious and non-religious worldviews interact with wider communities and cultures. They affect the way communities have come to identify themselves over time by shaping their traditions, laws, political systems, festivals, values, rituals and the arts. The patterns of influence vary significantly in different communities and at different points in time. Some communities are influenced predominantly by one religion. More diverse and plural communities are influenced by several religious and non-religious worldviews. Their appeal to a highly respected authority or vision, whether religious or non-religious, can lead them to make positive and life-changing contributions to their communities. It can also give them considerable power, which may lead to both positive and negative outcomes.*

#### 5–7

There are signs of religious and non-religious worldviews all around us and lots of evidence of their influence on our communities. Many local and national holidays are held at the time of religious or other festivals, and religious leaders are often important people locally. Several well-known traditional stories and songs reflect the ideas of religious traditions present in the community. Religions are not equally influential everywhere. Some places are more religious than others; some families are more religious than others. Most schools have children from different religions and non-religious worldviews and may have many who do not identify with any religion or worldview.

#### 7–11

Many communities around the world are influenced at several levels by their traditional religions and non-religious worldviews. Families who no longer practise a religion may continue to celebrate religious festivals, follow traditional religious rituals at key points in life and uphold traditional values. Local community leaders may be motivated by religious or non-religious worldviews, and religious leaders are often important people in the community. Organisations and individuals may be inspired by religions and beliefs to make a positive difference in their communities, while others sometimes use their religion or worldview to justify actions that do harm. Many well-known pieces of music and works of art reflect the ideas of religious and non-religious traditions present in the community. In some communities, one religion or worldview is influential; other communities are influenced by many different religions and worldviews living alongside each other. In some communities, religions and non-religious worldviews have little influence apart from among their followers.

#### 11–14

Religions and non-religious worldviews are influential at several levels: global, national, local and individual. In communities where religions are influential, not everyone is affected to the same extent. In some communities, leaders may appeal to religions and non-religious worldviews in order to justify their policies, for good or ill. In many places, religious and non-religious groups make an important contribution to community life through their contribution to education, youth work and work with the disadvantaged and with local charities. Claiming a connection to God or gods or to a non-religious vision or ideal can give them great

power, to which they can appeal in order to justify their actions. These actions may benefit or harm communities, communities and individuals. The relationship between a community and its religions is related to its history, distant and recent, and to particular events that have changed attitudes and allegiances. As populations become more diverse so does the landscape of religious and belief and its impact on communities. Throughout the world, the arts reflect both the religious heritage of communities and the changes in religious belief and unbelief that have occurred over time and continue in the present.

#### 14–16

Religions and non-religious worldviews exist at several levels. Most people encounter religions at local level where they can make a difference to communities and individuals. At national level, everyone is affected when a religious or non-religious group influences the country's political and legal systems, its education system or the times of national holidays. Religious and non-religious groups also influence people's ideas about what is right and wrong and affect the way they respond to ethical issues. Some people see their role as one of offering a critique of prevailing social attitudes and practices. Religions and non-religious worldviews influence culture and community in places where they had power in the past and may still have it. Consequently, around the world countries and communities have very different relationships with religions and non-religious worldviews, from theocracies, where God is seen as the source of all authority, to secular states, which may claim to be neutral in matters of religion and belief. Many communities have become more diverse and have responded to this diversity in different ways. Changes in community are also reflected in the arts, which in most communities continue to remind people of their traditional religious identities while also being affected by contemporary religious and non-religious ideas. Most religions have a global presence and respond to the hardship that results from natural disasters, war, prejudice or disability. The relationship between religions, cultures and communities is both complex and controversial, since it can be peaceful and harmonious or can lead to conflict and disagreement. The appeal to ideas about a superior authority or vision represented by God, an authoritative text, a powerful leader or a compelling vision of the future may be used to justify social and political actions. This may lead to social and spiritual improvement, but it may lead to intolerance and violence.

# BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

## BIG IDEA 6 THE BIG PICTURE

*Religions and non-religious worldviews provide comprehensive accounts of how and why the world is as it is. These accounts are sometimes called 'grand narratives'. They seek to answer the big questions about the universe and the nature of humanity such as 'Does anything exist beyond the natural world?', 'Is there life beyond death?', 'What is the path to salvation?' and 'Do we have one physical life or many? These narratives are usually based on approaches to life, texts or traditions, which are taken to be authoritative. People interpret and understand these traditions in different ways.*

### 5–7

Stories are very important in religions and in non-religious worldviews. They are used to explain ideas about life, and may include God, gods, spirits, humans and animals and the rest of the natural world. Religious and non-religious worldviews help people grapple with some of the big questions of life, such as 'What happens when people die?' and 'Where did the world come from?'. Many of these stories are well known because they have been handed down over generations for hundreds of years. They are often found in holy books.

### 7–11

Stories from religions and non-religious worldviews are used to communicate important teachings and often form part of longer narratives. Some religious narratives begin with stories to explain how and why God created the universe and everything in it. Others focus more on the nature of the world itself rather than how it came to be. All religions and non-religious narratives have a lot to say about where human beings fit into the grand order of things. They seek to help people understand the mysteries of life such as whether or not there is life after death and how people might find meaning and purpose in their own lives. People come to understand these stories in different ways. These stories are valued because they come from trusted people or traditions. They are often found in texts believed to be divinely inspired and therefore sacred or holy. Non-religious narratives today usually draw upon scientific theories of how the universe began and predictions about how it will end.

### 11–14

Many religions and non-religious worldviews provide a coherent account of what the universe is like and why it is as it is. These accounts may be called 'grand narratives'. Grand narratives frequently begin with stories of how the universe came to be, whether or how it will end, and the place of human beings in it. Other narratives treat these questions in terms of an ongoing cycle of life, death and rebirth. In most religious and non-religious narratives, people are acknowledged to be in some way imperfect. There are many different ideas about this and some grand narratives provide guidance on how to be liberated from this state. Most religious narratives support the idea that there is some form of life after this one, which may be a spiritual existence or another physical one. Some religious narratives say what happens to people after death depends on how good a life they have led; others emphasise faith in divine power; others stress belonging to a community and performing appropriate ceremonies; many combine all of these. These explanations of the meaning and purpose of life come from a variety of sources.

These can include community traditions, scientific evidence, personal experience, and reasoning. For many religious people the most important source of their big picture of the world is found in sacred texts, often believed to have been divinely inspired. Many<sup>9</sup> people identify with narratives that deny the existence of any divine beings or predetermined purpose in life and state that the only things that exist are those that can be experienced with the physical senses or verified by science.

### 14–16

Many religions and non-religious worldviews have constructed an overarching narrative, sometimes called a 'grand narrative', which seeks to offer ways of understanding the big questions about the universe and the nature of humanity. Final answers are not always provided, but such narratives usually provide a context within which the questions may be understood. There are variations of belief about these narratives. Some people consider their narrative cannot change, as it is true for all time. Others say the narrative needs to be adapted or re-expressed to take account of new discoveries, changes in community or new cultural settings. Many people believe in a balance between innovation and common shared practice, but where and how to strike such a balance is often a subject of debate. Most religious narratives recognise an Ultimate Reality may be expressed as a personal and loving God, an impersonal source of existence, or an eternal truth or principle that governs the universe. Other narratives, both religious and non-religious, focus more on the nature of the world itself and the human condition rather than on questions about the nature of God and creation. Religions and non-religious narratives tell very different stories about the nature of human beings and their place in the universe. Most of the religious narratives include common themes, such as why there is suffering in the world, why humans seem to be flawed, how they might find liberation or salvation or how they might make the world a better place. In some narratives death is the end for humans and all life forms; in others, humans, and sometimes other life forms, continue after death, although there are many different views on the form that existence beyond death will take, and on whether it is desirable. Most narratives that attempt to explain what the world is like appeal for their authority to one or more of community traditions, sacred texts, scientific evidence, personal experience and reasoning. For many religious people the most important source of their big picture of the world is found in sacred texts, though the nature of the 'truth' or 'truths' found in the texts is disputed. Many religious people accept scientific accounts and find no conflict with their religious beliefs. Others say it is only possible to believe one or the other.

<sup>9</sup> This is a reference to UK statistics.



## 9 USING BIG IDEAS AND TRANSFERABLE QUESTIONS TO FRAME THE RE CURRICULUM

### Topical and transferable questions

9.1. Wiggins and McTighe strongly recommend framing programmes of study (syllabuses and schemes of work) around Big Ideas and *Essential* Questions<sup>10</sup>. The close relationship between Big Ideas and what we in the UK call ‘key questions’ has already been identified (Section 5.3). Wiggins and McTighe distinguish between topical questions, which are limited to the topic being studied, and essential questions, which “burst through the boundaries of the topic”, adding that “deep and transferable understandings depend on framing work around such questions”.<sup>11</sup> These questions are keys that will unlock the Big Ideas for students; put simply, the Big Idea provides the answer to the question. In order to find the answer to the questions, students explore the key concepts, themes, theories, issues and problems located in the content. Essential questions are different from ordinary questions in the same way that Big Ideas are different from ordinary ideas in that they:

- cause genuine and relevant enquiry into the big ideas and core content;
- provoke deep thinking, discussion, enquiry, new understanding and new questions;
- require students to weigh evidence, support their ideas, consider alternatives and justify their answers;
- encourage continuous rethinking of prior learning and personal experiences;
- create opportunities for transfer to other situations and subjects;
- spark meaningful connections with prior learning and personal experiences;
- naturally recur, creating opportunities for transfer to other situations and subjects.<sup>12</sup>

The following examples illustrate the difference between ‘topical’ and ‘essential’ questions<sup>13</sup>

Topical	Essential
What do ceremonial masks reveal about the Inca culture?	In what way does art reflect as well as shape culture?
Why did the Roman Empire fall? Why did the British Empire come to an end?	What are the common factors in the rise and fall of colonial powers?
How does Hemingway use language to establish mood?	How do authors establish mood?

Each of these essential questions is a generalisation of a topical question, created to have wider application. They may be applied to, or transferred across, the same subject and a wide range of other subjects.

9.2. The most important characteristic of these questions is that they are transferable, as are the answers. They can be asked in relation to all religions and non-religious worldviews. In the RE curriculum they apply across all age groups and every time one of these ‘transferable’ questions is asked, a student’s understanding of the possible answers can deepen and extend. The term ‘transferable’ is used here as a reminder that these questions can be asked and answered at any age and in relation to certain subjects other than RE, as well as across religions.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* Chapter 5.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* 106.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* 110.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* 115.

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### **Big Ideas, transferable questions and curriculum planning**

- 9.3. Big Ideas have the power to underpin the whole RE curriculum, the curriculum for each age group and units for each age group. They are leitmotifs permeating the age groups, focused on developing and deepening students' understanding of important ideas in RE. Big Ideas are not suitable for the detailed planning of individual lessons, which are too short for students to grasp such complex goals. However, the smaller ideas included in the age group narratives are ideal foci for lesson planning. Because the Big Ideas define the learning outcomes, it is important not to allocate too many to each unit. Early trials suggest that for each unit one Big Idea will be particularly relevant with another in a subsidiary role (as with the example on page 25-26 and page 29). Ideally, each Big Idea might be visited twice during Y1-2, four times during Y3-6, three times during Y7-9 and twice during Y10-11.
- 9.4. In practical terms, there are two ways of using Big Ideas in curriculum planning:
- (i) Adapting an existing syllabus or scheme of work;
  - (ii) Creating a new syllabus or scheme of work.

In neither case are assumptions made about curriculum policies in schools; any RE material produced should be adaptable to single subject or cross-curricular planning.

(i) is by no means the lesser option. Big Ideas are not a philosophy of education and do not presume any particular pedagogy. They are not intended to be a prescriptive programme and they can be applied to many styles of syllabus. Applying Big Ideas to an existing syllabus has the advantage that teachers will already be familiar with most of the syllabus content. To illustrate the point, the next section examines the application of the principles in this paper to a unit of work in the Devon Agreed Syllabus 2014.<sup>14</sup>

- 9.5. This example illustrates how Big Ideas and content work together, with the Big Ideas driving the questions in the context identified by the syllabus content. Where Wiggins and McTighe refer to 'essential' questions and understandings, here the functional term 'transferable' is used because in the context of RE 'key questions', 'essential questions' and 'religious questions' could be susceptible to a variety of meanings.

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<sup>14</sup> This syllabus was chosen simply because it is used in the University's immediate locality.

## 10. USING BIG IDEAS ALONGSIDE AN EXISTING RE SYLLABUS OR PROGRAMME OF STUDY

10.2. The example given below illustrates how Big Ideas might be used in the review of an existing syllabus, in this case the Devon Agreed Syllabus (2014), which specifies Christianity and Judaism for study in Years 1-2. Several of the units for this age group concern 'special' things, in this case 'special stories and books'.

### STAGE 1: Identify Big Ideas

10.3. The first task is to decide which Big Ideas will work best with this unit, in this case BI1 and BI3, both of which refer to stories<sup>15</sup>. In the text below, the italicised passages are particularly relevant to this topic.

#### BIG IDEA 6 (5-7)

*Stories are very important in religions and in non-religious worldviews. They are used to explain ideas about life, and may include God, gods, spirits, humans and animals and the rest of the natural world. Religious and non-religious worldviews help people grapple with some of the big questions of life, such as 'What happens when people die?' and 'Where did the world come from?'. These stories may be passed on in prose or poetry, in writing or orally. People apply these stories to many aspects of life and interpret them in many different ways.*

#### BIG IDEA 5 (5-7)

*There are signs of religious and non-religious worldviews all around us and lots of evidence of their influence our communities. Many local and national holidays are held at the time of religious or other festivals and religious leaders are often important people locally. Several well-known traditional stories and songs reflect the ideas of religious traditions present in the community. Religions are not equally influential everywhere. Some places are more religious than others; some families are more religious than others. Many schools have children from different religions and non-religious worldviews and may have many who do not identify with any religion or worldview.*

### STAGE 2: Identify topical questions

10.4. Allow the italicised text of the Big Ideas to ask the questions.

Text of Big Idea 6 (BI6)	Questions in relation to the topic
<i>Stories are very important in religions and in non-religious worldviews</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where would Christians and Jews find their most important stories?</li> <li>• Why are these stories and the books they are found in so important to them?</li> <li>• Why are the books in which these stories are found often called 'holy'?</li> </ul>
<i>They are used to explain ideas about life ... and help people grapple with some of the big questions of life</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which particular 'ideas about life' and 'big questions' do these stories deal with?</li> </ul>
<i>People apply these stories to many aspects of life and interpret them in many different ways</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How might Christians and Jews use these stories and books in their lives?</li> <li>• How might they interpret the stories?</li> </ul>

<sup>15</sup> NB the link between content and Big Ideas will not always be so self-evident.

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Text of Big Idea 5 (BI5)	Questions in relation to the topic
<i>There are signs of religious and non-religious worldviews all around us and lots of evidence of their influence on our communities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Where might the Bible be found in our community?</li><li>• What stories from the Bible are most well-known?</li></ul>
<i>Several well-known traditional stories and songs reflect the ideas of religious traditions present in the community</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What popular songs, musicals and plays are based on Bible stories<sup>16</sup>?</li></ul>

### STAGE 3: Identify transferable questions

10.5. Transferable questions are generalisations of topical questions that have long-term relevance and create connections with other units. In this case, a question about the meaning of 'holy' presents itself from its use throughout the Y1-2 units. Secondly, the questions related to BI3 suggest a more general question about the place of Christianity in British society. So, our transferable questions might be:

- a. What might people mean when they refer to something as 'holy'?
- b. Why are many aspects of Christianity well known in our society?

### What have Big Ideas contributed to planning?

- 10.6. Big Ideas have:
- i. provided criteria, which have resulted in the selection of specific topical questions (and content).
  - ii. led to the identification of transferable questions, which provide continuity with other learning across all age groups.
  - iii. situated this unit within a wider context, which should help students understand Christian and Jewish scriptures in relation to both their religious communities and wider society.
  - iv. contributed relevance for all students by explaining why certain traditions, such as nativity plays, are maintained in their community, and why some Biblical stories remain popular with children today. This provides a foundation for their understanding that traditional religions and newer non-religious worldviews have an impact on societies.

<sup>16</sup> In Devon, these questions would probably be asked only in relation to Christianity. In more diverse areas the questions would probably be asked in relation to other religions as well.

### 11. CREATING A NEW CURRICULUM FOR RE USING BIG IDEAS

- 11.1. Using Big Ideas to create a new curriculum document, rather than review an existing one, offers exciting possibilities. Reviewing an existing agreed syllabus has the advantage of using content known to teachers. However, it could also be seen as a lost opportunity to reconsider traditional approaches to the teaching of religions and non-religious worldviews.
- 11.2. The Big Ideas for RE project set out to achieve, among other things, a new vision of RE for the 21st century, one that would engage students and enable them to understand the place of religions and non-religious worldviews in today's world. Here, the notion of relevance is important. Since the 1960s, a popular approach to RE has been to make it 'relevant' to students' interests and personal circumstances. This was the beginning of what became known as the 'ethical' approach which addressed, particularly in secondary schools, such issues as sex outside marriage, abortion, euthanasia, overseas aid, prejudice and discrimination, the work of charities and exemplars of the faith. This approach had two main pitfalls; first, the ease with which these themes can be taught with minimal reference to religious ideas; and, secondly, in an attempt to counter this danger, the use of 'proof texts' to provide a 'religious' view. The result was, and in some schools still is, a version of RE that is almost indistinguishable from Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE). In the context of the Big Ideas project (see 5.2) 'relevance' refers to the world in which young people are growing up today and is closely related to the idea of 'transfer'. A relevant idea is one that young people can apply to a wide range of situations in the contemporary world in order to make sense of them.
- 11.3. The 1988 Education Act led to a greater emphasis on teaching about religious diversity. Agreed syllabuses, academy syllabuses and free school syllabuses must "reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are, in the main, Christian while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain"<sup>17</sup>. Although this legislation did not stipulate that RE syllabuses should include blocks of content relating to Christianity and other religions, this has been widespread practice since 1998. With few exceptions, the central activities of RE are teaching 'religions and non-religious worldviews' as well as 'philosophy and ethics'. Teachers may devote blocks of time to each religion or worldview, teach themes across a number of religions together, or both. Regardless of whether religions are taught 'systematically' or 'thematically', they are widely presented as monolithic structures, 'isms' that stand apart from each other and from the majority of people (in the UK) who do not strongly identify with any of them. Religions, non-religious worldviews, their denominations and sub-groups are frequently defined in their most 'orthodox' forms as they are manifested by their central organisations and spokespeople. This has two important implications. First, RE syllabuses rarely take account of the extensive variations in belief, practice and values that exist among people who belong to the same group or denomination. Secondly, it overlooks the fact that many people who identify themselves, however loosely, with a religion or non-religious worldview cannot be described in 'RE textbook' terms. It also marginalises those who do not identify with any specific religion or worldview.

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<sup>17</sup> Section 375 (3) of the Education Act 1996 and paragraph (5) of Schedule 19 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

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- 11.4. So, what alternatives might there be? As has been illustrated (section 10), Big Ideas only come to life when fused with content. The worked example (10.3–10.6/pp25–26) illustrated how the application of Big Ideas could elevate a unit of work from a stand-alone topic to one that has close links with other topics and which helps students to make connections and to begin to understand the influence that religions and non-religious worldviews can have on society. Nevertheless, as teachers have pointed out, this unit only demonstrates a new interpretation of an old topic. They suggested that RE might be made more exciting, engaging and radical if traditional ways of presenting content were challenged.
- 11.5. Linda Woodhead analyses the ‘nones’, those people in the UK who describe themselves as having ‘no religion’. Woodhead’s research indicates that 60% of 18–24 year olds identify with this group:
- One thing [the data] reveal clearly is that nones are not straightforwardly secular. Certainly, nones reject religious labels—but they reject secular ones as well. If we take ‘secular’ in a strong sense to mean hostile to public religion (e.g. faith schools) and religious belief, surprisingly few nones are sympathetic ... only a minority of nones (41.5 per cent) are convinced atheists ... As to what kind of God they believe in, less than a quarter of the nones who think there is a God adhere to the traditional idea of a personal ‘God’, with the rest believing in a spirit, life-force, energy, or simply ‘something there’ ... When it comes to religious practices, again the picture is not straightforwardly secular. Fewer nones practise than believe, but a quarter report taking part in some kind of personal religious or spiritual practice in the course of a month, such as praying. What they absolutely do not do is take part in communal religious practices like church attendance and worship (unlike US nones). Nor do they join religious groups. On the whole they do not much care for religious leaders, institutions and authorities, but they tolerate them.<sup>18</sup>
- 11.6. This suggests that an RE curriculum that presents its content in terms of religious ‘isms’ and religious practices, such as formal acts of worship and pilgrimages, is focusing on the very things that appear to have least appeal for today’s teenagers.
- 11.7. Teachers and advisers consulted about this project were also critical of new GCSE specifications that require students to know a great deal about the ‘official’ teachings and practices of religions but little about how they are lived and experienced by people ‘at the fringes’ of the religion and still less about the inter-relationship between religions, societies, politics and cultures. As one adviser put it, ‘my GCSE students will know a great deal about Islam, both Sunni and Shi’a, but nothing about what is going on in the Middle East’.
- 11.8. Our first modest attempt at something slightly different was an enquiry into the work of leaders of local religious communities. This might appear far from radical, given Woodhead’s contention that young ‘nones’ “do not care much for religious leaders”. However, the fusion between content and Big Ideas resulted in something different from the usual school visits to local places of worship, when students tend to focus on the physical aspects of the building and perhaps its role in the life of the regular worshippers.

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<sup>18</sup> Woodhead, L. (2016). The rise of ‘no religion’ in Britain: The emergence of a new cultural majority. *Journal of the British Academy* 4, 245–61.

### Planning with Big Ideas: the process

11.9. The enquiry below was designed for a large primary school in a city which has several churches, an Orthodox Synagogue and a Mosque for the local Sunni community. Planning is based on a hypothetical unit for Y5 (9-10 year olds), entitled 'Religious leaders in our community'. The school has arranged for each of its four Y5 classes students to visit one of the Anglican church, the Baptist church, the Synagogue or the Mosque, where they will interview the Priest, Minister, Rabbi or Imam and members of their congregation.

### STAGE 1: *Identify Big Ideas*

11.10. As with the example above, the first task is to decide which Big Ideas to apply to the unit. What we want students to understand by the end of this unit is defined by applying the Big Idea narratives to the content (subject knowledge), which in this case is the role of local religious leaders. The Big Ideas point to the topical questions. As students ask these questions their topical understandings will develop, that is, understanding of the content interpreted by the Big Ideas. The questions identified below are starting points and it is likely that several of them will prompt follow-up questions and discussion<sup>19</sup>.

11.11. For this unit, the focus on community is suggestive of BI5. The focus on the leaders of religious communities suggests diversity and hence BI1. The italicised text below indicates the sections of the age group narratives that would be particularly helpful for planning this unit<sup>20</sup>.

#### BIG IDEA 5

*Many communities around the world are influenced at several levels by their traditional religions and by non-religious worldviews. Families who no longer practise a religion may continue to celebrate religious festivals, follow traditional religious rituals at key points in life and uphold traditional values. Local community leaders may be motivated by religious or non-religious worldviews, and religious leaders are often important people in the community. Organisations and individuals may be inspired by religions and beliefs to make a positive difference in their communities, while others sometimes use their religion or worldview to justify actions that do harm. Many well-known pieces of music and works of art reflect the ideas of religious and non-religious traditions present in the community. In some communities, one religion or worldview is influential; other communities are influenced by many different religions and worldviews living alongside each other. In some communities, religions and worldviews have little influence apart from among their followers.*

#### BIG IDEA 6

The name 'religions' is given to systems of belief, practices and values which share some common features, such as beliefs, values, places of worship, festivals, pilgrimages, rituals, texts and symbols. The elements of each religion are closely connected and can only properly be understood in relation to each other. *Each religion and non-religious worldview is made up of several groups of people who often believe different things and practise in different ways. For some people their religion is more important to them than it is for others.* Religions and non-religious worldviews change over time, sometimes as a result of historical events or technological developments or people moving from country to country and taking their traditions with them.

<sup>19</sup> Teachers are strongly advised to send these questions to the school [do we mean 'religious' not 'school?'] leaders in advance of the visit and to be open to discuss any matters that concern them. Teachers should also ask interviewees if students might audio-record the interviews.

<sup>20</sup> When planning a unit of work, it is unlikely that the whole narrative for the age group will be used.

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### STAGE 2: Identify topical questions

The smaller ideas within the Big Idea are pointers to the topical questions.

Big Idea 5	Topical Questions
<p>1. <i>Many communities around the world are influenced at several levels by their traditional religions and by non-religious worldviews.</i></p> <p>2. <i>Families who no longer practise a religion may continue to celebrate religious festivals, follow traditional religious rituals at key points in life and uphold traditional values.</i></p> <p>3. <i>Religious leaders are often important people in the community.</i></p> <p>4. <i>Organisations and individuals may be inspired by religions and beliefs to make a positive difference in their communities.</i></p> <p>5. <i>Others sometimes use their religion or worldview to justify actions that do harm.</i></p> <p>6. <i>In some communities, religions and worldviews have little influence apart from among their followers.</i></p>	<p>1. In what way does this (church, synagogue, mosque) make a difference to our city?</p> <p>a) Are there some people who come to the (church, synagogue, mosque) regularly and others who come infrequently or very rarely?</p> <p>b) What is the age and gender balance in these groups?</p> <p>c) What worship/activities do these groups attend?</p> <p>d) Why might people who have very little to do with the (church, synagogue, mosque) still come on some occasions?</p> <p>e) What are the (priest's, minister's, rabbi's, imam's) main roles with their regular congregation/members?</p> <p>2. a) Does the (priest, minister, rabbi, imam) spend all of his/her time working among regular members or does he/she work with the wider community?</p> <p>b) What does the (priest, minister, rabbi, imam) do in an average month i) with their members/congregation ii) in the wider community? Which takes more time?</p> <p>c) Is the (priest, minister, rabbi, imam) a member of any local committees/a school governor etc?</p> <p>3. a) In what ways are other members of the (church, synagogue, mosque) involved in serving the community?</p> <p>b) Why do members of the (church, synagogue, mosque) help the local community?</p> <p>4. [Do people ever do things in the name of their religion which harm the wider community? Why would they do this?] <i>Teachers will judge whether this question is better discussed with religious leaders or in school.</i></p> <p>5. a) How many people attend the (church, synagogue, mosque) regularly, sometimes, about once a year?</p> <p>b) Why do many people have nothing to do with religions?</p>

Big Idea 6	Topical Questions
<p>1. <i>Each religion and non-religious worldview is made up of several groups of people who often believe different things and practise in different ways.</i></p> <p>2. <i>For some people their religion is more important to them than it is for others.</i></p>	<p>1. a) [For the two churches] Why do people belong to different churches? What are the main similarities/differences? What are relationships like between the congregations? Do they do things together?</p> <p>b) [For the synagogue and mosque] Are all synagogues/mosques the same? What are the main similarities/differences?</p> <p>c) Do the churches, mosque and synagogue have anything to do with each other? If so, what do they do together?</p>



### STAGE 3: *Identify Transferable Questions*

The main issues to emerge from this enquiry are the decreasing numbers of people who identify with formal religion and the fact that those who have relationships with religious groups represent many different degrees of commitment, different interests and different reasons for the relationship. Our transferable questions might then be:

- Why is it that some people who have very little contact with their religion for most of the time still take part in some religious events?
- If religions disappeared, who would miss them?

### What have Big Ideas added to students' understanding?

- 11.12. Student visits to places of worship are not uncommon. Too often students do not get full value from these events, partly because teachers have not thought through with them or the religious community representative(s) the purpose of the visits, questions to ask and how to follow up the visit. In the unit planning above, Big Idea 5 (BI5) has given new direction to a traditional activity. The following points are examples of the knowledge and understanding students should gain by asking the Topical Questions suggested by BIs 3 and 5.
- i. There is a core of people (quite small in some cases) who attend worship regularly and others who join the core community infrequently. A comparison of the numbers in these groups between the four places of worship will probably raise further questions and hypotheses, particularly about the role of the Church of England.
  - ii. It will probably emerge in all four communities that some people attend the place of worship only for significant festivals, events and rites of passage. The churches in particular may attract large crowds for 'themed' services, which are informal and less likely to follow a set liturgy. These include Mothering Sunday and pet services, where attendance may exceed that at Christmas and Easter. The Anglican Church may host an annual civic service attended by leaders of all faiths and elected members of the council. In rural areas, harvest festival, Lammas and Rogation remain popular. Further questions and hypotheses are likely to arise about why people attend these events and about the gender and age balance across the four communities.
  - iii. These community leaders are all likely to have demanding and varied jobs with their 'core' communities, including leading worship, teaching, pastoral work, administration and fund raising.
  - iv. All four leaders will have a role in the wider community, which may include liaison with the local council (e.g. regarding 'prevent'). It is likely that the Anglican priest will have additional roles such as chaplain to local organisations, raising further questions about the place of the Church of England in British society. The rabbi and imam spend considerable time raising local awareness of their community – its beliefs, practices and culture. Any or all of the four leaders could be school governors and all are likely to host school parties and other groups of visitors.
  - v. Other members of all communities are likely to contribute to the wider community by, for example, providing support for the homeless, organising food banks, collecting for charities, making the building available for community activities, or providing a place for people who want to reflect.
  - vi. The two churches are likely to belong to a local council of churches and all four groups probably belong to a local inter-faith group, whose roles include promoting inter-faith understanding and social cohesion.

## **BIG IDEAS** FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

- 11.13. This example illustrates how the scope of a topic that may have appeared to concern only 'core' members of religious communities has been extended through the questions and issues raised by applying the 'lenses' of the Big Ideas. In particular, by identifying the large groups of people who have tangential associations with religion throughout their lives, this unit of work has identified a population with whom students may be able to identify. The transferable question, 'Why is it that some people, who have very little contact with their religion for most of the time, still take part in some religious events?' may concern them personally. It raises other interesting questions about the relationship between 'nones', infrequent worshippers and religions. Why do so many people who do not regularly attend church services attend Mothering Sunday and pet services, marry in church or have their children baptised? Why do some professed atheists take part in the ancient ritual of 'beating the bounds' on Rogation Sunday? Do religions have the capacity to meet deep human needs and feelings of identity and belonging? How important is belief? Why does the town council in many places hold an annual church service? Is identifying with a religion as simple as 'you're in or you're out'? Are the margins between those who 'belong' and those who do not fuzzy?
- 11.14. After carrying out this enquiry, students should be well equipped to answer the second transferable question – 'If religions disappeared, who would miss them?' – with understanding. Some might say 'no-one'. Those who might miss them include: organisations for whom local religious and non-religious groups provide chaplains; people who use places of worship for naming ceremonies, marriages and funerals; people who are supported in different ways by local religious groups. Is there evidence to suggest that if religions disappeared they would be re-invented? Notably, there is an increasing demand for naming ceremonies, marriages and funerals provided by humanist organisations. These ceremonies provide similar experiences to their religious counterparts but 'without God'.

### 12. BIG IDEAS AND 'LIVE' RE

- 12.1. The enquiry into 'religious leaders in our community' raised the possibility of drawing the content of RE away from a focus on the 'orthodox' textbook definitions towards religions and non-religious worldviews in the lived experience of the many. To take the example in xx, students might learn about Sunni and Shi'a by carrying out an enquiry into the situation in Iraq. This is not to suggest that students should not learn about religions and worldviews, but that syllabus writers might search for new contexts and points of entry, which show religions and worldviews to be live issues in the lives of real people. This is where the Big Ideas offer new possibilities. Because they are so clearly focused on the study of religions and non-religious world views, when applied as lenses to an area of content, the questions they trigger will be distinctively RE questions. It should therefore be possible to be more adventurous with the content. What follows is an example of a unit of work designed for non-examination classes in Y10-11 (ideally as a cross-curricular study in liaison with the English and music departments).
- 12.2. The focus of the unit is not a topic from a religion but Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem*. A study of this important work could include the following:
- i. Pacifism
  - ii. Musical form
  - iii. Orchestration
  - iv. Reconciliation
  - v. Rehearsal notes
  - vi. Use of the tritone or augmented 4th (the Devil's interval)
  - vii. The poems of Wilfred Owen
  - viii. The use of two orchestras
  - ix. The Requiem Mass
  - x. The use of music to communicate beliefs.

#### Applying the right lenses

- 12.3. This is a somewhat unrefined example to illustrate a point. If we were to colour the concerns of RE in red, music blue and English green (allowing for some overlap), and then overlay the list with a red lens, only the RE concerns would be visible. The RE lens, that is the Big Ideas for RE, will act as a reminder to keep to what is relevant when planning RE lessons around a theme that has many subject dimensions.
- 12.4. In relation to RE there are four main themes; pacifism, reconciliation, the Requiem Mass and the use of music to communicate beliefs. These themes clearly require the 'lenses' of BI3 and BI2.

## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

BIG IDEA	THEMATIC QUESTIONS
<p>BI3</p> <p>They may have different reasons for their views and they may disagree with each other and among themselves about how to interpret their ideas of right and wrong, good and evil, and how to apply these ideas to difficult moral questions of today.</p> <p>People have different theories, which may be religious or non-religious, about how and why we ought to live a good life.</p> <p>Some teach 'virtue theory'.</p> <p>They say in order to lead a moral life we should concentrate on developing a good character and good personal virtues such as generosity and compassion, which would then make us behave generously or compassionately.</p> <p>Others teach deontological theories.</p> <p>They say that the way to lead a moral life is to do one's duty or to follow the rules which tell us what is good or bad, right or wrong.</p> <p>A third group teach consequentialism.</p> <p>They say we ought to act in the way that brings about the best overall results, no matter what those acts are.</p> <p>When people discuss contemporary moral issues from these perspectives, they may come up with very different answers.</p> <p>One of the big moral questions which is relevant for religious and non-religious worldviews alike is whether or not there are unchanging moral rules.</p> <p>Are there rules that apply to all people and at all times, irrespective of culture and regardless of circumstance, or does right and wrong depends on context and circumstance?</p> <p>Many moral conflicts result from clashes between these two points of view.</p> <p>This is partly because ideas about morality are closely connected to a group's core teachings about Ultimate Reality, what it is to be human and how we should relate to our planet.</p> <p>Various religious and non-religious organisations have tried to identify rules and principles that should apply universally.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>"Since I believe that there is in every man the spirit of God, I cannot destroy, and feel it my duty to avoid helping to destroy as far as I am able, human life, however strongly I may disapprove of the individual's actions or thoughts. The whole of my life has been devoted to acts of creation (being by profession a composer) and I cannot take part in acts of destruction. Moreover, I feel that the fascist attitude to life can only be overcome by passive resistance ... I believe sincerely that I can help my fellow human beings best by continuing the work I am most qualified to do by the nature of my gifts and training, ie the creation or propagation of music."</i>  (Part of Britten's statement before a conscientious objectors' tribunal on May 4 1942.)  Which moral theory(ies) most closely support Britten's stance?</li> <li>2. Why was Britten so moved by the poems of Wilfred Owen?</li> <li>3. Why was Britten frequently verbally abused as a pacifist?</li> <li>4. Why might the first performance of the War Requiem be regarded as an act of reconciliation?</li> </ol>

## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

BIG IDEA	THEMATIC QUESTIONS
<p>BI2</p> <p>People of all religions and non-religious worldviews...</p> <p>Non-verbal forms of communication may have an explanatory power of their own.</p> <p>Some pictures, songs, and choral music can remind people of important events and stories in their tradition.</p> <p>Other works have less obvious meanings and require more interpretation.</p> <p>Many musical compositions and works of art were originally created to inspire or aid devotion or commitment.</p> <p>Whether displayed or performed in a religious building in order to inspire worship or made available to the wider public in a concert hall or gallery, they can inspire people to reflect on spiritual ideas and ask important questions.</p> <p>They may be interpreted through studying the original purposes of the authors or artists, but also by studying the different meanings they may have for people today.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What events did Britten intend to capture in the War Requiem?</li> <li>2. What is the Requiem Mass? Why have so many composers set it to music?</li> <li>3. In what ways is Britten's Requiem different from other famous ones? (Compare with those of Verdi and Mozart.)</li> <li>4. What particular messages did Britten intend to convey to people who heard the War Requiem?</li> <li>5. How did Britten use sounds and performers to convey these messages?</li> <li>6. What spiritual ideas might Britten have hoped to inspire in his listeners?</li> <li>7. What important questions are raised by Britten's War Requiem?</li> <li>8. Might the War Requiem be interpreted by listeners today in any ways that Britten did not foresee?</li> <li>9. If you were to create a slide show to accompany one of the movements of the War Requiem what pictures would you choose?</li> </ol>

### Identifying Transferable Questions

- 12.5. Two questions that emerge from Britten's War Requiem, that are for all time rather than being restricted to one topic, are:
- i. Is taking human life wrong all times, irrespective of culture and regardless of circumstance, or should an individual's decision depend on context and circumstance?
  - ii. How can music (of any genre) be used to convey ideas and feelings?
- 12.6. The *War Requiem* is a difficult piece to perform and, some would say, to understand. Many teachers would understandably avoid it. It is included here not to suggest that all RE programmes of study should include it, but as an example of an approach to moral issues through literature and the arts. A study of Picasso's *Guernica* could have a similar purpose, or an examination of the life of a well-known pacifist. All of these instances bring the issues surrounding pacifism to life through a 'real' person, rather than a list of arguments 'for and against'. The questions prompted by the Big Ideas ensure depth and challenge. The inclusion of BI2 adds a new dimension by illustrating how moral questions have the capacity to move us deeply as well as being the subjects of rational discussion.

## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

### Including 'live' religion in programmes of study for RE

12.7. Teachers were quick to see the potential of this approach. While the diverse enthusiasms and knowledge of individual teachers preclude specifying particular works of art or music, a programme of study for the future might include categories which teachers could adapt to their personal interests and expertise. One such category might be:

Examine a religious or moral issue using a work of art, musical composition, literature, poetry, architecture, drama or dance as a stimulus. You should examine this issue through the lenses of Big Ideas 1 or 2 and 6.

12.8. The specification of Big Ideas ensures that students' learning is related directly to the purposes and goals of RE set out in "Table 1 Principles of Religious Education" on page 5.

12.9. The world is full of 'live' religions and worldviews. It is difficult, if not impossible, to specify examples for study, precisely because they are 'live'. The danger of including specified instances is that they are quickly absorbed into the RE 'canon', where they still remain many years after they are no longer 'live'. Programmes of study that included categories associated with specific Big Ideas to steer the questions would give teachers some flexibility to develop units of their own devising. For example, one such category might be 'investigate a story in the news which illustrates the interaction of religions with local, national or international communities'. This would enable students to analyse, with reference to questions based on BI5 and BI6, a story in UK News at the time of writing about a Muslim Welfare House in London, which is the headquarters of a network of community centres serving Muslims in England and Wales. It offers a range of educational classes and after school clubs and tackles youth employment, domestic violence, gun culture and substance misuse<sup>21</sup>. The inclusion of questions directed by BI6 ensures that students still learn about 'zakat' but they will so do by studying Islam as it is lived rather than by simply reading a textbook account of Islamic attitudes to charitable giving.

12.10. Other categories might include 'religion and politics'. Again, at the time of writing, Tim Farron's resignation as leader of the Liberal Democrats offers much food for thought:

*From the very first day of my leadership, I have faced questions about my Christian faith. I've tried to answer with grace and patience ... At the start of this election, I found myself under scrutiny again – asked about matters to do with my faith. I felt guilty that this focus was distracting attention from our campaign, obscuring our message. Journalists have every right to ask what they see fit. The consequences of the focus on my faith is that I have found myself torn between living as a faithful Christian and serving as a political leader ... To be a political leader – especially of a progressive, liberal party in 2017 – and to live as a committed Christian, to hold faithfully to the Bible's teaching, has felt impossible for me. I'm a liberal to my finger tips, and that liberalism means that I am passionate about defending the rights and liberties of people who believe different things to me. There are Christians in politics who take the view that they should impose the tenets of faith on society, but I have not taken that approach because I disagree with it – it's not liberal and it is counterproductive when it comes to advancing the gospel. Even so, I seem to be the subject of suspicion because of what I believe and who my faith is in. In which case we are kidding ourselves if we think we yet live in a tolerant, liberal society. That's why I have chosen to step down as leader of the Liberal Democrats.*

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<sup>21</sup> [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jun/19/muslim-welfare-house-much-more-than-mosque](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jun/19/muslim-welfare-house-much-more-than-mosque).

## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

- 12.11. Fallon's resignation letter raises important questions about British democracy and the nature of our society. BIs 3 and 5 raise RE questions for 14-16 year olds such as, what did the press mean when they described Fallon as a 'strong Christian'? What about other political leaders who have been open about their religious affiliation (e.g. Tony Blair, David Cameron <sup>22</sup>, Sadiq Khan) – why did they not resign because of their faith? Over what issue was Fallon challenged and by whom? What alternative views on this issue are held by other Christians? How is it possible for Christians to hold such different views? Has Fallon's right to difference been respected? Are Fallon's views compatible with being leader of a political party or an MP?
- 12.12. BI4 is a 'lens' to help students enquire into and understand how human beings find meaning (see 9.2) in certain experiences. The age of the 'nones' has seen the rise of new rituals as people try to come to terms with tragic events, such as laying flowers, toys and balloons at the place of death. Large scale tragedies elicit large scale responses, some specifically religious and some less so, for example the 'One Love' concert, held in Manchester after the 2017 bombing.<sup>23</sup> Here were to be heard in words and song not only explicit statement of religious commitment but also examples of Woodhead's 'nones', who are 'not without belief'. The following extracts illustrate 'the spiritual thread', which one member of the audience noted running through the event:
- i. *"I'm not going to let go of hope. I'm not going to let go of love. I'm not going to let go of God. Put your hand up if you're not going to let go. God is good in the midst of the darkness. God is good in the midst of the evil. God is in the midst, no matter what's happening in the world, God is in the midst and he loves you and he's here for you."* (Justin Bieber)
  - ii. *"I'm with all of you in Manchester. We all know that love is truly the key. I don't care what ethnicity you are, what religion you are. Love really is the way. And anyone that tries to make anyone think that things of destruction have anything to do with God, with Allah, they're a lie. Yes, I stand with you, Manchester."* (Stevie Wonder via video link)
  - iii. *"Love casts out fear!"* (1 John 4:18) (Marcus Mumford, after performing Timshel, which takes its title from God's words to Cain in Genesis)
  - iv. *"Where is the Love?"* including the words *"practice what you preach ... turn the other cheek ... Father, Father, Father, help us. Send some guidance from above. 'Cause people got me, got me questionin' – Where is the love?"* (Will.I.am and the Black Eyed Peas)
  - v. *"Viva La Vida"* with references to the bells of Jerusalem, missionaries in a foreign field and the line *"I know St Peter won't call my name"*. (Coldplay)
  - vi. *"Glass Wall"* which includes the words *"I believe the resurrection's on, and you were wrong"*. (Liam Gallagher)

<sup>22</sup> [www.psa.ac.uk/insight-plus/blog/%E2%80%98doing-god%E2%80%99-number-10-british-prime-ministers-and-religion](http://www.psa.ac.uk/insight-plus/blog/%E2%80%98doing-god%E2%80%99-number-10-british-prime-ministers-and-religion).

<sup>23</sup> [www.premierchristianity.com/Blog/6-hope-filled-ways-God-was-centre-stage-at-the-Manchester-benefit-gig](http://www.premierchristianity.com/Blog/6-hope-filled-ways-God-was-centre-stage-at-the-Manchester-benefit-gig).

## **BIG IDEAS** FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

- 12.13. 11–14 year olds are likely to find these quotations an interesting point of departure for a study of belief. BI4 raises questions about the ‘meaning’ found by these performers in the Manchester bombing. What attitudes and beliefs do they express? With which religion(s) (if any) are their ideas most closely associated? What hopes and fears are expressed?
- 12.14. Of course, it would be possible to teach RE ‘live’ using this sort of material without reference to Big Ideas. However, there is no guarantee that without them, or something similar, the questions at the heart of the enquiry would be about RE (rather than GLBT issues or pop music) or that they would be sufficiently challenging. The clarity with which Big Ideas identify questions that are the genuine concern of RE raises the possibility of greater creativity within the curriculum. To be creative is not to sacrifice knowledge. Students will weigh up the pros and cons of ‘a just war’ and will consider religious and non-religious attitudes to homosexuality through the experiences of Britten, Picasso or Farron just as they would by working through a text book, but in a more meaningful context.



### 13. BIG IDEAS AS THE BASIS OF ASSESSMENT

- 13.1. When the government withdrew the 8-level scale and level descriptions as the criteria for assessment in England, they put nothing new in its place and schools were advised to develop their own assessment systems. This proved to be a considerable challenge for most teachers, not surprisingly since few of them under the age of 40 had experienced any forms of summative assessment other than those associated with the National Curriculum (based on the 8-level scale) and the public examination systems for 16 and 18 year olds.
- 13.2. The guidance on assessment in this paper is based on that provided for teachers by Learn, Teach, Lead Religious Education (LTLRE)<sup>24</sup>. Taking account of DfE guidance, the LTLRE model set out to:
- identify the 'essential curriculum core' which all students should attain in RE.
  - identify tangible learning objectives closely related to the curriculum at several stages (e.g. end of an age group, end of year, and end of unit of work).
  - include a statement of what constitutes the expected standard for all students at the end of each key stage.
  - include formative assessment tasks designed to identify specifically what students have learnt in direct relation to what has been taught.
  - include examples of alternative teaching and activities for students who have not demonstrated learning.
  - identify new applications of the core for students who have achieved the 'key elements'.
- 13.3. In this model, learning and assessment are hand in glove, which is as it should be. Each of the tasks on page 25 (10.4) is both a learning and assessment task. For example, by finding out how Jews and Christians use their sacred texts, students begin to develop an understanding of the 'holy' and of how 'holy' ('sacred') things are different from other things. When they communicate their findings and conclusions they provide the teacher with evidence of the extent to which they have understood. In this way, the LTLRE model, based on that of Anderson and Krathwohl's<sup>25</sup> taxonomy, provides a continuous process of learning, assessment and, where necessary, reinforcement. Since the Big Ideas constitute the desired understandings in RE, they should provide the criteria for assessment. The syllabus or scheme used by individual schools provides the content to be learned through the 'lenses' of the Big Ideas.

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<sup>24</sup> The full set of papers on assessment can be found at <http://ltre.org/projects/assessment-without-levels-in-re/>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

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13.4. The following assessment task is based on the Year 1 unit of work on page 25 (10.4). It illustrates the principles set out on the LTLRE website.

### The task

At the beginning of the unit students are told they are going to create a big book of Bible stories. These stories will be selected to illustrate stories that remain well-known today (research task).

In relation to these stories, students are set assessment tasks and questions, to which they may respond in writing or orally.

<b>1. Remembering: (knowing)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ What is the Bible?</li> <li>■ What are the names of the two sections of the Bible?</li> <li>■ What is the difference between the two sections of the Bible?</li> <li>■ What is the Tenach?</li> <li>■ What is the most important part of the Tenach?</li> </ul>
<b>2. Understanding:</b>	<p>With reference to the stories in the big book:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Which ones are in the Bible and the Tenach?</li> <li>■ Explain why some stories are special for Jews and Christians.</li> <li>■ Students can identify in stories or poems from the Bible the Christian themes of creation, God's intention for people, how people didn't live up to God's expectations and how God shows his love for people.</li> <li>■ Students can identify Biblical stories and poems from musicals, songs, films and art.</li> <li>■ Students can explain whether or not Christian stories are well known in Britain</li> </ul>
<b>3. Applying:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Students decide what questions they will need to ask adults in order to find out:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) which books are favourites and most useful;</li> <li>(ii) which Bible stories are best known;</li> <li>(iii) which songs, musicals, films and art reflecting Biblical stories are well known.</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ Students decide how best to create their presentations</li> </ul>
<b>4. Analysing:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Students decide what information and materials they will need for their presentations and projects.</li> </ul>
<b>5. Evaluating:</b>	
<b>6. Creating:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Students plan and execute their display, presentation and big book.</li> </ul>

**Note:** 'Evaluating' has been left blank deliberately. Processes should only be applied where a task naturally presents itself: in this case there is no obvious evaluation task so this section has been left blank.

## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

- 13.5. Formative assessment is far from being the only form of assessment. Teachers involved in the evaluation of the Big Ideas project have asked the following questions.
- i. *What is being assessed:* students' grasp of the syllabus content or the Big Ideas? The answer is 'both'. Knowledge of the content is important itself, but knowing the names of the sacred texts of Judaism and Christianity and how they are treated by community members may not provide much of a foundation for learning in the next unit. The Big Ideas constitute the transferable understanding which, if learnt here, can be applied to other areas of content later on.
  - ii. *Are these formative assessment tasks the only assessments I need to do?* It depends on your school policy. Many schools still have internal examinations at the end of each year, or expect teachers to include test results and/or a grade every time they report to parents. Even if this were not the case, it is worth reviewing students' learning at the end of each unit as well as at times required by the school. The key issue for assessment is whether or not students can demonstrate their understanding gained over the unit/term/year in a different context. For example, in relation to the unit on page 40 (13.4), in order to establish whether students have understood the Christian ideas of creation, God's intention for people, how people didn't live up to God's expectations and how God shows his love for people, students could be given a previously unseen selection of stories and poems from the Tenach/Old Testament and the New Testament (not necessarily in writing) and be asked to match each to the relevant concept. The essential point is that students are unlikely to have encountered these examples previously. If they were simply given a test on the meaning of stories and poems already encountered, this would be a test of memory rather than of understanding.
  - iii. *My school expects us to report on how far students have mastered their work. How will this approach help me to do this?* First, we need to be clear about the concept of mastery. Mastery Learning was developed in opposition to the traditional teaching/assessment model, where students study a unit of work after which testing reveals that some have learnt the work well while others have learnt less or even very little. Traditionally, regardless of these test outcomes, all students in the class move on to the next section of work together. Mastery Learning is predicated on the belief that nearly all students can 'master' a topic, but they learn at different speeds. Rather than move on when the fastest – or the majority – have completed a piece of work, the class only moves on to new work when *all* (or nearly all) students have demonstrated 'mastery'. In some ways, the term 'mastery' is unhelpful in describing this concept. We think of Yo-Yo Ma as a 'master' of the cello or of Rembrandt as one of the 'old masters'. This understanding of 'mastery' has led some schools to understand 'mastery' as the highest possible standard students can reach; it is the A\* equivalent. In reality, if 'mastery' is the level to be achieved by nearly all students it has to be a more modest standard. In recognition of this confusion, LTLRE has replaced the term 'mastery' with 'expected standard (ES)', a more neutral term that does not make unrealistic claims for what the majority of students can do. ES is the standard that can be realistically expected from all students in the class, with the exception of those identified as having learning difficulties. It is better described as 'competence' than 'mastery'. This is in keeping with the latest guidance from Standards and Testing Agency <sup>26</sup> on testing at KS1. Other students are said to be '**working towards the expected standard**' or '**working at greater depth within the expected standard**'. This wording may look familiar but the final description is significant. It does not say, as we might expect, 'working above the expected standard' but 'working at greater depth'.

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<sup>26</sup> Interim teacher assessment frameworks at the end of key stage 1.

## **BIG IDEAS** FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

In order to make the judgement, teachers must decide for each unit of work where the expected standard lies. Remembering that ES should be achievable by nearly all students, it should be challenging but achievable. In relation to the unit on page 40 (13.4), ES would probably include all or most of the knowledge, skills and understanding. Depending on the ability of the student group, it may extend to higher levels of understanding developed by application and analysis. The essential questions for a teacher to ask is 'what knowledge and skills do I expect all students in this group to acquire?' and 'what do I expect them all to have grasped about the Big Ideas underpinning this unit?'

- iv. My school expects me to quantify students' achievements. How can I do that using the taxonomy approach? It depends on individual school policies. Assessment in England has taken on such a high profile that many parents continue to expect a number or grade that indicates how well their child is doing. The simplest outcome of assessment would be reporting that a student was either working at, towards or at greater depth within the expected standard. If schools require grades, the three ES options can provide A, B and C or 1, 2 and 3, depending on the school system. If further differentiation between students is required, then a sensible approach would be to decide for each student in the upper and lower category how far removed from ES they are. Hence, if the school reports on a five-level system (say 1, 2, 3, 4, 5), then 3 might be ES, 2 would be between ES and 'working at greater depth' and 4 would be between ES and 'working towards'. Some schools operate a system of individual pathways, where grades are awarded in relation to students' personal targets. In this case, teachers would have to define ES differently for individuals or groups of students. Any grades awarded would then tell parents how well their child performed in relation to their own targets rather than in relation to the rest of the group. In the end, what is important is not the grade but students' understanding how well they have grasped the Big Ideas, which depends on the extent to which they can apply those ideas in new contexts.

### 14. MANAGING BIG IDEAS

14.7. Sections 9-13 of this document include principles for planning a programme of study and assessing students' attainment and progress using Big Ideas. This section addresses questions that have been asked by subject leaders about the wider management of a Big Ideas based RE curriculum.

#### **Should we base our whole RE programme on Big Ideas or can we use them with individual topics or lessons?**

- 14.8. Some teachers on first encountering the notion of Big Ideas have planned a 'test drive', applying the method to one or two lessons, or even to a complete unit of work. In the short term this can be a good way of finding out how Big Ideas merge with content to create questions and provide foci for enquiries.
- 14.9. However, a review of the characteristics of Big Ideas on page 11 (4.7) immediately makes it clear that some of their most powerful features will not be achieved in the short term. Only when they are used to underpin the whole RE curriculum will Big Ideas *act as criteria for the selection and prioritising of subject knowledge in the curriculum*. The selection and sequencing of subject knowledge can only be achieved when planning a subject curriculum for the whole school. Similarly, Big Ideas can only be used as the basis of progression over time. Ideally in order to use them to their full potential, teachers from groups of neighbouring schools will plan across the 5-18 age range together. Big Ideas have the power to *make sense of lots of what might otherwise be confusing information/experiences and isolated facts*. This cannot be achieved in a single topic but relies on students making links between aspects of their learning acquired over several years. Finally, *taken together, [Big Ideas] express the core or central concerns of the subject*. One of the key aims of this project is that by the time they finish compulsory education students will have a sound grasp of the central concerns of RE expressed through the Big Ideas.

#### **Will Big Ideas help me plan cross-curricular topics?**

- 14.10. The Big Ideas for RE provide many opportunities for creating topics that draw on RE and other subjects, particularly in primary schools. The following examples illustrate this point.
- i. BI1 – links with history (e.g. the Reformation resulting in significant change and increased diversity within Christianity)
  - ii. BI2 – links with the arts. For 7–11 year olds there are also strong links with literacy, and religious texts are important sources of imagery, for example symbol, metaphor, simile, analogy and allusion.
  - iii. BI3 – links with ethical issues that arise in literature, geography, science and PSHE.
  - iv. BI4 – links with literature and the arts.
  - v. BI5 – links with social studies and history.

## **BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

### **What approaches to teaching are most appropriate for enabling students to grasp Big Ideas?**

- 14.11. While it is true to say that Big Ideas are supremely adaptable, it is widely accepted that some styles of teaching are more effective for improving student motivation and learning. In particular, Harlen writes in relation to science, 'An inquiry-based approach [to teaching] is widely advocated and is being implemented in many different countries across the globe... There is growing evidence that this has a positive influence on attitudes to science'<sup>27</sup>. This is echoed by Ofsted in its latest report on RE: 'The current report highlights, as did the 2010 report, that in the most effective RE teaching, enquiry is placed at the heart of learning'<sup>28</sup>.
- 14.12. Ofsted reports have identified many of the weaknesses in both primary and secondary RE in terms of poor approaches to enquiry. For example, 'Pupils rarely developed their skills of enquiry into religion: to ask more pertinent and challenging questions; to gather, interpret and analyse information; and to draw conclusions and evaluate issues using good reasoning'<sup>29</sup>. Too often when teachers used elements of enquiry at the start of a topic, they did not intervene 'to make sure that the pupils maintained a focus on the key questions driving the enquiry'<sup>30</sup>. Even where students were asked to identify questions, 'teachers rarely extended these into a genuine investigation'<sup>31</sup>. Too often, students were not given enough time to process their findings and extend their enquiry: 'Teachers provided opportunities for gathering and summarising factual information but then moved the pupils quickly to a superficial summary instead of extending and deepening their understanding of the material'<sup>32</sup>. Harlen makes the same point in relation to science education, warning that, 'Inquiry-based learning can lead to greater depth in understanding but as it takes more time the corollary is that the breadth has to be reduced. Thus identifying big ideas in science is a natural, and indeed necessary, accompaniment to promoting inquiry-based science education'<sup>33</sup>. Although the Ofsted report was written before the potential of Big Ideas was recognised for RE, somewhat prophetically it recommends that, 'Engaging pupils from the outset in 'big questions' provides a context for carrying out an investigation'<sup>34</sup>.

### **What do we mean by 'enquiry-based learning'?**

- 14.13. 'Enquiry-based learning describes an environment in which learning is driven by a process of enquiry owned by the student'<sup>35</sup>. Students identify issues and questions related to a real problem, which may be presented in the form of a scenario, a case study or project. They acquire the relevant knowledge by examining the available resources. The teacher's role is to set up the focus of the enquiry (although students will sometimes suggest areas for investigation), ensure that the necessary resources are available, and facilitate and monitor students' learning.

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<sup>27</sup> Harlen 2010 p3.

<sup>28</sup> Ofsted. *ibid.* p23.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* p9.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.* p10.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Harlen *ibid.* p3.

<sup>34</sup> Ofsted *ibid.* p24.

<sup>35</sup> Centre for Excellence in Enquiry-based Learning. What is Enquiry-based learning? University of Manchester [www.ceebl.manchester.ac.uk/eb/](http://www.ceebl.manchester.ac.uk/eb/).

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- 14.14. The use of the singular 'enquiry-based approach' can give the misleading impression that 'enquiry' is a single method or that there is only one form of enquiry. In fact the term 'enquiry' is used to cover a wide variety of learning activities that require students to create hypotheses, plan and execute investigations, solve problems, think creatively and critically and make connections. There are different approaches to enquiry. For example, the Ofsted RE report (2013) commends a spiral model<sup>36</sup>, which includes asking questions, investigation, drawing conclusions, evaluation, reflection and expression. This identification of a model that can be repeated in numerous contexts is also at the heart of the revision of Bloom's taxonomy developed by Anderson and Krathwohl<sup>37</sup>. This begins by creating a contextualised plan, which takes the student on a journey beginning with finding out new information and moving on to developing understanding before using the higher order processes of applying, analysing and evaluating. The final stage of this process is 'creating', which requires students to bring together their learning in a coherent whole. Wiggins and McTighe focus an enquiry on topical and essential questions, which emerge from the superimposing of selected Big Ideas onto the topic in question (see Section 9).
- 14.15. As well as considering generic approaches to enquiry, teachers of RE have another issue to consider. An essential benefit of enquiry, according to Harlen, is that, 'it also involves students working in a way similar to that of scientists, developing their understanding by collecting and using evidence to test ways of explaining the phenomena they are studying. Implicit in all of this is that students are taking part in activities similar to those in which scientists engage in developing understanding'<sup>38</sup>. But when we apply this principle to RE, by enabling students to 'work in a way similar to that of ...', we immediately encounter one of the defining features of the subject, which is both its greatest asset and its greatest challenge. The problem is – similar to what? What is the RE equivalent to a scientist, an artist, historian or geographer?
- 14.16. Religious Educators from the teachers of under-5s to university professors are known nationwide for their inability to agree on the nature and purpose of the subject. There are a number of reasons for this, perhaps the most significant being the fact that RE is not a discipline in the way that most other subjects in the school curriculum can claim to be. School subjects such as English, mathematics, science, history and music can trace their origins to the academic disciplines that are taught in universities and share their name. There is no university discipline called Religious Education. Instead, RE as a school subject takes its knowledge base and its identity from a number of disciplines, more diverse than physics, chemistry and biology within science or human, physical and economic geography. RE draws primarily on theology, religious studies, Biblical studies, philosophy and sociology of religion. It also draws on history, anthropology, archaeology, psychology and the arts. These disciplines have their own distinctive approaches to study and research, which must be emulated at school level. The implication is that although every enquiry in RE will follow the same basic principles, the questions, skills and processes used to carry out the enquiry will depend on the discipline(s) reflected (see, for example, the indicative methodologies and methods endorsed by the RE-searchers approach to primary RE)<sup>39</sup>. When engaged in an enquiry into aspects of RE that derive from theology and Biblical studies, students need to deploy the skills of literary analysis, hermeneutics, language skills, historiography and critical thinking. When engaged in enquiries into religious communities today, such as that set out on page 26, students will draw on skills and processes used in the sociology of religion such as interviewing, observation, data analysis and interpretation. If students try to apply, for example, sociological or ethnographic approaches to a philosophical enquiry, the result is likely to be confusion and failure to achieve the learning objectives.

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<sup>36</sup> Ofsted *ibid.* p23.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* pp38-39.

<sup>38</sup> Harlen. *ibid* p45.

<sup>39</sup> Freathy, R. and Freathy, G. (2013). RE-searchers: a dialogic approach to RE in primary schools. *REsource*, 36:1, 4-7.

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14.17. The same is true of the application of Big Ideas to specific topics. The enquiry on page 25–26 set out to discover what religious communities contributed to wider society. Had we applied, for example, Big Ideas 2 or 3, the questions arising would not have related to this enquiry because they are not about impact or influence.

### How can Big Ideas help us to address the weaknesses in RE identified by Ofsted?

14.18. This paper does not claim that a Big Ideas approach to planning and assessment provides the only solution to the long-term problems in the subject. However, subject leaders choosing to use Big Ideas should find that the principles inherent in the approach enable them to set achievable targets in relation to the principal weaknesses in the subject identified by Ofsted's last report on RE<sup>40</sup>.

Issues raised by Ofsted	Possible solutions through Big ideas
<p><b>Weaknesses in students' knowledge and understanding of religions and beliefs</b></p> <p>Too many students leave school with scant knowledge and understanding of religion and belief, having had insufficient opportunity to develop:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. an understanding of the way in which the beliefs, practices, values and ways of life of specific religions and non-religious world views are linked</li> <li>2. an understanding and interpretation of the distinctive nature of religious language</li> <li>3. a deepening understanding of the diverse nature of religion and belief in the contemporary world</li> <li>4. a more sophisticated understanding of the impact, both positive and negative, that religion and belief can have on individuals and society.</li> </ol>	<p>Big Ideas express what students should understand about religions and non-religious world views at every stage in their education.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The set of Big Ideas overall and BI6 in particular demonstrate the inter-connectedness of all aspects of religion and belief.</li> <li>2. BI2 sets out the many ways in which individuals and communities use both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication, literal and figurative, to express their own beliefs, values, experiences and identities.</li> <li>3. BI1 sets out the diversity of religions, non-religious worldviews and ways of life, which are themselves diverse and changing.</li> <li>4. BI5 shows how religious and non-religious worldviews interact with the wider community and cultures, affecting, and affected by, politics, artistic and cultural life, social values and traditional rituals.</li> </ol>

<sup>40</sup> Ofsted (2013). Religious Education. Raising the Potential.



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Issues raised by Ofsted	Possible solutions through Big ideas
<p><b>Weaknesses in RE teaching</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers' confusion about the purpose and aims of RE had a negative impact on the quality of teaching, curriculum planning and the effectiveness of assessment.</li> <li>2. Many teachers have a weak understanding of the subject.</li> <li>3. There are many weaknesses in the use of enquiry, with the result that students rarely developed their skills of enquiry into religion: to ask more pertinent and challenging questions; to gather, interpret and analyse information; and to draw conclusions and evaluate issues using good reasoning.</li> <li>4. In the secondary schools, weaknesses in the curriculum often related to a lack of clarity about the purpose of the subject at Key Stage 3. A persistent problem was that planned work was not sufficiently challenging. Too often it failed to capitalise on the higher levels of thinking that students can bring to their learning from Key Stage 2. Students frequently commented that the work they did when studying religions was not challenging enough.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Big Ideas express the purposes of RE in terms of the understanding that students should achieve. This report illustrates how these purposes can combine to underpin teaching, curriculum planning and assessment.</li> <li>2. The Big Ideas have already been shown to have a positive impact on teachers' understanding of RE; particularly that of teachers without qualifications in the subject. Big Ideas extend their factual knowledge to an understanding of how and why religions and non-religious worldviews are important in today's world.</li> <li>3. This report recognises the importance of enquiry-based methods to develop students' understanding.</li> <li>4. The age-related narratives present a clear progression in the understanding expected of students in different stages of their education. The expectations of 11–14 and 14–16 year olds are set high in order that these students may build on understanding developed in primary schools.</li> </ol>

Issues raised by Ofsted	Possible solutions through Big ideas
<p><b>Weaknesses in the RE curriculum</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Providing RE teaching through short topics led to fragmented rather than sustained learning.</li> <li>2. Many RE topics lacked a clear structure.</li> <li>3. Too often secondary RE subject leaders focused on social and ethical issues because they could not see a way of making the direct study of religion challenging and engaging. It was rare to find topics related to, for example, the study of deeper aspects of religious belief, the controversial nature of religion, or the changing patterns of religion and belief in the contemporary world.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Big Ideas theory stresses the importance of depth, implying that the curriculum should include fewer topics that become the focus of detailed enquiry and deep learning.</li> <li>2. By providing the questions at the heart of an enquiry, Big Ideas provide a clear structure for planning.</li> <li>3. Big ideas should provide a richer, broader base for planning while retaining ethical issues as an important element of religions and non-religious worldviews.</li> </ol>

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### *How can I help teachers of RE in my school understand Big Ideas?*

- 14.19. Subject leaders adopting a Big Ideas approach to planning and teaching RE should become thoroughly conversant with the principles, theory and practice involved. Wherever possible, planning should be a shared exercise so that teachers benefit and gain confidence from sharing ideas and insights. In particular, individual teachers should take responsibility for planning their own lessons rather than expecting to teach from lesson plans written by the subject leader or provided by commercial publishers. When this happens there is a danger that teachers will teach from the plans without understanding the reason why it has been structured in this way or how to help students interpret the outcomes of their enquiries.
- 14.20. Very few primary teachers and around a half of secondary RE teachers in England have any qualification in RE beyond GCSE<sup>41</sup>; many of them do not even have that. In addition, they may have no allegiance to, or background in, any specific religious or non-religious belief system. Consequently their subject knowledge, particularly when they begin teaching RE, is likely to be weak. They may be wary of RE teaching, even to the point of distrusting the motives of those who support the subject's continuation. Introducing them to the Big Ideas may help dispel those suspicions and fears while enhancing their understanding of the subject.
- 14.21. There are four key areas of this report teachers should become familiar with, preferably in the following order:
- i. the principles of RE on page 5. This single page sets out briefly and clearly the purposes and goals of RE and why it is important in a curriculum for the 21st century.
  - ii. the theory behind Big Ideas, particularly the distinction between Big Ideas and subject knowledge and how the two can knit together to create a curriculum, individual units and lessons. Some primary teachers may have encountered *Principles and Big Ideas of Science Education*.<sup>42</sup> If so, it will provide a platform for understanding the Big Ideas for RE, since the concerns and how to address them are similar in both publications.
  - iii. the summary description of each Big Idea and the narrative for the age group taught. The understanding expected of 5-7 year olds in the narratives for that age group may seem only loosely related to the Big Idea as a whole. However, it is important that those who teach this age group understand how the foundations that they are laying with young children contribute to later learning. It is therefore important that teachers of all age groups understand the core of each Big Idea.
  - iv. For teachers with very little subject background the following simplified version of the Big Ideas may provide a useful starting point<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> The General Certificate of Education, which consists of subject examinations for all 16 year olds in England and Wales.

<sup>42</sup> Harlen. *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> With thanks to Professor Denise Cush.

## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

*Students should be offered opportunities to learn about and understand:*

- 1. there is an amazing diversity of religions, non-religious worldviews and ways of life, which are themselves diverse and changing, interacting with each other yet also maintaining continuities through different times and contexts;*
- 2. there are many ways in which individuals and communities interpret and respond to authoritative texts and traditional non-verbal artistic material and use both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication, literal and figurative, to express beliefs, values, experiences and identities;*
- 3. there are many ways in which religious and non-religious worldviews provide guidance on how to be a good person and live a good life, how these can be interpreted differently by members of the same tradition, and how agreement may often be found across traditions;*
- 4. religions and worldviews are about experience as much as belief, and they can help individuals interpret their experiences as well as providing transformative experiences through practice, and a sense of identity and belonging;*
- 5. religious and non-religious worldviews interact with the wider communities and cultures, affecting and affected by politics, artistic and cultural life, social values and traditional rituals, sometimes having considerable power and influence beyond their own adherents;*
- 6. religious and non-religious worldviews provide coherent overall accounts, however provisional, of the nature of reality – life, the universe and everything -, often based on texts or traditions taken as authoritative, though people interpret and live out these worldviews in different ways, and not everyone accepts the need for such 'grand narratives.'*

14.22. Teachers should have a very good knowledge of the narratives for their age group and should understand how these narratives relate to the overall expressions of the Big Ideas. Initial work with teachers of all phases suggests that Big Ideas help teachers get to grips with subject knowledge in the broadest sense. They also have the potential to help teachers locate their experiences and knowledge within a broader framework. A helpful way of introducing teachers to Big Ideas is to involve them in 'learning by doing' tasks. In relation to a theme or topic, they should be able to select one or two Big Ideas and use them to identify topical and transferable questions, which they can then use as the basis of developing a series of lessons.

### **15. FINAL COMMENTS**

This report summarises the principles that we consider should underpin the RE of all students in full time school education and sets out six Big Ideas which summarise what we hope young people would come to understand at the various stages of their education up to age 16. The Big Ideas project has not been introduced on a whim. It draws from theory developed in a number of countries and applied around the world for a growing number of subjects. An important factor is the availability of research-based evidence for the effectiveness of Big Ideas approaches. Newmann et al.<sup>44</sup> studied the impact of the principles of *Understanding by Design* (UbD) (the official title of Wiggins and McTighe's project) on students' learning in mathematics and social studies in 24 schools across all phases. Newmann found that not only were students of all abilities helped by the UbD principles, but also the inequalities between high and low-performing students were greatly decreased. Other studies demonstrate the effectiveness of practices associated with a Big Ideas based curriculum<sup>45</sup>.

The group assembled to identify Big Ideas for RE represents a wide range of expertise and subject interests. Towards the end of the process the draft report (sections 1-13) was sent for review to 25 subject experts. Of the 20 responses, all but two were positive or very positive about the general theoretical framework and although two reviewers made detailed suggestions regarding the text of the narratives, none of the responses took issue with the Big Ideas named in the report. Following this consultation, the text of the narratives was amended and sent for further comment to reviewers who had shown an interest at this level of detail. The text was also discussed with a small group of Learn Teach Lead Religious Education (LTLRE) hub leaders, whose enthusiasm and suggestions were particularly encouraging. Towards the end of the summer term 2017 the proposals in the report were discussed in LTLRE hub meetings with teachers. These events proved to be particularly valuable to the writing team and contributed to the completion of section 13.

We are often asked 'what next? We recognise that the way of thinking about and planning the curriculum proposed in this report are quite different from anything encountered previously in RE and we hope, subject to funding, to produce materials to support teachers wishing to implement its proposals. However, such materials are not needed for the approach presented here to be trialled and developed in classrooms. We hope that the ideas and proposals in this report may encourage others in thinking about how to make our subject challenging, stimulating and relevant for young people growing up in the 21st century.

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<sup>44</sup> Newmann, F., et al. (1996) *Authentic achievement: Restructuring schools for intellectual quality*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

<sup>45</sup> Graff, N. "An Effective and Agonizing Way to Learn": Backwards Design and New Teachers' Preparation for Planning Curriculum. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 3, (Summer 2011), pp. 151-168.

### DEVELOPMENT GROUP MEMBERS

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Alan Brine was Ofsted's National Adviser for Religious Education from 2007 until his retirement in 2015. In that role, he was responsible for the publication of three major Ofsted reports on RE. Subsequently he also wrote the report on RE in Church of England schools, *Making a Difference* (2014). He served as an HMI from 2001. Previously, he worked in higher education and as a local authority inspector with responsibility for RE. He currently works part-time in a humanist pastoral support role at Manchester Prison and he represents the British Humanist Association on the RE Council. He is also one of the members of the National Commission on RE.

#### Denise Cush

Denise Cush recently retired as Professor of Religion and Education, Bath Spa University, where she was also Head of Department of Study of Religions. Her interests include Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and alternative spiritualities such as Paganism, as well as religious education internationally. She is Deputy Editor of the *British Journal of Religious Education*, and currently a member of the national Commission exploring the future of religious education in England. She has an MA in Theology from Oxford University, an MA in Religious Studies from the University of Lancaster, a PhD in Religious Education from the University of Warwick, and an honorary doctorate from the University of Uppsala. She has also been an RE teacher and trainer of both primary and secondary teachers. Publications include *A Student's Approach to Buddhism*; *Celebrating Planet Earth, a Pagan/Christian Conversation: First Steps in Interfaith Dialogue* (ed.); *The Routledge Encyclopaedia of Hinduism* (ed. with Robinson & York); and the website (with Robinson, C.) *Living Religion: Facilitating Fieldwork Placements in Theology and Religious Studies* [www.livingreligion.co.uk](http://www.livingreligion.co.uk) as well as many articles and book chapters on aspects of religious education.

#### Dave Francis

Dave Francis is the Associate Adviser for Bath & North East Somerset SACRE and Deputy Chair of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC). He is a former Chair of AREIAC and Lead Consultant for RE:ONLINE. He worked as a teacher of RE for 14 years, including ten as Head of a Department of Religion, Philosophy and Social Education, and has published several RE text books, as well as practical guides for primary and secondary RE teachers on assessment, ICT, self-evaluation and developing an effective curriculum. He continues to offer a range of continuing professional development training events in RE, Citizenship and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

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Rob Freathy is Associate Dean of the College of Social Sciences and International Studies at the University of Exeter. He is also Professor of Education in the Graduate School of Education. His current research involves both historical perspectives on 20th century Religious Education and theoretical and empirical work on the teaching of Religious Education in schools today. He has published numerous journal articles, book chapters and books, including *Religious Education and Freedom of Religion and Belief* (2012), *History, Remembrance and Religious Education* (2014) and *Politics, Professionals and Practitioners* (2017). He is an Editorial Board member for *History of Education*, *British Journal of Religious Education* and *Journal of Beliefs and Values*.

## **BIG IDEAS** FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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### **James Holt**

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Janet Orchard is Senior Lecturer in Education at the School of Education, University of Bristol and a former Programme Director of the Secondary PGCE. She project managed the RE Subject Review for England (2013) initiated by the Religious Educational Council for England and Wales (REC). She has an ongoing research interest in ITE in RE in both primary and secondary phases and was co-opted onto the NATRE Executive in 2015. She is currently engaged in researching the place of dialogue in schooling, including the contribution which RE makes to promoting good community relations.

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Michael J Reiss is Professor of Science Education at UCL Institute of Education, Visiting Professor at the Universities of Kiel, Leeds and York and the Royal Veterinary College, Honorary Fellow of the British Science Association and of the College of Teachers, Docent at the University of Helsinki, a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences, and a Priest in the Church of England. His research and consultancy interests are in science education, bioethics and sex education. He is President of the International Society for Science & Religion and of the International Association for Science and Religion in Schools and writes on the interface of science education and theology.

### **Linda Rudge**

Linda Rudge is a freelance education consultant. She is the founding Director (2012) of the teachers' continuing professional development programme Learn, Teach, Lead RE, (ltlr.org) and the project manager for the RE Quality Mark ([www.reqm.org/](http://www.reqm.org/)). She was formerly Director of the Centre for Spirituality and Religion in Education at the University of East Anglia. Her professional interests are mainly in the initial and continuing education of primary and secondary teachers. She is a member of the International Seminar on Religion, Education and Values [www.yorks.ac.uk/isrev](http://www.yorks.ac.uk/isrev).

## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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Joy Schmack is subject tutor in Religious Education at Liverpool John Moores University. She has worked in three different initial teacher training institutions lecturing in Primary and Secondary RE. Before that she worked as an adviser/inspector for a London borough. She has considerable experience in CPD and currently supervises Masters students; Farmington scholars and co-ordinates the Greater Merseyside RE Networks and LTLRE Transforming Primary RE. In addition Joy is Principal Examiner for GCSE and IBO World Religions.

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Julian Stern is Professor of Education and Religion at York St John University, where he has also served as Dean of the Faculty of Education & Theology and Acting Dean of the Business School. A school teacher for fourteen years, prior to his current post he also worked at the Institute of Education, the Open University, Brunel University and the University of Hull. He is General Secretary of ISREV, the International Seminar on Religious Education and Values ([www.isrev.org](http://www.isrev.org), working with 250 senior researchers across 36 countries) and is on the editorial boards of the British Journal of Religious Education, the Journal for the Study of Spirituality, and Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives. He is author of 13 books, including Teaching Religious Education: Researchers in the Classroom (2nd edition 2017), The Spirit of the School (2009) and Virtuous Educational Research: Conversations on Ethical Practice (2016).

### **Karen Walshe**

Karen Walshe is Senior Lecturer in Religious Education at the Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter. Before moving into higher education, she taught and led RE in secondary schools in the South West of England. She has considerable experience in both initial and continuing teacher education and leads the Secondary PGCE RE and MA Education programmes at Exeter. In addition, Karen is reviews editor for the British Journal of Religious Education and deputy General Secretary of the International Seminar on Religious Education and Values (ISREV).

### **Barbara Wintersgill**

Barbara Wintersgill is an Honorary Fellow of Warwick University in the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit and an Associate Fellow of the College of Social Sciences and International Studies at the University of Exeter. She was the Professional Officer for religious education (RE) at the National Curriculum Council (1990–93) and then at the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (1993–97). In 1997, she was appointed by Ofsted as HMI and Specialist Subject Adviser for RE. She continued in this post until taking early retirement in 2005, after being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. She has come out of retirement numerous times to work on projects for Ofsted, the REC, the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for RE, Warwick University and the University of Exeter. Her professional interests include research and development of the curriculum and assessment in RE and teenagers' spirituality. She has written numerous papers, contributed to a number of books, most recently 'Government national agencies for inspection and curriculum development' (with Alan Brine) in Religion and Nationhood (ed. Gates) and is the author of Teenage Perspectives on Spirituality (Kindle).

## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

### APPENDIX: BIG IDEAS OVERVIEW FOR AGE GROUPS

AGES 5–7		
BIG IDEA 1	CONTINUITY, CHANGE AND DIVERSITY	We are surrounded by distinctive things that are often called ‘religious’ or ‘holy’. These include buildings, festivals and celebrations, rituals, books, acts of worship and symbols. These are usually different for each religion and non-religious worldview. Within the same religion or non-religious worldview people may believe different things and practise in different ways.
BIG IDEA 2	WORDS AND BEYOND	People have developed several different ways to explain their religious beliefs and feelings, such as using words in different ways when writing about spiritual or religious things in stories, poetry and drama. Many people also use symbols, art, music, drama and dance to express their beliefs and to tell their favourite stories. Some people believe that it is wrong to use certain forms of non-verbal expression. People may learn different things from these stories and symbols and might not agree about their meaning.
BIG IDEA 3	A GOOD LIFE	Most religions and non-religious worldviews introduce children to stories from the lives of their exemplary people as examples of the qualities and characteristics they might try to achieve. They also teach about specific actions that are right and wrong and about good and bad attitudes. This guidance can help people treat each other fairly and live together without upsetting or hurting each other or damaging the environment.
BIG IDEA 4	MAKING SENSE OF LIFE’S EXPERIENCES	Some people have amazing, puzzling or mysterious experiences that make them ask big questions about life. Others find deep spiritual meaning in everyday experiences. There are many stories about people’s experiences and encounters that have made them change their lives. Some people find that belonging to religious or non-religious groups which share their beliefs, values and traditions gives them a sense of belonging.
BIG IDEA 5	INFLUENCE, COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND POWER	There are signs of religious and non-religious worldviews all around us and lots of evidence of their influence on our communities. Many local and national holidays are held at the time of religious or other festivals and religious leaders are often important people locally. Several well-known traditional stories and songs reflect the ideas of religious traditions present in the community. Religions are not equally influential everywhere. Some places are more religious than others; some families are more religious than others. Most schools have children from different religions and non-religious worldviews.
BIG IDEA 6	THE BIG PICTURE	Stories are very important in religions and in non-religious worldviews. They are used to explain ideas about life, and may include God, gods, spirits, humans and animals and the rest of the natural world. Religious and non-religious worldviews help people grapple with some of the big questions of life, such as ‘What happens when people die?’ and ‘Where did the world come from?’. Many of these stories are well known because they have been handed down over generations for hundreds of years. They are often found in holy books.



## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

AGES 7–11		
BIG IDEA 1	CONTINUITY, CHANGE AND DIVERSITY	The name 'religions' is given to systems of belief, practices and values which share some common features, such as beliefs, values, places of worship, festivals, pilgrimages, rituals, texts and symbols. All the elements of each religion are closely connected and can only properly be understood in relation to each other. Each religion and non-religious worldview is made up of several groups of people who often believe different things and practise in different ways. For some people their religion is more important to them than it is for others. Religions and non-religious worldviews change over time; sometimes as a result of historical events or technological developments or as a result of people moving from country to country and taking their traditions with them.
BIG IDEA 2	WORDS AND BEYOND	People often can't find the words to express their feelings and beliefs. They often use imagery, for example symbol, metaphor, simile, analogy and allusion to interpret their religious or spiritual experiences and beliefs. People also express and communicate beliefs and experiences without words: through art, artefacts, symbols and icons; through dance, drama and symbolic gestures; and through music and ritual. There are different views as to which forms of non-verbal communication are appropriate to use, particularly in a religious context. All of these forms of expression not only provide a means of expressing complex ideas, they are also vehicles for learning, wisdom and inspiration for some and important evidence for those who want to understand the beliefs, ideas and values of others. Nevertheless, people find different meanings in all these forms of expression.
BIG IDEA 3	A GOOD LIFE	Religions and non-religious worldviews provide guidance for their followers on how to live a good life. Moral teachings come in many forms including songs and poems, codes of conduct and rules, proverbs and wisdom sayings and stories, including stories about people from the distant past or from recent times who set a moral example to their followers. It may be their particular actions or behaviour that inspires others or it may be their teachings that their followers apply to their lives. Many religions and non-religious worldviews also have codes of behaviour or sets of rules which tell people what actions are right and wrong and what their duties are. In many cases a balance is struck between advocating specific behaviours and guiding people to judge what is the right thing to do in a given situation and to act for the right reasons. There are different ideas about why people should aim to live a good life. Some believe that it is the will of God, others that it is for the good of everyone, or for the good of the whole world. There is considerable agreement over desirable virtues and qualities and what is right and wrong, good and bad, across religious and non-religious groups. However, there are also important disagreements between groups and within groups.

## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

AGES 7–11		
<b>BIG IDEA 4</b>	<b>MAKING SENSE OF LIFE'S EXPERIENCES</b>	<p>Many people have amazing, puzzling or mysterious experiences with the wonders of nature, other people, the arts, or with a power above or beyond the material world. These encounters may be highly affecting, changing their lives in a positive way and sometimes giving them a sense of destiny. Some people account for these experiences by saying that humans have an inner consciousness or spiritual nature. Certain individuals throughout history are said to have had extraordinary insights into the meaning of human life and have passed those insights on to others. In many cases their experiences have had a major impact on religions and non-religious worldviews or have even led to a new one. Many people find that religious rituals and other practices provide opportunities for them to make connections with God or gods and each other, or with what is most important to them. When practised in community with others, these experiences may give them a deep sense of identity and belonging.</p>
<b>BIG IDEA 5</b>	<b>INFLUENCE, COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND POWER</b>	<p>Many communities around the world are influenced at several levels by their traditional religions and non-religious worldviews. Families who no longer practise a religion may continue to celebrate religious festivals, follow traditional religious rituals at key points in life and uphold traditional values. Local community leaders may be motivated by religious or non-religious worldviews, and religious leaders are often important people in the community. Organisations and individuals may be inspired by religions and beliefs to make a positive difference in their communities, while others sometimes use their religion or worldview to justify actions that do harm. Many well-known pieces of music and works of art reflect the ideas of religious and non-religious traditions present in the community. In some communities, one religion or worldview is influential; other communities are influenced by many different religions and worldviews living alongside each other. In some communities, religions and non-religious worldviews have little influence apart from among their followers.</p>
<b>BIG IDEA 6</b>	<b>THE BIG PICTURE</b>	<p>Stories from religions and non-religious worldviews are used to communicate important teachings and often form part of longer narratives. Some religious narratives begin with stories to explain how and why God created the universe and everything in it. Others focus more on the nature of the world itself rather than how it came to be. All religions and non-religious narratives have a lot to say about where human beings fit into the grand order of things. They seek to help people understand the mysteries of life such as whether or not there is life after death and how people might find meaning and purpose in their own lives. People come to understand these stories in different ways. These stories are valued because they come from trusted people or traditions. They are often found in texts believed to be divinely inspired and therefore sacred or holy. Non-religious narratives today usually draw upon scientific theories of how the universe began and predictions about how it will end.</p>

## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

AGES 11–14		
<b>BIG IDEA 1</b>	<b>CONTINUITY, CHANGE AND DIVERSITY</b>	<p>There are a number of features that constitute a religion or non-religious worldview which can only be understood in relation to each other. Such features need to be understood in the context of their historical and cultural settings and the messages and lived experiences of the community being studied. Many people in the world belong to a religion; many others subscribe to non-religious worldviews; many others do not identify with any belief group. Religions and non-religious worldviews tend to be made up of several smaller groups. They usually share core beliefs and practices but there can be many differences between them. As a result, it is important that we do not make assumptions about all members of a religion on the basis of one group or individual. Most people recognise that religions do not stay the same; they change as a result of a number of factors, such as political and cultural differences, disagreements about ideology and authority, changes in population, the intervention of an influential person or group with a new interpretation of the religion – often several of these. Some think that religions and non-religious worldviews must adapt to the times. Others believe that there is one eternal truth for all time and that therefore their religion or non-religious worldview cannot change. Some people who do not agree with the decisions their leaders have made may break away and set up a new group. There are important differences in beliefs, values and practices between religions. There are also close connections between some religions for historical and cultural reasons.</p>
<b>BIG IDEA 2</b>	<b>WORDS AND BEYOND</b>	<p>Throughout history to the present day, people have used many methods to express their most profound beliefs and experiences. Sometimes this is in verbal form, and is communicated either orally or in writing. Non-verbal forms of communication may be used to communicate complex issues and make connections to key ideas, beliefs and practices. Different styles of non-verbal forms of communication, such as portraits, calligraphy, icons, sculptures, abstract, geometric and decorative arts and artefacts, may be used to express different aspects of religious or non-religious ideas or experiences. The extent to which these non-verbal forms of expression are used varies from religion to religion and between people of the same religion. The aim of some religious pictures, songs and choral music is often to remind people of important events, myths and stories in their tradition. They are also evidence of the faith of the community for which they were created. Both verbal and non-verbal forms of expression can be challenging to interpret and often raise further questions. The interpretation will, in part, depend on what is believed about the origins and inspiration behind them.</p>

## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

AGES 11–14		
<b>BIG IDEA 3</b>	<b>A GOOD LIFE</b>	<p>People have different ways of approaching moral issues. Some prioritise developing the virtues, personal qualities and characteristics that would make them a 'good' person – one who would live by these virtues and act on them when encountering moral challenges. Many people turn to religions and non-religious worldviews for guidance and personal examples of the virtues and qualities they should aspire to. Some people consider how their actions affect other people; some think that if they follow rules and codes of conduct they will do the right thing. It is very difficult to live a good life, even for people who try to follow the rules and guidance provided by their tradition. This is partly because the guidance from any tradition, religious or non-religious, does not extend to every situation with a moral dimension that face people today. So, we have to do our best by asking questions like 'what would be the best outcome from this situation?' or 'what might a person who is recognised as 'good' have done in this situation?' or 'what does this rule about right and wrong suggest I should do in this situation?'. Some religions and non-religious worldviews have different expectations for different groups of people. Some distinguish between rules revealed by God, those developed as a result of reasoned human reflection, those that are customs and traditions developed by community leaders over many years, and those that reflect the nature of the world.</p>
<b>BIG IDEA 4</b>	<b>MAKING SENSE OF LIFE'S EXPERIENCES</b>	<p>Many people find profound meaning at some points in their lives in mystical, religious, spiritual or peak experiences. These experiences may be prompted by encounters with the wonders of nature, beautiful works of art or music or with tragic events. Some people believe that any of these experiences are capable of putting them, or others, in touch with a greater power or powers or with other realms of existence and provide insights into the world and their place within it. Some individuals and groups say that experience of religious rituals and other practices help them make a connection with God or gods and with each other, or with what is most important to them. The experiences of a few key people are believed to have given them extraordinary insights into the nature of reality. They hold important and different places within one or more religions or non-religious worldviews. Some believe that these experiences are related to a spiritual dimension of human beings, which may or may not be associated with religion. Others deny that humans have a spiritual nature, believing that a human being is no more than a complex, highly evolved animal. Whether they see themselves as spiritual, religious or not, many people get a sense of identity from belonging to the same group as others who believe the same things, see the world in the same way, and have the same values. This can develop strong feelings of identity, belonging, loyalty and commitment.</p>

## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

AGES 11–14		
<b>BIG IDEA 5</b>	<b>INFLUENCE, COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND POWER</b>	<p>Religions and non-religious worldviews exist at several levels. Most people encounter religions at local level where they can make a difference to communities and individuals. At national level, everyone is affected when a religious or non-religious group influences the country's political and legal systems, its education system or the times of national holidays. Religious and non-religious groups also influence people's ideas about what is right and wrong and affect the way they respond to ethical issues. Some people see their role as one of offering a critique of prevailing social attitudes and practices. Religions and non-religious worldviews influence culture and community in places where they had power in the past and may still have it. Consequently, around the world countries and communities have very different relationships with religions and non-religious worldviews, from theocracies, where God is the source of all authority, to secular states, which may claim to be neutral in matters of religion and belief. Many communities have become more diverse and have responded to this diversity in different ways. Changes in community are also reflected in the arts, which in most communities continue to remind people of their traditional religious identities while also being affected by contemporary religious and non-religious ideas. Most religions have a global presence and respond to the hardship that results from natural disasters, war, prejudice or disability. The relationship between religions, cultures and communities is both complex and controversial, since it can be peaceful and harmonious or can lead to conflict and disagreement. The appeal to ideas about a superior authority or vision represented by God, an authoritative text, a powerful leader or a compelling vision of the future may be used to justify social and political actions. This may lead to social and spiritual improvement, but it may lead to intolerance and violence.</p>
<b>BIG IDEA 6</b>	<b>THE BIG PICTURE</b>	<p>Many religions and non-religious worldviews provide a coherent account of what the universe is like and why it is as it is. These accounts may be called 'grand narratives'. Grand narratives frequently begin with stories of how the universe came to be, whether or how it will end and the place of human beings in it. Other narratives treat these questions in terms of an ongoing cycle of life, death and rebirth. In most religious and non-religious narratives, people are acknowledged to be in some way imperfect. There are many different ideas about why this is so and some grand narratives provide guidance on how to be liberated from this state. Most religious narratives support the idea that there is some form of life after this one, which may be a spiritual existence or another physical one. Some religious narratives say that what happens to people after death depends on how good a life they have led; others emphasise faith in divine power; others stress belonging to a community and performing appropriate ceremonies; many combine all of these. These explanations of the meaning and purpose of life from a variety of sources. These can include community traditions, scientific evidence, personal experience, and reasoning. For many religious people the most important source of their big picture of the world is found in sacred texts, often believed to have been divinely inspired. Many<sup>1</sup> people identify with narratives that deny the existence of any divine beings or predetermined purpose in life and state that the only things that exist are those that can be experienced with the physical senses or verified by science.</p>

## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

AGES 14–16		
<b>BIG IDEA 1</b>	<b>CONTINUITY, CHANGE AND DIVERSITY</b>	<p>There is no consensus on the meaning of the word 'religion' or how it may be clearly distinguished from a non-religious worldview. Religions and worldviews are often understood as multi-dimensional, where the main elements are doctrinal/philosophical, ritual/practical, mythological/narrative, ethical/legal, experiential/emotional, social/institutional, material/symbolic and economic/political. Some argue that they are best studied as whole systems of beliefs, practices and values; others as lived realities in individual communities. No religion or non-religious worldview is monolithic. Rather, they are diverse. Some people believe that there can only be one truth, and there can only be one true version of a religion, not several. Others value diversity and respect each other's right to difference. During the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries religions and non-religious worldviews have been challenged to give their response to many issues, particularly those involving gender, sexuality, marriage, roles of men and women, the environment and the role of religion in education. They have also been challenged from other schools of thought such as science, philosophy, history and sociology, as well as the media, in addition to being challenged by each other. Religious groups and individuals have responded differently to these challenges. They have to ask whether their differences allow them to work and live together in mutual respect and tolerance or whether their differences make such co-operation impossible. Awareness of a wider range of religions and non-religious worldviews can deepen, challenge or change people's views and commitments. Some people believe that there can only be one truth, that only one religion can be true and that there can only be one true version of a religion, not several. Others believe that truth may be found in many different religious and non-religious traditions. However, people may respect each other's right to difference, whatever their beliefs about truth. In response to religious plurality, many religious and non-religious groups are now involved in inter-faith organisations at local, national and international level, often with the purpose of working together for a cause.</p>
<b>BIG IDEA 2</b>	<b>WORDS AND BEYOND</b>	<p>It is very difficult to describe metaphysical concepts using everyday language, particularly in religions, which frequently refer to ideas beyond our ordinary understanding such as God, nirvana, soul and heaven. In attempting to express the inexpressible, people have used what philosophers call 'religious language'. People of all religions and non-religious worldviews have developed technical terms to express what they believe. They also use everyday language through metaphor and analogy. Non-verbal forms of communication may have an explanatory power of their own. Some pictures, songs and choral music can remind people of important events and stories in their tradition. Other works have less obvious meanings and require more interpretation. Many musical compositions and works of art were originally created to inspire or aid devotion or commitment. Today, these works are available in a wider range of contexts. Whether displayed or performed in a religious building to inspire worship or made available to the wider public in a concert hall or gallery, they can inspire people to reflect on spiritual ideas and ask important questions. Each religion and many different groups within the same religion differ in the extent to which the use of some or any forms of art is compatible with their beliefs and practices. The uses of some forms of non-verbal expression can lead to debate within religious groups. There are many ways of understanding verbal and non-verbal expressions of beliefs, experiences and commitments. They may be interpreted through studying the original purposes of the authors or artists, but also by studying the different meanings they may have for people today. Some forms of expression, such as sacred texts, are believed to be divinely inspired and may be interpreted in that light.</p>

## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

AGES 14–16		
BIG IDEA 3	A GOOD LIFE	<p>Religious and non-religious groups agree on some moral issues and disagree on others. They may have different <i>reasons</i> for their views and they may disagree with each other and among themselves about how to interpret their ideas of right and wrong, good and evil, and how to apply these ideas to difficult moral questions of today. People have different theories, which may be religious or non-religious, about how and why we ought to live a good life. Some teach ‘virtue theory’. They say that in order to lead a moral life we should concentrate on developing a good character and good personal virtues such as generosity and compassion, which would then make us behave generously or compassionately. Others teach deontological theories. They say that the way to lead a moral life is to do one’s duty or to follow the rules which tell us what is good or bad, right or wrong. A third group teach consequentialism. They say that we ought to act in the way that brings about the best overall results, no matter what those acts are. When people discuss contemporary moral issues from these perspectives, they may come up with very different answers. One of the big moral questions which is relevant for religious and non-religious worldviews alike is whether or not there are unchanging moral rules. Are there rules that apply to all people and at all times, irrespective of culture and regardless of circumstance, or does right and wrong depends on context and circumstance? Many moral conflicts result from clashes between these two points of view. This is partly because ideas about morality are closely connected to a group’s core teachings about Ultimate Reality, what it is to be human and how we should relate to our planet. Various religious and non-religious organisations have tried to identify rules and principles that should apply universally.</p>
BIG IDEA 4	MAKING SENSE OF LIFE’S EXPERIENCES	<p>Some believe that consciousness is the key feature of being human. It is believed by some to be God-given constituting people’s spiritual nature, which marks them out from the rest of the animal world and enables them to think beyond their ordinary experience. Some people regard their spirituality as the inner personal dimension of being religious, while others see themselves as spiritual rather than religious because they do not identify with traditional religious institutions or meta-narratives. There are also people who do not identify with either religion or spirituality. A few individuals are believed to have had exceptional experiences that have resulted in insights into the meaning and purpose of life which they have communicated to others. This can lead to the formation of new religions and non-religious worldviews, something which is still happening today. People from different religions and non-religious worldviews might disagree about the origin and meaning of religious, mystical, spiritual or peak experiences. Some find that religious rituals and other practices may enable them to experience a deep connection with God or gods, nature, their own consciousness or with each other. Membership of groups with whom they share beliefs, values and traditions often gives people a heightened sense of awareness, mystery, identity and belonging, and bring about a transformation in their lives.</p>



## BIG IDEAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

AGES 14–16		
BIG IDEA 5	INFLUENCE, COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND POWER	<p>Religions and non-religious worldviews exist at several levels. Most people encounter religions at local level where they can make a difference to communities and individuals. At national level, everyone is affected when a religious or non-religious group influences the country's political and legal systems, its education system or the times of national holidays. Religious and non-religious groups also influence people's ideas about what is right and wrong and affect the way they respond to ethical issues. Some people see their role as one of offering a critique of prevailing social attitudes and practices. Religions and non-religious worldviews influence culture and community in places where they had power in the past and may still have it. Consequently, around the world countries and communities have very different relationships with religions and non-religious worldviews, from theocracies, where God is the source of all authority, to secular states, which claim to be neutral in matters of religion and belief. Many communities have become more diverse and have responded to this diversity in different ways. Changes in community are also reflected in the arts, which in most communities continue to remind people of their traditional religious identities while also being affected by contemporary religious and non-religious ideas. Most religions have a global presence and respond to the hardship that results from natural disasters, war, prejudice or disability. The relationship between religions, cultures and communities is both complex and controversial, since it can be peaceful and harmonious or can lead to conflict and disagreement. The appeal to ideas about a superior authority or vision represented by God, an authoritative text, a powerful leader or a compelling vision of the future may be used to justify social and political actions. On the one hand this may lead to social and spiritual improvement, but on the other hand this may lead to intolerance and violence.</p>
BIG IDEA 6	THE BIG PICTURE	<p>Many religions and non-religious worldviews have constructed an overarching narrative, sometimes called a 'grand narrative', which seeks to offer ways of understanding the big questions about the universe and the nature of humanity. Final answers are not always provided, but such narratives usually provide a context within which the questions may be understood. There are variations of belief about these narratives. Some people consider that their religious narrative cannot change, as it is true for all time. Others say that the narrative needs to be adapted or re-expressed to take account of new discoveries, changes in community or new cultural settings. Many people believe in a balance between innovation and common shared practice, but where and how to strike such a balance is often a subject of debate. Most religious narratives recognise an Ultimate Reality that may be expressed as a personal and loving God, an impersonal source of existence, or an eternal truth or principle that governs the universe. Other narratives, both religious and non-religious, focus more on the nature of the world itself and the human condition rather than on questions about the nature of God and creation. Religions and non-religious narratives tell very different stories about the nature of human beings and their place in the universe, but most of the religious narratives include common themes, such as why there is suffering in the world, why humans seem to be flawed, how they might find liberation or salvation or how they might make the world a better place. In some narratives death is the end for humans and all life forms; in others, humans, and sometimes other life forms, continue after death, although there are many different views on the form that existence beyond death will take, and on whether it is desirable. Most narratives that attempt to explain what the world is like appeal for their authority to one or more of community traditions, sacred texts, scientific evidence, personal experience and reasoning. For many religious people the most important source of their big picture of the world is found in sacred texts, though the nature of the 'truth' or 'truths' found in the texts is disputed. Many religious people accept scientific accounts and find no conflict with their religious beliefs. Others say that it is only possible to believe one or the other.</p>

<sup>1</sup> This is a reference to UK statistics.



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