Beyond the Classroom:

Informal Religion and Worldviews Education in the UK

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This report in 60 seconds

In a time of growing division, where religion is often seen as a problem, religious education cannot, and indeed does not, only take place within the classroom or within formal education. If we are to build compassionate, cohesive societies, we need to understand religious education as something active, lifelong, evolving and to be taken seriously.

This report explores where informal religious education happens across the UK; where are the places and spaces where people of all ages, in all kinds of communities, learn about and encounter other religions, belief systems and worldviews?

Through various sectors, including youth work, arts and culture, public services, media and sport, as well as extracurricular spaces, campuses, anchor institutions and local interfaith networks, we map the opportunities and challenges of informal learning about religions and worldviews.

We find that informal religious education varies significantly from locality to locality, and context to context; nationally, the picture is somewhat patchy although there are myriad examples of good practice at a local level, which we highlight through case studies here. In some sectors, we identify a 'squeamishness' or tentativeness in talking about religion and belief, which we argue needs to be combatted in order to grow the religious literacy of everyone, regardless of background.

Informal religious education is strongest in areas of greater religious diversity, where there is greater opportunity for organic, unstructured encounters with those of other beliefs, reinforced by stronger interfaith networks. This raises the question of how to

develop better religion and belief literacy in the whole population, not only those living in more diverse communities.

If every sector of society is provided with the tools and confidence for good conversations about religion and belief, then informal religious education can and will happen naturally anywhere. Greater formal literacy will lead to greater informal opportunities for religious education, which will in turn mean a more religiously literate population and a more cohesive community. The fact that this is not currently occurring universally or strategically across the UK is, we argue, a missed opportunity for a better society.

Foreword

We live in an increasingly interconnected and seemingly ever more complicated world. Given the rich diversity of the global community and the multi-religious tapestry of local life in cities, towns and villages across our country, religious education is more relevant and vital than ever. It is crucial that religious education be prioritised in the classroom. But religious education is so important that it cannot stop there, simply being limited to one sphere.

As this excellent report outlines, effective religious literacy and dynamic engagement with faith and belief communities should be a strategic priority for leaders and institutions across every sphere of society.

Beyond the Classroom argues that literacy in faith and belief matters more than ever. While we face many challenges in our communities, we also stand on the verge of a profound and powerful opportunity. The report highlights the many diverse and dynamic ways in which people encounter and learn about other religions and worldviews, whether through the media, the workplace, online, in civic society or in relationship one with another. By learning more about our neighbours, both near and far,

we create the conditions for more cohesive communities, a more United Kingdom and a more peaceful world.

This report is essential reading for anyone who is invested in fostering a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the role of faith and belief in today's society. It is a vital contribution to the conversation on how we equip future generations to flourish and thrive in a multireligious, multiethnic and multicultural world. If we listen and learn from the content and recommendations herein, we will be better equipped to play our part in bridging divides and building a brighter future for everyone.

Lord Rook of Wimbledon OBE

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Introduction

In a time of growing division, where religion is often seen as a problem, religious education cannot and indeed does not only take place within the scarce hours it is afforded in the classroom up to the age of eighteen.[1] If we are to build compassionate, cohesive societies, we need to understand religious education as something active, lifelong, evolving and to be taken seriously.

Religion and worldviews education in the school context varies significantly between nations, between local areas and between schools. There are pockets of good practice in schools engaging with the importance of the subject, prioritising it within the curriculum and teaching it to a high standard. However, recent evidence given by the Religious Education Council (REC) of England and Wales to a parliamentary committee argues that the current provision of RE is 'failing pupils,' with a postcode lottery and a clear need for reform.[2] Data cited in their evidence suggests that up to one in six schools in England might not be providing RE for Year 11 students, a trend attributed to the fact that the subject is not included in the current metrics by which student progress is measured.

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The numbers of students taking GCSE and A Level qualifications in the subject has fluctuated in recent years; the number sitting a GCSE declined by 2.6% in 2025, having increased slightly the previous year, although the subject was still one of the most popular non-compulsory options.[3]

The chair of the REC expressed concerns that "a shortage of specialism in schools is leading to teachers warning of tokenistic, low quality [RE] that risks embedding misconceptions, undermining societal cohesion."[4] Yet even the best examples of formal religious education count for only a few hours a week, for the school-age years of a person's life.

The notion that RE ends when the curriculum does is not conducive to a holistic understanding of faith and belief, nor to a rich picture of societal inclusion.

Alongside strengthening formal provision, we argue there is a need to amplify the ways in which religious education can happen organically and informally, in a far broader range of contexts than just the classroom. Put simply, where do people of all ages encounter and learn about other religious and non-religious worldviews, beyond the classroom, in daily life?

Definitions

At this stage, it is important to set out some definitions for what is meant here by formal education, informal education and formation, and the distinctions between these. The terms are often disputed, but for the purposes of this research, we have used these definitions.

Formal religious education refers to that which is specifically taught within the structure of a compulsory curriculum or legal requirement. There is typically an explicit intention of instilling knowledge for an academic purpose.

> "The notion that RE ends when the curriculum does is not conducive to a holistic understanding of faith and belief, nor to a rich picture of societal inclusion."

Informal religious education refers to occasions and activities which, intentionally or otherwise, have the effect of instilling deeper interpersonal knowledge and empathetic understanding of other religious and non-religious worldviews. This may involve direct interaction with a member of that religion or belief group. As is implied by their informality, these activities are much more varied in practice, nature and location than formal education.

Formation in the context of religion and worldviews refers to the intentional practice of a member of a faith group being shaped on a spiritual level, within the framework of that faith or belief system. It is usually instructive rather than informative, didactic rather than educational, and may primarily include those who already belong to a particular group.

The distinction between formal and informal education and formation is important here. The focus of this research is on informal religion and worldviews education, wherever it occurs.

We have not therefore included single-faith spaces that are formational or instructional in nature; for example, church youth groups, madrassahs, informal Jewish education or faith-specific summer camps. It was noted by one interviewee that these spaces may still constitute informal religious education, because the way you view other religions, and the preconceptions you may have, can be shaped for better or for worse by how they are spoken about

within your own community. This is a salient point, but a thorough exploration of these dynamics is beyond the scope of this research.

Likewise, we have also excluded acts of collective worship from the focus of this research. These are a legal requirement and a compulsory part of education (albeit with the right to withdraw), however and wherever schools choose to enact it. In some cases, collective worship happens within the context of school

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assemblies, which may be delivered by external organisations or local faith leaders, who do not always consider themselves primarily 'educators' in the formal sense. It was in this spirit that some distinguished doing collective worship and/or assemblies in local schools from RE lessons or more confessional aspects of their work.

It is also worth noting that the perception and construction of religious studies as a formal curricular subject varies between the four nations of the UK, between different local authority areas and even between different individual schools. The degree to which it is codified within the curriculum differs widely, as does the subject name. What is referred to as Religious Education (RE) in England is now known as Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) in Wales,[5] while in Scotland, it is taught as Religious and Moral Education (RME).[6] In Religious Education, it is a compulsory part of the national curriculum but the extent to which it engages with non-Christian religions has been challenged.[7]

Methodology

The research consisted of semi-structured interviews with 46 individuals, conducted between January and May 2025. Of these, 14 were based in England, 5 in Northern Ireland, 10 in Scotland, 7 in Wales, and 10 had UK-wide or non-geographically focused roles.

The interviewees included faith leaders, academics, youth workers, community leaders, charity workers, museum curators, chaplains, cathedral education staff, local interfaith coordinators, public service representatives, arts & culture professionals and council officers.

While many of the interviewees spoke in an explicitly interfaith capacity, they personally represented a range of different religions and beliefs, and none, including Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, Baha'i and humanist participants and those from a number of different Christian denominations.

The initial intention was to conduct geographical case studies in specific local areas across all four countries, mapping the extent of informal religious education in each area and extrapolating findings from that to the national context. Within this, we planned to conduct case studies in areas of different demographics, both rural and urban, religiously diverse and religiously homogeneous, with one large majority religious group and with a number of significant minority groups.

The initial four areas selected were:

— London Borough of Redbridge – chosen because of the diversity of religious groups in the borough. It is the second

most religious borough in England and Wales, with only 12.6% of the population defining as non-religious, along with one of the largest proportions of the population identifying as Muslim, Hindu or Sikh.

— Five of the metropolitan boroughs of the West Midlands Combined Authority (Birmingham, Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall, and Wolverhampton) – chosen because of the high religious diversity across the area, outside of London.

— South Wales (Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Torfaen) – chosen because this cluster of six neighbouring boroughs are all in the top ten most non-religious boroughs in England and Wales, with over 50% of the population defining as 'no religion' and less than 1% belonging to a non-Christian religion.

— Dundee – chosen as it has one of the most diverse religious landscapes in Scotland, outside of Glasgow and Edinburgh, with growth in Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism as well as a growing number of people with no religious affiliation.[8]

In each of these areas, we contacted representatives of a range of faith groups, educational stakeholders, charities, libraries, sports clubs, youth work organisations, local councils and cultural institutions, with an invitation to participate. The framing of the research questions was kept deliberately broad during recruitment, in the hope that those whose work is not explicitly religious or for whom religion is a point of tension in their work would feel able to engage.

Some of the most interesting work in this field is led by practitioners who do not see themselves as 'educators', less still

religious educators, and it was important that the research was open to them.

At this stage, we began to identify several trends in the responses, and in those who did not respond, to the invitation to participate. For example, arts and culture organisations were almost unanimous in their lack of response, as were libraries. Council representatives were, with some exceptions, hesitant to be involved and eager to emphasise that they are not experts in religion. Response rates overall were higher in areas of greater religious diversity.

We therefore broadened the scope of participants, to identify best practice and include those in sectors where we had not heard from people, regardless of where they were based.[9] We also recruited representatives of relevant national organisations, who offered a bigger picture of the informal religious landscape across the UK and were also able to signpost to specific examples. In total, we invited 133 individuals to participate in the research, of whom 46 agreed to an interview.

Subsequent chapters of this report lay out the findings from these interviews, according to sector rather than geography, although where there were significant differences between places or nations we note these. We explore the potential for informal religious education through extracurricular spaces, interfaith and interbelief projects, youth work, the public sector, arts and culture and the media in turn, before making recommendations for enhancing this.

1 Extracurricular spaces

The focus of this research is on informal religion and worldviews education; in other words, that which takes place beyond the remit of the formal curriculum and beyond the confines of the school timetable. However, before moving on to examine what this looks like in the wider community, it is important to note that there are spaces where religious education occurs within and around educational establishments but in a less formal, extracurricular manner.

We heard examples including

— chaplaincy spaces
— English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes
— lunchtime discussion groups
— parental engagement projects
— school assemblies
— university campuses
— school exchange programmes
— visits to places of worship

"**There are spaces where religious education occurs within and around educational establishments but in a less formal, extracurricular manner.**"

At the most informal end of the scale, interactions at the school gate or on the school playground were also described as key sites for informal learning about other religions and worldviews.

Some of these examples are demonstrably more formal or structured than others – take for example, the difference between the school playground and

a school trip to a mosque – but all were relayed by participants through the lens of informal religious education.

School trips

As mentioned above, school trips to places of worship can fulfil a curricular function and therefore sit at the more formal end of the scale in terms of religious education. In particular, many larger places of worship, such as cathedrals, have their own education teams responsible for delivering formal programmes of education for visiting groups of all ages. However, we observe a richness of the more informal interactions and encounters that occur during and surrounding these visits.[1]

In Blackburn, for example, the Church of England cathedral and the central mosque have collaborated on a joint schools' programme. This takes the form of a whole day trip to both places of worship, whereby primary school groups are encouraged and supported to visit both together. This provides greater opportunity for comparative religious study and interaction.

The demographic of local schools means that for some, either the mosque or the cathedral represents 'home territory' and parents sometimes express concerns or doubts about their children visiting the 'away' place of worship. Both the cathedral and the mosque take seriously the responsibility of conveying to anxious parents the importance of both sites. This can be an opportunity for religious education of parents alongside the educational value of the trip, as well as secondarily building cohesion between communities, as the cathedral education team made clear:

> *When headteachers ring up and tell me they've got*
> *parents moaning about the mosque, I always make the*
> *very important point that this is an educational visit. It's*
> *all our responsibility to ensure that we are educated to*
> *understand other people's beliefs and views, particularly*
> *in a place like Blackburn, where it's our responsibility to*
> *understand, at least, not necessarily to agree with, but*
> *understand somebody else's point of view.*[2]

We also found multiple examples of places of worship and universities hosting cross-curricular events, typically for Key Stage Four pupils, such as conferences bringing together local schools for a programme of lectures and seminars on a particular topic. Some of these solely provide revision opportunities ahead of exams, for example, and thus are not within our remit. Others however aim to expand students' understanding of and critical engagement with religion as a subject; for example, taking the relationship between science and religion as a case study on which invited speakers presented different perspectives to a depth that the GCSE/A Level curricula cannot.

We note that there is a potential inequity in trips to places of worship, for the simple reason that some schools, and authorities, have a greater range of religious communities with easy local access. It is important that religion and worldviews education beyond the classroom is not limited to places with diverse local sites of interest, nor to those beliefs and worldviews which have physical buildings. For example, humanism or smaller denominations without their own premises might not lend themselves to this aspect of formal or informal education.

Whatever form it takes, there is a need for spaces beyond the classroom where school age pupils can safely ask questions and explore and experience each other's faith and belief sensitively.

External facilitators

If a change in the physical environment, beyond the classroom, is important in expanding young people's understanding of religions and worldviews, there is also a demonstrable role for the individuals helping to develop this understanding to be broader than just teachers. Who facilitates these encounters is as important as where they occur.

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Even where these interactions take place beyond the classroom and may be led by others beyond the teaching staff, there is a clear benefit to the fact that it takes place within school time. This ensures that a much wider range of young people encounter this than might otherwise be the case for opt-in extracurricular activities outside of the school day or context.

In one powerful example, a youth worker working with local schools to facilitate dialogue across difference shared a story of a class group in which a breakthrough in mutual understanding and the young people's ability to articulate their own faith confidently came only when the teacher was gently asked to leave the room. This is not to diminish in any way the role of RE teachers, but rather an

acknowledgement that the formal lesson setting can sometimes assume a tone or mode that pupils respond to. There is a risk that, in responding to a teacher, pupils expect there is a 'right' answer, or take on the role of a spokesperson for their own faith, particularly in contexts where they are the minority. In this example, a pupil who was the only Hindu in their class felt able to open up and be honest about what their faith meant to them personally, rather than feeling they had to communicate the facts of their religion as expected by the curriculum.

In another example, we heard how in Redbridge, sixth formers of all faiths and none are trained up as 'Ambassadors of Faith and Belief' to deliver talks and discussions in local primary schools. There is an emphasis within this on the expectation that they should talk about and share their religion as they personally understand it, producing presentations which convey both their beliefs and how they are practiced, in the context of their own family and community. The scheme in Redbridge has been running for over ten years with the coordination of the local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE), the local body which has a statutory responsibility for religious education.

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The language encouraged here is 'I believe X' or 'I do Y' rather than 'Muslims believe X' or 'Christians do Y', with a clear demonstration of the diversity and nuance within and between faiths. This is not always straightforward, and may conflict with the more didactic or certain approach that young

people have learned from their own faith community. The sessions might take place in the classroom, but are more informal than lessons. The focus is on personal experiences of faith and relational encounters with real religious people, rather than following a curriculum which, however well designed, will by necessity be unable to cover the breadth of lived experience.

> *We encourage them to make it their own, to put a lot of their images in there, because it makes it very real. They'll have their cat reading the Quran, or the cat sitting on them while they're in religious dress, or just really lovely, playful teenage imagery which is really, really powerful.[3]*

The increased use of online events and Zoom conversations post-pandemic has opened up the possibility for this type of conversation beyond areas with high religious diversity. We heard examples of schools in monocultural areas facilitating virtual exchange programmes with schools in areas of greater religious diversity, or where the majority faith group is different than their own. For instance, the youth ambassadors in Redbridge are in increasing demand for Zoom presentations to primary schools in rural areas beyond their borough, to schools where the cost and ease of transport to engage with a more diverse community might have been prohibitive, including a presentation of the lived reality of young Muslims in Redbridge to schools in rural Cumbria.[4]

Home-school engagement

The relationship between home and school is a key channel for religion and worldviews education too. It was noticeable that several interviewees drew on personal experience beyond their

professional capacity, speaking unprompted about how they had gained knowledge of religion in their own life and that of their family. For many, this was in the context of their children's school or nursery being more religiously diverse than their own upbringing.

Some reflected that friendships with children of different faiths, and the ensuing relationships between their parents, had been central to the whole family's religious education. One person spoke about navigating the requirements of Halal in the context of a playdate between their child and a Muslim classmate, and how formative this had been as an adult who had never formally been taught about Islam. Socialisation can itself represent religious education, particularly for younger children; sociologists of religion Anna Strhan and Rachael Shillitoe argue that primary schools represent a key site where children from non-religious families first encounter the notion of religion or theistic beliefs, and therefore also where they first begin to articulate their own non-religious worldviews.[5]

The broader religious education curriculum can also represent a 'passive' education for the adult parents and carers, with several saying they had learned much of what they know about a particular religion by virtue of their children coming home and relaying what they had studied in RE. A number also suggested that, while RE as an academic subject is valuable, their children's understanding of it had been deepened and enhanced through their playground encounters.

The *Objects Connect* project developed by the Faith and Belief Forum is doing pioneering work in this space.[6] It involves using objects and artefacts to introduce conversations about religion and

worldviews in the home environment. Children take these items home for a period of time, in the same way they might be entrusted with a class teddy bear or pet, and are encouraged to share the discussions they have with their family around the object. The accompanying resources include questions for parents and children to ask each other about how the object might relate to worldviews and practices, as well as exploring their own beliefs.

As one parent said in the evaluation of the pilot project, "I think whether you have your own faith, or no faith, there's so much you can learn from the faiths of others."[7]

One caveat to this is that it depends heavily on the religious diversity of a school or an area, which can compound existing disparities in formal and informal exposure to other worldviews. In areas of lower religious diversity, or lower religiosity, teachers may find it harder to engage with a range of faith communities. Further, these may also be areas with the least representation of different faiths on the local SACREs, the committees which advise on RE locally. At the time of writing, the SACRE in Wolverhampton had representatives from five different non-Christian groups including humanism, whereas the equivalent bodies across all six of the South Wales boroughs we studied had multiple vacancies for non-Christian religion representatives.

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While extracurricular religious education through encounter is powerful, it is also more likely to be strongest in areas where curricular provision is similarly strong, with the reverse also true.

Chaplaincy

Within the institutional setting, chaplaincy is another example which we find blurs the boundaries of this project. In some cases, it is squarely beyond what we might term 'education', describing the pastoral support provided by a chaplain to students of their own faith. However, in certain supportive environments, it can also represent an interfaith space which, as explored further in the next chapter, facilitates education through encounter with other beliefs and faiths.

One specific contextual example of this is chaplaincy in further education (FE) colleges, which predominantly serve 16 to 18-year-olds. In particular, many of them will be studying vocational or technical qualifications, and as such not all colleges offer religious education as a formal academic subject, nor will they all have a religious studies department. Where the requirement for compulsory RE up to the age of 18 might be picked up by the RE department in a high school or sixth form, chaplaincy spaces can assume this role in FE colleges.

A similar dynamic may be true of university campuses, albeit without the compulsory element, in particular those without academic theology/religious studies departments. Only 22 higher education institutions in the UK offer degrees in theology or religious studies and this is diminishing, and thus chaplaincy spaces

become a main provider of religious knowledge or reflection on campus.[8]

Chaplaincy in FE settings is far sparser and less common than in secondary education or universities, but it is growing. A best practice example of this which we encountered is the chaplaincy provision within a group of FE college campuses across the West Midlands. The chaplaincy team runs an 'enrichment programme' of informal learning opportunities across the campuses, focused on a diverse annual timetable of significant religious festivals. They have developed activities around religious and cultural festivals and days; examples include Eid, Holi, Ramadan, Easter, Holocaust Memorial Day, Chinese New Year and Tu B'shevat, the Jewish celebration of the birthday of trees.

These sessions take the theme or ethos of a festival, including factual information about the tradition it comes from, then invite learners to explore how that relates to their own lived experience or belief system and points of commonality. The aim is to create an environment where people can not only learn *about* the festivals, but learn *from* them.[9] They take place in the open social areas within the college, which are accessible to all students and staff in a non-pressured manner.

In how the chaplaincy describes this, they make a clear distinction between inviting people to celebrate these festivals, which is a less inclusive framing, and inviting them to see religious festivals as a source of wisdom and learning and spiritual growth, regardless of their own tradition, and as a shared springboard for reflection. In light of this, it is seen as important that the range of festivals represents but is not limited to the communities the college serves.

It's like a bonfire, you know, people will come to the warmth or walk away from it. There's that freedom. They can get as much heat as they feel they need, and then wander off if they want to. In a school setting, that's not the case. There's a set way of doing it, and your attendance is required.

FE is different. The classes aren't timetabled in the same way, we don't have a bell or a uniform. There's more autonomy in the learning experience, for sure, and that allows for more autonomy in the chaplaincy work too. We find that makes a big difference, actually.[10]

These sessions often lead to pastoral engagement as a result of conversations with students who might not have sought out chaplaincy support, but feel enabled to share in the informal learning opportunities and then discuss challenges or concerns further with the chaplain.

"There is a greater need than ever for all students to be educated on religion, whatever their own belief and regardless of whether it is relevant to their field of study, yet initiating these conversations feels more difficult or more fraught than ever."

The sense of greater autonomy outlined in this quote may be understood as the flipside of the earlier point about the importance of activities being within the school day. While the latter might reach a greater range of young people, because they are all in school, it comes at the expense of the freedom or autonomy described here.

Conversely, while the learning experience in FE settings may be deeper and more reflective, a smaller proportion of students may be engaged by it.

University campuses and chaplaincies may also assume a similar role in encouraging informal, interactional religious education, although this is not without its challenges. We heard in several instances about the 'catch-22' situation in light of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and its implications on campuses in all four nations. There is a greater need than ever for all students to be educated on religion, whatever their own belief and regardless of whether it is relevant to their field of study, yet initiating these conversations feels more difficult or more fraught than ever.

Whether on campus, on the school playground or beyond, the sense of a real-life encounter being more influential than formal education cuts across other strands of the research, as we will go on to explore in subsequent chapters of this report; from the power of visiting a place of worship for yourself, to the friendships developed through interfaith social groups, to the normalising effect of people of faith in the media and sports industry.

2 Interfaith and interbelief spaces

Interfaith and interbelief spaces and experiences represent points of encounter and engagement with and between people of different religions, traditions and beliefs and none. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that these emerged throughout the research as key sites of informal religious education. These spaces span the whole spectrum of formality, ranging from established groups and organisations, through to much more informal conversations and friendships.

We heard examples including:

— arts festivals
— ceilidhs
— discussion groups
— football tournaments
— lectures
— photography exhibitions
— theatre productions
— youth programmes
— book clubs
— coffee mornings
— film clubs
— interfaith clubs in schools
— local faith forums
— summer camps
— walking groups

In all these diverse activities, 'interfaith' was articulated as a key aspect of what they do. The core purpose of these spaces is not always educational, often focusing on mutual understanding rather than explicit education, but they nonetheless represent spaces where people learn about other belief systems and religions through encounter.

> "Interfaith and interbelief spaces and experiences represent points of encounter and engagement with and between people of different religions, traditions and beliefs and none."

The interfaith landscape varies between the nations within the UK. In particular, Interfaith Scotland predates its UK-wide counterpart and Scottish Interfaith Week was founded in 2004, five years before the England and Wales equivalent. This was evident in the comparative strength, scale and responsiveness of local interfaith groups across Scotland.

By contrast, interfaith practice in Northern Ireland is a relatively new endeavour, for both historical and demographic reasons. Recent immigration patterns have increased religious diversity in Northern Ireland, slowly expanding the scope of interfaith dialogue and practice beyond the historic focus on cross-denominational dialogue and combatting sectarianism. In Wales, interfaith work mirrors the demographic and religious diversity, or lack thereof, within the population, with work almost entirely clustered around the larger and more diverse urban centres of Cardiff and Swansea.

Across the whole of the UK, the closure of the Interfaith Network in 2024 due to funding withdrawal is a significant and lamentable loss to the sector.[1]

Grassroots interfaith work

There is a plethora of grassroots interfaith organisations active in communities across the UK; the website of the now-disbanded Interfaith Network lists over 280 individual local groups.[2]

In the context of lifelong informal education, we found these spaces to be one of the strongest examples of engaging across age groups, particularly among older people. For example, an interfaith community group in Glasgow brings together women of different faiths and ages for conversation and socialising, and has led to

flourishing friendships between Christian retirees and Muslim young mums, older Catholic nuns and their younger Buddhist counterparts. As one member explained,

> *It's certainly not a very formal programme. I think the one thing I'd say is we're friends and we love one another. It's a very warm and friendly group to go into. Once we know one another, well, then it's just a joy to meet really, and in the course of that, over tea and cake, there is what you might call informal education because we are learning from each other all the time.[3]*

On the other hand, a report by the Faith and Belief Forum in 2025 into the future of Interfaith Week in England identified the need for interfaith activities to "move beyond the bubble" and in particular the comparative dearth of young people involved in local level interfaith activities, perhaps because of "the feeling that interfaith work is largely the preserve of often elderly 'enthusiasts'."[4]

"It's just a joy to meet really, and in the course of that, over tea and cake, there is what you might call informal education because we are learning from each other all the time."

The aforementioned group in Glasgow meets during the working week, hence the prevalence of retirees and stay-at-home mothers involved. We echo the finding of the Faith & Belief Forum report that there is work needed in order to broaden the appeal of interfaith work, particularly to younger people, beyond what one of our participants acknowledged is currently a "minority sport".[5]

One disadvantage of grassroots interfaith organisations and their educational potential is the relatively high bar for entry. This is not to say that they are exclusive in nature; the reverse is often true, at least in terms of the perceived openness of such groups to the whole community including those of all faiths and none. However, they typically require or presuppose a degree of interest in religion and a high level of faith literacy in order to seek out involvement, as well as the perception that you need a good enough understanding of your own faith tradition to be a spokesperson for it.

> **"The existence of an interfaith community group presupposes the existence of a range of individual faith communities, the diversity of which is significantly greater in some part of the country than others."**

Interfaith work also varies by community and borough. Local grassroots interfaith groups tend to be stronger and more prevalent in areas of greater diversity. The existence of an interfaith community group presupposes the existence of a range of individual faith communities, the diversity of which is significantly greater in some part of the country than others.

For example, in Redbridge, 82% of the population are religious, according to the 2021 census, and 51% of the population belong to a non-Christian religious group. This makes it the second most religious borough in England and Wales. Conversely, across our aggregate group of local authorities in South Wales, on average only 39% of the population are religious, and no single religious group other than Christianity represents more than 1%.[6] The potential for,

and ease of, interfaith encounter in these two contexts is clearly very different.

That said, we also observed that local interfaith groups are often very resourceful, achieving a depth and breadth of dialogue even with limited capacity. For example, one local interfaith group counted members of 15 different faith or belief traditions, even where some of these groups each represented less than 0.5% of the city's population. In more than one local area, we heard from representatives of the Baha'i faith who are actively involved in interfaith education, where the Baha'i community would not be big or well-resourced enough to deliver projects like that on their own.

It is important to define faith and belief as key characteristics here, distinct from multicultural or intercommunity inclusion. We contacted one community project in the North of England with an invitation to participate in this project, based on their website which celebrated the multicultural, multilingual, inclusive nature of their work with refugees, migrants and the local community through arts and culture. In this melting pot of difference, it felt likely that religion would indirectly, if not directly, feature in their discussions. We instead received the response that:

> *...in general we avoid discussing religion... We might light candles for Diwali or put out chocolate coins for the end of Hanukkah but otherwise we steer clear as much as possible.*[7]

Whilst this is an isolated example, it is illustrative of the need for greater religious confidence and literacy across the whole

> **"It is illustrative of the need for greater religious confidence and literacy across the whole population, even among those actively involved in community cohesion."**

population, even among those actively involved in community cohesion.

The interfaith context is a key example of the 'patchiness' of informal religious education, as we will see again throughout this report.

We encountered numerous examples of the value and strength of interfaith community work, but at the same time acknowledge that there are whole geographic areas and age cohorts which it struggles to reach or engage with at all.

Case study 1:

Bradford Faith Trail

The Bradford Faith Trail is a monthly guided tour of five different places of worship in walking distance of each other in the centre of Bradford.

Delivered by volunteers from the local faith community, the trail consists of visiting a Muslim mosque, a Hindu mandir, a Sikh gurdwara, a Roman Catholic church and the Church of England cathedral, exploring the places of worship and their connections to Bradford's history and community. It takes place on the first Saturday of every month (March-October) and has done so for over 15 years. It began as a small voluntary initiative, as part of a lottery-funded heritage event aimed at opening up religious buildings, but has become an established part of the faith landscape locally.

> *Everybody knows each other now. The person from the Catholic church knows the person from the masjid down the road, and the person from the mandir is always going to their events and to lots of events at the Cathedral. They'll turn up here and there's a really massive interfaith cooperation that goes on in Bradford, and you don't always hear about it, but it is there.[8]*

Visitors book onto the tour and are welcomed into each of the places of worship in turn by members of that congregation or community, who explain key aspects of the building and the worship space as they relate to their faith and practice. The gurdwara provides lunch. Bookings are now coordinated by the cathedral education team, by virtue of them having more paid staff

capacity than the other places of worship, but the trail itself is a voluntary endeavour.

> They're all volunteers, so they're all there on that one Saturday a month. The group comes and the person will give an explanation of that faith, an explanation of that faith building. They all have a story to tell, because a lot of them are working class sort of groups, immigrant groups that have come to Bradford. You know, the cathedral's a little bit different, but the other four – this is Bradford, this changing communities sort of place.[9]

The volunteer organisers have recently developed a stop on the trail to include the faith heritage of the Jewish community in Bradford, through exploring a historic manufacturing district of the city which was established by Jewish immigrants in the 1850s. The only synagogue in the city is situated too far away geographically to be incorporated into the walk, so this is an intentional alternative.

> We're learning as we go as well, because we felt the last few years the real lack of not acknowledging the Jewish community and we knew we couldn't physically go to the synagogue, so we found a way around it. We're learning and changing as well in what we do.[10]

Those taking part in the tour include individual members of the public, who are simply interested, to organised adult education groups like the University of the Third Age (U3A) and school groups from less diverse areas who are keen to learn about other communities and faiths. There are also a growing number of public service groups who undertake the trail as a professional

development activity, including doctors' receptionists and job centre workers. It is now a compulsory element of induction for new police officers locally. (This is explored further in chapter 4.)

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3   Youth work

At their best, youth work spaces and practitioners can be at least as influential as schools and teachers in shaping young people's perspectives, worldviews and understandings of other beliefs. Furthermore, the fact of being an informal educator, rather than a teacher, is seen to be an attractive aspect of professional identity for many youth workers, especially faith-based ones.[1] However, fewer and fewer young people are able to experience this directly, with the youth work sector experiencing a crisis in funding and prioritisation.

Statutory youth work provision has been subject to significant funding cuts in recent years. Local authority expenditure on youth services fell by 73% in England and 27% in Wales between 2010 and 2024. This represents a real-term cut of £1.2bn to youth services in England and £16.6m in Wales over that time period. The number of local authority-run youth centres in England has fallen by 54% in the last decade, with 34% fewer paid youth workers. 14% of councils reported that they had no youth centres, statutory or otherwise, in their local authority.[2]

Research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that this has had a profound impact on young people's educational outcomes, with teenagers in areas most affected by the cuts performing nearly 4% worse in national secondary school exams.[3] If a reduction in youth work provision contributes to lower formal educational attainment, we argue that it may also lead to a narrower informal education experience with fewer free and accessible opportunities for encountering and interacting with young people from different backgrounds outside of school.

In August 2025, the UK government announced plans to increase funding for youth services, investing £88 million to support youth clubs and schools to offer more after-school activities, while enabling organisations like the Scouts and Guides to deliver more places in local communities.[4]

> *There's a need for more youth work provision, for these physical spaces. People are crying out for it because all this has been scrapped. This is not the time anymore where every community has got a whole load of youth clubs. It just doesn't exist anymore.[5]*

Against this backdrop, a large proportion of youth work provision is now delivered by charities or faith groups. While some youth groups led by faith-based organisations are more social in focus and open to a wider group, the majority tend to fall into the 'formational' category of religious education, in that youth groups in places of worship often cater for their own young people and aim to develop their knowledge of their own religion, as opposed to broadening their understanding.

For this reason, we primarily explored youth work in this research through the lens of non-faith based spaces, discounting, for example, the majority of church, mosque or synagogue-based youth groups. Edge Youth Club (case study 2) was a notable exception to this.

Case study 2:

Edge Youth Club, Barkingside

Edge Youth Club is based at Holy Trinity church in Barkingside, in the borough of Redbridge. This is a youth group for 9 to 14 year olds run by the local Church of England parish church, but unlike many faith-based project, has the explicit aim of bringing together young people from different faiths and backgrounds rather than forming them in the Christian faith. None of those attending had a connection to the church prior to coming to the youth group.

> *In terms of shaping people's minds, and in particular, preventing stereotypes and racism and prejudice against other religions to grow, you've got to talk to these guys before they hit secondary school, and that's where there's still an openness... There are youth with Hindu backgrounds, with Muslim backgrounds, atheist backgrounds, Christian backgrounds, the lot.[6]*

The volunteer-run project includes activities like an interfaith treasure hunt, and regular discussion slots for talking about seven core values (Together, Diverse, Empower, Grow, Hope, Joy and Vision), with no expectation that the input will be didactically Christian in content.

Alongside this, the church has grown in presence in the local community. Young people from Edge Youth Club ran several stalls at a recent community garden party hosted by the church, attended by a large number of local residents from all backgrounds and none. Attending activities like this, which are hosted in the vicarage, has also been an opportunity for informal religious education for parents

of other faiths who had not previously encountered the church or members of the clergy.

The vision for the youth club stems directly from the vicar's previous career as an academic historian studying the rise of Nazism in 1930s Germany, through which he became convinced of the need to create spaces where young people could learn to understand each other across their differences. In Redbridge, a borough with a high number of different faith schools, the importance of a space like this where difference is encouraged and stimulated is even more important.

A significant proportion of those attending have additional needs, which the volunteer leaders explain is as a result of the inclusive approach taken. The group was initially deliberately inclusive in terms of faith and belief, but as a by-product this has engendered a culture of inclusion which means young people with additional or behavioural needs and their parents feel safe.

> *From the parents, we had the most amazing response to what we're doing. Gestures of gratitude and love. At our last session before Christmas, there were at least three parents who were more or less in tears, thankful, including Muslim parents, because they sense the blessing and the love. They asked us to pray for their families, they brought gifts, they shared with us that they pray for us too.*[7]

The church has recently received additional grant funding to continue Edge Youth Club for at least another two years, with a long-term goal of expanding the model to include 15 to 18 year olds as the current cohort age up.

Uniformed organisations

In the context of youth work, we had limited success in engaging with both national and local uniformed organisations (e.g. Scouts, Guides etc.), despite multiple attempts to contact them.

The Scouts offer a variety of badges, including 'World Faiths', 'My Faith', and one for younger members on celebrating festivals. The accompanying guidance emphasises the importance of "exploring our own and others' beliefs and learning about different beliefs in exciting and meaningful ways."[8] There are also locally developed badges; for example, a 'More in Common' badge developed by Scout leaders in Birmingham, which encourages understanding across difference and involves activities including designing a multifaith flag and talking to someone of a different religion.[9]

Unfortunately, statistics are not available about the number of young people who have achieved these badges nationally, nor how this correlates with local religious diversity.

A search for 'faith' in the Girl Guiding online badge directory yields no results, and searching for 'religion' points to the Morals and Values badge, which is only available to the oldest age group of members.[10] The guiding promise was updated in 2013 to remove the mention of God in order to make the organisation more inclusive to girls of all beliefs and none.[11] However, this inclusive approach should not come at the expense of mutual understanding across all beliefs.

We recognise that contact details and information about local scout or guiding groups would be far more easily accessible to

local stakeholders, as opposed to national researchers, and this is entirely appropriate for safeguarding reasons.

Anecdotally, we heard from a number of participants that their own children had engaged in religious education through their involvement in Scouts or Brownies; for example, completing a World Faiths badge. However, as with other areas we have explored there was also a suggestion that this is much more common in areas of greater religious diversity, or where the group leader had a particular interest in faith literacy and cohesion. There is no 'national curriculum' for this type of organisation, with local groups able to develop contextually appropriate sessions and activities.

The downside is that this engagement with religion is therefore patchy and can mirror the 'postcode lottery' of formal religious education in an area. Young people in more religiously diverse areas are more likely to have friends of other faiths from school and in out-of-school clubs like scouts or sports clubs. Youth work contexts may therefore reinforce or even deepen the dichotomy whereby informal religious education is more possible in areas of greater diversity.

Other examples of uniformed/membership-based youth work organisations engaging with religion and belief include a youth volunteer scheme attached to a local police force in a relatively monocultural area, which undertook an interfaith engagement project.[12]

We also heard about the enduring role of chaplains in army cadet forces; there are more than 80 army cadet chaplains across the country, supporting more than 70,000 young people each year.[13]

The majority of chaplains are Christian, drawn from a growing range of denominations, but there is work ongoing to broaden this to include other religions. An Anglican army cadet chaplain spoke about the dual importance of pastoral and spiritual support within their role, for young people of all faiths and none. While some of this is formational, it can also be a point of encounter between young people of different faiths.

> We have some very interesting conversations after a drum head service where I've perhaps used a Christian act of worship and somebody will come up to me and say, "well, Padre, that was really interesting because in my tradition, dot, dot, dot," and we can share that.

> We can learn about each other through that. Or we might be on a night exercise, and somebody will say, "oh, what's that star up there?" and we'll start to talk about why there are stars in the sky, and how our different faiths and traditions all consider that those are reflections of God's creation.[14]

Crucially, such camps are outside of everyday life and outside of formal educational settings, which provides an opportunity for the young people to reflect on their own beliefs away from home, and consider what they believe, often for the first time. This can lead to them articulating their beliefs independently of their community or family, and making commitments or decisions for themselves. The chaplain recounted, for example, how young people often ask to be confirmed by him during camp rather than in their home church or community.

We encountered multiple examples of best practice in interfaith or religious education in youth work settings being absorbed into school provision. For example, a programme of dialogue between young people of different faiths which started life as a holiday club and extracurricular youth project is now in increasing demand in schools. While this may enhance the quality of religious education in school, the need for spaces separate from this remains, as illustrated by the example of cadet camp.

Statutory youth work

As already stated, statutory or local authority provided youth work is decreasing as a proportion of the youth work sector as a whole. However, it remains an important site of informal education for many young people, with a flexible curriculum that includes citizenship content.[15]

> I think it definitely differs based on area and what is provided. If you think about open access youth work, there might be particular sessions if it comes up, but, you know, it's just a given. Or there might be, not necessarily led by youth workers, but conversations by young people, with young people about their religion and what they do, or young people might ask youth workers about their religion and what they do and stuff like that. I don't think there's a great deal of religious discussion necessarily, or religious education around what it is.[16]

One local authority youth worker spoke about how religion, when it is discussed in their context, is often raised in response to a problem or political issue between young people, rather than

proactively or positively. The content of sessions is led by young people, and so different worldviews come up organically rather than programmatically. This may again compound the disparity between contexts and areas; it is perhaps more likely to arise in conversation in places with greater religious diversity, where there are young people and youth workers of different faiths.

Youth work training

The training of youth workers is a specific, contextual example of the professional religious literacy that we will go onto explore more widely in the next chapter. Thus far, we have explored best practice examples of youth work and instances where the sector engages well with questions of religion and belief. However, this is very context specific, often reliant on well-equipped practitioners and/or a high level of interest from young people, in a way that is not universal.

There is a perception from some that youth work is a secular field, where secular is often misunderstood as being synonymous with

> "Engendering greater religious literacy can mean engaging in uncomfortable conversations."

neutral. Research by Goldsmiths and Youthscape in 2018 found no clear consensus among those leading youth work degree courses or training programmes that the curricula and professional standards were sufficient to equip youth workers to work with diverse groups of young people around issues of religion, faith and spirituality. Over half of secular programmes had some ad hoc lectures and/or reference to religion, faith and spirituality during lectures on broader topics, but none identified it as a core part of the curriculum or had a core module.[17] The researchers concluded that,

> *...people's expressions and positions in relation to religion, faith and spirituality are not isolated from other elements of their lives, cultures and identities such as their race, gender and sexuality. Religious literacy training should therefore equip youth workers to understand intersectional identities and respond to intersectional oppressions.*[18]

The perception of youth work as secular or neutral may come at the detriment of a wider understanding of all faiths, compounded by the misperception that Muslim youth workers will only work with Muslim young people, Christian with Christian etc., which diminishes the perceived need for all youth workers to be literate in a range of beliefs. This can extend as far as suspicion of religion and religious people in secular provision. We heard an example of a secularly trained Muslim youth worker who was prohibited from delivering a session on LGBT+ rights, without being asked about her actual beliefs and without respect for her professionalism and detachment.

> **"It is vital that youth work as a sector should reflect the religious diversity of the country, and that youth workers should have the confidence to talk about religion and belief with their young people."**

Both in the training context and in youth work delivery, engendering greater religious literacy can mean engaging in uncomfortable conversations and listening to misperceptions or even offensive views in order to be able to challenge them. This is not something that students or youth workers all find easy or which comes naturally.

> *I think religious literacy, more broadly, is risky, and whether that's in a training context or in a youth work context, if you allow kind of the problematic views, if your approach is that when somebody's just been Islamophobic, we're going to unpick that and talk about it and seek to understand each other. You could have a complaint, actually, that person should have just been barred straight away from the youth centre. But they don't learn anything from that other than there's consequences to expressing their views, it doesn't actually give them a different view. I think maybe that's one of the things is that it's very risky to engage in that kind of education.*[19]

The lack of diversity among youth work practitioners, or the siloing of faith and people of faith into faith-specific settings, reinforces this issue. It needs to be presented as a respected profession, one where those of different religious and non-religious worldviews are accepted, if this is to change.

It is something of a vicious circle whereby the relative lack of religious diversity in youth work sustains the notion that it is a neutral or secular space, which may in turn discourage young people from engaging in conversations about religion and removing the possibility of informal learning.

As with many other professions therefore – as we explore in the next chapter – it is vital that youth work as a sector should reflect the religious diversity of the country, and that youth workers should have the confidence to talk about religion and belief with their young people, even when it is uncomfortable, irrespective of their own beliefs.

4 Religion and belief literacy in community contexts

The concept of religious literacy describes the extent to which individuals and institutions are cognisant of – or literate in – different religions and beliefs. We heard a diverse range of public servants and professionals engaging in religion and belief literacy, from formal courses to workplace awareness sessions and social events. These included:

— care workers
— doctors' receptionists
— mental health care teams
— physiotherapists
— sports coaches
— palliative care professionals
— professional football referees
— council officers
— housing association staff
— midwives
— police officers
— university staff
— social workers
— trainee nurses

However, as we have seen with relation to other sectors, this is not universal and the quality and extent of religion and belief literacy initiatives varies significantly across geography and context.

Adam Dinham, who coined the term, argues that those working in public professions need to develop this religion and belief literacy in order to engage with diverse religious communities.[1] Further, he finds that training for professions like social work[2] and health and social care[3] typically does not equip graduates well in terms of religious literacy.

In 2023, the Bloom Review into government engagement with faith recommended that

> *…the Government should take steps to ensure that everyone on the public payroll including civil servants in*

> *Whitehall and local councils, colleges and universities, and police, prison and probation officers are provided with consistent, quality faith literacy training.*[4]

Implementation of this recommendation is ongoing. It also appears to be supported by workers, with polling in 2021 finding that 61% of UK adults think it is important to understand the beliefs and worldviews of others in the workplace.[5]

Public sector

There are two ways to understand the relationship between public services and the relative religious diversity of the areas they serve. Firstly, religious literacy among public servants might be assumed to be more necessary in areas of greater religious diversity, where a majority of patients or service users and their families might belong to a religion. The religious literacy of the workforce might thus contribute to institutions being able to represent the community around them. Secondly, and conversely, it is also true that in such areas, there is a greater degree of learning by osmosis, through the regular encounters with colleagues and neighbours of different religions and beliefs. Literacy is developed through everyday interactions and, as we saw with relationship to the school playground environment, the simple act of interacting with colleagues of different religions can constitute a very informal form of religious education.

> **"The simple act of interacting with colleagues of different religions can constitute a very informal form of religious education."**

By contrast, a medic in a less diverse area where they are encountering a Muslim patient for the first time, or a social worker who has never before had a Jewish family in their case load, for example, might benefit more from access to training or educational material, even more so when they are less likely to have recourse to the expertise of colleagues of that religion.

In mental health care in particular, there are often faith-specific aspects to the way some communities access and interact with services, which – if not addressed appropriately – can exacerbate existing inequalities in health care provision.[6] One interfaith practitioner spoke about how the suicide of a member of a minority religious community locally had led to an epiphany for local care providers about their lack of knowledge, which was now being actively addressed:

> The folk running the new mental health and wellbeing centre in town came to us and said, "we don't know much about Islam or Sikhism or, Hinduism. We don't know much, and we want to make sure we're getting it right for your communities."

> From that, what we're hoping will happen is we'll be able to facilitate a connection, so that they can then input into their services and be able to see, "this is the kind of language you need to use'", or "these are the kinds of things you need to be aware of if someone from our community presents themselves to you". It's those kind of routes of education and learning that we're taking. It's going out into those spaces and allowing that to happen.[7]

The Bradford Faith Trail (see case study 1 earlier in this report) is a good practice example of engaging public services in religious literacy. Participants in the monthly trail routinely include groups of public sector workers from across the region, some of whom are mandated by their employer to complete it as professional development, others of whom choose to undertake it in order to better understand the communities they serve.

> *Public sector groups locally now recommend it to their workers. If you are, for example, working in the job centre, and you're getting lots of people of different faith backgrounds, then if you do the faith trail, you've got a little bit more understanding or a little bit more confidence.*

> *We get lots of public services. We get lots of doctors' receptionists and we get lots of doctors and nurses... and job centre workers. The fire service support it. We've got a supportive relationship with the police as well. All police officers in Bradford have to complete the faith trail as part of their training, which is amazing, and then the PCSOs, they've extended it to that.[8]*

In professional degree courses, such as nursing or youth work, where there have been optional modules or sessions in religious practice offered, there is evidence to suggest they are mainly chosen by those who already have a higher level of literacy or interest in faith, because they are naturally more inclined to see the value of such a module.[9] In one such case, we heard anecdotally that the module had been scrapped altogether because of the low numbers of those choosing it, coupled with the fact that those who did were mostly already more religiously literate than the

average student. To make such course content compulsory brings its own challenges but would also avoid the double concentration of religious literacy among a small number of people.

Where this does occur as part of professional degree courses, it is often a session offered alongside, rather than as a part of, the assessed content. This is often possible because of strong existing relationships between relevant teaching staff and the campus chaplaincy or local faith leaders, rather than as a systematic or strategic engagement. Those involved in delivery noted that there is often no guarantee that the training would continue if the key individual in the department moved on.

The Medical Schools Council Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Alliance has produced comprehensive guidance for supporting students of different faiths, which recognises that medical schools are

> ...realising that having a faith can enrich one's clinical practice, and thus improve patient care... [but] there can be no celebration of this positive quality without giving students the safe space to thrive in their learning environment.[10]

This is as true of medical colleagues and peers as it is of their approach to patients.

One interfaith practitioner who is involved in training nursing students at a local university spoke about how they began with exploring how students relate to each other's beliefs and cultures, before considering patient care. She noted that prior to the training, the cohort of students naturally gravitated to fellow

students who were most like them, rather than actively engaging with difference.

> *One of them told me that on her first day nursing, she walked into wherever they were all gathering and saw a group of girls, just went over to them, and she's a hijab-wearing Muslim, and one of the girls said to her, there was a group of white girls said, "your lot are over there?" So I said to the head of nursing, "these young people don't get a choice of which patient they serve they look after. What are you doing about mixing them and getting them together?"[11]*

After a series of training sessions on religious literacy and interfaith dialogue, she described how the impact was visible in the greater integration among the group, as well as in their improved knowledge and, as a result, it was felt they would go on to be better nursing professionals.

Case study 3:

Religious Diversity in End of Life Care

The Woolf Institute's *Religious Diversity in End of Life Care* programme is an exemplar in this context. They offer a handbook on caring for Jewish, Christian and Muslim patients at the end of life and in palliative care settings, alongside a training programme in religious literacy tailored for hospice staff and care professionals.[12] This training highlights specific aspects of the Abrahamic faiths, while stressing the diversity of traditions with and between them, including beliefs and practices around the end of life; for example, burial rituals, approaches to medical treatment and beliefs about life after death. The training is delivered by experts in each of the religions. It features case studies of scenarios concerning patients of different faiths and backgrounds, with the opportunity for staff to explore together how they might respond and to ask questions of the experts.

As the Woolf handbook acknowledges,

> *improving the multi-faith literacy of those who provide end of life care in the UK today, by helping them gain a better understanding of religion and how it affects the end of life concerns of their patients is like adding another important string to their bow, enabling them to administer better, more holistic end of life care.*[13]

The same is true for any public service, in that a deeper understanding of a service user's beliefs and how they may play out in practice leads to better and more holistic service delivery, whatever the context.

The NHS represents the largest workforce in the UK, and indeed the sixth largest workforce in the world, and it is also one of the most significant employers in every local authority area.[14] Greater religious literacy and education among its staff therefore has huge potential to influence care delivery in every area of the country, regardless of the religious demographic or profile.

Anchor institutions

There is a role for government and top-down interventions to mandate faith literacy throughout public services. However, we argue that there is also a role for community institutions at a local level to cultivate a culture where this occurs both formally and informally.

One way to conceptualise this impact is through so-called 'anchor institutions'. In economic development, this refers to local institutions which are tied to a particular geographic place by their mission, history, physical assets and local relationships and have an important presence in that community. These are typically considered in terms of their economic contribution to the community, often as significant employers and generators of local wealth.[15] Examples might include universities, local authorities, professional sports clubs, NHS trusts and large local businesses.

> "There is also a role for community institutions at a local level to cultivate a culture where this occurs both formally and informally."

We argue that the religious literacy of a local community can be viewed in similar terms, in relationship to the emphasis placed on faith and belief in local institutions. The extent to which a local anchor institution takes this seriously has the potential to ripple more widely. If their success is closely tied to the wellbeing of the surrounding community, the degree to which they encourage greater religious literacy is also tied to that of the local community.

A sector-specific example of anchor institutions influencing the religious literacy climate of their area is the growing number of football clubs, at every level of the game from top-flight to grassroots, that now host community iftar meals during Ramadan.[16] In some cases, these are aimed mainly at supporting and including Muslim players and fans of the club. However, others frame them intentionally as part of their wider community engagement and as valuable opportunities to learn about Ramadan irrespective of your faith. At Wolverhampton Wanderers, for example, an iftar meal and call to prayer was accompanied by a panel conversation with Muslim players and staff about faith and spirituality, exploring what Ramadan means to them and "providing a moment of connection and education for all those in attendance".[17] Muslim and non-Muslim students from local schools attended, along with chaplains of different faiths from the local university. Similar initiatives are growing in other sports, with a community iftar hosted at Lord's Cricket Ground this year.[18]

Organisations like Nujum Sports have contributed to this through the educational support they offer to clubs and sporting governing bodies in order to help them better include and empower Muslim sportspeople. Through a partnership with the Professional Game Match Officials Limited (PGMOL), the body responsible for referees and match officials in professional football, for example, Nujum have improved Muslim inclusion in refereeing and also educated referees about the needs of Muslim players.[19]

Many of these examples are focused on Islam, because of the particular physical requirements of fasting for Ramadan and the impact this may have on sports performance. However, the Football Association has also developed events and initiatives promoting

knowledge of other faiths, such as a celebration of the Sikh festival of Vaisakhi at Wembley Stadium.[20]

Sport can also be a vital interfaith tool; for example, the Faiths Forum for London held a football training session at the Arsenal stadium for students from Muslim, Jewish and Christian boys' schools in North London, together with conversations about their respective faiths.[21]

In the most informal sense, anchor institutions and local infrastructure can contribute to what we might call 'passive' religious education. Examples given here included the way that public acknowledgement of religious festivals has evolved in recent years.

Supermarkets now routinely put up displays and sell appropriate products for festivals of particular importance to their community. Similarly, the advent of Ramadan lights on Oxford Street

> **"It communicates something of the religious character of an area and the importance of religion in other people's lives."**

in London, on a par with traditional Christmas lights,[22] and the choice of city councils to display Diwali decorations were cited as positive examples. This is cultural as much as it is religious, and is surely driven by commercial factors rather than a deep desire to educate people about religious practice. Indeed, it could be seen as reinforcing a narrow view of religious festivals as just about the food and festivities, rather than the beliefs that underly them.

However, it communicates something of the religious character of an area and the importance of religion in other people's lives, even to someone simply walking down a supermarket aisle or passing the council offices. Even subconsciously, this grounds religion and belief as a lived reality among local neighbours, not merely something abstract.

5 Arts and culture

As is mentioned in the methodology section, engagement with the arts and culture sector in the context of informal religious education proved difficult.

The education teams of many museums and galleries we contacted did not respond, or were reluctant to engage in conversations about religious education. In scanning individual gallery and museum websites to identify possible interviewees, it was noticeable that many were open to tailoring content like school visits to almost any aspect of the curriculum, except RE. Several readily offered the possibility of a maths- or science-related trip to the museum but neglected to mention religion.

We suggest this is in part due to a perceived lack of expertise among museum staff, worsened by the perception that only experts are able to speak about RE. This is not to suggest that non-expert approaches to religious education are universally helpful; indeed, in curricular terms, it is a problem that 51% of formal RE lessons are taught by non-specialists.[1] However, more broadly, the bar for engagement perhaps feels higher than in other subjects. This may be because the cost of getting it wrong is qualitatively different; mistakes by a non-expert presenting maths, for example, are not ideal but are unlikely to cause offence to communities.

This nervousness perhaps also results from RE being an area where fewer of the questions asked are likely to be answerable with a straightforward, objective fact, as is the case with maths or science. Representing the complexity of people's internal lives and beliefs is much more difficult than can be summarised in concrete objects or artefacts, although these artefacts can be helpful catalysts to initiate more philosophical or spiritual conversations.

I think a lot of people think that religious art has to be a Botticelli, or it has to be a really beautiful altar bit. What really you want is what people do in their own home. If you'd go into a Muslim family home, in the front room, there would be a beautiful hanging with the Quran on it, and there would be a sort of offering table, and there'd be some candles...[2]

It is worth noting that there are more direct or obvious places to learn about religion outside the classroom – namely places of worship or conversations with religious leaders – which is not the case for other subjects. This may contribute to the readiness of museums to offer provision for other curricular subjects like art or maths which do not have a direct equivalent in the community.

However, we argue that this can lead to the siloing of religion from history or art or culture, which is an unhelpful phenomenon when it comes to a rich understanding of the world. Religion and belief should be an integral part of discussions of culture and community, and museums have the potential to be key spaces where this is encouraged and enabled.

"This can lead to the siloing of religion from history or art or culture, which is an unhelpful phenomenon when it comes to a rich understanding of the world."

Governance wise, we note that in a significant number of local authorities, the same department or entity is responsible for running libraries, cultural institutions, community spaces and leisure centres across the whole borough, for example Glasgow Life which fulfils this

> **"The potential for these organisations to contribute to religion and belief understanding is largely untapped."**

function in Glasgow, including managing the St Mungo's Museum.[3] The potential for these organisations to contribute to religion and belief understanding is largely untapped.

Furthermore, questions of community cohesion are often dealt with by different council departments from those which manage cultural spaces, where integration between the two would benefit both. At a national level, this is typified by the distinction between the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the separate Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Culture and communities are intrinsically linked in reality, in ways that policy does not always grasp. The same phenomenon is true in local government.

Faith-specific cultural institutions

There are a small number of specialist museums and galleries which exist specifically to explore and curate content about the intersections between religion, belief and culture.

These include the Faith Museum in Bishop Auckland, a dedicated museum exploring the history and reality of faith in the UK, and St Mungo's Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow, which explores the importance of religion in peoples' lives across the world. Both offer a programme of activities for schools, families and general visitors about religious life, culture and history.

With the exception of the Faith Museum, which has received significant philanthropic investment, the relative lack of resources for religious museums within the museum sector is notable. Both the national Jewish Museum and the Migration Museum – which is not primarily religious in nature but which addresses diaspora communities and their religious practices in the context of migration history – are currently without a permanent premises or sustainable funding.[4] St Mungo's Museum was threatened with closure by the council until a public appeal saved it.[5]

We also heard how schools are struggling for resources, with a knock on effect on the feasibility of visits to smaller museums in particular. For example, the education team at St Mungo's have begun a programme of artefacts and material in boxes which can be delivered to schools for teachers to explore with classes, where the cost of coach travel would be prohibitive to a visit to the museum.

This innovation is valuable in maintaining religious education for as many young people as possible, but the earlier point about the need for non-teacher facilitators and non-classroom spaces to enhance engagement with religion and worldviews remains vital.

With particular reference to Judaism, we found multiple cases of synagogues and cultural centres/museums running alongside each other to fulfil a dual role of support or historical learning for the Jewish community and education of the wider public; for example, the Scottish Jewish Heritage Centre which operates alongside the Garnethill Synagogue in Glasgow, which is a Grade A listed building. In all these examples, the distinction between history, culture, heritage and religion was something the staff and curators had

thought deeply about. These concepts intersect but are different, and the choice of framing is important.

One education practitioner working to develop a Jewish cultural centre in a former synagogue in Merthyr Tydfil expressed how it was a deliberate choice to frame it as "an active, living, breathing, experiential cultural centre," celebrating Judaism and the Jewish community in a way that visitors could engage with and experience.[6] Particularly in the context of a synagogue and town which no longer has a regular worshipping community, they felt it was important to communicate something ongoing, not just historical.

There are sensitivities here with regards to how Jewish history and heritage is taught in a historical sense and where that is seen to rest within the curriculum. The events of the Holocaust are often covered within the history curriculum, for example, and this approach does not necessarily include much exploration of Judaism itself. This might also be a valid approach for a museum exploring Jewish history in a way which did not engage much, either formally or informally, with active religious practice and belief. Faith-specific historical events and their commemorations – for example, Holocaust Memorial Day – can also be incredibly valuable jumping-off points for informal religious education in the community.

Non-specialist museums

Within non-specialist museums and art galleries, conversations about religion and belief are far from mainstream. As previously noted, the response rate to our research enquiries in this area was very low. Where it does occur, it is often as a result of individual

curators with a particular interest in religion or in drawing out the religious significance of objects in their collections.

The work of the Religion, Collections and Heritage Group, a network of curators, educators and museum professionals dedicated to promoting the care and understanding of religious collections, is significant here and deserves highlighting.[7] They host workshops, blogs and other activities aimed at sharing best practice and growing confidence around faith and belief in museums and galleries.

> *I would say to a museum curator, "this is a fabulous collection of Buddhist stuff," and they'd say they didn't have the expertise to talk about it. Well, you don't clearly have the expertise in medieval weaving, but you've got tapestries and things up. I think they're very scared.[8]*

For smaller or locally-focused museums, staff capacity and expertise may be an additional challenge. In communities with less religious diversity, the likelihood of a staff member having religious expertise may be lower, but conversely in more religiously diverse areas, the fear of getting it wrong, or the assumption that visitors will know more about a particular religion than the staff can hamper the potential for engaging with faith and belief. This can be mediated through community engagement, co-production and collaboration, but this still requires a level of confidence, capacity and interest that is not universally evident.

> *Whereas there's might usually be archaeologist on the staff of a local museum, there won't necessarily be anybody knows anything about religion. I guess that is one of the*

main barriers, particularly for small museums. It's quite common that no one knows anything about religion.[9]

Overall, there is a clear need for greater awareness and confidence among museum staff and cultural practitioners when it comes to talking about religion and belief. The Museums Association already advocates for museums to be engaged proactively with their local communities, suggesting that "museums should develop innovative models of engagement which represent the cultural context of their communities and nations and that are brave and challenging".[10] We argue that any strategy aimed at developing this should include explicit mention of religion and belief.

> "There is a clear need for greater awareness and confidence among museum staff and cultural practitioners when it comes to talking about religion and belief."
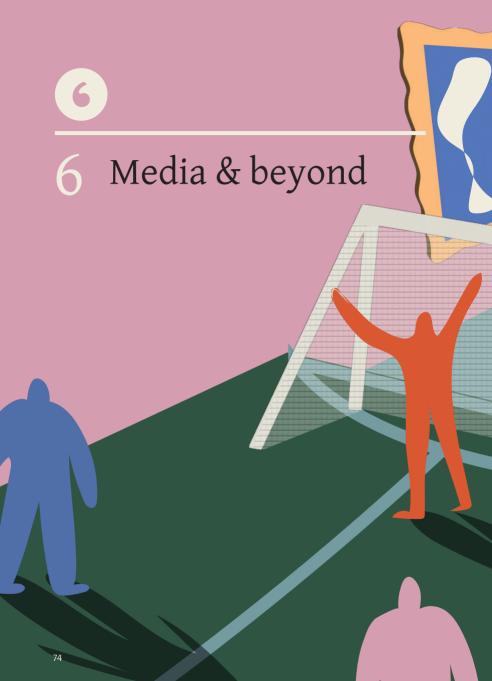
Libraries

Having contacted numerous local libraries in all four nations of the UK with an invitation to participate in the research, there was a low response rate. Among the few who did respond, there was a reluctance to talk about religion and a noticeably higher degree of confidence in talking about culture more generically. As with museums, there are some faith-specific examples, such as the Religious Resources Centre in the North East, which is entirely focused on religious material, but these are less representative of the wider sector.

We heard from one local interfaith group about their work engaging with libraries in their city to help them develop their religion and belief resources in collaboration with local religious leaders.

> They have these resource boxes for local schools, and nobody had really reviewed them for a long time, so we had faith leaders come down, first of all to review what's in the boxes. That was interesting, because cultural things had crept in... In the Muslim boxes, there was like a Pakistani flag, which is very cultural and not appropriate to have, and there were no hijabs. There was a Santa in the Christian box. We were saying, let's think about what actually are we teaching here?

> [What] we've been doing with the faith leaders and the libraries is saying, "What books have you got available on your shelves for the community to access? What information?" because they do, quite often, do displays in libraries. And they said, "Oh, we sometimes do displays around Diwali or around Christmas", so what we've been doing is the faith leaders have come in and looked at the books and made sure that they felt that they were up to date and appropriate, and kind of more engaging.[11]

This work has been received positively, but was the result of proactive engagement by the interfaith forum rather than on the part of the libraries.

6 Media & beyond

Physical spaces and opportunities for informal religious education – learning about other religions beyond the classroom or curriculum – are important, be they museums, football clubs, chaplaincies, interfaith networks or professional development courses, local or national. As we have seen, however, they vary in scope, scale and strength, and the map is somewhat patchy. It varies depending on the diversity of the local area, the resources available, the willingness of leadership, and often requires a deliberate openness to participation.

By contrast, there is a more pervasive, universal form of informal religious education, which has the potential to reach every community, with a lower bar to participation and the capacity to organically engage people beyond those with an expressed interest in religion: the media and social media.

Across all sectors, participants acknowledged the potential influence of the media, and social media in particular, on perceptions of religions and religious communities.

What follows here is not an exhaustive review of all religious content in the media, less still a comprehensive analysis of social media algorithms and their religious content. All examples in this chapter are anecdotal in nature, shared spontaneously by participants as illustrations of how they see media and social media as contributing directly and indirectly to wider religious education.

Social media

Social media was highlighted repeatedly as a particularly interesting context for informal learning about religion and worldviews. Social media encourages and promotes people telling their own stories

in their own voices; those who may not have a voice in mainstream media can build an audience there. The value of 'authenticity' is core to much of the content shared online, drawing on daily life and personal experience.

> I think there's been a shift in religion and worldviews education to say "we shouldn't be learning about religions as boxes of doctrines, we should be learning about what real people do, how they respond to and make sense of the world in that community." Well, TikTok does exactly this.[1]

Several participants contrasted the organic impact of social media almost jokingly or self-deprecatorily with the impact of their own work, often more deliberate and concerted yet with a narrower reach than a single TikTok post. We heard multiple anecdotes and sentiments like, "what we do is important, but I think where young people *really* learn about other religions aside from school is probably from social media or television."[2]

The quantitative data on this presents a mixed picture: while over a third of young people in a recent Youth For Christ survey said they had seen religious content on their social media feeds,[3] it came quite low down in terms of where parents of school age children thought they found out about religion according to polling for Culham St Gabriel in 2022, with 24% saying social media and only 17% saying via an search engine.[4] This might be because of a disjunction between perception and behaviour across the different age groups.

We heard how TikTok in particular can be an effective online space for this, with its emphasis on audiovisual content making it an

accessible way to share your story and faith with peers. It offers the potential for a big reach with little resource required, and the threshold for going viral is lower on TikTok than on other platforms. The #ChristianCheck trend, for example, encouraged Gen Z Christians to post videos about the physical objects that represent their faith and discuss them in the context of everyday life. This allowed them to

> emphasise the tangibility of their faith at a time when... [the] media expresses anxiety over the 'dilution' of Christianity in a new generation of non-religious teens to whom the tangible components of religion do not seem to matter.[5]

Crucially, on social media, religious content – whether formational, devotional or educational – is integrated into the rest of the content you might scroll through, rather than siloed or separated into something you actively click on. This may allow for organic engagement, replicating the way that religious education can occur in social interactions offline. The nature of the algorithm may still mean that religious people are more likely to encounter religious content, and those already interested in faiths are more likely to see more of it. However, it can also provide opportunities for those whose curiosity gets piqued by the more random addition onto their timeline to dive deeper into the topic with very little effort. As one participant told us,

> 'My girlfriend is always watching incredibly niche reels of Orthodox Jewish women talking about their everyday lives. It's a really good way to learn.'[6]

This person commented that while his own work was religion-adjacent, his girlfriend worked in a different field and so it was not obvious that the algorithm would show her content like this.

Examples in this sphere include Moses and Zippora, a married Hasidic Jewish couple who have amassed 26 million likes on TikTok for their Q&As about their faith and practice; and Miriam Malnik-Ezagui, who has over two million followers for her short videos which all begin with the refrain, 'Hi, my name's Miriam. I'm an Orthodox Jew and I share what my life is like'. She goes on to demonstrate her domestic life through aspects from utensils in a kosher kitchen, to why and how as a married Orthodox Jew, she covers her hair. Similarly, there are multiple Christian clergy who have laid claim to the moniker of 'the TikTok vicar'.[7]

Television

Leading on from social media, we also heard examples of religious content in traditional media, particularly on television. In many of the examples shared by participants about mainstream television and media, we note the prevalence of reality TV, as opposed to scripted dramas or documentaries, in normalising the presence and discussion of religion in popular culture. This echoes the centrality of authenticity, of real people and real lives, in the impact of platforms like TikTok.

In early 2025, athlete Aneila Afsar became the first hijabi contestant to appear on the gameshow *Gladiators*. She spoke about the importance of being a visible role model to younger Muslim girls, but also of dismantling stereotypes that people may have of women who wear the hijab.[9] At around the same time, Muslim comedian

Fatiha El-Ghorri, who also wears a hijab, was announced as a contestant on the latest series of the comedy panel gameshow *Taskmaster.*

Alongside *Taskmaster,* El-Ghorri hosted a BBC podcast called *Not Even Water,* focused on the British Muslim experience of Ramadan. The title references a common question asked by non-Muslims learning about the fasting practices of Ramadan, during which adherents do not eat or drink during daylight hours. Several of our interviewees mentioned having seen clips or reels from this podcast organically on their social media feed, and having listened further as a result.

Similarly, the appearance of an Anglican priest on the 2024 series of *The Traitors* may have been a deliberate casting decision by the producers. If not entirely educational in nature, this is part of an intentional effort to render religion visible on screen, not as a caricatured portrayal in drama, but through the lens of a real person. Harry Clark, a contestant from an earlier series of *The Traitors*, subsequently appeared on the BBC series *Pilgrimage,* in which he discussed his Catholic faith.[9]

Recent research from the University of Leeds, however, suggests that streaming services are weaker in their provision of religious content than public service broadcasters. They found that programmes on religion and belief were "not readily available, prominent or discoverable" on most commercial streaming platforms.[10] Furthermore, users who did not demonstrate an active interest in such programmes were less likely to be shown them as options.

There is a wider discussion to be had around whether representation automatically engenders education, and whether greater visibility of religion leads to greater literacy.

However, the prevalence of examples from the world of sport suggest that it is at least partly the case. One popular example that a lot of participants highlighted here was the growing awareness of Muslim footballers breaking their Ramadan fast during televised matches. A number of participants, particularly those who work with young people, noted the impact that this had had on understanding of Islam and Ramadan. The increasing number of Muslim players has led the FA to issue guidance to officials around pauses to evening games to allow these players to break their fast and, as explored in chapter 4, this has also driven wider community understanding and engagement.

Recent examples featured in the media include the first hijabi jockey to compete at Goodwood[11] and the first Sikh to become a manager of a professional football club in the UK.[12]

A much-cited study found that incidences of Islamophobia decreased on Merseyside after Liverpool signed the Muslim player Mohammed Salah. There were 18.9% fewer hate crimes than predicted, and a 53% fall in anti-Muslim tweets among Liverpool fans in the two years after his signing.[13] The researchers argued that these results stemmed from increased familiarity with Islam, as a result of increased familiarity with and favourability of an individual Muslim figure: "our findings indicate that positive exposure to outgroup role models can reveal new information that humanises the outgroup writ large". This backs up the 'parasocial

contact hypothesis' which suggests that contact with celebrities or characters from outgroups can reduce prejudice.[14]

This is as true of social media personalities and influencers as it is seen to be of elite sportspeople. The parasocial nature of interactions with TikTok personalities paves the way for a sense of personal connection and familiarity which might contribute to literacy and reduced prejudice.[15]

In the same way that a first encounter with a friend or neighbour of a different religion might constitute a form of informal religious education for some, so too might the demonstration of how religious faith informs the daily life of a social media 'personality'.

A small note of caution was sounded here by one participant, a Gen Z woman involved in interfaith work, who noted that while social media is very effective in normalising and increasing visibility of religion, its veracity is not always high. A couple of years ago, she said, she might have advised someone wanting to deepen their religious education to turn to social media but now she would hesitate to do so because of the lack of verification. There is no substitute for person-to-person engagement, visiting places of worship, interacting with religious texts and practices yourself.

> *You can have a sheikh or an imam, someone who's supposedly highly respected in Islam, or something, and he'll have a podcast and he'll mention things on it, and you'll be like, that is just not true at all... so I would say, if you're really keen to get the true information about religion or whatever it is you want to do, go to the actual place, speak to the actual person.*

Read a holy book for yourself. You might have to go to a lecture or whatever it is. But I think to simplify it, just go to the place. Go to the church or the mosque, go to the synagogue.[16]

Recommendations

If every sector of society is provided with the tools and confidence for good conversations about religion and belief, then informal religious education can and will happen naturally anywhere. Greater formal literacy will lead to greater informal opportunities for religious education, which will in turn mean a more religiously literate population and a more cohesive community. That this is not currently occurring universally is a missed opportunity for a better society.

Drawing on our findings from across sectors, we make the following recommendations in order to strengthen and develop informal religious education in the UK.

— SACREs should consider the extent of informal religious education in their authority alongside their responsibility for governing curricular religious education. The audit (appendix 1) provides a framework that could be used for this.
— Schools should consider how they can facilitate extracurricular learning about religion and belief, through parental engagement and building modes of religious education that encourage autonomous learning beyond the classroom.
— In further education colleges and universities, chaplaincies should be seen as vital spaces of encounter and cohesion, not only of pastoral support.

— In particular, provision of chaplaincy in the FE sector needs greater energy and support, in order for every FE college to benefit from this. This requires engagement from individual college and university leaders as well as wider financial investment.

— Local authorities should develop strategies for both formal and informal religious education across the whole of their remit, integrating education with other sectors. This might include, for example, within provision for asylum seekers and refugees where religion and belief literacy and shared learning should be paramount for all staff engaging with service users.

— This should also extend to national government departments, including the Home Office, MHCLG and DCMS, where religion and belief literacy should be prioritised, both among staff and within policy implementation.

— In local authorities where the same entity is responsible for community provision across culture and leisure, religion and belief literacy should be mainstreamed within this.

— As the government seeks to deliver much-needed investment in youth work services, religion and belief must be a core strand of this strategy. All youth workers should be equipped to speak openly and honestly about religious and non-religious beliefs, so that greater investment in youth work leads to greater community cohesion.

— There is scope for further research into how and where informal religion and worldview education interacts with the work of community organisations and civil society, for example where it takes place in the context of refugee support centres.

6

Appendix 1: Audit of informal religious education

This report has explored the extent and nature of informal religious education across the UK. We find that it varies significantly between local areas and different contexts.

We encourage SACREs, education practitioners, youth workers or anyone with an interest in good religious education and community cohesion to undertake an audit or mapping exercise of where informal religious education happens or could happen in their local area. (For example, this might be a borough, city, town, city region, village, mayoral combined authority or county.)

As we have found in our research, there is a real diversity of settings in which informal religious education occurs, but also large gaps in provision in some communities. This audit framework is not intended to be an exhaustive list of questions, nor will all of them be relevant in every context. However, they should spark conversations and help you develop a strategic view of informal RE.

Start by asking yourselves the following questions

— What are the main religious demographics or communities in your local area?
  — For example, look at the census data for the relevant area.
— What are the key interfaith networks or organisations locally?
— Are there key charities/civil society organisations in the area whose work interacts with religious communities?

Make a list of the following places in your local area (and beyond), then consider where religion and belief is part of what happens there, both explicitly and organically.

— Community spaces: community centres, grassroots sports clubs; youth clubs.
— Places of worship; mosques; cathedrals; temples; churches; shared spaces.
— Arts and culture spaces; libraries; museums; cinemas; art galleries; theatres; book clubs.
— Anchor institutions: large businesses; professional sports clubs; major employers.
— Local media: newspapers; local radio stations; community social media groups.
— Public sector: hospitals; local councils; schools; universities; care homes; colleges.
— Uniformed organisations: scouts; guides; cadets.

For some of these, you might find it helpful to think beyond the boundaries of the area itself. For example, is there a museum or cathedral outside the area but in close proximity that school trips or visitors from the area might naturally gravitate towards?

You might find it helpful to walk around some of these spaces and see what you notice. For example, visit a local supermarket and observe how (if) they cater to particular religious or cultural festivals.

Think about places which span multiple of these categories. For example, some religious congregations meet in libraries, cinemas or school buildings rather than having their own place of worship; how does this affect community religious literacy or understanding?

Make the most of local knowledge. In some of these categories, you will be better placed to gain an understanding of the landscape than national researchers were; for example, you might want to use local Facebook pages, WhatsApp groups or community magazines to reach out to relevant groups.

Endnotes

Introduction

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8 All data here from Office of National Statistics 2021 Census.

9 This decision was made prior to our fieldwork starting in Northern Ireland, which is why a case study site for Northern Ireland is not included in the initial list above.

1 Extracurricular spaces

1 This is also explored separately in relation to visits to museums and art galleries in chapter 5.

2 Interview #23.

3 Interview #17.

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9   This emphasis was the interviewee's own.

10   Interview #13.

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3   Interview #43.

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5   Interview #43.

6   Census data.

7   Email received by Theos researcher, March 2025.

8   Interview #32.

9   Interview #32.

10   Interview #32.

3 Youth work

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7   Interview #16.

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13   Interview #19.

14   Interview #19.

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9   Thompson and Shuker, *Youth work training*, p16.

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Hannah Rich is a Senior Researcher at Theos and author of numerous Theos reports, including *Growing Good* (2020), *A Torn Safety Net* (2022) and *Disunited Kingdom?* (2024).

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