

# What works for RE: Issues, Challenges and Successes

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The logo for Bath Spa University, featuring the text "BATH SPA UNIVERSITY" in white, stacked vertically, on a dark blue square background. The text is in a clean, sans-serif font. The word "BATH" is on the top line, "SPA" is on the middle line, and "UNIVERSITY" is on the bottom line. The square is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the slide.

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# An engaged academic perspective

- To summarise the current situation of RE
- Sources: research projects, academic theory, Ofsted reports, experience
- Which of these connect with your experience as SACREs?
- Which of these can SACREs help to address?

## Some Sources

- *British Journal of Religious Education*
- *Journal of Beliefs and Values*
- *Resource*
- Conroy et al, Jackson et al, Woodhead, Heelas, Weller, Harvey, Knott, Bowie/Petersen/Revell, Chater and Erricker, Collins-Mayo et al, Wright, Baumfield, Cush etc
- Recent 'RE Thinking Day'

# Issues arising from research and theory 1

- A lack of clarity about the aims of RE – confusion, trying to do too much, or real disagreement?
- Do community cohesion, SMSC etc get in the way?
- Real tension between an academic subject (RS?) and transformational personal development and wisdom applied to world issues like social justice, war and peace, wealth and poverty, environment (RE?)

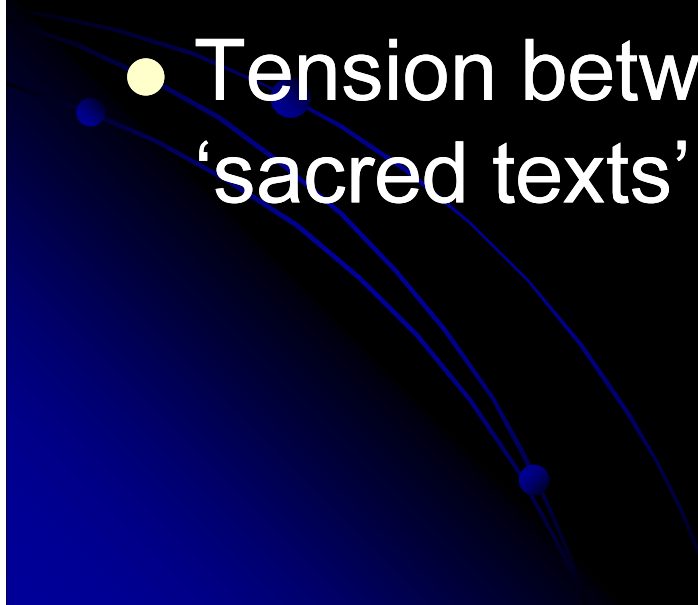
# Issues arising from research and theory 2

- Need for RE to reflect the actual religious landscape: Christian, secular, diverse
- Internal diversity of religious traditions
- The place of Humanism and non-religious worldviews
- What do people mean if they call themselves 'non-religious'?
- What/how do children and young people believe/do/value/find their identity? ('Happy midi-narrative' Collins-Mayo et al)

# Issues arising from research and theory 3

- Many draw on several traditions – mixed-faith families and ‘new age pick and mix’
- New forms of religiosity including Paganism, ‘spirituality’, ‘Spiritual Revolution’ (Weller’s university data shows both staff and students as ‘spiritual’ and ‘pagan’)
- Personalised, self as authority
- Interesting interfaith developments such as Forest Church

# Issues arising from research and theory 4

- Debates about content
  - Tension between 'study of religions' and 'philosophy and ethics' – is 'ethics' an easy option?
  - Tension between 'lived religion' and 'sacred texts'
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# Issues arising from research and theory 5

- Debates about approach
- Does much RE give a 'rosy' 'anodyne' picture of religions – need for a more critical approach, or was there value in the phenomenological 'epoché' and 'empathy'?
- Do faith communities have too much influence? A general 'pro-religion' stance?



# Issues arising from research and theory 6

- Who defines the 'facts'? (insider/outsider)
- Are our pictures of 'religions' shaped by patriarchy, heteronormativity and colonialism?
- Critique of 'objectivity', even concept of 'religion'
- Religious Studies, especially Philosophy of Religion, far too male and western

# Issues arising from research and theory 7

- Should the law be changed?
- Would a national RE curriculum be better?
- Should withdrawal be abolished?
- Should non-exam RE at KS4 and 5 be abandoned?
- What can we learn from other countries (eg Sixth Form RE in Scandinavia is very strong)?

# Practical Challenges 1

- Public understanding of RE
- Lack of qualified teachers (secondary)
- Little (in 25% no) input in ITT (primary)
- Lack of CPD
- Insufficient timetable time – even for GCSE
- Confusing varieties of schools

# Practical Challenges 2

- Pressures on role of SACREs (LA funding, Advisory staff, relationship to non-LA schools)
- Low status – Ebacc, Russell Group, parents and pupils
- Recruitment to Theology and RS degrees
- Poor assessment arrangements
- Collective Worship confusing things

# Practical Challenges 3

- Equal treatment of religious traditions/children
- 'Mentions' in REC NC Framework 2013:  
Christianity 26, Islam 16, Judaism 15,  
Hinduism 13, Humanism 7, Buddhism 5,  
Sikhism 4, Jains/Zoroastrians/Bahá'í 2,  
Jehovah's Witnesses and Latter Day Saints 1,  
Pagans 0.

# Successes 1

- 45 years experience of 'non-confessional, multi-faith RE' admired by other countries
- RE teachers with 'confidence, expertise and enthusiasm'
- Strong links with faith communities facilitate encounter with 'living religion' eg REC, SACREs, [www.livingreligion.co.uk](http://www.livingreligion.co.uk)

# Successes 2

- Range of pedagogies including critical enquiry
- Lots of resources eg RE:ONLINE
- Improved GCSE and A level criteria
- Restoration of bursaries - DfE support?
- Different? 'an academic subject like any other, and some...' 'a career beyond the ordinary'?
- Teacher training + meeting faith groups essential