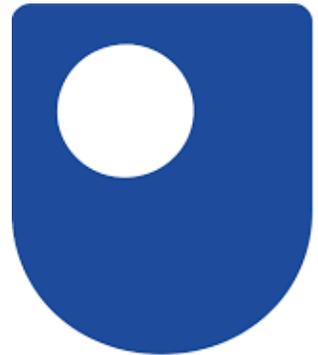


**The  
Faith  
& Belief  
Forum**



**The Open  
University**



**inform**

## **Public Perceptions of RE: What SACREs need to know**

**Workshop for NASACRE, 16<sup>th</sup> June 2022**

**Sarah Harvey, Inform**

**Suzanne Newcombe, Inform and The Open  
University**

**Amy Ark and Carrie Alderton, The Faith &  
Belief Forum**

# Promoting the Exploration of Religion and Worldviews in Schools

January 2021 – July 2022

## Project Aims:

- To generate more positive attitudes towards R&W teaching from and for those with a stake and influence outside the classroom.

## Target Groups:

- Parents and Local Stakeholders
- School Leaders, Local Authorities and Policy Professionals

## Project Objectives:

- To create clear messaging and resources to support key stakeholders in ensuring that the study of R&W is incorporated in schools.
- To support the development of a network to raise the profile of the importance of R&W.

## Project Outputs:

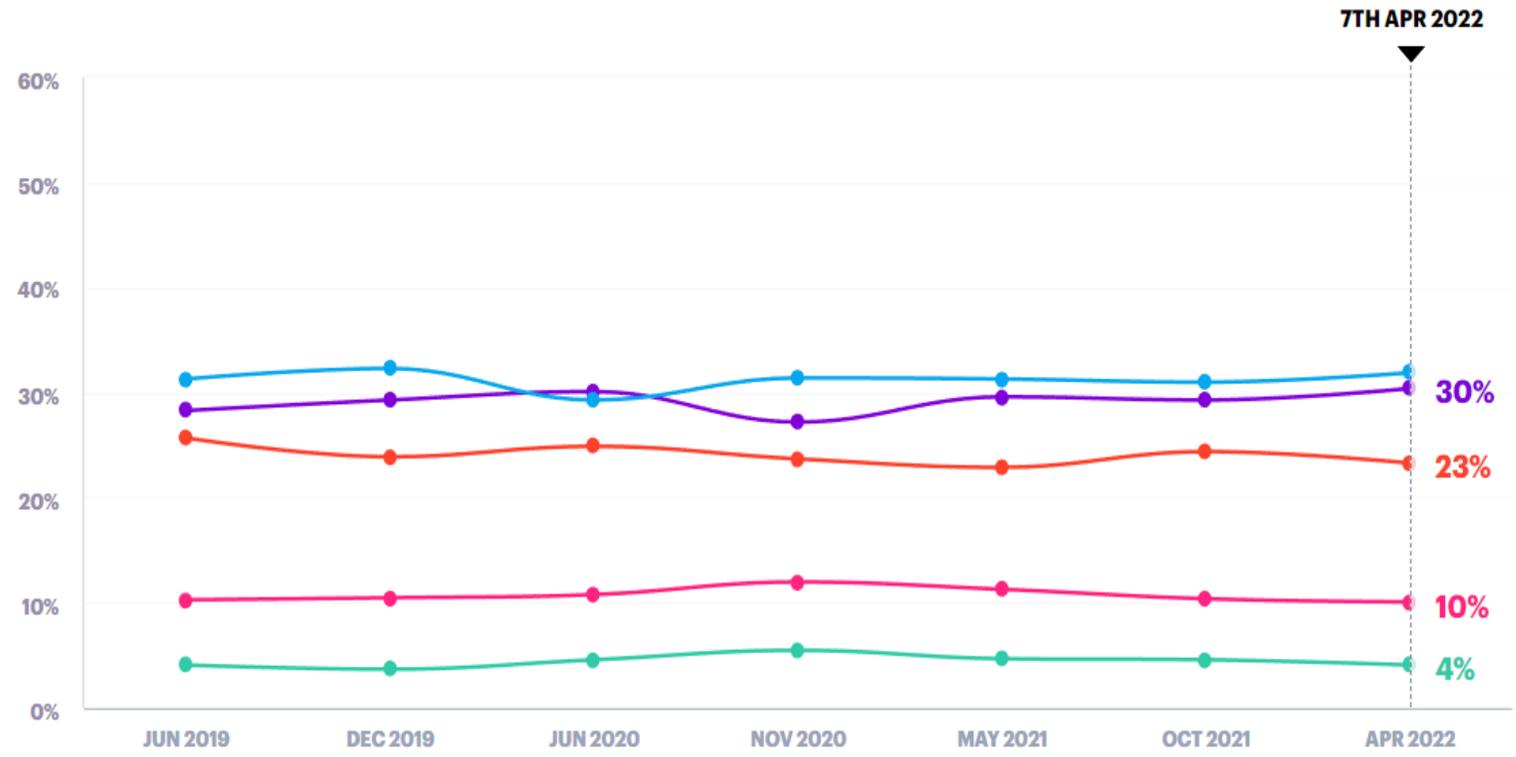
- Steering committee and Baseline Reports
- Focus groups, surveys and Insight Report
- Open Learn Course and other Resources

## How important is it to teach Religious studies at secondary school?



Filtering options:

- All adults
- Age ▾
- Gender ▾
- Politics ▾
- Region ▾
- Social grade ▾
- ALL



# Religion & Worldviews Survey 2021

Good religious education plays a vital role in equipping young people with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in today's modern, diverse society and workplace.

In Spring / Summer 2021, Culham St Gabriel's Trust, in collaboration with Savanta, surveyed the British public on their views of the benefits of understanding religious or non-religious worldviews, and the role of RE in schools. The following results are based on 2,000 responses from UK based adults.



Most UK adults think that RE should be taught in schools, with the majority agreeing that it helps young people understand and respect others' beliefs, regarded by many as important in a variety of social and private contexts.

# Our Student Survey

- 84% agreed or strongly agreed that RE is a useful subject
- 72% agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed RE
- 70% agreed or strongly agreed that they personally learnt a lot from studying RE.

*Is there anything more you could tell us about your experience of Religious Education /Religious Studies at school or your thoughts on the subject more generally?*

3 key themes:

1. Positive views about learning about different religions
2. Concerns around not enough religions being taught in not enough
3. Recognition of RE as a “neglected” subject

# Our Focus Groups



Thoughts on purpose of RE



Thoughts on current state of RE



Presentation of RW –  
*Nobody Stands Nowhere*  
video and key points from  
CoRE 2018



Immediate thoughts,  
strengths and weaknesses



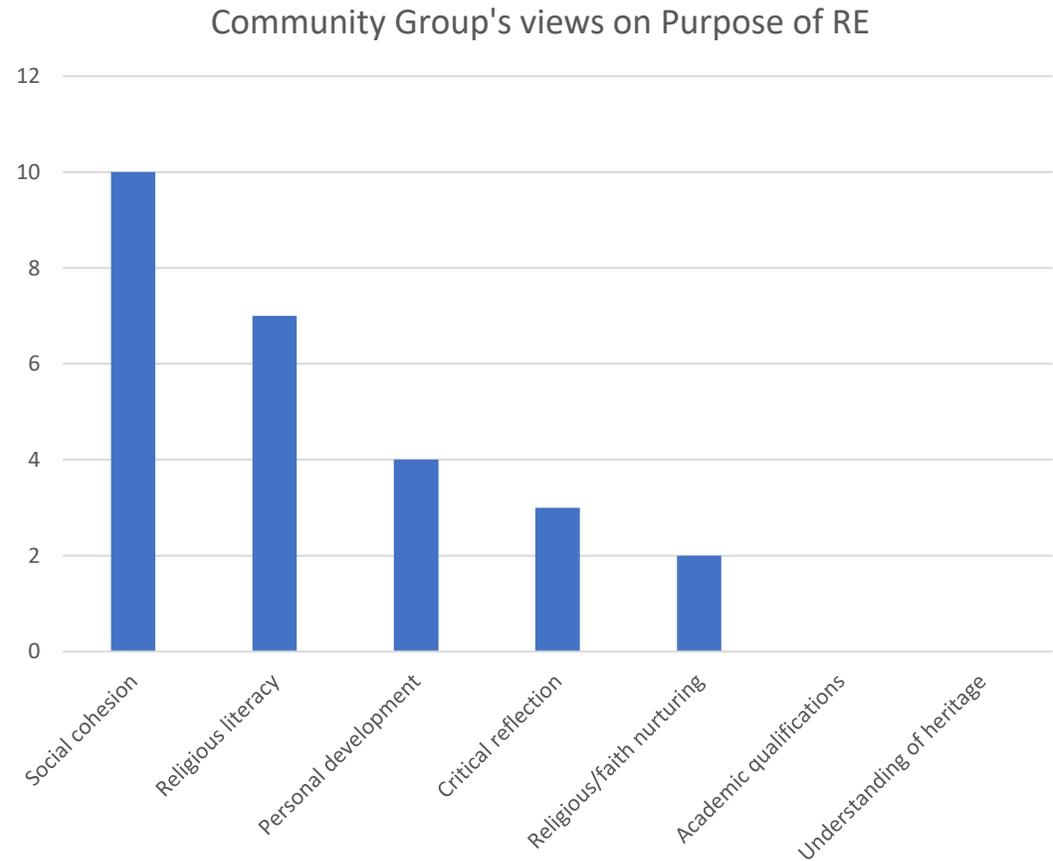
Resources needed for  
better promotion



Possible ways forward for  
implementing

# The Purpose of RE

- Community groups and SACRE members saw RE as having a practical purpose
- Parents and community groups also valued the 'character-forming' aspect
- Parents welcomed the different purposes....
- Whilst academics and policy professionals saw lack of clear purpose as a problem.



# Challenges to RE / R&W

1. Structural Issues – e.g.
  - A lack of specialist teachers and a lack of support and funding for initial training and ongoing CPD
  - A lack of resources and time for teaching RE
  - RE's unique status, exclusion from Ebacc, exam constraints
2. Public Perception Issues – e.g.
  - Negative public perception of RE
  - Parents seen as a particular problem by other stakeholders
3. Conceptual Issues – e.g.
  - Lack of clarity around the current purpose of RE
  - but also around the purpose of the RW approach – particularly the definition of 'worldviews' and what could be included in the syllabus under this title.

# Strengths of R&W approach

- It is more inclusive of all pupils, particularly those who are non-religious
- It recognises diversity
- It recognises historical and social context
- It encourages critical analysis of worldviews
- It encourages self-reflexivity
- It has greater potential for cross-over with over curriculum subjects.
- 65% of SACRE members had a generally positive view of the R&W approach.
- 51% of parents had a generally positive view.
- SACRE members were concerned with how to get other stakeholders on board – especially parents and government.

# Challenges with the R&W approach

- What is a worldview? Not clearly defined and not a neutral term
- The R&W approach might be a dilution or 'watering down' of the 'religion' component of RE
- Or it could just become a means of adding in extra content about 'non-religious' with the term 'worldviews' reserved only for this content
- Is it correct to assume that everyone has a worldview?
- Do worldviews prioritise individualism at the expense of community and tradition?
- Does the approach overemphasise cognition, belief and ways of 'seeing' the world, rather than materiality, corporeality, and social networks?
- Could R&W's critical approach lead to greater child withdrawal from religious parents?
- Could there be defensiveness around worldviews - from pupils/parents or at a higher level from community groups/religious organisations with a stake in schooling?
- How relativistic will an education in R&W be? Will all worldviews be considered equal? How will issues of, for example, extremism and minority religions be engaged with?

# Ways Forward

Practical suggestions included:

- Greater opportunities for networking, support and resource sharing, perhaps in the model of 'knowledge hubs'.
- Schools could network with their local university Religious Studies department for advice and support.
- Involving community groups in resource creation, as speakers in schools, and hosting lessons in places of worship.
- Parents could be provided with sample RE lessons in order to break down barriers and misunderstandings, and they could be included in RE lessons delivered in places of worship.

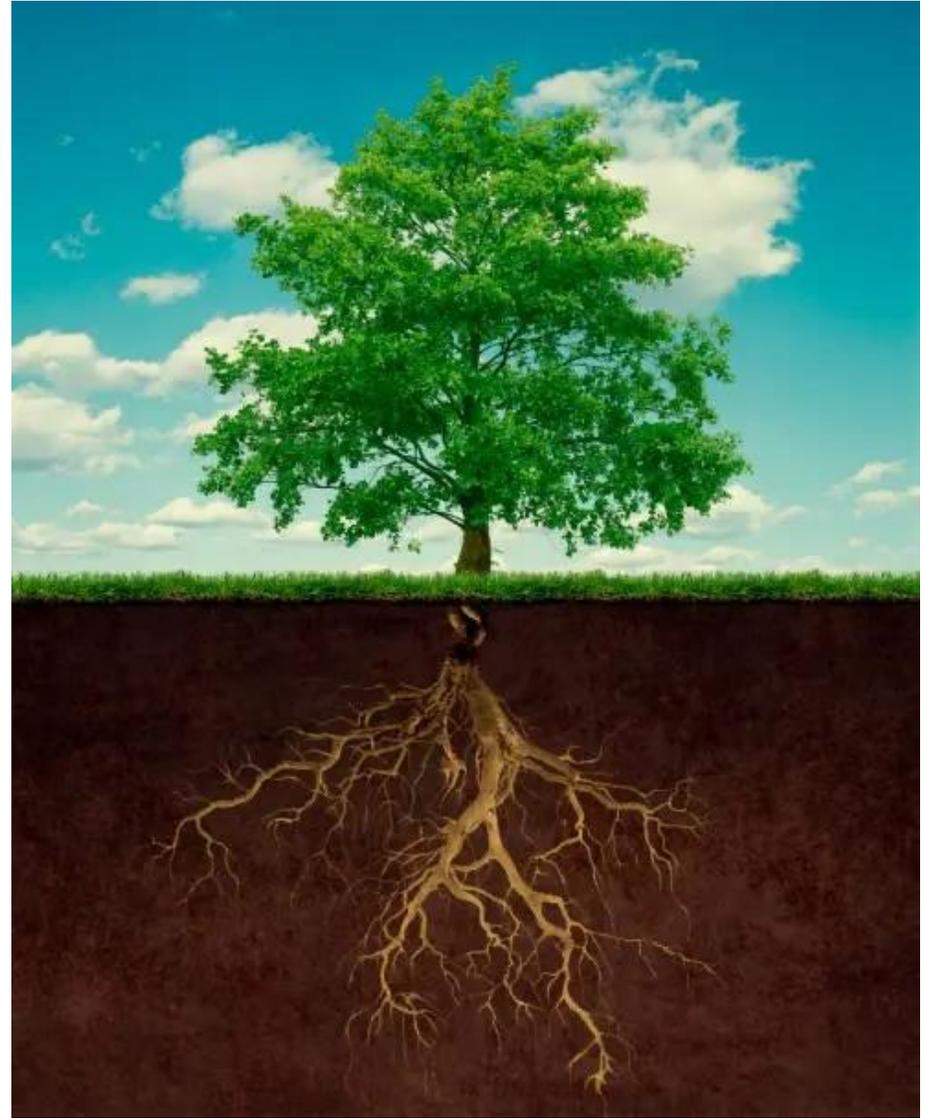
Our data suggests that there is a need and appetite for greater **engagement** between the different stakeholders we have reached. Schools, SACREs, community groups and parents all expressed enthusiasm for working together and suggested that support and best practice guidance on this would be appreciated. Academics were keen to host and/or facilitate networking meetings.

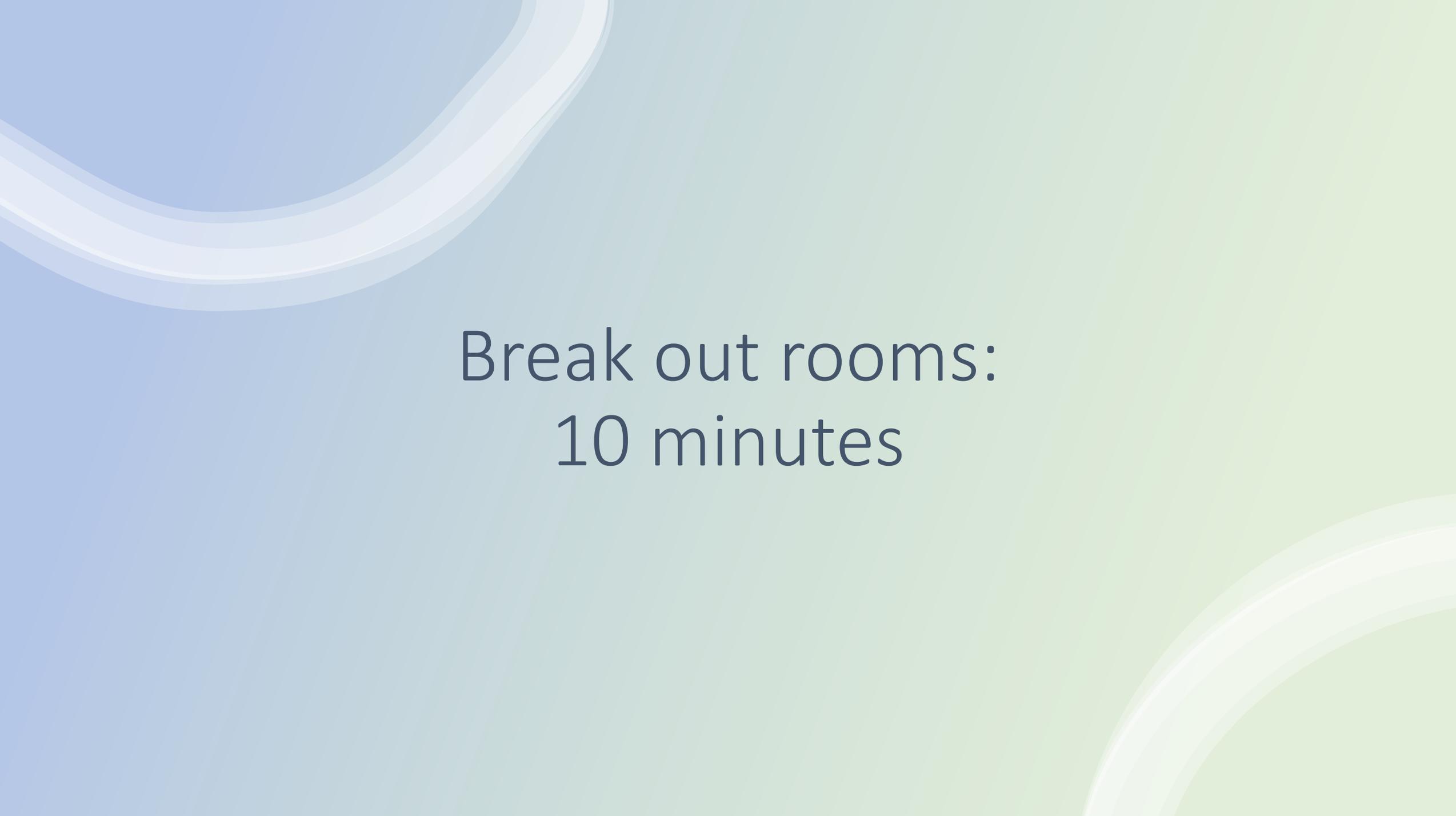
Greater community engagement could also contribute to greater **positive perceptions** of RE/RW education and hence to greater critical **religious literacy** in the long term. Greater interaction with academics could ensure that school and university-level teaching on religion can be more in-line, whilst recognising the differences between the two.

Any questions?



# Identity tree activity





Break out rooms:  
10 minutes



Discussion: what can we take forwards?

Thank you for coming!

[Carrie.Alderton@faithbeliefforum.org](mailto:Carrie.Alderton@faithbeliefforum.org)

[Amy.ark@faithbeliefforum.org](mailto:Amy.ark@faithbeliefforum.org)

[sarah.harvey@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.harvey@kcl.ac.uk)

[suzanne.newcombe@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:suzanne.newcombe@kcl.ac.uk)

**The  
Faith  
& Belief  
Forum**



**inform**



**The Open  
University**