

Open letter to Minister of State for School Reform Nick Gibb MP supporting Humanism in Religious Studies

Dear Mr Gibb,

We are startled to see that the new GCSE and AS and A level Religious Studies criteria, currently being consulted on by the Government, do not propose to allow for the systematic study of non-religious worldviews. Annexes at GCSE prescribe content for each of the principal religions but there is no equivalent annex for Humanism, even though one was provided to the Department. This is completely out of step with Religious Education as it is taught in many schools today, which reflects the fact that while many young people nowadays hold religious beliefs, many others hold non-religious beliefs, and both religious and non-religious beliefs influence most young people.

The latest RE curriculum framework for teaching prior to GCSE level was produced last year and recommends the study of non-religious worldviews like Humanism alongside religions – a simple codification of the developing place of non-religious beliefs in RE which has evolved over many decades. It was endorsed by the then Secretary of State, who in his foreword made explicit approving reference to teaching non-religious worldviews.

Now the Government is proposing to turn the clock back, ignoring the experience of young people, the current practice of teachers, and the requirements of a rigorous education. We urge you to think again.

Yours sincerely,

Philosophers and other academics (non-RE):

1. Dr Catharine Abell, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Manchester
2. Dr Arif Ahmed, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Cambridge
3. David Archard, Professor of Philosophy, Queen's University Belfast
4. Dr Julian Baggini, philosopher and author
5. Helen Beebee, Samuel Hall Professor of Philosophy, University of Manchester
6. Simon Blackburn, former Professor of Philosophy, University of Cambridge, Fellow, Trinity College Cambridge, and Distinguished Professor of Philosophy, UNC-Chapel Hill
7. Margaret A. Boden, Research Professor of Cognitive Science, University of Sussex
8. Dr Stephen Burwood, Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Hull
9. Dr Claire Cassidy, Senior Lecturer and Course Leader, Postgraduate Certificate in Philosophy with Children, University of Strathclyde
10. Dr Peter Cave, Lecturer in Philosophy, Open University
11. Andrew Chitty, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Sussex
12. Andy Clark, Professor of Logic and Metaphysics, University of Edinburgh
13. Michael Clark, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, University of Nottingham
14. Antony Duff, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, University of Stirling
15. John Dupré, Professor of Philosophy of Science, University of Exeter
16. Dr Nicholas Everitt, Senior Research Fellow in Philosophy, University of East Anglia
17. Simon Glendinning, Professor of European Philosophy, LSE
18. A. C. Grayling, philosopher and Master of the New College of the Humanities
19. Dr Peter King, Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Oxford
20. Dr Brendan Larvor, Reader in Philosophy and Head of Philosophy, University of Hertfordshire
21. Dr Stephen Law, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, Heythrop College, University of London
22. Ardon Lyon, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, City University London

23. D. H. Mellor, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, University of Cambridge
24. Peter Millican, Gilbert Ryle Fellow and Professor of Philosophy, University of Oxford
25. Richard Norman, Emeritus Professor of Moral Philosophy, University of Kent
26. Eric Olson, Professor of Philosophy, University of Sheffield
27. David Papineau, Professor of Philosophy, King's College London
28. Derek Parfit, Professor of Philosophy, University of Oxford
29. Duncan Pritchard, Professor and Chair in Epistemology, University of Edinburgh
30. Janet Radcliffe Richards, Professor of Practical Philosophy, University of Oxford
31. Jonathan Rée, philosopher and author
32. Theodore Scaltsas, Professor and Chair of Ancient Philosophy, University of Edinburgh
33. Peter Simons, Professor of Philosophy, Chair of Moral Philosophy and Head of the School of Social Sciences and Philosophy, Trinity College Dublin
34. Kate Soper, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, London Metropolitan University
35. Tom Sorell, Professor of Politics and Philosophy, University of Warwick
36. Dr Tanja Staehler, Reader in Philosophy and Head of the Department of Philosophy, University of Sussex
37. Raymond Tallis, philosopher and Emeritus Professor of Geriatric Medicine, University of Manchester
38. Thomas Uebel, Professor of Philosophy, University of Manchester
39. Dr Nigel Warburton, philosopher and author
40. Keith Ward, Regius Professor Emeritus of Divinity, University of Oxford
41. John White, Emeritus Professor of the Philosophy of Education, Institute of Education, University of London
42. Stephen Wilkinson, Professor of Bioethics, Lancaster University

RE professionals (other than teachers):

43. David Aldridge, Principal Lecturer in Philosophy of Education and Programme Lead for Professional Education, Oxford Brookes University
44. Phil André, RE teacher, university lecturer and SACRE advisor
45. Maxine Beech, RE teacher and research fellow, Farmington Institute
46. Revd Kevin Blogg, RE consultant and SACRE advisor, Norfolk
47. Revd Robert Boulter, Associate Principal Lecturer in Primary Education, Leeds Trinity University and consultant, Leeds SACRE
48. Alan Brine, former HMI and National Lead for Religious Education within Ofsted (2007-2014)
49. Roger Butler, RE consultant and SACRE advisor, London
50. George Casley, lecturer and RE consultant
51. Denise Chaplin, RE advisor, London
52. Mark Chater, Director of a Christian educational charity supporting research, development and innovation in RE and former Senior Adviser for RE, Qualifications & Curriculum Development Agency (2006-10)
53. Andrew Copson, Chief Executive, British Humanist Association and board member, Religious Education Council for England and Wales
54. Trevor Cooling, Professor of Christian Education and Director of National Institute for Christian Education Research, Canterbury Christ Church University
55. Denise Cush, Professor of Religion and Education, Bath Spa University
56. Dr Wendy Dossett, Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies, University of Chester
57. Dr Nigel Fancourt, Lecturer, Department of Education, University of Oxford
58. Dave Francis, education consultant and SACRE advisor

59. Brian Gates, Emeritus Professor of Religion, Ethics & Education, University of Cumbria and former Chair of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (1984-90 and 2002-11)
60. David Harris, education consultant and Senior Member, Wolfson College, University of Cambridge
61. Paul Hopkins, Lecturer in Education, University of Hull
62. Alex Howard, former Visiting Lecturer in Philosophy at Newcastle University and former RE teacher
63. Robert Jackson, Professor of Education and former Director, Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (1994-2012)
64. Sarah Lane-Cawte, board member and Chair of Governance Committee, Religious Education Council for England and Wales
65. Jonny Lawson, Head of RE, West Sussex and executive member, National Association of Teachers of RE
66. Phil Leivers, board member and Chair of Professional Development Committee, Religious Education Council for England and Wales
67. Doreen Massey, Baroness Massey of Darwen, educationalist
68. Nora Leonard, education consultant and SACRE advisor, London
69. Ed Pawson, Chair, National Association of Teachers of RE
70. Lesley Prior, RE consultant, SACRE advisor, and Senior Lecturer in Religious Education, University of Roehampton
71. Revd Michael J Reiss, Professor of Science Education, Institute of Education, University of London
72. Rabbi Dr Jonathan Romain, Maidenhead Synagogue
73. Alastair Ross, RE Consultant and SACRE advisor, West Yorkshire
74. Stephen Shashoua, Director, 3FF (Three Faiths Forum)
75. Dr Jacqueline Watson, Visiting Fellow in Education and former Director of the Centre for Spirituality and Religion in Education, University of East Anglia
76. Andrew Wright, Professor of Religious Education, Institute of Education

RE teachers:

77. Joanne Bagnall, RE Co-ordinator, Nook Lane Junior School, Sheffield
78. Hayley Bennett, RE Teacher, City of Bradford
79. Dr Robin M. Bevan, Headteacher, Southend High School for Boys
80. Ben Britton, Head of RE, Garth Hill College, Bracknell
81. Katie Brook, RE Teacher, Bracknell
82. Ellen Chisman, RE Teacher, Kirklees
83. Shirley Dang, RE Coordinator and Early Years Teacher, Hackney
84. Ms L Douglas, Philosophy and Ethics Teacher
85. Andrew Duffield, Humanities Co-ordinator, Haltwhistle Community Campus, Northumberland
86. Malachy Fivey, Head of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Aberdour School, Tadworth
87. Peter Gray, Primary Teacher, Derbyshire
88. Mike Harrison, former ESOL teacher, London
89. Helen Hodgson, RE Teacher
90. Laura Harvey, Head of Religious Studies, Newstead Wood School, Bromley
91. Amy Hyde, Teacher of Belief and Ethics, Suffolk
92. Jon Knight, Head of Philosophy and Ethics, Worcestershire
93. Ben Maddison, RE teacher, Southend High School for Boys
94. Alexandra Maxted, RE teacher, Hampshire

95. David Moffat, RE Teacher, Kingsbury High School, Brent
96. Max Mulvaney, RE Teacher, Blenheim High School, Epsom
97. Clare O'Brien, RS & Philosophy teacher and teacher trainer, Graveney School, Wandsworth
98. Margaret O'Sullivan, Head of RE, St. John's School, Episkopi, Cyprus
99. Iain Paterson, former HMI with responsibility for religious education
100. Shammi Rahman, RE teacher, Milton Keynes
101. Claire Sadler-Penn, Deputy Head Teacher, Nottingham
102. Alice Severs, former Deputy Head Teacher
103. Louise Stinchcombe, RE Teacher
104. Francesca Thomas, Secondary Teacher of RE and Philosophy, Cornwall
105. Rebecca Ward, Head of Department for Philosophy and Theology, Graveney School, Wandsworth
106. Richard Woffenden, Ethics, Religion, Ideas and Citizenship Teacher, Royds Hall Community School, Huddersfield
107. Hannah Yearsley, Teacher of Religious Studies, Humanities and Citizenship, Kent

Authors:

108. Jonathan Emmett, children's author
109. Matt Haig, writer, children's author and journalist
110. Natalie Haynes, writer, children's author and broadcaster
111. Michael Rosen, children's author, poet, former Children's Laureate and co-author, *What is Humanism?* (forthcoming, April, 2015)
112. Alom Shaha, author, *The Young Atheist's Handbook*
113. Annemarie Young, Senior Member, Hughes Hall, University of Cambridge, and co-author, *What is Humanism?* (forthcoming, April, 2015)