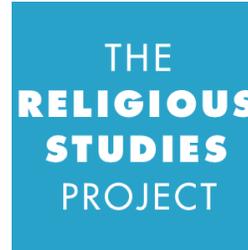


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## Podcast Transcript

Version 1.1, 28 October 2018



### RE Commission Report: A Way Forward?

Podcast with **Joyce Miller, Eleanor Nesbitt, Celine Benoit** (5 November 2018).

Interviewed by **Wendy Dossett**

Transcribed by **Helen Bradstock**.

Audio and transcript available at: <http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/podcast/re-commission-report-a-way-forward/>

**Wendy Dossett (WD):** *Hello everybody, and welcome to the Religious Studies Project! My name's [Wendy Dossett](#) and I'm senior lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Chester. And I'm also the TRS UK representative of the [Religious Education Council of England and Wales](#), which means I'm interested in the relationship between departments of the academic study of Theology and Religion and what goes on in schools. And we're at a particularly critical moment in the study of religion in schools. There's a lot of public mistrust of the subject. [Linda Woodhead](#) has said that religion is a toxic brand. And I think many people in the public think that Religious Education in schools is about recommending religion to people, or trying to present religion in a good light. And there's a lot of competing agendas and imperatives in Religious Education. Numbers are falling at GCSE and A' level. Obviously that has a knock-on effect for recruitment to academic Religious Studies at university level – so that's a concern. And this is a particularly important moment because, on the 10th of September, a new report published by the [Commission for Religious Education](#) came out. The report is called "[Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward – A National Plan for RE](#)". And it invites a new vision for Religious Education in schools, and the hope is that the Government will take account of that new vision and bring about some change. So we want to discuss that. And I'm very pleased to welcome two of the commissioners who contributed to that report. So we have Dr [Joyce Miller](#), who's an associate fellow in the Religion and Education Research Unit at the University of Warwick. She's a former senior lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Wolverhampton, and she's a former chair of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales. Hi Joyce!*

**Joyce Miller (JM):** Hello.

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**WD:** *We also have – down the line – another commissioner, Professor [Eleanor Nesbitt](#), who's Emeritus Professor at the University of Warwick. And she's well known for her work on the [religious lives of children](#) and [intercultural education](#). And Eleanor was using a [Lived Religions](#) approach in her work in Religious Studies and Religions Education before it became a slogan! (Laughs). She's also the author of [Sikhism: A Very Short Introduction](#). So welcome, Eleanor.*

**Eleanor Nesbitt (EN):** Hello.

**WD:** *And we're also very happy that we have [Céline Benoit](#) with us, who's a teaching fellow at Aston University, and a convener of [SocReL](#) which is the BSA Sociology of Religion group. Céline is about to submit her PhD, and that is entitled: Representing Religion in Schools: Locating the Self and the “Other”. So, welcome to everybody. I'll just start with what seems one of the most obvious things about the Commission's report – but I suspect the commissioners will tell us it isn't in fact the most obvious thing! But the report describes the subject, which has widely been known in schools as Religious Education, as “Religion and Worldviews”. So, this is a big change. And Professor [Stephen Parker](#) has said this is the most radical change in the subject proposed since the 1960s. So we really are talking about a potential game-changer, if this is taken up by government. And I wonder if I could just invite the commissioners to tell us a bit about why this change is necessary – Joyce?*

**JM:** I think it's necessary because, as Wendy's explained, there are very serious issues about Religious Education at the moment. Alongside falling entries for our examination subjects we have evidence of a huge disregard of the law. Religious Education is compulsory for all children in all schools. And yet, up to 30% of schools don't seem to be offering it at all at Key stage 4. There are a whole range of other issues. We have few teachers, entries are insufficient to keep the teaching profession afloat in terms of Religious Education. There's a lack of resources and support for schools. Religious Education in England is extremely complicated because it works on a local level. We have over a 150 Local Education Authorities, each of which is responsible for agreeing what is going to be taught in Religious Education in its own area. This makes it a fragmented and complex approach. This has been the law in England for a very long time. Most recently in 1988 the [law was amended](#), and that was when Religious Education was invented as the term in law. Before that it had been Religious Instruction, religious knowledge. And the 1988 Act made obligatory the teaching of religions other than Christianity in Religious Education in English schools. If we're now going to have a new and radical approach to the understanding of religion, we need a new name to signify a major change that is now going to happen in our schools. At least, we hope that's what's going to happen: that is the

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intention of the Commission.

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**WD:** *Thank you.*

**EN:** Could I add a bit in about the name as well?

**WD:** *Please do.*

**EN:** One of the things that's significant is, it's not “Religions and Worldviews”, it's “Religion and Worldviews”. Because the commissioners felt that it was really important that in school – not just in University – young people should be introduced to the nature of what we call religion: its dynamics, and its impact, and so on – almost regardless of which religion we're talking about. The nature of religion itself is important. And then, as far as worldviews go, it's not just that the commissioners want to include Humanism or non-religious worldviews. It's the fact of acknowledging that every human being has something that can be called a worldview. And so actually this re-naming is way of saying, “Yes, you're included as well.” You don't have to be Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, or some other organisational community that has a faith label. Actually, this subject is about the creation of the individual worldview, as well as the existence of acknowledged public worldviews.

**WD:** *That's really interesting. I mean, I guess some people in academic Religious Studies – even though they're in Religious Studies – might have a critique of the idea of religion as a kind of free-standing concept that is instantiated in these different religious traditions. Are we saying religion is a “thing” that you can study?*

**EN:** (Laughs). That's really interesting. But if you took any other name like “belief”, or any of the other terms we thought of, I think there could be similar points made. And what's going to be interesting is that the discussion is reinvigorated.

**WD:** *So, the decision was not to go just with worldviews and drop religion entirely?*

**EN:** Well, it could be argued that religion is a subset of worldview – but is it? Because religions involve community activity; they involve identity; they involve all sorts of aspects of human behaviour which are not generally thought to be necessary, or usually part of what we think of as a worldview.

**JM:** We also wanted to maintain some continuity. We are not inventing a new school subject that is

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called Worldviews, because then that would include political worldviews. So we had to constrain and tighten it in some way, and link it to the study of religions. But these conversations about what religion is, where it sits in our highly secularised society, what its link is to spirituality – these are the conversations we want children to be having in the classroom. So they're not just terms that they hear, and they never get the chance to unpack and explore. They need to understand it at an age-appropriate level, why these questions are important, and some of the conversations that are happening at an academic level. Children are far more capable at exploring difficult concepts than we often give them credit for. And so one of the things the Commission was very keen to ensure, is that we're not just adding a few more “isms”: 6 big religions, plus Humanism, plus a few others. We're looking for a much more in-depth analytical understanding of what religion is, what secularism is, what spirituality is, and the ways in which worldviews work, and how people live and how children grow and develop – how all of these are enabled through that study.

**Céline Benoit (CB):** I think this conversation about religion or religions is really important. And I think going for religion rather than religions allows us to have that conversation about trying to not rely so much on the [world religions paradigm](#), and trying to put every community in a very neat category. And no-one feels like they're really being represented correctly. Because, you know, you may have Muslim people who say “Well, this is not how I understand Islam. It doesn't represent what I am doing at home.” But also the plan is to move away from that outsider/insider perspective, where most of the pupils might feel like they're looking at the “other”, and it's very spectatorial. And it might be more damaging than . . . I know that's not the purpose of RE. But moving away from religions might be quite positive.

**JM:** I think part of this stems from the debate in 1988, where there was a strong emphasis in parliament on preserving the integrity of religions. And some teachers have interpreted that as having to teach each religion separately – what we call the silo approach. So children have no understanding of religion as a concept, or the way in which religions relate to each other, or the way they influence each other. And so we're trying to open this up to a broader but deeper analytical understanding of what we have around us in the world . . . that children are entitled to explore.

**WD:** *So is it envisioned that a more kind-of thematic approach would be taken, rather than this kind of silo or systematic approach? Because that as well has its problems, doesn't it? Because it potentially can re-inscribe the world religions paradigm, that Selina's just mentioned, in that it kind-of models religions on a kind-of Christian blueprint and says, “Every religion's got its festivals, and its rites of*

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*passage, and . . .*”

**CB:** And rituals and beliefs, yes.

**WD:** *Yes. So, is that a risk with this new approach?*

**EN:** There's always a risk if you have teachers who don't feel equipped for the task. And quite a significant part of the recommendations of the report involves ways in which teachers can be strengthened in their knowledge and confidence for dealing with this. But I think, also, one of the pointers in the report is towards understanding the ways in which religions interact. So it's not saying “You can't teach about Islam, about Christianity,” and so on. But it is saying, “Look there are people who happen to have one Christian parent and one Muslim parent, or there are people who live as a Muslim minority in a Christian country, or vice versa, and there is interaction between these understandings of the world in the lives of the families concerned. Again, it's about the nature of religion – that it doesn't exist in isolation from other ways of being religious.

**JM:** I think there are issues, as well, about the way in which teachers of Religious Education represent those religions in the way they choose to teach them in the classroom, and how this sits in relation to children's perceptions of those religions through the media. So, for example, there are many teachers who genuinely believe that they're addressing Islamophobia through teaching about Islam. So they do the Five Pillars and think they're making a major contribution to community relations, and children understanding them as their neighbours. Now that may be true, and an understanding of Islam is necessary, but it certainly is not sufficient. So Islam has to be understood in its current social context as well: how Christianity relates to Islam, how Judaism relates to Islam, how our politicians represent Islam in what they say, how the media represents Islam. So we have to move away from a narrow approach to a religion, to seeing it from the child's perspective – and all the influences that are affecting them and their judgements – so that they can come to a much more informed understanding and have the opportunity for their misconceptions and biases to be addressed. Children can walk away from lessons about Islam being as Islamophobic at the end of it as they were at the beginning. And we delude ourselves if we think that Religious Education can overcome these issues relating to serious racisms in connection with religion.

**EN:** Yes, this is so true.

**CB:** I think that's why it would be interesting to see if the government takes this on board – which I

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hope it does, because this is a step in the right direction. I think we need to move away from this essentialised approach, and knowledge about a few religions, and think how it's going to be put into practice, because of what you mentioned, Wendy. There might be some pitfalls in how we could be teaching religion and worldviews. One of the things I wonder, when we put it into practice: how can we move away from teaching about the different “isms”? And it's creating that space for the teacher, and for the pupils, to have that conversation about what they hear in the media, and what they hear at home as well. And at the moment it feels much more like we're learning a few key facts about particular religions. But then we will need – and I think the report does mention it – but we need to invest a lot more in teacher training, and in supporting the teachers throughout it. Because it might feel like a minefield to have to go and talk about all these things. And, you know, children are very curious and they will have questions. And from my experience, teachers tend to feel maybe more comfortable going back to telling them a story – a religious story. And then it's reopening the space for dialogue afterwards.

**JM:** One of the things we haven't mentioned yet is the major recommendation in the Commission's report to set up a new national body to write some exemplary programmes of study that schools can use. And I think that's going to be really important. And we have been very clear that the people on that body should be there because of their expertise in Religious Education, and not because they're there representing a religion. And the representation of religion – and Eleanor is much more expert in this than I am – that is a fraught area, a very complex area. And it goes back to people's sense of ownership and control and power over the curriculum for Religious Education. So there are complex and contested areas.

**WD:** *So, would you see the Commission's report as a kind-of decisive step away from faith communities having involvement in the construction of the Religious Education syllabus?*

**JM:** I think that I would. But there's a major “but”, and that is an enhanced role of local religious communities in supporting Religious Education in their localities. We would not go to the French embassy and say, “Please come and sit on a committee, and tell us how to organise the Modern Foreign Languages for French in English schools.” We wouldn't do it for Geography. And yet we do it in Religious Education. And this now seems an outdated model. The law, in fact, was about the Church of England and other Christian denominations. And there's been a fudging of all of that.

**EN:** What I feel is really important, in the light of what you were saying about the need for experts on the national body, is that in the new local advisory networks, if they are implemented, there wouldn't

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be the dominance, for example, of the Church of England, but there would be the presence of individuals who perhaps are teaching in higher education, teaching Religious Studies; or maybe from museums or galleries – which are part of the local cultural resources from which children can be educated about religion. So there is a different composition of the local advisory networks, as well as their having a different remit. So, not being burdened with having to produce or authorise an Agreed Syllabus, but being strongly encouraged to be proactive in resourcing schools education in Religion and Worldviews.

**CB:** I think that's really important if we . . . We need to keep these local advisory networks going. Because whilst I am all for a national entitlement – for reasons we mentioned in the report, every child should be receiving the same Religious Education or Religion and Worldviews education – at the same time, because they won't be involved in looking into the syllabus and that kind of thing, I'm wondering, would there be space for them to still be able to have conversations about the content of good practice and things like that? Because it's thanks to some of the SACREs that have done such good work that I think we are where we are today. We have been able to move away from teaching about the six major religions, and looking into constructing the syllabus into different ways. So I wonder if there would be space for that kind of conversation.

**JM:** I think the local area networks can almost invent themselves. If they want to write to write programmes of study as exemplars for their schools, they can do that. If they want to write a programme of study about religion in their local area, they can do that. If they want to produce resources, they can do that. There are huge opportunities for local involvement at a level that is focussed and appropriate for that area. And I think we are . . . I'd like to think we are freeing them up to develop themselves and become stronger, more active, more involved. There is a requirement at the moment, for example, that SACRES should have to monitor the quality of Religious Education in schools. How do they do that? You can look at exam results, but that tells you what happens in Key stage 4. It does not tell you what happens in Key Stages 1, and 2, and 3. So we want to give them the power to do what they can do well – and that is, support local schools in a local, democratic, open, flexible way. So we think there are real opportunities, therefore, to do what they can do well.

**WD:** *Just in relation to the philosophical underpinnings of the report: it strikes me as a report that is more influenced by social scientific approaches to the study of religion than perhaps some other approaches. And I notice what's not in the report is material on approaches to RE that come from values education or character education, or virtue education – which . . . some people feel that these*

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*are areas that RE should be addressing. They should be addressing the character development, the spiritual development, even, of the child. And this report doesn't seem to envision the subject in that way – which is something I welcome! But it's something that interests me. Is that a conscious kind-of decision that the commissioners had made?*

**JM:** I think there are lots of questions within that one question, Wendy. Shall I pick up on the spiritual and other things first, and then perhaps we can come back to the social versus theological debate?

**WD:** *Sure.*

**JM:** It's very important, I think, in English schools to recognise that children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a cross-curriculum requirement. It is a whole school issue. And so, RE teachers claiming spiritual development for themselves is not appropriate. It has to be every teacher, every classroom, the whole curriculum, the whole school. What we can do through RE is examine what this word spirituality means, whether it's linked to religion, whether it's separate from religion. So we do have a particular role to play. So the same is true of moral education. People may talk about virtue and character. That is a whole school issue, not a Religious Education issue in particular.

**EN:** Yes, I strongly endorse that.

**JM:** We have a lot of people saying, “Well, Religious Education's really important, because then children can understand art, and music, and literature.” That's children's *cultural* development and, again, it's a whole-school issue. And I've got this feeling that if RE teachers stopped saying, “Oh, we can do this,” and said to every department in their school: “This is your responsibility as well,” RE and religion wouldn't be seen as something separate from the rest of the school, and this odd bit of the basic curriculum as opposed to the National Curriculum. It would be a shared responsibility. And with social education – how we all relate to each other in society, how we all become socially responsible human beings – RE must stop saying, “Oh, this is ours!” We must say, “This is everybody's.” Because then, I think, RE will actually be strengthened though all of that. And I was also very clear on the Commission – I don't know about you, Eleanor – but I wanted to try not to tie us to current debates. A little while ago everybody was talking about religious literacy, but that will not continue. Because there are phases in these areas of discourse. We don't want to be identified with what people were talking about this year, because we're trying to present a vision for the next twenty-and-more years, perhaps, for Religious Education.

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**EN:** Yes, that's also very important. And I think what you were saying about RE as it is and was – but it will change its name, we hope – what you said about it almost seeing the cultural, and the moral, and the spiritual, and so on as its preserve, that's really important. But I suspect the tendency is for other teachers, other members of schools, to be perceiving this to be the preserve of the subject. And one would hope that somehow this report will shift the perception of the specialists in other subjects, and other areas of the curriculum, away from just thinking that there's one subject where all this can be shunted.

**JM:** Eleanor, would you agree with me that the social studies approach to religion has been neglected in Religious Education in schools? Or do you think I'm misrepresenting what goes on there?

**EN:** I think it's been neglected in the teaching; I think it's neglected in the resourcing; and I think that a lot of the difficulty for practitioners is the nature of the resources, which – if we talk about print resources – are those that publishers produce on the assumption that you have a publication about each of the religions, separately. And we very much need to have resources which are based on a social sciences understanding of religion. And in school, of course, it is still the case that there may be a non-specialist in secondary, as well as in primary, teaching the subject. And it may be that the head knows that somebody is a good member of a particular faith community and therefore asks that person to teach this subject – which reinforces a misunderstanding of the nature of religions as matters of faith and belief and commitment, rather than having many other dimensions that would be mapped out by somebody who was looking from more sociological or, for that matter, psychological or anthropological perspectives.

**JM:** The fact is, though, in a classroom, if you were to begin with a social scientific approach, it wouldn't take very long before children were beginning to ask questions beyond quantitative data. And as soon as you begin looking at qualitative data, you're talking about what people do as a religious practice, or believe as a religious person. And so very, very quickly you would come to the big questions about a religion: what it teaches, how it analyses the human condition. So I think the social sciences/ theological Religious Studies split is a false dichotomy, in a real classroom with children asking their questions. And children are very interested in questions of meaning and the big questions about religion and worldviews. I think we can have a balanced curriculum that will bring a social studies approach to the classroom, in a better, clearer way than it has been before. So Religious Education should benefit enormously from this, I think.

**EN:** Yes.

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**CB:** So, what would you say is the main aim of Religion and Worldviews? Because, as you rightly said before, it was religious instruction for a while, then it was about warmer community relations. And we put so many aims and objectives in RE that we didn't even know what it was for, in the end. So I wonder if you are keeping it vague on purpose, or if you've actually narrowed it down a little bit.

**EN:** It is simply about understanding the nature of religion and understanding the worldviews of people in a diverse local, national and global society.

**WD:** *But does that have some kind of transformative effect on the child? Are we hoping that they will be more open to religion, more empathetic, or are we hoping to develop stronger critical skills? What's the effect on the child of that understanding?*

**EN:** That would have to be researched. I'm sure we're hoping that throughout the curriculum, and outside of the curriculum, pupils are being transformed into happy responsible members of our harmonious society. But the study of Religion and Worldviews isn't to be seen as something instrumental. It's something of value in itself as an intellectual discipline, as a clue to understanding what's going on in world current affairs, and so on. But I would think that any responsible professional educator is hoping that their teaching is going to maximise the potential of their students and be beneficial to society as a whole.

**JM:** I like to think in terms of a sort-of family of resemblance when it comes to the aims and purposes of religious education. And I think as a profession we've spent a great deal of time talking about what RE is for and trying to define its aims when, in fact, there are many appropriate aims, and many appropriate emphases. And teachers with different strengths and different academic backgrounds come into teaching this subject. And I think there are a number of ways of approaching RE – a number of ways of looking at what the whole purpose of it is. And we need to remain open and flexible, and recognise that if they're doing all of those things that Eleanor's just set out, we're enabling young people to become more mature, more human, more moral, more aware of others, more able to cope with difference, more understanding of the human condition – and them, as individuals, within humanity. There are many, many ways of doing that. And so I don't think we should be too precise and we say, “The outcome has to be *this*.” There are many possible consequences of what we teach, and a good deal of those we'll never know. Because they come to fruition, we hope, in adulthood, as children grow up and continue to think about these sorts of issues that were raised as part of their Religious Education in schools.

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**EN:** And are actually friends with people from very different cultural and religious backgrounds from their own.

**JM:** And I love that phrase, Eleanor – I think I might have learned it through you – of children becoming “cultural navigators”. And that's a phrase from [Ballard](#), isn't it?

**EN:** Yes, that was a term I used. And I think certainly one of the first people to use it was Roger Ballard.

**JM:** And I love that idea of children becoming cultural navigators. In fact it may even be . . . when I worked in Bradford, we talked about children becoming cross-cultural navigators: this ability to respectfully engage in conversation and activity with people from a whole range of other backgrounds. And that is one of the purposes of Religious Education. It's not the only purpose. I think the government might be interested in RE's contribution to the emphasis it currently has on integrated communities. And yes, RE can contribute to that. And it's very important. But isn't the only purpose. Politically, at the moment, it may be given emphasis. But there are so many more consequences of good RE.

**EN:** I do have a concern about cultural and religious navigation. Navigation is about avoiding things!

**All:** (Laugh)

**EN:** I think we have to use some other metaphors as well.

**WD:** *(Laughs) Yes! Cultural explorers, maybe?*

**EN:** Yes.

**WD:** *If RE – or Religion and Worldviews, as it's newly envisioned – is academic and it's non-confessional, shouldn't every child have it by law? And should it be impossible for parents to withdraw their children from it?*

**EN:** I think a lot of commissioners would hope that. But we also have to be aware of the nature of the law and of precedents internationally, and nationally. And that is why there's a recommendation that the [DfE](#) should clarify the legal situation.

**JM:** Ideally it would go. And it is anomalous that children can be withdrawn by their parents and

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teachers can withdraw from teaching it, if they choose to do that. It does make us exceptional in the curriculum. But as Eleanor has said, the law around this is really quite complex, and we do not want to create a situation which is going to put schools at risk of litigation. And that is extremely important. And that was what absolutely put the brakes on this move.

**EN:** We did have experts with informed legal advice on this.

**JM:** We did. And the ideal situation is that it remains in law as a possibility, but nobody ever takes advantage of it.

**WD:** *Because advantage is increasingly being taken of it, isn't it? Often for Islamophobic reasons.*

**JM:** Well, the evidence seems quite limited on that. There has been one survey, but it included a very small number of schools that responded. I think 300 schools, out of the thousands in England. And a small percentage of those reported that there was that. Anecdotally we hear a great deal about that, but there isn't sufficient hard evidence to support that it actually happens. Would you agree with that reading of the evidence we've had, Eleanor?

**EN:** Yes, I think that's true. I think we're concerned about what a future trajectory might look like. And I think we're also concerned about the possibility of withdrawal from parts of the subject and whether or not parents, or anybody, is required to find some worthy substitute for education in Religion and Worldviews for those students who are withdrawn – if they are. There is . . . it's a complex area. But I think it's very easy for people to assume that it's all to do with Islamophobia or, even more widely, is Xenophobia. And I certainly haven't seen data that would support that.

**JM:** I think it's interesting though, that there are so many parents who don't want their children to be taught about certain things in case they are unduly influenced by them. And so this again shows the fear that lies underneath people's perceptions of Religious Education, as somehow – possibly in quite a subtle way – being indoctrinatory or evangelical. And we have not managed to shift public opinion sufficiently on that in the thirty-odd years that modern Religious Education has been in existence.

**WD:** *And, of course, the move to worldviews invites the perception that now Religious Education is going to include Humanism, atheism, etc., etc. And there may be a new cohort of people who might be disturbed about that.*

**JM:** It's possible. I think we have one cohort who look on religion with suspicion, because it's

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religious and they're secularist, and they don't want their children to be subjected to it. We have another group where there are deeply held religious convictions, that they don't want to be challenged. And it's how, somehow, we find a way of addressing the fears on both sides, so that everyone is confident that we're having a sensitive but academically challenging opportunity for children to explore what religion and worldviews are.

**EN:** I think that the more it becomes evident that a national programme of study is not being created by spokespeople for a religious group, the more it becomes evident that that a local advisory network is drawing on the expertise of Religious Studies professionals and not simply relying on insider views and voices, then the less risk there is of this sort of fear and knee-jerk withdrawals from the subject.

**WD:** *A final quick question, if that's ok? So, the Religious Studies Project audience is very diverse. But what do you think, as commissioners, that people who are interested in the Religious Studies Project, who are interested in academic Religious Studies, maybe Critical Religious Studies, might really appreciate about the Commission's report – and what might they be critical of?*

**JM:** What I think they should appreciate is the opening up of the subject to make it absolutely relevant to every child in every classroom. We talked a great deal in the Commission about entitlement and equality, but also the idea of inclusivity. Religious Education – Religion and Worldviews – has to be appropriate for every single child, whatever background they come from.

**WD:** *And whatever type of school they're in, as well.*

**JM:** And whatever type of school they're in. And if children who would describe themselves as not belonging to a religion can be excited by the study of religion and worldviews, and interested in exploring its place in the world, then they're the young people who will want to go on to learn more and study more deeply. So I would like to think that it could bring a whole new energy and an opening up of RE. I should think every teacher of Religious Education has been asked the question, “Why do we have to do this subject?” My ambition is that children will stop asking that question, because they will see it's relevant to them – whoever they are, whatever they believe or don't believe – that it's relevant and important, and enables them to understand the world and themselves better.

**CB:** And I think where the report is key is moving away from the majority of pupils feeling like they're looking at others, that they don't recognise themselves in the syllabus.

**WD:** *Well, isn't it more than 70% of children in classrooms don't identify as religious?*

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# 14

## Podcast Transcript

Version 1.1, 28 October 2018

**JM:** I wonder what people are going to be critical of? Perhaps . . . Do you have any insight into that, Eleanor?

**EN:** Well, I imagine they're going to be critical of the fact that we haven't gone far enough, for example, on saying that there should be no withdrawal. But that criticism, as we pointed out, is based on not necessarily understanding what the legal implications are of taking that stand. So I think the commissioners, very, very carefully thought through and tried to balance just about every sentence in this report. And I think it's very easy for somebody who hasn't been through that process to take one of the views that was taken into account in the Commission's consultations and in their ruminations on this, without, of course, having had the whole process of refining and reaching, in a sense, a compromise position. So I think there are all sorts of points at which somebody could say: "Well, it should go further than this."

**WD:** *Yes. I wonder if there may be . . . When knowledge is constructed, or the categories that we use become fixed in kind-of policy documents like this, it's very clear in the document that the worldviews that are being looked are not political worldviews. They're worldviews that have some relationship to, or are responses to religious belief. So atheism is included as a worldview. But not communism or something like that. And I think a lot of people working in Religious Studies – I don't know what you think, Celine – might say, "You can't draw those hard and fast lines quite so easily." And what you're creating is a kind-of constructed idea of what a worldview is.*

**CB:** Yes. I think from the conversation we've had in our conference today, there was some concern about worldviews maybe being too wide, and maybe being narrowed down a bit too much. But I think we may be also lacking the right vocabulary at the moment. So no-one seemed to come forward with a suggestion that would have been better than worldviews.

**WD:** *We hear, "Oh, it would be better to be Philosophy", rather than worldviews. But I mean philosophy is . . .*

**JM:** It's a different subject.

**EN:** And the other alternative, or another option, was "Beliefs". But similarly with beliefs, there can be beliefs which probably would be less suitable for this particular subject than others. But, where do you draw the line?

**WD:** *Well, belief comes very much out of the kind-of Protestant Christian model of what a religion is.*

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# 15

## Podcast Transcript

Version 1.1, 28 October 2018

*So I would be really disappointed if it was belief. I think worldviews is a massive improvement on that.*

**JM:** And when we looked at the record of what we'd said, and what had been written down on our behalf, the word that emerged naturally from our ruminations – to use Eleanor's word – was that word worldview. We could have taken any title and imposed it. But when we actually looked at the texts of what we'd been talking about, it just seemed the natural consequence of our thinking. So it wasn't arbitrary. We did try the arbitrary exercise, "Shall we call it this, that, or the other?" But then it did emerge naturally, I think, from the conversations that we had.

**CB:** I think that's the issue isn't it? Whatever we pick, whatever is selected as that word that we add to religion, it's going to be problematic anyway.

**WD:** *Well I think that's a good point to stop, if everybody's ok with that. And can I say a very sincere "thank you" to Dr Joyce Miller, Professor Eleanor Nesbitt, and Celine Benoit, for this interesting conversation. And can I ask Religious Studies Project Listeners to visit the Commission for Religious Education's website where they can find the report? And there's also some information on that website about getting behind the report if you would like to do that. We'll put the link to the report on the web page for this podcast. Thank you for listening.*

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