



## The Future of Learning about Religion and Belief

**British Sociological Association Sociology of Religion Study Group (SocRel) Annual  
Response Day**

[www.socrel.org.uk](http://www.socrel.org.uk)

Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> November 2015 10am - 4 pm

Venue: BSA Offices, Imperial Warf, Townmead Road, Fulham SW6 2PY



## Welcome

In light of the continued focus on learning about religion, not just in schools but also in wider society, the SocRel response day will explore the future of learning about religion and belief from a variety of perspectives, reflecting not only on what the future might hold, but also considering what knowledge we need for encountering religion in the modern world today.

Despite the long held assumption that we live in an increasingly secular society, the continued presence and visibility of religion in both the public and private sphere means that religion is still as significant and important as ever. As we encounter religion in everyday spaces and places throughout our lives, understanding and awareness about faith traditions is necessary for all sorts of professions, sectors and organisations. However, after decades of silence on the subject, many are lacking this essential knowledge. This coupled with suspicion and anxiety about religion, fuelled by media outlets and political agendas, means that we are increasingly ill-equipped to talk about religion comfortably and confidently in our daily lives.

In an increasingly diverse and multi faith society, it is vital that we have the necessary knowledge to understand the various faiths and religious practices in our world. Religion permeates most if not all areas of life and cannot be simply syphoned out or compartmentalised. As such we need to have insight and awareness about religion for everyday life situations and this learning should not start and finish in schools; we need a continued education. But what expertise do we need and how should we learn about this? Would a social worker need to know the same as a lawyer? Is 'religious talk' the same in politics as it is in business? And if we are to have different levels or types of 'religious literacy', how do we ensure accuracy and consistency within such learning schemes?

The SocRel response day aims to consider this through a series of presentations and plenary discussions, covering a range of topics related to the future of learning about religion and belief. The day will be highly participative and engaged. The symposium will be organised as a single stream so that the day is as much about discussion as it is about presentation.



## Programme Overview

10:00 – 10:15	<i>Registration</i>
10:15 – 10:25	<i>Welcome Address</i> Professor Adam Dinham (Goldsmiths)
10:25 – 11:25	<i>Keynote Address</i> Professor Robert Jackson (Warwick University)
11:25 -11:45	<i>Coffee Break</i>
11:45 - 12:30	<i>Educating civil servants for religion and diversity</i> Dr Amanda van Eck (Inform & LSE)
12:30 -13:15	<i>REforREal -What should young people leave school knowing about religion and belief?</i> Martha Shaw (Goldsmiths)
13:15 – 14:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14:00 – 14:45	<i>The role of religion in a ‘secular’ university</i> Dr Matthew Francis (Lancaster University)
14:45 – 15:45	<i>Plenary</i> Questions prepared in advance for speakers
15:45 – 16:00	<i>Closing Remarks</i> Professor Adam Dinham (Goldsmiths)

## Keynote Speaker: Professor Robert Jackson (Warwick University)

Robert Jackson PhD DLitt FAcSS was Director of Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (1994-2012) and is Professor of Religions and Education at the University of Warwick, UK. He has been involved since 2002 in the Council of Europe's work on the place of religions and non-religious convictions in intercultural education, and was Special Adviser to the European Wergeland Centre 2009-2014, holding a Visiting Professorship at Oslo University College. He has been involved in international research and development, including the European Commission-funded REDCo project, and the OSCE's work on religion and education. He was Editor of the *British Journal of Religious Education* (1996-2011). In 2013 he received the William Rainey Harper Award from the Religious Education Association of the USA and Canada, presented to 'outstanding leaders whose work in other fields has had a profound impact upon religious education'.

His publications include 26 books such as *Religious Education: An Interpretive Approach* (1997/2002); *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality* (2004); *Religion, Education, Dialogue and Conflict: Perspectives on Religious Education Research*, (2012) and *Religious Education at Schools in Europe, Part 2: Western Europe* (2014). His latest book on education, *Signposts: Policy and Practice for Teaching about Religions and Non-Religious Worldviews in Intercultural Education* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2014), was written on behalf of a joint committee representing the Council of Europe and the European Wergeland Centre. *Signposts* provides ideas for policy makers, schools and teacher educators across Europe, for discussing the implementation of the 2008 Council of Europe Ministerial Recommendation on teaching about religions and nonreligious convictions as a contribution to intercultural education. Bob also works as a jazz musician and is a Patron of the Humph Trust, supporting young jazz musicians, in memory of Humphrey Lyttelton. A book of Bob's poems (together with those of Dermot Killingley) – *Narrowboat Music* – has just been published (Newcastle upon Tyne: Grevatt & Grevatt).

[a free pdf of *Signposts* can be downloaded from the European Wergeland Centre website at [http://www.theewc.org/uploads/files/00Signposts%20Web%2016X24\\_web%20PDF%20TEXT%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.theewc.org/uploads/files/00Signposts%20Web%2016X24_web%20PDF%20TEXT%20FINAL.pdf).

Some examples of Bob's music are at <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ces/research/wreru/aboutus/staff/rj/jazz/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQblrYCnFo0> ]

## Professor Robert Jackson: Some recent and relevant publications

Jackson, R. (2014) *'Signposts': Policy and Practice for Teaching about Religions and Non-Religious Worldviews in Intercultural Education*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing. Downloadable free from [http://www.theewc.org/uploads/files/00Signposts%20Web%2016X24\\_web%20PDF%20TEXT%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.theewc.org/uploads/files/00Signposts%20Web%2016X24_web%20PDF%20TEXT%20FINAL.pdf)

Rothgangel M., Jackson R. and Jäggle M. (eds.) (2014), *Religious Education at Schools in Europe. Volume 2: Western Europe* (Wiener Forum für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft, Band 10.2), Göttingen: Vienna University Press/V&R unipress.

Arweck, E. and Jackson, R. (Eds.) (2014) *Religion, Education and Society: Young People, Religious Identity, Socialisation and Diversity*, London: Routledge.

Jackson, R. (Ed.) (2012) *Religion, Education, Dialogue and Conflict: Perspectives on Religious Education Research*, London: Routledge. <http://www.theewc.org/news/view/new.publication.religion.education.dialogue.and.conflict/>

Formerly published as a special issue of *British Journal of Religious Education*, 33 (2), 2011

### Articles

Jackson, R. (2015) The Politicisation and Securitisation of Religious Education? A Rejoinder, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Special Issue on Education, Security and Intelligence Studies, 63 (3), 345-366.

Jackson, R. (2015) Misrepresenting Religious Education's Past and Present in Looking Forward: Gearon Using Kuhn's Concepts of Paradigm, Paradigm Shift and Incommensurability, *Journal of Beliefs and Values: Studies in Religion & Education*, 36:1, 64-78.

Jackson, R. (2014) The Development and Dissemination of Council of Europe Policy on Education about Religions and Non-religious Convictions, *Journal of Beliefs and Values: Studies in Religion & Education*, 35, (2), 133-143.

### Chapters

Jackson, R. (2015 forthcoming) 'Inclusive Study of Religions and Other Worldviews in Publicly-funded Schools in Democratic Societies' in Kristina Stoeckl (Ed.) *The Future of Religious Education in Europe*, San Domenico di Fiesole: European University Institute, 7-18. (should appear freely available shortly on EUI website)

Jackson, R (2014) Addressing Religious Extremism: a Positive Approach for Policy Makers and Practitioners, in Daniel Cere & Thomas Thorp (eds.), *Religion and Conflict: Responding to the Challenges* (London: Tony Blair Faith Foundation), 70-77. (available free online at <http://tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/foundation/news/addressing-religious-extremism-positive-approach-policy-makers-and-practitioners#>)

### **Reviews**

Jackson, Robert (2015) review of Barnes, L. P., 2014, *Education, Religion and Diversity: Developing a New Model of Religious Education*, London: Routledge, in *British Journal of Religious Education*, 37 (2), 207-211.

### **Short Web-based articles**

Jackson, R (2011) Cameron, 'multiculturalism' and education about religions and beliefs

<http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/14271>

Jackson, R (2010) Antiracist Education, Multicultural Education and the Interpretive Approach

[http://www.theewc.org/uploads/files/State%20of%20the%20Art April 2010 RJackson.pdf](http://www.theewc.org/uploads/files/State%20of%20the%20Art%20April%202010%20RJackson.pdf)

Jackson, Robert (2009) 'Understanding the religions and worldviews of others', Alliance of Civilizations Forum, Istanbul, Turkey, 6 April 2009

<http://erb.unaoc.org/understanding-the-religions-and-worldviews-of-others/>

Jackson, Robert (2009) 'Studying Religions: The Interpretive Approach in Brief'

<http://www.theewc.org/library/category/view/studying-religions-the-interpretive-approach-in-brief/>



## Educating civil servants for religion and diversity Dr Amanda van Eck (Inform and LSE)

Religious literacy is important, especially for those who have an active role in policy and governance. Yet, in years of working with civil servants, I have learned that one should not necessarily assume a sound knowledge base on topics they are working with. Easily solved, one would think – communicate religious literacy. However, I have learned that the best way to teach, in such a context, is to first understand what they want to know, why, and how this knowledge will fit with other priorities (such as time constraints). Simply put, there is no point in preparing a large and detailed report if it will not be read. The reality is that civil servants often work against the clock themselves, and there are many other (and free) information sources, many only a few clicks away. The academic, here, has to develop a sort of ethnographic awareness of the ‘civil service milieu’ in order to achieve the goal of effectively instilling religious literacy.

Amanda is the deputy director of Inform, a non-profit information centre specializing in minority religious movements, spiritualities, and fringe ideological movements, based at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) in London, UK. In her training as a sociologist (with a focus on religion), and as part of Inform’s work, Amanda has researched a wide area of topics and issues dealing with minority and/or new religions.



## REforREal -What should young people leave school knowing about religion and belief? Martha Shaw (Goldsmiths)

This is the question posed by a new national study of teaching and learning about religion and belief in schools in England, conducted by the Faiths and Civil Society Unit at Goldsmiths, University of London. Researchers asked 330 people - employers and teachers, students and parents in 19 schools, what they think should be the purpose, content, and structure of teaching and learning in this area - whether inside or outside of RE itself. With the research report being launched later this month, this question remains key to both the ongoing national conversation about the future of RE in schools and to the wider discussion around religious literacy. This paper will draw on the data from this research to discuss what it means to be religiously literate. It will explore the range of perspectives generated in the research on the shape and the purpose of learning about religion and belief in schools.

Martha Shaw is a researcher at the Faiths & Civil Society Unit at Goldsmiths, University of London. She is a qualified teacher in Social Science and spent 4 years as Head of Sociology at a London secondary school. She has worked on a number of faith based research and projects both within the Unit and in practice settings. She is currently lead researcher on REforReal: What do pupils really need to learn about religion and belief in UK Schools? This 12 month project explores the view of parents, teachers, pupils and employers and feeds into national debates around the future of Religious Education



## The role of religion in a 'secular' university Dr Matthew Francis (Lancaster University)

In this paper I will present the findings of a case study undertaken into the religious literacy of a UK Higher Education Institution (HEI). Focusing on its policies and strategic leadership we sought to explore the role of religion and belief within the institution. These issues were framed within a discussion of key areas where religion and belief are seen to impact upon the HEI sector, as demonstrated through the work of the Religious Literacy Leadership Programme. Through interviews with heads of academic and operational departments as well as the strategic leadership we explored the role that religion has played within a nominally 'secular' institution. The data from these interviews were supplemented by a review of the published policies as well as a further investigation into the experiences of students and staff. This research forms provides an in-depth, institution-level study that builds on other recent research projects in the field.

Matthew is a Senior Research Associate in the Psychology Department at Lancaster University and Communications Director of the Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats. Prior to joining Lancaster he worked at the charity Inform, researching minority Islamic and far-right groups and also managed, and researched religious literacy with, the Religious Literacy programme at Goldsmiths. His current work focuses on the discourses of religious and non-religious groups, researching the role non-negotiable beliefs and values play in motivating and justifying violent action. He founded and edits the website [www.RadicalisationResearch.org](http://www.RadicalisationResearch.org) which highlights high-quality academic research on radicalisation, extremism and fundamentalism.



