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| Institution: Lancaster University | | |
| Unit of Assessment: 31, Theology and Religious Studies | | |
| Title of case study: Updating and Improving How Religion is Handled in Schools | | |
| Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000 to 2020 | | |
| Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit: | | |
| Name(s): | Role(s) (e.g. job title): | Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: |
| Linda Woodhead MBE | Distinguished Professor | August 1995 to present |
| Period when the claimed impact occurred: December 2015 to December 2020 | | |
| Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N | | |
| <p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The legislation that regulates how religion is handled in schools in England and Wales dates from 1944 and reflects the influence of the churches at that time. Research by Woodhead reveals how much the cultural and religious landscape has changed since then, shedding light on church decline, the growth of multiple new forms of religion and spirituality, and the rise of 'no religion' to become the majority affiliation. Further research on schools reveals problems arising from the disjunction between this situation and the 1944 law, which still applies. The impact of the research has been: (1) to identify and highlight the most pressing problems relating to religion and schools and how they can be solved; (2) to create a new push for change in policy and practice involving many different stakeholders, all now working with a common purpose; (3) progression towards legislative reform, and; (4) a broadening of RE in the classroom to include 'worldviews' and a more appropriate diversity.</p> | | |
| <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Using a variety of empirical methods, Woodhead has documented and analysed religious change since the 1970s [R1-R6]. In a novel series of national surveys [R8a-e], she captured changing attitudes, beliefs and values and revealed that, in or around 2015, 'no religion' became the majority affiliation in Great Britain for the first time. Her analysis has examined the diversity within this 'no-religion' constituency, finding that it is not straightforwardly secular [R8,R9]. Her work on an EU FP6 project informed a new approach to Islam in <i>Everyday Lived Islam in Europe</i> [G5,R3]. Her book with Brown, <i>That Was the Church that Was</i> analysed the collapse of the Church of England after the 1980s [R4]. Under Woodhead's direction, the £12m AHRC/ESRC Religion and Society Programme [G4] commissioned an unparalleled body of research on religion and non-religion in Britain, including work on schools such as Conroy et al, <i>Does Religious Education Work?</i> (2015); Madge, <i>Youth on Religion</i> (2014); Arweck, ed., <i>Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity</i> (2017)). Results were synthesised in Woodhead and Catto (eds), <i>Religion and Change in Modern Britain</i> [R2]. Two recent international funding awards are supporting further research on religious/non-religious diversity and its implications for education [G1,G2].</p> <p>The growing disjunction between the religious profile of Great Britain and religion in schools was highlighted by a survey and analysis of attitudes to faith schools by Woodhead [R8-10]. This informed a Westminster Faith Debate on 'The Future of Religion in Schools', with Richard Dawkins and the Bishop of Oxford responding to the research [G3]. Levitt and Woodhead's study of admissions criteria in Leicester schools [R7] revealed that children of non-religious, working-class parents are particularly disadvantaged by the current situation. The research identifies three main areas in which problems are evident in schools in England and Wales: (1) flouting of the requirement to hold a daily act of worship of a 'broadly Christian character'; (2) patchy resourcing, provision and quality of Religious Education (RE) in schools; (3) confusing criteria for admission to some faith schools (which represent 37% of primary schools and 19% of secondary schools in England). The research informs the proposed solutions to these problems discussed in Section 4, and the resulting impacts.</p> | | |
| <p>3. References to the research</p> <p>[R1] P.Heelas and L.Woodhead, <i>The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality</i>. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005 (pp.xii+204). Held by HEI. Peer-reviewed.</p> | | |

- [R2] L.Woodhead and R.Catto, eds., *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*. London: Routledge, 2012 (pp.xvi+408). Held by HEI. *Peer-reviewed*.
- [R3] L.Woodhead, N.Dessing, N.Jeldtoft and J.Nielsen, eds., *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe*. Aldershot: Ashgate 2013 (pp.196). Held by HEI. *Peer reviewed*.
- [R4] A.Brown and L.Woodhead, *That Was the Church That Was: How the Church of England Lost the English People* London: Bloomsbury 2016 (pp.241). Held by HEI.
- [R5] L.Woodhead, 'The Rise of "No Religion" in Britain: The Emergence of a New Cultural Majority'. *Journal of the British Academy*, 4, 2016 (pp.245–61). doi.org/10.5871/jba/004.245
Peer reviewed.
- [R6] K.Tusting and L.Woodhead, 'Kendal revisited: The study of spirituality then and now'. In S.Pile, ed., *Spaces of Spirituality*. London: Routledge, 2018 (pp.124-138).
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315398426>
- [R7] M.Levitt and L.Woodhead, 'Choosing a Faith School in Leicester'. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 41(1), 2018 (pp.224-241). *Peer reviewed*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2018.1478276>.
- [R8a] L.Woodhead, Westminster Faith Debates Surveys: 'Faith and Personal Life' Jan 2013;
[R8b] 'Faith and Public Life' June 2013; [R8c] 'Catholic adults' Dec 2015; [R8d] 'Anglican Clergy';
[R8e] 'Nones' Dec 2015. All available [here](#).
- [R9] L.Woodhead, accessible research analysis (20 reports) on the above surveys [here](#).
- [R10] L.Woodhead, *What British People Really Believe*. Special issue of *Modern Believing* Vol 55(1) 2014 (pp.74) (based on Westminster Faith Debates). <https://doi.org/10.3828/mb.2014.9>

Peer-reviewed research grants:

- [G1] Woodhead (Co-I and joint lead on the 'Education' strand), *Non-Religion in a Complex Future*, SSHRC Canada: (2019-2026) CAD2.5million
- [G2] Woodhead (Co-I), *iGen Project*, The Knight Foundation (USA): (2016-2019) USD400,000
- [G3] Woodhead (PI) *Westminster Faith Debates*, AHRC/ESRC: (2012-2015) GBP180,000
- [G4] Woodhead (Director of Research Programme), *Religion and Society Programme*, AHRC/ESRC: (2007-2012) GBP12million
- [G5] Woodhead (Co-I), *Values, Equality and Identities in Liberal Societies*, EU FP6: (2005-2008) GBP1.2million

4. Details of the impact

When this work began in 2015, problems with religion in schools were not on the public or political radar and substantial positive change seemed inconceivable. By 2020, the problems were being discussed in the media, Parliament, by dedicated public commissions, and by teaching associations. Consensus about what needs to change had grown, government had been influenced, steps had been taken towards legislative change, and a major updating of how religion is taught in the classroom was underway. To achieve these impacts, Woodhead partnered with former Education Secretary Charles Clarke who had established a non-statutory syllabus for RE. They began by highlighting the problems and recommendations revealed by Woodhead's research in *A New Settlement: Religion in Schools* (ANS1, 2015).

(1) Identifying and Highlighting the problems around religion in schools

ANS1 is a 39-page booklet written for a wide audience that builds on Woodhead's research [R1-3, R8-10] to set out the current problems with how religion is handled in schools and offer detailed proposals for change. It breaks down the findings and recommendations into three areas (a) Act of Collective Worship – recommends allowing schools to shape the content of assemblies in keeping with their ethos and values (b) RE – recommends that it follows other school subjects in being guided by a national curriculum rather than the current incoherent plethora of 'local determinations' (c) admission to faith schools – recommends immediate simplification and gradual voluntary removal of faith-based selection.

Launched in the House of Lords in 2015, in print and online, ANS1 was extensively covered in the media (including the *Economist*, *Financial Times*, *Guardian*, *Independent*, *Times*) with total audience reach estimated at 131m (source: Agility) [S1]. Following the launch, Woodhead and Clarke held more than 100 face-to-face meetings with influential individual stakeholders to discuss ANS1, including three successive Education Secretaries, the Minister of State for

Education, the Chair of the Working Group for School Reform, the Ofsted Chief Inspector, local government officers, trades union representatives and National Schools Adjudicators (full list on Faith Debates [website](#)). One-to-one meetings were also held with leaders of faith and secular groups including the Chair of the Association of Muslim Schools, the Chief Executive of Humanists UK, a senior Orthodox Rabbi, Jewish Board of Deputies Officers, the Chief Executive of the National Secular Society, the Bishop of Lambeth and the former Archbishop of Canterbury. Three by-invitation seminars were held with representatives of the main faith bodies. St George's House Windsor (a private conference centre attached to Windsor Castle dedicated to high-level social consultations) hosted a two-day consultation event in 2016 dedicated to discussion of *ANS1* with thirty prominent stakeholders from religion and education. The report issued by St George's House further raised the profile of the issue [S2]. Woodhead and Clarke also addressed many gatherings, including teachers' and SACRE conferences. The Chief Schools Adjudicator comments: *"By improving knowledge and understanding, [Woodhead] has encouraged more informed debate at all levels including amongst local authorities, school governing bodies and academy trusts which are responsible for admission policies enabling discussions on best practice to develop"* [S3a].

Following the consultations, and informed by new research [R4-7], Woodhead and Clarke published a revised 58-page policy booklet, *A New Settlement Revised: Religion in Schools* (*ANS2*, 2018) launched in the House of Commons. The event was attended by 75 invitees, including politicians, representatives of teaching associations, and faith bodies. The even higher level of media coverage given to *ANS2* than *ANS1* demonstrates success in raising the agenda: estimated audience reach increased from 131m in 2015 to 304m in 2018 (source: Agility) [S1]. This included in-depth coverage in the *Economist*, *Financial Times*, *Times*, *Telegraph*, *TES*, *BBC News* website, *Church Times*, and *Tablet*. The *Guardian* dedicated an entire editorial and commented that: *"Charles Clarke, a former education secretary and home secretary, and Linda Woodhead, a sociologist of religion, suggest a long-overdue clean up of this mess...In a diverse and multi-faith country, schools need to become places where values are both lived and examined. A reformed education in belief is an essential part of that process."* (19 July 2018) [S1]. Internationally, Education Ministers from Egypt, Georgia, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Tunisia and Uzbekistan and representatives of the Holy See have all shown an interest in *ANS1* and 2 in relation to their national institutions.

A former HMI for Schools and national lead on RE commented that *"the most noteworthy achievement... has been to map out a way forward and describe what change might look like. There is an intellectual rigour to their proposals, which are grounded in a deep understanding of the sociological and historical background to religious education in England and Wales"* [S3b].

(2) A revitalised push for change involving many different stakeholders all working with a common purpose

The research, disseminated through *ANS1* and 2 and resulting debate and coverage, quickly generated new energy, confidence and coherence in campaigning for change and achieving an overlapping consensus.

- **Example 1:** The Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life and its report *Living with Difference* (2015) cites Woodhead's research [R1,R2] and offers recommendations on schools that support those in *ANS1* (also referenced in the report) including repeal of the legal requirement for schools to hold acts of collective worship, a 'nationally agreed' curriculum for RE, and 'measures to reduce selection of pupils and staff on grounds of religion' [S4]. The Chair of the Commission confirms: *"The way in which this whole issue has risen up the agenda in public debate, and the emergence of a growing consensus for change, has been significantly helped by this work [of Woodhead and Clarke]"* [S3c].
- **Example 2:** In 2016, a National Commission on Religious Education was established to 'review the legal, education, and policy frameworks for religious education (RE)'. Chaired by the Dean of Westminster Abbey, its report *Religion and Worldviews* supports many conclusions of *ANS1* and cites Woodhead's research on 'no religion' [R5, S5]. The report was debated in the House of Lords. A government response acknowledged that a 'general consensus' had been secured, but felt that 'now is not the time to begin these reforms' because of a current 'priority to provide stability to schools'.

- Additional examples drawing on *ANS1* and *ANS2* include NATRE (National Association of Teachers of RE) web resource '*ANS1 Discussion Prompts*' for teachers [S9]; research by A.Dinham and M.Shaw (2015); books by M.Chater (2017 and 2020) on RE, and P.Cumper and A.Mahwhinney (2018) on assemblies; Theos think tank's consultations '*The Future of RE: Debating Reform*' (2018); the '*Reforming RE*' blogspace (2020).

A leading educationalist and former CEO of Culham St Gabriel's Trust (the major charitable trust supporting RE) said of Woodhead and Clarke's work: "*The impact of all this is that [today] no politician, academic, or teacher can have an informed conversation about RE without including the change agenda and making connections between the structures that underpin RE legally and the performance of the subject academically in schools. To have won this level of public and professional appetite for change, and grasp of complex structural issues, since 2015 is a remarkable achievement*" [S3d].

(3) Driving progress towards legislative change

- Woodhead and Clarke drafted four batches of parliamentary questions that were asked by an MP in 2017 and late in 2020. The responses (reported in Hansard) highlighted serious problems including failure to monitor schools not offering RE [S6]. In 2016 the House of Commons produced a Briefing Paper 'Religious Education in Schools' and in 2018 'Faith Schools in England FAQs', both of which draw on Woodhead's research via *ANS1* and *ANS2* in order to update parliamentarians and civil servants [S7].
- Woodhead and Clarke made a Submission to the governments' consultation document 'Schools That Work for All' (2016) informed by Woodhead's research [R2-3,R6,R8-9] to (1) argue against the proposal to remove the 50% 'cap' on faith-based admissions in new free schools, and (2) argue for investment in the Schools Linking Network. The government responded by withdrawing the proposal to remove the cap and investing in the Schools Linking Network [S8]. By 2020, The Linking Network extended from Newcastle to Kent and has benefitted 81,115 pupils [S3i]. An evaluation report in 2018 described the programme as having had 'a significant positive impact on pupils, teachers, schools, local linking programmes, the development of new partnerships, community relations and local authorities.' Woodhead and Clarke made an additional Submission to the government's 'Integrated Communities Strategy' Green Paper (2018) which recognised the importance of faith and schools in building cohesive communities. The Co-Director of the Schools Linking Network says, '*Following [Clarke and Woodhead's] Submission, the government did invest in The Linking Network, first providing funding in Spring 2017. This has been ongoing in each year since then with a 3-way matched funding agreement...It has allowed us to greatly expand the reach and scope of our work with schools*' [S3i].
- Woodhead and Clarke carried out work with the major education-providing Churches to enact reforms that build pressure for legislative reform. The RC Church is now reforming and simplifying faith selection criteria in all its schools and the Church of England is introducing a new process and 'admissions builder' app to help its schools do the same.

An MP and Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Faith and Society confirms: '*[Woodhead's] research – which underpins her proposals for a new approach to religion in schools – has been uniquely valuable, bringing clarity to a vital but underacknowledged aspect of national life... The law has not yet changed. There is, however, greater awareness of the need for change, and a growing recognition that it is a necessity... I believe the law will eventually change, as the current situation is unsustainable. The thinking of Woodhead and Clarke will have been influential in bringing change about, and in the form of change adopted*' [S3h].

(4) Updating RE in the classroom to include 'worldviews' and greater diversity

Woodhead's research on non-religion [R5, R10] has contributed to recent initiatives to update the way RE is taught in the classroom, including the move towards a 'Religion and Worldviews' approach (in England) and 'Religion, Ethics and Values' (in Wales). This involves greater alignment between approaches in schools and universities, with more emphasis on the diversity of lived religious and non-religious experience. This approach was endorsed by the RE Commission in its *Final Report* [S5]. In 2020 a project sponsored by the RE Council (involving Woodhead as a participant) commissioned a literature review and expert report on a 'worldview'

approach. The preparation of new classroom materials is now underway. The recent Norfolk Syllabus for RE already shows the influence of this change. Its co-author, the current CEO of Culham St Gabriel's Trust, confirms that Woodhead's *"research and publications have been a contributing factor in shaping my overall thinking and approach to the development of the Syllabus... Woodhead has influenced and helped shape the growing appetite for change and consensus on the form that change should take in Culham St Gabriel's Trust, the Commission for Religious Education and the legislature with far-reaching implications for the religious education community and the children who are its beneficiaries"* [S3e].

The Chair of the Commission on RE (CORE) added: *"Woodhead's research on non-religious worldviews and on spirituality has been influential in rethinking the approach to Religious Education. This had an impact on the re-imagining of effective RE, as highlighted in in the CORE report Religion and Worldviews: the way forward. A National Plan for RE. The report cites research by Professor Woodhead"* [S3f].

Leading educationalist Barbara Wintersgill (APPG for RE, Graduate School of Education University of Exeter) commented that Woodhead *"has done more than any other scholar not just to evidence the growth of 'no religion' but to probe what is involved in identifying as a 'none'... I have incorporated these findings on 'no religion' into the curriculum materials I am creating... Woodhead's research supports a fundamental reconfiguration of the approach we take to religion and non-religion in a way that is helping produce the lasting change and revitalisation of the study of RE in schools that is needed. Since the latter is compulsory for all pupils the importance of this change cannot be overestimated"* [S3g].

Summary

Woodhead's research, and the research-policy partnership with Clarke, has highlighted the need to improve the way that religion is handled in schools, and given a new impetus, profile and direction to the drive to do so. Changes are already taking place in the classroom, new materials are in preparation, and a new confidence is apparent. The gap between the study of religion in schools and universities is narrowing. A number of major blockages to enacting new legislation to replace the 1944 Act have been removed, and a new consensus and pressure for change has created the intellectual, policy and political climate that makes it much easier for a government to act. Although Brexit and COVID-19 have delayed legislative reform, change is already underway in schools, faith groups and professional associations, and the goal of fundamental reform and improvement is now much closer than when this research-driven effort began five years ago.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[S1] media coverage evidence portfolio from 16 major news outlets (2015-2018)

[S2] A New Settlement: Religion & Belief in Schools. A St George's House Consultation (2016)

[S3] Testimonials from (a) the Chief Adjudicator for Schools (2020) (b) former HMI for Schools and the national lead on RE (2020) (c) Chair of the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life (2020) (d) former CEO of Culham St Gabriel's Trust (2019) (e) current CEO of Culham St Gabriel's Trust (2020) (f) Chair of the Commission on RE (CORE) (2020) (g) Barbara Wintersgill (2020) (h) MP and Chair of the AAPG on Faith and Society (2020) (i) Co-Director, Schools Linking Network (2021)

[S4] Report of the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life (Woolf Institute, Cambridge 2015), referencing *A New Settlement* (section 4, pp.30-39)

[S5] Commission on Religious Education. Final Report: Religion and Worldviews the Way Forward. A National Plan for RE. Sept 2018 (reference to Woodhead's research, p.6)

[S6] In Hansard: Government responses to our Parliamentary questions: evidence bundle contains responses to 3 batches of questions asked by S.Timms MP on 16 April 2018 (batch 1, 134699), 20 March 2018 (batch 2, 133477), 26 March 2018 (batch 3, 133480)

[S7] House of Commons Briefing Paper 'Religious Education in Schools (England)'. No.07167, 7 July 2016 'Faith Schools in England FAQs' 208

[S8] Government response to consultation 'Schools that Work for Everyone', May 2018 (see pp.13-15, which takes account of points we make)

[S9] National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) – 'Discussion Prompts for A New Settlement' (October, 2015)