

# Religions and Worldviews Education: A Collaborative, Research-Informed Educational Approach to Strengthening Social Cohesion

Submission to the Royal Commission into Antisemitism and Social Cohesion

Submitted by:

Faith Communities Council of Victoria (FCCV)

With the support and collaboration of:

- Multifaith Education Collaboration (MFEC)
- Faith Values
- Australian Multicultural Foundation
- Centre for Multicultural Youth

Research and academic partners:

- University of Melbourne
- Australian Catholic University

FCCV member faith communities include:

- Baha'i Community of Victoria
- Brahma Kumaris Australia
- Buddhist Council of Victoria
- Hindu Council of Australia (Vic)
- Islamic Council of Victoria
- Jain Council of Victoria
- Jewish Community Council of Victoria
- Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria
- Victorian Council of Churches

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# Executive Summary

The Faith Communities Council of Victoria welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Royal Commission into Antisemitism and Social Cohesion.

We acknowledge the seriousness of antisemitism and the profound impact it has on Jewish Australians. Antisemitism undermines individual safety, community confidence, belonging and social cohesion. It requires a coordinated response across government, education, civil society, law enforcement, security, cultural institutions and community sectors.

We particularly acknowledge the gravity of the Bondi terrorist attack of 14 December 2025, the lives lost and harmed, and the deep trauma experienced by Jewish Australians. Any response to social cohesion must begin by recognising that antisemitism is not abstract. It affects the safety, belonging and daily life of Jewish communities.

At the same time, Australia is experiencing broader challenges associated with Islamophobia, religious vilification, racism, online hate and increasing social polarisation. These forms of prejudice are distinct and should not be conflated. However, they often emerge from common patterns of misinformation, stereotyping, fear, dehumanisation and collective blame.

This submission acknowledges that antisemitism requires direct and serious attention. Its focus on broader religious and worldview literacy is not intended to dilute that task. Rather, it reflects the view that countering antisemitism is strengthened when young Australians learn to engage respectfully across religious, cultural and worldview difference.

Religions and Worldviews Education (RWE) is an emerging educational approach that supports students to understand religious and non-religious worldviews, engage respectfully with difference and develop greater religious literacy. It is not presented as a complete solution to antisemitism or other forms of hatred. Rather, it is a practical, preventative educational contribution that can help reduce ignorance, challenge stereotypes, build bridging social capital and create conditions that support mutual respect and social cohesion.

By helping young people understand religious and non-religious worldviews, engage respectfully across difference and critically examine stereotypes and misinformation, Religions and Worldviews Education contributes to the broader civic foundations of democracy, freedom, the rule of law and social cohesion identified in the Commission's Terms of Reference.

Victoria is currently piloting an RWE program developed through collaboration between faith communities, educators and researchers. The pilot has been developed through the Multifaith Education Collaboration, auspiced by the Faith Communities Council of Victoria and is convened and coordinated by Faith Values. It has drawn on the lived knowledge of diverse faith communities, educational design expertise, international developments in RWE, and research and evaluation support from the University of Melbourne.

To date, the pilot has trained 39 teachers across 15 Victorian secondary schools, with potential reach to approximately 800 students. Early feedback from teachers and school leaders suggests the approach has significant promise.

This submission recommends further government support, research, evaluation and resourcing for Religions and Worldviews Education as one practical contribution to Australia's broader social cohesion agenda.

## 1. Relevance to the Royal Commission's Terms of Reference

This submission is particularly relevant to the Royal Commission's consideration of measures that can strengthen social cohesion, support the national consensus in favour of democracy, freedom and the rule of law, counter the spread of ideologically and religiously motivated extremism, and support educational and cultural institutions in responding to antisemitism and related social cohesion challenges.

The submission does not suggest that education alone can prevent antisemitism, religious hatred or extremism. However, it submits that schools are key civic institutions in which young Australians can develop the knowledge, habits and dispositions needed to live respectfully in a religiously, culturally and philosophically diverse society.

Religions and Worldviews Education contributes to the Commission's work by offering a practical, preventative and education-based approach that can:

- improve young people's understanding of Jewish life, history, identity and contribution;
- help students recognise stereotypes, scapegoating, conspiracy thinking, collective blame and dehumanisation;
- strengthen respectful dialogue across religious, cultural and worldview difference;
- build religious and worldview literacy as part of democratic citizenship;
- support schools and teachers to address sensitive issues in curriculum-aligned and age-appropriate ways;
- contribute to the broader social conditions in which antisemitism, Islamophobia, religious vilification, racism and polarisation are less likely to take root.

This submission therefore offers RWE as one practical contribution to the Commission's broader consideration of social cohesion and prevention.

## 2. About Faith Communities Council of Victoria and the Collaborative Partnership

The Faith Communities Council of Victoria is Victoria's peak multifaith body. For more than two decades, FCCV has worked to promote understanding, cooperation and dialogue

between diverse faith communities and to strengthen relationships between faith communities, government and wider society.

FCCV's member faith communities include the Baha'i Community of Victoria, Brahma Kumaris Australia, Buddhist Council of Victoria, Hindu Council of Australia (Victoria), Islamic Council of Victoria, Jain Council of Victoria, Jewish Community Council of Victoria, Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria and Victorian Council of Churches.

FCCV provides the auspicing framework for the Victorian Religions and Worldviews Education Pilot and supports collaboration across participating faith communities. This gives the submission a distinctive perspective: it is grounded not only in educational aspiration, but in the lived experience and constructive cooperation of Victoria's diverse faith communities.

The RWE pilot has been developed through the Multifaith Education Collaboration, convened and coordinated by Faith Values, with support from educators, researchers, school leaders and community partners. This collaborative model demonstrates the willingness of faith communities to work together constructively in support of young people, schools and the wider public good.

### 3. What is Already Happening and What Could Be Amplified

The Victorian Religions and Worldviews Education Pilot is not a theoretical proposal. It is an emerging, practical initiative developed over four years through collaboration between faith communities, educators and researchers.

The RWE pilot has already produced:

- curriculum-aligned classroom resources;
- teacher professional learning;
- engagement with 39 teachers across 15 Victorian secondary schools;
- potential reach to approximately 800 students;
- participation from diverse faith community representatives;
- research and evaluation involvement from the University of Melbourne;
- academic contribution from Australian Catholic University;
- early teacher and school feedback indicating positive impact.

The pilot has been developed by people from different faith traditions who share a commitment to strengthening social cohesion by improving religious literacy. In a period of heightened social tension, this collaboration is itself a practical demonstration of social cohesion in action.

With further support, the pilot could be expanded into a broader, properly evaluated implementation phase. This would enable wider school participation, further teacher professional learning, independent evaluation, resource refinement, and preparation for broader implementation from 2027.

The Royal Commission has an opportunity to recognise this existing work and recommend that it be supported, evaluated and amplified as part of Australia's long-term social cohesion infrastructure.

## 4. The Challenge of Social Cohesion

Australia is one of the most religiously and culturally diverse nations in the world. This diversity is a significant strength, but it also requires ongoing investment in understanding, inclusion, respectful dialogue and civic trust.

Recent years have seen growing concern regarding antisemitism, Islamophobia, religious vilification, racism and social polarisation. International conflicts, online misinformation and increasingly fragmented public discourse have intensified these challenges.

Many young Australians encounter complex issues relating to religion, identity, prejudice and conflict through social media, news coverage, peer discussion, family conversations and community experience. Teachers are increasingly required to respond to these issues, but often report limited confidence, resources and professional preparation.

A focus on one community alone is unlikely to build the bridging social capital needed for long-term social cohesion. To address antisemitism and other forms of racism and religious hatred, students need opportunities to learn with and from one another, ask respectful questions, recognise stereotypes and develop the civic habits required to live well in a diverse democracy.

Educational approaches that improve understanding of religious and worldview diversity therefore have an important role to play in strengthening social cohesion. This is especially important because religious and worldview diversity is often underdeveloped in broader approaches to inclusion, diversity and citizenship education.

## 5. Why Religions and Worldviews Education Matters

Religions and Worldviews Education helps students understand the beliefs, practices, histories, values and lived experiences of people from diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds.

Rather than promoting any particular belief system, RWE develops broader religious and worldview literacy. It supports students to understand how individuals and communities make meaning, form identity, live with convictions, practise traditions, ask big questions and contribute to shared civic life.

RWE is not simply textbook-based learning about religion. At its best, it is dialogical, reflexive and relational. It creates structured classroom opportunities for students to

explore personal and organised worldviews, listen to one another, ask questions, share aspects of their own background where appropriate, and learn about the lived diversity within religious and non-religious traditions.

Through this process, students do not only acquire information. They practise respectful dialogue, develop curiosity, recognise complexity and build relational understanding across difference. This is particularly important in a social context where ignorance, misinformation and lack of contact can contribute to suspicion, stereotyping and prejudice.

High-quality RWE can:

- improve understanding of religious and cultural diversity;
- challenge stereotypes and misinformation;
- support respectful classroom discussion;
- strengthen student belonging;
- build empathy and mutual respect;
- help students distinguish between people, religions, governments, political movements and overseas conflicts;
- support democratic citizenship and social cohesion.

In relation to antisemitism, RWE can help students understand Jewish life, history, identity, belief, practice and contribution in ways that move beyond stereotypes and inherited assumptions. It can also help students recognise broader patterns of prejudice, including scapegoating, conspiracy thinking, collective blame and dehumanisation.

To address antisemitism over the long term, Australia needs to assist the next generation of students to develop respectful intercultural and interfaith understanding. Unless young people learn to participate in respectful dialogue across religious, cultural and worldview difference, efforts to address antisemitism and other forms of racism will fall short of building the relational foundations of a more cohesive society.

## 6. International Experience

Religions and Worldviews Education has developed significantly in England, Wales and parts of Europe over the past decade.

In England and Wales, significant work has been undertaken to shift Religious Education toward a broader “religions and worldviews” approach, including attention to lived experience, non-religious worldviews, curriculum coherence and the academic study of religion and belief.

In Europe, related work on religious and worldview diversity has been connected to intercultural education, democratic citizenship, human rights and social cohesion. The Council of Europe has supported work on teaching about religions and non-religious worldviews as part of intercultural education.

International experience indicates that successful RWE approaches are:

- academically rigorous;
- inclusive of religious and non-religious perspectives;
- grounded in lived experience;
- attentive to diversity within traditions, not only between traditions;
- supported by teacher professional learning;
- connected to broader citizenship and social cohesion objectives;
- evaluated through ongoing research.

Australia has an opportunity to learn from these international developments while adapting RWE to its own multicultural, multifaith and educational context.

## 7. The Victorian Religions and Worldviews Education Pilot

The Victorian RWE Pilot represents a practical example of faith communities, educators and researchers working together to strengthen social cohesion through education.

The pilot has been:

- developed through the Multifaith Education Collaboration;
- auspiced by the Faith Communities Council of Victoria;
- convened and coordinated by Faith Values;
- supported by representatives from multiple faith communities;
- informed by international RWE developments;
- supported by research and evaluation involvement from the University of Melbourne;
- strengthened by academic contribution from Australian Catholic University;
- developed over four years through sustained collaboration.

RWE has also engaged in broader national conversations about antisemitism education in schools. Herbert Um, Project Director for Religions and Worldviews Education, has engaged with Australia's Special Envoy for Combatting Antisemitism and participated in the National Dialogue on Antisemitism Education in Schools. This engagement reflects RWE's constructive willingness to contribute to practical educational responses to antisemitism, while situating that work within a broader approach to religious and worldview literacy, respectful dialogue and social cohesion.

The project focuses initially on lower secondary students and aligns with the Victorian Curriculum, particularly Civics and Citizenship and relevant General Capabilities, including Intercultural Understanding, Ethical Understanding, and Critical and Creative Thinking.

A distinctive feature of the pilot is that it has been developed collaboratively by people from different faith traditions who share a commitment to improving religious literacy and social cohesion. The collaborative process itself demonstrates that communities with diverse beliefs can work constructively together in pursuit of a common civic goal.

The pilot is now at a point where further support would enable broader piloting, stronger evaluation, expanded teacher professional learning and preparation for implementation from 2027. Please see appendices A, B and E for more details on the Religions and Worldviews Pilot.

## 8. Early Findings and Emerging Impact

To date, the pilot has trained 39 teachers across 15 Victorian secondary schools, with the potential to reach approximately 800 students.

Early feedback suggests that RWE not only increases teacher confidence, but also helps students from minority faith backgrounds feel that their identities and communities are recognised within the curriculum. This sense of being seen and respected is an important dimension of belonging and social cohesion.

Feedback indicates that the resources:

- increase teacher confidence in discussing religion and worldview diversity;
- provide practical curriculum-aligned learning materials;
- encourage respectful student discussion;
- help students recognise and challenge stereotypes;
- support inclusion and belonging for students from diverse backgrounds;
- create opportunities for students to listen to one another;
- give students language to understand personal and organised worldviews.

School leaders have also identified the potential of RWE to contribute to wellbeing, citizenship, inclusion and intercultural understanding objectives.

One teacher who trialled the RWE course with Year 7 and Year 9 students reported that the materials helped students develop language for understanding personal and organised worldviews, encouraged students to share aspects of their family and faith backgrounds, and created a warm classroom culture for deeper discussion. In one example, a Sikh student reflected that she had never previously spoken about her religion in class. For the first time, she saw herself and her community represented in what she was learning.

These findings should be treated as preliminary and strengthened through further independent evaluation and broader research. However, they indicate that the pilot is addressing a real need in schools.

## 9. Faith Community Collaboration as a Social Cohesion Model

One of the most significant aspects of the Victorian Religions and Worldviews Education Pilot is the collaborative process through which it has been developed.

Faith communities hold lived knowledge of belief, practice, identity and community life that cannot be fully captured through textbooks alone. At the same time, educational resources must be curriculum-aligned, age-appropriate and academically rigorous. The RWE Pilot brings these strengths together by combining faith community contribution with educational design and university evaluation.

Through the Multifaith Education Collaboration, representatives from diverse faith communities have contributed lived experience, community knowledge and subject-matter insight to the development and review of the pilot resources.

In a period marked by rising antisemitism, Islamophobia, religious vilification, racism and polarisation, this collaboration demonstrates the willingness of faith communities to work together for the benefit of young people and the wider society.

The pilot therefore provides not only an educational resource, but also a practical model of partnership between faith communities, educators and researchers in support of social cohesion.

## 10. Research and Evaluation Needs

Australia currently lacks a strong evidence base regarding how students understand religions, worldviews diversity, prejudice, identity and belonging.

Further research is needed to better understand:

- religious literacy among Australian students;
- student experiences of inclusion and belonging;
- teacher confidence in discussing religion and belief;
- effective approaches to addressing prejudice and stereotyping;
- the relationship between religious literacy and social cohesion;
- how students distinguish between people, religions, governments, political movements and overseas conflicts;
- how classroom dialogue can build bridging social capital;

- how international RWE models can be adapted for Australian schools.

Independent evaluation of the Victorian RWE Pilot would make an important contribution to this evidence base and help inform future policy development.

Future evaluation should include teacher confidence measures, student surveys and interviews, school leader feedback, classroom observation where appropriate, and longitudinal analysis of educational and social cohesion outcomes.

Universities should be supported to work with schools, faith communities and government to build a stronger evidence base for religions and worldviews literacy education. This research should be practical, classroom-informed and designed to support future policy and implementation decisions.

## 11. Recommendations

### **Recommendation 1**

That governments and education authorities recognise religious and worldview literacy as an important educational contribution to strengthening social cohesion, inclusion and respectful engagement across diversity.

### **Recommendation 2**

That governments support the continued development, piloting and independent evaluation of Religions and Worldviews Education approaches, including teacher professional learning, research and evidence-based curriculum resources.

### **Recommendation 3**

That governments, education authorities, universities and faith communities collaborate to strengthen high-quality Religions and Worldviews Education that is accurate, inclusive, curriculum-aligned and respectful of both religious and non-religious worldviews, while contributing to the prevention of prejudice, stereotyping, conspiracy narratives and ideologically or religiously motivated extremism.

## Conclusion

Antisemitism represents a serious challenge to Australian society and requires a comprehensive response. Jewish Australians must be able to live safely, confidently and freely, with their identity, community life, schools, places of worship and cultural institutions respected and protected.

At the same time, Australia faces broader challenges associated with Islamophobia, religious vilification, racism and social polarisation. Long-term social cohesion depends upon building understanding, trust and respectful engagement across difference.

Religions and Worldviews Education is not a complete solution to these challenges. However, it is a practical, internationally informed and locally developed educational approach that shows considerable promise.

The Victorian RWE pilot demonstrates that faith communities, educators and researchers can work together constructively to support young Australians in understanding religious and worldview diversity. It also demonstrates that teachers and schools are seeking practical support to address religion, belief, identity and difference in curriculum-aligned and socially constructive ways.

The Commission has an opportunity to encourage further research, evaluation and collaboration in this field and to support educational approaches that contribute to a more informed, inclusive and cohesive Australia.

With appropriate support, the existing RWE pilot could be amplified into a stronger, evidence-informed contribution to Australia's social cohesion infrastructure.

# Appendix A - Victorian Religions and Worldviews Education Pilot

## Overview

The Victorian Religions and Worldviews Education Pilot is a collaborative educational initiative designed to strengthen social cohesion, improve religious literacy and support respectful engagement with diversity in Australian schools.

The pilot has been developed through cooperation between faith communities, educators and researchers who share a commitment to helping young people understand the religious and worldview diversity that shapes contemporary Australian society.

The pilot includes eight high-quality lesson plans, a teacher's guide to Religions and Worldviews, and professional development conducted by worldviews experts. The developed materials focuses on year 7 and 8, and aligns with Civics and Citizenship content area in the new Victorian Curriculum F-10 v2.0, and incorporates the relevant Capabilities (Intercultural Understanding, Ethical Capability, Personal and Social).

## Purpose

The pilot seeks to:

- improve student understanding of religious and worldview diversity;
- develop religious and worldviews literacy;
- promote respectful dialogue and critical thinking;
- challenge stereotypes and misinformation;
- support inclusion and belonging;
- increase teacher confidence in addressing religion and worldview diversity;
- help students learn how to live well with difference in a democratic society.

## Development Process

The project has been developed through the Multifaith Education Collaboration, auspiced by the Faith Communities Council of Victoria and convened and coordinated by Faith Values.

Representatives from diverse faith communities have contributed to the development and review of resources, helping ensure educational accuracy, cultural sensitivity and community relevance.

The project has also drawn on international developments in Religions and Worldviews Education, particularly work undertaken in England, Wales and Europe.

## Research and Evaluation

The University of Melbourne is contributing to the evaluation and research dimensions of the pilot.

The evaluation seeks to better understand teacher confidence, student engagement, student understanding of religious diversity, classroom dialogue, student belonging and opportunities for future curriculum development.

The project team recognises the importance of independent evaluation and regards the current pilot as an important first stage in building an Australian evidence base for Religions and Worldviews Education.

## Current Status and Future Potential

The pilot resources have been developed and are currently being trialled and refined through participating schools and teacher professional learning activities.

To date, the pilot has trained 39 teachers across 15 Victorian secondary schools, with potential reach to approximately 800 students.

The next phase of the project involves broader piloting, further evaluation, resource refinement and continued collaboration between faith communities, educators and researchers. With appropriate support, the pilot could be expanded to include additional government, Catholic and independent schools, stronger evaluation, additional teacher professional learning and preparation for implementation from 2027.

# Appendix B - Early Teacher and School Feedback

The Victorian Religions and Worldviews Education Pilot is currently in its early stages of implementation. Formal evaluation is continuing, and the observations below should be regarded as preliminary findings rather than definitive conclusions.

Despite this limitation, early feedback from teachers and school leaders has been encouraging.

## Emerging Themes

### Increased Teacher Confidence

Teachers have reported greater confidence in discussing religion and worldview diversity within classroom settings. Many educators indicated that religion can be a challenging topic to address because of concerns about accuracy, sensitivity and potential controversy. The RWE resources provided a structured framework that helped teachers engage with these topics more confidently.

### Improved Classroom Dialogue

Teachers observed that students were willing to engage in respectful discussions about beliefs, values, family backgrounds, identity and community life. The resources helped create opportunities for students to ask questions, explore differences, identify common values and listen to one another in a supportive learning environment.

### Challenging Stereotypes

Teachers reported instances where students reconsidered assumptions they held about particular religious communities. Several educators noted that students became more aware of the diversity that exists within religious traditions and gained a more nuanced understanding of religious identity.

### Student Belonging

Teachers observed that students from faith backgrounds often appreciated seeing aspects of their identity reflected in classroom learning. This contributed to a stronger sense of inclusion and recognition for some students who had previously felt that their beliefs and experiences were largely absent from the curriculum.

### Indicative Feedback

Examples of comments received from educators include:

- “The resources gave teachers a practical and balanced way to discuss religion in the classroom.”
- “Students were genuinely interested and asked thoughtful questions.”
- “The lessons helped students move beyond stereotypes and simplistic assumptions.”

- “It was valuable to have resources that recognised the diversity within faith communities.”
- “The program supported our school’s commitment to inclusion and respectful engagement.”

## Teacher Reflection – RWE Pilot teacher

Teaching the RWE course was encouraging, both for me as a teacher and for the students. The students were introduced to the big idea of worldviews first, giving them language and a helpful way to think about personal and organised worldviews.

The younger students recognised the influences in their lives and were encouraged to share about their families in ways they might not have done before. They enjoyed listening to one another and learnt more about the practices of religions represented not only in the lessons but also in the people in the room.

One Sikh student was asked by a friend if the diary entry by a Sikh boy in the activity was like her family. She was so pleased to say that it was. She shared with me that she had never talked about her religion in a class before, and that it felt good to do that.

The older students were particularly interested in the range of religions and worldviews presented throughout the course, including Humanism. Overall, students grew in curiosity as their understanding of big questions and various worldviews developed. The activities helped them engage personally and collaboratively, creating a warm and inviting culture for deeper discussion.

— Jenny, RE teacher, Victorian independent school

## Need for Further Evaluation

While early feedback has been positive, more extensive research and evaluation are required. Future evaluation should include larger numbers of participating schools, student surveys and interviews, teacher confidence measures, school leader feedback and longitudinal analysis of educational and social cohesion outcomes.

# Appendix C- Organisations and Partners Involved

## Faith Communities Council of Victoria (FCCV)

The Faith Communities Council of Victoria is Victoria's peak multifaith body. For more than five decades FCCV has worked to promote understanding, cooperation and dialogue between diverse faith communities and to strengthen relationships between faith communities, government and wider society.

FCCV provides the auspicing framework for the Religions and Worldviews Education Pilot and supports collaboration across participating faith communities.

For further information see: [www.faithvictoria.org.au](http://www.faithvictoria.org.au)

## Multifaith Education Collaboration (MFEC)

The Multifaith Education Collaboration is a network of faith community representatives, educators and researchers working together to improve religious literacy and support social cohesion through education.

MFEC has played a central role in reviewing, advising on and contributing to the development of the pilot resources.

For further information see: [www.reworldviews.org.au](http://www.reworldviews.org.au)

## Faith Values

Faith Values is a Christian not-for-profit organisation working with multifaith communities to develop high-quality education about religions and worldviews. It convenes partnerships between educators, researchers and faith communities and has led the coordination and development of the Victorian RWE Pilot.

For further information see: [www.faithvalues.org.au](http://www.faithvalues.org.au)

## University of Melbourne

The University of Melbourne contributes research and evaluation expertise to the project and supports the development of an evidence base concerning religious literacy, education and social cohesion.

For further information see: <https://education.unimelb.edu.au/research/academic-groups/mteg/worldviews-literacy-lab>

## Australian Catholic University

Australian Catholic University contributes expertise in education, theology, ethics and teacher formation and supports broader conversations regarding religion, worldviews and contemporary education.

## Faith Community Contributors

Representatives from a wide range of faith communities have contributed to the development and review of project materials.

Their participation demonstrates a shared commitment to supporting educational initiatives that strengthen understanding, inclusion and social cohesion within Australian society.

This includes:

- Jewish Community Council of Victoria
- Islamic Council of Victoria
- Buddhist Council of Victoria
- Australian Baha'i Community
- Hindu Council of Australia
- Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria
- Victorian Council of Churches
- Australian Multicultural Foundation
- Centre for Multicultural Youth

The project continues to welcome engagement from additional faith communities, educators, researchers and school sectors as the pilot develops.

# Appendix D - Research supporting Religions and Worldviews Education

The Religions and Worldviews framework is backed by international and local research findings, and its relevance to addressing religious vilification and social polarisation in Australian schools.

## Educational context and curriculum opportunities

Australia's classrooms reflect a society that is religiously and culturally diverse — yet the curriculum has not kept pace. Halafoff, Lam and Bouma's national study of Generation Z Australians finds that religious literacy among young people is low, and that this gap is directly reflected in limited interreligious understanding and social inclusion. Students are navigating genuine diversity without the knowledge or frameworks to do so well. Critically, both religious and non-religious worldviews should be included in any curriculum framework.

In the Australian context, Peterson (2015) establishes that Civics and Citizenship is the legitimate, curriculum-grounded home for this content in public schools. He argues that religion remains an important factor in shaping democratic citizenship, and that a constructivist, dialogical pedagogy provides the most effective framework for addressing religious diversity in public education. Religions and Worldviews Education is built on precisely this foundation.

## The research so far

The evidence base for this approach in Australia is growing. Halafoff et al. (2019) demonstrates that education about diverse religions and worldviews reduces religious vilification, builds religious literacy, and minimises the conditions that lead to alienation and vulnerability to extremism. Their study presents Victoria as a specific case making it the most directly applicable research in this submission. They also found students who received structured education about religions and worldviews held substantially more positive views toward religious minorities, while those with no such education were much more likely to hold neutral or negative perceptions.

Research by the University of Melbourne outlines several key characteristics of a high-fidelity approach, which have been adopted in the Religions and Worldviews pilot:

- Including the voice and perspectives of students in the classroom
- Explores both personal and organised religious and non-religious systems and traditions
- Is developed locally and contextually based
- Promotes students well-being, inclusion and self-understanding
- Equipping teachers with high quality resources and training

Teacher training is critical in this approach. Flanagan (2025) argues that meaningful engagement with worldviews requires a prior step: understanding self. Teachers and

students who develop greater self-awareness of their own worldviews are demonstrably better equipped to facilitate these discussions with credibility and care. Flanagan's Personal Worldviews Framework, developed and tested with teachers in England, has been adopted as a foundational tool in the Religions and Worldviews pilot.

## The foundations for a worldviews approach

The foundation for this approach comes from the Commission on Religious Education's national plan (2018) which recommended a decisive shift toward a worldviews model. Its central claim, that everyone has a worldview, became the organising principle for curriculum redesign across England. The approach encompasses both religious and non-religious students and better prepares young people for life in a diverse, democratic society.

Cooling, Bowie and Panjwani (2020), in their Theos report *Worldviews in Religious Education*, developed the Commission's framework further. They argue that reframing the subject around worldview as a shared human phenomenon not only prepares students for the reality of diversity in modern society, but promotes academic rigour and meaningful formation in the classroom.

## Further research is needed

The University of Melbourne Worldviews literacy lab continues to undertake research around the attitudes of students and teachers to diverse and minority religions and worldviews. Taken together, the research points to worldviews education not as a supplementary curriculum offering, but as foundational citizenship education. It is one component that addresses, systematically and at scale, the conditions in which prejudice, vilification and social division take hold.

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# Appendix E - Letters of Support

Please find attached letters of support from various Victorian faith communities and partner organisations:

- Victorian Council of Churches
- Jewish Community Council of Victoria
- Islamic Council of Victoria
- Buddhist Council of Victoria
- Hindu Council of Australia – Victoria Charter
- Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria
- Australian Baha’i Community
- Faith Values
- Australian Multicultural Foundation
- Together for Humanity
- University of Melbourne – Faculty of Education
- Australia Catholic University – Faculty of Education & Arts