



CULHAM ST GABRIEL'S
CHAMPIONING RELIGION AND WORLDVIEWS EDUCATION

Surveying the Freedom of Religion or Belief and Education Landscape: A review of research literature, resources, and organisations

Executive summary

Josh Cass and Kevin O'Grady

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Across four sections – an introduction, a survey of academic literature, a survey of resources and organisations delivering FoRB education in schools, and a conclusion - this review maps global efforts to promote Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) principles through educational interventions in formal educational settings. In order to achieve that, it traces research, scholarship and programmatic activity pertaining directly and indirectly to these aims.

FoRB is a human right, part of the United Declaration of Human Rights; Article 18 and protected by other international instruments (e.g. Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)). The heart of FoRB is the freedom to have, choose, change, or leave a religion or belief and the freedom to practice or manifest a religion or belief. FoRB protects the person and not the religion, does not protect religions or beliefs from criticism and does not mean that the public sphere should be free from religious expression. It protects the right to manifest religion or belief both in public and in private and protects the individual from discrimination. It is these concepts, and the principles which follow from them, which the authors of this paper have taken to be the basis for the 'FoRB Principles' which FoRB Education seeks to promote.

The following findings, about FoRB and education, emerge from the survey of academic literature:

- Some academic sources refer to how education can promote or act against FoRB principles; other sources focus on how to teach and learn about FoRB; while other sources combine these focus' to explore how different teaching approaches about FoRB can promote or act against FoRB principles.

- FoRB does not support religious causes but protects freedom of choice in religious and non-religious convictions and practices. As this relates to education, this means that FoRB cannot conflict with freedom of expression or the right to education.
- Researchers found that the context, whether of a school or state, is significant when considering the relationship between FoRB and education. For instance, a religion may dominate education in a state, or parents may have chosen a school with a religious character as an expression of FoRB.
- When considering FoRB and education, researchers suggest that religious education is a right but that it must enable children to develop an understanding of religious pluralism and be founded on principles of respect. Researchers suggest that this should be the case regardless of educational setting, applying equally to schools of religious and non-religious character.

The search of organisations delivering in-school FoRB Education initiatives reveals some clear findings:

- FoRB Education requires that learners have opportunities to reflect on their own religion or belief identities, to think about how they might differ from those that other people may hold, to feel comfortable with those differences, and to be able to talk about them with respect and sensitivity.
- FoRB Education requires that learners are aware of FoRB as a Human Right as articulated in Human Rights frameworks, documents and agreements.
- FoRB Education and FoRB Adjacent Education can embrace a variety of pedagogical approaches, reflecting the experiences and confidences of teachers and the contexts in which they teach.

In light of all this, the following recommendations are made in relation to how FoRB and FoRB principles can be promoted and protected in schools:

Recommendations for religious education teachers

- Engage with the organisations and resources listed in the Appendix 2 of this report to shape lessons for their own pupils and context. Take time to consider the FoRB principles being promoted.
- Ensure that specific named human rights are explored in curricula and classroom teaching.
- Ensure that pupils are enabled to reflect on their own backgrounds, values and positions as part of religious education.

Recommendations for senior school leaders

- Ensure that the importance of FoRB in relation to navigating our complex multi-religious and non-religious world is understood within the school, including encouraging staff to reflect on their own backgrounds, values and positions in relation to religious education.
- Provide professional learning for all staff about promoting and protecting FoRB principles to ensure it is taught comprehensively and sensitively, including engaging with and teaching about controversial issues.
- Inform and include parents in and about learning and reflections relating to FoRB, including how it might relate to the ethos of a school.

Recommendations for policy professionals

- Consider the relationship between high quality religious education and FoRB principles: specifically, that high quality religious education can only be taught in an environment where FoRB principles flourish, and that for FoRB to be promoted and protected requires that children have access to high quality religious education.
- Ensure that education about FoRB is embedded as part of high-quality religious education. Recognise that for FoRB education to be effective requires that learners have opportunities to reflect on their own religion or belief identities, to think about how they might differ from those that other people may hold, to feel comfortable with those differences, and to be able to talk about them with respect and sensitivity.
- Ensure that emerging FoRB education interventions enable learners to be aware of FoRB as a Human Right as articulated in Human Rights frameworks, documents and agreements.
- Ensure specialist RE teachers are well equipped through subject specific professional development and resourcing to teach effectively and appropriately about FoRB.

In light of the findings of this review, some questions emerge for future research, professional reflection and discussion:

- To what extent do current educational systems and structures in the UK support FoRB?
- What are the implications of implementing FoRB principles across the religion and worldviews education curriculum?
- How might the educational structures and systems be in harmony or in tension with the religion and worldviews curriculum in relation to FoRB principles?
- How do schools approach FoRB-related situations in their overall policies, for example, in relation to school uniform and visible religious symbols or items? How do they approach FoRB-related situations within specific curricular practice, for example, teaching about visible religious symbols or items in religious education?