

WHAT DIFFERENCES DOES A-LEVEL RS MAKE?

A two year investigation of the effects of study upon students' beliefs, values and worldviews

Co-Investigators: Professor Leslie Francis (Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU)) and Dr Stephen Parker (University of Worcester and Associate Fellow of WRERU). The project is funded by St. Peter's, Sattley and St. Gabriel's Trusts.

Overview:

Among those studying A-level RS are students with a religious faith and students with no particular faith commitment, making a study of attitudinal change fascinating. Who are these students? What do they currently believe about the transcendent? What is their moral outlook and attitude to faith (their own and others)? Does doing A-level alter any of this?

Among the key aims of A-level RS are the following: that students 'use an enquiring, critical and empathetic approach to the study of religion' (Edexcel RS GCE 'A' level Specification 2007), and that students are encouraged to 'reflect on and develop their own values, opinions and attitudes in the light of their learning.' (AQA, Religious Studies A-level specification, 2008), we wonder whether these aims of academic and personal change are in any way achieved and, specifically, whether they particularly impact upon students studying their own faith critically for the first time.

Typically, for example, among some Christians, beginning the academic study of religion has often been met with a sense of personal crisis and the need to either rebut or accommodate the 'new knowledge' presented. Is this challenge to existing faith true of those of any faith (or none)? Specifically, do students find studying their own faith, and the critical questions required by study at this level, challenging, and how do they respond? Is the experience of doing A-level RS a stormy one in terms of the challenge it presents to students' worldviews? Does students' faith or their attitude to faith change as a result of study? In what ways does students' attitude to their faith or their values change (if at all)? Does the study of A-level RS impact upon students of faith differently to those of no faith commitment? Little comparative research has been carried across faith perspectives (and non-faith groups) to explore the relative attitudinal and values changes across groups resulting from the A-level RS experience.

The Process and an Invitation:

This study is concerned with the impact of A-level RS on students over their two year period of study, investigating by questionnaire their attitudes at three stages across their programme. The questionnaire data will be collated, analysed and interpreted, and the results disseminated in a variety of forms. Neither students nor schools/colleges will be named in the reports of the research. We invite colleagues to participate in this research by:

- Explaining the project to their students and inviting their participation
- Distributing and collecting questionnaires*
- Providing observations to inform analyses.

In return, each participating school will receive a brief individual report for their centre.

To participate, please contact: Dr Stephen Parker at s.parker@worc.ac.uk or the University of Worcester, Institute of Education, Henwick Grove, Worcester, WR2 6AJ.

*All postage costs will be covered.