House of Lords Debate

Education (Non-religious Philosophical Convictions) Bill, Second Reading

**Baroness Burt of Solihull (Liberal Democrat):** ... I believe that noble Lords appreciate the vital importance of education in developing an individual who is able to understand that, in this diverse society that we live in, other views exist and can be valid. There is room for everyone to have a view, and the more that we know about how other people think, the more we can appreciate how we can all fit into an inclusive and tolerant society. ...

The term “philosophical conviction” is found in case law in the European Convention on Human Rights, which noble Lords will know that the UK is signed up to. The convention states that the education and teaching of children must be in line with their parents’ “own religious and philosophical convictions”.

Therefore, when teaching religious education, non-religious philosophical convictions or views must be given equal respect to religious views. Those non-religious views are termed “worldviews”, and the Bill would rename the subject “religious education” as “religion and worldviews”, or RW for short.

Why is it necessary to include worldviews in the syllabus? Because the British Social Attitudes survey consistently shows that half of British adults, and two-thirds of 18 to 24 year-olds, say they belong to no religion. Around half of non-religious people have beliefs and values that match the humanist outlook on life: crudely summarised, that means living their lives in the here and now because they believe it is the only life we have.

In terms of the law, the Bill would ensure that statute kept pace with case law. The 2015 judgment of Fox vs Secretary of State for Education, a case taken under Article 9 of the convention and Article 2 of the first protocol, stated:

“The State must accord equal respect to different religious convictions, and to non-religious beliefs: it is not entitled to discriminate between religions and beliefs on a qualitative basis: its duties must be performed from a standpoint of neutrality and impartiality as regards the quality and validity of parents’ convictions.”

This approach is supported by the subject association for RE, the Religious Education Council of England and Wales. It is also in line with the recent commission on RE, chaired...
by the then Dean of Westminster. …
I can assure the Lords Spiritual Benches and all noble Lords of faith that faith schools’ right to teach faith-based religion will be untouched. Voluntary-aided faith schools and academies which were previously voluntary-aided schools will still be able to teach RE in line with the particular faith of the school and, just as now, parents will be able to request the locally agreed syllabus as an alternative. …
col 937 Too many schools, and too many locally agreed syllabuses, still fail to afford equal respect to non-religious worldviews. …
col 938 Lord Griffiths of Burry Port (Labour): … it is about time that we Christians put our faith out into the marketplace, where it can hold its own or not according to the interplay of forces and realities that exist in the real world that we live in. I relish the thought of being a Christian in such a world where openness, transparency and fearlessness exist. …
col 939 The Lord Bishop of Southwark: … I stress the value of what remains of religious education within our schools. …
Religious inheritance in this country is primarily Christian, although I am not sure that the statistics take account of those who have very strong convictions of other faiths. It has shaped our culture, language and built environment. Even the shape of our present secularism bears the marks of an earlier Christian humanism and the Protestant Reformation. While that is the case, the whole framework of our education system, including that which the Bill calls a “worldview”, is the product of the European enlightenment. Consequently, what the noble Baroness seeks in this Bill in terms of a non-religious worldview is represented and imbedded already across the curriculum, from arts and social sciences to the sciences themselves. It is taught, imbibed and breathed in and out virtually every minute of every school day.
I am not seeking to decry the value of philosophy, not least the maxims of how to live a good life, nor do I demean humanism and the emphasis on individual and societal potential. … But the heirs of Spinoza and Rousseau neither understand nor support the role of religion in public life. This is a failure of imagination and spirit, as it is of the intellect……
Religious sensibility acknowledges the spiritual dimension of life in very particular ways. It does so through the inheritance of centuries and the lived experience of the human race. In the three Abrahamic faiths, it rests on claims of historic revelation. This feeding of the whole person is now restricted to a very small part of any programme of education. The Bill risks assaulting its identity by adding explicit principles evident throughout the rest of the educational curriculum. Whether or not this is intentional, it should be resisted.
col 940 Baroness Brinton (Liberal Democrat): … The Government’s non-statutory guidance on religious education in English schools 2010 says on page 23 that: “Pupils should have the opportunity to learn that there are those who do not hold religious beliefs and have their own philosophical perspectives, and subject matter should facilitate integration and promotion of shared values.” …
… my concern is that all children in our country need to understand the faiths and beliefs of those around us, including worldviews. This does not diminish the experience that each pupil has in their own life, home and family, but will enhance it.
col 941 Last month, we marked International Holocaust Memorial Day with a moving debate in your Lordships’ House, remembering how man’s hatred can result in the murder of millions. This year, the special focus was on the role of ordinary people then and now. … If those who disagree cut out thinking about the views of those whom they do not like or agree with, that is a problem. …
Baroness Bakewell (Labour): … The acceptance of Christianity as the overwhelming belief of most citizens of this country has long been in decline. …
col 942 … today the majority of people share those moral values without the concurrent supernatural beliefs of virgin birth, an all-powerful God, the resurrection of Christ, the Holy
Trinity and life after death. Other established religions—Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and others—embody for their members their own similar moral values, but so too do a growing number of humanists: believers in the human spirit and its power alone to shape values, justice and compassion in today’s world. Increasing numbers now follow these philosophical convictions that have power and significance without reference to the supernatural.

Younger generations, many of them growing up in non-believing homes, need to know the perspective that endorses moral values for us all, without what are considered the “believing” faiths. Humanists themselves have faith—in the human spirit, the values of human reasoning and the place of logic and evidence in the shaping of human behaviour in our lives today. So why would we deny our children the knowledge of such beliefs and how they are held? …

Baroness Uddin (Non-affiliated): … Despite the decline suggested in this Chamber and elsewhere, we live in a country of faith or faiths. When I arrived in the UK, I already had an understanding of only the most basic elements of my faith. My siblings and I were unable to access any religious studies in schools in London at that time—some 50 years ago. Hardly any masjids or mosques existed in the community, and there was no question that religious practice remained within our four walls. The racism experienced by many families was about colour, culture, clothes and a lack of English—even if you spoke good Queen’s English, it was not good enough. No one ever shouted, “You’re a Muslim” or “You’re a Hindu” as a slur.

Views on Islam have fundamentally changed, framing perspectives that have shaped worldviews through the falsified prism of 9/11. It is difficult to compare my experience to that of my children and grandchildren now, albeit that their experience appears to be similar when it comes to religious abuse and discrimination, although this is much more subtle.

Religious education in school is as diverse and varied as the number of schools that exist and the way they are managed, as well as their cultural context and leadership. … The facts speak for themselves, if anyone wants to delve deeper into the realities of students’ experience of religious studies, which are generally not fit for purpose.

col 943 … parents of students whose families may be practising one faith or another experience few interactions on, and have little choice about, how their children are taught religion or religions. … many schools appear to have become more inflexible and polarised about teaching other religions in any meaningful way. I cannot imagine that many parents would go into a Church of England school and ask, “Are you teaching my children about Hinduism, Islam or Judaism?”, for example, regardless of how legally agreed the syllabus may be.

I would go as far as to say that only faith schools that are not Church of England schools are more unfavourably scrutinised at the moment. Some faith schools are deliberately depicted in fearful ways, while very little attention is paid to the overall impact of Church of England schools on the experiences of religious education of the high percentage of non-Christian children who attend them. Many faith schools with an emphasis on one faith tend not to provide an adequate standard of teaching of other religions, which must be devastating for children’s mental well-being and their development of confidence in themselves as young minds. The impact of not being recognised, if they come from a family that practises a different religion from that of the majority of other students, must be detrimental to their personal growth and development. Denying a young student an aspect of their identity, such as religion, may impede their education and constrain their understanding of what valuing and respecting others means in their daily experiences in the community. …

… should religion be taught in a school, it cannot choose one particular religion over another. …

col 944 Young Muslims in particular are left disenfranchised, experiencing the wrath
evident in the perplexing terminologies of fundamentalism as well as the pathetic concept surrounding the long disreputable and Islamophobic application of the so-called Prevent and Channel strategies, which have demonised even young primary school children, who allegedly are under watch if they refer to God too many times or, in secondary school, raise concerns about the Middle East. …

No matter what our liberal views of the world may be, religious education has never been more relevant, engaging or challenging, as religion and religious issues are ever present in our lives. Religious education may provide students with valuable insights into the diverse beliefs and opinions that may inform their personal development and understanding of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural questions that are ever present in their lives. Thoughtful lessons may assist pupils to gain insights that can help to challenge stereotypes, promote cohesion and encourage them to value themselves and respect others. …

**col 946 Lord Davies of Brixton (Labour):** … In a sense … the Bill is not necessary because the argument has already been won, both in principle and in practice: religion is already taught in many schools in the way that is suggested in the Bill. That is the point. It is really bad to have a practice in our schools that is out of line with the legislation; let us bring them into line, through the Bill, as is happening in many schools. …

We know that, in truth, people say that they are Christian out of habit rather than that being what they actually believe. In my own London Borough of Lambeth, 38% of people have no religion. That is reflected, in practice, by what is happening in schools. Let us bring the law in line with what everyone thinks should be happening. …

The opposite of religion is no religion, and that is the basis upon which it should be taught as part of the worldview curriculum. I strongly believe that religion should be taught in our schools but it must be taught in context, including the context of not having religious views. There is a difference between humanism and non-religion; they are not coterminous. The ability not to have any religious or humanist views is an option. …

**col 947 Lord Addington (Liberal Democrat):** … Surely we require of people an understanding of what goes on around them, as understanding what other people think makes tolerance easier because you are less frightened of them. That is one of the primary directives of the Bill. Allowing somebody to understand that, if somebody disagrees with you, they are not, by definition, evil is probably the best we can hope for from this. …

**col 949 The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education (Baroness Barran):** … I must express reservations about this Bill on behalf of the Government …

The Bill seeks to introduce, as we have heard, an explicit requirement for schools in England, with the exception of voluntary aided schools with a religious character, to teach non-religious worldviews as part of their RE curricula. This is only right. … there has undoubtedly been a shift in belief over the last decade. The 2021 census showed a 13 percentage-point decrease in the number of people who describe themselves as Christian, and a 12 percentage-point increase in the number who describe themselves as having “no religion” …

Nevertheless, Christianity remains the most common response in the census, and it is therefore appropriate that religious education in schools without a religious designation should continue to be, in the main, of a broadly or wholly Christian nature. The Government consider the Bill to be an unnecessary amendment to that, given that RE may already include the concepts of both religious beliefs and non-religious worldviews. In many cases, non-religious worldviews are integral to RE, and this is evident when looking at the contents of the department’s religious studies GCSE and A-level subject content specifications.

**col 950** While the Government’s view is that RE is an important subject, we think it equally important that parents and older students are free to exercise their right of withdrawal. As
such, a child or young person can be withdrawn for all or just part of their school's RE curriculum without having to give a reason. It is permissible, therefore, for pupils to be withdrawn from all or some religious aspects of RE, while continuing to attend lessons on non-religious worldviews. For that reason, the Government do not think it appropriate or necessary to enforce the production and delivery of a discrete, parallel curriculum on non-religious worldviews for those who have been withdrawn from RE. …

Let me clarify a couple of points that distinguish the situation in Wales from that in England. … Wales does not have an established church … Secondly, my understanding … is that the Welsh Government, through the new legislation implemented in, I think, September last year, have removed the right for parents to withdraw their children from that education. The Bill also represents a significant departure from the current Government policy on curriculum design and implementation. The Government believe that RE curricula should continue to be designed at a local level … Continuing with this model ensures that local demographics can be appropriately accounted for, including where this relates to non-religious worldviews.

It is the opinion of this Government that there is no need to amend the legislation surrounding the provision of religious education in schools, especially where this relates to the inclusion of non-religious worldviews in the curriculum, the provision of an alternative non-religious worldviews curriculum for those who withdraw from RE or the membership of SACREs. We know that most schools are already integrating non-religious worldviews into their RE provision, and that non-religious representation already exists on many SACREs across the country. We will continue to trust our schools to deliver high quality religious education that is reflective of all beliefs and inclusive of the local demographic.

col 951 Baroness Burt of Solihull: … I do not want to proselytise about humanism, because what I am looking for in the Bill is something that is inclusive and respectful of other people's views, so I was a little disappointed in the Minister's response … Nevertheless … I beg to move that the Bill be now read a second time.

Bill read a second time and committed to a Committee of the Whole House.

To read the full transcript see
https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-02-03/debates/DEFE6FBD-3674-4843-8854-6C54D17AB568/Education(Non-ReligiousPhilosophicalConvictions)Bill(HL)

House of Commons Written Answers

Cryptocurrencies: Antisemitism

Pat McFadden (Labour) [133978] To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the report by the Antisemitism Policy Trust entitled Antisemitism and Cryptocurrency: A perfect Union, published in 2022, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies of the use of cryptocurrency by (a) terrorist, (b) criminal and (c) other groups; and if he will make a statement.

Andrew Griffith: Since January 2020 the FCA has been the Anti Money Laundering and Counter Terrorist Financing supervisor of UK cryptoasset activity. By maintaining a robust gateway for firms seeking to register for cryptoasset activity in the UK, we continue to reduce and prevent the financing of criminal and terrorist groups. The government's ambition is for the UK to be home to the most open, well-regulated, and technologically advanced capital markets in the world. However, recognising that there are both risks and opportunities associated with cryptoassets, the UK has adopted a staged, proportionate and agile approach to regulation, which is sensitive to risks posed, including the risk of financial crime, and responsive to new developments in the market.
This year a new regulatory measure known as the ‘travel rule’ comes into effect, ensuring that virtual-asset transfers are accompanied by detailed personal information of both the originator and beneficiary. The new requirements will apply to crypto-asset exchange providers and custodian wallet providers and will help remove some of the anonymity associated with private wallet addresses.

https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-27/133978

The report referred to above can be read at

Religious Freedom: Curriculum

Andrew Lewer (Conservative) [133659] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure that school curriculums include teaching on freedom of religion or belief.

Nick Gibb: The National Curriculum is broad and balanced for pupils to learn about how different groups and societies have contributed to the development of the UK. The curriculum offers many opportunities for schools to do this, notably through citizenship education and relationships, sex and health education (RSHE). The RSHE curriculum has a strong focus on equality, respect, and the harmful impact of stereotyping, as well as the importance of valuing difference. Within the citizenship curriculum pupils should be taught about the diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities and the need for mutual respect and understanding.

In delivering the curriculum, schools should be aware of their duties relating to political impartiality, as set out under the Education Act 1996, and must ensure that, where political issues are discussed in the classroom, they are presented in a balanced way. The Department has published guidance on political impartiality in schools which can be found here:

Legal duties on political impartiality do not supersede other important requirements for schools, including their responsibility to promote fundamental British values, including the mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. Developing and deepening pupils’ understanding of these values is part of the Ofsted inspection framework, alongside expectations that schools develop responsible citizens and promote an inclusive environment that meets the needs of all pupils, irrespective of their characteristics.

https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-26/133659

Palestinians: Corruption

Chris Green (Conservative) [132422] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent discussions with the Palestinian Authority on tackling corruption in that region.

David Rutley: There is regular high-level engagement between the UK and the Palestinian Authority, both through our Consulate-General in Jerusalem and through inward and outward visits. We will continue to encourage the Palestinian leadership to work toward strong, inclusive, accountable and democratic
institutions, based on respect for the rule of law and human rights. The Minister for the Middle East, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon offered the UK's support in efforts to de-escalate the situation on the ground, in his meetings with Israeli Foreign Minister Cohen, Palestinian Prime Minister Shtayyeh and Palestinian Foreign Minister Malki, during his visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories on 10-13 January.

https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-25/132422

Israeli Settlements

Nadia Whittome (Labour) [136789] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what the Government's policy is on the legality of Israeli settlements under international law.

David Rutley: The UK's position on settlements is clear. They are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace, and threaten the physical viability of a two-state solution. We want to see a contiguous West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as part of a viable and sovereign Palestinian state, based on pre-1967 lines. We urge Israel to halt its settlement expansion. The Minister for the Middle East, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, reinforced this message in his meetings with Israeli Foreign Minister Cohen, Palestinian Prime Minister Shtayyeh and Palestinian Foreign Minister Malki, during his visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories on 10-13 January.

https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-31/136789

Sarah Owen (Labour) [133685] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent discussions with his Israeli counterpart on the Israeli government's decision to (a) revoke the permanent residency of and (b) deport Salah Hammouri.

David Rutley: Israel must abide by its obligations under International Humanitarian Law. We continue to call upon the Government of Israel to fully respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of human rights defenders and organisations, and to allow them to freely operate in Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). The Minister for the Middle East, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon offered the UK's support in efforts to de-escalate the situation on the ground, in his meetings with Israeli Foreign Minister Cohen, Palestinian Prime Minister Shtayyeh and Palestinian Foreign Minister Malki, during his visit to Israel and the OPTs on 10-13 January.

https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-26/133685

Scottish Parliament Motion

Ross Greer (Green) S6M-07679] Israeli Raid in Jenin – That the Parliament notes with concern reports that Israeli forces have killed at least nine Palestinians, including one elderly woman, and injured several others in a raid in the city of Jenin on 26 January 2023; condemns Israeli forces for their alleged use of teargas within a children's ward of a hospital in the West Bank; understands that the number of Palestinians killed in the West Bank already in 2023 has now risen to 29 as a result of this attack; is concerned that 2022 was reportedly the deadliest year in Palestine since UN records began, with, it believes, over 150 civilians killed by Israeli forces, and recognises that, if the current rate of what it sees as Israeli massacres in the territory continue, 2023 will overtake 2022 as the deadliest year on record.

https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-07679
UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territory: UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk calls for the “illogic of escalation” to stop

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk on Friday urged an end to the “illogic of escalation that has been building up, to the detriment of the human rights of Palestinians and Israelis”. …

“I fear that recent measures being taken by the Government of Israel are only fuelling further violations and abuses of human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law.”

“Last year saw record numbers of Palestinians killed in the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem – and the highest number of fatalities of Israelis inside Israel and in the occupied West Bank in many years. Already this year, we have seen more bloodshed, more destruction, and the situation continues to grow more volatile,” he added.

In 2022, the UN Human Rights Office documented 151 killings of Palestinians by Israeli security forces in the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem, plus one boy who was killed by either the Israeli security forces or a settler. Another two Palestinians were killed by Israeli settlers. In many of the cases involving security forces, there are serious concerns of excessive use of force and arbitrary killings.

So far this year, 32 Palestinians have already been killed in the occupied West Bank by Israeli security forces, with two more killed by settlers.

In 2022, 24 Israelis were killed inside Israel and in the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem by Palestinians, and seven more have been killed so far this year.

Israeli authorities on 29 January announced measures to seal off immediately family homes of those suspected of having perpetrated attacks on 27 and 28 January in occupied East Jerusalem, including an attack in a settlement near a synagogue. More than 40 people, including family members, were arrested purportedly in relation to the attacks. Two families of the suspected attackers were forcibly evicted from their homes. Other proposed measures include revoking identity documents, citizenship and residency rights and social security benefits of family members of suspected attackers, and accelerating demolitions of houses for lack of building permits. If implemented, these may amount to collective punishment.

“Measures of collective punishment – including punitive forced evictions and house demolitions – are expressly prohibited under international humanitarian law and are incompatible with international human rights law provisions,” Türk said. …

“Rather than fuelling a worsening spiral of violence, I urge all those holding public office or other positions of authority – indeed everyone – to stop using language that incites hatred of ‘the other’,” Türk said. “Such fomenting of hatred is corrosive for all Israelis, Palestinians, all of society.” …

“Impunity has been rife, sending a signal that excesses are allowed,” he said. “The obligation under international human rights law is to investigate loss of life in any context of law enforcement – credibly and effectively – regardless of whether there was an exchange of fire between security forces and armed individuals.”

Türk called on Israel to ensure that all operations of its security forces in the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem, are carried out with full respect for international human rights law, in particular the rules regulating the use of force in law enforcement operations. Use of firearms is allowed only as a last resort, when there is an imminent threat to life or serious injury. …

UK Parliament

** Bill of Rights Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3227

** Education (Non-religious Philosophical Convictions) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3186
Second Reading, House of Lords
https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-02-03/debates/DEFE6FBD-3674-4843-8854-6C54D17AB568/Education(Non-ReligiousPhilosophicalConvictions)Bill(HL)

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2862

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3325

Online Safety Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3137
Notice of amendments
https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/49700/documents/2895

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3217

Private Burial Grounds and Cemeteries Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3188

Universal Credit (Removal of Two Child Limit) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3163

Schools Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3156

Scottish Parliament

Charities (Regulation and Administration) (Scotland) Bill

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill
The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438

Consultations  ** new or updated today

**Equality and Human Rights Commission Statutory Review** (closing date 1 March 2023)

**Draft guidance: charities use of social media** (closing date 14 March 2023)