



**AHRC/ESRC Religion and  
Society Programme  
Youth Call**

Research Programme Specification  
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Arts & Humanities  
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## **AHRC and ESRC Religion and Society Research Programme Specification**

Consultations with both the AHRC and ESRC's communities during 2004 and 2005 highlighted the importance and timeliness of research focusing on religion and society both because of the significance of this area for contemporary society and the readiness of the academic community to respond to the interdisciplinary challenges posed. Over 10% of the themes suggested as a result of the AHRC's 2005 consultation on thematic priorities centred on the relationships between religion, belief and society. As a result of the largest ever consultation among both UK social scientists and users and stakeholders on future priorities for funding, ESRC Council identified seven key areas, which ESRC have called 'key research challenges', as urgently in need of research. One of these seven was 'Religion, Ethnicity and Society'. In recognition of their shared priorities, the AHRC and ESRC have agreed to support this area through the co-funding of the Religion and Society Programme.

This programme addresses questions of vital contemporary importance, both on a local and global scale. To appreciate these issues fully we have to understand them in historical and comparative contexts as well as through the perspectives of gender, age, sexuality, class, economic status, dis/ability and ethnicity. This programme offers a unique opportunity to engage publics, religious groups, policy makers, charities, creative and cultural sectors and others in dialogue about the role of religion in society and it is envisaged that many projects will have outcomes of significance for these groups.

This programme will make important contributions to our understanding of religion and society in the short-term through the workshops and small grants supported, the establishment of research networks, and the activities of the programme director in forming links between related programmes both nationally and internationally, researchers, faith communities and policy-makers. The programme will also leave an enduring legacy through the adoption of new approaches to methodology and theory fostered through interdisciplinary collaboration, the development of international links and investment in new researchers.

## **Religion and Society Youth Call**

This Programme Specification is for the second phase of the Religion and Society programme, which is a specific call concerned with religion, society and youth. It should only be consulted for applications proposed for the Youth Call.

In the context of the Religion and Society programme it became apparent that the area of youth was important to current debate and in response to interactions with stakeholders and after identifying trends in applications to the first phase of funding, the AHRC and ESRC agreed to add a further £4m to the programme and run a specific call under the area of religion, society and youth.

In religious terms, the current generation of youth is of particular interest. To a greater extent than previous generations, young people in western societies are unlikely to have grown up in or been socialised into one particular religious tradition. They are likely to have come into contact with a wider range of religious, non-religious and secular influences than their parents and grandparents. With regard to religion, they are likely to be aware of a range of influences, ranging from alternative forms of spirituality to the world's major religious traditions, and a range of secular options.

Not only is this generation less involved, overall, in formal religious structures, than previous ones, it is also more religiously plural. Religion is still tightly connected to ethnic background, and processes of migration since the Second World War have turned Britain into a multi-faith society as never before. Many young Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus are now the second generation to be born in Britain. For white British youth, religions like Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism may appear part of the existing order of things rather than new arrivals. Christianity is changing its profile as 'black' churches prove to have greater vitality than 'white' ones.

For the current generation of teenagers and young adults the issue of religious identity is therefore encountered in new ways. Religious and secular identity is no longer straightforwardly ascribed but involves choice and negotiation. Young people may be religious in quite different ways from their parents and grandparents, as religion becomes a powerful force in the creation of new forms of identity. Thus some young people are becoming more religious than their parents as they forge

forms of identity which resist or creatively reconstruct existing forms of 'British' identity, and remain open to transnational commitments. Religion is also playing an important role for young people in the reconstruction of gendered identities and sexuality; in education, employment and class mobility; and in fostering new forms of activism and ethical and political commitment. At the same time, apparently non-religious forms of culture and commitment vie for attention as never before.

Given this context, research on religion and youth is urgent and important for understanding modern British society. This strategic initiative is mainly concerned to commission research related to teenagers and young adults (ages 13-25), but recognises that where topics like socialisation are concerned it may be necessary to be flexible about these boundaries. It is important that the topic of religion and youth in the UK should not be considered in isolation, but in relation to wider cultural, social, historical and international contexts. The contexts of religious indifference, secularisation, and active secularity/opposition to religion should not be neglected. Attention to intergenerational differences is important, for comparisons between generations can help establish what is typical of the current generation of young people, rather than a reflection of wider factors. Research on young people in other historical periods and in different societies and cultural contexts across the globe is needed. Studies focused on the current situation in Britain, comparative studies, and studies which do not focus on the situation in Britain but can nevertheless illuminate it, all fall within the scope of the call.

### **Religion and Society Youth Call Aims and Objectives**

The Youth Call cross-council initiative will form the second phase of the Religion and Society Programme. It will make important contributions to our understanding of religion, society and youth in the short-term by funding workshops and small projects, and in the longer term by supporting large collaborative projects and research networks. The Programme Director will forge links between related programmes both nationally and internationally, as well as between researchers, faith communities and policy-makers. The initiative aims to engage researchers from the full range of arts, humanities and social science disciplines, and to encourage new collaborations. It seeks to mobilise existing resources for the study

of religion, society and youth, as well as to build new capacity, and encourage new methods and approaches.

The Youth call will further the existing aims of the Religion and Society Programme by:

- developing understanding of religion and society through the thematic focus of religion and youth;
- developing an enduring research field in terms of theory, methods, sources, materials, and comparative analyses;
- exploring new approaches for studying religion, youth and society, including appropriate methods for the analysis of texts, narratives and non-verbal material such as art, music, popular culture, new media;
- promoting effective working between disciplines and building new connections and understandings as outcomes;
- promoting effective working relations between researchers and researched, including the development of user-led research, such as school-based practitioner research or action research;
- developing interdisciplinary themes and approaches that become embedded in the research agenda and resources of the social sciences and arts and humanities;
- making a significant international impact within the field and forging international collaborations;
- facilitating exchange between researchers and a wide range of individuals and organisations committed to understanding and promoting knowledge about religion, youth and society, including those in government agencies, public, charitable and voluntary bodies, the creative industries, the cultural sector;
- providing historical and comparative perspective;
- providing insights of practical and policy relevance;
- developing the research community by supporting new researchers and integrating them with established ones, including collaborating with researchers in organisations beyond the HE sector;
- contributing to public awareness by disseminating findings and addressing current issues of public concern through outputs directed at a wide audience (including web pages, exhibitions, performances, public lectures and broadcasts);

- encouraging the more effective use of existing data resources, and the development of long-term qualitative and quantitative resources and skills.

## **Research Themes**

The overall themes of the Religion and Society Programme, reaching across disciplinary boundaries, were identified, informed by pre-programme consultations:

- Meaning, Defining and Being
- Identity, Community, Welfare and Prosperity
- Religion, Violence and Conflict Resolution
- Religion, Media and the Arts
- Texts, Spaces, Rituals and Objects
- Education and Socialisation
- Law, Politics and the State

These themes and their relation to the Youth call are set out in the Annex to this specification with broad statements and indicative questions. Applicants will be asked to identify a maximum of two themes which will be addressed by their project. As the themes intersect, it is expected that some applicants will address issues in more than one theme and pose new questions which may arise.

## **Contributing disciplines and collaboration**

The programme themes are intended to attract researchers across the full range of arts, humanities and social sciences. In focussing on research themes, the programme both charts common ground and breaks new ground. The use of a range of established and innovative methodologies relevant to the research questions is encouraged. The programme budget will be used to only fund projects of outstanding quality; many of these projects will intersect between the arts and humanities and social, psychological and economic sciences.

The programme will bring together grant holders to share ideas and discuss methods, and will put them in touch with others interested in their findings or in working together on future research plans. It will make links with related

programmes, centres and research groups in order to seek out and develop new collaborative possibilities. Efforts will be made to connect the programme with other centres and programmes funded either wholly or partly by the ESRC and AHRC (such as [‘Diasporas, Migration and Identities’](#), [‘Identities and Social Action’](#) and [‘Re-emergence of Religion as a Social Force in Europe’](#) of the NORFACE network), by the other Research Councils and charitable foundations. Public bodies, voluntary and community agencies, private companies, performance and visual arts practitioners, and informed individuals with an interest and stake in the research and its outcomes will be involved at both programme and, where appropriate, project and network level. The director of the programme will provide a lead in forging connections between UK-based researchers and their international counterparts. A database of researchers and others interested in the programme will be developed. They will be kept informed of progress, events, and connections to other programmes, relevant funding opportunities, and future developments. A programme website will be launched in December 2007 ([www.religionandsociety.org.uk](http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk)) which will publicise information about networking events, feature awarded projects, make connections, and disseminate research (in the form of working papers and links to publications).

### **Youth Call Timetable and Schemes**

The development of the Religion and Society Programme began with the deliberations of an advisory group and the production of a draft outline specification. Two consultative workshops followed over the summer of 2006.

The £12.3 million Religion and Society programme will run for approximately 6 years from early 2007 under the oversight and management of a programme director and a steering committee. The programme will be commissioned in three phases. The first call for Religion and Society applications was issued in October 2006. The Youth Call will form the second phase of funding and then a third and final call for Religion and Society applications will be issued in late 2008/2009. All applications will be peer reviewed and specially convened panels will make the final funding decisions. In addition to specific research projects, workshops and networks, and studentships, the programme will also support networking events.

The Youth Call with funding to the value of £4million is in addition to the original programme budget of £8.3million which is for the first and third phases of funding mentioned above.

Support for research in the Youth Call will be provided through four schemes:

- Collaborative research studentships 3 year full-time awards
- Large research grants for up to 3 years and for between £100K and £600K fEC
- Research Networks and Workshops (Networks up to £30k for two years full economic costs (fEC) and Workshops £15k for up to one year (fEC)
- Small research grants for up to one year and for between £20K and £100K fEC

**Collaborative Research Studentships** will encourage and develop collaboration between Higher Education Institution (HEI) departments and non-academic bodies under the Youth Call. These studentships will provide opportunities for PhD students to gain first hand experience of work outside an academic environment. It is expected that approximately 5 grants will be awarded for 3 year, full-time awards that will commence in October 2008. The closing date for this call is 14<sup>th</sup> February 2008.

**Large Research Grants** (for between £100,000 and £600,000 fEC) will support approximately 7 projects under the Youth Call with a duration of between one and three years. Applications for three-year grants may propose a single studentship in association with the project. The competition will be conducted in two stages, an outline phase, followed by a request for full applications from short-listed candidates. The closing date for outline applications is: 28<sup>th</sup> February 2008 with the subsequent closing date for full applications 10<sup>th</sup> July 2008.

**Workshop and Networks** will support successful applicants to run *either* a series of workshops over one year (up to £15,000 fEC), *or* a network of researchers over two years (up to £30,000 fEC) to enable researchers to share ideas, to develop



collaborative proposals or publications, and to support engagement between scholars in the UK and beyond, and between scholars and other stakeholders. It is expected that approximately 7 grants will be awarded under this scheme as part of the Youth Call. The closing date for this call is 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2008.

**Small Research Grants** (for between £20,000 and £100,000 fEC) will support projects from less established as well as established senior scholars, and from those wishing to undertake small scale innovative or short projects of up to one year. It is expected that approximately 7 of these grants will be awarded as part of the Youth Call. The closing date for this call is 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2008.

### **Programme planning, management and evaluation**

The director of the programme is Professor Linda Woodhead, of the Department of Religious Studies at Lancaster University. She will be supported by a steering committee comprised of academics from a range of arts, humanities and social sciences disciplines and other stakeholders. With their help and that of a part-time programme administrator the director will oversee the running of the programme, develop its coherence, ensure that it meets its objectives, contribute to its dissemination, maximise its wider impact, and report annually on its work.

The steering committee, as part of its responsibilities, will contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of the programme (individual projects will also be monitored using normal AHRC processes). Its members will receive annual reports, the final programme report and will ensure that the objectives of the programme as stated in this specification are met. They will advise the director, the AHRC and ESRC on the development and management of the programme.

The programme's focus on research matters of common interest provides potential for linkage, mutual reflection on common issues or findings, and the added value that comes from separate researchers and research teams coming together to extend their thinking and ambition beyond their own project boundaries. To these ends, grant-holders will be expected to attend one or more workshops at which they will share and discuss their research, to submit annual reports which will contribute

to the annual programme report and provide material as requested for the website. To ensure co-ordination within the programme, the director will support exchanges between researchers on different projects, and between networks and projects. Existing ESRC and AHRC award-holders working on relevant projects may be invited to participate in programme events and to contribute to the website during the lifetime of the programme. A final programme conference is anticipated, and the programme will also feed into national and international conferences throughout its duration.

Non academics will be involved in the programme through participation in the projects supported and workshops and seminars, and representation on the programme steering committee. The involvement of non academics will be vital in terms of fully understanding and providing access to the communities and individuals involved in the research supported. They will also form an important audience for the programme outcomes in terms of translating evidence into policy recommendations.

It is through activities such as those outlined above that the coherence of the programme and its impact will be assured. In addition, monitoring and evaluating the amount, level and quality of activity (e.g. of conferences, workshops, lectures, media and electronic output, exhibitions, publications, creative work and performances, and other spin-offs and opportunities) will demonstrate the value added by the programme and its contributing projects to public knowledge, understanding of, and policy on religion and society. Moreover, it is anticipated that building of capacity in quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in the study of religion and society will contribute to the sustainability of programme activities. The legacy of the programme – the extent to which issues continue to be discussed and researched within the social sciences and arts and humanities beyond its lifetime- will also be a mark of its success. A full evaluation of the programme will be conducted up to two years after it has concluded.

Enquiries about the scholarly content of the Religion and Society Programme and in particular the current Youth Call, its aims and themes should be directed to Linda Woodhead at the contact address below:

Professor Linda Woodhead  
Department of Religious Studies  
Lancaster University  
LANCASTER  
LA1 4YG  
Tel 44 (0) 1524 592416  
Email: [l.woodhead@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:l.woodhead@lancaster.ac.uk)

Enquiries about the application procedures, competitions and timetables, application forms and application process for the Youth Call should be directed to one of the AHRC/ESRC officers as detailed below:

***Research Awards Officers***

Laura Milne-Day      e-mail: [l.milne-day@ahrc.ac.uk](mailto:l.milne-day@ahrc.ac.uk)      Tel: 0117 987 6686

Joanna Pollock      e-mail: [j.pollock@ahrc.ac.uk](mailto:j.pollock@ahrc.ac.uk)      Tel: 0117 987 6675

***Senior Awards Officer***

Louise Matter      e-mail: [l.matter@ahrc.ac.uk](mailto:l.matter@ahrc.ac.uk)      Tel: 0117 987 6669

***Programme Manager***

Kate Dunmow      e-mail: [k.dunmow@ahrc.ac.uk](mailto:k.dunmow@ahrc.ac.uk)      Tel: 0117 987 6674

***ESRC Senior Science Manager***

Dr Ian Farnden      e-mail: [ian.farnden@esrc.ac.uk](mailto:ian.farnden@esrc.ac.uk)      Tel: 01793 413017

## Programme themes Youth Call

The Religion and Society Programme is structured around seven research themes which raise a range of research questions. Comparative historical and cultural work can play an important role in answering these research questions. Without a rich historical and cross-cultural understanding, the programme would be at risk of providing only limited insights. Sensitivity to the significance of forms of social and cultural difference, including age, gender, ethnicity, economic status, class and sexual orientation – as well as diverse forms of religious and cultural background – is equally essential to effective work in this programme.

The programme as a whole is underpinned by certain fundamental questions about the relationships between religion and society. These are:

- How might we better understand the nature of 'religion' and the role of religious traditions, communities and identities in relation to various aspects of social and cultural life?
- What intellectual, educational, and cultural traditions shape (or possibly limit) the study of religion, and how might richer and more reflexive scholarship in this area be developed?
- How might religious groups negotiate their relations with each other and the wider public sphere in late modern society?
- How can we understand the complex relationships between the religious and the secular in different social and cultural contexts?
- In what ways are religious traditions, structures, identities and practices changing, and what are the implications of this?

- How might religion play a constructive role in the welfare of societies? How can more adequate ways of understanding religion and the sacred in the various aspects of social, political and cultural life be developed?

The research themes listed below provide a framework through which these key questions will be explored in relation to youth.

### **Meaning, Defining, Being**

Research on religion in relation to the lives of young men and women can help deepen our understanding of religion and its contemporary transformations. The initiative will test existing definitions of religion in the light of young people's beliefs and practice. It will provide fresh information on the wide and growing varieties of religion and spirituality today. It will encourage critical exploration of existing schemes of classification and terms such as 'religion', 'spirituality', 'faith' and 'faith based organisations', 'radicalisation', 'extremism', 'fundamentalism', and how these influence academic research and wider public policy and debate. It will be important to ask whether these terms, and our understanding of religion, has been distorted by selective vision – e.g. by giving more attention to adults than young people, to men's religiosity than to women's, and to a narrow range of monotheistic traditions.

The study of youth and religion will provide an important context for asking more general questions about the nature of religion, secularity and the sacred. Is religion, in some form, a central part of all human societies? How might identity, belief, values, emotion and practice interact in religious life? What is sacred to young people in different parts of the world? Is 'spirituality' more attractive to some young people than 'religion', and how should we understand the growing interest in spirituality?

### **Identity, Community, Welfare and Prosperity**

The initiative will explore the significance of religious traditions as resources for shaping young people's identities. It will consider the comparative importance of sacred texts, rituals, communities, and other religious authorities. How important is the influence of parents? Are young people actively involved in traditional religious institutions including temples, mosques, churches and synagogues, or do they feel

alienated from them? Do they see existing religious leaders as exercising authority? If not, what takes their place? There is evidence that religious identities are intensifying for many young people who are actively engaged with religion. What drives this intensification, and how do young people deepen and strengthen their religious identities in the context of a more secularised generational cohort and society? How are religious texts being read, and what interpretative authorities are being used? How do other cultural influences, particularly from popular culture, relate to religious influences? What significance do travel, occasional communities and festivals have on attitudes to religion? What events have shaped young people's imaginations, and how does this differ in relation to different religious and ethnic belongings?

Also important is the question of how religious identity interplays with other forms and contexts of identity: how is religious identity related to ethnic, gendered, sexual and class identity? How do different theologies and religious practices shape the way young people think, sense, feel, dress, behave, and comport themselves? What forms of stigmatisation and discrimination do young people face? How does religion interplay with this? This also involves considering how young people are represented, and the role played by religion, theology, and religious ethics. How have representations changed in modern times? Does religion continue to shape our understandings of the ideals and realities of youth? Do different religious and secular traditions sponsor different, perhaps conflicting, models and aspirations?

Questions about religious belongings, communities and organisations are relevant. In the context of a rapidly changing contemporary religious landscape, we need to explore why certain religious traditions and communities appeal to young people and others do not. The significance of the rise of both conservative forms of religion on the one hand, and new forms of individualised spirituality on the other, is of interest. So too are the role and fortunes of religious organisations which include youth, and organisations with a strong link to religious principles, whether international, national or local. Research is also needed on friendship and social networks, on interrelations between groups of young people, on sub-cultures, electronic communities and peer groups, and their interplays with religion. In a pluralist context, the question of identity and difference becomes increasingly important, as does the question of intra- and inter-faith relationships. What seems to encourage or discourage peaceful

co-existence within and between religions so far as young people are concerned? Are elements and aspects from different religious and secular traditions being combined in the formation of young people's identities, and if so, how?

The initiative will also explore a range of questions relating to welfare and prosperity in relation to young people's religious beliefs, identities and communities. For example, do particular groups suffer from social and economic marginalisation, and how might such inequalities be effectively addressed? Contrariwise, do some forms of religion encourage a 'work ethic' and socio-economic advancement? How do the theologies, structures or demographics of religious groups affect the development of expectations, opportunities, social capital and social integration? What is the religious significance of economic prosperity and consumption in different religious groups? And what are the implications of religious commitments for young people's physical and mental health, and understandings of wellbeing and human flourishing?

### **Religion, Violence and Conflict Resolution**

The initiative will seek to encourage research which advances our understanding of the relationships between religion, peace and violence through a focus on youth. There is a need for careful examination of how religion may encourage and legitimise violence, and how it can create support for violence undertaken by both state and non-state actors, and influence political attitudes to military and other interventions. It is also important to ask how religious legitimations for violence, radicalisation and extremism are disseminated, and under what conditions they gain wider support. Understanding more about the effects of representations of religion and violence in the media and political discourse will be important, as will examining the role of ethical models from different religious traditions in relation to contemporary conflicts. All forms of violence are of interest, whether inter-personal violence and vandalism, inter-group and gang violence, gender-based violence, race-based violence, state-led violence, or terrorist violence. It is important to gain a clearer view of the wider socio-economic profile of the young people who are likely to be attracted to religiously-inflected violence, in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and class.

Equally, it is important to consider the ways in which religion influences social cohesion, respect between individuals and communities, peace-making and other

initiatives to counter violence to persons, property and the natural world. In what ways do religious ideas and organisations contribute effectively to peaceableness, conflict-resolution or the use of non-violent forms of intervention in the public sphere? What can we learn from the role of religious groups in conflict resolution in particular settings and what role might religious groups play in challenging religiously-endorsed or other violence, and in promoting constructive progress? To what extent does religion have the capacity to foster social cohesion?

### **Religion, Media and the Arts**

Most young people inhabit a more, and differently, 'mediated' world than their parents, and it is important to consider the implications for religion. The nature and effects of the representation of religion remains a significant area of study. Also important are the ways in which individuals and groups use media (including the internet), and how this might be transforming religious beliefs, identities and rituals as well as shaping religious engagements with wider society. What is the role of old and new media in the globalisation of religious ideologies and identities? Are some media of particular importance? How do electronic gaming, computer simulation, the creation and habitation of virtual worlds, new forms of science fiction, interact with religion? How does the medium affect the message? How do traditional channels of religious dissemination relate to new media?

The initiative will also consider the extent to which art, music, sport, dance and theatre may be of significance for young people's religious identities, and in what ways. Are 'the arts' in the broadest sense a sphere in which young people can express their sense of the sacred? How does that expression relate to religious 'tradition', if at all? How are young people currently contributing to religious art, music, media, theatre, literature and other forms of creative enterprise? Conversely, do arts and media tend to have a secularising effect for many young people? Do they advance or inhibit religious understanding and co-operation, and in what ways?

### **Texts, Spaces, Rituals and Objects**

The study of religion and youth inevitably involves asking questions about the role of sacred texts, rituals, spaces and objects. In the case of sacred texts, this will mean



exploring the ways in which they shape the lives of young men and women and spill over into religious activity in wider society. Attention will be given to the hermeneutical approaches that are used when individuals and groups read texts which they regard as sacred. What theological assumptions underpin these reading strategies? How important and evident are new abilities to access and criticise sacred texts? Is the role of texts becoming more or less important for young people (compared to other forms of media)? How are sacred texts being presented and re-branded for young people through various media and other genres?

The initiative is also interested in the significance of other sacred objects, and of real, virtual and imagined sacred spaces. What kinds of sacred objects do young people engage with, what media and practices do they use to engage with these objects, and what is the significance of this engagement for other parts of their lives? How important are traditional sacred spaces like churches, mosques, temples, gurdwaras, synagogues and household shrines for young people? Are other sacred spaces of growing importance (natural sites, personal shrines, other public spaces, electronic spaces)? How has sacred space changed over time? Are traditional sacred spaces dominated by adults, and what place do young people have within them – and within the sacred spaces of civil society? How important is religious travel and pilgrimage? What might constitute appropriate public sacred space for young people in the context of a plural society?

### **Education and Socialisation**

Religion continues to play an important role in the educational and social formation of many young people, and it is important to research the role of religion in formal and informal learning – noting in particular the challenges posed for such learning in liberal, pluralist and increasingly globalised societies. Within this context, deeper exploration might be undertaken of the roles of mainstream and faith schooling, higher and further education, parents, peers and family, youth workers and religious leaders in affecting religious development and attitudes to people from religious and belief backgrounds other than one's own. The role of religion in prisons, youth-offender institutions and the military is also of interest. How do faith traditions themselves shape the aims and processes of educational and social formation? How are religious professionals trained, and how do they engage with their own and other

religious groups, and civil society? What impact have changes in pedagogy and the curriculum had on religion?

Research is also needed on the effectiveness of the way in which religious education is handled in schools and universities. Why is Religious Studies a growth subject in many British schools? How can religion best be taught in 'secular' societies, and how do young people become religiously informed? Countries like the UK, France and the USA have very different models of religious education, and comparative studies may be illuminating. What difference does it make where religion is not taught in schools? What are the implications for citizenship? Historical studies can also illuminate the present situation. How and why has religious pedagogy changed? To what extent have changes like the decline of the Sunday School movement had an impact? What significance do changing forms of family have for religion and socialisation? Are there changes in the way young people negotiate boundaries between 'faith' and 'science'?

### **Law, Politics and the State**

Religion and politics have close and constitutive links, no less for young people than for adults. Indeed, for those who are not yet able to vote and play a full role in state processes and the political process, religion may serve a key role in political socialisation, debate, activity, and protest. The initiative will consider how far and in what ways religion influences young people's political commitments, and how this varies in different religious groups and settings. Does religion encourage or discourage activism or indifference to politics? Does it shape party-political commitment? How does it relate to citizenship, national and transnational political commitments? It will be important to ask about the different ways in which religion may play a role: by influencing values and shaping visions of the perfect society? By setting up oppositions to 'sinful', degraded, hedonistic forms of social and political behaviour? By acting as a channel of transnational influences and commitments – whether to one's own faith community, the global poor, or the entire ecosystem? The initiative will also address a range of legal questions, particularly those with a bearing on young people's lives. Who takes legal responsibility for young people? What attitude do young people have to the law and to secular and religious laws? How does the law impinge on young people's lives, and how does this relate to religious commitments?