



Northern Ireland
Assembly



St Mary's
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Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

...is a forum that encourages debate on a wide range of research findings, with the overall aim of promoting evidence-informed policy and law-making within Northern Ireland

Creative Learning to Affirm Diversity

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Policy/Legal Context

- **Race Equality Bill** – in consultation 'Young people suggested that there should be widened curriculum on racism and diversity'
- implies associated widening of scope of Religious Education.
- **16s to 18s in Education or Training Bill** – recommendation for new RE syllabus to 'help young people to understand the society in which they are growing up'.
- **Supreme Court (19.11.25)** RE and collective worship in an NI school contrary to ECHR and UK Human Rights Act 1988.
- **Draft Framework for Race Relations (March 2026)** - emphasis on importance of education and training to reflect diversity.
- **National Curriculum for RE in England** currently under development.

RETOPEA aims to support young people to

- Move beyond generalisations and stereotypes about religious diversity
- Learn with history
- Make constructive and critical connections between past, present and their own experiences
- Think 'outside of the box' about religious toleration and peace
- Develop religious, digital and media literacy skills
- Work effectively in teams with others who bring different viewpoints, experiences and skills
- Focus on 12-18 age range but also engagements with older and younger age groups



RETOPEA Funders and Partners

EU Horizon 2020 2018-22

The Open University, Milton Keynes (UK)
KU Leuven (Belgium)
University of Helsinki (Finland)
University of Tartu (Estonia)
University of Warsaw (Poland)
University of Granada (Spain)
Ss. Cyril and Methodius University,
Skopje (North Macedonia)
Leibniz Institute for European History,
Mainz (Germany)
Macedonian Centre for Intercultural
Cooperation
Le Foyer vzw (Belgium – NGO)
Euro-Arab Foundation (Spain)



2023-6

Funders:

Culham St Gabriels Trust
Open University Open Societal
Challenges

Partners include:

Schools in Belfast, Cardiff, Leicester,
London, Milton Keynes
Rose Castle Foundation
Solutions not Sides
Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies
(Jordan)
Udhetim I Lire - Liberi di Viaggiare
(Albania)
Home education groups



The 'Docutube' Method

Uses the creative process of filmmaking to actively engage young people in learning about and reflecting on religious diversity in the past and present.

- Engage
- Plan
- Create
- Reflect

13-20 hours: either 2-3 full days or shorter sessions integrated into lessons over several weeks



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RETOPEA Clippings Collection



> Gender and Sexuality



> Migration, trade and travel



> Propaganda, stereotyping and communication



> Discrimination and being different



> Ideas about toleration



> Peace and conflict resolution



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Different Approaches to Docutubes

Pieces spoken to camera

Home-made drawings or maps

Hand-written graphs or bullet points

Short dramatisations or reconstructions of historical events

Interviews with other young people

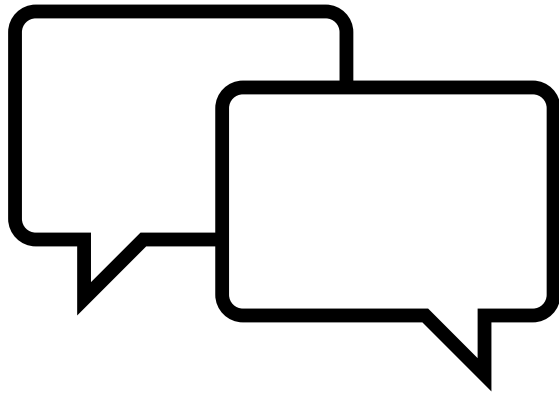
Objects which can be explained (eg: a religious object or clothing)

Landscapes which provide context (establishing shots)



Evaluation

Between 2020 and 2025, the RETOPEA team have run **20 docutube workshops** with **232 young people (aged 12-22)** with **schools and youth groups** in Northern Ireland, England, Germany, Spain, Poland, North Macedonia, Belgium, Finland, Estonia, Albania and Jordan.



These were evaluated through

- small group interviews
- participant observation
- questionnaires &
- analysis of the docutubes produced.

Evaluation Questionnaires

77.6% (No: 180 of 232) of docutube workshop participants completed evaluation questionnaires

84% of those agreed that RETOPEA had helped them to think of religious peace and toleration in new ways.

87% felt that making a docutube film helped them learn about religious peace and toleration.

96% said that they enjoyed making a docutube film.



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Free resources



**OU OpenLearn
Course for
Teachers:
Young people
and religion:
creative learning
with history**



**RETOPEA Website
(incl. RETOPEA
Clippings Collection
& examples of
docutubes):
<https://retopea.eu>**

**Open University
Religion, Belief and Worldviews Hub:
<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/religionandworldviews>**



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Docutube Workshops in Belfast, 2023-2025

1 Controlled school, 1 Catholic Maintained school & 1 shared education workshop involving both.

Young people engaged with:

- the background and text of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement;
- ideas of toleration in the past – eg. Roger Williams and Rhode Island;
- contemporary non-NI examples of toleration and intolerance, including the complexity of everyday life for Israelis and Palestinians; the impact of Mo Salah on attitudes towards Muslims in Liverpool;
- their peers' experiences of sectarianism (inc. verbal and physical attacks on way to school);
- discussions about recent anti-migrant disturbances in NI;
- interviews with Church of Ireland bishop and Roman Catholic priest (shared education workshop) and Presbyterian minister (Catholic Maintained school workshop).



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Docutube Workshops in Belfast, 2023-2025: Observations

- Young people saw the value in reflecting critically on the achievements and limitations of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement.
- Discussion of different generational experiences of conflict and peace in NI valued by students.
- They demonstrated willingness and ability to articulate their personal experiences of diversity and (in)tolerance, including in the shared education context.
- Their learning was enhanced by 'out of the box' thinking about meanings of toleration/tolerance in the broader sense and through comparative approaches.



One Docutube referred to the first integrated school in NI.



Interview with Church of Ireland bishop and Roman Catholic priest



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Docutube Workshops in Belfast, 2023-2025: Feedback

- Broadly comparable feedback results to other European workshops.
- 83% agreed or strongly agreed that the experience of working with young people from different religious background was valuable.
- Young people highlighted value of making new friends from other communities.
- *"I got to see a different culture and a different side of things"; "It helped me understand a different point of view that can change mine".*
- *"I do not think toleration is a strong enough word. We should not just put up with other people; we must celebrate them in all their uniqueness."*
- *"Peace is fragile. As a society, we need to be proactive as we continue to build better relationships between different communities."*



Recommendation 1:

Resource high-quality teaching on religious and non-religious diversity

- Evidence from both recent NI Assembly consultations and from our research that young people themselves want such teaching.
- Important basis for positive community and racial relationships.
- Now a legal requirement in light of Supreme Court judgement.
- Such education to be less about teaching ‘facts’ about distinct religious traditions, and more about the development of skills, especially the ability to engage respectfully and empathetically with differing points of view.



Recommendation 2: Encourage wider adoption of Docutube film- making methodology

- Enables deep learning.
- Helps young people gain understanding of media production and hence makes them less vulnerable to misinformation
- Stimulates development of other skills, including critical thinking, team working and good communication.
- Methodology successful with different age groups and with neuro-divergent young people
- Modes of delivery can be flexed to suit timetables and informal educational and training contexts.



Recommendation 3: Facilitate safe spaces for young people to explore diversity

- Adults to facilitate and establish ground rules but not to control discussion.
- Importance of a shared task – eg film, podcast, powerpoint, piece of drama – as outcome and encouragement to 'disagree well'.
- Encouragement to draw on lived experience and learn **from** and **with** each other.
- Group ownership of process significant safeguard against extremist and sectarian influences.

Recommendation 4: Promote engagement between History and RE

- Value of History for 'out of the box' thinking about the present
- Subject collaboration could ease timetabling pressures
- Important not to impose particular readings of the past – learn WITH history rather than from history



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Recommendation 5: Manage risk rather than try to eliminate it

- Youth culture and social media can be used to disseminate positive as well as negative messages.
- Our experience to date is that when young people are trusted to behave responsibly they normally do so.
- But need to monitor activity and raise awareness of risks – not least to themselves – of inappropriate sharing

Ongoing Activity/Future Plans

- Working with primary schools to adapt methodology to younger age groups – awareness attitudes can be addressed early in life
- Dissemination in workshops/seminars for teachers/teacher trainers & trainees
- Engagement with home educators
- Exploring applications to peace education, e.g. in Balkans, Middle East – would welcome further engagement in Northern Ireland
- Contact retopea@open.ac.uk



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