# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This interim report is published with the intention of creating an opportunity for as many people and organisations as possible to engage with the Commission on Religious Education (CoRE) about our developing thoughts on RE in schools in England. The interim report explores a number of issues which have emerged during our deliberations on the evidence presented to us during the initial consultation, at the evidence gathering sessions held around the country and in written submissions received during the 2016/17 academic year. It sets out initial recommendations alongside a range of issues on which we are seeking to consult further before drawing any conclusions. We hope that there will be a full and vigorous consultation on the content of this interim report, and that this will help to inform the final report of the Commission, due to be published in 2018.

RE remains a vital academic subject for education in the 21st century. Studying RE gives young people the knowledge, understanding and motivation they need to understand important aspects of human experience, including the religious, spiritual, and moral. It gives insights into the arts, literature, history, and contemporary local and global social and political issues. It provides them with a space in the curriculum to reflect on their own worldview and to engage with others whose worldview may be different. The young people that we have spoken to have told us that RE enables them to have better friendships and to develop greater respect and empathy for others. RE is highly valued by many employers, who increasingly understand that in a globalised world, understanding others' worldviews and their impact on people's lives is essential to success.

The knowledge gained through studying RE is central to good local, national and global citizenship. It enables young people to have a nuanced and informed understanding of key political and social issues that they will need to face as they grow up in an increasingly globalised world. RE helps pupils to deal positively with controversial issues, to manage strongly held differences of belief, and to challenge stereotypes.

As local and global demographics have changed, including patterns of affiliation to religious and non-religious worldviews, today's students will encounter people with a much more diverse range of beliefs, lifestyles and backgrounds than did the previous generations. Understanding religious and non-religious worldviews, and their impact on individuals, communities and wider society, has never been more essential to good citizenship than it is now. For these reasons, we argue throughout the report that all pupils, regardless of background or the type of school they attend, are entitled to high quality RE which enables them to develop the nuanced and informed

understanding of worldviews that they will need as citizens.

We were impressed by the evidence of high quality and innovative approaches to RE that were presented during our consultations.[1] At its best, the subject offers great educational benefit for pupils and the British model of RE is highly regarded and has earned international esteem. Of particular note has been the appearance in recent years of local and national support networks for teachers and also the high level of examination entry at GCSE and A level.

Having said that, we are unanimous in the view that RE faces a perilous future without strategic, urgent intervention. Examination entries fell for the first time in 2017, and many who gave evidence saw this as a sign of further decline in years to come. Amongst the many challenges the subject faces, the following are identified as particularly significant:

- The changed patterns of religious and non-religious belief from the time when the current system was enacted in 1944 present a requirement to ensure that RE's structures reflect the realities of contemporary society. The religious landscape in the UK has diversified with fewer people identifying as Anglican and more identifying with other Christian denominations or other religious traditions. Moreover, the number of people identifying as non-religious has increased: in 2017, 53% of the population described themselves as not having a religion.[2] The global religious landscape has also been undergoing rapid change, where religion is highly significant in many societies.

- There is inconsistency in the quality and provision of RE, with increasing numbers of schools not even meeting the basic legal requirement. Pupils are experiencing a lottery in their access to high quality RE. Evidence presented to the Commission made clear the impact that the type of school had on the extent to which RE is provided: while 6.5% of schools that follow an RE curriculum determined by their religious character devote no part of their curriculum time to RE at key stage 4, the figure is 20.7% for schools required to follow a locally agreed syllabus for RE and 43.7% for academies without a religious character.[3] This inequality of provision means that many children are being disadvantaged by being denied RE.

- As more schools become academies, leaving ever fewer under local authority control, the current framework of determination of RE via local authorities and agreed syllabuses is ceasing to be fit for purpose. A decrease in local authority funding has exacerbated this problem.

1 *Please see Appendix 1: Evidence received by the Commission for details of how we collected evidence.*
2 *NATCEN (2017). British Social Attitudes Survey. http://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/1469605/BSA-religion.pdf*
3 *RE Council & National Association of Teachers of RE (2017, forthcoming). The State of the Nation.*

Moreover, evidence submitted to the Commission makes clear that the current approach of relying on the requirements of academy funding agreements is not sufficient for ensuring the proper provision of RE across all academies. If no action is taken, there is a serious risk of increasing numbers of pupils leaving school with an inadequate level of knowledge and understanding of religious and non-religious worldviews at precisely the time when such understanding is becoming more important.

- RE has suffered from a policy environment that has not encouraged headteachers to regard it as a high-status subject. This environment includes insufficient processes to hold schools to account for their provision of RE and the omission of RE from key performance indicators published by DfE.

- There has been diminishing access to adequate training and support for teachers. This is particularly acute at primary level where the Commission heard that on average a primary trainee receives less than three hours of RE-specific training during a one-year PGCE or School Direct course.[4]

- The quality of RE is variable across schools. Low standards predominate across too many schools, including schools with and without a religious character. Teachers are not always clear on the purpose of the subject and many lack the subject knowledge necessary to teach about sensitive and crucial issues with skill and nuance. Locally agreed syllabuses are also variable in quality. One issue that we have noted is the fact that religion is often presented in an essentialist mode that fails to help pupils understand the complexity, diversity and historicity of religious ideas, institutions and practices. This was most often mentioned in relation to the Dharmic traditions (i.e. Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh traditions) in the written and oral evidence but affects the presentation of all religions and worldviews in resources and in the classroom.

> We are advocating RE for all not because children belong to religious traditions or not, but because in our age a nuanced understanding of the role of worldviews must be a part of citizens' intellectual make-up

The Commissioners have therefore made initial recommendations in four areas:

4 *Fiona Moss, oral evidence submitted to the Commission. See also NATRE (2016). An analysis of the provision for RE in primary schools. https://www.natre.org.uk/news/latest-news/an-analysis-of-the-provision-for-re-in-primary-schools/*

1. **A national entitlement for RE.** This would set out clearly the aims and purpose(s) of RE and what pupils should experience in the course of their study of the subject. This national entitlement should be for all pupils at all state-funded schools and we seek to consult with independent schools about whether they should adopt it. We are advocating RE for all not because children belong to religious traditions or not, but because in our age a nuanced understanding of the role of worldviews must be a part of citizens' intellectual make-up. It is to do with their ability to function effectively as citizens and as human beings. This is as important an aspect of education for pupils in schools of a religious character as it is in those without a religious character. It should be introduced through non-statutory guidance as early as possible with a view to it ultimately becoming statutory, either to supplement or replace the current legislation on agreed syllabuses. This national entitlement provides a reinvigorated vision for RE for all pupils in the future, drawing on the very best of the RE that we know happens in some schools. It seeks to be a basic statement of what all pupils are entitled to, but is not a national syllabus or curriculum. We hope that the flexibility of the proposed national entitlement will ensure that a diversity of high quality approaches will emerge and that this will best suit the landscape of a school-led system. We recognise that schools will need guidance and support to translate this entitlement into curriculum planning and we are reviewing where this guidance and support should come from.

2. **Holding schools to account for the provision and quality of RE.** The evidence presented to us indicates that at present too many schools are not being held to account for failing to provide adequate RE. Schools should be required to publish details on their website of how they meet the national entitlement for RE. Inspection frameworks should be revised to ensure that inspectors monitor whether schools meet the national entitlement for RE. The Commission has also given thought to how schools should provide for those Key Stage 4 pupils who are not taking the GCSE in Religious Studies and would like to consult on the possibility of a revised qualification for these pupils to ensure that their work can be accredited.

3. **A National Plan to improve teaching and learning in RE.** The Commission would like to develop a National Plan for developing teaching and learning in RE, along the lines of the National Plan for Music Education. The National Plan will bring together the Commission's recommendations for improving teacher subject knowledge and confidence and we seek to consult on how this can best be achieved.

4. **A renewed and expanded role for Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs).** The evidence we have received suggests that SACREs can have an important role in promoting and supporting RE and in promoting good community relations more broadly, but that their capacity to deliver this role fully has been diminishing in many local authorities. The Commission's suggested recommendations, which are

consultative at this stage, call for consideration to be given to adding the promotion of improved community relations to the remit of SACREs and make proposals for the securing of resources for their work. There are also recommendations that seek consideration of the composition of SACREs with a call to ensure that they are fully representative, with representatives of non-religious worldviews as full members.

The full recommendations are set out on pages 8 to 12.

In addition, the Commissioners are seeking to undertake further consultation in these areas and have set out the issues that they are particularly interested in exploring. These areas for consultation are set out on pages 12 to 14.

# LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

## A NATIONAL ENTITLEMENT FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

a. There should be a national entitlement statement for RE which sets out clearly the aims and purpose of RE and what pupils should experience in the course of their study of the subject. A draft statement for consultation is overleaf.

b. This entitlement should become normative through non-statutory guidance as early as possible, and should ultimately become statutory, either to supplement or to replace current legislation on agreed syllabuses.

c. The national entitlement should apply to all state-funded schools including academies, free schools and schools of a religious character.

d. Independent schools should consider adopting the entitlement as an undertaking of good practice.

### The National Entitlement for Religious Education

Overleaf is the draft text of the proposed national entitlement for RE. This draft is for consultation. We welcome comments on and refinements to the text.

**A National Entitlement for RE**

RE in schools should enable students to engage in an intelligent and informed way with the ideas, practices and contemporary manifestations of a diversity of religious and non-religious worldviews. It should enable them to understand how worldviews are inextricably woven into, influence and are influenced by, all dimensions of human experience. It should prepare pupils for life in modern Britain by enabling them to engage respectfully with people with worldviews different from their own. RE should equip pupils to develop their own beliefs, practices, values and identity in the light of their reflections on the worldviews they have studied.

Through their study of worldviews, pupils should develop a lifelong motivation to enquire into questions of meaning and purpose, and investigate others' worldviews and what they mean for individuals, communities and society. All of this will enable them to become responsible citizens and members of diverse and changing local, national and global communities.

Throughout their period of compulsory schooling, pupils should learn about, understand and engage with:

a. The diversity of religious and non-religious worldviews and ways of life that exist locally, nationally and globally.

b. The ways in which communities and individuals holding different worldviews interact, change and maintain continuity in different times and contexts and as the surrounding culture changes.

c. The different ways that people interpret and respond to texts and other sources of authority.

d. The ways that people communicate their beliefs, experiences, values and identities through verbal and non-verbal means (eg prose, story, poetry, art, music, dance, ritual, architecture).

e. How people seek moral guidance from religious and non-religious worldviews and how they interpret this guidance in their lives.

f. The importance of experience, including extra-ordinary experiences, in shaping people's worldviews and how worldviews are used to interpret experience.

g. The role of religious and non-religious rituals and practices in both creating and expressing experience, beliefs, values and commitments.

h. The relationship between people's worldview and their thinking and actions concerning political, public, social and cultural life.

i. Both the positive and negative exercise of power and influence resulting from people's worldviews.

j. The important role that worldviews play in providing people with a way of making sense of their lives and in forming their identity.*

As part of a balanced programme aimed at meeting this provision, it is expected that pupils will:

1. Experience meeting and visiting people from their local community from a range of worldviews including those different from their own and that of the school.

2. Develop core skills for researching the beliefs, values and practices of individuals and groups in society.

3. Experience a range of approaches to the study of religions (e.g. phenomenology, philosophy, sociology, textual studies, theology).

4. Engage with questions of meaning and purpose and of the nature of reality raised by the worldviews that they study.

5. Think through and develop a reflective approach to their own personal responses and developing identity and learn to articulate these clearly and coherently while respecting the right of others to differ.

6. Develop the core skills and dispositions of careful listening, critical thinking, self-reflection, empathy and open-mindedness required for making wise judgments.

7. Learn to discuss controversial issues and work with others (including those that they disagree with) with the intention of securing a healthy and peaceful society in the context of significant diversity.

** We are indebted to Barbara Wintersgill, who presented her project on Big Ideas in RE. Her work has informed much of the content of this list.*

## HOLDING SCHOOLS TO ACCOUNT FOR THE PROVISION AND QUALITY OF RE

a. Schools should be required to publish on their website details of how they meet the national entitlement for RE.

b. Inspection frameworks should be revised to ensure that inspectors monitor whether or not schools meet the national entitlement for RE, in the light of schools' duty to provide a broad and balanced curriculum.

c. The DfE should either monitor, or give SACREs or other approved bodies the power and resources to monitor, the provision and quality of RE in all schools, including free schools, academies and schools of a religious character.

d. The government should consider the impact of school performance measures, including the exclusion of RS GCSE from the EBacc, on GCSE entries and on the provision and quality of RE, and consider reviewing performance measures in the light of the evidence.

## A RENEWED AND EXPANDED ROLE FOR SACRES

We seek to consult on all our recommendations relating to SACREs. (See page 12)

## A NATIONAL PLAN FOR IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RE

We are considering developing a National Plan for developing teaching and learning in RE, along the lines of the National Plan for Music Education. This plan is likely to include the following recommendations:

a. A minimum of 12 hours should be devoted to RE in all primary Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses.

b. Leading primary schools for RE should be identified and all primary trainees should be given the opportunity to observe RE teaching in such a school.

c. Include under the Teachers' Standards, part 1, section 3 (Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge), the requirement that teachers 'demonstrate a good understanding of and take responsibility for the sensitive handling of controversial issues, including thoughtful discussion of religious and non-religious worldviews where necessary.'

d. Restore funded Subject Knowledge Enhancement (SKE) courses for those applying to teach RE and for serving teachers of RE without a relevant post A-level qualification in the subject.

e. Restore parity of bursaries for RE with those for other shortage subjects.

f. The government and relevant funding bodies should consider how funding of grassroots teacher networks can be made more sustainable.

g. SACREs and local authorities should review existing good practice in developing and sustaining these grassroots networks and start their own if such a network does not exist in their local area.

h. University performance measures should be updated to credit universities for their engagement with schools, including the provision of continuing professional development (CPD) and resource materials.

i. University staff conducting research in areas related to RE should be encouraged to contribute to grassroots networks, lead teacher development days, develop resource materials or become SACRE members. This may provide opportunities for them to demonstrate the impact of their research or increase student recruitment.

# LIST OF AREAS FOR CONSULTATION

## A NATIONAL ENTITLEMENT FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

1. The entitlement is not a national syllabus or curriculum. It is a basic statement of what all pupils are entitled to, whatever type of school they attend. Many schools will need guidance and support to translate this entitlement into curriculum planning, particularly in relation to progression. We are still reviewing where this guidance and support will come from. We seek input on what bodies would be best placed to translate the entitlement into detailed programmes of study and how best to support schools to plan their curriculum in line with the entitlement. Several possibilities have been discussed by the Commission so far:

   a. Removing the requirement for local authorities to hold Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs). In a context where every school will eventually become an academy, this requirement is no longer proportionate for many local authorities and will become even less so over time. However, it might be possible for programmes of study to be developed at regional levels. It would also be possible to include regional universities on this model. A regional system might not provide sufficient support to academies unless they were explicitly included. If the requirement for local authorities to develop a locally agreed syllabus were to be removed, it would not preclude those local authorities that had the resource and expertise from convening ASCs and developing programmes of study that could be adopted by those schools that chose to, within or outside that local authority.

   b. Recommending the development of a national set of programmes of study compliant with the entitlement. This may or may not be government-funded. This has the advantage of providing consistency

across localities, which was requested by some teachers in the written and oral evidence. However, there are a number of potential difficulties with it. First, there is the vexed question of who develops programmes of study. Second, there is the justified criticism that in the era of a school-led system a nationally agreed set of programmes of study is too rigid and leaves schools insufficient freedom to undertake RE that is appropriate for their pupils and immediate community. Third, there is the question of how to ensure that the syllabus is appropriately independent of political interference. Many of those who gave oral and written evidence were concerned about excessive political interference in the scope and content of RE.

c. Leaving the market open for schools, groups of schools, dioceses, SACREs, commercial providers and other relevant groups to write their own programmes of study. This would allow maximum freedom for schools but might not resolve the inequality in provision and quality discussed above. Non-statutory guidance or a range of model programmes of study might also be developed to support relevant groups in writing their own programmes of study.

2. There is likely to be a range of possibilities within these broad categories and other possibilities that we have not yet considered. We seek views on what would be most helpful to support schools with curriculum planning and ensure that all schools can meet the entitlement effectively.

3. The question also remains as to whether the entitlement statement should replace or supplement the current legislation on agreed syllabuses, which requires that they must 'reflect the fact that religious traditions in Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain' (UK Parliament, Education Act 1996, Section 375.2). This legislative statement remains a statement of historical and social fact. Of those who identify themselves as having a religion, the majority are Christian, and Christianity has played a particular role in the history of Great Britain. However, the statement in and of itself does not specify how much time should be spent on any worldview. It also does not include non-religious worldviews. We seek views on whether the entitlement should specify a number and range of worldviews, or a minimum time to be spent on one worldview.

4. We have also discussed whether the name of the subject should be changed, to signify the renewed vision for the subject. It is difficult to find an alternative name that appropriately captures the breadth and depth of the subject as outlined in the entitlement statement. We have discussed a number of options. A small majority of the Commission preferred to call the subject Religion and Ethics (or Religions and Ethics) while others wished either to preserve the current name, or to change its name to Religions and Worldviews or Religion, Philosophy and Ethics (or Philosophy, Religion and Ethics). We seek views on which of these options best captures the nature of the subject outlined in the entitlement. We

also seek suggestions on alternative names which fit the entitlement and the renewed vision for the subject.

## HOLDING SCHOOLS TO ACCOUNT FOR THE PROVISION AND QUALITY OF RE

1. We seek views on the most appropriate mechanisms for holding schools to account for the provision and quality of RE at both primary and secondary level.

2. We are considering recommending that a revised qualification at Key Stage 4, for those not taking Full Course GCSE RS, be developed. This would need to meet the requirements of the national entitlement for RE and have currency in school performance measures. This qualification would not be compulsory but would count in school performance measures and in individuals' applications for work or further study. We seek views on how effective this would be and what demand there would be for such a qualification.

## A RENEWED AND EXPANDED ROLE FOR SACRES

1. We seek views on the following recommendations on the role of SACREs:

   a. The Government should publicly highlight and reaffirm the important role of SACREs in supporting and resourcing RE.

   b. The Government should consider whether the role of SACREs should be expanded to include a duty to advise on all matters relating to religion and belief in schools.

   c. The Government should consider ways of securing funding to resource SACREs adequately. Options for this may include:

      i. Ring-fenced funding for SACREs.

      ii. Funding for SACREs from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport or the Department of Communities and Local Government.

      iii. Specifying a minimum amount of funding (perhaps per school or per pupil) to which local authorities must adhere.

   d. The Government should consider the composition of SACREs and the law should be changed to include representatives of non-religious worldviews as full members.

   e. The Government should publish all SACRE annual reports publicly on a dedicated website.

2. We seek views on what the duties of SACREs should be in relation to promoting good community relations, beyond matters relating to religion

and belief in schools.

3. We are still considering how the composition of SACREs should be adapted to be fit for purpose in a changed social and educational landscape. In particular, we are considering whether the committee structure should be changed or abolished. We seek views and evidence on this.

4. We seek views on which groups and organisations should be represented on SACREs.

## THE RIGHT OF WITHDRAWAL

1. We seek further evidence on the number of pupils being withdrawn from RE, and the reasons given, where these are given, as well as whether the number of cases and reasons given have been changing over time.

2. We seek views on the most effective ways to manage the right of withdrawal in practice.

3. We seek views on whether it is desirable to look to adopt an overall approach to the design of the RE curriculum in every school so that it is sufficiently 'objective, critical and pluralistic' as to render it capable of being compulsory without the right of withdrawal.

## A NATIONAL PLAN FOR IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RE

1. We seek views on what should be included in the National Plan for RE, beyond the recommendations set out above.

2. We seek views on how the National Plan might best be implemented.

3. There are increasing expectations of teachers to be engaged with research, by keeping up to date with published research at minimum, and where possible by engaging in action research, lesson study and other forms of practitioner research. We seek views on the kinds of research which would be most helpful for RE teachers to engage with, and what mechanisms would support this.

# SECTION 1

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This interim report outlines our thinking and discussions to date, drawing on the evidence that we have received and heard so far. It is an opportunity to open up a conversation on our proposed recommendations and invite contributions ahead of the final report in September 2018.

Our proposals are tentative at this stage. We seek thoughtful discussion to improve them, so that we can establish RE on a stable, secure footing for generations to come and ensure that young people grow up with a sound knowledge and understanding of this crucial area of study.

It should also be noted at this stage that much of the evidence that we have received has concentrated on the secondary phase of education, particularly in terms of quantitative data on provision. The majority of the teachers and pupils who have contributed oral evidence have also been from secondary schools. Our recommendations at this stage therefore have more to say about secondary than primary, and we intend to redress this balance during the next stage of our deliberations.

We have also engaged extensively with the major reports that have been published in the last few years on the state of, and direction for, RE. The evidence from these reports, particularly RE for Real and the Ofsted and All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) reports of 2013, is extensive and robust, and we have found this evidence extremely useful in understanding the issues and developing ways forward.

We begin with an introduction to some of the discussions we have had on the nature of RE and its objects of study. The terms 'religion' and 'worldview' have yielded much discussion and debate, and our thinking on this has shaped our substantive proposals. Therefore, we felt that it was important to share some of this thinking at the beginning of the report.

The next section, 'Religious Education in the 21st Century,' begins with an argument for why RE matters and the justification for retaining it in the curriculum in a rapidly changing world. We then review the legal and structural arrangements that currently apply to RE, the strengths of the subject at the moment and the key challenges that it faces.

It is these challenges that our recommendations seek to meet. The second half of the report outlines our proposals for meeting these challenges, in particular our proposed National Entitlement for RE, to apply to all schools. The implications of this for holding schools to account, and for the role of SACREs, are also discussed. We explore the possibility of

removing the right of withdrawal and the implications of doing so. Finally, we consider ways to support high quality teaching and learning in RE and contribute some thoughts towards what a National Plan for RE might look like. The proposals for a National Plan for RE are at an earlier stage of development than those for the National Entitlement.

We conclude with some thoughts about the next phase of the Commission's activity, and details of how to contribute your views between now and the publication of the final report.

## 1.1 ABOUT CoRE

The Commission on Religious Education (CoRE) was established in 2016 to review the legal, educational and policy frameworks for religious education. The ultimate aim of the Commission is to improve the quality and rigour of RE and its capacity to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.

The Commission's review has been, and seeks to continue to be, wide-ranging, inclusive and evidence-based. It seeks to inform policy-makers and suggest ways of tackling some of the challenges to RE that have been identified in a series of recent reports.

The Commission has been established by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC). The REC provides the secretariat for the Commission. The Commission is, however, independent of the REC and is entirely responsible for its reports and recommendations.

The Commission has had three residential meetings so far and presided over five oral evidence gathering sessions. A further four meetings are scheduled for the 2017/2018 academic year, and there will also be further opportunities for consultation. The Commission's final report is due for publication in September 2018.

The Commission's terms of reference have been set by the REC. The terms of reference were extensively consulted on among REC member organisations before being approved by the REC Board. While the REC has set the Commission's terms of reference, it is entirely up to the Commissioners to decide how to operate within these terms of reference. The terms of reference can be found in *Appendix 2: Terms of Reference for the Commission on RE.*

The Commission is made up of 14 Commissioners, including the Chair, with a wide range of expertise and professional backgrounds. Pen-portraits of the Chair and each of the Commissioners can be found in *Appendix 3: About the Commissioners.*

## 1.2 ABOUT THE EVIDENCE GATHERING PROCESS

The Commission's written evidence gathering took place from December 2016 to February 2017. The call for evidence was based on an online survey consisting of 17 questions. The questions set were based upon the terms of reference for the Commission. The questions were deliberately open-ended in order not to lead respondents. The survey was publicised on the REC and Commission on RE websites, via the REC's 64 member organisations, and via social media. We received 2,245 total responses to the survey, of which 862 exited without responding to the substantive questions. Once duplicates were removed, 1,377 responses were taken forward for analysis. Full details of the respondents to the call for evidence can be found in *Appendix 1: Evidence received by the Commission.*

The Commission also received 49 submissions of evidence by email to evidence@commissiononre.org.uk both during and after the time that the survey was open.

In addition to the call for written evidence, the Commission held five evidence gathering sessions in London, Birmingham, Manchester, Exeter and York from February to July 2017. Presenters were given seven minutes to present their evidence and around 10 minutes for questions from a panel of Commissioners. Half the slots available in each session were for invited individuals and organisations, including schools, while the others were booked by interested parties on a first-come-first-served basis. We would like to thank all those who presented and, particularly, all those who hosted sessions.

A total of 53 individuals and organisations presented oral evidence during the evidence gathering sessions. Full details can be found in *Appendix 1: Evidence received by the Commission*.

Individual Commissioners have also conducted school visits and attended meetings of interested organisations including SACREs and the REC. We would like to thank all those who have invited Commissioners and hosted visits.

Finally, Commissioners chose to invite selected individuals to present at Commission meetings. To date, the DfE, Adam Dinham and Martha Shaw, and Barbara Wintersgill have presented. The Commission also intends to hear from Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead at a future meeting.

We plan to hold a formal online consultation from October to December 2017 for a robust conversation about the proposals contained in this report. In addition, the evidence@commissiononre.org.uk email address remains open for those who wish to contact the Commissioners via this method.

We quote from both oral and written evidence in the report. Individuals and organisations who submitted written evidence are quoted by name where permission has been given. Pupils who contributed oral evidence are not identified by name but their year group and location are given. Teachers are also not identified by name, but their phase and location are given. Academics, SACRE members and other subject experts, as well as those who spoke as individuals, are identified by name and by the location where they presented.

# SECTION 2

## RELIGION, RELIGIONS AND WORLDVIEWS: THE SUBJECT MATTER FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Our discussions on the appropriate subject matter for RE and how it should be defined have been wide-ranging and rich. We have found it to be complex territory and have searched for terminology that adequately covers this complexity. We have sought to be properly inclusive of the breadth of perspectives, beliefs and ways of life that make up the subject. However, we recognise that such issues will always be open to interpretation and debate.

In a context of rapidly changing patterns of affiliation to what we commonly call religions, and the rising number of people in the UK who identify with non-religious worldviews such as Humanism, it is increasingly important for our terminology and thinking to capture this dynamism and fluidity. 53%[5] of the population of Britain describe themselves as having no religion, and many of these people live their lives with almost no reference to religious communities, ideas, or concepts.

We have found the concept of a 'worldview' extremely helpful in our discussions. Recognising that the word has been given different definitions, we have used the term 'worldview' to mean an overarching structure, often known as a metanarrative, which provides a 'lens' which is both in the world and through which one views the world. Worldviews encompass many, and sometimes all, aspects of human life – they influence how people understand what is real and what is not, how they decide what is good and what to do, how they relate to others, and how they express themselves, to name but a few examples.

We considered using the phrase 'religion and belief' to describe the subject matter for RE but worldviews – whether religious or non-religious – are more than just sets of propositional beliefs – they have affective (emotional) and affiliative (community, belonging) dimensions as well. We do use 'faith and belief communities' on occasion as this is a common way of referring to these communities and is inclusive of both religious and non-religious worldviews.

There has been a tendency to think of the subject matter for RE as 'religions and non-religious worldviews' but this suggests that religions are not themselves worldviews. It is our belief that religions are also worldviews and that the terminology should be 'religious and non-religious worldviews'.

Essentially, we see the subject matter for RE as worldviews in two senses:

5 *NATCEN (2017). British Social Attitudes Survey. http://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/1469605/BSA-religion.pdf*

1. Institutional systems of making meaning and structuring how one sees the world. These include 'religions' such as Christianity, Islam or Buddhism as well as non-religious worldviews such as Humanism, nationalism or Communism. These institutional systems are themselves complex and dynamic. They may refer back to sacred texts or narratives of continuity and at the same time be fluid, adapting to new times and cultures. They are made up of practices, rituals, narratives, experiences, interactions, social norms, doctrines, artistic expressions and other forms of cultural and individual expression, and should not be reduced simply to belief and practice but understood in all their complexity.

2. The individual process of making sense of life and making meaning. In this sense, everyone has a worldview. These worldviews may be more or less consciously constructed. They may make reference to institutional worldviews but the Commissioners are aware that increasingly young people make less explicit reference to overall institutional worldviews. They do, however, draw on ideas from these worldviews.

Therefore, the Commission uses the term 'worldview' in its broadest sense, to cover traditional and non-traditional religions, secular and atheistic movements and perspectives, non-standard forms of religious and spiritual life and the wide diversity of ways in which people make sense of their lives with or without reference or commitment to any specific religion or institutional worldview. We use 'worldview' to cover both religious and non-religious worldviews, and both institutional and individual worldviews.

We continue to use the term 'religion' or 'religious' to refer to institutional religious worldviews, and in relation to religions such as Christianity or Hinduism as well as in contexts where individuals might describe themselves as 'religious' or 'belonging to a religion'. This may make 'religions' seem as though they have harder boundaries than they do in practice. We are aware that in practice there are interactions and blurred boundaries between religions, and that individuals may not see religions as bounded entities. Equally, religious institutions as well as individuals within any one 'religion' may have different and sometimes contradictory positions on a range of matters of faith and practice.

Our comments in this report and, we believe, the content of our proposed national entitlement, are 'epistemologically agnostic' – that is, they neither affirm nor reject claims about divine revelation. Whatever the origin of worldviews, it is their manifestations in the world that RE seeks to explore (including, of course, the understanding that adherents to a particular worldview have about the origin of that worldview). Our understanding is that RE seeks to explore the language in which worldviews are expressed (whether or not they use the language of revelation) and the resulting cultural, social and intellectual responses and engagements to these over time. Both theistic and atheistic understandings of revelation itself are compatible with the approach that we have taken here.

# SECTION 3

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY: STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES

### 3.1 WHY RELIGIOUS EDUCATION MATTERS

1. Religious Education (RE) matters for a number of reasons, of which we have chosen to concentrate on four.

   a. It is an essential academic subject in its own right, with a distinctive contribution to make to pupils' overall knowledge and the development of their own worldviews.

   b. One cannot understand historical and contemporary trends and issues without an understanding of the worldviews that underpin them. RE is therefore essential to informed local, national and global citizenship.

   c. It provides a 'safe space to discuss difference' and therefore can contribute to improved community relations.

   d. Understanding religious and non-religious worldviews is essential to many job roles in an increasingly multicultural UK and globalised world, and RE therefore can contribute to social mobility.

> I get why you go on about RE Miss. It matters to people. I need to know why people be like they are. I don't have to agree but I do have to know about it.
>
> Comment by a year 5 pupil quoted by Fiona Moss, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, London

**'Talking genuinely about genuine things' – RE as an essential academic subject**

> After taking RS A level it becomes hard to ever blindly accept a proposition again... Before we studied RE, we'd have been more egocentric. Our discussions have stopped being celebrity gossip and more talking genuinely about genuine things.
>
> Year 13 pupil, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, Birmingham

2. RE is an essential academic subject. It draws on the disciplines of Religious Studies including anthropology, philosophy, theology, phenomenology and sociology, and has a distinct set of questions, methodologies to answer these questions, and an empirical body of knowledge.

3. Studying RE enables pupils to:

a. Study worldviews from an impartial, broad and balanced perspective

b. Understand other political, social and cultural issues

c. Understand other academic disciplines

d. Develop key transferable skills

e. Contribute as a rounded person to a modern, diverse society.

***RE enables pupils to study worldviews from an impartial, broad and balanced perspective***

4. Everyone has a worldview. It may be more or less conscious or systematic. It may or may not make reference to institutional religious or non-religious perspectives. It is one of the core tasks of liberal education to enable pupils to reflect on their own and others' worldviews. To flourish as a responsible adult and citizen, pupils need to understand where their own and others' worldviews come from, to understand their impact on people's actions in a whole range of areas of human life, and to be able to critique them in a climate of respect.

5. While patterns of affiliation to institutional worldviews have changed, those with no formal affiliation may still draw on ideas from institutional religious or non-religious worldviews, whether consciously or unconsciously. It is therefore important for young people growing up and working out their own worldviews to understand the origins and complexities of some of the ideas that influence them and others.

> [RE's] purpose is to make you know what you want to say in the outside world more than in the classroom, to form moral and ethical beliefs that you use in daily life.
>
> Year 9 pupil, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, London

> Adult life is really busy but the lives of students are just as busy. Where in our busy curriculum is the space for students to step back, take a little bit of time and really think? Where is the space for them to think about the big questions that they have? Why are we here? Why did God allow my grandma to die? Why didn't God stop the suicide bomber? These are hard questions – but this is why RE is relevant.
>
> Head of RE, secondary, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, Manchester

6. Institutional worldviews remain interesting and important in their own right, both in terms of the claims they make about reality, spirituality and the nature of the good life, and in terms of their influence on politics, society and culture as well as on individuals. It is also important to study

the ways in which social and historical trends influence both institutional and individual worldviews, and the way that these change over time and in different contexts. This provides young people with knowledge of the underlying principles that will help them understand a range of social phenomena.

7. It is important for young people to have the opportunity to explore these worldviews from an impartial, broad and balanced perspective.

***RE helps pupils understand political, social and cultural issues***

8. Institutional religious and non-religious worldviews remain strongly influential locally, nationally and globally. Without a good understanding of these worldviews, it will be much harder for pupils to understand the political, social and cultural issues that they face on a daily basis. We discuss this further below in paragraphs 19–26.

***RE helps pupils understand other academic disciplines***

9. The study of worldviews can be a gateway to a number of other curriculum subjects and disciplines. The overall school curriculum in England remains rooted in historical ideas of the liberal arts, of which theology was the pinnacle. It is still the case that you cannot fully understand literature, art, music, history or politics without some understanding of the worldviews that underpin particular movements or forms of expression. This is as true of references to Muslim thought in contemporary music such as grime and hip-hop as of references to the Bible in Paradise Lost.

10. Because worldviews are so complex and multifaceted, they call for multidisciplinary approaches to studying them. This provides a rare opportunity in the curriculum for young people to experience how applying different disciplinary approaches to a phenomenon may contribute to a richer and more complete understanding of that phenomenon.

***RE enables pupils to build transferable skills***

11. RE provides key opportunities for pupils to build both specific and general transferable skills. Some of these skills are essential to all academic learning, such as critical thinking, imaginative empathy, creativity, forming reasoned judgements based on sound evidence and argument, being able to locate relevant data, and becoming aware of bias and stereotype. Others are more intrinsic to RE, such as representing views other than your own with respect and empathy, reflecting on your own assumptions, using and understanding symbolic language, and using technical terminology accurately.

### *Summary*

12. RE makes a distinctive contribution to the overall intellectual as well as spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of children and young people. It enables them to think through the fundamental questions of being human. It helps them to understand a range of responses to these questions, the bases for these responses and the way that they influence, and are influenced by, individuals, communities and societies. This in turn enables young people to think through their own beliefs and be more thoughtful in their overall outlook.

13. Other curriculum subjects can and do contribute to pupils' understanding of worldviews, but only in RE are worldviews studied holistically from many perspectives. As the field is so wide-ranging and diverse it requires specialist knowledge and skills. Both primary and secondary students acknowledged the crucial role of specialist teaching in their oral evidence to the Commission.

14. There remains, therefore, a need for a discrete curriculum subject in which these institutional worldviews can be explored and discussed on their own terms, and in which pupils can be given the space to reflect on their own developing individual worldviews.

## RE is essential for understanding the changing local, national and global landscape

15. As stated above, it is impossible to understand contemporary political, social and cultural movements without understanding the worldviews that underpin them. Perhaps 30 years ago, it was frequently claimed that religious worldviews, in particular, were becoming less and less relevant, as religious affiliation declined in the UK and Western Europe. However, local, national and global events have reminded us that religious institutions and religious affiliation remain highly relevant whether or not we happen to be members of such institutions – indeed perhaps more so in the last 30 years than in the 50 years that preceded them.

### *Understanding local and national trends*

16. Locally, religion continues to play a role in shaping communities. The extent to which individuals from different religious communities are able to interact positively at local levels often depends on their ability to understand and work with diversity. The response of local religious institutions to major celebrations or in the aftermath of a crisis shows that they continue to provide points of contact and connection for local communities.

17. Across England, and indeed the UK as a whole, the religious landscape has changed significantly in the last 50 years. In 2016, 53% of the UK population described itself as not having a religion, compared to 31% in

1983.[6] Amongst those aged between 15–24, just over 70% describe themselves as not having a religion.[7] Religious diversity has also increased, with fewer people identifying themselves as Anglican and more identifying with other Christian denominations or other religions. 50 years ago, Judaism was the largest non-Christian religion, today it is fourth behind Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism.[8]

18. Religion continues to play a role in public discourse, both positively and negatively. In Britain, as in many other places, there has been a rise in extremist movements of various kinds, including those drawing upon religious, ethnic and national symbols. Some would argue that 'religion' has become a 'toxic brand' associated with wars, terrorism, restrictions on human freedom and untenable metaphysical claims, while others argue for its continued positive value in an increasingly atomised, individualistic and materialistic society. The reality is, of course, more complex than either of these two positions, and religions and worldviews can have both positive and 'toxic' impacts on individuals and communities, depending on a whole combination of political, social, cultural and ideological factors. It is therefore essential for young people to understand this.

19. Prejudice and discrimination against some worldviews and the communities that belong to them appears to be increasing in the UK, in particular Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.[9] At the same time, more individuals and public commentators are making a concerted effort to combat these prejudices in public discourse and to understand the diversity within religious communities. This is a striking illustration of the division and hatred that can result from a lack of understanding about religions and how they work.

### *Understanding global trends*

20. Globally, 84% of people describe themselves as religiously affiliated, while 16% do not. Christianity is the largest single religion at 31% and Islam the second largest at 24%. However, these statistics hide considerable diversity of belief, practice and lifestyle within both Christianity and Islam, and indeed across all those who identify as religiously affiliated. In an increasingly globalised world, pupils need to be able to appreciate the breadth of religion and belief globally, and in particular diversity within religions.[10]

*6 NATCEN (2017). British Social Attitudes Survey. http://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/1469605/BSA-religion.pdf*

*7 NATCEN (2017). British Social Attitudes Survey. http://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/1469605/BSA-religion.pdf*

*8 Commission on Religion and Belief in Public Life (2015), Living with Difference. http://www.woolf.cam.ac.uk/uploads/Living%20with%20Difference.pdf*

*9 See, for example, the London Mayor's hate crime dashboard: https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/mayors-office-policing-and-crime-mopac/data-and-statistics/crime%20/hate-crime-dashboard and the BBC 'reality check' on Islamophobia: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-40346457/reality-check-is-islamophobia-on-the-rise*

21. Religion continues to play an important role in individual motivations and communal decision-making. Furthermore, geopolitical conflicts are sometimes exacerbated by ethno-religious tensions. In an increasingly globalised world, where many people have internationalised affiliations, these tensions can affect relations between individuals and groups in the UK.

***Summary***

22. It is very difficult to understand these local, national and global issues without an understanding of the different ways in which people believe and belong, and of the impact of religious and non-religious worldviews on individuals, communities and societies, both positively and negatively. The young people that we spoke to understood this very clearly:

> [RE] can play a big role in defeating religious extremism in society – as young people are being taught more about this and they can understand the difference between truths and lies in religion.
>
> Year 10 pupil, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, Manchester

> [Studying RE] helps us understand the context of world events and what is right or wrong in the media and how to respond.
>
> Year 9 pupil, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, York

## 'A safe space to discuss difference' – the contribution of Religious Education to community relations

> [Studying RE] has helped me have more friends in school – there are other faiths in school and my best friend is a Muslim. We are connected because we've got to understand each other's faiths through RE.
>
> Year 10 pupil, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, Manchester

23. The phrase 'a safe space to discuss difference,' attributed by most to Robert Jackson of the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit,[11] was the most often quoted single phrase across the evidence gathering sessions. Teachers and subject experts alike turned to it to explain the distinctive place of RE in the curriculum. This is not 'safe' in the sense of 'sanitised' but rather a space where people can talk – agree and disagree – freely about the contentious issues raised by worldviews.

*10 Pew Research Forum (2017). The Changing Global Religious Landscape. http://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/*

*11 Jackson, R (2014). Signposts: Policy and Practice for Teaching about Religions and Nonreligious Worldviews in Intercultural Education. Published by the Council of Europe.*

24. Across the oral and written evidence submitted by teachers, RE was understood to play a key role in fostering positive community relations. Important and contentious issues could be discussed openly in RE and the reasons behind different opinions on key personal and social issues could be explored. Pupils also saw this as a key difference that studying RE had made to them:

> We learn to accept differences in each other as understanding breeds tolerance in our diverse communities. This allows us to create a safe environment that benefits everyone.
>
> Year 9 pupil, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, Birmingham

> You learn to respect your peers. You learn about their religion, rights and responsibilities – for example the 5 precepts of Buddhism. You learn what they do and why they do it. You won't then isolate them or bully them because of their faith.
>
> Year 10 pupil, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, Manchester

25. Large-scale research conducted by the Warwick Diversity Project also found that the study of religions had a positive effect on social cohesion.

> The results of both qualitative and quantitative strands support REDCo[12] findings that studies of religious diversity in schools contribute positively to social cohesion, while also fulfilling other aims, such as contributing to students' knowledge and understanding, and to their personal development. Having knowledge and understanding of religions was considered to be important by young people both with and without a personal religious stance (e.g. Arweck 2016a; 2017a).
>
> Among the topics explored in analysing the quantitative data of the Warwick Diversity Project was a study of young people in England taking religious education at GCSE level, with some comparisons with pupils not studying RE to exam level. The research confirms that studies of religions at examination level contribute positively towards a harmonious climate in relation to religious diversity (Francis, Penny and McKenna 2017).
>
> Warwick Religions And Education Research Unit (WRERU), written evidence submitted to the Commission

Having knowledge and understanding of religions was considered to be important by young people both with and without a personal religious stance

12 *'Religion in Education: A contribution to dialogue or a factor of conflict in transforming societies of European Countries (REDCo)' research project. See https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ces/research/wreru/research/completed/redco/ for more details.*

### The contribution of religious literacy to social mobility

> Most occupations require a knowledge of religion – [for example] doctors need to understand patients of different backgrounds.
>
> Year 10 pupil, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, Manchester

26. Research conducted by Adam Dinham and Martha Shaw found a consensus among the employers that they consulted that learning about religion and belief was essential to success in the workplace.

> A very, very large number of beliefs are relevant to the workplace, e.g. if you work in education or health sector, understanding about religious beliefs in our society today is very important. The precise utility of religious knowledge will vary by occupation, activity and sector but there is no doubt that to a wide, wide range of sectors, knowledge about religion and belief is very important. And to put the contrary, not understanding about religious belief is a serious weakness.
>
> Employer quoted in RE For Real Report, 2015[13]

27. Pupils who have a good understanding of religions and their impact on individuals, communities and societies will be more employable than those who display ignorance or prejudice. Where some pupils receive no RE, or poor quality RE, this will put them at a disadvantage compared to their peers who have a greater understanding of religions and worldviews and their impact on public life.

28. By way of an example, EY (formerly Ernst and Young) launched a religious literacy programme for organisations, in collaboration with Coexist House. This illustrates their recognition that religious literacy – understanding the diversity and influence of religious and non-religious worldviews – is essential to the successful functioning of organisations.

> As more evidence shows that recognizing religious diversity within the workplace can improve recruitment, retention of employees and team cohesion as well as maintaining an inclusive culture and enhancing brand and reputation, organizations will increasingly want to shift the dial on diversity.
>
> Press release announcing Ernst and Young's Religious Literacy for Organizations programme

29. Encountering worldviews other than that of one's own background may open up a wider range of options for pupils. Reflecting on one's own worldview in the light of these encounters may also open up new options and ways of thinking. This may, in turn, raise their aspirations and improve

13 *Shaw, M & Dinham, A (2015). RE for REal: The future of teaching and learning about religion and belief. Project report. Goldsmiths, University of London.*

their understanding and relationships with peers and future colleagues.

## 3.2 THE LEGAL AND STRUCTURAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

### The 1944 Education Act

30. The history of RE in schools in England has been shaped by what is often known as the 'dual system' – the state funding of both schools of a religious character and what used to be called 'county' or 'community' schools which have no affiliation to any religious denomination. Church schools – Church of England, Roman Catholic and others – predate the establishment of state education, and began to receive state funding after the 1902 Education Act established Local Education Authorities in place of school boards.

31. Schools of a religious character were divided into 'voluntary controlled' and 'voluntary aided' schools in the 1944 Education Act. Voluntary controlled schools would have all costs met by the state, but have less autonomy over the curriculum and staffing. In contrast, the 'foundation' or 'trust' that governed a voluntary aided school would be required to contribute towards capital expenditure but would retain greater influence in the governance and running of the school. All Catholic schools are voluntary aided, whereas more than half of Church of England schools are voluntary controlled. Some Church of England and Catholic schools have now become academies.

32. The 1944 Education Act stated that 'religious instruction shall be given in every county school and every voluntary school' (UK Parliament, Education Act 1944, Section 25.2). Religious instruction was the only specific subject mentioned as compulsory under the 1944 Education Act. All other subjects were to be decided by the local authority in all schools except voluntary aided secondary schools, where they were to be decided by the school (Section 23.1-2).

33. Deferring to the concerns of nonconformist Christians, it was also stated in the Act that such religious instruction in county and voluntary controlled schools 'shall be given in accordance with an agreed syllabus adopted for the school or for those pupils and shall not include any catechism or formulary which is distinctive of any particular religious denomination' (UK Parliament, 1944 Section 26). Religious instruction in voluntary aided schools was required to be 'under the control of the managers and governors of that school and... in accordance with any provisions of the trust deed relating to that school' (Section 27:1).

34. The right of parents to withdraw their children from both collective worship and religious instruction, as it was then conceived, dates from the 1870 Education Act and was reinforced in the 1944 Act.

35. The 1944 Act also established the provision for local determination of

agreed syllabuses and SACREs although at this point local authorities were given the power to constitute SACREs but not required to do so. They were, however, required to convene Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs) and develop agreed syllabuses. The committee structure of SACREs was also established, and at this time 'other denominations' was taken to refer only to other Protestant Christian denominations.

### The 1988 Education Reform Act

36. During the 1960s and 1970s, academic writing on religious education began to engage with social changes, particularly secularisation and the increasing religious diversity in society.[14] Ninian Smart's ideas were particularly influential at this time, and culminated in *Working Paper 36* of the Schools Council Secondary Project on Religious Education in 1971. This paper 'advocated the "phenomenological" or undogmatic approach to RE which saw the subject as developing understanding of religions without promoting any particular religious stance, a process drawing on scholarly methods to generate empathy with those holding religious worldviews.'[15] Some schools and local authorities were already doing this in practice, and it became increasingly popular following the publication of the working paper.

37. By the 1970s some local authorities had also started to interpret the legislation on SACREs and ASCs to include religions other than Christianity within the committee structure.

38. The 1988 Education Reform Act established a National Curriculum for the first time. However, this National Curriculum did not include RE, partly because local determination was already well established, and partly also because of the right of withdrawal. RE was included as part of the basic curriculum and together with the National Curriculum constituted what was compulsory to be taught in schools.

39. The 1988 Act included significant changes to the nature of RE. These changes reflected what was already going on in practice. First, 'religious instruction' was changed to 'religious education' with the underlying meaning that RE was no longer about the transmission of religious beliefs but about understanding religions and their impact on society.

40. In addition, multi-faith RE was enshrined in law for the first time, both in terms of changes to the composition of SACREs and in direct legislation about the content of agreed syllabuses. The famous statement that agreed syllabuses 'shall reflect the fact that religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the teaching and

*14 Jackson, R (2013) Religious education in England : the story to 2013. Pedagogiek: Wetenschappelijk forum voor opvoeding, onderwijs en vorming, Volume 33 (Number 2). pp. 119-135. http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/58637/*

*15 Jackson (2013) op. cit.*

practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain' (UK Parliament, Education Reform Act 1988, Section 8.3) was also enshrined in law at this time and has remained a requirement ever since.

41. The law relating to SACREs and ASCs was also strengthened. The role of SACREs was enhanced and members of other religions were officially included in SACRE committees for the first time.

42. The Act specified that voluntary aided schools could teach RE in accordance with their trust deed, while voluntary controlled and community schools were required to teach RE in accordance with their locally agreed syllabus.

43. RE remained compulsory until the end of Key Stage 5 in schools. It was not compulsory for students over 16 in FE or Sixth Form Colleges.

44. The Education Act of 1996 reinforced these changes.

### Non-statutory developments after 1988

45. Two non-statutory model syllabuses were developed in 1994, in consultation with representative groups from the major religious traditions present in Great Britain and included in the curriculum. It was in these model syllabuses that the two well-known attainment targets for RE based on the work of Michael Grimmitt, 'learning about religion' and 'learning from religion' were popularised, and these have since gained wide currency.

46. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) published a non-statutory national framework for RE in 2004. This too gained wide currency and was influential in the development of many locally agreed syllabuses. The national framework referred explicitly to students having the opportunity to study 'secular philosophies such as humanism' – again a reference to a development that was already taking place in practice in some schools and local authorities.

47. RE was not included in the Coalition Government's review of the National Curriculum. The RE Council therefore conducted a review of the subject in 2013. This set out both a curriculum framework to assist those writing RE syllabuses and a series of recommendations for improving RE in the future. The programmes of study developed mirrored the 2014 National Curriculum.

### The legal requirements for RE in academies

48. Academies and free schools are state-funded schools which are independent of the local authority. They operate in accordance with a funding agreement between the trust running the academy and the Secretary of State for Education. Academies do not need to follow the

National Curriculum. Some academies are operated by religious denominations and are therefore counted as 'schools of a religious character'. Where academies are operated by religious denominations, their funding agreement usually acknowledges this in relation to their provision of RE, giving them the freedom to use a denominational RE syllabus, as in voluntary aided schools.

49. Funding agreements for other academies require them to provide RE in accordance with the requirements for agreed syllabuses – i.e. that it must reflect that religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain. They do not require academies to follow the locally agreed syllabus in their local authority.

### GCSE and A-level Religious Studies

50. New content for GCSE and A-level Religious Studies was developed in 2015 for first teaching in 2016 and first examination in 2018. The GCSE content required pupils to study two religions and sought to respond to criticisms of 'current practice whereby students are rewarded for engaging in topical debates with virtually no understanding of religious teachings, beliefs or texts'.[16] Humanism was not included as an option in the 'two religions' papers but non-religious perspectives were taken into account in the philosophical and ethical sections.

### Implications

51. The legal and structural arrangements for RE are a key consideration for the Commission because they impact on the delivery of the subject. Commissioners have to consider whether the statutory requirements are still fit for purpose and provide an effective basis for securing high quality RE.

52. A key issue is whether the statutory position of RE has kept pace with wider changes both within the world of educational policy and practice and in relation to the changing nature of religion in the 21st Century. We review this below in the section on *Religious Education in 2017 – the main challenges*. In particular, we explore whether the checks and balances in the original legislation still apply in a context where local authorities no longer have responsibility for many schools and find it difficult to sustain the support for RE that they are legally required to provide.

53. Specifically, the Commission has identified the following aspects of the current legal arrangements which we believe require attention:

    a. The principle that 'in all maintained schools RE must be taught according

*16 Department for Education (2015). Reformed GCSE and A-level subject content, consultation response, February 2015, p.23.*

to either the locally agreed syllabus or in accordance with the school's designated religion or religious denomination, or in certain cases the trust deed relating to the school' and whether this should be revised to include some form of statutory statement of entitlement agreed at a national level to apply equally to all schools within the state sector.

b. The requirement that RE in agreed syllabuses must 'reflect the fact that the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.'[17]

c. The principle of local determination in the production of agreed syllabuses and whether the statutory responsibilities of ASCs should be transferred elsewhere.

d. The age range and key stages of schooling at which RE should be a statutory requirement.

e. The future of SACREs and the appropriateness of the current arrangements for membership, structure and responsibilities.

f. How RE should be inspected and how schools should be held to account for the provision and quality of RE.

g. Whether the right of withdrawal as it applies to both parents and teachers is still fit for purpose.

54. This report sets out our initial thoughts on most of these areas and we intend to consult on all of the above aspects of the current legal arrangements.

## 3.3 RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN 2017 – KEY STRENGTHS

55. At its best, religious education in England is highly regarded across the world. It is a beacon for multi-faith inclusive RE with a focus on enabling students to understand and respond to the complex world of religion, belief and identity. The UK has nearly 50 years of experience in teaching multi-faith Religious Education, going back to the first Shap conference in 1969[19] and the Schools Council Working Paper 36 in 1971. Internationally, only Sweden has as long a history of this kind of RE.

56. When RE is taught well, it is highly valued by students, as their comments from our evidence gathering sessions make clear. Other evidence, including the RE for Real report, shows that RE is valued by teachers, employers and parents.[19]

*17 UK Parliament, Education Act 1996, Section 375.2.*
*18 The Shap working party on World Religions in Education http://www.shapworkingparty.org.uk*
*19 Shaw, M & Dinham, A (2015). RE for REal: The future of teaching and learning about religion and belief. Project report. Goldsmiths, University of London.*

> I took RS (at GCSE) because I want to be informed about others' beliefs, so I don't become ignorant or prejudiced. I found the historical side of RE appealing as I could see how the Abrahamic faiths tie together. It's important if you want to do something that involves talking with or being with other people. I would like to do geography or politics later on – RE is a valuable skill to have because you need to connect with people in different ways.
>
> Year 10 pupil, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, Birmingham

57. The main strengths of RE in 2017 seem to be:

    a. The passion and commitment of teachers and school leaders

    b. High take-up of accredited courses at secondary level

    c. Emerging grassroots RE networks for professionals

    d. The integration of faith communities and lived experience into the curriculum.

**The passion and commitment of teachers and some school leaders**

58. Nothing makes more difference to the attainment and progress of pupils than good teachers and teaching,[20] and we were impressed by the passion and commitment of those teachers who contributed written and oral evidence to the Commission.

59. The teachers who contributed written and oral evidence also cited the important role of school leaders in establishing and communicating the status of RE. The support of school leaders was also identified as a key enabler of good RE in the 2013 Ofsted report[21] and the 2014 *Making a Difference* review of RE in Church of England schools.[22] RE thrived where it was supported by school leaders and governors. In primary schools, this might include employing a specialist RE teacher. In secondary schools, it included protecting curriculum time and specialist subject teaching and leadership, as well as decisions about examination entries.

20 *Department for Education, (2011) The Importance of Teaching. White paper. See also Hattie, J. (2008). Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement. Routledge.*

21 *Ofsted (2013). Religious Education: Realising the potential. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-realising-the-potential*

22 *Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, Education Division (2014). Making a Difference: a review of Religious Education in Church of England schools. https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2076944/making%20a%20difference%20a%20review%20of%20religious%20education%20in%20church%20of%20england%20schools.pdf*

> Headteachers and senior leaders are crucial to high quality learning and teaching in schools. Their vision of excellence for all is shown by the way they appoint quality staff, value well being, staff training and support a balanced curriculum. Where RE is excellent, the head and senior leaders value the subject, support CPD, school visits and visitors, fund the subject fairly and have clear and supportive assessment and marking policies. Excellent RE coordinators and heads of department have high standards of themselves including the management of classroom behaviour and learning and teaching.
>
> Jane Chipperton, written evidence submitted to the Commission

60. Previous Ofsted reports have identified outstanding practice in some schools,[23] where enquiry was embedded in the curriculum and where teachers were able to direct investigation into the lived experience of religion and connect this to pupils' own questions and beliefs.

61. We continue to be impressed by the commitment of teachers to developing their own subject knowledge and that of non-specialist colleagues. We discuss this further in paragraphs 67–72.

62. 'Passionate teachers create passionate pupils,' as one teacher told us in her oral evidence. This was clear from the pupils' comments in the oral evidence.

### High take up of accredited courses at secondary level

63. The high proportion of pupils sitting for, and passing, public examinations in Religious Studies is testament to its popularity. At its height in 2011, over 400,000 pupils – nearly two thirds of the total cohort – entered for GCSE Religious Studies (RS). Even with the steep decline in GCSE Short Course entries following their exclusion from performance measures, around half the cohort still takes GCSE Religious Studies, with 293,691 taking GCSE (Full and Short Course) in 2017. Allowing for the fact that many schools made GCSE Full Course or Short Course compulsory, these figures still show that it is a popular subject.[24]

64. RS A level entries also rose dramatically – by 96% – during the period 2002/3 to 2013/14, with small but steady increases since then until this year. In 2017 just over 22,000 pupils entered for Religious Studies A level – a slight drop of 3.6% from 2016 but still almost twice as many as entered in 2002.[25]

65. RS A level remains popular with top universities, despite not being

*23 Ofsted (2013). Religious Education: Realising the potential. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-realising-the-potential*
*24 JCQ, GCSE examination entries. https://www.jcq.org.uk/*
*25 JCQ, A-level examination entries. https://www.jcq.org.uk/*

included on the list of 'facilitating subjects' due to the small number of courses which specifically require it. The Russell Group of top universities has made it clear that RS A- level provides 'suitable preparation for University generally',[26] and both Oxford and Cambridge University include RS in the top level list of 'generally suitable Arts A levels'.

66. By way of illustration, almost 21% of students admitted to Oxford University to study English and 13.5% admitted to study History in 2015 had an RS A level. This is more than those with Economics, Physics and Business Studies A levels. 11% of those admitted to study PPE had an RS A level.[27]

### Grass-roots networks bringing professionals together

67. Some of the teachers who participated in the oral evidence gathering sessions were members of local grass-roots networks such as the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) hubs or Learn Teach Lead RE (LTLRE). These networks bring together primary and secondary teachers, university lecturers, professional advisers (employed by the LA or the Church of England diocese, or freelance members of professional associations), subject experts and SACRE members to improve the quality of teaching in RE. They do not yet cover every locality in England, so access to them remains patchy, but they are a promising vehicle for improving RE across the nation if they can be expanded and sustained.

68. These networks have become increasingly popular and widespread in the last five years, reflecting changes to the provision of CPD in an increasingly school-led system as well as the possibilities of technology and social media to bring people together. In a short time, they have had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and subject leadership in schools. They have proven to be excellent examples of what is possible in a school-led system.

69. While many RE networks are made up of teachers working together without any external support, others rely crucially on the contributions made by professional advisers and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The thriving community of professional associations in RE provides essential support to many grass-roots networks. These associations include: the Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants (AREIAC), the Association for University Lecturers in Religion and

*26 http://russellgroup.ac.uk/media/5457/informed-choices-2016.pdf page 29. The text reads*
*"There are some advanced level subjects which provide suitable preparation for entry to university generally, but which we do not include within the facilitating subjects, because there are relatively few degree programmes where an advanced level qualification in these subjects would be a requirement for entry. Examples of such subjects include Economics, Religious Studies and Welsh."*

*27 Deborah Weston, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, London (based on FOI requests).*

Education (AULRE), the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE), the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), and the RE Council (REC).

70. In addition, some of these networks have relied on charitable funding in order to exist. Those that do not have charitable funding operate on no budget and rely on the goodwill of teachers. RE is in a fortunate position in that charitable organisations do exist with a remit to fund professional development and subject knowledge enhancement in RE, but such funding does tend to be short-term and the resulting networks therefore precarious.

71. The high levels of membership in subject networks and in other RE professional associations reflects the commitment of teachers to their own subject knowledge development, both through these networks and through other forms of CPD provision such as university study days and the long-standing Farmington Scholarships.[28]

72. The RE Quality Mark (REQM)[29] has also been an important vehicle for professional development for those schools that have chosen to pursue it. Funded by a range of charitable donations and supported by the RE Council, it is another important example of school-led professional development. Since it began in 2012, over 400 schools have been awarded the REQM, the majority of these at Gold level. It both showcases good practice and provides an important tool for further development.

> The process has challenged us further; we have already put in place a number of new ideas, such as the pupils planning and even teaching lessons. We have also renewed some ideas which had been allowed to slip for a year or two, such as developing closer community links and there are some exciting things happening as a result. You have made us take a fresh look at ourselves, through a different lens. Although we have gained a gold award, the criteria still provide lots of creative pointers to move ourselves forward even further.
>
> Comment from a school holding the REQM Gold Award[30]

### The role of faith communities and lived experience

73. RE is distinctive among subjects in that one of the objects of study is 'living, breathing communities'.[31] These communities may be local, national and/or international, they may be influential in the immediate vicinity of the school and children in that school may belong to some of them. The active role played by these communities in the support and

*28 http://www.farmington.ac.uk/index.php/farmington-scholarships/*
*29 http://reqm.org/*
*30 http://reqm.org/*
*31 Ed Pawson, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, Exeter.*

delivery of religious education is vital to high quality RE, particularly as one goal of RE is to understand the lived experience of individuals and communities which identify with particular (religious or non-religious) worldviews.

> Teachers and students want to know how it [religion] works in practice, how it affects how we live. That has been the secret of my success to date. At the end of one session a primary school teacher said, 'I feel that I have just visited your house'.
>
> Jeremy Michelson, written evidence submitted to the Commission

> Much evidence from the Warwick Diversity Project and other WRERU projects supports the view that the more people are exposed to 'the other', the more they are able to relate to the other and the better equipped they are to deal with religious and cultural difference/situations/ environments. Thus, in religiously and ethnically diverse areas, RE (and school ethos) makes a major contribution to 'celebrating' this diversity and facilitating contact and dialogue among pupils from different backgrounds. In religiously and ethnically non-diverse areas, RE (and school ethos) can make a major contribution through the organisation of visits to religious communities, inviting outside speakers from religious or worldview communities into the school to help young people encounter and experience 'the other', and facilitating links between students and staff in different types of school (e.g. Arweck 2016, 2017c; McKenna, Ipgrave and Jackson 2008; Jackson 2014) and thus combat preconceived ideas and stereotypes.
>
> Warwick Religions And Education Research Unit (WRERU), written evidence submitted to the Commission

74. In both written and oral evidence, mention has been made of the ways in which visits and visitors enhance the pupil experience in RE at all levels. When both visitors and teachers are well-briefed, and the learning goals are clear, visits and visitors can be extremely powerful. They provide opportunities to explore how worldviews are lived out in practice and how individuals negotiate their relationship with religious or non-religious institutions. There is also evidence of good practice in some SACREs who train faith community members to host visits to places of worship or to visit schools. We seek further evidence on this in preparation for the final report.

75. The *Making a Difference* review of RE in Church of England schools identified this interaction with members of different communities as a key enabler of effective RE:

> A high quality enrichment programme to support learning in RE – for example, one [primary] school had carefully audited local resources to support the pupils' learning. These included a local

> Cathedral schools festival; opportunities for some Jewish parents to talk to the children; inviting the Muslim children in the school to share their faith with others; fieldwork visits to a local mosque; and, using the local vicar to introduce topics on marriage and baptism. A key to the success was the careful integration of the fieldwork and visitors into the pupils' learning.[32]

## 3.4 RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN 2017 – THE MAIN CHALLENGES

76. Despite these strengths, which must be preserved, RE is facing serious challenges. Our oral evidence gathering found real concern about the future of the subject and evidence that it was being squeezed out in some schools, potentially damaging the overall education of pupils in those schools. These challenges are partly the result of long-standing systemic neglect and partly the result of more recent policy changes. The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on RE concluded in 2013 that RE had been the 'unintended victim of a combination of major policy changes'. Four years have not reversed that trend, and indeed have exacerbated it, a message strongly reinforced by teachers and students on the ground during our evidence gathering.

> ...the combined impact of so many severe setbacks in such a short time has been to convey the message that, even though it is a statutory subject, RE is of less value than other subjects.[33]

77. The main challenges to RE in 2017 are:

a. Inequitable provision of Religious Education across different school types

b. Challenges to the structures which support and resource RE

c. Variable standards with persistent low standards in some schools

d. Lack of confidence among teachers

e. Confusion and disagreement over purposes.

### Inequitable provision of Religious Education across different school types

78. There is a statutory entitlement to RE. However, this is not being delivered equitably across all schools. This has partly been a result of the unintended consequences of policy changes over the last five years, as Michael Gove acknowledged during his tenure as Secretary of State for Education:

*32 Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, Education Division (2014). Making a Difference, op.cit.*

*33 The All Party Parliamentary Group on Education (2013). RE: the truth unmasked – the supply of and support for religious education teachers, Religious Education Council of England and Wales. http://www.mmiweb.org.uk/publications/re/APPG_RETruthUnmasked.pdf*

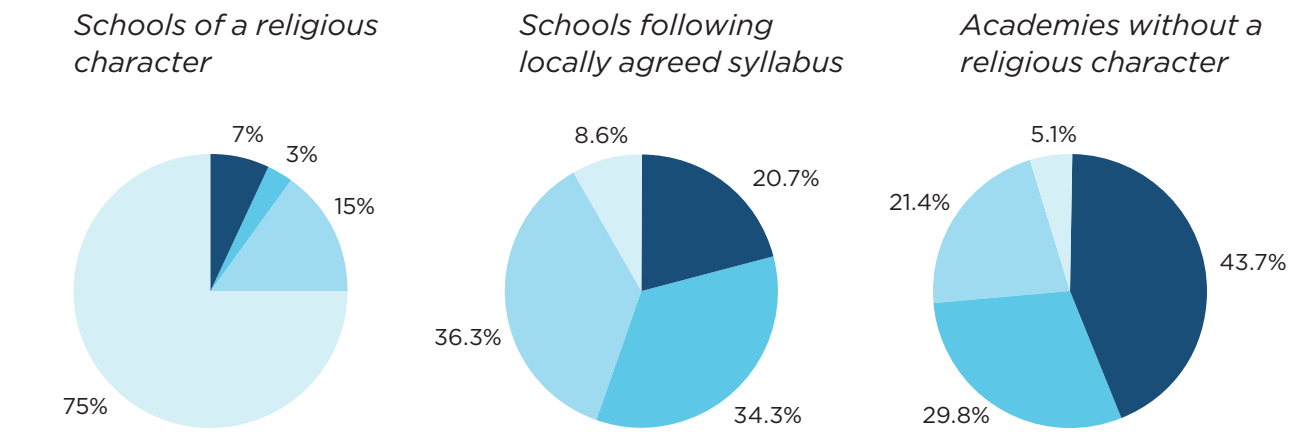
"I think, if I'm being honest, over the last three years I've thought, 'Well that's [the statutory nature of RE] protection enough', and therefore I've concentrated on other areas. Therefore, I think that RE has suffered as a result of my belief that the protection of it was sufficient and I don't think that I've done enough."

Michael Gove, comments made to a Church of England seminar. 2013[34]

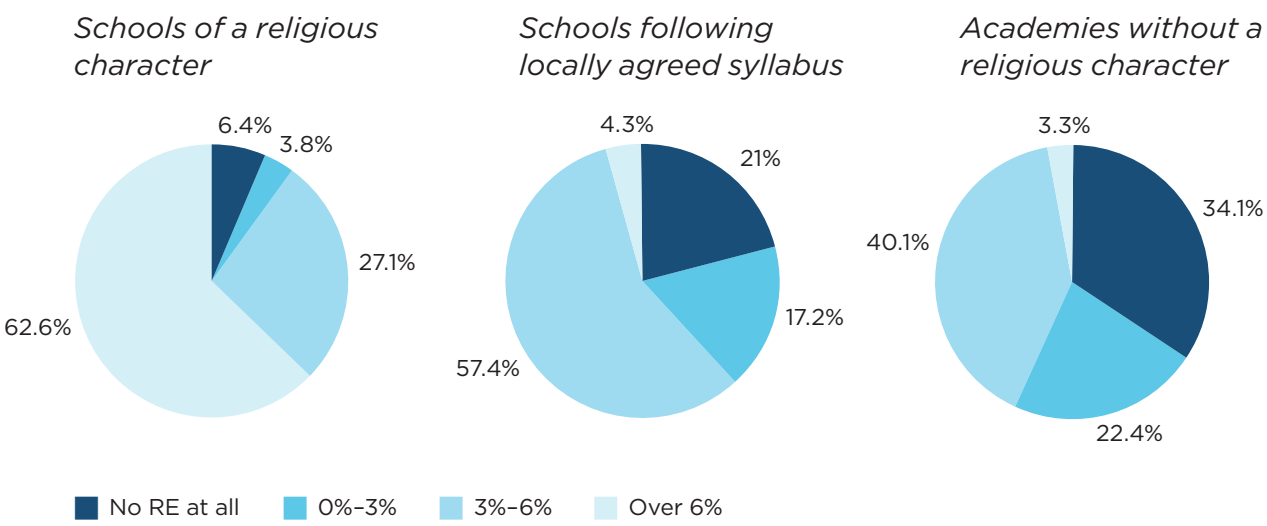
79. Thousands of secondary students – in around 26% of all state-funded schools[35] – are not receiving their entitlement to statutory RE as part of a broad and balanced curriculum. These students are being disadvantaged in terms of their preparedness for life in modern Britain and in our globalised world. They will not develop the necessary understanding of religions and worldviews which will prepare them for the workplace and

***Figure 1: Curriculum time for RE in secondary schools*** [36]

***Curriculum time for RE at KS4***




***Curriculum time for RE at KS3***

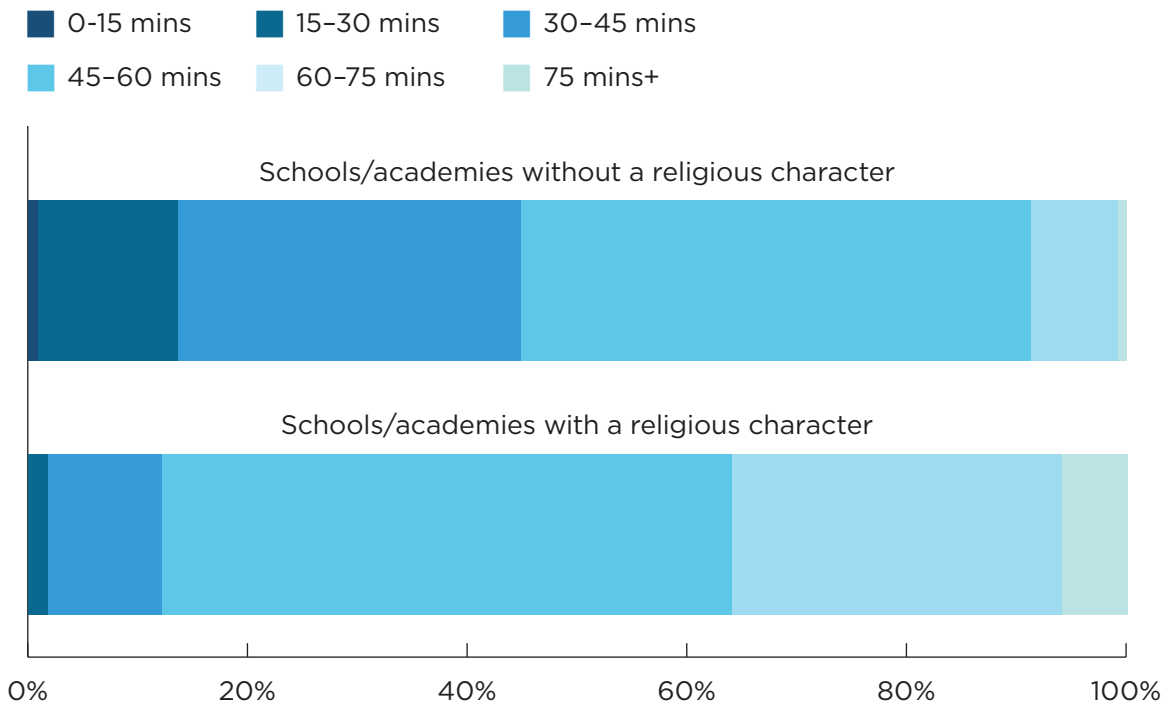


for responsible citizenship. This is ultimately an equity issue – some students do not have the opportunity to develop their knowledge and understanding of religious and non-religious worldviews while others do. Schools of a religious character teach more RE than schools without a religious character.

80. There is a widening disparity of provision of RE in both primary and secondary schools, as a consequence of policy change since 2010. The REC/NATRE/RE Today 'State of the Nation' report (2017) highlights the inequity of provision at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. The type of school that students attend affects whether or not they receive any teaching of RE and, if so, how much. This can be clearly seen from an analysis of school workforce data at Key Stage 4. A similar pattern applies at Key Stage 3.

81. We have less robust data for primary schools, as the data comes from a NATRE survey which was filled in by interested teachers, rather than the school workforce data. Respondents to the NATRE survey were generally teachers responsible for RE, and are likely to be those with a personal

***Figure 2: Curriculum time for RE in primary schools[37]***




34 *http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/10159937/Michael-Gove-quality-of-religious-education-has-dropped.html*
35 *RE Council & National Association of Teachers of RE (2017, forthcoming) The State of the Nation.*
36 *Analysis of school workforce data from RE Council & National Association of Teachers of RE (2017, forthcoming) The State of the Nation.*
37 *NATRE (2016). An Analysis of the provision for RE in primary schools. https://www.natre.org.uk/news/latest-news/an-analysis-of-the-provision-for-re-in-primary-schools/*

interest, and in schools where there is some resource for RE. However, the data we do have from primary schools shows that there are still differences in curriculum time for RE between schools of a religious character and those without a religious character.

82. Patterns of GCSE entry also show clear disparities between schools of a religious character and schools without a religious character. 14% of academies without a religious character entered no pupils for GCSE Religious Studies in 2016, compared to nearly 10% of schools following a locally agreed syllabus and just over 2% of schools with a religious character.[38]

83. This inequality extends to almost all aspects of RE, including the provision of CPD, the number of lessons taught by teachers with other specialisms, the subject expertise of subject leaders in primary schools, and the provision of professional advice and consultancy. For example, almost twice as many primary teachers in schools without a religious character had received no CPD in the past year (32%) as those in schools with a religious character (18%).[39]

### *Why this disparity is dangerous*

84. The disparity between different types of school reinforces perceptions that religions and worldviews are only interesting to their adherents and that the goal of RE is to make students more religious. The evidence received by the Commission consistently opposes this view of RE, as do the Commissioners.

85. We are concerned that, if disparities continue to widen, as seems likely if nothing is done, then there will come a time when the only schools that offer RE are schools of a religious character. For a country whose commitment to multi-faith RE for all is admired around the world, that would be a dire state of affairs. As society has changed and religious literacy has become ever more important the lack of provision for RE in some schools is dangerous.

### *Reasons for the disparity between different types of schools*

86. This state of affairs is partly created by the large number of schools converting to Academy status. The provision for RE in academies is included in their funding agreement and the default is that they must provide RE in line with the guidance for agreed syllabuses, but they need not follow their locally agreed syllabus. This leads to considerable

*38 RE Council & National Association of Teachers of RE (2017, forthcoming) The State of the Nation.*

*39 NATRE (2016). An Analysis of the provision for RE in primary schools. https://www.natre.org.uk/news/latest-news/an-analysis-of-the-provision-for-re-in-primary-schools/*

variability of provision in academies without a religious character, with some developing their own syllabus, some using their own or another locally agreed syllabus, and others not providing RE at all, as can be seen from the data above.

87. Some of this inequality in provision at Key Stage 3 and 4 is a result of changes to school performance measures. With Short Course GCSE no longer counting in school performance measures and Full Course not included in the EBacc, school leaders are driven to make decisions to prioritise subjects that are counted in performance measures, with the unintended consequence that RE is further marginalised.

88. The non-inclusion of RE in the EBacc was cited by teachers as both evidence of an existing low profile for RE, and contributing to further decline in the profile and status of RE.

> The pupils who want to study GCSE full course have been told they must choose the EBacc subjects [instead] because that's marked as a prestige pathway. [The exclusion of RE from the EBacc] redefines the subject in some pupils' eyes, and it's hard to win them over for Short Course GCSE.
>
> Teacher of RE in a secondary school, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, York

89. In some schools, GCSE Full Course was being taught in an hour a week, less than half the recommended time, as was mentioned several times in oral and written evidence. As one teacher who contributed oral evidence put it, this led to 'superficial' teaching and 'misrepresentation of the complexity of religions'.[40] Some schools of a religious character also taught GCSE Full Course in less time than was allocated for other subjects, as mentioned in the *Making a Difference* review[41].

90. The lack of curriculum time at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 contributed to poorer quality teaching and learning, as pointed out in the 2013 Ofsted report:

> The provision made for GCSE in the majority of the secondary schools surveyed failed to provide enough curriculum time for pupils to extend and deepen their learning sufficiently.[42]

*40 Head of RE, secondary school, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, Birmingham.*

*41 Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, Education Division (2014). Making a Difference: a review of Religious Education in Church of England schools. https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2076944/making%20a%20difference%20a%20review%20of%20religious%20education%20in%20church%20of%20england%20schools.pdf*

*42 Ofsted (2013). Religious Education: Realising the potential. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-realising-the-potential*

91. Perhaps one of the reasons for the extreme variability of provision is that some school leaders at both primary and secondary do not understand the value of RE. While many of the teachers who contributed evidence were in schools where RE was explicitly valued by school leaders, this was not the case for all teachers.

> My own experience is of a Head teacher who decided to cut RE to once a fortnight for Year 10s. Why? It became evident when he observed one of my lessons and at the end said: "Well, James I didn't know RE could be taught well until today!"– he saw no value in the subject, only following the lesson and outcry from parents and pupils did he back down.
>
> Dr James Holt, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, Manchester

### *Summary*

92. We see these disparities in provision as an issue of injustice and inequality. All students should have the opportunity to develop their knowledge and understanding of religious and non-religious worldviews in order to participate fully as citizens in an increasingly globalised world.

93. This inequality of provision is the main driving force behind our recommendations. Religious Education matters for all students and our recommendations are intended to secure high quality RE for all students in all settings.

## Challenges to the structures which support RE at local level

### *SACREs have less capacity to support schools*

94. Academisation has also significantly reduced local authority (LA) capacity. This has meant that some authorities have become unable to resource SACREs appropriately. We do not yet have evidence on the full scale of the problem but we do know that some SACREs have as little as two days per annum of time from paid advisers, and that these SACREs are therefore far less able to support schools. The 2013 APPG report found that:

> The ability of SACREs to provide support for teachers at a local level has been dramatically reduced by local authority funding decisions and the impact of the academisation programme.[43]

95. In the four years since the 2013 APPG report, the rate of conversion to

*43 The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Education (2013). RE: the truth unmasked – the supply of and support for religious education teachers, Religious Education Council of England and Wales. http://www.mmiweb.org.uk/publications/re/APPG_RETruthUnmasked.pdf*

Academy status has increased, with a corresponding loss of local authority and SACRE capacity. Changes to the structures supporting RE have not kept pace with changes in the wider education system.

96. SACREs are therefore less able to support and advise schools, which may also be a contributing factor to the lack of provision referenced above.

> I represent the Jewish community on Salford SACRE. On the SACRE there are many motivated and well-meaning people who are anxious to see that RE is well taught. They see RE as important in itself and as a means of promoting greater tolerance and social Cohesion. However, the loss of an RE adviser and the limited local authority support has severely curtailed what the SACRE is able to achieve.
>
> Jeremy Michelson, written evidence submitted to the Commission.

> The reduced capacity of SACREs was reflected in the increasing difficulties faced by many of the schools visited in obtaining guidance and support from their SACRE. Schools in a number of local authorities reported that they had had no support or guidance for implementing their new agreed syllabus.[44]

***SACREs are less able to monitor RE provision***

97. SACREs are also less able to monitor RE provision in schools that are not under local authority control. The evidence below from Cornwall SACRE illustrates the main issues.

> Most of its secondary schools and half its primary schools no longer have to teach the Cornwall locally agreed syllabus, and the SACRE has no way of knowing which ones do.
>
> SACRE has no RE adviser, and support from the LA extends to a small budget only, with no executive or specialist RE support for its use, preparation of reports and action plan. SACRE's development plan of 2015 has not been actioned.
>
> SACRE has not received a report on the quality of RE in its schools for three years.
>
> John Keast on behalf of Cornwall SACRE, oral evidence presented to the Commission in Exeter

98. SACREs have found it increasingly difficult to monitor the provision and quality of RE across all schools.

> Many SACREs highlighted the damaging impact of cuts to LA funding and/or RE Advisor expertise, on their ability to deliver this statutory duty at the levels possible previously. In contrast, well-

*44 Ofsted (2013). Religious Education: Realising the potential. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-realising-the-potential*

> funded SACREs listed a range of monitoring visits and activities. Another barrier identified was the sense of RE competing with core accountability subjects, leading to a reluctance of some schools in certain areas to engage with RE monitoring initiatives. SACREs described being discouraged by those schools from organising SACRE observer visits as well as receiving no response when sending out monitoring forms. SACREs expressed a wish for Ofsted to ensure formal monitoring, enabling SACREs to follow up and support the subject.
>
> NASACRE, written evidence submitted to the Commission following their AGM in 2017

> A number of SACREs felt that their ability to monitor effectively was hampered by a number of factors, including the power to require schools to change bad, or non-compliant practice and a lack of resource to carry out as much monitoring activity as the SACRE would like to.
>
> NASACRE, written evidence submitted to the Commission following a survey of members

### *Locally agreed syllabuses are of variable quality*

99. The quality of locally agreed syllabuses and SACRE support for schools has long been variable, and has depended on local decisions about SACRE capacity and resourcing. The Commission is seeking further evidence on the variable quality of agreed syllabuses. At this stage, it can be noted that while some locally agreed syllabuses are excellent, others are not as helpful for schools as they might be. They may lack clear guidance on progression, and do not always provide what schools need to help them with curriculum planning.[45] In addition, agreed syllabuses have not always kept pace with 'life after levels' and changes to assessment, particularly at Key Stage 2. This has led to some schools retaining the 8-level scale for RE, while the rest of the school has moved to new models.

### *Summary*

100. Academisation has led to greater freedoms for schools, and in some schools this freedom to innovate has been very positive for RE. However, the legal settlement for RE has not kept pace with these changes and needs to be adapted to fit the post-academisation educational landscape. The Commission's proposals directly tackle this challenge.

101. The loss of funding for SACREs, due to academisation and local authority funding cuts, has made it much more difficult for them to carry out their

45 *Ofsted (2004). An evaluation of the work of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education. http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/5181/1/An%20evaluation%20of%20the%20work%20of%20Standing%20Advisory%20Councils%20for%20Religious%20Education%20%28PDF%20format%29.pdf*

statutory duty to monitor and support RE.

### Variable standards with persistent low standards in many schools

102. Achievement and progress in RE were less than good in just under half of secondary schools, and in 6 out of 10 primary schools observed by Ofsted.[46] In *Making a Difference*, a review of standards in RE in Church of England schools, the reviewers found that RE was good or better in 70% of secondary schools, but only 40% of primary schools.[47] Poor standards at primary level are therefore prevalent across different school types. We do not have evidence on standards in Catholic schools and hope to be able to obtain this evidence before the final report.

103. Where RE was good or better, this was a result of strong support for RE from senior leadership and governors, effective training and good subject knowledge on the part of teachers.

104. Poor standards are a result of a number of important factors, including:

a. Lack of confidence on the part of teachers

b. Inadequate initial teacher training and CPD

c. The high proportion of lessons taught by non-specialists at Secondary and non-teachers at Primary

d. Possible lack of clarity over purpose.

### Lack of confidence among teachers, especially at primary

#### *Many teachers do not feel confident to teach RE*

105. According to the APPG report *The Truth Unmasked*, half of all primary teachers did not feel confident to teach RE. The 2016 NATRE primary survey found that a quarter of teachers that it surveyed did not feel confident to teach RE, but their sample was predominantly subject leaders, whom you would expect to feel more confident. In contrast, the NATRE survey respondents reported that only just under 5% of their colleagues feel very confident about how to teach RE and 8.5% about what to teach. The main causes of lack of confidence were inadequate training and lack of subject knowledge.[48]

*46 Ofsted (2013). Religious Education: Realising the potential. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-realising-the-potential*

*47 Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, Education Division (2014). Making a Difference: a review of Religious Education in Church of England schools. https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2076944/making%20a%20difference%20a%20review%20of%20religious%20education%20in%20church%20of%20england%20schools.pdf*

> Locally, many of our teachers feel that their own religious literacy is poor and they are particularly worried about teaching a subject about which they are not confident when they feel they may cause offence if they 'get it wrong'.
>
> Gillian Georgiou; Kathryn Wright; Olivia Seymour; Jane Chipperton, written evidence submitted to the Commission

106. The *Making a Difference* review found that many teachers in Church of England primary schools also lacked confidence in teaching RE, and that, as a result, pupils' learning was superficial.[49]

***Many RE teachers receive little or no training***

107. At primary level, the 2016 NATRE survey reports that more than 1 in 4 respondents received no CPD in RE and 60% received less than one day in the previous year.

108. Over 60% of recently qualified primary teachers who responded to the NATRE survey had had 0-3 hours of training at ITE (over a 1-year PGCE or Schools Direct programme), compared to 20% of those who trained more than 11 years ago. The oral evidence has also stated that with so few schools offering good RE, it is difficult to find school placements with high quality RE teaching for all primary trainee teachers.[50]

***Many RE teachers do not have relevant qualifications***

109. In 50% of primary schools that responded to the 2016 Primary NATRE survey, some RE is being delivered by a higher level teaching assistant (HLTA). In 1 in 10 schools between 25% and 50% of RE is delivered in this way.[51]

110. At secondary level, about twice as many teachers of RE (56%) as History (27.6%) have no relevant post A-level qualification. Almost two and a half times as many lessons in RE (27.2%) as History (11%) are taught by a teacher with no relevant post A-level qualification.[52] The 2013 Ofsted report referred to this as one of the reasons why RE was good or better in only just over half of the schools observed, as compared to 71% in the

*48 NATRE (2016). An Analysis of the provision for RE in primary schools. www.natre.org.uk%2Fuploads%2FAdditional%2520Documents%2FNATRE%2520Primary%2520Survey%25202016%2520final.docx&usg=AFQjCNFDWLUicovE8L0QEgZiiuHF7fFcAA*

*49 Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, Education Division (2014). Making a Difference: a review of Religious Education in Church of England schools. https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2076944/making%20a%20difference%20a%20review%20of%20religious%20education%20in%20church%20of%20england%20schools.pdf*

*50 NATRE, ibid.*

*51 NATRE, ibid.*

*52 Deborah Weston, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, London.*

most recent report on History (2011).

111. This is partly because non-specialist teachers may lack the nuanced subject knowledge required to correct pupil misconceptions (Ofsted 2013) or to respond accurately to questions. It also places an excessive burden on RE subject leaders who have to manage large numbers of non-specialist teachers, often each only teaching one or two lessons a week.

112. The shortage of specialist RE teachers at secondary is a result of various policy changes, including:

a. Lower bursaries for applicants for teacher training, compared to other shortage subjects such as Geography. Applicants for RE with a first class honours degree receive a bursary of £9,000 compared to £25,000 for Geography.

b. The removal of funding for Subject Knowledge Enhancement (SKE) courses[53] in RE, where this continues to exist for other shortage subjects.

**Is there a confusion over purposes?**

113. Previous reports on RE, including Ofsted reports, have cited a 'confusion over purposes' as one of the reasons why teaching and learning is less than good in so many schools. The most recent Ofsted report identified a number of consequences of this confusion:

> The confusion about the purpose of RE is exemplified in a number of ways.
> a. Many primary teachers, including subject leaders, were finding it difficult to separate RE from the more general, whole-school promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
> b. Many schools showed a strong tendency to detach learning in RE from the more in-depth study of religion and belief. Too often teachers thought they could bring depth to the pupils' learning by inviting them to reflect on or write introspectively about their own experience rather than rigorously investigate and evaluate religion and belief.
> c. In the primary schools visited, considerable weaknesses in teaching about Christianity frequently stemmed from a lack of clarity about the purpose of the subject. For example, Christian stories, particularly miracles, were often used to encourage pupils to reflect on their own experience without any opportunity to investigate the stories' significance within the religion itself.
> d. Much GCSE and, increasingly, Key Stage 3 work, focused primarily on the study of philosophical, moral and social issues. The work

*53 Subject Knowledge Enhancement courses of 12 or 28 weeks are offered to those preparing to train to teach at secondary. They can be offered in online, blended or face to face formats. They are fully funded and students are also given a bursary.*

> lacked any significant development of pupils' understanding of religion and belief – and frequently distorted it. [54]

114. The *Making a Difference* review found evidence of confusion over purposes in primary Church of England schools, whereas secondary schools had much greater clarity of purpose.

> There was a significant lack of clarity about the purpose and place of RE within the life of a Church school – often teachers confused developing pupils' moral awareness with the educational goals of RE as a curriculum subject.[55]

115. The written and oral evidence submitted to us shows evidence for a diversity of purposes, though more consensus than one would expect, and not necessarily confusion. This range of purposes can be broadly divided into two categories: learning about others' worldviews, and sorting out one's own. Because worldviews are complex and multifaceted, it is to be expected that RE will have a variety of purposes. It will need to explore the truth-claims of different worldviews, their impact on society and on individuals, the role of historical events in shaping them, and pupils' own responses to them.

116. There has been some disagreement among teachers and subject experts about whether this range of purposes is a problem. Some have argued that comparable subjects, such as History or English, have a similar range and similar debates. Some have also argued that this variety of purposes is a strength, rather than a weakness.

117. The Commission presents a renewed vision for RE, which does justice to the diversity of purposes and the complexity of the subject matter while clarifying confusion and limiting the boundaries of acceptable diversity of purposes. This can be found in paragraphs 118-119. We are aware that we need to discuss further the relationship between school type (particularly whether or not the school is of a religious character) and the purposes of RE, and we will address this over the next year in preparation for the final report.

## 3.5 OPPORTUNITIES FOR A RENEWED VISION AND STRUCTURE

118. As academisation gathers pace and as schools come under increasing accountability pressures, there is an urgent need for a renewed vision for RE and for the structures that support it to be reviewed and adapted. This vision also responds to the changing religious and socio-political

54 *Ofsted (2013). Religious Education: Realising the potential. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-realising-the-potential*

55 *Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, Education Division (2014). Making a Difference: a review of Religious Education in Church of England schools. https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2076944/making%20a%20difference%20a%20review%20of%20religious%20education%20in%20church%20of%20england%20schools.pdf*

landscape in Britain and the wider world today. The Commission's proposals in the rest of this report are the starting point for this renewed vision and structure. They are still consultative at this stage and we would like this document to be part of an ongoing conversation to ensure that the Commission's final recommendations are as effective as possible.

### A Vision for RE

119. Reflecting on the reasons why RE matters, the current strengths and challenges, and the needs of the population as local, national and global citizens, the Commission's vision for RE is as follows:

a. Every child is entitled to good RE and every school provides good RE. Good RE is defined as RE which enables pupils to:

i. Engage with lived experience and the diversity of religious and non-religious worldviews in order to become a global citizen

ii. Explore the varied ways that people live, believe, behave and belong

iii. Understand how worldviews work, and their impact on individuals, communities and society

iv. Consider and reflect on their own individual worldview in response to others' individual and institutional worldviews.

b. RE is considered as an academic subject in its own right. It does develop skills and character, as all school subjects do, but its primary purpose is educational.

c. All teachers have access to good initial training and continuing professional development, engaging with research on religions and worldviews in order to keep their subject knowledge up to date.

d. RE is valued and supported by all school leaders, who recognise the vital contribution that it makes to pupils' development, and this is recognised in school

performance measures and through holding schools to account via inspection.

e. Faith communities and communities affiliated with non-religious worldviews continue to support RE in schools, through developing resource materials, visiting schools and hosting visits to gatherings or places of worship. Schools and communities use technology ever more effectively to bring schools and religion and belief communities together.

f. Local and national RE networks continue to thrive and expand, drawing on the expertise of teachers, university departments (both Education departments and those involved in research on religious and non-religious worldviews), professional associations, and faith and belief communities.

g. The underpinning legal structures reflect the 21st century religious and educational landscape and provide a firm foundation for good RE.

# SECTION 4

## SECURING HIGH QUALITY RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR ALL

### 4.1 THE LEGAL AND STRUCTURAL ARRANGEMENTS

120. It is clear that the legal and structural arrangements for RE are no longer fit for purpose in the changing social and educational landscape in England:

a. Local determination of RE is no longer effective in a situation where there is widespread academisation and reduced local authority control of schools. There is a mismatch between making local authorities continue to be responsible for RE syllabuses, and the government's stated purpose of academisation for all.

b. The SACRE structure and remit is no longer fit for purpose in a nation of much greater religious diversity, looser patterns of affiliation and greater school freedoms than existed when SACREs were established.

c. Schools are no longer effectively held to account for their provision of effective RE. In a context of changed performance measures, it is all too easy for schools not to comply with the law and to deny pupils their entitlement to RE.

d. Changing patterns of religious affiliation mean that the nature and purpose of RE need to be renewed, so that RE reflects the 'real religious landscape'[56] and not a distorted ideal of what it means to have a worldview or belong to a religious or non-religious community.

**A national entitlement for Religious Education**

***The current situation***

121. Currently, RE is locally determined. Each local authority is required by statute to convene an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) and develop a locally agreed syllabus, which is binding on all community and voluntary controlled schools.

122. Voluntary aided schools of a religious character, including voluntary aided academies, are required to teach RE in accordance with the trust deeds of that school. In practice, most of these schools will use the syllabus developed by their local Anglican or Catholic diocese, depending on the

56 *Shaw, M & Dinham, A (2015). RE for REal: The future of teaching and learning about religion and belief. Project report. Goldsmiths, University of London.*

religious character of the school.

123. RE in academies is determined by their funding agreement. In most cases, all that is required is for academies to provide RE in accordance with the guidance for locally agreed syllabuses. Some academies do adopt their locally agreed syllabus, while others choose to use a syllabus from a different local authority or develop their own, and still others, as we have seen, do not provide any RE at all. There is almost no guidance for academies wishing to develop their own syllabus.

124. There is very little statutory guidance for locally agreed syllabuses. There is statutory guidance about the composition of the ASC but very little guidance on the content of the syllabus that results from it.

125. The statutory requirement for locally agreed syllabuses is that they must 'reflect the fact that religious traditions in Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain' (UK Parliament, Education Act 1996, Section 375.2).

126. Agreed syllabuses are highly variable in approach, level of detail and quality. There has not been a detailed review of agreed syllabuses, although the Ofsted review of SACREs in 2004 made some comments about agreed syllabuses.[57] The key findings of the 2004 review were:

> Agreed syllabuses vary significantly in style, character, structure and quality. None of the agreed syllabus conferences (ASCs) in the LEAs inspected had the capacity to carry out an agreed syllabus revision without significant support from an adviser or consultant. The extent of the involvement of ASC members varied between LEAs.
>
> Very few syllabuses seen were of high enough quality throughout to make a consistently sound basis for good planning, teaching, learning and assessment.[58]

127. Since 2004, the non-statutory national framework for RE and the subsequent 2013 review of RE have provided some guidance for ASCs. However, as these are non-statutory, they were not universally adopted.

128. From the evidence that we have, it appears that resources for producing agreed syllabuses have been reduced in recent years. Evidence from RE

57 *Ofsted (2004). An evaluation of the work of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education. http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/5181/1/An%20evaluation%20of%20the%20work%20of%20Standing%20Advisory%20Councils%20for%20Religious%20Education%20%28PDF%20format%29.pdf*

58 *Ofsted (2004). An evaluation of the work of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education. http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/5181/1/An%20evaluation%20of%20the%20work%20of%20Standing%20Advisory%20Councils%20for%20Religious%20Education%20%28PDF%20format%29.pdf*

Today Services states that the size of contracts for producing or supporting the development of agreed syllabuses have been steadily decreasing in size and frequency.[59] This is also supported by anecdotal evidence from NASACRE and individual SACREs about cuts to funding for ASCs.[60] We seek further evidence on this.

129. Many SACREs buy in support from commercial providers to develop agreed syllabuses. RE Today Services provides support and resources to about a third of agreed syllabuses per year.[61] This can range from developing the whole syllabus to providing professional advice and support to the ASCs. Local authorities do employ professional advisers as external consultants, although we do not yet have evidence on how much adviser time is normally used for developing agreed syllabuses. Those ASCs that do not have access to this professional resource rely on goodwill and voluntary commitment from teacher working groups and ASC members, or draw on the professional resources of their Anglican Diocesan RE adviser. Funding for ASCs is highly variable, and we seek further evidence on the maximum and minimum levels of funding for ASCs in the last five years.

### *Why the time is now right for a national entitlement to RE*

*The impact of academisation on locally agreed syllabuses*

130. It is clear from the above that the capacity of local authorities to develop high quality agreed syllabuses is highly variable, leading to a 'postcode lottery' in the experience of pupils in schools. It is also clear that capacity has reduced in many local authorities in the last five years.

131. While current non-statutory guidance is available and helpful, it does not provide a basis for holding ASCs or schools to account.

132. Voluntary aided (VA) schools are not required to use the locally agreed syllabus, although some Church of England VA schools may do so if instructed by their diocese. Academisation has blurred the difference between voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools, with the result that some voluntary controlled schools now use their diocesan syllabus, or a mix of the locally agreed syllabus and their diocesan syllabus, rather than the locally agreed syllabus.

133. If every school is to become an Academy, Local Authorities will then be developing syllabuses when no schools are required to use them. It will render local determination of syllabuses entirely redundant.

*59 Mike McMaster on behalf of RE Today Services, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, London.*
*60 NASACRE, written evidence submitted to the Commission.*
*61 Mike McMaster on behalf of RE Today Services, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, London.*

134. Given that increasing numbers of ASCs buy in commercial syllabuses, some of those who gave oral evidence claimed that the system is moving towards a 'national syllabus by default'.[62] A national entitlement would provide a consistent basis for these syllabuses and supports the general direction of travel.

135. We considered recommending that RE be included in the National Curriculum alongside any other subject. However, as academies are exempt from the National Curriculum, simply making RE part of the National Curriculum would not be sufficient to ensure that all schools meet their statutory requirements for the provision of RE.

***Teachers and subject experts, including some SACREs, are in favour of a national entitlement***

136. There was a strong call across the written and oral evidence for a national entitlement, although this was not universal. Most of the teachers who contributed evidence were in favour of a national entitlement as they stated that this would ensure greater consistency and enable more effective sharing of good practice and resources.

> NAHT [the National Association of Head Teachers] believes that one way to overcome this lack of clarity and achieve more consistency in the experience of all pupils in RE is to provide a national framework which balances the need for academic challenge and personal inspiration and development.
>
> NAHT, written evidence submitted to the Commission

> NATRE supports a national minimum entitlement for RE (purpose and outcome based) that would be the basis for RE in all state funded schools. NATRE would also like there to be research into the possible value and impact of such a national minimum entitlement for RE.
>
> Fiona Moss, NATRE, written evidence submitted to the Commission

137. Two-fifths of those SACREs surveyed by NASACRE (total 35 SACREs) were in favour of a national entitlement.[63]

138. Both the Church of England Education Office and the Catholic Education Service gave qualified endorsement to the prospect of a national entitlement in their written and oral evidence, so long as it was not too prescriptive of content.

> We feel this is now a vital next step forward for RE. It would need to be broad enough to incorporate the views of all sections of the RE

*62 Primary RE teacher, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, Manchester.*
*63 NASACRE, written evidence submitted to the commission following a survey of members.*

community but that is more possible now than at any time in recent history.

Derek Holloway on behalf of the Church of England Education Office, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, London

139. Those who favoured a national entitlement generally favoured a version that was sufficiently specific to set clear boundaries while offering sufficient openness for schools, multi-academy trusts (MATs) and resource providers to implement the entitlement appropriately for their specific context.

140. In general, those who contributed written and oral evidence did not want a national curriculum or nationally agreed syllabus with detailed programmes of study setting out the content at each Key Stage or year group. Apart from the difficulty of convening a body to write such a syllabus, there was also serious concern about the disproportionate power of entrenched interests and a fear of inappropriate political interference in the content of the subject.

***The role of a national entitlement in improving the quality of RE***

141. Ofsted found the following weaknesses in the quality of RE in primary schools and Key Stage 3.

> In three fifths of the lessons seen, both in primary schools and throughout Key Stage 3, a key weakness was the superficial nature of pupils' subject knowledge and understanding. While pupils had a range of basic factual information about religions, their deeper understanding of the world of religion and belief was weak. For example, as pupils moved through primary and secondary education, inspectors noted that most pupils had had insufficient opportunity to develop:
>
> - an ability to offer informed responses to a range of profound religious, philosophical or ethical questions
> - an understanding of the way in which the beliefs, practices, values and ways of life of specific religions and non-religious world views are linked
> - an understanding and interpretation of the distinctive nature of religious language
> - a deepening understanding of the diverse nature of religion and belief in the contemporary world
> - a more sophisticated understanding of the impact, both positive and negative, that religion and belief can have on individuals and society.[64]

64 *Ofsted (2013). Religious Education: Realising the potential. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-realising-the-potential*

142. Similar weaknesses were found in primary Church of England schools in the *Making a Difference* review of 2014.[65]

143. These are all essential aspects of RE that can often be missed in primary schools and at Key Stage 3. A national entitlement that explicitly references each of these core areas of understanding will help schools to understand what they are aiming for in their teaching of RE.

144. Ofsted also identified, as we mentioned in paragraph 113 above, that one of the possible reasons for poor quality RE is a confusion over purposes. Schools need support to manage a diversity of purposes without falling into confusion.

> A clear, consistent understanding of the purpose of RE helps to ensure that teachers understand why and how they should teach the subject. This leads to a more consistent experience for children and young people, as well as a better understanding in society more generally of the reasons why RE remains on our school curriculum. We have not had this clarity of purpose in RE, despite the fact that national curriculum subjects all have a clearly stated 'purpose of study'.
>
> Gillian Georgiou; Kathryn Wright; Olivia Seymour; Jane Chipperton, written evidence submitted to the Commission

145. Our written and oral evidence gathering has found that despite the perception of confusion, there is much more consensus among subject experts, universities, SACREs, teachers, employers and pupils than might initially be expected. There has, in general, been a consistent message that:

a. RE should enable pupils to understand the diversity of religious and non-religious worldviews, including the interactions between them.

b. It should enable them to understand the interactions between religious and non-religious worldviews, individuals and societies, as well as the ways in which worldviews affect and are affected by major social and global issues.

c. It should provide space for pupils to develop their own beliefs on questions of meaning, purpose and ethics, in the light of a range of worldviews, and respecting the right of others to differ.

d. It should develop pupils' skills in dialogue and critical reflection, and

65 *Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, Education Division (2014). Making a Difference: a review of Religious Education in Church of England schools. https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2076944/making%20a%20difference%20a%20review%20of%20religious%20education%20in%20church%20of%20england%20schools.pdf*

their attitudes of empathy and respect.

e. It should enable pupils to use appropriate vocabulary to discuss their own and others' beliefs, values and identity. RE is of necessity multidisciplinary, because worldviews encompass the full range of human experience. It draws on religious studies, philosophy, theology, phenomenology, sociology, history, ethics, and also a wider range of disciplines including literary theory, anthropology, psychology and aesthetics.

> On the subject of the purpose of RE, it is not wrong to have a collection of purposes: understanding the beliefs and values of those who are different from themselves, developing critical reasoning, developing responses to big questions, developing understanding of the cultural heritage of humanity. The content should be religions and humanism in Britain today. Such a subject should be compulsory.
>
> Andrew Copson on behalf of the British Humanist Association (now Humanists UK), oral evidence submitted to the Commission, London

146. Both the Catholic Education Service and the Church of England Education Office emphasised that RE should be an academic discipline in its own right and that it is different from catechesis.

> In all schools, RE ought to be an academic discipline with the same systematic demands and the same rigour as other disciplines. Therefore, it is to be distinguished from those aspects of the curriculum whose goals are not academic excellence, but rather the formation of character or preparation of pupils for participation in civic life (subjects such as PSHE, citizenship and careers).
>
> Philip Robinson on behalf of the Catholic Education Service, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, London

> RE is a rigorous academic study and that includes a critical evaluation of religious teachings belief and practice.
>
> Derek Holloway on behalf of the Church of England Education Office, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, London

147. Our proposed national entitlement clarifies the purposes of RE along these lines, recognising the complex and dynamic nature of the subject matter. Again, this will help schools and resource providers to be clear about what they are trying to achieve and to benchmark their content and planning against the entitlement.

148. A national entitlement would also provide a basis for holding to account schools which currently do not fulfil their statutory requirements for the provision of RE.

### *Recommendations*

149. Based on the above evidence and the case for change, the Commission therefore recommends that:

a. There should be a national entitlement statement for RE which sets out clearly the aims and purpose of RE and what pupils should experience in the course of their study of the subject. A draft statement for consultation is below.

b. This entitlement should become normative through non-statutory guidance as early as possible, and should ultimately become statutory, either to supplement or to replace current legislation on agreed syllabuses.

c. The national entitlement should apply to all state-funded schools including academies, free schools and schools of a religious character.

d. Independent schools should consider adopting the entitlement as an undertaking of good practice.

### *The National Entitlement for Religious Education*

Opposite is the draft text of the proposed national entitlement for Religious Education. This draft is for consultation and we welcome comments on and refinements to the text.

**A National Entitlement for RE**

RE in schools should enable students to engage in an intelligent and informed way with the ideas, practices and contemporary manifestations of a diversity of religious and non-religious worldviews. It should enable them to understand how worldviews are inextricably woven into, influence and are influenced by, all dimensions of human experience. It should prepare pupils for life in modern Britain by enabling them to engage respectfully with people with worldviews different from their own. RE should equip pupils to develop their own beliefs, practices, values and identity in the light of their reflections on the worldviews they have studied. Through their study of worldviews, pupils should develop a lifetime motivation to enquire into questions of meaning and purpose, and to investigate others' worldviews and what they mean for individuals, communities and society. All of this will enable them to become responsible citizens and members of diverse and changing local, national and global communities.

Throughout their period of compulsory schooling, pupils should learn about, understand and engage with:

a. The diversity of religious and non-religious worldviews and ways of life that exist locally, nationally and globally.

b. The ways in which communities and individuals holding different worldviews interact, change and maintain continuity in different times and contexts and as the surrounding culture changes.

c. The different ways that people interpret and respond to texts and other sources of authority.

d. The ways that people communicate their beliefs, experiences, values and identities through verbal and non-verbal means (eg prose, story, poetry, art, music, dance, ritual, architecture).

e. How people seek moral guidance from religious and non-religious worldviews and how they interpret this guidance in their lives.

f. The importance of experience, including extra-ordinary experiences, in shaping people's worldviews and how worldviews are used to interpret experience.

g. The role of religious and non-religious rituals and practices in both creating and expressing experience, beliefs, values and commitments.

h. The relationship between people's worldview and their thinking and actions concerning political, public, social and cultural life.

i. Both the positive and negative exercise of power and influence resulting from people's worldviews.

j. The important role that worldviews play in providing people with a way of making sense of their lives and in forming their identity.*

As part of a balanced programme aimed at meeting this provision, it is expected that pupils will:

1. Experience meeting and visiting people from their local community from a range of worldviews including those different from their own and that of the school.

2. Develop core skills for researching the beliefs, values and practices of individuals and groups in society.

3. Experience a range of approaches to the study of religions (e.g. phenomenology, philosophy, sociology, textual studies, theology).

4. Engage with questions of meaning and purpose and of the nature of reality raised by the worldviews that they study.

5. Think through and develop a reflective approach to their own personal responses and developing identity and learn to articulate these clearly and coherently while respecting the right of others to differ.

6. Develop the core skills and dispositions of careful listening, critical thinking, self-reflection, empathy and open-mindedness required for making wise judgments.

7. Learn to discuss controversial issues and work with others (including those that they disagree with) with the intention of securing a healthy and peaceful society in the context of significant diversity.

** We are indebted to Barbara Wintersgill, who presented her project on Big Ideas in RE. Her work has informed much of the content of this list.*

*Areas for consultation*

150. The entitlement is not a national syllabus or curriculum. It is a basic statement of what all pupils are entitled to, whatever type of school they attend. Schools will need guidance and support to translate this entitlement into curriculum planning, particularly in relation to progression. We are still reviewing where this guidance and support will come from. We seek input on what bodies would be best placed to translate the entitlement into detailed programmes of study and how best to support schools to plan their curriculum in line with the entitlement. Several possibilities have been discussed by the Commission so far:

a. Removing the requirement for local authorities to hold ASCs. In a context where every school will eventually become an academy, this requirement is no longer proportionate for many local authorities and will become even less so over time. However, it might be possible for programmes of study to be developed at regional levels. It would also be possible to include regional universities on this model. A regional system might not provide sufficient support to academies unless they were explicitly included. If the requirement for local authorities to develop a locally agreed syllabus were to be removed, it would not preclude those local authorities that had the resource and expertise to still convene ASCs and develop programmes of study that could be adopted by those schools that chose to, within or outside that local authority.

b. Recommending the development of a national set of programmes of study compliant with the entitlement. This may or may not be government-funded. This has the advantage of providing consistency across localities, which was requested by some teachers in the written and oral evidence. However, there are a number of potential difficulties with it. First, there is the vexed question of who develops detailed programmes of study. Second, there is the justified criticism that in the era of a school-led system a nationally agreed set of programmes of study is too rigid and leaves schools insufficient freedom to undertake RE that is appropriate for their pupils and immediate community. Third, there is the question of how to ensure that the syllabus is appropriately independent of political interference. Many of those who gave oral and written evidence were concerned about excessive political interference in the scope and content of RE.

c. Leaving the market open for schools, groups of schools, dioceses, SACREs, commercial providers and other relevant groups to write their own programmes of study. This would allow maximum freedom for schools but might not resolve the inequity in provision and quality discussed above. Non-statutory guidance or a range of model programmes of study might also be developed to support relevant groups in writing their own programmes of study.

151. There is likely to be a range of possibilities within these broad categories

and other possibilities that we have not yet considered. We seek views on what would be most helpful to support schools with curriculum planning and ensure that all schools can meet the entitlement effectively.

152. The question also remains as to whether the entitlement statement should replace or supplement the current legislation on agreed syllabuses, which requires that they must 'reflect the fact that religious traditions in Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain' (UK Parliament, Education Act 1996, Section 375.2). This legislative statement remains a statement of historical and social fact. Of those who identify themselves as having a religion, the majority are Christian, and Christianity has played a particular role in the history of Great Britain. However, the statement in and of itself does not specify how much time should be spent on any worldview. It also does not include non-religious worldviews. We seek views on whether the entitlement should specify a number and range of worldviews, or a minimum time to be spent on one worldview.

153. We have also discussed whether the name of the subject should be changed, to signify the renewed vision for the subject. It is difficult to find an alternative name that appropriately captures the breadth and depth of the subject as outlined in the entitlement statement. We have discussed a number of options. A small majority of the Commission preferred to call the subject Religion and Ethics (or Religions and Ethics) while others wished either to preserve the current name, or to change its name to Religions and Worldviews or Religion, Philosophy and Ethics (or Philosophy, Religion and Ethics). We seek views on which of these options best captures the nature of the subject outlined in the entitlement. We also seek suggestions on alternative names which fit the entitlement and the renewed vision for the subject.

## HOLDING SCHOOLS TO ACCOUNT FOR THE PROVISION AND QUALITY OF RE

### The current situation

154. Ofsted no longer inspect individual subjects, nor do they conduct subject reviews. The last RE subject review was in 2013. Between 2014 and 2016, mentions of whether schools are fulfilling their statutory requirement to provide RE for all pupils were infrequent. Recent evidence from NATRE suggests that mentions have increased since 2016 and Ofsted have highlighted cases where schools were not fulfilling their statutory requirements, but they remain fairly isolated.[66]

155. School performance data at primary and secondary do not offer mechanisms for checking whether schools are fulfilling their statutory

66 *NATRE (2017). Ofsted are continuing to highlight RE in reports. Online news article. https://www.natre.org.uk/news/latest-news/ofsted-are-continuing-to-highlight-re-in-reports/*

requirement to provide RE for all. Primary SATs cover only Maths, English and Science. Religious Studies GCSE is of course included in school performance tables at Key Stage 4, but there is no way of knowing whether schools provide RE for pupils not taking Religious Studies GCSE and no way to assess the quality of teaching and learning.

156. As stated above, SACREs find it extremely difficult to monitor the provision and quality of RE. They rely on published data, which does not give them the information that they need, or on the goodwill of schools to respond to requests for information. SACREs also have no power to monitor the provision and quality of RE in academies.

157. NATRE regularly conducts surveys of primary and secondary teachers. The most recent primary survey showed that about 10% of schools which responded are not fulfilling their statutory duties.[67] However, the scale of noncompliance is likely to be greater than this, due to the self-selecting nature of survey respondents. At secondary level, school workforce data can be used to assess how many schools are not fulfilling their statutory duties, and the results of this have been discussed in paragraphs 78–93 above.

158. Therefore, there is currently no robust mechanism for holding schools to account for either the provision or the quality of RE, at primary or secondary.

**The impact of school performance measures at Key Stage 4**

159. Religious Studies GCSE is not included in the EBacc performance measures. However, it is included in category D of Progress 8.

160. Short Course Religious Studies GCSE has been excluded from school performance tables since the 2013/14 performance tables.

161. Entries for Full Course GCSE rose from 170,767 in 2010 to 271,917 in 2015. They stayed almost the same in 2016, at 271,973. Full course GCSE entries in England fell for the first time in 2017, by 5.2%. They continued to rise in Wales, suggesting that the difference in performance measures between England and Wales may have contributed to the decline in GCSE entries in England.

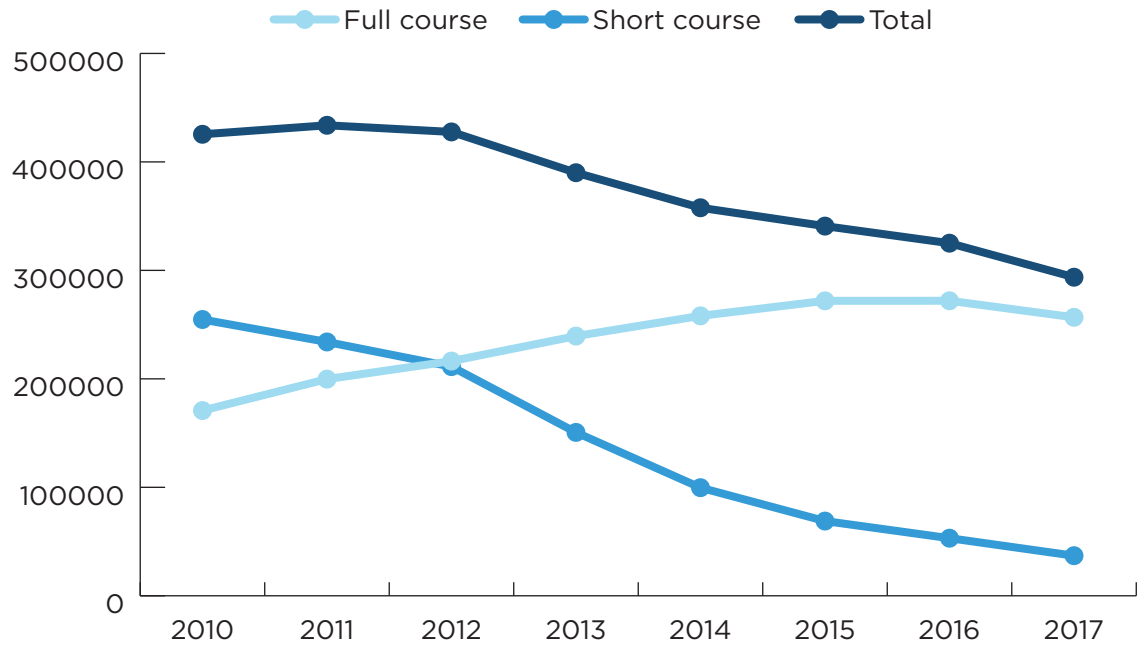
162. Entries for Short Course GCSE plummeted from 254,698 in 2010 to 36,962 in 2017.

163. Total GCSE entries have dropped from 425,465 in 2010 to 293,691 in 2017, a drop of over 130,000, or 31%.[68]

*67 NATRE (2016). An Analysis of the provision for RE in primary schools. www.natre.org.uk%2Fuploads%2FAdditional%2520Documents%2FNATRE%2520Primary%2520Survey%25202016%2520final.docx&usg=AFQjCNFDWLUicovE8L0QEgZiiuHF7fFcAA*

*68 All examination statistics from https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/gcses*

*Figure 3: Religious Studies GCSE entries 2010–2017*[69]




164. Some schools are attempting to teach Full Course GCSE in the time previously allotted to Short Course (i.e. an hour a week or less), and in many cases starting GCSE in Year 9 to cover the content. We do not yet have evidence on how many schools are doing this.

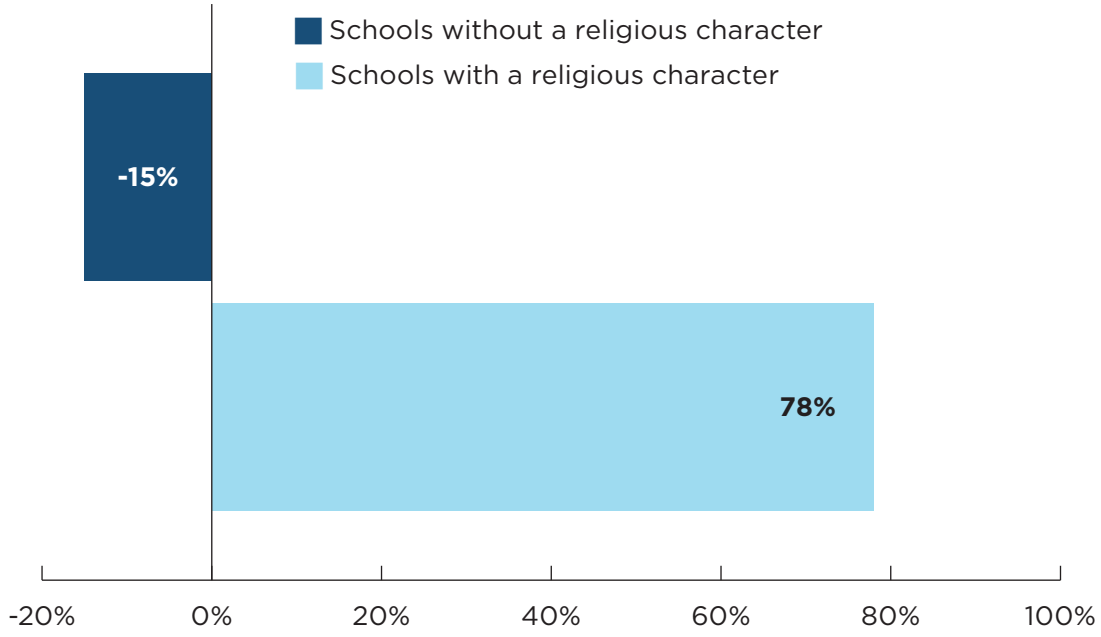
165. There is increasing disparity of provision between schools of a religious character and schools without a religious character. 14% of academies without a religious character entered no pupils for GCSE Religious Studies, compared to nearly 10% of schools following a locally agreed syllabus and around 2% of schools with a religious character. Over 80% of schools with a religious character entered their whole cohort for GCSE Religious Studies, compared to 40% of academies and schools following a locally agreed syllabus.[70] A pupil in a school with a religious character is twice as likely to be entered for GCSE Religious Studies as one in a school without a religious character.

### The case for change

166. Performance measures are a key driver of the behaviour of school leaders, teachers, parents and pupils. The rigorous inspection of RE led to improvements in both provision and quality in the period 1992-2010. The introduction of the GCSE Short Course led to pupils and parents valuing the subject more highly at Key Stage 4 during the same time period.

69 *2017 figures do not include Isle of Man and Channel Islands (about 1,000 Full Course entries and 900 Short Course).*
70 *RE Council & National Association of Teachers of RE, The State of the Nation (London, 2017).*

*Figure 4: Likelihood of being entered for GCSE religious studies in schools with or without a religious character* [71]




167. Since 2010, changes to subject inspections and school performance measures have reversed some of these improvements in provision and quality, particularly at secondary.

168. We currently have less evidence on the impact of changes to inspections and school performance measures on primary schools and we are seeking further evidence on this ahead of the final report.

169. Those who contributed written and oral evidence clearly stated that the exclusion of Religious Studies GCSE from the EBacc and of Short Course GCSE from performance measures have led parents, pupils and school leaders to consider that RE is less academically rigorous than other Humanities subjects, and of lower status in general.

170. Teachers who contributed oral evidence also stated that more academically able pupils who had chosen Religious Studies as an option were being encouraged by school leaders to switch to subjects that were included in the EBacc.

171. There was a consensus among teachers and subject experts that unless something is done, GCSE entries would drop very steeply over the next two to three years. This appears to have already begun in 2017, the first time that GCSE entries for Full Course have dropped since 2002.

*71 Source: calculations based on DfE GCSE entry and pupil cohort data.*

172. The Government has made clear that there is currently no intention to add more subjects or pillars to the Ebacc but that RE remains compulsory to Key Stage 5. There is therefore an urgent need to find some way for pupils' learning in RE to be accredited for them as individuals as well as to contribute to school performance measures.

> We have considered suggestions to include additional subjects or pillars within the EBacc but have decided that this could reduce pupil choice at GCSE to the point where no other subjects can be studied. Religious education must be taught to all pupils until the end of key stage 5, a qualification (such as GCSE religious studies) should be offered at the end of key stage 4 to accredit pupils' knowledge and understanding. The proportion of pupils in state funded mainstream schools entering a GCSE in religious studies remains high at 47% in 2015/16.
>
> Government response to consultation on the EBacc. 2017[72]

173. The loss of Short Course GCSE has left schools without a way to credit pupils for their learning in RE unless they take Full Course GCSE. This has made it more difficult in some schools to get engagement in RE from pupils and parents, who do not see the value in subjects at Key Stage 4 unless they are examined. The Government's view that a qualification should be offered at the end of Key Stage 4 opens up the possibility of new qualifications that could be accredited.

174. The lack of accountability for schools and the non-inclusion of GCSE courses in performance measures have contributed to the disparities in provision and quality of RE between schools of a religious character, schools following their locally agreed syllabus, and academies without a religious character.

175. Starting GCSE content in Year 9 when pupils have not had sufficient opportunities to build a foundational understanding of religions and worldviews leads to lower quality RE. The current HMI Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman, has stated that starting GCSE in Year 9 is detrimental to pupils' learning and to a broad and balanced curriculum.[73]

176. Equally, attempting to teach Full Course GCSE in one hour a week leads to superficial learning and pupils failing to understand the world of religion and belief in sufficient depth – an issue identified by Ofsted in 2013.[74]

72 *Department for Education (2017). Implementing the English Baccalaureate. Government consultation response. http://schoolsweek.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Implementing_the_EBacc_Government_Consultation_Response-with-links.pdf*

73 *Speech made by Amanda Spielman at the Festival of Education, 23 June 2017. https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/amanda-spielmans-speech-at-the-festival-of-education*

177. We believe that the lack of accountability for RE contributes to many schools giving it less curriculum time at secondary than other humanities subjects and using teaching assistants to teach it at primary.

> The provision made for GCSE in the majority of the secondary schools surveyed failed to provide enough curriculum time for pupils to extend and deepen their learning sufficiently.
>
> The way in which RE was provided in many of the primary schools visited had the effect of isolating the subject from the rest of the curriculum. It led to low-level learning and missed opportunities to support pupils' learning more widely, for example, in literacy.[75]

178. Schools are already required to publish details of their curriculum on their websites. This is essential in holding schools to account for providing a broad and balanced curriculum.

### Recommendations

179. The Commission therefore recommends that:

a. Schools should be required to publish on their website details of how they meet the national entitlement for RE.

b. Inspection frameworks should be revised to ensure that inspectors monitor whether or not schools meet the national entitlement for RE, in the light of schools' duty to provide a broad and balanced curriculum.

c. The DfE should either monitor, or give SACREs or other approved bodies the power and resources to monitor, the provision and quality of RE in all schools, including free schools, academies and schools of a religious character.

d. The government should consider the impact of school performance measures, including the exclusion of RS GCSE from the Ebacc, on GCSE entries and on the provision and quality of RE, and consider reviewing performance measures in the light of the evidence.

### Areas for consultation

180. We seek views on the most appropriate mechanisms for holding schools to account for the provision and quality of RE at both primary and secondary level.

*74 Ofsted (2013). Religious Education: Realising the potential. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-realising-the-potential*

*75 Ofsted (2013). Religious Education: Realising the potential. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-realising-the-potential*

181. We are considering recommending that a revised qualification at Key Stage 4, for those not taking Full Course GCSE RS, be developed. This would need to meet the requirements of the national entitlement for RE and have currency in school performance measures. This qualification would not be compulsory but would count in school performance measures and in individuals' applications for work or further study. We seek views on how effective this would be and what demand there would be for such a qualification.

## A RENEWED AND EXPANDED ROLE FOR SACRES

### The current situation

182. Each local authority is required by law to establish a Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE), composed of four groups:

a. Group A: Christian denominations and such other religions and religious denominations as, in the authority's opinion, will appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area

b. Group B: the Church of England

c. Group C: teacher associations

d. Group D: the local authority

183. The SACRE is legally separate from the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) and is a permanent body. In practice, ASCs and SACREs generally comprise very similar, if not the same, individuals.

184. The local authority is required to ensure that as far as possible Group A is representative of the proportionate strengths of the denominations and religions in the area.

185. The role of the SACRE is principally to 'advise the local authority on RE given in accordance with the agreed syllabus, and on matters related to its functions, whether in response to a referral from the local authority or as it sees fit'.[76] SACREs are also required by law to 'publish an annual report on its work and on actions taken by its representative groups, specifying any matters on which it has advised the local authority, broadly describe the nature of that advice, and set out reasons for offering advice on matters not referred to it by the local authority'[77] and to send a copy of this report to the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Authority (QCDA). As the QCDA no longer exists, NASACRE advises that SACREs fulfil this last aspect of their legal responsibility by sending a copy to the DfE and one to NASACRE.

*76 UK Parliament Education Act 1996, Section 391.1(a).*
*77 UK Parliament Education Act 1996, Section 391.6-7.*

186. As part of this role, SACREs should:

a. Monitor the provision and quality of RE taught according to its agreed syllabus, together with the overall effectiveness of the syllabus

b. Provide advice and support on the effective teaching of RE in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus; provide advice to the local authority and its schools on methods of teaching, the choice of teaching material and the provision of teacher training

c. In partnership with its local authority, consider whether any changes need to be made in the agreed syllabus or in the support offered to schools in the implementation of the agreed syllabus, to improve the quality teaching and learning of RE

d. Offer advice to the local authority, and through the local authority to schools, concerning how an existing agreed syllabus can be interpreted so as to fit in with a broad, balanced and coherent curriculum.[78]

187. SACREs may choose to co-opt members who are not part of any of the four constituent groups, to represent young people's views, provide educational expertise or represent religious and non-religious views that 'reflect a diverse multi-cultural society'.[79]

188. In decision-making, each of the four constituent groups has one vote. Co-opted members do not vote.

189. SACREs are involved in a range of activities to support the quality of RE in schools. These may include:

a. Facilitating visits to places of worship for teachers and pupils, through providing recommendations and guidance to schools, organising and sometimes accompanying visits.

b. Training faith representatives and community leaders to work with schools.

c. Contributing to continuing professional development for teachers, through running conferences and workshops or contributing to teacher network days or in-service training (INSET) days. Many of these are led by professionals such as RE advisers or external consultants.

d. Providing resources to support the locally agreed syllabus, including exemplar units of work.

*78 Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) Non-statutory guidance on Religious Education. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-guidance-in-english-schools-non-statutory-guidance-2010*

*79 Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) Non-statutory guidance on Religious Education.*

e. Providing resources to support the teaching of RE, including running resource centres, providing artefacts to schools, hosting and publicising relevant exhibitions and local events.

f. Presenting to headteachers, governors and the local council to keep RE on the agenda of these different groups.

g. Promoting RE through creating competitions and awards, or through events in the local community. [80]

190. In addition, some SACREs already provide support and advice for schools on inclusion for students from diverse faith and belief communities. This includes:

a. Producing guidance documents on a range of faith and belief related challenges, such as absence due to religious observance, fasting (especially during examinations), the wearing of articles of faith, providing prayer rooms and other frequently asked questions.

b. Providing support for specific cases as needed.

c. Supporting schools dealing with complaints and queries linked to sensitive issues such as safeguarding, the Prevent agenda and the right to withdraw.[81]

> The current local system has many flaws but it does mean that a group of people have to take RE seriously in each Local Authority. Many other subjects would love to have this.
>
> Fiona Moss, written evidence submitted to the Commission

191. SACREs also have a statutory duty to monitor the provision and quality of RE. They tend to do this by collating public examination data annually, and some collate comments from Ofsted reports. Many send out surveys to schools and, where there is capacity, some conduct school visits.[82]

192. The capacity of SACREs to carry out this work is highly variable. A recent survey (2017) of NASACRE members (35 SACRES responded out of 151) highlights the disparity in funding and capacity of different SACREs. Budgets for those SACREs who responded to the survey ranged from none at all (25% of respondents) to over £50,000 per annum (excluding funding for ASCs).[83] A very small number of SACRE budgets are higher

*80 NASACRE, written evidence submitted to the commission following their AGM in 2017.*
*81 NASACRE, written evidence submitted to the commission following their AGM in 2017.*
*82 NASACRE, written evidence submitted to the Commission following a survey of members.*
*83 NASACRE, written evidence submitted to the Commission following a survey of members.*

still, including Birmingham with a SACRE/ASC budget of £103,000 for 2017/18.[84]

193. None covered in the NASACRE survey employ full time RE advisers, and the number of days of adviser time bought in range from two to 65 per annum.

194. The 2013 Ofsted report found that:

> Many SACRE members have reported deterioration in the quality of professional expertise they receive as well as declining financial support from their local authority. The National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) reports that financial pressures make it increasingly difficult for many SACREs to find the expertise and resources to fulfil their statutory duties for RE effectively. A 2012 survey by NASACRE found that an increasing number of SACREs described reduced professional development opportunities in RE, a loss of professional advice and consultant posts for RE in local authorities, and a reduced number of advanced skills teachers for the subject. These were among the major challenges facing the SACREs.
>
> In addition, the loss of publicly funded national support for curriculum development work in RE has further isolated RE from wider changes in education and reduced the support for SACREs in addressing the need for curriculum development work highlighted in the previous Ofsted report.[85]

195. Our written and oral evidence found that the same issues highlighted by Ofsted in 2013 had continued and been further exacerbated by funding cuts and continuing academisation.

196. Some schools which contributed oral evidence felt that SACREs were 'out of date' and they received more effective support from elsewhere, in particular grassroots teacher networks. Some teachers mentioned that schools were not always aware of their locally agreed syllabus or of the services provided by their SACRE.

84 *Guy Hordern on behalf of Birmingham SACRE, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, Birmingham.*

85 *Ofsted (2013). Religious Education: Realising the potential. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-realising-the-potential*

## The case for change

### *The role of SACREs in linking schools with communities and promoting positive community relations*

197. It is desirable for children and young people to have contact with a diverse range of people from different religious and non-religious communities, so that they can better understand how worldviews, both religious and non-religious, are lived out, and the influence that they have on individuals, communities and societies. The role of SACREs in facilitating this remains crucial.

198. SACREs can play a key role in promoting positive community relations through facilitating meaningful contact between members of different communities and making sure that schools are inclusive places for all.

199. At their best, SACREs are well placed to take on further responsibilities related to promoting positive community relations. They have strong relationships with the local authority, schools and faith and belief communities, and where they work well they promote better community relations.

> A survey of SACREs by ap Sion (2014) demonstrated that benefits of SACREs extended beyond those of fulfilling statutory requirements in relation to religious education and collective worship. The survey results indicated that SACREs also carried the added and unintentional benefit of promoting interfaith dialogue and community cohesion, and cautioned that diminishing the role and effectiveness of SACREs (either by taking away the religious education provided by the schools from SACRE control or by weakening the connection between SACREs and the religions and religious leaders within individual local areas) may undermine these particular benefits.
>
> Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU), written evidence submitted to the Commission

200. Of those SACREs which responded to the 2017 NASACRE survey, over 4/5 (28 of 35) would like to play a greater role in promoting community cohesion, interfaith relations and relations between faith and belief communities and wider society, beyond their existing work with schools.[86]

86 *NASACRE, written evidence submitted to the commission following a survey of members.*

### *Risks to the current effectiveness of SACREs in carrying out their duties, particularly in relation to monitoring RE*

201. The effective functioning of SACREs is at serious risk due to cuts to funding and to the impact of academisation.

202. Direct intervention from the DfE can make a big difference to the capacity and resourcing of SACREs and their corresponding ability to carry out their functions. One oral submission claimed that a single letter from Lord Nash highlighting the importance of SACREs enabled some SACREs successfully to request budget increases or reverse planned cuts to funding.[87]

203. The monitoring function of SACREs is increasingly difficult, as the data is not readily available for them to carry out this function. SACREs depend on schools responding to surveys and requests for visits, and often schools which are cause for concern do not engage with SACRE requests.

204. Respondents to the NASACRE survey also stated that the lack of power to compel schools to change their practice undermined the monitoring activity of SACREs.[88]

205. The variability of current SACRE practice, partly due to variability of funding, is a cause for concern and there needs to be greater equality in the capacity of SACREs and the support they receive.

### *The composition of SACREs*

206. There are a number of key stakeholders in RE that are not represented on SACREs and have an equally important role to play in supporting and monitoring good RE. These include universities, teacher networks (not limited to teacher unions) and professional associations, and may also include museums and galleries or arts venues in some localities. Governors, school providers including MAT trustee boards, and parent groups are also not currently represented on SACREs but have important roles in supporting good RE.

207. In addition, the changing patterns of religious affiliation necessitate a review of the composition of faith and belief groups on SACREs. In many cases, representatives of non-religious worldviews already serve on SACREs as co-opted members and make significant positive contributions but are currently unable to vote.

208. We have not yet had sufficient evidence to make an informed judgement on whether Group B should be disbanded and incorporated into Group A.

*87 Lat Blaylock, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, Birmingham.*
*88 NASACRE, written evidence submitted to the Commission following a survey of members.*

We seek further evidence on this issue. We recognise the important work done by Church of England dioceses in supporting SACREs, and supporting RE in community schools for which they are not directly responsible. According to oral evidence provided by the Church of England Education Office, the Diocesan RE adviser is the only provider of specialist advice to the SACRE in over 40% of SACREs and the diocesan role is described as 'significant or greater' in two thirds of SACREs.

209. The role of SACREs in supporting, monitoring and providing determinations for Collective Worship was outside the scope of enquiry for the Commission on RE. This needs to be considered separately.

### Recommendations

210. We intend to consult on all proposed recommendations relating to SACREs.

### Areas for consultation

211. We seek views on the following recommendations on the role of SACREs:

a. The Government should publicly highlight and reaffirm the important role of SACREs in supporting and resourcing RE.

b. The Government should consider whether the role of SACREs should be expanded to include a duty to advise on all matters relating to religion and belief in schools.

c. The Government should consider ways of securing funding to resource SACREs adequately. Options for this may include:

   i. Ring-fenced funding for SACREs

   ii. Funding for SACREs from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport or the Department of Communities and Local Government

   iii. Specifying a minimum amount of funding (perhaps per school or per pupil) to which local authorities must adhere.

d. The Government should consider the composition of SACREs and the law should be changed to include representatives of non-religious worldviews as full members.

e. The Government should publish all SACRE annual reports publicly on a dedicated website.

212. We seek views on what the duties of SACREs should be in relation to promoting good community relations, beyond matters relating to religion and belief in schools.

213. We are still considering how the composition of SACREs should be adapted to be fit for purpose in a changed social and educational landscape. In particular, we are considering whether the committee structure should be changed or abolished. We seek views and evidence on this.

214. We seek views on which groups and organisations should be represented on SACREs.

## THE RIGHT OF WITHDRAWAL

### The current situation

215. As mentioned in paragraph 34 above, the right of parents to withdraw their children from RE and from Collective Worship has been in existence since 1870 and has remained part of the legal settlement in both the 1944 and 1988 Education Acts.

216. Parents may withdraw their children from some or all of the RE curriculum, without giving a reason. Non-statutory guidance released in 2010 states that the school must not influence the parents' decision but should make sure that parents are informed about the content of the curriculum.[89]

217. The law makes provision for parents to make alternative arrangements for children to learn RE in accordance with their parents' wishes.

218. The school must supervise the children who are withdrawn from RE but are not required to provide additional teaching or incur extra cost.

219. Teachers also have the right to withdraw from teaching RE.

### The case for change

#### *Widespread support for an end to the right of withdrawal*

220. There were strong calls across the written and oral evidence for the right of withdrawal to be abolished – a significant majority of individuals and organisations mentioned this. NATRE, the NAHT and the Church of England – representing three major stakeholders in schools – all called for an end to the right of withdrawal in their written evidence.

> NAHT believes that all pupils, in all schools, should experience consistent and high quality Religious Education in order to support the development of understanding, tolerance and respect for religious and non-religious beliefs, practices and viewpoints. In

89 *Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) Non-statutory guidance on Religious Education. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-guidance-in-english-schools-non-statutory-guidance-2010*

> order to secure this, we would like to see amendments made to Section 71 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, which provides a parental right to remove children from religious education. We believe that a child's right to develop religious tolerance and understanding should be paramount, and that this parental right should be removed.
>
> NAHT, written evidence submitted to the Commission

> The NATRE Executive sees no good reason for prolonging the right of parental withdrawal from inclusive RE. If the right of withdrawal is maintained then it should be clarified or modified by guidance to show that it can only be used for genuine reasons of a families' religion or worldview, and not for use selectively (e.g. for reasons motivated by racism or religiously motivated discrimination). Evidence from NATRE's primary survey found that whilst withdrawal from RE is still relatively rare; incidents of this selective withdrawal are increasing.
>
> NATRE, written evidence submitted to the Commission

> The right of withdrawal from RE is perhaps the most archaic and outdated aspect of the 1944 Education Act.... [T]he clause gives comfort to those who are breaking the law and seeking to incite religious hatred. Sadly, and dangerously, the clause is now exploited by a range of shall I say 'interest groups' often using a dubious interpretation of human rights legislation. This undermines the need for all children of all backgrounds to receive a broad and balanced curriculum and thwarts efforts to enable all to live well together.
>
> To the detriment of the subject the right of withdrawal perpetuates the myth that RE is confessional in all schools and aligns RE too closely with Collective Worship in the minds of the media and the public. This should be repealed although we would accept that it would be dependent on the development of an agreed national common entitlement statement to RE.
>
> Derek Holloway on behalf of the Church of England Education Ooffice, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, London

221. We are concerned at the anecdotal evidence here and elsewhere that the right of withdrawal is being used by parents affiliated to certain groups to withdraw children from anything in RE to do with Islam or Muslims, and that this has risen in the wake of recent terrorist activity in Europe. We do not have sufficient evidence about how widespread this is and seek further evidence ahead of the final report.

222. Some pupils were also concerned about the impact of the right of withdrawal on perceptions of RE, and on young people's ability to understand those with different beliefs and values from themselves.

> Parents shouldn't be able to withdraw their children from RE. Schools have a duty to protect children from extremism. RE teaches children how to interact with people from different beliefs, and it's a relevant subject and not outdated. It's essential for children to experience different beliefs because it reduces misconceptions and stereotypes. You wouldn't do this in history or French. Parents withdraw pupils from RE for outdated assumptions, for example, they think their family's religious beliefs will be questioned or disregarded. Parents may know their children best but don't know what's best for them. It brings into question the relevance of the subject when we need it more than ever.
>
> Year 10 pupils, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, York

223. Not all of those who contributed written and oral evidence were in favour of ending the right to withdrawal (although the majority were). Most of those who were not in favour of ending the right to withdrawal cited the rights of parents, the inconsistencies of standards in RE, and the implications of the dual system.

> There should be no opt-out if the subject were to be reformed to be genuinely inclusive. BHA generally support the human right of parents not to have choices taken away in terms of how they educate their children.
>
> Andrew Copson on behalf of the British Humanist Association, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, London

> The right to withdraw needs tightening up but abolishing it completely, in the current political climate, would probably be too provocative and likely to cause a backlash.
>
> Mark Chater, written evidence submitted to the Commission

> I am against the removal of the right to withdraw. In the first instance this is from a personal political view that dislikes any discussion of removing rights from parents over their children's education. Secondly, while there remain such inconsistencies in the standard of RE across schools, it is important that parents have the right of withdrawal.
>
> Ben Wood, written evidence submitted to the Commission

### *Legal implications of ending the right of withdrawal*

224. Both the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights expressly provide parents with rights in relation to their children's education.

225. Article 2 of the First Protocol to the ECHR provides that:

> 'No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions'.

226. There are relatively few ECHR cases concerning parental objection to compulsory religious education. The case of Folgero v Norway (2007) remains the leading case, summing up the overall approach. In this case, Norway had introduced a compulsory course which sought to provide an integrated approach to the study of religion, philosophy and ethics in a non-doctrinal fashion but which reflected the Christian, and Lutheran, preponderance and cultural heritage of the country. The course had two dimensions, knowledge-based and activity-based. The right of withdrawal was available for the activity-based element but not the knowledge-based elements of the course. The legal challenge was from humanist parents who objected to their children's participation in the course as a whole and sought full withdrawal from the course.

227. The Court was clear that in order for such a compulsory course to be acceptable its content has to be delivered, 'in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner'. This derives from older caselaw and is well established. If the material is not considered to be delivered in an 'objective, critical and pluralistic manner', then the adequacy of arrangements for withdrawal needs to be considered.

228. In the Folgero case it was decided that the content was not delivered in such a fashion, and that arrangements for withdrawal were inadequate, because it was, in the view of the majority, not possible to separate out participation in activities from the transmission of knowledge (ie it should have been possible to withdraw from the whole subject), and the practical arrangements for requesting withdrawal were flawed.

229. It should be noted that the judgement focused on the manner of delivery, not merely the content. One could therefore argue that it is not sufficient for the curriculum to be 'objective, critical and pluralistic' – it must also be delivered that way in every school.

230. The Court undertook a highly detailed examination of the curriculum in order to determine whether it was 'objective, critical and pluralistic' – and the judges were divided 9-8 on this issue. This highlights how difficult it is to establish whether a curriculum is 'objective, critical and pluralistic.'

231. In our current system, and indeed under a system in which there is a national entitlement but not a prescriptive national curriculum, the detailed content of the subject is developed by individual schools in many cases. In addition, as the court judgement considered the manner of delivery as well as the content, this would also be at the level of the

individual school.

232. This would result in the possibility of legal challenge, up to the ECHR itself, of each and every curriculum, very likely at the level of individual schools, and, given the likely variations in them and the varied interests of potential complainant parents, it is unlikely that any one decision would be considered definitive. A similar situation has already arisen with challenges to school uniform policies set locally.

233. The case of Zengin v Turkey, 2007, shows how difficult it is to be compliant with the ECHR and the requirement that RE be 'objective, critical and pluralistic.' In this case, only Christians and Jews, but not Alevis, were allowed to withdraw from religious instruction, which focused on Sunni Islam. The legal challenge from Alevi parents was successful because the court felt that the course was not objective, in that it did not include teaching about the Alevi interpretation of Islam.

234. Further complexity surrounds the involvement of groups representing religious and non-religious worldviews in devising the curriculum. If such groups are involved in devising the curriculum, and there is no right of withdrawal, it may make it easier for there to be legal challenges as to whether the curriculum is 'objective.' Even if ASCs were to be removed, groups representing religious and non-religious worldviews still develop resources, and may still develop curriculum frameworks that could be used by schools.

235. The Commission intends to discuss these issues further ahead of the final report, but it can be seen from this brief survey of the legal issues that removing the right of withdrawal would be very difficult, and has far-reaching implications for how the curriculum is developed, and indeed how it is delivered in schools.

236. Given the way that the right of withdrawal is being used in some cases, the Commission is also considering ways in which, if the right of withdrawal cannot be abolished, checks and balances can be put in place to safeguard children from extremism.

### Areas for consultation

237. We seek further evidence on the number of pupils being withdrawn from RE, and the reasons given, where these are given, as well as whether the number of cases and reasons given have been changing over time.

238. We seek views on the most effective ways to manage the right of withdrawal in practice.

239. We seek views on whether it is desirable to look to adopt an overall approach to the design of the RE curriculum in every school so that it is sufficiently 'objective, critical and pluralistic' as to render it capable of

being compulsory without the right of withdrawal.

## 4.2 SUPPORT FOR HIGH QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING

### A National Plan to improve teaching and learning in RE

### The current situation

240. According to the most recent Ofsted subject review (2013), the quality of teaching and learning in RE was less than good in six out of ten primary schools and just under half of secondary schools. This compares unfavourably to other humanities subjects such as history.[90]

241. Primary trainee teachers receive on average three hours or fewer of subject-specific training for RE. More recently qualified teachers have received on average fewer hours of training than those trained five or more years ago, according to the most recent NATRE primary survey.[91]

242. In a survey of over 800 primary teacher trainees conducted by Bishop Grosseteste University in 2013, 50% of teachers said that they lacked confidence to teach RE.[92]

243. Primary trainees are unlikely to see good RE in their school placements, given that RE was less than good in six in ten schools visited by Ofsted in 2013.[93]

244. In the most recent NATRE primary survey some RE was being delivered by a higher level teaching assistant in 50% of schools which responded. In 1 in 10 schools between 25% and 50% of RE is delivered in this way.[94]

245. Bursaries for RE teachers are £9,000 for First Class degree holders and £4,000 for 2:1 degree holders, compared to £25,000 for both for geography and classics.

246. Subject Knowledge Enhancement courses for RE are no longer funded. Funding continues to exist for Subject Knowledge Enhancement in maths, physics, languages, biology, chemistry, computing, English, geography

*90 Ofsted (2013). Religious Education: Realising the potential. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-realising-the-potential*

*91 NATRE (2016). An Analysis of the provision for RE in primary schools. https://www.natre.org.uk/news/latest-news/an-analysis-of-the-provision-for-re-in-primary-schools/*

*92 The All Party Parliamentary Group on Education, RE: the truth unmasked – the supply of and support for religious education teachers, Religious Education Council of England and Wales, 2013; http://www.mmiweb.org.uk/publications/re/APPG_RETruthUnmasked.pdf*

*93 Ofsted (2013). Religious Education: Realising the potential.*

*94 NATRE (2016). An Analysis of the provision for RE in primary schools.*

and design and technology.

247. At secondary level, almost two and a half times as many lessons in RE (27.2%) as history (11%) are taught by a teacher with no relevant post A-level qualification[95]. The 2013 Ofsted report referred to this as one of the reasons why RE was good or better in only just over half of the schools observed, as compared to 71% in the most recent report on history (2011).

248. Teachers with other specialisms can enhance RE in secondary schools but require extensive management and support. Schools often lack capacity to support teachers with other specialisms.

> The prevalence of Teachers with Other Specialisms (TwOS) in RE teaching can also be seen as something of a constraint. Research suggests that RE suffers more than any other subject (with the possible exception of IT) from being taught by those with no qualification in the subject. As mentioned earlier, working with TwOS can be tremendously rewarding; some of the best teaching in my department is by a PE and an MfL teacher. However, working with TwOS can put a disproportionate and inequitable demand on those planning and managing RE – to be effective they demand time, resourcing and support that may be difficult to find within some schools.
>
> Head of RE, secondary, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, Birmingham

## The case for change

### *The impact of training on the quality of teaching and learning*

249. There is a clear link between access to training – both ITE and CPD – and the overall effectiveness of the subject. This was made clear in the Ofsted subject review of 2013, and has also been picked up in the oral and written evidence submitted to the Commission. Lack of subject knowledge leads to a lack of confidence to tackle the contentious issues that are the lifeblood of the subject, and can also reinforce misconceptions about religion.

> In many of the primary schools visited, the senior leadership or RE subject leader acknowledged that the level of subject expertise among the staff was generally weak. Many of the teachers to whom inspectors spoke did not feel confident about teaching RE. They were often worried they might 'say the wrong thing' or were unsure about what they were trying to achieve in RE. Discussion with newly qualified or recently qualified primary teachers confirmed that very few had had any significant RE training during their initial training

*95 Deborah Weston, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, London.*

> and sometimes had had little opportunity to teach RE in their placement schools.
>
> Some primary headteachers openly acknowledged that because of a lack of confidence about RE, some staff preferred to take their planning, preparation and assessment time during these lessons, handing responsibility for the subject to a qualified teaching assistant or supply teacher. [96]

250. There is a clear lack of ITE and CPD at both primary and secondary level. In the most recent NATRE primary survey, 1 in 4 respondents during the last year received no training in RE and 60% received less than 1 day. Even more worrying, 40% of respondents reported that others who teach RE in their school received no training (not even a staff meeting) and 87% have received one day or less.[97]

251. RE teachers are required to have in-depth subject knowledge of a wide range of worldviews as well as various disciplinary approaches to the study of religion. Even those with university degrees in Theology or Religious Studies may only have studied one or two worldviews in depth.

> Coming from the Learning Department within the Jewish Museum, we regularly come into contact with teachers at both Primary and Secondary levels that feel under qualified to teach about Judaism. This may be due to RE not being their specialism or to not having studied Judaism before but being required to teach it as a second examined religion at GCSE and A Level. This is why we have begun to offer teacher training on Judaism so teachers can improve their knowledge of the faith. There should be further CPD opportunities for teachers who are required to teach faiths that are unknown to them. As religion is such a sensitive subject it is of the utmost importance that it is taught well, without stereotyping or misconceptions and that the variety of practice within religions is stressed.
>
> Jewish Museum, written evidence submitted to the Commission

252. Often teachers lack knowledge of Dharmic traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, and this can lead to damaging misconceptions. A lack of teacher expertise leads to teachers 'shaving off diversity'[98] or simply not teaching the Dharmic traditions, due to lack of confidence. All of the Hindu and Buddhist contributors to the oral and written evidence made this point. This makes a very strong case for reinstating funded Subject

96 *Ofsted (2013). Religious Education: Realising the potential. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-realising-the-potential*

97 *NATRE (2016). An Analysis of the provision for RE in primary schools. https://www.natre.org.uk/news/latest-news/an-analysis-of-the-provision-for-re-in-primary-schools/*

98 *Jo Backus, oral evidence submitted to the Commission in Exeter.*

Knowledge Enhancement courses for teachers during initial training and for more experienced teachers.

> There are some specific challenges for Hindus: 1. The poor portrayal of the traditions, as often replicated from one text book to the next. 2. A perception (right or wrong) that schools are opting out of teaching their tradition (and other Eastern or dharmic traditions). 3. The lack of study of a Hindu moral philosophy (in addition to the study of the standard Western approaches, such as Aristotelian virtue ethics, deontology, etc.). Text books and exam question often do little more than second guess what Hindu responses to concrete moral issues might be, and often rather poorly e.g. "Hindus don't eat meat because they believe they might be eating their (former) grandmother". One clear challenge is that in answering questions, there is a fear that excellent answers will be marked lower than the bog-standard.
>
> Rasamandala Das, written evidence submitted to the Commission

253. For secondary teachers in particular, access to university researchers is a key component of subject knowledge development. This has become increasingly urgent with the changes to GCSE and A-level.

> Exam syllabuses are not coherent documents, they're lists of bullet points and they need to be made more coherent. You need to be able to teach them coherently and that requires expertise – engagement with university and that undergraduate level of study for teachers. I think there's a mutual benefit in partnerships with universities. I've really benefited from several days listening to great scholars. I haven't necessarily learned what all the bullet points mean but I have been given underpinning understanding which means I can make a coherent set of lessons.
>
> Secondary teacher, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, Manchester

254. It has been very clear from pupils' oral testimony that they value a discrete curriculum subject taught by specialist teachers with the knowledge to both make it engaging and deal with pupils' questions.

> We are lucky to have a specialist teacher who helps us to go deeper with our learning. Your teacher needs to have a good understanding of religious and non-religious worldviews.
>
> Year 5 pupils, oral evidence submitted to the Commission by their teacher, Exeter

### *Disparities in access to training and CPD across different school types*

255. Teachers and subject leaders in schools without a religious character are far less likely to have received any CPD in the past year than those in schools with a religious character, as shown in research conducted by the APPG on Religious Education in 2013. The NATRE primary and secondary surveys in 2015 and 2016 corroborated this evidence.[99]

*Figure 5: CPD for RE subject leaders (primary)[100]*

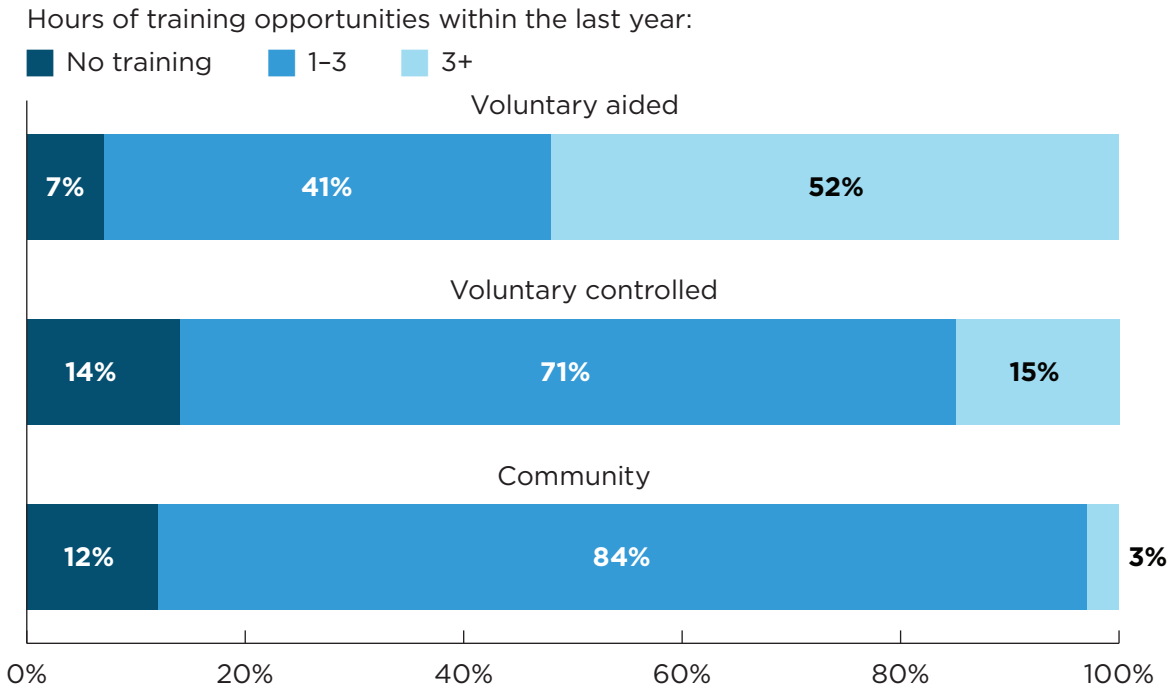
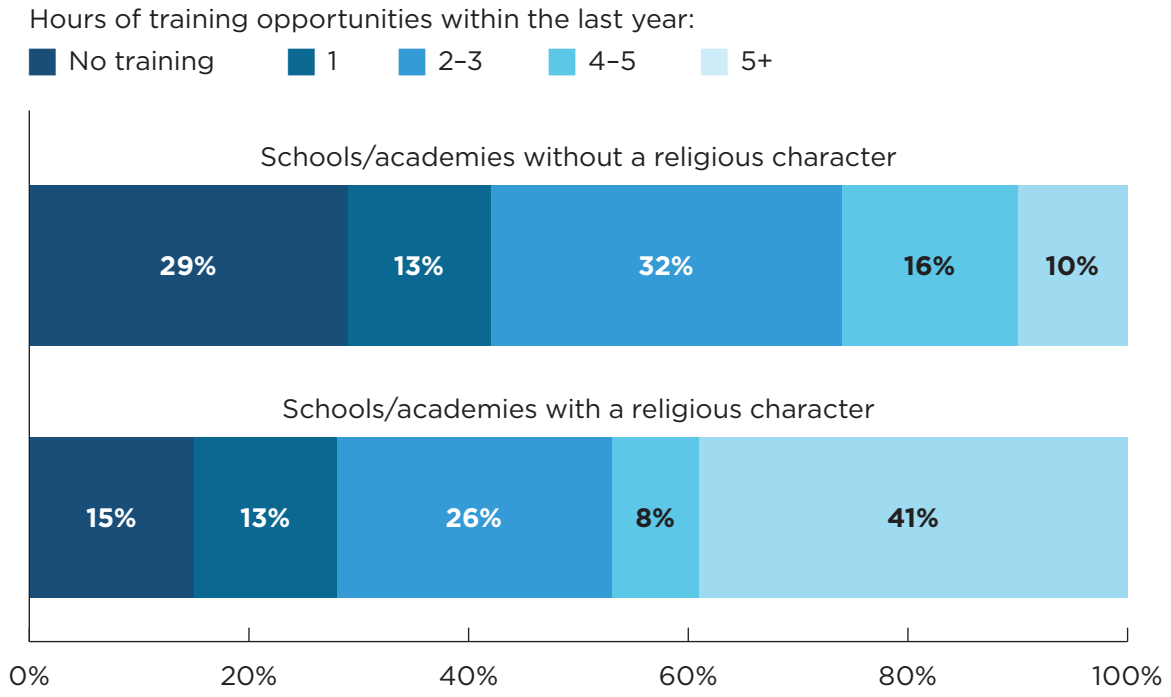



*Figure 6: CPD for RE department (secondary)[101]*



256. This may be due to the pressure on schools to focus on those subjects with more currency in performance measures, particularly English and mathematics.

257. These disparities between school types have an impact on teacher retention: Joy Schmack, in her oral evidence to the Commission, cited a class of 35 PGCE students. Just under half found jobs in schools of a religious character while just over half went to schools without a religious character. Of those in schools without a religious character, only one was still teaching RE full time 10 years later. This is a stark contrast to those in schools of a religious character, who were all still teaching, and half had been promoted to either Head of Department or senior leadership.

In a class of 35 PGCE students, just under half found jobs in schools of a religious character. Of those in schools without a religious character, only one was still teaching RE full time 10 years later.

258. Teachers reported that they felt isolated, demoralised, deskilled, and unsupported, as a result of the low status of the subject, the ongoing cuts to budgets and curriculum time, and the lack of support and CPD.

***Opportunities to enhance the quality of teaching and learning***

259. Research relating to religions and worldviews takes place in a number of university departments: Theology and Religious Studies, Philosophy, Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology and Cognitive Science, as well as religious education research in Education departments. There have been increasing efforts to make this research accessible to teachers, through Culham St Gabriel's *Research for RE* and *RE Today's* publications, as well as the long-standing *British Journal of Religious Education* and the *Journal of Beliefs and Values*.

260. University departments have a great deal to offer to schools and teachers, but their own accountability systems make it difficult for staff to engage with the teaching profession.

> Some awareness-raising needs to be done amongst university departments, but in fairness to them, the demands of REF and TEF [the Research and Teaching Excellence Frameworks] are not conducive to any kind of engagement with schools. It's hard to get

99 *All NATRE surveys can be found at https://www.natre.org.uk/news/latest-news/*
100 *The All Party Parliamentary Group on Education, RE: the truth unmasked – the supply of and support for religious education teachers, Religious Education Council of England and Wales, 2013. http://www.mmiweb.org.uk/publications/re/APPG_RETruthUnmasked.pdf*
101 *The All Party Parliamentary Group on Education, RE: the truth unmasked – the supply of and support for religious education teachers, Religious Education Council of England and Wales, 2013. http://www.mmiweb.org.uk/publications/re/APPG_RETruthUnmasked.pdf*

> staff to help with teacher days – they do it but it's at a cost to their career and to the department. It's more than just recruitment – we have a moral responsibility because we have got that resource there to pay attention to what goes on in schools and to do what we can to assist.
>
> Wendy Dossett, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, Manchester

261. Written evidence submitted by Rob Freathy discussed the RE-searchers project, a successful and influential example of school-university collaboration exploring the use of different disciplines and methodologies in RE at Key Stage 2.[102]

262. Another example of school/university collaboration on research is a joint initiative, by NATRE and the University of Bristol, researching best ways of promoting community relations within RE lessons. The project is investigating whether 'Contact Theory' could be applied usefully to the RE setting.

263. Teachers who gave oral evidence valued being able to access university lecturers and researchers in areas relevant to RE within Education, Theology and Religious Studies and other related disciplines.[103]

264. One of the key sources of training and support for teachers of RE has, in the past, been professional local RE advisers. The capacity of local authorities to provide this has been diminished. The lack of support for RE has been detrimental to the quality of teaching and learning. This was reinforced by teachers and advisers who contributed oral evidence as well as in previous Ofsted reports.

> Just having a national curriculum for history has not ensured good education in history in primary school – what has made a difference is having an adviser networking.
>
> Pat Hannam, oral evidence submitted to the Commission

> In the majority of cases, this [the quality of training provision] was directly linked to the capacity of the local authority to provide such training and support. In nearly every case where such support was not available, it had a direct and negative impact on the effectiveness of the teaching and subject leadership. RE was generally better where the locally agreed syllabus was well conceived with clear accompanying guidance, but too often the capacity of local authorities to provide this support was diminishing. [104]

*102 Rob Freathy, written evidence submitted to the Commission. More information can be found at http://www.reonline.org.uk/re-searchers/*

*103 Ben Wood on behalf of NATRE, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, Manchester.*

> I can't support schools the way I want to. I see my role as support, because a lot of teachers aren't confident teaching RE – it's okay to challenge, it's okay to do drama, sing, be creative, make paper plates etc. My children love it.
>
> Primary teacher with an unpaid role supporting other schools, oral evidence submitted to the Commission, Manchester

265. The lack of good local advice and support creates even more of a disparity between schools of a religious character and schools without a religious character. Schools of a religious character have far greater access to specialist advice. Church of England diocesan RE advisers do support schools without a religious character as far as they can, filling this vital gap, but it places a disproportionate burden on them.

266. Grass-roots networks have had a strong positive impact on teacher subject knowledge, skill and confidence. These networks are sometimes funded by charitable foundations. If not, then they are completely unfunded and rely entirely on the goodwill of members and on in-kind donations from teachers, schools which host meetings, and visiting speakers. They provide very cost-effective CPD, particularly as network meetings are usually held outside of school hours, and therefore carry no costs for supply cover. These networks are all the more effective when they are able to connect teachers with university researchers, professional advisers and SACRE members as well as with each other, but this depends on funding.

267. We seek further evidence on the impact of the Farmington scholarships on teaching and learning in schools.

**Recommendations**

268. We are considering developing a National Plan for developing teaching and learning in RE, along the lines of the National Plan for Music Education. This plan is likely to include the following recommendations:

a. A minimum of 12 hours should be devoted to RE in all primary ITE courses.

b. Leading schools for RE should be identified and all primary trainees should be given the opportunity to observe RE teaching in such a school.

c. Include under the Teachers' Standards, part 1, section 3 (Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge), the requirement that

*104 Ofsted (2013). Religious Education: Realising the potential. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-realising-the-potential*

teachers 'demonstrate a good understanding of and take responsibility for the sensitive handling of controversial issues, including thoughtful discussion of religious and non-religious worldviews where necessary.'

d. Restore funded Subject Knowledge Enhancement courses for those applying to teach RE and for serving teachers of RE without a relevant post A-level qualification in the subject.

e. Restore parity of bursaries for RE with those for other shortage subjects.

f. The government and relevant funding bodies should consider how funding of grassroots teacher networks can be made more sustainable.

g. SACREs and local authorities should review existing good practice in developing and sustaining these grassroots networks and start their own if such a network does not exist in their local area.

h. University performance measures should be updated to credit universities for their engagement with schools, including the provision of CPD and resource materials.

i. University staff conducting research in areas related to RE should be encouraged to contribute to grassroots networks, lead teacher development days, develop resource materials or become SACRE members. This may provide opportunities for them to demonstrate the impact of their research or increase student recruitment.

### Areas for consultation

269. We seek views on what should be included in the National Plan for RE, beyond the recommendations set out above.

270. We seek views on how the National Plan might best be implemented.

271. There are increasing expectations on teachers to be engaged with research, by keeping up to date with published research at minimum, and where possible by engaging in action research, lesson study and other forms of practitioner research. We seek views on the kinds of research which would be most helpful for RE teachers to engage with, and what mechanisms would support this.

# SECTION 5

## NEXT STEPS

### 5.1 THE CONSULTATION PROCESS AHEAD OF THE FINAL REPORT

272. We intend to have an extensive consultation process on the report, including the recommendations, areas for consultation, and any gaps or further issues to address in the final report.

a. An online consultation process will run from mid-October to mid-December 2017. Please keep an eye on www.commissiononre.org.uk or the @CommissionOnRE twitter account (https://twitter.com/CommissionOnRE) as details of the consultation will be publicised here, as well as via the RE Council's member organisations.

b. A consultation event will take place in late November or early December 2017. Further details of this event will be publicised in due course.

c. You are welcome to email your views to evidence@commissiononre.org.uk throughout the next year up until the publication of the final report.

273. We are looking for school case studies around the enablers to high quality RE:

i. Subject expertise and its impact on teaching and learning

ii. Support from school leaders and what this looks like when it's done well, as well as its impact on teaching and learning

iii. Professional development networks and their impact on teaching and learning and particularly on the experience of pupils

iv. How schools have made best use of local faith and belief communities.

274. We are also looking for school case studies around the barriers to high quality RE:

i. The impact of school performance measures

ii. Lack of specialist teachers

iii. Low teacher confidence

iv. Lack of support from school leaders.

275. We are also looking for case studies of good professional support from SACREs and cases where lack of SACRE support has had negative impact.

276. Please submit all case studies via the online consultation process when it opens, or by email to evidence@commissiononre.org.uk after the consultation process has closed.

277. Commissioners will be able to make limited further visits to schools, professional bodies and SACREs.

278. The final report will contain details of the consultation and our responses to the consultation. We will not be publishing a separate consultation response.

## 5.2 KEY AREAS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION AHEAD OF THE FINAL REPORT

279. The Commissioners have identified a number of areas for further discussion ahead of the final report. These include the areas for consultation we have identified above:

a. The implications of the 'dual system' for RE, in terms of the purposes of RE as well as the legal and structural arrangements, particularly in the light of the proposed national entitlement.

b. Who should provide detailed curriculum guidance, including programmes of study, based on the proposed national entitlement.

c. What the role of SACREs should be.

d. The state of the subject at primary level and specific recommendations for improving it.

e. Improving the quality of teaching and learning – further discussion on the suggested National Plan.

f. The right of withdrawal and how to proceed in the face of the complexities identified in this report.

# APPENDIX 1: EVIDENCE RECEIVED BY THE COMMISSION

## RESPONSES TO THE WRITTEN CALL FOR EVIDENCE

2,245 responses were received through the web-based call for evidence. Of the 2,245 responses received, 862 exited the survey without answering any of the substantive questions. Once duplicates were removed, there were 1,377 responses that were analysed. Of the 1,377 responses, 190 came from organisations (just under 14%). Many of the individual responses came from those working in particular organisations with an interest in RE, but did not claim to be answering on behalf of those organisations.

Of the organisational responses, 115 were from schools. This included 74 primary schools and 31 secondary schools, along with 10 belonging to other configurations (e.g. all-through, middle, or prep).

98 schools were of a religious character and 17 were not. 59 were Catholic, 33 Church of England, 6 were other faith schools.

56 responses were from religious groups. Defining an organisation as a 'religious group' can be a subjective exercise. We have taken any organisation that includes a specific religious position as part of its identity as a 'religious group', e.g. the Association of Christian Teachers has been defined as a religious group, whereas the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) has been defined as a professional body. This is not to deny that members of the Association of Christian Teachers are themselves professionals, nor that the personal religious position of members of NATRE will have an impact on their professional work. Of these religious groups, 44 were Christian. There were 3 Hindu groups, 2 Jewish groups, 2 Jain groups, 1 Muslim group, 1 Buddhist group, and 1 Baha'i group. In addition, there was 1 response from an organisation representing non-religious views.

9 SACREs submitted evidence, along with evidence from the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE). 6 further professional bodies submitted evidence including NATRE, NAHT and the Federation of RE Centres.

In addition, we have received 49 written responses that were submitted directly, outside the confines of the online call for evidence. These were either received by email to evidence@commissiononre.org.uk, or from the submission facility on the Commission website. These included a mixture of submissions on behalf of individuals and organisations. As with the responses from organisations to the formal online call for evidence, some came from professional bodies, some from SACRES and some from religious groups (and one came from a non-religious group).

## Schools that responded to the call for evidence

Names of all individuals and organisations have been left unedited: they appear as submitted online

| | |
|---|---|
| Philip Robinson | Aldro School |
| Kathryn Humphrey | All Saints Catholic School York |
| Jane Yates | Armathwaite Community Primary School |
| Penny Watkin | Barlow Church of England Primary School |
| Luke Angell | Bath Community Academy |
| Anja Webb-Ingall | Benington Primary School |
| Catherine Horton | Blessed Mother Teresa's Catholic Primary School |
| Luisa Maylard-Mason | Blessed Robert Widmerpool Primary School |
| Richard Smith | Bristol Grammar School Philosophy, Religion and Ethics Department |
| FIONA TODD | Bunbury  Aldersey & St Oswald's |
| Hilary Alcock | Buntingsdale Primary School and Nursery |
| Julie Warburton | Cardinal Newman Catholic High School |
| Sandra Mallon | Cardinal Newman Catholic School Coventry |
| Mrs Sarah Boyle | Cardinal Newman School Coventry |
| Christina Stewardson | Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School |
| Rose Magill | Charters School |
| Mike Madden | Chatsmore CHS |
| Sue Beckett | Christ Church CE Primary School |
| Tracy Johnson | Clayton Hall Academy |
| Toni Harris | Cranbrook School |
| julie kirk | Crich Church of England Infant school |
| J Johnstone | Dame Alice Owen's School |
| Chris Davies | De Lisle College: A Voluntary Catholic Academy |
| Kerry Anstee | Devonport High School for Boys |
| Bridget Knight | Eardisley CE Primary School |
| K Radford-Rea | Edenham c e primary school |
| Susan Thorn | Edward Peake CE Middle School |
| Liz Peachman | Ellison Boulters CE Academy |
| Caroline Vickers | Emmanuel Christian School Leicester |
| Alison Gourlay | FBEC |
| Karin Baker | Fritchley CE Primary School |
| Chloe Probert | Great Denham Primary School |
| Morag Flower | Great Torrington Bluecoat C.of E. Primary School |
| Ahmed Peeerbhai | Green Academy Trust |
| Ben McArdle | Hagley Catholic High School |
| Dr Neal Carrier | Hampton School |
| Weena West | Headington Prep School |
| Cathryn Clarke | Henry Box School |
| Simon Brown | Hertswood Academy |
| Lorna buchanan | Holy Trinity |
| Timothy Oxley | Holy Trinity Catholic School, Oakely Road, Small Heath, Birmingham, B10 0AX |
| Jacqui French | Holywell Middle school |
| Mrs Sally Billam | Hornsea Community Primary School  East Yorkshire |
| Miss Jane Cawthorn | Howden Church of England Infant School |
| Debbie Lewis | James Allen's Girls' School |
| Anna Crosby | John Harrison C of E Primary |
| Nick Seward | Kingham Hill School |
| Charis Geoghegan | Little Gaddesden School |
| MO'Sullivan | MOD Schools |

| | |
|---|---|
| Kelvin Gibbs | Mundy Church of England Voluntary Controlled Junior School |
| Sue Hart | Netherseal St Peter's C E Primary School |
| Christine Shasha | Oak Farm Infant school |
| Christine finnegan | Our lady & st kenelm primary school |
| Paul Carroll | Our Lady & St Rose of Lima Catholic Primary School |
| Clare McNally | Our Lady & St. Hubert's Catholic Primary |
| Kirstie Richards | Our Lady and St Joseph Catholic Primary School |
| Clare van Vliet | Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Primary School |
| Ben Taylor | Our Lady of the Wayside Catholic Primary School |
| Lauren Rickards | Our Lady Queen of Heaven Catholic Primary School |
| Angela Pitcher | Our Lady Queen of Heaven RC Primary |
| christine finnegan | OUR LADY ST KENELM RC PRIMARY |
| Stephen Oliver | Our Lady's Abingdon |
| Colette Harris | Painsley Catholic College |
| Adrian Hawkes | Phoenix Academy |
| Dorothy Marlow | Ponsbourne St. Mary's School |
| K Cox | Primary school |
| Stephanie Mcloughlin | Primary School |
| Jo Galloway | Radlett Lodge Schoo |
| Julie Ashwell | Raynsford Church of England Academy |
| Rachel Hames | Richard Hill Church of England Primary School |
| ELIZABETH O'CONNOR | Saint Augustine's Catholic High School, Redditch |
| Julie Sedgley | Saint Francis Catholic Primary |
| Mrs Ann King | Saint Mary's Catholic Primary School |
| Therese Langford | School within Birmingham Doicese |
| kerry shilling | Selborne Primary School |
| Lisa Huphries | Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School |
| Shereen ahmed | Smiths wood sports college |
| H Webb | Spalding Primary School |
| Jenny Byrne | SS Peter and Paul Catholic Primary Academy & Nursery |
| David Jobburns | St . Joseph's Catholic Primary School Rugeley |
| Mrs Ruth Vayro | St Ambrose RC Primary School |
| John Clapham | St Andrew's CE Primary School |
| Judy King | St Andrew's CE Primary School Much Hadham |
| Ian Crawford | St Andrews CofE Junior School, Hadfield |
| Susannah Hunt | St Andrew's Lower School |
| Michael Walters | St Anselm's Catholic School |
| Tamsin Davis | St Anthony's Catholic Primary School, Wolverhampton |
| Lisa Machin | St Augustine's Catholic Academy |
| Sarah Rayson | St Bartholomew's C of E Academy |
| nicholas gibson | st benedicts catholic high school |
| Emma Paton | St Bernard's RC Primary School |
| Andy Lewis | St Bonaventure's School, Forest Gate |
| Krystyna Bickley | St Catherine of Siena Academy |
| Ann Marie Owen | St Clare's Primary School |
| Patricia Opalko | St Edmund Campion Catholic Primary School Maidenhead |
| Louise Flanagan | St Edwards catholic primary |
| Louise Flanagan | St Edwards Catholic Primary Coleshill |
| Michelle Walsh | St Elizabeths Catholic Primary School |
| Peter Burke | St Elizabeth's Catholic Primary School |
| Dawn Farmer | St George and St Martin |
| Louise Norris | St George's CE Primary School |
| David Hird | St Gerard's Catholic Primary School |

| | |
|---|---|
| Fiona Leyshon | St Giles CE Primary School Killamarsh |
| Catherine Craig | St Godric's RC Primary School |
| NEIL SPENCER | st hilda's church of England High School |
| James Allen | St Joachims School |
| Theresa Madden | St John Fisher Catholic College |
| Janette Turner | St John Fisher Catholic School |
| Paul Reid | St John the Baptist CE Primary School |
| Veronica Gosling | St John Vianney Catholic Primary School |
| Debbie Peskett | St Johns Academy |
| John Morgan | St John's College, Cardiff - 68741 |
| Anita Gallagher | St Joseph's Camberwell Catholic Schools' Federation |
| Paula Lowry | St Joseph's Catholic and C of E Parimary |
| Paula Nudd | St Lawrence VA Cof E Lower School NN10 9LL |
| Sarah Nankivell | St Mary and StJohnSchool |
| Owen Finnegan | St Mary's  Catholic Primary School STUDLEY |
| Isobel Vassallo | St Mary's Beckenham |
| Matt Rebbitt | St Mary's Catholic High School, Croydon |
| Stephen Breeze | St Marys Catholic Primary School, Cannock |
| Mary Lynch | St Nicholas RC Primary School |
| Sarah Smith | St Peter & St Paul CE Primary School |
| Colleen Owen | St Peter's Catholic Primary School |
| Richard Cunningham | St Peter's Catholic Primary School, Waterlooville |
| Ann Gunn | St Polycarp's Catholic Primary School |
| Nathan Price | St Teresa's Catholic Primary School |
| Diane | St Teresa's RC Primary School |
| MARTINA MORAN | ST THOMAS AQUINAS SCHOOL |
| Mr  F Waugh | St Thomas More Catholic Academy |
| Sarah Hatfield | St Thomas More Catholic School |
| Carl McIver | St Willibrord's RC Primary |
| Graham Cotter | St. Andrew's Primary School, Buckland Monachorum. |
| Sue Rolfe | St. Andrew's VC Lower School |
| Marie Clark | St. Anne's C of E Primary |
| Deirdre Godsall | St. Bernadette's Catholic Primary School, Cardiff |
| Barbara Meaney | St. Edward's Royal Free Ecumenical Middle School |
| Alicia Bullock | St. Francis Xavier Catholic Primary School |
| Mandy Brown | St. George's C.E. (V.A.) Primary School |
| Jennie Molloy | St. James' Junior School, Derby |
| Roger Averis | St. John's CE Primary School - BELPER - Derbyshire |
| Louise Stephens | St. Joseph's Catholic Primary |
| Yvonne Wozniak | St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School, SW15 2 QD |
| James Salt | St. Joseph's Preparatory School |
| Mrs Grainne Davies | St. Vincent's Catholic Primary School |
| Claire Speakman | St.alban's RC Primary |
| Catherine Amos | St.Mary's the Mount School |
| Steve Deadman | St.Patricks Primary School Southampton |
| RICHARD BAKER | ST.WILFRID'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL |
| Melodie Harmer | Stourport High School and 6th form centre |
| Claire Whalley | Sunning Hill Primary School |
| Sue Pimlott | Sutterton Fourfields Primary School |
| steven meredith | tarvin primary school |
| Anne Green | The Faber Catholic Primary School |
| Anne Parr | The Federation of St George's with Our Lady and St Peter RC Primary School |
| Giles Mercer | The governors of St John's Catholic Primary School, Bath |

| | |
|---|---|
| LIZ | THUNDRIDGE SCHOOL |
| Liz Collins | Toddington St George C of E School |
| Amy Abbott | Tring School |
| Amy Abbott | Tring School |
| Clare Porter | Trinity Academy |
| Trudie Pabor | Trinity Catholic School |
| Leondre Douglas | Twyford Church of England High School |
| Helen Simms | Uffington Church of England Primary School |
| Rebecca Harvey | Walter Evans CE Primary School |
| Kate Markham | Well Green Primary School |
| sheila Anstey | welwyn st marys primary school |
| Andrew Watkinson-Trim | West Buckland School |
| Alison Gooderson | Weston CE Primary school |
| Helen Mancini | Weston on Trent Primary School |
| Nick Newitt | Weston St Mary CE Primary School |
| Ruth Maxwell | Whipton Barton Junior School |

## Organisations that responded to the call for evidence

Names of all individuals and organisations have been left unedited: they appear as submitted online

| | |
|---|---|
| Wendy Dossett | A small group within TRS-UK - does not necessarily reflect the views of the full membership |
| Graham Nicholls | Affinity |
| Irfan Malik | Ahmadiyya Muslim Association |
| Yousif | Al-Khoei Foundation |
| Rev Desmond Seddon | Archdiocese of Liverpool |
| Clive Ireson | Association of Christian Teachers |
| Paul Spear | Association of Grace Baptist Churches South East |
| Charles Baily | Bedfordshire Humanists |
| Mike Otter | Bible Society |
| Fr Jonathan Veasey | Birmingham Diocesan Education Service |
| Guy HORDERN | Birmingham SACRE |
| Dawn Waterman | Board of Deputies of British Jews |
| Dr D Corrywright | British Association for the Study of Religions |
| Victor Sulaiman | CAC Reformation Chapel Intl |
| Malcolm Edwards | Carmel Baptist Church, Pontlliw, Swansea |
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# APPENDIX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE COMMISSION ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

## TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE COMMISSION ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:

**i. Name of Commission:**
Commission on Religious Education

**ii. The purposes of the Commission:**
To review the legal, education and policy frameworks for RE, by a wide-ranging, inclusive and evidence-based process designed to inform policy makers about these areas. The ultimate aim will be to improve the quality and rigour of religious education and its capacity to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.

**iii. Remit of the Commission:**
- To consider the nature, purposes, and scope of religious education
- To identify the enabling factors that currently promote high quality RE, and the barriers that currently limit it
- To identify what changes are needed to ensure the highest quality provision of RE
- To ensure that recommendations focus on realistic and specific proposals aimed at both immediate and long-term implementation in the context of continuing educational reform.

In considering the above 4 tasks, the REC has identified the following areas for the Commission to consider:

- The quality of teaching and learning in RE
- The legal and structural arrangements
- The public and professional profile of the subject
- Recruitment, Initial Teacher Education and Continuous Professional Development
- The range of school settings in which RE should be required
- The age range for which RE should be required
- The right to withdraw (parents or carers, pupils and teachers)
- Whether or not there should be a common entitlement in RE, and if so what the entitlement should be

- The REC expects the Commission to make explicit the evidence base for the recommendations they make, and ensure the conceptual clarity of any key terms used.

**iv. Parameters of the Commission**

The Commission should consider RE in all schools and colleges in England that educate pupils of any age up to 19, irrespective of whether they are mainstream, special or alternative provision, independent or maintained, and of a religious character or not.

**5.2.1 The Commission should not consider:**

- Admissions policies in schools of a religious character
- Employment of staff on the basis of their religion
- Collective worship.

# APPENDIX 3: ABOUT THE COMMISSIONERS

**Chair**

**The Very Rev Dr John Hall**. Dean of Westminster. Former Chief Education Officer for the Church of England, having previously been Diocesan Director of Education in Blackburn, serving the people of Lancashire. Earlier he had ministered in parishes in London, and before that taught RE at a community comprehensive school in Hull. He chairs the Governors of Westminster School and of Harris Westminster Sixth Form, a free school.

**Commissioners**

**Samira Ahmed,** Journalist, broadcaster and Visiting Professor of Journalism at Kingston University. She presents Front Row on Radio 4 and Newswatch on BBC1 and a range of cultural and religious programmes and documentaries across BBC and Radio. These have included Something Understood and Sunday on Radio 4 and BBC1's religion and ethics discussion show Sunday Morning Live.

**Alan Brine**, HMI in Ofsted from 2001 to 2014 where he was National Adviser for RE from 2007 to 2014. He is author of many key publications on RE, including the most recent report from Ofsted, Religious Education: Realising the Potential (2013) and the key Church of England survey report on RE in Church Schools, Making a Difference? (2014). Previously he was a teacher of RE in schools and HE, and County Inspector for RE in Hampshire.

**Professor Denise Cush** was Head of Study of Religions at Bath Spa University. She specialises in Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and alternative spiritualities, as well as religious education. She has also taught Religious Studies in a sixth form college, and trained both primary and secondary teachers of religious education. She is deputy editor of the British Journal of Religious Education.

**Esther Deans MBE**, Humanities KS4 Lead at Malmesbury School. She is formerly an initial teacher training Associate Tutor for Bath Spa University and Bristol University. She is a member of the Race Equality in Education steering group in Bristol, Chair of the Stand Against Racism & Inequality and Chair of Bristol SACRE.

**Professor Sir Malcolm Evans KCMG OBE**, Professor of Public International Law, University of Bristol. He was a member of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Advisory Council on Freedom of Religion and Belief for ten years and is currently Chair of the United Nations Subcommittee for Prevention of Torture. He is Chair of the governing body of Regent's Park College, Oxford.

**Dame Helen Hyde**, Former Head of Watford Grammar School for Girls (1987–2016). She is a commissioner on the National Holocaust Commission and she chairs its education work stream. She is a member of the Freedom and Autonomy, National Schools Association (FASNA) board, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and a trustee of the Holocaust Education Trust. She is Patron of the Rwandan Sisterhood working with survivors of the genocide and deprived women in Kigali.

**Emma Knights**, CEO, National Governors' Association. Prior to her appointment to the NGA in 2010 she was joint CEO of the Daycare Trust. Before that, she worked in a number of roles in the voluntary sector, particularly in the Legal Services Commission, Citizens Advice and the Local Government Association.

**Juliet Lyal**, retired from her role as a teacher at Cunningham Hill Infant School in August 2017, and has extensive experience at junior and infant level. She serves on Hertfordshire SACRE and was on the writing group for its agreed syllabus (2017-22). She has national experience supporting local RE groups, having founded the St Albans RE Teachers Together group and is the primary vice-chair of the NATRE (National Association of Teachers of RE). Juliet is a Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) inspector.

**Dr Joyce Miller**, Associate Fellow in the Religions and Education Research Unit at the University of Warwick (WRERU). In 2007 she retired as Head of Diversity and Cohesion at Education Bradford, prior to which she was a Senior Lecturer in religious studies at the University of Wolverhampton. She taught in secondary schools in Coventry and Northumberland. She is a former Chair of the RE Council, AREIAC, Bradford SACRE and the Schools Linking Network.

**Eleanor Nesbitt**, Emeritus Professor, University of Warwick. She is an expert in the religious socialisation of young people of Christian, Hindu and Sikh background, and in qualitative research methods. She is author of Sikhism: A Very Short Introduction (2nd edition 2016). Between 1986 and 2007 (after briefly teaching RE in India and Coventry), she contributed to the training of secondary RE teachers and non-specialist primary teachers at the University of Warwick. She serves on Coventry SACRE.

**Dr Vanessa Ogden**, CEO of the Mulberry Schools Trust. Her teaching career covers twenty years of practice in challenging inner-city schools across London and involves work in school improvement. She is a religious education teacher and served on Ealing SACRE. Vanessa is designated a 'National Leader in Education'. She has contributed to curriculum development in RE nationally. She is a Visiting Fellow at UCL Institute of Education and she has a doctorate specialising in education policy and school improvement.

**Dr Farid Panjwani**, Director, Centre for Research and Evaluation in Muslim Education, UCL Institute of Education. He has published widely on the aims, curriculum and pedagogy of religious education. He has worked on several curriculum and teacher education projects in religious and inter-cultural education. He has a wide range of experience of teaching religious education in formal and non-formal settings. In addition to the UK, he has taught courses in universities in Italy, Canada, Tunisia and Pakistan.

**Dr Anthony Towey** is Director of the Aquinas Centre for Theological Literacy at St Mary's University, Twickenham. He lectured in Rome, Durham and Birmingham before leading the RE department at Loreto College, Moss Side. He is an Ofqual subject specialist and has assisted in the shaping of the Religious Education Reforms at A-Level and in particular by developing new specifications and resources at GCSE with AQA and Eduqas.

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