

Update on School Activity – SECONDARY – for March 2016

National Developments

1. Summer 2015 Examination results

The number of pupils in England and Wales taking GCSE Religious Studies full course has risen again this year, up 5.3% against 2014 to 283,756. This echoes the increase in A Level entries, which are up 6.5% this year compared with 2014.

However the removal of short courses from Department for Education (DfE) performance tables is having a serious and negative impact on the number of pupils choosing to take RS at GCSE level, with an increasing number of schools having no pupils at all taking the subject. DfE performance tables do not take account of results in short courses. The GCSE short course RS, which had been very popular in the past and provided a reward for schools who provided RE for all, has suffered as a result. The short course is delivered at GCSE standard but covers half the content of a full course and is therefore worth half a GCSE.

The key outcomes for Religious Education in England and Wales at KS4 in 2015 are as follows:

- There were 283,756 entries for the full course in GCSE RS, a rise of 5.3% from 2014 (269,494)
- There were 86,679 entries for the short course in GCSE RS, a decline of 26.8% from 2014 (118,481)
- There were 370,435 entries for GCSE RS (combined short and full courses), a decline of 4.5% from 2014 (387,915)
- In 2014 there were 1,197 schools making no entries for any RS qualification; a rise from 268 in 2010.
- 6% of entries for the full course in GCSE RS were awarded an A or an A*
- 8% of entries for the short course in GCSE RS were awarded an A or an A*

Havering's own Daniel Hugill, well known to SACRE, is currently Chair of NATRE and made this statement:

"Congratulations to the many students receiving their Religious Studies results today, and to their teachers who have worked tirelessly to ensure that their students can reach their full potential."

GCSE in Religious Studies makes a key contribution to preparing young people for adult life in our pluralistic society and global community. It is clear though that not all students receiving their GCSE results today were offered the opportunity to study this important subject."

The increasing number of schools that have not entered a single student for an accredited Religious Studies qualification is a grave concern. It is hard to see how these schools are ensuring a suitable degree of religious literacy in their students. NATRE will continue to call for a system that rewards schools for guiding students to study a combination of courses at 14+ that are in each individual's best interests and that will properly prepare them for life in the modern world. The current set of school accountability measures falls short of this aim."

The key outcomes of the 2015 A level results in England and Wales for Religious Education are as follows:

- 23,372 RS A level entries were recorded, an increase of 6.5% on 2014 and more than double the number in 2003 (11,132 entries were recorded in 2003)
- The number of entries for RS A level has increased by 110% since 2003, more than for any arts, humanity or social science subject (the nearest subject is Political Studies with an increase of 62%). Among all subjects, only Further Maths has seen more rapid growth than RS
- 23.9% of entries for RS A level were awarded an A or an A*
- There were 37,365 entries for RS at AS level, an increase of 5% on 2014 and more than double the number in 2003 (15,482 entries were recorded in 2003)

2. GCSE and A Level reform

The new GCSE specifications must be taught from September 2016, for first examination in Summer 2018. However, the draft specifications have been knocked back by Ofqual a number of times and at the time of writing this report, only AQA has had its two specifications now approved and accredited. The other boards will be hoping for theirs to follow swiftly. The delay is a real issue for those schools who have a three-year Key Stage 4 as they should then already be teaching it! Also, there are of course accompanying textbooks from major publishers for each exam course and option, and these cannot be finalised and published until accredited, and therefore teachers cannot choose and buy them now to be able to use them in the writing of their schemes of work.

Assessment will continue to be an even split between AO1 (knowledge and understanding) and AO2 (analysis and evaluation). All assessment will be through linear exams, no coursework, and will be assessed on a scale of 1-9 rather than the current G-A*. There will be an increase in exam time and the number of papers sat. Please see the attached Table 1 and Table 2 for a detailed breakdown of what will be studied under each option.

The A Levels also remain draft stage and as yet unaccredited by Ofqual. The biggest changes are that the AS and A levels have been unlinked, so each is a stand-alone qualification. All assessment will be linear with papers sat at the end of each year. Please see the attached Table 3 for a detailed breakdown of the courses.

3. Social Media and Networking

The online community of RE teachers, providers and interested parties continues to grow and provides great networking, publicity and CPD opportunities.

Daniel Hugill continues to host via Twitter a monthly #rechatuk, with pre-notified topics being discussed, and all invited to comment and share. This is usually the first Monday of every month, between 8-9pm. February's covered how to teach pupils about Hinduism. The next one is on Monday, 7th March, 8-9pm, with a focus on how RE teachers can use research to improve teaching. To join in or view, just use the hashtag #rechatuk.

After a very successful inaugural conference in 2015, the London RE Hub will be running another one on Saturday, 16th April 2016, more information on which can be found here: <https://sites.google.com/site/londonrehab/conference-2016>

It should make Havering proud that this was created and started in Havering by Havering RE teachers, and that Andy Lewis from Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School has been instrumental in organising and running them.

4. Local news from our Faith Schools

Schools are still in the process of consideration of which exam boards to choose to study RS with. The CES (Catholic Education Service) have been involved in AQA, Eduqas and Edexcel giving a good choice to schools. The AQA spec has been written jointly by the Philip Robinson (CES) and Ant Towey (St Mary's University); Eduqas spec was written by Philip Robinson (CES); Edexcel have consulted the CES but Philip Robinson has worked hard on the OUP textbook written by Catholic RE teachers – including Havering's very own Andy Lewis, Assistant Subject Leader at Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School - and lecturers from St Mary's University: <http://mrlewisre.co.uk/gcse-catholic-christianity/>

Catholic school have been engaged in the Year of Mercy and events have taken place within the schools and RE lessons to learn more about this and what it means to students.

5. RE Quality Mark Award

The RE Quality Mark (REQM) has been developed to celebrate high quality religious education. It is an accreditation system designed to be a mechanism for whole school improvement beyond religious education since its principle focus is enhanced pedagogy. The REQM is available to all schools. It is run and assessed externally by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales.

Hall Mead School in Upminster became the first Havering school to be assessed for the national RE Quality Mark Award and achieved Gold – the highest award available, recognising consistently high achievement in RE, high levels of pupil engagement and innovative and creative schemes of work. A copy of the certificate is attached.