

## National Updates for SACRE, Summer 2024

### Ofsted publishes its subject report on Religious Education

The long-awaited Ofsted subject report into Religious Education entitled *Deep and Meaningful?* was published on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2024. OFSTED notes the importance of government action in the body of this report and in its recommendations. This follows the 2021 Ofsted Research Review into RE and the HMCI's Annual Report which made specific mention of RE and which was published in November 2023.

The latest report sums up findings from Ofsted reports into RE in the primary and secondary phases. In response to the report, Sir Martyn Oliver, the Chief Inspector said:

'A strong RE curriculum is not only important for pupils' cultural development, it is a requirement of law and too many schools are not meeting that obligation. I hope that the examples of good RE curriculum in our report help schools develop their own practice and support the development of a strong RE curriculum for all.'

The report discusses how RE is delivered in schools and the impact on pupils' learning. It states that many secondary schools are failing to ensure that RE is taught at Key Stage 4 and 5 for those not undertaking a recognised qualification. The importance of appropriate timetabling was highlighted as key to developing schema and for pupils to encounter ever more challenging RE: *"Long gaps between lessons hindered pupils' recall. When the timetable was organised so that pupils had regular RE lessons, they remembered more."* Note was also made that schools were not enabling pupils to understand the diverse nature of religion and non-religious views. *"Given the quality of curriculums found in the majority of schools sampled, it is unlikely that their pupils would build up an overall diverse and rich conception of religion and non-religion. This is because most curriculums lacked collectively enough content to achieve it. Most lacked depth of study in specific religious traditions, which meant that there was a weak conceptual basis for pupils to make links with other traditions."*

Professional development of teachers was also commented on throughout the report with reference made to the fact that, through the inspections used as the basis for this report, more than half of secondary RE teachers had no qualification in the subject and in the majority of cases they had received no training in how to deliver RE. Around 50% of primary teachers do not feel confident teaching RE. The report refers to 90% of teachers not having received professional development in RE to keep up to date with subject developments. Read the full report, as well as responses from NATRE and the RE Policy Unit here: [OFSTED: 'Deep and meaningful? The religious education subject report' April 2024 \(natre.org.uk\)](https://natre.org.uk)

### Religious Education Council launches new curriculum toolkit to help teachers deliver high quality RE

The RE Council of England and Wales launched a new curriculum toolkit on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2024 to help schools in England develop a high quality RE curriculum using a religion and worldviews approach. The toolkit contains a handbook for curriculum developers, three curriculum frameworks, and the National Content Standard (NCS) for RE in England. This is the culmination of a three-year Religion and Worldviews in the Classroom project, with authors drawing on academic research, classroom experience, and further consultation on the landmark 2018 report from the Commission on RE, which recommended steps to both adopt an academically rigorous approach to the subject and reflect the nature of belief and practice in contemporary Britain.

The resources are available for all teachers, senior leadership teams, and curriculum developers. They build on existing best practice and were developed in partnership with teachers in different communities from multi-academy trusts to schools with a religious character.

Central to all these resources is a National Statement of Entitlement (NSE) that sets out what all state school pupils up to the end of year 11 are entitled to be taught. It provides a set of principles for content selection and pedagogical tools to help them deliver a more scholarly approach to the teaching of religious education. In addition, the NCS sets a benchmark for RE to help clarify expectations for schools. The need for this sort of guidance was one of the key recommendations of the Ofsted subject report published in April 2024. The NCS has been recommended by all major school providers in England including the Church of England, the Catholic Education Service, and the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

REC Chair, Sarah Lane Cawte, said:

“This is a major project that reflects a broad consensus across the RE community to help all schools deliver a personally enriching and academically challenging religious education. A religion and worldviews approach, already in use in many schools around the country, will help all teachers improve their existing practice by placing students at the heart of the subject, providing clarity and guidance for teachers in a variety of different contexts about what constitutes high quality RE.”

Access the resources and read commentary on them here: [Religious Education Council launches new curriculum toolkit to help teachers deliver high quality RE \(natre.org.uk\)](https://natre.org.uk/news/religious-education-council-launches-new-curriculum-toolkit-to-help-teachers-deliver-high-quality-re)

## **NATRE Primary Teachers' Survey now open!**

NATRE takes the voices of teachers to stakeholders such as OFSTED and the DFE through its biannual Primary survey. NATRE calls upon SACREs to proactively encourage teachers to participate. The survey takes 10-15 minutes to complete. As a token of gratitude for completing the survey, teachers will receive a complimentary NATRE resource and will be entered into a draw for two free Primary School Enhanced memberships.

[Complete survey →](#)

## **'REady for Work' Campaign**

Former President of the Confederation of British Industry launches call to action, highlighting the importance of high quality RE in schools.

In his open letter, Lord Karan Bilimoria, former President of the Confederation of British Industry and Chancellor of the University of Birmingham, says that he has 'always been keen to highlight the importance of high-quality Religious Education in schools'. Lord Bilimora is positive about how RE has evolved over the past decade, and the passion of RE teachers, but expresses concerns with the standard of RE in many schools across the country, launching a [Call to Action](#) for employers and business leaders, imploring them to stand by students interested in a high quality education in religion and worldviews as preparation for the future workplace.

Read Lord Karan Bilimoria's letter here: [REady for Work campaign - ReThinkRE](#) . Do you know of business leaders who would sign this call to action?

## Religious Studies remains a popular GCSE despite specialist teacher recruitment challenge

The number of students in England and Wales taking a GCSE course in Religious Studies has remained stable at 253,906, up by a margin of 0.3% from last year. The slight rise in entries comes as a campaign supported by cross party politicians intends to attract a new generation of teachers to the subject, focusing on the restoration of training bursaries. The latest UCAS data showed applicants to train to teach the subject had fallen by a one-third.

The number of GCSE entries this year means that RS is taken by more students than Business Studies, Design and Technology, and Art and Design at GCSE. Despite this, the number of hours of RE taught by teachers with no post-A level qualification remains one of the highest at 26%. Half of teachers delivering RE lessons spend most of their timetables teaching a different subject. This has led subject leaders and politicians to reissue their call for a National Plan for the subject and for the reinstatement of bursaries for trainee RE teachers.

Sarah Lane Cawte, Chair of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC), said:

“RS is one of the most popular subjects at GCSE, yet bizarrely it does not receive the corresponding funding and support. Teacher training applications have not recovered since the axing of the bursary in 2021, and no money has been spent on the subject for five years. We want an even distribution of funding across the curriculum to ensure young people taking the subject receive their fair share of support from the government.”

Katie Freeman, Chair of the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), said:

“An RE lesson offers a unique and much needed place for young people to explore life’s big questions, build societal cohesion and contribute to their spiritual and academic development. It’s a real travesty that one of the most popular subjects at GCSE has not received fair allocation of government support to ensure every young person in every school receives this opportunity.”

Father of the House, Sir Peter Bottomley MP, who first called for a National Plan for the subject after chairing a parliamentary roundtable on its future last year, also responded to the results:

“RE continues to play a pivotal part in the education of young people across the country, allowing them to understand and academically engage with some of the moral and theological debates that continue to inform our society. A National Plan would scale out a modern and relevant curriculum in the faiths, cultures and beliefs of modern Britain taught by highly trained and committed teachers. Neglecting the subject in this fashion does a disservice to the quarter of a million young people who take it at GCSE every year.”

## Fall in A Level RS entries sparks calls for action for recruitment of specialist teachers

Recruitment challenges mean schools are now struggling to offer the subject at A level after decades of growth in entries. RS A level exam entries have decreased by 3.5 percent in England and 24 percent in Wales. The fall comes as the overall number of A level entries in England and Wales increased this year by 2 percent from 812,124 in 2022 to 830,312 in 2023.

14,690 students took an RS A level in England in 2023 compared with 15,216 in 2022, while in Wales entries were recorded at 748, a fall from 982.

A level entries for RS also fell last year by 2.7 percent, despite a 6.1% increase in 2021. Between 2003 and 2022, A level RS has been one of the fastest growing subjects at A level, with an increase of 39 percent in the number of entries to the subject.

The fall follows the launch of a campaign to recruit a new generation of RE teachers to the subject, with the RE Council of England and Wales warning that a shortage in specialist teachers means some schools, particularly in the Midlands and North East, are now struggling to offer the subject at A level.

A level RS is the humanity most likely to be taken by disadvantaged pupils. Research by the FFT Education Datalab has found that this group is twice as likely to choose to study A level RS than their peers.

Sarah Lane Cawte, Chair of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC), said:

“These results show the really concerning impact that teacher retention and recruitment is having on the subject. For the last two decades, A level Religious Studies has been a success story with growing numbers of entries and impressive results that have opened up a world of opportunity, particularly for people from disadvantaged backgrounds, providing them with access to top universities and careers in law, journalism and teaching.

“That legacy is now threatened. A teacher training bursary and a fair allocation of resources to the subject would help reverse this trend and ensure RE continues to thrive as it has done for the last decades.”

Katie Freeman, Chair of the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), said:

“Despite this dip in entries, A level RS continues to be a very popular choice at A level, being both personally enriching and intellectually challenging. RS A level teachers are highly trained professionals, managing classroom debates on sensitive ethical and theological issues that continue to inform the modern world.

“To be in a situation where students are not able to take Religious Studies at an advanced level is a real travesty, denying many young people an opportunity to partake in a subject that has opened up a world of opportunities in higher education, their personal lives and the world of work.”

## Closure of the Interfaith Network

Following the withdrawal of government, the Interfaith Network Board has now closed its doors on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2024. For more than thirty years the organisation has worked diligently to fulfil its aims to work through ‘education, advocacy, and creation of opportunities for meeting, to:

- widen public awareness of the religious traditions in the UK, including their distinctive features and their common ground
- increase inter-faith understanding and cooperation and good relations at all levels of society.

Engagement between the IFN and bodies such as the REC (Religious Education Council) NASACRE and individual SACREs has provided a useful conduit for exploring ideas about interfaith in educational contexts.

## NASACRE News

### Webinar Programme

The next in NASACRE's series of webinars, entitled 'So, you've joined your local SACRE...' is hosted by Executive members for those who are new to SACRE. It will take place on **Wednesday 26th June 2024, 6:30-8pm**. This is a re-run of the September session, to help new SACRE members to understand their role, how SACRE works, its statutory responsibilities and how members make their contribution to SACRE's work. FREE session - for further details please contact [admin@nasacre.org.uk](mailto:admin@nasacre.org.uk)

### NASACRE Website Update

Work has been underway to reorganise and streamline the [NASACRE website](#). There is a new [Noticeboard](#) feature, and subscribing SACREs can now [share their documents](#).

## Upcoming NATRE Courses for the Summer Term

For more details on any of these courses, click here: <https://www.natre.org.uk/courses-events/upcoming-courses-events/?page=1>

### ALL PHASES

#### Introducing a Religion and Worldviews approach, Stephen Pett

11/07/2024

What is a religion and worldviews approach? How is it different from current RE practice? What are the benefits to teachers and pupils? A practical introduction, drawing on the new RE Council Handbook and Frameworks, including resources and strategies, to show how to enrich and deepen pupils' understanding of religious and non-religious worldviews.

### PRIMARY PHASE

#### RE Today Roadshow with Lat Blaylock



For primary teachers of RE looking for support and practical training to teach religious and non-religious worldviews, showcasing the best resources from RE Today and NATRE.

Led by [Lat Blaylock](#), the roadshows will draw upon an inspiring career in RE to give a clear vision for the future of the subject in the next five years including an engagement with worldviews, using different ways of knowing in RE and the latest Ofsted requirements.

Further details about the Roadshows can be found here:

- [Leeds – 3 June 2024, Venue - Hilton Leeds city centre](#)
- [Birmingham – 18 June 2024, Venue - the Eastside rooms](#)
- [Reading – 1 July 2024, Venue - Holiday Inn Reading South](#)

## **Developing Pupil Personal Knowledge, Julia Diamond-Conway**

27/06/2024

Increase your understanding and practice when it comes to personal knowledge. Of the 3 pillars of knowledge in RE, 'personal knowledge' is often the least explored, so if you need to consider what personal knowledge is and how to approach it in the classroom, this session is for you. This webinar will be a mix of practical and academic, looking at some of the theory surrounding personal knowledge before thinking about how to apply this in the classroom. Of course, there will be plenty of practical and ready to use activities for you to take back to school and try out with pupils.

## **SECONDARY PHASE RE**

### **Powerful Knowledge in RE, Angela Hill**

11/06/2024

What do learners need to know in RE? Is knowledge-rich RE dull and irrelevant to teenagers? With limited time and resources, how can we choose what to teach and what to leave out? In this session, we will think deeply about how knowledge in RE can empower those we teach and make them competent and independent learners.

### **The New Curriculum Leader for RE, Ian Nicholson**

14/06/2024

A day course for new Heads of Departments/Curriculum Leaders who will begin their new position in September, or for more experienced middle leaders. This course will provide you with the knowledge and confidence to be an effective and inspirational RE lead in your school. Explore the role of the subject leader, using practical activities to develop your understanding of RE and your leadership and management skills. Focus on planning a scheme of work using your locally agreed syllabus or faith community guidelines, and effective and manageable monitoring and self evaluation.