

Agreed Syllabus from 2023

The RE commission report

Background

The RE Council and NATRE Report

- In a report published in 2017, the National Association for RE teachers (NATRE) reported that more than a quarter of England's secondary schools did not offer Religious Education, in contravention of the law.
- The report, produced in association with the Religious Education Council for England and Wales (REC), was based on previously unpublished data obtained from the Department for Education under Freedom of Information law. It said that overall, 26% of secondary's were not offering RE lessons.
- Among academies, which make up the majority of secondary schools, more than a third (34%) were not offering RE to 11 to 13-year-olds and almost half (44%) were not offering it to 14 to 16-year-olds.
- NATRE warned that as more schools became academies, those figures could increase. It said the data showed a shortage of specialist RE teachers throughout the state system. The research was carried out in partnership with the RE Council for England and Wales.
- In response, the main union for secondary head teachers, the Association of School and College Leaders, said many schools covered religious issues in ways other than RE lessons, such as conferences, citizenship classes or assemblies.
- In 2019, NATRE published another report based on a survey of 663 schools in England. This suggested 50% of Academy schools in England and almost 40% of community schools did not offer Religious Education, in contravention of the law. For GCSE students in years 10 and 11 the situation was worse, with up to 64% of students receiving no Religious Education.

Commission on Religious Education

Established in July 2016, the commission was asked to make wide-ranging recommendations to overhaul Religious Education in England, and to review the legal, education and policy frameworks for the subject in all primary and secondary schools and further education colleges. It was set up by the Religious Education Council for England and Wales, but operates independently and produces its own reports and recommendations. The Rev Dr John Hall, Dean of Westminster, was appointed chairman.

In September 2018, the commission published its report. Its key recommendations were as follows:

- A new National Entitlement for Religious Education. This would clearly set out for the first time the aims and purposes of RE and what students should experience in the course of their study. The commission proposed that RE should enable pupils to understand the relationship between people's worldview and their thinking and actions in political, public, social and cultural

life, and how worldviews are “inextricably woven into, influence and are influenced by, all dimensions of human experience”. The national entitlement should apply to all state-funded schools including academies, free schools and schools of a religious character. Independent schools should consider adopting the entitlement as an undertaking of good practice.

- Schools should be held to account for the provision and quality of RE they offer. All schools, including free schools, academies, and schools of a religious character, should publish details of how they meet the new National Entitlement, and inspectors and other approved bodies would have the power to monitor RE to ensure a minimum standard.
- A National Plan for improving the teaching and learning of RE – along the lines of the National Plan for Music Education – which brings together the Commission’s recommendations for improving teacher subject knowledge. The nine draft proposals for the plan include a minimum of 12 hours devoted to RE in all primary initial teacher training courses; the opportunity for all primary trainees to observe RE teaching in a leading school for RE; and 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”.

In response, in December 2018 the Education Secretary Damian Hinds said he would not pursue the recommendations at that time, as schools were already dealing with other education reforms and one of his priorities was to reduce teacher workloads. He had also received concerns that including ‘worldviews’ risked diluting the teaching of RE.

The Clarke Woodhead report

- In July 2018, former Education Secretary Charles Clarke published a pamphlet claiming Religious Education in schools was outdated and should be replaced with a new subject, Religion, Belief and Values.
- Along with co-author, Prof Linda Woodhead of Lancaster University, he said the syllabus for the new subject should be determined nationally, rather than at local authority level.
- The report said there had been significant shifts in the UK since the 1944 Education Act, when Britain was a predominantly Christian country, in that a majority of people now said they had no religion, and there were parts of the country where people of other religions formed a significant part of the population.
- The report also called for the right of parents to withdraw their children from RE classes to be scrapped. And it said daily collective worship of “a broadly Christian character”, a legal requirement under the 1944 Act, should be replaced with a requirement for all state-funded schools to hold a “regular assembly or act of collective worship in keeping with the values and ethos of the school and reflecting the diversity and character of the school community”.
- Clarke and Woodhead also proposed changes to the admissions criteria of faith schools to broaden their intake. The children of families which followed a particular faith should continue to be given priority for admission to schools of that religion, but the proportion admitted on faith criteria should be reduced.(A New Settlement Revised: Religion and Belief in Schools).

- The report was condemned by a prominent Roman Catholic bishop, who said it had “little regard” for the Catholic Church, and that its recommendations were “unacceptable”.
- Bishop Marcus Stock of Leeds, the lead bishop for Religious Education on the bishops’ conference, said the report would “dictate” what the Church could teach in Catholic schools, and that it treated religion as a purely sociological matter. (Catholic Herald 18 July 2018)

22nd August 2019:

The number of pupils in England and Wales taking GCSE Religious Studies full course has fallen for the third year in a row, down 1.6% against 2018 to 237,862. In addition, the number of pupils in England and Wales taking the short course GCSE in Religious Studies has fallen even more sharply, down 19.7% from last year to 27,384. When the entries for the full course and short course GCSE are combined, the picture is of significant decline in the number of pupils taking a qualification in Religious Studies.

The number of students taking Religious Studies A level has also declined. Figures show a drop of 5.1% in 2019 and 22.8% in 2018.(Religious Education Council)

20th August 2018:

The Number of pupils taking Religious Studies at A level in 2018 slumped by 22.8 % – the lowest number since 2008.

18,422 candidates took Religious Studies A level in England and Wales in 2018
254,618 took Religious Studies GCSE in 2018, a drop of 10.1% from the previous year, according to the Joint Council of Qualifications Examination

Religious Education Council (REC) 2020/21

The REC is running a project to support conversations in the RE community exploring the concepts of Worldviews in religious education. A series of debates and discussions was had through the summer of 2020 discussing the concept of world views which seemed to bring up more questions than answers. Part of their conclusion being;

‘A shared understanding of what worldview means in RE and how that understanding can be effectively taught to students is crucial if the RE community is to move forward, as it will allow them to decide how best to implement the recommendations set out in the CoRE report (2018). The review team invite readers to engage with the questions above in order to advance meaningful discussions about the place and role of worldview in RE/R&W’.

Links to the different discussions

[Exploring Worldviews - REC Discussion Papers | The Religious Education Council of England and Wales %](#)

[Layout 1 \(commissiononre.org.uk\)](#)

[NATRE Report on the provision for RE -SWF for SOTN 2017 final4 130917.pdf](#)

[Layout 1 \(faithdebates.org.uk\)](#)