



---

## The Future of Religious Education in England and Wales: Debating Reform

A summary of roundtable conversations on the future of Religious Education held by Theos in 2017

---

It is impossible to understand the modern world without understanding religion or belief. Religions play a central role in global politics and are a major source of both conflict and peace-building. It is essential that all children have the opportunity to receive a high quality, critical education in school about religion or belief. Yet it is increasingly clear that Religious Education in English and Welsh schools is facing very major challenges.<sup>1</sup>

For example, in many schools time for RE is squeezed to make room for other subjects, and too many pupils are taught by non-specialists. There is inconsistency in the quality and content of RE syllabuses across the country. Many schools fail to provide any RE to their pupils at all.

This means that a huge number of young people are leaving school without the essential skills and knowledge they need to understand the religion or belief issues shaping events nationally and internationally. They are poorly equipped to navigate difference in our increasingly multifaith, diverse society and to respond critically to misconceptions about religion or belief. On a personal level, without access to good RE they are deprived of an important space to reflect on their own beliefs, values and identities.

This briefing paper captures the discussions of a series of roundtable discussions in 2017, hosted by Theos and funded by Culham St Gabriel's Trust. The series brought together a diverse group of participants, including members of RE professional bodies, policymakers and civil servants, and members of religion or belief organisations with a particular interest in RE. We had frank conversations about the issues facing the subject and considered how consensus about its future can be built between stakeholders. We also discussed three recent reports which set out the scale of the challenges facing RE and call for major and urgent reform.

This paper is intended for policymakers, RE professionals and others interested in the future of RE. It summarises the major recommendations arising from the three reports, sets out the discussions of our roundtable participants, and makes further recommendations to complement those from the reports.

It is clear from our discussions that there is a strong desire among different stakeholders in RE for policy change in order to redress the serious issues facing the subject. The time is right for action from policymakers on this.

## Reading this paper

The paper has the following structure, reflecting the different themes discussed in our roundtables:

- The structures of RE today
- The challenges facing RE
  - Teacher supply and support
  - Structural issues
- The aims and approaches of RE
- Local and national structures for RE
- Training and supporting RE teachers
- Extra burdens on RE teachers
- List of roundtable participants
- Acknowledgements

The latter four sections begin with a summary of the relevant recommendations from the following reports:

- ***Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward (2018)***, the final report of the Commission on RE. The Commission was established by the RE Council of England and Wales in 2016 to review the legal, education and policy frameworks for RE and make recommendations for improving its quality. During the period of our discussions, the Commission published its interim report, *Religious Education for All* (2017). While the participants discussed the interim report, their comments summarised in this paper are relevant for the Commission's final report.
- ***A New Settlement Revised: Religion and Belief in Schools (2018)***, by Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead of the Westminster Faith Debates. As well as making recommendations for improving RE, this report also addresses the act of collective worship and schools with a religious character. The 2018 report is a substantial revision of *A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools* (2015). Again, while the participants discussed the original report, their comments summarised in this paper are relevant for the final version.
- ***The State of the Nation: A Report on Religious Education Provision Within Secondary Schools in England (2017)***, by the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE). This report analyses various data sets, showing the extent of the challenges facing RE.

After this, each section summarises the main areas of debate among our participants, before setting out additional recommendations.

## The structures of RE today

RE in England and Wales is compulsory for pupils in all state-funded schools. It is not part of the National Curriculum and there is a great variety of syllabuses. Some syllabuses are specific to individual schools; some are produced by local authorities; some are produced by RE professional bodies and are used across the country.

In the last decade the school landscape has changed dramatically, with a great many schools becoming academies. Academies and free schools are independent of local authority control and are not required to follow the National Curriculum or the RE syllabus produced in their local authority, so can set their own syllabuses if they wish or adopt different ones. This has greatly changed the RE landscape.

Community, foundation and voluntary controlled maintained schools (non-academies) are normally required to follow the syllabus produced locally. In each local education authority, by law a syllabus for RE must be set every five years by an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC). The work of the ASC is supported by the local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). The local SACRE is also required by law to advise the local authority on the provision of RE and collective worship in schools under the authority's control, and to determine whether schools that wish to do so can be exempted from the statutory requirement to provide daily Christian collective worship.

Locally agreed syllabuses, along with the RE syllabuses used by academies and free schools without a religious character, must reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Britain are mainly Christian, whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religious traditions present in the country.

Maintained schools and academies that are (or were formerly) voluntary aided (with a religious character) normally set their own RE syllabuses in accordance with their religious ethos as set out in their trust deeds.

Parents have the right to withdraw their children from RE and collective worship, and pupils aged 18 and over can request to withdraw themselves.

## The challenges facing RE

At the outset, it is worth stating that there are many good things about the state of RE in England and Wales. Excellent RE is taught around the country by dedicated and enthusiastic teachers. The subject is supported by a strong network of organisations working to support teachers and promote high quality RE. GCSE Religious Studies is popular, with entries to the full course GCSE 45% greater than in 2008.<sup>2</sup> Above all, pupils value and are excited by RE.

Yet despite this, a succession of research reports in recent years has shown that the quality of RE is highly variable. Ofsted's subject review in 2013 found the quality of achievement and teaching was less than good in six out of ten primary schools and just over half of secondary schools observed by inspectors. The quality of the RE curriculum was less than good in nearly two thirds of primary schools and six out of

ten secondary schools.<sup>3</sup> In many ways the situation has not improved since 2013. RE today faces a range of challenges:

## Teacher supply and support

### — Inadequate supply of specialist teachers of RE

The number of secondary RE teachers recruited each year has slowly risen over the last few years, helped by recruitment campaigns such as the RE Council's 'Beyond the Ordinary' campaign in 2015.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, each year since then actual recruitment has been below target; in 2017/18 the Department for Education's provisional figures show that only 63% of the target was met, compared to 102% for History and 80% for Geography.<sup>5</sup>

It has been argued that this recruitment challenge is due to various policy changes, including the government's focus on recruitment to STEM subjects, significantly lower bursaries for RE teacher trainees compared to other shortage subjects,<sup>6</sup> and also the removal of funding for Subject Knowledge Enhancement courses in secondary RE (short courses to top up trainee teachers' subject knowledge).<sup>7</sup> There are no comparable Subject Knowledge Enhancement courses for primary trainees.

Furthermore, the proportion of teachers of RE without subject-specialist qualifications is very high. Alarmingly, in 2017 54% of teachers of RE in state-funded secondary schools in England had no relevant post-A Level qualification, compared to 25% for History.<sup>8</sup> A high proportion of primary teachers also have no qualification in RE. In 2016, a survey of primary teachers found that among respondents, 44% had no RE qualification and 25% had only a GCSE / O Level. In fact, many primary schools delegate at least some RE teaching to teaching assistants. This was the case in 50% of responding schools to the survey.<sup>9</sup>

This means that a great many children are taught by teachers without the essential subject knowledge needed to correct pupil misconceptions and to deliver high quality RE.

### — Inadequate time for RE in primary initial teacher education (ITE)

In ITE for primary teachers, very little time is dedicated to RE. A 2016 survey of primary teachers found that among respondents who were newly qualified, more than 60% had received between 0 and 3 hours RE training only.<sup>10</sup>

Combined with the fact that many primary teachers lack relevant qualifications, this means that many new teachers are unprepared for teaching RE. A survey in 2013 of over 800 primary teacher trainees found that 50% lacked confidence to teach the subject.<sup>11</sup> The Commission on RE reports that this lack of confidence leads some primary teachers to take their planning, preparation and assessment time during RE, leaving the subject to be taught by higher level teaching assistants.<sup>12</sup>

### — Patchiness of access to high quality continuing professional development (CPD)

Access to good CPD opportunities for RE teachers is highly variable. The capacity of local authorities to resource CPD opportunities is declining. Hundreds of schools have axed their budgets for training teachers, and schools that retain CPD funds are sometimes reluctant to devote them to RE.<sup>13</sup> RE teachers may also struggle to persuade their senior leaders to allow them time off to attend more long-term CPD programmes.

A 2015 survey of secondary teachers found that, in the previous academic year, 72% of respondents had received no subject-specific training in school and 40% had received none outside of school.<sup>14</sup> This is concerning given the high proportion of non-specialists teaching RE. However, there is a range of initiatives providing high quality CPD at regional and national levels, and there are also excellent resources available for teachers of RE online.

## Structural issues

### — Lack of compliance with legal/contractual requirements for RE in many schools and inadequate accountability measures

Many state-funded schools are failing to meet their legal requirement to provide RE for all registered pupils. Research from NATRE shows that in 2015, 28% (787) of all secondary schools participating in the School Workforce Census offered no time at all for RE, a rise from 16% in 2011. This means that in 2015 about 800,000 pupils were deprived of RE provision.<sup>15</sup> There is significant variance by school type. Schools with a religious character (both academies and maintained) are much more likely to comply with their legal requirements than schools without a religious character.<sup>16</sup> In 2015, 34% of academies without a religious character offered no RE time at Key Stage 3 (pupils aged 11-13 years) and 44% offered none at Key Stage 4 (pupils aged 14-16 years).<sup>17</sup>

If these trends continue, there is a danger that good RE will become primarily a preserve of schools with a religious character. This will create a major disparity in understanding of religion or belief between children attending schools with and without a faith ethos.

Our participants agreed that there are insufficient means for holding schools to account when they fail to comply with their legal requirements concerning RE.

### — Time for RE is squeezed

Among those state-funded schools which do provide some RE, many are failing to provide sufficient timetable time for the subject. The Dearing Review 1994 recommended that secondary schools devote at least 5% of curriculum time to RE.<sup>18</sup> While most schools with a religious character meet this target, only 44% of academies without a religious character in 2015 met the target for Key Stage 3, and only 27% did for Key Stage 4.<sup>19</sup> This means that many pupils taking GCSE Religious Studies only receive superficial teaching.

In primary schools time for RE is similarly squeezed. According to a 2016 survey of primary school teachers, 30% of respondent schools provided less than an hour of RE provision in their weekly curriculum.<sup>20</sup>

### — RE provision is detrimentally affected by the exclusion of RS from the English Baccalaureate

The failure of many schools to provide sufficient time for RE is driven by the exclusion of the subject from key performance indicators. Religious Studies GCSE was not included in the English Baccalaureate (the EBacc) – a school performance indicator introduced in England under the Coalition Government which measures how many pupils in a school achieve 5+ good grades in a list of specific GCSE subjects.<sup>21</sup> Our participants emphasised that some senior leadership teams choose to prioritise time in the timetable for subjects included in the EBacc at the expense of RE time.<sup>22</sup> Though this situation has been raised with the Department for Education since the EBacc's introduction, the Department has decided not to include additional subjects within the EBacc, arguing that this could reduce pupil choice at GCSE.<sup>23</sup> The government intends that 90% of GCSE pupils will choose EBacc subject combinations by 2025.<sup>24</sup>

— **Declining take-up of RS at GCSE as a consequence of the exclusion of the short course from performance tables**

While entry onto the full course Religious Studies GCSE has risen since 2008, the overall number of pupils taking any RS qualification at GCSE fell by nearly 180,000 between 2008 and 2018. This is the result of a steep decline in take-up of the short course RS GCSE by 88% over this period.<sup>25</sup> Our participants attributed this to the decision by the Department for Education to remove GCSE short courses from its performance tables, removing an incentive for schools to put forward students for the RS short course.

— **Inadequate resources for Agreed Syllabus Conferences / SACREs and declining use of locally agreed syllabuses**

In recent years the system of local determination of RE syllabuses has faced a number of serious challenges. Cuts to local authority budgets mean that many Agreed Syllabus Conferences and SACREs are under-resourced, reducing their capacity to access specialist RE advisors and hampering their ability to produce syllabuses and support schools in the delivery of RE.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, academisation has greatly reduced the number of schools which follow their locally agreed syllabus, since academies are not required to adopt it. In some areas, local authorities continue to produce agreed syllabuses (as required by law) despite very few local schools, or even none, being required to adopt it. This situation is only likely to continue as academisation progresses. Some academy chains have used their freedom to generate innovative approaches to RE.

In addition, some commentators have expressed concern that the local determination of RE leads to an unacceptable level of inconsistency in the content of syllabuses, which is out of step with other subjects.<sup>27</sup> There are, however, factors which create some consistency among syllabuses. For example, some SACREs share or sell their locally agreed syllabus to schools in other areas, and the Commission on RE's final report suggests that up to a third of local authorities buy syllabuses from national commercial providers.<sup>28</sup>

## The aims and approaches of RE

RE today primarily aims to be the critical academic study of religions and beliefs, and of the people who adhere to or hold them. It can also play a key role in the personal development of pupils. It is often the only space in school where pupils are encouraged to reflect on their own beliefs, identities and values, and to learn from others. As well as having plural aims, RE also often involves a diverse range of disciplinary approaches.

At its best, this plurality makes the subject dynamic and exciting. However, past reports have expressed concern over a lack of clarity and consistency among some RE teachers about what good RE should aim to do, and also about what pedagogical approaches it should incorporate.<sup>29</sup>

In this regard, the Commission on RE and Westminster Faith Debates make a number of recommendations:

**Commission on RE, Religion and Worldviews: *The Way Forward* (2018)**

***Name***

- The subject should be renamed 'Religion and Worldviews'. A worldview is defined as "a person's way of understanding, experiencing and responding to the world".<sup>30</sup>



## Approaches

- The worldviews to be studied can include organised and institutional worldviews, but also less formal, more personal ones that shape an individual’s way of understanding and living in the world. These include non-religious worldviews such as Humanism, atheism and existentialism, which make “ontological and epistemological claims”. The Commission advises that worldviews which (in its view) do not make such claims, like nationalism, capitalism or Communism, would not be included.<sup>31</sup>
- The subject should involve learning about major concepts, categories and themes – such as patterns of belief, identification, interpretation and practice, diversity and change within worldviews, and the complex lived experiences of people who hold them – as well as about the ‘official’ content of the more institutionalised worldviews, for example religious doctrines. Teachers should draw on, and pupils should experience, a range of disciplinary approaches to the subject.<sup>32</sup>

## Westminster Faith Debates, *A New Settlement Revised: Religion and Belief in Schools* (2018)

### Name

- The subject should be renamed ‘Religion, Beliefs and Values’. As with ‘Religion and Worldviews’, the suggested name change is intended to signal that the subject should explore more than the ‘official’ beliefs and practices of religious institutions, and should include non-religious perspectives.<sup>33</sup>

## Discussions arising from roundtables

In the Theos discussions, there was consensus that RE is about both the critical academic study of religion or belief, and the personal development of pupils as they consider questions of meaning and value. The participants suggested that most RE teachers would agree that these two purposes are core to the work of RE. However, they also noted that some RE teachers struggle to get the right balance between these purposes. Teaching that focuses mainly on pupil development risks losing its critical rigour, while teaching that neglects the views and beliefs of pupils risks losing their engagement.

Our participants also noted the positive role that RE can play in fostering community cohesion and breaking down barriers between groups. However, some cautioned against seeing this as a primary aim of RE – warning that this risks turning RE into a vehicle for government security concerns. Instead, one participant preferred to see community cohesion as a “collateral benefit” arising from RE’s primary academic aims. These concerns are discussed further below.

While RE teachers in general understand the aims of the subject, RE is sometimes misunderstood by members of the public, who may confuse it with religious instruction and question its place in the curriculum. (It should be noted that RE in some schools with a religious character is indeed understood as a space for faith formation as well as the critical study of religions; in other such schools, however, this is not the case). Moreover, participants warned that in some schools senior leadership teams are confused about the aims of RE. Some do not see it as a rigorous academic subject and therefore do not provide RE teachers with adequate support, resources and curriculum time. RE teachers need to find ways to explain the aims and importance of the subject to their senior leaders and to their pupils’ parents. Government ministers can play a key role in this by championing RE on a public platform.

Our participants agreed that good RE involves multiple disciplines, such as phenomenology, sociology, theology and philosophy. A multidisciplinary approach is followed in many schools, with

and without a religious character. However, one participant said that many schools with a religious character particularly emphasise theology, with Catholic schools, for example, seeing RE as being about developing good theologians. He cautioned against changing the subject in a way that side-lines theology. The Catholic Education Service has also made this argument following the publication of the two 2018 reports.<sup>34</sup>

The Commission on RE's proposed national entitlement statement (see below) advocates for a multidisciplinary approach and emphasises the importance, among other things, of studying the diverse ways in which people understand and live out their religious and non-religious worldviews. A national syllabus produced by RE professionals (as proposed by Westminster Faith Debates) may well take a similar approach. If the government implements either proposal, it is likely that schools which prioritise one discipline (whether theology or another) would need to shift to incorporate other disciplines more fully. It should be noted, however, that both proposals are compatible with good theological study in RE. The Commission's approach enables schools to tailor RE as they wish (including by having a strong theological focus) as long as they meet the requirements of the national entitlement. Westminster Faith Debates, meanwhile, does not offer specific recommendations on the content of its proposed national syllabus apart from that it should be light-touch and that schools should be able to shape it to take account of their needs. Westminster Faith Debates suggests that schools with a religious character should be able to complement the syllabus with further provision as they wish.

Our participants did not discuss the inclusion of non-religious worldviews in RE. Many schools, including schools with a religious character, provide good teaching about non-religious worldviews and beliefs including humanism and atheism. Nonetheless, the inclusion of non-religion is sometimes questioned in public discussion of RE. It is worth noting that since a high proportion of children are raised in non-religious households, the inclusion of non-religious perspectives can make RE seem more relevant to them, as well as helping them to understand today's religion or belief landscape. Moreover, it teaches children that the label 'non-religious' masks a great diversity of beliefs, practices and identities; that the distinction between religious and non-religious is not always clear-cut; and that non-religious identities should not be assumed to be the 'default' position, without need of critical interrogation in contrast to religions.

## Going forward

As our participants highlighted, there is broad consensus among RE professionals about the aims of the subject, but confusion persists among the general public.

In addition to considering the Commission on RE's recommendations concerning the subject's approaches, the Department for Education should:

- Take active steps to address misconceptions about the aims and value of RE. Changing the name of RE as suggested by the two reports may help tackle this. In addition, government ministers should emphasise publicly and vocally the critical importance of RE.

RE professionals should:

- Offer practical advice to RE teachers about how to explain the subject's aims and value to parents and senior leadership teams.



## Local and national structures for RE

Cuts to local authority budgets and ongoing academisation are contributing to a situation where the quality and content of RE provision is inconsistent both between local education authorities and between schools within the same authority. There are strong calls among sectors of the RE community for reform of the subject's legal structures, to reflect the changes that have occurred in the subject since the Education Act 1944 and the Education Reform Act 1988.<sup>35</sup>

In this regard, the Commission on RE, Westminster Faith Debates and NATRE make a number of recommendations:

### **Commission on RE, *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward* (2018)**

#### ***Syllabus structures***

- A 'national entitlement' statement to the study of Religion and Worldviews should become statutory for all state-funded schools. This would be a statement of what all pupils, up to and including Year 11, are entitled to experience as a minimum regarding RE. The Commission has developed such a statement, setting out what sort of themes and concepts pupils must be taught about, as well as other things pupils are entitled to, such as being taught by teachers with secure subject knowledge. Post-16 students, including those in Further Education, should also have the opportunity to study Religion and Worldviews.<sup>36</sup>
- Schools must publish a detailed statement about how they meet the national entitlement.<sup>37</sup>
- Non-statutory programmes of study for Key Stages 1-4 should be developed for Religion and Worldviews, in accordance with the national entitlement. These should be produced by a national body of RE professionals, appointed by the Department for Education on the basis of their relevant expertise in the subject. Schools would be able to choose whether to adopt the programmes of study or other syllabuses which accord with the national entitlement.<sup>38</sup>
- The legal requirement for local authorities to convene Agreed Syllabus Conferences and develop locally agreed syllabuses should be removed.<sup>39</sup>
- These changes should be implemented in phases to ensure that teachers and schools are not overburdened. The changes to legislation to make the national entitlement statutory should be sought once the programmes of study have been developed.<sup>40</sup>

#### ***Accountability***

- Ofsted or Section 48 inspectors should report on whether schools are meeting the national entitlement. Ofsted should conduct an in-depth review of the impact of the national entitlement and programmes of study once they have been implemented.<sup>41</sup>
- The Department for Education should publish accessible data on the hours taught in all subjects and GCSE entries for all subjects.<sup>42</sup>

#### ***SACREs***

- SACREs should be renamed 'Local Advisory Networks for Religion and Worldviews' (LANRW). Their make-up should be changed to include teachers of the subject, school leaders, ITE / CPD providers,

school providers, and religion, belief or other groups that support RE. LANRWs should facilitate the implementation of the national entitlement in all local schools, by providing information about available support and resources and connecting schools with local religion or belief communities. They may also perform other functions, such as providing CPD, developing programmes of study and promoting good community relations.<sup>43</sup>

- Statutory funding should be provided for all LANRWs, ring-fenced within the Central Schools Services Block provided to local authorities. The funding should be at a sufficient level to enable them to carry out their activities effectively.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Right of withdrawal***

- The Department for Education should review the right of withdrawal from the subject and provide legal clarification about it, for example on whether pupils can be withdrawn from specific parts of the subject or only from the subject as a whole. The Department should also monitor how the right of withdrawal is being used and provide data on its prevalence and the reasons for withdrawal.<sup>45</sup>

### ***School performance measures***

- The Department for Education should consider the impact of the exclusion of Religious Studies GCSE from the Ebacc and of GCSE Short Courses from school performance measures. It should amend those measures to ensure that schools are incentivized to provide proper provision for the subject at GCSE.<sup>46</sup>

## **Westminster Faith Debates, *A New Settlement Revised: Religion and Belief in Schools* (2018)**

### ***Syllabus structures***

- A national syllabus for Religion, Beliefs and Values should be required in all state-funded schools. This would set out the content for the subject. It should be a light-touch, minimum requirement, with space for schools to offer a wider syllabus and shape it to take account of local factors as they wish. This would be enacted through statutory regulations in a similar way to those for Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE). Agreed Syllabus Conferences should be abolished.<sup>47</sup>
- The national syllabus should be produced by a national ‘Advisory Council on Religion, Beliefs and Values’ (ACRBV), consisting of RE professionals appointed by the Secretary of State on the basis of their relevant expertise in the subject. The ACRBV would work in consultation with relevant professional bodies, representatives of religion or belief groups, and local groups like SACREs. The ACRBV would also produce guidance on delivering the subject, to be issued by the Secretary of State.<sup>48</sup>
- Schools with a religious character should be able to complement the national syllabus with further provision if they wish.<sup>49</sup>
- The legal requirement for RE at Key Stage 5, after the age of 16, should be removed. The Department for Education should consider whether to modify the legal requirement for RE provision at Key Stage 4 (a highly pressured educational level) to a wider requirement that all pupils should study contemporary religious, spiritual, moral, ethical, social and cultural values.<sup>50</sup>

### ***Accountability***

- Ofsted inspectors should report on whether schools are properly teaching the national syllabus.<sup>51</sup>

### **SACREs**

- SACREs should be consulted about the development of the national syllabus for Religion, Beliefs and Values and should facilitate the local implementation of it. They should strengthen links between schools, local religion or belief groups and further and higher education institutions. They should also be charged with helping to develop and deliver the faith aspects of the government's approach to community cohesion.<sup>52</sup> The government should ensure SACREs are properly resourced for this work.<sup>53</sup>

### ***Right of withdrawal***

- The right of parents to withdraw their children from the subject should be removed.<sup>54</sup>

**NATRE, *The State of the Nation: A Report on Religious Education Provision Within Secondary Schools in England* (2017)**

### ***Accountability***

- The Department for Education should hold schools to account for the level of provision and standards of teaching of RE. It should issue a public statement that it is unacceptable for a school to fail to provide RE at any Key Stage as part of its broad and balanced curriculum. It should also strengthen the mechanisms by which complaints can be made about schools failing to provide pupils with high quality RE, and publish data about RE provision routinely to allow SACREs and other bodies to monitor local provision.<sup>55</sup>
- Ofsted inspectors should ensure that all people teaching RE are suitably qualified or trained to do so. They should monitor RE provision in schools, with an expectation that the curriculum cannot be considered broad and balanced unless RE is provided. Ofsted should also ensure that inspectors are aware of the specific requirements for RE in each school and can differentiate between strong and weak provision.<sup>56</sup>

## **Discussions arising from roundtables**

### **Syllabus structures and SACREs**

Most of our participants said that improving the quality of RE will require more than just providing more funding to SACREs and recruiting more specialist RE teachers. They argued that the failure of a great many schools to provide RE and the challenges facing Agreed Syllabus Conferences and SACREs mean that more fundamental changes to RE's structures are needed. They noted that in many areas the use of locally agreed syllabuses is no longer the norm and called for a change in the law to reflect this.

Both the Commission on RE and Westminster Faith Debates propose major changes to the current system, including abolishing the requirement on local authorities to produce syllabuses. Westminster Faith Debates calls for the national standardisation of RE through a single light-touch national syllabus (to which schools could nevertheless add to suit their local needs). This would be developed by a national body of RE professionals appointed by the Secretary of State. The Commission on RE's recommendation of a national entitlement statement (supported by non-statutory programmes of study) would also encourage standardisation, but would retain the plurality of syllabuses. Schools could choose to follow syllabuses produced by SACREs, RE bodies, commercial providers or themselves, as long as they adhere to the national entitlement.

Most of our participants preferred the idea of a national entitlement statement rather than a national syllabus. Pragmatically, most thought that a national entitlement, being more ‘light-touch’ and preserving greater flexibility for schools in curriculum design, is more likely to receive support from key stakeholders and policymakers.

Participants argued that a national entitlement would help to bring clarity and consistency about the purposes of RE and about what pupils should be gaining from the subject. If applied on a statutory level to all state-funded schools, as recommended by the Commission, this would increase the consistency of RE provision between schools with and without a religious character. Crucially, a national entitlement would enable schools to be held to account concerning the quality of their RE provision. They would be compelled to ensure that RE is granted adequate time in the school timetable and taught by appropriately qualified teachers. For this to be effective there would need to be clear consequences for schools failing to comply with the entitlement statement.

Ofsted and other inspectors will play a critical role in any initiative to improve RE provision. Under the proposals of the Commission on RE and Westminster Faith Debates, inspection frameworks may need to be revised to ensure that inspectors can monitor school compliance with the national entitlement or national syllabus. While our participants all agreed that more rigorous inspection of RE is essential, some were sceptical that Ofsted’s framework would be changed to incorporate monitoring of a detailed list of pupil entitlements for RE. Nevertheless, even if the legal structures for RE remain unchanged, Ofsted can bring about significant improvement by holding schools more closely to account if they do not meet their legal requirement concerning RE provision.

While most participants preferred the idea of a national entitlement statement, a minority thought this would not go far enough to standardise the content that pupils are taught around the country. Syllabuses would still vary between schools and the practical interpretation of the national entitlement would also vary between RE teachers. They preferred the introduction of a national syllabus for RE, which would standardise the subject, raise its status amongst school leaders to that of other Humanities subjects, and may be easier to inspect for quality. Our participants noted, however, that securing consensus for this from key stakeholders, particularly from providers of schools with a religious character, would be more difficult than with the entitlement statement.

In contrast to the other participants, one thought that the current system of determining RE syllabuses locally should be retained, with Agreed Syllabus Conferences and SACREs receiving greater resources from the government. He was concerned that nationalisation of RE structures would inhibit the contribution of local faith groups to curriculum design. The Commission on RE’s proposals leave space for such groups to help design syllabuses, as long as they meet the national entitlement. Evidently, in Westminster Faith Debates’ proposal for a national syllabus, local faith communities would have much less of an influence over curriculum design than they do currently, since the national syllabus would be produced by a body of RE professionals and experts (in consultation with other groups including religion or belief groups). Westminster Faith Debates argues that this is necessary to achieve the abolition of the parental right to withdraw their children from RE.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, as some participants argued, RE professionals and teachers are better placed to understand what RE teachers need in terms of practical syllabuses.

Our participants also discussed the future of SACREs. While noting that some SACREs are well-funded and help to produce syllabuses of excellent quality, they emphasised that many others are struggling due to budget cuts and academisation. All participants agreed that SACREs have critical roles to play in

RE, such as through supporting and monitoring the provision of RE in schools and building links with local religion or belief groups. While detaching the role of syllabus production from Agreed Syllabus Conferences and SACREs, the Commission on RE and Westminster Faith Debates call for a revitalisation of SACREs and their functions; under the Commission's proposals, for example, they would be essential for helping the implementation of the national entitlement in schools. Such revitalisation will only be possible if sufficient funding for SACREs is guaranteed.

Beyond this, both reports call for SACREs to be given a greater role in promoting community cohesion in their local area. SACREs bring together representatives from different religions or beliefs and are ideally placed to build greater relationships of trust between local communities. Our participants agreed strongly with this. Consideration needs to be given to the processes by which SACREs could be given this role or duty (for example, whether this additional role would require legislative change); what kind of activities this would involve in practice; and how this role would complement the existing local structures designed to promote community cohesion.

### **The right to withdraw from RE**

If the quality of RE is to be bolstered by the introduction of either a national entitlement statement or a national syllabus, it is debatable whether the parental right to withdraw their children from RE (and the right of children aged 18 and over to withdraw) is necessary. Historically this right was introduced to enable nonconformists to opt out of the Christian 'religious instruction' provided in schools. It continues to be used sometimes by parents from minority Christian groups who object to their children learning about other religions or beliefs.

However, our participants reported that in recent years there has been a worrying increase in requests from parents to withdraw their children from RE because they do not want their children to learn about Islam. Far-right groups like the English Defence League have been circulating information about the right of withdrawal, encouraging parents to take children out of classes on Islam and visits to mosques. In 2018, a survey of 312 school leaders from across England found that 38% had received requests from parents for their child to be exempt from specific parts of the RE syllabus (such as Islam) rather than from the whole of it. Nearly half of those school leaders attributed the requests to the parents' conservative religious beliefs, and a quarter to the parents' misunderstanding of the aims of the subject. The survey coordinator suggests that it is likely that many more school leaders than those who responded to the survey will have received similar requests.<sup>58</sup>

The survey also revealed significant confusion about the right of withdrawal among school leaders, such as over whether parents need to give a reason for withdrawal and whether partial withdrawal is acceptable.<sup>59</sup>

This is a dangerous development which threatens to undermine RE's capacity to break down prejudices about Islam and other religions and beliefs. For this reason, in 2016 the conference of Head Teachers overwhelmingly voted in favour of abolishing the right to withdraw from RE.<sup>60</sup>

Most of our participants supported abolishing the right of withdrawal. A minority disagreed, however, arguing that the right to withdraw from RE should not be removed whilst there are some schools which use RE classes for confessional formation. In these schools the right is particularly important for parents of a different religion, or no religion, who do not wish their children to experience this kind of teaching.

Westminster Faith Debates argues that if a national syllabus for RE is introduced for all schools, including schools with a religious character, then there should be no reason to retain the right, as the syllabus would require schools to teach RE in a non-confessional way.<sup>61</sup> The Commission on RE, however, does not call for the abolition of the right, since its proposals continue to enable schools to choose their own syllabuses. It notes, however, that the majority of submissions to its consultation called for the abolition of the right to withdraw, and recommends that the Department for Education should review and provide legal clarification about it.<sup>62</sup>

If the right of withdrawal is retained, then the Department for Education needs to take steps to prevent it being abused. Guidance is needed for schools which clarifies what the right of withdrawal entails (for example concerning partial withdrawal), and which advises them on how best to handle requests to withdraw that are clearly motivated by hostility towards particular religions or beliefs. Fuller data on the incidence of withdrawal is also needed; one participant suggested that schools should be encouraged, or even required, to inform their local SACREs about withdrawal requests. Our participants also suggested that teachers can take practical steps to reduce the likelihood of requests to withdraw, such as combining trips to mosques with trips to churches. Above all, schools need to be encouraged to explain to parents what RE involves and why it is essential for children.

## Going forward

There is growing consensus within the RE community that the structures shaping RE provision and inspection urgently need to be changed in order to raise the standard of the subject nationally. Of the two options discussed by our participants, a national entitlement statement for RE was generally preferred, since it would combine a level of standardisation with flexibility in syllabuses. There are, however, other advantages that a national syllabus would have, including introducing consistency in the content being provided to all children.

As our discussions highlighted, despite the move to consensus on this issue some remain concerned about the consequences of reform. When considering RE's structures, it is important that the Department for Education takes these arguments into account. However, it should recognise that achieving full consensus among RE's diverse stakeholders is likely to be impossible. It should not let this be a barrier to action and should recognise that the challenges facing RE, including the variability of the system of locally determined RE, are too pressing to be ignored.

The Department for Education should:

- Consider seriously the proposals made by the Commission on RE and Westminster Faith Debates concerning a national entitlement statement and a national syllabus for RE respectively, as well as on SACREs and the right of withdrawal. Policymakers should recognise that securing full consensus among RE stakeholders about structural reform, though preferable, is unrealistic and should not be a barrier to action.
- Ensure that Ofsted and other inspectors monitor schools' compliance with their legal/contractual requirements to provide RE and take action where schools fail to do so. Inspectors must be able to distinguish between strong and weak RE provision.



- Secure sufficient funding for all SACREs and give them new responsibilities concerning the promotion of community cohesion.
- Consider whether the right to withdraw from RE should be removed. In the meantime, it should take steps to ensure that it is not abused by parents motivated by prejudice against particular religions or beliefs. The Department should also issue guidance to schools clarifying the legal details of the right.<sup>63</sup>

RE professionals should:

- Advise SACREs and parents on how they can raise concerns about schools that are failing to comply with their legal requirements for RE.
- Find ways to support schools that have been identified as non-compliant as they move to a state of compliance.

## Training and supporting RE teachers

The quality of RE provision nationally suffers from insufficient training and support for teachers. In primary schools, many teachers receive very few, if any, hours of training in RE during initial teacher education (ITE). In addition, teachers at both primary and secondary level are often unable to access high quality, subject-specific continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities. This means teachers lack the knowledge and confidence needed to deliver exciting, engaging RE – and worse, can mean that poorly trained teachers are unable to tackle challenging issues or correct misconceptions about religions or beliefs when they arise.

In this regard, the Commission on RE and NATRE make a number of recommendations:

### **Commission on RE, *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward* (2018)**

#### **ITE**

- All ITE programmes should enable teachers, at primary and where relevant at secondary level, to teach Religion and Worldviews based on the national entitlement, and with the competence to deal with sensitive issues in the classroom. The Teachers' Standards should be updated to reflect this.<sup>64</sup>
- All primary ITE programmes should include a minimum of 12 hours' study for Religion and Worldviews. New ITE modules should be developed focusing on teaching the national programmes of study for Religion and Worldviews.<sup>65</sup>
- Bursaries for ITE for Religion and Worldviews should be increased to parity with other shortage subjects, and funding for Subject Knowledge Enhancement courses (including for primary courses) should be provided at parity with EBacc subjects.<sup>66</sup>

#### **CPD**

- The government should provide funding for at least five years for CPD for Religion and Worldviews, to support the delivery of the national programmes of study. This would fund a national programme of CPD, including online courses, local face-to-face CPD, and the development of curriculum resources.<sup>67</sup>

**NATRE, *The State of the Nation: A Report on Religious Education Provision Within Secondary Schools in England* (2017)**

**ITE**

- The Department for Education should add a condition for the successful completion of teacher training, that newly qualified RE teachers must demonstrate they have an appropriate level of RE knowledge, understanding and skills.<sup>68</sup>

**CPD**

- School leaders should ensure that all specialist and non-specialist teachers of RE have access to subject-specific CPD throughout their careers, and that all non-specialist teachers of RE receive high quality subject-specific training before they commence teaching the subject.<sup>69</sup>

## Discussions arising from roundtables

Our participants strongly supported the proposals from NATRE and the Commission on RE concerning ITE and CPD. They agreed that such measures are essential to improve the quality of RE provision nationally. In particular they emphasised the urgent need for action to improve primary level RE.

Important questions remain, however, about how these proposals can be implemented practically. For example, the Department for Education would need to consider how to encourage primary ITE providers (including school-based routes) to provide the minimum amount of hours dedicated to RE recommended by the Commission, and how to ensure compliance. ITE providers, meanwhile, would face the challenge of expanding training for RE in already tight schedules for primary trainees.

Access to high quality subject-specific CPD is just as important as high quality ITE for improving RE. Our participants discussed the most effective approaches to CPD. They noted that the best CPD involves the establishment of long-term relationships between teachers and trainers – for example, NATRE’s New2RE programme supports newly qualified secondary teachers for three years, providing them with access to a mentor and resources.<sup>70</sup> However, schools are often unwilling to provide the funds for RE teachers to participate in such programmes or allow them to take the time off. This is particularly the case in schools without a religious character, creating a dangerous disparity between teachers in schools with and without a religious ethos. In addition, some senior leadership teams put a low priority on CPD focusing on subject knowledge, as they expect this to be the responsibility of teachers. One participant noted that the Church of England has been able to help RE teachers in this situation, as Diocesan advisors sometimes go into schools to provide RE CPD, saving the schools money. He emphasised the importance of resourcing and expanding existing networks of RE advisors, who can go into schools where teachers are unable to access external CPD.

New teachers in particular are often cautious about asking senior leadership teams for the funds and time off needed to access CPD opportunities. A participant suggested that teachers can use to their advantage the Teachers’ Standards requirement that teachers demonstrate “a critical understanding of developments in the subject and curriculum areas”.<sup>71</sup> In their annual appraisal, teachers can ask for support in meeting this requirement; this may encourage senior leadership teams to make provision for appropriate CPD.

Much of the CPD that is available to RE teachers is provided by RE professional bodies and the third sector, at regional and local levels. Where they have sufficient funding, SACREs also play an important role in the provision of RE CPD; some are able to fund their CPD activities through the sale of lesson plans to local schools. While the work of these groups is to be celebrated, participants stressed that the government relies too heavily on them to fund the upskilling of teachers. This is not a sustainable solution, since the funding for these groups' work is not always guaranteed. If real change in RE quality is to be achieved, the government needs to fund the kind of national CPD programme envisioned by the Commission on RE.

## Going forward

There is clear consensus across the RE community that action needs to be taken urgently to improve ITE and CPD. The Department for Education should recognise, however, that tackling these issues will only go so far in improving RE provision. Action on ITE and CPD should be taken in conjunction with consideration of the need for wider structural reforms.

The Department for Education should:

- Implement the Commission on RE's recommendations concerning ITE and CPD – in particular, the requirement that primary ITE includes 12 hours minimum of RE training, and the national programme of CPD.
- Consider how to monitor and enforce compliance among primary ITE providers with the minimum number of hours for RE training.

## Extra burdens on RE teachers

Our discussions highlighted that RE teachers often have to deal with burdens and responsibilities that other teachers do not face to the same extent. These include:

### — Promoting community cohesion and correcting misconceptions about Islam

Good RE plays a critical role in breaking down misconceptions about and promoting dialogue between different religious communities.<sup>72</sup> RE classes are often the only space in which pupils can discuss difficult topics of deep meaning to them concerning religion or belief, identity and values. Our participants agreed that this is a key contribution RE provides to school life, and one suggested that RE teachers can use this to their advantage when asking senior leadership teams to devote more resources and timetable time to RE.

However, the participants also emphasised that RE's role in building community cohesion can create significant extra burdens for teachers of RE. Some RE teachers feel under pressure to watch out for signs of radicalisation among their pupils. Some are also relied upon by school leaders to 'explain' extremism and terrorist attacks to both pupils and their parents. This responsibility can be particularly problematic if the RE teacher lacks specialist subject knowledge.

RE's role in community cohesion can also contribute to tensions about the purposes of the subject. For example, some teachers may feel that they have a special responsibility to dispel misconceptions about Islam. Whilst important, the impulse to provide a positive account of religions or beliefs can compete with the need to encourage pupils to approach them critically. Some participants questioned whether it is appropriate for RE teachers to reject the legitimacy of particular interpretations of religions, even if this would be helpful for building community cohesion. They also noted that teachers with less experience or weaker subject knowledge may try to avoid tackling particularly challenging subjects such as religion and violence, or issues of gender and sexuality within religions.

### — **Developing pupils' personal character and promoting British values**

All schools have duties to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of children, and to promote British values. As part of this, the Department for Education expects teachers to ensure that pupils show a recognition that people of different or no religion or belief should be accepted and tolerated.<sup>73</sup> RE plays a key role in this. Yet as our participants pointed out, as with community cohesion RE teachers often face a greater pressure than others from senior leadership teams to ensure that these duties are fulfilled. While our participants were generally positive about the ability of RE to contribute to this, other commentators have criticised the British values duty as co-opting RE teachers in particular into the government's security regime.<sup>74</sup>

### — **A greater chance of receiving complaints from parents and press about educational approach and choices**

Since RE sometimes probes quite controversial issues, RE teachers may be more likely than others to face external criticism. For example, one participant discussed the backlash from parents (and the media) that a school may face if an RE teacher organises trips to the 'wrong' mosque or hosts the 'wrong' imam – for example those with alleged or perceived links to extremism – or decides to tackle controversial issues in the classroom. He warned that a "culture of liability" can seriously undermine RE teachers' confidence and make them overly cautious in their educational decision-making and engagement with local faith leaders and communities. Where RE teachers favour caution over engaging with difficult issues, this can lead to bland RE that does not engage pupils and accusations that it is not critical enough.

## **Discussions arising from roundtables**

Since RE teachers face these extra burdens, it is essential that they feel supported and valued by their senior leadership teams. In particular, senior leaders need to reassure RE teachers that they will be supported in their educational decision-making, including when it comes to discussing controversial topics in the classroom and taking pupils on trips to places of worship. Where school leaders have questions about the suitability of connecting with particular places of worship or faith leaders, they should seek advice on this from their local SACREs.

More widely, the Department for Education needs to take action to ensure that teachers outside RE are able to handle difficult questions from pupils about religion or belief as they arise. The promotion of SMSC and British values should be the responsibility of all teachers, but many lack the knowledge and understanding about religion or belief needed to do this well. Our participants were very worried that

teachers outside RE can perpetuate stereotypes about religions or beliefs and undermine the work of RE teachers. Some insisted that all teachers must have a sufficient level of religion or belief literacy.

‘Religious literacy’ is a contested concept that has been defined in various ways.<sup>75</sup> Being religiously literate can be understood to mean having a basic understanding about the beliefs and practices of the main religion or belief groups (including non-religious groups) in Britain today, and of the changing religious landscape; an understanding that these traditions are diverse, changing and lived out by adherents in complex ways; and an ability to have effective dialogue about religion or belief while avoiding stereotypes.

There have been calls in the past for the all teachers to receive training in religious literacy. For example, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education has called for a core element of religious literacy training to be included in all secondary teacher training programmes and for the provision of religious literacy CPD opportunities for all teachers.<sup>76</sup> In our discussions, one participant suggested that Part 2 of the Teachers’ Standards should be amended. The final statement, with the addition in italics, could be: “Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by... *promoting religious literacy*, showing tolerance of and respect for the rights of others”.<sup>77</sup> This change would mean that all trainee teachers would need to demonstrate they have a suitable level of religious literacy in order to complete their training programme. This would be hugely beneficial for both staff and children in schools.

## Going forward

The Department for Education should recognise the extra burdens that RE teachers may face in school. In light of this, it should:

- Recognise that it is critically important that RE teachers are properly supported and have good access to high quality CPD.
- Consider changing the Teachers’ Standards to include an expectation to promote religious literacy, or at least to have an appropriate level of knowledge and understanding about religion or belief.

RE professionals should:

- Explore how to develop practical guidance about what a religiously literate teacher (outside RE) looks like, and how religious literacy training could be incorporated into ITE programmes as standard.

## List of roundtable participants

The following participants attended some or all of the four Theos roundtable discussions on the future of RE, held in 2017.

David Aldridge, Reader in Education, Brunel University

Julian Butcher, Head of Regulatory Framework Unit, Due Diligence and Counter Extremism Division, Department for Education

Alice Chan, Due Diligence and Counter Extremism Division, Department for Education

Mark Chater, Director of Culham St Gabriel's Trust

Charles Clarke, Visiting Professor in Politics and Faith, University of Lancaster; Visiting Professor in Politics, University of East Anglia

Trevor Cooling, Professor of Christian Education, Canterbury Christ Church University

Andrew Copson, Chief Executive of Humanists UK

Rachael Coutts, RE teacher, St Marylebone Church of England School

Jonathan Daniels, School Organisation and Admissions Division, Department for Education

Philip Davies, Integration Division, Department for Communities and Local Government

Francis Farrell, PGCE Religious Education Course Leader, Edge Hill University

Jeremy Fraser, Vicar of St Paul and St James Church, Stratford; Chair, Newham SACRE

John Hall, Dean of Westminster; Chair of the Commission on RE

Jonathan Hellewell, Special Advisor for Communities, 10 Downing Street

Derek Holloway, School Character and SIAMS Development Manager, Church of England Education Office

Guy Hordern MBE, Chair of the 2017 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus Conference; Vice Chair of Birmingham SACRE

Daniel Hughill, Chair of NATRE; RE teacher, The Cooper's Company and Coborn School

Neil Lawson, Policy Team Leader, Curriculum Division, Department for Education

Rudi Elliott Lockhart, Chief Executive Officer of the RE Council of England and Wales

Fiona Moss, Executive Officer of NATRE; National RE Advisor, RE Today Services

Elizabeth Oldfield, Director, Theos

Mike Otter, Head of Education, Bible Society

Simon Perfect, Researcher, Theos

Jon Reynolds, Project Manager of the Commission on RE

Philip Robinson, Religious Education Advisor, Catholic Education Service

Martha Shaw, Senior Lecturer in Education, London South Bank University

Paul Smalley, Chair of NASACRE; Senior Lecturer in RE, Edge Hill University

Nick Spencer, Director of Research, Theos

Peter Ward, Chair of the Secondary Advisers group of the National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers, Catholic Education Service

Deborah Weston, NATRE Research Officer; RE teacher, Mulberry School for Girls

Linda Woodhead, Professor of Sociology of Religion, University of Lancaster



## Acknowledgements

This project was funded by Culham St Gabriel's Trust. The briefing paper was prepared for Theos by Simon Perfect.

- 1 This briefing paper focuses on the situation of Religious Education in England and Wales. In Scotland and in Northern Ireland there are different legal frameworks for RE.
- 2 RE Council of England and Wales (2018) 'Falling numbers of Religious Studies GCSE entries suggests schools struggling to meet legal obligations', 23 August. <https://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/news/falling-numbers-of-religious-studies-gcse-entries-suggests-schools-struggling-to-meet-legal-obligations/>
- 3 Ofsted (2013) *Religious education: realising the potential*, pp. 5, 12. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/413157/Religious\\_education\\_-\\_realising\\_the\\_potential.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/413157/Religious_education_-_realising_the_potential.pdf)
- 4 NATRE (2017) *The State of the Nation: A report on Religious Education provision within secondary schools in England*, pp. 32-3. <https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Free%20Resources/SOTN%202017%20Report%20web%20version%20FINAL.pdf>
- 5 Department for Education (2017) 'Main tables: SFR68/2017', Initial Teacher Training: Trainee Number Census – 2017 to 2018. Table 1c. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/initial-teacher-training-trainee-number-census-2017-to-2018>
- 6 In September 2018 the Department for Education increased the bursaries available for RE trainee teachers. RE trainees with degree classifications of at least 2:2 will receive £9000. Jess Staufenberg (2018) 'DfE extends RS, history, DT and music teacher training bursaries to 2:2 graduates', *Schools Week*, 27 September. <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/dfe-extends-rs-history-dt-and-music-teacher-training-bursaries-to-22-graduates/>
- 7 Commission on RE (2018) *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward. A national plan for RE*. Final report of the Commission on RE, pp. 46-7. <https://www.commissiononre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Final-Report-of-the-Commission-on-RE.pdf>
- 8 Department for Education (2018) 'Tables: School Workforce Census 2017', *School Workforce in England*: November 2017. Table 12. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2017>
- 9 NATRE (2016) *An Analysis of the Provision for RE in Primary Schools – Autumn Term 2016*, pp. 7, 12. <https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Additional%20Documents/NATRE%20Primary%20Survey%202016%20final.docx>
- 10 Ibid, p. 9.
- 11 APPG on RE (2013) *RE: The Truth Unmasked. The supply of and support for Religious Education teachers*, p. 11. [https://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/APPG\\_RE\\_The\\_Truth\\_Unmasked-FINAL-1.pdf](https://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/APPG_RE_The_Truth_Unmasked-FINAL-1.pdf)
- 12 Commission on RE (2018) *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward*, p. 46.
- 13 David Weston (2017) 'Press Release: 21,000 Teachers In Schools Reporting No CPD Budget, Says Teacher Development Trust Study', *Teacher Development Trust*, 3 February. <https://tdtrust.org/press-release-21000-teachers-schools-reporting-no-cpd-budget-says-teacher-development-trust-study>
- 14 NATRE (2015) *An Analysis of a Survey of Teachers on the Impact of Government Policy on Student Opportunity to Study GCSE RS: A Seventh Survey – July 2015*, p. 12. <https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Additional%20Documents/NATRE%20EBacc%20Survey%202015%20v1%202%20060116%20FINAL.pdf>
- 15 NATRE (2017) *State of the Nation*, pp. 16, 38.  
One participant suggested that for some schools, there are discrepancies between the curriculum data which they submit to the School Workforce Census and the timetabling stated on their websites. Therefore, for some schools the Census could be overstating the hours devoted to RE.
- 16 Ibid, p. 19.
- 17 Ibid, p. 39.

## The Future of Religious Education in England and Wales: Debating Reform

- 18 Ron Dearing (1994) *The National Curriculum and its Assessment: Final Report*. London: School Curriculum and Assessment Authority. <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/dearing1994/dearing1994.html>
- 19 NATRE (2017) *State of the Nation*, p. 38.
- 20 NATRE (2016) *An Analysis of the Provision for RE in Primary Schools*, p. 6.
- 21 English language and literature, maths, a modern language, a science (including computer science), and history or geography.
- 22 This has been confirmed in NATRE surveys of RE teachers. See for example NATRE (2015) *An Analysis of a Survey of Teachers on the Impact of Government Policy*, p. 8.
- 23 Department for Education (2017) *Implementing the English Baccalaureate: Government Consultation Response*, p. 21. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/630713/Implementing\\_the\\_English\\_Baccalaureate\\_-\\_Government\\_consultation\\_response.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/630713/Implementing_the_English_Baccalaureate_-_Government_consultation_response.pdf)
- 24 Department for Education (2017) 'English Baccalaureate (EBacc): Policy Paper'. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-baccalaureate-ebacc/english-baccalaureate-ebacc>
- 25 RE Council of England and Wales (2018) 'Falling numbers of Religious Studies GCSE entries'.
- 26 A 2017 survey by NASACRE (National Standing Advisory Council for RE) of SACREs highlighted these difficulties, including the extreme variance in SACRE budgets. NASACRE (2017) *Evidence submitted on behalf of NASACRE to the Commission on RE by the NASACRE Chair, Paul Smalley, 13 June 2017*. <http://www.nasacre.org.uk/file/nasacre/1-488-evidence-submitted-on-behalf-of-nasacre-to-the-commission-on-re-by-paul-smalley.pdf>
- 27 See for example Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life (2015) *Living with Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good*, pp. 33-34. <https://www.woolf.cam.ac.uk/research/publications/reports/report-of-the-commission-on-religion-and-belief-in-british-public-life> ; Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead (2015) *A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools*. Westminster Faith Debates, pp. 31, 37. <http://faithdebates.org.uk/education/policy-pamphlet/>
- 28 Commission on RE (2018) *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward*, p. 41.
- 29 See for example St Georges' House (2016) *A New Settlement: Religion & Belief in Schools*. A St George's House Consultation, pp. 9-10. <http://www.stgeorghouse.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/A-NEW-SETTLEMENT-RELIGION-BELIEF-IN-SCHOOLS.pdf>
- 30 Commission on RE (2018) *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward*, p. 26.
- 31 Ibid, pp. 72-75.
- 32 Ibid, pp. 34-7.
- 33 Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead (2018) *A New Settlement Revised: Religion and Belief in Schools*. Westminster Faith Debates, pp. 19-20. <http://faithdebates.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Clarke-Woodhead-A-New-Settlement-Revised.pdf>
- 34 Catholic Education Service (2018) 'Catholic Education Service response to the Commission on Religious Education report', 10 September. <http://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/component/k2/item/1003658-catholic-education-service-response-to-the-commission-on-religious-education-report>
- 35 For the history of legislative developments for RE, see St Georges' House (2016) *A New Settlement: Religion & Belief in Schools*, pp. 4-7.
- 36 Commission on RE (2018) *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward*, pp. 12-13.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid, p. 14.
- 39 Ibid, p. 15.
- 40 Ibid, pp. 69-71.
- 41 Ibid, p. 17.

- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid, pp. 16-7.
- 44 Ibid, pp. 17.
- 45 Ibid, p. 18.
- 46 Ibid, p. 62.
- 47 Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead (2018) *A New Settlement Revised*, pp. 16-18, 31.
- 48 Ibid, pp. 16-18.
- 49 Ibid, p. 24.
- 50 Ibid, p. 26.
- 51 Ibid, p. 24.
- 52 See HM Government (2018) *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper: Building stronger, more united communities*. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/696993/Integrated\\_Communities\\_Strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696993/Integrated_Communities_Strategy.pdf)
- 53 Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead (2018) *A New Settlement Revised*, pp. 29-31.
- 54 Ibid, p. 28.
- 55 NATRE (2017) *State of the Nation*, p. 7.
- 56 Ibid, p. 8.
- 57 Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead (2018) *A New Settlement Revised*, p. 16.
- 58 David Lundie (2018) *Religious Education and the Right of Withdrawal*, pp. 7-8. <https://davidlundie.files.wordpress.com/2018/04/report-on-re-opt-out-wcover.pdf>
- 59 Ibid, pp. 7-8; Commission on RE (2018) *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward*, p. 67.
- 60 Javier Espinoza (2016) 'Head teachers argue parents should be stripped of right to take children out of religious education', *The Telegraph*, 1 May. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2016/05/01/head-teachers-to-argue-parents-should-be-stripped-of-right-to-ta/>
- 61 Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead (2018) *A New Settlement Revised*, pp. 27-8.
- 62 Commission on RE (2018) *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward*, pp. 67-8.
- 63 According to the coordinator of the survey on withdrawal, legal clarification is needed on i) the right of parents to withdraw selectively from part (but not all) of RE; (ii) whether parents seeking to withdraw their children from RE are responsible for providing an appropriate alternative curriculum; (iii) whether children withdrawn from RE can access other curriculum subjects or SEN support during RE time. Lundie (2018) *Religious Education and the Right of Withdrawal*, p. 2.
- 64 Commission on RE (2018) *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward*, p. 47.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Ibid, p. 49.
- 68 NATRE (2017) *State of the Nation*, p. 7.
- 69 Ibid, p. 8.
- 70 See <https://www.natre.org.uk/courses-events/upcoming-courses-events/new2re-programme-2017-2020>

- 71 Department for Education (2011) *Teachers' Standards: Guidance for school leaders, school staff and governing bodies*, p. 11. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/665520/Teachers\\_\\_Standards.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/665520/Teachers__Standards.pdf)
- 72 For a recent study demonstrating that taking RE as an examination subject works to promote more positive attitudes to religious diversity and thus contributes to community cohesion, see Leslie J. Francis, Tania ap Siôn, Ursula McKenna and Gemma Penny (2017) 'Does Religious Education as an examination subject work to promote community cohesion? An empirical enquiry among 14- to 15-year-old adolescents in England and Wales', *British Journal of Religious Education*, 39(3), pp. 303-316.
- 73 See Department for Education (2014) *Promoting fundamental British values as part of SMSC in schools: Departmental advice for maintained schools*. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/380595/SMSC\\_Guidance\\_Maintained\\_Schools.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/380595/SMSC_Guidance_Maintained_Schools.pdf); Department for Education (2014) *Improving the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of pupils: supplementary information. Departmental advice for independent schools, academies and free schools*. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/380396/Improving\\_the\\_spiritual\\_\\_moral\\_\\_social\\_and\\_cultural\\_\\_SMSC\\_\\_development\\_of\\_pupils\\_supplementary\\_information.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/380396/Improving_the_spiritual__moral__social_and_cultural__SMSC__development_of_pupils_supplementary_information.pdf)
- 74 See for example Francis Farrell (2016) "Why all of a sudden do we need to teach fundamental British values?" A critical investigation of religious education student teacher positioning within a policy discourse of discipline and control', *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 42(3), pp. 280-297.
- 75 For definitions of religious literacy, see for example APPG on Religious Education (2016) *Improving Religious Literacy: A Contribution to the Debate*. <http://www.reonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/APPG-on-RE-Improving-Religious-Literacy-full-report.pdf>; Adam Dinham and Matthew Francis eds. (2015) *Religious Literacy in Policy and Practice*. Bristol: Policy Press; Diane L. Moore (2015) *Religious Literacy Project: Our Method*. [http://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/files/hdsrlp/files/our\\_method\\_1.pdf](http://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/files/hdsrlp/files/our_method_1.pdf)
- 76 APPG on Religious Education (2016) *Improving Religious Literacy*, pp. 23-24.
- 77 As recommended in NASACRE (2017) *Evidence submitted on behalf of NASACRE to the Commission on RE*, p. 7. See also Department for Education (2011) *Teachers' Standards*, p. 14.

