

National RE Updates for SACRE from RE Today Autumn 2024 for Thurrock SACRE

Calls for a National Plan for Religious Education

The number of students taking full course Religious Studies in England and Wales at GCSE has remained stable at 233,288 following a 0.5% rise in entries from 2023 making it one of the most widely studied humanities at GCSE.

223,034 students took RS GCSE (full course) in England, an increase of 0.3%. In Wales 10,254 students took the subject, an increase of 6.4%. For the third year running, the number of students taking a GCSE short course rose in England, this year by 9.5% to 20,627. In Wales however, entries fell by 27.1% to 2,201.

This is despite an ongoing challenge in recruiting specialist teachers amidst a gulf in government funding. Recruitment targets were missed in 11 of the last 12 years during which time school workforce data show that 51% of those teaching RE mainly teach another subject and also that the number of teachers of RE has remained roughly the same since 2011, despite the number of entries growing.

The Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC) and the National Association for Teachers of RE (NATRE) have now called on the new Education Secretary, Bridget Phillipson MP, to introduce a National Plan for RE that provides a fair allocation of resources and prioritises the subject as part of Labour's plans to recruit more specialist teachers.

RE has recently seen a restoration of the teacher training bursary, but a shortage of specialism in schools remains a challenge given the long-term growth of the subject. The number of those recorded as teaching RE has remained roughly the same since 2011 at 16,200, while those delivering Geography and History lessons has risen by 1,700.

A Level Religious Studies steady in England but a decrease in Wales

The overall trend in A level entries for Religious Studies over the last 5 years has been steeply downward in Wales but fairly stable in England.

Since 2020 entries in Wales have fallen by 37% from 1126 to 702. During the same period, entries in England, remained fairly stable with a fall of just under 0.5% from 14,564 to 14,499.

Even though the trend for entries in England is downwards, this is within a context where most Humanities subjects have experienced a fall in entries and most science, technology, engineering and maths subjects have seen an increase. It is worth noting that financial incentives for schools will have boosted these entries including the advanced maths premium scheme and a number of schemes established to boost science learning in schools.

Of the Humanities, Religious Studies in England was one of the smallest decreases between 2023 and 2024 at 1.3%

RE Teaching in English Secondary Schools

The school workforce data is sourced from the annual school census which is submitted by schools in England to the DfE in November. Not every school completes the census each year however the data demonstrates who teaches RE in schools.

44% of teachers of RE have a post A Level qualification in the subject, compared to 80.3% for English, 76.6% for mathematics and 78.5% for History.

There has been an increase in the number of teachers of the other humanities subjects, history and geography between 2011 and 2023, however, the number of teachers of RE has remained static in the same period.

In response to a parliamentary question about how many RE lessons were taught by a teacher with another specialism, 51% of RE lessons were taught by teachers with another specialism, compared to 27% for history and 28% for geography.

Interfaith Week 2024

Interfaith Week will be taking place from 10th – 17th November 2024.

A consortium of organisations, former members of the IFN, are working in partnership to ensure that the week can run this year. Further partners will be engaging as the week becomes nearer and more detail will be available in the autumn term. In the meantime, colleagues from the consortium suggest schools and SACREs plan to raise the profile and celebrate the importance of Interfaith dialogue. The suggested theme educational establishments might use is ‘sharing my story – building our future’.

Further information can be seen [here](#).

Religious Studies remains a popular GCSE despite specialist teacher recruitment challenge

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Deborah Weston OBE, Chair of the RE Policy Unit, said:

“Poor quality, tokenistic RE taught by non-specialists without subject training, has a knock-on effect on not just our communities, but the depth and quality of a young person's education. Properly taught, GCSE RS provides invaluable academic and life skills that enables young people to think meaningfully about life's big questions in relation to their own beliefs and those of others. On average, pupils studying the subject at GCSE do significantly better on the Attainment 8 school performance measure, with disadvantaged pupils scoring a full 9 points higher than those who do not take GCSE RS. “If the Labour government is serious about breaking down barriers to opportunities, a national plan for RE that provides a fairer allocation of resources is vital. It would build on the brilliant RE practice that already exists, deliver a new generation of specialist teachers and ensure all students receive their entitlement to an academically rigorous programme of RE.”

Katie Freeman, Chair of the National Association for Teachers of RE (NATRE), said:

“These results are a testament to the incredible hard work of RE teachers up and down the country. RE teachers are a vital asset to their schools, their community, and most importantly the young people who they inspire and educate.” But with the burden growing on specialist RE teachers, there is a limit to what the teaching community can do. To safeguard the subject and its future, the new Labour government must provide a fairer allocation of resources to the subject, prioritise RE in its plans to recruit specialist teachers, and give young people the head start in life they deserve.”

Sarah Lane Cawte, Chair of the REC, said:

“Now is the time for action to safeguard the subject and meet the demand for high-quality RE in our schools and communities. The Religious Education Council recently launched a suite of resources including a National Content Standard, advocating a contemporary approach to the subject and offering a benchmark of quality to help schools deliver academic, personally enriching, and inspiring RE. A national plan would support schools in rolling this out, extend the teacher training bursary, and deliver ongoing specialist support to existing and aspiring teachers.”

OCR Review – Striking the Balance: A Review of 11 – 16 curriculum and assessment in England

Oxford, Cambridge and RSA have published a report into the content of the curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 and the role and form of assessment including SATs and GCSE qualifications. The review was chaired by Charles Clarke and draws focus to four key areas

- Reducing the assessment burden
- Digital assessment and learning
- English and maths at 11–16

– Curriculum evolution at 11–16

The research was undertaken with over 2000 teachers and students at a variety of events as well as working with education specialists to draw the conclusions for each of the four areas.

Commentary in the section of the report on curriculum evolution points to an over-crowded curriculum in which some subjects have been overlooked due to a focus on EBacc subjects, there is reference not only to the creative subject, but also physical education and the following comment is made in relation to religious education

‘Another important aspect of the evolution of the curriculum is the teaching of religion and belief in schools. This remains a statutory requirement often honoured, outside faith schools, in the breach rather than the observance.’ – page 74

It is made clear in the report that although it is not necessary for all pupils in a school to follow the subjects contained within the EBacc there is a strong move within schools for pupils to study these as EBacc uptake is an accountability measure of school performance. The review calls for an independent curriculum authority to oversee the changes to the sector and to ease the examination burdens placed on students in Year 11 through a wholesale review of the processes and purposes of assessment in the education sector.

A copy of the review can be found here: [717919-striking-the-balance.pdf \(ocr.org.uk\)](#)

RExChange

RExChange is being held on the 18th and 19th October as an online conference which is free to attend. A wide variety of sessions are available covering all aspects of RE, including, What do we mean by knowledge in RE with Trevor Cooling, Teaching of religious attitudes to same sex relationships with Helena Moore and the religion and worldviews approach and handbook with Stephen Pett and Gillian Georgiou.

Follow this link to request a place [RExChange 2024 Registration - RE:ONLINE \(reonline.org.uk\)](#)

Open University Religion, Belief and Worldviews Hub

The Open University Religion, Belief and Worldviews Hub can be accessed by all interested parties [Religion, belief and worldviews hub | OpenLearn - Open University](#). The Hub provides resources for schools and educational settings to support the delivery of RE in classrooms from Early Years through to post 16 education. The focus of the Hub is ‘Religion and Belief’ as a protected characteristic in UK legislation. Materials on the Hub have been provided by colleagues from The Open University, with classroom resources and online CPD opportunities for leaders and teachers of RE.

Strictly RE 2025

The annual NATRE conference for all RE professionals returns on 25th January 2025 and will be face to face following recent online conferences. This has become the annual date in the diaries of those within RE and will be held at Leonardo Hotel in Birmingham. Click on the link to register interest in attending Strictly RE 2025. [NATRE Strictly RE 2025: National Religious Education Conference](#)

NASACRE News

Webinar Programme

The next in the series of NASACRE's training has been announced for the Autumn Term 2024.

24th September 2024, 6:30-8pm: So, you've joined your local SACRE... Free session for any SACREs to attend specifically for new members of SACRE

3rd October 2024, 7-8pm: Funding for SACREs to work with pupils in RE - applying for and gaining a Westhill/NASACRE award Free session for any SACRE to attend

17th October 2024, 7-8pm: How can SACREs make strategic use of the Deep & Meaningful Ofsted RE Report (May 2024) in their work? Free to SACREs who have bought the annual webinar package; £25 for a subscribed SACRE and £35 for a non-subscribed SACRE

The Ethics Cup

Saint Andrew's University are offering secondary schools the opportunity to participate in The Ethics Cup. Unlike traditional debating tournaments, pupils are asked to prepare to simply discuss a particular case with the other competing teams on the day of competition. The cases are not presented in a resolution format, there is no requirement for the teams to disagree with each other, and the competition is not won by proving the other team wrong. Each team is instead asked to craft its own position with as much nuance as judged appropriate. It is a collaborative discussion with a panel of three judges awarding points for insight, thoughtfulness, and civility. This allows the pupils to put forward their own genuine beliefs, formed through prolonged thought and investigation, rather than a constructed polemic prescribed by the competition.

Schools can access information about The Ethics Cup here [The Ethics Cup – University of St Andrews Centre for Ethics, Philosophy and Public Affairs \(st-andrews.ac.uk\)](https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/ethics-cup/)

New Director for the National Association of Teachers of RE

After over a decade of dedicated service to NATRE as CEO, Fiona Moss has taken a new position at Culham St Gabriel's Trust (CSTG) as Education and Programmes Manager. Fiona has made significant contributions to NATRE and the world of RE during her time as CEO, whether it be lobbying political parties and government through to enabling the high-quality resources delivered by the NATRE Executive for its members.

Katie Freeman, the Chair of NATRE expressed these sentiments

All of us at NATRE would like to congratulate our wonderful Fiona Moss on her new role at CSTG. Fiona is a Powerhouse of RE and so many of us have stories about how she has inspired and supported us in our journeys within the RE community. Quite honestly NATRE won't be the same without her but we know that she will continue her important work in her new role and will be a vital part of the new CSTG team. She will be hugely missed but we look forward to continuing to work with her in new ways. Congratulations Fiona on your new role and thank you for all that you have done for NATRE members past and present!

Angela Hill, National RE Adviser and Editor of RE Today magazine has now taken over the role as Director of NATRE following Fiona's departure. Angela commented stated

I am honoured to take on the role at such a pivotal time for the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education. I look forward to working with the newly formed NATRE executive team to continue advancing the vital work of supporting and empowering all teachers, teaching the subject. Together, we will build on the strong foundation laid by Fiona and strive to create even greater opportunities for all teachers of religious education.

In welcoming Angela to her new role, Katie Freeman stated

NATRE are excited to welcome Angela Hill to her role working with and supporting the executive. Angela knows NATRE well as she has been working with us in her role as RE today's editor and we are looking forward to working with her more closely. She is a talented and knowledgeable adviser who will be able to support us with our existing projects as well as planning new ones. Congratulations Angela on your new role, we are so excited to see you develop your new role and we can't wait to work with you.

Upcoming RE Today Courses for the Autumn Term

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

PRIMARY PHASE

RE Today Roadshow with Lat Blaylock



RE Today Roadshow (South – Reading – 18th October 2024) – Lat Blaylock and Ian Nicholson

This face-to-face CPD event will focus on 'Challenge and Inspiration in RE', including religious and non-religious worldviews, diverse teaching methods, and the latest Ofsted requirements.

Festival Spotlight: Christmas – Julia Diamond-Conway

08/10/2024

Why and how do people celebrate Christmas. Subject knowledge and effective lesson ideas. A practical dip into Christmas using a sociological and a theological lens. Suitable for ECTs, Teachers, HLTAs and subject leaders.

cREative primary RE – Julia Diamond-Conway

20/11/2024

How can I ensure children are engaged in RE lessons? What strategies can I use to make sure pupils are inspired during RE? This session is packed full of ready-to-use ideas for anyone who

wants to engage pupils more fully in RE sessions. There will be a focus on the Spirited Arts competition 2024. Perfect for all primary practitioners who teach RE including Early Career Teachers, Subject Leaders and Teaching Assistants; with a wide range of practical classroom ideas for primary RE, there is sure to be something for everyone.

Primary - Understanding Christianity

11/11/2024

Get the confidence and subject knowledge to teach about Christianity: Text Impact Connections through this tried and tested course which is supported by a substantial whole school teachers handbook. Many locally agreed syllabuses include requirements for teaching Christianity that are directly supported by this resource. This resource supports good quality teaching about Christianity and can be used within the requirements of your syllabus guidelines.

SECONDARY PHASE RE

Statutory non-examined sixth form RE – Ian Nicholson

22/10/2024

RE continues to be a legal requirement for all sixth forms. This webinar will provide teachers of RE with a range of very fantastic ideas about how to meet these requirements, in imaginative ways by setting high standards. There will be discussion opportunities until 5.30 PM. This webinar is suitable for: all types of schools and academies including Catholic and Anglican.

Understanding Christianity - Secondary (Online) – Stephen Pett

05/12/2024

This course will help you with the implementation and delivery of Understanding Christianity - a substantial resource for teaching Christianity for 11-14s.

Cross PHASE RE

NEW! Introducing a Religion and Worldviews approach

22/10/2024

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.