

Religious Education in the HMCI Annual report

The [Ofsted Annual Report](#) published at the end of November 2023 presents the organisation's findings for the areas they inspect including schools. There is recognition of the challenges faced by teachers of RE and the impact on children.

Ofsted found the following issues in many schools:

- schools failing to meet the statutory requirement to teach RE to all pupils in all year groups.
- pupils not being taught enough substance to prepare them to engage in a complex, multi-religious and multi-secular society,
- non-examination provision typically not being of high quality.
- schools not teaching topics in the RE curriculum deeply enough for pupils to develop a substantial understanding of the subject matter.

Ofsted recommends a coordinated effort by stakeholders to improve the quality of RE in schools including:

- the provision of high-quality professional development
- curriculum publishers identifying clearly what pupils will learn and when
- the government proving clear expectations about RE provision in schools
- non-statutory guidance for RE needing to be updated and include clear information for schools about the breadth and depth of the syllabus they are expected to teach

These findings add weight to the call from many RE Associations for a National Plan for RE and for government support for the National Content Standard published by the RE Council last month.

From the Curriculum Section of the report:

However, some subjects still do not receive the attention they deserve:

- in many secondary schools, pupils do not benefit from a broad and ambitious music curriculum. In physical education (PE), pupils typically experience a broad range of activities. However, schools do not always ensure that these contribute enough to developing pupils' knowledge and skills.
- in too many primary and secondary schools, the religious education (RE) that pupils receive is of a poor quality and not fit for purpose, leaving pupils ill-equipped for some of the complexities of contemporary society.

Religious Education

RE in schools is generally of poor quality. Although it is a statutory subject, schools often consider RE as an afterthought. As a subject on the curriculum, it is undervalued. RE is a complex subject, and the lack of clarity and support from government makes schools' job harder.

Some schools steer through these challenges well, but most do not. We found that:

- many schools do not meet the statutory requirement to teach RE at all stages

- pupils are rarely taught enough substance to prepare them to engage in a complex, multi-religious and multi-secular society (where religion and non-religion play different parts in different people's lives)
- too often, schools do not teach topics in the RE curriculum deeply enough for pupils to develop a substantial understanding of the subject matter
- non-examined RE is typically not high quality.

All pupils should develop a broad and secure knowledge of the complexity of religious and non-religious traditions. It will take coordinated effort by stakeholders to improve the quality of RE in schools:

- schools need high-quality professional development to teach RE well
- curriculum publishers need to identify clearly what pupils will learn and when, building on knowledge over time, so that pupils develop a deep knowledge of the chosen religious and non-religious traditions
- the government should provide clear expectations about RE provision in schools. Schools should follow these. Current non-statutory guidance for RE should be updated and include clear information for schools about the breadth and depth of the syllabus they are expected to teach

National Content Standard for Religious Education

The RE Council of England and Wales has launched its National Content Standard for Religious Education in England. At present there is a postcode lottery of RE provision in England, evidenced in the Ofsted Research Review, NATRE primary and secondary surveys, and analysis of the DfE's own data. However, until now, there has been no national benchmark.

NATRE Chair, Katie Freeman said,

"It is genuinely encouraging to see so much agreement around the need for a National Content Standard that applies to all types of school in England. I hope that those who choose to work with this benchmark will find it useful to evaluate their own RE curriculum. If this standard achieves widespread support across the sector, that will give us the greatest chance of achieving our vision of securing high-quality teaching and learning in RE/Religion and Worldviews for all pupils in all schools.

You can read the National Content Standard [here](#) and a blog about it by Deborah Weston [here](#).

NATRE Secondary survey on RE: Results

This is an analysis of the data gathered from a questionnaire on impact of political policies on Religious Education in England, RME in Scotland and RVE in Wales. It relates particularly to the level of provision in different types of school, the experience of teachers in relation to initial teacher training and continuing professional development and the type of examination and non-examination courses offered at key stages 4 and 5. Through publicising this survey, NATRE hopes it can be used widely and seeks to make the case for more attention to be paid to the level of

provision and quality of our subject in all schools and, in England for there to be a National Plan for RE as recommended by the Commission on RE in 2018.

This tenth survey was conducted during the summer term of 2023 via a number of teacher networks supported by the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), and RE Today Services. The survey was publicised via social media networks and via the electronic networks of other RE organisations including AREIAC, AULRE, and NASACRE. Replies were received from 241 teachers in different parts of the United Kingdom. Respondents did not all respond to every question. Responses that are significantly different, according to school type of the respondent, have also been discussed. This tenth survey was conducted during the summer term of 2023 via a number of teacher networks supported by the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), and RE Today Services. The survey was publicised via social media networks and via the electronic networks of other RE organisations including AREIAC, AULRE, and NASACRE. Replies were received from 241 teachers in different parts of the United Kingdom. Respondents did not all respond to every question. Responses that are significantly different, according to school type of the respondent, have also been discussed.

Advanced British Standard Consultation

The DfE are currently consulting on the Advanced British Standard, a potential new qualification framework for 16–19-year-olds. The DfE have been advised that current plans have not included the statutory position of RE for those studying 16-19 within a school setting.

Parliamentary question on RE: Supporting and funding RE

Minister of State for Education; Damian Hinds, MP answered this written question from Jim Shannon MP as follows:

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether the Department plans to take steps to fund network hubs for Religious Education; and to make a statement.

“Religious education (RE) is an essential part of a school’s curriculum and remains a compulsory subject in all state-funded schools, including academies, to all pupils up to the age of 18. RE develops an individual’s knowledge and understanding of the religions and beliefs which form part of contemporary society, as well as serving to inform their own values and behaviour.

Although the Department has not been involved in the establishment of the RE Hubs project, the Department welcomes its work to support teachers and practitioners. The Department currently has no plans to provide funding for the project. The Department does, however, provide support for RE in other ways.”

The answer then goes on to cite spending on the new bursary which was finally reinstated this year but is still very small in comparison to other shortage subjects such as geography and languages including Latin, that the Oak National Academy materials which will eventually be rolled out to all subjects and the eight-week

funded subject knowledge enhancement courses for potential trainee teachers of RE – again offered to many other subjects.

DfE’s annual report and accounts set out government policy:

“Our main levers to support schools are our Curriculum Hub programmes (music, computing, languages, English and mathematics), the Behaviour Hubs programme and our model curricula guidance ... (page 72)

House of Lords Debate Quality Religious Education

Religious Education was in the spotlight on January 18th, 2024, as the Lords debated standards in RE in the Grand Committee. NATRE worked with the RE Policy Unit to help brief several peers who offered to speak in this debate proposed by Lord Harries of Pentregarth.

In his contribution, Lord Harries of Pentregarth raised concerns about schools' poor quality of religious education (RE) and quoted data collected by NATRE. He also referenced the damning 2023 HMCI Annual Ofsted report from Amanda Spielman, where RE was described as "poor quality" and "not fit for purpose". Ofsted suggested, he said, that RE was "undervalued" and often considered as an "afterthought" by schools and the "lack of clarity and support" from the Government made schools' job "harder".

The peer criticized the lack of government support, citing the survey conducted by NASACRE in August 2023, which found that five authorities declared no spending on RE at all, and a further 34—39 in all, or 31%—stated they did not spend any money supporting RE in schools.

Lord Harries closed his remarks by calling for a National Plan for RE, including a benchmark for the curriculum. He made a list of matters for inclusion in this National Plan.

1. it should include a budgetary provision at least comparable to that received for other subjects such as music.

- the plan should include a benchmark for what is expected from the syllabus,
- that what happens locally should be judged by this benchmark.
- that RE should be taught by people who have qualifications in the subject and who are given regular opportunities to enhance their professional skills,
- that more bursaries and more money for enhanced professional training should be made available to this end.

Responding to the Government, Baroness Barran – parliamentary under-secretary of state for Education, commended Lord Harries for initiating the debate on religious education (RE) and said she appreciated the insightful contributions from other speakers. She highlighted the importance of high-quality RE in a society with a changing religious demographic, emphasising its role in developing children's knowledge, understanding, and tolerance of religious and non-religious beliefs.

Baroness Barran addressed the unique nature of RE, which contributed, she said, to personal, social, and academic benefits, fostering respect and providing opportunities for exploring questions of belief, values, and morality. She acknowledged the significant shift in the religious demographic, as Lord Warner and Lady Meacher highlighted, and stressed the importance of adapting to this diversity.

Regarding teacher recruitment and retention, Baroness Barran outlined the Government's efforts to transform teacher training and recruit specialists in RE. Introducing a £10,000 bursary for RE trainee teachers in the 2024-25 academic year aims to incentivise more applicants. She also mentioned subject knowledge enhancement courses and the need for teachers to feel supported in handling sensitive content. She explained the poor recruitment for this year's RE initial teacher education (44%) by saying that the Government had increased the target by around the same amount but failed to acknowledge that the Government had inexplicably cut the target a few years ago, and the target had been restored to previous levels due to the apparent undersupply of secondary RE teachers.

Various speakers contributed to the debate which can be read in full here:

[Religious Education in Schools - Hansard - UK Parliament](#)

Listen via Parliament TV [Parliamentlive.tv - Lords Grand Committee](#)

RE Featured in Radio 4's Beyond Belief

On Monday 29th January, BBC Radio 4's Beyond Belief focused upon Religious Education. The episode was entitled [What Should We Teach in RE](#). Guests discussed the subject's importance, what they think should be taught in the subject and how, alongside challenges faced by RE at this time. The panel included Henna Karin-Sayer (RE teacher and TikTok content creator), Fiona Moss (CEO of NATRE, the National Association of Teachers of RE), Stephen Evans (CEO of the National Secular Society) and Rabbi Benjy Rickman (Head of RE at King David High School, which has a Jewish faith character).

The episode can be listened to on the [BBC's website](#).

Institute for Jewish Policy Research: Key Findings from National Jewish Identity Survey

[This study](#) provides a up to date profile of how Jews in Britain understand and live their Jewish lives. It is the largest survey of its kind, being conducted among a research panel of nearly 5000 members and is free to download. Headlines include: -94% of Jews in the UK say that ethical and moral behaviour make up part of their Jewish identities.

-Nearly 1/3 of Jewish adults had personally experienced antisemitism in the year leading to the survey.

-Over half of British Jewish adults in the UK belong to a synagogue. More than this practice aspects of Jewish religious culture.

The key findings of the report can be found in the film [Who Are Jews in the UK Today?](#)

How can SACRE encourage school RE to reflect the picture of lived religion in this report and in the UK in general?

Bayt al Fann: Exploring Art and Culture Inspired by Islamic Tradition

'Bayt al Fann' is Arabic for 'Art House'. It was launched in November 2021 and welcomes all to explore the past, present, and future of Islamic art, culture, and heritage. Its website is a huge treasure trove of information and examples of art and culture linked to Islam from ancient scriptures to modern calligraphy and architecture.

For those who want more, there are events and workshops and a new quarterly periodical with the first edition centred around Islamic pattern. There are regular, detailed social media posts across many platforms including Instagram (baytal.fann), Threads (baytal.fann), TikTok (@baytalfann) and X (@BaytAlFann).

List of Resources to Support Schools with Contentious Topics

Together is a coalition of some of the UK's best-known organisations that aim to build a kinder, closer, and more connected society. As one of its campaigns, 'Together for Humanity' is building a movement to stand against rising antisemitism and anti-Muslim hate in the UK amidst the conflict in the Middle East. The campaign is working to support schools, universities, and councils to build bridges in their communities.

It has created a document containing links and information to offer guidance that schools and teachers may find helpful. There are also some resources that could potentially be used with pupils on this document. [Access resource](#)

Training, networking, and other support

NATRE Membership and direct support for teaching

NATRE is the largest RE membership organisation which promotes, defends, and supports RE teachers and RE teaching. It does this through producing high-quality resources and CPD, lobbying government, being involved in conversations with the DfE and Ofsted, LAs and SACREs, telling teachers' stories and experiences and being a voice for all teachers.

NATRE currently has membership packages for students, ECTs, teachers, schools, RE professionals and RE enthusiasts.

Details: www.natre.org.uk/membership

RE Today in partnership with NATRE have created a primary curriculum made up of learning pathways for each half term, lesson by lesson power points, retrieval questions, knowledge organisers and much more.

Schools will receive this if they become NATRE school enhanced members which is an annual subscription currently priced at £270 per school.

www.natre.org.uk/primary/retoday-primary-re-curriculum/

NASACRE Training for SACRE members

Wednesday 26th June 6.30-8.30 So you have joined your local SACRE

Description: A rerun of the September session, to help new SACRE members to understand their role, how SACRE works, its statutory responsibilities and how members make their contribution to SACRE's work.

Price: Free

Other training and resources available on the NASACRE site - do log in

[Welcome to NASACRE - NASACRE](#)

New RE Today Learning Zone

RE Today Services are delighted to have launched a new e-learning platform that puts teachers in control of their CPD. Courses already available on the Learning Zone include subject knowledge webinars for both primary and secondary teachers on Buddhism, Christianity, Hindu Dharma, Islam, Judaism, Sikhi, and Non-Religious Worldviews alongside the ever-popular Understanding Christianity course for primary colleagues. Teachers of RE can select those courses and webinars most relevant to them – each can be accessed and used at times convenient for the participants, or even accessed in short bursts over a few weeks or months. More will be added to the Learning Zone over the coming months.

To find out more, please go to [RE Today Learning Zone. Login](#)