

An analysis of the provision for RE in Primary Schools – Spring Term 2013

Introduction

This is an analysis of the data gathered from a questionnaire on primary religious education conducted by the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE). The survey was publicised using the NATRE and RE Today websites and mailing lists, via local groups of teachers of RE and the member organisations of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales, including AREIAC, AULRE, and NASACRE and social media. Replies were received from 679 primary teachers.

Methodology

An on-line data gathering tool (Survey Monkey) was used to set a series of questions on the provision of RE in secondary schools. This method replicated similar surveys conducted for secondary school teachers of RE in relation to the impact of the English Baccalaureate and report here [<http://www.natre.org.uk/free.php>]. Questions were asked to collect key information about the provision and support for RE in primary schools and about the training and support for primary teachers and others who deliver Religious Education. This was self-reporting data from teachers in schools and all efforts have been made to remove duplication from multiple school entries to allow an accurate picture of impact as perceived by the responding institutions. It should be noticed that due to the nature of the survey, it can be argued that respondents are more likely to be in schools where teachers support RE since those who are not committed to RE would be less likely to take the time to complete the survey.

Conclusions

1. Teachers are most likely to hold the position of RE subject leader for less than two years (40.9%) and least likely to continue beyond 5 years (68.6%) – table 5. This would suggest that in order to improve leadership in the subject, new subject leaders need to have access to continuous professional development and to reliable resources to support the leadership of the rest of the team delivering the subject.
2. Most teachers (61.5%) regard the resourcing of RE as ‘adequate’ but schools with a religious character (26%) are more likely to describe resourcing as ‘more than adequate’ than schools without a religious character (19%). –table 6
3. In just over three-fifths of schools, RE is taught solely by the class teacher. In other schools, classes are taught by, for example, a different teacher who specialises in RE, by a full or part time teacher who is covering the class-teacher’s planning, preparation and assessment time or by a teaching assistant. (table 7)

4. The amount of time allocated to the teaching of RE varies considerably between schools but especially between schools with and without a religious character. In 37% of schools without a religious character, RE is allocated less than 45 minutes per week and in 10% of them schools, less than 30 minutes. In schools with a religious character, 13% of schools allocate less than 45 minutes per week to RE and 3% less than 30 minutes. (table 8). There is very little difference between the time allocated to RE, History and Geography in the schools that responded. (table 9)
5. The provision for RE in initial teacher training in RE is insufficient to allow beginning teachers to feel confident about delivering the subject. Tables 10, 11 and 12. Almost 25% of teachers reported receiving no sessions on RE in their initial teacher education at all and almost 50% received less than 3 hours. Only 34.5% of teachers reported that they had less than 3 hours training in History and 12% in English. Even in 3 or 4 year training courses that incorporate qualified teacher status into a bachelor degree, 14.6% of trainees reported receiving no RE sessions and 18.11% less than three hours.
6. The consequences of 5 above are that less than 5% of primary teachers described themselves as feeling very confident about teaching RE when they started teaching and 37% as only reasonably confident. This means that almost 58% of primary teachers felt only slightly confident or not confident at all about delivering the subject. In addition, only 47.7% of teachers currently delivering RE describe themselves as 'very confident' about teaching RE. The remaining say they are reasonably confident or less. (Table 12)
7. The most popular resources teachers used to support planning and assessment are the local agreed syllabus (77.6% said they used it regularly), web-based resources (67.2%) and local schemes of work (41.3%) . Teachers also occasionally use material produced by NATRE/RE Today and QCA/QCDA units of work. They are unlikely to refer to a different authority or diocese's syllabus or their scheme of work. The heavy reliance on web-based resources would suggest that teachers must receive training in the use of these materials in order to avoid reproducing inaccurate, misleading or even offensive representations of a religion or belief. (table 13)

1. Types of school

Table 1 - The evidence base of 679 represents approximately 5% of primary schools in England

Type of school	No.	%
Academy with a religious character	12	1.8%
Voluntary Aided (CE)	214	31.5%
Voluntary Aided (RC)	14	2.1%
Academy without a religious character	19	2.8%
Voluntary Controlled	118	17.4%
Independent School	13	1.9%
Voluntary Aided (other)	7	1.0%
Community school	266	39.2%
Foundation School	8	1.2%
Free School	8	1.2%
Total number of schools	679	

2. How long is it since you achieved qualified teacher status?

Table 2 - Almost two-thirds of respondents had taught for 11 or more years

Time	Less than 1	1-4	5-10	11 or more
	4%	12.8%	18.9%	64.4%

3. Are you the subject leader for RE?

Table 3 – The majority of respondents were current or former subject leaders.

75% Yes
8.1% No but was previously
1.6% No but would like to be in the future
15.3% No

4. The main role of respondents

Table 4 – around half of respondents were class teachers and a fifth were senior leaders

50.4% class teachers
19.9% senior leaders
8.4% middle leaders
14.9% other role
2.7% class teachers –newly qualified
3.5% Teaching Assistant
0.3% Teacher in training

5. How long do subject leaders for RE hold this post on average?

Table 5 – The most commonly reported period was between 3-5 years but just over 40% of subject leaders hold the post for less than two years. 11% of current subject leaders achieved qualified teacher status between 1 and 4 years ago.

Less than one year	20.4%
1-2 years	20.5%
3-5 years	27.7%
6-10 years	19.6%

6. The level of resources for RE in the school as judged by respondents

Table 6 – There are similar levels of resourcing for RE in schools with and without a religious character, although 26% of the former reported good levels of resourcing as opposed to 19% of the latter.

Resources	Less than adequate	Adequate	More than adequate
All schools	14.6%	61.5%	23.9%
Academy and Community Schools with a religious character	12%	58%	26%
Academy and Community Schools without a religious character	17%	61%	19%

7. The planning and delivery of RE in the school

Table 7 – in just under 40% of schools, RE is not delivered solely by the class teacher. In the majority of the schools that responded, RE is delivered by a teacher.

RE is delivered by

Solely the class teacher	61.5% (67.5% of class teachers plan the RE for their class)
Another teacher in planning preparation and assessment time	6.7%
Teaching Assistant	4.3%
A combination of the above	9%
Other (Headteacher, RE specialist teacher, part time staff etc)	18.4%

8. Time for Religious Education

Table 8 -

6.1% of all schools dedicate less than 30 minutes per week to RE but 10% of schools without a religious character fall into this category. Almost 25% of all schools dedicate less than 45 minutes per week to RE but 10% of schools without a religious character fall into this category. Most schools (81.7%) dedicate less than 60 minutes to RE

Minutes for RE per week on average	Less than 30	Less than 45	Less than 60	Less than 90	90+
All schools	6.1%	24.5%	81.7%	93.5%	6.4%
Academy and Community Schools with a religious character	3%	13%	74%	88%	7%
Academy and Community Schools without a religious character	10%	37%	85%	93%	5%

9. Timetable time for RE

Table 9 - A comparison between time dedicated to RE in comparison with History and Geography shows in most schools RE is allocated around the same time on the timetable as History and Geography

Minutes per week on average	Less than 30	Less than 45	Less than 60	Less than 90	90+
RE	6.1%	24.5%	81.7%	93.5%	6.4%
History	7.2%	32.5%	82%	95.3%	4.7%
Geography	7.8%	35%	83.6%	95.6%	4.4%

10. Training for RE in initial teacher education

Table 10 - Time provided in training to learn to teach RE in comparison with History and English

A quarter of primary teachers received no training in RE at all and almost half received less than three hours in their entire training programme. In comparison, almost 16% of teachers received no training in the teaching of History and almost 35% received less than three hours. 7.2% received no training in English or literacy and just over 12% less than three hours.

Hours training for each subject	none	Less than 3	Less than 6	Less than 10	Less than 15	Less than 20	21+
RE	24.4	48.5	65.1	74.7	82	87.6	12.3
History	15.8	34.5	53.2	70.3	80.8	90.3	9.7
English/Literacy	7.2	12.1	18.2	25.5	33.2	44.4	55.5

11. Comparison between routes into teaching in relation to preparation to teach Religious Education

Table 11 - On PGCE courses (one year), a similar number of trainees (24%) received no training in RE at all as above. Even on 3 -4 year, Bachelor Degrees that incorporate QTS, almost 15% of students received no RE training and 21% less than 6 hours over the three or four year course. Trainees on school based route fared marginally better with just over 20% of trainees receiving no RE training and almost 83% less than three hours overall.

Hours training for each subject	none	Less than 3	Less than 6	Less than 10	Less than 15	Less than 20	20+	Proportion of trainees on this route
PGCE (1 year)	24%	53%	75%	85.1%	90.1%	93.8%	6.2%	35.5
Bachelor Degree incorporating QTS (3 or 4 years)	14.6%	18.1%	21.3%	22.7	24.9	26.6	74.4%	43.7
GTP or other school based programme	21.9%	82.9%	92.6%	100%	100%	100%	0%	6.4

(1 year)								
Other	44%	54.8%	64.5%	68.8%	74.1%	92.6%	7.4%	14.5

12. Levels of confidence at the start of the teaching career and now

Table 12 – Less than 5% of primary teachers described themselves as feeling very confident about teaching RE when they started teaching and 37% as reasonably confident. This means that almost 58% of primary teachers felt only slightly confident or not confident at all about the subject.

Only 47.7% of teachers currently delivering RE describe themselves as ‘very confident about teaching RE’. The remaining say they are reasonably confident or less.

	Not confident at all	Slightly confident	Reasonably confident	Very confident
When first started teaching	17.2%	40.7%	37.2%	4.9%
Now	0.8%	5.9%	45.6%	47.7%

13. Support that teachers of RE in primary schools use to support planning and assessment.

Table 13 - The most popular resources are the *local agreed syllabus*, *web-based resources* and *local schemes of work*. Teachers also occasionally use material produced by NATRE/RE Today and QCA/QCDA units of work.

They are unlikely to refer to a different authority or diocese’s syllabus or their scheme of work.

	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Your own locally agreed syllabus	77.6%	7.9%	4.4%	10.1%
A different locally agreed syllabus	5.1%	19.4%	17.8%	57.6%
Your own LA-produced scheme of Work	41.3%	13.2%	9.75	35.9%

A different LA's scheme of work	4.8%	17.5%	20.1%	57.5%
Your own diocesan or faith community syllabus	29.7%	8.9%	8.5%	535
A different diocesan or faith community syllabus	1.5%	9.3%	13.1%	76.1%
QCA/QCDA units of work	8.25	23.0%	25.8%	43.0%
A scheme of work produced by your own school	32.9%	14.5%	8.2%	44.4%
Material produced by NATRE/RE Today	26.1%	30.8%	16.1%	27.0%
Web-based resources	67.2%	24.4%	2.9%	5.4%
Other		21.9%	13.6%	49.0%

14.A selection of teachers' comments

1. As a Coordinator I find we need to support fellow colleagues which I find is ok in theory but when it comes to delivering the curriculum - what is the best way to support other than being free to talk/share/support?
2. I am a permanent part time teacher who is employed in two specific classes each week to provide PPA cover. As such, I teach RE as the class teachers do not want to teach this subject. Since starting the RE Today and NATRE Project for Excellent RE in [name of local authority] I have become much more confident in teaching RE and enjoy teaching it more as well.
3. The [name of union] Action Short of Strike Action stipulates that if you are not paid to be a subject leader that you should limit your role. This is difficult to do but I have done LESS RE work as a result. This has meant that I feel frustrated and torn in two directions at once as you can appreciate. I understand why the [union] are saying this but I want RE to be supported better in my school. Any answers?
4. I teach RE as a HLTA. I plan and will assess children's work. No formal training initially to start teaching
5. Now working in a church school- RE is given a much higher status than I previously experienced. This has a huge impact on the children's PSE development as well as their spiritual and moral conduct.
6. I am a Head Teacher and have worked in faith school but am now in a community school. As Head Teacher I have the confidence and the responsibility to provide excellent RE and PSME experiences for all the children and the staff. The quality of Collective Worship opportunities is also important.
7. Up until two years ago, the RE coordinators in [name of local authority] met 3 times a year for a network meeting led by the RE Advisor and as part as the continuing

CPD which was paid for by a special in school price for in [name of local authority]. This service is no longer available and schools have to pay for this service independently and so CPD is not built into the system. Hence RE CPD has taken a backseat, though RE continues to be taught through the curriculum. Due to all the pressures on high achievement, progress and Ofsted etc on Literacy and Maths; RE has and will always take a back seat in terms of being a school priority which is a real shame.

8. When I worked in [name of local authority] there were regular local meetings which all schools were invited too, unfortunately this is no longer the case for any subject. I feel CPD naively has been axed! However the diocese still offer courses but schools can be reluctant to let more than one staff member go and [town] is a long way from [name of local authority]. Although I have managed the half-day course at The xxx Centre which was very useful.
9. I am concerned about the future of RE in my school after my imminent retirement. I was brought up with an understanding of the Christian faith and have been interested in discovering about other faiths. This is not the case with my colleagues so I think RE may become a 'Cinderella' subject which drops off the teaching week when other things happen.
10. RE is often a subject which is seen as being one that can be bypassed if something else takes precedent i.e. Maths and English. I find that teachers aren't responsive to it or to any work I personally have done to ensure that it is taught and that resources are readily available for teachers. I have found that its profile is not raised enough and therefore RE has a label of being less important in comparison to the 'core' subjects. I also think that – having studied Philosophy and Ethics at A-level - people have a misconstrued perception that RE involves someone telling you what they/a faith believe and that's 'your lot' so to speak. Instead, people need to realise that we should be making strong community links to allow children to have a 'real' cultural experience and that we should encourage the valuable philosophical discussions and issues that can arise from well planned and taught sessions.