MEDIA RELEASE

Full course GCSE Religious Studies entries rise, but number of schools with no RS students at all is increasing

The number of pupils in England and Wales taking GCSE Religious Studies full course has risen again this year, up 5.3% against 2014 to 283,756. This echoes the increase in A Level entries, which are up 6.5% this year compared with 2014.

However the removal of short courses from Department for Education (DfE) performance tables is having a serious and negative impact on the number of pupils choosing to take RS at GCSE level, with an increasing number of schools having no pupils at all taking the subject.

DfE performance tables do not take account of results in short courses. The GCSE short course RS, which had been very popular in the past and provided a reward for schools who provided RE for all, has suffered as a result. The short course is delivered at GCSE standard but covers half the content of a full course and is therefore worth half a GCSE. Changes in entries for short courses have a disproportionately significant impact on RS: almost two thirds of all short course GCSEs taken in England and Wales are in RS.

The damage to take-up of the RS GCSE short course comes at a time when RS is otherwise a subject growing in popularity and when the government is rightly emphasising the importance for young people to have knowledge and understanding of religions and non-religious beliefs. In addition, reforms to GCSE RS make it an increasingly attractive and rigorous subject, while increasing numbers of pupils are carrying RS on to A-level.

The key outcomes for Religious Education in England and Wales at KS4 in 2015 are as follows:

- There were 283,756 entries for the full course in GCSE RS, a rise of 5.3% from 2014 (269,494)
- There were 86,679 entries for the short course in GCSE RS, a decline of 26.8% from 2014 (118,481)
- There were 370,435 entries for GCSE RS (combined short and full courses), a decline of 4.5% from 2014 (387,915)
- In 2014 there were 1,197 schools making no entries for any RS qualification; a rise from 268 in 2010.
- 29.6% of entries for the full course in GCSE RS were awarded an A or an A*
- 11.8% of entries for the short course in GCSE RS were awarded an A or an A*

When RS GCSE entries in England over the past four years are compared to those in Wales (where the EBacc and the average point score at GCSE have not been adopted as school performance measures), the following patterns emerge:

England
- Take up of the GCSE RS short course has fallen from 211,269 in 2012 to 68,890 in 2015 (-67.3%)
- GCSE RS full course entries in England have increased from 216,182 in 2012 to 271,917 in 2015 (25.7%)
Wales

- Short course GCSE RS entries have declined slightly from 19,182 in 2012 to 17,789 in 2015 (-7.3%)
- RS GCSE full course entries have increased from 10,409 in 2012 to 11,839 in 2015 (13.7%)

Overall this means that compared with 2012 over 85,000 fewer pupils in England will complete key stage 4 this year having not gaining a qualification in Religious Studies (a drop of 20.3%).

This echoes research by the National Association of Teachers of RE (published in November 2013) that found that a third of community schools and over a third of academies without a religious character are still failing to meet their legal or contractual agreements to provide religious education for this key age group.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short Course (England)</td>
<td>261,399</td>
<td>254,698</td>
<td>233,998</td>
<td>211,269</td>
<td>150,621</td>
<td>99,661</td>
<td>68,890</td>
<td>-30.9%</td>
<td>-73.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Course (England)</td>
<td>164,647</td>
<td>170,767</td>
<td>199,752</td>
<td>216,373</td>
<td>239,409</td>
<td>258,067</td>
<td>271,917</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>65.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined entries (England)</td>
<td>426,046</td>
<td>425,465</td>
<td>433,750</td>
<td>427,642</td>
<td>390,030</td>
<td>357,668</td>
<td>340,807</td>
<td>-4.7%</td>
<td>-20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Course (Wales)</td>
<td>20,769</td>
<td>19,683</td>
<td>18,318</td>
<td>19,182</td>
<td>18,467</td>
<td>18,820</td>
<td>17,789</td>
<td>-5.5%</td>
<td>-14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Course (Wales)</td>
<td>5,656</td>
<td>6,100</td>
<td>9,727</td>
<td>10,409</td>
<td>11,654</td>
<td>11,427</td>
<td>11,839</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>109.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined entries (Wales)</td>
<td>26,425</td>
<td>25,783</td>
<td>28,045</td>
<td>29,591</td>
<td>30,121</td>
<td>30,247</td>
<td>29,628</td>
<td>-2.0%</td>
<td>-12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Course (England and Wales)</td>
<td>282,168</td>
<td>274,381</td>
<td>252,316</td>
<td>230,451</td>
<td>169,088</td>
<td>118,481</td>
<td>86,679</td>
<td>-26.8%</td>
<td>-69.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Course (England and Wales)</td>
<td>170,303</td>
<td>176,867</td>
<td>209,479</td>
<td>226,782</td>
<td>251,063</td>
<td>269,494</td>
<td>283,756</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>66.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined entries (England and Wales)</td>
<td>452,471</td>
<td>451,248</td>
<td>461,795</td>
<td>457,233</td>
<td>420,151</td>
<td>387,915</td>
<td>370,435</td>
<td>-4.5%</td>
<td>-18.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [http://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/gcse](http://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/gcse)

Comment from Daniel Hugill, Chair, National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE)

“Congratulations to the many students receiving their Religious Studies results today, and to their teachers who have worked tirelessly to ensure that their students can reach their full potential.

GCSE in Religious Studies makes a key contribution to preparing young people for adult life in our pluralistic society and global community. It is clear though that not all students receiving their GCSE results today were offered the opportunity to study this important subject.

The increasing number of schools that have not entered a single student for an accredited Religious Studies qualification is a grave concern. It is hard to see how these schools are ensuring a suitable degree of religious literacy in their students. NATRE will continue to call for a system that rewards schools for guiding students to study a combination of courses at 14+ that are in each individual’s best interests and that will properly prepare them for life in the modern world. The current set of school accountability measures falls short of this aim.”
Comment from Joyce Miller, Chair, Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC):

"I am heartened to see the rising number of entries for the GCSE full course in Religious Studies. This demonstrates the attraction of an academically rigorous subject that helps prepare students to understand an increasingly diverse modern world.

However it is frustrating that this enthusiasm among pupils for RS is not being translated into entries for the RS short course due to it not being appropriately recognised in performance tables.

It is alarming that in England there is an overall decline in pupils receiving a solid grounding in RE due to the dramatic fall in short course entries. The danger is that, as our society becomes increasingly multicultural and religious extremism continues to dominate the news agenda, we create a section of society that lacks an understanding of diverse faiths and beliefs that is essential to growing up in twenty-first century Britain."

-ends-

For media enquiries please contact:

Colin Hallmark, 3:nine Communications:
Tel: 0207 736 1888; 07745 914170;
email: info@3nine.co.uk

National Association of Teachers of RE

NATRE is the subject teacher association for RE professionals in primary and secondary schools and higher education, providing a representative voice at national level and publications and courses to promote professional development. NATRE’s Executive consists of a majority of serving teachers from primary and secondary schools who are elected for a three-year term of service.

Religious Education Council of England and Wales

Established in 1973, the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC) brings together over 60 national organisations. These comprise academic and professional associations specialising in religions and religious education, as well as individual religions and belief organisations inclusive of the range of faith communities found nationally, including the British Humanist Association.