

## **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 (v1.2)**

#### **Introduction**

This is an analysis of the data gathered from a questionnaire on the impact of government policy, including accountability measures and the English Baccalaureate on Religious Education. It relates particularly to the study of Religious Studies GCSE and seeks to make the case for more attention to be paid by the Department for Education (DfE) and its ministers to the level of provision and quality of Religious Education in all schools.

This survey was conducted during the months of June and July via a number of teacher networks supported by the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE) and RE Today Services, and was publicised via social media networks and via the electronic networks of other RE organisations including AREIAC, AULRE, and NASACRE. Replies were received from 419 individuals in 391 schools of different types.

#### **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 is similar to surveys conducted in previous years and, where applicable, this report includes the previous data as a comparison. Questions were asked to collect key information about how the provision and support for RE might have changed in key stages three and four and about the respondents' views about the reason for the changes. 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 with a specialism in RE are employed since those who are not committed to RE would be less likely to take the time to complete the survey.

## Conclusions

1. **PROVISION:** Whilst the legal requirement to provide Religious Education for all pupils is being met in almost 90% of schools at **Key Stage 3**, according to this survey, at **Key Stage 4** almost 30% of community schools and 40% of academy schools without a religious character do not meet their legal or contractual requirements for RE (**Table 3**). NATRE is hopeful that the renewed interest in Religious Education from the DfE and Ofsted will reduce the number of schools that do not meet these requirements. NATRE will continue to lobby the various agencies (including the DfE) to consider what levers they can use to further reduce non-compliance across the different types of schools. It will also be following the recommendation from Minister for Schools, Nick Gibb (6<sup>th</sup> November 2014) that the Education Funding Agency is made aware of academies that are not making provision for RE.
2. **GCSE**
  - a. **Entries -GCSE Religious Studies Full Course** continues to be very popular in the schools that responded to this survey. Only 7% of schools reported that they will make no entries for the Full Course in 2015 as the predicted decline of this course in the wake of the English Baccalaureate has failed to materialise.
  - b. **Entries – GCSE Religious Studies Short Course.** In contrast however, the removal of GCSE Short Courses from the list of qualifications that contribute points to performance tables has inevitably led to a rapid decline in entries for this qualification. 61% of the schools that responded stated that they will have no entries for GCSE Religious Studies at Short Course in 2015 (**Table 7**).
  - c. **Timetabling of and time for GCSE:**
    - i. There is a clear trend towards offering GCSE Religious Studies courses over three years instead of two, as has previously been the norm (**Table 11**). 25% of schools delivered the full course in this way in 2012 and this has risen to 42.2% of schools for the cohort that will take their GCSE in 2015.
    - ii. The most common mode of delivery is still the two year model which accounts for 57.7% of entries. We have no data to assess what impact a three year delivery might have on student attainment but this might suggest an increase in demand since students would need to use knowledge, understanding and skills retained over a longer period. A further issue is that GCSE is designed for students aged 14-16 and it is questionable whether or not some of the topics covered in some specifications are suitable for younger students especially summer born children who may be barely 13 when they start Year 9.
    - iii. Almost a third of the schools in our survey now attempt to deliver this course over less than the recommended teaching time (**Table 12**). There is a growing body of evidence, including from Ofsted subject surveys, that this practice is detrimental to students' Religious Education; failing to meet the aims of GCSE courses which include developing a coherent understanding of religious beliefs, ideas and practices. The introduction of performance related pay also raises the issue of whether or not teachers of Religious Studies GCSE are at a disadvantage from their colleagues who teach other subjects unless target grades are reduced to take account of the insufficient time provided.
3. **RE AS A SPECIALISM:**
  - a. Subject specific training is essential for the delivery of high quality provision in any subject. 68.5% of the schools that responded to this question reported that they had received no subject specific training in school in the last academic year. 43.8% reported that they had attended no training outside of school. Just over 16% reported that they had attended two days of training outside of school.
  - b. In 73% of schools the number of specialist teachers of RE either remained stable or in 15% of cases was increased (**Table 4**). In some schools however the number of specialists employed is falling. The most common reason for this in 64% of cases, was when specialist teachers leave, and are not being replaced, leaving lessons taught by teachers of other subjects (**Table 5**).
  - c. This survey also found that in 38% of schools more than one in five lessons, and in 52% of schools more than one in ten, Religious Education lessons are delivered by teachers whose main time is spent in another curriculum area (**Table 6**). This lack of specialist RE teachers is real concern to NATRE and should be a priority for policy makers. NATRE hope that in the long-term the reintroductions of training bursaries will act to correct this. We will also continue to work with the DfE, and other interested parties, to ensure that the available training places are filled and that RE teaching is an attractive prospect for those looking to enter the teaching profession. Recent research has found that, "The most effective teachers have deep knowledge of the subjects they teach, and when teachers' knowledge falls below a certain level it is a significant impediment to students' learning"<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *What makes great teaching? Review of the underpinning research*, Robert Coe, Cesare Aloisi, Steve Higgins and Lee Elliot Major, October 2014 (CEM, Durham University, and The Sutton Trust)

## 1. Types of school

Table 1

Type of school	No.	%
Community	92	23.5%
Academy with a religious character	35	9.0%
Academy without a religious character	163	41.7%
Free School	6	1.5%
Grammar School	22	5.6%
Independent School	26	6.6%
Voluntary Aided (CofE)	17	4.3%
Voluntary Aided (other)	7	1.8%
Voluntary Aided (RC)	15	3.8%
Sixth Form College	2	0.5%
Technical College	1	0.3%
Special School	1	0.3%
Voluntary Controlled	3	0.8%
Other (please specify)	1	0.3%
	391 in total	

## 2. Are legal requirements with regard to RE provision for all being met?

Table 2

	2014/15 KS3	2015/6 KS3	2014/15 KS4	2015/6 KS4
Yes	91.3%	90.5%	69.7%	67.7%
No	8.7%	9.5%	30.3%	32.3%

Table 2 above shows that, where just over 1 in 10 schools were failing to meet their responsibilities to make provision for all pupils at KS3, almost one in 3 schools were not doing so at KS4. This figure has continued to rise slowly over recent years but varies between school types (see table 3 below).

163 Academies without a religious character responded to the survey and of these less than half (48.3%) report that the contractual requirements for RE are being met at KS4. This is a sharp decline from last year when 61.3% reported appropriate provision for RE at this key stage. In addition, 65.9% of community schools report that their school is meeting the legal requirements.

Note that whereas the vast majority of voluntary aided Church of England and Catholic schools meet legal requirements, only 67.1% of other schools of this type reported doing so.

**Table 3: Percentage of schools reporting that legal requirements are **not** being met by type of school**

Type of school	KS4 2014-5	KS4 2015-6	KS3 2014-5	KS3 2015-6	No. of schools responding to this question
Community	33.0%	34.1%	12.5%	13.6%	88
Academy with a religious character	16.1%	12.9%	0.0%	3.2%	31
Academy without a religious character	38.7%	51.7%	8.7%	16.5%	150
Free School	20.0%	40.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5
Grammar School	10.5%	21.1%	5.3%	0.0%	19
Independent School	33.3%	37.5%	8.3%	8.3%	24
Voluntary Aided (CofE)	7.1%	7.1%	0.0%	7.1%	14
Voluntary Aided (other)	42.9%	42.9%	28.6%	14.3%	7
Voluntary Aided (RC)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	14
Voluntary Controlled	100.0%	0.0%	50.0%	100.0%	2

### 3. Do the requirements in the local agreed syllabus make a difference to the level of provision?

Schools were asked if their Agreed Syllabus **REQUIRES** a nationally accredited qualification to be studied, if the syllabus **RECOMMENDED** this or if there was a different requirement.

	RE for all at KS3	RE for all at KS4
An accredited qualification was <b>REQUIRED</b>	96%	86%
An accredited qualification was <b>RECOMMENDED</b>	88%	64%

Local Authority maintained schools are legally required to make provision for RE in accordance with their locally Agreed Syllabus. The syllabuses, reviewed every five years, make their own decisions about programmes of study for LA maintained schools and voluntary controlled schools in their area. This survey has found that the language used to describe the requirements for at Key Stage 4 RE has an impact, not only on KS4 but on Key Stage 3 also. When the syllabus **REQUIRES** that a nationally accredited course is followed e.g. GCSE short course, then schools are 22% more likely to be providing RE for all at this key stage and 8% more likely to be doing so at KS3.

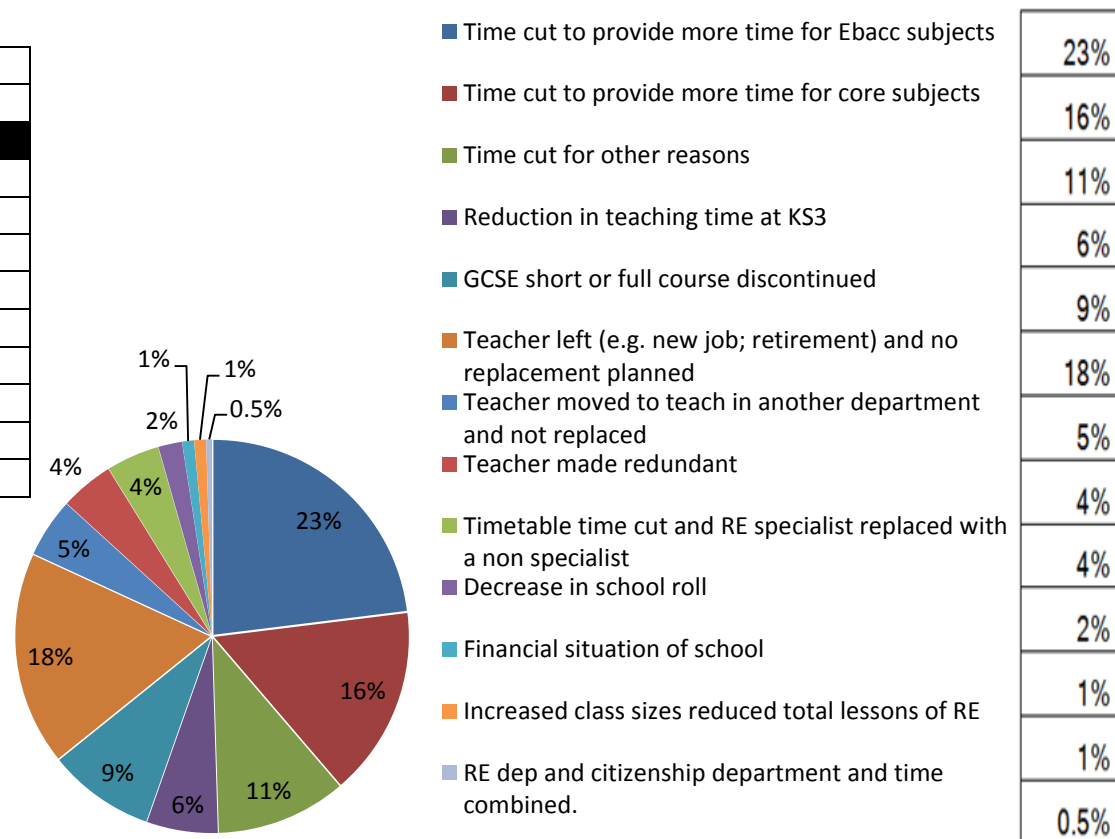
#### 4. Changes to the number of RE subject specialist staff for 2014/2015

The good news for teachers of RE (table 4) is that in 61% of schools, there has been no change in the number of specialist staff teaching RE and in a further 20% there has been an increase. In 28% of schools however – more than 1 in 4, the number of specialist staff has been cut, in addition to similar cuts in the previous two years.

The remainder of Table 4 however shows that these changes vary considerably between schools.

**Table 4**

No change	Decrease	Increase	
<b>61%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>All schools</b>
51%	28%	20%	Community
61%	16%	23%	Academy with a religious character
52%	30%	18%	Academy without a religious character
80%	20%	0%	Free School
63%	21%	16%	Grammar School
71%	8%	21%	Independent School
57%	29%	14%	Voluntary Aided (CofE)
14%	43%	43%	Voluntary Aided (other)
71%	21%	7%	Voluntary Aided (RC)



**5. What proportion of the RE provision in your school is delivered by teachers whose main time is spent in another curriculum area?**

**Table 5: Proportion of lessons taught by teachers whose main time is spent teaching another curriculum area.**

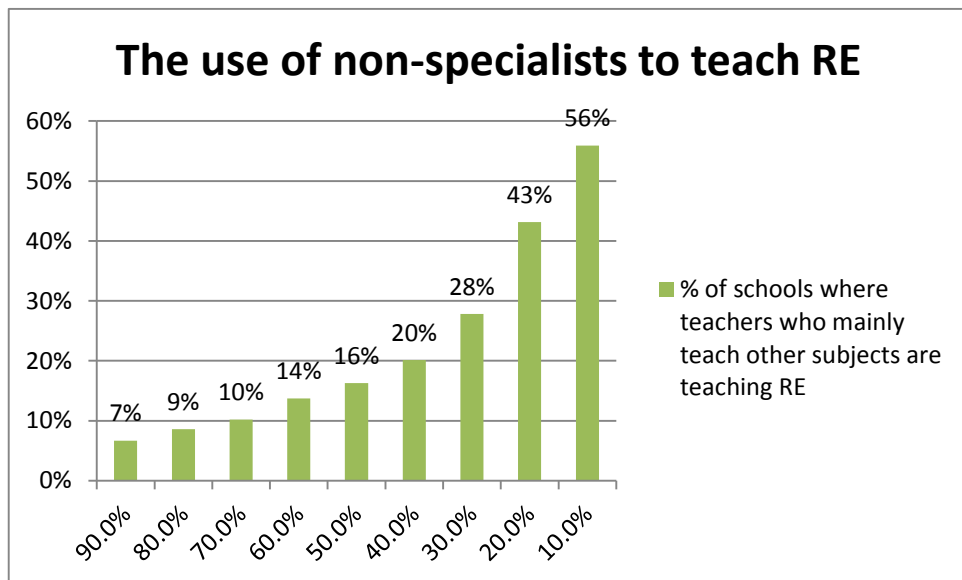


Table 5 shows that only in 40% of schools 1 in 5 lessons are taught by a teacher who spends the major part of their timetable teaching another subject. In 10% of schools that figure rises to 70% of lessons. Part of the reason for this is lack of RE teachers. The government has failed to heed the warnings that failing to provide bursaries for RE teachers and then providing only the smallest bursary for 2015-16 trainees has led to a 37% shortfall in recruitment this year. In addition, cuts to places in popular University led provision has caused several world ranking providers such as University of Warwick and University of Roehampton to close their RE courses.

This finding is consistent with the data provided by the Department for Education’s own School Workforce Survey which found that over half of those teaching Religious Education had no post A level qualification in the subject; almost twice as many as for History for example.

## 6. Has there been an increase or decrease in the amount of RE that will be taught in 2015/2016 compared to 2014/2015?

26% of schools reported an increase in timetable time

25% reported a decrease

49% no change

### The top reasons given for the decrease in timetable time were:

- 35% reported: Time cut to provide more time for Ebacc subjects
- 24% reported: Teacher left (e.g. new job; retirement) and no replacement planned
- 19% reported: Time cut to provide more time for core subjects
- 14% reported: GCSE short or full course discontinued
- 8% reported: Other reasons

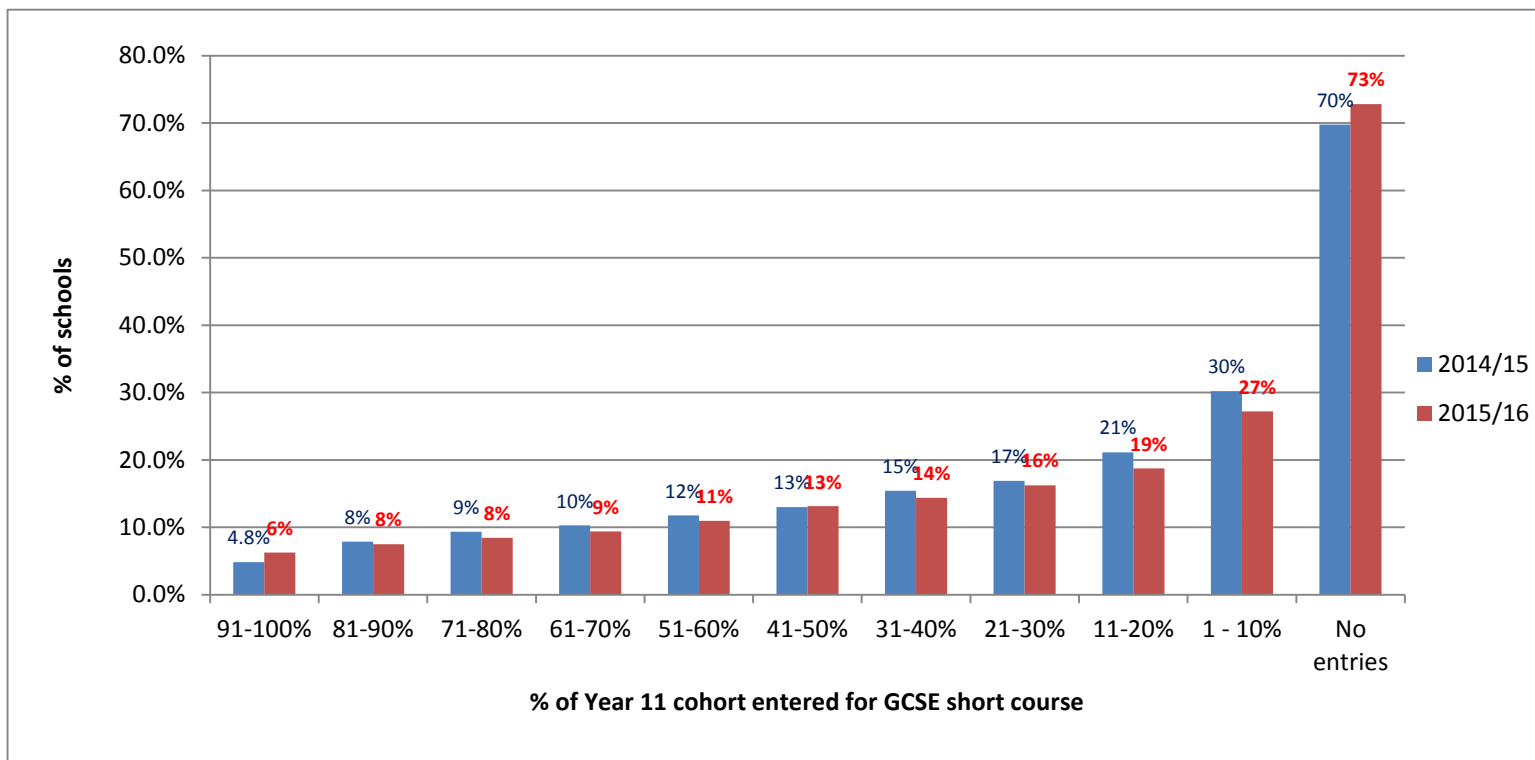
### The top reasons given for an increase in timetable time were:

- 32% reported: All students now taking full course GCSE
- 31% reported: More students opting for full course
- 12% reported: Increasing demand for A and AS RS
- 25% reported: Other reasons



## 7. Entries for Year 11 students for the GCSE Short Course – past and projected

**Table 7 – What proportion of the Year 11 cohort has been or will be entered for GCSE short course?**



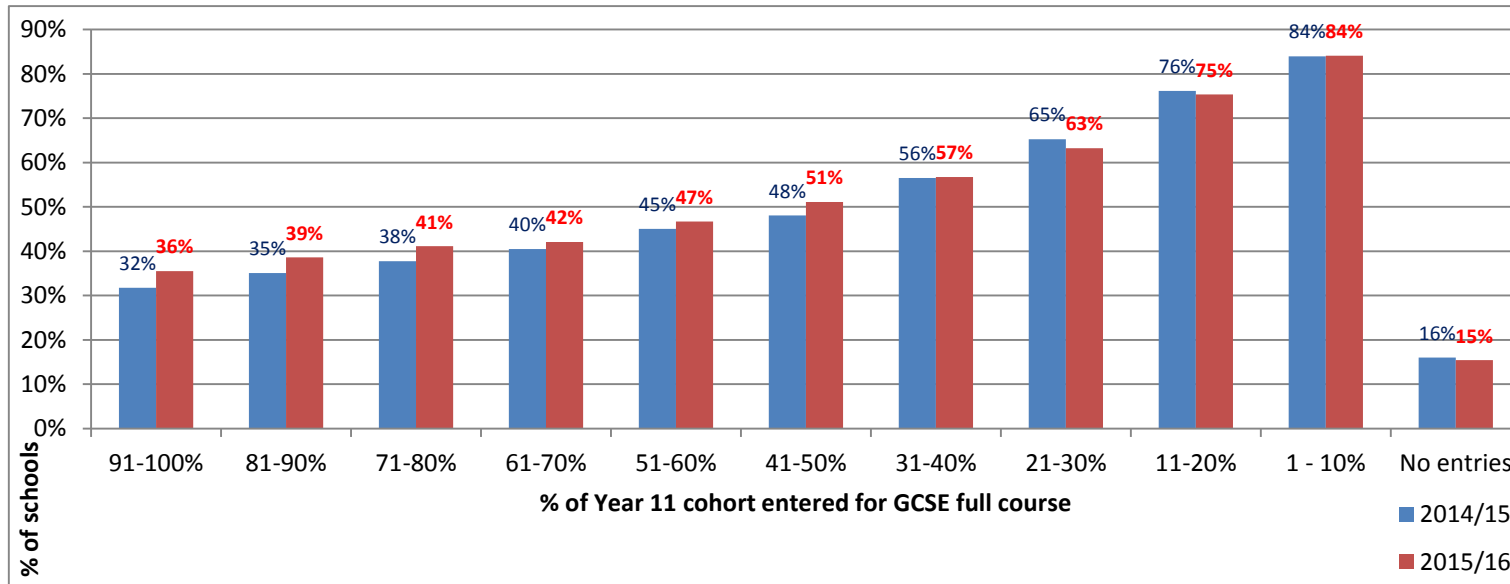
% of year 11 cohort entered for GCSE short course	2014/15	2015/16
91-100%	4.8%	6%
81-90%	8%	8%
71-80%	9%	8%
61-70%	10%	9%
51-60%	12%	11%
41-50%	13%	13%
31-40%	15%	14%
21-30%	17%	16%
11-20%	21%	19%
1 - 10%	30%	27%
No entries	70%	73%

Table 7 shows that entries to the Short Course Religious Studies have continued to fall. The number of schools now entering no students at all for this course is now 73%. Schools responding to the survey reported two reasons for this. Firstly, the impact of the English Baccalaureate meaning that there is less time on the Key Stage 4 timetable and secondly the removal of short course from the list of qualifications which counted in a school’s average point score from 2014.

The short course has grown in popularity over the past ten years, particularly because it provided a formal accreditation for the core RE provision which all students should receive throughout their school careers including Key Stage 4. For those students who do not wish to take a full course, it proved a powerful motivator to take their studies in RE seriously and rewarded those who worked hard with a GCSE grade. GCSE short course is awarded at the same standard as full course, but covers half the content, hence it is worth half a GCSE.

### 8. Proportion of Year 11 cohort entered for the GCSE Full Course – past and projected

In contrast, the full course remains popular with entries remaining broadly similar to the last academic year.



**Table 8**

	2014/15	2015/16
91-100%	32%	36%
81-90%	35%	39%
71-80%	38%	41%
61-70%	40%	42%
51-60%	45%	47%
41-50%	48%	51%
31-40%	56%	57%
21-30%	65%	63%
11-20%	76%	75%
1 - 10%	84%	84%
No entries	16%	15%

## 9. Changes to the way the GCSE full course is delivered

Table 8

How is the GCSE Full Course delivered?	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
1/3 of time over 3 years (starting in Year 9)	32.9%	36.4%	38.5%
1/2 of time over 2 years (starting in Year10)	67.1%	63.6%	61.5%

Table 8 shows that there is now a significant trend towards offering the course over three years instead of two, as has previously been the norm. This practice, which was almost unheard of four years ago, is now reported by almost 40% of schools. Where RS Full course cannot appear in the Humanities option box due to EBacc pressures, this may be seen as a means of retaining a Full Course option in an overcrowded Key Stage 4 curriculum. The disadvantages are clear, however, since students will be revising material studied up to three years previously as opposed to two as with most of their other subjects. They may also be studying content which was intended for more mature students. It remains to be seen how this will impact on student attainment.

## 10. Timetabled time for GCSE RS examination course

Table 9 – How much time is allocated to GCSE RS over the course?

Three year route	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	Two year route	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Less than 120 hours	43.3%	42.6%	37.1%	Less than 120 hours	31.3%	29.6%	28.1%
120 - 140 hours	30.9%	32.4%	36.2%	120 - 140 hours	36.4%	39.7%	28.9%
More than 140 hours	25.8%	25.0%	26.7%	More than 140 hours	32.3%	30.7%	33.0%

**GCSE Full Course specifications are designed to be taught over a period of 120-140 learning hours.** This is one of the criteria used by Ofqual when approving a specification for teaching to ensure that each GCSE is, as far as is possible, of equal demand. It is clear that some schools are not providing the same amount of time for each subject and almost 40% of schools offering the Full Course on a three year route are expecting candidates to be prepared for an examination in RS with less time than the course demands. In some cases, teachers feel under pressure to deliver a Full Course in the time Ofqual expects for a Short Course.

Ofsted has commented on this pattern of delivery and found that in some cases, the quality of Religious Education provided for students is unsatisfactory, even when the examination results are good or even outstanding. Students can be provided with a concentrated exam-driven course which does not meet the aims of the specifications in terms of their learning in the subject.

## 11. How much training in Religious Education did teachers receive in the academic year 2014-2015?

**Table 10**

72.16% of the schools that responded reported that they had received no subject specific training in school in the last academic year. This is an increase from 68% two years ago. In addition, almost 40% of schools reported that they had attended no training outside of school. Only 57% of teachers managed to gain release from school for one day or more to receive training; this would have included courses run by awarding organisations for their examination specifications.

Given the issues reported above in relation to teachers delivering Religious Education when the majority of their timetable is allocated to another subject, this is disappointing.

	School	Out of school
5+	2.20%	5.50%
4+	5.13%	11.00%
3+	8.06%	19.74%
2+	13.92%	33.66%
1+	21.61%	57.61%
0.5+	27.84%	60.19%
zero days	72.16%	39.81%