

Survey of teachers: the impact of the English Baccalaureate on RE in secondary schools

Introduction

NATRE conducted an online survey of secondary schools over ten days in January 2011 on possible curriculum changes to RE in the curriculum in light of the introduction of the English Baccalaureate. The data from the final analysis of the responses from 900 schools is given below in **Part 1**.

During December 2010 and April 2011 NATRE received a large number of emails and phone calls from concerned teachers. These responses are consistent with the comments provided in the online survey, and generally provide more detail about what is happening in schools. Extracts from these emails are given below in **Part 2**.

RE refers to compulsory Religious Education which all students must study. When the subject is taken as a GCSE it is called Religious Studies (RS). Many schools accredit compulsory RE by entering students for the GCSE RS Short Course. A significant number of students choose GCSE RS Full Course, which both meets the compulsory requirement and enables students to study an academic subject of their choice.

Methodology

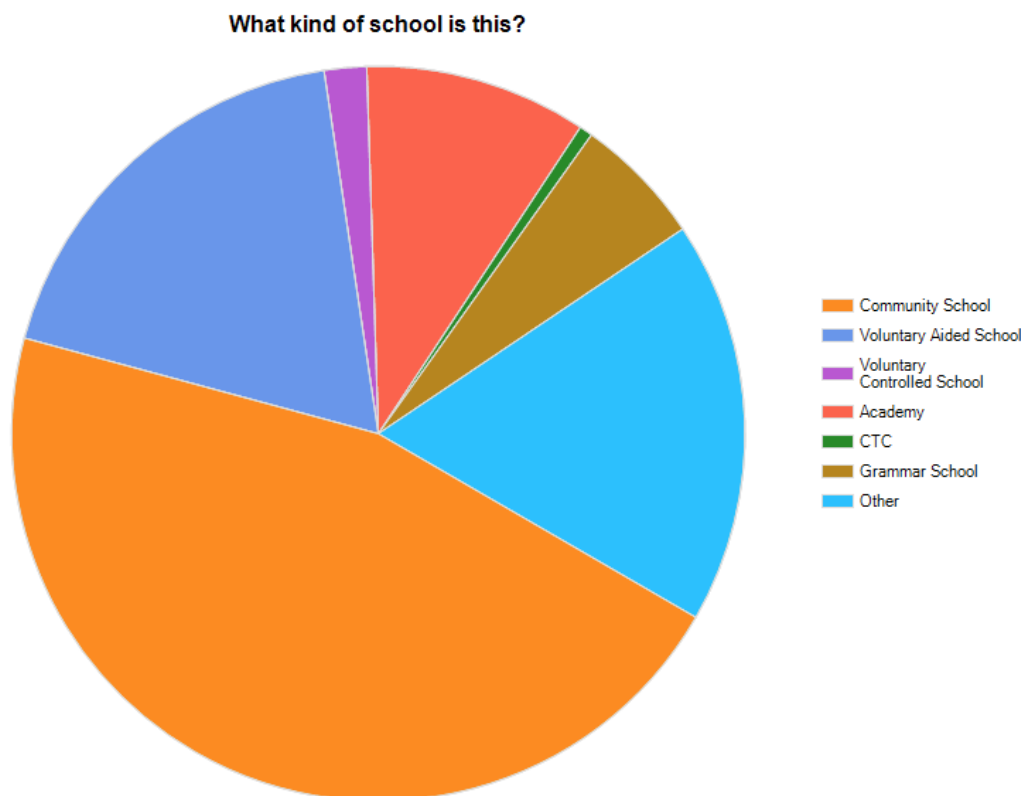
A short questionnaire was formulated focusing on

- (i) school data
- (ii) current GCSE provision
- (iii) planned changes in provision in 2012, 2013
- (iv) other changes to RE in light of other factors.

The link to this online questionnaire was circulated primarily via NATRE's membership database, RE Today's subscriber database, NATRE's local network groups of teachers, and the organisations' websites to teachers in secondary schools across England. This questionnaire went live on 17 January and in the days to 28 January generated 790 responses (i.e. 790 individual schools).

Results

a) Types of schools



The sample is of almost 900 schools [maintained and independent] from about 3,332 maintained secondary schools¹. If we removed the 'other' category from the responses we have a response rate of 721 schools from 3,332 or a rate of 21.6%. It is not unreasonable to consider this a representative sample - although the data gathering instrument was biased towards schools that are on data lists of organisations interested in RE².

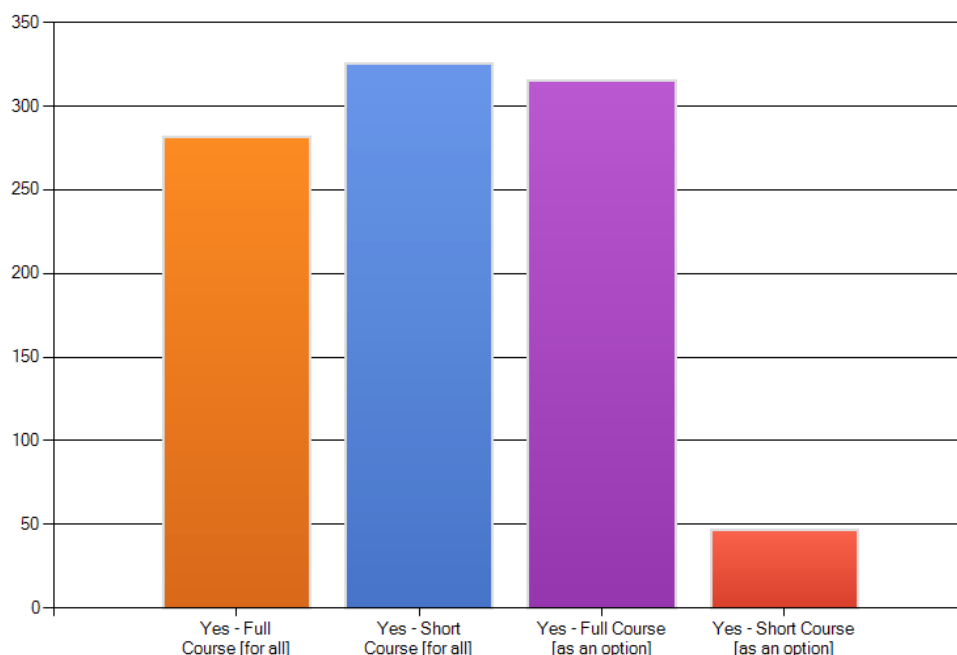
Schools are represented from 163 different local authority regions.

¹ <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000925/sfr09-2010.pdf>

² It is not unreasonable to suggest thus that schools that did not respond are less interested in RE, or have staff who will be less interested in supporting the place of RE in the school.

b) What do schools currently do with respect to GCSE level qualifications?

Is your school currently offering GCSEs for examination in Summer 2011. Tick as many as are appropriate.



It is not unreasonable to add the “full course for all” to the “full course as an option” and similarly for the Short Course which means that about 60% of schools currently offer a Full course in RE and 43 % of schools a short course, of course there will be some overlap.

This breaks down as follows:

Schools who offer FC for all	32.19%
School who offer SC for all	37.32%
Schools who offer FC [Option]	36.08%
Schools who offer SC {option}	5.27%

Comments

337 schools (from those who answered this question) chose to add an additional comment. Some of these are quoted below³.

'All students follow the AQA GCSE Full Course syllabus - but as it is not on full option time because we don't offer it as an option, not all students are entered for the full course. Some, depending on ability, will only do the short course; a few won't be entered at all. Time constraints (1 hour a week) do make it a struggle - but RS % A-C is always very comparable to other option subjects & is always in the 'top 10' of subjects offered.'*

'Currently chosen as an option where students must take one Humanity (Geography, History or RS).'

'All our pupils take their examination at the end of year 10. We usually achieve around 80% A-C and the popularity of the subject can be seen in the uptake at A Level. We are one of the most popular subjects in our sixth form.'*

'Full course is as an after school lesson once a week, in addition to core RE. It has run this way for 4 years. All others take short course in core RE lesson. 2 of last 3 years subject has most A/A of any subject.'*

'I'm doing the full course top up on 50 mins a week in 1 year! With lessons lost that's about 30 hours & I am expected to get A & A for all.'*

'We also offer an AS for the more able in key stage 4. I think more students would choose the Full course if they knew it would count towards the EBacc.'

'All pupils undertake full course AQA GCSE and are extremely successful. However, there has been talk about only entering pupils for short course, this is extremely worrying.'

'Most students complete the short course - around a dozen students are doing the full course paper because they have agreed to complete extra lessons after school.'

'Year 10 and 11 are taking Short Course as we have been told to start the GCSE in Year 9 to allow time for "important subjects".'

'We have 3 lessons a fortnight in year 10 to complete this and 2 lessons a fortnight in year 11.'

'2 days ago at short notice the school stopped the short course GCSE from being examined for the current year 9 students. Offering full course, but short notice and little take-up by students.'

'RS is integrated alongside into a course with Careers Education and PSHE which all students take. We are currently offering a full course GCSE. If the EBacc goes ahead

³ Comments are as recorded, no changes for grammatical errors have been made

with only Geography and History as Humanities then I am worried that our position will be compromised and that our subject will be sidelined as a result. It is madness not to include RS as a humanities subject.'

'Although it is compulsory as a full GCSE in our school, RE has been voted by students as being the best subject in the School via an independent body.'

'Typical timetable allocation for GCSEs is 9 lessons over 3 years. We have 4 lessons over 3 years.'

'Intention was to offer a full course - this has disappeared since the EBacc.'

'Short Course for all - Yes in theory but some students have been withdrawn for additional English and Maths lessons. In addition to this the "upper ability" students stopped the course at the end of Y10 without completing the course.'

'Mass misunderstanding. Finding I'm constantly explaining the status of RE hasn't changed to students, staff and parents. Most do not believe me, assuming I'm just promoting my subject. "RE isn't important if I pass my EBacc" - whole school issue, although only RE department seeing the extent of these issues.'

A number of themes arise from these comments

1. RE is often being taught in considerably less time than other option subjects
2. Compulsory full course is more common in faith schools or humanities specialist schools
3. Results, as reported, are often good⁴ and overall better than All Subjects
4. Top-ups are being undertaken in students', and teachers', own time
5. Students with particular needs, often lower ability in Maths and English, are removed from RE for more focused time.

⁴ GCSE FC results 2010-11 A*-C = 73.1%, c.f. All Subjects A*-C = 69.1%

c) Changes from 2011/12

Respondents were asked to comment on planned changes for the 2012 examination entry; this will be taken as a Short Course by those currently in Y9 and as a Full Course by those currently in Y10.

There were 667 answers to this question. Of these about 60% report that there will be no change in the school, another 10% report positive changes and about 30% indicate negative changes, many linked to the EBacc and concerns from SLT about the impact this will have on school status / league tables, or the impact that a change of status (to an academy) will have on the subject. There is much trepidation, with a significant number of the comments adding the phrase, 'Not ...at the moment', or 'This is being discussed by the SLT', or 'Options are being taken – there is a push towards EBacc subjects'.

Some illustrative comments

'We've started the GCSE in yr 9 and I'm concerned that there will be no RE lessons when these pupils finish the exam at the end of yr 10 and go into yr 11.'

'RS is not going to be offered as an option alongside the compulsory 1 hour a week entitlement for all.'

'Not at present, though unfortunately the Head will raise the issue of the English Bacc at Year 9 parents' evening this Wednesday.'

'RE Short Course to go.'

'They are trying to make the RE teacher redundant.'

'Possibly [it will go] due to Bacc - this could have a major impact on option numbers. It's always been strong (3 groups or more) but this could be cut to 1 if lucky!'

'It will not be offered in the same option group as Geography and History which is becoming compulsory for certain bands of pupils.'

'None that have been announced. In the light of the government white paper, I am expecting that a number of students will not be continuing with the second unit to make up the full course.'

'There will be no entrants for RE. ASDAN CoPE is being offered instead.'

'Not sure at the moment as it is an option subject. If the English Bacc affects options numbers then there is the possibility it may not run as an option subject and not be taught at KS4.'

'Possibly. It's all in the melting pot as I write.'

'Possibly students advised to take Geog or History. RS will be put into the 'extra subject' area, hence numbers will fall.'

'I am not sure, other than there is starting to be a focus on developing Maths, English and Science the Humanities subjects are not being invested in.'

'Yes. Full course as an option. No short course for all. Just 1 lesson per fortnight to cover both non-examined RE and Citizenship.'

'Move away from SC, and FC will be a full allocated time GCSE option. The other pupils will have experience of RE on immersive days, still 5% of timetable.'

'No, but I have heard from children that they are not planning to opt as they would like because of the EBac and constraints on options.'

'1 student is being removed from the exam to catch up on History work which is a direct reflection on the EBac expectations.'

.Any current yr 9 pupils able to get A to C in History, Geography or Ancient History GCSE now HAVE to take one of these subjects at GCSE level. This means that some are unable to choose RS as an option.'*

'Curriculum time for RE is currently being debated at Senior Management level.'

'We will only run full course option group if we get 15 students; last year we had 10 and needed ten, we are now up against a much wider range of options too. RE has been dropped completely in KS4.'

Whilst the majority of those responding have indicated that there will be no change, the timing of this survey has meant that many schools are still taking decisions. If the survey results are sorted by the response date then there are more concerns, or comments of a negative (for RE) in the later responses. There is clear evidence that schools are cutting back on choice for students and pushing them towards the subjects identified in the EBacc 'list' – this is especially true of the brighter students who can be seen to be A*-C material.

d) Planned changes for 2012/13

Respondents were asked to comment on planned changes for the 2013 examination entry. This is important as those students currently considering full course options will sit their GCSE examinations in 2013. This is thus the first entry where changes to the options system can impact on the EBacc envelope.

There were 640 answers to this question. Of these about 50% report that there will be no change in the school, about 5% are hoping for a positive change about 20% report uncertainty in light of changes and about 25% report a negative impact.

Some illustrative comments

'Yes - Almost all students will study GCSE History, Ancient History or Geography. Full Course RS now in the free option box alongside subjects which do not form part of the EBacc.'

'Will leave option group and become open option if not in E Bac.'

'I'm proposing to start FC at start of Yr 9 and take whole cohort through FC - not had meeting yet - not ideal as students aren't ready then and will only have 45 mins per week but we'll lose it otherwise.'

'Not at the moment - however our curriculum time cannot be reduced further without removing provision for RE.'

'My Head is of the view that an outstanding RE dept should stay as we get the best results in the school but if he had a poor dept he'd take it off the timetable! I guess he speaks for many heads. Pressure or what? No other subject faces this.'

'Yes, RE will move into an option block for Full Course GCSE and will be removed from the core curriculum.'

'Nothing has been announced officially, but we are unlikely to continue to be allocated the 2 hours a week we are now.'

'Full course GCSE will run, but Head is worried about recruitment to the course once the EBacc is up and running. She wants GCSE included in the Bacc.'

'Our school is changing the options of students that take certain subjects. They are making History and Geography compulsory, but omitting to include RS in this as a result of Michael Gove's decisions. This will affect our staffing and we will lose subject specialist staff, in addition to the subject being perceived as less important by the students.'

'We are uncertain about curriculum time if RE won't "count" as an EBacc subject...'

'Currently under review. Huge issue of RE not being categorised as a humanity for EBAC purposes. If it were to be correctly categorised as a humanity its position as a compulsory taught subject would be maintained/enhanced. If there has to be a compulsory History/Geography instead it is unlikely to be taught as a GCSE and may well disappear into 'RE Days' not delivered by [specialist] teachers and without any measurement of learning.'

'All school studied and put in for short course GCSE - now not examined but offered as f/c option.'

'YR9/10 do SC and top set do FC in one hour per week.'

'All students are being encouraged to study either Geog or History. This will have an effect on numbers. Also their choice is being limited. They will have to do some RS but time will be cut and resources low. This could lead to a poor quality due to lack of time. Also parents are worried as the students really want to do the subject but are afraid to opt for a full course. We usually have 80% of the year group (270) taking a full course.'

'Time allocation changed for all. Moved from full course to short course.'

e) Other planned changes to KS4 or KS3 RE of which you are aware

Respondents were invited to make more general comments about the place and status of RE in their school. It should be noted that the Secretary of State and other ministers have all emphasised that there will be no change to the statutory position of RE in all maintained schools [the status in Academies and Free Schools is less certain and no definitive answer has been given].

Some illustrative comments

'Students removed in Y10 and Y11 to do a language.'

'No - just that the options are being restricted by the requirements to get kids to do the EBac.'

'Our principal is pushing to reduce the amount of time allocated to RS in KS3 to allow more time for History & Geography (to prepare pupils better for the EBac).'

'Our time allocation at both KS3 and KS4 is expected to drop to two one hour periods per week as opposed to three 50 min periods.'

'PSHE is removed from the TT for KS4 from Sept 2011. PSHE topics including Careers will have to be included in the one RE lesson a week. RE in Yr 11 will be in a circus with Study Skills being part of the circus - so really very little RE in KS4.'

'KS3, currently 1 hour a week for all students. In Year 9, more able students will not do RS. Instead they will be doing Ebac subjects at GCSE.'

'The future is unsure in light of the Baccalaureate. Reducing the time allocated to RS on the timetable is a distinct and likely possibility as league tables are all that matter in schools these days.'

'KS3 RE has now been merged with PSHE; students are receiving it through this and their assemblies/form time. It seems to have been confused with collective worship. School management believes no problem will come with this and think the Government view it as a low priority.'

'Time allocation less at KS3. Reduction of 45mins per fortnight for all year 8 and 9. Non-inclusion of RE in English Baccalaureate cited as possible reason.'

'In Sept 2011 RE is becoming an optional GCSE at my school rather than remaining part of the compulsory core subjects at GCSE.'

'Prior to the white paper, RE had been planned to receive increased time at key stage 4 and the introduction of a full course GCSE in curriculum time (it's currently an extra-curricular course). However, this will now not take place as time is being allocated to subjects in the EBacc and vocational diploma.'

'KS4 students to be put onto a rotating timetable so they have six weeks of RE, six of citizenship etc each year, will focus on ethical issues and philosophy with no qualification. Only top set students will be sitting full course GCSE.'

'If we achieve academy status I think it is likely that RE will not be taught in yr 9 for all students. The hour going to MFL to foster increased numbers taking 2 langs.'

'We had from last year started teaching the GCSE course in year 9 for examination in year 10, and as of next year, year 11 will not have RE.'

'Already had curriculum time taken away in our 2 year KS3 (7 &8). This will remain with the likelihood of further curriculum time taken from next year.'

'Time allocation recently reduced. A curriculum review is currently taking place and there seems to be a desire to move away from GCSE and combine with PSHCE. There is unlikely to be any consultation process.'

'Time allocation is being cut in half @ KS3 + 4.'

'If Q3 is correct, we will in effect lose 33.3% of KS3 material time.'

Conclusions

The data sample of almost 900 schools [maintained and independent] gives confidence that the data in this sample is representative of England as a whole. Since the dataset was biased towards teachers who are members of, or known to the National Association of RE Teachers, RE Today or MMI it is likely that these are RE advocates. Thus the overall picture may well be even more negative.

From these data several themes emerge

1. In a small majority of schools there is no reported change to existing practice for 2011/12 though the picture looks more uncertain for 2012+; many respondents report that schools are 'waiting to see what happens'
2. There is much uncertainty at this time - much of this linked to the EBac qualifications envelope
3. There are planned changes to RE that are detrimental in either time or entry to FC qualification in a significant minority of the schools – much of this due to the exclusion of RE from the Humanities category within the EBac
4. There are few reported cases where the provision for RE is improving
5. There are a small but significant number of reported cases where RE will be curtailed in such a way that it is difficult to see how the statutory requirements are being met.

Caveat

There is much data in this sample with over 3,000 comments from the respondents; the data above is a small sample of these comments. Also, these are responses within one month of the statement from the Secretary of State about the EBacc. Repeating this survey in 6 months or 12 months may produce a different picture.

Acknowledgement

NATRE is very grateful to Paul Hopkins of the NATRE Executive for undertaking this survey on its behalf.

Part 2

Extracts from emails received by NATRE from teachers of RE

1. Despite getting 87% A*-C (51% A*-A) with the entire Year 11 group last year and an A Level group numbering 35 students, I have just been told on Friday that RE is being dropped from my school's KS4 curriculum. This is despite the fact that Mr. Gove has said that RE should remain statutory on Friday. Gutted!
2. The options are going to be severely affected as the students are being advised to take either Geography or History NOT RE. They will be put into different pathways. I am Head of Department and the only RE specialist in the school yet I teach English/Citizenship/PLTS/PHSEE while RE lessons are farmed out to 16 other teachers, many of whom have not taught RE. before.
3. I have been at my present school for 18 years and in that time have built up an excellent department for the teaching of RE which has included GCSE and A level and some RE provision for all years as part of the normal timetable (Approx 1 hour a week). However this is now being eroded and is about to change. From September students will take options at the end of Year 8. RE will no longer be part of the core Curriculum. There will be some RE for Year 7 and 8 but after this nothing in the timetable for Year 9 onwards. I have 'battled' but I have been told the school can meet any requirements for RE through enrichment days. This is obviously not how I see the teaching of RE so these management decisions have caused me a great deal of anguish.
4. From next year Key Stage 4 RE will be limited to 1 hour a week which is a reduction in time of one third. This means that whereas we used to try and put the whole cohort through full course we will no longer be able to do this. I plan to offer motivated students the chance to sit the GCSE despite the limited time, but the rest will follow the syllabus but not be entered. I'm not very happy about this but I feel it is unreasonable to expect staff and students to attempt GCSE on a tiny fraction of the time allowed for other subjects, particularly as the new GCSE is much more rigorous than the legacy qualification.
5. The delivery of RE has remained unchanged, despite the new proposals. All of our students at KS4 have the opportunity to either study the full course GCSE or the Entry Level Certificate course in RE, although the time allocated to this is still too little in our opinion.
6. My subject has gone from the most over-subscribed in the school (with the highest, consistent results at 87% A*-C) to having low take up this year following the Head's speech on Options evening about how RE had suddenly been dropped as a 'Humanities' subject by the government. Subsequently - projected take-up for this year is 24 pupils - the lowest since I was appointed in 2001. This has a huge impact on the staffing of my department. Despite having the highest GCSE results in the

7. school year on year at 87% - pupils appear to be encouraged not to choose RE as a GCSE.
8. I am keen to be involved with the movement to urge the inclusion of RS in the English Baccalaureate. Is there anything I can do?
We have almost 100% of pupils taking either the full or the short course GCSE with the majority taking full course. We are a comprehensive school and last year 70% of our pupils got A-C and 30% got A-A*. Our headteacher is very keen (as am I) that we do all we can to express our concerns and thoughts to Gove et al to see if we can make an impact on his decision to exclude RS from being a Humanities for the purpose of the baccalaureate.
9. I was hoping that you might be able to give me some advice as to the status of RE in secondary schools now that the government have said that it is not a humanity. I am Head of RE at a school and I am worried about where RE has been left in the curriculum. We are a popular subject at GCSE and A level and all pupils do core RE. The new government white paper seems to leave RE in a very unclear position. Will pupils still have to take RE as a core subject?
10. Things are really bleak here regarding the EBacc. I have just sat through a year 9 options evening where all pupils normally have to take one of the Humanities to say that although pressure is still going on at this moment in time they should only choose between history and geography. Many schools have contacted me regarding what should they do. Am I right that we are still trying to campaign to get it included? A few schools have hit upon the idea of taking RE out of the Humanities and form teachers will deliver the 'legal bit 'of RE. These are schools that had everyone doing long course GCSEs and A level groups.
11. I am the head of an emerging and ambitious department of Religion and Philosophy. I am very concerned about this news. I shall write to Michael Gove as you suggest.
12. Just got back from giving a presentation to SACRE on this issue and the omission of RE from the White Paper. They were appalled and agreed to write a letter.
13. PSHE has gone - no more in KS4. RE will be RE in name only as I have to put the PSHE elements into the one lesson a week which is named as RE. Also in there I have to put Careers. In Yr 11 RE will be on a circus with a study skills lesson. Basically RE in name but not RE in practice!
14. I am writing as a concerned Head of RE of a large secondary school in Bradford. I have just been reading about the new English Baccalaureate and am horrified to find that RE is not counted as a Humanities subject towards this qualification whereas Geography and History are. As a subject we are managed in the Humanities faculty and have historically competed with the Geography and History departments for

recruitment of students at GCSE in the schools, students' and the parents' eyes. As schools respond to the new criteria for judgement under the Baccalaureate I fear that senior leadership teams across the country will react pragmatically and promote Geography and History at the detriment of RE.

I am sure that I do not need to highlight to you the relevance of the RE GCSE qualification to modern day life and its immense usefulness in transferable skills to many areas of the workplace and later life whilst maintaining academic rigour. So, why has RE not been included in this new qualification measure? At this present time I feel that I can only conclude that the new baccalaureate will significantly damage our recruitment at GCSE and subsequently at A' Level despite my subject being one of the top performing departments in external qualifications at my present school.

15. I am deeply concerned about the news today that the status of RS as an academic subject has effectively been downgraded by the implicit assertion that the only academic humanities subjects are history and geography. As a committed RS specialist working in the independent sector, I have seen the popularity of my subject increase eight-fold over the past ten years and I fear that my colleagues in the maintained sector will be increasingly marginalised as the effect of the English Bacc takes hold.

I am no fan of league tables in general and this additional pressure can only harm the future development of RS. In the longer term, if this continues its course, we will probably find fewer schools opting for GCSE RS which will in turn mean that recruitment to our excellent A level courses will also drop. Not to mention the fact that as fewer students opt for RS we will find the exam boards spend less on developing our subject and the supporting publications will show a reduction in quality.

16. We have been presented with the new whole school curriculum justified through the introduction of the EBacc.

Currently the curriculum time allocated on the 2 week timetable for RE is:

Year 7: 2 lessons per fortnight

Year 8: 2 lessons per fortnight

Year 9: 2 lessons per fortnight

RE is offered as an option at GCSE with 6 lessons per fortnight in Years 10 and 11. Students who do not opt for the subject are taught between 3-6 lessons per school year in either Year 10 or 11 as part of the PSE program. The new curriculum time for RE will be:

From February half term 2011:

Year 7: 2 lessons a fortnight

Year 8: 2 lessons a fortnight

Year 9: No curriculum time

From Easter 2011:

Year 7: 2 lessons a fortnight

Year 8: No curriculum time

Year 9: No curriculum time

From September 2011:

Year 7: 2 lessons a fortnight

Year 8: 2 lessons a fortnight

Year 9: 1 lesson a week

There is some talk of putting the RE into the tutor period in a morning but nothing definite was said about this. I informed the Head today of the complaints procedure and have said that I am going to consult with the Chair of SACRE about the legality of the plan and get back to her by Wednesday or Thursday this week. I think the school is so confident that they will not receive an Ofsted inspection this academic year that they are willing to ignore the legality of the subject.

17. To try to put it in a nutshell, in our school we have been hit as a subject by a double whammy of the English Bacc plus a conversion to a 3-year GCSE with option choices being made in Year 8 this year instead of Year 9. Currently, with a four-form entry of 120 per year group, we have been thriving, with 70 opting to take RS in Years 10 and 11 and 35 taking A level in both Years 12 & 13. We have been one of the most popular and dynamic curricular areas in the school, with residential trips to Leicester in Year 11 and an India trip in the Sixth Form, a host of other trips and visiting speakers and regional conferences for students.

Our numbers have now been halved at a stroke at GCSE, and in two years' time this will knock on to A Level. To secure the status of the subject I have proposed to the Head that RS become compulsory at GCSE for all our students. At present the legal requirement is delivered via Social Studies on one hour per week, which also includes Citizenship. My proposal involved taking on that hour per week just for RS, as the whole GCSE would be deliverable in that time over three years.

18. At KS3 one hour of RE has been changed to an hour of RE and PSHE, citizenship and thinking skills. They could have scrapped an hour of business instead as it's not compulsory but choose to do this to RE instead.

At KS4 we have an option group if we get 15+ students. Core 1 hour of RE a week has been completely scrapped in favour of 'enrichment' - no one knows what it is but all we do is teach students 1 term of ethics in year 10 and 11.

The head is aware that it's wrong but has said, 'at the end of the day what's the worst that can happen?' She emailed that to the head of RE! The head seems to feel that the DfE doesn't have any threats to stop them doing it. So what are Ofsted doing when they inspect schools that aren't compliant?

19. My headteacher has announced that from September 2011 'core' RE in KS4 is to be allocated 1 hour every 3 weeks. Over the year I think this works out at something like a total of 12 hours. Obviously we can't offer a short course in this time and I am wondering what my response should be. It looks as though we will become an academy in April which I know allows some freedom for governors to decide on the curriculum.

20. Until now our school has followed the short course RS & Citizenship, but now they intend not examining it formally (i.e. GCSE). As far as timings are concerned the school is continuing to give 1 hour a week which is in the syllabus (3 hrs a fortnight = 2 hrs RS and 1 hr Cit) 40hrs a year. In the past that has been adequate, some pupils have excelled. Edexcel congratulated us on having 2 pupils achieve within the top 10 marks in the country (out of I think 96 thousand!) So we have been doing a good job! I don't really know where to go from here as I feel it will be a waste of time for pupils to study a subject they are not examined in, as well as the behaviour issues this will entail.