

An analysis of a Survey of teachers on the impact of the EBacc on student opportunity to study GCSE RS

A Fifth Survey – July 2013 (v1.3)

Introduction

This is an analysis of the data gathered from a questionnaire on impact of curriculum announcements and changes including the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) on Religious Education. It relates specifically to the study of Religious Studies GCSE and seeks to test the claim made by the Department for Education (DfE) and its ministers that the requirement in law that all students must study Religious Education means that it has a secure place in the curriculum of all schools.

This fifth survey was launched on 21 May 2013 via a number of teacher networks supported by the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE) and RE Today Services, and publicised via social media networks and via the electronic networks of other RE organisations including AREIAC, AULRE, and NASACRE. Replies were received from 580 individual 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 of RE are employed since those who are not committed to RE would be less likely to take the time to complete the survey.

Conclusions

Religious Studies in the curriculum continues to decline since the introduction of the English Baccalaureate, especially at key stage 4 where the impact of the EBacc is at its greatest. The problem has become even more acute since the announcement that GCSE short courses would no longer count towards a school's average point score. This impact is seen in the reduction of specialist teaching staff, the reduction of past and planned examination entries, but also in the time provided on the timetable where schools report that even though the subject is legally compulsory for all students unless withdrawn by their parents, students, are not always receiving their entitlement to a religious education.

- a. Over a quarter of all schools report that legal requirements for RE are not being met at key stage 4. These figures are distorted by the inclusion of schools with a religious character. According to this survey, a third of community and more than a third (35%) of Academy schools without a religious character do not meet their legal or contractual requirements for RE.
- b. 12% of schools report that legal requirements are not being met at key stage 3. (16% of community and 11% Academy schools without a religious character).
- c. A further 20% of community schools and academies without a religious character reported a reduction in the number of specialist staff employed to teach Religious Education. This was in addition to the 24% who reported cuts last year. 14% of academies with a religious character and voluntary aided schools also reported cuts of 14%. Of those, the vast majority stated that the introduction of the EBacc together with the removal of short course from the list of subjects that will count towards a school's average points score were the main reasons for this change.
- d. As the number of specialist teachers declines (see c above) teachers with other specialisms are being required to deliver the subject. This survey also found that in 42% of schools at least one in ten Religious Education lessons and in 31% of schools as many as one in five lessons are delivered by teachers whose main time is spent in another curriculum area.
- e. 57% of the schools that responded stated that they will have no entries for GCSE Religious Studies at Short Course in 2014. This represents a rise of more than 16% per cent over two years. 12% reported no entries for the Full Course.
- f. Some schools reported changes having been made to the structure of the timetable. This has been more marked in key stage 4 than in key Stage 3. The greatest impact was seen in Year 10 (the start of GCSE courses in most schools) where 16.4% of schools reported a reduction in provision, less time; in comparison with other subjects.
- g. There is a clear trend towards offering GCSE Religious Studies courses over three years instead of two, as has previously been the norm. This pattern has been introduced in 35.6% of the schools that responded to this question for students taking the examination in 2014, having risen from 25% in 2012. The most common mode of delivery is still the two year model which accounts for 64.3% of candidates. 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 specification are suitable for younger students especially summer born children who may be barely 13 when they start Year 10.
- h. Almost one in five of the schools in our survey now attempt to deliver this course over less than the recommended teaching time. 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.
- i. 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.

1. Types of school

Table 1

Type of school	No.	%
Academy with a religious character	41	7%
Voluntary Aided (CE)	21	3%
Voluntary Aided (RC)	53	8%
Academy without a religious character	171	27%
Grammar School	37	6%
Voluntary Controlled	39	6%
Independent School	12	2%
Voluntary Aided (other)	10	2%
Community school	241	39%
Total number of schools	625	

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

Table 2

	2012 KS3	2013 KS3	2012 KS4	2013 KS4
Yes	88%	88%	67%	74%
No	12%	12%	33%	26%

Table 2 shows the continuing discrepancy between key stages 3 and 4. Whereas 88% of respondents stated that their schools were meeting legal requirements in key stage 3, more than one in four schools (26%) were not doing so at key stage 4. These figures are distorted by the inclusion of schools with a religious character, more of whom comply with requirements for RE (see detail below – table 3).

Table 3

	2012 KS3	2013 KS3	2012 KS4	2013 KS4
Yes - Community School	86%	84%	60%	67%
No - Community School	14%	16%	40%	33%
Yes - Academy without a religious character	86%	89%	58%	65%
No - Academy without a religious character	14%	11%	42%	35%
Yes - Grammar School	92%	96%	78%	71%
No - Grammar School	8%	4%	22%	29%
Yes - Voluntary Aided (RC)	90%	82%	100%	93%
No - Voluntary Aided (RC)	10%	18%	0%	7%
Yes - Academy with a religious character	93%	92%	88%	95%
No - Academy with a religious character	8%	8%	13%	5%
Yes - Voluntary Aided (CE)	76%	100%	76%	87%
No - Voluntary Aided (CE)	24%	0%	24%	13%
Yes - Voluntary Aided (other)	100%	100%	70%	100%
No - Voluntary Aided (other)	0%	0%	30%	0%
Yes - Voluntary Controlled	100%	100%	82%	86%
No - Voluntary Controlled	0%	0%	18%	14%

Table 4

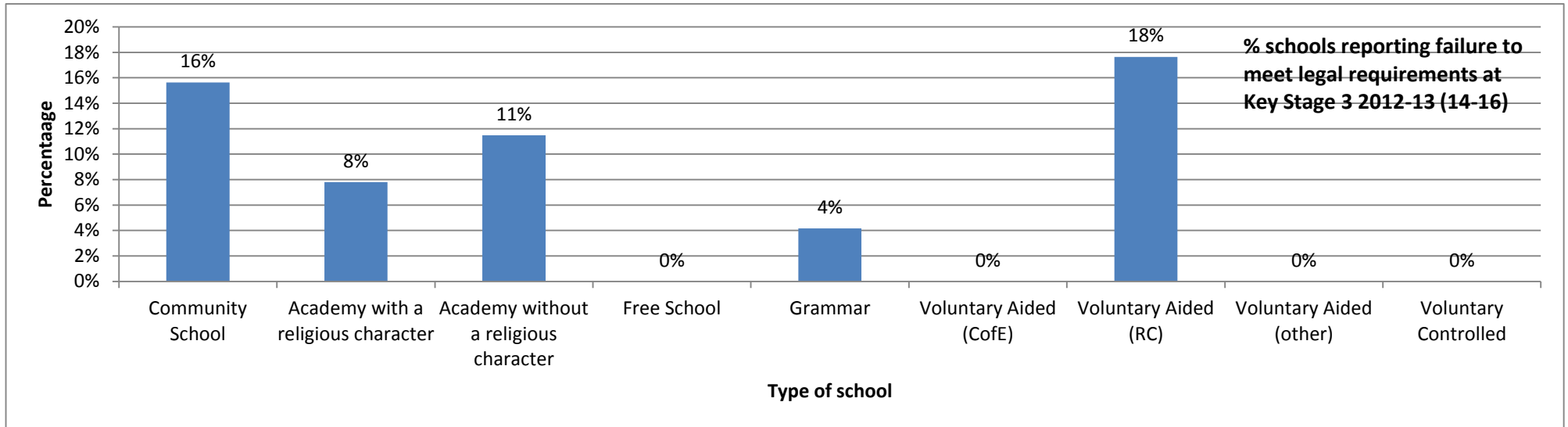
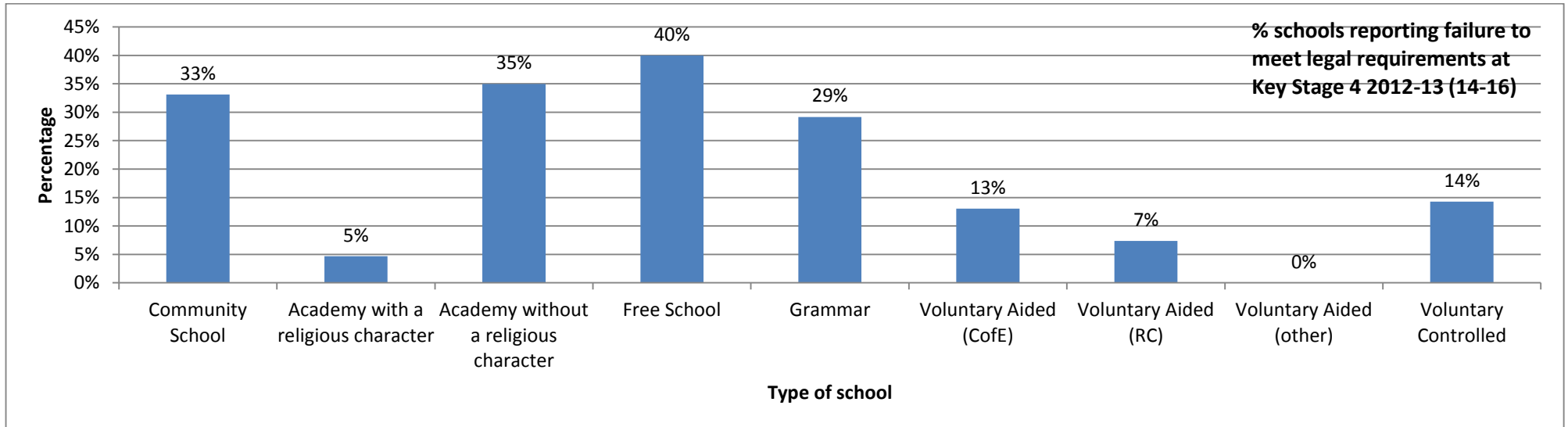


Table 5



Whilst the number of community and academy schools (without a religious character) reporting a failure to meet legal requirements for RE at key stage 3 ranges between 11% and 16% there is some variation between types of school. At key stage 4, the number of schools reporting a failure to comply with legal or contractual requirements was 33% for community schools, 35% for academy schools (without a religious character) and 40% for free schools.

Some voluntary aided schools and academies with a religious character also reported some of these failings; 18% - VA-RC, (Key Stage 3), 13% VA – CE, 7% VA = RC, 0% VA- other, 5% Academies (Key Stage 4). It should be noted however, that most schools with a religious character understand the legal requirements to be higher than the norm for all schools.

3. Changes to the number of RE subject specialist staff for 2013/2014

Table 6

Type of school	%
Community Schools and academies without a religious character	-20%
Academies with a religious character and Voluntary Aided Schools	-14%

The number of RE subject specialist staff continues to fall in all types of school. The first indication that teachers of RE were beginning to be made redundant or transferred to teach other subject areas was reported in NATRE’s first survey after the introduction of the English Baccalaureate. 20% of schools reported a cut in specialists for 2013-14 alone. This comes on top of a cut of 24% for 2012-13.

The consequences of these cuts are that far too many lessons of Religious Education are taught by teachers who spend the majority of their timetable delivering other subjects. This survey also found that in 42% of schools at least one in ten Religious Education lessons and in 31% of schools as many as one in five lessons are delivered by teachers whose main time is spent in another curriculum area. It should be made clear here that these figures are not lessons taught by teachers with other specialisms who teach RE for most of their timetable, but teachers whose main timetable is in another area and who have some shortfall on their timetable which needs to be filled.

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

Table 7

Cumulative

Short Course Entries as a % of the cohort	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
0%	40.7%	54.1%	57.1%
less than 10%	56.2%	65.9%	67.9%
less than 20%	61.6%	69.4%	71%
less than 30%	64.5%	72.9%	73.6%
less than 40%	66%	74.2%	74.8%
less than 50%	69.1%	75.9%	76.9%
less than 60%	71.6%	77.6%	79%
less than 70%	74.9%	79.8%	80.7%
less than 80%	77.4%	80.9%	82.1%
less than 90%	80.1%	83.5%	84%
less than 100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 8

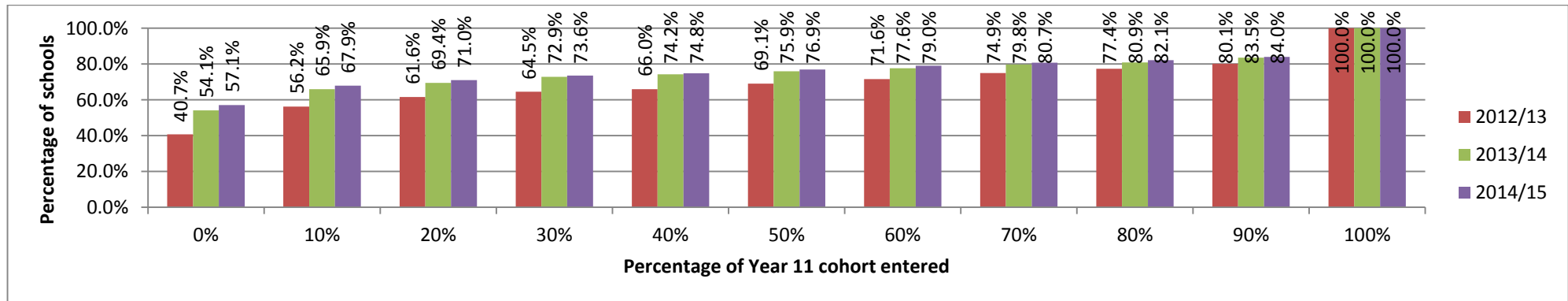
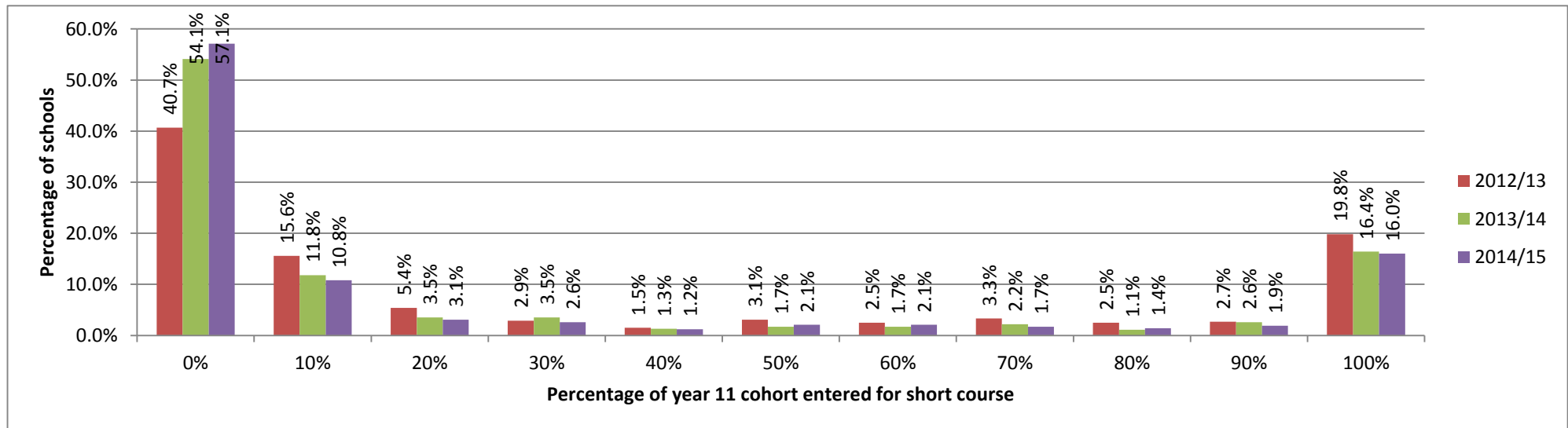


Table 9

% of cohort entered for Short Course RS	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
0%	40.7%	54.1%	57.1%
10%	15.6%	11.8%	10.8%
20%	5.4%	3.5%	3.1%
30%	2.9%	3.5%	2.6%
40%	1.5%	1.3%	1.2%
50%	3.1%	1.7%	2.1%
60%	2.5%	1.7%	2.1%
70%	3.3%	2.2%	1.7%
80%	2.5%	1.1%	1.4%
90%	2.7%	2.6%	1.9%
100%	19.8%	16.4%	16.0%

Table 10



Charts 7-10 show that entries to the short course Religious Studies have continued to fall. Schools responding to the survey reported two reasons for this. Firstly, the impact of the English Baccalaureate and secondly the removal of short course from the list of qualifications which counted in a school's average point score from 2014.

The number of schools who will not be entering any candidates for this course in 2014/15 is 57.1% a rise of 16.4% from 2012/13. GCSE entries for the short course as published by the Joint Council for Qualifications (www.jcq.org.uk) fell by 10% in England in 2012 but rose by 5% in Wales where the English Baccalaureate had no effect.

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.

5. Entries for Year 11 students for the GCSE Full Course – past and projected

Table 11

Cumulative

Full Course entries	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
0%	10.8%	13.4%	12.1%
less than 10%	27%	26.6%	22.7%
less than 20%	39%	35.7%	33.3%
less than 30%	46.3%	43.2%	41.7%
less than 40%	50.8%	46.4%	45.6%
less than 50%	56.1%	50.3%	50.6%
less than 60%	59.1%	52.1%	52.3%
less than 70%	60.1%	54.3%	54.2%
less than 80%	63.7%	56.1%	57%
less than 90%	67.6%	60.2%	59.8%
less than 100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 12

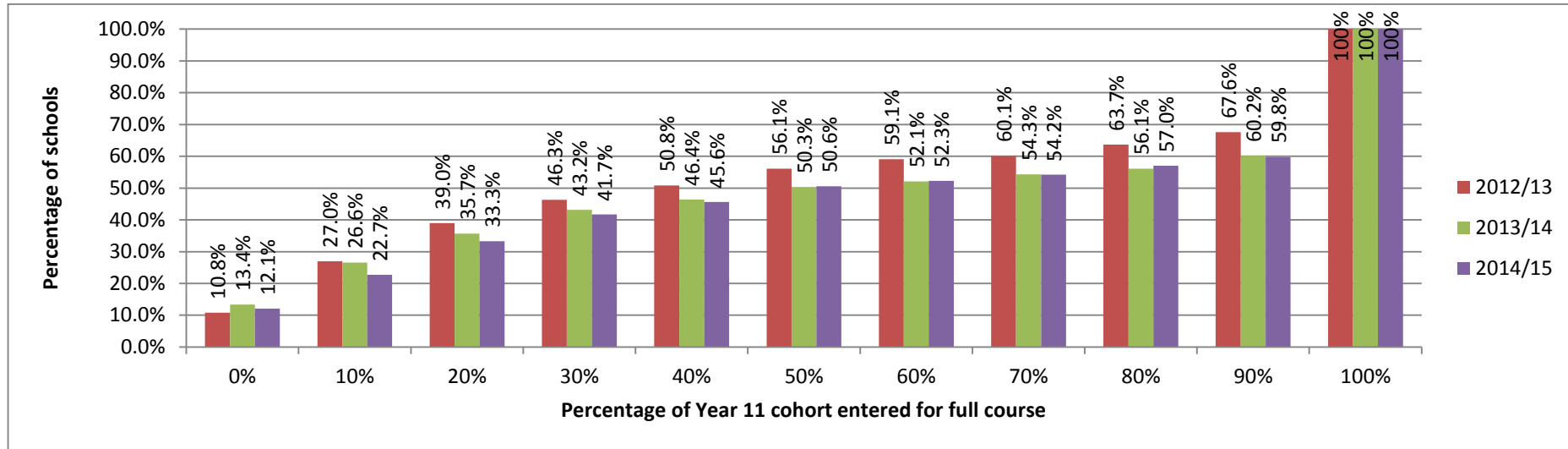
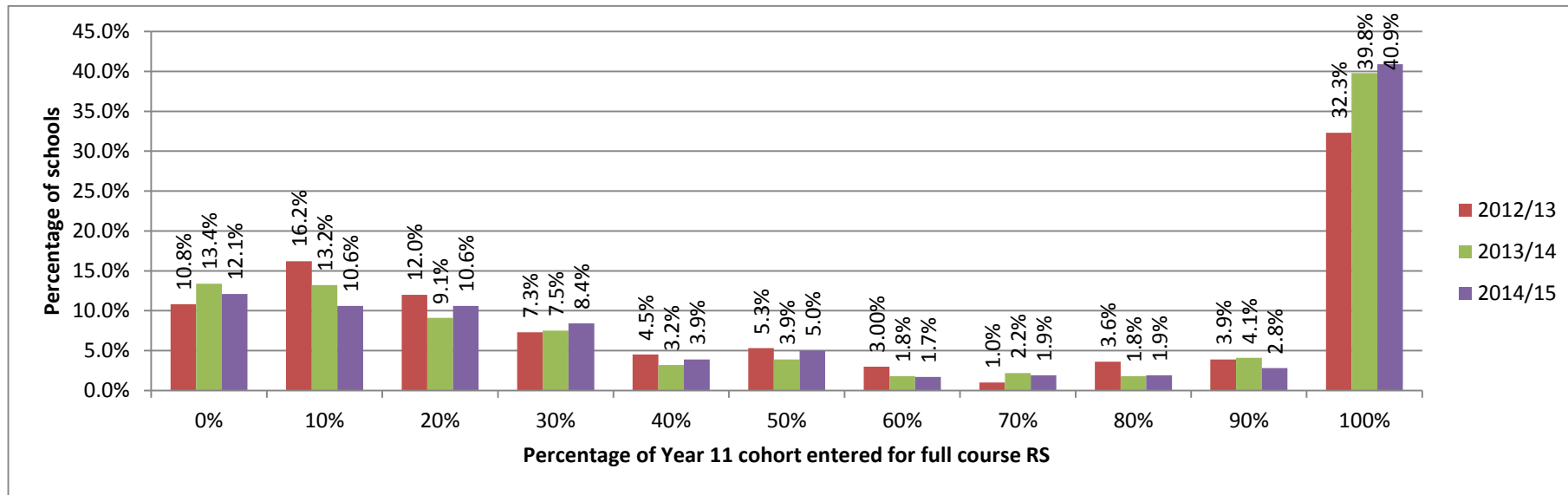


Table 13

% of cohort entered for Full Course RS	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
0%	10.8%	13.4%	12.1%
10%	16.2%	13.2%	10.6%
20%	12.0%	9.1%	10.6%
30%	7.3%	7.5%	8.4%
40%	4.5%	3.2%	3.9%
50%	5.3%	3.9%	5.0%
60%	3.0%	1.8%	1.7%
70%	1.0%	2.2%	1.9%
80%	3.6%	1.8%	1.9%
90%	3.9%	4.1%	2.8%
100%	32.3%	39.8%	40.9%

Table 14



Tables 11-14 show that 12.1% of the schools that responded stated that they will have no entries for GCSE Religious Studies at Full Course in 2014/5. The number of schools now entering their entire cohort has risen by over 8% over two years however. Whilst this may appear to be a positive step for the subject, almost addressing the shortfall created by the loss of the short course, section 8 below shows that in many cases, teachers have simply been asked to deliver the full course on short course time, which will almost certainly result in lower quality provision.

6. How has the timetable changed since the introduction of the EBacc? (2012 figures in brackets)

Table 15

[483 responses]	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
Reduced (i.e. less time; compared with other subjects)	8.4%(11%)	8.7%(10%)	12%(12%)	16.4%(19%)	14.4%(16%)

Table 15 demonstrates that more than 8% of schools have reduced timetable time for RE during key stage 3 for the coming academic year, in addition to those that reported significant cuts last year (2012-3 in brackets). At key stage 4, these cuts are more significant rising to between 14% and 16% in addition to the 16%-19% cuts last year (2012-3).

7. Changes to the way the course is taught in relation to key stage

Table 16

Delivery Patterns for GCSE Full Course	2012-13	2013-14
1/3 of time over 3 years (starting in Year 9)	31.2%	35.6%
1/2 of time over 2 years (starting in Year10)	68.8%	64.3%

Table 16 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 three years ago, is now reported by over a third 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. It remains to be seen how this will impact on student attainment.

8. Timetabled time for GCSE RS examination course

Table 17

Time allocation for GCSE RS over the course	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Less than 120 hours	22%	32.5%	29.4%
120 - 140 hours	29%	37.0%	37.9%
More than 140 hours	21%	30.6%	32.7%

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 around 20% of schools are providing 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.

9. How much training in Religious Education did teachers receive in the academic year 2012-2013?

Table 18

Number of days or less	In school	Out of school
None	68.5%	43.8%
0.5	73.2%	46.1%
1	86.4%	67.6%
1.5	87.9%	69.5%
2	93.0%	85.8%
2.5	93.9%	86.0%
3	97.5%	93.0%
3.5	97.9%	93.4%
4	98.5%	96.0%
4.5	98.5%	96.2%
5	99.4%	97.1%
More than 5	100%	100%

68.5% of the schools that responded 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.

86.4% of schools that responded reported receiving one day or less of subject specific training in school. 67.6% reported that they had attended one day or less of training outside of school.

This means that only 7% of schools reported providing two days of subject specific training for individuals in school. Just under 15% reported that they had attended two days or more of training outside of school. 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.