

Impact of Government Policy on GCSE Entry Patterns for Religious Studies Short and Full Course

Two elements of government policy have been described as having ‘unintended negative consequences for Religious Education’. The first of these was the *English Baccalaureate* introduced in 2010 which was a school performance indicator measure for schools which were ranked according to the number of candidates who achieved a grade GCSE A*-C in five so-called academic subjects; English, Maths, Science, a language and History or Geography. The second decision was to change the method by which a school’s *average point score* was calculated. The performance indicator was a calculation of the average number of points achieved per pupil across their best 8 qualifications and is often used in league tables to rank schools by performance. From 2014, only full GCSEs could count in the calculation. The recent release by Ofqual of provisional entries for GCSE in 2015 provides further evidence to support our claim, initially refuted by the government, that its policies were damaging the level of provision for Religious Education in England and that its legal status was insufficient as a safeguard.

Neither of these measures was introduced in Wales and therefore it is relatively easy to identify the impact of these policies.

Table 1

Table 2

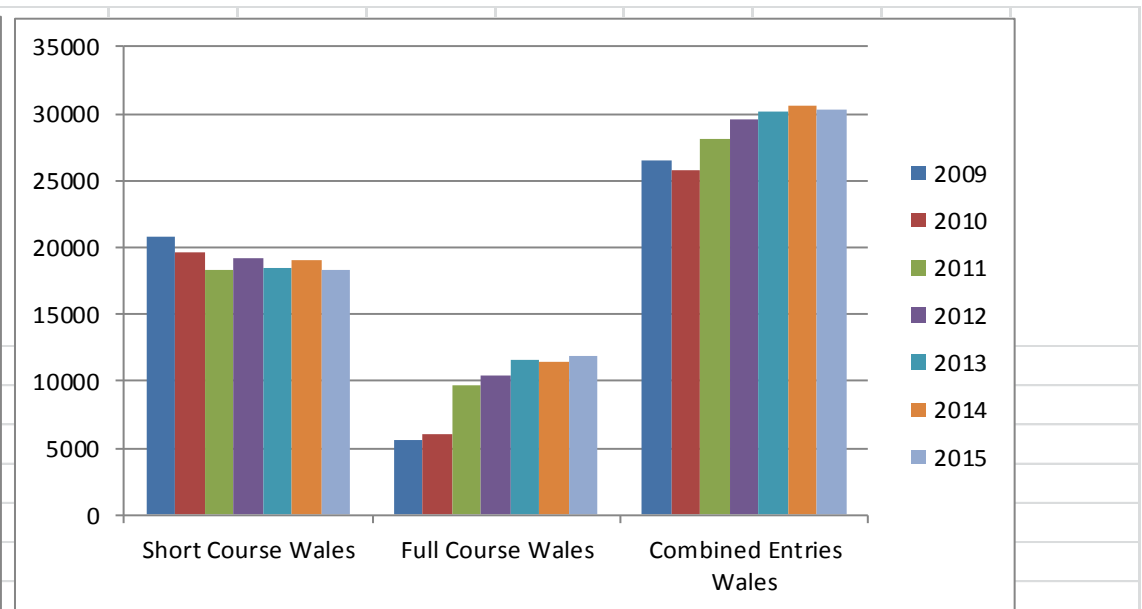
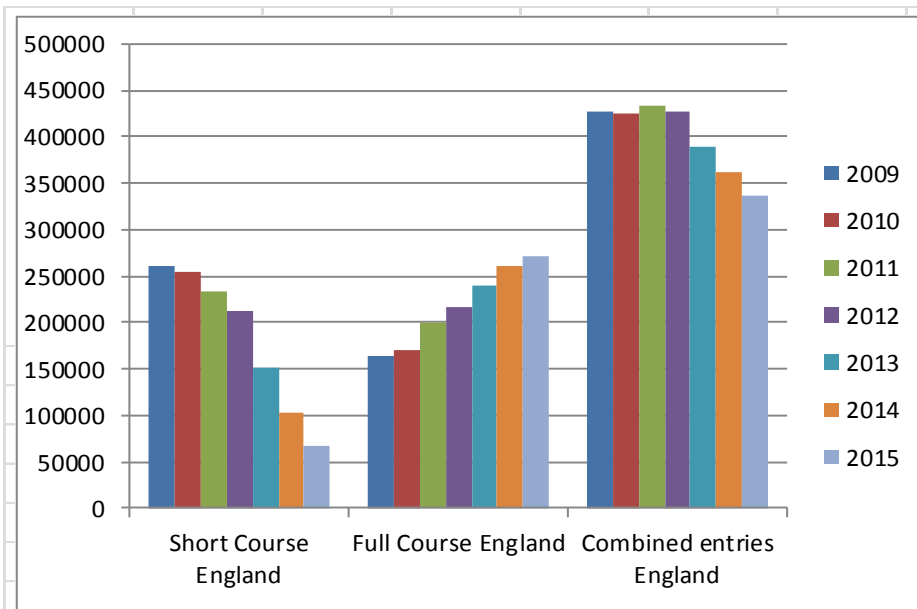


Table 1 shows GCSE short course entries have fallen dramatically in England especially after 2012 when those students who had begun their courses in 2010 would have taken their GCSEs. The total decrease is more than 70% in that three year period. In contrast, short course entries in Wales (Table 2) have fallen by less only 4%. Full course entries have increased steadily in both England and Wales. Overall, whereas the total number of pupils who have studied a GCSE in England has fallen by around 20% since 2012, the total number in Wales rose in the same period.

Given that almost all timetable time in schools at key stage 4 in secondary schools is dedicated to GCSE studies, it must be a reasonable assumption to make that some **90,000** fewer 16 year olds will complete key stage 4 in 2015 having not studied Religious Studies at all since the EBacc

	Short Course England	Full Course England	Combined entries England	Short Course Wales	Full Course Wales	Combined Entries Wales
2009	261399	164647	426046	20769	5656	26425
2010	254698	170767	425465	19683	6100	25783
2011	233998	199752	433750	18318	9727	28045
2012	211269	216373	427642	19182	10409	29591
2013	150621	239409	390030	18467	11654	30121
2014	101787	260495	362282	19056	11489	30545
2015	66480	270650	337130	18380	11889	30269

Table 3

NATRE calls upon the government to initiate an investigation into the level of provision for Religious Education at Key Stage 4 in schools in England and to take urgent action to ensure that students leave school with an appropriate level of Religious literacy to equip them for life in a diverse modern society.

Data Source: <http://ofqual.gov.uk/standards/statistics/provisional-summer-gcse-igcse-entries/>

Key Points:

- Short course entries in England have decreased by about 70% since 2012
- The total number of entries for GCSE RS has decreased by approximately 20% since 2012, some 90,000 candidates.
- *In contrast, entries for short course in Wales have decreased by approximately 4% since 2012 and the combined entries have remained fairly stable.*
- The data would strongly support the conclusion that the introduction of the English Baccalaureate in 2010 and changes to the way that school performance is measured have damaged provision for RE in England very significantly.