

Government Policy has damaged the level of GCSE provision for Religious Education in England

Two elements of government policy since 2010 have been described as having ‘unintended negative consequences for Religious Education’. The first of these was the **English Baccalaureate** introduced in 2010. This was a school performance 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** at GCSE 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 2014 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.

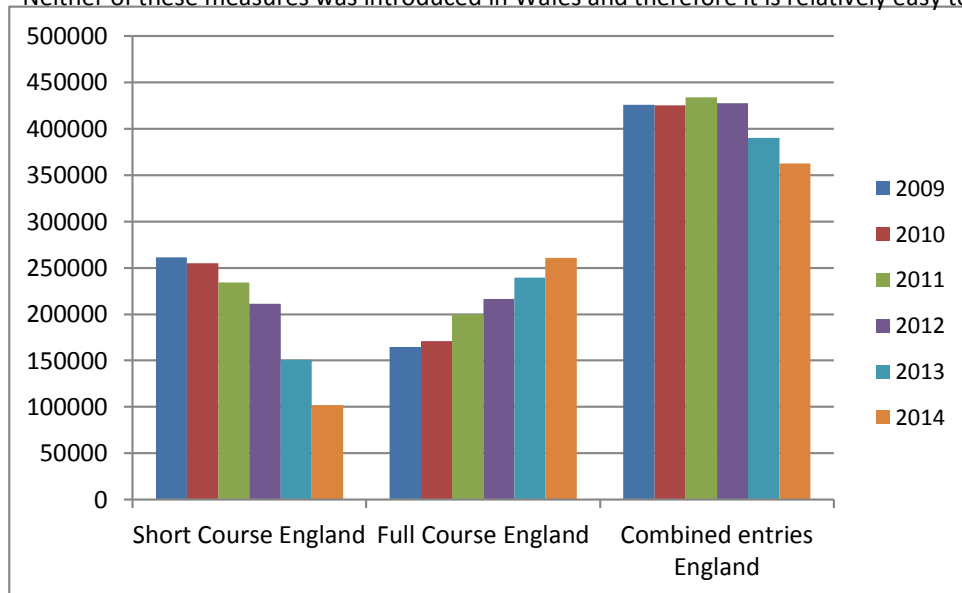


Table 1

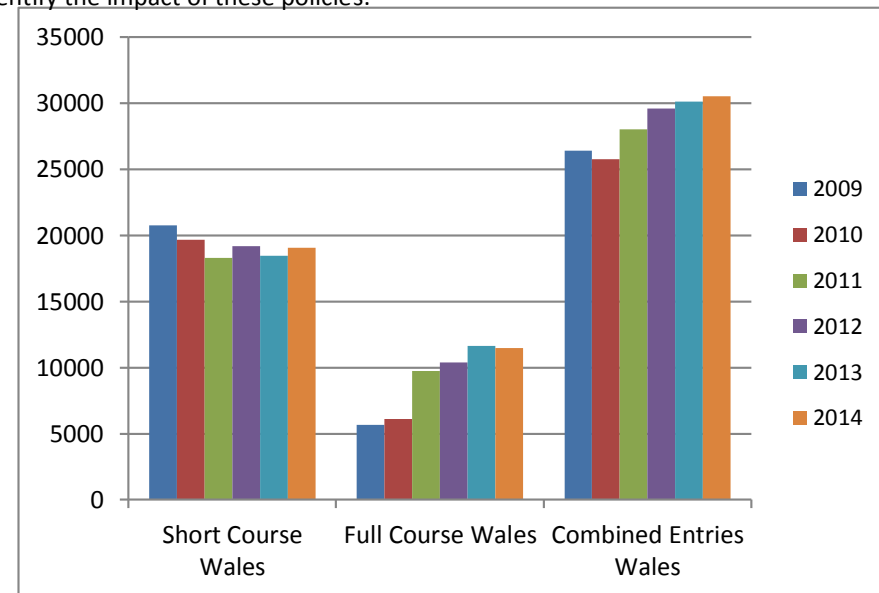


Table 2

When compared to Wales (Table 2), where the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) was not introduced, a steep decline in entries for Religious Studies short course can be seen in England (Table 1). NATRE predicted and reported this scenario several years ago using information from teachers responding to NATRE’s secondary surveys

Table 1 shows GCSE short course entries have fallen especially dramatically in England since 2012 when those students who had begun their courses in 2010 would have taken their GCSEs. The total decrease is **more than 50%** in that two year period. In contrast, short course entries in Wales (Table 2) have fallen by less than 1%.

Full course entries have increased steadily in England and remain stable in Wales. Overall, whereas the total number of pupils who have studied a GCSE in England has fallen by around 15% since 2012, the total number in Wales continues to rise. 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 **60,000 less 16 year olds will complete key stage 4 in 2014 having not studied Religious Studies** at all at this vital stage of their development than two years ago.

| | 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 |

Table 3

NATRE calls upon the government to:

- initiate an investigation into the level and quality of provision for Religious Education at Key Stage 4 in schools in England
- consider asking OfSTED to reinstate the check of compliance to legal or contractual requirements in section 5 inspections
- 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 33% since 2013 and by more than 50% since 2012
- This figure is far greater than the average for all subjects which is a decrease of 4 per cent
- The total number of entries for GCSE RS has decreased by approximately 15% since 2012, some 60,000 candidates.
- In contrast, entries for short course in Wales have decreased by less than 1% since 2012 and the combined entries have continued to rise.
- 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.