

## **An analysis of the provision for RE in Primary Schools – Autumn Term 2020**

### **Introduction**

This is an analysis of the data gathered from a questionnaire on primary Religious Education (RE) in the spring and summer terms of 2020 conducted by the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE). The survey was publicised using the NATRE and RE Today websites and mailing lists, via local groups of teachers of RE and the member organisations of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales, including AREIAC, AULRE, and NASACRE, the NAHT and social media. Replies were received from **489** primary teachers in **more than 80%** of the local authority areas in England and Wales.

### **Methodology**

An on-line data gathering tool (Survey Monkey) was used to set a series of questions on the provision of RE in primary schools. This method replicated similar surveys conducted for secondary school teachers of RE [here](#), the State of the Nation Survey [here](#), an earlier survey of primary teachers conducted in 2016 [here](#) and 2018 [here](#)

Questions were asked to collect key information about the provision and support for RE in primary schools and about the training and support for primary teachers and others who deliver RE. 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 is highly probable that respondents are in schools where teachers support RE since those who are not committed to RE would be less likely to take the time to complete the survey.

### **Legal Requirement for RE in schools**

Although RE is not designated as a National Curriculum subject, all maintained schools must follow the National Curriculum requirements to teach a broad and balanced curriculum, which includes RE. All maintained schools therefore have a statutory duty to teach RE. Academies and free schools are contractually required, through the terms of their funding agreement, to make provision for the teaching of RE. Both Ofsted and the Department of Education have stated that the RE curriculum in Academies must be ‘similar in breadth and ambition’ to that required in LA maintained schools.

The final report of the [Commission on RE \(2018\)](#) states, “The subject should explore the important role that religious and non-religious worldviews play in all human life. This is an essential area of study if pupils are to be well prepared for life in a world where controversy over such matters is pervasive and where many people lack the knowledge to make their own informed decisions. It is a subject for all pupils, whatever their own family background and personal beliefs and practices.”

## Key findings for 2020

### **TIME: Good news and bad news about the amount of time devoted to RE in the primary phase**

- a. Most Agreed Syllabuses recommend that the equivalent of approximately 60 minutes per week be spent on RE at Key Stage 1 and about 75 minutes at Key Stage 2. The survey data suggests that in just over a quarter of schools, insufficient time is being spent on the teaching of RE to ensure that pupils make good progress.
- b. **The amount of time made available for RE also varies by type of school.** The level of teaching reported in table 9a(i) varies by school type. In more than 40% of schools that are required to follow an Agreed Syllabus (including Voluntary Controlled Schools) and in Academies without a religious character, RE is taught for less than an hour per week on average. In 50% of schools with a religious character<sup>1</sup> RE is taught for 75 minutes a week or more. Only just over 6% of Agreed Syllabus schools<sup>1</sup> devote 75 minutes per week or more to RE. (table 9a(ii))
- c. **However, in total almost 96% of schools reported that timetable time had either remained the same or increased.** Almost a half (46%) of Academies without a religious character and almost a third (29%) of Agreed Syllabus Schools report increasing their time for RE. It is important to remember however, that this survey is less likely to have been completed by individuals in schools that do not value RE. (Table 9b). With Ofsted focusing on the curriculum and expecting pupils to 'know more and remember more', we expect this trend to continue.

### **FUNDING:**

- d. Funding is an issue for all schools in a climate of austerity. However, school leaders should be asked about **why the teaching of RE continues to be less well funded than foundation subjects** in around 30% of schools. If resources are up to date and appropriate to modern teaching methods, it is vital that subject leaders have appropriate funds at their disposal. (table 7-8). School funding is expected to rise this year and RE subject leaders will need to make the case for appropriate resourcing for RE.

### **TEACHING**

- e. **Too much RE is being delivered by adults other than teachers.** In more than 53% of schools some RE is being delivered by a higher-level teaching assistant (HLTA). This was raised as a matter of concern by [Ofsted in 2013](#) when in 24% of schools RE was delivered by teaching assistants. In 1 in 5 schools more than 25% of RE teaching is delivered in this way. Unless the HLTA teaching RE has an appropriately related qualification and/or receives regular CPD in RE and enough planning time to secure subject knowledge and confidence, then pupil learning and progress may be negatively impacted. (see section 11 page 10)
- f. **Too many teachers are not adequately prepared to teach RE by their training:** More than half of the teachers in primary schools report that they received between 0 and 3 hours of training to teach RE in their initial teacher training (ITE). *22% of these received no hours at all.* This represents a rise from 44% of our respondents to 55% since we asked the question in 2018. (Q13 -page 12/13). This serious issue was the focus of Recommendation 6 of the Commission on RE (2018) Report. It links with Q 14 (page 13/14) of our survey which asked about teachers' confidence. There has been a decline in confidence in teachers from 60.9% in 2018 to 51.7 in 2020 reporting feeling reasonably or very confident in how to teach RE and from 66.2% in 2018 to 61.2% about what to teach in RE (Q14a).

### **CONTENT:**

- g. **There has been a significant increase in the number of schools teaching about non-religious worldviews** from 51% in 2018 to 70% of primary schools in 2020. (12). However, when we asked teachers to rank the religions and beliefs, they taught in order of their confidence in teaching them, non-religious worldviews was in position 7 out of 8, behind all six of the so-called 'major world religions'.

### **LEADERSHIP**

- h. We were pleased to note that **58% of respondents reported that RE was featured on their school development/improvement plan.** However, it is unclear how these improvements will have been secured given that 83% of respondents said that teachers received either one day or fewer RE-specific training days in the last 12 months. 31.9% received no days at all.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: AS Voluntary Controlled Schools including those with a religious character are required to follow the local Agreed Syllabus, they are included in the category "Agreed Syllabus Schools"

**CAUSES FOR CONCERN:**

- It is pleasing that the right of withdrawal is not used frequently; 81.4% of schools reported that there had been no withdrawal from RE in the last academic year. This represents a fall from 84% in 2018. However, this still means 18.6% reported some withdrawal. There is a continuing worrying trend in the use of the right of a parent to withdraw a child from all or part of RE including 14% (3% in 2018) of withdrawals being a request that the child only be taught about Christianity.
- i. . This survey shows that the right is now being used to withdraw children from visits to non-Christian places of worship, any RE teaching that is not about a particular religion e.g. Christianity. This calls into question whether these pupils are prepared for life in modern Britain.

## Detailed breakdown of NATRE survey questions

### 1. Types of school

#### School Type

50.31% of responses came from schools and academies without a religious character, 40.49% from schools and academies with a religious character and 9.2% from other types of school. According to government data [here](#), in January 2019, 37% of primary schools including academies had a religious character so our respondents are slightly more likely to have come from that sector than average. This means that the results of our survey are likely to be more favourable towards RE than could be expected across the primary school sector.

**Table 1 – Phase of education**

Type of school	2016	2018	2020
Primary	69.4%	82.1%	80.8%
Middle School	2.4%	1.0%	1.6%
First or lower school	2.0%	0.7%	2.0%
Infant School	7.8%	4.9%	3.5%
Junior School	9.8%	7.5%	7.6%
Other: included all-through, PRU, special primary etc	8.6%	3.9%	4.5%

### 2. How long is it since you achieved qualified teacher status?

**Table 2 – Time since QTS**

This figure remains consistent from previous surveys. Around two-thirds of respondents qualified 11 or more years ago.

Time	2016	2018	2020
Currently in training	1.6%	1.3%	0.4%
Less than 1 year	3.0%	2.7%	1.0%
1-4 years	14.5%	12.8%	10.4%
5-10 years	18.5%	20.2%	20.3%
11 or more years	62.4%	63.0%	67.9%

### 3. Are you the subject leader for RE?

**Table 3 – Subject Leader:** As with 2016 and 2018, most respondents in 2020 were current RE subject Leaders

Are you the subject leader?	2016	2018	2020
Yes	74.5%	51.6%	79.5%
No	21.5%	48.4%	19.0%
Other	4.0%	0%	1.5%

### 4. The main role of respondents

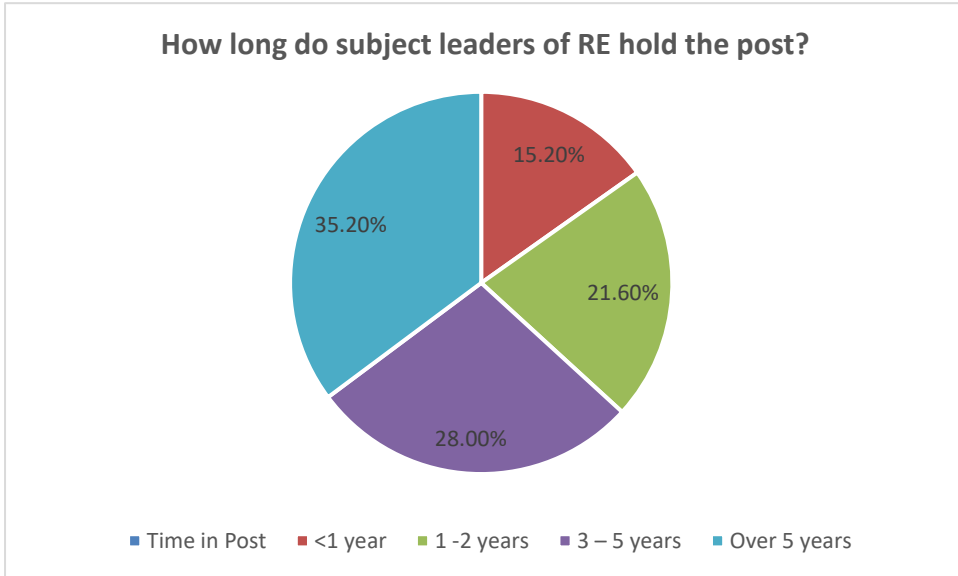
**Table 4 – Role:** Almost two-thirds of respondents were class teachers and 17% were senior leaders

Role	2016	2018	2020
Class Teachers	59.1%	53.7%	65.6%
Senior Leaders	21.0%	19.8%	17.2%
Teaching Assistant or High Level Teaching Assistant	5.4%	5.6%	5.5%
PPA Cover Teacher	10.8%	9.2%	2.9%
Other	0.7%	11.5%	8.8%

## 5. How long do subject leaders for RE hold this post on average?

**Table 5 – Time in Post**

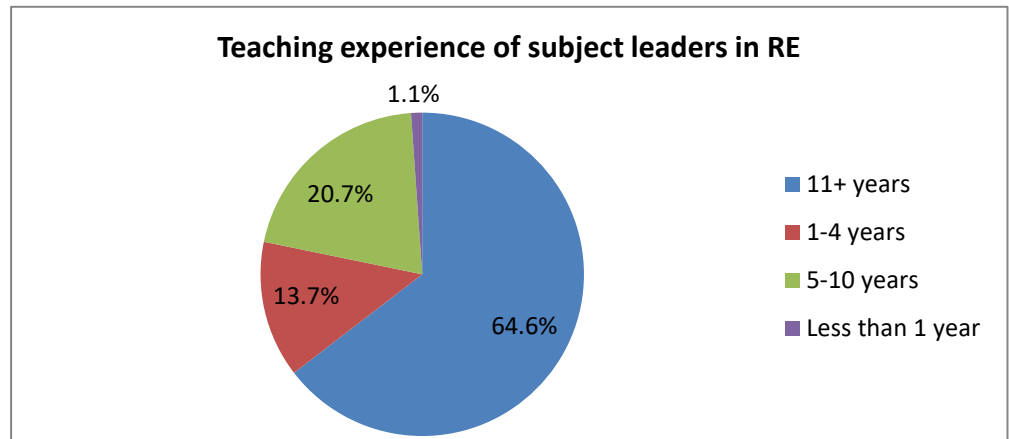
The most reported period was ‘over 5 years’ representing 35.2% (36.8% in 2018 and 30.4 in 2016) of those who responded to the question. However, 36.8% of subject leaders hold/have held the post for fewer than two years.



Time in Post	2016	2018	2020
<1 year	23.7%	18.5%	15.2%
1 -2 years	17.5%	19.9%	21.6%
3 – 5 years	28.5%	24.7%	28.0%
Over 5 years	30.4%	36.8%	35.2%

## How much teaching experience do subject leaders have on average?

**Table 6:** The overwhelming majority of subject leaders in RE have 11 or more years of teaching experience. This data may be distorted by the fact that more than 22% of subject leaders in schools with a religious character are either Headteachers, Principals, Deputy Headteachers, Assistant Headteachers or other senior leaders. By contrast, 9% of subject leaders in Agreed Syllabus Schools hold these senior positions. In Academies without a religious character 11% of subject leaders were from the senior leadership team.



## 7 What is the budget allocation for RE in your school?

Budget	2016	2018	2020
£0	5.1%	5.5%	9.4%
£1 - £50	3.1%	5.5%	4.0%
£51 - £200	18.1%	14.8%	14.7%
£201 - £300	7.4%	6.6%	5.1%
£301 - £500	9.4%	4.9%	9.3%
£501 - £1000	4.8%	4.5%	3.3%
£1001 - £2000	1.7%	2.0%	2.0%
£2000+	1.4%	0.4%	1.3%
No set budget	29.0%	23.5%	30.3%
Prefer not to say	1.4%	29.5%	0.9%
Don't Know	18.1%	2.2%	19.6%

**Table 7:** In many schools, the money available for supporting the teaching of RE is minimal. This data supports the findings of the large scale research project: “Does RE Work”<sup>2</sup> which found that many schools spend less than £1 per pupil per year on resources for RE. Department for Education statistics<sup>3</sup> show that given the average primary school size this data suggests that the most common budget is less than 50p per pupil per year and over 30% of primary schools in the survey have no set budget at all.

## 8 How would you compare the allocation of resources for RE in your school with those for Foundation subjects?

**Table 8 – Resource Comparison:** As in 2016 and 2018, around 30% of respondents say Religious Education receives a less favourable budget allocation than foundation subjects

Resource Comparison	2016	2018	2020
More favourable than foundation subjects	11.4%	13.6%	14.9%
The same as foundation subjects	58.9%	57.2%	54.6%
Less favourable than foundation subjects	29.6%	29.1%	30.5%

<sup>2</sup> <http://impact.ref.ac.uk/CaseStudies/CaseStudy.aspx?Id=28230>

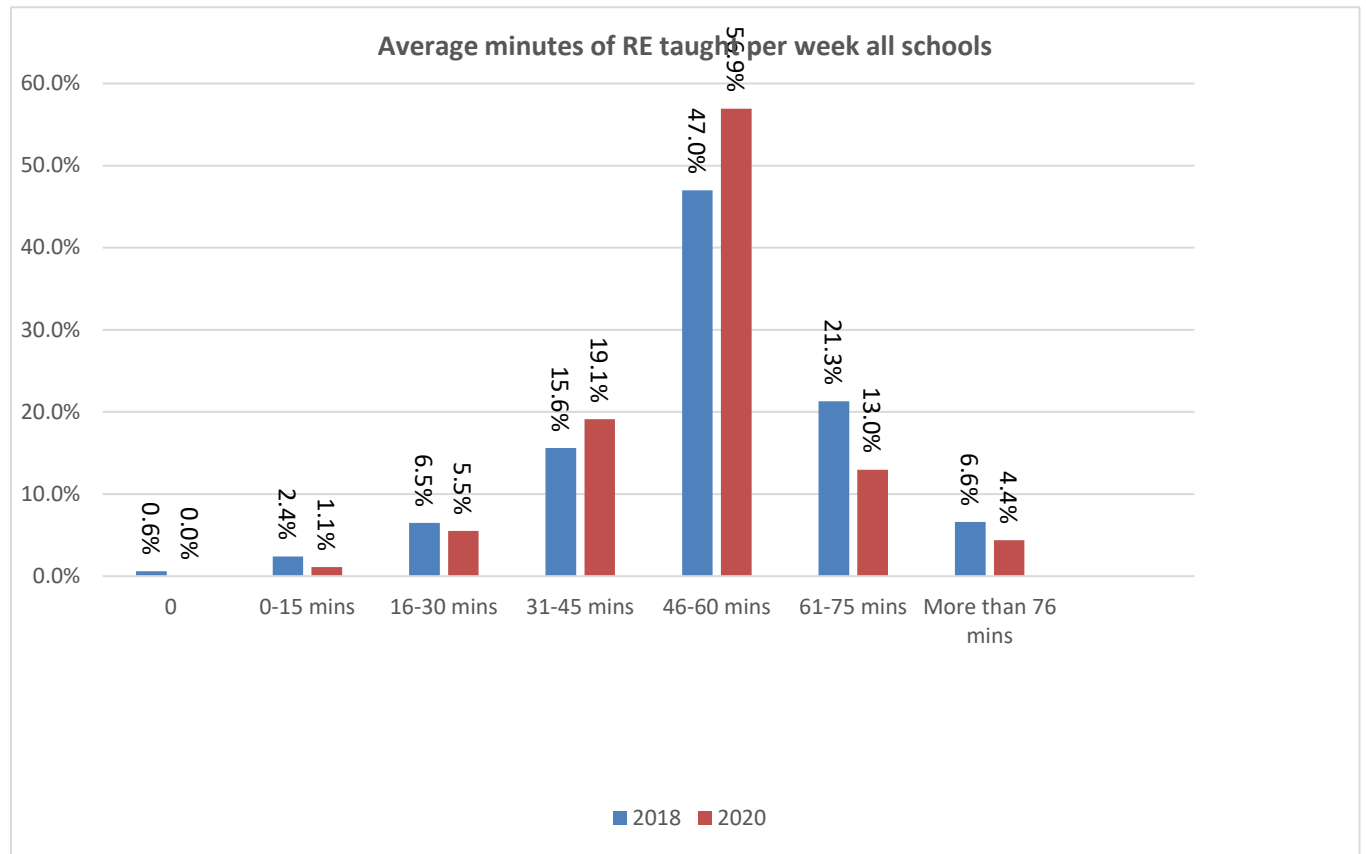
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2015>

## 9 Time for Religious Education

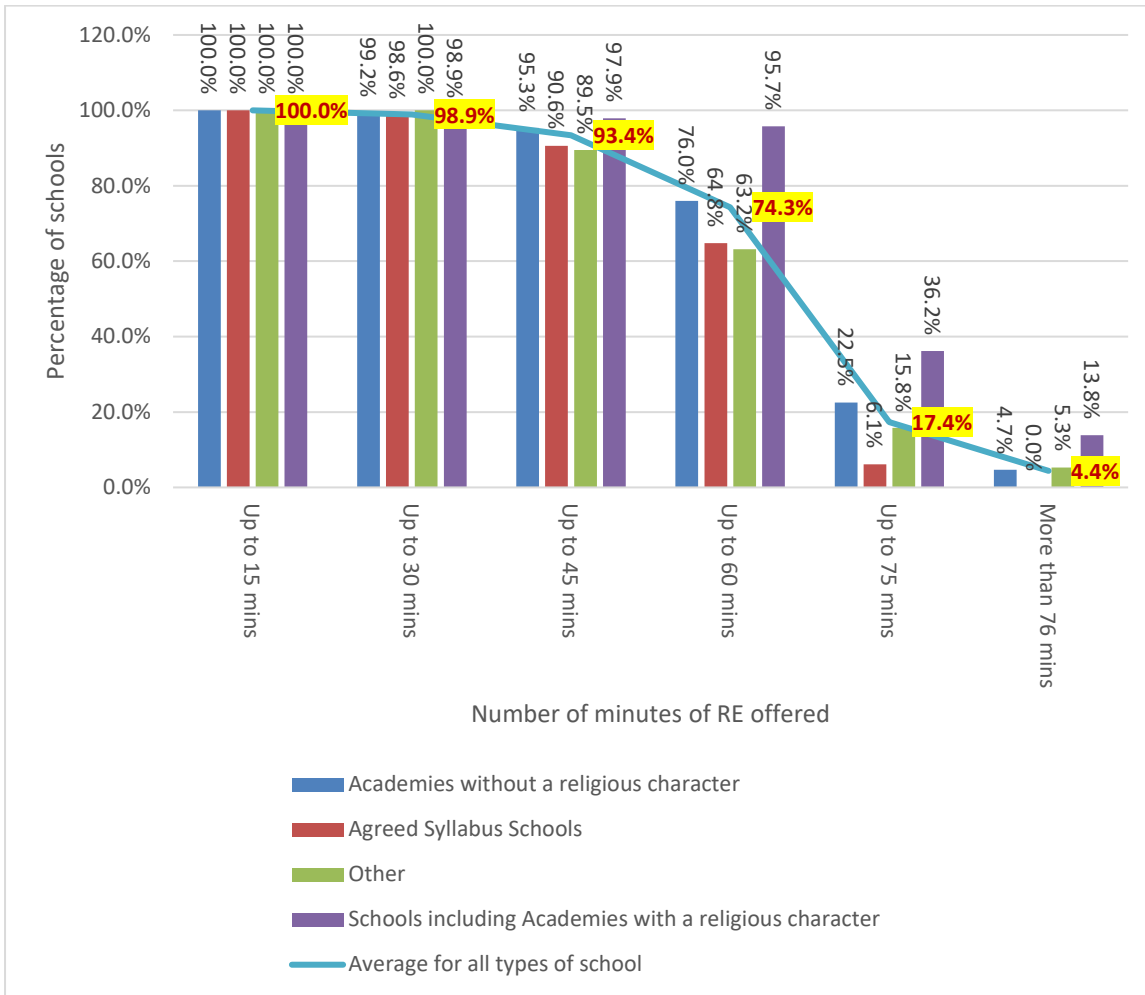
### (a) Time allocated to the teaching of RE

**Table 9a(i) – Teaching Time:** Most Agreed Syllabuses recommend that the equivalent of approximately 60 minutes per week be spent on RE at Key Stage 1 and about 75 minutes at Key Stage 2. This data suggests that in just over a quarter of schools, insufficient time is being spent on the teaching of RE to ensure that pupils make good progress.

These figures might be misleading however, since the time dedicated to teaching RE varies considerably by type of school. Schools with a religious character such as Church of England, Roman Catholic or Jewish Schools are far more likely to teach RE for an hour per week or more. More than a third of schools that are required to follow a locally Agreed Syllabus and Academies, teach RE for less than an hour per week. In schools with religious character, including academies with a religious character, only just over 4% teach RE for that amount of time.







**Table 9a(ii): The amount of time made available for RE also varies by type of school.** The level of teaching reported in 9a varies by school type. In more than 40% of schools that are required to follow an Agreed Syllabus and in Academies without a religious character, RE is taught for less than an hour per week on average. In 50% of schools with a religious character RE is taught for 75 minutes a week or more. Only just over 6% of Agreed Syllabus schools<sup>1</sup> devote this amount of time to RE.

**(b) Table 9b: Changes to time allocated to the teaching of RE**

Whilst around 68% of respondents stated that there had been no change in timetable time for RE in the last academic year, almost 28% (18% in 2018) said that time had been increased which is good news. **The most significant reasons given for the increase were:**

- Change in senior management/subject leader 18%
- The introduction of a new Agreed Syllabus 21%
- Change to whole school curriculum design 22%

**Where there had been a decrease in timetable time for RE (only 4% of schools (7% in 2018), the most significant reasons given were:**

- Other subjects taking priority 44%
- Change to whole school curriculum design 14%

Change to time allocated to the teaching of RE	2016	2018	2020
Increase	18%	17%	28%
No Change	70%	75%	68%
Decrease	12%	7%	4%

Further good news is that this survey shows almost a half (46%) of Academies without a religious character and almost a third (29%) of Agreed Syllabus Schools report increasing their time for RE in the last year. Fewer schools and academies with a religious character reported an increase in timetable time almost certainly because as the table above shows, they already typically offer more time for the teaching of RE.

	Decrease	Increase	No change
Academies without a religious character	4%	46%	49%
Agreed Syllabus Schools	6%	29%	66%
Schools including academies with a religious character	2%	21%	78%

## 10 Withdrawal from Religious Education

**Table 10 – Withdrawal**

81.4% of schools reported that there had been no withdrawal from RE in the last academic year. This represents a fall from 84% in 2018. However, this still means 18.6% reported some withdrawal.

Reasons cited were:

- membership of a particular religious or non-religious tradition e.g. Jehovah’s Witness, Muslim, Humanist, Plymouth Brethren, Christian = 56% of withdrawals (60% in 2018)
- A wish that the child should not be taught Islam = 4.7% (a fall from 6.7% in 2018)
- A wish that the child only be taught about Christianity = 14% (a rise from 3.0% in 2018)
- A wish that the child only be taught about Islam = 3.0%
- Withdrawal from trips and visits to non-Christian places of worship (5.6%)
- Withdrawal by the school for teaching other subjects/interventions (4.3%)
- Withdrawal but no reason given (12%)
- Withdrawal requested due to a special need (0.4%)

## 11 The proportion of the RE provision in your school delivered by non-teaching staff e.g. HLTAs

Over recent years NATRE has become increasingly concerned that the practice of delegating the teaching of RE in primary schools to teaching assistants has become more widespread. Ofsted reported that pupils’ achievement in RE was very inconsistent in 2013<sup>4</sup>. Shortly after an All-Party Parliamentary Group on RE enquiry in 2013 found that one of the contributing factors to this was the excessive use of teaching assistants to deliver RE.<sup>5</sup> The 2013 report found that in 24% of schools RE was taught to some children by higher level teaching assistants. This survey found that this figure has risen to more than 50% of schools.

- 47% of schools in 2020 (47% in 2018) say this does not happen in their school
- 53% allow some RE to be taught by non-teaching staff.
- In more than 1 in 5 schools between more than 25% of RE is delivered in this way.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-realising-the-potential>

<sup>5</sup> [http://religionseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/APPG\\_RE\\_-\\_The\\_Truth\\_Unmasked.pdf](http://religionseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/APPG_RE_-_The_Truth_Unmasked.pdf)

## 12 Religions, beliefs and worldviews taught in primary schools

**Table 11:** It was unsurprising to find that Christianity is taught in almost all schools that responded to the survey in 2020 and that Judaism and Islam are also almost always taught in primary schools. Hinduism features clearly in 80% of primaries and Sikhism in two-thirds of them. It is pleasing to see that non-religious world views are now specifically taught in 70%, an increase of 19% on 2018.

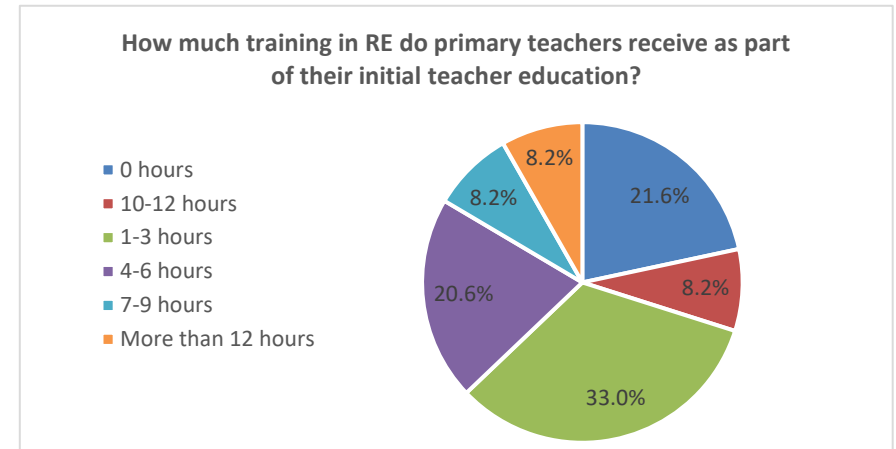
	2016	2018	2020		2016	2018	2020
<b>Christianity</b>				<b>Buddhism</b>			
Infant	100%	80%	94%	Infant	37%	13%	49%
Junior	100%	95%	95%	Junior	40%	65%	29%
Primary	100%	99%	92%	Primary	59%	64%	60%
<b>Judaism</b>							
Infant	74%	66%	65%	Infant	37%	33%	65%
Junior	76%	82%	81%	Junior	40%	73%	47%
Primary	96%	93%	88%	Primary	72%	78%	65%
<b>Islam</b>							
Infant	79%	66%	88%	Infant	21%	13%	56%
Junior	100%	95%	92%	Junior	52%	52%	29%
Primary	98%	95%	91%	Primary	36%	51%	70%
<b>Hinduism</b>							
Infant	84%	46%	53%	Infant			0%
Junior	88%	82%	84%	Junior			8%
Primary	89%	89%	83%	Primary			8%
<b>Other religious worldviews e.g. Bahá'í</b>							
Infant				Infant			
Junior				Junior			
Primary				Primary			

### 13 Training for RE in Initial Teacher Education

Predictably, those who trained to teach through a three or four year teaching degree programme received more training in RE than those who followed post-graduate routes. These represent 52.4% of respondents.

**Table 12**

How did you train as a teacher?	2016	2018	2020
Degree	30%	47.1%	52.4%
GTP	14%	4.9%	2.4%
HLTA	3%	1.6%	3.7%
PGCE	42%	40.4%	37.5%*
SCITT	3%	3.0%	2.2%
Teach First	1%	0.2%	0.0%
Other - Includes Schools Direct	7% -	2.8% 1.2%	1.8%



\* 32.8% PGCE without RE specialism 4.6% PGCE with RE specialism

The data below shows that Initial Teacher Education is not adequately preparing newly qualified primary teachers to deliver Religious Education. We asked those who had qualified in the last five years to answer this question. Table 13 shows that the average primary teacher has received fewer and fewer hours training in RE since our first survey in 2016. More than half received between 0 and 3 hours of training in the subject and more than one in five received no training at all.

**Table 13**

Hours of RE training received in ITT	2016	2018	2020
0 – 3 hours	31%	44%	55%
4 – 6 hours	31%	24%	21%
7 – 12 hours	19%	21%	16%
> 12 hours	19%	10%	8%

## 14 (a) Levels of confidence in teaching RE

**Table 14**

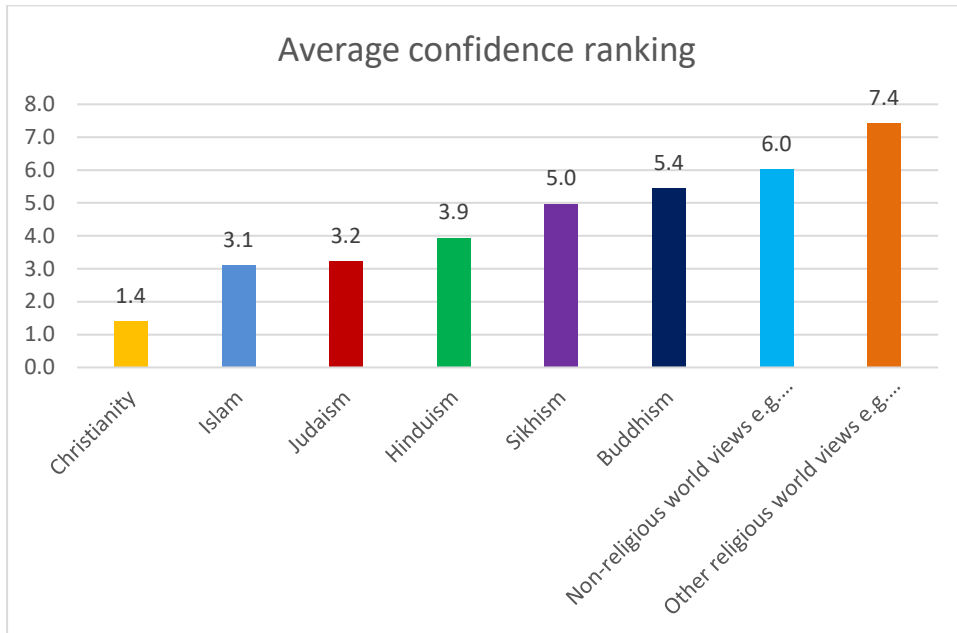
Similar to 2016 and 2018, the overwhelming majority of those responding to our survey in 2020 reported feeling either reasonably confident or very confident about how (90.4%) and what (88.4%) to teach RE. However, only just over a third of respondents claim to feel very confident about either of these areas which is disappointing given that around 80% of our respondents were subject leaders for RE, responsible to leading others in Religious Education.

In contrast, they report that their colleagues do not share this confidence judging that only 51.7% feel either reasonably confident or very confident about how and 61.2% about what to teach in RE. This represents a decline in confidence for this group when, in 2018, 60.9% reported feeling reasonably or very confident in how and 66.2% about what to teach in RE.

	2020	2018	2020	2018	2020	2018	2020	2018	2020	2018
	A variety of levels amongst my colleagues	A variety of levels amongst my colleagues	Not confident at all	Not confident at all	Slightly less confident than I would like	Slightly less confident than I would like	Reasonably confident	Reasonably confident	Very confident	Very confident
My level of confidence about how to teach RE	-	-	0.4%	1.5%	9.2%	6.0%	56.1%	56.0%	34.3%	36.5%
My level of confidence about what to teach in RE	-	-	1.1%	1.5%	10.1%	7.9%	54.5%	56.2%	33.9%	34.4%
My colleague's level of confidence about how to teach RE	13.9%	11.20%	3.9%	3.7%	30.5%	24.2%	47.6%	54.4%	4.1%	6.5%
My colleague's level of confidence about what to teach in RE	11.3%	8.7%	3.4%	3.5%	24.1%	21.7%	49.6%	58.3%	11.6%	7.9%

## 14 (b) Confidence in teaching religious and non-religious worldviews

We asked primary teachers to rank the religions and beliefs they taught in order of their confidence in teaching them (1 being the most confident and 8 the least). Buddhism, non-religious and other religious worldviews were the traditions that commanded the least confidence, Christianity the most.



## 14(c)

### How is RE delivered on the school timetable in 2020?

The majority of schools (80%) included weekly lessons as a means of delivering their RE provision

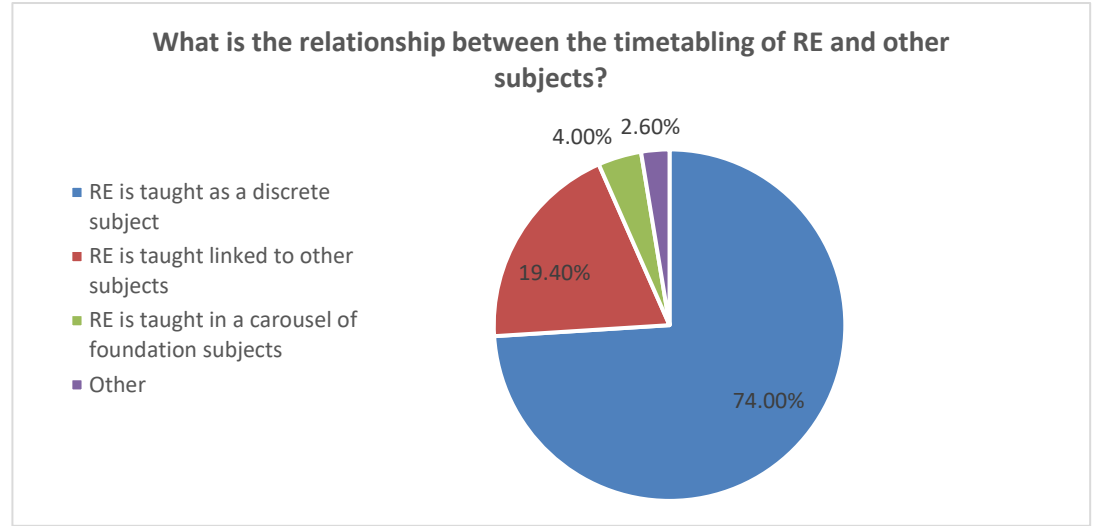
Just over 12% provided weekly or fortnightly blocks of time for the subject at certain times of the year

5% used RE weeks and 10% RE Days

14(d)

**What is the relationship between the teaching of RE and that of other subjects?**

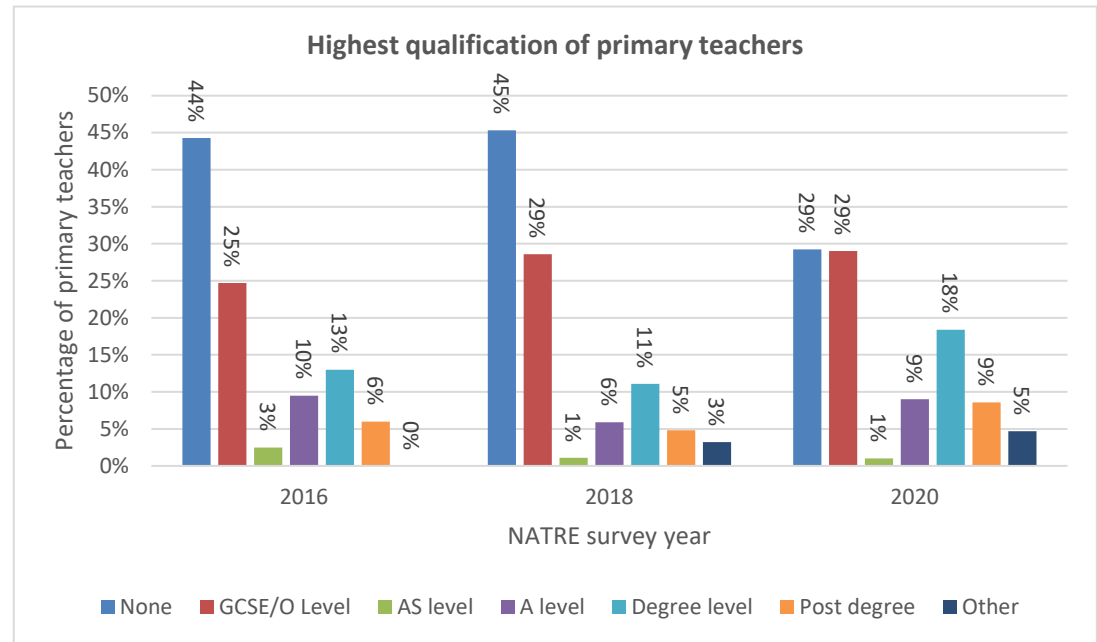
RE is taught as a discrete subject in almost three-quarters of the respondent schools. Where RE is taught in a carousel of foundation subjects or is linked to the teaching of other subjects, it is unclear as to whether the aims of RE are fully met. This issue requires further investigation.



**Teacher qualifications in Religious Education**

**Table 15 –Highest RE Qualification**

The level of qualification in RE of primary teachers seems to be increasing. This is likely not to be a finding unique to RE since those teachers who joined the profession before a degree was the expectation, are now reaching retirement age. Likewise, the number of teachers with post-graduate qualifications is increasing. However, it is likely that new teachers are now coming into the profession who were 14-16 years old during the period that the short course was introduced and almost 40% of pupils were leaving school with a qualification in Religious Studies (RS). With short course entries in rapid decline, mainly due to it not counting in performance measures, this will eventually have an impact on the level of subject knowledge of teachers coming into the profession.





## 15 Compliance with legal requirements on RE provision

Slightly more respondents reported that legal requirements are met in their school than in previous years. Whereas 93% responded in the affirmative in 2018 96.5% did so in 2020.

## 16 Training

### (a) Days of subject specific training the respondent received during the past 12 months

Table 16 – RE training in the past 12 months

- (i) Just over one in 5 (20.5%) primary teachers received **no** RE training in the past year. This is a slight improvement from 2018 when the figure was almost 30%
- (ii) Just over two-thirds of primary teachers received one day of RE training or more in the past year. This represents an improvement of just under 15% since 2018 yet still a cause for concern for the remaining teachers

RE specific training days in previous 12 months	2016	2018	2020
0	26.57%	29.4%	20.5%
0.25	3.71%	8.6%	
0.5	6.00%	6.1%	8.8%
1	24.57%	18.4%	21.8%
1.5	8.00%	4.1%	8.6%
2	14.29%	14.9%	16.3%
2.5			1.5%
3	8.86%	8.4%	11.5%
More than 3	8.00%	10.0%	11.0%

**(b) Days of subject specific training others who teach RE in your school received during the past 12 months?**

**Table 17:**

Just over 3 in 10 teachers in our respondents' schools received no training (not even staff meeting) in RE at all. The number in this position increased slightly to 31.9% in 2020 from 28.6% in 2018. Around 80% of primary teachers reported receiving one day or less of training in the year in 2020 and in 2018. Note the response of 0.25 was not asked in 2020 and 2.5 days was not an option in 2016 and 2018.

RE specific training days in previous 12 months	2016	2018	2020
0	39.7%	28.6%	31.9%
0.25	20.8%	21.7%	
0.5	14.0%	14.9%	29.1%
1	13.1%	17.8%	20.3%
1.5	2.3%	2.5%	4.6%
2	6.3%	7.4%	7.5%
2.5			0.4%
3	1.4%	3.9%	3.1%
More than 3	2.3%	3.3%	3.1%

**18. Are you in touch with a local group of RE teachers in your area?**

61% of teachers answered, Yes to this question. Subject leaders were more likely (65%) to be in touch with a local group than not (35%). Of those who are not subject leaders, only 30% reported being in touch with a local group of teachers of RE. NATRE is committed to working towards a situation where all subject leaders have the opportunity to be part of a local group. The impact of effective teacher networking is well researched ([e.g. NCSL review](#)). The review found that networks by themselves don't do anything. It was the people in networks and the relationships between them which made things happen. NATRE supports more than 280 affiliated local groups committed to teacher professional learning. <https://www.natre.org.uk/about-natre/re-in-your-region/what-is-a-local-group/>

**19. Does RE appear in your school SEF/SDP/SIP?**

58% of respondents reported that RE does appear in the school development plan, 25% said it did not and 17% said they did not know.