

## A case of denial or wilful neglect?- Government data throws a spotlight on the consequences of inaction by the government to restore lessons on RE to secondary schools.

Source: DfE school census Nov 2019 published June 2020

**Background:** In the late summer of 2018, NATRE published a report based on the school workforce data collection in 2016<sup>1</sup> and this was subsequently reported by the Commission on RE in the autumn of that year. The data demonstrated that *provision for RE had reached an all-time low. Not only were significant numbers of schools offering no RE but also there were wide variations between different types of school.* This report provides an update based on 2019 data published in June 2020

**The Commission on Religious Education, *Religion and Worldviews: the way forward* reported as follows:**

*“There is an increasing disparity of provision and support for RE in schools of a religious character and schools without a religious character. Over a third of schools and over 40% of academies without a religious character offered no RE in Year 11 in 2016, compared to 11% of schools with a religious character. Across Key Stage 4, 27% of schools and 35% of academies without a religious character offered no RE, compared to 7% of schools with a religious character.”<sup>2</sup>*

The tables below demonstrate that since 2019 the gap has widened further between schools with a religious character, academies without a religious character and schools that are required to follow their local Agreed Syllabus. It appears that the latter group has been protected to some extent from the devastating impact on provision for RE of government policy since 2010 (see point 3 below) but the situation remains dire.

**Government in denial?** Despite repeated government claims to the contrary, it is clear that the impact of these policies is that children in English schools are far less educated about religion and worldviews in 2021 than they were before 2010.

**Unintentional consequence or unspoken policy?** Some people are now asking whether the neglect of RE is deliberate as the government applies pressure to schools to implement their flagship English Baccalaureate (EBacc) policy. The EBacc has been widely blamed not only for the narrowing of the secondary curriculum but also for the decline of subjects such as art, music and design and technology. Teachers responding to NATRE secondary surveys have reported that some of their schools are dropping GCSE RS in order to focus on the EBacc. It has been suggested that, if the government turns a blind eye to schools breaking the law and their funding agreements in relation to RE, it leaves more time on the timetable to implement the EBacc or at least in theory ...

It is ironic therefore that this pressure from government is not necessarily having the intended consequence. As David Lundie reports<sup>3</sup>, **“Working on the hypothesis that schools dropped RS to focus on EBacc subjects, this data suggests such a strategy is counter-productive.”**

**“Across all six measures\*, schools that participated in GCSE RS scored more highly than schools that did not. The average Attainment 8 score for schools that participated in GCSE RS was 46.3, while for schools that did not the average score was just 29.2.”**

\*Attainment 8, Progress 8 for all GCSEs and Progress 8 for GCSEs included in the EBacc (which does not include GCSE RS), and Attainment 8, Progress 8 open and Progress 8 EBacc measures for disadvantaged students (those who have been eligible for Free School Meals in the past 6 years).

---

1

<https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Free%20Resources/NATRE%20Report%20on%20the%20provision%20for%20RE%202018.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Page 23. Final Report of the Commission on Religious Education (September 2018) <https://www.commissiononre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Final-Report-of-the-Commission-on-RE.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> GCSE Religious Studies: At a Crossroads <https://davidlundie.files.wordpress.com/2019/08/gcse-religious-studies-report.pdf>

As each year passes, a high-quality religious education, that truly prepares pupils for life in modern Britain increasingly becomes the preserve of those attending schools with a religious character; pupils in Academies (75% of secondary schools according to government figures)<sup>4</sup> are being left far behind.

### Specific findings

1. **A third of all state funded secondary schools continue to report that they make zero hours of provision in year 11. Since the implementation of the revised Education Inspection Framework (2019), this narrowing of the curriculum has been identified in some secondary Ofsted inspections but not in all cases where RE is absent or limited.**
2. **Just under a half of Academies without a religious character (49.2%) report providing zero hours for Religious Education in year 11.**
3. **The number of schools that report offering no provision in year 11 has increased in schools required to follow a locally Agreed Syllabus too. In 2018, the number of schools reporting offering zero hours in year 11 was 33.8% and this has increased in 2019 to 38.5%.**
4. **It should be noted that the average percentage of curriculum time in year 11 is inflated by those schools where GCSE RS is offered. Pupils studying this course, typically spend approximately 10% of curriculum time (120-140 guided learning hours) on a GCSE as recommended by Ofqual. The increase in the number of all schools offering less than 3% of curriculum time in year 11 (around 45 minutes on average) is therefore a serious concern. This figure has risen from 43.2% of schools to 65.3% of schools; an increase of more than 50% in just one year.**

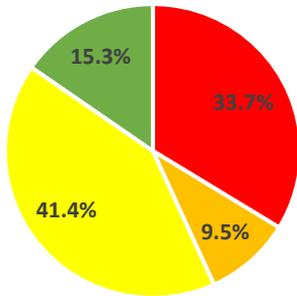
**NATRE calls on the government to act urgently to ensure all pupils in all schools receive a rigorous religious education. Specifically, they must implement the National Plan for RE recommended by the Commission for RE.**

---

<sup>4</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/812539/Schools\\_Pupils\\_and\\_their\\_Characteristics\\_2019\\_Main\\_Text.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/812539/Schools_Pupils_and_their_Characteristics_2019_Main_Text.pdf)

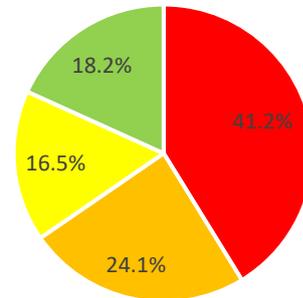
School Workforce data: Percentage of timetable time spent on RE as reported by schools

All Schools 2018



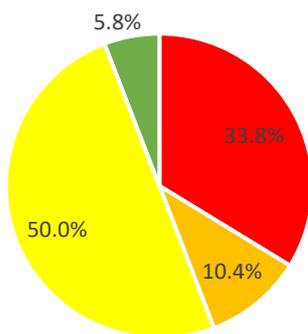
■ No RE at all      ■ Between 0% and 3%  
■ Between 3% and 6%   ■ More than 6%

All Schools 2019



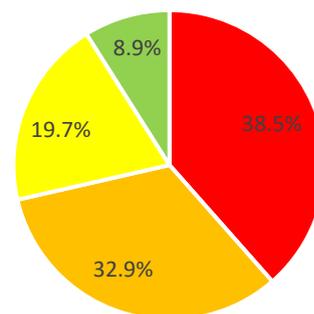
■ No RE at all      ■ Between 0% and 3%  
■ Between 3% and 6%   ■ More than 6%

Schools where the Agreed Syllabus applies 2018



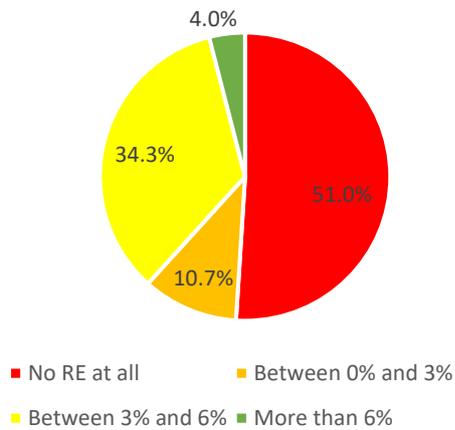
■ No RE at all      ■ Between 0% and 3%  
■ Between 3% and 6%   ■ More than 6%

Schools where the Agreed Syllabus applies 2019

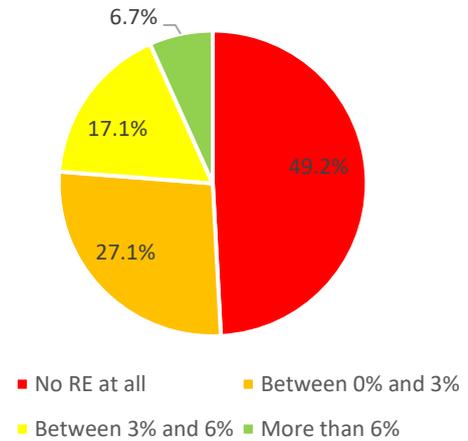


■ No RE at all      ■ Between 0% and 3%  
■ Between 3% and 6%   ■ More than 6%

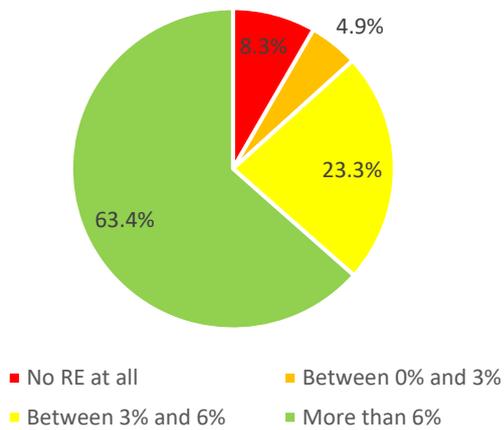
Academies without a religious character  
2018



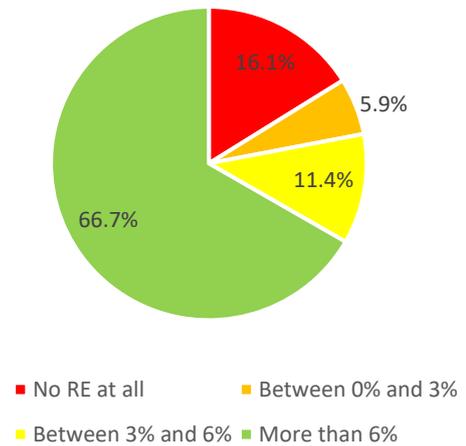
Academies without a religious character  
2019



Schools with a religious character 2018



Schools with a religious character 2019



**Note on School workforce Data based on information from DfE:** The School Workforce Census collects curriculum information from a large sample of secondary schools. Curriculum information is requested from all secondary, middle deemed secondary and all-through schools, including relevant academy schools, with timetabling software that interfaces with their Management Information System. The information collected relates to teaching in one selected week in autumn each year. If a school operates a timetable cycle covering two or more weeks we request an average figure, representative of one weeks teaching. If the school cannot provide that average then a figure to represent a typical week should have been provided; as such figures should be treated with caution.

Around 3,000 secondary schools – more than 80% of all secondary schools make a School Workforce Census return each year. However, not all schools provided complete curriculum information -where returned information on curriculum is mostly incomplete, the data for these schools has been removed from analysis.