

# A small-scale survey of GCSE examination performance in 2018

## Introduction:

This analysis of data gathered in a one-week survey of secondary teachers was conducted in order to support subject leaders in writing reports on the examination performance in the autumn term 2018. Previous [NATRE secondary surveys](#) had found that there was considerable variation in the way that GCSE was delivered in secondary schools. These variations included when teaching of GCSE began in relation to pupils' school year, over what period it was taught in school years and the number of hours of teaching time provided for the teaching.

Whereas, the pre-2016 specifications might have provided some opportunities to compensate for these delivery methods, it was clear that the new specifications would not. [Ofqual accredit all GCSE specifications](#) on the basis that a full course will require between 120 and 140 guided learning hours to be taught. This requirement is based on the expectation that one GCSE is equivalent to any other in the curriculum.

Since the short course GCSEs have been removed from the list of those that count in performance tables, the entries for this course have declined rapidly (figure 1). Unfortunately, many teachers of RE have then been required to teach GCSE full course in the time previously allocated for a short course i.e. approximately an hour a week over 5 terms; approximately 70 guided learning hours.

## Summary

1. **Performance in 2018 was similar to 2017:** In most schools, the new specifications examined in 2018 resulted in a broadly similar level of performance from 2017 or better. This outcome was reported by 74.1% of schools that responded to the survey.
2. In the majority (65%) of schools, results were either at, above or considerably above the national average
3. **Teaching time has a large impact on results especially when top grades are concerned:** Most schools (63.5%) in our sample are provided with the correct amount of teaching time expected by Ofqual but this means 36.5% expected teachers to find ways of allowing pupils to achieve their potential on fewer hours than expected.
4. Where schools expected the GCSE full course to be delivered in the time expected for a short course, *it more than four times more likely* that the students would achieve results *significantly below* the national average and twice as likely to report results that were *below* the national average.
5. Where schools provided the time expected by Ofqual for the GCSE course, students are *twice as likely to achieve considerably above* the national average performance and *almost twice as likely to achieve a result that is at or above* the national average performance.
6. 71% of the schools where results were equal to or stronger than English Language, taught the Religious Studies GCSE on the Ofqual recommended teaching time of at least 120 hours. If the school expected the GCSE to be taught in fewer hours than that, it was twice as likely that pupils would under-perform in comparison to English.
7. **Teaching the course over three-years has a detrimental impact on results:** The most popular delivery model is still a two-year course begin in year 10. This plan was followed by almost 48% of respondents. However, just over 40% of schools are now delivering RS GCSE over three years beginning in year 9.
8. 43% of the schools adopting the two-year, 10-11 delivery model achieved results that were *considerably above* the national average, as opposed to 19% of those adopting the three-year model.
9. 73% of the schools that achieved results that were *at, above or considerably above* the national average with the traditional two-year delivery model as opposed to 58% of schools using the three-year 9-11 model.

10. **More students in option groups achieve results considerably above the national average and more in full cohort groups perform below or considerably below the national average. However, both groups are equally likely to achieve results at or above the national average.** RS GCSE is compulsory for all students in 49.1% of the schools that responded and taught in an option group in 40% of those schools.
11. 81% of the schools where students had opted for RS GCSE performed either at, above or considerably above the national average. 51% of the schools where the whole cohort were entered achieved the same results.
12. In schools making full cohort entries as well as those entering option groups, 33% of schools achieved at or above the national average

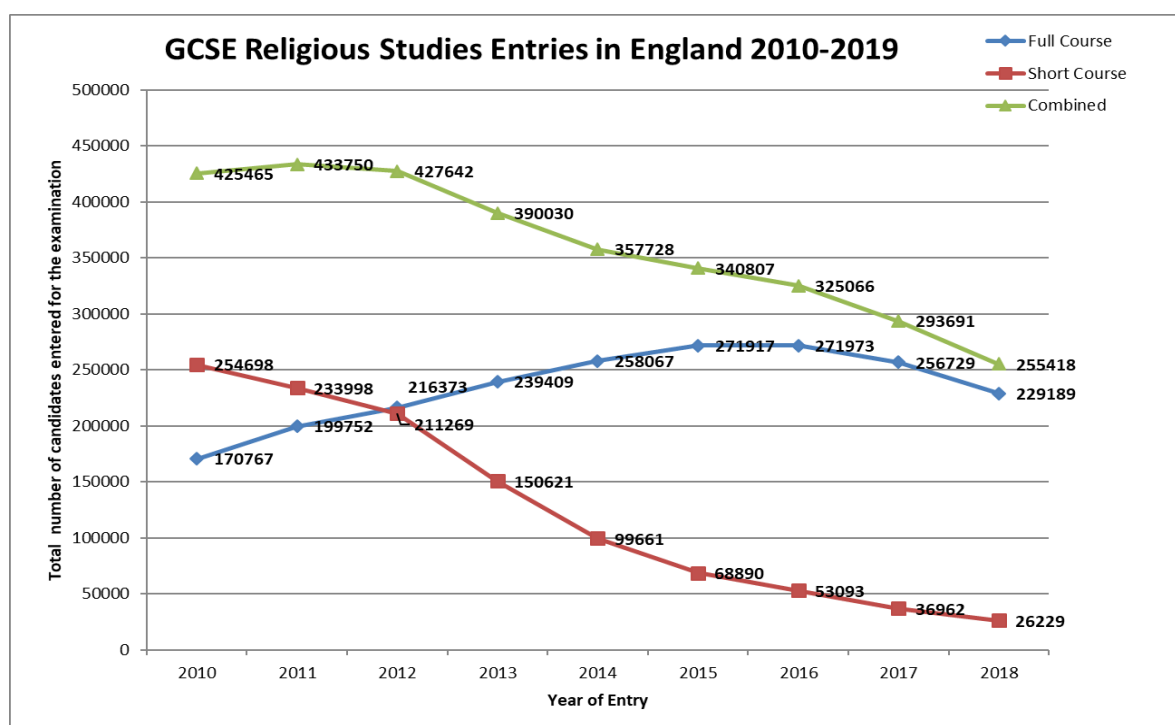


Figure 1

## Methodology

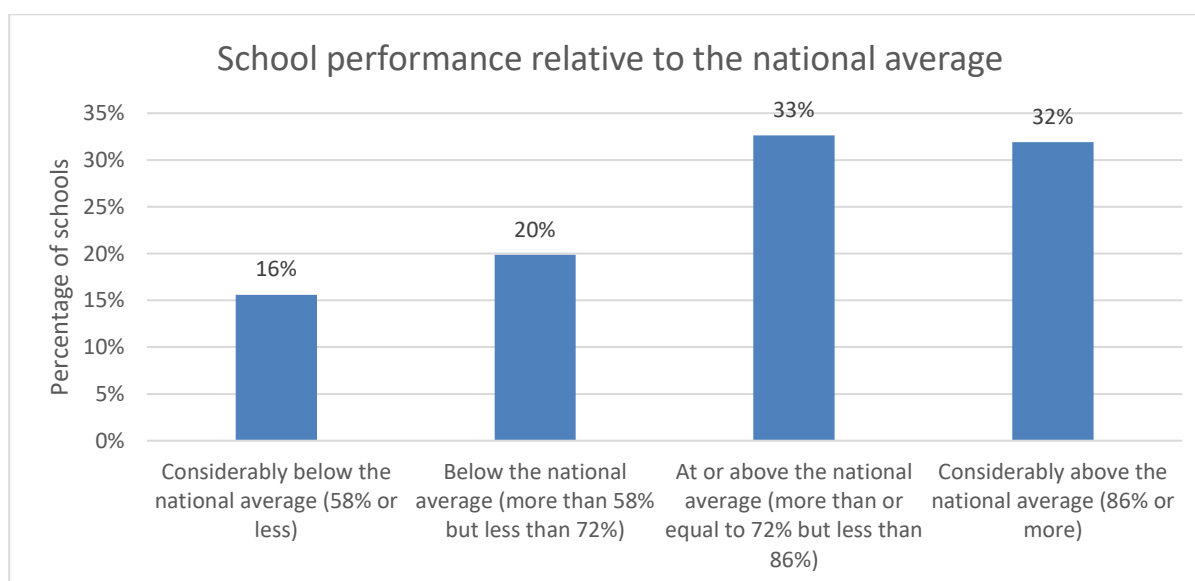
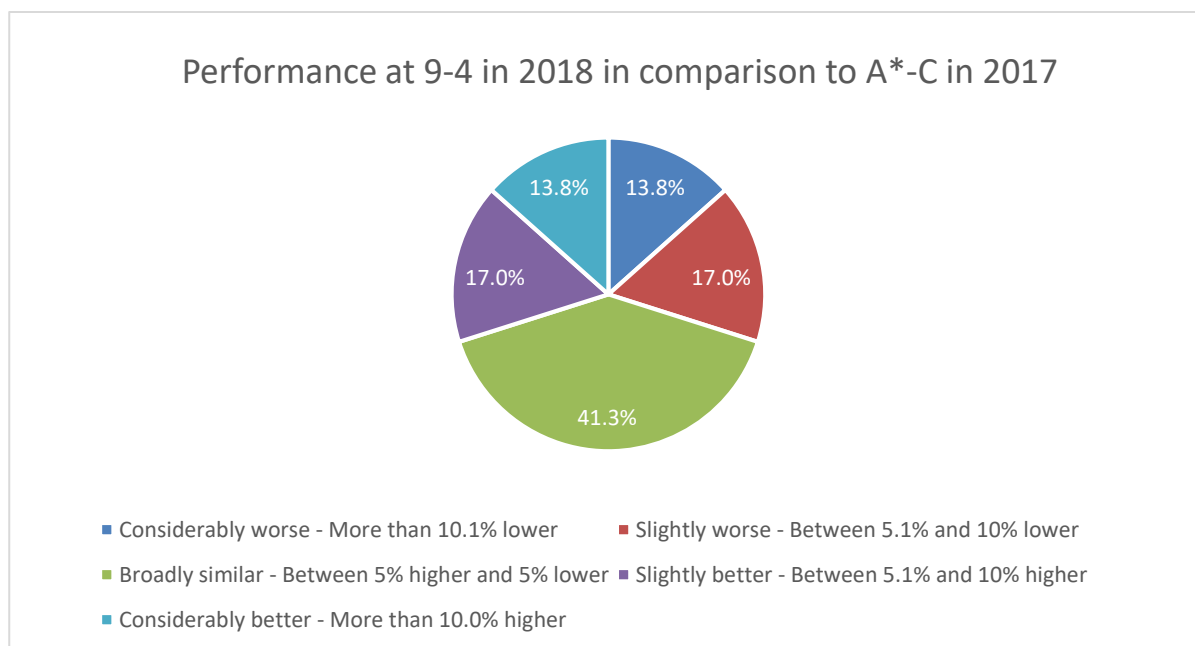
An on-line data gathering tool (Survey Monkey) was used to set a series of questions on GCSE in secondary schools. The survey was available for one week in September only. This was self-reporting data from teachers in schools and all efforts have been made to remove duplication from multiple school entries 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 support RE since those who are not committed to RE would be less likely to take the time to complete the survey and those where there is no GCSE provision would be unable to complete the survey at all.

## Rationale

NATRE has been informed by members that one of their concerns about the introduction of the new specifications was that they had been set targets for the performance of their pupils which did not take account of the fact of these variations in the delivery of the course and that therefore put them at a disadvantage from their colleagues in almost all other subjects. Some teachers compensated for these inequalities, by holding after school classes or by setting significant amounts of extra homework. These methods were likely to be more effective in certain types of school, especially where parents were in the position to support the extra work.

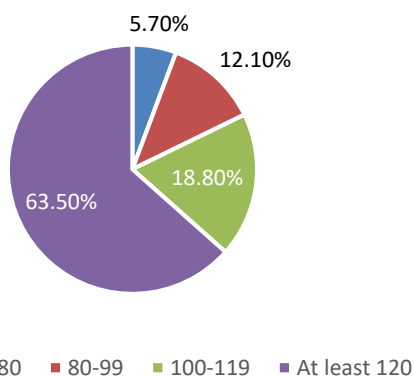
## Findings

Around three quarters of schools (74.1%) achieved broadly similar or better results in comparison with last year.



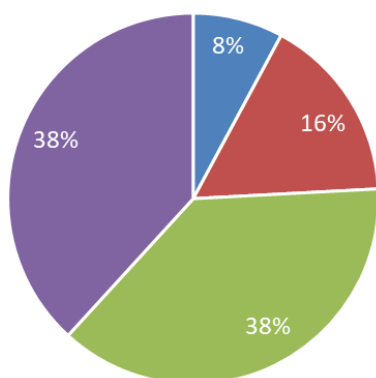
In total, 65% of the performance of students in the schools that responded to our survey achieved at, above or considerably above the national average. Given that our sample is likely to be skewed towards schools that are more committed to RE, this is not surprising but should be taken into account in the comments that follow.

### Percentage of schools offering different amounts of teaching time

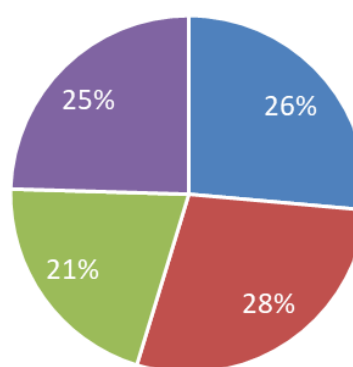


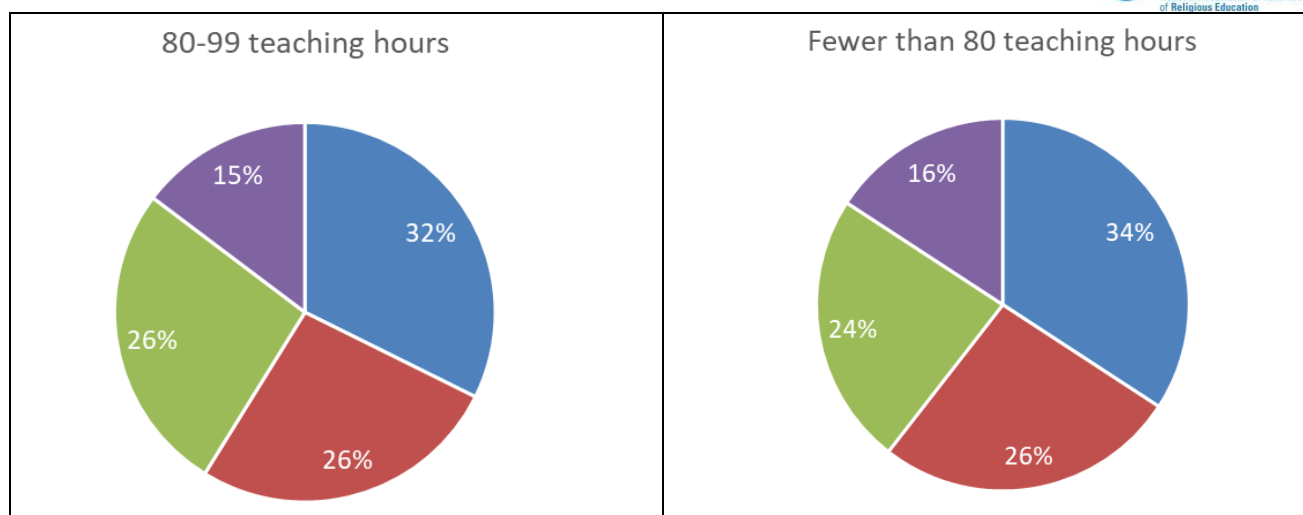
The majority of the schools (63.5%) in our sample are provided with the correct amount of teaching time expected by Ofqual. It is an obvious, but often overlooked fact that GCSEs in different subjects are intended to be comparable. It is one of the key aspects of the work of Ofqual, to ensure that this is so. This means that when Ofqual accredits a GCSE it expects the awarding organisation to demonstrate that the expectations of the assessments, including the assessment objectives and studying the content can be met in a specific amount of time. There are lots of debates about this, such as if candidates are developing knowledge or practising the skills required in one subject in different one, or when their prior learning gives them an advantage over other students, but Ofqual stipulates the requirement for a GCSE is 120-140 guided learning hours.

#### At least 120 teaching hours



#### 100-119 teaching hours





- Considerably below the national average (58% or less)
- Below the national average (more than 58% but less than 72%)
- At or above the national average (more than or equal to 72% but less than 86%)
- Considerably above the national average (86% or more)

Predictably, one of the conclusions from this survey is that the number of teaching hours provided has a significant impact on results. It was **more than four times more likely** that the students in schools providing around an hour per week would achieve significantly below the national average as schools providing the Ofqual recommended time. These schools were twice as likely to report results that were below the national average.

Similarly, in those schools providing the Ofqual expected time for the GCSE course, students were twice as likely to achieve results *considerably above the national average performance* and almost twice as likely to achieve a result that is *at or above the national average performance*.

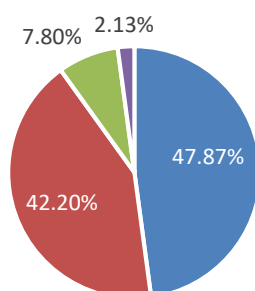
### Impact of different delivery models

This survey shows that just over 40% of schools are now delivering RS GCSE over three years beginning in year 9. This is a similar result as reported in the NATRE Secondary Survey in 2016. Nevertheless, most schools (almost 48%) are using the traditional method of offering GCSE over two years in Years 10-11. The pie charts that follow show that the most reliable means of achieving results that are considerably above the national average is to teach the course over two years to the students for whom the GCSE is designed i.e. 14-16 year olds.

43% of the schools adopting this delivery model achieved results that were considerably above the national average, as opposed to 19% of those adopting the three-year model. Likewise, 73% achieved results that were at, above or considerably above the national average with the traditional two-year delivery model as opposed to 58% of schools using the three year model.

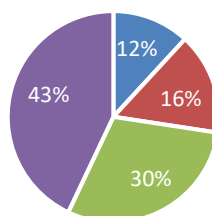
Only 7.8% of our sample were delivering GCSE over two years from year 9 and 10 so this is too small a sample size to draw firm conclusions, however, this model led to the poorest results including the highest proportion of results that were below or considerably below the national average. Ofsted has recently criticised the practice of beginning GCSE in year 9 since it often, though not always, leads to a premature narrowing of the curriculum for students. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/hmci-commentary-curriculum-and-the-new-education-inspection-framework>

### How do schools deliver GCSE Religious Studies?



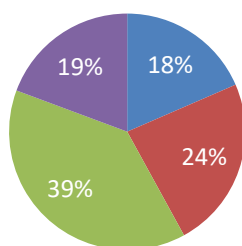
■ Over 2 years in year 10-11 ■ Over 3 years in years 9-11 ■ Over 2 years in year 9-10 ■ Other

### Religious Studies GCSE delivered over 2 years in years 10-11



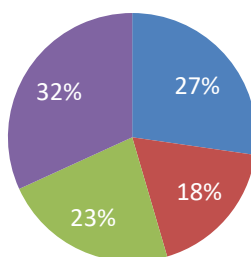
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### Religious Studies GCSE delivered over 3 years in years 9-11



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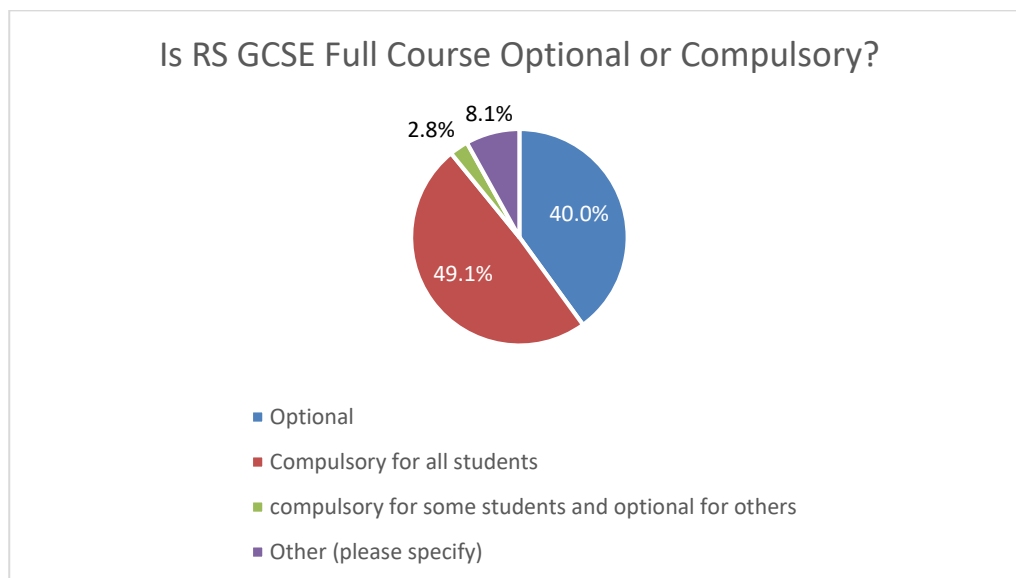
### Religious Studies GCSE delivered over 2 years in years 9-10



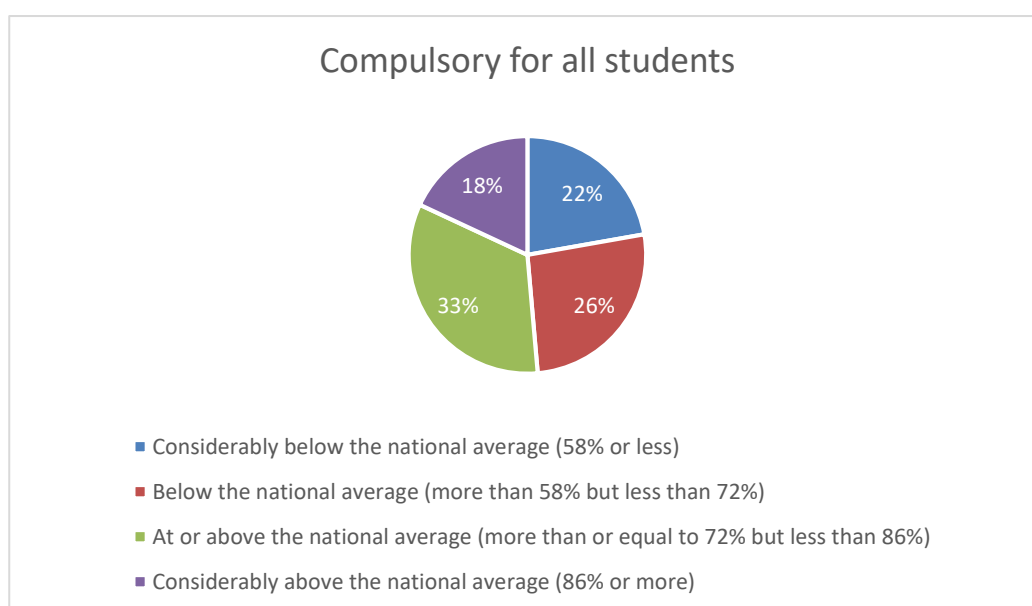
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**Impact on performance of the nature of the groups** – groups of students who have opted for RS, whole cohort groups or other organisational arrangements.

Our sample schools were largely made up of those for whom the subject is compulsory for all students - almost half (49.1%) of the respondents and who teach an option group (40%). The remaining 10% were either arranged in different ways or taught both option and compulsory groups.

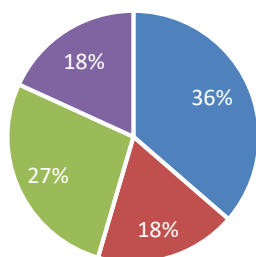


81% of the schools where students had opted for RS GCSE performed either at, above or considerably above the national average. In contrast, 51% of the schools where the whole cohort were entered achieved the same results. Interestingly however, in both sets of circumstances, 33% of schools achieved at or above the national average and it was achievement of results that were well above the national average that was much more challenging (18% for the full cohort entries as opposed to 48% of the option groups).



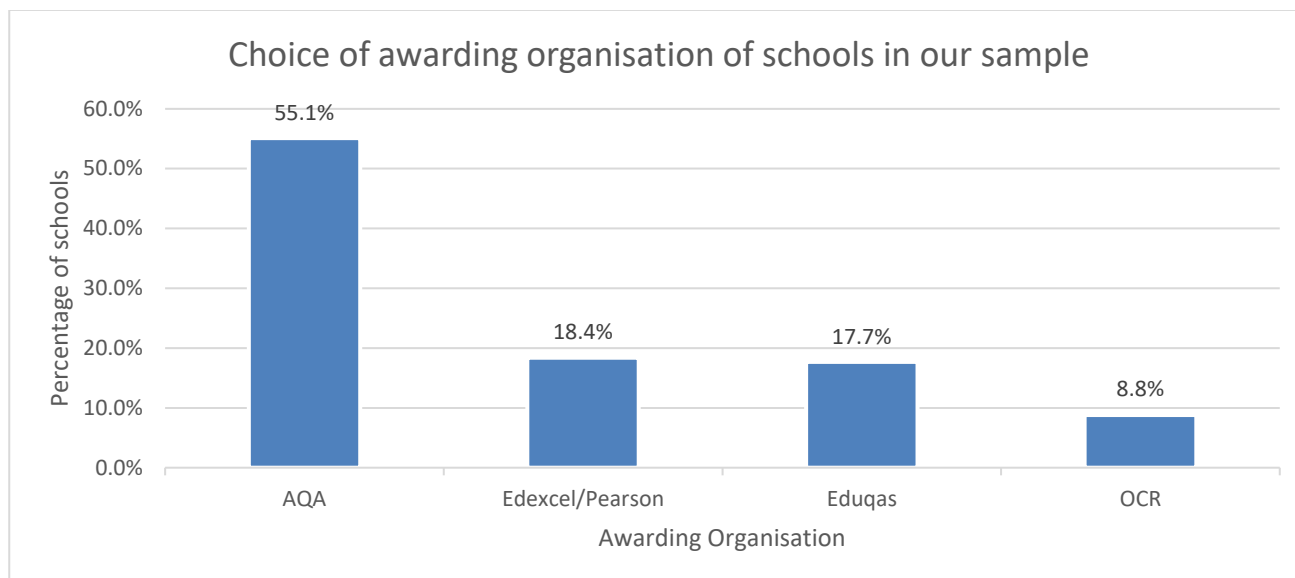


### Compulsory for some students and optional for others



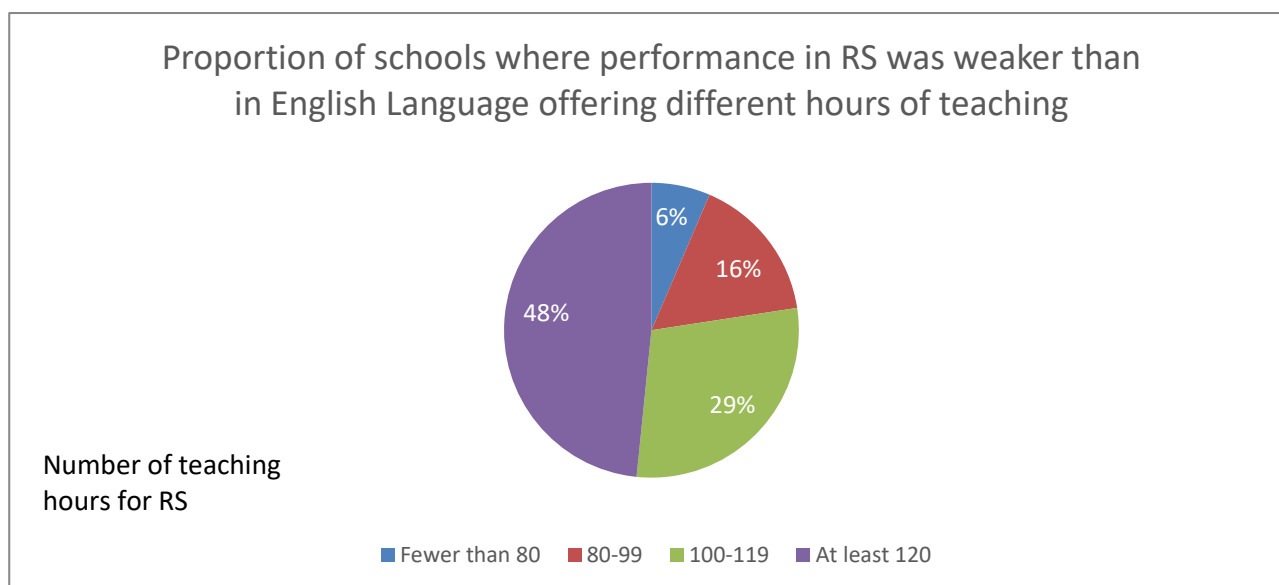
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## Choice of awarding organisations

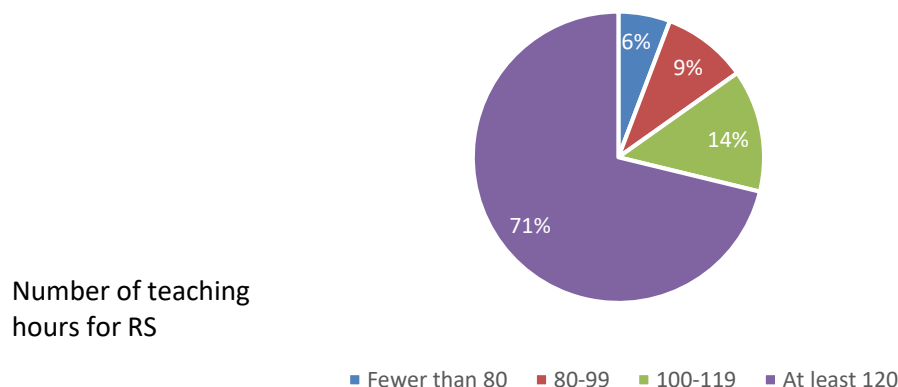


## Performance of students in Religious Studies in comparison to English Language

One of the challenges of analysing data from a survey like this is that we are analysing raw results rather than progress. The results from the data below therefore might be the most interesting finding from the survey. The question assumes that the overwhelming majority of school would provide at least the Ofqual recommended teaching time for English so the true impact on results of providing fewer hours for the teaching of RS can be compared. The results were that 71% of the schools where results were *equal to or stronger than English Language*, taught the Religious Studies GCSE on the Ofqual recommended teaching time of at least 120 hours. If the school expected the GCSE to be taught in fewer hours than that, *it was twice as likely that pupils would under-perform in comparison to English*.



### Percentage of schools where the performance in RS was equal to or stronger than English Language



The NATRE executive wishes to express their gratitude to all those teachers that took the time to complete this survey at a busy time of the schools year. We hope that the information in this report will help teachers of Religious Studies to be able to contextualise their examination results. It is important to make the point that teachers cannot be held accountable for the impact of other people’s decisions. We plan to use the results of this survey with Ofqual and the awarding organisations to support members further.

26<sup>th</sup> September 2018