

## **An analysis of a survey of teachers on the impact of political policy on student opportunity to study RE/RME and RVE**

### **A tenth Survey – July 2023**

#### **Introduction**

This is an analysis of the data gathered from a questionnaire on impact of political policies on Religious Education in England, RME in Scotland and RVE in Wales. It relates particularly to the level of provision in different types of school, the experience of teachers in relation to initial teacher training and continuing professional development and the type of examination and non-examination courses offered at key stages 4 and 5. Through publicising this survey, NATRE hopes it can be used widely seeks to make the case for more attention to be paid to the level of provision and quality of our subject in all schools and, in England for there to be a National Plan for RE as recommended by the Commission on RE in 2018.

This tenth survey was conducted during the summer term of 2023 via a number of teacher networks supported by the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), and RE Today Services. The survey was publicised via social media networks and via the electronic networks of other RE organisations including AREIAC, AULRE, and NASACRE. Replies were received from 241 teachers in different parts of the United Kingdom. Respondents did not all respond to every question. Responses that are significantly different, according to school type of the respondent, have also been discussed.

#### **Methodology**

An on-line data gathering tool (Survey Monkey) was used to set a series of questions on the provision of RE in secondary schools. This is similar to surveys conducted in previous years and, where applicable, this report includes the previous data as a comparison. Questions were asked to collect key information about how the provision and support for RE might have changed in key stages three and four and about the respondents' views regarding the reason for the changes. It should be noted that due to the nature of the survey, it can be argued that respondents are more likely to be in schools where teachers of RE, RVE or RME are employed since those who are not committed to the subject would be less likely to take the time to complete the survey.

## Conclusions

### TEACHER WORKLOAD

- This survey has identified a number of inequalities in the delivery and support for religious education that impact on the workload of teachers. For example, almost one in ten respondents reported that short term planning material is provided for them that requires minimal adaptation to their setting. However, 50% of respondents reported that no planning is provided at all (Table 14). Similarly, 13% of respondents reported that they are expected to deliver a GCSE full course on less than the hours agreed with Ofqual. This again will have an impact on teacher workload and almost certainly on the outcomes for pupils. (Table 8)

### PROVISION:

- Six in ten schools report that legal requirements for RE are not met at Key Stage 4. However, 91% of schools report offering discrete RE lessons at Key Stage 3. (Table 10 and 17)
- This data suggests that as with the 2021 survey, the past 12 months has been a rapid period of change for RE with almost one in 5 reporting an increase in provision again.
- Whilst just under one in five respondents reported that some parents withdraw pupils from Religious Education in their school, this is slightly fewer than in 2021. Of serious concern is the fact that there appears to be an increase in school-led withdrawal, which is outside the terms of the legislation. In just under a half of the cases reported, pupils had been withdrawn for a curricular reason. In 2021, the figure was a third. Example of reasons given include the school prioritising specific provision for a SEND pupil or to provide extra time for literacy or numeracy. In almost one in eight cases, the request cited 'unspecified religious reasons'. (Table 21 and 22)
- Christianity and Islam continue to be the most frequently taught religious worldviews at KS3 representing 97% and 89% of respondents. Buddhism is taught in 80% of schools and Hinduism, Judaism, a non-religious worldview such as Humanism and Sikhism are all taught in around 70% of schools. (Table 18a)

### LEADERSHIP

- It is pleasing to note that an increasing number of academy trusts are choosing to appoint one or more subject leaders for Religious Education. NATRE will monitor this development over the coming years and will investigate the nature of these roles and their impact on religious education. (Table 5)
- Disappointingly 54% of Early Career Teachers report that they did not have a subject specialist mentor for the programme. Consequentially, half of them rated the subject knowledge element of their programme as Poor or Very Poor. (Table 13)

### TIMETABLING AND TIME FOR GCSE

- Where Religious Studies is an optional subject at Key Stage 4, our respondents report that in more than one in three schools, students then receive no Religious Education at all in Key Stage 4 – even though it is a statutory subject for all pupils in this key stage. (Table 9)
- The trend towards offering GCSE Religious Studies courses over three years continues to become less common. There has been a return to teaching the course over two years. More than 70% of schools now teach GCSE in this way. However, that does mean that a one in five of schools are teaching GCSE over three years. (Table 7)

### RE AS A SPECIALISM:

- 36% of respondents reported that they had received no subject specific training out of school in the last academic year. In addition, 55% reported that they had attended no training in school. With so many schools reporting that teachers who mainly teach another subject delivering Religious Education, training must be even more important, and this area needs to be addressed urgently. (Table 12a and b)
- In 81% of schools the number of specialist teachers of RE either remained stable or (in 23% of cases) increased (Table 3). In some schools however the number of specialists employed is falling. This was reported almost one in five of respondents.
- Around 8 in 10 of respondents reported that RE was taught by teachers who spent most of their timetable teaching another subject (a slight decrease from 2021). In 34% of cases more than 1 in 5 lessons is taught by these teachers. Part of the reason for this is lack of RE specialists in the workforce and the failure of the DfE Teacher Supply Model to recognise the importance of specialism to high quality provision. (Table 4)

### DESTINATIONS OF A LEVEL RS STUDENTS

- By far the most common destination for pupils who studied A level RS, was another Humanities subject, such as History, Geography or Sociology. The second most common was Philosophy and then Law. Theology and Sciences were the third most common, but these only accounted for around a third of the Humanities courses. (Table 20)

## 1. Types of school

Responses were received by teachers in the following types of school. Note that some respondents ticked more than one category.

Table 1 – Representation of school types in our responses.

Type of school	No.	%
Schools where the Agreed Syllabus is required	57	24%
Schools and Academies with a religious character	30	12%
Academies without a religious character	135	56%
Independent School	11	5%
Other: Schools in NI, Scotland and one 6 <sup>th</sup> form college	8	3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>100%</b>

It should be noted that due to the method we use to contact schools, the data in their survey is likely to result in a more favourable picture of Religious Education than nationally. Schools where there are no specialist teachers of RE or no provision for the subject, will be much less likely to have responded.

**2. Has there been an increase or decrease in the amount of RE that was taught in 2022-2023 compared to 2020/2021?**

	2022-23 (2020-21)
Report (all school types)	% of total
Decrease	16%(15%)
Increase	21%(19%)
No change	63%(66%)

**Table 2(a) above and 2(b) below**

2022-23	increase	No change	Decrease
<b>School Type</b>	<b>%*</b>	<b>%*</b>	<b>%*</b>
Schools where the Agreed Syllabus applies	15%	63%	22%
Schools including academies with a religious character	17%	52%	31%
Academies and other state funded schools without a religious character	21%	57%	22%
Others (Grammar, Ind, Scot.NI etc)	27%	73%	0%
*NOTE: Percentage is the % of that school type and NOT % of all schools			

This data suggests that in the past 12 months the pattern has continued from that reported in 2021. Around two-thirds of schools reported their provision remains stable and more of the remainder reported an increase than a decrease. When we consider different types of school however, there is a worrying trend in schools with a religious character in that a third of them report a decrease in provision and only around a half report stable provision. This is consistent with what we have seen through other data sources including entries for GCSE in these schools and school workforce data where there has been some decline.

**3. RE as a specialism: Has there been an increase or decrease in RE subject specialist staff for 2022-23(2020-21)?**

Report	% total
Decrease	20% (16%)
Increase	22%(23%)
No change	59%(61%)

**Table 3 (above)**

Table 3 shows that whilst about 6 in every 10 schools did not report a change the number of specialist RE staff, 2 in 10 reported a decrease. 66% of those reporting a decrease gave staffing issues as the main reason for that increase. Just under 50% reported the decrease was a result of a member of staff leaving and not being replaced. Other reasons included failure to recruit a teacher to cover a maternity leave or the lack of a candidate who performed well at interview. This finding is consistent with the well reported issue across England and Wales of a lack of graduates taking up places on teacher training courses across most subjects and perhaps even more worryingly, the proportion of teachers leaving the profession entirely, within their first five years. Of those reporting an increase, the most frequent reason given was an increase in provision at examination leave and key stage 4 more widely.

**4. What proportion of the RE provision in your school is delivered by teachers whose main time is spent in another curriculum area?**

**Table 4**

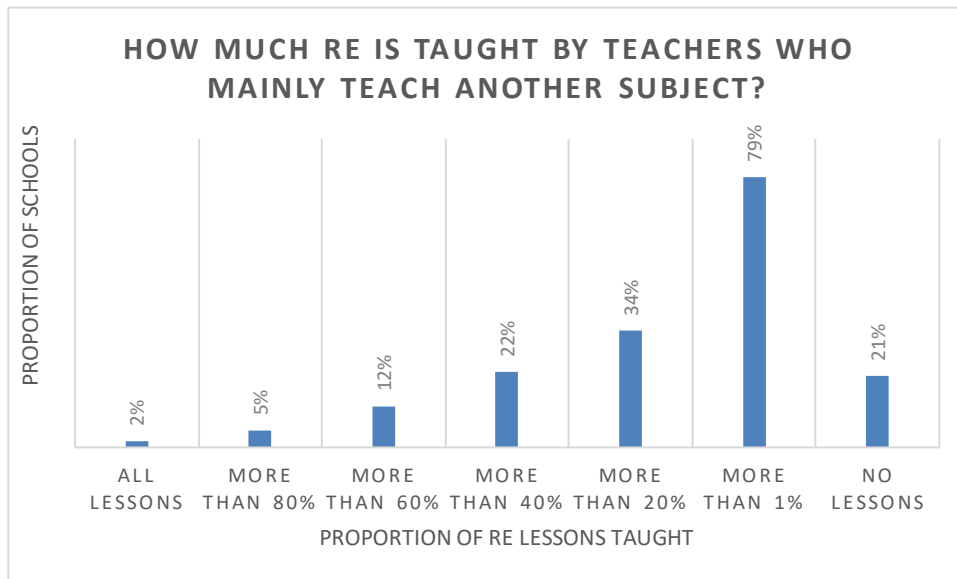


Table 4 (left) shows that in just under 8 in 10 schools reported that some RE was taught by teachers who spent most of their timetable teaching another subject . This is an increase from just over 7 in 10 in the last survey.

This finding is consistent with the data provided by the Department for Education’s own School Workforce Survey which found that three times as many lessons of RE as History are taught by those with no post-A level qualification in the subject.

Fortunately, this is an issue which is attracting the attention of policy makers including different political parties. [A report published earlier this year](#) about the impact of teachers teaching outside their main specialism on their confidence, has promoted a conversation about teacher retention.

[A parliamentary question](#) tabled earlier this year resulted in the Minister for schools admitting the 51% of ‘teachers of RE’ spent most of their time teaching a different subject.

## 5. Leadership

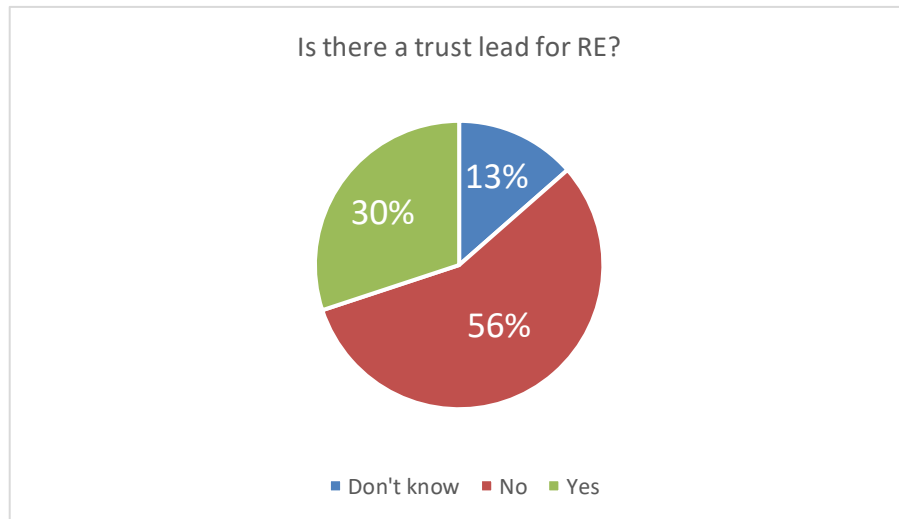
### (a) Is there a subject leader specifically for RE in your school?

- i. 11% said no in 2023 (9% in 2021)
- ii. 89% said yes in 2023 (91% in 2021)

As mentioned earlier, this is not a surprising result given that schools with a subject leader are far more likely to be in touch with NATRE and complete this survey. It is of concern however, that more than one in ten schools do not have a subject leader specifically for RE.

### (b) If you teach in a multi-academy trust, is there a subject lead for RE/RME/RVE across the whole trust?

Table 5 It is pleasing to note that an increasing number of academy trusts are choosing to appoint one or more subject leaders for Religious Education. NATRE will monitor this development over the coming years and will investigate the nature of these roles and their impact on religious education.



6. Which awarding organisation’s specification do you teach if you offer (a) GCSE short course Religious Studies? (b) Full course Religious Studies?

Table 6a

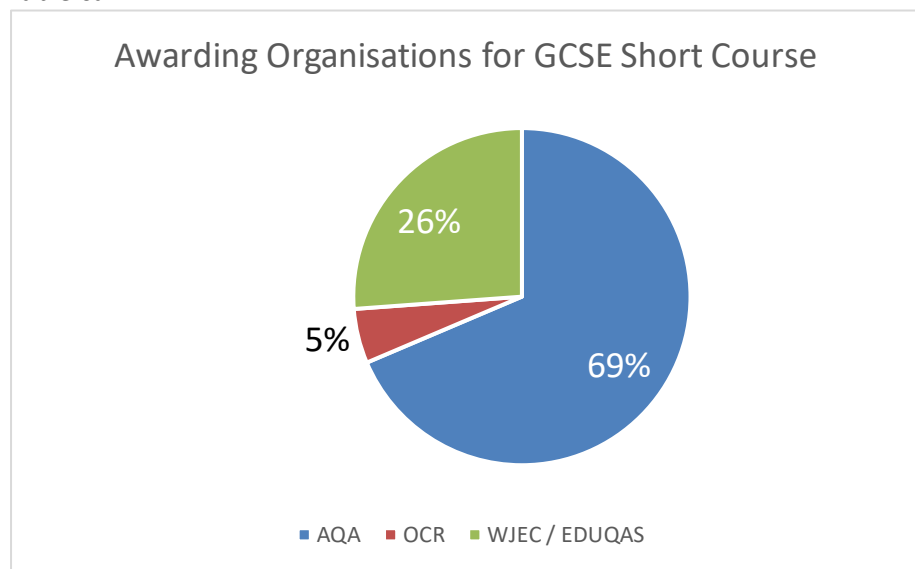
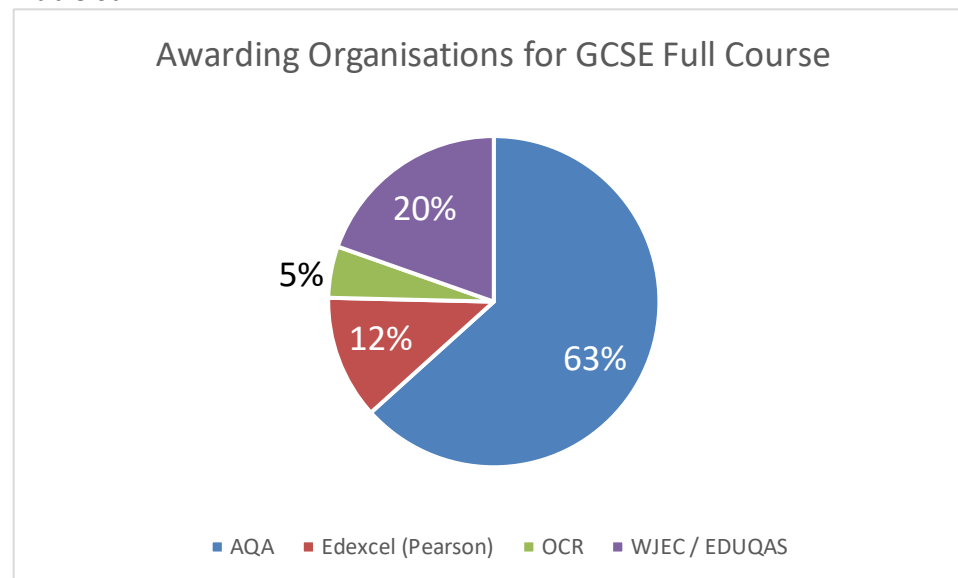


Table 6b



Around two-thirds of schools that responded to this survey have chosen AQA as their awarding organisation for GCSE – this applies to both short and full course. When the GCSE was reformed in 2016, AQA were the first organisation to have their specification approved by Ofqual. WJEC (for Wales) and Eduqas (For England) have a significant proportion of the market at full course.

Two respondents mentioned other awarding organisations: SQA Nation 3-Higher (Scotland) and CWRS Agored Cymru (Wales). The most popular choice of unit were:

For short course, Christianity which was offered by 93% of respondents where short course is taught, Islam at 69% and religious, **philosophical** and ethical studies at 40%. For full course, Christianity which was offered by 78% of respondents where full course is taught, Islam at 55% and religious, **philosophical** and ethical studies at 34%.

## 7. Changes to the way the GCSE full course is delivered

Table 7

How is the GCSE Full Course delivered?	2020-2021	2022-2023
1/3 of time over 3 years (starting in Year 9)	36%	22%
1/2 of time over 2 years (starting in Year 10)	64%	71%

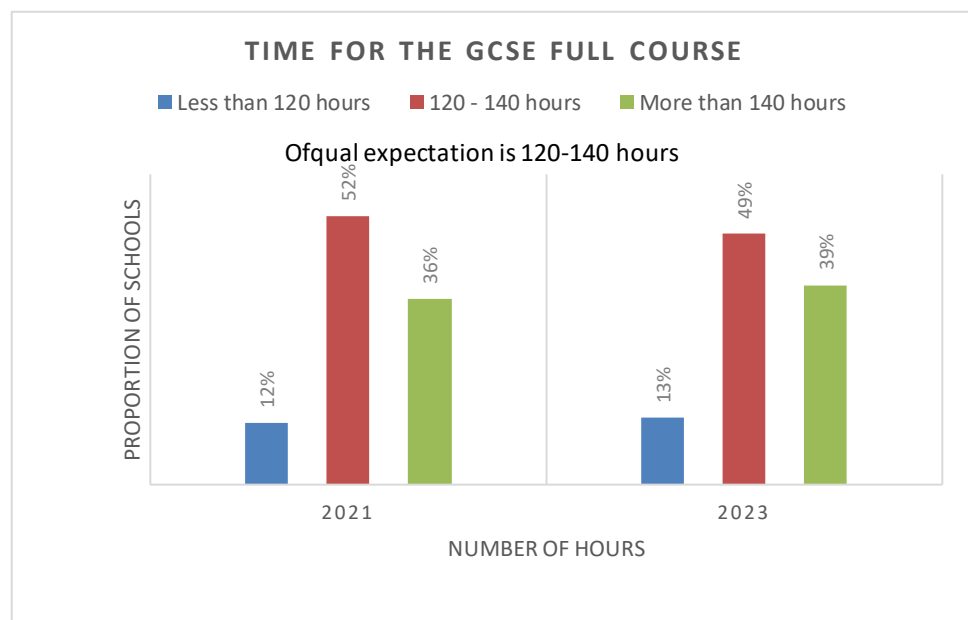
In the two years leading to the 2019 survey, we reported a significant trend towards teaching the GCSE full course over three years instead of two, as had previously been the norm. This trend began to reverse by 2021 and has continued to the point that more than two thirds of schools now deliver GCSE over two years.

Other patterns of delivery, making up 9% of respondents in total, included starting to teach the GCSE part way through year 9 and continuing through year 10-11 (4%), all the hours delivered in one school year, delivery in extra-curricular time and early entry at end of year 10.

Since the publication of the Ofsted research review in 2021, where the negative impact of early entry, especially on pupils with lower prior attainment was discussed, there has been a clear move away from early entry and beginning the course in year 9. This data shows a continuation in that pattern.

## 8. How much time is offered for GCSE RS examination courses?

Table 8



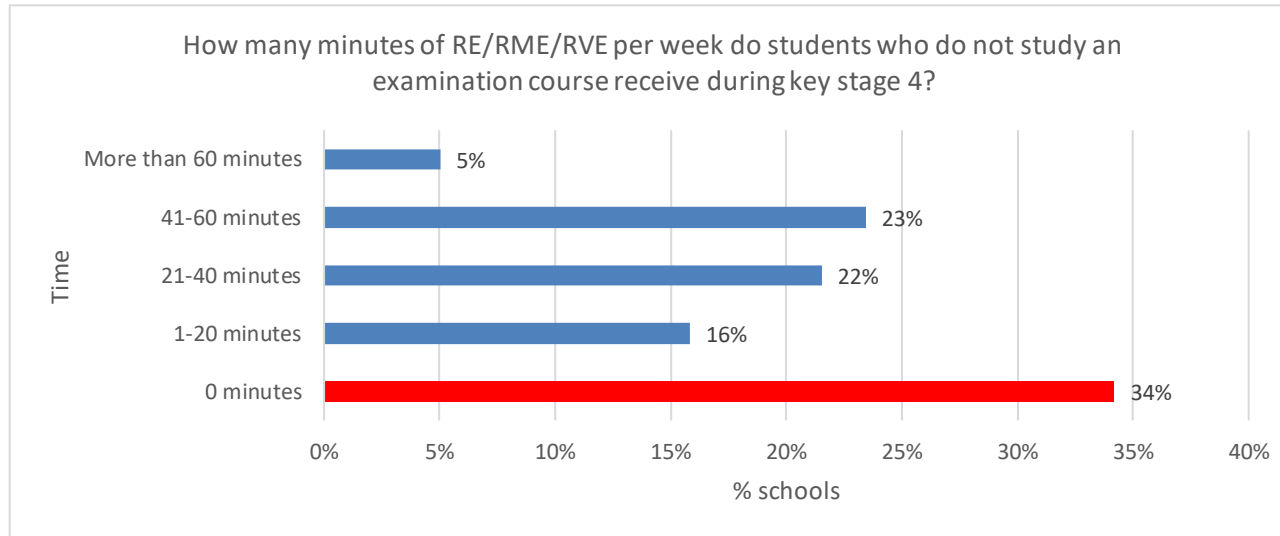
**GCSE Full Course specifications are designed to be taught over a period of 120-140 learning hours.** This is one of the criteria used by Ofqual when approving a specification for teaching. This aims to ensure that each GCSE is, as far as is possible, of comparable demand. Some schools are not providing sufficient time to allow the course to be taught in sufficient breadth and depth.

The number of schools adopting this practice has decreased over time. The most recent two surveys show 88% schools offer at least the specified time whilst in 2019, only 79% did so. That being said, the negative impact not only on pupil attainment, but also on their experience of religious education must be challenged. The impact on teachers should also be considered. Attempting to complete a specification in insufficient time is obviously stressful and disheartening if colleagues in other subjects, are given the correct hours. If performance targets are also based on performance this adds to the injustice of providing fewer hours than required. Comments in this survey relating to the retention of teachers demonstrates that this practice is one of the barriers to teachers of RE remaining in the profession.



**9. How many minutes of RE per week do students who do not study an examination course receive during key stage 4?**

Table 9

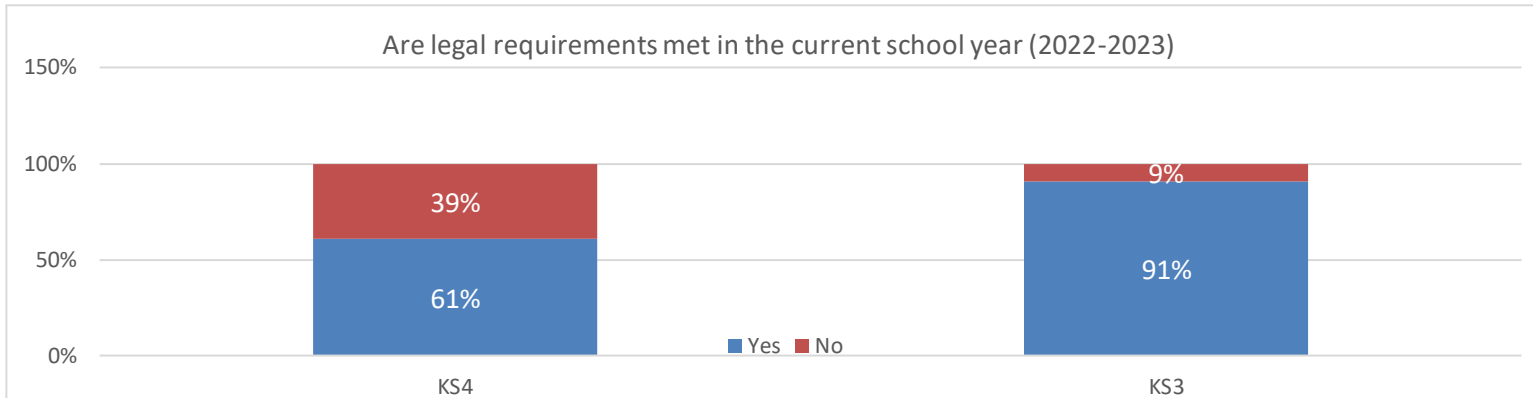


Just over 1/3 (34%) of respondents report offering no provision outside their option system which means their curriculum will not be compliant with the law which requires all pupils in all year groups to study Religious Education. This applies to both Agreed Syllabus Schools and Academies. This requirement appears in the funding agreement academies. This figure represents an increase from 29% in the 2021 survey.

This result shows that where schools are said to be non-compliant with the legal requirement to teach RE to all pupils, the majority of the deficit is due to this factor. It is worth noting also that only 28% of students receive more than 40 minutes of RE if they do not opt for an examination course.

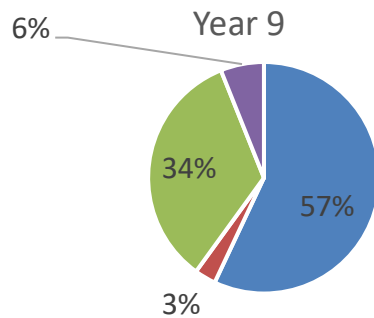
## 10 Are legal requirements being met?

Table 10



### 11. Where GCSE is offered, is it an option or compulsory?

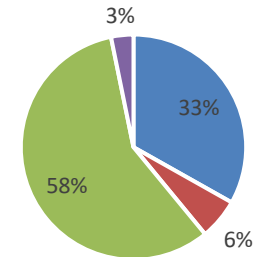
Table 11a



- The course was compulsory for all or almost all students
- The course was in an option box with other Humanities subjects; -History, Geography etc
- The course was in an option box with other subjects
- Other

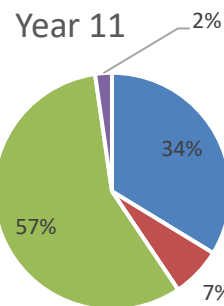
Table 11b

Year 10



- The course was compulsory for all or almost all students
- The course was in an option box with other Humanities subjects; -History, Geography etc
- The course was in an option box with other subjects
- Other

Table 11c



- The course was compulsory for all or almost all students
- The course was in an option box with other Humanities subjects; -History, Geography etc
- The course was in an option box with other subjects
- Other

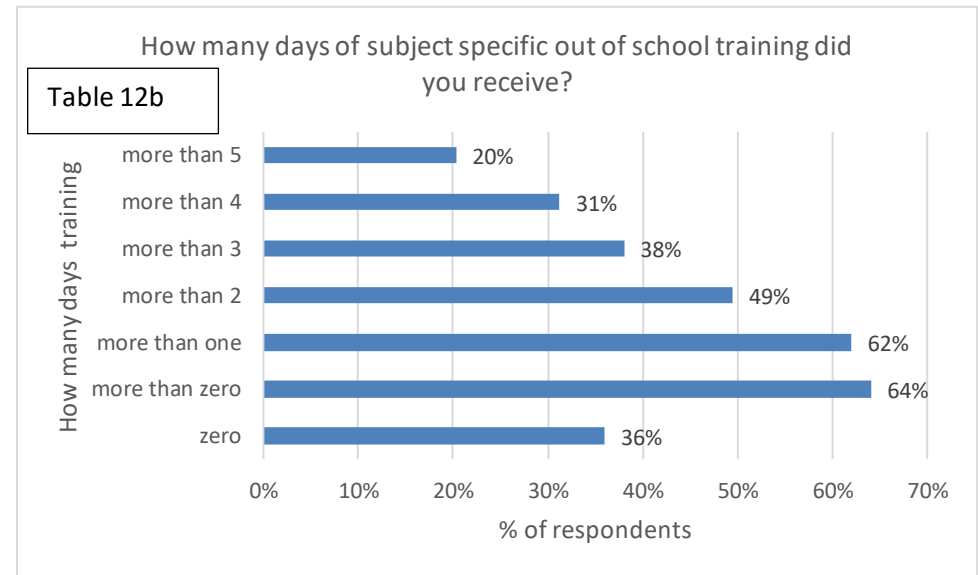
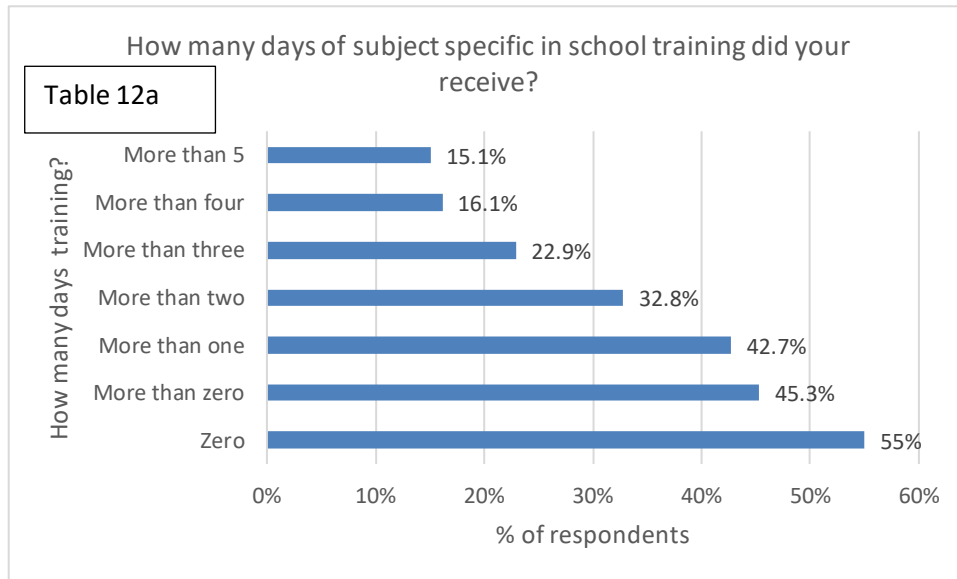
The number of respondents reporting that they start teaching the GCSE in year 9 has decreased over time (from 36% in 2021 to 22% in 2023), this still the practice in one in five schools where GCSE full course is offered.

In around a third of these schools, pupils choose their options at the end of year 8 and RS was one of the options. In 57% of these schools, the course was compulsory for all or almost all pupils.

In years 10 and 11 the pattern is reversed. For 58% of year 10s and 57% of year 11s RS was an option in a box that did not include Humanities subjects. For 33% of year 10s and 34% of year 11s, the course was compulsory for all or almost all pupils. Before the introduction of the English Baccalaureate, RS was most frequently offered in a box with other Humanities subjects, typically, History, Geography and Sociology. This change has usually found RS competing with a larger number of subjects with a predictable decrease in take up or even viability of the option itself.

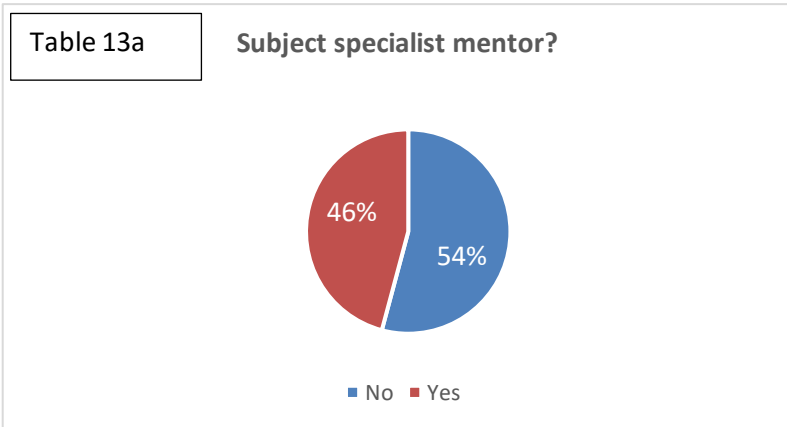
## 12. How much training in Religious Education did teachers receive in the academic year 2022-2023?

The amount of out of school training appears to have returned to pre-covid levels. 36% of respondents reported that they had received no subject specific training out of school in the last academic year. This figure was 38% in 2019. In addition, 55% reported that they had attended no training in school. In 2019, that figure was 48% so the amount of attention paid to subject specific professional development in schools has reduced. With so many schools reporting that teachers who mainly teach another subject delivering Religious Education, training must be even more important, and this area needs to be addressed urgently.

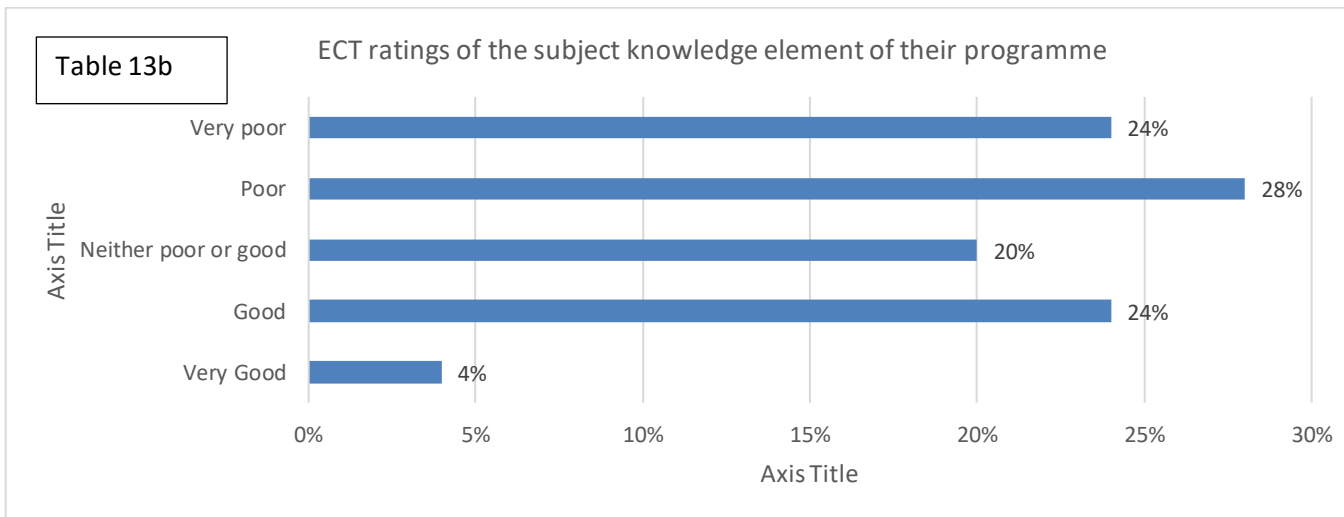


### 13. Experience of Early Career Teachers

Is there a RE subject specialist who mentors you as part of the ECT/NQT programme?



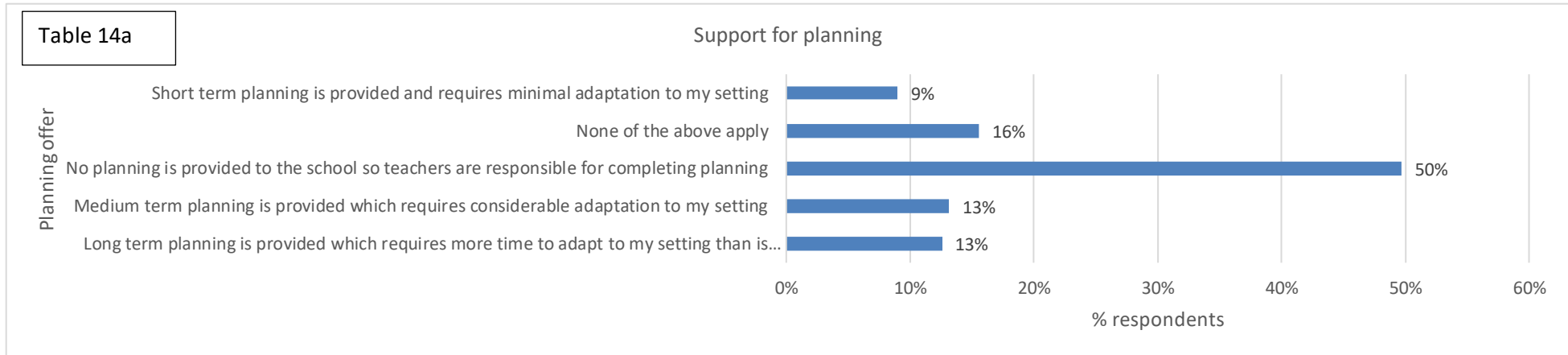
How would you rate your ECT programme to date in relation to standard 3 – Demonstrate good curriculum and subject knowledge for RE/RME/RVE?



Although this was a small sample of early career teachers, it is still of concern that more than half of them rated the subject knowledge element of their programme as Poor or Very Poor.

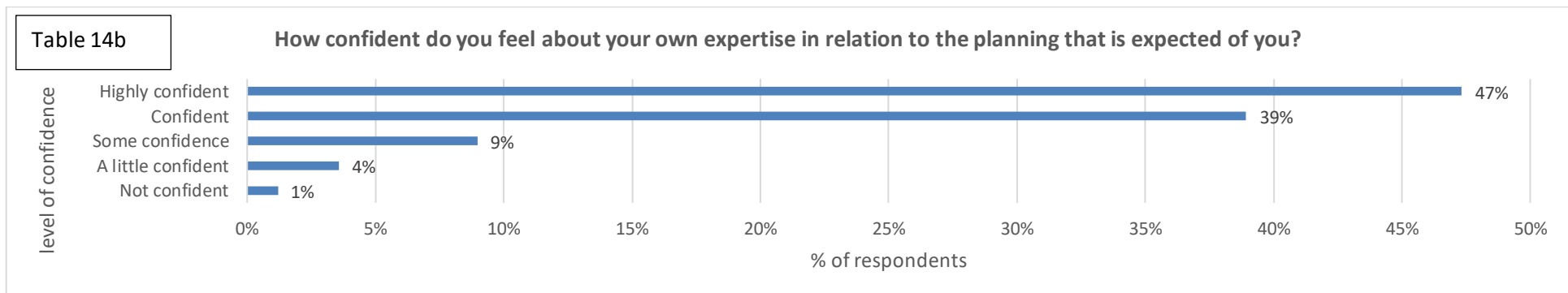
NATRE offer a programme of support for ECTs which is part of our promotion of ECT membership. See the website for details.

**14. Planning support: In some areas, detailed planning documentation is provided for schools by the Local Authority, Diocese or, in England, by an Academy Trust. Which of the following best describes provision of planning in your setting?**



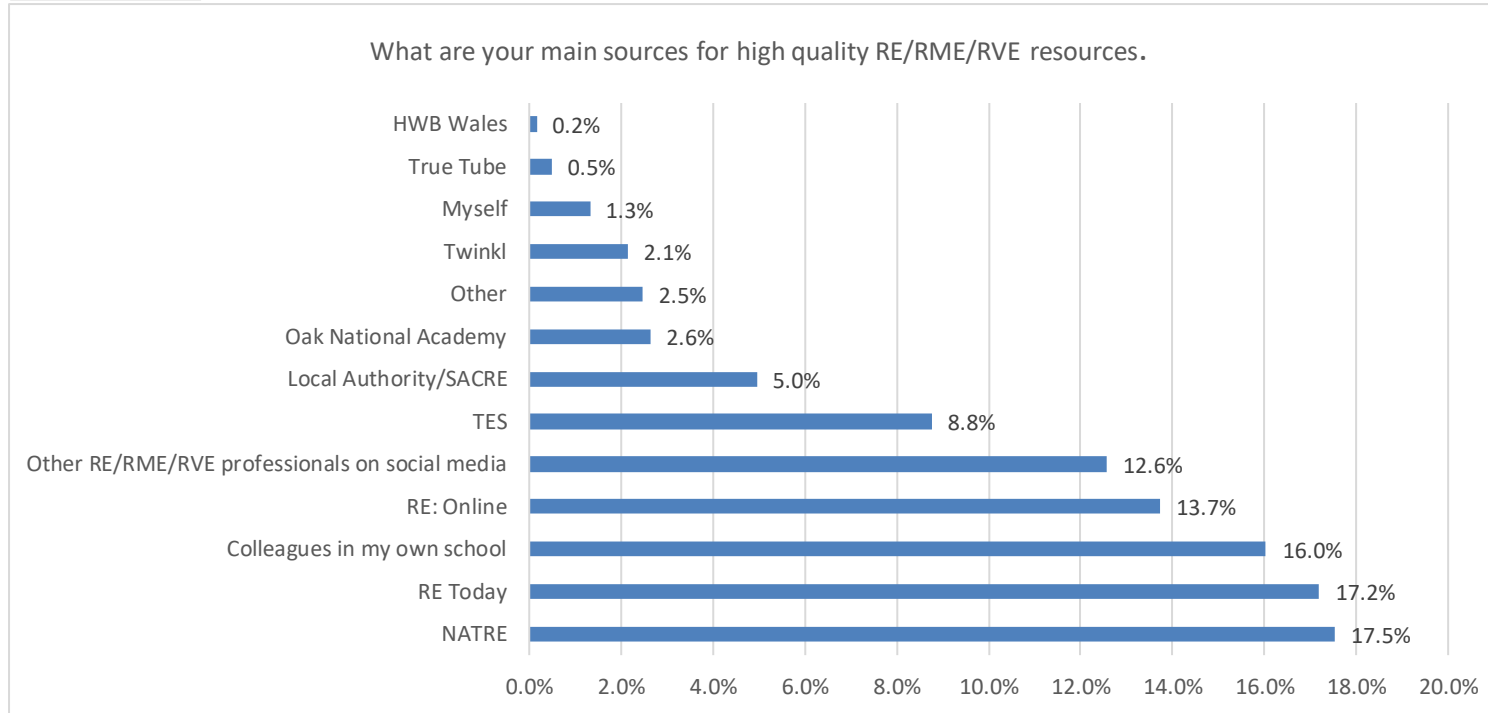
This new set of questions in our survey highlights enormous inequalities in the expectations of teachers in different local authorities, academy trusts and schools. 50% of teachers reported that no planning is provided to the school at all. There is a clear link between the issue of planning and workload and again, it is likely that these variations will impact on teacher retention. Given the number of teachers delivering RE who mainly teach another subject, it is obviously in the best interests of students and standards that at least some optional planning material is provided, even if the teacher wishes to adapt it to her own setting.

As most of the teachers completing this survey will be those who mainly teach RE, it is of concern that the current level of support provided for planning leaves almost one in seven teachers feeling less than confident about the planning that is expected of them.



### 15. Resources for teaching and learning:

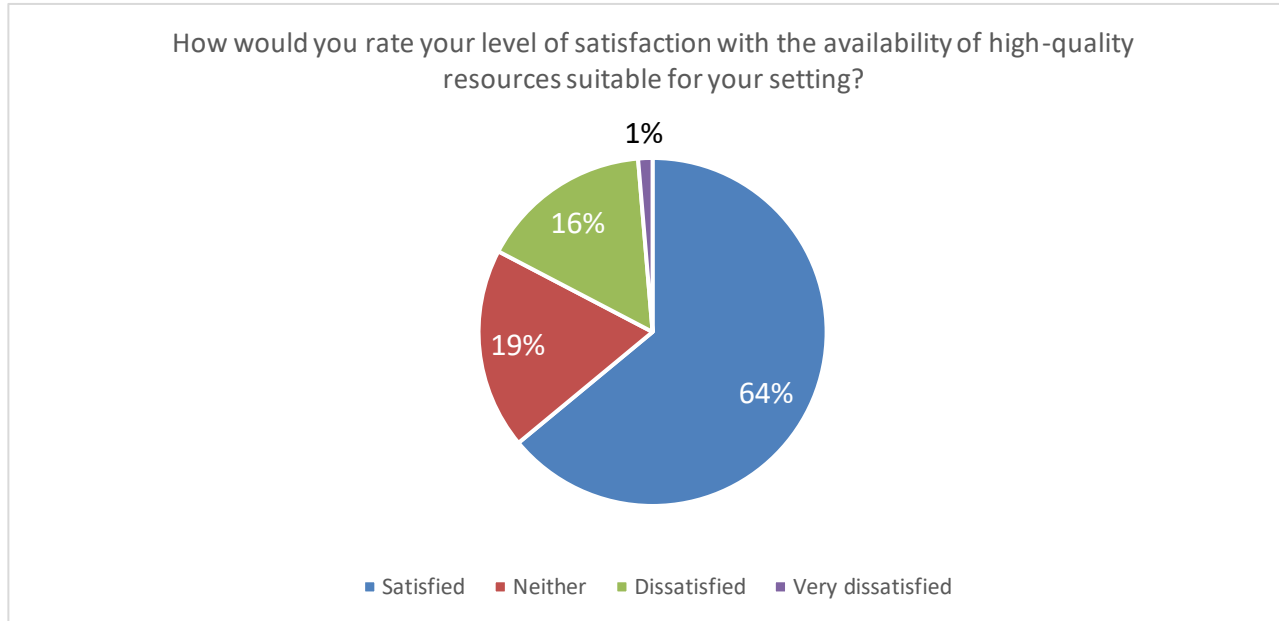
Table 15a



NATRE are pleased to see that the most frequently quoted source for high quality RE/RME/RVE resources, is NATRE and RE Today. It is disappointing that SACREs are not sufficiently funded to feature more prominently in this table but teachers supporting teachers through social media, TES and school colleagues seems to play a significant role in fulfilling this need.

**How would you rate your level of satisfaction with the availability of high-quality resources suitable for your setting?**

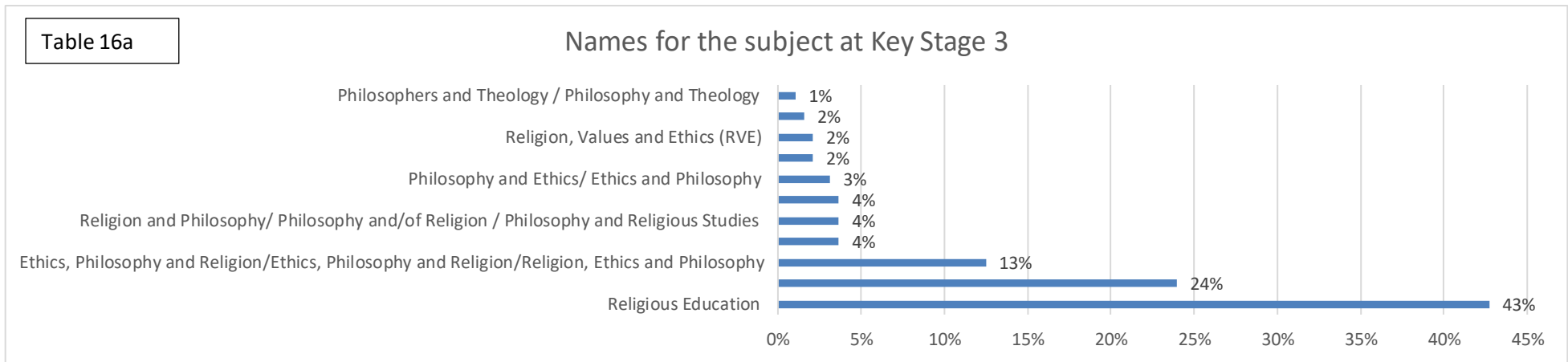
Table 15b



Almost two thirds of teachers reported feeling satisfied with the availability of high-quality resources suitable for their setting. This suggests that there are a significant number of teachers who believe there is more to be done to either improve the quality or availability of resources – perhaps both. NATRE needs to research this further.

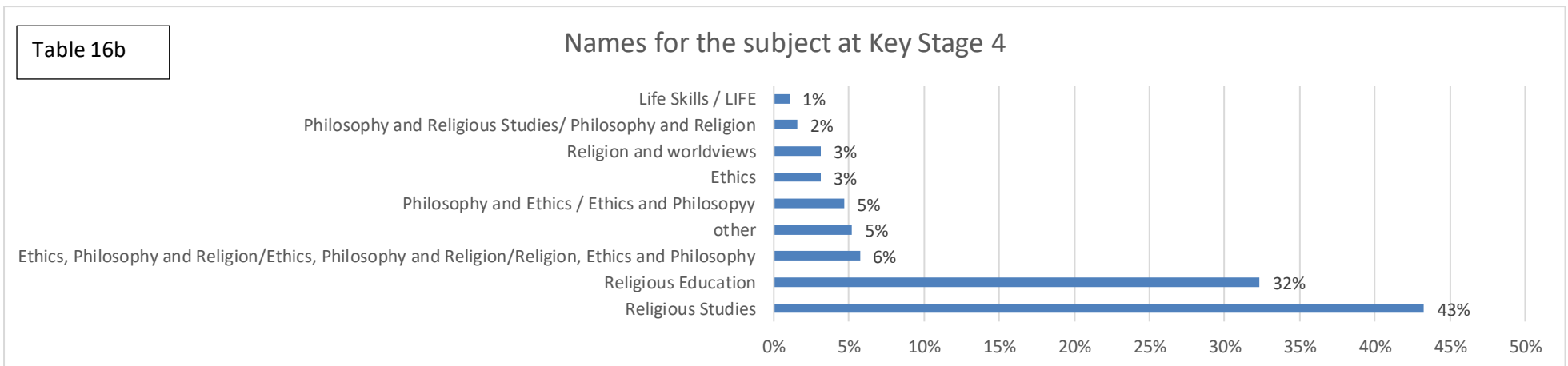


16. What is the subject called on the school timetable?



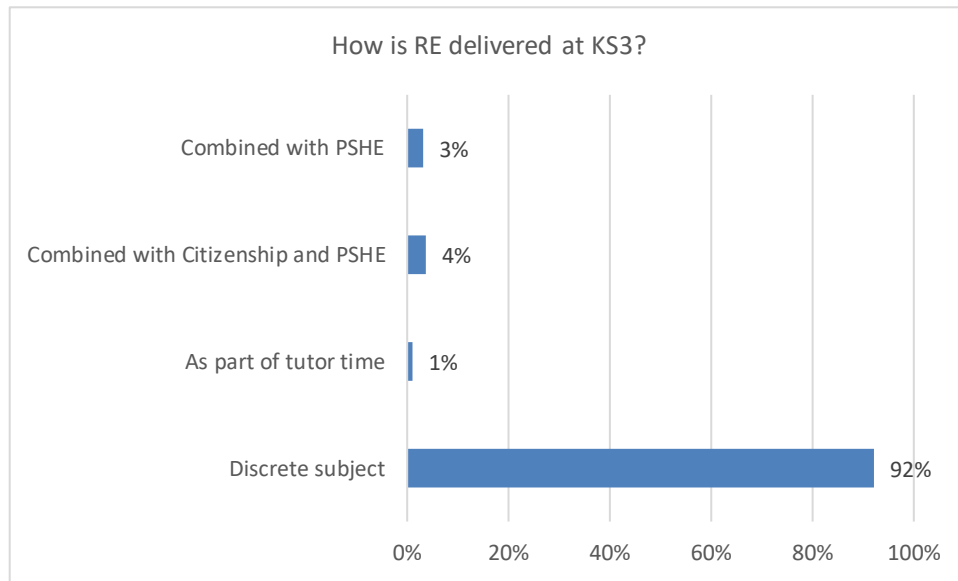
The name for the subject in legislation; Religious education, remains the most frequent response to this question in relation to Key Stage 3. In second place comes Religious Studies after which RPE, PRE and EPR (Religion, Philosophy and Ethics (in different orders) is chosen. It is interesting to see the name for the subject proposed by the Commission on RE (2018) beginning to be used, albeit in a small number of schools.

At Key Stage 4, almost half of the schools that responded to this question on the survey choose to use the name of the examination course most frequently offered at Key Stage 4; Religious Studies. The second most frequent response was Religious Education.



## 17. How is provision made for RE at Key Stage 3?

Table 17



Delivery of RE as a discrete subject was the most frequent response to this question with more than 9 in 10 schools teaching RE in this way. This is a significant difference from the provision at key stage 4 discussed in question 9 where more than a third report providing no RE at all for pupils who do not opt for an examination course.

## 18. Which religious and non-religious worldviews are taught?

At Key Stage 3, Table 18a shows which religious and non-religious traditions are taught at key stage 3 and 18b at key stage 4. Interesting to note that non-religious worldviews, usually Humanism is now taught as commonly and, in some cases, more commonly than some of the religious worldviews at key stage 3. This represents an increase from the last survey.

Table 18a

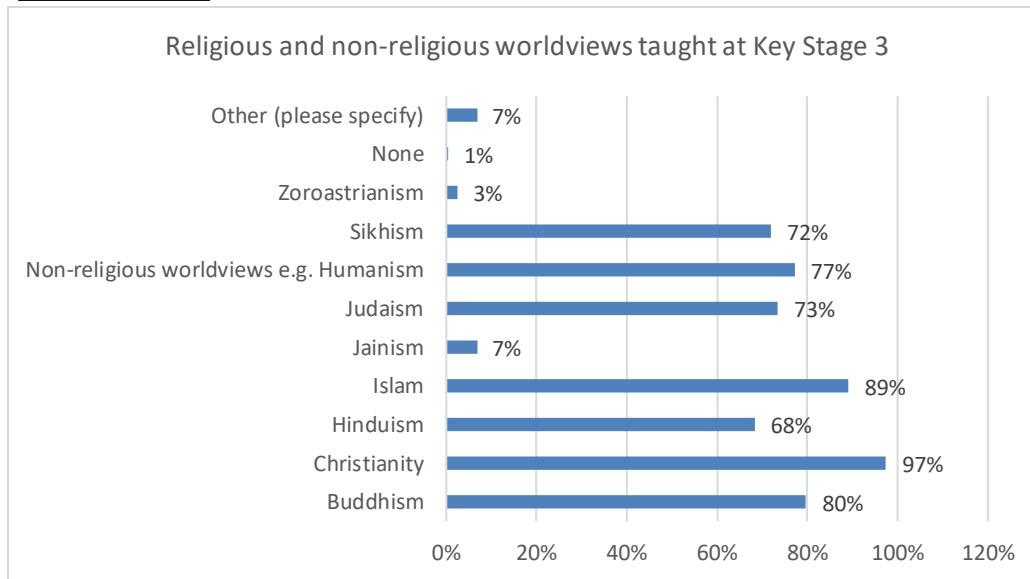
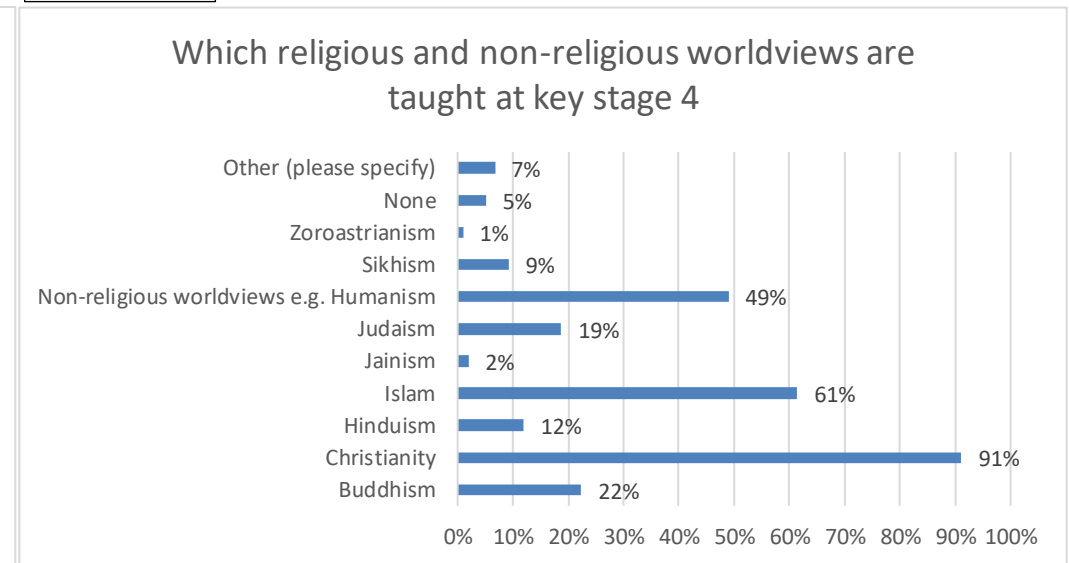


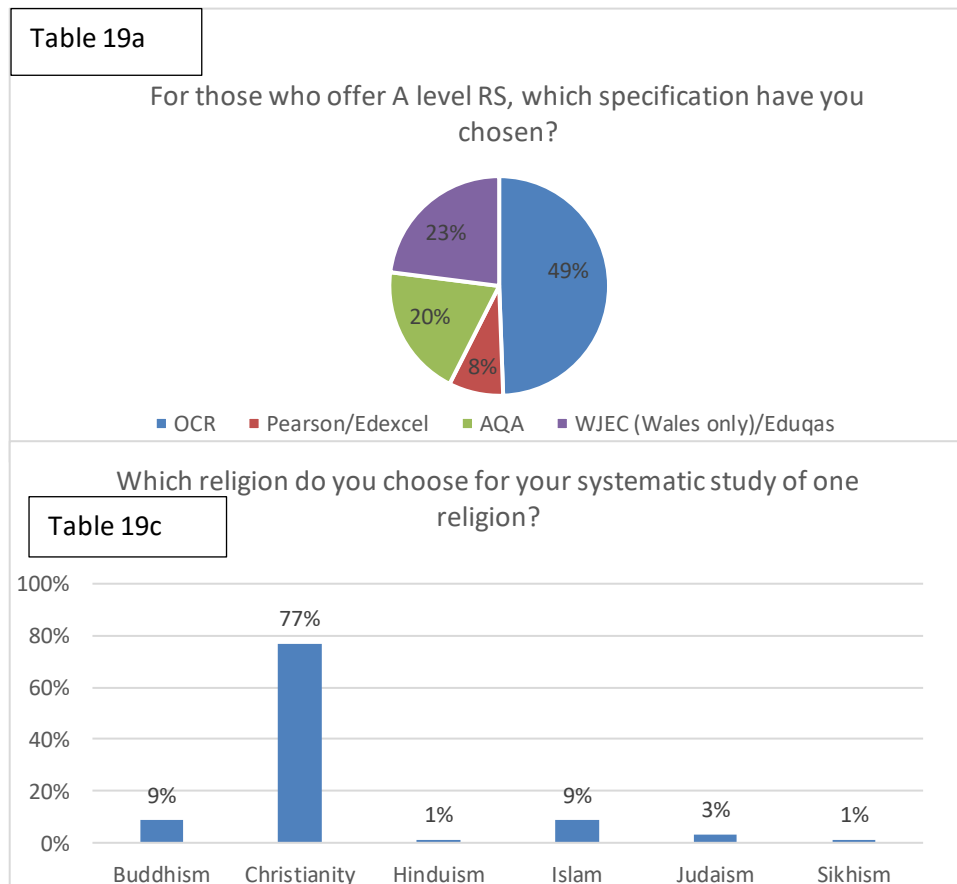
Table 18b



## 19. A level Religious Studies

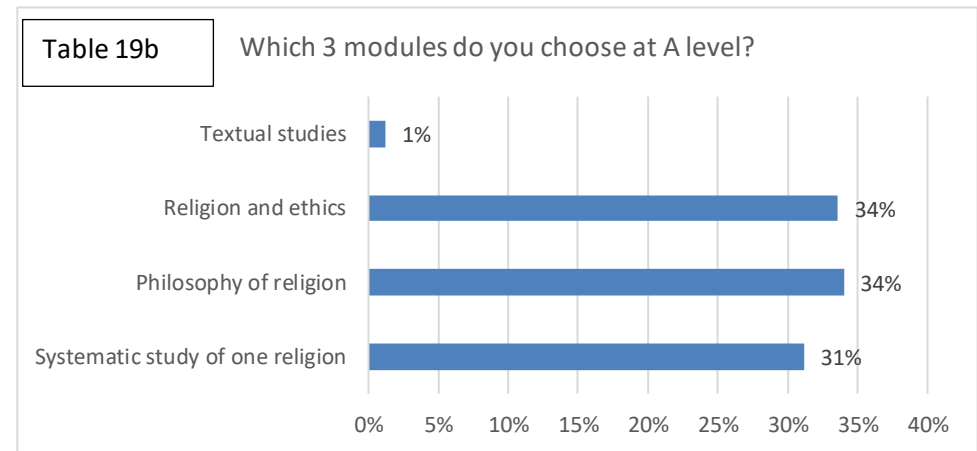
### Specification choices at A level?

OCR accounts for almost half of A level entries



### Module choices at A level?

The overwhelming majority of schools chose Religion and Ethics, Philosophy of religion and the systematic study of one religion



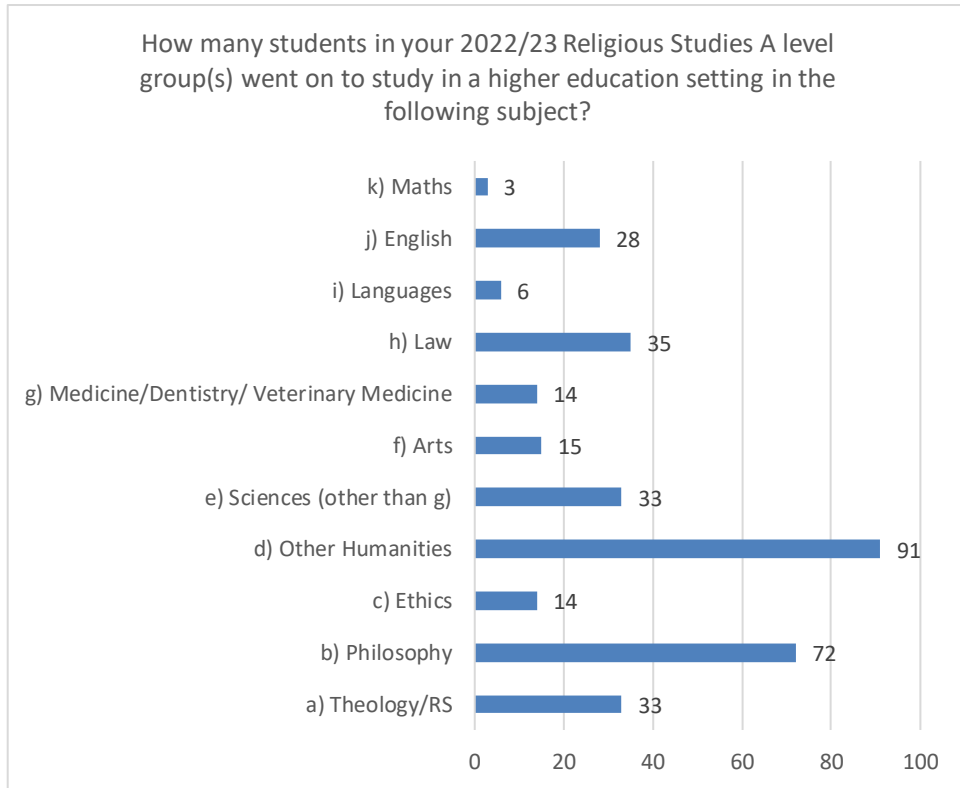
Christianity is the most frequently chosen tradition for the systematic study of one religion.

As with GCSE, the design of the subject content leaves little room for flexibility in relation to the study of a range of religious and non-religious worldviews.

This is a potential equalities issue because pupils who wish to study a specific religion may not have the chance to do so. In addition, there is no option to study a non-religious worldview e.g. Humanism.

## 20. Higher education destinations of A level RS students

Table 20



By far the most common destination for pupils who studied A level RS, was another Humanities subject, such as History, Geography or Sociology. The second most common was Philosophy and then Law. Theology and Sciences were the third most common, but these only accounted for around a third of the Humanities courses.

This data may be of interest to those promoting A level RS as a choice for study, especially as it shows the wide range of degree courses to which RS A level candidates gained admission.

Respondents reported that 144 students went on to study at a Russell Group University, 162 at another University and 14 at neither.

## 21. Are any pupils withdrawn from RE by their parents?

82% (80% in 2021) of schools said that no pupils are withdrawn from RE

18% (20% in 2021) of schools said that some pupils are withdrawn from RE

## 22. Why were pupils withdrawn (where this information was provided)?

Other reasons	1
Does not wish child to learn about religion	2
No reason given	3
Unspecified 'religious reasons'	6
Does not wish child to learn about other religions	3
Jehovah's Witness - so does not want child to study RE	5
Extra support for a SEND, literacy, numeracy or pastoral reasons	25
Wants to be responsible for their child's RE alone	2

***One in five respondents reported that parents withdraw pupils from Religious Education in their school.***

A number of themes emerged. For example, in just under half of the cases reported, pupils had been withdrawn for a curricular reason, such the school prioritising specific provision for a SEND pupil or to provide extra time for a different subject. These decisions fall outside the scope of the law.

In another one in four cases, the family religion or belief was cited as the reason for the withdrawal.

NATRE is concerned to see that there appears to be a sharp increase in the use of the right of withdrawal by schools – especially when this denies children with special educationally needs and disabilities (SEND) their legal entitlement to a religious education.

### 23. Local groups

68% of respondents do not attend a local group but 98% of those would like to do so. NATRE will try contact these people and help them to identify a group near them. 32% of respondents already attend a local group

### 24. Links with Higher Education.

Respondents reported links with the following Universities and Colleges. Many of these links were associated with initial teacher education and others to other projects.

University			
Aston	1	Lancaster	2
Bangor	1	Lincoln	1
Bath Spa	1	Liverpool	1
Birmingham	1	Marjons	1
Brighton	1	MMU	2
Bristol	3	Newman	1
Cambridge	2	Nottingham	1
Canterbury Christ Church	1	Open	1
Carmel College	1	Oxford	3
CCCU	1	Reading	1
Chester	3	Sheffield	3
Durham	1	Suffolk	1
Edge Hill	8	Surrey	2
Essex	1	Sussex	1
Exeter	1	UCL	2
Glasgow	2	Wales	1
Gloucester	1	Warwick	4
Gloucestershire	1	Worcester	9
Hertfordshire	1	York	1
Kings	3		

## **25. Are there any barriers to you continuing as an RE teacher?**

65% responded 'No' but 35% responded 'Yes'. Several themes emerged in the comments offered by respondents about barriers to them remaining in the profession:

- a. Unsustainable workload
- b. Lack of support for the subject from members of the senior leadership team
- c. Issues linked to non-specialists leading the subject
- d. Issues linked to the need to resource and support teachers who mostly teach another subject
- e. Parental misconceptions about religious education
- f. The feeling of isolation felt when a teacher is the only teacher of RE or RE specialist in the school
- g. Frustration caused by the lack of availability of trainee teachers or failure to fill a vacancy

Most of these comments are consistent with research into the issues of teacher retention for all subjects, however, those specific to Religious education, such as the widespread use of teachers who mostly teach another subject, should be highlighted.