

## **Research suggests Religious Studies at GCSE and A level supports ‘levelling up’**

There is a growing body of research linking the study of Religious Education/Studies with improved outcomes for pupils identified as ‘disadvantaged’.

### **Disadvantaged pupils less likely to be entered for GCSE Religious Studies than their peers**

A year before that, NATRE published [this report](#) which shows that disadvantaged pupils are considerably less likely to be entered for GCSE RS. This finding concurs with those of David Lundie and Mi Young Ahn’s findings in “[GCSE at the Crossroads](#)” (2017-8). You might also like to look at the evidence in this report relating to pupils from ethnic minorities (on average) outperforming their peers in RS but in schools where they are the minority, being less likely to be entered. The result in both cases of course is that the disadvantaged are even more disadvantaged by the neglect of RE.

### **Disadvantaged pupils twice as likely as their peers to choose RS at A level**

Earlier this year, FFT Datalabs published [this report](#). FFT found that disadvantaged pupils are twice as likely on average to choose to study A level Religious Studies than their peers. They also found that unlike many other subjects, prior attainment was not generally a barrier to courses in RS. This must be significant when improving access to higher education for this group of students and others, who may not make progress at a steady rate throughout secondary education.

### **Attainment gap for A level RS at A\*-E was the third smallest of all subjects**

According to DfE statistics relating to the attainment of this group and was interested to see that RS A level was the third narrowest gap at grades A\*-E (just 0.7 of a percentage point compared to Biology 3.1, Chemistry 3.2 and Maths 3.4).

### **Disadvantage gap for GCSE RS, narrowed with the introduction of ‘reformed’ specifications**

Research from the Sutton Trust in 2019 – [Making the grade](#), shows that unlike many subjects, the attainment gap for pupils taking GCSE RS narrowed.

### **Religious Studies has a below average disadvantage and participation gap**

Research from the [Education Policy Institute 2022](#) found, “In the humanities, geography and history have relatively high disadvantage gaps but history has a relatively small participation gap of 11 per cent, nearly half the rate for geography (20 per cent). Meanwhile religious studies is more egalitarian with below-average disadvantage and participation gaps.”

## **In conclusion**

This collection of research would suggest that schools that are serious about improving the outcomes for their disadvantaged pupils, should look carefully at their provision for Religious Studies at key stage 4 and 5. A couple of years ago, NATRE published [a report](#) looking at average performance at GCSE in a local authority with the average points score at GCSE. If you look at the graph on page 5 you’ll see a clear correlation between rate of entry for GCSE RS and overall pupil attainment. We all know that correlation does not equal causation, but this data reaffirms Ofsted research about the importance of a broad and balanced curriculum, David Lundie and Mi Young Ahn’s findings referenced above and similar research into rates of entry for GCSE Music carried out by [Cambridge Assessment \(2020\)](#).

## **Definitions:**

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*Disadvantage/Attainment gap: The gap between the average performance of disadvantaged pupils and their peers*  
*Participation gap: The gap between the average rate of entry for GCSE of disadvantaged pupils and their peers*

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