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MEDIA RELEASE

Entries for Religious Studies A level rising faster than for any other arts, humanity or social science

The key outcomes of the 2016 A level results in England and Wales for Religious Education are as follows:

- 24,966 RS A level entries were recorded, an increase of 6.8% on 2015 and more than double the number in 2003 (11,132 entries were recorded in 2003)
- The number of entries for RS A level has increased by 124% since 2003, more than for any arts, humanity or social science subject (the nearest subject is Economics with an increase of 69%). Among all subjects, only Further Maths has seen more rapid growth than RS
- 23.3% of entries for RS A level were awarded an A or an A*
- There were 35,808 entries for RS at AS level, a decrease of 4.2% on 2015, a far smaller fall than across all subjects where the drop was 14.1%, and still more than double the number in 2003 (15,482 entries were recorded in 2003)

The contextual evidence shows the growing status of RS as a subject for Higher Education entry:

- The Russell Group of top universities has made it clear that RS A level provides 'suitable preparation for University generally'
- Both Oxford and Cambridge University include Religious Studies in the top level list of 'generally suitable Arts A levels'
- Applicants with Religious Studies A level were more likely to gain admission to study History at Oxford University in 2012 than those with A levels in many 'facilitating' subjects such as French, Geography, Biology and Chemistry
- Almost 21% of students admitted to Oxford University to study English and 13.5% to study History in 2015 had an RS A level (more than those with Economics, Physics and Business Studies A levels)¹
- Research from the Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring at Durham University on the comparative difficulty of different subjects at A level showed that RS was 'in the middle difficulty range, similar to Geography and more demanding than English'.²
- Career prospects for those that take Religious Studies/Theology at degree level are very bright with 25% of 2015 graduates going on to work in the fields of legal, social and welfare, 11% choosing to become educational professionals and almost 5% managers.³

The increase in the number of pupils taking A level and AS level Religious Studies is all the more impressive for coming at a time when there is a shortfall in recruitment for teacher training in

¹<http://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/A%20level%20RS%20and%20Uni%20admission%202015.pdf>

² <http://www.score-education.org/media/3194/relativedifficulty.pdf>

³ Data collected for "What do graduates do? Higher Education Career Services Unit www.hecsu.ac.uk

Religious Education. Evidence collected by NATRE suggests that headteachers are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit RE specialists.

Comment from Daniel Hugill, Chair, National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE)

"Congratulations to the many students receiving their Religious Studies results today. Their results are the product of their hard work grappling with some of the most difficult questions to ever puzzle humankind. Congratulations to their teachers too who have worked tirelessly to ensure that their students can reach their full potential. It is of little surprise to those of us who teach RS that it continues to increase in popularity amongst young people. RS A-level is an excellent preparation for both further study and for entering the world of work. RS is a subject that helps young people gain access to a wide range of degree courses including those at the most prestigious Universities. Our most recent FOI request found that more than 1 in 10 students admitted to Oxford's PPE and History courses had studied RS A-Level, this statistic increases to more than 1 in 5 for students admitted to study English. The subject matter and approach of an RS A-level helps to equip students with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to succeed in modern Britain."

Comment from Rudolf Elliott Lockhart, Chief Executive, Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC):

"It's fantastic to see how popular Religious Studies A level has become. This is a highly rated subject that offers pupils the opportunity to explore crucial questions in relation to beliefs, values and morality. In doing so it provides an excellent preparation for living in a multi-faith, multi-cultural world. What's more, Religious Studies is a rigorous, academic, A-level that provides an excellent foundation for further study in a wide range of academic subjects, and remains a very attractive qualification to universities. These results are really encouraging, but there's still work to do. I hope that the Government will want to work with us to turn enough of today's keen A level pupils into tomorrow's teachers to meet the shortfall in appropriately qualified teachers of religious education that we currently face."

Numbers of A level entries in arts, humanities and social sciences in England and Wales by selected subject area, 2003 to 2016

A level subject area	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	% change 2003 to 2015
Religious studies	11,132	12,660	14,929	16,099	16,841	18,085	18,899	19,055	19,952	20,640	20,851	21,938	23,372	24,966	124%
Political studies	8,683	9,028	10,008	10,116	11,088	11,361	12,277	12,735	13,715	14,199	14,302	12,893	14,087	14,535	67%
Economics	17,153	17,211	17,087	16,974	17,016	18,122	20,546	22,512	23,476	23,975	25,755	26,231	27,202	29,004	69%
Sociology	23,498	24,598	25,709	26,373	26,663	27,526	28,472	28,660	29,703	30,309	29,681	29,657	31,378	33,066	41%
History	40,089	41,702	42,735	44,391	44,035	45,607	46,617	46,926	48,590	49,201	49,786	49,871	53,548	52,409	31%
Law	12,350	13,887	14,510	15,215	15,487	15,500	16,276	15,009	14,351	13,120	12,484	11,473	10,701	11,210	-9%
Geography	33,467	32,046	30,552	30,368	29,538	29,799	30,226	30,257	29,348	30,137	30,871	31,111	35,221	34,499	3%
ALL SUBJECTS	721,887	736,166	752,602	774,461	774,842	797,717	815,603	822,192	834,735	828,911	817,916	802,207	818,359	804,877	11%

Notes: GCE A level results of A level candidates in England and Wales.
 Source: Joint Council for Qualifications

Religious Studies A-level pupils explain why they chose the subject:

Emily Crabtree, Haslingden High School



Emily focused on Christianity for her GCSE, but her exposure to other religions and ways of thinking expanded when she took Religious Studies A Level – and will expand even further when she starts her degree at Manchester University in philosophy and sociology.

During her schooling, Emily has enjoyed finding out about these other thought systems, discovering the historical rationale for some behaviours as well as the way belief and theologies can evolve over time. She embraced the academic rigour needed to, as she says, “*formulate an argument*” and used it extensively to analyse the breadth of philosophical theories.

Her studies have encouraged and supported Emily to accept and celebrate the diversity of what others around her believe.

Louise Pryah, Haslingden High School



Louise unexpectedly – but happily for her – found out she was interested in Religious Studies when she was doing her GCSE. She has now completed her A Level and is in the process of starting a theology and ethics degree at Manchester University.

Religion is the most written about and talked about subject in the history of humanity. And Louise’s interest in the subject evolved as she studied just some of the range of texts on the curriculum and developed the key academic skills of independent, critical thinking and analysis –recognising and appreciating that in a classroom of 30 students, there might be 30 different but equally strongly-held

opinions. Her studies helped her to “*understand the logical connection between ideas, and as my confidence grew I was increasingly able to take part in class discussions on issues that could sometimes be controversial.*”

For Louise, every day introduced new aspects to studying RS that challenged and stimulated her – from the big, cosmological questions around the existence of God to situational ethics and the role of religious practices in contemporary 21st century society – and which have allowed her to have a better understanding of people and the variety of ideas, and have prepared her for life.

Matt Read, Haslingden High School



Matt has just completed his Religious Studies A Level. His original motivation for doing this was to develop an understanding of the concept of religion and the role it plays in people's lives. And the RS curriculum certainly provided that as it confronted him with a broad range of beliefs and practices that are fundamental to how the majority of humans behave and interact with others.

Not only has Matt gained an appreciation of different customs and value systems – many of them found in his own home town - but he was able to study secular and humanist approaches to life and to the moral and ethical dilemmas we may all face at some point. Matt commented, *“RS helps you learn about the main different belief systems which we are living with in our own communities, and so it helps us to both better understand the issues our neighbours may be facing as well as appreciate the wider range of opinions found in our mixed society.”*

Matt's ambition is to join the police service, where he believes his effectiveness will have benefitted from his time studying RS.

For media enquiries, contact:

Colin Hallmark, 3:nine Communications:

Tel: 0207 736 1888

Mubina Khan-Daniels, RE Today Services

Tel: 0121 415 3970

Email: mubina@retoday.org.uk

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National Association of Teachers of RE

NATRE is the subject teacher association for RE professionals in primary and secondary schools and higher education, providing a representative voice at national level and publications and courses to promote professional development. NATRE's Executive consists of a majority of serving teachers from primary and secondary schools who are elected for a three-year term of service.

Religious Education Council of England and Wales

Established in 1973, the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC) brings together over 60 national organisations. These comprise academic and professional associations specialising in religions and religious education, as well as individual religion and belief organisations inclusive of the range of faith communities found nationally, including the British Humanist Association.

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