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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Religious Studies A level entries decline by 22.8% as the subject is squeezed out of the curriculum**

- *Concerns cited by the Religious Education Council and NATRE over the effects this will have on society in modern Britain -*

At a time when Religious Education is more important than ever, with the need for community integration in our diverse society, it is concerning to see a significant drop in the number of young people taking Religious Studies at A level in England and Wales. The drop in RS entries by 22.8% is disappointing given the subject's popularity has grown in recent years. Despite this reduction in entries for RS, there are still 65% more entries than in 2003 (11,132 entries were recorded in 2003).

The key outcomes of the 2018 A level results in England and Wales for Religious Education are as follows:

- 18,422 RS A level entries were recorded, a decrease of 22.8% on 2017.
- The decrease in RS A level entries is an extreme example of a broader pattern of decreasing entries for humanities and social science subjects (English language down 14.8% across the UK, Geography down 11.3%, History down 2.7%) while entries for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths (STEM) subjects have increased (Chemistry up 3.4% across the UK, Physics up 3.4%, Biology up 3.1%, and Maths up 2.5%).
- Overall the number of A-level entries across England and Wales has dropped by 1.8% on 2017. This is related to the smaller cohort of students taking A levels this year with a decrease in the number of 18-year-olds in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland of 3.5% on 2017, and also due to fewer pupils taking four A-levels.
- There were 6,024 entries for RS at AS level, a decrease of 63% on 2017; this reflects the decline across all subjects where the number of AS entries fell by 55% across England and Wales (as AS level grades no longer count towards A levels under the linear scheme).
- 22.4% of entries for RS A level were awarded an A or an A\* with 4.6% of RS entries awarded the top A\* grade.

The dramatic fall in the number of Religious Studies A level entries in England and Wales comes after warnings in recent years of insufficient action to support the subject. In 2017 the RE Council of England and Wales (REC) and the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) published [analysis](#) based on data from the Department for Education showing that 28% of secondary schools in England report that they are not meeting their statutory obligation to teach religious education (RE).

The decline in entries is surprising given that Religious Studies at A level continues to be a favourable gateway to university and jobs. The importance of RS A level as a subject for Higher Education entry and for graduate recruiters is increasingly recognised by independent bodies. Whilst RS A level is not listed by The Russell Group as a 'facilitating subject', The Russell Group of top universities has made it clear that RS A level provides 'suitable preparation for entry to university generally', and both Oxford and Cambridge University include Religious Studies in the top level list of 'generally suitable Arts A levels'.

In fact, almost 21% of students admitted to Oxford University to study English and 13.5% admitted to study History in 2015 had an RS A level, more than those with Economics, Physics and Business Studies A levels.<sup>1</sup>

Employers recognise the value of religious literacy. For example, in February 2017, EY announced the creation of Religious Literacy for Organisations (RLO), a diversity and inclusion training programme designed to help organisations better understand religious inclusion and its positive impact on business process and performance.

Career prospects for those that take Religious Studies/Philosophy at degree level are also very bright due to developing a strong academic skillset with transferable skills attractive to employers. In 2015/16, 16.5% of Philosophy graduates entered the professional sector in the fields of Business, HR and Finance, compared to 10% for all disciplines. With 13% of graduates going on to work in the fields of legal, social and welfare, 6.8% choosing to become educational professionals and 4.6% managers.<sup>2</sup>

The drop in the number of pupils taking A level and AS level Religious Studies is all the more concerning at a time when there is a shortfall in recruitment for teacher training in Religious Education. Evidence collected by the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) suggests that headteachers are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit RE specialists.

The Commission on Religious Education established to review the legal, education and policy frameworks for religious education in schools will present its final report findings to government next month to address the current challenges faced by Religious Education in England today.

#### **Comment from Ben Wood, Chair, National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE)**

"Congratulations to the many students receiving their Religious Studies results today. These results are the product of their hard work grappling with some of the most difficult questions to ever puzzle humankind, and I am sure that they will feel the benefits of studying RS for many years to come. Congratulations and thanks must also go to their teachers who have worked tirelessly to ensure that students can reach their full potential in this reformed A level. It is of little surprise to those of us who teach RS that it remains popular amongst young people, however it is very disappointing to see that the number of entries has dropped by over 20%. This devastating fall has been expected given successive policy decisions that have failed to maintain and support the position of RS as part of a broad and balanced curriculum. RS A level is an excellent preparation for both further study and for entering the world of work. It is a subject that helps young people gain access to a wide range of degree courses, and it is valued by employers, with the subject matter and approach of an RS A level helping 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):**

"At a time when our increasingly diverse society makes high quality religious education more important than ever, it is deeply concerning to see such a dramatic fall in the number of Religious Studies A-level entries. It is, however, an unsurprising consequence of policy decisions such as the exclusion of RS from key performance indicators at GCSE, insufficient bursary provision to encourage people to train to become RE teachers, and a lack of action to hold schools to account when they fail to teach RE. Last year the REC and NATRE highlighted that 28% of secondary schools in England report that they do not meet their basic statutory duty to teach RE. Today's figures are further evidence of the critical need for decisive action to be taken. Next month will see the publication of the Commission on Religious Education's final report: I hope that the Government will be keen to take heed of its recommendations and work with us to secure the future of high quality education about religions and belief in this country."

**Numbers of A level entries in arts, humanities and social sciences in England and Wales by selected subject area, 2003 to 2017**

		2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2018	% change 2003 to 2018
<b>ENGLAND</b>	RS A-level entries	<b>10,313</b>	<b>14,064</b>	<b>15,793</b>	<b>17,676</b>	<b>18,463</b>	<b>19,173</b>	<b>21,577</b>	<b>22,121</b>	<b>17,024</b>	<b>65%</b>
	RS A-level entries as % of all entries	1.5%	2.0%	2.1%	2.3%	2.3%	2.5%	2.8%	2.9%	2.3%	
<b>WALES</b>	RS A-level entries	<b>819</b>	<b>865</b>	<b>1,048</b>	<b>1,223</b>	<b>1,489</b>	<b>1,678</b>	<b>1,795</b>	<b>1,735</b>	<b>1,398</b>	<b>71%</b>
	RS A-level entries as % of all entries	2.4%	2.4%	2.9%	3.2%	3.9%	4.7%	5.0%	5.2%	4.3%	
<b>ENGLAND &amp; WALES</b>	RS A-level entries	<b>11,132</b>	<b>14,929</b>	<b>16,841</b>	<b>18,899</b>	<b>19,952</b>	<b>20,851</b>	<b>23,372</b>	<b>23,856</b>	<b>18,422</b>	<b>65%</b>
	RS A-level entries as % of all entries	1.5%	2.0%	2.2%	2.3%	2.4%	2.5%	2.9%	3.0%	2.4%	

Notes: GCE A level results of A level candidates in England and Wales.

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ)

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For media enquiries, contact:

Sarah Leahy, 3:nine Communications:

Tel: 01403 563 452 / 07495 926 351

Email: [sarahjleahy@gmail.com](mailto:sarahjleahy@gmail.com)

Mubina Khan-Daniels, RE Today Services

Tel: 0121 415 3970 / 0121 458 3313

Email: [mubina@retoday.org.uk](mailto:mubina@retoday.org.uk)

**Notes for editors:**

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

<sup>2</sup> Data collected for "What do graduates do? 2015/16 Higher Education Career Services Unit [www.hecsu.ac.uk](http://www.hecsu.ac.uk)

<sup>3</sup> Due to a change in the way that JCQ present the data, figures for 2003 to 2015 include entries from candidates in the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, figures for 2016 and 2017 do not. This change has a relatively small impact on the time series data. 2016 is the only year in which it is possible to measure the impact of this methodological change: there were 117 entries for Religious Studies from candidates in the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man suggesting that the impact of the change will be very slight.

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 Humanists UK.