

An analysis of the provision for RE in Primary Schools – Autumn 2024

Introduction

This is an analysis of the data gathered from a questionnaire on primary Religious Education (RE) in the summer term of 2024 conducted by the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE). The survey was publicised using the NATRE and RE Today websites and mailing lists, via local groups of teachers of RE and the member organisations of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales, including AREIAC, AULRE, and NASACRE, the NAHT and social media. Replies were received from **557** primary teachers in **more than 75%** of the local authority areas in England and Wales. This participation rate has increased since the 2022 survey.

Methodology

An on-line data gathering tool (Survey Monkey) was used to set a series of questions on the provision of RE in primary schools. This method replicated similar surveys conducted for secondary school teachers of RE [here](#), the State of the Nation Survey [here](#), an earlier survey of primary teachers conducted in 2016 [here](#), 2018 [here](#), 2020 [here](#) and 2022 [here](#)

Questions were asked to collect key information about the provision and support for RE in primary schools and about the training and support for primary teachers and others who deliver RE. 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 is highly probable that respondents are 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.

Legal Requirement for RE in schools

Although RE is not designated as a National Curriculum subject, all maintained schools must follow the National Curriculum requirements to teach a broad and balanced curriculum, which includes RE. All maintained schools therefore have a statutory duty to teach RE. Academies and free schools are contractually required, through the terms of their funding agreement, to make provision for the teaching of RE. Both Ofsted and the Department of Education have stated that the RE curriculum in Academies must be ‘similar in breadth and ambition’ to that required in LA maintained schools. **87% of respondents reported that statutory duties to provide RE for all pupils were met however, this represents a decrease from 2022 when compliance was reported at 96%.**

This analysis is not framed in a context where we make the case for attention to RE, simply on the basis of compliance with statute. A pupil’s entitlement to a high-quality religious education is justified on far more significant grounds. For example, [the Ofsted subject report 2022, “Deep and meaningful”](#) states: “Through the RE curriculum, pupils build knowledge of the religious and non-religious traditions that have shaped the world: substantive content and concepts. Pupils should increase their depth of knowledge about such traditions, which provides them with detail on which to build ideas and concepts about religion. At the same time, high-quality RE curriculums accurately portray some of the diversity and complexity found within and between different traditions.”

Key findings for 2024

TIME: Good news and bad news about the amount of time devoted to RE in the primary phase

- a. Most Agreed Syllabuses recommend that the equivalent of approximately 60 minutes per week be spent on RE at Key Stage 1 and about 75 minutes at Key Stage 2. The survey data (table 7) suggests that in just under a third of schools without a religious character (30.7%) insufficient time is being spent on the teaching of RE to ensure that pupils make good progress. On the other hand, in around 94% of schools timetable time has either increased or remained the same. (Table 8)

FUNDING: Bad news – A third of subject leaders have no set or no budget for RE

- b. Funding is an issue for all schools in the current climate. However, school leaders should be asked about **why the teaching of RE continues to be less well funded than foundation subjects** in around a quarter of schools (Table 6). If resources are up to date and appropriate to modern teaching methods, it is vital that subject leaders have appropriate funds at their disposal. (tables 5). School funding is expected to rise this year and RE subject leaders will need to make the case for appropriate resourcing for RE. The most common budget is less than 50p per pupil per year and 35% of primary schools in the survey have no budget or no set budget at all

TEACHING: Good news: Adults than teachers are less likely to teach RE than in 2022

- c. **Too much RE is being delivered by adults other than teachers but the number has fallen.** In 54% of schools (63% in 2022) some RE is being delivered by this group of adults other than teachers. This was raised as a matter of concern by Ofsted in 2013 when in 24% of schools RE was delivered by teaching assistants. In just over one in five schools, (one in four in 2022) more than 25% of RE teaching is delivered in this way Unless the HLTA teaching RE has an appropriately related qualification and/or receives regular CPD in RE and enough planning time to secure subject knowledge and confidence, then pupil learning and progress may be negatively impacted. (see table 10)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Too many primary teachers have no training in RE

- d. **Too many teachers are not adequately prepared to teach RE by their training:** More than 56% of the teachers in primary schools report that they received between 0 and 3 hours of training to teach RE in their initial teacher training (ITE). This represents an increase from 40% in 2022. *18% of these received no hours at all.* Table 12. This serious issue was the focus of Recommendation 6 of the Commission on RE (2018) Report. It links with the question about teachers' confidence. 60.5% of our respondents' colleagues feel reasonably or very confident in how to teach RE and 63.2% about what to teach in RE (table 13)

SUBJECT CONTENT: Wide variations in teachers' confidence to teach about different traditions

- e. Teachers' confidence in teaching specific religions and beliefs varies significantly. Christianity, Islam and Judaism were ranked most highly in terms of teachers' confidence about their subject knowledge. Conversely, they were much less confident about teaching religions such as Zoroastrianism, the Bahá'í faith, Jainism and Paganism and also about non-religious worldviews such as Humanism (Table 14)

LEADERSHIP: Good news – RE now commonly led by more experienced teachers

- f. Far fewer subject leaders are recently qualified teachers than when we first began conducting this survey. Not only are the overwhelming majority of subject leaders, those with more than 10 years teaching experience but also they tend to hold the position for a number of years, 67% for more than 3 years and 42% for over 5 years. (Table 3)

CAUSES FOR CONCERN -

- g. The number of parents exercising the right to withdraw their child from RE is small but remains at around one in five schools but generally affecting fewer than 10 children per school, most frequently one or two. 82% of schools reported that there had been no withdrawal from RE in the last academic year. The fact that parents can withdraw their child from RE without giving any reason or justification means that the ability of schools to educate pupils for life in a diverse modern world is compromised. The most common use of the right of withdrawal is from teaching about anything other than the home religion or belief. This is cited in 54% of cases. We note the organisational challenges presented to schools when parents request that they scrutinise the content of each lesson or visit and then decide whether or not to use the right of withdrawal (Table 9)

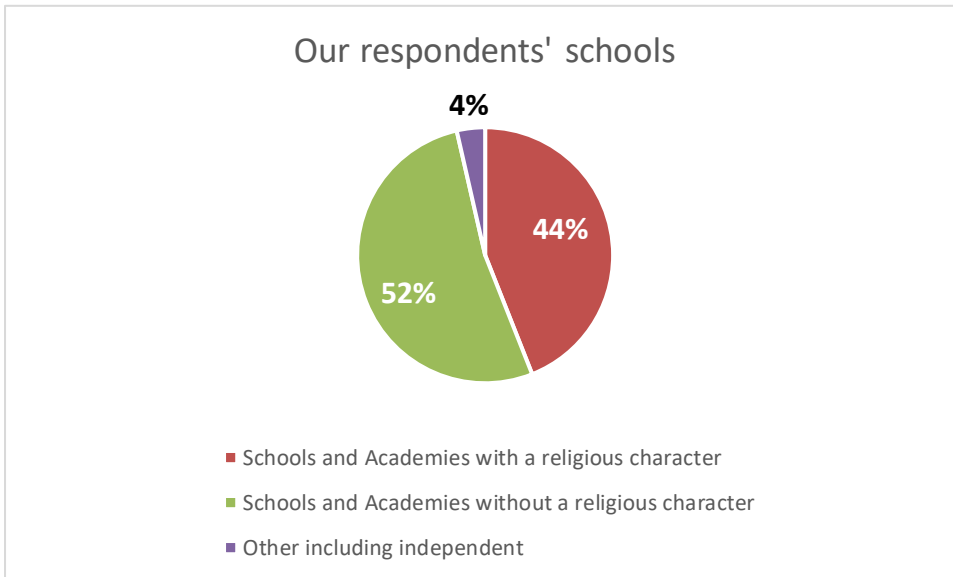
Detailed breakdown of NATRE survey questions

1. Types of school

School Type

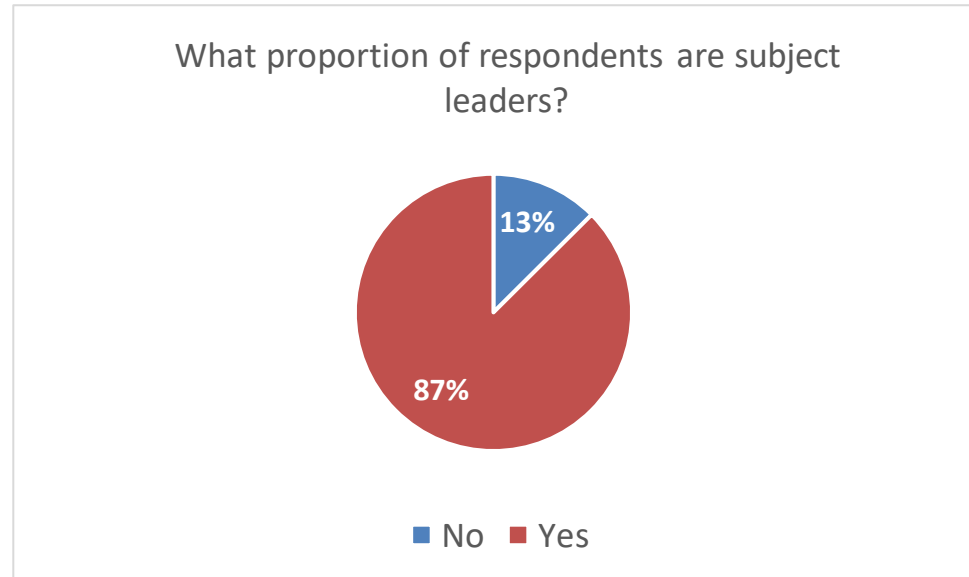
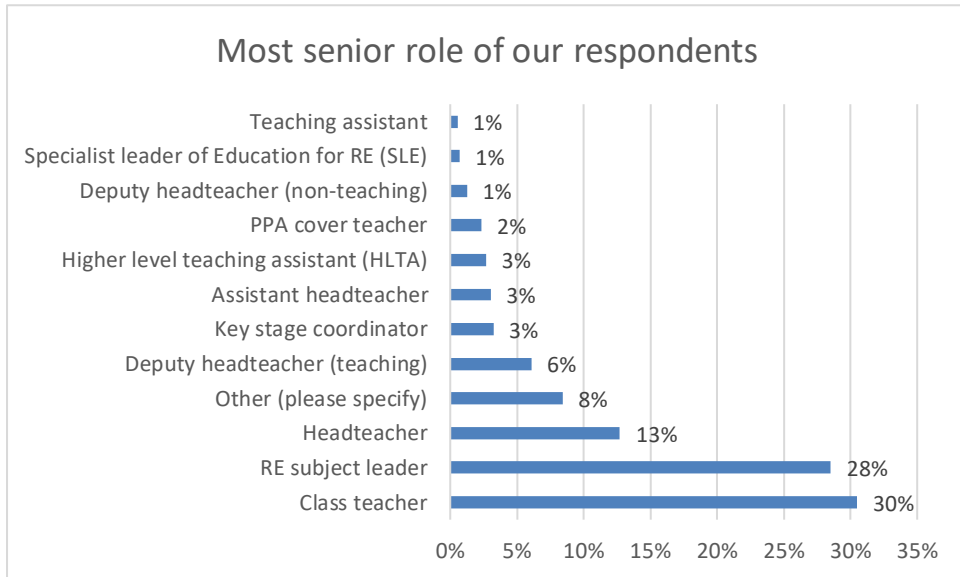
44% of responses came from schools and academies with a religious character, 52% from those without a religious character. According to the DfE, in January 2024, 37% of primary schools including academies had a religious character so our respondents' schools include slightly more schools with a religious character than the national picture.

Table 1 – Types of school



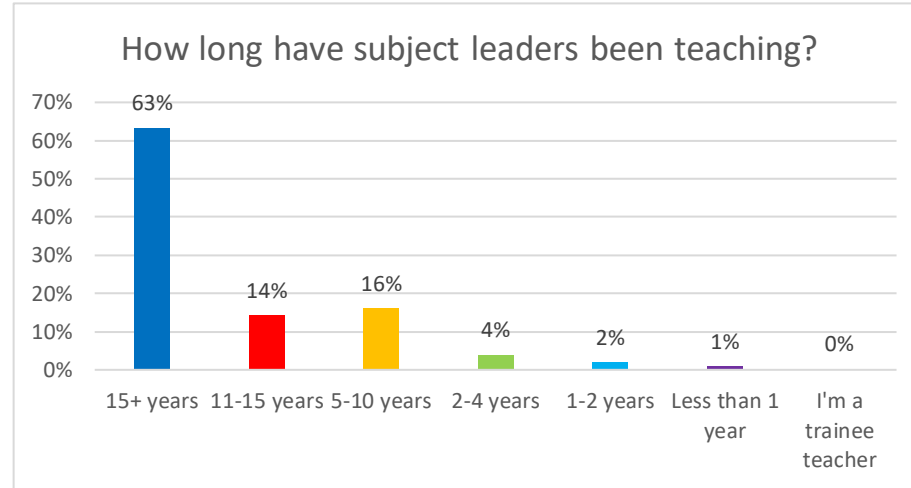
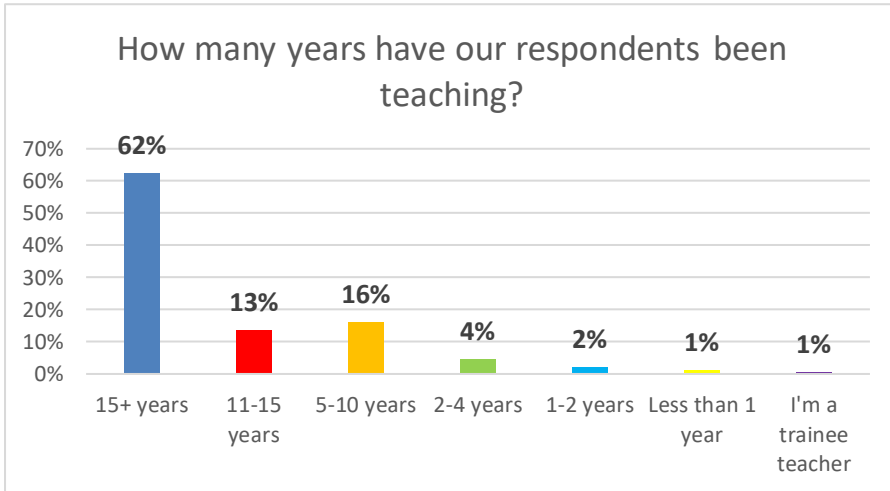
2. What is your main role in school?

Table 2 – Subject Leader: In 2018 and 2020, most respondents in 2022 were current RE subject leaders. In this survey, 30% of respondents said their most senior role was either a class teacher and 30% a subject leaders. Even if some respondents held more senior roles in the school, 87% of our respondents described themselves as the Religious Education subject leader. It is interesting to note, that 5% of those taking the time to complete this survey about religious education were not class teachers but teaching assistants or higher-level teaching assistants.



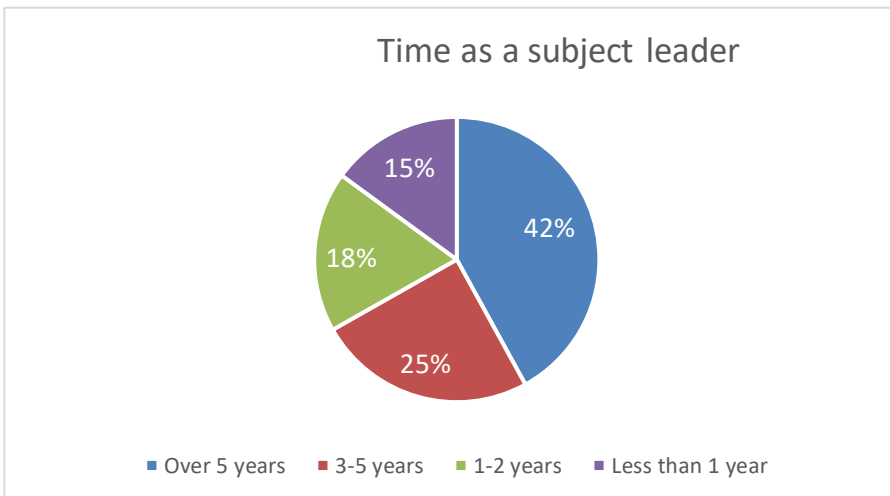
3. How long have our respondents been teaching?

Table 3 – Teaching experience: The most reported period was ‘over 15 years’ representing 62% of the total of those who responded to the question. As 87% of our respondents are subject leaders, it is not surprising therefore that 63% of those who lead RE have been teaching 15+ years and a further 14% 11-15 years. It is worth noting however, that around 7% of subject leaders have been teaching for four years or less.



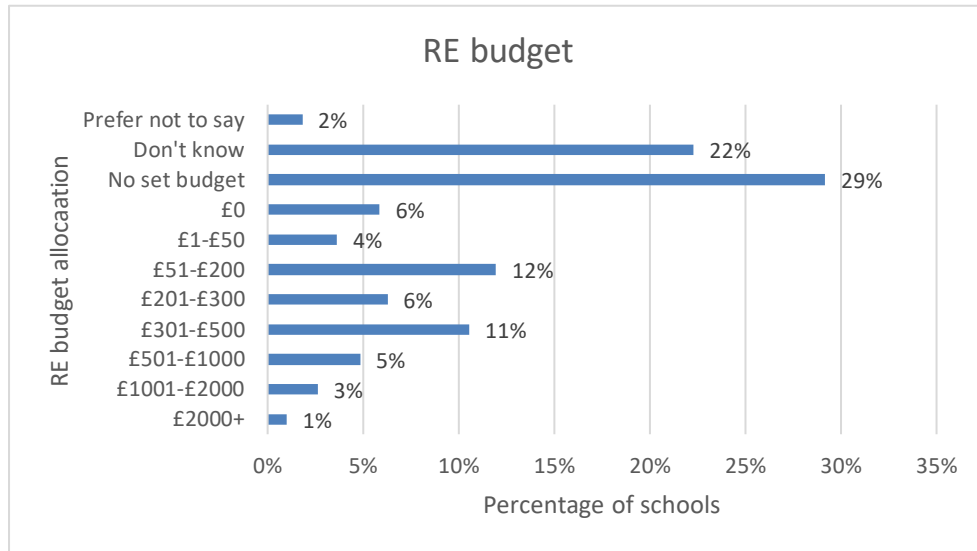
4. How long have subject leaders led RE in their school?

Table 4 – Experience of leading RE: The role of a subject leader for RE appears to be one that teachers retain for some time. 42% said they had held the role for more than 5 years. .



5. What is the budget allocation for RE in your school?

Table 5



In many schools, the money available for supporting the teaching of RE is minimal. This data supports the findings of the large-scale research project: “Does RE Work?”¹ which found that many schools spend less than £1 per pupil per year on resources for RE. Department for Education statistics¹ show that given the average primary school size this data suggests that the most common budget is less than 50p per pupil per year and **35% of primary schools in the survey have no budget or no set budget at all**. This is a deterioration on the findings of 2022 when 26% had no budget or no set budget

6. How would you compare the allocation of resources for RE in your school with those for Foundation subjects?

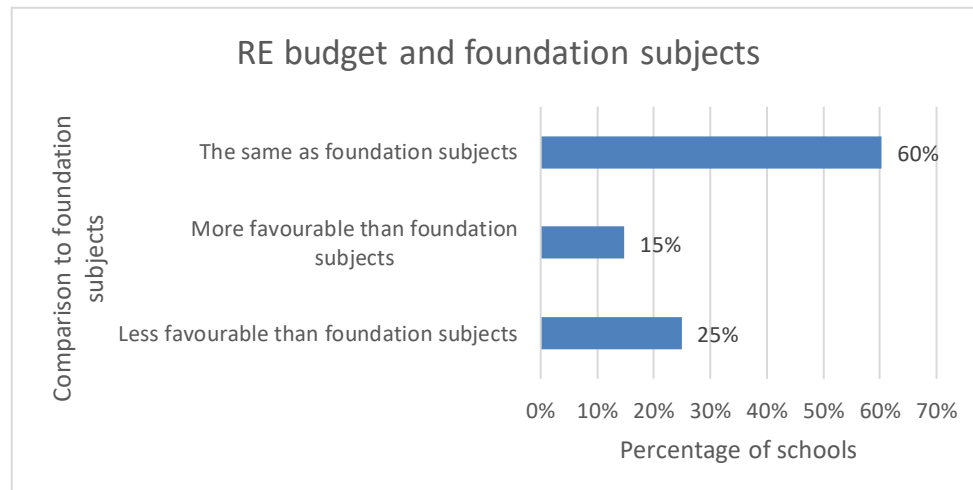
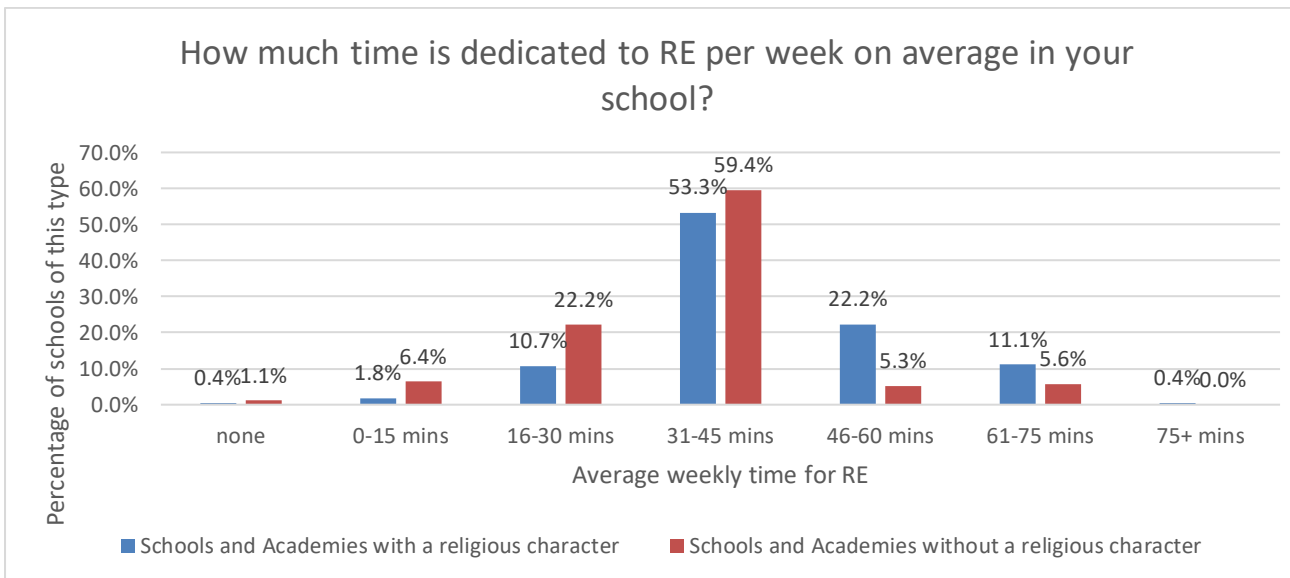


Table 6 – Resource Comparison: In 2018 ,2020 and 2022, around 30% of respondents said Religious Education received a less favourable budget allocation than foundation subjects. In 2024 however, this number has reduced to 25% and the number of schools where the budget is the same as foundation subjects has increased. It is disappointing that given the status of RE in the curriculum alongside the core and foundation subjects of the national curriculum that a small budget is set in some schools. **NATRE recommends that schools address this issue as a matter of urgency.**

7. Time for Religious Education

(a) Time allocated to the teaching of RE

Table 7 – Teaching Time: Most Agreed Syllabuses recommend that the equivalent of approximately 60 minutes per week be spent on RE at Key Stage 1 and about 75 minutes at Key Stage 2. This data suggests that in almost a third of schools without a religious character (30.7%), insufficient time is being spent on the teaching of RE in primary schools to ensure that pupils make good progress. In schools with a religious character, that figure is 12.9% of schools. Insufficient time on the timetable must result in the requirements of a syllabus for RE being met. This might be a set of Diocesan guidelines, an Agreed Syllabus or a syllabus adopted by an academy or free school, since the expectation is that Academies will provide a syllabus which is comparable in breadth and ambition to that provided in a local authority-maintained school. This data suggests that too many schools are not meeting that target.



8. Changes to time allocated to the teaching of RE

Far fewer schools reported a change in timetable time for RE in this survey – only 22% in comparison to 57% in 2022. In 94% of schools there has either been an increase in time provided or not change at all. This is good news. **The most common reasons given for the increase were:**

- Change to whole school curriculum design 26%
- The introduction of a new Agreed Syllabus 17%
- Change in senior management/subject leader 15%

Where there had been a decrease in timetable time for RE (only 4% of schools, 7% in 2018), the most significant reasons given were:

- Other subjects taking priority 31%
- Change to whole school curriculum design 29%

Table 8

Change to time allocated to the teaching of RE	2018	2020	2022	2024
Increase	17%	28%	31%	17%
No Change	75%	68%	57%	77%
Decrease	7%	4%	12%	5%

9. Withdrawal from Religious Education

Table 9 – Withdrawal

Fewer schools (18%) reported that parents had exercised their right to withdraw their child from RE in 2024 than 2022 when 23% made this report.

Reasons cited were:

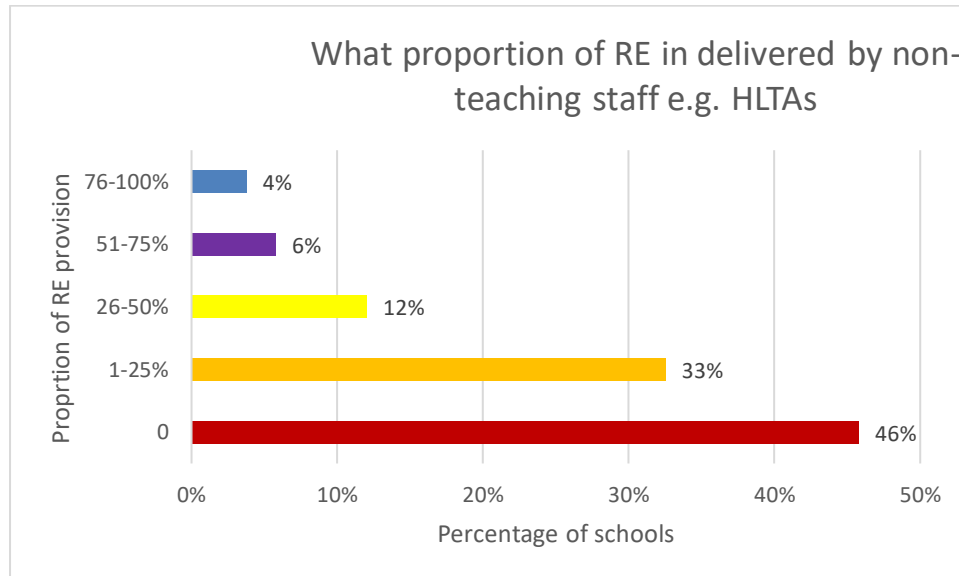
1. membership of a particular religious or non-religious tradition e.g. Jehovah’s Witness, Muslim, Humanist, Plymouth Brethren, Christian = 54% of withdrawals
2. A wish that the child should not be taught about one named tradition: e.g. Islam, Christianity or Hinduism 8% of withdrawals
3. A wish that the child only be taught about Christianity 5%
4. Withdrawal from trips and visits to non-Christian places of worship 7%
5. Withdrawal but no reason given 24%
6. Withdrawal by the school 2% (this is inconsistent with the legislation which does not recognise this practice)

Within the group that cited membership of a particular religion or belief were a small number who did not want their children learning about religion or belief at all, a much larger number who did not want their children learning about anything other than their home religion – most commonly Islam

10. The proportion of the RE provision in your school delivered by non-teaching staff e.g. HLTAs

Table 10

Over recent years NATRE has become increasingly concerned that the practice of delegating the teaching of RE in primary schools to teaching assistants has become more widespread. The 2013 an All Party Parliamentary report found that in 24% of schools RE was taught to some children by higher level teaching assistants. This survey found that this figure has risen to more than half of schools (54%).



- 46% of schools in 2024 say this does not happen in their school
- In 22% schools between more than 25% of RE is delivered in this way.

11. Religious and non-religious worldviews taught in primary schools

Table 11: It was unsurprising to find that Christianity is taught in almost all schools that responded to the survey in 2024 and that Judaism and Islam are also almost always taught in primary schools. Hinduism features clearly in 4 of 5 of primaries and Sikhism in just over half of them. Non-religious worldviews are now specifically taught in 71% of schools. Other traditions such as the Bahá’í faith, Zoroastrianism, Paganism and Jainism are rarely taught at this key stage.

	2020	2022	2024		2020	2022	2024
Christianity	92%	91%	91%	Buddhism	65%	44%	46%
Judaism	88%	82%	87%	Sikhi	65%	52%	52%
Islam	91%	85%	89%	Non-Religious Worldviews such as Humanism	70%	65%	71%
Hindu Dharma	83%	76%	79%	Other religious worldviews e.g. Bahá’í	8%	6%	4%

12. Training for RE in Initial Teacher Education

Table 12: The data below shows that Initial Teacher Education is not adequately preparing newly qualified primary teachers to deliver Religious Education. We asked those who had qualified in the last five years to answer this question. Table 12 shows that the average primary teacher trained in this period received very little training in RE as part of their initial teacher training. More than half (56%) received between 0 and 3 hours of training in the subject and almost one in five received no training at all. Very few of our respondents specialised in RE in their initial training. This group accounted for just 14% of them, meaning that 86% of respondents did not specialise. A NATRE survey investigating the amount of subject specific input into the early career programme found that almost all ECTs, received no RE input in their first year after qualification and NATRE has regularly campaigned for this to be addressed since in inevitably has an impact on teacher confidence and likely teacher retention.

Hours of RE training received in ITT	2022	2024
0	20.0%	18%
1 – 3 hours (0-3 in 2018)	20.5%	38%
4 – 6 hours	19.5%	15%
7 – 9 hours	21.5%	5%
10-12 hours	10.7%	9%
> 12 hours	18.5%	14%

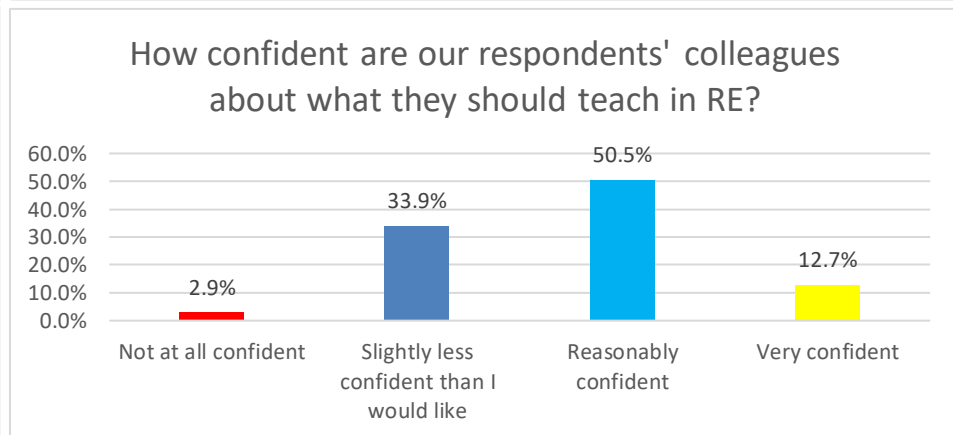
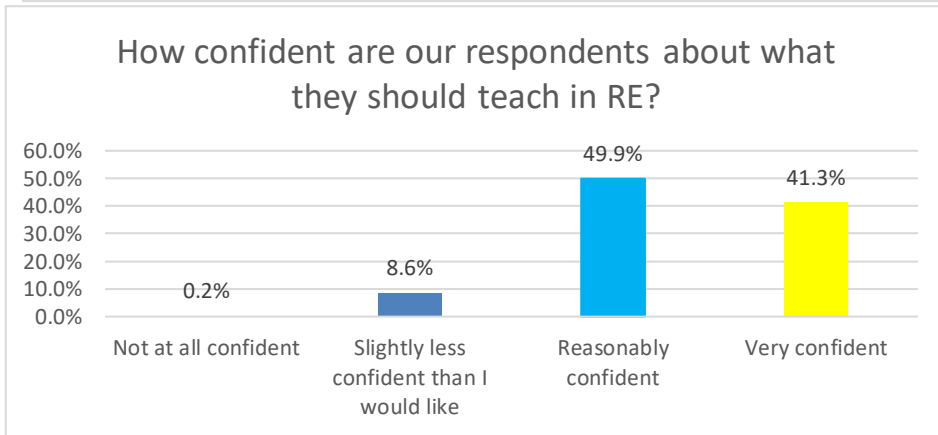
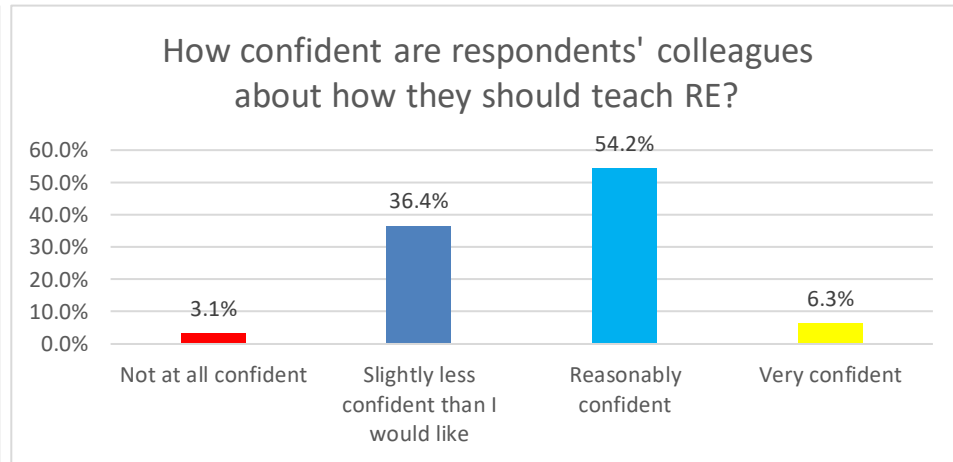
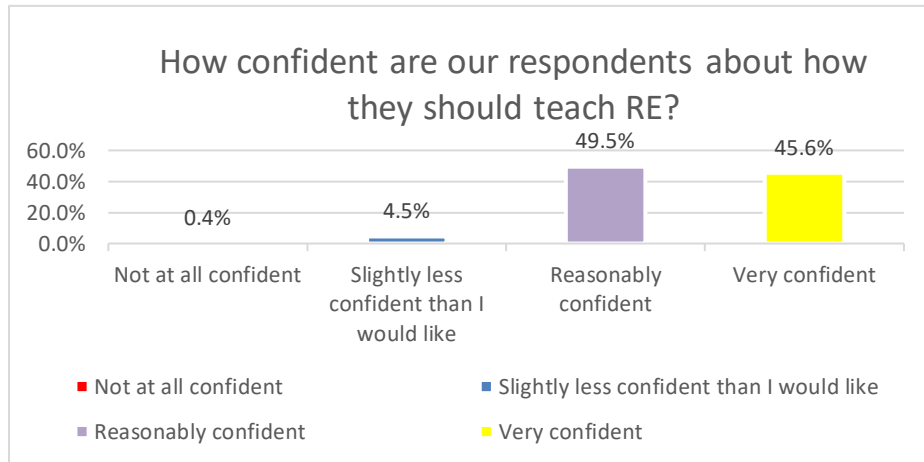
13. (a) Levels of confidence in how to should teaching RE

Table 13a

Similar to 2022, the overwhelming majority of those responding to our survey in 2024 reported feeling either reasonably confident or very confident about how (95.1%) and what (91.2%) to teach RE. However, only just under a half (45.6%) of respondents claim to feel very confident about either of these areas which is disappointing given that the majority of our respondents were subject leaders for RE, responsible for leading others in Religious Education.

In contrast, they report that their colleagues do not share this confidence judging that 39.5% of colleague say they are slightly less confident than they would like or not at all confident about about how and 36.8% about what to teach in RE. The most likely explanation for this difference can be seen in the figures for CPD. Whereas subject leaders report that they have received training in RE during the year, far less of their colleagues receive RE training.

Table 13b



14 Confidence in teaching religious and non-religious worldviews

We asked primary teachers to rank the religions and beliefs they taught in order of their confidence in teaching them (1 being the most confident and 8 the least). Buddhism, non-religious and other religious worldviews were the traditions that commanded the least confidence, Christianity the most.

Ranked 1 or 2 for confidence

Christianity 95.5%, Islam 44.5% and Judaism 38.2%

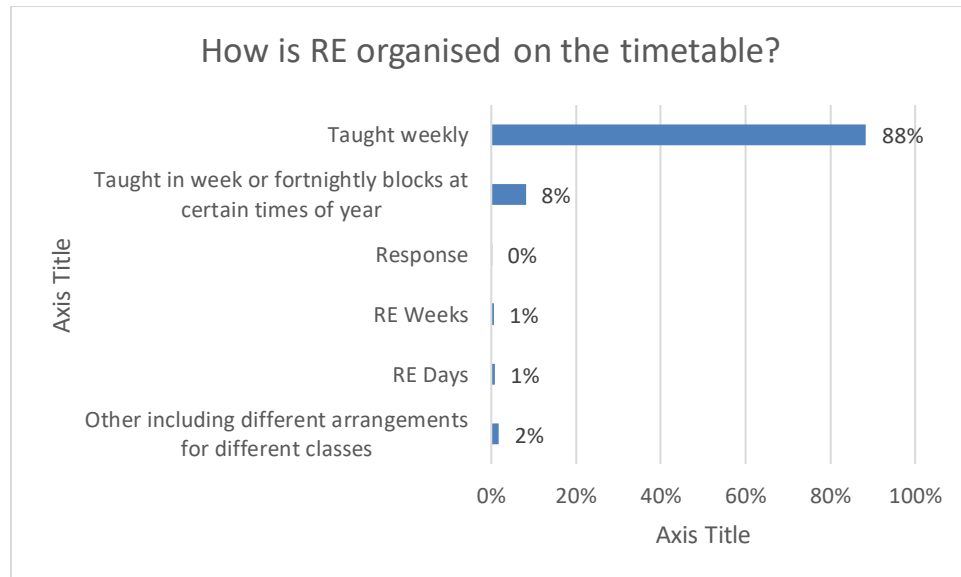
Ranked 7 or 8 for confidence, other religions and beliefs such as Zoroastrianism, the Bahá'í faith, Jainism and Paganism 93%, Non-religious worldviews such as Humanism 40%

15 How is RE organised on the school timetable in 2024?

Table 15 An increasing majority of schools 88% (69% in 2022) included weekly lessons as a means of delivering their RE provision

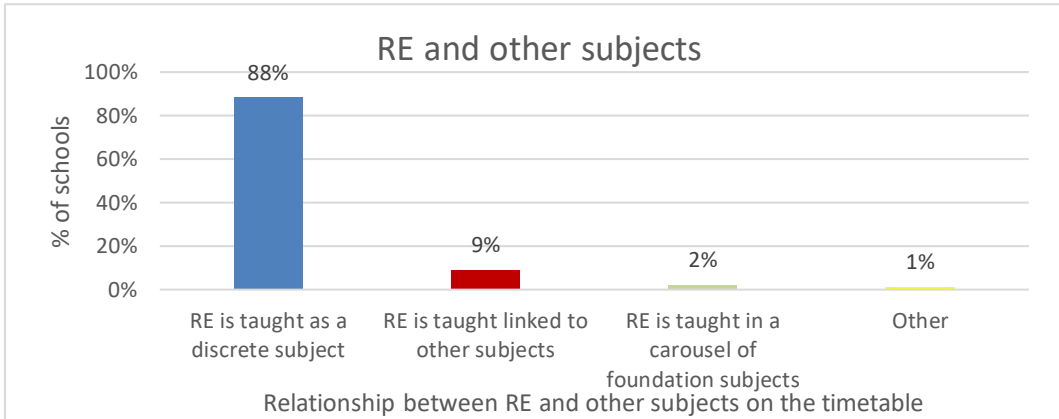
Just over 8% (17% in 2022) provided weekly or fortnightly blocks of time for the subject at certain times of the year

1% used RE weeks and 1% RE Days



16 What is the relationship between the teaching of RE and that of other subjects?

Table 16: RE is increasingly being taught as a discrete subject. This arrangement was found in 88% of schools (7% in 2022). Very few schools now organise RE in a carousel but almost one in five schools link their teaching of RE to other subjects.



17. Teacher qualifications in Religious Education 2024

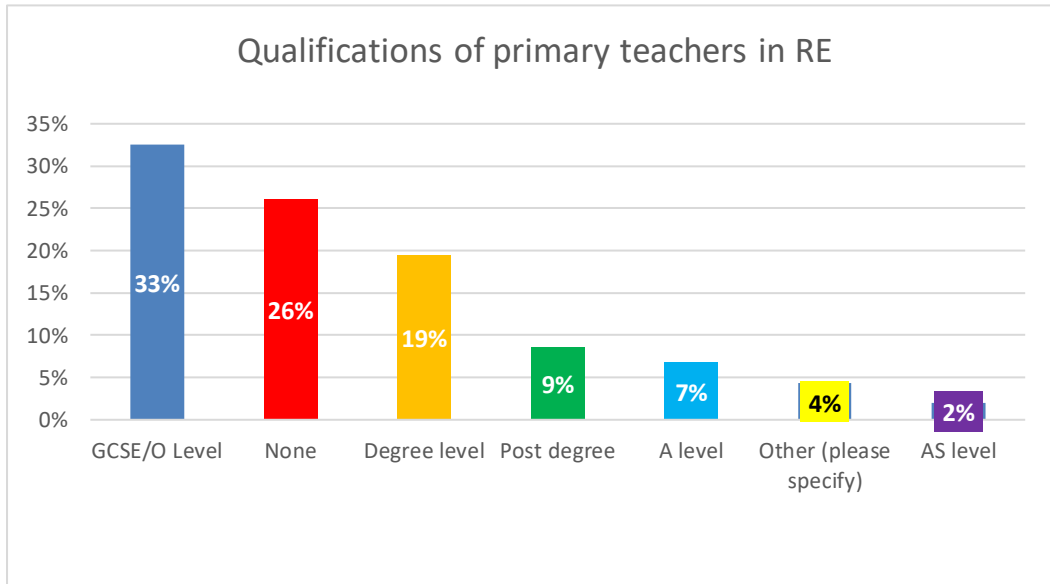


Table 17 –Highest RE Qualification

The level of qualification in RE of primary teachers has continued to increase. This is likely not to be a finding unique to RE since those teachers who joined the profession before a degree was the expectation, are now reaching retirement age. Likewise, the number of teachers with post-graduate qualifications is increasing. However, it is likely that new teachers are now coming into the profession who were 16-18 years old during the period that the short course was introduced and almost 40% of pupils were leaving school with a qualification in Religious Studies (RS). With short course entries in rapid decline, mainly due to it not counting in performance measures, this will eventually have an impact on the level of subject knowledge of teachers coming into the profession. 33% said their highest qualification in RE was GCSE or O level which is an increase on the last survey when 26% held this qualification. However, 26% said they held no RE qualification which is similar to last year when the equivalent figure was 25%.

18 Compliance with legal requirements on RE provision

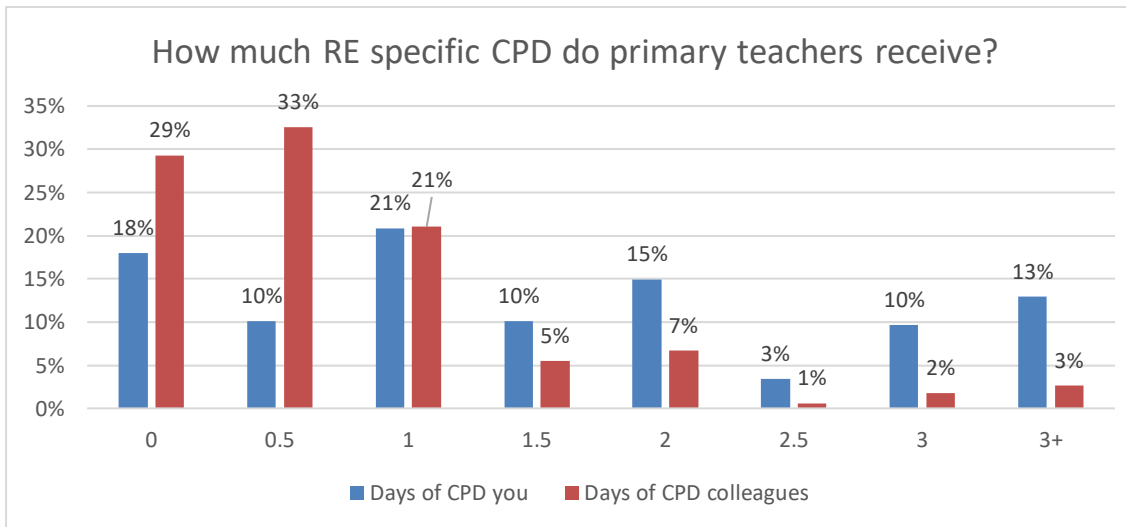
In both 2020 and 2022, 96% responded that their school met all statutory requirements for RE. This year, that figure has declined to just 87% and more schools chose not to answer this question. Both of these are worrying developments, especially as this is an anonymous survey.

19 Professional Development

(a) Days of subject specific training the respondent received during the past 12 months

Table 19 – RE training in the past 12 months

- (i) Just under one in 5 (18%) of our respondents received **no** RE training in the past year.
- (ii) 72% of primary teachers received one day of RE training or more in the past year which is a small rise from the 2022 survey. It should be noted that this group are largely those responsible for leading RE in their school so the fact that just over a third of them had so little training is a concern.
- (iii) More worrying again is the amount of RE specific professional development provided for the colleagues of our respondents. Almost a third of them had no training in RE at all and 62% received half a day or less.



20. Does RE appear in your school SEF/SDP/SIP 2022?

55% of respondents stated that RE does appear in the school development/improvement plan, 32% said it did not. 14% did not know. If the purpose of this document is to help steer improvements in the teaching and learning in a school. The wider findings of this survey would suggest that the majority of the third of schools where RE does not appear should reconsider.