

National Curriculum and Religious Education Teacher Briefing

July 2026

This briefing explains the background to the current proposal to include RE in the National Curriculum, what the Secretary of State for Education has announced and what schools and teachers can expect over the coming years.

1 HOW DID WE GET HERE?

2018 – Commission on Religious Education (CoRE)
The CoRE concluded that RE in England was too variable and recommended a National Plan and a National Entitlement to RE with stronger, more rigorous teaching and a broader curriculum.

2021 – Ofsted Research Review
The review concluded that high-quality RE is severely hindered by systemic challenges, including inadequate teaching time, poor curriculum design and assessment, a lack of scholarly depth, and a critical shortage of professional teacher training.

2023 – National Content Standard
The Religious Education Council developed the National Content Standard. Its publication in 2023 showed that the RE sector could agree on a shared standard for high quality RE whilst respecting the existing legal framework.

2024 – Ofsted Subject Report
Found that while many pupils enjoy RE, provision is often superficial rather than deep. Depth of learning, accurate knowledge and critical thinking were identified as important to ensure all pupils receive rigorous, challenging RE.

2025 – Curriculum and Assessment Review (CAR)
CAR concluded that access to high-quality RE remained too uneven. It recommended that Religious Education should be included in the National Curriculum through a phased approach to improve access to high-quality provision and prevent further diminishment of the subject.

2025 – Secretary of State's decision
The Secretary of State accepted the recommendation in principle and decided that RE should be moved into the National Curriculum conditional on the RE stakeholder community agreeing a way forward based on a draft programme of study.

2025–2026 – RE Task and Finish Group (TAFG)
The Secretary of State asked Dr Vanessa Ogden, a member of the CAR panel, to establish and chair an independent TAFG. The group brought together education professionals and representatives of religious and non-religious organisations. Its remit was to develop a draft National Curriculum programme of study and national standards, building on the broad consensus secured around the RE Council's National Content Standard.

2 WHAT HAS THE SECRETARY OF STATE ANNOUNCED?

On 3rd June 2026 the Department for Education announced that:

The Secretary of State for Education had asked the group to develop a draft National Curriculum programme of study for RE that reflected a broad consensus among stakeholders. She has concluded that this has now been achieved.

The Government intends to bring forward legislation necessary to include RE within the National Curriculum whilst preserving arrangements for those schools with a religious character that determine their own Religious Education.

The draft Programme of Study and national standards are intended to provide a common benchmark of breadth, depth and ambition, while respecting the distinct legal frameworks governing different categories of school.

3 WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

September 2026:
A public consultation on the draft National Curriculum, including RE, will begin in September 2026.

Spring 2027:
Final National Curriculum published taking account of consultation responses and, for RE, subject to the necessary legislation being passed

September 2028:
First teaching of the revised National Curriculum in schools.

4 WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR MY CURRICULUM?

Schools do not need to make any immediate changes. Existing requirements remain in place whilst consultation and legislation are completed.

A National Curriculum programme of study is a high-level document. Schools already providing high-quality RE are therefore unlikely to need to make major changes, though they may wish to review and refine their curriculum.

If the proposals are approved and legislation passed, schools could begin teaching the RE national curriculum from September 2028 alongside the other national curriculum subjects. The 2027 to 2028 academic year would allow for curriculum planning and preparation

Note that arrangements for schools with a religious character remain unchanged. The programme of study will serve as the benchmark for high quality RE in all state-funded schools.

5 HOW DOES THIS AFFECT GCSE AND A LEVEL RELIGIOUS STUDIES?

There are no immediate GCSE or A level changes. The Department for Education has confirmed that to ensure coherent progression from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4, GCSEs in National Curriculum subjects as well as Religious Studies, will be updated with Ofqual and awarding organisations.

DfE Phase 2 timetable for GCSE Religious Studies and A level Religious Studies			
GCSE		A LEVEL	
September 2030	Phase 2 GCSEs first taught, including GCSE Religious Studies.	September 2032	Phase 2 A levels first taught, including A level Religious Studies.
Summer 2032	First GCSE Religious Studies examinations.	Summer 2034	First A level Religious Studies examinations.

Teachers should continue teaching the current GCSE and A level specifications until revised qualifications are introduced.

KEY MESSAGES FOR TEACHERS

- Continue teaching your current curriculum and specifications.
- No immediate changes are required.
- Take part in the public consultation when it opens in September 2026.
- Schools will have time to prepare before any new curriculum is introduced from September 2028.
- GCSE and A level Religious Studies will be reviewed later as part of the published timetable.

OFSTED EVIDENCE

Ofsted's research review series includes a review of RE (2021) which highlights the importance of subject knowledge and pedagogy in supporting pupils to make sense of complex ideas.

Ofsted's subject report *Religious education: deep and meaningful?* (2024) identifies key strengths and areas for development in RE and provides practical recommendations for schools.