



2023-0015017NGPO

The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP
Minister for Schools

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Mr Nigel Huddleston MP
By email: nigel.huddleston.mp@parliament.uk

9 May 2023

Dear Nigel,

Thank you for your email of 6 April, enclosing correspondence from Councillor Mel Allcott of Worcestershire SACRE, regarding religious education (RE) in schools.

The Department recognises the importance of providing high quality RE to pupils. This develops children and young people's knowledge of the value and traditions of Britain and other countries, and fosters understanding among different faiths and cultures. RE remains a compulsory subject for all state funded schools in England, including academies, for all pupils up to the age of 18, unless they are withdrawn.

The bursaries the Department provides are designed to incentivise more applications to Initial Teacher Training (ITT) courses. A review is conducted each year before deciding which bursaries will be offered for trainees starting ITT the following academic year. In doing this, the Department takes account of a number of factors, including historic recruitment, forecast economic conditions, and teacher supply need in each subject.

We continue to focus bursaries on English Baccalaureate subjects, particularly those experiencing teacher shortages, to secure as many applicants as possible in the subjects where schools are likely to devote the most teaching time. This ensures the Department is spending money where it is needed most.

In the 2020/21 academic year, the Department exceeded the postgraduate ITT target for RE, recruiting 128 per cent of the trainees required. ITT recruitment has become more challenging in the last two academic years due to the current highly competitive labour market. This has affected recruitment in all subjects.

RE postgraduate ITT targets fell between 2017/18 and 2022/23 by a similar amount, in percentage terms, as those for mathematics, biology, geography, and history. The fall in RE targets during this period was largely driven by improvements in teacher retention. Overall, teacher leaver rates fell from 10.6 per cent in 2016/17, to 9.4 per cent in 2018/19, and down to 8.1 per cent in 2020/21. As fewer teachers leave service, fewer new teachers are needed to replace them. Although recruitment targets have fallen, RE trainee recruitment has been unlimited in recent years. As a result, recruitment has not been limited by a fall in targets.

RE trainee teachers on tuition fee funded ITT routes are able to apply for a tuition fee loan and maintenance loan to support their living costs. Additional student finance is also available depending on individual circumstances, such as the Childcare Grant. More information is available at: tinyurl.com/4wn5b93P.

To support high standards of RE teaching in all schools, the Department provides eight week subject knowledge enhancement (SKE) courses for candidates who have the potential to become outstanding teachers but need to increase their subject knowledge. The SKE course can be undertaken on a full or part time basis, but must be completed before qualified teacher status can be recommended and awarded. Eligible candidates could be entitled to a SKE bursary of £175 per week to support them financially whilst completing their SKE course. Further information on these courses is available at: tinyurl.com/2s3PscJn.

In addition, to support high quality teaching, RE resources will be procured by Oak National Academy during the second tranche of its work. The Department recognises the unique nature of RE as a subject and a decision was made that, by taking more time on its procurement, it would allow us to successfully navigate through these complexities. Oak will work closely with the sector and utilise sector experience when producing new materials, including for RE. This will ensure that high quality lessons and resources are available nationwide, benefitting both teachers and pupils.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Gibb', written in a cursive style.

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