

Worcestershire SACRE News – Spring Term 2024

The role of SACRE is to create and monitor the agreed syllabus for RE in our local area, and to advise the local authority on matters relating to the provision and quality of RE and school collective worship. SACRE is keen to respond to teachers' needs and school requests for RE help.

National RE news for teachers and SACRE members

This paper is a short digest of some useful items of interest about RE in the spring term 2024. Wherever possible we have provided hotlinks to additional web-based resources.

Religious Education in the HMCI Annual report

The [Ofsted Annual Report](#) published at the end of November 2023 presents the organisation's findings for the areas they inspect including schools. NATRE is pleased to see the recognition of the challenges faced by teachers of RE and the impact on children.

Ofsted found the following issues in many schools:

- schools failing to meet the statutory requirement to teach RE to all pupils in all year groups;
- pupils not being taught enough substance to prepare them to engage in a complex, multi-religious and multi-secular society,
- non-examination provision typically not being of high quality;
- schools not teaching topics in the RE curriculum deeply enough for pupils to develop a substantial understanding of the subject matter;

Ofsted recommends a coordinated effort by stakeholders to improve the quality of RE in schools including:

- the provision of high-quality professional development
- curriculum publishers identifying clearly what pupils will learn and when
- the government proving clear expectations about RE provision in schools
- non-statutory guidance for RE needing to be updated and include clear information for schools about the breadth and depth of the syllabus they are expected to teach

These findings add further weight to the call from NATRE and others for a National Plan for RE and for government support for the National Content Standard published by the RE Council last month.

Extracts from the report relating to RE are quoted in full below:

From the Curriculum Section of the report as follows.

However, some subjects still do not receive the attention they deserve:

- *in many secondary schools, pupils do not benefit from a broad and ambitious music curriculum. In physical education (PE), pupils typically experience a broad range of activities. However, schools do not always ensure that these contribute enough to developing pupils' knowledge and skills.*
- *in too many primary and secondary schools, the religious education (RE) that pupils receive is of a poor quality and not fit for purpose, leaving pupils ill-equipped for some of the complexities of contemporary society.*

Religious education

RE in schools is generally of poor quality. Although it is a statutory subject, schools often consider RE as an afterthought. As a subject on the curriculum, it is under-valued. RE is a complex subject, and the lack of clarity and support from government makes schools' job harder.

Some schools steer through these challenges well, but most do not. We found that:

- *many schools do not meet the statutory requirement to teach RE at all stages*
- *pupils are rarely taught enough substance to prepare them to engage in a complex, multi-religious and multi-secular society (where religion and non-religion play different parts in different people's lives)*
- *too often, schools do not teach topics in the RE curriculum deeply enough for pupils to develop a substantial understanding of the subject matter*

- *non-examined RE is typically not high quality.*

All pupils should develop a broad and secure knowledge of the complexity of religious and non-religious traditions. It will take coordinated effort by stakeholders to improve the quality of RE in schools:

- *schools need high-quality professional development to teach RE well*
- *curriculum publishers need to identify clearly what pupils will learn and when, building on knowledge over time, so that pupils develop a deep knowledge of the chosen religious and non-religious traditions*
- *the government should provide clear expectations about RE provision in schools. Schools should follow these. Current non-statutory guidance for RE should be updated and include clear information for schools about the breadth and depth of the syllabus they are expected to teach*

National Content Standard for Religious Education

The RE Council of England and Wales has launched its [National Content Standard](#) for Religious Education in England. This newsletter has previously reported on the postcode lottery of RE provision in England, as found in the Ofsted [Research Review](#), the [primary](#) and [secondary](#) surveys from NATRE, and [analysis of the DfE's own data](#). However, until now, there has been no national benchmark to cite when we are asked, "What exactly does high-quality RE look like?"

The purpose is to give a national benchmark that applies to all types of school in England. The NCS is set out in the style of National Curriculum documents, and at the heart of it is the standard, based on the [National Statement of Entitlement](#) from the RE Council's religion and worldviews project.

You can read the National Content Standard [here](#) and a blog about it by Deborah Weston [here](#).

NATRE Secondary survey on RE: results

This is an analysis of the data gathered from a questionnaire on impact of political policies on Religious Education in England, RME in Scotland and RVE in Wales. It relates particularly to the level of provision in different types of school, the experience of teachers in relation to initial teacher training and continuing professional development and the type of examination and non-examination courses offered at key stages 4 and 5. Through publicising this survey, NATRE hopes it can be used widely seeks to make the case for more attention to be paid to the level of provision and quality of our subject in all schools and, in England for there to be a National Plan for RE as recommended by the Commission on RE in 2018.

This tenth survey was conducted during the summer term of 2023 via a number of teacher networks supported by NATRE, and RE Today Services. 241 teachers from different parts of the UK responded.

The report discusses teacher workload, provision at KS3 and KS4, leadership, timetabling and time for GCSE RS, whether RE is taught by specialists and if teachers have had any RE CPD, and the destinations of A level RS students. Access the full report: [NATRE Secondary Survey 2023](#)

Advanced British Standard Consultation

The DfE are currently consulting on the Advanced British Standard, a potential new qualification framework for 16-19 year olds. NATRE have pointed that current plans have not included the statutory position of RE for those studying 16-19 within a school setting, nor is Religious Studies A level – one of the most popular subjects, used as an example in the literature around the proposal. The closing date for the consultation is 20th March 2024. You can respond [here](#).

Parliamentary question on RE: Supporting and funding RE

[Ofsted describes](#) “the lack of clarity and support from the government makes schools’ job harder” in relation to delivering high-quality RE. An example of this can be found in the answer from Minister of State for Education; Damian Hinds, MP [to this written question](#) from Jim Shannon MP:

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department plans to take steps to fund network hubs for Religious Education; and if she will make a statement.

Damian Hinds MP, Minister of State for Education responded

“Religious education (RE) is an essential part of a school’s curriculum and remains a compulsory subject in all state-funded schools, including academies, to all pupils up to the age of 18. RE develops an individual’s knowledge and understanding of the religions and beliefs which form part of contemporary society, as well as serving to inform their own values and behaviour.

Although the Department has not been involved in the establishment of the RE Hubs project, the Department welcomes its work to support teachers and practitioners. The Department currently has no plans to provide funding for the project. The Department does, however, provide support for RE in other ways.”

The answer then goes on to cite spending on the new bursary which was finally reinstated this year but is still very small in comparison to other shortage subjects such as geography and languages including Latin, the Oak National Academy materials which will eventually be rolled out to all subjects and the eight-week funded subject knowledge enhancement courses for potential trainee teachers of RE – again offered to many other subjects.

DfE’s annual report and accounts set out government policy:

“Our main levers to support schools are our Curriculum Hub programmes (music, computing, languages, English and mathematics), the Behaviour Hubs programme and our model curricula guidance ...” (page 72)

It is important to note that music hubs will receive £79m a year until at least 2025 and there is money available for other subject support too. For example, Schools Week [reported](#) on 1st December 2023 that the £320 million PE and sports premium for primary schools will be extended for at least another year from September.

NATRE and others in the RE community ask, if “Religious education (RE) is an essential part of a school’s curriculum and remains a compulsory subject in all state funded schools” and in relation to the RE Hubs project, “the Department welcomes its work to support teachers and practitioners”, why does the government not back up these words with action by funding the subject on a par with other subjects in the curriculum – including [RE Hubs](#)?

Is this a question SACRE should pose to local MPs and prospective candidates?

House of Lords debate quality Religious Education

Religious Education was in the spotlight on January 18th 2024, as the Lords debated standards in RE in the Grand Committee. NATRE worked with the RE Policy Unit to help brief several peers who offered to speak in this debate proposed by Lord Harries of Pentregarth.

In his contribution, Lord Harries of Pentregarth raised concerns about schools' poor quality of religious education (RE) and quoted data collected by NATRE. He also referenced the damning 2023 HMCI Annual Ofsted report from Amanda Spielman, where RE was described as "poor quality" and "not fit for purpose".

Ofsted suggested, he said, that RE was "undervalued" and often considered as an "afterthought" by schools and the "lack of clarity and support" from the Government made schools' job "harder".

The peer criticized the lack of government support, citing the survey conducted by NASACRE in August 2023, which found that five authorities declared no spending on RE at all, and a further 34—39 in all, or 31%—stated they did not spend any money supporting RE in schools.

Lord Harries closed his remarks by calling for a National Plan for RE, including a benchmark for the curriculum. He made a list of matters for inclusion in this National Plan.

1. it should include a budgetary provision at least comparable to that received for other subjects such as music;

- the plan should include a benchmark for what is expected from the syllabus,
- that what happens locally should be judged by this benchmark;
- that RE should be taught by people who have qualifications in the subject and who are given regular opportunities to enhance their professional skills,
- that more bursaries and more money for enhanced professional training should be made available to this end.

Various speakers contributed to the debate which can be read in full here: [Religious Education in Schools - Hansard - UK Parliament](#)

Listen via Parliament TV [Parliamentlive.tv - Lords Grand Committee](#)

Training, networking, resources and other support

Bayt al Fann: exploring art and culture inspired by Islamic tradition

'Bayt al Fann' is Arabic for 'Art House'. It was launched in November 2021 and welcomes all to explore the past, present and future of Islamic art, culture and heritage. Its [website](#) is a huge treasure trove of information and examples of art and culture linked to Islam from ancient scriptures to modern 'calligrafitti' and architecture.

For those who want more, there are events and workshops and a new quarterly periodical with the first edition centred around Islamic pattern. There are regular, detailed social media posts across many platforms including Instagram (baytal.fann), Threads (baytal.fann), TikTok (@baytalfann) and X (@BaytAlFann).

List of Resources to Support Schools with Contentious Topics

Together is a coalition of some of the UK's best known organisations that aim to build a kinder, closer and more connected society. As one of its campaigns, 'Together for Humanity' is building a movement to stand against rising antisemitism and anti-Muslim hate in the UK amidst the conflict in the Middle East. The campaign is working to support schools, universities and councils to build bridges in their communities.

It has created a document containing links and information to offer guidance that schools and teachers may find helpful. There are also some resources that could potentially be used with pupils on this document.

[Access resource](#)

Westhill Awards 2024-25

NASACRE is once again joining with Westhill to offer awards of up to £4000 for innovative and enduring projects. Any project should offer young people meaningful opportunities to engage in compelling learning experiences in RE (or Collective Worship), within the broad theme of “education into diversity”.

Any SACRE wishing to submit an application is strongly advised to review the briefing notes which accompany the application form. There is a webinar on **16th October** which will look at the application process and give interested SACREs an opportunity to hear from past winners. The application form and the notes can be found and downloaded [here](#).

NASACRE Training for SACRE members

Wednesday 26th June 6.30-8.30 *So, you've joined your local SACRE...*

Description: A rerun of the September session, to help new SACRE members to understand their role, how SACRE works, its statutory responsibilities and how members make their contribution to SACRE's work.

Free. Other training and resources available on the NASACRE site. [Welcome to NASACRE - NASACRE](#)

New RE Today Learning Zone

RE Today Services are delighted to have launched a new e-learning platform that puts teachers in control of their CPD. Courses already available on the Learning Zone include subject knowledge webinars for both primary and secondary teachers on Buddhism, Christianity, Hindu Dharma, Islam, Judaism, Sikhi and Non-Religious Worldviews alongside the ever-popular Understanding Christianity course for primary colleagues. Teachers of RE can select those courses and webinars most relevant to them – each can be accessed and used at times convenient for the participants, or even accessed in short bursts over a few weeks or months. More will be added to the Learning Zone over the coming months.

To find out more, please go to [RE Today Learning Zone](#). [Login](#)

RE Hubs – website growing!



RE Hubs website www.re-hubs.uk aims to connect those who can provide resources with those who need them, and create a neutral platform bringing RE professionals together.

Many organisations serve RE/RVE/R&W education in the UK, from places of worship and school speakers to CPD partnerships and resource providers. The website helps teachers to find local places of interest to visit, as well as people who will visit schools. Local training opportunities are listed.

The West Midlands hub is led by Chris Giles.

Culham St Gabriel's FREE self-study course

Digging Deeper: Subject Knowledge, this short, self-study course builds on the introduction level course and is available for FREE. Find out more here: [Culham St Gabriel's Trust Moodle \(cstg.org.uk\)](http://cstg.org.uk)

Free webinars for primary and secondary ECTs – a taster for NATRE ECT membership

Early Career Teachers have access to a range of free support through a series of online sessions. 'Café' sessions give you a chance to talk with experienced teachers and experts from different worldview backgrounds. The taught sessions offer expert input with a focus on practical classroom strategies.

Date – All Mondays 4.00-5.30pm	Speaker	Topic
11 March 2024	Stephen Pett	Exploring Jewish worldviews
8 April 2024	Deborah Weston plus an expert panel	Café NATRE: Pagan traditions
13 May 2024	Lat Blaylock	Using film to deepen learning in RE
10 June 2024	Fiona Moss	Café NATRE: Getting the most from your NATRE membership
8 July 2024	Stephen Pett	Using a religion and worldviews approach in RE

ECT webinars booking link <https://www.natre.org.uk/membership/early-careers-teachers/ect-free-monthly-webinar/>

BBC expands early years RE resources

There are new resources for 4- and 5-year-olds for RE / RME and RVE from BBC Bitesize Reception. These include some simple craft activities and some recipes for festive food with clear and simple ideas to bring the world of religion alive for small children.

The subject is connected to work in the fields of expressive arts and design, helping pupils with their understanding of the world particularly in the field of religion and belief.

These new materials cover Christmas, Easter, Eid Al Adha, Vaisakhi, Divali and more and have now gone live. They include video clips made for the age group, activity sheets and information for teacher-use.

Lat Blaylock, who contributed to the work says: 'I'm really pleased to see that BBC have made such a diverse and well thought out contribution to Early Years learning about religion and belief. Teachers will find this is a little treasure trove.'

Here is a link: www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/z24kqyc [Religions, festivals and celebrations](#)

*News update curated by RE Today Services
March 2024*