

North Yorkshire Council

North Yorkshire Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) –

September 2023 Update from Professional RE Adviser

1.0 Purpose of the Report

To inform Members on work undertaken by the Professional RE Adviser since the last SACRE meeting.

To provide members with local and national updates on RE

2.0 Overview Of Training for 2023-24

2.1 Primary RE Networks

Autumn – focus on subject knowledge Judaism

9th November 9.30-11.30

13th November 1.30-3.30

Spring –focus on RE and literacy - engaging with text and story in the RE classroom

6th March 9.30-11.30

19th March 1.30-3.30

Summer - focus on implementing the North Yorkshire Agreed Syllabus 2024-2029

1st July 1.30-3.30

4th July 9.30-11.30

2.2 Primary RE leadership course

This practical course is suitable for new or developing Primary RE subject leads to support their role in developing an effective RE curriculum and leading RE across their school. This course will be split over 2 sessions with a gap task in between

The course focuses on

- developing an understanding of the role of Primary RE lead
- principles for a developing an effective RE curriculum with a focus on the Ofsted research review, subject knowledge and the locally agreed syllabus
- developing meaningful and manageable monitoring and evaluation

As a result of attending, delegates should:

- Gained confidence in leading RE in their school
- have a good understanding of the principles of planning an effective RE curriculum
- have increased confidence in subject knowledge for the Primary RE classroom
- have increased confidence in monitoring and evaluating RE in their school

Session 1 7th February 9.30-12

Session 2 26th February 1.00-3.30

2.3 Secondary RE curriculum workshop

This workshop will focus on the principles for a developing an effective RE curriculum with a focus on learning from the Ofsted research review and the North Yorkshire Agreed Syllabus

The session will explore

- The legal framework for RE
- Curriculum intent
- Thinking about substantive, disciplinary and personal knowledge in RE
- Curriculum progression
- Curriculum impact: how do we know our curriculum is working?

Delegates should bring their RE long term plan to the session

Date 26th October 4-6pm

3.0 SACRE Newsletter

The autumn term newsletter will go out to schools in early October. Any contributions from members would be gratefully received.

4.0 GCSE data

4.1 Religious Studies remains a popular GCSE despite specialist teacher recruitment challenge

Quarter of a million students risk being neglected" says Father of the House, as teacher applications fall.

The number of students in England and Wales taking a GCSE course in Religious Studies has remained stable at 253,906, up by a margin of 0.3% from last year.

The slight rise in entries comes as a campaign supported by cross-party politicians intends to attract a new generation of teachers to the subject, focusing on the restoration of training bursaries. The latest UCAS data showed applicants to train to teach the subject had fallen by one-third.

The number of GCSE entries this year means that RS is taken by more students than Business Studies, Design and Technology, and Art and Design at GCSE.

Despite this, the number of hours of RE taught by teachers with no post-A level qualification remains one of the highest at 26%. Half of teachers delivering RE lessons spend most of their timetables teaching a different subject. This has led subject leaders and politicians to reissue their call for a National Plan for the subject and for the reinstatement of bursaries for trainee RE teachers.

Sarah Lane Cawte, Chair of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC), said:

"RS is one of the most popular subjects at GCSE, yet bizarrely it does not receive the corresponding funding and support. Teacher training applications have not recovered since the axing of the bursary in 2021, and no money has been spent on the subject for five years. We want an even distribution of funding across the curriculum to ensure young people taking the subject receive their fair share of support from the government."

Katie Freeman, Chair of the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), said:

"An RE lesson offers a unique and much needed place for young people to explore life's big questions, build societal cohesion and contribute to their spiritual and academic development. It's a real travesty that one of the most popular subjects at GCSE has not received fair allocation of government support to ensure every young person in every school receives this opportunity."

Father of the House, Sir Peter Bottomley MP, who first called for a National Plan for the subject after chairing a parliamentary roundtable on its future last year, also responded to the results:

"RE continues to play a pivotal part in the education of young people across the country, allowing them to understand and academically engage with some of the moral and theological debates that continue to inform our society. A National Plan would scale out a

modern and relevant curriculum in the faiths, cultures and beliefs of modern Britain taught by highly trained and committed teachers. Neglecting the subject in this fashion does a disservice to the quarter of a million young people who take it at GCSE every year.”

The subject results in full were:

England and Wales*

England and Wales RS overall, up 0.3%, by 847, from 253,059 to 253,906

England and Wales RS full course, up 0.1%, by 319, from 231,730 to 232,049

England and Wales RS short course up 2.5%, by 618, from 21,239 to 21,857

England

England RS overall, up 0.4%, by 1,009, from 240,240 to 241,249

England RS full course, up 0.2%, by 429, from 221,983 to 222,412

England RS short course up 3.2%, by 580, from 18,257 to 18,837

Wales

Wales RS overall, down 1.3%, by 162 from 12,819 to 12,657

Wales RS full course, down 1.1%, by 110, from 9,747 to 9,637

Wales RS short course, down 1.7%, by 52, from 3,072 to 3,020

4.2 Overview of data from the Joint Council of Qualifications

JOINT COUNCIL FOR QUALIFICATIONS													
Provisional GCSE (Full Course) Results (9-1 Only) - June 2023													
(England Only)													
CUMULATIVE PERCENTAGES of Subject Results by Grade													
Category	Subject	Year	Number Sat	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	U
GCSE FC England 9 - 1	Religious Studies	2023	222412	7.7	18.5	30.6	47.3	61.3	72.2	86.0	94.0	98.4	100
GCSE FC England 9 - 1	Religious Studies	2022	221983	9.7	21.6	34.7	51.8	66.1	76.7	87.7	94.5	98.5	100
GCSE FC England 9 - 1	Religious Studies	2019	227913	7.4	17.9	30.5	46.6	60.9	72.3	86.3	94.3	98.5	100
GCSE FC England 9 - 1	All Subjects	2023	5422613	4.9	12.0	21.6	35.6	52.2	67.8	83.8	93.1	98.0	100
GCSE FC England 9 - 1	All Subjects	2022	5219550	6.6	15.1	26.0	40.7	58.1	73.0	86.7	94.5	98.4	100
GCSE FC England 9 - 1	All Subjects	2019	5070481	4.5	11.2	20.6	34.0	50.6	67.0	84.3	93.8	98.3	100

4.3 Further information on entries can also be found on the student performance analysis website [GCSE National subject grade percentages \(bstubbs.co.uk\)](http://bstubbs.co.uk)

Percentage of candidates gaining grade

	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	U	9-4	Entries	
Religious Studies													
2023	7.7	10.7	12.1	16.7	14.0	10.9	13.8	8.0	4.4	1.6	72.2	222421	
2022	9.7	11.9	13.1	17.2	14.2	10.7	10.3	7.5	3.9	1.5	76.7	221983	
2021	11.5	12.4	14.0	15.5	14.2	12.6	9.8	5.8	3.1	1.1	80.2	221419	
2020	9.6	11.3	14.0	16.3	15.4	13.9	10.9	5.5	2.6	0.5	80.5	226767	
2019	7.4	10.5	12.6	16.1	14.3	11.4	14.0	8.0	4.2	1.5	72.3	227913	
England	2018	7.1	10.1	12.7	16.0	14.5	11.4	13.7	8.4	4.4	1.7	71.8	229183
UK	2018	7.1	10.1	12.7	16.0	14.5	11.5	13.6	8.4	4.4	1.7	71.9	229765
		A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U	A*-C	A*-U	
	2018	11.3	20.6	22.7	19.0	10.6	6.4	4.2	2.9	2.3	73.6	23853	
	2017	10.1	19.5	23.3	18.4	12.2	7.3	4.6	2.7	1.8	71.3	282193	
	2016	10.4	19.1	23.5	18.6	12.0	7.2	4.5	2.8	2.0	71.6	296010	
	2015	10.8	19.0	23.6	18.8	11.9	7.2	4.4	2.6	1.7	72.2	295730	
	2014	10.9	19.3	23.0	18.3	11.8	7.4	4.5	2.8	2.0	71.5	282099	

2013	11.2	19.7	22.8	18.7	11.8	7.0	4.4	2.7	1.7	72.4	263988
2012	11.8	20.3	22.9	18.7	11.4	6.8	4.2	2.4	1.5	73.7	239123
2011	11.7	20.2	22.7	18.7	11.4	6.9	4.3	2.5	1.6	73.3	221974
2010	12.0	20.1	22.6	18.4	11.5	7.1	4.5	2.4	1.4	73.1	188704
2009	12.6	20.1	22.3	18.4	11.6	7.0	4.3	2.3	1.4	73.4	182288
2008	13.2	19.4	21.8	18.1	11.7	7.3	4.5	2.5	1.5	72.5	179139
2007	12.3	19.2	21.4	18.6	11.8	7.5	4.8	2.6	1.8	71.5	171123
2006	11.2	19.3	21.3	18.8	12.2	7.8	4.7	2.8	1.9	70.6	159681
2005	10.5	18.8	20.8	18.5	12.5	8.3	5.4	3.1	2.1	68.6	147516
2004	9.4	17.9	20.3	18.2	13.1	9.0	6.1	3.5	2.5	65.8	141037
2003	9.1	16.4	19.5	18.8	13.2	9.3	6.3	3.9	3.5	63.8	132304
2002	8.5	14.6	19.5	19.1	13.0	10.0	7.2	4.4	3.7	61.7	122637
2001	8.0	13.7	18.5	19.4	13.5	10.7	7.6	4.8	3.8	59.6	119550
2000	7.5	13.5	18.4	19.5	13.9	10.7	7.7	4.8	4.0	58.9	116234
1999	6.6	13.1	18.2	20.3	14.3	11.0	8.0	4.9	3.6	58.2	115679
1998	5.5	12.6	18.5	19.9	14.2	11.3	8.5	5.4	4.1	56.5	113381
1997	4.9	12.0	18.7	21.0	15.0	11.7	8.5	5.2	2.8	56.7	118545
1996	4.4	12.0	18.8	20.7	14.7	12.1	8.9	5.3	3.1	55.9	116549
1995	3.5	12.2	19.6	21.4	14.6	12.3	8.7	5.1	2.6	56.7	110373
1994	2.9	12.0	19.8	22.1	14.2	12.1	8.9	5.5	2.5	56.8	102544
1993		13.7	19.1	22.2	14.8	12.5	8.9	5.6	3.2	55.0	98549

5.0 A level data

5.1 Recruitment challenges mean schools are now struggling to offer the subject at A level

Religious Studies A level exam entries have decreased by 3.5 percent in England and 24 percent in Wales.

The fall comes as the overall number of A level entries in England and Wales increased this year by 2 percent from 812,124 in 2022 to 830,312 in 2023.

14,690 students took an RS A level in England in 2023 compared with 15,216 in 2022, while in Wales entries were recorded at 748, a fall from 982.

A level entries for RS also fell last year by 2.7 percent, despite a 6.1% increase in 2021.

Between 2003 and 2022, A level RS has been one of the fastest growing subjects at A level, with an increase of 39 percent in the number of entries to the subject.

The fall follows the launch of a campaign to recruit a new generation of RE teachers to the subject, with the Religious Education Council of England and Wales warning that a shortage in specialist teachers means some schools, particularly in the Midlands and North East, are now struggling to offer the subject at A level.

A level Religious Studies is the humanity most likely to be taken by disadvantaged pupils. Research by the FFT Education Datalab has found that this group is twice as likely to choose to study A level Religious Studies than their peers.

Sarah Lane Cawte, Chair of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC), said:

"These results show the really concerning impact that teacher retention and recruitment is having on the subject. For the last two decades, A level Religious Studies has been a success story with growing numbers of entries and impressive results that have opened up a world of opportunity, particularly for people from disadvantaged backgrounds, providing them with access to top universities and careers in law, journalism and teaching."

"That legacy is now threatened. A teacher training bursary and a fair allocation of resources to the subject would help reverse this trend and ensure RE continues to thrive as it has done for the last decades."

Katie Freeman, Chair of the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), said:

"Despite this dip in entries, A level RS continues to be a very popular choice at A level, being both personally enriching and intellectually challenging. RS A level teachers are highly trained professionals, managing classroom debates on sensitive ethical and theological issues that continue to inform the modern world."

“To be in a situation where students are not able to take Religious Studies at an advanced level is a real travesty, denying many young people an opportunity to partake in a subject that has opened up a world of opportunities in higher education, their personal lives and the world of work.”

The key outcomes of the 2023 A level results in England and Wales for Religious Studies are as follows:

- 15,438 RS A level entries were recorded in England and Wales, a decline of 4.5 percent from 2022
- There were 39 percent more A level entries for RS in England and Wales than in 2003 (11,132 entries were recorded in 2003).

5.2 Overview of data from the Joint Council of Qualifications

JOINT COUNCIL FOR QUALIFICATIONS										
Provisional GCE A Level Results - June 2023 (England Only)										
Comparisons to previous years should be approached with caution.										
CUMULATIVE PERCENTAGES of Subject Results by Grade										
Category	Subject	Year	Number Sat	A*	A	B	C	D	E	U
A Level England	Religious Studies	2023	14690	5.9	25.4	55.3	79.0	92.2	98.0	100
A Level England	Religious Studies	2022	15216	12.5	35.6	67.6	87.6	96.1	99.0	100
A Level England	Religious Studies	2019	16214	4.2	21.5	49.8	75.9	91.8	98.1	100
A Level England	All Subjects	2023	797352	8.6	26.5	52.7	75.4	89.9	97.2	100
A Level England	All Subjects	2022	776625	14.5	35.9	62.2	82.1	93.4	98.4	100
A Level England	All Subjects	2019	736746	7.7	25.2	51.1	75.5	90.8	97.5	100

6.0 Guidance for local authorities about membership of SACREs

The DFE have produced the guidance below which has now been sent to local authorities. It makes clear that, in relation to committee A, it is the Local Authority who select which groups can be represented on the local SACRE and on the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) and that this selection may include representatives from non-religious belief systems. This note provides information on a recent court ruling and shares the Department for Education’s (the Department) view that representatives from non-religious belief systems may be appointed to Group A of a SACRE and/or to an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC).

Background

SACREs are established by local authorities, as required by legislation^[1], and their membership must consist of the following groups:

- Group A: members that represent Christian denominations and other religions and their denominations who will appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area;
- Group B: members that represent the Church of England;
- Group C: members that represent the teaching profession or other relevant associations that, in the opinion of the authority, ought to be represented; and
- Group D: members that represent the [local] authority.

The recent legal case of *Bowen v Kent County Council*^[2] (more details in the Annex) clarified that applications for Group A membership from persons who represent holders of non-religious beliefs should be considered in the same way as applications from those who represent holders of religious beliefs.

In the Department’s view, the non-religious beliefs adhered to by the person to be appointed must be analogous to a religious belief. To be “analogous”, the non-religious beliefs must, in accordance with case law under the European Convention of Human Rights

and the Human Rights Act 1998, attain the necessary level of cogency, seriousness, cohesion, and importance to attract protection under the Convention Rights. [3]

The final decision on appointment of persons to a SACRE or ASC is a matter for local authorities. This may include consideration of whether such a representative would help ensure that the relevant traditions and beliefs in the local authority's area are appropriately reflected in Group A.

[1] [Section 390\(4\)\(a\) of the Education Act 1996](#)
2 www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2023/1261.html

7.0 Shortage of RE teachers “dangerous cycle” within religious education

The shortage of religious education teachers has been highlighted in a Religion Media Centre briefing. Only six people have come forward to train as RE teachers in Wales, and in England no RE teacher training courses have reached their target of entries. Hundreds have their applications pending because their degrees have not been finalised due to the university lecturers' strike action. Dr Tim Hutchings, from the University of Nottingham, told the briefing that there was a dangerous cycle emerging in the study of Religious Education, where GCSE entries are stable with RE remaining as the 7th most popular subject, A-level results show a slight dip in entries, fewer students choose to study Theology or Religious Studies at university and fewer have chosen to train to teach RE. Teachers, academics and advisers told the briefing that headteachers want to include RE in the curriculum as the understanding of religion is vital in a global society, but the lack of specialist teachers is an issue. The RE council is campaigning for the government to create a national plan to support high standards in RE provision and bursaries to encourage new teachers. The briefing will go up on their YouTube channel [here](#).

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Background documents: