

An analysis of the provision for RE in Primary Schools – Autumn Term 2016

Introduction

This is an analysis of the data gathered from a questionnaire on primary religious education 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 and social media. Replies were received from 373 primary teachers in more than 100 local authority areas representing more than two-thirds of the local authorities in the country.

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 in relation to the impact of the English Baccalaureate and report [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 Religious Education. 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.

Religious Education contributes dynamically to children and young people's education in schools by provoking challenging questions about meaning and purpose in life, beliefs about God, ultimate reality, issues of right and wrong and what it means to be human. The Curriculum Framework for Religious Education in England 2013 by the Religious Education Council states that teaching therefore should equip pupils with systematic knowledge and understanding of a range of religions and non-religious worldviews, enabling them to develop their ideas, values and identities.

Key Findings

1. How suitable is primary teachers' training and preparation to teach RE?

- a. More than 44% of those teaching RE in primary schools do not have a GCSE or O level in RS and 75% of those are subject leaders. Even amongst those who trained in the last 5 years, more than 1 in 3 has no qualification in RE at all.
- b. During the last year more than 1 in 4 respondents received no training in RE and 60% received less than 1 day. Even more worrying, 40% of respondents reported that others who teach RE in their school received no training (not even a staff meeting) and 87% have received one day or less.
- c. Too much RE is being delivered by adults other than teachers. In 50% of schools some RE is being delivered by a higher level teaching assistant. In 1 in 10 schools between 25% and 50% of RE is delivered in this way. Unless the HLTA teaching RE has an appropriately related qualification and/or receives regular CPD in RE and sufficient planning time to secure subject knowledge and confidence then pupil learning and progress may be negatively impacted.
- d. There is a significant rise in the percentage of teachers who are receiving only 0-3 hours of training in RE, particularly if they have trained within the last year.
- e. 75% of the primary teachers who responded to this survey describe themselves as 'reasonably confident' or better about how to teach RE and what to teach. Bearing in mind that around 75% of our respondents are subject leaders one might expect this. In contrast, the respondents report that only just under 5% of their colleagues feels very confident about how to teach RE and 8.5% about what to teach.

2. How well supported are subject leaders of RE?

- a. Subject leaders only hold the post for 2 years or fewer. This group represents 41% of our sample but 30.4% have held the post of 5 years or more. This would suggest that in order to improve leadership in the subject, new subject leaders would be well advised to draw upon the resource of experienced local colleagues. They can do this by being in touch with the 200+ NATRE affiliated local groups (see: www.natre.org.uk/about-natre/local-groups/)

3. What issues are causing teachers of RE concern?

- a. Funding is an issue for all schools in the current climate of austerity. However, questions should be asked about why the teaching of RE is less well funded than foundation subjects in 30% of schools. The most common budget is less than 50p per pupil per year, this is insufficient to ensure resources are up to date and appropriate to modern teaching methods.
- b. It is pleasing that the right of withdrawal is not used frequently; 83% of respondents had no children withdrawn at all. However, there is a worrying trend in the use of the right of a parent to withdraw a child from all or part of RE. In the past, a limited number of specific groups of parents have withdrawn their children from RE for religious reasons. This survey shows that the right is now being used to withdraw children from lessons on Islam or visits to the Mosque calling into question their preparation for life in modern Britain.

4. What issues help or hinder the effective delivery of RE?

- a. Most Agreed Syllabuses recommend 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 just under 30% of schools, pupils receive the equivalent of less than 45 minutes per week teaching of RE.
- b. In total almost 88% of schools reported that timetable time had either remained the same or increased. Two reasons were the most commonly given (1) changes to the senior management (35%) and the British Values/Prevent Agenda (21%). Where there had been a decrease in time (10%), the reasons most commonly given were other subjects taking priority (37%) and New National Curriculum (23%).

Detailed breakdown of NATRE survey questions

1. Types of school

Table 1 – 255 schools identified their school type. Approximately 55% of those that responded to the question identified their school as an LA maintained school and 45% as an academy.

Type of school	No.
Primary	177
Middle School	6
First or lower school	5
Infant School	20
Junior School	25
Other: included all-through, PRU, special primary	22

2. How long is it since you achieved qualified teacher status?

Table 2 – Almost two-thirds of respondents had taught for 11 or more years

Time	Currently in training	Less than 1	1-4	5-10	11 or more
	1.6%	3%	14.5%	18.5%	62.4%

3. Are you the subject leader for RE?

Table 3 – The overwhelming majority of respondents were current or former subject leaders.

74.5%	Yes
4%	Yes and I am the subject leader for more than one school
14.8%	No
6.7%	No – but I have been in the past

4. The main role of respondents

Table 4 – around 60% of respondents were class teachers and 20% were senior leaders

59.1%	class teachers
21%	senior leaders
5.4%	teaching assistant or higher level teaching assistant
10.8%	PPA cover teacher
0.7%	other

5. How long do subject leaders for RE hold this post on average?

Table 5 – The most commonly reported period was over 5 years representing 30.4% of those who responded to the question. However over 40% of subject leaders hold the post for less than two years. 17% of current subject leaders achieved qualified teacher status between 1 and 4 years ago.

Less than one year	23.7%
1-2 years	17.5%
3-5 years	28.5%
Over 5 years	30.4%

6. Budget

(a) What is the budget allocation for RE in your school?

Table 7 – 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 statistics² 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 almost 30% have no set budget at all.

Answer Choices	Responses
£0	5.17%
£1-£50	3.16%
£51-£200	18.10%
£201-£300	7.47%
£301-£500	9.48%
£501-£1000	4.89%
£1001-£2000	1.72%
£2000+	1.44%
No set budget	29.02%
Prefer not to say	1.44% 5
Don't know	18.10%

(b) How would you compare the allocation of resources for RE in your school with those for Foundation subjects?

Table 8: 30% of respondents say Religious Education receives a less favourable budget allocation than other foundation subjects

Answer	Responses
More favourable than foundation subjects	11.49%
The same as foundation subjects	58.91%
Less favourable than foundation subjects	29.60%

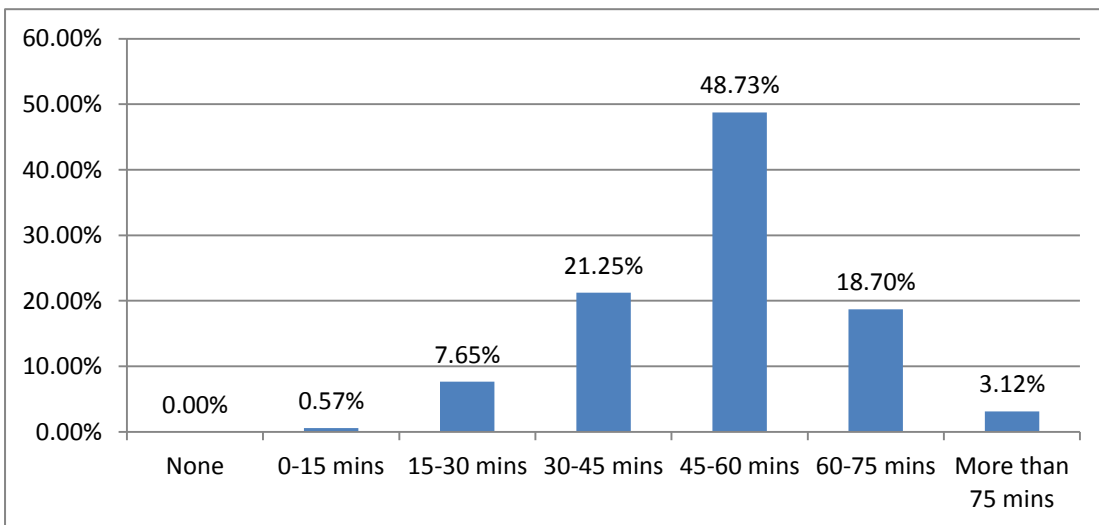
¹ <http://impact.ref.ac.uk/CaseStudies/CaseStudy.aspx?Id=28230>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2015>

7. Time for Religious Education

(a) How much time is allocated to the teaching of RE?

Table 9 – Most Agreed Syllabuses recommend the equivalent of approximately 60 minutes per week be spent on RE at Key Stage 1 and about 75% at Key Stage 2. This data suggests that in just under 30% of schools, insufficient time is being spent on the teaching of RE to ensure that pupils make good progress.



(b) To what extent have there been changes to time allocated to the teaching of RE?

Whilst around 70% of respondents stated that there had been no change in timetable time for RE in the last academic year, almost 18% said that time had been increased. The most significant reasons given for the increase were:

- Change in senior management/subject leader 35%
- The British Values/SMSC/Prevent Agenda 21%

Where there had been a decrease in timetable time for RE (10% of schools), the most significant reasons given were:

- Other subjects taking priority 37%
- The New National Curriculum 23%

8. Withdrawal from Religious Education

Table 10: Almost 83% of schools reported that there had been no withdrawal from RE in the last academic year but around 17% reported some withdrawal. Whereas withdrawal by groups such as Jehovah’s Witnesses has been common for many years, withdrawal from lessons on Islam is a relatively new phenomenon and is of great concern, not just amongst teachers of RE but also senior leaders. A motion to commit the National Association of Headteachers to negotiate with the government to revoke the right of withdrawal was passed at conference in May 2016.³

The most often reported reasons/types of withdrawal included:

Membership of a particular religious or non-religious tradition; Jehovah’s witnesses, Muslim, Humanist, Plymouth Brethren
Withdrawal from learning about any non-Christian elements as they don't want them to learn about other faiths
Withdrawal from a trip to a Mosque
Withdrawn from lessons on Islam

9. What proportion of the RE provision in your school is delivered by non-teaching staff e.g. HLTAs

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. Ofsted reported that pupils’ achievement in RE was very inconsistent in 2013⁴ Shortly after an All Party Parliamentary Group on RE enquiry found that one of the contributing factors to this was the excessive use of teaching assistants to deliver RE.⁵ The 2013 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 50% of schools. In 1 in 10 schools between 25 and 50% of RE is delivered in this way.

- 50% of schools say this does not happen in their school
- 50% allow some RE to be taught by non-teaching staff. In almost 1 in 10 schools between 25% and 50% of RE is delivered in this way.

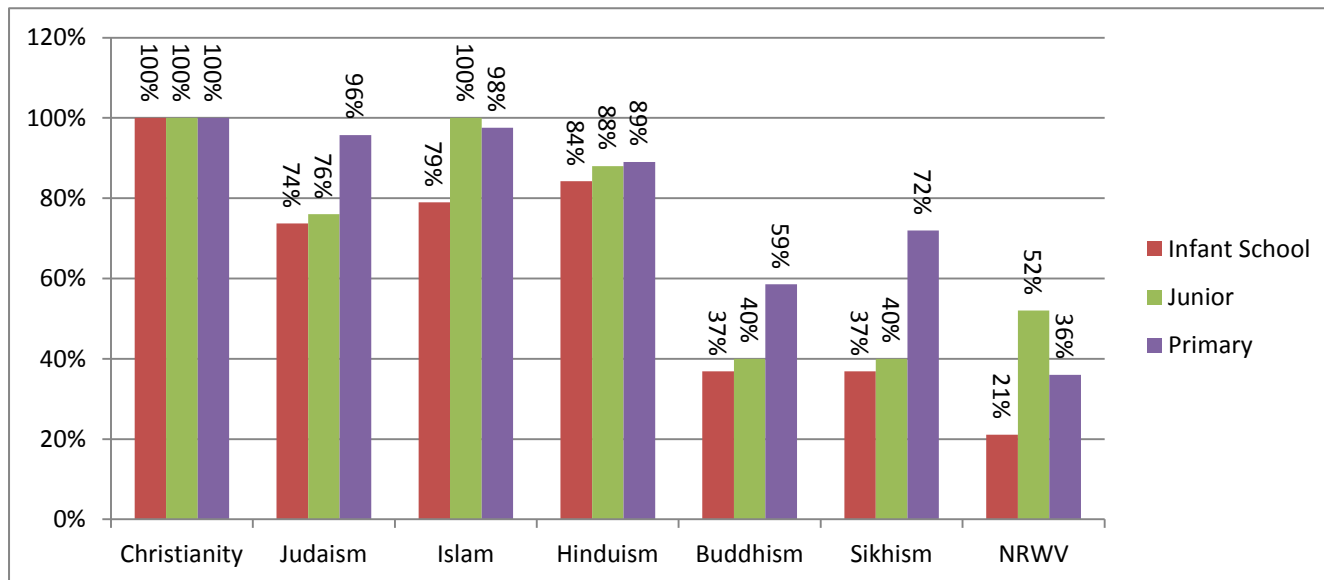
³ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2016/05/01/head-teachers-to-argue-parents-should-be-stripped-of-right-to-ta/>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-realising-the-potential>

⁵ http://religioueducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/APPG_RE_-_The_Truth_Unmasked.pdf

10. Which religions, beliefs and worldviews are taught at your school?

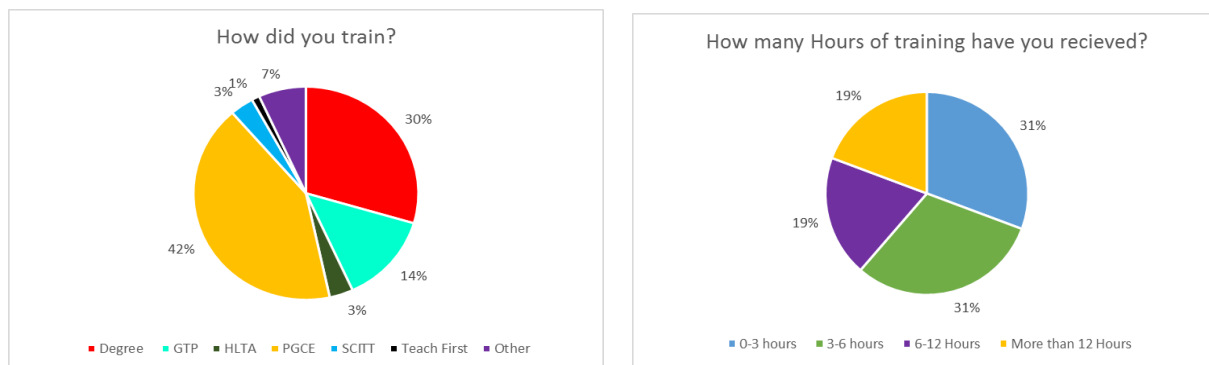
Table 11: It was unsurprising to find that Christianity is taught in all schools that responded to the survey and that Judaism and Islam are taught fairly universally in primary schools (the largest group of respondents). Hinduism features clearly and Sikhism too in almost three-quarters of primaries. It is pleasing to see that non-religious world views are now specifically taught in more than a third of primaries but more needs to be done to raise teachers' subject knowledge and confidence in this area and in the teaching of Buddhism.



11. Training for RE in initial teacher education

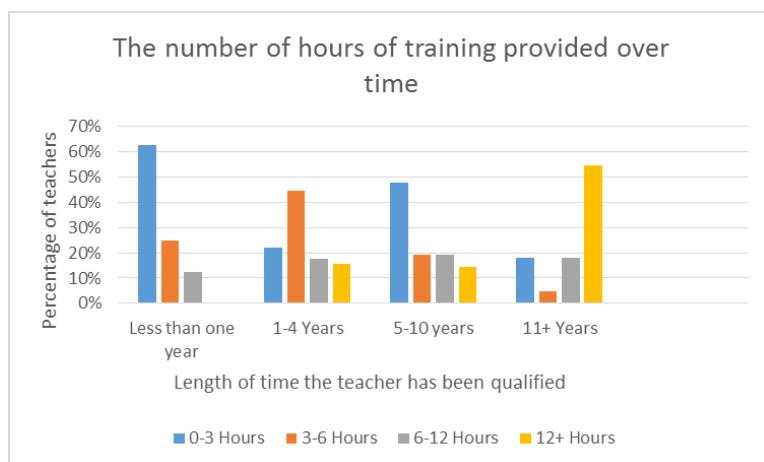
Predictably, those who trained to teach through a three or four year teaching degree programme received more training in RE than those who followed post-graduate routes. These represent 30% of respondents.

Table 12



Overall, there has been a significant decline over the past 11 years in the amount of training primary teachers receive to teach RE. Table 13 shows that the most common preparation for teaching RE (60% of teachers) was between 0 and 3 hours. Those that trained 11 or more years ago were more likely to have received 12 or more hours of RE training yet none of those that have just qualified had this sort of preparation for teaching the subject. Even though the percentage of teachers receiving 6-12 hours has remained steady, there is only an average of 10% of teachers receiving this amount of training. The majority of teachers that completed the survey had been teaching for 1-4 years and around 45% of these had only received 3-6 hours of training.

Table 13



12. Levels of confidence in RE

Table 14 Shows that 36% of the primary teachers who responded to this survey describe themselves as very confident about how to teach RE and 36% about what to teach. Bearing in mind that around 75% of our respondents are subject leaders one might expect this figure to be higher especially as they would be the individuals in schools who would typically be responsible for training others. More than half of respondents said they felt ‘reasonably confident’ about how to teach RE and what to teach.

In contrast, the respondents report that only just under 5% of their colleagues feels very confident about how to teach RE and 8.5% about what to teach.

This means that just over three-quarters of these primary teachers feel reasonably confident or better about how to teach and what to teach in RE.

	A variety of levels amongst my colleagues	Not confident at all	Slightly less confident than I would like	Reasonably confident	Very confident
My level of confidence about how to teach RE		0.8%	7.9%	54.3%	37%
My level of confidence about what to teach in RE		1.1%	9.8%	53%	36.1%
My colleague’s level of confidence about how to teach RE	13.4%	4.1%	21.9%	55.7%	4.9%
My colleague’s level of confidence about what to teach in RE	12.3%	3.6%	21.3%	54.4%	8.5%

Here are some typical responses made by those who felt less confident:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because our curriculum is enquiry based and, as such, consists of big questions, but not the resources, lesson plans, etc. to aid teaching. It is very much up to the teacher to interpret the question and then devise the unit.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are detailed plans on the diocese scheme of work but not split into lessons and with no suggestions for delivery. I would like to move children on from a superficial understanding but it is hard to always achieve this.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't want to teach something wrong. I also find my own knowledge of religion is pretty poor so most of the time I have to research prior to the lesson.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am not always sure that I am teaching exactly what is needed and can't always easily to relate to their lives.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compared with other subject areas for which I received initial training, I am aware that this was not the case with RE. The only practical knowledge which I have gained re' delivering RE lessons has been through the RE Today training courses which have been invaluable.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't have enough specialist knowledge of other world faiths, however I am happy to conduct personal research in order to strengthen my own knowledge.

Here are some descriptions of our respondents' colleagues' confidence about teaching RE

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They worry that they don't have the subject knowledge and may say the wrong thing about people's beliefs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lot of RE is covered by HLTA's and they lack experience and confidence in their knowledge of different religions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New members of staff have had very little opportunity to teach or learn how to teach RE while training. This has been a big issue for us as they lack confidence and know very little about the subject, particularly Christianity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some teachers don't have a depth of subject knowledge particularly outside of Christianity. Some are also conscious of parents' disapproval of teaching about other religions, especially Islam.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some have a tendency to make up something which fits in with their general class topic and to use google to build their subject knowledge, thereby teaching something very superficial and sometimes even erroneous. Others follow my planning closely. None has any specific subject knowledge.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RE is mostly covered by PPA teachers who do feel mostly confident about teaching RE. When class teachers are asked to do it they seem to feel daunted by it. There are a few class teachers who do the RE for their class and they do feel mostly confident about teaching RE. I am approached when people need help with RE.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes, they lack sufficient subject knowledge to feel confident answering pupil questions and exploring in detail the way different religions impact on people's lives

13. Teacher qualifications in Religious Education

What is your highest qualification in RE?

Table 15 - More than 44% of those teaching RE in primary schools do not even have a GCSE or O level in RS and 75% of those are subject leaders. This might be surprising to many, given that a GCSE short course has been the minimum legal requirement for Agreed Syllabus followed in most schools in this country for more than a decade so, we might have expected those who have been teaching for 5 years or less (20% of our respondents) to have studied at least a short course in RE. However, even in this group, more than one in three has no qualification in RE at all.

None	44.3%
Post degree	6%
Degree	13%
A level	9.5%
AS	2.5%
GCSE/O level	24.7%

14. Are the legal requirements with regard to RE provision for all being met in your school?

Almost 90% of respondents answered 'Yes' to this question, however that means that in just over 1 in 10 schools pupils are not all receiving their proper entitlement to RE.

15. Training

(a) How many days of subject specific training did the respondent receive during 2015/16

Table 16: More than 26% no training in last year and 60% less than 1 day in last year

Answer Choices	Responses
0	26.57%
0.25	3.71%
0.5	6.00%
1	24.57%
1.5	8.00%
2	14.29%
3	8.86%
More than 3	8.00%

(b) How many days of subject specific training did others who teach RE in your school receive during 2015-16?

Table 17: 40% of them reported no training (not even staff meeting) for staff on RE. 87% one day or less

Answer Choices	Responses
0	39.71%
0.25	20.86%
0.5	14.00%
1	13.14%
1.5	2.29%
2	6.29%
3	1.43%
More than 3	2.29%