

- Reviews the subject content, balance of assessment and assessment methods of GCSE Dance so that the qualification is inclusive, representative and better suited to the discipline.

Religious Education (RE)

- RE is a basic curriculum²⁹⁹ subject from Key Stages 1 to 4 and in school sixth forms.
- Take-up of the optional GCSE in Religious Studies was 28% in 2009/10 and 31% in 2024/25.
- In 2024/25, 70% of state-funded schools entered students for GCSE Religious Studies.
- A Level Religious Studies entries made up 2% of A Level entries in 2009/10 and 2% in 2023/24.

Since 1944, RE has been a compulsory subject in schools in England in some form. Initially, this was ‘religious instruction’ and was limited only to Christianity. At the time of the 1988 Education Reform Act, the subject’s title changed to ‘Religious Education’ and encompassed the other main world religions represented in Great Britain in addition to Christianity. Local Authority Standing Advisory Councils on RE (SACREs) became mandatory, and RE became part of a school’s basic curriculum for all pupils and students between the age of 5 and 18. The legislative requirements for RE in relation to maintained schools have since been mirrored in funding agreements for academies.

The RE stakeholder context is diverse, including different faith bodies, secular groups and experts from teaching and the education sector more widely. Stakeholders’ responses to our Call for Evidence showed there was a strong consensus about the subject’s importance and its essential place in a school’s curriculum, stressing its important role in children and young people’s intellectual, personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.³⁰⁰ RE is a place where they encounter differing beliefs, sometimes for the first time, understand the tenets of major faiths, and learn how to reason and wrestle with existential questions. Understanding the tenets of Christianity also unlocks a wider understanding of British culture in terms of Christianity’s historic

²⁹⁹ A ‘basic curriculum’ subject is not on the national curriculum but must be provided by schools. Parents or carers have the right to withdraw their child from these subjects, though different conditions may apply between subjects: GOV.UK (2025) - [The national curriculum: Overview](#)

³⁰⁰ The National Archives (2025) - [Education Act 2002](#)

influence and how it has shaped modern-day Britain. We have heard that RE provides a space for pupils to learn about human mutuality and reciprocity, that it develops their capacity to understand one another, and that it supports strong, secure, and confident communities with good relationships. Given the role that religion, belief and values play in local, national, and international events, it continues to be vital for children and young people to have access to high-quality RE.

Given RE's status as a basic rather than national curriculum subject, its content is not nationally defined, and no specified national standard exists against which to benchmark the quality of compulsory RE at Key Stages 1 to 4. While there are undoubtedly pockets of excellent practice in both faith and non-faith schools, the evidence suggests that provision for RE in many schools is not good enough and does not prepare pupils adequately for life beyond school.³⁰¹

Syllabi for RE are locally determined by an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC). SACREs then advise local authorities on their delivery; they also advise local authorities on all matters relating to RE. Some SACREs support high-quality regional practice, but many no longer have the resources or reach to provide such support, resulting in increasing fragmentation.³⁰² Financial constraints have led to squeezed support in many areas, meaning that producing new agreed syllabi is often done with a 'very tight budget' and is 'increasingly reliant on voluntary support'.³⁰³ The 2018 Commission on RE concluded that the structures and systems supporting RE have not kept pace with changes in the wider education sector, including greater academisation, a move towards a school-led system, and a world in which children and young people encounter a broader range of world views, including, for example, Humanism.³⁰⁴

All this is further exacerbated by the complex legislative framework underpinning RE, which hasn't changed in substance since 1944, apart from some minor updates in 1988. Curriculum requirements depend on school type and may differ between academies and maintained schools, as well as between schools with a religious designation and those without. As Ofsted has concluded, the quality of RE is not necessarily determined by the type of school, but the differing requirements seemingly contribute to a lack of parity across the sector.³⁰⁵ Moreover, the Review has heard that, in practice, the dated legislation has invited 'workarounds', including regarding the ongoing requirement to teach RE to the age of 18 in schools. Throughout our engagement with sector experts and during the Call for Evidence, we have heard that this static statutory backdrop, with

³⁰¹ Ofsted (2024) - [Deep and meaningful? The religious education subject report](#); Religious Education Council (2018) - [Religion And Worldviews Approach to RE: Resource Page](#)

³⁰² A report from the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on RE (NASACRE) found that the majority of SACREs in England were not receiving a sufficient share of the central school services block (CSSB) which would reasonably be expected so that they could meet their statutory functions, including the provision of a clerk. NASACRE (2023) – NASACRE's Second Report.

³⁰³ Smalley, P. (2019) - [A critical policy analysis of local religious education in England](#)

³⁰⁴ Religious Education Council (2018) - [Religion And Worldviews Approach to RE: Resource Page](#)

³⁰⁵ Ofsted (2024) - [Deep and meaningful? The religious education subject report](#)

complex and fraying local support arrangements, has led to uneven provision and tokenistic practice in some areas.

Some work to improve and standardise a curriculum offer for RE has been done, most notably by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC), which published its National Content Standard for RE in England in 2023.³⁰⁶ This has received consensus from across the sector and laid strong foundations for change. We believe it has potential as a catalyst for more substantial reform.

RE can be controversial and contentious. Different sector and faith organisations have different beliefs and different interests in the present arrangements. We have therefore engaged widely on this subject during the Review, seeking as many views as possible and aiming to identify points of consensus as well as areas of debate. Having evaluated the evidence, we are of the view that RE's importance is not currently reflected in its standing in the curriculum. The Review believes that RE should be moved to the national curriculum to improve access to high-quality provision and to prevent further diminishment. However, we are conscious of the sensitivities and complexities involved, including the legislative implications and the wider considerations relating to voluntary-aided schools with a religious character. It is important that these issues are accounted for in our recommendations.

The Review ultimately wishes to see RE in the national curriculum, but it recognises that it is unrealistic for this to be achieved immediately. We therefore believe that a staged approach to reform is the most appropriate way forward. To this end, we recommend that the Government invites the sector to establish an independent task and finish group made up of representatives from faith bodies, secular groups and experts from the teaching and wider education sector, to develop a draft RE curriculum. This group should be consultative, continuing the work of the Review in liaising with relevant external parties (including faith groups and communities, secular groups and faith and non-faith schools) and should seek to build on the REC's National Content Standard. The group should also consider whether there would be benefit in changing the name of Religious Education.

The process of producing a draft RE curriculum will be important in establishing whether a core of RE content can be agreed on across the sector to facilitate any move of RE to the national curriculum. Most stakeholders agree that all pupils, regardless of the type of school they attend, should have an entitlement to high-quality RE and that the most effective way to do this is by moving it to the national curriculum. However, if this desired quality and consistency are to be achieved, there will be trade-offs, and all parties will have to make compromises to achieve consensus.

³⁰⁶ Religious Education Council (2023) - [National Content Standard for RE in England – 1st Edition – 2023](#)

We recognise that making RE a national curriculum subject is not a panacea that will automatically improve the quality and quantity of compulsory RE. Other mechanisms would also be needed, including reviewing the DfE's non-statutory guidance for RE (which has not been updated since it was published in 2010) and the wider framework (which includes SACREs, for example). Following any changes, attention may also need to be given to the subject content of the optional GCSE in Religious Studies.

Finally, the Review has carefully considered the requirement that learners study RE between the age of 16 and 18. Currently, this requirement applies only to learners attending school sixth forms and does not extend to other 16-19 providers, such as sixth form colleges and further education colleges. The Review considers that, by age 16, students should have a secure grounding in RE, and one that should be strengthened if the recommendation about the national curriculum is taken forward. We also consider the compulsory study of RE to 18 to be inconsistent with 16-19 study's aim of prioritising learners' choices and subject specialisms. As such, we recommend removing the statutory requirement that learners in school sixth forms study RE: the Government should consider this as part of its review of the wider legislation in which RE sits. We believe this will better reflect actual practice and foster parity across 16-19 settings. We recognise that some schools will want to continue providing RE up to 18, and they would be free to do so. If learners wish to continue to study RE at 16-19, level 3 qualifications are available for them to do so.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Adds RE to the national curriculum in due course. A staged approach should be taken, in line with the following steps:

Stage 1:

Representatives from faith groups, secular groups and the wider teaching and education sector that we heard from during the Review should build on the constructive and collaborative work they have been doing through the course of the Review. DfE should invite the sector to form a task and finish group, convened and led by an expert Chair who is independent of any particular secular or faith group interest or representation. The review recommends that, given her leadership of this strand of the Review's work (based on her expertise), Dr Vanessa Ogden CBE should undertake this role, ensuring momentum in the successful convening she has established. This group should liaise with relevant external parties and, building on the existing National Content Standard for RE in England, engage with faith and non-faith schools, as well as RE organisations and faith communities, to co-create a draft RE curriculum.

Whilst this work should be sector-led, the DfE should welcome efforts the sector makes to reach a consensus and support and facilitate this group where necessary.

Alongside this, the DfE should consider the legislative framework for RE, including, for example, what any changes to its status in the curriculum would mean for functions such as SACREs. A long-term plan for implementing potential changes to legislation should be drafted.

As part of this review, the DfE should consider removing the statutory requirement for learners in school sixth forms to study RE.

In parallel, the DfE should review the non-statutory guidance for RE, which has not been updated since 2010, to establish whether beneficial changes to subject content could be made in the short term that do not pre-empt the wider work the Review is recommending.

Stage 2:

If consensus on a draft RE curriculum can be reached, the DfE should conduct a formal consultation on the detailed content.

Alongside this, the DfE should consult on proposed changes to the legislative framework, including any proposal to repeal the requirement to teach RE in school sixth forms.

Science

- Science is a statutory core curriculum subject from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 4.
- GCSE Combined Science take-up was 63% in 2009/10 and 66% in 2024/25.
- GCSE Biology take-up was 18% in 2009/10 and 24% in 2024/25.
- GCSE Chemistry take-up was 18% in 2009/10 and 23% in 2024/25.
- GCSE Physics take-up was 18% in 2009/10 and 23% in 2024/25.³⁰⁷
- In 2024/25, 91% of state-funded schools entered students for Combined Science; 87% for Biology and 82% for Chemistry and Physics.
- A Level Biology entries made up 7% of A Level entries in 2009/10 and 8% in 2023/24.
- A Level Chemistry entries made up 5% of A Level entries in 2009/10 and 7% in 2023/24.

³⁰⁷ Students may decide to take a single science GCSE alongside their Combined Science GCSE. Therefore, there may be differences in the proportion of take up across the single sciences.