



A Review of Religious Education in England

The Religious Education Council of
England and Wales

October 2013



Member bodies of the RE Council October 2013

Accord Coalition	Independent Schools Religious Studies Association
Al-Khoei Foundation	Institute of Jainology
All Faiths and None	Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom
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Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants (AREIAC)	Islamic Academy
Association of University Lecturers in Religion and Education (UK)	Jewish Teachers' Association
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FOREWORD

The place of RE on the basic curriculum has always been clear and local determination of its curriculum has been part of the statutory arrangements for RE over many years. I welcome *Religious education: a national curriculum framework* as a national benchmark document for use by all those responsible for the RE curriculum locally. I also welcome the wider Review of RE in England of which it is part.

The RE Review, an initiative of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales, takes account of wider educational aims, including the aims of the new national curriculum. In particular, it embodies respect for the law and the principles of freedom, responsibility and fairness. It demonstrates a commitment to raising expectations and standards of the RE received by all children and young people.

All children need to acquire core knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and practices of the religions and worldviews which not only shape their history and culture but which guide their own development. The modern world needs young people who are sufficiently confident in their own beliefs and values that they can respect the religious and cultural differences of others, and contribute to a cohesive and compassionate society.

RE's place on the curriculum will be strong if its role and importance are communicated effectively and widely understood. RE in England compares favourably with equivalent curricula in high performing jurisdictions around the world, but this reputation can only be maintained with a rigorous model of RE.

This RE curriculum framework and the RE Review of which it is part provides for such a model. It has the endorsement of a very wide range of professional organisations and bodies representing faiths and other worldviews. I hope the document will be useful to all those seeking to provide RE of the highest quality for young people in our schools.



Michael Gove

Secretary of State for Education

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This review of RE in England was undertaken by the RE Council of England and Wales (REC) as part of its strategic plan to enable the RE community to adjust to the major changes being made to education in England by the Coalition government. The Review was funded by donations and grants from REC member bodies and other trusts. The REC was founded in 1973 and is the umbrella body for RE with over 60 member organisations, including major RE professional bodies and faith and belief communities in England and Wales.

The REC was determined to carry out the review in a collaborative and consultative manner. It began with a scoping report in early 2012, followed by a report from an expert panel, mirroring the DfE's National Curriculum Review, in December 2012. In 2013, task groups took forward the panel's recommendations, and consultations were held at some points with the whole REC membership and at others with a Steering Group which represented the diversity of the REC. The final text of the Review was agreed by the REC Board on 2 October 2013 and launched at Westminster on 23 October 2013.

The Review provides:

1. a non-statutory national curriculum framework for RE (NCFRE) to complement the new national curriculum programmes of study (2013) resulting from the DfE's review of the school curriculum, in which RE was not included
2. an analysis of the wider context in which RE finds itself, including the opportunities and challenges that face the implementation of the new curriculum framework.

There is also a major appendix containing the recommendations of the expert panel.

The NCFRE sets out:

- the purpose and aims of RE
- the contribution of RE to the school curriculum
- the breadth of study for RE
- the place of RE in the early years
- the knowledge, understanding and skills of RE for key stages 1 – 3
- a framework for RE in key stage 4 and 16-19
- a note on assessment.

The analysis of the wider context reviews current issues in RE with recommendations for future discussion and resolution.

Both 1 and 2 above are available together, and 1 is available as a stand-alone document, both in hard copy and on the REC website www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk

INTRODUCTION

Why a review of RE?

Every child and young person who goes to school is entitled to an experience of religious education (RE) that is both academically challenging and personally inspiring. To that end, the RE Council of England and Wales (REC) has undertaken a review of the subject in England (referred to in this document as ‘the Review’). It has drawn as widely as possible on the expertise of the RE community to develop a benchmark curriculum that promotes high quality learning and teaching in all schools in the coming years, and to map out issues for further development. School structures are becoming increasingly diverse in England. It is important that within this diversity, schools’ RE curricula give all young people the opportunity to gain an informed understanding of religious beliefs and worldviews.¹

The REC undertook to lead a Review of RE in England early in 2012, as part of its wider strategic plan² for developing the subject. This decision was supported by the then Minister of State for Schools, Nick Gibb MP, who described the REC as ‘well placed’ to do so in a letter to John Keast, REC Chair, on the 25th January 2012. The REC is uniquely fitted for this task, with its wide membership, the range of views from both faith-based groups and education professionals and its commitment to an inclusive approach to RE.

The main catalyst for the Review was the extensive review of the national curriculum for schools in England, undertaken by the Department for Education (DfE) from January 2011 to July 2013. RE was not part of the DfE review as it is not one of the national curriculum subjects. The REC was clear that a review of RE in England was needed for reasons of equity with other subjects. Large changes to the curriculum have implications for all subjects³, including RE. From September 2014, teachers with responsibility for RE in schools in England will be expected to plan lessons, assess pupil progress, and have their performance held to account, as other teachers do. School leaders will expect them to use the same or similar criteria to those deployed in other subjects in the curriculum. For this reason alone, a new RE curriculum document is needed to support those teachers and schools, laid out in the same style as the documents for the national curriculum.

Beyond the need for parity, a wider set of challenges for RE has arisen in the past three years, mainly as the result of large-scale changes in education made by the Coalition government. These include the introduction of the English Baccalaureate, towards whose achievement GCSE Religious Studies cannot be counted, significant reforms of GCSE and A Level qualifications, the extension of the academies programme and introduction of free schools, all of which have implications for the way in which RE and its curriculum are decided and supported. Local authority cuts have also led to the reduction of local support for RE, and the number of new trainee teachers has been slashed. The total number of GCSE Religious Studies entries has started to decline after many years of growth.

¹ The REC recognises that in schools with a religious character, there is likely to be an aspiration that RE (and other aspects of school life) will contribute to pupils’ faith development.

² <http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/about/strategic-plan>

³ The RE curriculum is set locally, not nationally. Broadly speaking, it is set for community and voluntary controlled schools by local agreed syllabus conferences, advised by local SACREs, and by governing bodies in the case of academies, free schools and voluntary aided schools.

The RE community has felt a sense of crisis despite government assurance. This assurance has been challenged by many stakeholders in RE and the threats to RE confirmed in a report of the RE All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), *RE: The Truth Unmasked* in 2013. The adverse consequences of government policy on RE's place in schools were recognised subsequently by the Secretary of State for Education on 3rd July 2013. Addressing an event at Lambeth Palace, Michael Gove conceded that RE had been an 'unintended casualty' of recent curriculum reforms, and acknowledged that in thinking that RE's 'special status' was protected 'he had not done enough'. He expressed willingness to enter conversations to rectify the situation. This Review serves to help the RE community deal with these wider challenges.

Furthermore, successive triennial Ofsted reports for RE have argued, and the APPG inquiry has confirmed, that there are significant and well-founded concerns about the uneven quality of learning and teaching in RE across the country. In this context, a review presented the RE community with an opportunity not only to reflect again on the nature and purpose of the subject and its distinctive contribution to the curriculum, and to find better ways of articulating these to a general audience, but also to seek ways of raising standards. At its best, RE is an inspirational subject for pupils, as the REC's Young Ambassadors project has revealed.⁴

No public money has been allocated to support this Review, even though RE is a subject required on the curriculum of all state funded schools in England. Instead, the Review has been made possible by generous donations from REC members, charitable trusts and other interested organisations. A full list of those donors is given at the end of this document.

⁴ <http://religioueducationcouncil.org.uk/young-ambassadors>

The Review process

An initial scoping report⁵ for the Review was approved by the REC's Board in March 2012. Four specific foci for the Review were identified, in the light of the current policy climate at that time:

- The aims of RE
- The RE curriculum
- Exemplification of good RE practice
- Assessment in RE, including qualifications.

To manage the work, and also to ensure a wide and responsive consultative approach to which the REC was committed, the Review was conducted in four phases over a period of about fifteen months. An action plan was drawn up in June 2012 and developed alongside a budget for the project. Final versions of these plans were approved by a Steering Group for the Review (the REC's Curriculum, Assessment and Qualifications Committee) and by the REC Board.

a) Phase One

An expert panel (EP) for RE was appointed, mirroring the approach taken by the National Curriculum Review. The EP analysed the current strengths and weaknesses of RE in relation to the four foci agreed by the REC Board, drawing on a variety of evidence including both published research and oral evidence from a range of witnesses with authoritative standing in the field of RE. The EP identified nine recommendations for future action, each supported by a balanced argument assessing the current state of play. Following consultation, a final report was produced. The EP's findings were widely welcomed, and in January 2013, the REC Board accepted the recommendations it made with just minor amendments.

b) Phase Two

The EP recommendations for the Review were divided up in Phase Two with two task groups, each of four people appointed following an open and competitive selection process, to take the Review forward. Task Group 1 considered recommendations concerned with the curriculum and was given the remit of developing a programme of study for RE which mirrored that of other curriculum subjects. It was particularly concerned with the aims of RE, the knowledge, understanding and skills distinctive to the subject and their assessment. The group's proposals took account of a wider review of the national curriculum and were the subject of open consultation.

Task Group 2 was given a wider brief of exploring the contextual factors that would impact on a new RE curriculum. Issues identified by the EP had included: building influential links with the DfE and lobbying government to improve RE; seeking maximum influence with examination Awarding Bodies in order to promote coherence and progression between key stages; pursuing issues around the existing 'settlement' for RE; and identifying ways of bringing about greater collaboration between individuals and groups in the RE community. The proposals from Task Group 2 also took into account the new work on assessment being undertaken by the DfE.

⁵ http://resubjectreview.recouncil.org.uk/media/file/REC_final_scoping_report.pdf

It was held back by delays to two reports highly relevant to the remit it had been given, one of which, the triennial Ofsted report for RE, was published in October 2013 as the Review report was about to go to press, and the other - an Ofqual report on Religious Studies - which has still not been published. The findings of Task Group 2's work were discussed and reviewed extensively by the Steering Group in the summer of 2013.

c) Phase Three

Two writers with specific expertise in curriculum development and policy analysis respectively were appointed through an open and competitive selection process to develop the findings of the task groups. Each writer worked with a support group of four members of the Steering Group to shape the task groups' material into a form suitable for final publication.

d) Phase Four

During this final phase of the Review, the report was compiled and presented to a joint meeting of the Steering Group and REC Board for approval and publication in September and October 2013. Plans were made to launch the Review at the Houses of Parliament in October 2013, to be followed by public dissemination events across England in Bristol, Liverpool, London, Oxford and York during November 2013.

Outcomes from the Review

The Review has produced a new, non-statutory programme of study for RE: *Religious education: a national curriculum framework* (NCFRE; see pp 10-29), written to parallel the new national curriculum. It contains a statement of the purpose of study in RE, identifies its aims and sets out a model for progression in RE, by offering examples of subject content for key stages 1-3. The NCFRE also provides a statement on RE for the Early Years and Foundation Stage (EYFS) and for pupils aged 14-19. It succeeds the *Non-statutory national framework for RE* (QCA and DCSF 2004) and supplements current government guidance for RE contained in the document *Religious education in English schools: non-statutory guidance 2010* (DfE 2010). Work on assessment has also been put in hand but is not yet complete. This is contained in Appendix 2.

As well as producing the NCFRE, the Review has examined the wider context in which RE as a subject finds itself, and has identified a series of opportunities and challenges for the subject. In each case it looks at a range of perspectives held by various stakeholders and offers some new thinking on matters where there may not yet be a consensus, as well as proposals for moving forward together (see pp 29-45). It tries to avoid providing simple solutions to what are often deeply rooted issues of disagreement at the level of principle and conscience; rather it sets out the issues in as balanced a manner as possible and poses questions for discussion and resolution.

The starting point of the Review was that the entitlement to good RE of children and young people must come first. Individuals and groups, of course, interpret 'good RE' differently. Such difference has to be accepted as healthy in a democratic society. Throughout, the Review hoped that 'every argument would be a constructive argument'. The outcomes of the Review may fall short of perfection but they constitute a significant development of RE in England, far greater than the sum of their parts.

FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW

The findings of the Review are contained in three sections:

1. Religious education: a national curriculum framework

This is a national curriculum framework for RE (NCFRE) comprising a non-statutory programme of study designed to:

- I. **Complement the government’s National Curriculum Review, the aims of which are:**
 - to ensure that the new curriculum embodies rigour and high standards and creates coherence in what is taught in schools
 - to ensure that all children are taught essential knowledge in the key subject disciplines
 - beyond that core, to allow teachers greater freedom to use their professionalism and expertise to help all children realise their potential.
- II. **Promote high-quality RE, which will inspire young people in the years ahead.**
- III. **Provide a basis for developing locally agreed syllabuses and RE syllabuses in academies and free schools.**
- IV. **Support RE provided in schools with a religious character.⁶**

The NCFRE sets out:

- the purpose and aims of RE
- the contribution of RE to the school curriculum
- the breadth of study of RE
- the place of RE in the early years
- the knowledge, understanding and skills of RE for key stages 1 – 3
- RE in key stage 4 and 16-19
- a note on assessment.

2. Religious education: the wider context

This is an analysis of current issues in RE with recommendations for future discussion and resolution (pp 29-45).

The appendices

The appendices contain more detailed material relating to the findings.

1. The ‘Recommendations of the expert panel’, drawn up in the early phases of the Review and based on research and oral evidence from experts in the field, provide an authoritative picture of RE and its strengths and weaknesses. These recommendations set the parameters for the later stages of the Review. (pp 48-63)
2. A note on assessment and progression (p 64)
3. A note on the evaluation of the Review project (p 69)

⁶ Examples would include voluntary aided schools with a religious character and academies that teach a denominational syllabus.

1. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: A NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The national curriculum states the legal requirement that:

Every state-funded school must offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based, and which:

- *promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils, and*
 - *prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life*
- and*

All state schools... must teach religious education... All schools must publish their curriculum by subject and academic year online.

(‘The national curriculum in England: Framework document’, September 2013, p.4).

This national curriculum framework for RE (NCFRE) in England has been developed by the RE Council of England and Wales, through a review of RE parallel to the Department for Education’s National Curriculum Review, published in September 2013. The key audience is the range of bodies which have responsibility for making RE syllabuses in England. This includes local authority SACREs (which have responsibility for the RE curriculum through an agreed syllabus for local authority schools), academies, free schools, faith and belief communities which run schools and governing bodies in some individual schools. The REC also commends this framework as a contribution to teachers’ thinking, and to public understanding of RE’s role and place in schools today.

The NCFRE does not claim to be an exhaustive or final description of the place, value and scope of RE in 2013, and it is not an official document. However, the breadth of the RE Council’s membership (over 60 national bodies listed inside the front cover), representing professional religious educators and national organisations of religion and belief, gives this document wide currency. The extensive consultation about draft versions of this framework means the document provides a widely supported platform for RE which can encourage a coherent range of RE syllabuses.

The NCFRE follows the structure of the DfE's National Curriculum Review, so that RE has documentation that parallels the subjects of the national curriculum. RE is described in terms of purpose, aims and programmes of study for each age group. It also gives clear guidance on RE in the early years and RE for students aged 14-19. As RE is a core subject of the curriculum the Review has largely followed the ways in which English, Mathematics and Science are described in the national curriculum, including examples and notes for key stages 1-3.

In describing progression in RE, the NCFRE illustrates how pupils will develop increasing understanding of wide areas of RE subject knowledge, and also how pupils can develop religious literacy, including the skills of:

- investigating religions and worldviews through varied experiences, approaches and disciplines;
- reflecting on and expressing their own ideas and the ideas of others with increasing creativity and clarity;
- becoming increasingly able to respond to religions and worldviews in an informed, rational and insightful way.

Religious education

Purpose of study

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. In RE they learn about and from religions and worldviews⁷ in local, national and global contexts, to discover, explore and consider different answers to these questions. **They learn to weigh up the value of wisdom from different sources, to develop and express their insights in response, and to agree or disagree respectfully.** Teaching therefore should equip pupils with systematic knowledge and understanding of a range of religions and worldviews, enabling them to develop their ideas, values and identities. It should develop in pupils an aptitude for dialogue so that they can participate positively in our society with its diverse religions and worldviews. **Pupils should gain and deploy the skills needed to understand, interpret and evaluate texts, sources of wisdom and authority and other evidence.** They learn to articulate clearly and coherently their personal beliefs, ideas, values and experiences while respecting the right of others to differ.

Aims

The curriculum for RE aims to ensure that all pupils:

A. Know about and understand a range of religions and worldviews, so that they can:

- describe, explain and analyse beliefs and practices, recognising the diversity which exists within and between communities and amongst individuals;
- identify, investigate and respond to questions posed, and responses offered by some of the sources of wisdom⁸ found in religions and worldviews;
- appreciate and appraise the nature, significance and impact of different ways of life and ways of expressing meaning.

B. Express ideas and insights about the nature, significance and impact of religions and worldviews, so that they can:

- explain reasonably their ideas about how beliefs, practices and forms of expression influence individuals and communities;
- express with increasing discernment their personal reflections and critical responses to questions and teachings about identity, diversity, meaning and value, including ethical issues;
- appreciate and appraise varied dimensions of religion or a worldview⁹.

⁷The phrase 'religions and worldviews' is used in this document to refer to Christianity, other principal religions represented in Britain, smaller religious communities and non-religious worldviews such as Humanism. The phrase is meant to be inclusive, and its precise meaning depends on the context in which it occurs, eg in terms of belief, practice or identity.

⁸The sources of wisdom found in religions and worldviews will include the key texts, the teachings of key leaders, and key thinkers from different traditions and communities. Examples include the Bible, the Torah and the Bhagavad Gita; the Buddha, Jesus Christ, the Prophet Muhammad, Guru Nanak and humanist philosophers. Other sources of wisdom might come from texts, thinkers, leaders and scientists in the contemporary world as well as from experience and informed personal reflection and conscience.

⁹The RE programme of study usually refers to 'religions and worldviews' to describe the field of enquiry. Here, however, the aim is to consider religion and belief itself as a phenomenon which has both positive and negative features, and is open to many interpretations: in this aspect of the aims, pupils are to engage with the concept of religion and non-religious belief, not merely with individual examples, and similar critiques should apply to both.

C. Gain and deploy the skills needed to engage seriously with religions and worldviews, so that they can:

- find out about and investigate key concepts and questions of belonging, meaning, purpose and truth, responding creatively;
- enquire into what enables different individuals and communities to live together respectfully for the wellbeing of all;
- articulate beliefs, values and commitments clearly in order to explain why they may be important in their own and other people's lives.

RE in the school curriculum

RE is a statutory subject of the school curriculum of maintained schools. Academies and free schools are contractually required through the terms of their funding to make provision for the teaching of RE to all pupils on the school roll. Alongside the subject's contribution to pupils' mental, cognitive and linguistic development, RE offers distinctive opportunities to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. RE lessons should offer a structured and safe space during curriculum time for reflection, discussion, dialogue and debate. Lessons should also allow for timely and sensitive responses to be made to unforeseen events of a religious, moral or philosophical nature, whether local, national or global.

The breadth of RE

The law requires that local authority RE agreed syllabuses and RE syllabuses used in academies that are not designated with a religious character 'must reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain'. This means that from the ages of 5 to 19 pupils in schools¹⁰ learn about diverse religions and worldviews including Christianity and the other principal religions. Some schools with a religious character will prioritise learning about and from one religion, but all types of school need to recognise the diversity of the UK and the importance of learning about its religions and worldviews, including those with a significant local presence.

Attainment target*

By the end of each key stage, students are expected to know, apply and understand the matters, skills and processes specified in the relevant programme of study.

** Note: the wording of the attainment target for RE follows the same form of words found in the programmes of study of the national curriculum subjects*

¹⁰Except those withdrawn by their parents (or by themselves if aged over 18).

Subject content

RE in the Early Years Foundation Stage

Pupils should encounter religions and worldviews through special people, books, times, places and objects and by visiting places of worship. They should listen to and talk about stories. Pupils can be introduced to subject specific words and use all their senses to explore beliefs, practices and forms of expression. They ask questions and reflect on their own feelings and experiences. They use their imagination and curiosity to develop their appreciation of and wonder at the world in which they live. Religious education is a legal requirement for all pupils on the school roll, including all those in the reception year.

In line with the DfE's 2013 EYFS Profile RE should, through planned, purposeful play and through a mix of adult-led and child-initiated activity, provide these opportunities for pupils.

Communication and language:

- children listen with enjoyment to stories, songs and poems from different sources and traditions and respond with relevant comments, questions or actions;
- use talk to organise, sequence and clarify thinking, ideas, feelings and events;
- answer 'who', 'how' and 'why' questions about their experiences in response to stories, experiences or events from different sources;
- talk about how they and others show feelings;
- develop their own narratives in relation to stories they hear from different traditions.

Personal, social and emotional development:

- children understand that they can expect others to treat their needs, views, cultures and beliefs with respect;
- work as part of a group, taking turns and sharing fairly, understanding that groups of people, including adults and children, need agreed values and codes of behaviour to work together harmoniously;
- talk about their own and others' behaviour and its consequences, and know that some behaviour is unacceptable;
- think and talk about issues of right and wrong and why these questions matter;
- respond to significant experiences showing a range of feelings when appropriate;
- have a developing awareness of their own needs, views and feelings and are sensitive to those of others;
- have a developing respect for their own cultures and beliefs, and those of other people;
- show sensitivity to others' needs and feelings, and form positive relationships.

Understanding the world

- children talk about similarities and differences between themselves and others, among families, communities and traditions;
- begin to know about their own cultures and beliefs and those of other people;
- explore, observe and find out about places and objects that matter in different cultures and beliefs.

Expressive arts and design

- children use their imagination in art, music, dance, imaginative play, and role-play and stories to represent their own ideas, thoughts and feelings;
- respond in a variety of ways to what they see, hear, smell, touch and taste.

Literacy

- children are given access to a wide range of books, poems and other written materials to ignite their interest.

Mathematics

- children recognise, create and describe some patterns, sorting and ordering objects simply.

These learning intentions for RE are developed from relevant areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (DfE 2013). RE syllabus makers will want to provide detailed examples.

Key stage 1

Pupils should develop their knowledge and understanding of religions and worldviews¹¹, recognising their local, national and global contexts. They should use basic subject specific vocabulary. They should raise questions and begin to express their own views in response to the material they learn about and in response to questions about their ideas.

More specifically pupils should be taught to:

Requirements	Examples and notes
<p>A1. Recall and name different beliefs and practices, including festivals, worship, rituals and ways of life, in order to find out about the meanings behind them.</p>	<p>Note: the examples from religions and worldviews given below do not constitute a syllabus but illustrate what is meant in the first column</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils enact stories and celebrations from Easter, Divali or Id ul Fitr, finding out about what the stories told at the festivals mean, e.g. through welcoming visitors to talk about their festivals • Pupils experience thanking and being thanked, praising and being praised, and notice some ways Christians or Jewish people believe they can thank and praise God • Linking to English and computing, pupils recount a visit to a local church using digital photographs and find out about the meanings of symbols for God that they saw there.
<p>A2. Retell and suggest meanings to some religious and moral stories, exploring and discussing sacred writings and sources of wisdom and recognising the traditions from which they come.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils choose their favourite 'wise sayings' from different sources or key leaders and talk about what makes these sayings wise, and what difference it would make if people followed them • Pupils retell (for example through drama) two different stories about Jesus considering what they mean. They compare the stories and think about what Christians today could learn from the stories • Linking to English, pupils respond to stories from Hindu, Muslim or Jewish sources by identifying the values which different characters in the stories showed, and recognising the religions from which the stories come • Pupils ask and answer 'who', 'where', 'how' and 'why' questions about religious stories and stories from non-religious worldviews.
<p>A3. Recognise some different symbols and actions which express a community's way of life, appreciating some similarities between communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils choose to find out about the symbols of two different religious traditions, looking for similarities between the ways they use common symbols such as light, water, trees or rock • Pupils discover how and why Muslims wash, bow and pray in a daily pattern, noticing similarities to another religion or worldview • Pupils select examples of religious artefacts from Christianity or Judaism that interest them, raising lists of questions about them and finding out what they mean and how they are used in festivals and worship • Pupils hear three moral stories, for example from Christians, Hindus and humanists, and think about whether they are saying the same things about how people should behave.

¹¹Breadth: in line with the law and the statement about breadth of learning on p15, good practice should enable pupils to study Christianity and at least one other example of a religion or worldview through key stage 1 in a coherent way.

Requirements

Note: as this is not a statutory document, these are not legal requirements as in the national curriculum.

B1. Ask and respond to questions about what individuals and communities do, and why, so that pupils can identify what difference belonging to a community might make.

B2. Observe and recount different ways of expressing identity and belonging, responding sensitively for themselves.

B3. Notice and respond sensitively to some similarities between different religions and worldviews.

Examples and notes

Note: the examples from religions and worldviews given below do not constitute a syllabus but illustrate what is meant in the first column

- Pupils find out about what people with different religions and worldviews do to celebrate the fruitfulness of the earth (e.g. in Harvest festivals, and in generosity to those in need), responding to questions about being generous
- Pupils discuss reasons why some people go to mosques, synagogues or churches often, but other people never go to holy buildings, and why some people pray every day, but others not at all
- Linking to PSHE, pupils make lists of the different groups to which they belong and consider the ways these contribute to human happiness.

- Pupils learn about the daily life of a Muslim or Jewish child (eg from a teacher's use of persona dolls), and make an illustrated list of signs of belonging including using special food, clothing, prayer, scripture, family life, worship and festivities. Pupils make a list of the ways they show how they belong as well
- Pupils express creatively (e.g. in art, poetry or drama) their own ideas about the questions: Who am I? Where do I belong?
- Pupils watch a short film about the Hindu creation story and talk about different stages of the cycle of life.

- Pupils use a set of photos or a list of religious items they have encountered in key stage 1 RE to sort and order, saying which items are connected to a particular religion and which are connected to more than one religion
- Linking to English, pupils use key words (e.g. holy, sacred, scripture, festival, symbol, humanist) to present ideas or write about two different religions or worldviews about which they have learned.

Requirements

Note: as this is not a statutory document, these are not legal requirements as in the national curriculum.

Examples and notes

Note: the examples from religions and worldviews given below do not constitute a syllabus but illustrate what is meant in the first column

<p>C1. Explore questions about belonging, meaning and truth so that they can express their own ideas and opinions in response using words, music, art or poetry.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils work in groups to use art, music and poetry to respond to ideas about God from different religions and worldviews, expressing ideas of their own and commenting on some ideas of others • Pupils ask and answer a range of 'how' and 'why' questions about how people practise their religion • Linking to 'Philosophy for Children', pupils think about and respond to 'big questions' in a classroom enquiry using a story of Adam and Eve or a video clip of children asking questions about God as a stimulus.
<p>C2. Find out about and respond with ideas to examples of co-operation between people who are different.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils discuss stories of co-operation from different traditions and sources and make a 'Recipe for living together happily' or a 'Class charter for more kindness and less fighting' • Linking to English and PSHE pupils could play some collaborative games, and talk about how the games put the teaching of the 'Golden Rule' into action • Pupils notice and talk about the fact that people come from different religions, responding to the questions- 'How can we tell? How can we live together when we are all so different?'
<p>C3. Find out about questions of right and wrong and begin to express their ideas and opinions in response.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils respond to a quiet reflection or a guided visualisation by choosing one value they think the world needs more of today from a list of values, and by illustrating their choice in different media • Linking to English, pupils could ask questions about goodness, and write sentences that say what happens when people are kind, thankful, fair or generous, and what happens when people are unkind, ungrateful, unfair or mean • Pupils look at how different people have expressed their ideas about God, and think and talk about their own ideas about God.

Key stage 2

Pupils should extend their knowledge and understanding of religions and worldviews¹², recognising their local, national and global contexts. They should be introduced to an extended range of sources and subject specific vocabulary. They should be encouraged to be curious and to ask increasingly challenging questions about religion, belief, values and human life. Pupils should learn to express their own ideas in response to the material they engage with, identifying relevant information, selecting examples and giving reasons to support their ideas and views.

More specifically pupils should be taught to:

Requirements		Examples and notes
<p>Note: as this is not a statutory document, these are not legal requirements as in the national curriculum.</p>		<p>Note: the examples from religions and worldviews given below do not constitute a syllabus but illustrate what is meant in the first column</p>
A1. Describe and make connections between different features of the religions and worldviews they study, discovering more about celebrations, worship, pilgrimages and the rituals which mark important points in life, in order to reflect on their significance.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pupils make some connections between Hajj for Muslims and pilgrimage to Lourdes, Iona or 'the Holy Land' for Christians, describing the motives people have for making spiritual journeys Pupils describe spiritual ways of celebrating different festivals, and reflect on the reasons why some people value such celebrations very highly, but others not at all Pupils compare how Christians, Muslims, Hindus or humanists celebrate a marriage and express and argue for ideas of their own about partnership, in discussions or in writing.
A2. Describe and understand links between stories and other aspects of the communities they are investigating, responding thoughtfully to a range of sources of wisdom and to beliefs and teachings that arise from them in different communities.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linking to English, pupils consider how some texts from the Torah (e.g. the Shema), the Bible (e.g. 1 Corinthians 13) and the Qur'an (e.g. The 1st Surah, the Opening) are seen as sources of wisdom in different traditions. They respond to the ideas found in the texts with ideas of their own Pupils investigate aspects of community life such as weekly worship, charitable giving or beliefs about prayer, showing their understanding and expressing ideas of their own Pupils compare the texts in the Christian gospels that tell the stories of shepherds and wise men at Jesus' birth, exploring how they are remembered and celebrated in a range of Christmas festivities.
A3. Explore and describe a range of beliefs, symbols and actions so that they can understand different ways of life and ways of expressing meaning.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pupils pursue an enquiry into beliefs about worship, relating the meanings of symbols and actions used in worship such as bowing down, making music together, sharing food or speaking to God (e.g. in prayer) to events and teachings from a religion they study Pupils consider how the meanings of a parable of Jesus are expressed in poetry, video, stained glass and drama. Pupils describe the impact of Hindu teaching about harmlessness (ahimsa) on questions about what people eat and how people treat animals. They express their own ideas.

¹²Breadth: in line with the law and the statement about breadth of learning on p15 above, good practice should enable pupils to study Christianity and at least two other examples of a religion or worldview through key stage 2 in a coherent and progressive way.

Requirements

Note: as this is not a statutory document, these are not legal requirements as in the national curriculum.

Examples and notes

Note: the examples from religions and worldviews given below do not constitute a syllabus but illustrate what is meant in the first column

<p>B1. Observe and understand varied examples of religions and worldviews so that they can explain, with reasons, their meanings and significance to individuals and communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking to History and Design Technology pupils consider how the architecture of churches, mosques, mandirs or gurdwaras expresses a community's way of life, values and beliefs • Pupils develop their understanding of beliefs about life after death in two religions and humanism through seeking answers to their own questions and articulating reasons for their own ideas and responses • Pupils use their detailed understanding of religious practice such as the Five Pillars of Islam and worship of a deity in a Hindu family and a mandir to describe the significance of being part of a religion.
<p>B2. Understand the challenges of commitment to a community of faith or belief, suggesting why belonging to a community may be valuable, both in the diverse communities being studied and in their own lives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils explore the lives of key leaders from Buddhist and Christian contemporary life, describing the challenges they have faced and the commitments by which they have lived • Pupils find out about how celebrating Diwali brings the Hindu or Sikh community together, and expresses commitment to values of interdependence and generosity • Linking to the expressive arts, pupils develop their own imaginative and creative ways of expressing some of their own commitments such as working hard at sport or music, caring for animals and the environment, loving their family or serving God.
<p>B3. Observe and consider different dimensions of religion, so that they can explore and show understanding of similarities and differences within and between different religions and worldviews.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils use their thinking about stories of Moses and Jesus to explore how Jews and Christians today celebrate key events from their history (e.g. in Passover and Lent) • Pupils list and describe similarities and differences in the ways different traditions express what 'belonging' means to them • Linking to English, pupils find out about different forms of prayer and meditation in different religions and worldviews, and write some prayers or meditations suited to particular occasions and traditions. This is one point, among many, where RE can provide key opportunities for pupils' spiritual development. <p>Note: different dimensions of religion or worldview include, for example, narratives, beliefs, ethics, and social life</p>

Requirements

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Examples and notes

Note: the examples from religions and worldviews given below do not constitute a syllabus but illustrate what is meant in the first column

<p>C1. Discuss and present thoughtfully their own and others' views on challenging questions about belonging, meaning, purpose and truth, applying ideas of their own in different forms including (e.g.) reasoning, music, art and poetry.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils discuss different perspectives on questions about the beginnings of life on Earth, so that they can describe different ways science and religions treat questions of origins • Linking with the expressive arts curriculum, pupils create works of art or music which express their understanding of what it means to belong to a religion or worldview • Pupils discuss and debate reasons why different people have different ideas about the divine e.g. whether God is real and what God is like. <p>Note: pupils are not required to express personal beliefs in any coercive way in RE; good RE encourages an open hearted and broad minded approach to different beliefs.</p>
<p>C2. Consider and apply ideas about ways in which diverse communities can live together for the well-being of all, responding thoughtfully to ideas about community, values and respect.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils discover and explore what Jewish people, humanists and Christians teach about how people can live together for the well-being of all • Pupils discuss and apply ideas from different religious codes for living (e.g. Commandments, Precepts or Rules), to compile a charter of their own moral values, applying their ideas to issues of respect for all • Linking to Mathematics and Geography, pupils use local and national census statistics to develop accurate understanding of the religious plurality of their locality and of Britain today. <p>Note: This work offers valuable opportunities for engagement with religions with a significant local presence: pupils may learn about the contributions of, for example, Jains, Zoroastrians or members of the Bahá'í faith to inter faith work. These communities can also be studied elsewhere in the RE curriculum.</p>
<p>C3. Discuss and apply their own and others' ideas about ethical questions, including ideas about what is right and wrong and what is just and fair, and express their own ideas clearly in response.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils apply their own ideas about justice and fairness to the work of three development charities such as Christian Aid, Islamic Relief and Oxfam • Pupils write persuasively about the reasons why people who have a particular religious background or non-religious worldview try to help people who are vulnerable (eg victims of natural disasters or prejudice, people who live with disabilities or people affected by war) • Linking to Citizenship Education, pupils consider the Ten Commandments (Jewish) and the Five Precepts (Buddhist), expressing their ideas about right and wrong in the light of their learning. <p>Note: this is one point, among many, where RE can provide key opportunities for pupils' moral development.</p>

Key stage 3

Students should extend and deepen their knowledge and understanding of a range of religions and worldviews¹³, recognising their local, national and global context. Building on their prior learning, they learn to appreciate religions and worldviews in systematic ways. They should draw on a wide range of subject specific language confidently and flexibly, learning to use the concepts of religious study to describe the nature of religion. They should understand how beliefs influence the values and lives of individuals and groups, and how religions and worldviews have an impact on wider current affairs. They should be able to appraise the practices and beliefs they study with increasing discernment based on analysis, interpretation and evaluation, developing their capacity to articulate well-reasoned positions.

More specifically students should be taught to:

¹³**Breadth:** in line with the law and the statement about breadth of learning on p15 above, good practice should enable pupils to study Christianity and at least two other examples of a religion or worldview through key stage 3 in a coherent and progressive way.

Requirements

Note: as this is not a statutory document, these are not legal requirements as in the national curriculum.

Examples and notes

Note: the examples from religions and worldviews given below do not constitute a syllabus but illustrate what is meant in the first column

<p>A1. Explain and interpret ways that the history and culture of religions and worldviews influence individuals and communities, including a wide range of beliefs and practices, in order to appraise reasons why some people support and others question these influences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking to History, students plan and report on an investigation into the impact of two key leaders, thinkers or founders of religions or worldviews on their communities or on individuals today • Students examine how spiritual experiences (such as sensing the presence of God, or the experience of answered prayer) have an impact on some members of different communities. They develop reasoned arguments to support their ideas about these kinds of claims or events • Linking to Geography, students investigate the demographics of Christianity, Judaism or Sikhism or 'No Religious belief' in their local area and wider region. <p>Note: this is an aspect of RE that provides many opportunities for students' social and cultural development.</p>
<p>A2. Explain and interpret a range of beliefs, teachings and sources of wisdom and authority including experience in order to understand religions and worldviews as coherent systems or ways of seeing the world.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students develop their moral reasoning skills by studying moral ideas from Humanism about good ways to live. They compare these ideas with Christian sources of authority and wisdom, responding systematically • Students select and interpret texts from the Qur'an and Hadith to explain and exemplify their understanding of Muslim beliefs and ways of seeing the world • Students consider how sacred writings such as the Torah or the Bhagavad Gita, or other sources of wisdom, provide ethical guidance and spiritual nurture to members of different communities • Students consider why so many sources of wisdom and authority in religions and worldviews are men, and so few are women. • They appraise some sources of female wisdom, from within or beyond religions and worldviews • Students consider the importance of experience as a source of wisdom and authority including religious experience and everyday human experience. <p>Note: The focus on interpretation of religions and worldviews requires learners to be active in engaging with texts and issues and responding with reasoned ideas of their own.</p>
<p>A3. Explain how and why individuals and communities express the meanings of their beliefs and values in many different forms and ways of living, enquiring into the variety, differences and relationships that exist within and between them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students investigate the life, teaching and example of Jesus, responding to Christian theology and other views of his influence with their own interpretations and insights • Students plan an investigation into examples of daily practice of Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jewish people, Muslims and / or Sikhs in Britain, examining in particular some similarities and differences in spiritual practice, ethics, beliefs and community life • Students explore different ways of expressing beliefs and values in architecture, music, media and the arts, building their understanding of diversity within the religions and worldviews they study. <p>Note: The focus in this aim on expression and communication connects the ways people from different religious or non-religious backgrounds express their ideas to the ways learners themselves express their own ideas. Both are equally important in good RE learning.</p>

Requirements

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Examples and notes

Note: the examples from religions and worldviews given below do not constitute a syllabus but illustrate what is meant in the first column

<p>B1. Explain the religions and worldviews which they encounter clearly, reasonably and coherently; evaluate them, drawing on a range of introductory level approaches recognised in the study of religion or theology.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students plan, write and deliver an illustrated talk about different views of life after death, from, for example, a humanist, a Buddhist and a Christian, using arguments from philosophy of religion and human experience to evaluate varied ideas thoughtfully • Students use ideas from the sociology of religion, the psychology of religion or the philosophy of religion to explain the appeal of a non-religious or a Buddhist, Islamic or Christian identity to millions of people in Britain and / or the wider world today • Students experience dialogue between members of different religions and those who hold a non-religious worldview. They consider theological questions about truth that arise, giving reasons for the ideas they hold. <p>Note: in working to meet this aim, students may encounter religions and worldviews with a significant local presence, even if their national numbers are small. Examples might include members of the Bahá'í faith, Jains, Zoroastrians, Latter Day Saints or Jehovah's Witnesses.</p>
<p>B2. Observe and interpret a wide range of ways in which commitment and identity are expressed. They develop insightful analysis and evaluation of controversies about commitment to religions and worldviews, accounting for the impact of diversity within and between communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students investigate and evaluate in an essay the influence of some contemporary 'great lives' on religious communities and the wider world, weighing up ways in which the commitment of key leaders can inspire whole communities. They also consider questions about possible dangers of commitment • Students use an ethnographic approach to interview believers representing diversity within a tradition about what makes religious living challenging in Britain today e.g. from Sunni and Shi'a Islam, Protestant and Catholic Christianity or Orthodox and Reform Judaism. • Students select a religious controversy in current affairs to investigate (examples: What rights can migrant religious community members expect in the UK with regard to their religious practice? Why do some people convert from one religion to another? Why might some people from different religious groups or worldviews think that protecting the environment is not a major priority?) <p>Students present arguments from both sides of the controversy to show their ability to analyse issues from different perspectives.</p> <p>Note: Engagement with controversial issues is at the heart of good RE and one aim of the subject is to enable respectful disagreement.</p>
<p>B3. Consider and evaluate the question: what is religion? Analyse the nature of religion using the main disciplines by which religion is studied.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students consider the questions: What is religion? What is a worldview? They develop skills to interpret claims made by different religions and worldviews about the nature of reality and the value of religion • Students use methods of study from history, theology and philosophy to assemble a coherent case for their answer to the question: In the twenty first century world, is religion a force for good, or not? • Students examine questions about whether religion and spirituality are similar or different, about how different religions and worldviews relate to each other and about collaboration and conflict between individuals and communities, including inter faith. • Students consider questions about whether different religions are compatible or incompatible, in for example their ideas about God or the ultimate reality or deciding how to live a good life. <p>Note: it is in meeting this aim of RE that students build an understanding of religion itself as a phenomenon, rather than merely studying religions and worldviews one by one.</p>

Requirements

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Examples and notes

Note: the examples from religions and worldviews given below do not constitute a syllabus but illustrate what is meant in the first column

<p>C1. Explore some of the ultimate questions that are raised by human life, making well-informed and reasoned personal responses and expressing insights that draw on a wide range of examples including the arts, media and philosophy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking to Science, students examine arguments about questions of origins and purpose in life (Where do we come from? Why are we here?) • Students develop insight into and understanding of why some people argue that science and religion can be compatible and others argue that they cannot • Linking to expressive arts, students investigate the ways drama, broadcast media and visual artists explore questions about the meaning of life, selecting and explaining examples that they find compelling and relating these to the teaching of different religions and worldviews • Students develop their skills in reasoning and constructing arguments by debating questions and dilemmas about the nature of human life and the moral responsibilities of being human. <p>Note: this aim in RE connects philosophical reasoning with other forms of expression, using the varied talents students bring to the subject.</p>
<p>C2. Examine and evaluate issues about community relations and respect for all in the light of different perspectives from varied religions and worldviews.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students consider what religions and worldviews say about what makes people happy. They seek and articulate explanations for links between character, well-being and happiness, especially in relation to living with difference in our communities • Linking to Citizenship Education and History, students consider responses to genocide from different religions, for example studying the thought, theology and activism of Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel and Dietrich Bonhoeffer in response to Nazism. <p>Note: this aim of RE provides significant opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.</p>
<p>C3. Explore and express insights into significant moral and ethical questions posed by being human in ways that are well-informed and which invite personal response, using reasoning which may draw on a range of examples from real life, fiction or other forms of media.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students consider the impact of ethical choices. They could create a 'multi-path narrative' about a contemporary moral issue, showing what the consequences of different choices might be and evaluating the impact of moral choices with discernment • Students make compelling and reasonable connections between what religions and worldviews teach and what they say about issues such as starvation around the world, the sanctity of life, environmental ethics, war or prejudice • Students consider philosophical, ethical and religious questions about what it means to be human, for example questions posed in relation to the development of new medical technologies. <p>Note: this aim of RE provides significant opportunities for students' moral and social development.</p>

Key stage 4 and RE 16-19

All students¹⁴ should extend and deepen their knowledge and understanding of religions and worldviews, reflecting local, national and global contexts. Building on their prior learning, they appreciate and appraise the nature of different religions and worldviews in systematic ways. They should use a wide range of concepts in the field of Religious Studies confidently and flexibly to interpret, contextualise and analyse the expressions of religions and worldviews they encounter. They should be able to research and investigate the influence and impact of religions and worldviews on the values and lives of both individuals and groups, evaluating their impact on current affairs. They should be able to appreciate and appraise the beliefs and practices of different religions and worldviews with an increasing level of discernment based on interpretation, evaluation and analysis, developing and articulating well-reasoned positions. They should be able to use some of the different disciplines of Religious Studies (eg textual study, philosophical and sociological approaches) to analyse the nature of religion.

More specifically students should be taught to:

- investigate and analyse the beliefs and practices of religions and worldviews using a range of arguments and evidence to interpret and evaluate issues and draw balanced conclusions;
- synthesise their own and others' ideas and arguments about sources of wisdom and authority using coherent reasoning, making clear and appropriate reference to their historical, cultural and social contexts;
- analyse in a coherent and well informed way the forms of expression and ways of life found in different religions and worldviews;
- use different disciplines and methods by which religions and worldviews are studied to analyse their influence on individuals and societies;
- account for varied interpretations of commitment to religions and worldviews and for responses to profound questions about the expression of identity, diversity, meaning and value;
- argue for and justify their own positions with regard to key questions about the nature of religion, providing a detailed evaluation of the perspectives of others;
- enquire into and develop insightful evaluations of ultimate questions about the purposes and commitments of human life, especially as expressed in the arts, media and philosophy;
- use a range of research methods to examine and critically evaluate varied perspectives and approaches to issues of community cohesion, respect for all and mutual understanding, locally, nationally and globally;
- use ideas from phenomenological approaches to the study of religions and beliefs to research and present skilfully a wide range of well-informed and reasonable arguments which engage profoundly with moral, religious and spiritual issues.

¹⁴All state funded schools must teach RE to all students on school rolls, including all those in 14-19 education, unless withdrawn by their parents (or by themselves if aged 18 or over). It is important that teaching enables progression from the end of key stage 3, in ways that meet the varied learning needs of all students. All students can reasonably expect their learning will be accredited. These modes of accreditation include nationally accredited courses in RE such as GCSE and A level RS. Good practice examples include many schools of different types where all students take GCSE RS or other accredited courses at 16. Requirements are different in FE and sixth form colleges (see:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/a0064886/religious-education-in-english-schools-non-statutory-guidance-2010>)

2. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: THE WIDER CONTEXT

No curriculum document can of itself improve a subject and this section examines the contextual factors that are likely to affect the successful implementation of the NCFRE. These factors have been identified by the teams of people who have undertaken the Review, supported by evidence drawn in particular from *Transforming religious education* (Ofsted 2010), *RE: the truth unmasked* (APPG report 2013) and *RE: realising the potential* (2013).

Positive opportunities for the implementation of NCFRE

A succession of rapid changes in education have created positive opportunities for RE as well as challenges. For example, the expansion of academies and free schools has provided opportunities for innovative thinking. The government's increasing commitment to encouraging schools and teachers to exercise greater freedom sends a clear message that subject associations and other groups with an interest in the curriculum are expected to act independently, taking account of the increasing variety of curriculum structures in schools. This message has been heard within the RE community and has already resulted in pioneering developments such as the RE Quality Mark and Young Ambassadors Scheme and regional projects, such as the *Teach, Learn, Lead* initiative in the south west of England.

RE has much to celebrate and the APPG report refers to the 'overall gradual improvement in the provision for and quality of RE'. Ofsted has reported that there is good and outstanding practice in both primary and secondary schools and in schools where RE is taught well pupils in general receive it with enthusiasm and respect. For the NCFRE to succeed awareness of this high quality provision needs to become more widespread, in particular among those school leaders, managers and curriculum planners whose expertise will be needed to implement NCFRE or develop an agreed syllabus based on it.

Moreover, the contribution of RE to school improvement more generally needs wider recognition at the level of whole school management. Teachers of RE have often made a strong contribution to the delivery of whole-school policies. These might include spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, community cohesion, the *Respect for All* initiative, critical thinking and citizenship. The REC and its member organisations proved their resourcefulness by organising a national campaign in protest against the omission of RE from the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). It has now been proposed that RE should be included in the list of subjects that will contribute to the 'best 8' headline accountability measure of secondary school performance.

The value of RE is recognised by the public at large. For example, research into attitudes to RE conducted by YouGov in 2012 on behalf of the REC showed that over half of all adults in England and Wales who gave an opinion either way said that RE should remain a compulsory subject. 58% agreed it was beneficial for all pupils to participate in RE lessons and this figure rose to 63% among 18-24 year olds.¹⁵

¹⁵ <http://religioueducationcouncil.org.uk/public-engagement/media-releases/>

Furthermore examination entries in Religious Studies at GCSE and GCE A level have risen each year from 1998 to 2011, although in 2012 and 2013 short course GCSE entries dipped. The following chart gives the examination entry figures in Religious Studies for 2012 and 2013 in England.

Level	Entries 2012	Entries 2013	% difference
GCSE Full Course	216373	239409	+10.6%
GCSE Short Course	211269	150621	-28.7%
GCE AS	28682	29889	+3.7%
GCE A2	18950	19173	+1%

It will not be clear until 2014 whether the declining entries in the short course mark an overall wider downward trend or whether schools have stopped offering short course in favour of the full course.

Challenges to the implementation of NCFRE

Two interrelated factors have the potential to limit the positive impact of NCFRE. These can be broadly identified as (1) the school context, and (2) key national policy issues.

(1) The school context

While RE is high quality when it is well taught, the reverse is also true. The starting point for the implementation of the NCFRE is a low base in terms of standards and quality of provision in schools, as revealed by successive Ofsted reports and the APPG report. In 2010 Ofsted reported that achievement and teaching in RE were not good enough in six in ten primary and in half the secondary schools inspected. Of particular concern are the following conclusions.

- In primary schools the selection and sequencing of RE topics were often without a clear rationale. Many RE topics lacked a clear structure and RE was sometimes confused with the school's wider contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
- In secondary schools, teachers' lack of clarity about the purpose of RE at key stage 3 impeded curriculum planning
- RE teachers have insufficient access to high-quality training. Training had a positive impact on improving provision in only a third of the schools visited; its impact was poor in a further third. Many of the schools surveyed said that support from their local authority and SACRE had diminished
- Leadership and management of RE were good or better in half the schools visited; however, weaknesses were widespread in monitoring provision for RE and in planning to tackle areas identified for improvement

- The effectiveness of the current statutory arrangements for RE varies considerably. Recent changes in education policy are having a negative impact on the provision for RE in some schools and on the capacity of local authorities and SACREs to carry out their statutory responsibilities to monitor and support it
- Most of the GCSE teaching seen failed to secure the core aim of the examination specifications, namely, to enable pupils ‘to adopt an enquiring, critical and reflective approach to the study of religion’.

(2) Challenges from key national policy issues

The impact of recent policy changes in education has placed further pressure on RE in schools and the structures which are designed to support the subject. The effect of these changes, which is set out in the APPG report, is in brief:

- the loss of status for RE in many schools and the reduction of teaching time for the subject, in part as a result of the decision to exclude RE from the EBacc and to change the rules about counting short course results in the measure of school performance;
- the reduction in the number of specialist RE teachers entering the profession, which has extended the use of non specialists in secondary schools to teach the subject.

National policy changes have had an impact beyond schools. The absence of any publicly funded national support for RE to parallel the review of the NC has had the effect of marginalising RE from wider initiatives in curriculum development. The effectiveness of many SACREs and agreed syllabus conferences has been weakened by the reduction of funding and access to subject expertise. These public bodies underpin the key statutory principle of local determination for RE. In addition the successful expansion of the academies programme means that a growing number of schools are moving outside local authority control and are therefore no longer required to follow the locally agreed syllabus. One further challenge presented by the context within which RE finds itself is the very diverse nature of thinking about the subject. A key priority of the Review has been to work with this diversity in the interests of the future of the subject: some of the characteristics of this diversity are as follows.

- Much of the diversity promotes innovation and new thinking
- Some of the diversity reflects the differences in approaches to RE between schools with or without a religious character
- Other aspects of the diversity, however, reflect confusion and a lack of coherence in RE provision
- One of the consequences of poor access to subject training is that the diversity of thinking in RE can lead to confusion in some schools about the purpose of RE
- The review identified particular tensions in the relationship between the focus of RE in locally agreed syllabuses and in many of the GCSE specifications.

This section of the Review has considered the opportunities and challenges facing the implementation of the NCFRE. The next section examines not only some possible ways of addressing these challenges but also identifies strategies for tackling some key issues that face RE at this time.

Sustaining and structuring RE in the future

This is the first full national review of religious education (RE) since 2004, when the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA, later QCDA) published the *Non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education (NSNF)*.

This Review goes beyond the publication of aims and programmes of study to an examination of core questions at the heart of the future RE provision in England. The time is right to do this because education is moving on apace and if RE is to be on an equal footing with foundation subjects, those who have responsibility for it must find ways of adjusting the subject to its new contexts.

This section makes six recommendations for structuring and sustaining RE in the 21st century, which, with their accompanying questions for discussion, suggest a way ahead. These recommendations are to:

- 1. support improvement by developing more effective and coherent mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of RE;**
- 2. pursue with policy makers the challenges around the existing ‘settlement’ for RE;**
- 3. promote coherence and progression between 4-14 programmes of study and 14-19 public examinations;**
- 4. ensure that there are more robust arrangements for training and supporting teachers of RE;**
- 5. develop new structures and networks within and across the RE community so that its expertise is co-ordinated and utilised more effectively in the interests of improving the subject;**
- 6. develop new assessment arrangements for RE.**

Recommendation 1: Support improvement by developing more effective and coherent mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of RE

Any initiative introduced to improve RE, such as the NCFRE, requires rigorous monitoring and evaluation over time to measure its actual impact on practice. Ofsted has ceased to carry out subject specific inspections in all subjects, yet the APPG evidence shows that DfE monitoring alone has not been effective in relation to teacher supply in RE. The APPG report also provides evidence that increasingly SACREs are losing their capacity to monitor and improve the subject. There is an urgent need for regular accurate evidence about the state of RE in all types of school, which will indicate improvement priorities in the subject whether for teachers, teacher trainers, consultants or policy makers and those who advise them.

One way in which monitoring and evaluation in RE can be developed systematically in the absence of regular inspections is through the development and extension of existing RE specific educational research. Studies might usefully focus on:

- I. RE provision: compliance, time for RE, the qualifications of RE teachers, examination entries and results;
- II. the positive contribution of RE to:
 - school effectiveness and improvement
 - social cohesion
 - pupils' standards and attainment
 - school ethos
 - behaviour;
- III. monitoring the impact of initiatives, such as the RE Quality Mark, on raising standards;
- IV. identifying and promoting new models of networking and professional development which are proving effective.

Research in RE is carried out at many levels. Important policy-focussed research has been undertaken during the past year, for example through the APPG report and NATRE surveys. Significant university-led research projects have been completed over the past three years, including the ESRC Religion and Society funded project, *Does RE Work?* RE has a proud tradition of small scale practitioner led action research too, including Farmington Fellowships, communities of practice including those attached to Warwick University and Kings College, London, and a wealth of MA and PhD research in Theology, Religious Studies and Religious Education at other HEIs and universities. However, much of this research and the outcomes it generates remain unknown to teachers and policy makers, even when it is focussed on matters which concern them. Furthermore, there is a widespread perception (not limited to RE) that the research concerns of too many academics are far removed from issues of national policy and the improvement of RE in schools. Whether or not this impression is justified, it is important to research, policy and practice in RE that a stronger relationship is fostered between academic work and classroom practice.

Question Set 1

1a How might closer links be fostered between research and:

- the improvement of RE in schools ?
- gathering evidence to inform national policy?

1b How might:

- innovative activities (e.g. RE Young Ambassadors and the RE Quality Mark) and good practice be monitored and the outcomes of the monitoring shared?
- the work of researchers in RE be monitored and co-ordinated in a systematic way in order to encourage research into aspects of RE where evidence is both lacking and politically significant?
- researchers be persuaded to focus on those research priorities most likely to sway the opinion of policy makers and policy influencers?

1c How might the profile of published RE research be raised among RE teachers and professionals, particularly where the evidence produced has the potential to influence national policy or to improve learning, teaching and management of RE in schools?

1d How might existing projects be used to identify and share good practice?

Recommendation 2: To pursue with policy makers the challenges around the existing settlement for RE

Many contributors to the Review suggested that a thorough appraisal of the existing settlement for RE is overdue.

There is a strongly held view that local determination is good in principle. SACREs and agreed syllabus conferences (ASCs) continue to provide unique opportunities for local stakeholders, from many walks of life, to become actively involved in RE. Should SACREs be abolished, some stakeholders might feel that they had lost their chance to contribute something of the understanding of their faith to RE. Agreed syllabuses give confidence to faith communities that the RE taught in local schools is fair and balanced. Some SACREs remain strong in the face of current challenges and are supporting RE through the provision of training programmes and resources.

But there is growing concern that with the declining role of local authorities and the reduction in public money funding them, many SACREs are no longer able to support teachers of RE adequately. Furthermore, legislation allowing academies and free schools to devise their own RE curriculum has greatly reduced the extent of SACREs' and ASCs' responsibilities. The increasing diversification of schools means that SACRE members are by no means the only 'stakeholders' in RE. On the other hand, the involvement of local teachers, faith communities and elected members in RE through a SACRE has in many areas been a source of strength and support and in some this continues to be the case.

So there is also a strongly held view that a new system is needed for organising RE nationally and locally that takes account of the needs of those teachers with responsibility for RE whose access to training and support is currently limited. Local determination excludes RE from national initiatives (such as the National Curriculum Review, which this project parallels) and changes in assessment (Ofsted 2010). If RE is a statutory subject then it needs to play a more connected role in the curriculum and it cannot do so at present because it is not included in the family of NC subjects. Many SACREs lack the capacity to implement or monitor the locally agreed syllabus. Currently, no formal arrangements exist for evaluating the quality and impact of different agreed syllabuses. In addition, there are currently no formal structures in place for monitoring whether local authorities, advisory councils and syllabus conferences are carrying out their functions effectively (Ofsted 2010).

An important part of the Education Act in 1944 was the dual system of voluntary schools (mainly Church schools) and community schools. That relatively straightforward system has evolved now into a much more complicated structure of schools - community schools, voluntary schools of different kinds, academies, free schools, many designated as religious but most not. It is likely that the new and unprecedented diversity of school types will remain for the foreseeable future.

The RE settlement in 1944 has changed relatively little in comparison with these structural changes, the most significant being in 2010 when academies with no religious designation (which are state funded and were mostly community schools before becoming academies) were able to develop their own RE syllabuses.

Within the increasingly diverse system, schools with a religious designation will continue to exist and are even likely to grow in number. These schools can often provide RE in accordance with the nature of the foundation or trust they are part of. In the short and medium term future, therefore, the RE curriculum is likely to become more diverse than ever, with local authority agreed syllabuses controlling RE in fewer and fewer schools, more academies having their own RE and some faith-based schools providing faith-based RE. The fact is that there is now a new kind of localism, and RE must learn to flourish within it.

What is important is that the RE curriculum used in all schools enables young people to develop an informed understanding of religions and worldviews. Schools with a religious designation have an important role to play alongside schools without such a designation in this common goal.

Further work is needed to consider these issues on the basis of the questions below.

Question Set 2

- 2a To what extent is it possible to reach agreement among those concerned with the promotion of effective RE as to whether the 1944 settlement for RE needs to be reviewed?
- 2b What are the major obstacles in the way of such an agreement?
- 2c What would be the irreducible minimum level of agreement necessary for the REC formally to request the government to review the RE settlement?
- 2d How might the REC encourage a debate about the theological, educational, political and social questions raised by RE in the curriculum?

Recommendation 3: Promote coherence and progression between 4-14 programmes of study and 14-19 public examinations.

The last twenty years have seen a growing divide between the 4-14 RE curriculum and the 14-19 curriculum that leads to formal accreditation. In particular there is often a lack of continuity and progression between the RE curriculum in key stage 3 and programmes of study based on GCSE specifications.

The short course GCSE in Religious Studies has been a success story in providing motivation for students taking statutory RS courses and the number of students leaving school with a qualification in RE has risen as a result. The short course has also contributed to the increasing number of students taking AS and A2 exams in RS. However, many of the GCSE specifications in Religious Studies focus heavily on the study of philosophical, moral and social issues, with pupils being expected to apply religious perspectives to them. Ofsted has found that this approach frequently leads pupils to a superficial and distorted understanding of religion. The Review team noted that this approach created an artificial separation between such perspectives and the religions from which they arose. The focus on 'philosophy and ethics' at GCSE presupposes, often mistakenly, a depth of prior knowledge about religions. As a result, students have to learn by rote ways of explaining and evaluating those perspectives in order to meet examination requirements, and this tends to undermine the quality of their learning and distort their understanding of the meaning and significance of religions and beliefs. The reviewers recommended that the REC should find ways of working with Awarding Bodies in order to address these concerns.

The Review team also suggested, in the interests of securing coherence and progression, that new approaches to the RE curriculum were needed for key stage 4 and 6th form pupils (including those in FE) 'rather than leaving it as a vacuum simply to be filled by examinations'. Review team members suggested that the NCFRE should be extended to provide programmes of study for students who are not pursuing RE as an examination option, but for whom it is nevertheless a compulsory part of the curriculum. Similarly Ofsted praised schools that were developing a range of RE pathways, including full and short course GCSE and entry level qualifications, to ensure that the needs of different students were better met.

Question Set 3

- 3a In what ways might it be possible to ensure that 'the study of religions remains at the heart of RE', in order to secure continuity and progression in pupils' learning? What are the 'breadth and depth' issues involved?
- 3b Examination boards are independent companies with their own advisers. How might they be persuaded to work collaboratively with the REC?
- 3c How might a GCSE focused more strongly on the study of religions and beliefs retain its broad appeal?
- 3d How might the NCFRE be extended to include programmes of study for key stage 4 and the 6th form?

Recommendation 4: Ensure that there are more robust arrangements for training and supporting teachers of RE.

The report of the RE APPG identified, as a cause for concern, the availability of and access to high quality continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers of RE at all key stages. The reviewers identified two training needs in particular:

- that new instruments for describing achievement in RE are created which teachers can use working alongside the DfE's new descriptions of achievement in subjects like English, Mathematics and Science;
- that guidance materials on pedagogy and learning methods in RE are developed for teachers and curriculum-shapers, in order to promote high quality teaching and learning in RE while allowing for diversity.

Currently the availability of CPD for RE teachers across England is uneven. Some SACREs still have sufficient resources to provide a local training programme and increasingly diocesan RE staff are making their courses available to teachers from local authority schools and academies. Overall the APPG report (3a-c) found that 'in nearly 40% of schools RE teachers have inadequate access to continuing professional development' and that 'teachers' access to CPD is a postcode lottery'. One possible response to this situation which has attracted support during the RE Review is that of establishing eight regional centres or 'hubs' for religious education, which would be centres of teacher training, CPD, curriculum design, piloting initiatives, research, dissemination and policy. Affiliated to the hubs and working collaboratively with them would be local universities, schools, SACREs, Diocesan Boards of Education (DBEs) and faith communities. Each hub would work as a beacon of excellence and as a focal point for engagement.

These hubs would offer partial solutions to the other issues addressed in this Review by:

- facilitating the exchange of information between teachers, policy makers and researchers;
- providing an alternative source of support for RE teachers who no longer have the support of SACREs;
- becoming regional centres for CPD in RE.

Hubs would challenge RE organisations as never before to collaborate in the greater interests of RE, those who teach and those who learn. Some organisations such as the Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants (AREIAC) already have regional groups and these, while not losing their identity, might work with other groups to make available the very best local RE expertise.

The advantages of hubs would be:

- I. the opportunity to bring together the necessary local expertise in specific local projects;
- II. a regional 'centre' (real or virtual) for RE teachers in all schools (including academies and free schools) and in LAs where the SACRE no longer has the resources to provide support;
- III. close links through IT with local RE teachers, keeping them informed of regional and national developments and training opportunities;
- IV. enormous benefits to training schools and their trainees, particularly where no specialist RE staff are present;
- V. a regional resource bank, potentially reviving the regional RE centres, and
- VI. opportunities for teachers to maintain close links with university Theology, RS and RE departments, opening up opportunities for higher degrees and research partnerships.

The 'hubs' proposal is a positive initiative for restructuring RE at national level independently of government, and it is capable of existing alongside or instead of the current settlement. The fact of legislation does not preclude innovation; nor should it. RE is faced with a national infrastructure that has collapsed in some areas while remaining strong in others. The 'hubs' recommendation retains what is strong while introducing a new parallel national structure for RE that would provide support in schools where it is currently lacking.

Question Set 4

- 4a Are regional hubs desirable and/or viable? If not, what would the alternatives be?
- 4b Would regional hubs strengthen or weaken those SACREs that are continuing to meet teachers' needs?
- 4c Should hubs just be for RE professional organisations/individuals or should they enable wider participation including, for example, members of local faith communities who have an interest in RE but are not professionally involved in it?
- 4d How might hubs affect the implementation of the NCFRE?
- 4e Would regional hubs be effective in disseminating local research in RE? (see Rec 1).

Recommendation 5: Develop new structures and networks within and across the RE community so that its expertise is co-ordinated and utilised more effectively in the interests of improving the subject.

The reviewers identified as a priority the need for the main RE associations to speak on national issues with a clear and strong voice. There are probably more national organisations for RE than any other subject, most supporting the work of groups such as teachers, inspectors/advisers, university lecturers or interests such as those of SACREs or religious groups. At the time of publication, more than 60 organisations active in the field of RE are members of the REC.

For the last 20 years QCDA and its predecessors have led on curriculum development and have in many instances eased the way for members of the RE community to access government. Now that the education quangos have gone, for the foreseeable future at least, the RE community must bear that responsibility for itself.

The question has been mooted in the past whether the current system of several organisations, all with their own identities and strengths, is the most effective way of organising RE in the future. The present system has its advantages:

- People with an interest in RE can focus on the activities of the organisation that best suits their needs (NATRE for teachers; AREIAC for consultants etc)
- Organisations can hold conferences dedicated to their members' needs
- Some organisations have developed particular expertise in e.g. negotiating with government, that should not be lost;
- Several RE organisations have a long history, a strong identity and have considerable loyalty among their membership.

Likewise there might be advantages in creating a single national RE Association (REA) to match the Historical Association (HA) and Geographical Association (GA):

- A single national organisation may speak more powerfully for RE than several smaller ones
- Separation of interests is not always beneficial. Increasingly RE professionals require the support of more than one association; for example, some teachers are inspectors, consultants or academics. The separation of research from other aspects of RE (see Rec 1) is unhelpful
- It would be helpful to all members of the RE community to be able to access a single website for resources, news, research, journals etc.

The HA and GA websites offer insights into what an 'REA' could be and could achieve.

The **Historical Association** is the single national organisation representing the case for an historical education to policy makers and ministers. It advises on curriculum issues at all levels, furthers the study and the investigation of history and campaigns for access to specialist historical knowledge and collections. It complements the Royal Historical Society, which is the foremost body for those engaged professionally in the study of the past (mainly in HE). The HA also welcomes to its membership other people who are interested in the study and teaching of history.

Amongst its activities the HA:

- has a high quality website with separate pages for primary, secondary, students and the public;
- includes a resources section on the website providing podcasts and other articles;
- provides free access to key journals for members;
- offers fellowships, prizes and bursaries;
- has over 50 branches nationwide which run over 300 walks, lectures and visits annually;
- offers advice to students on examinations, transition to university and careers in history;
- publicises local events around the country.

The **Geographical Association** is the national organisation for furthering geographical knowledge and understanding through education. It supports teachers, students, tutors and academics at all levels of education through journals, publications, training events, projects, websites and by lobbying government about the importance of geography. Among its activities the GA:

- has over 40 branches throughout the country offering lectures and presentations of general and local interest, teachers' conferences, teacher training workshops and social events;
- holds a register of regional speakers;
- includes on its website a news page, which keeps teachers up to date with all matters related to geography, offers advice on funding opportunities and lobbying MPs;
- runs a wide variety of projects for schools;
- includes a wide range of contemporary resources on its website;
- offers opportunities for volunteering, work experience and careers;
- has website pages for primary, secondary and teacher education;
- provides free access to key journals for members.

It is likely that many of these benefits could be found by membership of several RE organisations; but not of any one of them. Nevertheless, this debate will not be an easy one and will have to take account of existing loyalties.

Question Set 5

5a What would the members of existing RE organisations stand to lose and gain if their organisation were incorporated into an REA?

5b What would the existing RE organisations stand to lose and gain by incorporation into an REA?

5c What are the tangible obstacles to closer collaboration between RE organisations, and how could they be overcome?

5d How might regional hubs (rec 4) co-exist with an REA?

5e What other options could offer alternative solutions to the issues outlined?

Recommendation 6: Develop new assessment arrangements for religious education

The NCFRE has not included instruments for describing achievement in RE. The decision has been taken to wait for further information about how pupils' work will be assessed in national curriculum subjects before issuing guidance on assessing RE¹⁶. Nevertheless, teachers will need criteria for assessing pupils' progress and in the intervening period, it is important that teachers and policy makers consider the matters to be addressed.

The DfE expects schools to have a curriculum and assessment framework that meets a set of core principles and commends this advice to syllabus makers and teachers in RE as they plan particular ways of describing achievement in RE in those schools for which they have responsibility.

The core principles are that assessment should:

- set out steps so that pupils reach or exceed the end of key stage expectations in the new national curriculum;
- enable teachers to measure whether pupils are on track to meet end of key stage expectations;
- enable teachers to pinpoint the aspects of the curriculum in which pupils are falling behind, and recognise exceptional performance;
- support teachers' planning for all pupils;
- enable the teacher to report regularly to parents and, where pupils move, to other schools, providing clear information about each pupil's strengths, weaknesses and progress towards the end of key stage expectations.¹⁷

¹⁶However see Appendix 2 for some interim work in this area

¹⁷These 5 expectations upon schools come from *Primary assessment and accountability under the new national curriculum* a DfE consultation document published July 2013.

In the light of these DfE principles and in relation to RE, syllabus makers and teachers will need to consider these 5 questions, with reference to NCFRE:

Question Set 6

- 6a What steps within an assessment framework enable pupils to reach or exceed the end of key stage expectations in the RE curriculum?
- 6b How can teachers and schools measure whether pupils are on track to meet end of key stage expectations?
- 6c How can teachers of RE pinpoint aspects of the curriculum where pupils may be falling behind, and also recognise exceptional performance?
- 6d How can the descriptions of expectations for the end of each key stage in RE support teachers' planning for all pupils?
- 6e How can expectations for RE be used to report strengths and weaknesses of pupils' progress to parents, and to other schools and teachers upon transfer?

Conclusion

This part of the Review has examined the factors that are most likely to help or hinder the successful implementation of NCFRE. It has also taken stock of where RE currently lies in school and national contexts and asked how those organisations and individuals with management responsibilities for RE might structure and sustain the subject to meet the challenges of these changing times.

Change underpins that context; the overarching conclusion is that there can be no going back. Academies and free schools are here to stay; the examination system is changing; the eight level assessment scales are unlikely to return; the QCDA is unlikely to be reconstituted in the near future. What is often known as the 'RE community' or 'RE world' is also changing. New contributors include academy trusts and private companies who provide training for teachers and run examination boards. The 'RE world' needs to involve them as well as the established networks in their deliberations.

The NCFRE has the capacity to inspire and to provide a clear basis for agreed syllabuses and RE schemes of work. But in order to succeed it needs a supportive infrastructure and, in particular, sufficient curriculum time for it to impact positively on pupils' learning. RE has much strength and over the last twenty years it has become more established than ever before as a serious curriculum subject. It is respected and valued by many school leaders, teachers, pupils and parents, and over half of all pupils leave school with a GCSE in RS. These improvements have had a positive impact on public opinion and whilst a clear majority of all adults see the value of the subject, the proportion is still higher amongst 18 to 24 year olds who have experienced 'modern' RE themselves.

But there is more to be done and improving the overall quality of RE teaching is a critical factor for the successful implementation of NCFRE. Two of the six key recommendations this Review makes concern teachers. While some schools in England can boast good and outstanding teachers of RE, there are too many which cannot do so. Three factors contributing to this situation are the shortage of qualified subject specialists in secondary schools, the lack of time given to RE in primary teacher training courses and the limited access to continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers of RE. CPD must be made more accessible.

Another critical factor concerns assessment. Two further key recommendations focus on this theme. Coherence and progression in RE between key stage 3, key stage 4 and the 6th form must be addressed as a matter of urgency through closer working links between the REC and examination boards. In addition, new monitoring systems need to be developed and closer links forged between research, policymaking and practice in RE.

The last and possibly most controversial pair of recommendations addresses the ways in which RE is structured and organised. The first revisits the very foundations of RE in England, the 1944 settlement that enshrined local determination for the subject in law. The second looks to the national structures that support RE from within the profession and asks whether this support can be provided more efficiently and what might be the possibilities for closer collaborative working.

The questions accompanying these six recommendations will not be answered immediately or easily. However they deserve serious consideration among all who care for the future of religious education.

RE REVIEW: AN AFTERWORD

John Keast, Chair of the REC

This Review, the first of its kind by the RE Council, forms part of the Strategic Plan of the REC adopted in 2011. It has taken a great deal of preparation and much hard work, particularly because it has been conducted in a deliberately consultative and collaborative manner – always harder than just getting a small group together! The REC is grateful not only to those individuals who have contributed in varying ways to this document, but also to the funders who made the Review possible.

The Review focuses, as intended, on a new curriculum framework for RE, parallel to the national curriculum, and the opportunities and challenges facing RE at the present time. The REC commends the new RE curriculum framework in this time of curriculum change to all local authorities and to schools of all kinds in England, as a benchmark for developing their own RE curriculum.

The Review also sets out the context of opportunities and challenges that this new curriculum faces. They follow a gradual improvement in the provision and quality of RE from 1994 until 2012, improvement that did not come about by accident. Rather, it is the result of constructive partnership work in RE between those responsible for the subject locally and national stakeholders in RE. Major educational reforms were introduced in 1988 and again in 1997. Each time the government had to be persuaded that RE also needed attention, despite its locally provided character. John Patten, a Conservative Secretary of State, authorised the national Model Syllabuses of 1994 and the GCSE Short Course in 1995; Charles Clarke, a Labour Secretary of State, authorised the publication of the non-statutory *National Framework for RE* in 2004.

The issues that RE faces today are identified clearly in this Review, the chief one being the inconsistent provision of good-quality RE and excessive variation of standards across schools. We know RE can be excellent and enjoyable; but we also know that this is an experience limited to far too small a proportion of pupils. The government and the RE community itself have a duty as well as an opportunity, in this period of wider educational change, to continue to work together and act on the recommendations of this Review. The RE Council hopes therefore that the current and future Secretaries of State act positively to support RE in 2014, the seventieth anniversary of the 1944 Education Act which still provides the legal and educational framework for RE, and beyond. If poor quality and inconsistent standards are the problem, teacher training, development and support are key to the solution. Both initial training and continuing development are sorely in need of improvement. This cannot happen in a vacuum. The structures currently governing RE, the priority given to it at a time when religion and belief is of such high profile and significance in the world, the public understanding and purpose of RE; these all need attention. They determine the policies that shape the recruitment of RE teachers, their role in the classroom and the resources they have to perform it.

Why is all this important? Religion and belief are an intrinsic part of human life, society and the modern world. Because children only get one chance to go to school, they should have the best RE they can get.

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Appendix One: Recommendations of the expert panel report

Context

In Phase One of the RE Review, an expert panel (EP) for RE was appointed, mirroring the approach taken by the national curriculum as a whole. Dr Bill Gent was appointed to chair this group. The other panel members were: Lat Blaylock, Professor Julian Stern and Dr Karen Walshe.

The EP analysed the current strengths and weaknesses of RE in relation to the four foci agreed by the REC Board at the time of the Scoping Report (March 2012), drawing on a variety of evidence supplied by a range of authoritative sources. On this basis, they identified nine recommendations for future action, each supported by a balanced argument assessing the current state of play.

The report was made available in draft form via the REC website for three weeks during November 2012 to allow for wider public consultation which was taken into account in the final EP report. The EP's findings were broadly welcomed; it was judged to have offered an accurate and comprehensive summary and the recommendations it made were accepted and ratified by the REC Board, with minor amendments, in January 2013.

The full text of the Phase One EP Report is available on the REC website:
<http://resubjectreview.recouncil.org.uk/phase-one/re-subject-review-phase-one-report>.

This appendix provides the final recommendations and the analysis which supports them.

Focus 1: the aims of RE

Recommendation 1

- That clear and cogent aims for RE, applicable across the range of school settings, are proposed, as well as ways of communicating them to different stakeholders.

Aims: background

1.1 The nature and purpose of RE are not easy to define in straightforward, unequivocal ways. The reasons for this are many. People's ideas about the role of both 'religion' and 'education' in society have changed over time. Moreover, religion itself is a complex concept, fundamental to the lives of some citizens whilst highly problematic for others, so that the issue of whether religion has a part to play in a nation's public education system at all is contested.

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- 1.2 A consistent feature in many of the submissions that the expert panel received was a strong perception that, despite the considerable amount written on the nature, purpose and aims of RE in all kinds of documentation, many people still don't 'get it'.¹⁸ That this was often linked to a sense of persistent frustration on the part of members of the RE community was demonstrated well in the document reporting a meeting of key members of the RE community that took place in late 2011: 'A lack of consensus on the rationale and purpose of RE, and a failure to find a simple accessible way of explaining RE to the public, media and government, struck many present as the most serious weakness'.¹⁹
 - 1.3 A strong feeling persists, therefore, that both the purpose of RE as well as its aims need further articulation in ways and forms that people of all backgrounds can better understand and relate to. ('The issues are not in the aims themselves', said one expert witness, 'but in the communication of them'.) Is the RE community itself partly to blame for the confusion that exists? A recent major research project, *Does RE Work?* concluded bluntly that RE has tried to do too much²⁰, re-inventing itself to include within its brief additional whole-school priorities – 'community cohesion', for example – and seeking to provide social, moral and values education so that the sense of a substantive core or essence of the subject has been eroded.
 - 1.4 There is some concern about the title of the subject itself. At a national level, the term 'religious education' has been enshrined in legislation since 1988 (superseding the term 'religious instruction' used in the 1944 Education Act). Some secondary school departments in particular have been experimenting with alternative titles which they judge to be more appealing to the pupils they teach. These new titles (such as 'Beliefs and Values', 'Philosophy and Ethics' and 'Religion and Belief') reflect the increasing emphasis on the study of philosophy and ethics in secondary school RE in recent times.
 - 1.5 The publication of the NSNF for RE in 2004 was a milestone in the history of English RE. In particular, its statement on 'the importance of RE'²¹ was an attempt to provide coherence for the subject at a national level while respecting the value of the subject's adaptability to local needs and requirements without inappropriate and unhelpful levels of prescription. There have been criticisms of the NSNF; some, for example, have suggested that, no matter how 'educational' such guidelines are, there is still the assumption that it is better to be religious than not. Others criticise the NSNF for encouraging a single view of RE and undermining the independence of local determination. Nonetheless, the NSNF was groundbreaking because it gained the broad agreement across the full range of professional RE associations and faith communities. About 150 local agreed syllabuses have followed the NSNF or the adapted versions of the framework – for secondary (2008) and primary (2010) – in varying ways.²²

¹⁸ See, for example: IPPR (2004) *What is Religious Education for? Getting the National Framework Right*.

¹⁹ St Gabriel's (2011) RE Community Conference 2011, 16.

²⁰ See: www.gla.ac.uk/schools/education/research/currentresearchprojects/doesreligiouseducationwork/

²¹ NSNF, 7.

²² The expert panel is aware of fewer than 10 local authorities and SACREs that have chosen not to use the NSNF to support the development of their locally agreed syllabus.

- 1.6 Although RE is a statutory requirement for all state schools, in schools with a religious character the understanding of the nature and purpose of RE might be promoted in slightly different ways from those in a community school. At worst – as one expert witness pointed out – this can lead to a kind of ‘us and them’ mentality with the underlying assumption that the only ‘proper’ RE is that which takes place in schools without a religious character. However, members of the expert panel agree that diversity of provision has considerable advantages; the purpose and aims of RE can be expressed in ways that respect the varied integrities of RE practice in different schools and different contexts.

Aims: main strengths

- 1.7 A tradition of inclusive and multi-faith RE has developed over time in England so that it is held in high esteem internationally. An expert witness with strong international links pointed out that, ‘Specialists in religion and education from many countries appreciate the attempts in England, Wales and Scotland to have an inclusive form of religious education, which is ‘open’. They also appreciate the fact that Britain ... has regarded religion as a legitimate subject for public discussion, including within education’.
- 1.8 The wide acceptance of the 2004 NSNF indicates some broad agreement about the nature of RE in schools. As one expert witness commented: ‘Remarkably, it did provide an agreed reference point intended to be relevant not only for LA ASCs (Local Authority Agreed Syllabus Conferences) and SACREs (Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education) but also for those responsible for shaping RE in schools of a religious character’.
- 1.9 Teachers of RE have often made a strong contribution to the delivery of whole-school policies, including community cohesion and respect for all, critical thinking and citizenship. In its long subject report of 2010, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate (HMI) identified the contribution of RE to the promotion of community cohesion as a strength of the subject in most of the schools that had been visited.²³
- 1.10 The existence of a widely based professional ‘RE community’ consisting of RE practitioners including teachers, advisers and consultants, professional bodies and interested faith community groups. Such groups and individuals represent a diverse group of people and organisations whose common bond is a commitment to supporting and promoting the educational aims of RE.
- 1.11 The legislative requirement that each local authority determines its own agreed syllabus for RE is considered a strength by some expert witnesses. At its best, this has meant that local groups of educational professionals, faith, and community representatives have thought through the purpose and aims of RE together and reached agreements about the best possible curriculum for children and young people in their particular areas. However, there is a need to take stock of localism and the increasing autonomy available to schools, and the impact of these policies on the local determination of RE.

²³ Ofsted (2010) *Transforming religious education*, 47-49.

Aims: main weaknesses

- 1.12 There is still widespread public uncertainty about the nature and purpose of RE. This is evident among a significant number of teachers²⁴ as well as the wider public. Some expert witnesses judged there to be too much diversity, complexity and variation in articulating the aims of RE. They went on to argue that this became more confusing still in aims statements that failed to distinguish between general aims of schooling, to which RE made a contribution, and particular aims specific to RE.
- 1.13 There is a lack of confidence and subject knowledge²⁵ among a significant number of teachers and practitioners. In increasing numbers of primary schools Higher Level Teaching Assistants are teaching and leading RE rather than teachers: their capacity to operate as fully functioning teaching professionals in the subject is severely limited. Furthermore, a lack of continuing professional opportunities in RE for all teachers and practitioners limits the scope for them to further develop their practice.
- 1.14 There is evidence of agreement that the development of knowledge and understanding of religion and belief is a core element of RE, and a widespread concern that pupils' knowledge and understanding is increasingly insecure. This point was made very strongly in the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) / Warwick University report, *Materials used to teach about world religions in schools in England (2010)* and commented on frequently by expert witnesses.
- 1.15 Though the NSNF was a milestone in the development of RE in England and Wales, it now needs to be updated and its usefulness extended in order to take account of the many changes that have taken place since 2004²⁶, both within RE and the wider educational scene. Furthermore, its statement about the 'importance of RE' in particular is not yet sufficiently clear or direct to be fully fit for purpose.
- 1.16 The locally determined nature of the RE curriculum is regarded as a weakness by some commentators. For them, this is a matter of urgency; they believe that the future well-being of RE is dependent upon radical reform of the legislation governing RE. The need to review this issue is heightened by recent radical revisions of local authority control over education. With increasing numbers of schools moving to academy status, thus outside local authority control and the requirement to follow the local agreed syllabus for RE, the future viability of SACREs is under threat, particularly in smaller districts and areas.

²⁴ See, for instance: Ofsted (2010) *Transforming religious education*, 51, n147.

²⁵ As one of the expert witnesses pointed out, this would include 'pedagogical knowledge' – that is, an understanding of why and how I am teaching RE so that pupils make progress.

²⁶ Including subsequent key projects and documents from Government and its agencies which largely follow the settlement that the framework achieved.

Focus 2: the RE curriculum

Recommendation 2

- That clear accounts that re-evaluate the core knowledge and understanding in RE, appropriate to pupils in particular age groups and stages, are produced.

Recommendation 3

- That guidance on pedagogy and learning methods in RE are developed for teachers and curriculum-shapers that promote high quality teaching and learning in RE while allowing for diversity.

Curriculum: Background

- 2.1 As a result of progress made in recent decades, many parents and teachers now think of RE as a 'subject', alongside other subjects of the curriculum. However, questions remain about what is and what ought to be taught in the RE curriculum. On the one hand, there appears to be a relatively widespread expectation that the key focus of a subject called 'RE' will be on studying 'religion/s', particularly Christianity and the other principal religions represented in Great Britain (usually named as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism). On the other, a further relatively well-established expectation is that the RE children receive in school will equip them for living in a plural society made up of people who, to a lesser or greater extent, follow one or other of the many patterns of religion and belief. Beyond this, agreement is less certain. Hence the various meanings of 'religious education' and its associated concepts have been the legitimate subject of often intense debate within the RE community and beyond. This was apparent in many of the key documents and submissions received from expert witnesses.
- 2.2 Sometimes, these debates reflect wider concerns about how to structure learning and teaching which affect the curriculum as a whole. For instance, the need for a school curriculum to be organised around traditional 'subjects' has been challenged at the level of principle²⁷ as anachronistic, and in practice because it leads to needless repetition of certain topics which do not fit neatly into any one subject's schemes of work. Experienced primary school teachers who began their careers using a 'theme'- or 'topic'-based model to plan the curriculum, were then later encouraged to focus on 'subjects'. Later still, they were encouraged to use more 'creative' styles of planning which, in spite of official rhetoric to the contrary, seemed to some to be a reintroduction of topics and themes, albeit under another name and to be 'delivered' with more 'rigour'.

²⁷See: White, J (2004), Wright, A (2004), and material related to the 2008 New Secondary Curriculum.

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- 2.3 Within RE, the idea that the principal focus of teachers should be on the RE 'curriculum' has been challenged on a number of levels. Some have pointed to an undue emphasis on subject content resulting in 'curriculum overload'. A number of expert witnesses were of the view that there has been too much emphasis on 'curriculum' at the expense of 'pedagogy'. This begs the questions, of course, as to what both the words 'curriculum' and 'pedagogy' mean and their relationship, there being evidence that there is often a lack of clarity in the use of both of these terms.²⁸
- 2.4 There is strong evidence that, particularly since the publication of the NSNF in 2004, there has been a greater uniformity across local agreed syllabuses for RE – in their adoption, for instance, of the notion that the dynamic of RE is bound up with the twin processes of 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion which provides a basis for describing pupils' 'levels of attainment' across their school careers. However, there is still substantial variation across local agreed syllabuses with a small number of notable examples which enshrine a very particular or original approach to RE: that, in essence, for example, RE aims at the development of individuals and of society across a range of 'dispositions'.²⁹ In another example, RE is framed as an exploration of the question, 'what does it mean to be human?'³⁰
- 2.5 Even when the assumption that RE is primarily concerned with the study of 'religion and belief' is broadly agreed, both the meaning of the concept of 'religion' and the most fruitful way of studying it are hotly contested. Within the English RE community, there has been an on-going debate between those academics who regard 'religions' as 'substantial social facts' and those who regard 'religion' as a flawed, outmoded concept. Those of the former view regard the concept of 'religion' as helpful in discussing such things as religious truth claims. Those of the latter view are wary of the term in that they think that it encourages people to think of 'religions' as fixed entities disregarding real life evidence that 'religions' are changing, internally diverse and have blurred boundaries.³¹
- 2.6 It follows from the identification of the principal religions to be included in RE (see 2.1 above), that there will be some dissatisfied by apparent exclusion. Members of religious communities that are globally significant, but have small numbers of members in the UK would like to see study of their faith traditions included in the curriculum. Atheists and agnostics – of whom those in the British Humanist Association (BHA) are the most visibly well-organised – draw attention to the fact that religious practice in the UK is a minority occupation, with many or most living as practically non-religious, and urge the more focused study of, for example, non-religious ways of living and arguments for atheism in the classroom.

²⁸ One expert witness suggested that the title of Michael Grimmitt's well-known book, *Pedagogies of Religious Education* (Great Wakering: McCrimmons, 2000), was really about 'methods' rather than 'pedagogies'.

²⁹ See the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus: www.faithmakesadifference.co.uk

³⁰ See the 2011 Lancashire Agreed Syllabus: www.lancsngfl.ac.uk/curriculum/re/index.php?category_id=136

³¹ See: Wright (2008) & Jackson, R (2008).

- 2.7 In terms of the historical and social phenomenon of 'religion', the once common Western idea that religion will gradually 'die out' has been increasingly challenged by research into what has been called 'the persistence of faith'.³² In its place, religion is increasingly seen as a key global phenomenon which is expressed in many and varied ways. A number of key documents³³ and expert witnesses expressed concern that the concept of religion as used in RE has not kept pace with such developments.
- 2.8 In addition to the challenges to any simple notion of a straightforward RE 'curriculum' already highlighted, contemporary changes (or emerging changes) in the national educational field need to be taken into account: the insistence of the DfE 2010-2012 that schools should have greater freedom to innovate and to devise their own curricula at school and community level, for instance. Expert witnesses commented that not only may a subject such as RE be left to wither in some schools, but also, the very idea of organising the curriculum into subjects will be set aside by others. So RE in the future will have to rely less on being a mandatory subject for all pupils by legislation, and much more on the intrinsic worth of the learning opportunities it offers. For example, academies will need to be convinced of the merit of the locally agreed syllabus if they are to choose to use it. The RE subject review should take these radical insights seriously.

Curriculum: main strengths

- 2.9 The 2004 NSNF provides an outline of the RE curriculum in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills to which most RE professionals could consent and from which almost all local agreed syllabus conferences have drawn in devising their own agreed syllabuses. Really weak agreed syllabuses appear less common, post-NSNF, than they were before.
- 2.10 Though the continuing usefulness of the terms 'learning about' and 'learning from' religions has been challenged³⁴, they have nevertheless become embedded in the thinking of many primary and secondary teachers who, as a result, understand that RE consists of more than just 'content'. This recognition of the need for balance is particularly significant in the context of the current national emphasis on the need for the identification of 'bodies of core knowledge' within subjects.
- 2.11 Evidence suggests that, since Ofsted began inspecting RE in 1994, more and better RE is being taught in more primary schools. Provision remains patchy, but inspection reports suggest a decline in the once common total neglect of the subject in many schools, and this improvement may have been helped by the five-yearly cycle of agreed syllabus review.

³² See: Sacks, J (1990) *The Persistence of Faith* (London: Continuum).

³³ See, for instance: Ofsted (2007) *Making Sense of Religion*, 7.

³⁴ See, for example: Ofsted (2007), 38

2.12 One way the strength of the RE teaching force has been developed and shown is through the 2008-2010 RE contribution to the New Secondary Curriculum through which 1016 secondary schools, involving over 1500 teachers, received professional development from 25 regional RE subject advisers.

Curriculum: main weaknesses

- 2.13 The lack of curriculum time made available to RE in many schools combined with the use of 'creative curriculum planning'. In some primary schools, for instance, teaching assistants³⁵ (or Higher Level Teaching Assistants) have been used to teach RE, sometimes in PPA time³⁶, lowering the status and the probable impact of RE in the school (REC 2007). Many teachers have identified a lack of understanding of, and support for, RE among senior school leaders and policy-makers as a significant cause of weakness in RE provision.
- 2.14 Within the secondary phase, the recent decision of the DfE not to include RE as one of the humanities subjects of the 'English Baccalaureate' ('EBacc') may have compromised the future of RE in secondary schooling. A series of National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) surveys of English secondary school RE departments³⁷ revealed widespread unsettlement, reporting a general feeling that RE had been unfairly 'downgraded' within, the October 2012 Ipsos Mori report, *The Effects of the English Baccalaureate* reported that 'Almost all case study schools questioned the exclusion of RE as an EBacc subject'.³⁸
- 2.15 The limited opportunities for teachers and other practitioners to increase their professional knowledge, understanding and expertise through RE-specific initial and continuing professional development. Many local authorities and SACREs no longer make any provision for continuing professional development in RE, due to reduced resources and/or a lack of subject-based advisory support.
- 2.16 The frequent misrepresentation of religion in both teaching and the literature produced to support RE in schools.³⁹ There is often concern with 'coverage of religions', noted one expert witness, 'rather than a commitment to understanding and impact'. Another pointed to the tendency to 'sanitise' religions leading to an avoidance of diversity and controversy.

³⁵ REC (2007) *Religious Education Teaching and Training in England: current provision and future improvement*, p35, identified a need for training for teaching assistants in RE.

³⁶ The Workload Agreement guarantees teachers in maintained schools in England and Wales ten per cent of their timetabled teaching to be set aside as preparation, planning and assessment (PPA) time during the school day.

³⁷ See NATRE website: www.natre.org.uk

³⁸ DfE (September 2012) *The effects of the English Baccalaureate*, 19.

³⁹ See, in particular: DCSF/Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (2010) *Materials used to Teach about World Religions in Schools in England*.

Focus 3: exemplification of good RE

Recommendation 4

- That evaluative principles are developed and published that enable teachers to make sound professional judgements about what constitutes good professional practice, promoting high standards of learning in RE.

Recommendation 5

- That strategies are explored through which the collective efforts and wisdom of the individuals and groups which make up the RE community can be brought together and made known effectively for the benefit of the subject and the young people studying it.

Exemplification: background

- 3.1 Good quality RE grows when best practice is identified, widely shared and understood. The term ‘exemplification of good practice’ is far-reaching, however, and the panel therefore took a broad view of what this category required it to address. With more time, the panel would have attempted to define the field more tightly.
- 3.2 Primary teachers have often looked to local SACREs and agreed syllabuses as well as commercially-published resources for their classroom approaches; notions of good practice have often been drawn from practice in other subjects. At the same time, poor subject knowledge and understanding and low confidence have often undermined the quality of primary RE practice.
- 3.3 Secondary teachers, in those schools in which teachers with other specialisms are in a majority, can be more influenced than they realise by the quest for parity with history and geography at both key stages 3 (11-14) and 4 (14-16). Advantages and disadvantages stem from these comparisons. Secondary schools have generally been less concerned than primary schools to implement their local agreed syllabus. In the case of new-style academies, the link with local arrangements for RE (including resources) is currently loosely defined.
- 3.4 In the last eight years, guidance produced by the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA)⁴⁰ has been widely used, though this has improved good practice less than would have been wished. The marginal position of RE within the curriculum and small amounts of curriculum time account for much of the weakness of teaching and learning which HMI observe in RE.

⁴⁰ Such as the New Secondary Curriculum Initiative and work on Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) in Foundation Subjects to define and exemplify levels.

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- 3.5 There are many national projects which provide high-quality exemplification, some originating in research, some funded and supported by RE's major donors, funders and agencies. Various REC member bodies have also produced exemplification material, such as the Islamic Council of Britain's package for learning about Islam, the BHA's 'Humanism for Schools' website, and the Jewish Way of Life exhibition. In general, these are less well known than they deserve and probably lack widespread impact, even where they would meet needs widely.
- 3.6 An increasing amount of material is available digitally via the Internet and, in the context of increased globalisation, from a wide range of international sources. However, such material is unregulated and raises issues – particularly for those lacking subject knowledge or confidence – about resource selection, balance and quality. Furthermore, best practice would suggest that such material has to be tailored to the particular situation in which it is going to be applied; an exercise that requires professional judgement, flair and expertise.
- 3.7 RE has relied on agencies of government for exemplification of good practice. Key examples include HMI, QCDA, the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) and the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTa). Local agencies – SACREs being the key example – have also often made a contribution to exemplification. Following the closure of some of these agencies⁴¹ and in view of the current austerities which affect many (though not all) SACREs, the RE community must look to other sources for the support of exemplification of good practice.
- 3.8 One particularly significant factor has been the reduction in the number and availability of 'experts' (including specialist RE advisers, advisory teachers and advanced skills teachers⁴²) to support teachers and schools. Where they continue to exist, local subject-specific groups of teachers have been a lifeline for many with meetings often focused on sharing examples of good practice. Some faith communities, such as Roman Catholic and Anglican dioceses, have continued to offer support to their own networks, sometimes beyond. However, many teachers of RE do report feeling isolated.
- 3.9 Some 'pull factors' have been having a good impact, but usually only on schools numbered in their hundreds at best.⁴³ These include quality marks and awards (such as the RE Quality Mark⁴⁴ and the Hockerill/NATRE prize for Innovation in RE Teaching⁴⁵); competitions (such as those associated with 'Spirited Arts'⁴⁶); and projects and initiatives (such as the

⁴¹ BECTa, for example, was closed down on 31 March 2011.

⁴² See recent NASACRE *Survey of Local Authority Support for SACREs*, www.nasacre.org.uk.

⁴³ The evaluation report on the RESilience Project, for example, noted that, 'The number of English schools that chose to participate was disappointing. This was due in part to external factors but the final number fell far short of the revised aspirational target of 400'. *An Evaluation of Resilience/At Gyfnerthu 2009-2011*, 25.

⁴⁴ A recently introduced award aimed at 'recognising outstanding learning in religious education'. See: www.reqm.org

⁴⁵ Now in its third year. See: www.hockerillfoundation.org.uk/Prize.aspx

⁴⁶ Including 'Art in Heaven', an annual art competition which, since 2004, has involved 250,000 pupils. See: www.natre.org.uk/spiritedarts/

Celebrating RE month held in March 2011⁴⁷ and developing students as ‘ambassadors of faith and belief’⁴⁸). These initiatives, which require opting into, often feature schools who already exhibit good practice in RE.

- 3.10 Many schools and teachers, lacking trust in their own ability to be curriculum innovators and evaluators, turn to commercially published schemes of planning and resources. While some of these provide professional guidance ‘on tap’, others are insufficiently coherent to please faith community groups and insufficiently creative to please pupils.
- 3.11 Published research projects into RE-specific learning methods and pedagogy have been influential. These methods, based on enquiry, ethnography, interpretation, religious literacy, experiential approaches, conceptual development and the quest for human meaning, are all used in some classrooms; at best, each is effective largely in relation to its own version of RE’s aims. Many teachers make eclectic use of these learning methods, often driven by the desire to make RE lively or relevant. The quest for ‘relevance’ in RE is sometimes pursued superficially, however: featuring a story of a Muslim boxer or a Christian pop star may in itself do little, if anything, to improve the quality of learning.

Exemplification: main strengths

- 3.12 There has never been a ‘golden age’ for RE, and it is a reasonable conjecture that there is a much stronger base of practice at a sound standard than ever before in both primary and secondary school RE. In a significant number of schools – primary, secondary and special – RE is identified by HMI as a subject that makes an important contribution to whole school priorities.
- 3.13 The capacity - despite a sense of being marginalised by central government decisions and a persistent belief that the subject is under-funded relative to other subjects - for RE-related groups, locally and nationally, to organise innovative and exciting projects and initiatives which both promote and bring together a wide range of exemplary practice and material.
- 3.14 The number and range of professional associations and other organisations which have exemplified their vision of RE in accessible ways through resources from which schools and teachers can benefit. While sometimes these are for sale, others are heavily subsidised and some are freely available.
- 3.15 Though there is widespread concern about the diminishing amount of initial and continuing professional development opportunities available to teachers, where good quality subject-specific training does exist it is valued highly and can have an impact. A significant number (though not enough) of teachers benefit annually from this sort of provision from SACREs, professional associations and commercial providers.

⁴⁷ See: www.religiouseducationcouncil.org/content/blogcategory/51/81/

⁴⁸ See, for example: www.redbridgeafab.org.uk

3.16 Best practice in RE is simultaneously alert both to pupils' own interests and questions and to the academic disciplines of theology and religious studies (in some cases, biblical studies or philosophy). Linking these two poles through learning about spirituality, ethics and religion and belief enables learners in RE to get a strong sense of how the subject encourages them to think deeply about their own questions of identity, meaning and value and of what it means to be human.

Exemplification: main weaknesses

3.17 Even after 10-15 years of solid progress, there are still too many schools which do not take RE seriously; it may still be treated in tokenistic ways by school leaders who are unaware of (or unreceptive to) the potential of the subject. Too many schools continue to deliver RE from a sense of legal duty rather than an appreciation of its value. Such schools have never seen best practice exemplified in ways that might inspire them to seek to replicate it in their own setting.

3.18 Though researchers have contributed to the exemplification of good teaching and learning in RE, primary and secondary teachers have not always known about this and/or have had difficulty persuading others of its value. The circle of well-informed and practically skilled users of RE learning methods accruing from research is small.

3.19 Clear criteria by which to judge what makes RE practice or resources 'good' or 'outstanding' are not readily available either to many teachers of RE or other stakeholders.

3.20 The time allocated to beginning primary teachers during initial teacher education is too limited – in many cases this is less than five hours tuition or even self-study to prepare primary graduates for teaching RE. The move to locate initial teacher education in schools (in which there can be no guarantee that beginning teachers will see good practice in RE exemplified) is worrying.

3.21 Despite good take-up of those CPD opportunities that are available, overall the amount of subject-specialist professional development available to subject leaders and specialist RE teachers is inadequate.

Focus 4: assessment (including qualifications)⁴⁹

Recommendation 6

- That new instruments for describing achievement in RE are created that teachers can use working alongside the DfE's new descriptions of achievement in subjects like English, mathematics and science.

Recommendation 7

- That maximum influence is sought with the relevant examination Awarding Bodies in order to promote:
 - A. coherence and progression between 4-14 programmes and public examinations used at 14- 19;
 - B. the study of religions in religious studies qualifications 14-19, in appropriate relation to studies of, for example, ethics and philosophy;
 - C. discussion of the importance and viability of adding an RE / SMSC element to future vocational qualifications.

Assessment: background

4.1 There has been substantial work on assessment in RE in recent years, to which many expert witnesses have drawn attention. The most recent reference point is the Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants (AREIAC) assessment working group. The work of the HMI and of QCDA's Assessing Pupil Progress in RE work is also pertinent. Though there is clearly 'unfinished business' in the area of assessment and RE, there is evidence that, with skilful and knowledgeable handling, the use of levels can promote progress in RE but that, generally, too few teachers and schools have the confidence or expertise to use assessment techniques well. From the pool of schools that has been visited in recent years, HMI judges assessment in RE overall to be relatively weak in relation to other subjects⁵⁰. There is also divided opinion over the usefulness of the 'learning about' and 'learning from' dichotomy as a means of carrying out assessment. At best, it has been suggested, it gives people a good sense of the subtle nature of RE and 'learning from religion' provides a strong starting point for higher order thinking in RE, including skills of critical and personal evaluation. At worst, however, it leads to a narrow interpretation of each element so that "learning about' becomes synonymous with 'facts' and 'learning from' with 'feelings'. Many expert witnesses stated that some teachers are confused about what the terms actually mean.⁵¹

⁴⁹ The title of the fourth focus as given to the expert panel was 'qualifications and assessment of RE'. Following discussion, however, panel members decided that it was helpful to reword this as 'assessment (including qualifications)' and to interpret 'qualifications' as applying predominantly to the GCSE and GCE public examinations in religious studies (RS) available to pupils at school.

⁵⁰ See the two long Ofsted reports (2007, 2010) on RE in schools visited.

⁵¹ See, for example: Teece, G (2010).

- 4.2 A review of qualifications in RE/RS⁵² also presents a mixed picture. On the one hand, there has been a spectacular increase in the number of students taking RE/RS public examinations in recent years,⁵³ both at GCSE and GCE levels, with solid rates of achievement being recorded. Evidence suggests that the worth of RE/RS examinations has risen in the esteem of students, many of them seeing the kinds of issues-based RE/RS examinations that have developed as being helpful for living in the modern, plural world. The increased popularity of RE/RS examinations has also meant that they have become a significant commercial factor for the examination Awarding Bodies: RE/RS has, in short, attained a strong market position. On the other hand, there are currently significant and fast-moving changes taking place in the national examination scene, some expert witnesses voicing concerns that there is a danger the RE community will not be able to respond quickly enough so as to influence decisions that will impact on the future of RE/RS as an examination subject.
- 4.3 There is also evidence, however, that the rapid growth in the number of candidates for RE/RS public examinations has come at a cost. For example, concerns have been expressed by some expert witnesses that: the GCSE short courses lack rigour and challenge; the full GCSE courses are too content-based so that they encourage ‘teaching to the exam’; and that the popularity with students of A level philosophy and ethics-type RE/RS courses has led to a belief that ‘anything goes’ (in terms of argument) and that ‘philosophy’ and ‘philosophy of religion’ (which usually means Western philosophy) have become conflated so that both become distorted. There is also a much-repeated concern that, all through the school years – but particularly in Key Stages 4 and 5 when examinations predominate – pupils exhibit a diminishing understanding of the nature of religion in general as well as of the basic theological positions of particular religious traditions and the questions that they raise. In the words of one expert witness: ‘The focus on so-called ‘philosophy and ethics’ has reduced religions at Key Stage 4 to providers of proof texts, learnt by heart, to illustrate religious attitudes to “issues”’.
- 4.4 If the above factors are, to a lesser or greater extent, within the control of RE/RS and examination professionals, the same cannot be said for changes that emanate from decisions made at government level and which can leave educational professionals feeling helpless, frustrated and often angry. Such has been the case with the decision not to include RE/RS as one of the humanities subjects which combine with others to form the measure of school examination performance termed the ‘EBacc’. Recent surveys⁵⁴ have demonstrated that this one move has done much to undermine the status and staffing of RE in a significant number of English secondary schools. It is, many have claimed, a cruel example of damaging RE ‘by default’; that is, educational decisions not specifically related to RE nevertheless having a negative impact on RE, thereby undermining its position in schools. Some expert witnesses also expressed concern at RS not being listed as a ‘facilitating subject’ by the Russell Group of universities, saying that this has fuelled negative perceptions of RE amongst some pupils and members of the wider public.

⁵² The term RE/RS has been used in this section as a reminder that, at public examination level, RE is termed ‘religious studies’ (RS).

⁵³ Over 450,000 students have been certificated at GCSE each year in the last six years. In the last 15 years, over 25,000 students have sat the AS level in Religious Studies.

⁵⁴ Particularly the four surveys, each of which attracted a significantly high number of responses from English secondary schools, which were conducted by NATRE 2010-2012.

- 4.5 The pattern of recent years through which students have gained teaching qualifications through a course in initial teacher education is also currently undergoing fundamental change with the number of post-graduate students being accepted for RE-related courses being reduced (resulting in some long-established university post-graduate certificate of education (PGCE) RE courses folding) and a clear national government-led preference for initial teacher education taking place ‘on site’ in schools themselves. Those currently involved in initial teacher education work, the quality of whose work is regularly monitored, have voiced concerns about there being no apparent safeguards to ensure that the school RE that beginning teachers will experience will be of an appropriately high standard. Taking a wider perspective, questions are continually asked about how school and university courses prepare future teachers to engage professionally in informed and engaging RE teaching, whether at primary or secondary level.

Assessment: main strengths

- 4.6 The quality and use of the RE eight-level scale from the Framework is not without problems, but is perceived to be a strength of the subject by many teachers and syllabus-makers. By offering a common platform with subjects such as history and geography, the eight-level scale has led to greater coherence and rigour in the ways that teachers describe achievement and progression in RE for 5-14s.⁵⁵ It has also been suggested that self-assessment and peer-assessment has become more popular in RE, giving pupils greater agency and ownership.
- 4.7 It is a strength that RE has for over a decade shared parity of language and structures for describing assessment with, for example, history, geography and art. This has had a benefit for the strength of the subject’s assessment work and for the status of RE in the eyes of teachers, parents and pupils.
- 4.8 The spectacular increase in recent years in the number of students taking examination courses at both GCSE and GCE levels, the short course GCSE being particularly strategic in helping schools to fulfil the legislative requirement for all students to take RE (unless withdrawn by parents or carers) at Key Stage 4.
- 4.9 The raised status of RE amongst 14-18 pupils, particularly with the popularity of issues-based/philosophy and ethics-type GCSE and GCE courses.

⁵⁵ One example of the impact of the scale is that over 2,600 teachers have benefitted from continuing professional development courses on assessing RE organised by RE Today.

Assessment: main weaknesses

- 4.10 The general standard of assessment in RE is relatively weak in relation to other subjects. Contributory factors include lack of teacher confidence, decreasing opportunities for initial and continuing professional development, lack of curriculum time, the unrealistic amount of assessment required of some teachers, the lack of clarity about the aims of RE, and variant and muddled understanding of how to use ‘learning about’ and ‘learning from’.
- 4.11 The debilitating impact of RE not being included as one of the humanities subjects of the EBacc, evidence suggesting that it is making some schools question the value of running RS short/full GCSE courses or even to eliminate such courses entirely. In such schools, the negative impact on the perception of RE’s value and on the morale of teachers can be marked.
- 4.12 There is widespread concern that the popularity of philosophy and ethics examination courses post-14, at the expense of a study of world religions or religious texts, has led to a shallower understanding of the nature of religion/s. This, in turn, will impact on the knowledge and understanding of future entrants into the teaching profession.
- 4.13 Since 1997, the GCSE short course in religious studies has been the most popular of all short courses, meeting a real need to certificate the core learning in legislatively required RE. If it were to continue, reform is needed because of a perceived lack of rigour⁵⁶ (a perception that is also widely applied to the full GCSE course), There is a need to clarify the relationship of the short course with other qualifications (such as, presently, the full RS GCSE course, or any successor qualification). But, if the short course in RS were to be abolished, then another way of accrediting the learning entitlement of the RE required by legislation will be needed. The accreditation of learning at 16 or in Key Stage 4 (14-16) is currently a weakness in RE provision.

Two further recommendations

Recommendation 8

- That the 2004 Non-Statutory National Framework for RE is reviewed and replaced with an updated and recast document.

Recommendation 9

- That increasingly influential links are built and used with the DfE in order to promote RE in all schools, in line with the REC subject review’s work and recommendations (above), challenging and encouraging government to act to improve RE.

⁵⁶ See, for instance: Ofsted (2010), 5.

Appendix Two

Expectations, progression and achievement in religious education: a contribution to current discussion.

This appendix provides an interim response to the REC's expert panel report, which recommended that 'new instruments for describing achievement in RE are created, that teachers can use working alongside the DfE's new descriptions of achievement in subjects like English, Mathematics and Science.'

Mirroring the subjects of the national curriculum, RE syllabus makers and teachers have used an eight level scale to describe learning intentions, expectations and achievements for many years. The effectiveness of such scales has been a contested area in RE as in other subjects, and as the DfE has set aside 8 level scales for other subjects, this document does not offer an 8 level scale for RE. Consultations on the RE Council's draft materials suggested a wide consensus about the need for further future national work in this area, but mixed professional views about this: many teachers will wish to continue to use RE levels, while others will not.

The NCFRE includes this statement: 'By the end of each key stage, pupils are expected to know, apply and understand the matters, skills and processes specified in the relevant programme of study.' This statement is also included in the programmes of study for each subject of the national curriculum. There is a clear expectation that pupils' achievements will continue to be weighed up by teachers using criteria arising from the programmes of study.

The RE Council notes that the DfE expects schools to have a curriculum and assessment framework that meets a set of core principles⁵⁷ and commends this advice to syllabus makers and teachers in RE as they plan particular ways of describing achievement in RE in those schools for which they have responsibility.

The core principles are that assessment should:

1. set out steps so that pupils reach or exceed the end of key stage expectations in the new national curriculum;
2. enable teachers to measure whether pupils are on track to meet end of key stage expectations;
3. enable teachers to pinpoint the aspects of the curriculum in which pupils are falling behind, and recognise exceptional performance;
4. support teachers' planning for all pupils;
5. enable the teacher to report regularly to parents and, where pupils move to other schools, providing clear information about each pupil's strengths, weaknesses and progress towards the end of key stage expectations.

⁵⁷ These 5 expectations upon schools are drawn from *Primary assessment and accountability under the new national curriculum*, a DfE consultation document published July 2013.

In the light of these DfE concerns and in relation to RE, syllabus makers and teachers will need to consider these 5 questions, to which we provide answers from the subject review below.

What steps within an assessment framework enable pupils to reach or exceed the end of key stage expectations in the RE curriculum?

In RE, at 7, 11 and 14, pupils should show that they know, apply and understand the matters, skills and processes specified in the programme of study. This should enable teachers to plan, assess and report on progress in RE as outlined in the principles above.

Areas of enquiry to be included

The programme of study enables pupils to increase and deepen their knowledge and understanding of key areas of enquiry in RE. These relate to the religions and worldviews studied. The range of key areas of enquiry in RE can be described like this:

- beliefs, teachings, sources of wisdom and authority;
- ways of living;
- ways of expressing meaning;
- questions of identity, diversity and belonging;
- questions of meaning, purpose and truth;
- questions of values and commitments.

While this list bears a close relation to previous versions of RE curriculum guidance (e.g. the QCA non statutory National Framework for RE of 2004), the purpose of its inclusion here is to provide a checklist of areas in which pupils will make progress in RE and also to guide syllabus makers in developing appropriate statements of attainment for different groups of pupils. This task will require further work within the RE community.

Gaining and deploying skills

The programme of study also illustrates progression in skills across the 5-14 age range. In relation to the religions and worldviews they study, pupils are increasingly enabled to develop both their knowledge and understanding and their expression and communication through the skills that they gain and deploy. While the programme of study makes clear the skills that are expected of learners at the end of each key stage, progress towards these outcomes will need careful planning in schemes of learning.

The progression in understanding and skills that the programmes of study envisage are made explicit in the grid below. This is presented for syllabus makers to consider as they approach the task of designing instruments that will enable fair, valid and manageable assessment for learning in RE.

Aims in RE: a progression grid

		At the end of key stage 3 pupils will be able to:		
A: Know about & understand		At the end of key stage 1 pupils will be able to:	At the end of key stage 2 pupils will be able to:	At the end of key stage 3 pupils will be able to:
A1. Describe, explain and analyse beliefs, and practices, recognising the diversity which exists within and between communities	Recall and name different beliefs and practices, including festivals, worship, rituals and ways of life, in order to find out about the meanings behind them	Describe and make connections between different features of the religions and worldviews they study, discovering more about celebrations, worship, pilgrimages and the rituals which mark important points in life, in order to reflect on their ideas	Explain and interpret ways that the history and culture of religions and worldviews influence individuals and communities, including a wide range of beliefs and practices, in order to appraise reasons why some people support and others question these influences	
A2. Identify, investigate and respond to questions posed by, and responses offered by, some of the sources of wisdom found in religions and worldviews	Retell and suggest meanings to some religious and moral stories, exploring and discussing sacred writings and sources of wisdom and recognising the communities from which they come	Describe and understand links between stories and other aspects of the communities they are investigating, responding thoughtfully to a range of sources of wisdom and to beliefs and teachings that arise from them in different communities	Explain and interpret a range of beliefs, teachings and sources of wisdom and authority in order to understand religions and worldviews as coherent systems or ways of seeing the world	
A3. Appreciate and appraise the nature, significance and impact of different ways of life and ways of expressing meaning	Recognise some different symbols and actions which express a community's way of life, appreciating some similarities between communities	Explore and describe a range of beliefs, symbols and actions so that they can understand different ways of life and ways of expressing meaning	Explain how and why individuals and communities express the meanings of their beliefs and values in many different forms and ways of living, enquiring into the variety, differences and relationships that exist within and between them	

B: Express & communicate

At the end of key stage 1 pupils will be able to:

At the end of key stage 2 pupils will be able to:

At the end of key stage 3 pupils will be able to:

<p>B1. Explain reasonably their ideas about how beliefs, practices and forms of expression influence individuals and communities</p>	<p>Ask and respond to questions about what communities do, and why, so that they can identify what difference belonging to a community might make</p>	<p>Observe and understand varied examples of religions and worldviews so that they can explain, with reasons, their meanings and significance to individuals and communities</p>	<p>Explain the religions and worldviews which they encounter clearly, reasonably and coherently; evaluate them, drawing on a range of introductory level approaches recognised in the study of religion or theology</p>
<p>B2. Express with increasing discernment their personal reflections and critical responses to questions and teachings about identity, diversity, meaning and value</p>	<p>Observe and recount different ways of expressing identity and belonging, responding sensitively for themselves</p>	<p>Understand the challenges of faith commitment to a community of faith or belief, suggesting why belonging to a community may be valuable, both in the diverse communities being studied and in their own lives</p>	<p>Observe and interpret a wide range of ways in which commitment and identity are expressed. They develop insightful evaluation and analysis of controversies about commitment to religions and worldviews, accounting for the impact of diversity within and between communities</p>
<p>B3. Appreciate and appraise varied dimensions of religion⁵⁸</p>	<p>Notice and respond sensitively to some similarities between different religions and worldviews</p>	<p>Observe and consider different dimensions of religion, so that they can explore and show understanding of similarities and differences between different religions and worldviews</p>	<p>Consider and evaluate the question: what is religion? Analyse the nature of religion using the main disciplines by which religion is studied</p>

⁵⁸ The RE programme of study usually refers to 'religions and worldviews' to describe the field of enquiry. Here the aim is to consider religion and belief itself as a phenomenon which has both positive and negative features, and is open to many interpretations: in this aspect of the aims, pupils are to engage with the concept of religion and non-religious belief, not merely with individual examples, and similar critiques should apply to both.

The content in Aims A and B will be the vehicle through which the skills in Aim C will be developed

C: Gain & deploy skills		At the end of key stage 1 pupils will be able to:	At the end of key stage 2 pupils will be able to:	At the end of key stage 3 pupils will be able to:
C1. Find out about and investigate key concepts and questions of belonging, meaning, purpose and truth, responding creatively;	Explore questions about belonging, meaning and truth so that they can express their own ideas and opinions in response using words, music, art or poetry	Discuss and present their own and others' views on challenging questions about belonging, meaning, purpose and truth, applying ideas of their own thoughtfully in different forms including (e.g.) reasoning, music, art and poetry	Explore some of the ultimate questions that are raised by human life in ways that are well-informed and which invite reasoned personal responses, expressing insights that draw on a wide range of examples including the arts, media and philosophy	
C2. Enquire into what enables different communities to live together respectfully for the well-being of all	Find out about and respond with ideas to examples of co-operation between people who are different	Consider and apply ideas about ways in which diverse communities can live together for the well-being of all, responding thoughtfully to ideas about community, values and respect	Examine and evaluate issues about community cohesion and respect for all in the light of different perspectives from varied religions and worldviews	
C3. Articulate beliefs, values and commitments clearly in order to explain reasons why they may be important in their own and other people's lives.	Find out about questions of right and wrong and begin to express their ideas and opinions in response.	Discuss and apply their own and others' ideas about ethical questions, including ideas about what is right and wrong and what is just and fair, and express their own ideas clearly in response.	Explore and express insights into significant moral and ethical questions posed by being human in ways that are well-informed and which invite personal response, using reasoning which may draw on a range of examples from real life, fiction or other forms of media.	

Appendix Three: Note on evaluation

An independent external evaluator, Dr Lorraine Foreman-Peck, an honorary research fellow at the Department of Education, University of Oxford, undertook evaluation of the Review process. On the recommendation of the Phase One expert panel and with the agreement of the Steering Group, Dr Foreman-Peck carried out a responsive form of evaluation. This ensured that consultation was undertaken during the Review rather than at the end of the process.

This ensured that members of the Review team benefited from the insights revealed in the wider consultation process as they arose. They were able to act on these when patterns in the responses emerged and on the recommendation of the Steering Group. Consultation responses also affected the progress of the Review when feedback was received that was judged to be unusually insightful by the Steering Group. Although more traditional forms of evaluation have other advantages, they only provide data after the event. Responsiveness was an important quality in the RE Review, given the wide range of often conflicting views that needed to be taken into account when the final versions of the various documents were being prepared.

The evaluation material comprises:

- A. Consultation responses to the Review expert panel Report from the web based survey in November 2012 (Dr Lorraine Foreman-Peck)
- B. Extended responses from the same consultation received by letter (EP Chair + three Steering Group members)
- C. Consultation responses to the draft programmes of study, Phase Two from the web based survey in July 2013 (Dr Lorraine Foreman-Peck)
- D. Extended responses from the same survey (Dr Lorraine Foreman-Peck).

This material can be viewed on the RE Council website⁵⁹.

In addition, 28 extended responses to the draft programmes of study in Phase Two were received by letter. The limited resources available to the Review meant that the external evaluator could not consider these, hence there is no analysis of these presented in the evaluation report. However, they were all considered carefully in Phase Three of the RE Review and their influence can be seen in the final NCFRE document.

⁵⁹www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk

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Grateful thanks are extended to the following organisations for their generosity in supporting the review.



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