

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **School and government performance on religious education failing record number of students, says landmark data review**

*Neglecting RE leaves 'gaping hole in the school curriculum', says Father of the House Sir Peter Bottomley in the wake of the Government's commitment to level up education across the country.*

The number of students taking a Religious Studies GCSE in England has risen by nearly a third in the last decade despite the subject being underfunded and poorly taught in many schools across England, a new 'state of RE' data analysis has revealed.

Despite the increase in students taking the subject, no government money has been spent on the subject in the last five years, while many academies fail to offer the high-quality RE provision that according to Ofsted 'affords students the opportunity to make sense of their own place in the world'.

The comprehensive review of data, carried about by a team from the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC), the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), and RE Today Services, comes from a variety of sources, including an Ofsted subject report, public surveys, school workforce data, freedom of information requests, and interviews with teachers and students. It is the biggest 'state of RE' report for five years. We've graded the performance of schools, government and the subject itself in a review of five years of data.

The most significant findings are:

- A 50% increase in A-level entries for Religious Studies (RS) since 2003, beating Geography and History
- Higher Attainment 8 scores than average in schools with higher rates of entry for GCSE RS
- 46% of academies without a religious character have reported an increase in time to teach RE

However:

- Almost 500 secondary schools are still reporting zero hours of RE provision in Year 11
- Around 34% of academies are reporting no timetabled RE

Teaching RE is a legal requirement for all schools in England. All maintained schools have a statutory duty to teach RE while academies and free schools are contractually required through the terms of their funding agreement to make provision for the teaching of the subject.

NATRE Research Officer, Deborah Weston OBE, who led the data review, said: "With record numbers of students taking the subject, it is a great shame that RE is being neglected by the Government, and marginalised by some schools, particularly in the academy system. In the Queen's Speech we saw the Government's commitment to "help every child fulfil their potential, wherever they live". The data has shown us that high-quality RE enables precisely this, being a key marker for both academic achievement and a vital part of young people's development in making sense of their own worldview as part of the diverse and pluralistic nature of belief in the 21st century."

"The planned changes outlined in the Queen's Speech provide a once in a generation opportunity to address most of the issues highlighted in this data. However, without a properly funded National Plan and a system of accountability for high-quality RE under the Government's academy vision for all schools, we risk denying a generation of students access to this vital subject. A high-quality education in religion and worldviews must now be part of their plans to help every young person fulfil their potential in school, society and the world of work."

In March, a parliamentary roundtable met to discuss the future of the subject, with the Father of the House, Sir Peter Bottomley, calling for a 'National Plan' for the subject.

Responding to the latest data, Sir Peter Bottomley said: "Looking at the performance data on this report card, too many young people are not getting a fair deal when it comes to religious education. In neglecting the subject, we leave a gaping hole in our school curriculum. At its best, RE prepares young people for the ethical, moral and religious debates that influence life in modern Britain and the wider world."

The report card summarising the data review can be accessed here: [www.rethinkre.org/re-report-card](http://www.rethinkre.org/re-report-card)