

## A National Plan for Religious education is urgently needed as one in five schools report including no lessons of the subject on their timetables

Source: DfE school census November 2021 published June 2022

**Background:** the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) has been reporting on the school level data from the school workforce census for the last seven years. The school census takes place each November in secondary schools in England. Almost 3,000 schools completed the census which was published by the Department for Education on 9th June 2022. You can read the national headlines [here](#).

This is the latest in this series of reports specifically on the Religious education workforce and includes points of comparison between the data collected in November 2020 and the equivalent data from November 2021. The good news is that the number of schools reporting no hours of Religious Education has decreased significantly in all types of school. The worrying trend is the increase in the number of schools, reporting on other curriculum subjects but not on RE. This group represent almost one in five schools overall but 23% of schools required to follow an Agreed Syllabus, 22% of Academies without a religious character but just 5% of schools and academies WITH a religious character. SACREs, Schools and Academy Trusts would be wise to explore some of the reasons for these figures.

**This is not a recent problem; the Commission on Religious Education, [Religion and Worldviews: the way forward](#) reported as follows in 2018:**

*“There is an increasing disparity of provision and support for RE in schools of a religious character and schools without a religious character. Over a third of schools and over 40% of academies without a religious character offered no RE in Year 11 in 2016, compared to 11% of schools with a religious character. Across Key Stage 4, 27% of schools and 35% of academies without a religious character offered no RE, compared to 7% of schools with a religious character.”<sup>1</sup> Since this time, academies without a religious character have continued to report poorer levels of provision than schools required to follow an Agreed Syllabus; most markedly in respect of Year 11.*

What do we deduce from these appalling statistics and the complete failure of the DfE to do anything about them? If this were data for Mathematics, English or another EBacc subject, action would surely be swift. That being the case, we can only conclude that allowing pupils to leave school with non-existent or weak knowledge and understanding of religious and non-religious worldviews, is consistent with this government’s vision for education. As a [recent Savanta survey commissioned by the Culham St Gabriel’s Trust](#) shows, the public, disagree and support for our campaign for a National Plan for RE is gaining support, including from [senior politicians](#), [parents](#), [employers](#) and [multi-academy trust leaders](#).

### Specific findings

1. **One in five schools report offering zero hours of RE in year 11 in a breach of their statutory responsibilities:** The number of state-funded secondary schools reporting that they make zero hours of provision in year 11 has fallen slightly from (497) 22.8% to (468) 21.7%. We believe that the most likely explanation for the year on year improvement is the implementation of the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (May 2019). This framework introduced a clearer focus on the curriculum during inspection. When the 2019 workforce data was collected (November 2019), curricular decisions for 2019-2020 will already have been made. Two years later however, in November 2021, there would have been a greater understanding of the expectation set out in the framework, and it appears that in the curriculum reviews that took place, many schools that had previous cut time for RE or removed it entirely, revised their decisions.

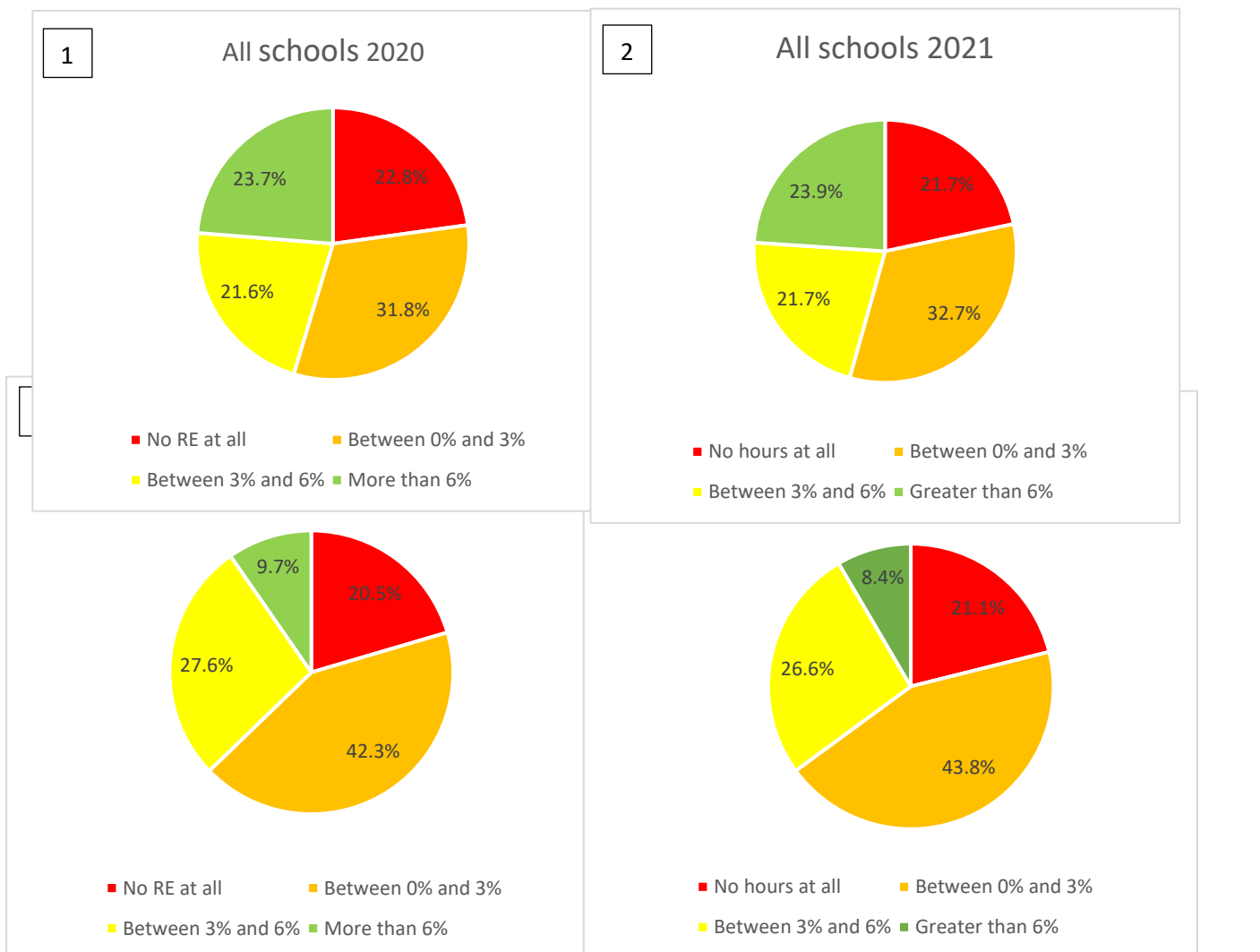
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<sup>1</sup> Page 23. Final Report of the Commission on Religious Education (September 2018) <https://www.commissiononre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Final-Report-of-the-Commission-on-RE.pdf>

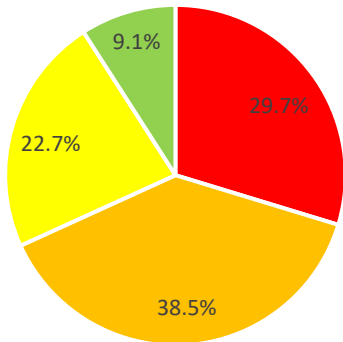
2. **Just under a third (27.4%) of Academies without a religious character report providing zero hours of RE to Year 11** The figure for 2021 represents a slight improvement from 2020 when 29.7% reported zero hours for this year group. The figure for 2021 represents an increase the proportion academies providing pupils' with their entitlement of 8%.
3. **The number of schools that report offering no provision in year 11 has increased slightly in schools required to follow a locally Agreed Syllabus from 20.5% to 21.1%.** However, it is worth noting that in 2019, the number of schools reporting zero hours in year 11 was 38.5%
4. **It should be noted that the average percentage of curriculum time in year 11 is inflated by those schools where GCSE RS is offered.** Pupils studying this course, typically spend approximately 10% of curriculum time (120-140 guided learning hours) on a GCSE as recommended by Ofqual. The increase in the number of all schools offering less than 3% of curriculum time in year 11 (around 45 minutes on average) remains a concern. However, this figure has remained fairly stable at just over 54% of all schools.
5. **Levels of provision in Key Stage three in all schools is much stronger than in Key Stage 4.** Around 10% of all schools report zero hours in year 7,8 and 9 on average. The level of provision for academies without a religious character is significant worse (just under 13% reporting zero hours) than schools where the Agreed Syllabus applies (just under 9%).

### School Workforce data: Percentage of timetable time spent on RE as reported by schools

#### Hours for RE in year 11 by type of school

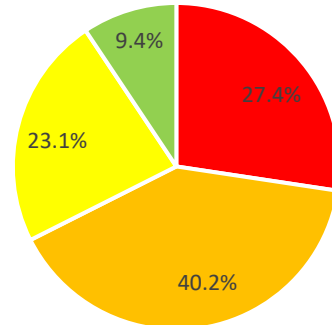


5 Academies without a religious character 2020



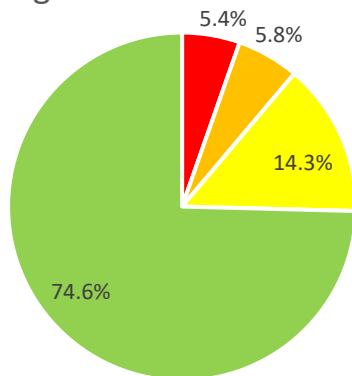
■ No RE at all      ■ Between 0% and 3%  
 ■ Between 3% and 6%      ■ More than 6%

6 Academies without a religious character



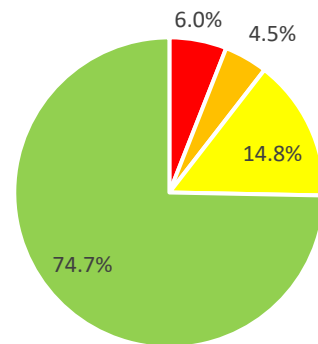
■ No hours at all      ■ Between 0% and 3%  
 ■ Between 3% and 6%      ■ Greater than 6%

7 Schools and academies with a religious character 2020



■ No RE at all      ■ Between 0% and 3%  
 ■ Between 3% and 6%      ■ More than 6%

8 Schools and Academies with a religious character 2021

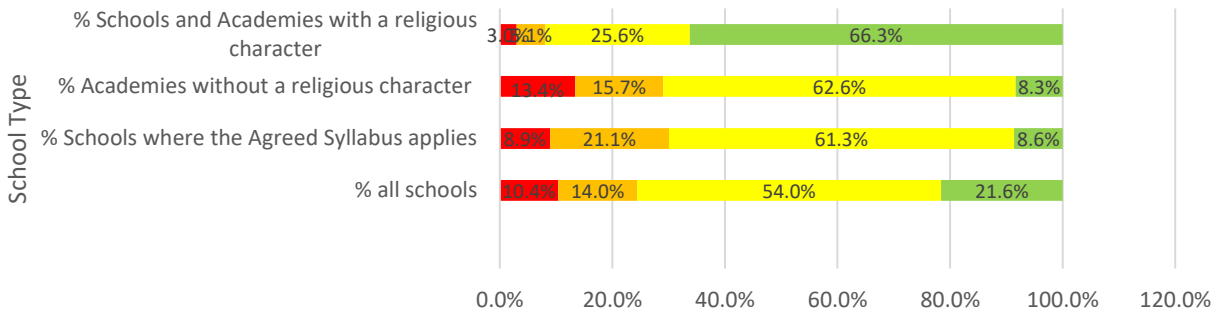


■ No hours at all      ■ Between 0% and 3%  
 ■ Between 3% and 6%      ■ Greater than 6%

### Hours for RE in different types of school by year group

9

#### Year 7 2021



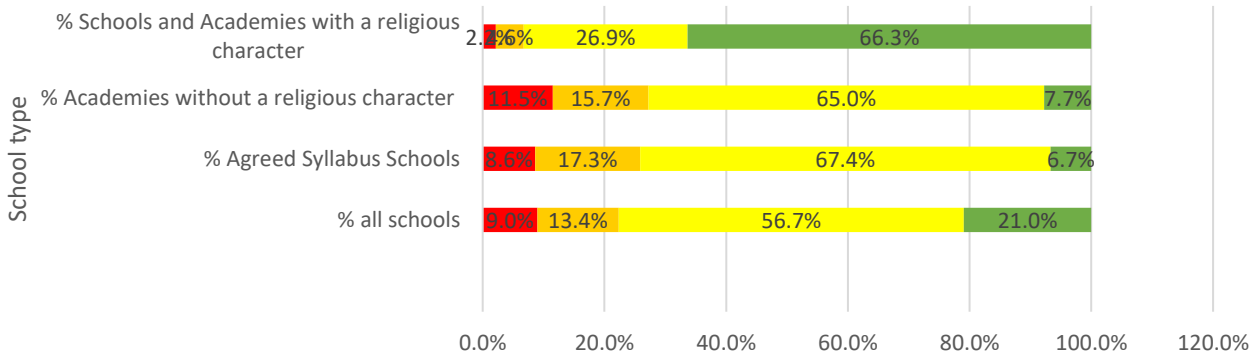
	% all schools	% Schools where the Agreed Syllabus applies	% Academies without a religious character	% Schools and Academies with a religious character
<span style="color: red;">■</span> No hours at all	10.4%	8.9%	13.4%	3.0%
<span style="color: orange;">■</span> Between 0% and 3%	14.0%	21.1%	15.7%	5.1%
<span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Between 3% and 6%	54.0%	61.3%	62.6%	25.6%
<span style="color: green;">■</span> Greater than 6%	21.6%	8.6%	8.3%	66.3%

Percentage of schools reporting this amount of timetable time

■ No hours at all  
 ■ Between 0% and 3%  
 ■ Between 3% and 6%  
 ■ Greater than 6%

10

#### Year 8 2021



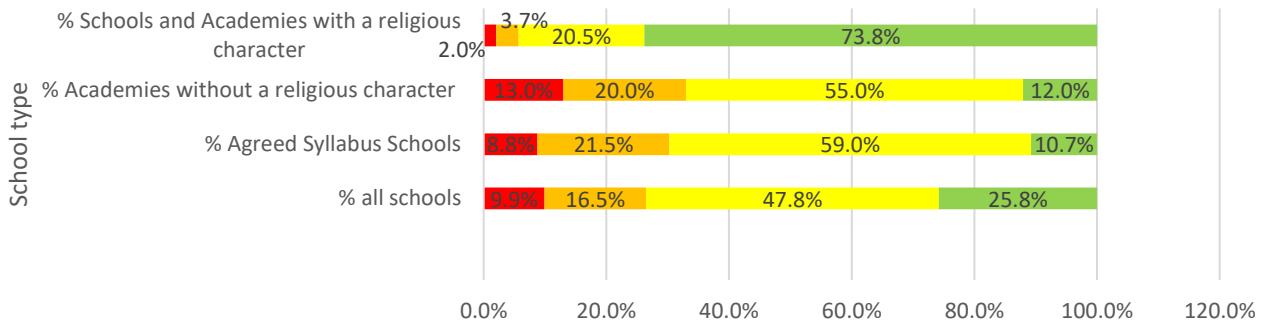
	% all schools	% Agreed Syllabus Schools	% Academies without a religious character	% Schools and Academies with a religious character
<span style="color: red;">■</span> No hours at all	9.0%	8.6%	11.5%	2.2%
<span style="color: orange;">■</span> Between 0% and 3%	13.4%	17.3%	15.7%	4.6%
<span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Between 3% and 6%	56.7%	67.4%	65.0%	26.9%
<span style="color: green;">■</span> Greater than 6%	21.0%	6.7%	7.7%	66.3%

Percentage of schools reporting this amount of timetable time

■ No hours at all  
 ■ Between 0% and 3%  
 ■ Between 3% and 6%  
 ■ Greater than 6%

11

### Year 9 2021



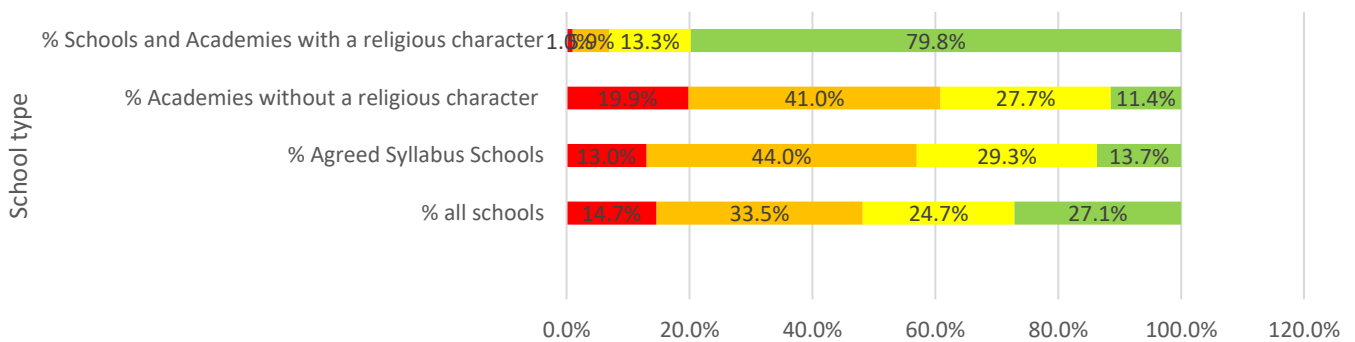
	% all schools	% Agreed Syllabus Schools	% Academies without a religious character	% Schools and Academies with a religious character
■ No hours at all	9.9%	8.8%	13.0%	2.0%
■ Between 0% and 3%	16.5%	21.5%	20.0%	3.7%
■ Between 3% and 6%	47.8%	59.0%	55.0%	20.5%
■ Greater than 6%	25.8%	10.7%	12.0%	73.8%

Percentage of schools reporting this amount of timetable time

■ No hours at all   ■ Between 0% and 3%   ■ Between 3% and 6%   ■ Greater than 6%

12

### Year 10 2021

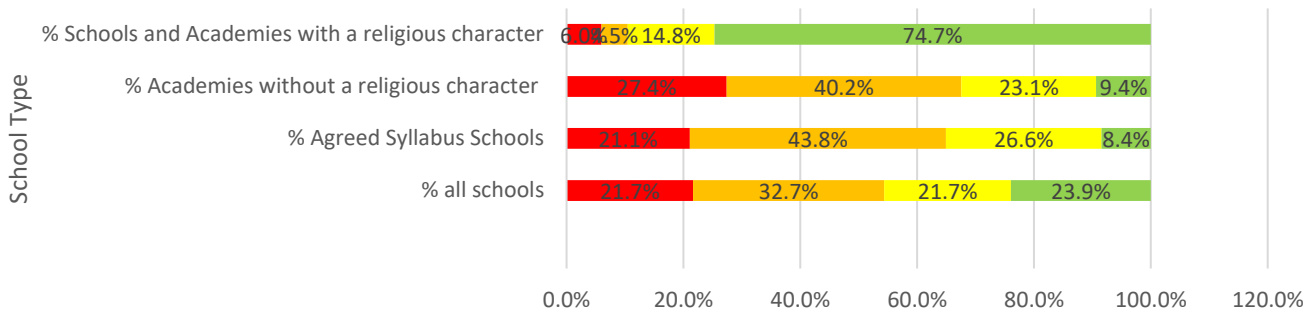


	% all schools	% Agreed Syllabus Schools	% Academies without a religious character	% Schools and Academies with a religious character
■ No hours at all	14.7%	13.0%	19.9%	1.0%
■ Between 0% and 3%	33.5%	44.0%	41.0%	5.9%
■ Between 3% and 6%	24.7%	29.3%	27.7%	13.3%
■ Greater than 6%	27.1%	13.7%	11.4%	79.8%

Percentage of schools reporting this amount of timetable time

■ No hours at all   ■ Between 0% and 3%   ■ Between 3% and 6%   ■ Greater than 6%

Year 11 2021



	% all schools	% Agreed Syllabus Schools	% Academies without a religious character	% Schools and Academies with a religious character
■ No hours at all	21.7%	21.1%	27.4%	6.0%
■ Between 0% and 3%	32.7%	43.8%	40.2%	4.5%
■ Between 3% and 6%	21.7%	26.6%	23.1%	14.8%
■ Greater than 6%	23.9%	8.4%	9.4%	74.7%

Percentage of schools reporting this amount of timetable time

■ No hours at all   ■ Between 0% and 3%   ■ Between 3% and 6%   ■ Greater than 6%

**Commentary:** The unintended consequences for provision of RE of the current set of performance measures is well documented. However, school leaders are not above the law. If most schools with a religious character (see tables 7 and 8) can find time for RE and still perform well in performance tables, it is difficult for leaders in other types of school to use this as a justification for neglecting pupils’ entitlement to a comprehensive RE. This neglect includes combining the subject with PSHE and or Citizenship into a single lesson per week which usually does a disservice to the subject content of all of these subjects. Similarly, the school level data used as a source for this report, alongside school level information about GCSE entry shows that many schools only providing RE in year 11 to pupils who opt for it, ignoring the statutory requirement to provide RE to all pupils in all year groups up to year 13.

**NATRE calls on the DfE to:**

- Amend the school performance measures to appropriately reward schools providing high levels of provision to all pupils – by including GCSE short and full courses in the performance measures
- Amend primary legislation and regulation of Academies to ensure pupils attending different types of school have equal access to high quality provision for RE
- Support SACREs and Multi-Academy Trusts in monitoring provision for RE and in holding leaders to account who do not provide appropriate levels of provision.

**Note on School workforce Data based on information from DfE:** The School Workforce Census collects curriculum information from a large sample of secondary schools. Curriculum information is requested from all secondary, middle deemed secondary and all-through schools, including relevant academy schools, with timetabling software that interfaces with their Management Information System. The information collected relates to teaching in one selected week in autumn each year. If a school operates a timetable cycle covering two or more weeks the DfE request an average figure, representative of one week’s teaching. If the school cannot provide that average, then a figure to represent a typical week should have been provided. As such, figures should be treated with caution.

Around 3,000 secondary schools – more than 80% of all secondary schools make a School Workforce Census return in any one year. However, not all schools provide complete curriculum information -where returned information on curriculum is mostly incomplete, the data for these schools has been removed from the analysis.