

7 June 2023		ITEM: 10
Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education		
Recruitment, Training and Retention of Teachers of RE		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key	
Report of: Deborah Weston, Associate Adviser for Religious Education		
Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Learning Inclusion and Skills		
Accountable Director: Shelia Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is: Public		

Executive Summary

Factors leading to difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified teachers of RE:

1. Unintended consequences of Government curriculum policies and use of performance measures
2. Removal of short course GCSE RS from performance tables
3. Decline in recruitment to Theology and Religious Studies Degrees
4. Lack of parity for subjects in relation to a training bursary
5. Demand far exceeding supply, especially in regions where HEI courses have closed

Impact on pupils

1. Poorer quality provision when teachers who teach RE as an additional subject have not been trained in line with the Teacher Standards.
2. Loss of pupils' statutory entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum which includes RE on a par with subjects of the National Curriculum
3. These factors disproportionately affect disadvantaged pupils who the evidence shows often have the most to gain from RE
4. Pupils in less diverse areas appear to be less likely to have the opportunity to study GCSE RS

What action should the Department for Education take to address challenges

1. Address regional variations including the availability of suitable courses, the demand for teachers and where HEI courses have not been replaced by school led ITT

2. Consider the target audience for recruitment campaigns which are often different for different subjects, including career changers, mature entrants etc
3. Work more closely with subject associations in recruitment campaigns and in the case of RE, faith and belief organisations, perhaps through the RE Council
4. Address inequalities in relation to the support of ECTs – so support Hubs for all, not just English, Maths, MFL, Computing etc.

What has been the impact of Bursaries and Scholarships?

1. The withdrawal of bursaries for RE deters people who want to train in RE who cannot afford the costs, especially mature entrants given there are so few salaried routes available for RE
2. Bursaries for others subjects draw graduates outside these specialisms, who might previously have applied for RE, towards bursary subjects.

Current system

1. Closer monitoring of ECT programmes needs to ensure the subject specific elements of the teacher standard are delivered to a high standard.
2. The diversity of training routes should be increased with more part time and more salaried/ apprenticeship routes supported.
3. Beyond the two ECT years, teachers need ongoing professional learning that is subject specific.
- 4.

Impact of the Early Career Framework

1. Teachers and leaders have given negative feedback about the ECF's impact on curriculum and subject knowledge.
2. A NATRE Flash survey showed ECT concerns that ECF could limit their flexibility in providing high-quality training for trainee teachers. Only 8% of current secondary ECTs described the subject specific aspects of the programme to be good. 2/3 of respondents described the programme as poor or very poor.
3. The implementation of the ECF needs to be closely monitored to ensure it is achieving its intended aims.
4. ECF may harm RE trainee teachers due to curriculum misalignment, limited professional development, and inadequate support from DfE for the teaching workforce.

1. Recommendation(s) that SACRE:

Consult with school leaders to collect information about:

- **whether challenges in recruitment of RE specialists affects Thurrock Schools**

- what strategies they have used to fill vacant posts, timetable slots e.g. changes to the curriculum, retraining teachers of other subjects, being involved in SCITTs (School centred initial teacher training) apprentice schemes etc?
- What impact the shortage of teachers has on provision for RE

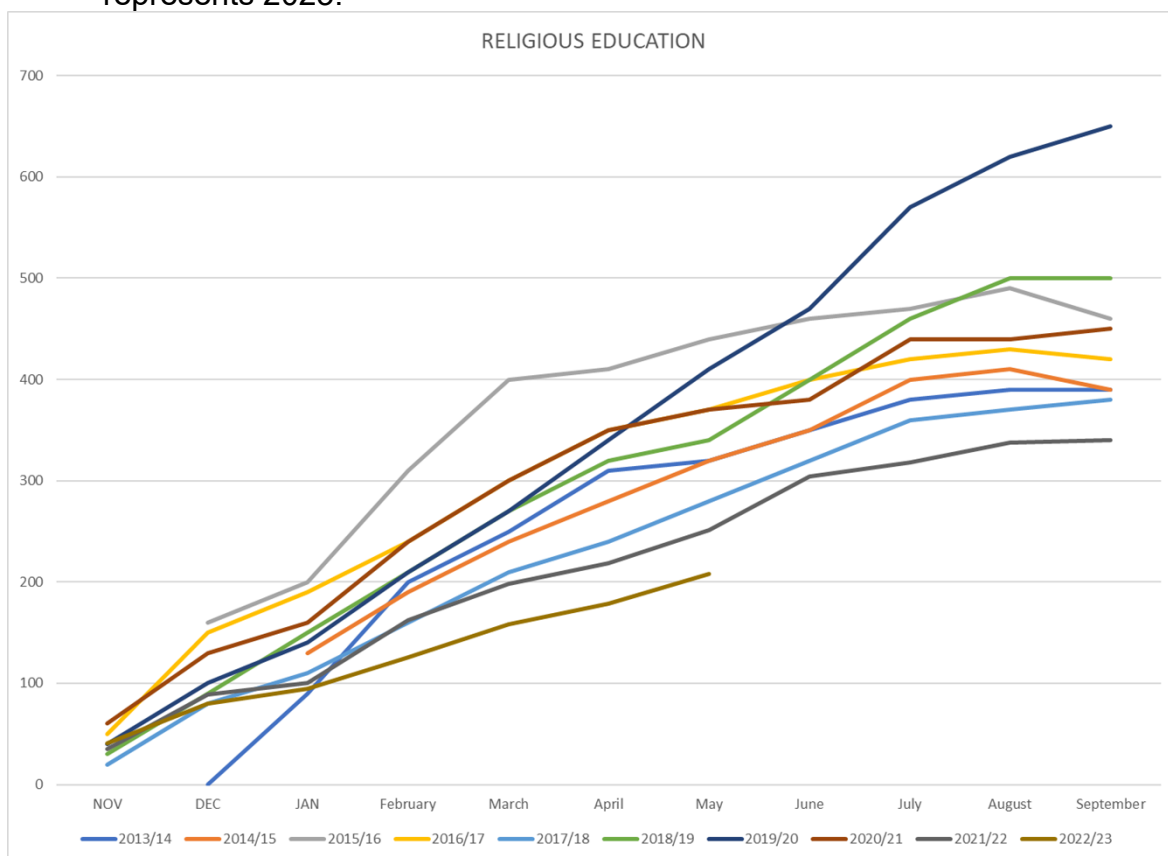
2. Introduction and Background

Section 391(1)(a) of the Education Act 1996 explains that one of the matters a SACRE may discuss is the supply of teachers and provision of teacher training. This item is presented to SACRE under this instruction.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

Evidence set out in this report and elsewhere supports the claim that there is a crisis in recruitment for teacher training at the moment and that this is particularly the case for Religious Education.

The diagram below from Prof John Howson of teachvac makes the situation very clear in comparison to other years. The brown line at the bottom represents 2023.



As lack of specialist teachers is a known issue in Thurrock (see survey data from data discussed at the Spring Term meeting), SACRE should investigate the extent to which it is having an impact on local schools and the provision of RE for pupils.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 Not applicable

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 Not applicable

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 The Local Authority reviews its Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education on a regular basis;

- Publishes an Annual Report of its work;
- Offers guidance on resources and methods of teaching and in consultation with Thurrock Schools;
- Monitors the quality of provision for RE and Collective Acts of Worship in Thurrock.

This exercise falls under the third element of this programme.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance

There are no financial implications to this report since the edits of the guidance was conducted by the Associate RE Adviser as part of her work

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Daniel Longe**
Principal Solicitor

The matters raised in this report and the recommendations made are within the remit and jurisdiction of the Council to approve. Section 391(1) of the Education Act 1996 expressly makes provision for SACREs to advise the local authority on such matters connected with amongst other things, the religious education to be given at a particular school, as SACRE may see fit. Therefore, these recommendations are within the remit of the local authority to approve.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project
Monitoring Officer

When there are insufficient specialist teachers to deliver RE, this will inevitably have an impact on the quality of Religious Education delivered or even on a school's capacity to deliver RE at all. This will reduce the capacity to celebrate the diversity in a school and local community. This in turn may have an impact on opportunities to develop respect and tolerance for those with beliefs that are different to their own.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder or Impact on Looked After Children

- Not applicable

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 – Recruitment and Retention of Secondary Teachers of RE 2023

Report Author:

Deborah Weston OBE
Associate Adviser for RE

Appendix 1: Recruitment and Retention of Secondary Teachers of RE 2023

The current situation regarding teacher recruitment and retention

1. What are the main factors leading to difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified teachers?

Government curriculum policies and use of performance measures

Since 2010, the unintended consequences of government policy is a decline in the status of RE e.g. omission of Religious Studies from the Humanities basket of the English Baccalaureate and consequential downgrading of the value of GCSE in performance measures including progress 8. The then Secretary of State for education, Michael Gove MP admitted to assuming that the subject's statutory place in the curriculum would protect it. It did not.

Removal of short course GCSE from performance tables

The removal of GCSE RS Short Course from the list of qualifications that can contribute to performance measures means the entries have fallen from 254,698 in 2010 to 18,257 in 2022. So, a staggering **236,441 fewer pupils** in England now leave school with an accredited qualification in Religious Studies and many of those will not have studied the subject past key stage 3. More than 500 schools (school workforce data) report offering zero hours of RE in Year 11 and thousands of others offer only a token amount of RE as part of a PSHE or Life programme.

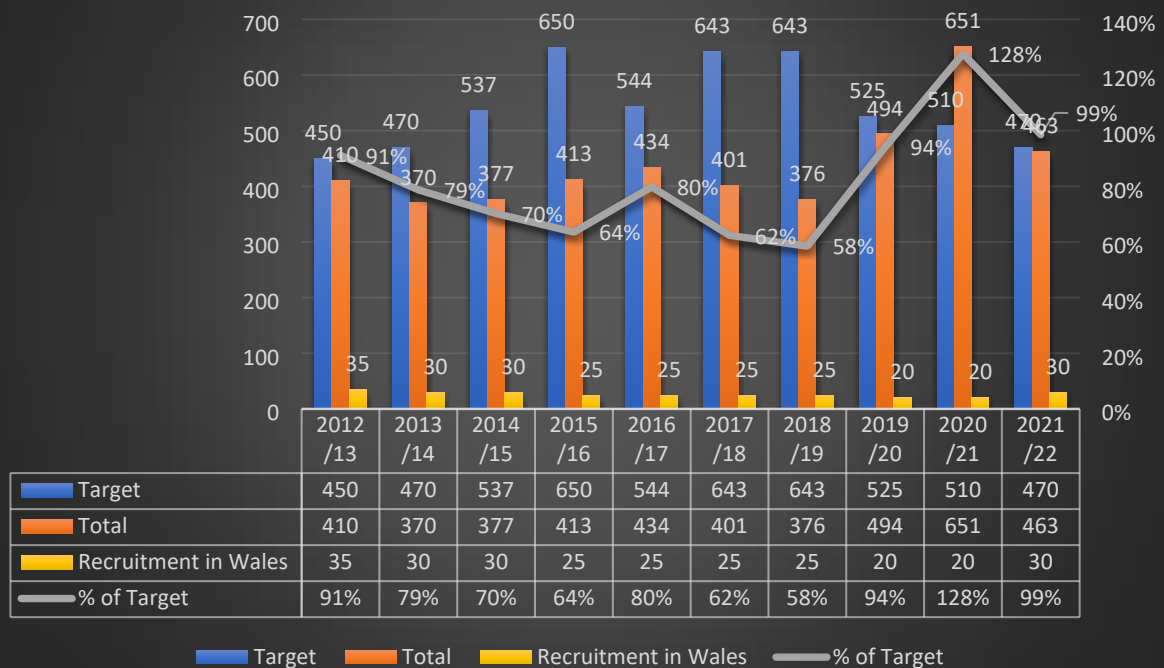
Decline in recruitment to Theology and Religious Studies Degrees

This lack of exposure to Religious Education for so many pupils, has obviously had an impact on recruitment to Theology and Religious Studies degree courses. At last count, there were only 1400 graduates from Theology and Religious Studies of whom around 10% follow a career in an education related subject. So with a pool of around 140 graduates, Religious Education needs to recruit from other graduate subjects including Philosophy, Social Sciences, Law and Education Studies for example. However, by failing to offer bursaries for RE trainees, graduates are deterred from training for RE because of the financial disincentives.

Lack of parity for subjects in relation to a training bursary

The RE community has campaigned for many years for a bursary. Even when one was offered, it was of a lower value to that for other subjects. When our campaigning drew attention to a long history of under recruitment to the target of around 650 trainees, the target was cut. Except for the year at the start of the pandemic, when most subjects recruited above expectations, the DfE has failed to meet its target for a decade.

Recruitment for Secondary Religious Education Specialists



Demand far exceeding supply

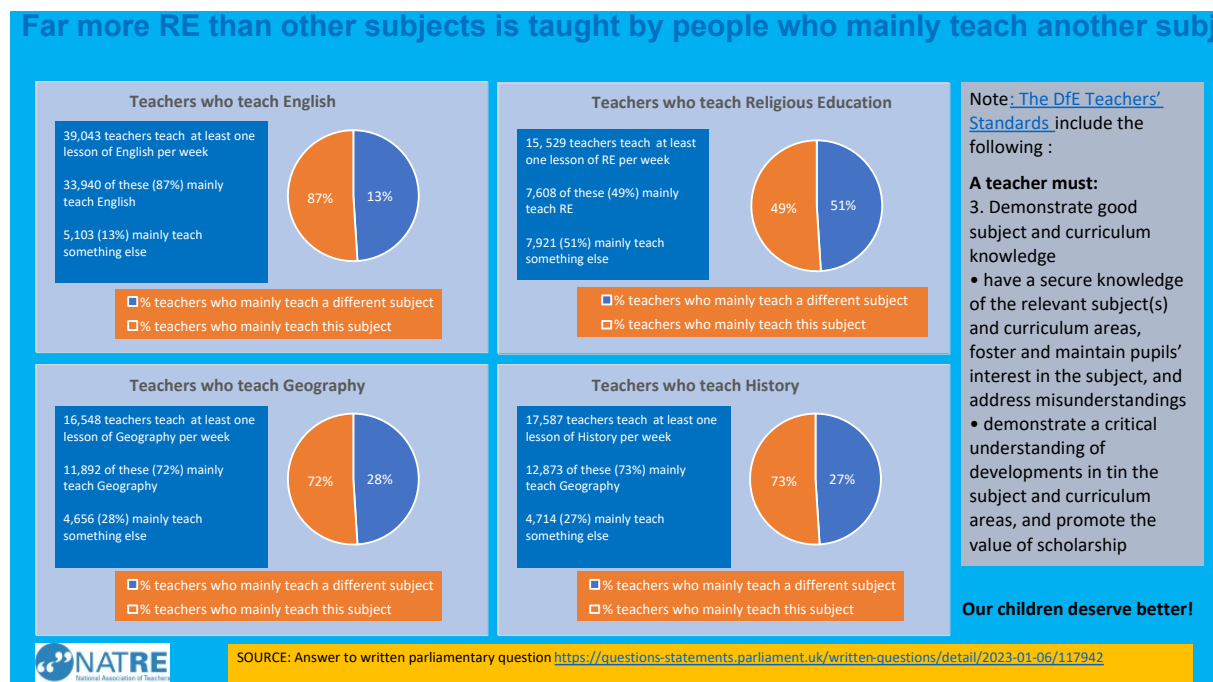
A count of advertised posts in May 2021 after the final resignation date for teachers in service, was over 100. Prof John Howson of TeachVac calculated that at this point in the school year, all but a handful of that year's trainees, who were seeking employment, had secured a post. The implications of this is that those 100 posts would have remained unfilled. In the last week of March 2022, almost 200 RE posts were advertised. See the regional distributions below, remembering that this is just one week of advertisements. Even though there are fewer trainees available in 2022/23, we can use the most recent published data to show how some regions are worse affected than others.

Row Labels	Advertisements in the region in the last week of March 2023	Trainees available 2021/22
East	7	28
East Midlands	17	18
London	39	137
North East	4	14
North West	25	84
South East	59	60
South West	11	41
West Midlands	20	54
Yorkshire and the Humber	14	39
Grand Total	196	475

2. Which subjects are most affected?

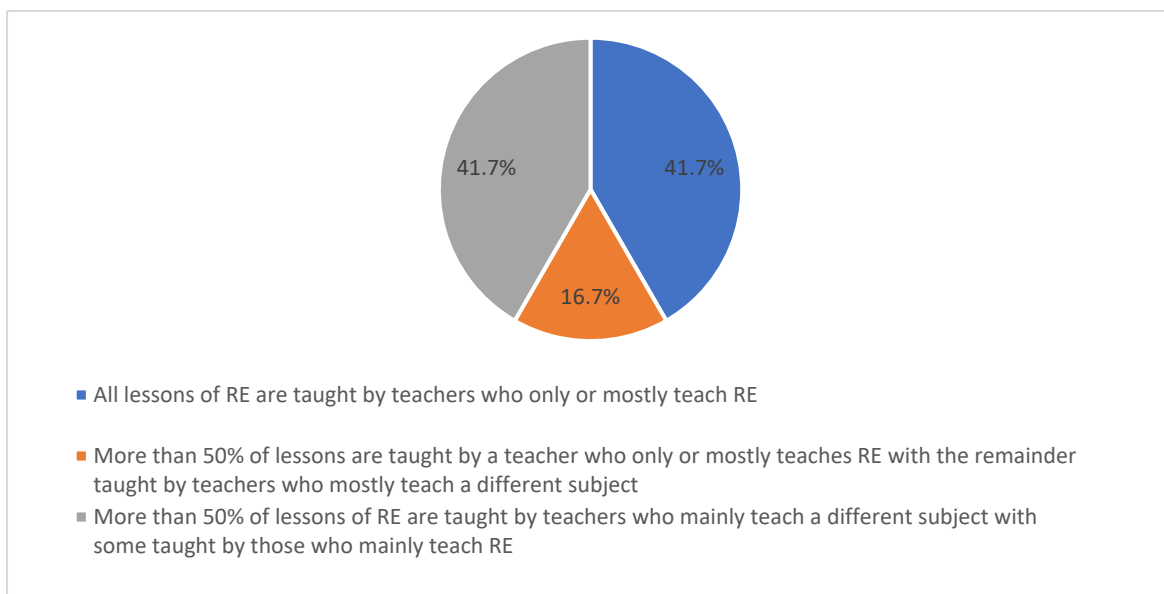
Religious education is listed as one of the subjects most likely to significantly under recruit this year by [NFER](#). In January 2023, according to the UCAS monthly data, applications for all subjects were down by 22% on the previous year and down by 32% for religious education.

Despite the government quoting high numbers of ‘teachers of RE ’in responses to questions by concerned MPs from across the political spectrum, these figures for the number of teachers of RE or even of the number of full time equivalent posts hides a vital fact. The DfE school workforce data counts a teacher of RE if they teach just one lesson of the subject per week. In this case, the total workforce is made up of far more teachers with other specialisms than most other subjects. The [NFER report of 2022](#) includes information about the number of non-specialists teaching at least ‘some lessons’ subjects like Maths (45%) Physics 39% and MFL (17%) but this year, the [minister for schools](#) admitted that according to the school workforce census, 51% of those teaching RE, spend most of their time teaching a completely different subject. This means that unlike the subjects above, where ‘some’ lessons are taught by non-specialists, in the case of religious education, MOST lessons are taught not just by non-specialists, who might have developed expertise in the subject through experience or further training, but by people who mainly teach another subject and might have a few lessons free on their timetable.



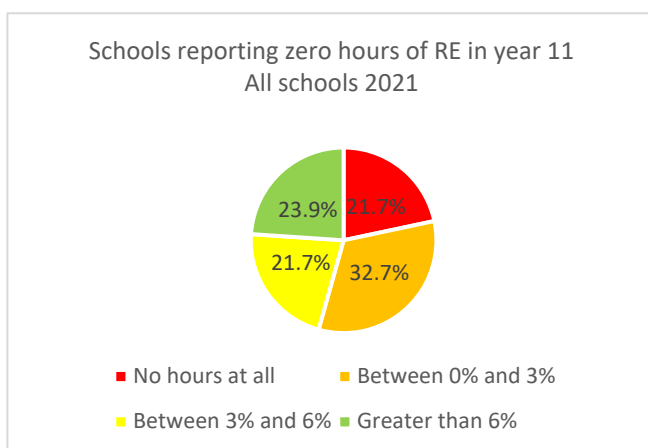
What is the situation in Thurrock?

The survey of Thurrock schools included in a report to the last meeting shows that in 41.7% of schools report that more than 50% of lessons are taught by teachers who mainly teach another subject.



School leaders then face an impossible choice. If they continue with their planned curriculum, they know that at best, the standard of delivery will not be as high as if a specialist or trained teacher were leading the lesson, they know that a teacher who mainly teaches another subject would be much less likely to be able to answer pupils' questions but at worst, they may provide inaccurate or even cause offence to pupils with religious or non-religious worldviews. [A report from members of the Hindu community](#) following a public survey, provides a useful source for evidencing this issue with accounts of the experiences of parents from a specific faith backgrounds.

Consequently, there has been a rapid increase in the number of schools that have removed discrete lessons of RE from their curriculum, instead offering much less ambitious programmes that combine PSHE, Citizenship and aspects of RE in a programme that does a disservice to all these subjects. A recent Ofsted school inspection report says this about the curriculum in one such school: *"Some curriculum plans are not ambitious enough. This means that pupils do not develop rich knowledge in some subjects. This is particularly the case in religious education, which is delivered through 'life' lessons. Leaders should ensure that curriculum plans are ambitious in all subjects, particularly religious education"*.



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In other schools, the subject has disappeared from the taught curriculum entirely, especially in years 10 and 11 (14-16 year olds).

This chart was constructed from the DfE school workforce census:

- How does the situation differ across the country and across different types of schools and colleges?

There appears to be a correlation between areas where there is a poor supply of specialist teacher training, particularly at higher education institutions and areas with shortages of RE teachers. The availability of school-led training places has not kept pace with the closure of HEI programmes where the number of suitable applicants has meant that group sizes are unviable. In the last round, around 75% of religious education teachers were trained in HEI institutions, however, there were significant variations between regions.

The table below provides an indication of the situation this year. Although we do not yet have the figures for the 2022-23 training year, the previous year's figures provide an indication of the likely pattern. However, fewer RE teachers are being trained in 2022-23 than 2021-22 so the situation is likely to be worse. It is clear that the situation in the South East and the East Midlands is particularly difficult with almost as many posts advertised as there will be new teachers in just one single week.

As of 21st April 2023, Prof John Howson of TeachVac calculated there have been 132 more posts advertised nationally than people, especially early career teachers, available to fill them. The evidence from training institutions is that almost all this year's recruits in RE and several other subjects, who are seeking a post, have secured one. This time last year, when the final closing date for serving teacher resignations had passed, over a hundred posts were advertised in one week but with virtually no one to apply for them.

Supply failing to meet demand

Row Labels	Number of advertised RE posts in the region in the first week of March 2023	Trainees available 2021/22 from that religion
East	7	28
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4. What impact does this have on pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND?

Ofsted subject reports over recent years has described the impact of the use of non-specialists to teach RE on the quality of provision. However, the DfE does not appear to include this factor in the teacher supply model.

There is [plentiful evidence](#) that Religious education/studies at examination level, is a subject with one of the smallest participation and attainment gaps between

disadvantaged pupils and their peers, in the curriculum. However, the lack of supply of specialist teachers is leading to fewer schools offering the subject at GCSE or A level. The deadlines of this research are as follows:

- a) Disadvantaged pupils less likely to be entered for GCSE Religious Studies than their peers
- b) Disadvantaged pupils twice as likely as their peers to choose RS at A level
- c) Attainment gap for A level RS at A*-E was the third smallest of all subjects
- d) Disadvantage gap for GCSE RS, narrowed with the introduction of 'reformed' specifications
- e) Religious Studies has a below average disadvantage and participation gap
- f) There is a close correlation between [areas with lower proportions](#) of people who identify on the census as belonging to a religion and lower levels of entry for GCSE RS. For example, in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, 81% of year 11 pupils are entered for a GCSE RS, but in Somerset and Wakefield

This suggests that when Religious Studies GCSE is not offered, disadvantaged pupils are affected to a greater degree.

5. What action should the Department take to address the challenges in teacher recruitment and retention?

- A) The DfE needs to take more account of the regional variations in supply and demand that affect recruitment in different subjects. In areas where Universities no longer train teachers, this has a direct impact on recruitment.
- B) Similarly, the age-profile of new recruits, varies between subjects and more mature students are less likely to be able to train when there is no bursary or salaried route or to travel large distances to find a provider offering such a programme.
- C) The TV and other advertisement rarely features images of classrooms other than science laboratories, which is less likely to attract a person considering subjects like Religious education, Art or Music for example. Careful attention needs to be paid to the target audience for recruitment campaigns in subjects. E.g. those working in Youth Work, particularly faith and belief-based activity, might be attracted by working through their national groups.
- D) New recruits need to know that they will be well supported throughout their training and early careers, especially in areas such as Religious education where subject knowledge is enormous and potentially contentious. Subjects should not be treated unequally, so for example, Mathematics, Languages and Science teachers can access support through subject Hubs. Religious education had to seek charitable trust funding to pilot regional hubs for teachers. [The Regional RE Hubs team is ready to go! \(natre.org.uk\)](#)

6. What has been the impact of the new bursaries and scholarships announced in October?

As the number of graduates in Theology and Religious Studies is insufficient to meet demand for RE trainee teachers, the subject needs to recruit from other subjects such as Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology, Education Studies and so on. However, when RE training does not attract a bursary or a scholarship, trainees are telling us that they need to train in a bursary subject for financial reasons, even when the subject they want to teach is RE.

TOP TEN DEGREES FOR SECONDARY RE TRAINEES IN 2020-21



Only 32% of the 633 trainees had a degree in Religious Studies, Theology or Theology and Religious Studies.