

An analysis of a survey of teachers on the impact of government policy on student opportunity to study GCSE RS

An Eighth Survey – July 2019

Introduction

This is an analysis of the data gathered from a questionnaire on impact of government policy including accountability measures and the English Baccalaureate on Religious Education. It relates particularly to the study of Religious Studies GCSE and seeks to make the case for more attention to be paid by the Department for Education (DfE) and its ministers to the level of provision and quality of Religious Education in all schools.

This eighth survey was conducted during the spring term of 2019 via a number of teacher networks supported by the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), and RE Today Services. The survey was publicised via social media networks and via the electronic networks of other RE organisations including AREIAC, AULRE, and NASACRE. Replies were received from 663 teachers. Respondents did not all respond to every question. Responses that are significantly different, according to school type of the respondent, have also been discussed.

Methodology

An on-line data gathering tool (Survey Monkey) was used to set a series of questions on the provision of RE in secondary schools. This is similar to surveys conducted in previous years and, where applicable, this report includes the previous data as a comparison. Questions were asked to collect key information about how the provision and support for RE might have changed in key stages three and four and about the respondents' views regarding the reason for the changes. It should be noted that due to the nature of the survey, it can be argued that respondents are more likely to be in schools where teachers of RE are employed since those who are not committed to RE would be less likely to take the time to complete the survey.

Conclusions

PROVISION:

- 1) **At Key Stage 4** almost 40% community and 50% of Academy schools without a religious character *do not meet their legal or contractual requirements* for RE (**Table 2**).
- 2) Our respondents reported that the legal requirement to provide religious education for all pupils is being met in more than 83% cases during **Key Stage 3**. According to this survey however, this level of compliance varies considerably according to type of school.
- 3) This data suggests that the past 12 months has been a rapid period of change for RE in schools *without a religious character* with 28% of community schools and almost 61% of academy schools without a religious character reporting a decrease in provision. This repeats the pattern reported in previous surveys and evidence that the funding agreement in academies is commonly breached. The body responsible for ensuring academies deliver on their funding agreements is the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) who have failed spectacularly to act despite plentiful evidence from the DfE of a systemic failure.
- 4) Almost one in three respondents reported that some parents withdraw pupils from Religious Education in their school. The reasons included: wishing their child to study a different area or spend extra time in a core subject, the parents stated they did not want their child to learn about any religion, about something specific within RE or about Islam in particular. Several of the reasons cited, are not consistent with the spirit of the legislation on this issue and if as several of our respondents claim, the withdrawal is initiated by the school that would contravene the letter of the law.

GCSE

- 5) **Entries -GCSE Religious Studies Full Course** continues to be well supported in the schools of our respondents. However, 16% of them reported that they made no entries for the Full Course in 2019. This is around half the number reported in 2018. (**Table 7**). In England overall, there was a small fall in entries for GCSE full course and a slightly larger fall in Wales. The difference in our results can be explained by the fact that our respondents are more likely to be in schools where RS is supported.
- 6) **Entries – GCSE Religious Studies Short Course**. In contrast however, the removal of GCSE Short Courses from the list of qualifications that contribute points to performance tables has inevitably led to a rapid decline in entries for this qualification. *More than 80% of respondents reported they will have no entries for GCSE Religious Studies at Short Course in 2018 or 2019 (Table 6)*.

Timetabling of and time for GCSE:

- 7) Where Religious Studies is an optional subject at Key Stage 4, our respondents report that a significant number of students then receive no Religious Education at all in Key Stage 4 – even though it is a statutory subject for all pupils in this key stage. 59% of students in year 10 and 64% in year 11, fell into this category. **Table 9**
- 8) There is a clear trend towards offering GCSE Religious Studies courses over three years instead of two, as has previously been the norm (**Table 10**). 42.2% of respondents reported that they delivered the full course in this way in 2015 and this has risen to 76% of schools in 2018-2019. You can read the results of our 2018 survey on this issue [here](#).
- 9) More than one in five respondents report that they attempt to deliver this course over *less than the recommended teaching time (Table 11)*. This represents an improvement on our previous survey when one in three schools attempted this feat. Nonetheless there is a growing body of evidence, including from Ofsted subject surveys, that this practice is detrimental to students' Religious Education; failing to meet the aims of GCSE courses which include developing a coherent understanding of religious beliefs, ideas and practices.

RE AS A SPECIALISM:

- 10) Subject specific training is essential for the delivery of high-quality provision in any subject. 38% of the schools that responded to this question reported that they had received no subject specific training in school in the last academic year. 48% reported that they had attended no training outside of school. The new Ofsted framework for inspection states that school leaders, including governing boards will be held to account during an inspection where lack of training for teachers has a negative impact on pupils. (Table 13)
- 11) In 58% of schools the number of specialist teachers of RE either remained stable or (in 13% of cases) increased (**Table 4**). In some schools however the number of specialists employed is falling. This was reported by more than a quarter of respondents.

12) Three quarters of respondents reported that RE was taught by teachers who spent most of their timetable teaching another subject. In 36% of cases more than 1 in 5 lessons is taught by these teachers. Part of the reason for this is lack of RE specialists in the workforce. (Table 5)

1. Types of school

Responses were received by teachers in the following type of school. Note that some respondents ticked more than one category.

Table 1 – Representation of school types in our responses.

Type of school	No.
Community	136
Academy with a religious character	55
Academy without a religious character	292
Free School	8
Grammar Schools	43
Independent School	57
Voluntary Aided (CE)	28
Voluntary Aided (other)	6
Voluntary Aided (RC)	48
Voluntary Controlled	8
Other (please specify)	37

2. Are legal requirements with regard to RE provision for all being met?

School Type	KS3				KS4			
	Yes	%*	No	%*	Yes	%*	No	%*
Community School	108	83.1%	22	16.9%	77	59.7%	52	40.3%
Voluntary Aided (RC)	42	91.3%	4	8.7%	43	93.5%	3	6.5%
Voluntary Aided (CE)	24	92.3%	2	7.7%	23	88.5%	3	11.5%
Voluntary Aided (other)	4	80.0%	1	20.0%	5	100.0%	0	0.0%
Voluntary Controlled	5	83.3%	1	16.7%	5	83.3%	1	16.7%
Academy with a religious character	51	100.0%	0	0.0%	46	90.2%	5	9.8%
Academy without a religious character	229	86.1%	37	13.9%	134	50.0%	134	50.0%
Grammar school	38	92.7%	3	7.3%	33	76.7%	10	23.3%
Independent school	44	91.7%	4	8.3%	34	69.4%	15	30.6%
Free school	7	87.5%	1	12.5%	5	62.5%	3	37.5%
Other (please specify)								
Table 2	31	91.2%	3	8.8%	24	70.6%	10	29.4%

*NOTE: Percentage is the % of that **school type** and NOT % of **all schools**. Where the number of responses from a school type is small, these figures have been greyed to indicate that this should not be taken as indicative of the situation in schools of that type.

Table 2 above shows that:

At Key Stage 3 (11-13 year olds)

- almost 17% (over 1 in 6) community schools are failing to meet legal requirements
- almost 14% of academy schools without a religious character are failing in this regard
- in schools and academies *with a religious character*, compliance with legal requirements at Key Stage 3 was over 90%.

A key stage 4 (14-16 year olds)

- more than 40% of community schools were failing to meet legal requirements at Key Stage 4. This is a rise from just over 34% in 2015-6.

- 50% of respondents in academy schools without a religious character do not meet their legal requirements at key stage 4 (14-16-year olds). This figure has not improved from a similar figure in 2015-16
- more than 88% respondents in schools with a religious character claim that legal requirements are met although, smaller numbers of responses in certain groups of schools of this type mean that too many claims should not be made about these figures.

3. Has there been an increase or decrease in the amount of RE that will be taught in 2018/2019 compared to 2017/2018?

Report (all school types)	Count	% of total
Decrease	139	24%
Increase	106	18%
No change	343	58%

School Type	Increase		No change		Decrease	
	Qty	%*	Qty	%*	Qty	%*
Community School	26	20.8%	64	51.2%	35	28.0%
Voluntary Aided (RC)	5	4.0%	35	28.0%	4	3.2%
Voluntary Aided (CofE)	6	4.8%	17	13.6%	3	2.4%
Voluntary Aided (other)	1	0.8%	1	0.8%	2	1.6%
Voluntary Controlled	0	0.0%	4	3.2%	1	0.8%
Academy with a religious character	12	9.6%	35	28.0%	3	2.4%
Academy without a religious character	43	34.4%	142	113.6%	76	60.8%
Grammar school	4	3.2%	28	22.4%	9	7.2%
Independent school	10	8.0%	30	24.0%	6	4.8%
Free school	3	2.4%	2	1.6%	2	1.6%
Other (please specify)	6	4.8%	17	13.6%	10	8.0%
*NOTE: Percentage is the % of that school type and NOT % of all schools						

Table 3(a) above and 3(b) right

This data suggests that the past 12 months has been a rapid period of change for RE in schools without a religious character. It is pleasing that almost 21% respondents reported an increase in the level of provision but 28% reported a decreased. Most worryingly however, **almost 61% of respondents in academies without a religious character reported a decline in provision**, repeating the pattern reported in previous surveys and evidence that the funding agreement in academies is commonly breached.

4. Has there been an increase or decrease in RE subject specialist staff for 2018/2019?

Report	Number of responses	% total
Decrease	167	28%
Increase	78	13%
No change	344	58%

Table 4

Table 4 shows that there is a continuing decline in the number of teachers who would be described as specialists. More than one in four respondents (28%) reported a decrease in staff. On the other hand, 13% report and increase. The net decline is therefore 15%

5. What proportion of the RE provision in your school is delivered by teachers whose main time is spent in another curriculum area?

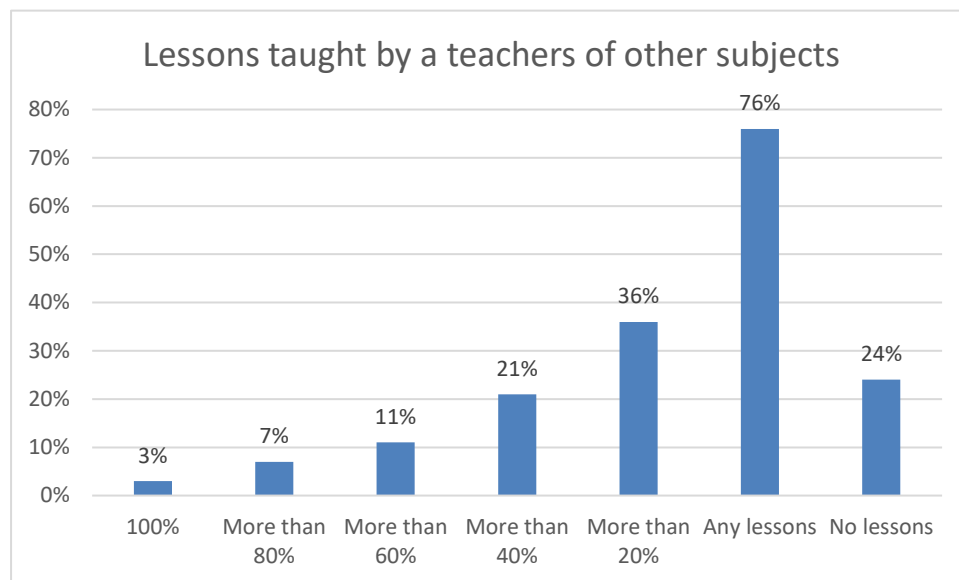


Table 5 (left) shows that three quarters of respondents reported that RE was taught by teachers who spent most of their timetable teaching another subject. In 36% of cases more than 1 in 5 lessons is taught by these teachers. Part of the reason for this is lack of RE specialists in the workforce.

In 3/4 of schools, these teachers teach some Religious Education. These teachers are not those who teach a number of subjects for a significant part of their timetable but instead those with a small number of unfilled lessons.

Even though the government finally reintroduced bursaries for teachers training in 2018-19 to teach RE, these bursaries were significantly below the value offered to those training to teach other subjects.

This finding is consistent with the data provided by the Department for Education's own School Workforce Survey which found that over half of those teaching Religious Education had no post A level qualification in the subject; almost twice as many as for History for example.

6. Entries for Year 11 students for the GCSE Short Course – past and current

Table 6 – What proportion of the Year 11 cohort has been or will be entered for GCSE short course?

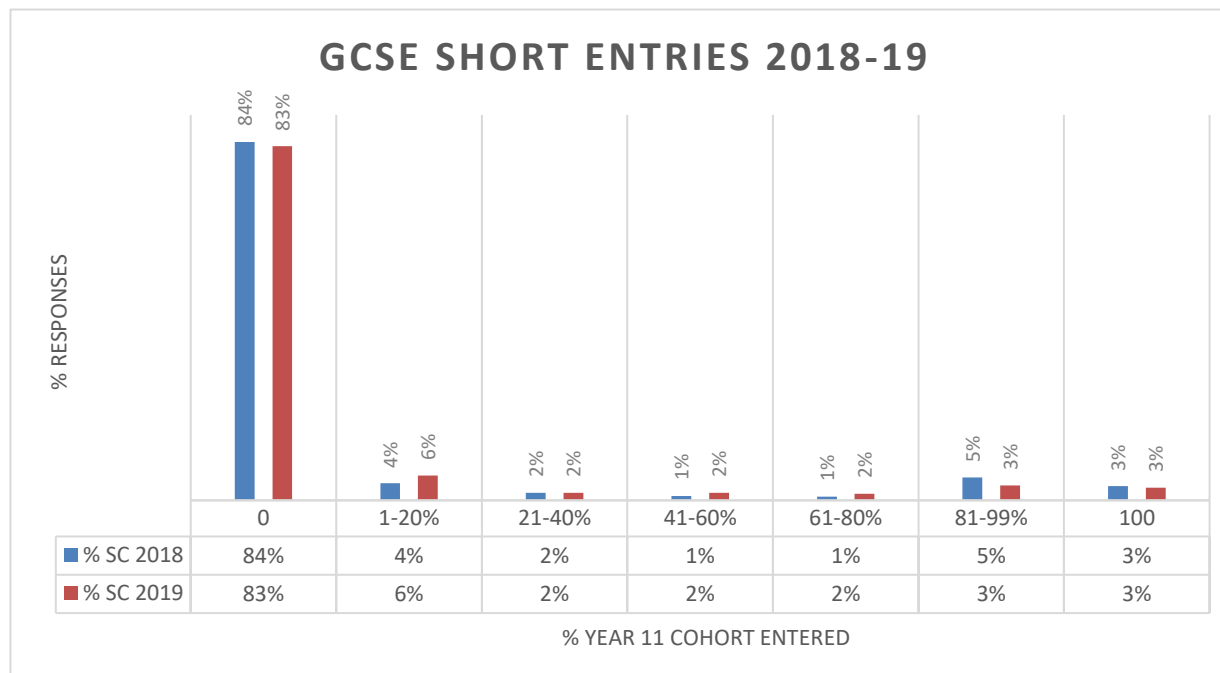
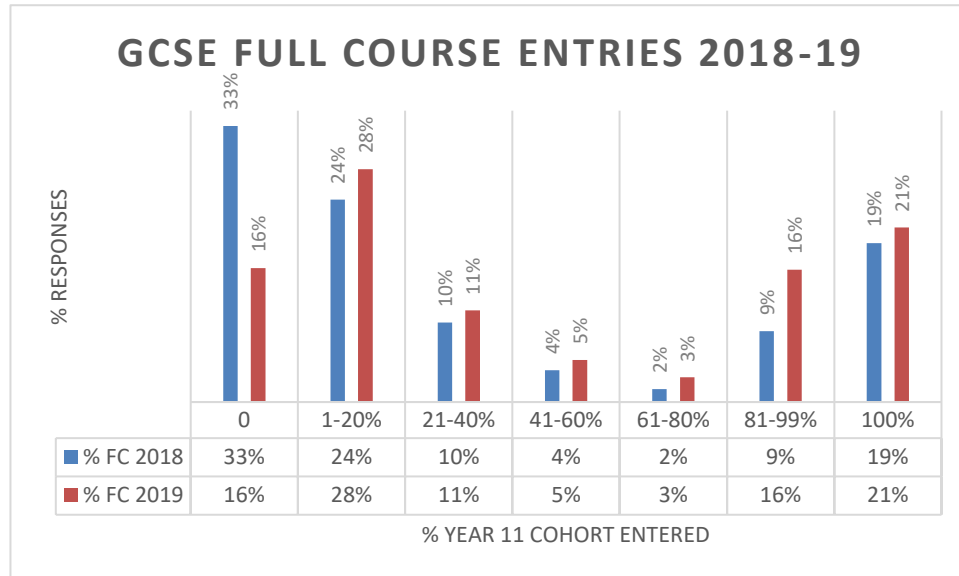


Table 6 shows that entries to the short course Religious Studies have continued to fall. The number of schools now entering no students at all for this course is now 83%. Schools responding to the survey reported two reasons for this. Firstly, the impact of the English Baccalaureate meaning that there is less time on the key stage 4 timetable and secondly the removal of short course from the list of qualifications which counted in a school’s average point score from 2014.

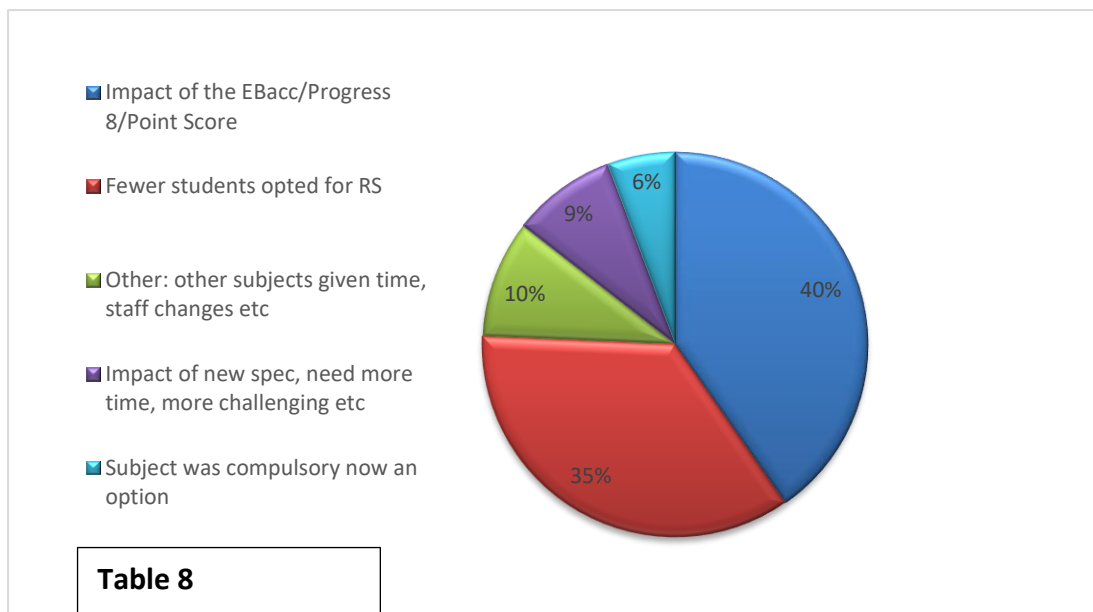
The short course grew in popularity over the past ten years, particularly because it provided a formal accreditation for the core RE provision which all students should receive throughout their school careers, including key stage 4. For those students who do not wish to take a full course, it proved a powerful motivator to take their studies in RE seriously and rewarded those who worked hard with a GCSE grade. GCSE short course is awarded at the same standard as full course, but covers half the content, hence it is worth half a GCSE.

7. Proportion of year 11 cohort entered for the GCSE Full Course – past and current

In contrast, the full course remains popular with more entries than last academic year.



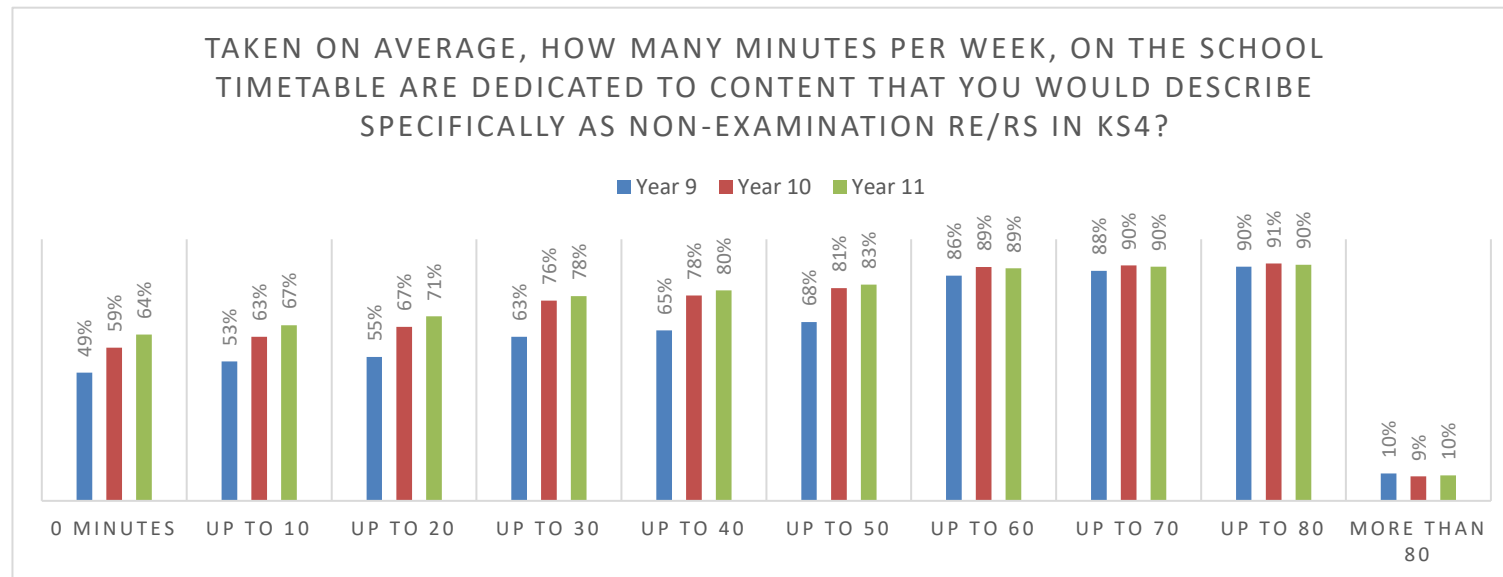
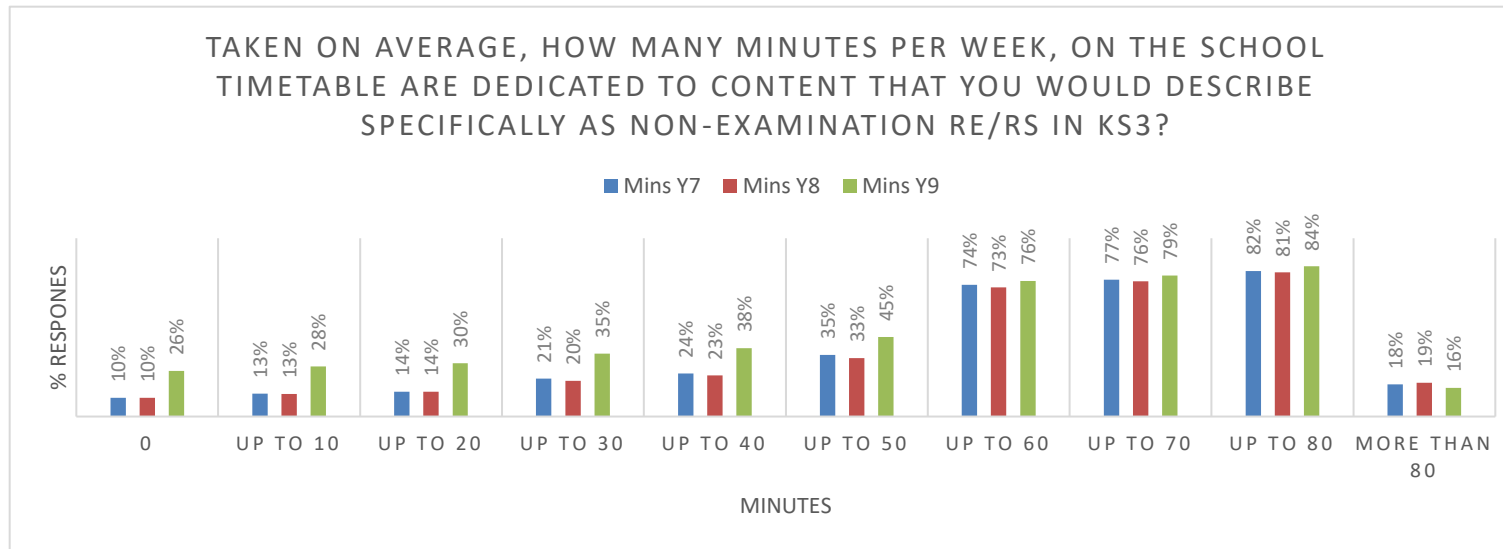
8. Where there has been, or is expected to be, a drop in GCSE Full Course entries; what is the main reason?



The EBacc was regarded as the most significant reason for the drop in full course entries, followed closely by the fact that fewer students opted for the subject and changes to school performance measures.

One in five respondents wanted to suggest different reasons. Most of these were related to the issues above but also to concerns about the reformed GCSE. The picture painted by the data is that when schools realised that they could no longer deliver the full course on short course time, they transferred the subject from a core subject to an option. With RS not counting in the EBacc 'baskets' of the Progress 8 score, RS GCSE found itself competing with a large number of other option subjects including the arts and design and technology. This in turn led to many courses becoming unviable.

9.



Given that RE must, by law, be taught to all pupils on the school roll, if GCSE RS is an option, you would expect schools to provide core RE for those that do not choose the examination course.

The table below left shows that this is not the case. In year 11 for example, 64% offer no recognisable RE provision outside the examination course.

Table 9 a(above)
Table 9b (below)

10. Changes to the way the GCSE full course is delivered

Table 10

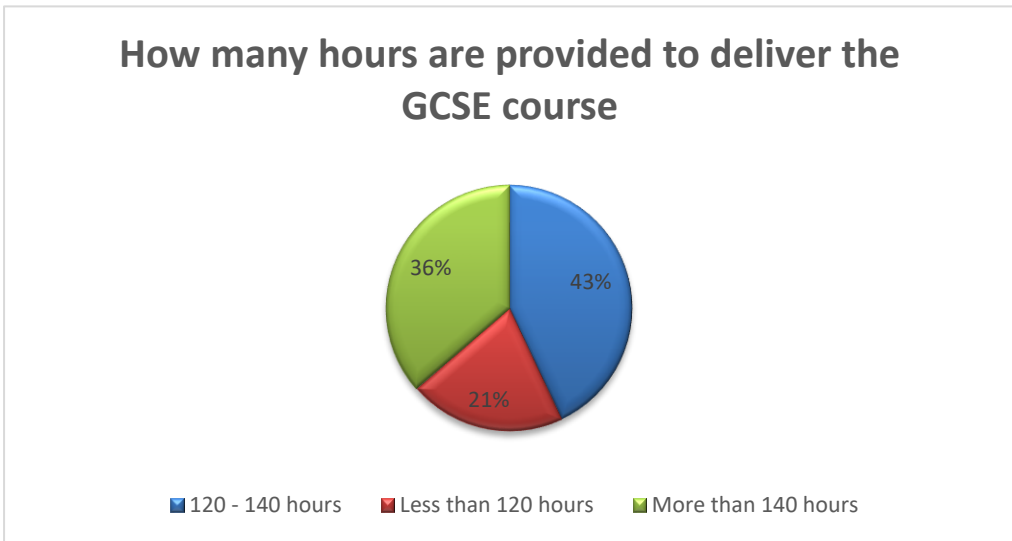
How is the GCSE Full Course delivered?	2015-16	2018-19
1/3 of time over 3 years (starting in Year 9)	38.5%	76%
1/2 of time over 2 years (starting in Year10)	61.5%	24%

In the three years leading to the last survey, we reported a significant trend towards offering the GCSE course over three years instead of two, as had previously been the norm. By 2018-19, more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of respondents stated the GCSE was delivered over three years instead of two.

11. How much time is offered for GCSE RS examination courses?

GCSE Full course	2018-19
Fewer than 120 hours	21%
120 - 140 hours	43%
More than 140 hours	36%

Table 11: How much time is allocated to GCSE RS over the course?

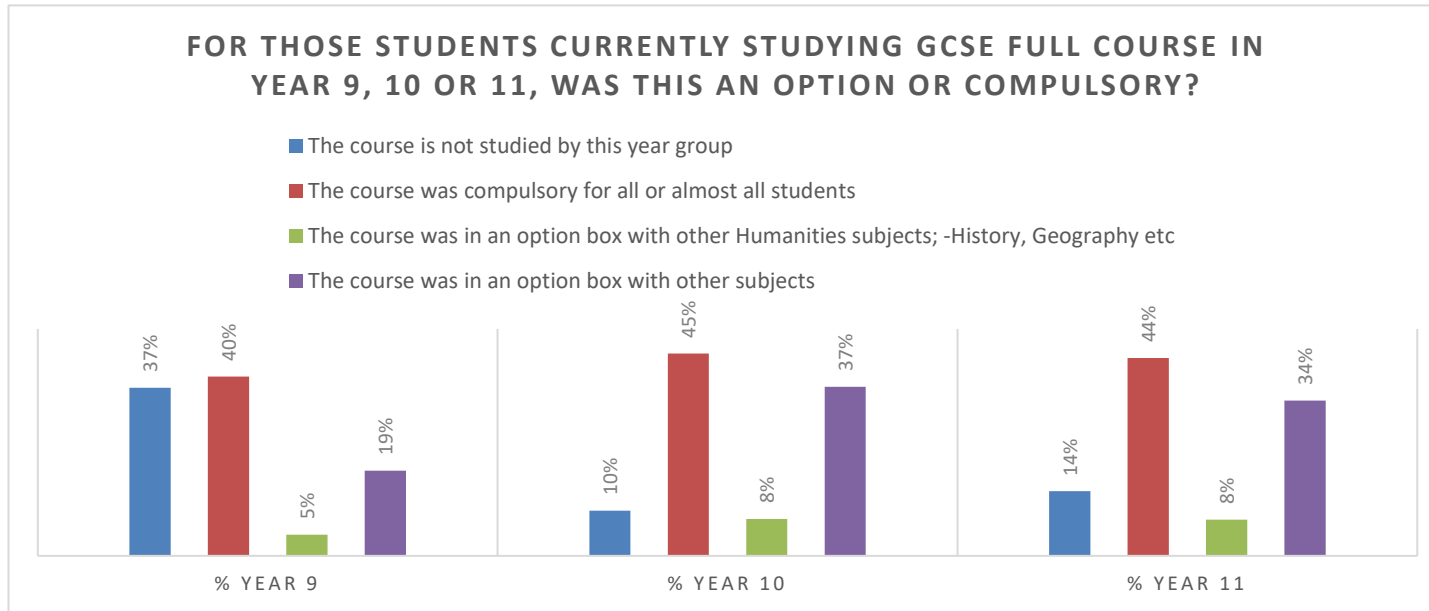


GCSE Full Course specifications are designed to be taught over a period of 120-140 learning hours. This is one of the criteria used by Ofqual when approving a specification for teaching to ensure that each GCSE is, as far as is possible, of equal demand. It is clear that some schools are not providing the same amount of time for each subject and 3/4 of schools offering the full course on a three-year route are expecting candidates to be prepared for an examination in RS with less time than the course demands. In some cases, teachers feel under pressure to deliver a Full Course in the time Ofqual expects for a Short Course. We conducted a small scale research into the impact of this practice in July 2018. You can read the results [here](#).

Ofsted has also commented on this pattern of delivery and found that in some cases, the quality of Religious Education provided for students is unsatisfactory, even when the examination results are good or even outstanding. Students can be provided with a concentrated exam-driven course which does not meet the aims of the specifications in terms of their learning in the subject.

12. Where GCSE is offered, is it an option or compulsory?

Table 12



Around 45% of our respondents reported that RS is compulsory for all pupils at Key Stage 4. This is common practice in schools with a religious character. In more than a third of schools, GCSE Religious Studies is an option. Note that the evidence in table 9 above is that in almost two thirds of the schools that make RS an optional GCSE, there is no other provision for the subject and pupils who do not opt for GCSE RS, effectively end their Religious Education at the end of year 9 (age 13) or even year 8 (age 12).

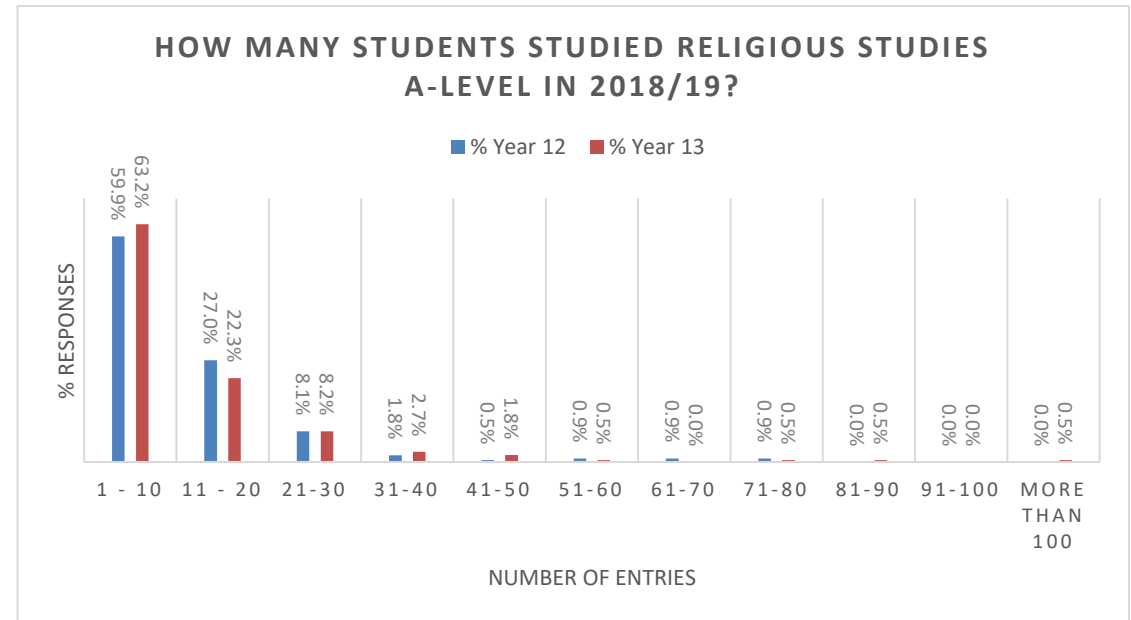
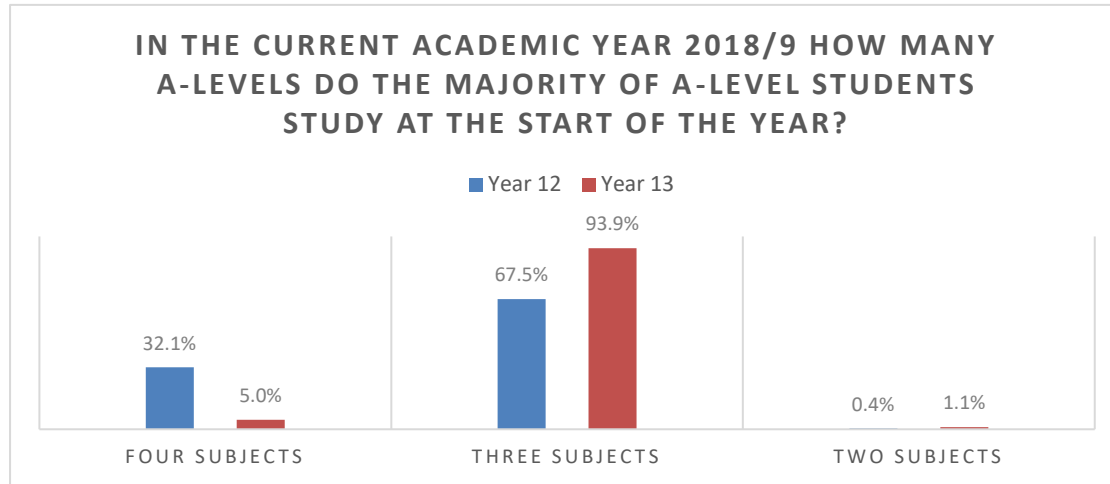
13. How much training in Religious Education did teachers receive in the academic year 2018-2019?

48% of respondents reported that they had received no subject specific training in school in the last academic year (Table 13a). In addition, 62% reported that they had attended no training outside of school (Table 13b). It is difficult to understand how these teachers are able to keep up to date with their subject; research, pedagogies and develop their subject knowledge with so little training. This must surely have an impact on outcomes for students. The language of new Ofsted framework for inspection suggests that school leaders, including governing boards will be held to account during an inspection where lack of training for teachers has a negative impact on pupils.



Table 13a above
Table 13b below

14. How many students study A level Religious Studies?



15. Are any pupils withdrawn from RE by their parents?

School Type	Yes		No	
	Qty	%	Qty	%
Community School	40	42.6%	54	57.4%
Voluntary Aided (RC)	2	6.5%	29	93.5%
Voluntary Aided (CofE)	6	28.6%	15	71.4%
Voluntary Aided (other)	0	0.0%	3	100.0%
Voluntary Controlled	4	80.0%	1	20.0%
Academy with a religious character	12	33.3%	24	66.7%
Academy without a religious character	68	33.5%	135	66.5%
Grammar school	8	22.9%	27	77.1%
Independent school	5	12.5%	35	87.5%
Free school	2	40.0%	3	60.0%
Other (please specify)	10	45.5%	12	54.5%
Total	157	31.7%	338	68.3%

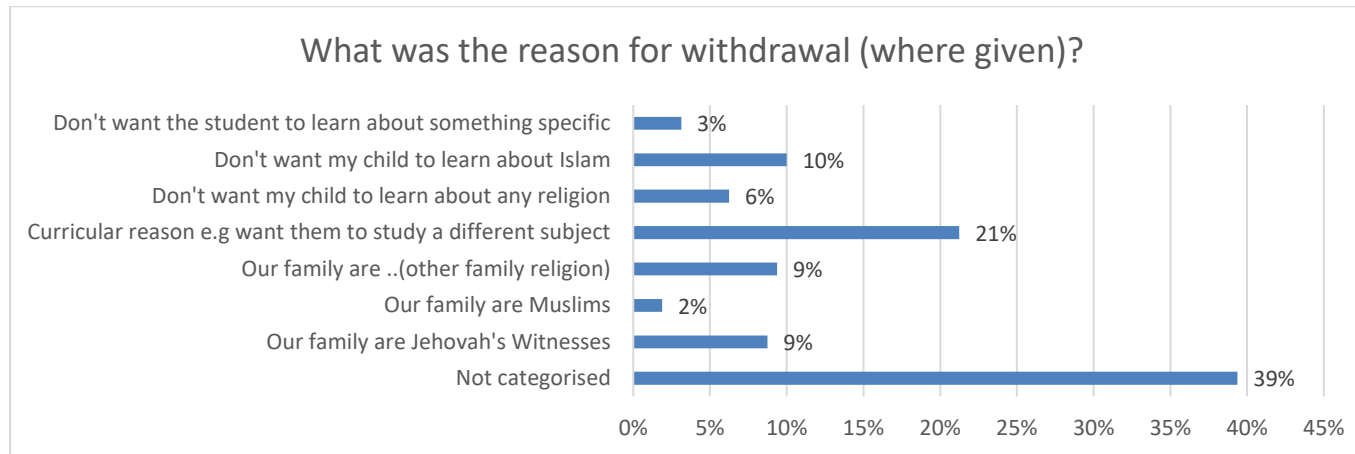
Almost one in three respondents reported that parents withdraw pupils from Religious Education in their school.

Many of the reasons given were individual and could not be categorised. A number of themes emerged. For example, in one in five cases, pupils had been withdrawn for a curricular reason, such as wishing their child to study a different area or spend extra time in a core subject. It is not clear if these cases were initiated by the parent or the school **but they are not reasons for withdrawal that are meant by the law and should not be granted by the school.**

In another one in five cases, the family religion was cited as the reason for the withdrawal.

In almost one in five cases, the parents stated they did not want their child to learn about any religion, something specific within RE or about Islam.

16. Why were pupils withdrawn (where this information was provided)?



As Head of RS I am having to 'fight' for parity in teaching time despite students regarding RS highly and equal to other Humanities subjects. I feel this is direct impact of the Ebacc.

[RE is being] absorbed into a 60min weekly life skills lesson

Following becoming an academy, SLT have made decisions which have resulted in a reduction of RS at KS4. ... I am very concerned about the way that SLT has interpreted the law with regard to RS.

“... going back into the KS3 curriculum as a discrete subject ...[has] impacted on students understanding of the world had a big impact on their progress.”

I feel strongly that the success of RE is based upon the value of the subject from the SLT team... It would be great to see the importance and relevance taught to heads.

New Headteacher School has stopped offering GCSE RS to all”

For the 2018-2019-year, year 7 RE was placed on a carousel of subjects with Art, DT and Music. Pupils have 3 lessons a week for 9 weeks before they are rotated. In September 2019, I will be teaching year 9 students who will not have been taught any RE for 10 months. This is in addition to the school not teaching any RE/RS to KS4 unless they opted for it.

My school dropped the subject as compulsory in which all students took it as a GCSE (330 students per year) and have made it an option. As a result of this, we lost 3 specialist teachers and now only teach 68 year 11 and 67 year 10. This is because the school have pushed the ebacc and did not make RE available to all students as an option

The exclusion of RS from the EBacc is an impoverishment of the education provision and therefore detrimental to young people not being exposed to the study of existential questions

My school breaks the law and nothing is being done about it.

R.E. is not valued in my school because it is not a Baccalaureate subject. History or Geography are compulsory. Science, English and Maths are valued and both students and parents are led to believe that is all that matters. This affects every aspect of RE in Years 9, 10 and 11.

Many academies have a watered-down version of RE at Ks3 called Life and little religion is studied.

When I joined 8 years ago there were three teachers and the whole cohort of KS4 studied RS. EBACC and points systems for GCSEs mean RS and short course is not valued as a subject as much as other Humanities subjects. Consequently, it is understandable that schools focus less time on RS as a subject at KS3 combining one 100-minute lesson with PSHE for all students. Pressures to focus on core subjects at KS4 mean there is not timetabled time for RS. We do have Personal Development days - 5 a year that cover citizenship for KS3 and some PSHE as well for KS4.