

The RE Policy Unit is a strategic partnership between the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE), the Religious Education Council (REC) and RE Today as three key stakeholders with a shared interest in public relations activity in support of in religious education (RE) in schools.

Development Plan 2020-2024:

Our overall aim: To secure high quality education in Religion and Worldviews for all pupils in all schools, taught by well qualified and trained teachers.

The four main areas of focus for our work for the period 2020-2024:

1. Building consensus about the vision of the Commission on RE: the need for action and the case for a focus on religious and non-religious worldviews
2. Improving public perception and developing more appreciation of the nature of R&W and its importance in a broad and balanced curriculum
3. Investing in raising the standard of the workforce: to ensure all children in all schools are taught Religion and Worldviews by well trained and qualified teachers
4. Securing space for education in religion and worldviews in school curriculums: so that all children in all schools receive high quality provision that is consistent with a statement of National Entitlement for the subject.

Examples of activity and achievements since the publication of the Commission on RE in 2018

This report aims to capture the activities of the RE Council, NATRE and RE Today, working individually and together towards the overall aim above. It will also reference and acknowledge projects undertaken by other REC member organisations that make valuable contributions to each of the focus areas listed.

Focus Area 1 – Broad Consensus	Activities and achievements
<p>1. A broad political and sector consensus on (a) the issues that necessitate action on RE by the government and its agencies and (b) on the first steps of a national plan for RE set out below</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A launch event for the CoRE (Commission on RE) was held in Westminster on 12th September 2018 ➤ Westminster Hall Debate held on Monday, 17th December 2018. Reported in Hansard here. ➤ REPU are currently updating the RETHinkRE website to act as a focus for all things R&W. ➤ Development of a stakeholder map to help target parliamentarians, not just for their interest in RE and/or positions of influence but also to include those with an interest in some of our key ‘asks’ e.g. teacher training, curriculum balance, community integration etc. ➤ Regular meetings with DfE and MHCLG to lobby for action by government. Monitoring of government initiatives to identify targets for specific lobbying e.g. The early career framework and core induction programme ➤ Multiple meetings and engagement with parliamentarians, councillors and their staff; face to face, virtual, at party conferences, by email, letter and on social media ➤ Under the leadership of NASACRE, Four SACREs have now embarked on their research project around the CoRE recommendations on Local Advisory Networks (LANs). Bath and North East Somerset SACRE is researching how their agreed syllabus review would need to change, to take account of CoRE’s national entitlement statement. Richmond SACRE is researching how to widen SACRE/ LAN’s membership, thinking about the principles and structure that need to be in place for community cohesion/an effective LAN to work well.

	<p>Hampshire SACRE is researching and writing about the role of democratic voice in a LAN/SACRE – what could be lost, what is important to keep.</p> <p>Barking and Dagenham SACRE is researching the impact of RE CPD in an LA. B&D SACRE applied for a NASACRE Westhill award to finance this CPD provision.</p>									
<p>2. Increased knowledge and understanding of:</p>										
<p>a. the vision for RE proposed in the CoRE final report including a statement of entitlement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Working with RE-Online, a series of blogs were published exploring the impact of the new paradigm on teachers, advisers and lecturers. ➤ Significant engagement from teachers and trainers in the conversation around religion and worldviews. This engagement includes blogs and articles by teachers, advisers and academics on the impact of R&W for curriculum planning and design ➤ The NATRE Annual Conference in January 2021: Strictly RE had Religion and Worldviews as its central theme. RE Today published curriculum books reaching all NATRE members in May 2021 and RE Today magazine 2019, focused on religion and worldviews. ➤ R&W project has attracted a large number of people from the RE Community to join in the conversation via online events in January 2021, these focused on the discussion papers and a literature review led by a team of academics. You can read about these events here: Session 1: What’s all the fuss about? Session 2: Is Worldviews the answer? Session 3: Faith and belief traditions as Worldviews ➤ REPU aims to learn from a project led by The University of Strathclyde which been awarded a grant by CSTG for a project which aims to promote a new vision for Religion and Worldviews (R&W) education establishing the intellectual rigour of the subject in current and educational research. 									
<p>b. the value of the subject as part of a broad and balanced curriculum</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Policomms have helped use the stakeholder maps to Target MPs. 52 PQ and written answers have been asked about RE by 22 different parliamentarians as follows. <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%;">➤ Teacher training and qualifications 7</td> <td style="width: 33%;">➤ Covid -exams 3</td> <td style="width: 33%;">➤ CoRE 6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>➤ Race, equality, anti Semitism & RE 5</td> <td>➤ Compliance 5</td> <td>➤ Terrorism and Extremism 2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>➤ SACREs and LAS 3</td> <td>➤ Standards 3</td> <td>➤ Curriculum 17</td> </tr> </table> ➤ Meetings with parliamentarians e.g. MPs: Wes Streeting, Janet Daby, John Healey, Robert Halfon with follow up activities agreed on each occasion. ➤ As well as promotion of the CoRE report, REPU has attracted media coverage based on public examination release days, the NATRE Primary and Secondary surveys, the Theos Report -Professor Trevor Cooling’s Article in the Church Times, October 2020 – “A quiet revolution in school RE” 	➤ Teacher training and qualifications 7	➤ Covid -exams 3	➤ CoRE 6	➤ Race, equality, anti Semitism & RE 5	➤ Compliance 5	➤ Terrorism and Extremism 2	➤ SACREs and LAS 3	➤ Standards 3	➤ Curriculum 17
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ As an example: NATRE secondary survey attracted coverage in 25 different outlets, including TES, Schools Week, Church Times, The Tablet, Premier, 14+ regional outlets, LBC (Fiona Moss interview) UCB Radio (Ben Wood interview) ➤ Attended Party Conferences each year before Covid. Ran a competition with chocolate prizes to attract conference delegates to the stand. A significant success in 2019 was the discussion with school’s minister Nick Gibb MP about a complaint from a parent at an academy– leading to it being resolved. No PC in Sept 2020 due to Covid. ➤ 11th December 2020: Through the REC, we encouraged member organisations to respond to the MHCLG’s Faith Engagement Review and answer the question about Religious Education by drawing attention to the evidence and recommendations in the CoRE here. ➤ Several members of REPU are also members of Ofsted’s subject group and are attending regular meetings to support the subject lead for RE; Dr Richard Kueh HMI. Training of inspectors in relation to the 2019 Framework is on-going and the research review for RE will be published in mid-May. The next part of the work will be a subject report. Dr Kueh has addressed the NATRE executive, the REC AGM, the Strictly RE conference 2021 for teachers and other groups with 380 delegates. ➤ In addition to this specific work – we have held regular meetings with other Ofsted officials to discuss inspector training, Deep Dives, the use of school workforce data to inform the ISDR (individual school data report). Here are examples of Primary exemplar ISDR and a Secondary exemplar ISDR
Focus Area 2: Improved Public Perception	
<p>1. There is evidence of changing public attitudes towards RE within the British public</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ April 2021: Working with media consultants 3:nine , we have agreed role descriptions for Champions in their respective fields e.g. Headteachers/ MAT CEOs, Governors, Parliamentarians, Parents, Young people. We hope these roles will help us lobby from inside these key stakeholder groups. ➤ AREIAC are working with the REC on the Young Ambassadors Programme. Plans are in place to ensure the Young Ambassadors can support lobbying for RE. ➤ Media coverage has been generated on a number of topics supported by 3:nine. Examples include: Ofsted Inspection Framework (cautiously welcoming the development and linking it to the CoRE recommendations). Coverage was generated in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 03.06.19 - Premier Radio (Ben Wood interview) • 03.06.19 – Premier online • 04.06.19 – UCB Radio (Ben Wood interview) • 09.06.19 – BBC Local Radio station x 11 (Ed Pawson interviews) ➤ REPU press release for each year’s GCSE and A level results days. Focusing on our key messages.

Focus Area 3: the workforce	
<p>1. A greater proportion of the teaching of religion and worldviews is taught by highly qualified, and knowledgeable teachers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Parliamentary Luncheon with Chartered College, 4/7/19 was an opportunity to bring together teacher unions, the Chartered College, REPU and parliamentarians to lobby for change in issues to do with the school workforce. ➤ Use of data with stakeholders to evidence issues with the workforce – including the school workforce data. We have presented each MP who comes to our stand at the party conference with a spreadsheet showing levels of ➤ This target received a boost in September 2020 when 633 trainees began their training as teachers of RE.
<p>a. There should be a minimum of 12 hours of contact time for Religion and Worldviews for all forms of primary ITE including School Direct and other school-based routes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ NATRE survey on teacher confidence in how and what to teach in RE provides clear evidence of the need for this training. An letter has been drafted that REPU hopes to circulate to REC member organisations and others for signature, calling for this change. Preparation for this initiative involve meetings this month with DfE officials and appointees who are leading the initial teacher training market review to determine the best approach.
<p>b. The recruitment of secondary teachers of RE should be supported through training bursaries for ITT in Religion and Worldviews and Subject Knowledge Enhancement courses (SKE)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ We managed to get training bursaries reinstated by demonstrating that subjects that met their recruitment targets were getting larger bursaries than RE where there was a significant shortfall. Now RE has met the target we need to illustrate issues with the nature of the RE teaching workforce -e.g., secondary RE being taught by teachers who spend most of their time teaching other subjects and the wide geographical variations in the availability of specialist ITT and applicants for RE posts. ➤ Sadly, the bursaries were withdrawn again in most subjects including RE for 2021-2022 training. NATRE promoted a successful campaign to secure school placements for trainee teachers of RE during the pandemic when it became clear that lack of placements could reduce the number of trainees. It was really good news that the number of trainees recruited for 2020-21 was the highest in a decade. We have reinforced the message that the SKE courses are still needed using a freedom of information request which generated this data and this article. A third of trainees for this current year do not have a degree in either Theology, Religious Studies or Theology and Religious Studies.
<p>c. allocate funding for CPD for Religion and Worldviews to raise the level of expertise of the workforce -especially primary teachers who had limited RE input in the ITE and secondary teachers with other specialisms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The R&W project resulted in significant numbers of teachers attending the online events. Since this time, REC directors have made themselves available to speak with local group e.g. Rachael Jackson-Royale’s group last month. ➤ Lobbying continues to challenge the DfE to provide funding for CPD in RE. The curriculum fund was an obvious target for this funding but disappointingly, the pandemic has resulted in the decision to direct resources to catch up programmes in core subjects – even though they have been the main recipients of this funding already. Parliamentary questions are planned in this area.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Another opportunity for input into government initiatives in relation to teacher training in RE includes the new early career framework and associated programmes. These were published this month and meetings are planned to explore opportunity for achieving our goals.
Focus Area 4: the curriculum	
A greater proportion of pupils receive their entitlement to high quality RE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The current Ofsted Inspection Framework is focusing minds on the curriculum. There are early indications that this approach is boosting the place of RE in primary schools with a significant number of Deep Dives being reported. In secondary schools, attention to RE has been inconsistent, with some schools achieving or retaining outstanding status when provision for RE did not fulfil the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus or Academy Funding Agreement. There is a new HMI subject lead who is working on a research review for RE and who is engaged in the training of OIs. ➤ Evidence from the most recent NATRE primary survey shows that there is an increase in curriculum time for RE
a. commissioning research into the reasons for and extent of non-compliance with legislation on RE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Working with NASACRE on FOI to measure levels of support for local SACREs. Interesting results which will be shared at the NASACRE AGM in May (PS and DW workshop) ➤ Spring 2021: Working with CSTG by learning from Grant Funded Projects that explore issues related to advocacy and public perception e.g. ➤ Faith and Belief Forum/ Open University/ Inform Collaborative Partnership have been awarded a grant to better align attitudes of key stakeholders within the education sector, but ‘outside the classroom’ to the critical importance of good teaching of Religion and Worldviews (RW) inside the classroom.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ REPU’s discussion about messaging includes the need to change the narrative when working with the DfE, Headteachers and others. The challenging non-compliance route appears to have had limited success. Recent analysis of the range of performance in each LA at GCSE in 2020 gathered as part of the NATRE research, has shown a correlation between LAs and low levels of entry for GCSE RS and poor average progress 8 scores as well as poor performance with EBacc subjects. ➤ A more effective narrative might be, when schools narrow the curriculum and cut out RS at GCSE, pupils are likely to do less well overall.

Deborah Weston May 2021

Chair – RE Policy Unit