

SACRE National Update: Autumn 2020

Interfaith week

Inter Faith Week starts on Sunday 8 November and concludes on Sunday 15 November. The Week is a great opportunity for pupils to explore inter faith issues and for schools to build relationships with faith, belief and inter faith groups in their community. Here are some things you might want to consider doing this year:

- Work with your local inter faith group and SACRE to host a special virtual 'Question Time' via a social media platform
- Organise an exhibition in your school featuring information and objects about a range of religions and beliefs reflecting your local population (this could be virtually available to others)
- Celebrate the Week on your website, perhaps have a series of short videos where pupils share what they have learned in RE
- Organise a virtual tour of local places of worship to investigate the importance of faith in the lives of believers in your community
- Create an Inter Faith Week poster, artwork or multifaith calendar
- Host a dialogue about a topic such as 'shared values' or how people of different faiths and beliefs can live well together at a lunchtime event
- Make a video of events at your school held for Inter Faith Week For more about Inter Faith Week

Visit <https://www.interfaithweek.org/> and if you have specific questions or ideas you'd like to discuss email IFN's Assistant Director at david.hampshire@interfaith.org.uk.

Can those of you that represent religion and belief communities to offer your services?

Can schools be informed about this week- together with the suggestions above?

Is this an opportunity to liaise with Walsall for All to see if they have plans for this week that could link into RE lessons?

GCSE Results

The number of pupils taking GCSE Religious Studies in England and Wales has remained stable in 2020 despite ongoing challenges, reflecting the relevance of the subject and its popularity among young people.

In England, RS GCSE entries for the full course fell by less than 1% to 225,719 compared to 227,913 in 2019. In Wales, entries fell by a similar amount from 10,129 in 2019 to 10,037 in 2020. Overall entries in England, including both full and short courses, fell by 2.3% to 243,786, compared with 249,443 in 2019. Full course entries in 2020 were still almost one third higher than in 2010. In Wales, combined entries fell by just under 2% from 16,327 in 2019 to 16,003 in 2020.

Until this year, there has been a gradual decline in full course RS GCSE entries since a peak in 2016, when 269,839 entries were recorded in England. Full and short course entries reached a high of 461,795 in 2011 but declined rapidly as schools in England opted not to enter pupils into the short course following Government policy changes, despite a requirement among all schools, including Academies, to provide Religious Education to all pupils at all key stages. In Wales however, the short course entries have not declined at the same rate and fell by just 3.74% (from 6,198 to 5,966). In England, short course entries fell by more than 16%.

Today's figures, however, provide some optimism that the decline may be levelling off. The key outcomes for Religious Education in England and Wales at Key Stage 4 in 2020 are as follows:

There were 225,719 entries in England and 10,037 in Wales for the full course in GCSE RS, a fall of less than 1% from 2019 (227,913 England and 10,129 Wales).

There were 18,067 entries in England and 5,966 in Wales for the short course in GCSE RS, a decline of 16.1% in England and 3.74% in Wales from 2019 (21,530 and 6198 respectively).

There were 243,786 entries for GCSE RS (combined short and full courses) in England, a decline of 2.3% from 2019 (249,443).

Despite a decline since the peak in entries, the number of pupils receiving a full course GCSE in Religious Studies in England in 2020 (225,719) is still 32% greater than in 2010 (170,767).

Is this reflected in Walsall?

Changes in RS examinations for 2021

Ofqual released their decisions on 3rd August regarding the cohort of students who will be taking their GCSE's, AS or A levels in 2021. There are a few headlines to report. *Obviously these decisions could change as the response to the pandemic develops but this reflects the current information that schools are working with.*

1. No change to the assessment arrangements for Religious Studies.

The report stated that there will be no change to the assessments in Religious Studies for the GCSE (short and full course) AS or A level. Thus, students will be assessed in the same manner as previous years.

Ofqual did recognise that:

"Many respondents were concerned about covering all the content, given the lost time and difficulty of covering it in a normal year. This was raised for most subjects at GCSE, AS and at A level."

"Respondents often suggested this could be addressed through question optionality, which was discussed further below. In some subjects, for example, GCSE Religious Studies and GCSE English Literature, parallels were drawn with GCSE history and respondents urged that similar arrangements were made to enable content sampling in their subject."

However, Ofqual decided against making changes to Religious Studies.

2. No decisions have been made about the dates for the examinations.

No decisions have yet been made with regards to the dates for the examinations for 2021. It is possible that July will be included in the timetable to allow for more teaching time. The reason for the delay is because Ofqual need to consult with other affected parties before making a decision.

As of 28.9.20 we are still waiting for an announcement – it is expected imminently. It is proving difficult for those undertaking course planning as they don't know how many teaching weeks to plan for for students in Year 11 and Year 13.

As they reported:

"While there was support for delaying the exams, to allow more time for teaching, a number of risks and issues were highlighted in the responses, including concerns about the likely impact on the dates by which the results could then be published. The key decision for Ofqual on the timetable is whether to change our rules to allow the exams boards to offer exams in July 2021 as well as in May and June. However, changes to the exam timetable are not for Ofqual alone. We will work with DfE, the exam boards, colleagues in Wales and Northern Ireland, and higher education to undertake a further analysis of the options the risks and the mitigations before taking a decision."

3. There will be further information on how student outcomes (i.e. grades) are to be protected.

Ofqual are currently considering how the grades or outcomes of students taking the examinations in 2021 can be protected. They have said:

"The Secretary of State has asked us to advise him in the coming months how we might ensure students' outcomes are protected through our approach to grading next year, as we did to protect the interests of students who took the reformed qualifications for the first time. Our approach- using statistical predictions to guide the first awards of reformed qualifications- worked well to protect the interests of students taking the reformed qualifications and we will consider its use next year. We did not consult on proposal for grading in summer 2021, but we will provide further information in due course."

Here is a copy of their [statement](#) and [decisions](#) document on the changes that will be made.

Other related issues:

At the end of July, the Department for Education announced that from September all pupils should return to school. The guidance sets an expectation that *"the curriculum should remain broad and ambitious: all pupils continue to be taught a wide range of subjects, maintaining their choices for further study and employment."*

The DfE have advised that when planning for pupils' return to school in September, subjects should not be removed from the curriculum. In relation to Key Stage 3 the guidance states, *"the curriculum should also remain broad from year 7 to year 9 so that the majority of pupils are taught a full range of subjects over the year, including... Religious Education."* Indeed, the suspension of subjects should only occur in *"exceptional circumstances"* and if this occurs, a school must be able to demonstrate that this is *"in the best interests of these pupils and should be subject to discussion with parents during the Autumn term."*

For key stage 4 and 5 the guidance states that, *"the vast majority of pupils in year 10 and 11 are expected to continue to study their examination subjects."* A year 11 pupil should only be advised to discontinue a subject in *"exceptional circumstances"*.

The DfE documentation can be consulted [here](#).

The NATRE summary of the implications of this guidance can be found [here](#).

Nick Gibb's written answer to a Parliamentary question on this subject can be found [here](#).

Can this information be shared with all Walsall secondary schools?

All Schools have a duty to teach RE to all pupils aged 5-18 even in current times

NATRE was pleased to see that Nick Gibb MP, Minister for schools, has given a clear and fulsome answer to a question from Luke Pollard MP regarding schools and RE.

We note from his answer below that he restates that;

- State-funded schools in England have a duty to teach religious education to all pupils aged 5 to 18 years
- where pupils do not choose Religious Studies as an examination subject, the requirement to teach religious education still applies.
- An agreed syllabus can stipulate that pupils follow an accredited qualification such as GCSE

He also clearly says that in the reopening of schools;

- Religious education is explicitly stated as one of the subjects that should be taught

The Department's guidance on full opening of schools sets the expectation that schools teach an ambitious and broad curriculum in all subjects from the start of the autumn, but that they use their existing curriculum flexibilities within subjects to create time to cover the most important missed content.

- Religious education is explicitly stated as one of the subjects that should be taught. The guidance was published on 2 July and can be found [here](#).
- The Department's guidance on religious education is already available for both maintained schools and for academies and free schools. The guidance for maintained schools is [here](#).
- The guidance for academies and free schools [here](#).
- No additional guidance on this subject is therefore needed.
- Nick Gibb's answer to Luke Pollard's Parliamentary question on this subject can be found [here](#).

Can this information be shared with all Walsall headteachers and chairs of governors?

Do school improvement partners or similar know whether this guidance is being followed? Could they find out?

A reminder re Timing of SATs tests in 2021: Adaptations available for Muslim pupils

In 2021, Eid-ul-Fitr is likely to begin on the evening of Wednesday 12th May. Given the significance of RE the DFE are aware that pupils are likely to be absent from school and so have given advice to schools on how to rearrange tests for some or all pupils if deemed necessary.

How will Walsall LA make sure schools understands the guidance?

Increase in the number of secondary trainees

The number of **trainee teachers for RE is increasing**, with the provision for Subject Knowledge Enhancement courses proving to be a real help to those entering the profession with degrees in other Humanities subjects. While it is good to see this increase, these trainee teachers will need to spend time in schools with good RE teachers in order to develop their own practice and become good RE teachers themselves. This year we have recruited almost 100 extra trainees.

Can we let secondary headteachers know that there will be an increase in the pool of RS qualified teachers to recruit?

Can we encourage secondary schools to take a trainee? Birmingham University have recruited a large cohort?

Materials available for self isolating pupils, socially distanced RE and any future lockdowns

To help teachers during this difficult time, RE Today is working hard to support NATRE by producing resources that ALL teachers can use and share with pupils and parents in order to support with home learning and also socially distanced RE in schools.

If teachers wish to sign up for the updates to inform you of new resources, then please sign up to the mailing list on the NATRE website. We have also made further resources available for NATRE members.

Access resources

Strictly RE: Online training for teachers

Date: 30 & 31 January 2021 (PLUS additional seminars leading up to Strictly!)

Location: Online

Full price: £100* (Price includes downloadable handouts and presentations from all sessions).

EARLY BIRD DISCOUNT! Book before 31 October - only £85!

Prices start as low as £45 for NATRE members*

*NATRE members discounts available on top of early bird (Bronze: £20 off, Silver: £30, Gold & Platinum: £40).

Strictly RE is back, this time NATRE will be hosting its national annual conference online to keep you all safe, whilst still giving you everything you love about Strictly RE without having to leave your home.

With 24 seminars, 4 Keynotes, networking and discussion opportunities, Saturday night entertainment, we have something for everyone. There's lots to choose from, and we hope that you will **pick and mix** from across the month and weekend to create a programme that works for you. You do not have to attend a seminar at every time slot.

Keynote speakers include Richard Kueh, OFSTED RE subject specialist, Christine Counsell on curriculum construction and progression in RE, a panel on worldviews in RE and a panel on Anti- racist RE.

NATRE will be running twilight sessions throughout January, culminating in a weekend of keynotes, seminars and networking. These will be announced soon! Delegates who have already booked a place will be the first to hear about them and book their sessions.

Book soon to avoid missing out on our or early bird discount which ends 31 October 2020.

Find out full details and book here.

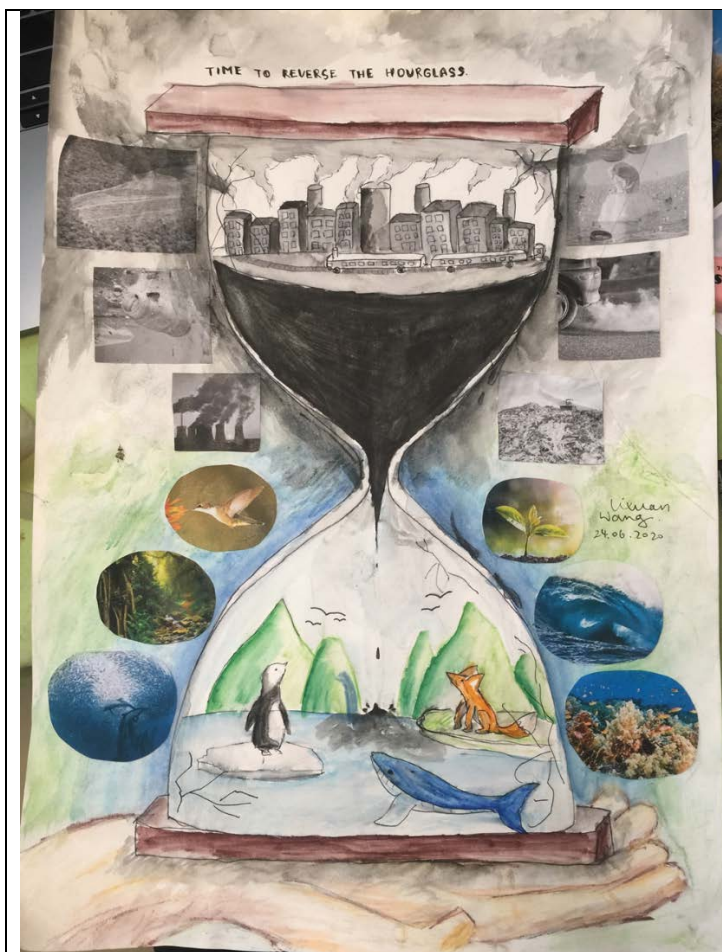
How can we encourage Walsall teachers to attend?

Some SACREs subsidise a number of teachers to attend and then share what they have learnt with other local teachers. Is this something that Walsall SACRE would be able to do?

NATRE's Spirited Arts competition: results and next year's competition

The competition has attracted record entries this year – it was a popular lockdown activity set by hundreds of teachers, and the YouTube lesson to accompany it was viewed about 14 000 times. Many of our schools have taken an interest in this competition. There are over 30 000 entrants.

Here is one of the inspiring entries, the best of which can be viewed at www.natre.org.uk/spiritedarts



This piece is called **The Hourglass**. I wanted to show a contrast between what the earth was like, and what it was now without a too obvious division of the page. I did not base it on a particular religion, but on the overall belief that God is watching over us, holding our hourglass with his hand. I got my inspiration from a picture of an hourglass with the mountains, the forests, all flowing down into the other side of the hourglass, where it is all rubbish and pollution. I've switched the concept subtly. Instead of the wonderful nature flowing and rotting into trash, I decided that it would be the other way round: the black tar that shows our pollution is flowing and dark drops are contaminating the Bright nature on the other side of the hourglass, and the animals are watching in vain. The whole hourglass is cracking. I wanted to show that if one system breaks, then, like the Buddhists say, the whole interconnected and interdependent community will fall. I have put pictures of the opposing sides on either end of the hourglass, they are examples of the wonderfulness of nature, and the heart wrenching truth of what we have done with our planet; on the bottom, corals, birds, forests, and on the top toxic fumes, fossil fuels, plastic, pollution, landfills, and deforestation. I hope that when people see this piece, they will see God's good Earth, and realise what we are doing to it, and strive to reverse the damage before the hourglass breaks.

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The competition for the next year is being launched and 5 themes are available to schools for them to engage and respond creatively. Can we, as a SACRE, promote the competition to all our schools? Could we run a webinar for them? Could we run a local round to the competition, to see what creative RE is going on here?

Next year's closing date is 31st July 2021.

Themes for the coming year:

- "We have far more in common with each other than that which divides us."
- God's good earth?
- Where is God?
- Healing
- Inspiring!

How can we share information about this competition with Walsall schools?

Anti-racist RE

NATRE and RE Today, working with the Free Churches Group and Methodist Schools are launching a project to help teachers tackle racism in RE lessons. The project aims to:

- Enable a team of 60+ black, Asian and minority ethnic teachers of RE and members of different communities to articulate perspectives on the contributions of RE to anti-racist education, accessible for all teachers of RE
- Provide challenging and well planned resources, case studies, plans and lessons for teachers of RE in both primary and secondary schools to use in RE that challenge and confront racism and are also good RE, mounted and free from web platforms hosted both by RE Today and by the Free Churches Group and the Methodist Schools.

- Create a forum for teacher education and development in relation to anti-racist RE, recognising that practice in RE in this area is patchy and inconsistent (also online)
- Disseminate better practice in anti-racist RE widely, using the wide range of contacts and networks available to RE today

Wide partnerships to maximise the impact of the project have been used, including for example with NATRE and the Jo Cox Foundation. Teachers can access a planned unit of six topics for primary and of 8 topics for secondary RE, including ready to use resources and a wide range of support materials.

www.natre.org.uk/anti-racist-RE

Can our SACRE publicise this to schools? Would we like to invest some of our budget this year in primary and secondary CPD for schools in this area?