

## National SACRE Updates for Walsall SACRE from RE Today Summer 2023

### Ofsted appoint new Acting Subject Lead for RE



Hazel Henson HMI was appointed as acting subject lead for RE in March 2023. She has a background in primary education and was a headteacher in Derbyshire. We are expecting OFSTED to bring out a report on RE in schools, akin to the old subject reports in the next few months.

### Children's Commissioner shares her view on RE with former pupil and the REC

Shammi Rahman, NATRE exec member, recently interviewed The Children's Commissioner, Dame Rachel de Souza. Dame Rachel is a previous RE teacher and headteacher and Shammi, is a former secondary teacher and now a Race Equality Adviser. Dame Rachel was her RE teacher!

Dame Rachel says, 'a former RE teacher myself, I believe RE teachers have a crucial opportunity to teach children about the wider world and principals of fairness and equality. It was great to talk about how different faiths can teach us different things, for example treating others as we would like to be treated ourselves; having compassion for others; and celebrating the beauty of life in our environment.'

Listen to their conversation here: [Conversation with Shammi Rahman: The importance of Religious Education | Children's Commissioner for England \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](#)



Dame Rachel also spoke robustly at the 50th anniversary Religious Education Council meeting about the 'safe space' offered by good RE teaching in schools, remarking that it is "the one place in the curriculum" where young people can discuss "important and exciting philosophical, religious and moral conundrums in safe spaces". <https://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/2023/05/childrens-commissioner-50th-agm/>

## The place of Humanists on SACRE

**Humanists cannot be excluded from Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education:** The High Court has ruled that local authorities cannot exclude [humanist representatives](#) from their Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs). The ruling followed a case brought by humanist Steve Bowen, who challenged Kent County council for refusing him a place on the grounds that he did not represent a religion. SACREs are responsible for reflecting the principal religious traditions in the area and the judgment states their role is about tolerance and pluralism in society. In a commentary on the case, Law Professor Russell Sandberg says this is a significant step forward and highlights how the protection of non-religious beliefs continues to be controversial and lacking in clarity. Read his commentary here: "Humanism and religious instruction in schools: the landmark case of Bowen" in [Law & Religion UK, 30 May 2023](#)

***As you know we already have a Humanist representative on Walsall SACRE and have been reviewing our constitution. As part of this we had already decided that it is suitable to have a Humanist as a full member of committee A.***

## Recruitment crisis in teaching and especially in secondary RE

**London, 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2023:** A campaign to attract a new generation of RE teachers has kicked off with teaching groups, religious organisations and parliamentarians stressing the importance of the subject for preparing students for life in modern Britain.

As of January, UCAS data show that teacher recruitment for all subjects is down 22% from last year. However RE stands out, being down a third of applicants from the last recruitment cycle.

Government inaction over recruiting teachers to RE has been blamed. The Department for Education (DfE) has so far missed its target for the recruitment of RE teachers in nine of the last ten years.

Despite this year's fall in applicants, the subject continues to grow in popularity. Over the last five years entries to the GCSE have stood around an average of 250,000 with entries to the full course GCSE rising by 30% over the last decade.

The recruitment campaign – entitled 'Beyond the Ordinary' - draws attention to the academic and knowledge rich approach of the subject to life's big questions, and will seek to attract a set of talented graduates up to the task of getting young people to grips with the complex nature of modern belief.

Kathryn Wright, Chief Executive Officer of Culham St Gabriel's Trust, which is supporting the campaign, said: "Religious education is an important curriculum subject enabling children and young people to navigate our complex multi religious, multi secular society. Everyone has a worldview, and it's important we prepare young people to become free thinking, critical participants in public discourse, who can make informed judgements about matters of religion or belief and reflect meaningfully on the big questions in life."

We are looking for ambitious graduates from a range of humanities and social science subjects who can deliver an academic and rigorous curriculum aimed at getting young people to think critically about their own beliefs and those of others."

Last March, the Father of the House, Sir Peter Bottomley MP hosted a roundtable on the future of the subject. In October, a Westminster Hall Debate saw MPs and Peers from across the House agree on its importance for life in modern Britain as well as express concern around a lack of government support for the subject.

Lord Karan Bilimoria said: "The latest teacher recruitment figures are deeply worrying. Parents are concerned, schools are concerned and so too the young people are missing out.

“As a Champion for RE, I’ve heard numerous times from students that this is one of the few times in the classroom where they get to say what they think about the world around them. At present we face doing a disservice to a generation of young people ill-equipped to deal with the complexities of belief in Britain and the world beyond. This campaign is about getting the best humanities graduates into the classroom to help them deliver a modern RE curriculum reflective of belief in our society.”

Teacher training courses are open to graduates from a range of academic disciplines and from all sorts of diverse backgrounds, with Subject Knowledge Enhancement courses available from schools, universities or other providers.

Anyone looking for more information about training to be a RE teacher should visit <https://www.cstg.org.uk/campaigns/teacher-recruitment/becoming-a-teacher>

*Do we know what this problem is like in Walsall Secondary schools?*

## Why does the rate of entry for GCSE Religious Studies vary so much around England? Does the 2021 census provide part of the answer?

In answer to a parliamentary written question asked by Janet Daby MP and **answered by Nick Gibb MP in January**, the minister provided a table ranking each local authority in relation to the number of entries for GCSE Religious Studies in 2022. The range is significant; from 14.4% to 81.0%. Looking for an explanation for this gap, we tabulated the percentage of the population in each local authority that recorded they belonged to a religion in the 2021 Census alongside the average entries for GCSE. The correlation is interesting as you will see by the colour coded shading in the last column. Comparisons between the local authorities entering the most and the least students are worth noting as follows:

An average of 57% of the English population, recorded that they had a religion in the 2021 census

An average of 51% of the population, in the bottom 10 LAs in terms of entries for GCSE RS, recorded that they had a religion in the 2021 census

An average of 71% of the population, in the top 10 LAs in terms of entries for GCSE RS, recorded that they had a religion in the 2021 census

The full table can be downloaded [here](#).

Even though this is correlation and not proven causation, SACREs may like to consider the following:

- How do entries in their LA compare with other LAs in their region and nationally?
- Does the census data provide part of the answer or not?
- Why do some LAs buck the trend implied by the census data – i.e. pupils appear to be more likely to be entered for GCSE RS in areas with a larger proportions of people who identify with a religious worldview?
- Might parental views of what their child should study be affecting curriculum design? See CSTG survey of parents [here](#).
- What are the implications of the answers to these questions for Religious Education in England?

Find out more in the document linked below

### [Local Authorities entries for GCSE and census records](#)

*How can we encourage more than 28.1% of pupil entries for GCSE RS, especially as we know disadvantaged pupils often do well in the subject?*

## Two-thirds of secondary early career teachers rate subject knowledge training as ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’

In May, NATRE conducted a flash survey for secondary teachers in their first two years in the profession since qualification (ECTs). They wanted to hear their assessment of the delivery of the government funded programme designed to develop their subject knowledge. When NATRE began its grant funded New2RE programme 7 years ago, one of the drivers was the evidence that lack of subject knowledge was a key factor in the alarming proportions of teachers leaving the profession in the early years of their careers. We are proud to report that New2RE participants, with the benefits of extensive subject knowledge learning, stayed in teaching at significantly higher rates.

When the government announced their Early Career Framework with a clear commitment to addressing the issue of subject specific knowledge and skills in 2019, we might have dared to be optimistic. However, the news from the classroom was not good. Anecdotal evidence from those attending NATRE’s free monthly subject knowledge webinars during this academic year, was that little or no attention was being paid to subject knowledge in their schools’ early career offering. Worse still, many of the ECTs were the only subject specialist on their staff team, so there was no one properly qualified to support this aspect of the early career programme.

Earlier this month, the government’s education select committee announced an inquiry into the recruitment, training and retention of teachers so the flash survey was launched. Open for just a week to hit last Friday’s submission deadline, we still attracted 60 responses. These are set out below. As you can see, almost 2/3rds of our respondents reported that, in relation to teacher standard 3: Develop good curriculum and subject knowledge, their rating of the ECT programme was either poor (37%) or very poor (28%). Only one in ten thought the programme was good in this respect. Obviously, this is a small sample, but NATRE will ask this question again as part of the secondary survey which will begin in a few weeks’ time.

So, we have told the government that there is a job to do here and that **NATRE’s ECT membership**, including its subject knowledge webinars, which are open to all, is playing its part. However, this is an issue that needs urgent attention, not only because it affects teacher confidence and consequentially retention, but even more importantly, standards of religious education for pupils.

*Do we know what support is being offered to RE ECTs here? Can we direct them to the free offer above?*

## NATRE Spirited Arts 2023 – a reminder

Will the LA’s schools join hundreds of from around the world taking part in this year’s Spirited Arts competition? Entries are welcomed in (almost!) any art form pupils can think of. Winning entries will provide a good response to one of the 5 themes, and judges will be asking is it original? Is it well-crafted? And (most importantly!) is it excellent RE?

**The deadline for this is Monday 31<sup>st</sup> July 2023**

1. “We have more in common than that which divides us.”
2. Green faith, green future? [‘God’s good earth?’]
3. Where is God today?

4. Faith in action, values in action.
5. Sacred space and holy buildings
6. All God’s creatures?

More details here [www.natre.org.uk/about-natre/projects/spirited-arts/spirited-arts-2023/](http://www.natre.org.uk/about-natre/projects/spirited-arts/spirited-arts-2023/)

## Training, networking, and other support

### The RE Podcast: FREE CPD for teachers, and RE professionals



The RE Podcast is an amazing resource for Teachers and Students. Hosted by the fabulous Louisa Jane Smith – who is a current Secondary teacher for RE. Each week she produces a podcast on a range of brilliant RE topics with fantastic guests. All the previous episodes are on the website.

<https://www.therepodcast.co.uk/> - or listen through your Mobile Podcast App!

### FREE CPD for Early Career Teachers

Early Career Teachers have access to a range of free support through a series of online sessions. ‘Café’ sessions give you a chance to talk with experienced teachers and experts from different worldview backgrounds. The taught sessions offer expert input with a focus on practical classroom strategies.

Date – All Mondays 4.00-5.30pm	Topic
10 July	Café NATRE: Subject knowledge Christianity

ECT webinars booking link [www.natre.org.uk/membership/early-careers-teacher/ect-free-monthly-webinar/](http://www.natre.org.uk/membership/early-careers-teacher/ect-free-monthly-webinar/)

### NATRE: new membership packages!

NATRE is the largest membership organisation which promotes, defends and supports RE teachers and RE teaching. It does this through producing high-quality resources and CPD, lobbying government, being involved in conversations with the DfE and Ofsted, LAs and SACREs, telling teachers’ stories and experiences and being a voice for all teachers.



Membership packages for students, ECTs, teachers, schools, RE professionals and RE enthusiasts!

Details: [www.natre.org.uk/membership](http://www.natre.org.uk/membership)

### Culham St Gabriel’s launch FREE new self-study course

Digging Deeper: Subject Knowledge, this short, self-study course builds on the introduction level course and is available for FREE. Find out more here: [Culham St Gabriel's Trust Moodle \(cstg.org.uk\)](http://Culham St Gabriel's Trust Moodle (cstg.org.uk))

## Understanding Humanism launches new animation and free resources

Understanding Humanism has launched a **NEW animation** 'One Life, live it well' voiced by author and presenter, Alice Roberts. Accompanied by classroom activities, this simple but beautiful animation illustrates how humanists try to approach life: [One Life, Live It Well: watch our new animation narrated by Alice Roberts » Understanding Humanism](#)

They also have available new FREE resources for children in early years, and the stories of four amazing humanist women who changed the world.

## RE Hubs – Website now live!



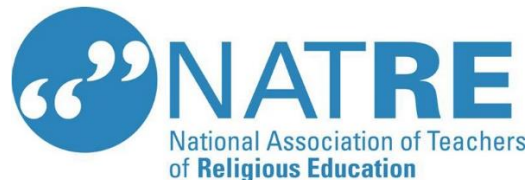
RE Hubs website is now live at [www.re-hubs.uk](http://www.re-hubs.uk). RE Hubs aim to connect those who can provide resources with those who need them and create a neutral platform being RE professionals together.

Many organizations serve RE/RVE/R&W education in the UK, from places of worship and school speakers to CPD partnerships and resource providers. However, until now, there hasn't been a single place to equip, enable, and signpost everyone within the community.

The Hub area for Stoke-on-Trent is West Midlands, led by Chris Giles.

*How can we encourage speakers and places of worship to sign up to the training and appear on the site?  
What links do you have where you can share this?*

## NATRE Secondary Survey



The NATRE survey of secondary RE teachers is now underway and open until Monday 31<sup>st</sup> July. Everyone who completes the survey will receive a £5 coupon for the RE Teaching Resources online shop as well as being entered into a prize draw to win a NATRE School Enhanced membership worth £270. The survey is here: [NATRE Survey - Secondary 2023 \(surveymonkey.co.uk\)](https://surveymonkey.co.uk)