

consultative at this stage, call for consideration to be given to adding the promotion of improved community relations to the remit of SACREs and make proposals for the securing of resources for their work. There are also recommendations that seek consideration of the composition of SACREs with a call to ensure that they are fully representative, with representatives of non-religious worldviews as full members.

The full recommendations are set out on pages 8 to 12.

In addition, the Commissioners are seeking to undertake further consultation in these areas and have set out the issues that they are particularly interested in exploring. These areas for consultation are set out on pages 12 to 14.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

A NATIONAL ENTITLEMENT FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

- a. There should be a national entitlement statement for RE which sets out clearly the aims and purpose of RE and what pupils should experience in the course of their study of the subject. A draft statement for consultation is overleaf.
- b. This entitlement should become normative through non-statutory guidance as early as possible, and should ultimately become statutory, either to supplement or to replace current legislation on agreed syllabuses.
- c. The national entitlement should apply to all state-funded schools including academies, free schools and schools of a religious character.
- d. Independent schools should consider adopting the entitlement as an undertaking of good practice.

The National Entitlement for Religious Education

Overleaf is the draft text of the proposed national entitlement for RE. This draft is for consultation. We welcome comments on and refinements to the text.

A National Entitlement for RE

RE in schools should enable students to engage in an intelligent and informed way with the ideas, practices and contemporary manifestations of a diversity of religious and non-religious worldviews. It should enable them to understand how worldviews are inextricably woven into, influence and are influenced by, all dimensions of human experience. It should prepare pupils for life in modern Britain by enabling them to engage respectfully with people with worldviews different from their own. RE should equip pupils to develop their own beliefs, practices, values and identity in the light of their reflections on the worldviews they have studied.

Through their study of worldviews, pupils should develop a lifelong motivation to enquire into questions of meaning and purpose, and investigate others' worldviews and what they mean for individuals, communities and society. All of this will enable them to become responsible citizens and members of diverse and changing local, national and global communities.

Throughout their period of compulsory schooling, pupils should learn about, understand and engage with:

- a. The diversity of religious and non-religious worldviews and ways of life that exist locally, nationally and globally.
- b. The ways in which communities and individuals holding different worldviews interact, change and maintain continuity in different times and contexts and as the surrounding culture changes.
- c. The different ways that people interpret and respond to texts and other sources of authority.
- d. The ways that people communicate their beliefs, experiences, values and identities through verbal and non-verbal means (eg prose, story, poetry, art, music, dance, ritual, architecture).
- e. How people seek moral guidance from religious and non-religious worldviews and how they interpret this guidance in their lives.
- f. The importance of experience, including extra-ordinary experiences, in shaping people's worldviews and how worldviews are used to interpret experience.

- g. The role of religious and non-religious rituals and practices in both creating and expressing experience, beliefs, values and commitments.
- h. The relationship between people's worldview and their thinking and actions concerning political, public, social and cultural life.
- i. Both the positive and negative exercise of power and influence resulting from people's worldviews.
- j. The important role that worldviews play in providing people with a way of making sense of their lives and in forming their identity.*

As part of a balanced programme aimed at meeting this provision, it is expected that pupils will:

- 1. Experience meeting and visiting people from their local community from a range of worldviews including those different from their own and that of the school.
- 2. Develop core skills for researching the beliefs, values and practices of individuals and groups in society.
- 3. Experience a range of approaches to the study of religions (e.g. phenomenology, philosophy, sociology, textual studies, theology).
- 4. Engage with questions of meaning and purpose and of the nature of reality raised by the worldviews that they study.
- 5. Think through and develop a reflective approach to their own personal responses and developing identity and learn to articulate these clearly and coherently while respecting the right of others to differ.
- 6. Develop the core skills and dispositions of careful listening, critical thinking, self-reflection, empathy and open-mindedness required for making wise judgments.
- 7. Learn to discuss controversial issues and work with others (including those that they disagree with) with the intention of securing a healthy and peaceful society in the context of significant diversity.

** We are indebted to Barbara Wintersgill, who presented her project on Big Ideas in RE. Her work has informed much of the content of this list.*

HOLDING SCHOOLS TO ACCOUNT FOR THE PROVISION AND QUALITY OF RE

- a. Schools should be required to publish on their website details of how they meet the national entitlement for RE.
- b. Inspection frameworks should be revised to ensure that inspectors monitor whether or not schools meet the national entitlement for RE, in the light of schools' duty to provide a broad and balanced curriculum.
- c. The DfE should either monitor, or give SACREs or other approved bodies the power and resources to monitor, the provision and quality of RE in all schools, including free schools, academies and schools of a religious character.
- d. The government should consider the impact of school performance measures, including the exclusion of RS GCSE from the EBacc, on GCSE entries and on the provision and quality of RE, and consider reviewing performance measures in the light of the evidence.

A RENEWED AND EXPANDED ROLE FOR SACRES

We seek to consult on all our recommendations relating to SACREs. (See page 12)

A NATIONAL PLAN FOR IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RE

We are considering developing a National Plan for developing teaching and learning in RE, along the lines of the National Plan for Music Education. This plan is likely to include the following recommendations:

- a. A minimum of 12 hours should be devoted to RE in all primary Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses.
- b. Leading primary schools for RE should be identified and all primary trainees should be given the opportunity to observe RE teaching in such a school.
- c. Include under the Teachers' Standards, part 1, section 3 (Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge), the requirement that teachers 'demonstrate a good understanding of and take responsibility for the sensitive handling of controversial issues, including thoughtful discussion of religious and non-religious worldviews where necessary.'
- d. Restore funded Subject Knowledge Enhancement (SKE) courses for those applying to teach RE and for serving teachers of RE without a relevant post A-level qualification in the subject.
- e. Restore parity of bursaries for RE with those for other shortage subjects.

- f. The government and relevant funding bodies should consider how funding of grassroots teacher networks can be made more sustainable.
- g. SACREs and local authorities should review existing good practice in developing and sustaining these grassroots networks and start their own if such a network does not exist in their local area.
- h. University performance measures should be updated to credit universities for their engagement with schools, including the provision of continuing professional development (CPD) and resource materials.
- i. University staff conducting research in areas related to RE should be encouraged to contribute to grassroots networks, lead teacher development days, develop resource materials or become SACRE members. This may provide opportunities for them to demonstrate the impact of their research or increase student recruitment.

LIST OF AREAS FOR CONSULTATION

A NATIONAL ENTITLEMENT FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

1. The entitlement is not a national syllabus or curriculum. It is a basic statement of what all pupils are entitled to, whatever type of school they attend. Many schools will need guidance and support to translate this entitlement into curriculum planning, particularly in relation to progression. We are still reviewing where this guidance and support will come from. We seek input on what bodies would be best placed to translate the entitlement into detailed programmes of study and how best to support schools to plan their curriculum in line with the entitlement. Several possibilities have been discussed by the Commission so far:
 - a. Removing the requirement for local authorities to hold Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs). In a context where every school will eventually become an academy, this requirement is no longer proportionate for many local authorities and will become even less so over time. However, it might be possible for programmes of study to be developed at regional levels. It would also be possible to include regional universities on this model. A regional system might not provide sufficient support to academies unless they were explicitly included. If the requirement for local authorities to develop a locally agreed syllabus were to be removed, it would not preclude those local authorities that had the resource and expertise from convening ASCs and developing programmes of study that could be adopted by those schools that chose to, within or outside that local authority.
 - b. Recommending the development of a national set of programmes of study compliant with the entitlement. This may or may not be government-funded. This has the advantage of providing consistency

across localities, which was requested by some teachers in the written and oral evidence. However, there are a number of potential difficulties with it. First, there is the vexed question of who develops programmes of study. Second, there is the justified criticism that in the era of a school-led system a nationally agreed set of programmes of study is too rigid and leaves schools insufficient freedom to undertake RE that is appropriate for their pupils and immediate community. Third, there is the question of how to ensure that the syllabus is appropriately independent of political interference. Many of those who gave oral and written evidence were concerned about excessive political interference in the scope and content of RE.

- c. Leaving the market open for schools, groups of schools, dioceses, SACREs, commercial providers and other relevant groups to write their own programmes of study. This would allow maximum freedom for schools but might not resolve the inequality in provision and quality discussed above. Non-statutory guidance or a range of model programmes of study might also be developed to support relevant groups in writing their own programmes of study.
2. There is likely to be a range of possibilities within these broad categories and other possibilities that we have not yet considered. We seek views on what would be most helpful to support schools with curriculum planning and ensure that all schools can meet the entitlement effectively.
3. The question also remains as to whether the entitlement statement should replace or supplement the current legislation on agreed syllabuses, which requires that they must ‘reflect the fact that religious traditions in Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain’ (UK Parliament, Education Act 1996, Section 375.2). This legislative statement remains a statement of historical and social fact. Of those who identify themselves as having a religion, the majority are Christian, and Christianity has played a particular role in the history of Great Britain. However, the statement in and of itself does not specify how much time should be spent on any worldview. It also does not include non-religious worldviews. We seek views on whether the entitlement should specify a number and range of worldviews, or a minimum time to be spent on one worldview.
4. We have also discussed whether the name of the subject should be changed, to signify the renewed vision for the subject. It is difficult to find an alternative name that appropriately captures the breadth and depth of the subject as outlined in the entitlement statement. We have discussed a number of options. A small majority of the Commission preferred to call the subject Religion and Ethics (or Religions and Ethics) while others wished either to preserve the current name, or to change its name to Religions and Worldviews or Religion, Philosophy and Ethics (or Philosophy, Religion and Ethics). We seek views on which of these options best captures the nature of the subject outlined in the entitlement. We

also seek suggestions on alternative names which fit the entitlement and the renewed vision for the subject.

HOLDING SCHOOLS TO ACCOUNT FOR THE PROVISION AND QUALITY OF RE

1. We seek views on the most appropriate mechanisms for holding schools to account for the provision and quality of RE at both primary and secondary level.
2. We are considering recommending that a revised qualification at Key Stage 4, for those not taking Full Course GCSE RS, be developed. This would need to meet the requirements of the national entitlement for RE and have currency in school performance measures. This qualification would not be compulsory but would count in school performance measures and in individuals' applications for work or further study. We seek views on how effective this would be and what demand there would be for such a qualification.

A RENEWED AND EXPANDED ROLE FOR SACRES

1. We seek views on the following recommendations on the role of SACREs:
 - a. The Government should publicly highlight and reaffirm the important role of SACREs in supporting and resourcing RE.
 - b. The Government should consider whether the role of SACREs should be expanded to include a duty to advise on all matters relating to religion and belief in schools.
 - c. The Government should consider ways of securing funding to resource SACREs adequately. Options for this may include:
 - i. Ring-fenced funding for SACREs.
 - ii. Funding for SACREs from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport or the Department of Communities and Local Government.
 - iii. Specifying a minimum amount of funding (perhaps per school or per pupil) to which local authorities must adhere.
 - d. The Government should consider the composition of SACREs and the law should be changed to include representatives of non-religious worldviews as full members.
 - e. The Government should publish all SACRE annual reports publicly on a dedicated website.
2. We seek views on what the duties of SACREs should be in relation to promoting good community relations, beyond matters relating to religion

and belief in schools.

3. We are still considering how the composition of SACREs should be adapted to be fit for purpose in a changed social and educational landscape. In particular, we are considering whether the committee structure should be changed or abolished. We seek views and evidence on this.
4. We seek views on which groups and organisations should be represented on SACREs.

THE RIGHT OF WITHDRAWAL

1. We seek further evidence on the number of pupils being withdrawn from RE, and the reasons given, where these are given, as well as whether the number of cases and reasons given have been changing over time.
2. We seek views on the most effective ways to manage the right of withdrawal in practice.
3. We seek views on whether it is desirable to look to adopt an overall approach to the design of the RE curriculum in every school so that it is sufficiently 'objective, critical and pluralistic' as to render it capable of being compulsory without the right of withdrawal.

A NATIONAL PLAN FOR IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RE

1. We seek views on what should be included in the National Plan for RE, beyond the recommendations set out above.
2. We seek views on how the National Plan might best be implemented.
3. There are increasing expectations of teachers to be engaged with research, by keeping up to date with published research at minimum, and where possible by engaging in action research, lesson study and other forms of practitioner research. We seek views on the kinds of research which would be most helpful for RE teachers to engage with, and what mechanisms would support this.

We seek further evidence on this issue. We recognise the important work done by Church of England dioceses in supporting SACREs, and supporting RE in community schools for which they are not directly responsible. According to oral evidence provided by the Church of England Education Office, the Diocesan RE adviser is the only provider of specialist advice to the SACRE in over 40% of SACREs and the diocesan role is described as ‘significant or greater’ in two thirds of SACREs.

209. The role of SACREs in supporting, monitoring and providing determinations for Collective Worship was outside the scope of enquiry for the Commission on RE. This needs to be considered separately.

Recommendations

210. We intend to consult on all proposed recommendations relating to SACREs.

Areas for consultation

211. We seek views on the following recommendations on the role of SACREs:
- a. The Government should publicly highlight and reaffirm the important role of SACREs in supporting and resourcing RE.
 - b. The Government should consider whether the role of SACREs should be expanded to include a duty to advise on all matters relating to religion and belief in schools.
 - c. The Government should consider ways of securing funding to resource SACREs adequately. Options for this may include:
 - i. Ring-fenced funding for SACREs
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 - iii. Specifying a minimum amount of funding (perhaps per school or per pupil) to which local authorities must adhere.
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213. We are still considering how the composition of SACREs should be adapted to be fit for purpose in a changed social and educational landscape. In particular, we are considering whether the committee structure should be changed or abolished. We seek views and evidence on this.
214. We seek views on which groups and organisations should be represented on SACREs.

THE RIGHT OF WITHDRAWAL

The current situation

215. As mentioned in paragraph 34 above, the right of parents to withdraw their children from RE and from Collective Worship has been in existence since 1870 and has remained part of the legal settlement in both the 1944 and 1988 Education Acts.
216. Parents may withdraw their children from some or all of the RE curriculum, without giving a reason. Non-statutory guidance released in 2010 states that the school must not influence the parents' decision but should make sure that parents are informed about the content of the curriculum.⁸⁹
217. The law makes provision for parents to make alternative arrangements for children to learn RE in accordance with their parents' wishes.
218. The school must supervise the children who are withdrawn from RE but are not required to provide additional teaching or incur extra cost.
219. Teachers also have the right to withdraw from teaching RE.

The case for change

Widespread support for an end to the right of withdrawal

220. There were strong calls across the written and oral evidence for the right of withdrawal to be abolished – a significant majority of individuals and organisations mentioned this. NATRE, the NAHT and the Church of England – representing three major stakeholders in schools – all called for an end to the right of withdrawal in their written evidence.

NAHT believes that all pupils, in all schools, should experience consistent and high quality Religious Education in order to support the development of understanding, tolerance and respect for religious and non-religious beliefs, practices and viewpoints. In

⁸⁹ Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) *Non-statutory guidance on Religious Education*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-guidance-in-english-schools-non-statutory-guidance-2010>

SECTION 5

NEXT STEPS

5.1 THE CONSULTATION PROCESS AHEAD OF THE FINAL REPORT

272. We intend to have an extensive consultation process on the report, including the recommendations, areas for consultation, and any gaps or further issues to address in the final report.
- a. An online consultation process will run from mid-October to mid-December 2017. Please keep an eye on www.commissiononre.org.uk or the @CommissionOnRE twitter account (<https://twitter.com/CommissionOnRE>) as details of the consultation will be publicised here, as well as via the RE Council's member organisations.
 - b. A consultation event will take place in late November or early December 2017. Further details of this event will be publicised in due course.
 - c. You are welcome to email your views to evidence@commissiononre.org.uk throughout the next year up until the publication of the final report.
273. We are looking for school case studies around the enablers to high quality RE:
- i. Subject expertise and its impact on teaching and learning
 - ii. Support from school leaders and what this looks like when it's done well, as well as its impact on teaching and learning
 - iii. Professional development networks and their impact on teaching and learning and particularly on the experience of pupils
 - iv. How schools have made best use of local faith and belief communities.
274. We are also looking for school case studies around the barriers to high quality RE:
- i. The impact of school performance measures
 - ii. Lack of specialist teachers
 - iii. Low teacher confidence

- iv. Lack of support from school leaders.
- 275. We are also looking for case studies of good professional support from SACREs and cases where lack of SACRE support has had negative impact.
- 276. Please submit all case studies via the online consultation process when it opens, or by email to evidence@commissiononre.org.uk after the consultation process has closed.
- 277. Commissioners will be able to make limited further visits to schools, professional bodies and SACREs.
- 278. The final report will contain details of the consultation and our responses to the consultation. We will not be publishing a separate consultation response.

5.2 KEY AREAS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION AHEAD OF THE FINAL REPORT

- 279. The Commissioners have identified a number of areas for further discussion ahead of the final report. These include the areas for consultation we have identified above:
 - a. The implications of the 'dual system' for RE, in terms of the purposes of RE as well as the legal and structural arrangements, particularly in the light of the proposed national entitlement.
 - b. Who should provide detailed curriculum guidance, including programmes of study, based on the proposed national entitlement.
 - c. What the role of SACREs should be.
 - d. The state of the subject at primary level and specific recommendations for improving it.
 - e. Improving the quality of teaching and learning – further discussion on the suggested National Plan.
 - f. The right of withdrawal and how to proceed in the face of the complexities identified in this report.