

PB Political Consulting
**Meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on
 Religious Education**
 16 January 2013

Attendees:

Fiona Bruce MP	Chair (Vice-Chair of APPG on Religious Education)
Mary Glendon MP	Vice-Chair of APPG on Religious Education
Jeremy Taylor	Church of England National Society
Phil Leivers	Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants
Ian Wintersgill	
Hugo Whately	RE Council
Aliya Azam	Al Khoei Foundation
John Lydon	Catholic Association of Teachers, Schools and Colleges
Derek Humphrey	Hockerill Educational Foundation
Helen Harrison	Tony Blair Faith Foundation
Rosemary Walters	Canterbury Christ Church University
Dr Priscilla Chadwick	Culham St Gabriel's Trust
Robert J Cawley	Independent Schools RS Association
Lesley Prior	National Association of SACREs
Ed Pawson	National Association of Teachers of RE
Sophie Agrotis	RE Council
Deborah Weston	RE Council
John Keast	Chair, RE Council
John Gay	RE Council
Janet Orchard	RE Subject Review
Debbie Danon	Three Faiths Forum
Barbara Wintersgill	RE Council
Sarah Smalley	RE Council
Richy Thompson	British Humanist Association
John Gordon	Board of Deputies of British Jews

Speakers:

The Reverend Janina Ainsworth	Chief Education Officer, Church of England
Father Tim Gardner OP	Catholic Education Service, RE Adviser
Joy Schmack	Chair, Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants
Linda Whitworth	Middlesex University, Senior Lecturer in RE
Professor John Howson	Managing Director, dataforeducation.info
Alan Brine HMI	National Advisor for RE, Ofsted
Yousif al-Khoei	Director of Public Affairs, Al-Khoei Foundation
Guy Hordern MBE	Chair, Birmingham Standing Advisory Council for RE

1. Welcome and Introductions

Fiona Bruce MP

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for travelling here today on one of the more difficult days to get through London. We very much appreciate you attending. My name is Fiona Bruce; I am the Member of Parliament for Congleton in Cheshire and I am the Vice Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education.

The All-Party Group is conducting an inquiry into the supply of and support for Religious Education teachers. The aim of the initiative is to bring together evidence that will form a report, which we will produce, which will both challenge and complement Government policy on RE. This is the second oral evidence session. The first took place on 28 November last year; it was chaired by my colleague the Chairman of the All-Party Group, Stephen Lloyd MP, and we expect this second session to be as insightful as the first, as we have some expert witnesses who will present oral evidence.

The meeting has been organised to hear expert oral evidence from key witnesses. There are six key witnesses listed on the paper in front of me: the first will be the Reverend Janina Ainsworth, then we have Father Timothy Gardner, Joy Schmack, Linda Whitworth, Professor John Howson and Alan Brine, I will introduce them in a little more detail as they speak. And then after those six key witnesses we are also going to have contributions for a few minutes from two further individuals, and these are Guy Hordern and Yousif al-Khoei.

Now, in order to ensure that every speaker has a fair allocation of time, we are going to take questions right at the end of the session, so there will be a general Q&A and a discussion then. So, without more ado, can I introduce a presentation from our first speaker, the Reverend Janina Ainsworth? Janina is Chief Education Officer and General Secretary of the Church of England National Society and she has particular focus on the Church of England's interests in RE, the purposes of RE in Church of England schools, inspection evidence and diocesan support for RE and also the Cathedrals Group provision.

2. Submissions

Reverend Janina Ainsworth

I am very grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this gathering of evidence and to present a perspective from the Church of England's experience of RE, bearing on the particular topic under consideration, and simply to remind us of why the Church of England has a particular interest. It is not only in terms of the 4,800 schools that the Church of England has within the state education system, and therefore a stake in what pupils are actually experiencing, but as part of the long history of a pioneer role in providing teacher education, which is continued in the twelve Church of England foundation universities. I will say a little bit more about that later on.

The Church of England's interest in schools beyond Church of England schools is statutorily provided for in the Department of Education measure of 1991, so there is an interest in Religious

Education for all children. It is not just the interest in what happens in Church of England schools, but across the whole system. That is reflected in the Church of England's engagement through SACREs and agreed syllabus committees. One of the reasons why there is a Church of England committee on SACRE is specifically to represent the Voluntary Controlled schools, which are Church of England schools that nevertheless teach RE according to the agreed syllabus. Our Academy provision is significant and mostly reflects the VA school provision.

I have quoted our most recent statement about what we consider the purposes of RE in Church of England schools to be, again to set the context that places our aspirations for children in Church of England schools alongside commonly understood purposes and aims for RE across the board. I simply want to emphasise that as exemplifying the fact the Church of England schools have a slightly different understanding of what their purpose as faith-based schools is – of course we do not use the term 'Faith' schools, we talk about 'Church' schools. Because the Church of England has a particular status in this country and understands its mission in relation of the whole nation that carries through into the education system; the schools were originally provided for all children, not just those in church-going families.

Whilst we have a particular concern that students understand and experience something of Christianity – particularly in its Anglican forms – it also sits alongside a commitment to help students understand religion as a human phenomenon and what that might mean for their own development. I have a full copy of the statement of entitlement, if that would be of interest.

Through denominational inspection – which is the system which examines RE and collective worship within VA schools – we have something of a picture of how RE is doing in Church of England schools. There is still an overt commitment to RE as a core subject. It is part of what makes a Church of England school distinctive; it is part of the distinctive offer to families and communities where the schools are set. That carries through into good levels, particularly of full course GCSE entry and A-level.

Our reviews of the annual denomination inspection report show that typically the grades inspectors give to RE in church schools sit about one grade lower than the grades given for collective worship and ethos. There is a whole set of issues around how seriously we can quality-assure those inspection grades, but that at least tells us that we have no room to be complacent about the RE that is taking place in Church of England schools. That is very much at the heart of our one strand of our own policy at the moment: our commitment to improving quality. We are developing material for the teaching of Christianity, about which we have particular concerns in our own schools as in other schools, and we are moving to a survey of teaching and learning which will enable us to locate more assuredly what the quality of RE in our schools is.

We maintain that commitment to RE through quite considerable diocesan investment. Most Diocesan Boards of Education have specialists who will be offering CPD and training to schools. However, there is a challenge to that. We carried out a survey last year to find out exactly what was happening in dioceses and what was available through Diocesan Boards, paid for from Diocesan sources and church sources. There is expertise in almost every Diocesan Education team. That need not necessarily mean a full time specialist advisor, but it means there is something there available to schools to help develop the quality of RE in the schools. That shows itself in the provision that is offered: the CPD provision.

Most Diocese focus specifically on primary schools; there is a lot less specialist support delivered to secondary schools because we do not have the same balance of primary and secondary advisory expertise. Some dioceses operate across into community schools on an extensive scale. When we

asked London Diocese to quantify what they were offering for us they said 'it is too many count'. They operate among many of the London boroughs being 'the deliverer' of RE support to all schools. But other dioceses are also finding that there is great enthusiasm and interest from community schools; in some cases that is formalised in, for example, diocesan staff being also on the LEA payroll, so there are a number dioceses where the Diocesan Advisor is both the Authority Advisor and Diocesan Advisor. Clearly diocesan staff are hugely important in servicing SACREs. We know that a significant minority of local authority SACREs where it is the Diocesan Advisor that is actually providing the support for the SACRE.

One of the things that has been reported to us – and one of the reasons why we are particularly anxious about the quality of RE – is to do with teachers entering the profession. I've said a 'rapid' decline because it is something that we have noticed fairly recently, that the kind of default understanding you might expect – particularly of Christianity – as part of the cultural heritage of our country has been eroded very rapidly over the last decade or so.

Add to that all the evidence you have already heard about what is happening to initial teacher education in relation to RE and the fact that Church of England schools draw from the general pool of teachers. My colleague next will probably say something about how teachers in Roman Catholic schools are resourced but there are no entry requirements; we do not have anything that mirrors the Catholic Teachers' Certificate. Newly qualified teachers coming in to Church of England schools are drawn from the same pool as community schools draw them, so the level of understanding – subject knowledge, understanding of the pedagogy of RE – is very similar. We may well have an overt stress on RE as an important and core subject, but the people who are delivering it are pretty much the same as the people who are delivering it in community schools. We focus quite a lot on school leadership; in that respect we expect our head teachers to have a greater understanding of what good RE looks like and to be promoting and developing it in their schools. Quite a bit of our diocesan support is directed towards that.

I said I would say a little bit about the church foundation universities; they are called the Cathedrals Group, which includes the Roman Catholic foundation universities as well. Our 12 institutions are seriously worried about the changes that are happening to both initial teacher education and PGCE. That rests on an anxiety about the health of Theology and Religious Studies departments; all of those are intertwined. Those institutions provide 45% of the teacher development agency funded PGCE places, for example. So because of their origins as teacher training institutions for Church of England schools, a very strong focus is put on providing that understanding of the Christian framework which has been retained into a focus on TRS, supporting Theology and Religious Studies departments, providing those PGCE places, but both PGCE and ITE places have been cut in to the bone in some of those institutions. I have statistical data, if that would be interesting, to offer in support of that.

I think the bottom bullet point is really what we are particularly worried about, that potentially a vicious circle is developing here. Poor quality RE in schools, particularly at GCSE, reduces your pool going through to A-level. The A-level is not supported and you are reducing your recruitment to TRS in the higher education institutions and potentially continuing to reduce the pool of high quality RE teachers.

If I can sum up where the Church of England thinks it is, we are still emphasising that RE is part of the core curriculum for us; it is actually critical and essential for students that it is part of their general education. However, dealing with a changing teaching workforce, losing the specialist training that is available through the HE institutions – we share the anxiety about shifting ITE into

schools: if there is poor quality RE in the schools how are we to develop good quality RE teachers – the effect of shutting RE out of the baccalaureate and the pressure on what we have been able to offer so far means that we share with everybody else a deep anxiety about what is happening to RE. Thank you.

Fiona Bruce MP

Thank you Janina, thank you in particular for sticking so well to time: a very interesting presentation which we appreciate. I now ask Father Timothy Gardner OP to come forward. He is the RE advisor for the Catholic Education Service and the topics that he is going to focus on are Catholic Schools in England and Wales, initial training of RE teachers, Catholicity and CCRS by phase, syllabus and programme of study. Tim, you are most welcome.

Father Timothy Gardner OP

Thank you. I am very grateful for Jan going before me because she has made lots of points that I would like to have made and therefore I do not have to use up my time making them. I do not have a summary at the end – my PowerPoint is not as good as hers – but just take hers as mine, if that makes sense. I agree on all those points.

The first thing I want to say about the specific role and purpose and understanding of Religious Education in Catholic schools is just to point out what, I suppose we all know, which is that the role of the church in education goes back an awfully long way. Arguably the first school established – formally at least – was Canterbury in 598 and then of course by the Middle Ages the church was the principal – more or less only – provider of education in Britain. After the Reformation we all became Europhiles. My own order, the Dominicans ended up in Flanders; Stoneyhurst of course was in France and then Belgium. Then in 1850, after Catholic emancipation and then with the re-establishment of the hierarchy in 1850 we came back to this country – officially and openly – and began to build schools. In practically every case the building of a school was a priority over the building of a parish church. It has been the priority for the Catholic Church in this country from its second beginning in the 19th Century and then starting at the end of the 19th Century and coming right up to the present day, there has been an on-going discussion – and occasionally fight – with the state about how those schools are funded. Many of my colleagues, looking towards Sanctuary Buildings at the moment, look back rather misty-eyed to 1944. What they forget is that our bishops did not really agree with the Government in 1944 and it took at least another 30 years for things to be sorted out.

This is the situation we have now. As you see, I have put numbers up here because they are very boring to talk about but you need to see them: 2,257 Catholic schools – independently maintained in different phases – in England and Wales: in other words about 10%. Lots of numbers there: what I really wanted to show you, though, was how RE features in those schools. If you look at primary first of all, four columns from the right – the percentage of staff teaching RE: you will notice that in primary schools it is a very high percentage, just over two thirds. That is of course because of the nature of primary education where children tend to stay with their class teacher, so many more teachers are involved in delivering RE. In the secondary phase, around 9%, which again makes sense because 10% of the curriculum is devoted to the teaching of Religious Education. Therefore just under 10% of teachers are involved with teaching Religious Education.

Where do those teachers come from? We also have a very small number of universities and university colleges which come out of Catholic teacher training institutions, but first of all we

would ideal be looking for an RE teacher to have a Theology degree. More recently the number of students studying Theology is decreasing. The numbers studying Religious Studies are increasing and that is no bad thing for RE generally, but it is having an impact on the kind of theological knowledge which would be necessary to teach RE in a Catholic school, certainly in the secondary phase.

We also have the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies – formerly known as the Catholic Teachers' Certificate – which is offered to all teachers in all Catholic schools. It is not specifically a qualification for RE teachers, but it is offered to any teacher in a Catholic school. However, I think it is true to say that RE teachers would be especially nudged, enthusiastically, towards that. This is really where our concerns are; it is around the supply of RE teachers. A couple of issues there really: the reduction in the allocation of teacher training places, for example, PGCE RE courses at those former Catholic teacher training colleges and also the disappearance of bursaries for training RE teachers. It is looking like it is going to become far more difficult for those institutions to insist upon either Theology or Religious Studies degrees, which means that the quality coming in is going down. They are faced with a much more difficult task in preparing those people to teach RE in Catholic schools, which I am hoping is an unintended consequence.

RE itself, those numbers about the CCRS: there is a much higher proportion in primary than in secondary, for reasons I have already mentioned. RE in Catholic schools: the content of Religious Education is set by the Bishops in this Religious Education Curriculum Directory. I have a copy for you, so I do not have to take you through all 170 pages. We are mainly talking about the study of Catholic Christianity, but looking also at other faiths, most especially Judaism, then Islam and then other major world faiths. The Church, very much like the Church of England, provides a great deal of support – continuing professional development, in-service training, and so on – to RE teachers in all Catholic schools.

Our other main concern, as I am about to run out of time, is the EBacc effect, which I noticed on Jan's presentation. I am very concerned at the moment with the EBacc certificate effect which our bishops regard really as an attack on parental choice in education – which perhaps one would not expect from a Conservative Secretary of State, but that is the way we see it – because Religious Education is the core of the curriculum. That is non-negotiable, that is in the nature of a Catholic school and that is what parents choose, whether they be Catholic or not, when they choose to send their children to a Catholic school. For the State to define the core of the curriculum in a way which makes it impossible for the Church to remain true to its vision is a huge threat for our schools a one which we cannot see having a good outcome for Religious Education. Thank you.

Fiona Bruce MP

Thank you very much Tim; again another insightful presentation, and very encouraging hearing the harmony and the unity which were expressed at the start. I am sure we will have some dissent as we go along. Our next contributor is Joy Schmack. Joy is Chair of the Association of RE Inspectors, Advisors and Consultants. Joy is going to present on two topics: the role of the advisor and also on development opportunities.

Joy Schmack

Thank you very much and thank you for asking me to give evidence. I am going to refer to my script because otherwise we could go on all night; I feel so passionate about this. My evidence is coming from a triangulation of sources: firstly from responses to questionnaires from the members

of RE Advisors, Inspectors and Consultants; secondly from within my role of Director of RE Services at a northern university, where I oversee primary and secondary RE, and a number of responses from PGCE teachers across 11 local authorities and dioceses; and thirdly my own action-based research in the classroom looking at the impact of Religious Education on countering prejudices and anti-Semitism.

I would like to just begin with a very brief outline on what the role of the local authority advisor was, one of which has been either sadly diminished or has become extinct. I think from looking at those points we can see three clear areas. Probably the first and most fundamental was serving a statutory body of SACREs and being that link between schools, SACREs and faith communities, making a significant contribution to social cohesion. From this grounded work we were able to provide CPD and lead projects that supported the teachers and the leaders of RE in the future, and empowered them. They also had a significant impact of working with initial teacher education as well; that impact was perhaps seen the next year when many PGCE students would go into those Local Authorities as providers of Religious Education.

It did not surprise me, therefore, when we sent out a questionnaire to all our teachers in partnership schools, that those who were in schools with a faith character reported that it was their local advisor, namely the Diocesan Advisor, that had the most impact on their classroom practice. We had a range of CPD courses that were suited to the needs of the people within the schools, whether those be non-specialists teaching RE or whether those be experienced head teachers who felt equipped to take a role in RE debates, leading network meetings and clusterings, and also valuing the regular denominational inspections and feedbacks. As we can see, for those within Local Authority schools and Community Schools, there were no such references anymore. The vast majority referred to what I would say are unmonitored internet forums as their methods of support now.

This polarised picture was again reflected when I asked, ‘What has changed Religious Education in your school during the last six months?’ For those in schools with a faith character, the response by and large was ‘nothing much’, that was a very different picture to those in Community schools. My evidence is mainly based on secondary surveys; I know that Linda is going to be referring to primary. I would say that significant changes have been happening since the week before Christmas and the weeks beginning this term, because I think many head teachers are starting to look at the curriculum for 2013 earlier than they would normally. We are seeing and hearing from teachers about changes that are afoot.

I am going to quote from five different responses that came in this week, all from local community schools. School A: ‘The school has decided to take the EBacc pupils away from that one lesson of RE a week they have.’ School B: ‘Senior leaders are cutting three lessons a week for GCSE to one 50 minute lesson a week. We hope that means we will keep short course; what we do know is long course is not an option.’ School C: ‘The introduction of the EBacc has cut our option numbers down by 25%. Pupils interviewed have said “I wanted to do RS, but already have to do history or geography”.’ School D: ‘The head of RE – who has since left with no replacement – was informed that will no longer be offered as a subject by September. Instead, there will be a one day conference a term organised by the geography department.’ School E: ‘We have no core RE in year 10 and 11 now. Previously all pupils did long course GCSE; now they can choose it as an option but since there is now RE now in year nine, is it a surprise they are not?’ That evidence has come in in the last three weeks, which I think paints a very different picture to the evidence that was being provided before.

What support is there out there for teachers of RE? We have already referred to the fact that, in many local authority schools, there is a lack of advisory support. Reference has already been made to initial teacher education – obviously close to my heart. We have heard about the funding cut; how do we esteem our trainees next year when they get no bursary and they go to the same schools as those that are getting £20,000?

With the cut in numbers, how do we provide the support for teachers that we once did? How do we provide action-based research projects and research-led CPD activities? As has been so clearly mentioned, I do not believe that any thought at all has been given to the fact that, in schools with a religious character within our area, there is a huge demand for teachers of RE that certainly our numbers are not going to be able to fulfil. With national initiatives, we have seen excellent projects like Resilience – looking at countering prejudices, looking at equipping teachers to challenge stereotypes – cut. However, with the few national initiatives that have survived I have been quite staggered by head teachers not being able to allow staff out for them. The most common excuse that I am given is, ‘We might get a no-notice Ofsted.’

Recently we have embarked on the ‘Three for RE’ programme, which offers fantastic bursaries for established teachers who want to fulfil a Masters’ in their own time. I have had three head teachers who have said that they will support – with reference – the teacher, but they will not provide the £200 because they are only going to be giving CPD money to EBacc subjects. Research constantly refers to the importance of schools going to visit places of worship to break down barriers and challenge misconceptions. We are hearing time after time of schools not being allowed to do that anymore because it is taking away curriculum time. We have talked about the role of advisors, we have talked about the role of SACREs; that is a statutory body. Yet for my members there is a huge disparity from zero funding to £20,000. It does appear that sometimes you get a SACRE by postcode lottery. How do SACREs monitor the lack of provision of RE in their schools? Where are they going to get that information from? Not from the local advisor, nor from Ofsted reports. I trawled 138 of our providers’ Ofsted reports and found three –I am really sorry to say this – incredibly minimalistic references to Religious Education. That is very different to the evidence that can be provided from denominational reports.

Finally, the one course that many people would go on from community schools, the GCSE course that was run by examination boards, the course where teachers would network together, look at the specification, look at the assessment; in September 2013 you will only be able to attend one of those courses if you are in Wales. Conclusion: I think my evidence collection has highlighted the impact of the many changes to Religious Education. I would argue it provides a very different picture of provision and teaching evaluated between those in schools with a religious character and those teaching RE in community schools. I would argue RE is not an issue of faith, but it is an issue of academic entitlement.

Fiona Bruce MP

Thank you very much Joy. Our next speaker is Linda Whitworth. Linda is Senior Lecturer in Religious Education at Middlesex University. The areas that Linda is going to cover in her presentation are primary RE in initial teacher education; pressures on primary RE and risks to primary RE in 2013.

Linda Whitworth

Thank you, good afternoon. I am here to talk about primary RE and the evidence base that I am using is mostly drawn from other RE lecturers in the same position as myself who are primary RE lecturers. I am referring to primary as training from three to 11 in this case. It is very important that RE is part of the world of three to 11 year-old children.

When we train RE teachers we are training both specialists and non-specialists, but all primary teachers need to be taught about the importance of RE. They need to understand RE because they need to create safe spaces in their classrooms where children can learn about their own understandings and explore them and understand the lifestyles and the experiences of others in the class. If we do not provide those safe spaces for young children we have a major problem because we have to then wait until secondary school where they get the specialist opportunities. It is key for us that RE is central to our training.

The slides illustrate what kind of training we do, mostly in higher education institutions, either undergraduate or post-graduate. We can teach it in a variety of ways. We can do it as a discrete subject or as a cross-curricular subject. We also feel it is very important to explain to student teachers that RE is part of a pastoral role: it has a role in terms of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; it is part of the community cohesion agenda, and also it is part of professional understandings and values. In other words, the values that our teachers are modelling in school are really important. Teaching practice which can include RE in a variety of ways; we are not in a position to say to our schools, 'You must deliver RE in a particular way.' We have to take what we find, and we might have it as a discrete subject, increasingly we have topic or theme work. We have an important role in encouraging both the teachers and students in school to understand the pastoral role of the teacher, because those very things I talked about before – spiritual, moral, social and cultural development – is all part of the picture too, and they need that experience.

Pressures on primary RE: some of these pressures are not new, they have been around for a while but I think it is very important that we look at them now. The first pressure is time. Initial teacher education is very tight-packed; most of the time is spent on literacy and numeracy. Foundation subjects struggle for time in busy schedules; this is an increasing problem. Some institutions give a lot of time to RE, especially if they run specialist courses or they have got connections to specific faiths or denominations. In other training, the situation is very varied. RE lecturers may be given only a couple of hours to cover the subject, and the time provided does not allow for knowledge and for pedagogy. That is a major issue.

Our next issue is status. The status of RE has been commented upon by Ofsted; we know it has low status in a number of schools. This was a problem in 2007; it is still a problem now. RE being outside the national curriculum means that it is not as secure in many of the primary schools that we have to use. It also means that, with the dominance of core subjects – particularly numeracy and literacy – time for RE is very often removed from the student teacher during their training. The status of RE in academies at the moment is uncertain and that means, again, that is an issue for us in terms of training. My research shows that most students are very positive about teaching RE, but their experience in schools is so varied that this impacts on both their practice and their commitment. That is something that we have to address in our community.

That brings me to knowledge: this is a really major pressure. We are asking our students to teach about six major world religions. We have heard about the issues with Christianity already today. They need to be able to teach and support pupils in their schools from a range of cultures and religions both in Britain and understanding the global situation. As well as subject knowledge, they also

need to know how to teach RE. As Mike Castelli said at the last session, the quality of RE in the English classroom is recognised across Europe and the world. This is when the best teaching – acknowledged by Ofsted and by others – is supported by understanding both what to teach and how to teach it. If our teachers do not feel confident, they do not explore understanding what RE offers their children. This includes finding opportunities to tackle prejudice, bullying, the stereotyping of religions, all of which need to be addressed in primary schools. The class teacher is the best placed person to promote tolerance and understanding with their class; student teachers need to see this being modelled in school. That is the kind of picture that we want to produce for our students

This takes me to school practices. Because RE has a varied status in school – often dependent on the nature of the school – there is a real difference between community schools, academies and faith schools in a variety of ways. Ofsted reports that primary teachers lack confidence and knowledge in teaching RE and therefore the quality of RE teaching in schools is very varied. This creates issues for students: can we guarantee that they will see good practice? We cannot. In addition, in 2010 Ofsted reported that a third of primary schools are using teaching assistants to deliver at least part of their RE provision. This practice is continuing and we are interested to see if this has become a bigger issue once the APPG survey results come through. This affects the way that teachers and pupils see RE and its relationship to the rest of their learning. Students should not be placed with TAs and with newly qualified teachers, so they are often steered away from teaching RE lessons, which is where the TA is, and they use that time for planning. It means they do not get an opportunity to observe what RE could be in the classroom.

Collecting data has proved very challenging indeed, so I have put up on here the 2007 data to give us a benchmark, and then some of the data that we have begun to collect now. You can see here a range from three to 40 hours: we do not have any specialist route data there, but we do have an average, which is 18.5. If you cross over to 2013, the range is from four to 26 hours that I have had reported so far. Specialist routes can go up to 90 hours; that shows that in Universities and HEIs that really are committed to teaching RE for primary you can get very good, extended courses that cover subject knowledge and pedagogy. In contrast, look at the PGCE courses: two to 18 hours. Two hours in which to teach RE: an hour on subject knowledge – six major world religions in an hour? – and an hour on pedagogy, how to teach it. It is not adequate.

We also have reports from individual institutions who are telling us – and this why some of the data has been so difficult to get in detail – about RE specialisms that are being lost and reductions in BA, undergraduate and post-graduate training. We are also hearing about, for example, a 12 hour course – now cut to four hours. The impact of that on the student teachers is that they are not learning how to deliver quality RE because they have not got the time.

These are the risks to primary RE right now in 2013. The reduction in time and training is a really serious issue for us. We do not know yet how it is going to pan out: we are losing courses; reductions are going in to place now, as courses are reviewed the reductions take place; it is a very moving picture at the moment. As you know, RE is not part of the curriculum review. That means that the status of RE is questioned in schools. What does it say to parents, to schools, to the educational community when RE is not part of this curriculum review? It is included in the thinking of the previous review, but this omission means that RE is not part of the developing discussion about the curriculum and it does not get included in curriculum development alongside other subjects, including opportunities for CPD. That is another problem that we have.

The resultant signal to schools is weak; RE is not part of the new review, which inevitably means it lags behind in teachers' perceptions. As you know, the proposal for the EBacc is creating major

issues for secondary education; ultimately that is going to affect primary education too. The majority of our students who have taken GCSE – short or long course – or have gone on to study RE higher up have a very positive attitude to RE. They think it is a good subject, they understand why they need to teach it to primary children. With the loss of the EBacc, what we are losing is a knowledge base which will then feed into the subsequent primary student teachers. If they do not have that knowledge and that attitude towards RE in particular, we have a problem. We know already about the increasing use of TA provision. That seems to be further entrenched, from what we can gather.

The really big issue for us is the fewer opportunities for student teachers to gain quality experience. If TAs are teaching it, if school teachers themselves are unsure what it is about, if they are not getting qualification and good quality teaching themselves, what is that going to do when we put student teachers with them? Our problem is that our student teachers are not getting enough good quality RE to learn how to teach it effectively.

Fiona Bruce MP

Thank you very much Linda. Our next speaker is Professor John Howson, who is Managing Director of dataforeducation.info. John is going to talk about current data around the labour market.

Professor John Howson

It is a great privilege to be here this evening from outside the community of experts on the subject, although I note from my records that it was almost 20 years ago that I first spoke to a group of RE specialists about issues to do with teacher training.

What I am going to talk about in the next few minutes is largely about the secondary situation, because that is where most of the usable data is. I think Linda made it quite clear from her talk that it is quite difficult to get an understanding about what is going on in terms of high quality data from the primary sector. Since 2010 and the White Paper report into teaching, the landscape of training teachers in this country has shifted quite markedly. I have put on this slide the number of different ways in which you can now become a qualified teacher in this country. What is interesting about RE in the current landscape is that a significant number of the training places for next year are still located in higher education.

Of the I think 450 target – although when they did the original allocations they only allocated 437 of those places – 319 stayed within higher education. 10 stayed within higher education undergraduate for secondary in one institution. There were 20 salaried places for next year on the School Direct salaried route and 98 other School Direct non-salaried places. That meant that RE, in terms of most of the subjects, had a relatively high percentage of its total still in higher education. About 73% are in the core, higher education or SCITTs, most of that in practice being in higher education, with 22% being in the non-salaried School Direct and only 5% in the salaried School Direct.

That may have implications for the future in some of the things that Tim was talking about – and I want to mention later on – but compared to, say, English, where 21% of the allocated places are in the salaried School Direct route, 33% in non-salaried and only 46% in higher education, RE has still got a very high proportion of its places left in higher education. I borrowed this – for those of you who were here last time – from Audrey Brown's presentation because it shows how that target of

450 has gone down from 740 a few years ago. Frankly, that 740 should have gone down before it did. We knew that falling roles were coming in to the secondary sector; we knew that that meant that we probably did not need to train as many teachers. We were then hit by the recession, which in one year brought 30,000 people back into teacher registration – who had let their registration either lapse or had not been with the General Teaching Council – and saw fewer people leave.

That, combined with falling rolls and a sector which in RE was over-recruiting against the target, left us with a situation where in secondary there were a significant number of people coming out of training looking for jobs. As most of you will appreciate, we have a situation in this country at present where the training is very significantly controlled in terms of subject knowledge and the number of places. However, once you get out of training, you are in a free-for-all. Despite what we all say to trainees – ‘Your expertise is going to be extremely useful and you will be expected to teach your subject’ – we know that any teacher may teach anything, certainly in a community school. As we know, and as Audrey told you last time, that means that a significant percentage of both the lessons and the time that RE is taught in secondary schools are taught by people who have had no post A-level qualification in the subject. Indeed – since they are not asked – they may not even have an A-level in the subject.

What worries me slightly is that as the number of places fell, the number of applicants for places rose from about two applicants for every PGCE place in 2010/11 to about just over 2.5, 2.6 in 2011/12. That meant institutions in theory had slightly more choice across the recruitment round. One of our other problems is that when we recruit people into teaching is there is no closing date: do you decide to take the first people who apply or do you decide they may not be good enough and there might be a better one along later, so we will keep some places open? That is a high risk strategy. It is a high risk strategy because you may take people who are less good than those that come along later. This is something that I do seriously think is going to be very interesting with School Direct, if they want to fill their places early.

What is interesting is that over the last two years we have lost, at this point in the year, roughly 200 applicants for PGCE courses; this time two years ago there were about 500 people who had already applied for PGCE courses for the following September. As of 7 January it was just below 300; it has now crept above 300 as of last Monday. Some of those will have gone to School Direct: they would have decided that School Direct would be a better bet compared to a PGCE. Some of them have just disappeared; it may be because of the bursary, it may be because of the fees. Indeed, I think the fees may well have a more significant effect when coupled with the bursary.

But before I finish on that point, just to say it is extremely difficult to get information about jobs. We trawl through nationally advertised jobs on the main websites and publications and log them into our database. It is quite difficult to categorise them exactly because schools do not always advertise – particularly main-scale secondary posts – in a way that I would like them to, by using nice convenient terms. They use a whole range of different words in different orders and it makes it quite difficult to do. But what we think is in 2009/10 there was roughly balance, 2010/11 – which you will recall from the earlier slide, was one of the years when there was over-recruitment on PGCE courses – there was a surplus of people coming out of training compared to the number of advertisements. By 2011/12 when we cut the target, we were back down to probably – I think – a cut which was too draconian, particularly if you add in the fact that some of those people would be teaching subjects that were not described as RE but were included in, say, humanities. If I included the humanities, where it might have included RE it was higher. I think across the board in all humanities subjects, I think the Department cut the target too far, but since it does not have an

iterative discussion with people about its modelling, it is difficult to have a conversation with them about that.

I am seriously worried about the combination of no bursary plus potential £9,000 fees, particularly when you get somebody who has had £27,000 worth of fees for their three-year undergraduate course. If they quit at that point and get a job – in what is supposed to be an improving labour market for graduates – they will pay back roughly £54,000. That is on the directgov calculator if you want to go and play with it. If you add on another £9,000 for your PGCE course – maximum fee – you have now borrowed £36,000. Such is the joy of compound interest that you will then pay back £94,000 – which directgov told me last time I did this. I think it has now changed its inflation rate and that has now gone up to £102,000 when I did it this morning. Even if those are overestimates, the crucial point is that if you want to do a PGCE it is going to cost you money. How many people sitting next to somebody in a classroom next door on a Teach First or School Direct salaried route, receiving a salary, are going to think it is worth the candle? That is probably the most serious thing that I have got to worry about.

As I have hinted, not much can be said about primary; even less I think can be said about the 16-19 sector. We have to remember that once the learning leaving age goes up to 19, we have got the whole of the 16-19 and the issue about the FE sector and what goes on there. In some parts of the country, that provides most of the 16-19 education as a result of the way in which comprehensive reorganisation was introduced in the '60s and '70s. My serious worry is that we have a very controlled front end, and a complete free-for-all from that point onwards. If we could get a situation where at least people started to think about whether there was a mandatory level of subject knowledge which you needed to be able to teach the subject, then I think that we could at least start to articulate a way forward. Without that, I cannot see any serious change in the position of the difference between the number of qualified teachers to the level that we in this room think is necessary and the percentage that Audrey spelt out last time.

Fiona Bruce MP

Thank you very much indeed Professor Howson; I think the skill of presenting a complex subject and making it readily understandable has been exhibited by you today, thank you. Our next speaker is Alan Brine, and he is an HMI from Ofsted. I want to reassure you that whilst this might not always be the case, you are very welcome here today. You are the National Advisor for RE and the topics that you want to focus on will be an Ofsted perspective, teacher supply and support, key findings and behind-the-scene concerns.

Alan Brine HMI

Right what I would like to try and do is paint a picture of what Ofsted knows about what is going on in schools in relation to the issues that we are concerning ourselves with. What I am going to show you is some information that is now being gathered as part of our tri-annual survey of what is happening in schools. That leads to a three-yearly report, the next one of which is due this term and will coincide rather nicely with your own report, I hope. Obviously we hope there will be some synergy between the two, which will be quite a powerful message.

The evidence base from which I am speaking is quite important. Over a three year period from 2009 to 2012, roughly 90 primary and 90 secondary schools, including specialist schools, were visited. These were quite significant inspection visits focussing exclusively on RE. We observed a lot of lessons. In that sample there are no VA schools or faith academies because our focus is

entirely on the non-faith sector, although we do go to some voluntary controlled schools. We have also undertaken a telephone survey of 30 schools and academies that had no GCSE entries for 2011, because we were quite interested to know why. Why were those schools not entering any pupils at all for RE GCSE in Year 11? That is the evidence base which I am talking about.

I am going to rattle through this fairly quickly; these are some of the key findings specifically related to teacher supply and support. One of the judgements we make is about the quality of the access to and impact of subject training and support in schools. We found it to be 'good' or 'better' in only a third of schools. Only a third of schools were able to say to us that they felt they were getting good entitlement to those things. That means two thirds were 'not good enough' – that is the new Ofsted phrasing. Of those, a third – half of that number – the provision was actually 'inadequate'. In other words the teacher was saying, 'We just have no access to any significant training or support with RE.'

And the evidence is that schools are finding this increasingly difficult; there is an increase in difficulty in accessing this aspect of training support. That is one of the worst statistics in all the statistics we gather in relation to RE. Primary head teachers are frequently referring a significant lack of confidence amongst many staff about teaching RE to us, and the problems they face as a head teacher. You might ask why they do not do something about the training, but they do not. That is a significant issue. When we talk to NQTs or RQTs – recently qualified teachers – they frequently report exactly what we have heard earlier: very limited initial training in RE. The picture is one of primary teachers really feeling quite inadequately supported and quite anxious about teaching this particular subject.

In 50% of schools that we visited some or all of the RE is taught in this preparation, planning and assessment time by someone other than the class teacher. Sometimes that is a cover teacher; sometimes it is an RE specialist in primary; often it is the HLTA or a TA. The problem with that is it isolates RE from the rest of the curriculum, because this subject is being taught by somebody different to the rest of the curriculum, which is being taught by a different teacher. We think that impacts on the quality of what is happening with the subject.

Subject leadership we found to be 'less than good' in 50% of the primary schools we visited. In particular, the whole area of monitoring and evaluating and improving the quality of the subject lacked rigour and focus. Very rarely did schools refer to any opportunity for staff training on RE in primary schools. That is a fairly bleak picture about the quality of support and training received in primaries.

In secondary, it is a very, very variable picture: the staffing resources vary enormously from school to school and there is an element of such a level of inconsistency that that causes us considerable concern. In around a third of secondary schools there is a continued routine use of non-specialists with some negative impact on the quality of the provision. I think it would be fair to say that process is better managed than it used to be. In the past RE was often described as a 'Polyfilla' subject – anyone with a bit of spare on their timetable would teach RE. Now the non-specialists tend to be slightly better managed – there tends to be a core of people – so there is some opportunity to involve some training, but there is still a negative impact there.

Many teachers of RE report a sense of isolation: they are often in one-person departments and have very high pupil contact ratios because of the number of pupil throughput, because they are often getting only one period a week of RE, so they have a huge amount of contact with a lot of pupils. That diminishes the effectiveness of what they do. There is also some emerging evidence of a reduction in specialist staffing. It is too early for us to determine a trend, although some of the

things Joy was saying suggests that there may be a rapid increase in this pattern of reduction now. It needs monitoring. The issue now is your point: who is going to do the monitoring? We certainly began to see a trend, which may now be increasing more rapidly.

So what? The point is of course, why does it matter? It matters for some of these issues: we are going to report, when this report comes out, that a significant percentage of pupils are leaving school with low levels of what I would call 'religious literacy'. They do not know enough. There is a real concern about the low level of religious literacy of many pupils who are leaving our schools now, and we think that is declining. The teaching is not good enough in 60% of provision across primary and Key Stage 3. In 60% of provision, the quality of teaching is 'less than good': not good enough. The teaching is better at Key Stage 4 – more like 60% good – but that actually conceals an issue, which I do not want to spend a whole lot of time on, but we have wider concerns about the actual quality of GCSE provision. We are often seeing better organised and better planned lessons, but actually the amount of time they have available to teach the GCSE or the quality of the GCSE itself actually means that the effect on pupils' learning is not as good as it should be.

Low standards mean this: we are saying that as a result of this pupils are not developing – in our experience – a coherent understanding of specific religions; they do not understand how the bits of a religion connect to each other: why do people do this; how does this connect to this in the life of a religious person? Their ability to discuss issues about the truth – the meaning and value of religion – is significantly diminished because of these low levels of religious literacy. Their grasp of the fact that religion is highly diverse is often very limited in many of the pupils who are leaving our schools. They often do not understand, effectively, the language of religion, the very distinctive nature of the language or religion – its imagery; its symbolic, metaphorical nature – and of course if you do not understand that language you are impoverished significantly in the way you make sense of this area. Their ability to actually talk about, evaluate and think through for themselves really fundamental and ultimate questions about life is limited.

So that is the effect of the problems we have been talking about in both of these days, in terms of Ofsted's findings. It means, therefore, that often these things also do not happen; the ability of RE to contribute significantly to these areas is diminished because the quality of the teacher providing the support and training available to teachers is not good enough.

Finally, we have a whole series of concerns behind-the-scenes. You have heard all these, but in a sense it is all part of a package of concerns about the state that RE is in at the moment; serious growing concern about the inconsistency and the quality of these local arrangements; many SACREs are not functioning effectively; many locally agreed syllabuses are not being revised and reviewed and improved in the way they need to be. Very few local authorities now provide the level of guidance one would expect and used to be able to provide in the past, and that is a postcode lottery now. I have mentioned a number of local authorities, there is one here you will hear from in a minute, where actually the quality of support is very good; however, in many other authorities it is virtually non-existent. It is a postcode lottery now.

Of course we have the issue of the wider impact of educational policy on RE. I suspect none of this is deliberate, but the development of academies – perfectly fine in itself – is having the effect of fragmenting the quality of support for RE, because they are taken out of LAs. LA budgets are being cut. We have heard a lot about the EBacc; our evidence is yet to be clear about the impact of the EBacc on RE numbers, but we think there is going to be a big dip if not this year then certainly next

year. The changes in the rules for short courses – all of these you know and have heard about elsewhere.

Finally, what we have lost is any clear locus for subject development work. This subject needs development; teachers need high quality support to enable them to improve the provision that is going on schools, and it is very difficult now to see where there is a locus for that at national level. We have talked already about the exclusion from the national curriculum review as part of that process. So, there we are; that is what we know; in a sense that is what – in the end – the impact of much of what we have been hearing over the last two days has, in terms of what we are actually seeing in schools.

Fiona Bruce MP

Alan, thank you very much indeed. I am sure that when you visit many institutions you leave with many lessons to be learned and you have not disappointed us today. There was much food for thought there I am sure we all agree, and much for us to consider. We have now got two additional witnesses. The first one is Yousif al-Khoei. The al-Khoei Foundation is an international Muslim organisation in the Shia tradition which runs two schools in the UK which teach the national curriculum. Please do come forward to make your presentation. And Mr al-Khoei's presentation is going to focus on the teaching of Islam and how this suffers in schools from the problems faced in teaching RE nationally; but as a minority within a minority, Shia Islam suffers particularly so, particularly in terms of the way it is presented, its history and philosophical traditions, a lack of experts and concern about how some text books and internet sites are inappropriate. You are welcome.

Yousif al-Khoei

I will not be long, because we are a bit short of time. Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity. We have all heard the problems that RE teaching faces nationally, and to be a minority within a minority faith, we really have serious problems: serious problems to identify the problems and serious problems to communicate this. Although Shia Islam is a minority in terms of numbers, nominally they are the other half of Islam, but for a number of reasons, some of them to do with the history of immigration into this country and the politics of it all, much of the teaching of Islam tends to portray it as part of an addition to the mainstream and will not teach it as part of the mainstream.

This means that the faith is often not taught as the adherents of that faith would like it to be presented, which has ramifications on the status of what is essentially 20% of the Muslims in the UK within the public sphere, within Government organisations, because the very basic teaching of Shia Islam seems to be – often – not very satisfactory. We have all spoken about the lack of experts, people who really know about the rich tradition in terms of history and philosophy. Some of the innovative thinking within Islam actually tends to come from minorities, but this is quite overlooked, and what is actually worrying about some of the commended text books and some of the citations to websites is that they contain very prejudiced, very anti-Shia material. Some of the websites even promote direct or indirect hate against Muslims, considering them as heretics and non-Muslim.

Within the Shia organisations, there are not really enough structures to monitor this, but I thought I would come and highlight this, flag it as a problem, and try to work out, hopefully, through the

Religious Affairs Committee and your good offices, to see what is reasonable to try to address this issue. Thank you very much for this opportunity.

Fiona Bruce MP

Thank you very much. And our final witness is Guy Hordern. Guy has been involved with Birmingham SACRE for many years, and has had a key role in the consideration and provision of the Birmingham model of RE provision. More information can be found about this on the website faithmakesadifference.co.uk. Guy is going to focus on issues relating to the content of RE, what outcomes should be expected from its teaching, the importance and contribution to RE of local communities and what RE is enjoyed by children. I look forward to that.

Guy Hordern MBE

Thank you very much indeed. Can I apologise as I do not have what I am about to say on slides? I do apologise for that; it is in the body of the written submission that we have made, and I shall be extracting a relatively small amount of the submission that we have made, so as to leave as much time as possible for questions.

Specifically I wanted to address three questions in the All Party Parliamentary Group pro forma, really focussing on the support for Religious Education teachers, and fairly briefly to go through the support that the Birmingham SACRE is currently offering to RE teachers. So to that extent it is quite a narrowly focussed presentation. So, question four: where can teachers of RE go for help if they want to ask questions? In Birmingham, teachers of Religious Education in Birmingham maintained schools have access to Simone Whitehouse, the RE advisor, who spends currently about 75% of her time either doing work for SACRE or advising schools. Teachers also have access to the city's Religious Education website that our Chairman has referred to, www.faithmakesadifference.co.uk, and in preparation for this visit I have been able to obtain some statistical evidence: in the last year there have been 5,355 unique visitors, the page views are 37,800 and the average duration of a visit is five-and-a-half minutes. Now, I am not a techy in any degree at all, but those that are tell me that this is actually quite a high use for an information website.

At present the website provides lesson plans, lesson planning, tools, filmed material for use in the classrooms and also interactive games; all of that is provided free for Birmingham teachers who use the website. Teachers who are outside Birmingham – who are also making extensive use of the website – have to pay, and in that way we hope to make it a self-sustaining exercise. In addition to this there are RE specialists at the University of Birmingham, in the Department of Education, and also in Newman University College, that we heard referred to earlier on in our presentation. A Theologian with an interest in Religious Education is available in the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Birmingham and he offers advice. So that is a quick answer, I hope, to question four.

Question five: to what extent SACREs are able to carry out effectively their function in relation to RE? The Birmingham SACRE benefits from the strong support of teachers and the full cross-party support of Birmingham City Council. I was a Conservative Chairman of SACRE until May of last year, I have been succeeded by a Labour colleague who does a much better job than I do, and I work very, very closely with him. So there is cross-party political support for the work; this helps in the provision of an annual budget of £90,000. We could discuss later why that funding is there, but suffice it to say that it is there and that has enabled extensive resources to be produced.

We have 'Learning From Faith', a DVD suitable for early years – children before the statutory age of education; a DVD, 'Religious Education in Birmingham' specifically designed for the faith groups who are very extensive in Birmingham – a wide diversity; and then a DVD, 'Faith Makes a Difference', which schedules the 24 dispositions on which the syllabus is based, with interviews from children from the nine major faiths in Birmingham explaining on DVD how their faith helps them to live out the dispositions. So we are well resourced. In addition to the resource, we also get a lot of help from the Birmingham Faith Leaders Group, which was formerly led by the Roman Catholics, by Archbishop Vincent Nichols, who has been a strong supporter of the Birmingham syllabus, and has offered us detailed advice. He was 'translated' to Westminster, if that is the right word, but he still keeps in touch with us.

So Committee A and Committee B own the syllabus through the active involvement of the faith communities in Birmingham. This is a proper basis for communal ownership of the school syllabus, and particularly in areas where you have a wide diversity of religion, and I was very struck by what Alan Brine said about religious illiteracy. That is really quite dangerous in some parts of this country and provides fertile territory for religious extremism, and we are committed in Birmingham, so far as we can and as many authorities are, to doing everything we can to prevent that happening.

One of our recommendations is that the 2010 academies Act be amended in the funding agreement to ensure that academies and free schools follow syllabuses in RE which have this local support. It is noteworthy that in Birmingham, the two free schools, Nishkam Primary and the High School, are voluntarily using the Birmingham syllabus, based on the inherent merit of the truths that it endeavours to teach. Other schools which have been converted to academies – I am the governor of an Oasis Academy – are committed to continuing to use the syllabus too. So finally: Continuing Professional Development. The RE syllabus website contains a CPD film for primary school teachers filmed and made by primary school teachers for primary school teachers, a CPD film for secondary school teachers made on the same basis, a filmed exemplar of a primary school RE lesson and a filmed exemplar of a secondary school education. So, within the scope of what we can do we have done our best to resource Religious Education teachers.

Fiona Bruce MP

Thank you very much, Guy. Can I ask, will you be leaving the material that you referred to in your submission?

Guy Hordern MBE

Yes this is all for you; I will leave them behind.

Fiona Bruce MP

Thank you very much. So we will accept those as part of your submission to this inquiry, and can I also say, before we move on to questions, I would like to thank the administrators who have been involved in co-ordinating the preparation of these sessions; it really has been excellent/. Thank you very much indeed.

3. Questions and Answers

Lesley Prior

I am Vice Chair of the National Association of SACREs and involve myself in CPD and ITT in RE. We have heard lots of comments this evening about teacher shortage in RE in terms of training places in universities, I am also wondering if it might be an issue that there are lots of overseas trained teachers teaching RE who, however skilled they are and whatever wonderful things they bring to their role, are not actually familiar with RE in this country for two reasons: first of all they do not have the subject knowledge, and second RE in this country exists as it does in a way that is not to be found anywhere else in the world, so while we are wondering about TAs teaching RE and non-qualified teachers teaching RE, is there also an issue here for some of the speakers to consider about other people from those backgrounds teaching RE. What about SCITT programmes? How capable are they of preparing people to teach RE effectively at primary and secondary levels and so on?

Fiona Bruce MP

Thank you very much for that contribution. Do any of the contributors want to comment briefly on that or shall we move on to the next question? Yes, next question, thank you.

Hugo Whately

I am an RE teacher and teacher associate on the APPG report. I just wanted to ask Alan Brine, is it true that Ofsted is not going to be inspecting RE anymore, and if so is that the last source of evidence about what is happening in RE?

Alan Brine HMI

There are two ways in which we inspect at RE. One is obviously through Section 5 reports, the general Ofsted inspection reports, and – I think it is the case – I have done a trawl this year of references to RE; there are few references to RE in general reports on schools, and very rarely is there any issue around failing to meeting statutory requirements or lack of appropriate provision; very rarely is that picked up. It is to do with the pattern in which Ofsted now inspects; it is focussed very much on key issues like the core curriculum, the overall quality of teaching, behaviour, safety and so on. As for subject inspections, the programme of subject inspections ceased in September for Foundation Studies and RE – it is not just RE; all Foundation Studies and RE – in order to focus all Ofsted resources on our Chief Inspector's desire to get Ofsted more actively involved in school improvement work.

There was some initial idea that we could perhaps use evidence from Section 5 to gain information about what is going on in RE, but you will have now gathered from the earlier point that we are finding that we cannot find evidence properly from Section 5. So there is at the moment some consideration to ways in which some programmes of subject inspection might be re-introduced, so

watch this space. But your general point is right, Ofsted subject inspections ceased alongside all the Foundation subjects in September.

Mary Glendon MP

It is an Ofsted question once again. Could I ask what you would suggest should be the priorities for action by the Government and the Department of Education in order to raise standards in RE?

Fiona Bruce MP

Thank you Mary, and you are very welcome to this evening's event. That is another question addressed to Alan.

Alan Brine HMI

I can suggest what I think the next Ofsted long report is going to suggest. There will be a number of recommendations to schools about things that they could do specifically, but perhaps in terms of the key issues this group will be likely to suggest – you cannot hold me to this – we are likely to suggest that some sort of review of the statutory position of this subject needs to be undertaken. We think there are serious fault lines now with the current statutory arrangements which need consideration. It may be that the role of SACREs need to be significantly strengthened, it may be the sort of points that you were making about academies being involved in RE and SACREs need to be established, but some review needs to take place because we are going to be in a situation soon where some local authorities have virtually no schools left. They would still have to produce an agreed syllabus for RE for non-existent schools. So that is a real issue, a real big issue, so I think they are likely to make that recommendation.

I think we are likely to place quite a lot of emphasis on the need to monitor very carefully what is happening in schools in terms of provision for RE, particularly in secondary schools, and we think the Government and the DfE need to monitor that extremely rigorously to see what impact Government policies are having. And the third thing I think is that the Department needs to work with the RE community, the Religious Education Council to actually look at the whole issue of teacher supply and teacher training and establish some more robust national and local arrangements to ensure that teachers have better access to training. I could probably go on quite a long way but those are some of the really key issues I think. The other issue is about GCSE. We think some significant review needs to be undertaken about the state of RE and GCSE where we have some fairly grave concerns, but I will not go into the details of that.

Reverend Janina Ainsworth

Not a question in fact but just an addition to the final point that Alan was making. I think one of the things that is going to make that last point actually redundant is the complete lack of understanding as to what is to happen to subjects that are not going to be included in the English Baccalaureate. Several people have seen a question asked in the House of Lords on Monday, which got a very opaque answer. So the first thing is at least to give some clarity about the Government's intentions in relation to non-EBacc subjects and accreditation at GCSE, that is 16 plus.

Fiona Bruce MP

Thank you very much Janina. I have a question that has been submitted; it is for Linda. ‘We have heard concerns about the teaching in schools of different faiths; what do you find is the attitude of primary trainees towards teaching Christianity and other religions?’ Linda, do you have a response to that?

Linda Whitworth

Yes, I think the attitude of my trainees is very positive and, talking to other ITT lecturers, the same. I think that there is a problem with Christianity which has been recognised already today. I think there is an issue about understanding the diversity within religions as well as the diversity among religions. I hope that that answers your question in that there is a positive nature, there is a positive interest. Their problem is, how do we get this information and how do we relate it to our children?

John Keast OBE

I am Chair of the RE Council. I think I am right in remembering that one of Alan’s slides said that 60% of key stage 1-3 provision was ‘not good enough’, which I think the short way of putting is ‘poor’, and we also have evidence that there is a collapse in the training of RE teachers. So my question is to the politicians, especially the Government, what is it going to do about that?

Fiona Bruce MP

If I can say, I think the key purpose of this inquiry is to probe exactly that question.

Yousif al-Khoei

I have got a very brief point. What I want to say: as we heard, the United Kingdom is probably one of the best examples of how RE is taught and in most other countries RE is taught as preaching rather than teaching, and I think if we want to market the experience in the UK, that can be a solution for many, many countries which suffer sectarian or ethnic conflicts and this country can become the source of a good case example of how RE can be taught. And that is a very good reason why we should not weaken the RE education teaching in this country and strengthen it.

Fiona Bruce MP

Thank you very much. Now we have another gentleman here who is going to ask a question. I am just going to usurp my role as Chairman, or take advantage of it, before we have the question from the gentleman at the front and say I would like to cast a question out to all of you, particularly those who have not spoken tonight, because many of you will have travelled a long way. It is a question that has been submitted, and it is: ‘What are your greatest concerns for the future of RE at the moment?’ So if any of you from the audience would like to respond to that, to take the opportunity to put your concerns on the record, briefly, then I will ask you to do so after we have had the next question.

Ed Pawson

I am the Chair of NATRE, the National Association of Teachers of RE. I think the picture I am going to go away with is Joy's slide there with the scales with online help on the right hand side and on the left hand side the diminishing help for teachers and advisory teachers, which are no longer there. All the structures which we would have looked to 10, 20 years ago have gone. My worry is, as a practising RE teacher, where are we to look to find solid guidance? The advisory system used to do that and I see no replacement for that except, effectively, hearsay – the unmonitored online support systems, which are good but inadequate as an ultimate source. So, where is the support coming from?

Fiona Bruce MP

Thank you. Does anyone want to pick up on that, or shall we record it as a grave concern from you?

Professor John Howson

I think that is part of a very much bigger problem about the middle tier and the future of the middle tier in the developing education scene in Britain. It is not just RE; it goes across the whole curriculum. And just if I may comment on one earlier thing from John's question, I think the thing we need to be particularly alert on in the primary sector is that significant numbers now go through the PGCE route, and whereas in the past policy makers could say 'Oh, it is alright, there are enough people coming through three and four year teacher training courses', that number is diminishing at the undergraduate level and is likely to diminish further in the future. And, as we saw from Linda's slide, the amount of time of PGCE courses is very limited indeed for some of the generalists.

John Gay

I am from the University of Oxford and I chair the RE Council's PR committee. Almost inevitably we are looking at problems, and that is part of the nature of this process. I am slightly concerned that when you are focussing largely on problems that it has a sort of downward spiral effect, and I think we have also got to think of the teachers in schools at the moment who are trying their best and we have got to try and find some good news stories to try to encourage them. So I just put that slight warning about the whole process that in a sense, we do not want to shoot ourselves in the foot about it. So, thank you.

Jeremy Taylor

I am involved in the Church of England's RE work. In answer to your question I have just got one suggestion: find the means by which the Department – be it officials or ministers – can be made to hear and to see what everyone is telling them. And that is it.

Helen Harrison

I think the hat I will put on is I am RE advisor to Lancashire SACRE. Just picking up on what John Gay said just before, I had the privilege of spending this morning with six high schools in Lancashire that advise Lancashire SACRE on how RE should be and when I told them where I was coming this afternoon one young lady said 'Would you ask them how I am going to persuade my

mum to let me take Religious Education? Because of the EBacc she is insisting that I do not.’ So I would like to also say in connection with that this morning, as well, what a privilege it was working with those young people whose brief is to support the work of Lancashire SACRE by carrying out various surveys and various other activities, so yes there is a lot of good practice, there are some very good RE teachers. There were six in that room this morning; they are all working incredibly hard to try and keep us afloat but they are doing it against the odds. The young people from Lancashire in that group would like to pass on their concerns but also the fact they truly believe it is a subject that is worth fighting for. Thank you.

Fiona Bruce MP

Thank you very much indeed. I have another submitted question if I may. This question is: ‘Do you agree that in teaching RE it is essential that religions are taught in accordance with how they understand themselves, i.e. based on revealed truth, rather than being taught through the perspective of today’s culture and secular mind-set?’ Does anyone want to comment on that? Or shall we leave it hanging in the air? Interestingly enough, it is written underneath the question, ‘I hope this makes sense.’

Can I say thank you very much to you all for coming? It has been an excellent session. Thank you to all the presenters for keeping to time, for your very clear presentations, for coming so well prepared and for exhibiting exactly what any good teacher should do: you really have communicated tonight what you meant to communicate to us and we are very grateful. The report will be greatly benefited through all of the contributions and questions tonight. Thank you so much.

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