

Meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education
Inquiry: The contribution of RE to good community relations
Launch 17 March 2014

Attendees

Stephen Lloyd MP	Chair (Chair of APPG on RE)
Mary Glendon MP	Member of Parliament for North Tyneside, Vice-Chair of APPG on RE
Annette Brooke MP	Member of Parliament for Mid Dorset and North Poole
Christopher Chope MP	Member of Parliament for Christchurch
Stephen Gilbert MP	Member of Parliament for St Austell and Newquay
John Glen MP	Member of Parliament for Salisbury
Philip Davies MP	Member of Parliament for Shipley
Steve Brine MP	Member of Parliament for Winchester
Robert Buckland MP	Member of Parliament for South Swindon
The Rt Revd John Pritchard	Bishop of Oxford
Lord Gordon of Strathblane	
Aisling Cohn	3FF, Three Faiths Forum
Robert Dixon	3FF, Three Faiths Forum
Stephen Shashoua	3FF, Three Faiths Forum
Colin Hallmark	3:nine
Paul Pettinger	Accord Coalition
Aliya Azam	Al Khoei Foundation
Joy Schmack	Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants
Joanne Harris	Broughton Business and Enterprise College
Jeremy Taylor	Church of England Board of Education
Mark Chater	Culham St Gabriel's Trust
Priscilla Chadwick	Culham St Gabriell's Trust
Paul Adams	Department for Education
Sarah Lane Cawte	Free Church Education Committee
John James	The Grey Coat Hospital C of E School
Derek Humphrey	Hockerill Foundation
Helen Harrison	Independent RE Consultant
Farid Panjwani	Isma'ili Council
Salima Bhatia	Isma'ili Council
Denise Chaplin	London Borough of Lewisham
Elizabeth Jenkerson	National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United Kingdom
Juliet Lyal	NATRE
Benjamin Waldmann	PB Political Consulting
William O'Brien	PB Political Consulting
Bridget McGing	Pears Foundation
Sarah Smalley	Religious Education Council
Sophie Agrotis	Religious Education Council
Mubina Khan Daniels	RE Today Services
Zoe Keens	RE Today Services
Phil Leivers	AREIAC
Jane Chipperton	St Albans Diocese

Speakers

Dr Joyce Miller	Inquiry Coordinator, Religious Education Council
John Keast OBE	Chair, Religious Education Council
Habeeba Shaikh	Young Ambassador for RE, Broughton Business and Enterprise College
Chloe Connor	Young Ambassador for RE, Broughton Business and Enterprise College
Saskia Starritt	Young Ambassador for RE, Broughton Business and Enterprise College
William Mercer	Young Ambassador for RE, Broughton Business and Enterprise College
Sonya Gandhi	Young Ambassador for RE, Broughton Business and Enterprise College
John Goodey	Head teacher, St John Baptist CE Primary School, Lewisham

Stephen Lloyd

Good afternoon everyone, welcome to Westminster. My name is Stephen Lloyd, chairman of the APPG on RE, which was founded about two years ago. We have had a huge amount of support from the RE Council, and I'd like to welcome John, as well as a great deal of cross-party support. I can see around the room a number of my colleagues from the Houses of Commons and Lords.

I've done a series of media interviews on the back of this report over the past couple of days, and it's clear that we have an interest from the media. One was slightly puzzling – the Voice of Russia – but it does show that clearly the APPG on RE reach is spreading.

Why are we here? In a minute I will be handing over to the Young Ambassadors for RE from Broughton Business and Enterprise College, then to Mr John Goodey, head teacher of the St John Baptist school, then to Dr Joyce Miller – who I've met and will be giving us more detail about the report, and finally to John Keast, Chair of the RE Council. There will then be an opportunity for questions if you would like, or for mingling.

Why are we here? It comes as no surprise to me that a key part of the evidence that came out of the sessions that my Vice-chairs Fiona Bruce MP and Mary Glendon MP have been running is that there's a strong belief that in today's modern, globalised, multicultural world, it has become more important than ever that students are taught about all the religions and non-religious worldviews by good teachers. If this does not happen, and the deteriorating conditions continue, then ultimately our nation will be less safe, with worse community relations; how can we have good community relations without knowing about our neighbours' religious beliefs? This is something I feel so strongly about – and I have put much more work into this than I had expected because I am so passionate about it. What chance do we have to live with a harmonious sense of community, with people who are different to us, and have different views from us, if we base our understanding and knowledge of religions on The Sun, The Daily Mail and what we see on the internet? This would be unacceptable; it is our duty as a nation to give proper training to teachers so that they can teach our students accurately about people of all religions and none.

We are going to win this battle because we have to. The world is not going to get any bigger. It is in fact getting smaller due to the information superhighway, so this report is very timely and I'm very confident that we'll keep taking it to Mr Gove and the Department for Education so they really grasp two things: we're not going away; and they're going to have to change their approach. This is a very serious subject for my colleagues and me, and today will be a very interesting afternoon, I'm sure.

I'd now like to hand over to the Young Ambassadors for RE from Broughton: Habeeba Shaikh, Chloe Connor, Saskia Starritt, William Mercer, and Sonya Gandhi.

Saskia Starritt

The world that we live in is a diverse place. There are the obvious examples of diversity such as religion, gender and race, but we also need to consider the importance of diverse thinking and the need to have dialogue between the vast range of differing opinions and beliefs that make up our communities.

Sadly, there are many barriers to good community relations; stereotypes, prejudice and ignorance cause community relations to suffer tremendously. In our modern world young people are bombarded by information from the media, but often lack the skills to filter this information and to question its accuracy. To combat this it is clear that education is essential. The willingness to enter into dialogue with others, to question and to develop your own opinion is an important element of RE.

William Mercer

RE helps us to understand the complex and diverse communities that we live in and gives us an understanding of the role we have to play within these communities. RE offers the opportunity to consider our own place within the global community and can allow us to broaden our ways of thinking and reflect on issues from different cultural perspectives. As our communities become more and more globalised, an understanding of the beliefs, values and lifestyles of others is essential to build respectful relationships based on mutual understanding.

Sonya Gandhi

Good RE helps us to understand and behave respectfully towards others. Religious Education does not teach us what to think or tell us that one belief system is better than another, but it encourages us to examine the different views that are held within our world and to understand the impact that these beliefs have on individuals and communities. There are times when we may not understand or even respect the opinions of others, and this is why good RE is vital – to teach us how to disagree respectfully and to still be able to live side by side in peace.

Chloe Connor

Really good RE should aim to move beyond the respectful disagreement and allow us to see the whole person. Recently, our school's youth voice group for RE worked with representatives from faith communities to present workshops at the Lancashire SACRE youth conference. At the end of the day the faith speakers were asked what they had gained from the event and what message they hoped young people would take away from the conference.

The representative from the Islamic faith felt that it was really important that young people had the opportunity to meet members of religious communities in order for them to be able to see beyond the external appearance and because of this to then have confidence to talk with those different from themselves. This is an essential part of good community relations. If people are to learn how to get along they must first learn to talk to one another.

Habeeba Shaikh

Religious Education provides a unique opportunity to bring people together with the common goal of promoting understanding and respecting differences. This is a good start to developing community relations.

Engaging with real people of faith allows us to see past the stereotype and challenge misconceptions. The parable of the Good Samaritan teaches that we need to take our responsibility as good neighbours seriously – but we often need to find some common ground with people who are different to us in order to see them as neighbours. Good RE celebrates the wonderful diversity of our communities but also enables us to see the bigger picture of religion as an expression of the human search for meaning, purpose and truth. It turns the “man in a dress” into a human being who is as easy to talk to as anyone else; it turns the “lady with the red dot on her head” into a friendly and devoted grandmother. These are the people we want as neighbours, the people who we can talk to and share our communities with.

Saskia Starritt

This is why RE in schools is so important. In English we read novels with a diverse range of characters, but this is exactly what they are – characters as opposed to real living people that we can engage with. In History we examine the impact that religions and religious people have had on our world – but this is the past and is often unhelpful for interpreting the world we live in today. In PSHE and citizenship we discuss the importance of social cohesion and how we can be better citizens – but this is not the same as gaining a real depth of understanding about the importance of religious beliefs to a person of faith so that we can show respect for their traditions and lifestyles, even when they differ greatly from our own.

William Mercer

Of course, religion is not the only barrier to cohesive communities. There are many view-points and lifestyles that some members of our society find difficult to tolerate, but again, RE is often the only place in school where these issues are investigated in any depth. For example; how have social attitudes changed regarding homosexual relationships? What about the way in which society treats the elderly or the disabled? Do we really value everyone in our community? What about issues surrounding poverty and inequality? Or responses to racism and immigration? All of these potentially divisive aspects of living in the modern world are part of my GCSE Religious Studies syllabus. We have already acknowledged that it is largely ignorance that leads to prejudice and intolerance within communities. If more people studied these issues in depth it would begin to challenge some of these views and build bridges between people of differing social, economic and cultural backgrounds.

Chloe Connor

There are many people in our communities who for a variety of reasons do not feel that they are listened to. For some, this leads to apathy and a general feeling of discontentment. For others, feeling excluded from society causes them to turn to extremist groups which only serve to distance them further from the wider community and promotes hatred rather than tolerance and understanding. Neither of these help to develop a cohesive community. A good RE lesson is one that is inclusive and enables all people to feel that they have been heard. I myself am quite an opinionated person. In RE lessons I often have very different opinions to the rest of the class. However, I am still listened to and even when others disagree with me they do so in a way that is respectful. In this way, RE provides a model for discussion, debate and disagreement. It is important that our RE teachers are properly trained to handle discussions surrounding controversial issues so that young people grow up knowing how to express their view in a way that is both sensitive and respectful without necessarily agreeing with others. For communities to be truly cohesive they must also be inclusive.

Sonya Gandhi

Good community relations involve all people feeling a sense of belonging to the society in which they live, it involves living side by side in peace, it involves recognising the value that all people contribute to our communities and accepting that there are times when we will disagree, but that this is simply part of being human. Our world is a diverse place where the lives of people of faith and none intertwine together to build good community relations. In Religious Education there is an important responsibility to teach the information needed to ensure that these relations are founded on knowledge and genuine encounter as opposed to perception and prejudice. Good RE is essential to help young people like myself to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to play our part in today's society and tomorrow's world.

Stephen Lloyd

Wasn't that an absolutely sensational presentation? I think everything they said summed up so perfectly what RE is. Part of me wanted to go back to school and have those debates again!

I'd now like to introduce John Goodey to speak.

Thank you. It's good to be here – the report is so interesting. I'm going to talk a little bit about the place of RE at St John Baptist Primary School and what we do there.

How do we teach RE? A very shallow answer to that question would be that we follow the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education's work. I could explain further that children learn about and from religions. We have high quality teaching that's recently been recognised by Ofsted, and the children are assessed and challenged to think more deeply about things – but I think this happens in a lot of schools up and down the country. But what makes St John Baptist school different? What makes it have an impact on our students?

I'll start by giving a bit of background about the school. St John Baptist is part of Lewisham. It is a small inner-city school that is very diverse and has a significant number of vulnerable families. They lack the resilience needed to succeed and thrive, and we have decided that it has to be us that enables those children to build resilience, emotional strength and self-belief. We've developed a shared vision which was based around a set of values – we were one of the first schools that embraced values education and pioneered it in Lewisham. As a community we have chosen 22 core values which are spread throughout the year. Each month a new value word is explored through assemblies, stories, displays, newsletters, collective worship, and in the classroom. The children are immersed in that value word and it becomes part of their working vocabulary. Then as students travel through their primary school education they meet that value word three or four times, each time going deeper and exploring themselves through that value word. I'm sure you can work out the kind of words they are – things like peace, honesty, humour, family, friendship and perseverance.

They are the big ideas. I think that among our most vulnerable families and the children we need to take care of sometimes lack that moral compass around which they can make those choices in their lives. The value words give them a working vocabulary so they can understand their lives.

That is one part of our shared vision. Another part is our 'Irresistible Curriculum' – we were the first to coin this phrase. We set out to put together themes that would be so engaging that they just couldn't resist the temptation of wanting to learn. A central, really crucial element of that Irresistible Curriculum is that of cultural entitlement. What do I mean by this? I mean the visits, visitors and ongoing community links that bring the curriculum alive. I'll give you a few examples. We've just completed our annual programme of visits to different places of worship; as children go through the school every year they visit a different place of worship. We also have a very strong link with Olive Tree School – an independent Muslim primary just down the road. I was asked if I'd go and give them a hand so I went along and spoke with the school leaders about leadership, professional development, health and safety and so on, and it was pure joy. It is quite an adventure because they were really going for it and doing a phenomenal job. That link built over the years and as members of Lewisham SACRE we were constantly bumping into our friends from the mosque, and had an opportunity to build that trust and ongoing friendship. Now if someone from Olive Tree wants some advice on how to teach an aspect of the curriculum, they will just pick up the phone and call. And of course when we are covering elements of Islam, the first place we turn is the Olive Tree.

We have also developed an annual programme where Year 6 children visit the Olive Tree children, and there's a return visit. The students lead the discussion – they talk about their faiths and faith practices, beliefs, and what is distinctive, comparing and contrasting their religions and asking lots of questions. It never ceases to amaze me how admirable they are and how respectful, and how they embody the values that they are taught.

I'm now going to tell you about the project that I'm perhaps most passionate about. We have a link with St Christopher's Hospice, which is not far from us, and for many years was our school's charity. We have developed this bond with the hospice, and I've taken my choir to sing there a few times. But I had in the back of my mind that it would be great if we could bring the children to work with the patients, and so after a few meetings we set up a programme where Year 5 children go to the hospice. Before that happens, staff from the hospice come and talk about death and dying, very frankly and honestly, and the children are told that their friend in the hospice may die

during the project, although this hasn't happened yet but is likely because the project has been running for a while. The children and patients create beautiful artworks together and last year did a fashion show. While they're creating these amazing works of art they talk about their life stories and the ups and downs of their life – both the child and patients talk about the joys and successes of their lives, and there's lots of giggling and laughing going on. Right at the end of the year there's an amazing celebration in the hospice gardens, and every family comes and joins us for this celebration.

So you'll see now why I use the word entitlement – every single child that comes through the school gets that experience, and so does every family. Children don't have the baggage around death that many adults pick up during their lives, and it's worked so well that other schools are doing it – not just in Lewisham, London, or England but every continent, involving hundreds of schools and hospices. It's gone global and I'm very proud of that – it started at St John Baptist.

Finally, we have a long-term relationship with Greenvale School which has students with severe learning difficulties and disabilities. St John Baptist children partner with Greenvale students and take part in planning the activities, focusing on the diversity of abilities. We've had three of our ex-students now going to work in special schools and all three attribute this back to their experience at St John Baptist.

These rich experiences enable students to develop a conscious journey of personal discovery where they can describe the beliefs and values which guide them and enable them to connect with their community – becoming powerful young people and identifying with others. Everything feeds into this vision of children thinking for themselves.

We do have lots of other programmes, and are starting Irresistible Curriculum 2.0 in September. In January we embarked on a new partnership with another school – St Mary's in Lewisham, which also has many vulnerable families, perhaps more than St John Baptist. They have also had a huge turnover of staff especially in leadership – the current head teacher is the sixteenth in twenty one years. Can you imagine what that does to a community? It is very difficult to build up sustained change – and that is the term we're embedding, beginning with values. We're working with families, parents and the local community, exploring the values that we will be focusing on.

Recently we've been drawing on the life of Victor Frankl, who wrote 'Man's Search for Meaning'. He was a Jew in Auschwitz, a young psychiatrist, and he observed the behaviours of other prisoners; some prisoners would lie down and die, their spirit extinguished; others continued to struggle for existence. What was different about these people? They had meaning and purpose in their lives which gave them the spark which kept them wanting to live. They might have been focusing on family who they wanted to be reunited with, or their doctoral thesis, or the desire to play the piano – like the woman who was in that documentary recently. And when everything is taken away from that prisoner and he's standing in just rags with a tattooed number, he still has one freedom – his freedom to choose his attitude, because no one could control his thoughts. I hope you can see the link. A significant number of our families are struggling and vulnerable; we need encourage these students to develop their values, and identify the meaning and purpose in their lives.

I'm going to finish with a quote I found yesterday in RE Online, written by Dilwyn Hunt, which really sums up what I wanted to say:

A person who is religiously educated is a person who has some resilience to the vagaries life will throw at them. They are not simply blown about; they do not just succumb to what they are told, or follow the crowd. Their beliefs and values are more firmly set because they have been encouraged to identify the reasons and evidence on which their views are grounded. They have deep roots because in RE they were helped to think more deeply about what they value or believe in and why. They have some capacity to decide for themselves, and to go on deciding what their beliefs and values are. They will know the ground upon which their beliefs and values are based because RE did not abandon them but helped them. RE

probed and challenged them – it invited them to be clear and critical in their thinking as they attempted to find their own response to life's enduring questions.

I think Dilwyn Hunt provides us with a clear rationale; in that, for the RE teaching and learning that we aspire to today, our children, families and communities will thrive tomorrow. Thank you very much.

Stephen Lloyd

Thank you, John. I'd now like to pass on to Dr Miller, who has done a really fantastic job at compiling all the evidence, putting it together in such a short document, especially since politicians can be very loquacious. It is a great report.

Joyce Miller

Thank you. It has been a real pleasure listening to the Young Ambassadors, and to John, because what they've been saying exemplifies what this report is about. When Sarah rang me and asked me to coordinate the inquiry and the report, I must confess I was terrified. It sounded like a huge responsibility, and it has been. I mainly decided to do this because the subject is very close to my heart. I have spent many years working in Bradford as Head of Diversity and Cohesion and Chair of the Bradford SACRE, where I worked in a team promoting community cohesion and respect for diversity. This included responsibility for religious education, and I found it a very exhilarating, if exhausting, job.

It has been thrilling for me to invite so many people to give evidence, to receive written evidence and then have nine days to put together this report. I'm not used to being short-winded. If someone had said I could write 4,000 or even 40,000 words, I would have been more comfortable. So it's no surprise that I've offered to write a longer, more reflective piece. Christian Education has been very generous in supporting the designing and printing of the report, and I've had a lot of time to reflect and think about what this report is really about, so I would like to reflect now on the two aspects of this: religious education and community cohesion.

I've been thinking about the interconnectivity of these two terms, because it's not just about what one can do for the other. I think there are different layers in which they interlink.

They are both contested titles. Commonly we talk about RE, but there are also other terms including religious studies, theology, ethics, philosophy. Similarly community relations versus community cohesion – are they the same thing, and is community cohesion the same as social cohesion? I don't think it is. We are dealing with a range of words that are full of significance and it is important to reflect on the aims and purposes, content, and scope of what they're all about. Both are subject to conspiracy theories, people who think that RE teachers are trying to convert the world, for instance. There are those in community cohesion circles who have strong views about what underpins all that. But good RE and good community cohesion also have some strong commonalities I'd like to comment on briefly.

There are attitudes that underpin both. You can only have both good RE and good community cohesion if you have real reflection, open hearts and minds, empathy, dialogue, and courage. I really believe that RE teachers need to be courageous people and I'm sure that Joanne, who has brought the Young Ambassador students from Broughton will agree: you need to be very brave to talk about something so personal; it is difficult to do and do well. Courage is also required in community cohesion.

There are also skills which are shared between the two, and are very important: critical engagement, the ability to find the right sort of language and ask the right questions, interpretation and dialogue.

In terms of content I think there are some key concepts that underpin both RE and good community relations. Two of the most important of these are identity and community, sometimes better expressed as identities and communities – we sometimes talk about multiple identities, and beyond that hybrid, hyphenated identities, and so

on. Multiple identities are very important and the recognition that we're not only our first impressions. We all have aspects of our identity which are visible first – someone may be quite clearly a Muslim or Buddhist – but that person is also a mother, daughter, brother, football player, and all other things that form part of their identity.

Exploring identity and community is important. But some of the things said have made me think about this in a slightly different way, and that is the notion of transcendence, that we are not just the sum of the labels that people attach to us. Each individual person is absolutely unique. For some that is about the sanctity of life. I thought the Young Ambassadors did a great job of showing how RE is different from other subjects with which it has similarities – in RE the idea of transcendence is really addressed in a way that's very significant. RE is about more than content and more than skills. It is in dealing with the existential questions to which religions and worldviews offer the answers through which we can really develop young people as skilled intercultural navigators and champions of equalities, human rights and social justice.

One other thought that has occurred to me is that RE has also multiple identities – people see the subject in many different ways and I think that it's quite a good analogy for RE. I hope that not only can we end up with the kind of society that Stephen has referred to but that we can also end up with plural identities around our communities. The ideas summarised in this report, which we will continue to develop and share, will form the basis of a good deal of work and energy. All of us have a part to play in that.

Stephen Lloyd

Thank you very much, Joyce. Last but not least, I'd like to welcome John Keast who is Chair of the RE Council.

John Keast

Good evening everyone. Such eloquence and wisdom has already been displayed that I feel that the things I could add might be taking up your time, but a number of things need to be said.

First, thank you, all of you for coming to this event and giving your support, and for the effort you've made in getting here. I want to thank Stephen and the APPG for all of the work they've done to support this publication. Thank you Joyce; the remarks she made a moment ago made me really look forward to the longer piece, because there will be even more thoughtfulness in that. I thank Sarah with great pleasure – the RE Council's Executive Officer, who keeps us all going. How she does this in the number of hours we pay her for is amazing, and she is supported by Sophie – thanks to both of you for your hard work. Thanks to Colin from 3:nine, and Ben, Paul and Will from PB Political Consulting for all of their support. Finally thanks to all those who have just spoken. I've heard many Young Ambassador presentations and I'm never disappointed by the eloquence and confidence they display when they speak. Thanks also to John who spoke from the school in Lewisham, which reminds us that what we do here is only indirectly important – the really important work goes on in classrooms in schools, day by day, with teachers and young people; that is where RE really takes place. And to the young lady from Broughton who admitted to being opinionated – I would love to be in that classroom, and you've come to the right place – there are lots of opinionated people here. I hope you'll be further inspired. John, thank you for reminding us of the depth and profundity that this subject is about. Thanks to everyone who made this event possible and successful.

This is the second report of the APPG on RE. The first, which we launched almost exactly a year ago, was a comprehensive picture of RE teacher training and support. The effect of that has not been quite what we had hoped, but we may see some effects yet.

This report is very different. It is, for example, more positive. At the time of the last report we had lots of negative things to report on. Looking at the vocabulary in this report – it is heartening, inspiring, interesting, and gives some very good examples of the contribution which RE makes to good community relations. This report captures the success of RE and its achievements in those places where it is good and well-taught, something we can all celebrate. This report also calls for the extension of good practice to places where it is not found, which does not require embarrassing changes to policy or lots of money. It requires a collaborative effort to extend what we know can be

done and is being done in some places already – making what we already have work better. It requires people to work together to pool their knowledge, experience, skills and expertise; something the whole RE community should be more than willing and able to do.

It does share, however, at least one important characteristic with the first APPG report: it concerns a vitally important topic. Good community relations are vital for a flourishing and compassionate society, just as quality RE training is required for quality RE teaching. They are connected, of course, because without the quality experience of RE, young people will not have the knowledge and skills they need to contribute to cohesive schools, communities and society. The point, though, is that this enquiry has shown that good RE makes a positive difference to community relations, and we must do what we can to spread that practice for the sake of a healthy cohesive, flourishing and compassionate society in these times when religious rivalry, misunderstanding, ignorance and misinformation are so dangerous right across the world. This inquiry has shown that good RE makes a positive difference to good community relations and in the world in which we live that is incredibly important. One aspect of the report which is encouraging is that it shows that the success of some RE in promoting good community relations is not confined to one type of school. The issue then is not one of school structure so much as of the quality of what is done in RE. That of course is a fundamental concern of SACREs, and the effectiveness of SACREs is a key part of the policy outcome of this report.

What next?

Since the first APPG Report we have had the Ofsted RE report and the RE Review report which together commanded unprecedented media coverage. The PR Committee of the REC needs to continue this momentum and work to improve further the public understanding of RE – I'd like to thank Jeremy for taking on the chairing role of the RE Council's PR Work. The REC is busy working on the implementation of its national Curriculum Framework for RE through the Curriculum and Assessment Committee and the Expert Advisory Group alongside the work to prepare for the new National Curriculum – thank you to Dave Francis for spearheading this important work. At same time the REC is busy working with awarding organisations and Ofqual on the reform of A Level and GCSE Religious Studies, through its new Qualifications Committee, led by Deborah Weston – a human dynamo if ever there was one. Thank you, Deborah for taking this on.

All this activity is conducted through and on behalf of the whole RE community – a term often used but sometimes misunderstood. RE flourishes when it is the product of informed and trained professionals working with communities of faith and belief and government (national and local). All these along with parents and pupils are the stakeholders of RE, and it is this breadth of interest, involvement and commitment that the REC seeks to represent and harness for the good of all. I am pleased to have been a part of that enterprise and look upon the RE APPG as one of its most significant achievements in my time as Chair which comes to an end this year.

Last March I said that I thought 2013 would be a make or break year for RE. Whilst we are not out of trouble – teacher training is particularly worrying still and examination entries may yet go down further – I believe RE is far from broken. There is a marked difference in relationship between the DfE and the REC, and a new willingness to make RE work better. We are not out of the water yet, though.

And neither is the RE Council broken. The REC will not run out of money in its current financial year, though the outlook for next year is still not clear. The REC goes forward, rather like RE itself, in faith; trusting that its friends in both high places and low, whether rich trusts or poor relations, suspicious or enthusiastic, will see the continued importance of a body like the REC that can be a forum for genuine debate and public understanding, a partnership for improvement and good practice, and rally to its support. Thank you.

Stephen Lloyd

Thank you very much, and thank you for the overview. It has been a momentous couple of years, and I want to put on record that, as Chair of the APPG, we could not have done this work without you as Chair of the RE Council, John.

I would like to finish with this: ignorance is not bliss when it comes to RE, because our world can't afford that ignorance. As I say it's a privilege to chair the APPG, it's a privilege to be here. Slowly and surely we are winning the fight, and we need your continued support to keep going. The reason we will keep going is because we know that ignorance is not bliss when it comes to RE; it is the road to perdition.