

PB Political Consulting
Meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on
Religious Education
Wednesday 28 November 2012

Attendees:

Stephen Lloyd MP (Chair)
Dan Rogerson MP
Sophie Agrotis, REC
Sarah Lane Cawte, Free Church Education Committee
Joy Schmack, AREIAC; AULRE
Richard Coupe, ISRSA
Angelika Baxter, Deanery of Great Britain and Ireland (Eastern Orthodox)
Jo Backus AULRE; Network of Buddhist Organisations
Imam Monawar Hussain, Oxford Foundation
Nawaz Khan, Oxford Foundation
Julie Grove, Free Church Education Committee
Clive Ireson, Association of Christian Teachers
Debbie Danon, Three Faiths Forum
Daniella Shaw Gabay, Three Faiths Forum
Daniel Hugill, NATRE
John Lydon, Catholic Association of Teachers, Schools and Colleges
Sarah Smalley, REC
Colin Hallmark, 3:nine
Ben Waldmann, PB Political Consulting
Andrew Brown, PB Political Consulting
Dr Janet Orchard, RE Subject Review
Peter Ward, Catholic National Board of Inspectors and Advisors

Speakers:

Deborah Weston	National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE)
Mike Castelli	University Lecturers in Religion and Education (AULRE)
Dr Mark Chater	Culham St Gabriel's
Lesley Prior	National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on RE (NASACRE)
Audrey Brown CBE	Department for Education
John Keast OBE	Religious Education Council of England and Wales

1. Welcome and Introductions

Stephen Lloyd MP

Welcome, everyone. Thank you very much indeed. As you know, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on RE is calling for evidence for the supply and support for RE education teachers. A heck of a lot of change has gone on for the past year and a half. Before we start, I would like to pay tribute to the RE Council. They have been tremendously helpful in setting up this group. They have provided not only a secretariat but a lot of advice and guidance, which I really appreciate.

We are having two sessions. I am chairing this one. One of my vice-chairs, the Conservative MP Fiona Bruce, is chairing the second session, as is another of the APPG members. It is a cross-party group. All the parties are represented, which is absolutely crucial. Equally, we have strong representation and support through the RE Council of different faith groups, but crucially I also persuaded one of our colleagues, Mike Crockart, to participate. He is co-chairing the evidence session with Fiona in a few weeks' time, and is also a paid-up member of the Humanist Association, because that emphasises what we are trying to do with RE in schools. My view, which I think is shared by John and others, is that sometimes the Secretary of State possibly does not quite understand what RE is in schools nowadays. My own strongly-held view is that he still thinks it is what it was – he will deny this – when people like he and I were at school a long time ago. It is not; it is very different.

We all know that there has been a battle around Ebac, and we have struggled despite a very effective campaign by a lot of MPs within the House, the RE Council and the constituencies represented. The Secretary of State has persevered and said there is really not a problem. We do not believe that to be the case. Locally, I know that for a fact. Equally, from the data the RE Council and others have provided we dispute that.

However, with the call for evidence session we want to start putting together the empirical evidence so we can go back to the Department for Education and Secretary of State and provide him with a robust report which shows us what is really happening at grass roots.

An awful lot of people have sent in evidence and what-have-you. The response across the UK has been very good indeed, which indicates just how important many of us feel this issue is within education.

Today, we are to have the first part of the evidence session. One of the gang in the corner will, hopefully, be typing at hundreds of words a minute to keep notes, and then someone other than myself will be putting it all together. Thank God for the RE Council! Obviously, we will then be presenting the report in the new year.

I will introduce each speaker. We are on a fairly tight schedule. As there are quite a lot of speakers I am going to claim the chairman's privilege and change it a wee bit. After each speaker we will have a couple of questions; otherwise, by the time we get to the sixth speaker I will have forgotten what questions I want to ask of the first speaker. But I will be very disciplined with everyone to make sure they do not go on for ages. So, after each speaker if I have any questions I will ask them, but I will also briefly open it up for discussion, if we can be disciplined on time. At the end, there

will be a full-blown Q&A session, but if because we ask two or three questions of each speaker in turn it means that by the time we get to the end we do not need a Q&A session, then so be it.

Equally, I say to the speakers in a lot of what the APPG is doing we need to keep the noise out there, so I would like a photo of you lucky people with myself and all the speakers afterwards, because we are going to put out a press release and talk about the issue. We will put out the details of what we are doing. We did very well with the media a while ago, but we dropped off the radar. That is what happens in politics. Unless you keep making noise and focusing on a particular issue, you just drop down the table. It was very clear from the meetings I had with the RE Council that we needed to ramp that up again. If, for whatever reason, you do not want to be photographed, that is fine; otherwise, we will all be together in that.

Are there any questions before we start? If not, the first speaker is Deborah Weston of the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE).

2. Submissions

Deborah Weston

I am going to focus on two main parts of this inquiry. The first is: are the teachers who are delivering RE the right people to be doing so? The second part is: are there enough well-trained teachers of RE? You will have to forgive me if I go through a fair bit of statistical evidence, because some of the material we have seen in the public domain recently seems to fly in the face of my instinct as a teacher and my experience of travelling round the country and speaking to people about this. It also flies in the face of the data that the National Association of Teachers of RE has collected in its two surveys in July of this year and July of the previous year.

The first thing I want to talk about is the school workforce survey. Those of you who have written to the Secretary of State and to your own MPs have often received letters back with information that the school work force survey provides evidence that we do not need any more teachers of RE and there are a sufficient number.

The school workforce survey is based on a census conducted in the schools every single year, and it has been published this year. When you look at that data and the data over the past few years, it appears to show that there are sufficient RE teachers to meet demand. The slide before you shows that for this year the numbers have moved up from 10,400 to 10,700, a 2.9% increase. It sounds like all is well in the world of RE.

At the same time, the number of hours taught of RE at Key Stage 4 has increased allegedly from 47,300 to 47,600, so again it is supposed to have gone up. Those figures were quoted by the Secretary of State when speaking to the REC in May 2012. The school workforce survey is published on the DfE website. It has statistics on the qualifications of teachers and also publishes information on the subject taught and the qualifications that teachers teaching those subject have.

When I first looked at the survey I was quite mystified by it because it appears that the numbers have gone up, but when you look at the tiny footnote it tells you that they count a teacher of any subject on the basis that they teach one single lesson of that subject. If you think about my own department, there are four people teaching RE for most of their timetable, but there is also a whole class of other people who teach maybe one or two lessons, so the headcount will tell you that I have

nine RE teachers in my school. You can see how those figures will get distorted. You would think that would therefore affect every other subject, but, when you look closely at this data, you see that RE has more non-specialists, or more teachers of other specialisms, teaching it than the other subjects. That is not new information; it has been reported in Ofsted surveys way back. It is certainly in the last annual report of Ofsted, in the previous year's report and probably the one before that.

The next point is about qualifications. Table 13 in the next slide shows the highest post-A-level qualification of teachers in publicly-funded secondary schools and the subject being taught. You will see that for people with a degree or higher teaching RE it is 33%, and for those with a degree or higher in history it is nearly twice as much. 61% of History teachers seem to have a degree or higher, whereas it is only 33% of teachers of RE.

Looking further down the table, you see that 55% of RE teachers have no post-A-level qualifications in their subject, which I think means they have not done either a PGCE or a teacher training course, because if they had done it that would be a post-A-level qualification. You have only 27% of historians in that situation, so again our numbers are twice as bad in RE. That is quite a significant table.

Table 14 looks at hours taught to pupils in years seven to 13 by the highest possible qualification. You see a similar pattern. If you look at the people with no post-A-level qualification, for history it is 12.6%, but people with no post-A-level qualification teaching RE it is 27%, so there are twice as many. Looking down that row, you see that for the humanities subjects – history and geography – RE is still significantly worse than other subjects.

Against that background, you can see why I find it very mystifying to be told that we have sufficient well-qualified RE teachers. Not only do we have an insufficient number of teachers; we have an insufficient number of well qualified teachers.

I just want to bring this down to school level and ask: does it matter that the people who teach RE do not have any actual training in RE? We see on the slide the GCSE results of a school, which I will certainly not name, that I have been working with relatively recently. I hasten to add it is not my own school. It is a middle-ranking school; it is not at the top or bottom of the league tables. This comes from a website. You see near the top, group 1, which has 28 students in it, of whom 11% got A* or A for their GCSE in religious studies. 46% were A* to C, which are not brilliant results by any means but they are above the school's average A* to C, so that is quite interesting.

All the other groups, groups 2 to 8, were taught by non-specialists, some of whom were senior teachers in the school; in other words, deputy heads and senior staff. You see the A*-C score in one of those groups is 13%, and that one is less than 1%. If you look further down, you see the sorry state of it. These are children whose GCSE results have been catastrophically affected, largely because they have not got the right teacher teaching their GCSEs, so who teaches them really does have an individual effect on children.

When you look at that alongside the 2012 NATRE survey, which asks a lot of detailed questions about the qualifications of teachers, particularly the impact of the Ebac on the number of specialists in schools, we asked teachers and 625 individual schools replied. We asked them whether there had been an increase or decrease in RE subject specialists for 2012-13. In response, 11% said there had been an increase; 24% said there had been a decrease; and 65% said there had been no change. Therefore, about a quarter of schools said there had been a decrease in specialists, and so this situation is set to get worse.

When they were asked for the reason they gave for that cut in specialist staff, 82% would say it was largely because of the Ebac. The GCSE was not being offered, or the GCSE groups were being made smaller, and then you did not need so many specialists, and so that was what happened in the school.

What tends to get lost in all this discussion about specialists, and the reason we do not see adverts for RE teachers, is that head teachers do not want to make their staff redundant. That is the last thing they want to do, so if you cut one GCSE group you are getting an historian or geographer to teach another one, so you get a decrease in specialisms in subjects like RE.

We also asked people what proportion of RE provision was delivered by teachers whose main specialisms lay in a different area. Again, this was a NATRE survey question. It was a very similar figure. Up to 20% of lessons were being taught by people whose specialism was in another area. If you look at that figure next to the workforce survey, which found it was 25%, the figures do not show an enormous difference.

We asked teachers themselves to give us their own stories. I have put just three stories at the bottom of the slide. One person said, 'I am now the only specialist RE teacher in the school. We rely on non specialists to teach with me, which is detrimental to the subject. Poor achievement in GCSE last year was also given as the reason to remove Key Stage 4 RE as a compulsory subject for all students.' So, you move non-specialists into the department; they deliver badly and so you cut GCSE altogether. That is the pattern.

Another teacher said, 'Our year 9, (the first year of the three-year GCSE) – we can talk about that as well but I won't – and year 10 had to opt for the full course or general humanities GCSE. No RE was offered to those not taking the full course, and over 50% of Key Stage 3 will be delivered by a maths specialist as they were overstaffed.' It is unusual to have overstaffing in math specialists. 'This will affect those who opt for GCSE because the delivery is poor and reduce numbers that are opting for it', because if the children see somebody teaching a subject who is not an enthusiast for that subject, they will often vote with their feet.

The last one is a better story. She says, 'It's been a battle. There are two small victories, first in 2012. Finally, all our lessons will be taught by a trained RS specialist. In previous years a non-specialist has taken classes in Key Stage 3, and this has a hugely negative impact. Change only came about as the issue was raised with governors at a meeting.' Obviously, this person is a bit of a fighter and managed to get the specialists back in.

This is not a new problem; it has not suddenly happened. The next slide shows the Ofsted report way back in 2007. It says in red, 'Other factors still have a negative impact on pupils' achievements, most notably non-specialist teachers.' It is a recurring theme. If you go to the latest report in 2010 – (we are still waiting for another one) – it says, 'The heavy reliance on non-specialist teachers in RE has been raised frequently in previous reports and remains a matter of concern.' This has been going on since 2007. It is a clear problem for the subject, but, as Mike will say, the response has been to cut numbers, not increase them.

I find the next slide fascinating; it shows the latest teachers' standards. If you like, it is the set of regulations that a teacher has to abide by or things that are expected of them. It says, 'I must demonstrate a good subject and curriculum knowledge; have a secure knowledge of the relevant subject and curriculum areas; maintain pupils' interest in the subject and address misunderstandings. I must demonstrate a critical understanding of developments in the subject and curriculum areas and promote the value of scholarship.' If you are a maths teacher who has to do

that for RE, it is impossible to do it. If I was expected to go in and demonstrate and promote the value of scholarship in maths, I could not do it. The expectation is there, but the means by which we do it are certainly not.

One question that I was asked some time ago was: 'Surely, as teachers you have in-service training. Surely, the Government need to put money into in-service training, and you should be able to get out of school to have that training.' No. I have been teaching for 25 years and it has never been as bad as it is now. If I get out of school one day a year I am really lucky. If you ask teachers about that, very few actually get out of school. 44% said they got out of school on no days at all last year, so if you were teaching another subject you would not be getting out, and if you are the teacher of another specialism you will not go out for RE; you will go out for your main subject, so you can see how that would work.

The next slide relates to this. I am now trespassing on Mike's area. I am sure he will be able to say a lot more about it. Why is the policy not following the evidence? This is an Ofsted report of 2010 on the standards of teacher training. You can see that the green bar indicates outstanding training as measured by Ofsted. The total number of judgements of outstanding initial teacher education is 46 out of 151 institutions.. Most of those are university-linked ones, whereas for school-centred and employment-based training only 10 were outstanding. What is the response? The response is to put more training into school-centred training. Therefore, where there is high provision we cut it; where there is lower provision we expand it. I find this incredible.

When we met the Minister for Schools last year we talked about how this could be addressed. One of the answers given was that the training would be in teaching schools, and they had the first 100 teaching schools. I thought I would have a look at the first 100 teaching schools and see what their RE is like. That is very difficult because we do not have inspection reports. What we can look at is their GCSE results. We can look at how many children they have got doing GCSEs.

I cannot make any comment about the standards of education in any of these named schools, but what I can show is a little bit about RE. The first on the list is Western Academy in the East Midlands. They already have 19 children doing GCSE in RE, so how would the trainee learn how to teach RE? They are not going to give them that GCSE group. Even if they did, I am sorry, Western, but the school is not quite up to the national average. It at 57% A*-C. It is not a disaster but it is not that high. The same thing applies to this school. In some cases you have got schools that have some good provision. You also have schools with very low results for GCSE. If you look at all of those at the bottom with a star by them, I would query whether they would be able to train an RE teacher effective either because they have not got enough capacity in the upper level, particularly in GCSE training, or their standards of GCSE are such that those people who are going to learn how to teach are not filled with confidence. That is a real worry; and it came out at about 40% of those training schools.

Turning to another area where RE is getting excluded from training opportunities, the Government have just introduced the concept of specialist leader in education who is someone with leadership skills but also specialisms in the subject area. They can go into different schools and help them raise standards. If you look at the subject you can have if you want to apply for that opportunity, guess which one is missing? RE. I have referred to non-specialists, lack of training and all the problems I have identified. Here is a perfect opportunity to do something about it. What happens? All of them are ignored, and that is my last point.

Stephen Lloyd MP

Thank you, Deborah. You have covered a lot of the issues really effectively. I have a quick couple of questions, and then I will open it to the floor. You quite correctly relied very heavily on the empirical evidence, which is vital. You are right. The Department for Education basically says that there is not a problem and you just need to look at the figures. The only way to deal with that is to drill down into the figures and say, 'Hang on a minute. There are figures and figures, and this is what they really mean.' My first question is: has the REC or whoever gone to the Department for Education to rebut their alleged positive figures and show they are not quite like that and they mean something else?

Deborah Weston

It was not until relatively recently that I spotted that footnote in the work force survey because it was in such tiny font. The numbers never made any sense to me, but the answer is: no, not yet.

Stephen Lloyd MP

That is good, because that is exactly the sort of thing for which we can use the report. At the end of the whole session, not just today but in a few weeks' time, John and I, the REC and the APPG will be planning for the bits of the report that we major on, so it is useful to have that answer and data.

The second question – you will probably give me the same answer – is about your reference to specialist leadership, because that is almost a 'bang to rights'. Has the REC gone back on that as well or not?

Deborah Weston

I wrote to the National College of School Leadership.

Stephen Lloyd MP

Has it come back to you yet?

Deborah Weston

That was four weeks ago and there is no reply yet.

Stephen Lloyd MP

Could you do me a favour and send me a copy of that letter? I am assuming you have my e-mail address.

Deborah Weston

I have.

Stephen Lloyd MP

Please send me a copy of that letter. We are noting that so it is something we can come back to later. Are there any other questions on Deborah's presentation? In that case, thank you, Deborah. You have set the scene very effectively.

The next speaker is Mike Castelli who is chair of University Lecturers in Religion and Education.

Mike Castelli

I am very aware that my slides are predominantly about secondary initial teacher education, mainly because there is more data in that area and also because we are still gathering data for the primary sector, but they will be available for your next meeting. We will make sure that they come to that meeting.

I have decided to drill down a bit more deeply into those secondary training figures, particularly but not exclusively for universities. The Teaching Agency allocates each year to each university how many trainees and students it can take for each subject. The ones I have are for initial teacher training for religious education: PGCE. For the year 2010-11 there were 675 places allocated overall nationally in England by the TA. In 2011-12 they dropped to 460 places, and in 2012-13 they drop to 310, and for next year it will be 321. There has been a drop of more than 50% from 2010 to 2013 and 2014.

The consequence of those cuts in numbers is that they have an impact on the universities themselves and the courses that provide training for those PGCE courses. I will show you more details about that. The consequence is that, if numbers drop too low, universities cannot sustain them economically; they are not viable numbers. I have figures to support the reduction of secondary PGCE RE providers over this period. In 2010-11 there were 40 providers in England for secondary PGCE RE; in 2011-12 there were still 40; in 2012-13 it is down to 33; and in 2013-14 further closures are expected. Why do we expect those closures? Seventeen of these 33 providers from last year have been allocated under 10 places. If the number of student places goes below 10, the university begins to ask: is that a viable course? Because of the pressure on universities there is a risk of closure. Ten of those places allocated were under six, so the threat is even greater because they have allocated five, four, three and sometimes two places. You can imagine the thinking of vice-chancellors at universities about the viability of running a course with only two students.

This slide shows the history of recent closures and the evidence which goes with that. In 2010-11 learning institutes allocated three PGCE places, and that disappeared. The Marches Consortium was allocated five and that disappeared; it is no longer functioning. Two places are dead. In 2011-12 the University of Warwick, an outstanding provider, was allocated seven PGCE places, so the fact the Ofsted reports of these institutions show they are outstanding seems to have no bearing on the way the Teaching Agency allocates the places. So, if you are an outstanding provider and you are allocated seven places, the university decides it is not viable and it closes.

The University of Hull was allocated five and that closed. That is another outstanding provider. The University of East London was allocated five places and it closed the same year. Another institution was allocated eight and it closed. There were two closures in 2010-11; four in 2011-12; and two more in 2012-13. The University of East Anglia was allocated seven PGCE places. That closed. Oxford Brookes was allocated six and it closed.

The history of recent closures is very clear. The Department might claim that they do not close university places. Fine. But if you allocate only numbers like this – three places, five places, eight places and seven places – over the past three years the consequences are that de facto these places will close.

As to the abolition of training bursaries for secondary PGCE places, the full consequences are yet to be judged because it has happened only this year. Last year the Department decided that for 2012-13 if you had a first-class degree in RE you could receive a training bursary of £9,000. If you had a 2:1 degree you had £5,000. This year it has been cut completely. We can begin to speculate on the consequences of that and think about it. When Phil Leavers from the Association of RE Advisers wrote to Mr Gove, Mark O'Donnell replied that the decision about bursaries was a very difficult one to make in these difficult financial times, but bursaries were maintained for 'subjects where there is currently a lot of national focus'. I do not know whether that is to do with PE and the Olympics – I am not sure what the criteria for the national focus might be – but maybe PGCE might be one of the ways of creating a national focus for RE, and perhaps the bursaries should be reinstated.

From my own professional standing as chair of the Association of University Lecturers in Religious Education, the Government are very fond of quoting international reputation and international data to support why the Ebac is important and to up the reputation of England in certain subjects. The reputation for English RE, or the RE specialism in England, is very strong. There was international research by Warwick supported by the European Commission in 2005 and 2009.

The evidence is there to support that international working. As to publications and academic repute, there are 12 professors in England involved in religious education-related studies. These appointments are universities judging their peers. The quality of academic work in religious education stands shoulder to shoulder with other academic subjects.

As to academic publications, the *British Journal of Religious Education* was founded in 1939. This is a recognised international publication with an international editorial board and international authors publishing within that journal. *The Journal of Beliefs and Values*, which is my own association's international journal, is equally renowned and recognised as a valuable international academic publication, so the international reputation for RE is there and is recognised as being sound. The quality of RE in the classroom is recognised across Europe and the world. Therefore, if the Government are using international criteria or making any international comparisons, RE can stand up very solidly up to that.

Stephen Lloyd MP

Thank you very much, Mike. One thing I can say is: God forbid I lose the next general election, but I would love to go to university to study a higher degree, but that is by the by.

Mike Castelli

I am sorry, I forgot one slide which is an illustration of the consequences of the closures. These are the PGCE places back in 2010. They were providing secondary PGCE RE. If those closures happen, as is sadly predicted, this year this is where the remaining ones will be. If the Government are arguing that they want to switch from training in university to training in schools, Deborah has

already raised the massive problem in terms of whether the qualified staff are there in schools to do the training. If those qualified staff are trying to do it in partnership with universities, look at the distribution. There is a big hole here and there. Schools will not have easy access to universities in order to support that in-school training that Michael Gove claims he wants to happen.

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Stephen Lloyd MP

That is a tremendously powerful point. I have a couple of questions. How did the DfE respond when your association challenged them on this? I am astonished by what you said about the University of Warwick given its reputation. What was their response?

Mike Castelli

I suppose they go back to the work force survey Deborah referred to earlier to say that the evidence for a great need for RE places is not there. Therefore, using that survey they produced, they would say we do not need RE places. Mr O'Donnell's point was that, although the numbers have fallen to 300 in universities, they intended to train 150 in schools, but that is highly problematic and very untried.

Stephen Lloyd MP

Deborah's data identified that. The other matter is more a statement than a question. I think there is a role for the APPG. There is currently a lot of national focus on this. It goes back to one of the things I said right at the beginning about the PR and media side and pushing the subject out there and making a lot of noise around the whole area. I think that is a given, but you have identified a very specific reason for us to do that. This is such an obvious statement that you can repeat it ad nauseam because you have to. So much of democratic politics is about being the sand in the oyster. The reason the middle class in this country does so well is that it has sharp elbows. I am sure we are all middle class. The reality is that with sharp elbows we know what we want and we argue like hell. For me as a politician, part of the challenge in RE is to try to get that message out to as many people as possible, but I am completely cognisant of the fact that we have got to be the sand in the oyster for the subject and also for some specific matters; otherwise, the trend is not looking good at all.

Mike Castelli

When these places have closed it is not going to be easy to reopen them.

Stephen Lloyd MP

It will be terribly difficult. It is damn easy to close something and really hard to reopen it. I know that from business. Are there any questions for Mike before we move on?

Peter Ward

I am Peter Ward from the Catholic Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers. Can you comment regarding the posts taken by successful trainees, specifically the distance from the training institute?

Mike Castelli

It is very interesting. I suppose it is anecdotal, but I have been an external examiner in quite a few universities: the Institute of Education in central London; my own institution, which I know very well; and also Birmingham. The schools I go into very frequently have partnerships with universities because it is good for recruitment. They take in students. They will often write to us and say, 'Can you send a student this year because I have got someone leaving? I would like to be partners with you.' If that is what you mean, there is a very close relationship. That final slide is a warning that there will be great areas of the country where the RE provision is going to be under even greater strain.

Stephen Lloyd MP

It is more than likely that our report will have to focus a lot on work-based experience, because that is an issue we have to take on very directly, particularly in view of what Deborah and Mike have said.

One of my colleagues has joined me. Dan, it is nice to see you. If you have any questions, just fire away. Do you have anything for Mike at the minute?

Dan Rogerson MP

I am sorry I missed the earlier presentation and the beginning of yours, Mike. I will have to go before long given other commitments today. I am really pleased that you are all here and continuing to use the APPG to get the message across. I am from John's part of the world; I am from Cornwall.

Michael Gove is very keen on getting away from particular locations, not just for RE but all sorts of things. He is constantly talking about teacher training being delivered in schools. Obviously, there is a strong track record about working in some areas, but having worked in a teacher training institution before on the admin side – not lecturing I have to say – I know the strength that the academic community brought to it. If that becomes the default way forward we need to make sure we are keeping the departments and research back-up and the wider academic distinction.

Mike Castelli

You probably missed Deborah's presentation as well. There is some very telling data there that shows there is so much RE being taught by non-specialists that the specialists are not in the schools to deliver the high quality of RE that is needed. Further, the Ofsted reports on the quality of RE

teaching in the classroom demonstrate that, if you have a well-qualified teacher, students in the classroom do better. It is not rocket science to think that would be the case.

Stephen Lloyd MP

Deborah managed to identify some clear stats that show that case.

Dan Rogerson MP

One of the things in the manifesto of the Lib Dems was to look at specialist and non-specialist teaching and delivery, not just in this subject but in others. If we are not delivering on that, then that is an issue. I will be seeing Michael Gove on Monday and will talk to him about it.

Stephen Lloyd MP

Thank you very much. Are there any other questions for Mike? We will all be doing a wash-up at the end, but, although we appear to be running behind, we are running ahead.

Next, we have Dr Mark Chater who is director of Culham St Gabriel's.

Dr Mark Chater

I am director of Culham St Gabriel's. It is not two but just one organisation, which is enough work. I apologise for being late. Part of south Oxfordshire is under water, so the train was rather slow and cautious getting here. I apologise on behalf of First Great Western.

Culham St Gabriel's is a church college trust supporting research, development and innovation in religious education. The name is the way it is because we are a recent merger of two older trusts called Culham and St Gabriel's. We have been in existence for about 30 years supporting religious education through grants and programme activity. I am going to say a bit about that in a minute.

I do want to just convey my thanks to you and the APPG for listening to us and for everything it is doing for RE at this crucial time.

I have three slides. The first one is just Culham St Gabriel's take on the CPD needs of religious education teachers. I have compartmentalised this down into three sections of teachers. Where do we get our evidence from for this? We run a lot of conferences; we do a lot of continuing professional development work with teachers and people who are about to be teachers of religious education. We also keep tabs on the scholarly and inspection evidence about RE, so our take comes from those sources, including direct contact with teachers.

From that, the chief need among primary teachers of RE and non-specialist secondary teachers is, first, to understand the purpose of religious education. There is quite a lot of evidence, particularly from Ofsted, that there is confusion about the purpose or purposes of the subject. There are several different religious educations at work in this country. There is RE for personal well-being; RE for community cohesion; and RE as a scholarly subject, the study of religions and beliefs in their own right. Depending on where and how one has been trained, a teacher goes into the profession with one or more of those understandings. A non-specialist teacher, or a primary teacher who has had perhaps only a couple of hours on RE during their PGCE year, has a very limited take on the purpose of religious education. What Ofsted is now finding is that, if you do not have clarity about

the purpose of what you are doing, it makes you much less secure and confident as a teacher in the classroom. I put that as the cardinal need among that sector of teachers. To a lesser extent it applies also to secondary specialists, but not so much.

Following on from that, there is a need for creative planning and the use of the very limited access time with pupils to do something that is going to stay with the pupils and avoids becoming too bogged down and bureaucratised. There is some excellent practice in the creative teaching of RE, but it needs to be more widespread.

Finally, there is the strengthening of subject knowledge. This is a serious problem. It relates to the first problem about understanding the purposes of the subject but knowledge of religions, including knowledge of Christianity surprisingly. That is perhaps in some ways a worse, deeper and more complex problem when it comes to teachers understanding what Christianity is and how to teach it than the other religions and beliefs in a normal syllabus.

The reason for that is that a lot of teachers are culturally closer to Christianity, whether they believe in it or not, for historical reasons in this country, and they think they know it, but quite often they do not understand Christian theology. There is a need to do something about that. My trust, along with one or two others, is supporting a project to try to underpin that in the primary initial teacher education stage.

The CPD needs of the secondary specialists are a little more straightforward and focused. There is a need for more clarity and validity around the assessment of religious education. That is a very complex story, connected to the 8-level scale and the existence of two attainment targets. There is a big debate in religious education circles about the 8-level scale and the two attainment targets learning about and learning from. Some people like them a lot and some people are a bit sceptical about them. There is a mixture of understanding of those two as well, and according to Ofsted that has created some rather unreliable assessment in some schools.

Then there is a need for stronger leadership, particularly leadership that articulates the benefits of religious education for whole school improvement and outcomes that the school as a whole is committed to. We need the RE world in general to articulate that much more strongly than it does at the moment. For all of those sectors there is a real need to overcome isolation. There is a large number of single member departments in secondary schools. You can imagine what it is like to be the sole RE teacher in your school. First, you are teaching a much larger number of pupils per week than probably any of your colleagues in the staff room, so you have difficulty in remember their names and staying on top of the marking. In addition to those practical difficulties you have nobody who is your buddy in the department with whom you can bounce around ideas. You may be facing a staff room where people do not quite understand or respect your subject and think it is about indoctrination and so on. To whom do you turn? You need a network of people out there; you need professional associations and people who understand and are backing religious education. With the weakening of local authorities, that need is not being met nearly as well as it was two or three years ago.

There is a need to overcome timetabling straitjackets. You are on a single period a week, or increasingly a single period a fortnight, and you want to create a professional development need for teachers to understand how they can step out of that and find better ways of having contact with their pupils. All of that needs networks, online activity, associations, advice and critical friends alongside the teachers in the schools.

I want to say a little about our activities as a trust. I mentioned earlier that we are one of about 10 church college trusts in different parts of the country. Some have a regional diocesan role. We have a national role. We support religious education all over the country. What we do is quite similar to what most of them do in the form of making grants to individuals who wish to do masters level professional development, or a doctorate, or simply wish to develop something in their school. We also give corporate grants to organisations that support religious education. We have run an annual national conference for many years that attracts about 200 teachers. We try to focus on teachers who are coming to the conference for the first time and are probably in the earlier stages of their careers. We try through that to overcome their sense of isolation and give them exposure to the best advisers and consultants in RE in this country. The conference this year was called 'From Here to Outstanding', and we have a real focus on raising standards and also raising a spirit of hope in the RE community. We got very good feedback from that conference from the teachers who came.

For several years we have run an online course called the Subject Knowledge Enhancement Course, for which we do charge but not that much. We have recently extended that to primary teaching assistants. There is increasing evidence, which you have probably heard from elsewhere, of primary schools asking teaching assistants to teach RE to release the class teacher for professional development time. This has raised eyebrows and caused some concern in the RE community, because those teaching assistants are wonderful people but they have had very little preparation to take on the task of teaching RE. We are offering this course to primary teaching assistants for free. Then there is RE Online which we have run for about 10 years. That is very widely used in this country. It has had about 9 million page downloads this calendar year.

We are fortunate enough to be able to do all of that with the money we have got. We know there are limits to what we can do, and we are itching to try to do more in the primary sector. The large numbers of primary teachers in this country, and the weakening of local authorities, is making it much harder for us to reach those primary teachers who are in need of a great deal of professional development and assistance.

We also have a strong focus on impact and dissemination. When we offer help to anyone through a grant or the programme we are trying to make sure we are not offering help to one individual but that the help will go further than that through a ripple effect. We are trying to build that into all our relationships.

One other thing of recent concern, which is not on the slide but is worth mentioning, is the very graphic map about the shrinking of the initial teacher education sector for RE. We share the grave concern about that and have had expressions of concern from several providers. Last week there was a meeting of the Association of Church College Trusts in which we discussed it. We recognise that it is a grave crisis for religious education, because, as was rightly said, it is easy to close things down; it is much harder to start them up again. We are going to do what we can to put collectively some church college trust money into supporting trainees from September 2013 with some bursaries, but we know that we will not be able to fill the gap that has been left behind by withdrawal of the bursary. We do not have the resources to do that, and do not think we really should have to. We are willing to do what we can to help but recognise that it really is not our job. We are stepping into something which really is a government responsibility.

May I say something about my previous incarnation? Up until 2010 I worked for the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority for four years as RE adviser. Up until 2010 I worked for the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and four years as RE adviser. I have been asked to say

something about the QCA-shaped hole that now exists in the RE world and its implications for all of us. What the QCA did for RE, among other things, was work with SACREs and the National Association of SACREs and try to do what it could to help the effectiveness of SACREs nationally. I think there are 151 SACREs in England – Lesley will know – and during my four years in the QCA I travelled around and visited just over 50% of them, so I have seen SACREs in all their glory, strength and vulnerability. We organised an annual conferences for SACREs and did a lot that hopefully helped to overcome the isolation factor. We published an annual digest of their annual reports and worked with them whenever there was a curriculum reform or review on the horizon. We worked with them to keep them informed about that, and, if they wanted to, to keep them involved in it as well.

Because RE is not a national curriculum subject it has had a history of being one or more steps behind national curriculum developments. During my time we tried to accelerate that a bit by having RE stepping along with the national curriculum developments by producing parallel documents. For the successor documents to the 2004 framework, which came out with the secondary curriculum review in 2008, and the primary curriculum review of 2009, led by Jim Rose, we produced parallel documents working with SACREs and other RE people, so that RE would really have a sense of keeping step with the wider aims of the curricula. All of that has disappeared from the websites, and quite a lot of that work has influenced SACREs. It is still alive out there, but there is no longer any national source for it.

We also do a lot of work on assessment, particularly adapting Assessment for Learning into something called Assessment of Pupil Progress, which was a model designed to create a set of focuses in all the subjects of the curriculum, and we produced material on that. There are some schemes of work, with a great deal of help from Deborah, and reforms to GCSE.

All of this work could be summed up by saying it was an attempt to overcome isolation and try to open the doors and windows of RE to make sure its thinking and its self-renewal were keeping pace with national thinking about curriculum and qualifications reform.

A final thought on all of this is that, now that structure has gone and the other structures around RE are being so grievously undermined in universities, training and local authorities, there is a real need for us to do two things: to shore up the structures of support that exist for RE teachers, and create new ones. So it is a bit about conserving what has existed for a long time and has worked pretty well but also about creating something new out of this maelstrom of change in which we are now working. Anything which Parliament or the Department can do to help on that will I am sure be very welcome.

Stephen Lloyd MP

Thank you very much indeed, Mark. You came up with potentially the title of the report: ‘Grave Crisis for RE’. We will have to kick that around. It might be too negative a title to start, but, by God, it would be an attention-grabbing one.

I was fascinated to hear about the fact that so many schools have just one RE teacher. All of this makes sense. I am a politician who comes at this because I think it is a really important thing. I am on a very steep learning curve, so as soon as you said it I thought this is probably right. Do we have any research data on that? How common is it for schools to have just one RE teacher? It would be useful to get data on that. Is that pretty common?

Dr Mark Chater

I would say that in the community schools sector it is pretty common; less so in the church school sector.

Stephen Lloyd MP

For obvious reasons, yes, but I would be interested in some data on that.

The second point is about the conference, morale and what have you. Diary permitting I would be keen – given I am making promises on behalf of my colleagues when they are not here – that the APPG should support a conference like that and send someone along potentially, just to show that they are not alone and that there are dozens of parliamentarians who support what they are doing. I am pausing, because I imagine that, as I tell my diary secretary, ‘By the way, you need to squeeze another thing in’, they will probably explode, but in principle it is something the APPG would want to do as best it could.

Dr Mark Chater

You would be very welcome.

Stephen Lloyd MP

Equally, some of the things you flagged up got me thinking about the report on early day motions and getting another debate. I wondered about alumni, which we can talk about later. I was struck by the issue of culling badgers involving MAFF which has appeared in the paper. To anybody who has ever been involved in politics it is always ‘Ag and Fish’, but I think it is now called Defra now. There are arguments for and against. All I would float up as a politician is that Brian May, formerly of Queen, and Bill Oddie were the front people in the anti-badger-culling campaign. Having coverage of such a campaign which involves A or B-list celebrities makes an enormous difference. All I would say is that there must be alumni out there at your college or some of the universities or what have you who are now celebrities and are willing to stand up and say how important RE was to them. Don’t underestimate the venality of celebrity. That is important, and what Mark said highlighted that. Are there any questions for Mark?

Richard Coupe

I am Richard Coupe of the Independent Schools Religious Studies Association. Mark, have we any data on what is happening now with free schools and academies in relation to RE? One hears dark rumours. Are you able to break down what you are saying in relation to those?

Dr Mark Chater

That is a very good question. The short answer is no. I have no data. I have a few insights. Part of the challenge with academisation and free schools – it is deliberately designed this way – is that they are less easy to get at; it is less easy to reach them if you are an outside agency and get data from them. That is deliberate because it is all part of a rationale of setting schools free, and I do not wish to argue with that. Who can argue with freedom? But it means that gathering data on that, withdrawal from RE or single member departments, or any other factor, is challenging. All I can

offer you is one interesting anecdote which is probably illustrative of something that is slowly happening. I refer to Peter Hyman, now head teacher of School 21 in the east end of London.

Stephen Lloyd MP

Peter Hyman used to work for Blair.

Dr Mark Chater

Yes. He wrote a marvellous book called *I Out of 10* about his journey from being speechwriter for the then Prime Minister to becoming a teaching assistant in a very challenging school in north London. He then rose through the ranks of the teaching profession and is now head of his own free school called School 21. He gave a presentation on the curriculum of School 21. Of course, he has complete freedom over the curriculum. As he described it, I could recognise in several different parts of the curriculum constituent elements of what I would call religious education, but it was not being named as RE and parcelled together as RE, but the pupils nevertheless were getting something very valuable and did the job that RE does. That is a story worth telling because, as academisation and free schools gather pace as they will, we will get more of that. I am not against it. There are some interesting innovations out there which we could follow and encourage. What does concern me is where a school makes use of its freedom to do nothing on RE. I have no evidence that that is happening. There may be other people who do have such evidence, and, if it was the case, I would deplore it.

Stephen Lloyd MP

Does anyone have anything to add on that?

Deborah Weston

Naturally, we are collecting data on the delivery of RE in academies. The difference between community schools and academies is now narrow so that the poor delivery has gone in the same way as in academies. We have got those figures for you.

The other more concerning point is that, because there is freedom as to what that provision is, whereas community schools will follow the agreed syllabus, academies must make provision for RE, but there is no requirement as to what that provision should look like. We have been trying to find some different examples of what that provision looks like. I can share with you one particular example. The Key Stage 3 provision is described in the funding brief of this academy as 'Shakespeare (Christianity)', followed by world literature, and at Key Stage 4 it is Shakespeare again, interestingly, followed by, 'SMSC in all schemes of work; one-world religions, eg Buddhism taught through a specific stream of work, poems from other cultures and tradition.' That is their programme for RE in that academy.

At the end of that, would we regard those children to be religiously educated? I would think that is highly doubtful. As Mark said, some academies are using those freedoms very creatively and make outstanding provision; others use their freedom in a different way.

Stephen Lloyd MP

That is a very strong point. Anecdotally, locally I would agree with that. My simple, sensible view is that, unless there is a clearly defined recommended structure, not everyone will do it well.

The next speaker is Lesley Prior, deputy chairman of the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on RE. Let's just take a two-minute comfort break.

[Short adjournment]

Lesley Prior

I am sure that many of you already know about SACREs. Many of you will be members of SACREs or support them or will have attended SACRE meetings. SACREs are key stakeholders in RE, and one of the key responsibilities of any SACRE is to support the training of teachers, both initial teacher training and continuing professional development.

The key responsibilities of SACREs are to focus not just on RE but collective worship, but I think RE is sufficient unto itself and is a hot potato this evening, so I am going to stay clear of collective worship.

We have to think about the challenges facing SACREs at the moment. As I say, they are key stakeholders in RE; they are in a very difficult position. By law, every local authority is required to have a SACRE. We have members in four different groups, as I am sure many of you will know: members of the Church of England; members of other Christian denominations and faiths; teachers from schools; and also local councillors. In that way SACREs have a real sense of ownership when they are working well on RE in their local area. The services that they create are agreed services, because they are agreed by all of those groups.

One thing that SACREs have been required by law to produce is an annual report. Mark made reference to these. In his tenure at the QCA SACREs had to send in their reports and analysis of those reports was carried out. The QCA and QCDA no longer exist, so where do SACREs send their annual reports with an analysis of what is going on? The National Association of SACREs is volunteering to host on its website those annual reports, but the law and what is actually now possible in practice do not match up.

SACREs are supposed to be supporting the training of teachers at local level. This is a crucial responsibility. SACREs have local knowledge, and the starting point for children and young people in learning about religion is very locally based. A former Secretary of State for Education wanted to know why SACREs and why these syllabuses exist when, surely, every child and young person in this country should have the same entitlement to receive good RE, but a child in Cornwall is in a very different place in terms of religion and their experience of religion from a child in Tower Hamlets, so SACREs can offer some kind of local perspective, and, with the involvement of all of those people who are members of SACREs, that is possible.

But there are various other obstacles to the effectiveness of SACREs, apart from the demise of the QCDA. Ofsted's report on individual schools used to be very lengthy and included sections on each individual curriculum area. SACREs used to analyse the RE sections of every Ofsted report of schools within their remit, identify issues of concern and then try and put on training and support opportunities for teachers to help them address those shortcomings, and also to celebrate and share the very good practice proclaimed in those reports. I never thought that as a teacher I would deplore

the demise of those detailed Ofsted reports, but many SACREs would say it has been detrimental to RE.

In recent years, however, we had Ofsted subject inspection reports, to which Deborah made reference in her presentation. The next one is going to be issued quite soon, perhaps in the next few weeks, but it is going to be the last, so SACREs will not even be able to refer to substantial evidence from Ofsted about RE overall. If my colleague Alan Brine, chief adviser for RE at Ofsted, were here today, he would say that, if you look at Ofsted reports now from individual schools, the words 'religious education' are probably mentioned it only about 6% or 7% of cases. Where do SACREs go to find the evidence they need to support teachers? That is missing.

SACREs have other concerns. Their resources have been seriously diminished. Many SACREs work really well when they have professional support from an RE adviser or consultant. Local authority posts for all subjects but RE as well have been cut in the vast majority of places, so SACREs, which are made up of groups volunteers, very often are now trying to function without the guidance and support of a professional person. Where those posts have been cut, SACREs have been given only limited funding to buy someone in to provide that support. In some authorities there was once a full-time person in the role of supporting a SACRE; now that is limited perhaps to just a few days a year, the bare minimum, and training opportunities as a result are also very limited. Funding is an issue.

It is very difficult to get accurate data on this. The National Association of SACREs has tried to garner that information, but the money some SACREs have will vary depending on what they are engaged in. If they have to produce a syllabus they might have a little more funding that year. Some SACRE funding is only to support the SACRE; for others, it is to support some training of teachers as well, and it is not always clear where those boundaries lie.

SACREs have been very exercised in recent months and years about things that are also exercising other members of the RE community, for example the impact of the Ebac where RE is not part of that clutch of subjects. Many SACREs have written to the Secretary of State campaigning for RE to be included. Michael Gove has said repeatedly that RE is a statutory duty of schools. Many SACREs would like to see him writing to schools to remind them of that statutory duty. At the moment that seems to be done by individual SACREs. Wonderful though they are, they do not have the authority of a letter from the Secretary of State. We are not asking him to change policy; we are simply asking him to reiterate the policy that is already in place and to make that clear to all schools. We are talking here not just about community schools but also the free schools and academies that have just been mentioned.

There is the whole issue about what happens with RE in academies. It is a very difficult thing to measure, as Deborah has already said. The previous Minister for Schools at the RE Council meeting said that academies did not have to use the local authority syllabus for RE but, if it is good enough, in a free market they will want to use it. The National Association of SACREs is trying to encourage academies to see the value of using the local authority syllabus, and we have a leaflet on our website which sets out our case. We are encouraging SACREs round the country to use that. We are also hoping to have an opportunity to speak at meetings of academy heads to get that message across, but we can only encourage and not compel. We hope that what we are offering is so good that people will want to take it on.

We are trying very hard in difficult times to play a continuing and vibrant role within this very fluid educational landscape in which we find ourselves. Mark said that in his time at the QCA annual SACRE conferences were held and funded through the QCA. Those no longer exist, so the

National Association of SACREs is trying to do that independently. We are also trying to work with those responsible for RE in academies and free schools, and we actively support and are involved in the current RE subject review. Like many other people in the RE community, we deplore the fact that, while the national curriculum review is being fully funded by the Government, the parallel review for RE has to be funded from within the community. What does that say about the status of the subject?

Clearly, as SACREs lose their official role with many of the schools that have become academies, particularly secondary schools in the first instance, what is there? I sat in SACRE meetings where I was the supporting consultant and heard people say, 'Are we here now only for primary schools, because all our secondary schools have become academies? What is our role? Are we creating a syllabus for only a small group of schools? Where do we sit in this new landscape?'

I would like to finish by picking up something Mike said about the status of RE in this country as it is seen elsewhere. I am personally involved in a European RE network. What we do in SACREs, where we have all these people from very different backgrounds working together, is looked at with wonder and fascination and is seen as an excellent model of good practice in community cohesion, bringing people together and sharing what is on offer.

If you will forgive me, I end on a personal note. If as a young teacher I had not been involved in a SACRE I would not be standing here now talking to you. That is where my career path was able to take off, so SACREs provide excellent professional development for teachers. I would also like to speak up for primary RE, which is also a key concern to SACREs. The data is much easier to access in terms of the attacks on secondary RE, but primary RE is also very vulnerable. I am proud to work in a university where primary RE is very much on the agenda. I am encouraging young teachers who have just qualified to join their local SACRE and play a part. It is a kind of symbiotic relationship with the SACRE, teacher training provider and the schools all working together to produce high-quality teaching and learning in RE.

Stephen Lloyd MP

A couple of things have occurred to me from what you were saying. You mentioned Michael Gove writing to the schools reminding them that RE is a statutory requirement. That is very simple and straightforward, and I think it is a bloody good idea. That is something we can certainly put in the report. I am quite sure we can get Michael at least to do that. Equally, underpinning that I can see a possible role for the APPG to push that out.

As to the role of SACREs in secondary schools and the whole issue around academies and free schools, that has to be a key part of the report, because we do not know what the hell is happening. I really value that. I wrote something down as you were talking, and others were speaking. It sounds rather apocalyptic. This sounds awfully negative, but it is really worth putting out there. Particularly with the change to academies and free schools on top of the Ebac, I wrote down: 'If we don't turn round this decline, general nationwide RE could be dead in 15 years.' It is quite clear to me that a series of issues or impacts – not giant conspiracy stuff – is turning into a perfect storm that is potentially lethal. Are there any questions for Lesley?

Jo Backus

I am Jo Backus, Network of Buddhist Organisations. Is it not the case, Lesley, that the former Minister suggested there would be inter-school support for some schools who were having issues

with the delivery of religious education, compared with those that were stronger, in response to a question about how SACREs were going to support academies and so on? Is it not also the case that, if we see a continuance of a lack of trained professionals, there will not be that support? It will be an ever-diminishing form of support.

Lesley Prior

Other speakers have highlighted that support for RE in individual schools can be very weak at both secondary and primary level. We must not forget special schools too. Schools that might be outstanding in other ways are not necessarily also outstanding in RE, so schools that become leading training schools may be very good and outstanding in a variety of areas, but the RE is not necessarily also going to be at that standard. A lot of my primary RE specialists who go into schools are expected to be a specialist in the school when they are there on placement to learn themselves. I always say to them, 'I don't think it matters how good you are when you go into a school. When you are there to be trained you've got a right to be even better by the time you leave. You are not there as an unpaid supply teacher to deliver the school's RE programme.' I also know that groups of schools are trying to work together to provide training. Mark alluded to the very different understandings of RE. If your partner secondary school is perhaps a voluntary-aided faith school and you are a community primary school, all sorts of wonderful things can go on in your subjects, but the understanding of RE in those two schools will be very different. How does that play out? It is not terribly practical in some respects.

Dr Janet Orchard

I am Janet Orchard, project manager of the RE Subject Review. How would NASACRE respond, for example, to an assurance of guaranteed numbers of people being trained in higher education institutes where there would definitely be provision for subject specialist teaching at secondary and also primary level?

Lesley Prior

SACREs around the country have always been hugely supportive of that. They have had strong links with the local SACREs, trying to set up a chain, if you like, so that people who are in training come in and observe SACRE meetings or participate in them, but it is not easy. SACREs, rather like the role of the Queen and the constitution, do not have a great deal of power but they can be consulted; they can advise and warn. I think that is the role SACREs are trying to adopt.

Stephen Lloyd MP

The influence of it, so to speak?

Lesley Prior

Yes. It is quite true that some SACREs are not very effective, but that is not always their own fault; it is because they are in very difficult situations. There are many SACREs that are really working hard. It is all done through volunteers making a difference, putting on events, running training, inviting people to visit places of worship and trying to offer enriching experiences, and I hope that teacher trainees would be part of that.

Stephen Lloyd MP

I am going to draw a line there. Thank you, Lesley. We appreciate it. We have another two speakers. Our next speaker I look forward to with great interest is Audrey Brown, deputy director of the education standards, analysis and research division of the DfE.

Audrey Brown CBE

Thank you very much for inviting me along to give evidence this evening. I work with statisticians at the Department for Education. Normally, they keep us chained in the basement and do not let us out very often, so I was delighted to get this invitation last week. I have been pulling out some of the figures. Some of them Deborah and Mike in particular have already shown you, but I have a few extra things that perhaps have not emerged from the data.

I will start by saying something about teacher numbers, deployment, qualifications and characteristics. That is the area where Deborah has already covered some of the things I was going to say. I will move on to teacher demand, supply and recruitment, some of which Mike has covered, and I will finish by giving you the latest take on exam results at Key Stages 4 and 5 for religious education.

The slide shows the headcount of in-service teachers in RE. You see that the figure for all Key Stages is just over 16,000. There are just over 12,000 in Key Stage 3 and just under 10,000 at Key Stage 4. This was the figure Michael Gove was drawing attention to. It has gone up from about 10,400 to 10,700, and it is just under 4,000 at Key Stage 5. But the important point, which you have probably already picked up from what Deborah said, is that you cannot add these up. This is the number of teachers, of whom this many teach some classes at Key Stage 3, some at Key Stage 4 and some at Key Stage 5. Therefore, a teacher who teaches two different key stages will be counted twice in this table. It is very important to get that clear, because that is probably at the root of some of the double counting you have been worried about. You also see the total number of hours taught at Key Stages 3, 4 and 5. They can add up because that is just the total number of hours of tuition that the classes have received.

The total of about 16,000 has been stable for a number of years. I have looked back at 1997, 2002 and 2007 when we held national staff recruitment surveys. The figure then was a little lower at about 14,000, or perhaps a little higher. In 2007 we had a further survey that pitched it at around 15,000. We now have a figure of about 16,500. It is important to remember that these are teachers who teach RE, not necessarily teachers who are qualified to teach RE, which is the next point I turn to.

I want to say something about the average class size that these teachers are addressing. You can see in both Key Stages and in all subjects that class sizes have been going down recently. The figures here are for 2003, 2007 and 2011. You do get a decrease. This is entirely in line with decreasing pupil numbers in these schools. I shall say a little more about that when we come to look at teacher demand. Religious education has similar sorts of class sizes in Key Stage 4 to the other compulsory subjects at Key Stage 4, science, English and maths, and a little higher than the humanities which on the chart are geography and history; and it is a lot bigger than foreign languages, which have been going downhill. These class sizes have been dropping as interest in entry into the modern foreign languages has been dropping. Some of these drops are to do with cohort getting smaller; others are to do with subjects being less popular, so you see two effects in one year.

At A-level, students of foreign languages in secondary schools and sixth forms are enjoying class sizes of only five or six at the moment, but for religious education it is about 12, which is similar to some of the other subjects in school sixth forms.

The next slide is a key slide. I will not dwell on it because Deborah has already explained it to you. This shows how the 16,000 teachers are divided into those that have a degree or higher in religious education; those who have a BEd in education; those who have a PGCE in religious education; and other qualifications. All of these teachers, although they are teaching religious education, have not got a qualification in RE above perhaps A-level.

The second column is also important, because that is the distribution by qualification held of the hours taught. You can see that the purple line goes up a lot higher on this chart than it does simply on the numbers. Although you have got lots of teachers here who have not got an RE qualification teaching RE, they are doing only about half the hours of the RE teachers. If you like, they are not being used as the primary source of teaching; they are being used to fill in. Nevertheless, we still have almost 30% of hours being taught done by someone who has not got a qualification in religious education.

The next one is new. I do not think Deborah looked into this. If they do not have a qualification in religious education, what are they qualified to teach? These are the subjects of their highest qualification. If they do not have a qualification in RE, what is their qualification? You can see that the most popular is history. I took this data from the most recent census which was the one in 2011. We see: history, social studies, education, whether or not they have a BEd, geography, English, science, and so on. There are a few maths qualifications; it is about 2%. There are quite a few with a qualification in geography. This is the subject they were trained to teach but they are delivering RE, and this is what we saw in our census. It accounts for 28% to 30% of RE lessons. Most of that will be key stage three. If you look at how that changes among Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5, the RE specialists are delivering more at Key Stage 5 than at the other two Key Stages.

I also looked at it by type of school. I thought this would be of interest to the group. You see the proportion of hours being taught by teachers who have got a post-A-level qualification in RE. For the voluntary-aided sector, over 80% of the teaching of RE is done by someone with a qualification in RE, but you can see it varies by type of school. In academies it is about 74%, so it is not that different. This is something I shall be interested to see developing in the next few years as we get more and more data from academies. Foundation schools and community schools are just under 70%. It is the voluntary-aided and the voluntary-controlled sector where most of the teaching is delivered by the appropriate specialist.

I have also had a quick look at this by denomination. Not surprisingly, the figures are around 80% in Church of England schools, Roman Catholic schools or schools of other Christian denominations, but there is not that much difference. In schools of no denomination at all it is still 70%, so there is not a great discrepancy here.

Let's take a quick look at who is teaching RE. Many of these facts are familiar to you. 68% are female teachers in secondary schools; 32% are male. That is not a great deal of difference from other subjects.

I thought I would look at age distribution. Of particular interest to you is the proportion over 50, which is 22%, but that is the national proportion for all secondary teachers; there is just no difference there. As to ethnicity, it is 14%. That is only one or two percentage points different from teachers of all subjects in secondary schools, so there is not a marked difference in that area.

Stephen Lloyd MP

Different higher or lower?

Audrey Brown CBE

I have it on a paper over there. I believe it is 16% or 17% for all teachers, but I will check it for you in a minute.

I go on to teacher flows. I thought I would start by looking at pupil numbers, because that governs a lot of the demand for teachers of all subjects. The red line at the top is primary numbers; the blue line at the bottom is secondary numbers. The secondary school numbers have been falling since about 2005, and they are still falling. They are projected to carry on falling until about 2015, and then they will start to turn upwards. Primary numbers have already started to turn upwards. They are going up pretty fast and will soon be the highest they have ever been since the 1970s, so that is something facing our primary schools soon. A few years after that it will be a problem facing our secondary schools. The recent history over the past 10 years has been falling pupil numbers, and that is affecting a lot of teacher demands we have seen.

We see a very brief description of how we try to model teacher flows. We start with our stock of secondary teachers and look at wastage and those who are leaving the maintained sector, or those who are retiring for all these different reasons. That gives us a shortfall that we need to top up. Sometimes we talk about those who return to the maintained sector or those coming new to the maintained sector, but the vast majority of the top-up needed next year will be newly-qualified teachers coming into the system. The chart we see is quite an old one, but the figures do not vary that much from year to year, but each year we have to make sure that the numbers coming into the system are enough to keep the stock at the level required. Bear in mind that the level required has been falling over this 10-year period, because pupil numbers are declining.

Mike showed the target on this chart, and the way the target has almost halved over the years. These figures are slightly different from Mike's, because he was showing PGCEs, and I am showing PGCEs plus the EBITT provision, so they are slightly higher, but the trend is very similar, of a fall over the last five years. It is interesting to note how high the recruitment has been over the years; this might be quite a key point to note, because there are 200 over target there, 150 more there, and almost 200 over there. When we are doing our modelling of teacher demand, we know that these extras are already in the system; we have already got 600 teachers over target.

There are three reasons why this has fallen so fast; one is the secondary numbers of pupils falling; two, is the over-recruitment that has happened in recent years, and three is this turning away from RE towards EBac subjects, which you noted. It is quite helpful to unpack the reasons why this is coming down so fast.

Stephen Lloyd MP

Could you give me those three again please?

Audrey Brown CBE

We know there are falling pupil numbers, that is the first reason, and then we have had the over-recruitment in RE. I wanted to compare it with geography and history; geography and history

started off around the same about three or four years ago. They both started to fall here, but around this sort of period, when we had the change of Government and the Secretary of State wanted to reemphasise geography and history, this fall has now stopped, but the fall in RE has now carried on going down.

These are figures that Mike showed us earlier, but it is a comparison with other subjects, so that you can see what is happening. In modern foreign languages, although the recruitment has always been larger the fall was just as much proportionally; that has now stopped now and started to go back up again. A bit later on I will look at the exam entries for these subjects as well.

This is to show that applications are still very healthy. There have been two or even three applicants for every place in the last couple of years. The next line is just looking at quality, because the Secretary of State, as you know, is trying to get more [inaudible]; that does look as if it is going up quite sharply.

I will finish with a couple of slides on exam results; the increase in four GCSEs entries over the last four years is quite well documented. It is fascinating to see how the short course entries have been coming down, almost like a mirror image. These are the pupils that used to take short and are now doing full.

Participant

Ask Mr Gove why they are going down?

Audrey Brown CBE

You explain it to me then?

Participant

He has dismissed them as being irrelevant, and they will not be counted in the scores for secondary schools.

Audrey Brown CBE

That cannot be the explanation, look at the years: why does it fall between 2008 and 2009? Did everyone know that Michael Gove was going to become Secretary of State in 2010 and make these pronouncements?

Participant

The fall between 2009 and 2010 is not significant.

Audrey Brown CBE

The fall between 2008 and 2009 when it started to fall, and even between 2010 and 2011, these pupils made their decisions...

Participant

You said the population was falling.

Participant

It is falling in line with the decline in secondary numbers, because those are the ones being made to do it who have not opted for it, so as secondary numbers decline, the short course declines. The encouraging thing is the full course has gone up for people who are choosing it, but inevitably, if secondary numbers are declining, something that they are compulsorily obliged to do, if they have not chosen it, will be declining along with it in numbers. It matches the statistics you gave earlier.

Audrey Brown CBE

I quite like that explanation, but it is too big a fall for that, because it is going down from 270,000 to 180,000 – it has gone down by one third. Although we have had a fall in secondary pupils it is nowhere near a third, we are only talking about 10%.

Participant

What do you think?

Audrey Brown CBE

I do not know; I only got these figures on Monday. They are switching, and I know it is easy to think they are switching because that is the political signals, but if the switch predates the signals.

Stephen Lloyd MP

This is useful, because, again, with any reports they are doing, and with any chance of success, we need to be robust and deal with every single rebuttal that comes our way. I am delighted with this Audrey. We need to try and understand what the reason could possibly be. You could be correct; in 2008/09 there was no certainty that Gove was going to be Secretary of State and was going to be as radical as he was around EBac. If I could ask some of those in the room what did you think would account for changes as dramatic as that?

Daniel Hugill

As a classroom teacher this is not so interesting to me. What is happening in the classroom is the full course number that is rising is more than likely taught in exactly the same number of hours as the short course was. Although they are accessing the full course GCSE, the quality of the teaching squeezed into the same amount of time will not be sufficient. I have got a very supportive head teacher; I still teach RE as a GCSE full course in significant less time than many of my colleagues. There are many schools who teach the full course GCSE, with numbers rising, who will be doing it in one hour a week, compared to their English, geography and maths colleagues who have four or five hours.

Audrey Brown CBE

You might find common cause also with some science teachers who are now teaching three GCSEs in the time they used to do two.

Daniel Hugill

The number of hours is not followed by many...

Audrey Brown CBE

If you add this up, even if these were to take half the time to deliver, the total load has not gone up much, because this has fallen about twice as far as that has gone up, so the total load has not changed quite so much. It is interesting.

Participant

Looking at the graph, when that full course starts shortening down that was about the time I was starting to teach GCSE around year 9. That is very worrying: a GCSE course is designed for children in year 10/11, particularly the issues based courses, but they are now starting to teach the children who are around 13.

Audrey Brown CBE

It is too early.

Participant

It is too early. The consequence on the reduction of the syllabus is you can end up with a situation where they know less about your religion. They have a really good understanding of the breadth of religions and they narrow down too quickly. This is what has become an issue in my school.

Stephen Lloyd MP

This is an important graph. We will be discussing the report later, but what I would strongly advise is we do not shy away from it: we say, 'Here are the explanations'.

Audrey Brown CBE

The next chart is the same data for religious education, but I have juxtaposed it with history and geography. Geography is the red line that starts off at the top and ends at the bottom. History is the blue line. This is now in proportions rather than numbers, because I take your point about the cohort size changes, so this one is in proportions to try and clarify that. It has gone up from 17% to 34%. It was not that much different in 1994, but history and geography were; their historic form has been further and farther. You have got some crossover points here, where religious education has climbed above those two subjects. It is data like this that led the Secretary of State to think that these are subjects that need a bit more encouragement, because religious education is going up...

Deborah Weston

One of the things not taken into account with history and geography is where those subject areas have got more than one specification on offer. For example, in geography you have got global studies and the global citizenship GCSEs being offered, which some geography departments do instead of straight geography. Likewise you have got citizenship as part of that mix, which has taken away some people from other humanities areas. Whereas RE has only got the one specification, history has got classic civilization and history; geography has got global studies.

Audrey Brown CBE

They did have tiny numbers, the ones that have taken away.

Deborah Weston

Not when you join them together.

Audrey Brown CBE

I thought I would put in the grades; you probably already know this. The grades attained in the short course are not as stunning as the grades attained in the full GCSE. I think that someone said that already; the short courses were for those that did not want it anyway, and perhaps that shows up in the grade. I did a few of these by denomination: you can see that schools with a Roman Catholic denomination really go in for the full GCSE; with other schools it is at a more modest level.

Stephen Lloyd MP

Looking at the previous slide, in the DfE's knowledge and the REC knowledge, I am assuming that Catholic Schools teach RE in the way that we are talking about, generally speaking.

Participant

We are not talking about the way they teach it, but certainly the hours.

Stephen Lloyd MP

Where we are looking at RE today, compared to my day, in the sense RE covers all the range of different religions, plus people with no belief, is that how it is still taught? When I was at Catholic school, as I was from the age of zero to whatever, it was Catholicism or you are burned. I know it is slightly different now, but in a modern Catholic school is RE taught with our syllabus?

Peter Ward, Catholic Education Service of England and Wales

The Catholic Church signed up to the National Statutory Framework, which is a generic statement, and it signs up to and is happy to be in line with the phraseology of the RE Council. The religious education that is specifically taught and examined at GCSE is more likely to be specifically critical, but if you go and look at all the option papers, the vast majority of them will either be two Christian or two Christian Catholic papers, or Christian and another faith. The other faith papers are not taken by very many pupils at all. The GCSE exams, by and large, irrespective of the denomination

of the school, are going to be broadly Christian papers. Deborah is nodding at me; I take that as confirmation of that. There are other faiths taught, and it is part of the Bishop's Directive that it has to be taught, but it would normally be up to and including Year 9.

Participant

It is more of a query than a question. I remember the Government's guidelines were that Christianity would be the main religion taught, and then you look at the demographics of the area, and based on that there would be a proportion of teaching. If there were more Buddhists in that particular city then Buddhism would be the first religion, Islam would be the first religion if it was a large population community in that particular city. Depending which city you are referring to there could be a shift of emphasis on the second faith that they would learn.

Coming back to the other religions, if we want to get positive support for SACRE, other religions are also very passionate about RE. It would be interesting to see a breakdown of that in the same manner that you have done there, because these have to reach the target to get the support that we need.

Lesley Prior

May I make a clarification; the 1988 Education Reform Act, which requires RE to reflect the fact that religious traditions within the name Christian were taking account of the teaching and practices of other principle religions, does not apply to voluntary aided schools. They may choose to do that, but they do not have to do that. The same legislation applies to academies now. That was the response that NATRE received from the Department when it sought clarification about whether or not academies had to follow the local authority syllabus; they do not, but they are bound by the same requirements of the local authority syllabus.

Stephen Lloyd MP

After hopefully we win the main battle we are talking about, I am going to get the [inaudible] going into Catholics, and I say that as someone who grew up a Catholic.

Audrey Brown CBE

Short courses by denomination, I do not think it adds a lot to the discussion we have just had. If we have a look at results by grade – this also shows you the trend in numbers. You have got almost 17,000 entries a few years ago, going up to almost 19,000 entries now; a steady increase, which nevertheless needs to be seen against the falling pupil[?] numbers. This is not just in schools; it is schools, secondary colleges and FE colleges. Nothing much has happened in the grade distribution except the emergence of the A* in the last three years, which is given to 7-8%.

For the A-Level, you see the proportion of pupils taking A-Level religious studies: only about 5% are doing that A-Level in schools without a denomination. The Church of England is about 10%, Roman Catholic is 15%, other Christian is 10%, and the other religion one is over 20%. Overall it is about 7% of A-Level pupils that are entering Religious Education.

Mike Castelli

How historic is that? That is today; if you showed 2001, for instance, would it be broadly the same?

Audrey Brown CBE

I do not know; I have not looked at that.

Participant

The work that has been done with the Shi'a Muslim community in enhancing the qualifications of teaching of A-Level Islamic studies within the Madrasah – within their own schools as well – shows a growing interest, certainly within the Muslim community of teaching A-Level Islam at a high professional level. I would think that the other religion numbers have increased.

Dr Mark Chater

Could you go back to the slide about full course GCSE by denomination; if you look at the low performance of the non-faith school sector, if I can put it like that, compared with the faith school sector. I do not like to say faith school.

Stephen Lloyd MP

I know what you mean.

Dr Mark Chater

Remember that the faith school sector is expanding at the moment; what we could be looking at is the faith school sector pulling away from the community school sector, and continuing to do RE more properly and more fully at Key Stage 4, while in the community school sector that is falling off. The expansion of GCSE numbers might be explainable in terms of the expansion of the faith school sector. If that is the case it is quite worrying.

Stephen Lloyd MP

It is: what I meant by that statement, 'If we do not turn this decline around general combination RE could be dead in 15 years', is that the faith schools are not going to be a problem. My bigger concern is the non-faith schools, where I see this huge drop-off.

Daniel Hugill

I am happy that specialist RE teachers, who love their subject, are teaching Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 – that is good. What I am worried about is that where all students are studying RE at Key Stage 3, they are not being taught by specialist RE teachers. It is those students who are being taught by a teacher here and there, who has got a spare hour in their timetable, without passion, without rigour, without the enthusiasm that a specialist might bring, that is the concern. It would be interesting in five years to see how GCSE numbers and A-Level numbers are when more and more students at Key Stage 3 are not beginning to love a subject and have an interest in the subject.

The stock of RE teachers: you used the phrase over-recruitment, because the target was exceeded, but there is still 30% of RE taught by non-specialists. It is not over-recruitment; the stock is insufficient.

Audrey Brown CBE

The stock of secondary teachers is too big. It is the mix that needs readjusting; it needs readjusting for every single subject. Every single subject is taught in some schools by someone who is not that specialist. It is not about a failure in stock; it is about a mismatch between schools.

Daniel Hugill

The stock is that more RE is taught by non-specialists than anyone else, and we have a Secretary of State, who very rightly so, is very concerned with rigour and quality. There are thousands of children out there tomorrow morning, at 9.00, who walk into a classroom with someone who knows very little about RE, and that is a concern. This 30% is thousands of children who are experiencing sub-par, not quality. We can wait until these people leave, but that is going to take a long time to get this mix right, and good RE teachers entering.

Audrey Brown CBE

Can I go back to the chart that showed 27% of pupils in schools without a specialism? In Year 12 mainstream, 27% of the pupils doing full GCSE; that is still 10 points of the whole population of schools, which we saw on the area slide, that came up with 17 points. You cannot argue that the whole of the increase over the last few years has been made up from increases in Roman Catholic schools, because this is the smallest figure in the whole chart and it is still 10 percentage points higher than it was a few years ago. It is not the case that it is going down in other areas; it is not the case that it is being driven entirely by faith schools. They will have taken a part of it. When you consider that there are a couple of thousand schools in this; this must be the engine of the increase, not the faith schools.

Dr Janet Orchard

When you are talking about the other teachers who are teaching RE, this screen was 14% or 16%, which suggests to me an oversupply of history teachers, but I do not see that the targets in history are going down.

Audrey Brown CBE

If you look at history there are still lots of history lessons being delivered by non-history teachers. It is not that they are not there: you have got a school over here with history being taught by an RE teacher, and a school over here with RE being taught by a history teacher. There is a problem at the school level; a lot of schools have not got the right mix.

Dr Janet Orchard

Do you think if they have over-recruited by 555 teachers in five years that will address the shortage?

Audrey Brown CBE

If they get jobs, but I am not sure that they will get jobs: there were only 14 vacancies for RE teachers in November, in the whole of the secondary sector. Schools are not looking for these people that have just been –

Dr Janet Orchard

[Inaudible].

Deborah Weston

Teachers are being shunted from one humanities subject to another, or they have made somebody redundant, and move an historian, or a geographer, or even a maths teacher, into a space for an RE teacher. I want to take issue with the other point; the slide I was shown at the beginning shows that 12.6% of the hours are for people with no qualification in history, but 27% – it is twice as bad in RE. It is not little bits is for difference overall; the picture is massive. We have an issue, and if we are not careful we are going to cause our own failure by head teachers saying, ‘I cannot get the teachers, so I will just put another teacher in’.

I have been talking to the data team at the Department over the last few years, and have grown to respect the level of detail and analysis that they do. Why the numbers are counted in this way? Every year I look back it was counted in the same way and there was some little footnote that said, ‘One teacher if they taught one hour’. The obvious way to count for anybody, and I am not a statistician, is to count full time equivalents. If you count full time equivalents you know exactly how many you have got. Why would you count it in such an odd way?

Audrey Brown CBE

I am amazed that you have gone back years in this, because we only started that survey in 2010; we published it in 2010 for the first time, and 2011 was the second, which is why I only showed you two figures. That SFR that you are quoting from is only the second one ever to appear. I do not know who you have been talking to in the Department, but I do not think any of your emails have ever come anywhere near me.

Dr Janet Orchard

No, they have not.

Dr Mark Chater

As interesting as all these statistics are, the consequence in terms of closure of university courses and university provision and training for RE, seems to me key. Twelve places have closed already; there is another 10 ready to close this year, possibly 17 next year – we saw the geographical distribution. It seems to me unclear what the rationale is from the Department as to who they close, and are they taking into account that final slide of the national distribution, and the consequence that has to support quality RE in schools?

Stephen Lloyd MP

Audrey, from your perspective, obviously you are on the statistics, the analysis side, but because you are from DfE and you are here – and thank you very much for that – have you any comment or answers around what Mike is talking about with the actual cutbacks in universities, or is that a completely different area?

Audrey Brown CBE

It is a different area, but some of the moves towards having teacher training in schools still require university involvement. If a department has got eight PGCE places, many of them over-recruit and they can always take 10 if that is what they wish to do.

Dr Mark Chater

Not always; we are penalised for that.

Audrey Brown CBE

They have done it in the past. I am not recommending it, but I am saying that some of them do, but also they have links with the EBac teachers...

Dr Mark Chater

That might be your rationale...

Audrey Brown CBE

That is not my rationale, because I have already said I am not involved.

Dr Mark Chater

No, the Department's rationale, but the Department needs to have the conversation with Vice Chancellors to say, 'This is our policy and this how we are going forward'. The Department keeps doing a hands-off thing and saying, 'We do not close RE providers'. They need to have a conversation with Vice Chancellors.

Participant

May I make one final plea for primary RE? Some years ago the REC commissioned a review of provision of initial teacher training in primary RE, and it varies tremendously. I am privileged to work in an institution where, for example, today I was teaching primary PGCE students; they have 14 hours of taught RE. I also work a lot with a large number of other providers, and with newly qualified teachers, who tell me that they perhaps had one lecture. The move for primary PGCE next year is to go to 120 days in school instead of 90 days, which means that time in universities is going to be cut. I have already got colleagues in maths and English saying, 'We cannot cut those subjects; they are most important'.

My colleagues and I in the other subjects, the foundation subjects, including the humanities, would argue very strongly that because those trainees are not going to see those subjects taught effectively in many of their placement schools, however good those schools might be in other respect, we must protect the place of the foundation subject in primary schools. We have talked a lot about data, but that data is relating to secondary provision, and it is vital that we address that. I am involved in secondary schools, and I feel equally passionate about it, but the danger is that RE in primary schools is being eroded. We cannot get a handle on how that is happening, because we have not got data, and we have not got statistics, it is slipping away and no one is really aware of it. We have got to hold that in our minds.

Peter Ward

[Crosstalk] did a survey of that – I am on that – and they found that one hour was the finding of all their NQTs in the year the survey was done: one hour for RE.

Stephen Lloyd MP

I am crystal clear that that needs to be in a report on the whole primary side. Thank you, Audrey; I thought that was tremendously valuable. What is essential with the APPG on RE, and the RE Council, and everyone else who is advising us on, is it is absolutely vital that if we believe that we can explain away those figures and make our case that we believe so passionately in, then we have to face those figures head on. One thing I know about Michael is he considers himself empirically evidence-based. Thank you very much Audrey.

John Keast OBE

Thank you very much indeed. I want to begin by thanking Audrey for going through those statistics with us. It is a shame that it has taken an All-Party Parliamentary Group to begin a dialogue between the RE community and the Department in this area, because we have not been able to have one until now, and there are some fruitful outcomes that could be achieved from that dialogue. I shall come back to that again in a moment.

My presentation will not be statistical. What I want to do is look at the bigger picture to look at the trends in policy development, the changes that have taken place, which will materially affect the subject of his inquiry, which is the support available to RE teachers. Where do teachers of RE get support from? They get it from a combination of different places: they get support nationally, which has been the case since the introduction of the national curriculum in 1989. The curriculum developments taking place in RE, alongside the national curriculum, exemplification of standards, the development of qualifications, and the training of teachers, are national forms of teacher support.

They also get it from local sources, and we have heard about that with SACREs and local authorities. I meant to put on their peer group support with teachers who get themselves together and provide local professional health. It is still a minority of teachers who have that access to peer support. What is crucial to remember is that these forms of support have been particularly effective since the early 1990s, because they work together. Many national initiatives have provided the agenda for local support to be available to teachers.

This slide shows a few national initiatives that ended up with local manifestations. It is this combination of national and local that has allowed the improvements to take place that some of

Audrey's statistics have noted: the increase in the number of young people taking GCSE, short and full, over the last 10-15 years. If it is true teachers get support from this combination of sources then we need to look at what is happening to that combination of sources to see what is happening to the support that they will enjoy in the future.

Here is a list of facts of what is happening in RE nationally; much of this has been mentioned already, but I put them together to give a national picture. I do not intend to go through them all, because you will be familiar with some of these, and one or two of them have been mentioned. The statutory protection of RE has disappeared from academies, because that is now contractual with funding agreements. We have noted the fact that academies do not have to teach locally agreed syllabuses; no response to the OFSTED report; the abolition of QCDA and no national advisor for the subject. I forgot to mention the removal of the exemplification of the subject in non-statutory programmes of study that have been available for years; that has disappeared overnight. The reduced targets, which we talked about, the exclusion from the EBac, the exclusion from the review of the school curriculum, the discounting of GCSE short courses from performance data scores, abolition of GCSEs in [inaudible], putting the future of GCSE RS, along with other subjects, in some other kind of limbo, and the removal of the bursaries.

There is one statistic I want to put in here, and that is that it has been calculated that the removal of bursaries will make the cost of undertaking a PGCE in RE from 2015 £38,000 per student. By having that extra PGCE year it will put the cost of doing a PGCE up from £14,000 per student to £38,000. That is the disincentive of the massive cut. That is the evidence of policy change and educational change nationally that will materially affect the support the RE teachers enjoy from the source.

We move to the local source of support and see what is happening here. We have heard about the loss of information from Ofsted subject reports, about what is happening in schools, SACREs no longer have access to that data; it does not exist. The advisor posts – with diminishing budgets for SACREs, those secondary schools that are now outside the remit of SACREs, some SACREs are now failing to meet the statutory agreed syllabus reviews that must take place every five years are not happening increasingly, and the virtual disappearance of continuing development locally.

The picture of what is happening locally in terms of support is also rather bleak. If you put those two pieces of evidence together and you have my interpretation of what is happening: the dismantling of national support structures, and the increasing collapse of local support structures. The consequences of that are not facts; they are judgements and predictions. My list of these includes that nobody locally will know what is going on in RE in schools, let alone nationally; little or no opportunity for continuing professional development. Fewer qualifications will be taken, because those graphs will start to decline, and that will have knock-on effects to higher education, to theology and religious studies departments, which will have knock-on effects of fewer trained teachers. We have already seen that there is a high deficit there. There will be fragmentation of the RE curriculum, marginalisation and decline in status – a downward spiral.

The sources of support for teachers, which are a mixture of national and local, are diminishing in both cases, and there will be a big black hole. I want to stop at that point, because that is the picture. The rest of my slides, which I am not going to go through, given the hour, are based on that the RE Council is quite determined to turn that negative picture into a positive one, by picking up the mantle where it has fallen flat from our resources. What we are seeking from Government is some willingness to dialogue with us to ensure that that picture does not become as bleak in practice as it seems to be in potential.

Stephen Lloyd MP

Thank you very much John. In a sense your final line to me, in many ways, is the most difficult one, because we understand all the other bullet points, and I certainly share that concern and anxiety. To me, one of the key consequences of this report when it comes out, we launch it, we publicise it, and we jump up and down, is just to get a better engagement between the whole RE area and the DfE, and Michael basically. That would be a key objective.

Julie Grove

Have we been naïve in thinking that RE has suffered unintended consequences over the last couple of years or so, in the wake of these developments and changes? It really seems as though it is a concerted effort to see the end of RE, which was a very powerful and important aspect of pupils' education and development, as it slides into the dust.

Stephen Lloyd MP

That is a very good point. My honest answer, from a personal perspective, is I have not quite worked out whether it is cock-up or conspiracy. My experience tends to mean it is usually cock-up with Government, but that does not mean there are never any conspiracies. That is not me sitting on the fence; it is the truth. Nine times out of 10 it is cock-up, but every now and then it is conspiracy. My hunch is it is still a cock-up; an unintended consequence is now delivering at pace that we have to stop, otherwise, I profoundly believe, we will have a problem in 15 years' time.

That will not be in the faith schools; I am not anxious about the faith schools, to be perfectly honest, that is not why I am here as Chair. What I am so passionate about in this globalised world, where there is so much madness on the internet, is to have an opportunity for our children across the piece to be taught about all the different religions and none by trained RE teachers, otherwise the world is going to get madder in my view.

John Keast

Like you, I started off thinking that it was an unintended consequence of Government policy. I think there is a sense of intention in that what we are seeing is a very different approach to education coming into play, which is very different from the one that people like me got used to over the last 15-20 years. In this instance, I think the philosophy of work is that RE is a locally determined subject. That is an intended policy that it should be locally determined. I do not think there is any doubt that that is the Government's view. Where the unintended consequences come in is that for non-faith based schools making RE a totally locally determined subject will undermine it. I can remember the time when it was, and it was nothing like as healthy a state as has become. I do not think the structures will be robust enough in terms of local authorities, and SACREs, and so on, to allow RE to flourish as a totally locally based subject in non-faith based schools. That is an unintended consequence.

Mike Castelli

May I come back to one of the points John made about the removal of the bursaries and the financial consequences. In my nervousness earlier I forgot to make one of my points about the consequences. It seems to me that there is strong evidence that there are social and ethnic

consequences to the removal of the bursaries. Social in the financial point of view: that we will end up with only those children from families who can afford those kinds of debts, and are used to those kinds of debts, becoming teachers. Therefore, the social makeup of the teaching profession will be skewed. Ethnically there has been, certainly within my own institution, a growing number of minority first generation teachers coming in, from non-traditional backgrounds. That is going to become more problematic if the financial situation is such that it is going to be costing a great deal financially.

Imam Monawar Hussain

I wear a number of hats; the Oxford Foundation is one of them. I also am the Imam at Eton College and I also serve on the Board of Oxford Brookes University. I think for the higher education sector there are a lot of challenges because of government policy there. It is vital, it is essential, and it is important that we strengthen RE for a number of reasons. Firstly as a Muslim, as a member of a growing community in the UK, it is essential that we have RE in schools that is balanced, in a way that can help eradicate not only extremism and extremist ideology, but also it can also help tackle sectarianism as well, because good RE means different arguments and different points of view that young people are exposed to. I am very fortunate at Eton – being an Anglican institution – as a Muslim there, we have a strong department, but there are faith schools that just focus on one religion at the expense and exclusion of others, and do not provide a balanced point of view. You have young people growing up just with one narrative of religion.

It is a national and global issue as well. The world in which our young people are going to work in is going to be a very diverse one; they are going to have to have skills and understanding about other religions and other cultures. It is essential in that respect to strengthen RE, so that we have young people who are equipped to deal with people of other cultures.

One of the biggest challenges we face in Britain and Europe is the rise of the far right. In order to challenge the far right narrative we need to have decent religious education in our schools, and that is how we are going to be able to defeat those voices as well.

Stephen Lloyd MP

I agree with every single one of those points; I think it is crucial.

Richard Coupe

I did a quick survey of around 20 of our schools before I came, and half the schools are now reporting a significant drop in A-Level numbers. Traditionally we have supplied a large number of A-Level proportionate to our overall membership; at one point 25% of the whole number doing A-Level were coming from the independent sector. The impact of that is because the universities Russell Group published their Informed Choices document two years ago. That was cock-up theory; there was no intention to downplay the importance of any particular subject, but to focus on 15 facilitating subjects, which quite rightly are things like maths and biology, which are required for certain university courses quite rightly. Of course, RE was not one of those.

I got email after email, and that thinking is affecting not only the senior management of the schools, but many well educated parents, who are now getting the idea that unless you are doing A-Levels in history, geography, biology and maths then your A-Levels are not worth having. We have been talking about people teaching RE who have only got an A-Level. Unless we step in at that level we

will not get people going to university to do the subject, and we will then go on to do the PGCEs and so on in that subject. We have to look at post-16 as well.

I had a reply from the Secretary of the Russell Group who drafted the document, and she said, 'There is no intention, of course', and I am sure that that is right, but the unintended consequence is a severe knock in our sector, and probably other areas of education where one has parents who are keen for city jobs that the subject is suffering. We have been halved in my school.

Stephen Lloyd MP

That is an extremely important point, and part of the report would include the Russell Group and what the APPG could do with that.

Dr Mark Chater

First, to add to Richard's extremely important point about the Russell Group of qualifying subjects; the definition of qualifying subjects was distorted by the Secretary of State when he started referring to them the 'tough' subjects. In other words, subjects with a proper academic rigour to them. Subjects that are not in that list are, by definition, not tough. That is not what the Russell Group meant, and I think Mr Gove has deliberately twisted the message coming from the Russell Group.

Second, about the way we Parliamentary Group construct the arguments in your publication about localism and local determination; I personally feel it is important that the RE community is not seen as being against academisation and free schools per se.

Stephen Lloyd MP

No. We would get into an ideological battle we would use.

Dr Mark Chater

We must not turn our backs on the whole idea of freedom and the innovation of that can spring from that. We need to be careful the way we construct that argument.

Stephen Lloyd MP

That is an important point; to me, this is not about me having an ideological argument with Gove on preschools and academies, although I would like to do that at a different time, but not on this. Otherwise we will be sidetracked into an ideological battle and I am not having that.

Sarah Lane-Cawte

I would like to caution against complacency about the state of RE in faith schools. Many of the teachers in faith schools were trained in universities and colleges that are not faith-based, and if there is a continued decline in those places in initial teacher training then faith schools will suffer as much as everybody else. It might seem okay now, but it is only for now. Mr Gove does need to be informed about the status of RE. In my hearing last week at the Institute of Education he said twice that RE was in the national curriculum. If he has that misunderstanding then we need to ensure he has the facts right while he is making the policy.

Stephen Lloyd MP

That is a very good point.

Debbie Danon

I am from Three Faiths Forum. We do a great deal of work in schools, and we recently held a series of round tables, which many of you attended, on 'Beyond RE'. One of the things that repeatedly came up, and we have mentioned a little bit the status of senior leaders in this conversation; they do set the tone and ethos of the school. One thing we hear anecdotally from ground level all the time is that religious prejudice, unlike racial prejudice, is seen as the problem of RE staff, and that RE staff constantly are being given these additional issues. We have already talked about how time-pressed they are: I have been to schools today where that was just the case, where a teacher who teaches citizenship, RE, and history was confronted with an anti-Semitic problem, and he had to deal with that along with everyone else. It was not regarded as sufficiently serious to be a behavioural issue. Let us also take into account that senior leaders can set the standard of saying that this is not only not acceptable, but it does not fall on the RE teachers' plate per se; this is something that RE teachers can inform the discussion about, but there should be a cross-school responsibility. We would welcome the letters from Michael Gove to head teachers, assuring them not only that RE is not on the national curriculum, but it is locally determined and is essential, but also that there is this additional aspect of ethos development, which falls within the area.

Stephen Lloyd MP

That is a useful, interesting and important point that I had not thought of until you said it.

Dr Janet Orchard

I would like to add to the eloquent case that John has made for local level support for the role of universities. University tutors of RE are not airy-fairy academics; they are teachers, they engage with teachers as well as the academic side, and they will not be around to support schools direct if the courses go. If somebody wants a schools direct RE place in Wiltshire, the way things are going currently their local institution would be in Oxford or Exeter, at least 70 miles away.

John Lydon

I would like to end on a positive note, that one diocese in the Catholic Church has bucked the trend of A-Level numbers; they are increasing, but that is mainly due to outstanding teaching at GCSE inspiring the students, validated by inspection reports. At least in one area of the country, the numbers have increased.

Stephen Lloyd MP

Excellent. Thank you very much for that. There is a lot of interest and a lot of passion, which is great. I am calling it to order now. Thank you very much to everyone for coming.

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