

Religious Education at KS4: what are the options for secondary schools?

Religious Education (RE) is a statutory subject in all state-funded schools throughout the whole of a child’s formal schooling (**in each year group from 5-18 years**). However, data from the DfE’s workforce survey shows that 28% of schools are failing to allocate curriculum time for RE¹.

The table below sets out some of the main options available for schools at KS4, giving recommendations about how schools can comply with their legal expectations to provide RE for all.

NATRE recommends any system of RE teaching where all students are being:

- given their entitlement to receive high quality RE
- taught by trained and experienced RE teachers
- given enough time to fulfil the legal expectations and/or the requirements set down by the examination awarding bodies. Most Agreed Syllabi state that RE should be allocated a minimum of 5% of curriculum time. Exam bodies recommend 140 hours minimum for a GCSE course.

Pathway	Course title	Qualification	Teaching context	Advantages	Disadvantages
Pathway 1A Recommended by NATRE	RS full course	GCSE	Option groups (RS should be given equal status and time to other option subjects)	Gives students the option to study RS as a full GCSE. Particularly helpful for those going on to A level RS but also other subjects such as English, History, Sociology.	
	RS short course	GCSE (short course)	Remainder of cohort	Provides a suitable level of RE input for all students leading to a relevant qualification. Fulfils an entitlement to RE for all	Since the removal of the short course from school performance tables in 2014, schools have steadily turned away from its use as a means to offer core RE at KS4.

¹ State of the Nation report

				Counts as an accredited course (0.5 GCSE) for the students	
Pathway 1B May be recommended by NATRE	RS full course	GCSE	Option groups (RS should be given equal status and time to other option subjects)	Gives students the option to study RS as a full GCSE. Particularly helpful for those going on to A level RS but also other subjects such as English, History, Sociology.	
	RE core	none	Remainder of cohort Must allocate at least 1 hour per week	If properly planned and resourced, may provide a suitable level of RE input for all students Fulfils an entitlement to RE for all	Requires careful curriculum construction, a time allocation commensurate with the aims of the programme* and trained RE teachers Can be difficult to teach, where students perceive that study does not lead to a qualification *Is often the space on the timetable that schools claim other subject requirements are met such as PSHEe and/or Citizenship
Pathway 1C Not recommended by NATRE	RS full course	GCSE	Option groups (RS should be given equal status and time to other option subjects)	Gives students the option to study RS as a full GCSE. Particularly helpful for those going on to A level RS but also other subjects such as English, History, Sociology.	
			No provision for other students		This arrangement does not comply with the laws that apply to LA maintained schools or to academies.

<p>Pathway 2A Recommended by NATRE</p>	<p>RS full course</p>	<p>GCSE</p>	<p>Whole cohort 120-140 guided learning hours over the course as specified by Ofqual.</p>	<p>Provides RE for all</p>	
<p>Pathway 2B Not recommended by NATRE</p>	<p>RS full course</p>	<p>GCSE</p>	<p>Whole cohort 1 hour per week, often starting in Year 9</p>	<p>Provides RE for all</p>	<p>There is evidence that full course GCSE RS is being taught on too little curriculum time in a growing number of schools. Many schools are offering a curriculum model where GCSE RS is taught in one hour per week. This is of concern for the following reasons:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 It puts teachers and students alike under significant strain to cover the specification content in adequate depth and detail to gain a rounded understanding of the topics 2 GCSE courses are designed to be studied by 14-16 year-olds. It is unethical for students younger than this to be exposed to some of the curriculum content. 3 There is a danger of narrowing the KS3 curriculum. 4 No other subject is expected to teach a full GCSE on such inadequate time. 5 Time for reflection and development of personal perspectives is crushed out.

Pathway 3 NATRE has strong reservations about this model	Core RE for all and no GCSE offered	none		Fulfils the entitlement to RE for all	Requires careful curriculum construction and specialist RE teachers Can be hard to teach, where students perceive that study does not lead to a qualification
Pathway 4 NATRE has strong reservations about this model	Drop-down days	none		Offers an entitlement to RE for all	Likely to be non-compliant, because there will be insufficient time allocated to these days in total It may be considered to put an unacceptable stress on teachers, who are expected to teach a full timetable AND organise additional, high quality RE days
Pathway 5 Not recommended by NATRE	RE through PSHE or Personal Development	none	various	Offers opportunities to link relevant topics across the curriculum	RE delivered by non-specialist teachers through tutor-time or PSHE lacks rigour and very easily gets 'lost'
Other pathways		Higher Project Qualification		Excellent way of offering students opportunities to become independent researchers in areas of religion and belief	Requires the support of specialist RE teachers and face to face lesson input.
		Entry Level Qualification		Meets the needs of less able learners. Eduqas offers a course in the new spec.	

