

## National Response to A Level and GCSE religious Education results

### A level Religious Studies results prompt call for government support

*Two decades of growth in A level RS at risk over a five year funding crisis says the Religious Education Council as Father of the House Sir Peter Bottomley warns the Government must not 'let down' young people.*

The number of students taking an A level in Religious Studies in England and Wales has fallen by 447, despite an increase of 6.1 percent last year.

This year's 2.7 percent decrease comes after a two decade period in which RS has had one of the fastest growth rates for A levels in the humanities, beating Law, Geography and History in a similar time period. This year there were 45.5 percent more RS A level entries than in 2003.

The National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) and the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC) have warned this period of growth is now under threat after a five year funding gap that has impacted current and future young people taking the subject.

This includes disadvantaged students, who are twice as likely to take RS A level than their peers, favouring it over Geography and History.<sup>[1](#)</sup>

Responding to the results, Father of the House Sir Peter Bottomley, reiterated his call for a National Plan, a proposal he first announced after chairing a parliamentary roundtable on the subject's future in March:

"We must not let down young people by continuing to starve the subject of funding and leadership. Schools and colleges need a National Plan that sets out a modern and relevant curriculum for education in religion and in the world's faiths and cultures. Generations of students should understand spiritual development and interfaith understanding that is necessary to contribute fully within modern British society."

Iona, an RS student who has accepted an offer to study Philosophy and Politics at Bristol, also spoke about her experience of the subject's funding crisis at the roundtable in March:

"I changed colleges so I could take an A level in RS since it wasn't offered at my previous school. For me, the interdisciplinary and philosophical aspect of A level RS was a chance to think deeply about a variety of religious and non-religious worldviews.

"During our two years we had three different teachers, one of whom wasn't qualified to teach RS at A level. Due to this inconsistency, I spent a lot of my own time studying and was lucky enough to have a parent who could help me. I'd like to see more support given to the subject and its teachers so other students can fully experience the benefits of A level RS."

Sarah Lane Cawte, Chair of the REC, said:

"Over two decades RS has become more and more popular for A level students. However, this year's results raise serious concerns over the ongoing funding crisis in the subject. The subject has cemented its reputation as academically rigorous and personally enriching with graduates going

onto successful careers in media, law and politics at some of the best universities in the country. It also appears to be a tool for social mobility, with many disadvantaged students taking the subject and doing well, opening up a wealth of transferable skills to these pupils that may previously not have been accessible.

“Sadly, we now foresee a situation in which the brightest and best students attracted to the A level risk being let down by a lack of specialism as a result of government inaction over funding and teacher recruitment.”

Katie Freeman, Chair of NATRE, said:

“Congratulations to all students who have faced immense challenges in the last few years. These results are testament to the hardworking and passionate community of RE teachers we have across the country. At A level we see some of the brightest students attracted to a subject which sees them debate, analyse and think deeply about a variety of religious and non-religious worldviews on humanity's most profound questions. Subsequently, teaching the subject at A level requires a high level of expertise and knowledge. A National Plan will ensure we can support current and future teachers by scaling out the best evidenced-based curriculum to ensure every A level student is taught by the specialist they deserve.”

[\[1\] https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2022/04/do-disadvantaged-students-choose-different-subjects-from-their-peers-at-key-stage-5/?fbclid=IwAR2jiuQoSf\\_vw5wouTBHFhFit9tQ9bXXxR--0M-DqjUxsnT-Yelf9sT0vWQ](https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2022/04/do-disadvantaged-students-choose-different-subjects-from-their-peers-at-key-stage-5/?fbclid=IwAR2jiuQoSf_vw5wouTBHFhFit9tQ9bXXxR--0M-DqjUxsnT-Yelf9sT0vWQ)

### **Take action on RE say leading politicians as more students take the subject at GCSE**

*Five year funding gap is letting down a ‘record number of students’ as new data suggests many disadvantaged GCSE students go on to take it at A level.*

The number of students in England and Wales taking a GCSE course in Religious Studies GCSE has risen to 253,225, an increase of 0.6% from last year.

The increase was largely driven by a surprise rise in the short course in England, up 16.5% from 15,672 to 18,257.

In Wales, amid an overall 5% drop in pupils taking GCSEs, the number of entries to RS courses fell by 11%.

The strong entry results in England saw the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC) and the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) reiterate their call for a National Plan for the subject. They warn that an ongoing funding crisis and lack of a specialist teacher recruitment strategy now seriously threatens the provision of high-quality learning for the quarter of a million students who take the subject annually.

Joining the call for a National Plan was Lord Karan Bilimoria, CBE, DL, Vice President of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and Chancellor of the University of Birmingham who pointed to the number of disadvantaged students going on to take the subject at A level. A study in April found they were twice as likely to take the subject than their peers, favouring it over history and geography:

"When it comes to levelling up education, the latest data shows that giving more support to religious education students at GCSE is an easy win. If RS is the humanity that disadvantaged young people are most likely to take, then backing this up with a properly funded National Plan is a must. The subject will provide those young people with the crucial skills of analysis, curiosity and intellectual confidence as part of a broad, balanced education and give them a headstart in the global workplace."

Father of the House Sir Peter Bottomley MP, who first called for a National Plan for the subject after chairing a parliamentary roundtable on its future in March, also responded to the results:

"These numbers show that RE is widely popular at GCSE. We must not let down young people by continuing to starve the subject of funding and leadership. Schools and colleges need a National Plan that sets out a modern and relevant curriculum for education in religion and in the world's faiths and cultures. Generations of students should understand spiritual development and interfaith understanding that is necessary to contribute fully within modern British society."

Sarah Lane Cawte, Chair of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC), said:

"I'm delighted to see an overall rise in students taking GCSE RS. At its best, RS is one of the most personally enriching and academic subjects on the curriculum. Yet sadly, I cannot think of another subject that has ever attracted such a large cohort of students yet received such little corresponding government support.

"In neglecting RE, the Government risks letting down a record number of students. There is now an average of around a quarter of a million students taking the subject at GCSE each year who receive £0 of additional government money to help with their study of RE. In comparison, in the last five years a GCSE music student has received up to £10,000 a head after a National Plan for music. We want an even distribution of funding across the curriculum to ensure it is broad and balanced."

Katie Freeman, Chair of the National Association of Teachers of RE, said:

"These results are testament to the hardworking and passionate community of RE teachers we have across the country. We would now like to see the Government back up their hard work with a properly funded National Plan. This will ensure that every young person has access to an excellent RE teacher, armed with the best evidenced-based curriculum that will allow them to take their place in modern society."

Earlier this year in March, students spoke at the parliamentary roundtable on why they enjoy the subject. Shreya, a Year 10 student offered her view:

"RE is fundamental to life. It's all about people and people will never be out of date. RE is the one time in school where you can talk, listen and try to make sense of people, events and beliefs in the world."

Last summer, research carried out by the charity Culham St Gabriel's Trust found that nearly two-thirds (64%) of adults in Britain believe RE is an important part of the school curriculum. Seven out of ten (73%) also agreed that the subject should provide students with the opportunity to learn about other people, beliefs, worldviews and cultures.

The full entry results were:

## Wales

- Wales RS overall, down 11%, by 1,598 from 14,853 to 12,985
- Wales RS full course, down 4.3%, by 445, from 10,358 to 9,913
- Wales RS short course, down 27.3%, from 4,225 to 3,072

## England

- England RS overall, up 1.3%, by 3,149, from 237,091 to 240,240
- England RS full course up 0.3%, by 564, from 221,419 to 221,983
- England RS short course, up 16.5%, by 2,585, from 15,672 to 18,257