



Addressing the Shortage of Secondary Religious Education Teachers in England and Wales

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October 2024

About the research

The persistent shortage of Religious Education (RE) teachers in England and Wales requires urgent attention to ensure that all students aged 3 to 18 receive their legal entitlement to this compulsory subject on the school curriculum. Despite sustained advocacy from stakeholders, the government has fallen short of its recruitment targets for new secondary RE teachers in 11 of the past 12 years. Currently, over half (51%) of secondary RE teachers are forced to teach other subjects to fill workforce gaps, resulting in inconsistent educational quality.

Schools and policymakers must attend to this issue going forwards, given the significant likely impact on educational standards. Ofsted's recent report, 'Deep and Meaningful' (April 2024), has revealed that the quality of statutory non-examined RE is largely inadequate, failing to equip students to navigate the complexities of a diverse society.

Furthermore, the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) has documented instances of schools neglecting their specific legal responsibilities concerning RE over several years.

A project funded by the All Saints Educational Trust, in which a teacher fellowship intervention was shown to enhance the pedagogical and curriculum knowledge and teaching practices of RE teachers, offers a promising potential response to the RE teacher shortage. Key features of the initiative include facilitated collaborations between teachers and university academics specialising in theology, Religious Studies, and education; a dedicated VLE and a community of enquiry that met regularly to offer peer support for participants.



With teachers reporting that the insights gained from the Fellowship significantly boosted their confidence and improved their teaching effectiveness, this model of professional development could translate effectively into in-service support for those secondary teachers currently responsible for delivering RE lessons yet trained primarily to teach other subjects. We describe them positively as "RE TWOs" (Teachers with Other Specialisms), recognising their existing strengths and skills as classroom practitioners, who require help to transition into effective RE specialists, especially when pressed to lead the subject.

By investing in targeted professional development for RE TWOs through a programme of Teacher Fellowships, we can ensure that all students receive the high-quality RE instruction they deserve, address the shortage of qualified RE teachers and so enhance the overall quality of RE in schools.



Policy implications / recommendations



- 1.** Increase recruitment: develop targeted recruitment campaigns to attract new secondary RE teachers, with specific goals and timelines to meet the longstanding shortfall in this area.
- 2.** Support Teacher Fellowships to provide low-cost in-service professional development for RE TWOs: These robust professional development programmes, adapted to address the needs of teachers with other specialisms (RE TWOs), can enhance knowledge and pedagogical skills in RE, supporting effective teaching and subject leadership.
- 3.** Promote collaboration with Higher Education: Facilitated school-university partnerships can create fellowship programmes enabling teachers and academics specialising in curriculum and pedagogical knowledge to share cutting-edge teaching strategies and research.
- 4.** RE must be supported: RE remains a compulsory school subject often valued by parents and students who recognise its role in fostering understanding of diverse beliefs in a complex society. This must be acknowledged by supporting increased funding for RE-specific initiatives aimed at improving the quality of RE education, including training, resources and support for schools facing challenges in delivering effective RE provision.

By implementing these recommendations, policymakers can effectively address the shortage of qualified RE teachers and enhance the overall quality of Religious Education in schools.