

What is the likely impact of leaving RE out of the English Baccalaureate?

- 1) **The following cycle of events will continue to unfold**
 - a) A reduced uptake of GCSE Religious Studies (RS) Full Course. See note 1 overleaf.
 - b) This will have an inevitable knock-on effect on AS/A2 RS and into undergraduate and postgraduate courses.
 - c) This in turn will reduce the supply of highly qualified subject-specialist teachers of RE/RS.
 - d) Which will impact on the quality of Key Stage 3 RE and GCSE, AS and A2 RS teaching.
 - e) A reduction in the number of students taking GCSE RS Short Course (the usual way by which compulsory RE is accredited) and impacting on points b) – d) above. See note 1 overleaf.
 - f) A removal from students of the chance to debate key issues related to religion and belief and the 'big questions of life' which are part of being human in an academically rigorous and structured way.
- 2) **Threatening the statutory position of RE in the school curriculum**
 - a) An undermining of statutory RE entitlement and the threatening of the principle of 'RE for all'. This will further increase non-compliance with the statutory requirements for RE. See note 2 overleaf.
 - b) The devaluing of RE because the academic underpinning of a well-regarded, rigorous and popular RE/RS programme will no longer be there.
 - c) The false premise that RE is less rigorous than some other subjects in the Humanities and Arts will go unchallenged. See note 3 overleaf.
- 3) **The reduction of RE/RS teaching at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4**
 - a) Schools will move towards a curriculum dominated by the EBacc subjects (English Language, Sciences, Maths, a language, a humanity (History or Geography)). Schools also have a statutory responsibility to deliver PE, PSHE (including sex education), ICT, Citizenship and RE. In addition, the vast majority of students will study English Literature and many a third science. For the great majority of students option choice will be severely restricted. This will have a detrimental effect on the number of students
 - opting for GCSE RS Full Course. See note 4 overleaf.
- 4) **The negative impact on primary teaching of RE**
 - a) Fewer students with GCSE RS [or higher] will mean a further reduction in expertise for teaching RE at Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.
- 5) **The negative impact on community, social and moral education and on society**
 - a) Fewer students and teachers who are able to understand and communicate the impact of religion on culture and society.
 - b) Greater stereotyping, misunderstanding and prejudice in matters of religion and belief among young people (and subsequently older people).
 - c) Diminished understanding of ethics and moral frameworks and the skills to interpret, analyse and apply these.
 - d) Diminished community cohesion leading to a fractured society.
 - e) Stifling of rigorous teaching and learning about and understanding of matters of faith, leading to tokenistic approaches to delivery of the subject.
 - f) Reduction of opportunities for students to study sacred texts and leading to shallower levels of cultural understanding.
 - g) Missed opportunities to challenge simplistic and extreme interpretations of religion and belief.
 - h) Missed opportunities for students to engage in meaningful dialogue with members of diverse communities.

NOTES

Note 1

- RE refers to compulsory Religious Education which all students must study. When the subject is taken as a GCSE it is called RS (Religious Studies).
- Many schools accredit compulsory RE by entering students for the GCSE RS Short Course. A significant number of students choose GCSE RS Full Course as an option, which both meets the compulsory requirement and enables students to study an academic subject of their choice.

Note 2

- In an online survey of 790 secondary schools carried out between 17 and 28 January 2011, when asked about curriculum planning for the academic year 2011/2012, 30% of respondents indicated that their school had already made substantial changes to the curriculum to deliver the EBacc subjects which significantly disadvantaged RE or removed it from the curriculum. Both compulsory RE and GCSE RS are being adversely affected.
- Some schools have removed compulsory RE completely from the curriculum in Key Stage 4, and have also ceased to offer the subject as a GCSE option. In some schools, compulsory RE is also compromised in Key Stage 3. There will be a negative impact on the subject at A level as GCSE numbers decline.
- Being compulsory offers no protection whatsoever to RE, as schools are prioritising the EBacc over legal requirements as they perceive there to be no effective accountability measures in place (e.g. Ofsted, which has ceased to conduct subject inspections and no longer reports on non-compliance with statutory requirements).

Note 3

- The view that GCSE RS is less academically rigorous than other GCSEs in the Humanities or Arts has no foundation in fact.
- Durham University's research report 'Relative difficulty of examinations in different subjects' (2008) demonstrated that interpreting statistical differences in the relative performance of students in different subjects as differences in difficulty is problematic. Whilst the STEM subjects (Science, Technology, English and Maths) lead the chart in relation to level of challenge, RE held its own as an academic subject in its own right comparable with other Humanities and Arts subjects.

- The revision of the GCSE criteria since the publication of the Durham report served to make the GCSE criteria even more rigorous, thus consolidating RE's position with regard to its comparability with other Humanities and Arts subjects. The new criteria saw a move to a 50-50 split between Assessment Objective 1 and Assessment Objective 2, meaning that the skills involved in evaluation (a higher order skill) are now worth 50% of the marks, rather than 25% as previously.

Note 4

- The DfE has stated: 'The core of subjects in the English Baccalaureate is small enough to allow students to choose other qualifications and areas of study that are of interest to them.' This is unsupported by the evidence from a significant number of schools.
- In most cases the subjects that make up the EBacc will result in students studying 8 GCSEs (English Language, English Literature, Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology, Physics, History or Geography and a Language). Add to this timetable time for statutory PE and PSHE, then few schools will be able to offer more than two options to complete a normal weekly timetable. This leaves GCSE Full Course RS competing with other valuable subjects such as the Arts, including Music and Fine Art, Technology, including Computing, ICT, Design and Technology, a second language for gifted linguists or those wishing to study a community language as well as a foreign or ancient language and of course all the vocational courses.
- This problem is worse still in church schools where GCSE RS is often a core subject and compulsory for all pupils. This reduces the number of options students have to choose from even further.

NATRE and the REC submitted evidence to the Education Select Committee Inquiry into the EBacc which goes into detail about the issues mentioned in this paper.

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