

**Religious Education in England: Underfunded and Undervalued?**

Religious Education Policy Unit Virtual Parliamentary Roundtable Report:

Date: Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> March

Time: 9:30am – 10:45am



## Introduction to the REPU

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REPU is a strategic partnership between The National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE), the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC) and RE Today Services. REPU works to improve understanding about religious education in schools and to lobby for high quality provision for all children taught by well qualified and trained teachers.

## Meeting Introduction

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This roundtable, chaired by Father of the House, brought together pupils, parents and leading speakers in the area of religious education and interested parliamentarians to discuss the continued value that RE brings to children and young people across England, despite a chronic lack of funding or support from the Government.

Recent survey data has shown that:

- **Nearly two thirds (64%) of the UK adult population think that an education in religion and worldviews (or RE) is an important part of the school curriculum today**
- **A further 65% agree that the subject has an impact on people’s ability to understand each other in wider society.**

Despite this clear expression of value by the UK public:

1. **No government money has been spent on projects specifically designed to support RE in the last five years.**
2. **The Department of Education has missed its recruitment target for secondary RE teachers in 9 of the last 10 years.**
3. **In 2020 – 21 the Department of Education has failed to include RE in the list of subjects attracting Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Bursaries giving trainee teachers for RE no financial support**

## Meeting agenda

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9:30 – 9:35am	Participants and Parliamentarians to join call
9:35 – 9:40am	Introduction from <b>Sir Peter Bottomley</b>
9:40 – 9:45am	A pupil’s view on the importance of Religious Education <b>1. Plashet School, Newham, London</b> <b>2. Loughborough FE College, Leicestershire</b>
9:45 – 9:55am	<b>Paul Kerensa:</b> A parents view on the importance of Religious Education
9:55 – 10:05am	<b>Professor Francesca Stavrakopoulou:</b> An academics view on the importance of Religious Education
10:05 – 10:15am	<b>Deborah Weston OBE:</b> The Religious Education Policy Landscape
10:15 – 10:45am	Q and A session with Parliamentarians

## Intended meeting outcomes

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The Religious Education Policy Unit organised this session to inform Parliamentarians and to raise their understanding of public support for the availability of high-quality teaching of Religious Education for all pupils.

## Parliamentary attendance report

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This parliamentary roundtable was attended by the following parliamentarians from across the political parties:



**Sir Peter Bottomley MP**  
Conservative MP for  
Worthing West



**Tim Farron MP**  
Liberal Democrat MP for  
Westmorland and Lonsdale



**John Howell MP**  
Conservative MP for  
Henley



**Luke Pollard MP**  
Labour MP for Plymouth,  
Sutton, and Devonport



**Andrew Lewer MP**  
Conservative MP for  
Northampton South



**Mary Glendon MP**  
Labour MP for North  
Tyneside



**Brendan Clarke Smith MP**  
Conservative MP for  
Bassetlaw



**Lord Singh of Wimbledon**  
Crossbench member of  
the House of Lords



**Sir Roger Gale MP**  
Conservative MP for  
North Thanet

## Wider Parliamentary Interest

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This roundtable also received interested from the following parliamentarians who were not able to attend due to prior commitments. They have received the meeting summary and follow up materials.



**Johnny Mercer MP**  
Conservative MP for  
Plymouth Moor View



**Jim Shannon MP**  
DUP MP for Strangford



**David Johnstone MP**  
Conservative MP for  
Wantage



**Afzal Khan MP**  
Labour MP for  
Manchester, Gorton



**Derek Thomas MP**  
Conservative MP for St  
Ives



**Janet Daby MP**  
Labour MP for Lewisham  
East

## Shadow Ministerial Interest

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**Shadow Minister for Schools Stephen Morgan MP** also expressed an interest in receiving the follow up materials from this session and outlined a willingness to submit written questions on behalf of the REPU.

## Summary of Discussion

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The Religious Education Policy Unit was delighted to welcome parliamentarians from across the political parties to its virtual roundtable titled **Religious Education: Underfunded and Undervalued**. This roundtable was chaired by Sir Peter Bottomley MP and featured contributions from students, teachers, parents, and professors on the importance of religious education in modern Britain. A summary of our discussion can be found below:

### 1. Religious Education is Important to your constituents

Nearly two thirds (64%) of the UK adult population think that an education in religion and worldviews (or RE) is an important part of the school curriculum today. 65% agree that the subject has an impact on people's ability to understand each other in wider society

### 2. Religious Education is about understanding people

Religious Education is a key tool in equipping our young people to learn about their peers, to engage constructively with difference and to combat ignorance and discrimination.

### 3. You don't have to be religious to need religious literacy

We come into contact with people with different religious beliefs on a daily basis as part of modern life. On social media and in the news, we are constantly reminded of the dangers of caricaturing and demonising religious difference. We need to equip our children to navigate these conversations well.

### 4. Religious Education is key to engaging with a global world

Whether we are inviting those from around the world into our local communities or we are engaging with cultures far from home, religious literacy is a crucial part of building constructive relationships and overcoming barriers to inclusion.

### 5. You wouldn't want Maths to be taught by someone with no training

The Department for Education has missed its recruitment targets for RE in 9 of the last 10 years. On average, 25% of secondary school RE lessons are taught by someone with no post A level qualifications in RE. For primary schools, the average teacher of RE has less than 3 hours training in the subject. The consequence is that access to high quality teaching in RE is currently a postcode lottery.

### 6. The current balance sheet for Government support for RE: £0

Over the past five years, other school subjects have received 10s or 100s of millions of pounds of Government support for teacher training, development, and resources. In that same time, Religious Education has received **no financial support whatsoever**

## Parliamentary asks

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Attendant and interested parliamentarians were asked to follow up on in the following ways:

### 1. Learn about Religious Education in your local area

### 2. Ask a Parliamentary Question

### 3. Write to the Education Select Committee



## Template email to the Chair of the Education Select Committee

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In addition to a discussion summary, parliamentarians received the following draft email to send to Education Select Committee Chair Robert Halfon MP

**Dear The Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP**

I am writing to you in your capacity as Chair of the Education Select Committee to raise my concerns about the current provision of Religious Education in England. I have recently attended a roundtable hosted by the Religious Education Policy Unit and heard from pupils, parents, teachers, and professors on the impact of the current unequal provision of religious education in England.

The Department for Education has missed its recruitment targets for teachers of Religious Education in 9 out of the last 10 years which has led to 25% of RE lessons in secondary schools being taught by non-specialist teachers. The Government has invested 100s of millions of pounds on subject specific projects over the past five years but has invested no money in subject specific projects for Religious Education.

Despite this lack of Government funding, recent surveys have shown that equal access to quality Religious Education is highly valued by the British public. Nearly two thirds (64%) of the UK adult population think that an education in religion and worldviews (or RE) is an important part of the school curriculum today. 65% agree that the subject has an impact on people's ability to understand each other in wider society.

I would be grateful if you could outline whether the Education Select Committee has any plans to investigate the current provision of RE in England. If you would like more information on the current state of religious education provision in England from the Religious Education Policy Unit, please contact [matthew.spencer@politicommsconsulting.co.uk](mailto:matthew.spencer@politicommsconsulting.co.uk)

Kind Regards

[Insert MP / Peer signature]

## Follow up parliamentary engagement

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On the basis of our activity, the following MPs have written to the Chair of the Education Select Committee



**Tim Farron MP**  
Liberal Democrat MP for  
Westmorland and Lonsdale



**Lord Singh of Wimbledon**  
Crossbench member of  
the House of Lords



**Andrew Lewer MP**  
Conservative MP for  
Northampton South

The following parliamentarians have also agreed to additional meetings with the REPU

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**Luke Pollard MP**  
Labour MP for Plymouth,  
Sutton, and Devonport



**Jim Shannon MP**  
DUP MP for Strangford



**Stephen Morgan MP**  
Shadow Minister for  
Schools

Parliamentary social media engagement

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The following parliamentarians have also engaged on social media regarding their involvement in our parliamentary roundtable



**Andrew Lewer MP**  
Conservative MP for  
Northampton South



**Brendan Clarke Smith MP**  
Conservative MP for  
Bassetlaw



## Proposed future follow up activity

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On the basis of our discussion with Parliamentarians as part of this roundtable, Politicomms has formulated several recommendations for future activity. The parliamentarians gathered for this roundtable represented a cross party consensus on the importance of Religious Education in Modern Britain. With this in mind, attendant and interested parliamentarians are ideally placed to undertake the following elements of activity

**1. The publication of a joint, cross-party letter to the Secretary of State for Education:** Following our scheduled follow up meetings, Politicomms will approach these engaged parliamentarians to add their signature to a joint letter to the Secretary of State showing their support for the integral role of RE in our school curriculums.

**2. Supporting engagement towards the inclusion of support for RE as part of party manifestos:** One key recommendation from this call was to support parliamentarians in their engagement with their party education teams around the inclusion of party support for RE as a key pillar of their future manifesto commitments. Politicomms will be sure to support these approaches going forward.

**3. Encouraging MPs to write to the Chair of the Education Select Committee:** Attendant and interested MPs will also be encouraged to write to the Chair of the Education Select Committee Robert Halfon MP to request that the committee undertake an inquiry into the provision of religious education in England.

## Wider Media Engagement – Carried out by 3:nine

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In addition to the dedicated parliamentary engagement regarding our virtual roundtable, the following media engagement has also taken place

### Twitter

- 20.8k impressions
- 1.9% engagement rate
- 57 link clicks
- 102 likes
- Maximum engagement rate: 8.1% for What is a worldview tweet

### Facebook

- 107 people searched for ReThinkRE Facebook page
- Highest Facebook page search was on 4<sup>th</sup> March: 63

### Website

- During this time period-
  - Pageviews: 1,448
- After the home page, most of the traffic was on What is an education in religion and worldviews (199 views), Champions (162 views) and FAQs page (95 views).
- 56% (297 users) were directed from social media channels
  - 172 users from Facebook and 124 users from Twitter



### 1. Publication of [We need a National Plan for religious education](#) by Sir Peter Bottomley in Politics.co.uk

(160k unique visitors / 60k Followers on Twitter)



**politics.co.uk**

## We need a National Plan for religious education

**MP Comment**

By Sir Peter Bottomley  
Sir Peter Bottomley is the Conservative MP for Worthing West.  
Wednesday, 2 Mar, 2022 9:57 am

What sort of society do we want to live in? This is the question we should always return to when it comes to education policy.

Freedom of speech, respect for the beliefs of others, the spirit of debate – these have long been pillars of British society. Teach these values explicitly in our schools and from the outset starting in the youngest years.

**Politics Live**

- 10:27, 15 Mar Labour says China must 'stand up to Russian aggression'
- 09:55, 15 Mar Unemployment nears record low

### 2. Publication of [Call out for RE syllabus writers](#) in Religion Media Centre on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2022

#### Call out for RE syllabus writers

The [Religious Education Council](#) is calling for applications to join a project shaping the future of RE in England and Wales. Three grants of £10,000 are available for writers of syllabuses for a new RE curriculum, taking forward the “religion and worldviews” vision for RE, which understands common principles in belief and identity, beyond the religion / secular divide.

### 3. Publication of [Time to explore the worldviews underpinning the iceberg of religion](#) Religion Media Centre Worldviews Briefing 10<sup>th</sup> March 2022



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## Time to explore the worldviews underpinning the iceberg of religion

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**RMC Briefings**

- Briefing: Religion and the war in Ukraine Sorchá Connell March 1, 2022
- Briefing: Data Security and Prayer Apps Sorchá Connell February 22, 2022
- Briefing: Levelling Up & Faith Sorchá Connell February 11, 2022

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4. The RE Podcast: [The Future of RE](#) with Paul Kerensa regarding the Parliamentary Roundtable  
11<sup>th</sup> March 2022

## Season 5 Episode 9: The One About The Future of RE




5. Publication of [Parliamentary talks over the future of religious education in schools sees call for a National Plan](#) NATRE and RE Today website 04.03.22



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## PARLIAMENTARY TALKS OVER THE FUTURE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS SEES CALL FOR A NATIONAL PLAN

04 March 2022

MEDIA RELEASE

Parliamentary talks over the future of religious education in schools sees call for a National Plan

MPs and Peers met with students, parents, academics and subject leaders in March over concern that religious education (RE) in schools is being both underfunded and undervalued.





POLITICOMMS

**For more information**

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