



Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP
Secretary of State

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

The Very Reverend Doctor John Hall
Chair of the Commission on Religious Education
c/o Religious Education Council
CAN Mezzanine
49–51 East Road
London N1 6AH

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Dr D Hall,

I want to thank you for all the hard work undertaken by the Commission on Religious Education over the past two years, culminating in the final report "Religion and Worldviews: the way forward". I recognize the immense effort the Commission has put into gathering evidence and views, providing insightful analysis of issues, and proposing actions to address these.

It is clear that you have secured a general consensus among those with a specific interest in Religious Education (RE) on some important matters. Both subsequent media coverage and correspondence I have received also make it clear, as one might expect, that some stakeholders have concerns that making statutory the inclusion of "worldviews" risks diluting the teaching of RE, and concerns as well about some of the finer detail of the Commission's recommendations.

I appreciate the issues that your report highlights. It is mandatory for all state funded schools to teach RE and it is important that they do this well. Good quality religious education not only helps schools meet their legal duty to promote children and young people's spiritual and moral development. It also gives them knowledge of the values and traditions of Britain and other countries, and so fosters mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

Therefore, it is important to continue to work hard to recruit new RE teachers and to ensure that they acquire good subject knowledge. This is why I recently announced improvements to bursaries for initial teacher training so that RE trainees with a 1st, 2:1, 2:2, PhD or Master's will now receive £9,000.

I have also announced funding for RE subject knowledge enhancement (SKE) courses of up to 8 weeks. These courses are designed to help these applicants gain the depth of knowledge needed to train to teach their chosen subject. Candidates that take SKE courses may have studied the subject at A-level, but not at degree level, or have studied an unrelated degree but have relevant professional experience. Eligible candidates will receive a training

bursary of £1,600 to help with living costs. I know that the Commission highlighted these as areas where we should review our funding, so hope this will be welcome news.

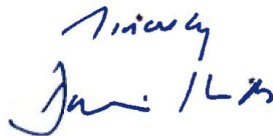
I have considered the Commission's other recommendations carefully, mindful that one of my top priorities, for the duration of this Parliament, is to reduce teacher workload. Indeed, I made a commitment in March to make no further changes to the national curriculum, statutory assessment, GCSEs or A levels, beyond those changes that have already been announced. In considering the Commission's ambitious proposals for a new statutory basis for "RE and worldviews" in the curriculum, I have to balance this against what would be needed to do to implement them; and the consequences for teachers.

I have therefore concluded that now is not the time to begin these reforms. This would commit the government to making radical change which requires primary legislation; requires the development of new programmes of study for "RE and worldviews"; and lead to all state-funded schools having to implement a long-standing subject in our schools in a new way. As your report highlights, there would be a consequent need for extensive training and continuous professional development to equip teachers to teach this revised curriculum well. My priority is to provide stability to schools while the significant and necessary reforms we have already made to curriculum and qualifications are being embedded.

As with full GCSEs for other non-EBacc subjects, RE counts towards both the headline Attainment 8 and Progress 8 measures. I have no plans to review current school accountability measures such as the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). The EBacc does not preclude pupils from taking RE GCSEs, which remain popular.

In relation to the recommendation that my department produce guidance for headteachers on managing the parental right to withdraw their children from RE – I support your reasons for this. In the meantime, I know that the NAHT and NATRE have produced excellent guidance which meets this need and rather than duplicate their efforts, my department will do what it can to promote and to make headteachers aware of this new guidance.

I would like to reiterate my thanks to you and your fellow Commissioners for your well-considered and valuable contribution to the RE debate. I appreciate all of the work that you have put in over the last two years to collate views from a range of stakeholders, consider the wider evidence and present this in a succinct and informed way to the department.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Damian Hinds', with a date 'Jan 14' written below it.

Damian Hinds
Secretary of State for Education