



Further guidance for schools, local authorities and agreed syllabus conferences about the religious studies gcse and the religious education curriculum

The Department for Education is aware that there continues to be some confusion about the nature and extent of schools' obligations regarding the Religious Education (RE) curriculum and the Religious Studies (RS) GCSE content.

The Department is therefore issuing this further Guidance to schools, local authorities and Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs). It should be read together with the "Guidance for schools and awarding organisations about the Religious Studies GCSE" which was issued in December 2015 ("the December 2015 Guidance"), which can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-religious-studies.

Schools, local authorities and ASCs are not under any obligation to have regard to guidance issued by other specific bodies, groups or individuals and should instead follow the Department's Guidance when making decisions about their RE curriculum. In particular, schools, local authorities and ASCs should not follow what purports to be 'guidance' issued recently by those associated with the British Humanist Society (including views on the law of Dr Satvinder Juss dated 28 April 2016) – that guidance and those views have no official status and are contentious.

As set out in the December 2015 Guidance, the Department's view has always been that schools should be free to determine their own approach to the teaching of RE, in line with statutory requirements. Those statutory requirements are summarised in sections 2 and 3 of the long-standing 2010 non-statutory guidance "Religious Education in English schools: non statutory guidance 2010" which is to be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-guidance-in-english-schools-non-statutory-guidance-2010.

As made clear in the December 2015 Guidance, the Government's policy was and remains that:

- Schools and Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs) should be free to determine their own approach to the teaching of RE and the selection of the appropriate RS GCSE.
- There is no requirement for an individual school's curriculum to mirror the make-up of the national or local population. Curricula should continue to be locally determined.

- Schools and ASCs are at liberty to use a range of relevant factors to determine their RE curriculum, including the intellectual rigour it presents and its role in supporting pupils' development as world citizens.
- There is no obligation for any school or ASC to give equal air time to the teaching of religious and non-religious views.
- Curriculum balance (and, therefore, compliance with statutory requirements) can be achieved across the key stages. There is no obligation on any school to cover the teaching of non-religious world views (or any other particular aspect of the RE curriculum) in key stage 4 specifically. Rather it is for schools and ASCs to determine how they meet their wider obligations across the key stages.
- Schools are, therefore, not obliged to choose a GCSE specification that meets the entirety of their wider obligations, as long as they are satisfied that they will meet them through their RE curriculum across the key stages.
- For schools without a religious character, the RE curriculum needs to reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are, in the main, Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain¹

For the avoidance of doubt, the Government also considers that:

- There is no obligation for any school or ASC to allocate 'air time' according to the apparent popularity of a religious or non-religious view.
- There is no obligation for any school or ASC to "balance out" the detailed teaching of a religion by teaching, in equal depth, about a non-religious view.
- It is for schools to determine which religious and non-religious views to cover in their RE curriculum in line with statutory requirements.

Overall, the important thing is that a balance is achieved during a child's education, rather than in any particular stage of a child's education. In those circumstances and building on the statutory requirements, it is recommended that there should be a wide ranging study of religious and non-religious beliefs across the key stages.

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¹ S375 Education Act 1996