

## **GCSE RELIGIOUS STUDIES 2019 REPORT TO DURHAM SACRE**

### **Entries for Full Course GCSE**

229 765 students were entered for Full Course Religious Studies GCSE in the UK in 2018 (excluding early entries in 2017). This is a fall from 2017 where 282 193 students were entered in the UK.

Entries in County Durham have also fallen from 2195 in 2017 to 1763 in 2018.

Some of the possible reasons for this decline both locally and nationally include:

- fewer schools now enter the full cohort in Year 11 for Full Course RS as it is impossible to teach a full GCSE in one hour, the time usually allocated in a school to CORE (statutory) RE
- many schools now offer RS as an option rather than as a course taught to all students and so a smaller number of students are entered per school.
- RS as an option competes with other subjects and so numbers may be small.
- RS was not included in the English Baccalaureate and so is not given the same priority as these subjects (E Bacc subjects are English, Maths, Science, History, Geography, Modern Foreign Languages). As a result RS is misunderstood and perceived to be of less value academically by some Senior Leaders, staff and students. This has an impact on the number of students who opt to take it at GCSE.
- Some schools lack subject specialists in RE so do not offer GCSE RS to students.

CORE RE = statutory RE. All students in Years 10 and 11 must be taught RE. This 'CORE' provision has usually been taught in one hour lesson per week (although this pattern is beginning to change). RS Short Course GCSE used to be taught in this lesson in a lot of schools

OPTION RS – this is when students have chosen to take RS GCSE as one of their option subjects. Option RS is usually taught in 2 / 3 hours per week (the same as other GCSE subjects).

### **Attainment – an overview**

**72%** of students entered for Full Course GCSE in the UK in 2018 gained a Grade 4 or above (4+). Grade 4 is classed as a GCSE 'pass' (similar to a grade C in the old GCSEs).

**60%** of students entered for Full Course GCSE in 2018 gained a Grade 5 or above (5+). Grade 5 is classed as a GCSE 'good pass' (similar to a high Grade C / Grade B in the old GCSEs).

**30%** of students entered for Full Course GCSE in 2018 gained a Grade 7 or above (7+). Grade 7 and above is equivalent to A\*/A in the old GCSEs.

These percentages are used to judge **attainment** i.e. whether a student and a school has attained in line with the national standard.

The percentages above do hide significant differences between boys and girls with girls outperforming boys at each grade boundary.

Grade 4+	Boys 64%	Girls 79%
Grade 5+	Boys 51%	Girls 69%
Grade 7+	Boys 22%	Girls 37%

### **Achievement – an overview**

This measures whether students have achieved their expected / predicted grades based on their ability. For example, students may attain Grade 5 (a good GCSE pass) but were capable of a Grade 9. In this case the student has attained at a good national standard but their achievement is negative.

Data from each school is analysed using these measures to see whether there are particular strengths or issues within a school and within a particular subject area. The data for various groups of students (e.g. boys/girls, more able students, students with particular or special needs) may be analysed. This analysis helps future action planning and support for various schools, students and staff.

### **The County Durham Picture**

- 20 schools entered students for Full Course GCSE RS in 2018.
- The number of schools in County Durham who do not enter any students for GCSE RS has risen in recent years.
- Number of entries varies between schools with three schools entering very small numbers (1 to 7 students) and some schools entering full cohorts (over 200 in 4 schools).
- It seems that more schools are now entering students from option block RS (i.e. students who have opted to take RS as one of their GCSEs) with smaller numbers entered e.g. 20, 28, 40 students. There has been a general change in provision in County Durham from full cohort entry to option block entry; this is the same pattern nationally.
- It would appear that some schools are still teaching GCSE Full Course in CORE time to the whole cohort of students and then selecting which students they enter for external examination. It is likely that schools who enter 70 students or so are most likely to be adopting this model. This will be investigated further.

- All schools are being contacted to ask about their provision and how this affects their entry for GCSE Full Course RS (including those who do not enter any students)
- The majority of schools are in line with or above the national standard for a GCSE pass (4+). However, there are several schools who have not reached this standard with some significantly negative.
- Most schools are above or in line with the national standard for a good GCSE pass (5+). Seven schools have not reached this standard with some significantly negative.
- Whilst some schools have reached the national standard for the higher grades (7+) the majority of schools have failed to meet this national standard (11 schools with an additional 3 just in line / below). High grade attainment is therefore an issue.
- Attainment looks at its best in schools that are entering smaller numbers (most likely to be option groups) apart from one school who enters a large cohort but who does provide extra time for CORE RS in order to cover the GCSE specification properly. This will be investigated further.
- Some schools show attainment in line with national standards but are seriously weak in terms of progress (achievement). This shows that the school is not taking sufficient account of the needs of different groups of students, is not ensuring teaching or setting of tasks meets these differing needs and is not being sufficiently challenging (of course this could all be due to insufficient teaching time for RS – further investigation required).
- The negative progress of students of all abilities in some schools is a concern. In other words students who have been predicted 4+, 5+ or 7+ are failing to achieve their estimated grades. In some schools this is negative by over 10%.
- There is a particular concern around the progress of more able students as at least half of the schools are negative for students achieving 7+ (remember: the achievement data tells us how well students have done in getting a 7+ who have the ability and were capable of getting this grade.)

### **Some issues to consider**

SACRE and the RE Adviser is fully aware of the many and complex reasons why performance in Religious Studies can vary and be below national standards for attainment and achievement. This can include insufficient curriculum time, lack of specialist teachers, lack of resources, poor attitudes towards the subject, insufficient support from senior leaders, poor planning,

poor teaching and assessment. Whilst SACRE may understand and have some sympathy as to why a school may have negative data for RS this is not acceptable for the students and requires further investigation. In order to find out more about the 'story behind the data', the RE Adviser is asking schools the following questions:

- What is the provision in your school? Is GCSE RS taught in option or CORE RE time?
- How much time is given (average per week) to RS GCSE teaching?
- When do you begin teaching RS GCSE? (Year 9, Year 10)
- If you deliver GCSE RS in CORE time do you enter all students for the exam? How do you decide who is entered for external accreditation?
- Are all teachers of RS GCSE specialist RS teachers?
- Are there any other issues (positive and negative) which contribute to outcomes in your school for RS?

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