

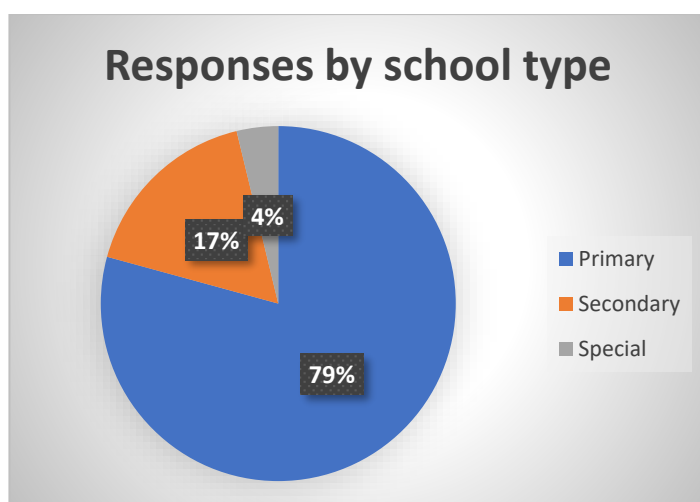
RE Agreed Syllabus review 2024

In the summer term 2024, we surveyed RE subject leaders in primary, secondary and special schools to establish their views on the Agreed Syllabus. The purpose of this was to build a picture around the current impact of the syllabus as we approach the review period.

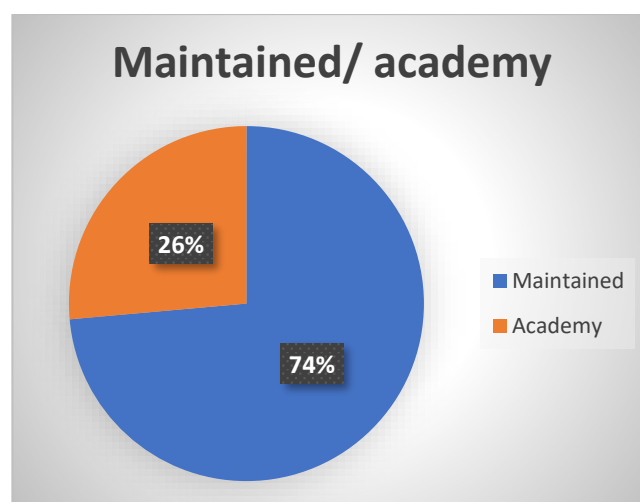
The survey was made available electronically and was shared in network meetings and via our Schools Portal, which is accessible to every school in County Durham. It was also shared with trust leaders for distribution across their schools.

The following pages outline the qualitative and quantitative responses received from the 53 leaders that shared their views.

Statistical overview of respondents



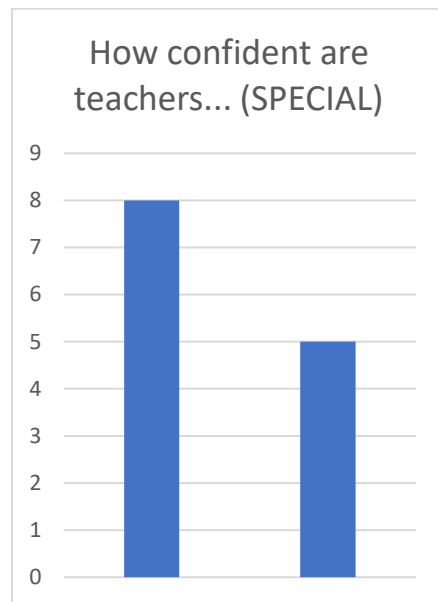
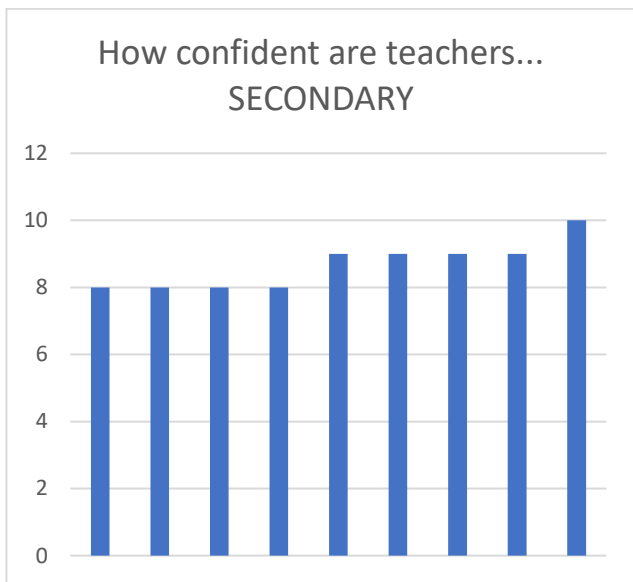
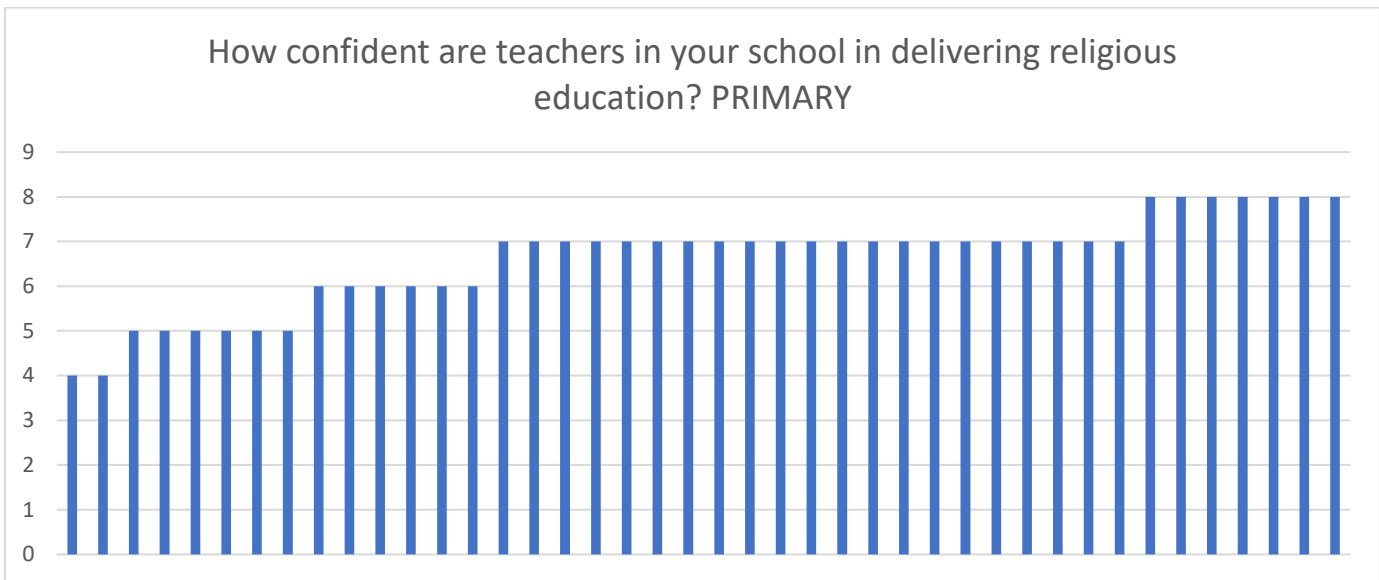
The majority of responses came from primary schools and the least from special schools, which is reflective of the breakdown of primary, secondary and special schools across the county.



The largest proportion of responses came from maintained schools as opposed to academies. Of the academies responding, 5 are primaries and 9 secondaries. Both special schools are maintained.

Confidence ratings

We asked leaders how confident they feel the teachers in their schools are in delivering RE, on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being very unconfident and 10 being very confident. Primary responses ranged from 4 to 9, with an average response of 6.9. Secondary responses ranged from 5 to 10, with an average response of 8. There were only two special school responses so we need to be cautious about drawing conclusions from this data, but the two responses were 5 and 8, with an average of 7.



Leaders had the opportunity to share their reasons for their confidence ratings. Looking at the lowest and the highest (4-5 and 9-10), comments are outlined below..

Lower confidence rating (4 or 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of resources if we can't attend CPD/ not enough CPD x2 Staff changes Moving to Kapow to support teaching Lack of subject knowledge x2 Lack of curriculum time x2 No subject specialist (secondary)
High confidence rating (9-10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CPD x3 Length of time leading the subject Experience Subject knowledge x2 Two specialists in the team Previous experience supporting the writing of the current syllabus

Staffing, subject knowledge and access to CPD feature in both lists, suggesting these significantly impact upon the confidence levels of leaders

What is working well?

We asked leaders to share what they feel is working well with the Agreed Syllabus. There were a range of responses as outlined below, with some clear commonalities around exemplar plans, unit questions and progression.

- Exemplar plans x18
- Suggested questions x15
- Progression/ coverage x11
- Diversity unit x6
- Core religions x4
- Christmas and Easter units/ progression/ thematic approach of these x5

Respondents also commented on the references to assessment, the programmes of study helping to develop core knowledge, critical thinking, personal reflection, knowledge and understanding, flexibility to adapt plans around the needs of each school and the benefit of having networks to share ideas.

What could be included to improve the syllabus?

KS1: Five people suggested including Islam in KS1 (1 suggested moving Buddhism up to KS2); 2 mentioned a “wider range of religions” in KS1 and making it more ‘age appropriate’.

KS2: Two commented that Y4 could include more diversity of religions as it is “very Christian-based”. Background knowledge for Y4 – “the curriculum assumes teachers have a strong underpinning knowledge of all of the branches and practices within Christianity.” 3 respondents commented on wanting to better understand denominations.

‘We find diversity in the local area a little difficult’

“The Y6 bridging unit is challenging for the children: they don’t have the thinking skills to access it properly” / “Year 6 units don’t engage or oldest pupils in the same way that others do.”

The unit on Bede is very difficult to resource.

KS3: Support with assessment (assessment mentioned 9 times across all responses)

“Would like more depth around non-religious world-views”

KS4: “Strengthening of the KS4 core offer, tightening up on new terminology, different types of disciplinary knowledge in RE.”

Planning and resourcing

Plans for topics where MTPs are not available – mentioned 8x

“Need the unit planning for Judaism and Islam to support all staff” x3

More resources available; lessons to pick up and go were mentioned 3x

“More detail for how to teach each unit question / there are gaps in the unit plans which my teachers have struggled with starting a unit from scratch.”

“Lesson titles for schemes of work to aid planning and preparation”

“More power points and video clips”

“Example activities, task design examples to highlight ways to ensure critical thinking and personal reflection”

Miscellaneous

- A focus on SEND/ differentiation
- More multi-faith learning and comparisons/ Room within the ‘6 questions’ for each topic to make links/ comparisons between religions
- Some of the units have a lot to cover

Core religions

Considering varying school contexts across the region, we asked leaders to share which core religions should be included in each key stage.

In the Early Years and Primary schools, leaders were keen to continue with coverage of Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism. 25 mentioned also looking at Islam, 12 of which felt this is important for children in KS1. Focusing on KS1, two respondents felt that Buddhism is quite tricky for this age group of children and wondered if it might be best approached as a thematic unit, building on Early Years and leading into a Buddhism topic in KS2. One respondent felt it would be helpful to focus more on the different denominations of Christianity, commenting that they have had a large intake of Nigerian children to their school, who attend a Pentecostal church.

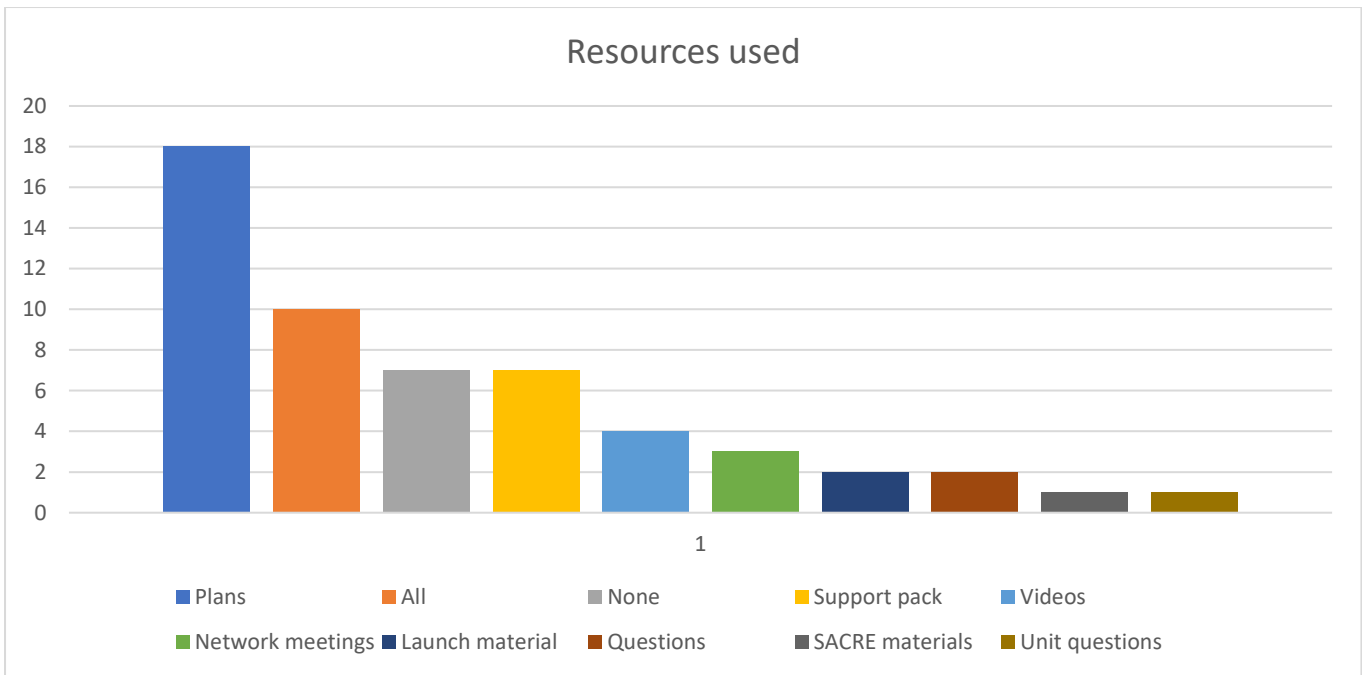
Responses at KS3/4 generally reflected the current Agreed Syllabus, with all bar 1 respondent mentioning Christianity, Islam and Sikhism. Two respondents mentioned wanting to cover Judaism and one also mentioned Buddhism and Hinduism. One school made the suggestion that Christianity and Islam should be core religions with schools being free to select a third religion.

The two special school respondents mentioned covering Islam (including one that suggested Islam should be covered in KS1). Judaism was also mentioned.

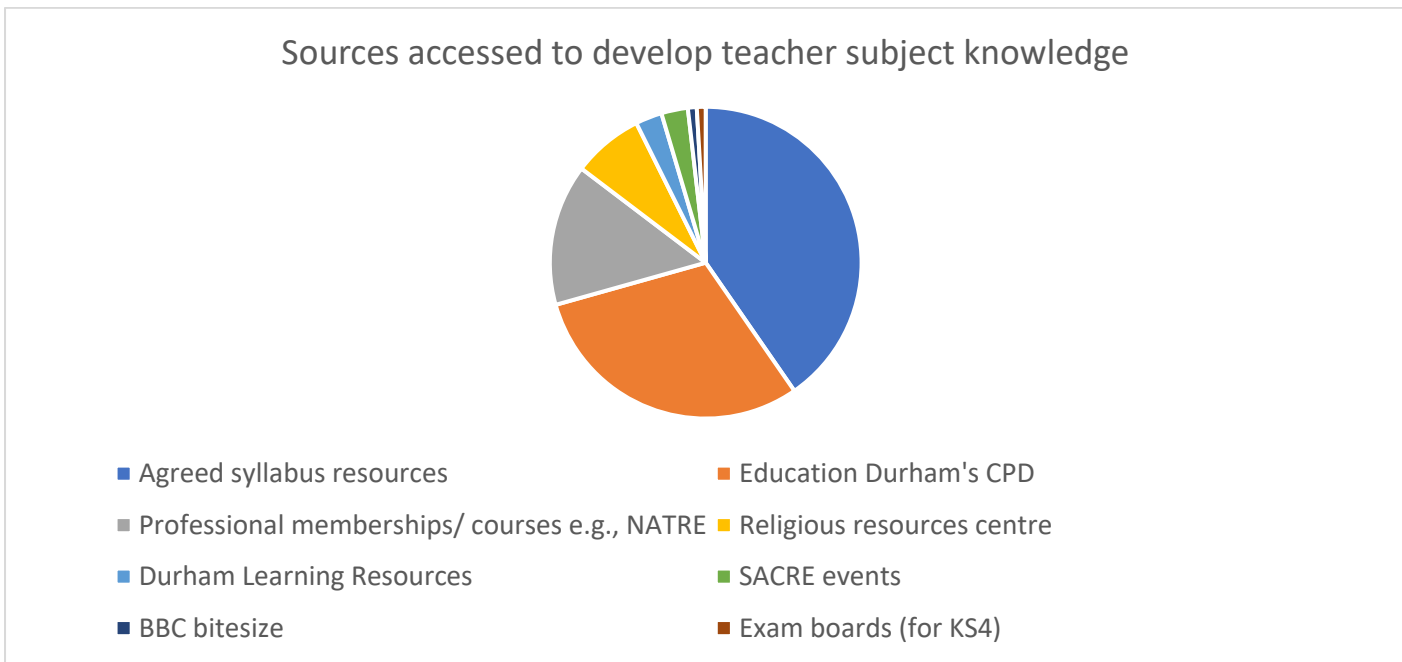
7 respondents shared that they are happy with the current religions, as set out in the Agreed Syllabus 2020.

Which of the support materials accompanying the syllabus have you used?

We asked leaders which of the support materials they have used. Please see overleaf. Plans were the most popular response, followed by ‘all’. As some leaders wouldn’t have been in post when the Syllabus was last reviewed, I feel we would need to ask a supplementary question to establish what leaders and teachers would find most useful and to be able to easily distinguish between resources embedded *within* the syllabus and those provided as a supplement.



We asked leaders which sources their schools access to ensure that teacher subject knowledge is sound. The largest % said Agreed Syllabus resources (83%) followed by Education Durham’s CPD (62%). There is, perhaps, some work we could do to signpost leaders to other high-quality resources, such as those found in the Religious Resources Centre and Durham Learning Resources, to supplement and enhance curriculum provision. Similarly, we might want to consider what we offer as a SACRE to support our leaders and teachers beyond the Agreed Syllabus.



Summary and next steps

This survey has highlighted some useful information that can be used as a discussion point to inform the review of the Agreed Syllabus 2025. We need to be mindful of the number of schools that *haven't* taken part and ensure that we don't arrive at conclusions that we assume are characteristic of all schools on this basis. However, with 53 responses from a range of phases, it is fair to draw the conclusion, from the range of qualitative and quantitative feedback we now have, that the Agreed Syllabus 2020 is still largely fit for purpose but that it would be prudent to revisit the content and coverage of religions in KS1, to consider our guidance around assessment and decide on our approach to resourcing requests.