

RE in the English Baccalaureate (E. Bacc)

You will be aware that the government are introducing an English Baccalaureate (E. Bacc) into secondary schools. Published results of schools will show how many students achieve A* - C at full course GCSE in 5 key subject areas:

- 1) English
- 2) Maths
- 3) Science
- 4) Modern Foreign Language
- 5) Humanities (History or Geography)

This has caused grave concerns for the RE community including RE teachers in schools as RE has not been included as one of the humanities subjects. The likely result of this is that RE may become marginalised at KS4 as schools feel the pressure to concentrate on achieving success in the subjects above. This may have a knock on effect on KS3 and the whole status of the subject.

As well as individuals registering their concern there have been local and national campaigns to try and persuade government to include RE in the E. Bacc. This has been led by various organisations in RE. Below are some of the activities that have taken place. RE has also been debated on Question Time and members of AULRE had a letter registering their concern published in the Telegraph.

Durham

Judith Bainbridge, Chair of SACRE wrote to the MP for Durham to register the concern of Durham SACRE and ask her to sign the EDM (she did). Other SACRE members and teachers in County Durham schools were also asked to do the same with their MPs. The Inspector for RE also wrote to government ministers and the Durham MP to register concern on behalf of Durham Local Authority.

Many senior leaders in Durham schools remain very supportive of RE both as a statutory subject but also as an academically rigorous subject that enables students to attain highly. However, there is no doubt that senior colleagues are under pressure to implement E. Bacc and achieve success in these subjects. Several RE teachers in Durham are contacting me to register concern about curriculum changes in their schools.

Early Day Motion 1375

EDM 1375, January 2011 stated,

'That this House notes the recent publication of league tables of school performance measuring the proportion of pupils obtaining the English Baccalaureate; further notes that the English Baccalaureate is awarded to pupils who gain GCSEs at Grade C or above in English, mathematics, science, a foreign language and a humanities subject; further notes with concern that this list of approved subjects does not include religious education; recognises that religious education is an academically rigorous subject with increasing popularity among pupils; further recognises that the rise of religious extremism around the world and in the UK means that a good understanding of all religions is vital to a well-rounded education; further notes that with the increasing emphasis on the English Baccalaureate as the primary qualification for 16-year-olds, schools are more likely to focus on the core subjects which make it up; and therefore calls on the Government to recognise the importance and relevance of religious education by including it as a core subject in the English Baccalaureate.'

105 MPs signed this motion including Roberta Blackman Woods, MP for Central Durham. For further information: www.parliament.gov.uk Link: parliamentary business, publications and records, EDM, type in 1375.

EDM 1759 from Conservative MP

That this House supports religious education in Harlow primary and secondary schools; believes that religious education lessons can help pupils to learn about ethical and philosophical questions as well as the many faiths in 21st century Britain; notes that the Government's reforms are a real opportunity to create closer community links between schools and faith groups such as local churches; further notes that many Christians have expressed a strong enthusiasm for these reforms but are worried that the English Baccalaureate may not make enough room for religious education; and further believes that religious education should be fully included in the important proposals for an English Baccalaureate.

Ten MPs have signed this EDM (by May 24th).

Statement from Catholic Bishops regarding the place of RE in the English Baccalaureate

The Bishops of England and Wales issued a statement regarding the place of RE in the English Baccalaureate. They are urging people to join the campaign and write to MPs. Updates are available on their website: www.cesew.org.uk

This statement applies to schools in England only.

All children and young people deserve an excellent broad and balanced education that will help them grow to their full human potential and contribute to the common good of society. This means that the curriculum must likewise be broad and balanced so that all have the opportunity to make real progress in a variety of subjects.

We are therefore hopeful that the "English Baccalaureate" (E-Bac) measure will help to further the learning of children and young people in a variety of subjects. English and Maths are clearly indispensable elements of any curriculum in England, and we strongly support any efforts to raise standards in Science. Similarly, we would hope all students will have the opportunity to study a Foreign Language and important humanities subjects like History and Geography.

We have very serious reservations about what is omitted from the E-Bac, namely Religious Education (RE). We recognise that RE is, and will continue to be, a compulsory subject in all schools, not least Catholic schools. However, lessening the incentive for schools to offer RE as a subject examined at GCSE will inevitably have implications for the quality and availability of RE offered.

Any subject studied in our schools should be taught to the highest standard, and the best quality RE opens up the mind to be receptive to other subjects and gives them context, not only in the present but in the future. It is a vitally important subject because it allows young people to explore critically and make sense not only of their own faith but of the questions concerning faith, truth and meaning in the society in which they live. At a time of increasing religious and cultural illiteracy, effectively to downgrade RE seems unwise to say the least. We therefore urge the government to reconsider its decision and include RE in the E-Bac.

*Catholic Bishops of England and Wales
13 May 2011*

NATRE Campaign

NATRE have headed the campaign amongst teachers, urging RE teachers to write to their MP and fill in online surveys which can be used as evidence for government ministers. 900 teachers responded to the first survey in January. The latest request was sent to members on 23rd May:

- <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/EBaccandREsurvey>

Please send to anyone who you think could fill this in and add to the evidence base.

Debate at Westminster Hall

This took place on 17th May and was debated by various MPs and ministers. The debate was opened by Fiona Bruce Conservative MP who stated that the exclusion of RE from E. Bacc may have 'unintended consequences' and that one in three schools were already reducing resources and teachers for RE. The value of RE was debated by MPs from all parties. Nick Gibb concluded the debate and stated that RE should be part of a 'broad and balanced curriculum' and that he wanted to 'get away from the mentality that a subject is only important if it is mentioned in the National Curriculum'.

(Summary from news.bbc.co.uk)

RE Organisations

NATRE (National Association of Teachers of RE)

NASACRE (National Association of SACREs)

AREIAC (Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers, Consultants)

AULRE (Association of University Lecturers in RE).

REC (Religious Education Council)