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## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **All Party Parliamentary Group to highlight importance of RE in schools**

Today, the Church of England, the Catholic Church, the Buddhist, Jewish, Sikh and Muslim faiths, the British Humanist Association and professional RE teaching associations are joining forces to support a new All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG). When it is set up, the new APPG will focus on safeguarding the provision of RE in our schools and explore how the subject can continue to deliver a valuable dimension to the education of all children and young people.

Eastbourne and Willingdon MP Stephen Lloyd has agreed to chair the group with its secretariat provided by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC). An active campaigner on the importance of RE in schools, Stephen previously tabled a popular Early Day Motion that led to widespread cross party support. 115 MPs from all parties agreed the Government should include RE as a humanities subject in the English Baccalaureate.

On taking the first steps to set up a new APPG, Stephen comments: "I'm confident this new APPG will be able to provide real insight into the value of RE, especially as it helps young people leave school with an accurate grasp on the importance and relevance of religion. In today's world where our children can be open to an enormous amount of misleading information, I believe it is absolutely essential they are taught about different cultures and religions by trained, experienced RE teachers, allowing children to make informed choices.

"The number of students studying RE at GCSE level has increased from 113,000 to 460,000 in the last 15 years, so it is clear that pupils find it a rewarding and fulfilling subject."

John Keast, chair of The Religious Education Council of England and Wales, says of the planned new group: "We are delighted Stephen Lloyd has agreed to help set up the first

APPG on Religious Education. Recently the RE community has felt under fire and this represents an important step to give the subject a strong profile amongst parliamentarians. The coalition government is making policy decisions about academies, the national curriculum, qualifications and even teacher training provision. Directly or indirectly all these will challenge how RE is taught to young people. It is extremely positive that there is such goodwill and interest in Westminster to support the subject in schools today."

One of the greatest challenges faced by RE is to promote widespread understanding of its status on the curriculum and the academic rigour and depth of the subject when it is taught to full GCSE and A level standard in schools. At its most basic, RE is a statutory subject in all schools meaning they have a legal requirement to teach it, even though it is not part of the national curriculum. Academies have no obligation to teach it as the requirement is written into their funding agreements.

The depth of the subject has been shown in recent research. The REC polled young people aged between 16 and 24 and found RE had a positive impact on those that study it, with 80% saying it can promote better understanding of religions and beliefs. Furthermore, young people opt to study RE GCSE as it is an academically rewarding subject that teaches discursive abilities and often provides the context and understanding required for history and literature. It also provides a current understanding of the contemporary world and society.

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#### **Notes to Editors**

1. Early Day Motion (EDM 1375) was initiated by Stephen Lloyd MP for Eastbourne and Willingdon. EDMs gauge opinion on an issue as part of the parliamentary process.
2. Established in 1973, the Religious Education Council of England and Wales brings together some fifty national organisations. These comprise academic and professional associations specialising in religions and religious education, as well as the individual religion and belief organisations inclusive of the range of faith

communities found nationally, including the British Humanist Association. The REC's shared priority is to strengthen the quality of provision for the subject throughout the educational system.

3. The REC conducted research in October 2010 across a representative sample of 1,000 16-24 year olds on their views of RE. For full details email [info@3nine.co.uk](mailto:info@3nine.co.uk). In January 2011 a poll of nearly 800 schools by the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education found that 30 per cent have already cut time for RE. For full details email [info@3nine.co.uk](mailto:info@3nine.co.uk)