

Commission on Religious Education

Wed 31 Aug 2016
REC August Newsletter

Following the launch of the **Commission on RE** last month, the wide-ranging, inclusive process of gathering evidence for the Commission will start in autumn 2016 and last for two years, with a final report expected in mid-2018.

The REC is very pleased to announce the appointment of the Commission's Project Manager, Jon Reynolds, who had this say:

"I am thrilled to have been appointed as Project Manager for the Commission on RE. I am looking forward to working with the rest of the team to ensure its success. The work of the Commission will be very important in reviewing the legal, education and policy frameworks for Religious Education. I hope that this will secure the best possible provision of RE for young people in schools across the country, as the subject continues to grow in popularity."

It will be essential for the Commission to be able to hear from all those who wish to contribute to the debate. It is expected that, following their first meeting, the commissioners will have made a decision on how they wish to hear from people; in the meantime the REC will be happy to collect submissions by email at commission@religioueducationcouncil.org.uk.

Contributing to the Commission

The REC has asked the Commission to ensure that its review is evidence-based. It will be essential for it to be able to hear from all those who wish to contribute to the debate. We hope that both individuals and organisations will want to contribute evidence to the Commission, and that contributions will come from both within the RE community and from outside it. Once the commissioners meet, they will be able to decide for themselves precisely how they wish to hear from people, but in the meantime the REC will be happy to collect submissions by email at commission@religioueducationcouncil.org.uk.

Terms of Reference

1. Terms of Reference for the Commission on Religious Education:

i. Name of Commission:

Commission on Religious Education

ii. The purposes of the Commission:

To review the legal, education and policy frameworks for RE, by a wide-ranging, inclusive and evidence-based process designed to inform policy makers about these areas. The ultimate aim will be to improve the quality and rigour of religious education and its capacity to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.

iii. Remit of the Commission:

- To consider the nature, purposes, and scope of religious education.
- To identify the enabling factors that currently promote high quality RE, and the barriers that currently limit it.
- To identify what changes are needed to ensure the highest quality provision of RE.
- To ensure that recommendations focus on realistic and specific proposals aimed at both immediate and long-term implementation in the context of continuing educational reform.

In considering the above 4 tasks, the REC has identified the following areas for the Commission to consider:

- The quality of teaching and learning in RE
- The legal and structural arrangements
- The public and professional profile of the subject
- Recruitment, Initial Teacher Education and Continuous Professional Development
- The range of school settings in which RE should be required
- The age range for which RE should be required
- The right to withdraw (parents or carers, pupils and teachers)
- Whether or not there should be a common entitlement in RE, and if so what the entitlement should be

The REC expects the Commission to make explicit the evidence base for the recommendations they make, and ensure the conceptual clarity of any key terms used.

iv. Parameters of the Commission

The Commission should consider RE in all schools and colleges in England that educate pupils of any age up to 19, irrespective of whether they are mainstream, special or alternative provision, independent or maintained, and of a religious character or not.

The Commission should not consider:

- Admissions policies in schools of a religious character
- Employment of staff on the basis of their religion
- Collective worship

v About the REC

The Religious Education Council of England and Wales was established in 1973 to represent the collective interests of a wide variety of professional associations and faith communities in deepening and strengthening provision for religious education. It provides a multi-faith forum where national organisations with an interest in supporting and promoting religious education in schools and colleges can share matters of common concern. The REC's vision is that every young person experiences a personally inspiring and academically rigorous education in religious and non-religious worldviews. It seeks to work in a way that embodies values of cooperation, collaboration, openness, mutual respect and critical engagement.

Commission on RE Press Release

Fri 8 July 2016

Independent Commission to make wide-ranging recommendations for change within Religious Education in schools

A high-profile independent Commission has been established with a remit to make wide-ranging recommendations to overhaul religious education in schools. The Commission has been asked to review the legal, education and policy frameworks for religious education in all primary schools, secondary schools and further education colleges in England.

The establishment of the Commission comes at a critical time for religious education, and its work will be vital. A series of recent reports have noted the state of religious education with increasing

concern, making a thorough review of the subject essential.* The Commission's work has been made even more essential by the Government's programme of educational reform. The current intention for full academisation of schools means that there will be severe implications for Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs). The Commission on Religious Education will review this challenge along with the broader education and policy issues that affect religious education. By doing so, the Commission hopes to provide a new vision for the subject. The ultimate aim is to improve the quality and rigour of religious education and its capacity to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.

The Commission's remit will cover four tasks:

- To consider the nature, purposes, and scope of religious education.
- To identify the enabling factors that currently promote high quality RE, and the barriers that currently limit it.
- To identify what changes are needed to ensure the highest quality provision of RE.
- To ensure that recommendations focus on realistic and specific proposals aimed at both immediate and long-term implementation in the context of continuing educational reform.

Specific areas - including the quality of RE teaching and learning; teacher recruitment, training and continuous professional development; the public and professional profile of the subject; and the right to withdraw from RE - will all be considered by the Commission.

The Commissioners, all experts in their different fields, bring together a wealth of experience from teaching, school leadership, academia, journalism and law. Each of them has been chosen for their particular experience after extensive consultation on the range of expertise necessary for the Commission. The Commissioners are:

The Very Rev Dr **John Hall**, Dean of Westminster. Former Chief Education Officer for the Church of England, who will Chair the Commission.

Samira Ahmed, journalist and broadcaster of a range of culture and religious programme and documentaries across television and radio.

Alan Brine, Ofsted National Advisor for RE from 2007 to 2014.

Professor **Denise Cush**, former Head of Study of Religions at Bath Spa University.

Esther Deans MBE, Humanities KS4 Lead at Malmesbury School. Chair Stand Against Racism & Inequality, and Chair Bristol Standing Advisory Council on RE (SACRE).

Professor Sir **Malcolm Evans** KCMG OBE, Professor of Public International Law, University of Bristol. Member of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Advisory Council on Freedom of Religion and Belief between 2004 and 2013.

Dame **Helen Hyde**, Head of Watford Grammar School for Girls between 1987 and 2016, Commissioner on the National Holocaust Commission and chair of its education work stream.

Emma Knights, Chief Executive Officer, National Governors' Association.

Juliet Lyal, teacher at Cunningham Hill Infant School, St Albans.

Dr **Joyce Miller**, Associate Fellow in the Religions and Education Research Unit at the University of Warwick (WRERU), formerly Head of Diversity and Cohesion at Education Bradford and Senior Lecturer in religious studies at the University of Wolverhampton.

Professor **Eleanor Nesbitt**, Emeritus Professor in Religions and Education at the University of Warwick.

Dr **Vanessa Ogden**, CEO of the Mulberry Schools Trust, Tower Hamlets.

Dr **Farid Panjwani**, Director, Centre for Research and Evaluation in Muslim Education, UCL Institute of Education.

Dr **Anthony Towey**, Director of the Aquinas Centre for Theological Literacy at St Mary's University, Twickenham.

The wide-ranging, inclusive process of gathering evidence will start in autumn 2016 and last for two years, with a final report expected in mid-2018.

The Commission has been established by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC). The REC will provide the secretariat for the Commission. The Commission will, however, be independent of the REC and will be entirely responsible for the content of its reports and recommendations.

Comment from the Very Revd Dr John Hall, Chair of the Commission on Religious Education:

“Religion is a powerful force for good in our world, and the perversion of it a powerful force for evil. If our society and our world are to benefit from the good and to avoid the evil, it is vital that children develop religious literacy and come to understand religious perceptions and motivations. They need to learn about their own religious or non-religious beliefs and practices and attitudes and learn to respect those of their fellow human beings. So Religious Education is an important, but often underrated, part of the school curriculum. I look forward to exploring with my fellow commissioners the changes that will allow RE to play its proper part in the formation of young people who will contribute to the sum of human happiness.”

Comment from Rudolf Elliott Lockhart, Chief Executive Officer of the Religious Education Council:

“I am delighted that the Commission on Religious Education has commissioners with such impressive credentials and that they are bringing expertise from such a varied range of relevant fields. RE is an essential subject for all pupils helping them to make sense of the role that religion and belief plays in people's lives and to engage with the diversity of religion and belief in modern Britain. These commissioners will be perfectly placed to make the far-sighted recommendations that we need to ensure a strong and positive future for religious education.”

Notes:

* The series of recent reports noting the state of RE with increasing concern include (but are not limited to):

- Living with Difference, the Report of the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life (2015)
- Clarke & Woodhead, A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools (2015)
- Dinham & Shaw, RE for REal (2015)
- Religious Education: Realising the potential, Ofsted (2013)

Remit of the Commission on Religious Education

The Commission will consider RE in all schools and colleges in England that educate pupils of any age up to 19, irrespective of whether they are mainstream, special or alternative provision, independent or maintained, and of a religious character or not.

The following areas will be considered by the Commission:

- The quality of teaching and learning in RE
- The legal and structural arrangements
- The public and professional profile of the subject

- Teacher recruitment, Initial Teacher Education and Continuous Professional Development
- The range of school settings in which RE should be required
- The age range for which RE should be required
- The right to withdraw (parents or carers, pupils and teachers)
- Whether or not there should be a common entitlement in RE, and if so what the entitlement should be