



# All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education

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## **Improving Religious Literacy: A Contribution to the Debate**

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# All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education

## *Officers of the All Party Parliamentary Group:*

Fiona Bruce MP, Chair

David Burrowes MP, Vice-Chair

Mary Glendon MP, Vice-Chair

Lord Singh of Wimbledon, Secretary

## *Aim of the All Party Parliamentary Group:*

*“To provide a medium through which Parliamentarians and organisations with an interest in Religious Education can discuss the current provision of Religious Education, press for continuous improvement, promote public understanding and advocate effective education for every young person in religious world views.”*

## *Acknowledgements:*

The APPG would like to thank respondents to the public consultation, oral witnesses, interviewees and all those who have shown such a keen interest in this inquiry. The APPG would also like to thank Penelope Hanton and Simon Perfect for their work coordinating the inquiry and compiling this report.

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## Foreword

We are, I believe, entering a defining period for our country, our national life and our national identity. The shape of our religious landscape is changing, as is the place of religion in the public sphere, our private lives and our local communities, and these will continue to do so for years to come. It is more important than ever, therefore, that action is taken to ensure we all have the knowledge and skills required to engage effectively with religion. It is my hope that religious literacy will enable communities and individuals to understand each other better, to communicate with one another on a more informed basis and promote community cohesion within a more inclusive and holistic society.

I do not think Religious Education should be a vehicle for policy objectives, community cohesion or religious integration. School-based RE must be a credible, engaging and academically challenging subject in its own right. But the realities of life in modern Britain necessitates that religious literacy must be a much more pragmatic endeavour than RE, and one which has, at the very heart of it, the need to equip individuals and communities to understand, respect and engage with the rich tapestry of religious difference and diversity present in our society. RE, as with education more broadly, should not stop at the school gates or on the last day of school.

Since becoming Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education at the start of this Parliament, I have been delighted and heartened by the lively and engaged nature of the RE community. I wish to pay a personal tribute to teachers, head teachers and the whole RE community for their hard work, and for the individual actions they take each and every day to ensure our children receive the very best teaching about religion. This gives children and young people the tools to understand and appreciate religion whilst instilling them with the necessary critical facility to ask questions and challenge assumptions.

I would also like to express a personal thanks to respondents, witnesses and all those who have shown such a keen interest in this inquiry; the contributions have been invaluable and form the foundations of the findings and recommendations of this report.

It is clear that the provision of high quality school-based RE, and good teaching and learning about religion beyond the school years in the whole of life context, cannot be allowed to fall off the agenda of the government or Parliament, particularly in these uncertain and changing times. I will continue, both as an MP and as the Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education, to highlight to government the importance of providing excellent RE for every child, in every school, in every town and city across the country.

Fiona Bruce MP

Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education

Member of Parliament for Congleton constituency

# Summary of Evidence Contributors

## **The inquiry took oral evidence from the following witnesses:**

The Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme and Coexist house, represented by Miriam Lorie

Professor Adam Dinham, Goldsmiths, University of London

Professor John Wolffe, The Open University

Theos, represented by Nick Spencer

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

Reverend Nigel Genders, Chief Education Officer, Church of England Education Office

Denise Chaplin, School Improvement Officer for Community Cohesion & RE, Lewisham

Sushma Sahajpal, Founder, Connectar Creative Education

## **The inquiry received written submissions from the following organisations:**

The Open University

Wales Association of SACREs

The Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme and Coexist House

The Spiritualists' National Union

FaithAction

Oasis

The Inter Faith Network for the UK

UK Bahá'í

The Church of England Education Office

National Secular Society

Theos

Independent Schools' Religious Studies Association

## **Summary of written evidence:**

69 written submissions were made in total to the inquiry

22 organisations made written submissions

## **The inquiry undertook evidence interviews with:**

Aaqil Ahmed, Head of Religion and Ethics, BBC

Dr Jenny Taylor, Founder and Executive Director, Lapido Media

An official from the Civil Service

Network of Buddhist Organisations UK

Association of Muslim Schools

The Diocesan Education Service of the Catholic Diocese of Wrexham

Westhill Endowment Trust

ResPublica

The United Synagogue

Inter Cultural Centre

The Blue Coat School, Birmingham

Birmingham Council of Faiths

Catholic Education Service

The Board of Deputies of British Jews

Evangelical Alliance

2 organisations made written and oral submissions

45 individuals made written submissions

# 1. Aims, Scope and Methodology

- 1.1. Effective teaching and learning about religion has never been as important as it is today. Religion continues to be a driving force which shapes events nationally and internationally, for good and for bad, and impacts upon everyone's lives, irrespective of their individual religious or non-religious commitments.
- 1.2. For this reason religious literacy – the ability to understand and engage effectively with religion and religious issues – matters, and needs to be taken seriously by everyone, including those who are not religious. It is important to emphasize here that improving religious literacy in society does not mean promoting adherence to particular religions, encouraging a more positive view of religion in general, or giving religion greater influence in the public sphere. The APPG believes that improving religious literacy means equipping people with the knowledge and skills to understand and discuss religions and issues around them confidently, accurately and critically.
- 1.3. All children in the UK learn about religions and beliefs in Religious Education at school. But improving religious literacy is too important to be confined to the RE classroom. Therefore, for the first time, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education is extending its area of work past formal school-based RE to engage with, and promote excellence in, education about religion in both the school and whole of life context.

## 1.1. Why now?

- 1.4. The UK's religious landscape is radically different from the way it was thirty years ago. Fewer people describe themselves as Anglican, and more people describe themselves as non-religious or as belonging to other forms of Christianity or to minority faiths. For example, in 1983, 40% of the population of Great Britain described themselves as Anglican; in 2014, only 17% did so. Conversely, the proportion stating that they were of no religion increased from 31% to 49% in the same period; the proportion stating that they were of a religion other than Christianity increased from 2% to 8%.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.5. Patterns of religious practice, including attendance at religious services, and the very nature of our beliefs, including belief in God, are changing.<sup>2</sup> We are becoming at one and the same time a more secular and a more multi-faith society, but with Christianity retaining considerable importance in our public institutions and physical landscape. The increasing adherence to non-religious worldviews such as Humanism, internal diversification within

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<sup>1</sup> NatCen (2015).

<sup>2</sup> Concerning religious practice, see for example Park et al (2012), p. 180 (using British Social Attitudes data): among people who either affiliate with a religion or were brought up in one, the percentage who say they do not attend religious services rose from 49% in 1990 to 56% in 2010. Concerning religious beliefs, see for example Dahlgreen (2016): out of a sample of nearly 12,000 self-identified Christians in Britain, only 41% said they definitely believe in a Creator while 18% said they did not.

religions and large demographic changes in the UK are all likely to continue, meaning that the religious landscape will continue to change in the future.

- 1.6. Although it is difficult to quantify the extent of ‘religious illiteracy’, as there is no clear consensus among experts about what a religiously literate person looks like, there are growing concerns among academics, politicians, faith leaders and teachers that too many people lack the relevant skills to understand and discuss issues about religion precisely at the time when they are most needed.
- 1.7. Additionally many respondents to our consultation argued that basic understanding about the shape of the contemporary religious landscape, and about the roles that religion and belief play in our society, is inadequate and indeed may be declining. The consequence of decades of presumed inevitable secularisation, coupled with significant ongoing structural failings in the provision of school-based RE, is that we are losing, if we have not already lost, the ability to understand and articulate ideas about religion.<sup>3</sup>
- 1.8. The consequences of poor religious literacy can be significant. We can see the impact of this in a number of ways. On a public or institutional level, religious illiteracy can lead to media stories which perpetuate stereotypes, are inaccurate, or foster suspicion and government policies which damage relations between particular religious groups and the wider society.
- 1.9. On a personal level, a lack of religious literacy can lead to overly simplistic assumptions about how beliefs, values and identities influence people’s actions. They can also result in an inability to understand the meaning of symbols, rituals and language with religious roots, which continue to make up an important element of our national heritage and identity. At worst, a lack of religious literacy can lead to hatred and prejudice and the marginalisation of some groups.

*“One can sum up this entire case by saying that ignorance of religion necessarily means a greater ignorance in general and that this ignorance is highly dangerous for our future.”*

ResPublica

## 1.2. Methodology and scope

- 1.10. This report is the culmination of a four-week public consultation during which the APPG received sixty-nine written submissions, held two public oral evidence sessions with a total of eight witnesses, and conducted a series of interviews with leaders in the field.

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<sup>3</sup> See further Dinham and Shaw (2015), p. 4; Dinham and Francis (2015), pp. 3-6.

- 1.11. We received submissions from academics, teachers, religion or belief organisations, leaders of religious literacy projects and other interested individuals – those who engage in this area on a daily basis. As such the nature of the submissions and other evidence received reflects the ‘on the ground’ reality of religious literacy encountered by specialists and professionals.
- 1.12. Additionally, in recent years a series of landmark reports and academic works have been published on both RE and religion and society more widely. These too formed part of the evidence base the APPG drew upon when producing this report.<sup>4</sup>
- 1.13. This report is ambitious in scope. Its aim is not to provide new statistical data concerning the ‘levels’ of religious literacy in our society. Rather, it intends to stimulate a conversation among policymakers about how greater religious literacy can be promoted. The report focuses on a number of key policy areas where religious literacy is particularly pertinent, and engages with the practical question of how religious literacy can be improved in them. The APPG hopes to encourage the government to take the need for greater religious literacy in society seriously, and to make its promotion a long-term priority.

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<sup>4</sup> Clarke and Woodhead (2015); Commission for Religion and British Public Life (CORAB) (2015); Dinham and Shaw (2015).

## 2. Towards a Working Definition

- 2.1. In recent years the term 'religious literacy' has become increasingly common in public debate, but it is a highly contested term.<sup>5</sup> As such, a significant majority of the written and oral evidence received by the APPG attempted to articulate what religious literacy might look like in practice.
- 2.2. A number of common features emerged in respondents' suggestions. Drawing on these ideas, the APPG suggests a working definition of religious literacy to be used throughout this report. This definition is not intended to be definitive, nor to act as the final word in the lively debates surrounding the nature of religious literacy. Rather, it is intended to provide a level of clarity to the discussion and to frame the parameters and recommendations of this report.

### 2.1. A definition

- 2.3. Religious literacy can be understood as composing four main elements:
  - A basic level of knowledge about both the particular beliefs, practices and traditions of the main religious traditions in Britain, and of the shape of our changing religious landscape today. This must be complemented by a conceptual understanding of what religious belief systems are, and how they may function in the lives of individuals.
  - An awareness of how beliefs, inherited traditions and textual interpretations might manifest into the actions, practices and daily lives of individuals. Crucial to this is an understanding of the diversity within religious traditions, and an awareness of the way in which the same text, or religious principle, can be interpreted in different ways by different individuals.
  - A critical awareness, meaning that an individual has the ability to recognise, analyse and critique religious stereotypes, and engage effectively with, and take a nuanced approach towards, the questions raised by religion.
  - A sophisticated ability to engage with religious groups in a way which promotes respect and plurality, and which enables effective communication about religion.
- 2.4. The latter three points identified here, although integral to religious literacy, are not exclusive to it. They represent a framework of skills which could be applied to many areas of public and private life – for instance cultural, philosophical or political literacy. But this report, whilst not intending to remove these other areas from a wider public debate, focuses specifically on the way these skills can be applied to learning about religious beliefs.
- 2.5. The level of knowledge and kind of skills needed by people will vary depending on the context. Everyone needs a base level of competency in the skills and knowledge we have outlined

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<sup>5</sup> Various definitions have been produced by academics in the UK and the USA. See, for example, Dinham and Francis (2015); Moore (2015); Prothero (2007); Wright (1993).

above; but some people in particular sectors need more in-depth or specialist understanding. In the following chapters we focus on key sectors where greater religious literacy training is especially needed. We emphasise that training needs to be tailored to the specific needs of people in these areas.

*“Religious literacy enables willingness and ability to live with religious and cultural tensions and with conflicting beliefs and practices. It supports social cohesion by providing safe spaces where different views can be aired, listened to and engaged with without the pressure to conform to an overall perspective.”*

Members of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of  
Chester

## 3. Religious Education in Schools

- 3.1. This report is concerned, at heart, with improving education about religion. An overwhelming majority of the submissions received by the APPG during our consultation emphasised that RE provision in schools is one of, if not the most, important sites for improving religious literacy in society more widely. Yet many also pointed to major difficulties facing RE provision today.
- 3.2. This chapter outlines some of the problems and ongoing areas for debate regarding RE. Many of these problems are long-standing and have been highlighted by numerous past reports. The APPG calls on the government to champion RE and to make its improvement an important educational priority, for its own intrinsic merit, and as part of a long-term strategy to improve religious literacy.
- 3.3. Most of the evidence considered by the APPG focused on RE provision in England and Wales, so Section 3.1 focuses in particular on the problems in English and Welsh schools. In Scotland and Northern Ireland the structures for education about religion and belief are different, as are some of the issues around the delivery of RE.<sup>6</sup>
- 3.4. Education about religion should not, however, be limited to the RE classroom. Section 3.2 discusses the wider opportunities in the school environment that can contribute to the development of pupils' religious literacy, including opportunities in subjects other than RE.

### 3.1. Religious Education in England and Wales

#### 3.1.1. The relationship between RE and religious literacy

- 3.5. The APPG notes that religious literacy and RE are not the same thing. During the public consultation held by the APPG, a wide range of ideas were offered regarding the relationship between religious literacy and RE. For some respondents, religious literacy is broadly akin to RE in its aims and content. For others, religious literacy is distinct from RE, with the former being a set of skills to help people understand and discuss religion, and the latter being the rigorous academic study of religions.
- 3.6. Nonetheless, all respondents agreed that high quality RE is fundamental to the improvement of religious literacy.

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<sup>6</sup> For an account of the Religious Education legal framework in Scotland, see Conroy (2014); for Northern Ireland, see Richardson (2014). See also <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/uk-activity/learning-together/re-across-the-uk>.

*“The school has an essential role in development of religious literacy, just as it has in other forms of literacy. Literacy is about comprehension and communication, and therefore, in the religious sphere, it is important to be able to understand and to be able to communicate ideas.”*

Head of Theology at an independent school

- 3.7. In light of that, the following sections explain some of the urgent challenges facing effective RE provision. The APPG believes it is essential for these to be overcome if good religious literacy is to be promoted effectively in schools.

### 3.1.2. Positive steps and continuing challenges

- 3.8. There are currently some positive and indeed exciting developments in RE. There have been major efforts by RE educationalists and organisations, teachers and academics to attract new teaching recruits, to develop new resources to support RE teachers, to provide funding for professional development, and to drive forwards broad debate about the future of the subject.<sup>7</sup> In May 2016, the number of applications for RE teacher training was 30% higher than in May 2015.<sup>8</sup> Between 2014 and 2015, uptake of GCSE Religious Studies (RS) full course in England and Wales increased by 5.3% and uptake of RS A Level increased by 6.5%.<sup>9</sup> In Wales, the importance of RE has been recognised by the Welsh government and the subject will be compulsory up to the age of 16 in the new national curriculum.<sup>10</sup> Crucially, it is clear that pupils value RE and see learning about religion and belief as increasingly relevant.<sup>11</sup>
- 3.9. At the same time however, there is now an overwhelming body of evidence indicating that, in many parts of England and Wales, the quality of RE provision does not meet a high enough standard. Ofsted found that, out of schools visited between 2009 and 2012, the quality of the RE curriculum was less than good in nearly two thirds of primary schools and six out of ten secondary schools. Achievement and teaching was less than good in six out of ten primary schools and just over half of secondary schools.<sup>12</sup> Low standards mean that “too many pupils leave school with scant knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.”<sup>13</sup> In 2013, the

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<sup>7</sup> For example, the Beyond the Ordinary campaign was established by the RE Council in March 2015 to encourage recruitment to RE teacher training. See <http://www.teachre.co.uk/beyondtheordinary/>.

<sup>8</sup> UCAS (2016a, 2016b).

<sup>9</sup> Uptake of the GCSE RS short course, however, has declined dramatically – see Section 3.1.G. Religious Education Council of England and Wales (RE Council) (2015a, 2015b).

<sup>10</sup> See Welsh Government (2016). It is not clear yet what the impact of the new curriculum will be on the role of SACREs in Wales.

<sup>11</sup> This is attested in research carried out in 2015 by Goldsmiths, University of London – see Dinham and Shaw (2015), p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Ofsted (2013), pp. 5, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 8. Other research has indicated the same – see, for example, Conroy et al (2013), pp. 219-226.

APPG on RE and the RE Council undertook an inquiry into the supply and training of RE teachers and found serious inadequacies.<sup>14</sup>

- 3.10. The evidence submitted to this inquiry by RE teachers and academics confirms that, in many ways, the situation has not improved since 2013. Other recent research has highlighted ongoing conceptual issues, including a lack of consensus among RE teachers about what the purpose and content of RE should be, and structural issues, including concerns about the adequacy of the current system of locally determined RE syllabuses in England and Wales. A number of reviews have called for a re-examination of the legal framework governing the place of religion in schools.<sup>15</sup> The APPG encourages a broad debate on this among all parties, including the Department for Education.
- 3.11. All of these issues can lead to poor RE provision. For many children today, RE serves as the main, or sole, space in which they encounter and discuss different religious beliefs, values and meaning. Poor quality RE can have a lasting detrimental impact on the extent of children's ability to understand and engage with religion. The Department for Education recognises the importance and value of RE; it needs to take urgent action to raise the subject's status within schools to ensure that students' religious literacy is being developed effectively.

#### *A. Lack of clarity over purpose and content*

- 3.12. A number of RE educationalists told us that there is a lack of consistency and confusion among many RE teachers and curriculum designers about what the purpose, or purposes, and content of RE should be. There is a perceived tension between the academic goal of deepening students' understanding of religions and the wider goal of promoting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) and critical thinking. Both goals are important, but there is evidence that in many classrooms greater emphasis is placed on personal and social development, particularly in primary schools, and on philosophical, moral and social issues, rather than on an in-depth study of religions.<sup>16</sup>
- 3.13. A number of respondents suggested that too much emphasis in some classrooms is put on community cohesion, "character-building, the promotion of British values or spiritual, moral, social and cultural development". Whilst these are important, they can overshadow RE's purpose of giving students a rigorous, critical understanding of religions and the values which underpinning them, or can lead to an avoidance of important differences between religious

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<sup>14</sup> All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Religious Education (2013).

<sup>15</sup> Religious Education Council of England and Wales (RE Council) (2013a, b); Clarke and Woodhead (2015); Dinham and Shaw (2015); CORAB (2015).

<sup>16</sup> Ofsted (2013) pp. 14-15. See also Conroy (2011). Research into RE in English schools in 2010 found that the majority of teachers involved in the study prioritised the development of personal and social values, positive attitudes to people of other religions and critical thinking above the transmission of knowledge about religion. Jackson et al (2010), p. 3.

groups and of major controversies, including extremism.<sup>17</sup> Such avoidance does not lead to the development of strong religious literacy. As outlined in Section 2.1, religious literacy should have a critical edge; it involves the ability to discuss, interrogate and critique religion and belief positions in an informed way as much as the ability to understand and respect them. It is important that teachers feel confident to facilitate critical discussion of this kind in the classroom.

- 3.14. Professor Adam Dinham, speaking at the APPG’s oral evidence session, articulated these problems. He suggested that RE has been “marginalised... and colonised by things that are not religion and belief”. In some schools, RE functions as a catch-all space, where eclectic topics are covered which have little to do with religion and belief.<sup>18</sup>
- 3.15. The Church of England Education Office concurred with this in their written submission. “Too often RE has been seen as a way of ticking a box and this has lessened the effectiveness of the subject in informing real debate about issues... As a result too many in education and wider society now see RE as a quick fix way of combating extremism or promoting community cohesion or character, we end up confusing the safeguarding and education agendas”.
- 3.16. Ofsted reports have argued that this lack of consistency about the aims and content is having “A negative impact on the quality of teaching, curriculum planning and the effectiveness of assessment.”<sup>19</sup> Various attempts have been made in the last few years by the Department for Education and other bodies to clarify the purpose of RE, including a number of landmark reports published in 2015.<sup>20</sup> New resources are being produced to increase RE teachers’ subject knowledge, such as the Church of England’s *Understanding Christianity* and the *Understanding Humanism* resource published by the British Humanist Association, and also their ability to use multiple disciplinary approaches in RE.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, these issues remain an ongoing source of debate among RE teachers, educationalists and policymakers.

### *RE in schools with a religious character*

- 3.17. RE often has a special place in schools with a religious character. Respondents from faith communities with their own schools reported that RE forms a core part of the school

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<sup>17</sup> Dinham and Shaw (2015), p. 3. See also Conroy et al (2013), p. 225: “The failures to distinguish properly between civics, ethics, religion and education are both a methodological problem and a philosophical conundrum about what might constitute viable ‘religious literacy’.”

<sup>18</sup> For example, researchers from Goldsmiths, University of London spoke to 190 Year 10 students and identified that there is “a perceived colonisation of the RE space, particularly where RE is combined with PSHE, Citizenship or Careers education.” Some students enjoyed this approach but the majority wanted a distinct space for the teaching of matters about religion and belief. See Dinham and Shaw (2015), p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Ofsted (2013), p. 14

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, the Department for Education’s subject content for GCSE, AS and A Level Religious Studies – Department for Education (2015d, 2015e); Clarke and Woodhead (2015); Dinham and Shaw (2015); RE Council (2013a).

<sup>21</sup> See <http://www.understandingchristianity.org.uk/> and <http://understandinghumanism.org.uk/>. See Freathy et al (2015) for an example of a new resource to help primary teachers to introduce learning about different methodologies and methods of enquiry into the RE classroom.

experience and can help to foster the ethos and values of the school. Some reported that an important part of religious literacy is ‘theological literacy’, and that this concept forms a central part of RE in their schools. For example, a member of the Church of England Education Office suggested that “religious literacy focuses on the human experience of religion and belief”, whereas “theological literacy focuses on the big concepts upon which religions are founded, such as God.”<sup>22</sup>

- 3.18. However, some of respondents to the APPG’s inquiry suggested that schools with a religious character undermine the religious literacy of pupils because they foster religious segregation. The APPG recognises that many schools with a religious character have high levels of religious and ethnic diversity, whilst others do not. Many have excellent arrangements so that pupils have good opportunities to interact with those of other faiths. Where these arrangements do not exist, the APPG urges the school leaders to pursue them as a matter of priority.

### *B. Inadequate time dedicated to RE*

- 3.19. One of the most concerning issues raised by our respondents is that some schools are failing to meet their statutory requirement in relation to RE. All state-funded schools must provide RE for all pupils, including those in the sixth form (except for those withdrawn by their parents, or by themselves if aged 18 or over).<sup>23</sup> A survey by the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE) of 391 secondary schools in 2015 found that in 32% the legal requirements for RE provision at Key Stage 4 were not being met. Non-compliance was most prevalent among community schools and academies without a religious designation.<sup>24</sup> Previous NATRE surveys have found similar trends.<sup>25</sup>
- 3.20. Even when RE is provided, often the time allocated for it is squeezed. This occurs in both primary and secondary schools<sup>26</sup> and can be due to a variety of factors, including RE time being given over to subjects in the National Curriculum and English Baccalaureate (EBacc – see Section 3.1.F.).<sup>27</sup> Ultimately, such practices indicate that in some schools RE has a lower status than other subjects. Pupils are left with reduced opportunities to gain deep knowledge about, and engage critically with, different religions and beliefs, and may come to regard RE as being of trivial importance.
- 3.21. **The APPG recommends that the Department for Education should reinforce the statutory requirement of all state-funded schools to provide RE for all pupils, including at Key Stage 4, and should monitor its effective delivery.**

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<sup>22</sup> This statement should not be taken as official Church of England policy. It derives from a document produced by the Diocesan Religious Education Advisors in 2016. See Chipperton et al (2016).

<sup>23</sup> Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010), p. 10. Requirements are different between sixth form and FE colleges.

<sup>24</sup> National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE) (2015).

<sup>25</sup> See NATRE (2013a, 2012, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> For evidence of squeezed RE time in primary schools, see for example NATRE (2013b).

<sup>27</sup> Ofsted (2013), pp. 16, 20-21.

*“I believe that the development of Religious Literacy in children and young people could be improved if the inspection of RE was given greater prominence in school inspections, if inspectors were themselves more knowledgeable and rigorous in this area, and if government were to take immediate action to address school failings.”*

Researcher and educationalist

### *C. Inadequate supply of specialist RE teachers*

- 3.22. National teacher recruitment levels for England are at a critically low point. The Department for Education and the National College for Teaching and Leadership have missed their targets to fill teacher training places for the last four years, and in 2015/16, the Department’s recruitment targets were missed in 14 out of 17 secondary subjects. In RE the recruitment shortfall was worse than that for most other subjects, with only 63% of the postgraduate trainee recruitment target met (compared to History at 113%).<sup>28</sup>
- 3.23. Additionally the Department’s headline targets do not necessarily reveal the full extent of the difficulties primary and secondary schools in some areas are facing in filling vacancies. The data can mask local and regional variations in teacher supply, and temporary solutions have often been put in place by the time the Department’s data on this is gathered.<sup>29</sup>
- 3.24. Recruitment issues for RE are exacerbating the major long-term problem of a deficit of specialist teachers. Non-specialist teachers of RE may lack the advanced subject knowledge which is essential for developing pupils’ engagement with the subject and therefore their religious literacy.
- 3.25. At secondary school level, the latest available data from the School Workforce Census shows that, in November 2015, 56% of teachers taking RE classes in state-funded schools in England had no relevant post-A Level qualification, compared to 28% for History and 35% for Geography.<sup>30</sup> 43% of the hours of RE lessons taught in a typical week were led by teachers

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<sup>28</sup> Teacher recruitment targets are set by the Teacher Supply Model (TSM), which estimates how many new teachers will be needed each year for each subject. The Department for Education has allowed English and History to recruit over the estimated need on the assumption that schools will use those teachers flexibly. In 2015/16, the TSM target was increased by nearly 5,000 compared to the previous year. This may explain part of the shortfall in RE recruitment from the TSM level, but it should be noted that in 2014/15, before the TSM change, the shortfall for RE was still very high. See Department for Education (2015c), pp. 4-5; National Audit Office (2016), p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> See National Audit Office (2016), pp. 19-25, which sets out some of the problems with the TSM system for setting recruitment targets. See also National Association of Head Teachers (2015), which is a survey of mainly primary phase head teachers on recruitment.

<sup>30</sup> The figure for RE here also includes Philosophy. It also includes teachers who teach Religious Education for only a few lessons, or only one lesson, a week. See Department for Education (2016b), Table 12.

without a relevant degree, and 27% by teachers without any relevant post-A Level qualification.<sup>31</sup> NATRE's 2015 survey of secondary schools also revealed widespread use of non-specialists in RE.<sup>32</sup>

- 3.26. It is difficult, however, to know precisely how much secondary RE is taught by non-specialists, and how many more specialists are needed, because the School Workforce Census records all teachers of RE, including those who teach one lesson a week, rather than full-time equivalent (FTE) RE teachers.<sup>33</sup>
- 3.27. **Therefore the APPG recommends that the Department for Education should record and publish data about the proportion of RE taught by full-time equivalent RE teachers and the proportion taught by non-specialists.**
- 3.28. In primary schools, there is a lack of adequately qualified subject leaders and a widespread tendency for someone other than the class teacher to teach lessons. The APPG's inquiry in 2013 heard from over 300 responding primary schools. In these, 37% of RE subject leaders had no qualification in RE at all, while 29% had only a GCSE or O Level.<sup>34</sup> Many primary school teachers receive little or no training in RE during initial teacher training (see Section 3.1.D).
- 3.29. RE in primary schools is often taught by someone other than the class teacher, a practice that is out of step with most other subjects. The APPG's 2013 inquiry found that in only 44% of responding primary schools were all pupils taught RE by their class teacher. In a quarter of schools, at least some classes were being taught by teaching assistants.<sup>35</sup>
- 3.30. Class teachers use their RE lesson time for planning, preparation and assessment more than they use other subject time.<sup>36</sup> Practices such as this run the risk of isolating RE from the rest of the curriculum and can have a bad impact on the quality of learning. It also reflects a widespread lack of confidence in the teaching of RE among primary school trainees and teachers.<sup>37</sup> The findings here suggest that heavy workloads may have a particularly detrimental impact on RE, as class teachers may be inclined to use RE time for other tasks.

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<sup>31</sup> This figure includes year groups 7-13. See Department for Education (2016b), Table 13.

<sup>32</sup> NATRE's July 2015 survey of secondary schools found that, out of the 391 schools that responded, in 56% of schools at least one in ten RE lessons, and in 43% of schools at least one in five, were taught by teachers who mainly teach other subjects. See NATRE (2015).

<sup>33</sup> For EBacc subjects, however, the Department for Education calculates the number of hours taught by specialist and non-specialist teachers. See Department for Education (2015b), p. 53.

<sup>34</sup> Over half of responding subject leaders in community schools lacked an RE qualification, while nearly a third did in voluntary controlled or aided schools. See APPG on Religious Education (2013), p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> APPG on Religious Education (2013), pp. 9-10. Ofsted (2010), p. 36, estimated that the proportion of primary schools in which RE was taught to some children by higher level teaching assistants could be as high as a third. In NATRE's Spring 2013 survey of 679 primary teachers, 61.5% said RE was delivered solely by the class teacher – a better figure but not adequate; see NATRE (2013b).

<sup>36</sup> APPG on Religious Education (2013), p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> Data presented to the APPG's 2013 inquiry from a survey by Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln of 824 primary trainees' attitudes to RE over seven years showed that 50% of the trainees felt cautious or lacking in confidence concerning the teaching of RE; see APPG on Religious Education (2013), p. 11. See also Dinham and Shaw (2015), p. 29; Ofsted (2013), p. 18; NATRE (2013b).

The APPG welcomes the findings of the Department for Education’s recent review of teacher workloads and hopes that this will lead to a reduction of the pressure on teachers and thus on RE time.<sup>38</sup>

- 3.31. Non-specialists in primary and secondary RE can be effective if teachers receive appropriate training, are well supported by specialists and have good quality continuing professional development opportunities. In schools where this is not the case, however, non-specialists will find it difficult to develop the deep subject knowledge that is needed to deliver high quality RE.<sup>39</sup>
- 3.32. The Department is focusing its resources on stimulating recruitment to high priority STEM subjects.<sup>40</sup> Whilst the APPG recognises the need for this, it urges the Department for Education to take further steps to stimulate recruitment to RE as well, by publicly championing the teaching of RE as a role of critical importance to society. Independent trusts have funded a marketing campaign in 2015-16, *Beyond the Ordinary*, which has helped to stimulate recruitment to the subject.<sup>41</sup> Such independent initiatives need vocal support and funding from the Department as they continue their work.
- 3.33. **The APPG recommends that the Department for Education should place a high priority on stimulating recruitment of specialists to RE. It should be a vocal champion of the teaching of RE and should take steps to support independent initiatives working to increase recruitment.**

#### *D. Inadequate initial teacher training for RE*

- 3.34. With the current recruitment difficulties likely to increase RE’s reliance on non-specialists, it is essential that all teachers of RE have access to high quality initial teacher training (ITT) and continuing professional development (CPD) for RE. The Wales Association of SACREs mentioned this specifically in their written submission: “Effective RE-specific Initial Teacher Training for both subject-specialist RE teachers and non-specialist ITT students in both the primary and secondary sector is essential”.
- 3.35. The APPG’s 2013 inquiry highlighted inadequacies in ITT for RE – for example, 43% of responding primary teachers estimated they had received no more than 15 hours of training in RE during ITT, and 15% had had no training in the subject at all.<sup>42</sup> Respondents to our current consultation also had serious concerns about inadequate ITT for RE. This has worrying implications for the development of religious literacy skills among children. The Department for Education must ensure that sufficient time is given to RE during primary ITT programmes.

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<sup>38</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-teachers-workload/reducing-teachers-workload>.

<sup>39</sup> For an analysis of the impact of teachers’ deep subject knowledge on students’ learning, see for example Coe et al (2014); Conroy (2016).

<sup>40</sup> Department for Education (2016a), p. 26.

<sup>41</sup> See <http://www.teachre.co.uk/beyondtheordinary/>.

<sup>42</sup> APPG on Religious Education (2013), pp. 13.

3.36. In addition, some respondents thought that an increase in school-based teacher training could have a detrimental impact on the development of RE teachers' subject knowledge. The high number of non-specialists teaching RE means that some trainee teachers may find themselves in school departments where there is insufficient RE subject expertise.<sup>43</sup> As the Department for Education expands school-based training, including for RE,<sup>44</sup> it is vital that it addresses such concerns by taking steps to improve the quality of RE training in ITT programmes (especially for primary teaching).

*“Initial teacher education, in which ever context, does not always enable practitioners to develop the confidence they need to deal with the ‘real religious landscape’... Continued professional development, which might be helpful in enhancing critical religious literacy, is difficult to obtain.”*

Education Officer, Network of Buddhist Organisations UK

- 3.37. The APPG welcomes the Department's commitment in the White Paper *Educational Excellence Everywhere* to strengthening ITT, with a focus in particular on improving advanced subject knowledge and promoting evidence-based practice.<sup>45</sup> This is particularly important for RE. The independent working group established by the Department has developed a core framework for ITT and we hope this will help to improve standards among RE trainees.<sup>46</sup> The Education Select Committee has also been conducting a review of ITT, CPD and teacher supply more widely.<sup>47</sup> It should be noted that the RE Council has already made substantial recommendations concerning the improvement of ITT and CPD, including in its review of training for RE teachers in 2007.<sup>48</sup>
- 3.38. **The APPG recommends that the Department for Education should ensure that all primary ITT programmes contain a suitable proportion of time dedicated to RE. Steps should be taken to ensure that all RE trainees can benefit from high quality subject experts informed by up-to-date pedagogical research.**

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<sup>43</sup> Such concerns about the impact of expanded school-based training in relation to subjects with high proportions of non-specialist teachers were also expressed in oral evidence given in the Education Select Committee's inquiry on teacher supply in June 2016. See House of Commons Education Committee (2015), pp. 7-8.

<sup>44</sup> For 2016/17, the Department's minimum recruitment level for School Direct (tuition fee) and SCITT (school-centred initial teacher training) routes is 106 out of the overall trainee target (determined by the Teacher Supply Model) of 544. See Department for Education (2015b), p. 61.

<sup>45</sup> Department for Education (2016a), p. 28.

<sup>46</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-government-response-to-carter-review>.

<sup>47</sup> See <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/supply-of-teachers-15-16/>.

<sup>48</sup> RE Council (2007).

- 3.39. Thorough religious literacy training is needed by all teachers, regardless of subject specialism. At secondary teacher level, we suggest there should be a distinction in teacher training between subject-specific RE ITT and broader, high quality religious literacy ITT for all trainee teachers. The content of the latter would need to vary depending on the requirements and specialisms of trainees. For example, it is important that all trainees learn how to respond appropriately to common questions or issues which may arise in the classroom in relation to religion or belief. Where appropriate, training could also include guidance on how to develop among pupils the skills and ideas we have identified as underpinning religious literacy. This would be most relevant to primary teachers and specialists in subjects like History, English, Philosophy and Politics, who along with RE specialists have opportunities to contribute to the development of pupils' religious literacy.
- 3.40. **As such, the APPG recommends that the Department for Education should encourage ITT providers to offer a core element of religious literacy training in all secondary teacher training programmes.**
- 3.41. As well as improving ITT, the Department should give consideration to other ways of addressing gaps in subject knowledge and pedagogical understanding among trainee RE teachers. One option could be encouraging universities to offer 'bridge to ITT' modules in the final years of relevant subject degrees, as recommended by the Carter Review of ITT.<sup>49</sup> This could stimulate recruitment and would mean that students entering secondary ITT would have begun to acquire the skills and subject knowledge appropriate for teaching.

### *E. Inadequate continuing professional development for RE*

- 3.42. Respondents to the APPG's public consultation made clear that high quality continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities are crucial for bolstering subject knowledge among RE teachers and wider religious literacy among all teachers. The Open University articulated this in a written submission: "Appropriate and accessible professional development for teachers is crucial here, especially as inevitably much responsibility will need to be carried by non-specialists". Effective CPD can also play an important role in boosting retention rates among teachers, helping to tackle teacher shortages.
- 3.43. The Education Select Committee's inquiry into teacher supply has heard evidence which suggests that many teachers do not have adequate access to CPD opportunities. Much of the CPD that teachers do access focuses on procedural matters such as assessment or curriculum changes, with less emphasis on the development of subject-specific knowledge and skills. Often CPD is not sustained for a sufficient amount of time to be of long-lasting benefit.<sup>50</sup> The education of teachers does not finish at the end of ITT but should be seen as an ongoing career-long process.

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<sup>49</sup> Carter (2015), p. 52.

<sup>50</sup> House of Commons Education Committee (2015).

- 3.44. Concerning RE, in 2010 Ofsted found that CPD was inadequate in nearly four out of ten schools visited, with little consideration given to the training of non-specialists in secondary schools.<sup>51</sup> The APPG's 2013 inquiry found that 27 out of 300 primary RE subject leaders and 33 out of 130 secondary ones said they had received no RE-specific training opportunities in the last three years. For teachers who are not subject leaders the situation was even worse – 54% of teachers of RE in community primary schools said they had received no CPD opportunities at all.<sup>52</sup> NATRE's 2015 survey of secondary teachers found that, in the previous academic year, 72% out of 419 respondents had received no subject-specific training in school, and 40% had received none outside of school.<sup>53</sup> These figures are alarming considering the high proportion of non-specialists who teach RE and the very small amount of time given to RE in primary ITT. A lack of good subject-specific CPD can have a detrimental impact on the quality of RE in the classroom, and therefore, on the development of pupils' religious literacy.
- 3.45. Several factors affect RE teachers' participation in CPD. For many schools, better RE provision is not seen as a funding priority. RE's exclusion from the EBacc may have exacerbated this (see Section 3.1.F). Some schools may not see the funding of training for non-specialist teachers of RE as cost-effective, because it may not be clear how long those non-specialists will be needed to cover RE.
- 3.46. Such challenges also exist at the local level too. The capacity of local authorities to resource CPD opportunities has deteriorated; as such, access to good RE CPD in the local area is something of a postcode lottery. There are of course a range of independent initiatives which provide high quality ITT and CPD opportunities for RE teachers, at regional or national levels or online.<sup>54</sup> These are vital initiatives and need support and resourcing from the Department. Yet even where CPD opportunities do exist, other issues can prevent teachers of RE from taking them up, including workload pressures and difficulties in securing the necessary time off.<sup>55</sup>
- 3.47. The APPG urges the Department for Education to take steps to improve the access to, and quality of, CPD opportunities for all teachers of RE as a priority. This involves encouraging schools to recognise the importance of RE and of subject-specific RE CPD. It also involves ensuring that providers of CPD for RE are sufficiently funded, particularly at the local level. The Department should also consider making funding available for primary school teachers to take Subject Knowledge Enhancement courses in RE after the completion of ITT, as recommended by the Carter Review of ITT.<sup>56</sup> The APPG hopes that the implementation of the

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<sup>51</sup> Ofsted (2010), p. 39.

<sup>52</sup> APPG on Religious Education (2013), pp. 13, 30-31.

<sup>53</sup> NATRE (2015).

<sup>54</sup> See for example <http://www.teachre.co.uk/already-teaching-re/professional-learning-opportunities/>.

<sup>55</sup> APPG on Religious Education (2013), pp. 27-32.

<sup>56</sup> Carter (2015), p. 52.

recommendations from the Department’s review of teacher workloads will ease the pressure on RE teachers’ time and make it easier for them to access available CPD opportunities.<sup>57</sup>

- 3.48. **The APPG recommends that the Department for Education should take steps to ensure that all teachers of RE, especially non-specialists, have access to high quality subject-specific CPD opportunities.**
- 3.49. As with ITT, there is a distinction between subject-specific RE CPD and broader religious literacy training. The APPG believes that it is important that all teachers have thorough religious literacy training. Such training should be contextual – it should help teachers to deal with issues of religion relevant to their particular school environment as well as giving them the broader skills and understanding we have indicated in Section 2.1.
- 3.50. **As such, the APPG recommends that the Department for Education should encourage the expansion of CPD opportunities for high quality religious literacy training, and should encourage all teachers to take part in them.**

#### *F. English Baccalaureate and RE*

- 3.51. A significant number of respondents to the APPG’s public consultation expressed concerns that the exclusion of GCSE Religious Studies (RS) from the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) has had a serious detrimental impact on learning about religion and belief in schools. A senior educationalist within the Church of England commented, “At the very time that the government wants more from RE, in terms of building the literacy needed to engage positively in the world, the consequences of not including in EBacc will have a very detrimental impact.” Another respondent thought that “the exclusion of RE from the EBacc has been little short of a disaster and has sent a most unhelpful message to head teachers”.
- 3.52. This issue has been a matter of debate since the introduction of the EBacc and the Coalition government emphasised that it did not wish to include RE, on the grounds that this could reverse the recent increases in the up-take of History and Geography.<sup>58</sup> Nonetheless, the current government’s intention to ensure that at least 90% of pupils in mainstream secondary schools take the EBacc subjects at GCSE means this issue needs to be re-examined with urgency because of the likely impact on RE provision.<sup>59</sup>
- 3.53. There is evidence indicating that curriculum time for RE has come under pressure, sometimes resulting in the marginalisation of RE teaching, due to the expansion of the EBacc and RE’s exclusion from it. NATRE’s 2015 survey of secondary schools found that a quarter reported a decrease in the amount of RE to be taught in 2015-16 compared to the previous year. Of those reporting a decrease, 35% said that time was cut to make more room for EBacc subjects,

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<sup>57</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-teachers-workload/reducing-teachers-workload>.

<sup>58</sup> House of Commons Debate (2013).

<sup>59</sup> Department for Education (2015a), p. 11.

19% said that time was cut to make more room for core subjects, and 14% said that GCSE RS short or full course had been discontinued.<sup>60</sup>

- 3.54. Further to that, the amount of time allocated by schools to the full course is often not sufficient. A third (32%) of schools responding to the 2015 NATRE survey said they had allocated less than the minimum recommended 120 hours to teaching the full course. Of most concern is that 32% of schools said they were not meeting the legal requirements for RE provision at Key Stage 4 – this is probably due to RE time being given over to other EBacc subjects.<sup>61</sup> These trends confirm the APPG’s findings on this issue in our 2013 inquiry.<sup>62</sup>
- 3.55. Cutting time for RE at Key Stage 4 can lead to a reduction in the number of specialist RE teachers, which decreases the quality of the RE that is provided at all Key Stages. The APPG is concerned that the expansion of the EBacc to 90% of pupils will exacerbate these trends and place the development of good religious literacy among children and young people at risk.<sup>63</sup>
- 3.56. The APPG believes that high quality RE for all children has never been more important, and that its inclusion in the EBacc would stimulate schools to protect curriculum time dedicated to it. If the Department for Education continues to hold the view that RE should not be included, then it must take urgent steps to ensure that the legal requirement for the provision of RE at Key Stage 4 is upheld in every state school, and that the quality of that provision at Key Stage 3 is sufficiently high that GCSE RS is an attractive option for students, despite not being in the EBacc.
- 3.57. **The APPG recommends that the Department for Education should give renewed consideration to including RE as a Humanities subject in the English Baccalaureate. It should conduct a new review of the impact that the exclusion of RE from the English Baccalaureate has had on the subject. It should also conduct a review of the likely impact on RE provision of the expansion of the English Baccalaureate to 90% of pupils, and set out how it will protect RE from any adverse effects of this.**

### *G. GCSE Religious Studies short course*

- 3.58. While the GCSE RS full course remains popular (see paragraph 3.8), uptake of the short course has declined dramatically. It has been argued that this is a consequence of the Department for Education’s removal of GCSE short courses from its performance tables in 2014. In England uptake of the RS short course fell by 67% between 2012 and 2015.<sup>64</sup> According to the 2015 NATRE survey discussed above, 73% of responding schools had no entries for the short course

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<sup>60</sup> NATRE (2015).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> APPG on Religious Education (2013), p. 19.

<sup>63</sup> Similar concerns about the impact on other non-EBacc subjects have been expressed in the Department for Education’s consultation on the expansion of the EBacc. See, for example, National Association of Head Teachers (2016); The Schools, Students and Teachers Network (2016).

<sup>64</sup> RE Council (2015).

in 2015.<sup>65</sup> This is concerning cause for concern because the short course qualification provides a useful alternative for pupils who do not wish to take the full course, and can encourage them to take RE seriously. Its removal from performance tables may result in more schools failing to meet their statutory requirements concerning RE provision.

- 3.59. **In light of this decline, the APPG recommends that the Department for Education should take steps to promote uptake of the GCSE Religious Studies short course.**

#### *H. Academisation*

- 3.60. The impact of academisation on RE was also raised in our inquiry. The APPG's 2013 inquiry heard that the resources for some Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs) are falling.<sup>66</sup> This decline can have an adverse impact on the quality of the locally agreed syllabus in these areas. In our current inquiry, respondents reported that academisation may lead to a large proportion of SACREs becoming redundant, as academies are not legally required to adopt locally agreed syllabuses, though they may choose to do so. The government's commitment to increased academisation raises major questions about whether the current role of SACREs is sustainable.
- 3.61. The RE Council has established a Commission on RE which will examine the current state of RE in England and Wales, along with the suitability of the current legal framework for religion in schools in a changed educational landscape.<sup>67</sup> The APPG welcomes the establishment of this Commission and hopes that it will provide new evidence about the situation with SACREs which can be used to shape future policy.
- 3.62. In 2015, three major reports called for the replacement of locally determined syllabuses with some form of nationally agreed framework for RE, seeing this as the best way to promote rigorous learning about religion and belief and the development of strong religious literacy among pupils.<sup>68</sup> These reports have sparked intense debate.
- 3.63. **The APPG recommends that all relevant parties should participate in the ongoing discussions about the legal framework for RE in schools and other major issues, including the Department for Education and faith communities.**

### **3.2. The wider school environment**

- 3.64. The development of religious literacy must not be seen as something that is reserved for RE. The Open University suggested that "some of the most effective education in religious literacy is likely to be delivered in the context of other subjects, especially Personal, Social Health and

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<sup>65</sup> NATRE (2015).

<sup>66</sup> APPG on Religious Education (2013), pp. 34-35.

<sup>67</sup> See RE Council (2016).

<sup>68</sup> Clarke and Woodhead (2015); Dinham and Shaw (2015); CORAB (2015).

Citizenship Education but also including English, History and Geography”. Another respondent commented, “RE should not be the only place where religions are talked about within our schools”.

- 3.65. There are a number of opportunities in the wider school environment to promote religious literacy:

#### *Other subjects outside of RE*

- 3.67. Issues around religion appear most frequently outside of RE in other Humanities subjects. When such topics arise, it should be recognised that they can contribute significantly to pupils’ understanding of religions and to their ability to discuss them confidently and critically.
- 3.68. For this to be effective, however, it is imperative that all teachers receive thorough religious literacy training, both during ITT and in CPD sessions, tailored where appropriate to the teachers’ needs. This is important even for specialists in non-Humanities subjects, as issues concerning religion and belief may appear in any classroom or outside of it. See further Sections 3.1.D and 3.1.E.

#### *Visits to places of religious worship*

- 3.69. Respondents to our consultation emphasised the importance of arrangements whereby school communities and religious groups are brought together. Such interaction and dialogue may be in the school itself, in places of worship, or through social action activities. These opportunities provide a space for students to apply the understanding and skills they have acquired in the classroom and can help them to understand more fully how religion is ‘lived’ by those in their local communities.<sup>69</sup>
- 3.70. It should be noted, however, that it is naïve to assume that infrequent trips to local places of worship are sufficient to encourage the development of highly religiously literate pupils. These are skills that can only be developed over a sustained period of time. It is important, then, that school leaders encourage the growth of lasting relationships between the school community and local religion and belief groups, and place a high priority on ensuring that the quality of RE provision, which ultimately is the bedrock of developing a more religiously literate generation, is excellent.

#### *Collective worship / assemblies (England and Wales)*

- 3.71. The role of collective worship has also been subject to recent policy-related analysis.<sup>70</sup> There is significant debate about whether it is appropriate in an increasingly secular, pluralist society

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<sup>69</sup> The Council of Europe has emphasised the importance of such activities. See further Jackson (2014), pp. 87-97.

<sup>70</sup> For a review of the recent debate, see Cumper and Mawhinney (2015).

for there still to be a statutory requirement for daily collective worship of a broadly Christian character, in relation to schools without a religious designation.<sup>71</sup> In practice many schools ignore the requirement,<sup>72</sup> often using the time for secular or multi-faith forms of reflection and personal, social and spiritual development.

- 3.72. There have been a number of recent reports calling for the statutory requirement to be abolished, or replaced with a requirement for ‘times for reflection’.<sup>73</sup> Some commentators consider the requirement to be inhibiting to the development of critical religious literacy. An alternative argument might be that collective worship can be valuable for religious literacy because it provides a space in which pupils can experience religious practice directly. As with the discussions about the legal framework for RE in England and Wales, the APPG encourages all relevant parties, including the Department for Education and faith communities, to participate in the ongoing debate on this issue.

*“If the school is indeed fostering an institutional culture of religious literacy, this will permeate the whole life of the school”*

Chair of a local SACRE and Officer of NASACRE

## Recommendations: Religious Education in Schools

**Recommendation 1:** the Department for Education should reinforce the statutory requirement of all state-funded schools to provide RE for all pupils, including at Key Stage 4, and should monitor its effective delivery.

**Recommendation 2:** the Department for Education should record and publish data about the proportion of RE classes taught by full-time equivalent RE teachers and the proportion taught by non-specialists.

**Recommendation 3:** the Department for Education should place a high priority on stimulating recruitment of specialists to RE. It should be a vocal champion of the teaching of RE and should take steps to support independent initiatives working to increase recruitment.

**Recommendation 4:** the Department for Education should ensure that all primary ITT programmes contain a suitable proportion of time dedicated to RE. Steps should be taken to ensure that all RE trainees can benefit from high quality subject experts informed by up-to-date pedagogical research.

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<sup>71</sup> School Standards and Framework Act (1998), sch. 20, para. 3.

<sup>72</sup> Cumper and Mawhinney (2015), p. 8.

<sup>73</sup> Clarke and Woodhead (2015); CORAB (2015). See also Committee on the Rights of the Child (2016).

Recommendation 5: the Department for Education should encourage ITT providers to offer a core element of religious literacy training in all secondary teacher training programmes.

Recommendation 6: the Department for Education should take steps to ensure that all teachers of RE, especially non-specialists, have access to high quality subject-specific CPD opportunities.

Recommendation 7: the Department for Education should encourage the expansion of CPD opportunities for high quality religious literacy training, and should encourage all teachers to take part in them.

Recommendation 8: the Department for Education should give renewed consideration to including RE as a Humanities subject in the English Baccalaureate. It should conduct a new review of the impact that the exclusion of RE from the English Baccalaureate has had on the subject. It should also conduct a review of the likely impact on RE provision of the expansion of the English Baccalaureate to 90% of pupils, and set out how it will protect RE from any adverse effects of this.

Recommendation 9: the Department for Education should take steps to promote uptake of the GCSE Religious Studies short course.

Recommendation 10: all relevant parties should participate in the ongoing discussions about the legal framework for RE in schools and other major issues, including the Department for Education and faith communities.

## 4. Religious Literacy Training, Resourcing and Accountability in the Workplace

- 4.1. The task of achieving better religious literacy should not solely be restricted to the Religious Education curriculum or to the wider school environment. Improving training, resourcing and accountability measures for religious literacy in the workplace also has an important role to play.
- 4.2. A number of respondents the APPG's consultation addressed the need for, and benefits of, improved religious literacy in the workplace and in the whole of life context. For example, Rev. Nigel Genders, the Church of England's Chief Education Officer, emphasised to the APPG that improving religious literacy within businesses and service providers can help them to build better relationships with their clients and service users: "We know that employers increasingly recognise the importance of faith and belief in the work place – both in terms of how to celebrate and respect the diversity that that brings, but also the way that greater religious literacy leads to more effective engagement in the global market... it's about diversity within the workplace but also about equipping us to actually play a more competitive role in the world."
- 4.3. Improved religious literacy among staff can also help to make both religious and non-religious staff feel more included and respected, by fostering a culture of openness towards informed discussion about religion or belief issues. Whilst many employers do adopt good practice approaches, there is evidence that in other workplaces religion or belief issues are poorly managed.
- 4.4. For example, in a large-scale call for evidence carried out in 2014, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) heard concerns from some respondents about hostile or unwelcoming environments in relation to holding or not holding a particular religion or belief. Some (religious and non-religious) respondents had experienced misinformed or derogatory remarks from co-workers or felt that particular beliefs were mocked or not taken seriously in the workplace or classroom; others felt unfairly treated or discriminated against, for example in relation to work conditions, time off work for religious holidays, or access to or provision of services.<sup>74</sup> These findings suggest that there is a need in many workplaces for improved access to religious literacy training, which can help to foster more cohesive and inclusive workplaces.
- 4.5. In addition to outlining the positive consequences which could arise for businesses and organisations from improving general religious literacy within the workplace, respondents also proposed that there was a need for greater, and more context-specific, religious literacy training in particular areas. These areas included the media – encompassing news and

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<sup>74</sup> Mitchell and Beninger, with Donald and Howard (2015), pp. 8-16. The EHRC has published good practice guidance for employers.

entertainment broadcasting, print media and social media – and the public sector – specifically the Civil Service, the police, the armed forces and the National Health Service. Comments by respondents included that:

- “Portrayal of religion in the media should be fair, educative and interesting and avoid the trap of stereotype. The provision of high quality broadcasting on religion is vital.”
- “In a plural society, it is vital that all major institutions foster and embody a culture of religious literacy throughout the institution: government and governmental departments; the media; public services of all kinds, e.g. the health service, schools and universities, the police”.
- “It is essential to teach our sailors, soldiers and airmen the deeply entwined place of religion in public life, especially in non-Western culture. This enables... the ability to ‘win hearts and minds’ on the ground whilst working with host nation forces”.

- 4.6. This chapter focuses on the public sector and the media as priority areas where the government should seek to improve religious literacy. It is important to note, however, that this does not mean that individuals working in these areas have particularly low levels of religious literacy compared with society at large. Indeed, there is little prior empirical evidence about the extent of religious literacy in the workplace, in general, or in the media and public sector, in particular. Rather, the APPG considers these services, and those who work within them, to have an integral and influential role in national life. As such, it is crucial that in these areas particularly religion should be understood and engaged with effectively.
- 4.7. This chapter synthesizes evidence received from respondents, previous reports which deal with religious literacy and evidence received from government departments. Section 4.1 of this chapter discusses training in the public sector. Section 4.2 turns to training among journalists. Sections 4.3 and 4.4 discuss ways to improve resourcing and accountability for religious literacy training in the workplace.

*“I have given nurses training on world faiths to help them in their work and consider it should be a compulsory part of any training for those in social services / national health / police as well as those entering the teaching profession”*

Consultant and member of the Association of Religious Education Inspectors, Advisors and Consultants

## 4.1. Religious literacy in the public sector

### 4.1.1. Public services

- 4.8. A number of respondents to our inquiry articulated the critical importance of high levels of religious literacy across the public sector, including within the Civil Service. Professor John Wolffe from the Open University called for “more sophisticated religious literacy in legislation and policy, for example in informing foreign policy towards the Muslim world, and in implementing the Prevent policy in a manner that genuinely prevents extremism while not alienating moderates”. A civil servant commented that “You need religious literacy to know how to interact with faith groups and to know when and how your policies are going to impact on religious communities living in the UK and on people of faith”.
- 4.9. Some respondents perceived a lack of religious literacy among civil servants and members of other public services. For example, the Evangelical Alliance reported that “In our public policy engagement, it is common to encounter deep and widespread religious illiteracy in both Westminster as we engage with parliamentarians, and in Whitehall as we engage with civil servants. With a few notable exceptions, in both politics and government, the standard of knowledge about the diversity and value of religion – and therein the beliefs and motivations of religious people – is very poor”. Similar findings were reported in the All Party Parliamentary Group Christians in Parliament’s 2012 inquiry, *Clearing the Ground*. Their report argued that: “There is a high level of religious illiteracy which has led to many situations where religious belief is misunderstood and subsequently restricted. This comes from a social and cultural minimisation of Christianity in public life... Religious illiteracy has led to legal restrictions on the way that faith can be expressed. Recent changes have compelled Christians to provide services that they had never previously offered and which may be contrary to their beliefs.”<sup>75</sup>
- 4.10. One specific area where there is cause for concern relates to the Home Office’s system for processing asylum-seekers. In June 2016, the All Party Parliamentary Group on International Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Asylum Advocacy Group published a report which found that there was a “lack of understanding and misperceptions of religion and belief among decision-makers working within the UK asylum system”.<sup>76</sup> Some of the problems highlighted by this inquiry in relation to religious literacy include:
- A disparity between the Home Office’s policy guidelines and the practices of decision-makers in relation to religious-based persecution.
  - Poor knowledge and understanding among interviewers of asylum-seekers of the religions and beliefs of applicants.
  - poor understanding among interviewers of the complex, diverse nature of religions and beliefs as ‘lived’ as opposed to formal doctrines and practices.

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<sup>75</sup> All Party Parliamentary Group Christians in Parliament (2012), p. 6.

<sup>76</sup> All Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Asylum Advocacy Group (2016), p. 5.

- The practice among interviewers of asking detailed factual questions about particular religions to ascertain the veracity of the applicant’s stated religion or belief (such as ‘Can you name the twelve apostles?’ ‘When is Pentecost?’).
- The inability of some translators employed by the Home Office to translate religion-specific concepts, or potential bias of some translators against the religion or belief of the applicant.<sup>77</sup>

4.11. These issues can result in “problematic investigation of the claim (including questions put to applicants), poor credibility assessment and weak analysis of well-founded fears of persecution and risks of such persecution upon return (including internal relocation analysis).”<sup>78</sup>

4.12. This evidence suggests that some public sector workers lack the understanding and religious literacy skills we have outlined in Section 2.1 – including an awareness that how people ‘live’ out their religions and beliefs may be different to the formal positions of their traditions and may change depending on the context.

4.13. A common theme in the written submissions to the APPG and evidence given by oral witnesses was that those who are engaged in implementing the Prevent strategy – either as Prevent officers or because they have specific functions to perform under the Prevent Duty – must be highly religiously literate.<sup>79</sup> It is essential that such individuals have a thorough understanding of the main religious groups in Britain today, as well as of the complex ways in which the beliefs and values of individuals may (or may not) manifest themselves in their actions. This is important to ensure that those who seek to implement Prevent can identify individuals who may be at risk of radicalisation without stigmatising communities, or creating a culture whereby harmless religious practices are viewed with suspicion.

4.14. For those involved with the Prevent strategy, the ability to engage with religion effectively and to understand the complex relationships between individual’s beliefs and their practices must be an integral part of the policy’s implementation. The APPG suggests that increased religious literacy in this area will enhance the ability of Prevent officers and those with specific responsibilities under the Prevent duty to recognise those who are genuinely at risk of radicalisation, thus helping to prevent stigmatisation of non-violent religious beliefs and practices.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, pp. 3-5.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

<sup>79</sup> The Prevent strategy forms part of Contest, the government’s counter-terrorism strategy. The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 places a duty on specified bodies (such as teachers, lecturers, local authority workers, police and health professionals) to have “due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism”. Prevent applies to England, Wales and Scotland. See Home Office (2015); Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015), s. 26(1).

<sup>80</sup> For an overview of debates about the Prevent strategy, including criticism of it, see Tinkler (2016).

*“I think that one of the key things government could do would be to model good religious literacy in the way that it behaves... Let’s see some really good religious literacy being modelled by government and civil servants and by those who are announcing policy... [including] when we talk about extremism or fundamental British values”.*

Reverend Nigel Genders, Chief Education Officer for the Church of England, speaking at an oral evidence session

- 4.15. Therefore, the APPG recommends that the Home Office should make religious literacy training a mandatory part of the Prevent training given in schools, universities, prisons and other institutions.

#### 4.1.2. The Civil Service

##### *A. Current training provision in government departments*

- 4.16. During our inquiry, Fiona Bruce MP tabled Parliamentary written questions to the government departments which have been identified by respondents regarding their level of, and plans for, religious literacy training. In addition, Viscount Waverley tabled a written question about the resourcing of training in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The questions received the following responses:

- **Foreign and Commonwealth Office**  
“Training to develop religious literacy is provided at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London and at a number of Embassies and High Commissions overseas. In London, staff are offered a two day course covering Abrahamic and Dharmic religions. This is supplemented by a range of training activities on specific religions and religious topics. A religion and foreign policy element is being built into the syllabus offered to all staff through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s Diplomatic Academy.”<sup>81</sup>  
  
“Our online Foundation Level course includes a basic religious literacy module. Our diplomatic missions report regularly on trends in political Islam and our research analyst cadre provide in-depth expertise, analysis and links to academics and think tanks. The FCO's Human Rights and Democracy Department run training courses on religion and foreign policy which serve as a practitioner level religion/foreign policy

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<sup>81</sup> Written response from David Lidington, Minister of State for Europe to question by Fiona Bruce. House of Commons (2016d).

module for the Diplomatic Academy. We also offer training on contemporary Islam and its role within politics and society in various regional contexts.”<sup>82</sup>

- **Department for International Development**

“In implementing DFID’s *Faith Partnership Principles Paper*,<sup>83</sup> DFID has produced material for staff on the role played by faiths in the local, national and global cultural contexts, arranged for faith literacy training and facilitated staff to attend the Foreign and Commonwealth Office faith literacy training courses.”<sup>84</sup>

- **Department for Communities and Local Government:**

“Civil Service Learning, the main training portal for civil servants, has a broad range of diversity and inclusion learning, which is available to all civil servants. There is also a two day course covering both Abrahamic and Dharmic religions for officials who need a more in-depth understanding to carry out their role.

DCLG officials have had discussions with the Commission on Religion and Belief in Public Life (CORAB) about their call for greater religious literacy in every section of society. The Government is aware of the recent evidence sessions on religious literacy held by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education and will carefully consider the findings of the Group's report when it is published.”<sup>85</sup>

- **Department for Education:**

“We currently have no plans to carry out religious literacy training in the Department. Civil Service Learning, the main training portal for civil servants, has a broad range of diversity and inclusion courses, which are available to all civil servants. There is also a two day course covering both Abrahamic and Dharmic religions for officials who need a more in-depth understanding to carry out their role.”<sup>86</sup>

- **Department for Health:**

“Religion or belief (or lack thereof) is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. Public authorities, including all National Health Service organisations, must have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under that Act towards people sharing that protected characteristic in discharging their public functions. Employers have a responsibility to ensure that their employees do not behave unlawfully and should take all reasonable steps to prevent unlawful acts from happening. Employees can also be personally liable for any unlawful conduct.

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<sup>82</sup> Written response from Baroness Anelay of St Johns, Minister of State, at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to question by Viscount Waverley. House of Lords (2016).

<sup>83</sup> Department for International Development (2012).

<sup>84</sup> Written response from Desmond Swayne, Minister of State for International Development to question by Fiona Bruce. House of Commons (2016c).

<sup>85</sup> Written response from Marcus Jones, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Local Government) to question by Fiona Bruce. House of Commons (2016a).

<sup>86</sup> Written response from Nick Gibb, Minister of State for Schools to question by Fiona Bruce. House of Commons (2016b).

NHS organisations are subject to duties under the Equality Act in their own right. They are also directly subject to regulation by the Equality and Human Rights Commission. To help them meet their statutory equality duties, NHS England published an Equality Delivery System for the NHS which became part of the NHS Standard Contract from 2015”.<sup>87</sup>

- **Home Office:**  
“Civil Service Learning, the main training provider for the Home Office, has a broad range of diversity and inclusion learning opportunities which are available to all staff.

Horizon (the Home Office intranet) hosts an information portal with resources to develop staff’s religious literacy”.<sup>88</sup>

## *B. Continuing challenges*

- 4.17. The positive steps that government departments have taken to provide training in the area of religious literacy are welcomed by the APPG. However, responses from departments to the written questions indicate that the extent of focused religious literacy training varies considerably. Some departments, including the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DFID), have organised training courses which explicitly cover religious literacy. Others, including the Department for Education, consider that more generic equality and diversity training, supplemented by more focused training for particular officials, is sufficient, and other research indicates that this is also true of local authorities.<sup>89</sup>
- 4.18. While equality and diversity training which covers religion or belief is certainly beneficial and is to be welcomed, it may not necessarily result in improved religious literacy. This was highlighted in 2013 by the All Party Parliamentary Group Christians in Parliament, which found that, in relation to local authorities, “Where training was provided it was usually through wider equality and diversity frameworks, which many respondents acknowledged did not improve religious literacy”.<sup>90</sup>
- 4.19. **The APPG recommends that the government should ensure that training programmes covering both equality and diversity and religious literacy are provided for civil servants and others in the public sector.**
- 4.20. As indicated by the evidence above, the FCO provides both a basic religious literacy module at a foundational level and more advanced courses for civil servants who require more

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<sup>87</sup> Written response from Ben Gummer, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Care Quality to question by Fiona Bruce. House of Commons (2016f).

<sup>88</sup> Written response from James Brokenshire, Minister of State (Minister for Immigration) to question by Fiona Bruce. House of Commons (2016e).

<sup>89</sup> See, for example, All Party Parliamentary Group Christians in Parliament (2013), pp. 27-30; Jones (2008), p. 6.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p.8

specialist knowledge, such as those involved in human rights work overseas for example. The foundational course provides an introduction to the key tenets of four religions and to major religion or belief issues that may be relevant work to the FCO, such as jihad, apostasy, blasphemy and same-sex relationships.<sup>91</sup> This training is being accessed by civil servants from a number of different departments, and is therefore forming an important part of the training available to civil servants.

- 4.21. However, more needs to be done to encourage take-up of this training within the FCO. A member of the FCO's Human Rights and Democracy Department reported to the APPG that among some members of staff, there remains "a very strong mind-set that religion and politics don't mix and that they shouldn't mix and that religion doesn't necessarily have a role" in foreign policy. The civil servant noted that a lack of religious literacy among staff means that they "don't want to work on freedom of religion or belief because they are not quite sure about how important religion is". Freedom of religion or belief may be seen by some civil servants as a "nice to have", whereas the promotion of women's rights or LGBT rights abroad may be seen as imperative. The civil servant also noted that it is particularly challenging to ensure that senior staff in the FCO partake in religious literacy training, due to time pressures.
- 4.22. Religious literacy training needs to become entrenched in the training of civil servants in the FCO, including at senior level. **The APPG recommends that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office should ensure that the current religious literacy training it offers is maintained, and should take steps to ensure that all civil servants within the FCO receive sufficient, context-specific religious literacy training.**
- 4.23. Despite the training provided by the Civil Service and in other areas of the public sector, some respondents to our consultation perceived a lack of religious literacy among civil servants, and among public sector workers more widely, which is negatively affecting their ability to engage with faith groups and communities effectively. This may suggest that the available religious literacy training is not sufficient in its design or depth (particularly if it is served within equality and diversity training); or that the uptake of such courses is not high enough to produce a significant improvement in the religious literacy of civil servants and others in the public sector.
- 4.24. The APPG recognises that religious literacy training may yield significant short-term benefit – and this is to be commended – but training should not be seen a quick fix. The APPG urges the government to ensure that context-specific religious literacy training is implemented strategically and over the long term in all public sector occupations, in order to develop a workforce which is qualified to engage effectively with religion and religious communities now and also with the changing global religious landscape of the United Kingdom in the future.

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<sup>91</sup> According to a civil servant in the FCO. The religions covered in this course are Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Hinduism.

- 4.25. To that end, the APPG recommends that the government should commission an inquiry into the effectiveness of training currently offered by the Civil Service and other public services for the improvement of staff religious literacy.
- 4.26. Additionally, the government should also ensure that civil servants and individual government departments have access to the guidance and resources they need to engage effectively with issues relating to religion and religious groups or communities.

## 4.2. Religious literacy in the media

### 4.2.1. Continuing challenges

- 4.27. Media professionals and organisations have a huge influence over how the public interprets and constructs understandings of religions, religious communities, and the place of religion in the public sphere.
- 4.28. There was a widespread perception among respondents to the APPG's consultation that many media professionals lack sufficient religious literacy. As Dr Jenny Taylor of Lapido Media put it, "the media have a problem with religion, and until it is addressed, a democratic system in a globalised world will function with both hands tied behind its back". According to another respondent, "there is a lamentable quality of understanding about religion and belief, just as we need it most. The media is particularly and most notably at fault".
- 4.29. When journalists and editors do not have the capacity to understand complex events involving religion and belief, or the skills to communicate them effectively, big problems can arise. Reportage can be inaccurate, generalisations can be made and stereotypes can be reified. Religion may be seen as an irrelevant factor in the modern world and inappropriately ignored from analyses of current events. Alternatively, particular events or conflicts or actions of individuals may be interpreted as being primarily about religion, when there could be a number of other factors involved.<sup>92</sup> A recent study of the BBC highlighted the consequences of religiously illiterate media output: "discussing or depicting religions inaccurately today risks not only misleading the public (which is bad in itself) but provoking suspicion, tension and, at its most egregious outright hostilities with and between communities".<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> See Taylor (2014) and Wolffe and Moorhead (2015), pp. 40-43.

<sup>93</sup> Wakelin and Spencer (2015), p. 227.

*“The media in the UK is generally fairly ignorant about religious / theological ideas and this is reflected in poor quality TV religious reporting and presentation... The tendency of the media is to focus on the extreme and wacky aspects of religion.”*

Religious Studies Chief Examiner and Head of Philosophy at a school

- 4.30. In a 2015 survey of UK journalists, a large majority (79%) said that they view educating their audience as a very important part of their role.<sup>94</sup> This self-identified ‘educational’ influence of journalists makes it even more essential that religion is engaged with in an informed way. However, it is important to note that the APPG does not believe it is the responsibility of the media to remedy a lack of religious literacy in society – though of course, if done well, religion and belief news stories can contribute to the development of religious literacy among the audience. As Aaqil Ahmed, Head of Religion and Ethics at the BBC, commented to the inquiry, “I do think when it comes to religious literacy [in society] the media plays a very important role”.
- 4.31. The APPG is concerned that there is declining expertise among media professionals in relation to religion, even as the quantity of reportage about religion continues to increase.<sup>95</sup> In the 2015 survey, only 3 (0.4%) of journalists in the sample identified themselves as being specialists in religious affairs.<sup>96</sup> In regional and local newspapers journalists often have little or no capacity to develop such a specialism.
- 4.32. The APPG is also concerned that public service broadcasters are losing specialist religious affairs correspondents and editors and are reducing budgets for programming about religion and belief. Channel 4, for example, has not had a dedicated Commissioning Editor for Religion since 2009, and there is no religion editor at BBC News. Channel 4’s budget for religious programming halved from £40 million in 2008 to £20 million in 2013, and in the same period ITV’s budget for religious programming fell from £40 million to £2 million.<sup>97</sup> Across all public service broadcasters, total religion and ethics output in 2015 was 204 hours, down from 243 in 2010 and 415 in 2002.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Out of a base of 694 journalists. Thurman, Cornia and Kunert (2016), p. 33.

<sup>95</sup> For evidence that media coverage of religion has increased over the last decade (even as expertise has declined), see for example Knott, Poole and Taira (2013), p. 56. Much of this is due to an increased coverage of Islam and issues related to Muslims.

<sup>96</sup> Out of a base of 669 journalists. Thurman, Cornia and Kunert (2016), p. 26.

<sup>97</sup> The Sandford St Martin Trust (2015), p. 9.

<sup>98</sup> Ofcom (2016), p. 36.

- 4.33. The APPG regards the loss of specialist religious affairs correspondents in newspapers and television news channels, and the fall in religious broadcasting output, as major detriments to religious literacy in both the media profession and wider society, at a time when high quality religion and belief reportage is needed more than ever.
- 4.34. **To that end, the APPG recommends that every newsroom should retain at least one religion and belief specialist to facilitate and support staff when reporting on, or engaging with, religious traditions or topics related to religion.**
- 4.35. Some respondents to our inquiry also noted structural constraints upon journalists which impact upon the quality of journalism about religion and belief.<sup>99</sup> Journalists face tight deadlines, editorial constraints, the pressure to appeal to or entertain target audience and the need to communicate in simple clear way.<sup>100</sup> This means that inaccuracies or generalisations may emerge because of hastiness and need for simplicity, rather than always being the result of a lack of subject knowledge. For journalists, even more so than for other people in society, it is clear that religious literacy needs to involve the ability to communicate these complex issues well and with nuance to a general audience.

#### 4.2.2 Religiously literate language

- 4.36. A recurring theme in the evidence received by the APPG was the problematic nature of some of the language used around religion both by journalists and by government departments. This was also noted by the Commission for Religion and Belief in Public Life: “The use of language in news reporting can be unhelpful. Terms like fundamentalist, extremist, radical, conservative, liberal and traditionalist are often used sloppily, without an understanding of the context or much attempt at definition.”<sup>101</sup>
- 4.37. These words are used as a kind of shorthand, but they risk of stigmatising and alienating communities by conflating the ideas and ideologies of those who commit violent acts in the name of religion and those who simply wish to live out their beliefs in a culturally distinct way. Longitudinal academic research has demonstrated the tendency of various British newspapers to frame British Muslims within security terms, which has contributed to the perpetuation of stereotypes and the alienation of Muslim communities.<sup>102</sup> Individuals from other religion and belief groups have also reported inaccurate or unfair depictions of their community in the media.<sup>103</sup>
- 4.38. For journalists, and for civil servants drafting government policy documents which refer to religion and belief groups, being religiously literate means more than having an understanding

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<sup>99</sup> See also CORAB (2015), p. 40.

<sup>100</sup> In addition, major changes like digitalisation of journalism and the rise of social media as a provider of news stories are increasing the time pressures journalists are facing. See Spilsbury (2014), pp. 4-5.

<sup>101</sup> CORAB (2015), p. 45.

<sup>102</sup> See, for example, Moore, Mason and Lewis (2008); Knott, Poole and Taira (2013).

<sup>103</sup> See, for example, Weller et al (2013), pp. 109–119.

of Britain's religious traditions. It also means being able to communicate about religion and religious communities with accuracy, clarity and in a nuanced way. There is a need to ensure that training programmes for people in these roles include training in effective written and oral communication to a general audience about the complex nature of issues relating to religion.

### 4.2.3. Training opportunities

- 4.39. Respondents suggested that additional training for those working in the media is an important step towards improving religious literacy among media professionals. In 2012, a study of UK journalists found that 71% of the 1,067 respondents had undertaken some form of learning or training activity in previous 12 months. Most often this was for industry-based skills development, but some may have been for the development of subject expertise.<sup>104</sup> This is a positive sign, but the concerns we heard from respondents indicate that more media professionals need to take up opportunities for specialist training about religion and belief.
- 4.40. Assessing the effectiveness, and uptake, of current training structures on religion for media professionals is a more challenging task than it is for the Civil Service or for other occupations in the public sector. Partially this is due to the nature of the media. As an industry it is far more dynamic and in some ways less formalised than occupations in the public sector, and the contribution made by non-professionals is growing through the advent and proliferation of social media and an increase in community content on sites like BuzzFeed. Additionally, many professionals in the media work on a freelance basis which makes systematic training more challenging to undertake and monitor.
- 4.41. The APPG would welcome the expansion of training opportunities which improve media professionals' knowledge and understanding about specific religious traditions and also develop their skills for effective engagement with, and communication about, religion. News organisations need to be encouraged to give trainees and junior journalists time off work and funding for religion and belief training courses.
- 4.42. **The APPG recommends that the government should encourage news organisations to give trainees and junior journalists the opportunity to attend training courses on religion and religious issues away from work and to provide funding for these courses. A high priority should be placed on ensuring that journalists, broadcasters and those working in the media generally develop a high level of understanding of, and a strong ability to communicate effectively about, religious traditions and how they are lived out in Britain today.**

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<sup>104</sup> Spilsbury (2013), pp. 56-58.

### 4.3. Resourcing

- 4.43. The links between religion and issues such as security, nationhood, freedom and communities, which are often addressed in the public discourse, are complex and frequently changing. Although good general religious literacy provides a robust framework which equips individuals to engage with these issues, it is important to recognise that additional context-specific knowledge or vocabulary may also often be required.
- 4.44. It is impractical to suggest that training programmes should have the capacity to reflect precisely the rapidly changing nature of these issues. This would be particularly challenging in the Civil Service and other parts of the public sector, since a frequent change of course content would undermine the foundations of such training and could make it susceptible to political manipulation, such as making it reflect short-term rather than long-term considerations.
- 4.45. Respondents to our consultation recommended that engagement between civil servants, academics and faith leaders should increase to fill the gaps between the general knowledge and skills acquired through standard training programmes and the specific knowledge and vocabulary related to religion which some individuals, particularly those in the Civil Service, may require in their work. Academics are often very aware of new and emerging trends or discourses and can therefore provide a valuable resource for civil servants in all departments, helping to ensure that policy is created in a religiously literate way.
- 4.46. External engagement of this kind is common in many areas of policy creation. However, the written evidence submission by the Open University suggested that “research has confirmed that where religion is concerned there are significant gaps in communication between security policymakers, news media producers and citizens in multicultural societies”.<sup>105</sup> Much more needs to be done to encourage knowledge-sharing between academics and policymakers on issues about religion.
- 4.47. In oral evidence to the inquiry, Professor John Wolffe of the Open University advocated that such engagement must not be done on an ad-hoc basis, but should rather involve a formalised and longstanding framework of engagement between academics and policy makers: “I very much would like to endorse the point about academics and policymakers having better conversations about this. I think it does need to be in the kind of context... where you establish the conversation and communication more in the generality than the particulars of ‘what is your answer to this problem?’... That then produces a more sophisticated understanding in the nature of religion in the academic sense... [It is also] a process of academics trying to understand the policy constraints and needs”.

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<sup>105</sup> See Gillespie (2007).

- 4.48. **The APPG recommends that a formal network of policymakers and academics should be created to discuss, comment and advise on upcoming policy publications concerning religion, and to share best practice relating to language use and terminology about religion.**
- 4.49. Already some very good work is being done by civil society organisations in relation to religious literacy in the media. For example, Lapido Media aims to improve the level of religious literacy in media output and journalism. It has published short guides on areas relating to religion and belief to equip journalists with a better understanding of particular faith traditions or positions. It also provides media briefings and a platform for good practice in religiously literate journalism.
- 4.50. In addition, a forthcoming initiative to help resource the media to facilitate increased religious literacy was outlined to the APPG by Miriam Lorie from the Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme: “The idea of the Religion Media Centre is inspired by the very successful Science Media Centre, which was set up to inform journalists about scientific concepts which were being very badly reported on. So the Religion Media Centre will be a resource for journalists but also for television, drama and soaps and it will allow media people access to experts who will get religion right. The concept behind the religion media centre is that ‘religion matters; get it right’. It would be an authoritative, neutral, trusted and available resource”.
- 4.51. Other organisations are providing excellent religious literacy training for civil servants and other public sector workers. The Religious Literacy Partnership, for example, has delivered bespoke, context-specific training sessions and online learning for a variety of occupations, including for members of the Civil Service, law firms, journalists and health and social care professionals. It has also established a training programme for religious literacy training in the workplace, which includes issues of recruitment, diversity and inclusion, conflict resolution, and how to accommodate religion and belief practices.
- 4.52. The APPG welcomes these initiatives and others like them. They represent very strongly the importance of communities and civil society – not just government – to the improvement of religious literacy in society.

#### 4.4. Accountability

- 4.53. The APPG believes that there should be a greater level of accountability among government departments and public services to ensure that they work in ways which promote and exemplify religious literacy. A dual approach, of providing opportunities for workplace religious literacy training and of creating a structure of accountability measures to monitor the provision of such training, is the most strategic way to ensure a long-term commitment to religious literacy in the public sector.
- 4.54. **To that end, the APPG recommends that public services and government departments should publish audits of the availability of training in religious literacy and religious matters, including**

statistical data on the number of staff completing this training and their levels of seniority. Levels of religious literacy within government departments and other public services should be scrutinised by Parliament and by external academic experts in this field.

- 4.55. The renewal of the BBC's Charter offers an excellent opportunity to ensure that the BBC is required to promote religious literacy in society. The BBC is now overwhelmingly the largest provider of religious programming out of the public service broadcasters and it makes a unique contribution to the promotion of knowledge about the lived experiences of religious communities in Britain today. Nonetheless, like other broadcasters the hours of religion and ethics output by the BBC have fallen in the last few years,<sup>106</sup> and Ofcom has identified religious programming as an "immediate area of concern".<sup>107</sup>
- 4.56. It is very disappointing, therefore, that the government's White Paper on the Charter change, published in May 2016, makes little reference to the great importance of covering religion and does not include a specific reference to the promotion of religious literacy.<sup>108</sup>
- 4.57. The APPG supports the call of Parliamentarians, the Archbishop of Canterbury and other civil society organisations for the renewed BBC Charter to include a commitment to promote religious literacy.<sup>109</sup> In June 2016, Justin Welby said "The BBC Charter White Paper proposes a reshaping of the BBC's public purposes. Surely there must now be a place for religious literacy in there – to improve people's understanding of the modern world".<sup>110</sup> The APPG urges the government to demonstrate its commitment to the promotion of religious literacy in society by making this change to the Charter.
- 4.58. The APPG recommends that the government should include a commitment to promote religious literacy in the new BBC Charter.

## Recommendations: Training, Resourcing and Accountability in the Workplace

**Recommendation 11:** the Home Office should make religious literacy training a mandatory part of the Prevent training given in schools, universities, prisons and other institutions.

**Recommendation 12:** the government should ensure that training programmes covering both equality and diversity and religious literacy are provided for civil servants and others in the public sector.

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<sup>106</sup> BBC One and Two dedicated 151 hours to Religion and Ethics broadcasting in 2010; this declined to 141 hours in 2015. Channel 4's corresponding output declined from 39 to 13 hours. Ofcom (2016), p. 23.

<sup>107</sup> Ofcom (2015), p. 3.

<sup>108</sup> Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2016).

<sup>109</sup> See, for example, The Sandford St Martin Trust (2015).

<sup>110</sup> Archbishop of Canterbury (2016).

Recommendation 13: the Foreign and Commonwealth Office should ensure that the current religious literacy training it offers is maintained, and should take steps to ensure that all civil servants within the FCO receive sufficient, context-specific religious literacy training.

Recommendation 14: the government should commission an inquiry into the effectiveness of training currently offered by the Civil Service and other public services for the improvement of staff religious literacy.

Recommendation 15: the government should ensure that civil servants and individual government departments have access to the guidance and resources they need to engage effectively with issues relating to religion and religious groups or communities.

Recommendation 16: every newsroom should retain at least one religion and belief specialist to facilitate and support staff when reporting on, or engaging with, religious traditions or topics related to religion.

Recommendation 17: the government should encourage news organisations to give trainees and junior journalists the opportunity to attend training courses on religion and religious issues away from work and to provide funding for these courses. A high priority should be placed on ensuring that journalists, broadcasters and those working in the media generally develop a high level of understanding of, and a strong ability to communicate effectively about, religious traditions and how they are lived out in Britain today.

Recommendation 18: a formal network of policymakers and academics should be created to discuss, comment and advise on upcoming policy publications concerning religion, and to share best practice relating to language use and terminology about religion.

Recommendation 19: public services and government departments should publish audits of the availability of training in religious literacy and religious matters, including statistical data on the number of staff completing this training and their levels of seniority. Levels of religious literacy within government departments and other public services should be scrutinised by Parliament and by external academic experts in this field.

Recommendation 20: the government should include a commitment to promote religious literacy in the new BBC Charter.

## 5. Community Initiatives

- 5.1. The promotion of greater religious literacy in society cannot be achieved by government-led initiatives and training programmes alone. Some of the most effective ways of increasing public understanding of religion are community-led initiatives. These can include formal interfaith and multi-faith dialogue at a local level and social action projects by local religious communities. Such initiatives often bring together people from a mix of different religion and belief backgrounds; some initiatives are led by religious organisations and others by secular ones.
- 5.2. Additionally, every city, town and region has its own unique religious landscape. Some community-based organisations help to promote dialogue between different religion groups and wider society through projects which engage with the specific religious landscape of the local area. In this way, the development of religious literacy can become a natural part of the fabric of daily life.

*“Religious literacy includes increased exploration in RE of religious ideas as expressed in literature, theatre, art, and music”*

Teacher in a school RE department

- 5.3. A central theme identified by our respondents as being important for improving religious literacy was face-to-face encounters between people of different religions and beliefs. Canon Dr Andrew Smith, Director of Interfaith Relations for the Bishop of Birmingham, suggested that “The best way to become religiously literate is to meet people from different traditions and ask them to explain how and why they do what they do, or behave in the way they behave”. The Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme and Coexist House also expressed this sentiment: “We believe that these face-to-face encounters communicate a more powerful religious literacy message than any other kind”.
- 5.4. Respondents also suggested that there could be a correlation between improving religious literacy and stronger community relations and cohesion on the local level:
  - “Community cohesion is only possible if those within the community are religiously literate, and the more religiously literate the members are, the more the community can flourish in a climate of mutual respect.”
  - “Religious literacy cultivates critically-informed respect for religious and cultural difference. It helps confront prejudice and ungrounded assumptions about religious groups and has the capacity to move communities beyond a tolerance of others towards a re-examination of how people might live together. Religious literacy enables willingness and ability to live with religious and cultural tensions and with conflicting beliefs and practices.”

- 5.5. Religious literacy and community cohesion are not synonymous, however, and the aims of these community-based initiatives are often much broader than the improvement of relationships between communities.
- 5.6. It is also important to emphasise that many people who do not identify as religious also participate in local projects which aim to improve the public's religious literacy. Further opportunities for formal dialogue between religious and non-religious groups are needed to help people deepen their understanding of others with different beliefs.
- 5.7. Sometimes cultural or community projects can be negatively viewed as having less effect on an individual's learning than formal teaching. Partly this is because the impact of such projects can be less tangible and may be more difficult to measure or quantify. But this does not mean that these initiatives are any less valid. Projects of this type which are already underway provide very real practical ways for improving religious literacy.
- 5.8. This chapter discusses the ways in which the government can support, and better facilitate, the work of communities and civil society organisations in the promotion of religious literacy. Section 5.1 outlines some of the excellent initiatives in this area and 5.2 discusses the need to promote 'open days' to different places of worship. Section 5.3 calls for greater government support for these sorts of projects, while Section 5.4 emphasises the need for a dedicated government minister to champion these efforts.

## 5.1. Current and ongoing projects

- 5.9. The APPG was informed about a very broad range of community-based projects and civil society organisations working to promote religious literacy. We commend these initiatives for the crucial work they are doing in this area. Here we outline a selection of these projects:
  - [Coexist House](#)  
Miriam Lorie explained this forthcoming project:  
"Coexist House has been envisaged as a physical space, welcoming and open to all. It would comprise an exhibition centre, media hub, sacred space, and museum and above all, place for learning... religious literacy in a physical Coexist House would be offered to visitors through exhibitions, conferences, films, lectures, meetings, seminars, language classes, performance, drama, dance and song."
  - [Jewish Living Experience](#)  
The Board of Deputies of British Jews explained this project:  
"This is a travelling exhibition which gives young people, teachers and others the experience of what it means to be Jewish in Britain today. It goes to venues throughout the country. Most recently, the exhibition was shown in Cardiff, Carlisle and at the Suffolk County Council office in Ipswich. MPs and local councillors are also invited to visit the exhibition."

- **The Birmingham Soul Boats Project**  
The Westhill Trust explained this project:  
“This involved 2,000 people (of different faiths and none) coming together from across the city to create a huge artwork in Birmingham Cathedral for its Tercentenary celebrations. Each person created and shared a small cardboard boat to represent their lives and their journeys of faith. These boats were hung from the Cathedral’s ceiling for visitors to admire, appreciate and discuss how there is far more that binds us than divides us.”
- **Art Trails**  
Some respondents had experienced local art trails with religious themes exhibited around cities across the UK. Often such trails centre on the themes of Easter or Lent, such as the *Be Still* exhibition held in venues throughout Manchester over Lent and Easter 2016.
- **The Harvard Religious Literacy Project**  
Respondents highlighted to the inquiry an American project which provides a helpful model for how academics and civil society projects can work together to promote religious literacy in various contexts. The project is “dedicated to enhancing and promoting the public understanding of religion” and provides resources and training for teachers, journalists, public sector workers and other members of the public wishing to improve their religious literacy. It also sponsors arts initiatives which explore the religious dimensions of culture.<sup>111</sup>

5.10. As some of these projects show, learning about different religions and beliefs, and about how to appreciate our commonalities and differences, can be facilitated through the creative arts as much as through conventional educational pedagogies. These sorts of projects are important for combatting misconceptions members of the public may have about religions, and for making learning about religion and belief available and appealing to a wide audience.

## 5.2. Open days and intercultural dialogue

5.11. Many of the submissions to the inquiry suggested that visiting places of worship and engaging in dialogue with members of local religious communities can help to develop individuals’ religious literacy. These can be organised locally or coordinated at a regional or national level. In February 2016, for example, 92 mosques welcomed thousands of non-Muslim visitors as part of the Muslim Council of Britain’s ‘Visit my Mosque’ campaign.<sup>112</sup> The Inter Faith Network for the UK organises an annual Inter Faith Week where hundreds of religious communities and interfaith organisations hold events and discussions and engage in volunteering initiatives.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> See <http://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/about>.

<sup>112</sup> Muslim Council of Britain (2016), p. 2.

<sup>113</sup> See <http://www.interfaithweek.org/>.

- 5.12. Organised visits and open days encourage dialogue between people of different religious and non-religious backgrounds. They can provide an informal space to deepen participants' understanding of each other's perspectives, and they can lead to the forming of positive long-term relationships between different groups in the community.
- 5.13. As noted in Section 3.2, many such opportunities for interacting with local religious communities are utilised by schools to enable children to understand, in a tangible way, the ways religious beliefs and concepts are 'lived out' in the experiences of local people. Nick Spencer of Theos explained the impact of such visits: "Without a doubt my daughter's best RE lesson was when she visited a mosque. She still talks about it, she learnt more and she had more sympathy and more engagement in that one visit than in many other lessons – I think that's a great example of how it can be done well." The Council of Europe has called for the further development of such intercultural links between schools and their wider communities.<sup>114</sup>

*"There should be encouragement to hold and participate in inter faith activities such as inter faith sport and cultural events."*

The Inter Faith Network for the UK

- 5.14. The APPG therefore recommends that central and local governments should take steps to encourage public engagement in local and national dialogue and outreach initiatives between different religious and non-religious groups. They should also take steps to encourage the development of new local schemes which can build long-term relationships between people of different religions and beliefs in local communities.

### 5.3. Funding

- 5.15. Community-based initiatives which generate interfaith encounter and dialogue often face financial pressures which limit what they can achieve. Some major networks, such as the Inter Faith Network for the UK and Interfaith Scotland, receive some government funding. Smaller, local projects, however, may struggle to secure enough funding to sustain themselves in the long-term. Some grant-making bodies are disinclined to fund projects that relate to religion and belief, and some local authorities have withdrawn funding from local interfaith organisations due to budget cuts. These problems mean that new, and even well-established, projects are finding it difficult to maintain their work.<sup>115</sup> Where these projects are forced to end, there can be a detrimental impact on the development of long-term relationships

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<sup>114</sup> See Jackson (2014), pp. 87-97.

<sup>115</sup> CORAB (2015), pp. 55-56.

between local people of different religions and beliefs. This, in turn, can adversely affect the development of individuals' religious literacy.

- 5.16. One of the key ways, then, in which the government can promote religious literacy is to provide greater support for community-based initiatives working on this, through the reasonable provision and effective allocation of funding for such purposes, whether through funding devolution or a grant-based system.
- 5.17. In recent years the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has made some funding available for projects that bring together different communities to engage in social action work. From 2013 to 2015, for example, the Department funded the Together in Service programme, which built on the 2012 A Year of Service fund and provided small grants to 57 multi-faith social action projects.<sup>116</sup> In April 2016, the Department awarded an extra £1.5 million of funding to the Near Neighbours programme, which was established in 2011 and seeks to bring together diverse communities and different faiths by providing grants for social action activity. The programme manages applications and awards grants through the Church of England's infrastructure.<sup>117</sup>
- 5.18. These government funding initiatives are specifically intended to encourage integration and community cohesion through community work and social action. By bringing together different religious and non-religious groups, they help to break down barriers and can contribute to the development of participants' religious literacy.
- 5.19. The APPG welcomes the current funding made available by the Department for Communities and Local Government for social action and integration programmes. Nonetheless, the APPG believes that organisations and initiatives dedicated to facilitating learning and dialogue specifically about religion and belief issues also need to receive sustained government support, so they can continue to provide vital opportunities for the deepening of public understanding of religion and belief. The APPG considers that existing funding and grant structures could be utilised effectively to promote improved religious literacy.
- 5.20. **The APPG recommends that central government and local authority funding allocation criteria should be orientated towards the delivery of religious literacy through community initiatives. It also recommends that projects that have the specific aim of improving religious literacy, or those for which there is a reasonable expectation that an improvement in religious literacy will be a natural outcome.**

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<sup>116</sup> See <http://www.faihtaction.net/work/together-in-service/>.

<sup>117</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-15-million-funding-to-bring-communities-together>.

## 5.4. Government representation

- 5.21. The APPG believes strongly that local communities and civil society organisations should be at the heart of improving religious literacy in the local context. As we have seen, however, government, although not the primary provider, does have an important facilitating role. Respondents and oral witnesses called for increased levels government support and for ministerial representation for organisations working to promote religious literacy. Professor John Wolffe of the Open University commented that he would welcome “central and local government giving positive encouragement and publicity to such activities”. Both Miriam Lorie of Cambridge Inter-faith Programme, and Aaqil Ahmed, Head of Religion and Ethics at the BBC, echoed these sentiments and suggested that such support could be in the form of a government ‘champion’ for religious literacy.
- 5.22. In light of this, the APPG criticises the removal of the Minister for Faith cabinet position in 2015. Although the APPG recognises that the ministerial duties have been added to the brief of the Parliamentary Undersecretary at the Department for Communities and Local Government, the removal of a dedicated Minister for Faith indicates that less governmental time will be dedicated to this area. This sends negative signals about the extent of the government’s commitment to engaging effectively with faith communities and promoting community integration.
- 5.23. **The APPG strongly recommends that the responsibility for faith and integration should be reinstated into a single cabinet position brief.**
- 5.24. Previously, the Minister for Faith role has not included a responsibility for promoting religious literacy. The APPG recommends that the government should make religious literacy a priority by including a responsibility for improving religious literacy within the brief of a reinstated Minister for Faith.
- 5.25. **The APPG recommends that a responsibility for promoting and facilitating religious literacy should be included within this ministerial brief. The minister should champion projects which seek to improve religious literacy, and seek out opportunities through which government could encourage civil society to improve religious literacy in the school, the workplace or the local community.**

## Recommendations: Community Initiatives

**Recommendation 21:** central and local governments should take steps to encourage public engagement in local and national dialogue and outreach initiatives between different religious and non-religious groups. They should also take steps to encourage the development of new local schemes which can build long-term relationships between people of different religions and beliefs in local communities.

Recommendation 22: central government and local authority funding allocation criteria should be orientated towards the delivery of religious literacy through community initiatives. Projects that have the specific aim of improving religious literacy, or those for which there is a reasonable expectation that an improvement in religious literacy will be a natural outcome.

Recommendation 23: the responsibility for faith and integration should be reinstated into a single cabinet position brief.

Recommendation 24: a responsibility for promoting and facilitating religious literacy should be included within this ministerial brief. The minister should champion projects which seek to improve religious literacy, and seek out opportunities through which government could encourage civil society to improve religious literacy in the school, the workplace or the local community.

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 6.1. The religious landscape of the UK is becoming increasingly dynamic and diverse. In light of this, it is essential that everyone in our society has the ability to understand, and to discuss effectively, and in an informed manner, the different roles that religions and beliefs can play in the lives of individuals and in the public sphere in general.
- 6.2. Religious literacy is not the exclusive domain of religious people – it is needed by everyone. The promotion of greater religious literacy is not intended to make people more religious, or to encourage a more positive view of religion. Instead, the aim of developing better religious literacy is intended to equip communities and individuals to understand each other better, to engage with one another on a more informed basis and to promote cohesion within a more inclusive and holistic society.
- 6.3. This report is the culmination of a four-week public consultation on how religious literacy can be promoted effectively in the future. During the consultation, the APPG received sixty-nine submissions, held two public oral evidence sessions, and conducted a series of interviews with leaders in the field.
- 6.4. The key findings and recommendations of this inquiry aim to provide a way for individuals to gain a greater knowledge of religion as a concept, increase their understanding of specific religious traditions and be able to engage, and disagree well, in debates about religion. The APPG encourages the government to take the need for greater religious literacy in society seriously, and to make its promotion a long-term priority.

### Religious Education in schools

- 6.5. Much of the evidence and recommendations received by the APPG centred on the support for and resourcing of Religious Education in schools. Overwhelmingly, respondents argued that high quality school-based RE is critical to improving religious literacy in society more widely.
- 6.6. Many of the difficulties identified in the teaching of RE were long-term and structural. The situation is now urgent. Respondents argued that RE in many schools has been marginalised in terms of teaching time allocated to it. Some schools are not fulfilling their statutory requirement concerning RE provision and respondents reported that too often RE lessons are being taught by teachers who are not specialists in the subject and who do not have access to sufficient subject-specific continuing professional development. The APPG heard that other factors have also had an adverse impact on the quality of the subject, including the exclusion of RE from the English Baccalaureate and a decline in resources for SACREs. This report is not the first to note such findings.

- 6.7. The APPG agrees with our respondents that excellent school-based RE is essential for improving religious literacy. We therefore call on the government to ensure that improving the provision of RE is, and continues to be, a high priority for the Department of Education. In particular we suggest that the Department should ensure that schools fulfil their statutory requirement relating to RE, that specialist RE teacher recruitment is stimulated, and that both specialist and non-specialist teachers are given good training in RE and religious literacy more broadly in initial teacher training and through continuing professional development. The APPG also recommends that the Department should give renewed consideration to introducing RE as a Humanities subject in the English Baccalaureate.

## Training, resourcing and accountability in the workplace

- 6.8. The task of achieving better religious literacy is not to be restricted to RE. Improving training, resourcing and accountability measures for religious literacy in the workplace also has an important role to play. Respondents identified the Civil Service, other parts of the public sector and the media as being particular priority areas where religious literacy needs to be improved. Identifying these areas as priorities is not necessarily an indication that levels of religious literacy in these sectors are particularly low. Rather it is a recognition that these sectors have a major impact on national life. Ensuring that employees in these sectors have appropriate religious literacy training is therefore extremely important.
- 6.9. There is a need for the availability of religious literacy training in these areas to be increased, while resources to enable individuals to find out more about specific religious traditions in line with the demands of their job should be easily accessible. The APPG recommends that a structure of accountability measures should be established to ensure the good delivery and uptake of religious literacy training. Additionally the APPG calls for the retention of religious affairs specialists in newsrooms and for the establishment of a formal network of policymakers and academics to discuss, comment and advise on upcoming policy publications concerning religion.
- 6.10. It is clear from evidence received that improving training, resourcing and accountability measures for religious literacy is essential and the APPG calls on the government to make this a priority.

## Community initiatives

- 6.11. Some of the most effective ways of improving religious literacy are community-led initiatives. These complement school-based RE and formal workplace training. The examples of successful work in this area submitted to the APPG varied from small-scale local projects to national cultural initiatives. The APPG recommends that the government supports, and facilitates more effectively, the work of local communities and civil society organisations in the promotion of religious literacy. We suggest that projects which aim to improve participants' religious literacy should receive a favourable assessment in the allocation of local

authority funding. The APPG calls on the government to appoint a ministerial champion with responsibility for the promotion of religious literacy.

## Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: the Department for Education should reinforce the statutory requirement of all state-funded schools to provide RE for all pupils, including at Key Stage 4, and should monitor its effective delivery.

Recommendation 2: the Department for Education should record and publish data about the proportion of RE classes taught by full-time equivalent RE teachers and the proportion taught by non-specialists.

Recommendation 3: the Department for Education should place a high priority on stimulating recruitment of specialists to RE. It should be a vocal champion of the teaching of RE and should take steps to support independent initiatives working to increase recruitment.

Recommendation 4: the Department for Education should ensure that all primary ITT programmes contain a suitable proportion of time dedicated to RE. Steps should be taken to ensure that all RE trainees can benefit from high quality subject experts informed by up-to-date pedagogical research.

Recommendation 5: the Department for Education should encourage ITT providers to offer a core element of religious literacy training in all secondary teacher training programmes.

Recommendation 6: the Department for Education should take steps to ensure that all teachers of RE, especially non-specialists, have access to high quality subject-specific CPD opportunities.

Recommendation 7: the Department for Education should encourage the expansion of CPD opportunities for high quality religious literacy training, and should encourage all teachers to take part in them.

Recommendation 8: the Department for Education should give renewed consideration to including RE as a Humanities subject in the English Baccalaureate. It should conduct a new review of the impact that the exclusion of RE from the English Baccalaureate has had on the subject. It should also conduct a review of the likely impact on RE provision of the expansion of the English Baccalaureate to 90% of pupils, and set out how it will protect RE from any adverse effects of this.

Recommendation 9: the Department for Education should take steps to promote uptake of the GCSE Religious Studies short course.

Recommendation 10: all relevant parties should participate in the ongoing discussions about the legal framework for RE in schools and other major issues, including the Department for Education and faith communities.

Recommendation 11: the Home Office should make religious literacy training a mandatory part of the Prevent training given in schools, universities, prisons and other institutions.

Recommendation 12: the government should ensure that training programmes covering both equality and diversity and religious literacy are provided for civil servants and others in the public sector.

Recommendation 13: the Foreign and Commonwealth Office should ensure that the current religious literacy training it offers is maintained, and should take steps to ensure that all civil servants within the FCO receive sufficient, context-specific religious literacy training.

Recommendation 14: the government should commission an inquiry into the effectiveness of training currently offered by the Civil Service and other public services for the improvement of staff religious literacy.

Recommendation 15: the government should ensure that civil servants and individual government departments have access to the guidance and resources they need to engage effectively with issues relating to religion and religious groups or communities.

Recommendation 16: every newsroom should retain at least one religion and belief specialist to facilitate and support staff when reporting on, or engaging with, religious traditions or topics related to religion.

Recommendation 17: the government should encourage news organisations to give trainees and junior journalists the opportunity to attend training courses on religion and religious issues away from work and to provide funding for these courses. A high priority should be placed on ensuring that journalists, broadcasters and those working in the media generally develop a high level of understanding of, and a strong ability to communicate effectively about, religious traditions and how they are lived out in Britain today.

Recommendation 18: a formal network of policymakers and academics should be created to discuss, comment and advise on upcoming policy publications concerning religion, and to share best practice relating to language use and terminology about religion.

Recommendation 19: public services and government departments should publish audits of the availability of training in religious literacy and religious matters, including statistical data on the number of staff completing this training and their levels of seniority. Levels of religious literacy within government departments and other public services should be scrutinised by Parliament and by external academic experts in this field.

Recommendation 20: the government should include a commitment to promote religious literacy in the new BBC Charter.

Recommendation 21: central and local governments should take steps to encourage public engagement in local and national dialogue and outreach initiatives between different religious and non-religious groups. They should also take steps to encourage the development of new local schemes which can build long-term relationships between people of different religions and beliefs in local communities.

Recommendation 22: central government and local authority funding allocation criteria should be orientated towards the delivery of religious literacy through community initiatives. Projects

that have the specific aim of improving religious literacy, or those for which there is a reasonable expectation that an improvement in religious literacy will be a natural outcome.

Recommendation 23: the responsibility for faith and integration should be reinstated into a single cabinet position brief.

Recommendation 24: a responsibility for promoting and facilitating religious literacy should be included within this ministerial brief. The minister should champion projects which seek to improve religious literacy, and seek out opportunities through which government could encourage civil society to improve religious literacy in the school, the workplace or the local community.

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