

Response to the Announcement of a Public Consultation on Religious Education in the National Curriculum

To: Secretary of State for Education and other interested parties

From: Association of Jewish Religious Education Professionals

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Conditional support

- The Secretary of State for Education announced on 3 July that there will be a public consultation on the future content of the national curriculum – including Religious Education – in September.
- This is in reference to the Draft Programmes of Study and national standards for RE that were developed by the RE Task and Finish Group headed by Vanessa Ogden CBE.
- We appreciate that many of the concerns raised in our [position paper](#) have been taken seriously.
- We particularly welcome the inclusion of Judaism at both the primary and secondary levels, which will be a real step forward compared to common practice currently.
- The Draft Programmes of Study may potentially offer a good way forward for RE, but ***our support is conditional on certain concerns being addressed.***

Concern 1: Neglect of cultural literacy

We worry that the **Aims** of religious education in this document do not specifically include a reference to cultural literacy. The primary aim of RE, as currently framed, centres on **making intellectual sense of** religions and other traditions. This **over-intellectualises learning** about other religions and fails to capture understanding that is emotional, intuitive, and empathetic, rather than purely intellectual.

We recommend that *the primary aim of RE should be to **gain understanding of religious and non-religious traditions***. This would better guide teachers away from presenting religions primarily as philosophical or theological systems or “religious worldviews”.

Concern 2:

Need for detailed authentic guidance on Judaism

We do not consider these Draft Programmes of Study to be adequate on their own to assure good quality RE teaching, either in general or regarding Judaism. **More detailed guidance is needed** to assure good standards for RE teaching, and specifically regarding Judaism. It is crucial that in drawing up such guidance, RE specialists within the Jewish community will play a central role.

Concern 3: Avoid Politicisation of RE

We continue to worry about the **potential for any detailed curriculum to be politicised** and are wary of proposals to embed contentious political ideas into the curriculum. We are particularly [concerned](#) about proposals to embed critical race theory into “antiracist RE”, as this framework marginalises Jews and undermines work against antisemitism.

Concern 4: Avoid coercive consensus

We are concerned that the consultation is set to begin in September and will coincide with the Jewish festive season. We are aware of many instances in which locally agreed syllabi have been “agreed” in a rushed manner in which those with concerns felt pressured not to object, despite real concerns. **True consensus cannot be reached on a schedule.** We need assurances that the process of agreeing a curriculum will not be rushed, particularly in view of the fact that the Draft Programmes of Study have still not been made public, three months after we expected this to occur.

It is not necessary or reasonable for a national RE curriculum to meet the same deadlines as other subjects, particularly if this occurs at the cost of genuine consultation and genuine consensus that is not forced.