

All Party Parliamentary Group for RE

You may be aware from the email and press release sent round to all member organisations last week that the REC has been instrumental in setting up an APPG for Religious Education. Its chair will be Stephen Lloyd, MP for Eastbourne and Willingdon, who put up the Early Day Motion on RE in the English Baccalaureate last summer - a very well supported campaign which resulted in 115 signatures, thanks to some vigorous campaigning in particular by teachers of RE.

What is an All Party Parliamentary Group?

As its name suggests, it involves parliamentarians of all parties from both Commons and Lords who are willing to work in support of a particular issue or theme. An APPG has to include at least 20 MPs, of whom 10 must be from the governing party/parties (Con-Lib Dem coalition) and 10 from the Opposition (Labour and others). In general they have at least two meetings a year which allow them to meet people active in the field concerned and to be informed about developments and debates. Stephen Lloyd has said, 'I have the ambition to see it as one of the best supported groups at Westminster'. As well as bringing together all interested parties, the best all party groups also invite experts to educate and inform parliamentarians, hold enquiries and publish reports, and suggest policy initiatives and changes.

The proposed aim for the group is to provide a medium through which MPs, Peers and other organisations with an interest in religious education can discuss the current provision for religious education in schools, academies, colleges and universities; to act as a forum for all who share common concerns in promoting the highest possible standards of religious education; to press for continuous improvement in religious education; to promote a clear, positive image and public understanding of religious education; and to advocate that every young person experiences a personally inspiring and academically rigorous education in religious and non-religious worldviews.

How can an APPG for RE help us?

It will be to the advantage of all who care about RE to know there is a group of well informed and positively disposed MPs and peers available to be contacted about particular campaigns and issues. It will help to keep RE on the national government agenda and we hope that a better understanding of the purpose and value of RE by parliamentarians will result in a favourable impact on policy. It will provide opportunities from time to time for teachers, academics and where possible students to make presentations about RE to MPs. It will help to raise the profile of RE as a subject – indeed it has already done so in the short time since Stephen Lloyd announced the establishment of the group.

How can we help the APPG?

Anybody can contact their constituency MP and suggest that they might consider joining the group. Invitations have already gone out to those MPs who signed the Early Day Motion in summer 2011. If you can convince your MP of the value of RE in the education of all young people, whatever their belief background, they may be willing to consider joining if they have not done so already.

When the APPG is fully established, you can suggest topics for discussion or presentations. The secretariat for the APPG will be run by the RE Council, so any suggestions should be sent to the group at appg@religiouseducationcouncil.org

Members of SACRE might also find a new Government document called 'Creating the Conditions for Integration' interesting. This can be found online at www.communities.gov.uk