

# Religious education (RE) and collective worship in academies and free schools

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## Introduction

Under the terms of their funding agreement with the Secretary of State for Education, all academies have to provide RE for all their pupils, except for those whose parents exercise the right of withdrawal. The type of RE specified in the funding agreement depends on whether or not the academy has a religious designation, and for converter academies, on whether the predecessor school was a voluntary-controlled (VC), voluntary-aided (VA) or foundation school.

Free schools are academies in law and have the same requirement to provide RE. Within this page any reference to academies includes free schools.

## RE syllabuses for academies with a religious designation

Other than for academies where the predecessor school was a VC or foundation school, the model funding agreement specifies that an academy with a religious designation must provide RE in accordance with the tenets of the particular faith specified in the designation. They may in addition provide RE that is in line with a locally agreed syllabus and teach about other faiths if they choose.

## Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)

A SACRE is a permanent body which must be established by each local authority. Local authorities must appoint representatives to each of 4 committees, representing respectively:

- Group A: Christian denominations and such other religions and religious denominations as, in the authority's opinion, will appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area
- Group B: the Church of England
- Group C: teacher associations
- Group D: the LA

## The role of a SACRE in relation to academies

SACRE has a statutory remit to advise the local authority on religious education to be given in accordance with an agreed syllabus and to support the effective provision of collective worship. A SACRE also has within its powers to discuss any matter related to its functions as it sees fit and may therefore include the provision of RE in academies in its discussions or address such matters as may be referred to it. An academy or group of academies can be represented through co-option onto the local SACRE (or indeed any SACRE) if all parties are in agreement.

## Locally agreed RE syllabus

An agreed syllabus is a religious education syllabus that is designed by a local authority's Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC). The syllabus, like the provision for RE in academies, must reflect that the religious traditions in Great Britain are, in the main, Christian while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principle religions represented in Great Britain.

## RE in academies that are not designated with a religious character

The funding agreement for an academy without a religious designation states that it must arrange for RE to be given to all pupils in accordance with the requirements for agreed syllabuses that are set out in [section 375\(3\) of the Education Act 1996](#) and [paragraph 5 of schedule 19 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998](#). That is, it must reflect that 'the religious traditions in Great Britain are, in the main, Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain'. It also means that an academy without a religious designation must not provide an RE syllabus to pupils by means of any catechism or formulary which is distinctive of any particular religious denomination.

An academy may choose to adopt a locally agreed syllabus, but is not required to. It may adopt a different area's agreed syllabus or develop its own, as long as it meets the requirements for such a syllabus as above. Academies are accountable for the quality of their curricular provision including RE.

## Variations to the general position as described

Some non-denominational academies with a religious designation (for example those designated as 'Christian') have funding agreements specifying that they will use the locally agreed syllabus. Academies that opened before around 2004 have a general requirement to provide RE and collective worship. However the detailed requirements may differ. The position is also different in former foundation or voluntary-controlled faith schools that have converted to academies and this is explained below.

## Former voluntary-controlled and foundation schools with a religious designation that have converted to academies

Foundation or voluntary-controlled schools with a religious designation that convert to academies must arrange for RE in accordance with the requirements for agreed syllabuses (in the main Christian whilst taking account of the other principal religions. as set out above) unless any parents request that their children receive RE in accordance with the tenets of the school's faith. If any parents do request this, the academy must make arrangements for those children to receive such RE unless, because of special circumstances, it would be unreasonable to do so. The funding agreement sets this out (by applying the relevant provisions of the Education Act 1996 and the School Standards and Framework Act 1998).

# Academies and daily acts of collective worship

An academy's funding agreement should mirror the requirements for acts of collective worship in local authority maintained schools. This legislation is set out in the [School Standards and Framework Act 1998 Section 70](#).

Academies should follow paragraphs 50 to 88 of the Department for Education's [guidance on collective worship in schools](#). The main points of this are detailed below.

Each pupil must take part in a daily act of collective worship unless they have been withdrawn by their parents, or if in the sixth form they have decided to withdraw themselves. This applies to academies with and without a religious designation.

Academies with a religious designation must provide collective worship in accordance with the tenets and practices of the academy's designated faith. It can also choose to reflect the other principal religions and those found in the local community.

The above also applies to former voluntary-controlled or foundation schools with a religious designation that have converted to academies. They must provide collective worship in accordance with the tenets and practices of the academy's designated faith.

Academies without a religious designation must provide collective worship that is wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character. A school can reflect the religious backgrounds represented in its community, as long as the majority of provision is broadly Christian.

Academies without a religious designation can apply via the ESFA to the Secretary of State for exemption from providing broadly Christian collective worship for some or all of its pupils. In its application, it will be asked to give reasons for the application (such as consideration of the family background of pupils), details of consultation with governors and parents, and of proposals for future collective worship.

## The right to withdraw from religious education and/or collective worship

Parents have the right to withdraw their children from religious education and/or collective worship.

From age 16, pupils can choose for themselves to opt out of collective worship if they wish. However, they cannot opt out of receiving religious education without parental consent until they are 18.

# Inspections of RE and collective worship in academies with a religious designation

Religiously designated academies are required by their funding agreement to arrange for the inspection of any denominational RE and collective worship. When arranging an inspection, they must consult the relevant religious authority:

- CofE/Catholic: the appropriate diocesan authority
- Jewish (note this is non-denominational): the Jewish Studies Education Inspection Service
- Methodist: the Education Secretary of the Methodist Church
- Muslim: the Association of Muslim Schools
- Sikh: Network of Sikh Organisations
- Seventh Day Adventist: the Education Department of the British Union Conference of the Seventh Day Adventist

If the religious designation of the academy is not listed above the school should consult the Department for Education before arranging the inspection.

# Inspections of RE and collective worship in academies without a religious designation

Ofsted inspection of academies follow the same format as those of local-authority-maintained schools. See [Ofsted's school inspection handbook](#) for further information.

*Extracted from:*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/re-and-collective-worship-in-academies-and-free-schools/religious-education-re-and-collective-worship-in-academies-and-free-schools>