

GCSE Religious Studies in Wales

Evidence of a System Under Strain (2022–2025)

In 2025, **26%** (1 in 4) of schools in Wales didn't enter any students for GCSE Religious Studies.

In 2025, only **28%** of students in Wales were entered for a GCSE in Religious Studies.

In 2024, **20%** (1 in 5) of schools didn't allocate any curriculum time for Year 11 RVE/ RE.

There are significant differences in entry level for GCSE RS across Wales, demonstrating a 'postcode lottery' of provision.

In 2024, only **10** RVE teachers trained and qualified in Wales (compared to 35 for History).

Purpose

This briefing summarises national and local GCSE Religious Studies (RS) full course entry trends in Wales between 2022 and 2025. It highlights emerging structural risks to examined Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) provision and implications for learner entitlement under Curriculum for Wales.

1. National trend: decline has become withdrawal

Between 2022 and 2025, GCSE RS full course entry fell from approximately 30% to 28% of the national cohort. While this headline change appears modest, school-level data reveals a more serious systemic shift.

By 2025:

- Over 26% of secondary schools entered no pupils at all for the GCSE RS full course, the highest proportion in the period.
- Decline is now driven primarily by schools withdrawing completely from the qualification rather than by smaller entry cohorts across the system.

GCSE RS is therefore no longer experiencing gradual national decline; it is becoming increasingly absent from a growing minority of schools, leading to an uneven and fragmented pattern of access.

2. Structural dependence on schools with a religious character

National entry figures mask a widening divide by school type.

By 2025:

- Schools with a religious character continued to enter over 90% of pupils for GCSE RS, with little change since 2022.

- Schools without a religious character entered just over 22%, down from 26% in 2022.

As a result:

- Schools with a religious character now sustain national participation levels.
- Community schools increasingly account for complete withdrawal, not incremental decline.

If these trends continue unchanged, **GCSE RS full course provision in non-faith schools will become negligible within the next decade**, leaving examined RVE concentrated primarily in schools with a religious character. Current evidence suggests this forecast may be optimistic, as several factors are likely to accelerate decline.

3. Factors accelerating risk

Curriculum–qualification misalignment

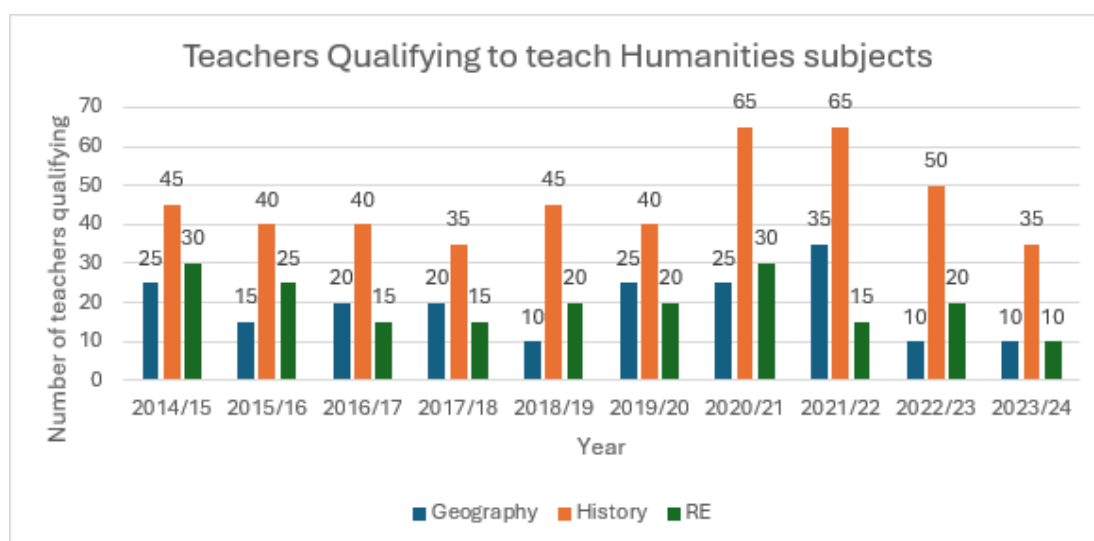
Teachers report a persistent mismatch between RVE under Curriculum for Wales and the revised GCSE RS specification. In response, some schools have:

- Withdrawn from GCSE RS, or
- Are planning to introduce GCSE Social Studies from September 2026 as a perceived better fit.

Early professional feedback suggests this reflects strategic exit rather than short-term uncertainty, with entry data submitted in 2027 likely to confirm the scale of this shift.

Workforce vulnerability

RVE teacher recruitment in Wales remains low, static and fragile. Specialist teachers are not being replaced at the point of exit, delivery increasingly relies on non-specialists, and the higher-education pipeline continues to weaken. This places RVE at particular risk, especially in community schools where commitment to examined provision is already declining.



4. Local authority divergence is now embedded

Local authority data for 2025 confirms that Wales no longer operates a single model of examined RVE.

- Higher entry (over 45%): Vale of Glamorgan, Cardiff, Blaenau Gwent
- Middle range (20–35%): Newport, Bridgend, Monmouthshire, Caerphilly, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Denbighshire, Neath Port Talbot, Swansea, Torfaen, Wrexham
- Lowest entry (below 15%): Conwy, Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Gwynedd, Isle of Anglesey, Merthyr Tydfil

In several lower-entry authorities, GCSE RS full course provision is now confined to a very small number of schools, often those with a religious character, raising concerns about regional inequity and learner entitlement.

5. Substitution has delayed, not resolved, system risk

Since 2022, many schools exiting GCSE RS have substituted towards non-GCSE qualifications, particularly *NCFE* Equality and Diversity Certificates and the *Agored Cymru* Worldviews qualification. By 2025, more pupils were entered for NCFE than GCSE RS in several authorities, temporarily maintaining accredited outcomes and masking pupil-level decline.

However:

- The GCSE RS Short Course ended in September 2025.
- Several alternative qualifications are due to be withdrawn from September 2027.

In areas where GCSE RS has already been abandoned, no guaranteed replacement pathway currently exists, creating a growing risk of a qualification gap rather than a planned transition.

Workforce data Wales indicates that the percentages of schools who are allocated less than 3% curriculum time to mandatory RVE/ RE is increasing rapidly.

Hours per week	2021	2024
Zero	10%	20%
Less than 1%	13%	20%
Less than 2%	30%	38%
Less than 3%	48%	53%

6. Implications for RVE in Wales

Evidence from 2022–2025 indicates that:

- Access to GCSE RS is increasingly uneven, school-type dependent and regionally variable.
- Examined RVE is now structurally reliant on schools with a religious character.
- Local authority variation reflects settled delivery patterns, not short-term fluctuation.
- The loss of qualification routes in 2025 and 2027 will expose a growing absence of accredited RS/ RVE, particularly in community schools.

7. Conclusion

Without timely policy intervention, Wales risks the effective loss of accredited RS/ RVE across large parts of the system, creating a significant and unintended entitlement gap under Curriculum for Wales.