NATRE
National Association of Teachers of Religious Education

Religious Education Delivers High Returns on Modest Investment: A Call to Rethink Bursary Allocations

John Howson published an interesting analysis of DfE recruitment data this week. I was struck by the implications of this table (below right):

Many subjects receive government bursaries and scholarships, designed to attract graduates into shortage areas. The **cost per new teacher in a state-funded school** can be assessed by combining the **number trained** and the **conversion rate**.

Example: Comparing Physics and RE

Both Physics and RE face serious issues in relation to recruitment and retention but far more incentives are offered to Physics graduates to join the teaching profession.

- **Physics**: Approx. £27,000 bursary/scholarship per trainee
    - 540 trainees → £14.6 million cost
    - 373 state school teachers = **£39,000 per state sector teacher**
- **Religious Education**: Approx. £10,000 bursary (varies by year)
    - 279 trainees → ~£2.8 million cost
    - 212 state school teachers = **£13,200 per state sector teacher**

In raw terms, RE offers 3× better value for money compared to Physics, based on bursary cost per state-funded school entrant.

Subject	Postgraduate			
	2023/24			
	Number of trainees			
	Total	Achieved QTS	Teaching in a State-Funded School (of those achieved QTS)	Teaching in a State-Funded School (of those achieved QTS)
Classics	69	67	33	49%
Physical Education	1,485	1,438	965	67%
Primary	9,378	8,712	6,271	72%
Business Studies	227	201	148	73%
Art & Design	401	382	288	75%
Computing	413	374	282	75%
Total	22,760	21,210	15,921	75%
Modern Foreign Languages	1,024	970	739	76%
Other	327	310	237	76%
Drama	248	227	175	77%
Physics	540	485	373	77%
Secondary	13,382	12,498	9,650	77%
Geography	822	771	601	78%
Chemistry	764	691	544	79%
Mathematics	1,900	1,762	1,385	79%
Biology	885	818	652	80%
Music	237	223	179	80%
Design & Technology	578	540	437	81%
English	2,210	2,062	1,681	81%
History	977	919	744	81%
Religious Education	279	258	212	82%

Implications and Questions

1. **Oversupply Risk**:
   PE and Classics have **high training numbers** but low state school conversion. This raises **public value-for-money concerns**, especially when students incur debt.

2. **Undersupply and Need**:
   Physics, Computing, and MFL receive high bursaries but deliver **relatively few new teachers**.
3. **RE's Strong Efficiency**:
   - RE receives **modest incentives**, but produces one of the **highest state-school teaching conversion rates**.
   - This suggests potential **underfunding of a high-retention subject**, contrary to strategic workforce planning.

Recommendations

- **RE deserves reconsideration** for higher bursary levels given its:
  - High conversion efficiency
  - Statutory curriculum presence
  - Ongoing specialist teacher shortfall in many areas
- **Better alignment needed** between:
  - Bursary and scholarship levels
  - Long-term workforce demand
  - Supply pipeline from ITT
- **Accountability for training providers and DfE**:
  Where bursary-funded courses result in low conversion, more scrutiny is needed on **admissions vs projected job availability**.

Summary

While Physics and other STEM subjects attract the highest government investment in bursaries and scholarships, their **high per capita costs** raise concerns about the efficient distribution of funds to support the provision of teachers across all shortage subjects. In contrast, **Religious Education offers strong value for money**, with an **82% conversion rate**, low dropout rate, and minimal per-teacher cost.

Yet, RE continues to **receive lower bursaries** no subject knowledge enhancement (SKE) grant, and less policy attention despite its strong efficiency. In a context of national teacher shortages and squeezed public finances, this imbalance deserves urgent review.

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