

An expert teacher in every classroom — unless it's RE?

Analysis of the School Workforce Census data (2011 - 2026)



Photo copyright National Association of Teachers of RE (2026)

Introduction:

The Government's Schools White Paper makes a bold promise: every child should benefit from expert teachers. It recognises that pupils miss out when too many lessons are taught by teachers without deep subject expertise. But there is an RE-shaped blind spot in its plans.

New analysis of the Government's own School Workforce Census data shows that **nearly six in ten qualified teachers teaching some RE do not hold a relevant post-A-level qualification in the subject**. At Key Stage 3, more than a third of RE teaching hours are delivered by teachers without one. RE specialists are still doing the heavy lifting — delivering 72% of teaching hours — but the subject depends on an unusually large wider workforce of teachers with no recorded RE specialism.

There are practical steps the Government could take. **Restoring the teacher-training bursary for RE, which helped strengthen recruitment during the two years in which it was available, would be an obvious start. Restoring funded Subject Knowledge Enhancement courses could also widen the pool of graduates able to train to teach RE, particularly those with strong backgrounds in related disciplines but who need additional subject preparation before beginning teacher training.**

The White Paper is right that subject expertise matters. But a policy for “expert teachers” cannot focus only on shortages that are already politically visible while overlooking a subject in which specialist capacity has been rationed for years. **If the Government is serious about putting an expert teacher in every classroom, it should restore the tools that can help RE build the specialist workforce it needs.**

Executive summary

Central finding: RE has the widest involvement of teachers without a relevant subject qualification among the humanities comparators. Yet RE specialists still deliver most RE teaching time. This indicates a staffing model in which many teachers from other subject backgrounds teach a small number of RE periods, while the specialist workforce carries the larger allocations and is prioritised towards examination classes.

In 2025/26, only 42.2% of qualified teachers involved in RE had a relevant post-A-level qualification, compared with 76.7% in History, 65.3% in Geography and 57.2% in Physics.

Those RE specialists nevertheless taught 72.0% of RE hours. The remaining 57.8% of teachers delivered 28.0% of hours.

The key-stage gradient is marked: specialists taught 65.9% of RE hours at KS3, 77.5% at KS4 and 85.8% at KS5.

At KS4, 22.5% of RE hours were taught without a relevant qualification, compared with 3.8% in History and 6.9% in Geography. Physics was higher at 35.9%.

The all-stage specialist share of RE hours was almost unchanged between 2010/11 and 2025/26 (71.8% to 72.0%), but it has fallen from a peak of 76.3% in 2017/18. The specialist share of teachers is now the lowest in the series at 42.2%.

The number of qualified teachers without a relevant RE qualification rose by 20.5% from 2010/11, while the hours they taught rose by only 7.0%. This is consistent with increasingly fragmented, small RE allocations.

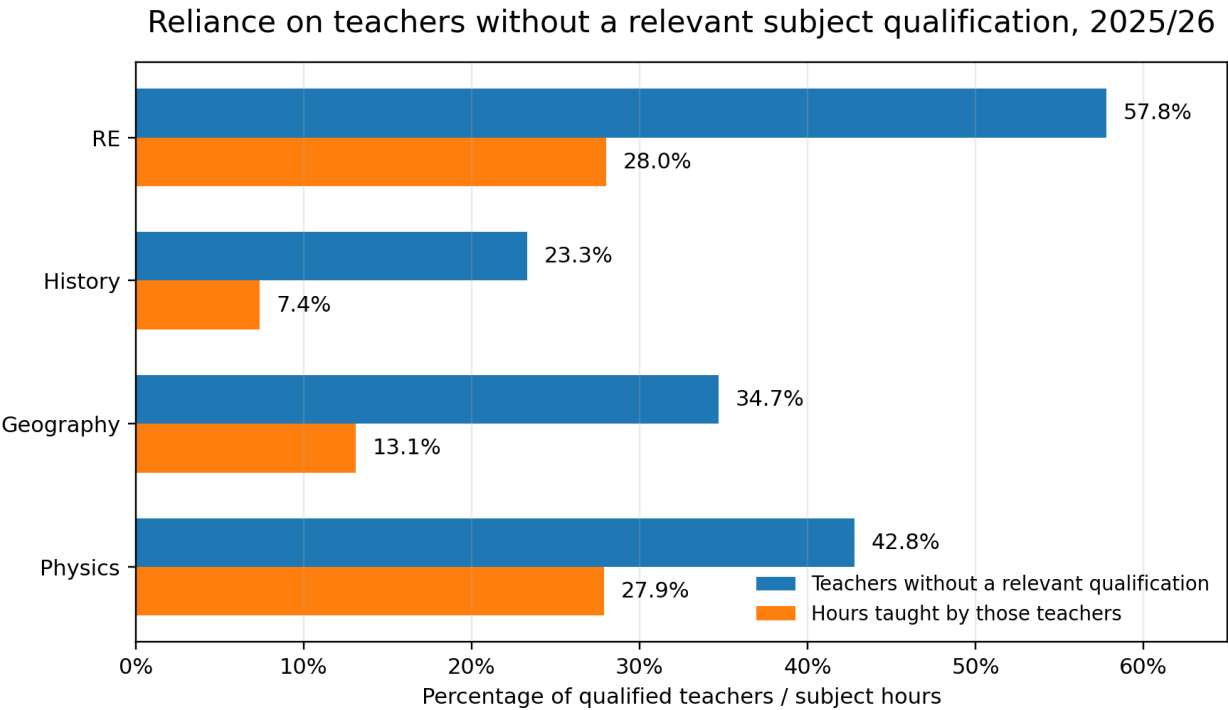


Figure 1. Percentage of qualified teachers and subject hours accounted for by teachers without a relevant post-A-level subject qualification, 2025/26.

1. What the data measures

Definition used in this report. A “specialist” is a qualified teacher recorded as holding any relevant post-A-level qualification mapped to the subject being taught. A “non-specialist” is shorthand for a qualified teacher recorded as having no relevant mapped post-A-level qualification for that subject.

Important limitation. The file does not identify the teacher’s actual other specialism. It therefore cannot show, for example, how many RE lessons are taught specifically by historians, geographers or English teachers. Nor does absence of a mapped qualification prove absence of expertise acquired through experience, professional development or lower-level study.

Measure	What it shows	Interpretation
Headcount percentage	Share of teachers teaching at least some of the subject who have a relevant qualification	Sensitive to teachers who teach only one or two periods; best measure of how widely other-subject teachers are used
Hours percentage	Share of the subject timetable taught by teachers with a relevant qualification	Best measure of pupils’ exposure to specialist-taught lessons
Hours per teacher	Subject hours divided by teacher headcount	Indicates whether specialists and non-specialists tend to carry large or small allocations

Coverage. The estimates cover state-funded secondary schools in England and are based on a large sample of schools supplying a typical-week timetable. Qualification breakdowns are for qualified teachers. Headcounts at different key stages overlap and should not be added together.

Physics caveat. Physics is recorded separately from General/Combined Science. The Physics comparator therefore does not represent every lesson containing physics content, especially at KS3.

2. The latest national position

RE stands out more strongly in the headcount measure than in the hours measure. This distinction is essential. A majority of the qualified teachers who teach some RE do not hold a relevant RE qualification, but specialists still deliver nearly three quarters of the timetable.

Subject	Specialist teachers	Specialist hours	Teachers without relevant qualification	Hours taught by them	Hours–headcount gap
RE	42.2%	72.0%	8,891	32,122	29.8 pp
History	76.7%	92.6%	4,069	14,225	15.9 pp
Geography	65.3%	86.9%	5,767	23,511	21.6 pp
Physics	57.2%	72.1%	2,265	10,131	14.9 pp

The 29.8 percentage-point gap for RE is the largest of the four subjects. This means specialists account for a much larger share of lessons than of the teachers involved. RE is therefore not simply taught by a small specialist group or simply “mostly taught by non-specialists”: both statements miss the underlying allocation pattern.

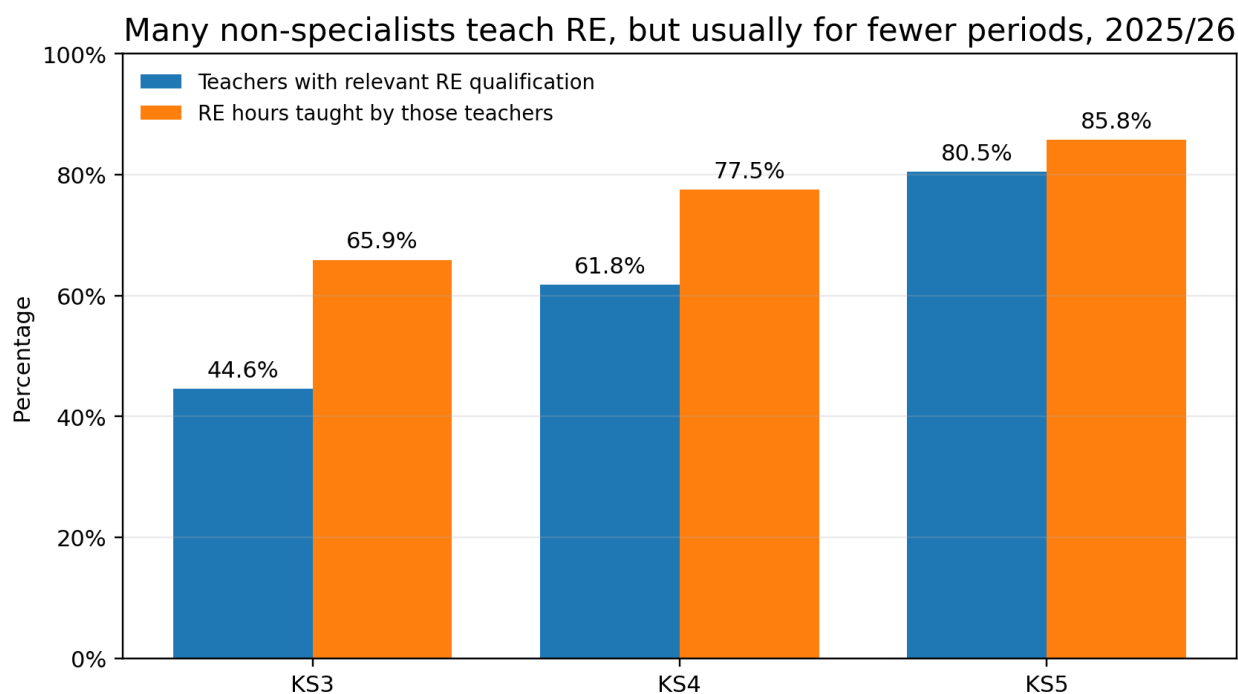


Figure 2. Specialist share of RE teacher headcount compared with specialist share of RE hours at each key stage, 2025/26.

3. Different allocations at different key stages

Schools allocate specialist capacity selectively. Across all four subjects, later key stages receive more specialist teaching, but the differences between RE and the other humanities are substantial.

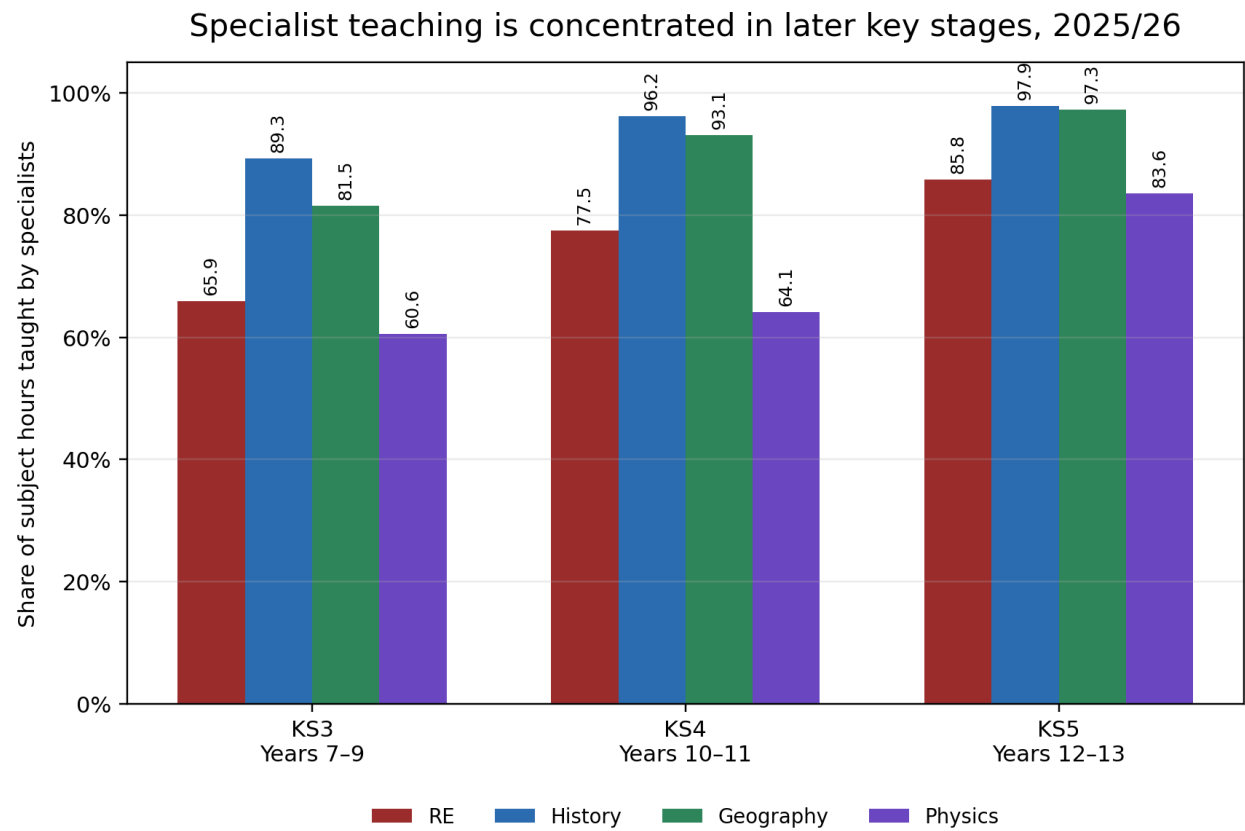


Figure 3. Percentage of subject hours taught by teachers with a relevant post-A-level qualification, by key stage, 2025/26.

Key stage	RE	History	Geography	Physics
KS3	34.1%	10.7%	18.5%	39.4%
KS4	22.5%	3.8%	6.9%	35.9%
KS5	14.2%	2.1%	2.7%	16.4%

KS3 is the pressure point for RE. More than one third of RE hours (34.1%) were delivered by teachers without a relevant qualification. The equivalent shares were 10.7% in History and 18.5% in Geography. At KS4 the RE figure fell to 22.5%, but remained several times the History and

Geography rates. At KS5 it fell to 14.2%, still above both humanities subjects and close to Physics (16.4%).

This pattern is consistent with examination classes receiving priority. It also means that pupils’ access to specialist RE is least secure at the stage when the foundations of later study are being built and when all pupils are ordinarily receiving the subject.

4. How the position has changed over time

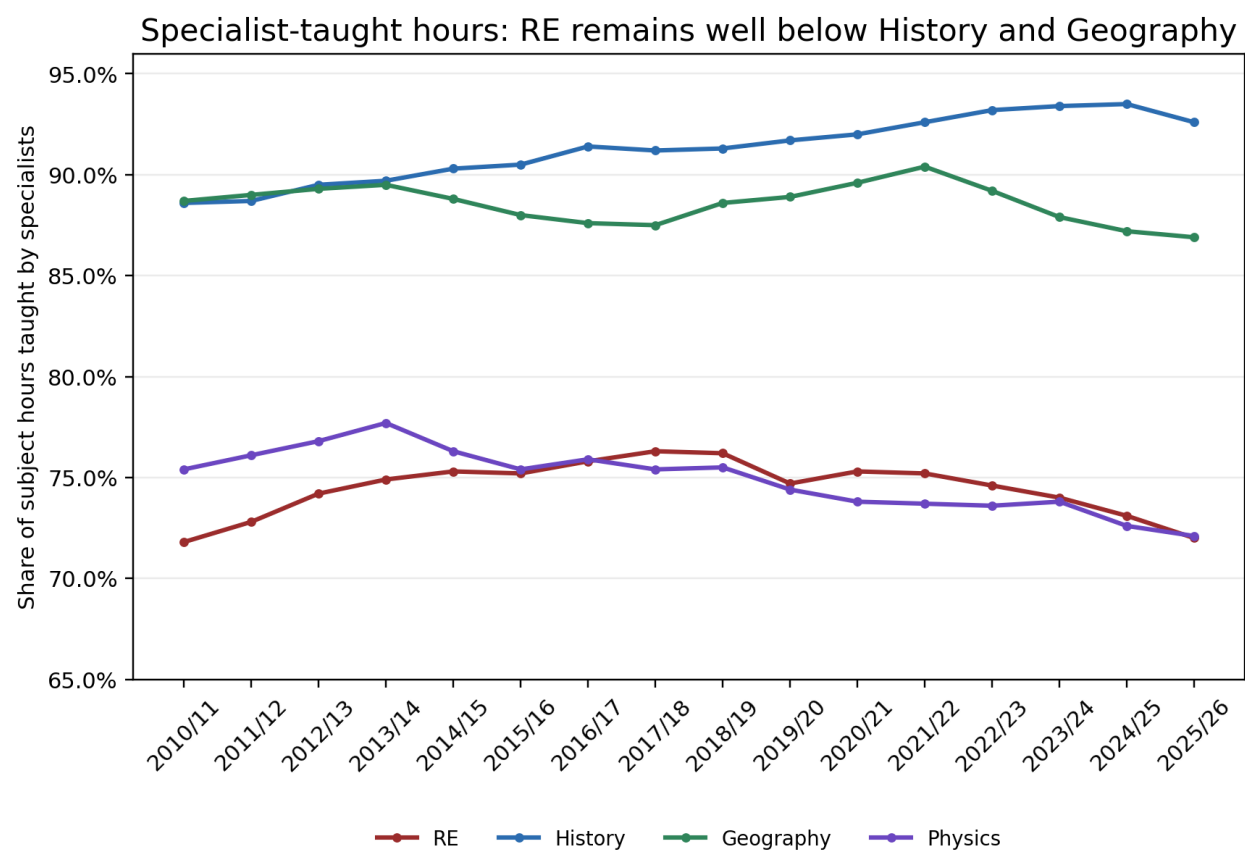


Figure 4. Share of subject hours taught by specialists, Years 7–13, 2010/11 to 2025/26.

RE’s long-term picture is stable only at the start-to-end comparison. The specialist share of RE hours rose from 71.8% in 2010/11 to 76.3% in 2017/18, then fell to 72.0% by 2025/26. The specialist share of RE teachers followed the same broad shape and reached 47.5% in 2017/18 before falling to 42.2%, the lowest point in the series.

Subject	Teachers 2010/11	Teachers 2025/26	Change	Hours 2010/11	Hours 2025/26	Change
RE	44.5%	42.2%	-2.3 pp	71.8%	72.0%	+0.2 pp
History	74.1%	76.7%	+2.6 pp	88.6%	92.6%	+4.0 pp

Subject	Teachers 2010/11	Teachers 2025/26	Change	Hours 2010/11	Hours 2025/26	Change
Geography	72.0%	65.3%	-6.7 pp	88.7%	86.9%	-1.8 pp
Physics	65.9%	57.2%	-8.7 pp	75.4%	72.1%	-3.3 pp

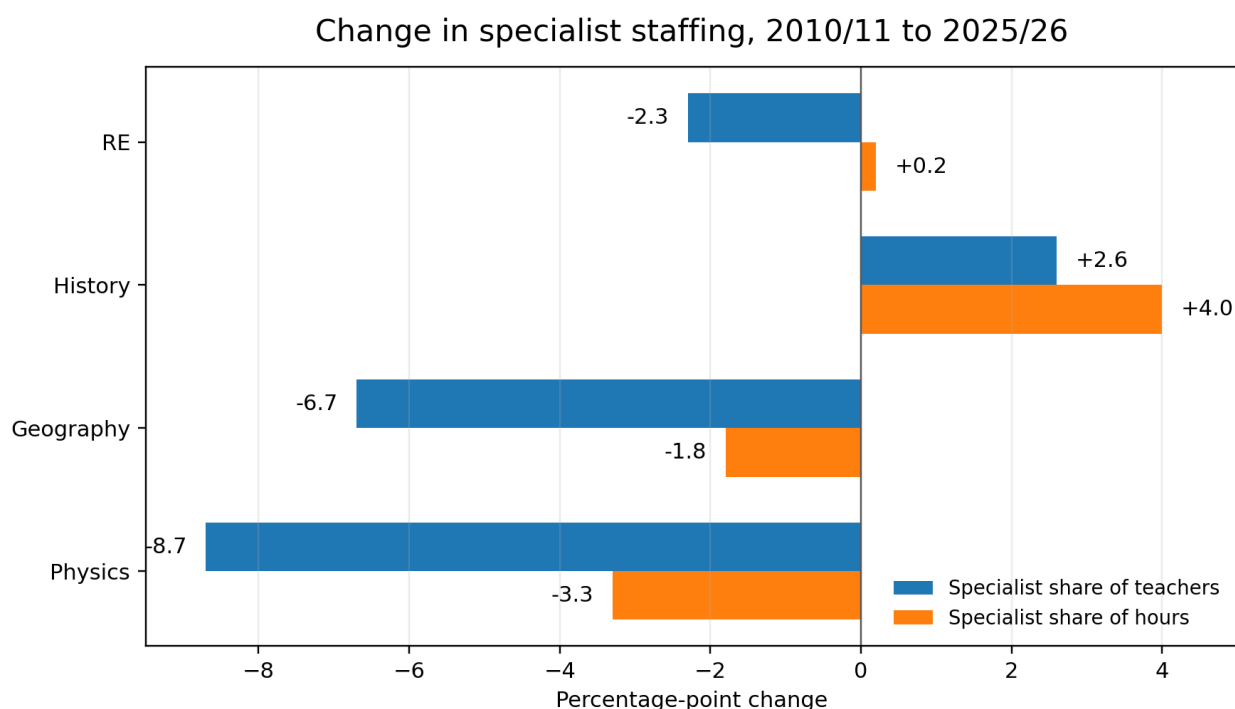


Figure 5. Percentage-point change in the specialist share of teacher headcount and teaching hours, 2010/11 to 2025/26.

The latest decline is not unique to RE. All four subjects recorded lower specialist shares in 2025/26 than in 2023/24. However, RE entered this period from a much lower base than History or Geography. Physics has seen the steepest long-term fall in specialist headcount, while History is the only comparator to show a clear net improvement over the full period.

5. The structure of RE staffing

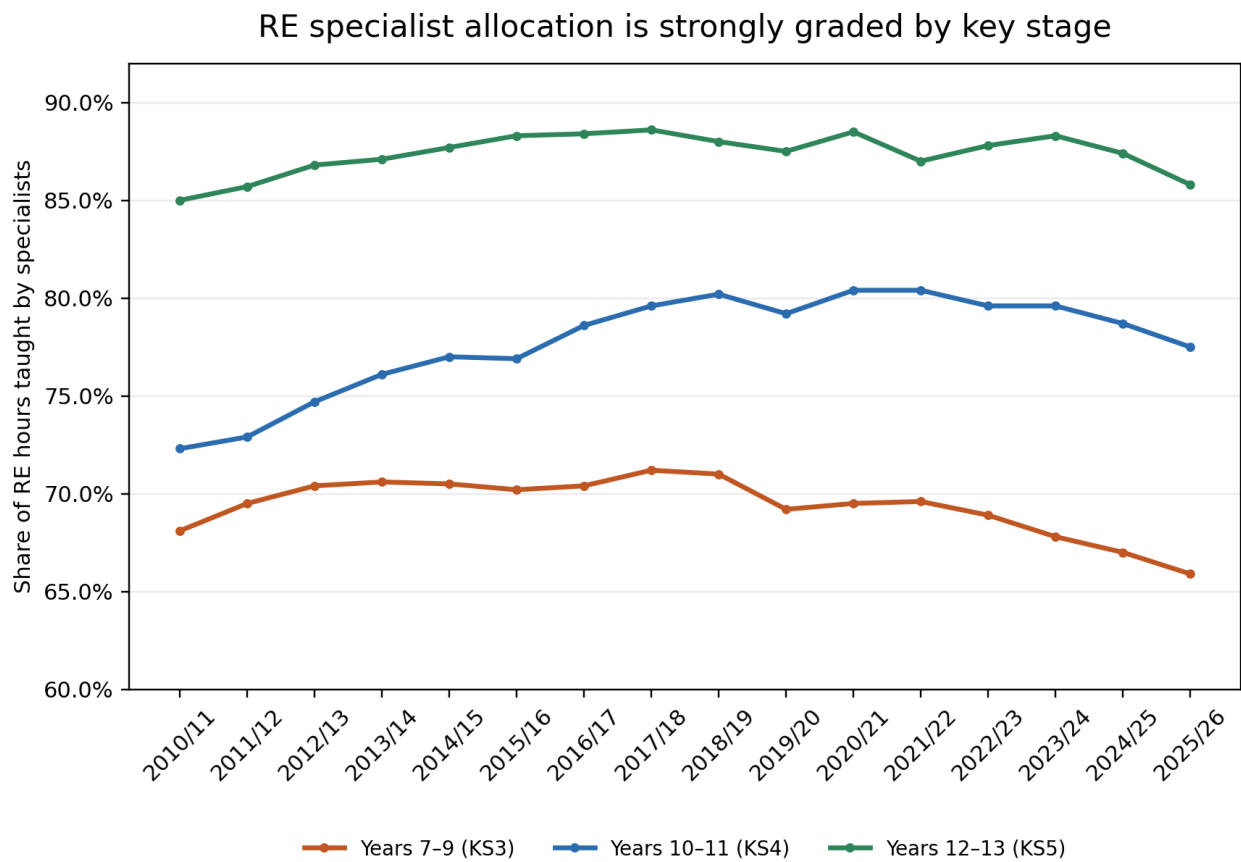


Figure 6. Share of RE hours taught by specialists at KS3, KS4 and KS5, 2010/11 to 2025/26.

The separation between key stages has widened. In 2010/11, the specialist share of RE hours was 68.1% at KS3, 72.3% at KS4 and 85.0% at KS5. By 2025/26 the figures were 65.9%, 77.5% and 85.8% respectively. KS4 improved over the full period, while KS3 deteriorated.

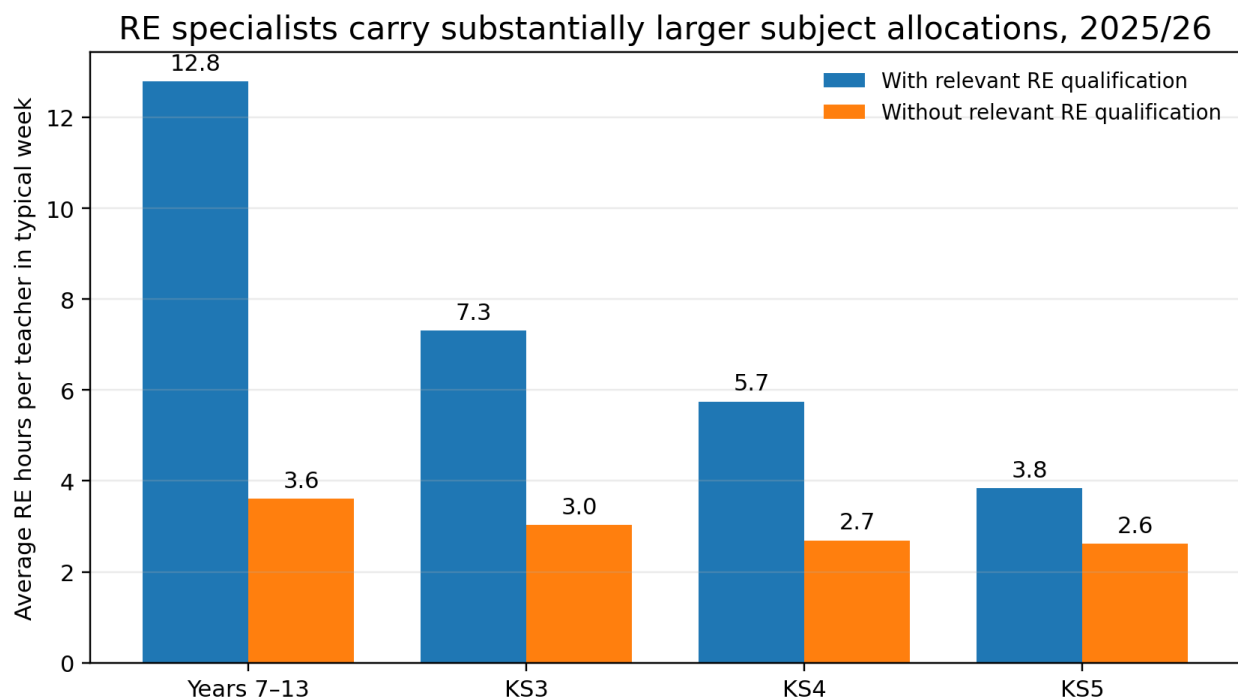


Figure 7. Average RE hours per teacher in a typical week, by qualification status and key stage, 2025/26.

The average allocation confirms the “many teachers, few periods” pattern. Across Years 7–13, an RE specialist taught an average of 12.8 RE hours in the typical week, compared with 3.6 hours for a teacher without a relevant RE qualification. At KS3 the comparison was 7.3 versus 3.0 hours; at KS4, 5.7 versus 2.7; and at KS5, 3.8 versus 2.6.

RE teacher group	Headcount 2010/11	Headcount 2025/26	Change	Hours 2010/11	Hours 2025/26	Change
Specialists	5,890	6,407	+8.8%	76,063	81,955	+7.7%
Without relevant RE qualification	7,381	8,891	+20.5%	30,029	32,122	+7.0%

The much faster growth in non-specialist headcount than in non-specialist hours is consistent with the timetable being spread among more teachers. It may create additional challenges for subject leadership, curriculum coherence, assessment, professional development and the maintenance of subject-specific knowledge, even where each individual allocation is small.

6. Conclusions and implications

RE is an outlier within the humanities. History and Geography use non-specialists too, especially at KS3, but RE's reliance is substantially greater at every key stage.

Headcount alone overstates non-specialist control of the timetable; hours alone understates the organisational challenge. Both measures are needed: specialists teach most RE hours, while a very large number of other-subject teachers remain involved.

Specialist capacity is rationed by key stage. The allocation pattern prioritises KS4 and KS5 and leaves KS3 with the weakest specialist coverage.

The post-2017 trend is adverse. RE's specialist share has fallen for both teachers and hours, and the 2025/26 headcount share is the lowest in the 16-year series.

The comparison with Physics is nuanced. RE and Physics have almost identical all-stage specialist shares of hours (72.0% and 72.1%), but RE involves a much larger proportion of non-specialist teachers. Physics coding also excludes General/Combined Science.

Key point: “Most RE teaching hours are delivered by specialists, but the subject depends on an unusually large wider workforce: nearly six in ten qualified teachers who teach some RE do not hold a relevant RE qualification, and specialist access is weakest at KS3.”

Appendix: method and cautions

The source is the School Workforce Census release. The data was submitted to DfE in November 2025 so the data covers the academic year that ended in July 2026.

The analysis uses national England rows, qualified teachers, and the categories “Any relevant post A level qualification” and “No relevant post A level qualification”.

Comparators are Religious Education, History, Geography and Physics. Broad categories such as “Other Humanities” were not used because they are not directly comparable subjects.

Figures are estimates based on a large sample of state-funded secondary schools providing a typical-week timetable.

Headcount percentages describe teachers involved, not full-time equivalent specialist posts. A teacher can appear in more than one subject and more than one key-stage category.

“Relevant qualification” depends on the DfE mapping of qualification subject codes to curriculum subjects. It is not a direct assessment of teaching quality or current competence.

Rounded percentages may not sum exactly because the source data are rounded.