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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Prospects and Problems for Religious Education in England, 1967-1970: curriculum reform in political context

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Prospects and Problems for Religious Education in England, 1967-1970: curriculum reform in political context

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Abstract

This article provides an historical case study of an abortive attempt to revise policy and legislation relating to Religious Education in English schools in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Drawing upon published sources, including parliamentary debates, as well as previously unutilised national archival sources from the Department of Education and Science, it comments upon events which have hitherto been omitted from the historiography of Religious Education, but which help to contextualise significant changes in Religious Education theory and practice at that time. Moreover, it demonstrates that the current parlous state of Religious Education in schools is in part the result of latent and longstanding issues and problems, rather than a consequence of present-day government policy alone. Therefore, in reviewing and developing Religious Education policies and practices, all stakeholders are urged to look more closely at both changes and continuities in the subject's past and the contexts in which they occurred.

Keywords

Religious Education, policy, legislation, curriculum, history

Introduction

In professional, political and public discourse, it has been widely asserted that Religious Education (RE)ⁱ in fully state-maintained schools in England is in crisis (Chater 2011). Some policy decisions have contributed to the subject's present predicament, including (i) the exclusion of RE from the National Curriculum Review; (ii) the deregulation and cuts to Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and the infrastructure of RE advisory services and Standing Advisory Councils on RE (SACRE); (iii) the absence of any statutory requirement to force Academies and Free Schools, which operate outside of the jurisdiction of LEAs, to include RE provision in their funding agreements with the Department of Education; and (iv) the ability of Academics and Free Schools to opt out of locally Agreed Syllabuses of RE. These factors have exacerbated already vociferous debates about the aims, methods and content of RE. For some, RE's identity and purpose have been rent asunder by the pull of too many competing objectives and imperatives (Teece 2011; Conroy *et al.* 2013). For others, the parameters of its distinctively religious content are insufficiently delineated, making permeable the subject's boundaries and heightening the likelihood of its disintegration or metamorphosis into something else, such as Citizenship or Personal, Social and Health Education (Watson 2004; Gearon 2014). There are concerns about the extent to which the subject misrepresents religions, particularly their internal diversity, or focuses on secular ethical beliefs and values rather than religious ones (Geaves 1998; Barnes 2007b; Revell 2012). There is evidence that teachers struggle to find a pedagogic balance between transmitting accounts of particular faiths and allowing pupils to freely develop their own worldviews (Conroy *et al.* 2013). At the same time, the extent to which RE is succeeding in its aim to promote community cohesion through interreligious understanding remains unclear, with critics claiming that the subject's 'sanitising' of religions fails to take religious difference seriously (Barnes 2007b). These findings are accompanied by arguments about the extent to which current approaches to multi-faith RE lead to the relativizing of truth claims and the secularisation of education and wider society (Felderhof 2012). Furthermore, there is a general consensus that, however its aims, methods and content are defined, RE remains under-valued and under-resourced, particularly in terms of the provision of suitably qualified teachers (APPG & REC 2013). The levels of teachers' subject knowledge and confidence are

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increasingly threatened by cuts to RE teacher training places and funding, and by the limited available number of RE-specific continuing professional development opportunities (APPG & REC 2013). As a result of these *problems*, RE is perceived to be at a watershed moment with its *prospective* position and purpose in the curriculum and qualifications structure of schools under review (REC 2013). Indeed, this convergence of challenges, controversies and criticisms has been described by one commentator as a ‘perfect storm’, but one which provides an opportunity for a debate about the nature and purpose of the subject (Chater 2011).

Towards an historical perspective

If RE is in a state of crisis, then is this a new phenomenon? Is the current parlous state of RE the result of present-day government policy alone? Have we not had before the sort of debate for which Chater calls and with only limited success? How can we ensure that this round of reflection reaches a fruitful conclusion? RE in England has long lacked a clearly recognized and shared core purpose, and its effectiveness has been hampered by its poor reputation, marginal position and derisory levels of funding (Freathy *et al.* 2015; see also Copley 2008, 57, 111-2, 175-6 and 181). The historiography of RE suggests that these are perennial problems and enduring issues. With this in mind, our collaborative research has been built upon the belief that an historical understanding of how contemporary RE theories, policies and practices originated, and how they developed until the present day, can illuminate longer-term, broader and philosophical issues, add depth and range to our understanding of the present, and temper a tendency to see contemporary challenges as entirely novel (Freathy & Parker 2010). With funding from The British Academy (Ref. SG-54151) and the Westhill Endowment Trust, we have focused particularly on the alleged transitions that took place in the nature and purpose of RE in the late 1960s and early 1970s (see Freathy & Parker 2010; 2012; 2013; Freathy *et al.* 2015; Parker & Freathy 2011a; 2011b; Parker *et al.* In preparation). In writing about this period, the existing historiography has been dependent upon published sources (e.g. academic, professional, church and local statutory documents), not least the Schools Council’s *Working Paper 36: Religious Education in Secondary Schools* (1971) (see Barnes 2002; 2007a; 2009; 2014; Barnes & Wright 2006; O’Grady 2005; 2009; Teece 2005), and neglected a vast array of relevant unpublished and non-documentary sources. By contrast, the present article draws upon a range of published sources, including parliamentary debates, as well as previously unutilised national archival sources from within the Department of Education and Science’s Schools Branch (ED 183.5) and Inspectorate Panels (ED 158.89). By doing so, we are able to provide an historical case study of an abortive attempt to revise policy and legislation relating to RE in English schools in the late 1960s and early 1970s which has hitherto been omitted from the existing historiography (see, e.g., Copley 2008). The utilization of novel primary sources enables us to scrutinize the existing historiography (not least its preoccupation with legislative turning points rather than the points that failed to turn) and to contextualise not only the alleged transition that took place in the nature and purpose of RE at the time, but also the alleged crisis in RE today. The first steps towards this goal are to outline the legal framework which then governed RE in England, to summarize some of RE’s key features, and to provide some insights into the immediate religious environment.

The legal framework

Three important acts of parliament provided the legal framework for RE in the 1960s and 1970s. First, the 1870 Elementary Education Act established locally managed Board Schools (ages 5-13) in England and Wales to supplement the existent voluntary (church) school sector. In church schools, denominational religious observances were a daily occurrence, providing catechetical training and promoting active participation in a worshipping community (Hull 1975, 11). Board Schools were permitted to provide religious instruction and/or worship, but were not obliged to do so (Hull 1975, 145). Non-denominational religious education in Board Schools was constrained by three legislative clauses: (i) a ‘conscience clause’ allowed parents to withdraw their children from any religious observance or instruction and from school on days set apart for religious observance by their denomination;ⁱⁱ (ii) to ease withdrawal, a ‘timetable clause’ limited the provision of any religious instruction or observance to the beginning or end of a school session;ⁱⁱⁱ and (iii) the ‘Cowper-Temple clause’ stated that ‘[n]o religious catechism or religious formulary which is distinctive of any particular denomination shall be taught in the school’.^{iv} Second, the 1902 Education Act replaced School Boards with LEAs which were empowered to establish secondary schools, and which took over responsibility for the running costs, but not building maintenance, of denominational schools through local rate-aid, appointing one-third of the school

managers in return.^v Third, the 1944 Education Act legislated for the continuance of a dual system of, firstly, voluntary schools (Aided, Special Agreement or Controlled), which were affiliated to, and partially funded and controlled by, the Christian churches (with a few exceptions, e.g. Jewish schools), and secondly, County schools, which were controlled and funded solely by LEAs. The 1944 Education Act stipulated that all pupils in England and Wales, except those withdrawn by their parents in accordance with the existing ‘conscience clause’, should receive a daily and, where practicable, single act of Collective Worship (CW) and weekly Religious Instruction (RI).^{vi} Denominational CW and RI were permitted in Voluntary Aided and Special Agreement schools, but the Act specified that in County and Voluntary Controlled schools, they should adhere to the ‘Cowper-Temple clause’, thereby not being distinctive of any particular denomination.^{vii} For County and Voluntary Controlled schools, the Act required LEAs either to produce their own RI Agreed Syllabus, adopt one from another LEA, or combine elements from several other examples.^{viii} By law, Agreed Syllabuses had to be defined by a ‘Conference’ consisting of four committees representing (i) religious denominations; (ii) the Church of England; (iii) teacher associations; and (iv) the LEA.^{ix} In order for an Agreed Syllabus to be accepted, all four committees had to agree unanimously.^x The 1944 Education Act did not specify which religion was to be taught, and although (non-denominational) Christianity was normally assumed, the usage of ‘religious’ recognised the presence of Jews among the population.^{xi} The ‘timetable clause’ was dropped, so that the subject could be taught by specialists at any time of the day, and LEAs were also permitted to establish SACRE ‘to advise the authority upon matters connected with the [RI] to be given in accordance with an agreed syllabus’.^{xii} According to the Act, whilst denominational RI could be requested by parents in Voluntary Controlled Schools,^{xiii} Voluntary Aided and Special Agreement schools were required to provide Agreed Syllabus RI where it was requested by parents and where no alternative provision was available.^{xiv} The Act also required facilities to be provided in County secondary, but not County primary, schools for the teaching of denominational RI where it had been requested by parents and where no alternative provision was available. In its rare application, this usually meant conferring a ‘right of entry’ upon a representative of the religious denomination in question.^{xv} Finally, the Act stated that no teachers should be (dis)advantaged as a result of their willingness, or lack of willingness, to attend CW or teach RI.^{xvi}

Key features

From the late 1940s, it was normally assumed that the main purpose of ‘confessional’ RI was ‘to impart the Christian faith in a Christian country’ (Priestley 2006, 1006), ‘to inspire Christian belief and adherence to the Christian Church’ (Bell 1985, 178), and to underpin ‘western democracy and civilisation in its struggle against fascism and communism’ (Bates 1996, 86). Non-denominational Agreed Syllabuses were largely Bible-based with some study of the history of Christianity (Parsons 1994, 166) and heavily influenced by the clergy and their pre-war theological training (Bell 1985, 183). If the study of other religions was undertaken it was usually at upper secondary school level and from a Christian point of view (Bates 1996, 87). Yet, from the early 1960s, calls from within RI discourses for significant changes to the subject’s nature and purpose included, but were not limited to: (i) increasingly negative assessments of the subject’s effectiveness; (ii) criticisms of its failure to take account of the cognitive development of children; (iii) the rise of thematic, problem-centred and life-orientated approaches; (iv) the increasing number of specialist teachers, especially in secondary schools, with a growing sense of shared professional identity nurtured by subject associations, and a yearning to claim independence from ecclesiastical control; and (v) growing dissatisfaction with the inflexible machinery by which Agreed Syllabuses were produced and revised (Bates 1996; Copley 2008; Jackson 1990; Parsons 1994; Priestley 2006). With regard to the latter, according to Hull (1984, 77-78), the system of checks and balances built into the process of defining Agreed Syllabuses assumed tensions between the denominations, LEA and teachers that seldom existed by the late 1960s. As a result, a number of LEAs began to interpret the legislation more liberally by replacing or supplementing existing Agreed Syllabuses with non-statutory resources written by educational professionals through teacher’s centres, working parties and projects (Hull 1975, 79). Such developments blurred the distinction between the statutory Agreed Syllabus Conference and the non-statutory SACRE, and demonstrated the more prominent role that teachers were taking in defining RI through processes of continuous curriculum development akin to those in other subjects (Hull 1984, 79). Moreover, even if the whole approach to RI still tended to seek to lead pupils towards a personal appreciation of Christian faith and morality, albeit in a more liberal and open-ended way than before (Parsons 1994, 171-2), the subject was

beginning to take account of ‘the increasing secularisation and pluralism of British society’ (Jackson 1990, 107). For example, the Inner London Education Authority’s Agreed Syllabus, *Learning for Life* (1968), was the product of a conference including ‘representatives of the Jewish and Muslim communities’, and discussed, amongst other things, the problems of teaching non-Christian religions and teaching secular beliefs from a Christian point of view (Hull 1984, 87-8). Such developments occurred against a backdrop which saw the establishment of the departments of Religious Studies (as opposed to Theology) in the universities of Lancaster and Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1967, and the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education in 1969.

Religious environment

The historical context in which the above changes and developments occurred has been characterised in terms of multiple challenges and opportunities, for example, (i) the prevalence of secularisation theories in relevant discourses (Chapman 2005); (ii) institutional attenuation in the churches and the collapse of organised Christianity in Britain (Brown 2001; 2010; Morris 2003); (iii) the displacement of Christianity as the sole referent of public and private morality, and the de-Christianisation and liberalisation of British law (Brown 2006; Grimley 2009; Morris 2003); (v) mass communication, immigration, ethnic diversification and other factors facilitating the emergence of a marketplace of diverse secular and religious beliefs and worldviews (McLeod 2007); (vi) the evolution of social and educational policy divorced from explicit religious commitment (Morris 2003); and (vii) Secularist and Humanist pressure, including well-publicised contributions to on-going public and political debates about the religious clauses of the 1944 Education Act (Freathy & Parker 2012; 2013). With regard to the latter, ‘Secularist and Humanist individuals and organisations, including the [National Secular Society] and [British Humanist Association], undertook concerted and organised campaigns with the intention of either abolishing RI (often, but not always, as distinct from the emerging concept of RE), establishing a secular alternative (such as moral education), or secularising the subject’s aims and broadening its content to include world religions and secular worldviews’ (Freathy & Parker 2013, 239). As we have argued elsewhere, ‘[e]ven if not persuasive enough to garner the level of support necessary to repeal the existing legislation, the arguments of Secularists and Humanists were sufficiently prominent and exacting to contribute, alongside other more pervasive secularising or de-Christianising contextual factors, to the emergence of a critical climate in which the long-term survival of religious education, and perhaps even Christianity itself, seemed under-threat and in need of defence’ (Freathy & Parker 2013, 242). Within this climate, according to Christopher Macy, much of the public discourse concerning RI/RE focused on the question of ‘What The People Want’ (Macy 1969, viii) and drew upon the findings of a whole series of surveys of public, professional, parental and pupil opinions, most notably May (1967) and May & Johnston (1967) (see Freathy & Parker 2013, 239). Overall, these suggested that Secularists and Humanists had underestimated the residual sympathy for Christian education to be found amongst the non-churchgoing population, and that, on the basis of the high non-completion rates, a large proportion of the population was apathetic rather than antipathetic with regard to religious education in schools (see Freathy & Parker 2013, 240).

The 1970 ‘Short Education Act’: Political dead-end or road to reform?

Having provided insights into the legal, educational and religious context of the time, we can begin constructing the case study of national policy-making and legislative reform relating to RE in English schools with which this article is primarily concerned. We start by focusing on parliamentary discourses in the period in order to contextualize the move to legislate for reform.

Parliamentary debates and questions

Between 1950 and 1966, sixteen questions were raised specifically about RI in the House of Commons and not once in the House of Lords. By contrast, there were fifteen questions or debates about RI in the House of Commons and three in the House of Lords in the brief period between 1967 and 1970. This suggests far increased political interest than in the previous twenty years, particularly from certain Members of Parliament. This was the period of the Labour Government under Prime Minister Harold Wilson (16th October 1964 - 19th June 1970). Its time in office is associated with youthful rebellion, sexual revolution, social and cultural upheaval and the passing of ‘permissive’ legislation, including the abolition of the death penalty (1965/69); the legalisation of abortions (1966) and private adult homosexual acts (1967); and the end of the Lord

Chamberlain's licensing of stage shows (1967). According to popular imagination, the Government was 'inspired by a new climate of liberalism and cultural freedom [to run] ahead of public opinion' in its legislative programme (Sandbrook 2006, 321-3). The extent of this liberalism would be challenged with regard to policy developments concerning RI and CW.

One focus of political interest was Lady Bridget Plowden's report for the Central Advisory Council for England (CACE) titled *Children and their Primary Schools* (1967). The authors were divided in their views on religious education. Although the main body of the report argued that religious education 'should influence the entire curriculum and set the tone of living and learning for the whole school community' (CACE 1967, 203), a note of reservation at the end argued that RE should not figure in the primary school curriculum at all, primarily because, when undertaken seriously, it would involve theology and 'theology is both too recondite and too controversial a subject to be suitable for inclusion in the curriculum of primary schools' (CACE 1967, 489). If RE remained obligatory, then it was argued that the moral element should 'predominate over the theological' and that moral examples should not be exclusively Christian (CACE 1967, 492). A second note of reservation maintained that an 'alternative programme of moral or ethical education' should exist for parents who wish to withdraw their children from RE (CACE 1967, 492). These points would each be addressed on a number of occasions in subsequent parliamentary debates and questions.

Questions in the House of Commons during 1967 focused upon whether Humanism would be taught as an alternative to RI in schools,^{xvii} and whether the British Humanist Association would be consulted on the Plowden Report's recommended changes to RI.^{xviii} The responses to both questions indicated that the present legal arrangements did not allow for such influence, nor did the Government intend to take steps to amend the existing regulations concerning RI and CW in County Schools.^{xix} In the House of Lords, a debate lasting almost eight hours on 'Religious Education in [County] Schools' was held on 15th November 1967, in response to a motion from Lord Aberdare.^{xx} Space does not permit a full recounting of Aberdare's wide-ranging speech, but some radical changes were proposed. He noted the 'poor results' obtained by RI, especially pupils' failure to understand the Bible and its implication for their lives. He asserted that the 'climate' around religion had changed since 1944, in particular that increasing Christian unity had facilitated the development of Agreed Syllabuses. The loss of a church-going habit, the increasing numbers of immigrant children, and modern, cross-curricular methods of teaching, each needed to be responded to, but Aberdare believed the focus for improvement should be in secondary schools (ages 11-16/18), where children were most ready for religious concepts (indicating the influence of Ronald Goldman's work). Perhaps most controversially, he argued that religion should not be a separate subject at primary school level (ages 5-11) and that Agreed Syllabuses should cover a broader range of content (including the students' lives and comparative religion) and be reduced in number to facilitate quality and coherence. He also recommended more in-service training for teachers, and leaving it to individual schools to decide whether CW should occur and/or how often. One of the most significant speakers in this debate was Lord Butler of Saffron Walden who had been President of the Board of Education when the 1944 Education Act was passed. Butler reminded parliament that the clauses on religious education were 'an essential part of the whole religious settlement', and asked – rather pointedly – that the 'sentiments and the emotion' of that time, 'in the flush of war ... in Church House with the bombs actually raining', should be remembered.

In further parliamentary debates, the following year, issues discussed included: (i) financial aid for voluntary schools, other than those already funded (Anglican, Roman Catholic and Jewish), and RI provision for children of the 'substantial immigrant communities';^{xxi} (ii) the recommendation of the Plowden Report that parents be told of their right to have their children excused from CW and RI;^{xxii} and (iii) the extent to which Agreed Syllabuses impeded the development of moral education.^{xxiii} In the context of these and the above parliamentary discussions, it is no surprise that, by the end of 1968, the Labour Government recognised the need to begin consultations regarding future policy for RE including the possibility of a new Education Bill (hence the Windsor Seminar detailed below).

Meanwhile, the parliamentary debates on religious education continued into 1969-1970. In a debate in the House of Commons on the 25th March 1969, Peter Jackson argued that the 1944 Education Act was improper in ‘an increasingly secularised society’.^{xxiv} Instead, he called for ‘a more open approach adopted whereby all religions, all the world philosophies, are taught’ and children are ‘given the intellectual equipment ... to evaluate [them]’. Christian values, which pupils are likely later to reject, he said, need to be supplanted with those of a ‘firmer foundation’. Even so, argued Alice Bacon in the final speech, the overwhelming majority of people, even if they do not attend church, desire the present arrangements to continue and the DES must take note of parental opinion.^{xxv} For her, the aim of RE in County Schools is to provide pupils ‘with sufficient information about Christianity as a way of life to make their own decisions whether to accept it’. However, she noted that ‘many schools with immigrant communities’ try to make opportunities for instruction in other faiths, whilst also seeking ‘to respect the integrity of the agnostic pupil’. In secondary schools, she said it is desirable to give ‘pupils of all persuasions an acquaintance with the tenets of other major religious faiths as well as of Christianity’.

Subsequent to this debate, in the House of Commons, there were a number of shorter debates and submitted questions. Peter Jackson asked for a list of the bodies being consulted as to their views on religious education,^{xxvi} and information on how many Colleges of Education required students to study a course on Divinity or RE,^{xxvii} and in how many a right ‘of conscientious withdrawal’ existed.^{xxviii} On 12th May 1969, a request was made for a ‘list of persons and organisations that have made representations’ to the DES for the abolition of RE in schools, in response to which it was noted that ‘2,268 letters in favour of the retention of the compulsory [RE] provisions in the Education Acts’ had been received and only 123 against.^{xxix} Similarly, on 12th June 1969, Eric Ogden asked what representations had been made to the DES about the future of RE.^{xxx} Lastly, on 22nd January 1970, Christopher Price asked by what procedure school pupils ‘who have attained the age of 18 years [can] withdraw from religious education’.^{xxxi}

In the House of Lords, on 20th November 1969, it was asked ‘whether any [LEAs] have taken steps to provide pupils with an appreciation of non-Christian faiths ... in order both to gratify the non-Christian parents and also to acquaint nominally Christian pupils with the nature and moral values of the religious faiths of their fellow pupils’.^{xxxii} Baroness Phillips responded on behalf of the Government stating that ‘schools with significant numbers of pupils of non-Christian faiths are increasingly providing opportunities for all pupils to learn about each of the faiths represented in the school [and that this] may be done both through curricular instruction and through joint or observed acts of worship’. Lord Somers reacted, expressing some frustration ‘that in a Christian country we should be paying so much attention to the education of non-Christian children’, whilst at the same time ‘giving no education in our schools to those of Christian faith’. This was refuted by Baroness Phillips who stated ‘that the example of the teachers is much more important than any precept which they could utter’ and that ‘[t]he first principle of a Christian is surely to be liberal and tolerant’.

In summary, these parliamentary debates and questions, generally reflected support for some reform of RE, and in directions that would accommodate societal changes, such as de-Christianisation (Freathy & Parker 2013) and increased ethnic and religious diversity (Parker & Freathy 2011a). The range of opinions broadly reflected the diversity of policy proposals and practical approaches being advocated by academics and other RE professionals at the time. Although there were dissonant voices at either end of the religious-secular spectrum, the voices of non-religious parliamentarians, specifically in the House of Commons, were particularly vociferous in challenging the status quo and seeking to expose church lobbying behind the scenes. The next section outlines the policy announcement made by the Secretary of State for Education and Science with regard to the reformation of religious education, and explores how the Government went about garnering responses from individuals and organisations to its proposals through a designated Seminar at Windsor and broader consultations.

The Windsor Seminar

On Friday 10th January 1969, the Secretary of State for Education and Science, Edward Short, delivered a speech at the opening of Alnwick Church of England Junior School in Northumberland, in relation to a major

Bill that the Government was intending to introduce in parliament. The Bill's aim would be to 'consolidate existing legislation, with minor amendments' and 'make some desirable changes in the law' (Short 1969, February 26). Perhaps to alleviate fears that the abolition or reformation of religious education would be another of the permissive reforms enacted by the Labour Government of the 1960s, the main message of Short's speech was that the religious settlement between Church and State on the financing and control of schools, and the compulsory provision of RE and CW in County Schools, would be preserved. In this regard, Short cited recent surveys of parents and teachers which indicated very high levels of support for the existing statutory requirements (Short 1969, January 10). Nevertheless, religious teaching should have 'something to say about the everyday problems and experiences of children'; it should lead them 'to an awareness of the spiritual planes of existence'; and it has to be more than merely moral education. He asserted:

'This is the point at which we part company with the humanist and the point at which an increasingly violent attack is being made on religious education in schools. It is the point at which all who care about the preservation of the Christian character of our community must man the barricades. If we do not do so, in my view, Britain will cease to be a Christian country within two generations. ... But [the Government and I] need the support of parents throughout Britain to withstand the pressure for abolition. We also need the continued dedicated work of the teachers to give reality to the far from easy concept of teaching religion.' (Short 1969, January 10).

Shortly afterwards, between 21st and 23rd March 1969, Edward Short, hosted a seminar at St George's House, Windsor, to discuss 'Problems and Prospects for Religious Education in the Seventies' with the aim of having 'an exchange of individual views by a group of people experienced in the practice and problems of religious education and able to comment from different standpoints' (DES 1969a, 1). The seminar was organised by Jack H. Earl in his new role as Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) for RE (Earl n.d.). Earl believed that RE 'was in a state of crisis' and that 'because of its legal status, [it] was more sensitive politically than most subjects' (Earl n.d., 2-3). On taking the job, his predecessor, had told him that his primary responsibility was to 'stop the minister talking nonsense about religious education!' (Earl n.d., 2) and it is clear from the archival evidence how closely he was involved in the policy-making process.

At the Windsor Seminar there were twenty-eight invited attendees included eight representatives from the churches (e.g. Ian Ramsey and Robert Stopford), eight from higher education institutions (e.g. Colin Alves and Harold Loukes), three from LEAs (e.g. Alan Loosemoore and E. W. H. Briault), two school inspectors (e.g. L. J. Burrows and Jack Earl), five headteachers (e.g. Edward Short's wife and J. M Cobban), the General Secretary of the Christian Education Movement (J. P. Lee-Woolf) and Edward Short himself. The programme was concentrated on 'the purpose of religious education, its relationship to society and to the individual, its present effectiveness, and desirable future developments' as well as, in the final session, a consideration of 'the statutory implications of what [had] been discussed' (DES 1969a, 1). The selective summary below is primarily taken from the subsequent DES report which sought to outline 'some areas of broad agreement' but without necessarily stating 'the view of any individual member of the Seminar' or expressing 'the views or policy of the Department' (1969b, 1). Additional material is drawn from a later and longer DES report, which similarly attempted to capture 'what was said' with the purpose of stimulating 'informed public debate' (1971, 1).

With regard to the present situation, it was commonly agreed that 'religious education no longer commands universal support' (DES 1969b, 1); 'political, ecclesiastical, social and theological factors ... press hard on the classroom situation' (DES 1971, 3); the majority of parents are 'in favour of the continuance of some form of religious education'; and 'authoritarian patterns of religious teaching have become steadily less appropriate and successful' with pupils (DES 1969b, 1). The delegates thought that, '[i]n the county school [the teacher] should not press the pupils to accept a faith; his aim is not to evangelize, but to aid the development of the pupils' personalities' (DES 1969b, 2). The aims for RE should be couched in 'educational terms', teaching not preaching, illuminating not converting, and focusing upon teaching about religion rather than teaching religion (DES 1971, 17), but in doing so, they should prioritize Christianity amongst other religions and secular philosophies, to reflect its 'significance in the life, history and literature of the country' (DES 1971, 56).

Thereby, pupils would be sensitively introduced to the religious dimension and interpretation of life, to the faiths and philosophies with which people have faced the human situation (DES 1971, 15 and 56).

In terms of CW, it was acknowledged it was a 'stumbling block' in secondary schools, often formal and dull, and that it is 'extremely difficult to provide a significant personal, or even communal, experience for the entire school' (DES 1969b, 3). Variability in form and relevance in substance were called for. In terms of staffing, it was recognised that 'new subject matter', 'new techniques' and 'pace of change' were presenting '[a] substantial training problem' (DES 1969b, 3) and the need for much in-service training...', for example, in the form of short courses, conferences or through LEA-appointed advisors (DES 1969b, 3). Moreover, it was accepted that 'the greatest obstacle to the spread of new methods and ideas is the continuing shortage of trained teachers' (DES 1971, 27). Finally, in terms of problems and future policy, it was noted that '[t]he compulsory element which many teachers and members of the public hold to be implicit in the statutory provisions of the 1944 Education Act is becoming increasingly unpopular' with the right of withdrawal for teachers and (at their parents' request) pupils being deemed a 'divisive expedient' which should 'continue to receive statutory protection', despite the establishment of new forms of co-operation between believers and others (DES 1969b, 4) and the possibility that 'religious education could be given so objectively, and in such an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect, that no-one could reasonably wish to withdraw' (DES 1971, 58).

'A further problem', as it was conceived, was 'the presence in schools in many areas of immigrant pupils of faiths other than Christian'. In response, it was recommended that schools should aim for 'benevolent integration' with religious education offering 'opportunities for mutual exchange of information, opinion and observance' (DES 1969b, 4). Nevertheless, it was not yet clear how this may best be accomplished. Some called for the creation of opportunities for observance and instruction in other faiths, so that all children 'have their own faith explained to them' (DES 1971, 37). Others called for the establishment of 'joint syllabuses in parts of the course which lead to the kind of exchange envisaged above with a resultant growth of mutual tolerance and understanding' (DES 1969b, 4).

The wide-ranging debates and resolutions of the Seminar are illustrative of the appetite for reform which had accrued amongst some of RE's stakeholders by the end of the 1960s. Edward Short, amongst others involved in the policy-making process, recognised the social significance – even cultural symbolism – of religious education, and took care to garner the opinions of a range of interested parties. What resulted did not constitute a setting aside of the entire settlement of the 1944 Education Act, but sought to permit rather than discourage flexibility of approach, and thereby, in principle, anticipated a root-and-branch overhaul to the nature, purpose and governance of religious education.

Wider consultation

The files of the Schools Branch of the DES (ED 183.5) contain evidence submitted by a number of organisations regarding the new Education Bill, including representatives of (i) students, teachers, headteachers, lecturers, principals and Vice-Chancellors; (ii) various types of private, voluntary and maintained educational institutions and organisations; (iii) the faith communities; (iv) local government and LEAs; and (v) businesses and trade unions. The following evidence was found in a letter from G. J. Spence (civil servant) to Earl on 30th May 1969.

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) submission urged avoiding 'the religious controversies of the past', and retaining the main provisions of the 1944 settlement with only a few changes: CW 'should no longer necessarily have to take place at the beginning of the day'; RI and CW should be voluntary for pupils beyond the compulsory age; and the requirement for Agreed Syllabuses should be removed. In this vein, the NUT stated 'a syllabus imposed upon a school from outside is contrary to the whole tradition of British education. ... teachers should be given the same freedom over the content of the [RE] syllabus as they are given over syllabus content in other parts of the curriculum'.

The Workers Education Association called for compulsory RI and CW to be rescinded and for legislation simply to require LEAs 'to provide in those schools a scheme of moral education'. The National Secular Society argued that the religious clauses of the 1944 Act should be removed, but rejected the idea of statutory moral education syllabuses too, arguing that the 'historical, artistic, literary or sociological aspects of the world's religions and philosophies ... should be treated as objectively and educationally as any other topic.' The National Union of Students argued that each school should have the powers to decide whether or not to provide RI and CW and to choose the form and syllabus to be used. Parents should be asked to sign an annual report to opt their children into RI and out of 'specified alternative activities or classes'; pupils beyond the compulsory leaving age should be given a grounding in comparative religion.

Amongst the churches, the Catholic Education Council (CEC), Church of England Board of Education and National Society (CofE BoE and NS) and Free Church Federal Council (FCFC) supported the retention of daily CW, but with greater flexibility regarding when it takes place (at any time of day) and who should participate (the whole school or smaller groups). The CEC, CofE BoE and NS and Catholic Teachers Federation of England and Wales (CTF) argued, contra existing legislation, that facilities should be provided in County primary, as well as County secondary, schools for the teaching of denominational RI where it had been requested by parents and where alternative provision was unavailable. Furthermore, the CEC wanted it to be possible to hold CW on and off the premises; asked for payment to be available for denominational instruction in County secondary schools in exceptional cases; and stated that where Sixth Form provision is made in a Further Education college, facilities for RE akin to those in secondary schools should be made. Lastly, the CofE BoE and NS argued that Agreed Syllabus Conferences should be compelled to meet periodically and that the Conference and the SACRE should be one and the same body with decisions being made by a two-thirds majority.

DES and HMI correspondence

Reflecting upon the above evidence in correspondence, Spence (1969, May) noted that there was 'little pressure for radical change in the 1944 provisions from the churches, though there is general lay pressure for some kind of relaxation'. Earl (1969, June 2) agreed that most of the bodies concerned are reasonably happy with the 1944 settlement as regards RE, apart for the provision for Agreed Syllabuses, and that 'the agitation for drastic change comes mainly from the small but highly organised Humanist Associations' who would, in many cases, 'agree to a settlement which included teaching about religion especially if some reference to moral education also appeared'. For him, the way forward had been shown by Dr E. W. H. Briault (Deputy Education Officer, Inner London Education Authority) in the final session of the Windsor Seminar. Briault proposed that RE should remain a compulsory element of the curriculum (Briault 1969), but he advocated dropping the 'negative and restrictive' requirement for Agreed Syllabuses. Instead, he argued that 'discussions between teachers and advisers' should be the norm and that 'maximum allowance' should be given 'to schools and to individual teachers to work out the provision of RE in their own way' (Briault 1969). So, following this lead, Earl recommended that the guidance offered to schools should 'be provided, not by a series of local Agreed Syllabuses, but by a centrally issued manual of guidance which would bear the same sort of relationship to the Act that the Highway Code does to the Road Transport Act' (Earl 1969, June 2). However, soon after, Earl's endorsement of James Hemming and Howard Marratt's *Humanism and Christianity: The Common Ground of Moral Education: A Consideration* (1969) (Earl 1969, June 4) was interpreted by Spence, in a letter to fellow civil servant, L. R. Fletcher, as evidence that Earl was 'thinking primarily along doctrinal lines whereas our interest is of course in what can be made to work and where opposition and support are likely to be found' (Spence 1969, June 16).

A meeting was held between DES civil servants and Earl to discuss the considerations which needed to be put to Ministers following receipt of the Minister of State's, Shirley Williams, views on the religious provisions of the new Bill. Williams had stated 'that while the religious provisions of the Education Act 1944 should remain, the Act of Worship should not be required to take place at the beginning of the school day; that teachers should be free to teach the syllabus within certain generally agreed guidelines, and should be encouraged to educate children in the main tenets of other creeds, with particular regard to the religious beliefs of any substantial

minority of the local community ...; that all parents should be informed in writing at the earliest practicable opportunity after their children start school of their right to withdraw their child from religious instruction; and that consideration be given to replacing the words “religious instruction” with the term “religious education” (Stone 1969, June 18). In discussing the latter point, amongst many, G. E. Dudman stressed the difference between religious ‘instruction’ (broad indoctrination) and ‘education’ (study of religious knowledge) and Fletcher recommended ‘a middle position’ in which ‘there might be a requirement in law for [RE rather than RI] to be taught in all schools, with a conscience clause’ (Stone 1969, June 18). Two days later, Spence called into question the likelihood of reaching detailed agreements on a national level, and suggested that ‘[m]easures for varying settlements in response to local conditions, whether in relation to the balance of denominations or to special problems such as high immigrant population, will almost always be required’ (Spence 1969, June 19).

On 21st July 1969, Spence sent Fletcher a brief for the Minister titled *Education Bill: Religious Provisions*, taking account of the departmental discussions above. The preamble recognised that the religious settlement of the 1944 Education Act had mainly stood the test of time, but that moderate opinion in the churches and in schools ‘has recognised that there are elements of rigidity in the present system which work against the aims and objectives for which it was established [including] the very specific provisions for the acts of collective worship and the problem of establishing and adhering to an agreed syllabus of religious instruction’ (Spence 1969, July 21). The provisions of the new Education Bill should seek to preserve ‘the main outlines of the settlement ... while at the same time securing a freer interpretation in practice which would meet the wishes not only of moderate opinion in the churches but also receive some support from humanist opinion outside’ (Spence 1969, July 21). It was also noted that ‘[t]he subject of religious education is likely to prove more contentious in the end than in the beginning; those who have so far addressed themselves to a solution largely represent liberal and forward-looking opinion, but when proposals are published they are likely to attract the scrutiny of those who believe that any concession to a more liberal approach is reprehensible’ (Spence 1969, July 21). For this reason, the proposals promoted workable compromises which would mollify the most liberal and progressive and conservative and traditionalist demands.

The next section of the briefing paper proposed ‘a possible series of negotiable compromises which might form the basis of discussions in advance of the [Green] Paper’ (Spence 1969, July 21). Table 1 below, set out ‘a middle course between the extremes’ which had been, or were likely to be, argued in regard to certain negotiable issues. The polarisation of ‘Advanced’ and ‘Traditional’ views and the pragmatic compromise at the heart of this are particularly notable.

Table 1 (Spence 1969, July 21)

Topic	‘Advanced’ Views	Possible Workable Middle Courses	‘Traditionalist’ Views
Nature of Religious Instruction or Education	Best treated like any other subject and not legislated for; if provided for at all by statute should be (a) capable of being mixed with other ‘humanities’, or (b) replaced by ‘moral’ or ‘spiritual’ teaching, or (c) study of comparative religion.	Teaching about religion and its relations with other subjects, but without distinctive denominational presentation; might perhaps be described as ‘religious and moral education’.	Taught as doctrine (‘instruction’) the truth of which is revealed. Provisions to be extended to [Further Education].
Right of Withdrawal	No need for right of withdrawal if religious education is truly humanist. If not, all parents must be informed of right of withdrawal.	Right of withdrawal either for agnostic or denominational reasons desirable. Parents might be informed of their right by the education authority but this would need to be negotiated with the authorities as expense and facilities would be involved. Students above compulsory age might have additional rights of withdrawal from acts of worship.	Right of withdrawal to depend upon parental initiative and insistence.
Right of Access for Denominational Teaching	Likely to be resisted	Right of access to all schools might be negotiated in return for a more liberal general approach to the general questions of nature of teaching and syllabus.	Should be extended to primary schools and in all schools where parents desire it; should not rest solely on the difficulty experienced by authorities in arranging this.
Agreed Syllabus	All provisions for statutory syllabus to be abolished.	General duty of maintaining authority to ensure teaching about religion in schools, possibly coupled with provision for each authority to consult local interests and to receive and give general advice on what is taught. Undesirable to attempt a national ‘highway code’ in view of great local and regional differences. Wales likely to insist on a separate settlement in any case.	1944 provisions to be retained.
Acts of Worship	Abolish specific provision	General duty of maintaining authority to arrange for acts of collective worship, but greater flexibility (to be negotiated) as to intervals, timing, places, and groupings.	Retain 1944 provisions

By way of commentary on the above, it was stated that ‘[c]learly the nature of the settlement will have to be broad brush if it is to command sufficient agreement; and is likely to reflect much more the attitudes of interested parties than a logical analysis of the subject. The history of the subject suggests that there are many sleeping dogs and sleeping consciences ... which should be awakened with circumspection’ (Spence 1969, July 21). Nevertheless, on anticipation that general outlines could be agreed, the briefing paper went on to consider some more detailed issues, including ‘[t]he special problem of immigrant areas’ which had not been faced in the 1944 Education Act. Lastly, an analysis of the ‘Implications of Some Possible Positions of Religious Teaching’

was included (Table 2 below) which provides a useful insight into the perceived views of various secular and religious bodies.

Table 2 (Spence 1969, July 21): Implications of Some Possible Positions of Religious Teaching [*Italics = “expressed views”*]

Position					
Consideration	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Nature of requirement placed on school	No statutory requirement for religious teaching <i>SECULARISTS</i>	‘Moral Education’ statutory (non-religious) <i>HUMANISTS</i>	‘Religious Education’ statutory (defined as comparative studies) <i>BRITISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES</i>	‘Religious Education’ statutory (defined as teaching about religious concepts) <i>METHODISTS</i>	‘Religious Instruction’ statutory (1944 Act) <i>CHURCH OF ENGLAND ROMAN CATHOLICS FREE CHURCHES</i>
Right of withdrawal	Unnecessary	Probably claimed by Churches, contested by ‘Moralists’	Probably claimed by Churches; not logically necessary.	Probably claimed by Churches; not logically necessary.	Necessary <i>CHURCH OF ENGLAND ROMAN CATHOLICS BRITISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES METHODISTS JEWS</i>
Right to alternative teaching	Unnecessary	Not logically justified but probably claimed by Churches, denied by ‘Moralists’	Probably claimed by Churches – for negotiation.	Probably claimed by Churches – for negotiation.	Necessary
Agreed Syllabus	Unnecessary	Probably essential	Not essential but desired by Churches	Not essential but desired by Churches	Not essential (Churches willing to compromise)
Act of worship	Abolished <i>SECULARISTS</i>	Abolished <i>HUMANISTS</i>	Limited or abolished: flexible	Limited or abolished: flexible	Retained, but more flexible
			<i>CHURCH OF ENGLAND/ROMAN CATHOLICS/BRITISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES/FREE CHURCHES</i>		
Right of pupils	Not defined	Either not defined or attendance optional over school leaving age	Probably attendance optional over school leaving age.	Probably attendance optional over school leaving age.	Attendance optional over school leaving age (R.C. opposition on this)
			<i>CHURCH OF ENGLAND//BRITISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES</i>		

Ministerial brief

In September 1969, Fletcher sent Edward Short and Shirley Williams a paper titled *Future Legislation: Provisions for Religion in Schools (MFL 69(6))* (Fletcher 1969) which was considered, at a meeting on 24th September 1969, by Edward Short, Shirley Williams, Fletcher, Spence, Earl and Mr W. Gamble (Assistant Private Secretary to Edward Short) (Gamble 1969 and Spence 1969, September 25). The main decisions of the Secretary of State from this meeting are outlined below:

1. He ‘agreed that provision for an agreed syllabus should be dropped from the new Act’ and that there was a good case for meeting teachers’ requirements for some sort of guidance through the provision of both national and local advisory committees. He maintained that ‘[a] national committee would be necessary to represent the leading opinion of the Churches and also to raise the quality of the teaching of religious education’; a local advisory committee ‘could more easily take account of local situations’; and, more generally, the ‘provisions in the new Act should allow for greater flexibility and should not be concerned with minutiae’ (Gamble 1969).
2. He ‘stressed his wish for the replacement of the expression “religious instruction” by “religious education”, or some very similar expression’ (Gamble 1969), but it was agreed that legislation should be drafted to allow for both precise instruction in non-denominational Christian doctrine and broader RE ‘including lessons about a variety of creeds, especially where non-Christian creeds are common in the local community’ (Fletcher 1969). Thus, ‘there would be no attempt to outlaw dogmatic instruction beyond that prescribed by the Cowper-Temple clause’ (Spence 1969, September 25).
3. He agreed that the ‘act of worship should no longer be required to take place at the beginning of the school day or to be attended by the whole school’ (Spence 1969, September 25). Furthermore, he ‘could see good reason for making the act of worship voluntary for children over compulsory school age, enabling them to “opt-in” if they so wished’ and that ‘[i]t would be consistent with this to apply the same principle to religious education, though he appreciated that a case could be made for treating it differently’ (Gamble, 1969).
4. He was ‘enamoured’ with the idea of making it obligatory upon LEAs to inform parents of their right of withdrawal and it was agreed that this should be discussed with LEAs (Gamble 1969). It was suggested that ‘a leaflet might be prepared which could be brought home by each child’ (Spence 1969, September 25). It was also agreed that teachers should continue to have a right to refuse to teach RE and ‘to be safeguarded against discrimination on grounds of religious opinions or observance’ (Spence 1969, September 25).
5. He agreed that ‘provisions preventing denominational teaching in maintained schools should be written into the new Act’, although not necessarily in the words of the Cowper-Temple Clause (Gamble 1969). Nevertheless, with regard to the right of access granted, on parental request, to those capable of providing denominational instruction in County secondary schools, he was inclined to standardise the position in the case of County primary schools, but perhaps at the discretion of the school governing body and headteacher.
6. It was also agreed ‘to upset the balance of voluntary schools as little as possible, allowing either parental withdrawal, non-denominational teaching, or denominational teaching as at present, with the sole change that [for non-denominational teaching, where requested by parents] there would be no statutory syllabus; and there would have to be a definition’ of the nature of this alternative (Spence 1969, September 25).

Overall, it was suggested that ‘these issues may be suitable for ventilation in the White Paper’, but that ‘[h]ighly contradictory reactions are to be expected from the various extreme points of view’ (Fletcher 1969).

Religious Education – Green/White Paper

Prior to the publication of a Green or White Paper (both steps towards legislation, but distinguished by the extent to which they are consultation documents or statements of Government intent), it was decided that Shirley Williams, Spence, Fletcher and Earl should meet with representatives of the CofE BoEd, CEC and FCFC. The purpose was to discuss the new proposals regarding the replacement of Agreed Syllabuses by LEA guidance and the introduction of a right of withdrawal for pupils over compulsory age. The meeting took place on 20th October, but only preparatory correspondence exists in the DES’ Schools Branch files. Spence (1969, October 15) provided the Minister with summaries of the comments received by the Methodist Education Committee, CofE BoEd, FCFC, CTF, CEC, British Council of Churches and the Community Relations Commission. Spence noted that, in general, ‘the Churches have been gently conservative and reasonable in their approach to the subject’, but that ‘more extreme views’ are represented ‘by such bodies as the National Secular Society on the one hand (“abolish”) and the Welsh Joint Education Committee (“no change”) on the other’. Furthermore, ‘[t]he Department receives a trickle of extremist letters even further afield than these views, and a larger number which suggests that many honest citizens are frightened about change’ (Spence 1969, October 15). As a sign that the range of stakeholders was widening at this time, Spence noted that though the churches remained ‘the principal voluntary bodies providing education alongside the [LEAs] ... [i]t should be made known gently that there are other parties to issues of religious education who will have to be satisfied’, for example, teachers and ‘in relation to the new problem of immigrant communities the bodies set up under recent legislation namely the Community Relations Commission and the Race Relations Board’ (Spence 1969, October 15). In addition to this consultation with the churches, a second seminar at St. George’s Windsor was convened by Edward Short on the topic of ‘Relevance in Religious Education’ (16th-18th January 1970) in which ‘relevance’ was considered in regard to different visions of society (i.e. multi-cultural, secular, uninformed and socially conscious), primary and secondary schools, and teacher training. The seminar was attended by Edward Short and his wife, primary and secondary school RE teachers and headteachers, HMIs, clergy and academics (Author, ca. 1970b).

It is possible to reconstruct a draft of the section on ‘Religious Education’ that was intended for inclusion in the Green/White Paper. This was wholly or mainly written by Earl in *circa* February 1970 (Author ca. 1969/70; Earl 1970). It acknowledged that the subject of RE had passed ‘through a period of radical reappraisal’ and that there was now widespread acceptance that it should have an ‘educational’ rationale to give pupils ‘an understanding of the religious interpretation of life’ in order that they may be able to make up their own minds and ‘have some appreciation of [different] standpoints’. To achieve this, it was argued that RE should be ‘open rather than dogmatic’, not confine itself to Christianity, and respect ‘the integrity of both teacher and pupil’ (Earl 1970). Furthermore, although it was recognised that the provisions of the 1944 Education Act were flexible and popular, it was also acknowledged that ‘there is wide measure of agreement on the need for some changes’. Thus, it was proposed that the requirement for CW should be made ‘more flexible as to time, place, and groupings’ and that students over the compulsory school age ‘should be free to decide whether to attend [CW and RE]’. In regard to RE, it stated:

‘E. There is general agreement among the Churches and other interested bodies that present arrangements for the statutory syllabus have outlived their usefulness, but that there is a continuing need for external guidance for teachers on religious education. There is also wide agreement that the term “instruction” is no longer appropriate and that religious education should take greater account of the needs of the increasing proportion of immigrant and non-Christian pupils in schools. Local authorities

should therefore establish standing representative advisory committees on religious education, but teachers should be free to interpret the advice that is rendered. The concept of an agreed syllabus would be dropped.’ (Author ca. 1969/70).

The DES files contain only one response to this draft, that is, from R. H. Stone (1970) who described it as ‘a soporific text which papers over very fundamental difficulties and is open to the accusation of being confused in thought, word and deed’. For him, it was ‘illogical’ because the study of ‘morals and comparative religion’, which it implicitly promoted, represented a dismantling of the statutory requirements which the Secretary of State had originally promised to preserve, and it had no more logical or legal reason to be included in new legislation than History or Civics. Furthermore, he described the draft text as ‘devious’ because it ignored both the support of the CEC, CoE BoE and NS and FCFC for the continuance of the 1944 Education Act clauses regarding RE, and the possibility that ‘taking greater account of the needs of the increasing proportion of immigrant and non-Christian pupils’ might mean the provision of separate classes in Judaism, Islam, Hinduism or Sikhism as had been suggested by HMI Eric Lord. From his experiences in the ‘multi-racial communities’ of Birmingham and the West Midlands, Lord (1970) had recommended the provision of a right of entry for representatives of the major faiths to deliver denominational instruction in schools. These ‘special classes’ would be in addition to ‘religious teaching acceptable to all faiths’ in which ‘pupils would learn about each other’s religions and would learn to be sympathetic and understanding’. The alternative to this ‘liberal middle way’, according to Lord, ‘would be the withdrawal of these groups to accommodation off the premises and this would be against the interests of integration, breeding misunderstanding and suspicion’. Stone’s concerns prompted a brief handwritten reply from Spence (1970) who stated ‘[t]he main point I would take issue with you on is the implied assumption that provisions for RE are founded in logic’!

The Short Education Act?

In fact, due to wider political events, namely the defeat of the Labour Government to Edward Heath’s Conservative Party in the General Election of 18th June 1970, no Green or White Paper, incorporating these provisions, ever materialised (Briggs 1975, July 15). Thus, this short act in the history of national RE policy-making and legislative reform did not result in a ‘Short Act’. If it had come to pass, it would have radically altered the direction of developments, particularly in conferring greater autonomy and responsibility upon schools and teachers for determining the RE curriculum, and bringing the processes of RE curriculum review and development into line with those of other subjects at the time. Instead, in the history of English RE, the year 1970 is most commonly associated with the publication of ecclesiastical rather than government policy, that is, *The Fourth R* (Commission on Religious Education in Schools 1970).

Conclusion

The detailed historical case study above provides insights into an abortive attempt at national policy-making and legislative reform relating to RE in English schools in the late 1960s and early 1970s, drawing upon previously unutilised published and unpublished documentary sources. The events reported here have been omitted entirely from the existing historiography. They include:

(i) policy and legislative developments which did not come to fruition, but nevertheless show that there was an intention, under the Labour Government (1964-1970), to introduce a major Education Bill which would: defend RE and CW from Secularist and Humanist attacks; reform RE and CW in accordance with the latest curricular and pedagogical theories; and abolish statutory Agreed Syllabuses in favour of non-statutory national guidance, partly to meet teachers’ demands for more professional autonomy;

- (ii) parliamentary questions and debates that reveal the extent of political interest in the reform, maintenance or improvement of RE and CW in schools, as well as the issues that were of primary concern to politicians;
- (iii) consultation, lobbying and correspondence which provide insights into the views on RE of national politicians, civil servants and HMI, as well as a range of educational, religious and secular stakeholders and pressure groups; and
- (iv) policy-making processes within Government which demonstrate the extent to which, and how, DES civil servants sought to promote workable pragmatic compromises which would mollify the most liberal and progressive, and the most conservative and traditionalist, demands in relation to this highly politically-sensitive issue.

Overall, it seems clear that the primary instigators of the exploration of the possibility of policy and legislative change were not the theoretical and practical developments already occurring within RE and being reported by academics amongst others, but the public and parliamentary lobbying of Secular and Humanist pressure groups and individuals (Freathy & Parker 2013), and the challenges facing particular LEAs in accommodating the religious educational needs of non-Christian immigrant communities (Parker & Freathy 2011a).

It is highly likely that the public, professional and academic discussions regarding the perceived political threat to the future existence of RE, and the legislative framework which surrounded it, helped to create the circumstances in which it was possible for some academics and other professionals (including those in the churches) to bring about the developments in RE theory and practice for which this period is most well-known. Previously, these curricular and pedagogical developments have been contextualised primarily with reference to the publications of (i) academics, such as Edwin Cox, J. W. D. Smith and Ninian Smart (Parsons 1994, 173-4), (ii) the churches, such as *The Fourth R* (Commission on Religious Education in Schools 1970), and (iii) the Schools Council's *Working Paper 36* (1971). Yet it is not possible to understand fully the conclusions and recommendations contained within these publications without knowing the legislative framework and policy context in which they were written. The theories and practices that rose to ascendancy did so in part because they were well adapted to that legal and political environment, negotiating a path between the competing demands of the churches and other faith groups, Secularists and Humanists, local and national government, teachers and their unions, and so forth (Cruickshank 1963; Murphy 1971; Chadwick 1997). Thus, researchers who wish to use the literature above to write about the curricular and pedagogical developments emanating from this period should recognise the complex circumstances in which these publications were produced (see, e.g., Barnes 2002). They were largely reactions to external factors or rose to prominence as a result of them.

Moreover, we have shown that the proposed policy and legislative developments were not the result of rigorous, internally-consistent and logically-coherent theorisation, but political compromises between the views of a plurality of individuals, organisations, pressure groups and other stakeholders, that were negotiated and re-negotiated over time by highly-pragmatic civil servants amongst others. By drawing attention to national political, professional and public debates about RE in the late 1960s and early 1970s, not least the well-publicised discussions between Christians, Humanists and Secularists, our research fundamentally challenges those, such as Parsons (1994, 194-5), who depict the decades between the 1944 Education Act and the 1988 Education Reform Act as relatively free of political controversy and confessional conflict. If one simply focuses upon legislative turning points in the history of RE (see also Copley 2008), rather than investigating the points that failed to turn, then policy changes, political controversies and other ideological and sectarian rivalries in the periods of legislative continuity will be imperceptible.

Even though no Green or White Paper, no Education Bill or Act, emerged during this short act in the history of RE, the abortive attempt at national policy-making and legislative reform detailed here is still of enormous significance in understanding the subject's history. This is not only true in relation to the range of views and positions outlined in Tables 1 and 2 above, but also with regard to the many legislative proposals discussed by Short and his Department which have been incorporated, in one way or another, into subsequent legislation. These include: the possibility of separate acts of daily CW for pupils in different age groups or in different school groups; the incorporation into Agreed Syllabuses of the teachings and practices of the principal non-Christian religions represented in Great Britain; the duty of every LEA to constitute a SACRE; the opportunity for pupils beyond the compulsory school age to be wholly or partly excused from attending CW in certain types of school; and most recently, the opportunity afforded to Academics and Free Schools to opt out of Agreed Syllabus provision either by adopting a different syllabus or developing their own. In terms of non-statutory national guidance and representation, the proposals discussed by Short and his Department may have found their fulfilment in the publications of the Qualifications & Curriculum Authority (1998a; 1998b; 2000; 2004) and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010), and the formation of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (est. 1973), which itself recently undertook a national consultation process resulting in the publication of a non-statutory 'national curriculum' framework (REC 2013). All of these ensuing developments indicate the far-sightedness of some of Short's proposals and the potential significance that his 'Education Act' could have had in fast-tracking some aspects of the history of RE and CW.

Finally, we have shown that the issues and problems contributing to what many perceive as a current crisis in RE are latent and longstanding, rather than a consequence of present-day government policy alone. These include, but are not limited to, the questions of whether RE should be a compulsory curriculum subject, whether RE should be taught along denominational/religious or non-denominational lines, whether the parental right to withdraw children from RE is necessary, whether RE should be determined on a local or national basis, and whether RE should be defined by a statutory and non-statutory curriculum framework. In reviewing and developing RE theories, policies and practices, we urge all stakeholders to look closely at the reasons for both changes and continuities in the subject's past, broadening and deepening their understanding of the relative beginnings of many contemporary issues and problems, and to use such knowledge to inform their contributions to current debates about the present and future of RE. Having a knowledge and understanding of how RE has evolved and why, and which vested interests would be served by the status quo enduring or ending, is a prerequisite of any accurate diagnosis of the subject's present *problems* and any worthwhile public discussion of its future *prospects*.

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ⁱ In the 1944 Education Act, religious education referred to Collective Worship and Religious Instruction. In practice, the curriculum subject known as Religious Instruction was variously called, for example, Religious Instruction, Religious Knowledge, Scripture and Divinity. From the 1960s, an increasing number of writers used the term Religious Education to refer to the curriculum subject only. This practice was adopted in the 1988 Education Reform Act. In this article, Religious Instruction / Education, in the upper case, refers to the classroom subject only, while religious education, in the lower case, refers to Collective Worship, Religious Instruction and any other religious element of the educational process as a whole.

ⁱⁱ Elementary Education Act, 1870, 33 & 34 VICT, Chapter 75, Section 7[1].

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