

**Review of the Northern Ireland
Religious Education Core Syllabus**

**Report on the process,
findings and output**

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Foreword

It has been both an enormous privilege and a significant responsibility to lead the Review of the Religious Education Core Syllabus for Northern Ireland.

The review was commissioned following the Supreme Court judgment concerning Religious Education and collective worship in Northern Ireland schools and was undertaken within clearly defined Terms of Reference. The review also forms part of the ongoing reform of the wider statutory curriculum framework in Northern Ireland. From the outset we recognised the importance and sensitivity of the task before us and were conscious that Religious Education occupies a unique place within the curriculum, touching on questions of belief, identity, values, culture and community.

Throughout this process, we have sought to listen carefully and respectfully to the wide range of voices who engaged with the review. We were greatly encouraged by the scale of engagement and by the sincerity with which individuals and organisations shared their views. The Call for Evidence generated over one thousand responses, reflecting the high level of public interest in the future of Religious Education in Northern Ireland. In addition, we held more than 25 face-to-face stakeholder engagement meetings, involving representatives from a wide range of Christian denominations and organisations, other religious traditions, education bodies, political parties, civic organisations, human rights groups and those with no religious beliefs. These engagements were informative and illuminating, helping us to understand more fully the diversity of conviction and aspiration surrounding Religious Education in Northern Ireland.

We were particularly mindful that the revised syllabus spans the compulsory part of the Northern Ireland Curriculum and a key part of the educational journey from our youngest children in the Foundation Stage through to the end of Key Stage 4. We were also conscious that it must serve pupils and teachers across the full range of school management types and across varied geographical, community and demographic contexts. The syllabus therefore needed to be coherent, progressive and academically rigorous, while also being sufficiently sensitive to the distinctive realities of schools and communities across Northern Ireland.

We are grateful to the children and young people who participated in the research led by Dr Emilia Symington. Their contributions highlighted the value pupils place on RE: the knowledge it provides, the skills it develops and its role in helping them engage thoughtfully with others and with the wider world. As one young person explained, RE is “a living subject” because “it teaches you about the world around you.”

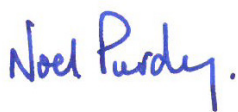
We also acknowledge the contribution made by the members of the Churches’ Consultative Group, established under the Terms of Reference and are grateful for their constructive engagement during the review process.

Above all we wish to pay tribute to the teachers within the Drafting Group. Drawn from schools

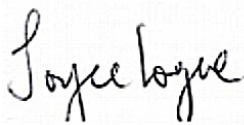
across sectors and phases, these teachers brought exceptional expertise, professionalism and commitment to their subject. Their work was characterised by an unwavering sense of purpose, collegiality and goodwill. The quality of their contributions and their willingness to engage thoughtfully with complex issues were instrumental in shaping the syllabus that is presented in this report.

The revised syllabus seeks to reflect the requirements of the Supreme Court judgment and fulfil the Terms of Reference while remaining responsive to the educational, cultural and societal context of Northern Ireland. It aims to provide Religious Education that is objective, critical and pluralistic; that recognises the significance of Christianity within the history, culture and society of Northern Ireland while engaging meaningfully with other religious and non-religious worldviews; and that is inclusive, relevant and intellectually challenging for all learners.

We believe that this syllabus will provide a strong foundation for the study of Religious Education in Northern Ireland for many years to come and will support children and young people in developing the knowledge, understanding, skills and dispositions needed to engage respectfully with others and to thrive in a diverse and changing world.



Professor Noel Purdy OBE
Chair



Joyce Logue
Vice-Chair

Introduction

1. Education Minister Paul Givan MLA announced a review of the RE Core Syllabus on 3 February 2026. The review was led by Professor Noel Purdy OBE, Director of Research and Scholarship at Stranmillis University College and Mrs Joyce Logue, former Principal of Long Tower Primary School.
2. The Drafting Group also comprised teachers from primary, post-primary and special schools across all sectors.
3. On Wednesday 19 November 2025, the Supreme Court delivered its judgment on the 2022 High Court Judicial Review (concerning the child referred to as JR87) relating to the legality of teaching of religious education and the practice of collective worship in state-funded schools in Northern Ireland. The Supreme Court reinstated the declaration made by Mr Justice Colton, within the original Judicial Review, allowing the appellant's appeal and dismissing the Department's cross appeal.
4. In the High Court Judicial Review judgment on 5 July 2022, Mr Justice Colton concluded that the impugned legislation (primarily the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 and the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006) was in breach of the Applicant's rights under Article 2 of the First Protocol (A2P1) of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) read with Article 9 of the ECHR. Justice Colton further determined that "the core syllabus does not provide for religious education in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner."

Review principles

5. The review of the Religious Education Core Syllabus was taken forward in parallel but independently to the reform of the statutory curriculum framework, given the specific legislative requirements and need for ongoing engagement with the churches. The review of the RE Syllabus, however, was required to follow the principles which underpin the broader curriculum review.
 - **Purpose-led** – guided by a clear vision connecting content to educational aims.
 - **Knowledge-rich** – teaching carefully sequenced, substantive knowledge essential for understanding, critical thinking and equity.
 - **Continuous and coherent** – ensuring the curriculum progresses logically across years and subjects, with sequenced content building cumulative understanding, supporting smooth transitions and preventing gaps.
 - **Specific and focused** – which clearly defines essential knowledge and skills at each stage, avoiding ambiguity and superficial coverage.
 - **Inclusive and flexible** – meeting the diverse needs of learners and communities while maintaining coherence.

6. In relation to Religious Education, the Terms of Reference for the work (which can be found [here](#)) stipulated that the revised RE syllabus should:
- **Treat RE as an academic discipline** – structured in an objective manner to promote intellectual engagement and respect for diverse perspectives.
 - **Develop critical and analytical skills** – fostering analytical and critical thinking by engaging pupils in interpreting texts, evaluating arguments and understanding historical and cultural contexts.
 - **Retain Christianity as the central focus** – recognising the historical, cultural and legal context of Northern Ireland and the enduring role of Christianity as the predominant religious belief in shaping education and society in Northern Ireland.
 - **Be Pluralist and Inclusive** – ensuring pupils explore a range of religious and non-religious worldviews and encourage engagement with questions of belief, ethics, identity and meaning, reflecting the diversity of contemporary society.
 - **Prepare children and young people for Future Learning and Citizenship** by promoting respect, tolerance and understanding of different beliefs and cultures.

Church consultative group

7. The Terms of Reference also explained that a Church consultative group (CCG) would be established, stating that:

“It is, therefore, both appropriate and essential that the four main churches have a formal consultative role within the design of the new core syllabus.

The Department will seek nominations from the four main churches for a consultative group as follows:

- a. Three representatives nominated by the Chairperson of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools*
- b. Three representatives nominated by the Chairperson of the Transferors Representative Council.*

The role of this consultative group is to engage with and provide advice, support and feedback to the Drafting Group, chaired by Professor Purdy. The consultative group will be engaged throughout the process, meeting directly with the Chair, deputy Chair and wider drafting group, providing input and reviewing the final draft before it proceeds to public consultation”.

8. The RE panel met with members of the CCG four times between 9 March 2026 and 1 June 2026. The members of the CCG were:
- Dr Andrew Brown (TRC)

- Dr Anita Gracie (TRC)
- Dr Peter Hamill (TRC)
- Most Reverend Dr Niall Coll (Catholic Church)
- Mrs Sharon Haughey (Catholic Church)
- Reverend Dr Edwin McGee (Catholic Church)

Drafting group

9. To lead the drafting process, as with other curriculum subjects, expressions of interest were invited from serving teachers with expertise in the subject. Following an open call for applications, over 100 expressions of interest were received from teachers across Northern Ireland, with twelve selected.
10. The twelve teachers were experienced RE subject specialists from a variety of schools and sectors. They have met formally seven times since 13 April 2026 and have been instrumental in drafting the new Religious Education Syllabus from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 4.
11. Under the leadership of Professor Noel Purdy and Mrs Joyce Logue, the Drafting Group developed and drafted a revised core syllabus (aligned to the principles outlined above) and this was provided to the Department and Minister in June 2026 so it may be published for consultation.
12. The process was iterative, involving direct engagement with the CCG and drawing on extensive stakeholder engagement and an open call for evidence.

Call for evidence

13. The call for evidence ran from 23 February 2026 to 20 March 2026 and elicited a total of 917 survey responses, 110 emails and 25 submissions. The responses were diverse in nature, reflecting deeply held and often divergent views on the purpose, content and future direction of RE.
14. Three dominant strategic tensions emerged consistently across all questions:
 1. **Academic vs confessional purpose**
 - Many respondents argued that RE should function as a critical, academic subject, comparable to history or philosophy.
 - Others viewed RE as inherently connected to faith formation, particularly Christianity and should resist attempts to secularise or relativise it.

2. Centrality of Christianity

- Strong and persistent division existed between:
 - those who believe Christianity must remain the central focus due to the historical, cultural and legal context of Northern Ireland; and
 - those who argued that retaining a “central focus” is incompatible with objectivity, pluralism and children’s rights.

3. Pluralism, inclusion and citizenship

- There was broad rhetorical support for respect and tolerance.
- However, respondents diverged on whether this should be achieved through:
 - expanded pluralistic content within RE; or
 - alternative curriculum areas (e.g. citizenship, PDMU), leaving RE primarily Christian.

Written submissions

15. A range of written submissions were received from stakeholders across Northern Ireland with a particular interest in the review of the RE Syllabus. They gave their views as to the appropriateness of the current Core Syllabus and made suggestions as to how it could be improved, including the promotion of RE as an academic discipline, the development of critical and analytical skills, the question of retaining Christianity as the central focus, the importance of a pluralistic and inclusive approach, the role of RE in preparing pupils for future learning and citizenship and the purpose and vision for RE.
16. The proposals were wide ranging and considered and in many aspects, mirrored the general tone and views captured within the online consultation.
17. Written submissions were received from the following individuals and organisations:
 1. CARE NI
 2. Catholic Schools’ Trustee Service (CSTS)
 3. CCMS (Council for Catholic Maintained Schools)
 4. Claire Lowry (teacher)
 5. Controlled Schools’ Support Council (CSSC)
 6. Dr James Nelson (Queen’s University Belfast)
 7. Dromore Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland
 8. Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI)
 9. Evangelical Alliance
 10. Fiona Page (University student)

11. Integrated Education Fund (IEF)
 12. Jack Russell
 13. Michael Doyle (parent)
 14. Natalie Gillien (parent)
 15. National Secular Society (NSS)
 16. Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC)
 17. Northern Ireland Humanists
 18. Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association (NIMMA)
 19. Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI)
 20. Professor Jonathan Lanman (Queen's University Belfast)
 21. Railway Street Presbyterian Church, Lisburn
 22. RE Today
 23. SDLP (Social Democratic and Labour Party)
 24. SEE Learning (Emory University programme submission)
 25. Stephen Wilson (Individual submission)
18. An additional 110 email responses in total were received. One response was submitted from a Christian perspective, while 109 responses reflected a humanist perspective and appeared to comprise a standardised response submitted by multiple individuals. The total number of responses was therefore 1,052.

Engagement with stakeholders

19. The chair and vice-chair, Professor Noel Purdy and Mrs Joyce Logue, held a total of 27 separate meetings with stakeholders from a wide range of perspectives and viewpoints between 9 March 2026 and 9 June 2026. The list of stakeholders with whom the panel met can be found at **Annex C**.

Children and young peoples' views

20. Following a request by the chair and vice-chair, the Department of Education sought expressions of interest from an external facilitator to carry out engagement with children and young people. The facilitator needed to have the necessary knowledge, skills and expertise to engage with a wide range of children and young people from primary school (4-11), post-primary school (12-18) and 18+.
21. Dr Emilia Symington was appointed and undertook the work between April 2026 and May 2026. The report is available separately at **Annex D** and a summary is provided below.
22. The research involved focus groups and age-appropriate consultation activities with children and young people across a range of settings, including primary, post-primary,

integrated, maintained, controlled, voluntary grammar, Irish-medium and special school contexts, as well as a youth group. In total, the engagement included 82 participants aged between 8 and 21.

23. Across the focus groups, participants generally spoke positively about RE. Many pupils described RE as enjoyable, interesting and meaningful, particularly when it involved discussion, debate, creative activities, visitors, visits, real-life topics and opportunities to explore different beliefs. Pupils valued RE when it was treated as a serious curriculum subject with substantive content, skilled teaching and clear relevance.
24. A key finding was that pupils understood RE as a subject capable of developing critical and analytical skills. Older pupils in particular described RE as a space for questioning, discussion, interpretation and independent judgement. They valued opportunities to examine different viewpoints, evaluate arguments, interpret religious texts and form their own views. Pupils also described RE as a safe space where young people could discuss difficult questions of belief, identity, morality and difference, provided discussion was respectful and well managed.
25. Participants recognised Christianity as a prominent and locally significant focus of RE, particularly in schools with a Christian ethos. Many pupils saw a rationale for retaining Christianity as a central focus because of its historical, cultural and community significance in Northern Ireland. However, support for Christianity did not usually mean support for an exclusively Christian syllabus. Pupils often distinguished between learning about Christianity and being required to believe it and many supported learning about Christianity alongside other religions and worldviews.
26. Participants generally supported RE being pluralist and inclusive. Across different sectors and age groups, pupils argued that RE should help them understand people who believe differently from themselves, engage with a range of religious and non-religious worldviews and develop respect for others. Some felt that RE should respond to the beliefs represented in the classroom, while others recognised that complete coverage of all religions and worldviews would be impossible. Pupils differed on whether RE should be taught from within a school's particular ethos or from a more neutral standpoint, but there was broad support for RE as a shared space where difference could be discussed respectfully.
27. A recurring theme across the findings was that pupils did not generally see Christianity and pluralism as mutually exclusive. Many wanted RE to retain a strong focus on Christianity while also engaging meaningfully with other religions, non-religious worldviews and contemporary ethical issues. In addition, the issue of 'opting out' revealed a related tension between respecting freedom of belief and ensuring access to shared learning. Many pupils felt that RE should be understood as part of the curriculum rather than as religious observance and therefore argued that pupils should not be withdrawn simply because they do not personally share the beliefs being studied. However, the findings also

highlighted the importance of ensuring that RE is genuinely inclusive, educational and non-coercive, so that pupils from different religious and non-religious backgrounds can participate meaningfully.

28. Finally, pupils frequently described RE as preparation for life beyond school. While some pupils identified specific future uses connected to family life, religious practice, or particular vocations, most described RE's value in broader civic terms. They saw RE as helping young people understand difference, interpret current affairs, engage with moral questions, develop their own beliefs and participate more thoughtfully in society.
29. Overall, the findings suggest that children and young people want RE to be serious, inclusive, relevant and intellectually meaningful. They value RE when it provides substantive knowledge, supports critical thinking, recognises the significance of Christianity, engages respectfully with religious and non-religious diversity and helps pupils make sense of themselves, others and the wider world.

The new RE Syllabus

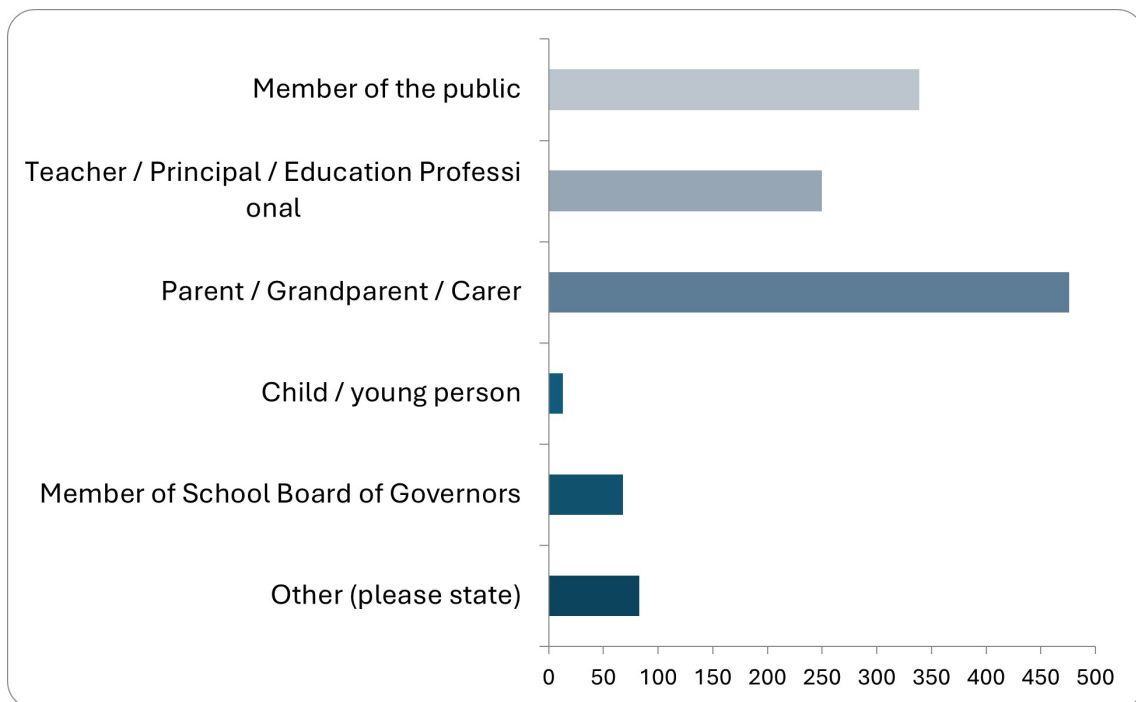
30. The new Religious Education syllabus was finalised on 29 June 2026.

Annex A – Call for Evidence Responses

Questions 1 to 7

Q1: In what capacity are you responding? (Select all that apply)

There were 917 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Member of the public	339	36.97%
Teacher / Principal / Education Professional	250	27.26%
Parent / Grandparent / Carer	476	51.91%
Child / young person	13	1.42%
Member of School Board of Governors	68	7.42%
Other (please state)	83	9.05%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

Where “other” was selected, please state - there were 125 responses to this part of the question.

Most Frequent Categories

- Parent – 6
- Retired teacher – 6
- Youth Worker – 5
- Teacher – 4
- Principal – 3
- Minister of Religion – 3

Moderately Occurring Categories (2 responses each)

- Minister of religion
- Student Teacher
- Retired primary school teacher
- Grandparent

All Remaining Categories (1 response each)

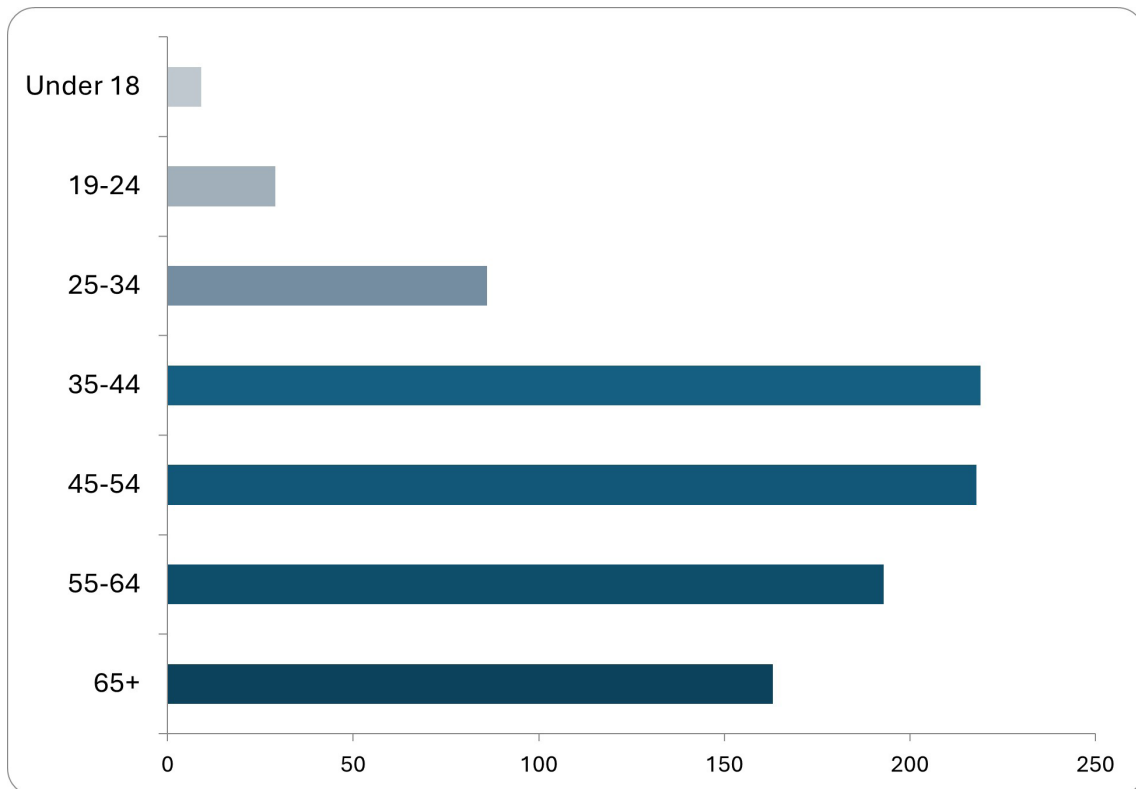
These are single-instance entries:

- Head of Department for Religious Studies
- Ex member of *** Primary School Board of Governors and previous chairman
- Former RE teacher / Head of RE / CARE NI role (combined description)
- Christian
- Retired university lecturer (Thinking Aloud sessions)
- On behalf of the Methodist Church in Ireland
- Senior leader for mental health charity
- Primary Teacher
- GB leaders
- Father of 3 children
- Charity Visitor to schools
- Church elder
- Charity worker
- Aunt
- Grandparent (variant spelling / phrasing)
- Head of Religious Education department
- Father
- Minister conducting assemblies

- Presbytery of Newry (PCI)
- Youth work volunteer
- Student teacher (case variation)
- Writer and academic
- NI Council for Integrated Education
- Christian charity organisation (education/faith promotion)
- Methodist Mission official
- PEACEPLUS interfaith project lead
- Retired bishop
- Church Youth Worker / Leader
- Chaplain
- North Belfast Presbytery (PCI)
- SEN assistant
- Counsellor / therapist
- RE teacher (variant)
- Former chair of Board of Governors
- Parents for Inclusive Education representative
- Former Head of RE (21 years)
- Clergy / Church minister / Church chaplain
- Classroom assistant
- Union Head
- Support worker in education
- Methodist minister
- Clergyman / governor
- Theological education employee
- Clergy delivering assemblies
- Retired Methodist Minister / RE teacher
- Recently retired Primary school principal
- University student
- Retired RE teacher / Board adviser
- Teacher education lecturer (RE/research focus)
- Former Religious Studies teacher
- Religious Education trainee teacher
- Psychologist
- Religious leader

Q2: What age are you?

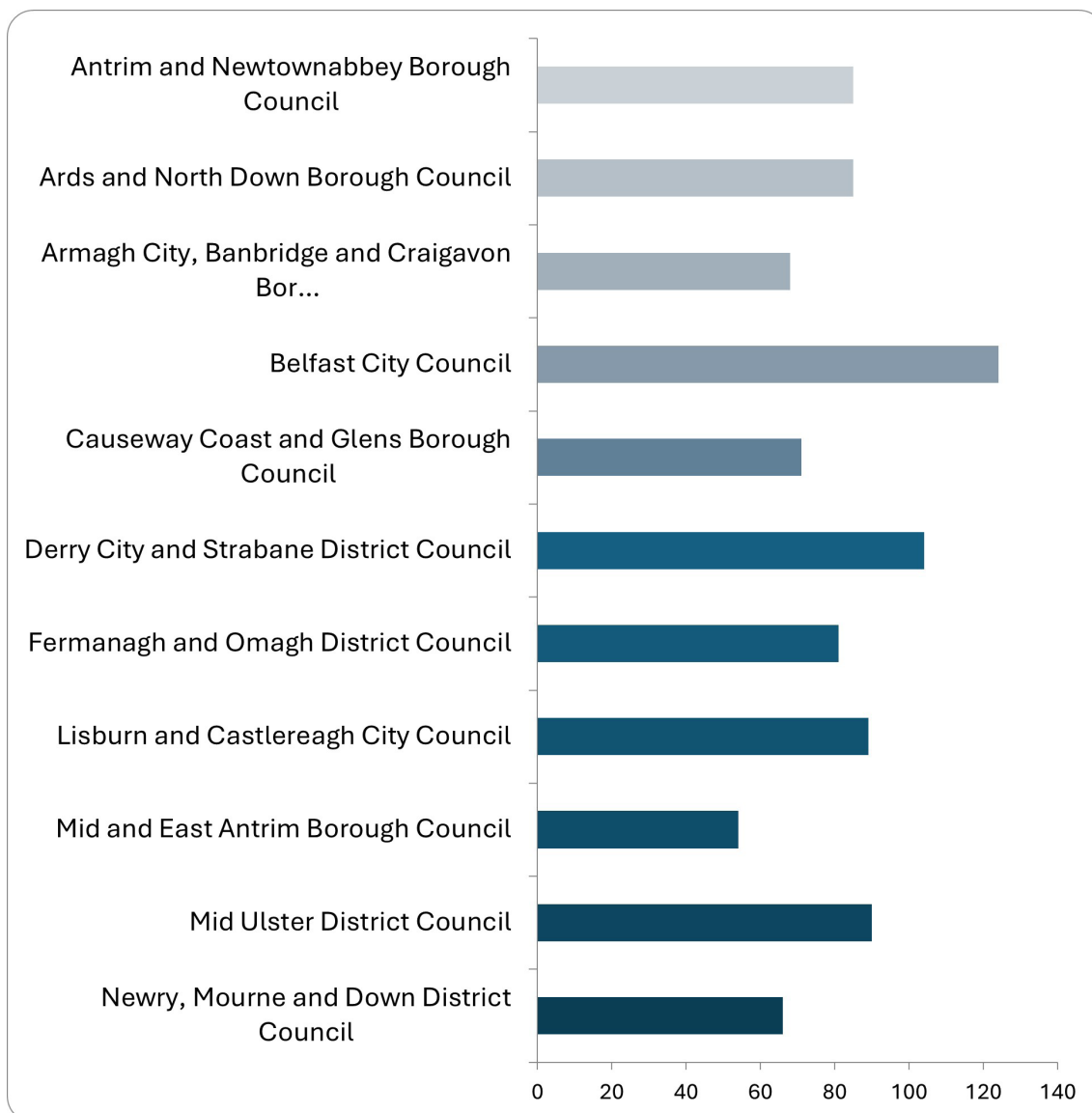
There were 917 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Under 18	9	0.98%
19-24	29	3.16%
25-34	86	9.38%
35-44	219	23.88%
45-54	218	23.77%
55-64	193	21.05%
65+	163	17.78%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

Q3: In which council area do you live?

There were 917 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council	85	9.27%
Ards and North Down Borough Council	85	9.27%
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council	68	7.42%
Belfast City Council	124	13.52%
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council	71	7.74%

Option	Total	Percent
Derry City and Strabane District Council	104	11.34%
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council	81	8.83%
Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council	89	9.71%
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council	54	5.89%
Mid Ulster District Council	90	9.81%
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council	66	7.20%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

Q5: Are there examples of RE syllabi from other countries that the drafting group should consider to inform its work? If so, please provide details, explaining the particular features and strengths of any such syllabi.

There were 519 responses to this part of the question.

Q6: Are there papers or research evidence relating to this matter that the drafting group should review to inform its work? (Please append and/or include references/links)

There were 426 responses to this part of the question.

Q7: Are there any other comments you wish to make?

There were 610 responses to this part of the question.

Analysis by Consultation Question

Q4: In your view, how should a revised Religious Education syllabus be designed and developed in order to meet the RE “Review Principles”?

Q4(a) Treat RE as an academic discipline - structured in an objective manner to promote intellectual engagement and respect for diverse perspectives.

Overall Themes

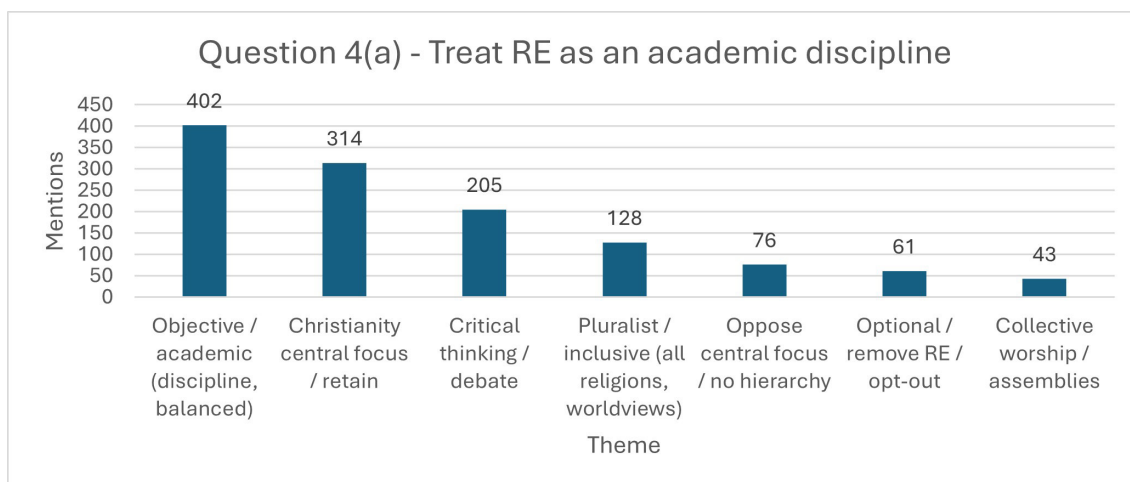
- Strong support for defining RE as an academic, evidence-based subject.
- Frequent comparisons to history, philosophy, ethics and literature.
- Repeated rejection of “indoctrination” or confessional teaching within compulsory education.

By Respondent Type

- Parents / public:
Strongly supportive, often citing children’s rights and the need for neutrality.
- Teachers / governors:
Generally supportive, but many stress that “academic” must not exclude Christian theology.
- Clergy-linked respondents:
Accept academic framing only if it preserves theological depth and Christian authority.

Key tension: agreement on “academic” in principle, disagreement on what that means in practice.

Theme	Mentions	Share of comments	Top word	Count
Objective / academic (discipline, balanced)	402	43.8%	religious	391
Christianity central focus / retain	314	34.2%	academic	380
Critical thinking / debate	205	22.4%	other	316
Pluralist / inclusive (all religions, worldviews)	128	14.0%	Christianity	275
Oppose central focus / no hierarchy	76	8.3%	Christian	268
Optional / remove RE / opt-out	61	6.7%	religions	252
Collective worship / assemblies	43	4.7%	religion	248



Strong support for “RE as a rigorous subject”: Many comments call for RE to be treated like history/philosophy—structured, evidence-aware and non-devotional, taught by trained staff and not presented as “fact.”

A clear tension on Christianity’s role:

A sizeable group want Christianity explicitly central (often framed as “historical/cultural foundation”).

Another group argues this conflicts with inclusivity, pushing for equal treatment of religions and non-religious worldviews (humanism/atheism/agnosticism).

Critical thinking is repeatedly emphasised: Many respondents want questioning, debate, analysis of texts, evaluation of arguments and student autonomy (“learn what people believe” vs “what you must believe”).

Pluralism/inclusion is a recurring expectation: Comments commonly ask for multiple religions + non-religious perspectives and language that avoids hierarchy (“one of many,” “balanced representation”).

School practice beyond the classroom matters: Some respondents link the aims of objective RE to concerns about assemblies/collective worship, arguing these can undermine neutrality even if lessons are balanced.

Q4(b) Develop critical and analytical skills – fostering analytical and critical thinking by engaging pupils in interpreting texts, evaluating arguments and understanding historical and cultural contexts.

Overall Themes

- Very high levels of agreement across all groups.
- Critical thinking framed as:
 - text interpretation
 - ethical reasoning
 - respectful debate.

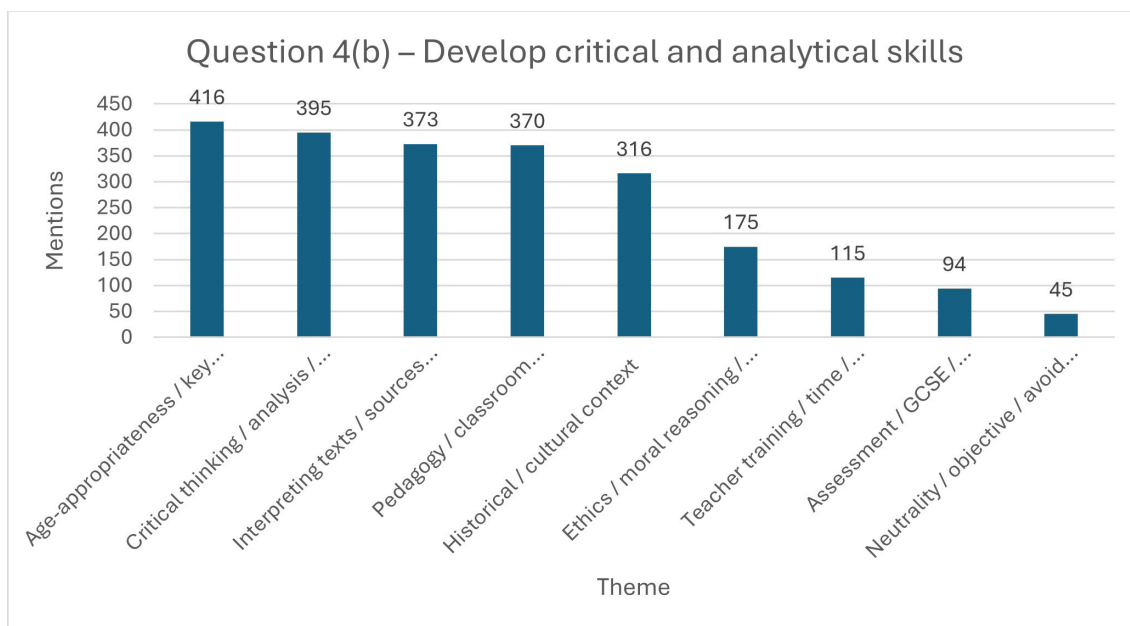
By Respondent Type

- Education professionals:
Emphasise assessment, progression and examination alignment.
- Parents / public:
Emphasise questioning, autonomy and freedom from fear or coercion.
- Some faith-based respondents:
Support critical thinking within boundaries, often specifying Christian frameworks.

Notable pattern: this is the least divisive question, though limits of critique remain contested.

Theme	Mentions	Share of comments
Age-appropriateness / key stage	416	45.4%
Critical thinking / analysis / debate	395	43.1%
Interpreting texts / sources (scripture etc.)	373	40.7%
Pedagogy / classroom practice	370	40.3%
Historical / cultural context	316	34.5%
Ethics / moral reasoning / philosophy	175	19.1%
Teacher training / time / resources	115	12.5%
Assessment / GCSE / qualifications	94	10.3%
Neutrality / objective / avoid indoctrination	45	4.9%

Top word	Count
pupils	369
religious	320
texts	293
skills	286
critical	283
historical	184
analytical	183
different	179
other	177
bible	176



There is very high agreement that RE should develop:

- Critical thinking
- Analytical reasoning
- Debate and discussion skills

Key Skill Areas Identified

- Interpretation of Texts – Core expectation: pupils interpret: religious texts, ethical arguments with strong emphasis on context (historical, cultural).
- Evaluation of Arguments – Pupils should: compare different belief systems, assess competing truth claims, form independent conclusions.
- Discussion & Debate – Many responses highlight: the need for open classroom dialogue, safe discussion of: ethics, belief differences.
- Real-world Application – RE seen as contributing to: citizenship, ethical decision-making, social understanding
- Age Appropriateness (Key Theme) – a consistent concern: Primary level: focus on: respect, awareness. Post-primary: introduce: debate, critical evaluation.
- Constraints Identified – teachers may: lack training for complex debate-based approaches. concern that: poor delivery = superficial or biased discussion.

Q4(c) Retain Christianity as the central focus – recognising the historical, cultural and legal context of Northern Ireland and the enduring role of Christianity as the predominant religious belief in shaping education and society in Northern Ireland.

Overall Themes

- This is the most polarising question in the consultation.
- Responses cluster into three broad positions:
 1. Strong support for centrality of Christianity
 2. Conditional support (historical significance without doctrinal priority)
 3. Strong opposition, citing human rights and inclusion.

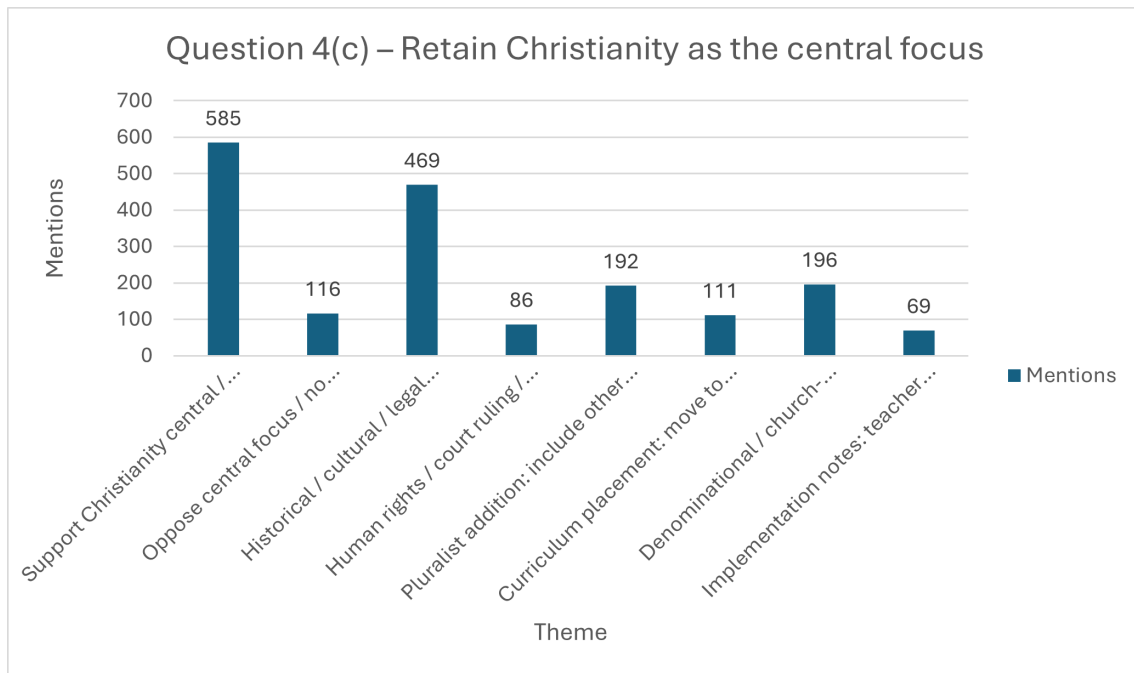
By Respondent Type

- Teachers / governors:
 Most likely to support retention, often referencing:
 - history of schooling
 - community context
 - parental expectations.
- Parents / public / young people:
 More likely to oppose or qualify centrality, especially non-religious families.
- Faith leaders:
 Overwhelmingly support centrality and express concern about erosion of Christian ethos.

Key risk identified by many respondents:

Retaining “central focus” may undermine claims of objectivity and pluralism.

Theme	Mentions	Share of comments
Support Christianity central / retain focus	585	63.8%
Oppose central focus / no hierarchy / bias	116	12.6%
Historical / cultural / legal context (NI context)	469	51.1%
Human rights / court ruling / legality (objective, pluralistic)	86	9.4%
Pluralist addition: include other faiths & non-religious worldviews	192	20.9%
Curriculum placement: move to history/RS or optional	111	12.1%
Denominational / church-school context	196	21.4%
Implementation notes: teacher training/resources/time	69	7.5%



Q4(d) Be Pluralist and Inclusive - ensuring pupils explore a range of religious and non-religious worldviews and encourage engagement with questions of belief, ethics, identity and meaning, reflecting the diversity of contemporary society.

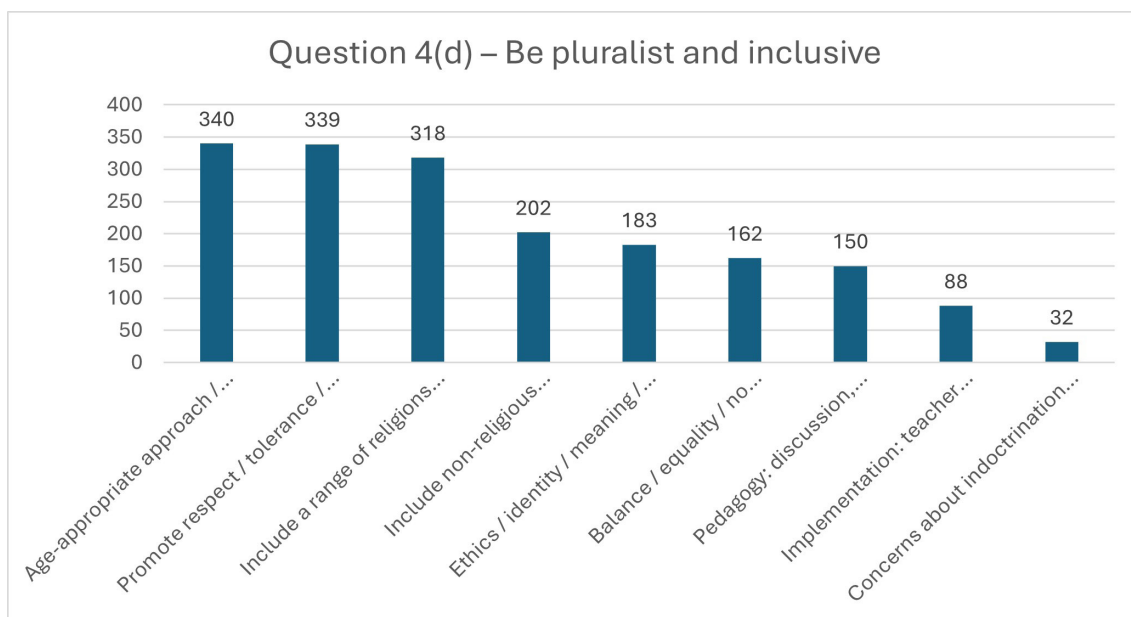
Overall Themes

- Broad rhetorical support for inclusion.
- Sharp disagreement over how far pluralism should extend.

By Respondent Type

- Parents / public / young people:
 Advocate meaningful inclusion of:
 - non-religious worldviews
 - minority faiths
 - lived experience.
- Teachers / governors:
 Often support pluralism but stress:
 - age appropriateness
 - curriculum overload
 - Christianity as the reference point.
- Some respondents reject pluralism entirely, viewing it as ideological.
- Recurring concern: tokenism versus genuine parity.

Theme	Mentions	Share of comments
Age-appropriate approach / key stage progression	340	37.1%
Promote respect / tolerance / inclusion / diversity	339	37.0%
Include a range of religions (world faiths, multiple traditions)	318	34.7%
Include non-religious worldviews (humanism, atheist, agnostic)	202	22.0%
Ethics / identity / meaning / values / philosophy	183	20.0%
Balance / equality / no hierarchy or bias	162	17.7%
Pedagogy: discussion, enquiry, critical thinking	150	16.4%
Implementation: teacher training / time / resources	88	9.6%
Concerns about indoctrination / confessional teaching / worship	32	3.5%



What respondents broadly said:

Pluralism is strongly supported, but many want it structured by age/key stage, with progression from simple awareness to deeper comparison and debate later on.

Inclusion is framed as practical classroom culture: respect, tolerance and ensuring all pupils feel represented.

Respondents frequently ask for explicit inclusion of non-religious worldviews (humanism/atheism/agnosticism) alongside faith traditions.

A recurring expectation is balance: avoiding hierarchy or privileging one worldview and presenting beliefs as “what people believe” rather than “what is true.”

Some comments highlight that delivery matters: discussion-based learning plus sufficient teacher training/time/resources.

4(e) Prepare children and young people for Future Learning and Citizenship by promoting respect, tolerance and understanding of different beliefs and cultures.

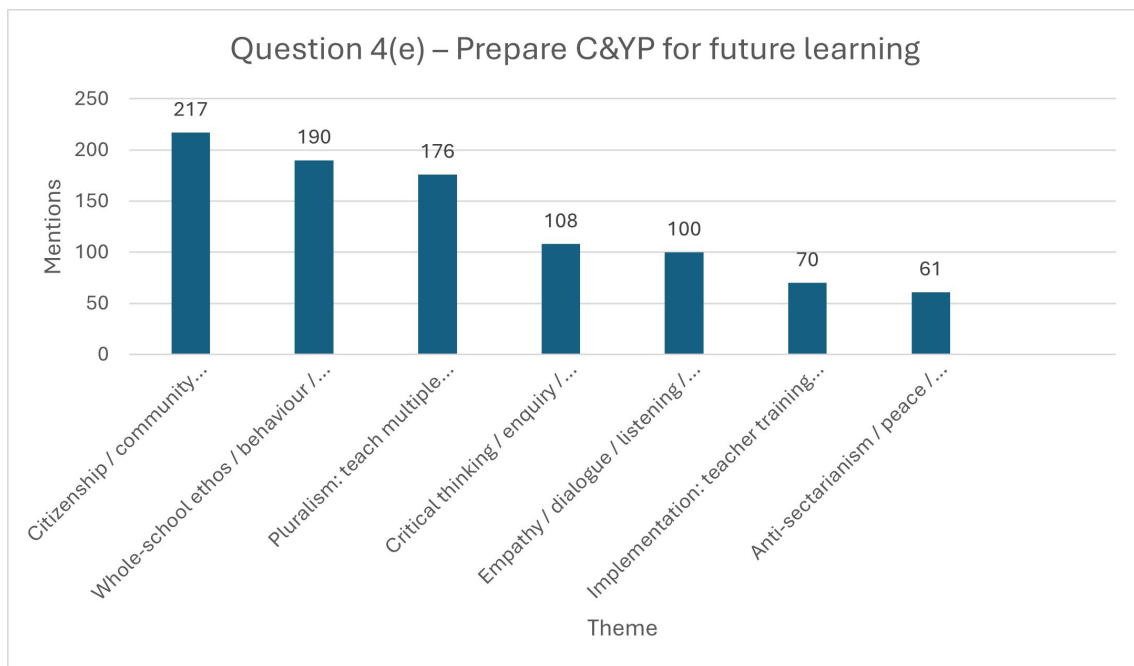
Overall Themes

- Near-universal agreement that RE plays a role in:
 - social cohesion
 - understanding difference
 - ethical reasoning.
- Disagreement on whether RE is the best vehicle for this work.

By Respondent Type

- Pluralist respondents:
View RE as a key space for dialogue and reconciliation.
- Christian-centred respondents:
Argue Christian values already provide moral foundations for citizenship.
- Some educators:
Suggest citizenship aims may be better delivered through other curriculum areas.

Theme	Mentions	Share of comments
Respect / tolerance / understanding	453	49.4%
Citizenship / community cohesion / democracy	217	23.7%
Whole-school ethos / behaviour / daily practice	190	20.7%
Pluralism: teach multiple religions & worldviews	176	19.2%
Critical thinking / enquiry / questioning	108	11.8%
Empathy / dialogue / listening / relationships	100	10.9%
Implementation: teacher training / resources / time	70	7.6%
Anti-sectarianism / peace / reconciliation (NI context)	61	6.7%



What respondents broadly said:

“Respect and tolerance” is the clear headline message—nearly half explicitly reference respect/ understanding/inclusion as the key outcome for future learning and citizenship.

Many respondents emphasise this is not just an RE classroom goal: it needs a whole-school culture, where staff consistently model respectful behaviour and inclusive expectations.

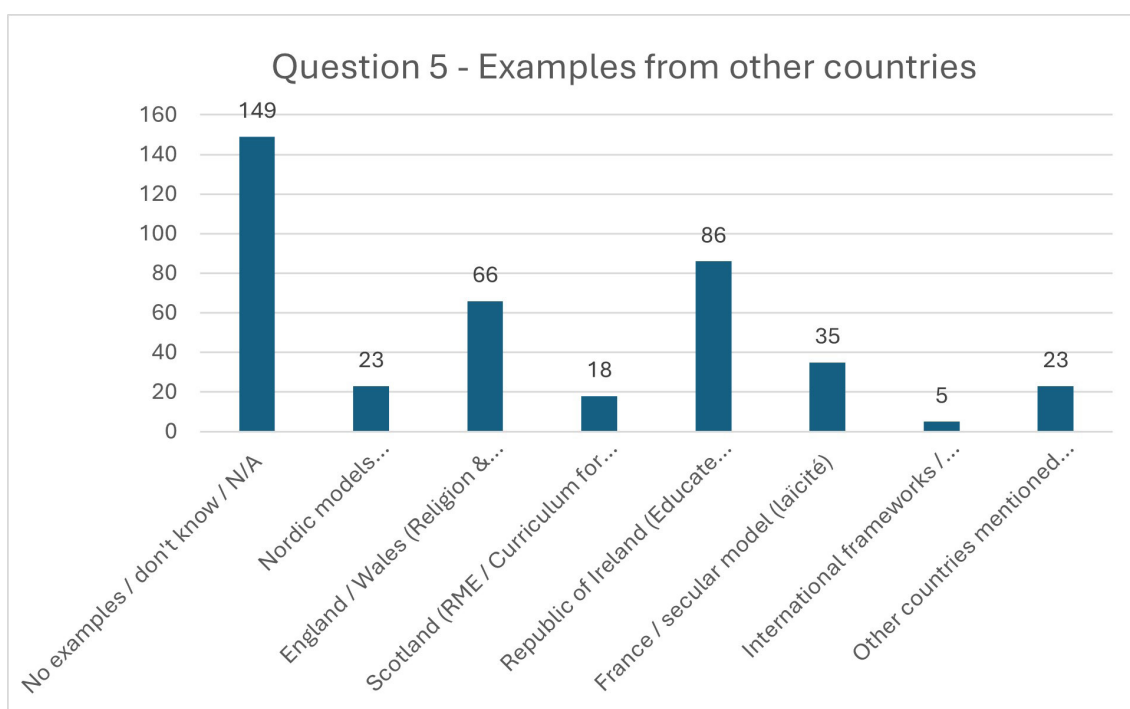
A sizeable group link RE directly to citizenship skills: living well with disagreement, understanding people of different beliefs and strengthening community cohesion.

There is consistent backing for pluralist coverage (multiple religions and non-religious worldviews), often framed as necessary to prepare pupils for real-world diversity.

A smaller—but notable—strand connects this work to Northern Ireland’s context, mentioning division/sectarianism and the need for reconciliation-minded education.

Q5: Are there examples of RE syllabi from other countries that the drafting group should review to inform its own work?

Theme	Mentions	Share of comments
No examples / don't know / N/A	149	28.7%
Nordic models (Norway/Sweden/Denmark/Finland)	23	4.4%
England / Wales (Religion & Worldviews, agreed syllabus)	66	12.7%
Scotland (RME / Curriculum for Excellence)	18	3.5%
Republic of Ireland (Educate Together / Learn Together)	86	16.6%
France / secular model (laïcité)	35	6.7%
International frameworks / comparative references (ECHR, IB, UNESCO)	5	1.0%
Other countries mentioned (US/Canada/Australia/NZ/Netherlands etc.)	23	4.4%



What respondents broadly said:

A large share either don't have examples or aren't sure (nearly 3 in 10 of those who wrote anything).

Where examples are provided, people most often point to:

- Republic of Ireland approaches (especially multi-denominational / Educate Together style references),

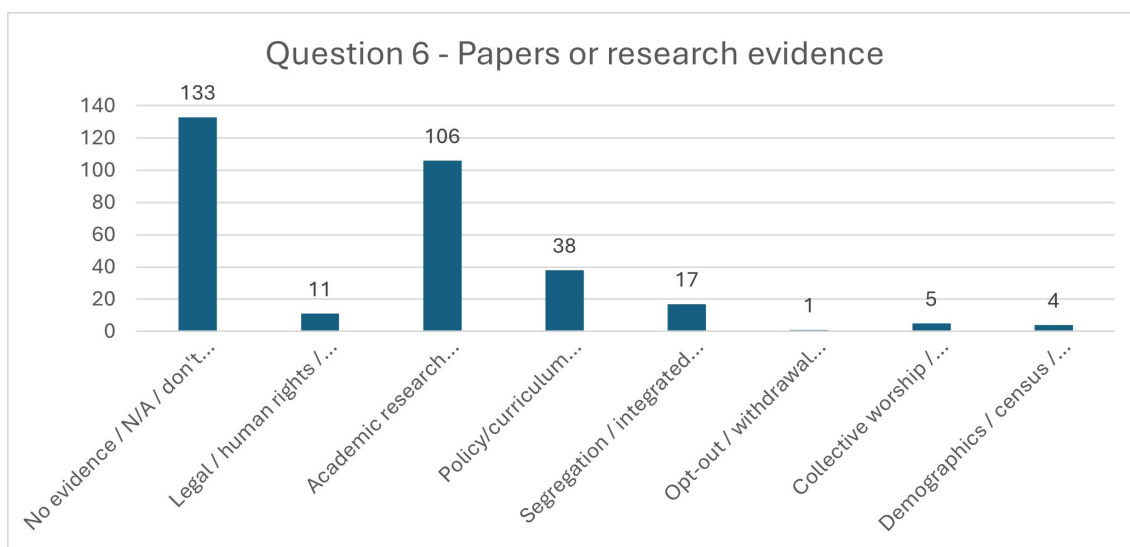
- England/Wales "Religion & Worldviews" framing and

- Secular models like France (typically mentioned in the context of neutrality).

Mentions of Nordic models (e.g., Norway/KRLE) and other international comparisons occur but are comparatively smaller.

Q6: Are there papers or research evidence relating to this matter that the drafting group should review to inform its work) (please append)

Theme	Mentions	Share of comments
No evidence / N/A / don't know	133	31.3%
Legal / human rights / court rulings (JR87, ECHR, UKSC)	11	2.6%
Academic research (papers, journals, theses, universities)	106	24.9%
Policy/curriculum frameworks (Religion & Worldviews, KRLE, RME etc.)	38	8.9%
Segregation / integrated education / sectarianism	17	4.0%
Opt-out / withdrawal arrangements	1	0.2%
Collective worship / assemblies	5	1.2%
Demographics / census / secularisation	4	0.9%



What respondents broadly said:

Over half the rows are blank and among those who answered, a large chunk simply don't have references (about 1 in 3 of non-empty).

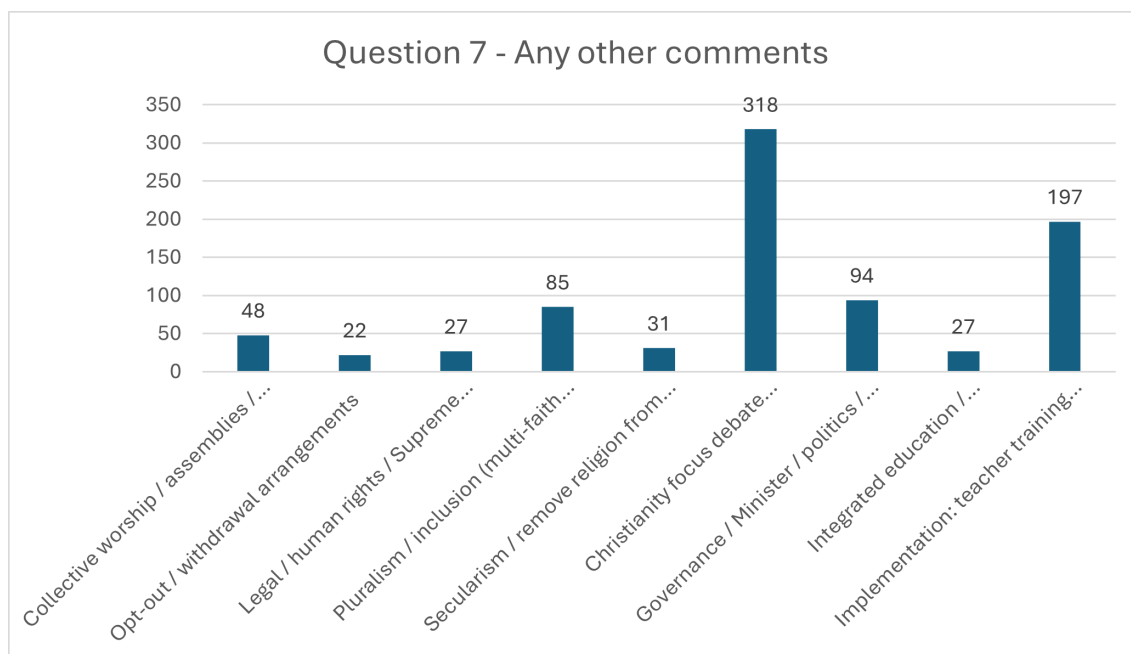
Where evidence is provided, it most commonly takes the form of general "research/studies/reports" mentions and university/academic references, rather than specific citations every time.

A smaller (but clear) portion point to named curriculum/policy frameworks (e.g., *Religion & Worldviews*, KRLE/RME style references).

Some link evidence to NI's school structure (segregation/integration) and a minority explicitly cite legal/human-rights judgments.

Q7: Are there any other issues or comments you wish to raise?

Theme	Mentions	Share of comments
Collective worship / assemblies / prayer	48	7.9%
Opt-out / withdrawal arrangements	22	3.6%
Legal / human rights / Supreme Court / JR87	27	4.4%
Pluralism / inclusion (multi-faith & worldviews)	85	13.9%
Secularism / remove religion from school	31	5.1%
Christianity focus debate (retain/oppose)	318	52.1%
Governance / Minister / politics / church influence	94	15.4%
Integrated education / segregation / sectarianism	27	4.4%
Implementation: teacher training / time / resources / curriculum	197	32.3%



What respondents broadly said:

Question 7 is where people “zoom out” and argue the bigger picture: over half explicitly reference Christianity’s role (either defending it, challenging “central focus,” or reframing it historically/culturally).

A large share focus on practical delivery issues: who teaches it, training, timetable priority, curriculum design and ensuring it isn’t treated as a “filler” subject.

Many comments raise process and governance concerns (ministerial influence, church role, perceived conflicts of interest), often tied to trust and legitimacy of reform.

There is visible support for pluralism (multiple faiths + non-religious worldviews), but it appears more as an “additional requirement” than the primary focus compared with the Christianity/governance threads.

Collective worship appears regularly as a linked issue—some argue it undermines a neutral/academic RE approach even if the syllabus changes.

Cross-Cutting Findings

Across all questions, several themes recur:

- Objectivity is widely demanded but differently defined.
- Christianity is viewed simultaneously as heritage and as exclusion.
- Pluralism is supported in principle, contested in scope.
- Children’s rights and autonomy are increasingly prominent.
- Trust in schools varies sharply by belief background.

Concluding Observations

The consultation demonstrates that any revised RE syllabus will need to:

- Clearly define what is meant by “academic”, “objective” and “pluralist”.
- Address the practical implications of retaining Christianity as a “central focus”.
- Acknowledge the demographic reality of non-religious families.
- Provide clarity on the relationship between RE, citizenship and collective worship.
- Anticipate continued legal, social and political scrutiny if tensions remain unresolved.

Annex B – List of meetings with stakeholders

Date	Organisation	Person name(s)	No.
09-Mar-26	Church Consultative Group – Meeting #1	Andrew Brown; Bishop Niall Coll; Anita Gracie; Peter Hamill; Sharon Haughey; Edwin McGee	1
09-Mar-26	CCEA	Gerry Campbell; Esther Martin; Liam Dempsey	2
09-Mar-26	Inter Faith Forum	Gasser Abdelal; Mutaraf Ahmed; Edwin Graham; Norman Richardson	3
10-Mar-26	NI Humanists	Boyd Sleator	4
10-Mar-26	Parents for Inclusive Education	Niamh Cullen; Laura McEllone; Niall McElone; Virginia Méndez; Jack Russell	5
10-Mar-26	Care NI	Ian Bingham	6
16-Mar-26	Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)	Eva Cahoon; David Brooks; Peter Martin	7
16-Mar-26	NI Human Rights Commission (NIHRC)	Colin Caughey; Melody Kozah	8
16-Mar-26	Evangelical Alliance	David Smyth	9
16-Mar-26	SDLP	Cara Hunter; Phil Carson	10
18-Mar-26	Alliance Party	Nick Mathison; Michelle Guy; Peter Purcell	11
18-Mar-26	Controlled Schools Support Council (CSSC)	Mark Baker	12
24-Mar-26	NI Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)	Claire Martin	13
24-Mar-26	Scripture Union Northern Ireland (SUNI)	Mark Moorhead	14
24-Mar-26	Education Authority	John Unsworth; Kieran Shields	15
24-Mar-26	Queen’s University Belfast	Dr James Nelson	16
31-Mar-26	Integrated Education Fund (IEF)	Jill Caskey; June Wilkinson; Patricia Murtagh; Ellen McVea; Teresa Devlin; David Thompson	17
31-Mar-26	Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG)	Maria Thomasson; Tarlach Mac Giolla Bhríde; Chrstine Mhic Colaim	18
20-Apr-26	Governing Bodies Association	Ronnie Hassard (GBA Chair), Joe McCann GBA (Secondment, former RE teacher), Helen McNally GBA, Nuala O’Neill, Leo O’Reilly (GBA Vice Chair)	19
20-Apr-26	Church Consultative Group – Meeting #2	Andrew Brown; Bishop Niall Coll; Anita Gracie; Peter Hamill; Sharon Haughey; Edwin McGee	20

Date	Organisation	Person name(s)	No.
20-Apr-26	Quaker Society	Rebecca Loader, Will Haire, James Nelson	21
20-Apr-26	CCMS	Eamonn Broderick, Mairead Harvey	22
5-May-26	Ulster Unionists	Jon Burrows	23
18-May-26	Church Consultative Group – Meeting #3	Andrew Brown; Bishop Niall Coll; Anita Gracie; Peter Hamill; Sharon Haughey; Edwin McGee	24
1 Jun 2026	Church Consultative Group – Meeting #4	Andrew Brown; Bishop Niall Coll; Anita Gracie; Peter Hamill; Sharon Haughey; Edwin McGee	25
3 Jun 2026	Post-Primary and Special School Teachers	Teacher Testing Group	26
9 Jun 2026	Primary School Teachers	Teacher Testing Group	27

Annex C – Children and Young People’s Engagement

[This is available separately]

