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Report on a survey of early career secondary RE teachers:

The First Year of Teaching

- a follow-up survey to the Covid-cohort RE ITE survey 2021



Introduction



In Autumn 2021 I published the results of a survey carried out that year across all ITE providers in England. The intention of that research was to explore the make-up and motivations of students applying to become secondary Religious Education teachers in the period 2020-21. A full copy of the report can be accessed at <https://bgro.repository.guildhe.ac.uk/id/eprint/881/>, and a summary of the findings is included as an appendix to this document.

About half of the participants in the above study agreed to be contacted for a further survey in 2022. The focus of this further research was to be their experience as early career teachers.

This report summarises their experience in applying for jobs, the nature of the teaching posts that they secured, their experience in being supported as early career teachers, and their hopes and dreams for the future. In addition, they were asked to reflect back on their previous training provision, including both the practical and academic elements of the ITE course that they completed.

In addition to being the first ITE cohort to surpass the government's target for RE ITE applicants in recent years, they are also the first to experience the new two-year induction into teaching, based on the 2019 Early Career Framework for teachers¹. This survey asks whether they are being provided with the various components intended by that programme, and what other resources and networks have been of help during their first year of teaching.

This study provides only a snap-shot of the experience of these early career teachers, but my hope is that it will be of interest to the RE community and possibly provide further stimulus for additional research. On the whole it suggests that early career RE teachers are content in their work and positive about their future as teachers.

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¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/978358/Early-Career_Framework_April_2021.pdf

Summary of findings

1. A majority (39=87%) of the 45 students who had trained as RE teachers in 2020-21 had secured a teaching post by the end of their ITE course.
2. Of the six who did not, four secured alternative non-teaching jobs in schools (including cover supervisor, supply cover, teaching assistant and SEN-support work), and two have moved on to alternative employment.
3. 30 of the 39 who secured teaching posts (79%) were in positions designated as Religious Education posts, and a further four were teaching a significant element of RE.
4. The majority (31=80%) were pleased with the kind of school that they were working in, and most of them (29=76%) were happy with the kind of RE being taught.
5. The majority of trainees (28=62%) had secured a post after just 1-3 applications, and some did not even need to apply, being offered posts in their training schools.
6. Most of those with teaching jobs (31=80%) were teaching a majority of RE lessons (80% or more of timetable), often supplemented by some teaching of History, Geography, Citizenship or PSHE (Personal, Social, Health & Economics).
7. The majority (32=87%) felt adequately supported as early career teachers (ECTs), having received timetable reduction, provision of a named mentor, and appropriate ECT training.
8. However, only 11 (30%) received any specific training input for Religious Education.
9. Only 1 respondent was presently continuing a Masters-level course begun during their ITE year, although a further 20 (53%) intended to do so.
10. Most of the group (34=89%) considered that the academic part of their ITE course was helpful for teaching. A similar percentage rate their overall ITE experience as good preparation for teaching.
11. Most of the group make regular use of RE support networks, particularly NATRE membership (53%) and social media sites (84%).
12. Most of the respondents (27=71%) were enjoying teaching, but 29% were not sure or had mixed feelings. None said that they were not enjoying teaching at all.
13. 58% of the group said that teaching was proving to be what they had hoped for, but 34% were not so sure or experienced elements that were unanticipated, and a further 3 (=8%) said that the job was not as expected.
14. Half of the group were content with their salary, and half were not. Most had accepted the salary offered, but 2 (5%) had negotiated a salary with the school.
15. A third of the group (34%) feel OK about their work-life balance, but 18 (=47%) would like more 'me' time. 18% were feeling overwhelmed by the demands of the job.
16. Most of the group (33=89%) spend 8-12 hours on schoolwork each day (not including travel); two respondents spend 13+ hours per day on work, and another two, just 6-7 hours.
17. Most of the group (60%) hope to be in a departmental or other leadership position in five years' time, although 8 (=20%) are content to remain as a classroom teacher.

Completion rate

72 early career RE teachers were invited to participate in this survey. These were trainees who had indicated that they were willing to participate in a follow-up survey when completing the Covid-cohort online survey, 2021.

Only 11 teachers had responded to the initial request in early June 2022, but after five further prompts, a total of 45 responses were obtained (62.5%) by end of July 2022. Since five trainees had provided university emails- and had presumably now left those universities -these 45 responses represent two thirds (67%) of the potential participation.

Of this group of 45, 42 (93%) have agreed to participate in another, final, follow-up survey.

Securing a teaching post

39 (87%) of the group successfully secured a teaching post by the end of their ITE course (this compares favourably with an overall cross-subject 73% of trainees from this cohort who secured teaching posts in a state-funded school²), and of the 6 (13%) who did not, four have been working in schools anyway (“supply cover”; “teaching assistant”; “cover supervisor plus 7 hours of teaching RE”; “agency & TA work in SEN schools”). However, one of the cohort now works as a TESCO shelf-filler, and one trainee left their course feeling very disillusioned with teaching and with their course, and now feels “in limbo”.

Of the 39 who secured teaching posts, the majority (30=79%) of these were full time RE teaching posts. A further 4 respondents taught some RE, but not in a full time capacity (“some History as well as RE”; “part-time RE post”; “Personal Development & Citizenship post, which includes some RE”; “only 20% RE, along with Citizenship & PSHE”).

Most of the group (31=80%) were pleased with the type of school in which they had found employment, although one had reservations: “I think I would have preferred to teach in a faith-based school due to my previous experience as a Licensed Lay Minister in the Church of England”.

Asked if the school teaches the kind of RE curriculum that suits them, 29 (76%) said that it did, but two commented that they would like to have included more world faiths teaching (“It is a good curriculum however I do feel it can be more rounded considering other faiths more”; Yes, but I’d like to teach beyond Christianity and Islam”).

At the end of the year, just 29 of the 39 (i.e. 76% of the total) would still be in the same teaching post, the majority of these moving on to new posts, but with a few leaving mainstream teaching all together: “The education system and schools are broken, the stress levels too high. Will tutor and teach outside the formal education system”.

² <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/initial-teacher-training-performance-profiles/2020-21>

Applying for jobs

Fig 1 indicates the number of job applications required in order to secure employment. The majority of trainees (28=62%) gained employment after 1-3 interviews, although two of those indicating that they made no applications were actually offered teaching posts at their training school or with a supply agency.

Job applications

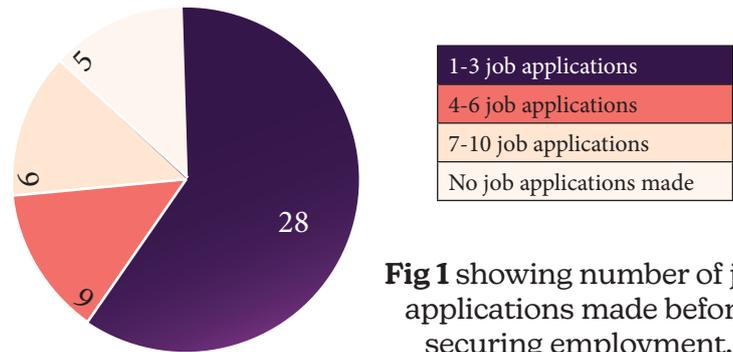


Fig 1 showing number of job applications made before securing employment.

'Free' comments made by respondents in respect of applying for jobs:

I didn't need to make an application as my training school offered me an ECT position	I wish I had more help/ support preparing for the job interviews.
I had 3 unsuccessful interviews before finding a job	Employed at First placement job offer in October during training
I made two applications to Outstanding Catholic Secondary Schools in London. I was invited to interviews at both and was given both jobs, however I turned the first job down.	The course did not find me a placement within reasonable distance of my home. The closest was 2 miles away during Covid. I am qualifying with PGCE non QTS
Supply teacher long term	I haven't secured employment
Received interviews for all, turned one down. Accepted a job offer after interview number 2.	I secured a job at my PGCE placement school
I was offered a job by the school I trained in - was an employment based training route	(4-6) Not including applications to non teaching jobs
Supply post secured straight away	5 teacher jobs, 2 non-teacher jobs
I did not apply. These questions seem quite England specific. Is this survey aimed at UK or only England. In Scotland after PGDE you are guaranteed your first job so don't need to apply. You do that for a year as your probation job then apply for posts yourself afterwards.	

RE subject teaching

Most of the respondents in teaching jobs were timetabled to teach a majority of RE (80% timetable or above), although four teachers had just 50% RE or above. Most were teaching another subject in addition to RE, usually a Humanities subject (History or Geography) or else Citizenship or Personal, Social, Health & Economics (PSHE). A few of the group were also teaching other subjects (e.g. rural science, business studies), often because this reflected their previous undergraduate studies.

Subjects taught

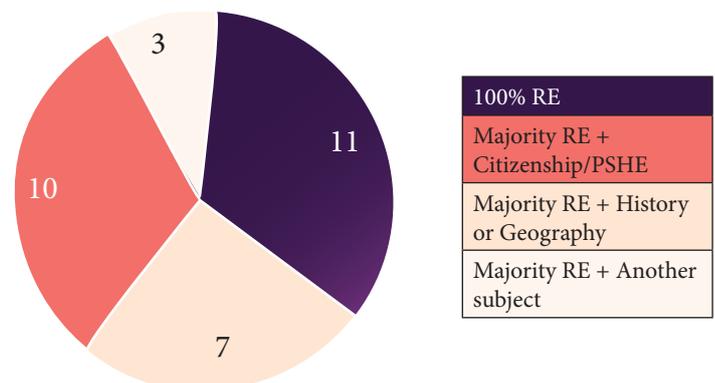


Fig. 2 showing the subject timetabling for survey respondents who were in teaching posts.

Early career teacher (ECT) support

Most of the respondents (32=87%) feel adequately supported as early career teachers, and their responses to the below questions indicate that they are being appropriately provided for, although little of their training support is specifically RE-related.

	YES	NO
Do you receive a 10% timetable reduction as an ECT?	35 (94.6%)	2 (5.4%)
Has an ECT mentor been allocated to you?	36 (97.3%)	1 (2.7%)
Is ECT training support provided by your institution?	35 (94.6%)	2 (5.4%)
Is the training support tailored to your individual needs?	22 (59.5%)	15 (40.5%)
Is any of the training specifically RE-related?	11 (29.7%)	26 (70.3%)
Overall, are you satisfied with the induction & training support provided?	30 (81.1%)	7 (18.9%)

Ongoing academic study

Only one of the respondents is presently continuing with their academic studies towards an MA or MEd, although the majority (20=53%) say that they intend to complete an M-level award within the next five years.

Asked whether (in retrospect) the academic element of their ITE training was helpful, the majority were positive. Fig 3 gives a break down of their responses.

How helpful for teaching was the academic study part of your ITE/PGCE year?

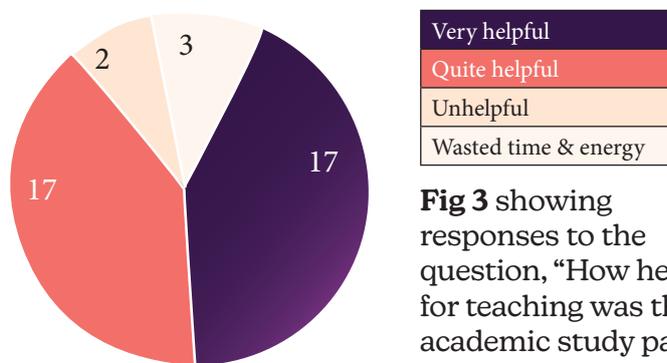


Fig 3 showing responses to the question, “How helpful for teaching was the academic study part of your ITE/PGCE year?”

In response to the question, “After a year of teaching (or other activity), and in retrospect, how would you rate last year’s initial teacher education/ training course?”, the majority (34=76%) were positive or very positive. See Fig 4 for a breakdown of their responses.

Retrospective evaluation of their ITE training

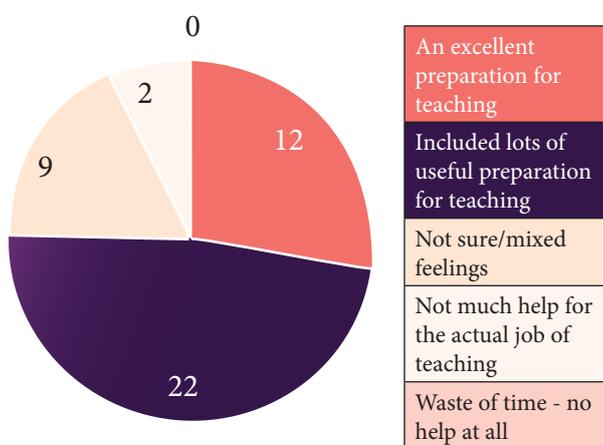


Fig 4 showing responses to the question, “After a year of teaching (or other activity), and in retrospect, how would you rate last year’s initial teacher education/ training course?”

Further comments to this question included:

It was mostly good, but I haven’t really used my assignment research and it would have been helpful to train in more challenging schools in terms of behaviour management.	They did not have enough placements and only had some in certain areas which they were not transparent about. There were only 11 of us on the university based course?
An excellent tutor with lots of interesting speakers and conferences.	School Direct was the better option for me as I could put into practice what I was learning.
Great support and help from those around me and the ITT training provided great training and resources which I still use.	There is no need for lesson plans. You never use them as a teacher. As a student, they are very time consuming.
Hampered by the pandemic, otherwise fine.	More guidance on marking.
Great support from everyone.	

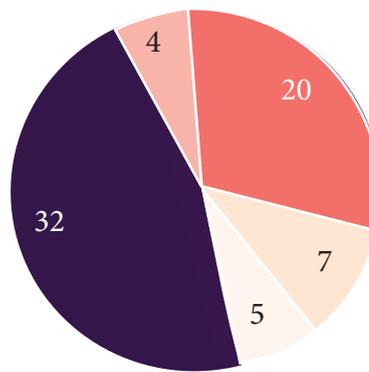
Guidance to future RE trainees

In response to the question, "What advice would you give to someone beginning their initial teacher education?", the following responses were provided:

Ask for help, talk to colleagues, don't suffer in silence	Your ability to cope with the demands will increase over time.
Do your research around your subject, ask for extra documents	Don't sweat over the uni stuff, focus on placements and getting the best out of those experience
Join Twitter/ Facebook groups for your subject.	Set limits and stick to them.
Concentrate on the end goal. Be kind to yourself. Set boundaries with your mentor/trainer immediately. Designate time for yourself.	Ensure it is what you passionately want to do so that you go into it with enthusiasm and a real willingness to make a difference to pupils' education.
Make sure you make time for yourself and don't sweat the small stuff.	Check if they have placements in your area where you can comfortably commute from.
Hard work but worth it.	Get some experience within a school, get a feel for it, ask questions
Critically analyse everything a school tells you - they are always seeking to make themselves look as good as possible. They will hide the issues in their school, but with the right questions you can find out in advance whether it is a place you would want to work - don't let yourself get carried away.	Ask everybody regardless of department for advice/ tips. Consider if you will be happy with the workload and pay balance as this is not something I had fully considered as I always wanted to be a teacher regardless but now having been in the profession a year it can be quite upsetting at times the hours put in and then not receiving that reflected in pay.
Don't take anything personally, stand up for yourself, be careful about ensuring good work/life balance.	Read all the books while you have time and the energy.
To enjoy their training before they are teaching full time.	Be prepared preparations is key to complete successfully.
Be organised.	Take a break over Christmas.
Be honest about how you feel about subject knowledge and what you do and don't feel confident with. Don't be scared to voice how you feel.	Try to maximise your efficiency in time management early on. Observe and take notes on as many expert teachers as possible, but don't imitate - bring yourself and be resilient.
Get in as much teaching time as you can. Be honest with your mentor about how you are feeling. Observe other teachers who teach your classes. Be adaptable to the advice given to you by other colleagues. Enjoy it.	Make sure to simplify your life as best you can, read up on subject knowledge as it is a steep learning curve. Get to know the exam board which you are teaching. BE KIND to yourself.
Be well prepared, fake it until you make it.	Try and get as much experience as you can with the more admin and assessment sides, what all that involves.
Don't!	Don't give up.

RE support networks

38 respondents (84%) make use of various RE support networks, and Fig 5 identifies the most popular of these (Social media sites and NATRE membership). Half of this group regularly use particular RE websites, and these are identified in their feedback comments below.



RE Support networks

Social Media RE support groups
NATRE membership
Other Support networks
Diocesan or Academy group support
Area RE Hub Meetings

Fig 5 showing RE support networks that respondents use.

Responses to the question, “Are there particular websites that you use regularly and/or rely on for RE information or planning?”

Philosophy.com	TEACH RE, George Teaches, TES
REspect Group on Facebook	Natre, REToday
Occasionally I use TES or Twinkl	PSHE Association, Educate and Celebrate, AQA, tes
Blogs such as Joe Kinnard and Louis Everett (From their twitters)	BBC bitesize, Segaroad, chabad.org, myjewishlearning.com, AQA
https://thevcs.org/	Tes, Reonline
RE Online, BBC Bitesize	REspect RE Facebook page
Chabad.org , Sefaria.org, MyJewishLearning, BBC Bitesize, Wikipedia	

Overall assessment of teaching so far

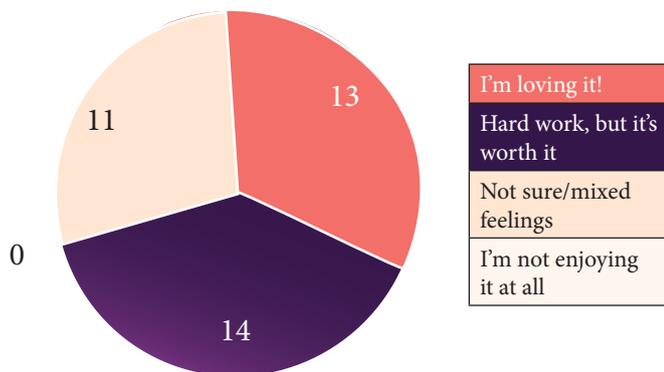
Below is a full list of comments in response to the question, What words or phrases best describe your overall experience of teaching RE so far?

The majority are very positive about the experience.

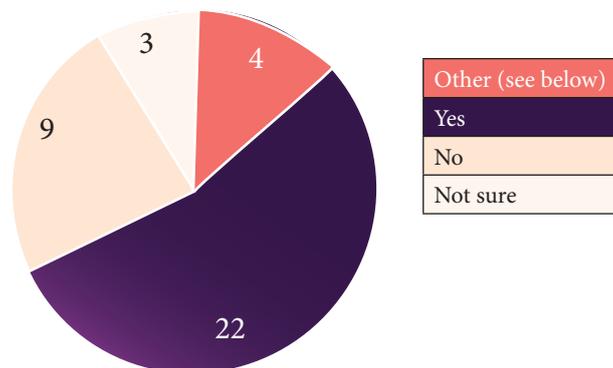
Enjoyable, I love it!	Inspiring, hopeful, challenging and fun.	
Challenging but rewarding	Rewarding, challenging, worldview changing	
Interesting, positive, entertaining, challenging	Difficult	
A journey!	Excellent	Interesting, amazing
Sometimes frustrating. Better experience than my training placement.	Opening students eyes to different areas/ideas	Interesting, challenging, rushed
Great	Exciting, fun and rewarding	Amazing, love it!
It has been fun teaching RE but I haven't had the best start to the teaching career itself.		
Exhausting, demanding, demoralising, interesting, challenging, character building, exciting at times, life-giving and exciting (if you're at the right school), 'I miss my old HoD', 'I miss centralised resources', School leaders, colleagues and those around you can make or break the year.		Exciting, engaging
Informative, explorative, exciting, fulfilling.	Challenging	Good
Interesting, varied and no 2 days are the same.		Incredible
Inspiring & Challenging	Exhausting teaching a full cohort of RE in a non-religious school	

Responses to specific questions about the profession:

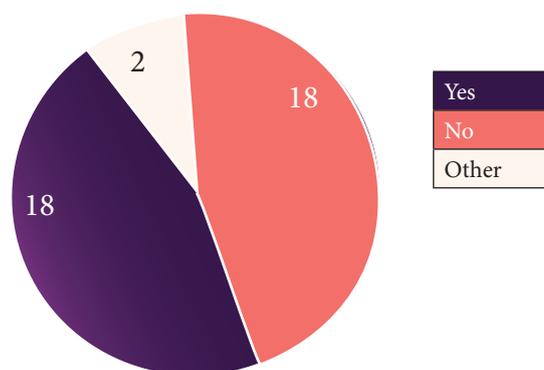
“So far, how much are you enjoying teaching?”



“Is the job proving to be what you had hoped?”



“Are you content with your salary?”

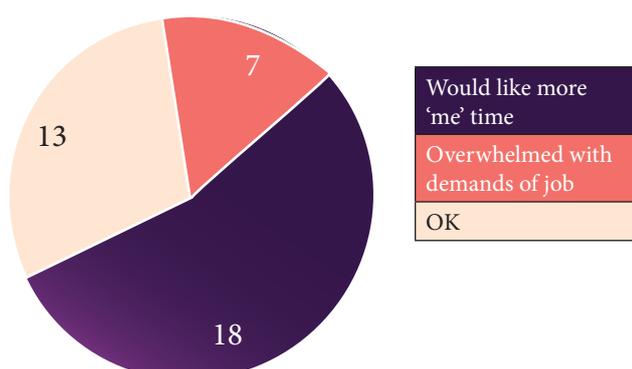


Further comments in response to the question, “Is the job proving to be what you had hoped?”

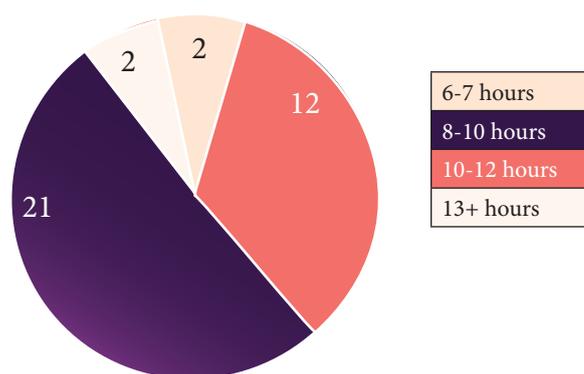
Yes and no, there is a lot of worklold no matter how organised one is. However this also depends on the school you are in too.	
I didn't want to be an RE teacher - it was the only job available to me when I graduated. But doing it now, I realise that it depends on the school. My current school doesn't have centralised resources and it means that my planning workload is unmanageable - the stress of this year and the challenge has only hardened my resolve to lead. Also, school leadership is poor which makes it even less encouraging.	
I've had to step up as acting HOD	Somewhat.
which has made it more challenging.	

In response to the question, “Did you negotiate your salary or just accept what was offered?”, the majority (95%) accepted what was offered, although two respondents indicated that they did negotiate.

“How do you feel about your work/ life balance?”



“Typically how many hours do you devote to school work each day (not including travel)?”

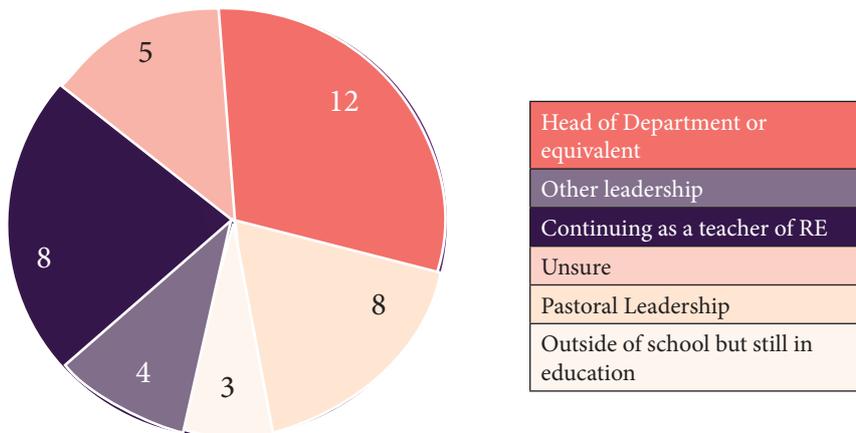


Further comments on salary, working conditions, or work-life balance:

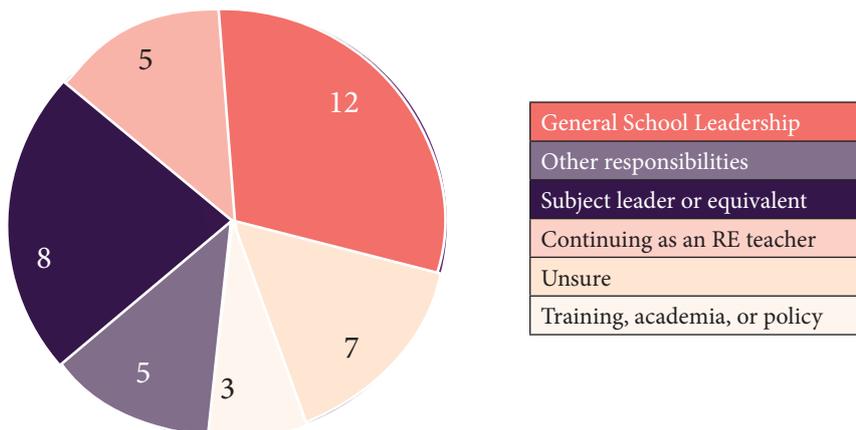
More planning time would enable me to do a better job.	For the hard work, the salary does not match to the role.	I work part time and have prioritised work life balance as a working parent
Working conditions are good and I feel I have access to everything I need. I feel salary does not reflect the hours put in for example any other job doing overtime they are paid hourly for that time.		
As a teacher I can spend busy weeks working until 8pm although my paid day finishes at 3:30pm	Personally find flaws in my own time management outside of school - not school's fault but has an impact on my day to day.	
Work-life balance is unreasonable - because people are unwilling to share. I am too exhausted at the end of the day and week to do anything else.		
Too many hours not worth the pay and also miss out on socials due to work load and family time isn't the same	I am now a cover teacher so these answers are different but at the time of my full time role it was a lot of hours, minimal support and very tiring.	
Minimum salary should be 30k. The wage does not match the work or what is expected of a teacher.		

The Future

“Where would you like your career to be in 5 years’ time?”



“What are your career hopes for 10 years’ time?”



Appendix:

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS from the 2021 Report on the Covid-cohort RE ITE trainees.

There are arguably no great surprises in the results of this survey. Overall, it reflects a group of RE teachers who are varied, world-and-work experienced, and with a wide range of personal interests.

- 662 trainees were enrolled for RE ITT in 2020, 130% of the government target (510). This was the first time that the government target had been met for many years. 152 of the cohort (23%) completed this survey.
- The majority of these RE teachers were trained in universities (54%), or through the school direct route (29%).
- More than half (52%) of the cohort were over 25 years of age, the majority (82%) bringing previous work experience, and many (over 40%) were making a career switch.
- The majority were female (78%), which approximately reflects government figures of 27% male/ 73% female for RE trainees in this cohort.
- The group represent a range of faith traditions, although the largest groups were Christian (34%), and Atheist/Agnostic (33%). 7% describe themselves as Undecided/Don't know. In total, 29% describe themselves as strongly committed to a religious faith perspective.
- 16% of the cohort identify as Black, Afro-Caribbean, Asian or Mixed race, and an additional 9% as Irish or European.
- Most of the group were educated in state schools, although 9% had experienced private education. Some had attended schools overseas, and one had been home-schooled.
- 36% of the group have other family members who are teaching, with 35 (65%) of these being immediate family (parents, partners or siblings).
- 46% of the cohort had a first degree which included Theology/ Religious Studies, and a further 15% have a first degree in Philosophy. The other 40% of the group have degrees in a wide range of subjects, including business, journalism, law, health and social care, etc.
- Nearly 43% of the group completed a subject knowledge enhancement course prior to commencement of their ITE training, and the majority (85%) found this helpful.
- Both personal and social utility factors (such as enjoying work with young people and wanting to make a difference to people's lives) attracted this group into teaching, whereas career value factors (e.g. holidays, job flexibility, fit with family responsibilities, etc.) did not.
- Likewise, fascination with the subject matter, and RE's scope for making a difference to young people's lives, was what specifically attracted them to teach RE, rather than financial incentives (e.g. the government bursary) or social influences (such as doing well in RE at school, or other people suggesting that they might become an RE teacher).
- A range of 'landmarks' contributed to peoples' choice to become a RE teacher, particularly love of philosophical debate (75%), having relevant qualifications (71%), and encouragement from others (51%).
- Respondents have several hopes and intentions from teaching RE, particularly, breaking down prejudice and misunderstanding (71%), helping pupils to discover their own perspectives (51%), and enthusing students in the study of religion and worldviews (43%).
- Trainees appreciated various aspects of their ITE experience, and offer a range of suggestions for improving the initial training year.
- Only 8% of trainees would travel to anywhere in the UK or abroad for a teaching job, and 75% would only travel up to 25 miles for a teaching job.



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