

RE Updates

1. National Curriculum Reform (England & Wales) - RE Proposed for Inclusion

Summary:

In **November 2025**, the *independent Curriculum and Assessment Review* — commissioned by the Department for Education — recommended that **Religious Education (RE) be formally added to the National Curriculum for the first time**. Historically, RE has been compulsory in state-funded schools but *not* part of the National Curriculum, with syllabus content decided locally via SACREs and agreed syllabus conferences.

Key points:

- The Review identifies RE's current standing as insufficiently reflected in curriculum status and inconsistent in quality and delivery across regions.
- It recommends a “*staged approach*” to reform, including establishing a **national task-and-finish group** to draft a national curriculum for RE, drawing on expertise from faith communities, secular organisations, teachers, and academics.
- Government response materials confirm that further consultation and sector consensus will inform potential legislative changes and task group outputs.

Implications for SACREs:

- SACREs will continue to advise on agreed syllabus development during the transition, but potential national standards may reduce local variance over time.
- SACREs may be invited to contribute to consultation exercises on draft national RE curriculum content.

2. Legal Ruling on RE & Collective Worship (Northern Ireland)

Summary:

On **19 November 2025**, the *UK Supreme Court* ruled that the provision of Christian-focused RE and collective worship, as delivered under the existing core syllabus in Northern Ireland schools, **breaches the rights of pupils and parents under Article 2 of Protocol 1 and Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)** because it is not conveyed in an *objective, critical and pluralistic* manner.

Legal context:

- The case (often referred to as *JR87*) was brought by a family whose philosophical convictions did not align with a curriculum framed predominantly around Christian doctrine.
- The Supreme Court held that the statutory right of parental withdrawal was insufficient to address the *lack of pluralism* in RE and collective worship, contributing to a breach of human rights protections.

The JR87 Judgment: Key Points

JR87 concerned a Northern Irish school but the Supreme Court applied ECHR principles as binding across the UK. The Court found that the school's RE and worship breached pupils' rights because they were:

- Confessional rather than educational,
- Presented Christianity as absolute truth,
- Lacked sufficient information about other religions or non-religious beliefs, and
- Required parents to rely on a withdrawal mechanism that imposed risk of stigma and undue burden.

The Supreme Court reaffirmed that where the State provides teaching in religion or belief, it must be:

“Objective, critical and pluralistic.”

Teaching that does not meet these standard risks amounting to indoctrination, which is prohibited. Crucially, the Court confirmed that:

- The right to withdraw is not an adequate safeguard where the core teaching itself breaches the pluralism requirement.

Implications for Schools in England

The judgment does not change legislation in England, but it strengthens expectations around how RE and worship must be delivered in non-faith schools.

Schools should now ensure that:

A. RE is educational, not confessional

- Teaching must explore multiple religions and non-religious worldviews, taught in a balanced and respectful way.
- Faith claims should be presented as beliefs, not facts.
- Classroom activities should never encourage pupils to adopt a religious commitment.

B. Assemblies are inclusive and non-coercive

- While collective worship must be “broadly Christian”, it should not resemble evangelism or require pupils to adopt a religious identity.
- Values-based assemblies, incorporating a range of religious and secular perspectives, are entirely compatible with the law.

C. Withdrawal is not the only safeguard

- Schools should aim for RE and assemblies that all pupils can attend without feeling pressured or marginalised.
- Where withdrawal is requested, arrangements must avoid stigma and ensure meaningful alternative activity.

Summary

JR87 does not remove RE or collective worship from schools, nor does it prevent schools from teaching Christianity as part of a balanced curriculum. It does, however, require schools to ensure that all teaching relating to religion or belief is **inclusive, educational and non-indoctrinatory**, and that reliance on withdrawal is not used to compensate for unlawful provision.

Brief Overview

Policy Area	Development	Practical Impact
National Curriculum Reform (England)	RE recommended to be added to the National Curriculum.	SACREs will likely engage in consultation and transition planning; future national standards may inform agreed syllabuses.
NI Legal Ruling on RE	Supreme Court finds existing RE & collective worship practices breach human rights.	Schools and SACREs in Northern Ireland face potential short- to medium-term review of syllabus content to ensure pluralism.
Sector Debate	Wide stakeholder engagement on both reform and tradition in RE provision.	SACREs may need to respond to consultations and support balanced implementation.