

A toolkit for teachers

Generating positive local media coverage for Religious Education



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Why generate media coverage?



Rudolf Elliott Lockhart
REC Chief Executive Office

An introduction and welcome from Rudolf Elliott Lockhart, Chief Executive Officer at the Religious Education Council (REC).

Religion and beliefs are frequently part of the news and media agenda. Everyone has something to say on the subject, and Religious Education in schools and colleges plays an important role in helping young people make sense of it all.

Many schools and colleges already work extensively with their local and community media; getting stories told by local media about the creative and engaging ways they help young people discuss issues and explore religion and beliefs is an important way to communicate the value and role of Religious Education. It can help:

- increase understanding of different religions and beliefs
- support the standing of Religious Education
- raise the profile of your school or college in the community
- increase community cohesion and mutual understanding

This toolkit is intended to support the existing media relations work your institution undertakes, and is specific to communicating the benefits of Religious Education. The toolkit gives some ideas, tips and techniques to help you work with your press officer or senior leadership team to promote the good work you are doing in the local media.

Before you start though, please discuss any potential activity with your head teacher and check what your school and local authority policy is regarding the media.

We hope this toolkit will help you think of some different ways to tell your stories. However, if at any time the media wants more detailed information than you feel able to give on Religious Education, please refer them to:

The Religious Education Council of England and Wales

CAN Mezzanine
49-51 East Road
London
N1 6AH

Tel: 0207 250 1866

Email: info@religiouseducationcouncil.org

What makes a good story?



Getting started

Regions in England and Wales each have their own local print and broadcast media that are always looking for a steady flow of good local stories:

- print media (daily and weekly papers)
- website, blog and social media presence
- broadcast media with news and feature bulletins on regional radio and television
- specialist media, for example 'what's on' magazines, many of which cover events happening in the area as well as news.

Your press officer, senior leadership team or local authority press officer may have a list of all the different media and named contacts in your area. It is always best to find out what publications and programmes exist in advance, so allow some time to do this.

Planning your story

Although the media can appear daunting and sometimes off-hand, remember they need your stories to fill their pages or airtime. Here are some ideas on what can make a good story.

- 1. People** – if you look at most media, people are in the majority of stories. So, always try to have a human interest at the heart of your story. Local press love names and faces so always try to have people involved.
- 2. Timing** – different religious festivals in the UK form a natural news hook. The media is driven by events so try to link to some of these or other topical issues.
- 3. A community story** – work with your leadership team to make sure different interest groups are involved as these can really help give your story the broader perspective the media often look for.

Some story ideas



Stories can include;

- promoting celebration days
- school visits to places of worship
- showcasing artwork generated around religious festival themes e.g. Diwali
- school wide involvement in national events and competitions e.g. promoting Christian Aid week
- community work and engagement
- shows, exhibitions and performances
- promoting interest and visits from MPs and other community leaders
- school and student achievements and results in Religious Education.

Backing up your story with useful facts about RE will help set it in a broader context.

Cultural sensitivities

Culture comes in many different shapes and sizes and includes religious and non-religious beliefs and values, history, thought and lifestyle. It is naturally part of teaching Religious Education. We don't want to teach you to suck eggs when it comes to religious observances, traditions and manners, but the following examples are useful as reminder that even an innocent lack of sensitivity can lead to significant problems.

- A local councillor in one of the London boroughs spoke against litter on an inner city estate commenting that it *"might be acceptable in their own country but it's not acceptable here"*. Her remarks were taken out of context and the story was picked up by a local paper and coverage soon escalated to include the London Evening Standard and the Times of India.
- When PepsiCo launched in China with the slogan *"Come alive with Pepsi"*, it hadn't anticipated the Chinese translation, *"Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the dead."*

As with anything in the public domain, ask someone else – a trusted colleague for example – for their opinion and double check any cultural or religious sensitivity that could be misinterpreted. It's worth thinking in advance of the ways your story could be interpreted and making sure you avoid any pitfalls.

- Check your language, for example if you are learning about worship and decide to recreate a shrine in the classroom it should be described as a 'replica'; be careful not to use the term 'priest' as a general term for spiritual leader.
- Be aware of the possible reactions to pupils dressed in clothing associated with faiths other than their own.
- Avoid sex and gender stereotypes.

How to write a powerful media release



A media release, sometimes called a news release or a press release, is the accepted way of communicating with the print and broadcast media.

- The media release should always contain news (as opposed to opinions) and clearly state something that is taking place.
- Have a look at how publications are covering similar stories. If you replicate a style well, your release may be used with few changes.

Five steps to follow:

1. Be factual. The first paragraph should always include who, what, where, when, why and how;

Twenty Year 9 pupils from Hockstead School visited the Greenwich Hindu Temple on July 10. The trip was part of a programme of events designed to broaden the students' knowledge and understanding of places of worship.

2. The headline can be snappy to capture attention but needs to be relevant; don't be afraid of just stating what's happening;

Hockstead pupils visit London temple.

3. The rest of the media release can include more detail and ideally a quote in the third or fourth paragraph to inject some emotion into the release.

- If you are using people as part of your story be sure to give their names (but check your institution's policy on this)
- Try to keep it short around six – eight paragraphs and try not to go over one page. Keep the sentences short and to the point, you want to give a reason for the media to call you and then you can talk more about the story.
- An editor will cut from the bottom, so make sure you have put all the important information in the first paragraph.

4. After the media release type 'Ends' and then include a section called 'Notes to editors' where you can give background to your school or college, draw attention to any images and give further contact details.

5. Use 1.5 line spaces and a traditional font such as Arial 11pt. Avoid the use of styles such as bold or italics.

Having a clear and consistent message



As well as announcing an immediate initiative, your media release is a chance to communicate broader messages that support the value of Religious Education in schools. It is important to be clear and consistent in what you are saying and keep it simple and jargon free.

A story to promote Religious Education teaching should cover the benefits it brings to society at large so you could select two or three themes from these messages to support your story:

Religious Education

- Is relevant for all children, whatever their religion or beliefs
- Teaches understanding of world religions and beliefs
- Shows how religion and beliefs influence individuals, families, communities and cultures
- Explores the political and social impact of religion and beliefs
- Encourages reflection on big issues of justice and truth
- Provokes questions about the meaning of life
- Offers opportunities for personal reflection
- Develops and affirms personal identity and responsible citizenship
- Prepares children for adult life
- Is not about making children religious

Religious Education can help

- Promote respect for self and others
- Contribute to an understanding of history and culture
- Enhance our understanding of global affairs
- Develop personal well-being and happiness
- Safeguard ethical standards in public life
- Generate social and community cohesion
- Tackle extremism and religious discrimination
- Counter stereotypes and misunderstandings

Religious Education in British schools is

- Admired across the world
- About all religious and non-religious beliefs
- A chance to learn about religion and beliefs without feeling pressurised
- Intellectually rigorous
- Up-to-date, relevant and enjoyable
- Popular with students; GCSE entries for RE are now higher than any other subject after Maths, English and the Sciences, and the figures have been rising continuously over the past few years.

Sample media release – results and academic achievement



HIGHCLERE SCHOOL

18 August 2015

MEDIA RELEASE

Top marks for local Religious Studies student

Teachers, students and parents at Nottingham's Highclere School are this week celebrating a top achievement by one of its students. Sixteen year old Annie May Jones scored the highest marks in the country for her GCSE Religious Studies exam, gaining her an award from exam board Edexcel and placing her among the top students in the country.

Proud head teacher Dr Lucy Vosper said, "This is a terrific achievement for Annie May and a tribute to both our Religious Education (RE) and the hard work that Annie May has put into preparing for her exams. It's particularly pleasing that this achievement is in RE as it's a subject that gives its students a real chance to express their individuality and explore different beliefs and values. We use RE to help stretch our students intellectually and give them a chance to learn about different religions and beliefs."

Student Annie May Jones added, "I couldn't believe it when the exam board got in touch. I'd worked hard and always enjoyed RE but didn't expect this. I'm really pleased with all my results and especially gaining this award."

Annie May now plans to continue studies with A levels at a local college.

All 1,234 pupils at Highclere study RE as part of their Personal and Social and Health education (PSHE) and around 20 choose to take their studies further at GCSE. It is an increasingly popular subject and RE offers students time for personal and moral reflection. A particular focus is promoting understanding of world religions and beliefs and supporting responsible citizenship.

Notes to editor:

1. Statistics from exam awarding body Edexcel show that out of a total of 94,361 GCSE entries Annie May was among the top ten, achieving the highest overall marks in its Religious Studies paper.
2. Highclere School is a science college with 1,234 students aged 11 to 16. It is an open and welcoming school that aims to create a caring community. It is rated Outstanding by Ofsted.

www.highclereschool.sch.uk

For media enquiries and high resolution images contact:

Jane Whitehead, press officer, Highclere School
Telephone: 0123 333 4444
Mobile: 07987 654321
Email: whiteheadjane@highclere.sch.uk

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highclere.sch.uk

Sample media release – celebrating events



SIR JOHN ALLEN PRIMARY

8 November 2015

MEDIA RELEASE

Sir John Allen primary school prepares for Diwali

A group of 32 year three students from Sir John Allen community primary school in Clifton, Bristol visited the city's Hindu Temple during Diwali to find out more about Hinduism. The visit, on Wednesday 7 November, was part of the school's programme to give pupils first hand experience of different faiths, beliefs and cultures. Students took part in activities such as drawing their own rangoli, the traditional pattern based Indian drawing, and learning to greet each other in the Hindu style. They also found out about the different deities that Hindus worship in the temple, as well as why it is important to look after the earth and each other.

Chris Duncan, deputy head teacher and curriculum manager responsible for Religious Education at the school said, "The Pandit showed us around the temple, which was beautifully decorated with dressed images of gods, lights and garlands. The children were fascinated by all the different deities and their meanings."

He added, "Our students come from a variety of different faiths and none. Getting to know other religions and cultures first hand really does help promote good understanding and awareness of each other's backgrounds."

Some of the themes have been brought back to the school as this week's art project includes modeling clay tea light holders, to represent the clay lanterns of Diwali. Additionally, one of the class mums is Hindu so she will be making extra traditional sweet Diwali treats for everyone to enjoy!

Notes to editor:

1. Sir John Allen is a caring community school committed to providing a broad and balanced education for all its students. All staff work together as a team and this has been recognised through our Investors in People award in June 2018. Parents, governors and staff work in partnership to provide the appropriate environment for students to learn and develop in an atmosphere of respect and understanding.
 2. www.sirjohnallen.sch.uk
 3. The Bristol Hindu temple is open for schools to visit Monday – Friday between 10am and 5pm. Telephone: 0123 4567 789
- Diwali (the festival of lights), is a five day Hindu festival now celebrated worldwide by many Indian / Asian cultures. This New Year celebration takes its name (also called Divali or Deepavali) from a Sanskrit word meaning "a row or cluster of light". Diwali marks the new moon in the Hindu month of Kartika (October / November).

For media enquiries and high resolution images contact:

Chris Duncan, deputy head teacher, Sir John Allen Primary
Telephone: 0123 444 5555
Mobile: 07123 456789
Email: duncanc@sirjohnallen.sch.uk

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sirjohnallempriamry.sch.uk

Sample media release – promoting a visit from an MP

Often the MP's office will write its own version to go on the constituency newsletter and website; but it is always powerful to have a school led communication.



MANORSIDE PRIMARY

8 September 2015

MEDIA RELEASE

Local MP visits the Manorside Primary School to see teaching of Religious Education

On Monday, 1st July Mike Freer MP visited the Manorside Primary School in Finchley, where he met with staff and pupils in the RE department which has as an excellent reputation for good quality RE. The visit comes after MPs published a report on the supply of and support for religious education teachers.

Mike's visit to the Manorside School found that the school was continuing to teach good quality RE, but was finding it hard to cope with uncertainty surrounding the future of the subject. Teachers at the Manorside School found that the school was continuing to teach good quality RE, but was finding it hard to cope with uncertainty surrounding the future of the subject. Commenting on the visit, Mike Freer MP said:

"RE teachers at the Manorside and across Finchley are doing an excellent job in ensuring our young grow up with a thorough understanding of the different faiths and beliefs around us – knowledge and skills that will equip them to tackle many of the challenges that life presents. We must ensure that students are not short changed and are given the best possible chance to get the most from a subject that will help them thrive in an increasingly multicultural and diverse society."

The inquiry found that the situation has been compounded by insufficient professional development opportunities for subject leaders, specialist teachers and those who take on the responsibility for teaching RE. Evidence also revealed a wide variation in the amount and quality of initial teacher training for RE with many trainee teachers stating they had little effective preparation to teach the subject.

The report was delivered to the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove on March 18th, 2013. It includes clear recommendations for primary and secondary schools, teacher training providers, local authorities, Ofsted, those providing professional development for teachers, and the Department for Education.

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manorsideprimary.sch.uk

Using images



In local newspapers photography can have a significant impact on whether your story is used.

When developing a media release think carefully about whether a supporting image would improve the story.

Digital photographs of people, particularly ones which show activity or movement, are always popular with local press.

Here are some guidelines;

1. If possible, use a professional photographer. If your local newspaper cannot send their own staff photographer, they may be able to put you in touch with one; alternatively find out if there is a skilled amateur photographer at the school.
2. Always provide a caption for your picture, and include any names of people shown (ensuring correct spelling).
3. Although the cost may seem extravagant, once you have a selection of stock shots, you will be able to use them again and again.
4. Work with photographers to make sure the resulting image reflects the diverse mix of pupils both from the point of view of ethnicity and gender. Also remember to think about possible cultural sensitivities (for example, Muslim individuals of different genders shaking hands could be considered inappropriate in some communities).
5. Remember that when using photographs of children you need to ensure you have written parental or guardian permission (within the last three months) before they can be reproduced (*see sample consent form on page 13*).
6. For local newspapers images should generally be high resolution (300 dpi) and in JPEG format (.jpg, .jpeg). These are not too large to be sent by email.

RE Today Services and the Religious Education Council have a number of approved high-resolutions images that can be suggested for media use, including children in classroom settings. To access these for media use please contact:

PR and Digital Communications Manager

RE Today Services

1020 Bristol Road, Selly Oak,
Birmingham, B29 6LB

T: 0121 472 4242 | F: 0121 472 7575

www.retoday.org.uk

Sample images available for media use



Sample consent form

Always check your school or Local Education Authority policy on students and the media. Many require a consent form (like the one below) to be signed by a parent or guardian.

A PDF of this consent form can be downloaded from the REC website



HIGHCLERE SCHOOL

8 September 2015 CONSENT FORM

Dear Parent/Guardian

We are in the process of updating our brochures in which we like to promote various school events or activities. There will be a photographer present taking photographs of pupils on the school site.

There may be a possibility of your child's photograph being taken as a group, whether walking around our school site or being taught during lessons. This is not a guarantee that their picture will be published.

In order to comply with the Data Protection Act 1998, the school needs your consent. We should be grateful if you could answer all the questions on the attached sheet and return it to the school as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

Please complete and return to the General Office

I agree that the school can take photographs of my child which may be used in school literature (e.g. the school newsletter; the school brochure and other promotional material etc.).	Yes/No
I agree that the school can use images of my child on its website. (Please note the web site can be viewed across the world.)	Yes/No
I agree that the school can use images of my child in video recordings to promote the school.	Yes/No
I agree that the school can take photographs and make video recordings of my child for the school's own records, archives and future interest (e.g. photographs of sports team)	Yes/No
I agree that my child can appear in video recordings or in collections of photographs stored on CD-ROMs which the school may make of school events and which it may sell to parents of children at the school to raise funds for the benefit of the school.	Yes/No
I am happy for the press to take and use images of my child.	Yes/No
The school may give the press the first name/first and surname (delete as appropriate) of my child for publishing with the child's photograph in a newspaper or for captioning on television.	Yes/No

Student's Name: T/G:
 Parental Signature:
 Printed Name:
 Date:

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 highclere.sch.uk

Talking to the media



Whether it's a features writer on an education trade journal, the forward planner on the local TV news or the news reporter on the local paper the same rules and opportunities apply.

Knowing your title

- Research the names and contact details of the key journalists you want to send the media release to and always send it to a named contact. You can always ring the title and check who you should send it to.

Pitching your story

- Spend some time thinking about the key points in your release before you speak to journalists. Think carefully about the way you phrase your explanation to reduce the risk of misunderstanding.

Don't be afraid to pitch your story to journalists but equally don't pester them – no tends to mean no!

When, and when not, to contact the media

All media work to deadlines so it is worth being aware of the following:

- Aim to call journalists at a time when they are less likely to be busy. For instance, avoid calling daily titles between 4 and 6pm, as they are filing copy for the next edition (earlier for evening titles).
- Weekly titles will have a 'press day'. Again, try to avoid calling on that day. A local paper that comes out on Friday might well have its press day on Tuesday or Wednesday.
- Monthly magazines work weeks in advance so it is worth approaching them early.
- It is best to contact broadcasters a few days in advance of your story and try to avoid calling close to the hour as they could be distracted by news bulletins.
- Be aware that a picture desk might work to different deadlines to the news desk.
- Always meet a journalist's deadline.

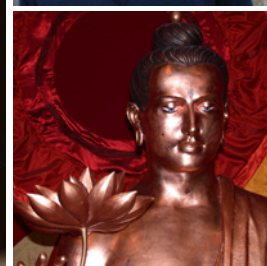
Doing media interviews



Having a good spokesperson and then spending time preparing and planning their script are at the heart of a successful interview.

1. Do some research beforehand and try to identify who the journalist is. What have they written before, what types of questions do they want answered and what line of questioning could they take?
2. Spend time identifying your key message and short, brief ways of getting this across.
3. Try and keep phrases as positive as possible.
4. Don't be tempted to speak 'off the record' – there is no such thing!
5. Likewise, don't be tempted to fill silences and don't be frightened to pause and collect your thoughts.
6. Never make up an answer if you aren't sure. It is acceptable to clarify the question and call back – as long as you do.
7. Don't assume the journalist is an expert, for example if you're talking about different religions and beliefs they may not be familiar with them. It's a chance for you to work with them to make sure they are clear on all the detail.
8. Do thank the journalist for the interview and their interest.

TV and radio



TV and radio have their own rules. It is unlikely your spokesperson will be asked to perform in a 'live' environment. The notes here refer to the much more likely pre-recorded interview.

TV

1. When considering what to wear, avoid extreme colours, checks and stripes.
2. Accept make-up if recommended.
3. Don't look at the camera!
4. But do look at your interviewer!
5. End by thanking the interviewer and don't talk again until you are sure the camera is no longer rolling.
6. Always ask what the first question is going to be.

Radio

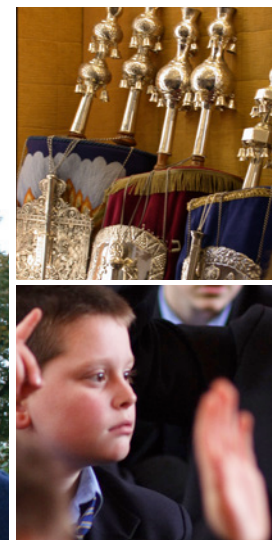
1. Don't move backwards and forwards or your voice will too.
2. Avoid creating distracting sounds like rustling papers, jingling coins in your pocket etc.
3. Speak at your normal volume – the sound engineers will take care of the rest.
4. Don't worry if you want to change what you've just said – simply leave a short pause and begin your statement again.
5. Always ask what the first question is going to be.

If the broadcaster wants to visit your school or college and you don't have a press officer you need to assign someone with clear responsibility for guiding them through their time with you. This could be a deputy head or head of year.

By all means involve students in the radio or television piece, the reporter will probably want to work with them, but make sure you are confident in their abilities.

If at any stage you feel the logistics are too much you can decline the opportunity but make sure you do this in plenty of time.

Avoiding pitfalls



There are many tips and techniques when it comes to dealing with the media.

This toolkit is written with local media in mind but it's worth always being aware that like all media, they will want a good story and some common sense principles apply.

1. Check what a journalist wants beforehand and if it isn't what you expect, put them in touch with someone who can help.
2. Be aware of cultural sensitivities (see page 5).
3. Be aware of examples that have backfired.
4. Think carefully about your response to questions – if you feel you are being asked a 'leading' question, think back to your key messages.
5. If something significant has happened at your school or college that may be likely to generate the wrong type of media interest, take professional advice on how best to generate a positive story. Be aware of the implications of social media, and the immediacy of content that is on these channels; journalists will often check Facebook or Twitter feeds as part of their background research to a story.
6. Always involve your press officer or senior leadership team before, during, and after media activity.

If a situation does become too difficult or hostile you should seek specialist, professional help from a PR consultant or agency with your response. A good place to start is the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (www.ipr.org.uk).

Tracking the coverage



You may well have a media monitoring service in place. If not it is worth asking the journalist or reporter when they plan to write a story and using the internet to search for it. There are professional press cuttings agencies who will charge to provide you with a cuttings service.

If you plan to circulate copies of the resulting coverage, check your school or college has a licence from the Newspaper Licensing Agency (www.nla.co.uk) to duplicate newspaper coverage.

What to do if the coverage isn't what you expected

The media do sometimes get things wrong and if this happens to you it is important to take a step back and consider how bad the mistake is.

If you feel it is significant enough to request a change, you can work with your press office or senior leadership team to gain a correction:

- For a substantial mistake, such as one that does damage to the reputation of individuals or organisations through incorrect reporting, you can ask for an apology or correction to be printed as soon as possible.
- For smaller mistakes you can write a letter to be published correcting the perception. You need to send this to the editor with a covering note indicating why you are writing it and indicating you expect it to be printed for good reason.
- Alternatively, you can follow up with the reporter and suggest a follow up interview to gain a greater and clearer understanding – which might result in a rebalanced piece of coverage.

Overall, the rules here are to take a step back and look at the situation, as you cannot expect 100% accuracy all of the time.

Your questions answered



Q. *How do I find out what my school's policy is towards dealing with the media?*

A. Ask your head teacher or a member of the senior leadership team and find out if there is a nominated press officer.

Q. *How do I reflect media communications through social media?*

A. Social media is another means of getting a message across. If your school uses Twitter and Facebook to keep parents up to date with activity it is often tempting to announce a story through these channels. However if you are trying to secure print, online or broadcast coverage it is often far better to do this first, and then use social media to report back on the coverage. You can of course use Twitter to reach journalists, many will respond quickly in this way.

Q. *What do I do if I have problem with a potentially negative media story?*

A. Discuss the issue with your senior leadership team. If necessary seek professional advice from a specialist public relations consultant (the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) has an online directory of members – www.ipr.org.uk).

Q. *I am planning a trip and a photographer wants to take photos for our local paper. What do I do?*

A. Check with the venue what restrictions there are on photography. Always make sure the photographer is aware of cultural sensitivities, give guidance during the photoshoot and offer to check the images before publication.

Q. *A picture has appeared in the paper and it did not have my correct name. What do I do?*

A. Mistakes do sometimes occur. Politely point out the error to the journalist; if it is a serious error, the paper may print a correction.

Q. *What if the media doesn't run my story?*

A. There may be a number of reasons. It is worth asking the journalist why it did not run so you can pick up tips for next time. Try asking an experienced colleague for advice as well.

Q. *I've been asked to pay colour separation charges by a regional magazine – what is this?*

A. Most media run stories as editorial, however a few, usually magazines, have a policy of asking you to pay a charge to run your story.

Q. *Where can I find out more about training in media relations?*

A. The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) runs courses on all aspects of public relations (www.ipr.org.uk).

Resources



We hope you have found this toolkit useful and you have great success working with your senior leadership teams to build relationships with the local media and community to generate positive coverage that supports your work and enhances the perception of Religious Education. We look forward to seeing how you get on!

There are numerous resources that may help you in your day to day work. In the first instance, we recommend you take a look at the REC website:

www.religiouseducationcouncil.org

The National Association of Teachers of Religious Education has a dedicated website full of useful advice.

NATRE has recently produced a DVD with useful guidance for teachers

www.natre.org.uk

Other useful information:

- Your local authority, County Council or Diocese will be able to provide advice and permission forms to use to secure consent for pupils to appear in the media.
- To get further style guidance, recent media releases can be viewed at www.prnewswire.co.uk
- The BBC website www.bbc.co.uk/religion contains useful facts, news and discussion boards.
- REonline contains information about planning visits to places of worship and important cultural sensitivities: www.reonline.org.uk/

About the Religious Education Council

The Council provides a collaborative network for over sixty professional associations and faith and belief communities which are promoting and supporting Religious Education nationally in schools, colleges and universities.

www.religiouseducationcouncil.org

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