Where ignorant armies clash by night:
A critical examination of the present and future politics of RE

Mark Chater
UCL Institute of Education
18 February 2016
A critical examination of the present and future politics of RE

• The RE landscape
• The argument for change in RE
• RE in England: successes and next steps
• The politics of epistemology
• An RE Commission
• Stakeholdership
How well do you know RE?

• RE: compulsory?
• Legal foundation?
• Stakeholders?
• Parents?
• Quality?
• RE Council?
• Clarke/Woodhead, Dinham/Shaw, Woolf?
The argument for change (1)

- RE has many positive achievements in the UK
- Ofsted 2013: RE is poor in six out of ten schools, because of its confused purpose and outmoded legal status
- J. Conroy 2013: a study of RE teachers showed great good will but confusion of purpose and low status
The argument for change (2)

• Charles Clarke, retired politician, and Linda Woodhead, professor of Sociology of religion, publish *A New Settlement: religion and belief in schools*, 2015: ‘RE cannot go on as it is’.
The argument for change (3)

• RE for Real, 2015: shows that pupils, parents and employers like RE and recommends that its status should be raised by making it a national curriculum subject

• Commission on religion and belief in public life, 2015: recommends that RE status should be raised by making it a national curriculum subject
The politics of epistemology

• School reforms have created confusion about the legal requirements on RE
• ‘Local’ determination has created confusion about the purposes of RE
• The religious tide and the breath of the night wind
• The dangerous eddies: SMSC, values, Prevent
A commission on RE

The REC Commission on RE’s remit is:

• To consider the nature, purpose and scope of religious education.
• To identify barriers that currently limit the provision of high quality RE.
• To identify what changes are needed to ensure the highest quality provision of RE.
• To ensure that recommendations focus on realistic and specific proposals aimed at implementation.
What will the commission do?

In considering the above 4 tasks, the REC has identified the following areas for the Commission to consider:

- The quality of teaching and learning in RE
- The legal & structural arrangements
- The status of the subject
- Recruitment, ITT & CPD
- Who should be studying RE (i.e. age range, right to withdraw, etc.)
- Whether there should be a common entitlement to RE, and if so what the entitlement should be
Stakeholdership

- The RE Council, with over 65 member organisations from all religion and belief communities and professional teachers of RE