

HARROW SACRE
(STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS
EDUCATION)
MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 1 DECEMBER 2009

Attendance:

GROUP A - Religious traditions and Christian Churches

* Mr Zia Baig	A <i>Councillor Asad Omar</i>
~ <i>Mrs Martha Besser (Vice Chair)</i>	~ <i>Miss Fatema Rahemani</i>
* Mr Mike Bishop	* Mr Neville Ransley
* Dr Julie Crow	* Mrs Gill Ross
A <i>Mrs Niru Desai</i>	~ <i>Mr Shabban Saddik</i>
* Mrs Phiroza Gan-Kotwal	* Mrs Doreen Samuels
* Mrs Mary Hale	~ <i>Mr Paramjit Singh-Kohli</i>
* Mr Vijay Hirani	~ <i>Ven Sumana Sramaner</i>
~ <i>Dr Vinod Kapashi</i>	A <i>Ms Beverley Wilson</i>

GROUP B - Church of England

* Mrs Mary Abbott	* Rev'd. Matthew Stone
* Rev'd. Giles Pinnock	

GROUP C – Teachers' Associations

A <i>Ms Heena Modi</i>	~ <i>Mrs Manju Radia</i>
A <i>Ms Bhavita Pandya</i>	* Mrs Alison Stowe (Chair)
~ <i>Ms Nancy Parsons</i>	

GROUP D – Local Authority

Councillors: * Anjana Patel

* Nana Asante
A *Mrs Lurline Champagnie,*

Co-opted Members:

Seconded from the Harrow Student Advisory Board: vacancies

Also attending:

- * Ms Rachel Bowerman (Senior School Improvement Professional & Adviser to SACRE, nominated by the Director of Education)
- * Vivian Wright (Clerk to SACRE)

* denotes *presence*

A denotes *absence*

~ denotes *absence without apologies*

Observers from the University of Westminster:

Elizabeth Khor

Urszula Cimoch

228. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed Mr Hirani to his second meeting of SACRE and two observers from the University of Westminster.

229. Opening Reflection

This was led by Mr M Bishop who described the season of Advent. He explained the symbolism of the Advent candles which represented hope, peace, love and joy, leading up to the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day. Each of the four Advent Sundays has its own reading: the opening of St John's Gospel, the Book of the prophet Isaiah, St Luke's Gospel, the Magnificat and the Book of Revelation.

230. Order of Agenda

- The Chair proposed that item 10: Youth on Religion (YOR) Study be taken after item 6: SACRE Annual Report. **This was agreed.**
- It was noted that some items might have to be deferred to a future meeting.
- Rachel Bowerman explained that she has included more information on the agenda and grouped items under different headings. Members agreed that these improvements make for greater clarity and also make clear that SACRE's primary purpose is to improve standards in religious education. A councillor added that this agenda also makes it clear that SACRE, while statutorily established and funded by Harrow Council, has an independent agenda and remit.

231. Apologies for Absence

RESOLVED: To note apologies for absence from Cllr Lurline Champagnie, Mrs Niru Desai, Cllr Asad Omar, Mrs Beverley Wilson, Heena Modi and Mrs Bhavita Pandya.

232. Attendance by Reserve Members

No reserve members attended.

233. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of personal or prejudicial interests, arising from business to be transacted at this meeting.

234. Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 September 2009

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2009, having been circulated and taken as read, were signed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

- p.1. Minute 1: Opening reflection: A J Aire should be A J Ayer
- p.3. Minutes 9: Zarthusht should be Zartusht-no-diso
- p.5. Minute 12: Resource Packs: this minute should read: Paramjit Singh Kohli was not present to give an update on the Sikh pack. Phiroza Gan-Kotwal reported that Pat Stevens was working with and in contact with Malcolm Deboo, Secretary of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe. She would therefore follow up progress on the toolkit with him.
- Minute 15: News from the Faith Communities: last bullet point: the Zoroastrian Centre was only open on Saturday 19 October, not on both days.

235. Matters Arising from the Minutes

- **3. Attendance by Reserve members:** the query as to whether the Mayor of Harrow should continue to be a reserve member no longer applies, as his term of office as Mayor is coming to an end.
- **6. Matters Arising: Response to QCDA questionnaire:** Ms Bowerman reported that the QCDA (which has superseded the QCA) has just published its report on the consultation on a new primary curriculum. In his announcement, Ed Balls, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, indicated that “due to the positive response ... few changes have been made to the proposed Areas of Learning.” RE would remain in the Area of ‘historical, geographical and social understanding’ and an illustrative programme of learning and non-statutory guidance on RE would be published. Rachel explained that the structure of the on-line questionnaire - with a particular focus on new level descriptions for subjects - had made it difficult for respondents to express RE-specific wider concerns about the principles or potential impact of the curriculum review.

Other groups had been more successful in lobbying to for changes to the proposed curriculum, e.g. pressure from the science community has resulted in evolution being included on the science curriculum and pressure exerted by the history community has also been successful. It

is announced that the new curriculum will come into primary Schools in September 2011. SACRE will need to monitor the impact of the new curriculum on the delivery of the Harrow Agreed Syllabus and the status of RE.

- **7. SACRE Maintenance Plan 2009-2010**

i) Rachel Bowerman reported that Buckinghamshire LA is producing a RE SEF(Religious Education Self-Evaluation Form) in line with the new Ofsted framework of September 2009. The LB of Harrow might be involved in trialing this form, but it will not be available until September 2010. In response to a question as to whether it might not be more relevant to use a pilot from another London Borough, Ms Bowerman explained that, to her knowledge, no other London Boroughs have yet produced a new RE SEF. She entirely agreed that it would, in most cases, be more appropriate to take examples from other London Boroughs, more similar to Harrow, but in this particular instance, the SEF was a generic document to which local variations would not apply.

236. SACRE Annual Report

(pp8-21 of documents previously circulated)

The Chair invited questions and comments on the report.

- In response to a question as to the distribution of the report, the Chair replied that it is sent to the QCDA, to Head Teachers, Harrow Council, Educational Bodies and Libraries. She agreed to draw up a list for the next meeting. **Action: Chair**
- There was another question relating to Section 1.a – g (Standards and quality of RE provision), specifically how the information was gathered and why members were hearing it for the first time in the Annual Report. Ms Bowerman explained that data relating to public examination entries and results of 2009 GCSE and A/AS Levels was provided by Harrow's Performance Management Team and was usually available in October each year.
The summary of provision and outcomes in RE in key stages 1 and 2 would have been prepared by Ms Pat Stevens, RE Consultant, as a result of information gained from her visits to schools and support for RE subject leaders. Rachel agreed that SACRE needed to develop independent mechanisms so that throughout the year members could review evidence of standards and provision for RE in Harrow schools.
- Ms Bowerman shared with SACRE members data relating to RS GCSE entry patterns in Harrow schools (excluding the two Catholic High schools) in 2009. This data had not been included in the draft annual report. 1398 students in Harrow's non-denominational schools had been entered for GCSE RS short course examinations, that is 74% of the Y11 cohort. Combined with the smaller number of pupils entered for the full course RS GCSE, Harrow non-denominational schools entered 1594 students for some form of GCSE in religious studies.

- Ms Bowerman explained that the Harrow Agreed Syllabus programme of study for KS 4 requires all students to follow a short or full course GCSE. The exam syllabus must cover Christianity and one other religion. Schools often allowed students to choose the other religion to study. Students often combined this with a module undertaken at their own faith centre, to make up a full GCSE. All but one Harrow school entered the majority of their Y11 cohort for an RS GCSE. Ms Bowerman undertook to follow up with one school where entry patterns diverged significantly from the Harrow trend, which suggested that the school might not be complying with Agreed Syllabus requirements.
Action: Ms Bowerman.
- A comparison of short course GCSE RS results was particularly gratifying. 70% pupils gained A* - C in RS compared with 71% in English (full course GCSE), 30% in PE and 58% in IT. English, a core subject of the National Curriculum, customarily enjoys a more generous allocation of curriculum time and larger departments, whilst other short courses were generally taught to much smaller cohorts of pupils who had opted to sit the subject.
- In response to a question concerning the numbers of students who were doing additional faith options through their school or through their faith centre, Ms Bowerman agreed that such information might be ascertained from RE SEFs. **Action: Ms Bowerman.**
- There was some discussion as to whether it would be useful to have an authorised list of speakers who were available to visit schools to take about different faiths. Ms Bowerman sounded a note of caution here, as such a list might suggest speakers were recommended by SACRE. A faith representative mentioned that such a list used to be in existence but would need considerable updating. It was suggested that this might be considered at a future meeting.
- With regard to a question concerning the appendices to the report, the Chair explained that these had been previously circulated so had not been included with these papers.
- **Executive summary:** it was proposed that this should include a reference to the fact that as well as year 7s transferring to High Schools, First and Middle schools will revert to being Infant and Junior Schools. **Agreed.**
- **Executive summary:** it was proposed that a formal note of thanks be added to Ms Pat Stevens for compiling the report and a note on her immense contribution to the work of SACRE over the years. **Agreed.**

With the two amendments to the Executive Summary listed above, the Committee unanimously agreed the report. The Chair and Ms Bowerman would add these amendments and circulate the report. Action: Chair and Ms Bowerman.

237. Youth On Religion (YOR) Study

(pp34-38 of documents previously circulated and questionnaire tabled at the meeting)

The Chair explained that the questionnaire was being tabled because the Research Team had first made the draft available only a week earlier, at a meeting specially convened to address the concerns of Harrow SACRE. Those SACRE members who had attended were: Mike Bishop, Vijay Hirani, Nancy Parsons and Alison Stowe. Feedback had been provided in advance by Mary Hale, Doreen Samuels, Revd. Matthew Stone and Dr Julia Crow. The Chair invited members of the committee to take a few minutes to read the questionnaire and discuss it with their neighbour if they wished. Questions, concerns and comments on the questionnaire included:

- how the questionnaire would be distributed and to whom;
- whether parents and carers would be able to see the questionnaire;
- whether it was appropriate that birth dates and post codes were requested;
- what use would be made of the information collated from these questionnaires and how it would be distributed;
- who was funding the research;
- whether relevant faith authorities had been consulted or notified;
- whether the timetable was realistic and the impact on time, cost and workload for High Schools had been taken into account;
- taking into account that many Jewish children are educated out of borough, whether the survey would be representative and inclusive of the perspective and experiences of that community of young people;
- whether the legal implications of this survey had been thoroughly investigated;
- that some were 'leading' questions and badly worded;
- that some of the questions might cause distress and anxiety to children, families and faith groups who have experienced persecution on the grounds of their religious beliefs.

Ms Bowerman, and other members of the committee replied to these concerns as follows:

- **Distribution of the questionnaire:** the Research Team intended the questionnaire to go to all High Schools and Independent schools (including the faith High Schools) in the Borough. It was expected to be completed by students in years 8,10 and 12. The expectation was that the participation of all these schools would be encouraged by SACRE and the LA.
- **Prior sight of the questionnaire by parents and carers:** although SACRE representatives were aware of other surveys which parents could view in advance on line, researchers had objected because they felt that in some circumstances pressure from parents might prohibit frank answers from young people.
- **Birth dates and post codes:** researchers had explained that postcodes helped to provide information about the socio economic background of respondents.

- **Use made of information and distribution of results:** researchers had assured the Chair that the results of the survey would be anonymous. A summary of their data would be provided for each school and collated to provide a single summary for the LA. It was suggested that the Legal Department could provide clarification about how the Freedom of Information Act will apply in this case.
- **Research Funding:** the research is being carried out by a Research Team headed by Professor Nicola Madge, of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Child and Youth focused Research at Brunel University funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council.
- **Consultation of relevant faith authorities:** SACRE was informed that the Chair of Hillingdon SACRE had recommended that the British Humanist Association should be consulted, and that Ms Bowerman had advised that correspondingly national bodies representing at least the 6 principal faith communities should be approached. However the Research Team had argued that there was insufficient time for such extensive consultation and that scrutiny by SACRE representatives of Groups A and B would constitute local consultation of faith groups.
- **Cost in terms of time and logistics:** Schools would need to ensure access to computer suites for the full cohort in each of the three year groups in order for students to complete the survey online. It was recommended that the YOR Study be introduced as part of a planned RE programme and that the Research Team expected to meet with relevant school staff to brief them on the YOR Study. Brunel University might be able to provide some young people as 'champions' of the Study.
- **Representation and inclusiveness of the survey:** a faith representative pointed out that all surveys are, to some extent, subjective.
- **Wording of questions:** the researchers plan to pilot the questionnaire in Y9 classes in some schools, in order to refine and clarify the questions. It was not clear if the questions modified as a result of this exercise would return to SACRE for consultation.

Prior to voting on the survey and the questionnaire, Ms Bowerman reminded the committee that the primary duty of a SACRE is to improve Religious Education and that the length of time spent discussing the YOR Study at this meeting alone had diverted SACRE from its own agenda.

The Chair proposed the following motion:

Should Harrow SACRE proceed with its participation in the YOR Study?

4 members voted for this proposal and 7 members voted against with 3 abstentions. The proposal was therefore defeated and the Chair will inform the researchers of the committee's decision. Action: Chair

It is not known how this decision will affect the project.

238. Determinations

Applications for determinations have been received from Stanburn Middle School and Glebe First and Middle School.

For the benefit of new members, Ms Bowerman explained that, on application from a school, SACRE could determine that the requirement for acts of collective worship to be “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character” (Education Reform Act 1988) was not appropriate for that school. Guidance in Circular 1/94, indicating that collective worship of a “broadly Christian character” should “contain some elements which relate specifically to the traditions of Christian belief and which accord a special status to Jesus Christ,” had informed the judgements of some inspection teams under the first Ofsted Evaluation Framework. As a result, the London Borough of Brent had pioneered a LA policy of encouraging all its schools to apply to SACRE for a determination.

Ms Bowerman informed SACRE that the emphasis of inspections had changed, in which context determinations appeared unnecessary. She advised SACRE that schools could develop an approach to collective worship that complied with the law, effectively promoted pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and community cohesion, and was inclusive of the backgrounds and experiences of pupils and staff. She hopes that SACRE will develop a recommended approach to collective worship that will reflect this.

Meanwhile, both schools were applying for a renewal of determinations granted in previous years and have prepared their applications thoroughly. Ms Bowerman recommended that in these instances, the committee grant these determinations pending the development of new SACRE guidance.

In response to a question, the Chair explained that in the schools’ parental questionnaire, “Christian” refers to Church of England and that “Christian – other” refers to other Christian denominations. It was noted that Greek Orthodox appears as a further category. It was agreed that these categories required clarification.

The Chair proposed that a determination be granted for Stanburn Middle School. This was agreed by 14 votes to 1 with no abstentions.

The Chair proposed that a determination be granted for Glebe First and Middle School. This was agreed by 14 votes to 1 with no abstentions.

239. Any Other Business

- a) **Resignation from the Committee:** Mrs Mary Hale tendered her resignation as a representative of the Buddhist faith. The Chair thanked her for her thoughtful contributions to the committee over her time as a member.
- b) **SACRE Chairs Group:** it was proposed SACRE establish a Chairs' group, a SACRE sub-committee commissioned to work on delegated items between meetings and to shape the agenda. Groups A, B, C and D were asked to nominate a Chair of their Group to represent them on a SACRE Chairs' Group. The Chair should be elected by the Group and identified at the next SACRE meeting.
- c) **Circulation of the minutes:** it was agreed that the draft minutes should be circulated within two weeks of the meeting, rather than with the agenda prior to the next meeting. Any corrections should be sent to the Chair within two weeks of receiving the minutes. The Clerk further agreed to circulate papers tabled at the meeting to those who were not present at the meeting, with the draft minutes. **Action: Clerk.**
- d) **Other items on the agenda:** deferred.

240. Dates of Future Meetings

- Spring Term 2010: Tuesday 9th March 2010
- Summer Term 2010: Tuesday 22 June 2010

(Note: The Meeting closed at 9.45 pm).

(Signed) MRS A STOWE
Chairman