

HARROW SACRE
(STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS
EDUCATION)

MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 14 JUNE 2011

Attendance:

GROUP A - Religious traditions and Christian Churches

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

GROUP B - Church of England

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

GROUP C – Teachers' Associations

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

GROUP D – Local Authority

Councillors:	* Camilla Bath
	* Nizam Ismail

Councillors:
* Nana Asante
* Bill Philips (Reserve)

Co-opted Members:

Also attending:

Visitors

From the Zoroastrian community

Malcolm Deboo

From Stag Lane Junior School

Alexis Sobell RE Coordinator with 8 students

From Canons High School

6 students (with Bhavita Pandya)

** denotes presence*

A denotes absence with apologies

~ denotes absence without apologies

1. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Mary Abbott, seconded by Cllr Camilla Bath proposed Alison Stowe as Chair.

Elected unanimously

Cllr Nizam Ismail seconded by Vijay Hirani proposed Cllr Camilla Bath as Vice Chair. **Elected unanimously.**

2. Welcome and Introductions

In the absence of the Chair, Cllr Camilla Bath as Vice Chair agreed to chair the meeting. She welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially Malcolm Deboo from the Zoroastrian community and the visitors from Stag Lane Junior School and Canons High School.

3. Apologies for Absence

RESOLVED: To note apologies for absence from Mike Bishop, Cllr Asad Omar, Gill Ross and Alison Stowe. The Head Teacher of Canons High School had also hoped to attend the meeting, but was unable to do so and sent her apologies.

The following members were absent without apologies: Fatema Rahemani, Niru Desai, Vinod Kapashi, Zia Baig, Nancy Parsons and Manju Radia

4. Membership

The Revd Philip Barnes has joined SACRE to replace Revd Giles Pinnock as one of the Church of England representatives.

There were no reserve members.

5. Celebrating RE

Rachel Bowerman explained the context for the two presentations that followed. Two schools that had given presentations at the Zoroastrian Centre on the 24th March had offered to repeat these for the SACRE committee.

a) Presentation from Stag Lane Junior School

The eight students from Stag Lane Junior School began their presentation with a description of the Jashan ceremony and the artefacts used, which symbolise the seven elements of creation: air, water, earth, fire, animals, plants and humankind. They explained that Zoroastrians believe in Ahura Mazda as Creator and that humans have a responsibility for protecting that creation. They reflected on the ways in which humans have damaged the planet and its ecological balance and affirmed that, like Zoroastrians, they believe humans should take better care of the world.

The students also commented on their involvement in Celebrating RE month. They felt that it is vital for young people to learn about religious beliefs and values in order that they can live in and contribute to a multi-faith society. They remarked upon similarities between Zoroastrian beliefs about God as Creator and the teachings of other religions.

The Chair thanked the students for a most enlightening and enjoyable presentation and invited questions.

In response to a question as to when the Zoroastrian religion began, Malcolm Deboo explained that it began about three and a half thousand years ago in Eastern Iran and Pakistan, when Zarathustra proclaimed his faith in one god. Today there are about 150,000 Zoroastrians worldwide.

b) Presentation from Canons High School

The students from Canons High School elaborated on the three key principles of Zoroastrianism: good thoughts, good words and good deeds. They listed some of the 101 names of Ahura Mazda, upon which Zoroastrians meditate in order to strengthen themselves in their constant spiritual struggle to overcome evil and choose goodness. The students explained the meaning of some of the names and linked these to qualities exemplified by four famous people: Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa and Benazir Bhutto. They examined some of the differences and similarities between Zoroastrianism and other religions and in a section entitled "Our Views", they shared what they had enjoyed about giving the presentation. They had, for example, enjoyed the opportunity to meet local and national figures from faith communities and to experience the generous hospitality of the Zoroastrian community.

They finished their presentation with the Zoroastrian prayer: "Happiness comes to him who is righteous for the sake of righteousness." The first prayer that Zoroastrians learn as children and that they then continue to say all their lives.

Bhavita Pandya urged SACRE to consider how the impetus which the Celebrating RE festival had given to RE could be generated by events each year.

The Chair thanked the students for their presentation and invited questions.

In response to a question about how learning about another religion made them feel about their own, they expressed the view that they became more aware of similarities between religions.

They said that they do sometimes discuss different customs with their friends of different faiths, but did not invite them to visit their places of worship.

One member of the committee asked for clarification about the Zoroastrian principle of sacrificing freedom for the sake of progress – a quality of Ahura Mazda which the students had exemplified through reference to Mahatma

Gandhi. In his reply, Malcolm referred to the UN Declaration of Human Rights and explained that alongside rights come responsibilities. Striving to contribute to the collective good of humanity often involves some sacrifice of personal freedom. Rachel Bowerman commended the teachers and students of both schools for modelling good RE that contributed to both learning *about* and learning *from* religion.

6. Minutes of the Meeting held on 2nd March 2011 (previously circulated)

2. Apologies for absence: Mrs Gan-Gotwal *should read* Mrs Gan-Kotwal.

Mr Paramjit Singh-Kohli had sent apologies.

RESOLVED: THAT WITH THESE AMENDMENTS THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2ND MARCH 2011, HAVING BEEN CIRCULATED AND TAKEN AS READ, WERE SIGNED AS A CORRECT RECORD

7. Matters arising from the minutes not included elsewhere on the agenda:

2. Apologies for absence: in response to a query about whether the meeting should have proceeded in view of the fact that it was not quorate, the Chair explained that it is standard committee procedure to hold a meeting, even if it not quorate, if the members present so wish and as long as no decisions are taken requiring a formal vote as SACRE groups.

6. Celebrating RE: March 2011

b) A report from Suzie Rook, RE subject leader, describing how Marlborough Primary is planning to join in celebrating RE and the intended outcomes of activities and visits.

The Clerk read out a short follow-up report from Gill Ross: “the RE day went off so well that we have built it into planning next year at Marlborough even if the national initiative for RE month is biannual. Suzie Rook led and planned a very exciting project and feedback from the children and parents who contributed was very positive. The whole school display of photographs graced the hall for the spring term.”

8. SACRE Development Plan 2011-2014

Letter to Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education (*tabled at the meeting*)

As agreed at the previous meeting, in response to comments from Gill Ross, the Chairs group has tabled a preliminary draft of a letter making representations to Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education, about the importance of SACRE’s remit in advising Local Authorities on the quality of RE in their schools.

Rachel Bowerman took members through the letter drawing attention to its four main points:

1. The implications of the government’s programme for Academies and Free schools in relation to SACRE’s monitoring of religious education;
2. The impact upon Agreed Syllabus RE as support for pedagogy and curriculum development shifts from national guidance and LA advisory teams to school to school support;

3. The implications of the English Baccalaureate for pupils' entitlement to RE and for the sustainability of RE departments in secondary schools;
4. The implications of proposals for inspection arrangements from 2012, which would stop the routine inspection of schools judged outstanding at their last inspection. Ofsted inspections had in the past played a significant role in challenging non-compliance and poor achievement in RE.

Discussion of the letter focused at first on a point raised by a member of the Sikh community. He felt that the letter should also mention the part played by SACRE in providing guidelines for dress and dietary requirements. Members of the committee agreed that such guidance was important; however, the feeling of the meeting was that this was not germane to the purpose of this letter, which was to remind the Secretary of State about sustaining SACRE's ability to fulfil its statutory duties in the context of the government's education programme.

The Chair also reminded the SACRE about the Equality Act 2010. Public bodies, including schools, have a general duty not only to prevent discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief but also to foster good relationships between people of faith and others. SACRE could play a significant role in this context. There was on-going training for schools on the new Equality Act and SACRE might be involved in preparing guidance.

The committee agreed that the purpose of the letter is to remind the Secretary of State for Education about SACRE's remit and it was important not to dilute this message. Members agreed to stay with the original four points. Malcolm Deboo recommended that copies of the letter also be sent to local MPs.

Agreed.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

8. SACRE Chairs' Group Meeting: (pp8-10 of meeting papers previously circulated)

Rachel Bowerman introduced this item and drew attention to the following items in the minutes:

3. Venue for the next meeting: following Bhavita Pandya's invitation to hold the SACRE meeting at Canons High School, there had been a discussion by the SACRE Chairs about holding SACRE meetings in venues other than the Civic Centre. Rachel Bowerman's advice had been that SACRE meetings should not be held in places of worship as this might exclude some members from attending and exclude some faith groups from hosting meetings. A school, on the other hand, as a secular educational environment, could be considered an appropriate venue. Visits to places of worship as part of training additional to SACRE meetings should be encouraged.

6. CPD: in response to a question from a member as to why this training for RE subject leaders had been timed to occur during the school day rather than

as a 'twilight' session, Rachel Bowerman informed the committee that the following considerations had influenced this decision:

- Core subject training for subject leaders were held within the school day. They were usually held once a term.
- Teachers had many in-house meetings scheduled at the end of the school day and therefore attendance at twilight sessions is not good.

Another question was to ask if SACRE members who were not teachers could attend. Members felt that subject leaders needed the security of knowing that they could ask questions about provision for Agreed Syllabus RE without feeling that they were being scrutinized by SACRE. However, SACRE members, particularly those who represented belief communities, might play a key role in leading some training; specific training and careful briefing would need to be provided for them in advance.

Business Items: Improving standards in religious education and collective worship

9. SACRE Guidance for Improving Provision in RE

Principles and Protocols for Visits and Visitors (*tabled at the meeting*)

Rachel Bowerman explained the context of this document. The Chairs' Group had decided that this publication would be the Harrow SACRE contribution to and impetus for Celebrating RE.

They had initially considered NATRE guidance for religious believers visiting schools. The Chairs Group had extended this document and given it a local context. It was to be launched at an event for subject leaders and local faith communities. It provided generic guidance on and protocols for visits and visitors for RE and Collective Worship and schools should use it to prepare teachers, parents and visitors. Rachel's plan was that individual SACRE members and faith communities would then draft specific guidance for visiting places of worship. These could be launched at the places of worship concerned and could lead to the development of a subject leader's handbook. This would demonstrate commitment on the part of teachers and SACRE members to the preparation and planning of visits. One member described these guidelines as outstanding – the whole thrust and purpose was superb. Rachel Bowerman thanked her on behalf of the Chairs group who had worked together on the document. Another member expressed the view that she had found the cameos very useful.

Members felt it was particularly useful to develop young people's questioning skills so that they were prepared to articulate probing questions with respect and sensitivity.

Rachel Bowerman asked members to send in comments and feedback for the final version by 30 June. They should consider the approach, readability, coverage and authenticity.

Action: all members – comments to Rachel Bowerman by 30 June

10. Impact of the English Baccalaureate on Religious Education

Rachel Bowerman introduced this item. An article from the TES was enclosed with

the papers for the meeting. Rachel outlined the proposals for an English Baccalaureate which would reflect accreditation at C-grade or better across a range of subjects but which would not include RE. Leaders within the RE world had reacted with concern as they feel that the excluded subjects will lose status. On pp 11-14 of the papers circulated for the meeting, was a set of questions from an online questionnaire which teachers have been asked to submit to the National Association of Teachers of RE about the immediate and long-term impact of an English Baccalaureate on provision for RE. Although SACRE does not usually favour passing on questionnaires to teachers, members felt that this was such an important issue that RE subject leaders in Harrow High schools should be encouraged to complete it online. This was agreed unanimously.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

11. SACRE Advice on Authorised Absence for Religious Festivals

SACRE usually sends out a list of important festival dates to schools so that they know when pupils might reasonably request absence. This list is based on the SHAP festival calendar. Rachel Bowerman will draft a list of festival dates occurring in term time 2011 – 2012 and circulate it to representatives of the faith communities. She asked the members of the faith communities to consult their own communities and report back to her.

Action: Rachel Bowerman and representatives of the faith communities

Information items: improving SACRE's effectiveness

12. Reports from SACRE Partners

a) Harrow Inter Faith Council

Paramjit Singh-Kohil from the Sikh community reported that, as a member of the Harrow Inter Faith Council he has been involved in meetings with schools to resolve the difficulties over provision of school meals. An unconfirmed figure of 22 schools (out of 65) has agreed to provide three options: Halal, non-Halal and vegetarian. HIFC has also met with the Mayor of London to advise him about catering for the Olympics. The Revd Matthew Stone, who is a governor at Stag Lane, reported that their kitchen now provides the three options and has found it straightforward to implement this change.

b) Faith Communities

- Phiroza Gan-Kotwal reported on an initiative by Harrow MIND to hold eight training sessions for members of faith communities who might be called upon to visit patients in mental health units. The Revd Matthew Stone explained further: this move has arisen because the Mental Health Trust will not pay for a chaplain but instead have agreed to appoint a coordinator who will call on members on local faith communities as needed. Faith communities were naturally concerned that they were inadequately trained for such specialised work and so the idea of eight training sessions had come about. Although this issue

does not fall within SACRE's remit, members were concerned and felt that eight sessions were completely inadequate to prepare lay people for a ministry to such a vulnerable group. The Church of England faith community has made representations to its Bishop about the inadequacy of these proposals and members of other faith communities were urged to lobby through the channels available to them.

- Doreen Samuels reported that the Limmud Day in March had been a huge success. Members of SACRE came and people from all over Harrow were talking about Judaism; representatives from every strand of Judaism were working together in harmonious and benevolent ways.

13. Dates of Future SACRE Meetings:

The following dates were agreed:

Autumn Term: 2011: 19 September
29 November

Spring Term 2012: 7 March

Could members please note these dates in their diaries. Action: all members

Chairs group: the date for the next Chairs' group meeting will be arranged by email.

(Note: The Meeting closed at Time Not Specified).

(Signed) MRS A STOWE
Chairman