



Harrow SACRE Meeting

Wednesday 4th December 2012 at 7.30 pm

To be held in Committee Rooms 1 & 2
Harrow Civic Centre

Enquiries & apologies to:

Vivian Wright

Clerk to SACRE

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or

Rachel Bowerman

SSIA, HSIP Lead Officer to SACRE

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HARROW STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE)

AGENDA

1. **WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS**
2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**
3. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10TH OCTOBER 2012** (Pages 1 - 5)
4. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

Business items: Improving standards in religious education and collective worship

5. **ANNUAL REPORT**
To agree content for:
 - Section 1 - Public examination entries and results 2012 (Pages 7 – 12)
 - Section 3 – Financial support for SACRE (to be tabled)
6. **SACRE GUIDANCE: A SPACE FOR PRAYER IN SCHOOLS** (Pages 13 – 20)
To receive the draft guidance, which SACRE commissioned Claire Ali (Islam Education Consultancy) to prepare. To agree amendments, commission additional content from Group A representatives and to agree arrangements for this guidance to be launched.
7. **SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND ABSENCE FOR RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE: REVIEWING SACRE GUIDANCE**
To agree the strengthened wording of SACRE Guidance (Page 21)
8. **RE COUNCIL SUBJECT REVIEW OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION – PHASE 1 CONSULTATION** (Separate paper)
To receive the Report of the Expert Panel and to agree arrangements for SACRE to respond to the online questionnaire by the deadline of 7th December 2012.
9. **DATES OF FUTURE SACRE MEETINGS**
Spring term 2012: 6th March 2013 - Committee Rooms 1 and 2

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HARROW SACRE
(STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION)
MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 10th OCTOBER 2012

Attendance:

Group A: (Religious traditions and Christian Churches)

~ Mr Zia Baig	~ Ms Beverley Wilson
~ Mrs Sanaz Ajala	A Mr Neville Ransley
* Mr Mike Bishop	* Ms Angela Clapham
A Dr Julie Crow	* Mrs Gill Ross
~ Mrs Niru Desai	* Mrs Doreen Samuels
* Mrs Phiroza Gan-Kotwal	~ Mr Paramjit Singh-Kohli
* Mr Vijay Hirani	A Ven Sumana Sramaner
* Varsha Dodhia	* Zafar Khalid
A Councillor Asad Omar	* Ananda Caitanya Das

Group B: (Church of England)

~ Mrs Mary Abbott	* Rev'd. Matthew Stone
* Rev'd Philip Barnes	

Group C: (Teachers' Associations)

~ Ms Bhavita Pandya	~ Mrs Manju Radia
	* Mrs Alison Stowe (Chair)

Group D: (Local Authority)

Councillors:	
* Nana Asante	* Camilla Bath
	* Sasikala Suresh

Officer

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

Visitors / observers

* Patrick O'Dwyer Professional lead at ESSO (Education and Schools Strategic Organisation)

Clerk

*Vivian Wright (Clerk to SACRE)

** denotes presence*

A denotes absence with apologies

~ denotes absence without apologies

1. Order of the Agenda: items 6, 7 and 8 were taken in reverse order, but are minuted in the order in which they appear on the agenda.

2. Welcome and introductions: the Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting especially Patrick O'Dwyer, lead education professional for ESSO (Education Strategy and Schools Organisation) and two new members, Ananda Caitanya Das, nominated by the Bhaktivedanta Manor Temple and Angela Clapham, a new representative of Harrow's Catholic communities on Group A. She is also a chaplain at St Dominic's College. Members of the committee introduced themselves.

3. Apologies for absence:

RESOLVED: To note apologies for absence from Julie Crow, Ven Sumana Srimaner, Neville Ransley and Cllr Asad Omar.

The meeting was quorate.

The following members were also absent:

Group A: Zia Baig, Sanaz Ajala, Niru Desai, Beverley Wilson, Paramjit Singh-Kohli

Group B: Mary Abbott

Group C: Bhavita Pandya, Manju Radia.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 25th June:

5. Apologies for Absence: Jill Crow *should read* Julie Crow. This has been amended earlier, but unfortunately the updated minutes had not been used when circulating the papers.

With this amendment the minutes were agreed and signed as a true record.

5. Matters arising from the minutes

4. b) Update on membership:

Academies: Mike Bishop asked if there has been any progress on recruiting a representative from the academies. Rachel Bowerman reported that she has not yet had any response from the academies. She will follow-up her initial communication.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

Lapsed members: Doreen Samuels asked if there had been any progress in removing lapsed members from the committee. Rachel Bowerman will advise those members who have not attended meetings this year and who have not sent apologies, that they are no longer eligible to sit on the SACRE committee. Rachel Bowerman is actively engaged in finding new members for Group C.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

There were no further matters arising from the minutes

Business Items: Improving standards in RE and collective worship

5. Annual report pp9-18

Rachel Bowerman introduced the draft Annual Report. She explained that the report is now sent to the NASACRE/RE council. It remains a statutory duty to publish an Annual Report.

The report is on target for completion by the end of December. It is organised under the same headings as previous years, which were first suggested as guidance by the QCA so that there was a consistency to the structure of SACRE reports.

The draft requires the addition of an analysis of public examination (GCSE RS and GCE A level) entry patterns and results. This data is not yet available. Schools which are now academies are not required to share their results with the LA although many have agreed to do so; some of this information will become available when the results are validated and move into the public domain.

The draft report includes pen-portraits of aspects of the provision for RE at Belmont School and at Priestmead Primary School and Nursery. These schools made RE presentations to SACRE during 2011 – 2012.

The report also includes cameos of the provision for collective worship at Norbury Primary and Stanburn Infant schools. When these schools submitted applications for a determination they were asked to make a presentation to SACRE outlining their approach to collective worship.

Rachel Bowerman also drew the committee's attention to the fact that Harrow Council receives a number of freedom of information requests each year, usually in relation to collective worship. One of these, from Chris Hastings of the *Mail on Sunday*, required a detailed response, including the collation of emails, about applications for determinations and the type of provision for collective worship in schools where determinations had been granted. Rachel contacted NASACRE and ascertained that other SACREs have received FOI requests from the same source. Members may see Rachel Bowerman's response if they wish.

There followed some discussion: Alison Stowe had received a "courtesy call" from the Saturday Telegraph asking her about assemblies at Priestmead. This had resulted in a positive article.

In response to a question, councillors informed the committee that portfolio holders have some training in handling the media but councillors are usually advised to refer requests to the Communications Team at Harrow Council.

It was agreed that it would be interesting to monitor these requests, which occur frequently, and if possible, to find out how the information is used.

The draft annual report concludes with an account of the training for RE subject leaders which took place at St Panteleimon Greek Orthodox Church. SACRE's new Guidance on Visits and Visitors for RE and Collective Worship was launched at this event.

Rachel Bowerman invited questions and suggestions for the report. The Jain representative, Varsha Dodhia, suggested including a paragraph on Harrow's cultural diversity.

Acknowledging that a statement on the SACRE budget had yet to be drafted, the Chair asked how the budget is allocated and what it covers. Patrick O'Dwyer explained that HSIP (Harrow School Improvement Partnership) is commissioned by ESSO (Education Strategy and School Organisation) to provide professional advice and guidance, on behalf of the Corporate Director, in order that SACRE can operate effectively and fulfil its statutory duties. SACRE is allocated a budget of £7500 by the Local Authority. HSIP had reported that in 2011 – 2012, the equivalent of 25 days of Rachel Bowerman's time had been used for SACRE business, including:

- co-ordinating school presentations;
- preparing the agenda and papers for meetings;
- drafting and developing the two guidance publications which had been launched in 2011 - 2012;
- recruitment of new members.

Rachel Bowerman had provided a statement (in reply to a freedom of information request from Christians in Government group) on HSIP support for SACRE. This could be used as a basis for the financial section of the report.

There were enquiries about the termly training for RE subject leaders and about how the budget could be used to commission external consultants. Members agreed that these questions indicated a robust approach to managing a budget allocated by Harrow Council.

It was agreed that the Chair's group should address these questions and report back at the next meeting

Action: Chair's group

The Chair expressed her appreciation for the hours that Rachel Bowerman spends on SACRE "over and above" the statutory requirements. The SACRE agreed that it continued to receive professional advice of a high quality from Rachel Bowerman.

Mathew Stone, on behalf of the committee congratulated Rachel Bowerman on the draft annual report.

6. SACRE Conference: Meeting the needs of families from religious backgrounds: developing SACRE Guidance for schools

Rachel Bowerman introduced this item.

As a result of the discussion, at the previous meeting, of SACRE guidance on establishing a space for prayer in schools, members had commissioned a SACRE Conference for school leaders in order to support schools in being proactive in meeting the needs of pupils and families from religious backgrounds.

The Chair advised postponing the conference from the proposed date of 29th November, in view of the fact that schools and SACRE members are very busy at this time of year. The date has been posted on CPD online but there have been no bookings so far. Mike Bishop added that the time scale is very short to organise workshops and a key speaker.

The committee resolved unanimously to postpone the conference until the spring term. Rachel Bowerman will circulate some possible dates.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

7. School attendance and absence for religious observance: reviewing SACRE guidance

Patrick O'Dwyer introduced this item. He thanked SACRE for inviting him to address this meeting. He was about to make a request to SACRE to strengthen its guidance to schools about authorised absence for religious observance.

He outlined the background to this request: the LA is currently in consultation with Harrow head teachers and chairs of governors about measures to promote good attendance. These include early intervention, support for families, and, when necessary, prosecution and penalty notices.

The LA and headteachers would welcome support from SACRE regarding its guidance on authorised absence for religious festivals. Patrick O' Dwyer reminded SACRE members of DfE guidance that "absence due to religious festivals should be authorised by the school if it is a day set apart exclusively for religious observance and it is set apart by the parents' religious body." However, headteachers had raised with the LA instances whereby:

- when a day of observance falls at the weekend, the parents take a compensatory weekday on the preceding Friday or following Monday;
- when one day is set aside for religious observance, parents take two or three days;
- parents apply for extended visits abroad on the grounds of religious observance.

Although numbers in primary and secondary school are comparable, religious observance accounts for twice as many days of absence in primary schools. SACRE's advice is much respected, and head teachers requested strengthened guidance so that schools felt supported in taking a consistently rigorous stance in relation to absences for religious observance. This would support their position with Ofsted.

In response to a question about how Ofsted judge attendance, Patrick O'Dwyer explained that Ofsted inspectors will take into account factors affecting absence. Inspectors look at overall absence; they do not distinguish between authorised and unauthorised absence but if they felt that schools were being too liberal in authorising absence, this could be considered a weakness in the school's leadership. Authorised absence is very high in Harrow: Harrow is 125th out of 150 LAs in the primary sector.

Doreen Samuels informed the committee that Jewish days of observance are very specific and it is extremely rare for children to need a day on either side of the day of observance. Vijay Hirani felt that SACRE should further clarify its guidance as requested by headteachers.

It was agreed that SACRE should support this request and include in its guidance a statement to the effect that SACRE does not endorse additional absence beyond the day exclusively set apart for religious observance by a religious body. A form of words will be drafted by the Chair's Group.

Action: Chair's group.

Information Items:

8. SEWA Day: 7th October 2012

Varsha Dodhia introduced this item. She explained that sewa is the concept of selfless service and that this concept of serving others is not an exclusively Hindu concept.

The Sewa International Charity has been promoting a sewa day across the world. In Britain this year, Sewa Day was linked to the celebrations for the Jubilee, with an emphasis upon volunteering within the community. Last Sunday (7th October) was SEWA day. Varsha Dodhia had taken part in a book collection project in Wembley Park. She was pleased to report that Harrow Council has adopted SEWA day.

The Sewa International Charity hopes to work through schools to make the event bigger and better next year. They want to target younger people and reach as many communities as possible.

Rachel Bowerman expressed disappointment that the published materials and website had not articulated the religious concepts underlying sewa, concepts shared across the faith traditions. Gill Ross agreed that it was essential that faith communities communicated to young people the link between religious values and the civic duty and service that they drive.

Doreen Samuels described her experience as a gamesmaker at the Olympics this year. The experience of had had an amazing impact upon some of the volunteers who had not previously been involved in that sort of community activity . Many were bereft when the project ended. Members of faith communities are privileged in that they enjoy this sense of belonging to and responsibility towards a community. SACRE members were invited to write a paragraph about what sewa might look like in their communities.

Rachel Bowerman thanked Varsha Dodhia for her presentation and for drawing the attention of the committee to Sewa Day. She asked committee members to work on their cameos.

Action: members of the committee

9. Reports from National RE Associations

- a) **RE Council Newsletter October 2012:** the RE council has been asked to conduct a review of RE leading to proposals for a revised RE framework. A panel had been convened and its first report will be published shortly. SACREs will be consulted at a later stage.
- b) **Update on the Agreed Syllabus:** it is a requirement that an Agreed Syllabus Conference should be convened to review the local agreed syllabus at least every five years. Rachel Bowerman advised that, taking account of the on-going RE Council consultation, the LA could establish an Agreed Syllabus Conference, which might meet once and agree to postpone its actions until a national review statement and the response of the Secretary of State had been published.

10. Any other business

There were no items of any other business

11. Dates of Future SACRE Meetings:

Tuesday 4th December 7.30pm Committee Rooms 1 and 2.

Wednesday 6th March 2013 7.30pm Committee rooms 1 and 2

The Meeting closed at 9.05 pm

Signed:

(Chair)

(Date)

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SACRE Monitoring and Evaluation of

- **Attainment and progress in RE**
- **Quality of teaching and the extent to which the curriculum delivers the Harrow Agreed Syllabus and meets the needs of pupils**
- **Leadership and management of RE**

Public examination entries and results in RS GCSE and GCE AS and A level in 2012

Nationally, the RS GCSE short course has a proven track record of accrediting provision for pupil entitlement to RE at KS 4, through a syllabus which motivates students, provides worthwhile recognition for their achievement and was designed to be covered in an hour a week over two years. In Harrow the number of entries steadily increased between 2008 and 2011, so that in recent years High schools have entered the large majority of their Y11 cohort.

In 2012 a slight decrease in numbers of Harrow entries for the short course reflects a fall in entries from one of the High schools; there is no available information about how the RE entitlement at KS 4 was provided for the 44% of pupils not entered for any RS GCSE at this academy. However, all eight High schools continued to provide RS short course GCSE as the core entitlement for pupils in KS 4.

Nationally, entry patterns for RS GCSE are being monitored. There was early evidence that when secondary schools became academies, some RE departments lost status, and curriculum time. Harrow SACRE is not aware of any similar impact upon the RE departments in local academies.

After 2014, short course GCSEs will not be recognized in the headline measures of a school's performance. The list of GCSE subjects which can be accredited with the English Baccalaureate, does not include RS. These decisions may have further impact upon provision for RE at Key Stage 4. SACRE continues to hope that the secondary phase academies will nominate associate representatives so that we can retain an overview of provision for RE in the secondary phase and offer support to school leaders in relation to their curriculum.

The RS GCSE full course is provided as an option subject in seven of the eight non-denominational High schools. It would appear that there have been slight increases in numbers of pupils choosing the full course locally, resulting in a 36% increase in entries overall in 2012.

59.5% pupils gained an A* - C grade in the RS GCSE short course in 2012. Percentages of A grades were high at Bentley Wood and Nower Hill. There is no national data available to make comparisons.

91% pupils gained A* - C in the RS GCSE full course.

In 2012 31 pupils from non-denominational schools were entered for RS A level, from 6 non-denominational schools. This is a significant increase compared with 2011.

Appendix A: Religious Studies Public Examination Data 2011 - 2012 (unvalidated, non-denominational schools, LA level data)

GCSE RS Short Course

Local Authority level data (non-denominational schools only)

Year	No. entries	% cohort	A*	A	B	C	A* - C	A* - G
2012	1519	81%	6.9%	15.2%	20.3%	17.1%	59.5%	94.8%
2011	1646	86%	10.2%	14.9%	19.3%	17.3%	61.7%	95.7%
2010	1434	87%	7.3%	16.6%	23.9%	20.8%	68.6%	98%
2009	1398	74%	12.2%	18.7%	20.9%	18.0%	69.8%	98.9%
2008	1294	65%	7.7%	14.8%	21.5%	22.2%	66.1%	97.7%

National data (provisional)

Year	No. entries	% cohort	A*	A	B	C	A* - C	A* - G
2012								
2011	257793	60.6%	6.3%	11.0%	16.8%	18.3%	52.4%	95.2%
2010	2779954	57.3%	5.9%	12.2%	17.5%	19.0%	54.6%	96.1%

GCSE RS Full Course

Local Authority level data (non-denominational schools only)

Year	No. entries	% cohort	A*	A	B	C	A* - C	A* - G
2012	179	10.7%	25.7%	30.2%	21.2%	14%	91.1%	98.9%
2011	113	7%	25.7%	28.3%	17.7%	15.9%	87.6%	99.1%
2010	211	11%	13.7%	25.1%	27.2%	17.3%	83.5%	99.5%
2009	196	10%	30.1%	29.1%	16.8%	10.7%	86.7%	100%
2008	215	13%	15.3%	26.5%	23.3%	20.5%	85.6%	97.7%

National data (provisional)

Year	No. entries	% cohort	A*	A	B	C	A* - C	A* - G
2012								
2011	221974	4.3%	11.7%	20.2%	22.7%	18.7%	73.3%	97.8%
2010	188704	3.5%	12.0%	20.1%	22.6%	18.4%	73.1%	98.6%

AS Level (KS5)

Local Authority level data (non-denominational schools only)

Year	No. entries	A	C	E	A - B	A - E
2012	13	0%	15.4%	15.4%	46.2%	76.9%
2011	16	6.3%	25%	12.5%	25%	93.8%
2010	9	55.6%	11.1%	11.1%	55.6%	77.8%
2009	5	20%	60%	20%	20%	100%

A Level (KS5)

Local Authority level data (non-denominational schools only)

Year	No. entries	A*	A	B	C	A* - B	A* - E
2012	31	3.2	9.7	54.8	25.8	67.7	100%
2011	20	15.0%	15.0%	71.4%	14.3%	70%	100%
Year	No. entries	A	B	E	A - C	A - E	
2010	13	7.7%	30.8%	15.4%	53.8%	100%	
2009	10	20%	70%	10%	20%	100%	

Subject : Religious Studies ; Exam : GCSE Short Course (Without VA Schools) 2012 Key Stage 4

Centre	NOR	NOE	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	Q	U	X	A*-C	A*-G	QCA Av Pts
Bentley Wood High School for Girls	180	128	6.3	22.7	26.6	17.2	8.6	5.5	5.5	3.9		3.9	[3]	72.7	96.1	20.39
Canons High School	173	164	1.2	6.1	14.6	11	15.2	17.1	11.6	10.4		12.8	[8]	32.9	87.2	14.59
Harrow High School	173	115	0.9	5.2	15.7	16.5	13	9.6	11.3	12.2		15.7	[4]	38.3	84.3	14.29
Hatch End High School	287	230	3	7	20	23	10	13	12.2	7.4		4.3	[2]	53	95.7	17.36
Home Tuition Service	41	7						14.3	28.6	28.6		28.6	[2]		71.4	7.43
Nower Hill High School	298	246	17.9	33.7	20.3	11.4	6.9	3.3	2	1.2		3.3		83.3	96.7	22.86
Park High School	279	238	6.3	16	25.6	20.6	13.9	10.5	2.5	2.1		2.5	[5]	68.5	97.5	20.26
Rooks Heath High School	186	170	7.1	11.8	17.1	14.1	18.2	16.5	8.8	2.9		3.5	[3]	50	96.5	18.46
Whitmore High School	257	221	7.2	13.1	21.3	20.8	21.3	7.7	3.6	3.6		1.4		62.4	98.6	19.95
No of Pupils		1519	105	231	309	259	202	155	103	76	0	79	-	904	1440	-2.11
% of pupils			6.9%	15.2%	20.3%	17.1%	13.3%	10.2%	6.8%	5.0%	0.0%	5.2%	-	59.5%	94.8%	

Subject : Religious Studies ; Exam : GCSE Full Course (Without VA Schools) 2012 Key Stage 4

Centre	NOR	NOE	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	Q	U	X	A*-C	A*-G	QCA Av Pts
Bentley Wood High School for Girls	180	48	10.4	27.1	33.3	25			4.2					95.8	100	46.38
Canons High School	173	1	100											100	100	58.00
Hatch End High School	287	29	10.3	24.1	24.1	24.1	3.4	3.4	6.9			3.4		82.8	96.6	42.97
Nower Hill High School	298	38	60.5	26.3	10.5				2.6					97.4	100	54.21
Park High School	279	27	25.9	55.6	11.1	7.4								100	100	52.00
Rooks Heath High School	186	1					100								100	34.00
Whitmore High School	257	35	20	25.7	22.9	11.4	14.3		2.9			2.9		80	97.1	45.54
No of Pupils		179	46	54	38	25	7	1	6	0	0	2	-	163	177	
% of pupils			25.7%	30.2%	21.2%	14.0%	3.9%	0.6%	3.4%	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%	-	91.1%	98.9%	

Grade Summary

2012 Key Stage 5

Subject : Religious Studies ; Exam : GCE AS level

Centre	NOE	A	B	C	D	E	N	Q	U	X	A-B	A-E	QCA Av Pts
Nower Hill High School	10		50			20			30		50	70	75.00
Park High School	3		33.3	66.7							33.3	100	110.00
	13		46.2	15.4		15.4		23.1			46.2	76.9	83.08

Grade Summary

2012 Key Stage 5

Subject : Religious Studies ; Exam : GCE A level

Centre	NOE	A*	A	B	C	D	E	N	Q	U	X	A*-A	A*-B	A*-E	QCA Av Pts
Bentley Wood High School for Girls	1			100									100	100	240.00
Canons High School	2		50		50							50	50	100	240.00
Hatch End High School	6			83.3	16.7								83.3	100	235.00
Nower Hill High School	13		7.7	61.5	30.8							7.7	69.2	100	233.08
Park High School	8	12.5	12.5	37.5	12.5	12.5	12.5					25	62.5	100	228.75
Rooks Heath High School	1				100									100	210.00
	31	3.2	9.7	54.8	25.8	3.2	3.2					12.9	67.7	100	232.26

SACRE Guidance: Offering a space for prayer and reflection in school

Introduction:

SACRE is delighted to present the following guidance on offering a space for prayer and reflection in schools.

Harrow schools are plural communities. They include families and staff from a number of religions, with religious, cultural and ethnic diversity within these, and from non-religious secular backgrounds.

The impetus to publish this guidance came from the uncertainty felt by a number of primary schools about how to respond to Muslim requests for prayer rooms. However we hope that schools will find herein comprehensive information that will empower them to confidently introduce a space for prayer and reflection for its whole community of pupils.

The guidance, therefore, comprises clear information on:

- Benefits for pupils
- Benefits for schools
- Practical considerations for schools
- Faith-specific notes

The guidance aims to support schools in preparing all pupils to be positive members of multi-cultural societies at local level and for their roles as global citizens. A space for prayer and reflection, for use by those of all faiths and no faith, can be an inspiring model of good practice which teaches young people, in very real ways, an optimum model for living successfully together with others regardless of background.

A space for prayer and reflection will allow pupils to learn to respect personal elements of each others' lives and will show pupils how they might best live as adults. Children will gain hands-on experience of the use of a space which models the 'multi-faith'* reflection rooms in hospitals, shopping centres, airports and such like. They will learn first-hand the part that such a space has to play in people's lives, that is of empowering people to carry out useful and profitable lives whilst at the same time observing religious practices or stopping for personal reflection.

* usually referred to as 'multi-faith' but we are keen to establish the concept of the concurrent use of this space for those of all faiths and no faith.

Pupils in many schools, including those with the UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Award are already exploring their rights and responsibilities and the space for prayer and reflection will enhance such learning in a practical way. Pupils using the space for prayer or reflection will be able to learn how to fulfil their individual religious/non-religious requirements responsibly within a community that may not be religious. Pupils who do not use the space will be able to learn about its normalised use by others.

Schools are exciting and innovative places. They are learning zones at the heart of the community that are capable of great things! Schools are able to achieve excellence in any venture they take on and we hope that this guidance will

encourage schools to successfully introduce a space for prayer and reflection so that pupils are aware of how easily those with secular and faith-based lives can profitably co-exist in society.

(Adults need to understand each other better! Preparing children, as schools do in other areas, will help towards this in future.)

*Finally, although this guidance is intended to be informative it is certainly not meant to replace, high quality dialogue between the school and its community.

Need for guidance?

There is, of course, no legal requirement to provide a space for prayer and reflection but in the interests of generating and maintaining excellent relationships within a school community as well as for the numerous benefits outlined in the two 'benefits' sections there may be a very strong case for providing one.

There may be a growing number of requests for a space for prayer for a school's community. This SACRE guidance promotes the wider concept of a space for prayer and reflection for all and allows schools to pre-plan such provision both ahead of requests and in response to requests.

What's new about the SACRE guidance?

Published guidance from individual faith organisations may seem demanding and perhaps impractical. We hope that you will find this SACRE guidance to be practical and comprehensive.

What are the potential benefits to the child?

The individual child is at the heart of all school processes and nurturing the whole child is of enormous benefit a school community and, ultimately, to society.

1. As with attendance at other lunch time activities/clubs – children develop time management skills, a commitment to an extra-curricular event and a sense of responsibility for being prepared and bringing the necessary equipment.
2. As with other lunch time activities children's learning and concentration are positively affected by taking a break to carry out a different activity.
3. Reflection and prayer can have a calming, refreshing and invigorating effect on children.
4. Individual children may be able to resolve their issues through prayer and reflection or to feel that they are (spiritually and mentally) using appropriate methods to deal with a particular stress.
5. For individual pupils their faith is a sense of strength for them. Touching base in one's faith tradition allows some to be, or to work towards being, grounded, centred, peaceful, energised and focussed.
6. For individual pupils it may be very normal to pray at certain times during the day. Without a place for prayer or reflection they may feel a 'need' to pray or

feel 'not quite right', however when they there is provision for prayer and reflection the child may benefit from feeling 'joined up'.

7. A space for prayer and reflection may allow pupils to bring their 'whole self' to school, that is, to feel that they wholly belong to their school community. Pupils would no longer have to bring just 'a part' of who they are to school - a clear benefit as a pupil develops her individual identity.
8. Providing a space for reflection and prayer would allow a pupil an arena within which to contemplate threads of P4C, PHSE and SMSC from the curriculum therefore allowing application of conscious thought.
9. By choosing to use the SPAR at different times in their school life pupils will have access to another school-based tool with which to personally develop as an individual.
10. SMSC – pupils do make sense of what is right and wrong through their faith system and 'touching base' via the SPAR allows a pupil to self-monitor their behaviour.
11. A SPAR allows a child to benefit from affirmative school practices regarding faith and identity. Permissive practices such as 'allowing' a child to wear certain items e.g. a sikh turban or to eat certain food e.g. halal do not afford the benefits that affirmative practices do. Via affirmative provision for a pupil's identity children are able to access what they believe and think at school rather than simply what they eat or wear.
12. Society exerts its own pressures on children as they grow and schools are very strong in helping children to navigate their journeys and make good choices for themselves. A space for prayer and reflection (though other affirmative curricular practices would help greatly too) can be a place from which children successfully develop such fundamental skills such as self restraint.

What are the benefits for schools? Good learners, good citizens

Many of the benefits listed below follow inevitably from multiplying the individual benefits listed above by a number: the more users, the more benefits to the school community and ultimately to society.

1. The use of the space for prayer and reflection requires self-discipline, time management and personal organisation skills. Through these children develop independence – multiple users of this space therefore will increasingly benefit the learning environment in a school.
2. Most schools acknowledge the benefits of Brain Gym and a spiritual 'work out' also has benefits. In some faith traditions the prayer is also a physical activity. Refreshed, recharged, regrouped and calm children will also benefit the learning environment in a school.
3. Good thinkers can be nurtured via the SPAR as pupils there will be able to develop the skills of inner reflection and contemplation.

4. Acknowledging its pupils needs/desires by providing a space for prayer and reflection will give the school fulfilled and satisfied stake-holders.
5. Pupils who are provided for via the SPAR may develop increased self-esteem and self-confidence. This, of course, has a direct impact on school learning and achievement.
6. A space for prayer creates a calm hub in the school (there may of course be others such as library). All children will know that this place is available for them should they desire 'quiet time' regularly or irregularly.
7. 'Joined up' communities: those who like to pray or reflect will realise that they can easily and practically fit their needs into a societal role. Those who do not use the space will realise that the children who do use it can still be purposeful member of the school community.
8. Differences are normalised. Pupils of all faiths and none work comfortably with each other even when the pupils are taking time out to nurture themselves through prayer or reflection. Everyone is able to 'be who there are' in a wider sense than if there were no provision.
9. Reduces the stress of bi-culturalism. Although it may seem strange to schools, it is a very normal practice for many children to stop during the day to pray as part of a daily routine. A space for prayer and reflection allows the child to fulfil their normal practices with less pressure on them to live a bi-cultural school life (i.e. leaving 'part of who they are' at home).
10. School 'incidents'. Pupils who seek strength and support through prayer and reflection will be able to initiate their own problem-solving of stressful personal situations - a clear bonus for the school.
11. Such disciplines as Philosophy for Children and all that it hopes to achieve will be empowered by a space for prayer and reflection.
12. All pupils develop deeper awareness of the spiritual needs of others. A space for prayer 'affirms' that the child is more than what s/he eats or wears!
13. The space for prayer and reflection is an obvious way for schools to provide PSHE by grounding children in their individual religious/spiritual identity.
14. Allows a school to help pupils develop as individuals. Life journeys are enhanced by trial and investigation. Pupils may use the SPAR regularly, irregularly or even just as a 'one off' according to need.
15. Dispel stereotypes and myths: pupils inevitably understand each other better.

What are the practical issues for school leaders?

This section, in conjunction with the 'faith specific notes', aims to inform schools so that they are able to reach mutually agreeable arrangements with pupils, families and staff for providing a space for prayer and reflection that does not require vast resourcing.

Perhaps the most helpful guidance for schools is that they conceive of the SPAR as they would any other lunch time 'drop-in' club for pupils as it can easily run along those lines. One school, for example, successfully runs a 'quiet club' which meets the needs of those pupils wishing to pray or reflect.

The following points offer additional advice:

Do we need to open the space for the whole of lunch time?

- No! As with other extra-curricular activities the space could be staffed for 20 minutes at lunch time. Pupils will need to turn up on time to use the facility. Children may need an early lunch pass.

Are there any timing requirements?

- See 'Muslim specific guidance point 3

Who leads / manages access to and use of the space for prayer and reflection?

- Any school adult may staff the room/space as they are there to ensure pupils' health and safety. The school adult does not need to be from a faith background. The school adult may rotate.

What is the suggested role for the school adult monitoring the space?

- The suggested role is to ensure that there is a calm environment and that the children's behaviour permits all to pray or to reflect whatever their faith background.

Do we need a special room?

- No. As for other lunchtime activities the SPAR can be in a classroom. (See also muslim guidance no. _)

Will the space for prayer result in peer pressure from other pupils?

- Normal school procedures for peer pressure(/bullying) will suffice. Cf. 'You must come to football club!'

Does the SPAR have to be open every day?

- Schools could trial the provision on certain days of the week or even once a week initially.

Faith-specific guidance

Muslims:

Muslims are taught to pray (perform 'salaat' – the second pillar of Islam) five times a day at specific times.

The morning and night prayers will never coincide with school hours.

Only the midday prayer will coincide with the school day during British Summer Time although it may not fall within the lunchtime of schools.

The midday, afternoon and evening (after sunset prayer) may coincide with the school day during British Winter Time, but only the midday prayer would fall within lunchtime.

Muslims cannot perform their prayers 'early'.

The prayer takes a few minutes to perform.

The muslim prayer is performed quietly.

Muslims may also use the SPAR for purposes other than the 'salaat' e.g. for quietly supplicating ('dua'), reading Quran or reflecting.

Muslims learn to pray from a young age – indeed many of them begin to copy the prayer as toddlers! The prayer is 'obliged' from the onset of puberty, but is learnt and performed by children before then.

School pupils will probably perform their prayer individually but can also pray together.

There would not be a requirement to get someone in to lead Friday prayer – where Friday prayer is not established, children can pray the normal midday prayer on a Friday.

Muslims need to be in a state of purity 'wudu' before they pray. This is a simple cleansing routine. Children can come to school 'in wudu' but may need to renew this by lunch time. This need not make a lot of mess and would not need a room other than the school toilets.

Pupils do not need to wash their feet but can 'wipe' over their shoes instead if they have performed wudu in the last 24 hours and have had their feet covered since then. Pupils can be encouraged to come to school in wudu to avoid the need for feet washing. In this case they can just 'wipe' the feet if they need to renew their wudu e.g. after using the toilet.

Muslims need to pray in the direction of Mecca. This is South East and is easily identifiable with an app, compass or map. A small sign in the place for prayer is sufficient to indicate this.

Muslims need to pray in a clean place but a special room is not necessary. The only inappropriate place for muslim prayer is a toilet.

Pupils may want to temporarily move pictures or cover objects that are in the direction of prayer.

Pupils may wish to bring their own prayer mat, in which case a small storage cupboard would be useful. It is equally appropriate to pray on a clean sheet or even just a clean piece of paper for one's head.

As with the use of a space for prayer and reflection by others, muslim pupils should be encouraged and taught to use the space responsibly.

Harrow Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE)

Authorised Absence for Religious Festivals: guidance for headteachers and Governing Bodies published for the academic year 2012-2013

In the UK, the pattern of the school year takes account of most of the western Christian festivals and holy days. Important days of religious observance in the calendars of other religious traditions and denominations, however, often fall in term time and on school days.

Those parents, who are nurturing their children within a faith tradition, understandably want their children to be able to engage in those key events which involve corporate worship and celebration and which affirm their religious beliefs. Schools will want to be sensitive to parental requests for the authorization of absence for religious observance because they recognize that a family's religious beliefs and traditions are intrinsic to a child's sense of identity and contribute to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

It has been agreed by the Local Authority that up to and no more than three days in the school year may be authorized for absence for religious observance. This applies to both pupils and staff. We are aware that Headteachers would welcome specific guidance from Harrow SACRE:-

- Headteachers should only authorise absence for that festival date 'exclusively set apart by the religious body'
- Therefore, absence taken on a school day for a festival falling at a weekend would not be authorised
- Additional days on either side of the festival day would not be authorised
- The LA agreement of up to 3 days should not be viewed as an entitlement which is to be taken in full, e.g. if only 1 festival day falls on a week day in term time then a school will only authorise that 1 day's absence. The school will not authorise an additional 2 days absence any other time later on in the year.
- In some faith traditions, on some holy days, observance can be kept outside of school hours for example, in the Christian tradition Ash Wednesday.
- Whilst sympathetic to the need of families to remain in contact with relatives and their 'heritage' overseas, SACRE does not endorse absence for extended visits / holidays abroad.

In order to support headteachers and Governing Bodies, representatives of Harrow's faith groups on SACRE have agreed a list of key dates for religious observance that fall during weekdays in the school year 2012 – 2013.

It should be noted that this document has advice status. The final decision for permitting authorized absence for religious observance must rest with the Governing Body and the school, balancing religious requirements with the importance of regular attendance at school. In 2011 – 2012, for example, four Jewish festivals / high holy days, on which Jewish law prohibits work, fall during term time. Observant Jews therefore may therefore require additional absence from school.

Some pupils, though growing up within a faith community, may prefer to attend school on festival days.

The needs of different religious groups

Within some religious traditions, observance varies between different denominations and communities. Ashura, for example, is a relatively minor festival for Sunni Muslims but a

holy day of major significance for the Shia community. Within Hinduism, Diwali is almost universally celebrated, whilst the Tamil Hindu community will also celebrate festivals particular to South India and Sri Lanka.

Whilst headteachers and teachers must ensure that requests are genuine and reasonable, they are recommended not to doubt a request on grounds that other families of the same faith have not requested absence on the same day or at the same time. It may be the case that:

- the level of observance differs amongst families within the same faith tradition;
- a particular denominational or cultural grouping observes different holy days to other groups within the same faith;

What can schools do to meet the needs of families from religious traditions whilst promoting high attendance rates?

Harrow schools are aware of the religious communities represented within their school and take reasonable steps to ensure, whenever possible, that events in the school diary – such as parents evenings, school performances, CPD days - do not clash with days of significant religious importance to pupils and staff.

As part of their written communications with families, some schools send a termly or annual proforma asking for advance information of parents' requests for absence for religious observance. However, some communities may not be able to identify festival dates that far in advance.

Parents should be encouraged to consider whether the religious observance could be accommodated out of school hours. They should be asked to give the school as much notice of a proposed absence as is reasonably possible and be willing to discuss with the school how work missed will be caught up.

For religiously observant children and young people there are expectations of religious prayer and observance throughout the year. Schools can often make provision for pupils and staff to fulfil these observances without the need for absence during the school day. For example, through consultation with the Muslim communities represented within the school, a prayer room and nearby facilities for washing can enable young Muslims to perform salah on the school site (see SACRE Guidance on offering a place for prayer and reflection).

SACRE has been involved in the Consultation with Schools on the Local Authority's Duties and Legal Measures to Secure School Attendance.

RE REVIEW PHASE ONE QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for helping us to evaluate the Phase One Report of the RE Review. Please spend a few minutes considering and answering the following questions. The information we gather from you will give us valuable insights into how we can further improve the final version of the Phase One Report and ensure that the processes we are putting in place to review RE are fair and inclusive.

The questionnaire is available online on <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/REReviewSurvey12012> It would be very helpful to us in analysing the responses if you could complete the questionnaire online. However, if this is impractical for you for any reason, please email your response to info@religiouseducationcouncil.org or post it to the REC, 14 – 22 Elder Street, London E1 6BT. Please note that due to the limited resources available to support the RE Review we cannot promise to review any responses received after **Friday 7th December 2012**.

No one's responses will be identified by name from this process, either in the evaluation or the Review; nor will the names of respondents be shared with anyone external to those evaluating the Review.

Section 1: Background details

1. What is your occupation?
 - a. RE teacher
 - b. RE-related educational professional
 - c. Educational professional
 - d. Employee of a religion or belief organisation
 - e. Other

2. What is your religion/belief affiliation?
 - a. Baha'i
 - b. Buddhism
 - c. Christianity
 - d. Hinduism
 - e. Islam
 - f. Jain
 - g. Judaism
 - h. Paganism
 - i. Sikhism
 - j. Zoroastrian
 - k. Non-religious world view
 - l. None
 - m. Other
 - n. Prefer not to say

Section 2: Responses to the report

3. The Review assesses the present situation in RE accurately

Strongly agree	
Agree	
Neither agree nor disagree	
Disagree	
Strongly disagree	

4. The Review assesses the present situation in RE clearly

Strongly agree	
Agree	
Neither agree nor disagree	
Disagree	
Strongly disagree	

5. The Review is fair, balanced and credible

Strongly agree	
Agree	
Neither agree nor disagree	
Disagree	
Strongly disagree	

6. The Review makes a valid case for the actions proposed

Strongly agree	
Agree	
Neither agree nor disagree	
Disagree	
Strongly disagree	

7. The Review represents all stakeholders views without bias

Strongly agree	
Agree	
Neither agree nor disagree	
Disagree	
Strongly disagree	

8. The Review represents dissenting views in a fair and balanced way

Strongly agree	
Agree	
Neither agree nor disagree	
Disagree	
Strongly disagree	

9. The Reviews recommendations are the right ones

Strongly agree	
Agree	
Neither agree nor disagree	
Disagree	
Strongly disagree	

10. Please feel free to make any additional comments in the box below

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of these important questions for RE

Dr Lorraine Peck, RE Review External Evaluator; Dr Janet Orchard, RE Review Project
Manager



**SUBJECT REVIEW OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
IN ENGLAND**

PHASE 1

REPORT OF THE EXPERT PANEL

DRAFT

Draft report for consultation only

12 November, 2012

RE Expert Panel Members

Lat Blaylock

Bill Gent (Chair)

Julian Stern

Karen Walshe

Acknowledgements

This report represents the collective findings and recommendations of the RE Expert Panel. The members of this panel would like to acknowledge the contributions made by:

- Dr Janet Orchard, the project manager of the whole REC RE Subject Review, for her constant support, encouragement, advice and back-up;
- Dr Sarah Smalley, REC Executive Officer, who, amongst other things, showed a remarkable gift in minute-taking during the two long, face-to-face meetings of the panel; and
- each of the expert witnesses who submitted detailed notes and comments and/or who provided oral evidence.

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Introduction

The origin of this report

Under the present coalition government, an extensive review of the National Curriculum is taking place. As changes in curriculum and assessment arrangements for other subjects have implications for religious education (RE), this provides an opportunity to clarify RE's distinctive place within the wider school curriculum. As part of its Strategic Plan, the RE Council (REC) has undertaken to carry out a review of RE, following a similar pattern to that adopted by the National Curriculum Review. There was support from the Department for Education (DfE) in that ministers affirmed that the REC was 'well placed' to carry out such a review.¹

A scoping exercise was commissioned in preparation for this process. The subsequent report, published on the REC website in June 2012, declared that: 'in the midst of an apparently threatening, divisive and destructive situation, the RE community has a unique opportunity through the leadership of the REC, to build on the considerable achievements of the last two decades'.²

The Subject Review of RE in England stemmed from the scoping report and Dr Janet Orchard was appointed manager of a project consisting of two phases. During phase 1, an expert panel of four members would meet to review key documentation and submissions by expert witnesses with two purposes in mind. First, to identify strengths and weaknesses in current RE provision in schools in England; second, to make recommendations for future action in phase 2 of the review and beyond related to four particular foci. These foci were identified by the scoping report and agreed by the REC Board and set the boundaries for the panel's work. They are: aims, curriculum, exemplification of good practice, and qualifications and assessment.

The members of the expert panel, chaired by Dr Bill Gent, began their work of reviewing key documentation and expert witness submissions in July 2012. Their primary tasks were, through a careful and sensitive reading, to present a summary of points raised in the documents and submissions, and to make a judgement on the implications of this evidence for the future of RE. They met twice, once in London in August and once in Birmingham in September 2012. A first draft of the panel's report was presented to the project's steering group at the end of October 2012.

The REC is committed to wide consultation among all of the various stakeholders with a direct interest in RE and beyond. Hence, a second draft of the phase 1 report was considered in early November 2012 by an Extraordinary General Meeting of the REC which represents the views of its 59 member bodies, including professional and faith-based groups. A third draft of the report is now being placed in the public domain for a period of three weeks in November and December 2012 for general consideration and

¹ Letter from Nick Gibb, DfE, to John Keast, Chair of the REC, 25 January 2012.

² This sense of urgency was reflected in many of the written submissions made to the expert panel. It is clear that many members of the RE community believe that RE's undoubted gains in recent decades across a wide age range are currently threatened and in jeopardy. As such, this review of RE - in the words of one expert witness - 'is a precious opportunity and I hope that we do not waste it'.

comment. A further revision will then be made to take account of these soundings and this final version of the report will be presented to the REC Board and the steering group for ratification.

The report's style, layout and length

The Expert Panel was asked to produce a report which would have credibility amongst the professional RE community and would be free of technical jargon to ensure its accessibility by a wide public audience. For example, footnotes have been used – mainly to identify key documentation and sources of further information – but sparingly. Acronyms cannot be avoided entirely but they have been explained in full when they appear first.

The panel agreed that the key element of the report is its recommendations of which it has made nine. Seven relate directly to the four specific foci of the review and two further recommendations follow. These form the executive summary to be found at the beginning of the report.

Each of the four main sections of the report, based around the four foci, begins with the recommendations for that section. The text that follows each recommendation provides commentary to support it that falls into three parts: background, main strengths, and main weaknesses.

The expert panel was asked to produce a report of about 10,000 words in length. It has succeeded in doing this but one of the consequences was that it left little room for detailed information about particular points made. Nonetheless, the purpose of the report was always to provide a general overview of the English RE scene, including its 'highs' and 'lows', in order to provide a basis for further, more detailed work later in the review process.

Underlying principles of the panel's work

As they engaged in their deliberations, certain principles informed the panel's work. These have been captured in the following brief statement:

1. The RE Subject Review for England should defend and enhance the place of RE in the curriculum of English schools.
2. The RE Curriculum in schools in England should reflect wider educational aims, including the aims of the new National Curriculum. It should respect the principles of freedom, responsibility and fairness, and show commitment to raising expectations of the quality of RE received by all children.
3. Local determination of the curriculum has been recognised in the statutory arrangements for RE over many years. The Expert Panel has worked on the assumption that any new guidelines for the subject must continue to balance the value to RE of wide national compatibility with that of vesting power in local communities.
4. The Expert Panel is committed to diverse forms of high quality RE; its members recognise that the subject, like religion itself, is contested. Plural traditions of RE in

England have integrity and value, and their practice should be encouraged and developed. Common to these traditions is a widely shared commitment to being educative rather than coercive, each in their own way.

5. At the same time, Religious Educators need to be much clearer about the reasons which make the plural aims of RE legitimate and how these relate to the overall purpose of the subject.
6. RE's place in the curriculum will be strengthened if its role and importance are communicated as widely, effectively and meaningfully as possible to all stakeholders.
7. RE in England compares favourably with equivalent curricula in high performing jurisdictions around the world and the Expert Panel has regarded it a privilege to reflect on some of the best collective wisdom about how children learn in RE and what they should know.
8. The RE Curriculum should embody rigour, high standards and coherence. There are diverse interpretations of high standards and rigour in RE but one key element is the opportunity all children should have to acquire core knowledge and understanding particular to this curriculum area.
9. This requires a well-trained workforce of teachers with continuing professional development to support them and adequate time in which to teach the subject.
10. RE continues to be a statutory requirement for maintained schools and should remain a national benchmark of excellence for any school. Any school aspiring to be a good school should aspire to offer good RE.
11. The Expert Panel seeks to work in a spirit of generosity towards all those who teach and care about RE. Contributions to the RE Subject Review from many perspectives have been wholly welcome and gladly received. It has summarised and synthesised that expertise for the good of RE, based on a careful reading of documentation in relation to the four foci identified.

Executive summary

Having considered a range of key documentation as well as submissions by a significant number of expert witnesses - a number of whom were met face-to-face - the RE Subject Review Expert Panel agreed that the following nine recommendations should be put before the REC Board for further consideration and action:

1. **that clear and cogent aims for RE, applicable across the range of school settings, are proposed, as well as ways of communicating them to different stakeholders;**
2. **that clear accounts that re-evaluate the core knowledge and understanding in RE, appropriate to pupils in particular age groups and stages, are produced;**
3. **that guidance on pedagogy and learning methods in RE are developed for teachers and curriculum-shapers, that promote high quality teaching and learning in RE while allowing for diversity;**
4. **that evaluative principles are developed and published that enable teachers to make sound professional judgements about what constitutes good professional practice, promoting high standards of learning in RE;**
5. **that strategies are explored through which the collective efforts and wisdom of the individuals and groups which make up the RE community can be brought together and made known effectively for the benefit of the subject and the young people studying it;**
6. **that new instruments for describing achievement in RE are created that teachers can use working alongside the DfE's new descriptions of achievement in subjects like English, mathematics and science;**
7. **that maximum influence is sought with the relevant examination Awarding Bodies in order to promote:**
 - (a) **coherence and progression between 4-14 programmes and public examinations used at 14-19; and**
 - (b) **the study of religions in religious studies³ qualifications 14-19, in appropriate relation to studies of, for example, ethics and philosophy;**
8. **that the 2004 *Non-Statutory National Framework* for RE is reviewed and replaced with an updated and recast document;**
9. **that increasingly influential links are built and used with the DfE in order to promote RE in all schools, in line with the REC subject review's work and recommendations (above), challenging and encouraging government to act to improve RE.**

³ At public examination level, RE is referred to as religious studies (RS).

Focus 1: The Aims of RE

Recommendation 1

That clear and cogent aims for RE, applicable across the range of school settings, are proposed, as well as ways of communicating them to different stakeholders.

Aims: Background

- 1.1 The nature and purpose of RE are not easy to define in straightforward, unequivocal ways. The reasons for this are many. People's ideas about the role of both 'religion' and 'education' in society have changed over time. Moreover, religion itself is a complex concept, fundamental to the lives of some citizens whilst highly problematic for others, so that the issue of whether religion has a part to play in a nation's public education system at all is contested.
- 1.2 A consistent feature in many of the submissions that the Expert Panel received was a strong perception that, despite the considerable amount written on the nature, purpose and aims of RE in all kinds of documentation, many people still don't 'get it'.⁴ That this was often linked to a sense of persistent frustration on the part of members of the RE community was demonstrated well in the document reporting a meeting of key members of the RE community that took place in late 2011: 'A lack of consensus on the rationale and purpose of RE, and a failure to find a simple accessible way of explaining RE to the public, media and government, struck many present as the most serious weakness'.⁵
- 1.3 A strong feeling persists, therefore, that both the purpose of RE as well as its aims need further articulation in ways and forms that people of all backgrounds can better understand and relate to. ('The issues are not in the aims themselves', said one expert witness, 'but in the communication of them'.) Is the RE community itself partly to blame for the confusion that exists? A recent major research project, *Does RE Work?* concluded bluntly that RE has tried to do too much⁶, re-inventing itself to include within its brief additional whole-school priorities – 'community cohesion', for example – and seeking to provide social, moral and values education so that the sense of a substantive core or essence of the subject has been eroded.
- 1.4 There is some concern about the title of the subject itself. At a national level, the term 'religious education' has been enshrined in legislation since 1988 (superseding the term 'religious instruction'). Some secondary school departments in particular have been experimenting with alternative titles which they judge to be more appealing to

⁴ See, for example: IPPR (2004) *What is Religious Education for? Getting the National Framework Right*.

⁵ St Gabriel's (2011) RE Community Conference 2011, 16.

⁶ See: www.gla.ac.uk/schools/education/research/currentresearchprojects/doesreligiouseducationwork/

the pupils they teach. These new titles (such as 'Beliefs and Values', 'Philosophy and Ethics' and 'Religion and Belief') reflect the increasing emphasis on the study of philosophy and ethics in secondary school RE in recent times.

- 1.5 The publication of the *NSNF* for RE in 2004 was a milestone in the history of English RE. In particular, its statement on 'the importance of RE'⁷ was an attempt to provide coherence for the subject at a national level while respecting the value of the subject's adaptability to local needs and requirements without inappropriate and unhelpful levels of prescription. There have been criticisms of the *NSNF*; some, for example, have suggested that, no matter how 'educational' such guidelines are, there is still the assumption that it is better to be religious than not. Others criticise the *NSNF* for encouraging a single view of RE and undermining the independence of local determination. Nonetheless, the *NSNF* was ground-breaking because it gained the broad agreement across the full range of professional RE associations and faith communities. About 150 local agreed syllabuses have followed it in varying ways.⁸
- 1.6 Although RE is a statutory requirement for all state schools, in schools with a religious character the understanding of the nature and purpose of RE might be promoted in slightly different ways to that in a community school. At worst – as one expert witness pointed out – this can lead to a kind of 'us and them' mentality with the underlying assumption that the only 'proper' RE is that which takes place in schools without a religious character. However, members of the expert panel agree that diversity of provision has considerable advantages; the purpose and aims of RE can be expressed in ways that respect the varied integrities of RE practice in different schools and different contexts.

⁷*NSNF*, 7.

⁸ The expert panel is aware of less than 10 local authorities and SACREs that have chosen not to use the *NSNF* to support the development of their locally agreed syllabus.

Aims: Main strengths

- 1.7 A tradition of inclusive and multi-faith RE has developed over time in England so that it is held in high esteem internationally. An expert witness with strong international links pointed out that, 'Specialists in religion and education from many countries appreciate the attempts in England, Wales and Scotland to have an *inclusive* form of religious education, which is 'open'. They also appreciate the fact that Britain ... has regarded religion as a legitimate subject for public discussion, including within education'.
- 1.8 The wide acceptance of the 2004 NSNF indicates some broad agreement about the nature of RE in schools. As one expert witness commented: 'Remarkably, it did provide an agreed reference point intended to be relevant not only for LA ASCs [Local Authority Agreed Syllabus Conferences] and SACREs [Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education] but also for those responsible for shaping RE in schools of a religious character'.
- 1.9 Teachers of RE have often made a strong contribution to the delivery of whole-school policies, including community cohesion and respect for all, critical thinking and citizenship. In its long subject report of 2010, Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) identified the contribution of RE to the promotion of community cohesion as a strength of the subject in most of the schools that had been visited.⁹
- 1.10 The existence of a widely based professional 'RE community' consisting of RE practitioners including teachers, advisers and consultants, professional bodies and interested faith community groups. Such groups and individuals represent a diverse group of people and organisations whose common bond is a commitment to supporting and promoting the educational aims of RE.
- 1.11 The legislative requirement that each local authority determines its own agreed syllabus for RE is considered a strength by some expert witnesses. At its best, this has meant that local groups of educational professionals, faith, and community representatives have thought through the purpose and aims of RE together and reached agreements about the best possible curriculum for children and young people in their particular areas. This is in the spirit of current national policies to devolve power over the curriculum to local stakeholders.

⁹ Ofsted (2010) *Transforming religious education*, 47-49.

Aims: Main Weaknesses

- 1.12 There is still widespread public uncertainty about the nature and purpose of RE. This is evident among a significant number of teachers¹⁰ as well as the wider public. Some expert witnesses judged there to be too much diversity, complexity and variation in articulating the aims of RE. They went on to argue that this became more confusing still in aims statements that failed to distinguish between general aims of schooling, to which RE made a contribution, and particular aims specific to RE.
- 1.13 There is a lack of confidence and subject knowledge¹¹ among a significant number of teachers and practitioners. In increasing numbers of primary schools Higher Level Teaching Assistants are teaching and leading RE rather than teachers: their capacity to operate as fully functioning teaching professionals in the subject is severely limited. Furthermore, a lack of continuing professional opportunities in RE for all teachers and practitioners limits the scope for them to further develop their practice.
- 1.14 There is evidence of agreement that the development of knowledge and understanding of religion/religions is a core element of RE, and a widespread belief that pupils' knowledge and understanding is increasingly insecure. This point was made very strongly in the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) / Warwick University report on *Materials Used to Teach About World Religions* (ref) and commented on frequently by expert witnesses.
- 1.15 Though the NSNF was a milestone in the development of RE in England and Wales, it now needs to be updated and its usefulness extended in order to take account of the many changes that have taken place since 2004¹², both within RE and the wider educational scene. Furthermore, its statement about the 'importance of RE' in particular is not yet sufficiently clear or direct to be fully fit for purpose.
- 1.16 The locally determined nature of the RE curriculum is regarded as a weakness by some well-respected commentators. For them, this is a matter of urgency; they believe that the future well-being of RE is dependent upon radical reform of the legislation governing RE. The need to review this issue is heightened by recent radical revisions of local authority control over education. With increasing numbers of schools moving to academy status, thus outside local authority control and the requirement to follow the local agreed syllabus for RE, the future viability of SACREs is under threat, particularly in smaller districts and areas.

¹⁰ See, for instance: Ofsted (2010) *Transforming religious education*, 51, n147.

¹¹ As one of the expert witnesses pointed out, this would include 'pedagogical knowledge' – that is, an understanding of why and how I am teaching RE so that pupils make progress.

¹² Including subsequent key projects and documents from Government and its agencies which largely follow the settlement that the framework achieved.

Focus 2: The RE Curriculum

Recommendation 2

That clear accounts that re-evaluate the core knowledge and understanding in RE, appropriate to pupils in particular age groups and stages, are produced.

Recommendation 3

That guidance on pedagogy and learning methods in RE are developed for teachers and curriculum-shapers, that promote high quality teaching and learning in RE while allowing for diversity.

Curriculum: Background

- 2.1 As a result of progress made in recent decades, many parents and teachers now think of RE as a 'subject', alongside other subjects of the curriculum. However, questions remain about what *is* and what *ought to be* taught in the RE curriculum. On the one hand, there appears to be a relatively widespread expectation that the key focus of a subject called 'RE' will be on studying 'religion/s', particularly Christianity and the other principal religions represented in Great Britain (usually named as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism). On the other, a further relatively well-established expectation is that the RE children receive in school will equip them for living in a plural society made up of people who, to a lesser or greater extent, follow many religions and beliefs. Beyond this, agreement is less certain. Hence the various meanings of 'religious education' and its associated concepts have been the legitimate subject of often intense debate within the RE community and beyond. This was apparent in many of the key documents and submissions received from expert witnesses.
- 2.2 Sometimes, these debates reflect wider concerns about how to structure learning and teaching which affect the curriculum as a whole. For instance, the need for a school curriculum to be organised around traditional 'subjects' has been challenged at the level of principle¹³ as anachronistic, and in practice because it leads to needless repetition of certain topics which do not fit neatly into any one subject's schemes of work. Experienced primary school teachers who began their careers using a 'theme'- or 'topic'-based model to plan the curriculum, were then later encouraged to focus on 'subjects'. Later still, they were encouraged to use more 'creative' styles of planning which, in spite of official rhetoric to the contrary, seemed

¹³ See: White, J (2004), Wright, A (2004), and material related to the 2008 New Secondary Curriculum.

to some to be a reintroduction of topics and themes, albeit under another name and to be 'delivered' with more 'rigour'.

- 2.3 Within RE, the idea that the principal focus of teachers should be on the RE 'curriculum' has been challenged on a number of levels. Some have pointed to an undue emphasis on subject content resulting in 'curriculum overload'. A number of expert witnesses were of the view that there has been too much emphasis on 'curriculum' at the expense of 'pedagogy'. This begs the questions, of course, as to what both the words 'curriculum' and 'pedagogy' mean and their relationship, there being evidence that there is often a lack of clarity in the use of both of these terms.¹⁴
- 2.4 There is strong evidence that, particularly since the publication of the *NSNF* in 2004, there has been a greater uniformity across local agreed syllabuses for RE – in their adoption, for instance, of the notion that the dynamic of RE is bound up with the twin processes of 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion which provides a basis for describing pupils' 'levels of attainment' across their school careers. However, there is still substantial variation across local agreed syllabuses with a small number of notable examples which enshrine a very particular or original approach to RE: that, in essence, for example, RE aims at the development of individuals and of society across a range of 'dispositions'.¹⁵ In another example, RE is framed as an exploration of the question, 'what does it mean to be human?'¹⁶
- 2.5 Even when the assumption that RE is primarily concerned with the study of 'religion/s' is broadly agreed, both the meaning of the concept of 'religion' and the most fruitful way of studying it are hotly contested. Within the English RE community, there has been an on-going debate between those academics who regard 'religions' as 'substantial social facts' and those who regard 'religion' as a flawed, outmoded concept. Those of the former view regard the concept of 'religion' as helpful in discussing such things as religious truth claims. Those of the latter view are wary of the term in that they think that it encourages people to think of 'religions' as fixed entities disregarding real life evidence that 'religions' are changing, internally diverse and have blurred boundaries.¹⁷
- 2.6 It follows from the identification of the principal religions to be included in RE (see 2.1 above), that there will be some dissatisfied by apparent exclusion. Members of religious communities that are globally significant, but have small numbers of members in the UK would like to see study of their faith traditions included in the curriculum. Atheists and agnostics – of whom those in the British Humanist Association (BHA) are the most visibly well-organised – draw attention to the fact that religious practice in the UK is a minority occupation, with many or most living as

¹⁴ One expert witness suggested that the title of Michael Grimmitt's well-known book, *Pedagogies of Religious Education* (Great Wakering: McCrimmons, 2000), was really about 'methods' rather than 'pedagogies'.

¹⁵ See the 2007 Birmingham agreed syllabus: www.faithmakesadifference.co.uk

¹⁶ See the 2011 Lancashire agreed syllabus: www.lancsnqfl.ac.uk/curriculum/re/index.php?category_id=136

¹⁷ See: Wright (2008) & Jackson, R (2008).

practically non-religious, and urge the more focused study of, for example, non-religious ways of living and arguments for atheism in the classroom.

- 2.7 In terms of the historical and social phenomenon of 'religion', the once common Western idea that religion will gradually 'die out' has been increasingly challenged by research into what has been called 'the persistence of faith'.¹⁸ In its place, religion is increasingly seen as a key global phenomenon which is expressed in many and varied ways. A number of key documents¹⁹ and expert witnesses expressed concern that the concept of religion as used in RE has not kept pace with such developments.
- 2.8 In addition to the challenges to any simple notion of a straightforward RE 'curriculum' already highlighted, contemporary changes (or emerging changes) in the national educational field need to be taken into account: the insistence of the DfE 2010-2012 that schools should have greater freedom to innovate and to devise their own curricula at school and community level, for instance. Expert witnesses commented that not only may a subject such as RE be left to wither in some schools, but also, the very idea of organising the curriculum into subjects will be set aside by others. So RE in the future will have to rely less on being a mandatory subject for all pupils by legislation, and much more on the *intrinsic worth of the learning opportunities it offers*. For example, academies will need to be convinced of the merit of the locally agreed syllabus if they are to choose to use it. The RE subject review should take these radical insights seriously.

¹⁸ See: Sachs, J (1990) *The Persistence of Faith* (London: Continuum).

¹⁹ See, for instance: Ofsted (2007) *Making Sense of Religion*, 7.

Curriculum: Main strengths

- 2.9 The 2004 *NSNF* provides an outline of the RE curriculum in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills to which most RE professionals could consent and from which almost all local agreed syllabus conferences have drawn in devising their own agreed syllabuses. Really weak agreed syllabuses appear less common, post-*NSNF*, than they were before.
- 2.10 Though the continuing usefulness of the terms ‘learning about’ and ‘learning from’ religions has been challenged²⁰, they have nevertheless become embedded in the thinking of many primary and secondary teachers who, as a result, understand that RE consists of more than just ‘content’. This recognition of the need for balance is particularly significant in the context of the current national emphasis on the need for the identification of ‘bodies of core knowledge’ within subjects.
- 2.11 Evidence suggests that, since Ofsted began inspecting RE in 1994, more and better RE is being taught in more primary schools. Provision remains patchy, but inspection reports suggest a decline in the once common total neglect of the subject in many schools, and this improvement may have been helped by the five-yearly cycle of agreed syllabus review.
- 2.12 One way the strength of the RE teaching force has been developed and shown is through the 2008-2010 RE contribution to the New Secondary Curriculum through which 1016 secondary schools, involving over 1500 teachers, received professional development from 25 regional RE subject advisers.

²⁰ See, for example: Ofsted (2007), 38

Curriculum: Main Weaknesses

- 2.13 The lack of curriculum time made available to RE in many schools combined with the use of 'creative curriculum planning'. In some primary schools, for instance, teaching assistants²¹ (or Higher Level Teaching Assistants) have been used to teach RE, sometimes in PPA time²², lowering the status and the probable impact of RE in the school (REC 2007, p. ?). Many teachers have identified a lack of understanding of, and support for, RE among senior school leaders and policy-makers as a significant cause of weakness in RE provision.
- 2.14 Within the secondary phase, the recent decision of the DfE not to include RE as one of the humanities subjects of the 'English Baccalaureate' ('EBacc') has compromised the future of RE in secondary schooling. A series of National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) surveys of English secondary school RE departments²³ revealed widespread unsettlement, reporting a general feeling that RE had been unfairly 'downgraded' within the school curriculum as a result. The October 2012 Ipsos Mori report on *The Effects of the English Baccalaureate* reported that, 'Almost all case study schools questioned the exclusion of RE as an EBacc subject'.²⁴
- 2.15 The limited opportunities for teachers and other practitioners to increase their professional knowledge, understanding and expertise through RE-specific initial and continuing professional development. Many local authorities and SACREs no longer make any provision for continuing professional development in RE, due to reduced resources and/or a lack of subject-based advisory support.
- 2.16 The frequent misrepresentation of religion in both teaching and the literature produced to support RE in schools.²⁵ There is often concern with 'coverage of religions', noted one expert witness, 'rather than a commitment to understanding and impact'. Another pointed to the tendency to 'sanitise' religions leading to an avoidance of diversity and controversy.

²¹ REC (2007) *Religious Education Teaching and Training in England: current provision and future improvement*, p35, identified a need for training for teaching assistants in RE.

²² The Workload Agreement guarantees teachers in maintained schools in England and Wales ten per cent of their timetabled teaching to be set aside as preparation, planning and assessment (PPA) time during the school day.

²³ See NATRE website: www.natre.org.uk.

²⁴ DfE (September 2012) *The effects of the English Baccalaureate*, 19.

²⁵ See, in particular: DCSF/Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (2010) *Materials used to Teach about World Religions in Schools in England*.

Focus 3: Exemplification of good RE

Recommendation 4

That evaluative principles are developed and published that enable teachers to make sound professional judgements about what constitutes good professional practice, promoting high standards of learning in RE.

Recommendation 5

That strategies are explored through which the collective efforts and wisdom of the individuals and groups which make up the RE community can be brought together and made known effectively for the benefit of the subject and the young people studying it.

Exemplification: Background

- 3.1 Good quality RE grows where best practice is widely known and understood. The term 'exemplification of good practice' is far-reaching, however, and the panel therefore took a broad view of what this category required it to address. With more time, the panel would have attempted to define the field more tightly.
- 3.2 Primary teachers have often looked to local SACREs and agreed syllabuses as well as commercially-published resources for their classroom approaches; notions of good practice have often been drawn from practice in other subjects. At the same time, poor subject knowledge and understanding and low confidence have often undermined the quality of primary RE practice.
- 3.3 Secondary teachers, in those schools in which teachers with other specialisms are in a majority, can be more influenced than they realise by the quest for parity with history and geography at both Key Stages 3 (11-14) and 4 (14-16). Advantages and disadvantages stem from these comparisons. Secondary schools have generally been less concerned than primary schools to implement their local agreed syllabus. In the case of new-style academies, the link with local arrangements for RE (including resources) is currently loosely defined.
- 3.4 In the last eight years, guidance produced by the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA)²⁶ has been widely used, though this has improved good practice less than would have been wished. The marginal position of RE within the curriculum and small amounts of curriculum time account for much of the weakness of teaching and learning which HMI observe in RE.

²⁶ Such as the New Secondary Curriculum Initiative and work on Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) in Foundation Subjects to define and exemplify levels.

- 3.5 There are many national projects which provide high-quality exemplification, some originating in research, some funded and supported by RE's major donors, funders and agencies. Various REC member bodies have also produced exemplification material, such as the Islamic Council of Britain's package for learning about Islam, the BHA's 'Humanism for Schools' website, and the Jewish Way of Life exhibition. In general, these are less well known than they deserve and probably lack widespread impact, even where they would meet needs widely.
- 3.6 An increasing amount of material is available digitally via the internet and, in the context of increased globalisation, from a wide range of international sources. However, such material is unregulated and raises issues – particularly for those lacking subject knowledge or confidence – about resource selection, balance and quality. Furthermore, best practice would suggest that such material has to be tailored to the particular situation in which it is going to be applied; an exercise that requires professional judgement, flair and expertise.
- 3.7 RE has relied on agencies of government for exemplification of good practice. Key examples include HMI, QCD, the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) and the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTa). Local agencies – SACREs being the key example – have also often made a contribution to exemplification. Following the closure of some of these agencies²⁷ and in view of the current austerities which affect many (though not all) SACREs, the RE community must look to other sources for the support of exemplification of good practice.
- 3.8 One particularly significant factor has been the reduction in the number and availability of 'experts' (including specialist RE advisers, advisory teachers and advanced skills teachers) to support teachers and schools. Where they continue to exist, local subject-specific groups of teachers have been a lifeline for many with meetings often focused on sharing examples of good practice. Some faith communities, such as Roman Catholic and Anglican dioceses, have continued to offer support to their own networks, sometimes beyond. However, many teachers of RE report feeling isolated, and do not feel well placed to see how exemplification of good practice can help them practically.
- 3.9 Some 'pull factors' have been having a good impact, but usually only on schools numbered in their hundreds at best.²⁸ These include quality marks and awards (such as the RE Quality Mark²⁹ and the Hockerill/NATRE prize for Innovation in RE Teaching³⁰); competitions (such as those associated with 'Spirited Arts'³¹); and

²⁷ BECTa, for example, was closed down on 31 March 2011.

²⁸ The evaluation report on the RESilience Project, for example, noted that, 'The number of English schools that chose to participate was disappointing. This was due in part to external factors but the final number fell far short of the revised aspirational target of 400'. *An Evaluation of Resilience/At Gyfnerthu 2009-2011*, 25.

²⁹ A recently introduced award aimed at 'recognising outstanding learning in religious education'. See: www.reqm.org

³⁰ Now in its third year. See: www.hockerillfoundation.org.uk/Prize.aspx

projects and initiatives (such as the Celebrating RE Month held in March 2011³² and developing students as ‘ambassadors of faith and belief’³³). These initiatives, which require opting into, often feature schools who already exhibit good practice in RE.

- 3.10 Many schools and teachers, lacking trust in their own ability to be curriculum innovators and evaluators, turn to commercially published schemes of planning and resources. While some of these provide professional guidance ‘on tap’, others are insufficiently coherent to please faith community groups and insufficiently creative to please pupils.
- 3.11 Published research projects into RE-specific learning methods and pedagogy have been influential. These methods, based on enquiry, ethnography, interpretation, religious literacy, experiential approaches, conceptual development and the quest for human meaning, are all used in some classrooms; at best, each is effective largely in relation to its own version of RE’s aims. Many teachers make eclectic use of these learning methods, often driven by the desire to make RE lively or relevant. The quest for ‘relevance’ in RE is sometimes pursued superficially, however: featuring a story of a Muslim boxer or a Christian pop star may in itself do little, if anything, to improve the quality of learning.

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³¹Including ‘Art in Heaven’, an annual art competition which, since 2004, has involved 250,000 pupils. See: www.natre.org.uk/spiritedarts/

³² See: www.religiouseducationcouncil.org/content/blogcategory/51/81/

³³ See, for example: <http://www.save-glasbury.org/aims.php>

Exemplification: Main strengths

- 3.12 There has never been a 'golden age' for RE, and it is a reasonable conjecture that there is a much stronger base of practice at a sound standard than ever before in both primary and secondary school RE. In a significant number of schools – primary, secondary and special – RE is identified by HMI as a subject which makes an important contribution to whole school priorities.
- 3.13 The capacity - despite a sense of being marginalised by central government decisions and a persistent belief that the subject is under-funded relative to other subjects - for RE-related groups, locally and nationally, to organise innovative and exciting projects and initiatives which both promote and bring together a wide range of exemplary practice and material.
- 3.14 The number and range of professional associations and other organisations which have exemplified their vision of RE in accessible ways through resources from which schools and teachers can benefit. While sometimes these are for sale, others are heavily subsidised and some are freely available.
- 3.15 Though there is widespread concern about the diminishing amount of initial and continuing professional development opportunities available to teachers, where good quality subject-specific training does exist it is valued highly and can have an impact. A significant number (though not enough) of teachers benefit annually from this sort of provision from SACREs, professional associations and commercial providers.
- 3.16 Best practice in RE is simultaneously alert both to pupils' own interests and questions and to the academic disciplines of theology and religious studies (in some cases, biblical studies or philosophy). Linking these two poles through learning about spirituality, ethics and religions enables learners in RE to get a strong sense of how the subject encourages them to think deeply about their own questions of identity, meaning and value and of what it means to be human.

Exemplification: Main Weaknesses

- 3.17 Even after 10-15 years of solid progress, there are still too many schools which do not take RE seriously; it may still be treated in tokenistic ways by school leaders who are unaware of (or unreceptive to) the potential of the subject. Too many schools continue to deliver RE from a sense of legal duty rather than an appreciation of its value. Such schools have never seen best practice exemplified in ways that might inspire them to seek to replicate it in their own setting.
- 3.18 Though researchers have contributed to the exemplification of good teaching and learning in RE, primary and secondary teachers have not always known about this and/or have had difficulty persuading others of its value. The circle of well-informed and practically skilled users of RE learning methods is small.
- 3.19 Clear criteria by which to judge what makes RE practice or resources 'good' or 'outstanding' are not readily available either to many teachers of RE or other stakeholders.
- 3.20 The time allocated to beginning primary teachers during initial teacher education is too limited – in many cases this is less than five hours tuition or even self-study to prepare primary graduates for teaching RE. The move to locate initial teacher education in schools (in which there can be no guarantee that beginning teachers will see good practice in RE exemplified) is worrying.
- 3.21 Despite good take-up of those CPD opportunities which are available, overall the amount of subject-specialist professional development available to subject leaders and specialist RE teachers is inadequate.

Focus 4: Assessment (including Qualifications)³⁴

Recommendation 6

That new instruments for describing achievement in RE are created that teachers can use working alongside the DfE's new descriptions of achievement in subjects like English, mathematics and science.

Recommendation 7

That maximum influence is sought with the relevant examination Awarding Bodies in order to promote:

- (a) coherence and progression between 4-14 programmes and public examinations used at 14-19; and**
- (b) the study of religions in religious studies¹ qualifications 14-19, in appropriate relation to studies of, for example, ethics and philosophy.**

Assessment: Background

4.1 There has been substantial work on assessment in RE in recent years, to which many expert witnesses have drawn attention. The most recent reference point is the Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants (AREIAC) assessment working group. The work of the HMI and of QCDA's Assessing Pupil Progress in RE work is also pertinent. Though there is clearly 'unfinished business' in the area of assessment and RE, there is evidence that, with skilful and knowledgeable handling, the use of levels can promote progress in RE but that, generally, too few teachers and schools have the confidence or expertise to use assessment techniques well. From the pool of schools that has been visited in recent years, HMI judges assessment in RE overall to be relatively weak in relation to other subjects³⁵. There is also divided opinion over the usefulness of the 'learning about' and 'learning from' dichotomy as a means of carrying out assessment. At best, it has been suggested, it gives people a good sense of the subtle nature of RE and 'learning from religion' provides a strong starting point for higher order thinking in RE, including skills of critical and personal evaluation. At worst, however, it leads to a narrow interpretation of each element so that "learning about' becomes synonymous with 'facts' and

³⁴ The title of the fourth focus as given to the Expert Panel was 'qualifications and assessment of RE'. Following discussion, however, panel members decided that it was helpful to reword this as 'assessment (including qualifications)' and to interpret 'qualifications' as applying predominantly to the GCSE and GCE public examinations in religious studies (RS) available to pupils at school.

³⁵ See the two long Ofsted reports (2007, 2010) on RE in schools visited.

'learning from' with 'feelings'. Many expert witnesses stated that some teachers are confused about what the terms actually mean³⁶.

- 4.2 A review of qualifications in RE/RS³⁷ also presents a mixed picture. On the one hand, there has been a spectacular increase in the number of students taking RE/RS public examinations in recent years³⁸, both at GCSE and GCE levels, with solid rates of achievement being recorded. Evidence suggests that the worth of RE/RS examinations has risen in the esteem of students, many of them seeing the kinds of issues-based RE/RS examinations that have developed as being helpful for living in the modern, plural world. The increased popularity of RE/RS examinations has also meant that they have become a significant commercial factor for the examination Awarding Bodies: RE/RS has, in short, attained a strong market position. On the other hand, there are currently significant and fast-moving changes taking place in the national examination scene, some expert witnesses voicing concerns that there is a danger the RE community will not be able to respond quickly enough so as to influence decisions that will impact on the future of RE/RS as an examination subject.
- 4.3 There is also evidence, however, that the rapid growth in the number of candidates for RE/RS public examinations has come at a cost. For example, concerns have been expressed by some expert witnesses that: the GCSE short courses lack rigour and challenge; the full GCSE courses are too content-based so that they encourage 'teaching to the exam'; and that the popularity with students of A level philosophy and ethics-type RE/RS courses has led to a belief that 'anything goes' (in terms of argument) and that 'philosophy' and 'philosophy of religion' (which usually means Western philosophy) have become conflated so that both become distorted. There is also a much-repeated concern that, all through the school years – but particularly in Key Stages 4 and 5 when examinations predominate - pupils exhibit a diminishing understanding of the nature of religion in general as well as of the basic theological positions of particular religious traditions and the questions that they raise. In the words of one expert witness: 'The focus on so-called 'philosophy and ethics' has reduced religions at Key Stage 4 to providers of proof texts, learnt by heart, to illustrate religious attitudes to "issues"'.
- 4.4 If the above factors are, to a lesser or greater extent, within the control of RE/RS and examination professionals, the same cannot be said for changes that emanate from decisions made at government level and which can leave educational professionals feeling helpless, frustrated and often angry. Such has been the case with the decision not to include RE/RS as one of the humanities subjects which combine with others to form the measure of school examination performance termed the 'EBacc'.

³⁶ See, for example: Teece, G (2010).

³⁷ The term RE/RS has been used in this section as a reminder that, at public examination level, RE is termed 'religious studies' (RS).

³⁸ Over 450,000 students have been certificated at GCSE each year in the last six years. In the last 15 years, over 25,000 students have sat the AS level in Religious Studies.

Recent surveys³⁹ have demonstrated that this one move has done much to undermine the status and staffing of RE in a significant number of English secondary schools. It is, many have claimed, a cruel example of damaging RE 'by default'; that is, educational decisions not specifically related to RE nevertheless having a negative impact on RE, thereby undermining its position in schools. Some expert witnesses also expressed concern at RS not being listed as a 'facilitating subject' by the Russell Group of universities, saying that this has fuelled negative perceptions of RE amongst some pupils and members of the wider public.

- 4.5 The pattern of recent years through which students have gained teaching qualifications through a course in initial teacher education is also currently undergoing fundamental change with the number of post-graduate students being accepted for RE-related courses being reduced (resulting in some long-established university post-graduate certificate of education [PGCE] RE courses folding) and a clear national government-led preference for initial teacher education taking place 'on site' in schools themselves. Those currently involved in initial teacher education work, the quality of whose work is regularly monitored, have voiced concerns about there being no apparent safeguards to ensure that the school RE that beginning teachers will experience will be of an appropriately high standard. Taking a wider perspective, questions are continually asked about how school and university courses prepare future teachers to engage professionally in informed and engaging RE teaching, whether at primary or secondary level.

³⁹ Particularly the four surveys, each of which attracted a significantly high number of responses from English secondary schools, which were conducted by NATRE 2010-2012.

Assessment: Main strengths

- 4.6 The quality and wide use of the RE eight-level scale from the Framework is not without problems, but is perceived to be a strength of the subject by many teachers and syllabus-makers. By offering a common platform with subjects such as history and geography, the eight-level scale has led to greater coherence and rigour in the ways that teachers describe achievement and progression in RE for 5-14s.⁴⁰ It has also been suggested that self-assessment and peer-assessment has become more popular in RE, giving pupils greater agency and ownership.
- 4.7 It is a strength that RE has for over a decade shared parity of language and structures for describing assessment with, for example, history, geography and art. This has had a benefit for the strength of the subject's assessment work and for the status of RE in the eyes of teachers, parents and pupils.
- 4.8 The spectacular increase in recent years in the number of students taking examination courses at both GCSE and GCE levels, the short course GCSE being particularly strategic in helping schools to fulfil the legislative requirement for all students to take RE (unless withdrawn by parents or carers) at Key Stage 4.
- 4.9 The raised status of RE amongst 14-18 pupils, particularly with the popularity of issues-based/philosophy and ethics-type GCSE and GCE courses.

⁴⁰ One example of the impact of the scale is that over 2,600 teachers have benefitted from continuing professional development courses on assessing RE organised by RE Today.

Assessment: Main Weaknesses

- 4.10 The general standard of assessment in RE is relatively weak in relation to other subjects. Contributory factors include including lack of teacher confidence, decreasing opportunities for initial and continuing professional development, lack of curriculum time, the unrealistic amount of assessment required of some teachers, and lack of clarity about the aims of RE.
- 4.11 The debilitating impact of RE not being included as one of the humanities subjects of the EBacc, evidence suggesting that it is making some schools question the value of running RS short/full GCSE courses or even to eliminate such courses entirely. In such schools, the negative impact on the perception of RE's value and on the morale of teachers can be marked.
- 4.12 There is widespread concern that the popularity of philosophy and ethics examination courses post-14, at the expense of a study of world religions or religious texts, has led to a shallower understanding of the nature of religion/s. This, in turn, will impact on the knowledge and understanding of future entrants into the teaching profession.
- 4.13 Since 1997, the GCSE short course in religious studies has been the most popular of all short courses, meeting a real need to certificate the core learning in legislatively required RE. If it were to continue, reform is needed because of a perceived lack of rigour⁴¹ (a perception that is also widely applied to the full GCSE course), There is a need to clarify the relationship of the short course with other qualifications (such as, presently, the full RS GCSE course, or any successor qualification). But, if the short course in RS were to be abolished, then another way of accrediting the learning entitlement of the RE required by legislation will be needed. The accreditation of learning at 16 or in Key Stage 4 (14-16) is currently a weakness in RE provision.

⁴¹ See, for instance: Ofsted (2010), 5.

Two Further Recommendations

Recommendation 8

That the 2004 *Non-Statutory National Framework* for RE is reviewed and replaced with an updated and recast document.

Recommendation 9

That increasingly influential links are built and used with the DfE in order to promote RE in all schools, in line with the REC subject review's work and recommendations (above), challenging and encouraging government to act to improve RE.

Note

Each of recommendations 1 to 7 is linked to one of the four foci of this report (aims, curriculum, exemplification of good practice, and assessment including qualifications). This is not the case with the final two recommendations which are more overarching in nature.

Recommendation 8 will draw from the outcomes of the work envisaged in the preceding recommendations. Recommendation 9 provides the backdrop to the RE Review as a whole and echoes one of the key aims of the REC.

A Final Word

There are many traditional adages that have, at their core, the truism that nothing that is really worthwhile is easy. Members of the expert panel have certainly discovered this anew over the three months of its work.

It was reassuring to know, however, that their report would be a beginning rather than an end: a starting point for further reflection and discussion which would lead to a refinement of both its findings and recommendations; a platform on which to base further action.

I wish to pay tribute both to my colleagues on the Expert Panel for the expertise, time and energy which they have brought to this task but also to the many other members of the RE community who have also contributed so willingly to the process culminating in this report and its later refinements.

Bill Gent

Chair of RE Expert Panel

November 2012

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Annex 1: Expert Witnesses Consulted

Written submissions were received from the following:

Jo Backus
Dr Robert Bowie
Jane Brooke
Alan Brown
Roger Butler
Mike Castelli
Professor Trevor Cooling
Andrew Copson
Dr Nigel Fancourt
Professor Brian Gates
Professor Michael Hand
Patricia Hannan
Dr Mary Hayward
Daniel Hugill
Dilwyn Hunt
Professor Bob Jackson
John Keast OBE
Anne Krisman
Juliet Lyal
Carrie Mercier
Dr Joyce Miller
Dr Bill Moore
Mary Myatt
Dr Kevin O'Grady
Dr John Rudge
Joy Schmack
Dr Anna Strhan
Sandra Teacher
Dr Geoff Teece
Peter Ward
Michael Wilcockson
Dr Barbara Wintersgill

The following provided written submissions and met with Expert Panel members:

Professor Vivienne Baumfield
Alan Brine HMI
Dr Mark Chater
Rev Sior Coleman
Julia Conway-Diamond
Professor Denise Cush
Dr Marius Felderhof
Dave Francis
Guy Hordern
Ed Pawson
Deborah Weston
Professor John White

Annex 2: Key Documents Consulted

As the first part of their work, members of the Expert Panel agreed to read and take account of the following key documents. Additional documents were referred to by individual panel members.

DfE-related

National Curriculum Expert Panel Report (Dec 2011)

Text of address of Minister for Schools at REC AGM (May 2012)

Government response to Expert Panel Report (June 2012)

On-going communications between DfE, Expert Panel Members & RE organisations

REC-related

Scoping Exercise Report (Feb 2012)

RE-focused (excluding journal/magazine articles)

Baumfield, V (2011) 'Making RE Work: a thoughtful future for the subject' (Burn Hall Lecture)

Castelli, M (2012), 'What makes a good preparation to teach RE, and how important is subject knowledge?' (Discussion plan, March 2012 ITER summit)

Chater, M 'What's Worth Fighting For?' (RE online/Unlocking RE website, March 2011)

Cush D (2003) Notes on 'Religiate school leavers aged 16+'

Cush, D & Robinson, C (2012) *Developments in Religious Studies: Towards a Dialogue with Religious Education* (Talk at AULRE Conference, July 2012)

QCA/DES (2004) *Religious education: The non-statutory national framework*

DCSF (2010) *Religious Education in English Schools: non-statutory guidance*

DCSF/Warwick University (2010) Conclusions and recommendations to *Materials Used to Teach About World Religions in Schools in England*

Felderhof, M C & Whitehouse, S, 'The 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus: Educating pupils and the community' in Grimmitt, M (2010) *Religious Education and Social and Community Cohesion* (Great Wakering: McCrimmons) + DVD to support 2007 agreed syllabus.

IPPR Report: *What is Religious Education For? Getting the National Framework Right* (2004)

ITE Summit (2012) *How will we prepare the next generation of RE teachers?*

Jackson, R (2011) *Learning about Religions & Non-religious Worldviews: European Research Findings & ongoing Policy Development in the Council of Europe* (ISREV Conference paper)

Jackson, R (2009/12) *Studying Religions: The Interpretive Approach in Brief* (European Wergeland Centre, Oslo)

Keast, J (2007) 'Does RE Matter?' (RE online/Unlocking RE website)

Mayled, J (2010) 'Religious Studies Examinations' (RE online/Unlocking RE website)

NATRE (April 2011) *Teacher Survey re impact of EBacc*

NATRE (June 2011) *Second Teacher Survey*

Ofsted (1997) *Making Sense of Religion*

Ofsted (2010) *Transforming Religious Education*

QCA (2004) *Non-Statutory National Framework for RE*

REC (2007) *RE Teaching & Training in England: current provision & future improvement*

RE Today Services (2012) Report on Westhill Endowment Trust Seminar Series, 2011-12

RE Today Services (date) powerpoint sequence on 'RE: Why do we have to do this?'

Rudge, J (2012) 'What is – and should be – happening to GCSE & A level RS as routes to University?' (Talk plan, March 2012 ITE summit)

St Gabriel's (2011) Proceedings of RE Community Conference, Wokefield Park, Reading, October 2011

Strachan, A (2011) 'The Future of RE: Looking backwards to look forwards' (RE online/Unlocking RE website)

Teece, G (2012) *Learning about religion & Learning from religion* + appendix (Paper prepared for the department of Education of the Swiss Canton of Zurich)

RE-focused (journal/magazine articles)

Blaylock, L (2009) '“Learning from Religion”: a very short history', *REsource*, 31:2, 10-13

Brown, (2012), review of *Debates in Religious Education*, *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 32:3, 368-370

Chater, M (2011) 'The Gove who kicked the hornets' nest', *REsource*, 33:3, 24-25

Habermas, J (2006) 'Religion in the Public Sphere', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14:1, 1-25

Jackson, R (2008) 'Contextual religious education & the interpretive approach', *British Journal of Religious Education*, 30:1, 13-24

Keast, J (2011) 'Political change & the future for RE: looking into the glass darkly', *REsource* 33:2, 4-5

Lundie, D (2010) 'Does RE Work?', *REToday* 28:1, 38-39

Teece, G (2009) 'Religion as Human Transformation', *REsource*, 31:3, 4-7

Teece, G (2010) 'Is it learning about and from religions, religions or religious education? And is it any wonder some teachers don't get it?', *British Journal of Religious Education*, 32:2, 93-103

White, J (2004) 'Should religious education be a compulsory school subject?', *British Journal of Religious Education* 26:2, 151-164

Wright, A (2004) 'The justification of compulsory religious education: a response to Professor White', *British Journal of Religious Education*, 26:2, 165-174

Wright, A (2008) 'Contextual religious education & the actuality of religions', *British Journal of Religious Education*, 30:1, 3-12

Annex 3: Pen Portraits of RE Expert Panel Members

Lat Blaylock

Mr Lat Blaylock is the Editor of *RE Today* magazine, and a national RE adviser in the UK. He trains about 1500 primary teachers of RE and about 1500 secondary RE teachers every year through his professional development courses on topics including RE for infants, spiritual development 4-19, assessing primary RE and GCSE learning. He has built up a national reputation for practicality and inspiration. Before joining the RE Today advisory team, he was a classroom teacher of RE for 11 years in a large comprehensive school in multi-faith Leicester. As Head of Humanities, he developed interests in history, geography, social science and curriculum partnerships. His MA from the University of Warwick studied the implementation of local agreed syllabuses.

He has published numerous RE resources, including making four series of RE broadcasts for the BBC. 'Representing Religions' explores the teaching of six religions through multi-authored chapters by teachers who are also members of six different faiths. He has written four packages of visual learning materials, called 'Picturing Jesus' which use the global art of the contemporary Christian communities for RE. He has been a consultant on RE to the BBC, the Bible Society, the Inter Faith Network, Christian Aid, many local authorities and some Academy networks.

His long-term work on assessing RE led to his appointment as a partner in the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agencies 'Assessing Pupil Progress' project, from which new RE assessment materials for RE were published by Michael Gove's Department in 2010. He is the initiator of 'Spirited Arts', a National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) strategy for creativity in RE in the UK, which is also used across Europe and in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

Bill Gent

Dr Bill Gent began his 15-year career as a schoolteacher in Birmingham, specialising in religious education. Early on developing an interest in the nature and problematic role of collective worship in schools, he wrote and spoke widely on this, building up a national reputation as an engaging and entertaining communicator. Following teaching, he moved on to advisory and inspection work where he worked with primary, secondary and special schools across the London Borough of Redbridge and beyond. He was involved in the writing and revising of a number of agreed syllabuses and, with his wife, wrote the Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 RE books in the popular Scholastic Curriculum Bank series. He also developed a particular interest and expertise in working with educational and faith groups in producing clear, agreed and authoritative texts.

His interest in the composition and educational life of religious communities led him to take an educational doctorate with the University of Warwick. His thesis explored the nature of supplementary schooling within the Muslim community, with a particular focus on Qur'ānic memorisation and recitation. He has published a number of articles and book chapters in this field and is currently working with a group of European scholars looking at how Muslim pupils move between different educational traditions in a range of settings. He is an Associate Fellow of the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit based at the University of Warwick.

From 2006, he has edited *REsource*, the journal of the National Association of Teachers of RE for the quality of which work he was awarded the prestigious Shap Award in 2012.

Julian Stern

Professor Julian Stern was educated at the Royal Academy of Music, London Institute of Education, and the universities of Oxford and Leicester. He is currently Professor of Education and Religion, and Dean of Education and Theology, at York St John University. He taught in UK schools for 14 years, and has worked in universities for 20 years (initially alongside school work), at the London Institute of Education, the Open University, Brunel University (as Deputy Director of the BFSS National RE Centre), the University of Hull (as Reader and Dean of the Institute for Learning), and now York St John University.

Julian has written eleven books, including *Teaching Religious Education* (2006), *Schools and Religions: Imagining the Real* (2007) and *The Spirit of the School* (2009), alongside general books for teachers and over 30 articles for journals as diverse as the *British Journal of Religious Education*, *Support for Learning*, the *Journal of Advanced Clinical Nursing*, and the *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*. He has worked in initial and in-service teacher education for both primary and secondary teachers, and has been involved in creating digital training materials and television programmes. He has been a consultant and researcher for primary, special and secondary schools, and universities across the UK and in Germany, Sweden, Hong Kong, Australia, and the USA. He is currently researching religious education, spirituality, dialogue, community, learning, loneliness, and the influence of research.

Professor Stern is General Secretary of ISREV, the International Seminar on Religious Education and Values (the major international research body in religious education with 243 senior researchers across 36 countries) and is on the editorial boards of the *British Journal of Religious Education*, the *Religious Education Journal of Australia*, and the *Journal of Spirituality Studies*.

Karen Walshe

Dr Karen Walshe is Senior Lecturer in Religious Education at the Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter, where she is Subject Leader for Secondary Post-Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) RE and Programme Director for the Secondary PGCE Programme. Having taught and led RE in secondary schools in Devon and Cornwall for ten years, she moved to the University of Exeter in 1989 to work as research assistant on the Biblos, Parables, and Teaching about Jesus research projects. She was awarded her PhD in 2009 for her research into young people's perceptions of Jesus in RE.

Karen has published a wide range of RE resources as well as professional and academic papers in the field of RE. She is currently working on a collaborative research project, funded by the Farmington Institute in Oxford, examining teachers' and trainee teachers' understanding of 'understanding' in RE.

Karen is Deputy General Secretary of the International Seminar on Religious Education and Values (ISREV) and a member of the Devon Standing Advisory Council for RE (SACRE). She also has extensive experience as an external examiner for secondary PGCE RE and Graduate Training Programme course.

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