



HARROW SACRE MEETING

WEDNESDAY 12TH JUNE 2013 AT 7.30P.M.

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

Enquiries & apologies to:
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or
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HARROW STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE)

AGENDA

1. **ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR**
(Please notify Rachel Bowerman of any nominations by 5p.m. on Monday 10th June)
2. **WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS**
3. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**
4. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6TH MARCH 2013** (Pages 1 - 8)
5. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

Business items: Improving standards in religious education and collective worship

6. **SACRE MONITORING THE QUALITY OF RE: A SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION REPORT**
A presentation by Dr Godfred Donkor, Head of Religious Studies, Rooks Heath College.
Godfred Donkor will report to SACRE on: standards and achievement in RE, quality of teaching and the RE curriculum, the status of RE at Rooks Heath and what he, as subject leader, regards as the strengths of his department and his priorities for further development.
7. **RAISING THE PROFILE OF HARROW SACRE**
A up-date from Rachel Bowerman outlining recent initiatives to bring the work of Harrow SACRE to the attention of headteachers and school governors. There will also be a LA response to SACRE's advice regarding the review of the Harrow Agreed Syllabus.
Papers: Governors Bulletin Summer 2013 (pages 9 - 10) and PowerPoint slides (slides 1 - 11)

Information items: improving SACRE's effectiveness

8. **'RE: THE TRUTH UNMASKED' AN INQUIRY BY THE ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION** (Page 11)
A one page summary of the Inquiry's main findings and recommendations which were published March 2013. The full report is available from Rachel Bowerman or on the RE Council website
<http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/appg>
9. **REPORTS FROM NATIONAL RE ASSOCIATIONS**
 - a) RE Council Newsletter May 2013 (pages 12 – 15)
 - b) NASACRE AGM - Presentations by the two key-note speakers are included with these papers. Alan Brine, 'Realising the potential' (Pages 16 - 25) and Mark Chater 'Challenging SACREs' (Pages 26 - 34).

Discussions explored three questions:

- What can SACREs do to promote closer working with academies in their locality and to mitigate the effects of the general reduction in the LA consultancy support for schools
 - How can SACREs locally and NASACRE nationally best press LAs to comply with their statutory duty to support SACREs?
 - What should be the focus of Agreed Syllabus reviews in the context of the national curriculum review and the current stage of the RE subject review?
- c) NASACRE Newsletter Summer 2013 (Pages 35 – 50)
In 'Are SACREs fit for purpose' the out-going Chair suggests that SACREs consider to what extent they recognise themselves from Mark Chater's analysis and what actions should be prioritised.

10. REPORTS FROM SACRE PARTNERS

- a) Harrow Interfaith Council
- b) Faith Communities

11. DATES OF FUTURE SACRE MEETINGS

Autumn Term 2013 meetings: 24th October 2013 and 2nd December 2013 at the Civic Centre

HARROW SACRE
(STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION)
MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 6th MARCH 2013

Attendance:

Group A: (Religious traditions and Christian Churches)

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

Group B: (Church of England)

* Mrs Mary Abbott	A Rev'd Philip Barnes
	* Rev'd Matthew Stone

Group C: (Teachers' Associations)

~ 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

* Judy Lethbridge, Head Teacher, Welldon Park Junior School
* James Simmons, Deputy head Teacher, Welldon Park Junior School

Clerk

*Vivian Wright (Clerk to SACRE)

* *denotes presence*
A *denotes absence with apologies*
~ *denotes absence without apologies*

1. Welcome and introductions: the Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially Judy Lethbridge and James Simmons, headteacher and deputy, Welldon Park Junior School. Mr Zia Baig was also welcomed back after a long absence because of ill health.

2. Apologies for absence:

RESOLVED: To note apologies for absence from Mr Neville Ransley, Rev'd Philip Barnes, Mr Paramjit Singh Kohli, Mr Mike Bishop, Mrs Gill Ross, Mr Vijay Hirani and Ms Doreen Samuels. The meeting was quorate.

The following members were also absent:

Group A: Mrs Niru Desai, Mrs Phiroza Gan-Kotwal, Ms Beverley Wilson and Ven Sumaner Sramaner
Group C: Ms Bhavita Pandya, Mrs Manju Radia.
Group D: Cllr Nana Asante

3. Order of the Agenda:

Agreed to take item 6c as the next agenda item, so that the visitors could leave after their presentation.

Clerks' note: for the minutes I have followed the original order of the agenda.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 4th December 2012 (pages 1-7)

The minutes were agreed and signed as a true record.

5. Matters arising from the minutes

There were no matters arising from the minutes not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

Business Items: Improving standards in RE and collective worship

6. A Space for prayer in schools: guidance document and illustrations

Context: earlier in the year, Grange School had contacted SACRE asking for advice regarding a request from a group of Muslim parents that the school provide a space for prayer. In the summer term last year, Claire Ali made a presentation to SACRE. Claire had recommended that advice to schools should be pragmatic so that school leaders were not daunted by what appeared to be prescriptive and demanding requirements. Following this, SACRE commissioned Claire Ali to draft guidance, showing that a space for prayer and reflection could be truly inclusive for all pupils of diverse religious faiths or none. This guidance document came to the last SACRE meeting. Rachel Bowerman has revised and updated the guidance in accordance with suggestions received from the Chairs' group and SACRE members, and this will be considered as item 6.a). In addition, Rachel Bowerman, Cllr Camilla Bath and Zafar Khalid have visited a prayer room at Rooks Heath School. Their report will form item 6.b). The third section of this item (which was actually taken first at the meeting) comprises a report by Judy Lethbridge and James Simmons on their experience of setting up a space for prayer and reflection.

a) Draft Guidance for Schools (*revised draft tabled at the meeting*)

As mentioned above, Rachel Bowerman has updated and revised the guidance document in line with suggestions received from the committee and included a cameo from Rooks Heath. She apologised for the late arrival of this revised draft: she will email it to members and invite any additional comments. **It was agreed that unless any major alterations were requested, the document should then go forward for publication. The deadline for responses is 31st March.**

There was some discussion about how best to promote and publicise the guidance. The following points were made:

- If the document were to be posted on the website, there would be no incentive for schools to buy it. It was agreed that a better alternative would be to announce the document on the website and provide it free to Harrow Schools and make a modest charge to schools outside Harrow.
- Rachel Bowerman will request an agenda item on the May briefing for headteachers with Catherine Doran, Corporate Director Children and Families. At this meeting Rachel will launch the Guidance and signpost them to other SACRE Guidance publications. She will also signal the difficulties of finding school representatives (group C) despite considerable efforts to recruit members for this group. Attendance from groups A, B and D, on the other hand, is consistently good.

Members made the following comments on the guidance:

Ms Varsha Dodhia wondered if it would be useful to include demographic information for children as well as for the population as a whole. Rachel Bowerman explained that accurate information would be difficult to obtain as it is not found in the Census statistics.

Mr Zia Baig suggested that there should be more advice on the kind of venue suitable for a prayer room. He cited an example where a gym was being used which was not entirely appropriate. Rachel Bowerman explained that the provision of a prayer room is not a requirement and schools might be put off if SACRE's advice is too prescriptive and the provision of the prayer room and its supervision become too much of a burden. At Rooks Heath, normally two classrooms are used, one for girls and one for boys, but at Ramadan the school hall is made available to accommodate more pupils. This has repercussions as other activities which would normally take place in the hall have to be cancelled.

The Rev'd Matthew Stone expressed his appreciation of the cross reference on page 1 to the RRSA (Rights Respecting Schools Award).

Action: members of the committee should make any additional responses to Rachel Bowerman by Sunday 31st March

Agreed: unless any major alterations were requested, the Guidance should go forward for publication.

b) Visit to Rooks Heath

The previous day, Cllr Camilla Bath and Mr Zafar Khalid had visited the prayer room at Rooks Heath High School. Rachel Bowerman had joined them later.

Cllr Camilla Bath opened the report by explaining that the pupils attending the prayer room had assured the SACRE visitors that they did not put any pressure on other pupils to attend the prayer room. Pupils felt it was more likely that pupils might once have been discouraged by their peers but that this had changed as the prayer room became more firmly embedded in the school culture. The visitors were informed that there were generally about 10-12 pupils and many more during Ramadan. The visitors had found the school very accommodating of pupils' religious requirements. Cllr Bath felt that this reinforced the importance of provision for collective worship in schools, which is a statutory requirement.

Mr Zafar Khalid added that the prayer room had previously been in a space used for drama, but the drama staff had reclaimed it for lunch time drama activities, so the pupils now used adjacent classrooms. Although pupils had to rearrange tables and chairs they were very relaxed about this. In answer to a question about how they felt if they missed a prayer session, they replied that they would feel guilty. The opportunity to pray was important to them.

Rachel Bowerman added that as they were teenagers, they had not been as communicative in their responses as younger children might be (cf the responses of children at Welldon Park below). However, this might also have been because they were genuinely surprised at the interest shown by the visitors; fitting prayer into their daily routine was perfectly normal. They felt it was their responsibility to organise the room, behave responsibly and lead the prayer themselves. Fatima Ibrahim, a Muslim member of staff at Rooks Heath felt that there were many benefits for the school community. It was particularly valuable that children of other faiths or none should see Muslims in ways that challenged stereotypes, showing Muslims as calm, prayerful and attentive to school work. The operation of the prayer room also demonstrated harmony between the diverse Muslim community and provided opportunities for non-Muslims to learn about the daily obligations of Islam.

c) Prayer Room at Welldon Park Junior School

James Simmons explained that the drafting of the SACRE guidance on prayer rooms had been timely for their school as they had received a request from three Y6 children for a space to pray at lunchtime. 40% of the school community is from a Muslim background; this includes various ethnic groups. The school also has several Muslim members of staff.

The prayer room request was initially granted by placing the small hall at the disposal of Y6 children for 15 minutes at the beginning of lunchtime between 12.20 and 12.35. This space was easy to supervise and the children were very responsible.

Word spread through the families and younger children wished to join in. The school needed to consider how to widen the scope of this provision to include younger children as well as both girls and boys. They wanted to make a coherent and organised response that would show that the school placed value on the children's faith obligations while at the same time keeping their response low-key. The school wished to be inclusive and also take account of what other schools were doing in this respect. The school needed to consider how best to contact parents, where the rooms should be located, how they should be supervised and how to maintain inclusiveness both across the school

community and within the different traditions of Islam practised within the school. It was a good learning journey.

Feedback from parents was positive. They felt that the school was supportive of their families. The school continued to provide the small hall, divided between boys and girls. Any child could come along between 12.20 and 12.35 for reflection and prayer time. There was space to accommodate the Muslim children with their prayer mats, but there was also seating round the edge for children of other faith traditions or none. The atmosphere was calm and reflective. There was a clear code of conduct and the children were quiet and respectful.

The initiative had been very well received by the children. A positive behaviour change had been noticed among some Year 5 boys who had been disengaged in Year 4. One child who had previously led other children astray, now leads them to the prayer room! This has improved his status. Children have said that the prayer room helps them, makes them “feel good” and improves concentration in the afternoon. One year 4 child remarked, “It helps me to reflect on what I’ve done and what I could change for the better.” Today there were 21 children using the prayer room including one Christian boy.

James Simmons concluded his report by saying that he values the fact that the request came initially from the children. There will be input from parents and governors over the next few weeks but children would always be at the centre of this initiative. Judy Lethbridge added that the space for prayer feels like a normal part of the school day. She values the way it enables children to see and appreciate other forms of prayer.

Rachel Bowerman invited questions and comments.

Mr Zia Baig expressed his pleasure at what he had heard. He emphasised that a space for prayer should not be exclusively for Muslim pupils. He complimented the school on their positive approach.

Cllr Asad Omar thanked Judy Lethbridge and James Simmons for their presentation. He asked if the timing of the room’s availability will change with the advent of British Summer Time. James Simmons replied that this is something the school is considering at the moment.

The Rev’d Matthew Stone enquired how the space will be supervised as numbers increase. James Simmons explained that there is currently a rota of volunteers who “hover near the door”. The room is central so it is easy for teachers to keep an unobtrusive eye although the whole initiative is essentially child led.

Ms Mercedes Afnan asked whether the school had written to parents and how they approached the issue with them. James Simmons explained that a general letter had been prepared to inform parents about the pupils’ request and how the school was accommodating it. The code of conduct was printed at the bottom. This letter was available in classrooms for children to take home if they wished. A display is planned in time for the next parents’ evening, so that parents who were not given a letter will be informed. James Simmons said that the school’s approach was characterised by a “light touch”. It was regarded as part of the school’s inclusive culture.

Rachel Bowerman expressed her thanks to Judy Lethbridge and James Simmons. She had particularly appreciated the indication of the children’s voice and was impressed by their maturity. The prayer room would contribute to children being equipped to reflect on their own thoughts and feelings. Other requests for prayer rooms have come from parents; this may not necessarily reflect the children’s wishes. She asked the speakers’ permission to use this example as a cameo in the guidance document and especially to quote some of the children’s remarks. This permission was gladly given and James Simmons tabled a summary of his report which included some quotations from children’s feedback.

On behalf of the SACRE committee, Rachel Bowerman formally thanked Judy Lethbridge and James Simmons who then left the meeting.

7. Authorised Absence for Religious Festivals: SACRE Guidance for Head Teachers and Governing Bodies. (Revised draft tabled at the meeting)

This draft, which strengthens the previous version, has already been circulated and approved. SACRE firmly supports the LA view that absence for religious festivals should be kept to a minimum. Head Teachers are pleased to hear that SACRE's policy endorses schools' rigorous approach to attendance. Rachel Bowerman has added a direct quote from the Education Act 1996 which sets out the legal obligations on school attendance.

The five bullet points at the bottom of the first page constitute the strengthened wording of the document.

In response to a question about the phrase "exclusively set apart by the religious body" which occurs in the first bullet point, Rachel Bowerman explained that this is a direct quote from the Education Act of 1996 cited in the document.

Dr Julie Crow pointed out that the two sentences from "Individual circumstances" to "visits/holidays abroad" on the second page of the guidance do not relate to religious observance. It was agreed to remove the first sentence and move the second sentence to the context paragraph.

Rachel Bowerman explained that in the past, SACRE has published a list of festival dates that fall on weekdays in term time. Previously, it was not made clear whether it was necessary to take these days as holiday in order to comply with religious observance. Rachel Bowerman tabled a grid where she has started to record those days when absence is absolutely necessary to fulfil the requirements of religious observance. She would like to ask each faith group to contribute to this list which could then be sent to schools as a supplement to the guidance.

Mr Zafar Khalid pointed out one problem with this: in the Muslim community there are two schools of thought about the date of a particular festival and it is celebrated on consecutive days at the two mosques. Rachel Bowerman explained that this instance could be explained in a note as she has already done with regard to a Jain festival, in response to an email received from Ms Varsha Dodhia. There are also some examples of festival days, for instance in the Zoroastrian tradition, where a whole day's absence is not necessary, but children might be late because of a festival breakfast.

Cllr Sasikala Suresh, speaking as a Hindu, although she is not a SACRE representative of the Hindu faith tradition, explained that there are variations in festival dates in the Hindu calendar. Rachel Bowerman has received responses from Vijay Hirani and Ananda Caitanya Das and requested Cllr Suresh's support in ensuring that South Indian Hinduism is reflected .

Members felt that this list would be very useful to schools.

Action: Rachel Bowerman will complete the list of essential days of religious observance with input from SACRE members. This will form a supplement to the Guidance.

8. Improving Teaching and Leadership in RE: SACRE Commissioned Seminars for RE Leaders

The spring term RE subject leaders' seminar was hosted at the Harrow Central Mosque.

Rachel Bowerman thanked Zafar Khalid for hosting the visit with Imam Iftikahr Daad and Cllr Camilla Bath for attending the training. She asked for their feedback.

In response to request from Zafar Khalid, Rachel Bowerman set the context for the seminar. She explained that the termly seminars for RE subject leaders are part of the HSIP training offer for subject leaders across the core curriculum and some foundation subjects. The training in autumn 2012 – 13 had focussed on the September 2012 Ofsted framework and how to prepare for subject-specific inspections. There had also been an introduction to the RE Quality Mark and its criteria for evaluating provision and outcomes in RE.

In the spring term the seminar was held at the Harrow Central Mosque in order to model approaches to teaching about Islam in KS 1 and KS 2. Harrow's scheme of work was produced some time ago, many new teachers have joined Harrow schools since then and it was necessary to re-visit RE aims, pedagogy and resourcing. Rachel Bowerman had consulted Zafar Khalid and Iftikahr Daad about the units of work in advance and they had been very impressed with its authenticity and approach.

Zafar Khalid informed members that twenty-five RE leaders attended the seminar on 13th February . He noted that many schools are keen to visit the Mosque but the children are not always well prepared and

ask questions that are not relevant. He felt that participants at the seminar learned a lot about both Islam and about how to teach RE. He had been impressed by Rachel Bowerman's presentation and teachers' questions. The seminar ended with tea, coffee and sandwiches.

Cllr Camilla Bath added that she found the seminar very informative. She had, in fact, been on the committee that granted planning permission for the Mosque and had always wanted to visit it. She was interested to see the simplicity of the prayer hall. She liked the two prayer halls but wondered why the women's hall was so much smaller than the men's hall. Zafar Khalid explained that this is because it is compulsory for males to pray but not compulsory for females. Cllr Bath felt privileged to see inside the mosque.

Cllr Bath thanked Rachel Bowerman for organising the seminar. Its success was attested by the fact that attendance was good and another seminar has been requested also to be held in a place of worship. Mary Abbott had attended the seminar as a participant and added that she had experienced a very warm welcome and atmosphere. The sandwiches were greatly appreciated too!

The Rev'd Matthew Stone thanked Rachel for circulating SACRE members with the flyer for this seminar and asked that SACRE members should continue to be invited.

9. Review of Harrow Agreed Syllabus

Rachel Bowerman tabled a document outlining the statutory requirements relating to the review of an Agreed Syllabus. She explained that under the provisions of the Education Reform Act 1988 and subsequent legislation, it is a requirement that an Agreed Syllabus should be reviewed every five years. This does not necessarily mean that it should be rewritten, but it must be reviewed by an Agreed Syllabus Conference. The Agreed Syllabus Conference could be constituted with the same members as the SACRE. It would need to meet at least twice, once at the beginning of the process and at the end to agree the proposed syllabus. Between these meetings, a working group would draft the revised syllabus with regular submissions to the Agreed Syllabus Conference. The four committees of the ASC must unanimously agree for the draft to become the agreed syllabus.

It is necessary to take into account what is happening nationally across the curriculum. The National Curriculum is being revised. The consultation period for the revised draft ends in April and the completed curriculum will be sent to schools in September for implementation in September 2014.

RE is not a subject of the National Curriculum. It is determined locally, in the form of an Agreed Syllabus. The RE Council for England and Wales is conducting a review of RE. Its report is scheduled for completion by the end of June/beginning of July. This report will produce explicit recommendations regarding aims, pedagogy and content of contemporary RE. This could guide the Agreed Syllabus Conference when they determine the local syllabus. It seems advisable therefore to wait for the report of the RE Council.

The SACRE needs to make a decision this evening. Rachel Bowerman suggested the following options:

- a) Write to the Catherine Doran advising her that SACRE will defer taking action regarding a review of the local Agreed Syllabus until the RE Council has made its recommendations.
- b) Recommend that the Local Authority convene an Agreed Syllabus Conference which would commence its review once the RE Council has made its recommendations.

Ms Varsha Dodhia suggested that the introduction of a new syllabus should coincide with the implementation of the new national curriculum in September 2014.

In answer to another question, Rachel Bowerman recapitulated the position regarding the revision of the National Curriculum and the report of the RE council. The National Curriculum is designed under the auspices of the DfE. The RE Council does not enjoy the same status; in fact it is even appealing for members to undertake sponsored walks to raise money on its behalf. However, the launch of a new RE curriculum would attract interest and funding and regenerate enthusiasm for the subject.

Members agreed to follow option b).

It is likely that the Agreed Syllabus Conference will have the same membership as SACRE unless the constituent faith groups and teachers' associations wanted to suggest different representatives. Once Catherine Doran had instructed Rachel Bowerman to convene an ASC, Rachel would write to the constituent bodies regarding their representation on the Agreed Syllabus Conference.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

Rachel Bowerman confirmed that membership of the Agreed Syllabus Conference need not involve frequent meetings. She undertook to send electronic copies of the existing Harrow Agreed Syllabus to new members, Angela Clapham and Mercedes Afnan.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

Business Items: Improving standards in RE and collective worship

10. Reports from National RE Associations

The REC newsletter was tabled at the meeting. See also minute 9 above.

11. Reports from SACRE partners

- a) **Harlow Interfaith Council:** Varsha Dodhia reported that some meetings known as “intuitive conversations” have taken place between members of different faith groups. There are some concerns that representatives of the council are presenting their own individual rather than corporate views and there is a move to ensure that members are considered representative of their faith community.
- b) **Faith communities:** Cllr Asad Omar reported that an exhibition about Islam will be held at the Harrow Central Mosque in the first week of May. He will email details, when known, to Rachel Bowerman so that schools can be informed.

Action: Cllr Asad Omar

- c) **Interfaith Week:** Varsha Dodhia reported that as part of Interfaith Week, a celebration of Faith expressed in the Arts had taken place at the Zoroastrian Centre, with readings, presentations, songs and dance
- d) **Pilgrimage:** Varsha Dodhia reported on a very successful pilgrimage between different places of worship in central London and wondered if a local pilgrimage of this kind could be arranged in Harrow.
- e) **Humanism:** Julie Crow informed members that Newton Farm School are holding a RE day and the Harrow Humanists will be participating and are always willing to visit schools and provide speakers.

12. AOB

- a) **Resources:** Rachel Bowerman thanked members for the responses she had received to her email about the RE resources at the Teachers' Centre. She explained for the benefit of members who did not know about this that, approximately four years earlier, the library at the Teachers' Centre had been cleared so it could be used as a training room. Since then, the RE resources had been stored in boxes in a cellar. However, the Teachers' Centre will be vacated at the end of the summer term, so these resources need to be rehoused. Rachel Bowerman feels that best use of them will be made if they are housed with the relevant faith community. They can then be used by the community and also loaned to schools. They will be useful for members going into schools to give talks.

Rachel Bowerman will organise some dates when she can hand over resources and she will prepare guidance notes if required.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

- b) **Apology:** Rachel apologised to members and especially to Phiroza Gan-Kotwal who was not present this evening. The annual meeting of the regional London and SE SACREs was held at the Zoroastrian Centre at Harrow, and Harrow SACRE was not represented. Rachel had informed SACRE that no notification of this event had been received, but had found on checking, that Harrow SACRE had been notified, but the event was not announced as a consultation. It was, in fact, an opportunity to be updated and informed about the work of the all-party committee, rather than an official consultation.

- c) **SACRE AGM 23rd May 2013:** this would take place in Birmingham. Two places would be funded and it might be possible to claim travel expenses. Members should contact Rachel Bowerman if they would like to attend. Mary Abbott expressed an interest in attending.

13. Dates of Future SACRE Meetings:

The next SACRE meeting is on Wednesday 12th June.

Future dates from the council were Monday 23rd September, Monday 2nd December and Thursday 6th March. The Clerk will confirm these dates after consultation with the Jewish representatives who were not present at the meeting.

Action: Clerk

The Meeting closed at 9.30 pm

Signed:

(Chair)

(Date)



Harrow
SACRE

How does Harrow SACRE support Governing Bodies to fulfil their responsibility for providing high quality Religious Education and Collective Worship?

By Rachel Bowerman, Senior School Improvement Adviser and lead LA officer to SACRE, on behalf of the Chair of SACRE, Alison Stowe, and the SACRE Chairs' Group

www.harrow.gov.uk/SACRE

Every Local Authority is required to establish a permanent body called a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). Its membership should represent local faith communities including the Church of England, other Christian denominations and other faith groups. Its purpose is to monitor and report to the LA on standards and quality of teaching in RE and provision for collective worship in non-denominational schools.

The SACRE is a unique concept which embodies and promotes partnership between the Local Authority, its schools and the principal faith communities in the area. Through the SACRE local people and local leaders of learning work together as champions of RE. Harrow SACRE designed its logo to reflect this local partnership and we strive to ensure that our ways of working also embody this.

SACRE Guidance: Application for a Determination

One of the statutory duties of a SACRE is to 'determine' whether a Governing Body may be allowed to 'lift' the requirement that provision for collective worship should be "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian tradition." SACRE expects that any school applying for a determination will attend a SACRE meeting and present its planning, policy and approach to collective worship. In this way, SACRE can be proactive in seeking out and disseminating excellence whilst providing advice where provision does not meet expectations. Norbury and Stanburn Infant schools trialled these new processes. Both schools, in different ways, modelled aspects of exemplary practice which SACRE judges worthy of being shared locally and has described in its 2011 – 12 Annual Report.

School presentations to SACRE

SACRE members are aware of their duties to monitor RE in schools and our current strategy is to invite subject leaders and, whenever possible, pupils, to come to a SACRE meeting and illustrate the school's RE curriculum and pedagogy. Recent presentations have included:

- pupils from Belmont School describing the links between RE and the Rights Respecting School agenda;
- the RE subject leader at Marlborough Primary reporting the school's Celebrating RE day. She outlined an example of a sequence of work in which Y5 children learnt about the religious principle of ahimsa and how this was the motivation for Gandhi's policy of passive resistance.

If your school has a strength in its provision for RE, SACRE would welcome a presentation at one of our termly meetings. Meanwhile SACRE is consulting headteachers about establishing an agreed three year cycle for reporting to SACRE.

The national **Celebrating RE 2011** event was marked locally at the Zoroastrian Centre and SACRE invited Newton Farm, Stag Lane Junior, Canons and Winchmore schools to contribute. In partnership with the Harrow Zoroastrian community, SACRE developed models of planning for teaching about Zoroastrianism at KS 2, 3 and post-16 which involved:

- Y7 pupils in discovering that Zoroastrians meditate upon a list of 101 'names' of God in order to strengthen themselves in their constant struggle to overcome evil and choose goodness. The pupils reflected on how these names might motivate and inspire Zoroastrians to develop these qualities in their lives today. They researched some 20th century role models who exemplify some of these qualities and suggested that Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela, had exemplified the quality of 'sacrifice of freedom for the sake of progress.'
- Y12 pupils in conducting interviews to explore the extent to which Zoroastrian beliefs about righteous living, charity, and caring for the oppressed, are shared by other faith traditions represented in the UK.

SACRE Guidance: visits and visitors for RE and collective worship

Pupils have frequently told SACRE members that visits to places of worship are rich and memorable experiences which consolidate and bring to life what has been learnt in RE lessons. SACRE has reinforced the importance of using local faith communities as a resource for learning *about* and *from* RE by commissioning HSIP to offer an annual programme of termly seminars for RE leaders which should include a visit to a place of worship. In 2012 new SACRE guidance on the principles and protocols for effective partnership working between school leaders, class teachers and faith communities was launched at St Panteleimon Greek Orthodox Church in Kenton. In 2013 RE subject leaders visited the Harrow Central Mosque and were given CD ROM resources for teaching about Islam in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

SACRE Guidance: Authorised absence for religious festivals

Having been consulted by the Local Authority, SACRE has recently published new, robust guidance for headteachers and Governing Bodies which is aimed at supporting them in securing good school attendance. In addition to a statement of policy, SACRE faith community representatives have identified those dates in 2012 – 2013 on which they recommend that parents' requests for absence should be authorised. A similar list of dates will be published for 2013 – 2014.

SACRE Guidance: offering a space for prayer and reflection

SACRE has received increasing numbers of requests for advice from headteachers and Chairs of Governors in the primary phase, regarding the provision of a space that can be used for prayer in school. In preparing new guidance, SACRE has consulted High schools which already offer this provision, has listened to pupils who use it and has taken advice from faith communities. Our guidance is intended to prompt school leaders to consider the benefits of offering such provision, for pupils and for the school community. Welldon Park Junior School, which trialled this guidance, found it practical and inclusive.

National and local developments and initiatives and the impact on RE in schools

Through its agenda, minutes of meetings and annual reports, which are public documents and available on the SACRE and Harrow Council websites, SACRE informs its partners about new educational initiatives which are relevant to the profile and status of RE in schools.

We have consulted High School RE leaders on the introduction of the English Baccalaureate and are keeping a watchful eye on whether it diminishes provision for pupils' entitlement to RE at KS 4 through, for example, whole-cohort RS short or full course GCSE, and what impact it has upon the viability of RE departments. In our Annual Report we analyse published examination entry and results data.

Academies do not fall within the remit of SACRE's monitoring or reporting duties but Harrow SACRE continues to reiterate its commitment to sustaining relationships with all the High schools and has invited the academies to nominate two associate, non-voting representatives to Group C.

In 2013-14 SACRE members will consult schools and faith communities as part of its revision of the local Agreed Syllabus for RE. The timing of this revision will enable SACRE to take account of the new National Curriculum as well as a government-commissioned subject report by the RE Council of England and Wales. Religious Education is the only subject of the statutory curriculum which is determined locally. This opportunity for local teachers and local faith representatives to shape curriculum requirements and guidance on pedagogy for local schools is unique to RE and can be highly effective in developing teachers' subject expertise. Governors will be kept up to date on the progress of the syllabus review through this Bulletin and the CPD programme.



Harrow SACRE - working in partnership with schools to promote quality RE and Collective Worship

23rd May 2013

Rachel Bowerman, Senior School Improvement Adviser

- ✓ High Quality
- ✓ Locally available
- ✓ Achieving Excellence





Harrow
SACRE

SACRE: a unique concept which embodies and promotes partnership between the Local Authority, its schools and the principal faith communities in the area. Through the SACRE local people and local leaders of learning work together as *champions of RE*.

SACRE is important in the local context

Harrow has the highest religious affiliation in England and Wales and is ranked as having:

- highest percentage of Hindus (25.3%)
 - highest percentage of Jains (2.2%)
 - second highest percentage of Zoroastrians (0.1%)
- ➔ second lowest percentage of residents declaring No Religion (9.6%)

The Census data also reveals that 37.3%% of residents have identified themselves as Christian, 12.5% as Muslim, 4.4% as Jewish, 1.1% as Buddhist and 1.2% as Sikh.

2011 Census

SACRE fulfilling its statutory duties

Collective Worship

- Form and guidance for schools applying for a 'determination'
- Schools expected to present their policy and approach
- ▶ School presentations in 2011 – 12 demonstrated strengths worthy of sharing and featured in the Annual Report

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SACRE fulfilling its statutory duties

SACRE's purpose is to monitor and report to the LA on standards and quality of teaching in RE and provision for collective worship in non-denominational schools.

- Over the past three years, SACRE has invited schools to submit a report / attend meetings and present an aspect of RE
- Pupils and RE subject leaders have welcomed the opportunity to meet SACRE members and celebrate areas of subject strength and have found this an opportunity to raise its profile in the school

SACRE guidance for school leaders

Visits and visitors for RE and Collective Worship: Generic Principles and Protocols

- launched at St Panteleimon Greek Orthodox Church, Kenton
- cameos of good practice & examples of planning
- etiquette for schools and outlined responsibilities of class teachers
- code of conduct for host communities and visitors

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SACRE guidance for school leaders

Authorised absence for religious festivals

- New robust policy statement to echo the stance school leaders take on improving attendance and reducing absence
- 19 ▸ Annual list of dates which on which schools are recommended to authorise absence for religious observance

SACRE guidance for school leaders

Offering a space for prayer and reflection in school

- Responding to requests for advice from Headteachers and GBs in primary schools
- 20 ● Consulted with High Schools
- Trialled at Welldon Park Junior – practical and inclusive
- Prompting schools to consider the benefits for pupils and the school community

SACRE supporting schools in developing quality RE

- Commissioning HSIP to offer termly seminars for RE leaders. These have included:
- Visit to St Panteleimon Greek Orthodox Church
- February 2013 visit to Harrow Central Mosque – CD RoM of planning and resources for teaching about Islam endorsed by the Imam and madrassah team

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SACRE interpreting national initiatives in the local context

- Academies – SACRE invited nominations of 2 non-voting representatives
- English Baccalaureate – continuing to consult High School RE departments on its impact

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SACRE working in partnership with school leaders

- Statutory review of the Agreed Syllabus – taking account of the new National Curriculum and the government-commissioned subject report by the RE Council
- SACRE's monitoring role – consultation with school leaders in order to establish a reporting cycle
- Representation of teachers' associations – refreshed and proactive new membership from local faith communities and committed participation by LA representatives but vacancies remain for teacher representatives

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RE: THE TRUTH UNMASKED

The supply of and support for Religious Education teachers



An Inquiry by The All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education

MAIN FINDINGS

1 Supply of primary RE teachers

- In over half of the 300 primary schools participating in this inquiry, some or all pupils were taught RE by someone other than their class teacher. In a quarter of these schools RE was taught by teaching assistants. This is unacceptable and in many cases this has a detrimental impact on the quality of RE.
- About a half of primary teachers and trainee teachers lack confidence in teaching RE.
- About a half of subject leaders in primary schools lack the expertise or experience to undertake their role effectively.
- There is a wide variation in the extent of initial teacher training in RE and too many trainee teachers have little effective preparation for teaching the subject.

2 Supply of secondary teachers

- Over 50% of teachers of RE in secondary schools have no qualification or appropriate expertise in the subject. This is unacceptable.
- The inclusion of non specialists in the total number of RE teachers given by the DfE gives the false impression that we have enough RE teachers and skews the statistics regarding the need to train more RE specialists.
- Secondary RE trainees on school based routes are not guaranteed places in schools where the RE staff have sufficient expertise to provide training.
- Applications for secondary RE teacher training courses are currently 143 down on the same time last year. The loss

of bursaries for RE is among the reasons for this reduction in applicant numbers for 2013/14.

3 Support for teachers of RE

- In nearly 40% of schools RE teachers have inadequate access to continuing professional development.
- RE teachers, particularly non specialists, in schools without a religious character have particularly limited access to CPD.
- The ability of SACREs to provide support for teachers of RE at a local level has been dramatically reduced by local authority funding decisions and the impact of the academisation programme.
- Teachers' access to CPD is a postcode lottery; it depends on the resources of their local SACRE or diocese, proximity to training and the priority given to RE in schools.

4 Contributory factors

- A range of government policies, notably those relating to the EBacc and GCSE short courses, are contributing to the lowering of the status of RE in some schools leading to a reduction in the demand for specialist teachers.
- Recent reductions and changes in teacher training have resulted in the closure of some outstanding university providers with a loss of opportunities for RE CPD.
- The combined effect of inadequate supply and inadequate access to support is that whatever their level of commitment, many teachers struggle to reach the levels of subject competence expected in the DfE's own teaching standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The DfE should:

- revise the methods by which it gathers information about the number of RE teachers in secondary schools and present full time equivalent totals, and use these as the basis of the department's calculation of teacher training targets
- introduce a system which requires all secondary teachers to receive some training in any subject they teach
- restore bursaries for RE trainees
- restore the inclusion of results for the GCSE short course for RE to school league table points
- require academies to use the local agreed syllabus
- publish the outcomes of SACREs' monitoring of teacher supply and CPD
- ensure that SACREs have the resources to carry out their statutory responsibilities

All schools should:

- ensure that all teachers of RE meet the Teaching Standards and develop their confidence and expertise in teaching RE
- make proper provision for continuing professional development for teachers and others

Primary schools should:

- review the widespread practice of using staff other than the teacher to teach RE
- provide regular opportunities for RE subject leaders to train their colleagues in subject knowledge and planning and assessing RE

Secondary schools should:

- review as a priority the

practice of using non specialist teachers to teach RE

- ensure that the same teachers teach the subject every year rather than fill gaps with any teacher
- ensure that all non specialists receive training

ITE training providers should:

- improve the quality of RE training for primary trainees
- monitor carefully all secondary trainee RE placements

LAs should ensure sufficient resources are made available to enable SACREs to:

- provide high quality RE support
- monitor the quality of the provision and staffing of RE
- develop networks to share good practice in RE

Those involved in providing CPD for RE teachers should:

- consider providing an on-line subject knowledge booster course
- encourage teachers and school leaders to become better informed about RE CPD opportunities

Ofsted should:

- require inspectors to report on non-compliance with statutory requirements
- continue to monitor the quality of RE provision, through subject inspections

The Teaching Agency should:

- review the capacity of training schools to provide subject specific training for RE

Use this area to offer a short teaser of your email's content. Text here will show in the preview area of some email clients.



May 2013

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[Introduction](#)

This month's newsletter features news of several conferences and workshops covering a diverse range of topics related to RE. The themes of these events vary widely but they have in common an aim to bring together people who are keen to investigate and discuss religious education at depth, to increase their understanding of its essence and purpose, and to improve their ability to teach it. Opportunities for members of the RE community to share ideas, information and

knowledge in this way are invaluable as they help us to step outside of our day-to-day engagement with the subject, to see it in a wider context and to think about how it should evolve in the future – particularly important objectives in these challenging times.

The new REC website goes live!

The REC has a new website which is now live. It is designed to reflect the changes in the Council's work, and will include a blog from the Chair and significant sections for the APPG and Young Ambassadors, as well as links to associated microsites for projects. There will be scope for more information about member organisations; this will be built up over the next few months.

Please have a look at it at: www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk



REC 40th Anniversary Sponsored Walks

Events are taking place across the country during May and June to celebrate the REC's 40th anniversary and to raise much needed funds for its work. Full details will be in the latest Sponsored Walk Newsletter on the new website. Please take part if you can, or sponsor somebody who is walking.

You can do this on line at:

<http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/charities/ReligiousEducationCouncilofEnglandandWales> or by donating via the REC website, or you can send a cheque to the REC at the address above. Your help will be much appreciated.

Professor Bob Jackson receives prestigious award

The Religious Education Association has awarded Professor Bob Jackson the prestigious William Rainey Harper Award, which he will receive formally in Boston in November. The award is presented to outstanding leaders whose work in other fields has had profound impact on religious education. Professor Jackson, who works at the University of Warwick's Religions and Education Research Unit, and the European Wergeland Centre in Oslo, is only the 12th recipient of the international award since its launch in 1975; the news is reported the [University of Warwick's intranet](#).

Young Ambassadors for RE



The pilot Young Ambassadors scheme is now up and running and the students who have won places on the scheme are throwing themselves into their activities with commitment and energy. One team has written to the Queen to share their enthusiasm for the subject! More details of why they want to champion RE can be found in the Young Ambassadors section of the REC website at www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/young-ambassadors.

AULRE Conference

The Association of University Lecturers in Religion and Education Annual (AULRE) Conference will be held on 5th and 6th July 2013 at York St John University. The theme of the conference is

the influence of research on professional practice in religious education and further details are available from the [York St John University website](#).

Unlocking RE in Academies

Unlocking RE in Academies is a new series of four regional day conferences for primary and secondary teachers of RE from RE Today and NATRE. Conference venues and dates are: Leicester (17 October); Bristol (5 November); Leeds (7 November); London (14 November), and the delegate fee is just £65 due to generous grant funding from the Jerusalem Trust. Teachers are invited to register their interest by emailing courses@retoday.org.uk - full details and booking forms will be available in early June on the [RE Today website](#).

9/11 National Schools Competition

Following the success of last year's inaugural 9/11 National Schools Competition, the 9/11 London Project is again offering students the chance to win a trip to New York this September. The competition is open to all UK students between the ages of 14 and 16 until 31st May 2013 and entrants are asked to send either a short film or a 1200 word essay conveying their views on one of two questions: either *How did 9/11 change the world?* or *Why and how would you keep the memory of 9/11 alive in the UK?* The judging panel will include Kevin Spacey CBE and Simon Schama CBE; for more details please visit the [9/11 Education Programme website](#).

RE-flect Workshop - 7th June 2013

The University of Exeter is offering a free one day workshop introducing a new approach to religious education, aimed at enabling RE teachers to create a classroom environment which is based on reflecting on beliefs, values and thinking. Participants will be able to meet teachers who have tried out this approach in their classrooms; learn how to create their own activities using the RE-flect framework; and take away a free sample lesson and resources. The workshop will be held on St Luke's Campus at Exeter University and more details are available on the [RE-flect website](#).

ISRSA Autumn Conference

The Independent Schools' Religious Studies Association (ISRSA) is holding its annual Autumn Conference and Training Day at Church House Westminster on 25th November. Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali is a key speaker, as is a senior education MP, and there will be a challenging array of seminars for teachers from across the independent sector. Please visit the [ISRSA website](#) for further details.

Free Conferences on Islam and Higher Education

Registration is now open for two conferences being organised as part of a project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council to explore *Collaborative Partnerships between Universities and Muslim institutions*. Papers presented will explore various aspects of Islamic education, including collaborative educational models in the UK and beyond; barriers to collaborative partnerships and possible solutions; and international and local best practice. The conferences will

take place on 23rd May at Senate House, University of London, and on 27th June at Birmingham University – for further details please visit the [conference web page](#).

[Historic Pageant in Chorley](#)

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is hosting the first official Church pageant outside the USA during the first two weeks of August. Taking place in the Temple grounds in Chorley, Lancashire, the pageant will tell the story of the Church's history over the past 176 years as well as providing information about the Church's beliefs. Teachers and school groups would be most welcome. Tickets are free. More information can be found on www.britishpageant.org or by emailing james.holt@britishpageant.org

[Face to Faith](#)

Face to Faith is encouraging students from around the world to learn how faith communities are working together to help eradicate malaria. World Malaria Day took place on 25 April, with schools being encouraged to hold a community event during April or May to raise awareness of this work. Further information is available from the [Faiths Act website](#).

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RE: Realising the potential

Alan Brine: National Lead for RE

NASACRE AGM 2013



Key headlines

- Too much RE is not good enough and little improvement - 60% of provision less than good
- Significant curriculum thinking needed to address concerns
- Concerns about quality and provision at GCSE
- Raft of recent education policies placing additional strain on RE – although degree of damage still unclear
- Policy changes raise serious concerns about the capacity of existing structures to support RE

SACREs

- NASACRE surveys and Ofsted evidence indicate many SACREs under increasing pressure
- Increasing variability in capacity
- Issues with funding and access to expertise
- Academisation raises serious and immediate questions about future of SACREs
- Morale and purpose issues

Pharaoh had a dream in which seven fat cows were swallowed by seven lean ones. Pharaoh and his men were puzzled until Joseph offered his interpretation: The fat cows represented seven years of prosperity, which would then be swallowed by seven lean years of poverty and famine.

The 15+ fat years 1990s to 2010

- SACREs functioning well
- National support strong – DfE, QCDA, Model syllabuses
- Statutory requirement retains leverage - Ofsted
- Broad consensus about RE – NSNF
- GCSE booming
- ITE – bursaries, strong recruitment
- Wider priorities giving RE purchase – ECM, Co Co,

But the cracks were there

- Statutory v educational justification not resolved
- Convoluted legal 'oddness' not addressed
- Short GCSE – seeking 'relevance' not rigour
- SACREs – fragile and variable
- National support - similarly fragile
- On the ground – little improving – status too low
- Issues around the purpose of RE unresolved

And then the climate changed

- Collapse of national support structures
- LA/SACRE capacity undermined
- Academies and Free schools – increase fragmentation of RE
- Culture around 'statutoriness' shifts – Ofsted etc
- GCSE landscape shifts – status crisis in secondary
- NC – SofS imposing approach unfavourable to RE
- CoCo and ECM disappear as educational priorities narrow
- Religion – shift in public attitude? – militant atheism etc

Good news

- Innovative thinking of some new syllabuses
- Some new models of partnership between academies and SACREs
- Some academy chains exploring new models of RE
- Threats have generated debate and interest – APPG etc
- New networks to support RE – REQM, F2F, 3FF, Faith Ambassadors, Leading Teachers

Key questions – we are where we are

Do we:

- Try to align with the NC – using REC to provide national framework?
- Stay detached, build capacity and plan for better days ahead?
- Develop a concerted campaign demanding Govt action?
- Work behind the scenes at local level to nurture best practice?
- Seek new models of structures/purpose/curriculum?

Key Questions

Is the current wide distribution of responsibility in RE (152 LAs, faith/non-faith; academies/maintained etc):

- A strength in the face of government policy?

Or

- A serious barrier to improvement?

How do we address a government that simply refuses to engage?

CHALLENGING SACRES

NASACRE AGM, 23 May 2013

Mark Chater, Director, Culham St Gabriel's Trust

Thank you, it is a great pleasure to be here, and to be able to celebrate twenty years of NASACRE with many dear and esteemed RE colleagues in this time of challenge and austerity.

We have heard Ofsted's evidence about RE. What follows from me is an interpretation of the evidence. You're either going to love this, or hate it. I was asked to be challenging.

We all remember those jokes about definitions of socialism, capitalism and so on, all beginning 'you have two cows.' The normal example is: '[Traditional capitalism: You have two cows. You sell one and buy a bull. Your herd multiplies, and the economy grows. You sell them and retire on the income.' Here is a topical one that I received the other day:

RBS venture capitalism: You have two cows. You sell three of them to your publicly listed company, using letters of credit opened by your brother in law. Then you execute a debt/equity swap so that you get all four cows back, with a tax exemption for five cows. The milk rights of the six cows are transferred via an intermediary in the Cayman Islands... and it goes on like this, ending: The public then buys your bull.

What, I wonder, might be the RE and SACRE equivalent to this? You have 152 cows. The government takes away your pasture land and says the milk is no longer wanted.

The economic crisis is never very far away from us, or from our thoughts; and part of what I'm going to say about SACREs is in that context of austerity and that context of misuse of power. Another part, of course, is based in my own experience of working with SACREs.

The constituencies that make up SACREs are teachers, politicians and members of faith communities. Whichever group we may belong to, we are here for the teachers. The teachers are here for the children and we are here for the teachers. Many of us have living professional heroes or heroines. One of mine is an adviser who programmed her phone with the words: 'will it help the teachers?' So every time anyone rang with a request, the words 'will it help the teachers?' flashed up on the screen. That adviser's post was made redundant some two years ago. Another hero of mine is a teacher in George Green's school in the Isle of Dogs. A secondary school in a very deprived area of Tower Hamlets, literally in the shadow of Canary Wharf, this school's challenges are living proof of the argument in *The Spirit Level*¹ that inequality is bad for us all. This teacher – I'll call her Georgia – reinvented herself energetically, belligerently, day after day to be everything those children lacked: mother bear, counsellor, homework bully, bringer of justice, passionate persuader that it made sense to work and to admire excellence. I spent a term there on secondment from the QCA, and I felt that I learned a great deal from her.

My question now, my challenge, is: what do national and local education structures offer to heroes and heroines like that? If the answer isn't very clear, then why are those structures in place.

So I've been asked to think about the challenges for SACREs. My basic message: the challenges are many, and they are not all the fault of this government, or of central government generally.

*Leviathan*², the work of political theory by Thomas Hobbes in 1651, used biblical language to conjure up a sea monster of enormous power. 'Any hope of subduing him is false; firebrands stream from his mouth; smoke pours from his nostrils; when he rises up, the mighty are terrified; they retreat before his thrashing.'³ Hobbes' argument, fashioned in part by the English Civil Wars, was that the people should make a social contract with their ruler, not recognising a ruler's divine right but according

¹ R. Wilkinson and K. Pickett, *The Spirit Level*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2010.

² T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1651, Oxford University Press Clarendon Edition, Oxford: University Press, 2012.

³ Job 41: 1-34

absolute power by agreement with the people. Thus would be created a Leviathan, an invincible power, the only protection against chaos and the war of all against all, the only guarantor of political reasoning in a commonwealth. A dictator, yes, but in Hobbes' view a benign and necessary one. The social contract slays the Leviathan of royal divine right and replaces it with another Leviathan of absolute power with consent. Over time, the concept of a Leviathan has stayed in our imaginations as a tentacled threat, a remorseless, malign and predatory bureaucracy. The English imagination connects it with jobsworths, health 'n' safety gone mad, local and national government. Those who believe in small government usually think the best thing governments can do is to get out of the way. There is a long pedigree to this thought, and it has influenced the American constitution and some US political strands today.

What could all this have to do with SACREs? We all know what SACREs are, how they are composed and what they are supposed to do. They have to review their local agreed syllabus (a strange word, syllabus – no other subject uses it) every five years, they are composed of four groups and they have strict rules about who can and cannot be on those groups, rules that seem rather arbitrary nowadays. SACREs have a slightly strange-sounding, vaguely religious name. No other subject has them. Local authorities have to be carefully persuaded and managed and coaxed in their understanding of how to use a SACRE. SACREs have an ambiguous accountability chain. They have more responsibility than power. Increasingly they have little money. There are 152 of them, a honeycombed or imbricated pattern of devolved power. Being honest, if we had to design from scratch a system of governance and support for RE, how many of us would design the SACRE system we presently have? Think about it. How many would design the present SACRE system? Let's have a show of hands. *(Out of an audience of eighty, four people raised their hand.)*

I sometimes think that in Leviathan terms, SACREs are both the accusers and the accused. For many years RE has been so hyper-vigilant about state power that it has chosen to isolate itself rather than be drawn in. The message to ministers and their civil servants has been clear: don't touch local

determination! Leave us alone. Local determination is a hurrah word, a self-evident good. It's very difficult to argue against local determination, and ministers don't even try to, because none of them wants to be accused of being Leviathan. The result over many years has been neglect. My critique is not of the people on the SACREs, but the system that keeps them there. My evidence is from my four years' work with the QCA, accepting invitations from nearly half the nation's SACREs, reading their annual reports and publishing annual summaries, and working with a third of SACREs on the agreed syllabus collaboration initiative. My critique of SACRE structures is that they are SACRE: semi-detached, antiquated, compliance-fixated, rigid and extravagant.

Semi-detached: the fact that SACREs exist only for RE, and not any other subject, increases the isolation of RE. It is often hard for local authorities to get their head round how to use a SACRE, precisely because it is *sui generis*. Just as SACREs are semi-detached from the LA structure, so RE is semi-detached from the rest of the curriculum. That semi-detached state has over many years damaged RE's educational credentials. It is time we faced up to this and demanded something better for our children and teachers.

Antiquated: the membership structure. For humanists, pagans, parents, universities, employers, school leaders, no official place: indefensible. For pupil voice, to tell us what RE really looks like: yes in some places, but not enough: could do better. Granted, several SACREs are adept at bending the rules and opening their membership out. But rules that have to be bent are bad rules.

Compliance-fixated: The programme to make all secondary schools academies by 2015 is making rapid headway: where will this leave the SACRE monopoly on RE in community schools? Nowhere. As regards subjects other than English and Maths, compliance culture in schools is over, and is not coming back. No change of government will bring it back. When RE people complain that the law is being flouted and Heads are getting away with it, this just sounds awful, like special pleading. When we demand that academies should use their local syllabus, it just shows that we don't get the policy direction. It makes us sound like people who are against freedom. School autonomy over the

curriculum is here to stay and is going to grow. It needs nurturing and CPD⁴, not resistance and attempts to claw them back into old ways. The legal compliance argument is dead, it is worse than useless because it makes us look as if we have a weak case. We should take a deep breath and stop using it.

Rigid: Part of the trouble with local determination is that it is not local enough. Academisation has leapfrogged over SACREs and gone to a level of devolution that the SACRE system cannot match. Large academy chains are in effect new, non-territorial local authorities. Dioceses are forming multi-academy trusts. Community schools are becoming single academies or small chains. (There is some vagueness in the DfE about how small or big a chain must be, to be called a chain. But I am sure they will sort that out.) The point here is that in improving the quality of teaching and learning in RE, local authority structures are becoming increasingly irrelevant. School improvement always tries to nail down the causes of variance in pupil progress and quality of teaching. Variance means unexplained variations in pupil achievement. Variance happens within schools and between schools, not between local authorities. The agreed syllabus system blindsides RE from regional or national efforts at improvement because it cannot get at variance patterns between schools that are statistical neighbours in other local authorities. This just increases the isolation of RE, and embeds its under-performance.

Extravagant: it may seem strange to say this in these austere times, but yes, a system that drafts 152 different syllabuses is extravagant. When Nick Gibb came to the REC AGM last year, he opined that local determination was a good thing for demographic reasons:

⁴ RSA and Pearson Learning, *Unleashing Greatness: getting the best from an academised system*. London: RSA 2013, <http://www.thersa.org/action-research-centre/learning,-cognition-and-creativity/education/reports-and-events/reports/unleashing-greatness>, accessed 5 May 2013. An RE response to the report can be found on the Culham St Gabriel's website at <http://www.cstg.org.uk/2013/01/unleashing-greatness-and-re/>

‘We know local determination of the curriculum is hugely important to meeting the specific needs and traditions of local communities.’⁵

What needs are met? The breadth of content, as we know, is broadly the same across all 152. Rightly, RE should be preparing young people for life in a globalised world. To draw in local communities of religion or belief, to involve them in RE through visits or conferences, you do not need to have them write an agreed syllabus. The deficit incurred by a system of 152 broadly similar syllabuses – all being revised on different cycles, unconnected to national developments – all similar in content, but widely different in complexity and structure, so that teachers changing jobs from one place to another must constantly accustom themselves to a new document – the deficits of this need to be taken seriously and weighed in the balance against the clear benefits of local stakeholderhood. There is extravagance of another kind when local authorities trumpet their RE syllabus, confusing municipal pride (a natural emotion) with high quality (a more elusive goal).

We in RE have turned the national curriculum into Leviathan, when in earlier times it could have been our friend. We look at the new draft national curriculum with horror: we look at what has been done to history and shudder, and we say ‘thank goodness for local determination’. That is undeniably a strong argument, but I think it ignores three other factors. First is that even with local determination we are not protected. The safe honeycomb, the imbricated system of protected spaces, is itself being damaged by national policy. Second, there is the collateral damage done by local determination to our credibility and our engagement with national priorities that could pull down money and harness energy. We have chosen mostly to live without that, and RE has suffered. The third factor is more speculative. I make a rash prediction that this national curriculum is the last we shall see. Mr Gove, in driving the national curriculum in the direction he has, has made it ridiculous; he has inadvertently slain it. In two years from now the national curriculum will be irrelevant. If there are any more versions, they will be just aims and requirements on breadth and

⁵ Gibb, N. Speech to RE Council, in unpublished minutes, London: REC, 2012.

balance, and nothing more. Leviathan is dead: it has speared itself with its own trident. That being the case, we should end our self-incarceration and start thinking about what comes next.

One key challenge is the question of accountability for single and small-chain academies. I'm reliably informed that the DfE is nearly at breaking point on this, because it cannot cope with the increasing number of academies, each with their information thread leading back to Sanctuary Buildings.

Sooner or later, some new, more sensible accountability system will come into existence. If we are smart we will make sure that RE is part of it, not sitting outside it.

Robin Alexander, in the Cambridge primary review, proposed a system of local community curriculum panels for all subjects. These panels would have a non-statutory remit to help implement the whole curriculum, by identifying local needs and opportunities while leaving schools with autonomy over the curriculum⁶. This idea was not devised with RE specifically in mind, but it would be an elegant solution for us, overcoming many of the weaknesses in the present structure. I only mention this as one example of a possible future out there if we choose to engage with others and take hold of it.

What characteristics would we want our new structures to have, and what kind of national/local settlement would work best for RE? I'm not going to do detailed constitution writing here, but I will say something about the character of the structures we could aim for. To describe this, let me abandon one vaguely Latin-wounding word, SACRE, in favour of another: FIDES. Our new structures should promote an RE that has freedom, innovation, democracy, engagement and standards.

Freedom – real freedom from compliance culture, and freedom to create learning experiences in schools within the parameters set by a brief, empowering national document.

⁶ R. Alexander, ed., *Children, their world, their education: final report of the Cambridge Primary Review*, London: Routledge, pp494-5.

Innovation – a system that uses technology to celebrate change and improvement in RE, led by research and looped back into classroom practice.

Democracy – a system with real openness to all the faith and belief communities relevant to RE, an end to the implied hierarchies of religions, a bold and courageous subject that enquires into all religions and beliefs.

Engagement – a commitment to learning in consort with the rest of the curriculum. Yes, pedagogy is unique in each subject. But RE is too fond of saying we are unique, and too stand-offish about creating cross-disciplinary enquiries. Cinderella can come to the pedagogical ball! She can come and dance with several partners; she does not always have to dance alone.

Standards – a subject driven by content coverage and compliance has a natural inbuilt tendency to dumb down. A subject driven by enquiry into real-world issues, really doing theology and philosophy, will be as challenging and rigorous as we all want.

If our structures are FIDES they will serve us well, and better than present arrangements.

Can we make this happen? The cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead, who was born 103 years ago, famously said: ‘Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.’ This belief reflected her work in cultural change and innovation, published as *Continuities in Cultural Evolution* in 1964⁷. This is a feelgood statement, but is it actually true? Well I think so, and I feel a pent-up energy in the RE community that is ready for change.

We have lived in a state of fear and compliance for long enough. Leviathan is dead, but other Leviathans threaten our children: inequality, extremism, debt, apathy, affluenza, climate change. Let us pay attention to the real threats, not the imagined ones. Let us not fear freedom. Let us not be

⁷ M. Mead, *Continuities in Cultural Education*, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1964.

passive victims. Let us not imagine for a minute longer that we can go back to the way things were.
Let us lead in creating the new structures that will transform and sustain RE today and tomorrow.

Mark Chater

Director, Culham St Gabriel's

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National Association of
Standing Advisory Councils
on Religious Education

SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2013

As part of the progress to launching the new NASACRE website at the AGM in May (see details below) we are pleased to be showcasing this new format of our newsletter.

In this issue:

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- [Michael Gove and religious education- the good, the bad and the ugly](#)
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[From the Chair](#)

As I write my last newsletter message to you as NASACRE Chair, I am, perhaps understandably, in reflective mode. February 2013 marked 20 years since NASACRE was formed and the last three years alone have seen unprecedented challenges for religious education to which we have been responding vigorously.

The AGM in May will see Lesley Prior assume the role of chair and there will be elections for the role of Vice-Chair as well as two Executive members as terms of office for Graham Langtree and Sharon Artley come to end. I would like to express my sincerest thanks to NASACRE officers and Executive members for their faithful support, dedication and hard work during my own term of office.



Michael Gove's statement in the House of Commons in early February on new arrangements for the national curriculum, GCSEs and school accountability gave hope of some respite from relentless changes that have been so damaging for RE. However, John Keast, RE Council Chair, pointed to aspects of that announcement which were good, bad and ugly and concluded that stormy times still faced RE. I agree, and as we move into the 2013 Summer Term NASACRE is only too well aware that yet more wintry blasts are in prospect for RE.

The APPG report on RE teacher supply and support published in March gave parliamentary prominence to important issues of concern to the RE community. A similar tone is expected from the Ofsted Long Report and the Ofqual report on GCSE both due to be published this term. Their messages are not expected to be comfortable for RE and, of course, for SACREs. As we rightly focus on what for us might be challenging analyses (see *Are SACREs Fit for Purpose?*) it is important that we remember our collective achievements, both past and present and appreciate the profound significance of the way that different parts of the RE community are working ever more closely.

The start of 2013 saw the launch of the RE Quality Mark after a pilot involving 40 schools. This pilot included schools from all phases, special school, faith and community schools. A flier for the REQM is included in this newsletter. The REQM is just one of the achievements of the RE community and has been designed to celebrate high quality religious education, promote SMSC (spiritual, moral, social and cultural education) and whole school improvement.

Another achievement must be the way the RE community has galvanised itself to work together under the leadership of the REC in taking forward the RE Subject Review with no government support. The Review has of necessity proceeded at a breathtaking speed with the Expert Panel starting its Phase 1 work in July 2012 and producing its draft work in October. The sheer pace has been a real challenge for SACREs many of which needed to schedule additional meetings to engage with the consultation on the Phase 1 report as well as to respond to the APPG call for

evidence on teacher supply and support. Phase 2 of the Review sees a series of working papers published during this term with a final document scheduled for launch in September. This phase of the Review involves two Task Groups producing a curriculum review document which is aimed to be as inclusive as possible, taking into account the diversity of provision for RE in community and aided schools, as well as the changing pattern in the light of the academisation programme. Task Group 1 will produce papers on the aims for RE, the core knowledge and understanding in RE for pupils and new instruments for describing achievement in RE. It is led by Graham Falgate with Kate Christopher, Dilwyn Hunt, and our own Lesley Prior. Task Group 2 will work on structuring and sustaining the future of RE and its members are Hazel Henson, James Holt, Jennifer Uzzell and Sue Wilson. It is very encouraging to note that people with long experience in and good understanding of SACREs are involved so prominently in this work.

This context, therefore, sets the theme for our **AGM** which will be as much about SACREs challenging as being challenged.

My thanks to you all for your faithful commitment to RE and the encouragement and support you have given me as Chair, over the last two years.

I look forward to seeing you in Birmingham on 23rd May.

Bruce Gill

Michael Gove and religious education: the good, the bad and the ugly

Comments on Michael Gove's statement in the House of Commons and DfE publication of new arrangements for the national curriculum, GCSEs and school accountability on 7 February 2013 from the Chair of the RE Council

GOOD

- No EBacc certificates but one qualification (reformed GCSE) for all subjects, so no first and second class qualifications
- A new broader performance measure for schools (Performance8) that allows GCSE RS to count towards school performance alongside EBacc subjects; this is good news for schools with successful GCSE provision
- RE was reaffirmed in the new National Curriculum documentation – “all state schools ... must teach RE to pupils at every key stage”
- Not mentioned on 7 February but RE now included in Specialist Leader in Education programme by National College of School Leadership

BAD

- 38
- The EBacc still exists and still excludes GCSE RS as a humanity option, despite the recent addition of Computer Science to the science suite
 - The EBacc headline measure for school performance remains in place, implying second class academic status to GCSE RS (and other subjects)
 - Position of GCSE RS is still precarious and depends on how Performance8 subjects will be determined; RS may lie only in an overcrowded option position, competing with provision for both EBacc and non-EBacc subjects
 - The GCSE Short Course RS will not count towards school performance and its future is very uncertain – no indication of how statutory RE in Key Stage 4 can be accredited
 - Not mentioned on 7 February but teacher training for RE remains in a dire state with the removal of bursaries for RE PGCE trainees (unlike nearly every other subject) being inequitable and unjustifiable

UGLY

- Some probably irreversible damage to RE has already happened, with reduced time, staffing and fewer exam entries
- ‘Bridge too far’ metaphor obscures the minimal change in Gove’s plans; sleight of hand is evident and he will not lose political credibility over any of this

Whilst mentioning nearly every other subject, he did not mention RE at all

CONCLUSION

- RE is not out of the woods yet; or to put it another way, there are stormy times still to come for the good ship RE

John Keast
Chair, RE Council
8 February 2013

Are SACREs fit for purpose?

In their thought provoking book, *Does Religious Education have a Future?: Pedagogical and Policy Prospects* (2013), Mark Chater and Clive Erricker examine various factors currently affecting RE today. In chapter six, entitled ‘The politics of English RE: A portrait of disfunctionality’, Mark Chater points to a number of shortcomings in relation to SACREs. His portrayal deserves serious consideration even if many of us who work closely with SACREs might take issue with all or some of the analysis.

Issues

39 He argues that the SACRE structure of four groups reflects an era in which England was less diverse, has a retrograde influence on the character of representation and contains an imbalance between the religious and the educational forces acting on RE. Mark Chater points to the voluntary nature of SACRE membership, for which there is no test, which makes it virtually impossible to exercise quality assurance on religious input and advice. Significantly, he also contends that such structural weaknesses carry through to agreed syllabuses and therefore to classroom learning and that the different vested interests of the SACRE groups/ASC committees conspire to lead to minimal changes being made to syllabuses when they are reviewed. He observes that SACREs have no equivalent in any other subject, that SACREs' responsibility for collective worship

"...confuses and embarrasses the educational profile of RE" and that the public is most often unaware that SACREs exist.

Caricatures or accurate descriptions?

His analysis can be summarised as seeing SACREs as

"... small dedicated bodies, battling against local authority apathy, proud of their local achievements for RE and hyper vigilant against the incursions of local government" and again, as entities that have tended "...to resist any form of accountability to the centre, preferring to be accountable locally to bodies that do not understand how to use them."

What is local?

He notes that global factors are now affecting many educational systems in different jurisdictions and wonders how helpful the expectation of compliance with a local document (the Agreed Syllabus) can be in the context of globalisation and IT. Mark Chater goes on to argue that the notion of marked variances between local authorities in the main enquiries of RE (or of progress in understanding of religion and belief) are now outdated.

The increased diversity in types of school (eight at the time of the 2010 guidance) each with differing RE requirements leads him to conclude

"In this new context SACRES are an inadequate vehicle, not because they are local but because they are not local enough."

I am sure that it will not be lost on many SACRE members that in current government educational policy 'local' increasingly tends to mean 'the school' and 'school' is tending to mean 'academy'. Mark Chater concedes that some SACREs have succeeded in establishing new and productive relationships with the academies in their areas but points out that these SACREs have no constitutional duty to do so. For me, his most telling point is about the 'statutoriness' of RE which in his view seems almost worthless in a time of deregulation.

Questions and Challenges

- To what extent do you recognise your own SACRE in this analysis?
- To what extent do you think the analysis might apply to other SACREs?
- What elements of the analysis, if any, do you think SACREs generally should prioritise for action and what form might that action best take?
- What should government do?

NASACRE would welcome responses from SACREs to these questions and invite you to share with us your thoughts on these matters as we shape our new two-year plan for support to SACREs.

Bruce Gill

Mark Chater is the afternoon speaker at this year's AGM.

Religious Education Quality Mark

The Religious Education Quality Mark (REQM) has now been achieved by over 55 schools. Training for assessors has taken place in Exeter and Norwich. The Diocese of Norwich has arranged for 15 schools to work together on the criteria for the REQM. Chester West and Chester SACRE has offered supported funding for 8 schools to apply. The REQM is currently being piloted in schools in Wales. Schools are finding the process helpful as they map their existing practice and see the next steps for improvement. The REQM is showing just how much pupils and staff appreciate high quality RE:

'I like acting things out. It makes it more interactive. I get to do it. I like talking and seeing other points of view.' (Primary pupil)

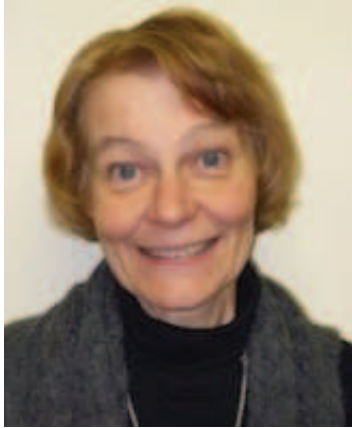
'I want to help the subject leader to move forward in RE and the REQM was a way of doing that.' (Headteacher)

'RE is everywhere in our school, well more than that really.... in RE there are no walls....' (Secondary Student)

All the schools which have achieved the award are listed on the website www.reqm.org. If schools are interested in self evaluation and do not wish to apply for the RE Quality Mark, they can download the criteria as an improvement tool.

The RE Quality Mark is open to all schools and the cost of applying is £475. Schools' school improvement budgets should pay for the application. However, if a school cannot afford to apply and needs financial support, then there is some funding available. Please contact the administrator at admin@reqm.org and give details of why the school needs funding for the award.

If you would like to become an assessor please contact the project managers Jane Brooke (jane.brooke@reqm.org) and Mary Myatt (mary.myatt@reqm.org).



Jane Brooke
Mary Myatt

RE




Quality Mark

Recognising outstanding learning in religious education

What Is the RE Quality Mark?

The RE Quality Mark:

- ★ has been developed to celebrate high quality religious education
- ★ provides community schools, faith schools and academies with a framework to capture good practice
- ★ encourages the development and celebration of school wide commitment to excellent teaching and learning in religious education

How does the RE Quality Mark work?

The REQM has five strands:


- ★ Learners and Learning
- ★ Teachers and Teaching
- ★ Curriculum
- ★ Subject Leadership
- ★ Continuing Professional Development

There are three award levels: bronze, silver and gold.


Schools applying for the REQM highlight where they think they meet the criteria. After applying for the REQM an assessor will visit the school, interview learners and meet the subject leader and a member of the senior leadership team.

What do I do next?

- ★ Visit the website and explore the criteria: www.reqm.org
- ★ If you think your school could achieve the award, email admin@reqm.org to find out more.
- ★ The cost of REQM is £475 per school.
- ★ There is funding for small schools (100 pupils or fewer) to meet the cost of the award.



www.reqm.org



NASACRE AGM 2013

A reminder about our 2013 AGM which will take place at The Council House in Birmingham on Thursday May 23rd (Registration 10:00am – 3:30pm).

- Download [the AGM flyer](#).
- Download [a delegate nomination form](#).

PLEASE NOTE: only electronic forms can be processed. Please do not send forms by post.

Further details regarding nominations and elections for the NASACRE Executive committee will be sent shortly, with other papers to follow nearer to the date of the AGM.

**DEADLINE FOR AGM BOOKINGS: TUESDAY 30th APRIL
BOOKINGS RECEIVED AFTER THIS CANNOT BE PROCESSED**



Annual General Meeting

Council House, Birmingham
23rd May 2013
10:00am (registration) - 3:30pm

CHALLENGING SACREs

Marking 20 years of NASACRE

In the 20 years since NASACRE was established, SACREs have had to face many challenges. Perhaps none have been as acute as those facing RE and SACREs now.

We invite you to join us in Birmingham to be inspired and challenged by our key-note speakers: HMI **Alan Brine** and Director of Culham St Gabriel's **Dr. Mark Chater** who will lay out:

- the very real problems facing RE today;
- the role of SACREs in the past and looking to the future

In the afternoon, discussions will explore:

- Fundamental principles for NASACRE and SACREs moving into the next 20 years
- Ideas and actions to address the issues raised
- Current examples of good practice within your SACREs and how these can be spread
- Identifying some key 'next steps' for NASACRE

The outcomes will inform the NASACRE action plan to support SACREs so that we rise to the challenge and also raise challenges of our own!

In addition, do not forget the AGM itself, and the announcement of the Westhill/NASACRE Awards for 2013-14.

We look forward to seeing you!

Fee £85



Membership matters

- **Updating our records:** Thank you to all who have provided updated details for your SACRE. Over the next few months, this information will be uploaded to the new website. In order to be able to communicate

with every SACRE efficiently and effectively, it is vital that we have up to date details. Unfortunately, there are still 61 SACREs from which no update has been received. It would be helpful if this information were received as soon as possible.

- **Subscription invoices:** Invoices for NASACRE membership subscription will be sent soon after the AGM.

Please note: As from mid-September, access to newsletters and most of the new website, will be on a **subscription basis only**. A user name and password will be sent to subscribers at the beginning of September.



Sharon Artley

RE Council Sponsored Walks

To celebrate the 40th anniversary of the REC, raise its profile and generate funds to support RE in schools at this critical juncture, the REC is organising a series of sponsored walks which will be held in cities, towns and villages across England and Wales during May and June 2013. Each walk will take in a number of places of religious significance and could nurture contacts which would be of value from an RE perspective.

The aim is to have 20 different walks taking place across the country, each with fifty participants and with each participant raising at least £100 in sponsorship; in general the walkers would usually be adult 'friends of RE' rather than school students. The target is to raise £100,000. Funds raised will be split equally between the REC and locally chosen charities. Since 2010, the REC receives no government funding to make possible its work of supporting RE in schools and does not wish to engage in revenue raising activities which would put it in direct competition with some of its member bodies.

THE REC is looking for help and support from individuals and groups from within its member bodies, of which NASACRE is one. Could your SACRE lead a local organising team? This would involve getting together a group of around half a dozen people to plan a route, persuade people to sign up as walkers, liaise with places to be visited on the route and generate publicity. Could some of your SACRE members take this on? SACREs are well placed to play a valuable role here as they have the local knowledge and contacts to be able to organise a walk effectively. The REC will provide a local organiser pack to help you get started. Perhaps if you are unable to organise a walk, you could join one which has already been organised or sponsor someone already participating?. [Click here to see the RE Council walks.](#)

The REC needs you! Please contact sarah@religioueducationcouncil.org if you can offer your help for this special 40th anniversary event. We will be very grateful for your contribution whatever form it takes – the first need is for local organising teams but walkers and sponsors will also play an important part.

Sarah Smalley,
Executive Officer, RE Council of England and Wales

In the beginning - some personal reflections

Colin James, NASACRE's first secretary, writes :

You might say that my involvement with NASACRE started by accident! A number of people came up with the idea of setting up a national body to support and co-ordinate the work of SACREs. They began with a working party and invited my colleague, Cherry Gould to join it. It was a natural choice as she was a superb RE adviser with a well deserved national reputation. Sadly, however, Cherry's MS was by this time so far advanced that she felt unable to accept. Instead she suggested I went in her place. (Although my responsibility in the Berkshire LEA was for further and higher education, I had also set up our SACRE and was its clerk.) There followed a series of meetings at the St Peter's Saltley Trust in Birmingham. Its Director Maggie Pickup provided the administrative support. Other members included Michael Metcalfe (still NASACRE Treasurer today) and the incomparable John Hull, whose vision, amazing grasp of the issues and sheer common sense inspired us all.

Having agreed on the principle of creating the new body, we then spent a lot of time working on a draft constitution and possible financial arrangements. I wish I could say we got it right, but as time passed we were to discover that we had gained approval for a constitution so difficult to amend that we were unable to improve it as we learned from our early experience.

Anyway NASACRE was duly launched, and most LEAs readily agreed to join. We needed of course a committee and officers. The first Chair was Angela Wood, an inspired choice, full of drive and professional experience. She it was who decided once and for all how to pronounce the Association's name: "It's NASACRE – massacre" she ruled, and no-one ventured to challenge her! Michael valiantly accepted the often thankless role of Treasurer. That left a vacancy for Secretary. I suppose I should have seen it coming. As it was I found myself "ambushed" but with the promise that the Saltley office would do the copying, posting etc for me.

Naturally things began slowly as we established our identity on the national scene among the various bodies who share an interest in RE and collective worship. One of my early tasks was to twist the arms of the chief education officers of the authorities which had not initially signed up. They did in the end, if only to get me off their backs. I quickly started receiving requests for advice on issues which were worrying those who ran the SACREs. The most common was "Can we appoint a representative humanist member?" Answer "Not to any of the four groups, but if your local constitution allows for co-optation, you could co-opt one." As NASACRE began to organise events, and in particular launched its awards scheme, one of the LEAs in Wales put it to us that all our literature must be issued in Welsh as well as English and threatened us with legal action. Luckily the Committee included a Welsh archdeacon, and between us we managed to get them to drop the demand.

Of course NASACRE, like the requirement for SACREs themselves, came into being following the passing of the Education Reform Act and had therefore nothing to do with its framing, its merits or shortcomings. (We should not forget, however, John Hull's excellent booklet *The Act Unpacked* which I suppose was one of the spurs to filling the gap for an informed body able to monitor the operation of the Act and to provide ministers with advice on how things should develop thereafter.) Over the years we offered a good deal of advice, but I should not like to suggest that it was often heeded. We went to a lot of trouble to gather our members' views on what eventually became Circular 1/94. I personally spent many hours putting together these views to produce NASACRE's submission. But then nearly thirty years as an LEA officer had made me used to preparing long and detailed reports which never seemed to have quite the desired impact on the eventual outcome!

I could of course ramble on interminably about things now perhaps better forgotten, but that will do for now. As one of those who were in at the start, I applaud the devotion of all still committed to a task we all felt was worthwhile and important. And whatever the uncertain times ahead may bring, I do wish NASACRE well as long as it is able to continue to make its special contribution.

Colin James

Twenty years on

48 Michael Metcalf – (Editor: *Still NASACRE Treasurer – he deserves a long service medal!*) reflects on the changing times.



Twenty years ago, NASACRE was launched with a reception in the House of Lords. In 2003, as we marked the Tenth Anniversary of that launch, there was a feeling that NASACRE had “come of age”. It had negotiated the hazards of childhood, had survived adolescence and teenage angst, and had become a healthy adult ready to play its full part in the wider RE World.

In the ten years since then, NASACRE has continued to thrive and to be an active agency in support of its member SACREs and in its advocacy of good religious education. For most of this period, RE has been in a buoyant mode, SACREs in general have been busy and purposeful, and NASACRE has taken part in several significant projects and initiatives, some of which are recalled below.

However, in the most recent years, the picture has changed dramatically with the impact of the new Government’s initiatives, and NASACRE and its member SACREs now find themselves facing an uncertain future. To explore the growth metaphor somewhat fancifully, we might suggest NASACRE is having a mid-life crisis – or is perhaps even contemplating enforced premature retirement! Certainly NASACRE’s life is more problematic at present, and there are a few health concerns.

More positively, let us note and celebrate some of the high points of the last ten years. In no particular order... our receiving substantial government funding to recruit and train potential SACRE members from minority faith communities. One outcome of this two-year programme was the development of a high quality training package for SACREs as a whole. Another outcome was the budget overspend, which severely eroded our finances!

...the inauguration and annual follow-on of the Westhill NASACRE Awards for SACRE interfaith projects with young people. The Awards have been enormously successful in stimulating creative initiatives from local SACREs and in raising the profile of NASACRE itself, while the partnership with the Westhill Foundation has been mutually enriching and beneficial.

... the support we were able to give to the “*Celebrating RE*” month, including our own Conference in Birmingham “Whose RE is it anyway?” (A question worth pondering again.)

... the growing prominence of inter-faith issues and the enhancing of NASACRE’s role within the InterFaith Network (UK), which has resulted in major programmes looking at young people in interfaith situations, and exploring relations between SACREs and local interfaith groups.

49 the presence of NASACRE in key situations and developments within the RE world, not least the current REC strategic review of Religious Education.

... the final achieving of a 100% affiliation of all SACREs in England and the Channel Islands to NASACRE.

No doubt this is a rather personal set of reminiscences, and others might have chosen a slightly different set, and my memory may have overlooked some major feature or other. However, it is clear that NASACRE has worthily and energetically lived up to its “adult” role over the last ten years, and this should be a cause of congratulation and acclaim.

NASACRE’s future lies with the future of SACREs themselves. As long as SACREs exist and are able to continue in membership of NASACRE, NASACRE will also exist and seek enthusiastically to support and work with them. I just wonder what we will be able to write a decade on from now, at the next ten-year anniversary.

Michael Metcalf

Personal reflections on being a member of a SACRE

My involvement with SACRE began in late 1998 following the formation of the unitary authorities in Berkshire, as a result of which the newly formed Bracknell Forest Borough Council had a statutory obligation to convene a SACRE. There was a need to find four CE representatives, so I was considered to be an obvious candidate, as I already represented the Oxford Diocese on the Bracknell Forest transitional education committee. This was a role that I had accepted with some reservations. Although familiar with school governorship over some twenty years I had had no teaching or education background. However, early retirement from a career in banking (it was held in much greater respect in those days) had given me more time and thus I had agreed to help out.

At the inaugural meeting of Bracknell Forest SACRE in the autumn of 1998 the first agenda item was the appointment of a chairman. To my surprise and consternation the then chairman of the education committee nominated me. My somewhat weak protestations and the absence of a second nomination resulted in my election; it was a position I somehow retained until last year, when I decided to retire: thirteen full years was enough.

Looking back over those years I realise the work of SACRE and the experiences gained from meeting people from all of the major faiths and others has broadened and enriched my understanding of my own faith, which has gone through some troubled times. It was SACRE that made me much more aware of how different and yet how similar all faiths are.

Bracknell Forest is a unitary that was, and to an extent still is, an area of modest ethnic and faith diversity. There is no purpose-built Hindu temple, synagogue or gurdwara, so it was pleasing to me as chairman to be able to welcome representatives from all the major faiths, as well as a Bahá'i and a Quaker. Even more pleasing was the fact that attendance at our regular meetings was very good with open and constructive comments being made on many aspects of SACRE's work. At an early stage we agreed to create a directory of contacts for all the religions and places of worship, the work of which taught me much about other faiths and prompted visits to several places of worship that otherwise I would not have thought of doing.

Little did I realise at the time how valuable personally this would prove to be, as in 2002 my younger son, living in Toronto, announced he was to be married to a Canadian Sikh girl. The full Sikh wedding ceremony in a Vancouver gurdwara was a wonderful experience, made all the easier by my earlier better understanding and appreciation of that faith.

My work for SACRE made me realise even more the importance of children of all ages learning about religion and from religion. Sadly, recent developments in UK government education policy and the school curriculum continue to indicate a reduced focus on religious education. This, combined with SACREs having only an advisory role, means it can be occasionally frustrating to serve on a SACRE, but my own experience has been one of enrichment and better understanding of my own faith and that of others.

Gordon S Anderson

Church of England representative on Bracknell Forest SACRE 1998 – 2012



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