

HARROW SACRE
(STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION)
MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 3rd MARCH 2016

Attendance:

Group A: (Religious traditions and Christian Churches)

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| * Ms Mercedes Afnan | |
| * Dr Julie Crow | |
| * Mr Mike Bishop | * Mr Neville Ransley (until 9.25pm) |
| * Mrs Phiroza Gan-Kotwal (from 8.10pm) | * Ms Ciara O'Flaherty |
| <i>A Mr Vijay Hirani</i> | * Mrs Gill Ross |
| * Ms Varsha Dodhia | * Mrs Doreen Samuels |
| * Mr Asad Omar | <i>A Mr Paramjit Singh-Kohli</i> |
| ~ <i>Ms Beverley Wilson</i> | <i>A Ven Sumana Sramaner</i> |
| ~ <i>Mr Zia Baig</i> | * Mr Zafar Khalid |

Group B: (Church of England)

- * The Rev'd Matthew Stone
- A Mrs Mary Abbott*
- Vacancy*

Group C: (Teachers' Associations)

- * Mrs Manju Radia
- * Mrs Alison Stowe (Chair)
- * Ms Teri-Louise O'Brien

Group D: (Local Authority)

Councillors:

- * Ghazanfar Ali (until 9.00pm)
- * Kareema Marikar (Vice-Chair)
- * Camilla Bath

Reserves:

- Chika Amadi*
- Margaret Davine*
- Manjibhai Kara*

Officer

- *Patrick O'Dwyer (Education Professional Lead & Adviser to SACRE)

- * Lesley Prior (Advisor ASC)

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 Teri-Louise O'Brien. Teri-Louise O'Brien is RE Curriculum Leader at Norbury Primary School. She has worked with Lesley Prior on RE seminars for teachers. She has been appointed to SACRE as a Teachers' Association representative. The constitution allows SACRE to have up to six representatives from Teachers' Associations, so there are still vacancies. Welcome too to Lesley Prior who has been working with SACRE members on the ASC. On behalf of SACRE, the Chair expressed her pleasure that Lesley Prior has agreed to become SACRE's advisor from 1st April 2016. She is a font of all knowledge on all things pertaining to RE. Lesley Prior is equally pleased to be working with Harrow SACRE which has an excellent reputation and has enjoyed first rate support from its advisors past and present. Lesley Prior is currently working four days a week at Roehampton University where she trains RE teachers at both primary and secondary level. On the remaining day she works for the Church of England Diocese of London to support community schools.

2. Apologies for absence:

RESOLVED: To note apologies for absence from Vijay Hirani, Mary Abbott, Paramjit Singh-Kohli and Ven Sumana Sramaner.

The following members were also absent:

Group A: Mr Zia Baig and Ms Beverley Wilson. .

3. Minutes of the last meeting held on 2nd December 2015 *(previously circulated and available at the meeting)*

The minutes were agreed and signed as a true record.

4. Matters arising from the minutes

p.5. Item 10. Update on School Journey Advice: Lock down policies: Doreen Samuels recommended the Community Security Trust. This organization advises Jewish schools on security and will give advice on request. The Local Authority has sent schools advice about lock down which comes from the police. The police have recommended not going into too much detail as each site is different; it is up to each school to work out its own security arrangements. The core advice from the police enables the schools to ask the necessary questions that will allow them to build their own security plans.

There were no further matters arising from the minutes

5. Nominations and Appointment of New members *(Nomination form previously circulated and available at the meeting)*

Patrick O'Dwyer introduced this item. He explained that the Council appoints members to the SACRE committee. Patrick O'Dwyer has made a few amendments to the nomination form so it now includes the Teachers' Association representatives as a category and a line for the head teacher to sign off such an application.

Members agreed the new format.

Group A: Mike Bishop has a list of nominating groups for members representing faith traditions. He will send this to Patrick O'Dwyer.

Action: Mike Bishop

Cllr Ali suggested that Islam should be included in the list of organisations represented by group A members. Islam will be included; alternatively the list of examples can be removed altogether.

Varsha Dodhia asked if representatives from the Interfaith Council should be included. The focus of SACRE is on the teaching of RE and Collective worship; it is a Council body. The remit of the Interfaith Council is different. The Interfaith Council has input into SACRE in that SACRE often approaches the Council when seeking representatives of faith traditions.

6. **The Director's Nominated Advisor to the Harrow SACRE 2016/2017: an update**

The London Diocese has agreed to release Lesley Prior for eight days a year. Four of these days will be to support SACRE meetings and four for other activities such as the Annual Report, NASACRE Conference or training. One area of uncertainty is the termly meetings for RE teachers: it is not clear how these can be supported by SACRE; Patrick O'Dwyer will take this forward with HSIP.

Action: Patrick O'Dwyer

Questions

How many days did Rachel Bowerman do? This was never specified. In the present financial climate it is important that this should be clarified. A sum was provided to the HSIP. This provided sufficient days to fulfil the LA's responsibilities.

How does this allocation compare with other SACREs? It is difficult to make a direct comparison as the number of schools supported by SACRE varies from borough to borough; there are also different models for the way SACREs operate. Financial constraints are having a significant effect on bodies like SACRE and professional development opportunities for teachers. The present situation is different from having a permanent member of staff based in Harrow. Members of SACRE can always apply for additional time from the LA for exceptional and specific projects which require extra input.

7. **Update on Published Reports and Guidance**

a) Annual report *(Previously circulated and available at the meeting)*

This has been well received by the Council and Officers; it was read and approved at the People's Directorate senior management meeting.

b) Authorising Absence for Religious Observance *(Previously circulated and available at the meeting)*

This publication was also well-received. Patrick O'Dwyer has received one concern: this was from a parent whose request for a day's holiday for Chinese New Year was refused by the Head Teacher, partly on the grounds that it was not included in the SACRE Guidance. The Guidance states that the list is not exhaustive, but it was agreed that this point could be more firmly emphasised in the next edition. The Guidance also makes clear that the school governors make the final decision whether to grant leave for religious observance.

The Head Teacher concerned felt that he has been consistent in approving requests for pupil leave.

Doreen Samuels mentioned the SHAP calendar. SACRE uses this and there is link to it in the Guidance.

Paddy O'Dwyer made the point that the leave is granted for a day of religious observance; any application needs to make it clear that this is purpose of the day for which leave is sought. The concerned parent used the word 'holiday' and may explain why it was not agreed.

The Chair thanked those members who had contributed dates for the calendar.

c) Fasting during Ramadan *(Previously circulated and available at the meeting)*

Schools have found this publication very useful. Patrick O'Dwyer has been approached by Hertfordshire LA who would like to use it. This request has been approved provided that Harrow SACRE is acknowledged.

Patrick O'Dwyer thanked Councillor Ali for his input. Councillor Ali explained that he had consulted religious scholars. He has received positive feedback from the Central Mosque and from Stanmore Mosque.

The Joint Council for Public Examinations cannot make any changes to the dates or times of public examinations at this late stage. However, the Guidance is balanced and will help schools to manage over this period.

d) Guidance on PE

A member asked how this Guidance was received. The feedback has been positive. The Guidance is on the website so it is in the public domain. Schools have found it helpful.

The Chair reported that, at Priestmead Primary, the PE co-ordinator has given a copy to every teacher. Teri-Louise O'Brien reported that Norbury Primary School has amended its PE policy in the light of this guidance.

8. School Self-Evaluation Form and Participation at SACRE *(Previously circulated and available at the meeting)*

Patrick O'Dwyer reported that this document is not quite complete. He followed the current Ofsted framework in drafting the form but received feedback from Head Teachers that took different views: some wanted to follow the Ofsted format, others disagreed. Patrick O'Dwyer has now drafted a form which allows for both approaches.

He has also included two additional questions:

How can SACRE support your school?

Would you be willing to do a presentation for SACRE?

He felt that including these two questions would save sending separate mailings to schools.

At this point (8.10pm) Phiroza Gan-Kotwal arrived and was warmly welcomed.

The feedback received from head teachers executives indicates that, in principle, they are in favour of the SEF. This year no summaries have been received from schools but it was felt that this new document will provide a useful framework for schools to report on this subject area.

Questions

Do schools keep the SEF? Yes, but we ask them to return a copy to SACRE.

How often do they complete the SEF? This varies from school to school but an annual return is most usual.

SACRE has no statutory powers here; it is hoped that the form will provide an opportunity for schools to reflect on their RE practices and consider how SACRE might support them.

A Teacher's Association representative commented that it could be very helpful for schools seeking the RE Quality Mark.

Who completes the form? This would usually be done by the RE co-ordinator and signed off by the head teacher.

Do RE teachers have to teach all major faiths? Yes, this is expected.

Would schools feel confident in coming to make a presentation to SACRE? Yes, schools are very confident. There have been a number of presentations in the past with children and young people participating. Nina Will, Head Teacher of Stag Lane Infant School, is coming to the next meeting to talk about British Values.

Should a question be added asking if the school would like a visit from a SACRE member? It was agreed that this was a good idea and could help to foster supportive relationships. Any requests from schools would be channelled through the Chair.

Could SACRE invite schools to participate in a display from the different faith communities to celebrate the new Agreed Syllabus? This has been done before on a school by school basis.

The committee thanked Patrick O'Dwyer for his work on the SEF.

9. Rediscussion of Woodhead and Clarke Publication (Groups' Input) *(Previously circulated and available at the meeting)*

(Internet link: <http://faithdebates.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/A-New-Settlement-for-Religion-and-Belief-in-schools.pdf>)

Patrick O'Dwyer had allocated a different section of this publication to each group; he asked members to feed back their thoughts to the committee.

Collective Act of Worship

The Teachers Group had considered Collective Worship. The Chair reported that the Gujarati speakers at her school were firmly in favour of retaining the "broadly Christian" act of worship. A member commented that this is about community cohesion and assimilation which parents feel is important.

Lesley Prior observed that a debate on the issues raised by Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead is very timely. They have received funding to continue their work and have met with a number of influential stakeholders. Lesley Prior drew members' attention to two similar reports that have been published recently: *RE4 Real* published by Goldsmiths College (<http://www.gold.ac.uk/faithsunit/reforreal/>) and *Commission on Religion and Belief in Public Life* (<http://www.corab.org.uk/>); these reports also argue that the requirements for the collective act of worship should be changed. This debate is not going to disappear and there is more appetite for legal change than might appear. Lesley Prior felt that the drive for this comes from secondary schools. Primary Schools see the value of gathering together for a collective act of worship. The current directive is widely interpreted and allows for an inclusive approach.

The fact that the government has indicated that it wants all schools to be academies by 2020 will have a profound effect and may diminish the role of SACREs.

Role of SACREs in a nationally agreed syllabus

Under the proposals put forward by Clarke and Woodhead, SACRE's statutory powers would be diminished. RE would have a national curriculum. SACREs would work at local level to put flesh on the bones of this curriculum. They would work in an advisory capacity.

It is not clear how this would be funded or whether schools would be bound by SACRE's advice.

In the discussion around these issues, the following points were made:

SACREs have a long standing track record; they need to articulate clearly and strongly an alternative narrative to these proposals.

There are legal requirements for RE and Collective worship. Many schools ignore statutory advice and Ofsted itself is not following up the legal requirements.

Perhaps a good way forward for SACRE would be to find examples of good practice and build on this.

Pupils can study two religions for GCSE. There are seven to choose from; of these Islam and Judaism tend to be the most popular which means that Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism are squeezed out and the smaller religions such as Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Rastafarianism and Baha'i are not represented at all. This is not inclusive.

Teaching RE can be inclusive in Key Stages 1-3. The ASC should ensure that students receive a thorough grounding in the smaller religions through these Key Stages.

Sometimes smaller religions are left out because of lack of resources, but this is not the only reason. Sometimes there is a lack of willingness to engage with smaller religions or belief systems. For example, Humanism is well resourced but it is still marginalised.

To talk about raising the status of RE by making it part of the national curriculum is to deflect the debate; it would be more valuable to focus on better resourcing for schools and training for teachers.

Diversity is an important British Value but the government is not applying it when considering RE.

In the political context, local accountability is set against academisation. This puts local accountability under pressure. What can SACREs do to be proactive about the value of local input?

Harrow is one of the most diverse boroughs in the country: this should prove a rich resource providing links for the new curriculum. This would be particularly useful for new teachers.

There needs to be a way of making resources available and accessible.

Teachers often need time to absorb detailed information and do not want to be under prepared. Teachers are now working 50-60 hours a week so it is difficult for them to find time to research resources and do the necessary preparation for a new subject.

Students want to study a subject that is meaningful to them. It is difficult to cater for minority interests among students.

There are many proposals at the moment but these do not have legal status. SACRE should continue work on the AS. It will be a good way of energising pupils in schools and bringing RE into the spotlight.

The new AS should be launched not only with an event but with training. The AS is not about resources but about how RE is taught.

The best resources are the members of the committee.

It is important to safeguard community cohesion and give students a well rounded education.

Should SACRE write a letter of objection to the proposal of a national RE syllabus? It was agreed that the best course of action would be to write to NASACRE who will collate responses from SACREs across the country. NASACRE will pass on responses to Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead.

The Chair and Patrick O'Dwyer/Lesley Prior will draft a letter based on these points as recorded in the minutes.

Action: Chair and Patrick O'Dwyer

Charles Clarke has agreed to become a patron of the National Association of SACREs. He will attend the National Conference on 17 May where keynote speakers will be Professor Adam Dinham, one of the authors of the Goldsmith's report and the Rt Hon Lady Elizabeth Butler-Sloss.

Role of SACRE in Assemblies

There was further discussion about the part SACREs should play in assemblies. The following points were made:

A good way forward would be to audit good practice for assemblies: this approach would have a better chance of response than prescriptive advice.

Primary schools use their assembly time very sensibly.

SACRE has not received any applications for determinations recently: assemblies can be inclusive while still following the government guidance.

It is important that SACRE members are informed about what is going on in schools. Nina Will's talk on British Values has been set up with exactly this aim.

At this point (9.00pm) Councillor Ali left the meeting

At a recent conference at SOAS, faith was considered as part of well-being.

In conclusion: SACRE members should keep reading the reports and reflecting on their implications.

10. The Harrow SACRE constitution (*Tabled at the meeting*)

Paddy O'Dwyer introduced the updated constitution drafted by Democratic services. It is closely linked to relevant legislation and guidance. It contains an additional clause to say that members lose their place on the committee if they fail to attend three consecutive meetings without adequate reason.

In this connection, the Chair has written to members who have not attended recently to say that if she does not hear from them, she will assume that they no longer wish to be members of SACRE.

The constitution cannot go to Council before September, so there is time to discuss it. Members raised the following points:

Should the constitution contain details of being quorate? Mike Bishop has the details from the previous constitution and will send it to Patrick O'Dwyer who will also check with Democratic Services.

Action: Mike Bishop and Patrick O'Dwyer

Should the constitution contain something about maintaining good relations with religious communities? This is not a statutory requirement: there is nothing in the constitution to prevent SACRE from doing this.

There is a useful document about SACRE constitutions on the members section of the NASACRE website.

Should the constitution include how the Chair and Vice-Chair are elected and how frequently? They should be elected annually and although not mandatory, it is considered good practice that they should be from different groups.

In the previous constitution, the faiths to be represented were listed. The SACRE should broadly represent the faiths in the community. 22 is the maximum.

Patrick O'Dwyer will reconsider the constitution in the light of comments made this evening.

Action: Patrick O'Dwyer

11. The SACRE Budget

Harrow SACRE is in a good financial position. The only area of uncertainty, as mentioned in 6 above, is the termly meeting for RE teachers. Members felt that this was an important part of SACRE's remit and would like to see it continue; they appreciated, however, that the Council has been fair to SACRE in a time of financial constraint and efficiency savings. At such a time it is difficult to argue that schools should be funded for RE training when they are expected to pay for CPD in other curriculum areas.

Question

Should expenditure and income be listed in the Annual report? This is not a requirement. The LA budget for the SACRE can be considered by SACRE members at their meetings.

At this point (9,25pm) Neville Ransley left the meeting

12. ASC Update and Key dates

Julie Crow updated the committee on the ASC. The Working group has met. There are two important dates when members must finalise and approve the AS:

Tuesday 15 March, Whitchurch School 9.30-500: this all-day meeting is to finalise the draft AS. Lunch is provided.

Monday 18 April, Harrow Arts Centre, 6.00-9.00pm: at this meeting members will vote to approve the AS. There is no proxy voting except for councillors. If members cannot attend, they can write their opinions to Patrick O'Dwyer who would then share them with members.

Patrick O'Dwyer will circulate the draft for 15 March

Action: Patrick O'Dwyer

Still outstanding

- Brief introduction to each religion similar to that included in the previous syllabus. Patrick O'Dwyer will provide guidelines.

Action: Patrick O'Dwyer

- Census information: the Census Publication Team have offered to provide this information free of charge.
- Photos showing people rather than buildings: permission of parents must be obtained for any pictures of children.

13. Future Reading list: "Living with Difference, Community Diversity and the Common Good"

This is for members to read not for discussion this evening.

14. AOB

- **NASACRE Conference 17 May 2016:** this year the NASACRE Conference is in London at Westminster Central Hall. Nicky Morgan has been invited. Alison Stowe and Gill Ross expressed interest in attending. It is the end of the financial year, but if possible, SACRE will fund two places. It costs £100 per member.
- **Diwali assembly at Newton Farm:** Manju Radia would like to express her thanks to Vijay Hirani; Vijay Hirani provided Mr Lakhani to lead the Diwali assembly at the school.
- **Launch of new AS:** Members discussed the best time for a launch. It was agreed that October/November would be the best time but to be aware of the many Jewish Festivals taking place in October this year. The Clerk will check possible dates with Democratic Services for a launch at the Civic Centre. Other venues could be investigated. This will be discussed at the next meeting.

**Action: Clerk
Item for next agenda**

15. Dates of Future SACRE Meetings:

Thursday 30 June (Note date change from 23 June) (*Apologies Neville Ransley*)

Thursday 27 September (changed from 20 October) (*Apologies Neville Ransley*)

Wednesday 7 December (changed from 15 December)

Thursday 9 March (Note change from 8 March)

The Meeting closed at 9.40 pm

Signed:

(Chair)

(Date)