

HARROW SACRE
(STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION)
MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 15 OCTOBER 2019

Attendance

Group A

* Mercedes Afnan
A Ven Sumana Sramaner
A Bob Dawson
A Carolyn O'Brien
A Ciara O'Flaherty
A Vijay Hirani
* David Cryer
A Varsha Dodhia
* Gill Ross
A Doreen Samuels
* Zafar Khalid
* Asad Omar
* Tahir Hashmi
* Mohammed Amar
* Paramjit Singh-Kohli
* Phiroza Gan-Kotwal

Religious traditions and Christian churches

Baha'i
Buddhist
Christian (Free Church Federal Council)
Christian (Catholic)
Christian (Catholic)
Hindu (Swaminarayan)
Humanist (Harrow Humanists)
Jain
Jewish
Muslim (representing Harrow Central Mosque)
Muslim
Muslim (representing Harrow Central Mosque)
Muslim (representing Harrow Central Mosque)
Sikh
Zoroastrian

Group B

A Mary Abbott
A Revd Kate Blake
* Revd James Power

Church of England

Group C

* Alison Stowe (Chair)
~ *Teri-Louise O'Brien*
* Fatema Rahemani

Teachers' Associations

Group D

*Cllr Camilla Bath Conservative (Vice Chair)
*Cllr Ghazanfar Ali Labour
*Cllr Angella Murphy-Strachan (Labour)

Local Authority

Cllr Dr Lesline Lewinson Conservative (reserve)
Cllr Simon Brown Labour (reserve)
Vacancy Labour (reserve)

Advisor to the SACRE

* Lesley Prior (Advisor to Harrow SACRE)

Present as observers from the Romanian Orthodox Church:

*Claudia Hutanu
*Cristina Olarasu

Clerk

*Vivian Wright (Clerk to SACRE)

* *denotes presence*

A denotes absence with apologies

~ *denotes absence without apologies*

1. Welcome

Alison welcomed everyone to this first meeting of the new academic year especially Claudia Hutanu and Cristina Olarasu, observers from the Romanian Orthodox Church.

2. Apologies for absence

RESOLVED: To note apologies for absence from Ven Sumaner Sramaner, Bob Dawson, Doreen Samuels, Mary Abbott and Revd Kate Blake. Retrospective apologies were received from Vijay Hirani, Varsha Dodhia, Carolyn O'Brien and Ciara O'Flaherty.
Note: following the meeting, the Clerk received an email from Carolyn O'Brien saying that she has moved so will no longer be a Catholic representative on Harrow SACRE.

The following member was also absent:

Group C: Teri-Louise O'Brien.

No apologies had been received.

3. Minutes of the last meeting held on 19 March 2019 (previously circulated)

p.1. item 3. Apologies had been received from Revd James Power.

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

4. Matters arising from the minutes

p.2. Item 7. Determinations

Norbury Primary School: Alison Stowe had written to the Head Teacher of Norbury Primary School to officially confirm that the school had been granted a determination.

Marlborough Primary School see item 8. Below.

p.3. Item 8. LGBT and Education see also item 11 below.

David Cryer raised a query as to whether SRE (Sex and Relationships Education) should now be known as RSE (Relationship and Sex Education).

Cllr Angella Murphy-Strachan asked if SACRE has any input into what this area of the curriculum is called. Alison clarified the situation: at the time of writing the minutes of the last meeting, SRE was still SRE and in primary schools the focus is predominantly on relationship education. Alison has written to Patrick O'Dwyer and his most recent email stresses that the LA has been advised not to create its own guidance but to wait for the advice being prepared by the DfE. There has been some advice published by Coram Life. The new curriculum does not come into force until September 2020, although it can be introduced earlier..

Alison had also enquired if the LA had a designated officer to advise on SRE. She has been informed that the LA does not have such an officer. She has also asked if the LA provides any sessions for governors on the new RSE curriculum. There has been no reply so far to this question. Patricia Davies has been appointed interim head of Harrow School Standards and Effectiveness. Alison will keep members of SACRE informed when she knows more.

Lesley Prior added that other SACREs are preoccupied with the new curriculum but to give advice is not within their remit except where concerns are related to religious identity; in this case SACREs may be required to give advice.

p. 6. Item 16. Any other business

New Islam Resource for School and Teacher Pack: Asad Omar's comments were noted. In the discussion about the resource packs, members felt that they could not advise schools to purchase such expensive resources when budgets were so tight. The Clerk has written to Shreyas Pulle and Imran Kotwal to inform them of SACRE's decision.

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

5. Monitoring of syllabus and websites: website reviews in the light of new Ofsted Inspections (Guidance documents previously circulated)

Alison informed members that schools are working on the new Ofsted framework. It will be included in the next cycle of teachers' performance management which is currently underway.

Q. Are schools improving their coverage of RE in the light of the new Framework's emphasis on the broad and balanced curriculum? Alison felt that coverage is improving and schools are now building up portfolios of children's work and comments for Ofsted. In due course she will receive feedback from RE coordinators about any increase in emphasis on RE. Lesley added that in schools where she has contacts, RE seems to be taken more seriously. Ofsted will be making "deep dives" into specific subjects in sample schools.

Q. Will inspectors have knowledge or expertise in RE? Lesley admitted that this is not always the case and inspectors do not always understand local RE syllabi.

Alison has received many tweets about the new Ofsted framework which confirm that inspectors are looking into individual subjects in greater depth. There are concerns about the lack of RE teaching in schools and Alison has sent members a link to an article on this subject: <https://www.retoday.org.uk/news/latest-news/number-of-schools-flouting-religious-education-laws-rises/>.

Inspectors of Harrow schools should be taking in to account the unique aspects of the locally agreed syllabus. In the past some SACREs prepared brief guidance on their locally agreed syllabus for Ofsted inspectors. This practice was discontinued when notice for inspections became so short but it might be worth Harrow SACRE members considering publishing such guidance which could be sent to all schools in preparation for Ofsted. See also item 7 below.

6. News from NASACRE

Lesley introduced this item. She informed members that she will be attending a meeting on Friday where plans for the next conference and AGM will be discussed. At the moment the government is so preoccupied with Brexit that concerns about RE education are not a priority. It is possible that following recent national developments, especially the Commission on RE Report, there will be appetite for change: however, any change to the RE curriculum will require a change in the law and financial backing. The political future is uncertain: there may be a change in government which will have different views. Meanwhile, NASACRE continues to lobby for greater support for RE with increased accountability for the subject and a stronger emphasis on training and recruitment for RE teachers.

Alison added that NATRE has always had a presence at party conferences where their representatives try to engage MPs. The RE council also funds attendance for some of their officers at national party conferences.

Q. In this country do we have the same authority as other countries to promote the religion of our country? Is RE better taught in other European countries? This is large question and prompted some discussion in which the following points were made:

- In England RE has a different place in the curriculum from other subjects as there is no national curriculum but it is a statutory requirement that RE is taught in schools.
- Lesley is Chair of the European Federation of teachers of RE and she represents England in this Federation. At a conference in Dublin last August delegates felt that despite its struggles, the status of RE in England was viewed with envy by other countries. See <http://www.eftre.net>.
- In other countries, children are divided by religion and belief and receive different RE education according to their faith. Representatives from other countries are astonished at the inter-denominational nature of RE in this country. They look to the UK as a model of collaborative and inclusive learning.
- England and Wales are the only European countries to have a locally agreed syllabus.
- Other European countries struggle for adequate time to teach RE.
- The Church of England has a particular place in this country and the 1988 Education Act made Christianity a key element in RE education.

- Census data shows that the number of religious people is in decline.
- There is greater freedom and tolerance in England. In Spain, for example, RE is Catholicism and children of immigrants are overlooked. Children in England know about different faiths.
- In Harrow the locally agreed syllabus is very diverse reflecting the nature of the borough. Other local authorities may not have such a wide representation of different faiths.
- It is a legal requirement for maintained schools to reflect that Christianity is the official religion of this country but maintained schools are also required to represent the other major faiths. However, the law does not state the extent to which Christianity should be represented nor does it state what the other major faiths are.
- Christianity cannot be taught through one denominational strand and it is very satisfactory that representatives of the Orthodox Church are present at this evening's meeting.
- Despite the challenges facing RE in this country, there is also hope. The Church of England needs to look to itself and its own position with regard to RE. What we see in Harrow is exciting: both in terms of religious diversity and also in the ways in which different communities are always seeking new ways of collaboration. There is lot to be proud of.
- People coming into this country often mix with others from their own community to start with. They may continue to embrace their own religion but in time they may adopt a more secular approach.
- In Spain, people have dropped away from Catholicism.
- England is very fortunate in that everyone is free to practise their religion without criticism or interference from the government.

Alison concluded the discussion by saying that the strength of community schools is the way in which children learn from each other about their religious faiths. It is exciting to see this. It is a strength in this country that good teachers are able to draw on this diversity: integration is a key factor.

7. Annual report 2018-19 *(previously circulated)*

Alison opened this item by thanking Lesley for the start she has already made on the Annual report. She explained that SACRE is required to produce an Annual report: as well as being posted on the website, this is circulated to schools and sent to NASACRE and the DfE. Past reports can be found on the NASACRE website.

Lesley then introduced her draft Annual Report.

Proceedings and decisions: the report is mainly a summary of the four meetings held over the last academic year and the decisions made by SACRE. Links to relevant documentation are included. For those who have colour, some sections are in red which means that they need to be checked.

Demographic information: the report includes demographic information about Harrow from the 2011 census – this is the most recent data available.

Status of schools: Patrick O'Dwyer or another representative from the LA will need to provide information about the number of schools under LA control and the number of schools that are now academies. Pravina Ladhu at the Civic Centre should have such a list, but this changes constantly. The report should make clear that the number of schools for which SACRE is responsible is gradually shrinking.

Foreword: Alison will write a foreword to the report.

Membership: Vivian has updated the membership section.

SACRE publications and the Agreed syllabus: SACRE publications are listed and some information about the agreed syllabus is included. This will be helpful to schools and could provide the basis for a briefing document for Ofsted discussed under item 5 above.

NASACRE AGM and Conference: the report also includes details of the NASACRE AGM and Conference. This year no one from Harrow SACRE was able to attend, but when a delegate is sent from Harrow, this information is also included.

RE Co-coordinators' meetings: the report also will contain information about the RE teachers' briefing meetings: these meetings are very well attended. Alison will draft this section.

Determinations: the report could include an appendix giving the number of schools with determinations, when they are due for renewal and which schools have had determinations granted in the course of the year. This would be useful for Freedom of Information requests. Alison has received three Freedom of Information requests since August. Most of the information requested is already in the public domain: SACRE holds open meetings and the minutes and the Annual Report are posted on the website. It should be made clear to those putting in freedom of information requests that SACRE is only responsible for schools under LA control. For academies and independent schools, enquirers must seek information elsewhere. When a school becomes an academy, its determination ceases to be operative and has to be renewed through the DfE. SACRE should keep a record of local schools that become academies.

Alison and Lesley will continue to work on the Annual report.

Action: Alison and Lesley

8. Determinations

Marlborough Primary School

This item was deferred again as no documentation has been received; Marlborough is now working with Glebe school to prepare its application for a determination.

One freedom of Information request asked if any schools have been refused a determination. In the case of Marlborough, their application has not been turned down and SACRE is supporting the school in preparing its application.

9. Collective Worship Working Group

There is nothing further to report since the last meeting.

10. Dates for Religious Days of Worship (previously circulated)

Alison again drew attention to the presence of two representatives from the Romanian Orthodox Church. Last year there had been a misunderstanding because the orthodox Easter fell in term time. The Head Teacher at Priestmead, a school with a large number of Romanian pupils, adopted an understanding approach and agreed that the Monday following Easter Sunday (known as "Bright Monday") could be taken as a day of religious observance. This practice has now been recommended in the guidance for 2020.

Q. Where do Romanians worship? The closest church is the Catholic Church in Kingsbury. The services are held in Romanian. Alison has emailed the priest in charge and he has supplied the dates for Orthodox Easter in 2020. There are many other Orthodox communities in London and Romanian Orthodox can go further afield to worship. There are also other diaspora Orthodox communities in Harrow including Greeks, Russians and Serbians. Patrick O'Dwyer and Alison have tried to track down as many as possible: they are anxious to hear from the diverse voices of Orthodox Christians and make sure that they are represented.

The dates have now been checked by the faith representatives; Vivian will send the guidance to Patrick O'Dwyer so that copies can be sent to schools and posted on the website.

Action: Vivian

11. LGBT and Education (*List of FAQs previously circulated*)

As noted under item 4 above, the LA is waiting for further guidance from the DfE. Some religious groups have produced guidance for members of their community: these include:

- The Jewish Board of Deputies: <https://chiefrabbi.org/lgbtwelfare/>
- The Baha'i community: <http://re.bahai.org.uk/>
- The Church of England: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/Valuing%20All%20God%27s%20Children%20July%202019_0.pdf
- The Catholic Church: <https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/education/other-topics/serving-lgbt-students-in-catholic-schools.html>

SACRE will collect a list of guidance from different communities to send out to schools.

The following points were noted:

- Those objecting to the new curriculum have often picked up on points which are not a true reflection of the curriculum that schools are required to teach.
- SACRE may be asked for advice where concerns touch on questions of religion and belief.
- The DfE has produced a number of advisory documents: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education>
- SRE/RSE is not part of SACRE's remit but it is important that SACRE is prepared should questions arise.
- Schools are already preparing for the new curriculum: they are consulting parents.
- The right to withdraw children from the SRE/RSE curriculum is still operative in primary schools. SACRE would not keep records about such withdrawals.

In summary:

- Should the LA ask for advice from SACRE, SACRE should be able to refer to the DfE and to the guidance from different religious groups. SACRE is a filter rather than source of advice and guidance.

12. SRE *see item 11. above*

13. News from Faith Groups

- **Sikh Community**
Guru Nanak's 550th at City Hall: Friday 8 November 17.45-20.00:
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/guru-nanaks-550th-at-city-hall-tickets-76560664007?aff=ebdssbdestsearch>
- **Humanists**
RE teachers' courses and resources: <https://humanism.org.uk/education/teachers/>
- **Christian: C of E:**
St Mary's 925th Anniversary: <https://www.stmarysharrow.org.uk/events> and
programme of school visits: <https://www.stmarysharrow.org.uk/children>
- **Islam: Harrow Central Mosque:**
24 November Celebration of the birth of the Prophet: *email to follow.*
- **Baha'i:**

Bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb (1819) and the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh: 19.00
Saturday 2 November at Nower Hill High School: rsvp to
harrowbahais@gmail.com

- **Harrow Interfaith:**
Interfaith week 10-17 November: <https://www.interfaithweek.org/>

14. Any Other Business

- **Congratulations to Doreen Samuels**
Doreen has been accredited as a mentor to volunteers going into schools.
- **Thanks to Gill Ross** for the delicious cake in honour of Sukkot.

. **There were no further items of any other business**

15. Future Dates:

- Future dates 2019-20
 - Tuesday 10 December
 - Tuesday 24 March

The dates were noted.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 9.00pm pm

Signed:

(Chair)

(Date)