

HARROW SACRE
(STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION)
MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 12th JUNE 2013

Attendance:

Group A: (Religious traditions and Christian Churches)

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|--|---------------------------|
| * Mr Zia Baig (<i>until 9.10pm</i>) | * Mr Neville Ransley |
| ~Ms Mercedes Afnan | A Ms Angela Clapham |
| * Mr Mike Bishop | ~ Mrs Gill Ross |
| A Dr Julie Crow | * Mrs Doreen Samuels |
| * Mrs Phiroza Gan-Kotwal | ~ Mr Paramjit Singh-Kohli |
| * Mr Vijay Hirani | A Ven Sumana Sramaner |
| * Ms Varsha Dodhia | + Mr Zafar Khalid |
| * Councillor Asad Omar (<i>until 9.10pm</i>) | * Ananda Caitanya Das |
| * Ms Beverley Wilson | |

Group B: (Church of England)

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

Group C: (Teachers' Associations)

- ~ Mrs Manju Radia
* Mrs Alison Stowe (Chair)

Group D: (Local Authority)

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| Councillors: | A Camilla Bath |
| ~ Nana Asante | * Manji Kara (Reserving for Camilla Bath) |
| * James Bond | * Sasikala Suresh |

Officer

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

Visitors

- *Dr Godfred Donkor, incoming Head of Religious Studies, Rooks Heath College
*Mrs Rankin, outgoing Head of Religious Studies, Rooks Heath College
*Students of Rooks Heath College, Lana Bader, Muna Rashid, Negina Maihanwal and Milan Divecha

Clerk

- *Vivian Wright (Clerk to SACRE)

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

Order of the Agenda:

Agreed to take item 6 as the first agenda item after the election of the Chair and Vice-Chair, so that the visitors could leave after their presentation.

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

1. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

Chair: Doreen Samuels seconded by Mike Bishop proposed Alison Stowe

Elected unanimously

Vice-Chair: deferred. Rachel Bowerman would ask Camilla Bath if she is willing to stand again. Varsha Dodhia indicated her willingness to stand if Camilla Bath is not.

- 2. Welcome and introductions:** the Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially Dr Godfred Donkor, Mrs Rankin and students from Rooks Heath School, new member Cllr James Bond, representing the Independent Party and Manji Kara, reserving for Camilla Bath. Members of the committee introduced themselves.

3. Apologies for absence:

RESOLVED: To note apologies for absence from Cllr Camilla Bath, Julie Crow, Angela Clapham, Ven Sumana Sramanar and Zafar Khalid.
The meeting was quorate.

The following members were also absent:

Group A: Ms Mercedes Afnan, Mrs Gill Ross and Mr Paramjit Singh-Kohli

Group C: Mrs Manju Radia.

Group D: Cllr Nana Asante

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 6th March 2013 (pages 1-8)

The minutes were agreed and signed as a true record.

5. Matters arising from the minutes

p.1. Attendance list and p.7. minute 12b: Mrs Gan-Kotwal wished to point out that she was not present at the meeting because she had not been informed of the date. Rachel Bowerman apologized; she knew that Mrs Gan-Kotwal had telephoned the Teacher's Centre and had therefore assumed that she had received information about the meeting. For this meeting, Mrs Gan-Kotwal had received the papers in the post and she wished to thank those responsible.

p.6. Minute 9: review of Harrow Agreed Syllabus: as agreed at the last meeting, Rachel Bowerman and the Chair of SACRE wrote to Catherine Doran advising her that the LA is required to convene an Agreed Syllabus Conference. The letter recommended that there are two national, on-going curriculum reviews which should be taken into account before the ASC commences its work. Rachel Bowerman tabled a copy of this letter and Catherine Doran's reply on behalf of Harrow Council. Harrow Council is in agreement with SACRE's recommendations and has set aside appropriate funds in order to convene an Agreed Syllabus Conference and, if the ASC should decide it is necessary to do so, to develop a new agreed syllabus.

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

Business Items: Improving standards in RE and collective worship

6. SACRE Monitoring the Quality of RE: a School Self-evaluation Report

A Presentation by Dr Godfred Donkor, incoming Head of Religious Studies, Rooks Heath College and a group of Y10 students

Dr Donkor gave a summary of provision for RE at Rooks Heath:

- a) Timetable allocations – the equivalent of an hour a week for RS throughout KS 3 and KS 4. At KS 4 it is timetabled in fortnightly 2 hour blocks.
- b) The KS 3 curriculum covers, over the three years, each of the 6 principal world religions, from a particular thematic focus, for example, Judaism: Why Festivals? and Sikhism: identity and belonging. Each unit runs for a term. This KS 3 curriculum is designed to meet the

requirements of the Harrow Agreed Syllabus. The final unit of study in Y9 is an introduction to the RS GCSE.

- c) At KS4 all students in Y10 and Y11 follow the Edexcel RS GCSE Short Course: Religion and Life, studying Christianity and one other religion.
- d) On entry in Y7 the majority of students are working at L4 in RE. They reach L5 by the end of KS 3. This trajectory is broadly in line with national expectations.
- e) The 2012 GCSE results broadly reflected pupils' predicted grades and 33 students exceeded expectations by two or more grades.
- f) The quality of teaching in the RE department is judged to be good and this evaluation is based upon lesson observations by the Senior Leadership Team and Ofsted.

Dr Donkor concluded his report on RE at Rooks Heath College by outlining some of the strengths of RE. He emphasised that neither the conversion to Academy status nor the introduction of the EBacc has made any difference to the profile of RE or the status of the RE department. RE continues to make a rich contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, as was reported by Ofsted. It is a subject in which pupils new to the school or to the country, and for whom English is an additional language, make good progress because the vast majority feel that their religious identity is valued and that they can contribute to the learning as well as engage with it.

Four students then added their views.

- Milan Dinecha spoke of how RE covers issues of importance to young people. Students have opportunity at KS 3 to raise questions. At KS 4, in order to fully cover the exam syllabus, there is less opportunity for discussion and interactive work. Pupils value the weekly RS clubs which aid revision.
- Muna Rashid spoke about how RE develops interest in other cultures. She felt that RE is vital and noted that, although Harrow is one of the most religiously diverse boroughs, there is less conflict than elsewhere and this might be due both to adherence to religious values and also perhaps to the way in which RE promotes tolerance and respect. She reminded members that RE educates all pupils, both those from religious backgrounds and those from non-faith backgrounds.
- Negina Maihanwal felt that the study of RE is essential in our constantly changing and cosmopolitan society, it prepares pupils for adult life.
- Lana Bader talked about the status of RE. Currently students follow a short course GCSE which is not recognised in either the EBacc or other measures of standards at the end of KS 4. RE does not open doors to many careers and so some people regard it as a less useful and less academic subject. However it holds a relatively high status at Rooks Heath and she suggested some ideas for enhancing its profile.

Unfortunately, the visitors were unable to access the school website where their PowerPoint slides were saved. These have been circulated separately.

The students had two questions for SACRE members:

- Question 1: do members feel that some minority faiths are neglected in the curriculum?

Varsha Dodhia, Jain representative answered that Jainism, though a small religion, has a considerable membership in Harrow. She felt that having places of worship for different religions in the borough provided an important focal point. This was reinforced by Beverley Wilson who agreed that the Rastafarian community in Harrow aims to have its own place of worship.

Doreen Samuels, Jewish representative, felt that this was an intriguing question: it indicated that the study of RE stimulates the spirit of enquiry and would prompt students to investigate other religions.

Phiroza Gan-Kotwal, Zoroastrian representative, indicated that although Zoroastrianism is a very small faith, she found primary school children extraordinarily well-informed about it.

Mrs Rankin added that the Harrow Agreed Syllabus requires a breadth of study at KS 2 that includes the Baha'i, Rastafarianism and Zoroastrianism.

Mike Bishop observed that because of the concentration on the larger faiths in the secondary syllabus, it is difficult to find good resources for the smaller faiths.

- Question 2: would it be a good idea to have a help line to offer advice to teenagers on religious beliefs?
Doreen Samuels sounded a note of caution, indicating the importance of distinguishing between advice and indoctrination.
Vijay Hirani felt it was important that students should learn how different faiths approach their deep probing questions.

Rachel Bowerman concluded this part of the discussion by pointing out that whatever happened elsewhere, smaller faiths are well-represented and have an equal voice on SACRE.

The visitors then invited questions from the panel.

Questions were asked about the constraints of timetabling allocations and the limitations of only offering the short course. Dr Donkor replied that the full course is a more attractive option for students and there is pressure from some students to offer a full course. On the other hand, the short course is very inclusive and accessible to students of lower ability. Whilst the short course remained the core entitlement offer, he would like to be able to offer additional modules so that pupils could 'top up' to make a full RS GCSE.

Varsha Dodhia asked about offering RE as an "A" level. Dr Donkor replied that Rooks Heath would like to promote "A" level RE but numbers are too few at present and there are not sufficient resources.

Rachel Bowerman asked if students regarded RE as challenging an academic subject as others. Lana Bader felt that it was not hard because pupils were usually well informed about their own religious traditions and beliefs.

Rachel Bowerman asked if RE promoted other forms of intellectual development apart from providing key facts about other religions. Milan Dinecha replied that a benefit of studying RE was the development of debating skills. As an atheist, he engages in debate with lots of students who hold different beliefs from his own. Negina Maihanwal added that much of the news concerns religion and culture and the study of RE improves knowledge of topical issues and encourages social cohesion.

Phiroza Gan-Kotwal asked if it would be possible for members of SACRE to see an RE examination paper. Rachel Bowerman undertook to supply this.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

Rachel Bowerman shared with members verbatim a question raised in an email by the Humanist representative. She asked for students' views and comments on the phrase "militant atheism," which Alan Brine had used in a presentation to NASACRE. Julie Crowe, who was not present this evening, had objected to the use of this phrase and asserted that atheists do not proselytize. The students were divided on this question. Two of the students, Negina Maihanwal and Milan Dinecha, who are themselves atheists, felt that there definitely was such a thing as "militant atheism" - although some atheists are very open to scientific discussion, others are only interested in converting others to their point of view while at the same time criticizing religious people who try to do this. No one should insist that one religion or point of view is correct or try to force their beliefs on others. Muna Rashid disagreed that atheists were militant and Lana Bader felt that being militant about either religion or atheism depends on people's background and upbringing.

On behalf of the SACRE committee, Rachel Bowerman thanked the students and their teachers for the quality of their presentation and the thoughtfulness and level of challenge apparent in both their questions and answers. Dr Donkor and Mrs Rankin expressed their pride in their students. Negina Maihanwal, on behalf of the visitors, thanked SACRE for inviting them to the meeting which they felt it had been an honour to attend. Mathew Stone also thanked their parents for allowing them to come and picking them up. The visitors then left the meeting.

Members felt that this was a very useful presentation. The students were very eloquent and engaged.

Rachel asked if there was anything else that members would like to see included in future presentations. Mathew Stone suggested a very brief introduction on the school's context.

Doreen Samuels suggested that the constraints around offering "A" level RE at Rooks Heath should be followed up by SACRE. After discussion about the best way to provide this advice and challenge, in the context of an academy that does not fall within the remit of SACRE, it was decided that: Rachel would write a letter to Dr John Reavley congratulating him on the high standard of the presentation by his pupils and then asking about provision for RE post-16. It was also agreed that Rachel Bowerman should:

- request an opportunity to attend a meeting of the academy headteachers in order to discuss academy representation on SACRE
- speak with headteachers in each sector to urge that, when schools make presentations to SACRE, headteachers or senior leaders attend so that they can answer questions at a strategic level.

Rachel Bowerman will follow up these suggestions and Neville Ransley agreed to accompany her when she meets with the secondary heads.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

7. Raising the profile of Harrow SACRE (pages 9-10)

The accompanying papers for the meeting contained a short report by Rachel Bowerman printed in the latest Governors' Bulletin. The committee had also received copies of the slides that accompanied her presentation at the summer term meeting of Harrow Head Teachers with the Corporate Director of Children and Families, Catherine Doran. Rachel had used this presentation to: highlight SACRE's recent guidance publications, alerted headteachers to the forthcoming review of the Harrow Agreed Syllabus and, particularly, to remind them of SACRE's duty to monitor RE.

Rachel Bowerman stressed that SACRE does not have a mechanism for carrying out its monitoring role; although SACRE meetings now feature regular presentations from schools, SACRE still only hears from a very small sample and because schools are not using a common format for their reports, the evidence base, on which to evaluate RE in Harrow, is not robust. Rachel Bowerman has requested a meeting specifically with the Primary Headteachers at which she would like to be able to suggest a rolling programme of school reports over a 3 year cycle, so that SACRE can obtain regular and consistent reports.

Doreen Samuels reminded the committee that Rachel Bowerman had been instrumental in drafting the RE self-evaluation form for schools. However, as Rachel Bowerman pointed out, only one RE leader, who is also a SACRE member, had used this to report to SACRE and the proforma is now out of date. SACRE does receive and scrutinise RS GCSE data in relation to entry patterns and results but cannot readily obtain other details, such as the exam board.

It is not certain that schools will agree to reporting mechanisms, but SACRE is held in high regard in Harrow and its recent publications have further enhanced its reputation.

Information Items: improving SACRE's effectiveness

8. "Re: the Truth Unmasked" an enquiry by the all party parliamentary group on Religious Education (page 11)

The papers for the meeting included a summary of the main findings and recommendations of the all party parliamentary group on religious education (page 11). These will prove useful for Rachel Bowerman's presentation to the Primary Head Teachers. It will be interesting to see if there is any response from the government to the APPG recommendations.

Members felt that the finding of most concern was the supply of RE teachers in primary schools. In a quarter of the schools surveyed, RE is taught by TAs and teacher training for RE is in decline. SACRE does not know how this finding is reflected in Harrow schools. It was suggested that Rachel might investigate this but there are certain problems attendant on extracting this information: Rachel Bowerman felt that a survey would not generate a good response from busy and pressurised Head Teachers. It was suggested that SACRE members might offer to interview Head Teachers. Although Head Teachers would be under no obligation to accept such a proposal, Rachel Bowerman agreed that, with prepared questions and the offer that this would enable schools to improve the quality of RE teaching and learning, this could be a viable proposal. Rachel Bowerman concluded this part of the discussion by proposing that, when she meets with primary and secondary headteachers, she offers a menu of proposals by which SACRE might be able to monitor RE and fulfil its statutory duties. This menu might include: a questionnaire; school reports to SACRE meetings using a standard set of headings; visits to schools by SACRE members using the same questions. **This was agreed.**

In response to a question, Rachel Bowerman affirmed that Head Teachers are aware that it is one of SACRE's duties to monitor the teaching of RE. It is important that schools feel that they have something to gain by participating. It was agreed that it was more effective to proceed via the Head

Teachers than through the RE coordinators. This might also prove to be a way towards recruiting teacher representatives

Rachel Bowerman commented that on the SACRE committee there are now very few vacancies for faith group representatives but two long-standing vacancies for teacher representatives. Her attempts to recruit representatives through the unions has not been successful.

At this point (9.10pm) Cllr Asad Omar and Zia Baig left the meeting

The all party parliamentary group had been set up to explore the current state of RE. Phiroza Gan-Kotwal asked if the Harrow SACRE officer or the Chair should be invited to attend national events held by different faith groups. Rachel Bowerman and the Chair agreed that national representatives from NASACRE and the RE Council might well be invited to such events but it was not really feasible to include local representatives.

9. Reports from National RE Associations

a) RE Council newsletter (pages 12-15). The aim of the RE council is to raise the profile of RE nationally. This is an information item and there were no questions.

b) NASACRE AGM – presentations from two keynote speakers: Alan Brine on “Realising the potential” (pages 16-25) and Mark Chater on “Challenging SACREs” (pages 26-34) These talks were designed to be provocative. Mark Chater’s talk in particular questioned the value of SACREs and whether they are any longer fit for purpose. Three questions arose from the discussion following the delivery of these papers and these are included on the agenda and below:

- 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?

In addition Rachel Bowerman asked members to consider whether Mark Chater’s description of SACREs fits Harrow SACRE.

Varsha Dodhia expressed the view that a locally determined syllabus promotes community cohesion. Members recalled that in a presentation to the committee last year, the RE leader at Park High school had explained that the department had changed the title of RE to Philosophy and Ethics in order to be more immediately relevant to pupils’ interests. The danger of this is that while RE is statutory, Philosophy and Ethics are not, and when RE is dropped from the curriculum, it cannot easily be restored.

Members were asked to reflect on these questions and consider whether SACREs need to change the way they work with schools or should they disappear?

In the discussion that followed these points emerged:

- The study of RE promotes harmony among different religions and cultures
- RE also promotes understanding among young people
- SACRE members need to be diligent in attendance at meetings and take their duties seriously
- No representative from Harrow SACRE had attended the NASACRE AGM but members have received all the papers and questions arising from the AGM.

c) NASACRE newsletter Summer 2013 (pages 35-50)

This is an information item. There were no questions.

10. Reports from SACRE partners

a) **Harrow Interfaith Council:** Varsha Dodhia reported that the Harrow Interfaith Council has held its AGM. Cardinal Tauran will be visiting the Jain centre in Hertfordshire on 14h June.

b) Faith communities:

- **Jewish Way of Life exhibition:** this will be held at the Pinner Synagogue in summer 2014. Doreen Samuels and Stanley Conway have contacted Rachel Bowerman with regard to possible support from SACRE for this exhibition. This would involve coordinating school visits and providing quality training for teachers. It is an administrative task of some complexity. Rachel Bowerman will prepare an estimate of the administrative costs and the synagogue will consider what contribution it can make to these.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

The training element can be built into the CPD programme. A key element of the exhibition is the fact that groups of pupils are shown round by guides from the local community in a participative way. This promises to be a very worthwhile venture. In reply to a question, Rachel Bowerman thought it was likely that there will be opportunities for the general public to visit the exhibition.

- **Zoroastrian exhibition:** Phiroza Gan-Kotwal informed members that an exhibition of Zoroastrian artefacts is planned to take place at SOAS once adequate funding (£30,000) is raised.

12. AOB

a) SACRE Guidance on Absences

Beverley Wilson, Rastafarian representative, commented that the SACRE guidance on absences had been well received in her school. However, she was disappointed to find that Rastafarian holy days were not included in the 2012 – 2013 guidance. Rachel Bowerman apologised for this while explaining that she had made every effort to contact all faith representatives asking for their contributions. The back page of the guidance will be revised and updated every year, so there will soon be a chance to rectify this omission and make sure that the guide is as inclusive as possible in 2013 – 2014. This depends on members responding to invitations to contribute.

b) RE Artefacts

Rachel Bowerman thanked members for their responses to her appeal to take these artefacts. These are still in boxes under the stage at the Teachers' Centre but she will make time to sort and distribute them.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

c) Comments from Humanist member

Two comments had been received from the Humanist representative who was unable to be present at the meeting. These were read out exactly as they had been emailed.

- 1) The first comment referred to the emphasis on Zoroastrianism found in the Harrow SACRE report under "Celebrating RE 2011". The writer referred to "a serious reality disconnect here which had allowed a minor religion to proselytise to young children from Harrow schools"

Members of the committee made the following responses:

- Phiroza Gan-Kotwal explained that you cannot convert to Zoroastrianism: it is a religion that members have to be born into.
- Rachel Bowerman explained that the context of this event was that the local Zoroastrian community had initiated a celebration of RE at their place of worship and the national Celebrating RE 2011 committee had requested that Harrow schools contribute presentations about Zoroastrianism. She was surprised that any SACRE member should suggest that an event in which SACRE was involved might have been used to proselytise.
- Doreen Samuels expressed the view that the purpose of SACRE is to raise the quality of religious *education* – learning *about* and learning *from* religion;

- In view of the lack of resources available for minority religions, this event was helpful in modelling ways in which pupils could learn about Zoroastrianism, with evidence of progression and continuity from KS 1 to KS 4.
- Neville Ransley emphasised that SACRE is about inclusiveness.

In conclusion, Rachel Bowerman affirmed that converting children into or out of a faith stance plays no part in Agreed Syllabus RE and that all SACRE members – whether representing a faith community or a non-religious group - should understand and affirm the principles and purposes of RE set out in the Agreed Syllabus.

- 2) The second comment referred to Alan Brine’s reference to “militant atheism” at the NASACRE AGM. Responses to this comment had already been made earlier in the meeting (*see minute 6 above*). These reflected the view that both people of faith and those of none sometimes want to convert others to their way of thinking.

d) London Schools Excellence Fund

Phiroza Gan-Kotwal drew members’ attention to a number of bursaries available for Harrow and John Lyon Schools. Although not strictly speaking relevant to the business of SACRE, this remark prompted Rachel Bowerman to mention the Mayor of London’s School Excellence Fund. This fund exists to improve the quality of teaching by improving teachers’ subject knowledge. Members fully supported Rachel Bowerman’s suggestion that SACRE should put in a bid in round 3 of the grants.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

13. Dates of Future SACRE Meetings:

Future dates have now been confirmed:

Thursday 24th October (not 23rd September) *Apologies from Neville Ransley*

Monday 2nd December

Thursday 6th March.

In response to a question as to why the first meeting of the autumn term had been set to a later date, Rachel Bowerman explained that the earlier date makes it difficult for SACRE to organise a presentation from a school. This year, the original date also coincides with the Jewish festival of Succoth.

The Meeting closed at 9.50 pm

Signed:

(Chair)

(Date)