

HARROW AGREED SYLLABUS CONFERENCE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 11TH SEPTEMBER 2014

Attendance:

Group A: (Religious traditions and Christian Churches)

* Mr Zia Baig
~ Ms Mercedes Afnan
A Mr Mike Bishop
* Dr Julie Crow
* Mrs Phiroza Gan-Kotwal
* Mr Vijay Hirani
A Ms Varsha Dodhia
* Mr Asad Omar
~ Ms Beverley Wilson

* Mr Neville Ransley
* Ms Ciara O'Flaherty
~ Mrs Gill Ross
A Mrs Doreen Samuels
* Mr Narinder Singh Mudhar (Reserve for Mr
Paramjit Singh-Kohli
* Ven Sumana Sramaner
* Mr Zafar Khalid
A Ananda Caitanya Das

Group B: (Church of England)

* Mrs Mary Abbott

* Rev'd Philip Barnes
* Rev'd Matthew Stone

Group C: (Teachers' Associations)

* Mrs Manju Radia
A Mrs Alison Stowe (Chair)

Group D: (Local Authority)

Councillors:

* Ghazanfar Ali
A Sasi Suresh
* Camilla Bath

Reserves:
* Kareema Marikar (Reserve for Sasi Suresh)
Margaret Davine
Manjibhai Kara

Officer

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

Clerk

*Vivian Wright (Clerk to SACRE)

* denotes presence

A denotes absence with apologies

~ denotes absence without apologies

1. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair for the Agreed Syllabus Conference

Rachel Bowerman chaired this part of the meeting

Chair

Ghazanfar Ali seconded by Kareema Marikar proposed **Julie Crow** as Chair
Elected unanimously

Vice Chair

Neville Ransley seconded by Kareema Marikar proposed **Mary Abbott** as Vice-Chair
Elected unanimously

Julie Crow then took over as Chair

2. **Welcome and introductions:** the Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Members introduced themselves. Rachel Bowerman was pleased to report that two new representatives for group C (Teachers' Associations) have been nominated. They represent the NASUWT and the ATL. It is hoped that they will be able to attend the next meeting once the unions have confirmed their nominations.

3. **Apologies for absence:**

RESOLVED: To note apologies for absence from Ms Varsha Dodhi, Cllr Sasi Suresh, Mrs Doreen Samuels, Mr Mike Bishop, Ananda Caitanya Das and Mrs Alison Stowe.

The following members were also absent:

Group A: Ms Mercedes Afnan, Mrs Gill Ross and Ms Beverley Wilson

4. **The Role and Responsibility of an Agreed Syllabus Conference**

from Religious Education in English Schools: non-statutory guidance 2010 (DfE) pages 2-4

Rachel Bowerman introduced members to the guidance set out in this DfE circular based on the Education Reform Act of 1988.

Review: the Agreed Syllabus should be reviewed every five years by the ASC. The pending review was delayed until the publication of the new National Curriculum and guidance from the RE Council. The "conference" (actually a committee) is separate from SACRE although it is comprised of SACRE members. It meets as long as it is reviewing the syllabus and once the syllabus is agreed, the ASC is dissolved.

The conference business is set out at the beginning of the document. Each group has a vote and all groups must agree unanimously on the syllabus to be recommended. The vote is very formal and all members of each group should be present. Within the groups, agreement does not have to be unanimous.

The syllabus must be "educationally sound" and meet legal requirements.

Membership of the ASC is from the four groups of the SACRE committee:

Group A: Religious traditions and Christian churches

Group B: Church of England

Group C: Teachers' Associations

Group D: Local Authority

In addition, working groups may co-opt members for consultation who are not members of these groups. These members may take responsibility for some of the drafting of the Agreed Syllabus.

Statutory Requirements: once the Agreed Syllabus is adopted by the council it becomes a statutory requirement for maintained schools. Voluntary aided schools with a religious character are not required to deliver the Agreed Syllabus, nor are Free Schools and Academies. However, Free Schools and Academies have to provide RE and fulfil the statutory requirements but not necessarily through the locally agreed syllabus.

A Church of England member asked who would decide whether an academy was delivering a syllabus that did not meet statutory requirements. Rachel Bowerman explained that this could be the funding agency, Ofsted or parents. She does not know of any instances.

Rachel Bowerman drew members' attention to p.3. para 3 which states:

Each locally agreed syllabus must reflect that the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of other principal religions represented in Great Britain.

A Representative from the Sikh community asked if Academies can decide their own RE syllabus, can they depart from the statutory requirements? Rachel Bowerman explained that that Academies or Free Schools with a religious character must follow the Trust Deed of the school. Non-denominational

academies and free schools must meet statutory requirements although not necessarily through the locally agreed syllabus. At present academies in Harrow deliver the locally agreed syllabus so it is likely that they will continue to do so.

Rachel Bowerman is continuing in her efforts to recruit a teacher from one of the Harrow academies to SACRE.

The previous agreed syllabus is available electronically and Rachel Bowerman will circulate this to members.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

5. Timeline and Processes

Letter from Patrick O'Dwyer 14.2.14 (Page 5)

Consultation with RE subject leaders (summary of responses Page 6)

The letter from Patrick O'Dwyer (Education Professional Lead) sets out the funding for each stage. Teacher consultation includes 12 days of cover costs so that teachers can be released to work on the AS.

The summary of consultation with the RE subject leaders will be considered in the context of the RE Framework *see 6 below*.

6. Religious Education: a National Curriculum Framework (Review of Religious Education in England – RE Council 2013 (Pages 12-28)

Rachel Bowerman explained that this document contains the recommendations of the RE Council for a National Curriculum Framework for RE. It provides guidance for an AS Conference. The ASC can decide to adopt it as it is or adapt it for Harrow.

Purpose of Study and Aims (pages 14-15)

In their responses to the opening sentence of this section, teachers felt in need of more specific advice on the purpose of RE. They did not understand what was meant by "challenging questions about meaning and purpose in life", "ultimate reality and "what it means to be human".

The 2008 syllabus has two attainment targets:

- Learning about religion
- Learning from religion

The RE Council recommendations contain three attainment targets: (pages 14-15)

- Know about and understand a range of religions and world views
- Express ideas and insights about nature, significance and impact of religions and world views
- Gain and deploy the skills needed to engage seriously with religions and worldviews

The teachers consulted felt that the second and third targets were overlapping.

Requirements (pages 18-27)

The requirements are unclear about meaning: they are generic although they include examples and notes. The examples come from a variety of faith traditions but are not comprehensive.

Those consulted were of the opinion that in order to understand broad and generic requirements, teachers would need more specificity.

Rachel Bowerman suggested that the ASC could use the RE Council's generic requirements and then decide how these could be illustrated from each faith tradition. Non-specialists are often teaching RE and receive very little CPD in this area. They would need specific examples for a requirement such as A.1. for KS 1 "Recall and name different beliefs and practices, including festivals, worship, rituals and ways of life."

Teachers liked the level of challenge and the idea of progression from KS1 with its requirements beginning with terms such as "recall", "retell" and "recognize" to KS2 where requirements opened with words such as "describe", "explore" and "describe and understand". The taxonomy shows gradation in children's understanding and teachers' questioning.

Profile of the new AS

Teachers were unanimous that the new syllabus should have high profile launch so that school leaders are reminded of the status of RE and that training and new resources will be needed. They were very positive about the new framework and pleased to be consulted about it.

Format of the AS

The ASC will need to decide whether to publish the RE Council Framework as it stands with supplements or produce a localized version. One consideration that needs to be taken into account is funding: the LA is required to fund the formation of an Agreed Syllabus but there are no statutory requirements to fund the development of a scheme of work. In addition, the formation of a scheme of work runs counter to current government thinking as exemplified in the new National Curriculum where value is placed on schools' autonomy over the delivery of the curriculum. Members can defer making an immediate decision.

Drafting a new Harrow Agreed Syllabus

Alongside the generic requirements of the RE Council for KS 1 and KS2, Rachel Bowerman has drafted specific examples showing how the requirements can be illustrated from one faith tradition, in this case Judaism. Rachel qualified this draft by saying that as yet she has not yet consulted the SACRE representatives of Judaism. At present, no decision is required as to the content of the examples, but members need to consider whether this is a useful approach.

A Representative of the Church of England asked if Ofsted would use the criteria of the RE Council or the locally agreed syllabus? Rachel Bowerman replied that Ofsted are only interested in teaching and learning, so they would not comment on the content of the syllabus. A subject HMI might comment on the syllabus in the course of a thematic visit to a school but this is unlikely as there are only 1.5 HMIs and one of them is unlikely to criticise as he has been closely involved in the development of the RE Council Guidelines. The locally agreed syllabus might have an impact on SMCSE (Social, Moral, Cultural and Spiritual Education).

Breadth of RE (page 15)

Rachel Bowerman deplored the fact that the phrase "in the main Christian" quoted in the DfE guidance, has been interpreted as representing the specific proportion of time to be spent on each religion – a numerical approach believing, for instance, that the amount of time spent on Christianity should be more than that spent on all the other religions put together.

This places a burden on teachers and is also a misinterpretation of the law.

Under the present syllabus, all six principal religions plus Jainism and Zoroastrianism are included by KS2. The AS could reflect more or less coverage by the number of bullet points containing examples for each religion. Fewer bullet points would indicate less coverage. SACRE can monitor schools but interpretation will depend on the wording of the agreed syllabus.

A representative from the Hindu faith tradition commented that Christianity contains much that can be applied to other religions.

Rachel Bowerman believes that teaching about Christianity has not been done well. Children need basic knowledge in order to make a synthesis.

Subject content – requirements and examples

Rachel Bowerman invited the committee to form small discussion groups to look at the requirements A1, A2 and A3 for KS1. If members imagined themselves as a class teacher of 5-7 year olds or children up to the age of 11, and if the unit of work were on Judaism, could they provide examples? Groups spent ten minutes discussing this and then gave feedback to the committee in which the following points were made:

- It is essential to know the basic tenets of a religion before comparisons can be made.
- There is a strong tradition of teaching comparative religion in Harrow.
- Parents should also be involved in teaching religious precepts
- In our multicultural society, similarities between religions should be stressed, Assemblies are often used for this

- Non religious beliefs should also be included
- Teachers would find it difficult to provide examples for these requirements as they are used to working from a script
- The examples should provide as much information and as many bullet points as possible.
- Teachers of RE may have limited knowledge so guidance would be helpful
- As well as providing the underlying principles, the syllabus should facilitate provision of resources for teachers and support from the RE subject leaders.
- While we might be confident in providing examples from our own faith tradition, it would be more difficult to provide examples from other faiths.
- The syllabus needs to give teachers relevant tools.

It was agreed that Rachel Bowerman and a working group of teachers would draft some examples, along the lines of those already circulated for Judaism. These will be circulated in time for members to consider before the next meeting. Members of the different faith traditions will be consulted.

Action: Rachel Bowerman and Working Party

Members will not make a decision yet about the format of the AS. They will wait to see how this approach works in practice.

Questions

In response to a question as to whether Harrow could continue with the previous syllabus, Rachel Bowerman explained that the new framework must be recognised. The RE Council is an influential body.

In response to another question as to whether the Harrow Interfaith Council could be involved, Rachel Bowerman explained that this body does not have the same statutory obligations as SACRE and the AS Conference. Schools are very aware of the existence of the Interfaith Council and the Council is represented on SACRE.

7. Dates of Future Meetings:

- **ASC Meetings**

November 12th seems a promising date. Rachel Bowerman will check with Democratic Services and the SHAP calendar and confirm later.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

- **SACRE Meetings**

Wednesday 1st October (*apologies received in advance from Neville Ransley*)
Thursday 4th December

Proposed date for spring meeting in 2015:

5th March: this coincides with Purim so an alternative date will be found.

The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks to Rachel Bowerman for her preparation for this meeting and especially the examples provided to illustrate the requirements.

The Meeting closed at 9.00pm

Signed:

(Chair)

(Date)