

HARROW SACRE
(STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION)
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD VIA VIDEO CONFERENCING ON
28 SEPTEMBER 2021

Attendance

Group A

* Mercedes Afnan
A Ven Sumana Sramaner
A Diana Ohene
~ *Ciara O'Flaherty*
* Vijay Hirani
A David Cryer
* Varsha Dodhia
A Gill Ross
A Doreen Samuels
~ *Zafar Khalid*
A Asad Omar
~ *Mohammed Amar*
~ *Paramjit Singh-Kohli*
* Phiroza Gan-Kotwal

Religious traditions and Christian churches

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

Group B

* Mary Abbott
* Alison Stowe
A Revd James Power

Church of England

Group C

* Fatema Rahemani

Teachers' Associations

Group D

* Cllr Camilla Bath Conservative (Vice Chair)
~ *Cllr Christine Robson Labour*
* Cllr Angella Murphy-Strachan Labour

* Cllr Dr Lesline Lewinson Conservative (reserve)
Cllr Simon Brown Labour (reserve)
Cllr Sasi Suresh Labour (reserve)

Local Authority

Advisor to the SACRE

* Lesley Prior (Advisor to Harrow SACRE)

Clerk

* Vivian Wright (Clerk to SACRE)

* *denotes presence*

A denotes absence with apologies

~ *denotes absence without apologies*

1. Welcome

Alison welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies for absence

RESOLVED: To note apologies for absence from Ven Sumana Sramaner, Diana Ohene, David Cryer, Gill Ross, Doreen Samuels and James Power. Retrospective apologies received from Asad Omar.

The following members were also absent:

Group A: Ciara O’Flaherty, Zafar Khalid, Mohammed Amar and Paramjit Singh-Kohli.

Group D: Cllr Christine Robson.

No apologies had been received.

Membership:

Group A

Bob Dawson has resigned with effect from 31 August and Tahir Hashmi is no longer a member of this committee.

Alison has written to Bob to thank him for his service on the committee. He was a representative of the Free Church Federal Council: Lesley will send a recruitment link to Alison so that she can seek a replacement.

Action: Lesley and Alison

Group C

The committee also needs more representatives from teaching associations. Alison will raise this at the next subject leaders’ meeting.

Action: Alison

Quorum

The constitution states that:

A quorum shall consist of at least eight members of the whole number of the SACRE and will include at least two representatives from Group A (one Christian and one Non-Christian), and one representative each from Groups B, C, and D.

As there was no Christian representative present from Group A the meeting was not quorate.

3. Minutes of the last meeting held on 29 June 2021 *(previously circulated)*

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

4. Matters arising from the minutes

p. 2. Item 5. Matters arising from the minutes

Local and National Updates

National:

Report from Insight UK on the teaching of Hinduism: this report has been shared with teachers and mentioned in the Subject Leaders’ Newsletter.

Hinduism in Harrow schools: the Harrow syllabus includes Hinduism at each KS and teachers are aware of the importance of Hinduism in Harrow.

There is always room for improvement but Lesley felt that it is true to say that Hinduism is better provided for in Harrow than in some other authorities.

Vijay felt that Hinduism could have a higher profile in secondary schools. It is often taught as an extra-curricular subject. Lesley agreed but pointed out that SACRE's remit only extends to one secondary school in Harrow. As the others are all academies, SACRE can only work in an advisory capacity. The only secondary school where SACRE has influence is Whitmore where Hinduism is offered as an option at GCSE. Angella pointed out that where students are being instructed through extra-curricular classes, a school will often enter them for the exam even though it will not undertake the teaching.

School Library Service: Alison has contacted the School Library service. They have a number of resources for RE which they are keen to promote and share.

pp.4-5. Item 13. Any other business

Hear My Voice: Lesley knows about this project. It is a very worthwhile initiative but as it only operates in schools which have a religious affiliation, it is not within SACRE's remit but might be more suitable for the Interfaith Network. Varsha added that cohesion and inclusion are emphasized in Harrow schools.

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

5. Local and National updates

Local

- **RE Network for primary Subject Leaders:** Lesley reported that the Network is thriving and growing. The WhatsApp group is very active and the Newsletter comes out every half term. The next meeting is on 9 December 4.30-6.30 when the theme will be "Sharing Resources". If members have resources they would like to share, they should contact Lesley.
- **Agreed Syllabus:** the Agreed Syllabus is coming up for its five year review. To initiate this process, SACRE must call on the LA to convene an AS Conference. SACRE members participate in the conference but first the LA needs to approach the nominating body for each member to seek their permission for their member to serve on the AS Conference. This is usually done via the Clerk.
- **Annual report 2020:** Lesley is awaiting the Annual Report template which is coming from NASACRE. There will also be training on the new format from NASACRE next month. The new format will make it easier for NASACRE to gather data about local SACREs' activities. Lesley will have a draft report available for the next meeting.

National

- **NASACRE Virtual Training courses** (*previously circulated*): NASACRE is running a range of online training. Details have been circulated to SACRE members.
- **AGM**: the AGM will take place in May. It will be a face-to-face meeting and conference in Birmingham. Dr Richard Kueh, the lead RE inspector at Ofsted, is again one of the keynote speakers and will be updating members on developments at Ofsted.
Harrow usually sponsors a member to go to the conference and it is a good idea to nominate the member and organize travel arrangements in good time.
Phiroza asked if Dr Kueh's video clips could be shown to members. Lesley has provided these links:

Dr Richard Kueh, Her Majesty's Inspector, Subject Lead for Religious Education at Ofsted, discussed some of the key factors that can influence the quality of Religious Education in schools in these two short clips.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJmJC_RhRNk&t=7s

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiaKdZkTAMU>

A major report on RE was published by Ofsted on 12th May this year.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-review-series-religious-education/research-review-series-religious-education>

- **NASACRE briefing and log-in details** have been circulated to members.
- **Attitudes to RE**: a Christian organization has commissioned a survey on attitudes to RE. This survey shows that attitudes are quite positive. This has not always been Lesley's experience and she would like to know more about how the questions were formulated in the survey. Lesline asked how questions could be made more objective. Lesley has not seen the questions for this particular survey but is aware that questions can be framed in such a way as to give a wide perspective.
Varsha commented that there is often lack of understanding and awareness about RE even among teachers.
Mercedes commented that survey questions can often focus on differences rather than common ground.
Lesley has provided a link to the survey:
<https://www.cstg.org.uk/activities/campaigns/public-perception/>

6. Workforce Data (*data for Harrow previously circulated*)

Vivian has extrapolated the data for Harrow to circulate to members. Lesley reminded members again that SACRE has no remit for any of these schools except Whitmore where staffing levels have improved. Whitmore is unique in offering students a choice of which two religions they should study for GCSE. The LA should be proud of this and the school should be celebrated. Members might like to consider sending a letter to the Head at

Whitmore to applaud the increase in staffing and the choices available to students.

The rest of the data presents a variegated picture: in some schools staffing has increased, in others it has decreased. Members should be aware that this data is not completely secure: for instance high levels of staffing may simply mean that a number of different staff are brought in to teach odd lessons of RE. Also RE is sometimes taught within a different subject area such as philosophy or ethics.

Lesley has two questions for members to consider:

- Does SACRE want to follow up on schools outside their remit?
- Should SACRE share this data with the LA?

Alison felt that the data makes interesting reading. Phiroza asked if similar data could be collected from primary schools. Alison explained that this would be difficult because RE is usually taught by the class teacher. Each primary school has a subject leader but it is not their responsibility to teach RE throughout the school. In secondary schools RE is a separate subject which can make analysis easier although this is not always the case.

Phiroza commented on the high levels of RE teaching achieved by Whitefriars schools. Whitefriars is a new school which takes ages from 3-18. Lesley advised caution when looking at this data but it could be worth making further enquiries.

7. Collective Worship Policy

The law on Collective Worship has not changed. Alison is considering making some changes to the policy. Alison and Lesley will meet outside this meeting for further discussion.

Action: Alison and Lesley

Alison explained that there is currently much debate about whether schools should be offering Collective Worship while Covid rates remain high. Collective Worship is still a legal requirement but the law does not require whole school collective worship so schools can employ any existing grouping including bubbles. Holding Collective Worship out of doors is another solution during the summer months. Some parents are withdrawing their children from Collective Worship because they are worried about Covid. On the other hand, it is relevant to mental health and well-being which are important concerns at present and there is growing interest in mindfulness and mediation: collective worship can provide a context for these.

In response to a question from Phiroza, Lesley confirmed that Collective Worship is a mandatory requirement in schools whether or not they have a religious affiliation. Many schools are in breach of the law in this respect despite the fact that one of the core British Values promoted in schools is respect for the law.

8. Days of Religious observance 2021-22 (previously circulated)

Members have seen the updated DRO and Vivian has received some amendments. These have been incorporated and the DRO is now ready to go to Paddy O'Dwyer to be posted on the SACRE website.

9. Determinations

- **Vaughan Determination:** Vaughan is working on its determination but schools are still under pressure and Alison has not had a response to her emails or texts this term. Vivian volunteers at Vaughan and will make enquiries in the first instance.

Action: Vivian

Angella asked how long a school has to renew its determination. Lesley explained that a determination lasts for five years. After this it must be renewed or the school should be offering Collective Worship that is predominantly Christian in character. Whether or not a school wishes to renew its determination depends on the demographic of the school which may have changed over five years.

During the pandemic, schools were advised by the DfE that their determinations could still be applied even if lapsed. However, this “period of grace” is not indefinite and applications for the renewal of determinations should be made now if the schools want them to continue. SACRE is aware that schools have had a hard time but should nevertheless remind Vaughan in a conciliatory way that their time is up. Alison who is an expert on Collective Worship is in a position to offer them first class support.

The Annual Report contains a list of schools with determinations. This is important for Freedom of Information requests.

10. Priorities for the Year ahead

- **Collective Worship Policy:** *see 7 above.*
- **Reviewing the Agreed Syllabus:** *see 5 above.*

11. News from Faith Groups relating to schools

- **Subject Leaders' WhatsApp group:** the WhatsApp group is very active and members use it to support each other and share resources. It also provides a space to raise questions and issues that arise, not directly relating to RE but connected with family background and beliefs. A recent enquiry was about PE and the group was able to point the enquirer to the SACRE advice on the subject.

12. Any Other Business

None.

14. Future Dates:

Meeting online or in person: the DfE cannot advise on this. The NASACRE briefing covers some points to consider. Most SACREs are continuing to meet online. Members are mindful that the R number is rising and is likely to rise more as winter approaches.

It was agreed to hold the next meeting online.

- **Thursday 2 December**

It is important that this meeting is quorate because decisions will have to be taken to initiate a review of the Agreed Syllabus. Also

members will need to take a decision on whether to grant Vaughan a determination (assuming the application is submitted in time for the next meeting).

Vivian and Alison will draft form of words to stress the importance of attendance.

Action: Vivian and Alison

Lesley pointed out that members can appoint a substitute to represent them if they are unable to attend. After some discussion it was agreed that changing the date or time of the meeting would not guarantee better attendance. **It was therefore agreed to keep to the original date of 2 December and the usual time of 7.30pm.**

- **Tuesday 8 March 2022**

The meeting closed at 9.15pm

Signed:

(Chair)

(Date)