

Minutes of the Agreed Syllabus Conference Meeting held on 12 November 2014

Present:

Sonia Andjelkovic
Diana Cutler
Peter Davies
G Devadason
Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf
Dr Laow Panyasiri

Muhammad Parekh
Sam Phillips
Bill Walley
Conor Wileman
David Williams
Rosemary Woodward

Also in attendance: Emma Jardine

Apologies: Susan Devereux, Terry Finn, Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal, Colin Hopkins and Caroline Wood

PART ONE

1. Minutes of the Agreed Syllabus Conference held on 9 July 2014

Resolved – That the minutes of the Agreed Syllabus Conference held on 9 July 2014 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

2. Consideration of Options

The Chairman confirmed that Councillor Ben Adams had arranged a meeting for himself and Emma Jardine to meet with Trudy Pyatt, Senior Commissioning Lead for School Improvement, and Matthew Prisk, Relationship Manager, Education and Wellbeing. The intension of the meeting was to identify what support was available for the agreed syllabus review. The County Council is happy to commission Emma to support the review for five days.

The County Council has commissioning agreements with Entrust. Five days work would enable some areas to be reviewed and amended including, for example, general updates, but there would not be the time or resource to do an in-depth review exploring sixth form to early years. The assessments would need to be changed to be bought in line with the National Curriculum which was a huge task. In one area a pilot had taken place which took eighteen months to complete.

The review would have to take place without consultation with schools even though it would be helpful to give teachers the opportunity to raise issues. Councillor Ben Adams had suggested approaching local charities to fund consultants to support the review and was aware that SACRE could only do a basic review of the syllabus with the current resources.

It was suggested that as other areas had recently commissioned new syllabus there might be the opportunity to look at these, and amend them to reflect Staffordshire's needs. It was confirmed that a selection of syllabus available for consideration at the meeting. It was noted that these were protected by copyright.

It was confirmed that it would cost approximately £500 per day for a consultant to support the review. There may also however be additional costs as headteachers were used to being funded for their attendance at meetings and for taking time out of school, which SACRE could not afford.

There were three possible options: a gold, silver or bronze syllabus review and SACRE were invited to comment on the examples presented. To do nothing and stay with the bronze option would cost very little, a silver syllabus would need approximately ten days of work and cost around £5000, a gold syllabus which would include resources for teachers and would require approximately twenty days of work and cost around £10,000.

The curriculum aims within the syllabus were currently very out of date as the national curriculum now focussed on one single outcome for each year group. Teachers would find more information on the process and clearer guidance very helpful. A gold syllabus would be clear about what should be taught and would include programmes of learning with teaching resources. The Sandwell Syllabus, with a CD of resources to guarantee good teaching and assessments was provided as an example of a gold syllabus. A bronze syllabus would result in the content of the syllabus and the assessments remaining the same. The Derby and Sheffield documents provided examples of a silver syllabus which would provide updated guidance and ideas for things to teach. They did not provide a bank of resources but outlined some key questions, themes and plans for teachers to follow.

The cost of buying in a gold style syllabus was queried. It was confirmed that this would cost a significant amount of money that SACRE would need to fund. The syllabus would also need to be amended to reflect Staffordshire census figures. The County Council had no money to buy in a syllabus but did have some capital to spend on the resource to undertake the review. Emma Jardine undertook to find out how much it would be to buy in and then adapt a syllabus from elsewhere.

The lack of specialist RE teachers was referred to and Members discussed the need to support teachers with resources to enable them to teach RE appropriately and involve them in the review to encourage them to buy into and deliver the syllabus. The gold example of a syllabus was the preferred option.

The Shopshire E-Learning syllabus was referred to and it was suggested that an online syllabus could be helpful as it could be updated as and when required.

It was commented that anything less than the Gold standard syllabus would only be a short term fix and would in the long term be a waste of money. It was suggested that SACRE approach local County Councillors who each have £10,000 to give to community groups, asking them for a contribution towards work to revise the syllabus.

It was highlighted that if SACRE did decide that a gold syllabus was the way forward then decisions would have to be made about what religions schools should look at, as the syllabus would need to prescribe what would be taught and when.

The number of schools who in the future would use the syllabus needed to be considered as academies and free schools did not have to use it but an online e-learning resource would enable the syllabus to be password protected and only available if paid for. Catholic and Church of England dioceses had their own syllabuses which approximately one third of schools in Staffordshire used. It was currently challenging to find syllabus and resources online.

It was suggested that further work on the syllabus could not wait until the next SACRE meeting in February and therefore a working group of the Committee should be formed to meet before Christmas to take this work forward. Diana Cutler, Dr Laow, Sam Phillips, Rosemary Woodward, Bill Walley put themselves forward to be part of this working group.

RESOLVED: That a working group would be convened to be consider the next steps in taking forward work to revise the syllabus.

Chairman

Documents referred to in these minutes as Schedules are not appended, but will be attached to the signed copy of the Minutes of the meeting. Copies, or specific information contained in them, may be available on request.