

MINUTES

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education Meeting - 6 February 2019

Present: **Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf**

Linda Goodwin, Julie Thompson (Co-Optee), Diana Cutler, Sam Kirwan, Sam Phillips, Ian Lawson, Mark Sutton, Syed Hussain, Judy Wyman, Gabi Oldfield, Bartlett and Miles

Apologies for absence: Mohamed Parekh, Lauren Nicholson Ward, Vickie Longson and Bob Spencer

Also in attendance – Mary Gale, Mandy Pattinson

PART ONE

15. Welcome to New Members

The Chairman welcomed Shaun Miles, representing NAHT and Lydia Bartlett representing the Salvation Army.

16. Declaration of Any Other Business

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

17. Minutes of the SACRE Meeting held on 7 November 2018

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the SACRE meeting held on 7 November 2018 be approved and signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

18. An Update on Key Issues

SACRE considered the report which covered the main issues affecting Religious Education (RE) since the last meeting. Further to the report, the following information was provided:

Continuing Professional Development – Mary Gale Informed Members that she had contacted 11 schools who had all taken up the opportunity to attend the RE networking events. There had been concern that some of the subject leaders had not appeared to know that there was a revised statutory locally agreed RE syllabus.

It was explained that the networking group was promoted through the school e-bags and through the school governor briefings. A Member asked a question on the usage of the e-bag and if there was a way of monitoring how often and who opened the information. In response, SACRE was informed that the e-bag was sent to Headteachers and the Main Office in Schools and it could then be passed to all teachers within the school. However, it was not known how many schools disseminated the information. The

method of accessing the e-bag had now changed. New access instructions had been sent out to all users and this could be an opportunity to remind schools to circulate the information to relevant subject leads/teachers.

There would also be a survey in the Spring e-bag for Local Authority schools and one of the first questions on the survey would be to ask if teachers are aware that there was an agreed RE syllabus.

The Chairman informed SACRE that Mary Gale had been involved in writing the Entrust Guidance on the Local Agreed Syllabus. She had also been asked to write termly National Governor Information updates for school governors, which included an update on RE matters. The first of these updates had been provided in January 2019. Members congratulated her on this.

NATRE Strictly RE Conference – There would be a further report presented to the next meeting on this item.

Entrust – Advisor support – The Chairman informed Members that Mary Gale had been commissioned through Entrust to support SACRE for a further 12 months until the end of financial year 2020. Members warmly welcomed this news.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report be noted.
- b) That Mary Gale be congratulated for writing the termly National Governor Information updates for school governors, which include an update on RE matters.

19. NASACRE Update

The Chairman informed the group that the next NASACRE Annual meeting was scheduled for the 22 May 2019 in Manchester. The two main speakers would be Professor Julian Stone from York St Johns University, and Peter Bull, a Head of RE in Liverpool. If a member wished to attend the event they were asked to contact Mary or the Chairman.

Members felt that this was an opportunity to show what the local SACRE was doing, particularly the Westhill/NASACRE Legacy project. Sam Phillips agreed to help with this promotion.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

20. Applications for variation of practice

There were none on this occasion.

21. Update on the Westhill/NASACRE legacy project - Explore - Engage - Reflect

SACRE were reminder that at the last meeting, the success of the project had been reported. At that time Members suggested that any surplus budget should be used to extend the project and for it to be offered to more schools. As a result of this, Mary Gale had contacted the schools who had not already accessed the project and with the support of the MEAS team and Youth Net, a further six schools had expressed an interest. Academies were able to take part but maintained schools would be prioritised.

A Member asked where the events were held as it was felt that some schools were not able to travel any distance due to cost. It was explained that legacy project events were peripatetic and normally held in school settings, to minimise costs.

The Chairman expressed particular interest in the diversity of the project and how people learnt to embrace difference.

Julie Thompson asked if SACRE observers were able to attend one of the legacy project events. It was confirmed that they could. Julie was invited to attend St. Luke's, Cannock on 27 March at 9.30am

In previous years some projects had been funded through the SACRE budget. However, last year SACRE were not able to carry forward any budget surplus and unspent funding had been clawed back by the local authority. This had been a different practice to previous years. Attempts had been made to clarify exact budget figures, but these had not been forthcoming. As a result, a budget update was not available at the meeting. There was concern that by not using the grant in previous years, future grants could be lower.

Councillor Sutton asked to have sight of the email trail and agreed to look at the circumstances around the budget clawback.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report be noted.
- b) That Mary Gale provide Councillor Sutton with details of the budget clawback.

22. An analysis of Examination results 2018

SACRE received a statistical analysis of the standards achieved in GCSE and GCE Advanced (A) Level Religious Studies (RS) by pupils examined in the summer of 2018. In accordance with the SACRE remit, the analysis of GCSE and A level results only took account of local authority maintained schools. Members were informed that there had been changes to the GCSE regulations regarding assessment with the majority of pupils who undertook their GCSE studies being assessed on a scale of 1-9 not A* to C or A* to G grades. This had implications for the analysis as comparisons to previous years could not be based on like for like. One school (Codsall High School) had been measured on the previous A* to G grades as the pupils had been entered for examination in Year 10, but the results are reported when they are in year 11.

Overall, GCSE results for 2018 found that the national results of state funded schools in 2018 for Grade 9-5 are at 59.7% (71.2% in 2017 A*-C) compared to Staffordshire's 53.5% (68.7% in 2017 A*-C). The national results of state funded schools in 2018 for

Grade 9-4 are at 71% (71.2% in 2017 A*-C) compared to Staffordshire's 2018 Grade 9-4 are at 66.7% (68.7% in 2017 A*-C).

Staffordshire state funded school results were therefore 6.2% lower than the National when comparing grades 9-5. Staffordshire state funded school results were 4.3% lower than the National when comparing grades 9-4. It was difficult to make a direct comparison to 2017 results.

Results for grades 9-1 Nationally were 98.3% and Staffordshire were 98.4% which was an improvement on the 2017 result of 77.1%.

A close examination of the results table revealed that there were several schools achieving results well above the national average. Of the 13 schools who entered students in for GCSE and comparing to the National results 2018 Grade 9-5 at 59.7%, six schools were above the National, one broadly in line and six below.

Overall, there had been a dip in standards this year which could be attributed to the new grading and the raising of the challenge within the GCSE syllabus.

In respect of A Level results, Staffordshire's 2018 results (43.5%) were lower than national but an improvement on the 2017 results of 36.6%. Results for all pupils show that although pupils in Staffordshire achieved below the national average at grades A*-B, they performed very well across the full spectrum of grades A*-E.

SACRE noted that two additional schools offered their pupils the opportunity to study for an A level qualification in Religious Studies in 2018 compared to 2017: Great Wyrley and Netherstowe High.

SACRE requested that letters of congratulation be sent to those schools whose pupils had achieved commendably above the national average results for those achieving A*-C in GCSE RE. They also agreed that letters should also be sent to those high achieving schools at A level.

A question was asked regarding the support offered to schools who do not appear to perform well. It was felt that these schools could be targeted with information on the RE network meetings which would offer support. Again, SACRE was reminded that the priority was maintained schools and not academies. A question was asked whether an academy could opt to change back to a maintained school. SACRE were advised that this was almost impossible to do, only one instance nationally being known.

RESOLVED:

- a) The report be received; and
- b) Letters of congratulations be sent to the schools whose pupils achieved results above the national average in GCSE and A Level Religious Studies.

23. Government's response to the REC Commission on Religious Education's Report - Region and World Views: The Way Forward and the REC response to the Government - December 2018

SACRE were reminded that the Commission on Religious Education had published its final report in September 2018 which had been considered by this group at its meeting in November 2018. The Commission had called for an overhaul of the subject to better reflect the diversity of modern society and to provide it with a different organisational structure.

The Secretary of State (SoS) for Education, had responded to the report and a copy of this response was attached to the papers. Along with this was the reaction from the Religious Education Council's (REC) to the SoS's response. The Commission's report had been received and accepted by the REC and was being used as a lever to facilitate discussions with the Government to changes in how RE is managed. It had been hoped that the Government would respond in a positive way. However, the REC stated that the SoS response was disappointing; the SoS response had said that now was not the time to begin reforms needing new legislation.

Members discussed the role of SACRE and how they worked differently in different areas. In some communities faith was very prominent but there were also areas where people with no faith was increasing.

Mary Gale informed SACRE that the Association of Religious Education Inspectors, Advisors and Consultants (AREIAC) would be responding soon and that their response would be on the agenda for the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

24. The SACRE Budget 2018-19 and new budget 2019-20

Unfortunately, the SACRE budget breakdown for the financial year 2018-19 was unavailable. Previously, Members had been informed that £4,500 had been left in the budget and it had been agreed to use this to extend the Westhill/NASACRE legacy project – Explore-Engage-Reflect. There was also some additional expenditure due on photocopying and refreshments.

Members were informed that as soon as an update was received it would be sent to all Members for information.

RESOLVED – That the current budget position be noted and that a further update be sent to all Members as soon as practical.

25. Any Other Business

The Chairman took the opportunity to explain that the Membership of SACRE was split into four Committees. Committee A comprised of Faith and World View organisations, Committee B comprised Church of England, Committee C Teacher associations and Committee D Local Authority. Decisions were normally made by consensus, but if a

vote was necessary, each Committee was allowed one vote each, the Chairman had a casting vote.

The two new Members were asked to sign a code of conduct which all members had been asked to subscribe to. It was felt that it may be appropriate for all members to re-sign at the next meeting.

Julie Thompson (Representing the Baha'i community) asked if she could become a full member and not just an observer. The Chairman explained that this would involve a minor change in the constitution, and he would explore this further.

RESOLVED:

- a) That all SACRE members sign the code of conduct at the next meeting.
- b) That the possibility of the constitution being amended to include a Baha'i representative be investigated and reported back to the next meeting.

26. Date of next meeting

RESOLVED – That the next SACRE meeting be held on Wednesday 19 June 2019, at 2.00 pm in the White Room, County Buildings, Stafford.

**Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf
Chairman**