

MINUTES

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education Meeting - 8 November 2017

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

Sam Kirwan, Diana Cutler, Dr Laow Panyasiri, Mohamed Parekh, Ian Lawson, Lauren Nicholson Ward, Mark Cooper and Bernard Peters

Apologies for absence: Linda Goodwin, Andrea Hopkins, Julie Thompson, Tajinder Singh, Sam Phillips, Mark Sutton and Syed Hussain

Also in attendance - Emma Jardine-Phillips and Julie Roberts

PART ONE

48. Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman

A nomination had been received for Rev Preb Michael Metcalf to be elected as Chairman. There were no nominations for Vice-Chairman, and it was suggested that this should be deferred to the next meeting of SACRE. No further nominations for Chairman were received and it was:

RESOLVED – That:

- a) Rev Preb Michael Metcalf be elected as Chairman for the ensuing year; and
- b) The election of Vice-Chairman be deferred until the next meeting.

49. Welcome to New Members

The Chairman welcomed Bernard Peters, County Councillor representative and Judy Wyman, ASCL representative, to the SACRE.

50. Minutes of the SACRE Meeting held on 21 June 2017

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the SACRE meeting held on 21 June 2017 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

51. Update on Key Issues

The SACRE received an update on key issues that had occurred since their last meeting, including:

- a) There would be a delay in reporting on the results of the Summer 2017 GCSE and A Level examinations in Religious Studies. The Insight, Planning and Performance Team at the County Council were in the process of obtaining the data. The performance of Staffordshire's maintained schools would be reported at the Spring term meeting.
- b) Inter Faith Week would take place from Sunday 12 to Sunday 19 November. It had three clear aims:
 - To strengthen good inter faith relations at all levels;

- To increase awareness of the different and distinct faith communities in the UK, in particular celebrating and building on the contribution which their members make to their neighbourhoods and to wider society; and
- To increase understanding between people of religious and non-religious beliefs.

The Inter Faith Week Toolkit had ideas for marking the week, complete with helpful checklists for organisers. The Inter Faith Network had also published a short, illustrated report on Inter Faith Week 2016: Stories from 2016, Inspiration for 2017. It contained examples of activities organised by schools last year, and would inspire schools to take part this year. Stafford and District Friends of Faith were holding a peace event on Monday 20 November, and SACRE members were invited to attend.

- c) Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) takes place on 27 January each year, and is a day for everyone to remember the millions of people affected by the Holocaust, Nazi Persecution, and the subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. On HMD the survivors of these regimes are honoured and people are challenged to work to end discrimination and prejudice, and pledge to help create a safer, better future. Involvement in the event ranged from civic events, displays, exhibitions, talks and activities. The theme for 2018 is “The Power of Words” and SACRE were given a link to the website where new resources linked to this theme were available.
- d) New from the BBC for four to seven year olds, “Religions of the World” was a series of ten animated “Octonaut-Style” stories from six different world religions. The BBC commissioned the programmes, and RE Today’s Lat Blaylock worked as their adviser for this short series. An animated A to Z Guide for pupils aged 11-14 that explored and introduced a variety of religious topics had also been created. Alongside each film there was more information about the content and suggestions of how it could be used in the classroom.

RESOLVED – That the update on key issues be noted.

52. Explore - Engage - Reflect

At their last meeting members were informed that Staffordshire SACRE had been awarded £2,725 by Westhill/NASACRE to complete the proposed Explore-Engage-Reflect project, which would take place on 22 November 2017. It was now nearing capacity with 89 delegates from 18 schools attending. Schools included primary, middle and secondary phase settings.

The rationale behind the project was that it was intended to embed the new Staffordshire Agreed Syllabus in RE. The Syllabus affirmed that the role of RE was to foster in each pupil a growing level of religious literacy, through three complementary aims, encapsulated as Exploring, Engaging and Reflecting. The first two of these corresponded to the standard themes of “learning about” and “learning from” religion. The third aim was innovatory and radical, it called for pupils to “acquire a growing range of the social, spiritual and emotional skills and dispositions appropriate to living well in a religiously plural and open society, by reflecting on the reality of religious diversity and on the issues raised by living in a diverse world”. SACRE was seeking to support and empower schools to fulfil the requirements of the third aim through the creation of a face to faith experience entitled “Explore – Engage – Reflect.” It would have a Christian and

Muslim focus and would be led by adherents to the faiths who were skilled in the field of education. It would take the form of a morning encounter with Christianity and an afternoon encounter with Islam (or vice-versa). It would be designed to be fully interactive with pupils exploring artefacts, images and text; engaging with key questions relevant to the faiths in question; and reflecting on what it means to live your faith within England through a real opportunity for dialogue. The Youth Net would be commissioned to deliver the Christian based content. This was a Stafford based Christian charity whose leader, Sam Phillips, was a member of SACRE. Waheeda Qureshi, a member of the Linguistic and Cultural Mediator team at Entrust, and Mohammed Fahim (former team member and now independent) would be commissioned to deliver the Muslim content. Emma Jardine-Phillips, Education Consultant, County RE Adviser and Advanced Skills Teacher in RE would be commissioned to oversee the project and report developments to NASACRE/Westhill.

In considering this matter there was wider debate around how the work of SACRE was promoted and awareness raised of its existence. The response was that this was not done in an active and effective way, although schools should be aware of it, as it was education and schools focused. Its role was to fulfil statutory functions under the auspices of the County Council. However it was acknowledged that when schools transferred over to academy status they would not have to follow the Agreed Syllabus, and there was no right of access or means of holding them to account. It was agreed that it would be helpful to reinvigorate the website and include pictures and pen portraits of members.

RESOLVED – That the progress on the Explore – Engage – Reflect project be noted.

53. NASACRE Update

- a) SACRE noted that the following resolution would be taken to the NASACRE AGM in May 2018:

“That the Annual Subscription to NASACRE should be raised from £95 per year to £105 per year with immediate effect (ie for the academic year 2018-19 and onwards).”

This was a modest increase, given that it was the first increase for perhaps ten years or more. NASACRE’s Executive Committee believed that the increase was justified because of increases in the costs of its core activities over the years, including administrative support, travel and subsistence, consultancy fees, and membership of/partnership with other (related) bodies, including the cost of representing NASACRE on these bodies and/or participating in their programmes. The true cost would be great deal higher were NASACRE not sustained by the voluntary contribution of time, energy and expertise generously given by its officers and committee members. Procedurally, the mechanisms for dealing with this motion would be circulated with the communications and papers for the AGM itself. However, SACREs may well discuss and vote on the resolution in advance of the AGM. The Chairman asked if SACRE were prepared to vote on this issue. Following an assurance that the increase would not mean that any SACRE would be unable to pay, members agreed to vote. The outcome of the vote was as follows:

- Committee A – In Favour
- Committee B – In Favour
- Committee C – In Favour
- Committee D – In Favour

This represented a unanimous vote in favour of the increase to the Annual Subscription Fee to NASACRE.

- b) The Commission on Religious Education had launched a consultation on the Interim Report, “Religious Education For All”, which would be open until 9.00 am on 4 December. It was important that the Commission heard from as wide a range of people and organisations as possible. People were encouraged to consider responding either in a personal capacity or on behalf of an organisation, or both. Members were provided with links to the call for evidence, and a link for questions about this or the Commission on Religious Education. In order to debate the content, and hopefully influence the final report, NASACRE were once again holding a joint conference with AREIAC at the Ibis Hotel, Birmingham on 24 November 2017. The conference would seek answers to many vital questions regarding the Interim Report, including what its recommendations might mean for pupils, teachers, advisers and SACREs. The Chairman invited members to split into two groups to discuss the proposed draft text for the proposed national entitlement for RE contained within the Executive Summary of the Interim Report.
- c) The Religious Education Council and the National Association of Teachers of RE had created a new State of the Nation report on RE provision within secondary schools in England. The report included data from the School Workforce Census and GCSE figures, as well as survey responses from 790 secondary schools. This project was running parallel to, but independent of, the continuing work of the Commission on Religious Education. However, any project findings would enrich the context of the Commission’s work and would feed into its own recommendations aimed at sustaining or improving the secondary school RE offer. The research found that:
- 25% of all schools surveyed said a weekly RE lesson to ensure pupils understand different religions and beliefs is not available. In academies and free schools, where RE is determined as part of the funding agreement, this figure rose to 34% for 11 to 13 year olds, and 44% for 14 to 16 year olds. 4% of schools with a religious character do not offer a weekly lesson.
 - RE also received the lowest level of teaching time in academies and free schools. A majority (56%) dedicated less than 3% of their timetables (around 40 minutes) to RE; this low level of RE was only found in a third of schools where a locally agreed syllabus applied and 10% of schools with a religious character.
 - Despite Religious Studies GCSE remaining a popular choice among students, it was still allocated less than the recommended level of teaching time of two hours per week in many schools; 43% of pupils were taught the GCSE full course in under one hour a week, nearly half (48%) receive one hour and a half or less of teaching.
 - Students were more likely to have a teacher trained with the appropriate level of subject knowledge and expertise who can create a space to discuss faiths and beliefs in a school with a religious character (90%) than

in schools where RE is determined with the locally agreed syllabus (73%), or academies and free schools where RE is determined as part of their funding agreement (66%).

Both strands of work were being undertaken at a critical time for RE, in particular because of the Government's ongoing programme of educational reform and drive towards full academisation.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) A unanimous vote in favour of the increase to the Annual Subscription Fee to NASACRE be reported to the AGM; and
- b) The Update be noted.

54. SACRE Annual Report

SACREs are required to produce an annual report of their work. This report would be distributed electronically to NASACRE and headteachers of all schools in the County, and would be available to teacher associations and local faith communities via the Entrust website. It would also be taken to the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee. SACRE were requested to read and approve the report prior to general distribution.

RESOLVED – That the 2016-17 SACRE Annual Report be approved.

55. Guidance on Visits

Members of SACRE were asked to consider proposed further guidance to schools regarding visits to places of worship, or trips which include visits to places with religious significance.

Some schools had experienced a reluctance from a few parents to allow their children to take part in visits to places of worship. Reasons given had included finance, safety issues or a political agenda. The guidance aimed to support head teachers and RE subject leaders in the planning and implementation of visits, trying to pre-empt any parental concerns. Because visits to sacred spaces were an invaluable learning opportunity it was important to ensure the experience was positive for all involved. Visits to places of worship required careful planning and consideration of teaching methodology in order to maximise the learning potential and to avoid any parental concerns. Teachers should establish stable relationships with appropriate places of worship, ensuring that pre-visits were made and risk assessments carried out. Visits to sacred spaces were believed to bring the Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education to life, and underpin the role of RE in helping to prepare and equip pupils for life and citizenship in today's diverse and plural Britain. The purpose of all visits was educational, not to evangelise or proselytise so a visit should not compromise a pupil's own religious or non-religious beliefs.

Members considered a number of suggestions for preparing pupils for a visit so that they would be comfortable with any differences they saw. They also considered a Code of Conduct for any member of a belief community who supported Staffordshire Schools with their RE. This was adapted from the National Association of Teachers of RE in their guidance document "Religious Believers Visiting Schools". The guidance also

covered: the need for a clear rationale about visits; ways of preventing a problem from arising; preparation in school before the visit; helpful questions to pose during the visit; and follow-up activities afterwards. There was also a sample letter to parents, which had been adapted from guidance produced by Surrey SACRE, which set out the details of the visit and offered practical advice and reassurance.

Every school was required to have an Educational Visits Co-ordinator to comply with safeguarding demands. As Local Authorities were focused on health and safety as well as safeguarding, it was likely that as schools implemented more stringent requirements they would become more demanding about the health and safety and safeguarding expectations of the places they wished to visit. It would be useful to suggest that schools ask faith leaders whose venues they wished to visit for sight of their health and safety policies and risk assessments.

It was suggested that once the guidance had been approved SACRE may wish to share the information with Stafford Friends of Faith for dissemination, to ensure that the local places of worship hosting visits from schools have some advice to raise awareness as to how schools would need help to plan their visits, and the questions they may be asking in advance. Members commented that the guidance was a helpful and constructive document which they believed schools would welcome.

RESOLVED – That the proposed further guidance on visits to places of worship, or trips which include visits to places with religious significance, be approved.

56. Applications for Variation of Practice

There were none on this occasion.

57. SACRE Budget 2017-18

SACRE received a breakdown of the current budget for the financial year 2017-18. The total budget allocation was £12,860, plus the additional Westill/NASACRE Award of £2,725. The spend to date was £6,500 contribution towards support for SACRE, and £365 on subscription and conference fees. The remaining balance was £8,720, of which £3,012 was committed to Explore-Engage-Reflect. This left a final unspent balance of £5,708.

RESOLVED – That the current budget position be noted.

58. Date of Next Meeting

RESOLVED – That the next SACRE meeting be held on Wednesday 7 February 2018, at 2.00pm at The Kingston Centre, Stafford.

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