

MINUTES

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education Meeting - 21 June 2017

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

Mrs J Grundy, Julie Thompson (Co-Optee), Sonia Andjelkovic, Ian Lawson, Lauren Nicholson Ward, Mark Cooper, Mark Sutton and Syed Hussain

Apologies for absence: Linda Goodwin, Andrea Hopkins, Paul Moseley, Sam Kirwan, Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal, Mohamed Parekh, Sam Phillips, Claire Shaw and Bernard Peters

Also in attendance – Emma Jardine-Phillips, Julie Roberts and Deborah Barnes

PART ONE

35. Welcome to New Members

The Chairman welcomed Mark Cooper, Church of England representative, Syed Hussain, County Councillor representative and Mark Sutton, County Councillor representative, to the SACRE.

36. Minutes of the SACRE meeting held on 8 February 2017

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the SACRE meeting held on 8 February 2017 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

37. Update on Key Issues

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

- a) Members considered a statement from the co-chairs of the Inter Faith Network (IFN) for the UK and Moderators of the IFN Faith Communities Forum in response to the Manchester Arena attack. The IFN had also provided information and guidance for the wider community, entitled “Looking After One Another: the Safety and Security of our Faith Communities.” This provided short guidelines for faith community organisations working together to respond to inter-community tensions and to attacks, or the threat of attacks, on places of worship or other faith community property. Members discussed the impact which this and subsequent attacks had had on the children in their schools and their parents, and shared their experiences of dealing with this. In relation to anxiety or resistance on the part of parents around visits it was suggested that as an alternative schools could bring in members of The Linguistic and Cultural Mediator Team from Entrust to deliver teaching on other faiths.
- b) On 22 February the Jo Cox Foundation launched “The Great Get Together” to build better community cohesion. The events took place over the weekend of 17-18 June. The Chairman had attended an event held in Stafford.
- c) In March, the European Court of Justice advised the Belgian government that companies could have a policy that forbade the wearing of religious symbols in

the work place. The Court recognised that companies had a right to project a neutral image and that they were within their rights to have policies which upheld that right. This was not deemed to be discriminatory. The advice can be used by judges in EU member states to inform decisions that they make where it has been alleged that discrimination has taken place, direct or indirect. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has stated: "Following a ruling from the Court of Justice of the European Union, employers can ban staff from wearing visible religious symbols, but must have a relevant policy in place before doing so".

The Department for Education, based on case law here, was quite clear that schools in England could determine their own dress codes and that they should do this in consultation with parents. It is not expected that this will change. What may be affected is the right of staff to wear religious dress in school, where a school wish to project a "neutral" image. SACREs may be asked for advice on this matter, especially where there are no interfaith groups that might be consulted. SACREs are advised to look closely at the Equality and Human Rights Commission website for the latest advice from them.

It was not clear what would happen to such a ruling when the UK leaves the EU in just under two years. The European Court of Justice is an EU institution, as opposed to the European Court of Human Rights which is a Council of Europe institution, and there will be some adjustment made in terms of its impact on UK law when the UK leaves the EU.

RESOLVED – That the update on key issues be noted.

38. Tell MAMA Update

At their meeting in February SACRE had agreed to pursue a more detailed response from the Cabinet Member for Communities on the measures which were in place to deal with religiously motivated hate crimes and other religiously motivated incidents in Staffordshire, which had now been received.

SACRE received a presentation from Deborah Barnes from Entrust, who is head of the Special Educational Needs and Inclusion Team on the procedures which are followed when schools report discriminatory incidents. The Team works with both maintained and academy schools. Schools were no longer required to provide information about discriminatory incidents as they occur, but were now sent an annual survey to ask them for basic details which Entrust collate and analyse. The first survey took place between July and October last year, and the next survey was due to go out shortly.

Often issues are resolved by the school, however schools are encouraged to contact the Minority Ethnic Achievement Service (MEAS) if they require additional support. This team will often suggest that schools look at their PHSE provision or RE curriculum. There was also a curriculum resource available entitled "Difference and Diversity", a version of this had been developed for KS1-3 and Special Schools. Another option was for members of the Linguistic and Cultural Mediator Team to go into school to provide proactive support. There were between 10 -12 requests for support last term, from a wide range of schools. When the second survey is completed the Team will be better able to make comparisons on the number and type of incidents and Ms Barnes informed SACRE that she would be happy to report back on this.

Members were shown a video which has been put together by the Team involving Staffordshire children entitled “Your Voice, Your Values”, which had been paid for out of Home Office Prevent funding.

RESOLVED – That the measures which were in place to deal with religiously motivated hate crimes and other religiously motivated incidents in Staffordshire be noted.

39. Westhill/NASACRE Award

Westhill/NASACRE Awards encourage schools to engage with diversity through projects which will generate compelling learning experiences in RE for young people, relevant to today’s context. Each year grants of up to £4,000 have been awarded to support suitable projects submitted by schools through their SACREs. The awards develop creative engagement among young people and build up a bank of ideas and good practice for others to use in their own ventures, to the benefit of their locality and society more generally. Members were informed that SACRE had applied for an award early in 2017 for a project entitled “Explore, Engage, Reflect”. This would involve an interfaith experience with a Christian and Muslim focus. Members noted the project outline and that Staffordshire SACRE has been awarded £2,725 to complete this. However, as this was not the full amount applied for consideration would need to be given as to how the project could be delivered with less funding.

RESOLVED – That the successful bid for a Westhill/NASACRE Award be noted.

40. Religions are not Monoliths

SACRE received feedback from Emma Jardine-Phillips, County RE Adviser and Advanced Skills Teacher, on the joint AREIAC/NASACRE conference which had been held in Birmingham on 6th March. Members also received summaries of the presentations by the two keynote speakers. Dr. Abdullah Trevathan discussed “Islam Beyond the Monolith: A more Nuanced Understanding”, and Revd Robert Reiss spoke about “Liberal Christianity: Exploring Credible Belief”.

In the context of the current educational climate (British Values and Prevent) what was discussed at the conference was enlightening. Emma informed members that it had encouraged her to reflect on the best approaches to take in the classroom to ensure that religion is more about personal/human experience and not just about ritual buildings, books etc.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

41. NASACRE Update

The NASACRE Conference and AGM 2017 had taken place in York on 16 May. The theme for the conference had been “Preparing for life in Britain today: the contribution of RE”, which had picked up on two areas of national interest that impacts on SACREs. Firstly, the increasingly vocal call to raise our population’s religious literacy and secondly the currently convened Commission for RE and its call for evidence to inform future RE policy recommendations. There were two keynote speakers, Dr. Joyce Miller who is one of the Commissioners as well as a former RE teacher, academic and former Chair

of the RE Council, and Professor Aaqil Ahmed, who has worked as Head of Religion and Ethics at both Channel 4 and the BBC. Full details of the conference would be available in the NASACRE briefing which would be circulated shortly.

RESOLVED – That the oral update by the Chairman be noted.

42. NASACRE and the Interfaith Network

Members were informed that part of the remit for the Inter Faith Network (IFN) UK was to promote a better understanding of RE and its website publications, under the heading of Education, included a page on RE across the UK, what was expected of different sorts of schools and a page on understanding SACREs. In this way the IFN was attempting to promote better religious literacy. Resources for schools are freely available.

The Chairman had produced some reflections for NASACRE members on the IFN, NASACRE and what could be learned from their respective histories. More especially he looked to the future with a real sense of optimism at what NASACRE, SACREs and the IFN could achieve in partnership. It was agreed that it was important to include young people as much as possible in the work of SACREs and NASACRE.

RESOLVED – That the report and reflections of the Chairman be noted.

43. Applications for Variation of Practice

There were none on this occasion.

44. SACRE Annual Report

Members were reminded that the SACRE Annual Report was completed annually to capture the work of SACRE over the previous 12 months. The report would be presented to the County Council and also sent to NASACRE. Writing of the report would commence at the end of July and it would be reported back to the next meeting in November. Members were asked to contact Emma if they had anything they wished to be included in the report.

RESOLVED – That members forward any ideas for items for inclusion in the Annual Report to Emma Jardine-Phillips.

45. SACRE Budget 2017-18

A budget had been made available to support the work of SACRE during the financial year 2017-18, as approved by the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities. Whilst invoices were being paid it had been challenging to determine an up to date record of the budget, which was held by Staffordshire County Council. The Chairman pointed out that a contribution was made from the budget to cover Emma's work in support of SACRE.

[Note by Clerk: The budget has now been confirmed as £12,860 for the current financial year.]

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

46. AOB

Baha’i Bicentennial Celebration

Julie Thompson, the Baha’i co-opted representative, informed SACRE that this year was a special year for B’aha’is as they are celebrating the bicentennial of the birth of Baha’u’llah, the Founder of the Baha’i Faith. Julie extended a warm invitation to everyone to attend a celebration being held at Walton Village Hall on 28 October, which will include food, dancing and a film about the Baha’i faith. Julie also indicated that she would be happy to go into schools to talk about the Baha’i faith.

RE Today

SACRE were informed that there was some suggestion that there was going to be a delay in issuing the “Understanding Islam” pack, possibly until 2019. It was reiterated that the “Understanding Christianity” pack was not a syllabus, but was a resource to use to support the formal syllabus.

47. Date of next meeting

RESOLVED – That the next SACRE meeting be held on Wednesday 8 November 2017, at 2.00 pm at The Kingston Centre, Stafford.

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