

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education
6th November 2019
Report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities

Discussion on the report from the Commission on Religious Education- Religion and World Views: The Way Forward – A National Plan for RE.

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present the SACRE members with an opportunity to further reflect on the report from the Commission on Religious Education- Religion and World Views: The Way Forward - A National Plan for RE

2 Summary

- 2.1 The Commission on RE published its final report on Sunday 9th September 2018 after a lengthy consultation period. The Commission calls for an overhaul of the subject to include teaching about non-religious beliefs to better reflect the diversity of modern society. It suggests a National Plan for RE and a change to the name and role of SACRES

3 Recommendation

- 3.1 That members of SACRE use this opportunity to further reflect on the report and the recommendations 1-11 and consider the implications for the future of SACRE highlighted in Recommendation 8. Also to re-familiarise themselves with the responses from national bodies.

4 Background

- 4.1 The Commission on RE published its final report on Sunday 9th September 2018 after a lengthy consultation period.

5 Equal Opportunities

- 5.1 This report has been prepared in accordance with the County Council's policies on equal opportunities.

6 Financial implications

- 6.1 There are no immediate financial implications
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Commission on Religious Education-Religion and World Views: The Way Forward – A National Plan for RE 2018

Preamble

THE NATIONAL ENTITLEMENT TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND WORLDVIEWS

All pupils are entitled to be taught Religion and Worldviews in every year up to and including year 11. Post-16 students, including those in Further Education should have the opportunity to study Religion and Worldviews during their post-16 course of study.

Schools must publish a detailed statement about how they meet the National Entitlement and ensure that every pupil has access to it through the curriculum, lessons and wider experiences they provide.

Pupils must be taught about matters of central importance

1. to the worldviews studied, how these can form coherent accounts for adherents, and how these matters are interpreted in different times, cultures and places
2. about key concepts including 'religion', 'secularity', 'spirituality' and 'worldview', and that worldviews are complex, diverse and plural
3. the ways in which patterns of belief, expression and belonging may change across and within worldviews, locally, nationally and globally, both historically and in contemporary times
4. the ways in which worldviews develop in interaction with each other, have some shared beliefs and practices as well as differences, and that people may draw upon more than one tradition
5. the role of religious and non-religious ritual and practices, foundational texts, and of the arts, in both the formation and communication of experience, beliefs, values, identities and commitments
6. how worldviews may offer responses to fundamental questions of meaning and purpose raised by human experience, and the different roles that worldviews play in providing people with ways of making sense of their lives the different roles played by worldviews
7. in the lives of individuals and societies, including their influence on moral behaviour and social norms
8. how worldviews have power and influence in societies and cultures, appealing to various sources of authority, including foundational texts
9. the different ways in which religion and worldviews can be understood, interpreted and studied, including through a wide range of academic disciplines and through direct encounter and discussion with individuals and communities who hold these worldviews.

Programmes of study must

Reflect the complex, diverse and plural nature of worldviews.

They may draw from a range of religious, philosophical, spiritual and other approaches to life including

different traditions within Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism, non-religious worldviews and concepts including Humanism, secularism, atheism and agnosticism, and other relevant worldviews within and beyond the traditions listed above, including worldviews of local significance where appropriate.

Teaching must promote

openness, respect for others, objectivity, scholarly accuracy and critical enquiry.

Pupils are therefore entitled to be taught by teachers who:

- a. have secure subject knowledge
- b. are capable of addressing misconceptions and misunderstandings and handling controversial issues
- c. demonstrate a critical understanding of developments in the study of religion and worldviews
- d. promote the value of scholarship.

In order for all pupils to have equal access to high quality education in Religion and Worldviews, the subject must be given adequate time and resources commensurate with the place of Religion and Worldviews as a core component of the curriculum.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS**RECOMMENDATION 1**

The name of the subject should be changed to Religion and Worldviews. This should be reflected in all subsequent legislation and guidance.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The National Entitlement to the study of Religion and Worldviews should become statutory for all publicly funded schools.

- a. For community, foundation and voluntary controlled a. schools, the requirement for Religion and Worldviews to be provided in accordance with the National Entitlement will replace the requirement in the Education Act 1996 (Section 375) to follow their locally agreed syllabus.
- b. For academies, all funding agreements should be amended to state that all academies must provide Religion and Worldviews in accordance with the National Entitlement.
- c. For voluntary aided schools of a religious character, a requirement should be introduced to provide Religion and Worldviews in accordance with the National Entitlement as well as the requirements of their Trust Deed

RECOMMENDATION 3

- a. Non-statutory programmes of study for each of Key a. Stages 1–4 should be developed at a national level, at a similar level of detail as those for History and Geography in the National Curriculum. These should be ratified by the DfE.
- b. Programmes of study should be developed by a national body of a maximum of nine professionals, including serving teachers. This body could choose to take advice from other organisations as relevant.
- c. The core purpose of the national body should be to develop and revise the programmes of study. It will also make recommendations to the government and advise the profession on issues relating to Religion and Worldviews and the resources and support needed to deliver high quality Religion and Worldviews for all pupils.

d. The national body should be appointed by the DfE on the basis of recommendations from the Religious Education Council of England and Wales, following an open application process.

e. Members of the national body should be appointed on the basis of commitment to the approach taken to Religion and Worldviews in the National Entitlement and proven expertise in some or all of the following:

- i. specialist knowledge of Religion and Worldviews with both research and classroom experience
- ii. curriculum development, within or beyond Religion and Worldviews
- iii. initial teacher education or continuing professional development of teachers
- iv. current or recent classroom experience in either primary or secondary phases.

f. The national body should be a standing body with a third of members changing every three years. It should be funded on a *per diem* basis by the DfE.

g. Programmes of study should be reviewed whenever the National Curriculum is reviewed, but the national body should also have the power to request the DfE for a review if they believe this is warranted.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Section 375ff of the Education Act 1996 should be amended to remove the requirement for local authorities to convene Agreed Syllabus Conferences and develop locally agreed syllabuses.

RECOMMENDATION 5

When GCSE and A-level specifications are next reviewed,

- a. this should be done in the light of the National Entitlement.
- b. The national body should also consider how the study of Religion and Worldviews may be incorporated into vocational qualifications, either as a stand-alone course or as modules within existing vocational courses.

RECOMMENDATION 6

All Initial Teacher Education (ITE) should enable teachers, at primary and where relevant at secondary level, to teach Religion and Worldviews based on the National Entitlement and with the competence to deal with sensitive issues in the classroom, and the teachers' standards should be updated to reflect this. In order to support this, the following should be implemented.

- a. There should be a minimum of 12 hours of contact time for Religion and Worldviews for all forms of primary ITE including School Direct and other school-based routes.
- b. Bursaries for ITE in Religion and Worldviews should be set at parity with other shortage subjects.
- c. Funding for Subject Knowledge Enhancement courses should be reinstated at parity with Ebacc subjects. Funding should be allocated for Subject Knowledge Enhancement for primary.
- d. Two new modules for Religion and Worldviews should be developed for primary ITE, and also made available as continuing professional development (CPD) modules: one for those with limited experience and one for those with proficiency in the subject who would like to be

subject leaders or work beyond their own classrooms. These modules should focus on the delivery of the national programmes of study.

RECOMMENDATION 7

The government should allocate funding for CPD for Religion and Worldviews to support the delivery of the new non-statutory national programmes of study. This funding should be for a period of at least five

years and be sufficient to cover:

- a. a national programme of online and face-to-face CPD, including an online platform with both massive open online courses (MOOCs) and static resources
- b. the development of curriculum materials and supplementary guidance, including resources for local studies
- c. support for local face-to-face CPD including teacher hubs and networks, with specific allocations for areas of opportunity and of a sufficient level to cover adequate professional advice and support.

All of the above funding streams should be administered and overseen by the national body as part of their remit.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Legislation regarding the establishment of ***Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education*** should be amended as follows.

- a. The name of the body should be changed to ***Local Advisory Network for Religion and Worldviews***.
- b. The Local Advisory Network for Religion and Worldviews **must facilitate** the implementation of the National Entitlement to the study of Religion and Worldviews in all schools within the local authority boundaries by providing information about sources of support available and must connect schools with local faith and belief communities and other groups that support the study of Religion and Worldviews in schools.
- c. The Local Advisory Network for Religion and Worldviews must submit an annual report to the DfE and to their local authority. The DfE and the local authority must publish the annual reports on a dedicated web page.
- d. The Local Advisory Network for Religion and Worldviews should be made up of members from five groups:
 - i. teachers of Religion and Worldviews from all phases including Higher Education
 - ii. school leaders and governors
 - iii. ITE and/or CPD providers
 - iv. school providers including the Local Authority (LA) and Multi Academy Trust (MAT), dioceses etc
 - v. religion, belief and other groups that support RE in schools or wish to do so (this might include local museums and galleries as well as religion and belief groups).

e. The Local Advisory Network for Religion and Worldviews may also:

- i. provide CPD support for schools
- ii. develop programmes of study to support the National Entitlement and supplementary curriculum materials for use within and across their local authority boundaries
- iii. provide extra resources for schools on local faith and belief communities to support local studies
- iv. provide further support for learning outside the classroom
- v. provide advice to schools and school providers on matters of religion and belief in schools
- vi. facilitate school-to-school collaboration
- vii. celebrate success including through offering prizes and competitions
- viii. promote good community relations within and outside schools.

Statutory funding must be provided for all Local Advisory Networks for Religion and Worldviews, calculated by size of local authority and of a sufficient level to enable the group to carry out its activities effectively. This should be ring-fenced within the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) of funding provided to local authorities.

RECOMMENDATION 9

- a. Ofsted or Section 48 inspectors must report on whether schools are meeting the National Entitlement.
- b. There should be a one-off, in-depth review of the impact of the National Entitlement and national programmes of study once these have been implemented. This should be conducted by Ofsted.
- c. The DfE should publish data on hours taught in all subjects (Key Stages 1–4) and GCSE entries for all subjects, including trend data, in an easily accessible format on their website.

RECOMMENDATION 10

- a. The DfE should consider the impact of school performance measures on the provision and quality of Religion and Worldviews, including the impact of excluding Religious Studies GCSE from the Ebacc and of excluding GCSE Short Courses from school performance measures.
- b. In the light of the evidence, the DfE should make amendments b. to school performance measures to ensure that the study of Religion and Worldviews is not neglected or disadvantaged.
- c. The Russell Group universities should review the list of facilitating subjects and consider whether, given their stated comments on the academic rigour and value of Religious Studies A-level, it should be included.

RECOMMENDATION 11

- a. The DfE should review the right of withdrawal from Religion and Worldviews and provide legal clarification on:

- i. whether parents have a right to withdraw selectively from parts of Religion and Worldviews
- ii. whether parents have a duty to provide an alternative curriculum for Religion and Worldviews
- iii. whether children withdrawn from Religion and Worldviews can access other curriculum subjects or special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) support during the time they would normally be studying Religion and Worldviews.

b. The DfE should work with school leaders to develop a code of good practice for managing the right of withdrawal.

c. The DfE should monitor how the right of withdrawal is being used on an annual basis and provide data on the number of full and partial withdrawals and the reasons for withdrawal where given.

Response from the REC to Secretary of State's initial reaction to the Commission on RE's proposal 2019.

The Religious Education Council (REC) is disappointed by The Secretary of State for Education's initial reaction to the Commission on RE's proposals. His response fails to grasp the urgent need for reform of Religious Education to better prepare young people for life in modern Britain, the broad consensus in support of the Commission's recommendations, and the excellent opportunity to strengthen the subject that the Report's publication represents.

The Secretary of State's response stresses the need for stability for schools and to avoid further changes to the curriculum for the time being. Yet he also acknowledges the Commission's work in highlighting the urgent issues that RE faces. RE is in a critical condition: increasing numbers of schools are failing to teach the subject. 33% of schools offered no RE at all at Key Stage 4 in 2016, up from 22% the year before. These are schools that appear to be in breach of the law: it is a real cause for concern that the Government is unwilling to act to address the significant and growing problems. The Secretary of State acknowledges RE's role in fostering "mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs". By failing to engage with the Commission's recommendations the Government misses the opportunity to strengthen schools' work in this area.

The REC shares the Secretary of State's concern not to unduly increase any teacher's workload but notes that the Commission's recommendations have widespread support from teachers: the report has been welcomed by the National Education Union (NEU), the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), and the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT).

While the REC is pleased that the Secretary of State has announced welcome funding for subject knowledge enhancement (SKE) courses, and an increase in bursary provision for people to train to become RE teachers, we note that the bursary provision does not yet match that of other shortage subjects as recommended by the Commission. Moreover, the REC is disappointed that the response has not addressed the full range of recommendations made by the Commission, including recommendations for the improvement of primary Initial Teacher Education (ITE) by guaranteeing a minimum of 12 hours of contact time in RE, and the development of a new modules to support teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) in RE throughout their careers.

The REC is disappointed that the Secretary of State has no plans to review current school accountability measures, despite the clear evidence provided by the Commission of the damage that these have done to the uptake for exam courses in Religious Studies. It is worrying that he is untroubled enough to claim that GCSEs in Religious Studies “remain popular” despite the drop in entries of over 10% last summer, alongside a decline of 23% in entries for the A-level.

It is also a concern that the Secretary of State believes that the Commission was recommending “making statutory the inclusion of ‘worldviews’”. The Commission did not ask for a legal change that would require including any new worldviews in RE. The law is already clear regarding the inclusion of both religious and non-religious worldviews in RE following a judicial review on this matter in 2015. It appears that the Secretary of State has misunderstood the Commission’s new vision for the subject, which is to offer pupils an academically rigorous study of how all human beings make sense of their lives using religious and non-religious worldviews. This lack of understanding is underlined by his incorrect description of the suggested renaming of the subject as “RE and worldviews” instead of “Religion and Worldviews” as recommended by the Commission.

While the Secretary of State’s response is disappointing, the REC notes that his reservations about legislating are limited to “this Parliament” and that he concludes that “now is not the time to begin these reforms”. The REC notes that the Commission did not recommend legislating straight away, and that the phased programme that it recommended could well mean legislating in the next Parliament. In addition, we recognise that much of what the Commission recommended does not require legislative change, and we therefore look forward to working closely with the Government, and the many organisations that have already indicated their support for the Commission’s recommendations, to ensure that the necessary policy changes and improvements are able to take place as soon as possible.

AREIAC Executive response to Religion and Worldviews: the way forward. A national plan for RE 2019.



Note

AREIAC is the organisation Association of Religious Education Inspectors Advisers and Consultants and as such its members have diverse and wide-ranging views on the nature of RE. This response reflects the professional dialogue of experts and not necessarily the views of all members.

The AREIAC Executive has considered the final report of the Commission on RE and offers the following in response.

First and foremost is our gratitude to the commissioners for the hard work and thorough research they have individually and collectively contributed to this over the last two years. We recognise both the enormity of the task and the challenge it must have been given the wide range of views and interests of RE.

The report has much to commend it. It offers a structure and process for the way forward, which if adequately supported and resourced, will build on the existing strengths of RE in schools and in many areas across the country and so promote quality RE for all.

The change in name might be significant for some, but AREIAC feels that what matters most is that we provide quality RE for all pupils in all schools across the country. Whatever we call the subject, there needs to be clarity about what it is and above all what it is not.

The recommendation for a national entitlement strikes a balance between a set of national principles for developing coherent programmes of study and local involvement. There is still work to be done on the national entitlement and AREIAC is looking forward to sharing our wealth of experience and expertise, working with partners and teachers in this critical next stage.

Our members also have extensive experience and expertise in ITE, CPD and leadership development and we fully support the well thought through recommendations in this area. We are, however, concerned the role of SACREs and their wealth of local experience should not be lost or overlooked in these exciting developments.

One concern expressed universally in our discussions relates to the right of withdrawal from RE. We recognise that this is legally complex but have some reservations about the wording of recommendation 11 iii, which weakens the principle that RE is an important entitlement of all pupils. We recognise that this is not the intention, but would encourage all involved to emphasise to government that by clarifying the situation it must strengthen rather than weaken school's provision for a coherent RE curriculum.

Our over-all view is that this report, properly resourced and collaboratively developed, provides a good way forward for RE. The crucial work remains to be done and we are confident that AREIAC members will be at the centre of this in partnership with other RE bodies, schools and teachers. The commissioners should be thanked and commended for laying the foundations for future developments.