



So you're joining your local SACRE...

A Handbook for  
**SACRE**  
Members

# So you're joining your local

## SACRE...

## Welcome!

You may have:

- Volunteered;
- been recruited;
- been elected;
- or simply been persuaded!

However you have come to join the SACRE, you are welcome. You are going to be able to serve your local community in a n important way. Whichever group you represent, your active participation can make valuable contribution to the quality of religious education and collective worship that pupils experience in schools in your local area and to the coherence of your local community.

### What is this booklet for?

This booklet is designed to be a point of reference for all SACRE members and, in particular, to be of interest and support to those who are new to the role. It:

- Will help you to understand the nature and purpose of religious education (RE) and collective worship;
- explains the work of a SACRE and the roles of its individual members;
- will help you to work within your SACRE to support and encourage local schools to ensure high standards in RE and collective worship;
- identifies support material for you;
- explains clearly what the law says about RE and collective worship.

It is also designed to help SACRES become more effective through the full participation of their members.

# The National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education

## What is a SACRE?

The acronym SACRE stands for:

- Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education.

## Why is there a SACRE?

Every Local Authority (LA) has to have a SACRE by law. In 1944, local education authorities (LEA's) were given the chance to set up a SACRE, if they so wished. In 1988, all LEAs were required to have a SACRE. It is now the Children's Services division of the LA that is responsible for making sure there is a SACRE.

## What does a SACRE do?

There is no other group anywhere else like the SACRE; it is unique. The law says that RE must be taught in all schools and a SACRE's role is to advise its local authority on what needs to be done to improve religious education (RE), and collective worship for schools in its area. This is because RE is not part of the National Curriculum; it is a local responsibility. Through the SACRE, local communities have the opportunity to influence directly what pupils learn in RE.

## Who attends the SACRE meeting?

A SACRE is set up to represent a balance of all the interests of the local community. You are likely to find elected councillors, representative of faith communities, and members of the education community, including teachers and head teachers, at a SACRE meeting. There may also be people representing teacher training in RE.

You will be joining one of four groups as a full member, depending on the community you will represent, or you may have been co-opted to serve because you represent a minority faith with a very small local presence, or have a particular interest or a specific expertise in religious education.

## How is the membership of a SACRE decided?

The structure of the SACRE is defined by law. It is made up of four groups, sometimes referred to by some SACREs as committees.

Details such as the specific numbers of members in each of the groups will usually be set out in the individual SACRE's constitution. These are usually decided by the LA, depending on local circumstances and in collaboration with the organisations and communities represented.

## The Composition of a SACRE

There are four groups of committees, as below:

A: The Christian denominations and other religious and their denominations, reflecting the principal religious traditions of the area	B: The Church of England
	C: Teacher and Head Teachers associations
	D: The Local Authority

On the rare occasions when a formal vote is taken, each of these groups or committees has equal voting rights; there is one vote per group.

### Who are the representatives?

#### Group A

This group is made up of representatives of Christian denominations (Other than the Church of England). It may include, for example, representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Churches, the Free Churches (e.g. Baptists, Methodist, United Reformed Church, Pentecostal, The Salvation Army) and The Society of Friends. It also has representatives from other faiths in the area, e.g. Buddhists, Baha'is, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Parsees, Sikhs.

The make-up of Group A will vary from SACRE to SACRE as it reflects the diversity of the various faith communities on the locality.

#### Group B

This is made up of representatives nominated by the local Church of England diocese or dioceses.

#### Group C

The Teacher members of this group are usually representatives of teacher associations. It is usual for there to be representation also from the head teacher associations. It is the local authority that decides which associations will be invited to be represented. They will usually approach the teacher unions, but local associations of RE teachers may also be asked to provide a representative. Sometimes someone from a local teacher training establishment is also invited to be a member of this group.

#### Group D

It is the local authority's responsibility to provide their own representatives for this committee. Usually these are elected members or other political nominees. The LA may wish to have all parties and viewpoints from across the political spectrum represented on the SACRE. In some LAs, a representative of school governors may also be in this group.

#### Co-options

SACREs are at liberty to co-opt other members who have a particular expertise or represent a small community. Many bring in a Humanist representative, currently technically prevented by law from becoming a full member of Group A. Co-opted members do not have voting rights.

### What are a SACRE's duties?

The SACRE's main function is to advise the local authority on matters related to the religious education, which follows the locally agreed syllabus, and on collective worship in schools.

The SACRE:

- Can require the LA to review its agreed syllabus;
- must consider applications from a head teacher that the school be released from the requirement for collective worship to be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' (this is known as a determination);
- must publish an annual report of its work.

### What is a locally agreed syllabus?

The locally agreed syllabus is the statutory document for RE in the local authority. It sets out what should be taught to pupils in all key stages and the standards expected of them at the end of each key stage. It is produced by an agreed syllabus conference (ASC).

The agreed syllabus has to be reviewed every five years. If, at some other time, a majority of committees of the SACRE asks the LA in writing to reconsider its agreed syllabus, it must convene a conference for that purpose.

### [Education Act 1996, Chapter III](#)

### What is the Agreed Syllabus Conference?

An agreed syllabus conference (ASC) is a statutory body brought together in order to produce an agreed syllabus for RE. It is a separate legal entity from a SACRE. An ASC:

- Has the same committee structure as the SACRE;
- can be made up of SACRE members but need not be so. There is no provision for co-opted members.

The Chair of the ASC can be appointed by the local authority or the LA may allow the ASC to choose its own Chair. The LA's responsibility to convene the ASC implies a duty to provide funds and support its work.

### What else can a SACRE do?

A SACRE's broad role is to support good RE and collective worship within its schools by:

- giving advice on ways of teaching agreed syllabus RE, including the choice of teaching materials;
- monitoring school's provision for RE and collective worship as well as the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) of pupils;
- advising the LA on the provision of training for teachers in RE;
- considering complaints about the provision and delivery of religious education and collective worships referred to it by the LA.

### What about community cohesion?

All schools now have to show how they promote community cohesion. SACREs are also well placed to do so. A SACRE that is working well is a model of social harmony and purposeful collaboration within a rich diversity of interests and backgrounds.

As a result of your local SACRE, you will be involved in the formal process as required by the law. It is also, however, an opportunity for you to work with others to look creatively and imaginatively at the religious education of young people in your community. Make time to dream dreams!

### How are decisions made?

Most of a SACRE's work is conducted through discussion and decisions are frequently made by consensus. In the event of a formal vote being taken by consensus. In the event of a formal vote being taken, it is each constituent group, rather than every individual, that is entitled to a vote, so the members of each group have to decide between themselves how that vote will be cast; this will be after discussion. In SACRE matters it would be sufficient for there to be a majority (i.e. three groups in agreement); in decisions of the ASC, there must be unanimous support from all four committees for a decision.

Since they are not full members of any group, co-opted members do not have the right to take part in the discussions prior to the decision about a vote.

### What are the local authority's responsibilities regarding its SACRE?

Every local authority has a duty to ensure that:

- There is a SACRE;
- all four groups are represented on it;
- there is an agreed syllabus, reviewed every five years;
- support is in place to enable SACRE to fulfil its duties, which includes providing appropriate clerking and specialist advice;
- it takes note of and responds to advice from the SACRE.

### Does SACRE's remit cover all schools in the local authority?

The answer to that question is no. SACRE's responsibility covers the majority of schools, but there are some exemptions, depending entirely on the category of school. Some schools have a specific religious character and these are either voluntary aided (VA) i.e.; voluntary schools, controlled by the local authority and aided by a religious body; the difference, from SACRE's perspective, is crucial. There are also some non-religious schools for which SACRE has no responsibility, including new academies. (See the table overleaf).

## RE and Collective Worship in School

Type of School	Religious Education	Collective Worship
Community Schools	Is taught according to the local authority's agreed syllabus and comes within SACRE's remit.	Follows the 1996 Education Act and is 'wholly, or mainly of a Broadly Christian character'.
Voluntary controlled schools	Is taught according to the local authority's agreed syllabus and comes within SACRE's remit. *2	Reflects the religious character of the school.
Voluntary aided schools	Is determined by the governors in accordance with the trust deed and reflects the religious character of the school. *1	Reflects the religious character of the school.
Foundation schools without a religious character	Is taught according to the local authority's agreed syllabus.	Follows the 1996 Education Act and is 'wholly, or mainly of a Broadly Christian character'.
Foundation schools with a religious character	Is taught according to the local authority's agreed syllabus. *2	Reflects the religious character of the school.
Trust Schools	Is taught according to the local authority's agreed syllabus.	Follows the 1996 Education Act and is 'wholly, or mainly of a Broadly Christian character'.
Academies	Must be part of the curriculum but is taught according to the school's funding agreement.	Must be offered to every pupil every day, but provision is determined by the school's funding agreement.

## Parents' Rights

Parents have the right, on conscience grounds, to withdraw their children, in any school, from religious education and collective worship. Sixth form students may withdraw themselves from collective worship.

Parents also have certain rights with regard to the provision of religious education in different categories of school.

- In these schools, (1\*) parents can opt for their children to receive Agreed Syllabus RE.
- In these schools, (2\*) parents can opt for their children to receive RE in accordance with the religious character of the school.

These rights are rarely exercised.

In community schools and foundation schools without a religious character, where parents exercise their right to withdraw their child from religious education alternative provision for that child can be made elsewhere by the parents or, if that is not possible, in the school by the local authority, as long as there is no additional cost to the school or the LA.

Similar arrangements apply in the case of children withdrawn from collective worship.

## What questions do new SACRE members frequently ask?

### How often does a SACRE meet?

There is no hard and fast rule about the number of meetings a SACRE should hold each year. It must, however, meet sufficient times to fulfil its statutory duties. Almost all SACREs meet at least three times a year, i.e. once a term, and some are more active and meet more frequently. Sometimes working groups made up of SACRE members meet between full meetings to move forward specific areas of the SACRE's work.

### Will I be asked to chair the meeting?

The law does not state how the Chair of a SACRE should be appointed. The local authority can appoint the Chair, or it can allow the SACRE to elect the Chair from amongst its members. As a member of the SACRE, you could, therefore, be appointed Chair of the SACRE, but not against your will!

### Will I be asked to take the minutes?

The local authority's responsibility to set up a SACRE carries with it a duty to fund it and make sure it can function efficiently. This means the LA should provide a clerk for the SACRE who would attend and minute each meeting. The clerk is usually the point of contact for SACRE matters within the local authority.

### If I'm not there, will it matter?

Your SACRE has a right to expect a level commitment from its members that is reflected in regular attendance at meetings. When this is not possible, it is common practice and polite convention to send apologies for absence.

Some SACREs invite members from whom they have not received apologies for non-attendance on three consecutive occasions to confirm their interest in continuing to serve. Some SACREs allow members who cannot attend to send someone else on their behalf.

Remember that when you are not able to be present no-one else will be able to provide your special knowledge in any discussions or make connections to your specialist networks to support the SACRE's constitution, but generally, at each meeting:

- each committee should have at least one member present;
- decisions cannot be made unless there is at least one person present to cast the committee's single vote;
- Co-opted members do not have a vote.

This applies particularly to meetings at which decisions are to be made.



## What should I know about Collective Worship?

The schools where collective worship comes within the remit of the SACRE are required to provide a daily act of collective worship which is 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character. This means that it 'reflects the broad traditions of Christian belief without being distinctive of any particular Christian denomination'. It does not mean it has to be exclusively Christian. It must, however, be educational and appropriate to the age, aptitude, and family background of pupils. When done well, collective worship provides an excellent opportunity for schools to contribute to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and to the ethos of the school community.

### [Education Act 1996, Chapter III](#)

In relation to collective worship, SACREs should:

- receive inspection reports, noting and references to the quality of collective worship in the context of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development;
- monitor the quality of provision where possible and share good practice;
- offer advice to head teachers and governing bodies, including where there may be difficulties.

Many SACREs produce their own statements and advice on collective worship. The SACRE may also be involved in providing training to teachers, head teachers and governors or other people who are involved in leading collective worship in schools as visitors.

## What should I know about Determinations?

Schools apply for a determination if they feel that, for religious reasons, collective worship which reflects the broad traditions of Christian belief is not appropriate for their pupils. That does not mean they do not have to offer collective worship at all.

The determination procedure allows for the requirement that collective worship should be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' to be lifted in respect of some or all of the pupils in a school for whom this requirement is deemed inappropriate.

They are called determinations because SACRE 'determines' whether the case being made in an application to modify the law for all or a group of pupils in a school is appropriate.

Applications for determinations are made to the SACRES by the head teacher of any community school after consultation with the school's governing body.

Determinations are only possible for schools that do not have a religious character. Many SACREs have an agreed process to enable such an application to take place.

The SACRE should review each determination every five years.

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### And what else about Religious Education?

Religious education is a statutory element of the school curriculum although it is not part of the national curriculum; it is therefore part of every pupil's entitlement.

Agreed syllabus RE does not seek to nurture religious faith, but 'provokes challenging questions about the ultimate meaning and purpose of life, beliefs about God, the self and the nature of reality, issues of right and wrong and what it means to be human'.

See: non-statutory National framework for Religious Education QCA 2004.  
*The importance of Religious Education statement, page 7.*

The table on page 7 shows the type of school where provision for religious education comes within the remit of a SACRE. These schools are required to follow the local agreed syllabus for RE which must 'reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain'.

See [Education Act 1996, Chapter III](#) DfE, Circular, 1/94, paragraph 31-37

### What else do SACREs do?

In relation to religious education, SACREs are expected to provide advice on:

#### Methods of teaching RE

How is the agreed syllabus delivered to each group? What mixture should there be of formal content, thematic work, group work personal discovery, visits to specified buildings or events, and visitors with an educational brief? What is the relationship to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, to cross-curricular studies, to citizenship and to personal, social and health education (PHSE)? Is the distinctiveness of RE being maintained in such relationships? These are questions which should concern SACRE.

#### Choice of resources for RE

National publications review all new RE materials and resources centres can be visited by teachers. The SACRE should consider cost factors and, with an RE adviser's help where possible, offer advice on the most appropriate materials to deliver the aims, objectives and content of the agreed syllabus. Sometimes SACRE members review materials or investigate websites that could be useful for schools to use for RE or collective worship and publish their findings to schools. Some SACREs produce and circulate a newsletter every term.

### What will my responsibilities be as a SACRE member?

As a SACRE member, you should be committed to education and to respecting the views of others. You have a responsibility to support children's learning in RE and collective worship, and to work for the highest standards in both.

You should represent your community in the work of SACRE and communicate the interests of the SACRE back to your community. You should be able to network effectively in order to contribute to the relationship between the SACRE, your local community and schools. The specific opportunities you have will also depend on the interest group you represent.

This is a unique opportunity to serve your local community and influence attitudes of others more widely. Community cohesion is recognised as being important to our society, now and in the future. The effective SACRE is in itself a model of community cohesion in which every member is heard and respected, even when there are many different positions or opinions on particular issues under discussion. In an effective SACRE potential conflict is managed harmoniously. By the same token, SACREs have the potential to promote community cohesion more widely, in schools and in the local community.

### Do we all have the same responsibilities?

Everyone shares the responsibility to put children's learning before personal interest. Members of **Groups A and B**, each of whom represents a faith community within the locality:

- should present and foster a positive image of their religion, so that negative stereotyping is avoided. They must also make clear any grounds on which they differ from each other, but also show respect for other's viewpoints, since such convictions and mutual understanding both lie at the heart of effective classroom RE;
- can create opportunities within SACRE meetings to raise awareness of issues of sensitivity in the teaching of RE to the children of their faith community, and also in the presentation of their particular faith and religious tradition, within school RE, always taking an educational approach.,
- should appreciate the difficulties schools are facing in the area, support their best endeavours, and act, where necessary, as a link between schools and the faith communities;
- should be aware of other local minority faith communities not represented amongst their number. Some SACREs address this by co-opting representatives from these communities.

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Members of **Group C**, representing teacher associations should:

- have a real and positive interest in RE primary, secondary or special schools;
- ensure that the needs of schools and teachers are considered by the SACRE in their discussions;
- provide the SACRE with information about the context in which RE is taught in the schools in the local authority.
- Ensure that the associations they represent are informed about the work of the SACRE and about RE in local schools;
- Create opportunities for other teachers to learn more about the work of the SACRE and give them the opportunity to have their views expressed at SACRE meetings;
- Consult their colleagues on matters of particular importance to the work of SACRE;
- Can bring 'public' dimensions to the debate about RE provision and support.

Members of **Group D**, representing the local authority:

- Can bring to the meeting the breadth of educational issues and concerns which elected members are wrestling with, and place RE's role within it;
- Can be the supporters of RE within the various committees and structures of the local authority;
- Can give political support to enable locally determined RE to flourish within each LA, including advisory support etc.;
- Can appreciate the issues raised by a multi-faith, multi-cultural society for the education of children in RE, and reflect these issues in support of RE in the relevant council structures, including scrutiny committee, cabinet etc.;
- Can support particularly the efforts of the SACRE to be effective through publicising its work with fellow elected members and the officers of the local authority, and ensuring it is taken seriously and is appropriately funded.

## How does a SACRE make its work known...

### ...to Local Authorities?

The relationship between SACREs, local authority officers and elected members is important. SACREs should ensure that their proceedings are reported in the appropriate committee established by the LA to make decisions about education services, through the circulation of the agreed minutes of each meeting as well as by the formal presentation, to that committee, of their annual report. Where such a person is in post, the local RE adviser is a vital source of professional guidance, support information and practical expertise for the SACRE. His or her attendance at SACRE meetings is invaluable.

Local authority representatives on SACRE also have a role in ensuring SACREs work, and any issues of concern it raises, are brought to the attention of the relevant sections of the council and the local authority.

### ...to schools?

Many schools seem unaware of the responsibilities and activities of their local SACRE. It would be helpful for SACREs to suggest that each school's staff noticeboard should display information about SACRE membership so that classroom teachers may know whom to contact. In this way the specialist expertise on different faiths represented on a SACRE may be a source of advice to schools, which is reliably representative of the religion or denomination concerned. Some SACREs also hold their meetings in schools.

### ...to governors and parents?

Many governing bodies and parents are also unaware of the activities of their local SACRE and the impact of this on the teaching of RE.

It would be helpful if the availability of the SACRE annual report were to be made more widely known. Some schools receive this report annually as part of a governors' meeting. Some SACREs have representatives of Chairs of Governors in Group D.

### ...to the faith communities?

Some SACREs hold meetings in local places of worship to build relationships. Individual faith community members have a responsibility to inform those they represent about the activities of the SACRE. They should also be available to receive the views of their community to feed into SACRE discussions.

It is good practice to send the SACRE annual report to the faith communities represented on the SSACRE. It should also routinely be sent to local libraries and be on the agenda of the local Inter Faith Group or Faith Forum.

### ...and to the general public?

SACRE meetings are open to the general public and notice of all meetings should be given, usually on the council's website. In the event of anyone requesting them, relevant documents should be made available.

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### What documents can I refer to in the future?

There is a number of standard texts to which SACREs can routinely refer for information, although the relevance of particular documents changes as developments occur nationally. These documents can all be accessed electronically. The most relevant include:

- Education Act 1996, Part V, Chapter III, Schedule 31
- School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Chapter VI and schedules 19 and 20.
- Circular number 1/94: Religious Education and Collective Worship
- From the then Department for Education (DfE) 1994. \* This guidance is currently under review and will be superseded in October 2009 by new guidelines on interpreting the legislation about RE and SACREs.
- An Analysis of SACRE Reports, [produced annually by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and available online at [www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk)
- Non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education 2004 QCA, also available on the website.

### Other sources of information:

The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) has produced a number of reports including:

- An evaluation of the work of SACREs, published 2004
- Making sense of Religion, published 2007
- SACRE self-evaluation

These documents can be downloaded from the Ofsted website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) supports the aims and the work of SACREs and provides a forum for the exchange of good practice. It lobbies for quality provision and represents SACRE interests nationally.

It offers a variety of advice and exemplar material through its website [www.nasacre.org](http://www.nasacre.org) and the publication of the termly newsletter.

Faith communities and teacher organisations may also produce material that is of use to SACREs.

For further information on any of the work of SACREs, contact: [chair@nasacre.org.uk](mailto:chair@nasacre.org.uk) or [secretary@nasacre.org.uk](mailto:secretary@nasacre.org.uk)