

MINUTES

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education Meeting - 12 February 2014

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

Sonia Andjelkovic, Diana Cutler, Jane Essex, Dr Laow, Liz O'Brien, Muhammad Parekh, Sam Phillips, Sue Blackmore, Peter Davies, Terry Finn, Liz Williams and Caroline Wood

Apologies for absence: Barrie Scott, Mick Dwyer, Ann Hewetson, Paul Lewis, Christine Chadwick, Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal, Colin Hopkins, Rosemary Woodward, Conor Wileman and David Williams

Also in attendance - Helen Phillips and Emma Jardine

PART ONE

13. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the SACRE meeting held on 13 November 2013 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

14. An Update on Key Issues

SACRE received an update on the proposed review of the Staffordshire Agreed Syllabus. Since their last meeting a letter had been sent on SACRE's behalf, and at their request, to Mr Ben Adams, Cabinet Member, Learning and Skills, requesting his authorisation for SACRE to review the Syllabus. Members received a copy of this letter and a copy of the Cabinet Member's response, giving his authorisation.

The Chairman noted the kind and supportive words from the Cabinet Member.

RESOLVED – That the update on key issues be noted.

15. Agreed Syllabus Review

The Education Act 1993 required the Local Authority (LA) to institute a review of its locally agreed syllabus every five years after the completion of its last review. The last revision of the Agreed Syllabus had been issued to schools in 2009 and at their meeting of 13 November 2013 SACRE resolved to write to the Cabinet Member, Learning and Skills, highlighting the need for a review and seeking approval to set up an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) to undertake this review.

SACRE had previously received a copy of this correspondence and the Cabinet Member's approval to convene the ASC.

Members noted the high regard that the original Staffordshire Agreed Syllabus had. This had been produced in 1992/93, largely led by Paul Bellingham, and had remained in tact with slight adjustments for over twenty years, a testament to its quality.

Since the last syllabus revision in 2009 there had been a number of major changes in education which had a direct impact on Religious Education (RE). These included:

- a) from September 2013 a new curriculum would be introduced to all schools (Key Stages (KS) 1-4) with a clear focus on slimming down the curriculum to allow for more cross curriculum dimensions and inter-disciplinary studies and the removal of levels of attainment. RE needed to take account of these changes in order to play a full and active role in the new curriculum;
- b) in 2012 the REC completed a review of the current National Non-Statutory Framework for RE.

SACRE considered the level of review they wished to undertake and the cost implications. If undertaking a more radical review Members wished to ensure the syllabus had the flexibility to be purchased and used by other authorities whilst being pertinent to Staffordshire. It was understood that Staffordshire teachers would welcome a syllabus that included more supportive materials to help support their teaching and work planning. This was particularly important for the non RE specialist teachers of RE.

If a more radical review was to be undertaken it would be necessary to have officer time and support to carry out the work needed. Lat Blaylock (a well respected expert in RE and part of the RE Today team) had been approached to give an estimate of cost and process should SACRE choose to use his expertise in reviewing the Staffordshire syllabus. Lat had a successful background in this field.

The funding required for this review would be between £15,000 and £20,000 in total. Whilst the SACRE budget could fund part of this there would be a significant shortfall and it was suggested that the Cabinet Member, Learning and Skills, be approached in the first instance. A business case would then be produced for Entrust for any further funding required.

It was proposed that SACRE convene an agreed syllabus conference to request the Local Authority review the agreed syllabus. A formal vote was taken and each committee recorded a vote in favour of convening the conference.

RESOLVED – That; a) SACRE convene an agreed syllabus conference and request that the Local Authority reconsider its agreed syllabus; and,
b) the recommendations of the agreed syllabus conference be conveyed to the Entrust Consultant and the LA for amendments if necessary.

[Note by Clerk: The SACRE meeting was formally closed whilst the Agreed Syllabus Conference was convened. Once the Agreed Syllabus Conference had concluded the SACRE meeting formally re-opened.]

16. Application for Westhill/NASACRE Award

Liz O'Brien and Jane Essex had previously agreed to consider possible projects around the parity of provision of RE for all children, irrespective of ability, and bring suggestions

back to SACRE as a potential submission for the Westhill Trust/NASACRE annual award. Members received a paper outlining the background journey to the proposed project and heard from Liz and Jane on their proposed submission.

The proposed project would build on recent work undertaken at the University of Aberdeen which had led to the setting up of the Kairos Forum.

The project had two aspects:

- to bring into one place and make available guidance on what resources already existed for RE and collective worship; and
- produce a practical resource with exemplar sample lessons for producing exciting RE for young people working within P scales, giving them the opportunity to explore stories from different faiths as a way into narrating their own stories.

The work would include a multi-sensory approach to RE and make use of symbol supported text.

In applying for a Westhill grant it was important to be clear about the anticipated budget and what this money would be used for. For this proposed project funding would be required for purchasing the use of symbol supported text and to allow both Jane and Liz time from their work to undertake the project.

Any submission for grants had to be in by the end of March and SACRE agreed to delegate the project approval to the Chairman and Emma Jardine, Entrust Consultant for RE.

RESOLVED – That SACRE support the proposed project, delegating final approval of the submission to the Chairman and Entrust Consultant for RE.

17. An Analysis of Examination Results 2013

SACRE received an analysis of the standards achieved in GCSE full and short courses, A Level and AS GCE religious studies by pupils examined in the summer 2013.

Key issues taken from an analysis of the results were:

- a) Overall entries for 2013 GCSE full course had risen whilst short course entries had fallen reflecting the change in the examination system;
- b) The number of pupils gaining A*-C at GCSE had risen above the national average for the second year running;
- c) the number of students gaining A*-C grades on the GCSE short course was broadly in line with the national figures;
- d) 84 students across 23 schools were entered for AS level and 176 students across 25 schools were entered for A level, which represented a small drop in entries;
- e) recruitment of boys to both the A level and AS level course remained an issue;
- f) the percentage of pupils gaining higher grades A-B was below the national figure for AS level, although broadly in line with national figures for A level; and,
- g) attainment at AS level continued to be an issue.

Emma Jardine, Entrust consultant for RE, informed SACRE that one teacher had expressed concerns at the way the analysis had been published for Members, feeling that highlighting those schools that had achieved below the national average was unhelpful and unsupportive. Members had a lengthy discussion on the best way to receive the examination result data. Whilst not wishing to undermine teaching staff it was important that they were aware of the achievements throughout Staffordshire schools and that they gained a clear picture of where further support could be effective in driving improvements. On reflection members agreed to receive the information in one table and for any conclusions to be drawn from this table during the SACRE meeting.

RESOLVED – That: a) the analysis of examination results be received;
b) a letter of congratulations be sent to those schools that achieved above national average results, with a letter offering support being sent to those schools achieving below the national average at A*-C grades; and,
c) future examination results be reported in one table to SACRE, with conclusions being drawn during the meeting.

18. NASACRE Update

The Chairman gave an update on recent NASACRE developments, including:

- NASACRE would shortly be issuing requests for information from SACREs on their current situation, for example the number of meetings held, their resource base etc. This information would be very helpful once drawn together;
- the All Party Parliamentary Group on RE had invited a representative from NASACRE to their first meeting which considered teacher training, however two individual SACREs had been invited to their second meeting on community cohesion, rather than NASACRE, which was a little curious;
- REC had invited local SACREs to write to their local Member of Parliament (MP) highlighting the importance of RE in respect of community cohesion. The Chairman had written to the Stafford MP Jeremy Lefroy, on behalf of the Staffordshire SACRE, and a copy of this letter was circulated to members;
- the new arrangements with the password protected NASACRE web-site were working well in encouraging SACREs to pay their subscriptions promptly; and
- the NASACRE Annual General Meeting was scheduled for Thursday 22 May, Central Hall, Westminster. The main speaker this year would be Stephen Lloyd MP.

RESOLVED – That the update be received.

19. Applications for Variation of Practice

There were none at this meeting.

20. The SACRE Budget 2013-2014

Members were informed that any remaining budget for this academic year would be used to support the Agreed Syllabus Review.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

21. AOB

1. Jane Essex informed SACRE that sadly the RE teacher training course at Keele University would no longer be run as there had been insufficient applications. SACRE wished to find out if this was a wide spread problem and it was agreed that this issue would be explored with REC to identify whether this situation was repeated elsewhere.
2. Dr Loaw informed SACRE that consideration was being given to organising a children's day at the Buddhist Temple in Kings Bromley and asked whether SACRE would like to be a part of this. This could be something to consider at their next meeting.
3. The next SACRE meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 9 July, 2.00pm, Kingston Centre, Stafford. An email with the subsequent dates had been sent to all SACRE Members.

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

Documents referred to in these minutes as Schedules are not appended, but will be attached to the signed copy of the Minutes of the meeting. Copies, or specific information contained in them, may be available on request.