

MINUTES

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education Meeting - 8 February 2017

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

Linda Goodwin, Andrea Hopkins, Sam Kirwan, Julie Thompson (Co-Optee), Sonia Andjelkovic, Diana Cutler, Dr Laow Panyasiri, Sam Phillips, Peter Davies, Caroline Wood and Ian Lawson

Apologies for absence: Mrs J Grundy, Paul Moseley, Emma Jardine-Phillips, Muhammad Parekh, Terry Finn, David Williams, Lauren Nicholson Ward, Mark Cooper and Claire Shaw

Also in attendance - Julie Roberts

PART ONE

24. Minutes of the SACRE meeting held on 9 November 2016

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the SACRE meeting held on 9 November 2016 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

25. Update on Key Issues

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

- a) An independent Commission had been established by the Religious Education Council (REC) to make wide-ranging recommendations in relation to Religious Education (RE) in schools. The Commission had been asked by the REC to review the legal, education and policy frameworks for RE in all primary schools, secondary schools and further education colleges in England. More information about the Commission, including its membership, could be found on the REC website.

NASACRE was an important member body of the REC and had urged member SACREs to send any recommendations, suggestions, etc. to the Chair. The deadline for submissions was the 13th February 2017 and therefore a submission had been sent on SACREs behalf. The Chairman went through the “Call for Evidence” questionnaire and outlined the responses which were sent to the Commission. In relation to a question on resources being available for teachers to learn about other faiths, Dr. Laow Panyasiri pointed out that his Buddhist Temple received regular requests for schools to visit. However, it was a cause for concern that teachers often had no knowledge or understanding of the Buddhist faith. Dr Laow asked if there was anything the SACRE could do to address this. The Chairman suggested that he could work with Dr. Laow and Emma Jardine-Phillips on this issue, and perhaps Emma could feed this into the courses which she delivered to schools.

- b) NASACRE were now accepting bookings for the NASACRE Conference and AGM 2017 on 16th May 2017 at the York Hilton Hotel in York. Speakers would include Dr. Joyce Miller and Professor Aaqil Ahmed.

- c) New guidance on assessment in RE had been published by Dave Francis, Lead Consultant, RE:ONLINE following a summit held at Culham St. Gabriel's. This new guidance was created for RE curriculum planners. Whilst this guidance had arrived too late for Staffordshire SACRE to take account of, it should be remembered that it was non statutory. It was however positive to note that the Staffordshire Agreed Syllabus reflected the new guidance as both were based on age related expectations.
- d) The Chairman had recently been contacted by Deborah Weston from the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE) who was enquiring about Staffordshire's Syllabus requirement at Key Stage 4. NATRE were preparing two test cases against schools elsewhere in England alleged to be non-compliant. In the light of judgements from these cases, SACRE may wish to consider adopting a more pro-active role in relation to issues of non-compliance within the County.

RESOLVED – That the update on key issues be noted.

26. Tell MAMA Update

At their meeting in November 2016 Members had considered the findings of the Tell MAMA Annual Report, which highlighted hate crime against Muslims in the UK. The report, entitled "The Geography of Anti-Muslim Hatred", looked at where Muslims reported hate crime against them. Amongst other findings it identified that 11% of attacks were in places of education, and the report commented that it was important that headteachers, teachers and safeguarding leads in schools were trained to deal with Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate. The SACRE had therefore decided to ask the Local Authority what measures were in place in light of the report to deal with these issues. The Chairman read out the response which he had received from the Cabinet Member for Communities and the Environment. Members expressed their disappointment at the perfunctory nature of the response, and requested that they have sight of the Chairman's original letter, the response, and the subsequent follow up email from the Chairman. The SACRE was keen to work with the County Council and contribute to its work in the wider community on this issue. Consequently members needed to be aware of the details of any policies which were in place, and requested that the Chairman pursue this matter further.

RESOLVED – That the Chairman contact the Cabinet Member for Communities and the Environment for more detailed clarification of the measures which the local authority had in place to deal with Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate.

27. Agreed Syllabus Launch Event

An event had been held on 31 January 2017 at Entrust Headquarters to officially launch the Staffordshire Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education 2016. It had been well attended by representatives of a range of schools, a number of SACRE members, and the Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills. There were artefact stands representing various faiths, presentations and quizzes. Those who had attended agreed that it had been a success and a real celebration of the Syllabus. It had been particularly pleasing to have a group of children from St. Dominic's High School in Brewood attend the event to share their experience and views of RE in the classroom.

RESOLVED – That the success of the launch of the Agreed Syllabus be noted.

28. NASACRE Update

The Chairman reminded members of the conference in Birmingham on 6th March 2017 being run jointly by NASACRE and the Association of RE Inspectors, Advisors and Consultants (AREIAC), on the topic of “Religions are not Monoliths” considering how to explore and cover diversity in Christianity and Islam in the classroom.

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

29. The Accord Award

As agreed at their meeting in November 2016, members were informed that the Chairman had submitted an application for an Accord Award on behalf of Staffordshire SACRE (Appendix 1). The application revealed an in-depth picture of the work and achievements of Staffordshire SACRE. Regrettably this was not placed by the judges in this year’s Inclusivity Award. However, the judges did view Staffordshire as a serious candidate and were grateful for the efforts gone to in applying for the Award, and the efforts that the SACRE was making. The nomination drew particular praise for:

- the production of separate guidance given for special schools;
- the wide range of SACRE representatives; and
- the letters of praise which SACRE sends to high performing and letters of advice to low performing schools.

The Chairman reported that the Accord organisation had subsequently asked if it could quote Staffordshire SACRE’s Award submission in Accord’s own response to the RES’s Commission on RE.

RESOLVED – That the comments of the Accord Inclusivity Award judges be noted.

30. The Big NASACRE Survey

Members were informed that a research survey was being conducted by the NASACRE Chairman, Paul Smalley, who was also a senior lecturer in RE at Edge Hill University. In order for NASACRE to be able to represent the views of its member SACREs at a national level, including to the REC and other policymakers, it was important that NASACRE try to develop as full an understanding as possible of the views of all SACRE members. Data from the survey would be anonymised before being discussed with the NASACRE Executive and being used to inform policymakers about the strengths, views and hopes of SACREs across the country. It was also hoped that the results of this research would be published more widely in suitable journals to inform the wider RE community.

Members had group discussions on responses to some of the key questions in the survey, and then shared and agreed these with the wider group. The Chairman undertook to complete the survey in full in consultation with the RE Consultant, Emma Jardine-Phillips.

RESOLVED – That the Big NASACRE Survey be completed and returned by the Chairman, on behalf of the Staffordshire SACRE.

31. Applications for Variation of Practice

There were none on this occasion.

32. GCSE Results 2016

SACRE received a statistical analysis of the standards achieved in GCSE and GCE Advanced Level Religious Studies by pupils examined in the summer of 2016. In accordance with the SACRE remit, the analysis of GCSE and A Level results only took account of local authority maintained schools, and the Chairman pointed out that the number of schools had reduced owing to schools having converted to Academies.

Overall, both national results and Staffordshire's results for GCSE Religious Studies in 2016 were broadly in line with overall results achieved in 2015. Results for all pupils showed that pupils in Staffordshire achieved slightly below the national average at grades A*-C but in line with the national average for A*-G. It was important to take note of the number of pupils on roll versus the number of entries. This gave an insight into the provision that different schools had in place for pupils at Key Stage 4.

Both national results and Staffordshire's results for A Level Religious Studies in 2016 were also broadly in line with overall results achieved in 2015. Results for all pupils showed that pupils in Staffordshire achieved slightly below the national average at grades A*-B, but broadly in line with the national average for A*-E. It was noted that the number of entries per school was small, but that this was not unexpected at Key Stage 5 for which examination courses would be optional.

SACRE requested that letters of congratulations be sent to those schools whose pupils had achieved commendably above the national average results for those achieving A*-C grades in GCSE RE. They agreed that letters should also be sent to those high achieving schools at A level.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) The report be received; and
- b) Letters of congratulations be sent to the schools whose pupils achieved results above the national average in GCSE and A Level Religious Studies.

33. AOB

The Chairman informed members that this would be the last meeting which County Councillor Peter Davies would attend, as he would not be standing again in the County Council Elections in May. He thanked Mr. Davies for his contribution to the work of the SACRE and said that it had been greatly appreciated throughout his 12 years as a member. On behalf of SACRE he wished Mr. Davies all the best for the future.

34. Date of Next Meeting

That the next SACRE meeting be held on 28 June 2017, 2.00 pm, at The Kingston Centre, Stafford.

**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.