

**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**NORTHUMBERLAND**  
**STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL**  
**ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**  
**ACADEMIC YEAR 2010 - 2011**

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## Letter from the Chairperson of the SACRE

Academic year 2010 - 2011 was, in common with the previous year, a busy one. This was so largely because work concluded on revising the RE Agreed Syllabus, which will be used by schools in Northumberland from September 2011 onwards. Although it was decided, with the support of a majority of the RE subject leaders in the County, that the units of work contained in the last syllabus would be retained, guidance about RE was subjected to a significant overhaul to account for changes in perceptions of best practice dating from 2004. OFSTED's report, "Transforming RE", and the Department for Children, Schools and Families' "Religious Education in English Schools: non-statutory guidance", also impacted on the SACRE's work, even though both documents had been published in Spring 2010. Moreover, the SACRE continued to work through its action plan; examined OFSTED reports as they related to Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development; and monitored public exam results in RE, RS, and Philosophy and Ethics. Some very useful training took place in schools, and reactions to the current Agreed Syllabus remained overwhelmingly popular.

None of what has been achieved would have been possible without the dedication, hard work, knowledge, skills and understanding of all those who have contributed to the SACRE's endeavours over the last year. Whether volunteers giving of their time freely and generously, or elected members and officers directly associated in some shape or form with the local authority, it has been, once again, a very good team effort. I find the work of the SACRE fascinating and enjoyable and am proud of the positive and mutually respectful way we conduct our business. On behalf of Northumberland County Council (NCC), thank you all for what you have done and achieved.

We hope that, in the years to come, the work of the SACRE will be at least as important as at present, although it is appreciated that, with the emergence of academies, free schools and an English Baccalaureate (EBacc) bereft of RE, to say nothing of the current hard financial times in which we live, those with interests in the continued well-being of RE and collective worship face many challenges. Nonetheless, it is hoped that issues such as community cohesion, learning outside the classroom, a curriculum which is more skills-based, and growth in the number of faith schools, will ensure that matters to do with RE and collective worship remain high on people's list of priorities. Thankfully, we have in Northumberland a SACRE with the knowledge, skills and understanding to steer a steady course through what promises to be busy, exciting but challenging times.

Robert Arckless  
Chairperson, Northumberland SACRE

## **SACRE Meetings**

The SACRE met on four occasions in the academic year 2010 - 2011, on 6th October 2010, 12th January 2011, 6th April 2011 and 29th June 2011. On each occasion the SACRE was quorate. A majority of SACRE members were able to attend all or at least three SACRE meetings, thereby ensuring continuity and progression from one meeting to the next. To help raise the SACRE's profile, and for the SACRE to secure a genuine feel for how RE is currently taught, three of the four meetings took place in schools around the County. During each school-based meeting, staff and/or students delivered short presentations about RE and collective worship. SACRE members found the presentations enjoyable and enlightening. Our thanks to the schools kind enough to host us.

## **Advice Offered**

The SACRE advised the local authority that, in order for the SACRE to fulfil its responsibilities adequately, consideration should be given to (a) allocating an agreed budget for the financial year, and (b) ensuring that the part-time RE Consultant is given an appropriate number of days per annum to meet his various responsibilities. Regarding the budget, the SACRE received assurances that all reasonable costs would be met centrally. Regarding the part-time RE Consultant, it was agreed that he would work for up to thirty days on SACRE-related matters on behalf of the local authority.

The SACRE advised the local authority about schools where good or excellent work was undertaken in relation to RE and collective worship, and about schools where there was still room for improvement.

The SACRE also emphasised that the current OFSTED inspection framework makes it very difficult to draw firm conclusions about the quality of RE and collective worship. Inspection of subject teaching is now much less of an issue than was once the case (although it is understood by the SACRE that "Transforming RE" has important things to say about how RE is taught nationally).

The SACRE made various recommendations to the local authority about the training programme that might be offered to teachers in the academic year 2010 - 2011. However, the SACRE recognises that some of the most effective training now and in the future is likely to be provided to staff in individual schools, or to RE teachers in specific partnerships working through Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes which they shape themselves.

## **Religious Education**

The SACRE has been able to monitor the quality of RE by various methods, including:

- public exam results (in particular, those at GCSE and A Level);
- feedback from individual SACRE members when making visits to schools;
- reports from the RE Consultant following his visits to schools;
- consultations with RE co-ordinators and heads of RE departments;
- feedback from teachers attending training courses;
- examples of good practice described in the SACRE's termly Newsletter;

the albeit limited information deriving from OFSTED inspection reports (OFSTED inspection reports no longer offer comment on the standards of teaching and learning in RE. However, the reports contain information about Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural [SMSC] Development).

The SACRE is of the opinion that the generally high standards that have been achieved in recent years have been broadly sustained, with some specialist and non-specialist RE teachers in all phases engaging in outstanding work. It is especially gratifying that many Northumberland schools make excellent use of visits and visitors to enrich and enhance the quality of RE. Moreover, many schools raise the profile of the subject by experimenting with collapsed curriculum/enrichment days (days during which the normal timetable is suspended and, for either a year group, a key stage or the whole school, a programme of events is arranged to explore in depth a religious topic or theme) or, as in the case of secondary and high schools in particular, organising day-long RE, RS and/or Philosophy and Ethics conferences for specific year groups, the sixth form included.

To some extent confirming the trend, OFSTED inspection reports for community schools brought to the SACRE's attention for 2010 - 2011 reveal the following information in relation to SMSC Development (figures in the brackets relate to outcomes for the previous, 2009 - 2010, academic year when no school had a score/outcome of 4/Poor):

Special Schools inspected: 2 (2)

1/Outstanding: 0 (2)

2/Good: 1 (0)

3/Satisfactory: 1 (0)

First and Primary Schools inspected: 20 (16)

1/Outstanding: 3 (2)

2/Good: 17 (11)

3/Satisfactory: 0 (3)

Middle Schools inspected: 8 (10)

1/Outstanding: 0 (0)

2/Good: 6 (5)

3/Satisfactory: 2 (5)

High Schools inspected: 4 (1)

1/Outstanding: 0 (0)

2/Good: 2 (0)

3/Satisfactory: 2 (1)

For the second year running, no school secured a score/outcome of 4/Poor.

Direct comparisons can be made with Anglican and Roman Catholic schools in the County because such schools are also graded on the extent to which they contribute to pupils' SMSC Development (figures in the brackets relate to outcomes for the previous, 2009 - 2010, academic year when no school had a score/outcome of 4/Poor):

Anglican First and Primary Schools inspected: 6 (12)

1/Outstanding: 3 (5)

2/Good: 3 (7)

3/Satisfactory: (0)

Roman Catholic First and Primary Schools inspected: 3 (3)

1/Outstanding: 0 (0)

2/Good: 3 (1)

3/Satisfactory: 0 (2)

Anglican Middle Schools inspected: 1 (2)

1/Outstanding: 0 (1)

2/Good: 1 (1)

3/Satisfactory: 0 (0)

Roman Catholic Middle Schools inspected: 3 (1)

1/Outstanding: 1 (1)

2/Good: 2 (0)

3/Satisfactory: 0 (0)

Roman Catholic High Schools inspected: 0 (1)

1/Outstanding: 0 (1)

2/Good: 0 (0)

3/Satisfactory: 0 (0)

For the second year running, no Anglican or Catholic school secured a score/outcome of 4/Poor.

### **The Locally Agreed Syllabus**

By July 2011, the Locally Agreed Syllabus for RE had been in use for almost 7 years. During academic year 2009 - 2010, the SACRE concluded that it was time to review the existing syllabus, and work on the revision began in earnest in September 2010. Decisions about what would be revised were shaped to a considerable degree by the outcomes of a questionnaire circulated in 2008 to all schools which used the Agreed Syllabus. However, the content of the "Non-Statutory National Framework for RE", "Transforming RE" and "Religious Education in English Schools: non-statutory guidance" also helped determine the decision-making process. As a result, changes were made to the existing Agreed Syllabus. However, changes were not made to the units of study themselves (RE teachers believe that the existing units of study allow for sufficient breadth, depth and flexibility, and almost unanimously petitioned for their retention), but to the introductory and guidance components which establish the broader context for RE in the contemporary era.

Needless to say, most of the training sessions provided in the academic year 2010 - 2011, and the great majority of school-based and electronic (e-mail) consultations, were undertaken with the view to ensuring that schools and RE teachers were in a better position to successfully implement the new Agreed Syllabus.

## **Standards in RE**

Above, various comments have been made about the quality of RE and SMSC Development in Northumberland schools. Here, we concentrate on results in public exams:

### **RE GCSE Full Course**

In 2011, 565 students sat the RE GCSE Full Course. In 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010, 733, 788, 470 and 532 students sat the exam respectively. The 2011 number of entrants is therefore a slight improvement on the number sitting the exam in 2010, but it remains well below the figures for 2007 and 2008. In 2011, 100% secured A to G grades and 79.5% secured A to C grades. The comparable figures for 2007 were 97.9% and 60.8% respectively, for 2008 they were 98.9% and 66.2% respectively, for 2009 they were 99.8% and 79.8% respectively, and for 2010 they were 99.8% and 75.8%. Results for A to C grades in 2011 are therefore, in percentage terms at least, the second best in the five year period.

Among the schools with a significant number of entrants (40 or more), stand-out results derive from the Duchess's Community High where 91.6% of entrants secured A to C grades, Hexham Queen Elizabeth High where 87.8% of entrants secured A to C grades, and St. Benet Biscop RC High where 78.6% of entrants secured A to C grades. The results from these schools are outstanding. St. Benet Biscop RC High entered 224 students for the exam, a remarkable figure.

### **RE GCSE Short Course**

In 2011, 901 students sat the RE GCSE Short Course. In 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010, 1428, 1445, 1467 and 944 students sat the exam respectively. The 2011 figure is therefore slightly down on the disappointing figure for 2010. In 2011, 91.3% secured A to G grades and 36.6% secured A to C grades. The comparable figures for 2007 were 92.5% and 33.4% respectively, for 2008 they were 94.5% and 37.8% respectively, for 2009 they were 94.5% and 30.6% respectively, and for 2010 they were 92.4% and 26.7% respectively. Although, in 2011, the percentage of students securing the highest, A to C, grades is the second best figure in the five year period, the number of entrants is the worst since 2007, and the percentage of students who are unclassified is the highest in the five year period (8.7%).

Stand-out results derive from Prudhoe High where, of 49 entrants, 81.6% secured A to C grades, and from Coquet High where, of 108 entrants, 50% secured A to C grades. Cohorts in excess of 120 were entered for the exam at Berwick-upon-Tweed High, Ashington High, Blyth Community College and The Duchess's Community High (the latter school entered the largest number of all, 156).

### **RE AS Level**

In 2011, 34 students sat the RE AS Level. In 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010, 19, 25, 36 and 47 students sat the exam respectively. In 2011, 88.2% of entrants secured A to E grades and 44.1% secured A to C grades. The comparable figures for 2007 were 94.7% and 56.6% respectively, for 2008 they were 84% and 61.2% respectively, for 2009 they were 85.7% and 56.4% respectively, and for 2010 they were 83% and 57.4% respectively. The number of students taking the RE AS

Level is too small to allow for meaningful discussion about trends.

## **RE A Level**

In 2011, 101 students sat the RE A Level. In 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010, 77, 104, 107 and 106 students sat the exam respectively. The number of students sitting the RE A Level has therefore remained more or less consistent for the last four years. In 2011, 100% of entrants secured A to E grades and 65.3% secured A to C grades. The comparable figures for 2007 were 100% and 62.2% respectively, for 2008 they were 100% and 81% respectively, for 2009 they were 100% and 71% respectively, and for 2010 they were 99.1% and 61.3% respectively. Results in 2011 are a slight improvement in relation to those for 2010.

While the number of students who took RE at AS and A Level in 2011 remained consistent with figures for recent years, the number of students sitting an RE exam at GCSE is, for the second year running, significantly down. In 2011, 1466 students took an RE Full or Short Course. In 2007, 2161 students took a Full or a Short Course, and in 2008, 2009 and 2010 the figures were 2233, 1937 and 1476 respectively. The number of entrants peaked in 2008. The downhill trend dates from 2009.

The figures above are perhaps best understood in relation to the exam statistics for RE in England as a whole. In England as a whole, 17% more students sat the GCSE Full Course in 2011 than in 2010, but 8.1% fewer students sat the GCSE Short Course in 2011 than in 2010. In 2011, 199,752 students sat the Full Course and 233,998 students sat the Short Course. In England as a whole, 22.3% more students sat the AS Level exam in 2011 than in 2010, and 4.3% more students sat the A Level exam in 2011 than in 2010. In 2011, 33,915 students sat the AS Level exam and 18,463 students sat the A Level exam.

At first sight, the statistics above suggest that in Northumberland we regress while the rest of England progresses. However, the statistics for England as a whole mask significant variation from one local authority to another. Schools in some local authorities have substantially boosted the number of entrants for RE at GCSE, AS Level and A Level, while schools in other local authorities (e.g. Darlington) have, for various reasons, witnessed a decline in entrants comparable to the situation in Northumberland. Variation from school to school must ultimately boil down to the extent to which senior leadership teams and governing bodies value the teaching of RE at Key Stage 4 and above, especially at a time when most school budgets are contracting, and difficult decisions must therefore be made about the deployment of specialist teaching staff. This said, we think it significant that the author of an REOnline article about the 2011 exam results felt compelled to write, "There is concern in the RE world that the 8.1% decrease in students taking the RS Short Course will set a trend for RS GCSE in the coming years, as more and more schools focus on the EBacc subjects and reduce provision for RS." Needless to say, if this is the case it will inevitably have a detrimental long-term impact on RE at AS and A Level.

## **Methods of Teaching, Choice of Teaching Materials and Professional Development**

The Agreed Syllabus for RE does not prescribe what teaching and learning methods teachers should use (although it does reflect on the variety of methods that teachers might utilise). Consequently, teachers select the methods they deem to be most appropriate, given the content

addressed and the needs and learning styles of the pupils and students concerned. Needless to say, as the children get older, more mature and more sophisticated in their outlook, and as greater emphasis is placed on learning from rather than learning about religion and belief, teachers of middle, secondary and high school pupils and students experiment with less didactic and more open-ended and exploratory teaching and learning methods, ones designed, above all, to create independent learners able to engage with the evidence in a dispassionate and rational manner. However, OFSTED inspection reports and more anecdotal evidence deriving from SACRE members and others, reveal that some of the most innovative teaching and learning methods exist in our first schools where every effort is made to approach the study of religion and belief in a cross-curricular manner. Such cross-curricular approaches emphasise that, for large numbers of people, religion and belief impact on many, if not all, aspects of life.

Again, the Agreed Syllabus for RE does not prescribe what teaching and learning materials should be used, but the non-statutory guidance highlights a wealth of printed and electronic material which teachers may find useful. Moreover, the new Agreed Syllabus will contain up-dated advice about good resources that have come on stream since 2004. The SACRE termly Newsletter and RE Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training sessions are used to up-date teachers about more recently produced teaching materials.

RE teachers can access training about RE from at least five possible sources:

- contacting the Northumberland CPD College to arrange in-house RE training for an individual school, for a cluster of schools or for RE co-ordinators/heads of RE in a partnership;
- contacting the part-time RE Consultant or the School Improvement Adviser with Responsibility for RE;
- contacting the North East Religious Learning Resources Centre (NERLRC);
- attending training events arranged by neighbouring local authorities which are offered to teaching staff beyond their boundaries;
- contacting the North East Consortium of LEAs (NECLEA).

During the academic year 2010 - 2011, schools where training/in-depth consultations were undertaken included:

- 6 first schools
- 2 primary schools
- 4 middle schools
- 1 high school.

Issues addressed during school-based training/in-depth consultations included:

- The content of the new Locally Agreed Syllabus for RE;
- Revising RE long-term plans to better reflect the demands of the Agreed Syllabus;
- Assessment for Learning and RE;
- Teaching Hinduism;
- Teaching Islam;
- Teaching Judaism;



Ensuring feeder middle schools in a partnership teach the same topics to the same year groups;  
Good visitors and places to visit;  
Up-dating school collective worship policies to take account of the latest (2007) NCC guidance.

Additionally, NCC Childminders were provided with a half day's training about Festivals (Christmas, Eid-ul-Fitr, Hanukah, Holi), and 2 NCC teachers (one from a special school and one from a first school) joined an RE teachers' training day organised by North Tyneside Council which visited the Hindu Mandir, the Sikh Gurdwara and the Reform Synagogue, all in Newcastle. The teachers who joined the North Tyneside training day used the occasion to assess the places visited as suitable places to take pupils and students, and to take lots of photos and video film for use in the classroom. Moreover, 3 NCC teachers joined a Northumbria University coach trip to Bradford in May 2011. The teachers who joined the Bradford trip used the occasion to buy excellent but inexpensive RE resources and to take lots of photos and video film for use in the classroom. The trip included visits to Manningham Mosque, Bombay Stores and Book Bazaar.

Discussions with the NERLRC and the NECLEA suggest that no NCC teachers were able to attend any of the RE-related courses provided by the two bodies.

### **Complaints Concerning RE**

During the course of the year, no formal complaint relating to RE was received by the local authority.

### **Collective Worship**

NCC's most recent Policy and Guidelines for Acts of Collective Worship (ACWs) was formally launched in September 2007. During the academic year 2010 - 2011, the SACRE termly Newsletter reminded schools about the sound advice the document contains. A number of schools revised their in-house policies for ACWs to take account of the NCC Policy and Guidelines.

No formal complaint relating to collective worship was received by the local authority. Nor was the SACRE required to make a determination about the appropriateness, for either a school or a group of pupils or students in a school, of collective worship which is wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character.

Taking the County as a whole, there are very few recorded instances of pupils or students withdrawing from RE or ACWs. We take this as confirmation that most schools are therefore providing RE and ACWs which take full account of the rich diversity of religion and belief that presently exists in Northumberland. In other words, RE and ACWs are provided in ways that are in sympathy with the needs and aspirations of the whole school community.

## **Links with Other Agencies**

### *National:*

Membership of the National Association of SACRE.

### *Local/Regional:*

Close working relations exist with the NERLRC and the NECLEA, both of which provide RE-related training

Close working relations exist with the region's Free Church denominations and other religious and faith communities, many of which are represented on the SACRE

Close working relations exist with the Anglican and Roman Catholic dioceses, which are represented on the SACRE

Close working relations exist with the North East Humanists, who are represented on the SACRE  
Individual SACRE members sit on other SACREs in the region, or are asked to attend other SACREs' meetings to contribute to discussions and debates.

## **SACRE Arrangements**

### *Staff*

The local authority has a School Improvement Adviser with ultimate responsibility for RE and Collective Worship, but such responsibility is merely one among many. Consequently, the local authority employs part-time (30 days maximum) a RE Consultant to assist with matters relating to RE and Collective Worship. Democratic Services provides the SACRE with a clerk who not only minutes the meetings and fields correspondence, but also engages in a host of tasks designed to ensure that the SACRE can conduct its business as efficiently and cost effectively as possible.

### *Finance*

Regarding a budget, the SACRE has received assurances from the local authority that all reasonable costs will be met centrally.

### *Any Other Business*

The SACRE continues to publish a termly A4 Newsletter which varies in length from 4 to 8 pages. The Newsletter keeps school-based colleagues informed about the latest developments relating to RE and ACWs; highlights best practice across the County; notifies about training options; provides early warning about important festivals and national and international events that schools may wish to discuss during RE lessons or ACWs; and alerts teachers about the most up-to-date RE resources. We are pleased to note that a few other SACREs in the region (e.g. Darlington, North Tyneside) have found it beneficial to engage in similar exercises designed to promote best practice.

Every 2/3 weeks during term time, the RE Consultant sends approximately 60 colleagues across

the County an e-mail containing useful information about RE, ACWs, community cohesion and a host of equality and diversity matters.

During the academic year 2010 - 2011, the SACRE continued to work its way through its action plan to ensure its work had structure and coherence (the action plan can be found in Appendix 2).

To progress matters in relation to the revised Agreed Syllabus for RE, the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) established a sub-group which was instructed to bring relevant revised copy to the ASC as it was drafted. The sub-group met on a number of occasions and helped move matters forward more speedily than might otherwise have been the case. Thanks to the sub-group members who, more often than not, gave of their time voluntarily.

## The SACRE Members, 2010 - 2011

### (a) Representatives of Other Churches and Faiths

Baptist Church	Vacancy
Methodist Church	Mr. D. Fenwick
Roman Catholic Church	Mr. J. McVay
United Reformed Church	Reverend E. Marley OBE
Hinduism	Bhakti Rasa Adhikhara
Humanism	Mrs. C. Butterworth
Judaism	Mrs. D. Van Der Velde
Sikhism	Cloud Singh (who resigned during the year and was replaced by Harpal Singh from June 2011)

### (b) Representatives of the Church of England

Mrs. E. Bainbridge  
 Mr. B. Hedley  
 Mr. D. Johnson  
 Mr. P. Rusby

### (c) Representatives of the Teachers' Associations

Mrs. L. Atkinson  
 Mrs. S. Brett (from June 2011)  
 Mr. T. Nicholls  
 Mrs. H. Shaw  
 Miss C. Wright (who resigned during the year)

### (d) Representatives of the Local Authority

Councillor Mr. G. R. Arckless (Chair)  
 Councillor Mr. A. H. Murray  
 Councillor Mr. J. E. Smith  
 Councillor Mr. R. Styring

### (e) Co-Opted Member

Mrs. E. M. Butler (Vice- Chair)

#### Terms of Reference

Terms of reference as per Circular 3/89, Circular 1/94 and legislation such as the 1988 Education Reform Act and the 1996 Education Act:

*“To advise the Authority upon such matters connected with religious worship in County schools and the religious education to be given in accordance with an agreed syllabus as the Authority may refer to the Council or as the Council may see fit.”*

The SACRE Action Plan

**Distribution List:**

All Schools in Northumberland  
Head of Children's Services, Northumberland County Council  
Department for Education  
University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne  
University of Northumbria at Newcastle  
County Library Service, Northumberland County Council  
4 MPs for Northumberland  
All Northumberland County Councillors  
The CE and RC Diocesan Authorities  
Karenza Passmore, North East Religious Learning Resources Centre  
Rowena Francis, United Reformed Church, Northern Synod Office, 4 College Lane,  
Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, NE1 8JJ  
Rev. L. Osborn, Chairman of District, Methodist Church  
Mr. D. Lennox, Secretary of the Baptist Union, North East Region Interfaith Group in  
Newcastle  
North East Humanist Association  
Harnham Buddhist Monastery, 2 Harnham Hall Cottages, Belsay, Northumberland, NE20  
OHF  
The Board of Deputies of British Jews  
The United Hebrew Congregation, Newcastle  
The Newcastle Reform Synagogue  
Muslim Council of Britain, PO Box 57330, London, E1 2WJ  
Sikh Council for Interfaith Relations UK, 43 Dorset Road, Merton Park, London, SW193EZ  
NASACRE