

The New RE Agreed Syllabus: it's almost ready!

Over two-thirds of the content of the new RE Agreed Syllabus has been approved by the Northumberland Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC), and the final part ("Guidance") should be approved at the next full SACRE/ASC meeting in May. With thanks to all those people, teachers included, who have helped get the new RE Agreed Syllabus into its current state. We have every confidence that it will be ready for use in schools from 1st September 2016, the date originally identified for the new syllabus to replace the old.



People who have followed progress on production of the new RE Agreed Syllabus will recall that, about two years ago, all interested parties in Northumberland were advised via this Newsletter that a revision would be undertaken, with a view to the new syllabus being in place for September 2016. People were urged to share with the SACRE what were the strengths and the weaknesses of the existing RE Agreed Syllabus and what they would like retained or changed. All such comments were taken into account as a SACRE sub-group began the task of generating copy for the new syllabus, along with

publications from the Government and the Religious Education Council (REC) for England and Wales. Such publications were helping to shape a consensus about what qualified, in the contemporary era, as best practice in relation to the production of RE agreed syllabuses.

In the light of all these influences, and discussions within the SACRE itself, it was unanimously agreed that the new RE Agreed Syllabus would consist of three parts.

The introductory section (in effect, the statutory component of the RE Agreed Syllabus) would comprise the REC "RE Framework" contained in its ground-shifting "RE Review" of 2013, a framework which has secured the support of almost all the stakeholders in what might be called the UK's RE community (cosmetic changes were made to the text to better reflect conditions and circumstances in Northumberland, and to remove any real or imagined ambiguities in the original text).

The main body of the new RE Agreed Syllabus would contain the units of work in the existing syllabus after they had been closely examined to remove any typographical errors etc., and after some teaching and

learning opportunities had been added to reflect contemporary issues of national concern (thus, teaching and learning opportunities have been added about promoting the fundamental British values and challenging extremism and radicalisation, among other things).

Teachers who engaged in the consultation process about revising the syllabus were almost unanimous in asking that the units of work be retained, partly to assist non-specialists, but also to reduce the amount of time that teachers had to spend planning lessons. The units of work are not a statutory component of the syllabus; they can be utilised by teachers if they think they will help to meet the statutory requirements contained in part one of the syllabus. An important refinement that teachers will notice when they see the complete syllabus is that advice is provided at the end of each Requirement in the statutory component of the syllabus to indicate which units of work should be examined for suitable teaching and learning opportunities. We believe such joined-up thinking will make the new Agreed Syllabus much easier to use.

continued overleaf

The last section of the syllabus is called "Guidance" and, as its name implies, it is simply this, no more and no less. Having said that, it is where teachers and others will find advice about RE provision for the youngest pupils and the oldest students, equality, diversity, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, British values, challenging extremism and radicalisation, RE resources and good places to take pupils and students on visits. The SACRE would urge teachers and others to examine "Guidance", perhaps especially for information about RE resources and good places to visit.

For over a year now, the SACRE Newsletter has been used to advise everyone (e.g. an article in the April 2015 edition) about what the new RE Agreed Syllabus will contain, and comments from teachers and others were sought to ensure the syllabus would meet the needs of

all the County's RE stakeholders (most comments were about the advice the syllabus will contain about assessment). All such comments were taken into account as the SACRE sub-group revised the syllabus.

Production of the new RE Agreed Syllabus is very much a team effort involving many people and interest groups. There will be much that is familiar to teachers and others (this is most apparent in relation to the units of work and some of the content in "Guidance"). However, the decision to utilise the REC's "RE Framework" of 2013 for the statutory component has proved to be a wise one, given that a majority of teachers and other stakeholders in the RE community now agree that a national framework for RE is long overdue to ensure that all pupils and students in schools using agreed syllabuses are in receipt of the same

basic entitlement. Moreover, in the absence of anything better, most stakeholders in the RE community are of the opinion that the REC's "RE Framework" of 2013 should provide the basis for any such national RE syllabus.

Please look out for information about an official launch for the new RE Agreed Syllabus at some point in the Summer term and, to access the new syllabus, simply go to the SACRE webpage on the Northumberland County Council website where, not long after the launch itself, the full syllabus will be available.

Once again, our thanks to everyone who helped with this mammoth but highly worthwhile project.

The Northumberland SACRE.

The UK's best RE resource bank the North-East Religious Resources Centre

With a new RE Agreed Syllabus ready for use in schools from 1st September 2016, schools in Northumberland will want to access the best collection of RE-related resources anywhere in England, thereby saving themselves money at a time of financial austerity and ensuring that RE of the highest quality is provided to all our pupils and students.

The North East Religious Resources Centre has facilities in Percy Main, North Tyneside, and Durham City.

Many Northumberland teachers (or schools on behalf of their teachers) have already joined the Centre because they know that, once a member, they can access 38,000 items addressing a host of different religious and belief systems. Such items include text books, posters, photo packs, audio-visual material including films and documentaries, copies of RE agreed syllabuses and diocesan syllabuses, and, perhaps best of all, religious artefacts. There are also many books designed to ensure that acts of

collective worship are stimulating and worthwhile educational experiences.

In recent years, Karenza Passmore and her colleagues have ensured that the ever-expanding resource bank not only covers the six religions we MUST teach (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism), but also some of the faiths and secular world views which, in recent years, have become more popular to study. Thus, Karenza and her colleagues have excellent resources relating to, for example, the Bahai Faith, Jainism, Rastafarianism and Humanism.

Before deciding to join the Centre, you may wish to visit to see what you have missed out on for so long! Staff

at the Centre are happy for visits to take place at times convenient to all concerned. Moreover, the Centre has sensible and flexible opening hours. Opening hours can be confirmed when you make contact with the staff.

For more information, telephone the Centre in Percy Main on 0191-270-4161. The postal address is NE Religious Resources Centre, Church House, St. John's Terrace, Percy Main, North Shields, NE29 6HS. To access additional information about the Centre, and to find out in more detail about all the services staff provide, visit the Centre's excellent website: **www.resourcescentreonline.co.uk**