

**Northumberland Standing Advisory Council  
on Religious Education**

**Annual Report: Academic Year 2019 – 2020**

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### **The Chair's Introduction and Context**

The work of Northumberland's SACRE has continued and 2019-20 proved to be a year like no other. It was an interesting time to take up the Chair of SACRE! I am pleased to report that the Locally Agreed RE Syllabus, revised and launched for use in schools from September 2016, remains popular with all the schools using it. The working party updating the syllabus will begin work shortly with a view to a new syllabus being launched for September 2021.

In some respects, our focus has remained the same: monitoring OfSTED reports; looking at the work of individual schools; and reflecting on best practice in the county and elsewhere. However one of our usual foci - considering exam results at GCSE, AS Level and A Level has not taken place due to the impact of COVID on public examinations.

We work in a rapidly changing educational environment. The full impact of COVID is unknown and we continue to be concerned over the future of RE in our secondary and high schools as the subject struggles to remain relevant outside of the EBacc. This may be exacerbated by the pandemic in the sense that core RE/collective worship may have taken a back seat whilst schools have been partially closed.

I firmly believe that the SACRE does and will continue to play an important role in providing a support framework within schools. We can also, through our CPD, the [SACRE webpage](#) and the termly [SACRE Newsletter](#), inspire teachers in all schools to understand the massive benefit that RE can bring to whole-school life.

Resources to support the work of the SACRE continue to be ring-fenced with a specific financial contribution from Northumberland County Council, and the commitment of all SACRE's members continues to be priceless. We depend on the goodwill of a very small central team who have an impact way beyond their number. The same is true of teachers and others working in our schools, many of whom face their own considerable pressures.

It is a privilege to serve as the Chair of the SACRE and to work with a group of dedicated, enthusiastic and knowledgeable members. Our meetings are enjoyable and constructive, and based on shared commitment to the promotion of the best possible provision of teaching and learning. We work in an atmosphere of mutual respect and celebrate what we can learn from each other by reflecting our increasingly diverse communities.

I want to thank all those who have helped us during the last year, and particular thanks go to my colleagues who make this task so worthwhile. These are challenging times, but with challenges come opportunities to bring about change for the better.

**Councillor Guy Renner-Thompson**

**Chairperson, the Northumberland SACRE**

### **Advice to Statutory Bodies**

The SACRE advised the local authority that, in order to fulfil its responsibilities adequately, consideration should be given to (a) continuing to allocate 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 various responsibilities. Regarding the budget, the SACRE received assurances that all necessary and reasonable costs will continue to be met centrally. Regarding the part-time RE Consultant, a new appointment was made and a target number of days engagement has been agreed.

In late 2019 the SACRE emphasised that the current OfSTED inspection framework makes it almost impossible to draw firm conclusions about the quality of RE, collective worship or Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) Development. We were hopeful that OfSTED “deep dives” would begin to provide some insight but there were no deep dives into RE in the 25 inspections in Northumberland between October 2019 and March 2020, when inspection activity was paused.

Training planned for March 2020 was cancelled due to lockdown. The SACRE recognises that some of the most effective training now and in the future will 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.

### **Standards and Quality of Provision of RE**

The SACRE has monitored the quality of RE far less since March 2020. However prior to that date some information has come back from:

- reports from the RE Consultant following visits to schools
- discussion with RE co-ordinators and heads of RE departments
- examples of good or best practice described in the termly SACRE Newsletter

Anecdotal evidence reveal that some of the most innovative teaching and learning methods exist in our first, primary and middle schools where every effort is made to approach the study of religion and belief in a cross-curricular manner. It should be an aim of SACRE to work more closely with secondary and high colleagues to ensure that such innovation and good practice is explored more closely.

### Public Examination Outcomes

In Summer 2020 examination results were provided to pupils based on moderated judgements from schools, as public examinations were cancelled due to the pandemic. As a result no data was collected from schools by the Local Authority. For the record, the outcomes for the RE courses from 2012 to 2019 are as follows:

<b>RE GCSE Short Course</b>			
	Entries	A* - G (or equivalent)	A* - C (or equivalent)
2012	679	78	25
2013	649	92	29
2014	489	90	52
2015	579	90	42
2016	286	99	54
2017	124	96	39
2018	1	100	0
2019	0	0	0

<b>RE GCSE Full Course</b>			
	Entries	A* - G (or equivalent)	A* - C (or equivalent)
2012	873	96	54
2013	966	95	58
2014	1039	97	55
2015	1436	97	64
2016	1367	96	62
2017	1225	97	57
2018	929	97	62
2019	838	99	65

<b>RE AS Level</b>			
	Entries	A* - G (or equivalent)	A* - C (or equivalent)
2012	38	98	25
2013	45	84	14
2014	44	68	14
2015	165	81	29
2016	150	88	34
2017	60	96	45
2018	31	62	13
2019	21	25	85

<b>RE A Level</b>			
	Entries	A* - G (or equivalent)	A* - C (or equivalent)
2012	88	99	44
2013	70	100	35
2014	71	100	34
2015	95	100	36
2016	88	99	43
2017	81	99	43
2018	63	99	23
2019	52	100	52

### **Training/Continuing Professional Development**

Once schools reopen fully RE teachers will be able to access training by:

- contacting the Northumberland County Council School Improvement Team to arrange in-house RE training for an individual school, a cluster of schools, or RE co-ordinators/subject leaders in a partnership
- contacting the part-time RE Consultant
- contacting the North East Religious Resources Centre (NERRC)
- attending training events in neighbouring local authorities offered to teachers, etc. beyond their boundaries
- attending the County's annual RE Conference.

### **Pupils and Students Withdrawn from RE and Complaints about RE**

Parents can withdraw their children from RE and students aged over 18 can exercise the same right to withdraw. The SACRE is aware of no pupils and students who have been withdrawn from RE. Additionally, during the course of the year, no formal complaint relating to RE was received by the local authority.

### **The Agreed Syllabus**

The Agreed Syllabus working party will begin work shortly with the aim of producing a revised document ready for September 2021. We hope that a launch event will take place in June or July to ready teachers. The working party is made up of SACRE members, the RE Consultant and teachers who have volunteered to take part.

### **Collective Worship**

The Policy and Guidelines for Acts of Collective Worship (ACWs) is been revised for 2021. The advice it contains follows what is considered by a majority within the RE community to be best practice. It will be launched once schools reopen fully with the expectation that schools have reconsidered their provision in time for the new academic year in September 2021.

No formal complaint relating to collective worship was received by the local authority. Nor did the SACRE have 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.

There are very few recorded instances of pupils or students withdrawn from ACWs. We take this as confirmation that most schools are therefore providing ACWs which achieve inclusivity by, among other things, taking full account of the rich diversity of religion and belief that exists in Northumberland. In other words, ACWs are provided in ways that are in sympathy with the needs and aspirations of the whole school community.

### **Management of the SACRE**

#### *Staff*

The local authority has a School Improvement Leader (The Commissioner for Secondary Education) with ultimate responsibility for RE and collective worship. The local authority employs a part-time a 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 in an enviably efficient and cost-effective manner.

#### *Finance*

The SACRE receives a ringfenced annual sum from the local authority that covers all necessary and reasonable costs.

#### *SACRE meetings*

The SACRE met on three occasions in the academic year 2019-20, on 13th November 2019, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2020 and 8<sup>th</sup> July 2020. On each occasion the SACRE was quorate with at least one member from each committee present. A majority of SACRE members/representatives were able to attend all or at least two SACRE meetings, thereby ensuring continuity and progression from one meeting to the next.

SACRE meetings were dominated by two issues: topical matters drawn to our attention by members and the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE), and the impact of COVID.

### **Contribution of the SACRE to the Wider Local Authority Agenda**

The SACRE contributes to the wider local authority agenda by:

- giving expression to equality, diversity, inclusion and community cohesion. It thereby makes a contribution to the local authority's public sector equality duty (note the broad, balanced and inclusive nature of the Agreed Syllabus and the "Policy and Guidelines for Acts of Collective Worship"; articles published in the termly SACRE Newsletter; etc.)
- helping to raise standards in schools (note the content of the Agreed Syllabus; the termly SACRE Newsletter which highlights best practice; the support that individuals associated with the SACRE provide to schools; the annual monitoring of public exam results; etc.)
- assisting with the annual HMD commemoration, an event for which it has "campaigned" for some years

- providing the knowledge, understanding and skills necessary for teachers to provide high quality RE (note the provision of training; consultations via email about specific matters raised by teachers/schools concerning RE and/or collective worship; the termly SACRE Newsletter which highlights best practice; etc.)
- avoiding unnecessary and/or unreasonable costs at a time of considerable financial difficulty/austerity (note the arrangements for meeting costs agreed with the local authority; the relatively few days each year that the part-time RE Consultant works on behalf of the SACRE; the willingness of SACRE members to volunteer when tasks need completing on behalf of the SACRE; etc.).

### **Links with Other Agencies**

#### *National:*

- Membership of the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE).

#### *Local/Regional:*

- Close working relations exist with the NERRC
- Close working relations exist with the region's Free Church denominations and other religious and faith communities, some of which are represented on the SACRE (e.g. the Hindu/ISKCON, Jewish and Sikh communities)
- Close working relations exist with the Anglican and the 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.

### **Summary of Other Relevant Information**

The SACRE continues to publish a [termly newsletter](#). The newsletter keeps teachers, governors and others informed about the latest developments in RE and collective worship; highlights best practice within the county; identifies training options; provides early warning about important festivals and national and international events that schools may wish to discuss during RE lessons or collective worship; and alerts teachers about the most up-to-date RE resources. We are pleased to report that a few other SACREs in the region (e.g. Darlington, North Tyneside, Gateshead) have found it beneficial, either in the past or present, to experiment with similar exercises designed to promote best practice.

During the academic year 2019-20, the SACRE continued to work through its action plan to ensure its work has structure and coherence (the action plan can be found in Appendix Two). The current action plan covers the period until December 2021.

The SACRE has a designated [webpage](#) where schools, teachers and governors can access the Locally Agreed RE Syllabus, the "Policy and Guidelines for Acts of Collective Worship", copies of all the SACRE newsletters and other relevant documentation.

Schools were encouraged to consider applying for the highly worthwhile [Accord Award](#) for Inclusive Schools, and attention was also drawn to the [RE Quality Mark](#) and the [Farmington Fellowships](#) for headteachers and teachers of RE/RS.

Members of the SACRE played a key role in the county's fifth Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) commemoration in January 2020.

## **Appendix One:**

### **Membership of the SACRE, plus the LA officers who attend, clerk and provide professional advice**

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

Baptist Church	Represented by the United Reformed Church
Methodist Church (SE Northumberland Ecumenical Area)	Represented by the United Reformed Church
Roman Catholic Church	Mrs. J. Cousin
United Reformed Church	Reverend E. H. Marley OBE
Hinduism	Bhakti Rasa Adhikhara
Islam	Ms. M. Khan
Judaism	Mrs. D. Van Der Velde
Sikhism	Harpal Singh

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

Mrs. E. Bainbridge

Mr. C. Hudson



Mr. P. Rusby  
Rev. J. Scott

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

Mr. M. Davidson  
Mr. A. Duffield  
Miss F. Gannon  
Mrs. C. Naylor  
Mr. T. Nicholls  
Mrs. H. Shaw  
Ms. S. Walton

**(d) Representatives of the Local Authority**

Councillor D. Campbell  
Councillor W. Crosby  
Councillor G. Renner-Thompson  
Councillor T. Thorne

**(e) Co-Opted Members**

Mr. S. Dearlove	North-East Humanists
Ms. M. Wardingham	Collingwood School and Media Arts College

**(f) Observer (Academies' Rep)**

vacant

**(g) LA Officers in Attendance**

D. Cookson	Commissioner for Secondary Education
C. Weir	Part-time RE Consultant
A. Todd	Clerk to the SACRE, Democratic Services

**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."*

**Appendix Two:**

**The SACRE's Action Plan**



## **Appendix Three:**

### **Distribution List**

- All schools in Northumberland
- Director of Education and Skills/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
- Northumberland MPs
- All Northumberland County Councillors
- The CE and RC Diocesan Authorities
- Karenza Passmore, North-East Religious Resources Centre
- Rev. David Herbert, United Reformed Church Synod Office, 4 College Lane, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, NE1 8JJ
- Rev. Stephen Lindridge, 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