

The Religious Education Council's “A Review of RE in England, 2013”

In October 2013, the Religious Education Council (REC) of England and Wales launched “A Review of Religious Education in England”. The “Review” contains a non-statutory framework for RE which has been warmly welcomed by Rt Hon Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education, and a very wide range of professional organisations and bodies representing faiths and other world views. In fact, to date, there has been almost no opposition to the framework, with the result being that almost everyone in the RE community regards it as an excellent starting point for an RE agreed syllabus because, among other things, it will ensure that all pupils and students secure the same broad and balanced subject entitlement, an entitlement fully in conformity with current legislative requirements and perceptions of best practice.

At its meeting in January 2014, the Northumberland SACRE agreed unanimously that the framework within the “Review” will be the starting point for the next revision of the County’s RE Agreed Syllabus. However, because the framework is merely that, a framework, the new RE Agreed Syllabus will have to be fleshed out with more detailed units of work and/or programmes of study which not only provide more precise guidance about what to teach, especially for non-specialist RE teachers, but ensure that the new syllabus reflects local realities, opportunities and perspectives.

Given the importance of the “Review”, and that it seems set to shape RE provision in England and Wales for many years to come, we urge all those who teach RE in Northumberland schools, and all those who have ultimate responsibility for RE provision in our schools (above all, Headteachers, Principals and Governors), to access the “Review” in general and the framework in particular (the framework occupies pages 14 to 28). Once the “Review” and the framework have been examined and critically evaluated in-house, we would suggest that schools consider what changes, if any, the school will have to make if Northumberland’s next RE Agreed Syllabus is based firmly on the framework itself.

The Northumberland SACRE would like to hear from RE teachers, headteachers, principals and/or governors about

- the “Review” in general,
- the framework in particular,
- what the advantages and/or disadvantages would be if the new RE Agreed Syllabus is based firmly on the framework, and
- what topics, themes, units of work and/or programmes of study should flesh out the syllabus to ensure that it reflects local realities, opportunities and perspectives.

Of course, we have plenty of time before a new RE Agreed Syllabus must be produced (September 2016 is the earliest date from when a new syllabus will have to be used), but the SACRE is keen to ensure that it is moving in a direction which has the broad support of all the County’s stakeholders interested in the well-being of RE in our schools. With this in mind, RE teachers might like to consider whether they already have topics, themes, units of work and/or programmes of study which relate to the “Requirements” of the REC framework, and whether they would be willing for their topics, themes, units of work and/or programmes of study to be published as part of the next RE Agreed Syllabus. If such documentation can be published as part of the next syllabus, we can ensure that best practice in Northumberland schools is disseminated across the County.

We know that many of you are passionate supporters of the existing RE Agreed Syllabus and find its content very helpful. Rest assured that those parts of the existing syllabus which will enhance the new one will be retained, especially if they relate to the “Requirements” of the REC framework.

Anyone who has yet to examine the “Review” in detail, simply access the REC’s website (www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk) and a link from the home page leads directly to an electronic copy of the document. Although the “Review” runs to 71 pages, it is written with commendable clarity and is therefore largely devoid of jargon.

If you wish to share your thoughts about the REC’s “Review” in general, or the RE framework in particular, please send comments to Linda Papaioannou at Linda.Papaioannou@northumberland.gov.uk or Phil André at phil.andre@ntlworld.com, ideally by mid-May 2014 so that the comments can be fed into the next SACRE meeting in June.

Enjoy reading the “Review”. Many people see it as the starting point for reviving the fortunes of RE after what have been some very challenging years for the subject.