



Northumberland

County Council

COUNCIL

4 MAY 2022

Adopting a New Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education

Report of: Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services,
Cath McEvoy-Carr

Cabinet Member: Councillor Guy Renner-Thompson

Purpose of report

To outline the process of designing a new agreed syllabus for Religious Education.

Recommendations

Council is recommended:

1. To note that a revised Locally Agreed Syllabus has been created and formally approved by Northumberland Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education;
2. To formally adopt the approved Locally Agreed Syllabus;
3. To authorise officers to recommend the revised Locally Agreed Syllabus to Northumberland maintained schools for implementation from September 2022.

Link to Corporate Plan

The proposed Syllabus for Religious Education is in strong accordance with the **Learning** priority of NCC Corporate Plan 2020-21.

Key issues

The Locally Agreed Syllabus is a statutory syllabus of Religious Education (RE) prepared under Schedule 31 of the Education Act 1996 and adopted by the Local Authority under that schedule.

It must be followed in maintained schools without a designated denomination (community, foundation and voluntary-aided or voluntary-controlled schools without a religious character).

The locally agreed syllabus for RE must be reviewed at least every five years.

To remain compliant under Schedule 31 of the Education Act 1996 Northumberland County Council must provide maintained schools in county with a revised Locally Agreed Syllabus for September 2022.

Background

The Locally Agreed Syllabus review process has been carried out between July 2020 and April 2022.

The review process involves the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) creating a statutory body known as an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) in order to produce a new locally agreed syllabus. The ASC is a separate legal body from a SACRE.

The Agreed Syllabus Conference must:

- meet in public
- include on any sub-committee at least one member of each of its constituent committees.
- produce an agreed syllabus for RE
- unanimously recommend that syllabus for adoption by the LA

This process has been completed and a new syllabus has been approved by the Northumberland SACRE. Before it is recommended to Northumberland schools, it must be adopted formally by the County Council. The proposed syllabus meets legal requirements and offers a suitable vehicle for Northumberland schools to provide high standards in RE.

The revised syllabus can now be recommended for adoption by schools from September 2022. The action being proposed will have benefits for the pupils of Northumberland in as much as teachers will be able to begin a new academic year by adopting a more relevant RE curriculum that fully complies with national guidance, prepares young people well for future examination courses in RE, and more accurately reflects the values and beliefs of citizens in the county and country.

The Northumberland SACRE resolved to commence a review of the Agreed RE syllabus at its meeting on 8 July 2020, in readiness for implementation from September 2022. An Agreed Syllabus Conference Working Group was set up, containing members of SACRE, the Head of School Improvement, and the Northumberland RE Consultant who provided feedback from teachers. Meetings took place on:

- 22 February 2021 - [minutes](#)
- 22 March 2021 - [minutes](#)
- 26 April 2021 - [minutes](#)
- 24 May 2021 - [minutes](#)
- 28 June 2021 - [minutes](#)

The ASC considered the outcomes of the ASC Working Group. The ASC considered the strengths and weaknesses of the current Agreed Syllabus, changes in demographics in Northumberland since 2016, developments in RE teaching, took feedback from focus groups, and considered the way they wished to move a new syllabus forward. Agreed Syllabus Conference meetings took place on:

- 21 July 2021 - [minutes](#)
- 8 December 2021 - [minutes](#)

- 4 February 2022 - [minutes](#)
- 6 April 2022 - [minutes](#)

The ASC considered a range of options:

- Keep the Agreed Syllabus in its current format
- Update the current Agreed Syllabus in full to take account for educational changes
- Write a new Agreed Syllabus in full
- Purchase a syllabus from a local authority who had recently updated theirs
- Purchase a new syllabus from RE Today, a private provider who have produced the Agreed Syllabus for over 30 local authorities.

The previous syllabus was putting teachers and students at a disadvantage as it was not as effective in terms of clarity, progression of learning or content.

The ASC felt that there was not sufficient time to update the current syllabus, or write a new syllabus in full, before the expected launch in June 2022.

Purchasing a syllabus from a local authority who had recently updated theirs was considered but none were found to be suitable for the Northumberland context.

Purchasing a syllabus from RE Today gives us the surety that the syllabus is of high quality and provides an opportunity for SACRE members to write local units to give the syllabus a more local context.

Consultation with the Church of England diocese has taken place via discussions between the Diocesan Director of Education and the Head of School Improvement.

Consultation with teachers has taken place via discussions at RE network meetings, facilitated by the RE Consultant, and at the SACRE termly meetings.

The various faith and non-religious belief groups represented on the SACRE have added their views during the drafting process.

The outcome of this consultation has been that Agreed Syllabus Conference decided to purchase a new syllabus from RE Today. SACRE has unanimously approved the finished syllabus and commends this to Northumberland County Council and to Northumberland schools.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services has seen a final draft of the new syllabus, and as Chair of SACRE agrees with committee members that it is suitable for adoption.

Once approval has been received, Northumberland schools will be invited to a launch event, funded from the SACRE budget. Network meetings will follow this event throughout next academic year to support the implementation of the new agreed syllabus. The RE Consultant will provide support to individual schools as necessary.

The main risk associated with this decision is that if the proposed agreed syllabus was not adopted, Northumberland would not be compliant under Schedule 31 of the Education Act 1996.

Once adopted a link to the statutory sections will be put onto the SACRE page of the Northumberland County Council website. Individual schools will receive a unique access code so that they can access the full content.

Additional funds were requested for the financial year 2021 – 2022 to ensure that the RE Consultant could undertake additional work in preparing the agreed syllabus. There is no cost to relevant schools as the costs are being borne by the SACRE budget.

The public sector equality duty (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) applies to the decision to be made on this report. There is a requirement when deciding upon the recommendations to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity for people with protected characteristics, foster good relations between such groups, and eliminate any unlawful discrimination.

The agreed syllabus should not negatively impact on residents or council staff with protected characteristics. As with all curriculum content schools have a general duty to ensure that every student can access the curriculum and this syllabus is designed to enable the content to be differentiated for pupils of all abilities, including those with disabilities.

Similarly, school staff with protected characteristics will not be negatively affected by the changes made to the content or proposed delivery of the new syllabus.

The professional development opportunities for teachers in Northumberland schools around the new agreed syllabus will commence in June 2022.

Schools should begin adopting the new agreed syllabus from September 2022 with full adoption expected from September 2023.

The new agreed syllabus will be brought to the attention of all schools through the ecourier, RE network meetings, Headteacher briefings and via School Improvement Partner visits to schools.

Implications

Policy	The revised Locally Agreed Syllabus is in strong accordance with the Learning priority of NCC Corporate Strategy 2020-21
Finance and value for money	There are no direct financial impacts positive or negative arising from the recommendations associated with the revised Locally Agreed Syllabus. All costs in implementing the revised Local Agreed Syllabus have been covered by SACRE budget.
Legal	The recommendations allow Northumberland County Council to remain compliant under Schedule 31 of the Education Act 1996
Procurement	None
Human Resources	None
Property	None
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes X	Equalities impact assessment embedded as appendix 01.
Risk Assessment	None
Crime & Disorder	This report has considered Section 17 (CDA) and the duty it imposes and there are no implications arising from it.
Customer Consideration	The revised Locally Agreed Syllabus as set out in this report is based upon creating a more current and inclusive curriculum for Northumberland's pupils and to better support outcomes in Religious Education.
Carbon reduction	It is not envisaged that the revised Locally Agreed Syllabus would have any positive or negative impact on carbon reduction.
Health and Wellbeing	None
Wards	Applicable to children in all wards who attend maintained schools without a designated denomination (community, foundation and voluntary-aided or voluntary-controlled schools without a religious character).

Background Papers

Appendix 01: Equality Impact Assessment – Agreed Syllabus Adoption



Appendix 01 -
Agreed Syllabus - Eq

Report sign off

Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Chief Executive	Cath McEvoy-Carr on behalf of Daljit Lally
Portfolio Holder(s)	Guy Renner-Thompson

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