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ANALYSIS OF SACRE ANNUAL REPORTS 2020-2021 FOR THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STANDING COUNCILS ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (NASACRE)

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It is always a pleasure to add a foreword to publications of this kind – especially when then the analysis has been so rigorous, and the findings are so important. Thanks to our consultant, Dr David Hampshire, I am happy to recommend this report to NASACRE members and to the wider education community.

Every year, Standing Advisory Councils for RE are expected to submit a report of their activities to their own local authority, and from there to the Department for Education and the National Association of SACREs. NASACRE has provided a revised pro forma for this purpose <https://nasacre.org.uk/resources/nasacre-support-materials/sacre-management/> and the database provides a snapshot of the work of the local bodies responsible for setting an RE curriculum through their Agreed Syllabus Conference, for monitoring this, for supporting teachers and schools as they implement the syllabus, and for determining the type of collective worship provided as part of the school day.

It is more than ten years since a summary analysis was provided by the government on a similar sample of SACRE reports. The responsibility for initiating a review was passed from the (former) Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to successive Departments of Education. NASACRE is delighted that the current DfE chose to help the association with the redesigned pro forma, and with the support of this 2022 analysis. It is an independent report, but its creation was supported by the DfE.

The report contains recommendations – these are mainly for NASACRE in relation to the association's partnership with SACRE's, local authorities and the Department for Education. SACREs work tirelessly, with extensive voluntary support, to achieve their aims and responsibilities. We thank all of those who submitted reports during this period, and who have engaged in the important provision of effective and affective religious education.

Foreword, from Linda Rudge, Chair of NASACRE

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 SACREs continued to function during the second year of the pandemic. Some SACREs reported that they were inquorate for some of their meetings and not all SACREs were able to meet in person when restrictions were lifted. Some SACREs reported that there was an issue in terms of vacant places in some Groups and this led to a greater likelihood of inquorate meetings.
- 1.2 The resources made available to SACREs was variable and the Freedom of Information request from NASACRE featured in a number of reports. Some SACREs had clearly defined budgets, some stated that there was a commitment on the part of the LA to provide support as needed and at least one report stated that there was no support at all from the LA. The level of support had an impact on SACREs ability to perform their functions, especially monitoring RE and collective worship.
- 1.3 SACREs faced challenges monitoring RE and collective worship during this period, especially where they had relied on visits to schools in the past, but some overcame this through virtual meetings with teachers. Some SACREs committed themselves to a visits programme in the year following on from the report submitted.
- 1.4 The Government decision to extend the examination and reporting arrangements for all subjects at GCSE and A Level during the year covered by this report had a significant impact on SACREs to report on the number of candidates and attainment. Where SACREs were able to report on standards this was due established e-networks and strong relationships with schools and academies.
- 1.5 The primary function of a SACRE is to advise the local authority on religious education and collective worship, and to report on how the local authority responded to the advice. Only a minority of SACREs reported that they had advised the local authority and only a minority of those reported on the response. The two main topics for advice were the need for an Agreed Syllabus review and funding for SACRE activities along with the need to appoint members to SACRE so that SACRE could function.
- 1.6 SACREs were more likely to advise schools on religious education than give advice to the LA but less likely to give advice on collective worship.
- 1.7 Some SACREs reported on support networks for teachers and training events but were unlikely to monitor the quality and impact of that training.
- 1.8 The majority of SACREs reported on requests for Determination and monitored complaints relating to RE and collective worship and a minority also monitored withdrawal.
- 1.9 The majority of SACREs reported on partnerships they had with other bodies and some had extended their remit into other curriculum areas as they were seen as trusted bodies, this related specifically to RSE/RSHE.

2. Recommendations to NASACRE Executive

On the basis of the evidence it is recommended that NASACRE discusses the following recommendations.

2.1 NASACRE support for SACREs

- i. Advice should be developed for SACREs on advising their local authority on RE and collective worship and reporting on how the LA responded to advice¹.
- ii. Advice developed on how SACRE annual reports could have a greater focus on the impact of their work, showing their value as statutory bodies.
- iii. NASACRE could develop a series of case studies to support SACRE members' training, exemplifying ways that SACREs have been creative in working with schools and other partners and the impact that this has had.
- iv. Revisit the annual report proforma on a regular basis.

2.2 NASACRE discussion with the DfE

- v. Discuss the ongoing strategy for ensuring 100% return on SACRE Annual reports as required by legislation.
- vi. Clarify what the response of the DfE would be where SACREs reported that the LA had not followed the advice of SACRE or where a SACRE could not function as a result of the lack of support from the LA.
- vii. Discuss how government can clarify and support the role of SACREs in relation to non-denominational academies in light of LA responsibilities to parents/guardians and their children in the authority², with a view to revising current guidance which is now 10 years old³.
- viii. Discuss the need to update *Religious education in English schools: non-statutory guidance 2010*⁴ and *Circular 1/94*⁵, both of which remain on the government's website as current advice.

2.3 Advice to LAs co-produced by NASACRE and DfE

- ix. Produce a guide for LAs, with the support of the DfE, to ensure authorities meet their statutory responsibilities.
- x. Advise LAs as to the continued nature of SACREs as statutory bodies appointed by the LA and that SACREs should at least have the same support and status as other local authority committees⁶.

¹ [The local authority is responsible for securing the standard of education for pupils in or from the authority, that includes religious education and collective worship.](#)

² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/section/10>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/re-and-collective-worship-in-academies-and-free-schools/religious-education-re-and-collective-worship-in-academies-and-free-schools?msclkid=3a97f159d07511ec9cb4ba4b39523eed>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-guidance-in-english-schools-non-statutory-guidance-2010?msclkid=3a98619ed07511ec9a84ffc6a5aa5dc4>

⁵

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/281929/Collective_worship_in_schools.pdf?msclkid=abf0da16d07711ecba73b170373fca63

⁶ In line with the requirements of [The Religious Education \(Meetings of Local Conferences and Councils\) Regulations 1994](#).

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The Analysis for SACRE Annual Reports 2020 – 2021 was commissioned by the NASACRE Executive with the agreement for the Department for Education (DfE).

3.1.2 Of 153 SACREs in England, 57 submitted a report by the 30 April 2022 (37.25%), noting that in the previous year 68 (43.8%) were received by December 2021 for the year 2019 – 2020.

3.1.3 There is a recommended format for SACRE annual reports, which is available from [NASACRE](#) but not all SACREs use this format some using earlier formats and others being peculiar to a SACRE. Some reports ran to 22 pages whilst others were 2 pages. Therefore, this analysis has not used the NASACRE recommended format rather it has identified 21 categories as the basis for data collection and analysis, see Methodology below. These categories were discussed with NASACRE's Executive Assistant during the process of data collection. See Appendices 1 and 2 for the categories used for analysis in this report.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Reports were received from 19 January to 25 April 2022. The first five reports submitted were analysed individually and then compared. Notes were made on differences in style and content, with key words identified for further analysis and the following categories identified (see also Appendix 1 and Appendix 2).

- Attendance
- Professional support
- Religious Education:
 - Advice to the local authority
 - Advice to schools⁷
- Collective worship:
 - Advice to the local authority
 - Advice to schools⁸
 - Determinations
- Monitoring:
 - Complaints (RE and CW)
 - Religious Education
 - Collective Worship
- Agreed Syllabus Review
 - Training for implementation of the syllabus

As more reports were received further categories were added:

- SACRE funding
- Examination performance
 - GCSE
 - A Level

⁷ Schools here refers to maintained non-denominational and controlled schools and academies and free schools without a religious foundation.

⁸ Schools here refers to non-denominational schools and academies and free schools without a religious foundation.

- Covid-19
- Communication with schools and others
- Collaboration with other bodies
- Development Planning
- Relationships and Sex Education/Health Education (RSE/RSHE)

3.2.2 The latter were added relative to the frequency they featured in reports received. These indicated new areas that SACREs were working in their authorities. Where statistical analysis appeared above or below what might be expected from the range in other categories they were revisited to check and amend as necessary.

3.3 Ethics

See Appendix 3 for details.

3.4 Declaration of interest

The author has written SACRE annual reports for a number of authorities in the past. No work for a local authority or SACRE was undertaken during the period from agreeing to do this research to its completion. The author declares no interest relevant to this research, and has refrained from making judgements on the reports submitted.

3.5 Confidence interval

The confidence interval as to how representative the findings of this report are in relation to all SACRE reports in England is 95%, based on:

$$\bar{x} \pm Z \frac{s}{\sqrt{n}}$$

Sample mean (\bar{x}): 153; Sample size (n) 57;
 Standard deviation (s): 67.882250993909; Standard error: 8.991;
 Confidence level: 95 %; Z-score (Z) 1.959964; σ or right tailed p value 0.025.

3.6 Caveat

It does not follow that SACRE Reports report fully on their support or activities, given that some are relatively short. This report is based only on what SACREs stated.

4. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and public health measures on SACREs

4.1 SACRE meetings

4.1.1 Over 98% of SACRE mentioned Covid-19 and/or pandemic in relation to their work during this period. During this period special regulations were in place for remote and virtual meeting up to 28 April 2021 (see: *Hertfordshire County Council & Ors v Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government [2021] EWHC 1093 (Admin) (28 April 2021) Judgement*). SACREs also organise visits to schools for a variety of purposes, such as scheduled SACRE meetings or monitoring visits. It was clear from reports that business could not be business as usual for many SACREs.

4.1.2 What was not clear from the reports was whether SACREs, as locally appointed statutory bodies, were expected to operate in the same way as other local authority

meetings over the period of transition from virtual to in person meetings. If not this would indicate, in individual cases, a local authority's understanding of the nature of SACRE and its significance in statute.

One SACRE report stated:

Unfortunately, we have been unable to arrange meetings in the last academic year, 2020/2021 due to Covid lockdowns, members' shielding and availability of suitably sized meeting rooms.

As can be seen, it was not simply the availability of space for meetings but also the impact that Covid-19 had on members.

But this response was not universal as noted in one report, which stated that it had continued to use a virtual platform for meetings:

As can be seen above, the members of both SACRE and Agreed Syllabus Conference continued to work and meet regularly through the second year of the pandemic. Attendance has been good and meetings have been quorate. The SACRE Exec have met between meetings to progress work and ensure profitable meetings. SACRE aims to develop its members by encouraging them to participate in meetings, and to lead on items where possible.

4.2 Monitoring RE, Collective Worship and public examinations

4.2.1 The majority of reports stated that it was not possible to monitor schools and examination results during this period. One SACRE report puts it:

Covid 19 has posed a considerable challenge to SACRE's usual monitoring processes.

4.2.2 Some SACRE's, though, found solutions to these challenges. One SACRE had continued to give advice to the local authority:

The Local Authority has been advised that despite the pandemic RE remains a statutory subject for all pupils in all schools. The LA has continued to support the delivery of the RE networks and ensure that LA officer is available to support at each of the sessions.

4.2.3 Training continued:

Whilst the Covid 19 pandemic continued to cause complications, the Advisor was still able to deliver training and CPD support to both primary and secondary schools via online sessions, held with support from the LA.

4.2.4 Schools websites and online network meetings were also important sources of information for SACREs, here are four examples:

Website trawls have revealed that RE has continued to be delivered in some face-to-face lessons and remote learning, but many teachers attending RE Network meetings admitted to little or no RE having been taught.

SACRE members had been monitoring the websites of schools and once this bit of work was completed decided that schools should be written to advertising SACRE and reminding them to make sure that RE was visible on their websites. This letter was put on hold due to covid in order not to put more stress onto school leaders.

School websites were trawled for evidence of RE provision i.e. details of what was being taught in each year group as required by law. In secondaries, this was made more complex by the fact that many schools include RE under different headings. Some secondary findings were quite disturbing and were followed up.

Monitoring for this academic year took place via email conversations, online conversations and face to face conversations, where deemed safe due to Covid-19.

Conversations with teachers at RE Network meetings and in SACRE meetings, have highlighted the difficulty that some schools have had in maintaining effective RE teaching during the last year, while others have adapted well and quickly to new ways of working.

The previous quotes in this paragraph underline the increasing significance of what schools and academies put on their websites and the important role that technology has in informing SACREs, so that they can have a strong evidence base for their advice to the LA.

4.2.5 A small number of SACREs, despite restrictions and the government's non-reporting of GCSE and A Level Results, published the Joint Council for Qualifications results and then asked schools to confirm whether these results reflected their own and where there had been an improvement on previous years or not. One SACRE stated:

Due to the pandemic, GCSEs in 2020 were teacher assessed grades. We have received data from 80% of the Secondary schools. 1079 year 11 students were assessed for Religious Studies qualifications, this is approximately 36% of the year 11 cohort. There were no entries for the short course GCSE in 2020. Some schools enter the vast majority of their students for Religious Studies. Students at one school achieved particularly well in 2020 compared to other schools with a high number of entries. Attainment was also high at X, compared to other schools where relatively fewer students were entered.

4.2.6 It was clear that some SACREs had important existing relationships with schools and strong networks that enabled continuing relationship during the pandemic. Other SACREs were inventive with their time, realising that they could not visit schools, but

they could visit school websites, report on findings and make suggestions as to the next steps.

4.2.7 One SACRE, though, was looking beyond the pandemic and what might be needed in terms of learning lost due to lockdown:

A larger piece of work for SACRE and the RE consultant was deciding to create a recovery RE curriculum for schools for the Autumn term 2020.

5 Support for SACREs and SACRE arrangements

5.1 Support for SACREs

84% of SACREs reported that they had professional support from an advisor, consultant, consultancy and/or a clerk. The breadth of arrangements reflected the budget provided by the local authority and in some cases, where there was no budget specified, the provision of an adviser and clerk was a signal of the LA's commitment to SACRE. One SACRE reported:

No identifiable budget is provided for SACRE. However, clerking is provided by the LA's Governor Support Services, the Chair of SACRE is an LA officer and a venue for the meeting are all provided by the LA. These costs are all borne by the LA.

In part this may be to do with NASACRE's self-evaluation proforma at 4d where Professional and Financial Support are conflated but further research would need to confirm this.

Where there was no advisor or consultant SACRE members had to rely on their own resources, one report stated that:

As there is no RE advisor or paid support for RE, all development work is usually led by members of SACRE and/or local teachers.

A small number of SACREs reported that they used the advice and support services from other local authorities, these tended to be smaller authorities and therefore there was an overall saving for the smaller authority.

5.2 Funding for SACREs

5.2.1 77% of SACRE reports mentioned funding but less than half of those (43.2%) identified a figure or, in some cases, a detailed budget.

5.2.2 NASACRE's FOI request on SACRE funding was reported widely across SACREs in 2020 – 2021 but it did not follow that these reports included any information about funding from the LA or a budget.

As one SACRE reported:

SACRE discussed the NASACRE report on funding for SACREs.

but no reference to a budget or funding from the LA appeared in the report. Some SACREs quoted the NASACRE research and used it as a comparison in relation to their settlement.

5.2.3 One SACRE noted:

SACRE's capacity to conduct direct monitoring has always been limited and there is a need to consider how this activity will take place in the future given current budget pressures.

5.3 Attendance and quoracy

3.3.1 Just under 60% of annual reports reported on attendance at SACRE meetings for the period of the report. There were a number of different ways of doing this:

- Giving a full list of SACRE members by Group and identifying which meeting they attended.
- Attendance reported as percentage for each group for each meeting.
- By member, but not by group.
- In a special appendix to the report but not submitted as part of the report.
- By providing hyperlinks to the minutes of meetings so that they could be viewed by those interested.
- Noting that all meetings were quorate but giving no detail.
- Noting apologies but not attendance.

5.3.2 Some SACREs reported on whether meetings were quorate, often linked to Covid-19 restrictions and alternative arrangements but not all. One SACRE gave a list of who was at each meeting and it was clear that at least one of the meetings was inquorate but no mention was made of that. One SACRE reported:

Membership in each of the four groups is inconsistent and as a result some meetings have been inquorate. SACRE has requested that the local authority supports them in identifying faith/community leaders to support their membership.

5.3.3 A small number of SACRE reports ($\leq 4\%$) appended a constitution to the report submitted. It was not clear why, but this did enable readers to compare the membership of SACRE with the membership required by the constitution.

5.3.4 *The Religious Education (Meetings of Local Conferences and Councils) Regulations 1994: UK Statutory Instruments 1994 No. 1304* (see footnote 6).

No SACRE reported on issues relating to SI 1994: 1304, although there clearly were issues due to Covid-19 restrictions and how these were managed when restrictions were lifted.

6. Religious Education

This section covers advice to the LA from SACREs, advice and support for schools, monitoring RE and Agreed Syllabus Review. Some of what is in paragraphs 4.1 – 4.2 will also feature in this section as the reports were written when the impact of Covid-19 was a major concern for SACREs. Quotes from section 4 will be referenced but not repeated.

6.1 Advice to the local authority

6.1.1 NASACRE's guidance on SACRE Annual Reports⁹ states:

The main purpose of the annual report is to hold the LA to account, by informing the Secretary of State and key partners what advice SACRE gave the LA during the year and how that was responded to; this includes advice on RE and Collective Worship in those schools for which the LA has responsibility.

This is consonant with government advice based on the requirements of the Education Reform Act 1988¹⁰ and subsequent consolidated legislation.

6.1.2 During the year under report 33% of SACREs reported that they had advised the LA on matters relating to RE. Although one SACRE simply stated:

No specific advice was given to the local authority during this academic year.

6.1.3 In some of these reports the advice related to resourcing and funding SACRE and Agreed Syllabus reviews:

Advice was given to the local authority around the necessity to review the current RE agreed syllabus and to ensure that schools were aware of what would be in place for September 2021-2026.

6.1.4 Other SACREs advised on matters relating to schools and their statutory or contractual duties (in the case of Academies), for example:

SACRE also advised the local authority on contacting schools who did not appear to be fulfilling legal requirements for RE provision or who were entering no or low pupil numbers for exams in RE.

6.1.5 One SACRE submitted its report to a scrutiny committee recommending it to comment on and to note:

The work of SACRE in the implementation of the Local Agreed Syllabus, raising the profile and importance of religious education and supporting the high-quality teaching of Religious Education in schools and academies.

This was a rare case that indicated the way that a SACRE communicates with its local authority. Looking at the report, though, it did not mention the response of the scrutiny committee to its previous report.

⁹

[https://nasacre.org.uk/file/nasacre/SACRE Annual Reports necessary desir.pdf#:~:text=The%20main%20purpose%20of%20the%20annual%20report%20is,responsibility.%20Suggested%20structure%20to%20the%20annual%20report%3A%201.](https://nasacre.org.uk/file/nasacre/SACRE%20Annual%20Reports%20necessary%20desir.pdf#:~:text=The%20main%20purpose%20of%20the%20annual%20report%20is,responsibility.%20Suggested%20structure%20to%20the%20annual%20report%3A%201.)

¹⁰

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/281929/Collective_worship_in_schools.pdf see paragraphs 98 - 100.

6.1.6 Another area of advice to the LA was SACRE membership, as noted above in 5.3.3, and requests such as:

To review the membership of SACRE to ensure it reflects the breadth and diversity of the borough in terms of faiths and beliefs.

This example emphasises the role of the LA as the appointing body and may indicate that some LAs are not taking their responsibilities seriously.

6.1.7 What was not evident, other than in response to advice to convene an Agreed Syllabus Conference, was what the response of the local authority was to the advice of SACRE. To that extent it appears that the conversation is one way but that may not be the case, it may simply be that SACREs are not reporting on the LA's response to its advice other than in a request for funding or the convening of an Agreed Syllabus Conference.

6.2 Monitoring RE

Monitoring in general

6.2.1 As noted in 2.2 many SACREs found it impossible to monitor RE in schools due to restrictions relating to the pandemic. Despite this around 42% of SACREs engaged in some form of monitoring of RE.

SACRE developed and approved a monitoring questionnaire in the academic year 2020-21 and this was circulated to schools in September 2021. In future years this will strengthen monitoring. In 2020-21 the main focus of monitoring was through the review of the locally Agreed Syllabus. Consultation with teachers took place via a questionnaire and the Agreed Syllabus Conference.

A representative monitoring group has met virtually during the period of this report, at a suitable time before each full SACRE meeting in order to monitor the effectiveness of the Agreed Syllabus.

6.2.2 Where SACREs monitored RE in schools, including Academies, one tool was scrutinising schools' websites to see they stated about RE in the school, the curriculum offer and other details such as attainment in Religious Studies. The following is one example of a SACRE's reported findings:

School websites were trawled for evidence of RE provision i.e. details of what was being taught in each year group as required by law. In secondaries, this was made more complex by the fact that many schools include RE under different headings. Some secondary findings were quite disturbing and were followed up.

Monitoring primary RE

6.2.3 42% of SACREs reported monitoring primary RE. This was predominantly done through online teacher events, such as primary support groups, where teachers were asked questions and had discussions about RE in their schools and the impact of the pandemic.

Conversations with teachers at network meetings and training events strongly suggest that teachers have continued to provide excellent RE provision despite the challenges of the pandemic.

Monitoring secondary RE

6.2.4 42% of SACREs also reported monitoring non-examination RE in secondary schools on a similar basis to that for primary schools. Existing networks of teachers provided a valuable resource for SACREs. Fewer SACREs reported on examination performance (GCSE 35% and A Level 19%). Where examination results were reported on this was predominantly historic with the latest published results being recorded and noting that results for the previous year were unavailable. As noted in 4.2.5 (above) online meetings with teachers were an opportunity to ask questions about GCSE and A Level attainment to see if the results were in line with the expectation of the school for each candidate.

Complaints about RE in schools¹¹

6.2.5 56% of SACREs reported that they monitored complaints about RE in the schools that come under their remit. Only one SACRE received a complaint about the RE curriculum in a secondary school:

During the year there was one parental complaint about religious education referred to SACRE. This involved a secondary school in the borough and their teaching of Hinduism. The RE Advisor worked individually with this school to review and enhance their curriculum materials relating to the specific aspect of Hinduism raised as a concern, develop the subject leaders' substantive knowledge of Hinduism and raise awareness of common misconceptions. Subsequently, the subject lead and the parent concerned have confirmed they were pleased with the support provided.

Whilst there was only one formal complaint about RE in a school dealt with by a SACRE another SACRE noted:

However, SACRE has been made aware of a few concerns made by parents and members of the community in relation to some content used in lessons, and some references used on the Agreed Syllabus website.

Therefore, the absence of formal complaints does not imply that there isn't discontent with RE in some areas but that these issues are resolved before they become formal complaints to the local authority and referred to SACRE.

Withdrawals from RE

6.2.6 30% of SACREs mentioned withdrawals from RE, of these 41% stated that pupils had been withdrawn and presented the statistics in a variety of ways. One SACRE reported on a year by year basis over a five-year period. Other SACREs reported only for the year under report. Here are some examples:

Data collected from schools would suggest that a small proportion of pupils are withdrawn from RE and CW across the county. Pupils come from the following

¹¹ Schools here does not include Academies, Free Schools or maintained Aided schools,

religious backgrounds: 57% Jehovah's Witnesses, 18% Muslim, 3% Plymouth Brethren, 3% Humanist and 19% unrecorded.

From the LA's monitoring of schools, we know that 70 pupils have been withdrawn from RE lessons across primary and secondary schools

SACRE have been officially informed of six pupils withdrawn from RE from two schools.

Some schools have contacted the RE Consultant about withdrawal of pupils and been given advice on how to deal with this.

One SACRE had no hard data but commented:

Anecdotally, however it seems that the number of children and young people being withdrawn from RE continues to be low and not an issue for concern.

Where SACREs stated that there had been no withdrawal some caveated that was on the basis it had not been brought to their attention.

Training for RE (including Agreed Syllabus implementation)

6.2.7 40% of SACREs reported that training for schools had taken place during the year, especially where a new agreed syllabus had been introduced. Training was predominantly online and delivered through existing networks supported by an advisor, consultant or consultancy. Some SACREs gave specific course details and noted their wider benefits:

Training provided was virtual and as follows:

- *Primary Twilight Teaching Christianity*
- *Half day 'What makes an effective Primary RE Lead*
- *Primary Twilight Teaching Islam*
- *Half day 'Implementation and Impact of Primary RE*
- *Primary Twilight Creating Communities of Enquiry*
- *Half day 'How to monitor progress in RE'*

These courses are well received and have good attendance. They also provide opportunities to discuss national RE trends and discussions. As well as feedback on what further support teachers require.

Structured professional development has been provided through the following courses, all on-line:

- *Primary RE Network: held each term after the school day, with about 20 teachers regularly attending*
- *Intent, Implementation and Impact: supporting schools preparing their 'Intent' statements and designing a curriculum (8)*
- *Three Faiths: developing subject knowledge of Judaism, Islam and Sikhism though a series of three webinars and including a guest from the respective faith community (about 15)*
- *RE Coordinator training: two linked evening sessions to support RE lead teachers (run twice) (22)*

More informal and ad-hoc support has been provided through email, zoom and phone calls and through a limited number of RE reviews.

6.2.8 Only 7% of SACREs reported on their monitoring of training and its impact. The role of SACREs in ensuring the quality of resources and training courses in the delivery of the agreed syllabus has long been expected of SACRE, as can be seen in Education Reform Act 1988 s11 (2) consolidated in the [1996 Education Act](#) and reflected in the comment in [Circular 1/94](#):

It is for a LEA to decide what matters it wishes to refer to its SACRE; but the 1988 Act says that these should include, in particular, methods of teaching, the choice of teaching material and the provision of teacher training.

Noting that the LA should take a lead on this and positively decide what it should refer to SACRE. Given that the LA remains responsible for the quality of education provision for the children who live in the authority this extends to Academies and even other authorities where appropriate¹².

6.3 Advice to schools and Agreed Syllabus Review

Advice to schools

6.3.1 49% of SACREs reported on advice that they have made available to schools, some of which was produced by SACREs before the time period under report. The most common type of advice related to the implementation of the Agreed Syllabus but there was also advice more broadly than that relating to the curriculum, such as advice on fasting during Ramadan or the wearing of the K's for Amritdhari pupils. At times SACREs reported that advice was given but only in general terms:

Advice about curriculum delivery was given via the SACRE newsletter.

6.3.2 SACREs also reported on making available national documents to schools to inform them in such a way as to influence teachers, such as:

Commissioned projects including those linked to Research awards (NASACRE/ Westhill/ CSGT/ Young Ambassadors/ WIRE award) have been shared and offered to schools free of charge to increase engagement and interest in RE.

6.3.3 Whilst some SACREs did report on feedback from teachers at training events and network meetings they did not report on the impact that advice had on schools or how it had changed the way schools delivered RE or used resources.

Agreed Syllabus Review

6.3.4 51% of SACREs reported that a new syllabus was being implemented, that a review had started or was in process or had just completed. Some SACREs reported on their advice to the LA that the syllabus needed reviewing in line with statute¹³ and that there were funding implications to that. Where the local authority's syllabus was

¹² [The Children Act 2004 c. 31 Part 2 General Section 10 \(2\)](#):

¹³ In line with The Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education (Prescribed Period) Order 1999: UK Statutory Instruments 1999 No. 1728.

shared with other authorities or written in collaboration with a consultancy or publisher this was usually stated.

7. Collective Worship

7.1 Advice to the local authority

9% of SACREs reported that they had given advice to the local authority with regard to collective worship. This included asking the LA to provide data on collective worship, to remind schools of the requirement to provide collective worship and on how to deal with specific issues arising in the LA's schools:

The RE consultant to SACRE has given advice to the local authority on a number of occasions in 2020/2021. Some of these have fallen into assistance with parental objections to a part of collective worship. The meetings often have to unpack cultural and religious objections, offering a great learning experience for parents as well as school leaders.

7.2 Monitoring Collective Worship

7.2.1 23% of SACRE reported positively monitoring collective worship in schools, one report stated:

We monitor Collective Worship by scrutinising Ofsted reports, through conversations with teachers/local clergy/ministers and a SACRE member who participates in school Collective Acts of Worship.

Other SACREs where monitoring collective worship was mentioned reported that it could not happen as a result of the pandemic, see section 4 above.

7.2.2 Other authorities have a systematic approach to monitoring collective worship by using surveys or scrutinising schools' websites:

In April 2021, SACRE undertook a survey in our schools to find out about the delivery of Collective Worship. Fourteen schools sent in replies to the survey and the findings show that there are differing approaches across our schools. Only one school had any requests to withdraw children from CW and none had considered applying for a Determination.

Monitoring RE and Collective Worship is discussed at each meeting. The SACRE had spent time checking all the websites of schools, looking for information on these two items.

7.2.3 There are recognised challenges to monitoring collective worship:

SACRE continues to hold the provision of good quality collective worship to be of paramount importance, such that it features frequently in our meetings. Some resources and materials have been provided to schools and will continue to be available via the new LA website. A picture of what Collective Worship (CW) has been gained from schools attending networks, and through contact with/requests from members of SACRE, but not all schools across the Borough have provided feedback.

SACRE finds that compliance with legal requirements in primary schools continues to be good. Because of constraints on space in secondary schools, compliance with legal requirements remains a cause for concern in most schools. SACRE has therefore included supporting Collective Worship in Secondary schools a priority in its 3-Year Action Plan 2021-2024.

7.2.4 Some SACREs reported monitoring visits to schools by SACRE members but during the pandemic most monitoring occurred through virtual meetings with RE teachers.

7.3 Advice to schools

7.3.1 45% of SACREs reported that they had provided advice on collective worship to schools. Much of this was signposting schools to existing resources such as model policies, protocols around visitors to collective worship, policies on withdrawal and advice on topics and resources for collective worship.

SACRE have previously provided resources for use in school assemblies including guidance on Collective Worship with ideas and suggestions for quality collective worship is on the LA's website.

7.3.2 As noted in 4.2 the pandemic caused particular challenges, at time leading to SACREs postponing their plans, but some SACREs continued to give advice and support:

Due to Covid restrictions collective worship/assemblies have been significantly curtailed during the last year, but support has been given to help schools access virtual input for this important aspect of school life.

This support in some areas extended to pupils schooled at home during the first lockdown and one SACRE reported feedback for the resources it had produced:

“Daily collective worship during lockdown provided an essential link between school and home and was much appreciated by our families from the feedback we received. We are grateful for the resources SACRE produced to support us during this time.”

7.3.3 On the whole SACREs either gave advice to schools or to the local authority on collective worship, with only one SACRE gave advice to both the LA and schools (1.8%). In part this appears due to lack of information that SACREs had about what is happening in schools during the pandemic. According to some reports this situation was not helped by a lack of reporting on Collective Worship by Ofsted. Whilst there has been a national review of RE as a curriculum subject there is nothing equivalent in relation to collective worship. Hence, SACREs have a responsibility for an area that is part of the school's day which appears to be a low priority nationally and locally. As a result of this there is a sense of frustration on the part of some SACREs as can be seen from the following quote (that also references RE):

The SACRE has only limited information about the quality of RE provision in schools in addition to the information about the outcomes of public

examinations in secondary schools. The SACRE does not make local-authority-wide checks on the extent to which all schools comply fully with the legal requirements for RE. Information mostly comes from any visits made to schools each year by the RE consultant, informally from staff at the local schools and contact with RE subject leaders on the SACRE. Very little information is provided in current Ofsted reports about RE or collective worship in the local area. The SACRE continues to believe that it is a matter of considerable regret that Ofsted no longer makes rigorous checks on the extent of compliance with statutory requirements for RE and collective worship when schools, especially secondary schools, are inspected.

7.4 Determinations and withdrawals

Determinations

7.4.1 Of the 77% of SACREs that mentioned determinations in their annual reports the vast majority reported that there had been no applications for a determination. Where determinations had been made SACREs reported on each application and the period to which the determination applied.

Withdrawals

7.4.2 Where withdrawals were reported on this was often groups with withdrawals from RE (see 6.2.6 above). The 30% of SACREs that reported on withdrawals from also reported on withdrawals from RE. As mentioned in 6.2.6 one SACRE presented detailed statistics showing the pattern over time, such as:

The LA officer to SACRE informs the Chair and Vice Chair of any completed or rescinded requests.

2020/21 1 from Collective Worship 2020/21 3 from RE

2019/20 9 from Collective Worship 2019/20 7 from RE

2018/19 14 from Collective Worship 2018/19 11 from RE

2017/18 11 from Collective Worship 2017/18 4 from RE

2016/17 13 from Collective Worship 2106/17 9 from RE

This approach enables readers to have a longer-term view and to determine whether there is a pattern that can be observed. In this case it appears that withdrawals are becoming less common over time, there is no reason given for this. Of significance here, though, is the role of the LA in the process as opposed to individual schools.

8 Other features of SACRE annual reports

Development plans

8.1 It was notable that some SACREs published their development plans (33%) and in some instances these were used as a basis for self-evaluation. On the whole SACREs did not report on their progress in terms of the development plan within the body of the report, although one SACRE RAG rated the plan.

Communication with schools

8.2 79% of SACREs used e-newsletter or e-bulletins to communicate with schools. The frequency of these bulletins varies, and the pandemic had an impact on some

SACREs normal pattern. The most frequent pattern was a termly newsletter going to all schools. The impact of these was not reported on.

*Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education*¹⁴

8.3 Since the change in the law regarding relationships and sex education 4 SACREs (7%) reported an involvement in RSE. The involvement of SACREs relate to their relationships with faith communities and indicates the trust that these communities have in SACREs. This is obvious in the following quote:

At the start of the academic year Odcombe¹⁵ SACRE discussed implications of the Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) requirements particularly for Jewish faith schools. It was agreed that a working party would be set up, with the proviso of creating some guidance for these schools demonstrating how they could support the delivery of the requirements in a manner that reflects the ethos of the school.

There is a recognition that SACREs do not have a remit for RSE/RSHE but that they can make a valuable contribution to this issue due to their connections across communities within the authority. In the one area of England four SACREs are working in collaboration, as stated:

Standing Advisory Councils on RE (SACREs) are responsible for what their title says, Religious Education. We do not have a remit for RSHE and point schools and parents to the national and local guidance provided. However, recognising the links between RSHE and beliefs, East Coker SACRE, in partnership with West Coker, North Coker and Holywell, felt it would be helpful to offer some signposts and support to schools, teachers, parents and governors.

In September, they formed a small working group of SACRE members and local authority advisers to prepare an anthology of authentic and diverse faith perspectives on the areas covered in RSHE, along with some basic background information. Over the year the group presided over the compilation of these materials and involved over 40 members of faith communities, including SACRE members.

One SACRE reported:

There was an update from the RSE steering group, which had provided extensive support for schools in the formal introduction of Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) in Barwick schools. Schools had valued this, especially the resource "Getting to grips with the new RSHE curriculum" and were appropriately resourced for its implementation.

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education>

¹⁵ The names of SACREs have been replaced by the names of villages within walking distance of the author on the principle that no SACRE is named, see Appendix 3.

Equalities legislation

8.4 A further SACRE also reported on its position on equality focusing solely on sexual orientation:

Equality

When using the locally Agreed Syllabus, the SACRE has made it clear that schools need to take into account the position that some faith groups take with regard to human sexuality, so that LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi sexual, and Transgendered) young people are not made to feel vulnerable when these issues are being explored.

9 Conclusion

9.1 During the reading of the reports, organising the data and writing this report three themes emerged, these were audience, relationships and creativity.

Audience

9.2 Some SACREs added their distribution lists to the report, but it was not clear who the audience was. If the Annual Report is to be sent to the Secretary of State reporting on the LA's response to SACREs advice, then it needs to be constructed in such a way that it fulfils that primary purpose. Given that local authorities have a responsibility to ensure the quality of education provided for the children who live in the authority's area, advice to the LA includes all schools irrespective of their status as maintained or independent. If the LA does not act on the advice of SACRE, then it must be held to account and as the provision in statute is to send the report to the Secretary of State it is reasonable to assume that it should be written with that audience in mind. This does not deny that there are other audiences, and they too need accommodating. Of course, there is then the question of what the Secretary of State is expected to do in light of reports submitted,

Relationships

9.3 One of the things that stand out from reading the reports is that some SACREs have strong relationships with their LA and within their LA. As a result they are seen as trusted bodies that can act as brokers in difficult situations, such as RSE/RSHE (see 8.3). It is not clear why this is the case and needs further reflection. It may be because of the attitudes and opinions within the LA but similarly it might be to do with SACRE members themselves. Research into this area would be valuable.

Creativity

9.4 Despite the pandemic it was clear that some SACREs have been highly creative. Where that is the case it would be worth NASACRE identifying innovative practice, identifying the conditions that allow SACREs to flourish and publishing case studies to enable all SACREs to reflect on their own practice.

Dr David Hampshire FRSA
15 May 2022

Appendix 1

Categories used to analyse SACRE Annual Reports

1. Attendance
 - a. Notes on attendance
2. Professional support
3. Budget specified
4. RE Advice to the LA
5. RE Advice to schools (including non-LA)
6. CW monitoring
7. CW Advice to the LA
8. CW Advice to schools
9. Withdrawal
10. Determinations
11. Complaints monitored
12. Monitoring Primary RE
13. Monitoring Secondary RE:
 - a. non-examination
 - b. Standards GCSE
 - c. Standards A Level
14. Agreed Syllabus Review
15. Training and support for AS implementation and RE
16. Monitoring training for schools
17. Covid-19
18. Communication (newsletter)
19. Development Plan
20. Collaboration/links to other bodies
21. RSE/Health Education

Appendix 2: SACREs reporting by category (maximum n57/100%)

Category	Number of SACREs reporting by the end of April 2022	Percentage of SACREs that submitted a report by end of April 2022
Attendance	34	59.64
Professional support	48	84.20
Funding/Budget	43	77.20
Budget specified	19	33.35
RE Advice to the LA	18	33.35
RE Advice to all schools	28	49.10
CW monitoring	13	22.80
CW Advice to the LA	5	8.80
CW Advice to all schools	26	45.60
Withdrawal	17	29.80
Determinations	44	77.20
Complaints monitored	32	56.15
Monitoring Primary RE	24	42.10
Secondary Standards: non-examination	24	42.10
Standards GCSE	20	35.10
Standards A Level	11	19.30
Agreed Syllabus Review	29	50.90
Training and support for AS implementation and RE	40	70.20
Monitoring training for schools	4	7.00
Covid-19	56	98.25
Communication (newsletter)	34	59.65
Development Plan	19	33.35
Collaboration/links to other bodies	45	78.95
RSE/Health Education	4	7.00

Note: percentages are rounded to the nearest 0 or 5 at the second decimal point.

Appendix 3: Research Ethics

The author is a member of the British Educational Research Association and the British Sociological Association, and the Ethical standards expected by both bodies were applied during the research; see,

British Educational Research Association:

<https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018>,
and

British Sociological Association:

https://www.britisoc.co.uk/media/24310/bsa_statement_of_ethical_practice.pdf.

During the research no local authority, SACRE, SACRE member, clerk to SACRE or RE Advisor or consultant was contacted for comment. SACRE Annual Reports are public documents the working presumption was that they were intended to be read by the interested public.

All data has been anonymised and no SACRE singled out for comment, a list of reports submitted to NASACRE and/or DfE are available on request and appear on the NASACRE website, when submitted. Where SACRE reports are quoted this has been for illustrative purposes not to make a judgement on the report used or the particular SACRE.