

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

AGREED SYLLABUS CONFERENCE

At a meeting of the **Agreed Syllabus Conference** held in Meeting Space, Block 1, Floor 2, County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 2EF on Wednesday, 8 December 2021.

PRESENT

Ms C. Weir Chair, in the Chair

COUNCILLORS

Bowman, L.,

Renner-Thompson, G.

TEACHER'S ASSOCIATIONS/UNIONS REPRESENTATIVES

Nicholls, T.

CHURCH OF ENGLAND REPRESENTATIVES

Hudson, C.

REPRESENTATIVES OF OTHER CHURCHES & FAITHS

Miller, Dr. J.

CO-OPTED REPRESENTATIVES

Dearlove, S.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Cookson, D.

Commissioner for Secondary
Education

Greally, R.

Assistant Democratic Services
Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor N. Morphet, C. Naylor, M. Connolly, D. Van Der Velde, P. Rusby, B. Rhasa, J. Cousin.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF AGREED SYLLABUS CONFERENCE HELD ON 14 JULY 2021.

Members noted that SACRE was on the title of the minutes and requested that this be amended.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Agreed Syllabus Conference held on 14 July 2021, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

3. SHORTLIST OF AGREED SYLLABUS OPTIONS

Caroline Weir, RE Consultant, reiterated that it was agreed in principle from the last meeting that she was to research options for the RE syllabus. It was agreed that creating a syllabus from scratch wasn't practical due to the extensive work, therefore it was agreed in principle to purchase a syllabus from another Authority or from RE Today. It was important that teachers felt supported and had guidance from the syllabus as this had been highlighted as a possible issue in the past. C. Weir outlined the steps she had taken to research options:

- She started by looking at Counties with similar demographics, which were rural and had no major Cities. When researching she found the following;
- Cumbria had a similar statutory programme to Northumberland, there was a lack of clarity with some of the coverage and it was less clear about non-religious views;
- Norfolk had a different model. They had a multidisciplinary approach of theology, philosophy and human & social sciences. It was abstract and there was a worry that it was too much of a 'blank canvas' for this Authority as teachers had made it clear that they wanted structure and guidance within the syllabus. It would require significant CPD for teachers to access;
- Lincolnshire was next to be researched. It focused on four strands that were looked at in every religion and world view that was covered. It was felt that the syllabus was perhaps a bit narrow as its key focus was on three religions and would have required a lot of CPD for teachers for them to access and utilise the syllabus appropriately;
- The next Authority C. Weir looked at was Devon & Torbay. Devon's syllabus was Model B from 'RE Today'. The model had clear unit outcomes and

suggested activities which was positive. It gave a clear overview of what should have been covered;

- Cornwall also use Model B and showed how general units in the syllabus were tailored to the region's heritage. It was suggested that these units could have been adapted to include Northumberland's religious heritage which had been a recommendation by members in previous meetings;
- The Model B approach had both systematic and thematic approaches in the syllabus. Its pedagogical approach is focused through three main strands that run throughout the syllabus: belief, impact and connections. It also contained information for special schools which was a real positive as that had previously been lacking in Northumberland's syllabus;
- In contrast to the rural Authorities, Hertfordshire's syllabus was also researched which had a completely different approach. The syllabus had 8 strands which were to be covered in every year group. It was a good progression model but there was a worry that it would become a 'tick box' exercise. Also, it was felt that it was perhaps too general in its approach for where Northumberland teachers currently are;
- The RE Today Model A syllabus was also investigated; it was found to take a more thematic approach. It had 3 key pedagogical strands; believing, expressing and living. It was suggested that a thematic approach works best after a systematic approach, so the students had a core understanding of the view and then applied it. There was a worry that this syllabus could be mismatched in places. It appeared to have less scope than model B to explore non-religious views and secularity;
- C. Weir recommended to the committee to use RE Today Model B for Northumberland's RE syllabus.

The following comments were made in response to members' questions:-

- Members welcomed the opportunity in RE Today Model B to adapt units to include Northumberland's religious heritage. It was noted that Northumberland had an abundance of opportunities to explore. Members noted that the Lindisfarne Gospels were coming to Northumberland and it would have been an opportune time to take a cross curricular approach to religious heritage;
- Members noted that the RE Today Model B had an option for schools to use Understanding Christian Project resources, however the syllabus could have worked without the training or resources. It was also noted that there was a subsidy for RE Today to allow community schools to attend training at a

greatly reduced cost.

- Members welcomed the KS2 section of the Model B syllabus and felt it was divided well as clear provision is made for LKS2 and UKS2 separately. It was felt that this would work particularly well in Northumberland where there were middle schools as the progression was clear over the year groups.
- It was confirmed that the aims in Model B were the same aims that were given in RE Today Model A.
- It was suggested that discussions were had with Durham County Council in regard to the KS4 and post 16 RE guidance offered in the syllabus as none of the syllabuses had specific mention of the provision and Durham SACRE used CSTG funding to form a working party to create some KS4 and post-16 unit suggestions.
- Members acknowledged that it was difficult to compare syllabuses fully as the information was received shortly before the meeting.
- It was agreed that after the meeting a spokesperson from each committee who had attended the meeting would liaise with the rest of the committee members. Each committee had one vote for the syllabuses.
- It was agreed that Dr J. Miller (committee A), C. Hudson (committee B), Cllr G. Renner-Thompson (committee C) and T. Nicholls (committee D) would act as the spokespersons. It was agreed that the spokesperson was to organise a virtual meeting with their committee members.
- Notes of the syllabus presentation would be shared with the members. Members were asked to email C. Weir and D. Cookson with any comments or questions. Final decisions were to be made by email to D. Cookson by Friday 17th December 2021.

AGREED that all suggestions and decisions would be made by Friday 17th December 2021.

CHAIR: _____

DATE: _____

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