

Please note: amendments were made to these minutes at the meeting held on 12 June 2023

SACRE (STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION)

MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON 20 FEBRUARY 2023 AT 6.20 PM

Committee Members Present

Group A

Beth Rowland	Free Church
Nigel Harman	Free Church
Shira Solomons	Judaism
Shahid Younis	Islam

Group B

Linda Galpin	Church of England
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Group C

Julie Easton	Primary RE Teacher
Nick Barnett	Soulscape
Philip Theobald	Primary School Headteacher (present in the last five minutes of the meeting)

Group D

Jackie Rance	Wokingham Borough Council
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Clerk to Sacre

Luciane Bowker

LA Link / RE Advisor

Angela Hill, Emily Waddilove

1 ELECTION OF CHAIR

Stephen Vegh was elected Chair of SACRE until the next election in November 2023.

As the meeting was not quorate at the start, this decision was ratified later on when the meeting was quorate.

2 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Beth Rowland was elected Vice-Chair of SACRE until the next election in November 2023.

As the meeting was not quorate at the start, this decision was ratified later on when the meeting was quorate.

Beth Rowland chaired the meeting in Stephen Vegh's absence.

3 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Apologies were submitted from Catherine Jinkerson, Samantha Lawless, Anju Sharma and Stephen Vegh.

SACRE was informed that Linda Galpin and Philip Theobald were going to join the meeting later.

4 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the SACRE meeting held on 7 November 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chair at a later date.

5 HOW ARE THINGS IN WOKINGHAM SCHOOLS?

Emily Waddilove, Local Authority Link explained that much of the information given at the last meeting was still valid. Schools were continuing with their excellent work programme to support children to catch up following the pandemic. It was noted that some existing issues had been exacerbated by the pandemic, for example school attendance, and increased special educational needs, which was both national as well as a local issue.

The following national and local challenges were highlighted:

- Difficulties in relation to the recruitment of teachers and support staff;
- The fact that children from disadvantaged backgrounds had been disproportionately negatively impacted by the pandemic and needed to catch up;
- The cost of living crisis and inflation affecting families, higher energy and food costs for schools;
- The support needed for the continuous arrival of Hong Kong and Ukrainian families;
- The planned teacher strike actions.

Beth Rowland commented that it was unhelpful that some unions had advised their members not to inform schools of their intention to strike. This made planning very difficult for schools.

RESOLVED That the update be noted.

6 RELIGIOUS STUDIES EXAM ENTRIES/OUTCOMES

Emily Waddilove shared a slide containing the Religious Studies exam entries and outcomes.

The government had advised that it was not useful to compare the results of last year's exams with the results of 2021 or 2020, as teacher assessments were used in those years rather than exams. The advice was to compare 2022 results to the 2019 results. However, the marking of exams in 2022 had been more lenient than before the pandemic, and students had been given some information about which topics were going to be in the exam.

The results showed that Wokingham had performed well and above the national average. However, there had been a significant reduction in the percentage of students that had been entered for GCSE (although there was still a higher percentage of students entered in Wokingham than was entered nationally). The government required schools to teach Religious Studies at Key Stage 4 but there was no requirement to enter students for the GCSE. Wokingham syllabus strongly encouraged schools to enter as many students as possible for the GCSE.

Emily Waddilove explained that she had been unable to find the results for A-Levels, but three Wokingham secondary schools had entered a total of 32 students for RS A-Level.

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During the discussion of the item the following comments were made:

- A concern was expressed that schools may be choosing not to put poor performing students forward for exams in order to protect their statistics;
- Members wondered if there was an issue of insufficiency of RE specialist teachers at schools;
- Members asked for more information on the data set, such as the demographics;
- Angela Hill, RE Advisor pointed out that Ofsted outcomes were not based on external examinations, so she did not believe this was a motivator for schools. She stated that there was no legal obligation to enter students for the exams and some students simply did not want to take the exams – some schools may be entering only students who choose to take RS GCSE;
- Members commented that there could be an issue in relation to the fact that RE was taught only one hour a week, and this may not be sufficient time to cover the contents of the GCSE course. It would also be interesting to find out what syllabus the children that were not doing the GCSE were following.

It was agreed that Angela Hill and Emily Waddilove would produce some survey questions to send to secondary schools to find out more about their RE provision at KS4. Emily Waddilove suggested that sending a survey after Easter would probably be the best time to facilitate schools' response. She would liaise with Angela Hill to draft the wording of the questions, circulate the draft questions to SACRE by the end of March, and send the survey to schools after Easter.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Religious Studies exam entries and outcomes results be noted;
- 2) Schools would receive a survey aiming to learn more about schools' RE provision at Key Stage 4, and how schools could be supported; and
- 3) The results of the survey would be reported back to SACRE at the next meeting.

7 DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND BUDGET

Angela Hill referred to some aspects of the current development plan. It was highlighted that there was a requirement and expectation for SACRE members to attend development opportunities such as training and network sessions with NASACRE, as well as Wokingham teacher network meeting and training events, and visits to schools if possible.

Angela Hill explained that a development plan for the new financial year would be drafted, based on the assumption that members would like the current programme of support for schools to continue. SACRE members were invited to suggest any other form of support for schools they would like to see included in the plan. Emily Waddilove explained that there was a well established work programme of support for schools (both secondary and primary), including training and network opportunities. She informed that any unspent budget in the new financial year was likely to be used on developing the new syllabus.

Beth Rowland explained that SACRE members were welcome (provided they gave notice in advance) to visit schools to gain understanding about what schools were covering in RE. She encouraged members to take part in training and networking sessions.

Members were interested to know how schools received the training sessions and networking opportunities. Emily Waddilove stated that the feedback was very positive.

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Sometimes attendance could be an issue, in particular for secondary schools, however this had improved with the introduction of online training.

Angela Hill confirmed that the feedback was very positive, she informed that topics were agreed democratically and teachers appreciated the help they received.

Julie Easton stated that in her experience the training sessions were very good, they provided an opportunity to ask questions and share experiences. They also kept teachers up to date with the curriculum and gave them confidence.

In relation to the budget document in the agenda pack, Emily Waddilove explained that any writing in blue represented spending that had occurred since the last meeting. This year it was unlikely that there would be any unspent budget.

A budget meeting with Beth Rowland was scheduled for 28 March 2023.

It was noted that holding virtual SACRE meetings was saving money that could be spent on schools, and it was also easier for some people to attend. This year only one face to face SACRE meeting was planned.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Development Plan and Budget Report be noted; and
- 2) A draft Development Plan for the 2023/24 financial year would be presented at the next meeting.

8 ANNUAL REPORT UPDATE

Emily Waddilove stated that the 2021/22 Annual Report had been circulated in December 2022, there was a requirement to submit this report to NASACRE in December. The production of this report had to follow a set procedure.

The annual report included information about Ofsted inspections of Wokingham schools during the 2021/22 academic year. Emily Waddilove drew attention to quotes from some Ofsted reports. Not all Ofsted reports mentioned RE, but when RE was mentioned, the feedback was mostly positive. There were two schools that Ofsted had commented that could improve their RE offer.

This report would be shared with schools once it had been formatted in an attractive design, with pictures. When sharing the report, Emily Waddilove would highlight the positive feedback from Ofsted and make contact with the two schools that Ofsted had pointed out could improve their RE offer, to ensure they were aware of the support available.

Emily Waddilove suggested including an Ofsted update as a standing item in the Autumn term going forward. Members agreed that this was a good idea.

Clare Walsh asked for clarification on a comment made by Ofsted about a need for better planning. Emily Waddilove stated that Ofsted was focused on the curriculum, she believed that this referred to a lack of coherence and sequencing of the curriculum. It was possible that this referred to ad-hoc teaching and inconsistency. Unfortunately, Ofsted comments were not very detailed.

Angela Hill added that nationally, there was a growing expectation that RE should be preparing students for a multi religious and secular world.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Ofsted updates would be included as a standing item in the Autumn term meeting; and
- 2) The Annual Report be noted.

9 FEEDBACK FROM TEACHER NETWORKS AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Angela Hill informed that since the last SACRE meeting, there had been a secondary network meeting on 2 November 2022. That meeting had focused on the syllabus review and exploring trickier topics in Christianity.

A training session for secondary school teachers had been scheduled for December 2022, but only two teachers had been able to attend, so a decision was made to re-schedule that meeting. However, due to the upcoming strikes this had to be postponed again, it was now scheduled for 30 March 2023.

RESOLVED That the update on training opportunities be noted.

10 BERKSHIRE SACRES HUB UPDATE

Angela Hill informed that Berkshire SACREs Hub was in the process of organising meetings with different faith groups to start working on the new syllabus. Anne Andrews from the Oxford Diocese was coordinating this work, and some members had already contacted her. Members were reminded that if they wished to be involved in this work, they could contact Emily Waddilove, Luciane Bowker, SACRE Clerk or Anne Andrews directly.

Clare Walsha expressed an interest in joining the discussions to represent Humanists. There was general support for Clare Walsha to join the meetings.

Angela Hill stated that the Real People Real Faith Project was going strong. This project consisted of a series of short videos with people from different faiths answering questions. This resource was being well utilised by schools. 18 more videos were being produced, including some videos on Humanism.

RESOLVED That the Berkshire SACREs Hub update be noted.

11 DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR 2023/24

Angela Hill informed that a document containing the Development Plan for 2023/24 would be circulated via email. She informed that the training programme would continue.

Angela Hill then moved on to national updates, starting with NASACRE updates. She drew attention to the NASACRE training event planned for 26 June 2023, this was going to be an online event hosted by an executive member of NASACRE, it would be particularly useful for new SACRE members.

Members who wished to attend training or other events were asked to contact Luciane Bowker, Angela Hill or Emily Waddilove.

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There were two spaces for SACRE members to attend the NASACRE face to face conference on 22 May 2023 in London, members who wished to attend were asked to contact officers.

As part of the celebrations of 30 years of NASACRE, they were asking for nominations of people or groups who had undertaken outstanding work during this period.

Angela Hill then made the following points relating to national updates:

- A grant of £600 had been received from a charity towards teaching Christianity in schools;
- There was a spiritual arts and creativity global competition which was free to enter and had been running for many years. Entry was now open and there were six themes;
- Free webinars were running for primary and secondary Early Carers Teachers;
- The original hubs were still running;
- Science and religion think thank project was included in the plan;
- Links and information on the projects would be circulated to SACRE

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

12 RELIGION AND BELIEF IN WOKINGHAM: CENSUS 2021 DATA

Emily Waddilove shared a slide containing statistic data information about region and belief in Wokingham from the 2021 national census, comparing it with national data statistics.

Of note was the fact that 37% of the population, nationally and in Wokingham had responded that they had no religion. Officers were of the opinion that this meant that those people did not affiliate themselves with any established religion, but this did not necessarily mean they did not believe in a god.

There had been a steady decrease, over the last 20 years in the number of people that declared themselves as Christians.

When people were asked about any other religion, the responses had included paganism and shamanism. The non-religious responses included agnostic, atheist and humanist.

It was important to consider these responses when reviewing the syllabus and SACRE membership.

During the discussion of the item the following comments were made:

- Beth Rowland asked for information going back 50-60 years in order to analyse trends. Emily Waddilove agreed to investigate to find out if this information was available;
- Julie Easton suggested a book which contained historical information and trends – Religion in Britain A Persistent Paradox by Grace Davie published by Wiley Backwell;
- Clare Walsh pointed out that the percentage of people with no religion was much higher in the younger generation;
- Shahid Younis asked if there was a breakdown of demographics (age, gender). Angela Hill informed that this was available for the national picture, and pointed to the

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Office for National Statistics (ONS) website for further information – an interactive map could be found there.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

13 NATIONAL UPDATES RELATING TO EDUCATION AND RE, INCLUDING NASACRE UPDATES

This item was covered during discussions of previous items.

14 DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

The dates of the next meetings were confirmed as follows:

12 June 2023 – in person at 6.15pm in David Hicks 1, Shute End, Wokingham

6 November 2023 – online via Teams at 6.15pm

19 February 2023 – online via Teams at 6.15pm

15 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The appointments of Chair and Vice-Chair were ratified and confirmed.

SACRE members were asked to consider accepting Clare Walsha as a co-opted member of SACRE, representing Humanists.

Clare Walsha explained that Humanists believed in:

- the natural world, science and evidence, and not in supernatural beliefs and god;
- that it was possible to find happiness and fulfilment in life, and that there was no afterlife; and
- It was important to be respectful of others and the nature.

Clare Walsha informed that the symbol for Humanism was a 'Happy Human' and this could be found in their website. She added that she was a member of Humanists UK and Reading Humanists. She had recently been trained as a school speaker on Humanism and was hoping to be able to present about the Humanist's beliefs at schools.

Members voted unanimously to accept the appointment of Clare Walsha to SACRE.

SACRE Self-evaluation Tool produced by NASACRE

Emily Waddilove advised that a meeting had been scheduled for 21 March 2023 at 3pm via Teams, to discuss how Wokingham's SACRE wanted to use the SACRE self-evaluation tool produced by NASACRE. SACRE members were invited to attend and were asked to contact Emily Waddilove to indicate that they wished to attend.