

SACRE (STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION)

MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON 6 NOVEMBER 2023 AT 6.15 PM

Committee Members Present

Group A

Nigel Harman	Free Church
Kiran Hunjan	Sikhism
Shira Solomons	Judaism
Clare Walsha	Humanists UK (co-opted)

Group B

John Sutton	Church of England
Linda Galpin	Church of England

Group C

Julie Easton	Primary RE Teacher
Philip Theobald	Primary Headteacher
Stephen Vegh	Chairperson Educational Advisor

Group D

Jordan Montgomery	Wokingham Borough Council
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Others present

Sarah Whitethread (observer)	Secondary RE teacher
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Clerk to Sacre

Luciane Bowker

LA Link / RE Advisor

Emily Waddilove and Angela Hill

1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Nick Barnett, Catherine Jinkerson, Samantha Lawless, Becky Medicott, Jackie Rance, Beth Rowland and Shahid Younis.

2 AGREED SYLLABUS CONFERENCE

Angela Hill, Religious Education Advisor explained that the syllabus needed to be reviewed every five years. However, on this occasion there had been a delay caused by the pandemic.

The last review had been undertaken in 2018, it was recognised that things had moved on and it was important to design a curriculum that was fit for purpose for the next five years.

A survey asking for teachers' views had been sent out, now an analysis of the responses was being conducted. Much consultation and discussion had taken place, with faith representatives as well as with teachers.

The Chairman proposed that SACRE delegates the responsibility of developing the new curriculum to Angela Hill and other advisors to SACREs in Berkshire.

Emily Waddilove explained that the thinking was that the advisors would develop a draft model syllabus and bring it back to a future SACRE meeting for discussion. The Chairman advised that an extraordinary meeting may be set up to undertake this work.

Members offered to help drafting the syllabus.

All members present were in favour of this proposal. *At this point in the meeting there were no members from Group D present, however subsequently Jordan Montgomery joined the meeting and this decision was ratified.*

RESOLVED That:

- 1) SACRE delegates the responsibility of drafting a syllabus to Angela Hill and the other Berkshire SACRE advisors;
- 2) An extraordinary SACRE meeting may be set up to discuss the draft syllabus.

3 ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

Stephen Vegh was elected Chairman for the 2023/24 academic year.

Beth Rowland was elected, in absentia, Vice-Chairman for the 2023/24 academic year.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting were approved, subject to the amendment below:

John Sutton was mistakenly listed twice in the attendance record.

4.1 Matters arising

- As a result of discussions held at the last meeting, SACRE had asked that a survey about RE education be sent out to headteachers to gain a better understanding of the level of teaching at schools.

Emily Waddilove explained that Angela Hill had drafted a survey and she read out the questions and the accompanying email. She proposed to send out the email in her capacity as link to the SACRE, given that she already had an established relationship with schools. The aim was to send this survey as soon as possible and to have it completed by Christmas.

Shira Solomon asked if schools taught all religions and if there was diversity in teaching? She wondered if a question could be included to cover this point.

Angela Hill explained that in drafting the survey questions, she had been conscious of keeping the survey concise to facilitate participation. In response to a question Angela Hill informed that the survey would be sent electronically and people would be able to respond electronically.

Sarah Whitethread stated that headteachers would have to consult with the subject lead about specific questions such as which exam boards were used, suggesting that it was better to include only questions that headteachers could answer.

John Sutton was interested to know if the survey covered Collective Worship and differentiated between RE and Collective Worship. It was agreed that it would be good to clarify this distinction. However, if this was pointed out to headteachers in the survey, it was possible that this information would discourage honest answers about RE provision. It was agreed that this was point be revisited at in the future.

Shira Solomon suggested grouping the questions and adding the Key Stages that they could apply to, to streamline the survey.

Angela Hill stated that the teachers' survey suggested that there had been a drop in curriculum time for RE teaching and less compliance, this was a concern. It was important to get a clear understanding of the real situation in terms of RE teaching in schools.

Angela Hill informed that schools were not legally obliged to teach RS for A-Levels. However, they were legally obliged to ensure that there was statutory provision for RE for all pupils in their sixth form, which was usually non-examined.

Emily Waddilove and Angela Hill were of the opinion that it was important to keep questions open in order to find out what is going on in schools. The aim was to offer support to schools so that they could fulfil the curriculum requirements.

- In response to the discussion at the last meeting about trying to recruit secondary school members, Sarah Whitethread had been invited to visit the meeting today.
- It was agreed to check with Shahid Younis at the next meeting whether he had managed to arrange a visit to Samantha Lawless' school to observe RE lessons and Collective Worship.
- The Chairman informed that the option to hold the summer face to face meetings in places of worship had been considered. However, it had been established that Shute End was the best place to hold this meeting as it was fully equipped to facilitate live streaming to YouTube and a hybrid option (should a member not be able to attend in person).

It was suggested that members joining the meeting online could do so from their place of worship – especially if they were giving a presentation about their faith at the meeting.

- Samantha Lawless would share artwork submitted by her school for the Spirited Arts competition at the next meeting.
- Julie Easton would give a presentation about Collective Worship at her school at the next meeting.
- Emily Waddilove had arranged a meeting with a colleague to find out about the Wokingham Inter-faith network.

- Emily Waddilove informed that a flier containing a list of competitions could be sent to schools.

5 HOW ARE THINGS IN WOKINGHAM SCHOOLS?

Emily Waddilove stated that there were no significant developments since the last meeting. Teachers and schools continued to face the same challenges previously reported.

Some of the points highlighted are listed below:

- There was a continued challenge in relation to recruitment and retention of staff of both teachers and support staff. In addition, there was a high percentage of teachers leaving the profession;
- It was positive to note that there were no further planned strike actions;
- Schools continued to work hard to help children to catch up academically following the pandemic, as well as supporting wellbeing;
- There was a challenge in relation to persistent absences;
- Schools faced financial pressures and were having to cut back on non-essential things;
- There was an increase in demand for SEND support services;
- New arrivals from other countries were ongoing, with the addition of a new Home Office refugee scheme for people from Afghanistan.

Julie Easton confirmed that schools were facing a lot of pressure for the reasons listed above.

Sarah Whitethread added that newly qualified teachers (now called Early Career Teachers (ECTs)) were required to teach for two years before being considered fully trained.

RESOLVED That the update be noted.

6 DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND BUDGET - UPDATES

The Chairman stated that for the time being the SACRE' would mainly focus on the syllabus review.

There had been no changes to the development plan since the last meeting and updates on activities would be reported under other items.

Emily Waddilove confirmed that the budget position was as stated in the report contained in the agenda.

The Chairman added that Wokingham was in a better financial position than many other local authorities.

RESOLVED That the Development Plan and Budget updates be noted.

7 FEEDBACK FROM TEACHER NETWORKS AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Angela Hill went through the report set out in the agenda papers. The report listed all the training and networking opportunities that were available.

She informed that the training for secondary teachers that had been scheduled for 5 July 2023 had had to be cancelled due to industrial action. The training for secondary teachers held on 19 September 2023 had been well attended and the feedback had been positive.

Julie Easton confirmed that the recent training session on the use of floor books in RE she had attended had been very useful and had provided practical ideas.

Angela Hill informed that there were training sessions planned for primary and secondary teachers in February.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

8 DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT ON PREVIOUS ACADEMIC YEAR

The Chairman thanked Angela Hill, Emily Waddilove and all the volunteers who were members of SACRE for their contributions during the year.

Emily Waddilove encouraged members to read the annual report, it contained details of all the activities undertaken during the year.

Some of the points highlighted are listed below:

- The annual report would be submitted to NASACRE and the DfE;
- It was a requirement that the report be set out in a formal layout, otherwise more pictures would have been included. The report would be re-formatted with visuals before it was shared with school colleagues;
- It was positive that SACRE had undertaken a review using the self-evaluation tool provided by NASACRE;
- At the time of writing GCSE and A-Levels Religious Studies outcomes data for 2023 had not been available. This data would be added to the report when available;
- During the 2022/23 academic year 15 schools were inspected by Ofsted. However, it was very rare for Ofsted to undertake a deep dive in RE or to comment on RE in their reports;
- Wokingham's SACRE was well supported by the local authority and the RE advisor.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

9 WOKINGHAM SCHOOLS OFSTED INSPECTIONS UPDATE

Angela Hill presented the Wokingham Schools Ofsted Inspections update report.

The comments in Ofsted reports were in general in relation to subject areas other than RE, there was less mention of RE and Collective Worship than other subjects.

Two of the primary schools and one of the junior schools inspected were designated as having a religious character. SACRE was not obliged to report on RE or Collective Worship in schools with a religious character. However these schools were invited to participate in all of the support provided by the Wokingham's SACRE.

Emily Waddilove informed that religious schools were subject to Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) inspections.

Angela Hill was of the opinion that not enough information was being obtained from Ofsted inspections in relation to RE and Collective Worship. She offered to write to Ofsted about this issue.

The Chairman and all those present were unanimously in favour of Angela Hill's proposal to write to Ofsted.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) Angela Hill would write to Ofsted to raise awareness of the issue of the lack of comments about Religious Education and Collective Worship in their Ofsted inspection reports.

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

Angela Hill presented the report containing national updates relating to education and RE, including NASACRE updates.

Some of the points highlighted are listed below:

- More than 30 MPs and peers wrote an open letter to the Education Secretary highlighting that school pupils receive tokenistic religious education. The MPs blamed the lack of trained teachers and funding for the poor quality of religious education;
- From September 2024 a bursary of £9k a year would be available for PGCE in RE. It was hoped that this would help with teacher recruitment;
- NATRE, along with three other subject associations were invited to speak to a session of the Education Select Committee to support their enquiry into recruitment and retention of teachers;
- The RE Council of England and Wales launched its National Content Standard for RE in England. It aimed to deal with the postcode lottery of RE provision in England;
- The report contained links to the following training, networking and support opportunities:
 - Anti-racist RE: continuing debates and widening resources
 - Global neighbours: school awards from Christian Aid
 - NATRE Membership – direct support for teaching
 - RE Connect Teacher Fellowship Programme
 - Philosophy of Religion courses from the FT
 - RE Hubs – website now live
 - BBC expands early years RE resources
 - Against Islamophobia: new resources free for schools
 - Fischy Music: 25 years nurturing emotional and spiritual wellbeing
 - Faith inspired art to encourage conversation, reflection and action
 - New museum exploring 6,000 years of faith in Britain open its doors
- The report contained the detail of all the dates for forthcoming training events being held by NASACRE, to which SACRE members could attend for free.

Shira Solomon asked if an antisemitism could be included in the list of teaching materials. She provided the following link for more information: [Educational Resources – CST – Protecting Our Jewish Community](#)

Angela Hill thanked Shira Solomon for her suggestion and agreed to include this topic in the update provided to schools.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) Antisemitism would be included in the updates document for schools.

11 MEMBER PRESENTATION ABOUT THEIR FAITH

John Sutton spoke for a few minutes about his faith. He explained that he felt that he was a religious, Christian and Anglican person – in that order.

The Chairman made reference to a recent study which found that faith helped young people to build resilience.

Clare Walsha offered to share her views at the next meeting.

12 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

The dates of the next two meetings were confirmed:

19 February 2024 – via Microsoft Teams

10 June 2024 – face to face in the council offices in Shute End

Members were advised that an extraordinary meeting may be set up to discuss the draft syllabus.

RESOLVED That the dates of meetings be noted and that an extraordinary meeting may be required.

13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Amendments to the constitution

Emily Waddilove informed that the local authority was considering proposing amendments to the SACRE's constitution to enable humanists to have full membership in Group A. Currently, Clare Walsha attended as a co-opted member with no voting rights. The Chairman asked members to vote on this proposal and almost all members were in favour of this.

The Chairman added that Wokingham's SACRE had traditionally been forward thinking in its approach to membership.

There was general agreement to this proposal.

SACRE leaflet update

Emily Waddilove informed that the intention was to update the leaflet. However, this work was now postponed in order to prioritise the work required to draft the new syllabus.

NASACRE training programme

Emily Waddilove wished to remind members that NASACRE offered a wide range of training opportunities. These training opportunities were free for SACRE members. Members were encouraged to take part.

Faith speakers in schools

John Sutton stated that a colleague was looking for faith speakers to visit their school. He explained that it was easy to find volunteers to speak about Christianity, but that it was more difficult to find volunteers to speak about other religions. He asked SACRE if anyone could help.

Shira Solomon and Clare Walsha both offered to help.

Shira Solomon informed that the Crossing the Bridges Directory had a list of speakers.

The Chairman informed that such information could be found in the Directory of Places of Worship.

Hub updates

The Chairman informed that there would be no hub updates for the time being, whilst work was undertaken to update the syllabus. This was the hub's primary focus for the time being.

RESOLVED That the updates be noted.