

## NASACRE conference – ‘Stronger Together’

24th May 2018

Merchant Taylors Guild, London

### Opening remarks for NASACRE’s Silver Jubilee: Right Honourable Charles Clarke, Patron

- The Government needs to give funding to SACREs
- NASACRE is to be congratulated for its 25 years
- SACREs need to be strengthened so they can ‘go out there and do something’
- The Government now recognises ‘faith’ in education
- SACREs becoming more involved in building relationships between faith communities and schools

### Keynote: Dr Vanessa Ogden

‘SACREs, Schools and Society: Building Bridges Across the Fault-lines’, followed by questions

Dr Ogden is an RE Commissioner and Head Teacher and CEO of the Mulberry Schools Trust in Tower Hamlets (<http://www.mulberry.towerhamlets.sch.uk/mulberry-schools-trust> )

She is a Head Teacher, but started out as an RE teacher.  
She has a commitment to social justice.

Dr Ogden made 3 points:

1. Character of social change
2. The role of RE in schools
3. What is our responsibility to children and schools?

1. Character of social change.

Children live in a world of technological change, the advance has been beyond the imagination of the generation that came before (us)

The web has changed schools too, now we can link people quickly, space and time is compressed, we can have immediate contact with parts of the world hitherto unreachable. It has intensified the human experience. More can be achieved but it can distance people further if they have no or limited access to this technology.

Information technology has given us a 'free pass' to a range of views, a window into the lives of others. It can be enriching and empowering but also challenging and can lead to targeting those who we might consider as 'others' e.g. economic migrants etc. This has fuelled the fires of race divisions and religious differences especially when the media encourages stereotyping and prejudice. Take the example of 'punish a Muslim day' which was circulated by some areas in April 2018. It is redolent of Hitler in the early days of his rise to power; it is very troubling.

RE is so important to combat this.

In 1943 when the need for legislation was considered, it was in the backdrop of war and the discovery of the holocaust. It created a moment to think and set things right. Now with these events

being out of living memory for most it is essential that RE is again at the forefront of tackling social and religious injustice. RE has a pivotal role as it benefits society rather than causes division. It gets to the heart of what it means to be human. It opens debate and gives a safe environment for the discussion of the controversial and sensitive.

## 2. There are 3 ways that RE can help

a. The development of literacy and of views. RE must be rigorous in discipline, help develop language and critical thinking skills. Needs to examine the quest for truth claims. Help provide a raft of technical language, develop the ability to recognise when propaganda is masquerading as truth: discernment.

b. RE is rich in personal development. Helps students develop awareness of their own skills, skills like sensitivity, enquiry, thoughtfulness, developing confidence in their beliefs and the ability to articulate them. Combines subject based knowledge with personal development.

In Dr Ogden's experience (in her school and local area) the islamophobia has been awful including parents being physically assaulted. The school had a visit from Michele Obama which raised the profile and highlighted some of the work they were doing. RE was a major contributor to bridging these fault - lines.

c. Actively building bridges. Engaging in interfaith dialogue. Deep questions are raised and a proper examination of answers is undertaken. Never has there been a more important time to do this.

## 3. Responsibilities to children and schools

Some SACREs have challenged poor practice, some have enabled interfaith relationships. REC figures show that the provision of KS 1-3 RE is troubling. RE has no currency in the current system. We should consider a national entitlement.

Urge SACREs to

- Help schools deliver on community cohesion and social harmony
- Help with interfaith dialogue and engagement

To build a cohesive society we must invest in RE  
SACREs and schools should stand shoulder to shoulder with RE teachers.

RE is unique and improves communication. No other subject can make the same contribution. We have a duty. Remember what happens if we do not fulfil this duty.... History will repeat itself. WW2 etc.

**Table discussions** about our own SACREs... 55 mins.... We worked with members of other SACREs on how we collaborated with others. Feedback sheets were given in

**NASACRE voting** (vice chair) ... On vice chairman position... Brief hustings. Vote over lunch.

## **Keynote: David Hampshire – Inter Faith Network Youth Project - second keynote**

Inter faith network across the UK.

Outlining the work with Youth forums, connecting across the generations.  
Youth interfaith engagement. 16-25 yr olds, target groups.

1. The 'Connect guide', needed redoing, with the addition of new contacts and new case studies.... downloadable and popular. How do you go about young people engagement? Need to involve social media as these are the platforms they all use.
  2. There were 5 regional consultation events, in Birmingham, Cardiff, Glasgow, Leeds and London.
  3. How do you reach the 'hard to reach'? How do you get folk to interact with faith communities if they don't have access to faith communities?
  4. Students said that they didn't get their skills in communicating with others in the curriculum, it was from the community and 'what goes on in the playground'. In other words, the curriculum doesn't help them learn how to effectively communicate.
- On the 4th July there will be the next big meeting, the new 'connect guide' will be released.  
NASACRE will be informed and given access to it.

What about young people who don't identify with a belief? The 'nones'... Actually, these students were often the most interested in interfaith dialogue so it's not that they don't have religious or spiritual ideas, they just don't identify with a religion.

SACREs must consider the local demographic. Few teachers live in the catchment area so may not actually know too much about the (religious) background of their students.  
Who is engaging with the faith communities? Is SACRE? If so how? Do people know?

Do SACREs have a youth section? Some areas do have a youth SACRE, e.g. Newham.

### **SACRE presentations: Bradford, Hampshire and Newham SACREs**

3 SACREs which were awarded grants last year were given the chance to showcase what they had done

These were

Bradford - Ros Garside

Newham - Claire Clinton

Hants - Elizabeth Jenkinson

Bradford

This project was about Collective worship. Bradford is very diverse and had many schools with determinations.

They had main aims including

1. To support schools in developing a collective worship policy
2. To develop pupils' capacity to think critically and empathetically.

Phase 1 of the funded project

included a day seminar with 7 very different schools working with LA faith tutors. Then presenting back to their own schools.

Phase 2

To help with determinations. Some schools were more concerned with the application process than with how appropriate having a determination was.

A pilot school (which was coming out of a determination period) was chosen to work on Collective Worship, focussing on

- engaging the senior leaders,
- distinguishing between moral and spiritual education,

- moving towards inclusive worship,
- making a whole school approach.

This involved a youth forum. Students from years 3-6 were involved and feedback was very positive from the students who found the collective worship to be 'calm relaxing, fresh, involving a happy atmosphere and also allowing learning from the relevance of stories.'

The SACRE has reviewed its policy on Collective Worship and is now more able to support schools with collective worship. It aims to encourage more good practice and hopefully this will lead to less applications for determinations.

## 2. Newham - Claire Clinton.

The money was used for a student SACRE and for developing resources.

Creating and filming classroom resources for Collective Worship on anti-bullying, particularly religious bullying.

Claire showed some clips including

'Bullying and belief'

The clips have been made available

Check out <http://rematters.co.uk/student%20re%20matters%20project%20work.html>

[Claire.clinton@rematters.co.uk](mailto:Claire.clinton@rematters.co.uk)

A clip for assembly was developed called 'what goes around', this featured a group of students each being unpleasant to each other until it went full circle.

Children learned to

- Communicate better
- Create poetry (after a real poet was brought in to run a session)
- Create lesson plans
- Work with others from a wide variety of different schools. These collaborations would have been unlikely otherwise.

## 3. Hants - Elizabeth Jenkinson.

Hampshire has 500 primary and 70 secondary schools.

Hampshire has spent some time seeking student voice

Findings included

1. Experiences in primary school were very different, ranging from the non-existent RE. to excellent RE and everything in between. A project was installed to work with primary to secondary transition phase children.

2. Annual conference... Involving different faiths - students wanted experience of many faiths

3. Debates - not formal debates but the opportunity to be heard.

Sometimes young people attend SACRE. Those who go to conferences in years 7&8 are then encouraged to become student representatives on SACRE.

## **2018-2019 Westhill Awards: Michael Metcalf**

West hill awards feedback Westhill awards 2018

£20,000 to allocate

5 SACREs put bids in. Each bid for £4000

The five who have been awarded grants (although the amounts were not specified) are

- Bedford borough
- Cheshire East
- Chester and Cheshire west
- Cumbria

- Newham/Waltham forest

The focus of each bid was also not revealed. It is expected that some feedback will be given at next year's conference.

**Question Time:**

Panel included

- Charles Clarke
- Vanessa Ogden
- Rudi Elliott Lockhart (chair of the REC - RE Council)
- Paul Smalley (Chair of NASACRE)
- Jane Brooke (Canon chancellor – Chester cathedral)

**Q1. Is there a future for locally determined agreed syllabi?**

CC- We should move to a nationally determined syllabus/curriculum. However, it is still vital to take into account the local area so there needs to be a local component to it. Local faith communities must be engaged with by SACREs.

If we continue as we are there will be patchy areas and an uncertain future for SACREs.

CC believes in a strong local community cohesion component in syllabi... This could/should/would be better resourced.

JBr - A national syllabus with local determinism is best and should be based on academic rigour and focussed on RE.

RL - local syllabi still have a future but there are issues of academisation, funding and examples of some poor SACREs. To have a national syllabus is a big challenge but could end up being achieved by stealth with many syllabi being based on the 'RE Today' model.

The CoRE final report is due on 12th September 2018 and will have a recommendation on the national entitlement.

VO - It is critical to have a national curriculum as it will hold Head Teachers accountable for their RE; for the provision and quality of it. it would force Head Teachers to do what is statutory in the same way it did for SEN.

It is important to have a local involvement in determinism.

**Q2. What action can be taken if an authority is not fulfilling its duties, is cutting budget, removing clerking services etc.**

All said it might be difficult however you should let NASACRE know if there is a failure to provide the statutory duties as well as notify the LA complaints procedure and inform the DfE.

There is no reason for SACRE budgets to be cut.

**Q3. What can SACREs and NASACRE do to encourage people to be RE teachers?**

The REC has the 'beyond the ordinary' campaign

The government needs to step up...

Figures show a fall in applications to teach secondary RE by 27% on last year... However, history has fallen 27% too so it's not that people don't want to teach RE ...they don't want to teach!

**Resources and contacts**

'inter faith matters', groups on Facebook, Twitter,

Graham Bickle, vicar on Westminster SACRE... [vicar@sswsj.org](mailto:vicar@sswsj.org) is part of it.

Interfaith groups go into schools together as a roadshow rather than individually, shows engagement within different faith groups. Could be a model to try in other areas.

David Rees for pan-Berkshire SACRE Hub May 2018

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