

## SACRE (STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION)

### MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON 12 JUNE 2023 AT 6.30 PM

#### Committee Members Present

##### Group A

Shahid Younis  
John Sutton

Islam  
Church of England

##### Group B

John Sutton

Church of England

##### Group C

Stephen Vegh  
Julie Easton  
Samantha Lawless  
Nick Barnett

Chairperson Secondary RS Teacher  
Primary RE Teacher  
Primary RE Teacher  
Soulscape

##### Group D

Jordan Montgomery  
Jackie Rance

Wokingham Borough Council  
Wokingham Borough Council

#### Clerk to Sacre

Luciane Bowker

#### LA Link / RE Advisor

Emily Waddilove / Angela Hill

#### 1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chairman welcomed members and introductions were made.

He welcomed new members and apologised for not having been able to contact new members in advance of this meeting. He stated that new members were welcome to reach out to him if they wanted to discuss anything outside of the meeting.

Apologies for absence were submitted from Linda Galpin, Nigel Harman, Catherine Jinkerson and Beth Rowland.

#### 2 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of SACRE held on 20 February 2023 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to the amendment below.

The third bullet point on page 7 of the agenda referred to religious belief census data.

#### 3 MATTERS ARISING

Matters arising from the 20 February 2023 meeting were discussed.

### **3.1 Secondary School Survey**

Emily Waddilove, Local Authority Link Officer for the SACRE presented the Secondary School Survey report.

At the last meeting the RS GCSE results of last year were shared with SACRE. Although the results in Wokingham were good and above the national average, there had been a reduction in the number of students entered for RS GCSE. This was in line with the national picture and Wokingham's number of entries were above the national average.

As a result of discussions about this issue, it was decided that SACRE would like to explore with schools the provision of RE in Key Stage 4 and 5 and the RE GCSE provision in Wokingham schools. A survey was drafted and shared with SACRE members, the final survey incorporated the comments received and was sent to 10 secondary schools.

Responses were received from 60% of schools. The report contained in the agenda pack included the questions and responses in red.

Emily Waddilove went through the report in detail, reading out the questions and responses.

The following points were highlighted:

- One school responded that they did not teach RE for Key Stage 5. However, some form of RE teaching for Key Stage 5 is compulsory;
- The survey was completed anonymously to encourage more responses and honest responses;
- One of the comments was about the wish for more direct contact from SACRE with schools headteachers and leaders. Emily Waddilove and Angela Hill, RE Advisor had discussed these comments and thought about sending a similar survey to headteachers and leaders to find out what support schools would like and their compliance with statutory requirements. This was well timed with the development of the new syllabus;
- Angela Hill added that it was clear that some schools were not fully compliant with RE requirements. She believed that offering support to schools was the best way to promote compliance.

Shahid Younis asked if Ofsted was picking up the fact that the statutory requirements were not being fulfilled. Angela Hill explained that Ofsted was an inspectorate and not a compliance organisation, and their comments about RE were infrequent. Non-compliance could affect Ofsted results but often this was not picked up.

Shahid Younis was surprised that a statutory requirement was not being monitored and added that SACREs did not have enforcement powers. He asked for further clarification.

Angela Hill stated that SACRE did have a role in relation to standards and compliance with the law in relation to RE and collective worship. However, SACRE did not have any powers to deal with non-compliance other than its advisory role.

Shahid Younis noted that only two schools reported having specialist RE teachers for all teaching at KS4. He believed that a lack of specialist teachers impacted negatively on learning outcomes. Specialist teaching was likely to improve outcomes. He asked if there

was a lack of specialist teachers and what could be done about it. He also asked if RE CPD training was available for RE teachers.

Angela Hill explained that there was a crisis in recruitment of specialist RE teachers. She pointed out that RE was, along with Personal Social Health and Economic Education (PSHEE), the subject that was most frequently taught by non-specialists. Often, when schools' budgets were tight, teachers with spare capacity in their timetables were directed to teach RE. This issue was not unique to Wokingham, it was a national issue which was often challenged by organisations. Non-specialist teachers were encouraged to do CPD, but it was recognised that RE was best taught by specialist teachers.

In terms of professional development opportunities for teachers, Wokingham's offer was very good. In Wokingham there was good engagement with primary school teachers, but there was a challenge with engaging secondary school teachers. This was also in line with the national picture. This issue was ongoing, and efforts were being made to improve secondary school teachers' participation in CPD opportunities. There were CPD opportunities outside of Wokingham too, and teachers were made aware of these in newsletters.

Emily Waddilove added that discussions were being undertaken about how best to encourage participation in CPD by secondary school teachers, including possibly working jointly with other Berkshire local authorities.

Nick Barnett asked how could we ensure that the 40% of schools who did not respond to the survey were compliant with the mandatory requirements? Emily Waddilove suggested sending an email to all headteachers, asking about RE provision in their schools. However, if schools chose not to engage, the local authority could only suggest best practice, there were no enforcement powers.

In response to a question, Emily Waddilove explained that responses from the survey with headteachers would be shared with SACRE, but without specifying the names of schools.

John Sutton asked for more information about the difference between RE teaching and collective worship (Q4 and Q6 responses raised concern that schools were not approaching these things separately). Angela Hill explained that RE was an academic subject with a syllabus and collective worship was a whole school collective responsibility. She suggested addressing this concern in the email to headteachers and school leaders.

Councillor Montgomery asked if the issue of RE specialist teaching being dropped due to budgetary constraints was on the same level as other non-STEM subjects. Angela Hill stated that she could only comment anecdotally; and she believed that STEM and English subjects received priority funding and timetabling on the curriculum for most schools.

Shahid Younis believed that SACRE had a role to play in terms of marketing RE and finding out why schools were not placing more value into the teaching of RE.

The Chairman confirmed that in his experience in schools, RE specialist teaching was the first thing to go when budgets were tight. He agreed that SACRE should look to promote the value of teaching RE to schools with the new syllabus.

Shahid Younis added that it was more than just the teaching of RE, but the learning of values, which impacted on other subjects too.

Upon being put to the vote, members voted unanimously in favour of instructing Angela Hill and Emily Waddilove to write an email to headteachers and school leaders, along the lines discussed during the meeting.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) The Secondary School Survey report be noted; and
- 2) An email would be sent to headteachers and school leaders to gain further understanding of provision in secondary schools in relation to RE and collect worship, and to open up conversations.
  - I. The survey questions would be circulated to SACRE members before they were sent out.
  - II. The feedback from the survey would be shared with SACRE.

### **3.2 Census Data - further information**

This information was being provided in response to a request made by SACRE at its last meeting, asking for more Wokingham specific data on religion and belief in the borough. It was explained that if members went into the website, they could use the buttons to find out more detail. Screen shots of the web pages available were included in the agenda pack

The link could be found here:

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiMzgxYTRlNzgtZDY2NC00ZDNjLWI1MWMtNWE3NDZmZDZmNGQyIiwidCI6IjFjZTZkZDIiLWlzMzctNDA4OC1iZTVlLThkYmJlYzA0YjM0YSIsImMiOiJh9>

Of note was the fact that around 37% of people in Wokingham were classified as having no religion. It was believed that this meant that 37% did not affiliate themselves with any religion, but it did not necessarily mean that they did not believe in God.

Emily Waddilove explained how to navigate the web pages and find out relevant information. Further information available included the percentage of the Wokingham population by religion; the proportion of those with different religions and beliefs by neighbourhood; the differences in census data between 2011 and 2021 in Wokingham.

**RESOLVED** That the Census Data – further information item be noted.

### **3.3 SACRE Self-evaluation Tool**

Emily Waddilove explained that NASACRE had produced a self-evaluating tool that SACREs could use to self-evaluate themselves. It had been previously agreed that this would be discussed outside of a SACRE meeting and the results would be presented to SACRE. Two meetings to discuss the self-assessment had taken place since the last SACRE meeting. Beth Rowland, Angela Hill, Clare Walsh, Stephen Vengh and Emily Waddilove took part in the meetings.

The report in the agenda contained the assessment. Useful discussions were had at those two meetings. As result of this self-assessment the following suggestions were made:

- Introducing a standing item in future agendas for a member to do a short presentation about their own faith or their work as a SACRE member;
- That the SACRE Chair would contact new SACRE members before their first meeting to discuss the work undertaken by SACRE;
- That members representing a faith group could contact members of group C to organise a visit to their school to observe a RE lesson or collective worship;
- To develop a more robust system to recruit new members;
- In relation to receiving information about collective worship in schools, members of group C could do a presentation about collective worship at their schools; (Julie Easton volunteered to give a presentation about collective worship at her school)
- Improvement could be made in relation to partnerships with key local stakeholders. Mention was made of a Wokingham Interfaith Group, and Shahid Younis informed that this group but was now inactive;
- Section 3, which was about the effectiveness of the syllabus would be discussed with the hub as part of the syllabus review;
- Section 4 was covered with the other sections;
- It was felt that Section 5 about community cohesion was not within the scope of the work undertaken by SACRE. A government report had recently been published which provided information for schools about programmes supporting community cohesion, including those linking RE and community cohesion.

Emily Waddilove suggested that the most useful parts of the tool could be used on a regular basis to assess SACRE's effectiveness, and the results could be brought back to SACRE for discussion.

Samantha Lawless stated that faith members were welcome to come to Shinfield Junior. She asked who to contact about event opportunities in schools. She was informed that members could contact Luciane Bowker, SACRE Clerk or Emily Waddilove, they would be able to share the information with SACRE members.

Shahid Younis welcomed the opportunity to visit schools, he asked for an invitation. He added that it would be good to re-activate the Interfaith Group and wondered who to contact about it. Emily Waddilove could enquire with community engagement colleagues.

John Sutton agreed with the suggestions made during discussions. In relation to 1C - he noted that there was a strong representation from the primary phase in the SACRE membership, but the secondary phase representation could be improved, and asked that this be included in the self-assessment.

Emily Waddilove explained that there was awareness of this issue. However, the last time there was a vacancy in Group C, there had been no interest from the secondary phase, and lots of interest from the primary phase. The intention was to try for a secondary representative again when a vacancy arises.

In response to a question, it was explained that there was a limited number of vacancies per group. However, if there was interest, a secondary representative could join as a co-opted member.

Clare Walsh asked what the action plan for improvement was following the self-assessment. Angela Hill explained that the plan was to act on the suggestions which arose in the meetings about the self-evaluation tool, including:

- Introducing the member presentations about their faith as a standing item in meetings;
- To proactively try to recruit secondary members;
- To encourage SACRE members to be more engaged in visits to schools to observe RE lessons and collective worship;
- Possibly holding the summer SACRE meeting in a school or in a place of worship.

Angela Hill stated that the all the options mentioned above were being discussed.

Clare Walsha asked for more information about the work of NASACRE and if there would be an opportunity to feedback to them about the usefulness of the self-assessment tool.

Angela Hill explained that NASACRE was the National Association of SACREs, they were a voluntary body that sought to support SACREs across England. The local authority paid a membership fee to NASACRE, and they provided advice, support, a website, information and guidance. They also held an annual conference to celebrate the work of SACREs across England.

In terms of feedback, the results of the self-assessment would be incorporated into the SACRE's annual report which was submitted to NASACRE. She stated that there was a good line of communication between SACRE and NASACRE.

John Sutton was in favour of the proposal to hold the summer meeting in a place of worship or a school and offered to help to facilitate this at St Paul's.

**RESOLVED** That the SACRE Self-evaluation tool report be noted, and the proposals discussed during the meeting be supported.

#### **4 HOW ARE THINGS FOR WOKINGHAM SCHOOLS?**

Emily Waddilove stated that information previously shared with SACRE in this academic year continued to be relevant. National reports confirmed the narrative that schools continued to work hard to help children recover from the pandemic, not just academically, but in terms of well-being and behaviour too.

Some of the points highlighted are listed below:

- A national report published in February revealed a greater level of anxiety amongst children and young people, and more mental health issues. Some of the factors mentioned included family financial difficulties, negative experiences with social media, and concerns about national and global issues, including the environment;
- A recent report had criticized the government saying that much more support for schools was needed to recover from the pandemic. More funding for tutoring, more support for attendance, and improvements for SEN need to be implemented as soon as possible;
- Attendance rates were now lower than they were before the pandemic;
- Recruitment and retention of teachers (not just for RE) was a challenge for schools. The teacher workforce census showed that there was a 5% overall teacher vacancy, a higher proportion of teachers retiring early and a third of teachers were leaving the profession within six years of qualifying;
- The number of sick days undertaken by teachers had increased;
- Teachers were often working more than 60 hours a week;
- A high level of mental health issues had been reported, with high workload and Ofsted being cited as causing stress;

- There had been teachers strikes and there would be further strikes in the future;
- There had been an increase in the number of SEN children, and there was a programme of improvement of SEN provision in Wokingham;
- Children from Ukraine and Hong Kong continued to arrive in the borough, with schools welcoming and supporting them.

Teacher members agreed that schools were under a lot of pressure. Samantha Lawless added there were difficulties in relation to helping children with limited English vocabulary.

In response to a comment, Julie Easton stated that in her experience, she often felt frustrated that she could not finish all her tasks. She went on to explain the challenges faced by her that caused stress. She stated that teachers were often juggling many different tasks/challenges for which they had no control over but were accountable for.

The Chairman sympathised with Julie Easton's comments and explained that he had decided to stop teaching for a better work-life balance.

Angela Hill stated that it was important to be mindful of teachers' workload in relation to CPD requirements. She stated that often secondary school RE teachers had a huge workload to deal with, teaching many different classes.

At this point Reverend Becky Medicott joined the meeting and introduced herself. She was looking to join SACRE as a Church of England representative.

**RESOLVED** That the update be noted.

## **5 DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND BUDGET**

Angela Hill and Emily Waddilove presented the Development Plan and Budget report. Angela pointed out that the main difference in this year's plan compared to last year's was the addition of the work on the development of the new syllabus. She corrected a typo in the report, it should read Summer 2023, Autumn 2023 and Spring 2024.

In relation to the development plan, the following comments were made:

- Meetings were often quorate, with representatives from all groups and decisions could be made;
- There was encouragement for SACRE members to participate in RE at schools and collective worship;
- The previous plan included CPD for secondary schools. However, in previous years attendance was so low that alternative ways to deliver training were being discussed. Network meetings for secondary school teachers had still been included in the development plan and support was still available for secondary school teachers.

There were no changes to the budget items from last year's budget. The total cost was slightly higher than last year's budget because there was a need to budget a little more for Angela Hill's time, this was because RE Today, who Angela worked for had increased Angela's daily rate. The rate remained reasonable in comparison with rates charged by other education consultants.

The Chairman drew attention to the fact that Wokingham's SACRE budget was very good in comparison with other local authorities.

Shahid Younis asked if inflation had been considered when setting up the budget. Emily Waddilove informed that she had discussed the issue of inflation with her finance colleagues. They had not been prepared to officially increase the budget but were agreeable to covering the cost of inflation if needed, for the continuation of services.

Nick Barnett suggested including a question in the email to headteachers and school leaders about the best way to deliver CPD to secondary teachers. Emily Waddilove informed that Angela Hill already asked this question at every opportunity, but agreed that it would be good to ask in the email.

**RESOLVED** That the Development Plan and Budget report be noted.

## **6 FEEDBACK FROM TEACHER NETWORKS AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES**

Angela Hill presented the Feedback from Teacher Networks and Training Opportunities report and highlighted the following points;

- A cross-phase face to face RE network session took place on 7 March and was primarily attended by primary school teachers;
- The secondary RE CPD session had been re-scheduled twice, once because of low attendance and once because of a strike. An effort was being made to be flexible to encourage participation. The possibility of a pan-Berkshire joint session was being explored;
- The primary network which took place on 25 May was well attended;
- The secondary network meeting had been scheduled for 5 July, after the exam season was finished. An effort was being made to ensure this session would be engaging and useful for secondary teachers;
- A programme of training and network dates for the next year had already been developed and SACRE members were encouraged to attend if possible. Dates would be shared with members.

**RESOLVED** That the report be noted.

## **7 NATIONAL UPDATES INCLUDING NASACRE UPDATES (AND CONFERENCE/ AGM FEEDBACK)**

Angela Hill informed that she had attended the NASACRE Conference and AGM on 22 May 2023. She reminded members that they were welcome to put themselves forward to attend the Conference next year with her.

The following points were highlighted:

- This event was a good opportunity for networking, finding out about innovations and the work being carried out by other SACREs across England;
- A report was presented at the Conference by Dr Katherine Wright who is the CEO of Culham St Gabriel's Trust which supports and advocates for RE. She talked about SACRE's supporting and enriching teachers' voices around RE, collective worship and worldviews;
- A discussion was had about the complexities involved in multi-academy trusts and the fact that they did not have to adhere to the locally agreed syllabus;
- Slides about the Conference would be shared with members;
- Some SACREs faced challenges in relation to their limited budgets. However, Wokingham was in a good position with a healthy budget;



- A point was made by David Hampshire in his analysis of annual reports, that SACRE's advice given to the local authority should be from the whole SACRE (and not just from the RE advisor and local authority officer);
- Hazel Henson had recently been appointed as the new subject lead for RE;
- The Children's Commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza, a former RE teacher had shared her views promoting RE;
- The report contained in the agenda included information about current competitions and awards, CPD, podcasts and other resources;
- The AREIAC (Association of Religious Education Inspectors, Advisors and Consultants) Conference would take place on 2 and 3 July 2023 and SACRE members were welcome to attend;
- RE Hubs were now live and Justine Ball led Wokingham's Hub. The Hub aimed to connect and provide resources for RE professionals;
- The NATRE (National Association of Teachers of Religious Education) survey for teachers was open until 31 July 2023.

Emily Waddilove stated that updates relevant to schools were passed on to teachers via newsletters.

Councillor Montgomery asked if any Wokingham's schools had won awards. Angela Hill and Emily Waddilove agreed to ask schools and report back. The Chairman added that it would be good to see some of the artwork produced by Wokingham's children, and Angela Hill agreed to find out whether any Wokingham schools had entered the Spirited Arts competition (which was run by the organisation she worked for). Samantha Lawless stated that her school would be entering the Spirited Arts competition and she would be glad to share the artwork submitted.

**RESOLVED** That the update be noted.

## **8 BERKSHIRE SACRE HUB UPDATE - INCLUDING SYLLABUS REVIEW**

The Chairman explained that there was a duty to review the syllabus every five years. This could be delayed if there were strong reasons, for example the pandemic. This was a big project for SACRE and it would be developed during the next meetings.

Angela Hill explained that the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) was a statutory body brought together in order to produce an agreed syllabus for RE. It was usually largely composed of the same members as SACRE, but was a separate legal body from SACRE, established by the local authority.

The specific requirements for the ASC were described in the slides shared with SACRE.

## **9 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS**

The dates of next meetings were confirmed:

6 November 2023 – online via Teams at 6.15pm

19 February 2024 – online via Teams at 6.15pm

## **10 AOB**

Shahid Younis suggested the idea of a RE project competition within schools in the borough, in an effort to promote RE teaching in schools. Emily Waddilove agreed that this was a good idea, but had concerns about capacity, given the amount of work that was

needed to undertake the syllabus review. Angela Hill and Emily Waddilove agreed to explore this idea with schools to see if there was an interest.

Angela Hill added that the launch of the new syllabus would be an ideal opportunity to promote RE teaching in schools.

Shahid Younis informed that he had organised an event which took place at the end of Ramadan in May, to which many people from different churches and faiths, different political groups and the police had attended. The purpose of fasting and the reasons behind it had been explained in talks. This had been held in the Mosque in Earley. A GP had also attended to explain about fasting from a medical perspective. The feedback for this event was very positive. SACRE members had been invited to attend, but no-one from SACRE had attended on this occasion. There would be an opportunity to attend next year.

## **11 AGREED SYLLABUS CONFERENCE**

### **12 ELECT A CHAIR**

Upon being put to the vote, Stephen Vegh was unanimously elected Chair of ASC.

SACRE members were advised to let the schools / faith organisation they represented know that they were taking part in the syllabus review.

Although not a requirement, the intention was to work in partnership with other Berkshire ASCs.

### **13 DISCUSSION OF SAMPLE SYLLABUS MODELS**

At this point in the meeting, members were given copies of samples of agreed syllabus pages, questions about the syllabus samples and the current syllabus for discussion. Members discussed in pairs.

Angela Hill declared an interest on the basis that she worked for RE Today. One of the samples had been produced by RE Today and was commercially available.

The samples had already been shared with some teachers and feedback was being gathered.

### **14 CONCLUSIONS - POINTS TO TAKE FORWARD**

Angela Hill asked members to take back the samples and to take their time to read and review them. She encouraged members to send any comments via email by 7 July 2023. *Subsequently this deadline was amended to Monday 17 July.*

Angela Hill informed that the initial feedback from teachers stated that:

- They were concerned that adopting a completely new syllabus would increase their workload considerably. However, there was acceptance that there was a lot of new thinking in RE that needed to be incorporated in the new syllabus;
- They had enquired about support material for a new syllabus;
- They felt that none of the samples was too radically different from current teaching of RE.

In proposing the new syllabus, a lot of weight should be given to teachers' feedback and the support available to pupils.

Shahid Younis pointed out that, from previous experience, this exercise took a lot of time and resources. He added that in his opinion it was a good idea to work in partnership with other SACREs, to share resources and financial costs. He wondered how many members from SACRE should take part in the hub's discussions about the syllabus

Emily Waddilove stated that an email had been sent from Anne Andrews, who was coordinating the discussion groups, asking for volunteers. Angela Hill informed that that piece of work had now been completed, but there would be further opportunity for involvement in the work.

Shahid Younis asked about the timeline for this project. Angela Hill informed that a decision had been made to delay the project during the pandemic to alleviate teachers' workload. Ideally the syllabus would be ready for delivery for Spring 2024.

Shahid Younis urged SACRE members to be mindful of the current level of teachers' stress, not to add to their workload unnecessarily.

Angela Hill stated that it was important to develop a syllabus that would be robust for the next five years.

The Chairman pointed out that the current syllabus had been written five years ago and much had changed. For example, the current syllabus did not include non-religious beliefs and Humanism, the syllabus needed updating.

Julie Easton stated that having a more extensive document would be helpful for lesson planning, the current document was very thin.

Nick Barnett asked what support material would be available for schools. Emily Waddilove explained that for the current curriculum there was support available on the website. The level of support for the new syllabus would be part of the future discussions as the project developed.

John Sutton wondered if there would be an opportunity to reflect about the fact that more people were opting out of organised religion. He wondered about the impact on mental health of not having a religion, and the negative impact of certain organised religions.

Emily Waddilove mentioned the Real People Real Faith project, which consisted of video interviews with people from different faiths addressing some of the issues raised by John Sutton. She suggested using these videos as support material for the new syllabus. The videos gave an insight into people's thoughts and feelings about their faith.

Julie Easton suggested adding links to the resource materials in the syllabus document, such as to the Real People Real Faith materials, as this would facilitate the accessibility of resources for teachers.

Members were advised that the Autumn meeting would focus on the development of the new syllabus.

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