

NAME OF COMMITTEE:	STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
DATE OF MEETING:	13 July 2010
SUBJECT:	Update from QCDA/NASACRE Conference on 24 March 2010
REPORT BY:	Neville Macfarlane (Vice Chairman)
NAME OF CONTACT OFFICER:	Wendy Harrison
CONTACT OFFICER TEL NO:	01455 272979
CONTACT OFFICER EMAIL ADDRESS:	wendyanneh@aol.com
IS THE REPORT EXEMPT?	No
IS THE REPORT CONFIDENTIAL?	No

SUMMARY: Notes from the QCDA Conference held on Tuesday 24 March 2010, attended by Neville MacFarlane, Vice Chairman of the Lincolnshire SACRE. Areas discussed include the Primary Curriculum, Religious Education in English Schools: Non-Statutory Guidance 2010 and points which were raised following the Panel Session and in Group Discussion. (Please note that this report was written prior to the election in May 2010)

DISCUSSION:

The main speakers at this conference were: Mark Chater (QCDA) and John Keast (currently RE Adviser to DFSC), supported by Fiona Moss (Leicester and NATRE), Bill Moore (NASACRE) and Reena Keeble (Head Cannons Lane Infants School). Also there was a panel with representatives of some Local Authorities, Regions and Ofsted.

Primary Curriculum

There are 9 Primary Curriculum Network Advisers, regionally based, to help implement the new curriculum, working with local networks and steering groups, seeking out and sharing good practice. The document “**Introducing the New Primary Curriculum**” is downloadable.

The Government plans to move from a knowledge to a skills base to “*secure basics and inspire a lifelong love of learning*”; the new curriculum gives “*permission*” to focus on learning rather than content coverage, without compromising breadth and balance. The 6 areas of National Curriculum learning plus RE should focus on the same key aims. The new curriculum is designed to allow flexibility – not “*what do they want me to teach?*” - and encourage developing understanding and community cohesion in the local context of the school. (The difficulties of implementing this satisfactorily in a largely mono-cultural community were largely ignored.) It should combine **knowledge** (the ‘big ideas’), **skills** (learning about and learning from) and **experiences**, but serious consideration has to be given to methods of recording

experiences. There must be feedback beyond a mark or grade to record evolution of work, and peer review may play a part. RE should still be taught both discretely and in collaborative, cross-curricular work with other areas. There may be specific RE days or weeks, or projects linked to e.g. Art or History.

The keynote is flexibility, and use of local and regional networks to disseminate good practice and develop structures which support planning will be helpful. Ideas promulgated included investigative learning (with the teacher standing back) and the selection of a key theme for the school and use of units from the Agreed Syllabus as a resource for delivering it across the curriculum. Speakers urged teachers to go for depth, not to do a whistle stop tour of the syllabus but be selective. However, the emphasis on flexibility and a less knowledge-based curriculum had implications for transfer to Secondary schools; teachers must remain aware of the key elements that pupils need to know. Speakers were optimistic, and in response to the question "Will it happen?" (with General Election consequences in mind) claimed that the new curriculum was already in place ahead of formal introduction in the best practice in Primary Schools.

Religious Education in English School: Non-statutory guidance 2010

John Keast reminded the conference that education was, like R A Butler's definition of politics, "*the art of the possible*". The new guidance was the natural end to a process beginning with the National Framework of 2004, the RE Action Plan of 2006, the RE Partnership and the recent reviews of Primary and Secondary Curriculum. It replaced the 1994 Guidance which had been overtaken by changes in legislation, curriculum and types of schools and it affirmed the Government's commitment to good quality Religious Education delivered by local provision through Agreed Syllabuses. It was essential to recognise that the guidance was initiated, financed, and produced by the Department which 'owned' it – its principles were those of the Government. The steering group with wide representation had been influential in its production and the consultation process had been effective.

The Guidance contains:

- Clear and comprehensive description of the law as it applies to RE
- Clear statements about the importance of RE
- Advice on good practice backed up by case studies and checklists

One must recognise some necessary ambiguity about some legal matters which have not been tested in court.

RE is seen as important:

- In its own right as a subject (an area of learning) as well as contributing to other areas
- For community cohesion
- For personal development and well-being
- For spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Attention was drawn specifically to page 7 (the importance of RE), page 10 (legal framework) page 23 (breadth and depth in the curriculum) and to the case studies and checklists. Although the provision of Religious Education through locally Agreed Syllabuses grounded in the context of the area was reaffirmed, there was a need for a Local/National partnership to provide some coherence – this was a function of the guidance.

The Guidance recommends:

- Support and proper resources for SACREs

- The use of Agreed Syllabuses
- A flexible combination of discrete and cross-curricular provision.

It is non-statutory, replaces Circular 1.94 and means RE can keep pace with the new flexible curriculum fully aligned with the National Curriculum.

Panel Session and Group Discussions

The following points emerged with relevance to the Lincolnshire SACRE:

- Training materials for SACRE members provided by NASACRE will be available from May 2010.
- Ofsted's report on RE has been delayed until after the General Election – it will be the first Ofsted document for the new Government.
- Ofsted is showing up deficiencies in teachers' continuing personal development and at the same time recognising the value of RE as a fine vehicle for high quality learning; it encourages making all teachers aware of this.
- The need to get the Guidance to as wide as possible relevant audience was paramount. Its initial publication had missed the intended publicity because of printing issues and timing. SACREs might consider ways of bringing it to the attention of Heads, Governors, Co-ordinators, elected members etc, possibly by producing their own 'briefing sheet' – a digest of key sections.
- Page 15 of the guidance emphasises the requirement for academies to teach RE and for academies without a religious character to do this by means of the local Agreed Syllabus.
- The difficulty for SACREs in monitoring RE provision without adequate Ofsted information is recognised, but monitoring need not mean 'policing'. NASACRE is working with NATRE to produce a database from the subject-based SEFs. This should be ready for September 2010 and, whilst not identifying individual schools, will give a picture of issues by Local Authority area. The provision of an Advisor is seen as key to establishing SACRE links with teachers, using SEFs as a point of communication. NASACRE will welcome news of any locally successful practice or initiatives which may be posted on its website.
- SACRE annual reports to QCDA are still required, but there is a revised reporting format and the new Guidance does **not** give a deadline for sending them. They should be sent electronically to sacres@qcda.gov.uk.
- There was agreement that QCDA should produce an open website containing all the annual SACRE reports as a national exchange of information.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the update be noted and comments requested.

APPENDICES

None

BACKGROUND PAPERS: No background papers of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.