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National Association of  
Standing Advisory Councils  
on Religious Education

## SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2013

As part of the progress to launching the new NASACRE website at the AGM in May (see details below) we are pleased to be showcasing this new format of our newsletter.

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[From the Chair](#)

As I write my last newsletter message to you as NASACRE Chair, I am, perhaps understandably, in reflective mode. February 2013 marked 20 years since NASACRE was formed and the last three years alone have seen unprecedented challenges for religious education to which we have been responding vigorously.

The AGM in May will see Lesley Prior assume the role of chair and there will be elections for the role of Vice-Chair as well as two Executive members as terms of office for Graham Langtree and Sharon Artley come to end. I would like to express my sincerest thanks to NASACRE officers and Executive members for their faithful support, dedication and hard work during my own term of office.



Michael Gove's statement in the House of Commons in early February on new arrangements for the national curriculum, GCSEs and school accountability gave hope of some respite from relentless changes that have been so damaging for RE. However, John Keast, RE Council Chair, pointed to aspects of that announcement which were good, bad and ugly and concluded that stormy times still faced RE. I agree, and as we move into the 2013 Summer Term NASACRE is only too well aware that yet more wintry blasts are in prospect for RE.

The APPG report on RE teacher supply and support published in March gave parliamentary prominence to important issues of concern to the RE community. A similar tone is expected from the Ofsted Long Report and the Ofqual report on GCSE both due to be published this term. Their messages are not expected to be comfortable for RE and, of course, for SACREs. As we rightly focus on what for us might be challenging analyses (see *Are SACREs Fit for Purpose?*) it is important that we remember our collective achievements, both past and present and appreciate the profound significance of the way that different parts of the RE community are working ever more closely.

The start of 2013 saw the launch of the RE Quality Mark after a pilot involving 40 schools. This pilot included schools from all phases, special school, faith and community schools. A flier for the REQM is included in this newsletter. The REQM is just one of the achievements of the RE community and has been designed to celebrate high quality religious education, promote SMSC (spiritual, moral, social and cultural education) and whole school improvement.

Another achievement must be the way the RE community has galvanised itself to work together under the leadership of the REC in taking forward the RE Subject Review with no government support. The Review has of necessity proceeded at a breathtaking speed with the Expert Panel starting its Phase 1 work in July 2012 and producing its draft work in October. The sheer pace has been a real challenge for SACREs many of which needed to schedule additional meetings to engage with the consultation on the Phase 1 report as well as to respond to the APPG call for

evidence on teacher supply and support. Phase 2 of the Review sees a series of working papers published during this term with a final document scheduled for launch in September. This phase of the Review involves two Task Groups producing a curriculum review document which is aimed to be as inclusive as possible, taking into account the diversity of provision for RE in community and aided schools, as well as the changing pattern in the light of the academisation programme. Task Group 1 will produce papers on the aims for RE, the core knowledge and understanding in RE for pupils and new instruments for describing achievement in RE. It is led by Graham Falgate with Kate Christopher, Dilwyn Hunt, and our own Lesley Prior. Task Group 2 will work on structuring and sustaining the future of RE and its members are Hazel Henson, James Holt, Jennifer Uzzell and Sue Wilson. It is very encouraging to note that people with long experience in and good understanding of SACREs are involved so prominently in this work.

This context, therefore, sets the theme for our **AGM** which will be as much about SACREs challenging as being challenged.

My thanks to you all for your faithful commitment to RE and the encouragement and support you have given me as Chair, over the last two years.

I look forward to seeing you in Birmingham on 23rd May.

Bruce Gill

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## Michael Gove and religious education: the good, the bad and the ugly

*Comments on Michael Gove's statement in the House of Commons and DfE publication of new arrangements for the national curriculum, GCSEs and school accountability on 7 February 2013 from the Chair of the RE Council*

### **GOOD**

- No EBacc certificates but one qualification (reformed GCSE) for all subjects, so no first and second class qualifications
- A new broader performance measure for schools (Performance8) that allows GCSE RS to count towards school performance alongside EBacc subjects; this is good news for schools with successful GCSE provision
- RE was reaffirmed in the new National Curriculum documentation – “all state schools ... must teach RE to pupils at every key stage”
- Not mentioned on 7 February but RE now included in Specialist Leader in Education programme by National College of School Leadership

### **BAD**

- The EBacc still exists and still excludes GCSE RS as a humanity option, despite the recent addition of Computer Science to the science suite
- The EBacc headline measure for school performance remains in place, implying second class academic status to GCSE RS (and other subjects)
- Position of GCSE RS is still precarious and depends on how Performance8 subjects will be determined; RS may lie only in an overcrowded option position, competing with provision for both EBacc and non-EBacc subjects
- The GCSE Short Course RS will not count towards school performance and its future is very uncertain – no indication of how statutory RE in Key Stage 4 can be accredited
- Not mentioned on 7 February but teacher training for RE remains in a dire state with the removal of bursaries for RE PGCE trainees (unlike nearly every other subject) being inequitable and unjustifiable

## UGLY

- Some probably irreversible damage to RE has already happened, with reduced time, staffing and fewer exam entries
- ‘Bridge too far’ metaphor obscures the minimal change in Gove’s plans; sleight of hand is evident and he will not lose political credibility over any of this

Whilst mentioning nearly every other subject, he did not mention RE at all

## CONCLUSION

- RE is not out of the woods yet; or to put it another way, there are stormy times still to come for the good ship RE

John Keast  
Chair, RE Council  
8 February 2013

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## Are SACREs fit for purpose?

In their thought provoking book, *Does Religious Education have a Future?: Pedagogical and Policy Prospects* (2013), Mark Chater and Clive Erricker examine various factors currently affecting RE today. In chapter six, entitled ‘The politics of English RE: A portrait of disfunctionality’, Mark Chater points to a number of shortcomings in relation to SACREs. His portrayal deserves serious consideration even if many of us who work closely with SACREs might take issue with all or some of the analysis.

## *Issues*

He argues that the SACRE structure of four groups reflects an era in which England was less diverse, has a retrograde influence on the character of representation and contains an imbalance between the religious and the educational forces acting on RE. Mark Chater points to the voluntary nature of SACRE membership, for which there is no test, which makes it virtually impossible to exercise quality assurance on religious input and advice. Significantly, he also contends that such structural weaknesses carry through to agreed syllabuses and therefore to classroom learning and that the different vested interests of the SACRE groups/ASC committees conspire to lead to minimal changes being made to syllabuses when they are reviewed. He observes that SACREs have no equivalent in any other subject, that SACREs' responsibility for collective worship

*"...confuses and embarrasses the educational profile of RE"* and that the public is most often unaware that SACREs exist.

### ***Caricatures or accurate descriptions?***

His analysis can be summarised as seeing SACREs as

*"... small dedicated bodies, battling against local authority apathy, proud of their local achievements for RE and hyper vigilant against the incursions of local government"* and again, as entities that have tended *"...to resist any form of accountability to the centre, preferring to be accountable locally to bodies that do not understand how to use them."*

### ***What is local?***

He notes that global factors are now affecting many educational systems in different jurisdictions and wonders how helpful the expectation of compliance with a local document (the Agreed Syllabus) can be in the context of globalisation and IT. Mark Chater goes on to argue that the notion of marked variances between local authorities in the main enquiries of RE (or of progress in understanding of religion and belief) are now outdated.

The increased diversity in types of school (eight at the time of the 2010 guidance) each with differing RE requirements leads him to conclude

*"In this new context SACRES are an inadequate vehicle, not because they are local but because they are not local enough."*

I am sure that it will not be lost on many SACRE members that in current government educational policy 'local' increasingly tends to mean 'the school' and 'school' is tending to mean 'academy'. Mark Chater concedes that some SACRES have succeeded in establishing new and productive relationships with the academies in their areas but points out that these SACRES have no constitutional duty to do so. For me, his most telling point is about the 'statutoriness' of RE which in his view seems almost worthless in a time of deregulation.

## Questions and Challenges

- To what extent do you recognise your own SACRE in this analysis?
- To what extent do you think the analysis might apply to other SACREs?
- What elements of the analysis, if any, do you think SACREs generally should prioritise for action and what form might that action best take?
- What should government do?

NASACRE would welcome responses from SACREs to these questions and invite you to share with us your thoughts on these matters as we shape our new two-year plan for support to SACREs.

Bruce Gill

*Mark Chater is the afternoon speaker at this year's AGM.*

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## Religious Education Quality Mark

The Religious Education Quality Mark (REQM) has now been achieved by over 55 schools. Training for assessors has taken place in Exeter and Norwich. The Diocese of Norwich has arranged for 15 schools to work together on the criteria for the REQM. Chester West and Chester SACRE has offered supported funding for 8 schools to apply. The REQM is currently being piloted in schools in Wales. Schools are finding the process helpful as they map their existing practice and see the next steps for improvement. The REQM is showing just how much pupils and staff appreciate high quality RE:

*'I like acting things out. It makes it more interactive. I get to do it. I like talking and seeing other points of view.'* (Primary pupil)

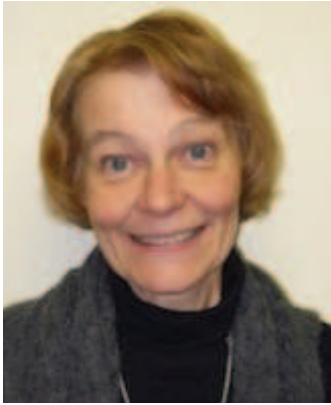
*'I want to help the subject leader to move forward in RE and the REQM was a way of doing that.'* (Headteacher)

*'RE is everywhere in our school, well more than that really... in RE there are no walls...'* (Secondary Student)

All the schools which have achieved the award are listed on the website [www.reqm.org](http://www.reqm.org). If schools are interested in self evaluation and do not wish to apply for the RE Quality Mark, they can download the criteria as an improvement tool.

The RE Quality Mark is open to all schools and the cost of applying is £475. Schools' school improvement budgets should pay for the application. However, if a school cannot afford to apply and needs financial support, then there is some funding available. Please contact the administrator at [admin@reqm.org](mailto:admin@reqm.org) and give details of why the school needs funding for the award.

If you would like to become an assessor please contact the project managers Jane Brooke ([jane.brooke@reqm.org](mailto:jane.brooke@reqm.org)) and Mary Myatt ([mary.myatt@reqm.org](mailto:mary.myatt@reqm.org)).



Jane Brooke  
Mary Myatt





# Recognising outstanding learning in religious education

## What Is the RE Quality Mark?

The RE Quality Mark:

- ★ has been developed to celebrate high quality religious education
- ★ provides community schools, faith schools and academies with a framework to capture good practice
- ★ encourages the development and celebration of school wide commitment to excellent teaching and learning in religious education



## How does the RE Quality Mark work?

The REQM has five strands:

- ★ Learners and Learning
- ★ Teachers and Teaching
- ★ Curriculum
- ★ Subject Leadership
- ★ Continuing Professional Development

There are three award levels: bronze, silver and gold.

Schools applying for the REQM highlight where they think they meet the criteria. After applying for the REQM an assessor will visit the school, interview learners and meet the subject leader and a member of the senior leadership team.

## What do I do next?



[www.reqm.org](http://www.reqm.org)

- ★ Visit the website and explore the criteria: [www.reqm.org](http://www.reqm.org)
- ★ If you think your school could achieve the award, email [admin@reqm.org](mailto:admin@reqm.org) to find out more.
- ★ The cost of REQM is £475 per school.
- ★ There is funding for small schools (100 pupils or fewer) to meet the cost of the award.

## [NASACRE AGM 2013](#)

A reminder about our 2013 AGM which will take place at The Council House in Birmingham on Thursday May 23rd (Registration 10:00am – 3:30pm).



- Download [the AGM flyer](#).
- Download [a delegate nomination form](#).

**PLEASE NOTE:** only electronic forms can be processed. Please do not send forms by post.

Further details regarding nominations and elections for the NASACRE Executive committee will be sent shortly, with other papers to follow nearer to the date of the AGM.

**DEADLINE FOR AGM BOOKINGS: TUESDAY 30th APRIL  
BOOKINGS RECEIVED AFTER THIS CANNOT BE PROCESSED**



## **Annual General Meeting**

Council House, Birmingham  
23rd May 2013  
10:00am (registration) - 3:30pm

# **CHALLENGING SACREs**

## *Marking 20 years of NASACRE*

In the 20 years since NASACRE was established, SACREs have had to face many challenges. Perhaps none have been as acute as those facing RE and SACREs now.

We invite you to join us in Birmingham to be inspired and challenged by our key-note speakers: HMI **Alan Brine** and Director of Culham St Gabriel's **Dr. Mark Chater** who will lay out:

- the very real problems facing RE today;
- the role of SACREs in the past and looking to the future

In the afternoon, discussions will explore:

- Fundamental principles for NASACRE and SACREs moving into the next 20 years
- Ideas and actions to address the issues raised
- Current examples of good practice within your SACREs and how these can be spread
- Identifying some key 'next steps' for NASACRE

The outcomes will inform the NASACRE action plan to support SACREs so that we rise to the challenge and also raise challenges of our own!

In addition, do not forget the AGM itself, and the announcement of the Westhill/NASACRE Awards for 2013-14.

We look forward to seeing you!

**Fee £85**



### Membership matters

- **Updating our records:** Thank you to all who have provided updated details for your SACRE. Over the next few months, this information will be uploaded to the new website. In order to be able to communicate

with every SACRE efficiently and effectively, it is vital that we have up to date details. Unfortunately, there are still 61 SACREs from which no update has been received. It would be helpful if this information were received as soon as possible.

- **Subscription invoices:** Invoices for NASACRE membership subscription will be sent soon after the AGM.

**Please note:** As from mid-September, access to newsletters and most of the new website, will be on a **subscription basis only**. A user name and password will be sent to subscribers at the beginning of September.



Sharon Artley

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## RE Council Sponsored Walks

To celebrate the 40th anniversary of the REC, raise its profile and generate funds to support RE in schools at this critical juncture, the REC is organising a series of sponsored walks which will be held in cities, towns and villages across England and Wales during May and June 2013. Each walk will take in a number of places of religious significance and could nurture contacts which would be of value from an RE perspective.

The aim is to have 20 different walks taking place across the country, each with fifty participants and with each participant raising at least £100 in sponsorship; in general the walkers would usually be adult 'friends of RE' rather than school students. The target is to raise £100,000. Funds raised will be split equally between the REC and locally chosen charities. Since 2010, the REC receives no government funding to make possible its work of supporting RE in schools and does not wish to engage in revenue raising activities which would put it in direct competition with some of its member bodies.

THE REC is looking for help and support from individuals and groups from within its member bodies, of which NASACRE is one. Could your SACRE lead a local organising team? This would involve getting together a group of around half a dozen people to plan a route, persuade people to sign up as walkers, liaise with places to be visited on the route and generate publicity. Could some of your SACRE members take this on? SACREs are well placed to play a valuable role here as they have the local knowledge and contacts to be able to organise a walk effectively. The REC will provide a local organiser pack to help you get started. Perhaps if you are unable to organise a walk, you could join one which has already been organised or sponsor someone already participating?. Click here to see the [RE Council walks](#).

The REC needs you! Please contact [sarah@religiouseducationcouncil.org](mailto:sarah@religiouseducationcouncil.org) if you can offer your help for this special 40th anniversary event. We will be very grateful for your contribution whatever form it takes – the first need is for local organising teams but walkers and sponsors will also play an important part.

Sarah Smalley,  
Executive Officer, RE Council of England and Wales

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## In the beginning - some personal reflections

*Colin James, NASACRE's first secretary, writes :*

You might say that my involvement with NASACRE started by accident! A number of people came up with the idea of setting up a national body to support and co-ordinate the work of SACREs. They began with a working party and invited my colleague, Cherry Gould to join it. It was a natural choice as she was a superb RE adviser with a well deserved national reputation. Sadly, however, Cherry's MS was by this time so far advanced that she felt unable to accept. Instead she suggested I went in her place. (Although my responsibility in the Berkshire LEA was for further and higher education, I had also set up our SACRE and was its clerk.) There followed a series of meetings at the St Peter's Saltley Trust in Birmingham. Its Director Maggie Pickup provided the administrative support. Other members included Michael Metcalfe (still NASACRE Treasurer today) and the incomparable John Hull, whose vision, amazing grasp of the issues and sheer common sense inspired us all.

Having agreed on the principle of creating the new body, we then spent a lot of time working on a draft constitution and possible financial arrangements. I wish I could say we got it right, but as time passed we were to discover that we had gained approval for a constitution so difficult to amend that we were unable to improve it as we learned from our early experience.

Anyway NASACRE was duly launched, and most LEAs readily agreed to join. We needed of course a committee and officers. The first Chair was Angela Wood, an inspired choice, full of drive and professional experience. She it was who decided once and for all how to pronounce the Association's name: "It's NASACRE – massacre" she ruled, and no-one ventured to challenge her! Michael valiantly accepted the often thankless role of Treasurer. That left a vacancy for Secretary. I suppose I should have seen it coming. As it was I found myself "ambushed" but with the promise that the Saltley office would do the copying, posting etc for me.

Naturally things began slowly as we established our identity on the national scene among the various bodies who share an interest in RE and collective worship. One of my early tasks was to twist the arms of the chief education officers of the authorities which had not initially signed up. They did in the end, if only to get me off their backs. I quickly started receiving requests for advice on issues which were worrying those who ran the SACREs. The most common was "Can we appoint a representative humanist member?" Answer "Not to any of the four groups, but if your local constitution allows for co-optation, you could co-opt one." As NASACRE began to organise events, and in particular launched its awards scheme, one of the LEAs in Wales put it to us that all our literature must be issued in Welsh as well as English and threatened us with legal action. Luckily the Committee included a Welsh archdeacon, and between us we managed to get them to drop the demand.

Of course NASACRE, like the requirement for SACREs themselves, came into being following the passing of the Education Reform Act and had therefore nothing to do with its framing, its merits or shortcomings. (We should not forget, however, John Hull's excellent booklet *The Act Unpacked* which I suppose was one of the spurs to filling the gap for an informed body able to monitor the operation of the Act and to provide ministers with advice on how things should develop thereafter.) Over the years we offered a good deal of advice, but I should not like to suggest that it was often heeded. We went to a lot of trouble to gather our members' views on what eventually became Circular 1/94. I personally spent many hours putting together these views to produce NASACRE's submission. But then nearly thirty years as an LEA officer had made me used to preparing long and detailed reports which never seemed to have quite the desired impact on the eventual outcome!

I could of course ramble on interminably about things now perhaps better forgotten, but that will do for now. As one of those who were in at the start, I applaud the devotion of all still committed to a task we all felt was worthwhile and important. And whatever the uncertain times ahead may bring, I do wish NASACRE well as long as it is able to continue to make its special contribution.

Colin James

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[Twenty years on](#)

Michael Metcalf – (Editor: *Still NASACRE Treasurer – he deserves a long service medal!*) reflects on the changing times.



Twenty years ago, NASACRE was launched with a reception in the House of Lords. In 2003, as we marked the Tenth Anniversary of that launch, there was a feeling that NASACRE had “come of age”. It had negotiated the hazards of childhood, had survived adolescence and teenage angst, and had become a healthy adult ready to play its full part in the wider RE World.

In the ten years since then, NASACRE has continued to thrive and to be an active agency in support of its member SACREs and in its advocacy of good religious education. For most of this period, RE has been in a buoyant mode, SACREs in general have been busy and purposeful, and NASACRE has taken part in several significant projects and initiatives, some of which are recalled below.

However, in the most recent years, the picture has changed dramatically with the impact of the new Government’s initiatives, and NASACRE and its member SACREs now find themselves facing an uncertain future. To explore the growth metaphor somewhat fancifully, we might suggest NASACRE is having a mid-life crisis – or is perhaps even contemplating enforced premature retirement! Certainly NASACRE’s life is more problematic at present, and there are a few health concerns.

More positively, let us note and celebrate some of the high points of the last ten years. In no particular order... our receiving substantial government funding to recruit and train potential SACRE members from minority faith communities. One outcome of this two-year programme was the development of a high quality training package for SACREs as a whole. Another outcome was the budget overspend, which severely eroded our finances!

...the inauguration and annual follow-on of the Westhill NASACRE Awards for SACRE interfaith projects with young people. The Awards have been enormously successful in stimulating creative initiatives from local SACREs and in raising the profile of NASACRE itself, while the partnership with the Westhill Foundation has been mutually enriching and beneficial.

... the support we were able to give to the “*Celebrating RE*” month, including our own Conference in Birmingham “Whose RE is it anyway?” (A question worth pondering again.)

... the growing prominence of inter-faith issues and the enhancing of NASACRE’s role within the InterFaith Network (UK), which has resulted in major programmes looking at young people in interfaith situations, and exploring relations between SACREs and local interfaith groups.



... the presence of NASACRE in key situations and developments within the RE world, not least the current REC strategic review of Religious Education.

... the final achieving of a 100% affiliation of all SACREs in England and the Channel Islands to NASACRE.

No doubt this is a rather personal set of reminiscences, and others might have chosen a slightly different set, and my memory may have overlooked some major feature or other. However, it is clear that NASACRE has worthily and energetically lived up to its "adult" role over the last ten years, and this should be a cause of congratulation and acclaim.

NASACRE's future lies with the future of SACREs themselves. As long as SACREs exist and are able to continue in membership of NASACRE, NASACRE will also exist and seek enthusiastically to support and work with them. I just wonder what we will be able to write a decade on from now, at the next ten-year anniversary.

Michael Metcalf

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### Personal reflections on being a member of a SACRE

My involvement with SACRE began in late 1998 following the formation of the unitary authorities in Berkshire, as a result of which the newly formed Bracknell Forest Borough Council had a statutory obligation to convene a SACRE. There was a need to find four CE representatives, so I was considered to be an obvious candidate, as I already represented the Oxford Diocese on the Bracknell Forest transitional education committee. This was a role that I had accepted with some reservations. Although familiar with school governorship over some twenty years I had had no teaching or education background. However, early retirement from a career in banking (it was held in much greater respect in those days) had given me more time and thus I had agreed to help out.

At the inaugural meeting of Bracknell Forest SACRE in the autumn of 1998 the first agenda item was the appointment of a chairman. To my surprise and consternation the then chairman of the education committee nominated me. My somewhat weak protestations and the absence of a second nomination resulted in my election; it was a position I somehow retained until last year, when I decided to retire: thirteen full years was enough.

Looking back over those years I realise the work of SACRE and the experiences gained from meeting people from all of the major faiths and others has broadened and enriched my understanding of my own faith, which has gone through some troubled times. It was SACRE that made me much more aware of how different and yet how similar all faiths are.

Bracknell Forest is a unitary that was, and to an extent still is, an area of modest ethnic and faith diversity. There is no purpose-built Hindu temple, synagogue or gurdwara, so it was pleasing to me as chairman to be able to welcome representatives from all the major faiths, as well as a Bahá'i and a Quaker. Even more pleasing was the fact that attendance at our regular meetings was very good with open and constructive comments being made on many aspects of SACRE's work. At an early stage we agreed to create a directory of contacts for all the religions and places of worship, the work of which taught me much about other faiths and prompted visits to several places of worship that otherwise I would not have thought of doing.

Little did I realise at the time how valuable personally this would prove to be, as in 2002 my younger son, living in Toronto, announced he was to be married to a Canadian Sikh girl. The full Sikh wedding ceremony in a Vancouver gurdwara was a wonderful experience, made all the easier by my earlier better understanding and appreciation of that faith.

My work for SACRE made me realise even more the importance of children of all ages learning about religion and from religion. Sadly, recent developments in UK government education policy and the school curriculum continue to indicate a reduced focus on religious education. This, combined with SACREs having only an advisory role, means it can be occasionally frustrating to serve on a SACRE, but my own experience has been one of enrichment and better understanding of my own faith and that of others.

Gordon S Anderson

Church of England representative on Bracknell Forest SACRE 1998 – 2012



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