

Still Standing: A report by the Religious Education Council, November 2021¹

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an analysis of a joint REC/NASACRE project which ran from May 2020 to June 2021. This aimed to test out the recommendations of the Commission on RE regarding SACREs. For the project, funded by Culham St Gabriel's Trust, four SACREs engaged in action-research into the Commission on Religious Education's report recommendations on the future viability of SACREs.

In September 2018 the Commission on RE gave a call to government and RE bodies for wide ranging reforms to the present law around RE in English schools. In section 7, their report details what is positive and important in the work of SACREs which the Commissioners would want retained in a modified form, as local area networks. The Commission report goes on in its recommendations in section 8, to suggest a number of possible changes to improve the make-up of SACREs and their work within local communities and schools. Over a one-year period, May 2020-July 2021, this Local Area Network (LANs) project has sought to investigate the proposals in recommendation 8, specifically 8b and 8e of the CoRE report, through analysis of case studies produced by four SACREs.

- The case study in Barking and Dagenham showed how a small amount of funding to a SACRE/LAN can be highly effective and impactful for teachers of RE, providing opportunities for support to all schools and connect schools with faith/belief/other support groups.
- The Bath and NE Somerset action research project demonstrated that the National Entitlement is useful for structuring a renewed Agreed Syllabus. A SACRE Agreed Syllabus review tool was created as part of this research project.
- The work in Hampshire suggested that the democratic involvement of the LA was essential in an effective and fully representative SACRE .
- Richmond SACRE found that SACREs could and should review their membership within the current legal framework to ensure that it is representative. A diverse range of voices with specific roles making up a SACRE/LAN is essential if an LA is to be able to discharge its legal responsibilities. A SACRE membership tool was created as part of this research project.

The fact is that schools have changed enormously over the last 70 years, and so has religious and non-religious practice and its place in our society. Having analysed the action-research, this project has discovered that, with proper funding, section 8 recommendations from the CoRE report could be useful in ensuring that there is effective support for RE/Religion and Worldviews in schools.

However, this report concludes that without a significant change in funding to SACREs the ambitious and positive recommendations from CoRE will fail and systemic change will not be possible. A SACRE cannot be expected to carry a wider

¹ <https://www.nasacre.org.uk/file/nasacre/1-58-final-still-standing.pdf>

remit without new funding streams being secured for their work. The RE community must come together to ensure current SACREs find their place in this new educational system.

This report therefore makes the following recommendations:

RECOMMENDATIONS

The UK Government should consider:

1. It is 33 years since the last Education Reform Act was passed in parliament. The time is right for the legislation around RE and SACREs to be reviewed and reformed, providing clarity to SACREs and schools about the nature of high quality 21st century RE in schools.
2. The National Entitlement, contained within CoRE, should be developed with all key RE partners to create clear guidance that all schools must fulfil in terms of the RE they teach. Exemplar schemes of work for RE at all key stages which a SACRE could use to inform its own practice around producing a local agreed syllabus would be welcome.
3. SACREs need to continue to have statutory powers to carry out their work and the necessary funding to meet these requirements.
4. Reforming current SACRE groups to reflect the make-up of 21st century society and ensure the diverse voices around religion and worldviews are captured and used in a SACRE's work and decision making. As part of this the government might consider whether a separate group for the Church of England group should continue to be a separate group, but rather these important members should join a newly constituted religion and worldviews panel.
5. Asking a SACRE to assist in the local development and delivery of faith aspects of the governments approach to community integration and cohesion.
6. The implications of its academisation programme. There are at present SACREs operating with only 1 state school within their area – all others being academies. Creating, reviewing and publishing a local agreed syllabus is not a viable nor good use of public money in these circumstances. Government needs to ensure SACREs do not get left out of education reforms and changes. SACREs themselves have identified reduced contact with schools as the greatest issue they face at present – The Government should consider how they can resolve this issue.
7. Celebrating the work of a SACRE in determining and creating education locally – involving at their best many parts of local communities and working for the best for all pupils in their area.

SACREs should consider:

1. Ceviewing their membership to ensure that it is representative of their local community, and the religions and worldviews included in their Agreed Syllabus. Having a diverse range of voices with specific roles making up a SACRE is essential if an LA is to be able to discharge its legal responsibilities. Current SACREs can start the process of reform around membership now – there is nothing in the present legislation that would hinder then.

2. Continue to build local partnerships with their LA to ensure necessary funding.
3. Within the present legislation their ability to widen their membership. The CoRE report helpfully suggests current SACREs think about adding, if they have not already, into their membership; education departments at museums and universities, local ITT providers, local RE CPD providers, training school hubs, parents, governors, pupil voice, academies and free schools to name a few possibilities. Widening representation and local buy in to strengthen the work of high quality RE in schools.
4. Making use of the toolkit (see Appendix 4) for auditing a current agreed syllabus (AS) provision in relation to a National Statement of Entitlement for an education in Religion and Worldviews. At this point also to consider how non-religious traditions feature in the AS and best practice in terms of presenting different religions/worldviews.
5. The next agreed syllabus should take account of the changing landscape of religion and belief in Britain by, for example:
 - paying more attention to non-religious traditions in both the syllabus structure and the exemplar units of learning;
 - providing more clarity on which aspects of Humanism, for example, would be included;
 - taking care to avoid 'colonial' attitudes and language in the programme and address an updated understanding of the broader aims of education, and
 - providing for teaching about key terms in the study of religion and particular worldviews, including 'spirituality' and 'secularism', as a contribution to 'worldview literacy'.

5. NASACRE should consider:

1. providing further support and opportunities for current SACREs to meet across local LAs and regions to support high quality RE in their areas.
2. provide national training which equips current SACRE members to carry out their duties well. Learning from best practice being shared and celebrated.
3. bringing chairs and vice chairs together nationally to ensure they have the relevant knowledge and skills to be able to lead current SACREs forward in ensuring they are relevant dynamic groups useful to schools and their local communities.

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