

Preparing for life in Britain today: the contribution of RE Conference and AGM 2017 16 May, York Hilton

Members present (totalling 70, representing 53 SACREs)

Barnsley (Roger Holmes), Bedford Borough (Gilly Riach, Rachel Gleeson), Bolton (Martin Short), Bracknell Forest (Anne Andrews), Bradford (Ros Garside), Brent (Basma Elshayyal), Bromley (Roger Bristow), Cambridgeshire (Amanda Fitton, Kerri McCourt), Camden (Paul Tomlinson), Central Bedfordshire (Paul Harpin), Cheshire East (Sue Glover), Cheshire West & Chester (Naomi Anstice), Cornwall & Devon & Plymouth (Mark Andrew Dearden), Coventry (Lizzie McWhirter), Croydon (Alison Brunt), Dudley (Dilwyn Hunt), East Riding (Sue Holmes, Phil Davison), Hackney (Katie Hanson), Halton (Paul Smalley, Mark Higginbottom), Hammersmith & Fulham (Liberty Sandeman), Hampshire (Sushma Sahajpal, Elizabeth Jenkerson, Pat Hannam), Harrow (Ciara O'Flaherty), Hounslow (Lesley Prior), Hull (Marilyn Cowling, Kamlesh Singh), Kent (Cliff Cohen), Kirklees (Emma Salter), Lambeth (Jo Backus, Sandra Teacher), Lancashire (Peter Martin, Alison Lloyd), Lincolnshire (Andrew Hornsby), Liverpool (Gillian Lawson), Merton (Peter Kendrick, Saleem Sheikh), Milton Keynes (Paul Smith), Newham (Ellen Kemp, Claire Clinton), North Yorkshire (Nasr Moussa Emam), Norfolk (Sue Paice), Poole (David Rees), Richmond upon Thames (Penny Frost), Rochdale (Margaret Smith, Peter Owen), Salford (Alex Klein, David Levien), Sheffield (Pam Smith, Helen Sheehan), Shropshire (Tristram Jenkins), South Gloucestershire/Bristol/Swindon (Katie Staples), Southwark (Linda Coplestone), Staffordshire (Mohamed Parekh, Michael Metcalf), Stockton on Tees (Kirsten Webber, Cloud Singh), Wakefield (Elizabeth Martin), Wandsworth (Angela Rundle), Warwickshire (Tracy Butcher), Westminster (John Pearson-Hicks), Windsor & Maidenhead (Barbara Meaney), York (Shabana Jabbar, Mike Jory) and Richard Dickson on behalf of The Westhill Trust.

Welcome and introduction

Paul Smalley (PS), Chair of NASACRE, opened the meeting and welcomed all delegates to York, thanking people for travelling, many over long distance, to join the conference. He particularly welcomed the keynote speakers:

Dr Joyce Miller, Associate Fellow in the Religions and Education Research Unit at the University of Warwick, REC Commissioner

Prof Aaqil Ahmed, formerly Head of Religion and Ethics for BBC and previously for Channel 4

The Rt Hon Charles Clarke (Visiting Professor, School of Politics, Philosophy, Language and Communication Studies, University of East Anglia) was attending as Patron of NASACRE.

The Keynote Addresses and Question Time sessions were audio-recorded for members to access on the NASACRE website:

Keynote Addresses

Dr Joyce Miller spoke about the work of the RE Commission, referencing authors who have offered interesting and challenging analyses of where RE is today. She suggested some questions for SACREs on their roles and futures and answered a range of members' questions.

Prof Aaqil Ahmed spoke on Importance of Religion & Belief in today's world and its authentic presentation in schools, and then answered members' questions.

Afternoon Seminar

Sushma Sahajpal introduced the seminar: *How SACREs impact RE and its capacity to prepare pupils for life in Modern Britain*. The Commission on RE (CoRE) states that its ultimate aim is to 'improve the quality and rigour of RE and its capacity to prepare pupils for life in Modern Britain'. To ensure that the specific ways SACREs support this function are valued, recognised and taken forward in the recommendations, it is crucial that the commission hear evidence of what are often outstandingly creative, local practices.

Delegates worked in regional groups, using pre-formatted discussion capture sheets to facilitate SACREs in recording their discussions in a structured way. NASACRE will use the same structure to collate and submit a coherent breadth of evidence from the many SACREs present, as evidence to the Commission.

Discussion format:

Group 1: How SACREs impact on the quality and rigour of RE

- **Resourcing Rigour**
 - *Contributing to training or development of Teachers*
 - *Contributing to subject knowledge/resources*
- **Impacting Quality**
 - *Monitoring quality of teaching and/or learning*
 - *Help raise profile/improve understanding of RE in schools*
- **Any other examples for group 1**

Group 2: How SACREs help prepare pupils for life in modern Britain

- **Linking school RE to the contemporary world**
 - *Contributing to links with faith speakers or places of worship*
 - *Helping improve understanding/raise profile of RE with parents/wider community*
- **Advice on pastoral support**
 - *For students from a faith background*
 - *For teachers dealing with faith-linked challenges in school*
- **Any other examples for group 2**

*A compiled summary of discussions is available from the **NASACRE AGM 2017** webpage.*

In organising a direct submission of evidence to the Commission, individual SACRE members are welcome to make use of the formatted discussion sheet, available from the NASACRE website.

Question Time

Table groups submitted questions for the panel of experts: Charles Clarke, Joyce Miller and Aaqil Ahmed responded to the questions from regional groups. chaired by Paul Smalley.

AGM and Business Meeting 2017

1. **Apologies:** Denise Chaplin (Exec), Sharon Artley (Exec), Philip Davies (Exec), Naif Sheikh (Kensington and Chelsea), Elaine Lever (Buckinghamshire), Geraldine Cooper (Bradford), Dennis Young (East Riding), Katie Hanson (Hackney)
2. **Minutes:** The draft Minutes for 2016 were accepted as an accurate record of the AGM held on 17 May 2016 in London. Martin Short (Bolton) proposed their adoption and all were in favour.

There were no matters arising.

3. **Chair's report:** Paul Smalley (PS) introduced his report (previously posted on the website).

PS thanked fellow Executive members for their support and all their efforts for the association. He especially paid tribute to Sharon Artley who, in her absence, received a round of applause for her dedicated hard work for the association over many years. He also thanked SACRE members for the energy that they bring to SACRE work. We must continue to work together so that NASACRE can be a strong voice, especially in relation to the REC's current Commission on Religious Education. PS said he'd recently attended a summit with a number of organisations who support RE; the hope is that, together, we can put on some more collaborative conferences. He asked SACREs to consider working together to make proposals for regional conferences – Culham will fund such events and there are templates to help with the organisation. The Big SACRE Survey is still accessible online for SACREs to enter their data and PS thanked all those who have responded. He picked out one/two highlights of the survey so far, including the issue of funding, encouraging SACREs to talk together and learn from each other. Some SACREs have extremely small budgets but still manage to do great things!

4. **Secretary's report:** previously posted online, there were no questions arising from the Secretary's report (Sue Holmes). The Secretary drew attention to the fact that everyone must continue to look out for a new Vice Chair for 2017-19, to ensure that the full range of NASACRE's work may continue.
5. **Accounts and Treasurer's report:** Michael Metcalf (MM) presented his report on the association's accounts for the calendar year 2016, previously posted online. The highlights are:
 - A relatively modest surplus of ~£320 was achieved during the year
 - The closing balance at 31st December 2016 was just over £28,900
 - Our main 'running' income is from annual subscriptions, which have not been raised for some time
 - So that it is clear who has paid their subscription, MM reiterated that LAs must inform him once payment is made.

Tristram Jenkins (Shropshire) proposed that the accounts be accepted, and the meeting unanimously adopted them; PS thanked MM for his continuing sterling work with the association's funds.

6. **New Constitution:** the new NASACRE Constitution has been unanimously adopted by the membership by an online vote.
7. **New Executive:** Claire Clinton (Newham), Roy Galley (East Sussex) and Emily Norman (Westminster) were nominated for the Executive. There were no other nominations, so all three were elected unopposed. The post of Vice Chair is vacant.

Philip Davies is happy to remain co-opted as Assistant Treasurer; Lesley Prior will remain Executive Assistant in the absence of anyone else in that role.

Alex Klein suggested that it could be useful to co-opt members from the main faiths as necessary to advise the Exec, for those faiths that are unrepresented on the Executive.

8. **Matters arising from the Minutes, not previously addressed:** there were none.
9. **AOB:** none was notified in advance of the meeting.

Westhill Awards

Michael Metcalf expressed NASACRE's appreciation to Westhill for continuing to fund the awards and announced the winners for 2017. There was a bigger and better entry than for the last 2 years. The panel had a difficult task – three applications were outstanding; three others had agreed to accept a lesser award, so the remaining amount could be shared between them.

There are new trends within the projects submitted, such as how to enable monocultural schools to encounter faiths when there is no diversity in their vicinity, whilst other projects relating to areas of school life that do not normally involve RE.

The successful SACREs are:

- Bucks £3,000
- Newham £4,000
- North Yorkshire £2,725
- Shropshire £3,550
- Staffs £2,725
- Suffolk £4,000

Westhill trustees have already agreed a sum for 2017-18.

Conclusion

Paul Smalley profusely thanked fellow Executive members who had taken responsibility for organising the conference, Sushma Sahajpal and Elizabeth Jenkerson, and also Marie Cooper, our new Administrator. He drew the conference to a close by paying tribute to all the good work carried out by SACREs across the country.