

Apologia

Religious education is not a national curriculum subject but it must be taught in all state-funded schools as enshrined in the 1988 Education Reform Act. Owing to the Secretary of State for Education having almost no influence in the subject, the curriculum for religious education is to be determined locally by Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs) (Bastide, 2007), formed under Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs). The main focus is that:

'Every agreed syllabus shall reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.' (Great Britain. Education Act, 1996, section 375)

Local authorities are required to establish a SACRE which, as its chief aim, is to advise the said authority upon matters pertaining to religious education and collective worship. The Education Reform Act states the composition of SACRE members, who may also comprise Agreed Syllabus Conferences, are drawn from: Christian and other faith communities, the Church of England, teachers' groups and democratically elected councillors. In addition to this role, it can require a local authority to review its agreed syllabus which then necessitates a standing conference to review it. It is called an agreed syllabus because it must be agreed by those with an interest in the teaching of religious education. Let it be clear to those who claim that it is the function of SACREs to convene an agreed syllabus:

*'...to draw up a syllabus the local authority must call a standing conference representing the interested parties; this is very often very similar and sometimes identical in membership to the SACRE **but it is not the same as the SACRE – it has been set up for this one highly specific purpose.**'* (Bastide, 2007, p.12)

The future regarding the role of SACREs has been debated by the Commission on Religious Education's 2018 report, *'Religion and worldviews: the way forward'* under recommendation 8, which can be read here:

<https://www.commissiononre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Final-Report-of-the-Commission-on-RE.pdf>

At this moment in time, the role of SACREs and ASCs is still valid. The reason is that the religious education syllabi provided by such organisations is underpinned by democracy. *'Religious leads'* do not write the syllabus. Local democracy is not anachronistic and local authorities are certainly not in a place to waste public funds. Local democracy works for its people regardless of their religious or faith beliefs. Local democracy's role in addressing the teaching and learning in religious education is diverse, functioning and relevant in today's local, national and global sense.

NASACRE is open to supporting the CoRE recommendations that seek to make religious education an entitlement for all pupils in all our schools. We want to see all SACREs functioning well across the country, ensuring that:

“RE remains a vital academic subject for education in the 21st century. Studying RE gives young people the knowledge, understanding and motivation they need to understand important aspects of human experience, including the religious, spiritual, and moral. It gives insights into the arts, literature, history, and contemporary local and global social and political issues. It provides them with a space in the curriculum to reflect on their own worldview and to engage with others whose worldview may be different.” (CoRE, 2017, p. 1)

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References

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