

SACRE Annual Reports – what is necessary and what is desirable?

SACREs have responsibility for advising a Local Authority (LA) on its schools.

For Religious Education (RE), SACRE advises community, voluntary controlled and Trust and Foundation schools without a religious designation.

For Collective Worship SACRE advises the LA on community, Trust and Foundation schools without a religious designation.

SACREs have a duty to publish an annual report, ideally by the 31st December each calendar year but if necessary in the following calendar year. This report has to be sent to the Secretary of State for Education as well as to key partners, including schools, teacher training institutions, libraries and councillors. The main purpose of the annual report is to hold the LA to account, by informing the Secretary of State and key partners what advice SACRE gave the LA during the year and how that was responded to; this includes advice on RE and Collective Worship in those schools for which the LA has responsibility.

Suggested structure to the annual report:

1. Chair's introduction and context
2. Advice to statutory bodies
 - a) Local Authority
 - b) Schools
 - c) Government or other statutory bodies
 - d) Response to the advice given, where appropriate
3. Standards and quality of provision of RE (with examples of good practice if appropriate)
 - a) Public examinations
 - b) Attainment in RE not covered by public examination
 - c) The quality of RE provision in schools
 - d) Withdrawal from RE
 - e) Complaints about RE
4. Agreed Syllabus
 - a) If there was a review of the syllabus under report
 - b) When the next review will take place

5. Collective Worship (with examples of good practice if appropriate)
 - a) Compliance with the statutory requirement
 - b) Quality of Collective Worship
 - c) Determinations
 - d) Complaints about collective worship
6. Management of SACRE
 - a) Attendance at SACRE, by Committee
 - b) Membership and training
 - c) Complaints about RE and Collective Worship
7. Contribution of SACRE to the wider Local Authority agenda
 - a) Identify what SACRE has contributed to other agendas
 - b) SACRE's contribution to the LA's public sector equality duty
 - c) What SACRE has done to support schools through events and training
 - d) Links to broader community initiatives
8. Summary
9. Membership of SACRE, local authority officers who attend, clerk and professional advice.

This is not meant as an exhaustive framework, but a useful guide.

The necessary

Firstly, it is important to recognise that SACREs are bodies that give advice (see 2 above). Hence, the annual report needs to state what advice was given and how that advice was acted upon in the year under review. It is important that the report makes clear to whom the advice was given.

The three main audiences, in order of priority, are:

- The Local Authority, this includes the portfolio holder for children's services, the director of children's services and any official of the LA (2a).
- The schools within the LA for which the SACRE is responsible and other schools within the SACRE's geographical area (2b).
- The government, including the Secretary of State, Ministers or civil servants (2c).

The annual report should answer the following questions (reported on in section 2):

- How did they respond to the advice?
- Was it acted upon? Or ignored?
- Did those being advised do something different and, if so, to what effect?

If SACRE cannot do this, it will be important to state why.

Here are some questions to consider (this could be included in sections 1 or 8, or both):

- Is SACRE taken seriously enough?
- Is SACRE adequately supported by professional staff, such as a clerk and adviser?
- Is SACRE adequately funded to perform its duties?

If the answer to any, some or all of these questions is no, then that needs to be acknowledged in the report.

Secondly, the report needs to include data about SACRE attendance by Committee, as well as any monies that it receives from the LA to carry out its responsibilities, including the time of an adviser and a clerk (see 5 above). As SACREs are statutory bodies that meet in public, they need to be properly clerked by the LA as their meetings are part of the public record.

SACRE should also report on any monitoring of RE (3) and Collective Worship (5) it has carried out and the results of such monitoring. Indeed, such monitoring should be the basis of at least some of the advice given. Similarly, a SACRE is required to advise on the appropriate materials used in classrooms to support teaching and learning in RE. SACRE should report on any such materials that it has looked at and advised upon (2 above). SACREs also need to report on the work of any Agreed Syllabus Conference within that calendar year, or indicate when another Conference is due (see 4 above).

SACRE has a statutory role in considering and granting determinations (see 5c above). Determinations are made where a school, on behalf of a number of parents, requests Collective Worship other than that set down by statute. If a SACRE grants or refuses a determination it should be noted in the annual report (5c). There is no reason for a full explanation of why SACRE made that decision, as that information will be available from the report presented to SACRE and the minutes of that meeting. Likewise, SACRE has a role in investigating complaints against schools in relation to RE (3e) and Collective Worship (5d) and the number of such complaints dealt with should be noted in the report, with an indication as to whether the complaints were upheld or not. In terms of complaints investigated, it would be rare to mention the schools or individuals involved, as these matters would usually be discussed with the exclusion of press and public.

SACREs should have a clear picture of the number of schools their advice applies to, and the number of pupils those schools educate. This would include a breakdown of schools by phase (see 2b) above).

The desirable

SACRE may have achieved a host of things that it should celebrate. It may have provided evenings for teachers to meet members of faith communities of significance in the Local Authority (see 7 above). It might be that SACRE has hosted lectures. It could be supporting other LA agendas, such as Prevent. Whatever SACRE has done can be celebrated in the report.

It might also be possible to highlight good practice, so that schools can see examples of what they might do to improve RE (see 3 above) and Collective Worship (see 5 above) in their school. It is also desirable that the Chair of SACRE writes a short introduction (see 1 above) to the Annual Report – maybe in the form of a ‘state of the nation’ address - setting out key issues for RE, Collective Worship and SACRE in the coming twelve months.

Conclusion

SACRE’s annual report is SACRE’s opportunity to hold the Local Authority to account. As a statutory body, it has this duty and responsibility. If RE and Collective Worship are of low priority in the LA’s schools and it does nothing to correct that, then the Secretary of State needs to know, as do key partners. If the LA is promoting RE and Collective Worship and the status of RE is high, then it should be celebrated.

SACRE also needs to celebrate what it and others have done to promote high quality RE and Collective Worship.