

STILL STANDING

A report on future directions for SACREs



A report on the joint REC/NASACRE LAN Pilot project 2020-21

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Appendix 5 'Does the existing legal framework ensure good practice in the running of a SACRE?' HAMPSHIRE SACRE

Introduction: overview of the study and key issues, current problems in running SACREs as reported elsewhere

NASACRE submission given by Paul Smalley to the Commission on RE in 2017 (1) stated that members felt a locally agreed syllabus enables pupils to learn about religions where they live. NASACRE felt that it helped teachers feel that they 'own' the syllabus and are committed to it, and agreed that the writing process is important in that it helps people to understand RE.

SACRES in England raised concerns raised about the lack of a 'national standard' and many SACREs felt that where there was not significant local expertise in a particular faith this could be a problem in how that faith is understood. The major concern was that of capacity as Local Authority support is being 'squeezed' in many areas, meaning that the production of a new Agreed Syllabus and ongoing support is done on a very tight budget and relies on voluntary support from RE teachers and others, whereas in the past much of this would have been done by a paid LA specialist adviser.

NASACRE reported that over three quarters of SACREs monitored the compliance and quality of RE provision in their local area. Sometimes this was done through an examination of data and often the SACRE issued a questionnaire to school for this purpose. Many SACRES also engaged in some form of visits to school, often by the RE adviser. Some SACREs felt that their ability to monitor effectively was hampered by a number of factors, including the power to require schools to change bad, or non-compliant practice and a lack of resource to carry out as much monitoring activity as the SACRE would like to. Whilst nearly 9 out of 10 SACREs in the survey have access to specialist RE advisers, this seems to vary between as little as two days per year and as many as 65, with no SACRE now reporting a full time RE adviser. There does appear to be a correlation in that those SACREs with the smallest numbers of contracted days' worth of advice appear to be engaged in the least effective monitoring and support activity. Funding was clearly a major issue for many SACREs with budgets varying tremendously (although of course the number of schools within an LA varies too). What is included is also difficult to ascertain, making comparisons difficult; half of SACREs have advisory time funded additionally to the budget.

The research concluded with the following statements:

Many SACREs are not opposed to a National 'Framework' or some definition of core entitlement – for all schools, but any solution needs a significant locally agreed element.

- All SACREs would like to do more to support, guide and advise schools.
- SACREs need fair and proper funding, and reasonable provision of specialist help and advice to enable this to happen.
- The creation of a Locally Agreed Syllabus is enabling for teachers and others involved and leads to high quality RE
- There needs to be consequences for schools who are not providing good RE. Either SACREs need to be given power to hold schools to account or Ofsted need to rigorously examine RE provision in all schools.

Section 1. What are Local Authority legal responsibilities with regard to SACREs?

A very good summary of Local Authority responsibilities is provided on the Interfaith website (2). The responsibilities include establishing a conference to produce a Locally Agreed Syllabus, advising the Local Authority on RE in Community and Voluntary Controlled schools and having responsibility for ensuring that children receive their statutory entitlement of RE in maintained schools. SACRE's must send their annual report to the Department for Education every year and therefore hold the LA to account with this. They have one specific legal duty which is to consider requests for determinations of Collective Worship and if approved, to modify the requirement for the school.

Section 2. How are Local Authority legal responsibilities met in Hampshire?

Hampshire SACRE (3) has a strong process for Monitoring RE. Modest funding for adviser time is available to monitor the effectiveness of the Agreed Syllabus through visits to both primary and secondary schools. Hampshire SACRE professional advice is given by the County Inspector/Adviser for RE who is also able to draw on the expertise of the

Primary RE Inspector/Adviser. This ensures specialist monitoring for RE in primary and secondary schools is possible. The time for monitoring is in addition to the HIAS time for SACRE business.

SACRE's contact with schools is assisted by SACRE members accompanying professional adviser on their visits. This gives members an opportunity to see current issues and good practice in schools. SACRE advisers also run training for SACRE members at the start of each academic year which ensures that members are aware of their role and responsibilities as well as how best to support schools.

Hampshire SACRE is also closely linked with the Hampshire Inspection and Advisory Service (HIAS) that both RE Advisers are part of more broadly. This enables the SACRE to be aware of wider trends and developments that affect schools, such as SEND, assessment and changes to the EYFS framework for example.

Hampshire SACRE has the services of an experienced Clerk based in HCC Democratic Services. All SACRE reports and minutes are on the LA template and published by the Clerk on the HCC website. Hampshire CC treats SACRE as it would all other county council committees. It funds the cost of the Professional adviser(s) to SACRE for 20 Days of the Advisers' work. All SACRE groups are filled and the Professional Adviser works with the Clerk to SACRE to review membership and contact nominating bodies when there are vacancies.

Hampshire SACRE operates in a context of an outstanding Children's Services – where there is still a robust intact School Improvement Services. This organisation runs training for schools in all subjects. SACRE works alongside to support HIAS RE Advisers in implementing the Agreed Syllabus. The Monitoring Group process is critical to this and is the link between SACRE, HIAS and schools. The Chair of SACRE is traditionally a County Councillor and the Council take SACRE and RE teaching seriously and therefore a high profile Elected Member is Chair. This gives weight to SACRE's work and ensures HIAS can listen to SACRE.

Having strong links into the Local Authority is critical. This enhances the work of the SACRE and links it into the wider arena of current council initiatives such as health, environment and mental health.

Section 3. What are the perceived benefits of Local Authority responsibilities to SACRE being met in these ways?

The strength of Hampshire SACRE comes to a large extent because of the direct engagement with Local Democratic processes, which work well in Hampshire. The chair and vice chair of the SACRE has always been a Local Authority Councillor and this has enabled the SACRE to be aware of wider council initiatives. Sometimes this has resulted in the contribution of the SACRE to wider Local Authority initiatives such as the annual production of a Hampshire Inter Faith calendar. This has increased the status of the SACRE in the Local Authority and ensured the SACRE continues to have relevance in the whole organisation. The use of groups where necessary has also enabled the SACRE to take on a wider range of work and to do this effectively. An example is the group which meets termly to monitor RE in schools and to look at the results of school visits that its members have taken part in with the Advisers. This enables the SACRE to deal with confidential information and make suggestions for RE improvements. Another example of the use of groups is the group formed recently to undertake work on an advice document with a small number of SACRE members as well as a time limited group working on the Determinations policy. More of these are planned for future academic years so that the SACRE members can gain experience of working with others and contribute to the development of ideas within the SACRE.

The advisers train the SACRE members at the start of each academic year and outline their role and the role of the SACRE in monitoring RE locally. This helps make all members aware of the role that they play and how they can help schools and helps inform their judgements when speaking to schools.

The two professional advisers run subject specific post qualification professional education courses for senior leaders, teachers and governors including networks, webinars and conferences through the Hampshire Teaching and Learning College (HTLC). The advisers are also able to work one to one with RE leaders in schools through the management partnership relationship established with schools and HIAS. SACRE members are encouraged to attend as many of the training sessions as they can and contribute to discussions, providing their own expertise to the training session. For example, the chair of the monitoring group has attended RE and EYFS training and the Muslim representative attended the Islam webinar to talk to teachers. They can also help with links to their own communities. For example, a SACRE member provided a link with a member of his own community who wrote articles for Primary RE News for teachers to help with subject knowledge.

A key strength of the SACRE is the wide range of members from all backgrounds who bring a diverse range of perspectives and expertise to every meeting. Teachers are nominated into Group C through the Teachers' Liaison panel (Link with the LA and joint Trade Union group). This works for LA schools. The SACRE is also able to co-opt

where necessary to ensure all types of schools are represented on SACRE, including Secondary Academies, 6th form colleges, special and independent schools. There are no SLE advisers but there are two Advisers working part time for RE Secondary and Primary. They therefore work with the professional expectations and responsibilities that Public Service employees are bound by. SACRE has the capacity to co-opt people to SACRE where there is need and where the existing 'groups' leave gaps. For example, Hampshire SACRE has representation from Academies, Governor services ensuring SACRE has broad understanding of key educational issues.

Section 4. Discussion: including of how the present model could be improved and whether the LAN vision adds something new: drawing on wider documented experience.

What is causing any issues?

In the past academic year, COVID-19 has made the monitoring visits very hard to complete. However virtual meetings have been held with RE leaders and planning and RE work have been looked at. Schools have commented upon how supportive they have found the visits and useful for them when planning the rest of their RE provision. SACRE members have been able to attend these virtually and this has enabled them to see RE set for home and virtual learning. Face to Face as well as virtual meetings are planned in 2021 and 2022.

The Hampshire SACRE has found some faith communities harder to contact and it has not been possible to recruit a representative from some. For example, it has found it hard to find a representative from some Christian denominations. This has been time consuming to work on and these positions have still not been filled. As both advisers work with other SACRES, it is known that other SACRES face similar issues and recruitment is an ongoing issue. The SACRE prefers to work with a nominating body rather than individual members of communities so that the process is streamlined and can draw on work already going on in other SACRES. Such a process also helps with those communities that are harder to engage with and ensures a wider pool of members. It is possible that a wider membership of the LAN might help with this in providing an ever-bigger pool for membership from a range of interested but diverse backgrounds that could strengthen membership of a SACRE. It also might enable the SACRE to be more aware of initiatives in other areas that it could contribute to, such as Cathedral, museum, university or other provider initiatives for RE. A greater unity in approach to RE CPD would be welcomed as well as greater awareness of what other stakeholders in RE are doing.

Section 5. Conclusions and questions raised for further research.

Overall, the success of Hampshire SACRE rests on the commitment from the Local Authority as required in statute. Were this to be lost, as in the current proposals for LANs, it is not clear that the LAN would have the administrative or professional support required.

Therefore, it is uncertain what the LAN vision adds and the conclusion of this pen study is that the existing legal framework is fit for purpose.

References:

1. <https://nasacre.org.uk/file/nasacre/1-488-evidence-submitted-on-behalf-of-nasacre-to-the-commission-on-re-by-paul-smalley.pdf>
2. <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/activity/understanding-sacres>
3. Committee details - Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education | About the Council | Hampshire County Council (hants.gov.uk)