

NASACRE Chair's Report 2019



You may be missing the balloons and the glitter of last year's Silver Jubilee NASACRE Conference and AGM in London, but I am sure that Manchester will do a splendid job of hosting us, which deliberately falls on the 2nd anniversary of the Manchester Arena attacks. RE in our schools can do a tremendous amount of work to help communities understand and work with one another. SACREs can guide this – and many other aspects of RE's work, which is why we chose to focus on *Cohesive Communities and Effective Partnerships; RE near and far* as our focus this year.

The big RE news dominating much of NASACRE's work in the last year was the publication of the Commission on RE's Report *Religion & Worldviews: the Way Forward*. NASACRE's response has been viewed as being overly critical in some quarters, whilst others have found it rightly critical. I would at this point just like to make two points: firstly, that the Executive do not wish to be seen as some autocratic elite, making pronouncements about what SACREs believe, but in order for us to properly reflect the views of member SACREs we do need to hear your views and feedback on a regular basis. Thanks to those SACREs who have sent us your thoughts on the Report. Secondly, when I gave evidence on NASACRE's behalf to the Commission back in 2017, I finished by stating that:

- 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 Local Agreed Syllabus is enabling for teachers and others involved and leads to high quality RE.
- There should be consequences for schools that are not providing good RE; either SACREs need to be given power to hold schools to account or Ofsted needs to rigorously inspect and report on RE provision in all schools.

My reading of *The Way Forward* is that it supports three of those objectives. The feedback coming from SACREs about the recommendation to remove the requirement to create an AS seems to suggest that many SACREs are happy with the way the recommendation allows SACREs who are able to continue to create.

There is much more I could say, and indeed have said, but now is not the time and the place.

We have continued our discussions at the DfE around funding for SACREs. We (and they) were shocked to find the tiny proportion of the Central Services Schools Block (CSSB) is being used by Local Authorities on SACRE business. Many SACREs are allocated much less than 1%. We have discussed these figures with the DfE and have recently set out a National Recommendation.

The government's guidance is clear:

An LA should fund and support a SACRE and an ASC satisfactorily in line with the duty to constitute or convene each of these bodies and to enable them effectively to carry out their functions (*Religious Education in English schools: Non-statutory guidance 2010*, page 11).

The following can be reasonably expected to be funded from CSSB:

- a clerk
- a professional officer who has expertise in RE curriculum design
- a publicly accessible place to meet
- the reasonable expenses of members
- publishing the agreed syllabus and other SACRE materials (including agendas and minutes), most usually on the LA website
- NASACRE subscription and AGM attendance.

The National Recommendation is that an LA should allocate at least 2% of the CSSB to SACRE in order that SACRE can carry out its statutory duties. We advise each SACRE to look up what your LA's CSSB is, work out whether your LA is allocating 2% to SACRE and if they are not, write to the LA, explaining what the National Recommendation is and asking when the LA is likely to fund SACRE adequately. Note that a year in which an Agreed Syllabus review is carried out is likely to require much more than 2% CSSB if it is to be done properly. Please keep the NASACRE Exec informed of your progress.

Our work with the Department can also be seen to be bearing fruit in the recent letter from Neil Lawson, setting out government expectations with regards to school compliance in RE. It is on the NASACRE website and covers:

- The requirement to teach RE (including what is expected from academies and free schools)
- Advice about the application of the agreed syllabus, and whether qualifications can be stipulated as part of that
- How to handle reports of a school not meeting the duty to teach RE.

It is extremely useful to have these aspects set out in writing, and we hope that this will help SACREs to be proactive in challenging schools of all types to provide the very best RE. Again, do keep the NASACRE Executive informed of your efforts to hold schools to account. We are also pleased that the new Ofsted Inspection framework appears to place a much needed emphasis on the need for a broad and balanced curriculum in all schools, including the statutory subject of RE. We are disappointed, however, that representatives from Ofsted

have not been able to meet with us this year. We are also disappointed that the DfE appears to have no plans to offer similar clarification as the Welsh Government on how the composition of Committee A in English SACREs should reflect belief in the local area, particularly with organisations representing non-religious belief systems, such as Humanism.

Behind the scenes, your Exec has been formulating a NASACRE development plan, and that is one focus of our conference today.

My overriding memory of the last twelve months will be a moment in October 2018 at the *20:20 RE, Practice, Policy and Powerful Knowledge* conference, organised by four RE associations (the National Association of SACREs, the Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants, the Association of University Lecturers in RE, and the National Association of RE Teachers).

I asked those present - teachers, university lecturers and researchers, advisers and inspectors - to stand up and wave if they served on a SACRE:



This image, for me shows that in many places SACREs are the beating heart of the RE community, in many ways subverting many of the performative pressures of the educational world. A place where those representing schools, councils and faiths can come together to build *Cohesive Communities and Effective Partnerships*.

Paul Smalley May 2019