

Reading SACRE report 2019-20

Chair's Comments

Educationally, 2019-20 will not be forgotten soon. Earlier in the academic year we broke new ground in beginning the process of filming interviews in local places of worship following a successful Pan-Berkshire funding bid from the Westhill endowment. Reading's contribution was to host a visit to a Shi'a Mosque, which will sit alongside other high-quality video-interviews that we hope will be of use to teachers.

In the last six months, of course, new ground was broken for less happy reasons. For the first time GCSE exams, including RE, were cancelled and, as schools closed or went on-line, Collective Worship opportunities inevitably were reduced. Despite anxiety, stress, exhaustion, and fear, remarkably we appear to be adapting. It is to be hoped that we can return (in some way) to these practises, certain that opportunities to learn about faith and worldviews, and to practice acts of worship, are important for our young people.

In the Christian tradition I represent we speak of humans both being made in the image of God (and so having a unique capacity for creativity and compassion), and also being flawed and 'fallen' (destroying our environment and behaving irrationally and selfishly). COVID and our responses to it do nothing to convince me otherwise than of the truth of these insights into humanity. For children to learn about such ways of understanding the world, I believe, is to offer the gift of ancient wisdom and the resources for wise future responses.

On the brighter side, the COVID-19 lockdown led us (like many others) to embrace swiftly online meeting both for our own committee and for our network meetings. As others have found, paradoxically, this has broadened the opportunities for engaging with those who might be put off by travel. I hope there may be some long-lasting benefits to these new ways of working.

Behind all of this I remain deeply grateful to all of our volunteer representatives, to colleagues in the Pan Berkshire Hub, and especially to our paid advisors at Hub (Anne Andrews) and local (David Rees) levels.

Mark Laynesmith – Chair, Reading SACRE

Fiona Murray - Vice Chair, Reading SACRE

2019-20: The Context

This year saw the embedding of the Pan Berkshire Agreed syllabus. Since its launch schools have become familiar with the requirements and should now be teaching challenging RE focussing on the key questions which were designed through a full consultation process. SACRE and schools continue to develop materials to support the new syllabus through networks and the activities of the Pan Berkshire Hub. Existing resources from the previous syllabus remain active but are being updated as an ongoing process.

National developments in RE have centred on looking at religion and worldviews through a variety of lenses and encouraging engagement with the voice of the believer and

understanding the lived experience. World events show how important it is for children to ask challenging questions, develop understanding, empathy and respect for those around them and in the wider world.

Over the next few years, it is important that Reading SACRE is fully aware of any developments and takes opportunities to be heard and to encourage and facilitate high quality RE in the current and future educational landscape. With this in mind the SACRE keeps informed through the NASACRE newsletters and disseminates information through active involvement in the Pan Berkshire hub and in running teacher networks. Teacher conferences are proposed and these will feature teaching and learning development as a priority.

The SACRE attempts to keep in touch with schools and to support them to fulfil their students' entitlement to high quality RE, mindful of the pressures upon teachers and school timetables. The SACRE listens to teachers through the feedback from teacher representatives on the SACRE, and the support it offers is informed by these conversations. Positive steps have been made to reach out more to teachers and encourage more to become members of SACRE

The work of SACRE this year was adapted to respond to the challenging times for schools, businesses and families in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic which saw a national lockdown starting in early March 2020. This resulted in the Summer term meeting and the teacher networks becoming virtual. SACRE is pleased that their crucial work of supporting schools was able to continue and the addition of virtual network meetings along with the introduction of a SACRE newsletter has meant that SACRE could reach out more than previously. Hopefully, this layer of support can continue from now on.

The SACRE has met once each term as required in November 2019, March 2020 and June 2020.

The work of the SACRE in 2019-20

Three meetings were held during the year: November 7th, 2019, March 12th, 2020 and 25th June 2020.

A Summary of issues raised over the year includes

- SACRE membership
- SACRE finances
- The Pan Berkshire Hub
- Responses to the Covid-19 pandemic
- The Annual SACRE report
- Exam results

Items concerning the running of SACRE are in ongoing discussion especially maintaining and refreshing the membership of SACRE and considering the action plan in the light of the available budget.

SACRE Members provided updates during the year and were encouraged to offer suggestions for the SACRE newsletter. As physical events were postponed due to the pandemic the need for communities to reach out virtually to offer support became more urgent

The Pan-Berkshire SACRE Hub

Reading SACRE is fully committed to the Pan Berkshire hub. The Hub came into being in December 2014 and soon developed into an excellent way for the Pan Berkshire SACREs to communicate and plan events together. It was the natural vehicle for the Agreed Syllabus Conference meetings when reviewing and writing the new RE syllabus. The hub, chaired by Anne Andrews (Oxford diocese), continues to pursue ways of supporting teachers in the Pan Berkshire region.

The original focus was to facilitate the updating of the existing agreed syllabus materials to bring them in line with the new agreed syllabus. This resulted in Key Stage 1-3 materials being produced for the following religions and worldviews, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Humanism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism. These materials were produced utilising adviser time, teacher writing groups and teacher network meetings. All schools and teachers were invited to be part of this process.

This year the Hub began a project with help from a Westhill grant and contributions from the 6 Hub SACREs. The project called 'Real People, Real Faith' is designed to engage with faith and worldview communities asking questions from the new agreed syllabus and producing short video clips for schools to use in RE classes. This project is now even more appropriate due to the fact that face to face visits to school have been reduced due to the pandemic. So far several places of worship have been involved across the region and all SACREs will be represented. More videos will be completed once restrictions are lifted. The films have been professionally filmed and edited and hopefully will be made available to schools very soon.

Reading SACRE is usually represented at the Hub by the chair, SACRE is grateful for his ongoing commitment

GCSE Examination Results

The Pan-Berkshire Agreed Syllabus for RE 2018 requires that "All pupils must receive Religious Education and should follow an externally accredited course for Religious Studies e.g. GCSE, or an alternative, well-structured and challenging programme of Religious Education. Schools are encouraged to facilitate examination entry for as many students as possible."

And post 16

'All students MUST receive Religious Education. Students should have the opportunity to follow a course, or modules, which lead to external accreditation e.g. A level Religious Studies'

RE Examination results: Summer 2020

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the examination series planned was unable to run as normal, results instead were calculated using a variety of methods. This makes meaningful recording difficult for both Key Stages 4 and 5.

David Rees

RE Adviser to Reading SACRE

5th November 2020