

# 1993 – National Association of SACREs - 2018

## AGM 2018: Chair's Report

The year began with the 2017 NASACRE Conference and AGM in York, which was thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended. We welcomed new Exec members, Roy Galley, Claire Clinton and Emily Norman. These three new members have very quickly settled into their roles and been a huge help this year – Roy has even found himself on the REC Governance Committee! Thanks are due to all on the Exec, but special thanks to my wonderful Executive Assistant, Lesley, and to Sue our amazing Secretary. I feel however a special mention must go to Mr NASACRE, the man who has been here for the whole of the 25 year history of NASACRE, our Treasurer, Michael.

The big RE news dominating much of NASACRE's work in the Autumn term was the publication of the Commission on RE's Interim Report, Religious Education for All. As you can see from the numerous references in the report, your responses to the Big NASACRE Survey and during last year's conference, helped inform that report.

You may also have seen the REC/NATRE 'State of the Nation' RE Report published in September 2017, which painted quite a worrying picture of the state of RE in England at the moment. We were involved in some of the follow-up to that, including a Parliamentary Round Table.

Throughout that term I met with other policymakers at a Theos sponsored 'think tank' which aimed to build consensus on the future of RE, and inform the Commission and the DfE who were present. We discussed teacher recruitment, and initial and continuing training, RE's relationship to - and role in combatting - extremism, and once again the role that SACRE should play in organising and monitoring the RE curriculum. The Professional RE Group (PREG) also met for the first time in a while, and it is due to meet again soon. We continue to build relationships with officials at the DfE.

The NASACRE Executive has taken every opportunity to remind policymakers 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 Locally 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.

There have been a number of statements from the DfE relevant to SACREs. They have re-affirmed the statutory nature of RE in all maintained schools up until the end of Key Stage 5.

We need to ensure that all of our Locally Agreed Syllabuses define what must be covered in Key Stage 4. The word 'should' has no legal standing.

In March, Nick Gibb appeared to encourage the work that Deborah Weston and others had done in complaining about non-compliance. We have placed on our website step-by-step guidance about how a SACRE might go about checking compliance in High schools and holding schools to account, including taking a complaint all the way to the Secretary of State if necessary. Deborah informs me that she has the latest GCSE and workforce data, if SACREs would like to request that from her. We have heard examples of where this is working and would love to hear more.

We have been involved with discussions with the DfE around funding for SACREs. The cost of SACREs is being met from the Central School Services Block (CSSB) from 2018-19 onwards. This is explained very well in a document that we have on our website. There is therefore no reason for an LA to not properly support SACRE; it is a statutory requirement for which they are funded by central government. Failure to do so could lead to a legal challenge in the courts, or serious sanctions from the DfE. However, we have heard that in some places it appears that the LA is trying to cut the budget for SACRE. If this is happening to your SACRE, we need to know what is being cut and what the justification is for these cuts. Only with this information will we be able to make a case to the DfE. These discussions have informed the revision of the FAQs section of the NASACRE website; several sections have been slimmed down and made more current.

We have noted with interest the recent guidance from the Welsh Government about representation on SACREs. We obviously only have membership from England, and have welcomed Gill Vaisey from WASACRE to our AGM, but we are pleased that the recent guidance from the Welsh Government reiterates that it is for the Local Authority to decide upon the relevant composition of a SACRE in order to represent the relevant traditions in the Local Authority's area. We note that the explicit guidance that Humanism may be considered 'analogous' with a religion, clarifies the matter for Welsh SACREs, many of whom have experienced difficulty interpreting which, if any, non-religious belief systems should be included within Group A in Wales. We look forward to similar clarification from the DfE on how the composition of Committee A in English SACREs should reflect belief in the Local Authority's area.

In conclusion, it is 25 years since that day in March 1993, when representatives of SACREs met to set up and formally constitute a National Association of SACREs. This followed the implementation of the 1988 Education Reform Act and the statutory powers and responsibilities which, from then on, were entrusted to the local SACREs. The new National Association – NASACRE - was launched that year in the House of Lords, in the presence of religious leaders and the then Minister of State for Education, Baroness Blatch. We have been honoured today to have so many former Chairs of the association with us, to celebrate the power of working in community. They each tell of a time of challenge for RE during their time at the helm. We have no reason to think that this will change. September will see the publication of the RE Commission report; it will have challenges, or opportunities, for SACREs. There will be funding struggles, there will be schools who do not provide the best RE they can, there will be politicians who come and go. But we know that whatever the future throws at us, we are NASACRE and we are Stronger Together!

Paul Smalley

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