

**Northumberland Standing Advisory Council  
on Religious Education (SACRE)**

**Annual Report: Academic Year 2020 – 2021**

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## An Introduction from the Chair

The work of Northumberland's SACRE has continued and 2020-21 proved to be a difficult year in education. Having taken on the Chair in 2019 it feels like I haven't quite seen what would pass as normal service in schools as yet.

In some respects, our focus has remained the same: monitoring Ofsted reports; looking at the work of individual schools; and reflecting on best practice in the county and elsewhere. However one of our usual foci - considering exam results at GCSE, AS Level and A Level has been impacted by COVID for the second year in succession.

The full impact of COVID is unknown and we continue to be concerned over the future of RE in our secondary and high schools as the subject struggles to remain relevant outside of the EBacc. This may be exacerbated by the pandemic in the sense that core RE/collective worship may have taken a back seat whilst schools have been subject to bubbles and restrictions on larger gatherings.

SACRE supports teachers across the county through RE networks, the [SACRE webpage](#) and the [SACRE newsletter](#). Our aim is to spread best practice.

Resources to support the work of the SACRE continue to be ring-fenced with a specific financial contribution from Northumberland County Council, and the commitment of all SACRE's members continues to be priceless. We depend on the goodwill of a very small central team who have an impact way beyond their number. The same is true of teachers and others working in our schools, many of whom face their own considerable pressures.

It is a privilege to serve as the Chair of the SACRE and to work with a group of dedicated, enthusiastic and knowledgeable members. Our meetings are enjoyable and constructive, and based on shared commitment to the promotion of the best possible provision of teaching and learning. We work in an atmosphere of mutual respect and celebrate what we can learn from each other by reflecting our increasingly diverse communities.

I want to thank all those who have helped us during the last year. These are challenging times, but with challenges come opportunities to bring about change for the better.

**Councillor Guy Renner-Thompson**

**Chairperson, the Northumberland SACRE**

## SACRE Meetings

SACRE met 3 times during the academic year 2020 –2021:

- 18 November 2020 - [minutes](#)
- 3 February 2021 - [minutes](#)
- 14 July 2021 - [minutes](#)

The development plan covering the academic year is available [here](#)

## ASC Working Group Meetings

The ASC working group began operation in February 2021, meeting (virtually) on:

- 22 February - [minutes](#)
- 22 March - [minutes](#)
- 26 April - [minutes](#)
- 24 May - [minutes](#)
- 28 June - [minutes](#)

The first full ASC meeting took place toward the end of the academic year:

- 21 July - [minutes](#)

The committee considered the strengths and weaknesses of the current Agreed Syllabus, changes in demographics in Northumberland since 2016, developments in RE teaching, took feedback from focus groups, and considered the way they wished to move a new syllabus forward. This work will continue into academic year 2021 – 2022.

## Statutory Responsibilities of SACRE

Northumberland SACRE continue to advise the local authority on matters relating to religious education and collective worship in schools.

The Locally Agreed Syllabus continues to be used by schools. We are unaware of any academies choosing to use it. There are a number of schools outside of the county which have adopted it.

The Agreed Syllabus Conference is underway and expects a new syllabus to be in place in 2022.

## Standards and Monitoring of RE

Examination results were not published again due to COVID 19 so no analysis could take place this year.

Pupils were allocated their results based on the school's teacher assessments, known as Teacher Assessed Grades. We are confident that schools in Northumberland followed a robust and appropriate process in order to get to a grade for each student. They used information such as previous classwork, homework, results in assignments and any mock exams in order to arrive at that grade.

Figures from the Joint Council for Qualifications indicate that, nationally, 4.4% of pupils in year 11 sat a Religious Studies examination; the concern still remains that religious education is being side-lined as it is not an EBacc subject.

Monitoring of classroom activity was scaled back during 2020 – 2021 due to the staffing pressures that schools were under. This was in line with other school improvement activities across the county.

In 2021-2022 Northumberland SACRE will consider how best to monitor RE, and will resume scrutinising exam data, conversations with schools, teacher groups, website trawls and will encourage presentations from teachers at any training events. SACRE intends to celebrate the success of schools at these events, as well as raising the profile and benefits of teaching RE within the wider community.

SACRE is not aware of any schools applying for REQM status.

SACRE monitors the Ofsted reports to note progress and excellence in SMSC and RE delivery as well as issues requiring support. No reports have mentioned RE explicitly. This work will continue.

## Support for Schools

Caroline (Caz) Weir (part time RE Consultant) has completed her first full year in post. She has provided a number of network meetings for first/primary and middle/secondary/high schools. Special schools have been allowed to join whichever phase has been most appropriate.

The support Caz has provided has been invaluable to schools – feedback has been very positive indeed. Also, the intelligence Caz has gathered around the implementation of the existing syllabus has helped shape the structure and content of the planned new syllabus.

The annual SACRE conference did not take place in 2020 – 2021 again due to the pandemic. We expect that face to face training sessions will resume in 2022, restrictions permitting.

The format of the [SACRE newsletter](#) has changed from being termly to an “on demand” service, meaning relevant information is available to schools as soon as it becomes available. We are grateful to those SACRE members who have contributed.

## Withdrawals and Complaints

There were no withdrawals brought to the attention of Northumberland SACRE in 2020 – 2021. Relevant information has been circulated via the [ecourier](#) on the Northumberland Education website.

Northumberland SACRE has a role in investigating complaints against schools in relation to RE and Collective Worship. In 2020-21 there were no such formal complaints to deal with.

## Collective Worship

Northumberland SACRE has not proactively focused on standards and monitoring of Collective Worship during the period on 2020 – 2021. It has been an unprecedented time in schools, and Headteachers, teachers and pupils have all been trying to navigate the new world that has been created by the upheaval of the pandemic. All pupils, after a prolonged absence for many, were welcomed back into the classroom. Schools in September 2020 had set up a process of ‘working in bubbles’. In July 2020 we provided [a statement](#) on the ecourier to clarify the national guidance and legislation from September 2020.

A number of schools reported that they were providing increased levels of collective worship or assembly style content, during this period to support the children that were finding it difficult to be learning at home away from the classroom environment.

In 2021-2022 Northumberland SACRE will launch an updated collective worship policy and, as the pandemic eases, return to monitoring the implementation of the policy.

## Determinations

The Education Reform Act of 1988 (sections 6, 7, 9, and 12) entitles schools to apply to the SACRE for a ‘Determination’. This allows the school to adjust the legal requirements to enable collective worship of a different character to take place for some or all pupils in the school. Determinations are made where a school, on behalf of a group of parents, requests Collective Worship other than that set down by statute. There were no determinations in 2020-21 for Northumberland SACRE to consider.

Northumberland SACRE has not commissioned any formal training on Collective Worship or the Determination process for Headteachers, Governors and teachers in schools during this recent period. This should be considered a development area going forward. However, SACRE members continue to generously offer schools their time and expertise. Faith representatives offer to deliver assemblies, support curriculum planning, and provide guidance to individual teachers.

## Links with National and Local Bodies

There were no applications for a Westhill NASACRE Award this year.

Attendance at the NASACRE Conference is offered each year – Caz attended

Caz also attended a number of NASACRE virtual training events

Members of SACRE were also signposted to the NASACE training events as access to all events was purchased.

AREIAC (Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants): The RE Adviser is an AREIAC member. The meetings provide an excellent network of RE leads and the sharing of best practice and ideas.

NATRE (National Association of Teachers of Religious Education): Northumberland SACRE promotes the resources and CPD provided to NATRE through the SACRE newsletter.

The Northumberland SACRE maintains excellent relationships with the dioceses. The Directors of Education meet regularly to see how all parties can support each other.

## Northumberland SACRE's own arrangements

Northumberland SACRE is supported by Dave Cookson, Head of School Improvement and Caz Weir, part-time RE Consultant. SACRE feels well supported by the team.

The Head of School Improvement acts as the conduit between the LA and SACRE on issues such as finance, data, and councillor representation.

Democratic Services appoint a clerk to attend each SACRE meeting. We are fortunate to have been served by Andrea Todd for many years, however Andrea was moved to serve other committees at the end of 2021. Rebecca Little has been appointed to replace Andrea.

The LA supports the funding of the RE Consultant time for around 25 days a year. This increased during 2020 – 2021 to take account of the workload of the Agreed Syllabus Conference.

The RE Consultant provides specialist RE advice and governance support, facilitates the collaborative working groups required for the Agreed Syllabus Conference, attends AREIAC/ NASACRE/ NATRE meetings or conferences and deals with day-to-day matters.

The [SACRE page](#) of the Northumberland LA website is inflexible. To raise the profile of SACRE and raise school awareness of the role and support that SACRE can provide, discussions will take place with the team who run the [Northumberland Education](#) website to see if pages can be made available for SACRE materials.

## Membership, representation & recruitment

The RE Consultant and Head of School Improvement work in partnership with the chair and members of the SACRE to identify gaps with representation of the local faith communities and wider group membership. This is an ongoing process.

A full membership list as of September 2021 is available as appendix A. Vacancies are being addressed as they arise.

All SACRE members have been offered access to NASACRE training.

## Finance Given to SACRE

The LA currently supports the funding of the part-time RE Consultant's post time, of around 25 days a year.

Funding of the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) review process has been agreed with the School Finance Team. The revision process will also include a series of launch events where the revised and updated Syllabus, and materials will be shared and modelled in training sessions with teachers.

## Circulation Details

The report will be shared, discussed, and agreed by Northumberland SACRE in February 2022. The report will be made available to Head teachers and teachers through the ecourier. The report will also be added to the [SACRE page](#) of the Northumberland County Council website. The report will be shared with Northumberland County Council.

The SACRE clerk will send a copy of the SACRE report to the Department for Education: via [ministers@education.gov.uk](mailto:ministers@education.gov.uk)

The report will also be emailed to NASACRE for publication on its website: SACRE reports via [admin@nasacre.org.uk](mailto:admin@nasacre.org.uk)

## Appendix A: SACRE Membership as of September 2021

### **Committee A: Other Faiths**

- Mrs. J. Cousin: Roman Catholic Church
- Reverend E. H. Marley, OBE: United Reformed Church (URC). The Methodist Church (SE Northumberland Ecumenical Area) and the Baptist Church are currently represented by the URC
- Bhakti Rasa Adhikhara: Hinduism
- Mariam Khan: Islam
- Harpal Singh: Sikhism
- Joyce Miller: Buddhism
- Mrs. D. Van der Velde: Judaism
- Mr. A. Gillespie: Society of Friends

### **Committee B: Church of England**

- Mr. C. Hudson
- Mr. P. Rusby
- Reverend J. Scott

### **Committee C: Teaching Associations/Unions**

- Mr. A. Duffield (middle school teacher)
- Miss C. Naylor (secondary/high school teacher)
- Mr. T. Nicholls (secondary/high school teacher)

### **Committee D: Local Authority**

- Councillor N. Morphet
- Councillor L. Bowman
- Councillor G Renner-Thompson (Chair)
- Councillor T. Thorne

### **Co-opted Representatives**

- Mr. S. Dearlove: North-East Humanists
- Maddy Wardingham (special school teacher)

### **Observer** (representing the academies and free schools)

- Vacant

### **Local Authority Officers in Attendance**

- Caroline Weir, Northumberland RE Consultant
- David Cookson, Head of School Improvement
- Rebecca Little, Clerk to the SACRE, Democratic Services