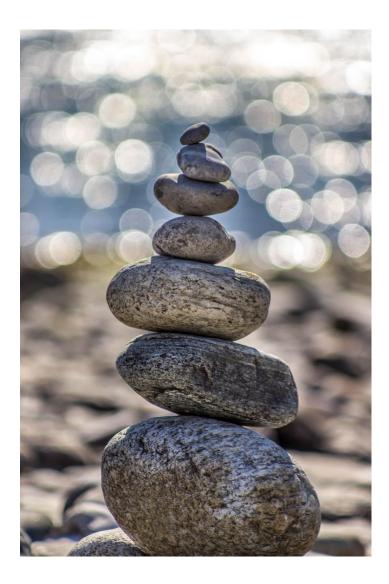# STILL STANDING

A report on future directions for SACREs

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

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Religious Education Council
of England and Wales

nasacre

National Association of
Standing Advisory Councils
on Religious Education

Appendix 1 LAN Guidance and Resources

Introduction

The following explanations and guidance are intended to help you organise your research related to the CoRE recommendations. The approach that is suggested is Participatory Action Research (PAR).

1. What is Participatory Action Research (PAR)?

- PAR is a version of action research that emphasises its participatory features. The basic idea is that all workplace problems or problematic social situations are best researched by people whose problems they are. Action research as a research approach is attributed to Lewin (1947) who devised it as a way of tackling intractable social situations such as racism and homelessness. The approach was adopted by educators, third world organisations, social workers, health care workers and many other professions which try to deal with social problems. The PAR approach stresses a democratic approach to problem definition and problem solution. This makes good sense in that clients are in the best position to define their situation and to help solve their problems as they see them. The key idea is that research should be *with* people not *on* people.

2. How does PAR differ from other approaches to research?

- Standard social scientific research approaches generally start with a problem set by academic researchers or organisations that employ researchers to find information about situations or the impact of an intervention or policy. The researcher is not part of the problem that is being researched. In some cases PAR can be thought of as a *hybrid* between standard social scientific research and action research. Standard social scientific research methods can provide information and highlight areas that need attention or development. However information, while important, does not always provide understanding or indicate solutions to problems. Action research is a way of testing out possible solutions to practice problems. In our present project you are invited to investigate a problem your SACRE has identified which comes under one of the headings in the CoRE Review recommendation 8d to e.

3. Who should be in the research team?

- In a PAR research team the members will each play a different role and have different responsibilities. While there should be a Lead Researcher, different jobs should be allocated to members of the team as appropriate to their skills and wishes. For example, one person might keep the minutes of meetings and decisions, another do a literature search, another collect data, another carry out interviews etc. You need to work out an even balance of contributions.
- In large SACREs the research team will be a sub set of all the members and will have to find ways of keeping the rest of the SACRE membership informed and able to comment, perhaps by having a standard item on regular committee meetings. Roles and responsibility can be configured in different ways. These and their associated responsibilities must be explicit.
- In the present project there are two Principal researchers who have overall responsibility for the direction of the project. Claire Clinton will be responsible for project management and liaison with the sponsors. Lorraine Foreman-Peck will act in the role of research consultant. Each SACRE will have a Lead Researcher and research jobs will be divided amongst other members of the team as meets their skills and interests. Client groups (e.g. schools, community groups etc.) might be configured as having an advisory role.
- The Lead Researcher should be given the right to ask team members who are not able to fulfil their obligations to step down, and should appoint another member if someone is unable to continue. The project must adhere to the ethical guidelines outlined in appendix i. The Lead Researcher role is important for the continuity and coherence of the project. As the project extends for over a year it may be advantageous to appoint a Deputy Lead Researcher if possible.

4. What are the data collection stages of a PAR project?

- The table below sets out in schematic form what data must be collected and recorded at each stage. Implementation of the plan must be documented and data collected, otherwise the case study cannot be

written with any credibility. Data should be stored safely and anonymised. It should not be released without permission to any unauthorised person. (see appendix i on ethical guidelines)

- No data collection method is prescribed by action research, but remember the project cannot succeed if data is not collected. The steps at which data collection is necessary are presented in bold in the chart below.

Process	Tasks	Data collection activities
Specifying the problem	Discussion and reflection with SACRE members on your present situation, with client groups, other stakeholders e.g. parents, pupils? what is good about your present situation, what needs improvement?	Some suggestions for data collection: Focus group reports, survey data, interview data, observation field notes.
Planning an intervention or change	Discussion and reflection. Reading any published evaluations of similar projects, theoretical literature if necessary	Notes and a rationale for what you propose. Success criteria agreed (numerical and /or qualitative)
Implementing the intervention	Collecting the data which provides the evidence for whether the intervention has been successful or not	Make a data collection table showing what data your evaluation is based on
Evaluating	Describing and analysing what you did. Reflecting on the outcomes. Learning lessons for future action, devising principles for action if possible.	Produce a report arguing your case with recommendations.
Revising the problem if necessary		

5. How does a research team find a research focus and a research question?

- We have suggested that you discuss with your research team and clients what aspects of your SACRE are working well and what you would like to change or improve. However not all problems are easily researchable or feasible given the resources available to you. Furthermore each research proposal has to be evaluated in terms of its relevance (to your situation and CoRE recommendation 8d and e and the possibility of its making a more general contribution to RE and /or the functioning other SACREs. A proposal therefore *must* be presented for comment to the Principal Researchers and the sponsors before any intervention is carried out. The table below sets out a suggested pro forma for the research proposal. I have taken an example from recommendation 8e viii as exemplification. It is purely a work of fiction!

The Research Proposal Format

Title of research project	Developing partnerships with museums: an action research case study

• Project researchers	• Name of Lead and other researchers in the SACRE team and their roles, names of other participants (these will be anonymised in any publication)
• Brief background of your SACRE	• Geographical area covered, very brief history, number of members, funded? major activities
• Your research focus	• Developing a partnership with a national university museum and the MATs in secondary schools in X area
• Rationale for the focus/ relevance and importance to the CoRE recommendations	• The area has a major national museum on its door step which is a resource that is not used by secondary school RE teachers in this area. A partnership would enrich the teaching of RE and contribute to schools' requirement to meet their obligation for pupils' cultural development and contribute to the government's integrated communities policy. • The case study will contribute to our understanding of how to build partnerships between RE teachers, MATs and museums.
• Problematic aspects of the present situation	• No record of partnership. Many of the schools do not have a specialist teacher of RE. The Museum has no history of working with this subject area. They do not currently have an outreach program. Little understanding by SACRE members of this museum's mission or pedagogy. MATs do not prioritise RE. The RE curriculum is changing to a National Entitlement and includes new elements such as World Views
• The research question	• How can our SACRE enable a partnership between a local national museum and MATs through a jointly devised outreach session?
• Research approach	• PAR including SACRE members, RE teachers and museum education department, school leaders, other stakeholders
• Research methods –qualitative: focus group, feedback from workshop, evaluating a pilot jointly devised outreach programme	• Activities will be planned which will provide the opportunity to collect data at each stage of the action research process. Step 1 focus group with members of SACRE, museum educators, RE teachers or school leaders. Step 2 background reading and discussion. Planning a workshop day with all participants – collecting data from workshop day. Step 3 proposing an intervention- such as a joint planning sub cttee to devise an outreach programme. Step 4 evaluating the process, what lessons did we learn?
• Ethical considerations	• We will follow the recommendations of the British Educational Research Association (2018) see appendix i. we will apprise the PAR research group of its guidelines
• Indicative time line of activities, data collection. Deadline for reporting to	• Activities etc. itemised from May 2020-July 2021

Claire Clinton. Deadlines for draft and final report.	

6. How do you write up an action research case study?

- The general advice for writing up an action research case study is to write according to the chronological order of events, i.e the story of your research. The four major steps have been outlined in paragraph 4. You should imagine your audience to be people just like you: committed to improving the provision of RE by your SACRE. Please use non-sexist language and anonymise participants' names and other details that may identify your SACRE and schools. Any references to the literature should use the Harvard referencing system. The length of the case study is up to you but we suggest you do not exceed 5000 words. Your case study may be edited and condensed in the final publication.

The following headings are provided as a guide to writing up.

- Suggested headings for writing up the case study
- **Title:** (this should indicate the topic e.g. Developing partnerships with museums: lessons from a participatory action research study)
- **Introduction** (brief history and social context of your SACRE, the present situation, what needed improvement/investigation in the light of your context, policy changes)
- **Rationale for your project** (why did you want to do it, why is it important, relevant necessary?)
- **Literature** (what documents, literature, government reports, previous evaluations, theories affected your thinking and planning, if any?)
- **The research question** (it should follow on logically from the discussion above, it should take the form of a 'How to' question, e.g. how do we form a partnership between a museum and a school)
- **Ethical considerations** (please see the appendix i Ethical Guidelines for Researchers- this section should discuss whether there were any particular ethical problems you faced in this project and how you dealt with them)
- **Planning the Intervention** (what did you need to find out, what did you plan, what did you hope to achieve, what did you think would be a good outcome, did you have a way of measuring success? Did you have some qualitative criteria?)
- **The intervention (**what did you do? What data did you collect? Were there any problems?- a neat way of presenting what you did at each stage of the action research is to provide a data collection table). The chart below gives an imaginary example of data collection addressing the first step of the action research cycle.
- Data collection table: fictional example

• Date & place	• researcher	• data	• notes	• Decisions /observations /comments
• 2.4.2020 • Museum x	• JS	• Interview with Museum head of learning	• Notes made and shared with research team	•
• 10.4.20 •	• LF, JS, EF	• Reading of govt. policies, previous evaluations etc	• shared with team	•
• 12.4.2020 • School x	• PJ	• Interview with CEO of the X MAT	• Notes shared with research team	•
• 20.4.2020	• LF	• Structured focus group meeting with SACRE members and RE teachers	• Recorded, transcribed by LM. Report shared with research team	•

- **How the data was analysed** (a brief account of how the data collected about the implementation was interpreted according to the success criteria or objectives)

- **The outcomes** (what was the outcome? Positive and negative findings are equally valuable to your community of practitioners.
- **Reflection and discussion of the outcomes** (Because action research is about taking action, practice and innovation your readers will be most interested in the principles for action that you established, your recommendations, and lessons learnt, even if you did not meet your objectives or success criteria. It is your insights about how to bring about change that count.

- They wish to learn from your experience. Could your case study provide any guidance for others?)
- **Dissenting voices** (as PAR is a democratic form of research any participants whose views differ from the majority should be recorded)
- **Dissemination activities** (This section need not go into the write up but it is important to consider. The sponsors of the project will produce a publication summarising your case study which will be made available on their web site. Your SACRE will not be explicitly named but will be listed as having taking part in the acknowledgements section. It is recommended that in addition to this publication you should think about whether those that have been affected by the research, or have given up time for interviews, or questionnaires etc. should receive a thank you letter with a short summary of the main findings of the research. It is important to acknowledge people who have helped you in some way).
- Foot notes (if any)
- **References** (please use the Harvard system of referencing: In the text if you use a quotation please in brackets place the author's name and date of publication). In your list of resources at the end of your action research please list alphabetically the list of texts used, their author/s, date of publication, Title of publication, places of publication and publisher's name.

7. Reading about action research and PAR

- Foreman-Peck and C. Winch (2010) Using Educational Research to inform Practice. (this introductory book has chapters on action research ch. 7, standards in action research ch. 8 and the ethics of practitioner research ch. 9)
- Danley, Karen Sue et al. A Handbook for Participatory Action Researchers 1999, Boston University of Massachusetts Medical School *(explains PAR in the context of psychiatry and is available on the web*)
- Kemmis, S and Mc Taggart. R(eds) 1988 The Action Research Reader 3rd edit. Deakin University Geelong. *(a well-known introductory text)*
- Stringer, E (2007) Action Research 3rd edit. Sage, Thousand Oaks

8. Reading about research methods

- Bell, J. (1987) 2nd edition Doing your research project. A Guide for First time Researchers in Education and Social Science. Buckingham, Open University Press *(this book has been through many editions – I prefer the second edition-it has many ideas for collecting data)*
- Robson, C. (1993) Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner –Researchers. Oxford, Blackwell. *(there is a second edition, but I prefer this one)*

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