

National Association of SACREs

Chair's Report, May 2024

The Secretary's annual report has provided us with the detail and analysis that we have come to expect from Sue over all the years (ten!) that she has been in this role. Thank you, ten times over.

My report for this business meeting is a personal reflection with a focus on the conference theme *How can SACREs support high quality RE and collective worship?* the simple answer is probably 'in many ways – and they do just that every day....', but we know there is never a simple answer.

Our own Executive Committee minutes, our webinar sessions and the email record of queries and answers show the complexities that our members (SACREs) face, and of course the enthusiasm and humour that many people here bring to their meetings. Their roles as education councils mean that they combine support to schools and teachers and advice to their local authorities. They also engage in professional dialogue with each other and within their groups. The local democracy supporting SACREs often models good practice in inter-faith and cross-worldview debates and events and brings people together in ways unlike any other aspect of school subject development.

At this point, I am paying attention to the sad loss of two dear colleagues this year – Lesley Prior, and Elizabeth Jenkerson. Both were specialists in the art of supporting SACREs and in promoting high quality religious education, and both will be missed by so many.

Lesley's work in the university sector, in research and teacher education, and in international links such as the European Forum of Teachers of RE (EFTRE) brought a wealth of experience to the Association. Lesley was a successful and innovative Chair of NASACRE, and she remained on the committee for as long as she could, in the face of her illness.

Elizabeth's quiet, good-humoured but firm presence as a committee member and conference organiser was invaluable. A representative of the Baha'i community on Hampshire SACRE for many years, she was one in our team who made sure we were welcomed and looked after wherever we met.

To support the subject of RE, and the special part of the school day known as 'collective worship', SACREs need to be up to date with national developments, well-versed in legislation but willing to seek advice from their local authority, engaged in education for their own members and for wider local authority groups, and able to manage the administration of a committee-style Council staffed principally by volunteers. The roles of the Chair and Clerk to SACRE are key – as are the roles of Chair and Secretary to our National Association.

Individual members of SACREs need to be confident in communicating responses to debates and decisions from their own religious or other worldview, and to hold in their hearts and minds the

central concerns of any SACRE – the teacher and their pupils, and how they create effective and affective religious education together in such a wide range of diverse contexts.

You will hear many things about how we can all support high quality RE and collective worship during the conference and afterwards in the online programme and workshops. Some you will agree with and might already be doing – but others will be a new challenge. Thank you all for everything you do for our partnership education in religion and worldviews.

I have worked with this amazing national team – the NASACRE Exec - at a national level for four years – stepping into the Chair unexpectedly, but with the agreement of members at an EGM in 2020. At the AGM, it'll be time for me to step into the position of Assistant to the Chair, so ably carried out by Paul Smalley with his sense of perspective, his knowledge and understanding of education policy and skills in strategic planning. Paul will be coming back as Co-Chair with Denise Chaplin and Bill Moore (both former Chairs) as NASACRE transitions to a CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation). We will be explaining this in some detail at the conference, but it is important to report that, as soon as we are able, we intend to hold a one item Annual General Meeting with elections to the Board of Trustees for the new organisation. We are covering other aspects - annual reports - at a Business Meeting at Conference on 20 May.

Our current patron, the Rt Hon Charles Clarke, who has supported NASACRE so generously and so well, is stepping down this year. His personal retiring message to NASACRE is at the foot of this report. I would like to record my personal thanks here for all his support to our Chairs, as well as to the Association and to the Executive. Charles' insights to political contexts and strategies, as well as his good-humoured way of speaking directly to the issues and to those with power, have helped and encouraged us all. I remember Charles' visit to Norfolk SACRE when I was a member – the first and only time a Secretary of State for Education has attended such a meeting, but not through any deficiency in terms of the SACRE. He has always spoken up for high quality RE, and while we have not always agreed across the Association about how this might be achieved, his challenges and care have spurred us on. We will be thanking him together at the conference, although he cannot attend in person this year. The committee has been considering the whole area of patronage, our current policy, and suggestions about who we might approach to give NASACRE the wider connections and expertise that it has always enjoyed. We welcome members' suggestions of potential patrons.

My personal thanks go to the rest of the Executive Committee team, some of whom will step down later this year when we have our AGM to elect new Trustees. Thanks also to Mike McMaster and David Hampshire for helping us with our key projects this year, and to good 'friends of NASACRE' like Deborah Weston. And thank you as ever to Marie Cooper our Administrator, and to Matt Tullett our Web Manager, as without them, NASACRE wouldn't work.

Thank you for welcoming me as your Chair – I will miss the opportunities it gave me, and the 'view from the Chair', but I know this Association is going places (again) and I'm pleased I will still be part of it.

Extract of a message from Rt Hon Charles Clarke, Spring 2024

Dear Linda,

I am writing to tell you that I have decided to submit my resignation as Honorary Patron of NASACRE.

It has been a privilege and honour to serve as your Patron for the past eight years. I have greatly enjoyed it and have been delighted to witness the big steps forward that the organisation has taken over this time. It plays a central role in the location of religion in our national and local education system and it is important that it flourishes, which it is indeed doing. You have all consistently treated me with great courtesy.

All best wishes,

Charles
