



Department
for Education



ANALYSIS OF SACRE ANNUAL REPORTS 2022-2023 FOR THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STANDING COUNCILS ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (NASACRE)

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PROLOGUE

During the period of analysis and writing of this report the death of Lesley Prior was announced. Lesley was a well-respected former Chair of NASACRE, as well as EFTRE. All of the reports in this analysis were completed before her death but she was referenced in ten reports. This is one tribute from one report:

‘... this year we have had to acknowledge the retirement through ill health of our wonderful RE Adviser, Lesley Prior. It is hard to put into words all that Lesley has done for us and for the many other SACREs which have had the benefit of her support for so many years. We miss her help and support for us, and we know that she would have greatly enjoyed the new areas of work that we have moved into with the Faith Direct days and the joint RE award for primary schools which will shortly be launched. Thank you, Lesley.’

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 In 2024 Sixty-nine SACREs submitted their annual report for 2021 – 2022, five less than in 2023. This figure is similar to the number submitted in 2021 (n68). It is of note though that some SACREs have only submitted a report once (n27), more twice or three times (n30/n31) but only 20 in all four years that reports have been collected.

There is no clear reason why this is the case but there is a need to contact those SACREs that have not submitted a report to the DfE or NASACRE to find out which SACREs have produced reports, and which have failed to do so, where those SACREs are responsible for submitting report to the Secretary of State¹.

1.2 Whilst the restrictions relating to the Covid-19 pandemic ended in February 2022 the impact of the pandemic continued to affect the work of some SACREs. This is usually in relation to work delayed.

1.3 A notable feature of the reports for 2022 – 2023 covered in this report was the issue of vacancies. At times this is to do with SACRE constitutions, which specify the number of SACRE members in each Group (or Committee in Agreed Syllabus Conferences) where places have not been filled. It might be reasonable for Local

¹ This would exclude the States of Jersey and the Isle of Man.

Authorities, as appointing bodies, to review these constitutions not only to ensure that SACREs are fit for purpose but also, they can reasonably expect to appoint the numbers required.

1.4 The issue of vacancies has the knock-on effect of the issue of quoracy. Nearly 20% of all SACREs that submitted a report noted that one or more meetings were inquorate during the period under report. Given that just under 60% of reports give any detail about attendance this is likely to be a larger issue than highlighted in this report.

1.5 Collective worship continues to be the most problematic area for SACREs relative to their statutory responsibilities, with at least ten SACREs making no reference to collective worship monitoring or advice, with only eight SACREs giving any advice of this matter to their local authorities.

1.6 One feature of around a third of reports was reference to Census 2021 data release and the changing patterns of religious and belief identity. These were predominantly larger urban areas and London boroughs. In a sense there is a justification for the place of RE and collective worship as a positive response to these changes. It is not easy, though, to understand why some reports also include statistics about ethnicity and language. What is not clear is the 'so-what?' of the inclusion of these statistics in reports.

1.7 As noted in 2023 SACREs continue to support schools and communities, in some areas, beyond their statutory remit and this shows how valued they are as providing something unique within a local authority. A number of SACREs reported how they made links with local inter faith and faith and belief forums. None of these reports were written after the closure of the Inter Faith Network for the UK, which had a key role in promoting and supporting Inter Faith Week. Nevertheless, 31 reports directly mentioned Inter Faith Week activity and involvement during the year under report and it will be interesting to see the impact of the closure of the Network on this feature of national life.

1.8 NASACRE was mentioned in 68 of the 69 reports submitted and these mentions were overwhelmingly positive. One SACRE felt the self-evaluation tool far too detailed but the majority appear to have found it extremely useful. The national conference was also referenced as a positive, along with online seminars offered by the NASACRE Executive.

2. Recommendations²

2.1 NASACRE and support for SACREs

- i. To look at ways to support SACREs where vacancies are an issue, how these might be managed and the advice that SACREs should give to their LAs as the appointing bodies.

² Appendix 4 contains the Recommendations from the last two reports, some of these are still pertinent and are not duplicated here.

- ii. That the NASACRE executive develop a resource with examples of the ways that SACRE advice has had impact through a series of case studies. These could be used to encourage all SACREs to look at ways of evidencing their impact in their LAs.

2.2 NASACRE discussion with the DfE

- i. The DfE, with NASACRE, should write to local authorities with regard to SACRE vacancies and issues relating to inquorate meetings, and how these are managed.
- ii. The issue of SACRE budgets being used to buy licences for an agreed syllabus should be discussed, given that it is clear from legislation that agreed syllabuses are publicly available documents adopted by the local authority.

2.3 Advice to LAs co-produced by NASACRE and DfE

- i. The issue of inquorate meetings has been identified in this report. As members of SACRE are appointed by the LA it is clearly an LA responsibility to ensure that SACREs can not only meet but also perform their functions. Therefore, NASACRE and the DfE should work together to bring this to attention of LAs and agree advice that should be given to all LAs to ensure that in quoracy.
- ii. To ensure that those SACREs and LAs which wish to continue to support Inter Faith Week have the link to the Faith and Belief Forum's portal³ to be able to register their events.

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The NASACRE Executive, with the agreement for the Department for Education (DfE) commissioned, an analysis of SACRE Annual Reports published in 2020 – 2021 and repeated the exercise in for 2021 - 2022⁴. This is the third report commissioned on that basis.

3.1.2 Due to changes in local government the number of SACREs in England has increased from 153 to 154. This has a marginal effect on percentages where comparisons are made. Sixty-nine SACREs submitted reports by 5th June 2024. It was noted in the previous report that in the first year that this research was commissioned 57 SACREs had submitted reports for analysis. The low number of submissions in the first year was attributed to the Covid-19 Pandemic and the increase in the previous year with signs of institutional recovery from the pandemic. There is, then, a question as to why there was not an increase of submissions in this reporting cycle, given that 72 SACREs submitted reports in the previous year (2021 – 2022). Whilst the pandemic officially ended in England on 21 February 2022 with the publication of the COVID-19 Response: Living with COVID-19 guidance⁵, 44 SACREs (66.7%) still referenced the impact of the pandemic has having an effect on their work.

³ <https://www.interfaithweek.org/>

⁴ See Appendix 4 for the recommendations in the 2020 – 2021 and 2021 – 2022 reports.

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-living-with-covid-19>

3.1.3 There is a recommended format for SACRE annual reports, which is available from [NASACRE](http://www.nasacre.org.uk) but not all SACREs use this format some using earlier formats and others being peculiar to a SACRE. Some reports ran to 31 pages, with appendices, whilst others were 9 pages. The analysis of the report published in 2022 did not use the NASACRE recommended format rather it identified 21 categories as the basis for data collection and analysis, see Methodology below, this has now increased to 25 categories. These categories were initially discussed with NASACRE's Executive Assistant during the process of data collection. See Appendices 1 and 2 for the categories used for analysis in this report. This format has been replicated in 2024 so that it is possible compare the three years with the addition of three further categories, the scrutiny of school websites, the theme of diversity and the issue of vacancies.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Reports were received from 3 March to 5 June 2024. As noted above the methodological approach was identical to that used in 2022 and 2023 (see also Appendix 1 and Appendix 2) but three categories were added, detailed notes on attendance and regular in person meetings with teachers.

- Attendance
- Detailed notes on attendance
- Professional support
- Religious Education:
 - Advice to the local authority
 - Advice to schools⁶
- Collective worship:
 - Advice to the local authority
 - Advice to schools⁷
 - Determinations
- Monitoring:
 - Complaints (RE and CW)
 - Religious Education
 - Collective Worship
- Agreed Syllabus Review
 - Training for implementation of the syllabus

- SACRE funding
- Examination performance
 - GCSE
 - A Level
- Covid-19
- Communication with schools and others
- Regular in person meetings with teachers
- Collaboration with other bodies
- Development Planning

⁶ Schools here refers to maintained non-denominational and controlled schools and academies and free schools without a religious foundation.

⁷ Schools here refers to non-denominational schools and academies and free schools without a religious foundation.

- Relationships and Sex Education/Health Education (RSE/RSHE)
- Diversity
- SACRE Vacancies

3.2.2 The latter were added relative to the frequency they featured in reports received. These indicated areas that SACREs were working in in their authorities. Where statistical analysis appeared above or below what might be expected from the range in other categories they were revisited to check and amended as necessary.

3.2.3 There was an obvious difficulty in collating the data as SACREs do not report in the same way under the same category. As noted in the previous reports some SACREs under advice to schools reported training for schools, whereas some SACREs reported no advice to schools but put training in a different part of the report. Therefore, it was necessary to interpret what SACREs had done under the general framework provided by NASACRE and the legal requirement to report to the Secretary of State for Education. How this was done and where will become apparent in the report as necessary.

3.3 Ethics

See Appendix 3 for details.

3.4 Declaration of interest

The author has written SACRE annual reports for a number of authorities in the past. No work for a local authority or SACRE was undertaken during the period from agreeing to do this research to its completion. The author declares no interest relevant to this research. and has refrained from making judgements on the reports submitted.

3.5 Caveat

It does not follow that SACRE Reports report fully on their support or activities, given that some are relatively short. This report is based only on what SACREs stated. Where quotes from reports have been used these have been anonymised.

SACRE meetings are subject to The Religious Education (Meetings of Local Conferences and Councils) Regulations 1994⁸. SACREs must produce an annual report⁹ and send to the Secretary of State by December 31st in any calendar year¹⁰

4.1 SACRE meetings

4.1.1 Just over 66% of SACREs mentioned the pandemic or Covid-19 in their reports, and whilst restrictions were lifted in February 2022 (see 3.1.2 above) the impact of the pandemic was sustained. The pandemic has, in some cases changed the ways that SACREs have operated. One SACRE report notes:

⁸ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1994/1304/contents/made>

⁹ Section 391(6) and (7), Education Act 1996.

¹⁰ Section 391(10), Education Act 1996 as amended by Education Act 2011 c21 Schedule 8 Abolition of the QCDA: consequential amendments.

We have now left the coronavirus pandemic behind and are embracing new opportunities and challenges whilst retaining some aspects of operational change that this brought about, for example a hybrid of remote and in person meetings.

4.1.2 There is also the issue of work that SACREs would have initiated, such as requesting the Local Authority to convene and Agreed Syllabus Conference or the launch of a syllabus, that have had to be rethought in terms of time scales.

The locally agreed syllabus (LAS) is nearing the end of its 5-year cycle, and the local authority had previously agreed that although the process would begin within the required timeframe, the impact of the pandemic meant that it was sensible to aim for a launch somewhere between September 2024 and April 2025.

4.1.3 As required by statute SACRE and ASC meetings must meet in public, with the exception on certain business specified in *Statutory Instrument 1994: 1309*. It was not clear from reports whether SACREs and ACSs were meeting in public or how this was managed in terms of hybrid meetings.

5.1 Support for SACREs

5.1.1 Professional support

Professional support for SACREs is mixed. Some SACREs retain the services of an LA RE Advisor whilst others buy in consultancy, there is clearly a mixed economy. Some SACREs have support in terms of a clerk but not an advisor:

The LA supports the SACRE by providing professional and administrative support from an experienced clerk. This arrangement has been in place for several years. There is currently no RE adviser attached to the SACRE, but this expertise is being sought.

Others clearly have support from a school improvement specialist but not necessarily one that has any experience of religious education or collective worship.

Nevertheless 94.2% of SACREs reported that they had professional support from an advisor, consultant, consultancy and/or a clerk. As in the previous year under report some professional support came from the Church of England's Diocesan Team in the absence of a local authority advisor or consultant.

5.2 Funding for SACREs

5.2.1 As in the previous report the majority of SACREs (87.0%) reported funding available but under half of those (40.6%) specifying a figure or, in some cases, a detailed budget. Interestingly, one SACREs simply noted:

We were extremely grateful to receive funding from an Educational Foundation, which allowed SACRE to purchase the new Agreed Syllabus.

Indicating that the local authority was not meeting its statutory duty in relation to a locally agreed syllabus, as the implication is that if monies were not forthcoming then there would be no agreed syllabus.

Four reports also mention licence fees for the use of its own syllabus, one stating:

The new agreed syllabus and supporting materials have been provided for schools free of charge. This has been funded using SACRE funding supplemented by curriculum support funding for RE, which has been payment for 5-year licence for the Agreed Syllabus for 90 schools at a total cost of £6,372 (£1,274.40 annually), representing 19% of the total annual budget.

Some SACREs published their costed development plan along with the syllabus. What was not clear was the relationship between the costed plan and SACREs budget.

5.2.2 NASACRE's FOI request on SACRE funding continued to be referenced in some reports as a benchmark against which to judge their own funding by the local authority.

5.3 Attendance and quoracy

5.3.1 88.4% of annual reports reported on attendance at SACRE meetings for the period of the reports, in line with the previous year. As in previous year there were a number of different ways of doing this:

- Giving a full list of SACRE members by Group and identifying which meeting they attended.
- Attendance reported as percentage for each group for each meeting.
- By member, but not by group.
- In a special appendix to the report but not submitted as part of the report.
- By providing hyperlinks to the minutes of meetings so that they could be viewed by those interested.
- Noting that all meetings were quorate but giving no detail.
- Noting apologies but not attendance.

5.3.2 Over half of the reports (59.1%) added detail to their reporting on attendance, but as can be seen from 5.3.1 this was varied. Twelve SACREs noted inquorate meetings, two of these more than once. The fragility of SACREs was exemplified by one report which wrote:

The first two meetings were quorate, but the third meeting of the year became inquorate part way through the meeting, when the one member of Group B in attendance had to leave for another meeting.

Another report noted:

Meetings have been consistently quorate, apart from very rare and unavoidable occasions.

But giving no context within the body of the report.

Technology itself can cause problems, where meetings are online or hybrid:

The first meeting of the year was not quorate due to technical issues, but all other meetings have been quorate.

This sometimes having a direct impact on a SACRE's statutory role:

Members were unable to agree renewal of determination as a meeting was not quorate. The consensus from all the representatives present agreed to renew the determination.

Significantly just over 30% of SACREs that gave details about attendance reported inquorate or not quorate meetings in the year under report. Two of those having the majority of meetings inquorate. This does not take into account one SACRE which is effectively self-appointed but now receiving support from its LA.

5.3.3 72.7% of SACREs, though, included some form of development plan, some of which were costed. What was less common was any reporting on the development plan or equivalent. This is an increase over previous years.

5.3.4 *The Religious Education (Meetings of Local Conferences and Councils) Regulations 1994: UK Statutory Instruments 1994 No. 1304 (see footnote 7).*

No SACRE reported on issues relating to SI 1994: 1304.

6. Advice to the local authority

6.1 Religious Education

6.1.1 NASACRE's guidance on SACRE Annual Reports¹¹ states:

The main purpose of the annual report is to hold the LA to account, by informing the Secretary of State and key partners what advice SACRE gave the LA during the year and how that was responded to; this includes advice on RE and Collective Worship in those schools for which the LA has responsibility.

This is consonant with government advice based on the requirements of the Education Reform Act 1988¹² and subsequent consolidated legislation.

6.1.2 During the year under report 40.6% of SACREs reported that they had advised the LA on matters relating to RE. As in the previous year it did not follow that advice was given even if it was referenced in the report, this was generally a result of the use of headings from the NASACRE Annual Report Framework and not using the headings as check for the text that followed.

6.1.3 There was, though, evidence that the 2023 NASACRE Conference and the previous iteration of this report was having an impact of some SACREs' practices. Five reports referenced the conference, one stating:

¹¹

https://nasacre.org.uk/file/nasacre/SACRE_Annual_Reports_necessary_desir.pdf#:~:text=The%20main%20purpose%20of%20the%20annual%20report%20is,responsibility.%20Suggested%20structure%20to%20the%20annual%20report%3A%201.

¹²

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/281929/Collective_worship_in_schools.pdf see paragraphs 98 - 100.

In his latest review of annual reports for the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE), Dr David Hampshire stated that “SACREs rarely evaluated the impact of their advice or actions”. While we have always taken care to gather evidence, we have not always documented it in our annual reports. That changes this year.

6.1.4 As in previous years some SACRE reports conflated the work of the RE advisor with that SACRE, so that professional advice given to the local authority by the advisor was reported as advice from SACRE. A distinction between SACRE’s advice and the professional advice given by the advisor, which may not have been discussed by SACRE at all, should be made. As an example, one report stated:

Advice was given on behalf of SACRE by RE Consultants to the Local Authority.

But it was not clear that SACRE had discussed the advice given.

6.1.5 A further issue might be identifying what constitutes the LA in relation to its work. One SACRE noted:

The RE Facilitator provided advice to the LA regarding national updates around the Religion and Worldviews approach, as well as ongoing feedback from the REC Worldviews project.

But in what context it is not clear. Advice was not confined to the curriculum, the same SACRE reports:

SACRE also provided guidance to the LA regarding issues around religious dress and prayer spaces within schools.

6.1.6 A number of SACREs appeared frustrated that they were not able to give advice to the LA due to a lack of information upon which to base advice, for instance:

SACRE has not been in a position to give advice to the LA on RE standards, though conversations with the LA officer at RE network meetings have shown that the LA is aware of some of the schools where standards are not as high as they might be. These conversations will be ongoing.

It was clear in terms of access to examination data some SACREs struggled to access data either in relation to when the annual report was written or simply lack of access to the data. This was highlighted as an issue in accessing data from Academies in the LA.

6.1.7 in the 2023 report it was noted that one SACRE reported that there were 23 vacancies and stated:

SACRE needs to ensure there continues to be consistent attendance and needs more teacher representatives.

As a result of this the issue ‘vacancy’ was examined in each report submitted. Over half of SACREs (53%) noted vacancies in their report. At times this appears to be in

relation to difficulties in engaging with specific faith communities, one SACRE reported:

The free church vacancies have remained hard to fill, and Group B has seen one member on extended leave.

One SACRE, which does not give any detail about its membership, simply states:

SACRE still has a number of vacancies especially representing the different faiths and beliefs in the borough and from schools.

Making it difficult to estimate the size of the problem.

6.1.8 As in previous years it was not evident in the majority of reports, other than in response to advice to convene an Agreed Syllabus Conference, that local authorities had responded to the advice of SACREs. Although one SACRE clearly set out how the LA had responded to its advice. As noted in 2022 and 2023, in the majority of cases it appears that the conversation is one way. Similarly, this may be more of an issue of reporting than the LA not engaging. It may help if LAs stated how they had responded to their SACRE's advice in full council so that there is a record of them meeting their statutory duty.

6.2 Agreed Syllabus Review

6.2.1 53.6% of SACREs reported that a review of the agreed syllabus was planned, in process or completed in the year under report. As in previous years SACREs reported on their advice to the LA that the syllabus needed reviewing in line with statute¹³ and that there were funding implications to that. Issues relating to shared syllabuses between authorities caused by the pandemic appear to have been largely overcome.

One SACRE noted:

Review of the locally agreed syllabus is well underway following a decision to postpone due to the impact of the pandemic in schools.

6.2.2 SACRE members have a key role, drawing on their own knowledge and understanding, to support the agreed syllabus review process:

The current Secretary of local Inter Faith Group sits on SACRE and gives regular updates on local activities which are circulated. This is a useful resource for RE teachers, and has also been invaluable as a resource for review of materials in the revised Agreed Syllabus.

Feedback from a range of activities with SACRE representatives on the current RE syllabus has shown that the current syllabus is too open and that some of the questions do not translate well to different traditions. Teachers have asked for there to be more detail and direction in the next syllabus.

¹³ In line with The Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education (Prescribed Period) Order 1999: UK Statutory Instruments 1999 No. 1728.

6.3 Collective Worship

6.3.1 11.6% of SACREs reported that they had given advice to the local authority with regard to collective worship, which is an increase on the previous year (8.3%). There is an issue highlighted in many reports that there is a lack of access to data on collective worship. One SACRE states:

It is the responsibility of SACRE to monitor schools' statutory responsibility to hold Collective Worship. Whilst there are many schools across the county that offer impactful Collective Worship, there is also some variation in the system.

What is of note here, though, is that it is not a responsibility of a SACRE to monitor collective worship, it is the responsibility of the LA. It is the responsibility of SACRE to advise. SACREs perform a number of functions, one of which is to hold the LA to account. Shifting a responsibility to a SACRE does not remove the LA's responsibility, and this is an area to be addressed by government.

It has been noted that some SACRE members are well-placed to support collective worship in schools and opportunities for discussion about this will be included on the agenda in 2023-24.

6.3.2 Whilst no formal investigation has been undertaken to establish a correlation in this report, it would appear that schools are more often confronted with the issue of worship and how to cater pupils' needs in areas where faith is an active feature of the lives of some pupils. One SACRE reported on issues affecting schools:

Matters concerned with Acts of Worship and of pupils' requesting space for prayer/private reflection.

This issue is then seen as one relating to diversity and inclusion:

The Integration Lead, Community, Equality & Cohesion Resilient Communities outlined the report. Members enquired as to the level of resource available to facilitate inclusion within schools and how often schools visited places of worship. The Integration Lead, Community, Equality & Cohesion Resilient Communities advised that the service targeted its support according to need as resource was limited. In terms of visits, this varied across school provision and often relied on volunteers to facilitate them.

Neither of these quotes relates specifically to collective worship as required by legislations or academies funding agreements but are clearly in the purview of some SACREs as they explore their role in the local authority.

7 Advice to schools

7.1 Religious Education

7.1.1 69.6% of SACREs reported on advice that they have made available to schools, some of which was produced by SACREs before the period under report. The most common type of advice related to the implementation of the Agreed Syllabus:

SACRE's advice to schools during this academic year has prioritised the changes to the Agreed Syllabus and signposting to the implementation training.

As in previous years advice has been developed by SACREs on how schools respond to the fast during Ramadan, often drawing on local expertise:

In April 2022 SACRE collaborated with the Council of Mosques to create a guidance document for Primary and Secondary schools on the observance of Ramadan and how it can best be accommodated in schools. This was the first time SACRE had sent out guidance to schools jointly with the Council of Mosques.

7.1.2 As noted in last year's report SACREs also continued to report on making available national initiatives such as the RE Quality Mark (REQM) (25) and the WIRE award (Widening Diversity in Religious Education) (6).

7.2 Collective Worship

7.2.1 59.4% of SACREs reported that they had provided advice on collective worship to schools. As in the previous report much of this was signposting schools to existing resources such as model policies, protocols around visitors to collective worship, policies on withdrawal and advice on topics and resources for collective worship.

Some SACREs have updated their guidance and are thinking about the next steps:

Updated guidance has been produced and sent to all schools especially to remind them of the statutory nature of collective worship. A CPD session online has been provided and follow up conversations have been held. Our next task with this is to produce an Inclusive Collective Worship Award which schools can apply for similar to the one we provide for RE.

7.2.2 As in 2021 – 2022 SACREs were more likely to give advice to schools on collective worship than they were to give advice to the local authority 63.9% compared to 8.3%, and this followed a similar pattern in 2020 – 2021.

8 Monitoring RE, public examinations and collective worship

8.1 General comments

8.1.1 In all areas monitoring of RE, public examinations and collective worship has increased, but there are still challenges.

8.1.2 As local authorities and schools have recovered from the pandemic more opportunities for monitoring have arisen and SACREs are moving back towards the pre-pandemic era. The reliance on Ofsted reports as the only source of information has greatly decreased. Where SACREs have reported issue these mostly to academies and academy chains. Given that it is the statutory responsibility of an LA to secure the education of each child in the local authority's area this is clearly an issue for the LA more than SACRE specifically. Hence, SACREs should be approaching the LA on this issue and reporting on the response they receive.

8.1.3 One way that SACREs have monitored RE and collective worship is by undertaking school website trawls to look for evidence such as policies and curriculum plans¹⁴. This was true for 37.9% of SACREs that submitted a report this year.

SACRE Monitoring RE and Collective worship

8.2. As noted in the previous report the date of the publication of a report had an effect on a SACREs ability to monitor RE and collective worship in schools. This was only true in relation to the release of public examination data in this reporting cycle. There was evidence that some SACREs had picked up pre-pandemic issues now that the pandemic was effectively over. All of the following examples relate to collective worship. One SACRE noted:

A review of policies and school application materials was completed following robust discussions held in 2019 regarding how SACRE might respond to a request for a determination and we believe we are ready should one arise.

One stated:

Having recently been remodelled SACRE has not as yet monitored collective worship but is seeking appropriate ways to do this. A working party was created in June 2023 to begin the work on this area.

But there is still a reliance in some areas on Ofsted data as the only source of information:

Ofsted have not raised any concerns with regards to the compliance with the law or standards in relation to collective worship in the LA's schools.

Given that Ofsted would not actually comment on this issue this is not surprising. This latter comment does raise some concerns about how SACRE members understand the inspection process and how reports focus their findings.

Monitoring primary, KS3 RE and non-examined RE

8.3.1 Monitoring primary and KS3 RE is well below the monitoring of GCSE. Only 52.2% of SACRE reports mentioned their monitoring of primary, KS3 and non-examined RE (the latter those pupils who do not follow a GCSE course) in comparison to 82.6% that report on GCSE. Fewer report on A Level, and in part that is because some LAs do not have schools with 6th Forms and in part due to options available in 6th Forms.

8.3.2 Some SACREs were engaging in consultations with teacher and pupils or aspiring to:

More opportunities should be found to hear from pupils as well as teachers.

¹⁴ see: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-maintained-schools-must-publish-online#curriculum> and <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-academies-free-schools-and-colleges-should-publish-online#curriculum>

In conjunction with the drafted survey ..., we will request student and teacher voice. Additionally, we will plan for another teaching conference, whereby we can elicit additional feedback.

There is a possible issue with this approach, though. Asking pupils about their experience of RE is not the same as understanding pupils' levels of attainment or the quality of the curriculum and teaching in the school. One SACRE noted its involvement with a national piece of research in this area:

In the summer term of 2022, the County Inspector/Adviser was involved with a national project collecting children's voices 7 – 11 year olds, talking about their RE experience.

Another SACRE reported:

SACRE conducted a student voice survey. 8 primary schools and 1 secondary school took part. This was positive and questions linked to a national survey for comparison. This is something we are looking to develop next year.

But it was not clear what the focus of the survey was. Likewise:

In addition, the SACRE is continuing its exciting collaboration with the Council for Students and aims to develop these links to ensure that the student voice on RE and collective worship in primary and secondary schools is heard across the city.

In all twelve SACRE reports referenced pupil, student or youth voice as a way of engaging with young people.

8.3.3 In 2020 – 2021 nearly 40% of SACREs used Ofsted reports as the only way of monitoring RE schools and this reduced to about 20.8% in 2021 – 2022. In this year it was clear that very few SACREs used Ofsted as the only way of monitoring schools but 58% of SACREs referenced Ofsted reports in their report. As noted in the previous year's report it did not follow that this exercise was useful as reports may not mention RE at all or include schools which come under SACREs remit. Thirteen SACREs reported on data from SIAMS reports:

During the December meeting consideration was given to a report by diocesan advisor which provided an update on SIAMS inspections. Members were advised that only one inspection had taken place, due to an increase in the number of inspectors taking retirement during the pandemic and difficulties in training new inspectors during school closures. It was expected that the number of inspections would increase as trainee inspectors completed the necessary training. During the summer term the diocesan advisor confirmed that a higher number of SIAMS inspections had taken place. Most schools were rated 'Good', and some received 'Excellent' classifications.

8.3.4 Eleven SACREs continued to report workforce survey to see the number of hours of RE being taught per year in each school and as in the previous year some SACREs used this as a basis for advice to the LA, naming schools that appeared to have no or little RE.

School workforce Data Nov 2022 (reported June 2023)

As a result of SACRE's analysis of this data..., they have advised the local authority to investigate the following issues: ...where there is no reported provision in a particular year group.

This was sometimes reported under 'standards in RE' data and, in some reports, there appeared to be a conflation of provision with standards.

8.3.4 As in the previous reports, schools and academy websites (see footnote 13) and online and in-person network meetings were also important sources of information for SACREs. 87.9% of reports mentioned regular meetings with teachers.

Monitoring GCSE and GCE A Level Religious Studies

8.4.1 In this year 82.6% of reports gave an analysis of GCSE results and 50.7% A Level results, this is up substantially previous years¹⁵.

Complaints and Withdrawals from RE

8.5.1 In this reporting year 78.3% of SACREs monitored complaints and 62.3% withdrawal compared to 70.8% and 55.6% in 2021 – 2022 and 56 and 30% in the previous year. This indicates that SACREs are returning to a more normal pattern of monitoring as the pandemic gets further away.

Providing, Supporting and Monitoring Training for RE (including Agreed Syllabus implementation)

8.6.1 In the year under report 88.4% of SACRE annual reports referenced training support for teachers, compared to 93.1% and 71.4% in the previous years. Training was provided by a range of providers and where there were exiting relationships with an organisation, such as providing a consultant or co-designing an agreed syllabus training was likely to be provided by that organisation.

8.6.2 Monitoring the impact of training was less common, with only 17.4% of SACREs in 2022 – 2023 commenting on how well training was received. With some SACREs included comments by teachers to show how they valued the training they had received. This was a marked improvement on the reports submitted in 2022 where only 5.4% of SACREs did this form of monitoring but significantly lower than in 2023 31.9% reported on this.

8.6.3 As noted in the 2022 report the role of SACREs in ensuring the quality of resources and training courses in the delivery of the agreed syllabus has long been expected of SACRE, as can be seen in Education Reform Act 1988 s11 (2) consolidated in the [1996 Education Act](#) and reflected in the comment in [Circular 1/94](#):

It is for a LEA to decide what matters it wishes to refer to its SACRE; but the 1988 Act says that these should include, in particular, methods of teaching, the choice of teaching material and the provision of teacher training.

¹⁵ In 2020 – 2021 35% of SACREs reported on attainment in GCSE and 19% A Level 19% attainment. This had substantially increased in 2021 – 2022 to 65.3% reporting on GCSEs and 29.2% A Level. The level of detail changed from SACRE to SACRE, with some giving global figures and others school by school breakdown.

Noting that the LA should take a lead on this and positively decide what it should refer to SACRE. Given that the LA remains responsible for the quality of education provision for the children who live in the authority this extends to Academies and even other authorities where appropriate¹⁶.

Collective worship

8.7.1 36.2% of SACREs mentioned monitoring of collective worship. One of the issues relating to reports is that monitoring is conflated with advice to the LA, see: 6.3.1. SACREs are employing different strategies.

Proactive monitoring included

During the year, the SACRE has conducted its own surveys to monitor Collective Worship. Noting that: Schools were very positive in the survey about the support they received for RE and Collective Worship.

A review of policies and school application materials was completed following robust discussions held in 2019 regarding how SACRE might respond to a request for a determination and we believe we are ready should one arise.

Planned monitoring included:

Having recently been remodelled SACRE has not as yet monitored collective worship but is seeking appropriate ways to do this. A working party was created in June 2023 to begin the work on this area

Guidance is offered to schools and Ofsted reports are scrutinised in order to keep up to date with current issues and concerns. It has been difficult for schools to maintain an effective programme of collective worship during the pandemic and one of SACRE's key priorities in the coming year will be to remind, facilitate and support schools. This will include offering light-touch review conversations with practical suggestions.

An example of passive monitoring:

Ofsted have not raised any concerns with regards to the compliance with the law or standards in relation to collective worship in the LA's schools.

8.7.2 As in the previous report at least ten SACRE reports made no mention of collective worship guidance, monitoring or advice at all.

8.7.3 Some SACREs again used website analysis to see if collective worship was happening in schools in the local authority:

8.7.4 As noted in 2023 it was not clear that monitoring led to advice, rather it was ensuring compliance with the requirements placed on school by statute or funding agreement. It may be worth SACREs reflecting on the information they have received and forming advice for the local authority for non-denominational schools, including academies.

¹⁶ [The Children Act 2004 c. 31 Part 2 General Section 10 \(2\):](#)

9. Determinations and withdrawals

Determinations

9.1 Of the 91.3% of SACREs that mentioned determinations in their annual reports the vast majority reported that there had been no applications for a determination. Where determinations had been made SACREs reported on each application and the period to which the determination applied.

Withdrawals

9.2 62.3% of reports mentioned withdrawal. Where details of the groups likely to withdraw their child were included in the annual report this usually related to RE and not collective worship, although it is possible to infer that where a report stated, for example, children of Jehovah's Witness parents were withdrawn from RE they would be likely to be withdrawn from collective worship.

9.3 Some SACREs have been clear to signpost their guidance on withdrawal, emphasising what schools must do, such as:

This guidance also contains advice to schools about the parental right to withdraw their child(ren) from RE. Schools are also reminded that their school prospectus and/or website should display clear information about withdrawal and how any parents might make such a request.

and it is clear that in some areas this is an issue relating to community cohesion:

The purpose of the guidance package is to advise schools of their statutory obligations if a parent does request the withdrawal of their child from RE or collective worship, but also to offer a range of actions, drawn from our experience and from the advice of the Local Authority Community Cohesion Team, which would reduce the likelihood of such a situation arising in the first place.

10 Other features of SACRE annual reports

Development plans

10.1 It was notable that some SACREs published their development plans (72.7% in 2023 63.9% and 12.5% in the previous years) and in some instances these were used as a basis for self-evaluation. On the whole SACREs did not report on their progress in terms of the development plan within the body of the report, although one SACRE RAG rated the plan. As noted in 5.1.2 there is no obvious relationship between costed development plans and the financing and budgets of SACRE.

Communication with schools

10.2 71.2% of SACREs that submitted a report in 2024, compared to 69.4% in 2023, used e-newsletter or e-bulletins to communicate with schools. As in previous years the frequency of these bulletins varied but mostly, they were termly. The impact of these was not reported on. It was obvious that some SACREs did communicate with schools but did not report on how this was done.

Regular in person meetings with teachers supported by SACRE

10.3.1 One feature of SACRE in 2021 – 2022 as the nation came out of the pandemic was the reporting on in person meetings with teachers, as indicated in some of the monitoring reported on above (8.3.6). 84.7% of SACREs reported on these in the form of online events, in person events, monitoring visits and training. Importantly, these were not simply one-off events but a programme of events which served multiple purposes, this was an increase 78.6% in the previous year. For the reports scrutinised in 2024 this had risen further to 87.9%.

10.3.2 In relation to teachers' meetings and future possibilities on SACRE reported:

SACRE has not been in a position to give advice to the LA on RE standards, though conversations with the LA officer at RE network meetings have shown that the LA is aware of some of the schools where standards are not as high as they might be. These conversations will be ongoing.

10.3.3 One Chair of SACRE in their introduction noted:

At grass root levels attendance of schools at RE subject leaders' meetings is excellent and the feedback has been very positive. I am delighted that this year saw the Primary Network meetings being extended to create a Secondary Network to support the secondary sector.

Showing that the proven worth of networks in one phase of education can lead to their development in others.

These networks are facilitated in a number of ways, especially the Local NATRE hubs.

Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education¹⁷

10.4.1 In the previous report it was noted that since the change in the law regarding relationships and sex education 8 SACREs (11.1%) reported an involvement in RSE in 2023, this is twice the number in comparison to the previous year's report. The involvement of SACREs relate to their relationships with faith communities and indicates the trust that these communities have in SACREs.

10.4.2 As in both 2021 and 2022 and 2020 – 2021 there was a recognition that SACREs do not have a remit for RSE/RSHE but that they can make a valuable contribution to this issue due to their connections across communities within the authority.

10.4.3 No report submitted in 2023 made reference to RSE/RSHE with this exception:

Collective worship continues to take many forms including thought for the day, with the inclusion of Relationship and Health Education, and well-being aspects.

And it is interesting that whilst collective worship is not considered part of the curriculum it can still make an important contribution to the education of pupils.

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education>

Demographic data

10.5.1 The 2023 report highlighted the inclusion of census data in SACRE annual reports. As a result, the scrutiny of reports submitted for this report looked at references to local diversity within annual reports. In all 63.6% of reports referenced diversity in some way. It would be reasonable to expect demographic data relating to religion and belief and some SACREs showed a discussion on the analysis of the Census 2021 data release one SACRE noting:

Regional data can be found here which demonstrates that some areas of the local authority are far more religiously diverse than others.

What was not clear in most cases was the implications for SACRE or RE and collective worship.

One SACRE did note caution about the Census question:

It is also worth noting that other sources suggest that the question on the census is hindering accurate recording of both the religious and non-religious population. This is especially the case when many people do not self-identify with a specific organised religious or non-religious worldview or have other reasons for not wanting to record a religious identity.

10.5.2 Some reports included statistics about language:

There are 12 different languages spoken in primary schools and 7 different languages spoken in secondary schools by at least 500 pupils across all of the borough's schools, and in total there are 173 languages spoken by at least 1 pupil. This, with the ethnicity break down within schools, shows there is a rich diversity within the borough's schools that the teaching of Religious Education must embrace.

Quite what that means, though is not clear. Does this mean that resources for RE need to be made available in the languages found across the LA? Or, is language to be taken as an indication of religious tradition?

Similarly, one report states:

70% of pupils come from ethnic minority backgrounds. Over one hundred languages are spoken by pupils attending the authority's school and 50% of these speak English as an additional language.

The implications of this do not appear to be drawn out.

Only in one local authority does this data appear to have made a difference, and that in relation to SACRE membership, with the inclusion of an Alevi representative.

10.5.2 Some SACREs highlighted diversity in terms of teaching about specific religions, especially the teaching of Christianity at GCSE, or having it as theme in the agreed syllabus.

10.5.3 One SACRE had introduced a specific agenda item to each SACRE meeting, such as:

We made diversity and equality an agenda item at every meeting.

This has been underpinned by the way some SACREs have engaged with the Diversity, Inclusion and Equality teams in their LAs.

10.5.4 It should be noted, though, that of the 34 SACRE reports that referenced the Census 2021 only seven were in non-urban LAs. The issue of diversity appears most prominent where there are substantial minority groups, both in terms of religions and ethnicity (the latter including language).

11 Conclusion

11.1 This year's report has focused on the same methodology as the 2023 and 2022 reports, which allows some measure of comparison and contrast. The data set is slightly smaller than in the previous year and the increase in the number of SACREs by one has had a marginal effect on percentages.

9.2 SACREs continue to serve their local authorities with no financial or other reward, other than being appointed as members of a statutory body that can have a direct impact on schools, teachers, pupils and their communities. Without a doubt SACREs are still recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic's effects but on the whole they are moving closer to business as usual. This has led to new ways to contact teachers and online platforms have continued to be beneficial to the work of SACREs.

9.3 As noted in 2023 some SACREs are working hard despite the lack of support from their local authorities, supporting teachers, organising training and finding ways to engage with schools. No doubt the academisation process has diminished some local authorities and focused their work more narrowly but SACREs still have the power to stay relevant and may be one of the few ways that teachers have an opportunity encounter the local authority other than in relation to Safeguarding.

9.4 Therefore, SACREs should be celebrated for what they do, especially where their task appears thankless. Reading sixty-nine SACRE Annual Reports between April and June 2023 has been a great privilege and, whilst not underestimating the challenges they have, a real insight into the good will and hard work of many SACRE members across England.

Dr David Hampshire FRSA FRAI
10 June 2024

Appendix 1: Categories used to analyse SACRE Annual Reports

1. Attendance
2. Detailed Notes on attendance
3. Professional support
4. Budget specified
5. RE Advice to the LA
6. RE Advice to schools (including non-LA)
7. CW monitoring
8. CW Advice to the LA
9. CW Advice to schools
10. Withdrawal
11. Determinations
12. Complaints monitored
13. Monitoring Primary RE
14. Monitoring Secondary RE:
 - a. non-examination
 - b. Standards GCSE
 - c. Standards A Level
15. Agreed Syllabus Review
16. Training and support for AS implementation and RE
17. Monitoring training for schools
18. Covid-19
19. Communication (newsletter)
20. Regular in person meetings with teachers
21. Development Plan
22. Collaboration/links to other bodies
23. RSE/Health Education
24. Diversity
25. SACRE vacancies

Appendix 2: SACREs reporting by category (maximum n69/100%)

Category	Number of SACREs reporting in set categories	Percentage of SACREs reporting in set categories
Attendance	61	88.4
Detailed notes on attendance	39	59.1
Professional support	65	94.2
Funding/Budget	60	87.0
Budget specified	28	40.6
RE Advice to the LA	28	40.6
RE Advice to all schools	48	69.6
CW monitoring	25	36.2
CW Advice to the LA	8	11.6
CW Advice to all schools	41	59.4
Withdrawal	43	62.3
Determinations	63	91.3
Complaints monitored	54	78.3
Monitoring Primary RE	36	52.2
Secondary Standards: non-examination	36	52.2
Standards GCSE	57	82.6
Standards A Level	35	50.7
Agreed Syllabus Review	37	53.6
Training and support for AS implementation and RE	61	88.4
Monitoring training for schools	12	17.4
Monitoring Ofsted as a source of information	40	58.0
Covid-19	44	66.7
Communication (newsletter)	47	71.2
Regular in person meetings with teachers	58	87.9
Development Plan	48	72.7
Collaboration/links to other bodies	64	97.0
RSE/Health Education	1	1.5
Checking schools' websites for compliance	25	37.9
Diversity	42	63.6
SACRE vacancies	35	53.0

Note: percentages are rounded to the first decimal point.

Appendix 3: Research Ethics

The author is a member of the British Educational Research Association and the British Sociological Association, and the Ethical standards expected by both bodies were applied during the research; see,

British Educational Research Association:

<https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018>,

and

British Sociological Association:

https://www.britisoc.co.uk/media/24310/bsa_statement_of_ethical_practice.pdf.

During the research no local authority, SACRE, SACRE member, clerk to SACRE or RE Advisor or consultant was contacted for comment. SACRE Annual Reports are public documents the working presumption was that they were intended to be read by the interested public.

All data has been anonymised and no SACRE singled out for comment, a list of reports submitted to NASACRE and/or DfE are available on request and appear on the NASACRE website, when submitted. Where SACRE reports are quoted this has been for illustrative purposes not to make a judgement on the report used or the particular SACRE.

Appendix 4: Recommendations from the Analysis of SACRE Annual Reports 2020 – 2021 and 2021 - 2022.

Recommendations to NASACRE Executive

On the basis of the evidence it is recommended that NASACRE discusses the following recommendations.

2020 - 2021

2.1 NASACRE support for SACREs

- i. Advice should be developed for SACREs on advising their local authority on RE and collective worship and reporting on how the LA responded to advice¹⁸.
- ii. Advice developed on how SACRE annual reports could have a greater focus on the impact of their work, showing their value as statutory bodies.
- iii. NASACRE could develop a series of case studies to support SACRE members' training, exemplifying ways that SACREs have been creative in working with schools and other partners and the impact that this has had.
- iv. Revisit the annual report proforma on a regular basis.

2.2 NASACRE discussion with the DfE

- v. Discuss the ongoing strategy for ensuring 100% return on SACRE Annual reports as required by legislation.
- vi. Clarify what the response of the DfE would be where SACREs reported that the LA had not followed the advice of SACRE or where a SACRE could not function as a result of the lack of support from the LA.
- vii. Discuss how government can clarify and support the role of SACREs in relation to non-denominational academies in light of LA responsibilities to parents/guardians and their children in the authority¹⁹, with a view to revising current guidance which is now 10 years old²⁰.
- viii. Discuss the need to update *Religious education in English schools: non-statutory guidance 2010*²¹ and *Circular 1/94*²², both of which remain on the government's website as current advice.

2.3 Advice to LAs co-produced by NASACRE and DfE

- ix. Produce a guide for LAs, with the support of the DfE, to ensure authorities meet their statutory responsibilities.

¹⁸ [The local authority is responsible for securing the standard of education for pupils in or from the authority that includes religious education and collective worship.](#)

¹⁹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/section/10>

²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/re-and-collective-worship-in-academies-and-free-schools/religious-education-re-and-collective-worship-in-academies-and-free-schools?msclkid=3a97f159d07511ec9cb4ba4b39523eed>

²¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-guidance-in-english-schools-non-statutory-guidance-2010?msclkid=3a98619ed07511ec9a84ffc6a5aa5dc4>

²²

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/281929/Collective_worship_in_schools.pdf?msclkid=abf0da16d07711ecba73b170373fca63

- x. Advise LAs as to the continued nature of SACREs as statutory bodies appointed by the LA and that SACREs should at least have the same support and status as other local authority committees²³.

2021 - 2022

2.1 NASACRE

- i. Guidance for SACREs is produced on how to focus an annual report on the impact of SACRE's work by reporting on any actions taken in the previous year and the outcomes of those actions, including advice.
- ii. Guidance for SACREs on how they should not confuse the advice given by professionals, in their own right, with advice given by SACRE as a statutory body.

2.2 NASACRE discussion with the DfE

- iii. NASACRE should request the DfE to approach the Secretary of State to write a letter of thanks to all those SACREs that have submitted a report for 2021 – 2022²⁴.
- iv. NASACRE should formally ask the DfE to write to Local Authorities whose SACREs that have not submitted an Annual Report in the last three years to enquire why this is case and request that these reports be sent to the DfE.

2.3 Advice to LAs co-produced by NASACRE and DfE

- v. That co-produced advice be produced for local authorities on good practice in supporting SACREs, including funding, officer support, the appointment of members and the role of each group in relation to those they represent.
- vi. Co-produced advice should also be developed for members of Group D as appointed by the local authority, representing the local authority and being an advocate for SACRE to the local authority and its elected members.

²³ In line with the requirements of [The Religious Education \(Meetings of Local Conferences and Councils\) Regulations 1994](#).

²⁴ The NASACRE Executive will be sent a complete list of all SACREs that have submitted a report to the DfE and/or NASACRE with this report.