



ANALYSIS OF SACRE ANNUAL REPORTS 2023-2024 FOR THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STANDING COUNCILS ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (NASACRE)

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Prologue

This report is a testament to the social capital made possible by the statutory arrangements that have been in place since 1988, with their roots in 1944. What is striking, though, is how much better they have become since the formation of National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) and the dedicated people who give their time to support SACREs across England. Every SACRE that submitted a report referenced NASACRE in 2023 – 2024.

NASACRE has supported SACREs through its national conferences, its website and as a place where SACREs can get informal advice as they meet their own challenges locally. Among the many names that could be mentioned one stood out in this year, Paul Smalley. [Reimagining the accidentally local in English RE](#) was referenced on a number of occasions and one SACRE report stated:

It was wonderful for our new locally agreed syllabus to be mentioned in the linked article by Paul Smalley.

The previous report noted the sad passing of Lesley Prior, also a former Chair of NASACRE, and it is worthy of mention that Hounslow SACRE has established an annual lecture in her honour.

Whilst it is recognised that there are challenges to all SACREs it is comforting to know that NASACRE is not only supporting but also advocating for those who give so much of their free time to support the one staple subject enshrined in legislation since the 1870 Education Act, which articulates the underlying principles for RE and Collective Worship are still in force 155 years later.

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 In 2025 Sixty-nine SACREs submitted their annual report for 2023 – 2024, the same number as in 2024 for the previous reporting year. Whilst the same number were submitted it did not follow that these were the same SACREs in each reporting year. Of those submitting reports since 2020 only 8% of SACREs submitted reports in each year and 14.1% of SACREs submitted a report once in the same period.

As noted in the previous analysis there is no clear reason why this is the case and there is a need for the DfE to contact those SACREs that have not submitted a report to the Secretary of States as required by the Education Act 2011 Schedule 8¹.

1.2 In previous reports the impact of the Covid-10 pandemic on the work of SACREs was noted. In 2021 – 2022 89.9% of reports included reference to the pandemic and in this reporting year the figure has dropped to 34.8%, much of this relating to historical gaps in data.

1.3 A notable feature of the reports for 2022 – 2023 covered in the previous report was the issue of vacancies. In 2023 – 2024 the percentage reporting vacancies had dropped to under 50%. It is clear that a number of SACREs have a considerable list of vacancies to be filled.

1.4 Collective worship remains the most problematic area for SACREs relative to their statutory responsibilities. It is clear though that SACREs are actively looking at this issue and finding inventive ways of monitoring collective worship. At times, though, this is not helped by annual reports including data from SIAMs reports.

1.5 SACREs continue to collaborate widely, with almost 90% reporting on their relationships with other bodies. Just over 50% mention diversity and its importance within the local authority area. What impact those relations and levels of diversity have on the work of SACRE is not always clear.

1.6 The impact of local government reorganisation on SACREs and ASCs is not always noticed. Two reports stand out, one where SACRE was formed independently of the new local authority and after a number of years now has clear LA involvement. One authority in a largely rural area was divided in two. In the previous reporting year 2022 – 2023 only one of the new authority's SACRE submitted a report, in this year one report was submitted for both authorities as they appear to share a SACRE. This would indicate that not enough thought had been given to processes coming under the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on a policy area that comes under the Department of Education. Given the current government's drive to further devolution this is an area that needs careful thinking by His Majesty's Government.

1.8 It was noted in previous reports that SACREs rarely reported the local authority's response to its advice, with the exception of the need for a locally agreed syllabus. 10% of SACREs noted how the local authority had responded to their advice, as required by legislation.²

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/21/schedule/8> noting this would exclude the Channel Isles and the Isle of Man or other Crown dependencies.

² See [1996 Education Act 391 \(7\) \(c\)](#) and [The Religious Education \(Meetings of Local Conferences and Councils\) Regulations 1994](#)

2. Recommendations³

2.1 NASACRE and support for SACREs

- i. That NASACRE should undertake a short review of newly created local authorities and how they are meeting their statutory responsibilities to appoint and adequately fund a SACRE and, where necessary, an Agreed Syllabus Conference.
- ii. That the NASACRE produce case studies which exemplify the ways that SACREs can work together to benefit religious education and collective worship across those authorities, including challenges that may emerge.
- iii. To work with SACREs on development planning, costings and how those relate to SACRE budgets.

2.2 Department for Education

- i. To work with MHCLG on the implications for SACRE when decisions are being made on local government changes, not least emphasising the importance of the proper constitution of SACREs and Agreed Syllabus Conferences.
- ii. Advise local authorities that their SACREs are required to submit an annual report to the Secretary of State each year as set out in the 2011 Education Act.
- iii. Advise local authorities that it is the authority that adopts an agreed syllabus not a SACRE. Therefore, emphasising the role that local authorities have in supporting an agreed syllabus conference and ensuring that its reports and syllabus are in the public domain as required by UK Statutory Instrument 1304 1994: The Religious Education (Meetings of Local Conferences and Councils) Regulations 1994 (see footnote 2).

2.3 Advice to LAs co-produced by NASACRE and DfE

- i. To produce advice for newly formed local authorities on establishing a SACRE.
- ii. A number of SACRE reports note that public examination results could not be reported on due to their unavailability at the time of reporting. NASACRE and the DfE could helpfully produce guidance on managing this situation as the access to and analysis of results are the responsibility of local authorities, which appoint SACREs.
- iii. Produce a statement which makes it clear that local authorities must pass on data to SACREs to inform members on standards in religious education and religious studies so that SACREs can give appropriate advice as necessary.

³ Appendix 4 contains the Recommendations from the last three reports, some of these are still pertinent and are not duplicated here.

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 fourth report commissioned on that basis.

3.1.2 Sixty-nine SACREs submitted reports by 5th June 2025. This is the same number of SACREs in the previous reporting cycle but not necessarily the same SACREs. Only 52.2% of SACREs that submitted reports in 2023 – 2024 had submitted them in the previous reporting cycle. 11 SACREs submitted a report for the first time since 2019 – 2020, 16% of all reports submitted this year. It is unclear as to why once a SACRE has submitted a report it does not necessarily carry on submitting reports. The most likely explanation is change of personnel, especially clerks to SACREs.

In previous reports the Covid-19 Pandemic was used to explain these inconsistencies, but the pandemic is rarely referred to in the reports informing this analysis, where mentions usually refer to gaps in historic data.

3.1.3 As noted in the previous report there is a recommended format for SACRE annual reports, which is available from [NASACRE](#) 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 5 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 30 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 2025 so that it is possible compare the four years with the addition of one further category, LA responses to SACRE advice.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Reports were received between February and June 2025. As noted above the methodological approach was similar to that used in 2022 and 2023 (see also Appendix 1 and Appendix 2) as 'Relationships and Sex Education/Health Education (RSE/RSHE)' was removed and LA response to SACRE's advice added.

- Attendance
- Detailed notes on attendance
- Professional support
- Religious Education:
 - Advice to the local authority
 - Local authority response to SACRE's advice
 - Advice to schools⁵
- Collective worship:
 - Advice to the local authority

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

⁵ Schools here refers to maintained non-denominational and controlled schools and academies and free schools without a religious foundation.

- Advice to schools⁶
 - 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
- Diversity
- SACRE Vacancies

3.2.2 The local authority's response to SACREs advice was added as this is one of the functions of an annual report, holding the LA to account. None of the reports in this cycle mentioned RSE or PSHE so the category was discontinued.

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.

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

3.5 Caveat

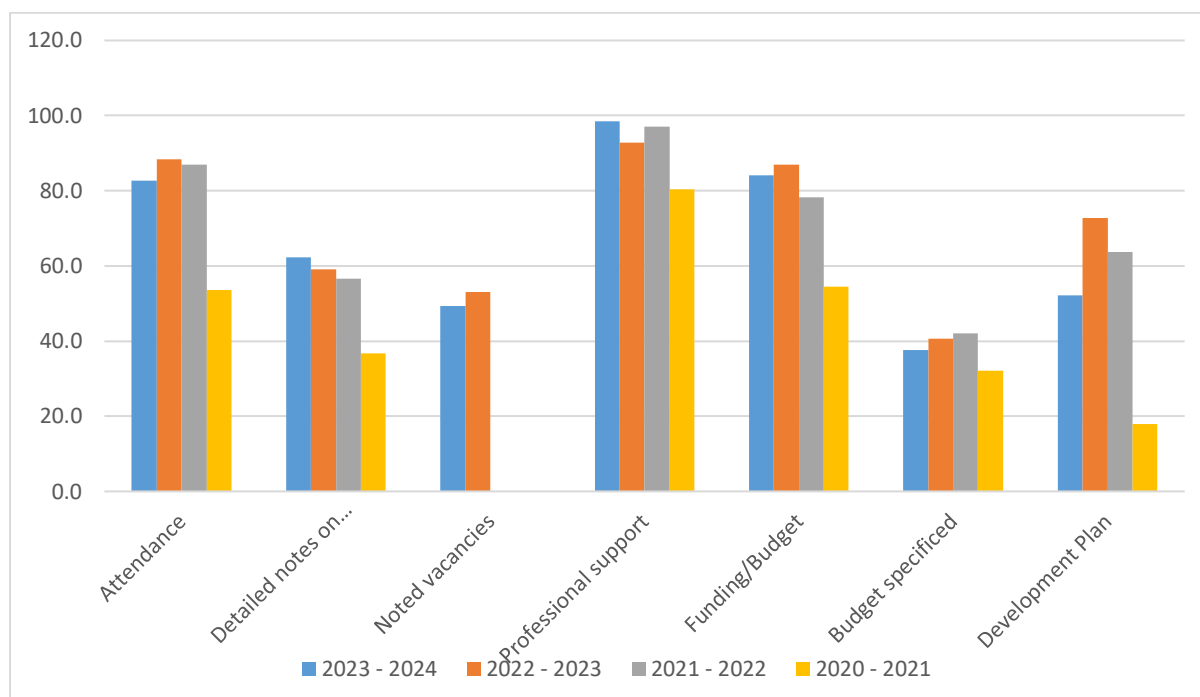
It does not follow that SACRE Reports report fully on their support or activities, given that some are relatively short. This report is based only on what SACREs stated. Where quotes from reports have been used these have been anonymised.

SACRE meetings are subject to The Religious Education (Meetings of Local Conferences and Councils) Regulations 1994⁷. SACREs must produce an annual report⁸ and send to the Secretary of State by December 31st in any calendar year⁹

4.1 SACRE meetings

4.1.1 Graph 1 above shows the date from four reporting cycles relating to SACRE arrangements and support

Chart 1: *Arrangements for SACREs 2021 - 2024 - noting that data vacancies were recorded only in two years: 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 and that development plan included a range of options from full development plans to reference to a development plan.*



4.1.2 SACRE meetings have on the whole been in person but some SACREs have hybrid arrangements, and a small number have in person meetings and online meetings. 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 and online meetings.

⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1994/1304/contents/made>

⁸ Section 391(6) and (7), Education Act 1996.

⁹ Section 391(10), Education Act 1996 as amended by Education Act 2011 c21 Schedule 8 Abolition of the QCDA: consequential amendments.

4.1.3 These concerns come into sharper focus when the process of Agreed Syllabus Conferences are in process, especially where there are a number of local authorities collaborating on the same syllabus. This is often the case where larger authorities have been divided into a number of local authorities which remain geographically contiguous. What becomes particularly problematic is when the demographic density of particular faith communities means one person representing a faith in Group A is serving on more than one SACRE and how that relates to their membership of Committee A on an Agreed Syllabus Conference which is in reality a number of Agreed Syllabus Conferences.

5.1 Support for SACREs

5.1.1 Professional support

In 2023 – 2024 professional support for SACREs reflects that of previous years. 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. Others clearly have support from a school improvement specialist but not necessarily one that has any experience of religious education or collective worship.

Nevertheless 98.6% of SACREs reported that they had professional support from an advisor, consultant, consultancy and/or a clerk, up from 92.8% in the previous year. As in the previous year under report some professional support came from the Church of England's Diocesan Team, and this can have a material effect on reports as a number have a detailed analysis of SIAMS reports relating to both RE and collective worship. This has the impact of affecting the overall picture of RE and collective worship as well as taking the focus off the monitoring of these areas in community schools, and controlled schools relating to RE.

5.2 Funding for SACREs

5.2.1 As in the previous report the majority of SACREs (84%) reported funding available but under half of those (37.7%) specifying a figure or, in some cases, a detailed budget. One SACRE noted that it had no budget:

...despite it being a statutory responsibility on the local authority to ensure funds and support are in place to enable SACRE to fulfil its duties.

Showing that some SACREs are working hard to support RE and collective worship despite lack of resources.

As in previous reports 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. This is a persistent issue on the basis of reports since 2021.

5.3 Attendance and quoracy

5.3.1 82.6% of annual reports reported on attendance at SACRE meetings for the period of the reports, in line with the previous years although down from 88.4% in the previous report. As in previous years 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 (62.3% as in the previous year) added detail to their reporting on attendance, but as can be seen from 5.3.1 this was varied.

Three SACREs that gave details about attendance reported that some meetings were inquorate, one that this applied to half of all meetings in the year under review noting:

Two out of four meetings inquorate

Another noted:

The active involvement of members in SACRE's work is a strength, leading to no inquorate meetings for many years.

A further comment was:

Whilst some of our meetings have been inquorate, we have piloted hybrid meetings to improve the situation. We work in an atmosphere of mutual respect and celebrate what we can learn from each other by reflecting our increasingly diverse communities.

There has been progress in some areas, one SACRE noted:

For the academic year 2023-24, our vacancies for Hinduism and Judaism were filled, which was brilliant news

5.3.3 52.2% of SACREs included some form of development plan, some of which were costed. This was significantly down from 72.7% in the previous year. As in previous years those SACREs that include a development plan rarely refer to the progress of actions set out in those plans or refer to them in the text of the report. Although it is clear that as more data becomes available to SACRE from monitoring that this is having an impact on development planning, one SACRE noted:

The results from the annual survey to schools are being used to inform the SACRE Development Plan and to identify priorities for further training and advice for schools during the academic year 2024-25.

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 Reports¹⁰ 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 1988¹¹ and subsequent consolidated legislation.

6.1.2 During the year under report 31.9% of SACREs reported that they had advised the LA on matters relating to RE, down from 40.6% in the previous year. 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 It is also not always clear how advice has been given to the authority, although one report noted:

Our Councillors and Clerk advise the LA as necessary.

There is no indication of the effect of this approach in the report.

6.1.4 As a result of NASACRE's conference in 2023 10.1% of SACREs reporting this year stated the response that the LA made to the advice of SACRE. One SACRE had requested data from the LA but was repeatedly told that it was not available. SACRE's advice was that the data was needed for it to be able to do its work:

The area of most concern was SACRE's effectiveness of getting and using data.

The report included the LA response, and this had a positive effect, as the data is now being provided as requested. This is not a common experience, as one SACRE noted:

SACRE has therefore not given the LA any advice on RE standards, though SACRE has requested that if school improvement partners visit schools either for Ofsted feedback or to offer support, that they should report back to SACRE about any RE observed. Although this request has been made during the last few years, no information has been passed on to SACRE.

¹⁰

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.

¹¹

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

6.1.5 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:

The SACRE consultant ... has given advice to the local authority on a number of occasions in 2023-24 around issues concerning collective worship on behalf of SACRE. Some of these occasions have included assisting with parental objections to a part of collective worship practice within the authority.

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

6.1.6 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.

6.1.7 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.

Chart 2: Six key areas reported on in relation to RE 2021 – 2024

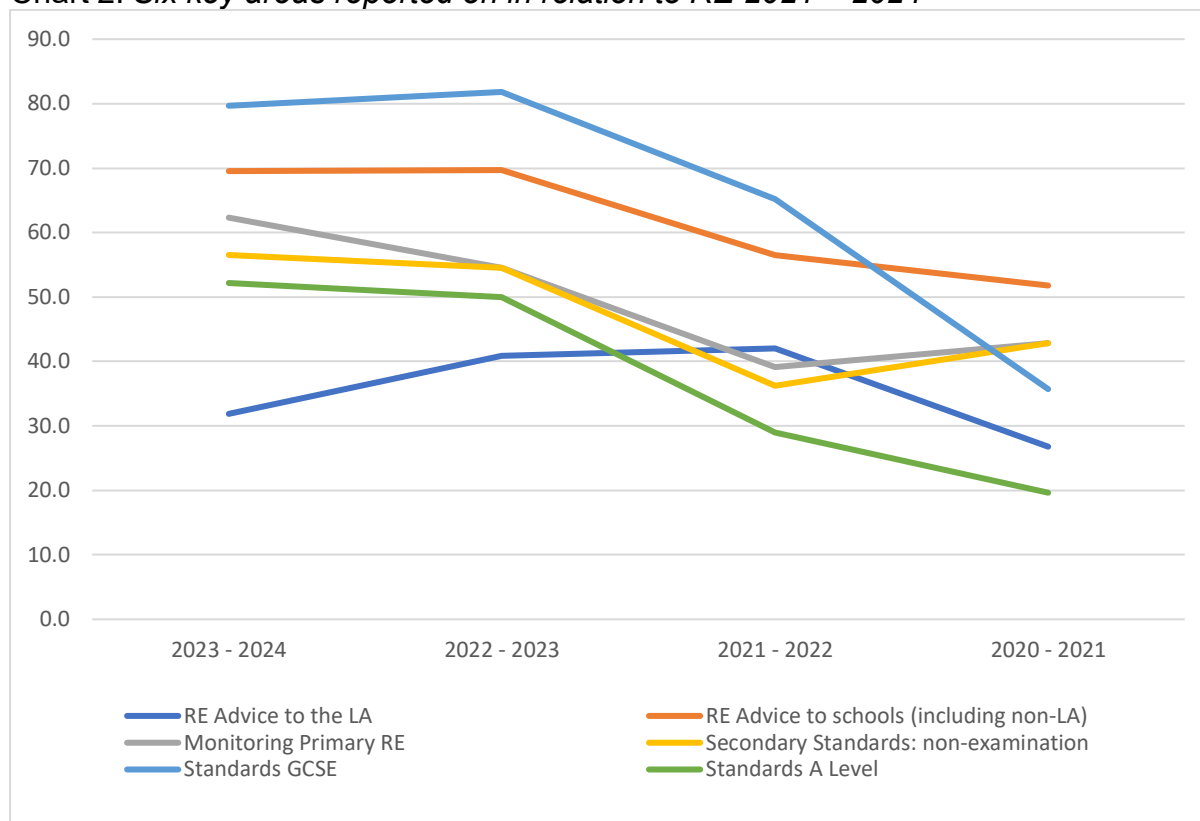


Chart 2 shows that in six key areas there has been an increase in reporting since the Covid-19 pandemic. Of note is RE Advice to the LA which has shown a downward trend since 2021 – 2022. Standards in public examinations have become more available across this four-year analysis and it is notable that SACREs monitoring of primary RE and secondary non-examined RE has also increased after a dip in 2021 – 2022.

6.2 Agreed Syllabus Review

6.2.1 66.7% of SACREs reported that a review of the agreed syllabus was planned, in process or completed in the year under report – up from 53.6% in the previous year. As in previous years SACREs reported on their advice to the LA that the syllabus needed reviewing in line with statute¹². As in previous years it was clear that some syllabuses were collaborations across local authorities and that this could cause issues that were known but not always reported on. These issues included appointed members who could not attend meetings due to scheduling on major days of religious observance. A member from a numerically smaller religious tradition could also find themselves as the member of all or the majority of local authority agreed syllabus conferences collaborating to have a joint syllabus, hence the burden on those members could be considerable.

Not all SACRE annual reports where an agreed syllabus review was underway gave any detail of what was involved. One SACRE simply stated:

¹² In line with The Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education (Prescribed Period) Order 1999: UK Statutory Instruments 1999 No. 1728.

We have, this year been reviewing our agreed syllabus.

6.2.2 What was of interest was that a commercial aspect was connected to the syllabus as review quoted above:

The detailed schemes of work that go with the syllabus are available to schools for purchase at reasonable prices and many of our schools use these.

Whilst it might be reasonable to charge Academies for materials to support the implementation of a syllabus given their funding arrangements, how this should work in terms of maintained schools is less clear.

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 the same as the previous year. There is an issue highlighted in many reports that there is a lack of access to data on collective worship. In many of these reports this was conflated with advice given by the advisor or consultant on specific issues as they arose in schools. (See Chart 3 below.)

6.3.2 As will be noted below there are real gaps in knowledge about collective worship in schools which leads to a situation where it is not possible to advise the local authority, one report noted:

During this period of reporting, SACRE did not actively monitor collective worship, although members of SACRE offered advice and guidance to schools and academies that sought it, especially regarding the right of parents/guardians to withdraw their children from collective worship.

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, as in the previous year. It was recognised that this advice goes to schools through the local authority, as one SACRE reported:

SACRE provided advice to the LA, for example, advising that schools teach about diversity within religious traditions as well as between them.

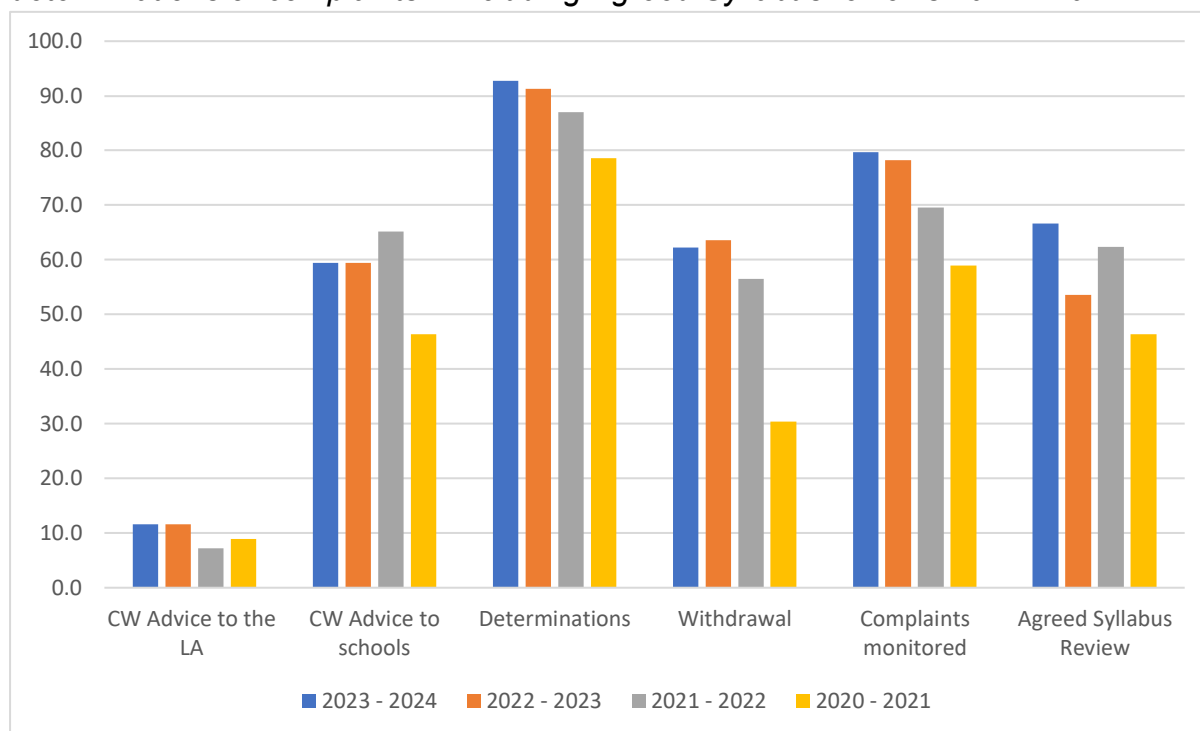
Although it is not clear how that was done in this instance. As noted above there can also be a conflation of professional advice with SACRE's advice when reporting:

The adviser to SACRE also provided advice on an ad-hoc basis to individual school requests regarding RE, collective worship and the right to withdraw children from either or both.

(See Chart 2 above for the four-year trend.)

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) (18) and the WIRE award (Widening Diversity in Religious Education) (3), although these figures are down on the previous reporting year.

Chart 3: *Collective Worship and SACREs - determinations, withdrawals and complaints mentioned in reports, the vast majority stating there were no determinations or complaints – including Agreed Syllabus reviews 2021 - 2024*



7.2 Collective Worship

7.2.1 59.4% of SACREs reported that they had provided advice on collective worship to schools, the same as in the previous year. 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.

One issue that some SACREs are aware of is the right to withdraw pupils from collective worship, one SACRE reported:

Parents have a statutory right to withdraw their children from collective worship. Guidance on good practice and protocols for withdrawal is available to schools; consultants are available if further support is needed.

Interestingly, whilst withdrawal from RE is also mentioned in the report it is not given the prominence here. Indicating the collective worship in the local authority area is more of an issue for parents.

7.2.2 62.3% of reports in 2023 – 2024 mentioned withdrawal from collective worship, which is marginally less than in the previous year. (See Chart 3 for a comparison.)

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 References to Covid-19 and the pandemic continued to decline, from 89.9% in 2021 – 2022 to 34.8% in 2023 – 2024. During the same period SACREs have been more able to work with schools to monitor RE and collective worship, had more access to public examination data and become more aware of the use of Ofsted reports and schools' websites¹³.

8.1.3 As noted above in 6.1.7 data for public examinations has been an issue since 2020 – 2021. There is not one specific cause for this. Some SACRE do not have data available to them at the time of writing the report – although they could report on the previous year's results as useful for indicating standards. What is more notable, though, is that some SACREs have found it almost impossible to get data whilst others have had no difficulty at all. The conclusion must be that this says more about local authorities than it does about SACREs or whether the data is available.

SACRE Monitoring RE and Collective worship

8.2.1 As noted in 8.1.3 the date of the publication of a report had an effect on some SACREs ability to monitor RE in schools. This was only true in relation to the release of public examination data in this reporting cycle.

8.2.2 72.5% of reports mentioned the use of Ofsted reports, 46.4% checking schools' websites and 60% meetings with teachers. It is clear, though, the collective worship is more difficult to monitor without visiting schools than RE:

SACRE members have been viewing collective worship from school websites but have found there is less information available than what can be found about RE.

Monitoring primary, KS3 RE and non-examined RE

8.3.1 There has been an increase in monitoring RE in schools, see Chart 2. 62.3% of reports mentioned monitoring primary RE and 56.5% secondary non-examined RE compared to 54.5% for both in 2022 – 2023.

8.3.2 One SACRE set out its sources for monitoring:

During the period of 2023 -2024 SACRE continued an established process of monitoring RE through:

- *Determination consideration and school visit process*
- *Termly Network meetings with teachers of all stages of their profession*
- *Ofsted report analysis*
- *ELP school support processes – reporting on the RE curriculum when noted*
- *Analysis of school data and examination result*

¹³ 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>

Others find it more challenging:

A key element of the work of this SACRE is to monitor the standards of religious education in schools. Within this the GCSE and A Level data for pupils undertaking a recognised qualification in Religious Studies is presented to the SACRE as unvalidated data in the year of the examinations and validated data for the preceding year.

What is notable here is the focus on monitoring public examinations and not standards at Primary or Key Stage 3 and there is no mention on monitoring collective worship.

8.3.3 14.5% of SACREs also mentioned SIAMS reports¹⁴, which clearly do not come under SACRE's remit as they relate to Voluntary Aided and Voluntary Controlled CofE and Methodist schools and their Academy equivalents. This can have the effect of taking the focus off community schools and their Academy equivalents, especially as these reports contain much more detail than those of Ofsted reports. The inclusion of SIAMS reports is more common when the advisor or consultant to SACRE is also a Diocesan advisor.

8.3.4 Twenty-four 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. This is more than 100% increase on the previous year (11).

Some SACREs treat this data with care but have clear actions based on it:

SACRE is also internally using the information from the school workforce survey that NATRE sourced from the DfE but will not be publishing commentary on this. Individual conversations are held between the local authority and school leaders where it seems schools might not be following legal or contractual expectations regarding RE.

Others clearly saw this as an action for the Local Authority:

SACRE expressed concern that some schools in the borough had not submitted any data with regard to hours teaching RE in the annual workforce survey 2023. The LA agreed to contact those schools and discover the meaning behind the lack of data.

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. 86.9% of reports mentioned regular meetings with teachers this year, which was comparable to the previous year.

¹⁴ <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/education-and-schools/church-schools-and-academies/siams-inspections>

Monitoring GCSE and GCE A Level Religious Studies

8.4.1 In this year 79.7% of reports gave an analysis of GCSE results (down from 81.8% in 2022 – 2023) and 52.2% A Level results (up from 50.7% in the previous year, showing that data access is reaching pre-pandemic levels¹⁵).

Complaints and Withdrawals from RE

8.5.1 In this reporting year 79.7% of SACREs monitored complaints and 62.3% withdrawal compared to 78.3% and 62.3% in 2022 – 2026. As noted in the previous report 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 92.7% of SACRE annual reports referenced training support for teachers, compared to 88.4% returning to a similar level in 2021 - 2022 (93.1%). For some SACREs access to training for schools was an issue and one SACRE noted:

SACRE priorities for 2023 – 2024 are to:

- *ensure that all teachers of RE have access to training in order to develop their confidence and skills to teach RE effectively.*
- *ensure that all schools are provided with information and access to training to help them deliver Collective Worship in a meaningful and appropriate way that meets statutory requirements*

8.6.2 Monitoring the impact of training was less common, although it rose to 26.1% from 17.4% of SACREs in 2022 – 2023. Monitoring can also inform a SACRE's future work:

In order to support schools, SACRE has provided termly RE training opportunities. RE leaders and teachers from all phases of schooling within the local authority area are invited to receive free, high-quality training, resources and curriculum updates. RE Consultants to SACRE deliver this termly training to Secondary colleagues followed by Primary teachers. Feedback from these groups, form the focus of the training ensuring SACRE is responding to the needs of teachers within the LA.

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 43.5% of SACREs mentioned monitoring of collective worship, can increase from 36.2% in the previous year. One of the issues relating to reports is that monitoring is conflated with advice to the LA, see: 6.3.1.

8.7.2 As in the previous report at least sixteen, 23% of all SACRE reports in 2023 – 2024 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. Reports indicate that some SACREs planning to focus their work in this area over the coming year:

At the Summer Term meeting, SACRE discussed making Collective Worship a focus of next year's development plan.

See also 8.6.1 above bullet point 2.

9. Determinations and withdrawals

Determinations

9.1 Of the 92.7% 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, as in the previous year. 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 that there is a need to support schools with collective worship on the basis of their analysis:

Due to the results of the previous year's survey of schools, Collective Worship was highlighted as a priority for this academic year. Schools were invited to a free CPD session on Collective Worship and consulted about SACRE's new Collective Worship guidance. The guidance was subsequently published and indications from this year's

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

survey are that schools are now meeting their statutory duty with regards to Collective Worship more often, but not necessarily at all times.

This including the issue of withdrawal and how schools can manage that positively.

10 Other features of SACRE annual reports

Development plans

10.1 It was notable that some SACREs published their development plans (52.2% in 2024, 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 mentioned in the previous report. 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 76.8% of SACREs that submitted a report in 2024, compared to 71.2% in previous report, 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. 86.9% 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 from 84.7% and 78.6% in 2023 and 2022 respectively but a slight dip on the 87.9% reported in last year's report.

10.3.2 In relation to teachers' meetings one SACRE reported:

These Termly networks provide a regular input of professional support and development for those who attend (a mixture of subject leaders, senior leaders, teachers and teaching assistants) and those in their own school to whom they disseminate learning. These meetings have moved to 4-6pm. The RE adviser is also available before and after these meetings for 1:1 meetings with subject leaders and teachers and can provide support by phone and email.

10.3.3 There was also a concern to ensure that new subject leaders were able to meet and be prepared for their roles, as one SACRE reported:

A new RE subject leaders network was also held online in October 2023 and well attended. Teacher subject knowledge and meeting statutory obligations formed the main structure of each meeting.

These networks are facilitated in a number of ways, especially the Local NATRE hubs and where appropriate LTLRE 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 – 2022 and 2020 – 2021 reports 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.

In reports covering 2023 – 2024 there was no mention of this issue, showing that it was a time limited phenomenon related to a response to new government guidance.

What this has shown is that SACREs provide one of the few spaces where people from different communities can discuss issues relating to education as a whole.

Demographic data

10.5.1 Over half of SACRE mentioned diversity in their reports. 34 mentioned the Census, as one SACRE noted:

Resources for schools were developed in line with local needs and national developments in RE and national events (e.g. the release of the 2021 Census data on religion).

Another:

The membership list quoted represents those who attended in the year 2023-24. SACRE has renewed its constitution (in 2024-25) to better reflect the population of the local authority (Based on the 2021 Census). A recruitment initiative is underway to ensure all posts are filled with representatives who are able to attend the majority of meetings.

And some give clear details:

Census data for the local authority 2021 shows that:

43.9% of the population had no religion

47.7% of the population are Christian

0.4% of the population are Buddhist

0.2% of the population are Hindu

0.1% of the population are Jewish

0.4% of the population are Muslim

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

0.0% of the population are Sikh
0.8% of the population are any other religion

10.5.2 A minority of reports also contained the ethnic breakdown of pupils relative to populations nationally. What is not always clear is the relationship between ethnicities and language groups and religion and belief. Therefore, there is no analysis to show that someone identified as Asian – Indian might be from the Syro-Malabar Christian community or that White – Gypsy/Roma may include Muslims.

11 Conclusion

11.1.1 This year's report has focused on the same methodology as the established from 2022 onwards, which allows some measure of comparison and contrast. The data set the same size as in the previous year but they were not necessarily the same SACREs, adding an analytical challenge.

11.1.2 It is clear that the challenges caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic have gone, as has the phenomenon of SACREs having to respond to issues relating to Relationships and Sex Education.

11.1.3 The most significant message that comes out of this year's report is that what a SACRE can do is dependent on the local authority's position on the need for a SACRE at all. An additional challenge is the creation of new local authorities, two instances are related in this report. Therefore, there is a real need for the DfE to work with MHCLG to ensure that new authorities meet their statutory requirements, especially and the government's faith portfolio rests in MHCLG.

11.1.4 SACREs should be celebrated for what they do, especially where their task appears thankless. Reading sixty-nine SACRE Annual Reports between April and June 2025 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 FRSS
30 June 2025

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 2023 – 2024 by category (maximum n69/100%)

Category	Number of SACREs	Percentage of SACREs
Attendance	57	82.6
Detailed notes on attendance	43	62.3
Professional support	68	98.6
Funding/Budget	58	84.1
Budget specified	26	37.7
RE Advice to the LA	22	31.9
LA responded	7	10.1
RE Advice to schools (including non-LA)	48	69.6
CW monitoring	30	43.5
CW Advice to the LA	8	11.6
CW Advice to schools	41	59.4
Withdrawal	43	62.3
Determinations	64	92.8
Complaints monitored	55	79.7
Monitoring Primary RE	43	62.3
Secondary Standards: non-examination	39	56.5
Standards GCSE	55	79.7
Standards A Level	36	52.2
Monitoring: Ofsted as source of information	50	72.5
Checking schools' websites for indication of compliance	32	46.4
Agreed Syllabus Review	46	66.7
Training and support for AS implementation and RE	64	92.8
Monitoring training for schools	18	26.1
Covid-19/Pandemic	24	34.8
Communication (news letter/website)	53	76.8
Regular in person meetings with teachers	60	87.0
Development Plan	36	52.2
Collaboration/links to other bodies	62	89.9
Diversity referenced	35	50.7
Noted vacancies	34	49.3

Note: percentages are rounded to the first decimal point.

Appendix 3: Research Ethics

The author is a Fellow of the Royal Statistical Society and a member of the British Educational Research Association and the British Sociological Association. The Ethical standards expected by both latter 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.

2022 - 2023

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.
- 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

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.

- 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 portal to be able to register their events.