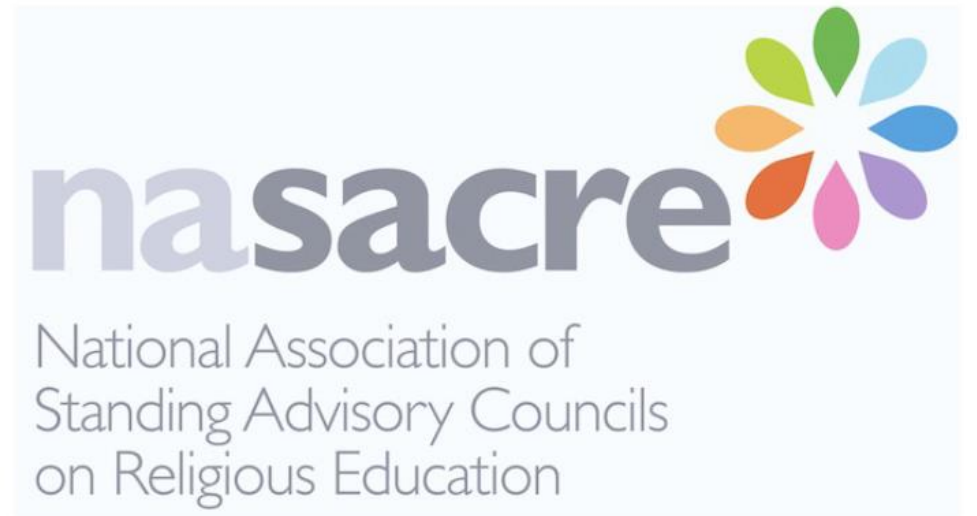




Joining your local SACRE

- supporting
- strengthening
- promoting

Aims for tonight's training

This training presentation looks at these four questions:

- What is a SACRE?
- How is it composed?
- What is its role?
- What are the Local Authority's responsibilities?
- Your relationship to your sponsoring group as their SACRE representative

What is a SACRE?

SACRE stands for:

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

A SACRE is part of local government.

Its main function is to advise the local authority (LA) on matters related to Religious Education and collective worship in schools.



What is a SACRE?

- In 1944, Local Education Authorities (LEAs) were empowered by law to set up a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)
- In 1988, the Law changed and LEAs had to do so
- Today every local authority must have a SACRE and it must meet sufficient times to fulfil its statutory duties
- Most SACREs meet at least three times a year

SACRE: Statutory responsibilities (1)

A SACRE must:

- Advise the local authority (LA) on matters related to agreed syllabus religion education (RE) and
- Collective worship (CW) either in response to a referral from the LA or as it sees fit
- Publish an Annual Report on its work and on actions taken by its representative groups
- Email a copy of the Annual report to the Secretary of State – these reports from September 2021/2022 have been analysed by the DfE and NASACRE – you can find a link to Dr David Hampshire's workshop on these reports here: <https://nasacre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/David-Hampshire-PPT.pdf>

SACRE: statutory responsibilities (2)

A SACRE must also:

- Meet in public, unless confidential information is to be disclosed
- Make minutes of its meetings available for inspection at LA offices
- Consider appeal from schools wishing to modify the legal requirement for the majority of acts of collective worship to be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character; this procedure is called a 'determination' as SACRE determines whether or not to agree the appeal

SACRE: statutory responsibilities (3)

An effective SACRE should:

- Monitor the provision and quality of agreed syllabus RE and of CW in order to provide targeted advice and support on teaching agreed syllabus RE
- Advise the LA on the provision of training of teachers
- Consider complaints about RE and CW referred to them by their LA
- Consider whether changes need to be made to the agreed syllabus, in partnership with the LA
- Offer advice to the LA in respect of the agreed syllabus and its implementation

SACRE: statutory responsibilities (4)

A SACRE may:

- Require the LA to review its Agreed Syllabus
- Decide to advise the LA on matters to do with RE and CW
- Co-opt individuals who are not members of any of the groups, for example to provide educational expertise, the views of young people and children, or religious and non-religious views that reflect a diverse multi-cultural society

How is SACRE composed?

Group A	Christian denominations other than the Church of England and other religions and their denominations, reflecting the principal religions of the area
Group B	The Church of England
Group C	Teacher and head teacher associations and often others representing education interests
Group D	The Local Authority

Questions



Representation on a SACRE

- All four groups must be represented on the SACRE
- The numbers of members in each group will be determined by the individual SACRE's constitution
- The composition of Group A should be broadly proportionate to the religions and worldviews (denominations) represented in the local area

Decision making

After discussions many SACREs come to agreement about issues without the need for a vote except in very rare circumstances.

However when votes need to be taken:

- Each of the four groups has equal voting rights: one vote per group
- Decision within a group about how that vote is to be cast do not require unanimity
- Each group has to regulate its own proceedings, including provision for resolving deadlock
- Co-opted members do not have a vote

SACRE annual reports

- The Annual Report should include details of the SACRE's activities, including advice given to the LA and to schools and any monitoring that has been undertaken in the past year
- The Report explains how the SACRE has fulfilled its responsibilities, evaluated its practice and used the resources at its disposal effectively
- In the best practice, SACRE's work would be linked to a development plan
- The Report can be used to publicise the work of SACRE with schools, governors, elected members and the general public

The role of SACRE

SACREs are responsible for oversight of the religious education and collective worship in their local schools. Levels of responsibility vary.

For example:

- In voluntary aided schools, RE is determined by the governors and taught according to the school's trust deed, not necessarily the Agreed Syllabus
- In all schools with a religious character, collective worship can be reflective of that religion
- In academies (even those which follow the LA agreed syllabus)
RE must be taught it is part of every academies funding agreement

Questions



Schools and RE:

Type of school	Religious education is
Community and Voluntary controlled (VC) schools	taught according to the local authority's agreed syllabus and comes within SACRE's remit.
Voluntary aided (VA) schools	determined by the governors in accordance with the trust deed and reflects the religious character of the school.
Foundation schools with or without a religious character	taught according to the local authority's agreed syllabus.
Trust schools	taught according to the local authority's agreed syllabus.
Academies	Is part of the curriculum, but is taught according to the school's funding agreement.

Type of school	Collective worship
Community	follows the 1996 Education Act and the majority is 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'.
Voluntary controlled (VC) and Voluntary aided (VA) schools	reflects the Christian character of the school.
Foundation schools without a religious character	follows the 1996 Education Act and the majority is 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'.
Academies	Collective worship is determined by the academy's funding agreement but must be every day for pupils not withdrawn in whole or in part by their parent.



Local Councillor Support for Religious Education: Statutory Responsibilities, Community Confidence and National Developments



Religious Education (RE) remains one of the few curriculum areas where local authorities retain important statutory responsibilities. In an increasingly academised and centralised education system, Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) continue to provide a valuable bridge between councils, schools, religion and belief communities, and wider civic life.



High-quality RE contributes directly to civic life. It helps young people understand religion and belief in contemporary society, supports respectful dialogue across difference, and develops critical thinking, ethical reflection and cultural literacy.

1. THE STATUTORY POSITION

Under the Education Act 1996, local authorities have a duty to:



establish and support a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)



convene an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) when required



review the local Agreed Syllabus at least every five years



publish and support arrangements for Religious Education and collective worship in maintained schools



take note of, and respond to, SACRE advice



RE is a statutory subject in all state-funded schools, although the legal arrangements differ between maintained schools, academies and schools with a religious character.

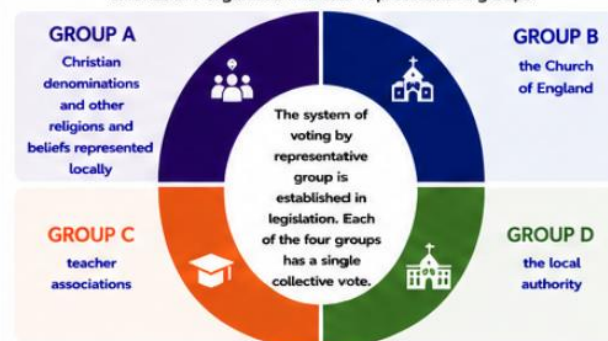
Councils therefore retain important statutory responsibilities for RE and collective worship within a wider educational landscape in which schools and academy trusts also exercise substantial curriculum responsibility.

2. SACRES AND THE ROLE OF ELECTED MEMBERS

SACREs are statutory advisory bodies established to support local authorities in fulfilling their responsibilities for Religious Education and collective worship. Local authorities are required by law to convene and support a SACRE, but SACREs are distinct statutory bodies rather than ordinary local authority committees.

Their work depends upon collaboration between schools, local authorities, religion and belief communities, teachers and elected representatives.

SACREs are organised into four representative groups:



This structure is intended to support balanced representation, dialogue and consensus-building across the SACRE.

Elected members serving within Group D bring an important democratic and civic perspective to SACRE discussions. Their role includes:

- ✓ helping ensure that SACRE advice reflects the needs and character of the local community
- ✓ supporting effective communication between the local authority and SACRE
- ✓ considering how SACRE work contributes to wider civic priorities, including educational opportunity and community confidence
- ✓ helping ensure that statutory responsibilities are fulfilled effectively and proportionately



Members contribute most effectively when discussions are grounded in:

- the statutory responsibilities of the authority
- professional educational expertise
- the representative nature of SACRE membership
- respectful dialogue across different viewpoints and traditions
- the educational interests of children and young people

3. THE CURRENT EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE

England's school system is now predominantly academised. Most secondary schools and many primary schools are academies and are therefore not required to follow the local Agreed Syllabus in the same way as maintained schools.



Academies are still required to provide Religious Education through their funding agreements, but many use trust-wide curricula or adapted versions of local syllabuses.



Schools with a religious character also operate within separate statutory and denominational arrangements.



In this context, SACRE influence increasingly depends upon professional expertise, the quality of support and advice offered to schools, and strong local relationships.

Successful SACREs therefore tend to focus on:



supporting rigorous and balanced RE



offering informed advice to the authority



supporting teachers and schools



helping different religion and belief communities work together



helping schools navigate complex issues relating to religion and belief

4. DRAFT NATIONAL CURRICULUM PROGRAMME OF STUDY

National discussion about the future of Religious Education is continuing following the government's Curriculum and Assessment Review (CAR).



Sector bodies like the RE Council of England and Wales, the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) and the National Association of SACREs, and religion and belief representatives, are working towards greater national coherence through the development of the Draft National Curriculum Programme of Study for RE.

These discussions aim to:



improve consistency and curriculum



strengthen academic rigour



ensure pupils encounter a broad range of religious and non-religious traditions



support teacher workload and curriculum planning



improve equality of access to strong RE provision

SACREs remain important within this evolving landscape because they:

- ✓ support local implementation
- advise councils on statutory responsibilities
- ✓ maintain local relationships and dialogue
- provide local expertise and insight



Religious Education Council of England and Wales



NATRE

National Association of Teachers of Religious Education

nasacre

National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education

5. RE AND THE LAW

Courts have repeatedly affirmed that Religious Education in publicly funded schools should be objective, critical and pluralistic while reflecting both the religious traditions and contemporary diversity of Great Britain.



The existing legal settlement balances:

- the historic place of Christianity in British public life
- the diversity of modern Britain
- the rights of parents and communities
- the professional autonomy of schools and teachers
- protections for schools with a religious character

SACREs play an important role in supporting this balanced and lawful approach.

6. WHY THIS STILL MATTERS

Well-supported SACREs can help councils:



strengthen civic cohesion and community confidence



support schools and teachers



maintain informed dialogue across diverse communities



respond constructively during periods of tension or misunderstanding



promote respectful and informed civic engagement

Prepared by Deborah Weston and Paul Smalley

May 2026

Local Authority responsibilities

- Ensure there is a SACRE
- Ensure all four groups are represented on the SACRE
- Establish an occasional body called an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) and appoint members to it
- Ensure there is an Agreed Syllabus, reviewed every five years
- Ensure funds and support are in place to enable SACRE to fulfil its duties
- Take note of and respond to advice from the SACRE

Local Authority responsibilities

Appointing members

It is the LA's responsibility to appoint members of the SACRE and the ASC.

The LA should:

- Seek nominations from the organisations to be represented
- Ensure those appointed are representative of the religion, worldview, denomination or sponsoring group in question

It is good practice for the SACRE to review its constitution periodically to ensure membership is appropriately representative and to advise the LA of any necessary amendments

Questions



Activity



What makes a good SACRE member?

Look at the grid overleaf.

In pairs or groups consider how you would rate each of these characteristics of a good SACRE member and agree on a ranking for them, the most important first and the least significant last, discarding any that you think are inappropriate.

A good SACRE member ...

... listens to all views and ideas.	
... seeks to understand the views of other members, rather than simply promoting his/her own agenda.	
... is willing to contribute to discussions.	
... understands his or her role as a SACRE member.	
... thinks his or her point of view is important.	
... is committed to SACRE meetings.	
... is well informed about the work of their SACRE.	
... works harmoniously with other members.	
... has time to spend in school.	
... listens more than he or she speaks.	
... wants to build good partnerships with other SACRE members.	
... is keen and able to communicate with teachers and pupils.	
... takes an active participative approach, following lines of enquiry of personal interest.	
... supports and encourages local schools to aspire to high standards in RE and collective worship.	
... is prepared to bring issues to SACRE from their faith, belief or other sponsoring group.	
... cares about pupils' learning and their personal development.	
... is confident about everything to do with RE and CW in schools.	
... takes an active part in meetings.	
... is able to offer relevant experiences.	
... understands and believes in the positive value of RE and CW in schools.	
... keeps in touch with national issues in RE and CW.	
... knows about local faith communities.	
... has the ability and confidence to question perceived wisdom.	
... takes an interest in key RE and CW issues facing schools.	
... works to create a bridge between SACRE, local communities and local schools.	

Points from chat – feeding back on the activity

1. Is committed to SACRE meetings.... and be willing to participate!
2. Supports and encourages local schools to aspire to high standards in RE and collective worship (+ understand about the value of RE and CW)
3. Work harmoniously with other SACRE members, listens to all views and ideas

1. Listens more than they speak and listens to all views and ideas
2. supports and encourages local schools to aspire to high standards in RE and collective worship.
3. Works to create a bridge between SACRE, local communities and local schools.

1. cares about pupils learning and personal development.
2. Takes an active part in meetings.
3. works to create a bridge...

- 1) creating a bridge

1. Understands their role as a SACRE member
2. Is committed to SACRE meetings
3. Supports and encourages local schools to aspire to high standards in RE and collective worship

- 1) supporting and encouraging local schools
- 2) building good relationships with other SACRE members

- ... seeks to understand the views of other members, rather than simply promoting his/her own agenda
- ... understands his or her role as a SACRE member.
- ... is committed to SACRE meetings.

- Seeks to understand the views of other members, rather than simply promoting his/her/their own agenda.
- Understands his or her role as a SACRE member
- Is committed to SACRE meetings

- Listens to all views and ideas
- Is committed to SACRE meetings
- Is prepared to bring issues from their faith or belief community to a SACRE meeting for others to help think about in relation to RE or CW

- Works harmoniously with others
- Knows about local faith communities and their concerns
- Works to create a bridge between SACRE, LA , schools and local community

In summary

SACREs:

- Are statutory bodies which all local authorities have to have and support
- Are representative of the local community
- Are responsible for RE and CW in most schools
- Are instrumental in ensuring quality experiences for all pupils in RE and CW
- Have to report annually to the DfE and NASACRE
- Have the potential to contribute to social harmony and community cohesion

Questions



Links that might be useful

- Here is a link to the non-statutory guidance for SACRE and RE <https://nasacre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2010-RE-Guidance-DCSF.pdf>
- Here is the link to useful documents including analysis of previous reports <https://nasacre.org.uk/useful-documents/>
- This is where you can find examples of good practice of policies, guidance and terms of reference from various SACRE <https://nasacre.org.uk/shared-space/>
- To gain access to many of our documents you need your SACRE to be in membership with NASACRE – you will need our username and password to access answers & documents