

South Gloucestershire SACRE Annual Report 2023/4



Words from the Chair

It is my pleasure to commend this report which has been painstakingly compiled by our hard-working adviser.

We are fortunate to have some highly dedicated teachers who provide great learning experiences for their pupils, some share this practice with others in RE Hubs. Highlights this year included a hugely successful Multifaith Day with fifty schools following online and the annual conference featuring a powerful keynote by Ashish Kundi on decolonising the curriculum.

There is still some inconsistency of provision, particularly in Key Stage 4 where some subjects are squeezed. This is a national phenomenon and we have no enforcement powers. Hopefully, the curriculum review will eventually redress issues like this as well as improve the RS GCSE specifications.

We have approached some of the Multi Academy Trusts to pull some of the lead Religious Studies teachers into SACRE. We enlisted a teacher from Sir Bernard Lovell (Futura Trust) and we are now very close to having all four groups filled. We have also benefitted from the membership of Cllr. Raj Sood who has joined in with great enthusiasm and will soon be welcoming Ian Boulton as the Labour representative.

In our last report I mentioned how the demographic of South Gloucestershire has a white, non-religious majority. From just visiting local schools to present our WIRE awards I have been pleased to see the growing numbers of children of different minority groups in the suburbs.

We are starting to plan for a new syllabus in 2027 and it should be a notable change from the old ways of teaching the subject. It has been a slow journey from the Commission on Religious Education's report in 2018 and the aim is to greater reflecting the reality of lived religion and worldviews, both multi-religious and multi-secular.

The importance of developing empathic insight and critical thinking skills cannot be underestimated in the current climate where it is becoming harder than ever to discern the quality of the information that we are bombarded with, both in mainstream media and across social media channels where people can easily become entrenched in echo chambers and misinformation.

Chris Selway – Chair of SACRE

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1 Introduction

Membership

During the year 2023/4 SACRE was pleased to welcome new members: Patrick Hill, Rob English, Bhadra and Raj Sood. Many thanks to Ruth Wallace who has stepped down.

Details of South Glos SACRE meetings

Tues 16th November 2023: 14 members plus adviser and clerk; online

Thurs 14th March 2024: 13 members plus adviser and clerk; venue: Sir Bernard Lovell Academy

Thurs 20th June 2024: 10 members plus adviser and clerk; Venue: Bristol Hindu Temple

All meetings were quorate.

2 SACRE's statutory responsibilities

2.1 The Local Agreed Syllabus

The current local Agreed Syllabus (AS) for RE runs for 5 years from 2022 to 2027. Therefore, SACRE will begin its consideration for renewing this syllabus provision in Autumn 2024.

SACRE members noted that up to six regional SACREs are at a similar place in the AS cycle, all updating their syllabus at the same time, for first teaching in September 2027. It would seem sensible to form a group to pool our resources. Conversations between these SACREs/LAs will begin in Autumn 2024.

SACRE members will be offered an opportunity to attend the NASACRE training session Working on an Agreed Syllabus Conference being run in 2024/5 to better understand how an ASC works.

2.2 Standards and monitoring in RE

2.2.1 Secondary schools

Data from the DfE annual workforce survey points to the fact that a number of secondary schools do not teach enough RE. Schools have been contacted and conversations with headteachers and senior leaders have taken place to explore further and offer input to encourage them to develop the place of RE in the curriculum.

SACRE is putting in place plans to carry out a survey of websites for secondary schools in the district to determine the extent of RE being taught in each school. This will be reported on at the Autumn 2024 meeting.

2.2.2 GCSE Religious Studies exam results 2024

GCSE RS data for 2024 shows that fewer students are being entered for a GCSE RS exam and fewer schools are entering their whole cohort of Y11 students (see Appendix 1). There are a number of schools who are entering less than 10% of their cohorts. This is a concern, because it suggests that, in many schools, young people are being denied the opportunity to follow this subject at GCSE, possibly impacting their chances of studying it at a higher level. However, grades in most schools are in line with the national average, which suggests that there is good GCSE teaching taking place in these schools.

2.2.3 Primary schools

Monitoring of RE in primary schools continues through sampling of websites. Where SACRE has concerns, schools have been contacted to raise issues about standards or profile of the subject. Resources have been shared and advice has been given to a number of schools with regard to parental requests for withdrawal from RE (and/or collective worship).

2.2.4 Monitoring RE in Multi-Academy Trusts

South Glos SACRE has been working in partnership with a number of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) to ensure that RE is given its statutory place in the curriculum. There are an increasing number of MATs who have appointed RE leads across their schools. SACRE, along with NATRE and RE Hubs, is active in drawing these hub leaders together and working with them to develop an understanding of how MATs need to make provision for the subject.

3 Collective Worship

The current guidance on collective worship and school assemblies from South Glos SACRE is in need of review and updating. A working party will be set up in the Autumn term 2024 to develop a way forward, with changes to be agreed and ratified by a full SACRE meeting. There have been no formal complaints about collective worship in schools and no applications for determinations.

4 Links with other bodies

4.1 Strong partnerships

Strong partnerships are a hallmark of the way South Glos SACRE operates. We have good links with a number of organisations, working closely with South Glos Council, the Diocese of Bristol, the University of Bristol.

SACRE continues to be a member of NASACRE (National Association of SACREs) and the Adviser is part of the SW AREIAC network of advisers (SWARE). SACRE members have attended the annual SW SACRE conference, with the Adviser delivering a workshop on Interfaith RE activities at the event. During the year, RE Hubs hosted a conversation forum for regional SACRE officers to receive updates and give feedback with NASACRE.

4.2 Bristol Multifaith Forum

SACRE works with Bristol Multifaith Forum and Bristol Diverse Doors to establish strong links to local faith and belief organisations. This enables schools to draw on visitors to school classrooms and to inform who will be the most suitable faith and belief representatives when member vacancies occur.

4.3 NASACRE: CIO Constitution

SACRE has discussed and noted that the NASACRE Executive is making an application to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).

4.4 Learn, Teach, Lead RE

South Glos SACRE is pleased to continue to partner the Learn, Teach, Lead RE programme (LTLRE). South Glos LTLRE hub is working well to support teachers of RE, offering termly twilight meetings and networking opportunities.

The 2024 conference was well attended, drawing over 80 teachers from across the region to the event at Bristol University. Both conference and hub meeting evaluations show how valuable teachers are finding these networking and CPD offers.

Hub leaders continue to be a valuable resource to teachers of RE in their locality, and termly training days enable hub leaders to keep up to date with current RE issues and initiatives.

5 SACRE: local involvement

5.1 RE Newsletter

The regular RE newsletter gives schools in depth support, information and networking links. It signposts current CPD, hub groups and conferences. Though this newsletter SACRE signposts guidance to schools about significant events, eg religious festivals such as Easter, Ramadan and Diwali, Interfaith Week etc

5.2 WIRE awards

Schools continue to value the way the [WIRE awards](#) give recognition to excellent RE in South Glos schools. During the 2023-2024 academic year, 4 schools completed the requirements for the WIRE award during the year. In addition, a number of schools have made enquiries about the WIRE Gold Award.

SACRE is keen to attract a greater number of community and secondary schools to apply for these awards.

5.3 Interfaith Week 2023: inter-schools event

SACRE wants to thank Kath English (Longwell Green) and Katherine Legg (St Chad's), working alongside the SACRE Adviser, to prepare for and run this online Interfaith Week event for schools across South Glos (and more widely). Using as a starting point the children's storybook Everybody is Different, pupils were able to discuss and raise questions around inclusion and diversity. As part of the day pupils watched a short video from people from a number of diverse religion and worldview perspectives. They could then ask their own questions in a plenary session. Well over 50 schools took part, across a whole range of ages and settings, which was very pleasing.

5.4 RE Conference 2024

The Annual South Glos RE conference in January 2024 'Let's talk about race – the power of RE to make a change' was well attended. The keynote presentations were shared by Lara-Alysia Ayonrinde and Ashish Kundi, presenting a Christian and a Sanatan Dharma position on the subject. They spoke to the title of 'Investing in roots to grow trees' and 'Flourishing RE – breaking barriers and creating inclusive spaces'. Feedback from the conference was very positive.

6 SACRE: regional and national involvement

6.1 RE Hubs

SACRE continues to be supportive of the [RE Hubs](#) initiative, which is providing teachers with a 'one-stop-shop' website, offering links to [school speakers](#), places of interest, CPD events, local network groups, RE job adverts, blogs and resources etc.

6.2 National Content Standard

SACRE has been kept fully informed of the publication of the REC's [National Content Standard](#). The NCS provides a benchmark for excellence in religion and worldviews in schools or across a MATs in England.

6.3 Religion and Worldviews Handbook

SACRE members have been introduced to the REC's Religion and Worldviews [Handbook](#). This is a tool kit for RE syllabus writers, to enable them to translate the core vision of religion and worldviews approach into a curriculum. RWs syllabus frameworks from three school based teams have also been published as part of the document.

6.5 Ofsted

SACRE members have been kept well informed with Ofsted's understanding of the state of the subject in schools. In her annual HMCI's report, published in November 2023, Amanda Spielman made some challenging observations: 'in too many primary and secondary schools, the religious education (RE) that pupils receive is of a poor quality and not fit for purpose, leaving pupils ill-equipped for some of the complexities of contemporary society.' April 2024 saw the publication of Ofsted's first RE subject report in over 10 years. 'Deep and Meaningful, the religious education subject report'. Some of the key observations were:

- Lack of sufficient depth of knowledge

- Lack of good quality CPD
- Pupils remember little
- Long gaps between lessons hindered recall
- Not enough opportunity for disciplinary or personal knowledge
- Concepts often over-simplified and compartmentalised
- Assessment not fit for purpose
- Misconceptions about non-religious worldviews

These comments underline the importance of putting a high quality RE syllabus in place, to enable schools in all sectors to be able to create strong practice in this subject.

7 SACRE organisation

7.1 SACRE leadership and organisation

South Glos SACRE is well served through its clerk (Hannah Wood), LA lead (Debbie Gibbs), and adviser (Julia Watts). South Glos Council is responsive to SACRE's needs and supportive in its administration and organisation. It is well supported financially.

SACRE membership is well-engaged, although there are still a few significant vacancies. A decision has been made to close Group E and return to a 4 Group structure (A-D), with additional non-voting members invited to join as co-opted members. This in line with the minimum legal expectations for SACREs.

SACRE would like to thank Bristol Diocese for their expert leadership over a number of years, in the role of SACRE advisers. Thanks to Katy Staples, Adam Robertson, Laura Harris and Julia Watts, who have all given invaluable service to the SACRE over recent years. The Local Authority is now looking into contracting a new Adviser from April 2025. Ed Pawson is standing-in in the interim, contracted through Bristol Diocese.

SACRE has recently reviewed its constitution, and this has been approved by the Local Authority legal team.

A number of SACRE members have taken advantage of useful training opportunities over the last year, both through attendance at the SW SACRE conference and national online NASACRE training events.

8 Appendices

Appendix 1

Full Course Religious Studies GCSE Entries 2024 (South Glos schools)

School	% Hours RE	% Entries of whole cohort	% Grades 9-4
1.	4.0	0.4	100.0
2.	1.7	26.9	74.4
3.	2.8	9.6	81.8
4.	4.5	8.8	70.0
5.	4.2	96.6	70.3
6.	3.7	83.7	62.7
7.	2.8	9.6	81.8
8.	3.9	39.5	70.6

9.	3.2	15.1	75.9
10.	2.8	10.9	73.9
11.	4.4	92.1	27.0
12.	3.1	37.8	71.4
13.	4.5	8.8	70.0
National			72.0

Appendix 2

Membership of South Glos SACRE August 2024

Committee A: Christian and other religious denominations 8/ 8 Members	Ramila Patel - Hindu April Begley – Roman Catholic Mohammed-Nassir Miah - Muslim Iris Segall - Jewish Alex Howard - Humanist Balbir Kaur – Sikh Bhadra – Buddhist Rebekah Guy - Baptist
Committee B – _Church of England Up to 3 members	Julia Watts Malcolm Strange Debbie Helme
Committee C – _teachers Up to 6 members:	Mike Riches Kath English Patrick Hill Chris Selway (Chair) Faye Kitchen Rob English
Committee D – _Local Authority representatives Up to 3 members	Cllr Ben Stokes Raj Sood

SACRE Officers

Clerk: Hannah Wood

Adviser: Julia Watts

LA lead: Debbie Gibbs