

# Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education in South Gloucestershire Annual Report 2012-2013



## Chair's foreword:

This has been yet another successful year for South Gloucestershire's SACRE in spite of a national political climate that has not been conducive or encouraging to its work. The SACRE remains passionate in pursuit of good RE in our schools because the wider situation nationally and internationally requires that that children and young people should have a clear understanding of the place of religion and other world views in their lives and in the wider world.

It remains my intention as Chair that the Council should be proud of its SACRE and that mention of it in the RE Community both regionally and nationally should reflect well on South Gloucestershire. My ability to follow this course continues to be made possible by the financial support provided by the Council, the support by Officers and the commitment of the three Councillors who attend the meeting and events.

Attendance at meetings is high and it remains important to remember that members give of their time voluntarily because of their shared commitment to the SACRE's work. This is indeed added human value to the Council's financial support

The South Gloucestershire SACRE is modest in size compared with others in larger local authority areas but in terms of innovation it clearly 'punches above its weight'. In many ways it has pioneered work with teachers and children and young people and has given its members a platform to talk about its work with confidence and pride. This is something we will continue to do.

Alderman Colin Cradock  
Chair of the South Gloucestershire SACRE

## What is SACRE?

SACRE is the abbreviation for the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education. Its composition is specifically multi-faith and includes serving primary and secondary school teachers. There is also a representative from the British Humanist Association.

It is a statutory requirement for every Local Authority to have a SACRE and to support its work. The purpose of SACRE is to advise on the effective provision of RE and Collective Worship.

The South Gloucestershire SACRE believes that Religious Education is unique because it is the only subject where the curriculum is not prescribed nationally but agreed locally.

SACRE takes an active part in the review of the Locally Agreed Syllabus every five years. The current syllabus is called 'Mystery and Meaning' and the current edition was launched in 2009. Work on the next revision is currently underway.



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## Support for schools

As part of its role to offer advice on the provision of effective RE, SACRE runs events to support the work of schools.

The key events during the academic year of 2012-2013 were as follows:

\* **Annual Teachers' conference:**

This was held on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2013 and was, once again, a shared event with Bristol SACRE. SACRE fully funds the conference to ensure that the only costs to schools are supply cover for the day. Many South Gloucestershire schools send at least one representative to the day. We have found that holding it jointly with the Bristol SACRE helps to spread the cost, and also gives opportunities to share good practice with our Bristol colleagues.

This year's conference took as its theme: Challenging RE: critical thinking. It included teaching ideas, workshops for targeted age-ranges, the latest national RE news and a Question and Answer session.

In addition to South Gloucestershire and Bristol school staff, participants attended from Swindon, North Somerset and a local independent school – generating revenue which helped to fund the conference.

\* **NeedLess Greed:**

SACRE has held large scale day-long events for upper primary school children for several years under the banner of 'NeedLess Greed', exploring issues of religion and ethics through workshops and opportunities to meet representatives from various faith communities. While the events were popular, they became more expensive and time consuming to produce.

**\* The Big Questions:**

During 2011-2012, SACRE had developed a new strand of events 'The Big Questions' which are shorter and more flexible. SACRE has now decided to concentrate on using the Big Questions strand of events in place of NeedLess Greed.

They are half day events, held several times across the year and spread across the authority. The sessions are tailored to the needs of local schools, with transport costs greatly reduced or eliminated for schools. This enables more schools to sign up to attend. During 2012-2013 four such events were held:

- 23rd November 2012 at Patchway Community College attended by 120 children from 4 schools – The Big Questions with three philosophy facilitators.
- Hanham High School on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> February 2013 with the theme Prejudice which included a commemoration of the Holocaust. Children participated in the debates about prejudice; investigated the theme through drama and art; and attended workshops to deepen their understanding of the Holocaust
- Mangotsfield school 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2013 with a theme of forgiveness. A dynamic and reflective morning with support from the Bishop of Swindon.
- Castle School 17th July 2013 –The Big Issues. This was an event for Year 10 students and many visiting speakers were invited to lead debates before a House of Commons was set up with Steve Webb MP for Thornbury and Yate opening the session and Chris Wilmore chairing the motions. These ranged from is alcohol a dangerous drug, to do we torture prisoners, is everyone equally and Are we good stewards of the earth?

Thanks are due to these schools for their support for these events.

**\* Offering help to schools:**

SACRE sends questionnaires to schools from time to time to help with its monitoring of RE and Collective Worship in South Gloucestershire. However, the main aim of the questionnaire is to find areas where SACRE can support schools in their work.

The questionnaire for 2013 'What can South Gloucestershire SACRE do for you?' was circulated at the SACRE Teachers' conference and 12 responses were received. While this is a low number, useful information was gleaned and a report for SACRE was prepared by the RE Advisory Teacher. Teachers reflected on their use of the current Agreed Syllabus and these comments are being used to inform the current revision. They also asked for more help to find people who could visit schools to talk confidently about their faith.

SACRE remains concerned that the schools which are not sending representatives to the SACRE conference and are not participating in questionnaires, may be the schools most in need of its support. SACRE welcomes the work undertaken by the RE Advisory teacher to make contact with such schools and offer help.

**\* Support for Governors:**

SACRE was asked to provide some training for governors on RE and Collective Worship. It has made arrangements to do so via a Governor training session through South Gloucestershire Council's Governor training programme.

**\* Music:**

The SACRE Chair met with Richard Jones, Head of Music Service to consider setting up an event with SACRE to explore spirituality in music.

**\* Best Practice Forum:**

SACRE has offered to hold grant funding for the Secondary Best Practice RE Forum. The grant will be used to facilitate visiting speakers, and was awarded by Culham St Gabriel's to the Best Practice Forum.

## **Review of Agreed Syllabus**

The Agreed Syllabus for South Gloucestershire ‘Mystery and Meaning’ must, by law, be reviewed every 5 years. The review for South Gloucestershire fell due during 2012-2013. SACRE considered how best to carry out this review at a time of great uncertainty for Religious Education as a subject. RE is not a National Curriculum subject and as such any changes to the National Curriculum being put forward by the DfE do not directly impact on RE. However, national changes are likely to have some impact on RE.

At the time of the last review the National non statutory framework for RE produced by QCA was helpful in ensuring a high standard for our own syllabus. QCA no longer exists and the framework no longer appears to be fully supported by the DfE. The widely respected RE Council has undertaken a subject review for RE which, it hopes will guide SACREs in their work on Agreed Syllabuses. Although outside of the period for this report ‘A Curriculum Framework for Religious Education in England’ was launched in October 2013 - see [www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk](http://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk) The conclusion is to reinforce established networks to include Academies and Free Schools but there is more to be done to improve the quality of RE teaching.

During 2012-2013, therefore, SACRE decided to carefully review our own syllabus with the aim of making minimal changes – in the expectation that a more extensive review will be required when the national situation is more settled. A small group of SACRE members, with the support of our RE Advisory Teacher, has begun this work.

Pending the completion of the review of the Agreed Syllabus, SACRE member Eve Scott undertook a revision of the Early Years section of the syllabus to bring it into line with the revised Early Years Foundation Stage. The revision will then be placed on the SACRE website and put forward for inclusion in the revised syllabus document.

Alongside the review of the Agreed Syllabus, a small working party of SACRE members has been working on programme of local study to incorporate the rich religious history of our area.

## **Monitoring of RE provision in South Gloucestershire**

SACRE has a role to advise the Council on matters related to RE provision in South Gloucestershire's schools. To do this, SACRE analyses the GCSE/A level results for RE, and any Key Stage 2 RE assessments. During this reporting year SACRE considered the public examination results for 2012, using a report prepared by Antony Evans, SACRE's Serving Officer, as follows:

### **\* At the end of Key Stage 2:**

It is statutory that primary/junior/special schools assess their pupils in RE to the eight point scale at the end of Year 6 by virtue of what is prescribed in the local authority agreed syllabus, Mystery and Meaning. It is not statutory that these results should be collected by the local authority or SACRE.

Hitherto we have requested/invited primary schools to let us have their results, but this has become harder and harder every year with more and more schools declining or not responding.

We have, however not given up and twice approached schools since September 2012 and have a small total result (15 schools).

In future, now that Ofsted is, more specifically noting SMSC (Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural), which admittedly is not RE per se, in inspections, it may be possible once again to extrapolate this part of the inspection report on which to base an assessment of the effectiveness of RE.

### **\* At end of Key Stage 4- GCSE results for 2012:**

This time last year the as yet unknown effect of the EBacc was much on our minds, but it was probably too early to assess probably any significant impact, though some analysts predicted that there would be a discernible influence. There is still insufficient statistical evidence to prove this point and indeed there may never be, but anecdotally commentators are attributing an apparent loss of interest and enrolment to the influence of the Ebacc if not on the actual results themselves.

Again all 16 secondary schools/academies entered pupils in either full or short-course GCSEs in Religious Studies in 2012. Five of these are now academies. One of the 16 schools entered none for the full course and none for the short course.

There were 911 full-course entries 402 boys and 509 girls, the highest number ever and a huge increase on last year. The number of short-course entrants, however, 1037 (582 boys and 455 girls) has fallen sharply from recent values and gradually from the highest value since 2006 which was 1499 in 2008.

Adding all GCSE RE entrants together there were 1,948 in 2012 and 1,961 in 2011, so almost the same. It would appear that full and short course entries are now roughly equal at 911/1037 with a significant number who might have opted for the short course going for the long course. This would appear to diminish the alleged influence of the EBacc.

At full-course GCSE in South Gloucestershire in 2012:

- 69% of boys gained a grade at A\*-C (69% nationally) – same as last year, and all entrants gained the qualification for the third year running.
- 77.4% of girls gained a grade at A\*-C (77% nationally), and all entrants gained the qualification.
- The overall rate for A\*-C grades was 74% compared to 74% nationally.
- Girls' results at A\*-C have improved by 1 percentage point since 2007 and boys' results have improved by 3 percentage points. Overall there has been an 2 percentage point improvement since 2007. Results in the intervening years have gone up and down a lot.
- These outcomes represent an improvement on last year's in terms of entries and a decline in percentagised achievement.

At short-course GCSE in South Gloucestershire in 2012:

- The overall rate for A\*-C grades was 38% of 1,037 compared to 50% nationally. This is a significant drop.

- Overall, girls' and boys' results at A\*-C have fallen by 11 percentage points since 2007 with 2010 being the best year at 55%
- The gender differentiated outcomes for the short course are not available

\* **At the end of the Sixth Form/Key Stage 5/post 16 – A levels results in 2012:**

In South Gloucestershire since 2007 the number of entries in any one year has fluctuated between 38 (2009) and 58 (2008). In 2012 there were 39 entrants, 35 girls and 4 boys.

- 75% of boys of gained a grade at A\*-C (78% nationally), and all entrants gained the qualification as has been the case for many years now, but the number is tiny.
- 51% of girls gained a grade at A\*-C (81% nationally), and all entrants gained the qualification as has been the case for many years now.
- The overall rate for A\*-C grades was 54% of 39, compared to 80% nationally.
- Because there are relatively few candidates, year-on-year comparisons are not particularly reliable and results fluctuate a great deal from one year to another. Last year girls' results at A\*-C declined by 30 percentage points from the 2007 baseline and boys' results by 25. These are significant falls.

**At AS-level:**

Most students take AS-levels in year 12, the first year in the sixth-form and RE teachers hope that these will convert to a full A level in the second year sixth/Year 13.

In South Gloucestershire's schools, 71 students took Religious Studies AS-level in 2010, but there were only 54 students taking A-level in 2011 dropping to 39 in 2012.

- 28% of boys gained a grade at A\*-C (60% nationally) and 76% gained the qualification (90% nationally).
- 51% of girls gained a grade at A\*-C, below the proportion nationally of 66% and 93% gained the qualification

- The overall rate for A\*-C grades was 43% compared to 64% nationally.

Because there are relatively few candidates, year-on-year comparisons are not particularly reliable. Girls' results at A\*-C have now fallen by 1 percentage point since 2007 and boys' results by 40. However, during the five years there have been tremendous fluctuations with boys' results varying from 43% (2009) to 78% (2006) and girls' from 47% (2011) to 72% (2010). Overall, results have varied from 46% (2011) to 75% (2006). Nevertheless this year has seen a significant overall fall in AS results even though the small cohorts tend to heighten percentage differences.

## **Attendance by SACRE members at outside events**

### **\* South West Regional SACRE conference:**

Two SACRE members attended the March 2013 conference of South West SACREs and reported back to the following SACRE meeting. There was an address by Bill Gent, Chair of the RE Council's Review and they attended workshops on:

- Making SACRE guidance on collective worship effective
- Distinctively Cornish: lessons on making RE truly local
- Report on the All Party Parliamentary group's findings by Barbara Wintersgill

### **\* National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) Annual Meeting:**

The NASACRE AGM for 2013 included a key note speech by Mark Chater, formerly RE Advisor at QCA, and now Director of Culham, St Gabriels. He summarised the current state of Religious Education and the difficulties it faced. He challenged SACREs to find new ways of working, in the light of decreased activity by local authorities, increased academisation and the need to offer a more coherent curriculum than that provided by the local syllabus system.

Alan Brine's contribution focused on the findings by Ofsted that not enough RE is good enough, with 60% of provision assessed as being less than good. He gave his analysis of the reasons for this situation and what needed to be done.

### **\* South Gloucestershire Schools Carol concert 2012:**

SACRE members were delighted to be asked to attend the South Gloucestershire schools' carol concert for 2012. The concert featured an attempt to break the world record for the Most Living Figures in a Nativity Scene. SACRE members attending the event dressed up as villagers. Schools attending dressed up as angels, market traders and Roman guards; model buildings set the scene and a donkey, a camel and some goats came too. In May, it was confirmed that the world record for the numbers participating in a live Nativity scene had been broken.

**\* The Future of RE conference 19th June 2013 at the University of Worcester:**

The conference drew together delegates representing a range of organisations and views to debate many of the current issues challenging the subject's future, with five keynotes addresses.

Thanks are due to those members and officers willing to attend these sessions on SACRE's behalf.

## National Issues



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### \* **All Party Parliamentary Group on RE:**

This group produced its report on RE '*The Truth Unmasked*' in March 2013. The South Gloucestershire SACRE considered this important report which re-affirmed the national importance of Religious Education. Although other subjects, such as Citizenship or History, appear to cover similar ground, no other subject can examine faith and people's life beliefs – and the influence these beliefs have on our world. The report raised concerns about the number of primary pupils being taught RE by teaching assistants, and suggested that more than half of those teaching RE in secondary schools did not have a subject related qualification. It reported that access to CPD for RE teachers was not consistent nationally but dependent on the resources of local SACREs and local authorities, and the priority given to RE in each school.

### \* **RE Council Review of RE:**

SACRE members sent submissions to the RE Council's Subject Review of RE. While RE is a compulsory subject, it is not a national curriculum subject because, as explained above, each local authority has its own syllabus (usually created on its behalf by the local SACRE).

Following the demise of QCA and its 'Non-statutory national framework for RE', there is currently no national guidance which inform each local authority syllabus. There is also a review of the National Curriculum in progress. Therefore, the RE Council undertook a review to provide revised programmes of study for RE at Key Stages 1-3. It is intended that these would be consistent with the new National Curriculum.

The RE community as a whole, including NASACRE, took part in in this work. The final document has now been published (October 2013) and was due to be considered by SACRE in Autumn 2013. SACRE will want to ensure that its Agreed Syllabus review of 2014 reflects nationally produced guidance and is particularly interested to take note of this work done by the most respected national RE organization.





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## Statutory matters

SACRE has a statutory role to decide on any determinations. These are requests by schools to move away from the requirement for collective worship to be wholly or mainly of a Christian character. During the period of this report, there have been no requests for determinations.

From time to time, local authorities receive Freedom of Information requests from national journalists about the work of their SACREs. During 2012-2013 South Gloucestershire Council had received a Freedom of Information request from the Mail on Sunday concerning how many schools in our area have an exemption from the legal requirement to hold a daily act of collective worship of a "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character". SACRE sent a nil return.

Where a complaint has been made about the RE curriculum in a South Gloucestershire school, it should be referred to South Gloucestershire Council for it to deal with. SGC has undertaken to seek SACRE's advice on any such complaint. There have been no formal complaints within this reporting period.

SACRE has a complaints procedure to deal with any complaints made against SACRE. There were no such complaints in the reporting period.

## Members of SACRE September 2012-July 2013:

<p>Committee A: Christian and other religious denominations 7 Members</p>	<p>Colin Cradock Ramila Patel Linda Pope April Begley Mukhtar Ahmad Younis Chris John</p>
<p>Committee B – Church of England – up to 3 members</p>	<p>Katy Staples Esther Saunders Sally Sibley</p>
<p>Committee C – teachers nominated by the South Gloucestershire TCC – up to 6 members:</p>	<p>Kath McCarthy Hazel Jefferies Eve Scott Susan Weaver to May 2013 Leah Osborne Mary-Anne Willmott Alex Wilkinson from July 2013</p>
<p>Committee D – Local Authority representatives – up to 3 members</p>	<p>Cllr Jane Allinson Cllr Matthew Riddle Cllr Gareth Manson</p>
<p>Committee E – non voting Co-opted – up to 6 members</p>	<p>Roger Allinson, Derek Jay Alex Howard Peter Day Helenka Stachera to July 2013 Susan Weaver from May 2013</p>

During the reporting period, SACRE's chair was Alderman Colin Cradock, and the Vice-Chair was Mary-Anne Willmott.

## How SACRE is funded/administered

SACRE receives funding of approximately £11,500 per annum from South Gloucestershire Council. SACRE creates an annual budget plan for how its funding is to be spent and expenditure is monitored by a designated SACRE member. A budget report is presented and discussed at each SACRE meeting. Thanks are due to SACRE member Peter Day who undertakes this role.

All SACRE's members are volunteers who give up their time freely and enthusiastically to help SACRE with its work.

SACRE has a part time clerk.

At the end of this academic year, the LA Serving Officer for SACRE, Antony Evans retired. Antony had served the South Gloucestershire SACRE with distinction for almost the whole of its existence. His advice and guidance will be much missed but SACRE members wish him a long and happy retirement.

South Gloucestershire Council has agreed to continue to provide funding to cover the duties of a serving officer for SACRE, and the position has been taken by Kathryn Symons, the RE Advisory Teacher.

Hannah Wood also helps the SACRE with the organization of its events.

SACRE works to the non-statutory guidance in the 1994 document: Circular 1/94. Parts of that document have been replaced with the guidance: 'Religious Education in English Schools: Non statutory guidance 2010'.

South Gloucestershire Council has approved a constitution for SACRE. A copy of the constitution may be obtained from the Clerk to SACRE

SACRE also prepares an annual development plan to guide its work.



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Following changes to the host website (South Gloucestershire Council) and the ending of the South West Grid for Learning, the SACRE website contents and layout were reviewed in 2013. Some improvements were made and it is hoped to have a more thorough review when the new sharepoint website goes live in 2014.

SACRE meetings are usually held at The Grange School, Warmley. Thanks are due to the school for allowing us to do so. The meetings are well attended by members and are also open to members of the public who should contact the Clerk for details of forthcoming meetings.

The South Gloucestershire SACRE can be contacted via its Clerk:

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