

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SUNDERLAND

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE)

2024-25

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1. Introduction

Sunderland Council has statutory obligations relating to Religious Education (RE) and Collective Worship in the city. This report summarises those statutory requirements and sets out how they have been met in the academic year September 2024 to July 2025.

This annual report has been prepared by the Sunderland Council Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). Members of SACRE represent churches and other religious traditions in the region, teachers' associations and elected councillors. SACRE members give their time voluntarily and are not paid for their service.

Religious Education is required by law and contributes to community cohesion by promoting mutual respect and understanding in a diverse society. It provides an important context for developing children and young people's knowledge of different beliefs, worldviews and cultures. RE challenges prejudice, encourages respect for difference and supports pupils in developing shared values.

2. The Chair of SACRE Comment

The 2024–25 year has been notably productive for Sunderland SACRE, marked by the continued implementation of the Agreed Syllabus. I wish to acknowledge Caroline Weir for her effective leadership as chair of SACRE over the past year. Her expertise and ongoing support as RE advisor and Vice Chair are greatly valued.

Sunderland SACRE has been pleased to welcome Christopher Barrass as the local authority school improvement officer, who brings considerable experience and dedication to the role.

As we prepare for a local syllabus conference in early 2026, I extend my appreciation to all members for their contributions, active participation, and dedication to enhancing RE standards across our city. Particular recognition is due to those undertaking additional responsibilities through working groups focused on collective worship and teacher networks. Participation in RE network meetings has been encouraging, and it is gratifying to observe the strengthening of professional relationships through our collaborative continuing professional development.

This year, Sunderland achieved recognition by winning a Westhill/NASACRE Developing Diversity Award for the first time at the national conference. This initiative originated from a SACRE meeting in which members collaboratively explored opportunities for schools to advance inclusion within our city. We anticipate working with NASACRE, a local Sunderland artist, and Sunderland schools to present this work in summer 2026.

While quoracy has shown some improvement, it continues to present challenges. Addressing this matter will remain a priority during the coming academic year.

I would also like to acknowledge our clerk, Paul Wood, and our local authority officer, Richard Cullen, for their valuable contributions to our work.

Amy Clarke

Chair of Sunderland SACRE

3. Meetings

This academic year saw three meetings take place on 15 October 2024, 18 March 2025 and 17 June 2025.

At the first meeting of the year Amy Clarke was elected Chair of SACRE and Caroline Weir Vice-Chair. Members also welcomed Mr. Chris Barrass, School Improvement Officer – Curriculum, who has taken on the role of supporting SACRE following the retirement of Mrs. Cathryn Forbes.

Throughout the year members considered a range of business including work with schools, developments in collective worship, training and support, GCSE outcomes, national updates, the Westhill/NASACRE Awards and opportunities to discuss and share ideas.

Members also received a presentation from the North East RE Hubs Lead which provided further information about resources and support for schools.

4. RE (Statutory Responsibilities)

4.1 Local Agreed Syllabus and RE in schools

SACRE noted the statutory requirement for all schools to deliver Religious Education to every year group. Workforce census data highlighted that while some schools reported their provision correctly, others misreported or failed to respond. Members discussed the challenges for academies, where school leaders often prioritise English and Maths, sometimes at the expense of RE. SACRE recognised the limitations of its role in academies but emphasised the importance of supporting all schools to deliver high quality RE for pupils in Sunderland. The primary syllabus was acknowledged as successful and members agreed that continued promotion of RE across all schools remains a priority.

Members also reviewed the 2024 GCSE results. These figures relate to the summer 2024 examination series. A total of 31% of pupils undertook the full course, equivalent to a full GCSE qualification, and 5% completed the short course. SACRE noted that local participation in GCSE Religious Studies remains variable and discussed the importance of strong Key Stage 3 provision and subject expertise in supporting outcomes at Key Stage 4. SACRE also discussed the need for specialist expertise to ensure pupils receive high quality RE provision.

4.2 Training, Monitoring and Other Information

Support for Schools

SACRE continued to provide training and professional development opportunities for schools. A conference held in October 2024, led by Lat Blaylock from RE Today, was attended by 41 participants. Feedback was very positive, with teachers valuing the practical strategies shared, particularly in relation to assessment.

Schools have since been able to download all of the resources from the event and take advantage of discounts to purchase additional support materials, helping them to deliver the Agreed Syllabus more effectively. The training was provided free of charge to schools.

Three RE network sessions for 2024–25 were delivered on 20 November, 4 March and 21 May by Chris Barrass and Amy Clarke. The sessions were well attended and provided opportunities for teachers to share practice, explore the Agreed Syllabus and receive updates. The focus included oracy and participation, developing vocabulary, lesson resourcing, curriculum structure, retrieval and assessment within RE. Feedback from schools was very positive, noting the value of sharing knowledge and resources.

Termly newsletters were also produced and circulated to all schools, containing updates on national and local developments. Content included information on Interfaith Week, Holocaust Memorial Day, the Sacred Arts competition and details about the RE Hubs and local resources available to schools.

Support for SACRE Members

During 2024 to 25, SACRE members were encouraged to engage with national and regional training opportunities to support their role. This included NASACRE briefings and events, alongside local updates and professional discussion shared through SACRE meetings. A fuller record of training attended during the year is included in section 8.2.

In March 2025, SACRE welcomed a presentation from Karenza Passmore, North East RE Hubs Lead, who provided an overview of the resources and support available to schools through the RE Hubs programme. This strengthened links between SACRE and the wider regional network of support for Religious Education.

GCSE Results

The preliminary findings of the RE GCSE results for Sunderland schools for the summer 2025 examination series are as follows:

A total of 862 entries were recorded (no indication as to which course).

98% of entries achieved a Grade 1–9, compared to the national figure of 97%.

76% of entries achieved a Grade 4–9, compared to the national figure of 71%.

65% of entries achieved a Grade 5–9, compared to the national figure of 60%.

Sunderland's performance demonstrates a slightly higher achievement rate than the national averages across all grade bands

5. Collective worship

SACRE continued its focus on collective worship during 2024–25. A questionnaire circulated in July 2024 received 27 responses, including 7 initial responses and a further 20 following recirculation in the autumn term.

The findings are being used to support the ongoing work within the Collective Worship Action Plan which will guide SACRE's support to schools. A working group has been established, with collective worship now a standing item on the termly agenda. Members including Tracy Conway, Amy Clarke and Steven Beck have contributed to this work.

Collective worship is also a feature of the termly newsletter and is included within network meetings with schools, helping to shape understanding and direct teachers towards supporting resources.

SACRE remains committed to providing guidance and resources to help schools enhance collective worship and to ensure that it remains an inclusive and meaningful part of school life.

6. Links with other bodies

Sunderland SACRE continues to value its links with local and national organisations. SACRE is a member of NASACRE and makes use of briefings, resources and training materials to support its work. Members are encouraged to access the NASACRE website and attend online training webinars where appropriate.

SACRE also maintains links with partners such as the Sunderland Interfaith Forum. Opportunities and key dates are signposted to schools through SACRE newsletters and network sessions, including Interfaith Week and Holocaust Memorial Day.

Amy Clarke and Caroline Weir attended the NASACRE annual conference during the year. Reflections were shared with members, alongside signposting to NASACRE resources that can guide future work. SACRE members also reflected on a conference message from Lord Khan of Burnley, considering how themes such as respectful disagreement, broadening collective worship, addressing diversity and reflection in RE and the challenges of limited secondary RE provision could inform local priorities. Training attendance is recorded in section 8.2.

During the year Sunderland SACRE was also successful in securing a Westhill and NASACRE Developing Diversity Award for the *Exploring Faith through Art* project. This initiative, led by Amy Clarke and Chris Barrass, will involve local schools working with an artist to explore themes of faith and diversity. By June 2025, an artist had been appointed and seven schools had shown interest in the project, with opportunities for community involvement and a city centre exhibition being considered. The project, one of only four national winners, will commence in the 2025 to 26 academic year.

7. SACRE local involvement

Sunderland SACRE supports local community cohesion by promoting opportunities that help schools engage with faith and belief communities. Members from a range of faith traditions and local Christian denominations contribute to SACRE's work and, where appropriate, help schools make links with local contacts and resources.

Links with partners such as the Sunderland Interfaith Forum continue to be maintained, with opportunities for schools signposted through SACRE newsletters and network meetings. Key dates and events, including Interfaith Week and Holocaust Memorial Day, have been promoted in this way.

SACRE's termly networks and newsletters have supported information sharing and signposting to local opportunities. Feedback from schools has highlighted the value of these updates in supporting RE and collective worship.

8. Management of SACRE, working in partnership

8.1 SACRE membership

Sunderland SACRE membership continues to include representatives from the four committees: elected councillors, the Church of England, other Christian denominations and faith groups, and teachers' associations. During the year Amy Clarke was elected Chair and Caroline Weir Vice-Chair. Members also welcomed Chris Barrass, School Improvement Officer – Curriculum, who now supports SACRE following the retirement of Cathryn Forbes. SACRE continues to work with the local authority to identify and welcome new members from local communities and faith groups.

8.2 Training for SACRE members

SACRE members were encouraged to engage with national and regional training opportunities to support their role. Training opportunities and updates from NASACRE were shared with members during the year and key messages were fed into SACRE discussion where relevant.

Where training attendance has been confirmed, it is recorded below.

NASACRE training and events attended in 2024 to 25

- **Chris Barrass** attended NASACRE training: *So, you've joined your local SACRE...* (24 September 2024)

- **Amy Clarke** attended the *NASACRE Conference and AGM (2024 to 25)*
- **Kevin Lapping** completed RE Hubs Kitemark training during 2024 to 25
- **Caroline Weir** attended:
 - *How can SACREs make strategic use of the Deep and Meaningful Ofsted RE Report in their work?* (15 October 2024)
 - *In Conversation with North East SACREs* (21 November 2024)
 - *In Conversation with North East SACREs* (20 March 2025)
 - *NASACRE Conference and AGM (2024 to 25)*

8.3 SACRE funding and support

Sunderland Local Authority has continued to provide funding and officer support for SACRE. The budget has been used to provide training and CPD opportunities for schools, including the October 2024 conference. SACRE also continues to be well supported by its clerk through the Law and Governance Team.

Appendix 1

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

CLLR DODDS	
CLLR O'BRIEN	
CLLR DAGG	
CLLR GLANCEY	
CLLR NEWAY	

CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS AND OTHER RELIGIONS

MATT MOORE	
MRS SYEDA FAHMENA KHATUN	
REV DR DAVID WHITING	
MR TONY WORTMAN	
MRS ELIZABETH WORTMAN	
MR MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL	
IMAN YUSEF MEAH	
MR DHAVALKUMAR VYAS	
MR ZAF IQBAL	
MR KEVIN LAPPING	

CHURCH OF ENGLAND

MISS CAROLINE WEIR	
MRS AMY CLARKE	
REV CHRIS HOWSON	
NICKY ANDERSON	

TEACHERS' ASSOCIATIONS

MISS NICOLA JACKMAN	
MRS FIONA MATTHEWS	
MS GEMMA HAWLEY	
MS LOUISE RIDINGS	
MS TRACY CONWAY	
MRS AMY CLARKE	
MS RACHEL WINLOW	
MR STEVEN BECK	

OFFICERS

RICHARD CULLEN	
CHRISTOPHER BARRASS	
PAUL WOOD	