
Introduction

Sunderland Council has statutory obligations relating to Religious Education in the City. This report summarises those statutory requirements and sets out key aspects of how they have been met in the academic year September 2021- July 2022.

This annual report has been prepared by the Sunderland Council Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE). Members of SACRE are representative of churches and non-Christian faiths in the region, teachers' associations and elected councillors. SACRE members donate their time and are not paid for their services.

Religious Education is required by law and contributes to community cohesion by promoting mutual respect and tolerance in a diverse society. It provides a key context to develop young people's understanding and appreciation of diversity, to promote shared values and to challenge racism and discrimination.

The Chair of SACRE Comment

The academic year 2021/22 has had some blessings and some continuing difficulties. The return to face to face meetings was resumed but once again quoracy was an issue. Following NASCRE advice we have contacted all official nominating bodies to refresh membership. The introduction of the new RE syllabus has provided a strong network of RE leads across the City.

We were saddened that our humanist member Valerie Blackett decided that she could not remain on our SACRE following the advice from the local authority about voting rights. Advice on full membership according to NASCRE the national body differs from the local authority so as Chair I have continued to press the authority to consider a variation.

Sunderland SACRE is again contacting all its nominated members to ensure that the time of the meeting is not the reason for our quoracy issues.

May I take this opportunity to thank all members of Sunderland SACRE for their support and wise counsel. I particularly wish to lay on record my thanks to Cathryn Forbes our adviser and Paul Wood our clerk as Sunderland SACRE would not function without their very able and dedicated service.

1 Meetings

After Covid-related disruption, this academic year saw a welcome return to 'in person' meetings. These took place on 19.10.21, 22.03.22 and 21.06.22. We continue to have

issues with quoracy, resulting in us being unable to elect a Chair for this academic year and therefore the Chair for the previous year has kindly remained in post.

We have explored the option of having hybrid meetings (in person and virtual) but currently we do not have the facilities to do this. To help encourage members to attend and be prepared to participate fully in the business of the meeting, a work schedule has been produced which includes standing agenda items, timely discussions of key items (such as annual reports) to ensure deadlines are met.

Work has begun on increasing our membership, using local connections via inter-faith forums and national contacts in the 'Still Standing' report.

We are exploring with the LA's solicitor whether a constitutional amendment, regarding numbers of 'committees' present required to pass a motion, would resolve our quoracy issues.

2 RE (Statutory Responsibilities)

2.1 Local Agreed Syllabus and RE in schools

The academic year 2021-22 saw the launch of a new Sunderland Agreed Syllabus.

The ASC voted to work with RE Today, using their Syllabus B as a template for our New Agreed Syllabus. In the autumn term, this work was completed and the Agreed Syllabus finalised.

The launch took place on 3rd November 2021. Following advice regarding Covid safety in educational settings, the launch took place virtually. It was led by Lat Blaylock from RE Today Services, who is the Editor of 'RE Today' magazine and a national RE adviser in the UK.

Though the event was moved to a virtual delivery, it still saw 75 schools take part in a day that was inspirational and full of practical activities to use in the classroom. The event provided an excellent platform for teachers to dive from into the new syllabus.

Schools have been able to download all the resources from the day and take advantage of discounts to purchase additional support materials to facilitate their delivery of the Agreed Syllabus. All schools have access to both a digital and hard copy of the Agreed Syllabus to work with.

Following the launch, there have been three further half-day training sessions (details in 2.2).

The current feedback from (predominantly Primary) schools has been very positive. They have seen it as an opportunity to re-launch the teaching of RE in their schools, taking advantage of new key questions, improved lesson planning resources and a shift to a more systematic approach. SACRE intends to seek further feedback through a questionnaire in the Autumn term 2022

2.2 Training, Monitoring and Other Information

Through Together for Children, the RE advisor for SACRE provides training to schools. To support the launch of the new Agreed Syllabus, the following courses were delivered:

- November 2021: RE Leading the way with the new Agreed Syllabus
- March 2022: Creating quality RE in the classroom
- June 2022: Working with the new Sunderland Agreed Syllabus (including a network opportunity)

These courses are well received and have good attendance. The June session saw the inclusion of a networking session with participants being asked to bring examples of students' work and resources they had developed using the new Agreed Syllabus. This worked well and is to be a regular feature of future sessions. The training also provides opportunities to discuss national RE trends and topics, as well as to explore further support teachers may require.

SACRE have noted that OFSTED no longer undertake any subject scrutiny visits in RE. In the past, these were useful for analysing national issues of importance. SACRE's capacity to conduct direct monitoring has always been limited and there is a need to consider how this activity will take place in the future given current budget pressures.

SACRE has looked at the preliminary findings of the RE GCSE results for Sunderland Schools 2022 and they are as follows:

- A total of 960 entries (no indication as to which course)
- 56% of entries identified themselves as female.
- 44% of entries identified themselves as male
- 75% pass rate at A*-C (F-59.5% M-40.5%)
- 98% pass rate at A*-G (F-56% M-44%)
- 10 out of 19 schools had entries, 5 of which are faith schools.

SACRE provides regular newsletter to all schools. Topics covered included:

January 2022:

- New Agreed Syllabus
- Holocaust Educational Trust
- God and the Big Bang
- RE CPD

Spring/Summer 2022:

- New Agreed Syllabus
- SACRE membership
- NATRE Spirited Arts Competition
- Free resources from Understanding Humanism
- RE Primary CPD.

Each newsletter always includes CPD that is being provided and the following paragraph encouraging schools to get in touch:

“AND FINALLY...All of us involved in teaching RE are acutely aware of the number of demands we face and how busy life gets! But we want to keep the work of SACRE relevant to everyone and to take every chance to share experiences (good and less so), as well as to celebrate your hard-won successes as widely as possible. So, even though we know it takes time and even though we know how hard you’re all already working, PLEASE do keep in touch! Let us know what you have found particularly useful of what we are sharing and what you have been doing that might helpfully be shared with others. You can always reach us by emailing [...] We are REALLY looking forward to your feedback and news (so get emailing!). “

Any queries about the provision of RE in schools, and resources to support that, are responded to by the RE advisor to SACRE who works on a non-contractual basis. In addition, the RE specialist advisor supports SACRE by attending meetings, reviewing policy documents and keeping the SACRE apprised of local and national RE issues, as well as, when requested, facilitating training and providing advice and guidance to schools within the Local Authority.

3 Collective worship

Having recently been remodelled SACRE has not as yet monitored collective worship but is seeking appropriate ways to do this.

4. Links with other bodies

Sunderland SACRE is a member of NASACRE and uses their briefings for discussion at meetings.

SACRE members have also been involved in the focus groups run by ‘The Faith and Belief Forum’ discussing ‘Religions and Worldviews’. The discussions from the focus groups have been part of the research in creating the ‘Promoting the Exploration of

Religion and Worldviews in Schools – Fostering Coherency and Diversity’ Insights Report.

5. SACRE local involvement

Both local Christian Dioceses have members on the Sunderland SACRE.

6. Management of SACRE, working in partnership

6.1 SACRE membership

The membership of Sunderland Local Authority SACRE is listed in the Appendix. Membership (and therefore representation at meetings) across the four ‘committees’ is unbalanced, resulting in some meetings being inquorate. SACRE has requested that the local authority supports them in identifying faith/community leaders to expand membership.

6.2 Training for SACRE members

Members have made use of the training materials offered by NASACRE. Several members have recently taken part in the virtual workshops run by NASACRE, including those about the roles of members and chairs and the two focusing on Worldviews. This has contributed to subsequent SACRE discussions.

6.3 SACRE funding and support

Sunderland LA has not reduced the SACRE budget and made a commitment to funding support for the Specialist RE advisor.

SACRE has made a commitment to use funding to provide CPD to support the development of RE in schools.

SACRE has been well supported by the clerk to SACRE, provided by Law and Governance Team.