

HARTLEPOOL STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

ANNUAL REPORT ACADEMIC YEAR 2019-2020

Chair's introduction and context

The academic year 2019-2020 was a year in which challenging questions about meaning and purpose, identity and issues of right and wrong seemed more important than ever. A global pandemic both brought home to us the complex web of connections between every part of the world and enforced our separation from the real and vital connections between family, friends, neighbours and colleagues that we so often take for granted. When the world slowed and quietened as a glorious spring unfurled around us, the fragility of our planet and the threats of climate change seemed ever more real. The Black Lives Matter movement shook the world.

In this context, the purpose of Religious Education to enable young people to learn about religious and non-religious worldviews, to develop their own sense of identity and belonging, to encourage empathy and respect and to develop an aptitude for dialogue so that they have a nuanced and informed understanding of political, social and moral issues¹ remains at the very heart of education.

During the academic year 2019-2020, SACRE and the Agreed Syllabus Conference have worked to review the Agreed Syllabus and to provide support to schools to implement it despite the many challenges posed by a global pandemic and the resultant restrictions on school attendance. Isobel Short, who has supported us for many years so ably, left us the legacy of one last Agreed Syllabus revision before her retirement and we are very grateful to her and wish her the very best.

We are also very grateful to Catherine Robson and Julie Rimmer of Education Durham who ensured that planned launch of the new Agreed Syllabus was able to go ahead, albeit in a very different format. Thanks should also go to Ann Turner, our highly experienced Clerk, for all her work and to the admin team at the Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) who worked so hard to ensure that schools had access to all the materials they needed.

More than anything I need to thank senior leaders and teachers in schools for their ongoing commitment to Religious Education and their excellent engagement with SACRE.

¹ Hartlepool Agreed Syllabus 2020: purpose of study

The Agreed Syllabus

The main advice offered by SACRE during 2019-20 focused on the review of the Agreed Syllabus. This was undertaken in partnership with Durham LA. Once again, we benefitted from Isobel Short's great expertise, enthusiasm and passion for Religious Education.

Partnership with teachers and other stakeholders was supported through both the Agreed Syllabus Conference and a series of network meetings throughout the revision process.

There have been a number of important changes to the Agreed Syllabus:

- throughout the syllabus the phrase religious and non-religious worldviews is used. This is intended to be inclusive of both religious and non-religious worldviews such as Humanism
- increased support for curriculum design with an emphasis on coherence
- a requirement for a unit on religious diversity at each of KS1, KS2 and KS3
- Benchmark Expectations in Knowledge and Understanding and in Critical Thinking and guidance as to what it means to 'get better' in Religious Education
- more guidance for special schools
- a greater emphasis on exploration in the Early Years
- a completely new section for KS4. There is no longer a requirement for schools to follow an externally accredited course for all students. The Agreed Syllabus now outlines a programme of study for non-examination statutory Religious Education at KS4
- sections on the contribution of RE to British values and to Literacy have been added

The Syllabus was formally adopted by the local authority in February 2020 and the next review of the syllabus will begin within five years of this date.

Following the review of the Agreed Syllabus, SACRE provided support and training to schools to implement it.

Hartlepool is a small local authority with only one secondary school and twelve primary schools that are required to use the Hartlepool Agreed Syllabus, as other schools are academies or voluntary aided schools. Engagement with SACRE from the primary academies is high and SACRE welcomes the fact that the syllabus is used in many academies without a religious character. We very much value this partnership. We are delighted that eighteen primary schools engaged with the Agreed Syllabus launch and training offer.

Schools were consulted about the timing of the launch as restricted attendance in schools was in place at the time of the scheduled launch. The overwhelming majority were keen to receive the Agreed Syllabus and support to implement it as soon as was possible, with the aim of teaching from it from September. In response, four sessions of recorded training were sent to schools over four weeks with teachers being given the opportunity to ask questions after each session and have these responded to in the next session. This training was complete before the date originally set for the face-to-face launch.

Sixteen schools accessed the training during this period and a further two schools have since requested the recordings. The enhanced longevity, sustainability and convenience to the participant of this training are advantages which, going forward, need to be carefully balanced with the loss of instructional responsiveness, social learning and networking opportunities brought by face-to-face Continuing Professional Development.

Evaluations of the training were extremely positive. All colleagues who responded (a wide variety of roles including deputies, RE leads both those with many years' experience and those new to the role, PPA teachers and HLTAs) had increased confidence. The vast majority were going to use the training to help them lead training for their colleagues, upskilling the wider workforce.

A representative sample of comments:

- *Thank you for your support - very thorough and informative work that was very accessible.*
- *I think it's been done wonderfully well considering the circumstances! It was clear and having the supporting materials on hand in a folder especially helped. I found it very supporting. Being able to download the video and resources was great as I have been able to fit in the training around my teaching commitments in school. Thank you very much Catherine!*
- *I just want to take this opportunity to thank you all for putting together such fantastic materials. Hopefully, by collaborating together and potentially establishing some kind of network of RE Coordinators, we can all make some positive strides forward in terms of teaching and learning of RE in Hartlepool.*
- *My knowledge of the new Hartlepool Agreed Syllabus has definitely increased and this course provided time for me to look at the different sections within it.*
- *Thank you for your help and support, I could go at my pace. I have missed working with other people to help clarify and make sure I'm on the right track.*
- *Catherine has done an amazing job! The sessions were short, but full of information.*
- *This was the first time I followed a blended learning program like this and I thought that the delivery was professional and showed a high level of expertise and competence.*

Next steps for SACRE

As part of the evaluation process, teachers and leaders in schools were asked to identify what further support they would value.

- 1. Teachers told us they would value more support with enquiry-based learning and with the new religious diversity units in the syllabus.**

During the autumn term 2020, a training offer for RE leadership is planned. This will also include support with enquiry-based learning and with the new religious diversity units in the syllabus.

- 2. Teachers expressed interest in the medium term planning materials developed by Isobel Short for the Durham Syllabus.**

Links to the e-shop to purchase these materials have been provided.

- 3. Teachers asked us to continue to build on the network meetings that have been part of the work of the Agreed Syllabus conference.**

SACRE has commissioned Catherine Robson through Education Durham to provide a termly network meeting and support to SACRE during the academic year 2020-21.

Collective Worship

The Primary Teaching and Learning Advisor has prepared a package of CPD, which will be offered to schools in the next academic year.

Inter-faith week – November 2019

In November 2019, SACRE organised an event to celebrate Inter-Faith Week. Pupils from nine primary schools across Hartlepool came together to showcase their RE work in a celebration of Inter-Faith Week. The Key Stage 1 and 2 children shared their work with other schools and members of the public, at a special event in Hartlepool Borough Council's Community Hub Central in York Road. Children talked about their exploration of different faiths with great enthusiasm and demonstrated excellent understanding of, and respect for, different people's faith and values.

Links to broader community initiatives

Representatives of the Youth Service attended a SACRE meeting to share with members their work to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day and celebrate difference and personal freedom. Members of SACRE later attended the Youth Service's 'Stand Together' event on Monday 27 January 2020 from 5pm-7pm at Hartlepool College of Further Education in Stockton Street. The quality of the event and especially the depth of reflection demonstrated by the young people involved was exceptional.

Determinations

There were no Determinations.

Complaints about RE and Collective Worship

There were no complaints about RE or Collective Worship.

Management of SACRE

The local authority supports SACRE with an annual budget, access to a highly experienced and knowledgeable Clerk and with additional funds to enable a comprehensive review of the Agreed Syllabus from specialist advisers from Education Durham.

The small number of Hartlepool residents who identify as having a faith other than Christianity and the small number of schools who use the Agreed Syllabus means that ensuring that SACRE has the necessary understanding and expertise to fulfil its role is both very important and a continuing challenge. We are very grateful to all who give their time and expertise in this way.

SACRE always welcomes new members who are committed to ensuring high quality religious education and collective worship in our schools. If you would like to know more, please contact Ann Turner ann.turner@hartlepool.gov.uk.

SACRE met on 3 occasions during the academic year 2019-2020. Meetings were quorate on two of these three occasions. In addition, the Agreed Syllabus Conference met during September when it resolved that the Syllabus be recommended for formal adoption following a unanimous vote in all four committees.

The membership of SACRE consists of four representative groups (or committees) and co-opted members.

Membership of SACRE as at July 2020

GROUP A: CHRISTIAN AND OTHER DENOMINATIONS

- Emma Daly
- Reverend Dr Andrew Craig
- Wendy Strain

GROUP B: CHURCH OF ENGLAND

- Jane Kashouris
- Andrea Swift

GROUP C: TEACHERS

- Gaynor Parkinson
- Maria Murray

GROUP D: LOCAL AUTHORITY

- Councillor Shane Moore
- Christopher Simmons
- Councillor Brenda Harrison

CO-OPTED

- Nicola Dunn

Clerk Ann Turner

Professional advice was provided on the review of the Agreed Syllabus by Isobel Short, Catherine Robson and Julie Rimmer of Education Durham.

All new members are provided with a copy of NASACRE's 'A reference handbook for SACRE members' and ongoing support, advice and training is provided through our partnership with Education Durham.