



**Annual Report**

**Newcastle Standing Advisory Council  
on Religious Education**

**Academic Year 2017 – 2018**

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## **The Chair's Introduction and Context**

It continues to be a privilege for me to be Chair of Newcastle SACRE.

I am indebted to my colleagues from the local authority, faith communities, those with world views and also co-opted members for their continued support and encouragement.

We have endeavoured to meet in different schools for each meeting and the hospitality shown to us has been heartwarming. I make no apology for highlighting the special welcome we get from Hadrian school with Pat Fox's delicious scones. She even makes eggless ones for our Sikh Representative!

I am particularly grateful to Ian Dawson our LA Supporting Officer who has done sterling work with regard to Networking meetings for RE teachers, after they had lapsed for some time.

These meetings are so important, especially in creating strong links between RE teachers and SACRE.

We are also grateful to Terri Armstrong for her note taking and organizing the Agenda and Minutes.

Whilst there continues to be a decline in the take up of RE at GCSE and A level, the results in Newcastle schools were reasonable in comparison to national levels. In particular, the faith schools achieved some excellent results and it is important that SACRE encourage the community schools to see the value of studying RE.

The Orthodox and Reform synagogues joined together to host the Jewish Living Experience Exhibition in May of last year. Whilst it was open to schools in the whole of the North East, several Newcastle schools attended and a group of home-schooled children also attended.

The exhibition is remaining in Newcastle and is available to be hired for a small fee.

Newcastle SACRE continues to encourage schools to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day.

The words I wrote last year about the rise of Islamophobia and the resurgence of Antisemitism, sadly still continue to be relevant.

I continue to believe that SACRE can and should play a part in giving young people the opportunity to learn about and from the faiths and world views which exist in this country.

Deanna Van der Velde  
Chair of Newcastle SACRE  
May 2019

## **Advice to Statutory Bodies**

The SACRE advised the local authority that, in order to fulfil its responsibilities adequately, consideration should be given to allocating an agreed budget for the financial year, and to ensuring that meetings are supported by local authority staff. Regarding the budget, the SACRE received assurances that all necessary and reasonable costs will be met centrally. In terms of support, an officer from the School Effectiveness Service and a local authority clerk attend SACRE meetings and liaise between the committee and the local authority.

The SACRE advised the local authority about schools where good or excellent work is undertaken in relation to RE and collective worship, and about schools where there is still room for improvement.

The SACRE emphasised that the current OFSTED inspection framework makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions about the quality of RE, collective worship or Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) Development. This is because references to these elements are embedded in the text of reports and are not graded. Inspections of individual subjects have reduced in recent years (although the SACRE appreciates that “RE: Realising the potential”, published by OFSTED in 2013, has important and instructive things to say about how RE is taught nationally). However, the SACRE also recognises the shift by OFSTED towards putting a greater emphasis on the quality of wider curriculum provision.

The SACRE made a few recommendations to the local authority about training that might be offered to teachers in the academic year 2017-18. However, the SACRE recognises that some of the most effective training now and in the future is provided through the sharing of strong practice between groups of schools. The continued development of the Newcastle network for RE leaders remains a priority for the SACRE.

The SACRE welcomed the recommendations made by the Commission on Religious Education, and was disappointed that the recommendations were rejected by the Government. Difficulties in the recruitment of RE teachers, together with the removal of RE from the EBacc, has led to a decline in the number of students taking RE at GCSE in recent years. However, the SACRE welcomed the decision by the Department for Education to increase the bursary available to trainee teachers of RE.

## **Standards and Quality of Provision of RE**

The SACRE has monitored the quality of RE in various ways, including:

Analysing public exam results (in particular, those at GCSE and A Level);

Feedback from individual SACRE members following visits to schools, including special schools;

Consultations with RE leaders in schools;

Feedback from teachers attending training courses;

The albeit limited information deriving from OFSTED inspection reports;

Currently, five aspects of a school's work are assigned grades in an inspection report: outcomes for pupils, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, personal development, behaviour and welfare, early years and effectiveness of leadership and management. SMSC Development is no longer assigned a grade. However, inspectors must take account of the quality of SMSC before coming to a judgement of a school's overall effectiveness. Consequently, an inspection evidence base must include inspection activity specifically around SMSC. Whilst this does not necessarily mean a scrutiny of a school's RE provision, RE work is a useful source of evidence to judge the extent to which pupils have, for example, the ability to be reflective about their beliefs and those of others. Inspectors also have to judge progress and standards across the curriculum beyond English, Maths and Science. Consequently, strong RE provision has the potential to "punch beyond its weight" in an inspection, providing evidence for several essential inspection areas. However, although this provides some external incentive for schools to invest in their RE provision, the fact that RE provision does not specifically have to be reported on means that inspection reports are of limited use to the SACRE in monitoring standards within the local authority.

The SACRE is aware that recent developments in education have the potential to improve the quality of RE, particularly in primary schools. As well as the increasing focus from OFSTED on the wider curriculum, there is also an increasing emphasis on deepening understanding through problem solving, reasoning and contextualisation. Whilst this emphasis has developed through the Maths curriculum, school leaders in all schools are increasingly seeking to develop these concepts by incorporating them throughout the curriculum. RE has very strong potential to develop pupils' ability to discuss, reason and explore ideas, if teachers are well supported in the subject. Consequently, developing effective support for teachers remains a key priority for the SACRE.

## **RE GCSE Results**

In the academic year 2017-18, 763 pupils sat GCSE religious Studies in Newcastle. This represented just under one third of the cohort, at 31.3%, with a further 7% of the cohort sitting the GCSE short course. The majority of these pupils (571 of them) came from Catholic secondary schools. Three of the thirteen Newcastle secondary schools did not enter any pupils for Religious Studies.

At 31.3%, the proportion of Newcastle students taking GCSE in Religious Studies declined again in 2018 and is lower than the proportion of students taking the exam nationally. However, the national proportion dropped significantly in 2018, bringing the Newcastle proportion closer to the national figure than it has been since 2015.

Of the pupils who took the GCSE, 78.6% of them achieved grades 9-4, the equivalent of A\*-C comparing favourably with the national average of 71.8%. The percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving these grades increased from 2017 to

68.7%. The proportion of students achieving the highest grades was well above the national average (30%) at 39.6%.

Special mention must be made of St Cuthbert's and Sacred Heart Schools, both of which entered almost all pupils for the exam and got over 50% of entrants to the highest grades. Also, to Kenton School, which regularly enters almost half its' students on the GCSE course and as such is the non-denominational school with the highest number of entries in Newcastle.

The SACRE recognises that the overall results are strong when compared against the national average. However, the results also highlight the wide variation of RE provision in the city and the fact that the proportion of pupils taking Religious Studies GCSE is declining against over time. A priority must be to share the obvious best practice that exists in order to improve what is offered to pupils across Newcastle.

### **RE GCSE Short Course**

164 Newcastle students were entered for the Religious Studies short GCSE course in 2017-2018. This represented 6.7% of the Newcastle cohort, which is higher than the rapidly declining national percentage of 0.5%. Of these pupils, 77.4% achieved 9-4 grades, a significant improvement from 2017 and well above the national average of 47.5%.

### **RE AS Level**

Across Newcastle, 97 students were entered for AS level Religious Studies in 2018, representing 9.5% of the city cohort. This was above the national average of 8%. Of these students, 45.4% achieved the highest grades of A–B, significantly above the national average of 35.8%.

### **RE A Level**

84 students took Religious Studies / Ethics at A level in Newcastle in 2018, representing 8.2% of the KS5 cohort. This is a sharp increase in uptake that brings the proportion of students taking the course into line with the national average for the first time in four years. Of the pupils entered for the exam, 56% achieved the top grades of A-B, compared to the national average of 52.3%. This was the first time in four years that the Newcastle results at top grades have been above the national average.

Overall, there are many positives in these KS4 and KS5 results which indicate very strong provision. However, this needs to be set against the fact that the strongest practice is confined to a small number of Catholic schools. Immediate priorities must be to improve practice at primary level and at key stage 3 if more pupils are to access RE at GCSE and A level standard.

## **Training/Continuing Professional Development**

SACRE members and the organisations that they represent can provide a wealth of support and advice to teachers about different faiths and beliefs. Contact details for the organisations are easily accessible to teachers through the Newcastle SACRE website. Although teachers in church schools can access pedagogical professional development through their Diocese, there was no local authority provision that specifically supported the teaching of RE for several years. However, two lead teachers have improved online support to schools, so that teachers can access information and resources from leading experts through blogs and Twitter. A subject leader network for teachers in all mainstream and special schools has been established which provides an opportunity to share some of the very strong practice that exists in the City.

The SACRE is tracking the extent to which schools explore the wealth of support on offer from representatives of the various faith groups in Newcastle. Evidence shows that uptake from Newcastle schools has lagged behind that of neighboring local authorities, although proportionally the uptake from special schools has been much stronger. However, some faith groups experienced a slight increase in uptake of visits from Newcastle schools in 2018.

## **Pupils and Students Withdrawn from RE and Complaints about RE**

Parents can withdraw their children from RE, and students aged over 18 can exercise the same right to withdraw from the subject. The SACRE is aware of only a small number of pupils and students who have been withdrawn from RE. Additionally, during the course of the year no formal complaint relating to RE was received by the local authority.

## **The Agreed Syllabus**

The Newcastle locally agreed syllabus was updated in 2015 and is due to be updated by 2020. The current Locally Agreed RE Syllabus does not prescribe what teaching and learning materials should be used, but the supporting guidance highlights a wealth of printed and electronic material which teachers may find useful, and this is updated regularly on the city website. Moreover, the Agreed Syllabus and the website contains advice about good resources that have come on stream in recent years.

## **Collective Worship**

No formal complaint relating to collective worship was received by the local authority. Nor was the SACRE required to make a determination about the appropriateness, for either a school or a group of pupils or students in a school, of collective worship which is wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character.

Taking the City as a whole, there are very few recorded instances of pupils or students withdrawn from Acts of Collective Worship (ACWs). We take this as confirmation that most schools are therefore providing ACWs which achieve inclusivity by, among other things, taking full account of the rich diversity of religion and belief that presently exists in Newcastle. In other words, ACWs are provided in ways that are in sympathy with the needs and aspirations of the whole school community.

SACRE members and officers associated with the local authority have witnessed or taken part in ACWs that comply with the statutory requirements.

## **Management of the SACRE**

### **Staff**

The local authority has a Head of School Effectiveness with ultimate responsibility for RE and collective worship who attends SACRE meetings and provides a point of contact for schools needing support. The local authority provides the SACRE with an admin support officer who minutes the meetings and fields correspondence, and also engages in a host of tasks designed to ensure that the SACRE can conduct its business in an efficient and cost effective manner.

### **Finance**

Regarding a budget, the SACRE has received assurances from the local authority that all necessary and reasonable costs will be met centrally

SACRE meetings, etc.

- 11 December 2017, 4 p.m. Lionel Jacobson House
- 5 February 2018, 4 p.m. Sacred Heart High School
- 9 July 2018, 4 p.m. Kenton School

Dates for 2018 -2019

- 8 October 2018, 4 p.m. Hadrian School
- 10 December 2018, 4 p.m. Benfield School
- 11 March 2018, 4 p.m. Heaton Manor School
- 24 June 2019, 4 p.m. Walbottle Campus



## **Contribution of the SACRE to the Wider Local Authority Agenda**

The SACRE contributes to the wider local authority agenda by:

- giving expression to equality, diversity, inclusion and community cohesion. It thereby makes a contribution to the local authority's public sector equality duty
- helping to raise standards in schools (note the content of the Agreed Syllabus; the website which highlights best practice; the support that individuals associated with the SACRE provide to schools; the annual monitoring of public exam results; etc.)
- assisting with the annual HMD commemoration, an event for which it has campaigned for some years
- providing the knowledge, understanding and skills necessary for teachers to provide high quality RE (note the provision of networks and training; consultations via email about specific matters raised by teachers/schools concerning RE and/or ACWs)
- avoiding unnecessary and/or unreasonable costs at a time of considerable financial difficulty/austerity (note the arrangements for meeting costs agreed with the local authority; the willingness of SACRE members to volunteer when tasks need completing on behalf of the SACRE; etc.).

## **Links with Other Agencies**

National:

Membership of the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE).

Local/Regional:

Close working relations exist with the NERRC

Close working relations exist with the region's Free Church denominations and other religious and faith communities, some of which are represented on the SACRE (e.g. the Muslim, Jewish and Sikh communities)

Close working relations exist with the Anglican and the Roman Catholic dioceses, which are represented on the SACRE

Close working relations exist with the North-East Humanists, who are represented on the SACRE

Individual SACRE members sit on other SACREs in the region or, are asked to attend other SACREs' meetings to contribute to discussions and debates.

## **Summary of Other Relevant Information**

Subject network meetings for RE leaders are now established. Supported by two lead teachers who maintain an online RE support forum, the network is well-attended and consists of primary and secondary teachers.

The SACRE has drawn up a school survey, so that it can shape priorities more effectively to meet the needs of schools. The summary of this survey will be included in the 2018-'19 annual report.

A new Ofsted inspection framework will be in place from September 2019, which will clarify how the "quality of education" judgement will be applied. At this point it is unclear how the increased emphasis on the wider curriculum will impact on the prioritisation of RE.

The key priorities for the SACRE going forward are to improve the quality of RE provision in non-denominational schools, so that more pupils are able to access the benefits of this topical and wide-ranging subject at national qualification level.

## **Appendix One: NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE SACRE – MEMBERSHIP**

**2018/19 below**

### **COMMITTEE A**

Christian Denominations and Other Religions and Religious Denominations

Judaism	Mrs Deanna Van der Velde (Chair)
Islam	Mariam Khan
Hinduism	Veena Soni
Sikhism	Cloud Singh
Buddhist	Richard Dell
Roman Catholicism	Mrs Denise Kendall
Humanism	Ron Armstrong
Quakers (Society of Friends)	Paul Hopper
Free Churches (4)	
United Reformed Church	Mrs Pat Fox
Methodist	Esther Zarifi
	Margaret Harrison
Salvation Army	Vacancy
Baptist	Vacancy

### **COMMITTEE B**

Church of England (3)	Reverend George Curry
	Judith Sword
	Vacancy

### **COMMITTEE C**

Teacher Associations

ASCL	Chris Million
ATL	Ashley Endacott
NUT	Paramjeet Singh Bhogal
NASWT	Heidi Guest
	Mr Gerard Shepherd
	Stephen Ord

### **COMMITTEE D**

Local Education Authority Nominated by City Council (4)	Councillor Jackie Slesenger
	Councillor Irim Ali
	Councillor Oskar Avery
	Councillor Nick Cott (Vice-Chair)
	Councillor Jamie Driscoll
	Councillor David Cook

## **CO-OPTED**

Phil Andre (Independent Consultant)  
Chris Million (Northumbria University)  
Aiden Gillespie (Northumbria University)  
Esther Zarifi (AQA examination board)  
K Hall (Benfield School)

## **LOCAL AUTHORITY SUPPORTING OFFICERS**

Ian Dawson (Head of Service - School Effectiveness)  
Terri Armstrong (Business Support Officer)

## **Terms of Reference**

Terms of reference as per Circular 3/89, Circular 1/94 and legislation such as the 1988 Education Reform Act and the 1996 Education Act:

- a) To advise the Authority upon such matters connected with religious worship in county schools and the religious education to be given in accordance with an agreed syllabus as the Authority may refer to the Council or the Council may see fit.
- b) To examine the current agreed syllabus and, if necessary, require the Authority to undertake a review.
- c) To monitor the teaching of religious education, aspects of OFSTED reports coming within the purview of SACRE (Section 5.1 of Reports) and the relevant part of an Action Plan, the choice of materials, the training of teachers and the conduct of collective worship within the schools of the Authority and to offer advice to the Authority on these matters when appropriate.
- d) To determine, on application by a headteacher, that the requirement for collective worship in county schools to be mainly or wholly of a broadly Christian character shall not apply to the collective worship provided for some or all of the pupils in a particular school and to carry out reviews of any determinations made.
- e) To advise the Authority on matters relating to religious education arising through the Authority's complaints procedure.
- f) To publish, each year, a report on the exercise of its functions and in particular specify:-
  - (i) any matters in respect of which the Council has given advice to the Authority and describe the nature of that advice; and
  - (ii) where any such matter was not referred to the Council by the Authority, the Council's reasons for offering advice on that matter.
- g) To support the effective provision of Religious Education and collective worship in schools.

## Appendix Two:

### Overall examination results 2018

<b>GCSE Religious Studies</b>									
<b>Newcastle</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>GCSE Religious Studies</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>
Number of students in KS4 cohort	2326	2393	2362	2438	Number of students in KS4 cohort	553195	539770	527854	523626
Number of students with entries in Religious Studies	952	879	801	763	Number of students with entries in Religious Studies	233196	252025	248063	213584
% of students entered for Religious Studies	40.9%	36.7%	33.9%	31.3%	% of students entered for Religious Studies	45.0%	46.7%	47.0%	40.8%
% of students entered achieving grade A*-C/9-4	74.7%	80.4%	78.5%	78.6%	% of students entered achieving grade A*-C/9-4	70.3%	70.4%	70.3%	71.8%
% of students entered achieving grade A*-G/9-1	99.2%	99.2%	99.6%	99.6%	% of students entered achieving grade A*-G/9-1	97.8%	97.7%	97.9%	98.1%
<b>GCSE Religious Studies Short Course</b>									
<b>Newcastle</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>GCSE Religious Studies Short Course</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>
Number of students in KS4 cohort	2326	2393	2362	2438	Number of students in KS4 cohort	553195	539770	527854	523626
Number of students with entries in Religious Studies	84	286	154	164	Number of students with entries in Religious Studies	43944	30337	12473	2780
% of students entered for Religious Studies	3.6%	12.0%	6.5%	6.7%	% of students entered for Religious Studies	7.9%	5.6%	2.4%	0.5%
% of students entered achieving grade A*-C	16.7%	39.2%	57.8%	77.4%	% of students entered achieving grade A*-C	50.5%	51.9%	47.3%	47.5%
% of students entered achieving grade A*-G	88.1%	92.0%	100.0%	100.0%	% of students entered achieving grade A*-G	95.4%	94.3%	94.5%	97.8%
<b>A Level Religious Studies</b>									
<b>Newcastle</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>A Level Religious Studies</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>
Number of A level/AS students in KS5 cohort*	1034	1177	1128	1025	Number of A level/AS students in KS5 cohort*	182919	201871	197423	195454
Number of entries in Religious Studies	79	84	64	84	Number of entries in Religious Studies	21283	21900	21180	16490
% of students entered for Religious Studies	7.6%	7.1%	5.7%	8.2%	% of students entered for Religious Studies	11.6%	10.8%	10.7%	8.4%
% of students entered achieving grade A*-B	49.4%	51.2%	43.8%	56.0%	% of students entered achieving grade A*-B	54.6%	54.7%	55.3%	52.3%
% of students entered achieving grade A*-E	100.0%	95.2%	98.4%	98.8%	% of students entered achieving grade A*-E	98.9%	98.6%	98.4%	98.1%
<b>AS Level Religious Studies</b>									
<b>Newcastle</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>AS Level Religious Studies</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>
Number of A level/AS students in KS5 cohort*	1034	1177	1128	1025	Number of A level/AS students in KS5 cohort*	182919	201871	197423	195454
Number of entries in Religious Studies	134	128	121	97	Number of entries in Religious Studies	30511	32515	13752	15590
% of students entered for Religious Studies	13.0%	10.9%	10.7%	9.5%	% of students entered for Religious Studies	16.7%	16.1%	7.0%	8.0%
% of students entered achieving grade A-B	50.0%	43.8%	54.5%	45.4%	% of students entered achieving grade A-B	43.1%	45.1%	46.9%	35.8%
% of students entered achieving grade A-E	94.8%	89.1%	97.5%	93.8%	% of students entered achieving grade A-E	92.1%	92.7%	93.3%	86.7%
<b>GCSE Religious Studies</b>									
<b>Difference to National</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>GCSE Religious Studies</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>
					% of students entered for Religious Studies	-4.0%	-10.0%	-13.1%	-9.5%
					% of students entered achieving grade A*-C/9-4	3.8%	10.0%	8.2%	6.8%
					% of students entered achieving grade A*-G/9-1	1.4%	1.5%	1.7%	1.5%
<b>GCSE Religious Studies Short Course</b>									
<b>Difference to National</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>GCSE Religious Studies Short Course</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>
					% of students entered for Religious Studies	-4.3%	6.3%	4.2%	6.2%
					% of students entered achieving grade A*-C/9-4	-33.8%	-12.7%	10.5%	29.9%
					% of students entered achieving grade A*-G/9-1	-7.3%	-2.3%	5.5%	7.2%
<b>A Level Religious Studies</b>									
<b>Difference to National</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>A Level Religious Studies</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>
					% of students entered for Religious Studies	-4.0%	-3.7%	-5.1%	-0.2%
					% of students entered achieving grade A*-B	-5.4%	-3.5%	-11.5%	3.7%
					% of students entered achieving grade A*-E	1.1%	-3.4%	0.0%	0.7%
<b>AS Level Religious Studies</b>									
<b>Difference to National</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>AS Level Religious Studies</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>
					% of students entered for Religious Studies	-3.7%	-5.2%	3.8%	1.5%
					% of students entered achieving grade A-B	6.9%	-1.3%	7.6%	9.6%
					% of students entered achieving grade A-E	2.7%	-3.6%	4.2%	7.1%

Please note that from 2018 Religious Studies became one of the new reformed GCSEs which are graded using the new 9-1 scale

\*Covers students at the end of advanced level study who were entered for at least one A/AS level, applied single A/AS level, applied double A/AS level or combined A/AS level during 16-18 study.