

**Northumberland Standing Advisory Council
on Religious Education (SACRE)**

Annual Report: Academic Year 2023 - 2024

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An Introduction from the Chair

2023-24 was a year of development for Northumberland SACRE. We have continued to support schools with the Agreed Syllabus, to ensure implementation was successful. We have also spent time working on an updated constitution to ensure we are fit for purpose as we go forward. I would like to thank all those members of SACRE who have given so generously of their time and expertise to enable this. I am also very grateful for the support of our officers, Dave Cookson and Rebecca Little, as well as to Caroline Weir, our RE Consultant, who has challenged and supported us professionally. Her deep understanding of all aspects of RE is highly appreciated.



Most importantly, I need to thank teachers and senior leaders in schools for their ongoing commitment to religious education and their engagement with SACRE.

A number of changes to the membership took place:

Committee A:

- Ted Marley sadly passed away in December 2023.

Committee B:

- Rosalynd Cant - Joined Committee B following on from an observer role.
- Chris Hudson - Stepped down due to a change in circumstance.

Resources to support the work of the SACRE continue to be ring-fenced with a specific financial contribution from Northumberland County Council, and the commitment of all SACRE's members continues to be priceless. We depend on the goodwill of the very small central team who have an impact way beyond their number.

It has been a privilege to serve as the Chair of the SACRE since 2023 and to work with a group of dedicated, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable members. I would also like to thank my vice chair Deanna Van Der Velde for her support, and our past Chair Cllr Guy Renner-Thompson, who served from 2021 - 2023.

Our meetings are enjoyable and constructive, and based on shared commitment to the promotion of the best possible provision of teaching and learning. Whilst some of our meetings have been inquorate we have piloted hybrid meetings to improve the situation. We work in an atmosphere of mutual respect and celebrate what we can learn from each other by reflecting our increasingly diverse communities.

Reverend Edward (Ted) Marley OBE passed away on 18 December 2023. Ted was a stalwart of SACRE, representing an increasing number of churches during his time on SACRE. He was always first to offer his support for working groups and the agreed syllabus conference. Ted's insights and suggestions were always pragmatic and positive and universally accepted as a good way forward! We will miss his input and cheerful disposition greatly.

Councillor Catherine Seymour (Chair of the Northumberland SACRE)

SACRE Meetings

SACRE met three times during the academic year 2023 -2024:

- 8 November 2023 - [minutes](#)
- 7 February 2024 - [minutes](#)
- 19 June 2024 - [minutes](#)

At the November meeting Rosalynd Cant, teacher at Cragside CE Primary School spoke to members around what good practice in RE looks like at her school. Details of that practice are available in the minutes above.

At the February meeting Deanna Van Der Velde explained to members that the Holocaust Memorial Day event at County Hall on 25 January, had been a success and had contained presentations from Corbridge Middle School along with Collingwood School and Media Arts College. Also in attendance to speak at the event was the Chair of SACRE, Cllr Catherine Seymour and the Leader of the Council Cllr Glen Sanderson. Cllr Seymour sent a letter to both schools to thank and congratulate them on their presentations at the event.

At the June meeting SACRE members were asked to note the re-appointment of Councillor Seymour as Chair for the ensuing 2024/2025 Council year as appointed by Council on 1 May 2024. Deanna Van Der Velde was nominated as Vice-Chair, and members unanimously agreed to her appointment.

The action plan covering the academic year is available [here](#). A new action plan is being drawn up to commence from September 2024.

The Agreed Syllabus

The Northumberland Agreed Syllabus 2022-2027 was launched in June 2022, with nearly 100 schools in attendance. Stephen Pett (National RE Adviser for RE Today) and Caroline Weir launched the syllabus with sessions for all phases and school types, as well as phase specific sessions tailored for first/primary and middle/secondary/high schools. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

Full implementation was expected from September 2023. SACRE provided two face to face training courses on the Understanding Christianity resource throughout the 2023/2024 academic year to support schools with implementing the Agreed Syllabus. One course was provided for first/primary and another for middle/secondary/high schools; colleagues from special school settings also attended. In addition, three network meetings were provided, at which the Agreed Syllabus was a topic of discussion. Additional training was provided throughout the year to boost teachers' subject knowledge and confidence with planning the units in the Agreed Syllabus. (See 'Support for Schools' section for more detail.)

Although not part of its statutory role, Northumberland SACRE seeks to serve and support all schools and academies within the county and makes its agreed RE syllabus available to all.

Working Groups

Joyce Miller led a working group on the constitution. The working group was established at a meeting of the SACRE held in July 2023. Its overarching aim was to carry out Section 16 of 2022 - 2023 SACRE action plan with regard to its relationship to the Local Authority and to examine the constitution to see if changes were necessary to improve SACRE's effectiveness.

Following the three reports from the sub-committee, a re-drafted constitution was created which incorporated all the recommendations. The draft is currently sitting with Northumberland County Council's Legal Services before SACRE members can vote and confirm the constitution. Finally the new constitution will go to Cabinet or Full Council for their final approval and adoption.

The working group consisted of Joyce, Ted Marley, Deanna van der Velde and Chris Hudson.

Standards and Monitoring of RE

Dave Cookson (Lead Officer for SACRE) met with the headteachers of the three local authority maintained secondary/high schools in the county to continue discussing the provision of RE at each. Those conversations will continue during 2024 - 2025.

Public examination data has been requested from secondary/high schools.

Joyce Miller undertook a scrutiny of RE provision in secondary/high schools based on:

- DfE workforce data, collated by RE Today Services and sent to SACREs.
- GCSE Religious Studies (RS) examination results, 2023
- Schools' websites
- The NATRE report on 2023 GCSE results: see Appendix 3.

It is hoped that such an exercise can be repeated in 2024 -25 so that SACRE can begin to build a picture of the growth or decline in provision over time.

SACRE is not aware of any schools applying for REQM status.

SACRE discussed [Deep and meaningful? The religious education subject report](#), published by Ofsted, in July 2024. Members discussed their frustration around the findings and the recommendations of the report, however noted that it did not show the entire picture as Northumberland schools were working beyond the recommendations by following the agreed syllabus.

SACRE monitors the Ofsted reports to note progress and excellence in SMSC and RE delivery, as well as issues requiring support. Two schools had a deep dive into RE (both first/primary schools). This was one fewer than in 2022 - 2023. No other reports have mentioned RE explicitly.

One school that had an RE deep dive was praised for the quality of their work. The lead inspector commended the PSHE/RSE aspects that were included through the RE curriculum. The school had been supported by Caroline Weir between inspections.

Support for Schools

In response to feedback and requests from colleagues at two Agreed Syllabus 'drop in' events in Summer 2023, a programme of training and support was planned for schools to help with colleagues to implement the new Locally Agreed Syllabus fully from September 2023.

Colleagues requested training focused on subject knowledge and on planning schemes to help them implement the LAS. Colleagues requested support with three worldviews not covered in the previous year's training programme: non-religious worldviews, Jewish worldviews, and Hindu Dharma, as well as support with planning the thematic units to weave in several worldviews in response to the unit enquiry questions.

The following subject knowledge & unit planning sessions took place:

- Understanding Christianity training - first / primary (14.11.23 and 4.12.23) (8 attendees)
- Understanding Christianity training - middle / secondary / high (24.11.23) (4 attendees)
- Jewish worldviews across the Syllabus (EYFS - KS3) (22.1.24) (21 attendees (inc. 2 SACRE members))
- Hindu worldviews across the Syllabus (EYFS - KS3) (13.2.24) (28 attendees (inc. 1 SACRE member))
- Working with the Thematic units (EYFS & KS1) (13.3.24) (12 attendees (inc. 1 SACRE member))
- Working with the Thematic units (LKS2 & UKS2) (24.4.24) (8 attendees)
- Understanding Christianity Refresher for classroom teachers (10.6.24) (12 attendees)

There were also termly RE Network meetings (cross phase):

- Autumn - Syllabus reminders, focus on non-religious worldviews from EYFS - KS3 (23.10.23) (16 attendees)
- Spring - Beginning to decolonise RE, encouraging greater representation and more inclusive practice (17.1.24) (15 attendees (inc. 2 SACRE members))
- Summer - Reflecting on the Ofsted RE Report - Deep and meaningful? (7.5.24) (15 attendees (inc. 1 SACRE member))

Feedback from these sessions has been overwhelmingly positive. In training evaluations, 100% of attendees either strongly agreed or agreed that the training was helpful, that their subject knowledge had improved and that the training would help them with their RE planning and teaching.

In addition to central training, the RE consultant provided support for 3 individual schools with curriculum planning (primary, middle and special) - via email, zoom and school visits.

Withdrawals and Complaints

There were no withdrawals (from both RE lessons and collective worship) brought to the attention of Northumberland SACRE in 2023 - 2024.

Information on withdrawals has been circulated via the [SACRE newsletter](#), signposting schools to [this document](#).

Northumberland SACRE has a role in investigating complaints against schools in relation to RE and Collective Worship. In 2023-24 there were no such formal complaints to deal with.

Collective Worship

In September 2021 Northumberland SACRE launched an updated [collective worship policy](#). The legislation determining the nature of collective worship in community schools has not altered since the Education Reform Act 1988, with the corresponding guidance offered in Circular 1/94. However, understanding of how to make the legislation meaningful in increasingly multifaith but predominantly secular school communities has changed considerably. There is now far greater agreement among teachers, educationalists, and others about what constitutes good practice in relation to collective worship.

The RE Consultant, along with four SACRE members, attended the NASACRE Collective Worship webinar (joint with AREIAC) on 20 November 2023.

Determinations

The Education Reform Act of 1988 (sections 6, 7, 9, and 12) entitles schools to apply to the SACRE for a 'Determination'. This allows the school to adjust the legal requirements to enable collective worship of a different character to take place for some or all pupils in the school. Determinations are made where a school, on behalf of a group of parents, requests Collective Worship other than that set down by statute. There were no determinations in 2023-24 for Northumberland SACRE to consider.

Northumberland SACRE has not commissioned any formal training on Collective Worship or the Determination process for Headteachers, Governors and teachers in schools during this recent period. This should be considered a development area going forward. However, SACRE members continue to generously offer schools their time and expertise. Religion and Worldview representatives offer to deliver assemblies, support curriculum planning, and provide guidance to individual teachers.

Links with Local and National Bodies

Attendance at the NASACRE Conference is offered each year -Cllr Seymour and Caroline Weir attended.

Members of SACRE were also signposted to the NASACRE training events as access to all events was purchased.

AREIAC (Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants): The RE Adviser is an AREIAC member. The meetings provide an excellent network of RE leads and the sharing of best practice and ideas.

NATRE (National Association of Teachers of Religious Education): Northumberland SACRE promotes the resources and CPD provided to NATRE through the SACRE newsletter. Caroline Weir is a member of NATRE and attended NATRE's Strictly RE Conference in January 2024.

The Northumberland SACRE maintains excellent relationships with the dioceses. The Directors of Education meet regularly to see how all parties can support each other.

Northumberland SACRE received a presentation from Karenza Passmore, the North East RE Hub Lead, in November 2023 and promote their work to schools via the [SACRE webpage](#).

The Chair of SACRE met with the Executive Director of Children's Services and the Head of School Improvement in October 2023 to ensure that the work of SACRE was well understood by senior managers within the council.

Northumberland SACRE's own arrangements

Northumberland SACRE is supported by Dave Cookson, Head of School Improvement and Caroline Weir, part-time RE Consultant. SACRE feels well supported by the team.

The Head of School Improvement acts as the conduit between the LA and SACRE on issues such as finance, data, and councillor representation.

Democratic Services appoint a clerk to attend each SACRE meeting. Rebecca Little continues in this role.

The LA supports the funding of the RE Consultant time for around 25 days a year.

The RE Consultant provides specialist RE advice and governance support, facilitates the collaborative working groups required for the Agreed Syllabus Conference, attends AREIAC/NASACRE/NATRE meetings or conferences and deals with day-to-day matters.

To raise the profile of SACRE, and raise school awareness of the role and support that SACRE can provide, a page on the [Northumberland Education](#) website acts as a central point for resources.

The SACRE action plan completed its second cycle in 2023 - 2024. The plan was amended as the emergence of RE Hubs should mean a number of roles and responsibilities are picked up regionally. The 2023 - 2024 action plan is available [here](#).

Membership, representation & recruitment

The RE Consultant and Head of School Improvement work in partnership with the chair and members of the SACRE to identify gaps with representation of the local faith communities and wider group membership. This is an ongoing process.

A full membership list as of September 2024 is available as appendix A. Vacancies are being addressed as they arise.

Training for SACRE Members

All SACRE members are access to NASACRE training. That offer was taken up by the following:

So, you've joined your local SACRE - 21 September 2023

- Jean Simpson

Collective Worship (joint with AREIAC) - 20 November 2023

- Cllr Catherine Seymour
- Cllr Les Bowman
- Cllr Nick Morphet
- Caroline Weir
- Chris Hudson

In Conversation with NASACRE (for North East SACREs) - 23 November 2023

- Dave Cookson
- Caroline Weir

How may SACREs effectively monitor schools? - 5 December 2023

- Dave Cookson
- Stuart Dearlove

RE Network - 17 January 2024

- Joyce Miller

Using data effectively as a SACRE - 18 January 2024

- Cllr Nick Morphet
- Dave Cookson
- Joyce Miller

Jewish Worldviews throughout the Agreed Syllabus - 22 January 2024

- Deanna Van Der Velde

Dealing with beliefs and practices about loss & death in your Agreed Syllabus - 2 February 2024

- Caroline Weir

NASACRE Chairs' workshop - 2 May 2024

- Cllr Catherine Seymour

RE Network - 7 May 2024

- Joyce Miller

NASACRE Conference - 20 May 2024

- Cllr Catherine Seymour
- Caroline Weir

Membership of your SACRE - 4 June 2024

- Caroline Weir

Joyce Miller also attended and completed the following:

- Teaching Sensitive Issues – The Faith and Belief Forum – June 2024
- RE Teacher Day Conference, University of Bristol – June 2024

Five members (Paul Rusby, Joyce Miller, Deanna Van der Velde, Sohail Arshad and Chris Hudson) are accredited with the Regional Hubs Kitemark.

Finance Given to SACRE

In 2023 - 2024 School's Forum provided £7000 which equated to 0.32% of the Dedicated School's Grant. Whilst the figure of £7000 has remained static it has grown as a proportion of the DSG over time, from 0.26% in 2020 - 2021.

The majority of the funding pays for the time of the RE Consultant. The remainder is used for room hire/refreshments for training events.

Northumberland County Council provide a clerk and back-office functions at no cost to SACRE.

Circulation Details

The report will be shared, discussed, and agreed by Northumberland SACRE in November 2024. The report will be made available to Headteachers and teachers through the ecourier. The report will also be added to the [SACRE page](#) of the Northumberland County Council website. The report will be shared with Northumberland County Council.

The SACRE clerk will send a copy of the SACRE report to the Department for Education: via ministers@education.gov.uk

The report will also be emailed to NASACRE for publication on its website: SACRE reports via admin@nasacre.org.uk

Appendix A: SACRE Membership as of September 2023

		Appointment date	Resignation date
Committee A: Other Faiths			
Sohail Arshad	Islam	November 2023	
Stuart Dearlove	Humanism	February 2022	
Reverend Ted H Marley, OBE	United Reform Church	January 2006	December 2023
Joyce Miller	Buddhism	November 2020	
Jean Simpson	Baptist	February 2023	
Deanna Van Der Velde	Judaism	January 2005	
Pandit Nayankumar Vyas	Hinduism	March 2023	
Vacancy	Assembly of God		
Vacancy	Salvation Army		
Vacancy	Society of Friends		
Vacancy	Jehovah's Witness		
Vacancy	Sikhism		

Committee B: Church of England			
Rosalynd Cant		March 2024	
Chris Hudson		May 2015	February 2024
Paul Rusby		November 2001	
Vacancy			
Vacancy			

Committee C: Teaching Associations/Unions			
Andrew Duffield	NASUWT	October 2015	
Tony Nicholls	NEU	September 2013	
Vacancy	ASCL		
Vacancy	NAHT		

Committee D: Local Authority			
Councillor Les Bowman		July 2021	
Councillor Nick Morphet		July 2021	
Councillor Catherine Seymour		June 2021	
Councillor Trevor Thorne		June 2017	

Observers			
Rosalynd Cant	Cragside C of E Primary School	July 2023	March 2024
Claire Curtis	Mowbray Primary School	February 2022	
Claire Dixon	Slaley First School	July 2022	
Jane Thompson	Whittingham C of E Primary School	February 2023	

Local Authority Officers in Attendance			
Caroline Weir	RE Consultant	November 2020	
Dave Cookson	Head of School Improvement	January 2017	
Rebecca Little	Clerk to SACRE	July 2021	