

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

Annual Report: Academic Year 2022 – 2023

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An Introduction from the Chair



2022-23 has been a year of consolidation and change for Northumberland SACRE. Since the publication of the new Agreed Syllabus in June 2022 we have worked with schools to ensure that they were ready for full implementation from 1 September 2023. 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 to Caroline Weir, our RE Consultant, who has challenged and supported us professionally. Her deep understanding of all aspects of RE is highly appreciated. Rebecca Little, our clerk, provides timely advice and guidance to support us and we are very grateful to her.

I would also like to thank Guy Renner-Thompson who chaired SACRE from May 2021 to June 2023. He has overseen the development of the new syllabus, an updated constitution and the introduction of new committee members.

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

A number of changes to the membership took place:

Committee A:

Josephine Cousin and Bhakti Rasa Adhikhara stepped down due to a change in circumstances.

Committee B:

Reverend J Scott stepped down due to a change in circumstances.

Committee D:

Councillor Guy Renner-Thompson stepped down in order to pick up other committee responsibilities across the council.

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 is a privilege to serve as the Chair of the SACRE and to work with a group of dedicated, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable members. Our meetings are enjoyable and constructive, and based on shared commitment to the promotion of the best possible provision of teaching and learning. We work in an atmosphere of mutual respect and celebrate what we can learn from each other by reflecting our increasingly diverse communities.

These are still challenging times, but with challenges come opportunities to bring about change for the better.

Councillor Catherine Seymour (Chair of the Northumberland SACRE)

SACRE Meetings

SACRE met twice during the academic year 2022 –2023:

- 9 November 2022 - [minutes](#)
- 15 February 2022 – cancelled due to illnesses
- 28 June 2023 - [minutes](#)

The action plan covering the academic year is available [here](#). A new action plan is being drawn up to commence from September 2023.

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 is due from September 2023. SACRE provided two face to face training sessions throughout the 2022/2023 academic year to support preparations in schools. There were also three network meetings at which the Agreed Syllabus was a topic of discussion., and a specific CPD session on the Muslim units.

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 is leading a working group on the constitution. The working group was established at a meeting of the SACRE held in July, 2023. Its overarching aim is to carry out Section 16 of SACRE’s action plan with regard to its relationship to the Local Authority and to examine the constitution to see if changes are necessary to improve SACRE’s effectiveness. A number of recommendations have been put forward thus far, and the group continues to meet into 2023 – 2024.

The working group consists 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 and RE Leads of the four local authority maintained secondary/high schools in the county to discuss the provision of RE. Each meeting concluded with a set of actions for the school to consider in order to improve the provision of RE. Communication has continued with the schools, either through direct support from Caz Weir (RE Consultant) or further discussions with Dave.

Dave has also worked with the middle, secondary and high schools to ascertain a more accurate picture of the curriculum time given to the teaching of RE. This was borne from the receipt of an extract of the school workforce census from November 2021 from NATRE. The conclusion was that the information in the census was not accurate; however Northumberland SACRE now possess a much more accurate picture of curriculum provision for secondary pupils.

Public examination data was not collected in 2022-2023.

In 2023-2024 Northumberland SACRE will consider how best to monitor RE, will resume scrutinising publicly available exam data, conversations with schools, teacher groups, and website trawls.

SACRE introduced a new standing agenda item in 2022 – 2023, “Good Practice in RE”. Schools are invited to attend and present on the aspects of RE provision in their school that they feel are most effective. We are grateful to Clare Curtis from Mowbray primary School for providing the first of these sessions in June 2023.

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

SACRE monitors the Ofsted reports to note progress and excellence in SMSC and RE delivery, as well as issues requiring support. Four schools had a deep dive into RE (3 first/primary schools and a secondary school). This was twice the number of deep dives than in 2021 – 2022. No other reports have mentioned RE explicitly.

In November 2022 SACRE discussed the analysis of SACRE Annual reports provided by NASACRE.

Support for Schools

A programme of training and support was offered to schools to help with colleagues’ transition to the new Locally Agreed Syllabus (launched June 2022) during the academic year 2022-23. Full implementation was expected from September 2023. Sessions were planned in response to data gathered at the Locally Agreed Syllabus launch event. Colleagues highlighted the need for support around subject knowledge, and planning schemes of learning based on the unit outlines within the Locally Agreed Syllabus. The key focus this year has been on subject knowledge enhancement, with a particular focus on Christians and Muslims, and how to plan using the syllabus.

The following training sessions took place:

- Understanding Christianity training – first / primary (28.9.22 and 18.10.22)
- Understanding Christianity training – middle / secondary / high (4.10.22)
- RE Network meeting – cross phase – focus on enhancing subject knowledge with signposting to where RE leads can access support with their own and their colleagues’ RE knowledge (7.12.22)
- Summer term network meetings - cross phase - Embedding the new Locally Agreed Syllabus ‘drop in’ sessions for colleagues to share ideas and ask questions (12.6.23 and 12.7.23)
- Working with the Muslim units in the Locally Agreed Syllabus (cross phase) – 14.6.23

Feedback from these sessions has been overwhelmingly positive and teachers have valued the opportunity to meet with colleagues and feel ‘less alone’. Some comments shared by colleagues at the end of the Muslim units CPD:

“Thank you so much. That was really useful.”

“This has been a really useful session and overview. Thanks for this.”

“Thank you; a very useful session.”

“It has been an excellent session - a big thank you. it has given me more confidence to teach the LKS2 unit.”

In the year 2023-24, the focus will be on three other worldviews: non-religious, Jewish worldviews, Hindu Dharma, and planning the thematic units to weave in a number of worldviews in response to the unit enquiry questions.

In addition to central training, the RE consultant provided support for individual schools with curriculum planning (both primary and secondary) – via email, online, and school visits.

Training attended by RE Consultant to help her support SACRE / schools:

- AREIAC North East meeting (Nov)
- NASACRE webinar: SACREs – a way forward – (17.11.22)
- NASACRE webinar: How to effectively use pupil and teacher voice in your SACRE – (6.12.22)
- NATRE: Strictly RE (28.1.23 and 29.1.23)
- NASACRE webinar: What’s happening to Collective Worship beyond determinations – (14.3.23)
- RE Today webinar - KS3 Buddhism (21.3.23)
- Holocaust Educational Trust webinar – An approach to teaching about the Holocaust (25.4.23)

Withdrawals and Complaints

There were two withdrawals (from both RE lessons and collective worship) brought to the attention of Northumberland SACRE in 2022 – 2023. Both withdrawals were managed very well by the primary school with the support of staff at the local authority.

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 2022-23 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.

Whilst the changes were minimal (even though the previous policy was written in 2006) it felt like an appropriate time to remind schools of their responsibilities and use the new policy to focus their minds.

In 2022-23 there were no formal complaints to deal with.

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 2022-23 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 (to complete)

Attendance at the NASACRE Conference is offered each year – 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.

The Northumberland SACRE maintains excellent relationships with the dioceses. The Directors of Education meet regularly to see how all parties can support each other. The Northumberland School Improvement Team attended the Church of England diocesan conference in June 2023.

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 new page on the [Northumberland Education](#) website has been created to act as a central point for resources.

A sub-committee met to focus on how the effectiveness of SACRE can be improved. A report was produced in July 2022 providing a list of points for implementation over the next two academic years. As a result of this work the SACRE action plan was amended to cover those points raised by the sub-committee. 7 of the 15 action points were achieved fully. 8 were still being addressed. The 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 2023 is available as appendix A. Vacancies are being addressed as they arise.

Training for SACRE Members

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

So, you've joined your local SACRE – 22 September 2022

- Nick Morphet
- Les Bowman

Applying and gaining for Westhill/NASACRE award – 13 October 2022

- Les Bowman

SACREs – a way forward – 17 November 2022

- Joyce Miller
- Les Bowman

How to effectively use pupil and teacher voice in your SACRE – 6 December 2022

- Les Bowman

Being an effective SACRE clerk – 21 February 2023

- Rebecca Little (Clerk)

What's happening to Collective Worship beyond determinations – 14 March 2023

- Clare Dixon
- Nick Morphet
- Les Bowman

SACRE annual report analysis conversation – 13 July 2023

- Jean Simpson
- Deanna Van Der Velde

Joyce Miller also completed the following training from AREIAC:

- AREIAC webinar on interpreting the census data on religion (January)
- Webinar on the REC draft handbook (January)
- Kitemark training (February)
- AREIAC North East regional meetings (February/June)

Three members of the committee (Paul Rusby, Joyce Miller and Deanna Van der Velde) have been accredited with the Regional Hubs Kitemark.

Finance Given to SACRE

In 2022 – 2023 School's Forum provided £7000 which equated to 0.29% 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 2023. 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 2022

Committee A: Other Faiths

- Reverend Ted. H. Marley, OBE: United Reformed Church (URC). (*The Methodist Church (SE Northumberland Ecumenical Area) is currently represented by the URC*)
- Bhakti Rasa Adhikhara – Hinduism
- Sohail Arshad: Islam
- Jean Simpson: Baptist
- Joyce Miller: Buddhism
- Deanna. Van der Velde: Judaism
- Stuart Dearlove: Humanism
- Josephine Cousin: Roman Catholic Church
- Vacancy: Assembly of God
- Vacancy: Salvation Army
- Vacancy: Society of Friends
- Vacancy: Jehovah's Witnesses
- Vacancy: Sikhism

Committee B: Church of England

- Chris Hudson
- Paul Rusby
- Jane Scott
- (1 vacancies)

Committee C: Teaching Associations/Unions

- Andrew Duffield (middle school teacher/NASUWT)
- Tony Nicholls (secondary/high school teacher/NEU)
- Vacancy (NAHT)
- Vacancy (ASCL)

Committee D: Local Authority

- Councillor Nick Morphet
- Councillor Les Bowman

- Councillor Guy Renner-Thompson (Chair until May 2023)
- Councillor Catherine Seymour (Chair from June 2023)
- Councillor Trevor Thorne

Observers

- Claire Curtis (Mowbray Primary School)
- Rosalynd Cant (Cragside C of E Primary School)
- Claire Dixon (Slaley First School)

Local Authority Officers in Attendance

- Caroline Weir, Northumberland RE Consultant
- Dave Cookson, Head of School Improvement
- Rebecca Little, Clerk to the SACRE, Democratic Services