

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OXFORDSHIRE
STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE)**

September 2020 – Aug 2021

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Section 1. Introduction

1.1 Welcome from the Chair

I am delighted to introduce this Oxfordshire SACRE Report for 2020-2021, and especially to acknowledge the work of various people during these difficult times. From within SACRE, we miss the contributions of the previous Chair, Councillor Charles Mathew, and who was chair at the time covered by this report. Charles served on SACRE as a local authority representative, for many years, and worked doggedly and tirelessly to support it. As chair, his warm welcome for members at meetings and his expertise in liaising directly with the local authority were invaluable. He is much missed. I also want to thank all the members of SACRE over this period. Individuals, despite any challenges of their own, still remained committed to SACRE's work, as we became habituated to online meetings.

More importantly, however, I want to mark the work of teachers during these difficult times, in providing online and face-to-face teaching under challenging and changing circumstances. Our work as SACRE is only manifested in your professionalism and expertise, which was tested hard in this year - and in the next year. Religious education depends on you, and my hope is that you will be able to flourish again as normality returns.

Dr Nigel Fancourt
Chair, Oxfordshire SACRE

1.2 SACRE Statutory Duties

The Education Reform Act 1988 required Local Education Authorities to convene a SACRE consisting of members appointed by the Authority to represent:

- Group A** Christian denominations and other religions and religious denominations
- Group B** The Church of England
- Group C** Teachers' Associations
- Group D** The Local Authority

Membership is for a period of three years and full members of the SACRE may co-opt non-voting members to the Council. **Membership and attendance for the period 2021-22 can be found in Appendix 1.** SACRE meetings are open to the public and Oxfordshire SACRE meets three times a year in County Hall. In the academic year 2020-21 all meetings were held on-line. As we have been reviewing our agreed syllabus, we also held three Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) meetings on the same dates.

The SACRE can advise the Authority upon matters connected with RE and collective worship in county schools; matters such as teaching methods, materials and teacher training are mentioned in the Act. The advice offered by the SACRE carries no statutory force. In Hertfordshire, SACRE also works closely with many Academies and Free Schools to try to ensure that all children and young people in the County receive high quality RE and schools provide appropriate acts of collective worship.

SACRE has two functions; it can require the LA to review its current Agreed Syllabus and it may determine, on application by a head teacher, that the requirement for collective worship in county schools to be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character, shall not apply to the collective worship provided for some or all the pupils in a school. Each SACRE must publish an annual report on its work.

1.3 Purpose of the Report

The Education Act 1996, Section 391 (6) and (7) requires that each year the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) of each local education authority will 'publish a report as to the exercise of its functions and any action taken by representative groups on the Council during the last preceding year.'

In particular, the report shall:

- specify any matters in respect of which the Council has given advice to the Authority;
- broadly describe the nature of the advice given; and
- where any matter was not referred to the Council by the Authority, give the Council's reason for offering advice on the matter.

This report deals with these matters in summary, for the academic year September 2020 to August 2021. The full Oxfordshire SACRE met three times during the year and considered a diverse range of topics, and the Agreed Syllabus Conference also met three times on the same dates.

1.4 SACRE Meetings 2020-21

SACRE met once each term on-line

10th Nov 2020

- Overview of the workplan
- Constitution
- Monitoring schools

3rd March 2021

- SACRE budget
- Communication with schools]
- NASACRE Survey
- Constitution
- Monitoring
- Succession planning

8th June 2021

- Ofsted review of research on RE
- NASACRE Conference
- Annual Report 2019-20

In addition, three meetings of the Agreed Syllabus Conference met to discuss the review of the 2014 Agreed Syllabus, that had been delayed by two years, initially to await the publication of the Commission on RE Report from the REC and then as a result of school lockdowns. See below section 2.2.

There have been discussions about how we can align the work of SACRE to LA priorities and the process of developing a strategic plan began but was interrupted by a change in the County Council majority party after the 2021 elections. We established a 'Vision and Strategy Group' which met twice to try and move this agenda forward. The V&S group identified a range of issues to be addressed, some of which are listed below:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>RE is academically justifiable in and of itself</p> <p>On-going agreed syllabus</p> <p>Broad representation on SACRE</p> <p>Meetings consistent and regularly held</p> <p>Reasonable take up and buy in from academies</p> <p>There is an adviser 15 days</p> <p>Good links with LA – CCs and LA Officer Experience and expertise</p> <p>We have a clerk</p> <p>We have a primary HT rep</p> <p>Link to Diocese</p>	<p>Adviser time</p> <p>No FT Adviser</p> <p>Teacher pressures so less likely to have after school commitments</p> <p>LA funding – demise of LA</p> <p>National priorities eg Ofsted, E-Bacc</p> <p>Trained specialist teachers</p> <p>Lack of CPD</p> <p>Lower priority on RE</p> <p>Schools unaware of SACRE</p> <p>Comms with schools</p> <p>Website</p> <p>Some Members not actively involved</p> <p>Collective Worship support and information</p> <p>PR with schools – comms</p>
Opportunities	Threats
<p>Use of technology – Zoom</p> <p>Ofsted?</p> <p>LA SIS targets – align with some of these?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent leaders • Excellent outcomes • Excellent well-being • Excellent engagement <p>LA Children Services strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0-5 • Mental Health (SMSC?) • Youth exploitation (radicalisation?) <p>Members need to actively take on work of SACRE</p> <p>Develop clearer expectations of and induction for members</p> <p>Greater clarity of roles and expectations of adviser, clerk and LA officer would enable more effective working of SACRE</p> <p>New AS is opp for comms</p>	<p>Ofsted?</p> <p>MATs? Can break down traditional partnership working – some MATs limit who you work with</p> <p>Academisation agenda</p>

Develop links with Diocese and other partners incl academy trusts SIAMS Success of SACRE is dependent on people being able to work with teachers in schools	
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1.5 SACRE Budget

This year there has again been no designated budget for SACRE. Support from a specialist adviser and for clerking have been bought in by the LA. No specified budget has been allocated for the Agreed Syllabus review, but adviser time is being provided on an ad-hoc basis. Whilst this is not ideal, and we have asked for a specific SACRE budget, this has enabled SACRE to function. A designated and agreed budget, drawn from the CSSB as per the paper distributed by NASACRE:

The government's guidance is clear:

An LA should fund and support a SACRE and an ASC satisfactorily in line with the duty to constitute or convene each of these bodies and to enable them effectively to carry out their functions.

(Religious Education in English schools: Non-statutory guidance 2010, page 11)

The following can be reasonably expected to be funded from the CSSB:

- *a clerk*
- *a professional officer who has expertise in RE curriculum design;*
- *a publicly accessible place to meet;*
- *the reasonable expenses of members;*
- *publishing the agreed syllabus and other SACRE materials (including agendas and minutes), most usually on the LA website.*
- *NASACRE subscription and AGM attendance*

*The national recommendation is that an LA should allocate **at least 2%** of the CSSB to SACRE in order that SACRE can carry out its statutory duties.*

Discussions with the LA are on-going.

1.6 Some key priorities for the next two years are:

1. Establishing a secured SACRE budget, linked to LA and School Improvement priorities, from which to plan and monitor effectiveness
2. To work and build partnerships with:
 - a. our schools
 - b. our faith communities
 - c. our Local Authority
3. Membership:

- a. Representation
- b. Training
- c. Engagement and involvement
4. Agreed Syllabus development and support
5. Monitoring:
 - a. RE and collective worship
 - b. School questionnaires
 - c. Websites
 - d. Examination data
 - e. Workforce data
 - f. External reports (Ofsted, SIAMS –public documents and therefore named for SACRE reference)
6. Preach to the converted, the skeptics and the disinterested about the educational value of RE, collective worship and close working between schools and SACRE
7. Communication with schools
 - a. Website(s) that suit OUR purpose
 - b. Newsletter
 - c. Training
8. Links with key partners
 - a. Secondary Headteachers
 - b. Primary Headteachers
 - c. Special Education
 - d. Governors
 - e. Teaching School Hubs
- 9. To be proud champions for quality religious education and collective worship, to be and feel valued, and to value our own work.**

2 RE in Oxfordshire Schools

2.1 Standards and Quality of provision of RE

Due to the impact of the Covid-19 Lockdown from March, there were no published examination results for either GCSE or A-Level Religious Studies from 2021.

Looking back at some of the questions posed from last years' reports, SACRE has highlighted the following issues:

- How do we stretch and engage the most able students in KS4 and KS5?
- What priority is RE given in schools?
- What is the provision of RE like in KS3 and KS4 across different schools and why?
- What priority is given to RE in primary schools?
- What is the quality of RE in primary schools?
- How effective is transition across primary to secondary RE?
- How well trained and prepared are teachers to provide quality of RE appropriate to the stage and needs of their pupils?
- How effective is the agreed syllabus in supporting good quality RE?
- How can SACRE support schools in working collaboratively to provide quality RE?

SACRE this year commenced a review of a sample of school websites to monitor the curriculum offer. This work will proceed into the next academic year and will be set alongside other data and evidence, such as Ofsted reports, a school questionnaire, examination results (when available) and school workforce data, so that we can gain a richer picture of the provision for and quality of RE in Oxfordshire schools.

It is hoped that, from next year (2021-22) public examinations will resume as normal and that we will be able to analyse the performance in Religious Studies at both GCSE and A Level. For this year, please see the table below with the last results we have (2019), which will form the baseline for comparison, with appropriate narrative, with the next set of public examinations.

Examination results 2018-21

GCSE 2019	% entry			%9-7			%9-5			%9-1		
	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2021
Oxfordshire	39%	46%	na	21	23	na	53.3	55	na	98.3	99	na
National	-	-		30	31	na	60	61	na	98	98	na

A Level 2019	% entries			% A*-A			% A*-C			% A*-E		
	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2021
Oxfordshire	5.0	7.0	na	17	21	na	71	70	na	98	97	na
National				23	22		70	76		98	98	na

2.2 The effectiveness of the agreed syllabus

Reviewing the agreed syllabus was underway from the autumn term and a survey was sent out to schools. Unfortunately, schools did not respond, another indication of the difficulties of communicating with schools. In the end, members of the writing panel responded to assist in their thinking.

A writing panel of primary and secondary teachers was set up in the spring term and met on-line in the spring and summer terms. Lockdowns, staff absences and the stresses of distant learning and Teacher Assessed Grades severely hampered this work, but progress was made and broadly the writing panel agreed that the syllabus would be broadly similar to the current one, but reflecting developments from the Commission report of 2018, Ofsted developments on the curriculum and the Review of Research published in May 2021.

3. Collective Worship

3.1 Determinations

SACRE has not received any requests for determinations with regard to Collective Worship.

3.2 Complaints

There have been no formal complaints under the statutory complaints relating to Collective Worship or RE.

3.4 Training and support

No training or support has been provided this year

Annex 1 SACRE Attendance 2020 – 21

Member's name/ group represented	10 November 2020	3 March 2021	8 June 2021
Committee A			
Rose Westwood (Methodist)	apology	absent	absent
Nicholas Wood (Baptist)	✓	✓	apology
Steve Beegoo/Giles Beck (Oxfordshire Community Churches)	✓	✓	✓
Fraser Long (Roman Catholic)	apology	apology	absent
Sarah Montagu (Judaism)	absent	apology	✓
Sheikh Ramzy (Islam)	✓	apology	✓
Chandra Vadivale/Sathya Vadivale (Hinduism)	absent	apology	absent
Committee B			
Helen Norman (Church of England)	✓	apology	✓
Christine Price-Smith (Church of England)	✓	✓	✓
Carol Worthington (Church of England)	✓	✓	✓
Committee C			
Ruth Cohen (Teacher)	✓	apology	n/a
Christian McGuinness (Teacher)	n/a	n/a	✓
Committee D			
Jamila Azad (Local Authority)	✓	apology	n/a
Charles Mathew (Local Authority)	✓	✓	n/a
Bob Johnston (Local Authority)	✓	apology	✓
Co-opted members			
Arzhia Habibi/Natasha Robinson (Baha'is)	✓	✓	apology
Shahin Bekhradnia (Zoroastrianism)	✓	✓	absent
Margaret Godden/John Webster (Humanists)	apology	✓	✓
Nigel Fancourt (University of Oxford)	✓	✓	✓
Officers in attendance			
Jane Ratcliffe (Local Authority)	✓	✓	✓

Bill Moore (SACRE Advisor, RE Specialist)	✓	✓	✓
Helen Batten (Clerk to SACRE)	✓	✓	✓

Annex 2 SACRE Development Plan 2019-21

Oxfordshire SACRE strategic priorities 2019 – 2022 (v4a 20/11/19)

1. Improve the effectiveness of SACRE by
 - a) Working in close partnership with the LA (Chairman and officers' termly meetings, budget)
 - b) Raising the profile and improving the marketing of SACRE (website, meet in schools, linking to wider school priorities, congratulate schools)
 - c) Linking with headteacher, governor and teacher bodies (provide clear educational and inspirational rationale for RE and collective worship)
 - d) Ensuring membership is representative and fit for purpose (identify gaps, inclusive, consider barriers, recruit teachers, ensure attendance, be proactive)
 - e) Developing manageable systems and working practices
 - f) Improve communications with schools
 - g) Linking to other educational initiatives
 - h) Improve links with faith and belief communities

2. Identify effective school provision and practice for RE and collective worship across the County and address non-compliance by
 - a) Improving communication with schools (on-line; direct comms with subject leaders; REfocus; meeting in schools)
 - b) Linking with headteacher, governor and teacher bodies
 - c) Accurate and timely data of examination performance
 - d) Monitoring new Ofsted reports (establish routines, set up links with LA,
 - e) Developing school spreadsheets (contact schools for leaders' details; establish preferred format for info)
 - f) Establishing and enabling/supporting networks of schools

3. Support schools in providing better quality RE and collective worship by
 - a) Producing a locally agreed syllabus that enables schools to plan a coherent RE curriculum (Sept 2021)
 - b) Producing supporting guidance and policies
 - c) Providing and/or sign-posting schools to appropriate CPD
 - d) Improving links with local faith and belief communities
 - e) Establishing and enabling/supporting networks of schools

Annex 3 ASC 8th June 2021 report from Agreed Syllabus Writing Panel

a) General

1. Recommend using only **Religious Education in the title** (continue with 'Challenging RE?') but with a **strapline beneath including 'Worldviews'** (eg 'Exploring and evaluating the importance of religious and non-religious worldviews (WV) in modern Britain and beyond'). WP felt that being explicit about WV would help teachers plan inclusive, accurate and challenging RE in the classroom in the context of modern Oxon, Britain and the world. Generally agreed!
2. Want to maintain both the **academic and the personal dimensions of RE**, but need to move away from 'learning about and from'. Recommend clarity about the personal, linking to Ofsted, but more significantly to the experiential (as in based in experience, not simply 'experiencing') and reflective aspects – WVs arise at least partly out of how we experience our world. Clarity needed? Perhaps pers dimension in ped process not curric?
3. Needs to take on board the **experience and background** of the children, but to make sure that it leads them into sound knowledge and understanding of religions and worldviews, including their impact on people's lives and then allowing students to respond both academically and personally (ie how this learning has affected their own perspectives – if at all) Powerful knowledge
4. Breadth of the **Big Questions and linked concepts** – give children chance to explore, reason, reflect. Also take really big concepts and smaller elements to then try to answer a bigger question. (eg worship – eucharist – salvation – forgiveness) Not imposing western structures onto eg dharmic traditions
5. Important to reflect both **similarities and differences** within and between religions and worldviews as pupils progress through the key stages. This achieved through deeper understanding of concepts (universal; religious; religion/belief-specific) Pedagogical or curric? Ensure diffs and sims threaded through whole learning
6. The **rationale, purpose and aims** need to be explicit, succinct and clear so that we can get buy-in from school leaders, teachers, pupils and parents. Different audiences – need to approach differently?
7. It needs to be **'knowledge-rich'** – ie pupils need to learn and understand what religious and non-religious worldviews are: their beliefs and practices and how these influence individuals and communities, with increasing understanding of similarities and differences as they progress through the key stages. Links to 3 and 4 Also links to qn of systematic/thematic
8. **The agreed syllabus itself (ie the statutory requirements) should be as short as possible** with clarifying appendices and information such as key concepts and knowledge of different religious and non-religious worldviews within the document itself for guidance. The WP strongly recommends separate additional support materials such as subject leaders' handbook, exemplar planning, suggested resources and support etc to assist schools and teachers. Yep!
9. Need to be clear about **what the AS is and is not**, who it is for and how the support materials relate to the AS itself. The AS is the basic planning document for RE leaders to plan the school curriculum. It is not for teachers to plan their lessons. That is where the support materials come in. Need to make AS as easy to use as poss for teachers to teach high quality RE
10. The WP discussed the **tension between statutory expectations (ie this is what schools have to do) and the flexibility to plan a school-appropriate curriculum**. The general

recommendation is that there needs to be more specific expectation in Primary and less in Secondary; more structured in Primary and more autonomy in Secondary. Sec still needs clarity and what is expected/reqd

11. **Planning needs to be open.** The AS should not dictate how schools provide RE. For example, whether systematic (religion-by-religion) or thematic; whether disciplinary, phenomenological or conceptual etc. Rather it should allow schools the freedom to use some or all approaches as appropriate to their context, with non-statutory guidance to support them in this within the appendices (general) and additional support materials (with exemplifications). Some research here (NF could you reference?) to suggest not mixing the two
12. WP would like to see KS2 split into **Lower and Upper KS2** in line with national curriculum and to aid progression and planning. Yes!
13. Need built in **freedom to tailor (be flexible within) the AS** in a way that is current, and responsive to current issues e.g. BLM/anti-racism/anti-semitism/islamophobia needs to be some clear expectations but flexibility to address issues (powerful knowledge/knowledge-rich?)
14. Assessment should be clear in terms of expectations (ie what it is setting out to achieve) but allow flexibility for schools to adapt to their whole-school approach to assessment. The expectations in the AS itself, with guidance on different possibilities in the appendices. Make sure not judging just literacy etc but can recognise RE learning. NF to share Swedish (?) curric assessment
15. Current aspects of the AS that teachers would like to keep/adapt include:
 - i. Legal requirements
 - ii. Rationale
 - iii. Aims
 - iv. Learning process
 - v. Enquiry and concepts
 - vi. Inclusion and SEN
 - vii. What pupils will learn Reception to KS5
 - viii. Progression and assessment
 - ix. Aspects of the appendices

The above to be worked on by the WP to adhere to some general principles, to be agreed by the ASC, such as:

- Be succinct and clear, esp re rationale, purposes and aims
- Only keep the bare minimum in the statutory AS, the rest in appendices and support materials
- Balance between statutory expectations and autonomy shifting as move through key stages
Focus on support materials
- Strong focus on knowledge and understanding as in Ofsted Research Report 2021:
 1. 'substantive' knowledge: knowledge about various religious and non-religious traditions
 2. 'ways of knowing': pupils learn 'how to know' about religion and non-religion
 3. 'personal knowledge': pupils build an awareness of their own presuppositions and values about the religious and non-religious traditions they study
- Worldviews within a sub-heading/strapline