

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

September 2019 – Aug 2020

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FOREWORD from Charles Mathew, Chairman –
Oxfordshire County Councillor for the division of Eynsham

In what will be my last Chairman's foreword, I would like to extol the value of Oxfordshire SACRE in ensuring that RE is properly represented in the curriculum of every school and thus able to provide our pupils with the right diet in this age of controversies between beliefs and modi vivendi. It has been a great pleasure to be Chairman and to work with fellow SACRE representatives, from faith communities, the teaching profession and Council Members in this important aspect of education. It is indeed a body for local community and democracy!

We continue to make some progress in our communications with schools but there is still much to do, as can be seen from the SACRE Development Plan appended to this report. Oxfordshire County Council has been supportive, and I would particularly like to thank Catherine Hayward, our LA Officer, who left us after the Spring meeting; her support has been most helpful. We welcomed, in her place, Jane Ratcliffe, who has already shown a similar commitment.

I cannot ignore the impact of Covid-19 and the national Lockdown, not just because SACRE has had to adjust to on-line meetings, but more importantly the effect it has had on our schools. SACRE has been immensely grateful for the commitment shown by teachers and school leaders in such challenging circumstances.

Thank you to all members for their contributions this year and let us hope some of the missing invitees begin to participate or at least send apologies when failing to attend meetings. Thank you to Bill Moore for his guidance and judgement in the management of Oxfordshire SACRE and to Helen Batten for keeping us in line so gallantly!

I leave you with a thought from Simone de Beauvoir, French existentialist philosopher- 'It is doubtless impossible to approach human problems with a mind free from bias'. Guilty as charged, your Honour!

Councillor Charles Mathew

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 2020.

Looking back at some of the questions posed from last year's report, SACRE has highlighted the following actions:

1. Why is there a decline in entries at A Level?
How do we stretch and engage the most able students in KS4 and KS5?
What is the impact of the EBacc and how can we address this?
[Explore with Secondary RE leaders and teachers via networks, either face-to-face or online.](#)
2. What priority is RE given in schools?
What is the provision of RE like in KS3 across different schools and why?
[Explore with Secondary Headteachers, curriculum leads and RE leads.](#)
[Review and analysis of school websites.](#)
3. What priority is given to RE in primary schools?
[Explore with Primary Headteachers.](#)
4. What is the quality of RE in primary schools?
[Explore with Primary RE leads](#)
5. How effective is transition across primary to secondary RE?
6. How well trained and prepared are teachers to provide quality of RE appropriate to the stage and needs of their pupils?
7. How effective is the agreed syllabus in supporting good quality RE?
8. How can SACRE support schools in working collaboratively to provide quality RE?
[Explore with both Primary and Secondary RE leads.](#)

We cannot assume anything specific from exam results, nor presume anything in relation to possible answers to these questions. However, the evidence does suggest that we need to act urgently to explore the issues, find out what the situation is and act to provide any support needed.

These are not easy to answer, but if we want RE to thrive in Oxfordshire, then as an educational community we need to collaborate on exploring:

- a) what the true situation is;
- b) what are the underlying issues;
- c) what are the best ways forward;
- d) how SACRE can work with schools, teachers, the LA and faith communities to achieve this.

These will feed into the strategic plan and work of SACRE over the next two years.

We welcome questions and suggestions from schools and other academic institutions as to how SACRE can support learning and teaching to ensure children and young people get the best religious education they can. We wish to learn from your own experience and situation to help improve RE in all our schools.

Examination results 2018-20

GCSE 2019	% entry			%9-7			%9-5			%9-1		
	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2020
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	2020
Oxfordshire	5.0	7.0	na	17	21	na	71	70	na	98	97	na
National				23	22		70	76		98	98	

2. Managing the SACRE and Partnership with the LA and Other Key Stakeholders

Meetings

SACRE meetings are public meetings and take place in County Hall. Agendas and minutes are published on the OCC website.

This year, SACRE held three meetings, one each term, as below:

1. 12th Nov 2019
2. 4th March 2020
3. 9th June 2020

All meetings were held in County Hall, with refreshments provided and ran from 4-6pm, apart from the June meeting which, because of 'Lockdown', was held virtually via Microsoft Teams.

Items discussed at these meetings include:

- Continued discussions on the significance of the RE Commission report, published September 2018
- Teacher Network meetings
- The extension to the 2015-20 Agreed Syllabus and the impending review
- Non-compliance of schools and how to monitor
- The new Regional Ambassadors for RE
- SACRE Funding
- The new Ofsted Framework and Handbook
- SACRE priorities and strategic planning

The two Network meetings held were a positive in-input to SACRE's work and will be extended with the review of the agreed syllabus. SACRE encourages teachers of RE to share good practice and to support each other, and also to inform SACRE of their needs through the newsletter REFocus and the OxonBucksRE Facebook group. SACRE recommended that these become more frequent, whilst recognising that this is a significant challenge given the number of schools, the size of the County and limitations of SACRE funding.

In the March meeting, we received an excellent presentation from the regional Ambassador for RE, Sarah Payne, promoting the establishment of local networks and linking them to the NATRE groups. The aim of these groups is to engage teachers themselves to develop links and gain the support they want and need. Such networks will also help establish a clearer picture of what is going on in RE across the LA.

Working with the OCC SIS, we monitored 12 primary Inspection Reports from Sept 2019 – March 2020 that mentioned RE or Collective Worship. Most of these were favourable, if not particularly detailed. Where it was not, it was largely because pupils were not offered a well-planned and rich curriculum enabling them to learn about different beliefs and cultures that are represented in modern Britain. Our next step is to make this part of our regular monitoring and also to include secondary reports.

It was considered vital that as far as possible we need to get schools on board and to offer support, but that where there was clear neglect of RE, firmer action would need to be taken.

One way forward would be to look at the school curriculum published on their websites. SACRE began this process, but it remains a work in progress.

There was much discussion about the Constitution, which had not been updated since 2010. In particular SACRE believes that the membership needs to be updated in the light of changes in education that have taken place since then. We will await the result of the next Census for Committee A, will re-consider the teacher representation to take account of different arrangements for schools and to ensure we have good teacher representation to reflect their needs and to allow for better communication with schools. The priority should be to make links with strong practitioners who will be able to assist the work of SACRE. It would be good to have an official Governor or Governor Services representative within Committee D.

We produced a SACRE Development Plan, which can be seen in Annex 2. This followed from a good discussion about SACRE's self-perception. It was agreed that SACRE needs to become more outward-looking to schools, faith communities and the LA. Priorities should include championing integration and diversity, advising schools and facilitating network meetings. In this way we need to become a greater resource to schools and support quality RE and collective worship more directly. This can be done by having working groups or committees and producing an effective strategic plan. It was recognised that support from the LA in the person of the LA link officer was very helpful, but also the limited resources and communication with the LA beyond Schools services.

3 Links with the LA

The partnership with the LA remains vital for SACRE to function effectively. We recognise that these are challenging times for LAs and that there is much for them to do with dwindling resources. However, properly resourced and funded, and with good officer support, communication with schools and members, SACRE can provide good value-for-money in terms of education, community cohesion and promoting Fundamental British Values through Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development in schools. Teachers need CPD and networking and, for RE, SACRE can act as a hub to promote effective school-to-school support, co-ordinating and facilitating the process. We bid farewell to Catherine Hayward as our LA officer. She has been a tremendous support and advocate for SACRE and we extend our thanks and appreciation. In June we welcomed Jane Ratcliffe from the School Improvement and look forward to working with her to develop our partnership with the LA.

SACRE sent out support for remote learning to schools in May 2020, via the LA Schools' website.

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 and costs of refreshments at meetings have been met on an ad-hoc basis.

4 The effectiveness of the agreed syllabus

The process for reviewing the agreed syllabus started in the Spring Term.

Rationale

It was agreed that a sequenced and coherent curriculum will be produced, based on the Ofsted notions of intent, implementation and impact. The structure of the syllabus will provide progression of knowledge and skills since each will support the other, in the anticipation that children will use RE as part of their personal development so that they can reflect on what they themselves and others think and believe, and use this to gain deeper understanding of life in modern Britain and the wider world.

The writing panel of teachers will drive the development of the new syllabus and will comprise approximately ten teachers covering all ages from five to eighteen.

It was agreed to concentrate activities on publication of the syllabus during March or April 2021, and then to spend some time developing appropriate support for teachers rather than trying to achieve both objectives simultaneously. Consideration will also be given to support materials, depending on available funding.

Given the impact of Covid and Lockdown that began shortly after the March meeting, and the stresses placed on teachers, school leaders and the LA to address this, it was agreed to postpone the review of the agreed syllabus until next academic year (2020-21) with the renewed implementation to be Sept 2022.

5 Collective Worship

Determinations

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

Complaints

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

Annex 1 SACRE Attendance 2019 - 20

Member's name/ group represented	12 November 2019	4 March 2020	9 June 2020
Committee A			
Rose Westwood (Methodist)	apology	absent	absent
Nicholas Wood (Baptist)	apology	absent	absent
Steve Beegoo/Giles Beck (Oxfordshire Community Churches)	✓	✓	✓
Fraser Long (Roman Catholic)	absent	absent	apology
Sarah Montagu (Judaism)	✓	✓	✓
Sheikh Ramzy (Islam)	✓	✓	✓
Chandra Vadivale/Sathya Vadivale (Hinduism)	✓	apology	apology
Committee B			
Helen Norman (Church of England)	vacant	✓	✓
Christine Price-Smith (Church of England)	✓	apology	✓
Carol Worthington (Church of England)	apology	✓	apology
Committee C		✓	
Ruth Cohen (Teacher)	apology	✓	apology
Lex George (Teacher)	absent	apology	apology
Committee D			
Charles Mathew (Local Authority)	✓	✓	✓
Bob Johnston (Local Authority)	✓	absent	✓
Glynis Phillips (Local Authority)	absent	absent	vacant
Co-opted members			
Stephen Vickers/Helina Taghavi/ Arzhia Habibi (Baha'is)	✓	✓	✓
Shahin Bekhradnia (Zoroastrianism)	✓	✓	✓
Margaret Godden/John Webster (Humanists)	✓	✓	✓
Nigel Fancourt (University of Oxford)	apology	✓	✓
Officers in attendance			

Catherine Hayward/Kim James/ Jane Ratcliffe (Local Authority)	✓	apology	✓
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
 - f) Promote RE Quality Mark (REQM)

Priority 1 Improve the effectiveness of SACRE by

What we need to do	Actions	Success criteria
<p>a) Working in close partnership with the LA (Chairman and officers' termly meetings, budget)</p> <p>b) Raising the profile and improving the marketing of SACRE</p> <p>c) Linking with headteacher, governor and teacher bodies</p> <p>d) Ensuring membership is representative and fit for purpose</p> <p>e) Developing manageable systems and working practices</p> <p>f) Improve communications with schools</p> <p>g) Improve links with faith and belief communities</p>	<p>Termly Chairman and Officers meetings</p> <p>Provide clear educational and inspirational guidance for RE and collective worship on website, meet in schools, linking to wider school priorities, congratulate schools</p> <p>Liaise with OCC</p> <p>Identify gaps, liaise with OCC re local communities' website,</p> <p>3x SACRE meetings, working groups</p> <p>REFocus, networks, OTSA on-line; direct comms with subject leaders; meeting in schools, surveys/questionnaires</p> <p>Ensure representatives report to and from their constituent groups. Also see e) above</p>	<p>Schools will know what good quality RE looks like</p> <p>There will be an effective interface between SACRE and RE Co-ordinators/leads</p>

Priority 2 Identify effective school provision and practice for RE and collective worship across the County and address non-compliance by

What we need to do	Actions	Success criteria
<p>a) Improving communication with schools</p> <p>b) Linking with headteacher, governor and teacher bodies</p> <p>c) Accurate and timely data of examination performance</p> <p>d) Challenging non-compliance</p> <p>e) Developing school spreadsheets</p> <p>f) Establishing and enabling/supporting networks of schools</p>	<p>See 1 g)</p> <p>See 1 d)</p> <p>liaise with SIS, Networks,</p> <p>Establish procedures, research school websites and monitor Ofsted reports, establish routines, set up links with LA</p> <p>Liaise with Clerk, contact schools, liaise with Oxford Diocese, develop spreadsheet with contacts. Update annually.</p> <p>Liaise with Regional Ambassador, promote through Refocus, run 2 events</p>	<p>We will have accurate information about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time for RE across KS1-5 • Provision of RE across KS1-5 • Examination entries • Examination attainment <p>We will have a map of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good practice across schools • the spread of religions taught • different approaches to RE (eg systematic/thematic)

Priority 3. Support schools in providing better quality RE and collective worship by

What we need to do	Actions	Success criteria
<p>a) Produce a locally agreed syllabus that enables schools to plan a coherent RE curriculum (Sept 2021)</p> <p>b) Producing supporting guidance and policies</p> <p>c) Produce termly newsletter REfocus</p> <p>d) Providing and/or sign-posting schools to appropriate CPD</p> <p>e) Improving links with local faith and belief communities</p> <p>f) Establishing and enabling/supporting networks of schools</p> <p>g) Promote RE Quality Mark (REQM)</p>	<p>Establish ASC, writing panel, timeline – separate activity and funding additional to annual SACRE role</p> <p>RE Policy, Collective worship guidance and policy</p> <p>REFocus, links with OTSA</p> <p>Develop role of SACRE reps, update website, visit community/faith centres (See 2 f)</p> <p>REFocus, networks</p>	<p>Teachers more confident to teach RE with helpful resources</p>