

Plymouth SACRE Annual Report 2023/4

Foreward

As Chair of Plymouth SACRE, I am pleased to publish our annual report. The report draws upon a number of strengths that we have as a SACRE. It also identifies areas in which we wish to move forwards.

As a SACRE, we are fortunate to have very good attendance from our representatives from a range of religious and non-religious worldview communities as well as education specialists. SACRE members are well-informed and meetings are frequently used to develop our knowledge and understanding of religious and world views in Plymouth schools and beyond. This year, we have drawn upon the knowledge and expertise of our new SACRE advisor, Ed Pawson. Ed's knowledge of different SACREs within the region have helped to ensure that Plymouth SACRE is up to date on the latest developments and doing all that it can to continue to develop and thrive.

One of SACRE's focus points in 2023 and 2024 has been to further develop the diversity of representation within our membership. By working with Ed, the Plymouth Centre for Faith and Cultural Diversity (PCFCD) and other well networked members, we have been able to approach and enlist 13 new members – which has given SACRE a broader membership, especially in Group A.

Work has continued on the Agreed Syllabus (launched in June 2024). Our Adviser to SACRE, Ed Pawson, in partnership with RE Today and NATRE, utilised local experience and expertise from teachers and faith speakers, developing an agreed syllabus working party, to ensure that our new Plymouth locally agreed syllabus reflects the diverse nature and lived experience of religious and non-religious worldviews present in our city. The group has also worked to ensure that there is a good range of support materials for schools to use. This work will continue into next year when Plymouth SACRE will work alongside the LTLRE Hub to provide further guidance and training for teachers in the city.

Another highlight for SACRE has been the continued development of partnerships with Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Diversity (PCFCD), the Learn Teach Lead RE network (LTLRE) and, of course, links with Plymouth teachers and many members of our community groups in the city.

As SACRE Chair, I would like to thank the members of this committee and its working groups for the time and effort that they have put into supporting and monitoring Religious Education and Collective Worship within our city.

Councillor Tess Blight
SACRE Chair

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1 Introduction

1.1 Membership

During the year 2023/4 SACRE was pleased to welcome new members: Giles Freathy, Selina Day, Dr Ian Jamison, Jasmin Rhead, Muhunthiny Sivasothy, Bhai Gurmit Singh, Arezoo Farahzad, Deborah Temple, Kerry Wardle, Father David Bailey, Martyn Cox, Chaz Singh and Cllr Kathy Watkin.

Many thanks to Annmarie Allchurch, Ben Kerr, Catherine Bowness and Councillor John Mahony who have stepped down.

Cllr Tina Tuohy, as Plymouth Lord Mayor, will not be able to attend meetings that are of a political nature during her tenure. Therefore, another councillor will be appointed in her place.

See Appendix 2 for a full list of SACRE members

1.2 Details of Plymouth SACRE meetings

November 2023: 15 attendees, plus clerk and adviser, hybrid meeting

March 2024: 20 attendees, plus clerk and adviser, hybrid meeting

July 2024: 21 attendees, plus clerk and adviser, hybrid meeting

All meetings were quorate.

2 SACRE's statutory responsibilities

2.1 Launch of the Local Agreed Syllabus

Following an extensive review, a new Agreed Syllabus for RE (AS) has been launched for Plymouth schools. This will run from 2024-2029. The recommendations from the Agreed Syllabus Council (ASC) were accepted by SACRE, and the new syllabus for schools in Plymouth, Devon and Torbay was launched at 4 events during summer 2024, for first teaching in September 2024. Nearly 300 teachers from across the region attended the launch conferences which were led by the RE Today curriculum writers. The feedback has been very positive.

On-going training for teachers will continue to be offered during 2024/2025 via Inset training, the LTLRE conference and local hub meetings. The new syllabus has also been adopted by Torbay and Devon SACREs, with Cornwall SACRE likely to adopt a similar pattern for 2025.

The new syllabus does not look radically different from the current model in terms of its substantive knowledge component. Where important changes have been made they are in the adoption of a religion and worldviews approach to RE, in response to developing understandings about the subject at a national level. This recognises a significant shift in the way the subject is being planned and taught, following on from the Commission for RE report ([2018](#)). The new syllabus also responds to many of the challenges laid down by the Ofsted Deep and Meaningful report ([2024](#)).

Here is a summary of the key changes to the AS:

- Availability of 'lesson-ready' resources
- Teaching units embody more diversity
- Teaching units reflect the local lived experience of people's religious and non-religious worldviews
- Greater emphasis on 'ways of knowing' and pupils' personal knowledge
- More input on Humanism and non-religious worldviews in primary phase
- More detail on assessment

- More input for special schools
- More input on progression in language and vocabulary across the syllabus
- Updated use of terminology and information on demographics
- More materials on how to link learning into local places of interest and places of worship

2.2 Standards and monitoring in RE

2.2.1 Secondary schools

Data from the DfE annual workforce survey points to the fact that a number of secondary schools are not teaching enough RE to comply with statutory expectations. Several Plymouth schools have been contacted and conversations with headteachers and senior leaders have taken place to explore further and offer input to encourage them to develop the place of RE in the curriculum.

2.2.2 GCSE Religious Studies exam results 2024

Exam data shows a very wide spread of entry patterns for RS GCSE across the country, by local authorities. In Tower Hamlets (East London) 83% of Y11 cohort were entered for the exam in 2023, while in Rutland it was just 11%. The figure for Plymouth was 31%. This raises questions about equality and fairness. Why are students being disadvantaged from being given the opportunity to study important subjects simply based on their geography?

In 2024 at least 7 Plymouth secondary schools entered fewer than 10% of their students for RS GCSE. Plymouth SACRE questions why students in these schools are being disadvantaged in this academic subject area?

RE continues to be a statutory subject for all pupils from 5-18 in state schools. The Plymouth syllabus requires all schools to teach RE for one hour per week at KS4 and SACRE monitors this provision.

SACRE is keen to give schools advice about how to run effective and vibrant GCSE exam options classes. It is vital for the subject to continue to be studied at higher levels and therefore help to create the next generation of RE teachers in our schools.

2.2.3 A level Religious Studies exam results 2024

SACRE continues to note the importance for schools and colleges to make provision for post-16 students to study RS as an examination subject, at A level. In 2024 69 students were entered for A level RS, down slightly from the 73 candidates in 2023. However, SACRE is concerned about the way RS A level appears to be being squeezed out in some school sixth forms, which will have significant impact in the future.

This raises serious questions about equality issues and about the academic pipeline to generate future teachers of RE. Many schools and colleges seem to be denying students the opportunity to study a subject for which they may be specifically academically and emotionally suited to follow.

2.2.3 Primary schools

Monitoring of RE in primary schools continues through sampling of websites and scrutiny of recent Ofsted reports. Over 70% of Ofsted reports include a mention of issues relating to SACRE's purpose (eg RE, collective worship or SMSC) and the majority of these comments are positive. Only about 3% of inspections involve a deep dive in RE.

Where SACRE has concerns, schools have been contacted to raise issues about standards or profile of the subject. Visits have been made to schools where their Ofsted report has highlighted weaknesses in RE or related areas. Where RE is mentioned positively schools have been contacted to thank them for their strong provision.

Resources have been shared and advice has been given to a number of schools with regard to parental requests for withdrawal from RE (and/or collective worship). In particular, LTLRE hub leaders continue to be a massive resource in being available in localities to offer support and guidance where schools make contact for help.

2.2.4 Monitoring RE in Multi-Academy Trusts

Plymouth SACRE has been working in partnership with a number of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) to ensure that RE is given its statutory place in the curriculum. There are an increasing number of MATs who have appointed RE leads across their schools. SACRE, along with NATRE and RE Hubs, is active in drawing these hub leaders together and working with them to develop an understanding of how MATs need to make provision for the subject.

2.2.5 Headteachers' briefing

Following the syllabus launch events in summer 2024 the Adviser has offered to contribute to a Plymouth headteachers' updates event to brief school leaders on the changes to the syllabus.

3 Collective Worship

The current guidance on collective worship and school assemblies from Plymouth SACRE is still in date. This guidance supports schools in developing a suitable CW policy and encouraging active pupil participation in assemblies. We want to help schools put in place effective practice, offering opportunities for reflective experiences for their pupils. The guidance document offers an explanation of the legal obligations, including the right to withdrawal, and outlines some of the rich opportunities that assemblies/ collective worship can offer pupils for spiritual, moral, social, cultural and personal development.

There have been no formal complaints about collective worship in schools and no applications for determinations.

4 Links with other bodies

4.1 Strong partnerships

Strong partnerships are a hallmark of the way Plymouth SACRE operates. We have good links with a number of organisations, working closely with Plymouth City Council, the Diocese of Exeter, the Universities of Exeter and St Mark and St John, Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity (PCFCD) and Devon Faith and Belief Forum (DFBF).

The SACRE Adviser attends the annual conferences for AREIAC (Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants) and NASACRE (National Association of SACREs), and sits on the AREIAC executive. He coordinates the SW AREIAC network of advisers (SWARE), organises the annual SW SACRE conference and acts in the role of RE Hubs lead for the SW. The 2024 SW SACRE conference hosted inputs from a number of regional and national RE figures, offering workshops on a range of important inputs for SACRE member training. During the year, RE Hubs hosted a conversation forum for regional SACRE officers to receive updates and give feedback with NASACRE.

4.2 Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity (PCFCD)

SACRE works closely with PCFCD to establish strong links to local faith and belief organisations. This enables schools to draw on visitors to school classrooms and to inform SACRE about who will be the most suitable faith and belief representatives when member vacancies occur.

Finances for PCFCD are very tight and this has impacted on staff numbers and the ability to maintain a viable website. Plymouth SACRE is committed to exploring options for future partnering of services.

4.3 Learn, Teach, Lead RE

Plymouth SACRE is pleased to continue to partner the Learn, Teach, Lead RE programme (LTLRE). Plymouth LTLRE hub is working well to support teachers of RE, offering termly twilight meetings and networking opportunities. We are sorry to be saying goodbye to Katie Freeman, who is standing down as Primary Hub leader after 12 years. Many thanks to Katie for all her dedicated input. We are pleased to welcome Jasmin Rhead as the new secondary Hub Leader.

In addition to the local Plymouth hub, a professional community has now been set up via SWIFT (teaching school) which offers termly CPD for both primary and secondary teachers of RE.

The 2023 conference was well attended, with over 90 teachers attending from across the region. Both conference and hub meeting evaluations show how valuable teachers are finding these networking and CPD offers.

Hub leaders continue to be a valuable resource to teachers of RE in their locality, and termly training days enable hub leaders to keep up to date with current RE issues and initiatives.

4.4 MarJon University

SACRE is pleased to support Plymouth MarJon University with regard to the recruitment of Secondary ITE RE trainees on its PGCE course. SACRE notes that there will be secondary RE training at Marjon in 2024/5.

5 SACRE: local involvement

5.1 RE Newsletter

The half termly RE newsletter gives schools in depth support, information and networking links. It signposts current CPD, hub groups and conferences. Though this newsletter SACRE signposts guidance to schools about significant events, eg religious festivals such as Easter, Ramadan and Diwali, Interfaith Week etc

5.2 Holocaust Memorial Day

The 2024 theme was 'the Fragility of Freedom'. Over 50 guests attended the Council House and contributions were given from a variety of speakers: representatives from Rwanda, speakers from trade unions, gender rights, the Jewish community, people with disabilities etc. The Council House event was very emotive, powerful and thought provoking.

After this, a public commemoration was held in the Peace Garden and flowers were laid at the memorial. A local school contributed to both the Council House proceedings and the public commemoration. The presentations from the school was so impressive that they were featured on the local news.

HMD resources and links were shared with schools.

5.3 Advice to Schools in Times of Conflict

In the aftermath of the unrest between Israel and Gaza, in October 2023, SACRE circulated a document to schools to enable them to navigate contentious cultural, religious and political community issues.

6 SACRE: regional and national involvement

6.1 Standing up for the importance of RE

SACRE members are very concerned about the shortage of trained RE teachers in secondary schools. There is a crisis in recruitment and retention. SACRE has noted that many more lessons in secondary school RE are taught by teachers with no post-A level qualifications than in comparable subjects.

6.2 RE Hubs

SACRE continues to be supportive of the RE Hubs initiative, which is providing teachers with a 'one-stop-shop' website, offering links to school speakers, places of interest, CPD events, local network groups, blogs and resources etc.

6.3 National Content Standard

SACRE has been kept fully informed of the publication of the REC's National Content Standard. The NCS provides a benchmark for excellence in religion and worldviews in schools or across a MATs in England.

6.4 Religion and Worldviews Handbook

SACRE members have been introduced to the REC's Religion and Worldviews Handbook. This is a tool kit for RE syllabus writers, to enable them to translate the core vision of religion and worldviews approach into a curriculum. RWs syllabus frameworks from three school based teams have also been published as part of the document.

6.5 Ofsted

SACRE members have been kept well informed with Ofsted's understanding of the state of the subject in schools. In her annual HMCI's report, published in November 2023, Amanda Spielman made some challenging observations: 'in too many primary and secondary schools, the religious education (RE) that pupils receive is of a poor quality and not fit for purpose, leaving pupils ill-equipped for some of the complexities of contemporary society.' April 2024 saw the publication of Ofsted's first RE subject report in over 10 years. 'Deep and Meaningful, the religious education subject report'. Some of the key observations were:

- Lack of sufficient depth of knowledge
- Lack of good quality CPD
- Pupils remember little
- Long gaps between lessons hindered recall
- Not enough opportunity for disciplinary or personal knowledge
- Concepts often over-simplified and compartmentalised
- Assessment not fit for purpose
- Misconceptions about non-religious worldviews

These comments underline the importance of putting a high quality RE syllabus in place, to enable schools in all sectors to be able to create strong practice in this subject.

6.6 Interfaith Network

Regarding the removal of government funding for the Interfaith Network (IFN), Plymouth SACRE has written to the DfE to reflect its disappointment. The support the IFN has offered for Interfaith Week over many years has been invaluable.

7 SACRE organisation

7.1 SACRE leadership and organisation

Plymouth SACRE is well served through its clerk (Asif Siddique), LA lead (Michael House) and adviser (Ed Pawson). Plymouth City Council is responsive to SACRE's needs and supportive in its administration and organisation. It is well supported financially.

SACRE membership is vibrant and well-engaged, although there are still a few significant vacancies. We are very proud to have significantly boosted the SACRE membership during 2023/4, with 13 new members, filling some long-standing vacancies, increasing the diversity and representation of the body.

All meetings in the year 2022/3 have been quorate.

A number of SACRE members have taken advantage of useful training opportunities over the last year, both through attendance at the SW SACRE conference and national online NASACRE training events.

8 Appendices

Appendix 1

Plymouth Schools GCSE RS exam data 2024 (anonymised)

	% Hours of RE*	% entries GCSE RS	% 9-5 grades	% 9-4 grades
1.	9.5	80	42	59
2.		0	0	0
3.		0	0	0
4.	3.5	31	97	97
5.	5.8	22	89	92
6.		6	88	100
7.	3.3	9	50	71
8.	2.0	17	65	77
9.	3.6	19	53	68
10.	2.5	0	0	0
11.	2.7	5	80	80
12.	1.3	51	54	68
13.	2.8	15	50	65
14.		92	24	
15.	7.5	96	38	51
16.	3.6	6	100	100
17.	4.1	21	90	97
Plymouth		26		
National			62	72

*% Hours of RE data is taken from the DfE School Workforce Survey

Appendix 2

Membership of Plymouth SACRE August 2024

Group A: Christian denominations and such other religions and religious denominations that appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area

Eight places

David Evans	Baptist Church
Vacancy	Buddhist Community
Muhunthiny Sivasothy	Hindu Community

Vacancy	Muslim Community
Dr Judith Beckman	Jewish Community
Vacancy	Methodist Church
Lesley Clark	Roman Catholic Diocese of Plymouth
Vacancy	United Reformed Church
Martyn Cox	Humanist
Nic Gibson	Pagan Community
Arezoo Farahzad	Baha'I Community
Bhai Gurmit Singh	Sikh Community

Group B: The Church of England, appointed by the Exeter Diocesan Board of Education

Five places

Sarah Lakey	Diocesan Board of Education, Exeter
Katie Freeman	Bickleigh Down Primary (Vice Chair)
Alex Parks	University of St Mark and St John
Vacancy	
Vacancy	

Group C: Teachers' Associations, who should nominate RE teachers

Nine places

Kerry Wardle	NASUWT
Ms Gwen Hughes	NEU
Jasmin Rhead	NEU
Vacancy	NATRE
Ian Jamison	NASUWT
Giles Freathy	HE
Selina Day	HE
Vacancy	PAPH (NAHT)
Claire Wills	Special Schools
Father David Bailey	School Governors

Group D: The Local Authority

Six places

Cllr Sue Dann	Plymouth City Council
Cllr Tess Blight	Plymouth City Council (Chair)
Vacancy	Plymouth City Council
Cllr Chip Tofan	Plymouth City Council
Cllr Sally Cresswell	Plymouth City Council
Cllr Kathy Watkin	Plymouth City Council

Co-opted Representatives

Six places

Sara Wells	Community (Centre for Faiths & Cultural Diversity)
Prof. David Salter	Quaker Community
Deborah Temple	Jewish community and schools speaker
Charanjeet Singh	Sikh Community

SACRE Officers

Clerk: Asif Siddique
Adviser: Ed Pawson
LA lead: Michael House