

## **Plymouth SACRE Annual Report 2024/5**

### **Foreward**

Welcome to the Annual Report for the Plymouth Standing Advisory Council for RE and Collective Worship. The report reflects another busy year and it has been a pleasure and an honour to continue in the role of Chair of SACRE.

I remain grateful to the members of Plymouth SACRE who contribute to lively, well attended meetings. In particular, we benefit from the wisdom and guidance of Ed Pawson, our Advisor to SACRE and the enthusiasm and indefatigable commitment to the teaching of RE in the city of Katie Freeman, our Vice Chair (who is Chair of the National Association of RE Teachers). Both Ed and Katie have national profiles in RE and, as a consequence, SACRE is well informed about national as well as local issues in the teaching and learning of RE.

This report demonstrates our strong partnerships with officers from the Local Authority, school leaders and the Learn Teach Lead RE Hubs. There has been another successful LTLRE conference and regular RE hub meetings for local teachers.

We continue to have strong ties to Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity (PCFCD) which promotes opportunities for children and young people to meet with speakers from a variety of faiths and cultural backgrounds. It is pleasing to read in this report of the way that SACRE and PCFCD combined to address issues raised by the unrest in the city in August 2024 by providing community and faith-based workshops in our schools to challenge misinformation and promote understanding of our city's growing diversity. We look forward to helping PCFCD celebrate its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2026.

At SACRE meetings this year we have had lively debate about the numbers of students engaged in examination courses in the city's schools. We have heard about positive responses to the new Agreed Syllabus which was launched in June 2024. In addition, SACRE welcomed the Government's Curriculum and Assessment Review, particularly the recommendation that RE should become part of the National Curriculum and the development of the Religious Education Council's National Content Standard.

This is an exciting time for RE. Plymouth SACRE is well placed to help support and encourage the city's schools to face the challenges of 2026 and beyond.

Tess Blight  
SACRE Chair

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### **1 Introduction**

#### **1.1 Membership**

During the year 2024/5 SACRE was pleased to welcome new members: Sarah Lakey, Leonore Newson and Councillor Andy Lugger.

Many thanks to those who have stepped down during the year: Nic Gibson, Alex Parks and Councillor Kathy Watkin (who has been appointed as Plymouth Lord Mayor).

Wendy Bratherton and Denise Prothero attended a meeting as observers.

See Appendix 2 for a full list of SACRE members.

### **1.2 Details of Plymouth SACRE meetings**

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

March 2025: 20 attendees, plus clerk and adviser, hybrid meeting

July 2025: 18 attendees, plus clerk and adviser, hybrid meeting

All meetings were quorate.

SACRE has been well led this year by Cllr Tess Blight (Chair) and Katie Freeman (Vice-Chair).

## **2 SACRE's statutory responsibilities**

### **2.1 The new Local Agreed Syllabus (2024-29)**

The new agreed syllabus, launched in June 2024, has been well received by schools. RE leads report that they are embedding the new Religion and Worldviews approaches into their teaching and learning planning. Both community and Church schools have found the new teaching frameworks helpful.

A primary teacher survey reveals that 96% of schools are using the new syllabus, with 71% reporting that it has been fully implemented. 82% of respondents expressed confidence in their understanding of the term 'religion and worldviews'.

Responses show that the new units on teaching about Humanism, caring for the world and diversity within and across religions have been particularly helpful. The development of Ways of Knowing and the use of disciplinary lenses has been well received. Confidence in delivering the syllabus is moderate, and future training needs have been identified.

Some concerns have been raised about the limited engagement from some academy trust networks.

Paid-for training sessions were offered in 2024/5, but due to low take-up the dates had to be cancelled. Much of the post-launch training has been provided through the Learn Teach Lead RE hub networks, offering free twilight training CPD.

### **2.2 Standards and monitoring in RE**

#### **2.2.1 Secondary schools**

Data from the DfE annual workforce survey shows that a number of secondary schools in Plymouth are not meeting statutory expectations for teaching RE. Some are only teaching RE for an hour or less every fortnight at KS3 and 4. Some schools are dropping RE in Year 11. GCSE exam data for 2025 (see Appendix 1) reveals that there are a number of schools that are not entering any students for GCSE RS exams in Plymouth, and others who are only entering low numbers of students.

Many of these schools, and, where relevant, the trusts they are part of, have been contacted. This has resulted in fruitful conversations with a number of headteachers and trust leaders, where we have been able to explore these issues further and offer input to encourage them to develop the place of RE in the curriculum. However, there are some schools and trusts who either do not respond or refuse to engage.

#### **2.2.2 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.

Where SACRE has concerns, schools have been contacted to raise issues about standards or profile of the subject. SACRE officers have had conversations with a number of 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, the Plymouth LTLRE hub leaders have been an important resource in being available to offer support and guidance where schools make contact for help.

### **2.2.3 Headteachers' briefing**

Following the syllabus launch events in summer 2024 the Adviser gave a briefing to a Plymouth headteachers' updates event 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 and Devon Faith and Belief Forum.

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 2025 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. The keynote address was given by Professor Trevor Cooling on Knowledge in RE.

During the year, Plymouth SACRE officers attended a regional 'In Conversation' forum, hosted by RE Hubs and NASACRE, to receive updates and discuss issues of SACRE effectiveness.

### **4.2 Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity (PCFCD)**

Plymouth SACRE continues to support the work of PCFCD. PCFCD offers a great provision to enable schools to draw on visitors to classrooms and to inform SACRE about suitable faith and belief representatives when member vacancies occur.

As an organisation they are working hard to keep up the excellent service they offer to schools, but the impact of school budget cuts and administrative issues have made this

harder to achieve. They are also looking for more speakers to fulfil the training expectations required by schools.

SACRE has been working with PCFCD, using money devolved to Plymouth in the wake of the 2024 unrest, to make additional provision of RE workshops for schools.

#### **4.3 Interfaith week activities**

Once again, PCFCD presented a wonderful Interfaith Week 2024 event in the Council Chamber, offering an opportunity for local faith and belief groups from across the city to showcase presentations and performances.

Schools were provided with website links, resources and offers of school speaker visits to enable them to add to the impact of this focus week.

#### **4.3 Learn, Teach, Lead RE**

Plymouth SACRE is pleased to continue to partner and offer financial support to 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 pleased to welcome Tracy Davis (RE lead at Tor Bridge High) as the new secondary Hub Leader. Hub leaders continue to be a significant 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.

The 2024 LTLRE conference was well supported, 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.

Here is a sample of conference evaluation comments:

- Great networking opportunity
- Practical ideas for staff development
- Understand how to implement a worldviews approach
- Inspiring, uplifting, imaginative, motivating
- Great choice of workshops for beginners and experienced teachers
- Fantastic wide range of workshops

## **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 2025 theme was 'For a Better Future'. Over 50 guests attended the Council House and contributions were given from a variety of speakers, commemorating the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Bosnian Genocide. The Council House event was very emotive, powerful and thought provoking.

The plan was to follow this ceremony with a public commemoration to be held in the Peace Garden, but bad weather forced this part of the day to be cancelled.

HMD resources and links were shared with schools.

### **5.3 Response to Recent Unrest in Plymouth**

Following the 2024 unrest in the city the SACRE Chair has written to schools commending the RE agreed syllabus and encouraging schools to use it as part of their community cohesion and inclusive education strategies. This letter highlighted the importance of a

positive debate and discussion taking place in classrooms. There are real fears that religious illiteracy is on a rise and will have unwanted consequences if not addressed.

The adviser attended a consultation about the unrest led by the Department of Housing and Communities. In the meeting he asserted the importance of RE in this context and explained how SACRE takes its role of advocating for RE in Plymouth schools very seriously.

## **6 SACRE: regional and national involvement**

### **6.1 Curriculum and Assessment Review (CaAR)**

Plymouth SACRE was pleased to contribute to the consultation for the DfE's Curriculum Review. In particular SACRE expressed its concern about the huge and unjustifiable variability of standards for RE in schools both locally and nationally. SACRE emphasised the need for a National Content Standard and gave support for the idea of RE becoming part of the National Curriculum.

Concerns were expressed regarding the huge crisis in RE teacher recruitment and the poor provision in training bursaries. SACRE also highlighted the need for systemic support and funding for the subject.

### **6.2 National Content Standard**

SACRE is fully supportive 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. SACRE is pleased to support the NCS as a basis for a possible future National Curriculum in RE.

### **6.3 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. The school speakers' database is of particular importance for schools who want to invite people into their classrooms with a particular 'lived experience' relating to the worldviews they are studying.

## **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 vacancies. We are very proud to have a wide SACRE membership, offering an inclusive representation of the diversity of the City of Plymouth.

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.

### **7.2 Constitution Review**

A review of the Plymouth SACRE constitution has been launched to ensure that it is up-to-date and is providing proper governance for SACRE business. Final discussion and ratification planned for autumn 2025.

## **8 Appendices**

### **Appendix 1**

#### **Plymouth Schools GCSE RS exam data 2025 (anonymised)**

Schools	% of cohort group entered	% 9-5
1.	0.0	0.0
2.	0.0	0.0
3.	0.0	0.0
4.	0.0	0.0
5.	0.0	0.0
6.	0.0	0.0
7.	6.5	45.5
8.	8.2	47.1
9.	8.6	55.6
10.	12.9	40.0
11.	18.1	68.6
12.	21.9	87.2
13.	23.3	87.5
14.	24.7	60.9
15.	25.7	75.4
16.	28.5	97.1
17.	29.9	56.9
18.	89.3	56.9
19.	96.1	44.6
<b>PLYMOUTH</b>	<b>19.6</b>	<b>63.8</b>

## Appendix 2

### Membership of Plymouth SACRE August 2025

**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
Leonore Newson	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

Michala Firth	Diocesan Board of Education, Exeter
Katie Freeman	Bickleigh Down Primary (Vice Chair)
Selina Day	University of St Mark and St John

Vacancy	
Vacancy	

**Group C: Teachers' Associations**

Nine places

Kerry Wardle	NASUWT
Ms Gwen Hughes	NEU
Jasmin Rhead	NEU
Vacancy	NATRE
Dr Ian Jamison	NASUWT
Giles Freathy	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)
Cllr Bill Stevens	Plymouth City Council
Cllr Andy Luggar	Plymouth City Council
Cllr Sally Cresswell	Plymouth City Council
Cllr Tina Tuohy	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

