

MINUTES of the meeting of Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Tuesday 27 November 2012 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor J Stone (Chairman)

Mrs C Ault, Mrs L Barker, Revd. P. Barlow, Mrs S Bryant, Councillor EMK Chave, Mrs G Jutle, Rev DT Meachem, Sr. D. O'Donnell and Miss A Taylor

Officers: Mrs J Tinsley; Mr S Pett; Mr P James.

120. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the Venerable Tsultrim Tenzin Choesang and Councillor CHN Attwood; Mrs A Daniel; Mrs S Catlow-Hawkins; Ms K Mayglothling, and Ms C Wolfe.

121. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

Mrs S McCamley substituted for Mr P Bowen.

122. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held 13 July 2012 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

123. RESPONSE TO WRITTEN PUBLIC QUESTIONS (IF ANY)

No written questions had been received.

124. MEMBERSHIP OF SACRE - UPDATE

SACRE received an update on its membership.

Further to the report to the July meeting the Democratic Services Officer reported that no further contact had been received from the Muslim community concerning a nomination to the current vacancy.

The Democratic Services Officer also reported that in accordance with the July meeting the Chairman had communicated SACRE's position concerning the Welsh Marches Humanists being invited to attend a meeting and the position concerning their possible membership of SACRE. The representative had responded that the Humanist position concerning membership of SACRE remained unchanged.

RESOLVED: That SACRE noted the reports.

125. RELIGIOUS STUDIES EXAMINATION RESULTS FOR 2012

SACRE considered the Religious studies examination results for 2012.

The agenda report was presented by the Lead Officer to SACRE who highlighted that the full course GCSE results were still above the national average; the short course at GCSE A*-C were below national average and that within the cohort taking Religious Studies at KS5 a 100% pass rate had been maintained at both A and AS level. A detailed breakdown of the results at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 had been provided with the agenda papers.

As in previous years it was difficult to establish any definite trends as firstly the data was sent by schools directly to the DfE and therefore had to be drawn down from the DfE database and that some schools had different patterns of entry from previous years.

SACRE noted that the data showed a significant increased entry to Theology at the Hereford Sixth Form College, however, the data would need further examination.

It was noted that different points values were attached to different levels of courses.

There was evidence nationally to show that in some schools the time allowance for teaching RE was being significantly reduced and that this may relate to the impact of the EBac upon RE. SACRE was concerned that any reduction in RE teaching time would affect the quality of the learning experience.

While approximately 55% of students were entered for some form of course, SACRE noted that this inferred that there were approximately 45% that hadn't been entered on a course. It was however acknowledged that an element of learning may be derived through other courses e.g. citizenship.

A view was expressed that it would be useful to see whether any trends were being established and how individual schools in the county were performing.

RESOLVED: That the Religious Studies examination results for 2012 be noted.

126. 2013 SACRE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Arrangements for the 2013 SACRE Annual Conference were considered.

The Consultant for RE circulated an outline programme for the 2013 Annual Conference and reported that Whitecross Hereford High School and Sports College had agreed to provide the venue. The theme would be 'Making Good Progress in RE: deepening understanding and developing skills. Lat Blaylock and Stephen Pett had agreed to deliver the key sessions, however, volunteers from SACRE were invited to take part in the 'Grill a SACRE rep' sessions. Bookings would be via RE Today at £75 per person.

The Chairman thanked the Consultant for RE for putting together yet another interesting programme for the conference and encouraged bookings to be made early to ensure that the Conference could go ahead.

Members questioned whether any discounts would be available e.g. book two places get one free or a discount for early booking. The Consultant for RE undertook to investigate whether this would be financially feasible.

The Lead Officer to SACRE reported that the Conference would be widely advertised as soon as possible and this may include inviting SACREs from Shropshire or neighbours in Wales. School Governors would also be invited.

RESOLVED: that progress with the SACRE Annual Conference 2013 and the Conference Programme be approved.

127. UPDATE ON ANY NEW INITIATIVES OR NEWS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

SACRE were informed of news or further changes to the government's education strategy effecting religious education.

The Consultant for RE presented the agenda papers and highlighted that:

- The NATRE report on the impact of English Baccalaureate (EBac) on RE had been published and in his opinion didn't make very good reading as it indicated a decline in RE teaching since the introduction of the EBac. It was probable that the general position outlined in the report was reflected in Herefordshire schools.
- The DfE report on the impact of the English Baccalaureate contained some positive comments from teachers of RE about the subject which had been acknowledged by the DfE.
- The DfE were cutting back on the bursaries for post graduate teacher training. RE was not the only subject to be excluded from the bursaries with Art, Citizenship and Design and Technology also being excluded.
- He encouraged schools to enter for the 2013 Hockerill/NATRE Prize for Innovation in RE.
- He also encouraged both primary and secondary schools to apply for the RE quality mark.

The 'RE Council RE subject review the Phase 1 report' had been published and had been included in the agenda papers. The Consultant for RE referred to the executive summary and encouraged members to read the report and respond directly. The Consultant for RE reported that this was a report on the first part of the parallel review (the DfE were also reviewing the subject) which attempted to: set out the aims of the RE community; define the levels of core knowledge and establish what good RE looked like.

SACRE briefly debated whether the report adequately defined Religious Education, how RE could tackle social problems, whether the report should include reference to God and whether school mission statements were linked in any way to RE.

On questioning the consequences to schools of not providing RE the Lead Officer responded that the Ofsted schools inspection team had to seek evidence of its teaching. Previously Ofsted had to undertake subject reviews but following the cuts in their inspection regime the subject wasn't necessarily investigated. However, if a school was found to be lacking in this area of teaching then it would be reported under the 'Leadership & Management of the School' section of the inspection report and would probably result in a follow up inspection of the school.

It was noted that academies were free to set their own syllabus providing it covered a broad and balanced teaching of all subjects.

RESOLVED: that the report on RE issues be noted and Members be encouraged to individually respond to the RE Council RE subject review the Phase 1 report.

128. SACRE ANNUAL SURVEY OF SCHOOLS

SACRE were invited to consider the contents of the 2012 Annual SACRE Survey of Primary Schools.

The Lead Officer to SACRE reported that in 2011 the local authority undertook a limited survey of RE in primary schools, the results of which had been reported to SACRE earlier in the year and were contained in the SACRE Annual Report. Building on the results of that survey and picking up on the request by SACRE to include questions on Collective Worship, a set of questions for the 2012 survey had been compiled and circulated in the agenda.

The Consultant for RE reported that last year 81% of Primary and 66% of Secondary schools had responded. While the agenda version was for primary schools a secondary schools version would be produced. It was intended to issue both early in the New Year with a three week response period and report the findings to the March SACRE meeting.

It was suggested that questions on resources and budget may provide interesting feedback.

It was noted that generally the feedback could be useful in providing direction to future SACRE Annual Conferences.

RESOLVED: That the content of the SACRE Annual Survey of Schools be approved.

129. SYLLABUS TRAINING FOR SPECIAL SCHOOLS

SACRE were informed of the outcomes from the training event for special schools held jointly with Gloucestershire SACRE.

The Consultant for RE reported that a joint training event had been held with Gloucestershire SACRE. The event entitled 'RE in special schools: promoting spiritual development' had been held on 16 October 2012. Twelve delegates attended from schools across both counties. The post event evaluation indicated a very positive response to both the event and venue and provided valuable feedback on how the day's learning would be translated into the school setting.

Delegates had particularly appreciated the opportunity to meet and share ideas/resources on a subject specific to them.

The Lead Officer to SACRE reported that this had been a good collaborative event and suggested that some of the learning could have been translated to primary 'P' level pupils, SEN or under achieving students.

Responding to whether the event would be repeated next year the Consultant for RE responded that that would be heavily dependent on finance being available.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

130. SACRE ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2011/12

SACRE considered the draft SACRE Annual Report for the academic year September 2011 to July 2012.

The Democratic Services Officer presented the draft for consideration, copies having been previously been circulated to members, and highlighted that the examination statistics discussed earlier in the meeting, together with any comment made would be added to the report.

RESOLVED: That subject to the inclusion of the examination results and final proof reading the Annual report was approved.

131. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

SACRE noted that the next meeting is scheduled to be held at 2.00pm on Friday 1st March 2013 at Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford.

132. URGENT ITEM - SACRE BUDGET 2013/14

The Chairman reported that since publication of the agenda information had come to light concerning the 2013/14 SACRE budget which he considered needed to be discussed before the end of December.

The Chairman invited the Consultant for RE to outline the statutory position concerning both RE in schools and SACRE, the benefits of having expert advice and any implications of reducing the level of that advice. Having provided a brief overview the Consultant for RE declared a pecuniary interest and left the meeting.

The Lead Officer to SACRE reported that indications had been received that the Council's budgets would again be reduced. To provide sufficient budgets to support front line services e.g. children's safeguarding, other budgets were likely to be severely reduced and this would include the SACRE budget.

The Chairman reported that the current SACRE budget was £11,750 of which £10,500 was used to fund 20 days of consultancy work. Unlike in some local authorities no technical RE input was provided in-house. The remaining £1,250 supported printing & refreshments for teacher training twilight sessions, the NASACRE annual conference attendance and subscription.

SACRE debated the key areas of its budget expenditure and noted that the Annual Conference, which was now run by RE Today, should not be affected. The level of consultant support to schools and to SACRE which was currently contracted until 31 March 2013, may have to be severely reduced. SACRE noted that there needed to be a balance between the principal objective of supporting teachers and supporting the work of SACRE. In response to a suggestion that a breakdown of the Consultants time be obtained the Lead Officer assured SACRE that she had a detailed breakdown and highlighted that in relation to his support to teacher twilight sessions, while preparatory work had been undertaken, one session had not taken place due to lack of support.

SACRE noted that the resources provided by the Lead Officer and the Democratic Services Officer were not included in the SACRE budget. However it was likely that these would also be reduced.

It was also noted that the next review of the RE Agreed Syllabus would commence during the 2013/14 budget period and this of necessity entailed extra work.

The Chairman suggested that authority be given for both he and the Lead Officer to SACRE to meet with the Cabinet Member (Education and Infrastructure) and the Director for Peoples Services to put the case for maintaining the SACRE budget whereupon it was proposed and seconded that:

RESOLVED: That the Chairman and the Lead Officer to SACRE be authorised to meet with the Cabinet Member (Education and Infrastructure) and the Director for Peoples Services to discuss maintaining the budget position for SACRE.

The meeting ended at 3.54 pm

CHAIRMAN