



Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority

QCA advice on the timing of agreed syllabus revisions in 2009 – 2010

***Non-statutory guidance for local authorities, SACREs and Agreed
Syllabus Conferences***

December 2008

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The purpose of this guidance is to advise local authorities, Standing Advisory Councils on RE (SACREs) and Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs) in England on making key decisions about revisions to agreed syllabuses for RE during 2009. The information contained here is for guidance only, and is intended to help SACREs, ASCs and local authorities to use their resources to support RE as effectively as possible. The guidance has been agreed with relevant national RE organisations, including the RE Council, the National Association of Teachers of RE, the National Association of SACREs, and the Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants.

The three key points in this guidance are

- (a) that those SACREs whose agreed syllabus for RE comes up for review in 2009 might consider timing their review, and any revision, so that it takes account of changes to the primary curriculum;
- (b) that they might also consider timing their review and revision so that it takes account of updated government guidance on RE (the successor to Circular 1/94);
- (c) it is the intention of QCA to work with SACREs and local authorities in 2010 to facilitate agreed syllabus revisions that take account of the above two developments.

Since 2004, SACREs and agreed syllabus conferences have been working with the non-statutory national framework for RE, a development that has helped to bring about wider coherence in the subject. In 2007, QCA worked with the RE community to align the framework with the new curriculum for key stages 3 and 4. This gave us programmes of study for ages 11 to 16, reflecting the framework fully in the format of the rest of the curriculum, with up to date supporting materials. It has helped to strengthen the profile of the subject and to demonstrate its contribution to curriculum aims, community cohesion and personal wellbeing.

QCA is presently working with Sir Jim Rose to develop proposals for a new primary curriculum. While the outcomes of this review cannot be known at this stage, it is probable that any changes to the primary curriculum will have some implications for RE. It is intended that the new primary curriculum will be made public in Autumn 2009, following public consultation.

QCA, together with the RE community, is also supporting the DCSF's work to revise government guidance on RE, and it is intended that this new advice will be launched in Autumn 2009 following public consultation.

QCA's approach to RE is, and will remain, to recommend to all SACREs the advantages of making a coherent use of the newly aligned framework in their agreed syllabuses. Local authorities whose syllabus comes up for review during 2009 are invited to consider the advantages of waiting, and revising their syllabus in the light of all the expected curriculum and RE guidance changes. This would mean waiting until December 2009 or January 2010. Alternatively, if it is not appropriate to wait, they could initiate a separate review timed to take account of the expected changes. The 1996 Education Act requires local authorities, through their SACRE, to review their syllabus no later than every five years. Therefore, one option for those local authorities whose review period comes up during 2009 could be to start their review and keep their existing syllabus in use whilst the review process is under way. They

could use this time to survey the effectiveness of their present syllabus, to consider the likely implications of the coming curriculum and RE guidance changes, and to be in discussion with their local authority, faith/belief communities and teachers about curriculum change. They could then choose to revise their agreed syllabus in the light of the expected new primary curriculum and the new RE guidance.

It is the intention of QCA to work with SACREs and RE organisations on milestones towards a unified step-change in all agreed syllabuses from 2010. The outcome of this would be a new, coherent 'generation' of modern agreed syllabus, all demonstrating their relevance to the bigger curriculum picture of the Children's Plan, to wellbeing and community cohesion. This would enable all syllabuses to reflect the aims of the new curriculum, use key concepts and adopt the same level scale, as well as taking account of the new government guidance on RE. These syllabuses would also benefit from the less prescriptive curriculum approach, and could be supported or exemplified by QCA non-statutory materials that promote good practice within RE and across subjects.

This guidance is non-statutory. Agreed Syllabus Conferences remain the statutory body with legal responsibility for devising an agreed syllabus for RE. QCA invites all SACREs to consider the advantages of waiting for the expected new primary curriculum and for the new RE guidance, or, if they prefer, initiating a separate review. QCA considers that, all other factors being equal, this course of action will give the users of agreed syllabuses stability during a period of curriculum change, and will also offer all SACREs the opening to make new changes coherently once the new primary curriculum and the new RE guidance have been agreed and published. We believe this course of action will prove of most benefit to SACREs, teachers of RE and, therefore, to learners.