

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Report By: Stephen Pett Consultant for RE

Purpose

To update SACRE on the national position concerning Religious Education.

Report

RE and academies

1. Academies are independently-funded state schools, outside the remit of the LA and therefore of the SACRE
2. All academies are required to teach RE. However, the Academies Act 2010 removed from academies and free schools the statutory requirement, in force since 1870, for all maintained schools to provide RE in the curriculum and a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. The requirement is now enshrined in the individual funding agreements for such schools. These funding agreements do require such provision but do not require a school to use a locally agreed syllabus.
3. Instead of following an agreed syllabus, current advice from the DfE says new academies must provide RE according to **the requirements for new agreed syllabuses** as set out in the 1988 Education Reform Act, that is they *'must reflect the fact that the principal religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teachings and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.'*
4. So, effectively, academies need to produce a school syllabus in much the same way as a SACRE produces a locally agreed syllabus. SACRE should recommend that schools make use of the work already done in the development of the locally agreed syllabus, as well as the support linked with it. SACRE should note that academies and free schools are free to amend the local syllabus.

DfE support for RE

5. The DfE have reiterated the compulsory nature of RE several times, both in private correspondence with teachers and in public.
6. They have stated that:
 - RE remains an essential component of a broad and balanced curriculum
 - RE remains central to the aim of the school curriculum, which is to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of children and young people for their own development and to prepare them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.
 - The continuing compulsory nature of RE in schools is a signal of their view of the importance of RE.
 - The National Curriculum Review is not looking at whether RE should remain compulsory.
 - They value the local determination of RE, whether "locally" means the Local Authority or the individual school, and so have declined to include RE within the National Curriculum Review.

- Keeping RE/RS out of the Ebacc is not because it is not important but because its status is already protected through being compulsory.

Compliance

7. The Young Person's Learning Agency is the place to go if there are complaints about whether an academy is failing to meet its statutory requirement to provide RE for all. Their functions will be taken over by the Education Funding Agency from April 2012.
8. OFSTED will not be inspecting for compliance, although they do have to assess whether schools are delivering a "broad and balanced curriculum", and there is a sharper focus on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in inspections. RE's contribution to this is acknowledged but the assessment of opportunities for SMSC is school-wide.

Curriculum Review

9. The National Curriculum is currently under review. An expert panel reported in December 2011 (available here <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-00135-2011>). The Secretary of State subsequently announced that the NC Review would be delayed to allow for responses to this complex area. The new NC will not be introduced in schools until 2014.
10. The expert panel report makes some recommendations that have implications for RE if they are accepted:
 - Assessment models that are not based on levels
 - An emphasis on "essential knowledge". The panel recommend that this is defined as "facts, concepts, principles and fundamental operations".
11. As stated above, the DfE have not included RE within the Curriculum Review. They anticipate producing a National Curriculum that is slimmed down to the essentials. They regard the requirements for agreed syllabuses as representing "the essentials" for an RE curriculum, namely, that the RE curriculum '*must reflect the fact that the principal religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teachings and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.*'
12. The National Curriculum will be compulsory in maintained schools and represent a "benchmark of excellence" for academies and free schools.
13. Some RE supporters asked the Government for RE to be included in the Nat Curriculum Review. Nick Gibb, Minister for Schools, refused this, but has told the RE Council that he supports their idea to have a review of the RE curriculum that is in step with the NC review, in order for RE to retain its academic rigour. The REC's Curriculum, Assessment and Qualifications Committee has already commissioned a scoping report on how such a review can be carried out. The Minister has asked the REC to produce a report on excellent teaching in RE.

NASACRE information on SACREs and Academies

14. SACREs are increasingly opening up their previous contacts, or establishing new relationships with the academies in their area, in a variety of ways. Some are inviting representatives of academies in their LAs to be co-opted onto the SACRE. Increasingly SACREs are also approaching their main academy sponsors to offer support for their provision for RE and to try to establish what their position is on RE and collective worship. Such sponsors (Ark, Harris, and Ormiston for example) have 'families' of academies which cover a number of LA areas and/or form a cluster within a given LA.

15. The recently published RETool for SACRE self-evaluation looks at relations with the academies sector and helps SACREs assess how effectively they encourage academies to see themselves also as stakeholders in their local area, specifically by devising ways in which an academies presence is incorporated into the SACRE itself.

Religion and Society Debate: faith in schools

16. Politicians, academics, faith representatives and teachers gathered to explore the place of religion and RE in schools. 'The debate encapsulated some important questions about the future of RE and demonstrated the determination of a wide variety of people to keep it on the public and political agenda; student teachers, in particular, seemed to be in no mood to let their subject disappear from the radar.' Speakers included Professors of RE, Robert Jackson and James Conroy; Richard Dawkins; and the Bishop of Oxford, John Pritchard.

17. Podcasts available from
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/faith_debates/faith_in_schools

The RE Council announces the new ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FOR RE:

18. 'The imminent establishment of an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) to support RE has received widespread coverage in the national media. The APPG will meet regularly to provide a medium through which MPs and peers can discuss the current provision of religious education and to advocate for the highest standards of RE teaching for all children and young people; its inaugural meeting is expected to take place within the next couple of months. It will be chaired by Stephen Lloyd MP who recently said: "In today's globalised, multi-cultural world, where our children can be open to an enormous amount of misleading information, I believe it is absolutely essential they are taught about different cultures and religions by trained, experienced RE teachers, allowing children to make *informed* choices.'"

Short course RE

19. Short course GCSE RE/RS will continue to be available after 2012 but will not count towards performance table results for schools. It will no longer be able to take two short courses and accredit them as a full course. Schools who have previously done this should look to enter pupils into full course GCSE.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT SACRE notes the national position indicated in the report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None identified.