

Extract from DCSF Religious education in English schools: Non-statutory Guidance 2009

5.4 Agreed Syllabus Conferences

5.4.1 Role and working of Agreed Syllabus Conferences

Every LA is required to establish and support an occasional body called an Agreed Syllabus

Conference (ASC). Its role is to produce and recommend an agreed syllabus for RE which meets legal requirements and is educationally sound, and then review it every five years. An ASC can specify what must be taught through the locally agreed syllabus but it may not require schools to allocate particular time to RE in the curriculum. The guidance offered by the Framework provides a national benchmark for an ASC when revising its syllabus.

An ASC and any sub-committee it may appoint must meet in public, subject to exceptions in relation to confidentiality. Each of the four committees of a conference must cast its single vote in favour of a recommendation that an agreed syllabus be adopted by the LA before the LA can adopt that syllabus. Any sub-committee of an ASC must include at least one member of each of its constituent committees.

5.4.2 Membership of an ASC

An ASC is required to be made up of four committees representing respectively:

- A Christian denominations and other religions and religious denominations
- B The Church of England
- C Teacher associations
- D The local authority

There is no provision for an ASC to include co-opted members, but this does not mean that advice cannot be sought beyond its membership. Some individuals might be invited to attend all meetings of the conference, and of committees of the conference, in order for their advice to be available to members of the ASC. For an ASC to work effectively and produce a syllabus, it is important that its membership is as inclusive as the law allows.

5.4.3 Nature of an agreed syllabus

The local agreed syllabus must meet statutory requirements and reflect breadth and balance in RE, particularly in taking into account local characteristics and circumstances. To ensure the effective promotion of high quality RE for pupils, it is recommended that an agreed syllabus should:

- provide a clear structure which users find easy to follow and which highlights the contribution of RE to the curriculum;
- ensure that learning in RE has both continuity and progression;
- have clear statements about expected standards and assessment arrangements;
- provide clear guidance about the process of learning which should underpin effective planning of pupils' learning in RE;
- provide appropriate levels of challenge for pupils of differing ages and abilities; these should be progressive and demanding but realistic; and
- reflect curriculum developments nationally (such as the aims of the curriculum, the use of key concepts and ideas, the personal, learning and thinking skills) to ensure RE is part of a coherent curriculum for all pupils.

The Framework is the basis for the illustrative non-statutory programmes for RE set out by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) alongside the National Curriculum. Both the Framework and the programmes of study, provide guidance on designing a RE curriculum for agreed syllabuses and for programmes of RE in schools with a religious character. To ensure a consistent entitlement to breadth and richness in RE for all pupils, and adherence to a coherent national set of standards, it is recommended that ASCs should use the illustrative programmes of study published by the QCA, as the basis for their development of the local syllabus. The ASC can interpret those programmes of study in the light of local circumstances, and to select appropriate content and construct learning experiences.

Syllabuses should enable schools to develop a balanced and inclusive approach to the organising of concepts, content, understanding, skills and attitudes.