

Herefordshire SACRE News Update

Commission on RE: response to Interim Report

The Commission had 905 responses to the Interim Report, some from individuals and some from groups (e.g. NASACRE, TRS-UK, Catholic Education Service). Many of them were very detailed. They have subsequently gathered more evidence from primary schools, and additional case studies on how a National Entitlement might relate to syllabuses. They are weighing up the implications on whether the final report will seek a change in the law, with all the unforeseen possibilities that that entails.

In respect of each of the four priorities, the feedback and current discussions include the following:

1. **National entitlement.** There was a general welcome for this idea, but disagreement about what kind of entitlement people wanted. Some suggested it needed to include an entitlement to curriculum time, expert teachers, an appropriate curriculum etc. Others focused on the curriculum content; some suggested it might be too sociological – insufficiently theological or philosophical, for example.
2. **Holding schools to account.** There was strong support for this. Quite how to do it is more complex, but might include seeking to get Ofsted and Section 48 inspections to follow this up, alongside SACRE monitoring, REQM assessments etc. They are looking at the balance of support available to schools of religious character and others, and considering the possible benefits of a new KS4 qualification outside the GCSE.
3. **Role of SACREs.** Responses were more divided on this, from those who wish to see the removal of this layer of uneven support to those who strongly advocate the value and worth of SACREs. Areas of discussion include funding, the composition of SACREs, whether they should have an expanded role, how they can better connect with other regional initiatives, such as the Learn Teach Lead initiative and NATRE local hubs.
4. **National Plan:** strong support for all efforts to increase training for ITT, CPD, teacher networks, links with universities, bursaries for ITT, educating the public about the role and nature of RE etc. The key issue is how any of this might be funded.

Other questions they are considering include whether it is good that there is a diversity of aims and purposes in RE rather than total agreement around a purpose; the problem of withdrawal; how far RE should expand beyond the 'big six' religions, particularly in regard to the rise of the 'non-religious'; and how to make the current arbitrary funding more equitable.

RE Council highlights the chronic shortage of RE teachers in schools

The REC is re-launching the Beyond the Ordinary campaign, designed to attract career changers and graduates to train as RE teachers. This is in response to the shortage of qualified RE teachers in schools.

- For entry into initial teacher training in 2017, 405 places were filled, falling well below the Government target of 643. This means that teacher training applications have dropped by 38%.
- According to the Government's 2016 School Workforce Survey around half (55%) of staff teaching RE in schools have no post-A level qualification in the subject.
- The REC is pressing the Department for Education for higher bursaries for RE teachers. Currently a first-class degree holder will receive £9,000 and an upper second-class degree holder will receive just £4,000 towards their training costs. By contrast training for similar specialist subjects such as Geography and Classics offers a grant of £26,000.
- The charity is also calling for funding for Subject Knowledge Enhancement courses, which enable graduates with a wide variety of degrees to apply for RE teacher training.

More information about the Beyond the Ordinary campaign: www.teachre.co.uk/beyondtheordinary/

Media coverage of this story: www.natre.org.uk/news/latest-news/religious-education-in-the-media/