

Final Report of the Commission on RE: Responses and implications

The Commission on RE (England) published its final report in September 2018. In these pages we set out some responses, and consider the broad implications for SACREs, RE policy and the classroom.

What were reactions at a national level? At a national level, bodies representing the RE community have responded by highlighting various aspects of the Report, welcoming aspects of the Report's recommendations, such as a focus on policy or CPD. The National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) is more cautious, as can be seen below:

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COUNCIL

This report's recommendations give us a chance to secure the future of religious education. If we don't grasp this opportunity we risk the subject dying in many schools. The Commission on Religious Education has produced an ambitious vision for the future of Religious Education in England that could mark the most significant developments in the subject in over 40 years. The report gives a compelling explanation of why it is essential for all pupils in all schools to have a rigorous and academic education about a range of religious and non-religious worldviews. The proposal for a National Entitlement for all pupils alongside the freedom for different groups to develop their own programmes of study provides an approach that respects the autonomy of schools over the character of their religious education while ensuring that no pupils miss out on core elements of essential study about religion and belief.

CULHAM ST GABRIELS

Culham St Gabriel's Trust exists to promote excellence in RE. We recognise that high standards in RE could be helped by a change in the policy and legal basis of the subject. In principle we welcome proposals that bring greater clarity to the educational purposes of RE, as well as introducing better school accountability and a national benchmark for content in all state-maintained schools. It is for the DfE, working urgently with key RE stakeholders, to give this subject the priority it deserves, supported and facilitated by realistic levels of government investment in the recruitment and professional development of teachers of RE.

National Association of SACREs (NASACRE)

It is important to remember that legally, the Report does not change anything: each local authority with responsibility for education must establish a SACRE and an ASC, who must fulfil their statutory duties. Each maintained school must provide RE to all pupils.

The NASACRE Executive has met and considered each recommendation in turn. We would support some of these, but strongly reject others. A fuller explanation of our thinking is available on the NASACRE website: <http://nasacre.org.uk/useful-documents>.

We feel some disappointment that, though good RE is mentioned the report paints an overwhelmingly negative picture of the current state of RE. We feel there should have been more celebration of the great RE that happens in many authority areas up and down the country, that helps to make our RE the envy of Europe, if not the world.

Given that any legislative change is highly unlikely, we are disappointed that the Commission did not make recommendations which strengthen the existing statutory framework. We would most strongly oppose Recommendations 4 and 8. We are not intrinsically opposed to some reform of the make-up of groups that make up SACREs or the committees of an ASC, but the make-up proposed, appears to severely weaken the contribution of the significant religious bodies in the locality, professional and elected local representation, thereby weakening local democracy.

NASACRE Executive Committee, September 2018

Association of RE Advisers, Inspectors and Academics (AREIAC)

AREIAC welcomes the report of the Commission on RE. It is particularly pleasing to see the central place of CPD in the RE Plan. The rationale of the proposed recommendations is to enable and encourage schools to improve RE and the development of staff is critical in that endeavour. It is also good to see that there is emphasis on a rigorous, academic approach, set alongside the process of helping pupils to develop their own worldview, finding their own sense of meaning and value in life.

The report has been published and the Commission's work largely complete. It is now that the hard and important work for the RE community really starts; to digest the report and reflect on it with a critical yet positive eye. The purpose of the report is to help all of us to work together to improve RE. AREIAC is delighted to enter into this professional dialogue and collaboration with all involved. We all have the opportunity to use this report to make a positive difference in schools, building on and developing the recommendations. We hope that the government will respond not just with words but with policy, funding and proactive support to enable RE to thrive and reverse the very real threat that it will wither on the vine.

This is a crucial time for RE. We cannot afford to let this report gather dust on a book-shelf, virtual or actual. Whatever the subject is called, it is too important for children, young people and the future of our society to remain poorly perceived and haphazardly resourced. **(Bill Moore, AREIAC Chair)**

RECOMMENDATIONS (SUMMARY)

- 1) Rename the subject 'Religion and Worldviews'
- 2) A statutory National Entitlement to RE for all pupils in publicly funded schools
- 3) Programmes of study to be produced by a national body of professionals (paid for by DfE)
- 4) SACREs lose the role of making RE Agreed Syllabuses.
- 5) Exam and vocational studies reforms in line with the National Entitlement
- 6) Enhanced provision of RE ITE
- 7) Allocated funding for RE CPD
- 8) SACREs to be re-named Local Advisory Network for Religion and Worldviews, membership groups to be reformed away from faith bodies
- 9) OFSTED to report on schools' success in meeting the RE National Entitlement
- 10) DfE to consider the impact of measures such as the EBacc on Religion and Worldviews.
- 11) DfE to review the current right of withdrawal and offer new guidance

What does the Report mean for the curriculum?

As Bill Moore, chair of AREIAC notes, the work of the Commission is complete and the work of the entire RE community, in partnership with government, begins.

While the recommendations are final, the detail will be subject to change. The implementation of the Report is by no means certain.

A striking feature of the Report is the suggestion of a name change. 'Religion and Worldviews' is to include both 'personal worldviews' and 'institutional worldviews'. However, what will this mean in terms of content and learning might involve a more profound change than surface re-branding. The recommendation is for an exemplar set of non-statutory 'Programmes of Study' to be created by a national body of 'professionals', ratified by the DfE, although this does not prevent local SACREs from producing their own examples of ways to meet the national entitlement. The Report indicates an interest in multidisciplinary RE, involving theological, historical and philosophical analyses, as well as sociological or anthropological where necessary. The Commission does not set out clearly what the purpose of RE is (despite that being a key part of their remit) but indicates that it is a component of a 'rounded academic education' (p. 3); part of understanding the world and one's place in it. Readers will recognise a further stepping away from dual aims of RE – the previous aims of learning *about* and learning *from* religion.

How likely?

Many details remain unclear, and these will be addressed during an implementation process. Appendix 1 of the Commission Report offers a suggested timeline of implementation, noting a desire to minimise disruption and extra work for teachers. The first six steps suggested rest with government, such as establishing a national body to create programmes of study, restoring bursaries and enhancing University provision of ITE. Thus any implementation of this Report rests with government, although teachers, school leaders and national RE bodies can and will put pressure on government to act.

Note that the DfE's response to the Report has been positive, and bursaries for ITE have been raised to £9,000 for those with a 2:2 degree and above – a movement towards Recommendation 6.

What does this mean for SACREs?

The Report proposes significant changes for SACREs. If the recommendations are accepted by the DfE, and if there is legislative change to remove the statutory duty on SACREs and Agreed Syllabus Conferences to produce an agreed syllabus, the Commission recommends that SACREs' make-up shifts to include teachers, school leaders, teacher educators and school governors, as well as representatives from faith and belief, who may also be drawn from 'local museums and galleries' (p. 56). SACREs are to be supported with allocated funding to support and develop local RE, such as through CPD, but no longer the curriculum. The lived and local nature of faith and belief is still seen as valuable, but the creation of a curriculum is presented as the responsibility of professional educators.

Lat Blaylock / Stephen Pett/ RE today Adviser Team, Nov 2018

Executive Summary of the Commission Report:

<https://www.commissiononre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Final-Report-Exec-Summary-of-the-Commission-on-RE.pdf>

Full report:

<https://www.commissiononre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Final-Report-of-the-Commission-on-RE.pdf>