

THE ROLE OF AN AGREED SYLLABUS CONFERENCE

Report By: Committee Officer (Scrutiny)

Purpose

1. To inform the Conference of a number of issues relating to the role of an Agreed Syllabus Conference and the formulation of an Agreed Religious Education Syllabus.

Background

2. At the meeting of the Herefordshire Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) held on 29th November 2004, SACRE noted that Herefordshire Schools are using the Herefordshire Agreed Syllabus which was introduced in September 2001. It is a requirement that the Syllabus be reviewed every 5 years. Therefore the current syllabus needs to be reviewed and agreed for implementation by September 2006. Having considered the time needed to undertake consultation and redrafting of the Agreed Religious Education Syllabus, particularly following the publication of the Non-statutory National Framework, SACRE agreed to recommend that the Local Education Authority re-establish the Herefordshire Agreed Syllabus Conference.
3. In accordance with Section 35, Schedule 31 of the Education Act 1996 the Local Education Authority (LEA) established an Agreed Syllabus Conference to produce and recommend to the LEA an agreed Religious Education Syllabus for Herefordshire.
4. The Conference should be aware that the process of undertaking a syllabus review is governed by legislation and legal advice will be made available at the meetings as necessary. However, a number of key guidance points contained in the Department for Education Circular 1/94 are brought to your attention.

The Agreed Syllabus Conference.

5. The Conference is a separate legal entity from a SACRE and, although common membership is permissible, it must be separately convened, therefore separate agendas will be produced for SACRE and the Agreed Syllabus Conference.
6. The Conference is made up of four committees each comprising representatives appointed by the LEA to represent the following bodies:

Committee A	Such Christian denominations and other religions as reflect the principal religious traditions in Herefordshire
Committee B	The Church of England.
Committee C	Associations representing teachers.
Committee D	Local Education Authority (LEA).

7. There is no provision for an Agreed Syllabus Conference to include co-opted members. However, it is anticipated that the Agreed Syllabus Conference will wish to seek particular advice or comment from the co-opted members on SACRE.
8. The role of the conference is to produce and recommend an agreed syllabus for RE which meets fully the requirements of the 1996 Act and is educationally sound. The task of producing a syllabus cannot be delegated except to a sub-committee which must include at least one member of each of the committees constituting the conference. This does not prevent a conference receiving advice or comment from outside groups or individuals.

The Religious Education Syllabus

9. DFE circular 1/94 outlines the aims of religious education in schools as seeking: to develop pupils' knowledge, understanding and awareness of Christianity, as the predominant religion in Great Britain, and the other principal religions represented in the Country; to encourage respect for those holding different beliefs; and to help promote pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and mental development".
10. Syllabuses must be non-denominational and must not be designed to convert pupils, or to urge a particular religion or religious belief on pupils.
11. When drawing up an agreed syllabus account should be taken of the needs of pupils who want to take a GCSE or other examination in Religious Studies.

Key Principles

12. It is important that the review of the Herefordshire RE syllabus is linked to some key principles that provide both a foundation for the review and give direction to the task ahead. These principles will therefore provide an important reference point for those practitioners involved with any working parties formed to revise the syllabus and report back to the Conference. The Consultant for Religious Education has compiled 6 key principles for the review for consultation (Appendix 1)

Timetable for the review

13. To ensure that the review meets the Syllabus implementation date of September 2006, the Consultant for Religious Education has compiled a draft timetable for consideration (Appendix 2).

Decision-making

14. On any question to be decided by conference, the representative committees, as outlined in paragraph 6 above, shall each have a single vote.
16. Only an Agreed Syllabus Conference may recommend an agreed syllabus and its recommendation must be unanimously agreed by the committees constituting the conference.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT

- a) the report be noted and the key principles for the review be adopted and;
- b) the timetable for the review be accepted.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- DFE Circular 1/94 "Religious Education and Collective Worship"