

All Members of the Reading Standing
Advisory Council on Religious Education

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6 June 2014

Your contact is: **Richard Woodford - Committee Services**

NOTICE OF MEETING - READING STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION -
17 JUNE 2014

A meeting of the Reading SACRE will be held on **Tuesday 17 June 2014 at 6.30 pm in Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, Reading.**

The Agenda for the meeting is set out below.

AGENDA

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	-
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10. RE REGIONAL STRATEGY PILOT 19

11. BERKSHIRE HUB FOR RE: BRINGING THE SIX SACREs TOGETHER ? -

Please refer to the RE Review Report on the Religious Education Council website by using the link below (in particular Recommendation 4 on page 56):

<http://resubjectreview.recouncil.org.uk/re-review-report>

12. DATES AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS:

- 26 November 2014
- 2 March 2015

**READING STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION MINUTES -
3 MARCH 2014**

Present:

Anne Cheeseman (Vice Chair in the Chair)	Church of England (Group B)
Ashok Khare	Hindu Faith (Group A)
Jo Fageant	Church of England (Group B)
Vera Bodman	NUT (Group C)
Michael Freeman	ATL (Group C)
Councillor Ennis	Reading Borough Council (Group D)
Councillor Hopper	Reading Borough Council (Group D)
Councillor O'Connell	Reading Borough Council (Group D)

Also in Attendance:

Teresa Jones	RC Diocese of Portsmouth (Group A) - Nominee
Jan Lever	RE Consultant
Richard Woodford	Reading Borough Council

Apologies:

Rabbi Zvi Solomons (Chair)	Jewish Faith (Group A)
Margaret Elcock	Church of England (Group B)
Robin Sharples	Church of England (Group B)
Councillor McElligott	Reading Borough Council (Group D)
Jamie Howell	Berkshire Humanist (Co-opted member)

1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. MATTERS ARISING

Further to Minute 10 of the last meeting, Draft Annual Report, Jan Lever confirmed that a copy of the report had been sent to NASACRE. Jo Fageant informed the SACRE that the analysis of SACRE Annual Reports had been discussed at a recent meeting of NASACRE where it had been confirmed that SACREs should be reminded to send their Annual Reports to the Department for Education as it was their responsibility to analyse them.

3. DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2013-14 - UPDATE

Jan Lever submitted a copy of the SACRE Development Plan for April 2013 to March 2014 and reported that progress against the actions was on target.

Jan informed the SACRE that the NASACRE AGM would take place on 22 May 2014 and said that she would be attending and asked that if any other members of the SACRE would like to attend that they informed either her or Richard Woodford.

Jan explained that the outcomes from the Plan would feed into the new Development Plan for 2014/15 (see Minute 4 below).

READING STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION MINUTES -
3 MARCH 2014

AGREED:

- (1) That the position be noted;
- (2) That any members of SACRE who wished to attend the NASACRE AGM inform Jan Lever or Richard Woodford.

4. NEW DRAFT DEVELOPMENT PLAN - APRIL 2014 - MARCH 2015

Jan Lever submitted a copy of the Draft Development Plan for the period April 2014 to March 2015.

Jan informed the SACRE that the budget for the SACRE for the 2014/15 Municipal Year had been granted and this had been reflected in the new Development Plan.

There were three aspects to the plan which were as follows:

Section A - The responsibilities of the SACRE

This section set out the actions the SACRE had to complete and fund both at a local and national level.

Section B - Supporting Teachers/ Section C - Supporting the Implementation of the Syllabus

Sections B and C had been combined and included work/suggestions aimed at supporting teachers, such as continuing with the network meetings for Primary Schools but maybe trying a more informal approach in order to make the meetings more attractive to teachers and therefore boost attendance. With regard to network meetings for Secondary Schools, teachers from secondary schools had been asked to provide feedback and whether or not they valued these meetings at a recent Secondary School Conference (see Minute 5 below).

With regard to joint training at places of worship, a CD had been produced of the last event and had been sent to all schools. Feedback had been very positive and there had been many requests for another training day to be held at other places of worship. Teachers would be asked at their next network meetings what places of worship they would like to visit and what would be most useful to them.

Jan informed the SACRE that arranging two half-day training sessions for subject leaders had been added as a new action to take place in the autumn term 2014. This action had been added as a result of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) report, Religious Education: Realising the Potential, that had identified a lack of subject leadership experience and training around RE. The action had been aimed at supporting teachers to teach RE as it was often given to new teachers to provide/co-ordinate and could be the first time they had been asked to run a subject across the school. Two training sessions would be offered to teachers in September and October 2014 and would be offered to 'new teachers'.

AGREED: That the position be noted.

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5. JOINT SECONDARY RE CONFERENCE

Further to Minute 6 of the last meeting, Michael Freeman reported on the Secondary School RE Conference that had taken place on 28 February 2014 at Waingels College.

The keynote speaker at the conference had been Stephen Pett, a key advisor from RE Today, who had led a discussion around levelling and assessment within RE. He gave practical tips that could be used in the classroom and provided a number of useful resources. Stephen also led a workshop that looked at literacy, spiritual awareness, raising achievement and Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) development.

Groups of faith speakers had also attended the conference and were given 12 minutes each to explain their faith. Rev. Gavin Tyte had also attended as a special guest and was a pastor from the south coast who used art and music to communicate the message from Christianity.

The conference had provided teachers with an opportunity to share ideas and exchange information in a relaxed atmosphere.

Stephen Vegh, Head of RE at Waingels College, had arranged a network meeting at the end of the conference and had asked teachers for feedback on the network meetings and specifically if they valued the meetings. In response teachers said that they would like the year planned and communicated in advance so that they could choose which meetings to attend. With regard to sharing good practice they wanted it clearly stated who would be sharing information. Overall, teachers thought that the network meetings were valuable but, they needed to be more focused and defined and there needed to be more opportunities to share best practice.

The meeting had also discussed the syllabus and had agreed that it was the best that had been produced to date and was well signed-posted.

AGREED: That the position be noted.

6. TEACHER NETWORK MEETINGS

Jan Lever informed the SACRE that teachers who attended the Primary School network meetings said that they found the meetings valuable although the number of teachers attending had remained small. Having looked at attendance since the meetings had started teachers from 24 Primary Schools had attended and not the same teachers had attended each time. Work had therefore been carried out to identify schools from which no teachers had attended, or had only attended once, so that they could be encouraged to attend the summer term meeting.

Jan explained that the focus of the meetings had to come from the teachers and that communication and publicising the events was a key element. Based on this the summer meeting would focus on assessing RE learning. Jan said that she would put a programme together once she had received the detailed feedback from Stephen Vegh (see Minute 5 above).

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AGREED: That the position be noted.

7. SACRE CONSTITUTION - DRAFT DECISION BOOK REPORT CHANGING MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENT OF GROUP C - TEACHER REPRESENTATIVES

Further to Minute 7 of the last meeting, Richard Woodford submitted a draft Decision Book Report that sought to change the membership requirement of Group C, the Teacher Representatives.

Currently Group C specified the unions from which members had to be sought as follows:

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers	1
The National Association of Headteachers	1
The National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers	1
The National Union of Teachers	1
The Secondary Headteachers Association	1

The report suggested that the membership criteria of Group C should be changed, as set out below, to encourage more teachers of RE in the Borough to take part in SACRE meetings:

- Five teachers representing schools in the Borough of whom at least two shall be nominated by teaching unions/associations.

The SACRE discussed the draft report and agreed that the draft report be approved for publication.

AGREED: That the draft Decision Book Report be approved for publication to amend the membership criteria for Group C to read as follows:

Five teachers representing schools in the Borough of whom at least two shall be nominated by teaching unions/associations.

8. DATE AND TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that the dates of meetings in the 2014/15 Municipal Year would be as follows:

Tuesday 17 June 2014
Wednesday 26 November 2014
Monday 2 March 2015

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and finished at 7.30 pm).

DRAFT Reading SACRE development plan April 2014-March 2015

Aim	Actions	Timescales	People Responsible	Cost	Summer 2014	Autumn 2014	Spring 2015
A. To be a supportive and proactive SACRE enjoying full and well-informed membership.	1. Fill membership vacancies	End July 2014	SACRE Chair Committee Services				
	2. SACRE members attend termly SACRE meetings (3 per year) and, when possible, teacher termly network meetings and training events	Termly SACRE meetings: Summer 2014 Autumn 2014 Spring 2015 Termly teacher network meetings Occasional training events	SACRE Chair/SACRE Adviser SACRE members SACRE Clerk	SACRE Adviser to prepare and attend x3 SACRE meetings a year @ £500 per term =£1500 SACRE Clerk to administer each meeting	Mtg 17 June		
	3. Produce annual SACRE Report	Autumn Term 2014	SACRE Adviser and clerk	SACRE Adviser x1 day @£500		Bring draft to November meeting	
	4. Review the development plan at each meeting and update for next year	At each SACRE meeting	SACRE Adviser and SACRE	SACRE Adviser time included in A2 above	June 17 th mtg		
	5. ~Subscribe to NASACRE ~ Representation at annual NASACRE conference, NASACRE AGM and local SACRE events including the annual pan-Berkshire SACRE conference	Ongoing	SACRE members SACRE Adviser to organise Jo Fageant re pan-Berks event/s	Subscription £95 Conference/s and AGM budget £500 SACRE Adviser time if needs to be the SACRE representative x1 day shared with Wokingham £250	JL to attend NASACRE conference 22 May in London. Michael Freeman also attending		
	6. Members to present aspects of their faith/beliefs to SACRE to inform members	At selected SACRE meetings	SACRE members. Decide plan at SACRE meetings: Chair				

<p>B. To support teachers of RE to continually improve RE learning in their schools and</p> <p>C. To support the implementation of the revised Berkshire Agreed Syllabus for RE</p>	2. Provide, jointly with Wokingham SACRE, a termly secondary RE network meeting, 4-5.30, hosted by a school. RE teachers and SACRE members to be invited	Once a term (3 per year) Summer 2014:8 July Forest School Autumn 2014 Spring 2015 venues tba Hosted by schools	SACRE to plan etc in liaison with Secondary Federation manager/LA	SACRE Adviser x1.5 days @ £500 = £750. Cost shared with Wokingham so Reading contributes £375	Summer Term mtg July 8 th to decide agenda for next year's mtgs		
	3. Provide, jointly with Wokingham, a 2 nd 'on location' training day for teachers at Places of Worship in Reading	Autumn 2014		£1000 (4 days adviser time to organise, attend, lead and collate resources after event (4@£500 =£2000 shared with Wokingham so £1000 for Reading SACRE)	Teachers want to go to Hindu Temple and a range of Christian places of worship		
	4. Subject Leader Training x2 half-day sessions	Autumn term 2014		2 days adviser time @ £500 a day..shared with Wokingham £500 for Reading	To be advertised September		
	5. Annual Secondary RE conference	Spring 2015		£500 to support school organisation and attendance	To be discussed July 8 th at network mtg		

Reading SACRE budget request April 2014-March 2015

SACRE Adviser

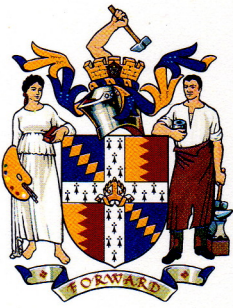
£4875

Secondary RE Conference £500

Other costs

NASACRE etc £595

Total: £5970 **Total budget request: £6000**



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May 2 2014

Dear SACRE Chair,

Attached to this message you will find a copy of a commentary on the Religious Education Council's (REC) Review of Religious Education (available at <http://resubjectreview.recouncil.org.uk/re-review-report>) which was launched in October 2013. This commentary was approved and endorsed by Birmingham SACRE on February 10th, 2014.

Birmingham SACRE encouraged and supported the REC in conducting a review of RE and endeavoured to help by submitting evidence based on our experience. We were, however, disappointed with both the process and the outcome of the REC review and are not convinced that the RE curriculum it has formulated will best help children to flourish and to contribute to society.

One point we made to the REC was that any review should canvass as widely as possible alternative views of RE and draw on their respective strengths. We also noted that the REC is a voluntary body and that statutory responsibility for RE still resides with Local Authorities and their respective SACREs. Any recommendations with respect to RE will need to have the backing of SACREs if they are to be implemented in Local Authority schools. The REC should have consulted widely and thoroughly with all SACREs. In correspondence with this SACRE the REC has admitted that they did not study the existing 150 Local Authority syllabuses as they thought it was not feasible and if RE professionals wanted to know what was in them they are all available publicly on the internet.

We have sent you our commentary prior to the NASACRE AGM in the hope that it will prompt discussion at that event and in local SACRE meetings. Your views and constructive proposals could be included in a shared complementary RE Review which is being prepared and which the Schools Minister said she was prepared to receive. Please circulate our commentary on the REC Review amongst your members, and their nominating bodies. Please send me your comments and your views on what should be in a complementary review which would make up for the shortcomings, as we see it, of the REC review.

Yours faithfully,

Councillor Dr Barry Henley

Chair of Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education

At its meeting on February 10th 2014 all four Committees of the Birmingham Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) approved and adopted this commentary of the Religious Education Council's (REC) Review of Religious Education which was launched in October 2013

Executive summary

1. The REC Review largely ignored representations from bodies with statutory responsibilities for RE. As a result the views of faith communities and local authority representatives on SACREs are not adequately reflected.
2. The outcome of the review defines the 'core curriculum' and therefore centralises the direction of RE and constrains the freedom of communities and faith bodies to define their RE syllabus to meet their local needs.
3. The RE Review is unclear about the purpose of RE. While nominally accepting the benefits of 'learning from' religion it assumes that religions should be examined simplistically as human constructs that some people happen to adopt and others not. It constrains itself to merely 'learning about' religion.
4. The proposed non-statutory curriculum framework for Religious Education (NCFRE) while descriptive of religions, does not incorporate teaching how (through religious observance or non-religious adherence to a moral code) pupils can contribute to betterment of society through practice of behaviours such as charity, truthfulness, beauty, goodness or love. This misses the societal aspect of RE teaching which is highly valued by OFSTED.
5. The Review's Non-statutory Curriculum Framework for RE is mistaken in supposing there must be one common core to RE teaching to achieve the overarching aims of education. The very nature of a multi-cultural and multi-faith society supposes that different traditions of teaching and practices can *all* lead to varying degrees of spiritual and moral depth.
6. The RE Review is correct in seeing that the structural changes in education brought in by the 2010 Academies Act and by other decisions of the Secretary of State for Education will potentially have a detrimental impact on the quality of provision in RE. Since RE was the responsibility of Local Authorities, the 2010 Academies Act is subverting the roles and the supporting structures of SACREs

and ASCs. It is denying faith communities a role in defining the RE syllabus and effectively restricting the powers of the Church of England as the established Church to share in the determination of what is taught in state-funded schools without a religious foundation.

1. Introduction

1-1 The authors of the RE review are to be commended for their good intentions and the serious efforts they have put into developing the policies and strategies which they believe will lead to better religious education for all young people in this country. None of what follows is to cast any doubts on their goodwill yet we believe that the course they have set will lead the 'RE community' into a desert where it and the religious education they hope to provide to young people will perish. This will happen because they do not fully realise what the political will is that keeps RE alive in schools. This misjudgment begins with the complex process they have followed, which is then exacerbated by their understanding of the purpose, aims, content and pedagogy of RE.

2. Process

2-1 There appears to be a kind of forgetfulness in the Religious Education Council (REC) and, for that matter, on the part of the government and the Department for Education. The REC is a *voluntary body* made up of interested individuals who may or may not represent or consult with the bodies they are said to represent. Much is made in the RE review of the process they have followed to come to their conclusions, so their forgetfulness cannot be attributed to simple carelessness. They have overlooked the fact that whereas the REC is a voluntary body, there are also *statutory bodies* that actually have legal responsibility for offering advice, monitoring and overseeing the delivery of RE in schools and for providing the syllabus for RE in local community schools, namely, Local Authority Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) and Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs).

2-2 In reviewing RE one might have expected the REC reviewers systematically to consult the statutory bodies, but they did not. Two SACREs insisted on offering evidence to the 'panel of experts'. The panel of experts, however, failed fully to engage with them, and did not discuss their evidence in the review. They might beneficially have analysed and discussed the reasons why, for example, some SACREs/ASCs did not follow the Non-Statutory

National Framework for RE drawn up by the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the DfE in 2004.

2-3 One of the reasons for the failure to consult the statutory bodies might be that whilst they did not consult with *individual* SACREs, the REC did have the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) as one of its affiliated bodies. However, as the current chair of NASACRE, Lesley Prior explained in an e-mail “NASACRE’s role is not to express views on behalf of its members ... Rather, it is our place to ensure that the rights and responsibilities of those SACREs are acknowledged and respected within the current legal arrangements.” But even NASACRE could hardly be claimed actually to have endorsed the Review’s published report when, according to her, immediately prior to the publication of the report “the final version of the report has not yet been made available for circulation to member bodies, including NASACRE, so we have not discussed it at our recent Officers’ and Executive Meetings.” This last comment must raise a fundamental question mark over the degree of support claimed for the Review document amongst the membership of the REC¹ and most especially amongst SACREs.

2-4 The legal framework for RE was set up in the 1944 Education Act with great care and wisdom, and one dispenses with the framework of this statute at one’s peril. As regards the RE in county/community schools, the act provided for the need for agreement on a syllabus of RE between 1/ Local Authority Representatives, 2/ Teachers/educational professionals, 3/ the Church of England as the established church, and 4/ the other main religious bodies. Each of these four groups had an equal say. The ensuing process is representative of the ‘Big Society’. It is inclusive, giving faith communities a genuine say, whilst acknowledging the needs of the wider society through the voice of Councillors, and the demands of teaching through the voice of teachers and educational professionals. One can only observe that the prescribed legal framework and process makes for genuine moderation and communal ownership.

2-5 Although the structure of four distinct committees is followed by all SACREs, regrettably this is not the structure adopted by the REC which seems to be designed to appear to speak for people of faith whilst keeping their influence in check through their place in the general

¹ See e.g. the claims on p. 12.

membership. The REC should have consulted faith communities and their leadership directly on the draft of the Non-statutory Curriculum Framework for RE and asked for CoE approval via the bishop directly responsible for educational matters (Rt. Rev. John Pritchard, Bishop of Oxford).

2-6 The 1944 Act in addition to providing for a process determining the syllabus for RE in county/community schools, also gave teachers and pupils (via their parents) the freedom to withdraw from RE. Furthermore, the act provided for the creation of ‘voluntary aided’ schools and ‘voluntary controlled’ schools as effective measures by which faith communities could determine their own RE and educational ethos within the state sector of education. Now the RE Review is proposing that its proposed framework should be followed by faith schools too.

2-7 The RE Review quotes from the former schools minister, Nick Gibb, who made it evident that government policy “values the local determination of RE, which reflects the needs and traditions of the community, whether that is carried out by local authorities or schools.” The concentration on *defining a core curriculum* in the proposed NCFRE is not a way of helping local ASCs and schools but a way of telling them what they *must* do, even if NCFRE permits some variable extras. This is a fundamental effort at centralisation and against the desired course set by the political guidance.

2-8 Legally it is clear that humanism and secular philosophies are not properly included within religious education *except as critiques of religion*. They are properly included only as a means for clarifying and testing religious claims and insights, but they are not properly included *in their own right*². The ‘experts’ were certainly informed of this legal advice but they have simply chosen to ignore it by including Humanism and ‘worldviews’ generally in the curriculum starting with the recommended curriculum for Key Stage 1 (p. 18) (i.e. 5-7 year olds). This is despite the ‘official’ position of the CoE in the form of a statement made by the Bishop of Oxford, the Rt. Rev John Pritchard, that humanism should not be taught to children in its own right within RE.

² That was the core of the legal advice received by the City of Birmingham in 1974 and reaffirmed by further legal advice in 2009.

2-9 The review proposes teaching humanism and atheism by expanding the ‘religion’ in RE into ‘religion and belief’ or ‘religions and worldviews’³. The paragraph that speaks of the ‘Breadth of RE’ states:

The law requires that local authority RE agreed syllabuses and RE syllabuses used in academies that are not designated with a religious character ‘must reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.’ This means that from the ages of 5 to 19 pupils in schools learn about diverse religions and worldviews including Christianity and the other principal religions. Some schools with a religious character will prioritise learning about and from one religion, but all types of school need to recognize the diversity of the UK and the importance of learning about its religions and worldviews, including those with a significant local presence. (p.15)

2-10 The second half of the paragraph interprets the law incorrectly. The phrase ‘religions and worldviews’ appears to be shorthand for ‘religions and secular/atheistic philosophies’. The clause in the law only specifies the UK’s principal religions and says nothing about requiring humanism or atheism to be taught. Secondly, as stated in the first sentence of the paragraph the legal clause refers to community schools and to academies *without a religious foundation*. To then go on to suggest that *all types of schools* should recognize ‘the importance of learning about religions and worldviews’ is at variance with the legal position. It would be wholly against the principles of voluntary schooling and academies with a religious foundation to insist they teach humanism and atheism. These schools must teach RE in accordance with their trust deeds⁴.

2-11 It is neither possible nor desirable in a free and open society to shelter children from secularity, agnosticism, atheism and humanism, nor is it feasible to do so since much of the curriculum already presupposes methodologies and intellectual enquiries *etsi deus non daretur* (as if God does not exist). What is at issue is whether such a methodology, or methodologies, should be used in RE and thus whether religions and secular worldviews are ultimately on a par. The latter (worldviews) are seen as human constructs which might differ from time to time like the duck-rabbit optical illusion - now you see the world one way and now another. Religions, on the other hand, present themselves in a very different way, perhaps as a truth to do or as a command to be obeyed. Schools with a religious foundation in

³ See e.g. footnotes 7, 8 and 9 on page 14 of the Review where this spelled out in full.

⁴ The caveat in a footnote on p. 7 hardly undoes the damage that this paragraph does to the rights in law given to the governors of voluntary aided schools and of academies and free schools.

particular will resist any attempt to diminish the *sui generis* character of religious interests and the way this informs religious education. Agreed Syllabus Conferences should do the same to conform to the law as it stands.

3. Purpose

3-1 Much was made in the initial stages of the review about the confusion surrounding the purpose and aims of RE. See para 1.2 of appendix 1 p. 49. It was claimed that ‘Some people don’t get it.’ The RE Review itself does little to bring about the clarity that is necessary.

3-2 The first, perhaps minor, mistake lies in indirectly quoting the law (1988 ERA) as to the fundamental aims of education as a whole (p. 12):

“Every state-funded school must offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based, and which:

- promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and
- prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life....”

In doing so, they omit the expectation in the law that the curriculum should also contribute to the development of *society* which is also mentioned in the ERA. This is important because there is still an all pervasive individualism in the Non statutory Curriculum Framework for RE that was so evident in the original NSNFRE of 2004 – though it is somewhat less pronounced. Thus one notes the intrusion of the word ‘own’ e.g. p. 18, p. 19, p. 20, p. 21 etc. When the document says that pupils “should raise questions and begin to express their own views ...” (p. 18, 21) the intrusion of the word ‘own’ suggests that it is not good enough for them simply to learn to express *their* views but that these views must somehow be set against those of others. This fails to recognise that we learn to articulate and express our views precisely in conjunction with, and through our relationships and in dialogue with, others. Not enough attention has been paid to the sociology of knowledge.

3-3 The most powerful argument that one can have for delivering religious education in school is that there is something intrinsically worthwhile about identifiable forms of religious life to which young people should be given access. Religious education cannot be done simply because the law requires it to be done but rather the law requires that it be done because many in society accept that these identifiable forms of religious life either have or may have this intrinsic merit. All education statute since 1944 in England up until the 2010 Academies Act have assumed that religious sensibilities might make this positive

contribution to the development of pupils and society hence the prescription of RE in contrast to systems in the US or France where religion is excluded from schools.. Young people without access to it would be impoverished spiritually, morally, socially and culturally speaking. It must, of course, be acknowledged that not everyone in society shares this judgment about religious life but religious educational processes cannot begin without it. The lack of universal agreement on this point is a good reason for maintaining the parental choice for pupil withdrawal clause in the law. But one must conclude that the purpose of RE is quite simple, namely, to enable religious sensibilities and religious life to contribute to the overarching aim of education. Religious traditions do so by articulating the nature and character of spiritual and moral life, and cultivating them through their acts of recollection of revelations, through their narratives, rituals, doctrines, social practices etc. that re-present or re-live the presence of God/transcendence. There can be no expectation that every religious tradition must be represented on the curriculum but whichever are selected, are selected because of the insight and contribution they might make to the educational enterprise in local and identifiable communities.

3-4 What the RE Review needs to make clear is how and in what ways, for example, that ‘knowing and understanding about a range of ‘religions and worldviews’ contributes to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and society. Sadly it does not do so in sufficient detail to be of much use.

3-5 To illustrate: What precisely is the connection between

‘...questions about meaning and purpose in life, beliefs about God, ultimate reality, issues of right and wrong and what it means to be human’

and developing

‘an aptitude for dialogue’? They might as easily develop an aptitude for nihilism, cynicism, and relativism unless one can be more positive about the value of studying such matters.

3-6 In ‘enabling pupils to develop their ideas, values and identities’, can we be indifferent as to *which* ideas, values and identities are formed by individual pupils? It appears that the plural and secular context in which the RE Review is done silences the ‘experts’ about *how* a pupil might develop or *what* character and qualities ultimately lead to an open, cohesive, tolerant, and discursive society - even if they had such social development in mind. This is very different from the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus that spells out the relevant

dispositions and looks to religious traditions to show how they do, or might, contribute to developing these dispositions.

4. Pedagogy and Content

4-1 Part of the difficulty to be found in the NCFRE stems from the desire of the experts to provide a 'core curriculum' that will set the benchmarks for all RE syllabuses everywhere. However, a little reflection on the overarching aims of education would have shown that the ambition of defining a 'core' for RE is impossible. The aims, (which require the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum that leads to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and of society), can be met in a whole variety of ways. The very reason we live in a multi-cultural society is that there are diverse traditions with very different historical roots, and which have each, and separately, developed considerable spiritual and moral depth i.e. they have each used a different set of resources. To claim that there is one single core of teaching would be difficult to establish. To pretend that one must, however, know something about many or all religious traditions to attain spiritual depth is to pretend that all saints, prophets, gurus, apostles of an earlier age with little knowledge of the different traditions, were shallow in some important respect. It is conceivable that social and cultural depth in current circumstances requires some engagement with different traditions but to suppose there must be a single 'core' is not believable.

4-2 What is interesting is that the review has abandoned the two attainment targets of *learning about* and *learning from* widely used in earlier documents. This is replaced with the expectation "to know, apply and understand the matters, skills and processes specified in the relevant programme of study" (P.15). The original distinction in attainment targets was introduced to make it self-evidently clear that RE was not just a matter of transmitting information about the different religious traditions but that pupils should be encouraged to engage with them. The original reason for the introduction of this '*learning from*' attainment target was to counter the rather voyeuristic tendencies in much multi-faith RE. It was certainly evident to teachers that pupils tend to find material boring unless it is made relevant to their lives.

4-3 If RE is to contribute to the development of pupils as the overarching aims of education demands, one must specify what bearing these religious matters should have for their character and life. Perhaps the words 'to apply and understand' or 'gaining and deploying

skills' in the NCFRE are expected to serve the function of *learning from*. Yet the advice to 'apply' without specifying to what purpose and in what ways, is all but useless advice. The generality makes it far from clear how it will actually contribute to the spiritual and moral development of pupils let alone to their social and cultural development. Does it need to be said that the sheer requirement to be clear and coherent does not ensure that the beliefs, ideas, values etc are worthy of a pupil's allegiance? Similarly, whether one should respect the right of others to differ as the Review claims, would also depend on what the views are. One cannot for example freely express racist views in public nor is there a requirement to respect the people, who do so, for holding such views.

4-4 The RE Review has replaced the abandoned two attainment targets with three aims.

'Know about and understand...'

'Express ideas and insights...'

'Gain and deploy skills....'

This is a puzzling trio. One could have thought that expressing ideas and insights was an intellectual *skill*, whether one did so 'reasonably' or unreasonably, with or without 'increasing discernment'. The second aim is not readily differentiated from the third, just as *expressing ideas* cannot be easily separated from the supposed skill of *articulating beliefs*. On the other hand it is difficult to see how 'knowing about and understanding' can be achieved or demonstrated separately from 'expressing ideas' or thoughts. The response may be that the three aims cannot in practice be separated from each other. But the difficulty is the degree of abstraction that ultimately provides no direction to pupils, despite the references to 'appreciating and appraising'. This is the point of this form of RE, it fails to guide and is directionless. There is no indication that the appreciation and appraisals made by teachers and by others in society are grounded.

4-5 There is a general failure in the Review's NCFRE to recognise the complexity of the human person as having not only thoughts and ideas but also as having feelings and dispositions to act. Human beings struggle not only to acquire a growth in knowledge but with developing empathy or with feeling rightly about matters. And not infrequently, human beings struggle to find *the will* to do things. Such distinctions could have given a characteristic identity to the different aims and provided a kind of rationale that the current collection simply lacks. The aims would also have had more pedagogical force, for without

the recognition of knowledge, feelings and human will and an acknowledgement of the communal nature of our existence, there can be no effective educational communication.

4-6 One does not gain any sense from the document that for the writers of the report, religious sensibility is of paramount importance to the development of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural life of pupils. At best it is the experience of a secular RE that is supposed to be of benefit to pupils. Perhaps the RE community needs to review the way in which it presents its case and describe the tasks of RE. If they are unsure of the value of religious life itself why should anyone else care?

5. Politics and the wider context

5-1 The RE Review is on much stronger grounds in identifying some of the practicalities that are affecting the delivery of RE in schools. The development of an E-Bacc (English Baccalaureat) without any mention of RE as a legally prescribed subject was bound to have a negative impact. Just as the disappearance of RE advisors and advisory teachers impoverishes the resources on which schools may draw to support the delivery of RE in the classroom. The reliance on teachers without an educational background in theology weakens the subject. Connect this fact with the withdrawal of support for the training of RE teachers and it begins to create a picture of a political indifference to RE in schools.

5-2 The (political) indifference may well be shared by Faith communities because they have been supplanted by those with a professional interest in education. Faith communities which have examined the secularised RE on offer no longer see RE as serving religious life in any positive way. Only an RE that is expressly and openly committed to serving the spiritual and moral development of young people using religious resources, can be of interest to faith communities.

5-3 What the RE Review fails to do is to ask why the indifference to RE exists. No doubt the secularisation of society has something to with it, but then the 'RE community' has directly contributed to this by insisting that in RE one must 'study' and 'understand religion as a phenomenon', effectively from a secular perspective. Phenomena may, or may not, be interesting. Whether they are interesting will depend on whether the phenomena convey moral commands, present something beautiful that is worthy of contemplation, or reveal truths that need to be acknowledged and affirmed. So long as the RE community seeks to be

neutral and value free, so long as they exclude the passions of faith and keep faith communities at bay, they will have little of value to contribute to social life and will consequently be treated with indifference by politicians.

REGIONAL STRATEGY PILOT

Please see the documents attached.

This provides information about a pilot scheme and from what I already know it would not surprise me if there are already groups lined up for this first round of awards. Our SACRE may not yet be in a position to put together a bid along with partners. However, you will quickly be able to discern the direction of travel. Culham St Gabriel's has a great deal of money and in partnership with The National Association of Teachers of Religious Education and the Religious Education Council represent powerful influence and influence which is not necessarily strongly supportive of SACREs unless they can prove they are making a difference.

If the pilots are successful this initiative could change the landscape for RE very considerably and as SACREs legally have to exist it is essential in my view that they get involved in these emerging partnerships - the aim is, after all, to make a difference for RE teachers and through them for pupils.

It was knowledge of this initiative that prompted the theme for this year's Joint SACREs Conference so can I, once again, ask you to do all you can to encourage attendance on that evening.

Best wishes

Jo Fageant

Dear Colleague

RE Regional Strategy Pilot launched

We are delighted to tell you about the launch of the RE Regional Strategy Pilot, and send you a link to the website and documents (also attached), including an Expression of Interest form for those regional networks that wish to apply for support from Culham St Gabriel's for pilot activity during the summer term 2014: <http://www.cstg.org.uk/2014/04/re-regional-strategy-pilot-launched/>

The strategy, to ensure that there are more robust arrangements for training and supporting teachers of RE, is based on Recommendation 4 of the RE Council's [Review of Religious Education](#). This pilot version of the strategy has been worked out by the RE Council and NATRE working in collaboration with Culham St Gabriel's. We hope the documents will help teachers of RE to develop a regional strategy in their own area, adapted and suited to their own professional development priorities.

We would be most grateful if you could broadcast this exciting new opportunity as widely as possible. Those interested are advised to read the Implementation Report and the Expression of Interest, and to consult with one of the CSTG consultants, Mary Myatt mary@cstg.org.uk or Alan Brine alan@cstg.org.uk, before applying for support.

Best wishes

Deborah Elwine



Please note our new address: We are now at **60-62 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6PN**. Our new phone number is **01865 612035**. Email and website remain the same.

Visit the new RE:ONLINE www.reonline.org.uk for practical, wise and interactive ideas on RE.

Email: deborah@cstg.org.uk | Web: www.cstg.org.uk | RE:ONLINE: www.reonline.org.uk | CPD4RE: www.teachre.org.uk

Read *Schools with Soul: A new approach to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development*: RSA report supported by Culham St Gabriel's: <http://www.thersa.org/smsc>