

An introduction to City of York SACRE

Why is there a SACRE?

In 1944, Local Education Authorities were empowered by law to set up a Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE). In 1988, the Education Reform Act made it a legal responsibility for them to do so.

What are the duties of SACRE?

The SACRE must:

- advise the LA on RE given in accordance with the agreed syllabus, collective worship, and on matters related to its functions, whether in response to a referral from the LA or as it sees fit
- have regard to any circumstances relating to the faith backgrounds of the pupils which are relevant for deciding what character of collective worship is appropriate when a school makes application for a determination
- publish an annual report on its work and on actions taken by its representative groups, specifying any matters on which it has advised the LA, broadly describe the nature of that advice, and set out reasons for offering advice on matters not referred to it by the LA
- send a copy of the report to NASACRE (National Association of SACRE's)
- meet in public unless confidential information is to be disclosed
- make minutes of its meetings available for inspection at the LA's offices (so far as the minutes relate to the parts of meetings that were open to the public). There are also provisions about public access to the agenda and reports for meetings.

The SACRE should:

- monitor the provision and quality of RE taught according to its agreed syllabus, together with the overall effectiveness of the syllabus, and collective worship
- provide advice and support on the effective teaching of RE in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus; provide advice to the LA and its schools on methods of teaching, the choice of teaching material and the provision of teacher training

- in partnership with its LA, consider whether any changes need to be made in the agreed syllabus or in the support offered to schools in the implementation of the agreed syllabus, to improve the quality teaching and learning of RE
- offer advice to the LA, and through the LA to schools, concerning how an existing agreed syllabus can be interpreted, and collective worship provided, so as to fit in with a broad, balanced and coherent curriculum.

The SACRE may:

- require its LA to review the agreed syllabus and, if after discussion a vote is taken on this matter, the LA group on SACRE is not entitled to cast a vote. A majority decision by the three other committees is sufficient
- decide to advise the LA on matters related to its functions to the LA – equally, an LA may decide to refer matters to its SACRE
- co-opt members who are not members of any of the four groups – such co-opted members may provide educational expertise, young peoples' views or religious and non-religious views that reflect a diverse multi-cultural society.

Attendance at meetings

SACRE members are expected to attend all meetings where possible and send apologies to the clerk when they are unable to attend. A SACRE member who fails to attend three consecutive meetings and does not send apologies will be asked to stand down and an alternative representative will be sought.

Who sits on the SACRE?

The composition of the SACRE is defined by law. It is made up of four committees. Each local authority (LA) must establish a permanent body called a standing advisory council on religious education (SACRE). It must appoint representatives to each of four committees, representing respectively:

Group A: Christian denominations and such other religious and religious denominations as, in the authority's opinion, will appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area

Group B: The Church of England

Group C: Teacher associations

Group D: The LA

Membership of each of the four groups which constitute the York SACRE are:

Group A: Baha'i, Humanist, Jewish, Methodist, Muslim, Salvationist, Sikh, Society of Friends (single representative for each)

Group B: Three representatives nominated by the Diocese of York.

Group C: Teachers for religious education

Group D: Four elected members of the LA.

What is the distinctive contribution of each committee?

Committees A and B:

- Should present a positive image of their religion, so that members of the other Committees are disabused of any religious stereotypes of each denomination or religion. They must also make clear any grounds on which they may differ from each other, but also the respect they have for each other's viewpoints – since such convictions and mutual understanding both lie at the heart of effective classroom RE
- Can create opportunities within SACRE meetings to raise awareness of issues of sensitivity in the teaching of RE to the children of their faith community
- Should appreciate the difficulties schools are facing in the area, support their best endeavours, and act, where necessary, as a link between schools and the faith communities.

Committee C should:

- Have a real and positive interest in RE in primary, secondary or special schools
- Ensure that the needs of schools and teachers are considered by the SACRE in their discussions
- Provide the SACRE with information about the context in which RE is taught in the schools in the local authority
- Ensure that the associations they represent are informed about the work of the SACRE
- Create opportunities for other teachers to learn more about the work of the SACRE and give them the opportunity to have their views expressed at SACRE meetings
- Consult other teachers on matters of particular importance to the work of the SACRE.

Committee D:

- Can bring to the meeting the breadth of educational issues and concerns which elected members are wrestling with, and place RE's role within it
- Can be the supporters of RE within the various committees and structures of the LA
- Can give political support to enable locally determined RE to flourish within each LA – financial support, advisory support, etc.
- Can appreciate the issues raised by a multi-faith, multi-cultural society for the education of children in RE and reflect these issues in the Education Committee, Scrutiny Committee, etc. as a means of supporting RE
- Can bring the 'public' dimension to the debate about RE provision and support.

Voting

On any question to be decided by the SACRE, its constituent groups each have a single vote, but co-opted members do not have a vote .

Decisions within a group do not require unanimity.

Each group must regulate its own proceedings, including provision for resolving deadlock.

Election of chair and vice-chair

Members of groups A, B, C and D shall vote individually for the election of a chair and vice-chair from within their collective membership at the first SACRE meeting of a new school year.

How often must a SACRE meet?

There are no requirements to meet for a certain number of times but meetings are usually held once a term. More meetings may be scheduled if the business is considered to be urgent or requiring more discussion time than is possible in the regular meeting/s.

It is important to attend because no decisions can be made unless there is at least one person present from each committee in order to cast that committee's single vote. Co-opted members do not have a vote.

How is the SACRE managed?

It is the LA's responsibility to set up a SACRE and this implies it also has a duty to fund it. Funding for SACRE's varies across the country, but in this authority there is no specified budget. The SACRE applies for funding as and when it identifies a need.

The SACRE is serviced by a clerk, provided by the Effectiveness and Achievement Team, who is a contact within the authority for SACRE matters, takes minutes of the meetings and provides administrative support.

The LA can make the decision on how the chair of SACRE may be appointed or it may allow the SACRE to choose the chair from amongst their members.

This SACRE is serviced by a Local Authority adviser from York's Effectiveness and Achievement Team, who:

- may advise the SACRE and LA
- ensures that the decisions of the SACRE are moved forward
- oversees the monitoring of RE and collective worship in schools
- oversees the development of the Agreed Syllabus and its implementation
- offers support and advice to teachers and schools through training and consultancy
- writes the SACRE annual report.

What is an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC)?

An ASC is convened in order to produce an Agreed Syllabus for RE. It is a separate legal entity from a SACRE.

Although a review of the locally Agreed Syllabus is required within five years of the last review, if the majority of the committees (other than Committee D) ask the LA in writing to reconsider its Agreed Syllabus it must convene a conference for that purpose.

An ASC:

- contains the same committees as the SACRE
- can be made up of SACRE members but need not do so. There is no provision for co-opted members.

The chair of the ASC can be appointed by the LA or the LA may allow the ASC to choose its own Chair.

The LA's responsibility to convene the ASC implies a duty to provide funds for its work.

What other activities might the SACRE be involved in?

- convene working parties of SACRE members and teachers
- produce guidelines for schools, such as: schemes of work; programmes of study; assessment guidance; resource lists including visits and visitors; policy documents; teaching and learning strategies; RE and the early years; RE and post 16; RE and SEN; SMSC; recording and reporting
- keep up to date with Ofsted reports; what is happening with SACREs in other areas (NASACRE and Analysis of SACRE reports)
- monitor action plans
- receive reports on local activities such as exam results; displays; exhibitions; 'special days';
- acknowledge schools on their achievements and encourage those who need it through visits; certificates; letters; invitations to talk to SACRE; listening
- visit schools to: experience an RE lesson or an act of worship;
- presentations to SACRE by teachers
- find out more about the faiths or non-faith stances of: members of SACRE; the faiths identified in the agreed syllabus
- recognise and seize opportunities to raise the profile and status of RE
- ensure schools are kept up to date with both local and national initiatives and information which will support them in their situation
- address the issue of schools' non-compliance with legal requirements
- organise SACRE training days and lectures
- ensure that the LA are fully aware of the duties and responsibilities of SACRE so that they may make informed decisions regarding policy and budget
- ensure that SACRE is represented on national bodies and at national courses/conferences
- write a development plan to ensure the SACRE 'moves forward' and is effective in carrying out its duties and tasks.

Autumn 2018