

NASACRE AGM 2016: Shaping the future

Chair's Report: As well as official engagements I have also worked with a variety of SACREs on specific issues as they have arisen during the year. This has mostly involved supporting Chairs of SACREs but also sometimes clerks or advisers. Much of this has been regarding support, or lack thereof, for SACREs from the local authority, the possibility of merging SACREs or ASCs and, increasingly common, vexatious members and how to deal with them. What is clear is that as local authority support for SACREs and ASCs is diminishing in some areas, the role of NASACRE becomes increasingly more important. I notice this when taking calls from advisers, many of whom have little or no training in that role. The priorities for the coming year are clear to me as the Chair: continued involvement in the public debates about RE and collective worship, such as the APPG on RE and other forums; making a clear response to the implications of the Government White Paper and its plans for local authorities; continued support for member SACRE as they face challenges in their locality; where appropriate, ensuring that NASACRE keeps a high profile in the media.

The government intend to take teacher training out of Higher Ed. and put it into schools – but just because a school is 'outstanding' it might not have good RE – so what happens to RE trainees?

Secretary's Report This year we have adopted a patron! Rt Hon Charles Clarke PC has kindly agreed to become our first patron, and we are considering who else amongst the great and the good might become our second.

Treasurer's Report In spite of the pressures on Local Authorities, income from Annual Subscriptions has continued to be robust, with 134 paid up member SACREs by December 31st compared with the remarkable combined figure of 140 paid up member SACREs for all of 2014. Your Executive Committee felt we were in a strong enough position financially to commit our funds to two important pieces of work: the upgrading of our website (this is in addition to, and separate from, the ongoing work of maintaining and running our website), and the updating and re-writing of some of our key information and training materials for the benefit of and to support SACREs in their ongoing work.

Of a 13K budget, 6 1/2 spent on travel; the rest on website and consultations. The AGM costs around 10K

The Rt Hon Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss GBE chaired a report Living with Difference - the Commission on Religion and Belief in Public Life – took 2 years to research widely, led by a multi-faith working party. Religion is no longer a glue that binds, but all too often a source of division, mistrust and sometimes hatred. The proportion of people who do not follow a religion has risen from just under a third in 1983 to almost half in 2014. Elsewhere, the

report reveals that almost half the population today describes itself as non-religious. We need a 'new settlement for religion and belief in the UK. Too many agreed syllabuses are too Christian and non-religious views underrepresented. RE should have equal standing with humanities subjects * and be in EBacc. Many syllabuses tend to "portray religions only in a good light ... and they tend to omit the role of religions in reinforcing stereotypes and prejudice around issues such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity and race." In all teacher education attention is given to religion and belief that is of a similar level to that which is given to reading and maths, so that every primary class teacher is confident and competent in this curriculum area, whether implicit or explicit, and so that in secondary and further education teaching all staff have general awareness of relevant sensitivities. Faith schools admissions criteria should reduce the element of religion and they are often the only school in an area. The religion should be inspected by OFSTED, not SIAMS. It recommends scrapping the law requiring schools to hold acts of collective worship (but they still want inclusive, spiritual assemblies **). Counter terrorism legislation contributing to a further demonisation of muslims.

* Some from the floor disagreed – RE goes well with English, the arts etc. sometimes

** The current law, as interpreted by most of us, already allows for this

Professor Adam Dinham produced a report RE for Real: The Future of Teaching and Learning about Religion and Belief – 1944 Act has been amended piecemeal but religious landscape has changed much more rapidly. White an average of £6K is spend per pupil, only £1 goes to their RE. Students are concerned that they hear a lot of stereotypes in the media and in some of their learning. They want to know what's real. They think that learning about religion and belief is becoming more and more relevant because they see more of it, and what they see is more diverse. . Students really enjoy learning about real 'lived' religion, especially through thinking about religion and belief controversies. Most of this cohort think RE needs to be a separate subject with subject specialist teachers. Many think that RE lacks status. The majority think they should they should study religion and belief up to Year 10, but then GCSE should be optional, not compulsory. Teachers think RE has an important task in rebalancing media stereotypes. They are frustrated by how little time there is for RE, often resulting in teaching about only one or two traditions. There is concern about a tension in RE between academic and personal purposes. 86% of teachers in the study feel that RE should be a National Curriculum subject and be included in the EBacc. 72% say it should be compulsory to at least 16. The majority of teachers in the study think teaching and learning about religion and belief should take place in a distinct RE subject (specific) and also be included as a theme in other learning areas (distributed). Most supported the inclusion of humanism. It was also thought that GCSE simplifies religion. There's a tension between people wanting all religions taught and the desire by specialist teachers to concentrate on fewer religions in more depth. There should be increased investment in continuing professional development for non-specialist teachers of religion and belief. Which religions should be included? Who are the stakeholders and how are they represented?? 'What's disability got to do with RE?' Nobody can know everything so shouldn't be

heavy content. 'Understanding each other' doesn't necessarily lead to live – can make us kill each other better. Move from 'tolerance' to 'improving the quality of our disagreement'. Those who work in health and social work also need training in religion.

Charles Clarke believed that the government is further ahead in planning a National RE syllabus than most suspect.

Derek Jay