

NASACRE AGM

Wednesday 12th May 2010

The British Medical Association, Tavistock Square, London

Key Note Address: **Clare Short** former MP and minister

“Religion, Politics and Community: SACRE’s capacity to engage ...”

Pre-amble

(Clare Short was speaking the day after David Cameron became Prime minister.)

“Interesting times” – the Chinese curse.

However there is a real sense of a new beginning and hope in a Hung Parliament.

We live in the age of a voracious 24 hour news driven political world – which sucks politicians into its agenda – creating arrogant central politics.

Power is sucked into No 10 with the Commons as a rubber stamp.

Potentially a coalition will force a more considered style of governing – if different backgrounds and traditions are thrashing things out, this may result in better decisions - which will be for the good.

However – difficult times are ahead – there will be massive cuts and increases in taxation. Things will be cut back to spending levels of 1997.

There may be some hope in this – as the centralisation of public services has meant bureaucratic targets which have stifled creativity and spontaneity - if those elements are cut it will be good.

Main Address

Praise for what we have achieved

Religious Education in Birmingham in the late 50s and early 60s, as a Catholic girl of Irish decent – they would point at the local Anglican Parish Church and refer to it as the church that was stolen from them.

Late 1950s and 60s saw post war migration from the Caribbean and the Indian sub-continent.

With this migration came an increase in deep racism – Enoch Powell “Rivers of Blood” speech. 15% National Front Vote.

They were nasty times and we have come a long way since then.

RE teachers have played an important role in massively shifting the attitudes of people in Britain and in educating people to understand a diversity of faith.

Within 10 years Birmingham will be a minority white city with a majority nothing population.

Learning about diversity in schools has meant liberation of people’s stories. It is not just about avoiding discrimination – we are bigger people when we learn from others.

RE teachers have been instrumental in leading our society through education to be one where we can appreciate each others rich stories.
It is not the same in other European countries – where there are silos of difference.
We have done well and RE teachers should be proud.

Challenges ahead

Clare quoted the main purposes of RE (from the NASACRE SACRE booklet) as being to help young people to answer those huge questions of meaning and purpose, which are the hardest questions people have ever asked.

As educational professionals it has to be done without being political – which is to walk on eggshells.

Britain is richer now than it has ever been (Richard Layard's work on Happiness and Wilkinson's "The Spirit Level"). Individual happiness does increase up to £7,000 per head, per annum, as basic needs are ensured – after that there is a decline in happiness levels as competitiveness and dissatisfaction increase.

The satisfaction levels in some of the wealthiest countries and States in the US, with the greatest inequalities, are very low – indicators of dissatisfaction are: crime, violence, drug addiction, alcohol addiction and teenage pregnancies.

We are rich in Britain – but not happy – so what is the meaning of life? – This is a question RE needs to address.

Ours is a Hedonistic culture – overworking with no time for those you love.

Yet most report that there is no meaning without relationship to others and that those engaged in service to others enjoy the greatest happiness.

These questions belong on the RE agenda.

But is this political?

We live in a global IT web world – one global community?

This provides massive threats.

Climate change – catastrophes – Hurricane Katrina – water shortages – lead to conflicts – middle East.

This in turn leads to a displacement of people – so demands on immigration of richer countries will grow – with an ugly expensive ineffective system of processing asylum seekers.

There is a deep mood in the country - a concern about immigration.

Old established migrants from the post war wave of migration are angry about the new wave of migrants.

The bottom of the labour market is affected.

In Netherlands and Sweden this has led to a swing to the right and anti-Islamic feeling and legislation.

International Convention of Asylum seekers need re-visiting.

Where there is more migration there is likely to be more "nastiness". Nasty Politics could take over.

We are at a point in History.

The way we live in OECD's is not sustainable – and others want to live like us.

The world population is expanding rapidly.

There needs to be a way of providing for all – or we will kill each other.

Either we share or even the selfish billionaire will be without safety and the world will become very ugly.

The wealthy cannot inoculate themselves from this.

In the Middle East and Gaza there is growing division which affects the globe.

A division of Arab/Muslim v Other countries.

Muslims feel "got at" – which leads to greater hatred.

Geo-Politics effect the RE agenda.

Global co-operation will be harder if we are ripping up the rules set up at the end of WW2 – which are all breached in the Middle East.

It is not good enough just to listen to one another, Geo-Politics affects everything we do in RE.

This is notable in the agenda of the BNP, the rhetoric has shifted from being anti-black to being anti-Islamic.

Issues of Religion are being used as the identity of conflict as identity is drawn around religion.

This is an issue for us.

Religious traditions can be misused and the results can be ugly.

We cannot gloss over this.

We are moving into a period of cuts – there is no boom where money might be sprinkled to all groups.

There will be competition for resources and some will get more and some will get less.

Support for the BNP is likely to rise.

RE needs to hold moral respect and get these issues on the agenda.

People are yearning for something more than hedonism.

RE should be a force that holds on to generous values.

You walk on eggshells and take the next generation by the hand to guide them through the difficult times.

Questions

Q. The place of science and environmental developments in helping a dividing world?

A. Ground heating, solar power – more emphasis on engineering important.

Q. How can we make SACREs more effective?

A. Problem often is that SACREs all concentrate on commonalities and not divisions – needs to be more discussion of the misuse of our religious traditions – greater honesty. We have had a period of education initiatives from top-down that fail to consult the practitioners. More effective SACREs – there have been great achievements in Birmingham – but I cannot tell you how to be more effective – that is up to you.

Q. How do you counter the statements and beliefs made by BNP supporters?

A. We need to ask why such people become so full of hate and fear. Blame will only increase hate.

We need to be generous and look for solutions.

People support BNP because they are full of disgruntled anger (also now including Sikh and Caribbean supporters).

We need to approach people with a generous attitude – draw people in not push them out.

Q. Have voting patterns and religious groups for certain political parties changed ?

A. There is less religious block identification with any political party and people appear to be putting less posters in their windows - greater privacy around voting.

Q. Is there really progression in religious understanding aren't we asked to provide sitar and samosas?

A. Token samosas are everywhere. However there has been real progress and you don't know what you have done - today's generation do know more.
Someone earlier mentioned 3rd generation Pakistani children still having to define themselves as Pakistani.

People are British but it is good that people acknowledge their origins.

Diversity is rich but labelling people has helped - for example working class boys underachieving.

Q. What do you think has been the legacy of your time in office as Secretary of State for International Development?

A. I was fortunate in that I had 6 years in one department. That doesn't happen often.

Development is about self interest not altruism.

We had the freedom to do it properly.

Now in the instant 24 hour news age that is not likely to happen again.

During the time of my office

- Rwanda
- Balkan crisis,
- the end of the cold war
- Nelson Mandela was freed and became the first President of South Africa in a fully representative democratic election
- the Berlin wall came down.

2000 Millennium Goals and a hope for change.

Then War on Terror and Iraq - changed the agenda.

But Education does transform lives and their country.

Particularly the education of girls.

We can advance people's opportunities.

But we are the poodle of the US - it is like being the best friend of the biggest bully in the playground.

We need to work with others for the safe good order of the world.

My biggest regret: Iraq **Chair's report: Partnerships** - In June 2009 a number of us attended a fascinating and useful conference run jointly by the Inter Faith Network UK and NASACRE, which Denise Chaplin and Michael Metcalf prepared on our behalf in partnership with Harriet Crabtree. The day itself was a huge success, with SACREs and interfaith organisations working together, sharing ideas and practice and learning much about and from each other. The resulting report,

which has recently been distributed, contains a lot of excellent thinking and practice and, in the 'key points' at the beginning, many helpful suggestions for moving this forward.

Review and renewal of the **RE Subject Self-Evaluation Form (SEF)** has been a partnership between NASACRE, NATRE (through Deborah Weston) and AREIAC (through Dave Francis). This is being piloted this term and will be available from September. As well as being helpful to schools, it will also help SACREs with their monitoring role - useful document is the RETool that Michael Metcalf, Bruce Gill and Katherine Wedell have been working on. This is a combination of the SACRE SEF and the report template. It will enable SACREs to evaluate their strengths and development needs, celebrate their successes in an individual way and report on work that they have done.

Month of celebration: March 2011 sees the first month of celebrating RE. Denise Chaplin is chairing the group and it is important that all SACREs work with their schools to raise the profile of good RE in maintained schools and Local Authorities. A main theme of this from NASACRE will be to use our 2011 Youth Forum projects as a strong link to Celebrating quality RE. This will be followed at the next AGM in 2011 with a major focus on pupil voice and participation in RE and Community Cohesion.

Agreed Syllabus Collaboration Project: A number of SACREs have been involved in a project co-ordinated by QCDA, which is seeking to find a collaborative basis for Agreed Syllabus development in the light of most recent developments in RE and the Curriculum. The approach has been to ensure that local determination enables the Agreed Syllabus to reflect the local faith communities, whilst providing a framework for planning this into national initiatives and priorities, so that pupils can experience RE that is in line with the rest of their learning. I think this is one of the major challenges facing SACREs in providing quality learning for all pupils.

Keeping in touch: Over the last two or three years we have faced the situation of having to phone and e-mail around to ask SACREs to pay their annual subscriptions and/or AGM fees, and this both is time-consuming on our resources (especially Yvonne) and has an impact on our finances. I want to stress that we can only continue to support you if we have the resources to do so and thus we do need prompt payment of subs and fees. This year, we will be checking payment of subs and fees from this and last year and those who have not paid will not be able to vote at the AGM. We do not want to go down this route unless we have to, so please do chase up and check your SACRE is up to date before you come.

Secretary's Report: was about the recruitment and training of new SACRE members and we were given a CD which we can use to train our new members and to update all of us.

Treasurer's Report: NASACRE has held the Annual Subscription at £85 for the last three years, but the Executive Committee believes that an increase to £95 is necessary in order for NASACRE to be able to sustain its support for local SACREs, and its activities on their behalf in national developments and initiatives.

Proposed Constitutional Changes Motion: That NASACRE increases the number of co-opted places on its Executive Committee from three to six - the significant increase in activity in which NASACRE has engaged, in recent years. In plain terms, there is much more work for the Executive Committee to do. Therefore it is seeking to increase its co-opted membership both in terms of

numbers, and also in terms of the range of expertise, skills and networking the Executive Committee can deploy. The EC does not consist of designated representatives of stakeholder groups. Rather, each EC member carries a responsibility to work collaboratively and inclusively to achieve the purposes of NASACRE in serving local SACREs.

A section on the *Celebrating RE* website on fundraising provides information for regional and local groups and schools who wish to apply for grants to carry out particular local projects, with suggestions for exploring the existence of local charities and trusts. This should be available in the next three weeks.

The ***Celebrating RE*** website is the hub for all *Celebrating RE* activities and includes a calendar of events (both advance planning and events during the month of March 2011), an interactive map showing regional activity, a wealth of ideas for activities by teachers and their pupils, schools linking with each other, local communities, faith communities and SACREs, involving parents, governors, politicians, the media, arts and creative groups and many others.

The *Celebrating RE* website is the main means of communicating with teachers; this will be supported by a news feed to those who sign up to the mailing list as well as by the use of social media to engage new subscribers.

Ofsted Report: The next Long Report on RE (draft title: *Transforming Religious Education*) is due for publication but was delayed once the General Election was announced. All publications go into purdah for the period of the election and the Report won't be out until late May at the earliest. The Report will summarise the main findings of the inspection evidence from 2006-2009 and will draw out a number of key themes related to:

- Enquiry-based learning in RE – in relation to on-going concerns about progression, the process of learning and creativity in RE
- The contribution of RE to community cohesion
- The effectiveness of the current statutory arrangements for RE

Among the main findings there are issues about:

- The access and provision of subject CPD
- The impact of the revised secondary curriculum on RE provision
- The quality of learning in the short course GCSE
- The narrow pattern of curriculum delivery of RE in many primary schools
- The variability in the degree to which SACREs are provided with the support they require to carry out their roles effectively

Resilience

- National RE training programme
- 700 schools
- Preventing violent extremism
 - Controversial issues

- Handling diversity
- Deepening understanding
- Roll-out September 2010 – March 2011
- Website: www.re-silience.org.uk

Questions to panel of Mark Chater (QCDA), Jacqui Wordsworth HMI, Brian Gates (RE Council) and John Keast

Humanists on SACREs – new framework could only work within the law so humanists cannot be on Committee A or vote, though they could be if they were representatives on Committees C or D. Any change would have to be tested in a court of law though European Human Rights legislation which might trump UK law. There has been humanist representation on the RE Council since 1973.

Collective worship – nothing likely to happen re-updating circular 1/94

APP – exemplars for levels 3-8 will appear in July

Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons on SACREs – if significant numbers in the area, local authority can put reps. On Committee A

Monitoring – use pupil voice

Awards – went to BANES, Bexley, Blackpool, Leicester, Newham and Warwickshire. There were lots of good ideas but many did not include enough detail on how the award money would be spent. A project has to be owned by whole SACRE.

This report was written by Katy Staples (Bristol, Swindon, South Glos. and Wiltshire SACREs) and Derek Jay (South Glos. SACRE)