

Appendix 1- National RE Update for Swindon SACRE June 2011

This is a very useful paper written by John Keast, with additions and comments about developments that have been made since the writing of the report, and questions about assertions made where appropriate. These are in underlined italics. (Katy Staples)

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN ENGLAND – STILL A CRITICAL TIME: A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE, JOHN KEAST

This is a third paper about the current situation regarding Religious Education (RE) in England. The first, in December 2010, was entitled *RE in England – an impending crisis*, and the second was *RE: A critical time* in January. This paper attempts to provide an update of the critical issues RE faces.

1. A continuing critical situation for RE in 2011

Since the mid-1990s provision and quality in RE has improved, though patchily across the country. Last year's Ofsted report *Transforming Religious Education* (Ofsted 2010) confirmed the pattern of good practice but identified issues concerning the current statutory arrangements for RE, what constitutes learning and progress, and the inadequacy of professional development in RE. There has been no government response to this report. Although there were worrying signs for RE before the coalition government including some negative impact on RE of the new secondary curriculum in some schools and the lack of a systematic monitoring of statutory compliance by Ofsted, the situation unfolding in 2011 remains the most critical for RE since 1988 or even before that. There is now no national RE adviser for curriculum, assessment and qualifications.

2. Contextual threats to the flourishing of RE.

2.1. The drive towards academies and free schools continues and seems intended to create a virtually 'independent' system of education everywhere. Whilst this has the potential to lead to much greater freedom, flexibility and diversity in provision and in the curriculum, the notion of statutory entitlement is much reduced, on which RE has traditionally depended. NASACRE's recent survey shows how the financial cuts are leading to the loss of RE adviser posts, reducing the capacity of LAs, who are legally responsible for RE, to review/update agreed syllabuses, support schools in teaching them, and resource their SACREs. SACREs are becoming increasingly redundant and impotent, and schools in their areas are increasingly detached from locally agreed syllabuses. Schools designated with a religious character, academies and free schools do not have to teach RE in accordance with them.

A. Is this the case in Swindon ?

2.2. LAs and SACREs will need to adapt their working practices, build relationships with the diversity of schools within their area, seek new sources of advice, be ready to offer guidance to schools to support them through a period of change, and be ready to review their Agreed Syllabus as the pattern of the new NC (**National Curriculum**) emerges. It is the wish of the RE Council to support the provision of high quality RE in all kinds of schools,

and through its member bodies, the RE Council should seek to support schools, LAs and SACREs in the most appropriate ways; for example:

- a) to work with the National Association of SACREs to support all SACREs through the changes they face and encourage them to adapt to these as creatively as possible, to identify new roles working in cooperation with other local inter faith and educational bodies, and in particular to encourage them to form relationships with academies in their areas and seek to give them such representation as is possible
- b) to work with all its member bodies (and, if possible, the national curriculum review team) to establish a national non-statutory programme of study for RE for use in academies and other types of school that are not required to use their locally agreed syllabus.

B. Is this what we would want to see in Swindon or would we seek to encourage Academies and other types of schools to adopt the Locally Agreed Syllabus and to stay and contribute to the local shared RE learning community?

3. Threats to Initial teacher training

- 3.1. Changes to Initial Teacher Training and the reduced targets for RE PGCE places mean that the provision and quality of training of specialist RE teachers will suffer. There is paradoxically a shortage of specialist RE teachers and some new RE trainees are finding it difficult to get posts. The CPD Round Table's mapping reveals that already there is insufficient effective CPD for RE teachers. It should be the policy of the RE Council to
 - a) seek to reverse the reduction in numbers of places on post-graduate courses in RE
 - b) work with and through all its member bodies to facilitate high quality professional development in RE for teachers in all kinds of schools. This should include the establishment of a Professional Development Committee of the Council with a view to introducing a national Professional Development programme available to teachers in all schools, building on the work of the CPD Round Table and the Resilience project.

4. Legal threats to the flourishing of RE.

- 4.1. Although the government is committed to retaining the statutory curriculum requirements for RE, it is clear from NATRE's evidence that already some schools are openly ignoring the statutory requirement for RE in Key Stage 4. The statutory provision of RE could become weaker or even cease, as has happened in the past. It should be the policy of the RE Council to seek a commitment by the government to ensuring that the statutory requirement for RE is clearly stated and upheld.
- 4.2. Ofsted has launched its consultation on the revised school inspection Framework and this runs until 20 May. The primary focus for inspections will be the quality of education provided by the school, giving priority to the four areas of achievement of pupils, their behaviour and safety, the quality of teaching and the quality of leadership and management of the school. Reference is also made to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. A key area of interest for the RE community is the extent to which inspectors will check on compliance with statutory requirements. **The emphasis for SMSC in the New Ofsted Framework is on provision rather than outcome. (source Alan Brine RE lead Inspector speaking to National Society RE Strategy Meeting 19th May).**

This will mean that Inspectors will be looking to see what provision schools are making for RE and Collective Worship. This could have a positive impact for RE and Collective worship.

Paragraph 31 under Leadership and Management states: "A broad, balanced and relevant curriculum is a key factor in raising attainment, improving behaviour and attendance and promoting personal development. In schools where the curriculum caters well for the individual needs, abilities and interests of the pupils, there are increased motivation and better outcomes. We propose to include the quality of the curriculum as an important consideration in judging leadership and management." The section of the document which allows for a response has a specific section on Leadership and Management. This would give an opportunity to urge Ofsted to include a clear focus on securing that schools comply with the statutory requirement to provide RE as part of a broad and balanced curriculum. The RE Council will need to consider the draft inspection Framework very carefully and frame its response to the consultation by the due date.

- 4.3. Where individual schools flagrantly fail to meet their statutory obligations to provide RE the use of the complaints procedure for maintained schools and the accountability process for Academies on a case by case basis should be considered. Awareness of the long-standing existence of such a procedure needs to be raised among SACREs and other bodies.
- 4.4. The Academies Act 2010 removed from Academies and free schools the statutory requirement, in force since 1870, for all maintained schools to provide RE in the curriculum (and a daily act of collective worship) for all pupils. Whilst the model funding agreements for such schools does require such provision the funding agreements can be changed by government policy. The funding agreement does not require a school to use a locally agreed syllabus. So far there is no commitment by government to restoring this statutory requirement. It should be the policy of the RE Council to seek the reinstatement of the statutory requirement for all schools to provide RE for all pupils except those withdrawn by their parents.

5. Curriculum threats to the flourishing of RE

- 5.1. The RE Council welcomes the review the National Curriculum, but believes that this can sensibly only be done in the context of the whole curriculum, which must by law be a broad and balanced one. The purpose of the National Curriculum and its components must be related to the purpose and components of the whole school curriculum, even if this is conceived in a freer way than previously. There is otherwise a danger that the relationship between the National Curriculum and the rest of what is taught will be unclear and possibly inconsistent, leading to a less effective outcome of the review and to lower standards in classrooms.
- 5.2. The RE Council believes it is vital that when the aim and nature of the National Curriculum and the whole school curriculum are under review the important contribution and place of RE in the school curriculum has also to be taken into account. RE is a statutory requirement for all pupils unless they have been withdrawn by their parents and so forms part of the broader national curriculum requirement. There are currently statutory requirements for the purpose of the school curriculum, ie to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and

physical development of pupils and of society and to prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life. RE plays an important part along with the National Curriculum in fulfilling these aims.

5.3. The RE Council is disappointed that RE is not being considered as part of the review of the National Curriculum. It is the policy of the RE Council to seek involvement in the review. RE should be included for the following reasons

- a) The whole statutory curriculum can be reviewed at the same time (in law RE and the National Curriculum form the basic curriculum for all maintained schools). If the Review results in legislative changes which seems highly likely if the nature or content of the National Curriculum is to be changed, then the legislation that currently governs the arrangements for RE should not be overlooked. The 2010 Ofsted report on RE Transforming Religious Education recommended the Department to review these arrangements.
- b) The position of RE in relation to the rest of the curriculum can be clarified and enhanced. The government has announced that it does 'not intend to make any changes to the statutory basis for religious education'; it would be helpful to schools to spell out what this is and how such provision can fit with other statutory provision.
- c) The positive contribution that RE makes to the whole curriculum and to specific subjects within the National Curriculum can be identified and affirmed. Religion and belief play important roles in many other subjects – literature, history and geography to name just a few. Without taking into account the place of RE within the curriculum a review of these and other subjects will be incomplete.
- d) RE can keep the parity with other developments in the curriculum established in recent years. Ever since the National Curriculum was introduced in 1989 successive governments have come realise the practical importance for teachers of developing the RE curriculum in a way that retains a structure and presentation similar to the subjects of the National Curriculum. For teachers, especially in primary schools, it is very useful that all the subjects they teach are described in similar ways. This has been the case since 2004.

5.4. The RE Council has played an active role in previous reviews of the curriculum, most notably

- a) in the 1994 publication of the national Model Syllabuses for RE five years after the introduction of the National Curriculum,
- b) in 2000 when non-statutory guidance for RE was published alongside a revised National Curriculum, and
- c) in 2004 when the REC played a major role in establishing the first National Framework for RE published by the QCA and the Department for Children Schools and Families.
- d) The first phase of the review of the National Curriculum covers the overall shape and structure of the National Curriculum, and so relates to much of the above. The RE Council should therefore submit evidence to the Review team by 14 April along the lines of the preceding paragraphs using the online form.

5.5. The second phase of the review of the National Curriculum is due in 2012 and covers draft programmes of study for all other subjects in addition to English, mathematics, science and

physical education, which the Government decides should be part of the National Curriculum in future or, where it is decided there should be a non-statutory programme of study, with a view to them being taught in maintained schools from September 2014. The review will also provide advice on:

- a) the extent to which the content of the National Curriculum should be set out on a year-by-year basis, to ensure knowledge is built systematically and consistently
- b) what, if anything, should replace existing attainment targets and level descriptors to better define the standards of attainment children should reach, and be assessed against, at various points throughout their education
- c) what is needed to provide expectations for progression to support the least able and stretch the most able
- d) how the National Curriculum can support the provision of more helpful advice and information to parents on their child's progress
- e) how the content of the National Curriculum can support the embedding of equality and inclusion.

5.6. All these are as relevant to RE as to other subjects. RE uses attainment targets, and already has non-statutory programmes of study which are in need of revision. Progression, reporting progress to parents and the support of equality and inclusion are as important for RE as any other subject. Since 2004 RE has had a non-statutory National Framework that sets out a clear and shared understanding of the knowledge and skills that pupils should gain through RE. The importance of this Framework was highlighted in the 2010 Ofsted Report Transforming Religious Education. Ofsted also recommended its review in order to establish clearer national guidance on RE.

5.7. A new source of consensus for the RE curriculum needs to be found; this would need to cover not only the content of agreed syllabuses, but the overall aim of the subject and its contribution to the curriculum, and the definition of attainment and progression. The crucial period for developing a consensus on how to align RE with the rest of the curriculum may well be Spring 2012 - Spring 13. It is the policy of the RE Council, as stated in its submission to the NC Review team,

- a) that the RE Council should be involved in both phases of the NC review
- b) to press for the review body to consider the development of a revised non-statutory national Framework for RE which would provide local authorities, SACREs, academies and the relevant authorities with responsibility for schools with a religious character with much needed guidance on the development of the RE curriculum and secure an alignment between RE and the wider approach to the curriculum. If this is not accepted, another strategy for the RE Council to consider is the establishment of a parallel RE group alongside the NC development work, preferably with some Department for Education funding, to revise the 2004 non-statutory Framework and re-align it with the new curriculum, to secure consistency with other subjects and support local SACREs. The RE Council believes that it is important this should happen in the context of the curriculum as a whole and alongside any other national non-statutory programmes of study for other subjects, such as the second phase of the review envisages.

6. Qualifications threats to RE

- 6.1. The announcement that full course GCSE RS did not count towards the English Baccalaureate in 2010 and the retrospective application of the EB to the 2010 school results has provoked a high level of protest from head teachers, faith communities and RE professional associations. The commitment of all kinds of schools to the provision of Full course GCSE RS for their pupils has been undervalued. NATRE's survey shows that evidence is accruing on an alarming scale of schools dismantling their key stage curriculum arrangements and removing the opportunity for young people to study GCSE RS. RE Departments are being radically reduced on grounds citing the English Baccalaureate.
- 6.2. The list of subjects that are to form the EB in 2011 has not yet been announced. The campaign to get full course GCSE RS included as a humanity in the EB for 2011 needs to be continued, without hostility to Geography and History. There must be room for all three subjects in the EB. The RE Council has already said that full course RS should be included as an option within the Humanities section of the EB. The study of religions and beliefs in today's world is as exacting, rigorous and necessary as the study of history, geography etc. The PR campaign focussing on Early Day Motion 1375 has been extensive, and work on identifying the consequences of the omission of RS from the EB has already been done and is being used by the PR committee to further the campaign.

Since John Keast wrote this paper a House of Commons debate was held on Tuesday 17th May 2011 this can be read from here:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm110517/halltext/110517h0001.htm#11051731000001>

(you will need to scroll down past "Social Care" to a blue sub heading "Religious Education")

- 6.3. One way of resolving the desire of the government to continue with its EB proposals and yet meet the need for RS to be included as a humanities option is to extend the EB so that it includes two humanities subjects to be chosen (from history, geography and RE). This would allow the government to claim success in its original policy of further encouraging the study of history (or geography) but also claim it has listened to a good case for including RS. If the EB (in its current or changed form) becomes a significant feature of the curriculum of secondary schools, a key question is that of the breadth and balance of the curriculum and consequent matters of timetabling and choice. These are quite complex and may vary from school to school. The general impression is that the introduction of a full EB and its related subjects (English Language, English Literature, Mathematics, a number of sciences, a language and one or two humanities subjects) means little time or choice for students to follow other subjects such as the Arts and vocational subjects. This matter is a problem for the EB as a whole and may yet help to sink the whole notion of an EB as currently conceived. Such a problem would be only slightly compounded by the addition of RS as another humanity since in practice the inclusion of a full course GCSE RS would mean only another 5% of curriculum time being added into the EB – the other 5% would have to be given to statutory RE anyway. It should be the policy of the RE Council to press

for the 2011 EBacc to include two humanities subjects, one of which may be GCSE Religious Studies.

This is the current best hope for RE within the EBacc and has not been ruled out yet.

- 6.4. Some of the discussion about RS and the EB has raised the question of the rigour of GCSE RS, especially of the short course. It is important for the RE Council to establish the rigour of RS, both in itself and in comparative terms with other humanities subjects, in such a way as to put this issue beyond question. Work needs to be put in hand to research as far as possible how standards compare across RS and other subjects.
- 6.5. Whether full course GCSE RS is included in the EB or not, there are other consequences for RE that follow from an EB. The very existence of such a certificate, whether it includes RS or not, will greatly influence the structure and contents of the secondary school curriculum, particularly in Key Stage 4. Schools are already restructuring their curriculum and timetable in Key Stage 4 to accommodate the subjects of the EB, and this is having a knock-on effect at Key Stage 3 in some schools. In nearly all cases where such changes are being made the effect on RE is regressive, with reduced time and staffing, in some cases extended to failing to meet statutory requirements. How RE fares alongside the EB is therefore an important question. Even if RS is included in the EB, it will be taken only by a proportion of pupils, which means that the provision of statutory RE for the other pupils has still to be considered. If RS is not included at all this matter becomes even more important.
- 6.6. The RE Council believes that the mantra constantly uttered by government spokespersons that RE is already statutory and will remain so needs to be seized and built on. It should be the policy of the RE Council therefore to continue to press for all students in Key Stage 4 to have their full entitlement to RE in one of the following ways:
- a) For students who take Full course GCSE RS (whether as part of the EB or not) the statutory requirement will almost certainly have been met (unless the particular syllabus they follow is not allowed by their local agreed syllabus, if they are in a school which is required to follow one).
 - b) For students at Key Stage 4 who do not take a full course GCSE RS (whether in the EB or not) the RE Council believes they should follow another course of study approved under Section 96 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000. This can be a short course GCSE RS, or, for students for whom a short course GCSE is not appropriate, a Certificate of Achievement in Religious Studies. The actual taking of the examinations and gaining the accreditation is not a legal requirement in any subject. Such a policy was included in the non-statutory National Framework for RE and has been followed by the majority of local agreed syllabuses and is a practice followed in many schools designated with a religious character.
- 6.7. It is not yet entirely clear what the government intends regarding Short courses at GCSE, though there is evidence that it may well be continued. These are taken by relatively few students in other subjects but are taken by a very large number of students in RS. The RE Council believes clarity on the status of the GCSE RS short course is needed urgently. Neither is it clear whether (and if so how) the government intends to encourage students

to take subjects outside the EB to GCSE level, including RS. A further area of uncertainty is the development and use of performance measures for secondary schools. A multiplicity of data is becoming available and it is not clear which set of data is likely to be the most widely used or applied. It should be the policy of the RE Council to seek clarity on the curriculum and its assessment at Key Stage 4, and on proposals for the accountability measures of schools.

6.8. A further question is how RE might fit within the time remaining in a student's curriculum outside the EB alongside the other areas of the curriculum that claim attention. These include PE, Sex Education (usually more widely provided in a PSHE course that also includes financial, drugs and careers education), and whatever Citizenship may remain in the curriculum. It is hard to see any government completely disregarding these important parts of a students' education. In a worst case scenario, statutory RE might have to find its place alongside these areas in a very limited curriculum slot. Whilst this position is not one which the RE Council would wish to see, the Council may need to investigate some creative solutions such as

- a) A combined RE and citizenship course
- b) A combined RE and PSHE course
- c) A combined RE, Citizenship and PSHE course
- d) A combination involving RE and arts courses
- e) A combination of various humanities courses

In each case, the RE component would need to be absolutely clear and properly represented, and in each case there would need to be national models and guidance. The resolution of all these issues would require serious discussion on curriculum development with the Department, awarding bodies and with other subjects. It is for this reason that the RE Council believes that RE needs to be considered alongside the review of the National Curriculum. Even if it is not so included, it would be wise for the RE Council to have exploratory discussions to be held with relevant parties at an appropriate time.

7. Summary

7.1. In short, whilst almost certainly not intentional, government changes to education are having a major regressive impact on RE as an unrealised consequence. The Government has not recognised the contradiction at the heart of its approach to RE: affirming the statutory position of RE and importance of local determination while dismantling the very structures which underpin this affirmation. RE faces massive marginalisation and decline in English schools from 2011 onwards. The critical situation that RE faces must continue to be made known to a wider audience. The current PR campaign by the RE Council, already effective, is being continued and stepped up. The *Celebrating RE* month in March, which reflected so much of the excellent practice and positive support for RE by young people and others built up during the two decades, should be used to illustrate what may well be lost in the next two years.

8. What should the "RE community" do?

8.1. Most of the government changes described above are high priority policies for the coalition government and are therefore unlikely to be changed. The "RE community" therefore must prepare to live with most of them. Many countries in Europe and beyond look to RE in

England as an example of good practice and a source of inspiration. Buoyed by this confidence and the success of past developments, the RE community should try not to be discouraged, but turn current events into opportunities for consolidation and self-determination. The potential for working together which is clearly emerging from the varied responses to this critical time is itself very helpful, and should continue.

- 8.2. Those who have the interests and wellbeing of good quality RE for all pupils not withdrawn by their parents should come even closer together, and, through the RE Council and its strategic plan, establish a more effective broadly-based subject community, seeking major funding from appropriate sources to empower faith communities, RE organisations, RE teachers and friends of RE to safeguard and improve provision and quality in England. In particular, the chairs of organisations that represent SACREs, RE teachers and advisers should work more closely together within the structure of the RE Council. Working with its member bodies the RE Council should continue to make representations to government and seek ways to work with the Department for Education.

John Keast, 4 May 2011