

National Update on Religious Education and Collective Worship

Swindon SACRE

27th September 2011

RE and the EBacc

On the last day before recess, the 20th July 2011, the Secretary of State for Education quietly published the statement of intent making it clear that RE would not be included as a Humanities subject in the EBacc. It was the last week of term for most schools.

David Cameron and the EBacc on 10th September 2011

In a question and answer session at the Free School Norwich, Mr Cameron was asked whether RE should be included in the Baccalaureate.

1. What are the responses of Swindon SACRE to the news about RE and the EBacc?
2. Is there any point in further campaigning on this issue ?

He replied: "There's been a concerted write-in campaign to Members of Parliament from churches, charities and others suggesting this. I don't have a closed mind on this, and I'm sure Education Secretary Michael Gove never has a closed mind.

"The balance here is to have something in the EBacc that's this set of subjects that colleges really want to know about and that employers are enthusiastic about, to have a sort of quality benchmark going through the system."

He added: "I think we can keep an open mind, but it's right to start with a pretty strict list of subjects that both colleges and employers say 'those are the absolutely essential ones I want to know about'."

John Keast, chairman of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales, said: "We welcome the reassurance from David Cameron that he and Michael Gove continue to keep an open mind on the question of including RE in the EBacc.

"RE is an academically rigorous and inspiring subject that equips young people with valuable skills for living and working in a diverse society. We look forward to working constructively with the Education Secretary to achieve good provision of RE in our schools."

RE Council expresses its concern in light of exam numbers

Religious Education is vital to a healthy society RE experts argued this week as GCSE results showed an 8 per cent fall* in numbers taking the short course version of the subject following its exclusion from the EBac, in contrast to a 17 per cent increase* in pupils taking the full course they would have begun before the EBac was introduced.

The drop in numbers is for the course which is the compulsory minimum whilst the rise is for the course that students generally choose. This means whilst students are more interested than ever before in matters of religion and belief, government policy is set to severely reduce the chances that every student will leave school properly educated in this vital area.

Last week's RE A-Level results showed a year on year increase in students taking the subject. This, may be directly affected in future by fewer schools offering RE at GCSE, including the short course, and cutting back the resources committed to a subject not included in the EBac.

1. Do SACRE members share the RE Council's concerns about the future of healthy RE exam numbers?

2. Is there anything we can do locally?

RE has been an important part of our education system for many years, says the Council, but we fear that the subject will start to lose its key role due to the latest changes. The popularity of the A-Level course, particularly philosophy and ethics, illustrated in the latest results shows that pupils enjoy the opportunity to think around their subject and have the chance to consider wider issues in our society. Many only go on to study at A-Level due to the enthusiasm they picked up at GCSE level and we fear this will be very different over the next few years. Despite the EBac decision, we hope that the Government will come up with a constructive way forward for the future of RE.

"Good education includes good religious education. GCSE in the subject is a basic building block towards becoming not just literate and numerate but also 'religiate' and so equipped with an understanding of the religions and beliefs found in our diverse world. The Coalition Government will do well to find means to strengthen RE provision in schools colleges and academies for children and young people of all ages," says Professor Brian Gates, Chair of the RE Council

BBC Poll about Collective Worship

The Comres survey for BBC local radio found 64% of the 500 parents questioned said their child did not attend daily acts of collective worship.

This poll raised debate about the place of Collective Worship in our schools

Comres spoke to 1,743 adults during the survey, including 500 parents, and found 60% believe the daily act of collective worship should not be enforced

It is therefore timely and appropriate that Collective Worship is a target on our Swindon SACRE Development plan for 2010/11

Government changes to education that will impact on SACRES

The drive to support academies and free schools will inevitably have an impact on the work of SACREs. A letter from the DfE to NATRE in February 2011 made it clear that Academies funding agreements are expected to set out how they will teach religious education. If they have a religious designation it will be in line with the tenets of their faith. Academies without a religious designation are expected to teach in accordance with a locally agreed syllabus. Although it is unclear if this will be the position in practice. There is the possibility, that future LAs and SACREs will produce an Agreed Syllabus that no school in the LA will need to use because they are all academies.

Although academies are, clearly, individual independent entities, it is vital that SACREs maintain links with academies and encourage the use of the local Agreed Syllabus.

The financial impact on LAs has been considerable and has a knock on effect in terms of the levels of professional and administrative support for SACREs to function effectively.

Katy Staples

11th September 2011

1 In what ways can Swindon SACRE ensure strong links with its academies?

2. Have we transparent and clear communication about the future financial provision for SACRE so we can plan?