

RE COUNCIL

TRAINING FOR SACRE MEMBERSHIP



Evaluation report



© Julie Grove

Dear Julie,

I just wanted to say **thank you** so much for the training you have provided. I feel very privileged to have been one of your students, even if it was only for two days. I wish we could have more, but the two sessions to date have been invaluable. The whole manner in which things have been organised and delivered is exemplary.

I hope insha'Allah you are successful with your bid for further funding so the good work can continue.

Warm Regards,

Secretary
Reading Muslim Council

Context

The work was done as part of an initiative to increase the involvement of members of faith communities in their local community and to build the capacities of SACREs. SACREs across the two pilot regions, Greater Manchester and London, were surveyed about vacancies on Committee A, and local faith community leaders were approached for suitable candidates to fill those vacancies.

Recruitment began in September 2006. The training, comprising two full conferences with 'field' work in between, began in November 2006 and finished in March 2007. The first training day focused on religious education and the work of SACREs, and the second on collective worship and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, with particular reference to SACRE responsibility for determinations. The objective was to raise delegates' awareness of the nature and purpose of RE and collective worship in school and to introduce them to the work of SACREs, in order to prepare them for SACRE service. This face-to-face training was to be enhanced by first-hand experience through an accompanied school visit, which included observing a lesson and attendance at a SACRE meeting. This was organised on a regional basis, giving delegates the opportunity to visit reasonably close to home. It was necessary to use the services of local RE advisers to select and liaise with schools, and accompany the visits once they were arranged.

Offers of hospitality from faith communities to host the training days were accepted; the group in the northwest met in Church House as guests of Manchester Diocesan Board of Education and, on the second day, in the headquarters of the Muslim Youth Foundation in Manchester. The southeast group met first in the London Muslim Centre and in March at the Board of Deputies of British Jews. This hospitality was welcomed by everyone, although catering arrangements were complicated.

Recruitment

The recruitment process was time-consuming and demanded all the administrator's skills and knowledge of faith communities in pursuit of suitable candidates. In total, in the two pilots, thirty-five people from faith communities were recruited for training to become SACRE members. In the northwest, where the focus was principally on bringing together members of the Jewish and Muslim communities across the Greater Manchester area, the group numbered sixteen and in the southeast, in a more diverse group, nineteen people were recruited. In the cohort, fourteen of the recruits were Muslim, six were Jewish, six Buddhist, five Sikh and four Hindu. During the training period, four people withdrew because of other commitments and one delegate who attended the first training day did not respond further to any communication.

Whilst the majority of those recruited to the programme were new to SACRE membership, several were already serving, but felt they would benefit from the experience.

Attendance

All the delegates who remained in the programme attended at least one of the conferences and eighteen attended both. A second opportunity to attend the first day was offered in the northwest and taken up by two people. Apologies were received from all but two of the delegates who could not attend one of the days and absence was due to illness, foreign travel or pressure of work.

Seventeen of the delegates completed their school visit and fourteen visited a SACRE other than their own; ten people attended all elements of the training. Twenty-five people had attended their own SACRE by the end of the training.

Thirteen people did not attend their school visit as arranged and confirmed, six of them without notice. Seven people did not attend the SACRE meeting they had opted for. These absences were accommodated in most cases, but were embarrassing on the two occasions where none of the guests turned up to a school and a SACRE meeting, when arrangements had been made for them. Organisation of these visits was time-consuming and pressured because of the difficulties of individual availability.

Due to a shortage of time, the overall recruitment process was pressured and would ideally have been done over a longer period, with more communication both with recruits and with SACREs. The short lead-in time before the beginning of the training meant that the dates of training dates were not convenient for some and lack of attendance led to gaps in understanding of the purpose, nature and shape of the training.

The visits and the (March) training day were good but I was a bit overwhelmed with the requests to attend training and visits. I was unaware that I was to be attending these trainings when I put my name forward and more clarification would have been good. Buddhist, London

Training

Since delegates in both groups came from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, few specifically in education, it was necessary to design the training to meet the needs of the majority who had no previous experience in education. The training day programmes gave delegates a first hand experience of religious education and collective worship respectively, then located each in a series of contexts: historical, statutory, current good practice and SACRE responsibility. The latter was explored both in the setting of a full SACRE meeting and specifically through the responsibilities of being a faith community representative on Committee A. In both regions, the role was illustrated by an experienced SACRE member.

Responses to the training days were positive. There was a high level of participation in both the whole group context and in paired discussion, with good interaction between delegates. When differences of opinion emerged, they were dealt with sensitively by the trainers and by fellow delegates.

Of those who were completely new to the material, some found it initially difficult to accommodate the notion of religion being used in education; the concept of any kind of worship in school was anathema to some, despite explanations of the term 'collective' and much discussion about the purpose of the activity.

It was clear from the feedback at the beginning of the second day that the programme of visits, where these had been convenient, had added considerably to the benefit of the training. Delegates talked animatedly about their experiences when they compared notes and identified what they had learned.

The short lead in time on the organisation of visits meant it was a problem accommodating some delegates who could not manage the dates originally arranged and this prevented some from completing their training. However, where visits did take place successfully, the opportunity to meet with and accompany new SACRE members on school visits and at SACRE meetings was welcomed by RE advisers in the two areas, despite the difficulties with diaries. There were benefits for advisers too, some of whom capitalised on the contact to make more links with faith communities to enhance their work.

Many thanks once again for this opportunity. I also learnt a lot from my guest about the Buddhist group she teaches meditation with. I was unaware of their existence in Wimbledon! So... a new contact for me as well. Independent RE Adviser, London

Delegates' responses to the training

After the first day's training, evaluations show all but one of the delegates felt the introduction to the nature and purpose of RE had been satisfactory or better and two thirds felt it had been clearly and thoroughly explained. All but one of the respondents gave the highest response to the presentation on the role and responsibilities of the SACRE and the ASC, and the discussion about what makes each effective.

Evaluation of the rest of the training programme was done at the end of the second day. Responses show 100% satisfaction with the organisation of the programme and all but two delegates rated it as good or excellent. The amount and format of the training was rated good or better by 90% of respondents. All the delegates who had made a school visit had felt very welcome in the school, but the responses on SACRE visits had been more varied with only half of the cohort feeling more than satisfactorily welcomed. By the end of the day, all of the respondents felt they had an understanding of collective worship, with two thirds rating their understanding as good or better.

Comments on the training in general:

The training process has been very good in respect of my understanding of the working of a SACRE in multi-religious society. Hindu member, London

The presentation was just enough for a new member to get this type of information, the handouts were very helpful and something which I benefited from personally. I think I learnt new things although I was a member of the SACRE for the last three years and that showed in my enjoyment of the the most recent SACRE in Manchester just s a few days after the training. Muslim member, Manchester

Thank you for your dedication and effort; I have really enjoyed the training. Muslim member, Manchester

The training has improved my confidence and has provided plenty of food for thought. Muslim member, London

This training has been excellent and absolutely must continue if SACREs are to reach their potential. Muslim member, London

Excellent training. Muslim member, Manchester

Enjoyed the high quality training; if there has been a disappointment, it has been the narrow range of faiths represented here. Jewish member, Manchester

Comments on representing a faith community:

I am clear about collective worship and its possible diversity. This will enable me to pass this on to my Buddhist community and explain how children from a Buddhist background may participate. Similarly with RE, my understanding of the objectives of faith visitors is very important. Buddhist member, London

After this training, I feel I am better equipped to perform my role as a SACRE member; I've gained experience but still have a lot to learn. It is a two-way process, one to represent our faith and the other one to introduce SACRE's role to our own faith. Muslim member, Manchester

I believe after the second day's training and the visits to an RE class has made me confident to play the SACRE rep role. Muslim member, Manchester

Highlights of the training:

Sharing experiences of different faith groups and meeting and conversing with new friends and colleagues, knowing there are many common bonds which unite us. Jewish member, London

As a foreigner now living in the UK, I am pleasantly surprised as to how much Britain as a nation is doing to incorporate different ways of thinking and believing into mainstream. It shows there is true intent on integration of the different communities. Hindu member, London

The vivid presentations here on actual RE lessons and collective worship. Buddhist member, Manchester

The highlight for me was I was fully equipped to participate in a discussion on curriculum evaluation (at the ASC meeting) Jewish member, Manchester

Suggestions for improving the training:

I would suggest visiting two different schools with an opportunity to sit in on collective worship. Sikh member, London

Introduce a mock SACRE agenda, discuss with the team, then how a SACRE member goes through the agreed syllabus review. Muslim member, Manchester

Make the training longer; training new faith community reps needs time not one or two days. Muslim member, Manchester

I would have appreciated more information about SACRE before the start of the training, and what it involves to be a faith representative, but that's not a criticism. Buddhist member, London

It would have been helpful to have some video footage of RE being taught in a typical classroom setting; perhaps a good and not so good example of how it's done. Muslim member, London

Benefits

For SACREs finding it difficult to recruit new members to represent local faith communities, this training will offer many advantages. It will put clerks in touch with faith communities directly; it gives some opportunity for consistency and it will offer training that is beyond the capacity of most SACREs:

By centrally-organised methods – I think it could be tremendously helpful to have induction and recruitment supported in this way – SACREs are all falling into the old trap of each re-inventing the wheel – and it's well past time we in education learned that this is NOT a clever idea! RE Adviser, Trafford

Throughout the programme, several unsolicited comments were received from advisers about the increased confidence of new members at meetings, with greater understanding of the business as a result of the training and more participation in consequence.

Recommendations

In any future roll out of the programme:

- there needs to be a longer period for recruitment and on-going communication with SACREs;
- it would be better to concentrate the training into a shorter time period to sustain the momentum;
- the planning phase must include contacting local SACREs in the region and RE advisers to set up school and SACRE visits so that all of this is in place before recruitment begins;
- the full training package, with confirmed dates, needs to be planned in advance and given to delegates beforehand so that, on the first day, individuals can commit to all the training, including opting for visits on convenient dates;
- the programme for the two training days needs to be amended in the light of feedback from the pilot;

**Julie Grove
March 2007**

This evaluation report was written for and presented to the RE Council at the end of the pilot programme of training for new SACRE members, in preparation for representing their faith communities on Committee A. The project was an REC initiative, part of the building SACRE capacity aspect of the proposed RE Strategy and, if established, will be rolled out to all government regions over the next 3 years.
