



Annual Report
Newcastle Standing Advisory Council
on Religious Education
Academic Year 2016 - 2017

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The Chair's Introduction and Context

The work of Newcastle SACRE has continued throughout 2016-17 with the valued support of my colleagues. We continue to expand our membership with new members joining from the Buddhist and Quaker communities as well as a senior member of the AQA examination and newly elected councillors with an interest in education and RE.

It was nonetheless a difficult year due to the change of personnel from the LA which necessitated meetings with the Lead Assistant Director of Education and Skills. He has a keen interest in RE and we now have the Head of School Effectiveness firmly supporting us.

During some of the sessions during this academic year we have discussed and debated the various reports about the state of RE nationally and contributed on an individual basis to NATRE survey.

As was stated last year I continue to be concerned about the lack of CPD, particularly for primary school teachers in non-faith schools. This will hopefully be addressed in the coming year with the reintroduction of Network meetings.

I am saddened by the decline in the uptake of RE at examination level in Newcastle, as it does not reflect the ethos of the city itself. We have a Council of Faiths, a City for Peace initiative, some of the schools are Schools of Sanctuary, a Peace and Unity group. Last summer the Orthodox synagogue held an Iftar on its premises.

In these times of continued Islamophobia and the resurgence of Antisemitism it is important that the next generation learn from and about those of faith and non, in order to create a more accepting and kinder society. This, I feel, is where SACRE can play its part.

Deanna Van der Velde
Chairperson Newcastle SACRE February 2018

Advice to Statutory Bodies

The SACRE advised the local authority that, in order to fulfil its responsibilities adequately, consideration should be given to allocating an agreed budget for the financial year, and to ensuring that meetings are supported by local authority staff. Regarding the budget, the SACRE received assurances that all necessary and reasonable costs will be met centrally. In terms of support, an officer from the School Effectiveness Service and a local authority clerk attend SACRE meetings and liaise between the committee and the local authority.

The SACRE advised the local authority about schools where good or excellent work is undertaken in relation to RE and collective worship, and about schools where there is still room for improvement.

The SACRE emphasised that the current OFSTED inspection framework makes it almost impossible to draw firm conclusions about the quality of RE, collective worship or Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) Development. For some years now, inspection of subject teaching has been much less of an issue (although the SACRE appreciates that “RE: realising the potential”, published by OFSTED in 2013, has important and instructive things to say about how RE is taught nationally). However, the SACRE also recognises the shift by OFSTED towards putting a greater emphasis on the quality of wider curriculum provision.

The SACRE made a few recommendations to the local authority about training that might be offered to teachers in the academic year 2016-17. However, the SACRE recognises that some of the most effective training now and in the future will be provided to staff in individual schools, or to RE teachers in specific partnerships working through continuing professional development (CPD) programmes which they shape themselves.

The chair, on behalf of the SACRE, wrote to the government to express concern about the continuing detrimental impact on secondary RE of RE being excluded from the Ebacc, and about cuts being made to the training of specialist RE teachers. It would appear that although there has been a national decline in the proportion of pupils being entered for GCSE Religious Studies, the decline has been particularly marked in Newcastle.

Standards and Quality of Provision of RE

The SACRE has monitored the quality of RE in various ways, including:

Analysing public exam results (in particular, those at GCSE and A Level);

Feedback from individual SACRE members following visits to schools, including special schools;

Consultations with RE co-ordinators and heads of RE departments;

Feedback from teachers attending training courses;

the albeit limited information deriving from OFSTED inspection reports (OFSTED inspection reports no longer offer comment on the standards of teaching and learning in RE).

Currently, five aspects of a school's work are assigned grades in an inspection report: outcomes for pupils, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, personal development, behaviour and welfare, early years and effectiveness of leadership and management. SMSC Development is no longer assigned a grade. However, inspectors must take account of the quality of SMSC before coming to a judgement of a school's overall effectiveness. Consequently, an inspection evidence base must include inspection activity specifically around SMSC. Whilst this does not necessarily mean a scrutiny of a school's RE provision, RE work is a useful source of evidence to judge the extent to which pupils have, for example, the ability to be reflective about their beliefs and those of others. Inspectors also have to judge progress and standards across the curriculum beyond English, Maths and Science. Consequently, strong RE provision has the potential to "punch beyond its weight" in an inspection, providing evidence for several essential inspection areas. However, although this provides some external incentive for schools to invest in their RE provision, the fact that RE provision does not specifically have to be reported on means that inspection reports are of limited use to the SACRE in monitoring standards within the local authority.

The SACRE is aware that recent developments in education have the potential to improve the quality of RE, particularly in primary schools. As well as the increasing focus from OFSTED on the wider curriculum, there is also an increasing emphasis on deepening understanding through problem solving, reasoning and contextualisation. Whilst this emphasis has developed through the Maths curriculum, school leaders in all schools are increasingly seeking to develop these concepts by incorporating them throughout the curriculum. RE has very strong potential to develop pupils' ability to discuss, reason and explore ideas, if teachers are well supported in the subject. Consequently, developing effective support for teachers will be a key priority for the SACRE over the coming months.

RE GCSE Results

In the academic year 2016-'17, 801 pupils sat GCSE religious Studies in Newcastle. This represented just over one third of the cohort, at 33.6%. The vast majority of these pupils (718 of them) came from four of the thirteen secondary schools. Three of these four secondary schools were Catholic. Four secondary schools did not enter any pupils for Religious Studies.

Of the pupils who took the GCSE, 99.8% of them achieved A* - G grades, comparing favourably with the national average of 98%. The percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving these grades was also above the national average, at 99.6%. The percentage of pupils achieving a "good" GCSE grade of A* - C was 77.9%, again comparing favourably to the national average of 70%. The gap between disadvantaged pupils and the overall percentage was wider for this band, with 66.2% of disadvantaged pupils achieving A* - C grades.

Special mention must be made of St Mary's and Sacred Heart Schools, both of which entered almost all pupils for the exam and got over 40% of entrants to the highest A*-A grades.

The SACRE recognises that the overall results are strong when compared against the national average. However, the results also highlight the wide variation of RE provision in the city and the fact that the proportion of pupils taking Religious Studies GCSE is declining against the national average over time. A priority must be to use the obvious best practice that exists in order to improve what is offered to pupils across Newcastle.

RE GCSE Short Course

One non-denominational secondary school was responsible for all of the 154 pupils who were entered for the RE short GCSE in 2016-2017. This represented 6.5% of the Newcastle cohort, which is higher than the rapidly declining national percentage of 2.1%. Of these pupils, 57.8% achieved A*-C grades, a significant improvement from 2016 and above the national average of 45.9%. All pupils achieved grades A*-E, again above the national average of 94.3%.

RE AS Level

Across Newcastle, 121 pupils were entered for AS level Religious Studies in 2017, representing 10.7% of the city cohort. Of these pupils, 52.1% achieved the highest grades of A – B, above the national average of 46.8% and the highest result for the last three years. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A–E was also the highest for three years at 97.5%, comparing favourably to the national average at 93.3%.

Nationally, the proportion of pupils entered for the AS level dropped sharply in 2017, whilst the Newcastle percentage remained fairly constant. Consequently, although the Newcastle proportion has been below the national average over the past three years, it was above the national average in 2017.

RE A Level

Sixty four pupils took Religious Studies / Ethics at A level in Newcastle in 2017, representing 5.7% of the KS5 cohort. This was significantly below the national average of 10.8% and represents an increasing gap against the national picture. Of the pupils entered for the exam, 43.8% achieved the top grades of A*-B, compared to the national average of 54.9%. This difference against the national picture is much greater than in the past, but should be treated with a certain amount of caution given the small cohort numbers involved.

The proportion of pupils achieving A-E was exactly the same as the national average at 98.4%. There is no clear trend against national average in this area, but this percentage was an improvement from a below average result in 2016.

Overall, there are many positives in these KS4 and KS5 results which indicate very strong provision. However, this needs to be set against a picture of declining uptake of RE in Newcastle, with the strong practice confined to a small number of schools. Immediate priorities must be to improve practice at primary level and at Key Stage Three if more pupils are to access RE at GCSE and A level standard.

Training/Continuing Professional Development

SACRE members and the organisations that they represent can provide a wealth of support and advice to teachers about different faiths and beliefs. Contact details for the organisations are easily accessible to teachers through the Newcastle SACRE website. Although teachers in church schools can access pedagogical professional development through their Diocese, there has been no local authority provision that specifically supports the teaching of RE for several years. However, two lead teachers have been identified and they have improved online support to schools, so that

schools can access information and resources from leading experts through blogs and Twitter. A subject leader network for teachers in all mainstream and special schools is also being established which will provide a clear picture of support needed, as well as providing an opportunity to share some of the very strong practice that exists in the City.

The SACRE is tracking the extent to which schools begin to use the information on the website in order to explore the wealth of support on offer from representatives of the various faith groups in Newcastle. Evidence shows that uptake from Newcastle schools has lagged behind that of neighboring local authorities, although proportionally the uptake from special schools has been much stronger.

Pupils and Students Withdrawn from RE and Complaints about RE

Parents can withdraw their children from RE and students aged over 18 can exercise the same right to withdraw from the subject. The SACRE is aware of only a small number of pupils and students who have been withdrawn from RE. Additionally, during the course of the year no formal complaint relating to RE was received by the local authority.

The Agreed Syllabus

The Newcastle locally agreed syllabus was updated in 2015 and is due to be updated by 2020. The current Locally Agreed RE Syllabus does not prescribe what teaching and learning materials should be used, but the supporting guidance highlights a wealth of printed and electronic material which teachers may find useful, and this is updated regularly on the city website. Moreover, the Agreed Syllabus and the website contains advice about good resources that have come on stream in recent years.

Collective Worship

No formal complaint relating to collective worship was received by the local authority. Nor was the SACRE required to make a determination about the appropriateness, for either a school or a group of pupils or students in a school, of collective worship which is wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character.

Taking the City as a whole, there are very few recorded instances of pupils or students withdrawn from Acts of Collective Worship (ACWs). We take this as confirmation that most schools are therefore providing ACWs which achieve inclusivity by, among other things, taking full account of the rich diversity of religion and belief that presently exists in Newcastle. In other words, ACWs are provided in ways that are in sympathy with the needs and aspirations of the whole school community.

SACRE members and officers associated with the local authority have witnessed or taken part in ACWs that comply with the statutory requirements.

Management of the SACRE

Staff

The local authority has a Head of School Effectiveness with ultimate responsibility for RE and collective worship who attends SACRE meetings and provides a point of contact for schools needing support. The local authority provides the SACRE with a senior admin support officer who minutes the meetings and fields correspondence, and also engages in a host of tasks designed to ensure that the SACRE can conduct its business in an efficient and cost effective manner.

Finance

Regarding a budget, the SACRE has received assurances from the local authority that all necessary and reasonable costs will be met centrally.

SACRE meetings, etc.

The SACRE met on four occasions in the academic year 2016-17, on 28th November 2016, 13th February 2017, 24th April 2017 and 3rd July 2017. On each occasion the SACRE was quorate with at least one member in each committee present. A majority of SACRE members, including Newcastle and Northumberland University co-opted representative, were able to attend all of the SACRE meetings, thereby ensuring continuity and progression from one meeting to the next.

Dates for 2017-18

- 11 December 2017, 4pm, Lionel Jacobson House
- 5 February 2018, 4pm, Sacred Heart
- 14 May 2018, 4pm, Kenton - TBC
- 9 July 2018, 4pm, venue TBC

Contribution of the SACRE to the Wider Local Authority Agenda

The SACRE contributes to the wider local authority agenda by:

- giving expression to equality, diversity, inclusion and community cohesion. It thereby makes a contribution to the local authority's public sector equality duty
- helping to raise standards in schools (note the content of the Agreed Syllabus; the website which highlights best practice; the support that individuals associated with the SACRE provide to schools; the annual monitoring of public exam results; etc.)
- assisting with the annual HMD commemoration, an event for which it has campaigned for some years
- providing the knowledge, understanding and skills necessary for teachers to provide high quality RE (note the provision of training; consultations via email about specific matters raised by teachers/schools concerning RE and/or ACWs)

- avoiding unnecessary and/or unreasonable costs at a time of considerable financial difficulty/austerity (note the arrangements for meeting costs agreed with the local authority; the willingness of SACRE members to volunteer when tasks need completing on behalf of the SACRE; etc.).

Links with Other Agencies

National:

Membership of the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE).

Local/Regional:

Close working relations exist with the NERRC

Close working relations exist with the region's Free Church denominations and other religious and faith communities, some of which are represented on the SACRE (e.g. the Muslim, Jewish and Sikh communities)

Close working relations exist with the Anglican and the Roman Catholic dioceses, which are represented on the SACRE

Close working relations exist with the North-East Humanists, who are represented on the SACRE

Individual SACRE members sit on other SACREs in the region, or are asked to attend other SACREs' meetings to contribute to discussions and debates.

Summary of Other Relevant Information

A combination of long term absence and a restructure within the local authority's School Improvement Service impacted negatively on the SACRE's ability to influence strategic improvement of RE provision in Newcastle in 2016-17. However, with a restructure in place, the SACRE now includes a senior officer from the council. Two lead practitioners are supporting the development of a useful website for teachers and a support network at which best practice can be shared. From these meetings will come priorities for teacher professional development, which will enable the SACRE to plan focused support. The key priorities for the SACRE going forward are to improve the quality of RE provision in schools, so that more pupils are able to access the benefits of this topical and wide ranging subject at national qualification level.

Appendix One:**NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE SACRE - MEMBERSHIP
2016/17****COMMITTEE A**

Christian Denominations and Other Religions and Religious Denominations

Judaism	Mrs Deanna Van der Velde (Chair)
Islam	Mr M. Kurdi
Hinduism	Veena Soni
Sikhism	Cloud Singh
Buddhist	Richard Dell
Roman Catholicism	Mrs Denise Kendall
Humanism	Ron Armstrong
Quakers (Society of Friends)	Paul Hopper
Free Churches (4)	
United Reformed Church	Mrs Pat Fox
Methodist	Esther Zarifi
	Margaret Harrison
Salvation Army	Vacancy
Baptist	Vacancy

COMMITTEE B

Church of England (3)	Reverend George Curry
	Judith Sword
	Vacancy

COMMITTEE C

Teacher Associations

ASCL	Chris Million
ATL	Ashley Endacott
NUT	Paramjeet Singh Bhogal
NASWT	Heidi Guest
	Mr Gerard Shepherd
	Stephen Ord

COMMITTEE D

Local Education Authority Nominated by City Council (4)	Councillor Jackie Slesenger (Vice-chair)
	Councillor Irim Ali
	Councillor Habib Rahman
	Councillor Oskar Avery

CO-OPTED

Phil Andre (Newcastle University)
Chris Million (Northumbria University)
Esther Zarifi (AQA examination board)
K Hall (Benfield School)
Angela Brady (Dame Allan's)

LOCAL AUTHORITY SUPPORTING OFFICERS

Ian Dawson (Head of Service - School Effectiveness)

Lee Rochester (Senior Admin Support Officer)

Terms of Reference

Terms of reference as per Circular 3/89, Circular 1/94 and legislation such as the 1988 Education Reform Act and the 1996 Education Act:

- (a) To advise the Authority upon such matters connected with religious worship in county schools and the religious education to be given in accordance with an agreed syllabus as the Authority may refer to the Council or the Council may see fit.
- (b) To examine the current agreed syllabus and, if necessary, require the Authority to undertake a review.
- (c) To monitor the teaching of religious education, aspects of OFSTED reports coming within the purview of SACRE (Section 5.1 of Reports) and the relevant part of an Action Plan, the choice of materials, the training of teachers and the conduct of collective worship within the schools of the Authority and to offer advice to the Authority on these matters when appropriate.
- (d) To determine, on application by a headteacher, that the requirement for collective worship in county schools to be mainly or wholly of a broadly Christian character shall not apply to the collective worship provided for some or all of the pupils in a particular school and to carry out reviews of any determinations made.
- (e) To advise the Authority on matters relating to religious education arising through the Authority's complaints procedure.
- (f) To publish, each year, a report on the exercise of its functions and in particular specify:-
 - (i) any matters in respect of which the Council has given advice to the Authority and describe the nature of that advice; and
 - (ii) where any such matter was not referred to the Council by the Authority, the Council's reasons for offering advice on that matter.
- (g) To support the effective provision of Religious Education and collective worship in schools.

Appendix Two:

Overall examination results 2017

GCSE Religious Studies				GCSE Religious Studies				GCSE Religious Studies			
Newcastle	2015	2016	2017	National	2015	2016	2017	Difference to National	2015	2016	2017
Number of students in KS4 cohort	2326	2393	2362	Number of students in KS4 cohort	553195	539770	587640				
Number of students with entries in Religious Studies	952	879	801	Number of students with entries in Religious Studies	253196	252025	264527				
% of students entered for Religious Studies	40.9%	36.7%	33.9%	% of students entered for Religious Studies	45.8%	46.7%	45.0%	% of students entered for Religious Studies	-4.8%	-10.0%	-11.1%
% of students entered achieving grade A*-C	74.7%	80.4%	78.7%	% of students entered achieving grade A*-C	70.9%	70.4%	71.5%	% of students entered achieving grade A*-C	3.8%	10.0%	7.2%
% of students entered achieving grade A*-G	99.2%	99.2%	99.8%	% of students entered achieving grade A*-G	97.8%	97.7%	97.9%	% of students entered achieving grade A*-G	1.4%	1.5%	1.9%
GCSE Religious Studies Short Course				GCSE Religious Studies Short Course				GCSE Religious Studies Short Course			
Newcastle	2015	2016	2017	National	2015	2016	2017	Difference to National	2015	2016	2017
Number of students in KS4 cohort	2326	2393	2362	Number of students in KS4 cohort	553195	539770	587640				
Number of students with entries in Religious Studies	84	286	154	Number of students with entries in Religious Studies	43944	30337	12489				
% of students entered for Religious Studies	3.6%	12.0%	6.5%	% of students entered for Religious Studies	7.9%	5.6%	2.1%	% of students entered for Religious Studies	-4.3%	6.3%	4.4%
% of students entered achieving grade A*-C	16.7%	39.2%	57.8%	% of students entered achieving grade A*-C	50.5%	51.9%	45.0%	% of students entered achieving grade A*-C	-33.8%	-12.7%	11.1%
% of students entered achieving grade A*-G	88.1%	92.0%	100.0%	% of students entered achieving grade A*-G	95.4%	94.3%	94.3%	% of students entered achieving grade A*-G	-7.3%	-2.3%	5.7%
A Level Religious Studies				A Level Religious Studies				A Level Religious Studies			
Newcastle	2015	2016	2017	National	2015	2016	2017	Difference to National	2015	2016	2017
Number of A level/AS students in KS5 cohort*	1034	1177	1128	Number of A level/AS students in KS5 cohort*	182919	201871	197423				
Number of entries in Religious Studies	79	84	64	Number of entries in Religious Studies	21283	21900	21289				
% of students entered for Religious Studies	7.6%	7.1%	5.7%	% of students entered for Religious Studies	11.6%	10.8%	10.8%	% of students entered for Religious Studies	-4.0%	-3.7%	-5.1%
% of students entered achieving grade A*-B	49.4%	51.2%	43.8%	% of students entered achieving grade A*-B	54.8%	54.7%	54.9%	% of students entered achieving grade A*-B	-5.4%	-3.5%	-11.1%
% of students entered achieving grade A*-E	100.0%	95.2%	98.4%	% of students entered achieving grade A*-E	98.9%	98.6%	98.4%	% of students entered achieving grade A*-E	1.1%	-3.4%	0.0%
AS Level Religious Studies				AS Level Religious Studies				AS Level Religious Studies			
Newcastle	2015	2016	2017	National	2015	2016	2017	Difference to National	2015	2016	2017
Number of A level/AS students in KS5 cohort*	1034	1177	1128	Number of A level/AS students in KS5 cohort*	182919	201871	197423				
Number of entries in Religious Studies	134	128	121	Number of entries in Religious Studies	30511	32515	13910				
% of students entered for Religious Studies	13.0%	10.9%	10.7%	% of students entered for Religious Studies	16.7%	16.1%	7.0%	% of students entered for Religious Studies	-3.7%	-5.2%	3.7%
% of students entered achieving grade A-B	50.0%	43.8%	52.1%	% of students entered achieving grade A-B	43.1%	45.1%	46.8%	% of students entered achieving grade A-B	6.9%	-1.3%	5.3%
% of students entered achieving grade A-E	94.8%	89.1%	97.5%	% of students entered achieving grade A-E	92.1%	92.7%	93.3%	% of students entered achieving grade A-E	2.7%	-3.6%	4.2%

