

Preparing for life in Britain today: the contribution of RE AGM 2016 17 May, Westminster Central Hall

Members present (totalling 104, representing 74 SACREs)

Barking & Dagenham (Rebecca Hunter), Barnsley (Roger Holmes), Bedford Borough (Judy Ruff), Birmingham (Guy Hordern), Blackpool (Helen Sage), Bolton (Martin Short), Bournemouth (Lynda Ford-Horne), Bracknell Forest (Anne Andrews), Bradford (Ros Garside, Geraldine Cooper), Brent (Laurence Hillel), Bristol (Katy Staples), Bromley (Julia Waldman, Roger Bristow), Buckinghamshire (Valerie McFarlane, Bill Moore, Sushma Sahajpal), Cambridgeshire (Kerri McCourty), Camden (Jim Walters), Central Bedfordshire (Jane Chipperton), Cornwall (Anna Corbett), Croydon (Penny Smith-Orr), Devon (Ed Pawson), Doncaster (Tom McCready), Dudley (Dilwyn Hunt), Ealing (Nora Leonard), East Riding (Sue Holmes, Phil Davison), East Sussex (Lilian Weatherley), Enfield (Margaret Hobbs), Greenwich (Bob Love, Shaun Burns), Hackney (Katie Hanson, Ernell Watson), Halton (Paul Smalley), Hampshire (Elizabeth Jenkerson), Hertfordshire (Lisa Kassapian, Stephen Lavender), Hillingdon (Naseem Bint Amir & Carer - Richard Cawley, Duncan Struthers), Hounslow (Gregory Wolcough), Hull (Marilyn Cowling, John Friend), Isles of Scilly (Perran Gay, David Hampshire), Isle of Wight (Pat Hannam, Ralph Hodd), Kensington & Chelsea (Lesley Prior, Javid Djalili), Kirklees (Alastair Ross), Lambeth (Michael Cullinane), Lancashire (Peter Martin, Alison Lloyd), Leicester (Wendy Harrison), Lewisham (Denise Chaplin, Luke Donnellan), Liverpool (Gillian Lawson, Anna Key, Matthew Hargreaves), Medway (Margaret McDowall), Merton (Keith Shipman, Peter Kendrick, Saleem Sheikh), Middlesbrough (Sharon Artley), Milton Keynes (Linda Bartlett, Shammi Rahman), Newcastle (Cloud Singh), Newham (Mark Janes, Claire Clinton), North Yorkshire (Nasr Moussa Emam), Northamptonshire (Philip Davies), Nottinghamshire (Ken Johnson), Peterborough (Sukaina Manji), Plymouth (Mark Andrew Dearden), Reading (Zvi Solomons), Redbridge (M. Leonard), Rochdale (Margaret Smith, Peter Owen), Rutland (Andreas Menzies), Salford (Alex Klein), Shropshire (Tristram Jenkins), Slough (Jo Fageant), South Gloucestershire (Derek Jay), Southwark (Sandra Rhule, Linda Coplestone), Staffordshire (Mary Gale, Michael Metcalf), Stockton on Tees (Kirsten Webber), Surrey (Margaret Hicks, Rachel Boxer, Peter Ward), Sutton (Mark Williams, Rosey Johnson), Swindon (Sarah Lane Cawte), Telford & Wrekin (Henry White), Wandsworth (Angela Rundle), Warwickshire (Gill Kingston, Lizzie McWhirter), Westminster (Emily Norman, Ruth Bush), Wiltshire (Mary Douglas), Windsor & Maidenhead (Barbara Meaney), Wokingham (Jan Lever), York (Shabana Jabbar, Mike Jory)

Guests - Richard Dickson (Westhill Trust)

Welcome and introduction

David Hampshire (DH), Chair of NASACRE, opened the meeting and welcomed all delegates, thanking people for travelling, many over long distance, to join the conference. He particularly welcomed and thanked keynote speakers Rt Hon Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss GBE, who served as Chair for the recently published *Commission on Religion and Belief (CORAB)* in British Public Life, and Professor Adam Dinham, Professor of Faith and Public Policy at Goldsmiths, University of London, co-author of *RE for REal*.

The Rt Hon Charles Clarke (Visiting Professor, School of Politics, Philosophy, Language and Communication Studies, University of East Anglia) was present, joining the meeting for the first time as Patron of NASACRE.

Keynote Address and Questions

Rt Hon Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss GBE spoke on the impact of CORAB. She shared highlights from the report, which indicates some current shortcomings in RE, particularly related to community, diversity and the common good. She then answered a wide range of members' questions.

Business meeting and AGM

1. **Apologies:** apologies were received on the day, from Lambeth (Jo Backus), Lewisham (Gurbakhsh Singh Garcha), Lynda Bussley (Slough)
2. **Minutes:** DH thanked the Secretary for preparing the Minutes of the 2015 AGM and gave an especial thanks to the Membership Secretary for putting all AGM papers online. The draft Minutes for 2015 were accepted as an accurate record of the AGM held on 21 May 2015 in Birmingham.

There was one matter arising –

Alex Klein asked a question arising from page 4 of the last Conference Minutes, regarding non-specialist teachers. He asked if any progress has been made over the last year in the training and qualification of RE teachers. DH said that there is still an important issue about who is qualified to teach RE and how they got their qualification. He explained that the recent White Paper proposes that all ITT education be re-structured, so training will move out of Higher Education into schools, thereby adding to the confusion. He expressed concern that the government sees teacher training as a form of 'artisan' training and not professional training, leading to a high drop-out. NATRE has already taken up this issue and the NASACRE Exec will keep a watching brief.

3. **Chair's report:** DH introduced his report (previously posted on the NASACRE website), making reference to the busy nature of the Chair's role, as local authorities feel increasingly under threat from budgetary cuts, ensuring that, together, we have a powerful 'voice' for SACREs. NASACRE needs to have a yet stronger and more consistent voice in both local and national debates, where we are often left out. The DfE requests all SACREs should remember to complete their annual report in the format shown on the NASACRE website.

DH thanked fellow members of the Exec for their support and all their efforts for the association. He thanked SACRE members for all the energy that they bring to SACRE work. We need to continue to work together so that NASACRE can be a strong voice, especially in relation to the REC's new Commission on Religious Education.

Bill Moore asked how we can ensure a collective response. DH said we need to keep consulting with members and keep them informed, holding the REC to account when, sometimes, SACREs have been marginalised.

Alex Klein said he believes NASACRE should meet more often than once a year, and suggested we should consider coming together twice a year, as important issues come up. DH said it's about being in touch with our members and responding to issues as quickly and as best we can.

4. **Secretary's report:** there were no questions arising from the report previously posted and thanks were expressed to the Secretary for her report.
5. **Accounts and Treasurer's report:** Michael Metcalf (MM) presented his report on the association's accounts for the calendar year 2015, previously posted online; the highlights are:

- Finances remain in a relatively healthy state, though there was a 'trading' deficit of ~£1.5k
- Heavier expenses included some authorised consultancy work on our resources and website

NASACRE is grateful that local authorities continue to support the association with their diminished budgets.

Margaret McDowell (Medway) commented on the lack of a NASACRE 'budget'. MM said we have a subscription income of approximately £12/13k pa and he explained in outline what our annual costs are: travel expenses account for roughly half, admin and website costs take up the bulk of the remainder. With a turnover of around £10k, events such as the annual Conference should pay for themselves; today's meeting is expected to make a slight loss despite the good attendance.

Richard Dickson clarified on behalf of Westhill, that grant monies have come direct from the Trust which are now administers funds, and therefore have not been included in the NASACRE accounts this year.

Pat Hannam (IoW) thanked the Exec for looking after NASACRE's money over many years; and asked if members might suggest how we might use the (currently £30k) reserve, should the opportunity arise. MM explained that the apparent 'reserves' get used up during the year, and we must retain some fluidity of cash flow, but he assured the floor that we'll use any 'extra' reserves in a positive and proactive way.

Alex Klein (Salford) thanked MM for his care of the funds, and asked if we had looked at other conference venues which may be less expensive? MM replied that we've used a number of different venues over the years and need to choose venues that are appropriate to the association's profile and the prestige of its member SACREs. The Exec will keep the member's suggestion in mind for the future.

The meeting unanimously adopted the accounts, and DH thanked MM for his tremendous hard work with the association's funds.

6. **Changes to the Constitution:** the old, brief, NASACRE Constitution is no longer fit for purpose and a new version with suggested changes was posted on the website in advance of today's meeting.

A member of Hillingdon SACRE raised a question about proposed Aims 2.5. Does it include lobbying for SACREs and would that come under point 2.4, in respect of the maintenance of SACREs which is currently under threat? DH answered that NASACRE can and should encourage the development of SACREs and post resources on our website, to benefit RE and Collective Worship *within the current settlement*, thereby being a strong advocate and a support to member SACREs, as a core purpose of the association.

Enfield SACRE asked a second question about the reasoning behind the change of constitutional majority from “two-thirds” to “more than half”. DH explained that if the association wanted to take a vote, then we may often not have enough members present to make the desired changes. The member asked if a vote can be made available to all members, whether or not they are present – the Exec will discuss organising an electronic vote at the next Exec meeting.

The same member asked about the Chair’s role being seen as a six-year commitment (comprising Vice-Chair, Chair, Exec Assistant roles in succession) with no opt-out clause. DH said that this has been our practice for some time to ensure continuity and progression. He agreed that there is indeed no opportunity for a vote of ‘no confidence’ in that member during that time. The questioner said that there may be people who are willing to give service for a shorter time; the terminology in the Constitution regarding appointments was confusing in the use of the word ‘regularised’ and DH agreed the Exec would look again at it.

It was asked from the floor how many SACREs are present today and are we therefore quorate? The Membership Secretary said no, we are not; 77 SACREs are present (later corrected to 74 on recounting the attendance list). Therefore, we cannot take a vote at this meeting.

Action: Send a form out to enable all SACREs to register a postal or electronic vote. The point was made that all SACREs - including non-paid up members - would technically need to minute their vote before sending it in. The Enfield member asked whether the vote of any non-responding SACRE’s should revert to the NASACRE Chair?

A member from Bromley SACRE clarified that the term of office for an ordinary member of the Executive is only 3 years; this needs to be clear in the new Constitution.

7. **Executive:** Sushma Sahajpal and Elizabeth Jenkerson were each nominated to serve another term of office on the Executive. MM and Sue Holmes are also seeking re-election as Treasurer and Secretary. There were no other nominations for the Executive, so all four were re-elected unopposed. There remains one vacancy from 2015. DH thanked these members for continuing.
8. **AOB:** none was notified in advance of the meeting.

Mention was made of the forthcoming memorial service to Prof John Hull who was the inspiration behind NASACRE and instrumental in the founding of the association.

Keynote Address and Afternoon Seminar

Professor Adam Dinham spoke on *The Future of Teaching and Learning about Religion and Belief* referencing his *RE for REal* report and answering members' questions.

Sushma Sahajpal then introduced the afternoon seminar *Shaping the Future – Evaluating the Recommendations*. The aim of the seminar was to facilitate deeper understanding and clarity around the recommendations for SACREs as well as give NASACRE richer, nuanced feedback, with which to represent SACREs in the national debates around the future of RE.

Delegates were given a handout extracting the 5 Recommendations deemed to most directly impact SACREs:

Living with Difference: community, diversity & the common good - Butler-Sloss (Dec 2015)

Recommendation 4

“All pupils in state-funded schools should have a statutory entitlement to a curriculum about religion, philosophy and ethics that is relevant to today’s society, and the broad framework of such a curriculum should be nationally agreed. The legal requirement for schools to hold acts of collective worship should be repealed, and replaced by a requirement to hold inclusive times for reflection.”

RE for REal: The Future of Teaching & Learning about Religion & Belief - Dinham-Shaw (Nov 2015)

Recommendations 1 and 2

“A statutory National Framework for Religion and Belief Learning should be developed, and be applicable to all schools, balancing shared national approaches with school level determination.”
“Since SACREs currently play a leading part in religion and belief learning, there is an urgent need for review of their role, and the role of others, such as professional bodies, local authorities, schools themselves, and other experts, in the forming of learning. This should inform and result in the appointment of a national panel to develop the framework.”

A New Settlement: Religion & Belief in Schools - Clarke-Woodhead (June 2015)

Recommendation 4

“The nationally-agreed syllabus would be determined by the Secretary of State in agreement with a newly created ‘National Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (NASACRE)’ comprising experts on religion and education, and after formal consultation and input from the relevant established professional bodies and representatives of religions, humanism and other belief systems. This nationally agreed syllabus should be reviewed every 5/7 years”

A New Settlement: Religion & Belief in Schools - Clarke-Woodhead (June 2015)

Recommendation 11

“The local Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) are given a new role which includes participating in the consultations about the content of the national RE curriculum, helping local implementation of the national RE syllabus, promoting community cohesion and educating for diversity, and advising on local availability of religious instruction.”

Delegates worked in small groups using pre-formatted discussion support/capture sheets that encouraged *clause by clause* evaluation of each recommendation. They were requested to develop sufficient consensus to score each element by their level of agreement with it. Their responses will be collated and analysed and SACREs will be informed of the headlines later.

Each group was invited to submit a question for the Panel of experts:

Question Time Panel

A Panel of Charles Clarke, Adam Dinham and David Hampshire, chaired by Paul Smalley, responded to ten questions from the floor.

Westhill Awards

Michael Metcalf expressed the NASACRE's appreciation to Westhill for continuing to fund these awards. There are four applications so far this year and an extended deadline (July) should enable more SACREs to apply. A full announcement of all successful SACREs will follow.

Sharing Wall

Over the course of the day, delegates posted their most successful ideas to address the most SACRE challenges identified at the 2015 AGM:

- Engaging with Schools: having an impact, making a difference to them
- SACRE Membership Issues: Group A representation, Teachers and Councillors
- LA Support and funding for SACREs
- Agreed Syllabus Reviews
- Dealing with Academies and Academisation

This networking opportunity was well received and generated over 30 examples of good practice.

Conclusion

David Hampshire drew the conference to a close and expressed thanks to everyone for attending and thanked them for all the energy that they bring to their work in SACREs across the country...