

Youth Voice to SACRE in Hampshire

Hampshire's experience with a Youth SACRE or Youth Voice to SACRE

One of the first things we thought about wasn't the most important – it was the name. After some thought, it was decided that it wouldn't be a younger version of a SACRE, but function as another viewpoint – the end-users! So, "Youth Voice to SACRE". Year 11 students would be sitting their GCSEs and schools would be unlikely to release them. So, Year 9 and 10 students (selected by their RE teacher) would meet once a term. There was no funding, but a meeting room at the County Council offices could be made available; the room with large wooden tables and chairs and a large map – a mural really - of the county on one wall where the councillors used to meet until there were too many of them. It seemed a good environment to show the kids that what they were doing was important. The SACRE Chair, a member of the County Council, attended the meetings when possible, welcoming and addressing the young people. One or two members of SACRE also usually attended – and provided biscuits! Biscuits or small pastries are essential! And the County Council provides coffee and tea and water.

The meetings usually consist of students from 5 or 6 schools with an RE teacher accompanying each group. They talk about RE – its importance, their background in Primary school and what they liked (or didn't) about their RE lessons. Eventually, they explained that many of them felt that they didn't have a good background in RE, their lessons in Primary school hadn't been challenging or very informative. Some felt at a real disadvantage compared to others who had had a different background. They all felt that they wanted to know more about different faiths and traditions, and they wanted to have more of an opportunity to "debate" their thoughts and ideas about religion/s and RE.

Another feature of the meetings has been all the teachers and a member of the SACRE going to another room and chatting and networking:

What do you think of x exam board? Their 12-point question? What other responsibilities do you have at your school? Oh, I have a template for that – happy to share it with you. We'd like to invite x as a speaker, would you like to bring some of your students to hear him? What do you think of RE at your feeder schools? Year 6 conference? Coordinate religions studied with primaries in the area? What a good idea!

After the first year, the young people decided that they wanted to have a conference, they wanted to invite younger students who would take their place when they entered Year 11 and started to focus more and more on their GCSEs – not that they were all sitting a GCSE in RE – these young people are a varied group. Some didn't even think RE was important and worthy of study but working on the conference changed their minds. Every year there's been a different topic, chosen by them: *Is RE important even if you're not religious? How does the media affect what we know about religions, etc.* More and more they take responsibility for planning the conference.

Some are able to visit a SACRE meeting to talk about their meetings and their thoughts on RE. Sometimes they prepare a video report. They report on Youth Voice meetings to their fellow students. The conferences are well supported by SACRE members and the SACRE listens. Some of the changes made to the syllabus in the recent Agreed Syllabus Conference were made with ideas and recommendations of Youth Voice in mind.

Our RE advisers work tirelessly to support Youth Voice, and it can be quite a bit of work. But it's highly recommended!