

NASACRE's 'Silver Jubilee' 25th Anniversary AGM

In the stunning setting of Merchant Taylors' Hall in the heart of the City of London, NASACRE held its 25th Anniversary AGM.

Patron, Charles Clarke, paid tribute to the work of SACREs during the tremendous changes of the past 25 years in promoting cohesion between communities and in encouraging tolerance between religions and between those of faith and those of none.

However more needs to be done and more government support is needed. The Government's Green Paper on Community Integration recognises the value of faith and Charles encouraged SACREs to do even more in their communities.

Keynote Speaker, Professor Vanessa Ogden highlighted that RE is fundamental to the curriculum and indeed to a civilised society. Professor Ogden emphasised the progress made in the last 25 years, but said we are again in a time of division characterised by racial and religious faultlines. As we have become more religiously and racially diverse, insecurities have reared their head and this is exacerbated by the immediacy of modern communications. She emphasised the importance of RE to understand the basis of religion and its impact on human nature. There has been a deep change in personal attitudes over the last 5 years and dialogue is the crucible of mutual understanding. It is her view that there has never been a time when good RE and good RE teachers were more important.

After useful work in groups discussing Dr Ogden's speech, and a range of other questions raised by the CoRE (Commission of Religious Education), there was a jolly good lunch! Then, Mr David Hampshire (soon to be Dr Hampshire), Assistant Director of the Inter Faith Network, spoke about the Network's activity. In particular, he focused on their work with young people based on 5 consultations in Birmingham, Leeds, London, Cardiff and Glasgow. Young people, of course, want to build a better society and the freedom to develop their own interfaith activities. However, some of the interesting insights drawn from this work were:

- many did not understand the language of interfaith
- people often learn about religion in silos and therefore don't see the connection between different faiths
- some young people don't see the need to know about other people's beliefs
- the 'nones', who often have religious or spiritual thoughts but don't identify with any particular ideology, were often the most interested in this work

Then an illustrious panel considered questions from the audience on:

- National entitlement and localism, with strong support from Professor Ogden for local syllabi
- Concerns about funding and support for SACREs, some of whom are not even receiving minimal clerking help. It was considered that the solution here has to be political, rather than a legal sanction.
- How more RE teachers can be recruited. Rudi Eliot Lockhart pointed out this was a wider problem than RE and much work had been done by the Religious Education Council. Jane Brooke advocated more RE ambassadors, including current NQTs.

- A concern about the disconnect between what students heard at home and at school, and how we could bridge the gap.
- Church and 'faith' schools and their ability to help with cohesion. Charles Clarke said the term 'faith school' is defined in vague and different ways.

Next, were the WESTHILL Awards. Three Projects in receipt of a WESTHILL award were outlined to the Conference.

Ros Garside and Helen Sellers from Bradford SACRE presented their project on Collective Worship. As a result of working with a pilot primary school and then with school headteachers in a seminar, they had developed a SACRE policy on Collective Worship. As a result, schools were distinguishing between moral and spiritual content and moving to whole school Collective worship and differentiating this from 'assemblies'.

Claire Clinton outlined Newham's project on anti-religious bullying with some very powerful videos made by the Youth SACRE.

Lastly, Elizabeth Jenkerson talked about Hampshire's 'Youth Voice to SACRE', engaging Year 9&10 pupils in an Annual Conference to discuss issues that concern them.

Michael Metcalf of Westhill Awards announced the winners for next year's grant as:

Bedford Borough

Cheshire East

Cheshire West and Chester

Cumbria

Waltham Forest and Newham in a joint project

The AGM and NASACRE business meeting concluded the day, with Robert Morgan confirmed as NASACRE's next Vice Chair, and Sheila Gewolb and Linda Rudge joining NASACRE as elected executive members.

It was a busy and invigorating day.