

It is a wonderful privilege to be speaking to you at the Launch of *Living Difference III*. This is an exciting time for RE, although, of course, in the world of RE times are always exciting. I am sure that you will all be aware that the Ancient Greeks had two words for time: *chronos* is time with the sense of that eternally onward-marching sense of sequential time; *kairos* was time with the sense of an opportune moment, the right season, and in the New Testament 'God's time'. I think RE is, and has been for a good few years, living in *kairos* time. In modern Greek, the word *kairos* has changed its meaning and now means weather and I note that today for the launch of the new Hampshire Agreed Syllabus, *Living Difference III*, we have unseasonably warm *kairos*!

In the aftermath of the (now abandoned) white paper, *Educational Excellence Everywhere*, RE is still in a state of flux – with worries about new specifications about GCSE and A Level specifications which demand much more religious knowledge of the candidates. Only three Secretaries-of-State-for-Education-ago (what is that? – two years?) we had Michael Gove admitting that RE had suffered because he thought it was protected under the 1944 Act. We have a number of high profile reports which seem to suggest that a National Curriculum for RE would be the magic bullet, the panacea which would go a long way to remedying many of RE's ills. We have competing battles (fortunately only verbal battles, not physical!) over the place of faith in education and indeed in wider public life, as the makeup of our society shifts and changes, to be dichotomously more secular and yet more religious. We have a very different vision of what Local Authorities should be from Bevan's and Butler's visions, leading to a variety of ways of schools being 'maintained'.

It has not always been this way, although it often feels like it to teachers at the chalkface: I recall the then Schools' Minister Jim Knight's speech to the NASACRE conference in 2007 when he stated, "Religious education is important because it helps bring social cohesion".

I sometimes wonder what difference have those pressures made to RE over the last few years. I would suggest that few would think that social cohesion is *the* reason for RE's importance, and recent research by Mark Plater into the views of SACRE members across the country would back this up. Of course, RE does have a contribution

to make, to this and many other initiatives and agenda, alongside other subjects, and the desire to combat extremism may be the reason behind the decision of the DfE that all pupils entering GCSE RS must study two religions. Indeed, *Living Difference III* suggests that the purpose of RE is, “to introduce children and young people to what a religious way of looking at and existing in the world may offer in leading one’s life, individually and collectively.” Perhaps the biggest challenge to RE noted in that Holy Trinity of reports in 2015: the *CORAB report* of Baroness Butler Shloss, the *RE for Real* report of Professor Adam Dinham, and the *New Settlement* proposals from Professor Linda Woodhead and NASACRE patron Charles Clarke, are the changes in society, with fewer people identifying themselves as Christian, and patterns of religious belief and practice becoming more complicated, leading to pressures to change the balance of religions studied (and include non-religious worldviews) which again, *Living Difference III* clearly includes.

What has made a huge difference to the all-important unique and irreplaceable pupil in the classroom, is the sheer hard work and dedication of teachers of RE in schools up and down the country, and obviously in this county, of those who have supported and advised them locally, through SACRE and nationally through NASACRE, as well as through other partner organisations, in order to make RE as interesting, exciting and challenging as it can be. This must, and I am sure will, continue.

Hampshire has, for many years, had a strong and well supported SACRE. In some areas, Local Authorities have struggled to properly support SACREs with pressures on the Education Services Grant budget. I was pleased that Schools Minister Nick Gibb recently made a commitment to the continued funding of SACREs following the removal of the ESG. In these economically challenging times, many LAs are setting up independent Community Interest Companies to deliver many of their services and others are looking to share services with other LAs. Schools can, more than ever, choose where to buy services from – and so will clearly purchase the best service at the best value. SACREs are outside of this, with each LA having a legal responsibility to establish its own SACRE, and despite well thought-out proposals from Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead, I do not share Charles’ optimism that a change to the legal settlement for RE is likely in the near future. Some of you may have seen me

refuting the allegation recently that many SACREs are not functioning. There is no evidence of this, although some are facing difficult times and NASACRE will continue to monitor and support the few SACREs who are struggling.

So, let's take a moment to think what makes a SACRE successful and strong? See if you recognize anything of Hampshire SACRE.

One of the strengths of the SACRE model is that it includes representation from faiths, teachers and the authority. A strong SACRE has good representation on all four committees, who attend regularly and actively engage in the work of the SACRE, so that the whole community is represented. Where local diversity means that Group A (faiths and denominations other than the Church of England) is underrepresented in an area, the SACRE works to ensure that expertise from a wide variety of faiths is able to contribute to the workings of the SACRE and the syllabus. These can be useful fora for much inter-faith dialogue, remembering that SACREs are places where faiths can work alongside one another to benefit the children.

Healthy SACREs are timely in reviewing their Agreed Syllabus. In some places this is bought off-the-shelf as it were, but in the strongest SACREs there will be a distinctive nature to the syllabus, that has been developed locally, often together with other SACREs in the area. Where the syllabus has a history of excellence this will mean a revision of the existing syllabus, rather than a wholesale baby and bathwater rewriting. Since the first edition of *Living Difference* in 2004, Hampshire has had a national reputation for its distinctive approach to RE. Indeed, there is a copy of that syllabus in my University library 5 hours North of here. I use the concept pyramid and the enquiry cycle diagram with my trainee RE teachers, to encourage them to think in a critically analytical way, about creating an RE syllabus.

Collaboration at a regional level is increasingly common, either through projects such as *Learn Teach Lead RE*, which has been a huge success in the South West and is now taking root in the North, or through the sort of

Regional Hub model which Hampshire has been central to here. The best SACREs also work in close partnership with local Dioceses and with Higher Education Provision, such as the University of Winchester in this fine city.

Good SACREs have systems in place to monitor the RE in their area, and they know what the strengths of schools are – where the best RE is taught in primaries, secondaries and special schools across the authority. They will facilitate schools working together to develop the RE in the very local area to share good practice. The very best SACREs have put in place mechanisms for the young people themselves to contribute, with RE Ambassadors from schools contributing to a form of Youth SACRE or some similar grouping.

A strong successful SACRE in one area will invest and provide quality RE support which is able to attract buy-in from schools, including free schools and academies, and engagement from teachers over a wide area. It will provide guidance on issues such as collective worship or assessment, and provide training for teachers of RE, through pupil and/or teacher conferences, and other CPD events. The best SACREs are those which still have dedicated RE advisers, who are subject specialists able to provide high quality advice, guidance and training to teachers of RE across the age phases. In the very best SACREs these advisers will be not only tied into national associations such as AREIAC and NASACRE, but will be viewed as having national expertise and able to contribute for example to national conferences.

And this is where NASACRE can fit in to support our members, currently over 130 of the 153 eligible SACREs in the country. NASACRE works to support, strengthen and promote the work done by local SACREs and represents the interests of members at a national level. For us to do that promotion work means that we need to know the good work that is being carried out. Your Hampshire RE Facebook page is one way that NASACRE can be informed of some of the fantastic work of this SACRE and, in turn, publicise that through our Twitter account and our SACRE briefing. Much of my time is providing advice to Clerks and Officers of SACREs – but if I am honest, Hampshire SACRE is a knowledgeable bunch and rarely need NASACRE's help in that way.

We do represent your views and the views of other SACREs at a national level, engaging with policymakers and politicians, the DfE, Ofsted and others including the Religious Education Council of England and Wales. In order to do this properly we do need to communicate, in a bi-directional way. In the next SACRE Briefing – which should be emailed to you at the start of January - there will be details of a survey, a large evidence-gathering exercise, where we will be trying to ascertain the views of our membership on a range of issues and try to establish how many SACREs measure up to the excellently high standards of Hampshire! This survey will be in addition to our usual support mechanisms: we are holding a joint conference with AREIAC in Birmingham in March, at which Pat spoke last year, this time examining the liberal wings of religions; booking for that is open now and the first few delegates have signed up already. There will also be details of our Annual Conference and AGM, which I can reveal will be held for the first time in the beautiful city of York (and I know that is 5 hours by direct train from here – but only 3 and a half via London!) We will return to London for 2018.

I mentioned the REC a moment ago, and you will be aware that at this *kairos* the REC has launched a new Commission on RE, and has issued recently a call for evidence. Can I urge you all, as individuals and as Hampshire SACRE, to consider making a written submission to that? NASACRE, on your behalf, will be making a submission, and that is one reason why we are keen to hear the views of our member SACREs.

Let me end with some Tibetan Buddhist philosophy “Everything changes, and at the same time, nothing changes.” So, the question for Hampshire SACRE and schools is how, with the change of syllabus, will you ensure that the high standards of RE across the country do not change, so that you continue to make a real difference to the lives of the unique and irreplaceable young people of Hampshire a *Living Difference* perhaps?

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