

Chair's Report 2020

As this is a very unusual Chair's Report, I thought I would write something slightly different. It is a story, a true story, of something that I did the other week. In telling this story, I hope to show that what I have helped NASACRE achieve over the last 4 years, as Chair, can make a real and tangible difference to SACREs, Schools and the RE that pupils experience.

This week I was contacted by a Head of RE in a High School. Their SLT had decided to cut KS3 provision to one hour per fortnight. This is not an uncommon situation, as the 2018 'State of the Nation' Report from REC/NATRE and the REC Commission's reports testify to. NASACRE had input into those reports, largely through the data we gathered in the Big NASACRE Survey of 2017, the data from which informed my British Journal of RE paper published in 2019.

She was asking for help in making her case and I was able to help. I sent her the template compliance letter that I wrote on NASACRE's behalf a year ago and which, thanks to our fantastic Administrator, Marie, is available on the NASACRE website. This template was informed by a letter from the DfE to me, setting out the expectations around compliance. This letter would not have been sent without the good relationships that we have built up with the DfE; over my four-year tenure as Chair we have met with three different teams within the DfE. That letter contains the assertion that RE must be delivered to all pupils, in all years, in all state-funded schools. That consistent message has come through answers to questions in the Houses of Parliament, from Nick Gibb - *still* the Schools Minister (some things in Education don't change, it appears!) - questions asked through the RE Policy Unit. Through NASACRE's membership of the REC, I have been able to be part of that Policy Unit, seeking to work with NATRE and RE Today to influence policymakers. NASACRE has continued to work with our Patron, Charles Clarke, as he seeks a New Settlement for RE and also continues to engage with the APPG for RE. I would have spoken at their most recent meeting, if a certain global pandemic hadn't got in the way.

I was able to point her towards the requirements of her Agreed Syllabus, and the strong recommendation about curriculum time within it. Through NASACRE's monitoring, we had realised that her LA was failing in its statutory duty to establish and maintain a SACRE. After complaining to that LA, I had worked with the newly appointed officer to help them re-establish the SACRE. I could point to the fact that SACREs are funded through the Central Schools Services Block grant (CSSB) and that there is a national recommendation that 2% of CSSB is the minimum expected to sufficiently support a SACRE. Despite this, they felt unable to create their own syllabus and the ASC adopted (at a cost) the syllabus from a larger SACRE. This again is increasingly common; over a third of Agreed Syllabi are not locally produced. In our most recent meeting with the DfE we came away with a sense that a 'model' RE syllabus, perhaps in the style of the Music Model Curriculum, was becoming more likely. The purpose of this would be to set a national standard for RE that schools could be more easily be measured against. The REC appears to be laying the groundwork for this with their recent invitation to tender for a Foundation, Framework and Exemplification Project. RE structures appear to be headed in a decidedly neoliberal direction, something which I wrote about in the most recent

Professional Reflection section of RE Today. This article grew out of thinking around the CoRE Report, which I initially shared at the SW SACRE conference last year and developed for the AULRE conference. I was also due to speak at the AREIAC conference this year. These, and events such as the joint AREAIC/NASACRE conferences in Birmingham, the 2020:RE conference in Cheshire, and the proposed Culham St Gabriel's funded REXChange conference in October, are demonstrable signs that NASACRE is working together with the rest of the RE Community to make a real difference to RE in England.

I was able to give her numerous examples of schools who had been inspected under the new 2019 Ofsted Framework. Some, where improvement is required, frequently mention poor curriculum provision, sequencing, or pupils unable to remember key facts; in other 'Good' schools, where excellent RE is being delivered, often - but not always in the case of academies - in line with a well thought out Agreed Syllabus. NASACRE cannot claim responsibility for the new Ofsted Framework, but it is exactly what we have been calling for over the four years of my Chairmanship, and before. We have met with Ofsted, albeit not often enough, and were hoping to hear from the Lead Inspector for RE at our AGM and Conference, where this report should have been delivered.

None of this would be possible without member SACREs paying their annual subscription fees. Thank you. Thanks too, to our Treasurer, Michael Metcalf – who has been around even longer than Nick Gibb! We really need someone to shadow and take over from him. Huge thanks to Sue Holmes, our secretary and chief organiser, and everyone else who volunteers to serve on the NASACRE Executive. Each Exec member now has a specific NASACRE responsibility, for the regular SACRE Briefings, for Conference Organisation or for our ongoing Strategic Development as an organisation. And finally, as I move on to the position of Executive Assistant, my biggest thanks go to Dr Robert Morgan, who succeeds me as Chair.

Paul Smalley

Chair of NASACRE

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PS. The school Senior Leadership relented, and the school has an hour a week of RE again!