

Chair's report for NASACRE AGM – May 2021

Welcome to the AGM and to the annual conference for NASACRE members. As usual, our Secretary has provided an excellent report giving us a detailed and inspirational overview of the year. I am limiting my comments to three themes, focused on what it has meant (from the Chair) to watch and participate in work through the pandemic of COVID-19.

Those themes are resilience, flexibility and commitment:

Resilience

Our necessarily cancelled AGM in May 2020 resulted in some creative thinking about how to manage the organisation's functions and responsibilities. The EGM in November allowed us to ratify finances, identify priorities, examine membership and elect officers – so this formal report to the AGM of 2021 really only covers 6 months of work in a very busy year.

The last time you received a formal report from the Chair was in May 2019 when Paul Smalley, now our Executive Assistant, wrote about the implications of the Commission's report *The Way Forward* and provided happy memories of both our 25th Anniversary, and the joint RE associations conference in Crewe. So many delegates had served - or were serving - on a SACRE.

For me, as the new and unexpected Chair, this year has been visually decorated with images from numerous online meetings: Executive meetings, new established Exec 'socials' (at which we shared aspects of our professional lives not usually apparent in NASACRE meetings), the Extraordinary General Meeting, meetings with the DfE and the RE Council, plus meetings with partners such as AREIAC officers. The (all too common) themes of dogs/cats on Zoom, contributions of builders and window cleaners, surprise family 'visits' to the meetings, and supermarket delivery interruptions, were all part of the story...

As you can tell, we met – and continue to meet – in order to boost spirits, share news, inform members and keep the NASACRE agenda on the move. You could see on the faces of so many the excitement, panic and confusion about making the technology work, against the need to make contact (somehow) with others in a difficult and frightening time for many of us, and at a time when teachers and others in education rose to incredible challenges. Exec members have all been stalwart, creative, and supportive of their own SACRE's interests, and the concerns of our association. SACREs have been amazing throughout the year, dealing with unprecedented queries and (sometimes) controversies, and well, we can't thank schools enough for keeping RE alive and 'kicking'.

Flexibility

This Executive committee has been outstanding in their dedication to NASACRE and to your SACREs, and my report is intended to record personal thanks for all their help and their patience. Professionalism and good humour conquered all, and my highlights of our achievements this year include:

- meeting with our Patron to discuss NASACRE's work and its overlap with other subject and policy initiatives
- helping SACREs continue their work online, acting on DfE advice to local authorities about how this might be achieved
- redesigning the SACRE annual report template with DfE input
- keeping the creative and educational lives of members and their schools going – through competitions, sharing resources across SACRE boundaries, listening to online materials and being amazed at the IT skills of others in the network
- contributing to projects such as the Local Area Network project, with the RE Council and Culham St Gabriel's
- bidding to the REC with AREIAC colleagues for the management and development of the Religion and Worldviews project, and now looking forward to working with the successful bidder (RE Today)
- reviewing and then signing off the report on SACRE funding, emerging from the FOI request last November
- working on the new NASACRE website and FAQs – now close to completion, as you will hear at the conference
- responding to individual requests – and working with the team and our editor to providing SACRE *Briefings* for you, and lately
- working with the team to draw up a NASACRE online study group/CPD programme for 2021-22 to provide support between AGMs.

Commitment

I am occasionally asked what NASACRE 'stands for', what our 'agenda' is and what we intend to 'do' next to help those leading RE and collective worship in SACREs and schools. The implication is that we are being asked to state our commitment(s), or 'worldview'....

If you are ever asked the same it is worth quoting from the website:

The welcome page says that '*NASACRE works to support, strengthen and promote the work done by local SACREs and represents the interests of members at a national level.*'

And point one of NASACRE's mission statement is that the association: '*exists to **strengthen** (my emphasis) local SACREs and to support them in carrying out all their responsibilities*'.

There's much more to it than that, but this commitment to strengthening RE through your work, so much of it on a voluntary basis, is key to our rationale. I hope you can see that we stand firm for our members and for local democracy, we have a finely balanced but flexible agenda, and that we have a commitment and a development plan that will take the association and its members forward in this most unusual decade and beyond.

Take care till we meet again – and I look forward to the next year as your Chair.