

**Durham County Council  
Standing Advisory  
Council on Religious  
Education**

**Annual Report 2014**

# Durham County Council SACRE – Annual Report 2014

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# **Durham County Council SACRE – Annual Report 2014**

## **1 Introduction**

Durham County Council has statutory obligations relating to Religious Education in the county. This report summarises those statutory requirements and sets out key aspects of how they have been met in 2014, against a background of reduced funding and national challenges.

This annual report has been prepared by the Durham County Council Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE). Members of SACRE are representatives of churches and non-Christian faiths in the region, teachers associations and elected councillors. SACRE members donate their time and are not paid for their services. They work closely with the authority's Specialist Inspector for Religious Education, who provides technical advice, and liaises with Education Development Service (EDS).

Religious Education is required by law and also contributes to community cohesion by promoting mutual respect and tolerance in a diverse society. It provides a key context to develop young people's understanding and appreciation of diversity, to promote shared values and to challenge racism and discrimination.

## **2 Background**

### **2.1 Legal requirement for Religious Education**

Every maintained school in England must provide a basic curriculum (RE, sex education and the National Curriculum). This includes provision for RE for all registered pupils at the school (including those in the sixth form), except for those withdrawn by their parents (or withdrawing themselves if they are aged 18 or over) in accordance with Schedule 19 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

The key document in determining the teaching of RE is the locally agreed syllabus within the Local Authority (LA), although schools designated as having a religious character are free to make their own decisions in preparing their syllabuses.

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## 2.2 Durham County Council's statutory responsibilities<sup>1</sup>

### 2.2.1 Establish a permanent standing advisory council on RE (SACRE)

The Education Act 1996 requires local authorities to constitute a permanent Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). The statutory functions of SACRE are to:

- a) Advise the local authority on matters connected with:
  - Religious Education given in accordance with an agreed syllabus; and
  - Religious worship in community schools and in foundation schools that do not have a religious foundation.
- b) Carry out the functions conferred on them by section 394 (determination of cases in which requirement for Christian collective worship is not to apply).

### 2.2.2 Convene an occasional agreed syllabus conference (ASC)

Every local authority must also establish an occasional body called an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) to review the Agreed Syllabus for RE adopted by the local authority.

### 2.2.3 Agreed syllabus

The local authority must institute a review of its agreed syllabus within five years of the last review, and subsequently every five years after the completion of each further review.

Local authorities must ensure that the agreed syllabus for their area is consistent with Section 375(3) of the Education Act 1996, which requires the syllabus to reflect that the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.

### 2.2.4 Required membership of SACRE and ASC

The ASC is a separate entity from SACRE but may have common membership. The local authority appoints representatives to each of four committees that make up the ASC and, in Durham's case, the ASC has the same membership as SACRE.

The four groups of SACRE (four statutory committees of ASC) are:

- A Christian churches (other than C of E) and other faiths

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<sup>1</sup> See 'Religious Education in Schools: Non-statutory guidance 2010' issued by Department for Children, Schools and Families for further information

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- B Church of England (C of E)
- C Teaching associations
- D Local authority

The local authority must ensure that the composition of group A on SACRE and committee A on ASC is broadly representative of the proportionate strengths of the denominations and religions in the area.

The authority is also required to take all reasonable steps when appointing a person to be a member of a group on a SACRE or a committee of an ASC to represent any religion, denomination or association, to ensure the person appointed is representative of the religion, denomination or associations in question.

### **2.2.5 Funding and resources**

Local authorities are required to fund and support a SACRE and ASC satisfactorily in line with the duty to constitute or convene each of these bodies and to enable them to carry out their duties effectively.

## **3 Monitoring of RE and collective worship**

In order to fulfil the responsibility to advise the local authority on matters to do with RE and collective worship, SACRE seeks to monitor provision, standards, teaching and learning in RE. SACRE monitors by requesting information from the local authority (e.g. standards, information about monitoring visits undertaken by the Specialist Inspector (RE) or carrying out their own survey work (e.g. through questionnaires).

### **3.1 Limitations in monitoring**

SACRE have noted that OFSTED no longer undertake any subject scrutiny visits in RE. In the past these were useful for analysing national issues of importance.

SACRE's capacity to conduct direct monitoring has always been limited and has been reduced still further in 2014 by the reduction in technical support referred in section 7.2 below.

The Specialist Inspector for RE has visited some secondary school RE departments in order to monitor provision, standards, teaching and learning, leadership and management of RE. However, this is at the request of individual schools or academies: there is no longer a pattern of local authority monitoring of RE in all County Durham schools. This has resulted in a gap in SACRE's knowledge of the status of RE in schools.

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## 3.2 Responses to requests for information

SACRE were asked this year to provide the local authority with the number of schools who provided alternative acts of collective worship (determinations) for groups of students in their schools. This was a freedom of information request. No such applications for determinations have been made and no schools currently have been issued with a determination.

SACRE have received a number of queries from parents and schools in relation to collective worship e.g. about parental right of withdrawal of their children from collective worship, the use of prayer in acts of collective worship, and statutory requirements. SACRE will continue to monitor the situation and may consider offering written guidance in the future.

## 4 Advice and support for RE and collective worship

SACRE uses information received through monitoring procedures to identify ways in which SACRE and Durham County Council Education Development Service (EDS) can support schools. It notes the following advice and support for schools provided through EDS and SACRE.

### 4.1 RE support contracts

A number of primary and secondary schools have requested contracts for support RE as part of their service level agreement with EDS. These have mainly been fulfilled by the Specialist Inspector for RE and have included staff meetings and support of individual teachers and groups of teachers. The Specialist Inspector for RE regularly provides a report on her work to SACRE.

### 4.2 Enquiry project

Following on from the success of previous interfaith week activities Durham SACRE (in collaboration with South Tyneside SACRE) applied for a bursary from the National Association of Advisory Councils on Religious Education (NASACRE). This was to run an enquiry based learning project supporting schools and academies around the issue of religious diversity in the local area and the North East. Schools and academies applied to participate in this project over the 2013/14 academic year.

The enquiry project was undertaken as a joint project with South Tyneside SACRE in order to forge greater links and to engage schools in different areas of the region in working together collaboratively.

SACRE supported the project by inviting schools and academies to bring their students to a morning or afternoon conference to meet people of faith and beliefs, to hear about their lives and beliefs and ask questions which had been planned as part of the overall enquiry. This programme involved several SACRE members and

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members of local faith communities. Evaluations from students, teachers and faith members rated the conference highly.

Following this conference, the next phase of the project involved a visit outside the region in order to compare religious diversity. Those schools and academies involved in the project visited Bradford, choosing to visit a combination of a Mandir, Gurdwara or Mosque tailoring the input to reflect on their enquiry. Students have since had the opportunity to finalise their enquiry and put together a presentation of outcomes and learning which was given in the November 2014 SACRE meeting.

A SACRE member has been involved in leading and managing the project together with the Specialist Inspector for RE. SACRE has been regularly updated about the impact of the project and the range of the enquiry throughout the academic year. An opportunity exists to develop the project enquiry group of teachers and middle leaders into a North East Hub for Religious Education.

### **4.3 Secondary school RE networks**

Secondary RE network meetings have continued to be held termly and have been well attended. The Specialist Inspector for RE provides local and national updates and explores current issues with colleagues, e.g. provision at key stage 4, planning and sharing of good practice. Various papers and reports have been presented and discussed, e.g. Ofsted's 'Religious education: realising the potential'

Networks have been established for special schools. Although attendance is low, it has been useful to tailor the session in order to meet needs and included developing some planning materials for use in special schools. Some of the items discussed have been the three elements of RE in special schools, adapting planning for special schools, good practice case study.

SACRE continue to discuss other ways to support colleagues through recommending new networks and courses.

### **4.4 Primary school RE networks and courses**

Primary school networks have continued to be held termly and have been very well attended. The Specialist Inspector for RE provides local and national updates and explores current issues with colleagues. In addition visitors have been invited to make presentations on the use of story in RE. Some items discussed have been using Philosophy of Children to develop critical thinking in RE, creating planning materials on "What do Christians believe about God?"

In addition to termly network meetings a course was held throughout the year entitled "Being an outstanding RE coordinator." This was attended by RE coordinators from Durham, Darlington and Sunderland. As a result of this course some delegates have continued to meet and work together creating an "RE Improve" group. With the support of the Specialist Inspector for RE they meet regularly to discuss issues, share good practice and develop materials to use across the region.

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## **4.5 External and specific support**

The Specialist Inspector for RE has continued to receive requests to support some Durham schools in their selection process for teachers and leaders in RE. She has been involved in lesson observations and interviews and offered advice and guidance where appropriate.

The Specialist Inspector for RE has been asked to provide some advice and guidance to schools outside the local authority. She has undertaken RE monitoring visits in schools, been part of selection panels and offered advice to another local SACRE on the procedure for revising the locally agreed syllabus. Within this year the Specialist Inspector for RE has provided professional support to South Tyneside SACRE and has been advisor to the agreed syllabus conferences of Darlington and Sunderland local authorities. These activities result in income for Durham County Council.

Durham SACRE fully support this collaborative and partnership working and the adoption and adaptation of Durham agreed syllabus by other local authorities.

## **5 Status of ASC and agreed syllabus review**

### **5.1 Launch in 2012**

The most recent Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education in Durham was agreed by an ASC with the same membership as SACRE and launched in May 2012. This agreed syllabus has also been purchased and adapted by other local authorities in the region, providing income to Durham County Council.

### **5.2 Status in 2014**

All Durham schools and academies have bought into the agreed syllabus. Durham County Council's Specialist Inspector for RE has continued to provide additional training and planning materials to support the delivery of the agreed syllabus. It is anticipated that further planning and resources could be produced if schools contract with Education Development Service (EDS).

In 2014 SACRE was concerned to hear that Durham Diocese had issued directives to voluntary controlled schools as well as aided schools about the use of the diocesan syllabus for RE. Whilst aided schools may follow the diocesan agreed syllabus, voluntary controlled schools are required by statute to follow the local authority agreed syllabus. This matter has now been resolved, as the Specialist Inspector for RE met with the Assistant Diocesan Director of Education to clarify the requirement and revised guidance was issued to the affected schools.

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The Specialist Inspector for RE also wrote to head teachers to remind them of the statutory obligation to use the agreed syllabus for teaching of RE in community and voluntary controlled schools.

### **6 Local, national and emerging issues in RE**

The Specialist Inspector for RE informed SACRE that she had received a high volume of calls from parents asking to withdraw from RE and collective worship. Members sought clarification about whether the calls were from a particular geographical area in the county which appears not to be the case.

SACRE has been carefully following national updates and developments in Religious Education. Members of SACRE received a summary of the report 'The Truth Unmasked.' This was produced by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education following an inquiry into resources and provision for teacher training in Religious Education. Durham SACRE had contributed evidence towards this inquiry and encouraged Durham schools to do likewise.

Ofsted published its long report on Religious Education in October 2013 entitled, "Religious education: realising the potential". The report was based on findings from RE inspections in primary and secondary schools undertaken across the country between 2009 and 2012 (a report was published every three years). The report highlighted several areas of weakness, including the role government has played in undermining RE, as well as poor subject knowledge and lack of understanding of purpose of RE amongst teachers. Alan Brine, HMI and Ofsted's National Adviser for RE is the author of the report and gave input to the Durham RE conference in March 2013 ensuring that teachers in the region were already aware of some of the key issues which were raised through Ofsted monitoring of RE.

### **7 Management of SACRE, working in partnership**

#### **7.1 SACRE membership and meetings**

SACRE met as planned in March, June and November 2014. All meetings take place in a committee room at County Hall, in order to be visible to all and easy for members of the public to attend.

The membership of Durham County Council's SACRE is listed in the Appendix. Membership in each of the four groups remains strong and all meetings have been quorate.

#### **7.2 SACRE funding and support**

In June 2013 the Durham County Council SACRE received notification from the council's Head of Education that the amount of professional support offered to

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SACRE by them would need to be reduced due to budget pressures. The calendar year 2014 was thus the first full year of this reduction in professional support.

A SACRE task group met throughout the year to review the issue of working with reduced support. These discussions have focused on new ways of working and the greater involvement of SACRE members. The Specialist Inspector for RE continues to provide SACRE with a national and local update at each meeting; this is used as a basis for discussion and evaluation.

So far the impact of this change has been mitigated somewhat due to the body of experience represented within SACRE. However there has been an impact on SACRE's project work and monitoring, reported above. As new members join SACRE and as the time of the review of the agreed syllabus approaches these challenges will grow.

SACRE has been well supported by the clerk to SACRE, provided by Democratic Services.

### **7.3 External relationships and activities**

SACRE continues to work with local partners and stakeholders. The Specialist Inspector for RE is a member of The North East Religious Learning Resources Centre (NERLRC). The Director of NERLRC has provided input to network meetings. The Director of NERLRC has become a member of SACRE representing the Church of England. Links with the diocese have been further strengthened through the appointment of the Diocesan RE consultant joining SACRE who also represents the Church of England (at time of writing).

SACRE was notified by the SACRE chairman (Senior Tutor in RE at Durham University ITT) that the PGCE Religious Education programme would be closed in Durham University at the end of the 2013/14 academic year. This means that there is no provision in the North East to train secondary RE teachers). In response to this the Specialist Inspector for RE commissioned a questionnaire to RE teachers in Durham to assess the long term impact of this closure.

SACRE is kept informed of local faith issues by Ian Hunter Smart, Community Development Officer (with responsibility for faiths and beliefs) through his attendance at SACRE meetings. Durham Faiths Network have been very supportive of the SACRE Interfaith conferences this year with members of the network offering to lead workshops.

Durham SACRE is a member of the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE).

The council's Specialist Inspector for RE is a member of AREIAC (Association of Religious Education Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants). She uses this membership to keep SACRE and teacher groups informed of developments and good practice.

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### Appendix – SACRE membership 2014

Group	Representing
A	Christian churches (other than C of E) and other faiths
B	Church of England (C of E)
C	Teaching associations
D	Local authority

Name	Representing	Group
Bhakti Rasa Adhikhara	Hinduism	A
Ms V Bain	RE Curriculum Group	C
Miss J Bainbridge	Methodist Church	A
Mrs S M Baker	National Union of Teachers (NUT)	C
Major N Barker	Salvation Army	A
Cllr Brookes	Durham County Council	D
Mr S Brown	Assemblies of God	A
Canon L Burton	Church of England	B
Mrs C Callaghan	National Union of Teachers (NUT)	C
Ms N Chapman	Church of England	B
Cllr Dixon	Durham County Council	D
Mr V Gallant	Judaism	A
Mrs W Gray	Buddhism	A
Mr W S Guymer	Baptist Church	A
Ms A Hartley	National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)	C

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<b>Name</b>	<b>Representing</b>	<b>Group</b>
Cllr Iveson	Durham County Council	D
Rev. J Jewsbury	Church of England	B
Mr J G Kidd	Methodist Church	A
Mr P Lamb	Association of School and College Leavers (ASCL, formerly SHA)	C
Mrs D Mowbray-Pape	Church of England	B
Ms S Lupton	RE Curriculum Group	C
Ms J Nicholls	Society of Friends (Quaker)	A
Mrs I Osborne	Roman Catholic Church	A
Mrs J Pallister	Roman Catholic Church	A
Ms K Passmore	Church of England	B
Mr Purba	Sikhism	A
Miss C Spencer	Baha'i Faith	A
Cllr Stelling	Durham County Council	D
Mrs M Stephenson	United Reformed Church	A
Mr P Welch	National Union of Teachers (NUT)	C

### Specialist Inspector for Religious Education

Mrs I Short

### Representative from Community Development

Mr I Hunter Smart

### Vacancies in 2014

<b>Group</b>	<b>Representing</b>
A	United Reformed Church (1) Islam (1) (vacancy filled in 2015)

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C	NASUWT (1) NAHT (1)
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