



SACRE Officers and support

Supporting the SACRE

This paper explores the relationship between three pivotal functions in the support of a SACRE – the Clerk, the RE Professional Officer and the LA Officer. How LAs organise these functions will vary.

Background

The responsibilities of the Local Authority to a SACRE are:

- ensure there is a SACRE;
- ensure all four groups are appropriately represented on the SACRE;
- establish an occasional body called an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) and appoint members to it;
- ensure there is an Agreed Syllabus, reviewed every five years;
- ensure funds and support are in place to enable SACRE and the ASC to fulfil their duties;
- take note of and respond to advice from the SACRE.

‘Sufficient funding’ for the SACRE may vary depending on factors such as the demographics and faith diversity of different LAs but should not be less than:

- Clerking support for 3-6 SACRE meetings per year.
- Specialist RE advice and support for 3-6 SACRE meetings per year, including supporting the recommendation or any recommendations that may arise from these meetings
- Specialist RE advice and back up support from the clerk and LA support officer for preparation, publication and distribution ensuring that it is received by the Secretary of State and other key partners in the work of SACRE

Most SACREs meet on average 4 times annually, although there are sometimes additional meetings when required e.g. to consider the impact of new government legislation on the role and function of the SACRE or to provide advice to local schools during times of national or international crisis.

Each SACRE is required to publish an annual report which has to be submitted to the Secretary of State and which should be circulated widely locally.

Local Authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that the agreed syllabus is reviewed every five years. SACREs should require the local authority (LA) to convene an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC), a parallel but different body to the SACRE that requires the same level of ‘support’ from the LA to perform this function.

During the review period (which can take up to 18 months) the ASC needs to meet regularly to consider new draft syllabus materials and make recommendations. The ASC must also be clerked by a dedicated and professional clerk. Its minutes are a legal document, available for scrutiny should the syllabus process subsequently be challenged, possibly in a court of law.

The LA is responsible for providing satisfactory funding for this task, including writing, consulting, publishing and providing necessary training, so it requires a sufficient budget for the work to be granted by the LA. A close partnership between the LA Officer and the SACRE is necessary to ensure sufficient funding is dedicated so that the work proceeds effectively.

In addition, the SACRE has the power, rarely used, to require the LA to review its agreed syllabus earlier than within the five year period as stated in the Education Act 1996 Schedule 31: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/schedule/31>.

'Sufficient funding' for the ASC within a five year cycle may vary for reasons similar to those leading to variation in funding of SACREs in different LAs but should not be less than:

- Clerking support for 3-6 ASC meetings in a year.
- Specialist RE advice and back up support for the 3-6 ASC meetings.
- Specialist RE advice and back up support for reviewing the agreed syllabus, and preparing, and publishing the reviewed syllabus and disseminating it across the LA schools, including training for the implementation of the syllabus in maintained non-denominational schools.

Clerk to the SACRE and the ASC

Legislation underpinning the statutory work of SACREs required that they should have the support of a clerk or similar officer, that minutes are produced in an efficient and legal way and therefore that the smooth and effective running of the SACRE is supported by the LA. LAs have a responsibility to ensure that the minutes of SACREs and ACS are publicly available for six years after their adoption.

Clerk to the SACRE is not a full time job. However, follow up from meetings and liaising with and responding to the various organisations and communities that are linked to the SACRE's business is time consuming. It cannot be equated to the role of a Governing body's 'session clerk' because of all the other work surrounding the role, although it does require the same level of professional competency.

In addition, the clerk is a first point of contact for a wide range of groups and individuals. For these reasons, it is important that the clerk has some regular availability during working hours.

Both the SACRE and the ASC need to have a wide membership, representing most of the many and varied faith communities in the LA. The clerk is often the first point of contact with these communities and SACRE members. For this reason the clerk must be sensitive to the faith and beliefs of all SACRE members and have some understanding of them.

Responsibilities:

The SACRE and/or ASC clerk should:

- Arrange, attend and clerk meetings of the SACRE and/or ASC;
- Produce and circulate minutes and agendas of the SACRE and/or ASC in a timely manner in accordance with the LA's standard format;
- Ensure that all papers from working parties or consultants are circulated to SACRE and/or ASC members in advance of meetings electronically and where necessary printed;
- Advise on dates of meetings, particularly in relation to religious holidays or other Council meetings which may clash and effect quoracy;
- Arrange venues for meetings of both the SACRE and ASC;
- Liaise with the venue regarding any catering for a meeting with due sensitivity towards the religious requirements of a particular faith community or communities represented on SACRE;
- Liaise with a venue for use of any necessary equipment (e.g. IT, digital projector) required for the meeting;
- Remind and chase members/other attendees about reports for meetings and circulation deadlines;

- Circulate additional papers or conference invitations e.g. from government departments, Council departments, the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE), the RE Council and Ofsted as appropriate;
- Alert the Chair and RE Professional / Adviser to any communications from these and similar bodies;
- Ensure that regular communications such as the NASACRE updates are circulated to members;
- Working with the Chair, the local RE Professional and other SACRE Officers, produce reports to the Mayor or Portfolio Holder and Cabinet when changes to the SACRE constitution or membership are required;
- Work as a team member closely with the Chair, the local RE Professional and other SACRE Officers; this includes regular phone contact, email, setting meeting dates and up to 3 agenda planning / executive meetings per year;
- Be the first point of contact for SACRE members, faith community members, members of the public and other bodies concerned with the work of SACREs, e.g. NASACRE;
- Respond to queries, alerting the Chair and Advisor when necessary, for example FOI requests, this function is particularly crucial in LAs where the RE Professional is a contracted external consultant;
- Maintain the SACRE membership list, keeping it up to date, chasing members whose attendance is poor and identifying any membership issues for the attention of the Chair, RE professional and LA Officers;
- Contact nominating bodies represented on the SACRE when membership lapses to arrange for replacements and / or liaise with these bodies for any other issues as appropriate;
- Contribute information, e.g. membership and attendance details for the Annual Report of SACRE;
- Assist in the production and circulation of the Annual Report; issue Welcome / Induction Packs for new members and ensure that they have sufficient information to prepare them for their first meeting.
- Maintain a filing system (electronic and sometimes paper) of relevant and up to date information;
- Where possible liaise with the LA Officer, other Council departments, keeping the Chair, the RE Professional and other Officers informed of any Council initiatives which may be relevant to the work of the SACRE;
- Ensure that all SACRE publications / advice are circulated to the relevant bodies;
- Liaise with the Council's committee / legal section re: governance issues;
- Be responsible for the passing on for payment, invoices relating to SACRE work, e.g. payment for attendance at national conferences, payment for catering for meetings.

RE Professional Adviser to the SACRE

In some LAs this role is taken over by a consultant, only employed for this purpose. It is important therefore that the RE Professional Adviser is able to work with the support of the Clerk and the LA Officer, at least one of whom should be able to make necessary links with council processes and departments to ensure communications with schools and that cross Council working is effective.

Responsibilities:

The SACRE (SACRE* indicates ASC when appropriate) RE Adviser should:

- Attend all SACRE* meetings, helping to prepare Agendas and key papers;
- Advise SACRE* on issues relating to its work;
- Ensure SACRE* is up to date with local, regional and national initiatives and issues related to RE, collective worship and syllabus developments, e.g. the work of the RE Council, the All Party Parliamentary Group for RE, DfE or charitable funded initiatives;
- Relate SACRE's work to wider community issues, including partnerships with faith and belief communities ;
- Lead on areas related to the Agreed Syllabus, RE and collective worship;
- Manage and deliver the training of SACRE members and, where appropriate, teachers and other groups interested in RE;
- Produce reports to meet the deadlines agreed for distribution of papers for the meetings;
- Support SACRE members' development, including their ability to provide a bridge between their nominating body and SACRE;
- With relevant administrative support and the SACRE clerk, manage and advise meetings of sub groups e.g. working parties for particular initiatives;
- With the SACRE clerk ensure that all SACRE publications are circulated to the relevant bodies;
- Working with the Chair, the clerk and other SACRE Officers, produce reports to the Mayor or Portfolio Holder and Cabinet e.g. when changes to the SACRE constitution or membership are required;
- Draft and edit the SACRE Annual Report and all SACRE materials and publications;
- With administrative support, update any relevant RE / ASC / SACRE website and SACRE's presence on the LA website;
- Take the lead on the monitoring aspects of SACRE, especially agreed school visits and analysis of examination results in Religious Studies;

The Local Authority Officer to the SACRE

It is customary for SACREs to be attended by a senior Local Authority Officer who represents the Director of Children's Services, supports SACRE's effective communications with the LA and the smooth running of the work of the Clerk and RE Professional Officer. Where either or both of these other functions are provided by an external consultant, this role is vital and pivotal as the LA Officer will need to establish the necessary links for SACRE with Council processes and departments to ensure communications with schools and that cross Council working is effective.

The LA Officer will be able to provide SACRE with information regarding the local schools and the successes and difficulties they are experiencing, will understand and link SACRE to budget

processes and cross Council initiatives which may influence or impact on their work, e.g. the Prevent Board or Community Safety Partnership.

Where the RE Professional Officer is not a dedicated LA employee the LA Officer will need to facilitate their link to other information about schools, examination data and other LA employees who can support links with schools, training processes and office backup.

When the LA is setting its budget for the coming year the LA Officer should ensure that the needs of SACRE are recognised and that a sufficient budget is available so that SACRE can perform its statutory duties. In years where there is an Agreed Syllabus Conference its needs will also have to be budgeted for.