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National Association of
Standing Advisory Councils
on Religious Education

SACRE BRIEFING

Issue: 11

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[NASACRE Conference and AGM 2016](#)

Shaping the future

May 17th 2016 | Central Hall Westminster | London.

Conference programme

- 11:00 Arrival, registration and coffee
- 11:30 Welcome and introductions
- 11:40 Keynote address: **The Rt Hon Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss**
- 12:10 Question time
- 12:45 Business meeting
- 13:30 Lunch
- 14:15 Keynote address: **Professor Adam Dinham**
- 15:00 Discussions and questions
- 15:35 Table discussions/panel discussion
- 16:15 Closing remarks from Chair
- 16:30 Close

The **Rt Hon Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss GBE**, formerly President of the Family Division of the High Court was the first female Lord Justice of Appeal and until 2004, was the highest-ranking female judge in the United Kingdom. She has chaired many high profile enquiries and inquests. Baroness Butler-Sloss served as Chair for the recently published Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life: **Living with Difference**.

Professor Adam Dinham is Professor of Faith and Public Policy at Goldsmiths, University of London. He is also Chair of the British Sociological Association Sociology of Religion Study Group (Socrel), Professor of Religious Literacy, Diakonhjemmet University College, Oslo, Norway and Honorary Stephenson Professor of Leadership, Religion & Society, Sheffield Institute for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies, Sheffield University, UK. With Martha Shaw, Professor Dinham is the co-author of **RE for REal: The future of teaching and learning about belief**.

Delegate cost: £100 member SACREs; £125 non-member SACREs

NASACRE is seeking nominations for Treasurer, Secretary and two Executive members and is proposing some changes to our Constitution.

For further information and to make a booking, visit the **Conference and AGM 2016 page** of the website.

IMPORTANT DATES:

- Nominations close May 6th

- Bookings close May 8th

AGM Papers and information

All documents and support papers together with venue details can be found on the **2016 Papers** page of the website. Documents can be downloaded from this page. Conference papers will not be available on the day.

A reminder about downloading AGM papers will be sent to conference delegates and colleagues who made bookings about a week before the conference.

Educational Excellence Everywhere: the implication for SACREs

Chair of NASACRE, David Hampshire writes:

In March 2016 the government published the White Paper: *Educational Excellence Everywhere*. The White Paper sets out the government vision for schools which, if the proposals become law, will have an impact on SACREs and Agreed Syllabus Conferences.

Firstly, there is the intention that every school will become an Academy by 2022. As agreed syllabuses do not have to be used by Academies, the question arises as to whether a local authority will need to review its agreed syllabus as required by the 1996 Education Act and the Statutory Instrument 1304 (1994). Similarly, SACREs were established to advise the local authority on RE and collective worship. If local authorities have no schools for which they are responsible, will they need advice on these two areas of school life?

Secondly, the White Paper indicates that the government will reconsider the role of local authorities and their functions. It is not clear whether this includes SACREs or not. If they are to be reformed, on what basis would this happen? Or, will they simply be abolished? The White Paper is silent on this issue.

Thirdly, statements on the National Curriculum in the White Paper are significant. The government seeks to set a standard that Academies will be able to go beyond in the National Curriculum but no Academy will have to follow it. Will the government seek to establish a national standard for RE given that no locally agreed syllabus would have to be followed? What is strongly indicated in the White Paper, is that Multi Academy Trusts will have responsibility for curriculum and therefore, what will be the requirements placed upon them for religious education and, further, collective worship? The issue of funding agreements is significant here, especially as all existing Academies (without a specifically religious

foundation) have the current definition of RE and collective worship written into those agreements – which cannot be retrospectively changed – and a clear reference to Agreed Syllabuses.

Finally, it is important to focus on the current situation. Many White Papers have proposed changes that have not come about. However, certain things are clear:

1. For the time being, the current law remains in place. Local Authorities have to appoint and maintain a SACRE as set out in statute and statutory instruments.
2. Agreed syllabuses have to be reviewed at least every five years and a revised syllabus published on the recommendation of an Agreed Syllabus Conference.
3. These functions have to be maintained even in authorities that currently have no schools to which an agreed syllabus or SACRE's advice applies.
4. SACREs have to report annually to the Secretary of State on the advice they have given and the response to that advice.

It is also the case that Local Authorities are legally responsible for the education, training and recreation of all children and young people up to the age of 19 (and in some cases, 25 as a consequence of the Children Act 2004). This responsibility includes the religious education of pupils in whatever educational establishment they might be in, whether within or beyond the boundaries of the Authority. Hence, SACREs have a clear role in ensuring that the quality of religious education and collective worship is high for all children whether they are in a maintained community school or not.

Fit for purpose?

A critique of the Purpose of Study and Aims of the REC's 2013 Framework for RE

NASACRE's Treasurer shares a personal perspective on the RECs Framework for RE

Disclaimer: This article represents the views of the writer only. It should in no way be taken as reflecting the views of NASACRE or Staffordshire SACRE.

Recent reports charting the present fragmentation of RE envisage a national syllabus in RE, as part of the way forward. More recently still, the government appears suddenly to be taking steps to tackle the situation. Currently, the REC's proposed **National Curriculum Framework for RE** (2013) is at the forefront of the stage. It is therefore a matter of acute urgency and gravity to consider whether the Framework is fit for purpose, before it is too late and the Framework - or something very similar - is adopted and imposed by default, whether we like it

or not.

A few months ago, I found myself heading up the re-writing of Staffordshire's Agreed Syllabus, as Chair of Staffordshire's SACRE and Agreed Syllabus Conference. To set the ball rolling, I started to look more closely at the Framework. I took particular interest in the opening sections, on the Purpose of Study and on the Aims of RE, which provide the rationale for the whole Framework. I discovered that I was experiencing some quite strong negative reactions to the text. This article is accordingly an attempt to articulate those reactions cogently and coherently, in order to test them out with colleagues, and to stimulate serious and urgent debate.

My main initial reaction had been one of disappointment and a feeling of anticlimax. Could this really be the document which would attract, motivate, and inspire the next generation of RE teachers, subject leaders and advisers? Where was the sense of enthusiasm for Religious Education, and a proper recognition of the "buzz" and the enjoyment that good RE can generate among pupils? A torrent of worthy but pedestrian prose smothered the presentation like the proverbial wet blanket. Perhaps I was being unfair; the text of the Framework had hardly been devised to "sell" RE to the world at large, but at least it might have made more effort to be upbeat about RE.

My further reactions are arguably much more serious. The first of these is that the Framework appears to be uninterested in what pupils bring with them into the school situation from their homes and communities, and how this interacts with their work in RE. The Framework states right at the start that RE sets out to "provoke challenging questions..."; but it does not apparently set out also to respect and recognise pupils' existing identities, their emerging faith, or the communities they may already belong to. The pupil is conceived of as an individual without any roots, who must be helped to find their lonely way in the world without reference to anything already there for them beyond the school gates.

This individualistic and arid ideology is compounded by an excessive emphasis on rational skills and processes, at the expense of adequately appreciating the affective element in religion, and indeed in life itself. According to the Framework, religion is there to be "explained", "analysed", "appraised", "evaluated". The awkward fact that there is a non-rational dimension to religion (even maybe to non-theistic stances also) is quietly swept under the carpet. In consequence, the Framework appears to be biased in favour of a quite aggressive rationalistic stance over against religion, all religion, and to be promoting – consciously or unconsciously – a secularist critique of religion as such.

One factor which may be at work here is the pressure to ensure that RE is academically rigorous and respectable, and can robustly defend its corner in

comparison with other subjects. This is a fair concern, but only up to a point. There is an inescapable tension between the academic study of religion, and the inclusive character of Agreed Syllabus RE, a tension exemplified by the problems that arise for schools and Agreed Syllabuses as they seek to cater for Key Stage 4 pupils.

It seems to me that the Framework has too much of an eye on GCSE performances and programmes, and on the hoops exam pupils will have to learn to go through, and not enough of an eye on the needs, capabilities and interests of the general pupil. Is a GCSE course really the most appropriate strategy or model for every pupil, to build on what has gone before? Does not the GCSE goal distort the essence of RE, and introduce an unwanted emphasis on rationally manipulating religious data and knowledge, to satisfy some external arbiter?

So, is the Framework “fit for purpose? No, it is not, as far as its underlying philosophy is concerned. Can it be rescued and re-jigged? Not without much hard thinking and reflection. It’s not a simple matter of modifying the text here and there. Who’s going to do this work? You and I. If we don’t engage with the task now, it may be too late. The Framework is already there, warts and all, in the forefront of the stage.



The RE Quality Mark

**Are all your schools aware of the RE Quality Mark?
Could your SACRE encourage or support them?**

The RE Quality Mark award acknowledges and celebrates outstanding RE, recognises good practice and provides a powerful tool for development. Schools which have applied for the award have found that it affirms the work they are already doing, raises the profile of the subject and gives them ideas and confidence for developing their practice even further. There are **winners** throughout England and it is encouraging to read the **positive comments** which both pupils and staff make about the difference that good RE can make.

The criteria based School Evidence Form enables RE subject leaders to determine their award level and also helps them to consider critically five different aspects of practice:

- Learners and Learning
- Teachers and Teaching
- Curriculum
- Subject Leadership
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

The cost of the REQM is £475. SACREs may consider offering small grants to support interested schools. Cheshire West and Chester SACRE for example, offered £100 towards schools applying for the REQM on a first come first served basis. In addition, schools which have fewer than 150 pupils, are categorised by Ofsted as "requiring improvement" or in "special measures", may be eligible for a £275 grant.

Visit the [REQM website](#) for further information.

A new resource

Dealing with SACRE member issues is a companion piece to the code of conduct and SACRE constitution documents and provides advice if a SACRE member becomes a problem.

You don't have to be Sherlock Holmes, but it helps.



Our intrepid sleuth Michael Metcalf reveals all.

"Why can't we access the whole of the NASACRE website?" (Message from Borsetshire SACRE)

"Because you need a new user name and password each year." (Reply from Treasurer/Membership Secretary)

"Then why haven't we been given a new user name and password?" (Borsetshire SACRE)

"Because you haven't paid your annual subscription yet." (Treasurer/Membership Secretary)

"Oh yes we have."

"Oh no you haven't."

"Oh yes we have"

This interchange, or something like it, happens many times each year, and is a source of much frustration and inconvenience on both sides. So how DO we know if your SACRE has paid its annual subscription? (Or Conference/AGM fee, etc)

A few SACREs/LAs (Local Authorities) still pay by CHEQUE and snail mail. Cheques are easy. There is never any problem about linking a cheque to its originating LA or SACRE.

The great majority of LAs now use electronic credit transfers, known as BACS. Two things can happen at this point. Either the LA sends me a separate notification telling me that the transfer is being made, or it does not send me any notification.

If I have received notification, I take this as proof of payment, even if the actual transfer date into NASACRE's account is later than the date of notification. Again, there is rarely any problem linking a notification with the originating SACRE and LA, though sometimes a bit of routine detective work may be necessary to pair all this up with the actual payment entry in the monthly bank printout (see below).

But what if I receive no separate notification? How do I then know that Dorsetshire SACRE has paid its annual subscription? This is when life begins to get interesting. I scour the bank printouts to track down any payments which have appeared out of the blue, and cannot be paired up with any notification. I then have to become Sherlock Holmes, and work out which LA each of these mystery payments has come from. This is not a straightforward task, since the printout gives only limited or ambiguous details.

Some linkings have become familiar friends. I have learnt, for instance, that Babcock 4S relates to Surrey, but Babcock LDP to Devon. Serco Ltd is North East Lincs, while SCCAPORS is Suffolk. Two new ones have had me scratching my head: SIL indicates Liverpool, but S4E T/A Services is from Birmingham. It's the ambiguous ones which cause the real problems, not helped by the fact that the abbreviation CC can stand for both County Council and City Council. You might like to try and identify the following, all real examples from the printouts: LCC, WBC, LBR, DMBC, DBC, BMBC, NCC, NCC1, SCC, RUT (*answers below*)

If every LA issued a notification with each BACS payment, there would be very little problem. In practice, quite a number of LAs fail to notify BACS payments, perhaps as part of a cost-cutting regime. (This is self-defeating, as the staff time used when a payment has to be verified is far greater than the time taken to send a notification in the first place.)

As the funding squeeze tightens, more and more LAs may become non-notifiers, so what can YOU do to help the situation?

1. Please be patient! While human error can and does happen, there are some intrinsic difficulties for us with many LAs in verifying whether they have paid their Annual Subscriptions etc.
2. Please check (if you can) whether your LA, or finance agency, issues notifications with BACS payments. If they do not, it is sometimes necessary for us to request you to extract further information (e.g. date of payment) before payment can be verified at our end.
3. Please follow up the progress of your payments within your own LA's systems. Quite often, a Purchase Order needs to be raised within your LA, and a code number attached to our invoice. This is routine, and is rarely the cause of a hold-up in the payment. It is far more likely that someone in a particular LA has failed to act. For instance, you could ask to be notified when your LA's payment has been achieved, and keep enquiring until it has.
4. Please be patient! And don't hesitate to contact us if there seems to be a delay or other problem in acknowledging your payments.
5. Please accept our thanks for your patience and understanding!

Answers to bank printout indicators:

(I can't guarantee that these are 100% correct, even now. It's an inexact science.)

LCC Leeds City Council

WBC Wokingham Borough Council

LBR London Borough of Richmond

DMBC Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council

DBC Darlington Borough Council

BMBC Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

NCC Norfolk County Council (but there's a mystery entry under the same initials which doesn't quite tally, and is probably Nottingham City Council)

NCC1 Northumberland, apparently

SCC Southampton City Council

RUT Richmond upon Thames (NOT Rutland)

Yes, I know we have Richmond twice, under different indicators, but that's part of the hell of it, particularly when LAs join forces or share resources and staff and do not inform us. Quite frankly, it's a nightmare! May I refer you to 1 and 4 above.

As we are currently in the invoicing season, both for the Conference and AGM and in June the issue of annual subscriptions, it would help us tremendously if you could act as Dr Watson and pursue payments as appropriate with your respective local authorities.

NASACRE membership 2015-16

(and membership 2016-17)

To view all the resources on the website, **your SACRE needs to be a member of NASACRE**. Locked areas are indicated with a white padlock and require you to log in.

Log-in details for the website were changed in September and this information was sent to the clerks from SACREs from which we have received payment of the annual membership subscription.

Clerks have been invited to share the new login with members. If you have not yet received this information, **please contact your SACRE clerk**.

If you are a **SACRE clerk** and have not received the log-in information email but think your invoice (first sent 5th June 2015) has been paid, please email the **Treasurer** providing full details regarding payment.

Invoices for the academic year 2016-17 will be issued in June in the hope that your payment will be received by 31st August and therefore in time for you to receive the new username and password in early September.

SACRE member survey

What is RE for? A SACRE member survey.

"I wish to thank all SACRE members who completed the online survey and those who sent me completed paper copies."

Results can be seen [here](#).

Mark Plater

All Party Parliamentary Group on RE report

Paul Smalley, Vice Chair of NASACRE provides a report of the APPG on RE meeting held in January

Combating extremism, and promoting community cohesion and character development: the contribution of Religious Education to schools

The first meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Religious Education since the election was held on 19th January 2016. Fiona Bruce MP, Chair of the APPG, welcomed around 80 people including a number from the NASACRE Executive and local SACREs to Committee Room 10 of the Houses of Parliament. The speakers were mainly drawn from the Birmingham SACRE, with Nigel Genders giving a CofE perspective and David Hampshire, Chair of NASACRE able to bring some wider national thinking.

First to speak were Ron Skelton and Adiba Khan Head and Head of RE from Broadway school in Birmingham. Their school was held up as an example of good practice as they use faith and interfaith work to ensure they have 'rounded' pupils: promoting British values and developing character in RE. Their (mostly Muslim) pupils visit different places of worship, such as a synagogue, and are encouraged to discuss controversial issues, such as jihad.

Ranjit Singh Dhanda of the Nishkam Schools Trust, also based in Birmingham, suggested that faith inspires 'character' and therefore all children need to learn RE and to explore their own faith wherever they are at school. He spoke of how the Sikh tradition of respecting all faiths underpins the trust's schools. He wanted to ensure that existing legislation is upheld and put into practice to empower local SACREs and local authorities.

Marius Felderhof co-author of the book: *Teaching Virtue - The Contribution of Religious Education*, explored the way Birmingham SACRE had been used by the authority after the Trojan Horse affair. He advocated a strengthening of inter-faith networks and suggested that 'RE and collective worship are essentially about character development'. He also recommended that all SACREs should be properly funded, that GCSE RS be included in the EBacc, RE teachers better trained in 'character' development, and increased funding for research.

David Hampshire, chair of NASACRE, focused on challenging the contemporary understanding of all extremism as being evil, and argued that extreme pacifism (as exemplified by the Quakers) or generosity (such as that of St Anthony) should be celebrated in schools. He stated that RE cannot change the world in an hour a week, but offers the opportunity to look at countervailing narratives, so that pupils can critique the totalising narratives of violent extremism – remembering that even our narrative about extremism itself is unfairly linked to Islam. He noted that the CORAB report alleges that there is too much positive spin on religions and yet there is a Christian heritage of dissent and protest. He questioned why, if RE has an important role to play in combatting extremism (as the Secretary of State suggests) it is not in the EBacc and not mentioned as part of the Prevent agenda.

Nigel Genders Chief Education Officer for Church of England asked 'What is RE for?' and suggested that viewing RE primarily as a means to an end risks distorting its primary purpose: of promoting theological enquiry and religious literacy. He said RE can make a contribution to combatting extremism, or developing community cohesion and character building, but we need to keep some separation between Prevent and RE. RE should focus on the impact of faith in the lives of believers, and provide the tools to answer the big questions, such as the source of identity that so many young people are searching for. He wants the whole curriculum used to develop SMSC and character.

Professor James Arthur, Director of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtue at Birmingham University, ended the presentations by giving a short history of the development of character education, an area he claims has consensus across all main political parties and for which interest is expanding globally. He thinks that education is more than simply examination success and schools should be value driven, involved in teaching intellectual, civic, moral and performance virtues.

There were a number of questions from the floor, including questions about the purpose of RE, the training of RE teachers and whether a National RE Curriculum or greater accountability measures are the best way to improve the subject's standing.

DfE audit of SACRE Annual Reports

As members will know it is a **statutory requirement for SACREs to publish an annual report and to send this to the Secretary of State, ideally by the 31st December each calendar year**. Since the abolition of the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency in 2011 there has been no analysis of SACRE annual reports.

In light of this, the DfE has approached the RE Council to work with us to produce an analysis of reports. In order to do this, a template is to be produced which will allow easier analysis, although this is not compulsory. Currently, the **template for Annual Reports** on the NASACRE website is recommended and any new template for use will not be in place for this year due to time-scales.

As part of this process **SACREs will be asked by the DfE to send copies of their Annual Report to NASACRE** electronically, which many do already. It is important though that SACREs continue to send a copy of their report to the Secretary of State as required, as a result of the changes brought in by the Education Act 2011.

Thank you to those SACREs who have already submitted **reports** for the year 2014-15.

Please email your SACRE report as **one** document in **PDF format** with a **maximum size** of approx **3Mb** to: memsec@nasacre.org.uk

A request from NASACRE MemSec

When SACRE Officers change or move on, it is sometimes difficult to remember to let me know of those changes. However, it is vital if your SACRE is not to miss out on important mailings (including *SACRE Briefing*) that you provide up to date information.

Please note: the SACRE database has been amended. An email address will now only be listed once. If for example, the clerk's email address is also the one used for contact with other SACRE Officers, then that email address will only be listed once and under the name of the clerk.

Click [here](#) to check details.

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