

At a meeting of the STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION held at TOWN END FARM ACADEMY, BORODIN AVENUE, SUNDERLAND on THURSDAY 13 SEPTEMBER 2012 at 3.30 p.m.

Present:-

Church of England

Rev. G. M. Beck

Christian and Other Religions

Ms. C. Nicol
Mrs D. Sadlik (Jewish Representative)
Rev. G. Phillips

Teacher Associations

Ms. T Laybourne (Chair)
Miss. A. McChesney

In Attendance:-

Isobel Short	-	Inspector for RE at Durham County Council
Annette Parr	-	School Improvement Team
Kate Cuthbert	-	Principal Governance Services Officer

As the meeting was inquorate, the following discussions could not be viewed as having been approved and therefore, could not be acted upon until approved at a future quorate meeting.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Francis, P Smith, Stewart and Williams and Mrs W Lundgren.

Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 February, 2012

It was AGREED that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 February, 2012 be

approved as a correct record subject to the following amendments:-

The minutes to read 'At a meeting of the STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE)' and not AGREED SYLLABUS CONFERENCE as there had not been an agenda for an Agreed Syllabus Conference meeting.

This therefore meant that Paragraph 4 on Page 2 was incorrect as it referred to that being the first conference meeting.

Isobel Short explained that the first conference meeting took place on Monday 26 March. As the meeting scheduled for Wednesday 30 May did not take place, the second Agreed Syllabus Conference was scheduled to take place subsequent to this meeting.

As a resignation had been received from Mrs Slater, Mrs Sadlik had been appointed to SACRE, representing the Jewish community. Members welcomed Mrs Sadlik to her first meeting and thanked her for her interest. The Chair explained that she would be a valuable asset to the group.

Matters Arising

The Chair queried the reference made to a budget of £11,500 and asked whether this was for the previous or present financial year. Annette Parr responded by advising that there was £11,500 available within the 2012/13 financial year and agreed to ascertain what monies were left from the previous year.

With regards to bursary applications, Isobel Short commented that it would be useful for some professional support to assist SACRE Members in considering applications.

Membership and Questionnaire

Isobel Short circulated a questionnaire. SACRE members present at the meeting were given the opportunity to complete the questions.

Kate Cuthbert agreed to circulate a copy to all members of SACRE not present at the meeting.

A discussion ensued in relation to membership during which SACRE members discussed increasing the number of representatives within each of the groups. They noted that the constitution did not specify the numbers to be appointed to each group and acknowledged that increasing membership would be useful for both discussion and quorum.

With regards to quorum, members gave consideration to the most appropriate days and time of meetings. It was agreed that Tuesdays and Wednesdays would be avoided and the suggested time for meetings was 4.00pm-6.00pm. Provisional dates would therefore be compiled and circulated for approval. A proposal was also made to hold the meetings in different schools to see how the new syllabus was being interpreted and implemented or alternatively hold the meetings in places where a bursary had been awarded.

Discussions then took place around ensuring the meetings were purposeful and productive and suggestions were made for group work or having sessions whereby different members spoke about themselves. Isobel added that a priority for the autumn term could be analysis of the KS4 data. Members welcomed proposals.

The successes of Interfaith Conferences were considered and SACRE members felt that this was an excellent idea.

National Updates

Isobel Short circulated a report detailing some of the latest news and developments in RE.

SACRE Members were reminded that that the government had introduced an English Baccalaureate (E. Bacc) into secondary schools. This was causing grave concerns for the RE community as RE had not been included as one of the humanities subjects. The likely result of this was that RE may become marginalised at KS4 as schools felt the pressure to concentrate on achieving successes in the E Bacc subjects. It was anticipated that entries for RS at KS4 may drop significantly by 2013.

Isobel went on to describe the RE campaigning undertaken the previous year in order to have RE included in E Bacc subjects. The campaign was ultimately unsuccessful and this had caused real problems for the profile and provision of RE in schools, however the campaign did raise the profile of RE nationally and in the media.

With regards to KS4 there had been various changes over the way in which schools could enter students for accreditation and how attainment in exams was reported in school league tables. This was having a considerable impact in RE.

RS GCSE Short Course remained as an externally validated course, however from 2014 this would not count in school performance tables. It would also not be possible to accredit two Short Courses together as a full course.

It was therefore suggested that SACRE members monitor what KS4 provision schools were offering, what time was given to RE and whether this was leading to appropriate attainment and achievement for all pupils.

Isobel explained that the RE Quality Mark was an accreditation system to recognise good practice, raise the profile and promote excellence in RE. It would be similar to Artsmark, with schools being awarded bronze, silver and gold. SACRE commented that this was extremely interesting.

A discussion ensued in relation to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests during which members were advised that recent requests had included the teaching of paganism in RE, the number of determinations, and the teaching of Christmas.

Communication to Schools

SACRE acknowledged that an Annual Report had been previously circulated and commented that this should be distributed on a regular basis to ensure that the work of SACRE was communicated to others.

A suggestion was then made to establish a network of RE teachers/co-ordinators as it was felt that it could be beneficial for this group to consider the syllabus and also to ensure good quality RE was being delivered in schools.

A discussion ensued in relation to the new primary curriculum and SACRE acknowledged that the Government did not intend providing any training on this. Instead, they were expecting schools to be innovative and interpret it in their own way.

Updates and Position of SACRE & LA

Annette Parr explained that she had now taken on the role of SACRE in place of Margaret Ferrie. She would therefore be undertaking a piece of work to determine her responsibilities and also the level of LA support which was required.

Professional Support

The Chair proposed buying-in some professional support. She felt that this was necessary to ensure that the work of SACRE moved forward and this support could also be used as a tool to monitor the work undertaken in schools.

As SACRE members commented that this resource would be extremely valuable, the Chair agreed to meet with the local authority to discuss how this could be funded.

Timeline and Legal Process for Approval of the Agreed Syllabus

The Executive Director of Children's Services and the Head of Law and Governance circulated a report on the timeline and legal process for approval of the Agreed Syllabus.

The report reminded of the provisions that the LA must cause an Agreed Syllabus Conference to be held (either every 5 years or at the request of the SACRE) for the purpose of reconsidering any agreed syllabus.

The recommendation from the ASC would then need to go to the Council's Cabinet for consideration. If Cabinet accepted a recommendation for a new syllabus to be adopted, Children's Services would then advise when the syllabus could be launched.

The next Cabinet meetings at which this could be considered were 10 October or 7 November 2012.

SACRE recognised that the October Cabinet meeting was too premature and therefore aimed for a recommendation to be submitted to the meeting on 7 November 2012.

Isobel explained that if a decision was taken in November, the Agreed Syllabus would be circulated in February/March 2013, at the earliest.

Dates for Further SACRE Meetings

The Chair requested that dates be scheduled for the forthcoming academic year. It was noted that Tuesdays and Wednesdays should be avoided and the suggested time for meetings was 4.00pm-6.00pm.

Membership and Constitution

The Chair commented that some of the membership was out of date. Kate Cuthbert agreed to review this.

SACRE commented that it would be helpful to have all major faiths represented and also felt that the number of members within each of the groups should be increased, as mentioned above.

(Signed) T. Laybourne,
Chairman.

