

124 Gough Road, Birmingham, B15 2JQ
guy.hordern@hotmail.co.uk

Dear Colleague

Curriculum reform consultation-Non Statutory guidance on Religious Education.

As I am sure you know the QCA has invited responses to a series of questions relating to the non-statutory Guidance and the Minister has written that:

“It is our intention to hold a full public consultation on the updated guidance when it is ready. This will enable all stakeholders to put forward their views”.

And that

“The guidance will be subject to a full consultation to enable all interested parties to put forward their views”

Following the invitation of the Minister may I please share with you some of the questions which I think arise following a careful consideration of the draft non-statutory guidance?

With others I am exploring ways in which the Guidance could be strengthened.

I had hoped to be able to arrange a conference in Birmingham to discuss these matters with SACREs in the Midlands Region but thus far this has not been possible. Perhaps there will be an opportunity between now and July 24th when the consultation ends.

Clearly every opportunity must be taken to strengthen RE through the new guidance from the Department of Children Schools and Families.

Some of the ways in which this will be done is to provide:

1. Guidance that displays the outcomes one would like to see from RE: accurate information, support for autonomy, tolerance and open-mindedness.
 - Accuracy: Is the draft guidance right about education law when it includes secular philosophies in their own right as a part of *religious* education? By including secular philosophies in RE could the outcome of this guidance have the effect of misleading religious communities about the content of RE, i.e. they may believe RE is about communicating the sense of religious life to young people when in fact by communicating secular philosophies this is not so? At the same time could the advice subvert the integrity of these secular philosophies by treating them as if they were a religion?
 - Autonomy: By being more prescriptive than the law requires is the guidance discouraging the autonomy of Agreed Syllabus Conferences?
 - Tolerance: Does the guidance fully acknowledge, promote and tolerate alternative possibilities to the NSNF?
 - Open-mindedness: By only citing the NSNF does the guidance take sufficient account of work undertaken by local Statutory Agreed Syllabus Conferences? Is it right to treat the *non-statutory* Framework as if it were of more significance than *statutory* syllabuses? Does it (the guidance) consider the likelihood that the NSNF could be improved upon and that RE has developed since 2004?

2. Clarity on the law.

With respect to RE is the situation in law made clear? The guidance suggests the Human Rights Act, The Equalities Act and the Race Relations Amendment Act affects the requirements of Education Statute. However, the guidance does not appear to specify where and in what ways these acts do so. Actually the legal advice obtained is that Education law is unchanged.

3. Support for a dynamic and creative RE.

The law is unspecific about certain key requirements e.g. what the principal religions are or how many they are. By promoting the Non-Statutory National Framework is the guidance being more prescriptive than it needs to be? By not showing the variety of ways that the RE requirements have been met, and can be met, is the guidance hindering rather than stimulating the dynamic and creative development of RE by Local ASCs? Should the NSNF not be reviewed in precisely the way that Statutory Agreed Syllabuses are subject to review i.e. every 5 years by using four committees?

4. Opportunities to engage as many people as possible with RE.

The law places responsibility for RE in the hands of Local Authorities via ASCs. By seemingly centralising the content of RE in and through the NSNF is the

government reducing the effectiveness of a local contribution i.e. will it discourage local people from becoming involved and making significant decisions about the character and shape of the RE curriculum in their area?

5. Sufficient clarity about the benefit to children and society.

Is there clarity about how social solidarity and development of children comes about by following the advice of the NSNF? What evidence is there that teaching increasing numbers of religious traditions also increases interest and a sense of community with others who may differ?

With my best wishes and perhaps we will meet at the NASACRE AGM on June 4th

Guy

Guy Hordern

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