

4 November 2020		ITEM: 6
Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education		
Update on National Developments and Opportunities		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key	
Report of: Deborah Weston, Associate Adviser for Religious Education		
Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Learning Inclusion and Skills		
Accountable Director: Shelia Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report details the key national developments that impact on Religious Education with suggestions for actions by SACRE

1. Recommendation(s):

1.1 That SACRE Members

- **Review the information collected in Appendix 1**
- **Evaluate the relevance of each section for RE in Thurrock**
- **Consider the suggested actions**

2. Introduction and Background

In the period since the last SACRE meeting, a number of developments have taken place such as the publication of a report from Theos and decisions by the Department for Education. These are presented to SACRE for consideration in support of the duties of SACRE and in accordance with the work plan.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Schools need to be informed about national developments and opportunities available to them but it is important not to overload them with information.
- 3.2 Likewise, SACRE needs to be aware of the national context for information they receive that applies just to Thurrock.

3.3 SACRE needs therefore to decide on which information to share with schools and which reports and national data is most relevant to the situation in Thurrock.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 According to the non-statutory guidance – RE in English Schools (2010), SACRE should provide advice and support on the effective teaching of RE. This advice and support includes keeping stakeholders include SACRE members and schools informed about current developments that impact on the subject.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 Not applicable

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 The Local Authority reviews its Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education on a regular basis;

- Publishes an Annual Report of its work;
- Offers guidance on resources and methods of teaching and in consultation with Thurrock Schools;
- Monitors the quality of provision for RE and Collective Acts of Worship in Thurrock.

This exercise falls under the third element of this programme.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance, Corporate Finance

There are no financial implications to this report since the actions recommended in this report, if approved will be conducted by the Associate RE Adviser as part of her work

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lucinda Bell**
Education Lawyer

The legal duties on the advisory council are set out in s391 of the Education Act 1996. The main one is to advise the local authority on such matters connected with (1) the religious worship in community schools or in foundation schools without a religious character and (2) the religious education to be given in accordance with an agreed or other syllabus, as the authority may refer to the advisory council, or as the council may see fit.

This report is for review and consideration. No decision is required.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**
Community Development Officer

The aim of this report is to provide information about issues that support the provision for RE in Thurrock, to address concerns and to celebrate success. Higher standards in the teaching of RE will help schools to fulfil their statutory duty to promote community cohesion and to encourage better respect and tolerance for those with different religions and beliefs.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

- Not applicable

8. **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 -Thurrock SACRE: Update on new initiatives Autumn 2020

Report Author:

Deborah Weston

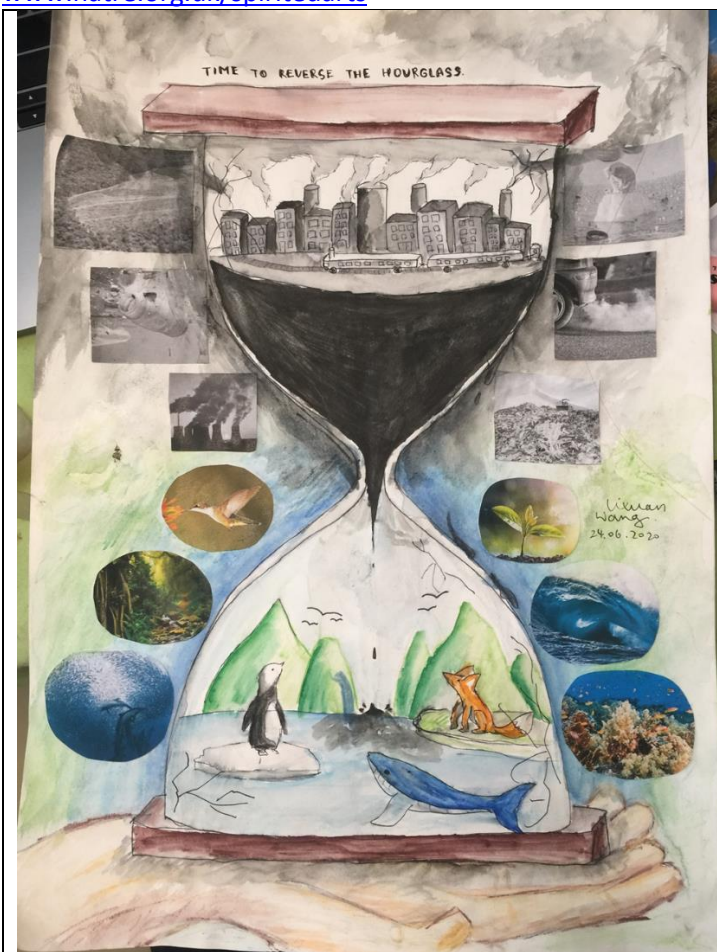
Associate Adviser for RE

Appendix 1

Thurrock SACRE: update on new initiatives Autumn 2020

NATRE's Spirited Arts competition: results and next year's competition

The competition has attracted record entries this year – it was a popular lockdown activity set by hundreds of teachers, and the YouTube lesson to accompany it was viewed about 14,000 times. Many of our schools have taken an interest in this competition. There are over 30,000 entrants. Here is one of the inspiring entries, the best of which can be viewed at www.natre.org.uk/spiritedarts



*This piece is called **The Hourglass**. I wanted to show a contrast between what the earth was like, and what it was now without a too obvious division of the page. I did not base it on a particular religion, but on the overall belief that God is watching over us, holding our hourglass with his hand. I got my inspiration from a picture of an hourglass with the mountains, the forests, all flowing down into the other side of the hourglass, where it is all rubbish and pollution. I've switched the concept subtly. Instead of the wonderful nature flowing and rotting into trash, I decided that it would be the other way round: the black tar that shows our pollution is flowing and dark drops are contaminating the Bright nature on the other side of the hourglass, and the animals are watching in vain. The whole hourglass is cracking. I wanted to show that if one system breaks, then, like the Buddhists say, the whole interconnected and interdependent community will fall. I have put pictures of the opposing sides on either end of the hourglass, they are examples of the wonderfulness of nature, and the heart wrenching truth of what we have done with our planet; on the bottom, corals, birds, forests, and on the top toxic fumes, fossil fuels, plastic, pollution, landfills, and deforestation. I hope that when people see this piece, they will see God's good Earth, and realise what we are doing to it, and strive to reverse the damage before the hourglass breaks.*

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The competition for the next year is being launched and 5 themes are available to schools for them to engage and respond creatively.

Can we, as a SACRE, promote the competition to all our schools? Could we run a local round to the competition, to see what creative RE is going on here?

Next year's closing date is 31st July 2021.

Themes for the coming year:

- "We have far more in common with each other than that which divides us."
- God's good earth?
- Where is God?
- Healing
- Inspiring!

Farmington Scholarships

Farmington Scholarships are now open to Head teachers and UK secondary and primary school teachers, teachers of RE to children with Special Educational Needs

Academic Year 2021-22

The Farmington Institute

The aim of the Farmington Institute is to support and encourage Head teachers working on values and standards, and teachers of Religious Education in schools. The Institute awards Scholarships to UK Head teachers and teachers of Religious Education in schools, and publishes discussion papers and arranges conferences.

What types of Scholarships are available?

The Scholarships are divided into two types: university-based and school/home-based. Teachers who live within a reasonable distance of one of the selected universities or colleges may be awarded a university-based Scholarship. The academic facilities of the colleges and universities are available for Scholars.

[Find out more here.](#)

Should SACRE encourage teachers to apply for one of these scholarships. If so, what would the best means be of doing so?

Interfaith week

Inter Faith Week starts on Sunday 8 November and concludes on Sunday 15 November. The Week is a great opportunity for pupils to explore inter faith issues and for schools to build relationships with faith, belief and inter faith groups in their community. Here are some suggestions for schools for things you might want to consider doing this year:

- Work with your local inter faith group and SACRE to host a special virtual 'Question Time' via a social media platform
- Organise an exhibition in your school featuring information and objects about a range of religions and beliefs reflecting your local population (this could be virtually available to others)
- Celebrate the Week on your website, perhaps have a series of short videos where pupils share what they have learned in RE
- Organise a virtual tour of local places of worship to investigate the importance of faith in the lives of believers in your community

- Create an Inter Faith Week poster, artwork or multifaith calendar
- Host a dialogue about a topic such as 'shared values' or how people of different faiths and beliefs can live well together at a lunchtime event
- Make a video of events at your school held for Inter Faith Week For more about Inter Faith Week

Visit <https://www.interfaithweek.org/> and if you have specific questions or ideas you'd like to discuss email IFN's Assistant Director at david.hampshire@interfaith.org.uk.

**Can those of you that represent religion and belief communities offer your services?
Can schools be informed about this week- together with the suggestions above?**

Anti-racist RE

NATRE and RE Today, working with the Free Churches Group and Methodist Schools, are launching a project to help teachers tackle racism in RE lessons. The project aims to:

- Enable a team of 60+ black, Asian and minority ethnic teachers of RE and members of different communities to articulate perspectives on the contributions of RE to anti-racist education, accessible for all teachers of RE
- Provide challenging and well planned resources, case studies, plans and lessons for teachers of RE in both primary and secondary schools to use in RE that challenge and confront racism and are also good RE, mounted and free from web platforms hosted both by RE Today and by the Free Churches Group and the Methodist Schools.
- Create a forum for teacher education and development in relation to anti-racist RE, recognising that practice in RE in this area is patchy and inconsistent (also online)
- Disseminate better practice in anti-racist RE widely, using the wide range of contacts and networks available to RE today

Wide partnerships to maximise the impact of the project have been used, including for example with NATRE and the Jo Cox Foundation. Teachers can access a planned unit of six topics for primary and of 8 topics for secondary RE, including ready to use resources and a wide range of support materials. www.natre.org.uk/anti-racist-RE

Can our SACRE publicise this to schools? Would we like to invest some of our budget this year in primary and secondary CPD for schools in this area?

GCSE Results

The number of pupils taking GCSE Religious Studies in England and Wales has remained stable in 2020 despite ongoing challenges, reflecting the relevance of the subject and its popularity among young people.

Until this year, there has been a gradual decline in full course RS GCSE entries since a peak in 2016, when 269,839 entries were recorded in England. Full and short course entries reached a high of 461,795 in 2011 but declined rapidly as schools in England opted not to enter pupils into the short course following Government policy changes, despite a requirement among all schools, including Academies, to provide Religious Education to all pupils at all key stages. In Wales however, the short course entries have not declined at the same rate and fell by just 3.74% (from 6,198 to 5,966). In England, short course entries fell by more than 16%. In general, these figures should be interpreted in the light of government policy – they don't indicate much about the popularity of the subject with students.

This summer's figures, however, provide some optimism that the decline may be levelling off. The key outcomes for Religious Education in England and Wales at Key Stage 4 in 2020 are as follows:

- There were 225,719 entries in England and 10,037 in Wales for the full course in GCSE RS, a fall of less than 1% from 2019 (227,913 England and 10,129 Wales).
- There were 18,067 entries in England and 5,966 in Wales for the short course in GCSE RS, a decline of 16.1% in England and 3.74% in Wales from 2019 (21,530 and 6198 respectively).
- There were 243,786 entries for GCSE RS (combined short and full courses) in England, a decline of 2.3% from 2019 (249,443).
- Despite a decline since the peak in entries, the number of pupils receiving a full course GCSE in Religious Studies in England in 2020 (225,719) is still 32% greater than in 2010 (170,767).

How is this reflected in our area? How should we be engaging with schools about these figures?

Changes in RS examinations for 2021

Ofqual released their decisions on 3rd August regarding the cohort of students who will be taking their GCSEs, AS or A levels in 2021. There are a few headlines to report. *Obviously, these decisions could change as the response to the pandemic develops but this reflects the current information that schools are working with.*

1. No change to the assessment arrangements for Religious Studies.

The report stated that there will be no change to the assessments in Religious Studies for the GCSE (short and full course) AS or A level. Thus, students will be assessed in the same manner as previous years.

Ofqual did recognise that:

"Many respondents were concerned about covering all the content, given the lost time and difficulty of covering it in a normal year. This was raised for most subjects at GCSE, AS and at A level."

"Respondents often suggested this could be addressed through question optionality, which was discussed further below. In some subjects, for example, GCSE Religious Studies and GCSE English Literature, parallels were drawn with GCSE history and respondents urged that similar arrangements were made to enable content sampling in their subject."

However, Ofqual decided against making changes to Religious Studies.

2. No decisions have been made about the dates for the examinations.

Update 12th October - *Today (12 October), the government is announcing the summer exam series will start on 7 June and end on 2 July for almost all AS/A levels and GCSEs.*

Results days are Tuesday 24 August for A/AS levels and Friday 27 August for GCSEs so students will start the following academic year as normal.

3. There will be further information on how student outcomes (i.e. grades) are to be protected.

Ofqual are currently considering how the grades or outcomes of students taking the examinations in 2021 can be protected. They have said:

"The Secretary of State has asked us to advise him in the coming months how we might ensure students' outcomes are protected through our approach to grading next year, as we did to protect the interests of students who took the reformed qualifications for the first time. Our approach- using statistical predictions to guide the first awards of reformed qualifications- worked well to protect the interests of students taking the reformed qualifications and we will consider its use next year. We did

not consult on proposal for grading in summer 2021, but we will provide further information in due course.”

Here is a copy of their [statement](#) and [decisions](#) document on the changes that will be made.

Other related issues:

At the end of July, the Department for Education announced that from September all pupils should return to school. The guidance sets an expectation that *“the curriculum should remain broad and ambitious: all pupils continue to be taught a wide range of subjects, maintaining their choices for further study and employment.”*

The DfE have advised that when planning for pupils’ return to school in September, subjects should not be removed from the curriculum. In relation to Key Stage 3 the guidance states, *“the curriculum should also remain broad from year 7 to year 9 so that the majority of pupils are taught a full range of subjects over the year, including... Religious Education.”* Indeed, the suspension of subjects should only occur in *“exceptional circumstances”* and if this occurs, a school must be able to demonstrate that this is *“in the best interests of these pupils and should be subject to discussion with parents during the Autumn term.”*

For key stage 4 and 5 the guidance states that, *“the vast majority of pupils in year 10 and 11 are expected to continue to study their examination subjects.”* A year 11 pupil should only be advised to discontinue a subject in *“exceptional circumstances”*.

The DfE documentation can be consulted [here](#).

The NATRE summary of the implications of this guidance can be found [here](#).

Nick Gibb's written answer to a Parliamentary question on this subject can be found [here](#).

How much of this information has already been shared with Thurrock secondary schools?

All Schools have a duty to teach RE to all pupils aged 5-18 even in current times

NATRE was pleased to see that Nick Gibb MP, Minister for schools, has given a clear and fulsome answer to a question from Luke Pollard MP regarding schools and RE.

We note from his answer below that he restates that:

- State-funded schools in England have a duty to teach religious education to all pupils aged 5 to 18 years
- where pupils do not choose Religious Studies as an examination subject, the requirement to teach religious education still applies.
- An agreed syllabus can stipulate that pupils follow an accredited qualification such as GCSE

He also clearly says that in the reopening of schools:

- Religious education is explicitly stated as one of the subjects that should be taught

The Department’s guidance on full opening of schools sets the expectation that schools teach an ambitious and broad curriculum in all subjects from the start of the autumn, but that they use their existing curriculum flexibilities within subjects to create time to cover the most important missed content.

- Religious education is explicitly stated as one of the subjects that should be taught. The guidance was published on 2 July and can be found [here](#).
- The Department's guidance on religious education is already available for both maintained schools and for academies and free schools. The guidance for maintained schools is [here](#).
- The guidance for academies and free schools [here](#).
- No additional guidance on this subject is therefore needed.
- Nick Gibb's answer to Luke Pollard's Parliamentary question on this subject can be found [here](#).

Can this information be shared with all Thurrock headteachers and chairs of governors? Do school improvement partners or similar know whether this guidance is being followed? Could they find out?

Shadow Minister for Faiths; Janet Daby MP asks a question about RE to the Minister for Education Nick Gibb MP

NATRE, the REC and RE Today had a very productive meeting with the Janet Daby MP in October 2020. They learned that the Shadow Minister, who is the MP for Lewisham East, had served on Lewisham SACRE and was fully conversant with the issues surrounding the subject. Following the meeting, she entered the ballot to ask an oral question and was successful. The exchange, as reported in Hansard follows below:

Religious Education: Maintained Schools: 12 October 2020

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure maintained schools comply with requirements to teach religious education. [907364]

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): Maintained schools are required to teach religious education to all five to 18-year-olds. Any concerns that a maintained school is not meeting that duty should first go through the school's complaints procedure, and if the complaint is not resolved, the issue can be escalated to the Department's school complaints unit.

Janet Daby: Religious education helps children to grow up with an understanding of and respect for people from different religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. It is also a statutory requirement, but the Religious Education Council tells me that 40% of all schools give no hours to RE in year 11. Does the Minister agree that the Department needs to better support schools to ensure that they are meeting their obligations to teach RE?

Nick Gibb: I agree with the hon. Member. Good quality religious education can help to develop children's knowledge of the values and traditions of Britain and other countries, and foster understanding among different faiths and cultures. At a national level, the proportion of time secondary schools spend teaching RE has actually remained broadly stable. It was 3.2% of all teaching hours in 2010 and 3.3% in 2019.

Source: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-10-12/debates/D4C4FA2A-9950-4149-B266-6CAEEA74DFFC/ReligiousEducationMaintainedSchools>

SACRE members should note that the figure of 3.2% (about 50 minutes per week) is distorted by the inclusion of schools with a religious character who typically allocate more time to RE than other schools. According to the school workforce data which includes 85% of schools. The average hours offered by all schools (2941) is 3.1% but schools including academies with a religious character (546) offer 6.9% whereas Academies without a religious character (493) offer 2.2% - only about 33 minutes

How is this reflected in our area? How should we be engaging with schools about timetable time for RE?

A parental complaint about RE in an academy leads to a school reinstating the subject

The minister for schools; Nick Gibb MP has repeatedly suggested that people concerned about the level and quality of provision for RE to use the statutory school and academy complaints process. NATRE was approached by a parent who was dismayed that discrete lessons in RE were being replaced by a combined life skills style programme and wanted to challenge the academy about it. The document below sets out the two-year journey towards the re-establishment on RE at the academy. We hope that it demonstrates that it is possible to take action when pupils are not receiving their entitlement to RE and secure a change.

Read about the complaint [here](#)

Might these grounds for complaint also apply to any Thurrock Academies? Should Headteachers and Governors be made aware of this case?

Theos' latest report 'Worldviews in Religious Education launched on 21st October

Theos aim is to stimulate the debate about the place of religion in society, challenging and changing ideas through research, commentary and events. The notice for the launch event explains the context for this new report as follows:

How RE is taught in schools is a central pillar of any society's religious literacy, challenging false assumptions and expanding young minds to consider the role of religion and belief in a modern world. In 2018, the Commission on Religious Education launched new proposals for a paradigm shift in the subject, broadening the focus of RE in English schools to a consideration of "Religion and Worldviews". However, while many RE professionals have embraced the proposed changes, including the focus on worldviews, the proposed shift generated considerable debate and has not yet been adopted by the government.

The event will be held on Zoom and you can sign up for it [here](#)

Do SACRE members feel that they have sufficient understanding about the concept of worldviews? Should we place the subject on the Agenda for a future meeting?

Increase in the number of secondary trainees

The number of **trainee teachers for RE is increasing**, with the provision for Subject Knowledge Enhancement courses proving to be a real help to those entering the profession with degrees in other Humanities subjects.

While it is good to see this increase, these trainee teachers will need to spend time in schools with good RE teachers in order to develop their own practice and become good RE teachers themselves. This year we have recruited almost 100 extra trainees and exceeded the government's target.

Removal of the bursary for those training to be secondary teachers of RE

The table below shows the changes to the availability of bursaries for those training to be teachers (announced on 13th October 2020).

Subject	2020-2021		2021-2022	
	Bursary	Scholarships	Bursary	Scholarships
Art and Design	£9,000	£0	£0	£0
Biology	£26,000	£0	£7,000	£0
Business Studies	£9,000	£0	£0	£0
Chemistry	£28,000	£26,000	£24,000	£26,000
Classics	£26,000	£0	£10,000	£0
Computing	£28,000	£26,000	£24,000	£26,000
Design and technology	£15,000	£0	£0	£0
English	£12,000	£0	£0	£0
Geography	£17,000	£15,000	£0	£0
History	£9,000	£0	£0	£0
Languages	£28,000	£26,000	£10,000	£0
Music	£9,000	£0	£0	£0
Physics	£28,000	£26,000	£24,000	£26,000
Primary with mathematics	£6,000	£0	£0	£0
RE	£9,000	£0	£0	£0
Secondary mathematics	£28,000	£26,000	£24,000	£26,000

www.gov.uk/government/publications/funding-initial-teacher-training-itt/funding-initial-teacher-training-itt-academic-year-2021-to-2022

What are the implications of this decision for Thurrock Schools? Can we discover how many teachers of RE have post-A level qualifications in the subject? (School workforce)

Materials available for self-isolating pupils, socially distanced RE and any future lockdowns

To help teachers during this difficult time, RE Today is working hard to support NATRE by producing resources that ALL teachers can use and share with pupils and parents in order to support with home learning and also socially distanced RE in schools.

If teachers wish to sign up for the updates to inform you of new resources, then please sign up to the mailing list on the NATRE website. We have also made further resources available for NATRE members.

Access resources

Strictly RE: Online training for teachers

Date: 30 & 31 January 2021 (PLUS additional seminars leading up to Strictly!)

Location: Online

Full price: £100* (Price includes downloadable handouts and presentations from all sessions).

EARLY BIRD DISCOUNT! Book before 31 October - only £85!

Prices start as low as £45 for NATRE members*

*NATRE members discounts available on top of early bird (Bronze: £20 off, Silver: £30, Gold & Platinum: £40).

Strictly RE is back, this time NATRE will be hosting its national annual conference online to keep you all safe, whilst still giving you everything you love about Strictly RE without having to leave your home.

With 24 seminars, 4 Keynotes, networking and discussion opportunities, Saturday night entertainment, we have something for everyone. There's lots to choose from, and we hope that you will **pick and mix** from across the month and weekend to create a programme that works for you. You do not have to attend a seminar at every time slot.

Keynote speakers include Richard Kueh, OFSTED RE subject specialist, Christine Counsell on curriculum construction and progression in RE, a panel on worldviews in RE and a panel on Anti-racist RE.

NATRE will be running twilight sessions throughout January, culminating in a weekend of keynotes, seminars and networking. These will be announced soon! Delegates who have already booked a place will be the first to hear about them and book their sessions.

Book soon to avoid missing out on the early bird discount which ends 31 October 2020.

Find out full details and book here

[How can we encourage teachers from our area to attend?](#)

Deborah Weston