

1 November 2023		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) that SACRE:

- 1.1 Review the information collected - see Appendix 1**
- 1.2 Evaluate the relevance of each section for RE in Thurrock**
- 1.3 Authorise the adviser to share the attached update with schools and their governing boards**

2. Introduction and Background

In the period since the last SACRE meeting, a number of developments have taken place. 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**
Head of Finance, Children Services and
Dedicated Schools Grant

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: **Daniel Longe**
Principal Solicitor

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 does not contain information for which there are legal implications, and it is for review and consideration. No decision is required.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Becky Lee**
Team Manager, Community Development and Equalities

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 Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder or Impact on Looked After Children

- Not applicable

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 – National SACRE Updates for SACRE From RE Today / Autumn 23

Report Author:

Deborah Weston OBE
Associate Adviser for RE

National SACRE Updates for SACRE From RE Today / Autumn 23

The RE Council launches a National Content Standard for RE

The RE Council's National Content Standard provides a non-statutory benchmark for syllabus providers and other bodies to evaluate their work. It is specifically for use in England. It is not a curriculum, and it does not determine precisely what content schools should teach. Rather it is a standard by which different RE curricula, content, pedagogy, and provision can be benchmarked. You can read more about it [here](#) and a blog about it here. "[It's about the standard, not the stuff](#)" – National Content Standard – REC (religiuseducationcouncil.org.uk)

Open letter from over 30 Parliamentarians

An Open Letter was published on the 18th September by the Daily Telegraph. More than 30 MPs and peers have written to the Education Secretary, highlighting that school pupils receive tokenistic religious education or none. The MPs are blaming this on a lack of trained teachers and funding for the poor quality of religious education. They argue that this lack of education leaves children ill-prepared to understand their own and others' worldviews, hindering their ability to participate in society. Link to the [letter](#)

NATRE provide evidence at Education Select committee enquiry session

NATRE, along with 3 other subject associations, were invited to speak to a session of the Education Select Committee to support their enquiry into Recruitment and retention of teachers. Deborah Weston, NATRE Research Officer and Chair of the RE policy unit (Joint group made up of NATRE, REC, RE Today), gave evidence in the two hour session.

The session can be viewed [here](#)

The TES wrote about the session in which [D&T teachers 'rummage in skips' for materials, MPs told | Tes](#)

Deborah Weston is quoted:

'Deborah Weston, research officer at the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education, told MPs that "schools are very inflexible places". She said that the "pressures on headteachers are so significant in terms of accountability...that there's a nervousness about

taking people on part time”. Ms Weston also argued for an increase in the provision of part-time training to become a teacher, arguing that this could boost recruitment and retention.’

DfE Guidance on the place of Humanists on SACREs

[Guidance for local authorities about membership of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education \(SACREs\) \(natre.org.uk\)](https://natre.org.uk)

Following a request from NATRE, the DfE have produced the guidance below which has now been sent to local authorities. It makes clear that, in relation to committee A, it is the Local Authority who select which groups can be represented on the local SACRE and on the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) and that this selection may include representatives from non-religious belief systems.

See DfE guidance below.

Guidance for local authorities about membership of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs)

This note provides information on a recent court ruling and shares the Department for Education’s (the Department) view that **representatives from non-religious belief systems may be appointed to Group A of a SACRE and/or to an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC).**

Background

SACREs are established by local authorities, as required by legislation^[1], and their membership must consist of the following groups:

- Group A: members that represent Christian denominations and other religions and their denominations who will appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area;
- Group B: members that represent the Church of England;
- Group C: members that represent the teaching profession or other relevant associations that, in the opinion of the authority, ought to be represented; and
- Group D: members that represent the [local] authority.

The recent legal case of *Bowen v Kent County Council* ^[2] (more details in the Annex) clarified that applications for Group A membership from persons who represent holders of non-religious beliefs should be considered in the same way as applications from those who represent holders of religious beliefs.

In the Department’s view, the non-religious beliefs adhered to by the person to be appointed must be analogous to a religious belief. To be “analogous”, the non-religious beliefs must, in accordance with case law under the European Convention of Human Rights and the Human Rights Act 1998, attain the necessary level of cogency, seriousness, cohesion, and importance to attract protection under the Convention Rights. ^[3]

The final decision on appointment of persons to a SACRE or ASC is a matter for local authorities. This may include consideration of whether such a representative would help ensure that the relevant traditions and beliefs in the local authority’s area are appropriately reflected in Group A.

[1] **Section 390(4)(a) of the Education Act 1996**

2 www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2023/1261.html

3 This aligns with the policy in Wales, where a non-religious belief for the purposes of education is aligned with those philosophical beliefs that are protected following European Convention of Human Rights caselaw.

Recruitment crisis in teaching and especially in secondary RE

London, 6th March, 2023: A campaign to attract a new generation of RE teachers has kicked off with teaching groups, religious organisations and parliamentarians stressing the importance of the subject for preparing students for life in modern Britain.

As of January, UCAS data show that teacher recruitment for all subjects is down 22% from last year. However RE stands out, being down a third of applicants from the last recruitment cycle.

Government inaction over recruiting teachers to RE has been blamed. The Department for Education (DfE) has so far missed its target for the recruitment of RE teachers in nine of the last ten years.

Despite this year's fall in applicants, the subject continues to grow in popularity. Over the last five years entries to the GCSE have stood around an average of 250,000 with entries to the full course GCSE rising by 30% over the last decade.

The recruitment campaign – entitled 'Beyond the Ordinary' - draws attention to the academic and knowledge rich approach of the subject to life's big questions, and will seek to attract a set of talented graduates up to the task of getting young people to grips with the complex nature of modern belief.

Kathryn Wright, Chief Executive Officer of Culham St Gabriel's Trust, which is supporting the campaign, said: "Religious education is an important curriculum subject enabling children and young people to navigate our complex multi religious, multi secular society. Everyone has a worldview, and it's important we prepare young people to become free thinking, critical participants in public discourse, who can make informed judgements about matters of religion or belief and reflect meaningfully on the big questions in life."

We are looking for ambitious graduates from a range of humanities and social science subjects who can deliver an academic and rigorous curriculum aimed at getting young people to think critically about their own beliefs and those of others."

Last March, the Father of the House, Sir Peter Bottomley MP hosted a roundtable on the future of the subject. In October, a Westminster Hall Debate saw MPs and Peers from across the House agree on its importance for life in modern Britain as well as express concern around a lack of government support for the subject.

Lord Karan Bilimoria said: "The latest teacher recruitment figures are deeply worrying. Parents are concerned, schools are concerned and so too the young people are missing out.

"As a Champion for RE, I've heard numerous times from students that this is one of the few times in the classroom where they get to say what they think about the world around them. At present we face doing a disservice to a generation of young people ill-equipped to deal with the complexities of belief in Britain and the world beyond. This campaign is about

getting the best humanities graduates into the classroom to help them deliver a modern RE curriculum reflective of belief in our society.”

Teacher training courses are open to graduates from a range of academic disciplines and from all sorts of diverse backgrounds, with Subject Knowledge Enhancement courses available from schools, universities or other providers.

Anyone looking for more information about training to be a RE teacher should visit <https://www.cstg.org.uk/campaigns/teacher-recruitment/becoming-a-teacher>

Do we know what this problem is like in our Secondary schools?

NATRE analysis of GCSE and A level Religious Studies data: National and regional variations

The reports linked to below cover GCSE and A level RS in both England and Wales and reveal many similarities and some differences between the two nations in relation to trends over time. It is clear that the removal of the short course from performance tables has had a devastating impact on the number of children leaving school with a qualification in Religious Studies. In many cases, the loss of the short course has coincided with an increase in the number of schools reporting zero hours of timetable time for RE in year 11 in the school workforce data. At A level, entries have remained fairly stable over recent years in England but in Wales, there is a step decline, of around 33% since 2020. The reasons for this need further investigation.

For example:

A level Essex % A*-C 2023 77.9 % (Nat 79%)

Uptake in Essex 1.69% (Nat 1.88%)

GCSE Essex % Grade 9-4 2023 74.6% (Nat 72.2%)

GCSE Uptake Essex 16.8% (National Average 25.7%)

[NATRE analysis of GCSE and A level examination data for Religious Studies reveals interesting variations between nations and regions](#)

How can we encourage more pupil entries for GCSE RS, especially as we know disadvantaged pupils often do well in the subject?

Shortage of RE Teachers ‘Dangerous cycle’ within Religious Education

The shortage of religious education (RE) teachers has been highlighted in a Religion Media Centre briefing. Only six people have come forward to train as RE teachers in Wales, and in England, no RE teacher training courses have reached their target of entries.

Hundreds have their applications pending because their degrees have not been finalised due to the university lecturers' strike action. Dr Tim Hutchings, from the University of Nottingham, told the briefing that there was a dangerous cycle emerging in the study of Religious Education, where GCSE entries are stable with RE remaining as the 7th most popular subject, A-level results show a slight dip in entries, fewer students choose to study Theology or Religious Studies at university and fewer have chosen to train to teach RE.

Teachers, academics and advisers told the briefing that Headteachers want to include RE in the curriculum as the understanding of religion is vital in a global society, but the lack of specialist teachers is an issue. The RE council is campaigning for the government to create a national plan to support high standards in RE provision and bursaries to encourage new teachers.

Link to webinar below

[Shortage of RE teachers “dangerous cycle” within religious education \(natre.org.uk\)](https://www.natre.org.uk)

RE at the Party Political conferences

In late September and Early October, teams of teachers from NATRE will be joining representatives from the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC), Culham St Gabriel's and RE Today to attend the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat party conferences.

This lobbying work that NATRE do on your behalf is really important because it enables us to take the voices of teachers and pupils to policy makers. At the party conferences, we will be sharing the importance of high-quality RE for all pupils in all schools, talking about the need for a national standard in the subject, sharing constituency data related to RE with MPs, SACRE members, local councillors and party members and talking about what high-quality RE looks like in Primary and Secondary classrooms.

As an election comes round. Please talk to your candidates when they come to your door and write to them about supporting RE.

[Your Voice Matters: NATRE's Call to Action to ask your MP to meet us now!](#)

Training, networking, and other support

Anti-racist RE: continuing debates and widening resources

Jonathan Marshall, MBE, ran a brilliant RE and interfaith centre in Plymouth before he retired. Thanks to Jonathan for drawing attention to resources which might compliment the NATRE anti-racist RE materials (<https://www.natre.org.uk/about-natre/projects/anti-racist-re/>)

“I think teachers might find the work of the Equiano Project on anti-racist education helpful. In the true spirit of quality RE, some diversity of views might be welcome.”

This black-led project may help teachers of RE who want to understand the complexity of an anti-racist RE approach: they should be encouraged to explore a range of different voices, one of which is to be found on the excellent website of “The Equiano project”

<https://www.theequianoproject.com/>

See for example the video “Understanding the new politics of race” by Prof. John McWhorter. At just under twenty minutes, this perspective is an extremely helpful and profound insight into the background and current situation of anti-racism.

Global Neighbours: school awards from Christian Aid

The Global Neighbours accreditation scheme is an award scheme for schools run by the charity Christian Aid, in partnership with the Church of England Education Office. It is open to all primary schools and has recently expanded into secondary schools too. The scheme has been running for five years and celebrates the development of global citizenship and courageous advocacy in schools. Its aim is to encourage a deeper understanding of the world and for young people to be empowered to engage with and respond to global issues.

Schools can apply for a bronze, silver or gold award. To achieve accreditation, schools must demonstrate how they are fulfilling criteria relating to:

- Leadership, vision and values
- Teaching and learning
- Collective worship and spiritual development
- Pupil participation in active global citizenship
- Community engagement

For more information please contact Alison Brown (Global Neighbours Schools Programme Officer): abrown@christian-aid.org

NATRE Membership- direct support for teaching

NATRE is the largest membership organisation which promotes, defends and supports RE teachers and RE teaching. It does this through producing high-quality resources and CPD, lobbying government, being involved in conversations with the DfE and Ofsted, LAs and SACREs, telling teachers' stories and experiences and being a voice for all teachers.



Membership packages for students, ECTs, teachers, schools, RE professionals and RE enthusiasts!

Details: www.natre.org.uk/membership

RE Connect Teacher Fellowship Programme

This programme is designed to help deepen teachers' understanding and confidence for exploring the environmental crisis through the lens of religions and worldviews in RE. The programme is not just about getting ideas, but also enhancing your teaching practice and professional network around this theme.

After a successful pilot of the programme in 2021-22, RE:Connect will be running again from September 2023, thanks to a grant from the Culham St Gabriel's Trust. There are places for **up to 10 teachers** of RE (primary and secondary) on the 6 month teacher fellowship programme.

The initiative is run by Dr Jeremy Kidwell, Associate Professor in Theological Ethics at the University of Birmingham and Dr Ian Jones of St Peter's Saltley Trust, with input from experienced primary and secondary specialists, environmental scientists, climate activists and academic researchers in religion and environment.

The programme offers opportunities to:

- Deepen subject knowledge on the intersection of religion and ecology
- Work with cutting-edge subject specialists on religious ethics/practice, ecology, and climate change policy
- Work as part of a supportive and dynamic team to create and trial new approaches and resources for teaching on this theme
- Become a champion for teaching and learning on religion and environmental crisis

The Teacher Fellowship Programme involves monthly workshops from Autumn 2023 to Spring 2024, with tasks to undertake between workshops. Programme sessions will include one fully-funded weekend residential and 6-8 online evening sessions (roughly one per month). There is no cost of participation to the teacher or their school and Fellows receive a bursary of £500 to cover costs of participation plus travel expenses to enable attendance at in-person sessions.

Interested? Please contact Ian Jones (director@saltleytrust.org.uk) to register your interest. Selection for the programme is by a formal application process.

Philosophy of Religion courses from the FT

Jack Robertson, RE teacher in north London, is working with the Financial Times to offer free access to FT.com for all schools and colleges teaching sixteen to nineteen year old students. An FT subscription can support students in developing the broad knowledge that will help them stand out to examiners, universities and employers. A Philosophy Class page, ft.com/philosophyclass, is available for teachers and students of philosophy and ethics. It brings together relevant articles from across the FT and provides accompanying questions that prompt students to reflect critically and make connections to areas of the A-level specification. There is also an IB Theory of Knowledge page for IB students. Recent Philosophy Class articles cover topics from the ethics of climate protests and abortion to developments in AI and quantum physics, as well as interviews with philosophers such as MacAskill, Chalmers and Srinivasan. Participating schools receive the same level of access to FT.com as regular subscriber. Check if your school is registered or register your interest via the Philosophy Class page or at ft.com/schoolsarefree

Jack Robertson JRobertson@gebarnet.co.uk

RE Hubs – Website now live!



RE Hubs website is now live at www.re-hubs.uk. RE Hubs aim to connect those who can provide resources with those who need them and create a neutral platform being RE professionals together.

Many organizations serve RE/RVE/R&W education in the UK, from places of worship and school speakers to CPD partnerships and resource providers. However, until now, there hasn't been a single place to equip, enable, and signpost everyone within the community.

How can we encourage speakers and places of worship to sign up to the training and appear on the site? What links do you have where you can share this?

BBC Expands early years RE resources

There are new resources for 4 and 5 year olds for RE / RME and RVE from BBC Bitesize Reception. These include some simple craft activities and some recipes for festive food with clear and simple ideas to bring the world of religion alive for small children. The subject is connected to work in the fields of expressive arts and design, helping pupils with their understanding of the world particularly in the field of religion and belief. These new materials cover Christmas, Easter, Eid ul Adha, Vaisakhi, Diwali and more and have now gone live. They include video clips made for the age group, activity sheets and information for teacher-use. Lat Blaylock, who contributed to the work says: 'I'm really pleased to see that BBC have made such a diverse and well thought out contribution to Early Years learning about religion and belief. Teachers will find this is a little treasure trove.'

Here is a link:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/z24kqyc>

Against Islamophobia: new resources free for schools

Educate Against Islamophobia (EAI) has recently published a plethora of educational materials for the Early Years, primary schools, high schools and educational practitioners across the U.K. The teaching and learning materials are reflective of the respective curriculums and national frameworks, and offer learners with learning opportunities that are applicable to their respective nations.

Early Years resources:

- Amna & Amy Storybook
- 2 lesson plans.

The storybook and accompanying lesson plans aim to support children in the Early Years to develop an awareness of equality, diversity and respectful behaviour and introduce learners to aspects of the Islamic identity.

Primary school resources:

- Unit of work

The unit of work which comprises 6 lesson plans supports KS1-KS2/P2-P7 learners in developing positive attitudes towards diversity. This unit of work also aims to introduce learners to the Islamic identity and will enable them to explore some of the similarities and differences between Islam and other faiths/culture.

High school resources:

- Unit of work

The unit of work which comprises 6 lesson plans supports KS3-KS4/S1-S4 learners in developing an awareness of Islamophobia, including its manifestations and dangers.

Learners will explore the issue of Islamophobia through a range of themes and lenses including human rights, anti-bullying and media literacy.

Educator resources:

- Islamophobia awareness training session
- Equality, diversity and inclusion audit

The Islamophobia awareness training and EDI audit aims to promote an awareness of Islamophobia and equip practitioners with the understanding of how to address it in the school community. These materials will also assist educational practitioners to meet their Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act (2010).

To download your free copy of EAI's materials, visit: <https://eai.org.uk/>

If you would like to learn more about Educate Against Islamophobia's work and services contact info@eai.org.uk

Fischy Music: 25 years nurturing emotional and spiritual well being

Lots of schools use Fischy Music in RE as well as assemblies. 2023 is an exciting year for Fischy Music, this year celebrating its 25th Anniversary! Free online concerts streaming live every month throughout this year, so whole classrooms and assembly halls of children can join in with 30 minutes of uplifting songs!

Founded in 1998 by Stephen Fischbacher, Fischy Music (www.fischy.com) is a children's charity, writing songs for and with children to nurture positive mental health and help them express and manage a range of emotions.

Songs are at the heart of Fischy's work, with Health & Wellbeing and RE & Collective Worship songs and teaching resources made available to children, families, schools and churches. In addition to live events the innovative song-streaming platform, Fischy Music Online has made it easy for teachers everywhere to access over 140 songs and teaching resources, with new songs regularly added.

"Fischy Music songs open an emotional door allowing children to have the confidence to discuss issues and problems that we might otherwise not pick up on."

Teacher, St Philomena's Primary School, Glasgow

Schools can subscribe to Fischy Music Online to access over 140 songs. The RE Package includes resources created in conjunction with Lat Blaylock, RE Today, to help staff use music well in RE and connecting to significant Christian concepts (eg from Understanding Christianity). The resources can be used by all staff and are useful in all primary schools wherever you want to enable spiritual reflection and can also be used in assemblies and services for collective worship. To find out more, email: info@fischy.com

Faith inspired Art to encourage conversation, reflection and action

Cheryl Homer, Westhill Endowment, writes: RE Today and NATRE have always been great supporters of the arts and if you are wondering if using faith inspired arts in your school might be beneficial the answer is most likely 'yes'. But where do you start?

Westhill Endowment are here to help, with years of experience working with faith inspired arts. The charity has 10 art collections which are available FREE* to schools and community venues around the UK.

Many communities have already benefited from these resources which aim to encourage conversation, enable reflections, and inspire action.

A Year 10 textiles student recently reflected on her experience with the Gethsemane Garments: "I liked the green garment [representing Hope] showing the rips and tears of the fabric, but with the sides being restitched to show signs of healing and positivity."

A Primary School Teacher reflected on a creative lockdown session provided by their local vicar using the exhibition Bald Statements: "The creative artwork [the children produced in response] has been thought provoking and the children were able to speak honestly on their feelings and experiences of lockdown."

The art collections come with a variety of themes and mediums, including free standing and wall mounted works of art. Additional materials such as booklets, education packs, and films are available. Westhill will also consider funding applications for events around your exhibition.

Westhill Endowment work one to one with all exhibition hosts helping you tailor your exhibition to suit your space and your audiences. If you'd like to know more, please contact Westhill's Arts Coordinator, Cheryl Homer, on cheryl@westhillendowment.org or check the website or social media. www.westhillendowment.org

www.facebook.com/WesthillEndowment

www.youtube.com/channel/UCHKjKpunQ0C4XSXD4j88XZA

**You may incur transport and insurance costs, please ask if this is applicable.*