

NASACRE AGM & CONFERENCE 2015
21st May 2015 at Birmingham Council House

NOTES

Keynote Speaker: Rt. Hon Charles Clarke

Secretary of State for Education & Skills, 2002 – 4. Visiting Professor, School of Politics, Philosophy, Language & Communication Studies, University of East Anglia

Booklet co-authored with Linda Woodhead on relationship between schools & religion due to be published this summer. Link to CC & LW's book will be made available.

RE has never been more important than it is at present. Just a cursory review of the news headlines reveals this to be true.

Religion features more highly in people's thinking today than it used to in periods in the past, especially young people.

Curriculum Questions and Answers:

Should RE be a statutory requirement?

Historically not part of National Curriculum due to concerns about the right to withdraw children from RE.

Clearly it is vitally important that RE does remain a statutory requirement in a world where religion features so highly, despite the arguments of secularists.

Should RE be part of the National Curriculum?

Historically RE was once called Religious Instruction due to arrangements with the established Church.

Religious Education is more open and arguably a better name. In Scotland it is Religious & Moral Education.

Should RE be required throughout all stages of education, i.e. Key Stages 1-5?

Questions currently around key stage 4 especially. Key stage 5 doesn't really exist as a specific provision. Some also question whether RE is appropriate at Key Stage 1.

Should the curriculum & syllabus for RE be determined nationally?

Clear need for local issues to be reflected in the delivery of RE within schools but there are also strong coherent arguments for a nationally determined curriculum.

If we retain the status quo there needs to be clear commitment from National Government to require Local Authorities to support SACREs to strengthen their authority, power and influence.

Local structure, if it is to be effective, must extend to *all* schools.

If a National syllabus, it must be reviewed at least every 5 years with local input into that process.

The delivery of RE syllabus *must* be informed by the local situation and SACREs are best placed to ensure that this happens.

RE must include *all faiths* including non-theistic belief systems.

What is the place of Community Cohesion within the teaching of RE?

Active local SACREs can help to ensure that community cohesion remains part of the teaching within schools, irrespective of whether Ofsted are required to inspect this aspect of school provision.

What is the role of SACRE in helping parents to access Religious Instruction where that is wanted?

Should the 'Right to Withdraw' remain established within education, or does the present world situation demand that *all children* receive Religious Education?

General Questions and Answers:

Contact local MP about issues regarding RE.

Right to Withdraw: clear arguments for and against. Westminster Faith Debates have tackled this issue in recent years. Real concern about those with extreme views who choose to withdraw their children from a balanced presentation of Religious Education.

Q: What is your view on the privileged position of the Anglican Church on SACREs as opposed to Christians of other denominations who are lumped together with other faiths?

A: Argument for a revision of the constitution of SACREs.

Q: Can local SACREs choose to constitute in accordance with the local situation?

A: There is some allowance for flexibility in the co-option of members to SACRE.

The National Framework for RE (2004) and RE Council advice is followed by most SACREs.

Important to allow SACREs to retain some decision making powers otherwise they are demotivated.

The support for and delivery of SACREs across the country is very patchy. SACREs need to be funded appropriately (many aren't) if they are to be truly effective. Good local leadership is vital.

Q: What *should* be the role of the established Church in education and in SACREs?

A: This will inevitably vary from place to place.

Role of CofE in SACREs is frequently hugely beneficial. When there were issues around the viability of a local SACRE entered into SLA with local Diocese.

Question re Humanist Lobby: What should be the place of humanism in RE & on SACREs?

A: CC strongly of the view that non-theistic belief systems should be reflected within both as all belief systems should be included.

Q: Should RE become 'Religious & Cultural Education'?

A: How do we ensure that RE is taught well, by specialists given specific & sufficient time allocation?

Media & 'professional' ignorance often leads to serious misunderstandings both at home and in the classroom.

Very difficult to find the right wording to encompass what RE is in practice.

There are serious issues around the training and resourcing of teachers for RE. There needs to be some consistency in Continuing Professional Development for teachers but this will require funding.

This is a time for change! What is the role of Collective Worship in today's world?

Should RE & Collective Worship be separated? RE is essential.

CW should not, perhaps, be compulsory.

Seminar Leader: Denise Cush – Professor of Religion and Education at Bath Spa University

The Current Situation in RE

Confusion about the aims of RE
Do Community Cohesion, SMSC, etc. get in the way of RE?

Need for RE to reflect actual religious landscape
Internal diversity within Religious traditions
Place of Humanism? What does non-religious mean?
What do children themselves believe/do?
Majority would not call themselves religious but are not living selfish lives. Most children/young people aspire to happiness and believe that if things go wrong it's their fault.

Many draw from several traditions, mixed faith, pick n mix.
New forms of religiosity incl. Paganism, spirituality, spiritual revolution.
Customised personalised faith, self as authority.
Majority faith adherents call themselves Christian, then non-religious, spiritual, before other 'mainstream' faiths.
Rise of 'Forest Church' as new form of Pagan spirituality.

Debates about content.
Tension between study of religions and philosophy & ethics
Study of 'lived religions' rather than historical context.

Debates about approach
Does much RE give a 'rosy' anodyne picture of religions? Need for a more critical approach.

Who defines the facts? Academics or Faith Communities (which section of FC?)?
Are our pictures of religions shaped by patriarchy, heteronormativity and colonialism?

Should the law be changed?
Should non-exam RE at KS4&5 be abandoned?
What can we learn from other countries?

Practical Challenges

Public understanding of RE
Lack of qualified teachers (secondary)
Little input at ITT (primary)
Lack of CPD
Insufficient timetable time - even for GCSE
Confusing varieties of schools
Pressure on role of SACREs
Low status - Ebacc, Russell Group, parents and pupils
Re rudiment to Theology & RS degrees

Notable Successes

45 years' experience of non-confessional multi-faith RE
RE teachers with confidence, expertise and enthusiasm
Strong links with faith communities facilitating the encounter with living religions
Range of pedagogies including critical enquiry
Lots of resources - RE:online
Improved GCSE and A level criteria
Restoration of Bursaries
Different: an academic subject like no other

**Mary Myatt – Lead Ofsted Inspector, Culham St Gabriel’s Lead Consultant for Teacher Conferences
“Great RE”**

Religion = *religion* 'the ties that bind us together'

'Sharing Our Stories' - Suffolk Interfaith Resource

Building Capacity: Three Aspects

Funded Projects i.e. - Culham St Gabriel, Hockerill - RE Teachers' Prize, Farmington, Keswick Hall Trust
Getting to Good RE' (about improving the quality of RE teaching and learning in Primary schools).
RE Hubs,
Teachers' Groups (NATRE website & social media)

RE Quality Mark: downloadable self-assessment tool, pupil questionnaires, growing the next generation of leaders, nearly 200 schools have now received QM

Wokefield Park: weekend RE training at no cost to schools
"Helping colleagues to feel hopeful (not helpless)"

**Mark Plater: Lecturer in Education & Theology, Bishop Grossteste University
The purpose of RE – SACRE Member survey**

There is considerable confusion about what RE is for / seeking to do.

Survey of SACRE members will be undertaken to discover what those responsible for RE across the piece think.

Method:

On-line survey

To all SACRE members in all SACREs

How do SACRE members views compare with others? Teachers, etc.

Opening shortly, initial responses Sept 2015.