

## **NASACRE AGM**

**17<sup>th</sup> May 2016**

**Westminster Hall**

### **Event Report for Bromley SACRE July 2016 meeting**

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#### **David Hampshire, Chair – Introduction to the day**

In his introduction the Chair raised issues regarding the role of SACREs and lack of thought about the unintended consequences of the Education White Paper 2016 and other policy reforms. This is leading to:

- instability
- LAS don't know what to do with SACREs  
But also becoming more politicised.

#### **Keynote speech Dame Elizabeth Butler-Sloss – Commission on religion and belief in Public Life**

Did not write chapter on education - this dealt with all 4 UK countries but talk focuses on England.

My talk and report is aspirational - that it will make an impact.

Commission of 20 commissioners convened in 2013 multi faith.

- Involved substantial consultation.  
Evident that society has changed incredibly in last 2 decades in particular.  
Policy making re religion piecemeal. Need a new settlement.  
Key recommendations across a range of civil life. Need greater re literacy.  
In vision section spent time exploring religion and belief literacy.  
Moral and economic imperative to equip young people with this.  
Religion is something given not chosen  
Practice, doctrine and ideas. Beliefs and what people actually do to express these vary greatly.  
We can all enjoy culture of all religions without sharing the belief. Different Faith ideas also merit a hearing to aid understanding and solutions to social issues.
- We need media and politicians to understanding complexity of religious beliefs  
So recommend training and education.
- Education is core of report. Addressing Ofsted report and Clark and Woodhead report and goldsmiths.  
Education received most comments in call for evidence.  
Local curricula often failing, sanitised and too simplistic as well as not having non-religious world views.  
Commission recommends stat entitlement for different type of RE. Allowing different minimum requirements to be built on according to school type.
- RE should be part of national curriculum and be within national baccalaureate.
- Serious issues re training of teachers so recommend higher level input to give teachers confidence to teach RE.  
Repeal of statutory duty to provide collective workshop recommended.  
Frequently ignored now. Inclusive act of reflection preferable.

Specific recommendations associated with faith schools and sub selection.  
Could improve links with schools of different faiths.

- HRC should produce best practice guidance for different professionals such as HE teachers, lawyers etc.

### **Questions to the panel**

1. What will NASACRE do about the recommendations?

NASACRE Chair - NASACRE will be looking at some of these recommendations. Important that we keep them live and avoid hiatus where nothing gets done.  
EBS - initial strong condemnation of our recommendations - need to be looked at from different angles.

2. We have a Pan Berkshire syllabus but even though pops diverse to what extent does the local development of RE need to continue?

EBS - no idea! But do need to give children chance to engage with different communities and faiths.

NASACRE chair - we need to think about different needs for different contexts in which young people live so maybe one size does not fit all.

3. Concerned that report suggests that faith schools should not employ people of same faith and concerned about idea of inclusive assembly. Can't pick and mix to get coherence as religion is a singular belief. Not all religions are worthy of equal treatment in a western society.

EBS – The Queen said she saw CofE as an umbrella of 9 main religions so this expresses respect for these 9. In terms of collective worship I don't like having a law that is not obeyed.

NASACRE Chair - Children need to be exposed to and informed about what goes on outside their own grouping. I see nothing wrong in children being taught by people who are not of the school's faith.

4. Discussion about assumed place of RE in humanities area of the curriculum and the idea of religion and belief literacy. Concerned about a monolithic approach and the certainty of a body of content. Uncertainty and ambiguity seems ok and using the tensions associated with this to learn.

EBS. I think that view is interesting and worthy of thought. Support encouragement of uncertainty and children left in a comfortable mould without questioning this. But needs to be balanced with knowing about things too. e.g. Current anti-Semitic views based on sheer ignorance.

5. Question about diversity we should listen more to children about their views on religion, faith and integration to inform and form policy

EBS - of course.

6. Query on the idea of sanitised religion as referenced in your report? Is it not good to show the things we have in common. Do you have evidence that difficult things are avoided in the teaching of religion.

EBS- I confess I did not study the evidence that led to these comments in the report. I think you need to ask someone else - Robin Richardson and Ed Koestler. Worthy of further discussion. I would be surprised if we didn't have the evidence as we would not have had the nerve to say it otherwise.

7. As a RE teacher of 13 years I have delivered a diverse approach and taking the views of children within a youth SACRE. I think a lot of state schools have been doing a lot of this work for a long time.

EBS - that is brilliant and you are ahead of our report.

8. Reiterate last person's view about the progressive nature of RE teaching in many schools. Local SACREs have played a part in this and locally agreed syllabus.

Collective worship recognises collectivity of schools

EBS - still says broadly and mainly Christian. Sorry but the evidence from round the country does not back up your view of this progressive teaching. We did not a single thing that was not based on evidence but glad people in this room are doing a good job.

### **Chair's report**

- LAs need to fulfil stat duties
- Follow NASACRE template for annual report
- Need stronger and more consistent voice including with government.

### **Changes to the constitution**

Changes aim to reflect current position NASACRE

2.2 Query re lobbying role - we can act as a strong advocate for local SACREs and provide information. To help local SACREs fulfil their activities.

3.5 change to simple majority. We will look at this.

6 year rolling officer regime and no opt out clause. Concerned about inability to change vice to chair if they are not fit for purpose. Perhaps need to look at a vote of confidence. 6 year term may discourage good candidates. People could leave by resigning.

How many council members are here today. We do not have 2/3 SACREs here today so cannot agree the constitutional changes so will send around a voting form with amended constitution.

Q - postal vote - would this require every SACREs to send in part of minutes where got agreed.

Next exec meeting will look at how this can be done via an electronic forum.

### **Keynote Professor Adam Dinham - Future of teaching and learning about religion and belief - RE for REal**

- In policy: Historical perspective - RE unintended casualty of reform.  
In schools: RE marginalised and colonised
- Impacts in wider society
- New atheists the loudest voice?
- All recent reports recommend national content.
- Our report recommends SACRE review - Led by a national panel to develop national RE framework and supported at local level.
- Clarke and Woodhead recommendations led by Secretary of State.

- SACRES and future – general issues and conclusions
  - Who are stakeholders
  - Which faith communities and leaders are involved
  - How are reps chosen
  - For whom do they speak
  - Who are 'others' with relevant expertise and experience
- Don't assume a faith leader, volunteer or congregant is engaged with all aspects of the faith community
- Confusion about what RE is for? Who is the final arbiter?
- Clarifying the muddle
  - Collective act of worship
  - Right to withdraw admissions to faith schools
  - Role of religion in wider school life
- Blurred boundaries in educational, confessional or formational
- Lack of clarity impacts on lack of status - a recipe for subconscious secularity.
- Report focuses on 3 aspects to address these issues
- Educationally enabling
- Vs useful in its own right
- Stretchy definition
- Lived - identity or tradition - views of young people
- Compulsory plus optional GCSE
- Need to address purposes, content and structure, each of the above relates to one of these.
- CofE is very important in this because country is culturally Christian even if not all are religious so linked to national identity plus nos of CofE schools.
- RE should teach that GB is historically and culturally CofE as well as pluralistic, diverse and secular.
- Timing
- Connects with issues of national identity thus its sensitivity.
- Religious literacy encompasses:
  - Attitude
  - Disposition
  - Knowledge
  - Skills
- For Everybody
- Sociological turn in RE - is that appropriate as living the life of a religious person is different kind of knowledge. Sociology can provide a breadth of perspective.

## **Summary**

A useful conference drawing attention to the impact of wider policy changes but more work needed to be done by NASACRE to have a voice with DfE to influence developments in policy and practice and limited steer for local SACREs.

Some of the debates useful and the second keynote helpful for reflection about what RE is or could be and the role of SACREs going forward.