

NOTICE OF MEETING

**Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education
Thursday 9 July 2015, 5.00 pm**

Bedford Room, Education Centre, Easthampstead Park

To: The Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

David Fawcett, Church of England (Chairman)
Councillor Dr Gareth Barnard, Bracknell Forest Council
Ken Blanton, The Free Churches
Ben Britton, NASUWT
Rev Jackie Case, Free Churches - Methodist
Rev Paul Collins, Church of England
Madeline Diver, Associations Representing Teachers (VOICE)
Councillor Ms Moira Gaw, Bracknell Forest Council
Kathy Hadfield, Co-opted Member
Councillor Mrs Dorothy Hayes MBE, Bracknell Forest Council
Manfred Lemke, The Free Churches
Carol Logan, Church of England
Councillor Mrs Isabel Mattick, Bracknell Forest Council
Councillor Ms Ash Merry, Bracknell Forest Council
Carol Nicholls, Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth
Mark Olney, Church of England
Arfan Rashid, Muslim faith
Rabbi Zvi Solomons, Jewish faith
Councillor Clifton Thompson, Bracknell Forest Council

ALISON SANDERS
Director of Corporate Services

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If you require further information, please contact: Priya Patel
Telephone: 01344 352233
Email: priya.patel@bracknell-forest.gov.uk
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Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education
Thursday 9 July 2015, 5.00 pm
Bedford Room, Education Centre, Easthampstead Park

Sound recording, photographing, filming and use of social media at meetings which are held in public are permitted. Those wishing to record proceedings at a meeting are however advised to contact the Democratic Services Officer named as the contact for further information on the front of this agenda as early as possible before the start of the meeting so that any special arrangements can be made.

AGENDA

Page No

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

Since the last meeting, Councillor Barnard has approved the following appointments to fill vacancies on SACRE:

Church of England:

- Rev Paul Collins
- Carol Logan

Roman Catholic:

- Chris Cooper
- Steve Rollins

Free Churches:

- Rev Jackie Case
- Manfred Lemke

Chris Collins and Steve Rollins will be accompanying Carol Nicholls to this meeting as this will be her last.

Manfred Lemke has tendered his apologies for this meeting.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19 March 2015.

1 - 6

3. Matters Arising

4. Presentation - Collective Act of Worship

Louise Fletcher (Assistant HeadTeacher and pastoral manager at Edgbarrow School) and Catherine Forrester (Headteacher at new Scotland Hill Primary) will each give a brief presentation about how they approach the Collective Act of Worship in their schools.

5. **A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools**
To discuss a pamphlet entitled "A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools" produced by Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead as part of the Westminster Faith Debates series. 7 - 74
6. **NASACRE AGM**
To receive a report from Anne Andrews on the NASACRE AGM. Anne has also provided a copy of the discussion sheet which was used as the basis for group sessions. 75 - 78
7. **NASACRE Web Site**
To review the resources available on the new NASACRE web site. Anne Andrews will guide SACRE through what is available but anyone who has not seen the site should go to www.nasacre.org.uk.
8. **SACRE Briefing 8**
To consider any issues arising from NASACRE's latest briefing. 79 - 90
9. **Subject Leader Meeting and Hub Session Feedback**
To receive feedback from Anne Andrews on the subject leader meeting and hub session
10. **Joint SACREs Conference**
To receive a report from David Fawcett on the Joint SACREs Conference.
11. **SACRE Development Plan**
To discuss the SACRE Development Plan, in particular, initiatives for the promotion of SACRE.
12. **SACRE Reporting and Evaluating Toolkit**
To continue the ongoing review of SACRE using the self-evaluation document. 91 - 120

NB: This item has been included but may be deferred if the other business takes a substantial time.
13. **Any Other Business**
To consider any other items of business.
14. **Dates of Future Meetings**
Further meetings of SACRE have been scheduled for 5pm on:

12 November 2015
3 March 2016

**STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
19 MARCH 2015
5.00 - 6.30 PM**



Present:

David Fawcett, Church of England (Chairman)
Anne Andrews, Church of England
Councillor Andy Blatchford, Bracknell Forest Council
Councillor Will Davison, Bracknell Forest Council
Madeline Diver, Associations Representing Teachers (VOICE)
Kathy Hadfield, Co-opted Member
Councillor Mrs Dorothy Hayes MBE, Bracknell Forest Council
Carol Nicholls, Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth
Mark Olney, Church of England
Arfan Rashid, Muslim faith
Councillor Clifton Thompson, Bracknell Forest Council

In Attendance:

Chris Salt, School Adviser

Apologies for absence were received from:

John Baildam, The Free Churches
Ben Britton, NASUWT
Mr Christopher Smith, The Free Churches
Rabbi Zvi Solomons, Jewish faith
Ms Jo Fageant, Oxford Diocese

53. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting. Apologies received were noted.

54. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2014 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to Minute 51 being amended to read that Carol Nicholls would be retiring after the summer meeting and not next meeting and further amended to read Kathy Hadfield in place of Cathy Hatfield.

55. Matters Arising

Note from Jo Fageant

Anne read an e-mail she had received from Jo who had sent her apologies for being unable to attend the meeting. Cllr Andy Blatchford requested that the content should be inserted into the minutes:

“I’d like to thank all members, past and present, of the BF SACRE for their welcome and support over many years of us working together. We have of course been disappointed by our reduced funding but we have had a good record of supporting schools – something to be proud of. The thing I have

been disappointed about is that Gordon Anderson was no longer with us when we published our current syllabus when all through he was such an active and committed Chair of both the SACRE and the Agreed Syllabus Conference. As well as thanking all members for their support I should like especially to go on record as being enormously grateful to Gordon for his strong leadership and support over many years and more recently to David since he has taken over as Chair.

I'm leaving at a time of exciting development in partnership working with other Berkshire SACREs on projects I believe will make a positive impact on RE in schools. I've long thought this would be valuable and it's one of the reasons why I've run the joint SACREs conference for so many years and I thank you for being so supportive of these.

I apologise that I am unable to be with you for what should have been my final meeting because I'm inspecting in a school in central Leicester.

On an entirely personal note, I want to thank you all for your friendship – I shall miss working with you BUT I am looking forward to having a bit more time for relaxation and hobbies.

Best wishes to you all".

Minute 50 – Anne Andrews reported that she did not have the contact details for Ben Britton in order to pass on to him the contact details for Sandy Lane Primary School. Anne asked if any member could supply her with Ben's details so she could complete the action.

56. SACRE - Budget 2015/16

Chris Salt passed each member a copy of the 2014/15 budget. It was noted that the budget for 2015/16 had been increased to £1,570.00 from £1,499.00 meaning that current expenditure could be sustained for the new financial year.

Anne Andrews reported that she had not yet submitted her travel claim for £32.00 for attending the national conference. Cllr Andy Blatchford requested that she do so before 31 March 2015 and to send her claim directly to Alan Nash. It was noted that the under-spend for 2014/15 of £850.00 would not be carried over to 2015/16 though the cost of the annual report had yet to be deducted from the under-spend.

Anne Andrews volunteered to attend the next national conference on behalf of the Bracknell Forest SACRE and proposed she should also attend on behalf of the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead so that attendance costs could be shared.

(Action: Anne Andrews)

57. Lord Nash's Letter to SACREs

The Chairman reported that he was happy with the letter from Lord Nash and that he supported the proposal within the letter that the Department of Education intended to commission a review of SACRE annual reports.

The Chairman reported that his response to Lord Nash's letter would point out that SACRE members were not volunteers but were appointed members of a statutory body who happened to be unpaid. This was agreed by all.

(Action: Chairman)

58. Collective Worship Survey - Replies and Analysis

Anne Andrew's evaluation of the responses to the Collective Worship Survey was noted and it was observed that the number of responses was disappointingly low. Responses had been received from 5 church schools (1 secondary, 4 primary) and 8 community schools (1 infant, 6 primary and 1 secondary). It was noted that no response had been received from Garth Hill College where Ben Britton was Head of RE.

The meeting discussed possible reasons for the low level of responses and agreed that a misunderstanding of what was intended by collective worship and the fact that the survey took place during Holocaust week may have been contributing factors.

The meeting discussed the meaning of collective worship and Anne Andrews summarised it as a daily act of worship that could take place at any time of day in any normal group of pupils. Chris Salt reported that Edgbarrow School had worthwhile collective worship and stated he thought it was a shame that no response had been received from the school. It was proposed that Chris Salt should liaise with the appropriate person at Edgbarrow School and invite them to come to a SACRE meeting to talk about the school's understanding of collective worship. In addition, Chris Salt agreed to identify a primary school that had meaningful collective worship and also invite their appropriate representative to attend a SACRE meeting.

(Action: Chris Salt)

It was proposed that the Chairman should write to all schools, including church schools, to find out why no response had been forthcoming or, in the case of some of those who had responded, why the results indicated that the statutory requirement for collective worship was not being fully complied with.

It was proposed that Anne Andrew's evaluation should be included in the Chairman's letter – excluding the second sentence of the first paragraph – with SACREs possible response prefaced with '*SACRE could take any of the following actions and will advise the LA appropriately*' with points 3, 5, 6 and 9 being removed from the possible responses.

(Action: Chairman)

59. SACRE Reporting and Evaluating Toolkit

The meeting considered section 3 of the SACRE Reporting and Evaluating Toolkit – Collective Worship.

(a) Key Area 3a – Supporting pupil entitlement: *What strategies are in place to enable the SACRE to support the delivery of pupil entitlement in the LA's schools?*

All agreed this was a **Developing** practice.

(b) Key Area 3b – Enhancing the quality of provision of collective worship: *How does SACRE seek to influence the quality of collective worship in the LA's schools?*

All agreed this was a **Developing** practice and that there was a need for a better understanding by members of the meaning of 'effective provision'. It was hoped that attendance at a SACRE meeting by appropriate staff from Edgbarrow School and a primary school who facilitated worthwhile collective worship would clarify this point for members.

- (c) **Key Area 3c – Responding to requests for determination:** *How robust are SACREs procedures for responding to requests from schools for a determination?*

All agreed this was an **Established** practice.

60. **RE Subject Leader Training - 10 March 2015**

Mark Olney reported the RE subject leader training had been very valuable and had included a worthwhile cross-section of views on places to visit to worship and discussion on what could be gained from those visits. Mark explained that 9 teachers representing 8 schools had attended the training with a further 3 schools showing interest in the training day content after the training had taken place.

Mark reported that the same people tended to be present at these training sessions which indicated the value of the training. It was agreed that future RE subject leader training should take place at Easthampstead Park Conference Centre.

61. **SACRE Development Plan for 2013-15**

The meeting considered the SACRE Development Plan for 2013-15.

- (a) **Annual report on the work of the SACRE:** Anne said she would check with Jo Fageant when the final report would be ready and circulated to members. Anne said she would ask Jo to ensure the cost of producing the report was invoiced before 31 March 2015.

(Action: Anne Andrews)

- (b) **Annual analysis of GCSE and A level entry and results statistics:** The Chairman reported this had been carried out in the autumn term.

- (c) **Review and amend/update a SACRE development plan:** The Chairman said this should be the main focus of the summer meeting.

Members considered how the department for Children, Young People and Learning could be made aware of the work of the SACRE and discussed the production of a paper outlining its function at a scrutiny panel.

Members agreed that to support cohesion across the community, the annual report would be sent to Cllr Gill Birch with a request for her to take it to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel. Anne Andrews volunteered to speak at a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel about the work undertaken and future plans of the SACRE and the Chairman said he would attend with Anne. Cllr Mrs Dorothy Hayes said she would arrange for this to take place.

(Action: Cllr Dorothy Hayes)

It was proposed that the Development Plan should be amended to include a statement that the SACRE would promote itself across the community and

attendance at the Overview and Scrutiny Panel would be part of that initiative. Members discussed other initiatives for promotion of the SACRE and agreed to forward their ideas to Anne Andrews in time for inclusion in the July meeting agenda pack.

(Action: All)

62. Developing a Strategy for Regional Support for RE - Regional Expression of Interest

Anne Andrews explained the aim of the bid to Culham St Gabriel's Trust was to fund a training seminar for volunteers from faith communities who hosted visits to places of worship. The purpose of the training would be to increase confidence and expertise and raise standards in the teaching associated with the visits. Anne said the bid would be considered on 27 March 2015 and reported it was currently progressing well.

63. Meetings of SACRE Chairs

The members considered the report of the meetings of the Chairs of the six Berkshire SACREs.

The Chairman noted that the second meeting had been poorly attended.

64. Joint SACREs Conference

It was reported that Jo Fageant had agreed to run this year's Joint SACREs Conference. The date had been agreed as 15 June between 4.15pm – 7.30pm at Easthampstead Park Conference Centre. It was proposed that members should advise Jo Fageant of their intention to attend.

(Action: All)

65. NASACRE - SACRE Briefing 7

SACRE noted the latest NASACRE Briefing. Issues raised in the briefing had been discussed earlier.

66. Any Other Business

Social and Cultural Association of Dastyar

Madeline Diver reported that a group called the Social and Cultural Association of Dastyar made up of English and Afghan individuals had registered with Involve. The aim of the Association was to teach RE but it was not clear whether the teaching was aimed at everyone or just Afghans. Madeline reported that the group are promoting themselves on Facebook and their registered address was Ivy Court on Harmans Water Road. Madeline advised that she had given this information to Ian Boswell who was investigating what the group's teaching syllabus was, who they were teaching and, in particular, if this involved young persons. Madeline said she would update members on the outcome of Ian Boswell's investigation.

(Action: Madeline Diver)

67. **Dates of Future Meetings and Forward Plan**

It was noted that future meetings would be held at 5pm on the following dates:

9 July 2015

12 November 2015



Westminster
FAITH DEBATES

A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools

CHARLES CLARKE AND LINDA WOODHEAD



The Westminster Faith Debates bring together leading academic and public figures to debate the latest research on religion and values. The debates have been funded by generous grants from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Economic and Social Research Council, and Lancaster University.

www.faithdebates.org.uk

A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools

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PREFACE

This pamphlet arises from the research and debate carried out by the Westminster Faith Debates and the Religion and Society Research programme which gave rise to them. Both were supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Economic and Social Research Council, and Lancaster University, and we are most grateful.

It would not have been possible without the support and engagement of many people, some of whom we would like to acknowledge and thank by name.

Peta Ainsworth and Simon Reader have given consistent practical and intellectual support both in preparing this pamphlet itself and in organising two related events in our Westminster Faith Debates series:

- What's the Place of Faith in Schools?¹ which took place in London on February 22nd 2012
- RE for Real: A Consultation on Religious Education² which took place in Birmingham on February 4th 2015.

We would like to thank the large number of participants in these two events, including teachers and pupils, whose contributions informed this pamphlet.

We would also like to thank Alan Brine, Jane Brooke, James Conroy, Andrew Copson, Mark Chater, Adam Dinham, Brian Gates, Bill Gent, Bob Jackson, Joyce Miller, John Pritchard and Stewart Sutherland whose comments on a draft version of this pamphlet were extremely helpful. Teachers at the NATRE conference held in Bradford in May 2015 also gave valuable feedback. Of course we bear sole responsibility for the views and recommendations made here, and hope that they promote constructive discussion and change.

Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead

June 2015

¹ <http://faithdebates.org.uk/debates/2012-debates/religion-and-public-life/richard-dawkins-faith-in-schools/>

² <http://faithdebates.org.uk/debates/re-for-real-religious-education/>

INTRODUCTION

Religion is an inescapably important aspect of our modern world. Even those who hoped that social and scientific progress would lead to the decline of any form of religious belief have to concede the continuing significance of religion. The most cursory examination of political and economic affairs today demonstrates the visibility and importance of religion and belief in the affairs of the world. This has increased after the end of the Cold War, which tended to inhibit and even suppress much of its impact.

That is true in England too, albeit less dramatically than in some other countries. The last twenty-five years have witnessed some of the most significant shifts in religious belief and practice since the Reformation, as traditional forms of religious authority, and uniformities of doctrine and practice, have given way to a much wider and more diverse range of religious and non-religious commitments.

In this period the churches' religious monopoly has been lost, other faiths have grown in strength and visibility, some elements in all the main religions including not only Islam but the churches are taking more radical 'counter-cultural' stances against a perceived secular mainstream, and there is a growing proportion of people who do not affiliate with any religious organisation, even though a majority of them are not atheist.³

Throughout these last seventy years the organisation and structure of schools has also changed very significantly, for example in the nature of the overall curriculum, and the reduced influence of local authorities.

Since 2006 the 'Religion and Society' research programme⁴ has been exploring these changes and trying to explain and understand what has been taking place. This culminated in the Westminster Faith debates,⁵ which began in the spring of 2012. They have tested the research findings in engagement with the practical experience of public figures actively engaged with matters of religion and belief.

One of the most important areas explored by the programme has been the recent

³ Linda Woodhead and Rebecca Catto (Editors), *Religion and Change in Modern Britain* London: Routledge, 2012

⁴ Details can be seen at <http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk>

⁵ These can be seen at <http://faithdebates.org.uk/category/debates/>

relationship between religion and education.⁶ There are many areas of controversy, including the place of ‘religious education’ in the curriculum, the practices of ‘faith schools’,⁷ and the operation of the statutory ‘wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character’ act of collective worship.

It is clear to us that the educational settlement between church and state which was formalised in the 1944 Education Act, and reflected a different era, no longer serves its purpose. Indeed, as OFSTED and others have indicated, there are many areas of educational practice where the law is honoured more in the breach than the observance.

For example there can be a ‘nod and wink’ culture around the nature of the act of collective worship in school. The requirement that the act should be predominantly Christian, and possibly even promote a sense of ‘awe and wonder’, is sometimes honoured in form rather than substance. The status and quality of education about religion within schools is highly variable, and this, together with under-resourcing and controversy about the place of RE in the curriculum, have led to low morale. Some worry that aspects of the admissions procedures to some faith schools promote dishonesty in religious observance by families and children in a way that is distasteful at best.

More generally, energy is constantly being diverted from serious thought about the values and qualities which education should be fostering in citizens, and how best to proceed in that respect as society changes.

Overall, the whole area of religious education has suffered from being treated very differently from other subjects. Sometimes it has been treated as less important, sometimes as more important. It has been freighted with too little significance or too much. The consequences have been negative and have inhibited reform. We believe that the subject should be put on a similar footing to other subjects, and no longer treated as the exceptional case.

The issues around the place of religion in schools are not going away. Indeed they are rising up the political and educational agenda as it becomes clear that the way in which religion is being dealt with in schools is not meeting the needs of our time.

This is why we think there is value in re-examining the post-1944 educational settlement between state and church in England in the light of contemporary beliefs and practices, illuminated by the latest research. On this basis we propose a new

⁶ The particular debate on education is at <http://faithdebates.org.uk/debates/2012-debates/religion-and-public-life/richard-dawkins-faith-in-schools/>

⁷ For reasons we explain in the subsection on Faith Schools below, we have decided to use this somewhat loaded term. We take care to explain exactly what it includes in that same subsection.

educational settlement which can better foster genuine understanding of modern religion and belief, and allow young people better to explore their own and other peoples' religious and non-religious beliefs and come to their own conclusions.

We should make it clear at the outset that we do not agree with those who urge that religion can somehow be excluded from public life and should therefore play little or no part in the state education system. We observe that the place of religion in the political and social and public life of countries such as France, with its historic tradition of 'laïcité', or the USA, with its constitutional requirement of religious neutrality, is a reflection of the circumstances and position of the churches in the 18th century rather than today. Such constitutional bars have not in practice reduced the significance of religion in the national and political lives of those countries.

In the current situation, such secularist or 'separationist' approaches risk reducing general religious literacy and good state-religion relations at a time when they are most urgently needed.⁸

At the same time, we believe that secular humanism and other non-religious philosophies, 'life stances' and forms of belief and commitment are entirely legitimate, and should be respected and treated in the same way as religion within the education system. This is given added importance by the fact that roughly equal numbers of younger people in Britain today report having 'no religion' as report having a religion.⁹

We have decided to restrict our focus on these issues to England. It is tempting to discuss the situation in the different environments of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, but the legal powers in general lie with the devolved Parliament and Assemblies, and the historical and current situations are very different. Specific consideration needs to be given to these, and recommendations would vary from those relevant to England. We have however made some references to comparable practices in Scotland.

In light of recent concern about the way in which some independent schools are dealing with these matters, we consider the position of independent schools. We have not, however, ventured into discussion about higher or further education, except in relation to compulsory Religious Education.

⁸ E.g. Dinham and Francis 'Religious Literacy in Policy and Practice' <http://www.policypress.co.uk/display.asp?K=9781447316657&sf1=keyword&st1=Religious+literacy+in+policy+and+practice&m=1&dc=1>

⁹ See Woodhead, 'No Religion' is the New Religion', <http://faithdebates.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/WFD-No-Religion.pdf>

The 2015 Pew Projections for religion worldwide predict that by 2050 Christians will be a minority in the Britain at 46% of the population, that 'Muslim' will rise to 11%, and that 'unaffiliated' will rise to 39%. http://www.pewforum.org/files/2015/03/PF_15.04.02_ProjectionsFullReport.pdf

We hope that this pamphlet will stimulate discussion about what might be the appropriate modern educational relationship between religion and state in England today, and what consequent changes might be needed in law and practice.

We conclude this pamphlet with a series of recommendations, covering the act of collective worship, the curriculum, and the future of faith schools. These are different subjects, though they are related. Reform in relation to each area needs to be tackled in different ways, and at different paces. We do not envisage one 'big bang' transformation, but we think that reform in all these areas is necessary, that there are common principles behind such change and linkages between various elements, and that a holistic approach can therefore be useful in approaching the updating of the overall relationship between religion and schools.

Our conviction, reinforced by the research on the 'Religion and Society' research programme, and by the Westminster Faith Debates, is that the time is ripe for a new relationship, and that education, religion, and wider society will benefit.

HISTORY

For centuries religious institutions were the main means of generating and transmitting knowledge. They were society's researchers, educators and trainers. They founded the first universities and schools.

The state began to play more of a role in the 19th century, notably through the Forster Education Act of 1870 and then the Balfour Education Act of 1902, which established a universal mass system of education from ages 5 to 13, and gave local education authorities (LEAs) the responsibility to carry this through in practice.

Our current school system was established by R. A. Butler's Education Act in 1944,¹⁰ widely viewed as a progressive and codifying piece of legislation. It gave local education authorities a key role, and established the so-called 'tripartite system' of secondary schools: grammar, secondary technical and secondary modern.

1944 Act

For the purposes of this discussion, the significance of the 1944 Act lay in the compromise agreement which was reached between the state and the main Christian churches in the UK concerning the place of religion in modern schools. This reaffirmed the principle of the 'Dual System': a partnership between government and churches in providing the nation's education system. This hard-fought outcome has endured ever since.

Section 25 of the Act dealt with religious education. This was the term used to cover both what was then called 'religious instruction' and the act of collective worship. At the time the two were closely linked, though this has now changed.

On collective worship (or 'school assemblies') the Act said:-

The school day in every county school and in every voluntary school shall begin with collective worship on the part of all pupils in attendance at the school, and the arrangements made therefore shall provide for a single act of worship attended by all such pupils unless, in the opinion of the local

¹⁰ http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1944/31%20/pdfs/ukpga_19440031.pdf

education authority or, in the case of a voluntary school, of the managers or governors thereof, the school premises are such as to make it impracticable to assemble them for that purpose.

And on 'religious instruction' (sic):-

religious instruction shall be given in every county school and in every voluntary school.

Section 25(4) gave parents the right to withdraw their children from attendance at religious worship and religious instruction:-

If the parent of any pupil... requests that he be wholly or partly excused from attendance at religious worship in the school, or from attendance at religious instruction in the school... the pupil shall be excused from such attendance accordingly.

Section 29 established the framework for establishing Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs) which were responsible for setting the Religious Education syllabus in their locale (there being no national syllabus) and permitted Local Education Authorities to establish Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs):-

A local education authority shall have power to constitute a standing advisory council on religious education to advise the authority upon matters connected with the religious instruction to be given in accordance with an agreed syllabus and, in particular, as to methods of teaching, the choice of books, and the provision of lectures for teachers.

Significantly this was only an enabling power, and only a small number of LEAs established SACREs until this was made compulsory in 1988.¹¹ In general ASCs and SACREs sought to reflect local religion and belief though some were banner carriers for differing ideological approaches to RE in schools.

The parts of the 1944 Act dealing with 'religious instruction' were the only parts which dealt with any aspect of the curriculum. This was necessary because of the importance of the church contribution to the new education system, the complex and difficult negotiations between the government and the churches about religion's place in the maintained education system, and the extent to which the state might influence or control church schools, all of which had to be incorporated in the Act itself.¹²

¹¹ Some local education authorities had SACREs before 1944, the oldest dating from the beginning of the 20th century.

¹² These negotiations are well covered on pages 39-48 of Michael Barber, *The Making of the 1944 Education Act* London: Continuum, 1994. Barber later became Tony Blair's Chief Education Adviser after 1997

Sections 8 to 16 of the Act established the framework of ‘voluntary-aided’, ‘voluntary-controlled’ and ‘special agreement’ church schools. Requirements differed in relation to funding, governance, employment of teachers, admissions, and the curriculum, dependent upon the precise relationship with the foundations which had established each school, and the church which supported them. The Roman Catholic Church was particularly concerned to maintain a significant degree of control over its schools.

Sections 70-71 of the 1944 Act required all independent schools to be registered, with suitable school premises and adequate accommodation; the proprietor and every teacher was required to be ‘a proper person’, and ‘efficient and suitable instruction’ had to be provided.

This legal framework, though modified later, most notably in 1988, remains the fundamental basis for religion’s place within school education today¹³. It reflects an era in which the churches, especially the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church, had dominated education.

1988 Act

The 1988 Education Reform Act¹⁴ established a ‘National Curriculum’ which covered Key Stages 1-4 of education from ages 5-16.¹⁵ This was the first time, other than in relation to religion, that the law specified the curriculum schools had to cover.

Section 2 stated that the basic curriculum must include:-

- (a) provision for religious education for all registered pupils at the school; and
- (b) a curriculum for all registered pupils at the school of compulsory school age (to be known as ‘the National Curriculum’).

Note that the reference is to ‘religious education’, not the ‘religious instruction’ of the 1944 Act, and that the requirement to provide religious education is distinct from the requirements of the national curriculum.¹⁶

One of the reasons that Religious Education was excluded from the National

¹³ Rob Freathy and Stephen Parker publish an interesting account of failed efforts to review this settlement in 1969 /70 in the *Journal of Beliefs and Values* (June 2015)

¹⁴ http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/40/pdfs/ukpga_19880040_en.pdf

¹⁵ Key Stage 1 covers ages 5-7, Key Stage 2 ages 7-11, Key Stage 3 ages 11-14 and Key Stage 4 ages 14-16. Key Stage 5 covers ages 16-19.

¹⁶ Indeed the 1988 Act implemented specific changes in legal wording to substitute ‘religious education’ for ‘religious instruction’. Note particularly Schedule 1 to the 1988 Act:

http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/40/pdfs/ukpga_19880040_en.pdf

Curriculum was because of concerns that the right to withdraw from religious education, established in the 1944 Act, should not apply to any part of the National Curriculum.

The requirement that religious education is provided applies to all students in school, including those over the age of 16, but not to those in further education colleges.

Section 3 stated that the core subjects in England are mathematics, English and science, and that the other foundation subjects are history, geography, technology, music, art and physical education, and at Key Stages 3 and 4 a modern foreign language. There were subsequent modifications, including the addition of citizenship, but Religious Education has never been part of the national curriculum.

Section 6 specified that the act of collective worship could now take place in smaller groupings than the whole school, and at more varied times, rather than necessarily in whole-school assemblies as before.

Section 7 stated that the collective worship shall be ‘wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character reflecting the broad traditions of Christian belief without being distinctive of any particular Christian denomination.’ This precise formulation followed a lengthy and acrimonious debate in the House of Lords, which repays study for those interested in the mood of the times.¹⁷

Section 8 stated that for religious education within the basic curriculum:-

Any agreed syllabus... shall reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.

Other than these, the main school organisational changes established by the 1988 Act were the establishment of grant maintained schools - directly funded by central government - and ‘local management of schools’. These significantly eroded the authority of the LEA, with some consequential impact upon faith schools, but did not otherwise significantly change the structure of schools established in 1944.

In 1992 the Education (Schools) Act¹⁸ established OFSTED and a national and open system of inspection of most aspects of school life. An important general requirement was Section 2(d) of the Act which required Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of schools to keep the Secretary of State for Education ‘informed of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils’.

Under this Act, OFSTED inspects religious education in all state schools, although

¹⁷ <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1988/jun/27/education-reform-bill>, and related Hansard links

¹⁸ http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1992/38/pdfs/ukpga_19920038_en.pdf

Section 13 set up special arrangements for the inspection of ‘denominational education’, i.e. religious education given otherwise than in accordance with an agreed syllabus. This allowed the governors of some faith schools to make their own arrangements for inspection of this aspect of their educational provision.

2004 and later

Though the essential legal framework for the religious education curriculum remained in place after 1988, it was significantly qualified in 2004 by the publication of a non-statutory national framework for religious education¹⁹ which had been prepared by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority on behalf of the then Secretary of State for Education and Skills, Charles Clarke, with the support of a steering group consisting of a wide range of faith and belief communities and professional organisations. This was designed to provide a non-statutory national, clear and appropriate framework for the Religious Education syllabus, agreed by the main religions (and humanists). Some hoped that over time this could develop into a statutory national agreed syllabus, to replace the locally agreed syllabuses which obviously varied from locality to locality (though there were also many similarities).

As far as independent schools were concerned, the system of inspection was broadened by the 2008 Education and Skills Act.²⁰ This widened the inspection basis established in 1944 to include the ‘spiritual, moral, social and cultural development’ and ‘welfare, health and safety’ of students.

Since 2010, a wider system of academies and free schools has developed, though it is still not dominant, particularly in the primary sector. It does, however, confirm the diminishing role of local authorities in the provision of education, and represent a further retreat from the idea of a ‘national’ curriculum as established in 1988.

Overall, the history of religious education in schools since 1944 can best be read as a series of piecemeal amendments and accommodations to the 1944 settlement between church and state, in particular in relation to the act of collective worship, the place of religion in the curriculum of all schools, and the involvement of faiths in the organization of schools. By 1988, few would have seen collective worship as a part of religious education, and some supported religious education but not the act of collective worship to which it was once related.

¹⁹ http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090903160937/http://qca.org.uk/library/Assets/media/9817_re_national_framework_04.pdf

²⁰ http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/25/pdfs/ukpga_20080025_en.pdf

We suggest that today, seventy years after the historic 1944 agreement, it is time for a fresh settlement which reflects the very substantial changes which have taken place in both the practice of religion in England and the nature of our school system. Such a settlement needs to address these significant changes, and to find the best way of equipping schools to educate young people so that they are prepared for life now and in the future.

SCHOOLS TODAY

This is a brief statistical description of schools in England today, including the place of faith schools in the English education system.

It is helpful to begin with a summary of findings about religion in England and Wales from the 2011 Census:-²¹

Christianity was the largest religion, in terms of the number identifying as 'Christian', with 33.2 million people (59.3% of the population). Muslims made up the second largest religious group with 2.7 million people (4.8% of the population).

14.1 million people, around a quarter of the population in England and Wales, reported having 'no religion'.

The religion question was the only optional question on the Census and 7.2% of people did not answer the question.

Between 2001 and 2011 there has been a decrease in people who identify as Christian (from 71.7% to 59.3%) and an increase in those reporting no religion (from 14.8% to 25.1%). There were increases in the other main religious group categories (Muslim, Hindu etc.).

Additional research carried out by the Religion and Society Programme and for the Westminster Faith Debates suggests that these shifts towards (a) greater religious diversity and (b) a higher proportion of religiously unaffiliated people, are likely to continue. In the process, belonging to a religious group will become less common than being religious, spiritual or non-religious outside of traditional institutional frameworks. The influence of traditional religious authorities is likely to continue to diminish, and the authority of personal choice and new, more disorganised, forms of authority is likely to grow. The influence of more conservative and 'fundamentalist' elements of religion relative to less activist liberal or 'moderate' majorities is also likely to increase.

²¹ http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_290510.pdf

Numbers and distribution of faith schools

The term ‘faith school’ is relatively recent. It is understandably rejected by many since it is seriously misleading insofar as it homogenises this hugely diverse category of schools. Moreover, the term has often been associated with minority faiths and controversies associated with them, but also applies to the far larger number of schools of all Christian denominations which are part of the school system. Some argue that ‘schools with a religious character’ is a less loaded way of speaking about this domain of schools. Whilst we acknowledge the limitations of the term ‘faith schools’, we have decided to use it because of its simplicity and currency, but to spell out what it includes. We also note some indications that the churches and/or governing bodies may be beginning to give greater emphasis to the faith element of the schools in their care.

The table below is based on the Department for Education’s Statistics First Release (SFR 15/2014, Table 2c).²²

Table 1: SCHOOLS OF DIFFERENT CATEGORIES

	Primary	Secondary	Total State	Independent
Total (24,347)	16,788	3,329	20,117	2,411
Of which:-				
No religious character	10,577	2,696	13,273	
% non-faith schools	63% primary	81% secondary		
% Faith schools	6,211	633	6,844	
% faith schools	37% primary	19% secondary		
Of which:-				
CofE	4,394 (VC 2,235)	207 (VC 26)	4,601	1,000
Catholic	1,662	324	1,986	150
Other Christian	101	77 (VC51)	178	
% Christian schools	99.1% primary	96.1% secondary		
Jewish	36	12	48	60
Muslim	9	9	18	140
Sikh	5	3	8	
% non-Christian schools	0.9% primary	3.9% secondary		
Other	4	1	5	

²²https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335176/2014_SPC_SFR_Text_v101.pdf

These categorisations are not always straightforward and the recent development of ‘academies’ (which includes all ‘free schools’) complicates the situation further. For example, the table includes about 400 free schools which are either open or have been approved, and whose number may double in the next 5 years.

A number of immediate conclusions can be drawn which provide a helpful sense of perspective when considering the often controversial issues which arise in debates about faith schools.

- (1) 37% of all state primary schools and 19% of all secondary schools in England are faith schools. They have roots in every community in England. This is a reflection of the historical origins of our faith schools, as described above. The fact that these proportions remain so large means that any serious reform would be a major educational and political undertaking. This is not itself an argument against reform but is a serious factor to be taken into account when considering it. It helps to account for the previous reluctance to make changes.
- (2) The flip side of those figures is that 81% of all state secondary schools, and 63% of state primary schools do not have a religious character, i.e. are not faith schools. The overwhelming majority of children are educated in state schools with no religious character. What happens in regard to religion in these schools is by far the most important dimension of any discussion about the place of religion in education, simply because of the number of children involved.
- (3) The churches dominate the state faith school sector: 99.1% of all faith primary (state) schools and 96.1% of all faith secondary (state) schools are Christian in character. The proportion of non-Christian faith state schools is tiny.

Types of faith school

Faith schools within the state system, where no student pays fees, fall into two broad categories in both of which the school building and site are owned by the church, foundation or trust.

In the first (‘voluntary controlled’) the local education authority funds repairs and capital projects and appoints a majority of the governing body, though the church appoints some governors. The local education authority employs the teachers and is also the admissions authority. Nearly all voluntary controlled schools are Church of England, but Religious Education normally follows the local agreed syllabus, like other local schools. The acts of collective worship vary from a very Christian focus to broadly inclusive.

In the second category (‘voluntary aided’) the governing body raises the cost of repairs and capital projects with 90% grant from the government. Most Catholic,

Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Hindu schools are voluntary aided. The sponsoring religious body appoints a majority of the school governors, and the governing body appoints and employs the teachers. The governing body is the admissions authority. Religious education and worship follow the practice of the sponsoring faith.

There is also a group of schools, 'Foundations with an Anglican trust' and 'Academies designated as having Church of England character' which are similar to voluntary aided schools except that the foundation or Trust owns the school. The trustees of Academies provide some set-up capital, and the government provides revenue and continuing capital funding. The church appoints only a minority of governors. In some schools Religious Education follows the locally agreed syllabus, though in others Religious Education and worship are distinctively Anglican and may follow a syllabus specified by the Diocese, though not usually in a strongly confessional sense.

It can be seen from the above description that 'voluntary controlled' faith schools are similar to local authority community schools in relation to school admissions policy, employment of teachers, the Religious Education curriculum and general funding, although they might have a Christian ethos. Like Anglican Foundations and Academies, they do not usually have a strongly confessional character though they are expected to have a distinctively Christian character and are inspected accordingly.

Overall, 76.3% of all English state primary schools and 83.3% of all English state secondary schools either have no religious character or are 'voluntary controlled'. In practice these 'faith schools' are not all that different from non-faith schools.

There are no 'voluntary controlled' Catholic and Jewish Schools, but 87.4% of all Church of England secondary schools, 49.1% of Church of England primary schools, and 33.8% of 'Other Christian' secondary schools are not 'voluntary controlled'.

In addition to the state schools described above there are about 2,400 independent schools in England of which approximately 1,000 have a Church of England ethos. There are about 140 Muslim independent schools in the UK, mainly affiliated to the Association of Muslim Schools,²³ which acts as an umbrella body for registered Muslim schools in the UK, including 13 state-funded Muslim schools.

Although not state schools, there are also around 700 unregulated madrassas in Britain, attended by approximately 100,000 children of Muslim parents. These are essentially supplementary schools, in principle not dissimilar from Christian Sunday schools and Hebrew schools, which many children attend in addition to their other day school. The leader of the Muslim Parliament of Great Britain has called for them to be subject to government inspection following publication of a 2006 report that found some instances of physical and sexual abuse.²⁴

²³ <http://ams-uk.org/>

²⁴ <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2006/mar/22/schools.uk1>

ACT OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Legal guidance

The most recent non-statutory guidance for schools concerning the Act of Collective Worship²⁵ was Circular 1/94 which was published more than 20 years ago, on January 31st 1994.²⁶ Its introduction states:-

All maintained schools must provide religious education and daily collective worship for all registered pupils and promote their spiritual, moral and cultural development....

Collective worship in county schools and equivalent grant-maintained schools must be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character, though not distinctive of any particular Christian denomination.

The parental right of withdrawal from RE and collective worship and the safeguards for teachers are unchanged.

Information and inspection requirements apply to RE and collective worship.

The Department for Education website republishes at the 'Ethos' section of its website this same 20-year old advice to guide contemporary practice.²⁷ No other piece of departmental advice is as outdated, and of course the fundamentals were established in 1944, since when there has been minimal amendment.

Paragraphs 50-88, and Annex G of this guidance set out interpretations and information about 'worship', as opposed to 'assembly', the right to withdraw, how the worship may be organised, the meaning of 'Christian' etc. Some have described this guidance as 'disastrously muddled',²⁸ since in certain paragraphs (notably 57, 59 and 63 on page 21) it appears to license a confessional act of Christian worship, which only practising Christians could undertake.

²⁵ There is a distinction between 'corporate' and 'collective' worship. The former is that of a community of shared religious beliefs and the latter an educational gathering wherein differences in belief are acknowledged and appreciated.

²⁶ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/281929/Collective_worship_in_schools.pdf

²⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/departmental-advice-schools#ethos>

²⁸ Private correspondence

In 1997 a substantive consultation was organized by the RE Council of England and Wales, the National Association of SACREs and the Inter Faith Network for the UK.²⁹ This came close to arriving at a politically viable consensus for an alternative, but was challenged by a ‘last-minute rearguard action’³⁰ and so no change took place. Circular 1/94, despite its inadequacies, remained in force.

Since 2012 the status of Circular 1/94 has become even more confused. The National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (NASACRE) and the Association of Religious Education Inspectors, Advisors and Consultants (AREIAC) wrote to the Secretary of State for Education in March 2012 suggesting that Circular 1/94 should be withdrawn. NASACRE and AREIAC subsequently issued a statement in October 2012, stating that:

In the course of this correspondence it has been made clear that 1/94 has no legal or semi legal status, nor does the Circular have a quasi-legal status. It does not represent the Government’s official advice on collective worship which schools are in some sense obliged to follow. Officials state that in this area local determination is a key strength and for this reason all schools and Academies can choose whether or not to use the Circular.

However no action was taken to withdraw the Circular, which remains on the Department of Education website. Indeed the government’s most recent guidance on the curriculum, issued in December 2014 states quite bluntly and without qualification: ‘All state schools are also required to make provision for a daily act of collective worship’.³¹ In any case it is difficult to see how the withdrawal of government guidance, without any replacement, could moderate the letter of the law.

In April 2004 the then Her Majesty’s Inspector of Schools, Sir David Bell, gave a lecture which included reflections on the then state of the act of collective worship, during which he reported that 76% of secondary schools were failing to meet their legal requirements.³² More recently, in 2011, a ComRes poll commissioned by the BBC found that only 28% of pupils attended daily worship at their school, and 60% of the public did not think the requirement to provide a daily act of worship should be enforced.

The two most recent reports from OFSTED on Religious Education - ‘Transforming religious education’ in June 2010³³ and ‘Realising the Potential’ in

²⁹ http://www.cstg.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/culham_cw_reviewed.pdf

³⁰ Private correspondence.

³¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4/the-national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4>

³² <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2004/apr/21/ofsted.schools>

³³ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141124154759/http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/surveys-and-good-practice/t/Transforming%20religious%20education.pdf>

October 2013³⁴ - do not analyse the observance and educational impact of the requirement for an Act of Collective Worship in schools, no doubt because collective worship is seen as distinct from religious education.

Similarly, the March 2014 report 'Schools with Soul, A new approach to Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural education (SMSC)'³⁵ from the Royal Society of Arts calls for innovatory approaches to SMSC but makes no suggestion that the requirement for an act of collective worship has any positive role to play.

The reality is that the legal regime is both unclear and more honoured in the breach than the observance. An unhealthy culture of confusion and, in some cases, even institutional dishonesty, exists as OFSTED and schools try to justify their practices in this area. In policy terms the act of collective worship has become a marginal issue which no one sees much value in addressing. We contest that view and think that there is a need to reach a more appropriate and well-founded settlement.

The Options

We need a healthy and up-to-date legal framework which reflects modern religious and educational life and practices.

There are four options:-

- (1) Maintain the current law, guidance and formal arrangements but for all practical purposes treat it as a dead letter; effectively unenforced and probably unenforceable. This is broadly the current situation.
- (2) Maintain the current law, guidance and formal arrangements and put great effort into forcing schools to honour them.
- (3) Maintain the statutory requirement for some form of assembly which would promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, prefigured in the 1944 legislation and reinforced in the 1988 Education Act.³⁶
- (4) Abolish the statutory requirement altogether and leave the issue to governors and heads of every school to decide what is appropriate for the particular circumstances of their own school, subject to non-statutory government guidance and inspection by OFSTED.

³⁴ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141124154759/http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/surveys-and-good-practice/r/Religious%20education%20%20realising%20the%20potential.pdf>

³⁵ <http://www.thersa.org/action-research-centre/learning-cognition-and-creativity/education/reports-and-events/reports/schools-with-soul#download-report>

³⁶ The Executive of the Religious Education Council made a similar proposal to the Secretary of State for Education at the time of the 1988 Act.

We consider each of these options, first (1) and (2), then (3) and (4).

Maintaining the current law

As already observed, the existing law and associated arrangements reflect an era of religious practice and belief which is now long gone. There have been many significant changes in religion and belief, including decline in the number of people regularly worshipping at Christian church services, growth in the number and visibility of non-Christian religions, and a rise in the number of people describing themselves as non-religious and/or 'spiritual' rather than 'religious'.³⁷ Christian commitment has declined with each living generation and of course its nature has also changed.

The current legal requirement for a daily act of collective worship has remained in place whilst all this has happened. That seems to show that it has done little or nothing to affect this process of change. Indeed it has even been argued that the inadequate nature of the experience of religion in schools (and possibly universities and colleges as well) may have had an impact in reducing traditional religious practice.

There is no reason to believe that maintaining the current legal requirement for the act of collective worship would do anything at all to reverse the direction of the changes in religious practice which have been taking place. And there is little doubt that the widespread failure of schools to meet the requirement of the law would continue, and probably deepen.

The first option of leaving the law in place, but as a dead letter, therefore offers no gains in long-term stability, and will continue to bring the law into disrepute and inhibit the efforts of those who want to approach religion and belief in a more creative and positive way.

The second option, of a government-led effort to enforce the law more rigorously, so that more schools fulfil their legal obligations, would highlight clashes of conscience and belief. This would certainly be damaging, and possibly even explosive, in certain environments.

So there seems to us no merit in maintaining the current legal requirement for collective worship, either from the point of view of encouraging spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, or of promoting knowledge and understanding of religion and belief in today's world. Instruction in a particular faith for those

³⁷ Woodhead and Catto, *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*, op cit.

parents who desire that for their children is often best done in the family and community, perhaps reinforced by supplementary education, such as Sunday schools or madrassas (though there may be some issues of regulation here).

Alternative approaches

If the law is not to fall further into disrespect and disrepute, the choice is between the third and fourth of the above options: either modifying the legal requirement for collective worship to permit individual schools to conduct assemblies in a way which reflects their circumstances, or abolishing the requirement altogether.

In our view, there is a very good case for both, though on balance we favour removing the requirement altogether and so repealing those parts of legislation which require schools to provide daily acts of collective worship.

The value of assemblies in school, at least for some part of every week, is widely recognized. There are of course practical issues about school size, diversity of the school population, teacher beliefs, timetable requirements and so on which provide genuine constraints. But in principle, there is widespread support for the significant social, educational and cultural value of such assemblies.

For example, a great deal of good work has been done to develop larger assemblies which offer things that are difficult to achieve in the classroom, such as genuinely reflective time, imaginative means of communication, and opportunities for student input and student-led events in a collective setting.

We strongly support the widely held view that it is important to provide for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of today's pupils and offer a creative space in which to debate, discuss and learn as well as to reflect or worship on the qualities that make us human, particularly with the broadening of Britain's religious and cultural identity. Communal school assemblies contribute significantly to this and can be used in ways which fit into the environment of which schools and pupils are a part.

The case for this element of school life is becoming stronger all the time in the midst of the wider pressures of the world, and there is widespread support for an approach to assemblies which is much broader and more flexible than that permitted by the current legislation.

In July 2014 the then Bishop of Oxford, the Rt Revd John Pritchard, who was then Chair of the Church of England's Board of Education, said in an interview with BBC Radio 4:

I think the problem is with the word ‘worship’. It worked in the 1940s and so on, but worship is by definition a voluntary activity, and I think it may be better to reframe the discussion, and to call this time that we are discussing spiritual reflection ... I think this reframing in terms of spiritual reflection might be helpful, might liberate schools if we reframe what we are doing, informed by Christian values.

It is also interesting to note that at the end of 2013 first the Church of Scotland alone,³⁸ then jointly with the Humanist Society of Scotland in January 2014,³⁹ called for a change in the law to allow the statutory requirement for religious observance in schools to be renamed ‘Time for Reflection’.

If it were thought essential to lay down a statutory obligation for a daily school assembly of this type (as opposed to our preference for leaving individual schools to make their own decisions), the current legal requirement could be amended from:-

All pupils in attendance at a maintained school shall on each school day take part in an act of collective worship... the collective worship required in the school shall be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character...and is of a broadly Christian character if it reflects the broad traditions of Christian belief without being distinctive of any particular Christian denomination.⁴⁰

to another formulation, for example:-

All pupils in attendance at a maintained school shall on each school day take part in a period of reflection which addresses their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

This is a sensible approach but we believe that it does bring with it a further important difficulty which is that any new statutory wording would itself be bound to stimulate significant debate with difficulties of definition and interpretation in practice. That is the inevitable consequence of trying to specify this requirement in legally-binding language. Indeed an important reason why change has not been seriously considered in this area for so long is that such controversies tend to generate far more heat than light and can be quite divisive. The 1988 Lords debate on this is a good illustration.

Moreover the parliamentary debate about this change would be likely to raise

³⁸ http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news_and_events/news/archive/articles/2013/reflection_time_in_schools_shows_what_we_can_learn_together

³⁹ <http://news.stv.tv/politics/261833-church-of-scotland-and-humanist-society-issue-schools-reflection-call/>

⁴⁰ Sections 7 and 8, Education Reform Act 1988

debates about whether all schools, including independent schools, should be under a similar legal requirement.

We believe that a far more effective and more productive way of making the necessary change is to remove the requirement in law and replace it with non-statutory guidance and the duty of OFSTED to inspect this aspect of every school.

We do appreciate that many are worried that removal of any legal requirement for some form of assembly would lead to a decline in school assemblies as governing bodies may prefer to use the time in other less beneficial ways. We do not share that concern and are confident that the very widespread support which currently exists for school assemblies would prevent any such decline. There is an example in the existing practice of independent schools which continue to hold assemblies, though under no legal obligation to do so.

However we accept that there is concern and think that the best way to address this is to require the governors of every school to have a statement and strategy about the way in which they propose to promote Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education, and to use school community assemblies as an important part of that strategy. OFSTED would be required to pay particular attention to the approach of schools in this respect and to comment explicitly, as part of their inspections, on the school's performance in this area.

This approach would be reinforced by government non-statutory guidance, including giving good examples of the wide range of ways in which effective assemblies can be organized, and in addition we suggest that OFSTED would be asked regularly to review the success of this whole approach.

We believe that removing the element of obligation, combined with the approach described, will rejuvenate assemblies, rather than the opposite.

A final complication, particularly if the legal requirement is to be retained, is the right of parents to withdraw their children from this part of the school day.

This right of withdrawal was established in the 1944 and 1988 Acts in order to give parents the right to withdraw their children from 'religious instruction'.

This was entirely reasonable at the time, but it is now much less clear that parents should have the right to withdraw their children from 'religious education', and 'spiritual, moral, social and cultural development'. Indeed we would say that there is no case for a right to withdraw a child from 'religious education' as opposed to 'religious instruction', though the legal issues under the European Convention of Human Rights would need to be explored.

There is also the related question of the right of children themselves, aged under

16, who have formed their own views on matters of religion and belief, to be withdrawn from, or stay in, assemblies against the decision of their parents. To neglect this might appear to deny children their freedom of conscience under Article 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights⁴¹ and Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁴²

Though we are clear that the right to withdraw should not remain under the new arrangements we recommend, there are legal issues to be resolved. These would be more tricky with a redefined statutory requirement than if the statute was abolished altogether.

So in summary, in an era where schools have more and more responsibility for their curriculum, values and ethos, it seems to us better to leave them to work out for themselves what to do about school assemblies, within the overall ethos of the school, the requirements of the curriculum, and non-statutory advice from the government.

We accept that the more limited option of revising and rewording the statutory requirement is an option which would certainly improve the current state of affairs, but we think this more limited approach would retain a number of difficulties, as well as the unhelpful element of compulsion and obligation, which we believe it would be better to avoid.

Recommendation on the Act of Collective Worship

We recommend that the current requirement in statute for an Act of Collective Worship should be abolished, and the decision about the form and character of school assemblies should be left to the governors of individual schools. Schools should be required to set out their statement and strategy for promoting Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education, with school community assemblies as an important part of that strategy, upon which they would be inspected by OFSTED. The government should provide non-statutory guidance to help achieve this.

⁴¹ 'Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.'

⁴² 'States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.'

THE CURRICULUM

The Quality of Religious Education

In recent years criticism of the teaching of Religious Education in English schools has been substantial and authoritative.

The two most recent reports from OFSTED on Religious Education - 'Transforming religious education' in June 2010⁴³ and 'Realising the Potential' in October 2013⁴⁴ - are extremely critical of standards and the quality of provision. However they do (particularly in 2010) contain some good news, particularly in relation to student recognition of the importance of the subject:-

More pupils recognize the value of RE and nearly two thirds of them left school with an accredited qualification in the subject in 2012.

Examination entries in religious studies at GCSE and GCE A level have continued to rise each year since 2006, reinforcing a key success of the subject in recent years. Results in the full course GCSE are rising, although for the short course GCSE the results show only limited improvement, with around 50% to 55% of those entered gaining the higher A* to C grades. Results at GCE A and AS level have remained broadly the same since 2006.

As reported in 2007, a key success of RE in the past decade has been the improvement in pupils' attitudes towards the subject. In most of the schools visited, pupils clearly understood the importance of learning about the diversity of religion and belief in contemporary society.

A major success of RE is the way that it supports the promotion of community cohesion.⁴⁵

Opinion polls, research carried out on the Religion and Society research

⁴³ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141124154759/http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/surveys-and-good-practice/t/Transforming%20religious%20education.pdf>

⁴⁴ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141124154759/http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/surveys-and-good-practice/r/Religious%20education%20%20realising%20the%20potential.pdf>

⁴⁵ The governing bodies of maintained schools were given the duty to promote community cohesion in Section 38 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and OFSTED is required to inspect the exercise of this duty.

programme, and Westminster Faith Debates on religious education, reinforce such concerns.

Both OFSTED reports give detailed accounts of the problems which currently exist, for example (from the 2013 report except where stated):-

Too many pupils were leaving school with low levels of subject knowledge and understanding.

Achievement and teaching in RE in the primary schools visited were less than good in six in 10 schools. The quality of the curriculum was less than good in nearly two thirds of the primary schools visited.

In three-fifths of the lessons seen, both in primary schools and throughout Key Stage 3, a key weakness was the superficial nature of pupils' subject knowledge and understanding. Achievement and teaching in RE in the secondary schools visited were only good or better in just under half of the schools. The picture was stronger at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form than at Key Stage 3. The quality of teaching was rarely outstanding and, at Key Stage 3, was less than good in around half of the lessons observed. The quality of the curriculum was good or better in just under two-fifths of the secondary schools.

Inspectors judged pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christianity to be good or outstanding in about 6% of the schools and inadequate in about 10% of them, making teaching about Christianity one of the weakest aspects of RE provision.

There were significant inconsistencies in the way humanism and other non-religious beliefs were taught, and some uncertainties about the relationship between fostering respect for pupils' beliefs and encouraging open, critical, investigative learning in RE. (2010)

Assessment in RE remained a major weakness. It was inadequate in a fifth of the secondary schools and a third of the primary schools.

Leadership and management of RE were good or better in half the schools visited; however, weaknesses were widespread in monitoring provision for RE and in planning to tackle the areas identified for improvement.

Most of the secondary schools in the survey with sixth forms did not fully meet the statutory requirement to provide core RE for all students beyond the age of 16. (2010)

Although the proportion of pupils taking GCSE and GCE examinations in

RE remains high, in 2011 nearly 250 schools and academies did not enter any pupils for an accredited qualification in GCSE.

The effectiveness of the current statutory arrangements for RE varies considerably. Recent changes in education policy are having a negative impact on the provision for RE in some schools and on the capacity of local authorities and SACREs to carry out their statutory responsibilities to monitor and support it.

Other criticisms and concerns include an insufficient supply of well-qualified specialist teachers, inadequate time for teacher training for both specialists and non-specialists, lack of availability of advice, and inadequate continuing professional development for teachers.

Both these reports and their predecessor, 'Making sense of religion'⁴⁶ in 2007, called upon the Department for Education to review the current statutory framework within which Religious Education is offered.

From this depressing description of overall failure (despite substantial patches of good practice and excellent teaching), which offers little comfort to defenders of the current statutory framework, *we identify four aspects of the OFSTED commentary as particularly significant.*

The first, and most important, is a recurrent theme relating to confusion about the whole purpose of the subject. For example:-

In secondary schools, weaknesses in the curriculum often related to a lack of clarity about the purpose of the subject at Key Stage 3.

Confusion about the purpose and aims of RE had a negative impact on the quality of teaching, curriculum planning and the effectiveness of assessment.

The current survey found further evidence of teachers' confusion about what they were trying to achieve in RE and how to translate this into effective planning, teaching and assessment.

Confusion over the proper relationship between religious education, ethics, moral guidance and community cohesion is a typical example, but there are others.

An important recommendation of the 2013 report was that the Department for Education should work in partnership with the professional associations for RE to clarify the aims and purposes of RE and explore how these might be translated into high-quality planning, teaching and assessment. This may well best be

⁴⁶ [http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/11105/1/Making%20sense%20of%20religion%20PDF%20format\).pdf](http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/11105/1/Making%20sense%20of%20religion%20PDF%20format).pdf)

expressed through a mix of intrinsic and instrumental (personal and social) aims for RE.⁴⁷

The second important recurrent theme of the OFSTED assessment is the need for wholesale reconsideration of the operation of local determination of syllabuses. This was common to both the 2010 and the 2013 reports and formed the basis of strong recommendations from OFSTED to review the system:-

The effectiveness of the current statutory arrangements for RE varies considerably. Recent changes in education policy are having a negative impact on the provision for RE in some schools and on the capacity of local authorities and SACREs to carry out their statutory responsibilities to monitor and support it.

The structures that underpin the local determination of the RE curriculum have failed to keep pace with changes in the wider educational world. As a result, many local authorities are struggling to fulfil their responsibility to promote high-quality religious education.

The gulf between local authorities that support and monitor RE effectively and those that find this role impossible continues to widen. Whether local determination still provides the best basis for improving the quality of RE in schools should therefore be reviewed urgently.

We believe that these criticisms now have widespread support.

A third, perhaps less important, theme is a comment on the time available for RE in the curriculum:-

The provision made for GCSE in the majority of the secondary schools surveyed failed to provide enough curriculum time for pupils to extend and deepen their learning sufficiently.

This comment reflects the fact that RE is not part of the National Curriculum, despite being legally required, a concern which is reinforced by frequent references to the isolation of RE from the rest of the curriculum.

The final clear theme from the OFSTED Report, also very important, is the current lack of focus upon getting the RE curriculum right. The 2013 Report comments:-

Since 2011, a range of RE professional associations including the RE Council for England and Wales (REC), National Association of Teachers of RE

⁴⁷ Inclusive Study of Religions and other Worldviews in Publicly Funded Schools in Democratic Societies' by Robert Jackson in European University Institute ReligioWest Project book, Jan 2015, <http://www.eui.eu/Project/ReligioWest/Home.aspx>

(NATRE), the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE), and the Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants (AREIAC) have expressed concerns to OFSTED that recent changes in education policy have been having a negative impact on the provision of and support for RE, both nationally and locally. These concerns have been reinforced by the 2013 All Party Parliamentary Group report which concluded:

RE has been the unintended victim of a combination of major policy changes rather than the subject of a deliberate attack. Nevertheless, the combined impact of so many severe setbacks in such a short time has been to convey the message that, even though it is a statutory subject, RE is of less value than other subjects.

The policies referred to have included: the decisions to exclude RE from the list of EBacc subjects and to remove short courses from the headline measures of school performance; the reduction in teacher training places for RE and the withdrawal of bursaries for RE trainee teachers; the way in which the roles and responsibilities of local authorities and SACREs for RE have not kept pace with wider changes: these include the expansion of the academies programme and reductions in local government spending; the decision not to fund an RE subject review in England to run in parallel with the Department for Education review of the National Curriculum, and the loss of publicly funded national support for curriculum development work in the subject.

This lack of focus clearly contributes seriously to the demoralisation and confusion which the OFSTED Report describes. These OFSTED conclusions need to be taken seriously, and the reassessment of the 1944 settlement which we recommend can help by directing attention to the means by which performance in this area can be improved.

It is worth emphasising again that despite the very real problems that do exist there are very many outstanding examples of teaching Religious Education, as evidenced by the number of schools achieving the recently introduced RE Quality Mark in the last three years, which simply illuminate what might be possible in a more positive environment.

Clarification: discriminating between three senses of religious education

Debate about religion in schools is bedevilled by confusion about what is meant by ‘religious education’. Failure to discriminate between legitimate and illegitimate forms of RE in schools fuels much criticism and defensiveness about the place of religion in our school system.

To cut through this, we propose a distinction between three senses of ‘religious education’, and suggest that the term should mainly be reserved for the third use.

1. Instruction

Religious instruction is that which takes place from a faith standpoint, and its purpose is to instruct in that standpoint. It does not involve critical questioning or consideration of alternative religious or non-religious options.

Such instruction is what many critics of religious education in schools have in mind. They may speak of ‘indoctrination’. In principle, there is nothing wrong with religious instruction, or indeed with indoctrination (‘doctrine’ = credo, a set of beliefs or convictions), nor with the process of trying to embed young people within a particular religious or non-religious tradition. These are legitimate enterprises in a society which upholds freedom of religion and belief.

However, there are legitimate concerns about religious instruction taking place in schools. We agree that such instruction or ‘indoctrination’ should not take place in schools when it (a) allows little or no room for questioning or criticism by pupils and/or (b) ignores (or even distorts and caricatures) other forms of religion and belief, and grants them no legitimacy.

We believe that if religious education is characterised by these features (a) and/or (b), it should be separate from the religious education curriculum which all schools should provide. It should take place outside the school, in families, Sunday Schools, madrassas etc. (though there may be a need for inspection, to safeguard against abuse or coercion).

Religious instruction should be principally the responsibility of religious communities and families. It should take place outside the school day, and should only take place on the premises of schools if those schools also properly provide the pupils involved with religious education on the basis of the legally required RE syllabus.

Religious instruction which involves distortion and caricature of other traditions, denial of their right to exist, and/or any element of coercion, should have no place on school premises, even outside the school day.

2. Formation

It is normal for parents to wish to form their children in certain ways and imbue them with certain beliefs and values, and natural for those whose children attend a faith school to expect that school to form them within a particular religious tradition. (Arguably, this also occurs in non-faith schools, even if not in such a self-conscious way.)

Collective formation is an important and often powerful aspect of formation, with an important role to play in shaping sensibilities – beyond what is possible for parents alone. Collective gatherings in a school setting can help foster social virtues, complement a sense of individuality, and balance a growing emphasis on individual achievement.

We believe that it is acceptable for state-funded faith schools to offer religious formation, both within the informal curriculum (e.g. school assemblies) and the formal curriculum, subject to two provisos – (a) that there is room for agency, questioning and criticism by pupils (b) that such formation does not ignore, distort or caricature other forms of religion or belief.

We think that it would be helpful if all faith schools which offer religious formation state this clearly, and take care to inform prospective parents and pupils about the nature of this formation (e.g. not just ‘Christian’, but ‘evangelical Christian’, ‘liberal Catholic’, ‘traditionalist Catholic’, ‘broad CofE’, ‘Orthodox Judaism’ etc.) We think it would also be desirable if non-faith schools were equally clear and self-conscious about the sort of formation they offer (e.g. ‘liberal humanist’, ‘secular egalitarian’).

3. *Religious Education*

Most people accept the need for all children to be brought up to understand the importance of religions; to appreciate their history and social significance; to be familiar with their beliefs, customs and practices; to be aware of the ways in which they have shaped the world and human lives; to be able to understand the meaning of religious language and symbols; to be able to form and articulate their own values and beliefs in relation to such understanding.

It is this kind of ‘religious education’, which we believe enjoys broad understanding and support, which is the main focus of this pamphlet, and which we would like to see placed on a firmer footing in our schools, on the same basis as other subjects.

Such religious education is critical, outward looking, and dialogical. It recognises diversity, and encourages students to learn ‘about’ and ‘from’ religious and non-religious worldviews. It involves both ‘understanding religions’ and ‘religious understanding.’⁴⁸ It develops knowledge about a range of beliefs and values, an ability to articulate and develop one’s own values and commitments, and the capacity to debate and engage with others. These are essential skills in a multi-faith society and a diverse but connected world.

⁴⁸ Cox E., ‘Understanding religion and religious understanding’, *British Journal of Religious Education*, 6(1), pp. 3-13, 1983.

Religious education should be based upon a commonly understood overall curriculum, which seeks to gain the confidence of all religions and beliefs, in that each is taught with proper respect for its own assessment of itself and also accepts the considerable diversity of belief within faiths. This should take place in all schools, within an even stronger requirement for schools which are substantially funded by the state. The state is entitled to insist that it will only fund schools that teach religions in accordance with such a commonly understood overall curriculum and that it will not provide funding for the teaching of faiths which do not genuinely respect the legitimacy of other belief systems.

In our view, it would be a mistake to remove the requirement for religious education from the statute book. This is a time when it is increasingly important for all citizens to comprehend religious belief and practices, as well as to have the space and opportunity to explore and develop their own beliefs and values.

Since 1944 the nature and place of religion in our society has changed, but religion and belief, experienced and practised in a far more diverse way, remains a very important part of our society. Therefore the place of religion and belief within our education system should change to reflect modern realities. But there is absolutely no case to remove it, as some suggest. In fact we need a more coherent and effective means of increasing the quality of religious education throughout our school system.

In this context it is interesting to note that the Scottish education system uses the phrase 'Religious and Moral Education'. The Scottish government's document on 'Principles and Practice'⁴⁹ sets out the underlying approach. We believe that this name is more accurate than 'Religious Education' in modern times, and recommend that consideration be given to using 'RME' rather than 'RE' in describing this part of the statutory curriculum.

We need also to take account of the very significant changes in the nature of schools in Britain. The role of local authorities has changed and a wide range of different publicly funded schools has grown up. All face similar issues in deciding how best to teach about religion.

⁴⁸ <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningandteaching/curriculumareas/rme/nondenominational/principlesandpractice/index.asp>

A national curriculum and syllabus for Religious Education

Sections 2 and 8 of the 1988 Education Reform Act state that the basic curriculum must include:-

provision for religious education for all registered pupils at the school; and ... any agreed syllabus ... shall reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.

In each local authority 'Agreed Syllabus Conferences' are required to determine the locally agreed Religious Education syllabus, according to local circumstances. There are thus in principle 152 different RE syllabuses in England, though of course many are very similar and many variations are not significant. Individual schools are required to design curriculum and subject content on the basis of the locally agreed syllabus requirements.

This locally agreed syllabus provides the basis of religious education in maintained and community schools, as well as many faith schools and academies, whose funding agreement usually specifies use of this local syllabus. We address the position in other faith schools below.

The membership of agreed syllabus conferences, and the related SACREs, is determined locally, within a national statutory framework and in some accordance with local religious and other characteristics. Non-theistic beliefs such as humanism participate in different ways throughout the country although humanist organisations cannot be full members of agreed syllabus conferences under the existing law, and have been excluded in some local areas though they participate fully in others.

The publication in 2004 of a non-statutory national framework for Religious Education, agreed by all the traditional religions in the UK, including humanists, sought to influence the SACREs, Agreed Syllabus Conferences, and other relevant organisations to move towards a common national pattern, and had wide support. For example, the February 2006 joint statement from the Department for Education and Skills and faith communities on the importance of religious education stated:-

We are fully committed to using the Framework in developing the religious education curriculum for our schools and colleges.⁵⁰

However, this guidance did not change the statutory arrangements, though available evidence does suggest that the majority of local syllabuses do take account

⁵⁰ <https://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2006/02/pr2106b.aspx>

of the national framework, with some significant exceptions.

The existing system has been widely criticised for a number of reasons. Some of these were set out in the OFSTED reports quoted above. In addition, in our increasingly national, indeed global, society and culture it seems anomalous, to put it mildly, to have different RE curricula in different localities within England. Moreover SACREs and agreed syllabus conferences, usually through no fault of their own, do not always find it easy to engage with the whole of the local educational community, let alone national expertise in religion and education.

In each of 2007, 2010 and 2013 OFSTED recommended that the Department for Education should carry out a review of the current statutory arrangements for the local determination of the RE curriculum, and establish stronger mechanisms for supporting and holding to account the work of local authorities, SACREs and Agreed Syllabus Conferences.

We believe that this review is urgent, but do not think that the best way forward is to attempt to strengthen the current legal framework for locally agreed syllabuses. The time has come to accept that such syllabuses are no longer the best means to provide a consistent quality of Religious Education throughout the country.

The kind of commitment which is needed to improve RE teaching, provide better RE resource material, and give real focus to the subject will only come if a national RE curriculum is established.

The law should be amended to require that the curriculum for Religious Education should now be set in accordance with a nationally agreed syllabus and programmes of work. We would suggest that this covers Key Stages 1-3 of the curriculum. We turn below to the discussion about Key Stage 4.

This approach would not be dissimilar to those for the other National Curriculum subjects, but with one very important difference: the nationally agreed syllabus would not be determined by the Secretary of State independently, but in agreement with a newly created national statutory 'Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)' which would be established to discuss this syllabus with the Secretary of State.

This new national SACRE should include relevant experts on religion and education, who should together represent some of the variety of religious and non-religious stances characteristic of the UK today, including the main faith communities and humanism. They should be independent and not act as delegates.

There is a case for simply including RE in the National Curriculum. We can see merits in this approach and would not in principle oppose it. However we believe that the kind of independent National SACRE structure which we recommend, which is more than simply an advisory committee to the Secretary of State for Education, is a good way of maintaining a healthy partnership between religions and the state. Moreover it ensures that proper respect is given to the educational experience and practice of religions, and avoids the danger of the state or any particular government narrowing the focus of RE or changing its aims without agreement.

We suggest that an updated 2004-style non-statutory national framework for Religious Education form the basis of this new syllabus. We believe that it should continue to be the case that, unlike the National Curriculum, Religious Education should not be subject to statutorily prescribed attainment targets, but there would be agreed programmes of study and assessment systems. We would recommend that this nationally-agreed syllabus be reviewed every 5/7 years and thus kept up-to-date.

There are already sensible suggestions on the table for improving the quality of Religious Education. Professional associations and educational professionals have for many years proposed helpful measures for improvement.⁵¹

In October 2013 the Religious Education Council of England and Wales, with a range of member bodies encompassing the whole range of interest and experience in religious education, published its review of ‘Religious Education in England’,⁵² with a Foreword from the Secretary of State for Education. This offers a national curriculum framework for RE comprising a non-statutory programme of study which would be straightforward to replicate in a statutory context. It also offers, at Appendix 2, very helpful reflections upon the way which assessment and the measurement of attainment could be addressed in this context. Useful recommendations have also been made more widely, including in the Council of Europe.⁵³

We also note that as part of its overall review of GCSEs and A levels the

⁵¹ These include assuring the supply of properly qualified teachers, and improved continuing professional development. We need many more teachers who have a deep knowledge and understanding of religious and cultural diversity. This also raises issues about university courses in religious studies and theology, and the way in which teacher training has been cut in recent years. There has also been a decrease in specialist advice to teachers, particularly from local authority advisers who used to arrange substantial in-service courses and encourage and facilitate networks of serving teachers. High-quality support remains important, not least for non-specialist RE teachers (which includes almost all primary teachers, and many in secondary education as well).

⁵² <http://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Free%20Resources/2013%20Review%20of%20Religious%20Education%20in%20England.pdf>

government is currently consulting on proposed subject content for Religious Studies GCSE, AS and A level, to be introduced from September 2016. Three consultation documents were published in November 2014: ‘Reformed GCSE and A level subject content consultation’,⁵⁴ ‘Draft Religious Studies AS and A level subject content’,⁵⁵ and ‘Religious Studies GCSE subject content’.⁵⁶

The main change proposed at GCSE is the expectation that all students must study two religions. This is an important and welcome shift, applying as it does to faith schools as well as all others, and moving towards a situation in which RE has to cover a wider range of religion and belief. In the longer term, other options, including the study of humanism and other religious and non-religious affiliations should be included.

The recent recommendations of the RE Council mentioned above, and the experience of agreeing the 2004 non-statutory framework, give us confidence that a statutory framework could be agreed without undue difficulty.

Such an agreed syllabus would provide a focus for raising standards of teaching RE, and improving teacher training. It would provide a focus for the development of high-quality and popular teaching materials, enable literacy in religion and belief to be developed more widely than at present, and provide a foundation for lifelong learning.

An important consequence of these changes is that, like the changes which we recommend in relation to the act of collective worship, the argument for parents to have the right to withdraw their children from this part of the curriculum should no longer exist, as the curriculum would have lost its ‘instructional’ or ‘confessional’ nature. We therefore recommend that this right be removed if the changes we recommend are introduced.

⁵³ Robert Jackson’s ‘Signposts – Policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious world views in intercultural education’ offers a helpful analysis of issues of principle and competence in this field <https://book.coe.int/eur/en/human-rights-education-intercultural-education/6101-signposts-policy-and-practice-for-teaching-about-religions-and-non-religious-world-views-in-intercultural-education.html> published 2014

⁵⁴ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/372136/Reformed_GCSE_and_A_level_subject_content_consultation.pdf

⁵⁵ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/381388/Religious_Studies_AS_and_A_level_subject_content_for_consultation.pdf

⁵⁶ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/371723/Religious_Studies_GCSE_subject_content_for_consultation.pdf

Extending the agreed syllabus to all schools

The arrangements for determining the RE curriculum are complicated in schools which are not maintained community schools (which are required to teach from the locally agreed syllabus). The latest guidance from the Department for Education (February 1st 2010, perhaps significantly not updated since)⁵⁷ sets the position out clearly:-

Religious Education provision in foundation and voluntary-controlled schools with a religious character is to be provided in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus, in the same way as maintained county schools.

In voluntary-aided schools with a religious character RE is to be determined by the governors and in accordance with the provisions of the trust deed relating to the school or, where there is no provision in the trust deed, with the religion or denomination mentioned in the order designating the school as having a religious character.

A further complication is that in both types of school special arrangements have by law to be made to meet parents' wishes if they prefer their children to receive RE in accordance with an approved syllabus which the school is not using.

There are no specific curriculum requirements for independent schools. They have a broad obligation to be registered with the Department for Education. As a condition of registration they must meet certain standards which set out areas of learning which all pupils should experience, but independent schools have considerable flexibility about how they are delivered. All independent schools must also reach and maintain a satisfactory standard in respect of the quality of education provided, and the spiritual, moral, social and cultural developments of pupils.

The government has recently taken powers to strengthen its guidance to independent schools in this area, and notably to promote what it describes as 'fundamental British values'. In November 2013, following legislation, it issued guidance, 'Improving the Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) Development of Pupils: Departmental advice for independent schools, academies and free schools',⁵⁸ subsequently updated in November 2014,⁵⁹ and then reinforced

⁵⁷ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/190260/DCSF-00114-2010.pdf

⁵⁸ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/268826/dept_advice_template_smscadvicenov13.pdf

⁵⁹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/380396/Improving_the_spiritual_moral_social_and_cultural_SMSC_development_of_pupils_supplementary_information.pdf

with a ministerial letter in January 2015.⁶⁰

The main providers and sponsors of faith schools, including some independent schools, are in general committed to working closely with the locally agreed syllabus and the non-statutory national framework for religious education. In ‘Faith in the System’, they agreed with the Government that they:-

believe that all faith schools should teach pupils about their own faith and foster awareness of the tenets of other faiths and that they recognize the important contribution of RE to developing respect for and sensitivity to others, in particular those whose faith and beliefs are different from their own... and they reaffirm their commitment to using the principles of good religious education enunciated in the non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education when developing and reviewing the RE curriculum for their schools and colleges.⁶¹

We believe that there is a good case to be made for extending the role of the nationally-agreed syllabus which we recommend above to all maintained schools.

We are confident that this nationally-agreed syllabus would retain the commitment of the main faiths, as a result of their involvement in the national SACRE (and perhaps through consultation with the local SACREs) which would draw it up, and their general commitment to joint work of the kind described above.

In these circumstances we believe there is a very good argument for all schools in England, including all voluntary schools and academies, to use this nationally-agreed RE syllabus. The ambition is to achieve this goal through discussion and agreement, but should any independent schools wish to take a significantly different approach, this is a matter which OFSTED could explore in relation to inspecting schools from the point of view of their obligation to maintain a satisfactory standard in respect of the quality of education provided and the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.

We suggest that Government should commit, through discussion with the providers and sponsors of faith schools, to this end. It would be possible to implement this without legislation though a legal change at the same time that the nationally-agreed syllabus is established would be desirable.

These recommendations for some faith schools and for independent schools represent a significant change in the formal position though, we would argue, a less

⁶⁰ <http://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Additional%20Documents/Letter%20to%20SACREs%20Dated%20Jan%202015.pdf>

⁶¹ <http://www.religionlaw.co.uk/FaithInTheSystem.pdf>

significant change in the actual practice of the schools concerned.

The benefit of ensuring that all students in schools of every type in England are educated about religion as accurately as possible, and in a way which reflects the overall values of our society, seems to us a great benefit if it could be achieved.

Religious education after Age 14, and changes in Key Stages 4 and 5

As described earlier, the 1944 Education Act and succeeding legislation requires that religious education (and participation in the Act of Collective Worship) should be part of the syllabus for all students, including those older than 16, registered in either a school with a sixth form, a sixth form college constituted as a school, or in a school working as part of a consortium, except for those withdrawn by their parents. However it is not a requirement in colleges of further education. This is a significant anomaly which in our opinion is unsustainable and arises from an era when the structure of schools and further education colleges was fundamentally different, unlike the situation today.

This anomaly can be resolved either by extending the RE requirement to FE Colleges or by removing it from schools. We believe that the best way forward is to abolish the requirement for RE to be part of the curriculum at Key Stage 5. Our view is reinforced by the reasons covered at the end of Chapter 4 which relate to modern human rights. We believe that the RE requirement should end at the age of 16 in all educational institutions.

The issue of whether or not RE should continue to be required in the curriculum in Key Stage 4, i.e. from 14-16, is far more contentious.

At the moment, the legal requirement for Key Stage 4, as set out in the most recent guidelines (December 2014)⁶² is that maths, science and English have to be provided, as well as physical education, citizenship, and computing. These all fall within the National Curriculum, with religious education and sex and relationship education outside it.

There is a strong case for including RE in the Ebacc as it develops, and we believe that consideration should be given to that.

More widely there is a very good case for overall reform of this part of the national

⁶² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4/the-national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4>

curriculum, within which the position of RE, and indeed the teaching of moral and ethical values in general, needs to be considered. It would clearly be best for the future of RE at Key Stage 4 to be considered in such a context of wider reform. Nevertheless it is worth reflecting upon some of the issues.

Part of the case for ending compulsory RE from Key Stage 4 is that this is in many ways the most pressurized part of the school curriculum, as pupils approach GCSEs and are likely to be focusing upon them. The increased interest in RE GCSEs is encouraging, but little is to be gained by forcing pupils not taking GCSE (and their schools and teachers) to go through the motions of studying RE at this more advanced level, but not really committing to it. This is especially the case if Key Stage 4 remains the stage at which students start to specialize on fewer subjects. Schools would still be required to make RE available at Key Stage 4 for those students who wanted to study it but we believe that removing compulsion at Key Stage 4 would help normalize RE and place it on the same footing as other subjects.

On the other hand, there is also a good case for retaining compulsion. For example, the European REDCo project⁶³ and the work of Warwick University's Religion and Society project⁶⁴ on young people's attitudes to religious diversity show that 13-16 year-old students welcome opportunities for learning about one another's religions and beliefs in the 'safe space' of the classroom, from well-qualified teachers able to facilitate dialogue and discussion competently.

Similarly the case can be made that good, discursive, dialogical RE can be complementary to examination-focused study and that, if RE GCSE becomes more academically demanding and fewer students opt for it, this will leave the majority with no opportunity for engagement with religion, belief and values issues in the classroom.

On balance, and recognising the complexities, we think that when a more holistic change at Key Stage 4 of the National Curriculum is considered, there is a strong case for changing the requirement to study RE to a requirement to study religious, spiritual, moral, ethical, social, and cultural values. Such reform should better integrate RE and other elements of the curriculum such as PSHE, sex and relationship education, and education about values, and help 'de-exceptionalise' RE. This area if study would be different from and complementary to the GCSE in RE.

⁶³ <http://www.redco.uni-hamburg.de/web/3480/3481/index.html>

⁶⁴ <http://erb.unaoc.org/warwick-religions-and-education-research-unit-university-of-warwick-uk/>

Curriculum and Teaching support

All of the interested professional RE associations, as well as OFSTED, are very clear about the need to improve significantly the quality of support for schools and RE teachers, in terms of teaching and educational materials, initial teacher training and continuous professional development.

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education has analysed the challenges faced in improving the quality of RE teaching in ‘RE: The Truth Unmasked’⁶⁵ which sets out a comprehensive set of policy recommendations which deserve attention.

A new approach to assessment may well be required, particularly in a climate where ‘religious literacy’ is or should be a requirement for a very wide range of jobs in both the public and private sectors.

Detailed recommendations in these areas are beyond the scope of this pamphlet, except to say that the status quo is inadequate.

A new role for the local Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs)

Since 1988 the local SACREs have played an important role in developing the relationship between religion and schools. As well as proposing a new national SACRE, we recognise the important contribution made by SACREs and their members.

For this reason, though we argue for the abolition of ‘local agreed syllabus conferences’ and suggest that the RE curriculum should be determined nationally and not locally, we believe that SACREs should be retained, and receive secure government financial support, in order to provide a bridge between local faith communities and the school system as a whole. Their role should explicitly include the responsibility to relate to all schools, whatever their type. It is difficult for SACREs to develop a consistent contribution if their remit does not extend to all schools.

We identify four specific and important roles.

First, SACREs should contribute, in a consultative process with local communities, to the regular recommendations of the national SACRE on the content of the national RE curriculum.

⁶⁵ http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/APPG_RE_-_The_Truth_Unmasked.pdf

Second, SACREs should help implement the RE curriculum locally, for example through informal teacher training and provision of teaching materials, organisation of visits by representatives of different faiths and beliefs to schools, and school visits to faith communities.

Third, SACREs should play a role in promoting the priorities of community cohesion and educating for diversity. For example the Department for Communities and Local Government in July 2008 published 'Face to Face and Side by Side: A framework for partnership in our multi-faith society' which argued:-

SACREs where properly supported by the local authority can act as powerful vehicles for building, appreciating and managing differences in beliefs and values in schools, education more widely and the local community.⁶⁶

And fourth, SACREs should be in a position to advise on the availability of religious instruction locally, for those families and children seeking such provision. They may also be in a position to advise others local bodies on multi-faith issues.

Local SACREs are organisations with a strong track record which are in a good position to develop the relationship between different types and communities of religion and belief, schools, and the wider society. Some have worked collaboratively very successfully to improve the quality of RE in their area. They should be supported and reviewed in this light.

Community Cohesion and 'Radicalisation and Extremism'

It is accepted across government, from all political parties, and across the main faith groups, including those which provide faith schools, that community cohesion is an important function of education and that 'radicalisation and extremism' should be countered. It is widely accepted that views and ideologies which could be used to justify violence and terrorism should be challenged through critical debate, even if holding them is not in itself an offence. Currently, the most serious concerns are those to do with Islamic and far right forms of extremism, but we have noted the growing power of more conservative elements in all religions. There is a growing danger of mutual incomprehension between religious and non-religious people. Religious Education is certainly not the only place where such issues can be dealt with, and in which potentially divisive views need to be discussed and debated, but it is a very important one.

It is also agreed that schools – all schools, including faith schools - are important

⁶⁶ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919132719/http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/898668.pdf>

from this point of view, and it is accepted that a central goal of education is to provide a forum for debating fundamental beliefs, and to explain and defend values which mark a liberal, democratic and respectful society.

One example of this commitment is the comments in their Joint Statement on the importance of RE by Government and faith leaders made in February 2006 and July 2008 ('Faith in the System'),⁶⁷ in which the Government and faith leaders:-

recognised the important contribution of RE to developing respect for and sensitivity to others. In particular those whose faith and beliefs are different from their own. It should promote discernment and enable pupils to combat prejudice and contribute to community cohesion. In this spirit, the Government and the faith school providers reaffirm their commitment to using the principles of good religious education enunciated in the non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education (2004) when developing and reviewing the RE curriculum for their schools and colleges.

A recent sharp example of dangers for community cohesion arose in the 'Trojan Horse' affair in Birmingham in 2014 which gave rise to substantial public concern and debate. It was alleged that there had been a plot to take control of a number of schools in the city with the aim of installing a narrowly Islamist curriculum, practice and conduct of the school. All 21 of the schools alleged to have been influenced were non-faith maintained schools or academies.

Enquiries were held by Peter Clarke on behalf of the Secretary of State⁶⁸ and by OFSTED⁶⁹ (later extending its enquiries to a small number of schools in Bradford, Luton and Tower Hamlets), by Ian Kershaw, Birmingham City Council's Independent Chief Adviser,⁷⁰ and by the Education Funding Agency in relation to alleged financial irregularities at two schools.⁷¹

Peter Clarke's report concluded that there was 'no evidence to suggest that there is a problem with governance generally' nor any 'evidence of terrorism, radicalisation or violent extremism in the schools of concern in Birmingham', but said that there was

⁶⁷ <http://www.religionlaw.co.uk/FaithInTheSystem.pdf>

⁶⁸ http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/20549/1/Report_into_allegations_concerning_Birmingham_schools_arising_from_the_Trojan_Horse_letter-web.pdf

⁶⁹ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141124154759/http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/other-forms-and-guides/a/Advice%20note%20provided%20on%20academies%20and%20maintained%20schools%20in%20Birmingham%20to%20the%20Secretary%20of%20State%20for%20Education%2C%20Rt%20Hon%20Michael%20Gove%20MP.pdf>

⁷⁰ <http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/trojanhorsereview>

⁷¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/318392/Review_of_Park_View_Educational_Trust.pdf and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-oldknow-academy-trust>

evidence that there are a number of people, associated with each other and in positions of influence in schools and governing bodies, who espouse, sympathize with or fail to challenge extremist views’, and that there had been ‘co-ordinated, deliberate and sustained’ attempts ‘by a number of associated individuals, to introduce an intolerant and aggressive Islamic ethos’ into ‘a few schools in Birmingham.

In general the issues and recommendations which emerged had to do with proper supervision of the existing system and sufficient resourcing of supervision by OFSTED to detect and prevent such attempts. No major issues concerning the place of religion in the structure of the curriculum and the organisation of schools of the type discussed in this pamphlet were identified.

However, one important recommendation of the OFSTED Enquiry was that the government should:-

provide much greater clarity to all schools (including academies and free schools) on what should be taught in a broad and balanced curriculum.⁷²

This relates to our comments about the necessity of making distinctions between religious instruction, formation and education, and about confusion in the curriculum. It reinforces the case for our recommendations. Moreover, the government has recently strengthened its advice in relation to independent schools.

More generally OFSTED has been inspecting schools to look at the effectiveness with which they carry out the responsibility to promote community cohesion which they were given from September 2007.⁷³ Until 2011 they were required to report separately on this, though this responsibility was later removed. This decision should be reconsidered.

Public concerns about the wider issue continue to reverberate, and media investigations into attempts to impose ‘extremist’ Muslim ideology continue. In February a group of religious leaders wrote to the BBC encouraging it to retain a commitment to balanced coverage of religion arguing that ‘Religious literacy is essential to the diversity we treasure in Britain – and a tonic to the extremism and

⁷² OFSTED Letter to Sec of State re 21 Birm schools:-
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141124154759/http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/other-forms-and-guides/a/Advice%20note%20provided%20on%20academies%20and%20maintained%20schools%20in%20Birmingham%20to%20the%20Secretary%20of%20State%20for%20Education%20and%20R%20and%20Hon%20Michael%20Gove%20MP.pdf>

⁷³ The governing bodies of maintained schools were given the duty to promote community cohesion in Section 38 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

intolerance that threaten it.⁷⁴ Thinking in this area has moved forward across Europe, with religion being taken increasingly seriously as an important component of intercultural education.⁷⁵

We recommend that the best way to promote community cohesion across the school system is to make the kinds of curriculum change which we are proposing and to establish a strong inspection system to ensure that all schools, faith or not, play a constructive role in their practice.

This will help ensure that Islamist and other extremist ideas are tackled by way of serious critical discussion in the classroom, in the context of a proper engagement with religious and non-religious traditions. We believe that this offers a more robust and effective way of dealing with extremist beliefs amongst young people than driving such ideas underground or presenting 'British values' as a kind of 'counter-propaganda'. Values of respect, liberalism and democracy can then be promoted in practice as well as in theory.

Recommendations on The Curriculum

We recommend that consideration be given to using the phrase 'Religious and Moral Education' rather than 'Religious Education' in describing this part of the statutory curriculum.

We recommend that the Religious Education syllabus in county and voluntary controlled schools should no longer be set by a system of agreed local syllabuses, but by an agreed national syllabus which would have a similar legal status to the requirements of other subjects in the National Curriculum.

We recommend that the nationally-agreed syllabus would be determined by the Secretary of State in agreement with a newly created 'National Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (NASACRE)'

⁷⁴ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11384878/Muslim-Christian-and-Jewish-leaders-alarm-as-BBC-axes-religion-chief-post.html>

⁷⁵ See Professor Robert Jackson's Signposts, written for the Council of Europe following their resolution in 2008, which sets out the situation.
<https://book.coe.int/eur/en/human-rights-education-intercultural-education/6101-signposts-policy-and-practice-for-teaching-about-religions-and-non-religious-world-views-in-intercultural-education.html>

comprising experts on religion and education, and after formal consultation and input from the relevant established professional bodies, and representatives of religions, humanism and other belief systems. This nationally-agreed syllabus should be reviewed every 5/7 years.

We recommend that the government discusses with the faith school providers, including academies and free schools, the merits of voluntary-aided and foundation faith schools adopting this nationally-agreed syllabus and, on the basis of such discussions, considers legislating to require all maintained schools to adopt this syllabus.

We recommend that the government also discusses with faith school providers including academies and free schools, the importance of making a distinction within schools between religious instruction, formation and education, including agreement that religious instruction (even of a kind which does not include coercion, or distortion of other religions or beliefs) does not take place within the school day.

In addition, we recommend that the government discusses with independent schools whether they should adopt this nationally-agreed syllabus and, on the basis of such discussions, considers legislating to require all schools to adopt this syllabus.

If these changes are agreed we recommend that the right of parents to withdraw their children from the Religious Education part of the curriculum should be abolished.

We recommend that the legal requirement for Religious Education at Key Stage 5, after the age of 16, should be removed and that, within the context of a general reform of the curriculum at Key Stage 4, consideration should be given to modifying the legal requirement for Religious Education to a wider study of religious, spiritual, moral, ethical, social, and cultural values.

We recommend that all faith schools, and possibly all schools in receipt of state funding, clearly advertise and explain the kind of religious (or non-religious) ethos and formation which they offer, so that prospective parents and pupils can make informed choices.

We recommend that the local Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) are given a new role which includes participating in the consultations about the content of the national RE curriculum, helping local implementation of the national RE syllabus, promoting community cohesion and educating for diversity, and advising on local availability of

religious instruction.

We recommend that an important, though not the only, way to promote community cohesion and to counter radicalisation across the school system is to make the kinds of curriculum change which we are proposing. Consideration should be given to OFSTED re-establishing a strong inspection system to ensure that all schools, faith or not, properly fulfil their duty to promote community cohesion.

FAITH SCHOOLS

There are a number of areas where ‘faith schools’, or ‘schools with a religious character’, mainly funded by the government, operate on a different legal and administrative basis from maintained community schools. These are:

- The curriculum, which we dealt with in the preceding chapter;
- Admissions policy;
- Inspection;
- Employment of teachers.

Each of these areas was differentiated within the 1944 Act and later legislation.

A good deal of relevant research on faith schools has been carried out, including by the Westminster Faith Debates. Two overviews worth mentioning here are:

1. The Theos report from 2013, ‘More than an Educated Guess: assessing the evidence on faith schools’,⁷⁶ which observes that the debate is often ‘an arena for proxy debates’, notably about the place of religion in the public life of this country. It addresses four main questions about faith schools:-

- Are faith schools socially divisive?
- Are faith schools exclusive and elitist?
- Is there a faith school effect?
- Do faith schools offer a distinctive education experience?

2. The Accord Coalition ‘Databank of Independent Evidence on Faith Schools (September 2014)’.⁷⁷ This categorises information using the following categories:-

- Faith schools’ impact upon social and community cohesion
- Standards and attainment in faith schools
- Discrimination in admissions
- Discrimination in employment

⁷⁶ <http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/files/files/More%20than%20an%20educated%20guess.pdf>

⁷⁷ Accord <http://accordcoalition.org.uk/research/>

Homophobia and LGBT equality

The curriculum (Religious Education, Collective Worship, and Sex and Relationships Education)

Other groups' stances on faith schools and issues of religion in education

Opinion polls

Other statistical and general information on faith schools

Readers interested in the balance of research evidence addressing the main concerns about faith schools can usefully consult these materials and come to their own conclusions.

3. Survey work carried out by YouGov for the Westminster Faith Debates in 2013 which shed new light on public attitudes to faith schools in Great Britain.⁷⁸ It found that the most important reasons people give for choosing a faith school for a child are, in descending order, the school's academic standards, location, discipline, and ethical values. These far outweigh any more purely faith-related reasons.

The place of faith schools in the state education system has become increasingly contentious. The same Faith Debates survey found that 45% of the population believe the government should not provide funding for faith schools, compared with 32% who think it should (23% don't know). However, amongst younger people (18-24) those proportions are roughly reversed with a majority in favour of state funding.

Critics suggest that in relation to the curriculum, admissions policy, and employment of teachers, the existence of faith schools has adverse consequences for society which justify their abolition. For some, the very existence of faith schools in the state sector is unacceptable. On the other hand, supporters point to the educational success and popularity of many faith schools, their positive ethos, and the rights of religious parents – who are also taxpayers – to have their children educated in their family faith.

The churches are of course well aware of the criticisms, and have examined their own practices with the intention of addressing concerns where they consider them to be justified. In March 2012, for example, the Church of England Archbishop's Council Education Division published 'The Church School of the Future Review' which sets out a clear direction for their schools.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ 'What people really think about faith schools' <http://faithdebates.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/WFD-Faith-Schools-Press-Release.pdf>

⁷⁹ [http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1418393/the%20church%20school%20of%20the%20future%20review%20-%20march%202012\[1\].pdf](http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1418393/the%20church%20school%20of%20the%20future%20review%20-%20march%202012[1].pdf)

Nevertheless, judgments have been made against a small number of church and other faith schools which are in breach of fair admissions policies, and issues remain in distinguishing some exclusivist faith-based schools which do not fairly represent other faiths and beliefs, from more outward looking faith-based schools, including in terms of recognition and funding.

Here we confine ourselves to looking at the overall legal framework and the practical changes which could be made to address the outstanding issues of concern. We do not believe that abolition of faith schools is either desirable or feasible, but we think that reforms could be beneficial and should be properly explored.

In the rest of this section we address the main areas for possible reform, and include references to the position of independent schools, including independent faith schools, the registration of which was first established in the 1944 Act.

Admissions Policy

Admissions policies seek to reconcile the constraints and needs of schools, and the rights of parents and children to find the school best suited to them. These issues continue to give rise to enormous controversies in overall policy, such as continued selection at age 11 in some parts of the country, and to personal anguish when individuals cannot be admitted to the schools they want to attend. There are also disputes about the extent to which schools can and do set admissions criteria which enable them to perform better in league table rankings. These controversies are by no means limited to faith schools.

Successive governments have varied in the extent to which they have sought to regulate school admissions policies, giving different degrees of autonomy to schools and to LEAs to determine such admissions policies.

The fundamental question in relation to faith schools, is whether or not they should be able to give priority to applicants on the grounds that they (and/or their parents) are active members of the particular faith which the school upholds.

Some argue that this criterion is entirely inappropriate for publicly-funded schools and should be abolished altogether. Others argue that whilst the criterion itself is acceptable (or at least should be accepted since abolition is not politically feasible), there are a range of abuses such as, for example, parents dishonestly pretending to have a faith commitment in order to have their children admitted to the relevant faith school (mainly on the grounds that it offers a better standard of education), which need to be addressed.

The Church of England and the Catholic Church control 97.5% of maintained faith primary schools and 83.9% of maintained faith secondary schools. The Church of England's 'Admission to Church of England schools' gives detailed information on current admissions practices (Appendix 2), and states:-

The Office of the Schools Adjudicator carried out a wide-ranging scrutiny of admission arrangements in all types of schools in 2008... It was evident from this scrutiny that there needed to be an increased engagement in and monitoring of the process by Diocesan Boards of Education... it also revealed that there were cases of partial compliance with the Code on the part of some admissions authorities.⁸⁰

This judgment was the basis of a fresh assessment by the Church of England of its admissions practices from which it concluded that:-

Church of England schools should be able to show how their Admissions Policy and practice demonstrates the school's commitment both to distinctiveness and inclusivity, to church families and the wider community... The Church of England stands ready to give support to the small number of schools that currently only admit children from Christian families to enable them to provide some open places available to the local community.

The Church of England national office will regularly review the national picture of admissions arrangements in Church of England schools and report biennially, beginning in September 2012. The purpose of such monitoring is so that a national perspective can be offered to both the Church and the Government of the day on how church schools carry out their responsibility to both parties.

The Diocesan Boards of Education in advising its schools will be able to take account of the overarching guidance provided by the Board of Education interpreting it as relevant to their local context. They will also ensure that Admissions Policies comply with the current admissions code.

Following a survey, the Church of England concluded:-

For a majority of schools all places were offered on a neighbourhood basis, and with no faith based places. It is only for a small number of primary schools and the 100 or so of the Church of England's 160 secondary schools where there is a very heavy demand for places that the relationship between admissions based on church affiliation and on local residence can be a cause of contention.

⁸⁰ [https://www.churchofengland.org/media/1513919/nsadmissionsguidancejune2011final%20\(3\).pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/media/1513919/nsadmissionsguidancejune2011final%20(3).pdf)

On the issues around providing evidence of family religious commitment as a ground for admission to an over-subscribed school:-

Evidence may be sought from clergy on the supplementary information form and this should be stated in the policy. Policies must make it clear if the commitment of the family, parent or the child will be measured... The National Society recommends that the only criterion to be taken into account is attendance at worship. Points systems used to differentiate between families with equal commitment should be as simple as possible, and only used if absolutely necessary, and ideally should be phased out over the next few years. The Church welcomes children of other faiths into its schools.

Families of other faiths often choose to send their children to Church of England schools because they are places where faith will be respected and taken seriously... Many governing bodies rely on the wording of the original Trust Deed to draw up their Admissions Policy. These deeds often emphasized a bias to the poor. Governors should ensure that they examine the trust deed and if necessary reinterpret its terms to reflect the current context. The Diocese can help with this.

There are a number of agreements between the Church of England and other churches that ought to be reflected in admissions arrangements.

In response to a recent case Nigel Genders, the Church of England Chief Education Officer, stated

Most CofE schools do not prioritise their places on church attendance and those that do find room for pupils from the local community. New CofE schools being established to meet local need use distance for all or more than half their places. Our schools are not faith schools for Christians but church schools for all.⁸¹

This approach represents a serious substantive response from the Church of England to legitimate concerns about the operation of their schools' admissions policies. As it is applied to the 4,601 Church of England state schools it should lead to a situation where existing abuses and concerns are substantially removed.

The May 2014 Catholic statement on 'Catholic Education in England and Wales' provides guidance on admissions, and is less detailed and prescriptive than that of the Church of England.⁸² On issues of social selection, it makes it clear that:

⁸¹ Church Times, May 1st 2015

⁸² <http://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/images/CatholicEducationEnglandandWales.pdf>

Analysis of OFSTED data statistics from the Department for Education shows that Catholic schools and academies generally have more diverse populations than other schools.

A significantly higher proportion of pupils in Catholic schools in England are from the most deprived areas. 18.4% of pupils at Catholic maintained primary schools live in the most deprived areas compared with 13.8% nationally. 17.3% of pupils at Catholic maintained secondary schools live in the most deprived areas compared with 12.2% nationally.

Catholic schools in England have a greater proportion of pupils from ethnic minorities. 34.5% of pupils in Catholic maintained primary schools are from ethnic minority backgrounds compared with 28.5% nationally. 30.2% of pupils in Catholic maintained secondary schools are from ethnic minority backgrounds compared with 24.2% nationally.

At the same time the academic results of the Catholic schools are better than average:-

At age 11, Catholic schools in England outperform the national average English and Maths SATs scores by 5%. This is echoed in GCSE results, where Catholic schools also outperform the national average by 5%. As well as this, 82% of Catholic primary schools and academies have OFSTED grades of good or outstanding. This is in comparison to a national average of 79%.

There have been some cases of abuse of fair admissions policies by Catholic schools, including a high-profile judgement⁸³ against the London Oratory School in July 2014, and clearly any remaining abuses need to be ended.

Whatever faith is involved, we do not think that it would be right to remove from children of families who regularly worship an enhanced right to attend schools of that faith.

However, we do acknowledge that a number of serious problems arise from this policy. It:-

- encourages the distasteful practice of church attendance in order to secure a school place – mockingly referred to as ‘bend the knee and save the fee’
- unfairly advantages churches and Christians whose energies are directed inwards to their own worshipping community rather than outwards to the whole local community, or wider society
- takes as much or more account of the practice and wishes of parents than of the child whose education is at stake

⁸³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/330614/ADA2410_The_London_Oratory_School.pdf

- discriminates against children whose families have no faith practice, or are not willing to pretend to have one, even if the child has a genuine desire to be educated in a faith school, and formed in that faith
- may advantage those who are able to afford to attend regular worship, given associated costs like transport and financial donations.

There are also less principled and, in our view, less weighty, problems, including the direct costs to the state of providing ‘faith schools’, and the significant additional costs in many parts of the country of providing transport for students to get to their nearest faith school.

Nevertheless, we acknowledge that families who are regular worshippers have a legitimate right to expect their children should have some priority in admission to schools which share their faith. We believe that removal of the right of parents to choose schools which are of their own faith would be an enormous change which would be very widely challenged, including in law, and would be unachievable even if desirable.

However we do think that all steps to fairer admissions systems, and the elimination of abuses of the types that we have described, are very important.

Moreover one of the most important missions of any faith school is to serve its local community as a whole, and we believe that there is support within the churches for policies which would see the proportion of those selected by church attendance or related criteria reducing over time to become a much more limited proportion of intake, sufficient only to sustain the distinctive character of the school.

In the longer term more effort should be given to devising fairer admissions policies to faith schools, with the aim of addressing the serious objections listed above.

One option, which is closer to that pursued in many European countries, is to devise a policy which relies on each and every faith school making explicit what kind of faith formation it offers. If parents and children are willing to accept that in-school formation and not ‘opt out’, then that – rather than pre-existing family practices – would serve to demonstrate their commitment to the faith. This would remove many of the objections listed above. Where problems of over-subscription remained, random systems of selection, such as a lottery, would be needed.

We see many advantages in this approach over the current situation, in terms of fairness, consistency and transparency. The disadvantage is that it removes some control over setting admissions criteria from faith schools and churches and it does not fully safeguard access for worshipping families.

This area of policy – admission to faith schools – is hotly contested for understandable reasons. However we strongly believe it is in the interests of the churches, and their schools, to promote progressive change in this area and to widen confidence in the fairness of the systems which operate. Reform is really only possible with the willing consent and participation of all involved.

As far as independent faith schools are concerned, the issues are entirely different, as pupils have to pay for their places and there is no state funding. This situation does not seem to require reform by any change in the law.

Inspection of standards throughout the school system, including independent schools

Under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005, OFSTED inspects Religious Education in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus in maintained schools. Academies are inspected on the quality of their RE by OFSTED as part of the normal inspections regime. The content of collective worship and Religious Education, together with ‘Christian character’ and leadership and management, is inspected separately under section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

This requires the governing bodies of foundation and voluntary schools with a religious character, and all denominational academies, to ensure that they are inspected at regular intervals during the course of the periodic inspection of a school. The person who conducts the inspection is chosen by the governing body in consultation with a person prescribed in relation to the relevant designated religion or denomination. The separate inspection arrangements are limited to the content of collective worship and denominational education (religious formation). They currently take place every 5 years and are not aligned to OFSTED inspections.

Independent schools are registered under Section 70 of the 1944 Education Act, and have to fulfil certain conditions which were broadened by the 2008 Education and Skills Act⁸⁴ to include the ‘spiritual, moral, social and cultural development’ and the ‘welfare, health and safety’ of students. Subsequent government guidance has set out more detail.

There are around 2,400 independent schools in England. OFSTED inspects the educational provision of about half of them and the others are inspected by one of three approved independent inspectorates: Independent Schools Inspectorate, School Inspection Service, or the Bridge Schools Inspectorate. Guidance on this

⁸⁴ http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/25/pdfs/ukpga_20080025_en.pdf

process is set out in ‘Registration of independent schools: Departmental advice for proprietors and prospective proprietors of independent schools in England’,⁸⁵ published in December 2013. The OFSTED annual report 2013/14 indicates that this is a comprehensive process.⁸⁶

The purpose of the inspection process in all schools is to raise educational standards and, in the context of this pamphlet, to strengthen the quality of religious education in schools. It would be possible to remove the ability of faith schools to have their own inspection process for the content of collective worship and denominational education (religious formation), and simply give this responsibility to OFSTED. However we can see no very powerful argument either for or against this change and would simply recommend that it be considered within the context of the overall changes we propose.

The inspection regime for independent schools is being steadily tightened through legislation from 1998 to 2014. We would recommend that this be continued in the context of the curricular changes we propose.

Employment of Teachers

The law permits the governing bodies of voluntary schools, when appointing a head teacher, to take account of the person’s ability and fitness to preserve and develop the religious character of the school.⁸⁷ It also permits governing bodies of voluntary aided schools to give preference, in connection with the appointment, remuneration or promotion of some teachers at the school, to persons:-

- whose religious opinions are in accordance with the tenets of the religion or religious denomination specified in relation to the school, or
- who attend religious worship in accordance with those tenets, or
- who give, or are willing to give, religious education at the school in accordance with those tenets

and states that:

- regard may be had, in connection with the termination of the employment of any teacher at the school, to any conduct on his (sic) part which is incompatible with the precepts, or with the upholding of the tenets, of the religion or religious denomination so specified.

⁸⁵ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/283014/Independent_school_registration.pdf

⁸⁶ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/384707/Ofsted_Annual_Report_201314_Schools.pdf

⁸⁷ Section 60 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/31/contents>

Section 58 of the same act sets certain limitations to this power.⁸⁸

The current DFE guidance (April 2013) simply confirms the 2009 guidance which makes this clear.⁸⁹ The Church of England's summary of this power is as follows:-

In a voluntary aided school the governors may decide to discriminate in favour of candidates who can demonstrate a positive commitment to the Christian faith and its expression in the school when employing teachers and some support staff whose posts have a genuine occupational requirement to be committed Christians. Such posts may include non-teaching chaplains, pastoral heads or bursars. The requirements should be clear in advertisements and in job or person specifications. This right is not affected by current human rights or equal employment opportunities legislation.

The governors and senior staff of a voluntary aided school should have a policy on whether teaching staff of the school need to be active Christians and/or active Anglicans. This may depend on the duties of the post, for example teaching religious education, leading school worship, or providing Christian leadership within the school or a section of it. This does not mean that an active Christian will be appointed to the post even if he or she is not the best candidate on professional grounds. For some posts, the governors will not appoint unless the best professional candidate is also an active Christian.⁹⁰

This ability to discriminate has been available to faith schools since their foundation, and confirmed in previous legislation. What has sharpened contemporary concern about the right to discriminate in favour of certain candidates for teaching posts (and to take action against teachers in certain circumstances) was the passage of the Equalities Act in 2010 which sought to eliminate discrimination wherever possible, including on grounds of faith. Limited exemptions were argued for and won by some faith organizations.

Some argue that some faith bodies are overstating the nature of the 'genuine occupational requirement' for headteachers and other staff. For example, it may be enough to be a baptised member of a church and/or to be sympathetic to the aims of a religious body and faith school, without having to be an activist or fully professing member of a faith. As in relation to admissions criteria to faith schools, this situation may unfairly favour more activist or conservative members of religious bodies over more traditional or moderate adherents who are nevertheless as well qualified for

⁸⁸ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/31/contents>

⁸⁹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/269036/01081-2009dom-en.pdf

⁹⁰ Find reference

leadership positions in state-funded faith schools. Overall, this may reinforce a tendency for faith bodies to move away from liberal forms of religion towards less liberal forms, as well as to discriminate against actual and potential employees.

Such concerns have led to challenge. For example the Joint Committee on Human Rights of the UK Parliament wrote in their first report on the then Equality Bill, published in October 2009, that:-

We consider that substantial grounds exist for doubting whether sections 58-60 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (SSFA) as currently framed are compatible with the requirements of Article 4(2) of the Framework Equality Directive 2000/78/EC. We also consider that the provisions of section 60(5) SSFA permit Voluntary Controlled and Voluntary Aided Schools to impose wide-ranging requirements upon employees to adhere to religious doctrine in their lifestyles and personal relationships which may go beyond what is permitted under Article 4(2).⁹¹

A case was taken on related grounds to the European Court of Justice where the final Court judgment upheld the legislation in its current form.⁹²

Despite the legitimate concerns about the power of faith schools to discriminate in their employment, we tend to the view that if faith schools are permitted to exist, as we think that they should be, they need to have the ability to ensure that their staff can genuinely carry out the mission of the school, which may exceptionally require the ability to discriminate which the law now grants them (for example, where a priest is needed to conduct worship). In general, however, we believe that the requirement that a teacher or headteacher be in sympathy with the aims of the school and its faith, and willing to uphold and promote them, is sufficient. We recommend that the situation be kept under review.

⁹¹ Legislative Scrutiny: Equality Bill. Twenty-sixth Report of Session 2008-09, p.96

⁹² <https://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/EU-Pilot-3800-12-JUST.pdf>

Recommendations on Faith Schools

We recommend that children of families of faith should where possible be able to attend schools of that faith and that their current right to be given priority in the admissions process should not be removed.

We also recommend that the churches need to make strong and continued progress in addressing the very real concerns about fairness, and that changes to the current legal position should be considered as an urgent matter if faith bodies fail to make progress in the directions which they have set for themselves. We believe that there are legitimate concerns about using regular attendance at worship as a selection criterion and we recommend that this criterion be kept under review.

We recommend that further effort be given to developing alternative proposals for fairer admissions procedures to faith schools, procedures which balance the rights of families of faith to have their children educated in that faith with considerations of fairness to others and serving the whole local community.

We recommend that the ability of faith schools to retain their own inspection process for the content of collective worship and religious formation should be reconsidered within the context of the overall changes we propose.

We recommend that the inspection regime for independent schools continue to be steadily tightened in the context of the curricular changes we propose.

We recommend that the current arrangements which enable faith schools to discriminate in their employment are kept under review, given legitimate concerns about their necessity and their effects.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We began this pamphlet by suggesting that, seven decades after 1944, the time is overdue for a new settlement in the relationship between religion and schools. The old settlement no longer works as well as it needs to for the benefit of schools, religion and wider society.

The simple fact is that schools have changed enormously over the last 70 years, and so has religious and non-religious practice and its place in our society.

We have discussed, in some detail, the various aspects of the existing settlement as they operate today, and we have come to a judgment about areas where changes are needed, and areas where they are not, or the situation can be kept under review.

We have not addressed in any detail a number of important practical questions, such as improving teacher supply and quality, developing better course material and ensuring that all teachers are religiously literate. These are exceptionally important, but we think it will be easier to make progress once the overall legal framework is in the right place.

Our recommendations represent our personal views, formed on the basis of relevant recent research, and our respective expertise in politics and religion. We hope that they may be useful in informing a new settlement, and we conclude by listing the recommendations made in the course of the investigation above.

We recommend that:-

Act of Collective Worship

- (1) The current requirement in statute for an Act of Collective Worship should be abolished, and the decision about the form and character of school assemblies should be left to the governors of individual schools. Schools should be required to set out their statement and strategy for promoting Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural*

Education, with school community assemblies as an important part of that strategy, upon which they would be inspected by OFSTED. The government should provide non-statutory guidance to help achieve this.

Curriculum

- (2) *Consideration be given to using the phrase ‘Religious and Moral Education’ rather than ‘Religious Education’ in describing this part of the statutory curriculum.*
- (3) *The Religious Education syllabus in county and voluntary controlled schools should no longer be set by a system of agreed local syllabuses, but by an agreed national syllabus which would have a similar legal status to the requirements of other subjects in the National Curriculum.*
- (4) *The nationally-agreed syllabus would be determined by the Secretary of State in agreement with a newly created ‘National Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (NASACRE)’ comprising experts on religion and education, and after formal consultation and input from the relevant established professional bodies and representatives of religions, humanism and other belief systems. This nationally-agreed syllabus should be reviewed every 5/7 years.*
- (5) *The government discusses with the faith school providers, including academies and free schools, the merits of voluntary-aided and foundation faith schools adopting this nationally-agreed syllabus and, on the basis of such discussions, considers legislating to require all maintained schools to adopt this syllabus.*
- (6) *The government also discusses with faith school providers including academies and free schools, the importance of making a distinction within schools between religious instruction, formation and education, including agreement that religious instruction (even of a kind which does not include coercion, or distortion of other religions or beliefs) does not take place within the school day.*
- (7) *In addition, the government discusses with independent schools whether they should adopt this nationally-agreed syllabus and, on the basis of such discussions, considers legislating to require all schools to adopt this syllabus.*

- (8) *If these changes are agreed, the right of parents to withdraw their children from the Religious Education part of the curriculum should be abolished.*
- (9) *The legal requirement for Religious Education at Key Stage 5, after the age of 16, should be removed and that, within the context of a general reform of the curriculum at Key Stage 4, consideration should be given to modifying the legal requirement for Religious Education to a wider study of religious, spiritual, moral, ethical, social, and cultural values.*
- (10) *All faith schools, and possibly all schools in receipt of state funding, clearly advertise and explain the kind of religious (or non-religious) ethos and formation which they offer, so that prospective parents and pupils can make informed choices.*
- (11) *The local Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) are given a new role which includes participating in the consultations about the content of the national RE curriculum, helping local implementation of the national RE syllabus, promoting community cohesion and educating for diversity, and advising on local availability of religious instruction.*
- (12) *An important, though not the only, way to promote community cohesion and to counter radicalization across the school system is to make the kinds of curriculum change which we are proposing. OFSTED should re-establish a strong inspection system to ensure that all schools, faith or not, properly fulfil their duty to promote community cohesion*

Faith Schools

- (13) *Children of families of faith should where possible be able to attend schools of that faith, and that their current right to be given priority in the admissions process should not be removed.*
- (14) *The churches need to make strong and continued progress in addressing the very real concerns about fairness, and that changes to the current legal position should be considered as an urgent matter if faith bodies fail to make progress in the directions which they have set for themselves. We believe that there are legitimate concerns about using regular attendance at worship as a selection criterion and we recommend that this criterion be kept under review.*

- (15) Further effort be given to developing alternative proposals for fairer admissions procedures to faith schools, procedures which balance the rights of families of faith to have their children educated in that faith with other considerations of fairness to others and serving the whole local community.*
- (16) The ability of faith schools to retain their own inspection process for the content of collective worship and religious formation should be reconsidered within the context of the overall changes we propose.*
- (17) The inspection regime for independent schools continue to be steadily tightened in the context of the curricular changes we propose.*
- (18) The current arrangements which enable faith schools to discriminate in their employment are kept under review, given legitimate concerns about their necessity and their effects*

About the authors...

The Rt Hon Charles Clarke

was Secretary of State for Education from 2002-2004, and is now a Visiting Professor in Politics and Faith Religion in the Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion at Lancaster University.

Linda Woodhead MBE DD

is Professor of Sociology of Religion in the Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion at Lancaster University. Between 2007 and 2013 she was Director of the £12m AHRC/ESRC Religion and Society research programme. She is now co-director of the Institute for Social Futures at Lancaster University.

Charles and Linda founded and organised the Westminster Faith Debates.

www.faithdebates.org.uk



A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools

Andrew Copson, Chief Executive, British Humanist Association

"It is over seventy years since the place of religions and non-religious worldviews in our state education system was last given any systematic legislative attention. In those seven decades, the demography of England and Wales has changed beyond recognition and yet the education system is fossilised, failing to make its full contribution to developing the inner life of our young people in line with their beliefs and values and to equipping them for life in today's actual society. Every area of our education system that intersects with questions of religion or belief needs urgent review and that is what this pamphlet does systematically and with acuity. No one will agree with all of it, but all of it is an informed and valuable contribution to what should be one of the biggest educational debates of our time."

Very Reverend John Hall, Dean of Westminster

"The place of religion in education is contested but there is no doubt that young people need a far better understanding than they currently have of the powerful motive force that is religious - and non-religious - faith, for good and ill. And they need to develop spirituality and morality. These matters require illumination and, on the basis of substantial experience, receive it here."

Robert Jackson, Professor of Religions and Education University of Warwick and Professor of Religious Diversity and Education, European Wergeland Centre, Oslo.

"The publication of this lively discussion document on religion and belief in education in English schools, co-written by a former Home Secretary and Minister of Education and the Director of Britain's largest research programme on religion and society, is timely and very welcome. The pamphlet brings fresh thinking in an instrumental educational climate in which, perhaps inadvertently, crucial areas of human experience such as religion and values have been neglected. The ideas presented here are worthy of close attention, and warrant serious debate by all concerned with educational policy and practice, including parents and young people as well as politicians, policy makers and teachers."

Lord (Stewart) Sutherland

"It is over seventy years since 1944 settlement on Religion and Education. It is certainly time for a reassessment and this careful and penetrating report provides an excellent starting point."

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Agenda Item 6

Report on NASACRE – 21st May 2015

Meeting the Challenge

Keynote by **Rt. Hon. Charles Clarke**

He spoke about the need to reconsider RE as major changes are coming. Faith is important in society, but the government does not seem to understand this, which means that SACREs are often alone in fighting for inter-faith relations. He suggests that the place of RE & CW in schools needs to be rethought and a booklet that he is working on will be made free of charge to all SACREs in PDF format later in the term.

He reiterated all the things that have changed: schools, faiths and their forms & practices, the role of the LA to name but a few. He questioned whether the current statutory framework is the right one, thinking that pupils need to have a robust understanding of faith so that they can come to their own views. Religion is much higher on the agenda than it has been in the past.

He asked whether RE should continue to be a statutory subject and whether it should be included in the National Curriculum or parallel to it. He suggested the need to debate the name (RE or RS or something else) Should it run from KS1-5 as there are issues where KS5 is delivered in colleges. He suggested that the whole of the 14-19 curriculum is in need of review – not just the RE. He asked whether RE should be determined nationally or locally, while recognising that even if there were a national determination, there would need to be a local interaction between schools & faiths. In any case the current state of affairs is not adequate. Whatever decisions are made, it has to be adequately financed.

He suggested that the responsibility of SACREs be extended to ALL types of school and all schools so that all children have an opportunity to engage with all faiths. SACREs need to be the driving force, so that the words of the syllabus are turned into a living curriculum. Non-theistic belief systems should be taught alongside. SACRE needs to be involved in the construction and implementation of syllabus and schools should be resourced to carry that through. RE should also be returned to the inspection regime. The question of withdrawal should also be discussed.

In other words there needs to be a big debate around the subject; the status quo cannot be allowed to persist. All of these suggestions and proposals are included in the pamphlet that has hopefully been circulated to all SACRE members.

MPs need to be involved and the membership of SACREs need to be looked at so that they better reflect the modern situation. Joint work between SACREs and Dioceses could be considered. There have to be key people and the group needs to work well together. The LA needs to honour its' responsibility by providing a good clerk. He also wondered whether every subject should have a body like a SACRE.

Several SACRE members responded with questions about finance and ways to support; particularly important is the enabling of teachers to become more religiously literate and so the provision of CPD is important particularly in primary school. Accountability is another big question.

AGM: David Hampshire is the new chairman

NASACRE finances are in reasonable shape – more SACREs have joined.

Denise Cush: Talked about what works well in RE and what the issues, challenges and successes.

Basically she asked lots of questions: topics included the need to clarify the aim for RE and whether SMSC clouded the issue, whether it was an academic subject or something else. It needs to reflect the accrual landscape and recognise internal diversity. Which version of the "facts" should be given? The divide between religious, non-

religious and secular viewpoints is not clear. We need to know what young people believe and recognise that the belief in “happiness” creates a lack of resilience. Does the pick & Mix view of religion needs to be included? What about the new forms of religion? Or is it more philosophy & ethics?

There need to be debates about approach: is it too anodyne? Is there value in using empathy? Do faith communities have too much influence? Is it too pro-religion? Who defines the facts? The public understanding of RE is muddled and there is a lack of qualified teachers and ITT. There is a lack of CPD, inadequate timetabling and inequality in the classroom as some religions get no mention at all.

Mary Myatt went through the various bodies that support RE and made one or two suggestions. Could the stories of SACRE members be used to teach RE? Stories are a good route into RE and can help to overcome lacks in subject knowledge. Blogs area available at RE online; hub projects funded by CStG, Hockerill, Farmington; NATRE; twitter, REQM

Our attention was drawn to the new NASACRE website. It is really worthwhile for members to explore.

There will be a survey for SACRE members to complete. Little cards will be given out to SACRE members.

There was then a South East Region discussion group; a copy of the sheet we discussed is attached. The discussion was wide-ranging but not easy to report back on. No decisions were reached.

SACRE Discussion Support Sheet

Meeting the Challenge: Seminar

Taking the 8 most requested topics from last year's conference you will have the opportunity with colleagues from nearby SACREs to network, discuss in-depth and record your work. Please look at these before-hand and give some thought to your local situation, ready to share with colleagues. This proforma will be used to collect your contributions and discussion. We will collate and make all the groups' ideas for 'Meeting the Challenge' available on our website.

Top 8 Challenges highlighted by SACREs at <i>Rising to the Challenge 2014</i>	What are the issues in your area? (Share your Experience)	How do/might you address this? (Share your experiences & <i>Ideas</i>)
<p>1. Engaging with schools</p> <p><i>What are some successful ways you connect with your local schools and support their RE?</i></p> <p>2. Lack of coherence/ consistency of RE across schools</p> <p><i>What are the challenges in keeping contact with schools to monitor their RE?</i></p>		
<p>3. Confusion around our role in relation to Academies/ free schools</p> <p>4. The decline of RE in Academies & free schools</p> <p>5. Engaging with Academies to develop better working relationships</p> <p><i>How do you work with Academies? How do you know what schools are providing in RE when there is such a range of types of school? How do you keep contact with schools to monitor RE, when we have less resource and such a range of non-LA maintained schools?</i></p>		

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SACRE Discussion Support Sheet

Meeting the Challenge: Seminar

Taking the 8 most requested topics from last year's conference you will have the opportunity with colleagues from nearby SACREs to network, discuss in-depth and record your work. Please look at these before-hand and give some thought to your local situation, ready to share with colleagues. This proforma will be used to collect your contributions and discussion. We will collate and make all the groups' ideas for 'Meeting the Challenge' available on our website.

Top 8 Challenges highlighted by SACREs at <i>Rising to the Challenge 2014</i>	What are the issues in your area? (Share your Experience)	How do/might you address this? (Share your experiences & <i>Ideas</i>)
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<p>6. Sharing good practice across SACREs</p> <p>7. Encouraging collaboration / sharing of resources with neighbouring SACREs eg sharing adviser, CPD and clerk</p> <p><i>What examples of collaboration or partnership can you share? How effective are they? What barriers were there?</i></p>		
<p>8. Need to promote importance of RE in schools and with LAs and DfE</p> <p><i>How do you raise the profile of RE with local partners and communities in your area?</i></p>		
<p>Other Areas of Challenge</p> <p><i>Any other challenges that are particular priorities for your SACRE either as current issues or successes to share with others?</i></p>	<p>Solutions/Suggestions</p>	

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Latest news and updates from NASACRE

[View this email in your browser](#)



National Association of
Standing Advisory Councils
on Religious Education

SACRE BRIEFING

Issue: 8

This issue includes:

- [Conference and AGM](#)
- [The State of the Nation - 2014 NASACRE survey responses](#)
- [A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools](#)

- [SACRE annual reports](#)
- [Westhill awards](#)
- [New website](#)
- [It may seem really boring, but ...](#)
- [New FAQ](#)
- [NASACRE membership 2015-16](#)
- [SACRE member survey](#)
- [Inter Faith Network Young Voices](#)
- [Teach RE](#)
- [Day conference: The role of faith in British schools](#)

To view all the resources on the website, your SACRE needs to be a member of NASACRE. Locked areas are indicated with a white padlock and require you to log in. Officers of member SACREs have the log-in details. Please contact them for this information.

NASACRE conference and AGM



A very successful NASACRE annual conference was held on 21st May. The Rt Hon Charles Clarke gave us a great deal to consider in his keynote address and the seminar addresses from Prof Denise Cush and Mary Myatt provided us with thought provoking starting points for our regional round table discussions. From the [Conference materials](#) page, you can listen to Charles Clarke's keynote address, download the two seminar presentations and read an analysis of the evaluation forms.

The State of the Nation

2014 NASACRE survey responses

From September to December 2014, NASACRE held an open consultation via its

website. Of the 152 education authorities in England, each required to have a SACRE, 87 (57%) participated in the 22 question survey. The purpose of the survey was to see the current state and status of SACREs in England; Wales has its own national association. David Hampshire has now completed the [analysis of the NASACRE survey](#).

A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools



Four members of the NASACRE executive committee attended the launch of [A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools](#) at the House of Lords on Monday 15th June.



The authors of the pamphlet, Prof Linda Woodhead and Rt Hon Charles Clarke, were introduced by Lord Sutherland who hosted the reception. Linda spoke about the background of changes to society, religion and education since 1944. Charles spoke about the recommendations of their policy initiative. These can be read in full on pages 63-66. Those recommendations which most pertain to SACREs are:

- (1) That collective worship should no longer be statutory; governors and head teachers being able to decide the form and nature of school

assemblies.

- (4) That locally agreed syllabuses are replaced by one nationally agreed syllabus, determined by a 'National Standing Advisory Council on RE' made up of "relevant experts on religion and education"
- (11) That local SACREs are given a new role including participating in the consultations about the content of the national RE curriculum, helping local implementation, promoting community cohesion, educating for diversity and giving advice.

NASACRE is preparing a briefing paper (available by the end of June) to support SACREs in their discussions about the recommendations. We would ask that SACREs discuss these three proposals in particular and report back to NASACRE so that we can represent accurately members' views in any further discussions. Although the next steps for these proposals are not yet clear, Charles and Linda are planning to meet the Schools' Minister in the near future.

SACRE Annual Reports

Thank you to those SACREs who have already submitted **reports** for the year 2013-14. We have already had one for the current year!

Please email your SACRE report as **one** document in **PDF format** with a **maximum size** of approx **3Mb**

to: <mailto:memsec@nasacre.org.uk?subject=SACRE%20report%202012-3>

The Westhill /NASACRE Awards 2015-16

The formal notice, briefing paper and application form are now on the

[NASACRE website](#). The **closing date for applications** for an Award (of up to £4,000) has been extended to **24th July**.

Michael Metcalf

New website

We hope that you will have had chance to explore the new [website](#) and that you are finding it easy to navigate and find the resources and help you need to support your work.

As you will see from articles in this briefing, new resources are being added all the time. If you cannot find what you are looking for, the improved search facility may help you to track it down. If you are still unable to find what you need, please contact the relevant member of the Exec - see the [Contacts page](#).

It may seem really boring, but ...

... in order that you don't miss out on important mailings, it is essential that we have up to date contact information about your SACRE personnel.

Click [here](#) to check details.

Click [here](#) to email new details.

A new FAQ

Agreed syllabus

This [new FAQ](#) is to be found in the Resources area:

Question 8: We have a non-mainstream religious group that is lobbying to be included in the agreed syllabus and it wants to change some of the agreed content. How should we respond?

NASACRE membership 2015-16

At the beginning of June, invoices were emailed for payment of annual subscription for the academic year 2015-16. We have already begun to receive some payments. Thank you.

Payment needs to be received by the end of August.

At the beginning of September, clerks of paid up SACREs will receive a special email with the 2015-16 log in details for the website. Next month, a reminder will be sent to those LAs from whom we have not yet received payment. You may wish to check with your finance team where in the cycle your payment has reached.

SACRE member survey

Those who attended the annual conference and AGM last month will remember Mark Plater introducing a survey he wishes to conduct with SACRE members. NASACRE Exec is currently discussing the final details of this with Mark and it will soon be live. Please check continue to check the website for details.



Follow us on Twitter

Young people and inter faith engagement

In April IFN launched a new [youth inter faith engagement](#) 'microsite' linked to its main website.

On this site are materials flowing from a special event, 'Young Voices, Young Agents for Change', which took place in November and brought together over 80 participants of different ages from a range of organisations to explore aspects of inter faith activity developed by, with and for young people. The aim is to broaden and strengthen this area of activity, enabling even more young people to get involved. In preparation for the event, the IFN office contacted member bodies to ask if they had programmes or projects which were relevant to the day and a number were featured.

On the microsite is an illustrated report on the day and a summary of points made by participants in the course of the day. There are also videos of the presentations by the three young presenters who opened the day: Aamna Alam of Bolton Interfaith Young Ambassadors; Ankit Sinha of Redbridge Ambassadors of Faith and Belief and Megan Wallace of Interfaith Scotland and many more video clips of participants from other organisations and projects such as: Rachel Silveira of 3FF; Dr Joyce Miller of the RE Council of England and Wales; Raheed Salam of the National Council of Faiths and Beliefs in Further Education and Isabelle King of the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services.

The work on the microsite and on the event was kindly made possible by support

from the Church Urban Fund, Golden Tours Foundation, Inter Faith Youth Trust, National Association of SACREs, and Zoroastrian Trust Funds for Europe as well as through support from the Department for Communities and Local Government for the work programme of which this event formed part.

Teach RE

RE Council 'Beyond the Ordinary' campaign

The RE Council is leading the campaign to increase trainee numbers. Entitled 'Beyond the Ordinary', its aim is to encourage graduates and career changers to train as RE teachers:

"The Government has reintroduced training bursaries this year – up to £9,000 tax free for individuals with a first or a PhD - and we are hoping to increase awareness of this and help reverse the drop in numbers of people advancing to study for a PGCE as an RE specialist. And as vital members of the RE community, we are hoping that you can help spread the word."

The campaign highlights the benefits of a career in RE teaching and includes a short video looking at the experiences of an RE teacher and her students. Click [here](#) for further information.

The Role of Faith in British Schools

Day conference

Thursday, 3 September 2015

The Stripe Theatre at the University of Winchester



10:00am - 4:00pm (followed by SEEFF AGM at 4:00pm)

The South East England Faiths Forum (SEEFF), in conjunction with the University of Winchester and the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (NASACRE) is hosting a conference on The Role of Faith in British Schools at the University of Winchester to explore that connection. The plenary speaker will be Alan Brine, recently retired as the lead on Religious Education for Ofsted.

There will be a panel on faith schools, independent and state, and a variety of workshops, some of specific interest to members of SACREs and school governors. There will also be a workshop on SMSC.

Workshop leaders and panellists will include:

- Alan Brine, possibly workshop on requirements for teaching of RE as well as plenary
- Jo Fageant, RE adviser, Oxford Anglican diocese
- Mark Owen, Centre of Religions for Reconciliation and Peace, University of Winchester
- Patricia Hannam, RE adviser, Hampshire County Council
- Rhiannon Love, Primary RE and SMSC training, University of Winchester
- Alasdair Richardson, secondary RE training and PGCE, University of Winchester
- Zafar Ali, Governor Iqra Muslim school, Slough

Because of generous funding the fee will be only **£12** for the day, to include coffee, tea, biscuits and a light lunch.

The SEEFF AGM will be held at 4 PM.

For further information and a booking form contact Elizabeth Jenkerson:

<mailto:elizabeth.jenkerson@btopenworld.com?subject=Day%20conference>



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Officers of all SACREs receive SACRE Briefing. This can be forwarded to other members of your SACRE. SACREs which are paid up members of NASACRE are able to view all content on the website.

Our mailing address is:

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BRACKNELL FOREST SACRE

RETool

The SACRE RETool: Reporting and Evaluating Toolkit

Introduction

The essential role of the SACRE is to support its Local Authority (LA) and the local authority's schools in meeting the entitlement of pupils across the local authority to engage in high quality Religious Education and Collective Worship. In an educational context where standards and accountability are at the top of the agenda, a SACRE's work has become increasingly challenging and diverse, but also more rewarding and stimulating. Good SACREs will therefore tackle their responsibilities and opportunities with enthusiasm, whilst recognising the need for realistic and ongoing appraisal and self-review.

In many ways SACREs reflect the work of governing bodies in schools, in so far as they act as critical friends to the local authority on matters of religious education and collective worship. Like school governors, members are unpaid volunteers who give up their time to support religious education (RE) and collective worship locally.

This Reporting and Self-Evaluating Toolkit is an amended version of the original SACRE SEF (2004). It takes account of changes in inspection arrangements and in the role of local authorities, and of the development of maintained schools independent of their local authority. It is designed to help individual SACREs evaluate their role and, in particular, to consider their impact on pupils' educational experience and learning. It also helps SACREs review their organisational patterns and structures, and their partnership with the local authority and other key stakeholders.

92 The Toolkit highlights five key dimensions of a SACRE's work and provides exemplification of good practice. A SACRE which uses this self-evaluation guidance should gain a clear picture of its strengths, identify areas for further development, and establish its key priorities for action.

The DCSF publication "Religious education in English schools: Non-statutory guidance" (2010) ("the Guidance") remains the most recent official statement in this field. The Guidance sets out the responsibilities of SACREs and Local Authorities as well as those of other stakeholders in RE. Key summaries from the Guidance are included in the Annex to this document.

Rationale

.The RETool focuses on the following five aspects of the work of SACREs:

1. promoting improvement in the standards, the quality of teaching, and provision in RE
2. evaluating the effectiveness of the locally agreed syllabus
3. promoting improvement in the provision and quality of collective worship
4. managing the SACRE and building the partnership between the SACRE, the LA and other key stakeholders
5. contributing to cohesion across the community and the promotion of social and racial harmony.

Each aspect forms a section within the RETool matrix and each section is divided into focus questions to help SACREs explore their provision. Descriptors for 'Developing', 'Established' and 'Advanced' practice will enable SACREs to evaluate their standing within each focus question.

In the final column SACREs may wish to identify any issues and action points within that focus as appropriate. Key priorities can then be identified at the end of each section to inform the development of an action plan.

The intention is that, over time, exemplars of good practice from different SACREs will be made available on an open website, together with annual reports, as a way of adding further support to SACREs and local authorities. Clearly the capacity of any SACRE to make the most of this will be dependent on the extent of the support it receives from, and the quality of its relationship with, its Local Authority.

SACREs are invited to use the format of this RETool to compile their annual report to their local authority. A copy of the annual report should also be lodged electronically with the central database sacrereports@nasacre.org.uk. When compiling their report, SACREs could either use the entire RETool document, or copy sections of text from it into another document; the annual report could focus on specific areas in any given year.

Section 1. Standards and quality of provision of Religious Education

*How effectively does the SACRE, in partnership with the LA, evaluate standards and the quality of provision for RE in schools?
How effective are the strategies to improve standards and the quality of provision?*

In principle, every pupil is entitled to RE of the highest quality. At its best RE will be one of the most popular, relevant, stimulating and truly educative elements in the curriculum. This potential gives SACREs both a benchmark for their aspirations, and a spur for their actions.

A core duty of a SACRE is to gain an overview of the quality of the RE provision in local authority maintained schools and to develop effective strategies to promote the highest standards. In the light of the current inspection culture of partnership and self-evaluation, SACREs will need to approach the achieving of this overview with some sensitivity and astuteness.

Information to assist the SACRE in carrying out its role is likely to come from a range of sources. This may include:

- public examination results
- reports from School Improvement Partners
- analysing questionnaires
- sharing of information from subject self-evaluation forms as appropriate, and in agreement with schools
- feedback from professional development activities
- presentations to SACRE from local teachers

The Guidance offers analysis and advice to support SACREs in reviewing their own effectiveness, their patterns of partnership, and their strategies in relation to enhancing the quality of RE provision in local authority maintained schools. In addition, in the light of the development of academies and other non-LA maintained schools, SACREs also need to take note of and respond appropriately to this new diversified scenario. (In the ensuing pages, the phrase “academies etc” is used as shorthand to refer to all non-LA maintained schools within a particular LA area.)

Key Area: 1a. RE provision across the LA. <i>How effectively does the SACRE gain information about RE provision in schools and put in place strategies to support the delivery of pupil entitlement?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have little knowledge of which schools are fulfilling pupil entitlement in RE because local processes are insufficient to gather such information.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have some knowledge of which schools are providing adequate time for effective learning in RE and have a scheme of work that enables them to deliver the Agreed Syllabus. SACRE's process for acquiring this information is adequate but lacks coherence. Have limited opportunities to implement strategies in support of pupil entitlement.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have robust processes (for example effective and wide-spread use of the RE SEF) in place to gain a full and accurate overview of RE provision within the LA. It works effectively with the LA to support and promote pupil entitlement. Examples of different models for fulfilling pupil entitlement within local schools will be shared with all schools so that schools can have a menu from which to adapt an approach that delivers pupil entitlement whilst meeting the specific needs and priorities of their schools.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?		

Key Area: 1b. Standards of achievement and public examination entries <i>How does SACRE use information about standards and examinations to target support and training for schools?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have limited knowledge of standards in primary and secondary schools including examination entries. The SACRE has no clear strategy to address this.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have some process in place to find out how well learners are doing in KS 1-3, (e.g. by meeting teachers, pupils and through the LA). SACRE will be provided with adequate information about examination entries and standards in examinations in secondary schools and how these relate to national figures. Analysis would be limited as would strategies to address issues.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have robust processes (for example including effective and wide-spread use of the RE SEF) in place to gain accurate information about standards in all schools and examination entries in secondary schools, with useful analysis that enables it to address issues effectively in partnership with the LA. entitlement whilst meeting the specific needs and priorities of their schools.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?		

Key Area: 1c Quality of learning and teaching.		
<i>How well does SACRE use knowledge of quality of learning and teaching to target support appropriately?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have little or no knowledge of the quality of learning and teaching in the LA schools and therefore is unable to provide appropriate challenge and support to the schools. The SACRE has no means to offer or recommend support to schools as there is little professional support in the LA working with the SACRE.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have some information regarding the quality of learning and teaching from LA SIPs, the RE SEF and from contact with teachers and pupils. Limited analysis of this information, however, means that SACRE's attempts to improve learning and teaching have limited effect. be able to circulate information about national courses and support mechanisms to schools	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have a robust relationship with schools and the LA to gather meaningful information about the quality of learning and teaching in RE. This information is analysed to identify trends, areas of strength and areas for development and SACRE draws on expertise in effective schools to support all schools in the LA. advise the LA on the support that is needed and have access to professional support that can be linked to schools in need.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?		

Key Area: 1d Quality of leadership and management, including the provision and management of resources.		
<i>To what extent does SACRE have and use information about the effectiveness of senior and middle leadership of RE in its schools?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have little knowledge about the quality of leadership and management in RE in local schools. They are unaware of issues relating to the availability of resources for RE in schools.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have some information regarding the quality of leadership and management (including senior leadership interest in RE) from the LA, the RE SEF and from contact with teachers and pupils. Limited analysis of this information, however, means that SACRE support to improve learning and teaching has little effect.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have a robust relationship with schools and the LA to gather meaningful information about the quality of L&M (including senior leadership interest in RE). This information is analysed to identify trends, areas of strength and areas for development. SACRE draws on expertise in effective schools to support all schools in the LA.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?		

Key Area: 1e. Recruitment and retention of skilled specialist RE staff.		
<i>To what extent does SACRE use information about specialist provision in their schools to target training and support recruitment?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have little knowledge of data and issues related to the recruitment and retention of subject specialists in schools. Little or no support from the LA.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have some processes in place, supported by the LA, to gather information on staffing in schools, both in relation to subject specialism and teacher commitment to RE. The SACRE would have limited opportunity to act effectively on this information.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have a robust relationship with schools and the LA to gather meaningful information about specialist and committed staff in RE. This information is analysed to identify gaps, training needs and ways to support recruitment and retention.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?		

Key Area: 1f. Relations with academies and other non-LA maintained schools.		
<i>To what extent has SACRE developed a pro-active strategy in relation to academies and other non-LA maintained schools in its area?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have haphazard information about the RE situation in local academies etc, and little or no established relationships and liaison with them. No serious attempt has been made to develop an overall strategy.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have made some effort to establish liaison with each academy etc and to keep updated SACRE's information about their RE situation. By and large academies co-operate with SACRE at this level. SACRE keeps under review the ongoing situation.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have a pro-active policy of liaison with all academies etc and of sustaining a wider professional RE network within the area. While the independence of academies etc is genuinely respected by SACRE, many academies value this network and look to SACRE for ongoing advice and leadership in RE.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?		

Successes/ What are we good at?

Barriers to success

Areas for development/ Action points:

- **For the SACRE**

- **For the LA**

Section 2: The effectiveness of the locally agreed syllabus

How effectively does the SACRE, in partnership with the LA, monitor the impact and evaluate the effectiveness of the agreed syllabus in raising standards? How effectively does the Agreed Syllabus Conference in partnership with SACRE make decisions about the use of national guidance and exemplar material in a review of the agreed syllabus?

The locally agreed syllabus is the bedrock on which schools will build robust sequences of effective learning experiences in RE. A good modern AS will support both the delivery of high quality RE in schools and RE's contribution to the schools' wider curriculum aims and impact measures.

The major factors to be considered in creating or revising an AS include statutory requirements, non-statutory guidance and exemplar material, developments in the school curriculum generally, and local circumstances. Key advice on producing an AS is given in the Guidance. SACREs and ASCs are recommended to take note of this advice in their work on the AS.

66 Local authorities are required to review their locally agreed syllabus at least every five years. This cycle of reviewing, revising, re-launching and re-implementing the AS gives SACREs and ASCs opportunities for ongoing development and improvement of their effectiveness in providing schools with a locally agreed syllabus which is truly "fit for purpose".

While the ASC holds the legal responsibility for revising the agreed syllabus, in practice much of the preparatory and supplementary work will be carried by the SACRE within its routine business. Moreover, in most LAs the membership of SACRE and ASC overlap substantially or are identical. This can contribute to greater inclusiveness and coherence, but good practice will ensure that it is always clear at any time which body is in place at a meeting, and that it is the ASC which is in session when formal decisions about the AS are to be considered.

Academies etc are in principle free to choose their own RE syllabus. In practice, however, many may well continue to use their local AS. There are some sound reasons for SACRE and the LA to encourage this where possible, and to enable academies etc to have some involvement in the process of revising the AS or of devising a new AS. Relationships between SACREs and academies will necessarily be entirely voluntary and not covered by existing legislation or guidance. SACREs should therefore approach such relationships in a spirit of mutual respect and collegiality. These issues have not been incorporated into the matrix below, but see Section 4.

Key Area: 2a – The review process		
<i>How does the SACRE review the success of the existing agreed syllabus?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	<p>have limited arrangements in place to monitor the impact of the agreed syllabus, particularly in raising standards. This provides little or no opportunity to review the effectiveness of the agreed syllabus.</p> <p>not know the views of teachers and have had no systematic evaluation of the strengths/weaknesses of the syllabus. The SACRE is unclear how to proceed with the five-yearly syllabus review and there is little or no budget allocation made by the LA.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	<p>have reviewed the opinions of schools and RE teachers in several ways and have a good idea of the strengths/areas of weakness of the current agreed syllabus.</p> <p>have devised a costed action plan in partnership with the LA, and have been allocated a sufficient budget for the agreed syllabus review and relaunch.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	<p>have a clear and systematic process for monitoring the effectiveness of the agreed syllabus built into its development plan. Reviewing the agreed syllabus includes full consultation with schools and other key stakeholders, including faith communities. Issues that have arisen have been discussed and addressed in planning for a Review. An ASC budget has been planned and allocated in partnership with the LA to include consultation meetings, administrative support and printing/ distribution costs. There is a strong sense of shared ownership of the prospective agreed syllabus review, with clear targets for what needs to be achieved.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?		

Key Area: 2b – The quality of the local Agreed Syllabus		
<i>How well does the locally Agreed Syllabus promote effective learning & teaching in religious education? Is it “fit for purpose”?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	<p>ensure that the Agreed Syllabus sets out what is to be learnt at each Key Stage. Levels are made available, but do not link directly to the learning and there is no clear expectation of quality learning in the Agreed Syllabus.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	<p>ensure that the Agreed Syllabus provides a clear framework for and expectations of learning in RE.</p> <p>make clear the value of RE in school both in terms of learning and of wider issues.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	<p>ensure that the Agreed Syllabus provides a thoroughly professional and inspirational framework for effective learning in RE which is proactively supported and promoted by the LA.</p> <p>have set out clear expectations of the role of the LA and school leadership in ensuring adequate resource and provision in schools.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	
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Key Area: 2c – Launching and implementing the Agreed Syllabus
How well does SACRE promote the AS and provide training to prepare teachers to use it effectively?

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Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	<p>provide for no special launch or other publicity, so that schools are unaware of the significance of the syllabus revisions for learning and teaching in RE.</p> <p>have little training provision for implementing the revised syllabus.</p> <p>be prevented from providing any significant additional guidance or extended training on using the agreed syllabus by a shortage of financial and human resources.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	<p>use other forms of communication (for example the LA website) to promote the launch.</p> <p>have clear arrangements for training teachers on implementing the syllabus provided by the LA; this training is well supported and managed.</p> <p>provide additional guidance or extended training on using the Agreed Syllabus over the life of the Agreed Syllabus.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	<p>Involve the wider community and use strong media coverage, to give the Agreed Syllabus a high profile as an important development in the work of the LA and SACRE. The launch event would include high quality presentations from a range of local faith or belief groups and schools.</p> <p>provide effective training on implementing the Agreed Syllabus, which is supported by all schools, leads to teachers being clear about standards and expectations in the Agreed Syllabus and the implications for teaching and learning. The SACRE provides clear guidance about ways in which schools might begin the process of reviewing their own provision for RE in the light of the revised syllabus.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	
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Key Area: 2d – Membership and training of the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC)

To what extent is the membership of ASC able to fulfil its purpose?

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<p>Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:</p>	<p>have a membership that fulfils basic statutory requirements. There are limited induction and training opportunities; members are unclear of their roles, or how an agreed syllabus can be structured. Particular faith or belief groups or teachers from different phases do not attend.</p> <p>provide clerking, admin and advisory support for only a very limited amount of time or range of work. Routine admin arrangements are in place. Agendas and papers are distributed.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Established A SACRE with established practice would:</p>	<p>have a membership that strongly reflects the diversity of the wider religious and professional community. There are some opportunities for members' training and the purpose and action plan for the work of the ASC are clear.</p> <p>have all four committees well represented at meetings. Agendas and papers are distributed well in advance so all members have time to consider them carefully. Meetings are well managed with strong contributions from a wide range of members.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:</p>	<p>have a membership that is well informed and highly representative of the diversity of the local community. Where particular faith or belief expertise is missing locally there are arrangements to work with consultants. There is a strong, co-ordinated programme of induction and training opportunities for members.</p> <p>Have lively and purposeful meetings with a wide variety of contributions. Members of all 4 groups regularly attend and participate fully in meetings, sharing their experience, expertise and insights.</p> <p>provide effective admin to support the process</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?</p>		

Key Area: 2e - Developing the revised agreed syllabus		
<i>How robust are the processes for producing a strong educational Agreed Syllabus?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have no clear structure for developing a new agreed syllabus. It does not undertake a thorough revision, tending to add material rather haphazardly to the existing syllabus, leading to lack of coherence in the final outcome. There is little or no consultation during the development of a new agreed syllabus.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have clear objectives for the revision and involve a wide range of local expertise in its construction. The LA and the ASC in partnership ensure that strong direction is provided to design an agreed syllabus which is coherent, clear and accessible. Working parties and consultations are reasonably managed and supported.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	ensure that high quality advice is sought to review and advise on the revisions as they develop. The ASC in partnership with the LA holds well attended consultation meetings and briefings to ensure teachers are fully involved in, and have a sense of ownership of, the revision process. The Agreed Syllabus has a clear framework for progression and challenging learning	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?		

Key Area: 2f - Making best use of National Guidance		
<i>How does the Agreed Syllabus Conference make choices relating to the use of national documentation? (See footnote*)</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have a limited awareness and understanding of national documentation in relation to the agreed syllabus review process and are unable to use national guidance in a coherent way. have members not fully understanding the broader curriculum and how this is organised and have no opportunity for training to give them the skills to understand how RE might best play a part in the education of the whole child.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	be aware of national documentation and some of its implications for the Agreed Syllabus review process, but does not ensure its use reflects local circumstances. Have ASC members who take note of the broader curriculum picture but do not link the Agreed Syllabus to it systematically or appreciate how teachers will be able to make use of it to link to the wider curriculum in schools.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	take full account of national documentation in the construction of the revised Agreed Syllabus, while ensuring their work reflects local circumstances. The syllabus is devised so that RE fits appropriately with other curriculum areas at all key stages and guidance about how to make the best links is given to schools.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	
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*Documentation includes: the Non-Statutory National Framework in RE; the Programmes of Learning in RE (Primary) and Programmes of Study in RE (Secondary), the new Primary and Secondary Curriculums, and “Religious education in English schools: “Non-statutory guidance 2010”.

Successes/ What are we good at?

Barriers to success

Areas for development/ Action points:

- For the SACRE
- For the LA

Section 3. Collective worship

How effectively does the SACRE fulfil its responsibilities for the provision and practice of collective worship?

Maintained schools are required to provide a daily act of collective worship for every pupil. In community schools not having a religious foundation, the acts of collective worship should be “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character”, without being distinctive of any particular denomination. Part of a SACRE’s role is to support the effective provision of collective worship in community schools and to advise the LA on issues related to provision and quality. It must also consider applications from head teachers in community schools that the requirement for collective worship to be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character be disapplied for some or all of the pupils in that school. SACRE ‘determines’ the appropriateness of that application and grants a ‘determination’ to those schools where the application is judged to be in the best interests of the pupils. All pupils in schools with determinations continue to have an entitlement to daily collective worship.

Collective worship can be a rich and rewarding element of the curriculum as a whole. SACREs have the opportunity to enhance the quality of collective worship by appropriate guidance and support.

Key Area: 3a – Supporting pupil entitlement		
<i>What strategies are in place to enable the SACRE to support the delivery of pupil entitlement in the LA's schools?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	be unaware of the issues facing schools in providing collective worship. provide little advice or support towards fulfilling pupil entitlement to collective worship.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	understand local issues of delivering pupil entitlement and of the challenges facing schools in providing collective worship. provide some advice in support of delivering pupil entitlement and would seek to ensure that schools had access to, and advice on, appropriate resourcing towards delivering collective worship.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have a balanced and realistic overview of provision and its challenges across the LA. provide or arrange for systematic support and guidance for schools experiencing difficulty in delivering pupil entitlement. obtain feedback from schools to evaluate the impact of advice and support, and periodically reviews its strategies for supporting pupil entitlement.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?		

Key Area: 3b – Enhancing the quality of provision of collective worship		
<i>How does SACRE seek to influence the quality of collective worship in the LA's schools?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	not be adequately supported for promoting quality of provision of collective worship. have agenda items about collective worship dominated by the issue of SACRE trying to find a mechanism for obtaining data. have little understanding of the nature and potential of collective worship and of what effective provision in each school might be.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have occasional agenda items on collective worship, with some insight into how collective worship is being delivered in the LA's schools. understand what effective provision is but members of the SACRE have little 'hands-on' experience of	<input type="checkbox"/>

	<p>collective worship in schools.</p> <p>promote in-service support for teachers with responsibility for collective worship, and provides advice on enhancing quality of provision.</p>	
<p>Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:</p>	<p>have a good overview of quality of provision across the LA, with information from the LA and from presentations by schools.</p> <p>have first-hand experience of collective worship in schools.</p> <p>disseminate good practice in consultation with schools and teachers, sponsors an ongoing programme of in-service development, and assist schools in evaluating and enhancing the quality of their provision.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?</p>		

<p>Key Area: 3c – Responding to requests for determinations</p> <p><i>How robust are SACRE's procedures for responding to requests from schools for a determination?</i></p>		
<p>Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:</p>	<p>have had little or no experience of any requests for a determination, and have given at most only minimal attention as to how it might respond to such a request.</p> <p>be found unprepared and at risk of making an unsound decision or giving erroneous advice by a request for a determination.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Established A SACRE with established practice would:</p>	<p>be aware that schools have the option of requesting a determination, and that SACRE has a major role in this process.</p> <p>have provided some training to its members regarding determinations, either directly through working on earlier requests, or through specific elements in developmental sessions.</p> <p>be found by a request for a determination able to respond in an adequate but piecemeal fashion, without a systematic overview of this area of work.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:</p>	<p>be fully equipped for responding to requests for determinations, with a good understanding of SACRE's responsibilities.</p> <p>have a well-established and effective framework for responding to requests, with which members are familiar and comfortable.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Meet a request with a judicious and well-informed appraisal of the request by SACRE, leading to a sound decision communicated clearly to the school in a context of ongoing advisory support. SACRE periodically reviews all existing determinations.	
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?		

Successes/ What are we good at?

Barriers to success

Areas for development/ Action points:

- For the SACRE
- For the LA

Section 4: Management of the SACRE and partnership with the LA and other key stakeholders

How far does the SACRE's partnership with the LA enable it to carry out its responsibilities effectively?

The relationship between a Local Authority and its SACRE is essentially one of partnership and collaboration, with mutual obligations and responsibilities. So that a SACRE can advise and act effectively for the LA in the field of Religious Education and collective worship, the LA must ensure not only that there is a local SACRE, but also that it is able to fulfil its functions. The extent to which a SACRE is supported, by funding and personnel, will determine how well individuals and committees can work together. Where a SACRE is valued by the Local Authority, it is more likely that the members of the SACRE will be able to contribute both to the SACRE's work and to the LA's wider strategic objectives.

By bring together many local stakeholders (faith/belief communities, teachers, local politicians and cooptees such as universities and parents) into a statutory body, SACREs can act positively for LAs as a sounding board on their core business of RE and collective worship, and also on wider strategic educational objectives such as raising standards, narrowing the gap and promoting community cohesion, as well as community matters related to interfaith collaboration and wellbeing. These core and value added functions work best when the SACRE is appropriately supported, resourced and managed, and when channels of communication with the LA are good.

The potential for SACREs to contribute more widely is dependent on SACRE members feeling that the meetings are outward looking, focused on pupil needs, purposeful and enjoyable. This can be achieved, for example, by meeting in different locations (schools, places of worship, cultural centres and Council meetings rooms) and by ensuring that all members feel they are equal partners whose views and experiences are sought, listened to and valued.

Alongside this, SACRE has the power to develop structural relationships with academies etc by exploring ways in which an academy "presence" can be incorporated into SACRE itself, e.g. by co-options (non-voting), through additional places in Group C (teacher organisations), or by creating a non-voting notional "Group E" (as had been envisaged in the Grant Maintained era). Similar considerations apply to the ASC. Although the legal framework would currently not allow voting rights to any distinct academy representation, SACREs and ASCs would surely not wish to proceed with decisions which were clearly not acceptable to the academy sector represented in their wider membership.

Key Area: 4a – SACRE meetings		
<i>How purposeful, inclusive, representative and effective are SACRE meetings?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	hold meetings regularly with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • routine administrative arrangements • appropriate distribution of agendas and papers Business is dealt with in a prompt and orderly way. There are limited opportunities for teachers and representatives of faith communities to be invited to share their work. Business tends to be focused solely on routine statutory requirements.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have good attendance where all four committees are well represented. Agendas and papers are distributed well in advance ensuring all members have time to consider them carefully. Meetings are well managed with strong contributions from a wide range of members. Meetings move beyond routine matters to consider wider issues about the quality of RE and collective worship.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have SACRE members contributing to the development of the agenda. Meetings will be lively and purposeful with a wide variety of contributions focused on the major priorities for improvement in schools. Teachers and representatives of faith communities regularly attend and participate fully in meetings, sharing their experience and insights. Meetings are held in a variety of venues, including local places of worship and schools.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?		

Key Area: 4b – Membership and training		
<i>To what extent is the membership of SACRE able to fulfil SACRE's purpose?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have a membership that fulfils the basic statutory obligations. Arrangements to fill vacancies are not always effective. There are limited induction and training opportunities for SACRE members.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have a membership that strongly reflects the diversity of the wider religious and professional community. There are some opportunities for SACRE members to participate in training activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	make good use of co-option to ensure membership of the SACRE is well informed and is highly representative of the diversity of the local community. There is a strong and co-ordinated programme of induction, and training opportunities for SACRE members.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?		

Key Area: 4c – Improvement/development planning <i>How effective are the priorities and actions identified by SACRE in improving the experience of pupils in schools?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	not have an action plan to focus its future work and there is little overt linkage between the priorities of the LA's development / improvement plan and the work of the SACRE.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have a basic action plan which is reviewed regularly and updated on an annual basis. This provides an effective focus for the SACRE's work. There is some attempt to link the plan to the wider LA priorities. The SACRE is regularly represented at national events relevant to its work; for example, NASACRE.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have a well-defined action plan with clear objectives and success criteria. Resource implications are clearly defined. There is a clear link between the plan and the wider objectives of the LA.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?		

Key Area: 4d – Professional and financial support <i>How well supported and resourced is SACRE?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have financial and management support to allow it to exist. Representatives of the LA attend meetings but there is limited subject specialist advice available. There are resources for basic SACRE functions but there is no specific budget for the SACRE and little opportunity for the SACRE to take initiatives requiring funding.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have some access to subject specialist advice and is informed of local and national initiatives. The LA is represented at meetings and can provide a means of communication with the wider LA. The SACRE has a modest budget which enables it to fund some initiatives. Meetings are clerked and the clerk maintains communication with the Chair and other members between meetings as needed.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	be well supported by a subject specialist who provides effective advice and is well informed about the provision and quality of RE in the LA and about national developments. Representatives of the LA attend meetings and the SACRE is also attended by a lead officer from the LA who can provide a strong link between the work of the SACRE and the wider LA. SACRE's plans are linked to other local work and projects. The SACRE has access to funds to enable it to make decisions about its priorities and ensure these can be properly resourced.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?		

Key Area: 4e - Information and advice		
<i>How well informed is SACRE in order to be able to advise the LA appropriately?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	receive limited information about public examination data from the LA. Limited information is provided about wider national and local developments. The SACRE tends to receive information from the LA rather than ask questions of the LA and challenge its work.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	be regularly provided with clear information relevant to the quality and provision for RE and collective worship in local schools. The SACRE receives the information in a way that enables it to challenge and question the LA's work.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	receive detailed and well-analysed information about the quality and provision for RE and collective worship. As a result SACRE uses this information effectively to give advice to the LA which leads to strategic action to improve standards. This can include advice related to the review of the Agreed Syllabus. The SACRE has a strong partnership with the LA and plays an active role in promoting ideas and initiatives.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?		

Key Area: 4f - Partnerships with key stakeholders		
<i>What partnerships does the SACRE have with key local and national stakeholders, and of what quality are these?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have little contact with or awareness of other local agencies, and rarely has contact with pupils or parents.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	be well informed about other key stakeholders supporting RE and has some contact with the groups involved.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	build its activities effectively on local networks. Links with other bodies, such as local Inter-Faith groups, are positive and able to support raising standards and developing community cohesion. The SACRE has opportunities to hear the views and experience of pupils and parents about RE. Representatives of key support networks such as ASTs and higher education providers are regularly involved with the SACRE.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?		

Key Area: 4g– Relations with the Academies sector		
<i>How effectively is SACRE encouraging academies etc to see themselves also as stakeholders in their local area, specifically by devising ways in which an academies presence is incorporated into SACRE itself?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have nothing formal in place. Little encouragement, if any, is extended to academies to relate to the SACRE's proceedings, and there are no channels through which academies can contribute.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have made some attempts to set up an academies presence in SACRE, but these have been hampered by e.g. lack of confidence or vision on the part of SACRE, or by confusion over what is legally valid and possible. Nevertheless, some academies are now committed to working with SACRE and to finding a constructive way forward.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have considered systematically the legal and structural options open to them, and have set up formal procedures for establishing a permanent and sustainable academies presence on SACRE. A high proportion of academies in the area regard themselves as stakeholders and partners with SACRE.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?		

113 **Successes/ What are we good at?**

Barriers to success

Areas for development/ Action points:

- **For the SACRE**
- **For the LA**

Section 5: Contribution of SACRE to promoting cohesion across the community

How effectively does SACRE, in partnership with the Local Authority and the faith communities, contribute to the promoting of cohesion across the community?

“By community cohesion, we mean working towards a society in which there is a common vision and sense of belonging by all communities; a society in which the diversity of people’s backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued; a society in which similar life opportunities are available to all; and a society in which strong and positive relationships exist and continue to be developed in the workplace, in schools and in the wider community”¹.

Schools play a major role in helping to shape the future of our society, and the duty laid on each school to promote community cohesion is a significant part of that role. One of the most obvious and effective contributors to the community cohesion agenda is Religious Education. SACREs should take every opportunity to promote the contribution of RE to the community cohesion programmes in local schools. Where properly supported by the LA, SACREs themselves can act as powerful vehicles for promoting community cohesion in schools, in education more widely, and in the local community. SACREs should exemplify good practice in their internal relations and in the ways in which they go about their business. Advice on the contribution of SACREs and RE to community cohesion is given in the Guidance.

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¹ Alan Johnson, Secretary of State for Education and Skills, speaking in Parliament on 2 November 2006. Based on the Government and the Local Government Association’s definition first published in Guidance on Community Cohesion, LGA, 2002 and resulting from the Cantle Report in 2001.

Key Area: 5a – SACRE’s membership		
<i>How representative is SACRE’s membership of the local community?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have a membership that is not necessarily strongly representative of the religious diversity of the local community.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have membership that broadly reflects the religious diversity of the local community. This is regularly reviewed by the SACRE in partnership with the LA particularly where there is a high mobility of communities.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have strong representation from all major local religious communities including different groups within the same religious tradition (e.g. different Muslim communities). It would also endeavour to include representation from small local faith communities and / or have links with national bodies that can broker advice from those communities elsewhere in the UK.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?		

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Key Area: 5b SACRE’s understanding of the local area		
<i>How much do SACRE members know and understand the local community in its religious, cultural and ethnic dimensions?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have limited knowledge about the religious, cultural and ethnic diversity in the local area.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	be provided with a detailed analysis of the religious and cultural diversity within the LA and therefore be well aware of different groups representing the diversity within the local area. know about local Inter Faith groups and the work that they do in the locality.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have detailed knowledge of the nature of the religious, ethnic and cultural diversity in the local area and take active steps to inform itself further about the distinctive needs and opportunities created by this diversity. SACRE would have good liaison and seek to develop initiatives with local Inter Faith groups. The SACRE would be aware of the impact of this local context on schools and on the provision for RE and collective worship in those schools.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?		

Key Area: 5c – SACRE’s engagement with the community cohesion agenda.		
<i>How much does SACRE understand the contribution which RE can make to a schools’ provision for community cohesion?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have a basic grasp of what community cohesion means and therefore a limited understanding of the contribution which RE can make to the community cohesion agenda. It may also have little opportunity to promote RE’s contribution to schools of faith communities.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have an understanding of what community cohesion means and the duty on schools to promote this. The SACRE would understand and have a clear commitment to the part RE can play in promoting community cohesion and would seek to promote this throughout its work.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	understand what community cohesion means and be clear about the duty on schools and the LA to promote this. The members of SACRE would appreciate their key role in promoting RE’s contribution to the community cohesion offer of its schools. SACRE would ensure this is explicit in the local Agreed Syllabus and related guidance. SACRE members, as representatives of different sections of the wider community, would appreciate how they and their wider constituencies can work in partnership with other agencies to enhance the promotion of community cohesion in schools.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?		

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Key Area: 5d – SACRE’s role within wider LA initiatives on community cohesion		
<i>How well is SACRE linked to or consulted about LA initiatives promoting community cohesion?</i>		
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	be given little information about, or contact with, wider LA initiatives linked to the promotion of community cohesion.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	be aware of some LA initiatives promoting community cohesion and have opportunity to discuss and contribute to this work.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	be a key partner and stakeholder in the work of the local authority in this area and take the initiative in promoting activities and links, which relate to this work. be aware of and work in partnership with local Inter-Faith groups to ensure the LA’s work has a broad consultation base.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?		

Successes/ What are we good at?

Barriers to success

Areas for development/ Action points:

- For the SACRE

- For the LA

ANNEX

The responsibilities of a Local Authority

The detailed rights and responsibilities of local authorities can be seen in full in *RE in English Schools: Non-statutory guidance 2010*. This can be found at <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/subjects/re/guidance/>

In brief, local authorities are legally required to:

- establish a SACRE and appoint representatives to each of the four committees
- establish an occasional body called an agreed syllabus conference (ASC)
- institute a review of its locally agreed syllabus every five years
- appoint members of the committees represented on the ASC
- ensure that membership of group/committee A on the SACRE and ASC is broadly representative of the local area
- take all reasonable steps to ensure that SACRE and ASC membership is representative

The responsibilities of a SACRE

The detailed rights and responsibilities of SACREs can be seen in full in *RE in English Schools: Non-statutory guidance 2010*. This can be found at <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/subjects/re/guidance/>

In brief, SACREs are legally required to:

- advise the local authority on RE and collective worship
- publish an annual report on their work
- send the annual report to QCDA (or its successor body)
- meet in public, unless confidential information is to be disclosed
- make their minutes available to the local authority and make provision for public access to their agenda and reports

The Guidance also indicates that SACREs should, as a matter of good practice:

- Monitor the provision for both RE and Collective Worship
- Provide advice and support on RE and Collective Worship to schools
- In partnership with the local authority, keep the locally agreed syllabus and provision in schools under review
- Offer advice to the local authority

In addition, SACREs may:

- Require their local authority to review the locally agreed syllabus
- Decide to advise their local authority
- Co-opt members who are not members of any of the four groups.

The Guidance also makes it clear that SACREs can and should make a strong contribution to the promotion of community cohesion in schools and in the local community through their promotion of good quality RE and through their operation as a SACRE.

Discussion date(s)

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