

THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF A SACRE

A SACRE must:

- advise the LA on RE given in accordance with the agreed syllabus, and on matters related to its functions, whether in response to a referral from the LA or as it sees fit ¹¹
- publish an annual report on its work and on actions taken by its representative groups, specifying any matters on which it has advised the LA, broadly describe the nature of that advice, and set out reasons for offering advice on matters not referred to it by the LA ¹²
- send a copy of the report to the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) ¹³
- meet in public unless confidential information is to be disclosed ¹⁴
- make minutes of its meetings available for inspection at the LA's offices (so far as the minutes relate to the parts of meetings that were open to the public). There are also provisions about public access to the agenda and reports for meetings. ¹⁵

A SACRE should:

- monitor the provision and quality of RE taught according to its agreed syllabus, together with the overall effectiveness of the syllabus
- provide advice and support on the effective teaching of RE in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus; provide advice to the LA and its schools on methods of teaching, the choice of teaching material and the provision of teacher training
- in partnership with its LA, consider whether any changes need to be made in the agreed syllabus or in the support offered to schools in the implementation of the agreed syllabus, to improve the quality teaching and learning of RE
- offer advice to the LA, and through the LA to schools, concerning how an existing agreed syllabus can be interpreted so as to fit in with a broad, balanced and coherent curriculum.

A SACRE may:

- require its LA to review the agreed syllabus and, if after discussion a vote is taken on this matter, the LA group on SACRE is not entitled to cast a vote. ¹⁶
A majority decision by the three other committees is sufficient
 - decide to advise the LA on matters related to its functions to the LA – equally, an LA may decide to refer matters to its SACRE ¹⁷
 - co-opt members who are not members of any of the four groups ¹⁸
– such co-opted members may provide educational expertise, young peoples' views or religious and non-religious views that reflect a diverse multi-cultural society. However, on any question to be decided by a SACRE, its constituent groups each have a single vote but co-opted members do not have a vote. ¹⁹
- Decisions within a group do not require unanimity. Each group must regulate its own proceedings, including provision for resolving deadlock. Many SACREs have chosen to adopt a constitution to regulate their proceedings and ways of working.

11 Section 391(1)(a), Education Act 1996

12 Section 391(6) and (7), Education Act 1996

13 Section 391(10), Education Act 1996

14 Religious Education (Meetings of Local Conferences and Councils) Regulations 1994, SI

15 Religious Education (Meetings of Local Conferences and Councils) Regulations 1994, SI 1994/1304

16 Section 391(3), Education Act 1996

17 Section 391(3), Education Act 1996

18 Section 390(3), Education Act 1996

19 Section 390(7) and Section 391(4), Education Act 1996

THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF AN ASC

Every LA is required to establish and support an occasional body called an agreed syllabus conference (ASC).

An ASC must:

- produce and recommend to the LA an agreed syllabus for RE which is educationally sound and meets legal requirements – as indicated earlier, this process should take account of the illustrative primary programme of learning and secondary programme of study but is in no way bound by them
- with any sub-committee it may appoint,²⁰ meet in public, subject to exceptions in relation to confidentiality²¹
- unanimously recommend a syllabus for adoption by the LA (each committee having a single vote) - there are provisions for the Secretary of State to become involved where an ASC is not unanimous²²
- include on any sub-committee at least one member of each of its constituent committees.

An ASC may specify what must be taught through the locally agreed syllabus.

In recommending a syllabus the ASC may not specify the amount of curriculum time that must be allocated to RE by schools, but they may provide an estimate of how much time their syllabus would require, to help schools to plan their timetable.

Membership of an ASC

- An ASC is required to be made up of four committees²³ (see 'LA role', p.10).
- Committee A – Christian denominations and such other religions and religious denominations as, in the opinion of the LA, will appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area;
- Committee B - the Church of England
- Committee C - teacher associations
- Committee D - the LA.

There is no legal provision for an ASC to include co-opted members, but it can seek the advice it considers appropriate from those it considers appropriate, to inform the development of effective RE provision in its area.

The agreed syllabus

The locally agreed syllabus is a statutory syllabus of RE prepared under Schedule 31 to the Education Act 1996 and adopted by the LA under that schedule. It must be followed in maintained schools without a designated denomination.

Once adopted by the LA, the agreed syllabus sets out what pupils should be taught and can include the expected standards of pupils' performance at different stages.

Every locally agreed syllabus must reflect that the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.²⁴

The law does not define what the principal religions represented in Great Britain are. ASCs can decide which are the principal religions represented in Great Britain, other than Christianity, to be included in their agreed syllabus.

Agreed syllabuses in any community school and any foundation, voluntary aided or voluntary-controlled school without a religious character cannot require RE to be provided by means of any catechism or formulary which is distinctive of a particular religious denomination.²⁵

This prohibition does not extend to the study of catechisms and formularies.

20 Schedule 31(6), Education Act 1996

21 Regulation 3, S1 1994/1304

23 Schedule 31(10), Education Act 1996

24 Section 390(2) Education Act 1996; Schedule 31, para 4, Education Act 1996

25 Section 375, Education Act 1996

26 Para 3 of Schedule 19 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998