

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.