



# SACREs and self-evaluation

A guide

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Better  
education  
and care

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## Introduction

Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs) have an important role in the development of effective learning in religious education and supporting good practice in collective worship. The work of SACREs has become increasingly challenging and diverse. In many ways SACREs reflect the work of governing bodies in schools, in so far as they act as critical friends to the local education authority (LEA) on matters of religious education and collective worship. They also mirror the work of governing bodies in that members are unpaid volunteers who give up their time to support religious education (RE) and collective worship locally.

A key question for a SACRE to consider is if SACREs were abolished tomorrow, who would miss them? This guide to SACREs and self-evaluation is designed to help individual SACREs evaluate their role and, in particular, to consider their impact on pupils' learning. The guidance highlights five key dimensions of a SACRE's work and provides exemplification of good practice. Using the self-evaluation guidance should enable a SACRE to have a clear picture of its strengths and areas which could be further developed. It encourages SACREs to consider their key priorities, their organisational patterns and structures, and their partnership with the LA and other key stakeholders.

This self-evaluation tool has been developed from three main sources:

- the recent Ofsted report on the inspection of SACREs (*An Evaluation of the work of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education*, HMI 2269, published in November 2004)
- the Qualification and Assessment Authority's (QCA) annual analysis of SACRE reports
- the National Association of SACRE's (NASACRE) work in exemplifying effective practice in SACREs.

## Rationale

The purpose of the self-evaluation tool is to help SACREs and LAs assess the quality and effectiveness of their work and to identify where they might develop further.

The tool focuses on a range of aspects of the work of SACREs including:

1. the monitoring and improvement of the standards, quality of teaching and provision in RE
2. the partnership between the SACRE, the LA and other key stakeholders
3. the effectiveness of the locally agreed syllabus
4. the monitoring and improvement of the provision and quality of collective worship
5. the contribution of the SACRE to the promotion of social and racial harmony.

Each SACRE should be able to identify where it is in relation to three broad stages of development: **Developing**, **Established** and **Advanced**. Wherever possible some examples of good practice are included.

## Stage 1: developing

SACREs at this stage of development may be fulfilling their statutory obligations but do so at a fairly basic level and are not able to take a lead in providing advice to the LA or the initiative in promoting developments. They are often unclear about their roles and responsibilities and are not particularly well informed about the strengths, weaknesses or priorities for development in schools. They often have a formal relationship with the LA but have little input in or awareness of the LA's priorities.

SACREs at this stage may:

- find it difficult to meet their statutory responsibilities
- experience low levels of attendance at SACRE meetings
- have limited awareness of the quality of provision for RE and collective worship in schools
- have limited subject specialist or financial support from the LA
- little information about the impact or effectiveness of the locally agreed syllabus
- have limited representation from religious diversity in the local community
- have no development plan to focus the future work of the SACRE.

The objectives for SACREs at this stage of development are to focus on ways of providing more proactive leadership, so as to move beyond the basic fulfilment of their statutory obligations. Key targets might include:

- reviewing and extending the membership of the SACRE
- making SACRE meetings more purposeful
- identifying sources of specialist advice to support the SACRE's work
- producing an action plan to focus ways of developing the work of the SACRE
- creating stronger links with RE teachers in local schools.

## Stage 2: established

SACREs at this stage will have a well-established relationship with their LA and have a clear idea about their priorities for development. Good acquisition of resources enable it to carry out its functions effectively. Members will be reasonably well informed about the quality of provision in local schools and, as a result, are in a position to challenge and support the work of the LA. Meetings will be seen as purposeful and worthwhile occasions.

The issues facing SACREs at this stage may be:

- limited opportunities to take the initiative in promoting new ideas
- gaining better information about the quality of provision in schools
- the need to extend the links with wider LA priorities and activities
- ways of extending their analysis of the impact and effectiveness of the locally agreed syllabus.

At this stage, maintaining momentum may be important and key targets might include:

- exploring ways of measuring the impact of their work more effectively
- extending the ways in which the SACRE can contribute to the LA's priorities
- investigating opportunities to promote and initiate activities to improve quality and provision
- exploring ways in which the SACRE can extend its contribution to the promotion of social and racial harmony.

### **Stage 3: advanced**

SACREs at this stage will have very effective practice. Members will have a shared vision and understanding of their aims and purpose, and will seek to sustain their positive work in the light of changing needs and priorities. Meetings will be very purposeful and focused on the major priorities for improvement in schools. There will be a very effective partnership with the LA, and SACREs will be well supported by subject specialist advice, training and funding. They will be very well informed about the quality and provision for RE and collective worship in schools, and about wider LA and national priorities and developments. The process of reviewing, revising, implementing and evaluating the locally agreed syllabus will be very robust, ensuring that schools are well supported in their work. Objectives at this stage will be concerned with innovation and sharing good practice to sustain the momentum and success.

Key targets might include:

- extending the range of initiatives taken to improve standards and quality in schools
- ensuring pupils' progress can lead to recognition of achievement through, for example, GCSE accreditation
- exploring ways of sharing good practice more widely with other SACREs and schools.
- improving the ways in which evidence is gathered about standards and the quality of provision in schools, particularly in the light of changes in the nature of Ofsted inspections
- developing the ways in which the SACRE can contribute to the promotion of social and racial harmony.

## The responsibilities of SACREs

The legal responsibilities of the LA are to:

- ensure that there is a SACRE
- ensure all four committees<sup>1</sup> are represented on the SACRE
- ensure there is an agreed syllabus which is reviewed at least once every five years
- ensure that support is in place for the SACRE to enable it to discharge its responsibilities
- take note of, and respond to, any advice it receives from the SACRE.

Reference to SACREs from the LA may include advice on methods of teaching, the choice of teaching material and the provision of teacher training.

A SACRE must:

- publish an annual report of its work and send this to QCA
- consider requests for determinations on collective worship when required
- advise the LA upon such matters as collective worship and the religious education to be given, in accordance with an agreed syllabus.

A SACRE is also likely to:

- monitor the provision for both RE and collective worship
- provide support and advice on RE and collective worship to schools.

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<sup>1</sup> There are four committees on every SACRE representing the Church of England, other religions and denominations, teachers, and elected members.

## 1. Standards and quality of provision of religious education

*How effectively does the SACRE, in partnership with the LA, monitor and evaluate standards and the quality of provision for RE in schools?*

*How effective are the strategies to improve standards and the quality of provision?*

Key area	Developing	Established	Advanced	Exemplar of good practice
<b>1a</b> Compliance and time allocation for RE	Little knowledge of levels of compliance with the legal requirements for RE in schools. Little information about the time schools are allocating to RE.	Informed about levels of compliance and time allocations but limited opportunities to establish strategies for action where evidence of non-compliance or inadequate time allocation is reported.	Well informed about levels of compliance and time allocations and factors impacting on these. Clear understanding of effective ways schools can provide adequate time for RE. Established strategies to take action to support schools which are non-compliant and receive feedback on the impact of interventions.	Where a school self-evaluation shows it to be non-compliant or to provide inadequate curriculum time for RE, the SACRE requires the LA to investigate and report back on the action being taken by the school to address the situation.
<b>1b</b> Public examination entries in RE	Limited knowledge of the number of pupils in the LA entered for GCSE, AS and A2 examinations.	Informed about the number of pupils in the LA entered for GCSE, AS and A2 examinations and how this compares with national figures but few strategies to increase the number of entries.	Well informed about the number of pupils in the LA entered for GCSE, AS and A2 examinations and how this compares with national figures. Clear strategies in place to increase the number of entries.	The SACRE receives a detailed analysis of examination entries in RE from the LA, including a breakdown by grouping (e.g. gender and ethnicity) and how this compares with national figures. The SACRE works collaboratively with the LA to promote examination courses as a means of fulfilling statutory requirements.

<p><b>1c</b> Standards and achievement: including standards at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, GCSE, AS and A2 level</p>	<p>Limited knowledge about standards within schools and no clear SACRE or LA strategies to address areas of concern or share good practice.</p>	<p>Informed about standards of RE in schools locally and by comparison with national figures, but limited analysis of the data and little opportunity to develop strategies to address weaknesses.</p>	<p>Detailed information about standards with careful analysis of data against national figures and trends. Information about standards extends to primary schools and Key Stage 3. Clear strategies in place to tackle areas of weakness. Developing independent mechanisms to gather data about performance.</p>	<p>The SACRE receives detailed analysis of examination performance and requires the LA to explain how it will intervene in schools where there is clear evidence of under-performance.</p> <p>The SACRE requests schools to provide details of pupils' levels of performance at the end of each key stage.</p>
<p><b>1d</b> Quality of teaching</p>	<p>Limited knowledge about the quality of RE teaching in schools.</p>	<p>Information provided about findings in relation to quality of teaching derived from LA intelligence and RE subject self-evaluations, but limited analysis of strengths and weaknesses and little opportunity to develop strategies to tackle weaknesses.</p>	<p>Clear and detailed information about the quality of teaching, with some analysis of trends and strengths and weaknesses. Good strategies to share good practice and target improvement strategies on areas of weakness.</p>	<p>The SACRE receives regular presentations from teachers about good practice in teaching and learning in RE.</p> <p>The SACRE works with the LA to provide guidance to schools about effective RE teaching in primary and secondary schools, including guidance on effective and rigorous subject self-evaluation.</p>



<p><b>1e</b> Quality of leadership and management.</p>	<p>Limited knowledge about the quality of leadership and management of RE in schools.</p>	<p>Information provided about findings in relation to quality of leadership and management derived from LA intelligence and RE subject self-evaluations, but limited analysis of strengths and weaknesses and little opportunity to develop strategies to tackle weaknesses.</p>	<p>Clear and detailed information about the quality of leadership and management, with some analysis of trends and strengths and weaknesses. Good strategies to share good practice and target improvement strategies on areas of weakness.</p>	<p>The SACRE works with the LA to provide guidance to schools about effective leadership and management of RE in primary and secondary schools, including guidance on effective and rigorous subject self-evaluation.</p>
<p><b>1f</b> Recruitment and retention issues. Level of specialist provision</p>	<p>Little knowledge of data and issues related to the recruitment or retention of specialist RE teachers in schools.</p>	<p>Some investigation and analysis of subject recruitment and retention issues. The SACRE is aware of the level of non-specialist teaching of RE but has limited opportunity to take action to deal with its concerns.</p>	<p>Detailed knowledge of patterns of recruitment, retention and specialist provision. The SACRE is active in promoting strategies to improve recruitment and provide training to address the needs of non-specialist teachers of RE.</p>	<p>The SACRE recommends to the LA that a comprehensive analysis is undertaken of the provision of specialist staffing for RE across the LA. Together they build links with local teacher training providers to explore ways of improving recruitment of specialist staff.</p>
<p><b>1g</b> Resources</p>	<p>Little knowledge about issues related to the quality of resources for RE in schools</p>	<p>Some information about issues related to resources for RE in schools but limited opportunity to address areas of concern.</p>	<p>Detailed knowledge of issues related to resources for RE in schools. The SACRE is active in promoting the development of resources and setting benchmarks about appropriate levels of funding for the subject in schools.</p>	<p>The SACRE works in partnership with the LA to develop a subject website which incorporates guidance about current high quality resource materials.</p>

## 2. 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?*

Key area	Developing	Established	Advanced	Exemplar of good practice
<b>2a</b> SACRE meetings	Meetings are held regularly. Routine administrative arrangements are in place. Agendas and papers are distributed appropriately. Attendance is satisfactory. 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.	Attendance is good and 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.	SACRE members contribute to development of the agenda. Meetings are lively and purposeful with wide variety of contributions. 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.	The SACRE frequently holds meetings in local places of worship providing opportunities for members to develop their understanding of the religious communities in the local area.

<p><b>2b</b> Membership and training</p>	<p>The membership fulfils the basic statutory obligations. The arrangements to fill vacancies are not always effective. There are limited induction and training opportunities for SACRE members.</p>	<p>The membership strongly reflects the diversity of the wider religious and professional community. There are some opportunities for SACRE members to participate in training activities.</p>	<p>Very good use is made 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.</p>	<p>The SACRE has a well-developed process of co-option of local teachers of RE to ensure it has a broad representation from all types of school in the LA.</p>
<p><b>2c</b> Improvement/development planning</p>	<p>The SACRE does 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.</p>	<p>The SACRE has 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.</p>	<p>The SACRE has 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. The SACRE is regularly represented at national events relevant to its work; for example, NASACRE.</p>	<p>The SACRE is provided with a summary of the current LA priorities and identifies ways its action plan can incorporate relevant objectives related to these priorities</p>

<p><b>2d</b> Professional and financial support</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>The SACRE has some access to subject specialist advice. 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.</p>	<p>The SACRE is 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. 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. The SACRE has access to funds to enable it to make decisions about its priorities and ensure these can be properly resourced.</p>	<p>The SACRE in an LA with no subject specialist adviser co-opts a local advanced skills teacher (AST) with expertise in RE and secures release time for her to undertake development work for the SACRE and schools.</p> <p>In another case a SACRE develops a partnership with a neighbouring LA's specialist adviser to provide advice and support</p>
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<p><b>2e</b> Information and advice</p>	<p>The SACRE receives 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.</p>	<p>The SACRE is 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.</p>	<p>The SACRE receives 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 and quality in schools. The SACRE has a strong partnership with the LA and plays an active role in promoting ideas and initiatives.</p>	<p>The SACRE, as a result of receiving detailed evidence about pupil performance, identifies significant underachievement by boys. It advises the LA to undertake an exercise to identify good practice and provide guidance to schools that is effective in raising boys' achievement.</p>
<p><b>2f</b> Partnerships with other key stakeholders (for example pupils, parent, ASTs, specialist schools, ITT providers, local religious organisations and groups, Commission for Racial Equality)</p>	<p>The SACRE has little contact with or awareness of other local agencies, and rarely has contact with pupils or parents.</p>	<p>The SACRE is well informed about other key stakeholders supporting RE and has some contact with the groups involved.</p>	<p>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. The SACRE's activities build effectively on local networks.</p>	<p>The SACRE invites RE trainees on the PGCE course at the local university to attend one meeting a year to provide an opportunity for the trainees to develop their understanding of the role of the SACRE and provide a forum to discuss issues of mutual interest.</p>



