

# NASACRE AGM 2016 - Notes

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Key note 1:

**Elizabeth Butler-Sloss** talked about the report that was published earlier this year about Faith and Belief in Society. She made it clear that the report is aspirational, rather than factual and that Andrew Copson, who heads up the British Humanist Society, played a large part.

She stated that religious policy has been piecemeal and mostly been trying to catch up with the current situation. The issues as she sees them are as follows:

- The need for all religions to be treated equally under law
- The need for greater religious literacy to combat conflict and stereotyping
- The need to recognise that for many religion and culture are inextricably intertwined
- The fact that affiliation, belief & practice, beliefs and ideas are not evenly interwoven
- The need for greater religious literacy is not just a matter for schools, but for media & government
- What we teach now will affect the leaders who run the country tomorrow and into the future
- Locally agreed syllabuses that sanitise religion
- The lack of inclusion of non-religious worldviews
- Too much Christianity

She sees some of the solutions as follows:

- There should be a statutory entitlement that establishes content and learning objectives
- This should be broad and inclusive
- It should have the same status as humanities subjects
- Teacher training needs overhauling
- The requirement for daily act of Collective Worship should be repealed and replaced with a time for reflection
- Admission procedures for faith schools need overhauling
- Faith schools could have links to different faith schools to ensure breadth and encounter
- The community of a school should engage with the community outside the gates
- There should be independent inspection
- There should be a freedom to debate all views

There were questions from the floor concerning the actions or rather lack of it in response to the various reports, the local nature of SACREs and how the differences between urban and rural areas are to be addressed, the choice of faith adherents for jobs within schools and whether RE really is a humanities subject. A request was made for evidence that the version of RE taught is sanitised. None of the answers really dealt with the questions, in my opinion.

Dilwyn Hunt raised the issue, as did the previous speaker that much of what has been talked about has been going on for ages and that local SACREs have played a large part in that. An expert panel

risked undermining the role of SACREs which have ensured that there are fully-integrated religious and non-religious world views in RE. Collective worship should not be described as being Christian; it is meant to be inclusive though of a broadly Christian character.

Keynote 2:

**Adam Dinham: The future of teaching and learning about religion and belief**

The PowerPoint is available on the NASACRE website for any who are interested.

He identified 3 main areas for discussion: policy, teaching and learning and young people's thinking.

In terms of policy, he set the scene, including the background and agreed with Dame Butler-Sloss that the current settlement has evolved as a way of keeping up with the real picture. There is more believing without belonging; more belonging without believing and quite a lot of non-belief. As a result of immigration and globalisation people encounter increasing diversity.

As a result, neither a Christian nor a Secular settlement will work.

With the proliferation of academies and free schools which do not need to follow the locally agreed syllabus there is a freedom from LA control. The purposes of RE have multiplied.

RE has been marginalised and colonised – that is pushed to the side and filled with things that are not RE. There are discussions over purpose, content and place in RE. It has sometimes been distributed across other subjects and topics or disguised as philosophy and ethics. In many places it has been given 45 minutes a week, with an annual spend of £1 per child. Other topics such as cohesion, citizenship and ethics are often included.

This has impacts in wider society. Anxiety, indifference and hostility often result. Do we want RE dictated by the new atheists, who seem to have the loudest voices? There is confusion between Religious Literacy and fuzzy secularity, which is often mistaken for neutrality (which of course does not exist).

He recommends a review of SACREs alongside other bodies, the creation of a national panel to develop a national framework and this needs balance. But who are the stakeholders? If faith leaders are the spokespeople, which ones are picked? Who chooses? How are they chosen? For whom do they speak? Who are the others? Not all parts of faith communities meet and have coherence and contact, so who is the final arbiter?

It is a muddle. There are issues over CW, the right to withdraw, faith school admission policies and the position of religion in the wider life of the school.

The purpose of RE needs to be clarified: it is interesting and links to history and art; it is instrumental and has a social element. There is an assumption that more encounters lead to more love, but this is not always the case.

Regarding the content, the RE 4 Real research found that young people wanted more breadth, a "stretchier" idea of what religion is; more lived RE and elements of informal religion and belief. Is there a way that SACREs can look more like the real, local religious landscape?

The structure of RE also needs to be explored. What should go where? The role of SACRE is crucial and it has to include the Church of England, as much is connected culturally and historically to Christianity. RE needs to teach that there is Christianity and other religions too.

The political issue raises the question of timing. Are these issues too big and totemic to handle for little or no gain, but lots of grief?

The key issue is religious literacy as it affects attitudes. But attitude, disposition and feelings come into play, even when there is little or no knowledge. However it is important to recognise that no one can know everything. It is important to learn how to ask appropriate questions in an appropriate way. And everybody can be involved, regardless of religious belief or none.

There needs to be an opportunity for robust disagreement about truth claims, rather than the syncretistic. There needs to be talk about the discovery of truth and what about fundamentalists? Should they be included?

Questions addressed the need for an opt out, the sociological twist often given to RE and the tension between theology and sociology.

There followed an activity looking closely in small groups at the key recommendations from the most recent reports. This is worth replicating in SACRE.