

ANALYSIS OF SACRE ANNUAL REPORTS 2021-2022 FOR THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STANDING COUNCILS ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (NASACRE)

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 In 2023 72 SACREs submitted their annual report for 2021 – 2022, 16 more than in 2022. This figure is similar to the number submitted in 2021 (n68) and would indicate that the main cause for not submitting a report last year was the Covid-19 pandemic, which continued to have an impact in the year under report. The pattern of submission of reports is more complicated than first appears. Only 29 SACREs have submitted a report in all three years (2021 – 2023), 37 submitted their report twice, 35 once and 52 not at all. There is no clear reason why this is the case but there is a need to contact those SACREs that have not submitted a report to the DfE or NASACRE to find out which SACREs have produced reports, and which have failed to do so, where those SACREs are responsible for submitting report to the Secretary of State¹.

1.2 Whilst the restrictions relating to the Covid-19 pandemic ended in February 2021 the impact of the pandemic continued to effect SACRE meetings and the ability of SACREs to fulfil some of their statutory responsibilities. Some SACREs had substantial issues with membership and vacancies. It is not clear whether this was an issue of the local authority not being able to appoint, but desiring to do so, or whether this was an issue that SACREs felt they had to address themselves. Whichever this was causing an issue for some SACREs.

2.2 One of the main influences on a SACRE’s work was its relationship with the local authority. Where the local authority was fully engaged with SACRE and its work this was evident in a SACREs report. Reports indicate that the level of support for a SACRE was proportionate to the importance of religion and belief in the local authority area, often related to concerns about community cohesion – although that language was rarely used.

2.3 Where SACREs covered more rural areas the importance of Church of England diocese and its schools was more likely to be evident. This led to reporting on standards of RE and collective worship through a scrutiny of SIAMS reports. At least one SACRE was served by a diocesan officer and others received reports from diocesan officers.

2.4 It was clear that SACREs took their work seriously and were trying their best to support RE, if not always collective worship, in the schools in the local authority – in at least one case with no obvious support from the local authority. This though could lead to a series of conflations in reporting, such as the professional advice given by an adviser or consultant with that of a SACRE and the conflation of data, such as workplace surveys, with standards in RE. SACREs rarely evaluated the impact of their

¹ This would exclude the States of Jersey and the Isle of Man.

advice or actions, and this should be addressed if SACREs are to show their impact and focus on areas of improvement.

2.5 In many areas SACREs also work in collaboration with other SACREs, especially in the area of Agreed Syllabus development, implementation and training. To that extent links with external bodies such as NASACRE remain important as does their trialling and supporting of national initiatives to support RE in schools, such as REQM and WIRE.

2.6 SACREs continue to support schools and communities, in some area, beyond their statutory remit and this shows how valued they are as providing something unique within a local authority. A number of SACREs reported how they made links with local inter faith and faith and belief forums.

2. Recommendations²

2.1 NASACRE

- i. Guidance for SACREs is produced on how to focus an annual report on the impact of SACRE's work by reporting on any actions taken in the previous year and the outcomes of those actions, including advice.
- ii. Guidance for SACREs on how they should not confuse the advice given by professionals, in their own right, with advice given by SACRE as a statutory body.

2.2 NASACRE discussion with the DfE

- iii. NASACRE should request the DfE to approach the Secretary of State to write a letter of thanks to all those SACREs that have submitted a report for 2021 – 2022³.
- iv. NASACRE should formally ask the DfE to write to Local Authorities whose SACREs that have not submitted an Annual Report in the last three years to enquire why this is case and request that these reports be sent to the DfE.

2.3 Advice to LAs co-produced by NASACRE and DfE

- v. That co-produced advice be produced for local authorities on good practice in supporting SACREs, including funding, officer support, the appointment of members and the role of each group in relation to those they represent.
- vi. Co-produced advice should also be developed for members of Group D as appointed by the local authority, representing the local authority and being an advocate for SACRE to the local authority and its elected members.

² Appendix 4 contains the Recommendations from the last report, some of these are still pertinent and are not duplicated here.

³ The NASACRE Executive will be sent a complete list of all SACREs that have submitted a report to the DfE and/or NASACRE with this report.

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The Analysis for SACRE Annual Reports 2021 – 2022 was commissioned by the NASACRE Executive with the agreement for the Department for Education (DfE) on the same basis as the report commissioned for in 2022⁴.

3.1.2 Of 153 SACREs in England, 72 submitted a report by the 19 May 2023 (47.1%) compared with 56 in 2022 and 68 in 2021, indicating that the biggest barrier to SACRE work and reporting in 2020 – 2021 was the Covid-19 pandemic, which officially ended in England on 21 February 2022 with the publication of the COVID-19 Response: Living with COVID-19 guidance⁵.

3.1.3 There is a recommended format for SACRE annual reports, which is available from [NASACRE](#) but not all SACREs use this format some using earlier formats and others being peculiar to a SACRE. Some reports ran to 31 pages whilst others were 9 pages. The analysis of the report published in 2022 did not use the NASACRE recommended format rather it identified 21 categories as the basis for data collection and analysis, see Methodology below. These categories were discussed with NASACRE's Executive Assistant during the process of data collection. See Appendices 1 and 2 for the categories used for analysis in this report. This format has been replicated in 2023 so that it is possible compare the two years.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Reports were received from 4 February to 5 May 2023. As noted above the methodological approach was identical to that used in 2022 (see also Appendix 1 and Appendix 2) but two categories were added, detailed notes on attendance and regular in person meetings with teachers.

- Attendance
- Detailed notes on attendance
- Professional support
- Religious Education:
 - Advice to the local authority
 - Advice to schools⁶
- Collective worship:
 - Advice to the local authority
 - Advice to schools⁷
 - Determinations
- Monitoring:
 - Complaints (RE and CW)
 - Religious Education
 - Collective Worship
- Agreed Syllabus Review

⁴ See Appendix 4 for the recommendations in the 2021 – 2022 report.

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-living-with-covid-19>

⁶ Schools here refers to maintained non-denominational and controlled schools and academies and free schools without a religious foundation.

⁷ Schools here refers to non-denominational schools and academies and free schools without a religious foundation.

- Training for implementation of the syllabus
- SACRE funding
- Examination performance
 - GCSE
 - A Level
- Covid-19
- Communication with schools and others
- Regular in person meetings with teachers
- Collaboration with other bodies
- Development Planning
- Relationships and Sex Education/Health Education (RSE/RSHE)

3.2.2 The latter were added relative to the frequency they featured in reports received. These indicated areas that SACREs were working in their authorities. Where statistical analysis appeared above or below what might be expected from the range in other categories they were revisited to check and amended as necessary.

3.2.3 There was an obvious difficulty in collating the data as SACREs do not report in the same way under the same category. As instance would be that some SACREs under advice to schools reported training for schools, whereas some SACREs reported no advice to schools but put training in a different part of the report. Therefore, it was necessary to interpret what SACREs had done under the general framework provided by NASACRE and the legal requirement to report to the Secretary of State for Education. How this was done and where will become apparent in the report as necessary.

3.3 Ethics

See Appendix 3 for details.

3.4 Declaration of interest

The author has written SACRE annual reports for a number of authorities in the past. No work for a local authority or SACRE was undertaken during the period from agreeing to do this research to its completion. The author declares no interest relevant to this research. and has refrained from making judgements on the reports submitted.

3.5 Caveat

It does not follow that SACRE Reports report fully on their support or activities, given that some are relatively short. This report is based only on what SACREs stated. Where quotes from reports have been used these have been anonymised.

SACRE meetings are subject to The Religious Education (Meetings of Local Conferences and Councils) Regulations 1994⁸. SACREs must produce an annual report⁹ and send to the Secretary of State by December 31st in any calendar year¹⁰

4.1 SACRE meetings

4.1.1 Just over 90% of SACREs mentioned the pandemic or Covid-19 in their reports, and whilst restrictions were lifted in February 2022 (see 3.1.2 above) the impact of the pandemic was sustained. As one SACRE reported:

As you will know, this academic year has continued to be a challenge for everyone, not least for those involved in education, as we have all continued to journey through the rumbling on of the COVID-19 pandemic and its unprecedented and largely negative impact.

Online meetings for two SACREs had become the norm as a result of the pandemic:

Four SACRE meetings were held during the year. The first three – in October and November 2021 and March 2022 – were held virtually online as had become the norm during the restrictions on meetings applied during the pandemic.

Three SACRE meetings were held during the year. Wed 17th November 2021, Wed 9th March 2022 were held virtually online as had become the norm during the restrictions on meetings applied during the pandemic.

To what extent SACREs will have a mixed economy of meetings will remain to be seen, as explored in 4,1,2 below.

The pandemic may also have had the impact of giving SACREs new energy, as can be seen in one SACREs report:

Meetings have focused on the following areas: Inspiring children and young people to reflect on God's presence in the world as schools fully re-opened following the pandemic; this was achieved through an ambitious, well-resourced art competition and exhibition.

4.1.2 As noted in the 2020 – 2021 report it was not clear from the reports was whether SACREs, as locally appointed statutory bodies, were expected to operate in the same way as other local authority meetings over the period of transition from virtual to in person meetings. As previously noted, this would indicate in individual cases a local authority's understanding of the nature of SACRE and its significance in statute. Virtual meetings were still taking place during the year under report, although there was a mixture of online and in person meetings in most SACREs.

⁸ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1994/1304/contents/made>

⁹ Section 391(6) and (7), Education Act 1996.

¹⁰ Section 391(10), Education Act 1996 as amended by Education Act 2011 c21 Schedule 8 Abolition of the QCDA: consequential amendments.

4.1.3 As required by statute SACRE and ASC meetings must meet in public, with the exception on certain business specified in *Statutory Instrument 1994: 1309*. This remained an issue in 2021 – 2022 but some SACREs had found ways to make their meeting publicly accessible.

One SACRE report stated:

SACRE met three times – each time online and streamed live on YouTube.

Another:

There were four meetings of SACRE during the year 2021-22, all held via Zoom Meetings are open to the public and minutes are also available on-line.

It was also clear that for some SACREs having a hybrid format or online option helped the work of SACRE as it meant more members could attend and improve or ensure quoracy:

There were three meetings of SACRE during 2022, held in a hybrid format consisting of in-person and online attendance enabling all our meetings to be quorate.

Online meetings had proved in many ways to be more convenient, one SACRE expressed this sentiment:

We in SACRE have continued to have our regular meetings by Zoom and are now looking forward to reinstating the face-to-face meetings. The reason for the long period of virtual meetings was due more to convenience for members rather than to pandemic restrictions.

And another SACRE commented:

Although attendance is higher when meetings are held virtually, this has been to the detriment of quality networking and discussion.

5.1 Support for SACREs

5.1.1 Professional support

Not all SACREs have support from their LA:

This was another challenging year, for SACRE. As there is no RE advisor or paid support for RE in the LA, all development work is usually led by members of SACRE and/or local teachers.

Nevertheless 97.2% of SACREs reported that they had professional support from an advisor, consultant, consultancy and/or a clerk. In some cases, professional support came from the Church of England's Diocesan Team in the absence of a local authority adviser or consultant. The role of the adviser/consultant was welcomed by SACREs, as one reported:

SACRE members gave close consideration to the various national and local developments concerning the provision of RE. These discussions were prompted by the information provided to the SACRE through the regular updates from the RE Consultant and SACRE Adviser and NASACRE Briefings.

5.2 Funding for SACREs

5.2.1 As in the previous report the majority of SACREs (79.2%) reported funding available with over half of those (43.1%) specifying a figure or, in some cases, a detailed budget. Some SACREs simply noted:

The LA provides sufficient resource to enable the effective operation of SACRE.

5.2.2 NASACRE's FOI request on SACRE funding continued to be referenced in some reports as a benchmark against which to judge their own funding by the local authority.

5.3 Attendance and quoracy

3.3.1 87.5% of annual reports reported on attendance at SACRE meetings for the period of the reports, compared to just under 60% in the previous year. As in the reports received in 2022 there were a number of different ways of doing this:

- Giving a full list of SACRE members by Group and identifying which meeting they attended.
- Attendance reported as percentage for each group for each meeting.
- By member, but not by group.
- In a special appendix to the report but not submitted as part of the report.
- By providing hyperlinks to the minutes of meetings so that they could be viewed by those interested.
- Noting that all meetings were quorate but giving no detail.
- Noting apologies but not attendance.

5.3.2 Over half of the reports (56.9%) added detail to their reporting on attendance, but as can be seen from 5.3.1 this was varied. A small number of SACREs reported issues with being inquorate and business not being able to be carried out, e.g.

The Summer (July) meeting was not quorate due to lack of Group D (councillors) being present.

One meeting in this period was inquorate due to in attendance of Group B – Church of England.

In one case this also applied to the Agreed Syllabus Conference:

It was not possible to take the decision to convene the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) as the meeting was inquorate.

5.3.3 As in 2022 a small number of SACRE reports ($\leq 4\%$) appended a constitution to the report submitted. It was not clear why, but this did enable readers to compare the membership of SACRE with the membership required by the constitution. 63.9% of

SACREs, though, included some form of development plan, some of which were costed. What was less common was any reporting on the development plan or equivalent.

5.3.4 *The Religious Education (Meetings of Local Conferences and Councils) Regulations 1994: UK Statutory Instruments 1994 No. 1304* (see footnote 5).

No SACRE reported on issues relating to SI 1994: 1304, although there clearly were continuing issues due to Covid-19 restrictions during the year under report and how these were managed when restrictions were lifted.

6.1 Advice to the local authority

Religious Education

6.1.1 NASACRE's guidance on SACRE Annual Reports¹¹ states:

The main purpose of the annual report is to hold the LA to account, by informing the Secretary of State and key partners what advice SACRE gave the LA during the year and how that was responded to; this includes advice on RE and Collective Worship in those schools for which the LA has responsibility.

This is consonant with government advice based on the requirements of the Education Reform Act 1988¹² and subsequent consolidated legislation.

6.1.2 During the year under report 43.1% of SACREs reported that they had advised the LA on matters relating to RE. It did not follow that advice was given even if it was referenced in the report, one SACRE quoted NASACRE's guidance above but gave no advice to the local authority on either RE or collective worship. Some SACREs though were clear in the way they reported advice they had given:

The following advice is given by SACRE to the local authority:

- 1. To review the funding of SACRE to ensure it is in line with national recommendations and good practice;*
- 2. To review the membership of SACRE to ensure it reflects the breadth and diversity of the borough in terms of faiths and beliefs and schools' structures.*
- 3. To ensure SACRE's annual report is considered carefully by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the Council and any of its content noted.*

6.1.3 In some SACRE reports there was a conflation of the RE advisor with SACRE, so that professional advice given to the local authority by the advisor was reported as advice from SACRE. It may be useful to make a distinction between SACRE's advice

¹¹

https://nasacre.org.uk/file/nasacre/SACRE_Annual_Reports_necessary_desir.pdf#:~:text=The%20main%20purpose%20of%20the%20annual%20report%20is,responsibility.%20Suggested%20structure%20to%20the%20annual%20report%3A%201.

¹²

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/281929/Collective_worship_in_schools.pdf see paragraphs 98 - 100.

and the professional advice given by the advisor, which may not have been discussed by SACRE at all.

6.1.4 As in 2022 in some reports the advice related to resourcing and funding SACRE and Agreed Syllabus reviews. One SACRE was going to advise the local authority to convene an Agreed Syllabus Conference but couldn't because it was not quorate:

The agreed syllabus will be due for review in the academic year of 2022-23. Groups A, B and C will need to vote for a recommendation to the Local Authority to establish an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) for the review of the syllabus at the SACRE meeting in Autumn 2022. As Group D is the Local Authority, it does not get a vote. The voting was originally planned for the SACRE's meeting in June 2022; however, it did not take place as the meeting was not quorate.

6.1.5 Other SACREs advised on matters relating to schools and their statutory or contractual duties (in the case of Academies), for example where the workforce survey indicated that in some schools there was no RE provision:

SACRE has advised the council to carry out an investigation into these cases.

6.1.6 Another area of advice to the LA was SACRE membership, as noted above in 5.3.3. In response to a self-evaluation target:

To widen the membership of SACRE to ensure full representation from faith groups in the borough.

this SACRE reported:

As SACRE has been reconstituted, we have looked carefully at membership of different groups and we are conscious that diversity in representation is needed including the range of faiths and beliefs in the area as well as working with Multi Academy Trusts.

This SACRE also reported that there were 23 vacancies and noted:

SACRE needs to ensure there continues to be consistent attendance and needs more teacher representatives.

6.1.7 As in 2022 it was not evident, other than in response to advice to convene an Agreed Syllabus Conference, that local authorities had responded to the advice of SACREs. As noted in 2022 to that extent it appears that the conversation is one way but that may not be the case, it may simply be that SACREs are not reporting on the LA's response to its advice other than in a request for funding or the convening of an Agreed Syllabus Conference.

[Agreed Syllabus Review](#)

6.2.1 61.1% of SACREs reported that a new syllabus was being implemented, that a review had started or was in process or had just completed. Some SACREs reported

on their advice to the LA that the syllabus needed reviewing in line with statute¹³ and that there were funding implications to that. This was an increase of 16% in comparison to the previous year. Where the local authority's syllabus was shared with other authorities or written in collaboration with a consultancy or publisher this was usually stated. Again, the pandemic was clearly having an effect on the usual processes that SACREs follow, one noted:

During the year we discussed the new Agreed Syllabus due to be published in 2023. Due to the pandemic and having consulted with the other SACREs [with which the syllabus is shared], we decided along with them to delay this until 2024.

6.2.2 The reception of a new agreed syllabus also gave SACREs an opportunity to monitor its reception and use:

The implementation of the new Agreed Syllabus from September 2023 we hope will give us some indication of how well the current syllabus is embedded and what will help to improve it.

Collective Worship

6.3.1 8.3% of SACREs reported that they had given advice to the local authority with regard to collective worship, which is in line with the previous year. One SACRE put it succinctly:

Besides Religious Education each local authority must work with its SACRE to monitor the provision of daily collective worship.

6.3.2 Not that there was evidence of that in the report quoted in 6.3.1 or many reports. As noted below there is a danger of conflating professional advice to the local authority with advice from SACRE as a body:

The RE consultant to SACRE has given advice to the local authority on a number of occasions in 2021- 22. Some of these occasions have included assisting with parental objections to a part of collective worship. The meetings often have to unpack cultural and religious objections, offering a great learning experience for parents as well as school leaders.

Which in no way casts doubt on the quality of the advice but confuses the role of professionals and that of an appointed body.

6.3.3 Some SACREs were actively thinking about post pandemic collective worship and how they might help:

It has been difficult for schools to maintain an effective programme of collective worship during the pandemic and one of SACRE's key priorities in the coming year will be to remind, facilitate and support schools. This will include offering light-touch review conversations with practical suggestions.

¹³ In line with The Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education (Prescribed Period) Order 1999: UK Statutory Instruments 1999 No. 1728.

7 Advice to schools

Religious Education

7.1.1 58.3% of SACREs reported on advice that they have made available to schools, some of which was produced by SACREs before the period under report. The most common type of advice related to the implementation of the Agreed Syllabus but there was also advice more broadly than that relating to the curriculum, such as advice on fasting during Ramadan. One SACRE noted:

Advice is always available and open to whomever requests it. It has been shown that pre-pandemic there were more emails from schools regarding advice on certain elements within Religious Education, which the SACRE would discuss and help with.

This SACRE did not report on what had happened during the pandemic or in the post-pandemic period and what was not apparent was how schools received advice or acted up on it.

7.1.2 SACREs also continued to report on making available national initiatives such as the WIRE award (Widening Diversity in Religious Education) and how schools had responded, one report noted:

During the 2021-2022 academic year, three schools completed the requirements for the WIRE award. They will receive their awards in the Autumn term 2022. In addition, some schools who have already received the WIRE award are working towards their WIRE Gold Award.

Collective Worship

7.2.1 63.9% of SACREs reported that they had provided advice on collective worship to schools. As in the previous report much of this was signposting schools to existing resources such as model policies, protocols around visitors to collective worship, policies on withdrawal and advice on topics and resources for collective worship. Some SACREs were actively looking at updating their guidance:

SACRE have decided to undertake a review of guidance on collective worship around the UK with a view to creating new guidance for schools on collective worship and assemblies.

A small number of SACREs reported on the ways that they had supported schools in the authority, such as:

SACRE has done the following in relation to collective worship:

- *Produced thorough wide resources to use within lessons and collective worship for Holocaust Memorial Day. This included activities produced by students from various schools.*
- *Produced and shared a sample Collective Worship policy for all schools.*
- *Produced and shared a sample SMSC policy for all school's which links to collective worship.*

- *Chair of SACRE led a CPD session on Collective Worship which all RE leads from all schools were invited to attend and resources shared.*

7.2.2 As in 2021 – 2022 SACREs were more likely to give advice to schools on collective worship than they were to give advice to the local authority 63.9% compared to 8.3%, and this followed a similar pattern in 2020 – 2021.

8 Monitoring RE, public examinations and collective worship

8.1.1 Whilst most reports in 2020 – 2021 stated that it was not possible to monitor RE, collective worship or examination results this had substantially changed in 2021 – 2022, but that depended on when the report was written. Some SACREs reported early in the 2021 – 2022 period and were still unable to monitor RE, collective worship or public examinations, others were increasingly able and some more able. It does not follow, though, that if a report references monitoring that it actually reports anything about the results of that monitoring. Hence, it may not be possible to derive anything about standards, compliance or issues relating to RE and collective worship from the monitoring of these areas. It did not follow that if a SACRE monitored RE and collective worship that the data generated then formed the basis of advice to the local authority and its schools. Given the resources that SACREs have it is clear that monitoring of RE and collective worship in schools depends on the local authority, as one SACRE noted:

Working more closely with the LA would enable SACRE to be more effective and to begin to gather more information about standards on RE across the LA.

8.1.2 This poses a serious question not only about what the relationship between LA officers and SACRE but also Group D, which represents the local authority and (as with all SACRE members) appoints them.

SACRE Monitoring RE and Collective worship

8.2. The date of the publication of a report had an effect on a SACREs ability to monitor RE and collective worship in schools. This was particularly true in relation to the release of public examination data. It can be reasonably expected that this will not continue to be an issue in the next reporting cycle.

Monitoring primary and KS3 RE

8.3.1 In 2020 – 2021 42% (n24) of SACREs reported monitoring primary RE this had marginally dropped to 40.3% (n29) in 2021 – 2022. More SACREs reported monitoring KS3 RE in 2021 – 2022, n27 (37.5%) than in 2020 – 2021 n24 (43%), but the percentage of SACREs is significantly lower, as can be seen. This can be explained by the increased number of reports submitted in 2023 and may be a more accurate picture of monitoring Primary and KS3 RE than those submitted in 2022.

8.3.2 Where monitoring was mentioned but not possible to undertake this was usually due to the impact of the pandemic on the work of SACREs. A small number of SACREs reported extensively on RE in Church of England (VA/VC and equivalent) schools and looked at SIAMS reports, but not on similar reports from other denominational schools. One report dedicated 4 – 5 pages on a diocesan update. Another SACRE used Ofsted

reports to monitor standards in RE and two thirds of the reports were voluntary aided schools.

8.3.3 In 2020 – 2021 nearly 40% of SACREs used Ofsted reports as the only way of monitoring RE schools and this reduced to about 20.8% in 2021 – 2022. As noted in the previous year’s report it did not follow that this exercise was useful as reports may not mention RE at all or include schools which come under SACREs remit. Some SACREs also reported on SIAMS reports, as noted above, and it may be the case that reason for this was that there was little else to report on due to the continued impact of the pandemic.

8.3.4 One area of data for SACREs was the workforce survey – *School Workforce Data Published* summer 2022 by the Joint Council for Qualifications – which in the absence other data enabled SACREs to see the number of hours of RE being taught per year in each school and some SACREs used this as a basis for advice to the LA, naming schools that appeared to have no or little RE. This was sometimes reported under ‘standards in RE’ data, and in some reports there appeared to be a conflation of provision with standards.

8.3.5 Some SACREs also found interesting ways to non-systematically monitor RE as they came out of the pandemic but were wary of face-to-face encounter with schools, as one report stated:

Monitoring for this academic year continue to take place via email conversations, online conversations and some face-to-face conversations where deemed safe as schools recovered after COVID-19.

8.3.5 As in the previous report schools and academy websites and online network meetings were also important sources of information for SACREs. This showed that SACREs could be learning organisations in their own right:

We learned to adapt with zoom meetings and monitoring of school’s RE activities via surveying their websites, together with on-line teacher training and other activities to maintain the profile of RE.

8.3.6 There were some SACREs that couldn’t access the data because the local authority or Academy Boards would not provide the data requested. This raises questions about the local authority as the appointing body and its support for that body. One SACRE appeared not to have a Group D at all, although records of the meetings during the period under report showed that two meetings had a councillor present and one a headteacher who ‘represented the LA’. It was clear from looking at the previous year’s report that this was an improvement and there had been engagement with the LA, but it was not clear that the LA had any role in appointing members to the four Groups required by statute.

Monitoring GCSE and GCE A Level Religious Studies

8.4.1 In 2020 – 2021 35% of SACREs reported on attainment in GCSE and 19% A Level 19% attainment. This had substantially increased in 2021 – 2022 to 65.3% reporting on GCSEs and 29.2% A Level. The level of detail changed from SACRE to SACRE, with some giving global figures and others school by school breakdown.

Complaints and Withdrawals from RE

8.5.1 In 2021 – 2022 70.8% of SACREs monitored complaints compared to 56% in the previous year. 55.6% monitored withdrawal from RE and a small number reported on the groups requesting withdrawal, this is compared with 30% in 2020 – 2021.

Providing, Supporting and Monitoring Training for RE (including Agreed Syllabus implementation)

8.6.1 In the year under report 93.1% of SACRE annual reports referenced training support for teachers, compared to 71.4% in the previous year. This was to be expected as school life got back to normal. As noted above, though, the move to digital had definite benefits, in that online training made the events more accessible to schools. As one SACRE noted:

An alternative version of the WIRE (Widening Inclusivity in RE) award using zoom and other means has been made available to enable schools to make contact with faith communities at a time when distance, availability and cost can be a problem in very rural areas.

8.6.2 Training was provided by a range of providers and where there were exiting relationships with an organisation, such as providing a consultant or co-designing an agreed syllabus training was likely to be provided by that organisation. Monitoring the impact of training was less common, with only 31.9% of SACRES in 2021 – 2022 commenting on how well training was received, as one SACRE noted:

Our support for RE in schools continues through well attended and evaluated training sessions.

With some SACREs included comments by teachers to show how they valued the training they had received. This was a marked improvement on the reports submitted in 2022 where only 5.4% of SACREs did this form of monitoring.

8.6.3 As noted in the 2022 report the role of SACREs in ensuring the quality of resources and training courses in the delivery of the agreed syllabus has long been expected of SACRE, as can be seen in Education Reform Act 1988 s11 (2) consolidated in the [1996 Education Act](#) and reflected in the comment in [Circular 1/94](#):

It is for a LEA to decide what matters it wishes to refer to its SACRE; but the 1988 Act says that these should include, in particular, methods of teaching, the choice of teaching material and the provision of teacher training.

Noting that the LA should take a lead on this and positively decide what it should refer to SACRE. Given that the LA remains responsible for the quality of education provision for the children who live in the authority this extends to Academies and even other authorities where appropriate¹⁴.

¹⁴ [The Children Act 2004 c. 31Part 2 General Section 10 \(2\)](#):

Collective worship

8.7.1 29.2% of SACREs mentioned monitoring of collective worship and for many of them it was the case that no monitoring had taken place or that strategies were being sort on how to monitor this area of their responsibility. As one SACRE noted:

In the year 2021-22, no collective worship monitoring has been undertaken, as schools gradually returned to normal processes for worship at various points in the year. As Covid outbreaks continued, some schools reverted for periods of time back to virtual collective worship, resuming in person worship when it was judged to be safe to do so.

Another:

Monitoring Collective Worship is recognised as an area for development.

8.7.2 One method for collecting data that a number of SACREs employed was asking schools to complete a self-evaluation exercise, predominantly these focused on RE but some included collective worship, as one SACRE noted:

91% of the schools who responded to the school self-evaluation survey confirmed that they are meeting legal requirements and providing a daily act of collective worship. The 9% of schools who indicated that they were not meeting this duty were all community primary schools.

8.7.2 At least one SACRE report made no mention of collective worship at all.

8.7.3 Some SACREs used website analysis to see if collective worship was happening in schools in the local authority:

SACRE occasionally discusses collective worship and has looked at schools' websites to check that it is part of the day in schools.

8.7.4 It was not clear that monitoring led to advice, rather it was ensuring compliance with the requirements placed on school by statute or funding agreement. It may be worth SACREs reflecting on the information they have received and forming advice for the local authority or non-denominational schools, including academies.

9. Determinations and withdrawals

Determinations

7.4.1 Of the 87.5% of SACREs that mentioned determinations in their annual reports the vast majority reported that there had been no applications for a determination. Where determinations had been made SACREs reported on each application and the period to which the determination applied.

Withdrawals

7.4.2 55.6% of reports mentioned withdrawal. Where details of the groups likely to withdraw their child were included in the annual report this usually related to RE and not collective worship, although it is possible to infer that where a report stated, for example, children of Jehovah's Witness parents were withdrawn from RE they would

be likely to be withdrawn from collective worship. Of the SACREs that reported on withdrawals from collective worship a few noted how few withdrawals there were:

From the LA's monitoring of schools, we know that two pupils have been withdrawn from collective worship from a total of 64,257 pupils. This means that almost 100% of pupils are in daily acts of collective worship.

7.4.3 One SACRE had used its monitoring to see if schools let parents and guardians know about the right of withdrawal:

Despite the legal requirement to let parents know of the right to withdraw children from the daily act, however, 13 of the sites failed to mention it.

7.4.4 Another SACRE noted, without reporting whether there had been any withdrawals from collective worship:

Parents have a statutory right to withdraw their children from collective worship. Guidance on good practice and protocols for withdrawal is available to schools; consultants are available if further support is needed. SACRE recognises parents' legal rights but hopes all children will be enabled to receive stimulating and balanced RE as part of their entitlement to a broad curriculum.

10 Other features of SACRE annual reports

Development plans

10.1 It was notable that some SACREs published their development plans (63.9% compared to 12.5% in the previous year) and in some instances these were used as a basis for self-evaluation. On the whole SACREs did not report on their progress in terms of the development plan within the body of the report, although one SACRE RAG rated the plan. It was also not always clear how the development plan was informing the work of a SACRE in 2021 – 2022.

Communication with schools

10.2 69.4% of SACREs that submitted a report in 2023 used e-newsletter or e-bulletins to communicate with schools, compare to 17.9% in 2022. The frequency of these bulletins varied, and the pandemic had an impact on some SACREs normal pattern. The most frequent pattern was a termly newsletter going to all schools. The impact of these was not reported on. It was obvious that some SACREs did communicate with schools but did not report on how this was done.

Regular in person meetings with teachers supported by SACRE

10.3.1 One feature of SACRE in 2021 – 2022 as the nation came out of the pandemic was the reporting on in person meetings with teachers, as indicated in some of the monitoring reported on above (8.3.6). 84.7% of SACREs reported on these in the form of online events, in person events, monitoring visits and training. Importantly, these were not simply one-off events but a programme of events which served multiple purposes, this is an increase 78.6% in the previous year.

10.3.2 In relation to teachers' meetings and communications one SACRE reported:

Our SACRE actively seeks to ensure all children in the borough have access to high quality and challenging RE and we provide support to primary RE subject leaders through the teachers' network meetings, now taking place in person again. These are free of charge to maintained schools and we urge school leaders to recognise the importance of allocating school time for staff to attend. We also produce a termly newsletter which signposts resources, draws attention to issues of interest in the RE world and highlights forthcoming festivals among other features.

10.3.3 One Chair of SACRE in their introduction noted:

Support for teachers in the region to develop best practice has been successfully expanded so that we now have more localised RE hubs with the leaders receiving ongoing CPD to help them disseminate great teaching and learning ideas.

The ability of SACREs to convene, in the broadest sense, meetings for teachers to improve their knowledge, understanding and confidence is something that is worthy of further exploration.

[Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health Education¹⁵](#)

10.4.1 Since the change in the law regarding relationships and sex education 8 SACREs (11.1%) reported an involvement in RSE, this is twice the number in comparison to the previous year's report. The involvement of SACREs relate to their relationships with faith communities and indicates the trust that these communities have in SACREs.

10.4.2 As in 2020 – 2021 was a recognition that SACREs do not have a remit for RSE/RSHE but that they can make a valuable contribution to this issue due to their connections across communities within the authority.

[Demographic data](#)

10.5.1 In light of the publication of the Census 2021 data some SACREs included data about the authority from the census relating to religion and belief, as one SACRE reported:

It is one of the most religiously diverse Boroughs in the U.K. While families from all religious backgrounds live in the Borough, Christians make up 39.3%, then Muslims 12.6%, followed by Jews 3.6%, other religion 2.3% Hindus 1.3%. There are a minority of Buddhists and Sikhs in the authority, and a significant proportion of families, over 31.6%, citing no religious beliefs.

The same SACRE also reported on the local authority's data on the ethnic make up of the school population.

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education>

10.5.2 Not all SACREs, depending on when the report was written in relation to the data release, drew upon the 2021 Census but relied on the 2011 Census recognising that its use was limited:

Although statistics from the 2011 National Census are now somewhat out of date they remain helpful in illustrating the diversity of the Local Authority.

No doubt this will be updated in the next reporting cycle.

10.5.3 Where this data appeared to be of most use was identifying the need for SACRE membership to represent the communities in the local authority. Generally, though, the implications of demographic data was not drawn out in SACRE reports. For example, mention of training relating to Humanism as a worldview did not reference the Census in terms of the growing number of people not identifying with a religious tradition.

9 Conclusion

9.1 This year's report has focused on the same methodology as the 2022 report, which allows some measure of comparison and contrast. The data set is larger, due to the lower number of reports submitted in 2022 and therefore there is some caution about drawing absolute parallels. In future years it may be an idea to focus on a number of specific areas to better inform NASACRE about specific issues facing SACREs in greater depth.

9.2 SACREs continue to serve their local authorities with no financial or other reward, other than being appointed as members of a statutory body that can have a direct impact on schools, teachers, pupils and their communities. They have come through the pandemic after a year of operating in the most unusual circumstances and developed new skills, as can be seen by their adaptation to online and hybrid working.

9.3 Some SACREs are working hard despite the lack of support from their local authorities, supporting teachers, organising training and finding ways to engage with schools. No doubt the academisation process has diminished some local authorities and focused their work more narrowly but SACREs still have the power to stay relevant and may be one of the few ways that teachers have an opportunity encounter the local authority other than in relation to Safeguarding.

9.4 Therefore, SACREs should be celebrated for what they do, especially where their task appears thankless. Reading 72 SACRE Annual Reports between February and May has been a real privilege and whilst not underestimating the challenges they have a real insight into the good will and hard work of many SACRE members across England.

Dr David Hampshire FRSA FRAI
10 June 2023

Appendix 1: Categories used to analyse SACRE Annual Reports

1. Attendance
2. Detailed Notes on attendance
3. Professional support
4. Budget specified
5. RE Advice to the LA
6. RE Advice to schools (including non-LA)
7. CW monitoring
8. CW Advice to the LA
9. CW Advice to schools
10. Withdrawal
11. Determinations
12. Complaints monitored
13. Monitoring Primary RE
14. Monitoring Secondary RE:
 - a. non-examination
 - b. Standards GCSE
 - c. Standards A Level
15. Agreed Syllabus Review
16. Training and support for AS implementation and RE
17. Monitoring training for schools
18. Covid-19
19. Communication (newsletter)
20. Regular in person meetings with teachers
21. Development Plan
22. Collaboration/links to other bodies
23. RSE/Health Education

Appendix 2: SACREs reporting by category (maximum n69/100%)

Category	Number of SACREs reporting in set categories	Percentage of SACREs reporting in set categories
Attendance	63	87.5
Detailed notes on attendance	41	56.9
Professional support	70	97.2
Funding/Budget	57	79.2
Budget specified	31	43.1
RE Advice to the LA	31	43.1
RE Advice to all schools	42	58.3
CW monitoring	21	29.2
CW Advice to the LA	6	8.3
CW Advice to all schools	46	63.9
Withdrawal	40	55.6
Determinations	63	87.5
Complaints monitored	51	70.8
Monitoring Primary RE	29	40.3
Secondary Standards: non-examination	27	37.5
Standards GCSE	47	65.3
Standards A Level	21	29.2
Agreed Syllabus Review	44	61.1
Training and support for AS implementation and RE	67	93.1
Monitoring training for schools	23	31.9
Monitoring Ofsted only as source of information	15	20.8
Covid-19	65	90.3
Communication (newsletter)	50	69.4
Regular in person meetings with teachers	61	84.7
Development Plan	46	63.9
Collaboration/links to other bodies	65	90.3
RSE/Health Education	8	11.1

Note: percentages are rounded to the first decimal point.

Appendix 3: Research Ethics

The author is a member of the British Educational Research Association and the British Sociological Association, and the Ethical standards expected by both bodies were applied during the research; see,

British Educational Research Association:

<https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018>,

and

British Sociological Association:

https://www.britisoc.co.uk/media/24310/bsa_statement_of_ethical_practice.pdf.

During the research no local authority, SACRE, SACRE member, clerk to SACRE or RE Advisor or consultant was contacted for comment. SACRE Annual Reports are public documents the working presumption was that they were intended to be read by the interested public.

All data has been anonymised and no SACRE singled out for comment, a list of reports submitted to NASACRE and/or DfE are available on request and appear on the NASACRE website, when submitted. Where SACRE reports are quoted this has been for illustrative purposes not to make a judgement on the report used or the particular SACRE.

Appendix 4: Recommendations from the Analysis of SACRE Annual Reports 2020 – 2021.

Recommendations to NASACRE Executive

On the basis of the evidence it is recommended that NASACRE discusses the following recommendations.

2.1 NASACRE support for SACREs

- i. Advice should be developed for SACREs on advising their local authority on RE and collective worship and reporting on how the LA responded to advice¹⁶.
- ii. Advice developed on how SACRE annual reports could have a greater focus on the impact of their work, showing their value as statutory bodies.
- iii. NASACRE could develop a series of case studies to support SACRE members' training, exemplifying ways that SACREs have been creative in working with schools and other partners and the impact that this has had.
- iv. Revisit the annual report proforma on a regular basis.

2.2 NASACRE discussion with the DfE

- v. Discuss the ongoing strategy for ensuring 100% return on SACRE Annual reports as required by legislation.
- vi. Clarify what the response of the DfE would be where SACREs reported that the LA had not followed the advice of SACRE or where a SACRE could not function as a result of the lack of support from the LA.
- vii. Discuss how government can clarify and support the role of SACREs in relation to non-denominational academies in light of LA responsibilities to parents/guardians and their children in the authority¹⁷, with a view to revising current guidance which is now 10 years old¹⁸.
- viii. Discuss the need to update *Religious education in English schools: non-statutory guidance 2010*¹⁹ and *Circular 1/94*²⁰, both of which remain on the government's website as current advice.

2.3 Advice to LAs co-produced by NASACRE and DfE

- ix. Produce a guide for LAs, with the support of the DfE, to ensure authorities meet their statutory responsibilities.

¹⁶ [The local authority is responsible for securing the standard of education for pupils in or from the authority, that includes religious education and collective worship.](#)

¹⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/section/10>

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/re-and-collective-worship-in-academies-and-free-schools/religious-education-re-and-collective-worship-in-academies-and-free-schools?msckid=3a97f159d07511ec9cb4ba4b39523eed>

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-guidance-in-english-schools-non-statutory-guidance-2010?msckid=3a98619ed07511ec9a84ffc6a5aa5dc4>

²⁰

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/281929/Collective_worship_in_schools.pdf?msckid=abf0da16d07711ecba73b170373fca63

- x. Advise LAs as to the continued nature of SACREs as statutory bodies appointed by the LA and that SACREs should at least have the same support and status as other local authority committees²¹.

²¹ In line with the requirements of [The Religious Education \(Meetings of Local Conferences and Councils\) Regulations 1994](#).