

NASACRE AGM Report

The first speaker was Alan Brine who is a HMI with special responsibility for RE. He reported the position as he sees it.

The Department is about to publish its third report on the teaching of RE which is concerned with the realising of potential. 60% of the provision is less than good and there is a need to address the concerns about the quality and the provision. Recent policies have placed an additional strain and caused serious concerns. On the face of it 60% of pupils gained at least a short course GCSE but there is too much of an emphasis on the rote learning of facts about religions and less on the learning from religions.

SACREs are under strain and there is great variation in capacity. There are questions about funding and access. On the positive side there are some very good new syllabuses. There is a problem over the position of academies and morale and purpose issues with no clear understanding of where they are headed.

The period from 1990 to 2010 was good for RE with positive national initiatives. There was leverage to identify schools in various categories and the numbers entering for GCSE long and short courses were booming. There were bursaries for trainee teachers of RE, strong recruitment and RE had purchase and a sense of purpose. However there were cracks was RE only there because of statute or was there strong educational reasons for its existence? There were legal oddities - RE had to be taught in sixth forms but not in further education colleges. The GCSE short courses lacked rigour. SACREs were often fragile as was the National support. The teaching of RE was not improving in schools and its purpose was unresolved.

After 2010 the climate changed there was a collapse of support nationally. SACREs and hence SACREs were undermined. The coming into existence of Academies and Free Schools who did not have to follow agreed syllabuses caused problems. The GCSE landscape was changed.

There was some good news there was more innovative thinking. In some cases Academies were working well with their area SACREs. There were several new models for RE being trialled. The threats had generated debate.

There are several bodies moving forward the debate, Faith ambassadors from Secondary to Primary, Leading teachers of RE. Does RE try to align with the National Curriculum, RECs to provide a national syllabus? Are these five years just fallow years? Do we need a concerted campaign to raise the profile and to stress the importance of RE? Are the structures in place adequate? Are they a strength or a barrier? All these questions may need considering but it is difficult to move forward whilst the Government refuses to engage in meaningful discussions.

This was followed by a report By Dr Mark Chater. He wished to challenge SACREs. SACREs existed to help teachers and

teachers to help children. What help does the present structure provide?
(There was a need to get more teachers into the SACREs) The challenges are many. SACREs are unique the system no other subject has such panels.

There are 154 SACREs and their position is ambiguous, some have little or no money to aid the improvement of RE teaching and its monitoring. Power has been devolved and SACREs defend the local determination of the development of RE. SACREs are semi-detached and isolated from the rest of the curriculum. The system is antiquated. SACREs can seek compliance with their ideas but have no means of enforcement. The Academy programme and the culture of school autonomy have created problems. The present structure of local determination creates additional problems and the aim to improve quality becomes irrelevant. It is an extravagance to have 154 syllabuses.

Municipal pride may stand in the way of National Quality. Perhaps we should investigate the concept of a National Curriculum.

SACREs would need to lose some of their freedoms.
RE could be more innovative and the findings of research would be more likely to be put into practice. The advisory bodies should be open to all faiths. They would engage with others. Standards would rise by engaging with the real world and by making the subject more rigorous. Are we ready for change?

THESE ARE MY VIEWS OF TWO TALKS - OTHERS MAY HAVE INTERPRETED THEM IN A DIFFERENT WAY.

We had discussion groups and it might be better to look up the NASACRE web site to view the results of that.
NASACRE is opening a newly developed website which only SACREs which subscribe to NASACRE will be able to access.

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