

The Berkshire Joint SACRE Conference: 6 June 2013

The annual Berkshire Joint SACRE Conference was held at Easthamstead Park Conference Centre on 6th June 2013. This year's conference was entitled "Realising the Potential". The keynote presentation was given by Alan Brine, the National Lead for RE and an Ofsted inspector. All Berkshire SCARE's were represented but Jo Fageant was disappointed in the low numbers attending.

The theme of the conference was, "Steps forward – where do we go from here?" Alan Brine said that he could have called the conference "At the cross roads" because RE was experiencing lots of challenges with present government policy. It is not the only subject that is affected by this.

The joint revised Berkshire syllabus is good.

The three year report on RE will be published in the autumn and it will show that at its best, RE is enriching and academically challenging exploring how we relate to one another.

However,

- § Too much RE is not good enough with little improvement - 60% of provision less than good
- § Significant curriculum thinking needed to address concerns
- § Concerns about quality and provision at GCSE
- § Raft of recent education policies placing additional strain on RE – although degree of damage still unclear
- § Policy changes raise serious concerns about the capacity of existing structures to support RE

According the NASACRE surveys and Ofsted evidence indications are

- § Many SACREs under increasing pressure
- § Increasing variability in capacity
- § Issues with funding and access to expertise
- § Academisation raises serious and immediate questions about future of SACREs
- § Morale and purpose issues

There were 15+ fat years 1990s to 2010

- § SACREs functioning well
- § National support strong – DfE, QCDA, Model syllabuses
- § Statutory requirement retains leverage - Ofsted
- § Broad consensus about RE – NSNF
- § GCSE booming.
- § ITE – bursaries, strong recruitment
- § Wider priorities giving RE purchase – ECM, Co Co,

But the cracks were there

- § Statutory v educational justification not resolved
- § Convoluted legal 'oddness' not addressed
- § Short GCSE – seeking 'relevance' not rigour
- § SACREs – fragile and variable
- § National support - similarly fragile
- § On the ground – little improving – status too low
- § Issues around the purpose of RE unresolved

And then the climate changed

- Collapse of national support structures

- LA/SACRE capacity undermined
- Academies and Free schools – increase fragmentation of RE
- Culture around ‘statutoriness’ shifts – Ofsted etc
- GCSE landscape shifts – status crisis in secondary
- NC – SofS imposing approach unfavourable to RE
- CoCo and ECM disappear as educational priorities narrow
- Religion – shift in public attitude? – militant atheism etc

There is some good news

- ⌘ Innovative thinking of some new syllabi -including our pan-Berkshire one
- ⌘ Some new models of partnership between academies and SACREs
- ⌘ Some academy chains exploring new models of RE
- ⌘ Threats have generated debate and interest – APPG etc
- ⌘ New networks to support RE – REQM, F2F, 3FF, Faith Ambassadors, Leading Teachers

We are where we are so do we

- ⌘ Try to align with the NC – using REC to provide national framework?
- ⌘ Stay detached, build capacity and plan for better days ahead?
- ⌘ Develop a concerted campaign demanding Govt action?
- ⌘ Work behind the scenes at local level to nurture best practice?
- ⌘ Seek new models of structures/purpose/curriculum?

In groups, delegates discussed possible ways forward for SACREs. What can Bracknell SACRE do to encourage best practice and carry out its statutory duties?

Suggestions:

- Merging with another SACRE to pool resources and ideas. (Two Berkshire SACREs already work together)
- SACREs might get together to train sixth formers (years twelve and thirteen) to become Faith Ambassadors and they would then visit primary schools – see Bolton website for more information.
- It was also agreed that SACREs should obtain copies of GCSE RE papers to acquaint themselves with the types of questions the pupils were being asked in the various short courses.
- Face to Faith – something set up by Tony Blair - <https://www.facetofaithonline.org/>
- A youth SACRE - <http://www.redbridgerenet.co.uk/>
- Invite schools to apply for the RE Quality Mark

Carol Nicholls