

## SACRE: options for Agreed Syllabus review 2020 (for beginning teaching September 2021)

**Fiona Moss, RE Today**

### **The legal requirements:**

- **SACRE must review its RE Agreed Syllabus every five years**
- **An Agreed Syllabus Conference is to be set up to conduct the review**

An agreed syllabus must *'reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are, in the main, Christian while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.'*

Education Act (1996 Section 375 (3))/School Standards and Framework Act (1998, Schedule 19, para.5).

### **Background: the need for a high-quality syllabus**

The provision of a clear, well-structured, up-to-date and professional agreed syllabus is probably the single most important function of SACRE. Combined with on-going implementation training and resources, a new syllabus offers the possibility of raising achievement in RE in all local schools. In 2019/20, it is essential to consider how this relates to new inspection requirements, to developments in assessment and in teaching and learning, revised GCSEs, the National Report from the Commission on RE, the 'British Values' agenda, and all related educational change.

Ofsted's Subject specialist RE reports 2010 and 2013 highlight the need for syllabuses to:

- be clear about expected knowledge and understanding about religion(s) and belief(s)
- support and empower teachers to plan effectively
- offer coherent progression across the ages and key stages
- support clear and focused assessment, useful for raising standards
- encourage enquiry-based RE.

### **Implications of new Ofsted framework**

The draft new Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (EIF, 2019) places great emphasis on curriculum planning. It asks schools what the thinking is behind their curriculum plan for the school – their intent. It then examines how they implement it – including a context and narrative for its implementation in the school. And then it examines the impact. An agreed syllabus needs to be able to support schools in all three. It needs to have a good rationale for its structure; it needs to be operable in diverse school settings; it needs to show schools how they can see what impact the syllabus is having on pupil achievement.

The first day of reports being published revealed clear information that some schools are not providing a broad and balanced RE for all pupils in all key stages.

*These recently published reports act as a reminder of how even when RE isn't the focus of a deep dive a lack of provision will be picked up.*

*An example from a Primary academy (Overall grade RI) Pupils are starting to build knowledge in some subjects. Pupils in Year 4 told us about their topic on ancient Rome and what they have learned about democracy. In other subjects planning to build pupils' knowledge is less well developed. For example, in religious education (RE) pupils know little about religions other than Christianity. Pupils do not learn a modern foreign language.*

***What does the school need to do to improve?***

*Pupils do not know enough about cultures and religions different to their own. Leaders have put plans into place to address this, but they must continue to review this work to ensure that pupils have opportunities to develop the knowledge they need to prepare them for life in modern Britain.*

*An example from a Secondary academy (Overall grade RI) Most teachers are now teaching pupils the subject content that matters the most, apart from religious education, which is limited.*

***What does the school need to do to improve?***

*Currently, some pupils in key stage 3 do not cover subject content sufficiently well to be able to draw upon their learning in the future. This is because subjects such as religious education lack prominence in the curriculum. Additionally, the time pupils spend learning new content is limited in some subjects as teachers attempt to teach a broad and balanced curriculum that is commensurate with the national curriculum. However, time is limited, and teachers sometimes gloss over important learning points. This leads to gaps in pupils' understanding. Leaders must ensure that pupils are afforded sufficient time to learn important subject content in detail for as long as possible, including in religious education.*

**Current situation**

Whilst the current syllabus was refreshed in 2016 it was an older version of a syllabus that was adapted. Since then there have been changes in understanding of best practice in teaching generally and many new resources and strides forward in the teaching of RE, including a judicial review.

**Commission on RE National Report 2018**

Since the last syllabus review and the publication of the non-statutory guidance, the RE Council has published the result of a two-year commission into RE. Among its recommendations are:

- A change of name for the subject, from *Religious Education* to *Religion and Worldviews*
- The removal of the responsibility for SACREs to produce a local agreed syllabus
- Instead, to have a national statement of entitlement and national example programme of study, upon which Local Advisory Networks for Religion and Worldviews (the body replacing the reconstituted SACRE) can base local guidance and support.

The Report has had a positive response from the RE community, in general, although there remain some strong differences of opinion. Its impact on the role of SACREs is limited as yet. The Department for Education gave a lukewarm response to it, and indicated that there would be no time or inclination for any legal change for the foreseeable future. This means that SACREs retain the requirement to set up an Agreed Syllabus Conference and decide upon development of an agreed syllabus.

The RE Council is seeing this as part of a long process, however, and even though there is not any immediate structural change, the Report is having an impact on how people think about the content and purpose of RE, and may well end up having an impact on the structures of RE too.

### **Implications for SACREs**

It would be wise to consider the impact of the description of our subject as outlined in the Commission Report. Whether or not we wish to embrace the name change, there may be some adjustments (at least) that we could make to RE. On the other hand, the national conversation being held among RE professionals may not reach quickly down to the classroom. It is part of SACRE's role to mediate this impact, as it sees fit.

### **Decisions to take:**

- Do you need to commission/write a new syllabus or is the current syllabus fit for purpose
- There are funding implications for each of the options. It is better that these do not drive the decisions – better to decide what is the best option for the teachers and then pursue the funding!

### **The options for SACRE include:**

#### **Buy into one of the RE Today RE syllabus models.**

This is what this paper is about, and staff from RE Today will be pleased to speak to SACRE about this and other possibilities. The information here is commercially sensitive as far as RE Today are concerned: may I ask you not to share it with other parties please? A confidential briefing paper with specific costings can be presented, as discussed, at the full SACRE meeting.

Or

Commission a bespoke syllabus

This paper outlines four options to consider:

- a. **Buy into Syllabus Model A:** based on A Curriculum Framework for RE in England (CFRE)(2013) and Non-Statutory National Framework (2004), and building on all of the experience in syllabus writing that the charity has developed over the last 3 decades.
- b. **Buy into Syllabus Model B:** the most recent model agreed syllabus which offers a more systematic approach, incorporating questions from the Understanding Christianity resource being used in many schools, and a revised assessment model.
- c. **SACRE could commission a bespoke new syllabus from RE Today.** This could reflect the Commission on RE national report recommendations closely, exemplifying its new direction for Religion and Worldviews.
- d. **Adapt the current syllabus to make it fit for purpose**

### Option A: Purchase Syllabus Model A plus schemes of work

RE Today has written two agreed syllabus models, based on the CFRE and NSNF, and building on all of the experience in syllabus writing that the charity has developed over the last 3 decades.

Syllabus Model A provides the minimum for a SACRE / LA to fulfil its legal requirement. It is good value for money. To make a positive impact on raising standards in RE in the LA area, very substantial additional resources are available for purchase.

#### **Advantages:**

- Full syllabus available with minimal effort from LA / SACRE, to the swiftest timescale
- All schools receive a hard copy of the 100+ page document, in a ring binder, in full colour, plus full digital access to our substantial support package
- Up to date, reflecting all current guidance on EYFS, National Curriculum, outcomes-led, assessment without levels, GCSE and A level reform, Humanist legal judgment and all recent developments taken into account
- Flexibility built in to allow schools to adapt to their particular situation
- Support materials available – up to and including complete planned schemes of work, to schools or to LAs and SACREs
- On-going support from RE Today with potential upgrades within the 5-year review period if necessary
- More than 20 local authorities have recently purchased the franchise rights for this new, excellent RE syllabus – it is a proven success with teachers in primary and secondary schools, who evaluate it as excellent (90% plus)
- Thousands of schools are using this syllabus.
- About half a dozen other LAs and SACREs are currently actively exploring their use of the RE Today syllabus – it is proving to meet needs at fair cost and very high quality.
- SACRE can write and insert their own introduction, and can create additional local appendices (although these are the responsibility of SACRE to print and insert).
- **LAs and SACREs can work with RE Today to recoup a significant proportion of their costs through entrepreneurial launch events for schools.** We have wide experience of the effectiveness of this, including premium rates for local Academies. Further detailed examples available.

#### **Disadvantages:**

- Little involvement from local teachers or SACRE on the content and style.
- Local RE is less prominent (though clients can insert their own local introduction and appendices to the syllabus)

#### **Details**

Syllabus licensed for adoption by SACRE. The syllabus includes these sections:

- The Aim and Purpose of RE
- Legal requirements for RE
- Contribution of RE to whole-school: SMSC, well-being, literacy, PSHE, citizenship, British Values
- Breadth of study: which religions and beliefs are to be studied and when
- Programmes of study, 4-19, EYFS-KS5
- Core knowledge for RE: Outline
- Assessment processes 'after levels' – an 'eight steps up' approach
- Planning processes for teachers to use and fully applied in the unit plans
- Inclusion statement
- Creative curriculum and cross-curriculum outlines

- Application of syllabus requirements to special school contexts
- Advice on including Academies

Flexibility and freedom are built in to the requirements, to encourage creative development and adaptation within a school.

### **Option B: Adopt RE Today's more recent syllabus Model B**

In 2017, RE Today developed a new syllabus model. It has some questions that are similar to the Walsall non-statutory guidance, but its approach is different.

#### **Features:**

- The syllabus follows a more systematic approach to the study of religions, in contrast to the more thematic approach of Walsall. This means that most questions address one religion at a time. For example, in each year a class will generally study two religions separately before addressing a thematic question in the summer term, allowing them to build on their learning through the year.
- The syllabus follows a coherent teaching and learning approach, with clear assessment outcomes for each unit and each phase.
- The syllabus contains additional guidance on religions and worldviews, and is accompanied by a selection of units of work that can be purchased by SACRE for its schools, or by schools themselves.
- This syllabus incorporates key questions from the Understanding Christianity resource that is currently in use in many Church of England and community schools. This is used in most, if not all, C of E schools in Walsall.

#### **Advantages:**

- The systematic approach is more in sympathy with a knowledge-rich curriculum, and its spiral curriculum reflects the contemporary emphasis on embedding pupils' knowledge and understanding in their long-term memory. This idea of curriculum coherence ties in well with new Ofsted emphases, with the focus on the sequencing of concepts for effective learning.
- This syllabus is a substantial move forward for RE for pupils and for teachers.
- Many schools using Understanding Christianity would be delivering the agreed syllabus as they use it; and schools who have not discovered Understanding Christianity would benefit from the structural coherence of the study of Christianity in the syllabus.
- The syllabus includes additional scope for the examination of non-religious worldviews, in line with the Commission Report 2018.
- Syllabus is ready for summer 2020 launches.
- On-going support from RE Today with potential upgrades within the 5-year review period if necessary.
- Feedback from local authorities using this syllabus has been very positive.

#### **Disadvantages:**

- A substantial change of syllabus may not be welcomed by schools, even though the syllabus Model B has been greeted very positively by schools in other LAs.

#### **Details:**

Syllabus licensed for adoption by SACRE. In addition to the sections found in Model A The syllabus includes these sections:

- Teaching and learning approach
- Spiral curriculum
- Core concepts identified for each unit, building on prior learning
- End-of-unit and end-of-phase outcomes for coherent assessment
- Background knowledge on core concepts in world religions and non-religious worldviews
- Demographics of religion and belief in your area

**Option C: Bespoke review**

SACRE could fulfil statutory duties by requiring a local review of the agreed syllabus. This would involve a process something like this:

- an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) set up, over-seeing the review;
- a survey of teachers;
- initial drafts by the adviser / a consultant;
- teacher working groups to feed into the process of reviewing the drafts;
- re-writing by adviser;
- approval from ASC, SACRE and the Local Authority;
- design and production of text and/or online version.

This would need to be launched with either a schools conference day or a series of hub CPD sessions, to provide training and resources to enable teachers to implement the syllabus in their schools. A syllabus with strong implementation training plus support will be far more effective than one with no training.

The production of support materials can extend the value of the revised syllabus. A good syllabus can provide the drive, coherence and context for RE, with sample or full units of work exemplifying the syllabus. They are not an alternative to the statutory syllabus but can enhance teaching and learning by providing teachers with additional suggestions and guidance.

The key reason to consider this would be if SACRE believes that it should create a syllabus that reflects the description of the subject of Religion and Worldviews from the 2018 Commission Report.

***Relevant recent examples:***

RE Today Services have had recent involvement with SACREs and Local Authorities in, for example, Sandwell, Bedford, Bedfordshire and Luton, and Gloucestershire, who have used RE Today to develop a bespoke syllabus. No one else has yet written a syllabus based on the 2018 Commission Report, so this would be ground-breaking.

***Advantages:***

- Involvement of local teachers strengthens the commitment to the syllabus, maybe resulting in greater buy-in for the revised syllabus
- The process is a form of professional development for those involved, who can then support local schools in the implementation process.
- The syllabus can reflect the local area closely.
- The syllabus could set the standard for post-Commission syllabuses, with national impact

***Disadvantages:***

- Costs are considerably greater than options a-b.
- Duplication of work with other local SACREs.

**Likely costs must include:**

- Establishing, managing and supporting the review process,
- Running teacher consultations, including supply cover for teacher working party
- Setting the parameters for writing review materials, and developing local applications of national materials; writing time, drafting and redrafting services
- Production supervision
- Supply cover
- Production costs: editorial, design, print.

**Option D: Refresh the current syllabus**

This will require at least fifteen days of adviser time and will still not create a syllabus as detailed as either model syllabus A or B

Note that a SACRE might include or exclude various school types – Academy, Free Schools, Catholic or Anglican schools. SACRE can recoup these costs via the launch and training offered to schools. Some SACREs have done this in full.

Costs would be confirmed by a contract letter before agreement.

Launch events can be arranged as a separate financial package, to recoup some of the overall costs. These possibilities can be discussed and options offered.

**Includes:**

**Launch conferences: two presenters costs**

**Units of work**

**Syllabus Model A:** A complete set of units of work is available for either SACRE to buy for all schools or for schools to buy individually. Price on request.

**Syllabus Model B:** A complete set of units of work for all thematic units and for all systematic units except Christianity is available for either SACRE to buy for all schools or for schools to buy individually. Price on request. The Christianity units are provided by the Understanding Christianity resource which schools can access through training. SACRE could support/organise/subsidise this training for the schools who have not already undergone this training. Four local authorities in another area of the country are doing this successfully.