

Minutes



Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE)

Date: 7 March 2019

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors L Lacey (Chair), Cllr J Watkins, Cllr I Hayat, Cllr R Hayat, E Keen, P Webber, H Stephens, N Baicher, C James, S Sharma, H Vaughan, C Roberts

In Attendance: N Barnett (Governance Officer)

Apologies: Councillors T Holyoake, N Huggleston, P Landers, S Hunt, L Picton

1 Time of Quiet Reflection

The Chair welcomed the Committee to the meeting. Members then took part in a period of quiet reflection.

3 Apologies for Absence

Members noted the apologies for Cllr Tracy Holyoake, Nicola Huggleston, Patricia Landers, Susie Hunt and Lana Picton.

4 Minutes of the meeting held on 18th October 2018) and to consider actions and matters arising (see attached)

Matters arising: On page 5, there is a duplication from paragraphs 2 to 4.

Agreed:

The minutes of the SACRE meeting of 14 June 2018 were accepted as a true record.

5 To receive a membership update

To receive an update on the SACRE Membership.

Reverend Catrin Roberts was welcomed to the Committee as a representative of the Presbyterian Church of Wales.

Actions:

The Committee accepted the membership update.

6 Presentation from Dr Abdalla Y Mohamed OBE, Chair and Operations Director of the Onyx Link Foundation

The Committee welcomed Dr Abdalla Yassin Mohamed. He advised that the Onyx Link Foundation is a non-profitable company that has been established to achieve several objectives in two main areas: promotion of social wellbeing through education and training

and improving community relations through empowering interfaith communities (67% in the UK; 84% worldwide) and the rest of society for advancing active national and global citizenship.

The Committee were given a brief presentation. The Onyx Link Foundation is an interfaith organisation with aspirations to get people moving together and raising awareness of faiths. Committee members were advised of the next Onyx Link Foundation meeting taking place at the Celtic Manor on the 1st May at 9am.

The Foundation advised they have devised programs for dealing with inclusion of those who may be isolated from mainstream education, radicalisation or other issues. They shared their research and raise awareness at presentations. Dr Abdalla shared the outcome of the last conference held on 10th May 2018 and explained it is the ownership for Interfaith leaders and Committees to attend.

Dr Mohamed how important it is to acknowledge beliefs in committees across Wales. Onyx is not imposing or dictating beliefs. The OLF is inspired and guided by the belief that humans are one family, sharing one home – earth, and its natural resources to survive. They believe that happiness resides in interacting upon morality and bonding with love. The OLF seeks to encourage good community work by promoting awareness of active national and global citizenship

Faith leaders were mentioned in the presentation, however despite Humanists not being faith based, the Humanist representative on SACRE suggested Wales Humanists might like to be involved in this work. OLF advised that Humanists are included and had recently been in touch with Ruth from Humanists UK, hopefully a representative will be attending the conference. PW, the EAS adviser informed the Committee that Kathy Riddick from Humanists UK recently gave a presentation at Caerphilly SACRE and that there were seemed to be many shared values between Wales Humanists and the OLF.

The Committee praised the hard work in the presentation and thanked OLF for its dedication to bring Faith and communities together.

Members asked whether schools could access the information as there had been a isolated few incidents and tensions within communities. Schools are always looking at ways to work with children to improve relationships. OLF advised that they have been working with schools for the past several years in Cardiff by attending assemblies and visiting schools. Today they are due to visit Bassaleg school. The OLF are happy to work with whoever, and schools are free to contact. Workshops are also designed to discuss radicalisation and Islamophobia.

HT advised she works in a school and hadn't heard of OLF, she will raise awareness with the clusters and circulate contact details.

The Committee thanked the Onyx Link Foundation for attending and for their presentation.

SACRE members were invited to attend the Wales Inter Faith Conference organised by OLF on 1 May 2019 in Newport.

Agreed:

Copies of Declarations to be sent to SACRE clerk.

SACRE clerk to send information of OLF to schools.

7 **New Curriculum development verbal update: - to include discussion on Prof. Donaldson's Video**

PW introduced the item to the Committee and explained the Prof. Donaldson video had been sent prior to the meeting, and asked the Committee for their comments
The Committee discussed the following:

HT explained she acts as a Catholic Teacher and Prof. Donaldson has attended her school for an evening and would also be visiting for 3 hours the day after the SACRE meeting. Topics of discussion included the position of Religious Education, a long debate of whether RE should sit inside of Humanities or outside. Humanities stressed how important it was to maintain focus on RE.

PW explained Prof. Donaldson was very supportive of RE. She said that many people had expressed concern that Religious Education could be lost if an interdisciplinary approach were taken. However, PW explained that each discipline should be visible in the curriculum. You cannot have an interdisciplinary approach without the individual disciplines. There is a lot of work being done by the pioneers developing the curriculum to make sure each discipline is visible and represented. In the 14 -16 age group there should be quite strong specialism in the disciplines.

RE is statutory until the age of 16. PW explained that Qualifications Wales are she is unsure what the qualifications will look like, but that there will be meeting soon with the Qualifications Team later in March. SACRE members recommended that there was a need to highlight some of the pitfalls with the current short course, whilst also making sure it will be suitable for learners in the new curriculum.

PW advised that the draft curriculum would be published in April for consultation, and that it is currently out for translation and editing. This will be discussed in the next SACRE meeting. PW informed SACRE members that, following the SACRE consultation with Welsh Government for the need for supporting framework, Welsh Government have made funding available for RE. An experienced writing team had already been put together to produce the RE Framework. Meurig Roberts is acting as Welsh Government Lead and the writing group are being led by Paula Webber (EAS Adviser for RE) and Libby Jones (Wrexham RE Adviser) whose services have been procured by Welsh Government. . SACRE were informed that the first meeting of the RE Framework group would be the following week.

HS enquired about qualifications, and asked are they looking at age 16 to have Humanities qualifications? PW advised that she is unsure what it will look like currently, but it needs to take into account that RE is statutory and needs to be taught until children are 16. HS expressed concern that if the qualification is moving into a joint qualification it would be difficult for children to be withdraw from it. .

The Chair asked how would you specialise in these areas if they are grouped together? PW replied she is unsure what is going to be done, it could be a bespoke qualification. HT commented that secondary options are so much restricted because of having Maths and Welsh Baccalaureate and that children should have a broader education. PW advised it be kept broad but reiterated that not decisions had been made in terms of qualifications. .

PW advised that children should be doing RE because it is statutory and suggested that they should, therefore, be awarded for it. HT commented that qualifications drive the curriculum, and are used to measure the schools performance. PW agreed that this is the case under the current system. Welsh Government are also looking at a new Assessment and Evaluation framework and that Estyn have been part of this process. In the new curriculum the learner will be at the heart of the curriculum rather than the data. Therefore, This will Assessment and Evaluation Framework be published the same time as the draft Curriculum.

SS commented that there are 3 aspects to Maths, but the qualification is just Maths. Humanities should take the same line, with Geography and History. PW commented that it may look different. HT replied that because it is locally agreed, how can it fit in with the syllabus for Geography and History, which is central. PW replied that it is up to the local SACRE to adopt or adapt the national Framework for RE as the locally agreed syllabus and

that SACREs had been consulted on this . Could get a rogue SACRE that doesn't want to sign up but it is understood that every SACRE has signed up.

Actions:

The report was noted.

8 **To consider and respond to the Welsh Government white paper**

PW talked through the paper and its proposals and committee members discussed the feedback questions in order to make a full written response from Newport SACRE. .

3.65 In keeping with *Successful Futures*, we propose that RE is retained as a statutory requirement from age 3 and forms part of the Humanities AoLE.

Newport SACRE agree with this proposal

3.66 It is our intention also that RE reflects our historical and contemporary relationship in Wales to philosophy and religious views, including non-religious beliefs. Therefore the current legislation will be amended to ensure the agreed syllabus for RE takes account of non-religious world views which are analogous to religions (e.g. humanism).

PW commented that in the WASACRE meeting it was felt that this needed clarification.. The statement doesn't make clear how this would affect the wording of current legislation. . RE has to include all worldviews, including non-religious views. During the discussion the term 'faith' was referred to. CJ commented that the word 'faith', as it is used in some contexts, would be misleading for Humanism, would prefer to see Religion and worldviews. Humanism would like children to know that it is okay for them not to have religious faith but to be able to understand faith.

HT advised that it is really important that the audience reading this statement fully understands it, and not to view any other faith wrongly. PW advised the exact wording and not proposed changes would need to be seen before SACRE could give full feedback to Welsh Government. Cllr. I Hayat expressed the need to be very careful as the wording could end up not making any sense.

Cllr Watkins commented that the proposal here is for 3 – 4 years old, so need to be mindful that a light touch is needed. PW advised that this is progression steps in the curriculum, at this level children might learn, for example at Progression Step 1 they might have learned how to be kind to each other.

Agreed:

SACRE suggests that it is important to consult on the precise wording of this change to legislation. It is important that the audience reading it understand the wording to avoid misconceptions.

SACRE agree it is important that learners gain an understanding of both religious and non-religious worldviews.

3.67 Our approach will recognise the local responsibility of the Agreed Syllabus Conferences, local authorities and the place of the denominational syllabus in Voluntary Aided schools but make a clearer connection with a national approach.

Newport SACRE Agree with this proposal

3.68 We propose to amend the legislation relating to the adoption of an agreed syllabus to ensure that each Agreed Syllabus Conference and local authority must give due regard to a supporting framework to be produced by Welsh Government. This document will be developed with expert practitioners and key partners such as

the Wales Association of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs) and the National Advisory Panel for Religious Education will clarify and further develop aspects relating to RE outlined in the statutory guidance to be produced for the Humanities AoLE. There will be regular consultation with SACRE members and key stakeholders throughout the development period.

Newport SACRE Agree with this proposal

3.69 Voluntary Aided schools with a religious character will continue to deliver their denominational RE and guidance will be developed by the relevant authorities to make the links with the Humanities AoLE.

Newport SACRE Agree with this proposal

3.70 There is currently an exemption from RE for registered pupils in school nursery classes. It is proposed that the exemption be repealed to ensure parity for all subjects / components of the AoLEs. We believe learners of all ages can benefit from knowledge of the broad spectrum of religious, philosophical and cultural traditions held by people in Wales. Those Funded Nursery Settings will also have to deliver the new curriculum for Wales, this will include the Humanities AoLE and they will be expected to give regard to the content of the statutory guidance document, as well as their locally agreed syllabus.

Newport SACRE Agree with this proposal

3.71 We propose to legislate to amend the current provisions regarding the description of an Agreed Syllabus as well as membership of Committee A of Agreed Syllabus Conferences and Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) to encompass non-religious views that are analogous to religious views. This is to clarify the current legislation and take account of the effect of the *Human Rights Act 1998* which means that references to religious views should be read as also encompassing non-religious views that are analogous to religious views. We have already written to Local Authority's Directors of Education setting out the action they need to take in response.

Newport SACRE Agree with this proposal.

3.72 The following provision included in Schedule 19 of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998 will also be retained:

"No agreed syllabus shall provide for religious education to be given to pupils at a school to which this paragraph applies by means of any catechism or formulary which is distinctive of a particular religious denomination (but this is not to be taken as prohibiting provision in such a syllabus for the study of such catechisms or formularies)."

SACRE agrees with this proposal, but request that the wording of the legislation is simplified.

3.73 At present all learners in school sixth forms must study Religious Education. In future, it is proposed that learners will have an entitlement to receive learning and schools must provide it if it is requested – it will be optional. It is important to note schools will not be prevented by the legislation to continue to provide Religious Education to sixth formers. However, there will be no legal obligations for sixth formers to attend if they do not wish to do so. Guidance will be made available for schools to support this new approach.

Cllr Watkins commented that sixth formers are under huge pressures such as planning life going forward. To continue with compulsory Re at sixth form is an additional pressure and the question of whether it could be delivered in a different way was raised. SACRE members discussed whether it could be part of an induction, discussion groups or seminars. CJ suggested that if RE in sixth form continues it needs to be relevant and more creative. PW

advised that some schools in Wales are not teaching statutory RE and that if it were to continue this would need to be monitored.

Agreed:

Newport SACRE are of the opinion, given the rise of prejudice and discrimination against people based on race or religion and belief within society, that it is more important than ever to retain statutory RE at all ages including in sixth forms. If this entitlement is withdrawn Welsh Government will be removing something that is very important, e.g. the opportunity for learners to develop empathy for people of faith or belief.

The delivery of statutory RE at sixth form could be presented in an imaginative way, e.g. during induction or drop-down days.

SACRE suggests that RE should also be statutory for learners in sixth form colleges to ensure equality of opportunity.

SACRE members are aware that sixth form students are under huge pressure, but that it is important that the learning experience goes beyond examination specifications and is a preparation for life.

Guidance should be provided for schools in managing either the current law or how to manage the optional RE should the law change.

3.74 There is currently a right for parents to withdraw their children from RE. There is a need to determine the appropriate arrangements for this and the similar right to withdraw from sex education in the current system. This is discussed below.

The Right to Withdraw from Religious Education and Relationships and Sexuality Education

There should not be a link in this consultation between RE and Sex Education in the consultation as they are separate issues.

- 11. Should the right to withdraw from RE and RSE be retained?

Newport SACRE are of the opinion that the right to withdraw be removed. The right to withdraw should be unnecessary if high quality Religious Education is being delivered. Training should be given to staff at all levels so that conflict in schools is avoided.

SACRE members are aware that there are limited withdrawals within Newport and within Wales however, one of the reasons parents withdraw their children from RE is on grounds of conscience, religion and belief. SACRE would not like to see situations where learners are losing out on education if they are then home schooled because the right to withdraw is removed. SACRE suggest that there is a need for headteachers and relevant staff to receive training that will limit this.

If the right to withdraw is retained, then SACRE suggest that a more stringent process of withdrawal be put in place. For example, withdrawals might be considered on a case by case basis to ensure that opting out is an informed, committed choice and not an easy option.

- 12. If the right to withdraw is to be retained, should it remain with the parent (parent includes those with parental responsibility or those who have care of the child)?

If the right to withdraw is retained and learners have that option schools could potentially see more withdrawals. SACRE suggests that the right remain with the parent but that the rights of the child be respected, and their views also considered, so that learners are not withdrawn from RE against their will.

- 13. If the right to withdraw is removed, what alternative, if any, should be in its place? Newport SACRE suggest that there should be significant training relating to religious education for schools as the New Curriculum is rolled out. This necessity would increase

should the right to withdraw be removed as the RE delivered should be objective, critical and pluralistic. There should be an advisory service within the local authority and a dedicated, specialist advisory teacher specifically for Religious Education. This needs to be funded appropriately.

Agreed:

PW to send draft response to White Paper to Welsh Government.

9 Monitoring of Religious Education and Collective Worship

PW presented a brief overview of the report to the Committee which included the examination data and comments. It was explained that results had improved in 2018 in comparison with those of 2017.

The inspection reports were good, with an especially good report for St Julians School. It was then suggested that the Committee should send a letter of congratulations to the school.

Actions:

To send a letter of congratulations to St Julians School.

10 To consider the recommendations of the Estyn Thematic Report and the response of NAPfRE to the report.

PW gave a brief overview of the report. It was felt that there was quite a few issues need to be addressed from the report, such as the report didn't reflect some of the anecdotal evidence coming through that RE is a bit more vulnerable than the report appears to say. The report states that the planning was good in Key Stage 2 but Key Stage 3 suggests of a shortfall and that schools do not plan well from the evidence that was gathered.

An issue was raised that many examples that were given in the document were good examples of good citizenship but not of RE, which has been misinterpreted. Estyn included collective worship in the report but is a separate issue, it shouldn't be included. PW advised she would report back to NAPfRE with any issues.

Cllr I Hayat queried if there were any issues with Headteachers and delivering the new curriculum? NB suggested that representatives of Committee A could visit schools and could arrange to attend collective worship. HT then suggested that information details be sent to schools from the SACRE committee to advise how the committee can help them.

Actions:

To produce a collaborative information sheet to send to schools.

11 Discussion on Effective SACREs: to include feedback from the 20:20 RE Conference from Paula Webber

The Committee agreed that this item would be discussed at the Summer meeting.

12 To consider the recommendations of the Final Report of the Commission on Religious Education and their relevance to Wales and Newport SACRE

The Committee agreed that this item would be discussed at the Summer meeting.

13 **SACRE News Bulletin – To consider information briefings from members for inclusion in next SACRE News Bulletin**

PW advised that Committee that there are no articles this time, but she would circulate anything coming through to the committee. There has also been no further information briefings, which shows how busy SACREs have been.

Actions:

The Committee were informed of the News Bulletin.

14 **WASACRE**

PW gave a brief overview of the WASACRE minutes from the last meeting. She advised of the presentation that was made by Kevin Palmer from Welsh Government about professional learning in the new curriculum. He says that the needs for professional learning needs to be addressed in RE. There will be a new approach and professional learning will be quality assured. PW asked at the meeting how specialist training had been diminished. Kevin advised that there are negotiations in place for the need for additional training in the new curriculum and invited further discussion with PW.

During the WASACRE meeting the lack of professional support for SACREs was raised as a matter of concern. . SACRE not being supported by a full time dedicated RE Advisor.

The Committee were advised that HS is stepping down as Executive Member of WASACRE, and asked if anyone wished to put their names forward to replace. The Council would be funding, not schools, incase School Teachers are interested. It would be found if the Council could pay for teacher release. Nominations would be needed as soon as possible.

Actions

To accept the report.

SACRE clerk to send nomination forms to committee.

15 **To note dates and venue of future meetings and notification of Agreed Syllabus Conference**

The meeting terminated at 12.00 pm