

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE NEW CURRICULUM QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK

Name: Paula Webber

SACRE Region: Newport

What are your views on the proposed relationship between the agreed syllabus and the Humanities AoLE?

Members are pleased to see that RE will be an integral part of a new curriculum and that it has escaped the 'stranglehold' of the current, the narrow, national curriculum which RE sat outside. This new humanities curriculum is both good and exciting. Some Newport SACRE members reported having experienced a 'buzz' within schools who are already engaging with the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience. They reported that they had not experienced this level of enthusiasm within schools for a very long time. Some Newport SACRE members were enthusiastic about the benefits of a holistic approach and suggested that the Humanities would clearly engage the learners and would enable them toward achieving the Four Purposes. Members liked the focus on skills within the curriculum suggesting that this might improve levels of engagement, particularly at Primary School.

However, SACRE members ask the question - if the Humanities curriculum is just delivering broad themes then how will learners find the key facts and knowledge within Religious Education? Members would like to ensure that core concepts of Religious Education be more visible in the Humanities AoLE. SACRE is adamant in its view that RE must not be lost. Members expressed concern that there were not enough 'hooks' easily identifiable to RE specialists in the draft of the document shared by Welsh Government. Non-specialists would, therefore, find this task even more difficult. If this is the case, then where is the RE component going to be? It was suggested that clear instructions are needed in guidance and that we must not be left with verbiage. A supporting framework would also help towards this goal.

Would the supporting framework be a good way of supporting the Agreed Syllabus Conferences to fulfil their statutory role?

Newport SACRE takes the need to produce a locally agreed syllabus very seriously. SACRE is pleased that Welsh Government acknowledges the local responsibility for RE and is offering to support the development of a framework that might be adopted or adapted as the locally agreed syllabus. Newport SACRE agrees with the Welsh Government proposal that there be a framework for RE supporting framework for RE that supports the place of RE within the New Curriculum. This would assist ASCs to fulfil its statutory role to produce an agreed syllabus - if the Framework is rigorous enough in requiring that excellent Religious Education is taught in schools. However, SACRE are concerned that it might not be able to agree with an agreed syllabus based on the new supporting framework if the hooks for RE are not found.

Is there anything we should consider when developing the supporting framework?

There should be rich opportunities for good RE within the framework. SACRE would like to see the hooks for Religious Education flagged up in the new supporting framework so that both specialist and non-specialist teachers of religious education are clearly able to identify the RE. Some of the specialists in the group suggested that even experts might find it difficult to clearly identify opportunities for Religious Education without a supporting framework. SACRE members are keen that they are consulted during this process if the Newport ASC is to adopt the framework as its syllabus.

In the current system qualifications have become the driver for what happens in schools. SACRE would suggest that there is a need for good quality Religious Education courses and qualifications. The curriculum needs to build up to the qualifications which are needed to lay the foundations for specialist study at A Level and beyond. SACRE also discussed the need for effective accountability to ensure the delivery of statutory RE. An excellent framework/agreed syllabus will not work unless you get the qualifications and accountability right. Changes to the GCSE specifications, the loss of the old RE Short Course and the fact that the current short course does not count towards school accountability measures has had a detrimental effect upon religious education in schools. This must be avoided in the New Curriculum.

SACRE foresees a need for specialist RE teachers and middle managers to be trained to deliver RE in the new curriculum. Whilst RE has always been statutory it was not placed within the national curriculum and as such had been left in a vulnerable place in our schools. As a result, there has been a drain on expertise. There is a need to address this issue.

SACRE members were concerned about the level of engagement from schools who are not pioneer schools. Members raised the concern that specialist RE training be provided. Members were keen to see what is good about the Foundation Phase be retained. There is also a need for good quality resources to be produced.

What are the implications of these proposals for you?

Newport SACRE takes its statutory duties seriously and understands the place it will play in supporting the New Curriculum as it rolls out to schools. As a stakeholder, SACRE would, therefore, appreciate being fully consulted on as the RE Framework develops in order to feel able to adopt or adapt the Framework as the Newport Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education. Newport SACRE appreciate the support of Welsh Government in funding and producing the RE framework.