

## Suggestions for strengthening SACREs

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In the introduction to the SACRE self-evaluation framework, HMI / QCA made the following statement:

*'Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs) have an important role in the development of effective learning in religious education and supporting good practice in collective worship. The work of SACREs has become increasingly challenging and diverse. In many ways SACREs reflect the work of governing bodies in schools, in so far as they act as critical friends to the local authority (LA) on matters of religious education and collective worship. They also mirror the work of governing bodies in that members are unpaid volunteers who give up their time to support religious education (RE) and collective worship locally.'*

The guide to SACREs and self-evaluation produced by HMI and QCA was designed to help individual SACREs evaluate their role and, in particular, to consider their impact on pupils' learning. The guidance highlighted five key dimensions of a SACRE's work and provided exemplification of good practice. It encouraged all SACREs to consider their distinctive key strengths and areas for development. It was felt that using the self-evaluation guidance should enable a SACRE to have a clear picture of its strengths and areas which could be further developed. It encourages SACREs to consider their key priorities, their organisational patterns and structures, and their partnership with the LA and other key stakeholders.

The areas by which it is organised are:

1. Monitoring and improvement of the standards, quality of teaching and provision in RE
2. Partnership between the SACRE, the LA and other key stakeholders
3. Effectiveness of the locally agreed syllabus
4. Monitoring and improvement of the provision and quality of collective worship
5. Contribution of the SACRE to the promotion of social and racial harmony.

### **The responsibilities of Local Authorities**

Recalling that *that members are unpaid volunteers who give up their time to support religious education (RE) and collective worship locally*, the responsibilities of the Local Authority are key in bringing this group together and enabling them to function effectively.

The HMI document reaffirms that the legal responsibilities of the LA are to:

- ensure that there is a SACRE
- ensure all four committees are represented on the SACRE
- ensure there is an agreed syllabus which is reviewed at least once every five years
- ensure that support is in place for the SACRE to enable it to discharge its responsibilities
- take note of, and respond to, any advice it receives from the SACRE.

Reference to SACREs from the LA may include advice on methods of teaching, the choice of teaching material and the provision of teacher training.

### **The responsibilities of SACREs**

Once constituted a SACRE's role is to:

- Monitor standards in RE in its LA
- publish an annual report of its work and send this to QCA
- consider requests for determinations on collective worship when required
- advise the LA upon such matters as collective worship and the religious education to be given, in accordance with an agreed syllabus.

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In order to achieve these requirements a SACRE needs to:

- monitor the provision for both RE and collective worship
- provide support and advice on RE and collective worship to schools.

A reorganisation of the materials of the SACRE self-evaluation tool demonstrates clearly the vital role that the Local Authority has to play in order to ensure that a SACRE can be effective and strong and highlights the responsibilities of the LA in this partnership.

### 1. Standards and quality of provision of religious education

The Self-evaluation tool asked the question:

*How effectively does the SACRE, in partnership with the LEA, monitor and evaluate standards and the quality of provision for RE in schools? How effective are the strategies to improve standards and the quality of provision?*

In order to achieve an advanced level in relation to this area, the tool indicates that **SACREs** need to be able to be well informed about:

- Compliance and time allocation for RE
- Public examination entries in RE (it states that the SACRE should work collaboratively with the LA to promote examination courses as a means of fulfilling statutory requirements)
- Standards and achievement: including standards at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, GCSE, AS and A2 level.
- Quality of teaching

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- Strengths and weaknesses of teaching & learning across the LA and have the opportunity to develop strategies to tackle weaknesses.
- Quality of leadership and management in RE in schools
- Recruitment and retention issues and level of specialist provision
- Issues related to resources for RE in schools. (stating that the SACRE should be enabled to be active in promoting the development of resources and setting benchmarks about appropriate levels of funding for the subject in schools.)

In relation to this area the document indicates the necessary *LA actions*:

- Provide detailed information about standards with careful analysis of data against national figures and trends including standards in primary schools and Key Stage 3.
- Provide a detailed analysis of examination entries in RE, including a breakdown by grouping (e.g. gender and ethnicity) and how this compares with national figures.
- Supported the development of clear strategies to tackle areas of weakness in relation to RE in schools.
- Work collaboratively with the SACRE to promote examination courses as a means of fulfilling statutory requirements.
- Provide information about findings in relation to quality of teaching and quality of leadership and management derived from LA intelligence and RE subject self-evaluations including some analysis of trends and strengths and weaknesses so that SACRE can devise strategies to share good practice and target improvement strategies on areas of weakness.
- Provide SACRE with detailed knowledge of patterns of recruitment, retention and specialist provision.

### 2. Management of the SACRE and partnership with the LEA and other key stakeholders

The tool states that the SACRE's partnership with the LA should enable it to carry out its responsibilities effectively. In order to achieve an advanced level in relation to this area the SACRE SEF indicates that SACREs need to be included and active in:

- Planning and setting agendas for SACRE meetings
- Ensuring that meetings are lively and purposeful with wide variety of contributions. In successful meetings teachers and representatives of faith communities regularly attend and participate fully, sharing their experience and insights.
- Organising meetings that are hosted in a variety of venues, including local places of worship and schools.
- Improvement/ development planning
- Attending national events relevant to its work; for example, NASACRE.
- Analysing information on standards in RE & Collective worship so that they can use this information effectively to give advice to the LA which leads to strategic action to improve standards and quality in schools.
- Developing a strong partnership with the LEA so that its members can play an active role in promoting ideas and initiatives.
- Engaging in dialogue with pupils and parents about RE.
- Fostering and engaging with local networks - Representatives of key support networks such as ASTs and higher education providers should be regularly involved with the SACRE and SACRE's activities build effectively on local networks.

In relation to this area the document indicates the necessary *LA actions*:

- Facilitate regular meetings of SACRE.
- Ensure routine administrative arrangements are in place and that agendas and papers are distributed appropriately.

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- Ensure that all four committees are well represented. (The membership should strongly reflect the diversity of the wider religious and professional community.)
- Use their contacts to encourage teachers and representatives of faith communities to attend regularly and participate fully in meetings, sharing their experience and insights.
- Arrange meetings in a variety of venues, including local places of worship and schools.
- Ensure there is a clear link between the SACRE's development plan and the wider objectives of the LA.
- Ensure the SACRE is well supported by a subject specialist who provides effective advice and is well informed about the provision and quality of RE in the LA and about national developments.
- Ensure the SACRE is attended by a lead officer from the LA who can provide a strong link between the work of the SACRE and the wider LA.
- Ensure the SACRE has access to funds to enable it to make decisions about its priorities and ensure these can be properly developed.
- Provide detailed and well-analysed information about the quality and provision for RE and collective worship.
- Ensure there is a strong and co-ordinated programme of induction and training opportunities for SACRE members.

### 3. The effectiveness of the locally agreed syllabus

The Self-evaluation tool asked the question:

*How effectively does the SACRE, in partnership with the LEA, monitor the impact of the agreed syllabus in raising standards, use national guidance (e.g. the non-statutory national framework) and evaluate the effectiveness of the previous agreed syllabus?*

In order to achieve an advanced level in relation to this area the SACRE SEF indicates that **SACREs** need to:

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- Have a clear and systematic process for reviewing the agreed syllabus including full consultation with schools and other key stakeholders, particularly faith communities.
- Have a strong sense of ownership of the agreed syllabus review, with clear targets for what needs to be achieved.
- Uses and extends the non-statutory national Framework in a coherent way to reflect local circumstances in the construction of the revised agreed syllabus, understanding fully the importance of retaining the coherence and integrity of the Framework
- Ensure that high quality advice is sought to review and advise on the revisions as they develop.
- In partnership with the LA hold consultation meetings and briefings to ensure teachers are fully involved in, and have a sense of ownership of, the revision process.
- Organise a successful launch, involving the wider community and strong media coverage to give the agreed syllabus a high profile as an important development in the work of the LA and SACRE.
- Plan and sponsor effective training on implementing the agreed syllabus that leads to teachers being clear about standards and expectations in the agreed syllabus and the implications for teaching and learning.
- Devise fully costed precise plans for further guidance and support to the Agreed Syllabus after consulting extensively with schools on what these should be.
- Ensure that teachers are actively involved in the development of support materials ensuring the process provides a strong professional development opportunity.
- Organise clear arrangements to monitor the impact of the new agreed syllabus and to measure its effectiveness in raising standards.

In relation to this area the document indicates the necessary *LA actions*:

- Clearly allocate a budget that includes consultation meetings, external evaluation and printing/distribution costs.
- Have a strong sense of ownership of the agreed syllabus review, with clear targets for what needs to be achieved.
- Ensure that high quality advice is sought to review and advise on the revisions as they develop.

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- In partnership with the SACRE hold consultation meetings and briefings to ensure teachers are fully involved in, and have a sense of ownership of, the revision process.
- Fund and support the organisation of a successful launch, involving the wider community and strong media coverage that gives the agreed syllabus a high profile as an important development in the work of the LA and SACRE.
- Ensure the delivery of effective training on implementing the agreed syllabus that leads to teachers being clear about standards and expectations in the agreed syllabus and the implications for teaching and learning.
- Support the SACRE in the development of fully costed precise plans for further guidance and support
- Ensure SACRE is able to consult extensively with schools on guidance and support and that teachers are actively involved in the development of support materials ensuring the process provides a strong professional development opportunity.
- Put in place clear arrangements to monitor the impact of the new agreed syllabus and to measure its effectiveness in raising standards.

### 4. Collective worship

The Self-evaluation tool asked the question:

*How effectively does the SACRE fulfil its responsibilities for the provision and practice of collective worship?*

In order to achieve an advanced level in relation to this area the SACRE SEF indicates that **SACREs** need to:

- Provide high quality advice and support on collective worship, sharing best practice, which leads to improvements in the quality of children's learning experiences.
- Regularly focus on collective worship in its meetings and update schools on new resources.
- Be actively involved in national developments in collective worship.
- Organise high quality, well-supported training to enhance provision.
- Monitor the provision of collective worship and tackle issues of non-compliance



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- Have direct experience of collective worship in schools through first-hand observation. Members should discuss key issues with staff and pupils and provide further advice in the light of their findings.

In relation to this area the document indicates the necessary *LA actions*:

- Facilitate SACRE members meeting with schools
- Support the monitoring process of provision for collective worship across all schools so that SACRE is enabled to fulfil its role.
- Ensure professional support that enables SACRE members to produce the high quality advice they are expected to develop.

## 5. Contribution of the SACRE to the social and racial harmony agenda

The Self-evaluation tool asked the question:

*How effectively does the SACRE, in partnership with the LEA, contribute to the wider social and racial harmony agenda?*

- In order to achieve an advanced level in relation to this area the SACRE SEF indicates that **SACREs** need to:
- Include strong representation from all major local religious communities, including different groups within the same religious tradition (for example, different Muslim communities).
- Be very aware of the nature of the religious, ethnic and cultural diversity in the local area and take active steps to inform itself about the distinctive needs and opportunities created by this diversity.
- Understand the intrinsic contribution which RE can make to social and racial harmony
- Link to local authority initiatives promoting social and racial harmony

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In relation to this area the document indicates the necessary *LA actions*:

- Ensure SACRE membership includes strong representation from all major local religious communities, including different groups within the same religious tradition (for example, different Muslim communities).
- Understand the intrinsic contribution which RE can make to social and racial harmony
- Ensure SACRE is linked to local authority initiatives promoting social and racial harmony

### Appendix – descriptions of an advanced SACRE from the SACRE SEF

#### Stage 3: advanced

SACREs at this stage will have very effective practice. Members will have a shared vision and understanding of their aims and purpose, and will seek to sustain their positive work in the light of changing needs and priorities. Meetings will be very purposeful and focused on the major priorities for improvement in schools. There will be a very effective partnership with the LA, and SACREs will be well supported by subject specialist advice, training and funding. They are informed about the quality and provision for RE and collective worship in schools, and about wider LA and national priorities and developments. The process of reviewing, revising, implementing and evaluating the locally agreed syllabus will be very robust, ensuring that schools are well supported in their work. Objectives at this stage will be concerned with innovation and sharing good practice to sustain the momentum and success.

Key targets might include:

- extending the range of initiatives taken to improve standards and quality in schools
- ensuring pupils' progress can lead to recognition of achievement through, for example, GCSE accreditation
- exploring ways of sharing good practice more widely with other SACREs and schools.
- improving the ways in which evidence is gathered about standards and the quality of provision in schools, particularly in the light of changes in the nature of Ofsted inspections
- developing the ways in which the SACRE can contribute to the promotion of social and racial harmony will be very well