

NASACRE AGM

The AGM was on 23 May; as well as business items there were two major presentations, summarised below:

Alan Brine HMI:

1. Only 40% of RE teaching is good (or better), GCSE provision is a matter of concern, recent policies place strain on RE and support for RE;
2. SACREs experience that pressure, particularly from academisation – they vary in their capacity and access to resources and expertise, so issues of morale and purpose result;
3. Up to about 2010 there was a more benign mutual support context, arising from Ofsted frameworks, Initial Teacher Education (with bursaries), growth in accreditation (GCSE), QCDA and model syllabi;
4. Nevertheless there were elements of fragility in SACREs, their national support, their status, lack of rigour in GCSEs and the extent of consensus over the purpose of RE;
5. With the ending of national support structures, Ofsted and GCSE (English Baccalaureate) changes and the localism agenda seen in academies rather than LAs, the climate has changed more recently;
6. Despite that there has been innovation in some new syllabi and models of working both with and within academy chains – interest generated by threats is reflected in the new RE Quality Mark and other new networks;
7. Final questions: do we align with national curriculum, seek new models, nurture best practice behind the scenes locally, or campaign for government action – can 152 SACRES successfully “address a government that simply refuses to engage”?

Mark Chater, Director, Culham St Gabriel's Trust

1. In a context of austerity and questioning of the legitimacy of authority, what do SACREs have to offer teachers and pupils? There is no place for benign dictators...and SACREs seem obscure in their formality, having more responsibility than power and little money. This system is not one you'd design now from scratch (confirmed by audience show of hands). SACREs have become isolated and thus neglected: the speaker invented a new acronym (below):
 - a. **SEMI-DETACHED** in their isolation from other structures and from the national curriculum, resulting in a weaker RE offer;
 - b. **ANTIQUATED** in terms of the rules providing for membership;
 - c. **COMPLIANCE-FIXATED** when the “compliance culture in schools is over” and “school autonomy over the curriculum is here to stay”, so what is needed is CPD and nurturing, not resistance;
 - d. **RIGID** because local authority structures are becoming increasingly irrelevant and innovation will happen regionally or among academy chains;
 - e. **EXTRAVAGANT** in producing 152 local syllabi which are broadly similar in content but confusingly different in structure, and fail to address the globalised world facing our young people.
2. Neither being outside nor within a national curriculum protects non-core subjects. The national curriculum will become a skeleton of broad-brush statements anyway.

3. There will be a need for new accountability frameworks for academies and “if we are smart we will make sure RE is part of it, not sitting outside it”. Local community Curriculum Panels for all subjects (recommended in the Cambridge Primary Review) would be an elegant solution. The speaker had another new acronym for an appropriate framework - FIDES:
 - a. **FREEDOM** to create learning experiences under an empowering national document;
 - b. **INNOVATION** involving technology and research leading to improvement in classroom practice;
 - c. **DEMOCRACY** in openness to all the faith and belief communities with RE seen as a bold enquiring subject;
 - d. **ENGAGEMENT** rather than RE as stand-offish;
 - e. **STANDARDS** deriving from enquiry into real-world issues, really doing theology and philosophy.
4. There is a pent-up energy in the RE community that is ready for change, and threats to our children in inequality, extremism, debt, apathy, affluenza, climate change. Let us lead in creating new structures which address the real issues.

Discussions around the floor were about:

1. Working with academies and in a context of reduced LA consultancy support
2. How best to press LAs to comply with their statutory duties to support SACREs
3. The focus on Agreed Syllabus reviews in the context of the national curriculum review and RE subject review

These were challenging areas in which it was difficult for groups to identify big new ideas.

Alan Stubbersfield