

North Yorkshire County Council

North Yorkshire Agreed Syllabus Conference

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 28th March 2023 at 4.00 p.m.

Group A: Christian Denominations and such other religious denominations as, in the Authority's opinion, will appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area: Professor John Adams (Humanist), Tom Clayton* (Methodist), Chris Devanny* (Catholic) and Abhijeet Kulkarni* (Hindu)

Group B: Church of England: Reverend Simone Bennett* (Diocese of Leeds)

Group C: Teachers Associations: Jo Colledge and Sarah Hodgson*

Group D: Local Authority: County Councillors Alyson Baker and George Jabbour

Officers present: Adrian Clarke (Principal Education Adviser - Support), Patrick Duffy (Principal Democratic Services Scrutiny Officer), Heather Russell (Senior Education Adviser) and Olivia Seymour* (Professional Religious Education Adviser)

In attendance: Anna Silver* (Judaism) and Owen Griffiths*, Corporate Governance Officer

*Denotes joined remotely

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

NOTE:

References to Agreed Syllabus, throughout these Minutes, refer to the Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education

1. Election of Chair

The Clerk to SACRE, Patrick Duffy, introduced the meeting and stated that the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) is a body which people have to actively indicate that they wish to be a Member of; membership cannot be assumed. Therefore, he thanked Members for having agreed to be a part of the ASC.

With being a separate body from SACRE, the ASC needed to appoint a Chair. He asked if Members would be agreeable to the Chair of SACRE, Councillor Alyson Baker, chairing the ASC. Members concurred with this suggestion and, therefore, it was

Resolved –

That Councillor Alyson Baker be elected Chair of the Agreed Syllabus Conference.

Councillor Alyson Baker in the Chair.

Councillor Baker thanked Members for electing her as Chair. She welcomed Dr. Abhijeet Kulkarni, who had joined the Committee as the Hindu Representative and Anna Silver, from the Jewish Faith. Anna is seeking a representative from the Jewish Community, as Brian Berry is no longer their representative but, in the meantime, she would be part of the discussion in a non-voting capacity.

The Chair also welcomed Owen Griffiths, who would shortly become part of the Democratic Services Team at the new North Yorkshire Council and who was observing today, to raise his awareness of SACRE.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Tara Askew.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved –

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the Item Agreed Syllabus, Options Paper (See Minute No. 9, below), on the grounds that it would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.

5. Budget for the Agreed Syllabus Conference

Considered –

A verbal report by the Principal Education Adviser (Support), Adrian Clarke.

He stated that:-

- By way of context, the Agreed Syllabus covers a five-year period. In 2019 the cost had been £15,000 and it had been launched prior to the Pandemic.
- The Local Authority has a responsibility to fund the ASC.
- The Schools White Papers states that Schools should become Academies, or be in the process of becoming one, by 2030. So far, 32% of Schools have academised.
- The new North Yorkshire Council (which comes into operation on 1st April 2023) has proposed a budget of £25,000. This is a significant increase of £10,000 on the previous figure and will enable some resource development, as well as launch costs – it is anticipated that not as many Launch Events will be held this time.

In response to questions from Members, the Principal Education Officer (Support) advised that:-

- the previous budget split had been £10,000 for the Agreed Syllabus and £5,000 for the launch;
- attendance at Launch Events had been highest in Harrogate; and
- it should be possible to make a video, outlining the Agreed Syllabus (when it has been determined) and make it available to Schools online.

In response to further questions from Members, the Professional Religious Education Adviser, Olivia Seymour, commented that:-

- Should the ASC decide upon an Agreed Syllabus similar to the current one, then a single Launch Day would suffice. If a new Agreed Syllabus was introduced the Launch Day would, effectively, mark the beginning of training to plan for the new Agreed Syllabus. It is difficult to say with certainty, however, until a decision has been made.
- If it were decided to use another Local Authority's Agreed Syllabus, North Yorkshire Council would need to ascertain from them the costs required to use the licence and there would be the costs of training.

NOTED.

6. **Setting the Scene**

Considered –

A presentation by the Professional Religious Education Adviser, that had been produced by NASACRE - the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education.

You can view the presentation [here](#).

The presentation provided information on the ASC and, in particular,

- what it is;
- the statutory requirements; and
- the questions that should concern it

The Professional Religious Education Adviser highlighted that, legally, the ASC must be convened every five years and should comprise representatives from each of the four Groups that comprise SACRE.

NOTED.

7. **North Yorkshire SACRE: Timeline for Agreed Syllabus Review (for Autumn 2024 implementation)**

Considered –

A report by the Professional Religious Education Adviser, which provided the key dates, leading to a new Agreed Syllabus in 2024, together with time implications and a commentary on the likely tasks involved, according to the various options.

The timeline is available to view [here](#)

The Professional Religious Education Adviser stressed that the timeline and commitment required from SACRE Members will be determined by which option is chosen. She will adjust the timeline accordingly, depending on the decision made.

In response to a question, the Professional Religious Education Adviser confirmed that the timescales were indicative, in order to give context to the discussion. She reiterated that the timescales would be shaped by the decisions taken as to the Agreed Syllabus.

NOTED.

8. Teacher Consultation on Review of the Agreed Syllabus

Considered –

Two documents produced by the Professional Religious Education Adviser, Olivia Seymour, which summarised the consultation undertaken with Teachers on the review of the Locally Agreed Syllabus.

The first document concerned the consultation through the Autumn and Spring Primary Religious Education Networks. The second contained the results of an online consultation.

Both of the documents are available [here](#)

The Chair commented that she had not found any comments in the documents which indicated Teachers are not happy with the current Agreed Syllabus.

The Professional Religious Education Adviser said it is important to be mindful of what is a statutory requirement for Schools and what is not. For example, additional support on curriculum development is not statutory. The Chair commented that it might be worth providing support to Schools on this aspect.

A Member commented that the feedback is what she would have expected. She felt that, on a day-to-day basis, the educational system is creaking. Due to COVID-19 (i.e. Schools had been closed for several periods of time), the current Agreed Syllabus still feels relatively new. Therefore, would it be appropriate to do something radically different? The ASC needs to be mindful of the enormous challenges faced by Schools.

In response to questions, the Professional Religious Education Adviser confirmed that:-

- Currently, the Agreed Syllabus is a mix between thematic and systematic units of study. In Religious Education Networks, a Religious or non-religious World View has been looked at in depth, with substantive knowledge and resources for the classroom being explored to support the outworking of the syllabus in the classroom.
- A long-term plan and knowledge organisers have not been written for Schools, as it is preferable for Schools to ensure this is bespoke to the needs of pupils and class structures in individual Schools.
- Curriculum, Assessment and Early Years Foundation Stage Guidance will be updated to take into account national changes.

NOTED.

9. North Yorkshire SACRE: Options for Agreed Syllabus Review (for Autumn 2024 implementation)

NOTE: The Clerk confirmed that the press and public are excluded for this Item of business, as resolved by the Committee at Minute No. 4, above.

Considered –

A report by the Professional Religious Education Adviser which informed Members of:-

- the legal requirements;
- the need for a high-quality syllabus;
- implications of the new OFSTED Framework and OFSTED Research Review;
- the current situation; and
- implications for SACRE

The report set out the four main options and outlined the advantages and disadvantages of each.

The options are:-

- a) Renew the licence with RE Today, which includes updating the 2019-2024 folder
- b) Adopt RE Today's more recent Syllabus Model B
- c) Adopt a syllabus from another local authority
- d) Commission a bespoke new syllabus

A Member questioned whether the four options are based on content and quality or on operational feedback.

A Teacher representative stressed that that Teachers are very happy with the current Agreed Syllabus and are getting to grips with it. Assessment is not such a high priority. Knowledge organisation has been greatly appreciated – more so than assessment.

The Senior Education Adviser informed Members that, from a School Improvement perspective, Schools are still implementing the Agreed Syllabus.

A Member felt that, in an ideal World, an Agreed Syllabus could be bespoke – but we are not in that position and must be mindful of the context.

A Member stated that he has been a long-term critic of the current Agreed Syllabus. Some of these criticisms can be addressed. However, there remain issues with the Agreed Syllabus and he would like to explore these. For example, it includes no mention of locality.

The sense of the meeting was that a decision should not be made at this stage but, instead, be taken at the next meeting. The Chair sought confirmation from the Local Authority that the timescale for implementation would not be affected by this. The Principal Education Adviser (Support) confirmed that the Local Authority can work within a timeline of a decision not being taken until the next meeting.

The Chair stated that comments made today by Members can, alongside census information and the level of support materials required to reflect the local context, be considered further at the next meeting. At that meeting, the ASC should seek to arrive at a decision on the option to be adopted.

10. Next Meeting/Next Steps

Resolved –

That the next meeting be held at 4.00 p.m. on Tuesday 20th June (with the SACRE meeting scheduled at that time being put back one hour to 5.00 p.m.)

The meeting concluded at 5.05 p.m.

PD