

North Yorkshire Council

North Yorkshire Agreed Syllabus Conference

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 20th June 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), and Abhijeet Kulkarni* (Hindu)

Group B: Church of England: Philippa Smith* (Diocese of York) and Lee Talbot* (Diocese of Leeds)

Group C: Teachers Associations: Tara Askew*, Jo Colledge and Sarah Hodgson*

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

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

*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. Welcome by the Chair

The Chair Welcomed people to the meeting and, in particular, Lee Talbot, who had been appointed to replace Reverend Simone Bennett as one of the Church of England Representatives from the Leeds Diocese.

The Chair stated that, to save time, she would not do a round of introductions on this occasion, but asked people to introduce themselves when they spoke on any particular item of business.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Chris Devanny.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 28th March 2023

Resolved –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 28th March 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. 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.

6. Public Participation

The Clerk confirmed that no public questions or statements had been received.

7. Recap from the last meeting

The Principal Education Adviser (Support) recapped as follows:-

- There will be a budget of £25,000 – a significant increase from the last budget. This would include the costs of the launch which could just be one event.
- The Professional Religious Education Adviser had taken the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) through the framework and timeline.
- Feedback from Teacher Representatives had been that COVID-19 had disrupted implementation of the current Agreed Syllabus which is, therefore, still embedding
- Members had considered the four options. They had decided not to take a decision at that stage, but to decide which option to recommend at today's meeting. This would allow for September 2024 implementation, as planned and as required.

At this stage, the Principal Education Adviser (Support) advised that he would be leaving his role at the end of the summer term to take up a post as Head of Service in the Business and Environmental Services Directorate. He added that, realistically, his replacement would not be in post until January or Easter 2024.

The Chair, on behalf of the ASC, thanked Adrian for his work and wished him good luck in his new role.

NOTED.

8. Correspondence and information for Agreed Syllabus Conference Members

Considered –

A report by the Professional Religious Education Adviser, which provided information on the exchange of correspondence between Dr. Abhijeet Kulkarni and herself, with regard to the teaching of Hinduism/Hindu people in the current Syllabus.

The report also contained reference to *The place of non-religious worldviews in the Syllabus*, together with reference to Authorities who had updated their Agreed Syllabus in the last 18 months.

The Professional Religious Education Adviser advised Members that, as well as those Authorities stated in the report, Kent, Liverpool and Thurrock Councils, among others, had updated their Agreed Syllabus during this period.

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

- There is no legal requirement to include a particular percentage for the teaching of specific Religious Worldviews in each Key Stage, other than the requirement that Christianity is 'in the main'. The key is what is educationally appropriate and enables a coherent RE curriculum.
- OFSTED look at the contextualised curriculum within a School and its impact, rather than the specific number of hours that subjects are being taught.
- If Option A were to be chosen, further aspects can be included. For instance, the teaching of Hinduism at Key Stage 1 and Humanism in a systematic way.
- If a bespoke option is chosen, Members would need to commit to the cost for the daily rate of a Consultant and releasing teachers to ensure it works; printing and producing the document.
- She had heard back from RE Today about additions and these can be provided if Option A is chosen, with individual additional units costing £250 per unit.
- Should the option chosen be to update the current Agreed Syllabus then, whilst the wording on key elements could not be amended, it is important to highlight these are the minimum requirements and we can ensure Schools understand they can, and should, consider going beyond this. For example, including additional elements such as Hinduism and Humanism. Supporting teachers understanding of coherent and sequenced curriculum planning is key.

The Senior Education Adviser commented that, within the Schools that her work encompasses, the Schools, overwhelmingly, do not want a change - they would like support to develop framework areas. Other Senior Education Advisers have reported similar feedback.

The Chair acknowledged that there is a degree of overlap between some of the Items on today's Agenda, but felt that there was a danger of the discussion veering into the next Agenda Item. Therefore, she felt it appropriate to now move onto the next Item.

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. 5, 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, which had also been considered by the ASC at its initial meeting in March 2023, 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

NOTE: Prior to the meeting, views submitted by Professor John Adams, Tara Askew and Chris Devanny were emailed to Members of the ASC.

A lengthy discussion followed, which is summarised below. Where appropriate (i.e. a response was not always required) the response of officers is in italics:-

- Dr. Abhijeet Kulkarni – No issue with Option A or B, particularly, but the problem is their inflexibility in terms of minimum requirements. The balance between different Faiths is not reached. Dharmic Faiths cannot be taught until the other Faiths have been covered in Key Stage 1.
It is typically the case we have ensured that Hindu and other Dharmic Religions are covered in Primary School. If additional subjects are included this could start to crowd the curriculum. The key point is the Local Authority ensures that the Agreed Syllabus is not the sum total of the conversation with Schools.
- Dr. Kulkarni also enquired how the context is decided by a School.
This might be based on diversity or a lack of diversity. Schools make that decision. OFSTED look at the language used and the coherence of the curriculum. Therefore, these aspects are covered as part of the Religious Education Networks.
- Tara Askew – The Agreed Syllabus is working well on the ground, with an intertwining focus on other Faiths. If Option A or B are chosen, might it be possible to undertake to look at Humanism and Eastern Religions going forward?
- Professor John Adams – The current Agreed Syllabus is deficient in a number of ways. He had summarised these in his paper that had been emailed out to ASC Members. For example, it is not possible to read the current Agreed Syllabus from RE Today and conclude that it is not written from a particular point of view. It is, basically, a cut and paste operation. This has to be the most important task of any SACRE and we have an opportunity to do something new. It is not reflective of where we are in understanding religion – over half of people class themselves as non-believers - among young people, 17% say they are believers.
- Professor Adams added that, in his opinion, if the ASC choose Option A, it is not doing its job properly. Oxfordshire County Council's is one example of a very good Agreed Syllabus. What is required is something that is more relevant; inclusive and up-to-date.

- Councillor George Jabbour – Does Option A satisfy OFSTED Review?
Any option chosen will provide a Framework, but no Agreed Syllabus offers a contextualised Religious Education. This is for schools to do, taking the Agreed Syllabus as the legal framework.

The Agreed Syllabus cannot be viewed in isolation - curriculum considerations are taken into account. Therefore, the current document speaks to the Curriculum Development Framework, whilst applying an OFSTED lens. OFSTED does not inspect an Agreed Syllabus, per se. Rather, it examines how an Authority has taken the Statutory Framework and shaped it to meet the needs of its pupils.
- Sarah Hodgson – What is the turnaround in Religious Education Subject Leads – could that be why Schools do not want change? Option B would be more systematic and children learn well systematically.
- Tom Clayton – Agree that this is an opportunity to do something different. However, a balance has to be struck. Would favour Option B.
- Lee Talbot – Can understand the points made against continuing with RE Today, but the general feeling within Schools is echoing what has been said by others at this meeting. Would favour Option A.
- Philippa Smith - Schools do not want change, but this does not mean they are not constantly developing the curriculum; it is not remaining stagnant. Would prefer Option A.
- Jo Colledge – Agree with much of what Professor Adams has said – by continuing with RE Today, we could be missing an opportunity.
- The Chair – If Option A or B is chosen, perhaps we could look at the Oxfordshire County Council Agreed Syllabus at a future meeting.

The Professional Religious Education Adviser clarified that if Option A or Option B are chosen, it will not be possible to change minimum requirements. However, addendums and supplementary units can be included.

It was proposed and seconded that a decision be made as to the Option for an Agreed Syllabus at today's meeting.

On being put to the vote, the proposal was carried.

It was then further proposed and seconded that Option A be recommended. On being put to the vote, this was carried. Therefore, it was...

RESOLVED –

That the Agreed Syllabus Conference recommend to the Local Authority that, in respect of the Agreed Syllabus for 2024-2029, Option A be chosen – namely, Renew the licence with RE Today, which includes updating the 2019-2024 folder.

10. Any other Items

The Chair confirmed that she had not been notified of any other business of urgency.

11. Next Meeting

Resolved –

- a) That the next meeting be held before the next SACRE on Tuesday 19th September 2023 – either immediately prior to SACRE or on a separate day (This will be determined by the Chair).
- b) That the next meeting consider addendums and supplementary units to be included with Option A.

The meeting concluded at 5.40 p.m.

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