

North Yorkshire Council

North Yorkshire Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) –

12 December 2023

Update from Professional RE Adviser

1.0 Purpose of the Report

To inform Members on work undertaken by the Professional RE Adviser since the last SACRE meeting.

To provide members with local and national updates on RE

2.0 Primary RE Networks Autumn 2023

2.1 Two Primary RE Networks in the autumn term were attended by 15 RE subject leaders and Headteachers. The networks continued our focus on substantive knowledge and curriculum progression, this time, with a focus on Jewish worldviews.

2.2 Feedback from teachers in the networks:

- This has been excellent - thank you
- As someone new to the role it has been really helpful and given me lots of ideas to take forward.
- This has helped improve my own subject knowledge considerably and has signposted me to some very useful resources which I will pass on to staff.
- The virtual tour look fab - very useful as an alternative to trips
- Progress knowledge statements have been really helpful
- It has been really useful for my knowledge organiser for Judaism, thank you.
- I did the last course on Judaism which was great but you've made this much more concise and focussed and feels so easy now to plan more from
- I think putting on the long term plan the progressive vocab would be very useful
- Really helpful resources to share with ECT (Early Career Teacher) who will be teaching Pesach next term.
- I have used BBC videos but good to know more diverse examples on Jewish museum site
- As always lots of useful subject knowledge but also input on our curriculums and long-term plans. Golden threads info and vocabulary very useful.
- Brilliant bank of resources to share with staff
- I am so glad I attended this – excellent
- Having taken over as the lead for RE in this last year, I have been able to attend some of the network meetings which have been fabulous. The materials shared are really helpful and have enabled me to develop our curriculum and teacher knowledge well.

2.3 I am also pleased to report that following sharing the information at the summer term network, 2 schools have reported that they were successful in their bid for a Jerusalem Trust grant for RE resources.

3.0 NYC Literacy Networks

3.1 A short input on reading and RE was delivered to Literacy leads at 2 NYC networks this term. This provided an opportunity to highlight the work of SACRE and the Primary RE Networks. The focus of the Primary RE Networks in spring term is engaging with text and story in the RE classroom including a focus on disciplinary knowledge. Literacy leads were encouraged to signpost these networks to RE leads in their schools.

4.0 SACRE Newsletter

4.1 The spring term newsletter will go out to schools in January. Any contributions from members would be gratefully received.

5.0 National Content Standard

5.1 The vision of the RE Council of England and Wales is for every young person to experience an academically rigorous and personally inspiring education in religion and worldviews. The publishing of a National Content Standard provides clarification and a benchmark for excellence in religion and worldviews/religious education (RE) in England thus contributing to this vision.

5.2 The RE Council's National Content Standard provides a non-statutory benchmark for syllabus providers and other bodies to evaluate their work. It is specifically for use in England. It is not a curriculum, and it does not determine precisely what content schools should teach. Rather it is a standard by which different RE curricula, content, pedagogy, and provision can be benchmarked. Without a national standard for RE, it can be challenging for syllabus providers including Standing Advisory Councils on RE, Academy Trusts and others to know if their RE provision is of high quality when compared to other subjects, schools, and regions. It can be difficult to set targets for improvement in provision such as when Ofsted describe an RE curriculum as lacking breadth, depth and/or ambition.

5.3 The National Content Standard

- is developed around extracts from a draft resource released in May 2022 which has been the focus of extensive consultation and scrutiny. The final version of this resource will form a handbook for curriculum developers in the subject and is due for completion in Spring 2024.
- uses the format of a National Curriculum Programme of Study because, although Religious education is part of the 'basic curriculum', which is the collective term for RE, SRE and the National Curriculum, it is a format familiar to school leaders and curriculum developers.
- differs from a national curriculum programme of study because it provides a benchmark for the subject within the current legal framework, including the selection of content, but does not seek to recommend or specify a set of content.
- recognises that models for the description of progress can only be produced once specific content has been selected and therefore a structure for progression has been developed and not a comprehensive set of descriptors.

5.4 The RE Council has partnered with a range of contributors in the national RE sector in this project. This group encompasses organisations that, among other tasks, operate thousands of schools, provide DfE-endorsed school curriculum content, and directly support teachers nationally in raising standards in RE. This work gives us high confidence that the National Content Standard can both meet the needs of all state funded schools and be adopted by many providers in a range of contexts.

5.5 The RE Council is currently collecting endorsements from school providers, academy trusts, RE Council member organisations and others who recognise the National Content Standard as a benchmark for high quality RE and want to use it to raise standards.

5.6 A copy of the document can be downloaded here: [National Content Standard – 1st Edition – 2023 – REC \(religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk\)](https://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/national-content-standard-1st-edition-2023-REC)

6.0 Ofsted Annual Report

6.1 Ofsted published their annual report on 23rd November 2023. RE is mentioned on page 41 (excerpt below) We still await the subject report which may now be published in to next year.

Religious education

RE in schools is generally of poor quality. Although it is a statutory subject, schools often consider RE as an afterthought. As a subject on the curriculum, it is under-valued. RE is a complex subject, and the lack of clarity and support from government makes schools' job harder.

Some schools steer through these challenges well, but most do not. We found that: many schools do not meet the statutory requirement to teach RE at all stages

- pupils are rarely taught enough substance to prepare them to engage in a complex, multi-religious and multi-secular society (where religion and non-religion play different parts in different people's lives)
- too often, schools do not teach topics in the RE curriculum deeply enough for pupils to develop a substantial understanding of the subject matter
- non-examined RE is typically not high quality.
- All pupils should develop a broad and secure knowledge of the complexity of religious and non-religious traditions. It will take coordinated effort by stakeholders to improve the quality of RE in schools:
- schools need high-quality professional development to teach RE well
- the government should provide clear expectations about RE provision in schools. Schools should follow these. Current non-statutory guidance for RE should be updated and include clear information for schools about the breadth and depth of the syllabus they are expected to teach.

6.2 NASACRE wrote to SACREs regarding the report last week:

Dear Chairs of SACREs and SACRE Clerks

Last week Ofsted published its annual report. In it, Ofsted makes some comments about RE provision nationally. The full report can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-annual-report-202223-education-childrens-services-and-skills>

While some of the findings might not fully represent the good RE you encounter in schools in your own area, some readers will find that this description is only too familiar. SACREs might want to think about their own answers to the points raised by Ofsted, and how they might prepare answers about RE in their local authority.

NASACRE will be continuing the conversation with partner associations and stakeholders, with the DfE (the government is mentioned) and with our membership. We also hope to find out more about Ofsted's research findings on RE in the anticipated subject research report, due out in 2024.

We are here to support you in your consideration of the report at meetings in your area, and to continue to help SACREs join the 'co-ordinated effort by stakeholders' mentioned below.

*With best wishes, Linda
on behalf of the NASACRE executive committee*

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Background documents: None