



## The SACRE Religious Education Newsletter Autumn 2016

Dear Colleagues,

As ever RE seems to be in the news & a number of significant documents were published in the last few months. I am sorry for the length of this report but it seemed to be easier to include all the information in one place.

### REC Commission

The REC (Religious Education Council) has launched an Independent Commission in relation to RE in schools. It has been asked to review the legal, educational & policy frameworks for RE in all schools & FE colleges in England. More information can be found on the REC website. This Commission comes at a critical time for RE and its work may well be very influential. Anyone who wants to make a contribution should do so at the following site: [commission@religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk](mailto:commission@religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk).

It will provide an interim report in 2017 & the final report in 2018.

### APPG/RE Enquiry on Religious Literacy

The APPG/RE under its new Chair Fiona Bruce, MP, began an enquiry on Religious Literacy. They set up a consultation process & has produced a report of its findings on **'Improving Religious Literacy' July 2016**. The definition is complex & requires concentration & schools may need to rework it. It identifies the problems facing RE today saying that the situation is **urgent**. In many schools RE has been marginalised, often taught by non-specialist teachers who do not have access to good CPD (Continuing Professional Development), some schools are not fulfilling their statutory requirements, its exclusion from the EBacc and a decline in the resources for SACREs. Concerns echoed by a number of previous reports!

The foreward by Fiona Bruce, MP, states:

*"We are ....entering a defining period for our country, our national life & our national identity. The shape of our religious landscape is changing, as is the place of religion in the public sphere, our private lives &*

*our local communities .... It is more important than ever that ...we all have the knowledge & skills required to engage effectively with religion."*

*"the provision of high quality school based RE, & good teaching & learning about religion beyond the schools years in the whole life context, cannot be allowed to fall off the agenda of the government or Parliament. I will continue ...to highlight to government the importance of providing excellent RE for every child..."*

The Conclusions & Recommendations are below:

- 6.1. The religious landscape of the UK is becoming increasingly dynamic and diverse. In light of this, it is essential that everyone in our society has the ability to understand, and to discuss effectively, and in an informed manner, the different roles that religions and beliefs can play in the lives of individuals and in the public sphere in general.
- 6.2. Religious literacy is not the exclusive domain of religious people – it is needed by everyone. The promotion of greater religious literacy is not intended to make people more religious, or to encourage a more positive view of religion. Instead, the aim of developing better religious literacy is intended to equip communities and individuals to understand each other better, to engage with one another on a more informed basis and to promote cohesion within a more inclusive and holistic society.
- 6.3. This report is the culmination of a four-week public consultation on how religious literacy can be promoted effectively in the future. During the consultation, the APPG received sixty-nine submissions, held two public oral evidence sessions, and conducted a series of interviews with leaders in the field.
- 6.4. The key findings and recommendations of this inquiry aim to provide a way for individuals to gain a greater knowledge of religion as a concept, increase their understanding of specific religious traditions and be able to engage, and disagree well, in debates about religion. The APPG encourages the government to take the need for greater religious literacy in society seriously, and to make its promotion a long-term priority.

#### *Religious Education in schools*

- 6.5. Much of the evidence and recommendations received by the APPG centred on the support for and resourcing of Religious Education in schools. Overwhelmingly, respondents argued that high quality school-based RE is critical to improving religious literacy in society more widely.
- 6.6. Many of the difficulties identified in the teaching of RE were long-term and structural. The situation is now urgent. Respondents argued that RE in many schools has been marginalised in terms of teaching time allocated to it. Some schools are not fulfilling their statutory requirement concerning RE provision and respondents reported that too often RE lessons are being taught by teachers who are not specialists in the subject and who do not have access to sufficient subject-specific continuing professional development. The APPG heard that other factors have also had an adverse impact on the quality of the subject, including the exclusion of RE from the English Baccalaureate and a decline in resources for SACREs. This report is not the first to note such findings.
- 6.7. The APPG agrees with our respondents that excellent school-based RE is essential for improving religious literacy. We therefore call on the government to ensure that improving the

provision of RE is, and continues to be, a high priority for the Department of Education. In particular we suggest that the Department should ensure that schools fulfil their statutory requirement relating to RE, that specialist RE teacher recruitment is stimulated, and that both specialist and non-specialist teachers are given good training in RE and religious literacy more broadly in initial teacher training and through continuing professional development. The APPG also recommends that the Department should give renewed consideration to introducing RE as a Humanities subject in the English Baccalaureate.

#### *Training, resourcing and accountability in the workplace*

6.8. The task of achieving better religious literacy is not to be restricted to RE. Improving training, resourcing and accountability measures for religious literacy in the workplace also has an important role to play. Respondents identified the Civil Service, other parts of the public sector and the media as being particular priority areas where religious literacy needs to be improved. Identifying these areas as priorities is not necessarily an indication that levels of religious literacy in these sectors are particularly low. Rather it is a recognition that these sectors have a major impact on national life. Ensuring that employees in these sectors have appropriate religious literacy training is therefore extremely important.

6.9. There is a need for the availability of religious literacy training in these areas to be increased, while resources to enable individuals to find out more about specific religious traditions in line with the demands of their job should be easily accessible. The APPG recommends that a structure of accountability measures should be established to ensure the good delivery and uptake of religious literacy training. Additionally the APPG calls for the retention of religious affairs specialists in newsrooms and for the establishment of a formal network of policymakers and academics to discuss, comment and advise on upcoming policy publications concerning religion.

6.10. It is clear from evidence received that improving training, resourcing and accountability measures for religious literacy is essential and the APPG calls on the government to make this a priority.

#### *Community initiatives*

6.11. Some of the most effective ways of improving religious literacy are community-led initiatives. These complement school-based RE and formal workplace training. The examples of successful work in this area submitted to the APPG varied from small-scale local projects to national cultural initiatives. The APPG recommends that the government supports, and facilitates more effectively, the work of local communities and civil society organisations in the promotion of religious literacy. We suggest that projects which aim to improve participants' religious literacy should receive a favourable assessment in the allocation of local authority funding. The APPG calls on the government to appoint a ministerial champion with responsibility for the promotion of religious literacy.

#### **Recommendations:**

**Recommendation 1:** the Department for Education should reinforce the statutory requirement of all state-funded schools to provide RE for all pupils, including at Key Stage 4, and should monitor its effective delivery.

**Recommendation 2:** the Department for Education should record and publish data about the proportion of RE classes taught by full-time equivalent RE teachers and the proportion taught by non-specialists.

**Recommendation 3:** the Department for Education should place a high priority on stimulating recruitment of specialists to RE. It should be a vocal champion of the teaching of RE and should take steps to support independent initiatives working to increase recruitment.

**Recommendation 4:** the Department for Education should ensure that all primary ITT programmes contain a suitable proportion of time dedicated to RE. Steps should be taken to ensure that all RE trainees can benefit from high quality subject experts informed by up-to-date pedagogical research.

**Recommendation 5:** the Department for Education should encourage ITT providers to offer a core element of religious literacy training in all secondary teacher training programmes.

**Recommendation 6:** the Department for Education should take steps to ensure that all teachers of RE, especially non-specialists, have access to high quality subject-specific CPD opportunities.

**Recommendation 7:** the Department for Education should encourage the expansion of CPD opportunities for high quality religious literacy training, and should encourage all teachers to take part in them.

**Recommendation 8:** the Department for Education should give renewed consideration to including RE as a Humanities subject in the English Baccalaureate. It should conduct a new review of the impact that the exclusion of RE from the English Baccalaureate has had on the subject. It should also conduct a review of the likely impact on RE provision of the expansion of the English Baccalaureate to 90% of pupils, and set out how it will protect RE from any adverse effects of this.

**Recommendation 9:** the Department for Education should take steps to promote uptake of the GCSE Religious Studies short course.

**Recommendation 10:** all relevant parties should participate in the ongoing discussions about the legal framework for RE in schools and other major issues, including the Department for Education and faith communities.

**Recommendation 11:** the Home Office should make religious literacy training a mandatory part of the Prevent training given in schools, universities, prisons and other institutions.

**Recommendation 12:** the government should ensure that training programmes covering both equality and diversity and religious literacy are provided for civil servants and others in the public sector.

**Recommendation 13:** the Foreign and Commonwealth Office should ensure that the current religious literacy training it offers is maintained, and should take steps to ensure that all civil servants within the FCO receive sufficient, context-specific religious literacy training.

**Recommendation 14:** the government should commission an inquiry into the effectiveness of training currently offered by the Civil Service and other public services for the improvement of staff religious literacy.

**Recommendation 15:** the government should ensure that civil servants and individual government departments have access to the guidance and resources they need to engage effectively with issues relating to religion and religious groups or communities.

**Recommendation 16:** every newsroom should retain at least one religion and belief specialist to facilitate and support staff when reporting on, or engaging with, religious traditions or topics related to religion.

**Recommendation 17:** the government should encourage news organisations to give trainees and junior journalists the opportunity to attend training courses on religion and religious issues away from work and to provide funding for these courses. A high priority should be placed on ensuring that journalists, broadcasters and those working in the media generally develop a high level of understanding of, and a strong ability to communicate effectively about, religious traditions and how they are lived out in Britain today.

**Recommendation 18:** a formal network of policymakers and academics should be created to discuss, comment and advise on upcoming policy publications concerning religion, and to share best practice relating to language use and terminology about religion.

**Recommendation 19:** public services and government departments should publish audits of the availability of training in religious literacy and religious matters, including statistical data on the number of staff completing this training and their levels of seniority. Levels of religious literacy within government departments and other public services should be scrutinised by Parliament and by external academic experts in this field.

**Recommendation 20:** the government should include a commitment to promote religious literacy in the new BBC Charter.

**Recommendation 21:** central and local governments should take steps to encourage public engagement in local and national dialogue and outreach initiatives between different religious and non-religious groups. They should also take steps to encourage the development of new local schemes which can build long-term relationships between people of different religions and beliefs in local communities.

**Recommendation 22:** central government and local authority funding allocation criteria should be orientated towards the delivery of religious literacy through community initiatives. Projects that have the specific aim of improving religious literacy, or those for which there is a reasonable expectation that an improvement in religious literacy will be a natural outcome.

**Recommendation 23:** the responsibility for faith and integration should be reinstated into a single cabinet position brief.

**Recommendation 24:** a responsibility for promoting and facilitating religious literacy should be included within this ministerial brief. The minister should champion projects which seek to improve religious literacy, and seek out opportunities through which government could encourage civil society to improve religious literacy in the school, the workplace or the local community. Note the letter to Justine Greening.

### **The Accord Award**

This year, as a one off will only be accepting nominations from SACREs. The deadline is Monday 12 December 2016 & prizes will be announced in the New Year. The 2017 award seeks to reward those SACREs that have worked hardest & gone that extra step to help boost the growth of inclusion, cohesion & mutual understanding between those of different religions & beliefs. Manorside School in Barnet won the award in a previous year.

## **Memorial for Professor John Hull**

There was a Memorial Service service to remember Professor John Hull & his major contribution to RE & theology. His inspirational book *Notes on Blindness*, which was based on his audio diaries in the 1980's & chronicles his journey from sight loss to blindness, has been made into a film. It was on limited general release in the summer and a DVD will be available in October 2016

## **DfE Guidance on Religious Studies**

The Department for Education has published Further guidance for schools, local authorities and agreed syllabus conferences about the religious studies gcse and the religious education curriculum.

The Department for Education is aware that there continues to be some confusion about the nature and extent of schools' obligations regarding the Religious Education (RE) curriculum and the Religious Studies (RS) GCSE content.

The Department is therefore issuing this further Guidance to schools, local authorities and Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs). It should be read together with the "Guidance for schools and awarding organisations about the Religious Studies GCSE" which was issued in December 2015 ("the December 2015 Guidance"), which can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-religious-studies>.

Schools, local authorities and ASCs are not under any obligation to have regard to guidance issued by other specific bodies, groups or individuals and should instead follow the Department's Guidance when making decisions about their RE curriculum. In particular, schools, local authorities and ASCs should not follow what purports to be 'guidance' issued recently by those associated with the British Humanist Society (including views on the law of Dr Satvinder Juss dated 28 April 2016) – that guidance and those views have no official status and are contentious.

As set out in the December 2015 Guidance, the Department's view has always been that schools should be free to determine their own approach to the teaching of RE, in line with statutory requirements. Those statutory requirements are summarised in sections 2 and 3 of the long-standing 2010 non-statutory guidance "Religious Education in English schools: non statutory guidance 2010" which is to be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-guidance-in-english-schools-non-statutory-guidance-2010>.

As made clear in the December 2015 Guidance, the Government's policy was and remains that:

- Schools and Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs) should be free to determine their own approach to the teaching of RE and the selection of the appropriate RS GCSE.
- There is no requirement for an individual school's curriculum to mirror the make-up of the national or local population. Curriculums should continue to be locally determined.
- Schools and ASCs are at liberty to use a range of relevant factors to determine their RE curriculum, including the intellectual rigour it presents and its role in supporting pupils' development as world citizens.
- There is no obligation for any school or ASC to give equal air time to the teaching of religious and non-religious views.

- Curriculum balance (and, therefore, compliance with statutory requirements) can be achieved across the key stages. There is no obligation on any school to cover the teaching of non-religious world views (or any other particular aspect of the RE curriculum) in key stage 4 specifically. Rather it is for schools and ASCs to determine how they meet their wider obligations across the key stages.
- Schools are, therefore, not obliged to choose a GCSE specification that meets the entirety of their wider obligations, as long as they are satisfied that they will meet them through their RE curriculum across the key stages.
- For schools without a religious character, the RE curriculum needs to reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are, in the main, Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain. For the avoidance of doubt, the Government also considers that:
- There is no obligation for any school or ASC to allocate 'air time' according to the apparent popularity of a religious or non-religious view.
- There is no obligation for any school or ASC to "balance out" the detailed teaching of a religion by teaching, in equal depth, about a non-religious view.
- It is for schools to determine which religious and non-religious views to cover in their RE curriculum in line with statutory requirements. Overall, the important thing is that a balance is achieved during a child's education, rather than in any particular stage of a child's education. In those circumstances and building on the statutory requirements, it is recommended that there should be a wide ranging study of religious and non-religious beliefs across the key stages.

All good wishes

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