



## **Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)**

**Date** Thursday 7 March 2024

**Time** 3.00 pm

**Venue** Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham

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### **Business**

#### **Part A**

**Items during which the Press and Public are welcome to attend.  
Members of the Public can ask questions with the Chair's  
agreement.**

1. Introductions, Welcome and Apologies
2. Minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2023 (Pages 5 - 10)
3. Declarations of interest, if any
4. Matters Arising
5. Chairs Comments
6. SACRE Self Evaluation and Future Planning (Pages 11 - 14)
7. Presentation of the Impact of the Agreed Syllabus from a Secondary Context
8. Education Durham Report to SACRE (Pages 15 - 18)
9. SACRE Membership Review
10. Community Cohesion
11. Date of Future Meetings
12. Any other business
13. Any resolution relating to the exclusion of the public during the discussion of items containing exempt information

**Helen Bradley**  
Head of Legal and Democratic Services

County Hall  
Durham  
28 February 2024

To: **The Members of the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education**

**1. Church of England**

Canon L Burton, N Dodd, K Passmore, H Tait and C Weir

**2. Other Religious Denominations and Faiths**

|                  |                    |
|------------------|--------------------|
| S Baker          | - Roman Catholic   |
| A Barron         | - Roman Catholic   |
| W Gray           | - Buddhism         |
| F Johnson        | - Methodist Church |
| Bhakti Rasa Dasa | - Hinduism         |
| C Singh          | - Sikhism          |
| C Spencer        | - Bahá'í Faith     |
| M Turner         | - Islam            |
| D Van der Velde  | - Judaism          |
| S Walker         | - Humanist         |

**3. Teachers Associations**

|           |                       |
|-----------|-----------------------|
| B Dunn    | - RE Curriculum Group |
| A Hartley | - NASUWT              |
| M Lowden  | - NEU                 |
| S Lupton  | - RE Curriculum Group |
| P Welch   | - NEU                 |

**4. County Council Representatives**

Councillors D Haney, S Townsend, M Walton and M Wilson

**5. Co-opted Members**

M Dixon

**Local Authority Education Advisor**

S Blakeman

## DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

**At a Meeting of Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) held in Committee Room 1A , County Hall, Durham on Thursday 9 November 2023 at 3.00 pm**

**Present:**

**P Welch (Chair) In the Chair**

### **Church of England**

Canon L Burton, N Dodd, K Passmore and C Weir

### **Other Religious Denominations and Faiths**

|                 |                    |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| S Baker         | - Roman Catholic   |
| F Johnson       | - Methodist Church |
| C Spencer       | - Bahá'í Faith     |
| M Turner        | - Islam            |
| D Van der Velde | - Judaism          |
| S Walker        | - Humanist         |

### **County Council Representatives**

Councillors D Haney, M Walton and M Wilson

### **Local Authority Education Advisor**

S Blakeman

## **1 Introductions, Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked Members to introduce themselves.

Apologies for absence were received from V Bain, B Dunn, M Dixon, W Gray, A Hartley, S Lupton, and H Tait.

## **2 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to minute No. 7, paragraph 4, the word 'meet' replaced with 'meeting'.

## **3 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations on interest.

## **4 Matters Arising**

C Spencer asked that teachers be advised to contact SACRE Members if they required a speaker from a particular faith group.

In response to a question from F Johnson, the Senior Professional Learning Advisor indicated that there were no scheduled launches of the Agreed Syllabus planned but there would be a re-launch of the next Agreed Syllabus in 2025 which Members of SACRE would be invited to attend.

D Van der Velde advised Members that she used Microsoft Teams or Zoom to deliver talks on Judaism. She continued by referring to a short video that had been produced by International Durham, Durham County Council that could be accessed on YouTube and was entitled 'Judaism in the North East England' that was produced for Durham Schools.

Members were advised that videos had also been produced for Diwali and Islam.

Members asked for the links to the videos to be circulated to SACRE Members so that they could be shared with school hubs and networks.

In response to a question from Canon L Burton the Senior Professional Learning Advisor indicated that there would be a presentation from a secondary school on how the Agreed Syllabus was brought to life in a secondary classroom at the next SACRE meeting.

## **5 Chairs Comments**

The Chair indicated that the school where he worked were expecting an Ofsted inspection and he had heard that Religious Education could be one of the subjects to be inspected for a Deep Dive. He commented that preparing for the inspection had created a lot of work and was keeping him busy.

He then wished to convey his thanks to Phil Hodgson, Education Durham, who had recently provided professional support to SACRE but retired from the authority at the end of August 2023.

He continued by referring to SACRE Membership and indicated that he had received the resignation of V Bain who was representing the NEU and he had also received correspondence from the RE Curriculum Group representatives expressing their desire to resign. He had asked both colleagues to rethink their resignation and indicated that if they still wished to resign then they would look to appoint new representatives to the RE Curriculum Group. He commented that this may be linked to the timing of the SACRE meetings, and this may need to be reviewed at a later date.

He then read out the summary of an article in the Daily Telegraph on 17 September 2023, around pupils receiving a tokenistic Religious Education, warn cross-party MPs and peers.

He continued by raising his concerns about the lack of trainees coming through to Religious Education and provided examples of what was happening in the SCITT linked to the Academy Trust, where he worked, in particular that they received no applications for Religious Education vacancies for a number of years and stated that SACRE should be concerned.

The Chair then referred to the RE Hub and asked K Passmore for an update who provided Members with an update and indicated that the Hub launched in August 2023, and they already had 120 local groups registered. She indicated that she was creating a presentation for teacher networks, and she was happy to share this with Durham SACRE for circulation.

Members discussed the Hub and the issues around the lack of trainees for Religious Education, in particular for secondary schools.

## **6 Revised SACRE Constitution**

SACRE considered the report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services that provided a new constitution which reflected the amended membership of Committee A (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

An alteration to the SACRE constitution can only be approved by Cabinet. At the meeting held on 14 December 2022 Cabinet approved a request made by the Director of Children and Young People on behalf of SACRE to alter their constitution to enable Humanist representation.

K Clayton, Legal Manager was in attendance to present the report and answer any questions from Members.

**Resolved:** The Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education noted the amended Constitution which included a representative of the Humanist non-religious worldview as a full member, alongside denominations and religions currently forming Committee A.

## **7 SACRE Medium and Long-Term Planning**

The Chair referred to the completion of the NASACRE evaluation process which SACRE has been engaged with over previous meetings including a SWOT analysis.

Following a discussion on the medium and longer term planning the Chair agreed to carry out some further work on the analysis and pull together potential priorities for SACRE to be presented at the next meeting.

## **8 Education Durham Report to SACRE**

The Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education considered a report of S Blakeman, Senior Advisor for Education Durham that provided a summary of the professional development and networking opportunities available to RE leaders and teachers, observations from Ofsted inspections and training opportunities that had been shared with the advisory team. The report also provided details of the Farmington Scholarship for leaders and teachers (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

S Blakeman, Senior Advisor for Education Durham was in attendance to present the report and answer any questions from Members.

Members advised that C Robson had been Head of RE at Framwellgate Comprehensive School and not Durham Johnston Comprehensive School as indicated in the report.

Canon L Burton raised concerns around the attendance at RE subject leader network meetings and the future of these networks.

The Senior Advisor for Education Durham indicated that low attendance at secondary network meetings were across all subjects and understood Members concerns and wanted to continue offering the opportunities to attend networks.

The Chair indicated that Academies have their own networks and commented that it was difficult for colleagues to get time out from teaching.

Members discussed the network meetings that were held across other authorities, in particular how often they were held and if they were held in person or virtually and the topics covered.

**Resolved:** That the contents of the report be noted.

## **9 Working Group Report on Religion and Worldviews**

The Chair asked for volunteers to lead the Working Group on Religion and Worldviews.

Members discussed the Working Group and agreed to pause this work and pick it up at a later date.

## **10 Community Cohesion**

C Spencer advised Members of a County Durham Faith Network taking place on Monday 13 November 2023 at 6.00 pm at the Oriental Museum. She asked Members to contact her if they wished to attend the event.

## **11 Date of the next meeting**

The next meeting of SACRE was scheduled to be held on 7 March 2024 at 3.00 pm.

## **12 Any other business**

The Local Authority Education Advisor provided Members with details of the new Regional Advisor for Jigsaw RE in the North East.

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**Durham SACRE**  
**Self Evaluation & Next Steps**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good working relationships, active and work in meetings and between meetings.</li> <li>• Meetings are usually quorate with County Councillor representation.</li> <li>• Renewed connections with the Local Authority, senior officer.</li> <li>• Colleagues who report back to faith communities &amp; who they represent (two- way dialogue).</li> <li>• Humanist representation – full member of SACRE.</li> <li>• Actively reviewed and evaluated SACRE.</li> <li>• Keeping up to date with contemporary changes in RE – Religion &amp; Worldviews</li> <li>• Support the LA (e.g. School absence and religious observance).</li> <li>• Clerking support &amp; Education Durham support.</li> <li>• Access to NASACRE and LA training and support.</li> <li>• Offer support schools with faith speakers, places of worship, networking opportunities.</li> <li>• Agreed Syllabus / Agreed Syllabus Conference, quality. Impact – other LA's.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance at meetings is sometimes poor and there is a concern with meetings almost being unable to proceed due to quorum rules and legal advice.</li> <li>• Membership of SACRE is a concern, colleagues move on from roles or successors and new representatives are not appointed.</li> <li>• SACRE needs to review meeting timings and whether it could be held in a hybrid way would possibly improve attendance.</li> <li>• Changes in the Education landscape (Academisation) means that it is increasingly difficult for SACRE to fulfil part of its statutory obligations.</li> <li>• Access to quality data was also considered to be a current weakness making it difficult to advise the Local Authority.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chance to become more inclusive and open, especially to review membership to be inclusive of other groups.</li> <li>• Opportunity for SACRE to put a greater emphasis on worldviews.</li> <li>• Opportunity for training and support for new members would be beneficial.</li> <li>• Should seek to publicise Durham SACRE online and via social media.</li> <li>• Opportunity to create a stronger link with colleagues who attend RE network meetings.</li> </ul>  | <p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The biggest threat to SACRE's would be RE being added as a national curriculum subject.</li> <li>• A lack of religious diversity in Durham is a threat to the strength and vibrancy of SACRE because it makes it hard to recruit active Faith members who live locally and can serve more easily.</li> <li>• Lack of authority / opportunity to collect information on the teaching of RE and implementation of the Agreed Syllabus in schools is a threat to the ability of all</li> </ul>  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek to share best practice and utilise the LA to better effect to communicate with schools.</li> <li>• To organise conferences where pupils and teachers can meet and share with people from a range of Faiths and other world views to learn more about how Faith affects daily life.</li> </ul> | <p>SACREs to do what they are legally supposed to.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial constraints (lack of direct budget for SACRE and increasingly tight school budgets) mean that it is difficult for teachers to get time and permission to attend SACRE meetings, leading to a further reduction in our knowledge of RE teaching and issues in schools.</li> <li>• Financial constraints can also limit the ability of SACRE to establish conferences where pupils and teachers can meet and share with people from a range of Faiths and other world views to learn more about how Faith affects daily life.</li> <li>• Constraints / changes within Education Durham, which have led to the loss of a full-time Inspector for RE mean that the departments resources, including time, are much more restricted when it comes to revising the Agreed Syllabus, giving less opportunity for SACRE members to input to the process.</li> <li>• The COVID-19 pandemic is still a threat to SACRE (and to the teaching of RE) because it disrupted the launch of the Agreed Syllabus, which eventually took place virtually.</li> <li>• The increasing proportion of schools which are now academies is a threat to SACRE as there is no formal role for SACRE to be involved with them.</li> </ul> |
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## Next Steps

### Short-term planning 2024-2025

- Improve and renew SACRE membership – to include a membership review with the support of the Clerk, Chair and Professional Support from the LA.
- Provide support to schools and review the impact of SACRE in the classroom – through inviting teacher input from different phases on the impact of the Agreed Syllabus, further evaluation of the Agreed Syllabus, standing item on the SACRE meeting agenda to share best practice.
- Further work needed on religious and non-religious worldviews to feed into Agreed Syllabus review. Opportunity to re-establish working group.
- Agreed Syllabus review – preparation and convening of the Agreed Syllabus Conference, involvement of SACRE members in the review process. Launch event and involvement of SACRE members.

### **Long-term planning 2026-2027**

- Improve SACRE attendance, look to bring in members of faith to meetings for purposes of presentation – a learning and sharing experience.
- Collaboration with other regional SACRE's or a North East SACRE to share resources and expertise and working alongside the Regional RE Hub.
- Research the possibility of a Youth SACRE to collaborate more with stakeholders, carefully considering the role of SACRE in schools beyond a speaker resource base.
- Attending network meeting to share best practice. Create opportunities for RE conferences and events in collaboration with Education Durham.
- Evaluate the launch and assess the impact of the next Agreed Syllabus in the classroom.

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## Education Durham’s report to SACRE

Spring 2024

Prepared by Sarah Blakeman, Senior Professional Learning Advisor

### This term’s report outlines:

- An overview of courses and networks offered to date
- A summary of GCSE and A Level results for the summer 2023 season

### Networks and training

211 bookings have been received for RE courses and network meetings to date. Just over half of these (108) have come in this term. Secondary network meeting numbers are broadly the same across the two terms. Primary numbers have dipped, which is a common trend we see in foundation subjects at this time of year. ‘New to leading Primary RE’ was offered for the first time last term and proved to be successful. Similarly, 35 teachers booked onto a full day course looking at Buddhism (am) and religious diversity (pm).

|   | Autumn term | Spring term |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| Primary network meeting                 | 79          | 66          |
| Secondary network meeting               | 6           | 7           |
| New to leading primary RE               | 18          | X           |
| Buddhism and religious diversity course | X           | 35          |

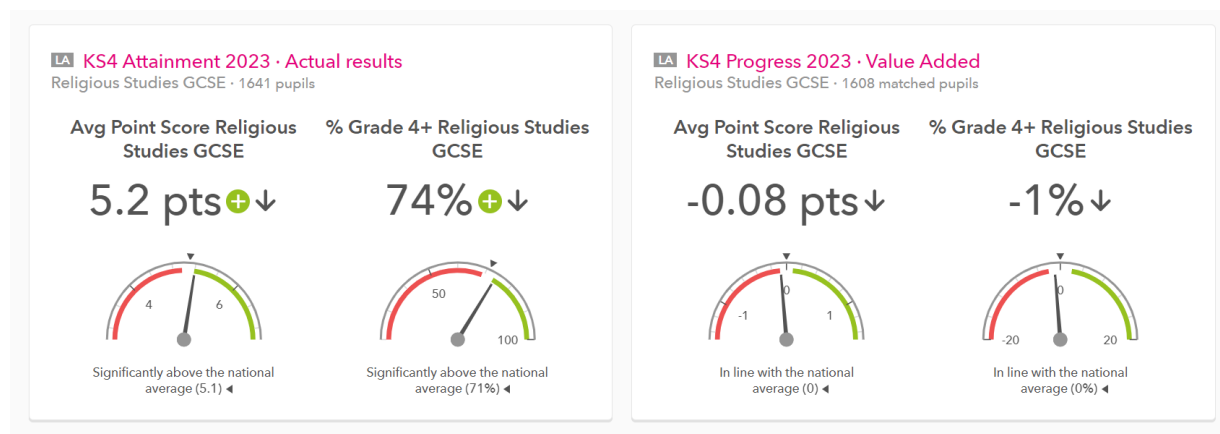
Summer networks will be offered for primary and secondary schools, and we are scoping next year’s courses presently. These are likely to include another ‘new to leading primary RE course’, a course around other religious- and non-religious traditions, and a course on assessment in RE.

We are sharing a survey with leaders of RE in schools to ascertain if they need any additional support with implementing the RE Agreed Syllabus and this will inform future courses. We also anticipate this being helpful when we review the syllabus in 2025. These results will be shared in the next meeting of SACRE in the summer term.

### Secondary results

As a local authority, we are able to view KS4 (GCSE) examination results using a programme called FFT Aspire. This enables us to delve into results by subject and to analyse trends over time. We can also access overview data for the most recent KS5 (A Level) cohort.

## GCSE 2023 headlines at a glance



Attainment results are based on actual student results with grade 4 equivalent to a GCSE grade C. This shows us that County Durham’s RE results are significantly above the national average.

‘Value added’ refers to the progress made from KS2 (Y6) SATs results to GCSE compared to other students. If ‘value added’ is 0, students make expected progress. This data suggests that students didn’t make quite as much progress as other students nationally.

### Data overview

|                              | Actual results |         |           |
|------------------------------|----------------|---------|-----------|
|                              | 2021           | 2022    | 2023      |
| Number of Pupils / % Matched | 1,143          | 1,459   | 1,641     |
| Avg Point Score              | 5.9 (+)        | 5.6 (+) | 5.2 (+) ↓ |
| % Grade 4+                   | 86% (+)        | 81% (+) | 74% (+) ↓ |
| % Grade 5+                   | 74% (+)        | 72% (+) | 63% (+) ↓ |
| % Grade 7+                   | 39% (+)        | 35% (+) | 31% ↓     |
| % Grade 1+                   | 100% (+)       | 99% (+) | 99% (+)   |

Pleasingly, the number of students taking GCSE RE has increased from 1,143 in 2021 to 1,641 in 2023.

99% of students passed last summer and County Durham’s students have consistently achieved results above national average at Grades 4+ and 5+ (GCSE ‘C’ equivalent). However, we can also see a decline in this % over time, and the % of students achieving a Grade 7 (GCSE A equivalent).

Schools with the highest number of entries were:

- Durham Johnston Comprehensive School (253)
- St Leonard's RC School (225)
- St Bede's RC School, Lanchester (236)
- St John's School and Sixth Form College (193)
- Sedgfield Community College (156)
- Framwellgate School (128)
- St Bede's RC School, Peterlee (117)

The top 5 schools for pupil progress based on average points scores were:

- St Leonard's (+1.26)
- Park View (+0.7)
- Belmont (+0.63)
- Consett Academy (+0.51)
- Easington Academy (+0.25)

### A Level coverage and results

Of the 15 schools and colleges that offer A Level qualifications, 8 had an A Level Religious Studies cohort completing their qualifications in the summer 2023. Cohort sizes varied from 3 to 13, with a total of 69 students across the County. The average points scores ranged from -3.7 to +14.3, with the highest performing results at St Bede's Peterlee, New College Durham and St John's in Bishop Auckland.

|                          |    |
|--------------------------|----|
| The Hermitage Academy    | 3  |
| Durham Sixth Form Centre | 10 |
| Durham Johnston          | 12 |
| St John's                | 12 |
| St Leonard's             | 8  |
| St Bede's Peterlee       | 3  |
| St Bede's Lanchester     | 13 |
| New College Durham       | 8  |

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