

DURHAM SACRE Updates

March 2011

National Updates

English Baccalaureate

You will have received a briefing paper on the impact for RE of the Government introduction of an English Baccalaureate which does not include RE. (please see Appendix A). I have received a standard reply to my letter (Appendix B) and intend to respond. Whilst it appeared at one point that The Secretary of State for Education was taking concerns seriously, (The Department are certainly impressed by the number of correspondence received), the picture remains bleak for the inclusion of RE. Below is Hansard from the Commons debate of February 7th.

Religious Education

9. **Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): Whether he plans to include religious education in the humanities section of the English baccalaureate. [38226]

The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove): Religious education did not count towards the humanities element of the English baccalaureate in the 2010 performance tables, because it is already a compulsory subject. One intention of the English baccalaureate is to encourage wider take-up of geography and history in addition to, rather than instead of, compulsory RE.

Caroline Nokes: I thank the Secretary of State for that response, but does he think that the exclusion of religious education from the English baccalaureate might dramatically reduce the number of students studying the RE full course at GCSE and have a knock-on and detrimental effect on the number of candidates for religious education teacher training?

Michael Gove: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for making her point. We all recognise that high-quality religious education is a characteristic of the very best schools—faith schools and non-faith schools. But the decision to include geography and history in the humanities section of the English baccalaureate will mean that those subjects, which have seen a decline in the number of students pursuing them, will at last see an increase, alongside modern foreign languages. As the Minister of State, Department for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr Gibb) pointed out, the English baccalaureate is intended to be a suite of core academic qualifications, which every child can be expected to follow alongside other qualifications, whether vocational, RE or others.

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State tell the House on what research or evidence he has based his selection of subjects in the new English baccalaureate?

Michael Gove: Yes. The research and evidence that I undertook was to look at what the highest performing education jurisdictions do. When the OECD published its table on how our country had been doing in education over the past 10 years, I was struck to see that under Labour's stewardship we had slipped in the international league tables for English, for mathematics and for science. I was also struck by the fact that the numbers of students studying modern foreign languages, history and geography were declining. I was particularly struck by the fact that only last week the Russell group said that these are the subjects which the best universities expect of students if they are to go on and prosper and achieve the level of social mobility that sadly eluded us when the right hon. Gentleman was in government.

Andy Burnham: The Secretary of State mentions the OECD, so let me quote from last year's PISA—programme for international student assessment—report, which says: "Most successful school systems grant greater autonomy to individual schools to design curricula and assessment policies".

That is in direct contradiction to what he has just said. I support the right of every child to take these five GCSEs, but it is a narrow selection, and not right for everybody, and the way in which he has introduced it is restricting student choice right now. Many feel that it is not a fair way to judge all children and all schools, suggesting that some are second best. So is he really saying to young people and employers today that dead

languages are more important than business studies, engineering, information and communications technology, music and RE? Will he not listen to the call from the Chair of the Select Committee, made just a few moments ago, to allow a broader and more flexible English baccalaureate?

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but these questions are becoming excessively long. I hope that we can have a pithy response, and I am sure we will, from the Secretary of State.

Michael Gove: I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman has the brass neck to quote the PISA figures when they show that on his watch the standard of education which was offered to young people in this country declined relative to our international competitors. Literacy, down; numeracy, down; science, down: fail, fail, fail. I am surprised that he has the brass neck to stand here and to say that working-class children should not study modern foreign languages, should not study science, should not study history and should not study geography. If it is good enough for the likes of him, why should it not be good enough for working-class children elsewhere? Why is he pulling up the drawbridge on social mobility? Why is he saying that they are only fit to be hewers of wood and drawers of water rather than university graduates like you and me, Mr Speaker? Rank hypocrisy!

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): While I entirely accept the Secretary of State's point that RE is compulsory, it is not obligatory to sit the GCSE. Does he agree that the very many faith schools where RE is compulsory are thereby penalised in the calculation of their English baccalaureate achievement?

Michael Gove: I appreciate the care with which my hon. Friend puts his question. I also appreciate the fact that he has been a very strong advocate for faith schools in his own constituency, including St Mary's, whose cause he has championed with particular eloquence. I do appreciate that many schools will want to offer RE as a GCSE, and indeed we would encourage them to do so, but the core element of the English baccalaureate relates to five subjects which we believe are the essential academic knowledge that students should be able to master. The news from the Russell group of universities last week that the subjects that we have chosen for the English baccalaureate are the subjects that they expect students to have if they are to go on to leading universities ensures that there is an appropriate match between schools and universities in advancing social mobility rather than seeing it decline, as happened in the past 13 years.

Revision of the National Curriculum

The Government have announced (January 2011) a review of the National Curriculum in two phases with implementation of core subjects in September 2013 and non-core subjects (whatever these may be) by September 2014. The main thrust of the review is to slim down the curriculum and put greater emphasis on essential subject knowledge. There will be less prescription on teaching methodology. The National Curriculum will remain statutory as do current requirements.

As you will be aware, RE is statutory but locally determined. It is not a National Curriculum subject and so will be directly unaffected by this review. The government have announced that they have no intention to change the statutory order surrounding RE.

" It is essential to distinguish between the National Curriculum and the wider school curriculum. There are a number of important components of a broad and balanced school curriculum which, as is currently the case, it would be inappropriate to prescribe national programmes of study. This applies, for example, in the case of religious education (RE), where what is taught reflects local circumstances. RE will not, therefore, be considered as part of the review of the National Curriculum. The Government does not intend to make any changes to the statutory basis of religious education."

The Agreed Syllabus Conference should, however, take note of developments over the coming months in order to ensure that RE aligns with some of the developments in other subjects.

Academies and Free Schools

The Government are encouraging schools to apply for Academy or free school status. One County Durham school has become an Academy and two other sets of schools will merge and become Academies from September. I do not know figures for primary schools but know that some have shown interest in Academy status.

Academy and free schools are no longer Local Authority schools. As a consequence SACRE would no longer have a role in these schools.

The position of RE in Academies is rather unclear. Guidance 2010 states that non-faith Academies should teach RE according to the Agreed Syllabus but that is not the case under the Academies Act 2010 (where RE may no longer be statutory). There is some confusion about this nationally but we may want to monitor the situation in Durham over the next few months.

John Keast

Many of you will remember John Keast as former Adviser for RE both at Qualification and Curriculum Council (QCA) and the Department for Education (DfES). John visited Durham on several occasions and did speak to SACRE. If you have not already heard I am pleased to tell you that John has been awarded the OBE for his services to education.

Local Updates

Collective Worship

Several SACRE members were able to attend collective worship training in January. I am happy to provide opportunities for training and / or discussing any SACRE issues and responsibilities.

Celebrating RE March 2011

This is a national promotion campaign designed to showcase good RE and promote its importance within schools and to a wider audience. There are many activities taking place across the country with some national conferences and projects involving faith communities and organisations.

SACRE have some funding for developing a project for Celebrating RE Month. This will be an art competition for secondary pupils based. We are working in partnership with Durham Cathedral and the North East RE Centre and hope to organise an exciting trip around the region as the prize! Details still being worked out.

Some Development Work in Schools

Gayle Hackett, Head of RE at Sunnysdale is our lead Teacher in RE this year. Gayle has expertise in developing vodcasts. She is going to produce a vodcast on the importance and value of RE. She is currently interviewing teachers, students and faith members. She would very much like to interview SACRE members and is doing some filming at the Durham Leadership Centre, Spennymoor on March 4th. Please let me know if you could pop in and would be willing to be filmed. If you would be available another day, please let Isobel know.

Sharon Lupton is a new colleague in County Durham who is the Head of RE at Sedgefield School. She is going to develop a piece of work on diversity of faiths in the North East. She hopes to engage students in enquiry based learning. We would be grateful if SACRE members could provide any information about numbers of faith members in the region and other ways in which students could find out about faith groups in the North East. (e.g. recommended websites etc). Please contact Isobel.

Rabbi Dovid Lewis

I am both sad and pleased (sad he is going, pleased for him) to tell you that Rabbi Dovid has a new job in Manchester and will be leaving Gosforth Synagogue. Rabbi Dovid has been a great support of this SACRE both in the interfaith lecture he gave to SACRE a few years ago, in his hospitality when he helped host our SACRE visit to the synagogue in April and with his participation in our Interfaith conferences.

Appendix A (sent as email and in post to SACRE members, January 2010)

SACRE Briefing on Government Proposals for Key Stage 4 January 2011

- The Government are going to introduce a new English Baccalaureate (Bacc) at GCSE Levels which will require students to achieve at least a Grade C GCSE in English, Maths, Science, a language and humanities.
- Humanities subjects have been identified as History or Geography. **Religious Studies is not included.**
- This is likely to have severe consequences for RE provision at Key Stage 4 e.g. the loss of full GCSE as an option (several schools still do this) as students choice will be restricted by the requirement to take History / Geography and a language.
- Responses from Government so far to concerns raised at the lack of RE inclusion in the Bacc is that RE is already a compulsory subject and so does not need to be included in the Bacc. The DfES (Department for Education) state that they are “trying to encourage the wider uptake of geography and history in addition to, rather than instead of, compulsory religious education”.
- Whilst RE would remain a statutory subject (there is no change to the Law requiring the teaching of RE), and should therefore still be taught to all Key Stage 4 students, schools will be under increasing pressure to perform well in the English Bacc subjects. Priority is likely to be given to these subjects and this may be at the detriment of other subjects, including RE e.g. removal of some students for some RE lessons for extra learning in the Bacc subjects. We know this has already happened in some schools when extra support is needed for English and Maths. It is also possible that some Headteachers will choose to ignore statutory requirements and no longer include RE for all students at Key Stage 4.
- The value of RE as an important challenging and academic subject may be lost for students with the resulting fall in take up for AS / A Level and Higher Education courses.
- A Government review of qualifications is also taking place and the future of Short Course GCSEs is uncertain. This again would have consequences for our RE departments and Key Stage 4 students as significant numbers are entered each year in order for them to receive accreditation for their compulsory study.
- Changes to the Ofsted inspection framework are likely to lead to no regular inspection of outstanding schools and less focus generally on the monitoring of statutory compliance. This could lead to some schools ignoring the compulsory nature of RE at Key Stage 4 with the resulting disappearance of RE as an academic or curriculum subject.
- Many members of the wider national RE community (RE organisations, RE Advisers and teachers) are writing to express their concerns about RE not being included in the English Bacc. There have also been protests from other quarters e.g. independent schools who state that English Bacc has too narrow a selection of subjects and that there are other academically rigorous subjects.
- Possibly as a response to concerns raised about RE, the Education Secretary Michael Gove has said that he will ‘take on board’ concerns about GCSE

subjects excluded from the English Bacc measure. BBC newsonline (14.1.11) quotes him as saying,

“There are one or two points being made about perhaps one or two qualifications that might count within the five pillars and I will look at that.... That’s not to say that I’m going to change my mind but any fair point made, in a constructive spirit about how you can improve league tables, I will always take on board.”

Action in Durham

- An e-mail from the Chair of AREIAC (Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants) has already been forwarded to the RE secondary teachers network, asking them to consider writing to their MPs, Michael Gove. I do not know how many teachers have written (I know of some) but we will be discussing the matter further at our network meeting on February 2nd.
- After checking that I have permission to write to Government as the Inspector for RE in Durham, I have just written to Michael Gove and Nick Gibb (Schools Minister). I will also write to my own MP and would hope that SACRE could also write to the MP in Durham. I am initially writing to express my concern about RE not being included in the Bacc. When I receive a response I intend to follow up by raising point about compliancy and the role of Ofsted in monitoring statutory requirements.
- Judith Bainbridge and I have met to discuss the matter and consider what response SACRE could make.
- I am more than happy to talk to any SACRE member who wants to discuss further or would like more clarification. I am also happy to organise a discussion forum meeting of SACRE members if you would like to discuss further and consider actions before the next SACRE meeting.

Appendix B

Dear Ms Short,

Thank you for your recent email.

We have introduced the English Baccalaureate because we are concerned that the number of pupils who currently receive a broad education in core academic subjects is far too small. This is particularly the case for pupils in disadvantaged areas. The English Baccalaureate is designed to recognise the success of those students who attain GCSEs or iGCSEs at grade A*-C across a core of academic subjects. We want to encourage more pupils to study these core subjects and to open up opportunities for all students to have the chance to study them regardless of the school they attend. We will give special recognition in the performance tables to those schools which are helping their pupils attain this breadth and we will mark individual pupils' achievements through a certificate.

Whilst the English Baccalaureate will give pupils the opportunity to study a core of academic subjects, it does not mean that we wish to restrict their choices or opportunities for wider study which is why the number of core subjects is small enough to allow for that. Study in other subjects will be just as valuable to pupils and we will encourage all pupils to study non-English Baccalaureate subjects alongside the core English Baccalaureate in order to benefit from a well rounded education.

We recognise, as many schools do, the benefits that religious education (RE) can bring to pupils. This is why the teaching of RE remains compulsory throughout a pupil's schooling. Success in all subjects studied at GCSE will also continue to be recognised by other performance table measures, as it has in the past.

We have not included RE as fulfilling the humanity requirement of the English Baccalaureate because it is already a compulsory subject. One of the intentions of the English Baccalaureate is to encourage wider take up of geography and history in addition to, rather than instead of, compulsory RE.

Yours sincerely,

Christine Orme
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www.education.gov.uk

Department for
Education

Your correspondence has been allocated the reference number 2011/0011028. To contact the Department for Education, please visit www.education.gov.uk/contactus