

DURHAM SACRE - JUNE 2011 LOCAL UPDATES

- 'Celebrating RE' was a month-long event held in March 2011 to raise the profile of RE noticeably and showcase good work in schools. Here in Durham we developed a vodcast on the value of RE (see below) and held an art competition for secondary schools. Winners will experience a day at Durham Cathedral and the Angel of the North, considering the importance of art in religion and spirituality.
- Durham Education Development Service (EDS) has been able to fund a project which develops the use of functional skills (English, mathematics, ICT) in RE. Sharon Lupton, Head of RE at Sedgefield Community College, is producing some excellent work around this:
 - presentation and analysis of census data to discuss the question "Is England religiously diverse?"
 - development of questionnaire of school population to find out beliefs about the existence of God and reasons for this.

This work will prove extremely useful for our Agreed Syllabus development.

- Many thanks to all SACRE members who volunteered to be interviewed by Gayle Hackett. Gayle is producing a short film (vodcast) for use in schools on the value of RE. Gayle is a real expert in producing vodcasts and has led some training of secondary teachers to help them create their own short films. When this is ready, we will showcase at SACRE.
- At the last SACRE meeting in March members requested an open session of the SACRE Task Group in order to discuss the Ofsted long report and its findings on RE in primary schools. This has been arranged for Tuesday July 19th from 1.30pm in County Hall. Isobel will lead discussion on the Ofsted report. Catherine will present findings from the NQT questionnaire on training needs. And a nice surprise – our friend Marilyn Longtaff will return to present her report on SACRE RE audit visits to primary schools. Invitations will be issued to all SACRE members and papers made available to all.

NATIONAL UPDATES

RE in English Baccalaureate

Please find attached report on latest developments.

NASACRE Annual General Meeting

I attended this on May 11th in Birmingham on your behalf. The whole day was most valuable not least because of the opportunity to discuss national developments and difficulties with others.

The key note address was given by Dr Robert Beckford on the title "Engagement with young people in the Big Society". Dr Beckford is a theologian, teacher, author and TV presenter.

Items discussed in the AGM business meeting included:

- NASACRE may have an uncertain financial future as some SACREs are already indicating that they may not be paying annual subscription fees. This could affect core functions of NASACRE work.
- A request made for more SACRE members to use the NASACRE website.
- 'Celebrating RE' has generally been a huge success and several MPs did attend the launch of the month at the House of Commons. It is unclear how much Michael Gove has been aware of the month and what his response is. Examples of events, resources and good

practice is being added to the website by Sharon Artley, independent consultant. Sharon did also state that the month has highlighted a continued lack of understanding amongst some practitioners about what good learning in RE looks like.

- The issue of humanist representation on SACRE was raised again (this issue was discussed at the 2010 AGM). 2010 guidance did not make the position clear and clarity will now only be gained if a court ruled on the issue. In the meantime, NASACRE advice states that full membership to Committee A is 'outside the law' but recognises that some SACREs have full membership of humanism in Committee A, whilst others do not.

The new Chair designate to the Religious Education Council (REC) is John Keast OBE. He gave a 'State of the RE Nation' address and made the following points:

- the state of RE varies from place to place across the country and is, therefore, very mixed.
- RE is generally better than it was 15 years ago and 30 years ago. RE has made enormous progress over that time BUT he is not sure whether it is better than it was 2 years ago.
- The profile of RE is tied up with the profile of religions and how it is regarded in this country by individuals, communities, the media etc.
- We know the profile of RE and religion has been raised in the last 10 years and religions, belief and matters of faith are contestable. So, the state of RE nationally will also not be clear or perfect as we are dealing with contestable ideas in the RE classroom.
- The state of the RE nation at present is critical - Local Authority cuts, new types of schools, statutory nature changed (through academies/ free schools legislation), curriculum questions (dismantling of National Curriculum), qualifications (eg there has been enormous growth in RE at GCSE so the impact of English Baccalaureate (E Bacc) may be particularly severe).
- The RE world in the last 9 months "has shown how effective we can be when we work together to make a case". John congratulated all who have taken part in these actions to influence and improve RE.
- There are 3 priorities that are important for the future of RE:
 1. Resolve the E Bacc question soon as academic credibility of RE is under threat by the exclusion of RE from it
 2. RE should be involved in the review of the curriculum (even though it is not a national curriculum subject)
 3. Resolve questions about the role of SACREs including relationships with academies.
- A key questions for us all to ask: Where does authority lie in RE? Who is the guarantor of RE? Does authority lie in the RE community? (meaning local communities including professional organisations and faith groups). RE should continue to have both national and local importance and elements. What does local mean? - Local Authorities but also individual local schools, community representatives (local councillors), professionals (eg practitioners and university lecturers), representatives from faith communities.
- What is the embodiment of the RE community? Locally it has been SACRE, nationally it has been REC. BUT the question is "How well do these umbrella organisations ensure all people from different backgrounds work together?" SACRE needs to be an effective embodiment of the local community as much as possible.
- The REC will have a strategic plan for the next 5 years so members can know what approach is being taken as the embodiment of RE community nationally.
- To take advantage and remedy threats to RE we must work together.