

Recommendation 8

This is the proposed change to legislation regarding the establishment of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) by local authorities. The full details of this can be found on pages 56/57 of the CoRE full report, Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward

This recommendation has several points but the key ones are that:

- legislation regarding SACREs would be amended so that SACREs would be renamed from Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education to Local Advisory Network on Religion and Worldviews (the recommended new title for Religious Education)
- the Local Advisory Network would remain the statutory responsibility of the Local Authority (LA)
- statutory funding for the Local Advisory Network will be provided within centralised School Funding which all local authorities receive. This will be ring-fenced
- the Local Advisory Network would have responsibility for all schools within the local authority boundary including academies and aided schools
- membership would change from the current 4 committees to 5 groups: teachers of RE; ITE/CPD providers, school providers including LAs, academy trusts, dioceses; school leaders and governors; religious and non-religious communities and groups that support RE (including local galleries and museums as well as faith communities).
- the main function of the Local Advisory Networks would be to facilitate the implementation of the statutory National Entitlement and to provide information on sources of support and local communities for the teaching of the subject.
- the Local Advisory Network could provide CPD, develop local programmes of study (there is an expectation that they will apply for national funding to do this), provide resource material and support for engagement with local communities, provide advice to schools on matters relating to religion.

A perspective from the RE Adviser: some issues to consider

- In some respect this is no different to the activities of current SACREs. The main difference, however, is that Local Authority Networks would have no power or need to require the Local Authority to revise their Agreed Syllabus or form into an Agreed Syllabus Conference. They would not be providing guidance and support on their own Agreed Syllabus (as this has been abolished) but would instead be providing information and support on the statutory National Entitlement. Does this reduce the remit and power of SACREs and does this matter?
- There is a change in language from a 'standing council' to an 'advisory network'. NASACRE are concerned about this and state that 'standing' implies permanence and gravitas within the local democratic structure as opposed to something which sounds more transient and could be confused with local interfaith organisations which meet to share and discuss but not to pass resolutions or give clear advice. How much does the place of SACRE within the Council structure matter?
- I can see that the change of name does partially come about because of the proposed change in name of the subject from Religious Education to Religion and Worldviews. Whilst the name of the subject may be a matter for debate it does not follow that the change of SACRE name needs to be so radical especially as much of the work that SACRE and a new LAN would do is the same. Why can't it change to Standing Advisory Council on Religion and Worldviews? This would surely keep it more in line with current role and status whilst still allowing for a change in the committee structure. Does the proposed name change matter?
- The change to the committee structure does reflect the changing landscape within schools and with religious affiliation (as shown in the last census) and does seem necessary if SACRE is to be relevant for all children within the local authority. What are the implications for us as SACRE and what opportunities and challenges would this change present?
- The requirement for local authorities to convene and host these Local Advisory Networks is encouraging and does show that the Commission on RE regards local authorities as central in providing good RE locally. This is good as evidence is that many local authorities have struggled to convene and keep their SACRE functioning effectively and having any impact on RE in schools. The widening of the remit to include all schools does help to address confusion about the responsibility of SACREs – is it just for maintained schools or for all children who live within the local authority boundary? CoRE make their position clear.
- The clarity about funding is also welcome. Local authorities do receive centralised ring-fenced funding for many aspects of school work but

SACRE is not covered by this. This can lead to some real confusion as to who in the Local Authority is responsible for providing funding for the effective working of SACRE. Again, CoRE are making their position clear.

- NASACRE do point out that the CoRE report only covers Religious Education and not Collective Worship. It is not clear what would happen about Collective Worship if the proposals became statutory and whether CW would also be part of the remit of the newly constituted Local Advisory Networks? This lack of clarity is rather unhelpful.
- NASACRE again: "Given that any legislative change is highly unlikely, we are disappointed that the Commission did not make recommendations which strengthen the existing statutory framework."