

**OXFORDSHIRE  
STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

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***Minutes of the Oxfordshire SACRE Meeting  
Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2015 at County Hall, Oxford at 2.00 pm***

<b>Present:</b>	<u>Committee A: World Faiths, Christian Denominations</u>
M = Member	Mohammed Abbasi (M)
SD = Standing Deputy	Ruth Cohen (M)
	Jean King (SD)
	Fraser Long (M)
	Dick Wolff (M)
	Nick Wood (M) - Chair
	<u>Committee B: Church of England</u>
	Sarah Sharp (M)
	Christine Price-Smith (M)
	<u>Committee D: Local Authority</u>
	Councillor Jamila Azad (M)
	Councillor Bob Johnston (M)
	<u>Co-opted Members</u>
	Nigel Fancourt (M)
	Margaret Godden (M)
	Helina Taghavi (M)
	<u>Local Authority</u>
	Suzanne Edwards
<b>Visitors:</b>	Monawar Hussain
	Sadat Khan
	Sheik Ramzy
<b>In attendance:</b>	Helen Batten (Clerk)
	Bill Moore (Advisor to SACRE)
<b>Apologies:</b>	Steve Beegoo (M)
	Shahin Bekhradnia (M)
	Vikki Gledhill (LA)
	Kamalpreet Kaur (M)
	Alex Lionakis (M)
	Councillor Charles Mathew (M)
	Lyn Moore (M)
	David Paterson (Obs)
	Katherine Wedell (M)

**1 Welcome and Apologies**

- Apologies tendered were accepted.
- NW welcomed visitors and members who have not been able to attend for some time, and introductions were completed.

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**2 Reflection**

HT presented a reflection illustrating the principles of the Baha'i faith, the text of which is appended to these minutes.

**3 Minutes of the meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2015 and matters arising**

Approval of minutes

Minutes were agreed to be an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

Annual report

The draft which had been circulated was approved subject to some minor amendments. BM clarified that the Report will be provided to all schools, OCC Councillors and NASACRE.

**Action: BM to circulate final Annual Report.**

Lord Nash letter

NW apologised that this action had not been completed but confirmed that following the change of government the time is now appropriate to pick up these themes and a draft response will be circulated.

**Action: NW to circulate draft response to Lord Nash.**

**4 Agreed Syllabus launch & training feedback**

Syllabus Launch

NW reported that approximately 100 people attended the Syllabus Launch on 19<sup>th</sup> March and enjoyed good discussion and networking opportunities. Feedback was extremely positive and NW thanked HB and BM for their work in organising this event.

Syllabus training sessions

BM reported that 6 training sessions for teachers have been delivered at 3 venues. Some responses to key questions discussed at the sessions have been displayed at the current meeting and handouts provided to the sessions will be circulated for further information. BM also tabled some initial responses from teachers which will be collated for further consideration, but confirmed that the key message is that the training was well-received and teachers felt it will help them to deliver the new syllabus well.

**Action: BM to circulate training handouts and collated feedback.**

Members asked whether interest in RE teaching is improving. BM explained that no additional funding for RE is anticipated, however some schools are receptive to a range of potential developments which will change how RE teaching is supported and are predicted to become increasingly important. In general schools recognise the importance of quality RE teaching but there is intense pressure on timetables, especially in secondary schools and the emphasis the subject receives can depend on school leaders and therefore vary widely between establishments. SE explained that many teachers need guidance on next steps and curriculum planning, particularly where one teacher is working alone within a primary school, and the LA will be looking at how effective support can best be provided. This aspect would appear to be borne out by the attendance at the training which mostly comprised primary teachers.

**5 The future of RE**

BM described a number of changes which are developing simultaneously:

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- **RE Quality Mark:** This is a national standard of RE teaching based around self-assessment. A half-day introductory session on 8<sup>th</sup> July was extremely successful and teachers who attended are now enthused and keen to move forward.
- **RE curriculum:** There is also pressure for a national RE curriculum (particularly from secondary schools) and NATRE is arguing that SACREs are now outdated and unfit for purpose although clearer information about agreed syllabus writing would be helpful to correct some current misconceptions. NASACRE will be surveying secondary teachers about these issues.
- **RE hubs:** The potential development of RE hubs was discussed at the March meeting. Feedback from teachers is positive and it is anticipated that the hubs could fill some known gaps and strengthen support. They would also fit well with new collaborative ways of working, including school-to-school support and professional development. Although originally conceived as an alternative to SACREs, it is now considered that the two can work well together and be well-placed to accommodate other potential changes. An application for funding has been made as previously agreed, and this will enable an initial sharing of ideas and the first steps towards getting teachers involved.
- ***A New Settlement: Religion & Belief in Schools:*** A link had been circulated. This paper recommends a national agreed syllabus and opens further questions about a national RE curriculum. However the practicalities are not clear since the need to maintain the distinction between state and religion, and to accommodate withdrawal from collective worship, would remain. Although these ideas link well with community cohesion and the promotion of British values, they also go against recent moves towards increasing autonomy for schools, and are therefore unlikely to become government policy. However the proposals do reflect much current thinking and may be expected to gain significant support.

#### Discussion

Members asked why an Oxon and Bucks hub area is recommended. BM explained that many activities in the Berkshire/Thames Valley area are becoming more closely linked with Hampshire CC, and geographically and administratively an Oxon/Bucks hub area would work well. The similarities in the agreed syllabus for each authority would also enable teachers across the region to work effectively together.

It was suggested that RE is an outdated name which is unhelpful since it does not reflect the content of the subject and can be off-putting. Members recognised this problem but also agreed that it will remain due to the nature of RE although a variety of titles and approaches are used by schools. It is positive that these questions continue to provoke debate and keep the subject live. Members also questioned the requirement for daily collective worship and it was clarified that this is generally not presented as worship as such, but rather an opportunity to raise minds above the mundane.

#### Conclusion

It was agreed that hubs will help schools to meet anticipated future challenges within RE and that the proposal to establish an Oxon/Bucks hub should proceed. It was also agreed that the Quality Mark is a positive step that will fit well with this work.

**Action: BM to progress RE Hub and Quality Mark activities.**

Taking a wider view of the place of RE in schools, NW suggested that *A New Settlement* presents a number of important concerns but that other points of view should also be considered. He requested members to study the content before the next meeting, which will consider what this SACRE can take from it that will contribute to our work. It is expected that NASACRE will also make a national response, and it was agreed that feedback from future discussion will be provided to inform this.

SE also confirmed that the LA will be taking an interest in the proposals and will ensure that they are brought to the attention of the Scrutiny Committee as appropriate. It was also suggested that Prof. Woodhead could be invited to address a joint meeting with Bucks SACRE and this will be

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considered.

**Action: All members to identify points in *A New Settlement* for further discussion at November meeting.**

**Action: BM/NW to look at options for a joint meeting with Bucks SACRE.**

**6 SACRE administration**

The following memberships will be confirmed:

- Muslim representative and deputy;
- Diocese representative;
- Methodist representative and deputy.

**Action: BM to liaise with groups as necessary.**

**7 News & updates**

*REfocus*

BM confirmed it is intended that publication to schools will be completed before the end of term. In response to an enquiry BM explained that teaching about British values comes within SMSC and is not the responsibility of SACRE although this body should be aware of current thinking and issues. The British values currently used by the government are specific, however what it means to be British may change over time.

**Action: BM to circulate *REfocus* for information**

NATRE – RE in the new curriculum

Further information from NATRE is anticipated as previously discussed.

**8 Other business**

NF presented a new guide to teaching RE which has been jointly produced by Oxford University and Discovery RE.

**9 Future meeting schedule**

Due to BM's changed commitments it has been necessary to alter the November and July dates. Meetings will now take place at 2.00 pm at County Hall, as follows:

- Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2015
- Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> March 2016
- Monday 4<sup>th</sup> July 2016

Meeting closed at 4.05 pm.

**Chairman's signature .....**      **Date .....**

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**SACRE 9.7.15: Actions list**

<b>Minute</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>By whom</b>	<b>Completion by</b>
3	Circulate final Annual Report for information	B Moore	ASAP
3	Circulate draft response to Lord Nash letter to SACREs.	N Wood	Early September
4	Circulate teachers' handouts and collated feedback from syllabus training sessions.	B Moore	Early September
5	Progress initial activities towards RE Hub and Quality Mark.	B Moore	Update to November meeting
5	Provide feedback to <i>A New Settlement</i> for discussion at November meeting.	All members	Submit to N Wood by end of September
5	Progress joint meeting with Bucks SACRE.	B Moore/ N Wood	Early September
6	Progress actions to appoint members to current vacancies.	B Moore	Update to November meeting
7	Circulate <i>REfocus</i> for information	B Moore	ASAP

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**SACRE meeting reflection – 9 July 2015**

The Baha'i Faith is an independent world religion and is the second most geographically wide spread religion in the world after Christianity. The fundamental principles of the Baha'i Faith, enunciated by its Prophet-Founder, Baha'u'llah, are the oneness of God, the oneness of religion, and the oneness of humankind. Baha'u'llah taught that divine revelation is a continuous and progressive process and that the missions of the messengers, or prophets of God, represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society.

The world seems to be in turmoil more than ever- we just had the 10 year anniversary of the London bombings, and only weeks ago 38 people were killed in Tunisia. There are ongoing conflicts across the world, resulting in the loss of life and displacement of huge numbers of people. 60 million people worldwide are displaced from their homes - that's the highest it's been since the Second World War. There is a feeling that nowhere is safe and around the world the society is disintegrating spiritually, socially and economically.

There are however groups of people working together to establish a new world, to unite, to love, to build friendships, to build communities. We must remain firm and reassured in the knowledge that, amidst the disintegration, a new kind of collective life can and is taking shape.

Inter-faith groups have a large role to play in this.

World unity and peace are the goals of all religions including the Baha'i Faith.

Baha'u'llah said that "the well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established".

Albert Einstein said: "Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding". I believe this understanding can only be achieved through education.

The Bahá'í sacred writings emphasize the importance of education as the key to material and spiritual progress. The Bahá'í teachings exalt knowledge, encourage independent inquiry and learning, and emphasize the importance of acquiring expertise in such arts and sciences as will promote human prosperity.

Baha'u'llah says: "Man is the supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess". He continues to say: "regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom".

We are advised that schools must first train their children in the principles of religion, but this in such a measure that it may not injure the children by resulting in ignorant fanaticism and bigotry. The aim needs to be imparting wisdom, good conduct, integrity, righteousness, respect and tolerance.

I would like to finish with a Baha'i prayer from Baha'u'llah:

God grant that the light of unity may envelope the whole earth and that the seal, The Kingdom is God's may be stamped upon the brow of all its peoples.

Helina Taghavi