

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)
held
at Room P4 - County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Thursday, 28th March, 2019 at
1.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor R.John, M.Lane, T.Thomas, A. Webb and
J.Watkins

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Sharon Randall-Smith Head of Achievement and Attainment
Wendy Barnard Democratic Services Officer

Faith Representatives:

| | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Suzanne Gooding | Free Church Council |
| Revd. Peter Baines | Free Church Council |
| Nick Pryor | Free Church Council – Salvation Army |
| Susan Cave | Baha'i Faith |
| Revd. Dr. Annette Daly | Church in Wales |

Teacher Associations:

Andrew Jones
Kate Wilding
Melanie Millington
Suzanne Hamer

Co-Opted Members:

Kath Fitter

RE Adviser:

Paula Webber

APOLOGIES:

County Councillor P.Pavia

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. To approve the minutes of the meeting held on the 15th October 2018 and to consider matters arising.

The minutes of the meeting held on 15th October 2018 were confirmed as a true record.

Matters arising:

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- Professional Advice: It was confirmed that Paula Webber provides professional advice to Monmouthshire SACRE and clarified that the professional learning offer is to provide specialist advice to those teaching RE.
- Erasmus+ Programme: An update was provided that this is an ongoing three year programme to challenge radicalisation and extremism. It involves three schools in South East Wales working with schools in Germany, Poland and Spain with the purpose of designing a programme of study for Key Stage 3 age pupils for use EU wide. Teachers from the participating schools have visited schools in Wales meeting in City Hall, Cardiff.

Teachers from Wales will also be visiting schools in Warsaw; attending training and conferences to share ideas. It is hoped that the resulting schemes of work will be available in the Autumn ready for external verification in each country. The target group is Y8 pupils.

It was confirmed, in relation to Brexit, that the funding for the project has already been received and is secure

ACTION: It was agreed to write to European Forum for Teachers of Religious Education (EFTRE) to raise awareness of the work and to see if any similar work is being undertaken elsewhere.

3. SACRE Annual Report 2017/18 (matters arising)

SACRE Annual Report 2017/18: It was agreed that the vacancies in the annual report would be checked. The report has been completed, translated into Welsh and sent to Welsh Government and WASACRE (will be available on website).

4. Holocaust Memorial Day Update

A SACRE member had attended an event at Chepstow Community Hub to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day. It was reported that the event was well attended. The programme comprised great presentations from schools, films and readings. The Holocaust survivor didn't speak this year but her husband wrote a poem for her entitled "The Last Train In" referring to the last Kindertransport train.

5. To receive a membership update

A membership update was provided and new members were welcomed to the meeting, as follows:

- Free Church Council: Mrs. S. Gooding
- Free Church Council (Salvation Army): Mr. N. Pryor
- Teacher Associations: Ms. K. Wilding, Ms. C. Smith and Mrs. S. Hamer

Vacancies exist for the following:

- Jewish faith representative: The named representative has not attended for several meetings. Further information will be sought and a new representative if necessary
- Muslim faith representative
- Sikh faith representative
- Free Church Council

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- Roman Catholic faith representative
- Co-Opted non-voting Member

ACTION: The Clerk was asked to make enquiries with the Onyx Foundation and Cytun. P. Webber will seek nominations via the Interfaith Network and other contacts.

6. SACRE News Bulletin - To consider information briefings from members for inclusion in the next SACRE news Bulletin

The following suggestions were put forward for inclusion in the SACRE News Bulletin.

- Erasmus+ Programme;
- Goytre Fawr Primary School had visited the Eastern Valley Foodbank which had inspired other work including recording a jingle on school radio and designing posters. Some of the children's work was passed around. Losing a pet has also been a topic that has generated sensitive responses
- It was agreed to hold a future meeting in a school to see examples of the good work being undertaken.
- It was reported that it was the Bahá'í New Year on 21st March 2019. A letter from the Prime Minister was shared.
- County Councillor J. Watkins had visited a class in Archbishop Rowan Williams Church in Wales Primary School to celebrate the Tibetan New Year with musical instruments for the children to test and to sing mantras. A report will be provided for the newsletter.
- A topic from the diocesan newsletter Grapevine on school prayers and children's mental health and wellbeing was suggested for inclusion. The article on Prayerspace can be shared in the newsletter.
- Other contributions related to RE are welcomed and must be submitted to P. Webber by 12th April 2019.

7. New Curriculum development update (to include verbal updates on the progress with the Humanities AoLE and the supporting framework for religious education, the review of legislation and the white paper and Professor Donaldson's video)

Members had viewed the video on the position of RE in curriculum reform recorded by Professor Donaldson and were reassured but also wished to see how it works out in practice. The Welsh Government Consultation has been extended and some members have made individual representations. An update was provided on progress. The Humanities curriculum is completed in draft and will be published 1st April 2019 for consultation. Pioneer groups are working on resources and the framework is being written up.

Generally SACRE Members were impressed with developments e.g. more RE is visible in the finished draft and progression steps are included. It was commented that by ages 14-16, all disciplines are evident at quite a challenging level. Further feedback will be provided at the next meeting. It was suggested that SACRE may wish to look at RE in other areas such as health and wellbeing.

It was noted that teachers, RE practitioners, Estyn, Qualifications Wales and RE Co-ordinators will meet as a group to write up a draft by July for consultation. The aim is to review the curriculum as written and create an agreed syllabus albeit with no content. For higher level concepts, schools are able to design their own curriculum for which guidance will be given.

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Members were appreciative of all the work being undertaken and emphasised the importance of having a significant input and feedback from teachers. It was reported that teachers are being released in small groups for a day to look at Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLE) also with a view to developing professional learning tools.

ACTION:

1. S. Randall-Smith to make enquiries with schools to release of teachers/practitioners to create a working party to respond to the consultation on the draft curriculum.
2. It was agreed that there would be a presentation on the humanities curriculum at the next meeting.

SACRE addressed the consultation questions as follows:

Monmouthshire SACRE response to p.29-33 the Welsh Government Consultation - Our National Mission: A Transformational Curriculum: Proposals for a new legislative framework

Monmouthshire SACRE welcomes the opportunity to participate in the consultation on the legislation surrounding the new curriculum for Wales. Comments relate directly to Religious Education p.29-33 of the consultation.

Q9. Do you agree with the proposed approach to RE?

3.65 In keeping with *Successful Futures*, we propose that RE is retained as a statutory requirement from age 3 and forms part of the Humanities AoLE.

Monmouthshire SACRE agrees with the proposed approach as outlined in *Successful Futures*. However, there is concern among members that Religious Education might be eclipsed by the other four humanities subjects. Given its statutory nature, legislation should ensure that RE is both visible in the new curriculum for Wales and in school-based curriculum planning and delivery.

SACRE Members are pleased that the statutory requirement for religious education will be from age 3 in the new curriculum giving it parity with other curriculum subjects. Foundation Phase practitioners who sit on SACRE suggest that RE naturally lends itself to being explored by young children. Learners at the age of 3 will be interested, and engage well with Religious Education, as it is about life, here and now.

Given that RE will now sit within the new curriculum and be statutory from the age of 3 concern was expressed about the new demand for specialist training. There will be a deficit in specialism in the current workforce. Monmouthshire SACRE highlights the need for training, both in the current workforce and in ITE to ensure high quality Religious Education within the new curriculum. This is more important than ever given many challenges facing individuals and society today that relate directly to religion and belief. SACRE members suggest that the Professional Learning offer is extended to non-maintained settings to ensure consistency in learner entitlement in Wales.

RE in the new curriculum must be solid enough to ensure that those students wishing to progress to specialise in Religious Studies GCSE and A Level would be equipped in subject specific knowledge and skills to be able to do so. SACRE points out that if Religious Education is statutory to the age of 16 then there should be RE specific qualifications available at 14-16.

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3.66 It is our intention also that RE reflects our historical and contemporary relationship in Wales to philosophy and religious views, including non-religious beliefs. Therefore, the current legislation will be amended to ensure the agreed syllabus for RE takes account of non-religious world views which are analogous to religions (e.g. humanism).

Monmouthshire SACRE agrees with this proposal in order to bring the curriculum and up to date with more recent legislation.

3.67 Our approach will recognise the local responsibility of the Agreed Syllabus Conferences, local authorities and the place of the denominational syllabus in Voluntary Aided schools but make a clearer connection with a national approach.

Monmouthshire SACRE agrees with this proposal. However, the role of the regional consortia was discussed and SACRE members questioned whether there was going to be more collaborative working on a regional basis?

3.68 We propose to amend the legislation relating to the adoption of an agreed syllabus to ensure that each Agreed Syllabus Conference and local authority must give due regard to a supporting framework to be produced by Welsh Government. This document will be developed with expert practitioners and key partners such as the Wales Association of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs) and the National Advisory Panel for Religious Education and will clarify and further develop aspects relating to RE outlined in the statutory guidance to be produced for the Humanities AoLE. There will be regular consultation with SACRE members and key stakeholders throughout the development period.

Monmouthshire SACRE agrees with this proposal and is pleased that a new supporting framework is being developed in partnership with WASACRE and NAPfRE. It is very important that specialist teachers of Religious Education, in collaboration with experts, write this framework. Monmouthshire SACRE welcomes continued involvement in consultations to take place throughout this development period.

3.69 Voluntary Aided schools with a religious character will continue to deliver their denominational RE and guidance will be developed by the relevant authorities to make the links with the Humanities AoLE.

Monmouthshire SACRE agrees with this proposal.

3.70 There is currently an exemption from RE for registered pupils in school nursery classes. It is proposed that the exemption be repealed to ensure parity for all subjects / components of the AoLEs. We believe learners of all ages can benefit from knowledge of the broad spectrum of religious, philosophical and cultural traditions held by people in Wales. Those Funded Nursery Settings will also have to deliver the new curriculum for Wales, this will include the Humanities AoLE and they will be expected to give regard to the content of the statutory guidance document, as well as their locally agreed syllabus.

In principal, Monmouthshire SACRE agrees with this proposal. However, with regard to the sentence, "We believe learners of all ages can benefit from knowledge of the broad spectrum of religious, philosophical and cultural traditions held by people in Wales" SACRE suggests that the sentence is amended to read "in Wales and the wider world" so that learners are not limited to only looking at the cultural traditions held by people in Wales.

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3.71 We propose to legislate to amend the current provisions regarding the description of an Agreed Syllabus as well as membership of Committee A of Agreed Syllabus Conferences and Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) to encompass non-religious views that are analogous to religious views. This is to clarify the current legislation and take account of the effect of the *Human Rights Act 1998* which means that references to religious views should be read as also encompassing non-religious views that are analogous to religious views. We have already written to Local Authority's Directors of Education setting out the action they need to take in response.

Monmouthshire SACRE agrees that the make-up of SACREs should encompass non-religious views that are analogous to religious views and that legislation should take account of the *Human Rights Act 1998*.

3.72 The following provision included in Schedule 19 of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998 will also be retained:

"No agreed syllabus shall provide for religious education to be given to pupils at a school to which this paragraph applies by means of any catechism or formulary which is distinctive of a particular religious denomination (but this is not to be taken as prohibiting provision in such a syllabus for the study of such catechisms or formularies)."

Monmouthshire SACRE agrees that this legislation be retained but suggest that it might be reworded to ensure clarity.

10. Do you agree with our proposals to make RE optional for learners in sixth forms?

3.73 At present all learners in school sixth forms must study Religious Education. In future, it is proposed that learners will have an entitlement to receive learning and schools must provide it if it is requested – it will be optional. It is important to note schools will not be prevented by the legislation to continue to provide Religious Education to sixth formers. However, there will be no legal obligations for sixth formers to attend if they do not wish to do so. Guidance will be made available for schools to support this new approach.

Monmouthshire SACRE agree with proposal 3.73 that religious education in sixth form schools be optional. SACRE members agree that there would be a need to produce guidance around the practicalities of this approach. SACRE members highlight the need for all sixth form learners to be made aware of their entitlement to Religious Education should they choose it (e.g. as part of the enrolment process or within school prospectuses).

11. Should the right to withdraw from RE and RSE be retained? (Page 33)

The comments from Monmouthshire SACRE relate only to Religious Education. The consultation on RSE and RE should be separate they are unrelated.

3.74 There is currently a right for parents to withdraw their children from RE. There is a need to determine the appropriate arrangements for this and the similar right to withdraw from sex education in the current system. This is discussed below.

It is the view of Monmouthshire SACRE that the right for parents to withdraw their child from Religious Education be removed. However, there are complex arguments surrounding this issue and SACRE understands that equalities legislation will be checked by Welsh Government.

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Monmouthshire SACRE suggests it would be impractical for schools to manage the right to withdraw in an integrated curriculum. It would be difficult to draw the line between RE and other Humanities subjects and to know what exactly the learner should be withdrawn from. If the right to withdraw, either wholly or partly, is retained then, the subject will be seen as less important than other Humanities subjects. Thus, RE would not have the parity that is intended within Successful Futures. Retaining the right to withdraw would disadvantage learners within an integrated curriculum. The new curriculum seeks to develop learners who are well rounded citizens and who can make their own decisions. An important part of this education would be to receive the objective, critical and pluralistic Religious Education.

Monmouthshire SACRE wish to point out that currently practitioners also have the right to withdraw from the teaching of Religious Education. The requirement to teach Religious Education may conflict with the faith or beliefs of some teachers. Currently most teachers of Religious Education train to teach the subject. However, in the new curriculum practitioners who are not RE specialists would be required to teach the subject in an interdisciplinary approach. Welsh Government should consider the legal implications of this during consultation.

SACRE is of the opinion that, If the right to withdraw is retained, then the parents of learners opting out should be required to give reasons in a more robust procedure for withdrawal from. For example, learners should not be allowed to withdraw from religious education should not be able to do so in order to spend extra time on other aspects of the curriculum such as additional literacy or numeracy or examination revision.

Q12. If the right to withdraw is to be retained, should it remain with the parent (parent includes those with parental responsibility or those who have care of the child)?

Monmouthshire SACRE are in favour of removing the right to withdraw. If this legislation is retained the right should remain with the parent. However, the views of the child should also be considered as part of a more robust process.

13. If the right to withdraw is removed, what alternative, if any, should be in its place? (Page 33)

Monmouthshire SACRE is in favour of removing the right to withdraw. There should be no alternative to this. SACRE members feel strongly that Religious Education should not be treated differently to any other subject in the curriculum. All learners in schools in Wales should be entitled to receive high quality, objective, critical and pluralistic Religious Education.

ACTION: It was agreed that a letter should be sent to Welsh Government calling for professional learning for RE to ensure high quality Religious Education and that the professional learning officer should be extended to non-maintained settings to deliver consistency.

8. Monitoring of Religious Education and Collective Worship - PAPERS TO BE TABLED AT MEETING

This item was deferred until the next meeting.

9. GCSE and GCE Examination results

This item was deferred until the next meeting.

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10. **Estyn Inspection Reports**

This item was deferred until the next meeting.

11. **Self-evaluation reports**

This item was deferred until the next meeting.

12. **Discussion of effective SACREs and the REQM - to include discussion on the recommendations made by Estyn and feedback from the 20:20 RE Conference workshop in Effective SACREs - Paula Webber**

This item was deferred until the next meeting.

13. **Discussion on the Final Report of the Commission on Religious Education.**

This item was deferred until the next meeting.

14. **WASACRE**

15. **To receive and note draft minutes from WASACRE meeting 20th November 2017**

The minutes were received and noted.

16. **To consider possible nominations from Monmouthshire SACRE members to join the WASACRE Executive Committee**

Members were informed that Monmouthshire SACRE can make one nomination for a Member to join the WASACRE Executive Committee. Two names were considered and, following a vote, it was agreed to nominate Andrew Jones to join the Executive Committee. It was confirmed that P. Webber attends WASACRE meetings as an Officer.

17. **To note dates of future WASACRE meetings: Friday 28th June 2019 - Colwyn Bay, Conwy**

Dates of future WASACRE meetings were noted.

18. **To note dates and venues of future meetings**

Thursday 23rd May 2019 at 1.00pm at Caldicot School.

The meeting ended at 3.15 pm