

NASACRE conference and AGMYork HiltonTuesday 16th May, 2017Notes

Welcome by Paul Smalley - Chair

First keynote speaker, Joyce Miller of the **Commission on RE**
Dr Miller gave a recap on the background of RE. From the 1971, working paper 36 - RE in secondary RE through to the present day. She referenced recent reports like 'A new settlement', 'RE for REal' and 'Living with difference'

There is now the '**Commission on RE**'

Joyce Miller is on this commission

The Commission is chaired by the Very Rev Dr John Hall, this includes

- 5 RE academics
- 2 education organisations including Ofsted (Alan Brine)
- 1 journalist,
- 1 lawyer
- 4 teachers/head teachers,

As well as

- a project manager (John Reynolds) and
- 2 observers from RE, Rudi from REC and Trevor Cooling

The makeup of the group is nothing to do with their faiths but about their expertise in RE

Remit

- To consider the nature and purpose of RE,
- To explore how RE can fit in the continually changing educational landscape.

Key issues include

- Quality of teaching and learning,
- The role and public profile of RE,
- The legal situation
- Age range and coverage
- Recruitment of RE teachers
- Withdrawal from RE
- Common entitlement (national curriculum for RE?) etc...

There have been two meetings so far and two public gathering sessions, there are three more of these gatherings to come (across the country).

A 'state of the nation' survey has been conducted. 4500 state-funded secondary schools. More evidence gathering is being undertaken from now, **there is a real need for concrete evidence** not just opinion so please urge SACREs to get involved. There will also be visits to schools, visits to SACREs (feel free to invite), four more CoRE meetings, an interim report due in September 2017 and a final report due in the Summer of 2018

Life in Britain today is too often divided into binaries for example

- Religiosity and secularity
- Globalisation and atomisation
- Clash and commonality
- Leave and remain
- Them and us

the real world is not binary

We need to show commonality in identity, what we have in common. Intellectual collaboration and intermingling.

How does this impact on RE?

1. What should we do?
 - avoid generalisations and stereotypes. Take opportunities to challenge these.
 - Avoid seeing religion and belief as separate 'silos'
 - Address conflict between and within religions (it's not squeaky clean)
 - Examine perceptions and misperceptions
 - Focus on commonalities and collaborations as well as differences

There is a lot of fear and anger about religion

2. Inter faith and inter cultural navigation.
 - inclusivity - how to make RE relevant for all, especially now that most children wouldn't consider themselves a believer - merely adding humanism will not suffice as they may not identify with that either.
3. What does it mean to be human?
 - Morality and ethics will be central
 - An exploration of questions raised because of scientific and technological advances e.g. Should we transplant from animal to human?

What will be the impact on pedagogy?

- greater collaboration and co-operation between disciplines and cross curricular areas

Current situation

SACREs, agreed syllabus conferences, collective worship, RE

Key Questions

1. What is the purpose of RE? Especially as many children are classed as 'nones' (belonging to no faith or worldview)
2. Questions of Policy and power - who owns RE? Who decides on RE? Should we have 150 agreed syllabi or 1 national curriculum? Should we prescribe content or let teachers decide due to local context? We cannot afford to lose excellence in local syllabi but not all SACREs are good, Butler-Sloss report claimed many agreed syllabi were 'inadequate'.
3. Questions of people, training, support and resources - how is it acceptable that primary teachers may only get 3 hours of RE training?

Questions for Joyce Miller

1. What is the political situation with CoRE?
 - appointing the Very Rev John Hall is a 'smart move', v well connected and respected.
 - Need to get politicians onboard - they need to know that RE really matters.
 - Unsure of the impact of the election.
 - How do you get the DfE onboard? Who would be involved.
2. How independent is the CoRE? Is it secular? There seems to be a strong centralist presence, will this influence the findings?
 - No decisions have been made yet, decisions are needed but there is a wide range of opinion on CoRE which is a positive thing. No holds barred.
 - Commission is independent, the REC is observing but not driving.
3. Why is anti-Semitism so prevalent today? and islamophobia?
 - A disturbing fact is that teaching RE has not reduced racism, overt racism is unacceptable but fear and suspicion abound.
 - Knowledge does not prevent all racism, it is a different agenda. A concern about teaching faiths is that you identify people as just Muslims or Jews rather than people with multiple identities.

4. Will the CoRE speak explicitly about LA's inability to interfere in free schools/ academies etc?
 - the educational landscape is changing, there are different rules and regulations.
 - Did SACREs represent every group? Should academies, free schools, Governors and others have a group too? Does the CofE need a group to itself?
5. Who owns RE? Who owns education? Can RE be given the same status?
 - The same status as which subject? Eng/maths? Arts? We are different but while we have ASCs we will not have equal status as we are more local!
 - Who **should** own RE? We cannot speak with one voice - it's not a problem to have lots of differences.
6. Is CoRE looking at SACREs negatively as a broken system? There is evidence that many are flourishing?
 - Many of the CoRE are on SACREs and have experience
 - Need evidence to be fed back about effective SACREs. Good news or even average news.
 - Funding of SACREs is an issue. Some have decent budgets, some have v little.

At this point area based discussions took place concerning the following issues.

How does SACRE impact on the quality and rigour of contemporary RE?

1. Resourcing rigour
 - LTLRE
 - Training hub leaders
 - Network meetings
2. Impacting quality
 - SACRE report
 - SIAMS
 - REQM
 - Local initiatives (dependent on availability of funding)
 -

A Yes/No answer was required in each group to the following

1. Should RE maintain statutory status?
2. Should there be the right to withdraw?
3. Should there be a national entitlement?

This lasted 30 minutes and written feedback was given in

Second keynote speaker

Prof Aaqil Ahmed.

Formerly Head of Religion and Ethics for Channel 4 (7 years), Head of Religion and Ethics BBC (8 years). Now a lecturer at Bolton university.

TITLE 'Why religious literacy is important for community cohesion'

Background on the media. TV and radio are regulated by OFCOM. Newspapers regulate themselves.

The population is changing, there are now 1 million Hindus, 5% of the population are Muslim and forecasts show that by 2050 40% of the U.K. population will be from an immigrant background (within 2 generations)

We need to understand that

- Societies are not at ease with themselves
- There has been a failure to grasp religion and beliefs

The root of our problems is a **chronic lack of religious knowledge**. This situation has been created. 'I know nothing about religion' is now worn as a badge of honour... How did this happen?

Poor religious literacy creates a vacuum, prejudice then kicks in, leading to erroneous assumptions like mosques are a 'command and control centre' for terrorism. This is claimed by people who have never been in a mosque.

There needs to be a strategy to

- Mark and celebrate key dates and occasions (public eye)
- Engage with people of faith
- Help develop better religious literacy
- Take people on a learning journey
- Make quality programmes that have an immediate impact and have a long shelf life
- Ensure all public bodies should have a religious literacy strategy, not just RE

Teaching about belief is not enough, we need to

- Understand communities
- Have inclusive workplaces
- Ensure there are safe places to study
- Be aware of hyper diverse societies
- Really ensure the basic knowledge is embedded.
- Give confidence through knowledge so that offence isn't mistakenly given

There needs to be a commitment to the importance of RE

- In school as a subject
- In other subjects within the school
- In the ethos of the school - embedded shared values
- In Higher Education
- In Government

The media must make positive programmes and make them visible.
Religion is saying something about the world we live in today.

Parting statement - **is there a more important subject than making our communities religiously literate?**

Questions for Prof Ahmed.

1. Why does the BBC ignore the need to teach Arabic?
 - it's not the job of the BBC to do that.
2. How does social media impact?
 - effectively it is publishing! The internet is not regulated, but would we want it to be?

Question time

A Panel was asked questions from the floor – the panel consisted of
Charles Clarke

Joyce Miller

Aaqil Ahmed

Paul Smalley

Q1. Where are the boundaries on fuzzy edges in RE?

CC- As a subject it is internally contested and fuzzy. We need to highlight the role of Head Teachers and Governors; how do they see RE? Is it in class? Or in how the whole school operates?

Q2. What are the most important steps we can take now as SACREs to support RE?

CC

- To build and use networks and relationships in your local area.
- Try to develop religious literacy across the whole area, this is difficult in areas where the LAs have been diminished.

JM

- Celebrate good RE, congratulate areas of success, schools are good at doing this, SACREs need to do it as well.
- Promote REQM? Gold awards include the ability to share good practice with other centres.

- Get children on visits.... 85% teachers said visits were a great idea but only 8% actually did it. Help make contact between children and faith communities.

AA

- plan a strategy and support this particularly when things are tricky

Q3. How do we get people who control education to value RE?

CC

- This is a key issue - raising the standing and interest in RE is critically important.
- Having a national advisory board on RE is needed. The status of RE is not high enough. All problems stem from this. Most politicians won't risk getting involved so the religious communities particularly the CofE need to raise the status. Collective endeavour is needed.

Q4. If you had £1 million to spend on religious literacy, what would you spend it on?

AA

- Getting more money as £1million isn't enough
- Make religious literacy integral to everything... Understanding what is around you. Embed RE into the whole curriculum.

JM

- Teacher training - ITT and CPD
- Challenge the fact that the child is not central to education.
- Be sensitive to the background of the child... Equality is not sameness.

Q5. How do you raise the profile of RE at university level?

PS

- Universities provide a service but are not regulated. We need to change the market.
- Amend part 2 of the teacher standards so it reads to not only uphold British values but to develop religious literacy. This would mobilise people as it would be checked up on.

Q6. Religious literacy, is it always educational and educative?

JM

- We need a common understanding of what religious literacy is
- What literacy *are* we actually good at?

AA

- People are actually getting more religious literacy out of 'Citizen Khan' than documentaries. A great documentary is only great if someone sees it!

The main conference ended then, several people left

Business meeting/AGM

Paperwork was circulated prior to the meeting
The following areas were covered

- Minutes from last AGM- passed
- Chairman's report
- Treasurer's report - finances are stable for another year.
- Election of new executives to NASACRE. There were 3 people standing, all were elected on without the need for a vote.
- AOB - none

Westhill awards

Thanks were given to all who submitted a bid - the field was better than last time.

Many bids were centred on similar themes including

- Ways to enable mono-cultural areas gain access to and engage with faith communities
- Ways of extending RE to other areas of the curriculum and school life

The following SACREs were given awards. There was no disclosure on what the money will be used for. Some area received less than they bid for

Awards went to

- Buckinghamshire £3,000
- Newham £4,000
- N Yorkshire £2,725
- Shropshire £3,550
- Staffordshire £2,725
- Suffolk £4,000

Thanks were then given to all who had helped organise and run the day.

Day ended 4.30pm