

## **SACRE Update, Autumn 2018**

### **The Commission on RE**

The final report from the Commission on RE is to be published on 12<sup>th</sup> September. This independent report, funded and supported by the RE Council, has spent over a year developing its perspective and recommendations, and has been observed by DfE and government. SACREs are very interested in its conclusions, not least because it has considered questions about local determination of RE and Agreed Syllabuses, recommending in its interim report a new national entitlement for RE, on which all future syllabuses should be based, and which should eventually be statutory.

For more information see: <https://www.commissiononre.org.uk/>

### **'A new settlement revised: Religion and Belief in schools'**

This recent report by Professor Linda Woodhead and former Education Secretary Charles Clarke suggests that our more diverse society makes reform to current legislation overdue.

At the launch Stephen Timms MP welcomed everyone and reflected that we are all shaped by our experience of religion at school, legislation that was set in this place, Parliament, in 1944.

Professor Woodhead introduced the report she noted that when the 1944 act was first read in 1943 the country was at war but education was still considered to be important. She explained the morphing of the subject from RI to the official renaming in 1988 of Religious Education. She characterised RE as learning about others and suggested in 2018 it is time to learn about us in the diverse context we live in. She said, '...change is overdue RE like any other academic subject needs no longer to be exceptionalised and parents should no longer be allowed to withdraw pupils from RE'.

Other recommendations in the report are around collective worship and 'faith schools'.

For more information, please see: <http://faithdebates.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Clarke-Woodhead-A-New-Settlement-Revised.pdf>

### **Examinations**

The number of RS GCSE and A level entries from students in England has declined considerably. This seems to be the trend with subjects that are not included in the EBacc. The government's target is for 90% of all GCSE pupils to choose the EBacc subject combination by 2025. NATRE, alongside other associations that find their subjects left outside of the EBacc have issued a joint press release to highlight the impact on exam entries.

<https://www.natre.org.uk/news/latest-news/warning-of-factory-farmed-kids-as-curriculum-narrows-with-ebacc/>

### **RE Teacher recruitment**

This has been a particularly challenging year for teacher recruitment and especially so for RE. After missing the target for recruitment for training of teachers of RE to begin in 2017, the DfE failed to take an action to incentivise recruitment for 2018. In contrast, bursaries were increased or maintained at a higher level for those choosing to train in other subjects. These higher level bursaries are offered for many subjects including subjects who had been more successful in recruiting 2017. We should not be surprised therefore, that at the time of writing, of all secondary subjects, RE the fourth worst level of recruitment at just over 50% of the target.

### **Youth Debate: England's young people challenge MPs at Westminster**

On Monday 9th July 2018, 80 Year 10-12 students from schools across England came to Parliament to debate some of the key issues around the teaching of Religious Education (RE). The students discussed some of the fundamental issues facing the subject, such as whether, in an increasingly secular society, RE is still a vital

component of balanced, modern curriculum, and whether pupils learn more by studying other people's belief than your one.

Numerous MPs, Parliamentary researchers, policy advisers and other interested parties witnessed the debate, which showcased the students' engagement with the subject through their range and depth of thinking around these complex questions.

Students were welcomed to Westminster by William Wragg MP, Liz Twist MP, and historian of religion and broadcaster, Professor Francesca Stavrakopoulou.

In a wide-ranging discussion – covering topics as diverse as the role of religious literacy in combatting extremism, the need for RE in an increasingly secular society, and whether or not students learn more by studying their own religion and belief than they do by studying their own – United Nations debating rules were firmly applied in the chamber by the co-chairs, students from Mulberry School for Girls in Tower Hamlets, London. Both young women were clearly and expertly trained in handling opinionated peers...and politicians!

Professor Francesca said, "The level of debate was extremely impressive - the pupils were bright, passionate and rigorous in their arguments'.

### **NATRE's Strictly RE: bigger and even better for 2019**

Bookings are open now for the national annual NATRE conference in London on January 26<sup>th</sup>. Subscribers to RE Today and members of NATRE may be eligible for discounts on their fees to Strictly – check the website for details. There is also an early bird discount for those booking before the end of October. The conference brings together about 250 people in the largest gathering of RE professionals in the year. As ever, the conference promises to be an inspirational and exciting day of lectures, seminars, exhibits, connections and opportunities: all the exam awarding bodies and major publishers will be there too.

<https://www.natre.org.uk/courses-events/strictlyRE-2019/>

### **New teachers of RE getting together: NATRE's regional 'Welcome to RE' conferences. Can SACRE support RE teachers in training this year?**

NATRE's Inter-University conferences for new teachers ran last year in Belfast, Exeter, Swansea, York, Ormskirk and London. We love to bring together the new entrants to secondary RE teaching from different universities, Teach First, SCITT and other routes: we have over twenty ITE partners who send their graduates along to these events. Over 200 new teachers of RE attended one of the events, which are generously sponsored by the Jerusalem Trust, and their continuing support means that a similar set of conferences can be run next year. Already, these are planned for Leeds (7<sup>th</sup> December), Edge Hill (14<sup>th</sup> December) and London (8<sup>th</sup> February 2019). The program will enable new RE teachers to learn about the national politics of RE but also to engage with some of NATRE's lesson and learning ideas in highly practical ways. For more details email the conference organiser Lat Blaylock: [lat@retoday.org.uk](mailto:lat@retoday.org.uk).

### **NATRE's New2RE project: mentoring, support and conferences for those starting teaching secondary RE**

NATRE runs a funded programme called 'new2RE' for those who are secondary NQTs, over the first three years of their careers. A small number of places may still be available: does SACRE know any new teachers in secondary RE who it could refer to this programme, rated excellent by a big majority of its participants every year.

### **BBC's recent and new RE programming: can SACRE draw attention to these programmes for schools?**

The well-loved BBC Bitesize site has a major review and renewal underway, with 10 new KS4 programmes nearly ready to use, and major innovations around the new GCSE for 14-16s. These 'A day in the faith of...' clips will present the lives of young members of the 6 principal religions, as they talk about some of the key ideas and concepts of GCSE RE.

Now broadcast and available free via BBC Teach (all these have notes written by RE Today to accompany them):

- For 5-7s, 10 animated short films of key stories of faith from 6 different religions, series title: 'Religions of the World'.
- My Life, My Religion 5 x 30 minute programmes. Featuring lots of original filming from across Britain using child presenters with diarycams, one each on being Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh in today's Britain. Online as clips in segments of 2-4 minutes.
- For 11-14s, 'An A-Z of Religion' with notes for students to use the 26 programmes from RE Today (written as supported self study materials for homework).
- For 14-16s, A Question of Faith 5 x 12 minute programmes for GCSE and Standard Grade in 2014 on sexuality, marriage, death, revelation and suffering, with notes on RE Today and clips on BBC Bitesize.

### **Having RE Subject Leaders' meeting**

This term's meeting will take place at Branfil Primary on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2018. It will partially focus on RE outside the classroom. It is hoped that SACRE's plans to coincide with the BBC's Year of Beliefs in 2019 can be revealed at this meeting.