

Worcestershire SACRE: options for Agreed Syllabus review 2019 (for 2020)

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The legal requirements:

- SACRE must review its RE Agreed Syllabus every five years
- An Agreed Syllabus Conference is to be set up to conduct the review

An agreed syllabus must '*reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are, in the main, Christian while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.*'

Education Act (1996 Section 375 (3))/School Standards and Framework Act (1998, Schedule 19, para.5).

Background: the need for a high-quality syllabus

The provision of a clear, well-structured, up-to-date and professional agreed syllabus is probably the single most important function of SACRE. Combined with on-going implementation training and resources, a new syllabus offers the possibility of raising achievement in RE in all local schools. In 2019/20, it is essential to consider how this relates to new inspection requirements, to developments in assessment and in teaching and learning, revised GCSEs, the National Report from the Commission on RE, the 'British Values' agenda, and all related educational change.

Ofsted's Subject specialist RE reports 2010 and 2013 highlight the need for syllabuses to:

- be clear about expected knowledge and understanding about religion(s) and belief(s)
- support and empower teachers to plan effectively
- offer coherent progression across the ages and key stages
- support clear and focused assessment, useful for raising standards
- encourage enquiry-based RE.

Implications of new Ofsted framework

The draft new Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (EIF, 2019) places great emphasis on curriculum planning. It asks schools what the thinking is behind their curriculum plan for the school – their intent. It then examines how they implement it – including a context and narrative for its implementation in the school. And then it examines the impact. An agreed syllabus needs to be able to support schools in all three. It needs to have a good rationale for its structure; it needs to be operable in diverse school settings; it needs to show schools how they can see what impact the syllabus is having on pupil achievement.

Current situation

Worcestershire worked with RE Today to develop its 2015-2020 agreed syllabus, which is currently licensed to Worcestershire for 2015-2020. The licence runs out at the end of the academic year, August 2020, and so SACRE needs to consider its options.

The current Worcestershire syllabus was developed in the light of the National Curriculum Framework for RE (NCFRE) produced in October 2013 by the RE Council (REC). It is a mainly thematic syllabus, constructed around three broad strands (believing, expressing, living), and based on the progression outcomes developed in the NCFRE.

SACRE bought 240 licences for all state-funded schools in Worcestershire, including academies. The number of academies has increased, but it may well still be the wish of SACRE to support all schools in the county, and encouraging them all to use the local syllabus makes it much easier to offer subsequent support through training and CPD.

Commission on RE National Report 2018

Since the development of the Worcestershire syllabus, the RE Council has published the result of a two-year commission into RE. Among its recommendations are:

- A change of name for the subject, from *Religious Education* to *Religion and Worldviews*
- The removal of the responsibility for SACREs to produce a local agreed syllabus
- Instead, to have a national statement of entitlement and national example programme of study, upon which Local Advisory Networks for Religion and Worldviews (the body replacing the reconstituted SACRE) can base local guidance and support.

The Report has had a positive response from the RE community, in general, although there remain some strong differences of opinion. Its impact on the role of SACREs is limited as yet. The Department for Education gave a lukewarm response to it, and indicated that there would be no time or inclination for any legal change for the foreseeable future. This means that SACREs retain the requirement to set up an Agreed Syllabus Conference and decide upon development of an agreed syllabus.

The RE Council is seeing this as part of a long process, however, and even though there is not any immediate structural change, the Report is having an impact on how people think about the content and purpose of RE, and may well end up having an impact on the structures of RE too.

Implications for Worcester SACRE

It would be wise to consider the impact of the description of our subject as outlined in the Commission Report. Whether or not we wish to embrace the name change, there may be some adjustments (at least) that we could make to RE. On the other hand, the national conversation being held among RE professionals may not reach quickly down to the classroom. It is part of SACRE's role to mediate this impact, as it sees fit.

Decisions to take:

- The licence for the syllabus from RE Today ends in 2020, so SACRE needs to do something. There is not an option that just allows everything to roll on without change.
- There is the opportunity to make some amendments to the current model, and SACRE should consider the options below.
- There are funding implications for each of the options. It is better that these do not drive the decisions – better to decide what is the best option for the teachers and then pursue the funding!

The options for SACRE include:

- a) **SACRE renews the licence with RE Today, which includes a supplement to insert into the 2015-2020 folder, delivered electronically.** This supplement includes updates on, for example, the Commission Report, tighter requirements at KS4 and 5, assessment, and some additional guidance. This relicensing would include a 'relaunch' conference, to support teachers with ideas and resources.
- b) **SACRE could adopt RE Today's more recent Syllabus Model B.** This syllabus shares some DNA with the current Worcestershire syllabus, but offers a more systematic approach, incorporating questions from the Understanding Christianity resource being used in many schools, and a revised assessment model.
- c) **SACRE could commission a bespoke new syllabus from RE Today.** This could reflect the Commission on RE national report recommendations closely, exemplifying its new direction for Religion and Worldviews.

Worcs SACRE have decided against Option C.

Option A

Renew licence with RE Today syllabus (model A) plus supplement

The Worcestershire syllabus was written by RE Today in conjunction with Worcestershire SACRE and teachers. It has been adopted by over 15 other local authorities, with very positive feedback as to its effectiveness. This syllabus provides the minimum for a SACRE / LA to fulfil its legal requirement.

- The licence renewal would include a slight update to the 2015 syllabus – including new dates, a few corrections and potentially an updated Foreword.
- It would also include a **supplement**. This would be produced electronically, so that it can be sent around to all schools together with the updated syllabus.

The supplement would include, for example:

- An update on the developments in RE, post-Commission Report 2018
- Updated guidance on assessment, withdrawal, Ofsted and SIAMS priorities, legal judgments on Humanism, sample long-term plans for a range of school types, GCSE and A level reform, and links with Understanding Christianity
- Some additional guidance on religions and worldviews
- A limited number of additional unit questions, as alternatives to current questions.

Advantages:

- Teachers build on the work they have put into implementing the 2015 syllabus. Change at this stage may not be welcome.
- All schools receive an updated digital copy of the 120+ page document, in full colour, plus the supplement
- Supplement offers useful updates and additional guidance, to enhance and promote good learning in RE.
- No difficulty with it being ready for summer 2020, with recommendation that we run re-launch conferences for the update.
- There is scope for some additional unit questions to extend options for teachers
- Support materials schools have purchased already continue to be relevant
- On-going support from RE Today with potential upgrades within the 5-year review period if necessary
- Note that the units of work for the 2015 syllabus are still available for schools to purchase, if they missed out first time around.
- Feedback from local authorities using this syllabus has been very positive.

Disadvantages:

- Little involvement from local teachers or SACRE on the content and style.
- Local RE is less prominent (though Worcestershire can insert additional appendices if desired)
- If the Commission Report recommendations are put into action, the syllabus will not reflect its fullest extent.

Details and likely costs

Syllabus licence renewal includes cost of update and supplement.
Supplement will be printed and PDF supplied.

Option B

Adopt RE Today's more recent syllabus model B

In 2017, RE Today developed a new syllabus model. It has some questions that are very similar to the Worcestershire syllabus, but its approach is different.

Features:

- The syllabus follows a more systematic approach to the study of religions, in contrast to the more thematic approach of Worcestershire. This means that most questions address one religion at a time. For example, in each year a class will generally study two religions separately before addressing a thematic question in the summer term, allowing them to build on their learning through the year.
- The syllabus follows a coherent teaching and learning approach, with clear assessment outcomes for each unit and each phase.
- The syllabus contains additional guidance on religions and worldviews, and is accompanied by a selection of units of work that can be purchased by SACRE for its schools, or by schools themselves.
- This syllabus incorporates key questions from the Understanding Christianity resource that is currently in use in many Church of England and community schools.

This syllabus would include some of the key updates from Option A.

Advantages:

- The systematic approach is more in sympathy with a knowledge-rich curriculum, and its spiral curriculum reflects the contemporary emphasis on embedding pupils' knowledge and understanding in their long-term memory. This idea of curriculum coherence ties in well with new Ofsted emphases.
- This syllabus is a substantial move forward for RE for pupils and for teachers.
- Many schools using Understanding Christianity would be delivering the agreed syllabus as they use it; and schools who have not discovered Understanding Christianity would benefit from the structural coherence of the study of Christianity in the syllabus.
- The syllabus includes additional scope for the examination of non-religious worldviews, in line with the Commission Report 2018.
- Syllabus is ready for summer 2020 launches.
- On-going support from RE Today with potential upgrades within the 5-year review period if necessary.
- Feedback from local authorities using this syllabus has been very positive.

Disadvantages:

- A substantial change of syllabus may not be welcomed by schools, who are just getting used to the current one, even though the syllabus Model B has been greeted very positively by schools in other LAs.

Costs:

Syllabus licence for five years, plus hard copy of syllabus for each school.

Notes for SACRE meeting 2 October 2019:

Costs have been kept at the 2015 price, as Worcestershire was RE Today's first client on this syllabus model.

SACRE needs to weigh up the feedback given by teachers at the summer 2019 conference (see evaluations).

SACRE must vote to decide the syllabus option, voting according to committees, one vote per committee.

Additional cost of units of work and training for *Understanding Christianity* will be presented at the meeting, to discuss how far SACRE can go in providing additional resources, and how to defray those costs against income from launch conference(s).