

SACRE NEWS



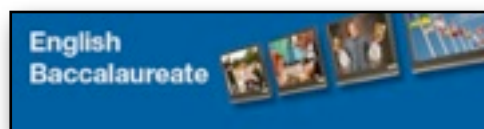
Issue 31

FROM THE CHAIR...

CRISIS or DRAMA?



On becoming NASACRE Chair in May this year I quickly fell to the task of contributing to the campaign around the place of RE in the English Baccalaureate. The NASACRE website soon sported 13 FAQs about the issue and work was in hand to gather responses from as many SACREs as possible on the status of GCSE RS in their respective Agreed



Syllabuses.

As the summer holiday period drew close, the RE world prepared for and awaited the Secretary of State's promised announcement on the EBacc. However, all this was completely overshadowed in the countdown to the parliamentary recess by the astonishing allegations that journalists had hacked into numerous private telephone accounts. The dramatic closure of the **News of the World** newspaper, the Murdoch empire's withdrawal of its bid to acquire BSkyB, resignations of the most senior police officers in the Metropolitan Police all followed in the wake of public revulsion at the scandalous hacking revelations.



The speed of the changes proved that a week was indeed a long time in politics with many commentators remarking that a turning point

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and been reached from which there would be no going back. The News International Newspaper Group was castigated by MPs of all political parties and the people at the top of that organisation were called to give answers to a parliamentary select committee. The summer recess was delayed. One commentator waggishly observed that Rupert Murdoch's approach to the saga was akin to making 'a crisis out of a drama'

What of the EBacc announcement and the future of RE in all this? On the last day before recess and just as the political frenzy over the hacking scandal began to abate, the Secretary of State for Education quietly published the statement of intent making it clear that RE would not be included as a Humanities subject in the EBacc. It was the last week of term for most schools.

The campaign against this decision had managed to concentrate minds, win friends and galvanise the RE community in ways that had not been achieved even in 1988. Some of us recall then, that the uproar over the place of RE in the curriculum forced the government of the day seriously to rethink and depart from ideological dogma that hitherto it had been reluctant even to question.

Indeed, the EBacc campaign had elements of drama of its own, but as the REC pointed out to government, RE and the EBacc was not itself the crisis but just one symptom of that crisis.

In its paper to government entitled **Why animation regarding RE in the EBacc is the tip of a dangerous iceberg**,

the RE Council drew attention to the fact that our RE tradition is widely admired internationally. It pointed out that our flexible RE framework as formulated in the 1988 Act and elaborated in 2004 non-statutory National Framework for RE was co-signed by faith community leaders in 2006. It argued that SACREs covering every local area and having a structure comprising teachers and scholars, local politicians and faith community representatives exemplifies 'Big Society' and that our tradition demonstrates complementarity between RE provided in public educational provision and that provided within parental faith communities.



Research Report, the Arts and Humanities Council 2011 Glasgow University Research Report and the DfE-REC 2011 Resilience Project for secondary schools on beliefs-based extremism.

The RE Council and its member organisations, including NASACRE, see the crisis as being the likely exacerbation of these weaknesses, intentionally or otherwise, by some elements within the government's education policy and by some consequences of current economic policy.

The RE Council paper also cited findings from surveys conducted by NATRE in January and June 2011 and NASACRE in April 2011.

The NASACRE survey findings (details of which can be found on the [NASACRE website](#)) go to the heart of how symptoms other than the EBacc are impacting directly on SACREs and these in turn point to how these challenges must shape the future work and priorities of NASACRE. They show, for example, that of the third of the SACREs who responded; around 55% were receiving less than 15 days of support from LAs; 45% had a budget of less than £5,000 for 2010/11 and only 20% had been assured that their budget level would be maintained during 2011/12.

Against this background a NASACRE priority is to provide advice to LAs and SACREs on streamlining their working practices, building relationships with the increasing diversity of schools within their area, seeking new sources of subject advice, and providing guidance to schools to support them through the coming period of change.



The paper went on to say that unfortunately, there are however substantial weaknesses as identified in successive research and went on to summarise the key findings of reports since 2007 that highlighted a range of areas that needed to be addressed. The reports cited included: the REC Teacher Education and Training Report 2007, the OfSTED 2010 Long Report on RE, the DCSF 2010 Warwick University

We are already looking for ways to provide greater support to SACREs on reviewing their Agreed Syllabuses (AS) as the pattern of the new National Curriculum emerges (and to ensure that the language and approach in RE is aligned with it).

As part of our developing public relations strategy we shall also be promoting the

outcomes of the excellent **Celebrating RE** month from which we can draw many examples of good and excellent practice. We are looking to co-opt to the NASACRE Executive a SACRE member with experience and background in communications, marketing or PR who could advise us on such matters. We would like to encourage SACRE members with relevant experience and background in this area to give serious consideration to volunteering their services particularly if they also members of SACRE Group A.



We shall be monitoring and reviewing the content of the NASACRE training CD in light of developments in government policy and their impact on religious education and will be very

grateful for feedback from SACREs on how useful they have found the training materials that were launched in May 2010.

Undaunted, we look to the future and our final priority for SACREs is to promote and support the involvement of children and young people in SACREs and SACRE work.

These key components of a hefty agenda respond to huge changes now taking place within local government at breathtaking speed and seek to prepare us for a very different educational landscape that many of us would not even have contemplated a year.

NASACRE is clear about the challenges facing SACREs and RE and as Chair I am clear that we have no need to make a drama out of the crisis. There is too much work still to do!

Bruce Gill



Intense public debate is now taking place about this month's unprecedented riots in Britain. With predictable inevitability, attention has turned to schools and education as possible sources for solutions to the recent breakdown in civil order. Central to that discussion are notions of community, responsibility, and materialism. Our next newsletter will focus on this debate, revisiting our conference theme of what good RE might contribute to the emerging concept of the 'Big Society' and exploring how good collective worship contributes to developing community spirit, a common ethos, shared values and promoting positive attitudes.

SUPPORTING RE / SACRES

The demise of local authority capacity has required many SACREs to search for appropriate subject specialist RE support. There are many committed Officers to SACREs, working hard to ensure effective outcomes for the schools they serve. However RE subject specialists are critically important to ensure effective SACRE development planning.

John **Keast**, the new Chairman of the RE Council recently wrote, "LAs and SACREs will need to adapt their working practices, build relationships with the diversity of schools within their area, seek new sources of advice, be ready to offer guidance to schools to support them through a period of change, and be ready to review their Agreed Syllabus as the pattern of the new National Curriculum emerges". This will require support from subject specialists with hands on experience of teaching RE and a good grasp of the needs of schools in the light of the rapidly changing requirements of government.

But where to find such support? **AREIAC** – the Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants - has put a contact list of people offering support for RE on their web site <http://www.arei.ac.org.uk/consultancy.html> . The site explains:

For all your needs .. Are you looking for consultancy support for your local authority, school, cluster, SACRE etc.. then members of AREIAC can offer you a range of expertise to suit all your needs.

You can search for support geographically by Person, by Skill or by Service

Helen **Harrison**



BEING AN EFFECTIVE FREE CHURCH SACRE MEMBER

Conference for Free Church Representatives on SACREs - Tuesday 21st June, 2011

Ever since I joined the Free Church Education Committee (FCEC), I have been keen to bring together Free Church SACRE members to inform and update them and create useful opportunities for networking, in the same way the Board of Deputies regularly brings together Jewish SACRE members. I know how much that is appreciated, however lack of funding made it seem an impossible aspiration for us on the FCEC until, that is, I mentioned it to John Walmsley, Secretary to the Westhill Endowment and he suggested the Trustees could support our efforts as a grant-in-kind. This was a real breakthrough after I, along with Sarah Lane Cawte, who is the Education Officer for Churches Together in England and Secretary of the FCEC, felt we had exhausted other possibilities.



So, the first gathering of Free Church SACRE members was held in Birmingham on 21st June, thanks to the generous hospitality of the Westhill Endowment Trustees. Although fewer people than we had hoped were able to come, the response was positive and the day a great success. In the event, it was attended by twenty five people from twenty different SACREs from all over England, and from Ceredigion in Wales. Several people had expressed interest in the event but were unable to come because we had opted for a weekday, being more appropriate for our sponsors. We were assured, nevertheless, of enthusiasm for the idea and goodwill beyond the actual attendance.

Revd Mark Fisher, Executive Secretary of the Free Churches' Group, gave his welcome, reminding us all that collectively the Free Churches constitute a considerable percentage of the Christians in this country, a fact we should not forget in our efforts to be a FC voice for education. John Keast OBE, Chair elect of the RE Council and a member of the FCEC, was the keynote speaker with his 'State of the Nation of RE' address, comprehensively clear as always, inspirational, and much appreciated by everyone. After small group discussion, a question and answer session with John and a good lunch, everyone attended their choice of workshop from the four on offer: '*Being an effective FC representative*' (led by Martin Sweet, Croydon SACRE); '*Engaging with difference*' (Gill Kingston, Warwickshire SACRE); '*Ensuring a FC contribution to an agreed syllabus*' (Mark Cawte, Swindon SACRE) and '*Understanding the changing role of local authorities*' (Graham Handscomb, Essex SACRE). All the workshop leaders are members of Group A on their SACREs as representatives of one of the Free Churches and also members of the FCEC.

The afternoon presentation was my responsibility and, drawing on my NASACRE experience, I spoke about '*The Evolving Role of SACREs*', after which there was time for more reflection and group discussion. We finished the conference with a sumptuous tea in the Lodge where those of us who had been responsible for planning and delivering the day lapped up the general feeling of satisfaction being expressed about the event especially, of course, the hospitality. It was a very worthwhile effort and one we hope to repeat. Certainly there has never been a time when SACRE members, whatever their constituency, need to be well informed and confident of their role.



Julie Grove

Chair of the FCEC and URC representative on Solihull SACRE

BRIEFING FOR MEMBERS OF SACRE GROUP B

NASACRE is engaging with a number of partner organisations on different pieces of work to support members of the different SACRE Groups as they and their SACREs prepare themselves for the complex challenges ahead. One such piece of work is with the partners from the Church of England where the intended outcome is a briefing paper giving advice to members of SACRE Group B.



The intended briefing paper will:

- comprise an overview of the current challenges facing RE and SACREs from a Church of England perspective
- provide some analysis of the issues and emerging trends: and ideally,
- offer some advice to Group B members on the actions SACREs might take in light of these.

Our key partners at this stage of the work are the National Society and the Board of Education both of which send representatives to the RE Council.

The briefing paper, currently in process, is drawing upon a number of documents already in circulation which deal with various aspects of the current educational, economic and political context presenting challenges to RE and SACREs.

The **PREG** (Professional Religious Education Group) of the RE Council is interested in this joint approach to SACRE Group B members and the Church of England representatives on the RE Council are being kept fully informed of progress*.

With the aim of circulation in September 2011 or soon after, work underway is to collect and summarise the existing material, so that the briefing note can be drafted and its contents checked. The Church of England partners are seeking to undertake parallel communications with diocesan RE/schools advisers before the eventual dissemination of the final document to Group B members across all SACREs nationally.

NASACRE is looking to replicate this approach with other partner organisations with a view to provide similar such briefings for some of the other faith groups in Group A, with Group C members and then for members of Group D.



Bruce **Gill**
July 2011

* Current REC CE Representatives are Jane Chipperton, Jane Brooke, Jeremy Taylor, Derek Bastide and Janina Ainsworth.

CELEBRATING THE COMMUNITY IN RE [WARWICK SACRE]

Warwickshire SACRE was awarded £5000 from the NASACRE/Westhill Foundation Project. SACRE used this funding to run a competition for schools based around 'Celebrating the Community in RE'. The main aims of the project were to provide opportunities to:



- get involved with the national celebration of RE in March 2011
- recognise the contribution schools and SACRE have made to community cohesion
- promote the national initiative Learning Outside the Classroom
- promote the Warwickshire Agreed Syllabus and the work done by SACRE to support teachers in planning for visits and visitors in RE

What it involved:

- SACRE launched a competition for all Warwickshire schools called '*RE-action: Celebrating the Community in RE*'.
- Entries were invited from teachers who had organised an 'RE event' that involved the wider community. For example, a visit to a place of worship, an RE trail or having a visitor(s) into school.
- The quality of entries was very high and many demonstrated good practice. In some cases the competition encouraged schools to take initial steps to engage with the community. For others, it inspired elaborate whole-school events.
- Prizes were awarded at the *Celebrating RE* event on 25th March 2011 to teachers and pupils from each Key Stage, including special schools, and for additional categories for 'whole school', 'inclusiveness' and 'originality and innovation'.
- Teachers received money to help resource RE in their school and students were awarded book tokens
- The celebration event was held at the newly built Leamington and Warwick Gurdwara Sahib and was attended by over 200 people, including the Bishop of Coventry, members of WCC, Warwickshire schools and members of SACRE.

- The Bishop of Coventry gave a very thoughtful talk about the importance of RE for young people and the community as a whole.
- The event was lively, with a variety of performances by pupils across the county; including poetry, choirs and drama.

Some feedback received after the event:

"...a big thank you for Friday's event. I really enjoyed looking at the contributions to the competition and enjoyed the performances as well. Thank you also for the prize money. My school was delighted and we will really enjoy spending it on new RE resources." (Lorna Maloney, Bawnmore Infant School, Rugby)

"...pupils and teachers clearly appreciated the opportunity to attend and it was certainly a very good example of the way SACRE can be effective in promoting RE in schools. Thank you and well done to all involved." (Bob Hooper, Head of School Improvement, Warwickshire LA)



What next:

- Winning entries will be published on the Warwickshire SACRE website (www.warwickshire.gov.uk/sacre) as a resource for teachers in the future. It is hoped that this way the event will leave a lasting legacy in Warwickshire and that schools can benefit from the sharing of good practice.

The full report of this project can be found on the NASACRE website.



NEWHAM YOUTH SACRE

When I started as the RE Adviser for Newham five years ago, I inherited from Kathryn **Wright** (the previous adviser) a Student SACRE which had four or five schools which together with Kathryn had pioneered this new venture. I have just finished working for Newham and writing this gives me a perfect opportunity to reflect on what we have achieved over the last five years and the incredibly rewarding time I have had personally through working with Newham young people from a wide variety of religious and non-religious backgrounds who are all passionate about RE.

I have seen attendance at our half termly meetings in different secondary schools around the borough develop to a regular 50-60 young people. All fifteen secondary schools are now getting involved in being part of the group. I have seen a Junior SACRE develop, where 40 primary schools meet in cluster groups to learn and debate religious and ethical issues. Next year for the first year, we are launching our Infant version.



One of things I wanted to see was this group being part embedded into the wider CYPS organisation. So, Student SACRE (who elect their own chair, vice chair and secretary), and Junior SACRE (who elect their own chair and vice chair) regularly attended adult SACRE meetings where each reported to adult members on their group's activities, as well as giving their views on whatever was on our agenda. This added a new vibrancy and impetus to many of our meetings as we heard the voices of the children and young people present presenting their thoughts and opinions to councillors, teachers and faith representatives. The chair and vice chair of each group also had places at the young mayor's cabinet and the children's parliament respectively, ensuring that their groups had other

avenues of influence on LA policy and practice.

Student SACRE has worked with the BBC to produce short films on gang violence and peace. Through receiving grants from NASACRE and Westhill, they have produced a DVD that supported faith sensitive sex and relationships education in Newham schools, and have influenced practice throughout our schools in this area. They have written prayer room guidance to schools and headteachers, and this last year worked with a local artist to produce sculptures and display boxes that unpacked their ideas on identity and belonging. These are now on display in 10 schools around Newham. They have also worked with Middlesex University and the Runnymede Trust on research issues involving young people. We have been offered a place for people within the LA to come and find out the thoughts of young people and a place where the young people themselves have gone out to influence and change practices within schools.

These groups give students and children the opportunity of developing leadership skills, and headteachers have always seen this as one of the strengths of our practice. The groups have always sought to **promote dialogue** between young people of differing faiths and secular backgrounds and cultures, supporting collaborative work and **contribute to community benefit**, as it seeks to develop young people's skills in understanding their concerns and providing a place for them to learn to become initiators and developers of solutions.



Having been made redundant, I decided that one of the things that I didn't want to see disappear was this vibrant group of children and young people meeting regularly and being empowered as future leaders and influencers in their local community as the LA would no longer fund this work between schools. Therefore Student SACRE has now become Student RE Matters, Junior RE Matters and Infant RE

Matters and hopefully with the support of schools, will continue to be a place where children and young people can come together across schools and work together on ideas and issues which are of concern to them.



Claire Clinton

EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED OR NOTHING HAS CHANGED

Having had some time off this year, due to poor health I have found returning to the special world of RE and Collective Worship especially interesting. In one sense, nothing has changed; there are no plans to change legislative requirements either in RE or Collective Worship. (A senior DfE official reaffirmed this recently at the national RE advisers' conference). There are no plans to abolish SACREs and no plans to knowingly diminish RE. Yet somehow, it feels everything has changed. I have often heard the phrase 'unintended consequences' in terms of the coalition government's approach to RE. The decision on the 20 July, which excluded RE from the English Baccalaureate, is however an intended act and a hammer blow for the subject. My own view was that RE should never have been seen as part of the Humanities group, but we should be in the EBacc as a free-standing subject in our own right. One of the reasons given for not including RE in the EBacc is that it's already a statutory subject. That is one of the central reasons why it should be in the EBacc!

In my opinion, we are the only statutory 'academic' subject not in the EBacc! It will be really important for SACREs to monitor closely the impact this decision will have on GCSE entry numbers in LA schools.

However, I do think out of this sense of crushing disappointment good things have emerged. The most important is that real sense of common purpose the RE community (brilliantly led by NATRE – National Association of teachers of RE) gained in supporting RE in the EBacc. It is no mean feat to gain well over 100,000 signatures and well over 100 MPs signing an early day motion in support of RE. There has been some positive press coverage too which has raised the profile of RE and increased public understanding of the subject.

The challenge now – wrestling with paradox

I think there are a number of issues which directly impact on SACREs as a result of current government priorities;

- The drive to support academies and free schools will inevitably have an impact on the work of SACREs. It's possible that in the future LAs and SACREs will produce an Agreed Syllabus that no school in the LA will need to use because they are all academies!
- Although academies are, clearly, individual independent entities, I think it's vital that SACREs maintain links with academies (co-opted membership?) and encourage the use of the local Agreed Syllabus.
- The financial impact on LAs has been considerable and has a knock on effect in terms of the levels of professional and administrative support for SACREs to function effectively.
- The diminution of Every Child Matters and Community Cohesion has lessened RE's pivotal role in these important areas. There is of course scope for SACREs to link into the growing 'Big Society' agenda and the revamped Prevent strategy.

I think it's critical that in these challenging times SACREs are pro-active. I would include the following approaches:

- Make full use of the brilliant compendium album for *Celebrating RE* (details on the NASACRE website) to generate ideas for building SACRE's profile with schools and faith and belief communities.
- Keep up the political pressure to ensure RE is not frozen out of significant developments in education.
- I am disappointed that RE is not included in the National Curriculum review. In my previous job as RE Adviser at QCA I had the privilege of being centrally involved in developing the non-statutory national framework. That document is now seven years old and would benefit from review!

- Build partnerships with schools through curriculum projects. I am privileged to be in a LA which gives SACRE a high profile. In the last two years, Devon SACRE has produced the following:
 - Primary and secondary RE handbooks
 - The Rainbow project (a king, the RE equivalent of healthy schools award where children and young people receive a certificate of achievement based on the colours of the rainbow which match level descriptions (red = level 1, orange = level 2 etc).
 - Guidance on Community Cohesion (especially the role of faith and belief communities)
 - RE in the Early Years
 - A new DVD 'It matters to me' where young people in Devon, from a wide range of Faith and belief communities, (including Bahá'í and Humanist) share their thoughts ideas and experiences in relation to the six key areas of learning reflected both in national guidance and many Agreed Syllabuses. (Beliefs, Teachings and Sources; Practices and ways of Life; Forms of Expressing Meaning; Identity, Diversity and Belonging; Meaning Purpose and Truth; Values and Commitments).

All of these projects have enabled Devon SACRE to build a strong partnership with schools and have a positive impact on the central role of any SACRE which is to improve the quality of learning in RE and collective worship. These projects have only happened though because of a clearly costed development plan which reflects key issues in both RE and the wider education community. The NASACRE website has a clear and very helpful set of statements about developing quality administrative and professional support for SACREs.

- Building positive partnerships with other groups (our new DVD 'It matters to me', was developed in partnership with the Devon Faith and Belief Forum, FaithNet South West and the Media Studies department at Plymouth University) who have an active interest in issues of faith and belief.
- Hold at least one public event annually, which heightens awareness of the role and work of SACRE. Devon SACRE, again in partnership with city and county councils, plus local faith and belief groups, have involved a wide range of schools in remembering Holocaust Memorial Day. This has had a powerful effect both on pupils and the wider public.

I was really disappointed to have missed the NASACRE 'Whose RE is it anyway?' conference which concluded *Celebrating RE* month (I am sure the conference was far better without my contributions!) Instead I can remember watching the human bear-baiting TV programme, 'Jeremy Kyle' and waiting for 'Loose Women' to start! (I have discovered that the sole purpose of daytime TV is to ensure sick people get back to work as quickly as possible!) It's good to be back in RE!

One final thought - Michael Gove clearly values the importance of languages such as classical Greek and Biblical Hebrew as they feature in the EBacc. Another language is Latin. So for all SACREs now it's time for *carpe diem!* (seize the day). After all if SACREs don't protect, nourish, support and enrich RE for all our children and young people, who will?

Graham **Langtree** (Graham is a member of the NASACRE executive and RE adviser in Devon and Torbay). This article is written in a personal capacity. Details of all Devon SACRE projects can be obtained from Graham - graham.langtree@devon.gov.uk or Tel 01392 384831.



THE IMPORTANCE OF RE IN BRITAIN

Sixteen year old Clare Dempsey, a *Celebrating RE* competition winner, inspired everyone attending the NASCRE *Whose RE is it anyway?* conference on 31st March. Clare was then invited to deliver a speech at the NASACRE AGM on 11th May 2011 on the topic *Voice of the Future: Inspired by RE*. Instead, Clare chose her own title: *The importance of RE in Britain today*. Here is the speech she delivered.

“ Good afternoon everybody.

I hope you've all had a fantastic day at this NASCRE conference. Before I explain to you why I'm here with you today, I'd like to share with you a quick video about what RE is in today's classroom:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLBsqaHL-R0&feature=channel_video_title

Now I've had an opportunity to share that with you, I'll move onto why I'm here today. I'm going to share with you my philosophy on religious education, and why it is important to society in Britain, and also across the world.



You see, I think there are a lot of common misconceptions where RE is concerned. There are some people in society – and unfortunately, in government – who don't seem to think RE is important enough to be recommended at GCSE. I can't help but wonder, therefore, what they think RE really is. The mind immediately jumps to a conclusion that they think RE is a lesson where you're indoctrinated, and will read a holy book – word for word – and are told to believe it. So this is RE, is it? Well, no, actually, it's not. We have to ensure everyone understands what RE is. In some schools, if you study RE at A Level, it's called Philosophy and Ethics. This name is appropriate, as you learn about – and draw your own conclusions on – philosophical and ethical issues that face members of society today. So what have I, a 16 year old who's going to be taking a GCSE RE exam in 6 day's time, learned about in RE? If you'd be so kind as to listen, I'd love to let you know.

Religious
Education...

what is it?

In year 7, I learned about the different philosophies of life; scientific explanations for the existence of the universe; and different beliefs about the six main world religions amongst other topics. In year 8, ideas of Karl Rahner's *anonymous Christian*; why do people believe in God?; how do I know what is right or wrong?; am I responsible for others? And several other units of work. When I started my GCSE RE course, I learned about so many issues facing humanity: abortion; euthanasia; IVF; is there life after death?; situation ethics; why should I vote?; is there such a thing as a just war? And plenty of other moral and philosophical dilemmas that face the

world today. When my RE teacher explained to me why he believes RE to be important, he said one of its benefits is that students "can develop their personality and grow into a fully rounded human being." So, I suppose these topics aren't important for the children in our society learn about? Well, actually, yes, they are.

I'd like to give a direct example of RE's importance in society. There have been thriving debates over the past couple of years as to whether euthanasia should be legalised in the UK. Out of all of my GCSE courses – including 2 GCSEs in Science - RE has been the only one in which I've learned

about euthanasia. In RE, we studied religious and non-religious arguments for and against the legislation of euthanasia, the lengths to which some people will go to allow a loved one to have euthanasia and, after careful thought, decided whether or not we personally believed euthanasia should be legalised in Britain. However, if we *hadn't* done this in RE, I'm sure that several members of my class wouldn't ever have made an informed decision regarding their own views on euthanasia. This is what RE offers: free thought. Yes, you do have a specification in GCSE RE, but just look what that specification offers. My own GCSE course has 50% of the paper assessed on questions asking you about your own opinions. If students today aren't studying these pressing moral issues in RE lessons, when are they going to study them? Don't get me wrong, of course, you'll learn about certain issues in other subjects – for example, GCSE students learn about the controversy of Genetic



Engineering in Biology as well as RE, but Biology won't offer the time to reflect upon a student's own opinion regarding a controversial issue – RE will. Do we want a generation of children who haven't thought about such pressing issues? As one of the students who has thought about them, I advise you, the answer to that is a resounding no.

Another example I'd like to give is that of Islam. Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. With this, unfortunately, comes rising levels of prejudices of the Muslim religion. How, without RE, will young people *really* learn what Islam is?

Chances are, unless they're from a Muslim background, they'll learn about Islam through society's pre-conceptions. Now, these pre-conceptions aren't always going to be the reality of what Islam actually is. For example, someone may look at extremist actions – such as the 7/7 bombings – and decide that must be what Islam is all about. When in fact, Islam is about peace and submission to God.

According to Michael Gove – Secretary of State for Education – there's "too much religion in society" I've said before now that surely if there's so much religion in society that Gove thinks it's *too much*, we need good RE to accompany it. In Gove's constituency of Surrey Heath, the percentage of ethnic minority groups is 6.9%, compared with Birmingham's 33.3%. We can begin to see why Gove doesn't think RE is necessary. As there's so little diversity in Surrey Heath, it seems Gove may not see the need to learn about it through RE. However, his constituency is not representative of the UK as a whole. In Birmingham, where today's conference is taking place, we can see that there is diversity, and we learn about and celebrate this diversity in Religious Education.



Community cohesion is a vital thing that's necessary to achieve in the UK's multi-cultural societies, in places like Birmingham, for example. In areas where there's no sense of cohesion, there could be high levels of support for extreme right-wing parties, like the BNP. I personally don't want the UK to go on to develop in this way, and I don't think any of you would, either. RE teaches students to really think about what a person's beliefs mean to them, and how it's their identity. Differences aren't something to be afraid of, but something to be celebrated. What subject celebrates this? What subject will bring this

cohesion to a diverse society like the UK? The answer is none other than RE.

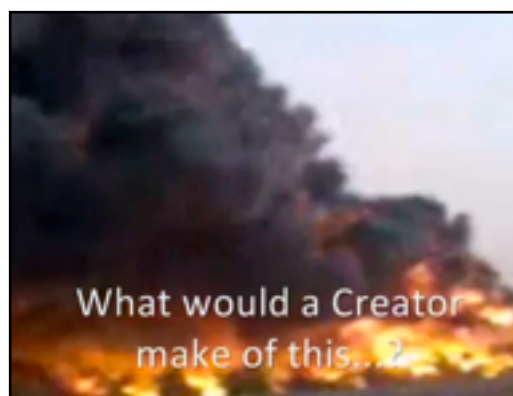
Although I constantly campaign for people to realise that RE isn't a dictatorship where you're told to believe the words of a holy book, RE does actually hold significance in the religious-self of a human being. Whether we like it or not, religion is here to stay. It's something that



everyone is going to think about in their lives. Why ignore the faith that exists in society? Even atheism itself is a faith, because there's no solid evidence to prove that there is no God. RE provides a safe place to develop your ideas, whether you're a modern day Oscar Romero or an advocate of Dawkins, you still have a set of moral beliefs, that you've developed from all of the different experiences you've had, the things you've read, heard and been told; RE brings a binding for all of these different sources, and enables a human to practically apply these morals to ethical dilemmas, such as is there ever such a circumstance in which war could be just, or is it right that we're worrying how

we're going to pay for our holiday when there are children a plane journey away who are dying from starvation.

In a few words, I'd like to explain what I think RE is. RE is a subject whereby students can, yes, develop faith and beliefs, however, also have the time to think about reasons why maybe their religious views aren't right, and other people's ideas are. It's a time to think about the moral and ethical issues that come about in our society today. It's a time to decide what we think is right or wrong. It's an opportunity to change the world we're living in; to make the world a much better and more tolerant place to be. Yes, this is all coming from a future RE teacher, but I'm not the only one with these opinions.



At this point, I'd like to read you an extract from a blog post I wrote in March. Those of you who attended the NASACREs Celebrating RE event in Birmingham on

31st March would have heard this already, so I do hope you don't mind hearing it again:

Never in my 11 and a half years of schooling have I found a subject so captivating; so wide in its content to interest and motivate myself. As long as humans have existed, so has the desire to know and understand the meaning and purpose of life. RE provides the variety of opinions on issues like the meaning of life and God's existence so as we can make informed choices on the thing that most motivates people in their lives. If RE were a poem, it would be Shakespeare's finest works; a painting, the broadest and most mysterious horizon; a personality, the deepest most meaningful being.



Now, those are just my own opinions, but they're ones I'm sure a lot of you here today will share.

I'd like to thank you for listening to me today. A final thought I'd like to leave you with: don't ever lose heart in the most important subject for the understanding of society; the subject we call 'RE'."

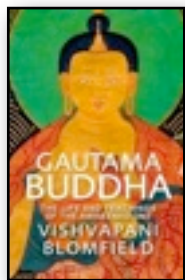
NASCRE is delighted to report that Clare achieved an A* in her GCSE RS and send our congratulations to her. Well done Clare.



BOOK AND FILM REVIEWS



GAUTAMA BUDDHA: The life and teachings of the Awakened One



Author: Vishvapani Bloomfield **ISBN:** 978-1849164092

From its opening sentences this book convincingly draws the reader into the culture of people and places of the distant past; powerfully evoking the sights, smells and sounds of times long gone; and in so doing provides a perfect backdrop to the light that Vishvapani Blomfield shines on the life and teachings of Gautama Buddha.

Blomfield's narrative is founded on his faithful use of relatively recently translated texts and interestingly the gentle, careful and understated tone of his research speaks volumes of the mission, if not passion, that evidently moved him to devote time and attention to this work.

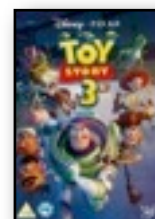
Gautama Buddha's birth, Enlightenment and death are placed in the late fifth century BCE around a century later than the traditional dates. A light-touched and eminently readable biography, this is compelling and captivating as well as being significant in addressing an important gap in current discourse on the historical Gautama. It does not shrink from using the myths and legends that surround Gautama to shed light on his life and the development of his teachings and so contributes to the sense of a real encounter with Gautama.

Blomfield's tracing of Gautama's life and development is sympathetic and instructive and his accounts and explanation of the religious context of that development is clear and very accessible. As a result, Buddhist concepts that might be potentially difficult or new to readers are introduced in a meaningful manner that enables easier learning. Religious Studies students in schools will find this book both useful and inspiring. Particularly, those following A or AS level courses and GCSE students with a special interest in Buddhism will discover an extraordinarily human Gautama revealed within its pages.

Bruce Gill

I am always impressed by the erudite and intellectually challenging material my friends on the NASACRE executive claim they are reading and watching! As for me there is one film and one book I strongly endorse!

The film is **Toy Story 3**, not just the finest and last of the greatest film trilogy ever - eat your heart out Godfather series - but, in my view (and that of Mark Kermode, the film critic) the film which should have won the Oscar in 2011, good as **The King's Speech** was! **Toy Story 3** is a wonderful film to link with RE across all key stages. As well as the usual humour (especially when Buzz can only speak Spanish and the introduction of the brilliant Michael Keaton as Ken, boyfriend of Barbie) and stories of friendship and courage **Toy Story 3** is powerfully moving. The scene when all the toys circle together and hold hands when facing imminent death is a wonderful illustration of sacrifice and bravery. The film does not shy away either from the darker side of humanity, exploring abandonment, loss and anxiety and regret. I found myself remembering with fondness the toys I played with as a child and the huge sense of regret when they were gone. Overall this is a brilliant film and a fitting climax to a wonderful series. It should be compulsory viewing for all SACRE members!



As for the book, I have **The Biggest Ever Tim Vine Joke Book** (currently £6 at Amazon - the Kindle version is even cheaper), is great bathroom or bedtime reading! Here are four examples of his entertaining puns:

- One-armed butlers - they can take it but they can't dish it out!
- Conjunctivitis.com- that's a site for sore eyes!
- Velcro - what a rip off!
- So I said to this bloke "You invented Tippex - correct me if I am wrong!"

Graham Langtree

TO BRIGHTEN YOUR DAY

During **Celebrating RE** month, people from all walks of life provided statements about the value and importance of RE. They can all be found on the **Celebrating RE** website <http://www.celebratingre.org/>, but here are one or two to brighten your day:



"The importance of learning about the multitude of religious faiths, and the various belief systems that inform the world in which we live, should never be underestimated. Bigotry and intolerance are the bedfellows of ignorance, and the more that young people in particular know about each other's beliefs, the more optimistic we can be about our shared futures. We know well in London the enormous benefits of bringing people together and learning from, and about, each other for the common good."

Boris Johnson, Mayor of London

"As a primary school teacher, I have a huge responsibility and privilege to influence the children I teach. This is not just through the teaching of curriculum subjects, such as RE, but also by contributing to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Children learn about faiths and beliefs through the sights, sounds, and smells they experience. This encourages the children to engage with religion, learn about other people and decide what religions and beliefs mean to them and to the lives that they lead."

Joanna Hann, Primary School Teacher



The following three statements were amongst those collected at an event held at the Zoroastrian Centre, Harrow during the month:

RE matters because

- ... it is a way to celebrate religion – both our similarities and differences. It promotes tolerance and respect for all religions. Without RE how would there be coexistence?
- ... it challenges us to think about our beliefs and those of our neighbours. It helps to bind communities together and bring cohesion.

RE is important

- ... to root people in their own traditions which is incredibly important for entering into dialogue with others.

Sharon **Artley**

SACRES AND THE STATUTORY NATURE OF AN AGREED SYLLABUS

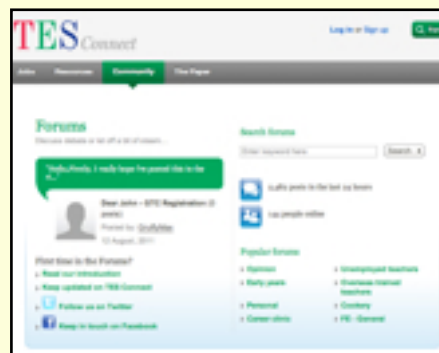
The following question and responses appeared on the TES (Times Educational Supplement) RE Community Forum in July:

Question: *We want to teach RE thematically next year, which looks like it'll be amazing - but do we need to stick to the SACRE SoW [Scheme of Work] instead????! Help!*

Response 1 *In short no, but you might be asked to show where you do meet the SACRE SOW. So for example if doing a unit of work on 'does God exist' you can tick off a fair bit of Christian and other religious views from the various sections in the SACRE.*

Response 2 *Sounds like you have done some good work which would be of great interest to your SACRE. The LA syllabus has to be rewritten every three (or 4) years and most of the SACRES I have served on have found it difficult to get input directly from the classroom. If you are not on SACRE you should find out who your Rep. is and make them aware of your thematic SoW and suggest it is incorporated into the next rewrite.*

Response 3 *We may be 'supposed' to but I have yet to find anyone who actually cares whether we do or not! I have had 3 Ofsted inspections, none of which checked our PoS (Programme of Study) against the agreed syllabus. Certainly management doesn't care as long as end results are OK. I suspect only a subject inspection would even notice. As said above I essentially teach what suits me and then 'tick off' the bits of the syllabus that this fits - my local RE inspector is fine with this. I do wonder really what purpose the SACRE serves anymore but that's another topic I guess.*



SACRE members will be interested see this recent RE correspondence on the TES forum in connection with whether a school has to follow the SACRE scheme of work. Of course it is the **Agreed syllabus [AS] which is statutory** for many schools in the LA. Additional support and guidance in using the AS (including schemes of work) is often welcomed by schools but of course **this is not statutory**. It is not unusual for an Agreed syllabus to also contain additional guidance but **it is important that schools are clear about what in the syllabus is statutory and what is guidance and support**.

The legal context of RE (i.e. an Agreed Syllabus must reflect the fact that religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian while taking account of the other principal religions represented in GB) HAS BEEN UNCHANGED SINCE 1988. Many Agreed syllabuses of course reflect the faiths and beliefs within the LA as well as the national picture. As SACRE budgets diminish more and more Agreed syllabuses are being developed in collaboration across a range of LAs and are published only in web form to save on printing costs.

A very interesting example of this is the new version of Awareness, Mystery and Value, the Somerset AS which is also used in North Somerset, Bath and North East Somerset and Bristol. The syllabus is web only and can be found on <http://amv.somerset.gov.uk>. The sidebar menu is colour coded with the statutory elements of the syllabus in red, while the (non-statutory) additional guidance is in blue, so helpfully indicating to the reader what is statutory and what is guidance. Note: you are welcome to look at these materials, but they are copyright. Please use the contact information if you wish to find out more.



SOME DATES FOR YOUR DIARY ...

September / October		
1st	Hindu	Ganesh Chaturthi
	Sikh	Installation of the Scripture
2nd	Jain	Paryushan
6th	Zoroastrian	Fravardin Mah Parab
11th	Rastafarian	Ethiopian New Year's Day
12th	Chinese	Chung Ch'iu
20th	Japanese	Higan [begins]
23rd	Japanese	Shunbun No Hi
	Pagan	Autumn Equinox
29th	Hindu	Navarati [begins]
29th	Jewish	Rosh Hashanah [until 30th]
1st	Zoroastrian	Jashn-e-Mehergan
4th	Hindu	Durga Puja
5th	Chinese	Chung Ming
6th	Hindu	Douser
8th	Jewish	Yom Kippur
12th	Buddhist	Pavarana
13th	Jewish	Sukkot [begins]
20th	Bahai	Birth of the Bab

October / November		
20th	Sikh	Guruship of the Guru Granth
21st	Jewish	Simchat Torah
26th	Hindu / Jain	Divali
	Sikh	Divali - Bandi Chore Divas
31st	Pagan	Hallowe'en / Samhuinn
1st	Christian	All Saints' Day
	Pagan	Samhain
2nd	Christian	All Souls' Day
	Rastafarian	Crowing of Haile Selassie I
6th	Muslim	Yum-Arafah
7th	Muslim	Eid-ul-dAha
10th	Buddhist	Anapest
12th	Bahai	Birth of Baha'ei'llah
13th		Remembrance Sunday
15th	Japanese	Shichi-go-San
21st	Sikh	Birth of Guru Nanak
24th	Sikh	Martyrdom Guru Tegh Bahadur
27th	Christian	Advent Sunday
30th	Christian	St Andrew's Day

ON THE WEBSITE ...

Do keep an eye on the website where you will find:

- 🕒 News updates
- 📄 Information about NASACRE
- 📅 News about events
- 📄 News on projects
- 📄 The Newsletter Archive
- 📄 The FAQ archive
- 📅 Agenda items for your next SACRE meetings
- 📄 A membership list
- 📄 Exemplar documentation



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Please also check your details and if necessary update the membership section and add to the exemplar documentation. Contact us at web@nasacre.org.uk

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This Summer issue is edited by Sharon **ARTLEY** and Paul **HOPKINS**. Newsletter design by MMI web - www.mmiweb.org.uk