

## **Minutes of SACRE Meeting held online – 8 March 2023 2pm**

**Attendees:** Cllr Tessa Munt (Interim Chair), Niel Apps, Rhona Burfield, Jude Clements (from 15.19pm), Leonard Daniels, Eleanor Delaney, Pauline Dodds, Pat Ebdon Penelope Jerrard, Mike Keogh, Cllr Tim Kerley, Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey, Shell Sullivan, Jessica Witchell.

**Also present:** Amelia Walker, Alison Jeffery, Kate Daunton, Robyn Dexter-Attwood, Jamie Jackson, Sarah Wright.

### **1. Apologies for absence**

Cllr Caroline Ellis.

Liz Payne-Ahmadi who wished to send greeting for International Women's Day.

Jude Clements – Church of England representative elect – joined at 3.30pm

### **2. Membership and Welcomes**

Cllr Tessa Munt, as Interim Chair, welcomed all the attendees to the meeting and invited them to introduce themselves to the rest of the group.

Jamie Jackson – Scrutiny Manager at Somerset County Council

Alison Jeffery – Head of Curriculum and Literacy at Somerset County Council

Amelia Walker – Assistant Director Education Partnerships and skills with responsibility within the LA

Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey – Somerset County Councillor

Cllr Tim Kerley – District and Somerset County Councillor

Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey – Somerset County Councillor

Jessica Witchell – Learning Manager, Wells Cathedral

Kate Daunton – Curriculum Project and Resources Service Manager, Somerset County Council

Leonard Daniels – Jewish representative

Mike Keogh – Buddhist representative

Shell Sullivan – Secondary RE Advisor

Penny Jerrard – Primary representative

Pauline Dodds – Church of England representative

Rhona Burfield -Independent Evangelical Church representative elect.

Robyn Dexter-Attwood – Senior Business Support Officer, Somerset County Council

Sarah Wright – Democratic Services, Somerset County Council

Pat Ebdon – Quaker representative

Eleanor Delaney – Pentecostal representative

Niel Apps – NEU representative

Cllr Tessa Munt – Lead Member for Children and Families at Somerset County Council

### **3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Chair invited comments from the committee members on the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 30 November 2022.

- Item 5 Presentation on National Research Policy on Religious Education - Councillor Prior-Sankey asked Shell Sullivan to clarify if investigative and thought-provoking teaching of RE was appropriate for primary settings as well as secondary, where it was felt primary RE teaching has traditionally centred on understanding and fact finding. The Chair suggested this could be discussed later on this agenda. Shell

Sullivan confirmed she would be happy to discuss but explained she was not the Primary representative. Leonard Daniels stated that critical thinking skills of primary-aged children should not be under-estimated.

- Niel Apps referred to the top of page 9 and asked if that action point had been completed regarding whether non-associations were permitted to be nominating organisations. The Chair explained that she could not find any reference to prevent this from happening and invited Mr Apps to provide this reference if it exists. The Chair re-iterated the intention for maximising participation and acknowledged there may be overlap of interests. Mr Apps stated that SASH potentially had three routes to join. Ameila Walker stated that many individuals may have multiple routes to join SACRE.
- The minutes were proposed as an accurate record of the previous meeting by Cllr Tim Kerly, seconded by Shell Sullivan, accepted by the Chair and will be signed at a future date.

#### **4. Public Questions**

There were no public questions submitted.

#### **5. SACRE Annual Report 22-23**

The Chair invited Shell Sullivan and Kate Daunton to present the report.

Shell Sullivan explained that much training has been delivered and conversations with primary and secondary RE teachers. Leadership programme covers much curriculum content including a curriculum symposium, postponed from summer 2022 with high-quality speakers including Catherine Wright, Katie Freeman and Stephen Pet. This will cover a multi-disciplinary approach to RE and World Views. Article being written for RE Today for September 2023 with input from Leonard Daniels on Genesis 1. Holocaust Memorial Day was marked at St John the Evangelist Church. Leonard Daniels reported that he spoke at the event which was a positive, well attended and well organised event, notwithstanding microphone issues. Shell Sullivan continued that the Lead RE Teacher Conference will take place on 30 June 2023. The NACRE has recently met. Diocesan Primary Conference will take place on 28 March 2023 to which all are invited.

Kate Daunton acknowledged the work being undertaken and the breadth of activities since Shell was appointed last April. She also drew attention to the various queries from primary and secondary schools that Shell manages. Kate referred to the locally agreed syllabus, Awareness, Mystery and Value written in 2019 and the work of the Religious Education Council in drafting and trialling resources in supporting schools in World Views and a multi-disciplinary approach. Three groups in a variety of settings including a large MAT are trialling these for the LA. The Somerset Library Service now manage the SACRE Resource Boxes for all schools, maintained and academies, to hire. Funding was secured to tidy and replenish the boxes. There are now 32 boxes which are all well used. Amelia Walker explained that silver and gold packages of the Core Offer to school includes access to the SACRE boxes. There is currently a waiting list for the boxes.

Kate continued to explain that a review of Ofsted inspection reports spanning approximately 18 months has been carried out to review comments regarding RE and diversity. The comments were shared including where Ofsted 'deep dives' into RE were

conducted in primary inspections. GCSE Religious Studies data was presented from 2019 and expected data for 2023 following resumption following the two year break due to COVID. 2019 data shows approx. 5000 year 11 pupils were entered for the full course and 1200-1300 for the short course. Expected numbers for 2023 show little change for the full course but a drop to 563 entries for the short course or 11% of pupils in Somerset currently entered for the short course and 26% for the full course for 2019 which has reduced to 14% for the full course for summer 2023. These figures are lower than neighbouring counties – Devon 45%, Dorset 40%. Nationally, Somerset is the second to lowest county for GCSE RE entries. Trends to be explored, explained and addressed.

Cllr Tim Kerly asked for clarification of the short and long course. It was explained that the long course no longer contributes to the English Baccalaureate (EBac). Amelia Walker suggested that the teaching of subjects at primary such as modern foreign languages and RE, influence uptake at GCSE. Depth, breadth and rigor at primary is therefore crucial. Niel Apps suggested that the short course no longer has a points value hence why schools have moved away from it. There was discussion about the quality of RE teaching in middle schools and the availability of RE teacher training in Somerset. Leonard Daniels said that more cosmopolitan towns and cities have a greater incentive to teach world views and Somerset does not fit this profile.

#### **6. Update from RE Adviser**

Shell Sullivan reported that much of this item has already been covered on this agenda. She did report that there has been interest several individuals including Early Career Teachers (ECTs) in the Primary Advisor role. Niel Apps, whilst encouraged by the enthusiasm of ECTs, warned that newly qualified professional may not have the capacity to take on additional roles. Amelia Walker thanked Niel for flagging this issue but equally did not want ECTs to feel isolated or disconnected as networking can help to support, motivate and retain teaching staff

#### **7. Update from Diocese**

Pauline Dodds was invited to present an update from the Diocese. The focus of the report was church schools that have been inspected under the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist (SIAMS) framework usually every 5 years but still disrupted by COVID. Ten Somerset schools have been invited under section 48 up to February 2023 including voluntary aided (VA), primaries and one secondary, the Blue School in Wells, that was particularly commended and graded 'excellent' overall. All received a 'good' grade overall. A separate grade is awarded for Collective Worship but not for RE. All were graded 'good' for Collective Worship. A variety of inspection comments were shared. All schools were assessed against Awareness, Mystery and Values (AMV).

First inspection criteria assesses if the RE curriculum ensures the covering of Christianity and a range of major world religions based around the Understanding Christianity teaching resource. The Diocese training offer is available to all schools and academies and includes collective worship planning at primary, middle and secondary; governor monitoring; new RE subject lead; and the annual conference in the spring.

#### **8. Governance Arrangements**

Amelia Walker presented a verbal update of progress since the last meeting. All members received a letter from the interim chair on 9 January 2023 inviting further comment on the Constitution by 20 January. One response was received. Nomination letters were sent to organisations on 23 January with responses reviewed on 8 February. A summary document was

sent to all members on 14 February giving feedback received on the draft Constitution from September 2022 to produce a revised draft with further feedback invited by 1 March. One response was received to request for a member of the clergy to be represented on Group B which has been agreed as well as an objection to the composition of Group A which will be considered today.

Four Christian representatives, six non-Christian with two approaches to the Clifton Diocese with no response. No Catholic nomination received, nor Methodist or Congregational. Two nominations for other Christian denomination received who are present today. One nomination received for the Humanist. Quaker and Buddhist representative. No nominations received for Muslim, Pagan, Hindu or Sikh. One nomination for Jewish representative present today. Four group C nominations have been received and response from SAPH and SASH

Eleanor Delaney queried the change in Group A to include other Christian denomination and Evangelical separate. Amelia Walker proposed two nominations from Evangelical denominations. Jessica Witchell contacting Somerset Diverse Communities to fill vacancies and to reach out to Hindu, Sikh and Muslim communities. Kate Daunton has spoken to the interfaith workers and will follow up contacts following decisions taken today regarding membership on whether to split the Jewish, Sikh and Hindu places into three separate roles with no limit on maximum vacancies. The other proposal to discuss is whether to accept the multiple nominations under 'Other Christian'. There was agreement for the principle of not seeking to exclude anyone. It was suggested that a shorter term of office be more appealing for new nominees. Leonard Daniels reminded members that Judaism is the founding monotheistic religious from which Christianity and subsequently Islam. The same direct historical and theological connection does not apply in the same way to Sikhs, Hindus and other religions and therefore their separate contributions are very important. The changes to accept multiple nominations under 'Other Christians' and to split the Jewish, Sikh and Hindu into three separate roles was agreed. Cllr Prior-Sankey said that other Christian denominations covers an array of denominations with moderate levels of participations in Somerset and felt it would be advantageous to retain the ability to nominate separately as non-Christian denominations and non-faith have the potential to outweigh Christian.

There was a concern from some that limiting terms of office would lead to a loss of experience and a suggestion that the number of terms in succession should be two or three to avoid this loss. Eleanor Delaney stated that the shortage of RE teachers may impact on nominations and that reps needed time to establish themselves in role which shorter terms may not allow.

Rhona Burfield expressed surprise that Judaism may be linked to Hindu and Sikh as it is Christian, Judaism and Muslim that are linked by the Torah and Bible. Leonard Daniels acknowledged the sentiment. Amelia Walker reminded members that Group C represents teachers and Group A enables an interfaith representation with no one religion dominating to enable voices of different perspectives to be heard and discussion to be as informed as possible by the community.

Amelia Walker reiterated that a key concern for SACRE is to ensure that children of Somerset are exposed to a broad and balanced understanding of a multi-faith community of modern Britain. Leonard Daniels stated that there has been a long history of trying to recruit other minority religions for various groups which has always been challenging in Somerset but is essential. Amelia Walker said that some communities in the county had experienced racially motivated incidents and less inclusive behaviour which may explain an reluctance to engage. SACRE can play a important role in modelling interfaith relationships. The Chair stated that Somerset has been rated as the fifth most racist county by reg Racial Equality Council and remains a largely non-diverse population. Cllr Prior-Sankey referenced racism towards the

Traveller Community in Somerset. Jessica Witchell outlined a Transatlantic Slavery Conference in Wells and stated that racist online comments had been received in relation to this.

It was suggested that terms of office should be implemented but that membership should be reviewed regularly to enable new nominees. The need to be more proactive was also identified.

**ACTION:** AMELIA WALKER - Check NASACRE guidance for re-election process

There was discussion regarding representatives from minority faiths from outside of the county who could easily join online meetings for which there was general agreement. Jessica Witchell suggested minority faith could be 'bought in' by offering expenses to meet the important requirement for a diversity of voices. Links with other SACREs in the south-west could help with minority representation as part of a dialogue to work creatively to meet challenges.

Cllr Prior-Sankey asked for confirmation on membership and the effect on voting. Amelia Walker said that the group did not vote often and had a more deliberative focus for discussion, dialogue and reflection. The vote for the syllabus review would be one vote per group, with one vote dedicated to Christianity, via Group B. There was discussion as to whether the chair should circulate between the groups and be included in the constitution. Agreement was voiced by some members. There was discussion about vice-chairs and broad agreement for the suggestion. There was discussion about online and in-person meetings as well as days and timings. There was broad discussion for a hybrid of online and in-person meetings, with a predominance of online meetings to address busy schedules and the environmental imperative to decrease travelling. There was also discussion about the difficulty of teaching staff release time due to the national shortage of supply teachers. It was suggested that the constitution is reviewed periodically. Members were thanked for a productive and insightful conversation.

Niel Apps questioned the allocation of a portion of the Central School Services Block and asked if this was a percentage or fixed amount. Amelia Walker agreed to bring this figure to the next week and reminded members that the Central School Services Block is under extreme budgetary pressure being underfunded for statutory duties with a huge amount of efficiency work and savings undertaken. Amelia Walker gave a personal commitment to maximising funding for SACRE and suggested a yearly consideration of SACRE finance is included in the constitution.

Mike Keogh, as a volunteer listener with the Samaritans, explained the schools and education programme on emotional health and wellbeing linked to PSHE. Links are being re-established with school post-COVID to promote the programme. The Chair asked for details to be emailed to her. Amelia Walker said that she would be very happy to include this in the Schools Weekly Bulletin to reach 1000+ people in the education system which can be used to disseminate information to a wide-reaching audience. It was suggested that external speakers such as Katie Freeman, could present to this group for which there was broad agreement. Shell Sullivan agreed to pursue this with Pauline Dodds.

Amelia Walker said that the syllabus review there should be consideration of curriculum knowledge progression and skills and the flexibility of enquiry of younger learners even with complex issues. Cllr Kerly felt that it is never too early to introduce critical thinking skills to young children if delivered correctly.

## **9. Dates for future meetings**

The following dates were given for future meetings:

- Tues 4 July in person at Holyrood Academy, Chard
- Tues 3 October online
- Tues 2 January online (to be moved)
- Tues 2 April (online)

**ACTION:** CLERK - To change 2 January 2023 meeting to 9, 16, 23 or 30 January

**Meeting closed at 4.55pm.**