



## **RE REVIEW DISSEMINATION EVENT: London**

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I shall be saying something about faith schools and about the significance of the RE Review for SACREs.

Let me begin by asking you to look at the inside back to see the list of donors who made the Review possible.

Now let us examine the Foreword from Michael Gove and how significant it is that the Review has his endorsement

He makes the statement that “The modern world needs young people who are sufficiently confident in their own beliefs and values that they can respect the religious and cultural differences of others, and contribute to a cohesive and compassionate society.” Gove’s use of the word ‘compassionate’ is like a trigger word for Muslims and the word ‘compassionate’ is one the most widely used and important names of God, so we can say that by nurturing a spirit of compassion in human being we are encouraging them to reflect an overarching quality of God. This reminds us that an essential element of Religious Education is to awaken the spiritual dynamism in the heart of every human being so that this compassion can help to build the kind of society that Gove speaks.

This document was produced through wide consultations – see the list of REC members on page 2 of the report. The Review included experts, including of course many RE teachers, academics who study religions, members of a wider variety of religious traditions and other consumers and interested parties from various perspectives on RE in school. It should be seen as a thought-provoking and well-supported attempt in the development of religious education in Britain, making this framework something that could be used in many different school contexts- community schools, academies, free schools, independent school, some with a religious character, most not having a religious character.

The REC is a very widely representative body. It is dedicated to raising the profile of RE, improving standards and constantly reviewing ideals and provision in schools

Faith-based schools need to take from this the challenging pedagogy, desire to be seen to stand alongside other disciplines and concern with teacher education. It is a matter of considerable importance for faith schools’ RE syllabi to consider how they should address teaching about the other faiths in Britain. The fact is that there is now a new kind of localism, and RE must learn to flourish within it. What is important is that the RE

curriculum used in all schools enables young people to develop an informed understanding of religions and worldviews. Schools with a religious designation have an important role to play alongside schools without such a designation in this common goal. To understand the world around us we must look through the prism of religion and belief.

'As all minority faiths will attest, the danger of distorting or trivialising our "faiths and practices" is compounded by grossly inadequate preparation to teach them. I cannot urge this point enough that as a teacher in a faith school, that whatever syllabuses we have for RE and whatever the legal position of the subject, what really matters is the training of teachers, both ITT and CPD - the fate of any syllabus lies in their hands. I'm very concerned about how ill equipped many of them are for this role.

The Review (p6) rightly draws attention to the centrality of well-educated specialist teachers in the delivery of good RE. Please do look at the recent Ofsted on RE report which draws attention to teacher training issues and also the APPG report last March entitled, 'RE: The Truth Unmasked'.

All citizens of Britain need to be religiously educated and this is a veritable "civic imperative", given the state of world affairs. Every citizen needs an understanding of the multi dimensional roles played by religions in the lives of people.

Those pupils who come from families committed to a way of life rooted in their faith have the right to expect that their developing personal faith should be given room to mature and be supported rather than undermined by the RE curriculum. Of course this point applies to young people from non-religious backgrounds, i.e. Humanist or other non-religious worldviews should similarly be supported rather than undermined by RE.

The Review provides guidelines for syllabus writers to prevent the particularities of minority faiths and groups within a faith from being obscured or not given sufficient weight to promote understanding by students. For example, Islam according to the Shi'a perspective is regularly misrepresented or ignored and this can upset and confuse Shi'a students in schools, and their parents. Shi'a Islam is the school to which I belong. I know similar things happen with most of the other religions. For example, there were twin girls who went through most of their schooling saying they were Hindu when in fact they were Jain. Whenever they talked about being Jain the teachers assumed this was just a type of Hinduism so in the end the girls gave up and just said they were Hindu when asked.

Syllabus writers need to be careful to strike a good balance between breadth and depth and to think through the progression of a young person's learning about individual religious traditions or non religious worldviews across the whole of their RE experience.

The legal requirement (p14) to give a particular place to Christianity in LA schools and Academies without a religious character is understandable. Moreover, in schools in England that have a religious character other than Christian, we see the need for Christianity to be included within the syllabus at least to the extent necessary for pupils to understand the Christian heritage of Britain and the role still played by Christianity in the

life of the nation; otherwise, can we say that we are educating young people to be citizens of the country today?

New forms of unfair treatment are being reported particularly by Christians. For example, ample evidence points to a greater reported incidence of Christian employees concerned about employer policies and practices in relation to Sunday working. It could be argued that such legislation is a product of a lack of appreciation of the sanctity of Sunday for at least some Christians. Another example is the widely reported difficulty for some Sikhs in the wearing of 'the 5Ks' of their religion.

What does the Review mean for SACREs?

The RE Review has the potential to be very influential within the RE community, but of course as the legislation remains unchanged; just as with the Non Statutory Framework of 2004, it has no legal force and is therefore advisory only. As far as local authority schools are concerned, the agreed syllabus remains binding and NASACRE has prepared a short briefing paper which will be posted on its website with the document. Individual SACREs (like Brent) will have to decide what use to make of the Review in the context of agreed syllabus revision. NASACRE plans to set out these options, but it is the role of our member SACREs to make decisions about which option to take.

The hubs idea for organising professional development regionally is attractive IF IT IS FUNDED.

## **Conclusion**

What becomes ever clearer is that such a curriculum demands a vast knowledge and understanding on the part of the teacher; how are they to be trained? Faith communities have a responsibility to provide high quality and appropriate resources to service the needs of teachers in this discipline; in this way they will help to shape what is taught in the classroom.

The new RE Review and other documents that influence, govern and shape RE will not solve all the problems our subject faces but they can play a supportive role if teachers are properly trained in using them to the benefit of the learners in the classroom. As a believer I put my trust in God and ask God to help the future of RE.