



RE REVIEW DISSEMINATION EVENT:

York

Roger Butler

I would like to begin by expanding a little on what Sarah (Smalley) has just said regarding the membership of the REC. If you open your copies of the document and look at the inside of the front cover you will see a list of bodies that are members of the REC. And there are a couple of points I want to make about that membership.

First, and again echoing Sarah, the REC is a membership body, which is to say that it is not possible to become an individual member, but one is represented at the REC if one is a member of one of the bodies that is a member of the REC. And it is immediately obvious looking at the list that the membership is wide.

Then, it is also worth noting that some of the member bodies are themselves membership bodies so, for example, the Board of Deputies of British Jews represents a very wide band of the Jewish community in England; and similarly with the Muslim Council of Britain, and, on a much smaller scale so it is with the Pagan Federation.

Before, going further it may be useful if I explain my own involvement with this project. The day to day running of the REC is in the hands of its Board of Directors but like most organisations lots of its work is done by committees. Within the REC committees are appointed by the Board. One of those committees is the Curriculum, Assessment and Qualifications Committee (CAQC) and I am a member of that committee. When the project that led to the writing of the document you are holding was first mooted the Board decided that there was a need for a steering group, and that that group should consist of the CAQC plus some additional members.

If you now turn to the inside of the back cover of the document you will see the logos of the organisations who contributed money to the project of which the document is the end product. Again there is something that is, I think, important to say here. Having attended every meeting of the steering group except the very last one, when I was away, those of us on the steering group never knew who the funders of the project were, indeed I only discovered when I looked inside the front cover on the train up from London today. And I am mentioning this because at all times in the deliberations of the steering group the only concern was 'what is best for RE' which is to say 'what is best for the children and young people of all ages in all English schools'. At no point was the group leaned on in any way

other than through open public consultation. At absolutely no time was there the vaguest mention of the fact that such-and-such organisation is a sponsor and therefore we need to ensure that its special interest must be taken account of.

I was specifically asked to outline the process by which the document you are holding came to be. However, I am not going to do that, partly because of time but more especially because that process is set out succinctly on pages, 9 and 10 of the document. However, what I do think is important is to say something about those who took part in the review process and they are named on page 47. The point here is that those of us on the Steering Group were not paid for the work we did. The Project Manager, those who produced the Scoping Report, those on the Expert Panel, the Task Groups, and the Specialist Writers were paid. Every single one of those individuals came to be appointed by a process of open competition, the posts were widely advertised, there were publicly available job descriptions and person specifications, interviews were held, and decisions fairly made. Something else that needs to be said is those who were paid were paid well below the rates they would expect from normal private consultancy work, and whilst I cannot speak for all of them, most of the people involved worked longer than they were paid for and with a level of commitment and dedication above and beyond any reasonable expectation.

Again to repeat something said earlier, when Michael Gove announced his review of the National Curriculum he was petitioned, by the REC, to include a review of religious education as part of the same process and he said “No!” When he was further petitioned to fund, or help fund, an REC review of religious education he again said “No!” More recently he was asked to write a foreword to the completed REC review document, and he said ... “Yes!” And if you turn to page 5 of the document you will see that foreword. There is just one sentence that I want to draw attention to now and that is,

“I welcome Religious education: a national curriculum framework as a national benchmark document for use by all those responsible for the RE curriculum locally. I also welcome the wider Review of RE in England of which it is part.”

What I want to say about that is that, irrespective of anyone’s views of Michael Gove personally or as a Secretary of State for Education, it is hugely significant and beneficial that his signature is on this document. In principle it does not alter the status of the document one iota but in practice there will be many who take this document much more seriously than they otherwise would because it has been endorsed by the Secretary of State for Education.

I would like now to ask you to turn first, and briefly, to page 11, where I think the expression, used often in the Review document, of “a national curriculum framework for RE (NCFRE)” requires some explanation. I was not initially happy with this expression as I feared it might be seen as what lawyers refer to as ‘passing off’, misleadingly suggesting a

product is connected with another more prestigious product. And of course we all know that RE is not part of the National Curriculum. But there are two good justifications for our use of the term in this context and these are:

1. the curriculum framework contained in this document is presented in the format that will be used for the subjects of the new National Curriculum, so teachers in schools will be able to plan their work using the same style of documentation as they use for the subjects of the National Curriculum.
2. the framework is designed to be sufficiently flexible such that it will be suitable for use in every school in England, community schools and academies; schools with a religious character and those without.

Now, and finally, would you turn to page 18, the first page that has subject content. Here there are some points that I will make hurriedly.

You will notice that in the first line of the text above the table a reference to “religions and worldviews”. For many years now lots of agreed syllabuses, and most classroom teachers, have accepted that we cannot teach RE as if atheists and agnostics have nothing to contribute to the subject. It is likely that most RE teachers will welcome the fact that the place of such worldviews within the curriculum space that is RE is formally and clearly acknowledged.

From the word ‘worldviews’ you can follow the footnote to the bottom of the page and see that “good practice should enable pupils to study Christianity and at least one other example of a religion or worldview through key stage 1 in a coherent way.”

At key stages 2 and 3 it is asserted that students should study Christianity and at least two other traditions in a coherent way throughout the key stage.

What is to be noticed here is that if syllabus writers think it possible and desirable to teach about more traditions coherently throughout key stages they can. But also, there may be justifications for devoting time to looking at other religious traditions, always coherently but sometimes for a relatively short space of time rather than throughout an entire key stage.

Here I must stop.