



## RE REVIEW DISSEMINATION EVENT:

### York

#### Sue Holmes

Good evening everyone. I am an independent Education Consultant. I have worked in Yorkshire schools – both church and community - for more than 25 years, as teacher and RE subject leader, as an assessment moderator for East Riding Council and latterly a Project Manager for RE on the advisory team, overseeing the development of our last three agreed syllabuses from 1996 onwards.

We are very lucky in Yorkshire and Humber to have an excellent RE network, involving teachers and many others - faith communities, interfaith groups, initial teacher training providers, elected members, advisers and consultants. When Humberside demised in 1996, we kept the local expertise in RE and we still work and train together, to support teachers and students in schools and colleges, though you will know all too well how the landscape in which we are operating has changed out of all recognition in recent years. The RE Review finds that rapid changes in education have created positive **opportunities** for RE as well as challenges. We now have academies interspersed with free schools, providing opportunities for innovative thinking within 'a new kind of localism'. So in the words of the Review: "RE must learn to flourish within it."

Colleagues on our old patch were made redundant after we launched our last joint syllabus in 2011, but we're still here! We surely mirror the situation in so many other areas of the country. The difference is, we now work as independent consultants who have found it increasingly hard to see how best to assure future support for schools and advise our Standing Advisory Councils (the SACREs) with their ever-decreasing budgets. We have been awaiting the findings of the RE Review to frame our thinking for the next curriculum cycle as we begin to revisit our syllabus next year.

I see this as a seminal document that pulls together much of what we already know, already have concerns about and are already aiming to address. Hopefully now we can do just that. We have to!

The RE Review has to be a rallying cry - for all those in the RE world to work together and use the 'opportunities and challenges' identified by the report, to set the scene for the next 10 years. All credit to those who have driven this through with a passion and a strength of purpose that other subjects would die for – but then RE is different, as we all know! And thank goodness it is... the only subject to be locally determined, the only subject that is core for all pupils from rising 5 to rising 19... and the only subject to have a committee that

determines a local curriculum and is responsible for monitoring the outcomes. But it's here that RE struggles in the current education climate.

Some SACREs have no budget and some are relying on neighbours to carry them along. Others have to make presentations to Overview & Scrutiny Committees before they can be assured of any money to continue their work. Some feel they are hanging on by the skin of their teeth, but they are still there! The RE Review, together with *RE: The Truth Unmasked* and the Ofsted long report *Realising the Potential*, provides evidence and offers possible solutions that can only aid our cause.

Local SACRE members welcome the National Curriculum Framework for RE, as we look towards our next syllabus. In 2009-10 our Humberside team enjoyed working with a band of other local authorities drawn together by QCA. The Qualifications and Curriculum Agency was a quango dismantled by the coalition government, but together we worked to prepare a common framework for individual syllabus reviews. Hence local schools are already using the same areas of enquiry as the programmes of study in the NCFRE; they were agreed in discussion with QCA. The SACRE will now look forward to taking assessment a stage further to find particular ways of 'describing achievement' in RE, using the 5 core principles of assessment, as outlined on page 64.

Going back to basics, I want to highlight the four stated *Aims of the NCFRE* on page 11 as the starting point:

To 'provide a basis for developing locally agreed syllabuses' (Aim III.) and also to 'support RE... in schools of a religious character.' (Aim IV.)

We must remember that the main issue identified by the Review is the inconsistent provision of good-quality RE. This is backed up in *Realising the Potential*. So Aim II is over-arching: 'Promote high-quality RE which will inspire young people in the years ahead'. That must surely underpin all we aspire to do.

John Keast points out in his Afterword that given inconsistent provision, then teacher training, development and support are key to the solution. Teachers' access to CPD must avoid being a 'postcode lottery' and be made more accessible. Ongoing professional support for RE teachers needs to be more robust to ensure the 'rigorous model' of RE demanded by Michael Gove in his Foreword.

So what are the implications for SACREs? As a key audience and the body with responsibility for local RE through an agreed syllabus, SACRE must sit up and take note. Our SACREs are finding they agree with the recommendation on page 35; to summarise, in principle local determination is good and stakeholders should have ownership of their local syllabus by contributing something to the understanding of their faith. We would hope that our free schools and academies will follow the NCFRE and choose to use the local syllabus and an enquiry-based model. Why reinvent the wheel?

Page 14 gives us the Aims of RE, to ensure that all pupils:

- A. Know about & understand...
- B. Express ideas and insights...
- C. Gain and deploy the skills...

commensurate with their key stage. Content is exemplified, to be locally added.

In the wider context outlined on page 29, SACRE works to commend the unique contribution that RE makes in respect of children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, for all schools aiming to be Good or Outstanding.

I invite you to start discussing the recommendations of the Review with your local SACRE members. My colleagues agree wholeheartedly with the Review that the capacity of SACREs and LAs to develop, implement and monitor their agreed syllabus is becoming increasingly compromised. As others are pointing out, part of the problem is that SACREs are a remnant of a previous age. A locally defined RE syllabus, monitored and supported by local stakeholders, came from an era of local authority control when education was locally determined - but we are now in an era when education structure, policy and content is either controlled from the centre or not controlled at all. Just as we'll never return to the 'old' days, it also seems *unlikely* that SACREs will in future have any *effective* role simply ensuring compliance.

However, precisely because of the fragmented nature of the education system, particularly in a context where RE is considered by some to be 'less important', the role of SACREs in supporting the teaching of RE is actually *more* important. We therefore like the Review Recommendation number 4 on page 38, to establish regional 'hubs' as beacons of excellence and focal points of engagement and collaboration, in the greater interests of RE. Hubs would indeed offer partial solutions to the other issues addressed in the Review, by linking professional advisers and consultants, local universities, schools, SACREs, Diocesan Boards of Education and faith communities to, quoting from page 38:

- facilitate the exchange of information between teachers, policy makers and researchers
- provide support for specialist and non-specialist teachers of RE and SACREs alike, and
- become regional centres for CPD (real or virtual) bringing together local expertise to support local RE.

I like the idea that a 'hub structure' can run parallel with the existing 'settlement' for RE, so we can hopefully *retain* what's strong, whilst supporting what is lacking. There is a part for everyone to play. Hubs restructure RE at national level but bring the focus down to our local, regional community.

So, I invite you to consider the questions set out in Set 4 on page 39.

I think that Question 4c is a key one:

*Should hubs just be for RE professionals or should they enable wider participation?*

For me, we are missing a trick unless all those actively involved in local faith matters are included. Only with everyone on board can we give RE the profile it deserves in our society.

I sincerely hope that we decide to work together in our Yorkshire hub and I invite you to come back to us with your thoughts as to how we can start to make it happen.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to initiate that thinking.