



A reference handbook for SACRE members

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Introduction

Joining your local SACRE

This is a handbook for all SACRE members, new or experienced. It is designed to:

- help SACREs become more effective through the informed participation of their members
- introduce you to the context and work of a SACRE
- be a point of reference

As a member of a SACRE you are serving your local community in an important way. Whichever group you represent, your active participation makes a valuable contribution to the quality of religious education and collective worship that pupils experience in schools in your local area and also contributes to the coherence of your local community.

What is this handbook for?

The handbook is designed to be a point of reference for all SACRE members, and in particular to be of interest and support to those who are new to the role.

It:

- explains the work of a SACRE and the roles of its individual members;
- will help you to understand the nature and purpose of religious education (RE) and collective worship;
- explains clearly what the law says about RE and collective worship;
- will help you to work within your SACRE to support and encourage local schools to ensure high standards in RE and collective worship;

It is also designed to help SACREs become more effective through the informed participation of their members.

SECTION 1

SACREs: duties, roles and responsibilities

What is a SACRE?

The acronym SACRE stands for: **Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education**

Why is there a SACRE?

Every local authority (LA) has to have a SACRE by law. It is often the Children's Services division of the LA that takes responsibility for making sure SACRE works well and SACRE's work is related to schools and their curriculum.

What does a SACRE do?

There is no other group anywhere else like the SACRE; it is unique. The law says that RE must be taught in all schools and a SACRE's role is to advise its local authority on what needs to be done to improve religious education (RE) and collective worship for schools in its area. This is because RE is not part of the National Curriculum; it is a local responsibility. Through the SACRE, local communities and teachers have the opportunity to influence and support what pupils learn in RE.

The SACRE's main function is to advise the local authority on matters related to the religious education, which follows the locally agreed syllabus, and on collective worship in schools.

It:

- can require the LA to review its agreed syllabus;
- must consider applications from a head teacher that the school be allowed to modify the 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' requirement for collective worship. (This is known as a determination.);
- must publish an annual report of its work.

What else can a SACRE do?

A SACRE's broad role is to support good RE and collective worship within its schools by:

- giving advice on ways of teaching agreed syllabus RE, including the choice of teaching materials;
- monitoring schools' provision for RE and collective worship as well as the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) of pupils;
- advising the LA on the provision of training for teachers in RE;
- considering complaints about the provision and delivery of religious education or collective worship referred to it by the LA.

Assessment and testing

SACREs should monitor school approaches to assessing pupils' progress in RE. They should also be aware of the uptake of external examinations in RE and religious studies and monitor or review the standards achieved.

RE and SMSC

SACREs should be aware of the contribution RE and collective worship can make to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Members of Groups A and B have the opportunity to indicate awareness that pupils should have about religious beliefs and the influence these have on the formation of attitudes and values.

SACREs may

- monitor good practice in the delivery of the agreed syllabus in a range of ways and take note of any difficulties;
- disseminate good practice in the teaching of RE;
- review provision for in-service training and development;
- receive school inspection reports or sections of these reports.

SECTION 2

SACRE membership, composition, group representation, roles and responsibilities

Who attends the SACRE meetings?

A SACRE is set up to represent a balance of all the interests of the local community. You are likely to find elected councillors, representatives of faith communities and members of the education community (including teachers and head teachers) at a SACRE meeting. There may also be people representing teacher training in RE and local Academies.

SACRE members join one of four groups as a full member or if you have been co-opted to serve on SACRE, you will not be formally linked to any of the groups.

How is the membership of a SACRE decided?

The structure of the SACRE is defined by law. It is made up of four groups, sometimes referred to by some SACREs as committees.

Details such as the specific numbers of members in each of the groups will usually be set out in the individual SACRE's constitution. These are frequently decided by the LA, depending on local circumstances and in collaboration with the organisations and communities represented.

The composition of a SACRE

Group A	The Christian denominations and other religions and their denomination, reflecting the principal religions of the area.
Group B	The Church of England
Group C	Teacher and head teacher associations and often others representing education interests
Group D	The Local Authority

On the rare occasions when a formal vote is required, each of these groups has equal voting rights; there is one vote per group.

Co-options

SACREs may co-opt other members who have a particular expertise or represent a small local faith or belief community. Many bring in a Humanist representative, currently technically prevented by law from becoming full members of Group A. Co-opted members do not have voting rights.

Who are the representatives?

Group A

This group is made up of representatives of Christian denominations, (other than the Church of England). It may include, for example, representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Churches, the Free Churches (e.g. Baptist, Methodist, United Reformed Church, Pentecostal, The Salvation Army) and The Society of Friends. It also has representatives from other faiths in the area, e.g. Buddhists, Baha'is, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Parsees, Sikhs.

The make-up of Group A will vary from SACRE to SACRE as by law, it should reflect the diversity of the various faith communities in the locality.

Group B

This is made up of representatives nominated by the local Church of England diocese or dioceses.

Group C

The members of this group are usually representatives of professional teacher associations. It is usual for there to be representation also from the head teacher associations. It is the local authority that decides which associations will be invited to be represented. They will usually approach the teacher unions, but local associations of RE teachers may also be asked to provide a representative. Sometimes someone from a local teacher training establishment is also invited to be a member of this group, or someone representing the interests of local Academies or Free schools.

Group D

It is the local authority's responsibility to provide their own representatives for this committee. Usually these are elected members or other political nominees and also a representative of the Director of Children's Services. The LA may wish to have all parties and viewpoints from across the political spectrum represented on the SACRE. In some LAs, a representative of school governors may also be in this group.

What will be my responsibilities as a SACRE member?

As a SACRE member, you should be committed to education and to respecting the views of others. You have a responsibility to support children's learning in RE and collective worship, and to work for the highest standards in both. You should represent the perspective of your community or sponsoring group in the work of SACRE and communicate the interests and the work of the SACRE back to them. You should be able to network effectively in order to contribute to the relationship and dialogue between the SACRE, your sponsorship group, your local community and schools. The specific opportunities you have will also depend on the interest group you represent. Remember that how you present yourself and work with others will be seen as reflecting on the values and ethos of the group you represent.

This is a unique opportunity to serve your local community and influence the attitudes of others more widely. Social cohesion is recognised as being important to our society, now and in the future. The effective SACRE is in itself a model of social cohesion in which every member is heard and respected, even when there are many different positions or opinions on particular issues under discussion. In an effective SACRE potential conflict is managed harmoniously. By the same token, SACREs have the potential to promote social cohesion more widely, in schools and in the local community.

Do we all have the same responsibilities?

Everyone shares the responsibility to put children's' learning before personal interest.

Members of **Groups A and B**, each of whom represents a faith community within the locality:

- should present and foster a positive image of their religion, so that negative stereotyping is avoided. They must also make clear any grounds on which they may differ from each other, whilst showing respect for each other's viewpoints, since such convictions and mutual understanding both lie at the heart of effective classroom RE;
- can create opportunities within SACRE meetings to raise awareness of issues of sensitivity in the teaching of RE to the children of their faith community, and also in the presentation of their particular faith and religious tradition within school RE, always taking an educational approach;
- should appreciate the difficulties schools are facing in the area, support their best endeavours, and act, where necessary, as a link between schools and the faith communities;
- should be aware of other local minority faith communities not represented amongst their number. Some SACREs address this by co-opting representatives from these communities.

Members of **Group C**, representing teacher associations and education, should:

- have a real and positive interest in RE in primary, secondary or special schools;
- ensure that the needs of schools and teachers are considered by the SACRE in their discussions;
- provide the SACRE with information about the context in which RE is taught in the schools in the local authority;
- ensure that the bodies they represent are informed about the work of the SACRE and about RE in local schools;
- create opportunities for other teachers to learn more about the work of the SACRE and give them the opportunity to have their views expressed at SACRE meetings;
- consult their colleagues on matters of particular importance to the work of the SACRE;
- can bring 'public' dimensions to the debate about RE provision and support.

Members of **Group D**, representing the local authority:

- can bring to the meeting the breadth of educational issues and concerns which elected members are wrestling with, and place RE's role within it;
- can be the supporters of RE within the various committees and structures of the local authority;
- can give political support to enable locally determined RE to flourish within each LA, including advisory support etc.;
- can appreciate the issues raised by a multi-faith, multi-cultural society for the education of children in RE, and reflect these issues in support of RE in the relevant council structures, including Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet, etc.;
- can particularly support the efforts of the SACRE to be effective through publicising its work with fellow elected members and officers of the local authority, ensuring it is taken seriously and is appropriately funded and supported.

SECTION 3

Religious education and collective worship

What is a locally agreed syllabus?

The locally agreed syllabus is the statutory document for RE in the local authority. It sets out what should be taught to pupils in all key stages and the standards expected of them at the end of each key stage. It is produced by an agreed syllabus conference (ASC).

The agreed syllabus has to be reviewed every five years. If, at some other time, a majority of the groups of the SACRE asks the LA in writing to reconsider its agreed syllabus, it must convene a conference for that purpose. *Education Act 1996, Chapter III*

What is the Agreed Syllabus Conference?

An agreed syllabus conference (ASC) is a statutory body brought together in order to produce an agreed syllabus for RE. It is a separate legal entity from a SACRE. An ASC:

- has the same committee structure as the SACRE;
- can be made up of SACRE members but need not be so. There is no provision for co-opted members.

In some LAs, the Chair of the ASC is appointed by the local authority whilst in others, the ASC chooses its own Chair. The LA's responsibility to convene the ASC includes the duty to provide funds and support for its work.

RE and collective worship in school

Type of school	Religious education	Collective worship
Community schools	is taught according to the local authority's agreed syllabus and comes within SACRE's remit.	follows the 1996 Education Act and is 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'.
Voluntary controlled (VC) schools	is taught according to the local authority's agreed syllabus and comes within SACRE's remit. ²	reflects the Christian character of the school.
Voluntary aided (VA) schools	is determined by the governors in accordance with the trust deed and reflects the religious character of the school. ¹	reflects the Christian character of the school.
Foundation schools without a religious character	is taught according to the local authority's agreed syllabus.	follows the 1996 Education Act and is 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'.
Foundation schools with a religious character	is taught according to the local authority's agreed syllabus. ²	reflects the Christian character of the school.
Trust schools	is taught according to the local authority's agreed syllabus.	follows the 1996 Education Act and is 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'.
Academies	must be part of the curriculum, but is taught according to the school's finding agreement.	must be offered to every pupil every day, but provision is determined by the schools funding agreement.

What should I know about religious education?

Religious education is a statutory element of the school curriculum although it is not part of the national curriculum; it is therefore part of every pupil's entitlement.

Agreed syllabus RE does not seek to nurture religious faith, but 'provokes challenging questions about the ultimate meaning and purpose of life, beliefs about God, the self and the nature of reality, issues of right and wrong and what it means to be human'.

What should I know about collective worship?

The schools where collective worship comes within the remit of the SACRE are required to provide a daily act of collective worship the majority of which would be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'. This means that it 'reflects the broad traditions of Christian belief without being distinctive of any particular Christian denomination'. It does not mean it has to be exclusively Christian. It must, however, be educational and appropriate to the age, aptitude and family background of pupils. When done well, collective worship provides an excellent opportunity for schools to contribute to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and to the ethos of the school community.

Education Act 1996, Chapter III

In relation to collective worship, SACREs should :

- receive inspection reports, noting any references to the quality of collective worship in the context of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development;
- monitor the quality of provision where possible and share good practice;
- offer advice to head teachers and governing bodies, including where there may be difficulties.

Many SACREs produce their own statements and advice on collective worship. The SACRE may also be involved in providing training to teachers, head teachers and governors or other people who are involved in leading collective worship in school as visitors.

What should I know about determinations?

Schools apply for a determination if they feel that the proportion of collective worship which reflects the broad traditions of Christian belief as required by law is not appropriate for their pupils. That does not mean they do not have to offer collective worship at all.

The determination procedure allows this requirement to be lifted in respect of some or all of the pupils in a school.

They are called determinations because SACRE 'determines' whether the case being made in an application to modify the law for all or a group of pupils in a school is appropriate.

Applications for determinations are made to the SACRE by the head teacher of any community school after consultation with the school's governing body.

Determinations are only possible for schools that do not have a religious character. Many SACREs have an agreed process to enable such an application to take place.

The SACRE should review each determination every five years.

Parents' rights

Parents have the right, on conscience grounds, to withdraw their children, in any school, from RE and collective worship. Sixth form students may withdraw themselves from collective worship.

Parents also have certain rights with regard to the provision of RE in different categories of school. (However, these rights are rarely exercised.)

- In these schools^{1*}, parents can opt for their children to receive Agreed Syllabus RE.
- In these schools^{2*}, parents can opt for their children to receive RE in accordance with the religious character of the school.

In community schools and foundation schools without a religious character, where parents ask to withdraw their child from religious education alternative RE provision for that child can be made elsewhere by the parents.

The school continues to have responsibility for ensuring any pupil withdrawn from RE is supervised and safe.

(*See RE and collective worship in school table, page 9)

Religious teaching from within the faith community

SACRE members should be aware that some pupils will be formally receiving teaching about their own religion from their parents or through attendance at classes at or sponsored by their place of worship. The purpose of this teaching will differ from that of the religious education delivered in their schools, and the approach to learning may differ quite significantly from that in school.

There is a clear distinction between this religious nurture, which is the responsibility of the family and community, and religious education, by nature an open and explorative activity, appropriate in schools. It is important that the home and community background of the pupils is recognised and respected in school, but also that the educational approach is understood to promote reflection on faith and belief stances. SACREs might consider how they will support schools and communities in understanding each other's different roles and ensuring that any potential tension is creative rather than threatening.

SECTION 4

Local Authorities and SACREs

What are the local authority's responsibilities regarding its SACRE?

Every local authority has a duty to ensure that:

- there is a SACRE;
- all four groups are represented on it;
- there is an agreed syllabus, reviewed every five years;
- support is in place to enable SACRE to fulfil its duties, which includes providing appropriate clerking and specialist advice;
- it takes note of and responds to advice from the SACRE.

Does SACRE's remit cover all schools in the local authority?

The answer to that question is no. SACRE's responsibility covers the majority of schools, but there are some exemptions, depending entirely on the category of school. Some schools have a specific religious character and these are either voluntary aided (VA) ie: voluntary schools, aided by the LA but controlled by a religious body, or voluntary controlled (VC) ie: voluntary schools, controlled by the local authority and aided by a religious body; the difference, from SACRE's perspective, is crucial. There are also some non-religious schools for which SACRE has no responsibility, including new academies (*See RE and collective worship in school table, page 9*).

How does a SACRE make its work known?

1. Local Authorities

The relationship between SACREs, local authority officers and elected members is important. SACRE's proceedings need to be reported to the appropriate council committee in the LA where decisions are made about the education service and schools. The agreed minutes of meetings should be brought to their attention and the SACRE's Annual Report should be formally presented. Where such a person is in post, the local RE adviser is a vital source of professional guidance, support, advice, information, and practical expertise for the SACRE. His or her attendance at SACRE meetings is essential.

Local authority representatives on SACRE also have a role in ensuring SACRE's work, and any issues of concern it raises, are brought to the attention of the relevant sections of the council and the local authority.

2. Schools

Many schools seem unaware of the responsibilities and activities of their local SACRE. The specialist expertise on different faiths represented on a SACRE may be a source of advice to schools, which is reliably representative of the religion or denomination concerned. Some SACREs also hold their meetings in schools where they can meet and hear from teachers working in that school who have responsibility for RE or collective worship.

3. Faith communities

Sometimes SACREs hold meetings in local places of worship to build relationships. Individual faith community members have a responsibility to inform those they represent about the activities of the SACRE. They should also be available to receive the views of their community to feed into SACRE discussions.

It is good practice to send the SACRE annual report to the faith communities represented on the SACRE. It should also routinely be sent to local libraries and be on the agenda of the local Inter Faith Group or Faith Forum.

4. General public

SACRE meetings are by law open to the general public and notice of all meetings should be given, usually on the council's website. In the event of anyone requesting them, relevant documents should be made available.

SECTION 5

Frequently asked questions for new SACRE members

How often does a SACRE meet?

There is no hard and fast rule about the number of meetings a SACRE should hold each year. It must, however, meet sufficient times to fulfil its statutory duties. Almost all SACREs meet at least three times a year, i.e. once a term, and some are more active and meet more frequently. Sometimes working groups made up of SACRE members meet between full meetings to move forward specific areas of the SACRE's work.

Will I be asked to chair the meeting?

The law does not state how the Chair of a SACRE should be appointed. The local authority can appoint the Chair or it can allow the SACRE to elect the Chair from amongst its members. As a member of the SACRE you could, therefore, be appointed Chair of the SACRE, but not against your will!

Will I be asked to take the minutes?

The local authority's responsibility to set up a SACRE carries with it a duty to fund it and make sure it can function efficiently. This means the LA should provide a clerk for the SACRE who would attend and minute each meeting. The clerk is usually the point of contact for SACRE matters within the local authority.

If I'm not there, will it matter?

Your SACRE has a right to expect a level of commitment from its members that is reflected in regular attendance at meetings. When this is not possible, it is common practice and polite convention to send apologies for absence.

Some SACREs invite members from whom they have not received apologies for non-attendance on three consecutive occasions to confirm their interest in continuing to serve. Some SACREs allow members who cannot attend to send someone else on their behalf.

Remember that when you are not able to be present no-one else will be able to provide your special knowledge in any discussions or make connections to your specialist networks to support the SACRE's work.

Rules about quoracy are usually laid down in the individual SACRE's constitution, but generally, at each meeting:

- each committee should have a least one member present;
- decisions cannot be made unless there is a least one person present to cast the committee's single vote;
- co-opted members do not have a vote.

This applies particularly to meetings at which decisions are to be made.