

Adoption of the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education's recommendations concerning the Syllabus

The Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) is perhaps one of the more obscure council committees, but like the Planning Committee, it is a statutory body required by law, and its functions are regulated by government. It is not quorate without the presence of council representatives, one of which I have had the privilege of being since 2015, when the Syllabus was last revised. At that time I brought the report to the appropriate Scrutiny Panel for their attention but I am very pleased that this time it is coming to Cabinet. I have always argued that RE is too important for it to be left to officers to 'sign off' in a small office on the top floor of the Guildhall. I want the Council to own the syllabus. SACRE members, especially the Secretary, have worked hard on it, introducing a few minor alterations and improvements as a result of feedback from RE teachers since 2015, and getting new resource materials written. The syllabus must by law reflect the spirituality of the local population. Unfortunately we have not succeeded in introducing a module on black religious experience, which would build on school visits to Fairfield House and the legacy of Haile Selassie, and on the experience of black led churches in Bath and Bristol. With that caveat, I commend the syllabus to cabinet.

Some members here may have had very negative experiences of RE in schools. The syllabus is an important tool in raising standards, but I hope there will be sufficient money in the Budget to allow SACRE to continue offering training to RE teachers- for example as we did on how to teach the Holocaust, or on Islamophobia, to get training ourselves at national and regional conferences, and to monitor our local schools. One issue noted in our Annual Report just published is schools failing to advertise the right of parents since 1944 to withdraw their children from RE and school assemblies. We monitor this, and school websites generally. Please don't withdraw yourselves. With rising intolerance, tribalism and extremism we need RE so that children value diversity, explore their own beliefs and appreciate the underlying values which hold society together.

Dr Eleanor Jackson

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