

Charles Clark at the NASACRE AGM 2015

Introduction: Big time of reconsideration for RE. Professor of politics, not a man of faith. Gov doesn't understand well enough the place of religion in public life. SACREs work for links between education and faith communities.

Has authored with Linda Woodhead a book about relationship between religion and schools eg does present legislative framework work now in contemporary context of changed religious life and practices; also role of LAs having been diminished. Started from question about whether the current framework is the right one to promote good RE. RE has never been more important than it is now – just listen to the daily news! Students can't be prepared to live in the modern world without an understanding of religions and having a chance to consider their own responses. His experience is that religion has an importance in the lives and thinking of young people.

Questions addressed in the book: (also covers CW, admissions, faith schools etc)

Should RE be a statutory requirement at all? They maintain it is important to retain it because of the need for young people to understand religion and think about it in the formation of themselves. If dropped they think this would be very damaging. Should it be part of the NC? Sceptical that its inclusion would be helpful but it is a question for consideration.

What should the subject be called? RI/RE? Reasonable to have right to withdraw if RI. In Scotland it's Religious and Moral Education. Interesting balance between instruction, formation and education (*this compares with a debate within the National Society about whether the purpose of RE should be evangelism, faith nurture or academic study!!!*)

Should it be right through the school curriculum - to end of sixth form? Their conclusion is that 14-19 curriculum in schools and colleges is in a mess. He had supported the implementation of the Tomlinson Report for a more coherent approach. Real question about whether should be part of all KSs

National or local determination of the structure of the subject? His own family move from Hackney to Norwich highlighted the dislocation of different syllabuses. Not therefore convinced about different content but is convinced about the importance of local SACREs in building link between religion and schools/education. Limited support in some areas means the current situation is not acceptable. Either change or make the current structure work. (*CStG hub initiative potentially undermines SACREs*). IF a national structure, how will local SACREs work? The content should be influential in all schools faith/independent etc. because important that all children have a well-rounded understanding. Delicate situation to manage and very controversial. BUT cannot be off the agenda.

Roles of SACREs if properly resourced? Whether national or local syllabus it should be reviewed every 5-7 years and there should be local debate about how this would be worked out in local context. There should be more engagement between schools and local faith communities to develop understanding (*absolutely our hub project*). He suggests local SACREs should be driving this forward through visitors from communities into schools and students visiting faith communities/places of worship to implement syllabus so it's a breathing living learning. Supports the idea that non-theistic systems of beliefs should be compulsorily part of RE. Community cohesion is important and schools need to be properly resourced to support this and this can be promoted and driven by local SACREs. It should have revised weight of importance. This is particularly important in our society where many people are alienated and frustrated by how issues are not resolved.

For parents who do want their children to have RI, SACREs could help them find and access this.

Need to question the continuing right of withdrawal. Sensitive issue but our contemporary context raises this as a serious issue. However, how this sits with human rights of parents and children makes this very complex.

The status quo is not an acceptable situation. There are too many criticisms of the state of RE in our schools. The 1944 settlement needs to be revisited – relationship of religion and schools. This re-evaluation needs to be addressed early in the life of this new government.

(CC suggests either proving the current system cannot work OR providing sufficient support to ensure SACREs do work. Later discussion also pointed out that to be effective local SACREs need to have decision-making powers as well as funding.)

Post-presentation discussion

- Good idea to approach local MP. CC thinks this area will be increasingly discussed in response to reports coming out. Need to contact new MPs to highlight APPG and find out how it is going forward without Stephen Lloyd. CC suggests limiting this initially to sharing situation in local community.
- Withdrawal can only be removed when it can be clear to everyone what is being taught. Can't be achieved quickly but important that extremists should not be able to opt their children out in order to avoid them studying a balanced RE curriculum.
- Group structure of SACREs needs to be looked at - Group B v Group A. CC raised issue of Humanist representation. Suggests rigid divides between churches and faiths is not so relevant today. Challenged by how the structure of SACREs could be reformed in a sensible way so this has not been covered in his book.
- If there is a national framework, decisions about implementation need to be made locally reflecting local context.
- CC promised immediate access to electronic copy of his book when it's published.
- Referred to value of a SACRE for every subject.
- Not supportive of inclusion of Humanists due to reduction in church attendance. Not just focused on Humanists but a wide range of religious and non-religious faith systems and beliefs should be included because fluidity between is more likely these days and children have these broad interests.
- Name of the subject – just 'religious' is not enough these days but no simple answer about what it should be.
- CPD is very important to make sure teachers have relevant and up to date understanding.
- Mismatch between RE and insisting on CW – CC's book raises issues about CW and future options.

All italics are my additions – not what CC said