
NASACRE conference write up 18.5.26

Introduction

The conference was formally opened by Bill Moore, NASACRE chair. He welcomed delegates from around the country and spoke about why Liverpool is a special place for him.

The conference then did an interactive menti-meter task – results to delegates answers can be found on our NASACRE webpage for 2026 conference <https://nasacre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Menti-meter-results-NASACRE-conf-2026.pptx>

Rejoicing in difference – Prof Vanessa Ogden

We welcomed Prof Vanessa Ogden as one of our 2 keynote speakers

Prof Ogden trained as an RE teacher, has been in profession for 32 years and has had many challenges in the profession. She has worked hard in an RE department and worked hard to bring in SACRE's to help teach and support RE. She showcased the work of RE departments and bolstered the importance of the department to senior leadership. For her, SACREs were very helpful in arguing the case for RE. She invited visitors to come into her school and the senior leaders were impressed by how many people came into school. Over 5 years they saw real change in the quality of RE.

There is a nation building role that schools have which is also reflective of their local communities – economics, politics, transport etc, as well as wider geo politics.

This nation building role is really important for schools and is vitally important given social fault lines that are exposed by antisemitism and anti-Muslim hostility. We have to respond in a way that is active and faces this threat down.

Parsons and Watson 1993 – “It is the integrity of the world that is at stake. By the word integrity I mean the organic unity of society, a unity that may as certainly be disrupted as enriched by religious and cultural diversity, especially if the educational implications are not understood, or simply ignored”.

SACRE's, RE and Building social cohesion – RE is an academic subject, it is high quality and it is essential to provide a rich knowledge of diversity and difference in religious traditions. We need to understand this diversity and difference. Very important to have engagement with communities and places of worship and to have visitors coming into schools from these places. Prof Ogden has done this herself with visitors. The visits and interactions make great RE and this has stood out for children that Prof Ogden asked. SACRE's being leaders of place is important for RE and schools – SACRE's need to understand this. SACRE's can model how to live well together and again this is important.

SACREs support RE as an academic subject in the curriculum - the foundation for social harmony comes from religious literacy pupils gain in religion and belief traditions. SACREs can become anchors for social harmony.

RE has three areas:

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1. Substantive knowledge – matters of central importance for religious and non-religious traditions. Substantive Knowledge is about pupils knowing about organised traditions and individual ways of living and religion and belief locally, nationally and globally.
 2. Disciplinary knowledge - ways of knowing and scholarly tools.
 3. Personal knowledge – how you apply this knowledge, how you learn to apply and navigate religion and belief in the world with others.

Great RE, supported by SACREs builds pupils confidence in identity, belief and self-expression – understanding your own involvement in the beliefs you hold and your own identity can lead to feeling positive about difference and diversity – as you have your voice and can use it.

The role of SACREs in RE – Prof Ogden’s vision is for a society which rejoices in pluralism and diversity. It embraces human reciprocity which rejects the harms of hate and brings people together. It contributes towards a unified confident, resilient, democratic nation, able to withstand world change and remain true to its values.

She spoke about a way of seeing this is through the idea of one song, with many different voices in harmony. This is tied to the mission of helping to build a better society.

Prof Ogden said thank you to SACREs for all they do and asked for SACREs help as the RISE regional director in London and lead for the other regions across the country.

Deborah Weston – Update on the CaAR proposals for RE to be in the NC

Deborah is currently chair of the REC policy unit, working on all sorts of policy initiatives. She highlighted that RE is under threat – GCSE numbers are on the way down, some SACREs don’t meet or find it hard to be quorate, some schools don’t offer RE at KS4, even in some primary schools RE is diminishing. She talked about the govt response to the CaAR report and the need for a clear, shared position from the sector on the future of RE.

The groups involved with the response to the CaAR report were the expert advisory group, a religion and belief reference group, a teacher reference group, lead drafters & young ambassadors, as well as a legal reference group. She has been very proud of the community in helping this happen and being willing to compromise even with very wide-ranging views - she has been really impressed. The DfE have also been really grateful for the excellent collaboration, and is clear on the importance of the subject and the thoughtful and detailed work that has come out from the CaAR work. They look forward to working collectively with the sector. The letter sent to Katie Freeman who gave the minister letters from children was shown to delegates which had had a very positive response from Bridget Phillipson MP, the Secretary of State for Education.

There has been no public announcement yet on RE in the NC. All subjects are being reviewed. It is the intention that all national curriculum subjects will be sent out for public consultation so RE will be part of this if it is accepted. Deborah talked through how a bill becomes law in the UK for our awareness and stated that moving RE into the National Curriculum requires primary legislation, the last time RE needed this was in 1988.

The summary of the roles and responsibilities of local councillors on a SACRE (produced by the REC, NATRE & NASACRE) is on the NASACRE website here [REPU-infographic-for-new-councillors-on-SACREs-100526.png \(1536x1024\)](#)

Delegates were given time on their tables to write a question or comment to put to Deborah.

Questions from the audience and answers:

4. What will the role of SACREs be if RE is in the Nation Curriculum (NC)?

The proposed programmes of study are a high-level document. A decision needs to be made for it to go out for public consultation. Prof Ogden and her team have put together a draft programme of study and it has been submitted to the Secretary of State for Education. The document is designed to be flexible, so it is likely that most of the RE materials that SACREs have produced to support their Agreed Syllabus will be relevant.

5. What is happening about GCSE reforms, so many schools just teach about Christianity, Judaism and Islam at GCSE and nothing else?

The RE Council (REC) has put together another group on GCSE reform and as part of this, they have been trying to get a consensus statement together to support the DfE in this. One of the suggestions in this document aims to secure a better balance between breadth and depth in GCSE. More on that soon, but NASACRE is involved. If RE goes in the NC then that would need influence reform at GCSE and A Level for RS.

6. What has been NASACRE's role in the consultation period on RE reforms?

They have been included as part of the REC Faith and Belief group and have also had several meetings with Prof Ogden. They have been able to put forward communications from SACREs we have received into what we have raised with government and with Prof Ogden.

7. What is happening with collective Worship (CW)?

The DfE is also revising and looking at CW at the same time as RE and GCSE reform. NASACRE have offered our support to help with any reforms.

8. What is the timeline for any potential changes if RE goes into the NC?

The timeline is short. 2027 is the published date for the new updated NC and then there is a year before classrooms implement this. Deborah has been told that the legal timetable is not impossible.

9. Will NC inclusion of RE change the law around withdrawal?

There is the inclusion of the phrase "objective, critical and pluralistic" in the wording of the RE draft programmes of study, reflecting the wording required for RE under European human rights law. This may mean that in the future the right of withdrawal is no longer needed, but there are no plans at the moment to change that legislation.

Elections and Website

Paul Smalley, NASACRE Executive Officer, launched our new look website and explained that Saquat Ali, Jo Backus and Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal were all elected onto NASACRE exec.

Lunch

We then enjoyed a fabulous lunch – very healthy!

AGM

We then had our AGM – all reports and papers can be found on the website

<https://nasacre.org.uk/conference-and-agm> .

Claire Clinton, NASACRE vice-chair spoke about the planned 26-27 webinar programme and Bill presently gifts and present to those members of the executive leaving.

Connection over division: lived experience, belonging and RE in social cohesion- Amy Ark: School engagement lead Faith and Belief Forum

Amy explained that they work in schools, universities and communities for positive encounter across all ages and stages. It is an interfaith approach with anti-racist approaches as well.

Amy explained the methodology for F&B forum which is based on social contact theory, Allport 1954. When pupils come together and work together in a positive way they are less likely to be unkind to each other with such an approach. The present time is one of division and polarisation. Amy recommended reading '[Hope not Hate](#)' report by Good Faith partnership.

She highlighted that we are working in a very difficult environment these days. Belonging has been weaponised in present day conversations. There is a need for solidarity and to protect and defend our communities, while recognising the cost of this for, such as, hiding identities. Recognising this is a real problem for many people is very important. We know things can change and we have seen this.

How do we make this a place that is home again for everyone?

Read strategy paper by govt "[Protecting what matters](#)" which highlights that increasing investment in youth and community structures is also important. A lot of behaviours come from fear and misunderstanding and we must recognise this. Why is RE the place to help?

10. It directly studies belief systems
11. It explores identity in a meaningful way
12. It builds empathy and respect
13. It develops critical thinking skills
14. It teaches how to navigate difference
15. It connects to real world issues

Belonging in the classroom involves everyone feeling safe and brave to be themselves, respected in their beliefs, interested in others' perspectives and included not othered.

The F&B forum work using an 'I /you/ we' structure to work from as a basis. It highlights the importance of safe, brave and shared spaces – encouraging respect, active listening, dialogue not debate, I statements and oops and ouch (being able to say when you haven't said something in the right way, or in turn being able to say when someone says something that it is an ouch moment for you and why)!

Amy explained that we encounter faith and belief through storytelling – stories matter and many stories matter, not just a single story. The workshops are interfaith workshops which involve preparing for the discussion, hearing from the speakers and reflecting and creating dialogue. The F&B forum set boundaries and explore the power of language and what inclusive language is, as well as boundaries for answering sensitive questions. Speakers are not expected to represent a group, religion or belief – just themselves.

Their parental engagement project has had very positive feedback and shows how RE can have real benefits for parents - both religious and non-religious. They have an Interfaith week poetry competition which encourages pupil voice and is a great way to amplify this voice from children, which SACREs could get behind and share with schools.

Schools, RE, SACREs and communities – the answer is connection, the vision is a shared connection and a transformed society with a mutual understanding and respect of difference, equality of faiths and beliefs, and a shared understanding of belonging and perhaps, most essentially safety.

Amy then answers some questions from tables (that delegates were asked to write collaboratively) – due to time restraints not all questions were got through on the day, but the exec will continue to review and answer anything that wasn't covered.

Westhill / NASACRE Awards Updates

The 4 SACREs in receipt of a Westhill / NASACRE award give an update of where they are at one year into their 4 projects. This is warmly received by the conference. SACREs were asked to consider applying for the new round of applications that open in December 2026 and close at the end of February 2027. Details on the Website <https://nasacre.org.uk/westhill-nasacre-awards/>

Close

Our chair Bill brought the conference formally to a close.

Justine Ball, NASACRE executive