

NASCARE Conference 21th May 2015
Andreas Menzies

This year's Conference and AGM was held at Council House in Birmingham. This was an extremely well attended event with representation from SACREs from across the country.

The keynote speaker was The Rt Hon Charles Clarke who was the Labour Education Secretary from 2002 to 2004 before becoming Home Secretary. During his time as Education Secretary he had some contact with NASACRE and has been an advocate for RE, he reckoned that SACREs were such a good idea that every subject should have one!

He has been Visiting Professor in Politics and Faith since 2010 at Lancaster University and with Professor Woodhead directed Britain's largest ever research programme on religion and society producing a report enclosed - A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools.

I have enclosed a summary which you should read! The report makes several recommendations, covering the act of collective worship, the content and formation of the legally required RE curriculum and the operation of faith schools. The report also calls for a strengthening of the inspection regime to ensure that all schools, faith or otherwise, "contribute to the promotion of community cohesion".

I'm not going to try to transcribe the entire speech but I am enclosing a summary for his report which I think also covers a great deal of his speech (you can listen to all 1 hour and 10 minutes of it on the NASACRE website if you wish). Arguably Mr Clarke, no longer being an influence in government, may not have been the right person to speak at our conference (general opinion was that Nicky Morgan would have been a better catch!). However he gave us a great deal to consider that led us to ask certain questions;

- Should RE be a statutory part of the curriculum with the obligation for monitoring this given back to OFSTED?
- Should right to withdraw be repealed?
- Should there be support for a National structure as many local initiatives are insufficiently supported?
- Can anyone understand the world today without learning about religions?

We also listened to two seminar addresses from Denise Cush, Professor of Religion and Education at Bath Spa University, on What works for RE? and Mary Myatt, Lead Ofsted inspector, Culham St Gabriel's Lead Consultant for Teacher Conferences, Ideas for Good RE. Again these materials are available from the NASACRE website.

All these speakers provided us with some thought provoking points, however what emerged from last year's conference was the importance for SACREs to collaborate on sharing practices and resources with each other and this I found to be very informative.. We mainly spoke with our 'round table'

neighbours but I did manage to speak to several representatives of other SACREs.

Many of the questions raised and the issues faced by other SACREs are similar to what we have, but the overall feeling I got is that most are better engaged with schools, meeting attendance is good and there's good support from LA

Here are some interesting things and common questions that picked out of these discussions;

- Shropshire SACRE, LA fully recognise the requirement and employ a full time RE Advisor part of the Schools Improvement service, visits every school 3 times a year
- Syllabus and other resources available online.
- Too much influence from CofE!
- South Glos SACRE nearly fell apart due to the officer at the time being sacked. They developed an SLA with CofE to keep SACRE together.
- Problems finding key people and leadership, membership, staying quorate and with expertise
- Consistent clerking is key South Glos SACRE now have a clerk appointed by the LA
- Suggestion that perhaps the subject name should be changed perhaps something like Religious and Cultural Education
- There should be qualifications for teaching the subject, there appears to be no experts teaching it
- Lack of contact between schools and religions, breeds misunderstanding and misconceptions
- Training teachers to understand religions and cultures and what different faiths believe
- Collective worship and RE? Focus on the spiritual side and common spiritual beliefs between faiths or should collective worship be scrapped?

Web Links referred to;

Shropshire SACRE

<https://torch.taw.org.uk/CorporateInformation/SchoolImprovementService/sacre/SitePages/Home.aspx>

NACACRE

You'll need the Rutland SACRE login details to get access to this

<http://www.nasacre.org.uk/conference-and-agm/2015/materials>

Username: members2015

Password: gr8RE4all