

National Association of SACREs

AGM 2023: Chair's Report

Our Secretary, Sue Holmes, has provided her usual detailed report, giving us an overview of the year and making it very clear that our future needs you. Thanks to Sue for all her tireless work and expertise, and to every member of the Executive committee for their commitment to the association. Special thanks to all those who are leaving the committee this year – we will miss you – but for some the long arm of co-option will be reaching out.

It is with real sadness that we note the absence of very dear friends and colleagues on the committee, and from amongst our membership, and it is vital on the occasion of our 30th Anniversary that we record the achievements and expertise of Lesley Prior and Elizabeth Jenkerson, as detailed in our Secretary's report. Without their tireless efforts, sharp insights and good humoured contributions, NASACRE wouldn't be where it is today.

Our national association is successful and well-respected, an authority that others come to for advice, and with expertise spanning RE and collective worship, knowledge and expertise in how to Chair and Clerk SACRE meetings, where to find information, how to manage membership and constitutions with the local authority, and how to just keep going... while stringing together the pearls of wisdom of SACREs nationally.

While the past certainly is another country, it was prophetic that in the wake of the 1988, 1992 and 1993 Education Acts, SACRE members and high-profile national figures knew that a national association of the Standing Advisory Councils on RE was going to be instrumental in the survival of the subject and its related areas.

You can do your own search online for economic, social and cultural history of 1993 as well as searching your own memory banks if you were there – and searching for key educational changes reveals the gradual 'working out' of the effects of a new organisation called the Office for Standards in Education, and the provision of royal assent to the Education Bill, Choice and Diversity: a New Framework for Schools. Within it, clauses related to school governance (especially grant maintained status) and also those covering the curriculum, led to a draft Circular from the DfE which eventually became *Circular 1/94* on RE and Collective Worship. This pearly Queen of Contradictions is still with us – it has never been withdrawn. In 2023 NASACRE has started another conversation about the implications and effects of this Circular with the professional RE network AREIAC, and with the current Department for Education.

This year of 2023 has been full of moments that suggest the *'there and back again'* theme of a 30th Pearl Anniversary. We have worked with other partners and with the RE Policy Unit to secure some improvement in the supply and retention of teachers of RE, and to provide SACREs and the DfE with data about funding. We have also continued the discussions about RE, as the subject moves to another phase in its identity. Pedagogical discussions about the process and philosophy of education in religion and worldviews, or big ideas for RE and how we might address these in new Agreed Syllabuses, have absorbed us. And collective worship has moved back up the collective agenda.

SACREs need to be well-informed, professionally and democratically supported, flexible, resilient - and nurtured. After all, for many of us this is an entirely voluntary activity, provided because of a conviction - or several - about teachers, schools, the subject, local democracy and the world in which we share our community lives. We hope you agree that NASACRE provides some of what you need to add to the *'strings of pearls'* forming around this influential and democratic network.

In the first Briefing of this academic year, I noted:

"As we look forward to our pearly 30th year as an association, and a celebration at our Conference in May, we can be proud of the pearls of wisdom that emerge from our membership and the people they work with in schools, local authorities, faith communities, universities and beyond.

We also know that pearls emerge in oysters through the effects of grit and irritation – I'm not going to risk extending the metaphor, but we all wish you well as we work together for the benefit of the subject, its teachers, and those who learn with them in these difficult times."

I stand by that whole statement as we begin the next part of our future together.

Linda Rudge