

Devon SACRE Annual Report 2013/4

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Foreword: Chair of Devon SACRE

It has been a real privilege to Chair Devon SACRE over the last year and be part of the progress made in continuing to support and advance RE in Devon. As the Head of RE in a Devon secondary school I can see the practical application of the work done by SACRE. It is important that we thank Ed Pawson and Jeremy Roberts for the hours of work they have put in for SACRE; particularly in developing and rolling out the revision of our Agreed Syllabus launched in June 2014.

The Agreed Syllabus Conference allowed members of Devon SACRE to work with others from Torbay and Plymouth. The intention was always to reform the existing Syllabus rather than completely rewrite it. The new document is focussed on an enquiry based approach to encourage students to lead their own learning, also giving staff more freedom in choosing what to teach and how to deliver topics. The Syllabus was introduced to Devon teachers in eleven events in local areas and it is very encouraging that so many teachers attended the roll out events for the new Syllabus. SACRE would like to thank all who were involved in this process.

During the last year we have said farewell to several long standing members of Devon SACRE and we would want to take the opportunity to thank them for the work they have done. We will miss the wisdom of Roger Lawrence, Kay Hughes, Jonathan Marshall, Teresa Griffiths, Jat Saha and Barbara Wintersgill. We are delighted to have welcomed several new members. During the 2013/14 Graham Langtree was not able to fulfil his role as advisor to SACRE and we are grateful to Babcock/LDP for funding the support SACRE needed through Ed Pawson and Jeremy Roberts.

A highlight of the year has to be SACRE's part in Holocaust Memorial Day events in Exeter. Many young people from schools in Devon took part by displaying work and presenting drama or poetry. Many of us heard Rudi Oppenheimer, a Holocaust survivor, tell his story; a reminder of how important the work of RE is in challenging prejudice and discrimination. The Gypsy Educators reminded us that, unfortunately, prejudice is not confined to the past.

SACRE has also continued its important work of monitoring RE in Devon schools. We have been particularly concerned about the growing tendency for schools to teach GCSE in an hour a week or begin teaching the exam syllabus in Year 9. SACRE has initiated a programme of monitoring visits focussing on those schools where there is concern about compliance or exam results. We are keen to support RE teachers who are working in difficult circumstances. The exam results show that there is a big jump in the number of students taking Full course RS GCSE which is to be celebrated but it is important that teachers have the time to maintain high standards.

In a time of great change in education the work of Devon SACRE continues to be of great importance. The work that we do ensures that the students in our schools are given the opportunity to receive high quality religious education and that teachers are supported and trained in their work. It is wonderful to have a group of people from so many different backgrounds meeting together to share in this task; I look forward to another great year for Devon SACRE.

Mary Hext
Chair of Devon SACRE 2013/4

Introduction

Devon SACRE is pleased to produce this report as a summary of its work in Religious Education and Collective Worship in 2013/4. It provides a useful opportunity to reflect on its deliberations over the last year and inform others of its valuable work.

SACRE is a unique organization and amidst the challenges and issues we face concerning the place of religion in schools and society, there has never been a more important time for teaching and learning of RE in our schools.

1 Devon Agreed Syllabus

1.1 The Review Process

In partnership with Torbay and Plymouth SACREs, Devon conducted a review of the RE Agreed Syllabus in 2013, culminating in the launch of the revised version in June 2014. As part of this process, an Agreed Syllabus Conference was set up, with volunteers from across the three authorities, to manage the process of reappraising the existing advice to schools. The background work had been underway for some time, led by the Babcock LDP advisor. Through conferences and courses the views of professionals had been sounded out and a broad strategy for reform was established. The intention was to work by 'reform, not revolution', to provide a syllabus that would build on the strengths of the existing guidance, but which teachers would also see as similar in style and format to recently published national curriculum documents in other subject areas, reflecting the current understanding of best practice in the classroom.

During the process several influential documents were published, including the DfE National Curriculum plans, the Ofsted subject report on the teaching of RE and the National Non-Statutory Guidance for RE (NCFRE). These all, in their own way, proved to be very influential in the final writing of the Agreed Syllabus.

An on-line survey of teachers provided additional evidence of the views of the local RE community and in combination with the national priorities it provided the impetus to set the agenda for reform.

The resulting document bears much similarity to the previous Agreed Syllabus, but it differs in several key ways: it is significantly slimmed down, taking its model from the other National Curriculum documentation; it gives more freedom in what to cover and how to teach it; it more overtly espouses an enquiry-based model, encouraging a more student-centred form of learning.

In approving and adopting the new Agreed Syllabus, SACRE expressed its gratitude to the teachers of Devon for their whole-hearted engagement with the process of reform and in particular paid tribute to the members of the steering group who had seen the new document through its many revisions.

Following the publication of the new document, SACRE supported eleven 'roll-out' events across the county. These were well attended by teachers from all phases.

1.2 Assessment

In terms of assessment, the new syllabus recognises that schools are reviewing their assessment practices, but in the absence of clear, national guidelines it was decided that the new Agreed Syllabus would advocate a continuation of level-based assessment for the time being.

Many subject areas are experimenting with the introduction of age-related assessment systems, focusing on the demonstration of knowledge and understanding relating to the 'mastery' of specific concepts. The idea of "secondary-ready" (at, above or below) is gaining some acceptance. However, at the time of writing, there was no clear consensus across schools and subject areas. This matter will be kept under review and as schools develop new approaches to judging progress, further advice and guidance may need to be made available and SACRE may choose to set up a working party on this matter.

2 Standards in Religious Education

2.1 GCSE Examination Results 2014 – an interpretation

This year's report on GCSE Religious Studies examination results in Devon schools is overshadowed by the inability to comment on the progress of students in the RS Short Course examination, due to a lack of data. In 2014 the DfE changed its method of accrediting points for examination results with Short Course GCSEs now no longer included in the data. The upshot is that Short Course results are not being processed and reported on with other examination results and any information on Short Course exam outcomes has been almost impossible to obtain. Given that many students in Devon sit the RS Short Course exam every year (nearly 3,000 students sat this exam in Summer 2013) it is a source of frustration to be unable to make any comment on results for 2014. This data serves a vital function in giving us a more detailed picture of KS4 provision for RE across the County, so to be unable to access these results is a significant source of frustration.

National data shows us that Short Course entries continued to dip in 2014 (see Table B, Appendix1), dropping from 23% (2013) of the Y11 cohort down to 16% (2014), while Full GCSE entries rose by a modest 2%, from 35% (2013) to 37% (2014). While we cannot be certain whether a similar trend is occurring in Devon schools regarding Short Course, Devon data shows that there was a massive 23% increase in entries for RS GCSE Full Course last year, (see Chart 1, Appendix1). This is an enormous jump and we would suspect that this is caused, at least in part, because schools are moving from Short Course to Full GCSE.

While being pleased with the increased uptake for GCSE RS examination in our schools, Devon SACRE remains concerned by the implications of these changes. With so much pressure on both curriculum time and results, many schools are opting to either squeeze RE out altogether or they are entering students for a full GCSE instead of a Short Course. On the surface one would imagine that entering more students for a full GCSE in RS (rather than a Short Course) would be a good thing, but there are concerns that many schools are failing to provide additional time for its study. Recommended study time for GCSE full course is 120-140 hours, and where schools are teaching full course on 1 hour a week, this falls far short of the time needed. There is some evidence from Ofsted that this is proving detrimental to students' learning in RE, where, due to the lack of curriculum time, students are required to 'cram' for exams, rather than concentrating on a deeper level of understanding, reflection and discussion. With new GCSEs being introduced in 2016 we worry that we will see schools struggling to maintain standards in RS GCSE, given that the level of academic challenge is set to be raised, along with an increased level of content.

In many schools there is a tendency to begin RS GCSE in Year 9 in a bid to extend the number of hours that students can study these courses. Again, it is the opinion of SACRE that this is not fully acceptable, given that this cuts short the breadth of KS3 experience and begins a course whose content is designed to be followed by a more mature student.

Chart B shows a worrying drop in exam results with A*-C grades down from 73% in 2013 to 65.8% in 2014. This is also significantly below the national figure of 70.1%. It is quite likely that this is directly linked to the fact that many of the students who were entered for this exam this year with too little time to cover the topics, with their schools attempting to teach the exam syllabus on one hour per week, but more research needs to be done into this matter.

While many schools in Devon are still giving a large majority of their students their statutory opportunity to study RE at KS4, there are a growing number of schools who are not offering students their entitlement to develop their religious literacy. This is a matter of significant concern. Data shows that some schools are failing to enter any of their students for RS examinations, and while some may be doing good non-examination RE, it is likely that others will not be. SACRE has asked for these schools to be referred to the monitoring group for possible exploratory visits.

2.2 Schools Monitoring Visits

Devon SACRE has initiated a programme of monitoring visits to secondary schools, specifically to schools where there have been concerns about compliance, time allocation or low examination entry/pass levels for Religious Education. This is to be continued into the next academic year. In the three schools visited so far there have been positive discussions with students, the teachers in charge of RE and Head Teachers/Senior Leaders. These schools have all shown an appreciation for the support given by SACRE, leading to an expectation of further development of the curriculum opportunities for Religious Education.

Both Community Schools and Academies alike are being approached for these monitoring visits and it is noted that, although Academies are not bound by SACRE/LA jurisdiction, there is a willingness to engage with SACRE advice, because it is understood to represent good practice for the creation of high quality RE. In many cases our visits have opened up opportunities for new communication channels, allowing RE teachers to access advice from a wider range of support networks and leading to curriculum developments for RE.

3 Devon SACRE

3.1 SACRE constitution review

It has been decided to review the 2006 Devon SACRE constitution and re-visit the criteria for SACRE membership. This will be worked on in the Autumn and presented for discussion and approval at the November meeting.

3.2 Membership

We thanked Christine Channon for being SACRE Chair, as she stood down in November 2013, making way for Mary Hext to take over the role.

During the year, we said thanks and goodbye to a number of our long-standing and respected members, including Roger Lawrence, Kay Hughes, Jonathan Marshall, Teresa Griffiths, Jat Saha, Barbara Wintersgill, and we welcomed in Mfanwy McCorry, MarkAndrew Dearden, Jeremy Roberts, Ravi Nathwani and Nula Nation.

3.3 Professional support for Devon SACRE

Due to sporadic illness Graham Langtree was unable to offer consistent support as SACRE adviser. In line with their contractual obligations, Babcock/LDP continued to fund core professional support through Ed Pawson, drawing in Jeremy Roberts to lead on the Agreed Syllabus reform.

3.4 Holocaust Memorial Day 2014

Holocaust Memorial Day events in Exeter were again very successful. The theme of the two day exhibition was Journeys and this was exemplified in much of the material produced by the 11 schools who participated in the day. There were opportunities for young people to display exhibition material in the Guildhall and to present drama and dialogue in Southernhay URC.

There were a number of showings of the film “Porajmos: the untold story of the gypsy holocaust”, accompanied by talks from a Gypsy educator and several schools took advantage of the guided, reflective walks around the city centre. The Holocaust survivor talk on 27th Jan was well attended, with Rudi Oppenheimer giving a moving account of the cruel events of life under Nazi rule. The additional discussion event, on 28th Jan, was also a success, but less well attended.

3.5 SACRE working groups and publications

We have been pleased to see the publication of the Early Years report, WOW this year. This exciting book is the culmination of work produced by a whole number of early years’ practitioners.

The work produced by the SMSC working party is now nearing completion, ready for publication.

3.6 Working with other agencies

Learn, Teach, Lead Project (LTLRE)

Devon SACRE is pleased to continue to support the work of the Learn, Teach, Lead Project, under the leadership of the Project Director Linda Rudge. This three year partnership aims to improve the quality of Religious Education teaching, learning and leadership in schools in Devon and Cornwall, in particular trying to reach those schools that have ‘unmet needs’ in RE. It operates through hub networks, offering training and support for primary and secondary teachers of RE.

4 Training and CPD opportunities and provision

Devon SACRE, through Babcock/LDP, ran the following whole day RE CPD events in 2013/4:

- Primary RE co-ordinators’ conference
- Secondary HoDs conference
- New to RE in Devon conference

Over 180 teachers attended the roll-out events for the new Devon Agreed Syllabus in June/July 2014

A number of Devon SACRE members attended the 2014 South West SACRE Conference on “Building Effective RE in a New Educational Landscape”.

5 Collective Worship

There have been no formal complaints about Collective worship in schools.

6 Appendix 1: Devon Schools GCSE Exam results 2014

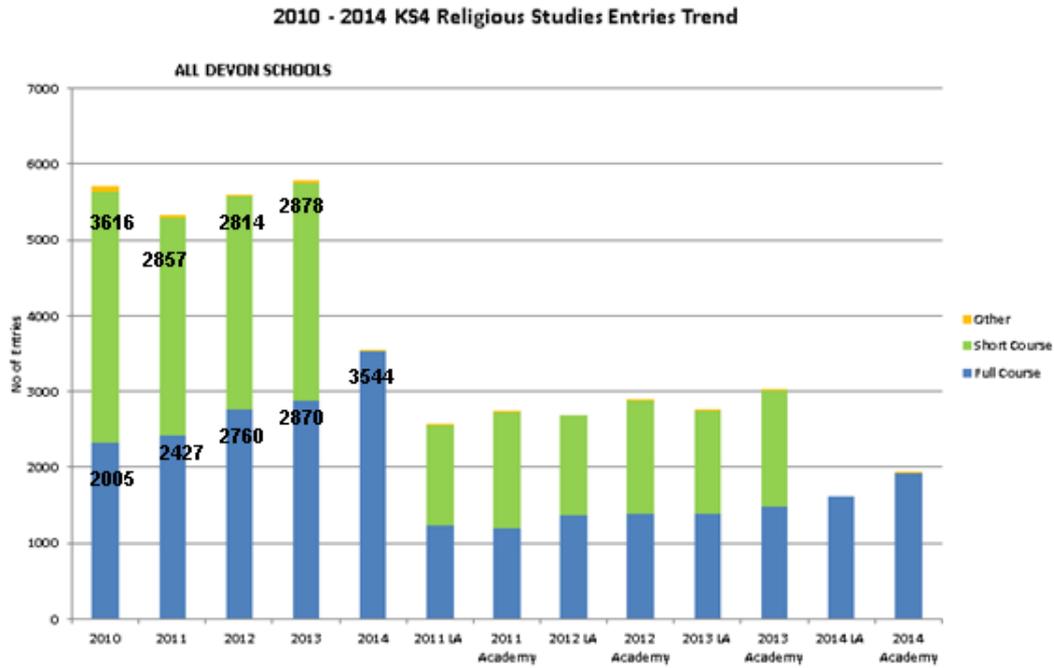


Chart A: 2010- 2014 GCSE Religious Studies exam entries trends

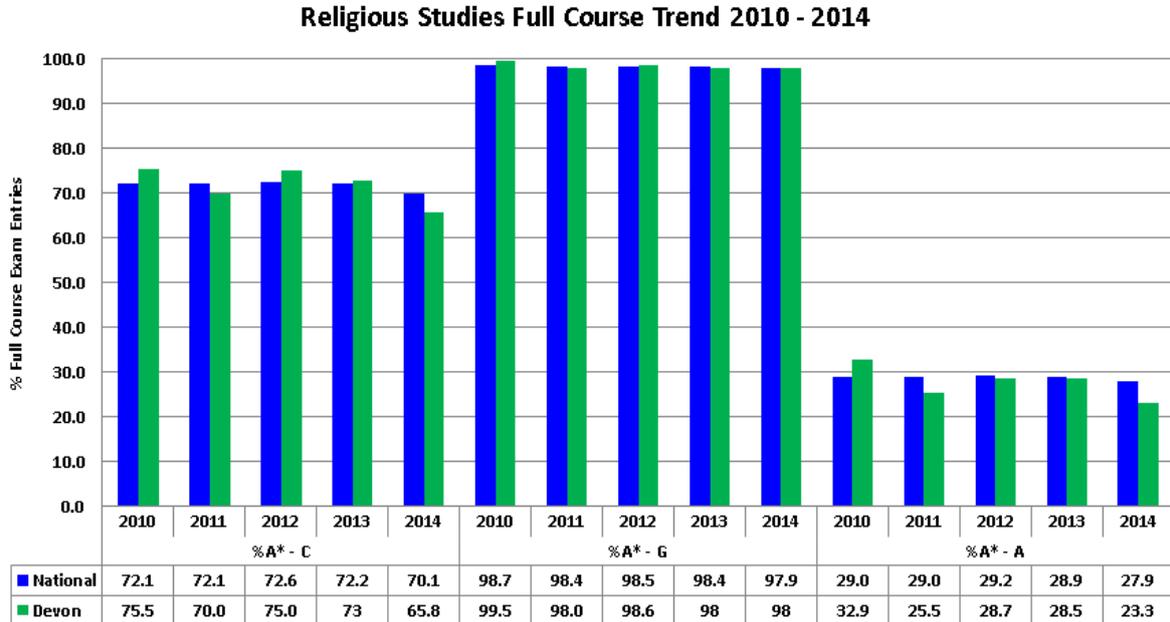


Chart B: 2010- 2014 GCSE Full course results trends
A*-C: National: 70.1%, Devon 65.8%

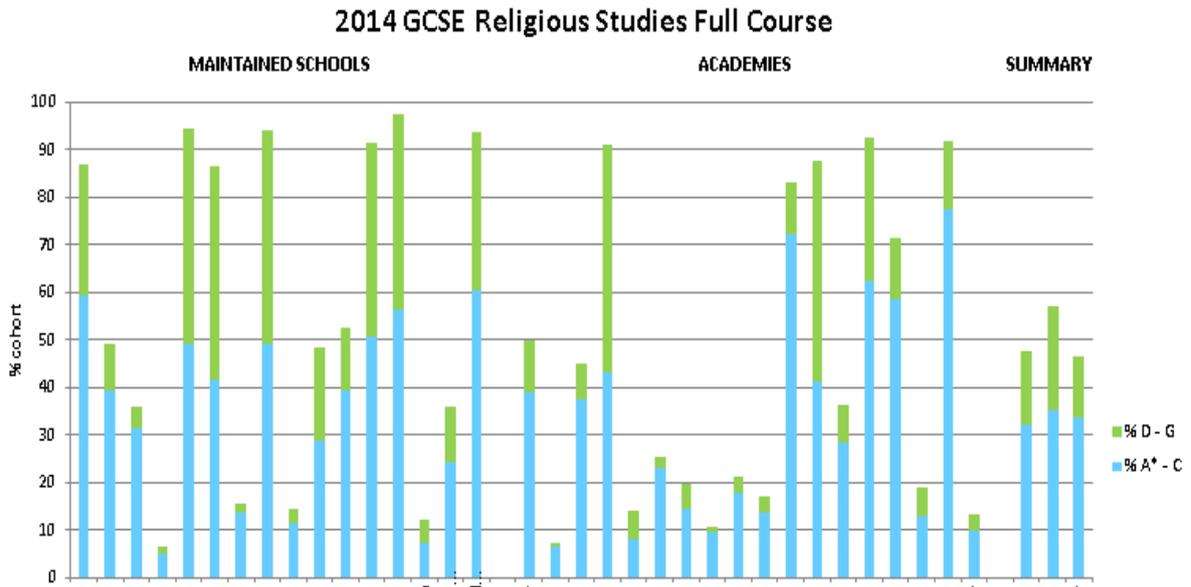


Chart C: GCSE RS results table 2014.

Table A Top ten GCSE full course subjects in 2014

Ranking	Subject	% of total	Number of candidates
1 (1)	Mathematics	14.11	736403
2 (2)	English	9.88	515575
3 (3)	English Literature	9.17	478575
4 (4)	Science	7.19	374961
5 (5)	Additional Science	6.21	323944
6 (6)	Religious Studies	5.41	282099
7 (7)	History	4.91	256179
8 (8)	Geography	4.32	225149
9 (9)	Design & Technology	4.09	213629
10 (10)	Art and Design subjects	3.67	191398

(2013 ranking in brackets.)



National RS statistics 2001-2014

	2001		2011	2012	2013	2014
Short	165520		257,793	235,916	169,088	118,421
Full	119550		221,974	239,123	251,063	269,494
Total RS	286070		479,767	461,097	420,151	387,915
Total entries	673056		762,792	772,974	760,170	736,403
% Short	25		34	31	23	16
% Full	18		29	31	35	37
% entered for RS	43		63	62	58	53

Table B: National Data on RS GCSE exam entry

7 APPENDIX 2: MEMBERSHIP OF DEVON SACRE 2014

Group A: Christian and other religious denominations, not including Church of England.

13 places: Appointment for four years ending on 30 April 2017

Rev Stuart Mackay
 Rev Master Myfanwy McCorry
 Miss Mary Hext
 Mr Ravi Nathwani
 Ms Caroline Walmsley
 Mrs Rosemary Khreisheh
 Mrs Nula Nation
 Mr Richard Halsey
 Mr Bernard Lane
 Mr Chaz Singh
 Mr Michael Watson
 Mr Keith Denby
 Mr Ian Jamison

Baptist Church
 Buddhist Community
 Methodist Church
 Hindu Community
 Quakers, Religious Society of Friends
 Islamic Community
 Roman Catholic Church
 Jewish Community
 United Reformed Church
 Sikh Community
 Baha'i Community
 Devon Humanists
 Pagan Community

Group B: The Church of England

6 places: Appointment for four years ending on 30 April 2017

Mrs Tanya Pritchard	Diocesan Board of Education
Ms Claire Hulbert	Diocesan Board of Education
Ms Penny Hammett	Diocesan Board of Education
Mr E Pawson	Diocesan Board of Education
Mrs Tatiana Wilson	Diocesan Board of Education
Mr MarkAndrew Dearden	University College of St Mark and St John

Group C: Teachers' Associations

12 places: Appointments for four years ending on 30 April 2017

Mr John Goody	ATL
Ms Karen Walshe	Exeter University
Mr Neil Swait	NAHT
Mrs Lorna Clay	NAS/UWT
Rev Cate Edmonds	UCU
Mrs Wendy Harrison	NUT
Mrs Sue Shute	NATRE (secondary)
Mrs Gerry Winnall	NATRE (primary)
Vacancy	PAT
Vacancy	SHA
Vacancy:	Devon Special schools representative
Vacancy	ASCL

Group D: The Local Authority

6 places:

Cllr Ms E L Barisic	County Councillor
Cllr Mrs C Channon	County Councillor
Cllr Mrs P Colthorpe	County Councillor
Cllr A Hannan	County Councillor
Cllr M Squires	County Councillor
Cllr R Younger-Ross	County Councillor

Co-opted members

Up to 6 places: Appointments for two years ending on 30 April 2017

Ms Paula Fletcher
Mrs Saxon Spence
Mr Jeremy Roberts
Ms Teresa Griffiths
Mr Jonathan Marshall