

Devon SACRE Annual Report 2023/4



Foreward

I would like to begin this report by recording grateful thanks to members of SACRE for their enthusiasm for, and encouragement of, the delivery of high-quality learning in RE for our schools. We have continued with hybrid meetings and thanks must also go to our clerk who handles all the arrangements to make this possible. The breadth of representation on SACRE is a strong feature and the willingness of people to work together is an inspiration.

Our partnership with Torbay and Plymouth SACREs and support from RE Today provided a hugely successful roll-out of the new Agreed Syllabus to teachers and schools leaders from across the area and work is on-going to ensure that support and resources are made as widely available as possible. This has been an important achievement against a background of extreme budgetary challenge.

SACRE has been pleased to continue its support of the work of Learn Teach Lead RE through local hubs. We continue to foster healthy and positive relationships with an array of educational and faith and belief organisations in the county, to ensure that teachers are well supported and enabled to deliver an inspirational educational in Religion and Worldviews to all pupils in the county, regardless of the funding regime or governance of schools.

Through this report you will detect the huge influence of Ed Pawson. Without his breadth and depth of understanding, his network of local and national contacts and his passion for the delivery of high-quality learning experiences Devon SACRE would not be the beacon of hope for the subject that it remains.

Jeremy Roberts (SACRE Chair)

Table of contents

- 1 Introduction
2. SACRE's statutory responsibilities
- 3 Collective Worship
- 4 Links with other bodies
- 5 SACRE local involvement
- 6 SACRE: regional and national involvement
- 7 SACRE organisation
- 8 Appendices

1 Introduction

Membership

During the year 2023/4 SACRE was pleased to welcome new members: Dr Pat Hannam, Jo Hunter, Leonore Newson, Dr Dave Regis, Professor Susannah Cornwall, Councillor Colin Slade.

Many thanks to Maia Miller, Keith Denby, Professor David Tollerton, Gerry Winnall, Councillor Margaret Squires who have stepped down.

Details of Devon SACRE meetings

November 2023: 27 attendees, plus clerk and adviser, hybrid meeting

February 2024: 23 attendees, plus clerk and adviser, hybrid meeting

June 2024: 19 attendees, plus clerk and adviser, hybrid meeting
All meetings were quorate.

2 SACRE's statutory responsibilities

2.1 Launch of the Local Agreed Syllabus

Following an extensive review, a new Agreed Syllabus for RE (AS) has been launched for Devon schools. This will run from 2024-2029. The recommendations from the Agreed Syllabus Council (ASC) were accepted by SACRE, and the new syllabus was launched at 4 events during summer 2024, for first teaching in September 2024. Nearly 300 teachers attended the launch conferences. These events were led by the RE Today curriculum writers, and feedback has been very positive.

On-going training for teachers will continue to be offered during 2024/2025 via Inset training, the LTLRE conference and local hub meetings. The new syllabus has also been adopted by Torbay and Plymouth SACREs, with Cornwall SACRE likely to adopt a similar pattern for 2025.

The new syllabus does not look radically different from the current model in terms of its substantive knowledge component. Where important changes have been made they are in the adoption of a religion and worldviews approach to RE, in response to developing understandings about the subject at a national level. This recognises a significant shift in the way the subject is being planned and taught, following on from the Commission for RE report ([2018](#)). The new syllabus also responds to many of the challenges laid down by the Ofsted Deep and Meaningful report ([2024](#)).

Here is a summary of the key changes to the AS:

- Availability of 'lesson-ready' resources
- Teaching units embody more diversity
- Teaching units reflect the local lived experience of people's religious and non-religious worldviews
- Greater emphasis on 'ways of knowing' and pupils' personal knowledge
- More input on Humanism and non-religious worldviews in primary phase
- More detail on assessment
- More input for special schools
- More input on progression in language and vocabulary across the syllabus
- Updated use of terminology and information on demographics
- More materials on how to link learning into local places of interest and places of worship

2.2 Standards and monitoring in RE

2.2.1 Secondary schools

Data from the DfE annual workforce survey points to the fact that a number of secondary schools do not teach enough RE. Schools have been contacted and conversations with headteachers and senior leaders have taken place to explore further and offer input to encourage them to develop the place of RE in the curriculum.

2.2.2 GCSE Religious Studies exam results 2024

Devon schools are to be congratulated in their continued improvements in progress data in GCSE Religious Studies. In 2018 Devon schools recorded 19.5% (9-7) and 50.7 (9-5). This compared unfavourably with national figures of 30.0% (9-7) and 60.0% (9-5). In 2024 Devon schools showed much better progress achieving 28.3% (9-7) and 58.5% (9-5) in comparison

to national figures of 31.0% (9-7) and 61.5% (9-5). This is a remarkable and creditable improvement.

Appendix 1 shows entry data for Devon schools for 2024 GCSE RS exams. This chart shows the spread of entries, from schools entering their whole Y11 cohort to those entering few or no students. The percentage of Y11 cohort in Devon schools who were entered for GCSE RS has dropped by more than half in the last 6 years from 58% in 2018 to 25.7% in 2024. This fall demonstrates a significant reduction and is partly explained by a (national) trend that is seeing schools move away from entering their full Y11 cohort for the GCSE RS exam, towards entry via more limited option groups. It also reflects the increased competition in many schools for GCSE option choices. This is, in part, due to pressures from EBAC subjects. In some ways this can be understood as a positive shift, where schools are more accurately targeting students who want to study RS as an exam subject. However, an increasing number of schools are not running a GCSE course at all, either because they don't see it as a priority subject, or because the RS option fails to recruit sufficient numbers to be viable as a course.

SACRE is keen to give schools advice about how to run effective and vibrant GCSE exam options classes. It is vital for the subject to continue to be studied at higher levels and therefore help to create the next generation of RE teachers in our schools.

2.2.3 RS at A Level

SACRE continues to note the importance for schools and colleges to make provision for post-16 students to study RS as an examination subject at A level. In this context SACRE is concerned about the significant reduction in both the number of schools teaching RS A level and the number of students being entered for the exam (see Appendix 2 for details). In 2018 12 schools offered RS A level, with 107 students entered for the exam. In 2024 only 9 schools were teaching RS at A level and the number of entrants had dropped by nearly 50% to 56.

This raises serious questions about equality issues and about the academic pipeline to generate future teachers of RE. Many schools and colleges seem to be denying students the opportunity to study a subject for which they may be specifically academically and emotionally suited to follow.

2.2.4 Primary schools

Monitoring of RE in primary schools continues through sampling of websites and scrutiny of recent Ofsted reports. Over 70% of Ofsted reports include a mention of issues relating to SACRE's purpose (eg RE, collective worship or SMSC) and the majority of these comments are positive. Only about 3% of inspections involve a deep dive in RE.

Where SACRE has concerns, schools have been contacted to raise issues about standards or profile of the subject. Visits have been made to schools where their Ofsted report has highlighted weaknesses in RE or related areas. Where RE is mentioned positively schools have been contacted to thank them for their strong provision.

Resources have been shared and advice has been given to a number of schools with regard to parental requests for withdrawal from RE (and/or collective worship). In particular, LTLRE hub leaders have been a massive resource in being available in localities to offer support and guidance where schools make contact for help.

2.2.5 Monitoring RE in Multi-Academy Trusts

Devon SACRE has been working in partnership with a number of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) to ensure that RE is given its statutory place in the curriculum. There are an increasing number of MATs who have appointed RE leads across their schools. SACRE, along

with NATRE and RE Hubs, is active in drawing these hub leaders together and working with them to develop an understanding of how MATs need to make provision for the subject.

2.2.6 Headteachers' briefing

Following the syllabus launch events in summer 2024 the Adviser and Chair attended a Devon headteachers' updates day to brief school leaders on the changes to the syllabus, and to give a report on the latest Ofsted evaluations of the subject.

3 Collective Worship

The current guidance on [collective worship](#) and school assemblies from Devon SACRE is still in date. This guidance supports schools in developing a suitable CW policy and encouraging active pupil participation in assemblies. We want to help schools put in place effective practice, offering opportunities for reflective experiences for their pupils. The guidance document offers an explanation of the legal obligations, including the right to withdrawal, and outlines some of the rich opportunities that assemblies/ collective worship can offer pupils for spiritual, moral, social, cultural and personal development.

There have been no formal complaints about collective worship in schools and no applications for determinations.

4 Links with other bodies

4.1 Strong partnerships

Strong partnerships are a hallmark of the way Devon SACRE operates. We have good links with a number of organisations, working closely with Devon County Council, the Diocese of Exeter, the Universities of Exeter and St Mark and St John and Devon Faith and Belief Forum.

The SACRE Adviser attends the annual conferences for AREIAC (Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants) and NASACRE (National Association of SACREs), and sits on the AREIAC executive. He coordinates the SW [AREIAC](#) network of advisers (SWARE), organises the annual SW SACRE conference and acts in the role of [RE Hubs](#) lead for the SW. The 2024 SW SACRE conference hosted inputs from a number of regional and national RE figures, offering workshops on a range of important inputs for SACRE member training. During the year, RE Hubs hosted a conversation forum for regional SACRE officers to receive updates and give feedback with [NASACRE](#).

4.2 Devon Faith and Beliefs Forum

SACRE works closely with the [Devon Faith and Belief Forum](#) to establish strong links to local faith and belief organisations. This enables schools to draw on visitors to school classrooms and to inform who will be the most suitable faith and belief representatives when member vacancies occur.

4.3 NASACRE: CIO Constitution

SACRE has discussed and noted that the NASACRE Executive is making an application to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).

4.4 Learn, Teach, Lead RE

Devon SACRE is pleased to continue to partner and provide funding support for the Learn, Teach, Lead RE programme ([LTLRE](#)). Devon LTLRE hubs are working well to support teachers of RE, offering termly twilight meetings and networking opportunities. A professional community has now been set up via SWIFT (teaching school) which offers termly CPD for both primary and secondary teachers of RE.

The 2023 conference was well attended, with over 90 teachers attending from across the region. Both conference and hub meeting evaluations show how valuable teachers are finding these networking and CPD offers.

Hub leaders continue to be a valuable resource to teachers of RE in their locality, and termly training days enable hub leaders to keep up to date with current RE issues and initiatives.

5 SACRE: local involvement

5.1 RE Newsletter

The half termly RE newsletter gives schools in depth support, information and networking links. It signposts current CPD, hub groups and conferences. Though this newsletter SACRE signposts guidance to schools about significant events, eg religious festivals such as Easter, Ramadan and Diwali, Interfaith Week etc

5.2 Holocaust Memorial Day

SACRE officers organise Holocaust Memorial Day events for schools every year. On Holocaust Memorial Day in January 2024 a service was held at Exeter Cathedral where schools participated in remembrance and reflection. The theme, The Fragility of Freedom, provided a poignant opportunity for pupils to reflect on issues of conflict in today's society. Over 200 school pupils were involved in the Exeter events from eight schools across the County. Presentations were given on Kindertransport, the Gypsy Holocaust and Holocaust history. The closing ceremony was hosted by the Jewish community.

HMD resources and [links](#) were shared with schools.

5.3 Advice to Schools in Times of Conflict

In the aftermath of the unrest between Israel and Gaza, in October 2023, SACRE circulated a document to schools to enable them to navigate contentious cultural, religious and political community issues.

6 SACRE: regional and national involvement

6.1 Standing up for the importance of RE

SACRE is grateful to Councillor Tracy Adams for her correspondence with Ben Bradshaw MP, and for his commitment in following up with the Schools' Minister, Nick Gibb. The concerns raised were regarding the shortage of secondary RE teachers and the need to improve recruitment. SACRE has noted that many more lessons in secondary school RE are taught by teachers with no post-A level qualifications than in comparable subjects.

SACRE members considered the reply from the Minister to be largely unhelpful. In particular, the claim that it was right for the DfE to focus spending on EBAC subjects, to the detriment of subjects in the wider curriculum, was questioned.

SACRE also thanked Belinda Twiggs for taking the crucial issues of recruitment and retention to Anthony Mangnall MP, highlighting the shortage of trained RE teachers in secondary schools.

6.2 RE Hubs

SACRE continues to be supportive of the [RE Hubs](#) initiative, which is providing teachers with a 'one-stop-shop' website, offering links to [school speakers](#), places of interest, CPD events, local network groups, blogs and resources etc.

6.3 National Content Standard

SACRE has been kept fully informed of the publication of the REC's [National Content Standard](#). The NCS provides a benchmark for excellence in religion and worldviews in schools or across a MATs in England.

6.4 Religion and Worldviews Handbook

SACRE members have been introduced to the REC's Religion and Worldviews [Handbook](#). This is a tool kit for RE syllabus writers, to enable them to translate the core vision of religion and worldviews approach into a curriculum. RWs syllabus frameworks from three school based teams have also been published as part of the document.

6.5 Young Ambassadors for Freedom of Religion or Belief

The Devon SACRE Advisor has been partnering with the Dartmoor Multi-Academy Trust to train up a group of Young Ambassadors for RE and for Freedom of Religion or Belief. The project runs from 2023-25, working with pupils from Okehampton Primary School and students from Okehampton College.

A current update on the activities undertaken by the secondary students include:

- creating short films for a national REady work campaign, inspired by Lord Bilimoria, which advocates for the importance of RE in the workplace
- Campaigning about the need for a suitable prayer room in the school
- Discussing and submitting questions to be answered by Children's Commissioner Rachel De Souza
- Visiting places of Religion and Worldviews significance in Exeter, including the Exeter Synagogue and The Quaker Meeting House
- Working with and inspiring their primary school peers
- Speaking to a large group of teachers at the launch of the new RE agreed syllabus
- Planning Interfaith Week activities

Young Ambassador pupils from the primary school have enjoyed engaging with the NATRE Spirited Arts competition and taking part in an online event with Muslim Ambassadors of Faith and Belief from schools in Redbridge, London.

This project will culminate in a visit to Westminster in June 2025 to address MPs and Lords about the importance of RE.

SACRE has invited the Young Ambassadors to come to address a SACRE meeting.

The project is led by the Association of RE Inspectors and Advisers (AREIAC) and funded by Culham St Gabriel's Trust.

7 SACRE organisation

7.1 SACRE leadership and organisation

Devon SACRE is well served through its clerk (Yvette Welsh), LA lead (Simon Bissett), LA admin support (Sally Watts) and adviser (Ed Pawson). Devon County Council is responsive to SACRE's needs and supportive in its administration and organisation. It is well supported financially.

SACRE membership is vibrant and well-engaged, although there are still a few significant vacancies. The new SACRE constitution, approved by DCC in Feb 2023, stipulates that SACRE members will serve a 4 year period, followed by a further 4 year period, if invited to continue. After this (8 years) most SACRE members will come off SACRE, to allow others to join and gain the valuable experience of being on this body.

As a result of this change there has been some transfer of representative roles on SACRE, opening up opportunities for new members.

7.2 Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice training

SACRE continues to be aware of the need to increase the diversity of its representation. In response to requests from members, SACRE received input from a schools DEIJ lead.

Issues that were raised and noted included:

- importance of language used
- importance of treating everyone with equal respect, always aiming to see the individual before the group
- need to avoid phrases which are reductive and perpetuate stereotyping
- need to aim not to cause offence, but being alert to apologise and learn rather than blaming the victim
- importance of making the effort to find out more information
- awareness of barriers and prejudices around religion, race, culture, class, poverty
- discussion about what prevents children learning about other religions and worldviews

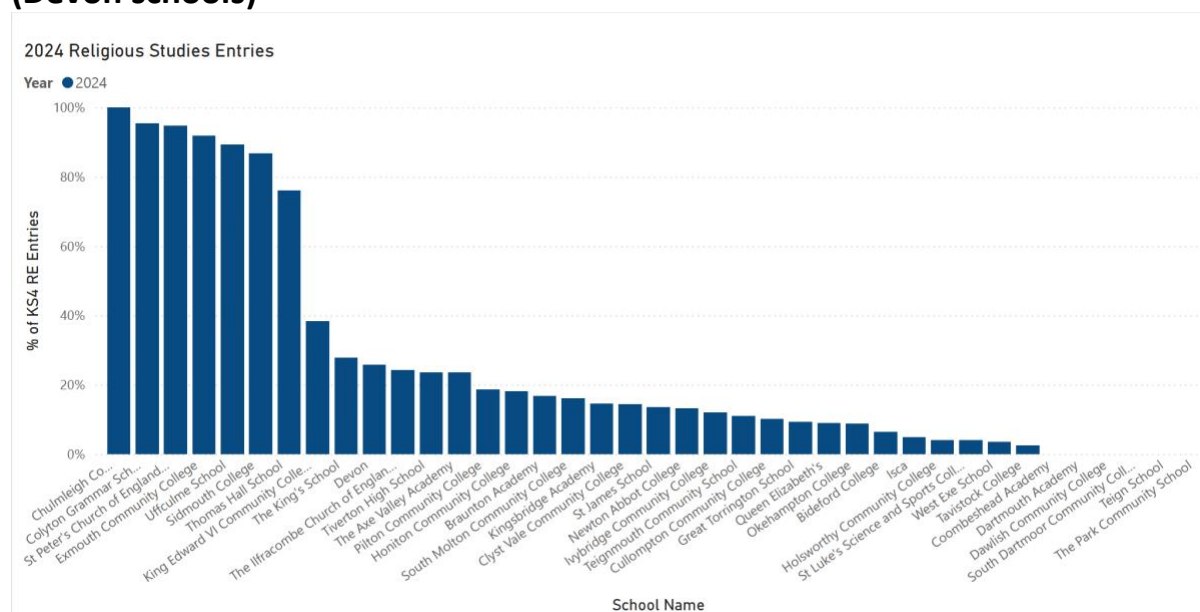
All meetings in the year 2022/3 have been quorate.

A number of SACRE members have taken advantage of useful training opportunities over the last year, both through attendance at the SW SACRE conference and national online NASACRE training events.

8 Appendices

Appendix 1

Percentage of KS4 Cohort Full Course Religious Studies GCSE Entries 2024 (Devon schools)



Appendix 2

Religious Studies Full Course GCSE Outcomes 2024

School	9 - 7	9 - 5	9 - 4	9 - 1
The Ilfracombe Church of England Academy	64.3%	92.9%	97.6%	100.0%
Queen Elizabeth's	58.8%	94.1%	100.0%	100.0%
Honiton Community College	40.9%	68.2%	77.3%	95.5%
The King's School	45.8%	87.5%	93.8%	100.0%
Isca	80.0%	90.0%	90.0%	100.0%

Clyst Vale Community College	48.0%	72.0%	76.0%	96.0%
Sidmouth College	14.6%	36.9%	53.1%	96.9%
Exmouth Community College	14.0%	40.5%	53.0%	94.6%
West Exe School	75.0%	87.5%	87.5%	100.0%
St James School	38.5%	84.6%	84.6%	96.2%
Bideford College	20.0%	60.0%	73.3%	86.7%
The Axe Valley Academy	11.1%	37.0%	44.4%	96.3%
St Luke's Science and Sports College	57.1%	71.4%	85.7%	100.0%
Thomas Hall School	2.4%	24.4%	41.5%	92.7%
Braunton Academy	16.7%	45.8%	58.3%	83.3%
Chulmleigh Community College	19.4%	50.3%	67.7%	97.4%
Great Torrington School	7.7%	61.5%	61.5%	100.0%
Holsworthy Community College	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	100.0%
The Park Community School*				
Pilton Community College	15.9%	43.2%	54.5%	95.5%
Dawlish Community College				
South Dartmoor Community College				
King Edward VI Community College	33.3%	75.9%	81.5%	98.1%
Kingsbridge Academy	53.6%	75.0%	82.1%	100.0%
Coombeshead Academy				
Teignmouth Community School	26.3%	57.9%	68.4%	94.7%
Tavistock College	16.7%	16.7%	33.3%	100.0%
Okehampton College	25.0%	75.0%	90.0%	100.0%
Ivybridge Community College	56.3%	81.3%	91.7%	100.0%
Colyton Grammar School	83.9%	99.3%	99.3%	100.0%
Teign School				
Newton Abbot College	25.0%	78.1%	90.6%	100.0%
Uffculme School	23.6%	59.3%	72.0%	99.5%
Dartmouth Academy				
Cullompton Community College	0.0%	33.3%	46.7%	100.0%
South Molton Community College	5.3%	42.1%	57.9%	94.7%
Tiverton High School	9.4%	28.3%	49.1%	100.0%
St Peter's Church of England Aided School	22.8%	63.0%	73.2%	99.2%
Devon	28.3%	58.5%	69.5%	97.5%
National	31.0%	61.5%	72.0%	97.5%

Appendix 3

Entry data for A level Religious Studies 2018-2024

Year	Schools/Centres entering students for A level RS	Total entries
2018	Ilfracombe, QE, Clyst Vale, Sidmouth, Exmouth, South Dartmoor, Tavistock, Okehampton, Ivybridge, Colyton, Teign, Newton Abbot College Total: 12	109

2019	Iffracombe, QE, King's, Sidmouth, Exmouth, Axe Valley, South Dartmoor, Tavistock, Okehampton, Colyton, Teign, Newton Abbot College, Mount Kelly, Blundell's, Stover, West Buckland, Exeter School, Maynard, Exeter Tutorial College, Exeter College, Petroc College Total 21	170
2024	Iffracombe, QE, King's, Clyst Vale, Sidmouth, South Dartmoor, Colyton, Newton Abbot College, Ivybridge Total 9	56

Appendix 4

Membership of Devon SACRE August 2024

Group A: Christian and Other Religion and Belief Communities, with the Exception of the Church of England

Name	Faith / belief community
Dr Dave Regis	Humanist
Jane Carpenter	Jewish
Warren Houghton	Baha'i
Mary Hext	Methodist
Ravi Nathwani	Hindu
Leonore Newson	Pagan
Jude Taylorson	Buddhist
Dr Pat Hannam	Quaker
Gurmit Kang	Sikh
Helen Brown	Catholic

Group B: The Church of England (Diocesan Board of Education)

Name	Organisation
Sandra Gill	Church of England
Claire Hulbert	Church of England
Jeremy Roberts	Church of England
Jo Hunter	Church of England
Elizabeth Underwood	Church of England
Kelly Keatley	Church of England

Group C: Teachers' Associations

Name	Organisation
Dr Edgar Mihas	UCU (FE)
Belinda Twiggs	NATRE
Phil Randall	Secondary School Leaders (DSLS)
Caitlin Cornwell	NEU
Wendy Harrison	NEU

Ruth Flanagan	UCU
Penny Hammett	Primary School Leaders (DSLs)
Prof Susannah Cornwall	HE
Joe Matthews	NATRE Secondary

Group D: The County Council

Name of Councillor	Organisation
Christine Channon	DCC
Colin Slade	DCC
Ron Peart	DCC
Debo Sellis	DCC
Daniel Thomas	DCC
Tracy Adams	DCC
Janet Bradford	DCC

Co-opted Members

Name
Saxon Spence
Rosemary Khreish
Bex Northcott
John Gooddy

SACRE Officers

Clerk: Yvette Welsh

Adviser: Ed Pawson

LA lead: Simon Bissett

