

**SACRE – STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL
ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
21/11/2023**

Present:

Councillors: Menna Baines, Elin Walker Jones, Anne Lloyd-Jones, John P Roberts, Meryl Roberts, Angela Russell and Paul Rowlinson

Others:

Christians and Other Faiths and Non-religious Philosophical Convictions: Eurfryn Davies (The Baptist Union of Wales) and the Reverend Nick Sissons (The Methodist Church)

Teachers: Heledd W Jones (NEU), Eleri Moss (Headteachers' Representative) and Emma Roberts (UCAC)

Officers: Einir Rh Davies and M Eirian Roberts (Member Support Officers), B Mair Huws (Assistant Resources Officer and SACRE Clerk) and the Translators

1. PRAYER OR QUIET REFLECTION

The meeting was opened with a prayer from Councillor Paul Rowlinson, with an opportunity for quiet reflection.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Beca Brown, Nathan Abrams, Bethan Davies Jones, Siôn Huws, Edward Parry-Jones and Gwawr M Williams, and a late apology came to hand from Eirian Bradley Roberts

3. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

4. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent items were received.

5. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED to accept the minutes of the meeting of this Committee held on 4 July 2023 as a true record, and they were signed by the Chair.

6. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS SACRE MEETINGS

Gwynedd updates in relation to:

- i. SACRE Annual Report 2021 - 2022
- ii. Specialist Support for the SACRE
- iii. Correspondence sent on behalf of the SACRE

- i. SACRE Annual Report 2021 - 2022

It was confirmed that the changes discussed at the previous meeting had been completed and that the work on the SACRE Annual Report 2022-2023 would be addressed in due course.

ii. Specialist Support for the SACRE

Everyone was reminded that the specialist support by a GwE Officer had been withdrawn in 2018, and as a result the Committee had been operating without expertise ever since, which had proved frustrating. It was confirmed that the Head of Education at the time had been in discussions with GwE to reinstate the support, and it was confirmed that Bethan James would be supporting from now on. It was reported that the support would not be at the same level as previously, but Bethan James would be attending the SACRE meetings and would provide half a day's support. As a starting point, she would give a presentation at the next meeting.

iii. Correspondence sent on behalf of the SACRE

In the previous meeting it had been agreed to write to GwE to ask for clarity on GwE's role, but it was confirmed that the letter had not been sent – instead, Bethan James would give a presentation at the next meeting on the support that GwE provided in this area of learning.

Also at the previous meeting, it had been agreed to send a letter to the WJEC and the Welsh Government asking them to ensure that they provided Welsh-medium resources; again, it was noted that a letter had been drafted but had not been sent.

RESOLVED: To accept the above updates and look forward to welcoming Bethan James to her new role with the SACRE.

7. AN UPDATE ON THE WORK OF DEVELOPING THE COLLECTIVE WORSHIP GUIDANCE

Everyone was reminded of the background to the situation, where nominations were requested some months ago by now to look at the current guidelines as they had dated. Everyone had agreed that the guidelines were no longer suitable, and as a result the Reverend Nick Sissons and Councillor Elin Walker Jones had offered to review the current Guidance.

The Reverend Nick Sissons reported that, after studying the current guidance, it had become clear how much work was required, and he suggested that there was no value in going through the current document and altering it since there were wider issues that needed to be addressed, particularly the need to review the legislation on collective worship. He wondered whether anyone was aware of what the schools were doing at present? The Reverend Sissons felt that there was a role here for the Churches to lead on the work, as there really was a need for a more suitable document by now.

He referred to the paper where four options had been proposed, which were:

Option 1: Do nothing

Option 2: Review the existing Policy

Option 3: Write to the Welsh Government asking them to take the issue of Collective Worship or assembly seriously, and review the legislation as a matter of urgency.

Option 4: A compromise? Write to the Welsh Government and create a new policy that takes children and young people's mental health, spiritual and moral needs seriously. A policy that is written by those who undertake these tasks within schools regularly: A policy that values the idea of a whole-school community.

The Reverend Sissons noted that the situation would continue to cause concern until the legislation was changed, and he stated his concern that collective worship was too important a matter to be left to one side.

Councillor Walker Jones elaborated on the above and noted that an opportunity was being missed to address the matter of collective worship, and that merely revising the current document would not address the issue.

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She also reported her concern that it appeared that neither the Welsh Government nor ESTYN were taking the matter seriously, and consequently there was a need for the SACRE to do something urgently in order to address the situation.

The Reverend Nick Sissons and Councillor Elin Walker Jones were thanked for their work in delving to the root of the matter, and the floor was opened to comments.

Concern was noted that it was not very clear what currently took place in schools, and it was questioned why ESTYN reports were no longer being brought to the attention of the SACRE? The Assistant Resources Officer and SACRE Clerk confirmed that the layout of ESTYN reports was now quite different, with very little reference to collective worship.

She noted the feeling that it was a duty for the SACRE Members to monitor what went on in the schools, but she questioned whether the receipt of an invitation to attend a school assembly truly meant that a service was held regularly in the school?

It was reported that schools were requesting a copy of the guidance, therefore the Council had a responsibility to make them fit for purpose, and it was suggested that perhaps we should ask the WASACRE to raise the matter with all SACREs, and look at the matter nationally. In addition, it was noted that any changes would have to be made by individuals who were knowledgeable in the field.

The importance of bringing children together was noted, and that meaningful consideration was needed in order to do the task well and perhaps offer something creative, especially having heard the comments that there was shortage of space in some schools, and that the opportunity to assemble was being lost.

The committee took the opportunity to question specialists from education about their experiences, and one noted that a service for different school years was held every week, with the years being combined when that was possible, but it was a challenge to get all the children into the Hall. It was noted that collective worship had its benefits, but COVID had had a negative effect on the children's listening and concentration skills. This was reiterated, noting that children needed to see the value of collective worship. With regard to having everyone in the Hall at once, it was noted that some schools had high numbers of pupils in some years, and that collective worship with one form year at a time was the only option. The 'Minute to Think' model was referred to, where a slide was placed on the white board in the registration classroom, giving the pupils the opportunity to reflect on its contents during registration.

Many of the Members were keen to take the matter further, such as discussing with the national bodies of all the churches in Wales, raising it with the WASACRE, await a change in legislation through the Welsh Government and enquire with individual schools, but concern was noted that the timescale for some of the options was slow, and the feeling that we need to do something urgently.

The members noted their thanks for the above options, and noted that perhaps there were other options, but whatever the best option was, there was agreement that we needed something more useful than what was currently available.

RESOLVED: To accept the report and the proposal by the Reverend Nick Sissons that we as the SACRE send a letter to the WASACRE and the national bodies of all the churches in Wales to enquire how they could assist in moving the matter forward. The Reverend Sissons agreed to draft the letter.

8. WASACRE Matters

- I. A Report on the Activities of the Association: Chair
- II. Report for the 2022/2023 Financial Year: Treasurer
- III. Membership of WASACRE Executive Committee 2023/2024
- IV. Draft Minutes of the Summer WASACRE Meeting held on 19 June 2023

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- V. An opportunity to give feedback on the consultation on the proposed new GCSE Religious Studies qualification (teaching beginning in 2026) (on the WJEC website)
- VI. An opportunity to contribute to the creation of an exciting programme for the 2024 Conference which will include free interactive on-line seminars, as well as the physical conference day event.

The above items were referred to, which had been shared for information, and members shared updates from the previous WASACRE meeting as follows:

Schools' Data – concern was raised that the usual data was not available, but confirmation was given that more data would become available, with a health warning that it was not to be used to make comparisons.

Reference was made to the National Teaching Resources, drawing particular attention to the Governors module, and the committee was asked to promote the Resources.

It was confirmed that Collective Worship would be a topic in the Annual Conference 2024.

The Consultation on the proposed new qualification was highlighted, noting that it was extremely important for teachers in particular to take the opportunity to respond to the consultation.

It was noted that the question regarding KS4 Learning required consideration, and the opportunity was taken to confirm that it would be assessed formally.

RESOLVED: To accept the correspondence by the WASACRE and the relevant updates.

Everyone was thanked for their observations.

The meeting commenced at 3.30p.m. and concluded at 16:35p.m.

CHAIR