

SACRE Annual Reports – what is necessary and what is desirable?

Note: SACREs have responsibility for advising an authority on its schools. For religious education it advises community, voluntary controlled and Trust and Foundation schools without a religious designation; for collective worship it advises the authority on community and Trust and Foundation schools without a religious designation.

SACREs have to publish an annual report ‘as to the exercise of their functions and any action taken by representative groups on the council ... during the last preceding year’¹. This report has to be sent to the Secretary of State for Education as well as to key partners (see the Appendix). The main purpose of the annual report is to hold the local authority to account by informing the Secretary of State, and key partners, what advice SACRE gave during the year to the local authority and how that was responded to, this includes advice on religious education and collective worship in those schools for which the local authority has responsibility. Therefore, it is important that the Annual Report writing process takes into account the various audiences that SACRE is hoping to communicate with.

The necessary

Firstly, it is important to recognise that SACREs are statutory bodies that give advice. Hence, the annual report will need to state what advice was given, to whom and how that advice was acted upon in the year under report. Advice would normally be given to:

1. The local authority, this includes the portfolio holder for children’s services, the director of children’s services and any official of the authority
2. The schools within the authority for which the SACRE is responsible and other schools within the SACRE’s geographical area
3. The government, including the Secretary of State, Ministers or civil servants

The annual report should answer the following questions:

1. How did those who were give advice respond?
2. Was the advice taken?
3. How effective were actions taken in light of the advice given?
4. Did those being advised do something different and, if so, to what effect?

If SACRE cannot do this it will be important to state why. Here are some questions to consider:

¹ Education Act 1996: 391 (6); Circular 1/94 recommended that the annual report was sent to the Secretary of State by 31st December each calendar year.

- Is SACRE taken seriously enough?
- Is SACRE adequately supported by professional staff, such as a clerk and an RE professional?
- What resources did SACRE receive, how were they used and did that constitute value for money?

If the answer to any, some or all of these questions is: no, then that needs to be acknowledged in the report.

Secondly, the report needs to include data about SACRE attendance by Committee as well as any monies that it receives from the local authority to carry out its responsibilities, including the time of an advisor and a clerk. As SACRE's are statutory bodies that meet in public they need to be properly clerked by the local authority, as their meetings are part of the public record.

SACRE should also report on any monitoring of RE and collective worship it has done and the results of such monitoring. Indeed, such monitoring should be the basis of at least some of the advice given. Similarly, a SACRE is required to advise on the appropriate materials used in classrooms to support the teaching and learning in RE. SACRE should report on any such materials that it has looked at and advised upon. SACREs also need to report on the work of any Agreed Syllabus Conference done in that calendar year, or indicate when another Conference is due.

SACRE has a statutory role in considering and granting determinations². A request for a determination is made by the head teacher of a school to provide collective worship that is not Christian. If a SACRE grants or refuses a determination it should be noted in the annual report. There is no reason for a full explanation of why SACRE made the decision that it did as that information will be available from the report presented to SACRE and the minutes of that meeting. Likewise, SACRE has a role in investigating complaints against schools in relation to RE and Collective Worship and the number of such complaints dealt with should be noted in the report with an indication as to whether the complaints were upheld or not. In terms of complaints investigated it would be rare to mention the schools or individuals involved, as these matters would usually be discussed with the exclusion of press and public.

The desirable

SACRE may have done a host of things that it should celebrate. This may be provided evenings for teachers to meet members of faith communities of significance in the local authority. It might be lectures that SACRE has hosted. It could be supporting other local authority agendas, such as Prevent or its contribution to the promotion of social cohesion in the authority. Similarly, SACRE may have formal contacts with a number of significant groups in the area, such as Churches Together, the local interfaith network, RE hubs or professional

² Education Act 1996: 394

associations such as NATRE. Whatever SACRE has done can be celebrated in the report.

If possible the report should highlight good practice in the local authority so that schools might see examples of what they might do to improve RE and collective worship in their school.

It is also desirable that the Chair of SACRE write a short introduction to the Annual Report – this may be in the form of a ‘the state of the nation’ address setting out key issues for RE, collective worship and SACRE in the coming twelve months.

Conclusion

SACRE’s annual report is SACRE’s opportunity to hold the local authority to account. As a statutory body it has this duty and responsibility. If RE and collective worship are of low priority in the authority’s schools and it does nothing to stop that then the Secretary of State needs to know, as do key partners. If the local authority is promoting RE and collective worship and the status of RE is high then that should be celebrated.

SACRE too needs to celebrate what it has done and to celebrate what others have done to promote high quality RE and collective worship.

Suggested structure to the report

Here is a suggested structure for the annual report.

1. Chair’s introduction and overview of the report
2. Table of contents
3. Advice to statutory bodies
 - a. Local Authority
 - b. Schools, including advice on methods of teaching and teaching materials
 - c. Government or other statutory bodies
 - d. The response to advice given by SACRE
4. Religious Education
 - a. Standards and quality of provision of RE
 - a. Public examinations
 - b. Attainment in RE not covered by public examination
 - c. Evidence from Ofsted reports
 - d. Withdrawal from RE
 - e. Complaints about RE in the local authority’s community and controlled schools
 - f. Training provided to schools, the number of schools involved in training and its quality
 - b. Agreed Syllabus Review

- a. When the Agreed Syllabus was last reviewed and when the next review is expected to start
 - b. Monitoring of the current Agreed Syllabus, its implementation and issues that SACRE have highlighted as a result of monitoring undertaken
5. Collective Worship
 - a. Compliance with the statutory requirement
 - b. Quality of collective worship
 - c. Determinations
 - d. Withdrawal from collective worship
 - e. Complaints about collective worship in the local authority's community schools
6. Management of SACRE
 - a. Attendance at SACRE by Group
 - b. Membership and training
 - c. The number and work of subcommittees
 - d. Resources available to SACRE, including finance, professional advice and clerking
7. Contribution of SACRE to wider local authority agendas
 - a. Identifying what SACRE has contributed to local authority agendas and the impact of that contribution
 - b. SACRE's contribution to the local authority's public sector equality duty
 - c. SACRE's contribution to governor training and advice to governors
 - d. Links to broader community initiatives
 - e. How SACRE is linked to local and national bodies
8. Summary
9. Membership of SACRE

This is not an exhaustive structure but meant as a useful guide.

Appendix: Key partners

When writing the report it is important to understand whom the various audiences of the report. This may mean thinking carefully about style and the language used, especially acronyms. Here is a suggested list:

- Councillors
- Nominating bodies
- Schools, including Academies, Free Schools and Independent schools in the local authority's area
- Libraries for the general public (including a version for the visually impaired where requested)
- Local faith leaders and faith communities (on request SACRE's annual report should be available in languages other than English)

- Local institutes of further and higher education, especially where teachers are trained, if there are none in the area then those who use schools in the authority for teacher training
- Teaching schools, in that specific capacity
- Academy chains, to the Executive Head Teacher/Principal and the Chair of the Board of Directors