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Department: Chief Executive's  
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To NASACRE, by email.

For the attention of the NASACRE Executive

### **Re. A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools**

Further to the NASACRE briefing paper titled 'A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools' by Clarke/Woodhead, published in June 2015, Slough SACRE recently formed a Sub-Committee to discuss the paper and formulate a response, as requested. Please find Slough SACRE's response, below. Please note, the Sub-Committee has not addressed each question as set out in the paper, but expressed their thoughts about the issues raised.

#### General Comment

The Sub-Committee is concerned about the degree of variation across SACREs and local authorities which seems to make the law a bit of a nonsense.

#### Collective worship:

The Sub-Committee generally want something more robust to support, challenge and monitor the quality of collective worship than what is in place now. The present requirements are not enforceable so any new system needs to be more effective and this involves taking collective worship seriously. The Sub-Committee cannot see how the proposal will necessarily improve the situation on the ground. Quality rather than quantity should be the focus so maybe 'worship' shouldn't be required on a daily basis – instead, perhaps once or twice a week? There should, perhaps be a focus on collective worship within initial teacher training programmes if it is deemed to be important.

#### Religious Education:

Does it matter if a syllabus doesn't reflect the local situation? – surely schools should be preparing students for life beyond their local area, to be responsible, informed citizens of the world. The Sub-Committee likes the idea of a local SACRE to interpret a national syllabus in the light of the local context. The Sub-Committee would like to see local SACREs given teeth to monitor and support the teaching and quality of RE. (The Sub-Committee also think that it is a nonsense to have a national curriculum that is not required in all state funded schools.)

In relation to the appointment of people to a national SACRE – this is just the same problem as is experienced in every local area. It has to be sorted out locally so the same compromise would have to be sorted out. If it can be done locally why not nationally?

On the matter of a veto – careful consideration should be given to the choice of members. The threat of a veto locally prevents SACREs ever getting as far as failing to publish a

syllabus so it is likely that the same would prevail because no one would really want to hand on the responsibility for a national syllabus to the Secretary of State.

The Sub-Committee agree that the right of withdrawal should be removed but it does mean that teachers, visiting speakers and hosts of visits to places of worship must all have a good understanding of boundaries and this has training implications. There should also be clear information given to parents about the nature of RE and what might be involved, for example, on a visit.

In this day and age RE should be understood to be an important subject and treated as such with appropriate funding and structures which ensure the highest of standings.

On a note not relevant to SACREs:

The Sub-Committee believe faith schools should retain their own inspection systems to ensure that each one conforms to norms agreed beyond individual schools.

Yours sincerely

*Neil Fraser*

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**Clerk to Slough SACRE, on behalf of Julie Siddiqi, Chair**