

Summary Transcript of Keynote by Kathryn Wright
NASACRE AGM and Conference
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A quick retrospective – my 30 years with SACREs

My first engagement with SACREs took place around 1991 when my own RE Teacher, who was on Kent SACRE talked about their role and asked us as 6th Formers what we thought about the curriculum. In 1994-5, whilst training to teach, we learnt about SACREs, in particular about Birmingham as that is where I was based at the time. In 1997 I joined Newham SACRE as a teacher representative and called on the local authority to support further the professional development of teachers. After a brief spell in Redbridge where I was a teacher representative on the Agreed Syllabus Conference working group, I returned to be adviser to Newham SACRE from 2001-2005. In 2007 I became adviser to Norfolk SACRE, and then subsequently became a member of the SACRE and worked with a team of teachers to develop the Agreed Syllabus in 2018-19. Currently, I don't actually sit on a SACRE, but it is always a pleasure to engage with NASACRE at events like today.

Strengthening Voices

NASACRE has four aims, and I have drawn how here what I see as four key words - strengthening, supporting, representing and celebrating.

Firstly, strengthening voices, and the value of multiple perspectives. SACREs give voices to communities and to teachers. In my own journey, as a young teacher, I was given a voice on SACRE, talking about the need for professional development and networking. As a result I worked with SACRE to apply to what was then St Gabriel's Trust for funding! So CSTG and SACREs have always gone hand in hand to me! The CSTG leadership programme is supporting several teachers who are on and in some cases chair local SACREs. Some are here today! We've funded several projects with SACREs including Cumbria SACRE – voices project- which utilizes the local voice.

Supporting Innovation

As a young teacher I was part of an Agreed Syllabus Conference that innovated – under the steady hand of Dr Bill Gent. We reviewed some proposed new 'levels' from QCDA, and thought long and hard about pedagogy together. This tradition of innovation has had a huge impact across the country. To name just a few – Hampshire Living Difference, Birmingham Dispositions, Norfolk Disciplinary... there are many more... some have huge local impact, others having wider national and international recognition. SACREs are places of innovation...

Representing the community

NASACRE has done a great job at representing the RE community - locally, regionally and nationally. It has contributed to the vibrancy of the subject that I believe exists in many places across our nation. NASACRE has also contributed to many different initiatives that CSTG have developed in partnership over the last few years including RExChange and our leadership programme. It has also been a strong voice within the new RE Hubs initiative showing how SACREs can work with hub leads to engage different stakeholders.

Celebrating an education in religion and worldviews

Agreed Syllabus launches are one of my favorite things! They are such great occasions to showcase the great work of SACREs, teachers and pupils in a local area. I have the privilege of speaking at the launch of the new Cambridgeshire, Peterborough and Rutland one in a few week's time. However, there are many other ways in which SACREs in the last 30 years have celebrated an education in religion and worldviews – festivals, competitions, conferences, publications, innovative projects... Living out the vision of RE – to help young people navigate our complex multi religious, multi secular world. We do this in SACREs! We should be celebrating!

So, in the next 30 years do we need more of the same or do we need to change...

I want to suggest both...Clearly we want to continue strengthening, supporting, representing and celebrating, but how we do this might change... I see challenges and opportunities ahead....

Strengthening Partnerships

There are challenges and opportunities in our current context. Multi Academy Trusts are growing in strength and number. Many are taking very seriously their responsibilities for RE. Last term AREIAC and NATRE hosted an online event for MAT RE leads, the numbers signing up to attend were interesting- there were a lot, and there will be more. We need to work with Trusts, learning from their expertise and sharing ours with them. We can strengthen relationships with government too, the recent Colin Bloom report opens up opportunities for discussion with officials for example. I am aware of some controversies around its content, but one thing is clear in it, he wants to strengthen the position of an education in religion and worldviews. That is something we must utilize together. Partnering with other organizations locally and nationally to support an education in religion and worldviews particularly to promote good community relations is vital. The Religion Media Centre Creating Connections initiative has already been to five cities, and more are planned in the Autumn – its time for SACREs to join in!!

Supporting Understanding

I've referred a lot to an education in religion and worldviews. Personally I don't mind what we call the subject, in law of course it is still religious education. However, I do think we need to take very seriously our approach to the subject in the next few years. I have spoken elsewhere about this, so won't repeat it at length here. However, in summary, I think we can deepen our understanding of a religion and worldviews approach, and by this I mean two things...

A pedagogical emphasis on – hermeneutics, intellectual humility, reflexivity, critical interpretation and understanding of positionality. AND

A curriculum framing which takes seriously lived authentic experience, diversity of belief and practice, continuity and change, context and different ways of knowing.

For me the new approach is about both a pedagogical and a curriculum turn.

Representing the religion and worldviews community

Recruitment, recruitment, recruitment. This may have been our mantra for the last 30 years too, but it is far more acute now than ever before. The government recently increased the target for

recruitment for September, and it is likely that this year we will only recruit half of the teachers required. NASACRE, and individual SACREs, are already using their lobbying power on this, working with other organisations. We must keep up the pressure for a bursary, but also for funded ongoing support for teachers of RE too. Many in the RE community are using a shorthand for this – we need a government funded National Plan.

We can also support understanding of the importance of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) which is also highlighted in the recent Bloom Review. SACREs are a great place to promote this, and to live it out! This is something that in the next few years will, I think, become increasingly important in the public square. CSTG is developing work with primary schools in this area which we hope to share later this year.

Celebrations should continue!

Public perception is actually good. The two CSTG commissioned surveys have demonstrated this in the last couple of years. Parents in particular are far more positive than we might have initially thought, and I think are a resource we need to engage with far more. 1/4 of a million young people will take a GCSE in RS this year (roughly). So the subject is very much alive. Young people are positive about it and see its value. Again our own competitions support this view and do go onto our website to see the voices of young people and their views on the world. There are many great projects across the subject community promoting and engaging with a range of audiences. We've been supporting Portsmouth, Barnet and Cumbria SACREs, and we will hear about the Westhill awards later.

The treasured pearl...

It is NASACRE 30th anniversary, the pearl anniversary. We have a treasured pearl in our subject. An education in religion and worldviews is highly valuable. The most valuable pearls are those which are highly reflective. As we mark 30 years, let's pause and reflect. Much has been achieved, but there are challenges as well as opportunities ahead. As a religion and worldview community we need to be agile; the education world is not the same as 5, 10 and certainly not 30 years ago. This requires us to think differently, see possibilities when sometimes things seem against us. We have to work within the systems we have, and that will present themselves to us. This may mean we have to do things differently too. If our subject is a treasured pearl, we need to make sure it is on display, that people admire it. So let's work together, to strengthen, support, represent and celebrate. Let's move together to future proof the subject, and see the subject make a difference in the lives of the children and young people.

Kathryn Wright
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