

AGREED SYLLABUS CONFERENCE

Thursday 9 January 2025 at 9.30am to 3pm
Green Room, Archive Centre, County Hall, Norwich

Minutes

Present:

Committee A (Representatives of faiths and beliefs): John Turner (JT) Deborah Carpenter (DC) via Zoom	Committee D (Representatives of the LA): -
Committee B (Representatives of Church of England): John Semmens (JS), Chair Chris Allen (CA)	In attendance: Nikki McGee (NM) Matthew Lane (ML)
Committee C (Representatives of the Teachers' Associations): Sue Paice (SP) Helen Jacquet (HJ) Jennie Warner (JW)	Advisers: Clerk: Christopher Perry-Yates (CPY) NCC: Jill Duman (JD)
Apologies received: Cllr Ian Mackie (IM) Cllr John Ward (JW) Simon Oldfield (SO), Vice-Chair Gayatri Verma (GV) Naegeen Noorani (NN) Clare Williams (CW) Jane Green (JG) (resigned)	Observer: -

Item No.	Item and discussion	Owner	Target Date
1.	Welcome and introductions: All members were welcomed and introduced themselves.		
2.	Apologies: Apologies had been received from Cllr Ian Mackie, Cllr John Ward, Simon Oldfield, Gayatri Verma, Naegeen Noorani, and Clare Williams.		

	It was noted that the meeting was not quorate as the Councillors had been called to an extraordinary meeting of the Full Council.		
3.	<p>Overview of purpose of Agreed Syllabus Conference:</p> <p>Conference agreed that an overarching aim of the agreed syllabus should be to embed the message of having acceptance and respect for all world views and faiths. Conference also discussed the need to identify shared principles and commonalities.</p> <p>Conference discussed what changes needed to be made to the syllabus that would empower teachers to feel confident in the delivery and assessment. It was acknowledged that there were differences in the way that teachers were trained initially over the years and that the syllabus needed to break down the delivery to aid lesson planning.</p> <p>It was noted that there were over 300 schools that were not regularly engaging such as non-religious academies and therefore it was unknown what quality the RE education was within the Norfolk education sector as a whole. Conference acknowledged the pressures with the reduction of Teaching Assistants in school due to budget pressures and this made it difficult to retain granular knowledge and the importance of RE. It was noted that there was a lack of understanding about the difference between a syllabus and a curriculum, but it was important to ensure that the syllabus was not 'spoon feeding' schools who ultimately responsible for developing their own RE curriculum schemes in line with the syllabus.</p> <p>Conference noted that the disciplinary lenses within the current agreed syllabus were clearer compared to other local authorities. There was consideration over whether the lens approach used was a barrier. It was noted that the Norfolk Agreed Syllabus was often cited as an exemplar in its use of lenses. It was also agreed that it was important to focus on the of what is respectful when teaching about other religions and beliefs and using the syllabus as a platform to understand diversity including the large proportion of non-believers.</p>		
4.	<p>Discussion of the Census 2021 data (Norfolk in Numbers):</p> <p>It was noted that there were 47% of people in Norfolk who identified themselves as religious and 44% of people who had no religion. It was also noted that the number of people identifying as having no religious view had increased significantly since the 2001 census. Conference agreed that the syllabus needed to accommodate those with no beliefs.</p> <p>Conference discussed ensuring that the syllabus included what had to be delivered, what to cover if asked and what not to cover or was not appropriate at the age range (essential, desirable and no-go). It was also discussed how to reflect on the differences within denominations. Conference also discussed where the line was drawn with involvement of recorded beliefs. It was agreed to also use the local studies and contexts and resources which would also align with the history curriculum.</p>		

	<p>Conference discussed whether the agreed syllabus should provide any further guidance for KS4. It was noted that most syllabi seemed to stop at KS3.</p> <p>It was noted that under the Academies Bill there was currently no requirement for Trusts to follow the national curriculum. The proposed changes to the Education Bill may include the need for academies to teach the National Curriculum, but this was still a grey area.</p> <p>Conference noted that the national curriculum review would not be completed until after the review of Norfolk Agreed Syllabus was completed, but there would remain a focus on what was needed for Norfolk based on the local demographics.</p> <p>Conference noted the wide variety of people who identified with 'other religions' and agreed that it was important for the syllabus to include a respect for all views, beliefs and religions and the differences within denominations.</p>		
5.	<p>The Agreed Syllabus 2019 – what works and what needs to change:</p> <p>Conference agreed that there was a need for a preface to the agreed syllabus to state that schools needed to use the syllabus to work up their own curriculum delivery and explain that it was not designed to be a curriculum.</p> <p>It was noted that there were some exemplar materials that supported the agreed syllabus. Conference agreed that there needed to be further consideration over access to the materials and reviewing that they were still fit for purpose.</p> <p>Conference re-emphasised the need for reflecting the local context in the syllabus but emphasising that each curriculum should reflect the micro-demographics of their location and keep this under review. The provision of case studies incorporating the world view and lived experience was also suggested. An example of the Cornwall Agreed Syllabus was used for this. It was agreed that it would be useful to have detail about the expectations of RE / RS in KS4 along with expectations for Special Schools.</p> <p>It was suggested that the exemplar materials could be included within the Agreed Syllabus to aid teachers with curriculum planning in line with the Cornwall Agreed Syllabus. Inclusion of census data was also suggested as part of the premise and rationale section of the syllabus. The inclusion of flow diagrams for curriculum planning were also suggested.</p> <p>Conference discussed creating template pro forma's for case studies relating to religions, beliefs, and world views. Production of videos was also discussed as a future development. It was also agreed that the syllabus should focus on the role of RE within safeguarding, focusing on the language in the current agreed syllabus.</p>		

6.	<p>Assessment:</p> <p>Conference reviewed the attainment and progress element of the Agreed Syllabus. It was noted that there was a disconnect between Age Related Expectations (ARE) and the syllabus which made it harder for teachers to assess against. It was agreed that the syllabus should remove the ARE and include a suite of ways of assessing against personal knowledge. This could include linking to children's understanding of RE and looking at what this looked like (assessing ways of knowing). It was agreed to set out some principles and ways of assessing, although not focusing on detail as this would be shaped by individual curriculums. It was agreed that assessment did not just happen during the enquiry process but also about whether what was learned was used in context and in other areas. It was also suggested that case studies could also include ways of assessing.</p> <p>Conference discussed the potential of SACRE offering sessions modelling moderation and assessing. It was agreed that it was important for assessment to be a tool to show progression and inform adjustments. Disciplinary assessment would drive disciplinary teaching. Signposting should be included such as the Cornwall, approach to 'I can' statements as exemplars of where children should be at each stage. It was also important to ensure that the syllabus was following what was happening nationally.</p> <p>Conference agreed that it was important to ensure that the guidance on assessment did not focus on skills base but on principles of RE as this was an Agreed Syllabus, not a curriculum. There was a need to emphasise that assessment should be based on each individual curriculum. Advice around the assessment of personal knowledge could also be included as well as including the whole process within example case studies from syllabus to curriculum to delivery and then assessment. It was suggested that Julian of Norwich could be used as a case study to show how it was taught and assessed in each Key Stage; this would clearly demonstrate progression.</p> <p>Conference noted the difference in the RE content that was being taught in feeder schools – Infant through to Junior through to Secondary.</p>		
7.	<p>Timeline for development of the Agreed Syllabus:</p> <p>Conference discussed a proposed timeline for review of the Agreed Syllabus. It was agreed that this would be finalised at the next meeting.</p>		
8.	<p>Zoom meeting to agree next steps:</p> <p>Conference discussed the need to explore further the case study idea incorporating world views and lived experiences with a focus on diversity and intellectual humility of and within different denominations, religions and world views.</p> <p>Conference agreed that a separate working party would be created to look further into assessment.</p>		

9.	Date of the next ASC: 6 February 2025 ASC at 9.30am to 1pm.		
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Meeting closed at 15:10.