

Activist SACREs

30+ things a good SACRE can do

Any SACRE could be passive and reactive, but this is a plea for activism from SACREs. I hold the view that any SACRE, large or small, expert or developing, should consider how to take action in pursuit of its mission to guard and develop standards in RE. NATRE has a very strong interest in SACRE effectiveness and is pleased to support our many members who serve on SACREs.

We think that SACREs are more powerful than we have yet seen – statutory bodies, in all local authorities, with representation from religion, professionalism and democratic structure are powerful, but often don't notice their powers. Both dependent upon the LA, and independent of it, the SACREs that do most for RE are powerful.

I like the idea of activism, because it represents the capacity of the SACRE to make a difference, rather than merely maintain itself. Perhaps a rule of thumb for activism might be 'does this SACRE innovate at least one project every year?' Is yours an activist SACRE?



30+ things a good SACRE can do: teacher representatives can initiate any or all of these.

Flexing the activists' muscles.

1. **Ask the LA for money.** Tackle the question of the SACRE's own funding needs. I think NASACRE has an important role here, to disseminate best practice in funding SACREs. Some of you manage without anyone to pay the cost of stamps, and others can find tens of thousands of pounds of local authority money from a core services budget for working parties and agreed syllabus work. Connecting the work of SACRE with citizenship and community cohesion is a route some have taken here. This is, for some SACREs, the essential first step to becoming activist.
2. **Monitor and praise.** Monitor schools' performance through reading OFSTED reports (this data not as good as it was, so needs supplementing by GCSE and SIMS scores from secondary schools and any possible sources from Primary schools, especially with regard to self-evaluation in schools). Will school improvement partnerships be able to give us some data as their work unfolds? Do teacher members know of any successful practitioners through Local RE Groups? Celebrate success, and seek to find at least three schools in each key stage that are 'beacons' for its RE ~ then spread the word about them.
3. **Information on provision.** Send out questionnaires to schools, or to pupils, (named or even anonymous?) to support teachers in the endless 'status skirmishing' required of RE subject leaders in their battle for more of the buns, rather than just the crumbs. Information is power here – can schools say 'we know we need to improve, because of what SACRE say'? Can they say that they know how to improve because of their SACRE's advice?
4. **Offer professional development.** Providing or organising CPD and INSET for teachers, with faith communities to the fore (using the expertise of SACRE members?), running conferences for a day, to bring SACRE members, teachers and governors together, or doing courses on new syllabuses, guidance, schemes of work or planning. Staffordshire, Leicestershire, Lancashire, Gloucestershire and Poole all do this, along with many others. It offers SACRE members and teachers to meet and learn from each other. Maybe the TDA will even help us with this soon! REC's training commission report should be on every SACRE's agenda.
5. **Inspect the inspectors.** Monitoring OFSTED inspection performance and complaining to the office of HMCI. (Could we do that 21st century contextualisation activity, where students write up 'the parable of the good OFSTED inspector?') Why don't they mention RE even if its non-compliant, or if its excellent? This needs challenging locally and nationally, at both primary and secondary. SACREs might take this up with inspection contractors.
6. **Try a resource project.** Activist SACREs offer local religions chances to resource RE in local, authentic and contemporary ways. Make a booklet or CD Rom of photos, contacts, teaching and learning activities related to a dozen places of worship in the Local Authority area, as Leicestershire, Blackburn and Coventry have done. This makes schools grateful to SACREs – and can even produce some revenue!

7. **Give authentic faith community voices an audience among teachers.** Write from faith to school: Redbridge's excellent briefing papers on Sikh dress, observing Ramadan, Jehovah's Witnesses and RE, and other topics are all good models. And it doesn't have to be written: Video, photopack or visiting speaker work even better.
8. **Tell parents.** Publishing a parents' leaflet, to highlight the value of community involvement in RE. Show off some pupils work! (Barnsley have done this with their SACRE annual report and Lancashire have an annual display of children's RE work at the Faith Centre and welcome visits from local schools and faith groups to view the work) This could significantly shift one of RE's perennial problems, that parental attitudes always seem at least a generation out of date. DFE's contribution here was nice, but could be bettered!
9. **Gather information.** Monitoring standards and examination results, time for RE, subject leadership and other aspects of provision. Information is power in this context, and local authorities can reasonably be asked to provide information to the SACRE. Northamptonshire's approach is exemplary, among many others.
10. **Exemplification.** Get together some pupils' work that exemplifies standards in RE with reference to the local syllabus. The exemplification is important to establish standards, and such projects have a powerful impact, especially for those new to an area or new to a syllabus. As for example Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Lancashire, Leicester and Hertfordshire local authorities have done, to the great benefit of their teachers.
11. **Run a local parliament of religions** for 15~17 year olds. Can we think of a better way of helping young citizens see the place of faith in the 21st century? Inter faith projects model the best of RE and are always exciting. Prince Charles did one – make him your role model! Bradford and Lancashire have done.
12. **Organise an arts competition:** RE improves where it gets more creative, and the linked curriculum models increasingly popular in primary schools can make this very useful. Design the cover for the new syllabus ~ as children in Gloucestershire, Lincoln and Hereford have done. Why not relate faith and spirituality to poetry, drama or creative writing too? NATRE's 'Art in Heaven' competition is a model (see www.NATRE.org.uk/spiritedarts)
13. **Help the SEN schools and teachers.** Some SACREs have used the LA's good offices to give particular support to SEN schools for RE, and others have made a section of their Agreed Syllabus that addresses this clearly and helpfully. Training and CPD can go with this.
14. **Facilitate some exhibitions.** In Croyden and Coventry, hundreds of children from dozens of schools attended and learned from exhibitions at the faith community buildings of several religions over a period of years. Copy that. Lancashire Faith Centre, for example, co-ordinates visits and visitors to contribute to this purpose. Or invite the national faith community bodies to mount a 'Jewish way of life' for your schools to visit. Or similar.
15. **Do an essay competition.** RE today and partners promote an essay competition on the spiritual principles for life in conjunction with the Templeton Foundation. A SACRE would be an ideal local partner for this. We may even be able to put you in touch with a grant to provide the money for prizes and administration. City of Derby SACRE have made a great success of this.

16. **Book the stage.** Arrange a pupil performance, like those hundreds inspired by the RE Festival of 1997, or the JC 2000 millennium arts festival. NATRE has a display which we hire out! Linking this to a syllabus launch, or an annual lecture is powerful, and involves the interaction of pupils and teachers with SACRE members.
17. **Get lecturers.** Set up an annual lecture series for all those interested in RE, as happens in Hounslow, Redbridge, Westminster or Kent for example. Link it to the publication of the annual SACRE report, and invite the director to preside: directors need to know about RE at its best. Hounslow get about 60 to theirs.
18. **Be the voice of religion in the Local Authority.** Contribute to civic inter faith work, e.g. in inter-faith forums or from the millennium, with the Diocese or other faith groups. Send and ask for representatives. Ask Leicester City about this. Wandsworth SACRE give multicultural and community cohesion guidance to the schools too. Lancashire has a Faith Centre which can organise visits to religious buildings or from religious visitors to schools.
19. **Celebrate the grassroots.** Make a presentation to the Education Committee about the SACRE's grass roots work with pupils, teachers and schools. Make them proud of the religious communities involved, and the sense of inclusion SACRE can create.
20. **Smoke out the key voices.** Invite key people to speak to the SACRE's annual conference: would this invitation to speak help the Chair of the Education Committee to clarify his / her own thinking on RE? What about locally prominent religious leaders? Politicians? Nothing concentrates the mind like having to speak thoughtfully to a plural audience. Norfolk SACRE had a significant influence on Rt Hon Charles Clarke (a local MP in Norwich) when he was Secretary of State.
21. **Listen to teachers.** Ensure that serving RE teachers are heard every time SACRE meets: do the LA and Union seats get filled by people with RE expertise, or without? Can the SACRE arrange to have more in-touch voices present? Could half day cover be paid, or could it be a standard item on the agenda to hear a report of good practice from the classroom? Some SACREs have a representative from NATRE on the Teachers' Committee.
22. **Serve 16-19s.** Run an active learning day conference for post sixteen students, to model for schools great ways of providing RE for all in the sixth forms. Link it to tertiary college students as well, to show them what they're missing. Ask in Lancashire, Cumbria, Hertfordshire or Gloucester for experience. The 'dare2engage' initiative is a way to get started with this – see the website www.dare2engage.ork.uk
23. **Every year, innovate.** Make sure there's an annual working party of teachers and faith representatives on a key topic: current favourites might include special needs and RE, RE for the most able, assessment, RE three to seven, performance management or citizenship.
24. **Go visiting.** Arrange your meetings around the faith communities: Three meetings a year could enable six religions to host your SACRE over two years. Hospitality always develops community, as Westminster's SACRE might testify. Lancashire SACRE have met at a Hindu Temple and then at a Mosque

25. **Get well advised.** Use the RE adviser, and if no adviser is available, explore the use of an RE consultant for briefing and supporting the SACRE and pursuing its business. Many SACREs from Tower Hamlets to Newcastle have done this and been pleased with the increased professionalism resulting. 15 days of real professional time is worth more than the cash it costs to the activist SACRE.
26. **Draw attention to yourself ~ be noisy!** If the local authority is being inspected, aim to get a paragraph in the report, praising the best of your work. Ask for an appointment with the inspectorate, and supply your SEF, development plan annual report and syllabus as required. Expect to be noticed in any other ways too: in any local government re-organisation SACREs must be recognised as a core service. Blowing the trumpet will help RE. If they ignore you, play a noisy attention seeking game.
27. **Be publicists.** Let schools and teachers know about prizes and awards for RE, e.g. fellowships from Farmington, science and religion awards from the Templeton Foundation (via RE Today), the Church College Trusts or the recent Sandford St Martin Trust Award for media excellence in RE. Or set one up of your own, and ask some local firms, or the library service, to sponsor the prizes and exhibit the winners.
28. **Support local groups.** NATRE has a link network of over 50 groups for teachers of RE. But many SACREs could really help these often small and struggling but professionally friendly groups. They are a valuable source of current issues facing practising teachers in the classroom. Can you grow one in your area? Can the Clerk to SACRE help just a little with publicity or administration? Have a joint SACRE / teachers' group meeting?
29. **Lobby nationally.** Every meeting of a SACRE could result in a letter to DFES, QCA, TDA, OFSTED, BECTa or some other nationally powerful institutions (Unions? Faith community bodies?) which need (honestly) the benefit of your experience and grass roots local knowledge. Activists propose such letters at SACRE meetings, and follow up the replies.
30. **Tackle the teaching shortage.** Don't give up on teacher supply. If the SACRE asks the local authority who is teaching RE, or uses inspection reports to identify shortfalls in specialist teaching, then it can take action to improve the most intractable problem RE faces. Does the local ITT course speak to the SACRE? Contact the University, and see if joint training is a good idea.
31. **Education Sunday:** this annual opportunity for faith to remember education could be taken up at the civic level and among inter faith groups much more than it is. Details are published annually by the Churches' Joint Education Policy Committee. February 2007 is your first chance to get involved.
32. **Check your own pulse.** Use the QCA SEF or the older report on 'An Effective SACRE: Making the difference' to audit the effectiveness of your own work, and seek to develop the role and influence of the SACRE every year.

Most of these ideas, in one form or another, are culled from several years of SCAA / QCA's analyses of SACRE reports, and therefore are all already happening somewhere. Making more happen in more places is a definite possibility. It may suggest some new directions for some SACREs.

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