

**ROTHERHAM STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
(SACRE)
THURSDAY 4 DECEMBER 2025**

Present:-

Group 1

D. Homer
T. Griffin

Group 2

H. Lambert (Chair)

Group 3

L. Melvin
E. Nicholls

Group 4

N. Devlin

68. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following members: Councillor R. Ismail; Councillor V. Cusworth; Councillor S. Alam; V. Gregory; T. Williams and S. Yasseen.

69. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

70. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items on the agenda for which it was deemed necessary to exclude members of the public or press.

71. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes from the last meeting on 18th September 2025 were approved as a true and accurate record of the proceedings.

72. CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

The Chair advised that they had recently completed subject leader training for primary schools on the world views approach to teaching RE.

The Assistant Director for Education and Inclusion (Assistant Director) referred Members to a recent High Court judgement in Northern Ireland relating to the teaching of RE, which endorsed Rotherham SACRE's broad based, world views approach. The Governance Advisor confirmed

that they would find a summary of the judgement and would circulate it amongst Members for information.

73. DEVELOPMENT PLAN UPDATE

The Chair commented that most of the items on the SACRE Development Plan were also items on the agenda so would be covered as discussions continued.

74. RE HUBS

The Chair commented that SACRE had previously discussed compiling a list of RE Experts and speakers that schools could be directed to, but that this information was now collated by the regional RE Hub. It was possible to sign up as an accredited RE speaker and the Chair was aware that at least one member of SACRE has provided their details as an available speaker to the regional RE Hub.

The Governance Advisor confirmed that they had recently attended the regional meeting of the Yorkshire & Humber branch of the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) and that NASACRE had sent out a survey to regional SACRE members on the content and use of RE Hubs. The Chair confirmed that they had received this survey and had completed it and the Governance Advisor agreed to circulate the link to members who had not received the survey in case they wanted to provide their feedback.

75. FEEDBACK FROM THE AGREED SYLLABUS CONFERENCE

The Chair provided a verbal update on the recent activities of the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) following the meeting held on the 18th November 2025.

The Chair explained that they had met with the RE Advisor and together they had gone through the current ASC Syllabus on a line-by-line basis, working out where amendments and improvements could be made. The Chair reminded members that it had been previously agreed that this review of the Agreed Local Syllabus would not be a full overhaul of the document but a lighter touch update and refinement where required.

The Chair took Members through the following issues that had been discussed and agreed at the ASC meeting:

Main updates proposed and agreed:

- To add “*Together for Tomorrow*” theme to the subtitle and introduction.
- To amend the Executive Summary to stress guidance and flexibility

for schools.

- To expand inclusion of non-religious world views (Atheism, Humanism, etc.)
- To strengthen the world views approach to teaching RE.
- To reorder the aims diagrams and remove a redundant table for clarity.
- To update Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural guidance and align it with the current OFSTED framework.
- To keep the Cultural Capital section but make it more concise.
- To add references to collective worship and update related guidance.
- To recommend weekly RE lessons over block teaching.
- To update census data (2011 → latest ONS figures) with tables and pie charts.
- To insert hyperlinks for useful resources and RE visits.
- To remove the outdated “Skillsbuilder” diagram and instead, emphasise theologian/sociologist/philosopher skills.
- To strengthen the section on SEND inclusion and adaptive teaching approach.
- To add a section on critical engagement and analysis in response to AI concerns.
- To include an acknowledgment list and incorporate more recent artwork examples from Rotherham schools.

Other Discussions:

- Interfaith activities to be encouraged but not fully embedded.
- Collective worship guidance to be refreshed.
- Increased coordination with RE Hub for better school speakers.
- Consider Madam Mayor’s involvement in January event.

Agreed next steps:

- Chair & RE Advisor to redraft syllabus, incorporating feedback from wider ASC members.

- T. Williams to provide updated census data and charts.
- Revised syllabus to be presented at ASC meeting on 2 March 2026, then presented to full SACRE meeting in June for approval, prior to implementation in schools from September 2026.

Members went on to further discuss whether the teaching of Islam should be made more prominent across the key stages, especially bearing in mind the demographic and religious census data in Rotherham. The Chair expressed caution due to the amount of work involved in creating a new unit of materials for teachers to deliver. However, teaching Members pointed out that a lot of schools use the ASC as a guide but obtain their lesson plans and materials from elsewhere and that there would be an abundance of resources on Islam available.

The Assistant Director expressed the view that it would be a pragmatic approach to start compiling this information now, with a view to creating a unit on Islam at a later date. Currently, almost 1 in 5 children in Rotherham are from an Islamic background so the Assistant Director agreed that Islam should be introduced as early and as often as possible, but was mindful of placing any additional pressure on the Chair and the RE Advisor, who need to finalise the ASC by June.

D. Homer felt strongly that effort should be made to introduce Islam earlier in children's education, in order to encourage a broader understanding of the religion, particularly in light of increasing incidences of Islamophobia, both with the Rotherham area and nationally. D. Homer volunteered to assist in collecting together materials on Islam for each key stage to help signpost teachers to the good resources that were available. The Chair mentioned RE Today, which had recently produced an excellent resource called "Understanding Islam".

There was further discussion about the complexities of teaching Islam when there are certain elements of the culture and religion which could be controversial, such as misogyny. It could be very difficult for teachers to have the strength and confidence to address these difficult issues. Members who were staff at secondary schools reported that they had often had discussions on these topics with the Asian teenage males at their schools. The Chair commented that given the existing expertise within SACRE, there could be a future piece of work for SACRE to put together some advice to schools on how to raise and address the challenging complexities of Islam.

76. CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT REVIEW - PROPOSALS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Members considered the recent publication of the Report of the Curriculum and Assessment Review commissioned by the government. The recommendations from this review were that RE should be formally incorporated into the National Curriculum. NASACRE had also produced

a response to this review, welcoming the proposed changes.

Members of the group discussed whether the government would actually take steps to embed RE into the National Curriculum. The Chair expressed the opinion that it was a positive development which would help to raise the profile of RE. The Assistant Director agreed that it would assist RE Leads, especially in secondary schools, when they were trying to argue for more time to be built into timetables for RE.

The Governance Advisor added that the report set out the expected next steps from these recommendations, which would be to set up a task and finish group to engage relevant stakeholders with a view to co-production and consultation on a draft RE curriculum. The Assistant Director expressed the view that once the consultation was underway, Rotherham SACRE should discuss the proposed RE curriculum formally at a meeting.

Members discussed whether the introduction of RE to the National Curriculum would lead to the demise of SACREs as there would be no requirement for an ASC. However, it was felt that SACREs would still be needed to oversee collective worship and to carry out determinations.

77. MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

There was no further update to the membership of the SACRE to report but Members remained keen to attract further members, particularly teachers with SEND experience. It was agreed that Members would continue to encourage any relevant contacts to consider joining the SACRE.

78. DRAFT SACRE ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025

The Assistant Director for Education and Inclusion introduced the draft SACRE Annual Report for 2024-2025 (Annual Report), which had been included in the agenda pack. The Assistant Director explained that the NASACRE guidance on the statutory requirements for the contents of a SACRE Annual Report had been consulted when the report was drafted. Details of all issues that had been discussed in the meetings throughout the year had been included, along with participation at additional events.

The Assistant Director made Members aware that any report that is submitted by the Council would need to go through a number of different stages of internal approvals, which he had obtained. The Governance Advisor confirmed that once the Annual Report had been approved by SACRE, it would go to the Improving Lives Select Commission in either February or March (for information), then on to Full Council (for information) and then would need to be sent on to the Department for Education (DfE), and NASACRE, who would publish it on their website.

Ideally, submission to the DfE and NASACRE would take place at the start of the calendar year so Members noted that in future years, the

process of drafting the Annual Report and obtaining the relevant approvals would need to start much earlier, preferably in the summer term, with approvals and the Governance process to take place during the autumn term.

The Assistant Director explained that a statement of account for the 2024-2025 SACRE Budget had been included in the Annual Report. Advice received from the Finance Link officer for SACRE was that accounts would be closed at the end of the Council's financial year (31 March) and the statement of account presented to SACRE in the summer term.

The Assistant Director commented that whilst this Annual Report formed a good basis to work on, the plan for future years would be to start work on the Annual Report much earlier and to further develop it to include more detailed information. It was agreed that in future years, responsibility for drafting the Annual Report should sit with the RE Advisor, in conjunction with the Chair and the Vice-Chair. Input from the Assistant Director and the Governance Advisor would also be provided where required. The Chair commented that the task of writing the Annual Report would need to be incorporated into an updated job description for the RE Advisor.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director for his work in producing the draft Annual Report.

Members agreed as follows:

- To approve the draft SACRE Annual Report 2024-2025; and
- To approve the statement of account for the 2024-2025 SACRE Budget.

79. SACRE BUDGET UPDATE

The Assistant Director provided an update on the 2025-2026 SACRE budget, including the proposed forecast spend for 2025-2026, during which the following was discussed:

- It was noted that there was projected total expenditure of £5,178.00 and an uncommitted balance of £517.00.
- D. Homer asked if there had been any budget allocated for the launch of the new Agreed Syllabus in September. However, the Chair commented that any expenditure for this would fall into the next financial year.
- The Chair noted that the budget for the RE Awards had been accounted for within this statement but that the event would take place in June 2026, into the next financial year. The Assistant Director commented that this could stay in and a variance could be made to the budget if funds were not spent within this financial year.

- D. Homer asked if there would be any available budget for more community cohesion events. The Assistant Director explained that such events were organised via the Together for Tomorrow programme, which received its own grant funding. If there were any specific events that Members wished to propose from an RE perspective, these would need to be brought to SACRE for approval and the availability of any specific grant funding or surplus budget would be considered. The Chair confirmed that she had written some lesson plans on community cohesion for the Together for Tomorrow programme so there was possibility to build on those in the future.
- The Assistant Director confirmed to Members that the final statement of account for the 2025-2026 Budget and the proposed 2026-2027 Budget should be available around April 2026 and would be brought to SACRE at the meeting in June 2026.

Members agreed as follows:

- To approve the proposed 2025-2026 SACRE budget.

80. RE AWARDS CEREMONY UPDATE

It was confirmed that no meetings had taken place yet to plan the Rewards ceremony. The Chair mentioned the previous suggestion of combining the event with the Together for Tomorrow celebration event and confirmed that they would get in touch with Fiona Radford at the Council to work out if a venue had been arranged for this.

The Assistant Director for Education and Inclusion asked whether it would be possible to broaden the range of schools involved in the event. It was confirmed that S. Yasseen and T. Williams had indicated that the schools they were involved with wanted to attend. The Chair commented that it would be good to get the message about the RE Awards out via the same channels used for Together for Tomorrow.

Members discussed how to encourage better knowledge sharing and networking amongst teachers of RE within the borough. There had been barriers in setting up a networking group up previously, with a disappointing level of response when one had been suggested. It was agreed that it had become increasingly difficult to get secondary schools involved, as the majority of them were now part of an multi academy trust.

It was suggested that a networking event could be held by SACRE, potentially at the Rockingham Centre or the Town Hall. However, the Chair pointed out that it is difficult for teaching staff to get time out of school to attend such events due to budget constraints and lack of cover. Members agreed that it would be very beneficial to set up a community of RE specialists within Rotherham, even if this was initially just via an email

circulation group. The Chair agreed to discuss the matter further with the RE Advisor who might have further ideas and useful contacts.

81. TOGETHER FOR TOMORROW PROJECT UPDATE - ASK ME ANYTHING PANEL 21 OCTOBER 2025

The Chair confirmed that the filming for the “Ask me Anything” panel event had taken place and that the video of it was available to view on the Forge CPD website. T. Griffin had attended the panel event and provided feedback that members of the Jewish, Christian and Ba hai faiths had been represented. The Chair confirmed that they would send the link to the video around Members.

T. Griffin commented that the questions posed were interesting and challenging, particularly in light of the fact that the majority of them had been submitted by primary school age children – for example, “Is religion always a force for good?”. T. Griffin confirmed that there had been appetite to host a similar event again, perhaps with more of a live audience with immediate feedback and interaction as on this occasion, questions had been submitted in advance.

82. URGENT BUSINESS

The Assistant Director mentioned a recent Freedom of Information request which the Council had received asking for information on the numbers of pupils who had been withdrawn from Religious Education classes on the grounds of moral objection. The Council did not track this information and the Assistant Director was interested to know whether schools collated this information. Members of teaching staff in attendance confirmed that this data was not routinely collected and that incidences of this were rare locally.