



# SACREs and Development Planning Activities

Creating, implementing and monitoring the  
SACRE development plan

## The SACRE Development Plan

The purpose of a Development Plan for SACRE is twofold. Firstly, it enables the SACRE to have its priorities identified for a specified period of time. Secondly, it sets how those priorities are going to be met.

Therefore, the development plan should:

- be a critical tool for the SACRE to outline its key priorities and activities;
- be discussed and agreed with the LA, especially in terms of funding and linking with the LA's own priorities for pupils, schools and communities;
- be accurately costed and realistic in its goals.

## Focus of the Plan

Any activities or areas in a development plan will need to be justified by evidence and so the gathering of evidence to inform the plan is crucial to the whole process. The evidence and actions will need to be related to the statutory nature of SACRE. Hence, the development plan should:

- support the smooth and efficient running of the SACRE;
- focus on the needs of schools, teachers and pupils;
- ensure SACRE's advice has a positive impact on pupils' quality of learning in RE and experience in collective worship;
- fully utilise the key findings from any monitoring the local authority has done on SACRE's behalf to help improve provision in RE and collective worship;
- reflect both local and national priorities which have an impact on RE and CW, for example: curriculum development, community cohesion etc.

## Developing and implementing the Plan

When undertaking the development plan process it is important that SACRE has a realistic view of what can be achieved within the resources allocated to it. The planning process may have a phase of requesting targeted funds from the LA for specific actions so that these can be built into the plan, otherwise, SACRE will not be able to implement all or part of its plan and important work will not take place. With this in mind the development plan should:

- rank priorities in such a way that the most pressing issues are dealt with fully in a timely manner;
- be clear about criteria for success for all planned activities so that the actions undertaken to meet the priority can be fully evaluated;
- identify who is responsible for each aspect of the work and when each aspect will be completed;
- involve as many SACRE members as possible in its delivery;
- incorporate in-service training opportunities for SACRE members to help develop their understanding of RE and CW.

## Steps in the process

When development planning takes place it is important that there is a proper process undertaken. This also applies to the review and evaluation of the success of activities built into the development plan that will necessarily lead to a new set of priorities being set for the future. Key to this is having the ability to set priorities against what is known.

Part of the evidence base for SACRE to decide on priorities it wishes to undertake to improve standards in its schools may be difficult to collate.

Where SACREs are having difficulty obtaining meaningful information for a number of reasons, they may need to take out a Freedom of Information (FOI) Act request against their own local authority, academy chains and / or individual schools, Academies and Free Schools. Whilst this level of activity would be unusual it may be necessary in the pursuit of SACRE's statutory duties.

It is worth noting that local authorities are responsible for the education of children and young people who live in the authority but are educated outside of it. Hence, if pupils are not receiving their entitlement to RE and CW in a school, academy or Free School in another authority the SACRE's own local authority is responsible for doing something about that situation in partnership with others.

SACREs need to:

- monitor
- plan
- evaluate

All of this is done through effective partnerships with the LA, schools and the local community.

## Monitor

There are different sorts of monitoring of needs that SACREs can do. Key to monitoring is the quality of the data that SACRE is able to access. Usually, SACREs have access to the examination data produced by the local authority. Having access to that data though, may not help SACRE unless it is properly analysed. What the data is telling us is as important as the data itself, if not more so. Hence, there is a need to have historic data that can indicate whether there are trends emerging – such as a reduction of the number of schools entering candidates for GCSE or an increase in numbers of candidates overall. Similarly, are the results for GCSE or A Level RS comparable with, better than or worse than other GCSEs in the authority for that cohort? Having a professional officer who can understand statistics is key to good quality monitoring of attainment.

Another type of data might be interviewing pupils during school visits. It is important that SACRE members do not confuse their role with that of an inspectorate. When listening to pupils it is important to know how they were selected, if they are representative of all pupils in the school and how that data is going to be fed back and for what purpose. Naturally, it is also important to recognise that the school itself was happy to host SACRE members – if a number of schools were approached and declined the offer it is useful to have that as part of the data gathering exercise.

- The 'monitoring role' might include:
- analysing external examination results, sharing findings and asking the local authority to write schools letters of support or challenge;
- meeting in schools, listening to teachers, listening to pupils and looking at pupils' work;

- finding out first hand what goes on in lessons, or using the experience of the specialist RE adviser;
- promoting RE as an agenda item for the school improvement partner visits;
- reviewing key judgements on community cohesion/SMSC in schools;
- feeding back findings to the full SACRE and the LA.

## Plan

When planning it is useful for SACRE members to discuss how they would know that SACRE had been successful. This can help to inform the priorities for development. If SACRE was of the opinion that for it to be successful it would have to have evidence of the impact of its advice, it should develop an action to gather such evidence. For the next development plan it would then reflect on its finding to see how that could be improved, and if it didn't need to be improved, when it might to be monitored again.

Planning activities include:

- discussing and setting out aspirations for the long term and mapping them in a 3, 4 or 5 year plan;
- setting targets for the coming year(s), with clear objectives, timescales, costs, named responsibilities and identifying success criteria.

Within any development plan there should be clear indicators of success, sometimes referred to as targets. These should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timed. It also needs to be recognised that such targets often depend on the good will and participation of others. If, for example, the target was that *'all maintained non-denominational secondary schools fulfil their statutory responsibility to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils not withdrawn by their parents'*, SACRE could not achieve that on its own. Therefore, in the planning process and the writing of the plan, it is important to identify who is going to work with SACRE and the local authority to achieve this goal.

Depending on need, targets might include:

- developing effective support for schools, to enrich the curriculum;
- creating curriculum projects to enrich RE, e.g. RE and collaborative learning in the primary and secondary curriculum;
- developing effective practice in supporting gifted and talented pupils in RE;
- increasing RE and community cohesion links;
- developing effective practice in SMSC and collective worship;
- inspiring meaningful collective worship.

## Evaluation

In terms of evaluation the key criterion is impact. A good question is: what difference has this action made? If it has not made the expected difference has it had good, if unintended, consequences? A further question could be: has it made a positive impact for some schools but not others? If so: why is this the case? It is such questioning that can help a SACRE have greater impact in the future.

Of course a good evaluation is only as good as the evidence that it has to inform it. Knowing where you would look for evidence should be indicated in the plan. It may be that an intended action could not or could only partially take place. For example, SACRE produces some advice on teaching about Hinduism in Key Stage One in light of evidence that some schools are struggling to deliver this part of the Agreed Syllabus due to the rurality of the authority and such schools have no meaningful access to Hindus. In the development plan it states that the local authority's school improvement team will monitor the impact of the advice in a number of primary schools but the local authority disbands its school improvement team due to budget cuts. Clearly, the primary source of evidence is no longer there. In light of this, SACRE members who are associated with schools could simply ask whether schools are aware of the advice, if it has been useful and what impact it has had. This may mean that the sample is smaller but the evidence might prove to be useful in light of the changed circumstances. If no one has heard of it, then the evaluation would lead to a priority around communication in the next plan. If parts were really useful and others not then the advice could be modified in light of the evidence.

To this extent evaluation involves:

- a critical appraisal of the outcomes against each of the success criteria;
- identification of next steps against each target following development activity;
- setting new targets for the coming year in relation to the long term plan.
- importantly, whilst some of this work may be done by a sub group, the whole SACRE should be involved at key points in the process.

## Partnerships

SACREs exist in partnerships with others. Key to this is its partnership with the local authority, both officers and elected members. A good SACRE builds partnerships with its LA by:

- sharing its development plan with chief officers and elected members;
- reporting on its own evaluation of its effectiveness;
- ensuring SACRE receives the appropriate funding, administration support and professional expertise to carry out its work effectively;
- advising the LA on RE and CW issues;
- having a positive impact on provision of RE and CW;
- contributing effectively to LA plans, such as the Children and Young People's plan or the Community Cohesion plan;
- ensuring that the annual report accurately describes the response of the LA and its schools.

SACRE is itself a partnership of faith communities, teachers and elected members. This can be a platform for building wider partnerships on a number of fronts. Therefore, SACRE's work is also developed through partnerships with:

- schools, through both published guidance, the annual report and special events, such as joint SACRE/Head teachers' or Governors' conferences or planning special events, and LA wide events like Holocaust Memorial Day;
- teaching schools;
- academy chains;
- local faith and belief communities, e.g.: dioceses, inter-faith forums, race equality networks.

SACREs also exist within a framework of regional and national bodies such as the DfE, Ofsted and NASACRE. Members of SACRE might also be members of NATRE and bodies such as the RE Council of England and Wales. It may also have strong links with local universities, especially where they provide initial teacher training or have Theology and Religious Studies departments. SACREs may also develop strong contacts with other SACREs locally, especially if they share the same locally agreed syllabus.

## Support for SACRE development

NASACRE has produced the **RETool**, which was a collaboration between NASACRE and QCDA before it was disbanded. The RETool is available from the Resources section of the NASACRE website and can be used as a framework for self-evaluation. It can also be useful for structuring the annual report.

The RETool has five sections:

1. promoting improvement in the standards, the quality of teaching, and provision in RE;
2. evaluating the effectiveness of the locally agreed syllabus;
3. promoting improvement in the provision and quality of collective worship;
4. managing the SACRE and building the partnership between the SACRE, the LA and other key stakeholders;
5. contributing to cohesion across the community and the promotion of social and racial harmony.

A SACRE might want to take one section as a starting point, otherwise the exercise might be overwhelming initially or it might have the capacity to do it all at once than then priorities certain areas over others. It might also need to adapt the tool. The contexts of urban and rural SACREs is very different and what is appropriate in one area might prove impossible in another. It is not the aim of the RETool simply to make SACREs feel that they are constantly failing.

## Conclusion

SACREs are statutory bodies and as such have an important part to play in the religious education of pupils, both within the RE lesson and in participation in collective worship. Therefore, it is important that SACREs work with direction and purposes. The process of development planning can do where it is meaningful and well supported.