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| **Title:** | **All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education (APPG) report: Improving Religious Literacy – a contribution to the debate** | | | |
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| This report relates to the on going debate about religious literacy and its relationship to religious education. As such it is of interest to SACRE members as they have a responsibility to monitor religious education in the local authority and be appraised of the latest issues as they effect RE in schools. | | | | |
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| Wards Affected: | **All** | | | |
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| To: | **SACRE** | | On: | **Date 15th November, 2016** |
|  |  | |  |  |
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**1. Key points and Summary**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform SACRE about the All Party Parliamentary Groups on RE’s report into religious literacy (see Appendix 1). Religious literacy has become an increasingly important concept over the last three years, especially in light of the REforReal report published by Goldsmiths, University of London in November 2015 (see Appendix 2). Defining Religious Literacy, though, has proved to be more difficult. The attached report, on the basis of wide consultation, has sought to provide a working definition for the UK context. SACRE may wish to bring the APPG’s report to the attention of teachers in Torbay.

**2. Introduction**

2.1 The report is based on a call for written submissions (see 2.2 for the six driving questions) and two sessions in Parliament. There was concern that the APPG’s report might be unrepresentative of the broader RE community as the APPG no longer fell under the aegis of the RE Council of England and Wales (see the RE Council’s website for a full statement on its relationship to the APPG). Nevertheless, the report appears to have been welcomed and the breadth of opinion that informs the report appears broad enough to make it worthy of consideration.

2.2 The APPG invited written submissions from individuals and organisations on the following:

1. What you understand ‘Religious Literacy’ to mean;

2. The ways in which Religious Literacy enriches the lives of individuals and positively affects their engagement with their local community, society and public life;

3. How people learn to be religiously literate through school based education, out-of-school activities, the local community, lifelong learning, media and literature, workplace training schemes and other means;

4. How the development of Religious Literacy in children could be improved within the school context;

5. How the development of Religious Literacy in adults could be improved in formalised education settings such as universities, adult education and workplace training schemes;

6. How the development of Religious Literacy in people of all ages could be improved in settings which are not be considered formal education, such as the local community, out-of-school activities, sports teams, media and literature and other means.

The enquiry closed on the **14th of April 2016**

The report defined religious literacy as having four distinct elements (page 6):

A basic level of knowledge about both the particular beliefs, practices and traditions of the main religious traditions in Britain, and of the shape of our changing religious landscape today. This must be complemented by a conceptual understanding of what religious belief systems are, and how they may function in the lives of individuals.

An awareness of how beliefs, inherited traditions and textual interpretations might manifest into the actions, practices and daily lives of individuals. Crucial to this is an understanding of the diversity within religious traditions, and an awareness of the way in which the same text, or religious principle, can be interpreted in different ways by different individuals.

A critical awareness, meaning that an individual has the ability to recognise, analyse and critique religious stereotypes, and engage effectively with, and take a nuanced approach towards, the questions raised by religion.

A sophisticated ability to engage with religious groups in a way which promotes respect and plurality, and which enables effective communication about religion.

It is important to recognise that religious literacy is broader than religious education in schools. It is seen as an important skill for citizenship in a modern pluralistic society where religion and faith remain significant for that society, especially for public bodies and officials.

2.3 Whist it is recognised that religious literacy is relevant to the whole of society the APPG also believe that it has particular importance for religious education in schools (see Chapter 3). As a result of this the APPG made ten recommendations, nine of which are directly to the Department for Education:

Recommendation 1: the Department for Education should reinforce the statutory requirement of all state-funded schools to provide RE for all pupils, including at Key Stage 4, and should monitor its effective delivery.

Recommendation 2: the Department for Education should record and publish data about the proportion of RE classes taught by full-time equivalent RE teachers and the proportion taught by non-specialists.

Recommendation 3: the Department for Education should place a high priority on stimulating recruitment of specialists to RE. It should be a vocal champion of the teaching of RE and should take steps to support independent initiatives working to increase recruitment.

Recommendation 4: the Department for Education should ensure that all primary ITT programmes contain a suitable proportion of time dedicated to RE. Steps should be taken to ensure that all RE trainees can benefit from high quality subject experts informed by up-to-date pedagogical research.

Recommendation 5: the Department for Education should encourage ITT providers to offer a core element of religious literacy training in all secondary teacher training programmes.

Recommendation 6: the Department for Education should take steps to ensure that all teachers of RE, especially non-specialists, have access to high quality subject-specific CPD opportunities.

Recommendation 7: the Department for Education should encourage the expansion of CPD opportunities for high quality religious literacy training, and should encourage all teachers to take part in them.

Recommendation 8: the Department for Education should give renewed consideration to including RE as a Humanities subject in the English Baccalaureate. It should conduct a new review of the impact that the exclusion of RE from the English Baccalaureate has had on the subject. It should also conduct a review of the likely impact on RE provision of the expansion of the English Baccalaureate to 90% of pupils, and set out how it will protect RE from any adverse effects of this.

Recommendation 9: the Department for Education should take steps to promote uptake of the GCSE Religious Studies short course.

Recommendation 10: all relevant parties should participate in the ongoing discussions about the legal framework for RE in schools and other major issues, including the Department for Education and faith communities.

2.4 In light of these recommendations SACRE could, if it so desired, write to the Secretary of State to ask what it has done or is going to do about the APPG’s recommendations and what timetable it has set itself for response. SACRE may wish to focus on some recommendations that it feels are particularly significant for Torbay schools in any communication it has with the Secretary of State.

**3.0 Recommendation**

* 1. That SACRE write to the Secretary of State for Education to ask what its response to the APPG of RE’s report **Improving Religious Literacy: A Contribution to the Debate** published in July 2016 has been.
  2. That SACRE include in any correspondence with the Secretary of State any specific concerns it has in light of those recommendations for schools in Torbay.

**Andrew Strachan**

**Chair of SACRE**

**Appendices**

**Documents available in members’ rooms**

Background Papers: