

# Summary from the Follow-up Seminar

## 14 December 2000

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The seminar was held on 14 December 2000 at London House. It had been called together to 'reflect on what had been said at the St Gabriel's Conference on October 23rd and to come forward with some proposals'.

One concern at the Conference had been the 'status' of RE within the curriculum. The seminar noted that two ways in which the DfEE could enhance the quality of RE provision further were

- by reinstating its status as a 'core' subject (even though one which is technically outside the National Curriculum) and
- by giving it parity of treatment in its publications (both printed and electronic).

A second concern had been the possible impact of local government reorganisation on the work of SACREs. Members of the seminar reported a very mixed situation, both in terms of support available from the Local Authority and in terms of the tasks the SACRE was expected to undertake. Concern was expressed that some Ofsted inspectors of LEAs were interested only in whether the minimum legal requirements regarding SACREs were being fulfilled rather than assessing the *effectiveness* of the arrangements in place. Research was needed to establish the range of support available to SACREs with a view to the production of national guidelines regarding the level of provision which should be expected. It was also noted that no SACRE could be deemed to be successful unless its work actually had an impact on what was being done in the classroom.

The seminar then turned to what had been the central area of discussion at the Conference – the desirability or otherwise of a 'national framework' for RE. Its 'reflections and proposals' included the following points.

There had been a lot of misunderstanding around that a 'national framework' was simply another name for a national syllabus. This was emphatically *not* what had been proposed. There was also widespread concern that further 'national' initiatives of any sort would put at risk the many benefits of the present locally rooted system. Among these benefits was the fact that the delivery of RE could be 'owned by' the local community through the involvement of all the member groups on the Agreed Syllabus Conferences. This involvement also developed and deepened the interaction between the members which often spread into other areas of co-operation where it had not previously existed. The direct involvement of classroom teachers also ensured that the content of Agreed Syllabuses (and the activities of SACREs) could be informed by classroom experience and innovation. On the other hand the diversity of the local bases made it virtually impossible for there to be any satisfactory integration with other curriculum subjects at the level of national planning and support; this was particularly significant in relation to Citizenship. It was also a handicap in the training of RE teachers. What was also missing from the present arrangements was the possibility of any co-ordinated attempt to set standards of pupil performance in the way other subjects were able to. (The related issue of the wide variation in local support systems was dealt with above.)

A way forward which might meet all these concerns would be to explore the possibility of building on the existing Model Syllabuses and Schemes of Work from QCA to

- identify ways in which the content of existing Agreed Syllabuses could be more easily cross-related to curriculum developments in other subjects; and
- develop guidance to LEAs as to how Agreed Syllabuses and the work of SACREs might contribute to the enhancement of pupil performance (especially at Key Stage 3) by the setting of standards of expectation both in the classroom and in the structures supporting the subject.

It would be important for this exploration not only to have support from the DfEE (through QCA) but also to involve representatives from all the ‘member groups’ which make up Agreed Syllabus Conferences. The result of such an exploration could well be the eventual production of a ‘national framework’, though this of course would be non-statutory (as with PSHE). It could fit entirely within the present legal framework. While establishing a national level of expected standards there would of course be full flexibility and need for local involvement in the local application of these standards – perhaps taking the model provided by the GCSE awarding bodies as a starting point.