



## The SACRE Recruitment and Training Programme Report for the RE Council

Dear Julie,

This is to let you know that I today completed my training by attending a meeting of the Leicester City SACRE which took place in the Leicester Sikh Centre. We were shown round and given some Indian food before the meeting. The latter included group discussion on exactly the matters – concerning religious education, collective worship, and the role of SACREs – that were covered in the Birmingham training days.

I should like to thank you most warmly for the excellent training programme, which I very much enjoyed in all respects. I was invited by my own SACREs (Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin) to report on my training to their recent meeting, and I hope to add a few further comments on my Leicester experience at some point in the next meeting in Shrewsbury.

I was able to report with both gratitude and enthusiasm on the training days at Carrs Lane Church and on my school visit in Wem, and the other SACRE members were glad to hear that all had gone so well.

My thanks again to you for making it such a pleasant and rewarding experience, and for the excellent printed materials with which you supplied us.

With very best regards.  
As ever, Cameron (Wilson)

This unsolicited email sums up the positive responses that we received from those who participated in the first year of the NASACRE Recruitment and Training Project. I am grateful to Dr Wilson for his permission to reproduce his message in full because it epitomises the enthusiasm and sense of commitment we encountered in all the training groups. It was a privilege to work with people who were so eager to serve on a SACRE.

### What we set out to do:

Our principal objectives were to support SACREs in the targeted areas to fill their Group A vacancies, to build their capacity and to increase the involvement of minority faith communities locally. We were committed to recruiting and training new members for at least 50% of the SACREs in the targeted regions. We wanted to maximize the effectiveness of the whole SACRE by introducing these new members and also by offering training to those already serving who felt they would benefit from better knowledge and understanding of the role and purpose of SACREs.

Naturally we hoped for a reduction in the number of vacancies which would mean a greater investment of faith communities. We were keen to establish wider understanding by faith communities of the place of RE in schools and the role of SACREs. We also hoped for positive feedback from recruits and their SACREs.



## What we achieved:

In summarising our key outcomes, we filled over 50% of the vacancies for minority faith community members in the targeted SACREs and, of those, the highest success rate was in filling Buddhist and Muslim vacancies (74% and 72% respectively); we increased the involvement of minority faith community representatives on 48 SACREs in the Government regions we were working in; we filled vacancies in 49% of SACREs across all three cohorts; we recruited a total of 80 potential new members of whom 66 participated in the training and have joined SACREs; we offered training to 57 serving but inexperienced SACRE members to improve their effectiveness. And we had very positive feedback from delegates, advisers and SACREs.

## What we did:

We worked in three areas of the country, combining Government regions that were geographically close and based all the training in easily accessible centres. These were cohort 1: the East and West Midlands, based in Birmingham; cohort 2: Yorkshire and Humberside and the NE, based in York, and cohort 3 (split into two training groups): London and parts of the SE with training based in central London and Guildford respectively. We held three regional meetings in the early autumn with Chairs of SACREs and RE Advisers to brief them on the plans and to enlist their help. We identified a local person in each area to help with contacts and organisation of events. We established a Partnership Group of national representatives of faith communities which met in the autumn of 2008. This group has engaged with the project, supporting the work by enabling NASACRE to make contact with local faith communities and representatives.



We contacted all the SACREs in the regions concerned to request confirmation or updates of their SACRE vacancies, particularly in Group A, and the NASACRE vacancy database was then updated with this information. Marjorie Crombie, who was responsible for recruitment, developed a database of national, local and faith organisations which has proved helpful in locating key local faith organisations. With all this preparation underway, vacancies were advertised and recruitment began in earnest in the autumn term of 2008.

The training was scheduled for the spring term, with the first training days in the four centres held in January and the second in March. These days focused on the nature and purpose of religious education and collective worship respectively, with implications of both for SACREs.

In between the full days, there was a programme for each delegate, individually organised, of a visit to a school to observe an RE lesson and attendance at a SACRE meeting other than the one the person was due to join. During February, a complementary one-day's conference was also offered in each of the areas for serving SACRE members.

At the end of the programme certificates were sent out to all SACREs receiving new members for presentation to individuals at the summer term meeting. We reported to the DCSF on the outcomes, evaluated against our key targets, and presented plans for year two of the project.

*'The two training days were very helpful. It will certainly prepare me to be a good SACRE member.'*

*'I have found this course very interesting and worthwhile. It has broadened my knowledge of the work of SACREs. It has also made me look more closely at my own beliefs and, as a result, I'm planning to investigate ways of learning more about my own faith.'*

*'I appreciate these well planned and informative training sessions, facilitated by many years of hands-on experience.'*

*'I found the training to be far more professional and comprehensive than I expected...I found the experience invaluable.'*

*'Very well organised training, and a warm and friendly atmosphere.'*

*'Very professional; pacey and informative.'*

## What the trainees said:

We found the people who participated in the training overwhelmingly enthusiastic and positive, both those newly recruited who committed to the full programme and those already serving who attended the one-day conference. There were very few negative comments.

Oral feedback from those who spoke to us on each of the training days was extremely encouraging. One serving

member attending the London one-day conference said he had planned to leave at coffee time, but had found it so interesting, he had stayed all day! Another, in York, said that she had found the day very helpful because, despite being a teacher herself, there were aspects of SACRE's role that she had not previously understood and she found the discussion and networking invaluable.

Written evaluations of the full training showed that almost all participants felt they had understood the purposes of the programme, had met the objectives of each of the two days and were well prepared for SACRE membership. The comments also show how much the training was appreciated and enjoyed...very heartening for us.



*'I can become an agent for support for RE teachers.'*

*'It's about bringing the whole community together so that they can understand each other.'*

*'SACREs encourage faith groups to respect each other. That's what community coherence is all about.'*

*'The work of SACRE is so important; this has helped us to understand the role and the contribution we can make.'*

*'We've been preparing for the role and I feel happy that I will be able to do something for the community.'*

*'What I find most inspiring is the possibility of transforming society through participation in the SACRE. I'm excited to be able to make a personal contribution.'*

The opportunity of field work was particularly welcomed and greatly valued by those who were able to make the visits. Although the organisation of the visits was complex and time-consuming, they undoubtedly played an important role in the training experience. Trainees reported how the experiences of the RE lessons particularly had given them insights into the 'real business of SACREs'. Many of them had been genuinely surprised at the quality of the RE they had seen. Several of the advisers who set up the school visits commented on how enthusiastic and motivated the visitors were.

We asked trainees at the end of the second day to sum up in a single sentence what they considered to be the most important message they were taking from the training. Some of their responses were insightful and inspiring.

## Our evaluation:

The project overall was a success. Our thorough evaluation, however, shows where we could possibly have done better and what we need to change in year two. We are taking those issues very seriously.

Although the recruitment target of 30 trainees per cohort was not met, we worked intensively throughout the whole period and the quality of those who were newly recruited was generally very encouraging. Networking through the established professional links and faith networks was invaluable. We plan to build on those contacts.

Unfortunately there was a drop out rate of 17% between recruitment and training and we are surveying those who signed up but did not attend, despite all attempts at making contact, to ascertain their reasons. We will also be sharing these concerns with the Partnership Group in the hope that we might identify and address some of the barriers to successful recruitment within their faith communities.

The greatest success was in the enthusiasm of those who participated in the training. The training days were lively and stimulating with a high level of interest in the issues and a good atmosphere. In acknowledging this, we did not underestimate the possibility of challenge to people of faith, who have no background in education, seeking to appreciate the role of religion, particularly of their own faith, in education. As well as whole group discussions, sometimes very far reaching and controversial, there was a lot of paired and small group interaction, both planned and informal.



We recognised that fulfilling every aspect of the package was a huge commitment, and some people found it impossible to complete every activity. Attendance on some of the training days was disappointing although absentees sent apologies, mostly for reasons of illness or travel or work commitments. In order to offer a catch-up opportunity for absentees, an additional training day was organised in Birmingham on the last Saturday of January, which six people took up.

We were particularly disappointed in the take up of the one-day conferences for serving SACRE members. We had been encouraged by SACREs to offer opportunities for such training and felt it was a good way to support those in the targeted areas who might be receiving new members. We did acknowledge that the weather played a part in low attendance; surprisingly severe conditions during January and February caused havoc with our plans. This experience has been instrumental in our decision to bring the training forward in 2009/10 to the autumn term.

The training has been our major activity this year. It has involved the NASACRE Officers on a daily basis, and occupied those of us responsible for the training almost full time between November and March. Identifying local support for both the recruitment process and the organisation of events has been a major success. Members of the NASACRE Executive have also been involved in the organisation of the one-day conferences and several of them have shared in the presentation of the training. Extra support has also been needed for the NASACRE Administrator who has sent letters, organised registers and prepared conference packs.



### **What we plan to do in year two:**

The programme will be repeated during 2009/2010 in the Southwest and in a combination of the East of England and the SE regions. In the coming year we have decided to bring the programme forward by a term. A meeting of the Partnership Group is planned for mid-May and briefing meetings for SACRE Chairs and Advisers will be held in the two areas later in the summer term. Training will take place in the autumn term.

We hope a longer run-in will enable the recruitment stage to be more productive and we will establish personal and ongoing contact with just one person in each SACRE, by telephone, at the outset to ensure effective communication. The data bases will be updated and maintained.

As well as offering the training itself, the emphasis in year 2 will be on sustainability. One of the main activities will be the production of a set of stand-alone training materials based on the package which has been delivered. This will be made available to all SACREs free of charge. We will also try to follow up some of the new recruits from all cohorts to evaluate their on-going involvement in SACRE. It will be interesting to discover if their enthusiasm and optimism has been maintained.

Julie Grove  
April 2009

***'This training was well organised, extremely helpful and practical and the trainers were open, honest, thorough and accessible.'***

***'The school visit and the SACRE visit fully matched the usefulness and enjoyment of the days in Birmingham.'***

***'Thank you; it was a privilege.'***

***'I feel ready to go!'***