



# EFFECTIVE SACRES

This has been an extremely worthwhile experience; it has given me confidence to take on the role. Thank you.

Very professional; pacy and informative



Some members of my local SACRE were envious of my training and wanted to know how they could get some too.

Very good learning days

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.

What impressed me most was the thoroughness of the training and the materials accompanying the course were excellent and will provide a useful resource for years to come.

I have felt most welcome on the training and have learned a great deal. I enjoyed the presentations and have been impressed by the respect shown to people of different faiths, both on the training and at the SACRE meeting.

NASACRE Recruitment and Training Project  
Final Report

APRIL 2010

## INTRODUCTION

The NASACRE recruitment and training programme was part of the RE Action Plan established between the RE Council (REC) and the Department for Children, Families and Schools (DCSF) in 2007. Its main objective was to strengthen the capacity of SACREs and to increase their effectiveness. It was a two year programme, building on the REC pilot offered in 2006/7 and using that experience to inform the roll out of the training. The face-to-face training was completed in March 2010.

There were three parts to this programme. The main work was to recruit and train new members to fill specific vacancies identified by the SACREs in all the targeted areas. Complementary to that activity was the 'in-service' training for existing but inexperienced SACRE members who felt they would benefit. The third component of the project was the development of a training resource, based on a supplemented version of the hand-out materials, for use by individuals or groups of SACREs.

## OBJECTIVES

The programme set out to support SACREs in England to increase their effectiveness by raising interest in the work of SACREs and increasing minority faith involvement; by filling Group A vacancies with trained SACRE members; by providing training for serving but inexperienced SACRE members from all groups and, finally, by making the benefits sustainable and available to all SACREs in the future.

A key objective of the face-to-face training was to have new members recruited and trained for at least 50% of the SACREs carrying vacancies in each of the targeted regions. The agreed indicators of success were a reduction in such vacancies, greater investment of faith communities, a wider understanding of the role of SACREs and of the place of religious education and collective worship in schools by faith communities, and positive feedback from new recruits and their SACREs.



## SCOPE OF THE PROGRAMME

The plan was to target SACREs in all of the nine government regions in England over the two years of the face-to-face training, with cohorts of up to thirty people in each training group. The resources available, however, did not allow for the full scope of the planned programme to be implemented. Nevertheless, training was offered across the whole of the country but, in some areas, neighbouring regions had to be amalgamated into one cohort.

Following the pilot in the north west and in London, the first year of the roll out focused on the Midlands (East and West regions) and the northeast (the NE and Yorkshire & Humberside regions). In the late autumn of 2008, NASACRE was invited to broaden the scope of the work when additional funding was made available; this was achieved by adding two further cohorts: London and parts of the southeast. The



training was centred in Birmingham, York, central London and Guildford. In year two training has been offered in the Southwest region, based in Tiverton, Devon, and in the Southeast and the East of England regions, with the training days in London for these cohorts because of ease of travel.

The training programme comprised two face-to-face training days, with the opportunity in between to make an accompanied visit to a school to observe an RE lesson, and talk about it afterwards, and to attend a SACRE meeting, if possible other than the one the new member would be joining.

## PREPARATION

In both years, regional meetings were held in the early autumn with Chairs of SACREs and RE Advisers to brief them on the plans and to enlist their help. These meetings were well attended and the project was enthusiastically supported by colleagues. Some advisers continued to be proactive following the regional meetings, offering their own local faith and higher education contacts. Invaluable support in organising and accompanying school visits was also facilitated through SACRE and adviser networks.

A Partnership Group of national representatives of faith communities was convened in the autumn of 2008 to meet the officers responsible for the training, especially the national recruitment manager, and to become engaged with the project. Another meeting was held in May 2009 to evaluate the first year's experiences and to plan for year two. This network has supported the work by enabling NASACRE to make contact with local faith communities and representatives.

All SACREs in the regions concerned were contacted in the summer terms of 2008 and 2009 to request confirmation or updates of their SACRE vacancies, particularly in Group A. The NASACRE vacancy database was then updated with this information; reports were created from this which were subsequently passed on to the recruitment manager. It is planned to revisit this data collection at the end of the project to see how the situations have altered for each SACRE.



## RECRUITMENT

The recruitment process relied heavily on the regional and local support of professionals and their knowledge of local religious demographics: the national faith partners, the regional and local Inter-Faith groups, Anglican diocese staff and RE Advisers, four of whom acted as local support to the recruitment manager. Advertising through various local council and religious networks, which happened in year one, resulted in one or two cases in a number of applications for some vacancies and was not repeated, since it was not the project's role to select preferred candidates.

The Partnership Group of national representatives of faith communities agreed, in early summer 2009, to continue to support the recruitment of faith representatives, which started in earnest in early September. Once again these 'partners' greatly assisted the recruitment work by linking the recruitment manager with local faith communities through their own faith networks. The organisations represented in the faith Partnership Group were all members of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales and included the Network of Buddhist Organisations; the Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster; the Board of Deputies of British Jews; Churches Together in England (for the Free Churches); The Hindu Council UK; ISKCON; the Education Committee of the Muslim Council of Britain and the Network of Sikh Organisations.

Contact was subsequently made with the Orthodox Church's Diocesan department for RE. The recruitment manager's database of national, regional and local faith organisations also provided a useful source for identifying regional and local faith organisations and communities.

Difficulties were experienced in filling Christian vacancies on Group A, due to the Catholic Church and the Free Churches having their own systems for SACRE recruitment. In the second year, however, new faith representatives for the Free Churches were secured through direct approaches to the local organisations, thereby supplementing the FC's own recruitment process.



Members of the Partnership Group were able to identify appropriate regional and local links to potential faith representatives with a genuine interest in RE and its educational philosophy. It was emphasised, however, that even with the best of intentions, the national faith partner could not guarantee a person's commitment; securing the nomination could only happen 'from a distance' and was often through a secondary regional faith contact.



The recruitment process raised sensitive issues including the question of whose right it was to speak for a religion where there were different traditions within one faith in the locality; how that nomination could be secured where tensions existed; how to nominate a representative person from a region where the faith community was very small, diverse or geographically scattered; how to engage a growing but 'insular' faith community whose ethnic origins were giving a distinct local expression of faith in schools. Some specific issues were alleviated by the expertise of the regional Inter-Faith Groups.



Pursuing contacts was very time consuming, sometimes leading to a fruitless outcome. Direct approaches to faith organisations or places of worship were not always successful. Many telephone messages were left and mail was delivered to listed places of worship and returned unopened.

SACREs nevertheless benefited over the two years from a greater investment in their work from the rich diversity of their local faith communities. Increasingly some SACREs began to respond positively to faith communities' requests to allow two nominated persons to share the membership role and in some cases SACREs even increased their membership to be more representative not just of a particular faith community but of the diverse nature of certain religious traditions in their areas. During the project there was a growing number of enquiries from various sources about the appropriateness of approaching SACREs for membership; these came from various other belief systems and faith communities, notably Pagan, Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and Humanists.

## THE TRAINING

The first training days for the new recruits took place during January of 2008 and 2009, except in the southwest when extreme weather in Devon forced a postponement until the beginning of February. The

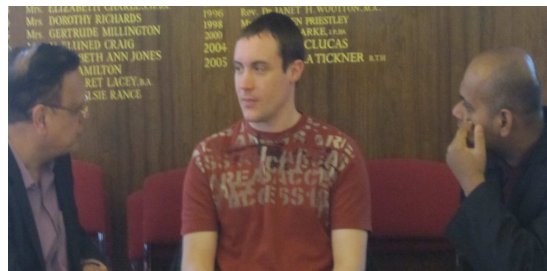
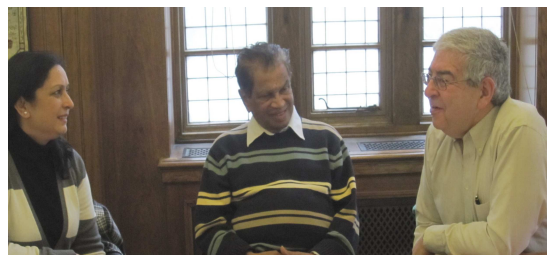


second days were held in March and, in between, trainees had the opportunity to make visits to a school and to a SACRE meeting. Despite the disappointing numbers overall, groups were viable and participation levels were high. The opportunities for group interaction and discussion were enthusiastically received.

The training celebrated the diversity of religious backgrounds and also recognised the wide variation in experiences of education. For some trainees this would be their first encounter with current educational practice; for others, it was an extension of their day-to-day life. Everyone was encouraged to ask questions, especially if there was any jargon that needed busting. The training was basic but grounded in what happens in school; every attempt was made to make it real.

In year one, average attendance across the four groups was fourteen for day one and ten for day two; in year two, the average attendance of the three groups was sixteen for the first day and fifteen for the second. Apologies were received from about 60% of non-attenders on each of the days. In year one fifty people took up the opportunity to make a visit to a school and/or to attend a SACRE meeting other than the one they were joining; in year two, the figure was thirty-three.

Since it was felt to be particularly unfortunate for trainees to miss the first day when the coherence of the training groups was established and the purposes of the training set out, 'catch-up' days were offered in February 2008 and 2009 for those who had been unable to attend the first day's training and these were attended by eight and thirteen people respectively. Across all seven cohorts, a total of 24 people made no further contact after their initial agreement to join the training; a further five withdrew either because of other pressures or, in the case of one person, because he felt after the first day that it was not a role he wanted to play.



As well as the two training days, the package included the opportunity for visits and most trainees who attended signed up for them in venues of their choice. Those who could not attend the first day's training were contacted to encourage them to opt for their choice of visits and most did so. The visits all went ahead and letters of appreciation were sent out to all the schools involved and advisers who facilitated and accompanied the visits. These experiences proved to be an important component of the training experience. All participants received a certificate, presented at the summer term SACRE meeting.

Almost all the vacancies for Buddhist representatives were filled during the training. Remaining vacancies at the end of year two of the programme included ten for Hindu members, five Jewish, three Muslim, eight Sikh and one Baha'i.

Of the 140 recruits who participated in the roll out of the training, twenty-six were to fill Buddhist vacancies; thirty-nine Christian (four RC, four Russian Orthodox, and the rest representing Free Church denominations); five Jewish; twenty-five Hindu; twenty-four Muslim; eighteen Sikh, two Baha'i and one Jain. These numbers represent almost a 20% drop on those who were recruited and had agreed to join the programme; some were lost for legitimate personal or professional reasons; others simply did not respond to further contact.



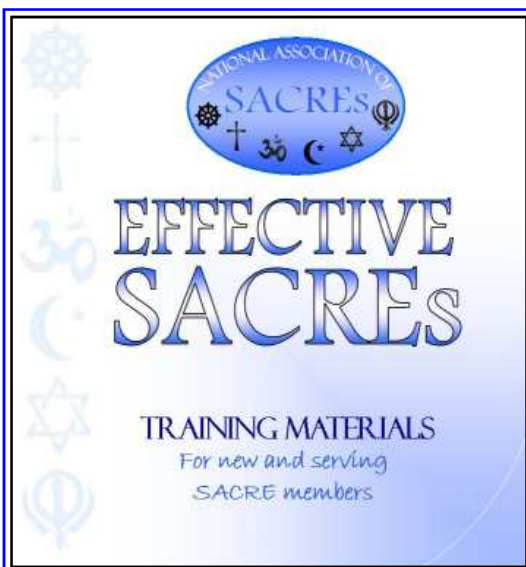
## CONFERENCES FOR INEXPERIENCED SACRE MEMBERS

The second strand of the project, the one day conferences targeted at inexperienced serving SACRE members offered a condensed version of the new recruits' training. These were held in February of each year and were open to any SACRE member. Up to three free places were offered to each SACRE in the designated regions, with a maximum possible attendance of around 75-80 people. These events did not recruit as well as expected, despite repeated requests from SACREs for such an opportunity. The response was very disappointing. In year one, in Birmingham only half of those expected attended (but the snow was a significant problem) and in York, twelve people attended. The London/SE area conference recruited 32. In year two numbers were only slightly better.

Despite the small numbers, the days were interesting and well received. Several people said they had taken a day's leave to attend. One delegate remarked that it was just what he needed to feel he could make a useful contribution, after being a SACRE member for more than a year. Another said the day had made him realise how much he had not been aware of previously. Evaluation responses to the opportunities offered were all positive.

# STAND-ALONE TRAINING MATERIALS FOR SACRES

The third aspect of the work, that of ensuring the project is sustained in a form that can be used by all SACREs, has been a strand exclusively of year two. It has been a major piece of work in its own right, enormously challenging and time-consuming, both from the content point of view and the technical aspects. It is designed to help SACRE members, individually and collectively, to be as effective as they can be. The main section called 'Being an Effective SACRE member' is based on the training materials and this is supplemented with other sections covering key roles and a number of aspects of SACRE effectiveness.



The publication is currently in press and a copy will be available to SACREs, free of charge, in the near future. A complementary copy will also be sent to all Chief Officers as a reminder of the responsibilities of the local authority in supporting the SACRE.

It is hoped it will be a useful tool in every SACRE's kit box of support materials and will be available to new SACRE members as a key part of their induction



CONTENTS	
<b>Guidance:</b>	Technical guidance; Guidance for trainers;
<b>Being an effective SACRE member:</b>	
Section 1: SACRE;	Part 1: All about SACREs; Part 2: SACRE's responsibilities (RE); Part 3: SACRE's responsibilities (CW);
Section 2: Religious Education;	Part 1: What is RE? Part 2: RE and the Law; Part 3: National developments; Part 4: SACRE's responsibility (RE);
Section 3: Collective Worship;	Part 1: What is collective worship? Part 2: CW and the Law; Part 3: SACRE's responsibilities (CW);
Section 4: SMSC Development;	Part 1: What is SMSC development? Part 2: Good provision for SMSC; Part 3: Outcomes of good SMSC;
Section 5: Representing a Constituency;	

<b>Key roles:</b>	Being an effective chair; Being an effective clerk;
<b>Strategic partnerships:</b>	With the local authority; With schools and young people; With the general public;
<b>Community cohesion:</b>	Introduction; SACRE and schools; Faith communities; Evaluation and outcomes;
<b>SACRE development:</b>	Self evaluation: REtool; Development planning;
<b>Resources:</b>	Presentations and notes; Activities and web links;
<b>Acknowledgements;</b>	
<b>Site map.</b>	
<b>Finding your way around the CD</b>	
The material is organised under these headings to make the CD easy to navigate. Each section can stand alone, allowing a SACRE to dip into the materials as need suggests and time permits.	

## EVALUATION

In summarising the key outcomes of the project, over 50% of the vacancies for minority faith community members in the targeted SACREs were filled and, of those, the highest success rate was in filling Buddhist vacancies (74% in year one and 100% in the second year); the involvement of minority faith community representatives was increased on 88 SACREs across the Government regions; vacancies were filled in 49% of SACREs in the year one cohorts and 64% in year two; a total of 161 potential new members were recruited, of whom 66 in year one and 58 in year two participated in the training and have joined SACREs; training was offered to 102 serving but inexperienced SACRE members to improve their effectiveness. The Partnership Group was established with its strong network of faith community representatives, committed to supporting the work. The CD is finished and in production. And, along the way, there was consistently positive feedback from delegates, advisers and SACREs.



Despite the hope that the process could be started earlier in the second year to give a longer run-up for recruitment, and to avoid adverse weather, this was not possible in the event so recruitment to fill vacancies for both years began in mid September and finished in early January. The relatively short time scale for the recruitment process presented problems and SACREs continued to call on the recruitment manager for help to fill long standing vacancies, even when the programme had ended.

Whilst the aspirational target of 30 trainees per cohort was not met, work was intensive throughout the whole period. A significant amount of recruitment time was taken in communicating with faith communities and SACREs and its eventual effectiveness remains an issue in some cases. Apathy on the part of some faith communities was often a barrier and some carefully nurtured contacts were ultimately unproductive. In other situations, good intentions to support often came to nothing. Despite all these difficulties, the quality of those who were recruited through these established professional links and faith networks was generally very encouraging. Without exception, everyone who attended the training was enthusiastic and committed.

***'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.'***



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.



*'I expected people would sit and listen. I was amazed about the interaction between the teacher and the students – the teacher skilfully helped them to explore ideas that were not their own. A real eye opener!*

*It was very, very good. The teacher was drawing out information from pupils and challenging them; they were using artefacts. It was beautifully geared up for the children to take so much on board.*

*I came away absolutely thrilled and enlightened and unnerved about the depth that these children were going into.*

*'I wondered what the fine line was between understanding a religion and its practices and those parents (for example: Buddhist or Muslim who would say – 'it's a step too far.'*

*'There was an activity to make prayer beads and when placing these on a string children had to say something positive about their class and not to God, rather being respectful to each other. When we talked about the dividing line, this was a good way of not crossing boundaries.'*

The visits to SACRE meetings had also made an impression. *'I was mightily impressed, not knowing what to expect... there was a huge agenda – and the Chair was able to keep to the task. I felt a real unity and support for each other. Many had their own area of expertise, and took responsibility for it - reporting back about it to the group. There was a sense of delegation and graciousness, an acceptance and acknowledgement of each other. We were made very welcome.'*

*'...a very active SACRE; all the different faith members took part; the meeting lasted 3 hours and included a visit from PGCE students who gave their presentations on the Holocaust. There was a lot of discussion and this was very interesting.*

*'I think I was expecting something informal but the meeting was very structured, organised – a fantastic agenda. For others, however, the experience was not so positive: 'My SACRE was a shambles.'*

Several of the advisers who set up the school and SACRE visits commented afterwards on how enthusiastic and motivated the visitors were and the experiences generated a good deal of interest and discussion on the second training day.



Asked 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, responses included:

***'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.'***  
***'I really don't think I could cope with the SACRE meeting without the training – I wouldn't have been effective or useful without the training.'***  
***'We could promote ourselves as a 'self-help' group to new members and mentor them.'***  
***'I feel inspired and energised.... meeting people here and taking this enthusiasm back; what we get out of it is to help young people recognise the value of faith in their lives.'***

## FINAL REFLECTIONS

It was a privilege to be involved in this training. It was also a huge professional challenge, even after a lifetime of teaching, advising and serving a SACRE. The people who attended the training were delightful; each group, however diverse, gelled together and there was a real sense among them all of commitment and mutual support. There was genuine interaction and mutual respect: it was truly community cohesion in action!



Even with two full training days, there was pressure on time to achieve a balance between giving information and creating opportunities for meeting the needs of a diversity of learning styles. As much time as possible was given to discussion, the most interesting aspect for an observer.

The weather was a problem to be overcome; timing the training in the spring term meant the early events were adversely affected by snow, some quite considerably. Additionally, some trainees were unable to attend parts or all of the training activities because of work, illness or, in some cases, travel particularly to the subcontinent. This was disappointing for the organisers but also, from what they said, for them too.



The experiences of planning, writing and delivering the training has emphasised how much is sometimes taken for granted in the contribution of SACRE members. It is a demanding role; a number of the evaluations commented on how difficult it would be to pick up the job without any training, yet that is what we expect so many to do. For religious people without a background in education it is a challenge to appreciate the place of religion, particularly of their own faith, in education and the role it can play in the education of children and young people. I hope we made a small difference.

Julie Grove  
April 2010

