

LEARN/TEACH/LEAD: Enhancing RE in the South-West

Briefing paper 3– for Standing Advisory Councils on RE

November 2012



The website has now been launched - www.ltIRE.org



from: Linda Rudge, Project Director

Dear SACRE member

Thank you for your partnership during the launch of the project. This paper is a report for Standing Advisory Councils meeting during the autumn term in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, in Devon, in Plymouth, and in Torbay. This first briefing paper for SACRE partners provides the context to the project and its aims, and introduces the different elements of the work to be achieved during the three years of its duration- 2012-15. It also focuses on the issues closely related to each SACRE's monitoring role and to the support of the initial and continuing education of teachers.

The Project

The original bid to St Luke's College Foundation highlighted the following issues that are relevant for teachers of RE nationally, and in the region.

'The overall aim of the project is to identify and address unmet needs of RE (Religious Education) teachers in Devon, Cornwall, Plymouth and Torbay and thereby to improve the quality of teaching & learning. The overall aim of the project is to identify and address unmet needs of RE (Religious Education) teachers in Devon, Cornwall, Plymouth and Torbay and thereby to improve the quality of teaching & learning outcomes, and leadership.'

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Project objectives:

1. To identify and prioritise what the unmet needs in RE are for the SW
2. To create plan and deliver a range of strategies to meet these needs such as:
 - An annual regional conference
 - Dissemination of good practice through the SWGfL (South West Grid for Learning)
 - Sustainable support networks for RE across the region in hubs
 - Developing a coherent approach to the teaching and learning in RE
3. To target the unmet needs of those new to RE teaching or subject leadership
4. To work together with interfaith groups and SACREs (Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education) where appropriate to develop and coordinate faith speaker services to schools
5. To strengthen links through working in partnership with LAs (Local Authorities), Dioceses, HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) and Faith Communities
6. To promote and share good practice in sustaining leadership and management for religious education especially in primary schools
7. *(agreed later with the funding agency)* To encourage 'A' level students to consider reading Theology at university.

The Role of Hub Leaders

So far we have appointed seven out of twelve project leaders for RE (PLREs) who are all teachers of RE in primary and secondary schools across the region. Another teacher in Plymouth is kindly acting as a reserve for this first year. We are still looking for five colleagues to fill the PLRE roles in Cornwall, Plymouth and North Devon.

Supported by steering group members, and by the equivalent of two days training each year, PLREs are expected to lead the hub groups in developing quality RE which raises standards and improves teacher knowledge and confidence. Their responsibilities are to:

- attend the training sessions for hub leaders (equivalent to 1.5 days per year)
- contribute to resource development in the project and utilise the website to promote good practice
- ensure all hub sessions are well planned with clear objectives and outcomes
- ensure that hub sessions are well attended and administered (venues, refreshments, materials).

Details about dates of hub meetings and venues will be posted on the website and sent round to schools through partnership networks. Appointments so far:

Nicola Bonell	St Mary's (CE) Primary, Penzance	West Cornwall (PY)
Rachel Willcocks	Exmouth Community College	Exeter and East Devon (SY)
Sarah Hopkins	Drake's (CE) Primary School East Budleigh	Exeter and East Devon (PY)
Joseph Matthews	Ilfracombe Community College	North Devon (SY)
Corrine Price	Wolborough (CE) Primary, Newton Abbot	Torbay area (PY)
Charlotte Caluori	St Cuthbert Mayne (RC/CE) Secondary, Torquay	Torbay area (SY)
Ian Hartley	The Ridgeway School, Plymouth	Plymouth (SY)
Simon Knight	All Saints Academy Plymouth	(Reserve – Plymouth and southern areas)

The Role of the Project Director

I was appointed to this role during the summer term of 2012. My responsibilities are to:

- oversee selection and support for lead RE practitioners
- prepare and deliver high quality RE input to project participants to enrich learning and improve standards in the subject
- liaise with hub leaders so that hub sessions are purposeful, focussed and lead to improved learning in RE, addressing the identified areas of weakness in the subject
- coordinate training of the faith communities
- provide the trust with annual reports of the project's progress and a final summative evaluation of the project and its impact on participants
- plan the annual residential conferences, in partnership with the steering group and hub leaders
- liaise with South West Grid for Learning (SWGfL) in ensuring ICT (information and communication technology)/ website is effectively utilised to enhance the quality of the project and resources developed during the project are shared effectively and promoted nationally – **(NB – October 2012** – the project is developing its own website as a response to the emerging theory that not enough schools in the project are using SWGfL as the main virtual environment)
- liaise with the administrator in ensuring all aspects of the project (conferences, hub sessions, training for hub leaders, steering group meetings) are clearly and effectively administered.

The Role of the Steering Group

The steering group represents partners across the region and includes SACRE members. The group's role is to:

- provide guidance and support in terms of shaping the key priorities in the project and monitor the development of the project
- actively contribute to the conferences, training sessions for hub leaders and development of support materials
- attend steering group meetings (twice yearly)
- where practicable support the hub sessions
- support the project directors in the effective leadership of the project

Membership of the steering group

Exeter Diocesan Board of Education: Tatiana Wilson
Truro Diocesan Board of Education: Irene Pooley
Cornwall LA/SACRE: David Hampshire
Devon LA/SACRE: Ed Pawson
Torbay LA/SACRE: David Hampshire
Plymouth LA/SACRE: Jonathan Marshall
University of Exeter: Karen Walshe
University College of St Mark and St John: Teresa Griffiths
Teacher representative: Giles Freathy
St Luke's College Foundation (Trustees): Dick Powell and Barbara Wintersgill
In attendance: project director (Linda Rudge) and project administrator

There are some budget constraints on the size of the group (originally 7) and on the frequency and location of meetings. Partner organisations can suggest substitutions for meetings if a member is unable to attend.

2012 conference: 'The Teacher as the Key to Successful RE'

This launch conference in Plymouth was attended by 64 delegates and speakers, mainly teachers from primary and secondary schools (approximately - 10 from Cornwall, 24 from Devon, and 19 from Plymouth and Torbay.) The programme lived up to its promise to provide opportunities for teachers and other educators in the region to enjoy positive experiences of continuing professional development at another challenging time in the history of this subject. All the evaluations showed how much teachers and other guests appreciated this opportunity. Our two nationally renowned keynote speakers (Mark Chater and Dilwyn Hunt) presented sessions that raised (and answered) questions about the meaning of 'learning from 'religion, and about assessment for learning in RE. Workshop and session leaders from the steering group, and the PLREs, added to the professional and academic challenges presented by the keynote speeches. These sessions also provided teachers with an excellent start to the CPD promised in this project.

'Unmet needs'

Focus group discussions at the conference with reporting cards enabled us to carry out some checks on the project's list of 'unmet CPD needs' identified in a questionnaire which supported the bid for funding. OFSTED priorities in 2010 for CPD were identified in the bid (below), and they will be

familiar to SACRE members. The focus group data suggests that the initial research was accurate in identifying the broad needs of RE teachers, especially those who cannot regularly access CPD on-line or in direct contact with providers.

CPD needs tend to be associated with uncertainties about RE:

- *‘the core purpose of the subject*
- *how attainment is defined*
- *the way pupils’ progress is defined*
- *how key concepts and questions can be used in RE*
- *how to secure continuity and progression in the RE curriculum*
- *the way to structure and define a clear process of learning in RE*
- *the approach to teaching about Christianity*
- *ways of balancing the need to foster respect for pupils’ religions and beliefs within open, critical, investigative learning in RE*
- *the place of teaching about humanism and non-religious beliefs.*

(OFSTED, 2010¹).

The conference data can be clustered around these headings, although the approach to teaching about Christianity is not explicitly identified as an ‘unmet need’ in the SW region; this might indicate a misconception about this area not that ‘all is well’. There were others, such as the ambiguous legal position of RE in different school settings and its impact on continuity and progression. The need to celebrate the diverse nature of religion, religions, spiritualities and worldviews represented in agreed syllabuses was mentioned by several groups, with a plea for more resources and opportunities to enable interfaith dialogue in (and beyond) schools. Some responses were clear in their requests for more exemplification of units of work and examples of pupils’ learning. Teachers in at least three discussion groups were also keen to observe outstanding practice in other schools, and the role and needs of HLTAs teaching the subject was also raised.

Many of the responses at the conference also indicated an individualised path to learning, or particular school needs; these might be beyond the scope of the current project. Other providers (e.g. RE-Online, the RE Quality Mark and the National Association for Teachers of RE) are already working with us in our efforts to support teachers and other educators across the south-west.

The next briefing paper with an updated report on the project will be circulated at the end of the Spring school term, 2013.

¹ Office for Standards in Education (2010) *Transforming religious education: Religious Education in Schools 2006-2009*. London: OFSTED.