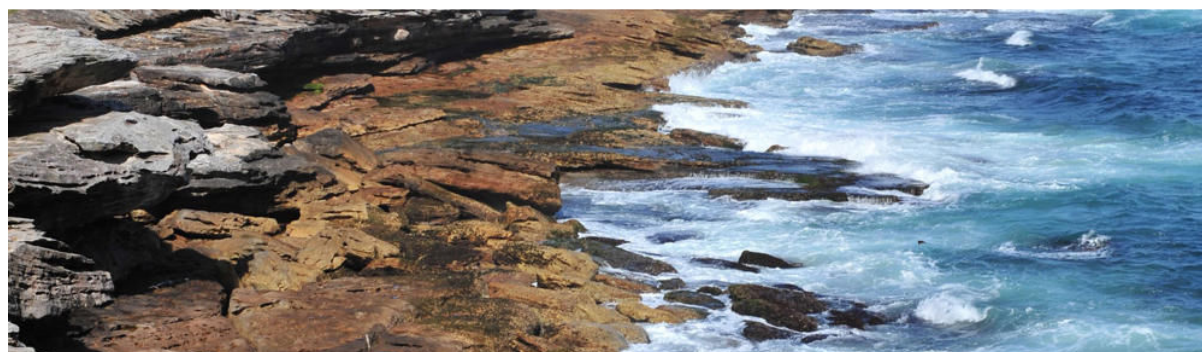


LEARN/TEACH/LEAD: Enhancing RE in the South-West

Briefing paper 8 – for partnership SACRE members

Linda Rudge – Project Director

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www.ltRE.org is under development with Project Lead Teachers (PLREs) and Steering Group members. Please visit it for updates and forums.

Context

This briefing paper is being circulated to inform partnership SACRE members about the project's recent developments, research findings, and proposed future plans.

The project was launched in October 2012 through funding in excess of £100,000, for a three year period, from the St Luke's College Foundation (often referred to as St Luke's Trust) <http://www.st-lukes-foundation.org.uk/>

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. It intends to achieve this by the leadership of local teachers (Project Leaders of RE – PLREs) in hubs across the region. They are working closely with established advisory staff in local authorities, in diocesan boards of education and in universities. There is an emphasis in the project on the needs of newly-qualified or early RE career teachers, and on the needs of teachers (and teaching assistants) with other specialisms and responsibilities.

The hypotheses underpinning the project's design were stated in the original funding bid.

1. *There is need for improvement in the quality of RE teaching, learning and leadership in schools.*
2. *There is a decline in support available to teachers of RE.*
3. *There is diminished capacity of LAs to provide effective training in RE.*
4. *There is a need to establish more effective partnerships between faith communities, SACREs and all education settings for the betterment of RE. (CCYP, Exeter, Nov 2011¹)*

These ideas are not surprising given the historical context of the period of the bid, and the interests of the principal authors; like any hypothesis they are open to challenge, investigation, review, ratification, or even rejectionⁱⁱ. However, the underlying principles of effective partnerships and the recognition of teachers' enthusiasm, hard work and professional quest for learning in RE, mean that the project has been welcomed across the region. The hypotheses are also being supported (in the main) through data emerging from conference evaluations and discussions with hub members and PLREs.

Through background research from three principal sources (Conroy, Jacksonⁱⁱⁱ and OFSTED), through focus group discussions in the original steering group, and through a questionnaire to schools, the project proposal to St Luke's reported that the 'unmet' CPD needs of teachers were not remarkably different to national trends and perceptions, and they tended to be associated with uncertainties about the subject:

- *'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, 2010^{iv})

The project's original and emerging data can be clustered around these headings, but there are others, such as the ambiguous legal position of RE in different school settings and the impact of this ambiguity on continuity and progression. One unmet need identified by the steering group, and reiterated in the conference data and hub meetings, is the need to support the level of teachers' subject knowledge and understanding across such a wide-ranging and challenging curriculum:

As a group we feel strongly that there is a clear need to strengthen subject knowledge in the teaching of RE. This is a particularly important when cross-curricular approaches to teaching RE are employed as sometimes the religious element of this is diminished. A priority for this project is strengthening the links teachers have with faith traditions, especially in the south west, so that their own understanding of different faith traditions can be extended. (CCYP, 2011)

The perceived need to celebrate the diverse nature of religion, religions, spiritualities and worldviews represented in agreed syllabuses have all been mentioned in hub groups, with a plea for more resources and opportunities to enable interfaith dialogue in (and beyond) schools. There have also been requests for more exemplification of units of work and examples of pupils' learning. Teachers are keen to observe outstanding practice in other schools.

During the first year, hub leaders have reported increasing anxiety in schools about RE's position in the curriculum and its status in schools. Other providers (e.g. RE-Online, the RE Quality Mark, RE Today 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 during this difficult period of change. RE training to support teaching assistants in primary school has also been a recurring theme in hub discussions. Some meetings have a high percentage of attendance by people in these roles, though

there is some uncertainty about how long this will continue under proposed government changes to employment conditions.

The project (2012-15) is being externally evaluated by Dr John Gay, Oxford. It is led by Tatiana Wilson (Exeter Diocesan Board of Education, which is also the administrative centre) and the director is Linda Rudge. A Steering Group, representing all the partners in the project, meets three times a year; it advises the project leader and director on the development of the programme, and on future bids for funds.^v An additional bid to St Luke's for an enhancement grant of just over £15,000 to sustain growth in 2013-15 has been approved. We are also planning a bid for the continuation of the project beyond its current 'end date' of 2015, and this bid may include other funding agencies. St Luke's Foundation is keen to 'pump-prime' initiatives so that they can be demonstrated as viable to other potential partners.

Hub Leaders (PLREs)

The project's underlying rationale can be illustrated by the diagrams that use the words 'Teach' and 'Learn' as reflections of one another (you can find many on-line, but please note copyright material). The rationale is also encapsulated in the motto '*Docere est Discere*' – to teach is to learn. The teachers in lead roles in the project are simultaneously in the positions of learners and teachers. They learn from the training and from each other, they teach, and learn from, others in the hub meetings and contribute to the learning of the advisory team. Then they share their learning in their own schools both as teachers of children and young people and as leaders of RE amongst their peers and school leaders. A community of enquiry and learning (see for example Cassidy, Christie et al, 2008)^{vi} supported through a virtual environment and in face to face meetings is being created across a large and diverse region.

We have appointed ten out of fourteen project leaders for RE (PLREs)^{vii} who are all teachers of RE in primary and secondary schools across the region. One reserve PLRE covers absences where feasible. PLREs have tenure on these roles (and an annual honorarium) until at least January 2015.

We are still looking for three colleagues to fill the PLRE roles in Cornwall as part of the enhancement bid created the opportunity for a third Cornwall hub. 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.

The project's lead teachers are chosen through an open and widely advertised regional selection process. Candidates are asked to make a five minute presentation within a peer focus group setting of their skills in subject leadership, specifically as these relate to leadership of other colleagues. Five out of the ten leaders so far are in the early stages of their RE careers.

Feedback data on the role of the PLRE

At the beginning of this term, PLREs were asked to share responses to their experiences of the lead role. Data is still being gathered and analysed but one response (below) provides a clue to the project's contribution to RE CPD:

PLRE 1

- ▶ It (the project) has made me more aware of the teaching of RE in the wider school community. By understanding the needs of others in the area, it has made me think more critically about my own practice and what I could do to improve. It has also made me think extensively about missing CPD opportunities within RE and this has led me to make links with the local churches and other organisations within Exmouth in the hope of working more coherently with others who are interested in effective RE. On a practical level, ideas shared at hub meetings have been passed back to my department and used by all in school which shows the benefit of sharing good practice.



Hub Meetings

Details about dates of termly hub meetings and venues are posted on the website and they are sent round to schools through partnership networks. These are now underway in all areas and some have met more than twice. Steering group members and the project director are leading in areas where PLREs are yet to be appointed. Reports of the meetings are added to the website by PLREs through the website manager, Ian Hartley.

Attendance rates are promising – between ten and twenty attendees in most hubs across the region – and venues change to make sure meetings are accessible to more staff. This presents some questions about continuity in the training, but it takes account of the large geographical areas^{viii} and travel times to twilight sessions. Meetings last about one hour and a half, and venues are offered a small fee for accommodation and refreshments. Topics for sessions are governed partly by the cycle of training for PLREs, but as meetings do not all happen at the same time in the cycle, agendas are usually agreed by PLREs with teachers who attend the session. There is a strong element of ‘bring and share’ – RE planning, curriculum materials and refreshments.

Training for PLREs

The first training day took place in Plymouth in January 2013, and explored assessment (especially AT2, Dilwyn Hunt) and subject knowledge (Judaism, David Hampshire). These topics emerged from the first conference. The second training date was 27th June (Exeter). Leaders included Jonathan Marshall MBE, Director of the Centre for Faiths and Diversity, Tatiana Wilson from Exeter DBE, and Linda Rudge (Project Director). Training sessions focused on planning RE, CPD for PLREs including accreditation, interfaith dialogue and RE, and managing hub meetings.

Sessions for January and June 2014 are still being planned in the light of the conference proceedings.

2013 conference – ‘Sustaining RE: developing the Art of Subject Leadership’

This took place at Dartington Hall near Totnes, Devon. Keynote speakers at this historic educational venue included Alan Brine, HMI, National Adviser for RE who focused on the recommendations from OFSTED’s long report on RE. Other speakers included Kathryn Wright (CPD4RE) and Lat Blaylock (RE Today). It was a free event for all teachers of RE (state sector) in Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Workshops included *RE-Route*, *RE-Online* and presentations from Project Lead Teachers of RE, and local RE advisers from across the south-west region. More than 80 delegates attended (there were 100 places available) – an increase of more than 30% on last year’s numbers – and 99% of the evaluations received were overwhelmingly positive in their feedback and appreciation. We know there are areas to work on in relation to workshop choices and the management of a busy programme for next year, but the event was judged to be highly successful by steering group members. Topics covered at the conference will be followed up in hub meetings this term.

Bid to St Luke’s Foundation to enhance the project between 2013 and 2015

An additional bid to St Luke’s for an enhancement grant to sustain growth in 2013-15 has been awarded (June 2013) – see below. We are also planning a bid for the continuation of the project beyond its current ‘end date’ of January 2015. During the first year of funding (April 2012-April 2013) several areas for development were identified. These were based on additional needs highlighted by the project lead, project director and steering group. They reflect the enthusiasm with which the PLREs have shown in their roles, their emerging success, and the practical issues and new opportunities that team members have encountered in the first year of the project. The project is currently funded to run until January 2015, and the funds for this extension are intended to take the activities through to the current end date.

AIMS of the programme extension in year 2/3:

1. to create opportunities for PLREs to enhance RE in local cluster groups through a) being enabled to observe good practice and b) being enabled to visit other schools in their immediate hub area to offer on-site CPD through modelling good practice in classrooms or staff meetings;
2. to create third Cornwall hub, with two PLREs, in Cornwall covering mid and northern areas;
3. to facilitate academic or vocational accreditation for the PLREs through project partner Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) – this will also boost the research base for the project as a whole;
4. to provide direct support from the project director to PLREs in their own schools through annual visits/on-site CPD;
5. to continue to develop the website (www.ltIRE.org) with a view to launching a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) section for project members in 2015;
6. to provide administrative support for the extended programme.

Beyond ‘the end’ - 2015

In a CPD project of this kind the principal intention is to leave a legacy for the future (CCYP, 2011) both in the participating schools and in the wider learning networks across the region. Any bid for

funding beyond 2015 will need to take account of the external evaluation report as well as the programme evaluations taking place throughout the project. Detailed future planning is not appropriate at this stage but SACRE reports and suggestions via the steering group should ensure that the project stays in touch with the region's CPD needs..

Early indications also suggest some gaps in provision; these have appeared because of the initial success of the project's provision i.e. we are finding it challenging to meet demand, and we need to find ways not to disappoint our colleagues when we have raised expectations. These reflections lead to four additional areas for consideration in relation to future funding:

1. The geographical limits on the programmes (peninsula of Devon and Cornwall, and the Isles) have presented some disappointment amongst schools engaged with the project's Higher Education partners beyond these limits. This might be an area for consideration in any continuation or expansion.
2. It has also been difficult so far to engage students on ITE courses directly, and we need to find a way either to encourage their participation or to recognise that the constraints of ITE programmes (in all settings) will usually prevent their attendance at hub meetings or the annual conference. Eight students from Exeter University's secondary RE PGCE course attended the conference this year.
3. With limited (but generous) funding, the hub areas are very large, mostly rural with small populations, and often challenging in terms of transport links. While we are conscious of the potential benefits of the website as a means of communication, the central method of the LTLRE approach to CPD is face to face support and learning. It might be possible to engage in partnership with other schemes and funding streams to establish satellite hubs between 2014 and 2018. For example, NATRE has offered to link all the existing hubs to their resources and benefits; this is under discussion for 2013-14.
4. The eight original partners in the project currently represent traditional providers of RE ITE and CPD. This could be reviewed and others might offer support. As it is, the only direct funding comes from the Foundation and partners support some aspects of the work by offering venues and administrative support, workshops and professional time. Funding streams could be expanded. These prospects need to be researched and approached with some sensitivity and realism in the changing context for teacher education and learning.

In the meantime, we are looking forward to the second year.

(Briefing paper 8 ends – LR/16/09/13)

ⁱ Bid to St Luke's College Foundation for a grant to support 'Unmet Needs in RE', (Council for Children and Young People, Diocese of Exeter, November 2011)

ⁱⁱ The project Director (who was not part of the original steering group) has taken them as 'proven' for the first year of the project given the limited research resource within the project as a whole; we would all welcome the opportunity to explore them in more depth.

ⁱⁱⁱ Conroy, J. C. (2011) *Does Religious Education Work? A three-year investigation into the practices and outcomes of religious education: A Briefing Paper* University of Glasgow

Jackson R, et al. (2010) *Materials used to teach about World Religions in schools in England* Institute of Education, University of Warwick, Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit, Warwick: DCSF

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

^v The steering group contributes actively to hub meetings, the conference, and to strategic developments. It represents partners across the region, and includes SACRE members. From 2014, nominated PLREs will take turns to attend steering group meetings; PLREs already make reports to local Standing Advisory Councils for RE (SACRES).

^{vi} Cassidy, C, Christie, D, Coutts, N, Dunn, J, Sinclair, C, Skinner, D, Wilson, A , 'Building communities of educational enquiry', OXFORD REVIEW OF EDUCATION 34:2, 217-235 (Routledge) Although there is a deliberate and valid link to educational research in the original proposal, this still to be formalised in the project's development especially through refereed publications.

vii

PLRE	e-mail contact	Home/ school base	HUB/area
Nicola Bonell	Nicki@st-marys-ce-pz.cornwall.sch.uk	St Mary's (CE) Primary, Penzance	West Cornwall(PY)
Michael Heron	MHeron@helston.cornwall.sch.uk	Helston Community College	West Cornwall
Rachel Willcocks	Rachel.Hughes@exmouthcollege.devon.sch.uk	Exmouth Community College	Exeter and East Devon (SY)
Sarah Hopkins	shopkins@drakes.devon.sch.uk	Drake's (CE) Primary School East Budleigh	Exeter and East Devon (PY)
Joseph Matthews	jmatthews@ilfracombecollege.devon.sch.uk	Ilfracombe Community College	North Devon (SY)
Gill Tewkesbury	gtewkesbury@piltonbluecoat.devon.sch.uk	Pilton Bluecoat School, Barnstaple	North Devon - PY
Corrine Price	corrineprice@wolborough-primary.devon.sch.uk	Wolborough (CE) Primary, Newton Abbot	Newton Abbot/Torbay Area
Charlotte Caluori	Charlotte.Caluori@stcm.torbay.sch.uk	St Cuthbert Mayne (RC/CE) Secondary	Newton Abbott/Torbay Area
Ian Hartley	HartleyI@ridgeway.plymouth.sch.uk	The Ridgeway School, Plymouth	Plymouth (SY) and website lead
Katie Freeman	hyde.park.infants.school@plymouth.gov.uk	Hyde Park Infants, Plymouth	Plymouth - PY
Giles Freathy	gilesfreathy@hotmail.com (school e-mail address to follow)	Sir Robert Geffery's C of E VA Primary School, Landrake	East Cornwall – PY (SY – vacancy)
			Mid/North Cornwall – PY and SY vacancies
Simon Knight	sknight@asap.org.uk	All Saints Academy Plymouth	SY – reserve Plymouth area