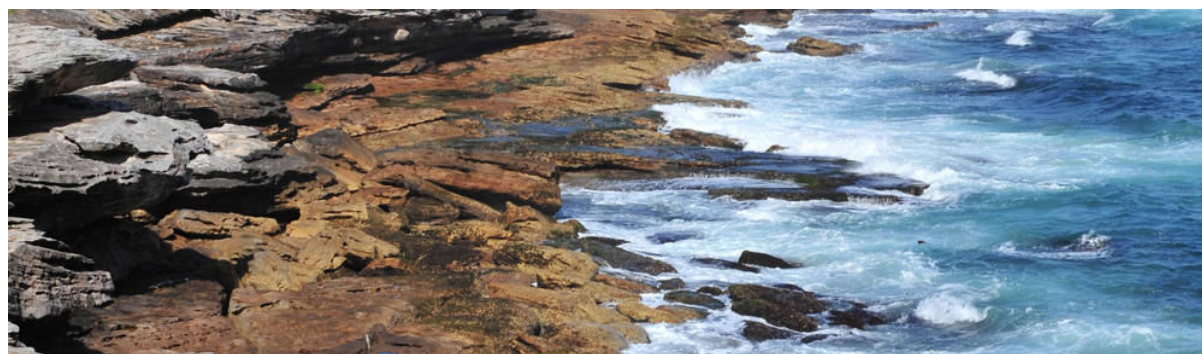


LEARN/TEACH/LEAD: *Enhancing RE in the South-West*

Briefing paper 11 – for partnership SACRE and Steering Group members, and Project Leaders of RE

Linda Rudge – Project Director

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www.ltlRE.org is managed by one of the Project Leaders of RE, and Steering Group members. Please visit it for updates and forums.

Context

This briefing paper is being circulated to inform partners and PLREs about the project's recent developments and our 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 <http://www.st-lukes-foundation.org.uk/> This is the second full year of its programme. We received additional funding from St Luke's of just over £15,000 (June 2103) in order to enhance the project in key agreed areas.

The aim of the project is to identify and address unmet needs of RE teachers in Devon, Cornwall, Plymouth and Torbay and thereby to improve the quality of teaching & learning outcomes, and leadership. This aim is achieved principally through the leadership of local teachers (Project Leaders of RE – PLREs) in hubs across the region. These teachers 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 project is being externally evaluated by Dr John Gay, and Dr Barbara Wintersgill is leading the internal evaluation. The project's steering group is chaired by Tatiana Wilson

(Exeter Diocesan Board of Education, which is also the administrative centre) and the Project Director is a freelance education consultant.

We have sent a position paper to St Luke's (April 2014) outlining our plans for the continuation of the project beyond its current 'end date' of summer 2015. The third phase, for which we will be applying for a reduced level of funding from St Luke's, will be focused on building the capacity for hubs to become self-funding.

Hub Leaders (PLREs)

We have now appointed twelve out of fourteen Project Leaders for RE (PLREs)ⁱ 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. Supported by steering group members, and by the equivalent of two days training each year, PLREs lead the hub groups in developing quality RE. We have referred in our training to the 'RE Quality Mark' standards and have encouraged schools to participate in this scheme where appropriate and feasible. Hubs are also formally linked to the National Association of RE Teachers (NATRE).

We are still looking for two colleagues to fill the PLRE roles in mid/north Cornwall following the successful application for funds for this hub. Interviews for these two new roles are on 12th June 2014. The hub new has met once in the Spring term of 2014, and fifteen people attended the session. The main topics were project and RE updates from the area and nationally, and routes to achieving 'outstanding' in RE.

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 and by PLREs. These meetings are now underway in all areas and some have met more than once each term since the Spring term of 2013. Extra meetings are becoming a feature of at least one hub, and another uses a Newsletter compiled by the PLREs to keep people in touch between meetings. Reports of the meetings are added to the website by PLREs through the website manager, Ian Hartley.

Training for PLREs

The first of the two PLRE training days for 2013-14 took place in Newquay in February 2014. Topics included national and local developments in RE (Linda Rudge) best practice in hub leadership (PLREs), routes to achieving 'outstanding' in RE (Tatiana Wilson), introductory subject knowledge enhancement on Hinduism (Mike Heron), and a report on the Exeter University project 'Researchers' by Rob and Giles Freathy. These topics emerged from discussions at PLRE and Steering Group meetings during and after the second annual conference. The second training date is 12th June at the University of St Mark and St John, Plymouth. This day coincides with the Steering Group's meeting, and it will be an

opportunity for all to meet prior to the third annual conference in October 2014. Topics on the second training day will include updates on website resources, developments in new agreed syllabus implementation (Torbay, Devon, Cornwall and Plymouth), and an in-depth session on approaches to Hinduism in the classroom presented by guest speaker Dhirasanta Das.

The role of the Project Director

Previous briefing papers have focused on the role of PLREs and the steering group. The role of the Director is likely to change in the third phase from 2015 onwards and partners might like to consider how these proposed changes coincide with their own priorities for the project. The Director's role has already expanded, through the 2013 enhancement grant, to include visits to support PLREs in their own schools. Eight schools have been visited so far, and the range of activities negotiated with the schools has been challenging, relevant, and highly informative for schools and for the Director. These activities have included meetings with senior school leaders about the project and RE, in-depth discussions with individual PLREs about departmental or subject plans, joint observation of lessons to help subject leaders develop observation and subject monitoring skills, and observation of lessons taught by PLREs in order to learn about the school and its pupils.

Another of the key (original) aspects of the work is to oversee the selection of PLREs and to organise the support for them through the training days and through e-mail distribution of national and local RE news, new resources, and CPD opportunities within and beyond the region. This aspect also involves preparing and disseminating high quality RE input to training sessions in order to enrich learning and improve standards in the subject. The role of the Director is also one of mentor to PLREs, for example through liaison with hub leaders so that meetings are purposeful, focussed and organised to help improve learning in RE.

The Director also plans the annual residential conferences, in partnership with the steering group and hub leaders. Regular discussions with the PLRE website manager help to ensure that the website is effectively utilised to enhance the quality of the project and that resources developed during the project are shared effectively and promoted nationally. The role also involves regular liaison with the administrator (Exeter DBE) and the Project Lead. This is to ensure all aspects of the project (conferences, hub sessions, training for hub leaders, steering group meetings) are clearly and effectively administered. In consultation with the Project Lead and the Steering Group the Director also provides the Trust with annual reports of the project's progress. There will also be a final summative evaluation of the project and its impact on participants, written by the Director in consultation with internal and external evaluators.

Internal evaluation data

The Steering Group will receive a full report on the current data on June 12th. The report is written to address the impact of the project on teaching and learning, and leadership and management. Two extracts below point to the quality of the work so far:

(Teaching and Learning – raising expectation of pupils' attainment)

The liaison between primary and secondary RE teachers has been particularly instrumental in heightening secondary teachers' awareness of what pupils are capable of when they enter Year 7. They have also become aware of the tendency of secondary schools to lower rather than raise the levels of challenge in RE when pupils enter the school. This too has often been reported on by Ofsted. The development reported by one teacher is unusual and reflects the positive impact of the project. *'We now work more closely with all of our feeder primary schools to figure out why there is such a difference in expectations and what we can do to change this. We have now started to develop new schemes of work together for the end of primary school to ensure all students start with the same knowledge as they enter secondary school'.*

(Leadership and Management)

Team leaders have had opportunities to hone their training skills and have developed between them a significant body of knowledge and expertise which is now disseminated across the region. One PLRE writes; *'I feel we have become better at picking out specifically what our hub requires at each meeting and trying to plan activities to really meet areas where needs have not been met before. An example of this is our current work to try and set up links with the new local Mosque to give all teachers more confidence in using Muslim speakers and taking groups of students out to the Mosque on visits'.*

Dr Wintersgill concluded her report by commenting on the overall value of the project:

Although teachers' responses are overwhelmingly positive and the project is clearly effective in transforming many schools in the south west, it will inevitably take time for an enterprise of this kind to extend its impact across the region. During this first stage, systems and procedures have been put in place and trainers identified. But some of the hubs are still very new while others are yet to be established.

These findings, and the support of the external evaluator who attended the Steering Group meeting in March 2014, are informing our plans for continuation to 2017, if we can achieve a suitable level of funding.

2014 conference

This will take place at the St Mellion Resort Hotel near Callington, Cornwall. More than 50 places have already been booked by teachers, PLREs and project partners. Entitled *'The Learning Journey in RE: leading the way through religious understanding'* this third annual conference will focus on subject knowledge and understanding for RE teachers. Keynote speakers include Dr Geoff Teece and Dr Karen Walshe from the School of Education at the University of Exeter, and Mr Lat Blaylock, RE Adviser for RE Today Services and editor of *REtoday* magazine. An after dinner speech by John Keast OBE, outgoing Chair of the RE Council of England and Wales, will reflect on 'a life in RE'. Workshops will be led by specialists and faith community leaders on key aspects of the RE curriculum.

Bid to St Luke's Foundation for third phase

The LTLRE Steering Group agreed in March 2014 that the project's new direction under third phase funding (if available) would be:

- to consolidate the working practice, pedagogy and partnership philosophy of the project
- *through* securing the capacity for most of the 'inner' local hubs (and other elements of the programme) to become self-supporting by 2017-18
- *by*
 - a) obtaining an agreed level of continuation funding from St Luke's Foundation;
 - b) adjusting Director, Lead and PLRE roles suit the new aim of consolidating the project's practice and its legacy;
 - c) extending the membership of the steering group to include senior leaders from schools;
 - d) reinforcing the culture of teacher-led networking and conferencing in RE across the south-west;
 - e) meeting national expectations for RE CPD and subject development by establishing the project as a regional training hub with accredited CPD programmes.

A formal bid for funds will be presented in April 2015. The annual conference 2015 will need to be planned in contingency terms before we have the outcome of the bid.

Meanwhile, we are looking forward to the final year of this second phase of the project, and I would like to thank everyone for their support, creativity, enthusiasm and professional commitment to RE.

(Briefing paper 11 ends – LR/06/14)

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