



Report to Leader (Education & Children's Services portfolio)

Decision Date:	3 March 2022
Reference number:	EC03.22
Title:	The Buckinghamshire Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education 2022-2027
Cabinet Member(s):	Councillor Anita Cranmer
Contact officer:	Simon James Service Director Education Simon.James@buckinghamshire.gov.uk
Ward(s) affected:	None specific
Recommendations:	That the local authority adopts the Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education, agreed and commended to Buckinghamshire Council by the Agreed Syllabus Conference of Buckinghamshire SACRE on 6th December 2021, for all Buckinghamshire maintained schools including Voluntary Controlled schools for 2022-2027.
Reason for decision:	After consultation with schools and listening to the views of a number of pupils, the Buckinghamshire SACRE have agreed appropriate changes to the Agreed Syllabus, to reflect educational developments, developments in Religious Education and to make the syllabus structure more accessible for schools, so that teachers can provide an appropriate curriculum for their pupils and school.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education is a statutory document for maintained schools, which must be reviewed every 5 years.

1.2 The Buckinghamshire SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education) recommends this updated version of the Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education, which reflects changes in education developments and developments in Religious Education.

2. Content of report

2.1 Background:

- The Agreed Syllabus is the statutory document for all maintained schools, including Voluntary Controlled schools. Academies and free schools are encouraged to follow the syllabus but are free to develop their own or choose another locally agreed syllabus.
- Every five years, SACRE (the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education) reviews the Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education and, if deemed necessary, recommends to the Local Authority that it develops a new Agreed Syllabus.

2.2 The Legal Background:

- The partnership between Local Authority and its SACRE and Agreed Syllabus Conference is a key factor in the provision of effective RE for all pupils. A positive joint approach allows a LA to draw on the input of local religious groups and teachers as well as elected member representatives.
- The locally agreed syllabus is a statutory syllabus of RE prepared under Schedule 31 of the Education Act 1996 and adopted by the LA under that schedule. It must be followed in maintained schools without a designated denomination.
- Once adopted by the LA, the agreed syllabus sets out what pupils should be taught and can include the expected standards of pupils' performance at different stages.
- Every locally agreed syllabus must reflect that the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain. (Section 375(3), Education Act 1996).
- A Local Authority must establish an occasional body called an agreed syllabus conference (ASC) to review the agreed syllabus for RE adopted by the LA (Schedule 31(2), Education Act 1996). This may have common membership with the SACRE but is a separate entity and must therefore be separately convened.
- It must also institute a review of its locally agreed syllabus within five years of the last review.
- An ASC must produce and recommend to the LA an agreed syllabus for RE which is educationally sound and meets legal requirements.

- It must unanimously recommend a syllabus for adoption by the LA (each committee having a single vote) - there are provisions for the Secretary of State to become involved and appoint a body of persons having experience in RE to prepare a syllabus of RE where an ASC is not unanimous (see Schedule 31(10), Education Act 1996).
- To ensure high quality RE, it is recommended that the agreed syllabus, as well as meeting legal requirements, should:
 - provide a clear structure which users find easy to follow and which highlights the contribution of RE to the curriculum
 - provide opportunities and examples to support the cross-curricular dimensions of the curriculum
 - ensure that learning in RE has both continuity and progression
 - have clear statements about expected standards and assessment arrangements
 - provide clear guidance about the process of learning that should underpin the planning of RE
 - provide appropriate levels of challenge for pupils of different ages and abilities - these should be progressive and demanding but realistic
 - reflect curriculum developments nationally

2.3 The Process for Developing the Agreed Syllabus:

- The Agreed Syllabus Conference sent a survey to all schools in Autumn term 2019, asking for feedback on the current Agreed Syllabus (2016-2021).
- Research groups were held across the county in Spring term 2020 with RE Leads (primary), Heads of Department for RE and RE Teachers (secondary) to gain greater insight into their views of the current syllabus and how it should develop.
- The Agreed Syllabus Conference established a writing panel of RE teachers to contribute to the writing of the new Agreed Syllabus. This was postponed from Spring 2020 to Spring 2021 due to the COVID pandemic and the life of the current Agreed Syllabus was extended by one year by the Buckinghamshire Agreed Syllabus Conference.
- The writing panel and the RE Advisor drew up a first draft of the Agreed Syllabus which was presented to the Agreed Syllabus conference in November 2021. Members of the Agreed Syllabus Conference had the opportunity to contribute, comment and ask questions, which were presented back to the writing panel for consideration.
- A final draft of the Agreed Syllabus was presented and debated at the Agreed Syllabus Conference meeting on the 6th December 2021. It was accepted by all four

groups of the Agreed Syllabus Conference (three groups in attendance and one by email).

2.4 Main Changes Since the 2016-2021 Syllabus:

- The syllabus is largely developed from the previous 'Challenging RE' syllabuses of 2006, 2011 and 2016, taking on board the feedback from teachers, RE Leads and Heads of Department.
- The role of an Agreed Syllabus as basis for building an appropriate school curriculum for pupils has been clarified, emphasising that it is not a scheme of work.
- The introductory sections have been sharpened and made clearer. The section on personal development has been revised and linked to current Ofsted requirements.
- The four aims of the Agreed Syllabus remain, but
 - the wording of the first aim includes 'worldviews' to take account of recent developments in RE (Commission on Religious Education Report 2018); and
 - the second aim has changed from '*pursue quest for meaning, purpose and value*' to '*reflect on questions of meaning, purpose and value*'.
- The skills progression through the learning process has been sharpened. Progression through Key Stage two has been enhanced by the inclusion of statements and descriptors of expectations to support teacher planning for Lower Key Stage two (years 3-4) and Upper Key Stage two (years 5-6).
- The syllabus clarifies the importance of concepts in developing pupil knowledge and understanding of religions and worldviews and support materials will be included in the non-statutory appendices to guide Subject Leaders/Heads of Department in their curriculum planning.
- Consideration has been given to format to ensure that the document is more accessible and usable.
- Changes in Content:
 - The Agreed Syllabus endeavours to ensure continuity in content from the previous syllabus.
 - The syllabus continues to recommend the same religions to be studied at Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 as per the previous agreed syllabus, but extends the choice in Key Stage 2 so that teachers can plan a curriculum that is more appropriate to their school and pupils.
 - Humanism has been introduced explicitly in Upper Key Stage 2, Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 to reflect the changes in RE on the basis of the Commission on RE Report 2018 and Human Rights legislation.

- Context and core questions have been refined and made clearer at each key stage.
- The new agreed syllabus provides a set of 'enquiries' for each key stage which Subject Leaders/Heads of Departments use as the basis for their curriculum planning. The non-statutory appendices will include additional support materials to help in this process.
- 'Disciplinary Approaches' have been added to Appendix 1: Different approaches to learning and teaching in RE, to reflect recent developments in RE and enable Subject Leaders/Heads of Department with their planning.
- In addition, the SACRE, through the writing panel, will be providing more detailed guidance on planning for Subject Leaders/Heads of Department in the form of a Subject Leader's Handbook and for teachers there will be more information on religious and non-religious worldviews.

3. Other options considered

- 3.1 The SACRE considered whether any changes needed to be made to the current Agreed Syllabus. It was concluded that changes should be made to reflect educational developments and developments in Religious Education since 2016 and changes to make the syllabus structure more accessible for schools.

4. Legal and financial implications

- 4.1 The locally agreed syllabus is a statutory syllabus of Religious Education prepared under Schedule 31 of the Education Act 1996. Schedule 31(2) of the Education Act 1996 states that a locally agreed syllabus must be reviewed within five years of the last review.
- 4.2 There are no financial implications.

5. Corporate implications

- a) Property – no implication.
- b) HR – no implication.
- c) Climate change – no implication.
- d) Sustainability – no implication.
- e) Equality – an equality impact assessment is not required.
- f) Data - a data protection impact assessment is not required.
- g) Value for money – the SACRE and ASC are both voluntary bodies.

6. Local councillors & community boards consultation & views

6.1 The SACRE consists of 4 committees:

- a) **Committee A** – representatives from Christian and other religious denominations or beliefs as, in the opinion of the Local Authority, will appropriately reflect religion and belief in the area
- b) **Committee B** - Church of England representatives
- c) **Committee C** - Teacher representatives from Buckinghamshire schools
- d) **Committee D** - Local Authority representatives, two councillors and one school governor

7. Communication, engagement & further consultation

7.1 All Buckinghamshire schools were consulted via a survey in the Autumn term 2019. All Religious Education Subject Leaders and Heads of Department were invited to attend focus groups in Spring term 2020 to gain greater insight into their views of the current syllabus and how it should develop.

7.2 The new syllabus has been developed by a writing panel consisting of RE teachers from Buckinghamshire schools and the RE Consultant Advisor.

8. Next steps and review

8.1 The Agreed Syllabus will be launched to schools on the 9th June 2022 for use from September 2022.

8.2 The Agreed Syllabus will need to be reviewed in 2027.

9. Background papers

9.1 The Buckinghamshire Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education 2022-2027

9.2 Membership structure of the Buckinghamshire SACRE

10. Your questions and views (for key decisions)

10.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by telephone 01296 382343 or email democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.