



THE ROLE OF the SACRE CHAIR

PRESENTATION AND NOTES

PRESENTATION

HOW DOES A CHAIR GET APPOINTED?

- SACRE Chairs are appointed or re-appointed annually.
- The LA has the power to appoint in principle.
- Failing this, the SACRE needs to set up an open and fair process itself for appointing its Chair.
- Some SACREs 'rotate' the Chair annually.
- Other SACREs have a set time limit for a Chair's term of office, or re-appoint the same Chair indefinitely.

THE SACRE CHAIR'S ROLE: OVERVIEW

Elements of the role of a SACRE Chair:

- **Generic** (or general) – what the Chair of any meeting needs to do;
- **Specific** – the particular responsibilities of a SACRE Chair;
- **Strategic** – furthering the cause of RE more widely.

GENERIC ASPECTS OF THE ROLE

- setting the agenda for meetings;
- ensuring SACRE members receive proper notice of meetings, and documentation in advance of meetings;
- conducting the meetings effectively and pleasantly;
- ensuring the business is dealt with, decisions are recorded, minutes are kept and circulated;
- enabling SACRE members to participate and contribute;
- appointing a Deputy Chair (optional);
- arranging authorisation should there be a need to act between meetings.

SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE ROLE OF SACRE CHAIR

- The main specific role is to **ensure that the SACRE fulfils its statutory duties and responsibilities.**
- The ultimate aim is to seek the best possible RE and collective worship for pupils.
- The Chair needs a clear grasp of technicalities within the SACRE remit, e.g. membership structure, how to make decisions, ‘determinations’, the legislative parameters.
- The Chair may need to liaise with the LA’s legal department over these legal dimensions.
- The Chair leads the SACRE in the ongoing process of the SACRE’s own self-evaluation and development.

THE STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES OF THE ROLE

- The SACRE Chair is potentially a key advocate and motivator for religious education within the LA.
- The SACRE’s interfaith dimension offers the possibility of initiatives and collaboration in the wider community, e.g. in citizenship; promoting community cohesion; responding to significant events or issues.
- Much of this creative activity will go beyond the legal remit of the SACRE, and is strictly optional.
- However, it is a natural extension of the SACRE’s work, and will serve to enhance the role and standing of RE.

SOME KEY TASKS FOR A SACRE CHAIR

To ensure:

- that a plan for the annual cycle of meetings and generic items is in place;
- that representation of each of the groups is maintained;
- that SACRE produces guidance documentation for both RE and CW;
- that relevant and appropriate training is available for members, including induction of new members;
- that an annual report is produced and issued;
- that a Deputy Chair/executive group is available to undertake tasks in case of the Chair’s absence.

DUTIES OF SACRE

- A SACRE’s main duty is to advise its LA on religious education, as taught in accordance with the LA’s agreed syllabus, in community, foundation and voluntary controlled schools.
- SACRE also gives advice on collective worship in community schools and other schools within the LA which have no specific religious character (normally all except voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools).

SACRE must also:

- ensure the LA reviews its agreed syllabus every five years;
- consider requests from schools to be released from the requirement to provide collective worship that is wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character (a determination);
- publish an annual report of its work.
- The Education Reform Act (1998) sets out the central aims of the school curriculum, to which RE contributes through:
- promoting the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils (and of society);
- preparing pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

See also current statements about the curriculum in

- 'Every Child Matters',
- 'The Primary Curriculum'
- 'The Secondary Curriculum'.

NOTES

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THE LEGAL SITUATION

Following the Education Reform Act 1988, each local authority (LA) is required by law to maintain a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE), whose basic structure of four 'Groups' is likewise set out in law, together with the SACRE's duties and responsibilities. The power to appoint a Chair for the SACRE rests with the LA. However, if the LA fails to appoint a Chair, chooses not to exercise its rights, or delegates its power to the SACRE itself, it is the responsibility of the SACRE itself to create a fair and open process for appointing a Chair from among its members. There are different models for how this may be done. Some SACREs, for instance, rotate the position of Chair of SACRE annually so that each Group takes it in turn to nominate the Chair. Others have time limits on the position of Chair and still others keep or re-elect the same Chair until he/she wishes to resign.

THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A SACRE CHAIR

Some aspects of the role are clearly **generic** and pertain to the Chair of any organized meeting, for instance: setting agendas; conducting meetings effectively; ensuring that the business is dealt with, that any decisions are made and recorded, and that minutes are kept and followed up; enabling all members to participate and contribute in meetings; establishing a process for authorizing the Chair to act between meetings and for appointing a Deputy Chair, etc. Much of this may be spelt out in the SACRE's locally drawn up Constitution or Terms of Reference (if these exist). These generic responsibilities are important, but our main focus here is those aspects of the role which are specific to the SACRE context.

The main **specific** role of a SACRE Chair is to manage the work of SACRE in accordance with statutory requirements and local circumstances. For convenience, a SACRE's basic responsibilities are set out below, always remembering that the ultimate aim underpinning the legal requirements is to seek the best possible religious education and collective worship for pupils in schools.

In addition, the Chair needs a clear grasp of the role and processes of a SACRE, including technicalities involved in areas such as Group and SACRE membership, 'determinations', and how SACRE decisions should be reached, and must be prepared to consult with the LA's legal department where necessary regarding these technical matters. The Chair is also responsible for leading the SACRE in its own self-evaluation and development/training programmes.

Further aspects of the Chair's role may be described as **strategic**. Being a SACRE Chair provides many opportunities for furthering the cause of religious education at all levels: the

SACRE Chair is potentially a key advocate and motivator for RE within the LA. Moreover, a SACRE's inter-faith dimension can lead to SACRE initiatives and collaboration in the wider community (e.g. promoting community cohesion and engaging in issues of citizenship and identity), in which the Chair would have a leading role. These strategic aspects enable a SACRE and its Chair to go beyond their legal remit into creative and visionary activities, which, while strictly optional, are natural extensions to the bread and butter work, and enhance still further the role and standing of RE.

DUTIES OF SACRE:

A SACRE's main duty is to advise its LA on religious education as taught in accordance with the LA's agreed syllabus in Community, Foundation and Voluntary Controlled schools.

SACRE also gives advice on collective worship in Community schools and other schools within the LA which have no specific religious character (normally all except Voluntary Aided and Voluntary Controlled schools).

SACRE must also:

- ensure the LA reviews its Agreed Syllabus every five years
- consider requests from schools to be released from the requirement to provide collective worship of which the majority is to be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character. (Such a request, if granted, is called a "determination".)
- publish an Annual Report of its work

The Education Reform Act 1998 sets out the central aims of the school curriculum, to which RE contributes, through:

- promoting the Spiritual, Moral, Cultural, Moral, Physical development of pupils and of society;
- preparing pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life

SOME KEY TASKS FOR A SACRE CHAIR

To ensure that:

- a plan for the annual cycle of meetings/venue and generic items is in place
- the LA seeks to maintain proper representation in each of the four Groups
- SACRE produces guidance documentation for both RE and CW
- a Vice Chair/executive group is in place in case of the Chair's absence
- relevant and appropriate training is available for members
- the SACRE has an ongoing programme of self-evaluation and development