

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Report for Information

Title:	Humanist representation on SACRE
Presented to:	SACRE
Presented by:	Director of Children's Services
Date:	23 November 2010

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1) Purpose of Report:

- 1.1. To inform SACRE of a letter received from the British Humanist Association (BHA)

2) Contextual Issues:

- 2.1. This paper supports the Corporate Strategy (maximising well being) by ensuring children's provision in religious education is secure.

3) Humanist representation on Hampshire SACRE.

- 3.1. Hampshire SACRE has benefited from the contributions made by Humanist representatives over a number of years. The Hampshire agreed syllabus Living Difference 2004 included a page of significant Humanist concepts with the assistance of the Humanist representatives on SACRE. These representatives have been co-opted members, however, and not full members of SACRE and this has prevented them from voting when the need arises.
- 3.2. A letter was received by all chairs of SACRE during the summer urging SACREs to consider extending membership to Humanists (See Appendix 1)
- 3.3. Recent government guidance has made reference to "Religious and other belief organisations" as making a contribution to religious education.

"Members of religious and belief organisations can make a real contribution to RE both locally and nationally....At a local level, representatives of different denominations, religions and beliefs can serve as members of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs) and Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs). This gives them opportunities to help make sure the RE curriculum deals accurately and sensitively with their own religious or belief tradition, and that any concerns about RE are raised and considered."

4) Recommendation:

That SACRE considers the proposal of extending membership of SACRE group A to include Humanist representation .

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

Humanist Letter

Wednesday, 31 March 2010

Dear,

I am writing to you to urge you to co-opt a humanist representative to your SACRE or, if you already have a co-opted member, to make that member a full member of Committee A of your SACRE.

As you may be aware, in January the government published new guidance on Religious Education. The guidance solidified many positive improvements that have been made in recent years.

Significantly, it deleted the explicit prohibition on humanists serving as full members of SACREs and Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs), which had appeared in the previous guidance (Circular 1/94). It also observed that SACREs could co-opt members to represent non-religious views (p.13) and noted how this could be done in the interests of inclusion (p.21).

With regards to RE syllabuses the guidance also reaffirmed the government's view that RE should examine both religious and non-religious perspectives. It noted that:

'Religious education provokes challenging questions about the ultimate meaning and purpose of life, beliefs about God, the self and the nature of reality, issues of right and wrong, and what it means to be human. It can develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christianity, of other principal religions, other religious traditions and worldviews that offer answers to questions such as these' (p.7).

The Government had already set out that RE should examine non-religious perspectives in:

- the new secondary curriculum published in 2007, which noted that RE should study a 'secular world view' (p.7 of the KS3 programme of study)
- the new RE programme of learning for the primary curriculum published in September 2009, which recommended that 'over the primary phase as a whole, children should draw on both religious and non-religious world views' (p.2)
- the 2004 national framework for RE, which recommended that there should be 'opportunities to study secular philosophies such as humanism' (p.14). The framework was endorsed by a wide range of RE professional and religious groups, including the Church of England, the Catholic Education Service and the Muslim Council of Britain.

Following the release of the updated RE guidance we are writing to all those SACREs in England that do not currently have a humanist representative on their Committee A, to urge you to admit one. We believe the new guidance has removed any sound reason that SACREs may have had about not

admitting a humanist, while we believe there are compelling reasons why you should admit one, whether as a full or co-opted member of Committee A. Firstly, given that non-religious views should be taught in RE lessons, it follows that humanists should have a role in monitoring how their views are taught. This is a right only extended to religious representatives. Admitting a humanist will ensure that your SACRE is both inclusive and also acting fairly.

Secondly, the addition of a humanist will make a positive contribution to the work of your SACRE and help ensure that the RE in your area remains broad and accurate. Humanists have had a long history of contributing towards and improving RE.

The British Humanist Association has been a member of the Religious Education Council for over thirty years, while some of our representatives have served on SACREs throughout this period with distinction, including as Chairs and Vice-Chairs of both SACREs and ASCs.

We hope that you will agree that your SACRE should admit a humanist representative as a full member and we would be very happy to help find a suitable humanist for you if you are not already in touch with one. If you would like any more information or would like to explore how to find a humanist to nominate please contact Paul Pettinger at paul@humanism.org or on 020 7462 4993.

Periodically we discover SACREs that have appointed a humanist representative by going through a local humanist group. If you have already appointed a humanist from a local humanist group we would be very grateful if you could let us know so we can update our records accordingly. We would also be grateful if we could have their contact details so we can send them useful material. Again please contact Paul Pettinger with any of this information.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Copson BHA Chief Executive andrew@humanism.org.uk



Humanists on SACRES

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Humanists on SACRE

The BHA has written to all CEOs in Local Authorities asking that they consider Humanist representation on SACRE. The law still stands as it was before and as such there is no legal foundation for a Humanist representative on Group A. Co-option is the solution within the legal framework and the only practical difference this makes is in the voting. Considering that each committee only has one vote, this is not in essence a major handicap, as co-opted members contribute fully to all discussions and consultation on any decisions. The issue really is one of equity and it is not difficult to see the Humanists' objections here - and indeed for many SACREs to sympathise with that as well. It is for this reason that some SACREs, despite the legal position, have decided to have full representation on Group A (as opposed to Groups C or D, where there is no issue, but the representation is of a different nature).

Our advice is and has to remain within the legal framework. Our purpose is to support SACREs in providing quality RE and CW. It is for individual SACREs to make the final decision, and we would expect complete agreement if that means going outside statute. It is good practice for all potential members and co-optees on a SACRE, to have an agreed vision and set of principles, so that everyone is clear about the nature and purpose of SACRE.