

GATEWAY DOCUMENT 3.6

Linking with expert colleagues in the field of RE

WHY IS THIS RELEVANT TO *REsilience*?

It is important that teachers are able to rely on their sources of information and know where to turn if they want additional knowledge or advice about practice in the classroom. Often RE teachers are in a department of one or they are the only subject specialist, managing several non-specialist teachers, and have no RE specialist colleagues with whom to share ideas. They may have to take on the opportunities and burdens of curriculum development in isolation. For this reason the encouragement of regular links with a range of other teachers and lecturers working in the fields of religious education and religious studies, and experts on different faith traditions, is very important. The establishment of communities and networks of such colleagues to offer mutual support is included amongst the objectives of *REsilience*.

KEY QUESTIONS

How can this help teachers and students to increase their understanding of contentious issues?

- Teachers need a source of expertise and advice available to call upon quickly if required.
- Through networks of colleagues, teachers can share and learn about a range of strategies to handle contentious issues based upon sound classroom experience.
- Reliable and independent help is available, providing authoritative support of a kind that is not always easy to access within a teacher's own school.

What classroom challenges might arise in RE?

- The school may be part of a largely mono-cultural community. The local authority's Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) may have few representatives of different faiths and beliefs to support work in schools.
- Some local authorities do not have an RE adviser so relatively little support is available to schools from this direction.
- There may be costs associated with obtaining professional support: subscription fees may be needed to access some professional groups.

- Teachers may not have the time or the opportunity to establish links with other professionals, such as colleagues in other schools.
- Some local faith and belief communities may not be fully conversant with the basis of school RE
- All teachers are entitled to CPD but because of the 'rarely cover' agreement there is now less opportunity than in the past for them to attend professional development out of school. It may be more effective and economical to use available funds for subscriptions (e.g. for resources such as *RE Today*).

How can teachers address such challenges?

- By engaging pro-actively in *REsilience* and helping to build RE teachers' networks across the country.
- By becoming a member of NATRE (National Association of Teachers of Religious Education).
- By considering the possibility of becoming a member of the local SACRE and getting in touch with the clerk to SACRE to see if there are any vacancies. Alternatively, by establishing links with SACRE, asking the clerk to make available minutes and agendas and by attending meetings where possible (these meetings are, by law, open to all members of the public).
- By attending any local RE networks run (e.g.) by NATRE, the local authority or a diocese.

NEXT STEPS

Signposts for further reading

The on-line CPD handbook for religious education www.re-handbook.org.uk

Signposts for further resources

Professional bodies

<http://www.natre.org.uk/>: The website of the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education. This is the subject association for RE teachers and provides a focal point for their concerns, a representative voice at national level, and publications and courses to promote professional development. NATRE has an active teachers' blog with some helpful responses and information.

www.nasacre.org.uk/: SACREs were made statutorily required by the Education Reform Act (1988), which charged them with the function of advising local authorities on matters concerned with RE and collective worship. In March 1993, representatives of many SACREs met to set up and formally constitute a National Association of SACREs (NASACRE). Teachers may wish to be aware of NASACRE's national activities.

<http://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk> The Religious Education Council of England and Wales was established in 1973 to represent the collective interests of a wide variety of professional associations and faith communities in deepening and strengthening provision for RE. It provides a multi-faith forum where national organisations with an interest in supporting and promoting RE in schools and colleges can share matters of common concern.

<http://www.shapworkingparty.org.uk/>: There are two databases of information that may be of help. The first consists of articles from previous Shap Journals; it is possible to search these for information by faith, field or topic. The second consists of queries already put to the Shap Support/Advice Service and the answers given to them. The website also has a glossary of religious terms, many with a recording of accurate pronunciation.

<http://www.arei.ac.org.uk/>: The Association of Religious Education Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants is a membership organisation for those who provide support to those delivering religious education in schools and colleges.

<http://www.aulre.org.uk/>: The Association of University Lecturers in Religion and Education supports the community of academics in the United Kingdom researching and teaching at the interface of religion and education. For more details please see the Mission Statement.

www.cstg.org.uk : Culham St Gabriel's is an endowed charitable trust dedicated to educational work in support of religious education (RE) and is committed to excellence in religious education for all learners. It supports teachers by helping them to offer the best, high-quality learning experiences in RE, school worship and spiritual and moral development.

<http://www.tes.co.uk/>: Times Educational Supplement has on-line support through its blog.

<http://www.christian-teachers.org.uk/> Association of Christian Teachers

<http://www.jewishteachers.org.uk/> Jewish Teachers' Association

<http://www.mta-uk.org> Muslim Teachers' Association

<http://www.humanismforschools.org.uk/> Humanism for Schools

Local support

Local SACRE. SACREs are responsible in law for advising local authorities on RE and collective worship. There is one in each local authority in England and Wales. Each is composed of four representative groups (three in Wales): Christian and other religious denominations, the Church of England (not in Wales), teachers' associations, and local authority representatives (usually elected councillors).

In practice the kind of advice and support offered by SACREs varies. Effective SACREs carry out a range of tasks from supporting implementation of an Agreed Syllabus to monitoring the quality and provision of RE and collective worship in local schools.

Local Authority RE Adviser. To find out whether your LA has an RE Adviser contact your local authority or its SACRE via their websites.

Inter Faith groups. If there is an interfaith group or forum in the local area, its members may be willing to support RE work in schools in a variety of ways. See www.interfaith.org.uk/local/directory.htm.

Signposts for further action

Schools should consider:

- the value of having a clear CPD policy which enables staff to develop and take advantage of links with teachers and lecturers working in the RE field in different institutions, whilst recognising that this may be affected by timetables, supply cover and use of departmental funds;
- whether the understanding and skills of teachers of RE might be significantly enhanced if the school encouraged and facilitated engagement with external RE professionals.