

Report to:	SACRE
Relevant Officer:	Amanda Whitehead, Head of Schools, Standards and Effectiveness
Date of Meeting:	17 May 2017

LIVING WITH DIFFERENCE

1.0 Purpose of the report:

- 1.1 To consider the report of the Commission on Religion and Belief in Public Life- Living with Difference attached at Appendix 5a.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

- 2.1 To note the report of the Commission on Religion and Belief in Public Life- entitled Living with Difference.
- 2.2 To consider any future action from the SACRE to address the issues outlined in the report.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

- 3.1 To shape the future development of the SACRE.
- 3.2a Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No
- 3.2b Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes
- 3.3 Other alternative options to be considered:
None, the item is for discussion.

4.0 Council Priority:

- 4.1 The relevant Council Priority is: "Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience"

5.0 Background Information

5.1 Vision

The commission's vision is of a society at ease with itself in which all individuals, groups and communities feel

at home, and in whose flourishing all wish to take part. In such a society all:

- **feel a positive part of an ongoing national story** – what it means to be British is not final,

for people in the past understood the concept differently from the way it is seen today, and must be

able to participate in shaping its meaning for the future

- **are treated with equal respect and concern** by the law, the state and public authorities

- **know that their culture, religion and beliefs are embraced** as part of a continuing process of

mutual enrichment, and that their contributions to the texture of the nation's common life are valued

- **are free to express and practise their beliefs, religious or otherwise**, providing they do not constrict the rights and freedoms of others

- **are confident in helping to shape public policy**

- **feel challenged** to respond to the many manifest ills in wider society.

Recommendations

The implications of such a vision for public policy are of many kinds, and are highlighted throughout this report.

Prominent amongst them are those which are briefly summarised below. Each is discussed and explained in much fuller detail in the main body of the report.

- **A national conversation should be launched across the UK by leaders of faith communities and ethical traditions to create a shared understanding of the fundamental values underlying**

public life. It would take place at all levels and in all regions. The outcome might be a statement of the

principles and values which foster the common good, and which should underpin and enrich public life.

- **Much greater religion and belief literacy is needed in every section of society, and at all levels.** The potential for misunderstanding, stereotyping and oversimplification based on ignorance is

huge. The commission therefore calls on educational and professional bodies to draw up religion and belief literacy programmes and projects, including an annual awards scheme to recognise and celebrate best practice in the media.

- **The pluralist character of modern society should be reflected in national and civic events**

so

that they are more reflective of the UK's increasing diversity, and in national forums such as the House

of Lords, so that they include a wider range of worldviews and religious traditions, and of Christian

denominations other than the Church of England.

- **All pupils in state-funded schools should have a statutory entitlement to a curriculum about**

religion, philosophy and ethics that is relevant to today's society, and the broad framework of such

a curriculum should be nationally agreed. The legal requirement for schools to hold acts of collective

worship should be repealed, and replaced by a requirement to hold inclusive times for reflection.

- **Bodies responsible for admissions and employment policies in schools with a religious character**

('faith schools') should take measures to reduce selection of pupils and staff on grounds of religion.

- **The BBC Charter renewal should mandate the Corporation to reflect the range of religion and belief of modern society,** for example by extending contributions to Radio 4's daily religious

flagship *Thought for the Day* to include speakers from non-religious perspectives such as humanists.

- **A panel of experts on religion and belief should be established** to advise the Independent Press

Standards Organisation (IPSO) when there are complaints about the media coverage in this field.

- **Relevant public bodies and voluntary organisations should promote opportunities for interreligious and inter-worldview encounter and dialogue.** Such dialogue should involve Dharmic as well as Abrahamic traditions, young people as well as older, women as well as men, and

local groups as well as national and regional ones. Clergy and other opinion leaders should have a

sound understanding of the traditions of religion and belief in modern society.

- **Where a religious organisation is best placed to deliver a social good, it should not be disadvantaged** when applying for funding to do so, so long as its services are not aimed at seeking

converts.

- **The Ministry of Justice should issue guidance on compliance with UK standards of gender equality and judicial independence** by religious and cultural tribunals such as ecclesiastical courts, Beit Din and Shari'a councils.
- **The Ministry of Justice should instruct the Law Commission to review the anomalies in how the legal definitions of race, ethnicity and religion interact in practice** and make recommendations to ensure all religious traditions are treated equally.
- **In framing counter-terrorism legislation, the Government should seek to promote, not limit, freedom of enquiry, speech and expression**, and should engage with a wide range of affected groups, including those with which it disagrees, and also with academic research. It should lead public opinion by challenging negative stereotyping and by speaking out in support of groups that may otherwise feel vulnerable and excluded.

5.3 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

5.4 **List of Appendices:**

Appendix 5a: Living with Difference Report of the Commission for Religion and Belief in Public Life

6.0 **Legal considerations:**

6.1 None

7.0 **Human Resources considerations:**

7.1 None.

8.0 **Equalities considerations:**

8.1 None.

9.0 **Financial considerations:**

9.1 None.

10.0 **Risk management considerations:**

10.1 None.

11.0 Ethical considerations:

11.1 None.

12.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:

12.1 None.

13.0 Background papers:

13.1 None.