

A handbook for humanists on English and Welsh SACREs (Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education)

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Introduction to the 2019 edition

Welcome to your role as a humanist SACRE rep!

This handbook has been designed to include advice and guidelines for those who are, or are about to be, on a SACRE (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education). A second booklet exists, called 'A guide to SACREs', which contains further information about the nature and processes of SACREs and ASCs (Agreed Syllabus Conferences).

The landscape of RE has changed significantly in recent years and it is fair to say that the place of humanism in RE has largely improved. In recent years there has been more demand for resources and support from teachers, more interest from SACREs in humanist participation and willingness to include humanism in local syllabuses, more awareness of humanism amongst RE advisers and teachers, and ever-broadening support for the inclusion of non-religious worldviews in RE more generally. In 2018, this culminated in the [Commission on RE's final report](#), and, in 2019, with the Welsh Government proposing to amend the law so that the new Welsh curriculum is [fully inclusive of humanism](#) as a non-religious worldview.

However, it is not all plain sailing, as was demonstrated by the Government's [response](#) to the [High Court ruling](#) that humanism should be treated with equal respect in the RE classroom.

The subject of RE itself, however, is in poor health. Being left out of the English Baccalaureate, which has caused schools to shift focus and curriculum time, has negatively impacted on the quantity and quality of RE provision at Key Stage 3 and 4. According to a [NATRE survey](#) in 2017, 28% of secondary schools 'gave no dedicated curriculum time to RE'. This equates to around 800,000 pupils who aren't receiving a weekly lesson in religious education.

The other significant development to affect SACREs over the last several years is the expansion of the Academies and Free Schools programme. With Academies and Free Schools having more autonomy, including full control over the curriculum and their budgets, many local authorities are struggling to provide services to the decreasing number of schools that have to follow the national curriculum and the locally agreed RE syllabus. The impact of this will be felt differently from SACRE to SACRE, but it is important to understand the current environment and the implications it has for what is, or is not, achievable on your SACRE.

I would like to thank all the humanists who serve so patiently on SACREs, and those who gave advice to help improve this handbook.

*Luke Donnellan, Director of Understanding, Humanists UK
30 September 2019*

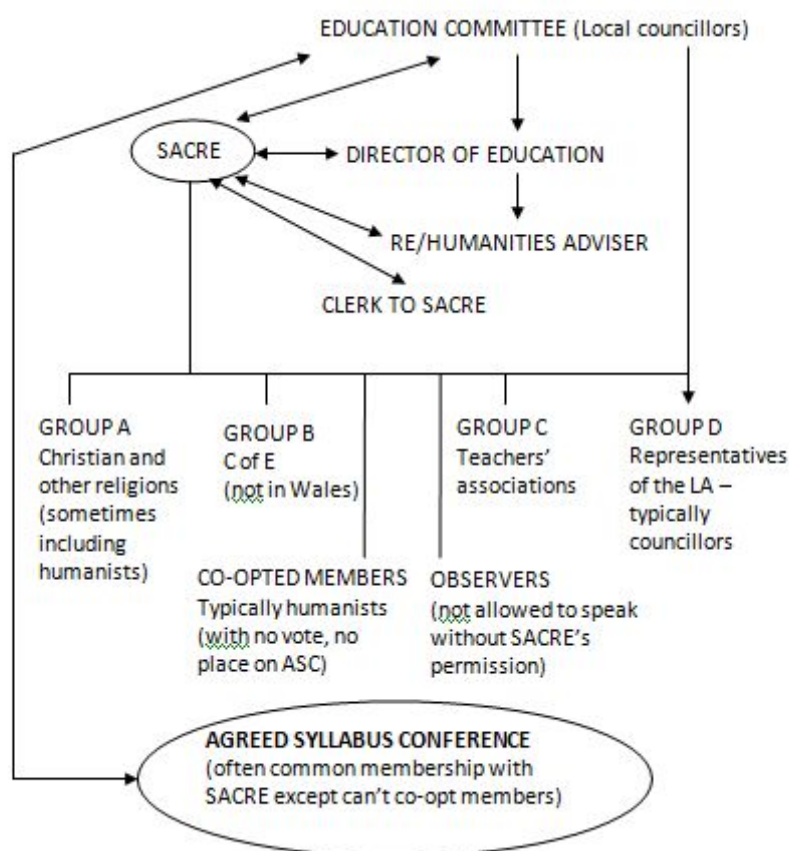
What are SACRE meetings like?

It is very difficult to generalise. Some SACREs have well-attended meetings and are efficiently conducted with good clerical and advisory support. Other SACREs hold poorly attended and badly run meetings that are not well supported by their LAs. Some take a formal approach, holding regular votes and frequently splitting into their separate groups (see below). Others are more informal and make decisions through discussion and consensus. Many SACREs have an open-minded educational approach, while in a few, narrow, intolerant political and religious attitudes can dominate and sour the atmosphere.

Of course, the flavour and atmosphere of meetings can very much be (and often are) influenced by individual SACRE members. In many ways, then, the answer to the question 'what are SACRE meetings like?' is 'whatever you make of them', so it is important to bear in mind the influence you can have, even as a co-opted member.

Membership of SACREs and ASCs

Who's who?



Full membership

It is important to note that it is the LA **not** the SACRE that determines whether an individual is to be a full voting member of the SACRE and ASC (some SACREs get confused on this point and think it is the SACRE), although in practice many LAs respect their SACRE's opinion on this matter and defer to them. It is the SACRE, however, that determines co-option.

As of writing, over 40 local authorities have given humanist representatives full membership of Group A of the SACRE, agreeing with Humanists UK's legal arguments on the matter. In most of the cases where this has recently been agreed to, the humanist representative was initially co-opted, and the SACRE became

amenable to extending full membership after the humanist established a good working relationship with the other representatives, dispelling any uncertainties they might have had about us. The SACRE then recommended to the LA that the humanist representative become a full member. Some LAs have appointed a humanist to sit with Group D, the 'group of persons to represent the authority'. This group is typically reserved for councillors, but there is no reason why the LA cannot decide to appoint a humanist if they believe that would best represent their interests in producing a balanced SACRE.

If you are involved in education (as a teacher, lecturer, or governor, for example), you might be invited to sit on Group C as a full member. If you are involved in local politics, or you are a councillor, you might be invited to sit with Group D as a full member.

In November 2018, the Welsh Government [announced](#) that humanists must be given the same right as religious representatives to sit on SACREs. In a [letter](#) to all local authority Directors of Education, the Welsh Government explained that its existing guidance, barring humanists from being full members of SACREs, does not 'comply with current legislation', specifically 'the Human Rights Act'. Education and human rights law is identical in this area in England and in Wales. To ensure that the practice of SACREs complies with human rights law going forward, the Welsh Government has now proposed to amend the current education legislation to make it clear that agreed syllabuses, SACREs, and ASCs '[take] account of non-religious world views which are analogous to religions (e.g. humanism)'.

Since, at present, the law in England is the same as that in Wales, the legal reasoning of the Welsh Government should logically also apply to SACREs and ASCs in England. Indeed, in 2019, Humanists UK successfully used the same arguments to challenge an English LA, the Royal Borough of Greenwich, when it refused to admit a humanist to Group A of the local SACRE. Following the threat of legal action on this point, [the Council backed down](#) and acknowledged that there is a legal basis on which humanists may be included as full members.

Co-option to SACREs

Page 13 of [Religious Education in English Schools](#) makes it clear that humanists can be co-opted to SACREs: 'SACREs may co-opt members who are not members of any of the four groups – such co-opted members may provide educational expertise, young peoples' views or religious and non-religious views that reflect a diverse multicultural society'.

Before 1994, humanists used to sit on Group A, by a tactful stretching of the meaning of the word 'denomination', and this has been becoming increasingly common since 2010. However, most humanist representatives are co-opted. Many local authorities and SACREs continue to take a cautious reading of the law as disallowing full membership, and unhelpfully the National Association of SACREs and Welsh Association of SACREs give advice to SACREs to this effect.

The decision to co-opt is taken by the whole SACRE. Usually the decision in favour has been unanimous, or been agreed to by consensus, but sometimes a vote is taken. SACREs vote by group. It is therefore necessary for three out of the four groups (A, B, C, and D) in England and two out of the three groups (A, C, and D) in Wales to vote in favour of co-option.

Co-opted members are therefore co-opted to the *whole* SACRE and are thus not a member of any one group and do not contribute to any vote. In most SACREs this will not be such a problem, as an informal approach is taken and decisions are made by discussion. However, some SACREs have separate meetings of the constituent groups in which items on the agenda are discussed and attitudes may be set. As a co-opted member it is important for you to try to attend these meetings. Officially, you should wait for a formal

invitation to sit with one of the groups, but you should definitely ask – and some of our representatives have even simply turned up at the meetings of Group A.

Observers

A few SACREs refuse to even co-opt humanists; however, humanists can then be Observers instead. SACRE meetings, like most other council meetings, are open to the public and should be advertised locally (e.g. in libraries or on the council website). Anyone can go along and observe a meeting, and sometimes (with permission from the group) Observers have opportunities to speak and influence a SACRE. Some SACREs insist on having potential members observe for a period before inviting them to join as co-opted or full members, and sometimes regular Observers are eventually co-opted to SACREs, so it is worth treating Observer status as a possible probation period.

What about Agreed Syllabus Conferences?

For ASCs, the rules are identical to those for SACREs, except that there is no provision for co-opted members. Often, humanist input into ASCs is valued by the SACRE and the LA so, even if there is no humanist full member of the SACRE, it may be the case that they try to involve the humanist in some other capacity.

Attitudes you may encounter

As you might expect, you will find a wide range of attitudes towards you and towards humanism.

You will probably find a welcoming attitude among most education professionals – advisers, head teachers, and teachers involved in RE, Personal, Social, Health, and Economic (PSHE) education, Citizenship Education, or Spiritual, Moral, Social, and Cultural (SMSC) development. They tend to agree with the view of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC) that ‘Humanism and other non-theistic beliefs... ought to be part of a child’s Religious Education’.¹ The [REC’s vision](#) is that ‘Every young person experiences a personally inspiring and academically rigorous education in religious and non-religious worldviews’. It acknowledges Humanists UK’s record of constructive dialogue in this area.

The response to humanist representatives on SACREs from religious representatives can be mixed. Some members of religious groups bring to SACRE discussions only their own rather limited vision and experience. The insecurity and suspicions of some community members occasionally surface. Some opposition to humanism is based on misunderstandings of our position and philosophy, and can be dispelled. You are probably only too aware that you are the lone humanist, so do seek opportunities to develop contacts and make allies. This can be difficult to do within meetings so try to use refreshment breaks, or the time before and after meetings.

Be open-minded about these contacts. You may find support in unexpected quarters. In two London SACREs, for instance, a humanist was co-opted despite the opposition of the Conservative-controlled authority because the Church of England Group voted with Group A (Other Faiths) and Group C (Teachers) in favour of co-option. We have often enjoyed good relations with Quaker, Unitarian, Bahá’í, and Buddhist members where they have been appointed. Members of the Free Churches usually recognise in humanists something of their own non-conformity, and the Free Church Federal Council has persistently argued that nurture in religious belief is the job of parents and not of the local authority or state schools.

¹ RE Council, *RE, Attainment and National Curriculum* (1991)

What can you achieve on the SACRE?

Over the years, humanist representatives on SACREs have earned a great deal of respect and goodwill for humanism. Often they are the most informed members and the most regular attendees (occasionally SACREs cannot even muster a quorum for meetings). It is worth going along looking efficient – you will make a good impression and could even end up being voted Chair (as some humanists have been)!

You will have opportunities to draw attention to the problems facing schools in implementing the law on collective worship, and to raise awareness of the needs of non-religious pupils and teachers. Although SACREs have to operate within the law, you can voice humanist objections to the legal context. You can challenge misconceptions about the non-religious and defend their right to be heard. However, remember that the SACRE is not a forum in which to vent extraneous views about issues not relevant to the work of the SACRE. In fact, some SACREs have used humanist opposition to things such as faith schools as an argument against having humanists on the SACRE.

Clearly, the people you communicate with should at least learn that humanism is a coherent belief system, practising respect for others and open-mindedness. Turning up regularly, being polite and co-operative, and taking up opportunities to speak about your beliefs can help to educate other members of the SACRE about humanism. You can encourage an open-minded attitude to people of no religion, both in the classroom and on the SACRE – even if progress towards inclusion in syllabuses is slow. Sometimes you will be able to represent humanism in the wider community and in schools. You can make a contribution to in-service training (INSET) on RE, and volunteer to represent your SACRE at NASACRE forums and other events.

Perhaps the two most important reasons for your participation in the system are to get humanism into your local RE syllabus and to ensure that collective worship in schools is as inclusive as possible of those of all religious beliefs and none (while staying within the confines of the law, of course). Details on how this can be achieved is contained within the two sections on collective worship and ASCs.

Questions you might ask:

- How are we checking that the agreed syllabus is actually being taught?
- Do we know the range of beliefs, religious and non-religious, represented in the classroom and how are we ensuring that all children's beliefs, including humanist beliefs, are respected?
- Does our syllabus make clear that morality can be based on non-religious, as well as religious, beliefs? Or does it promote faith as a virtue?
- Is our approach educationally sound? In particular, does our syllabus offer an understanding of the nature of religion and non-religious beliefs, or does it consist mainly of descriptive detail from the major religions?
- Do local schools know that they can apply for a 'determination' (see below) in order to have more inclusive assemblies? What would the attitude of this SACRE be to such applications?
- Do local parents know that the SACRE is here to receive any complaints about RE or 'collective worship' they may have?

Supporting SACRE's understanding about humanism

You may be invited to speak to your SACRE about humanism, sometimes before they consider co-opting you. Most people who have done this have found their contribution well received. There is plenty of material on the [Humanists UK](#) website and the [Understanding Humanism](#) website to help you. Humanists UK can also offer training for SACREs on humanism.

Agreed Syllabus Conferences and Locally Agreed Syllabuses

Background

There are usually 15-30 members of an ASC (similar to a SACRE, and ordinarily the membership is more or less the same). Local syllabuses have to be reviewed at least once every five years, and this usually entails finding out what changes local RE departments would like and then setting up an ASC – your opportunity to get humanism into a syllabus and hopefully into the classroom.

Unlike a SACRE, an ASC cannot technically co-opt members, but the law, as well as *Religious Education in Schools*, states that ‘it can seek the advice it considers appropriate from those it considers appropriate, to inform the development of effective RE provision in its area’. Given this, and recognising their importance, sometimes an LA with a co-opted or Observer humanist on their SACRE will decide to invite the humanist to be a full member of group A of the ASC. This is very useful; if the LA is happy to interpret the law as allowing this, then they should be equally happy to interpret the identical law for SACREs as allowing a full-member humanist there as well! Alternatively, because of the ambiguous legal position, they are sometimes listed officially as ‘Observers’, with the extent to which they are involved varying depending on the SACRE. In any case, many humanist representatives have participated in the work of drawing up agreed syllabuses, so a clear precedent has been established.

Getting humanism into the syllabus is one of the main reasons for your being on the SACRE, so it is important to make sure you are included. Clearly, if you have attended every meeting, made regular and helpful contributions, been friendly and polite, and built relationships with members of the different groups, you are much more likely to be invited to join an ASC.

Producing the local syllabus

Some ASCs conduct all their discussions as a full conference, but the majority set up one or more working parties to do the actual drafting and report back periodically to the full ASC. As your priority is to try to ensure that humanism appears in the syllabus, it helps if you can obtain a place on a working party, which will ensure that you see all drafting papers and attend meetings on the syllabus.

Procedures followed by ASCs vary considerably. They include:

- in England, using the RE Council’s [Curriculum framework for RE](#) published in 2013 as a basis of the syllabus.
- in some areas, basing the syllabus on previously published Government guidance, such as the [Religious education non-statutory national framework](#) published in 2004; the [key stage 3](#) and [key stage 4/5](#) non-statutory programmes of study and attainment targets published in 2007; and the 2010 [level descriptions](#) and [key stage 1/2 non-statutory programmes of learning](#). However, since none of these is adequately inclusive of humanism, we would strongly urge humanist representatives to resist over-reliance on the content of these older documents.
- in Wales, using the 2008 [National exemplar framework](#)
- adopting a syllabus that is already being used in another area or buying one from an external provider such as RE Today. Some ASCs decide not to write their own syllabus. Instead they inspect several others, select one, and obtain permission (or buy the rights) from the original authority (or an external provider) to use it as their own locally agreed syllabus.
- purchasing the syllabus provided by [RE Today](#), which an increasing number of ASCs are doing. While this syllabus does include reference to humanism, the language and tone of the syllabus feels as though it is written from a very Christian perspective. Some humanists on ASCs have been able to persuade the ASC to include more inclusive introductions to the syllabus or a humanist appendix with additional material to provide teachers with further information about humanism and support them to provide a more inclusive RE.
- producing a joint syllabus with other local authorities.
- writing a syllabus from scratch, which can take some time.

Ensuring that humanism is included

What are humanist aims for locally agreed RE syllabuses?

Ideally, students have the opportunity to learn about humanism as part of their primary and secondary education. All students should leave school with a sound understanding of humanism. Agnostic and atheist students would know that their beliefs are widely shared and that Humanists UK exists to represent humanist views. They will have been taught that some moral values are shared by those of all faiths and none, because they arise out of human nature and society. Humanism would be taught as a belief system alongside the major religions as a coherent example of a non-religious worldview, with its beliefs, values, practices, and history given due attention.

You should also try to ensure the inclusion of recommended classroom material on [Understanding Humanism](#) and the web address of [Humanists UK](#) on SACRE resource lists. Such material is usually published as appendices to the agreed syllabus or in a separate handbook.

What you can achieve will depend partly on what is already in your previous local RE syllabus and how willing the ASC is to undertake radical revisions. Syllabuses differ markedly not just in their inclusion/exclusion of non-religious beliefs, but also in their structure and pedagogical methods. Because of this, it is impossible to provide an off-the-peg course on humanism that would fit every local syllabus, and the examples we offer, while providing useful ideas, will probably have to be adapted for your particular syllabus. Samples of syllabuses that include teaching about humanism are available upon request, and our Understanding Humanism website (<http://www.understandinghumanism.org.uk/>) provides lots of helpful material, including [planning guidelines](#) highlighting appropriate content on humanism for Key Stages 1-3.

What are your arguments?

- **The law** – which clearly states that agreed syllabuses must be non-denominational, and that they must not be designed to convert pupils, or to urge a particular religion or religious belief on pupils. This extends to promoting religious beliefs or faith as a virtue, when most humanists consider themselves as not having any faith.
 - Fox case – in November 2015, in a [judgement](#) handed down in the High Court, it was ruled that the Government had made an ‘error of law’ when it claimed that a GCSE syllabus that left out non-religious worldviews such as humanism would meet the statutory need for RE. The ruling declared ‘the state has a duty to take care that information or knowledge included in the curriculum is conveyed in a pluralistic manner... the state must accord equal respect to different religious convictions, and to non-religious beliefs; it is not entitled to discriminate between religions and beliefs on a qualitative basis’, meaning humanism would need to be treated as a worldview as worthy of study as the world’s major religions. (For more information see Appendix E.)
 - In Wales, the Government has proposed to change the law to make it clearer that humanism must be included on an equal footing with religions and the guidance on the [new draft curriculum](#) is fully inclusive of humanism.
- **Support from the RE community**
 - **The Commission on RE** – in September 2018, the [Commission on RE’s final report](#) recommend the subject of RE be renamed Religion and Worldviews, and be reformed to ensure full inclusion of humanism. (For more information see Appendix F.)
 - **The RE Council of England and Wales’ [National Curriculum Framework](#)** states that non-religious worldviews such as humanism should be included.

- **Several other major reports** on RE released over the last three years have called for the subject to be more inclusive of non-religious worldviews such as humanism ([Living with Difference](#), [A New Settlement](#), [RE for REal](#)).
- **Non-religious children** – the 2018 [British Social Attitudes Survey](#) records 71% of 18-24-year-olds as having no religion, so including non-religious worldviews in the RE syllabus ensures they do not feel marginalised or excluded as a result of their beliefs. (See Appendix C.)
- **Demand from teachers and available support** – even where Humanism is not explicitly on the syllabus, many teachers would welcome the opportunity and resources to offer a humanist perspective. Demand for resources, training, and support with teaching about humanism has rocketed over the past two years, with over 30,000 people visiting the Understanding Humanism education resources website in 2018. Humanists UK provide support to teachers through the provision of free teaching resources, school speakers, online courses, and face-to-face teacher training to support subject knowledge.
- **This is already happening elsewhere** – SACREs across the country have included humanism in locally agreed syllabuses (particularly inclusive examples include West Yorkshire and Brent).
- **Inclusive language** – wherever possible, you should encourage the use of inclusive language in an agreed syllabus. That means using ‘religion and belief’ instead of simply ‘religion’ or ‘faith’, ensuring that stories from religious texts are not made to sound factual, avoiding the conflation of the words ‘moral’ and ‘religious’, and, at all times, emphasising that religious teachings on things such as god, the afterlife, and what is good and evil are only beliefs that differ from individual to individual, place to place, and period to period. Assumptions should not be made in the language used in the syllabus that a god exists.
- **Inclusivity and relevance** – teaching a diverse range of beliefs and values helps schools develop the whole person. All young people, with or without religion, deserve guidance on ways to discover truth, meaning, and happiness in their lives, and how to judge what is right and wrong. Where schools teach about non-religious worldviews alongside religious beliefs, young people who are not religious can become more engaged with RE as a whole. If young people are to be able to fulfil the SMSC development goals of appreciating and celebrating diversity, as well as developing the ability to understand and empathise with others, then, just like they should be made aware of the beliefs and values of the different principal religions, it is also vital that they learn what it means to be a humanist. As a significant portion of RE is concerned with the teaching of values and morality, it is important to ensure that those without a religious faith understand that moral values are relevant to them too and are not necessarily founded on religious teachings. Of course, it’s equally important that those with religious faith see that all human beings share a common core of values. You can usually use the inclusive aims of your syllabus to argue for inclusive content.
- **Opportunity and entitlement** – teaching about humanism helps schools deliver a fair and balanced education that ensures the SMSC development of all young people. In many schools, RE represents the main opportunity for young people to explore questions of meaning and ethics; it would be neglectful not to include non-religious perspectives on these in a manner comparable to religious perspectives. Including non-religious beliefs, values, and perspectives also becomes especially important if RE departments are entrusted with teaching values for Citizenship Education or contributing to PSHE and Sex and Relationships Education.
- **History and culture** – humanist thinkers and ideas have played a key role in our cultural heritage and national identity. Teaching about humanism helps enable young people to become culturally literate. From the scientific revolution, through the enlightenment thinking of David Hume, the feminist advocacy of Mary Wollstonecraft, the science of Charles Darwin, the ethics of John Stuart Mill, the novels of George Eliot, and the philosophy of Bertrand Russell, the UK has become one of the most non-religious countries in the world today. Humanist thought has helped to shape the nation in

which we now live, from the foundation of the welfare state to the way we approach death, from our social values to our literature and art.

- **Intrinsic value** – humanism is a fascinating subject in its own right and contributes to an academically rigorous curriculum. Studying it allows young people the opportunity to explore and learn from over 2,500 years of human endeavour to understand our world and ourselves from a non-religious perspective. Humanism has had a significant influence on the beliefs, behaviour, and values that exist around the world today.

Arguments NOT to use

In addition to the above, there are some arguments that would be unwise and counterproductive to use in SACREs – even if you think they are true – including:

- Everyone would be a humanist if only they learnt about it. (Religious believers find this every bit as irritating as we find statements like ‘Everyone worships something’ or ‘Everyone must be religious at heart’.)
- Given that most young people are non-religious, non-religious worldviews should get **more** curriculum time than religions. (We want inclusive, broad, and balanced RE that teaches the full range of religions and beliefs.)
- All non-religious children are humanists. (Some might be, others won’t.)
- All non-religious children ought to be humanists, and this is the purpose of teaching about humanism. (RE long ago discarded its proselytising role.)

Appendix D below provides some of the questions and arguments against the inclusion of humanism you might face, as well as some responses.

Collective worship

Due to the role of SACREs in overseeing collective worship, and the fact that some faith schools fall under its remit (namely religious voluntary controlled and foundation schools), some have used humanist opposition to both collective worship and state-funded faith schools as an argument against having humanists on a SACRE.

With regard to collective worship, Humanists UK's policy on the law is that it should be repealed and replaced with a law requiring inclusive assemblies. This policy is the same as that which was [supported in 1998](#) by, among others:

- At least two-thirds of **local SACREs**
- **The major teaching unions:** the National Union of Teachers (NUT); the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL); the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT); the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT); the Secondary Heads Association; the Society of Education Officers; the National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations
- **Most national RE bodies:** the Professional Council for Religious Education; the Conference of University Lecturers in Religious Education (CULRE); the Association of Religious Education Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants (AREIAC); two-thirds of responding members of the Religious Education Council for England and Wales
- **Religious bodies:** the Board of Deputies of British Jews; the Christian Education Movement; the Buddhist Society; the Sikh Education Council; the National Council of Hindu Temples; all responding members of the Inter Faith Network for the UK
- The **Local Government Association**
- **Humanists UK**

The same position has since been endorsed by many other organisations including [members of the Accord Coalition](#) and numerous religious organisations [such as](#) the Association of School and College Leaders, the Hindu Council UK, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís, the Unitarian church, British Muslims for Secular Democracy, the Hindu Academy, Ekklesia, the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, and more.

With that said, recognising that statute requires such 'worship' to take place, humanists members of SACREs should typically work to ensure that any 'worship' is as inclusive as possible of those of all religious and non-religious beliefs, while staying within the confines of the law, for them to be moments of reflection and contemplation, rather than worship.

Inclusive assemblies for students from all backgrounds can be found on Humanists UK's Assemblies for All website: assembliesforall.org.uk.

'Determinations'

The determination procedure was intended mainly to allow schools with substantial numbers of members of non-Christian religions to provide appropriate forms of worship for the whole school or for the relevant pupils in a separate assembly. Some SACREs, notably in the London Boroughs of Brent and Ealing, have used the procedure to encourage or permit schools to apply, in order have multi-faith worship of a broadly spiritual nature, or to hold spiritual worship. In Brent, almost every school has applied for and been granted a determination.

Although multi-faith or spiritual worship is still worship, and thus cannot be truly secular, it must surely be undogmatic and based upon shared values, and is therefore, in practice, much closer to secular in character. Some humanist representatives may wish to raise this possibility on their SACREs, stressing that

assemblies that take into account the beliefs and backgrounds of the participants will be more effective in transmitting moral values and contributing to the spiritual development of pupils. They are also less likely to provoke requests to withdraw from teachers or parents, and thus should contribute positively to the cohesiveness of the school culture.

Faith schools

With regard to faith schools, again it is Humanists UK's desire that state-funded faith schools be reformed and then absorbed into a secular state school sector, as Humanists UK believes it is better for all schools to be equally welcoming to the entirety of their local community, regardless of religion or belief.

However, again, this does not stop humanists from working with faith schools much in the same manner as discussed above for collective worship, and ultimately acting in the best interests of the children concerned.

In sum, Humanists UK would expect any candidates it puts forward to share its views on collective worship and faith schools, and would not anticipate these views causing any difficulty in the humanist taking up a place on the SACRE.

Education resources for teachers

As a SACRE rep, you can also help teachers and schools by making them aware of the resources available to support them with teaching about humanism. This can be done either directly with teachers attending SACRE meetings or SACRE-organised training events, via communication organised by the SACRE to all teachers in the local authority, or by ensuring links are provided with the locally agreed syllabus. Even if your local syllabus does not include reference to humanism, it will hopefully refer to non-religious worldviews or atheism. Take this as an opportunity to flag up resources to support students' understanding of non-religious approaches to life.

Understanding Humanism: understandinghumanism.org.uk

On Understanding Humanism, teachers can find lesson plans, videos, classroom activities, and humanist perspectives on a wide range of topics and themes, including those covered in the RS GCSE.

Planning guidelines: understandinghumanism.org.uk/planning-guidelines

These can support ASCs to include units on humanism in a locally agreed syllabus or schools to create schemes of work on humanism.

School speakers: understandinghumanism.org.uk/school-speakers

Do what you can to encourage local schools to invite in a free trained humanist school speaker. Humanists UK's school speakers are trained and accredited. If SACRE reps would be interested in training to become a school speaker, they can find more information here: humanism.org.uk/education/schoolspeakers.

The following guidance is also useful for all SACRE rep members for guidance on any representative of a religion or belief visiting a school:

www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Free%20Resources/Voices%20of%20faith%20and%20belief%20in%20schools.pdf.

Teacher training to support teachers in your area: understandinghumanism.org.uk/training

Humanists UK can support teachers with their subject knowledge, good practice when teaching about non-religious worldviews, and ideas for classroom activities. Encourage schools to collaborate with other local schools when booking teacher training in order to save costs.

The MOOCs:

Introducing Humanism: www.futurelearn.com/courses/introducing-humanism

Humanist Lives: www.futurelearn.com/courses/humanist-lives

The MOOCs are massive open online courses on humanism. They will help humanist SACRE reps to develop their own subject knowledge about humanism. They can be recommended to other interested SACRE reps to learn more. They can also be of value to teachers and sixth-form students wanting to find out more about humanism.

Assemblies for All: assembliesforall.org.uk

Assemblies for All is a project run by Humanists UK that aims to provide access to high-quality, inclusive assemblies for schools across the UK so that every student can experience assemblies that are educational, enjoyable, and appropriate for young people from all backgrounds.

Unlike many existing websites, which offer assemblies that are frequently of a faith-based Christian nature, Assemblies for All prioritises assemblies that are not acts of collective worship and that do not seek to promote one particular religion or belief. The assemblies are inclusive and accessible for all schools, teachers, and pupils, regardless of their religion or belief background.

Assemblies for All features hundreds of interactive, meaningful assemblies made by education professionals from charities such as Amnesty and Oxfam, to organisations such as the BBC. Every assembly is organised by theme, key stage, organisation, and, for many of them, by a corresponding event in the calendar. The calendar contains notable dates across the year so that assemblies can be held to mark important events such as International Women's Day and Martin Luther King Day.

Resources available on request

In 2017, we distributed over 20,000 copies of **What is Humanism?** by Michael Rosen and Annemarie Young to schools across the country. If any local schools have not received a copy of the book, you or they can request a copy [here](#). If you deliver a book to a school, please tell us about it [here](#).

You can request [promotional flyers](#) about Understanding Humanism and humanist school speakers [here](#). If you can get these into the hands of teachers, then please do. You can download an electronic copy of the flyer [here](#).

You can also request some new **What is Humanism? student handouts** by clicking [here](#). These are designed as an introduction to humanist beliefs and values for secondary school students, and teachers can also request copies. Always check with the teacher first if he or she is happy with you handing anything out directly to students. You can download an electronic copy [here](#).

Additionally, we have a list of [recommended books](#) on humanism and have created a new list of [recommended fiction for children](#) on humanist themes. Please do let teachers and parents know about this resource.

Appendix A: Definitions of humanism

Roughly speaking, the word humanist has come to mean someone who:

- trusts to the scientific method when it comes to understanding how the universe works and rejects the idea of the supernatural (and is therefore an atheist or agnostic)
- makes their ethical decisions based on reason, empathy, and a concern for human beings and other sentient animals
- believes that, in the absence of an afterlife and any discernible purpose to the universe, human beings can act to give their own lives meaning by seeking happiness in this life and helping others to do the same.

Today, people who share these beliefs and values are called humanists, and this combination of attitudes is called humanism. Many millions of people in the UK share this way of living and of looking at the world, but many of them have not heard the word 'humanist' and don't realise that it describes what they believe.

Other definitions

'An appeal to reason in contrast to revelation or religious authority as a means of finding out about the natural world and destiny of man, and also giving a grounding for morality ... Humanist ethics is also distinguished by placing the end of moral action in the welfare of humanity rather than in fulfilling the will of God'.

Ted Honderich, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*

'Any position which stresses the importance of persons, typically in contrast with something else, such as God, inanimate nature, or totalitarian societies'.

David Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia*

'A commitment to the perspective, interests and centrality of human persons; a belief in reason and autonomy as foundational aspects of human existence; a belief that reason, scepticism and the scientific method are the only appropriate instruments for discovering truth and structuring the human community; a belief that the foundations for ethics and society are to be found in autonomy and moral equality'.

Edward Craig, *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

'Believing that it is possible to live confidently without metaphysical or religious certainty and that all opinions are open to revision and correction, [humanists] see human flourishing as dependent on open communication, discussion, criticism and unforced consensus'.

Robert Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*

Appendix B: Spiritual, moral, cultural, and social development

Every school subject is expected to contribute towards pupils' [spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development](#). Ofsted inspectors are required to report on how each school is meeting this requirement, and SACREs will normally review this as part of inspection reports of local schools. You will want to support activities that contribute to this. You may find that these important issues are, or become, the preserve of RE departments in your local authority – and it will be up to you to try to ensure that non-religious pupils are adequately catered for if this happens.

What do humanists mean by 'spiritual'?

'Spiritual' and 'spirituality' are difficult words for non-religious people. Many humanists are divided on its meaning and use. Some humanists think that the words have a general usefulness, to describe human experience, as in the expression 'the human spirit', the experience of awe and wonder, or rising above materialistic ambitions. Others, though they see advantages in claiming that humanism is spiritual, feel uneasy about using words carrying so much religious and pseudo-religious baggage.

'The fact is that the mystical feeling of enlargement, union and emancipation has no specific intellectual content of its own. It is capable of forming matrimonial alliances with material furnished by the most diverse philosophies and theologies, provided only they can find a place in their framework for its peculiar emotional moods. We have no right therefore to invoke its prestige as distinctively in favour of any special belief...'

William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

The Ofsted guidance for inspectors in 1994 stated "'Spiritual" is not synonymous with "religious"...spiritual development is emphatically not another name for religious education', and this interpretation was confirmed in Ofsted guidance published in 2004.

Today [Ofsted](#) defines pupils' spiritual development as shown by their

- ability to be reflective about their own beliefs, religious or otherwise, that inform their perspective on life and their interest in and respect for different people's faiths, feelings and values
- sense of enjoyment and fascination in learning about themselves, others and the world around them
- use of imagination and creativity in their learning willingness to reflect on their experiences.

Fundamental British values

Ofsted is also required to report on how schools are promoting [British values](#). These are:

- democracy;
- the rule of law;
- individual liberty;
- mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith.

Many teachers object to these being labeled 'British' values. They argue that these are simply human values. Teaching about humanism can again support schools with their need to fulfil this requirement.

Appendix C: Data to support the inclusion of humanism in RE

All the usual contemporary justifications for the subject of religious education in the school curriculum – its contribution to social cohesion and mutual understanding, its presentation of a range of answers to questions of meaning and purpose, its role in educating about the history and present culture of humanity, and its role in the search for personal identity and values – can only be served by including humanist perspectives and non-religious students, as well as different religions.

According to the [British Social Attitudes Survey](#) (BSAS), over half the population of the UK are non-religious (52% in 2018). This figure has grown steadily over the past 30 years. The 2011 census gives a lower figure of 25%. One explanation of this is that the census asks the question ‘What is your religion?’, which assumes the person answering the question has one.

The BSAS reveals significant diversity in religiosity between age groups, with a greater proportion of young people describing themselves as non-religious than older people (72% for the 15-25 age group). This might appear to indicate that people become more religious as they get older, but other research does not appear to indicate that. [For every person brought up in a non-religious household who becomes religious as they go through life, 19 people travel in the opposite direction.](#) Being non-religious is sticky. The differences in the data by age therefore appear to be due to generational differences. For RE to remain relevant to students growing up in modern Britain, it must teach about the full range of beliefs they actually hold, including non-religious beliefs.

Who are the non-religious?

Not all the people who tick the non-religious box are the same. Some may hold religious beliefs (such as believing in god or an afterlife). However, most don't. It's important to recognise that there is diversity within the religious as well. Many hold non-religious beliefs. Around 40% of people who define themselves as Jewish, and around 35% of Anglicans, are also atheists. When it comes to religion, it's often helpful to think about the three Bs: belonging, beliefs, and behaviour. It's possible to be religious or non-religious in one sense and not in another, as in the case of the non-religious person who believes in an afterlife, or the Jewish atheist.

How many humanists are there?

Around [5% of the population self-identify as humanist](#). However, many more (about one in five) hold humanist beliefs and values but do not use the label to describe themselves. Sometimes this is a personal choice not to use the label. Often it is because people are not aware of the label or what it means. This reflects the fact that non-religious people are not compelled by their beliefs to engage in any sort of formal practice or observance, join any organisation, or even identify with any particular creed at all. The label ‘humanist’ is often employed differently to a label such as ‘Christian’ or ‘Muslim’. Religious labels are often applied before or during the formation of associated beliefs, while many humanists discover the label later in life and realise it applies to the beliefs and values they already held.

Appendix D: Questions you might face, and responses

Aren't you just anti-religion?

The opinion of individual humanists may vary on this point, but the important thing is that in the context of a SACRE, it simply doesn't matter whether or not a humanist rep is anti-religious, or to what extent. Reps should avoid getting drawn into these kinds of discussions – SACREs are not forums for debating religion – and should always stress that they are there to work positively with members of religious groups, with whom they may have a lot in common. Reps are of course all in favour of high-quality, impartial teaching about religions and non-religious beliefs in schools, as is Humanists UK.

I thought you didn't want any religious education taught in schools?

No, humanists have always been committed to the teaching of objective, neutral, and accurate RE in schools. Being able to understand the beliefs of those with whom we share society is crucial to fostering tolerance, respect, and social cohesion, and RE is central to that. What we object to is when RE is taught from a particular religious perspective, or it is not inclusive of the full range of religions and beliefs – and SACREs do not set faith-based syllabuses and so should not deal with such scenarios. Children must be given the opportunity to make decisions for themselves.

The law says we're not allowed to admit humanists as full members.

Firstly, there are plenty of humanist reps who are full members and even Chairs or Vice Chairs of their SACREs. Secondly, when correctly understood, the law does not proscribe full membership for humanists. We've obtained legal advice on this point and are clear that human rights law actually demands that humanists be allowed full membership. See also the recent [statement by the Welsh Government](#).

The rest of the school curriculum is non-religious, so why does there need to be non-religious stuff in RE too?

The rest of the curriculum is neither religious nor non-religious – it is not at all about non-religious worldviews. In fact there is overwhelmingly more discussion of religion in English, history, art, and science than there is humanism.

Don't you want to abolish SACREs in favour of a national syllabus?

Humanists UK policy supports a national syllabus (and consequently the abolition of ASCs) but is happy to see SACREs continue in the advisory capacity in which they already operate. This view is held by many religious groups as well – it is also Church of England policy. Regardless of that, though, many SACRE reps are very wedded to the idea of local determination of RE, and while local determination continues to exist, humanists will remain committed to working to improve agreed syllabuses.

What about humanist opposition to collective worship and faith schools?

Our opposition to faith schools is not the concern of the SACRE, and there is no need for such topics to be discussed or considered. Similarly, whilst we oppose the collective worship requirement on the whole, this same position has actually been taken by many, many national RE and religious groups. Humanist members can draw attention to some of the problems encountered by schools, parents, and teachers with regard to collective worship and should encourage the SACRE to adopt a more inclusive approach, but discussing whether or not the requirement should exist at all is not particularly relevant, as the law isn't going to change.

We already include teaching about atheism. Why do we need more?

Atheism is simply a response to the question of whether or not a god exists. Humanism is a worldview that provides an approach to life and addresses questions of ethics and meaning. Simply teaching some of the arguments against the existence of god is not the same as teaching about humanism as a positive and coherent approach to life. Non-religious worldviews should not simply be presented as something defined in opposition to religion. It should not only be included in units designed to compare and contrast it to religions.

Can't we just add this into the philosophy and ethics section of our syllabus?

Humanism is more than just philosophy and ethics. Including humanism only as part of thematic units is therefore not sufficient.

If the Government wanted humanism to be taught in RE, why didn't they include it in the GCSE subject content?

There is some content on humanism in the GCSE subject content, but not enough. Humanism helps students to answer questions that require 'non-religious responses' and the wider context required by GCSE. Be clear that law states that the Government made a [mistake](#) on this.

Schools and teachers are under pressure to prepare pupils to pass exams as it is, and these focus on knowledge about religion. How does making them learn about humanism help?

Our responsibility as SACRE reps is first and foremost to ensure that children receive the best, most thorough, most accurate, most beneficial religious education that can be provided. Including humanism is a key part of that.

Teachers don't have the knowledge to teach about humanism, and there aren't enough resources available.

Point to the Understanding Humanism website and to the availability of school speakers. Lots of resources are available, and more and more are being created. Humanists UK also offer teacher training to support subject knowledge. It's also the job of the SACRE to help teachers in this kind of situation.

We haven't had any schools or teachers contact us about including humanism, so I'm not sure there's demand for this.

Over 30,000 people visited the Understanding Humanism website in 2018, and humanist school speakers were requested to speak to over 30,000 students in schools across the UK. Even if the demand was not there, that still would not be an argument against including humanism in religious education.

The last census showed that there weren't very many humanists in the UK, so why should they get their own section in the syllabus?

25% of the population returned 'no religion' at the census, so it's important that non-religious worldviews are represented to a significant extent in the syllabus. Humanists UK encouraged humanists to tick the 'no religion' box. The census data on religion is also very misleading. 'What is your religion?' is not a good question and assumed people have a religion, meaning many people will tick a box based on cultural affiliation of upbringing rather than actual belief. Other [survey](#) results with better questions can be referred to. And, of course, even if there were only a small number of humanists locally, that wouldn't mean that humanism shouldn't be on the syllabus. There are likely to be small numbers of particular religions in the local area too.

Humanism is too simple, there's nothing to it.

There is as much richness and depth to be found in humanism as in any of the world's religions. It provides answers to questions on reality, identity, happiness, meaning, ethics, and society. Humanist thought has a long and diverse history, from ancient India, China, and Greece, through the work of many of the world's great philosophers, scientists, and political campaigners, to modern concepts such as human rights and secularism. Direct people to Humanists UK's [online course](#) if they want to learn more.

Humanism is too difficult. Young people can't deal with such complicated ideas.

This question has come up in the same SACRE meeting as the one above. Often it is founded on the fact that the SACRE reps don't understand it. Children from non-religious families have very little difficulty in grasping non-religious answers to life's big questions. From a non-religious perspective, many religious concepts and beliefs can appear equally bewildering. We are here to support the education of young people.

Humanism has too little influence on our history and culture.

Humanist thinkers and ideas have played a key role in our cultural heritage and national identity. Teaching about humanism helps enable young people to become culturally literate. From the scientific revolution, through the enlightenment thinking of David Hume, the feminist advocacy of Mary Wollstonecraft, the science of Charles Darwin, the ethics of John Stuart Mill, the novels of George Eliot, and the philosophy of Bertrand Russell, the UK has become one of the most non-religious countries in the world today. Humanist thought has helped to shape the nation in which we now live, from the foundation of the welfare state to the way we approach death, from our social values to our literature and art.

Humanism (or secular worldviews) have too much influence in society. We need to make space for children to learn about religious views.

This claim often refers to the fact that people today spend too little time considering ethics or life beyond materialistic concerns. Even if this were the case, humanism, like many religions, believes in the value of reflecting on our lives and life's bigger questions. It too challenges purely hedonistic, nihilistic, or apathetic approaches to life.

There is not enough time or money to make significant changes to the syllabus.

This argument is often made as an attempt to hide some of the other reasons for opposing the inclusion of humanism. Units on humanism can be easily added to a syllabus that already has a template for such units on the major religions. Language can easily be made more inclusive by saying 'religious *and* non-religious worldviews'. Very often you will simply have to volunteer to take on the responsibility for doing the work to ensure the syllabus is more inclusive.

Appendix E: The Fox case

In a [landmark judgement](#) handed down in November 2019, the High Court ruled in favour of three humanist parents who had challenged the legality of the Government's assertion that a GCSE Religious Studies (RS) syllabus that failed to include non-religious worldviews in the subject content would meet the statutory requirement for RE.

In his judgement on [Fox v Secretary of State for Education](#), Mr. Justice Warby stated that the Government had made an 'error of law' in saying, in the GCSE subject content, that schools could just teach the GCSE for the entirety of their key stage 4 teaching, when this could easily mean leaving out non-religious worldviews, such as humanism. This amounted to a breach of the duty to 'take care that information or knowledge included in the curriculum is conveyed in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner'.

[Legal guidance](#) on what the ruling means for local authorities, academies, schools, teachers, ASCs, and SACREs was written by Dr. Satvinder Juss, Professor of Law at King's College London, pointing out that the law has been shown to require that humanism is included in the RE curriculum in a way that affords it equal respect to religions.

However, not long after the *Fox* judgement, the Department for Education (DfE) issued [guidance](#) to local authorities maintaining that, in its view, the case had changed nothing. In its guidance, it claimed that the High Court ruling referred to a 'narrow technical point' and that the Government considered 'the judgment to have no broader impact on any aspect of its policy in relation to the RE curriculum or the RS GCSE subject content for schools with or without a religious character, nor on the current inspection arrangements'. As a result, it continued, 'schools and ASCs should be free to determine their own approach to the teaching of RE and the selection of the appropriate RS GCSE' in the same manner that they always had and are under no requirement to give 'equal air time' to all types of belief.

The DfE's claim that the judgment has no impact on the RE/RS curriculum is entirely inaccurate – in fact it is as bad as the claim it made in the first place that led it to lose the case. As Dr. Juss points out, although it is still legally acceptable to devote more curriculum time to Christianity than to other perspectives (religious or otherwise) – and syllabuses 'may give more attention to a religion or non-religious worldview that has a particularly high local following or relevance' – equal respect must nevertheless be afforded to different religions and humanism. In practice, this means, as Dr. Juss' guidance states, that 'an RE course which provides for the study of religions of a small size or little relevance without giving comparable attention to non-religious worldviews of the same or a greater size or relevance will be unlawful'. In other words, the law is not just about respect in some abstract sense, but about how that respect translates into curriculum content.

When discussing the inclusion of non-religious worldviews in RE, we are often asked the question of why humanism should be included in particular. There are two main reasons for this. The first is that it is the only non-religious worldview that is sufficiently well articulated and the subject of a sufficient body of writing suitable for use in schools. The second is that it is the (explicit or implicit) worldview of the great majority of non-religious people in the UK. The humanist outlook on life is widespread in Britain today, much more so than all the minority religions combined, and thus meets the necessary criteria for inclusion in the curriculum.

Documentation connected with the case:

- High Court ruling on Religious Education, Dr. Satvinder Juss:
humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016-04-28-FINAL-High-Court-ruling-on-Religious-Education-legal-guidance.pdf
- Guidance for schools and awarding organisations about the Religious Studies GCSE, Department for Education:
assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/488477/RS_guidance.pdf
- Commentary on the Department for Education's Guidance for schools and awarding organisations about the Religious Studies GCSE, Dr. Satvinder Juss:
humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016-05-31-FINAL-Commentary-on-DfE-RE-guidance.pdf
- For a more in-depth account of the Government's initial response to the Fox case, please see
www.thinkingabouthumanism.org/religion-in-schools/objective-critical-and-pluralistic/#note22

Appendix F: Further material to support the inclusion of humanism in RE

When it was published in **2004**, the recommendation in the *English RE national framework* to study humanism was more explicit than in any previous guidance from QCDA and in most local syllabuses:

Many pupils come from religious backgrounds but others have no attachment to religious beliefs and practices. Therefore, to ensure that all pupils' voices are heard and that the RE curriculum is broad and balanced, it is recommended that there should be opportunities for all pupils to study... secular philosophies such as humanism.

About religious education in the curriculum, page 12

In the years that followed, Humanists UK considered the national framework a very useful tool for humanists involved in revising local syllabuses. It encourages the inclusive, questioning, philosophical, open kind of RE that most humanists could support and many children find interesting and relevant – and it is significantly better than many local syllabuses. Most of the points made in the following national framework description of RE could be used to argue for the inclusion of humanism:

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 develops pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christianity, other principal religions, other religious traditions and other world views that offer answers to questions such as these. It offers opportunities for personal reflection and spiritual development. It enhances pupils' awareness and understanding of religions and beliefs...

Religious education encourages pupils to learn from different religions, beliefs, values and traditions while exploring their own beliefs and questions of meaning. It challenges pupils to reflect on, consider, analyse, interpret and evaluate issues of truth, belief, faith and ethics and to communicate their responses.

Religious education encourages pupils to develop their sense of identity and belonging. It enables them to flourish individually within their communities and as citizens in a pluralistic society and global community... It enables pupils to develop respect for and sensitivity to others, in particular those whose faiths and beliefs are different from their own. It promotes discernment and enables pupils to combat prejudice.

The importance of religious education, page 7

The national framework had the support of the QCDA before its abolition and has the support of the DfE, as well as a wide range of stakeholders in RE. However, although the 2004 framework marked a clear step forward in terms of providing SACREs with a clear rationale for the inclusion of humanism in RE, it was later superseded by [A Curriculum Framework for Religious Education in England](#) (published by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales in **2013**), which Humanists UK strongly suggests should be used in its place. The curriculum framework garnered similarly broad support from RE stakeholders and explicitly states that the subject should be inclusive of a range of religious and non-religious worldviews such as humanism. For example, a section on the aims of RE states that:

The phrase 'religions and worldviews' is used in this document to refer to Christianity, other principal religions represented in Britain, smaller religious communities and non-religious worldviews such as humanism. The phrase is meant to be inclusive, and its precise meaning depends on the context in which it occurs, eg in terms of belief, practice or identity.

A Curriculum Framework for Religious Education in England, page 11

Similarly, in **2018**, the final report of the **Commission on Religious Education**, [*Religion and Worldviews: the way forward. A national plan for RE*](#), argued that:

The study of religious and non-religious worldviews is a core component of a rounded academic education. This has long been recognised as essential in Britain. Indeed, one could argue that it is more important now than ever. Young people today are growing up in a world where there is increasing awareness of the diversity of religious and non-religious worldviews, and they will need to live and work well with people with very different worldviews from themselves. One need only glance at a newspaper to know that it is impossible fully to understand the world without understanding worldviews – both religious and non-religious.

Religion and Worldviews: the way forward. A national plan for RE, page 3

The report goes on to recommend that RE should be renamed *Religion and Worldviews* to reflect the fact that the subject involves the study of both religious and non-religious perspectives such as humanism. The Commission also recommended that a national entitlement (the text of which is included in the report) to the subject be introduced in place of existing legal requirements. Humanists UK has welcomed both recommendations, which are strongly in line with its own position of many decades' standing.

The report recommends:

- 'The name of the subject should be changed to Religion and Worldviews.'
- 'The National Entitlement to the study of Religion and Worldviews should become statutory for all publicly funded schools' – which, for maintained schools, should 'replace the requirement... to follow their locally agreed syllabus'. ASCs will no longer be required.
- For faith schools, 'a requirement should be introduced to provide Religion and Worldviews in accordance with the National Entitlement' in addition to any faith-based education.
- The National Entitlement states 'Programmes of study must reflect the complex, diverse and plural nature of worldviews. They may draw from... non-religious worldviews and concepts including Humanism...'. The National Entitlement should be supported by 'Non-statutory programmes of study for each of Key Stages 1–4... developed at a national level, at a similar level of detail as those for History and Geography in the National Curriculum'.
- Standing Advisory Councils on RE should be replaced by Local Advisory Networks for Religion and Worldviews, with the composition of the groups within it changed to, amongst other things, make clear humanists should be included, and remove the privileged place for the CofE.

However, somewhat unhelpfully, the CoRE's report also lists 'secularism, atheism, and agnosticism' as non-religious worldviews, when atheism and agnosticism are simple positions on the existence or otherwise of gods, and are no more non-religious worldviews than theism is a religion. And secularism is (depending on the academic field) either a political philosophy that can be held by religious and non-religious alike or a sociological description of a certain social approach associated with modernity.

The Commission has been largely welcomed by members of the RE community and has been wholeheartedly endorsed by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales. The Catholic Education Service and the Board of Deputies of British Jews objected to the inclusion of non-religious worldviews. The National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) also objected to the proposals to reform the role of SACREs. However, some individual SACREs recognise the need for reform, and disagreement over this recommendation should not hold back support for the others.

One important thing to remember about the findings of the CoRE report, as well as the curriculum framework, the national framework (and all the other supporting documents on RE that the QCDA and DfE have produced) is that they are non-statutory; that is, your SACRE and ASC may, wholly or partly, choose to ignore their recommendations, guidance, content, and structure (although it is important to recognise that the ruling in the *Fox* case means that if the SACRE was to develop a syllabus that excludes humanism, it would be unlawful). Further, because the documents represent a compromise between a great many professional and faith stakeholders in RE, they do not necessarily generate the perfect syllabus for anyone, including humanists. You may well be able to do better for humanism locally – as some humanists have. Another point to bear in mind about the 2013 and 2004 documents is that they were deliberately designed to act as a ‘framework’, that is, a document that needs fleshing out and more detail before it can work in the classroom. For this reason there is plenty of scope for ASCs and teachers to improve upon them – or indeed to make them worse.

Some ASCs will be reluctant to undertake the radical revisions that would be needed to bring their syllabus into line with the curriculum framework, perhaps because of financial constraints or worries about the demands on teachers. Some will think that using the framework would make their syllabus worse, or less inclusive. They could be right, but if you disagree, below are some arguments you can use to try to persuade them otherwise.

In Wales

Amongst other references to non-religious and philosophical perspectives, page 6 of the 2002 *National exemplar framework for religious education for 3 to 19-year-olds in Wales* emphasises that learners ‘plan investigations by gathering and utilising a range of religious and non-religious sources and use these to evaluate and justify their personal responses’. Page 8 adds that ‘Religious education contributes to Wales, Europe and the World by raising challenging questions from religious and non-religious perspectives’. Page 13 encourages ‘in-depth investigations of religion and religious/non-religious ideas evident in [learners’] locality in Wales’.

Page 8 of the 2011 *Religious education Guidance for Key Stages 2 and 3: Key messages for planning learning and teaching* emphasises that pupils should ‘engage with fundamental questions to investigate interpretations of meaning and the purpose of existence as raised by religious and non-religious people alike’. Page 25 adds that ‘In religious education, learners will have opportunities to plan investigations by gathering and utilising a range of religious and non-religious sources and use these to evaluate and justify their personal responses’.

The 2011 *Exemplifying learner profiles at Key Stages 2 and 3 in religious education: Additional guidance* also emphasises the importance of learning about non-religious beliefs, and cites a number of examples.

Amongst other references, page 70 of the 2009 *Religious education Guidance for 14 to 19-year-olds* explains ‘Pupils should be given opportunities to investigate fundamental questions from a variety of informed religious and non-religious sources to evaluate a range of possibilities and begin to draw reasoned conclusions based on the evidence gathered’.

Since 2017, the WJEC RS GCSE has included a section on humanism, and all exam questions can be answered from a non-religious perspective.

The draft Welsh curriculum, set to be introduced from 2022, explicitly seeks to make use of a change in the law that will see humanism taught on an equal footing with religious perspectives. On page 17 of the guidance on the [Humanities Area of Learning and Experience](#) (AoLE), it says:

'It is our intention also that religious education reflects our historical and contemporary relationship in Wales to philosophy and religious views, including non-religious beliefs. Therefore the current legislation will be amended to ensure the agreed syllabus for religious education takes account of non-religious world views which are analogous to religions (e.g. humanism).'

Non-religious worldviews are explicitly integrated into the progression steps and achievement outcomes across the draft curriculum. GCSE-level exams will be revised in 2023 to bring them in line with the new curriculum.

Appendix G: Other Useful Websites

Apart from www.humanism.org.uk, the website of Humanists UK, there are several useful sites and sections for those who want to know more about RE and RE organisations. Most of the websites below acknowledge and include humanism and link to Humanists UK.

National Association of SACREs (NASACRE), with newsletters, information and FAQs on SACREs, and news of NASACRE conferences and events.

<http://www.nasacre.org.uk/>

Welsh Association of SACREs (WASACRE)

www.wasacre.org.uk

The RE Council, the umbrella organisation for national faith groups and professionals involved in RE in England and Wales (Humanists UK is a long-standing member).

www.religiouseducationcouncil.org

The National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE)

www.natre.org.uk

The RE Directory – a useful source of information about RE and a list of RE websites.

[/www.theredirectory.org.uk](http://www.theredirectory.org.uk)

The European Forum for Teachers of Religious Education

Exists to form a Europe-wide forum to further the teaching of Religious Education.

www.eftre.net

Religious diversity and intercultural education: A reference book for schools

Published by the Council of Europe in 2007: Council of Europe Publishing, ISBN: 978-92-871-6223-6.

(www.pi-schools.gr/lessons/religious/europ_diast/Religious_Diversity_%20and_Intercultural_Education.pdf)

The Toledo guiding principles on teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools

Published by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the text prepared by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in 2007, ISBN 83-60190-48-8.

(www.osce.org/odihr/29154?download=true)

Guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion

Published in July 2007, DCSF Reference 00598-2007.

(dera.ioe.ac.uk//8108/1/DCSF-00598-2007.pdf)