

APPENDIX 3

Minutes of a meeting of Birmingham Agreed Syllabus Conference on Wednesday 10th November, 2021 at Broadway Academy, Birmingham, at 1800 hours.

Initial codes of speakers are referenced on the attached register of attendance.

Welcome and apologies

1810 GH welcomed all, extending a first welcome to Sue Harrison, Executive Director of Education and Skills, BCC, from November 2021. SH spoke to thank all for inviting her, and of her gratitude to the volunteers of both SACRE and ASC. SH is excited by new syllabus for Birmingham.

Outline

1820 GH outlined the procedure for the meeting, namely that an initial vote to be held. This vote is to decide whether a formal vote to go ahead to agree the syllabus will take place tonight or at a later date. GH reminds all that the meeting needs to work within the legal advice written by HJ to ASC by BCC on Tuesday 9th November and instructs all to review that advice now with the greatest care.

Legal Framework

1825 PD reviews minutes from meeting of 07.10.21 and thanks RF for his correction, the word legal being added to his quotations 'can of worms' and 'elephant trap' minuted at 1930. No other amends tabled.

1830 PD reads out verbatim legal advice from HJ, Senior Solicitor, Education Team, BCC, to cement GH's instruction that this advice must be followed in total. In response to the motion at the end of the legal advice, RF asks if minor changes can be made to HJ's draft motions. PD agrees that minor changes can be made.

Amendments since 7.10. 21

1840 SW brings all up to date on changes made to syllabus as a result of the conference on 7th October, 2021, and three subsequent rounds of legal advice from HJ and Mr Peter Oldham, QC (PO). SW talks the dispositions, dimensions of learning and revised key questions. All have stayed the same. She talks about the status of the content overviews and key questions which are to be guidance.

1850 PD explains that PO's current advice when meeting papers were distributed to members on 04.11.21 was that the main syllabus, the content overviews and key questions were all to be considered statutory. However, as a result of a subsequent zoom conference where SW, GH, PD and LH offered further explanation to The QC, PO confirmed that his principal conclusions contained in advice offered on 28th October, 2021, where in (1) he refers to all but the main document as 'Guidance' stands, and that just the main document being statutory is compliant with the law, as long as that statutory document undergoes some further revision. Some examples of such revisions, to ensure consistency and clarity, were authored as exemplars by PO and relayed by HJ to ASC core group on Monday 8th November, 2021. These were emailed to the chair of each ASC conference groups on Tuesday 9th November to inform today's discussions. PD assured conference that PO required mechanistic and word level changes, not changes on matters of religion or non- religion.

ZH asked for clarification about the revised statutory status of the Content Overviews and Key Questions since 04.11.21 as these define the content. SN remarked that they are 'Tools' or guidance. AJ said these documents 'are what they should be' helping a profession that doesn't need a script and that can be trusted'. AJ was frustrated, the legal status of these documents, which are used in schools, being less material to teachers than it is to lawyers.

SW continued her presentation using notes from page 4. SW clarified that the lesson plans, offered optionally with the 2007 syllabus will be updated for those who want a weekly detailed plan rather than just overview guidance. S HC asked for clarification that only the main document is statutory, SW answered that was the case with the most recent advice from PO, but that Content Overviews and Key Questions, the Teacher Planning Tools, will be differentiated as guidance. LG remarked that the table on page 48 guiding the teaching of RE in various types of schools and revised by PO is now 'really helpful'. Further LG asked if we had moved away from NRWV towards only Humanism. S HC asked if the NRWVs listed on p27 was exhaustive. RF remarked that such a list could never be exhaustive. SW clarified that the list of NRWVs states it is 'regularly used examples'. RS remarked that the inclusion of compulsory teaching hours was imperative.

ZH expressed concern that the Content Overviews have reverted to Guidance. SW clarified this is PO's final advice. ZH feels it is strange that there is no statutory content (and as a result asked through Group A if the MLG could revise the information on Islam in the main document as this would affect her decision on how to vote. Such opportunity to change was agreed). PW wanted clarification on whether teachers are given enough help to meet the 'mainly Christian' requirement for their teaching. PW noted that Christianity did not appear in all the fields of the table on the content overview displayed in Powerpoint. SW referred PW to her paper analysing the content of the whole syllabus where data proves content guidance is in the main Christian. LG referred to teacher training and standards where all teachers are trained to know that RE must be in the main Christian to comply with current laws.

ZH rephrased her concerns on statutory content mindful that the content overviews provide medium term plans and the lessons short term, but both are to be optional. Is there room for a long-term overview of knowledge to be gained? LG felt that keeping the content as Guidance means it can have additions, JH said content could never be exhaustive, RF that it would allow NRWV to evolve.

1910 PD explained PO's advice of 28.10.21 around planning, SEND, Key Questions and removing over complex material and ensuring guidance materials never refer solely to 'God' as NRWVs need equal respect. LG reminded all that SEND includes those of high ability and asks they be catered for in any revision.

1915 SW explained the nature of the rewrites that will be required by PO, giving some specific exemplars (1) in defining with absolute clarity statutory and guidance and (2) consistently differentiating NRWVs and no religion. SW sums up balance of risk of further drafting to ensure PO compliance following a vote to agree and postponing vote to agree in the knowledge that writing needs to be done. PD amplified on SW's remarks in the light of the three levels of legal revision since last conference and that the core group was assured by PO's final advice where he handed some of the responsibility for delivery back to the teaching profession. SC reminded conference that previous syllabuses had been agreed and even adopted when not complete, stating that the freedom of the guidance is that it allows evolution. S HC felt that the final revision needs time and headspace from SW and PD reflecting that Birmingham might have a 'world beater' given the complexity of the situation with the teaching of RE nationally.

Group Discussion, Feedback

1920 Conference broke into four groups for discussion on all above. GH reminded groups that they needed to decide whether they want to move to a formal vote to agree today. PD, SW circulated groups giving further information on the legal advice.

1950 GH took feeling of room which was to move towards a formal vote to agree the new syllabus. However, the precise words of the motion were brought into question. RF felt there was an unfortunate use of the word 'fact' in motion 1, and tension between the intent of motion points one and two. RS felt the current wording necessary to ensure legal compliance and that the motion points were drawn from statute. JH wondered if therefore we were allowed to alter them at all? S HC warned all that the law can be contradictory and advised specialist advice. AJ felt, mindful risk of not having a new syllabus, that it is important to move towards a vote. SA tabled an amend from Group A to p26 inserting 'may' between indeed and abandon.

SH left conference, expressing her thanks yet again.

Conference was paused to take legal advice from HJ by telephone. LH appraised HJ of discussion to this point. Several re-drafts of the motion were considered, RF and LG offering potential solutions to LH, SW and HJ. A solution was authored and dictated by HJ which satisfied all.

Formal Vote

The motion, identifying with precision the agreement of the new syllabus, was read out by SW for all and was fixed as:

In respect of the draft syllabus dated 4th November 2021, this conference has voted and is unanimously satisfied that:

- 1) The draft syllabus reflects the requirements of The Education Act, 1996.
- 2) Bearing this in mind, the draft syllabus accords equal respect to Non-Christian Religions and Non-Religious World Views.
- 3) The draft syllabus is approved and this Conference recommend that the Local Authority adopt it in substitution for the existing syllabus ; and
- 4) The Drafting Secretary has been delegated the power to make further presentational amendments to the draft syllabus and guidance documents as required to amend any typographical errors and to ensure consistency across the four documents."

GH asked each group to confirm their position on going to a vote to agree the new syllabus, such agreement further defined by the revised motion. Group A said yes, with the proviso that some faith groups had asked to revise the information about their own faith that will appear in the main document. Group B said, JS expressed confidence in GH, SW and PD to 'adjust, amend and resolve' the document in line with 'the mood of conference'. Group C asked that the greater clarity in some earlier versions regarding statutory and non-statutory be reinstated in the finalisation, otherwise echoing Group A and B. For D, Cllr DC thanked the presenters for their openness and stated 'D' was unanimous that they could vote successfully now that the motion had been amended as read out by SW. Group D expressed trust in SW and team to make the necessary amends.

Formal Vote Result

2010 GH reflected on the above plenary and moved conference to a formal vote. With regard to the above motion, Group A vote to agree the new syllabus (expressed by SA) Group B vote agree the new syllabus (expressed by JS) Group C vote agree the new syllabus (expressed by RS) and Group D vote to agree the new syllabus (expressed by Cllr DC).

There was applause from all.

Conclusions and thanks

GH thanks all, including the three councillors who chaired SACRE during the life of the conference, Cllr Dr Barry Henley, Cllr Tristan Chatfield, and present Cllr John Cotton; officers from BCC including David Bishop, Alan Michell and present Laura Hendry, legal experts Ian Burgess and present (by phone) Helen Jones, and assistant to the ASC Paul Davies. He thanked each and every conference member both past and present, especially the group chairs. Most of all he offered thanks of all to current drafting secretary, Dr Simone Whitehouse. GH was undecided if this would be his final ASC.

There was further applause.

JC expressed his most sincere thanks to all calling the decision to agree the new syllabus 'a momentous moment for Birmingham' He voted thanks to GH and those supporting GH directly SW, PD and LH. JC thanked all conference members for their service to The City of Birmingham.

There was no other business. The meeting ended without a formal disbanding of conference to enable further review and consultation as necessary during and after the revisions discussed during the conference this evening.

The meeting ended at 2030.