

I attended the nasacre 2016 AGM in London on 17th of May and found it a very informative, encouraging and worthwhile event. There were 77 out of 154 sacre's represented. This is 50% of those eligible and it was hoped that turnout could be improved.

The keynote speakers were Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss and Professor Adam Dinham

Baroness Butler-Sloss spoke on 'Community, Diversity and the Common Good', and I found her comments highly relevant (her full report 'Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life: Diversity and the Common Good') can be downloaded for free from www.corab.org.uk .

I was very impressed by the academic depth and detail of Professor Dinham's presentation, and I feel much better informed about the thinking behind government decisions and priorities regarding R.E., but it was Baroness Butler Sloss' presentation that made me think that this is something I could go away and work with.

She spoke of the importance of religious literacy, and of recognising how heritage and identity contribute to cultural and religious awareness and the necessity of understanding how much of religious and cultural sensibilities were given and not chosen; and how urgent it was that those involved in education were sensitive to this if they are to help young people to navigate the complications of a multicultural society and to connect in a healthy way with their peers from differing cultural backgrounds. I thought this was wonderful stuff but I must acknowledge that I have always been in complete agreement with these principles.

There was a good deal of discussion of recommendation 4: *"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 The legal requirement for schools to hold acts of collective worship should be repealed, and replaced by a requirement to hold inclusive times for reflection."*

But it was felt that this needed more careful consideration, partly on the grounds that a recommendation could be made without a legal requirement being involved. It was also felt by many that schools could be given a choice between holding an act of worship or a period for inclusive reflection with the option of choosing to have both.

Some interesting and relevant points emerged from round table discussions I participated in, which I think are questions that we could consider.

1) At the primary school level pupils do not only learn about different beliefs, cultures and traditions from their parents and their teachers: they learn from each other. Is there an effective way to acknowledge and encourage this? 2) At the secondary, F.E. and H.E. level, R.E. and Religious Studies are not just about differing beliefs and practices but about using the world's religions and wisdom traditions to frame serious ethical and philosophical questions. and 3) there is still considerable resistance among some members of some faith groups to more engagement with other faith groups, even though all the main leaders of the faith groups encourage engagement on terms of friendship and respect. How do we address this? Is it part of our job to address this?