

Humanism in Agreed Syllabuses for Religious Education A Report to the British Humanist Association

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An investigation of take-up of 'secular philosophies such as Humanism' in locally Agreed Syllabuses for Religious Education in response to the 2004 National Framework for Religious Education.

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Executive Summary

This study examined the response of local authority Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs) and Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) to the recommendation, in the non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education (QCA & DfES, 2004), that local agreed syllabuses for Religious Education include 'secular philosophies such as Humanism' across the key stages.

Evidence was gathered through a survey of Humanist SACRE representatives, and an examination of a sample of agreed syllabuses which had included 'secular philosophies such as Humanism'. Eighty local authorities in England were included in the survey.

Survey respondents reported that 62 of the 80 local authorities surveyed had included 'secular philosophies such as Humanism' in their local syllabus, in some form. But of these, only nine had included Humanism extensively, including four where Humanism was compulsory at some key stages. Humanism had an explicit but weaker, and often tokenistic, presence in 28 of the 62 syllabuses, and more general secular worldviews were referred to in a further 25.

Survey respondents were asked to assess the influence of the NFRE on inclusion of Humanism. Where Humanism was included extensively, it was generally reported that the NFRE had not been influential since Humanism had usually been included in past syllabuses. Where Humanism was included less strongly, the NFRE was reported to have had a greater influence. There appears to be an incremental increase in inclusion over time and the NFRE is having some effect in raising awareness of Humanism. However, there continues to be much room for dispute and discussion about whether syllabuses have sufficiently included Humanism even where they appear to.

In line with the recommendations of the NFRE, local agreed syllabuses often suggest that secular philosophies such as Humanism, as well as the new religious worldviews, should be included 'where appropriate', perhaps according to the demographics of the local area, the school or the class. This phrase fits with the NFRE's deliberately light touch approach but, along with the non-statutory status of the framework, leaves the recommendation for inclusion open to interpretation and the *actual* inclusion of Humanism open to school and teacher choice, creating an inconsistency of approach.

There is a reported lack of knowledge and understanding of Humanism among many teachers, RE advisers and SACRE members. There is a lack of teaching resources, especially by comparison with the six principal religions. The BHA should consider further investment in the development of teaching resources and the initial training and professional development of RE teachers.

Future QCA reviews of the RE framework should consider including forms of words that ensure Humanism is given parity of status with the principal religions. In particular, the phrase 'where appropriate' should be dropped so that the framework aims for an equally diverse educational offer for all children and young people across the country. Given the wide range of worldviews now on offer in the RE framework, new approaches to syllabus construction and formats must be considered to ensure a wide breadth of study is a practical possibility in order to secure inclusive programmes of study in schools.

The government and QCA should give clearer guidance about the position of the non-statutory NFRE in relation to Circular 1/94 and clear guidance should be disseminated to ASCs, SACREs and local authorities. Circular 1/94 is a major

obstacle to the inclusion of Humanism because it limits Humanism's representative voice on SACREs and Agreed Syllabus Conferences and, as a result, prevents Humanism making a full contribution to agreed syllabuses and to religious education in schools. The government should clarify the legal position to ensure Humanists can consistently enjoy full membership of SACREs and ASCs across the local authorities in England. However, to ensure children and young people receive a full and diverse religious education wherever they live it seems likely that a national syllabus would have to be introduced.

The invaluable assistance of those BHA members and local authority representatives who completed survey questionnaires is gratefully acknowledged by Dr Watson and by the BHA.

Section 1: The project's aims, objectives and methods

1.1 Introduction

In 2004 the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) published a national framework for Religious Education. The National Framework for Religious Education (NFRE)¹ initiated a curriculum step-change for Religious Education by recommending that pupils of all ages should learn about and from secular philosophies such as Humanism as well as a wider range of religious traditions such as the Bahá'í faith, Jainism and Zoroastrianism. The NFRE therefore addressed "equality of opportunity" by introducing a more inclusive RE curriculum, "(t)o ensure that all pupils' voices are heard and the religious education curriculum is broad and balanced" (QCA, 2004, p. 12).

Since the 1988 Education Act, local authorities have had a statutory duty to ensure that Christianity features through all four key stages of the RE curriculum, and they have also been encouraged to include an additional five 'principal religions', Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism, which are said to be represented in England. Accordingly, the NFRE makes it clear that to ensure legal requirements are met "Christianity should be studied throughout each key stage," and Agreed Syllabus Conferences and schools should also "ensure that by the end of key stage 3 pupils have encountered all ... five principal religions in sufficient depth" (QCA, 2004, p. 12).

Additionally and innovatively, the NFRE strongly recommends two additions to agreed syllabuses: "secular philosophies such as Humanism" and "other religious traditions such as Baha'i, Jainism and Zoroastrianism" (QCA, 2004, p. 12). The NFRE's statement that secular worldviews and other religious traditions should be included in order that "all pupils' voices are heard and the religious education curriculum is broad and balanced ... [and] there are opportunities for all pupils to study [them]" suggests these opportunities should be available for *all* children and young people in England.

The NFRE provides ethical and educational reasons for including Humanism in agreed syllabuses, but does not provide a statutory basis for inclusion. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is cited in some locally agreed syllabuses (e.g. Hampshire's *Living Difference*) but is not cited in the NFRE. The NFRE is also a 'light touch' document, leaving considerable room for local interpretation.

The NFRE is also, of course, itself *non-statutory* guidance and each local authority's Agreed Syllabus Conference will determine the statutory syllabus for Religious Education, with advice from its Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). Steps taken to broaden the RE curriculum will be welcomed by many on such bodies but can be expected to meet with resistance from others, including both members of SACREs and some teachers.

The QCA does not yet know how many locally agreed syllabuses have included, or are likely to include, 'secular philosophies' in response to their framework. This project took first steps in exploring whether and how local authorities, ASCs and

¹ Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) & Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2004) *The Non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education*, London, QCA.

SACREs were responding to the NFRE's suggestion that 'secular philosophies such as Humanism' be included at all key stages² in local agreed syllabuses for RE.

1.2 Project aims and methods

The research focused primarily on those local authorities where there was a Humanist representative on the SACRE in contact with the British Humanist Association (BHA). Through a questionnaire, the survey investigated the following questions:

1. How many of the locally agreed syllabuses published in these local authorities since 2004 have made reference to or included 'secular philosophies such as Humanism'?
2. How many of these local authorities intend to include 'secular philosophies such as Humanism' in their revised syllabus?
3. Are any schools in the local authority areas including 'secular philosophies' in RE?
4. What has been the Humanists' experience of the barriers and facilitators to inclusion of 'secular philosophies such as Humanism'?

The project also involved the collection of agreed syllabuses which were reported to have included 'secular philosophies such as Humanism.' These were analysed to investigate a fifth research question:

5. In what kinds of way have agreed syllabuses included 'secular philosophies such as Humanism'?

The original research proposal had suggested that up to ten telephone interviews should be carried out with BHA SACRE representatives to discuss question 4 in more detail. A handful of BHA representatives and RE advisers were contacted by phone and some conversations were pursued via email messages. However, a larger number of extended telephone interviews was not felt to be necessary because of the detailed written responses in questionnaire returns. Instead, a second, shorter questionnaire was sent to local authority representatives, the RE adviser or the SACRE clerk, in a selection of the local authorities where there was no BHA representative. This second questionnaire did not generate the same level of response as the internal BHA questionnaire but it did serve to increase the number of returns. In total, over half of the 151 local authorities in England were included in the survey.

The survey questionnaires are included in the appendices.

Important Note

It will be seen that this research largely focussed on local authority areas where Humanists have at least some representation on the SACRE. Therefore, the level of inclusion of Humanism in syllabuses within the sample should not be taken to be indicative of the situation in areas not examined – it is probable that, in those areas, the level of inclusion of Humanism is even lower.

² Education for pupils aged 5-16 is divided into four key stages (KS1, KS2, KS3 and KS4) although currently KS4 is also referred to as 'the 14-16 curriculum'. The NFRE section on KS4 actually covers ages 14-19 and does not use the same phrase (as quoted) as for the previous stages.

1.3 Key Findings

- Overall, there was *some* reference to 'secular philosophies such as Humanism' in 81% of the local authority syllabuses surveyed, although this was often tokenistic.
- Where syllabuses claim to have responded to the NFRE and to have included 'secular philosophies such as Humanism' there continues to be room for dispute about whether these syllabuses have sufficiently included Humanism in any meaningful sense
- There was no meaningful reference to secular philosophies in 19% of syllabuses.
- A small number of SACREs are deliberately ignoring the recommendation to include Humanism.
- Where Humanism is included in a syllabus it is usually as a recommended and not a compulsory topic, which depends on teachers choosing to teach it.
- Humanism was compulsory (at some key stages) in only 5% of the syllabuses and in only one of them at all key stages.
- KS4 is emerging as a problem area because GCSE courses do not always include Humanism.
- The NFRE was said to have had some influence on the inclusion of secular philosophies such as Humanism in only a third of the local authorities surveyed.
- Humanism had been included in pre-NFRE syllabuses in a third of the local authorities surveyed.
- Respondents reported that Humanism was being taught in schools in just under a third of local authorities surveyed, although usually minimally.
- Where other religious worldviews have been included in syllabuses in response to the NFRE this has usually been the Baha'i faith.
- Local authorities use different mechanisms for including Humanism in their syllabuses and it is not obvious, at this stage, what is the best model for inclusion.
- Humanism is usually expected to fit the same template in syllabuses as religious frameworks and the challenge of doing this can be used as an argument against its inclusion: 'Humanism is not a religion'.
- A thematic syllabus may be particularly helpful to the inclusion of Humanism; however there is a risk that without specific reference to Humanism, and AT1³ content on Humanism as a worldview, many in religious education would continue to lack knowledge of what it is and might continue to treat it with suspicion.

³ Religious Education currently has two attainment targets: AT1, learning about religions and AT2, learning from religions.

- Many BHA respondents were writing a syllabus appendix on Humanism or support materials for teachers.
- Not only does Circular 1/94 legally bar Humanists from full membership: SACREs and ASCs can be undemocratic in other ways that are not helpful to Humanists.
- A number of respondents felt that teachers lacked knowledge of Humanism and were hostile to Humanism. However, a similar number reported they had found teachers helpful in promoting Humanism.
- Humanists often encounter open hostility and bigotry from some religious SACRE members but some receive support both from SACRE members and RE advisers

1.4 Key Recommendations

- The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DfCSF) should revise circular 1/94 to recommend Humanist representation on SACREs and ASCs, bringing it in line with the NFRE's recommendation that Humanism should be included in RE.
- The government's *Every Child Matters* and *Citizenship and Diversity* policies should be used to argue that *all* children should have their beliefs included in RE.
- SACRE Humanists (and SACREs generally) need to be more responsive to education and educational needs. It would be helpful if SACRE Humanists and local Humanist groups could provide informed speakers for Initial Teacher Training (ITT), teacher professional development sessions (INSET) and other teacher events, as well as speaking more with children and young people and their families.
- Many BHA respondents were writing a syllabus appendix on Humanism or materials for teachers and it would be helpful for BHA members to find some way of sharing these resources.
- The BHA should research the ways in which syllabuses are constructed to ensure the format is sufficiently open to admit a wide breadth of study so that Humanism, and a wider range of religions, can be taught. There is a need to develop new approaches to syllabus construction and formats to more readily secure inclusive syllabuses.
- In particular, the BHA should give attention to whether syllabuses which take a general approach to secular philosophies, or include Humanistic approaches in themes on ethical issues, are achieving sufficient depth and rigor in the study of the Humanist worldview, particularly for AT1 (knowledge about 'religions').
- A number of existing agreed syllabuses (see Table 1 on page 11) are invaluable in demonstrating mechanisms for including Humanism, and these should be disseminated and shared as widely as possible.
- It is important to find out how different syllabuses are interpreted by RE teachers; how RE teachers respond to different syllabuses' house styles; and, ultimately, which methods of inclusion best promote take-up by RE teachers.
- The BHA will need to consider the cost of supporting change. Resources, support for teachers and support for the BHA members involved in fighting for Humanism on SACREs need to be seriously considered to take full advantage of the opportunity the NFRE and potential amendments of it offer.

Section 2: Overview of Survey Responses

In total, the survey gathered knowledge of local implementation patterns in 80 of the 151 Local Authorities in England.

In the first stage of the survey, BHA members involved in SACREs were surveyed and 44 responded⁴, covering 60 areas of England.⁵ The majority of respondents were co-opted to SACRES and a small number were observers or members of the teacher or local authority groups. Just five were full members of SACRE as representatives of Humanism.

In the second stage of the survey, 63 Local Authority (LA) representatives were surveyed, and 18 responded, covering 20 areas of England.⁶

2.1 Answering the question: 'Is Humanism included in the syllabus in some form?'

Respondents were asked whether their LA agreed syllabus included Humanism in some form, or whether it might do so when it was revised. If Humanism was included, respondents were asked to state at which key stages Humanism was included and at which key stages Humanism was compulsory.

Responses to these questions were not always reliable. In particular some respondents overplayed the significance of Humanism in their syllabus while others downplayed its significance. It was also difficult to know whether respondents had understood the word 'Humanism' in a broad sense, to mean non-religious views in general, or in a narrower sense, to mean a discrete worldview as promoted by the BHA. When the second survey was sent out to the LA representatives, changes were made to distinguish between more general 'secular philosophies or worldviews' and explicit 'Humanism'. However, the openness to interpretation and obfuscation remained, as this local authority respondent indicated:

Our current syllabus includes 'other world views' which may be secular. We found the non-statutory NFRE very vague on 'secular philosophies such as Humanism', especially as 'Humanism' is a generic rather than specific term..... unless it was intended to mean 'the philosophy of the BHA' (in which case it would have been helpful if this had been explicitly stated). (Local authority)

This represents a fundamental problem with the general light-touch approach of the NFRE and, therefore, an issue in its own right. In terms of accurate reporting of survey returns, it presented a practical challenge, especially when coupled with the under- and over-reporting of some respondents. In order to more accurately established whether and to what extent a syllabus included Humanism as an explicit worldview or included secular philosophies more generally, analysis compared respondents' answer to the question *Does your locally agreed syllabus include Humanism (in some form)?* with their answers to various additional questions and any written comments. In most cases, and particularly where

⁴The original Excel file from BHA had 82 members on the list, all of whom were included in the survey. Many of these were no longer involved in SACREs however, and a majority of current SACRE members responded.

⁵ BHA and LEA respondents were able to provide multiple returns where areas shared the same syllabus or respondents were involved in more than one LA/SACRE.

⁶ These were LA representatives, including SACRE clerks and RE advisors, who could be contacted directly by email.

strong claims were made for the inclusion of Humanism, findings were corroborated by examining the agreed syllabus itself.

It remains the case, however, that errors may have occurred and the current results should be viewed as an approximation. Further close analysis of syllabuses and continuing discussion with those involved would lead to greater accuracy and clarification; this report contributes a starting point. It must also be stated that the sample of syllabuses used here should not be the basis for an extrapolation of what might be the national situation, as the areas examined mostly had Humanist representatives of one sort or another.

Analysis of respondents' answers to the question 'Does your locally agreed syllabus include Humanism (in some form)?' led to the development of 3 categories of 'Yes' answer:

1. Humanism is included extensively or strongly.
2. Humanism has an explicit but weak presence. For instance it is referred to in one or two key stages or in an appendix, or receives a tokenistic mention in the preamble.
3. Secular worldviews or non-religious perspectives are referred to.

The Tables on the following pages show responses to this question and also include respondents' answers to the questions:

Did the NFRE influence the inclusion of secular philosophies such as Humanism?

Were secular philosophies such as Humanism included in past syllabuses?

Are secular philosophies such as Humanism taught in schools in your local area?

The first Table also shows at which key stages Humanism was compulsory.

1. Humanism is included extensively or strongly.

11% of syllabuses (9/80)

	COMPULSORY AT KEY STAGE				NFRE influence	PAST inclusion	TAUGHT in schools
	1	2	3	4			
Brent LBC					No	Yes	Don't know
Camden LBC					No	Yes	Yes
Ealing LBC					No	Yes	Yes
Hammersmith & Fulham LBC	√	√	√		No	Yes	Don't know
Hounslow LBC	√	√	√	√	No	Yes	Yes
Islington LBC					No	Yes	Don't know
Suffolk CoC	√	√	√		Yes	Yes	Yes
Wandsworth LBC					No	Yes	Yes
Westminster CiC			√		Yes	Yes	Don't know

2. Humanism has an explicit but weak presence. For instance it is referred to in one or two key stages or in an appendix, or receives a tokenistic mention in the preamble.

38% of syllabuses (30/80)

	NFRE influence	PAST inclusion	TAUGHT in schools
Bournemouth BC Poole BC (Similar syllabus)	Yes	No	Yes
Bracknell BC Reading BC Slough BC West Berkshire Council Windsor & Maidenhead, RB Wokingham DC (Shared syllabus with minor differences in preamble)	Yes	No	Don't know
Bradford MDC	Yes	Yes	Yes
Devon CoC Plymouth CiC Torbay Council (shared syllabus)	Yes	Don't know	Yes
Dorset CoC	Yes	No	Yes
Durham CoC	Yes	X ⁷	Don't know
Essex CoC	No	Yes	Yes
Gloucestershire CoC	Yes	X	Don't know
Hackney LBC	No	No	No
Hampshire CoC Portsmouth CiC Southampton CiC (shared syllabus)	No	Yes	Don't know
Haringey LBC	No	Yes	Don't know
Havering LBC	Yes	X	Don't know

⁷ X = missing data.

Herefordshire Council	Yes	X	Don't know
Kent CoC	X	X	Yes
Kingston upon Thames, Royal Borough	Yes	No	Don't know
Manchester CiC	No	Yes	Don't know
Northumberland CoC	X	Don't know	Yes
Stoke on Trent CiC	No	X	Yes
Sutton LBC	Yes	Yes	Don't know
York CiC	No	Yes	Yes

Category 2 is very broad, with wide disparities. The range includes, for instance, Humanism as an option written into the programme of study (Essex), an appendix on Humanism (Hampshire), or a preamble welcoming Humanism but no, or very little, Humanist reference elsewhere in the syllabus (Kingston upon Thames, Reading). These syllabuses share recognition of Humanism as a distinct worldview.

Syllabuses which made *any* reference to Humanism were included in category 2, but it should be noted that this includes Kingston upon Thames and Kent, which merely quote the NFRE's phrase 'secular philosophies such as Humanism', and York, which includes Humanism in an annex. The BHA representatives in Reading and Berkshire, for instance, did not feel that the very low level of inclusion of Humanism in the six Berkshire syllabuses really constituted inclusion. So, there is much room for dispute and discussion about whether syllabuses in category 2 have sufficiently, or even really, included Humanism.

3. Secular worldviews or non-religious perspectives are referred to.

32% of syllabuses (26/80)

	NFRE influence	PAST inclusion	TAUGHT In schools
Bolton MBC	X	X	Yes
Cambridgeshire CoC	No	No	Don't know
Cheshire CoC	Yes	X	Yes
Croydon LBC	No	Don't know	Yes
East Sussex CoC	Yes	X	Yes
Harrow LBC	Yes	Yes	Don't know
Hertfordshire CoC	No	Yes	Don't know
Kingston upon Hull CiC NE Lincolnshire Council N Lincolnshire Council East Riding of Yorkshire Council (shared syllabus)	No	Yes	Don't know
Leeds CiC	Yes	No	Don't know
Lewisham LBC	Yes	X	Yes
Merton LBC	No	Yes	Don't know
Newham LBC	No	X	Yes
N Somerset Council Somerset CoC (shared syllabus)	Yes	X	Don't know
North Tyneside Council	X	X	X
Nottinghamshire CoC	X	X	X
Oxfordshire CoC	Yes	No	Don't know
Richmond Upon Thames LBC	Yes	X	Yes

Shropshire CoC Telford & Wrekin Council (shared syllabus)	No	Don't know	Don't know
South Tyneside MBC	Yes	No	Yes
Stockport MBC	Yes	Yes	Don't know
Warwickshire CoC	X	X	Yes

In this category, and again this is to speak very broadly, Humanism is implicitly included as part of an acceptance of non-religious, human experience, but is not given any recognition as a worldview in its own right.

SUMMARY	Number of syllabuses	
Humanism is included extensively or strongly.	9	11%
Humanism has an explicit but weak presence. For instance it is referred to in one or two key stages or in an appendix, or receives a tokenistic mention in the preamble.	30	38%
Secular worldviews or non-religious perspectives are referred to.	26	32%
Respondents report there is no reference to Humanism or to secular worldviews.	15	19%
Total number of syllabuses	80	100%

Overall, therefore, it was reported that there was *some* reference to 'secular philosophies such as Humanism' in 81% of the local authority syllabuses studied, and no reference in 19%.⁸

Humanism was compulsory (at some key stages) in 5% of the areas (4/80). A handful of areas anticipated Humanism would become compulsory at some key stages in the next revised syllabus.

2.2 The influence of the National Framework for RE

In order to get a sense of the motivation for including Humanism, the survey questionnaires to BHA and LA representatives asked whether the NFRE influenced the inclusion of Humanism and whether Humanism had been included in past syllabuses.

The NFRE was said to have had some influence on the inclusion of secular philosophies such as Humanism in 34% (27/80) of the LAs and to have been no influence in 33% (26/80) of the LAs. (Some respondents did not answer or did not know.)

⁸ It was not always possible to check respondents' reports that secular philosophies such as Humanism were not included in their local syllabus. In a small number of cases it may be that respondents judged a low presence as no presence.

Humanism had been included in some form in past syllabuses in 33% (26/80) of the LAs and had not been included in past syllabuses in 26% (21/80) of the LAs. (Several respondents did not know and some did not answer.)

Again, it is important to be cautious about these responses which may sometimes reflect personal views. It is striking, however, that where syllabuses had included Humanism strongly (category 1 responses) all 9 respondents also stated that Humanism had been included in the past and only 2 reported that the NFRE had influenced its inclusion. Overall, respondents' comments suggest that past inclusion, along with personalities in the local authority area, may have been more significant factors in achieving current successes than the NFRE. Those SACREs which have included Humanism at this early stage are necessarily unusual and ahead of the game. It is also notable that all but one of the syllabuses in category 1 are from London authorities.

However, a number of respondents stated that the NFRE was a significant factor in influencing Humanism's inclusion and it may be that the NFRE will have a greater influence in the future.

2.3 Humanism in schools

The survey also asked the BHA and LA respondents whether Humanism was being taught in schools in their area. Given that an important role of SACREs is to inform the local authority of what is happening with RE in schools, it is at least surprising that 55% of the respondents reported they did not know what was happening in schools. Thirty-two percent reported that Humanism was being taught in local schools and two respondents said it was not being taught.

Some respondents explained where Humanism was being taught and this was usually in a limited way – e.g. BHA speakers for 6th form, or it was being taught in one school in the area. One respondent reported that a teacher had taught 12 lessons on Humanism which had been well received.

Section 3: Including Humanism in RE Agreed Syllabuses

A number of the new agreed syllabuses were examined to find out how they were including Humanism. Syllabuses had been constructed in a variety of different ways:

- Syllabuses are developed from different theoretical bases.
- Syllabuses refer to different policy initiatives including, sometimes, earlier QCA and DfES or DFEE recommendations.
- All refer to Education Acts, but a small number of syllabuses also refer to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- There is a wide range of house styles: some syllabuses are short and simple while others are published to a high specification; some can be downloaded free from websites whereas others must be paid for; the presence of an overarching rationale, a detailed programme of study, appendices and glossaries of terms vary.

It was found that, because syllabuses are constructed differently, comparison is not straightforward. More importantly, those syllabuses which include Humanism can use quite different mechanisms for inclusion and it is not obvious, at this stage, that there is a best model for inclusion. It would be very important to find out, for instance, how different syllabuses are interpreted by RE teachers; how RE teachers respond to different syllabuses' house styles; and, ultimately, which methods of inclusion best promote take up by RE teachers.

A close analysis was made of a selection of the syllabuses, especially those which were reported as including Humanism more strongly. This section describes the distinctive features of the ways in which these syllabuses included Humanism. The section is divided into three categories:

- 3.1 The four syllabuses to include Humanism as a compulsory topic.
- 3.2 Examples of syllabuses which include Humanism as a recommended topic.
- 3.3 Examples of syllabuses which take a more general approach to non-religious views.

3.1. Humanism compulsory within the breadth of study

Humanism was included in the following LA agreed syllabuses and was compulsory at the following key stages:

Hammersmith and Fulham	Key Stages 1, 2 & 3
Hounslow	Key Stages 1, 2, 3 & 4
Suffolk	Key Stages 1, 2 & 3
Westminster	Key Stage 3

Hammersmith and Fulham 2003

The Hammersmith and Fulham syllabus includes Humanism strongly and was published in 2003, before the NFRE. Humanism is compulsory at Key Stages 1-3. It is made clear in the Section on Planning RE (p.10) that 'Schools must ensure that there is a breadth of coverage of each of the world religions and Humanism.' Humanism is included in a bulleted list along with the 6 principal religions.

Humanism is referred to prominently in the foreword. It is a clear component of the Key Stage 1-3 Core Content sections and the (brief) schemes of work for Key Stages 1, 2 and 3.

A significant weakness, a weakness common to many syllabuses and a fundamental issue, is that at Key Stage 4 a GCSE course is encouraged, but is not mandatory, and its one requirement is that it must reflect Christianity. Humanism is the one worldview not included in the section, Glossary of Terms. Perhaps because of its pre-NFRE publication date, the syllabus makes no reference to other, non-principal religions.

Hounslow 2006

Entitled 'Widening Horizons', the Hounslow syllabus was first published in 2001 and was reinstated in the same form in 2006: it therefore significantly pre-dates the NFRE. The syllabus includes Humanism strongly and positively: Humanism is compulsory at Key Stages 1 – 3 and potentially at Key Stage 4 (see below). The syllabus is developed to a high specification.

In the section 'Statutory Requirements in Hounslow' (p. 8) it is made clear that Humanism is compulsory. Here, the syllabus refers to its 'core areas':

- These are **Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam Judaism and Sikhism and Humanism** as an example of a non-theistic belief system. ... [and]
- Across the Key Stage each of the Core Areas should be drawn upon.

This paragraph then goes on to state:

The principle of equality of opportunity entails that pupils should be able to learn about religious traditions that may not be represented in their own school or encountered personally.

These principles are also said to apply at Key Stage 4: the BHA respondent reported that Humanism is compulsory at all four key stages. However, KS4 also encourages a GCSE course and it is not clear how *all* the core areas could be included in a GCSE course; therefore the compulsory inclusion of Humanism at KS4 appears to be more ambiguous.

The levels of attainment for assessment in RE refer consistently to 'religions and belief systems' (p. 19-29). The section, *Guidance on the World Faiths and Humanism*, includes a valuable description of Humanism as having equal standing with the six religions (p. 32). Humanism is also included in equal detail in the guidance for each key stage, and the variety of ideas suggested here is extremely valuable.

Perhaps because the syllabus is pre-NFRE other non-principal faiths are not described, but they are referred to in the Guidance section, under the title, 'Guidance on other faiths' (p. 33).

Suffolk 2006

The Suffolk syllabus, published in 2006, apparently gives the same status and parity to Humanism as the six principal religions. Other, non-principal religions are referred to briefly in the syllabus, but are not included in any detail or in the list of 6 religions and Humanism which appears, decoratively, at the bottom of many pages of the syllabus. At present, however, Humanism is the one worldview which is not described in detail in the programme of study.

The BHA respondent stated that Humanism was compulsory at Key Stages 1-3 but a close reading of the syllabus suggests the formal position is ambiguous and a school or teacher might be able to argue that Humanism is not compulsory. On the one hand, the syllabus states in the section, Breadth of Study:

In accordance with national legislation and to provide a broad and balanced curriculum, the Suffolk Agreed Syllabus *requires* that: ...

- secular philosophies such as Humanism should be studied. (my italics)
(p. 19)

The same wording is used for the six principal religions, suggesting Humanism has parity with them and is statutory; by contrast the syllabus states that other non-principal religions 'may' be studied. However, in the Programme of Study for Key Stages 1 and 2, Humanism appears to be merely optional, see Box 2.1.

Box 2.1: Suffolk syllabus: Breadth of study

KS1 includes:

- encountering examples from other religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam or Sikhism) possibly with a local presence and a secular world view as appropriate

and

- encountering secular world views and sharing their own beliefs, ideas and values

(pp. 23 & 24)

KS2 includes:

- a secular world view within any of the themes

and

- comparing religions with the world views of pupils, including, where appropriate, secular philosophies or religious traditions not otherwise being studied

(pp. 26 & 28)

Wording and themes for KS3 and KS4, such as in the following paragraph, imply that Humanism is to be included:

They apply their understanding of religious and philosophical beliefs, teachings and practices to a range of ultimate questions and ethical issues, with a focus on self-awareness, relationships, rights and responsibilities. They enquire into and explain some personal, philosophical, theological and cultural reasons for similarities and differences in religious beliefs and values, both within and between religions. (Suffolk syllabus, 2007, p. 29)

Overall, it does appear that Humanism is statutory at KS1-3 but it is sufficiently ambiguous to be open to misinterpretation.

Westminster 2006

Westminster City Council adopted the new Hampshire syllabus, *Living Difference*, but significantly amended it so that Humanism (and Baha'i) are compulsory at KS3 in Westminster (which they are not in Hampshire). The syllabus states that for KS3:

Not fewer than three religions will be studied, one of which must be Christianity. Units of work on the Bahá'í Faith, Humanism and interfaith dialogue must also be incorporated within this key stage.

(Content for KS3)

The Westminster syllabus also carries the advantage of a thematic approach at KS3 which alleviates the time-pressure of including a broader range of worldviews one by one. Unlike the Hampshire syllabus, Westminster includes substantial material on Humanism (and Baha'i) in an appendix, as well as examples of ways of constructing units of work on Humanism (and Baha'i). These factors may additionally encourage RE teachers to incorporate Humanism in their lessons, as may the fact that the unit of work required at KS3 has also been produced for teachers and distributed with the syllabus.

3.2. Humanism as a recommended subject

The following are examples of syllabuses where Humanism was included, and sometimes strongly represented, but was not compulsory.

Brent 2002

The Brent syllabus was published in July 2002, well before the NFRE, but is highly sensitive to the potential range of belief systems in the UK and its own locality. In its introduction it states that RE should encourage pupils to:

Understand and respect different theistic and non-theistic religious traditions as well as other ethical traditions (such as Humanism) by exploring issues within and between them. (p. 5)

The syllabus' introduction also makes some further lengthy and interesting statements about the worldviews in the UK and in the Brent locality, encouraging and justifying their inclusion in Religious Education (see Box 2.2).

The syllabus states that, "During key stages 3 and 4 pupils learn about theistic and non-theistic religions and other spiritual and ethical traditions in the broader context of history, culture and interfaith dialogue." Humanism is one of several additional units for KS3, of which three must be chosen.

The syllabus includes a glossary for the Baha'i religion but not for Humanism; however it also includes a substantial unit on Humanism which would be useful for teachers.

Camden 1998

The Camden syllabus was adopted from the Tower Hamlets syllabus of 1995/6 with slight modifications and was approved in 1998. Presumably because of its early date, there is no reference to non-principal religions but Humanism features strongly through Key Stages 1-3, although it is very clear that it is only optional.

At the outset, it mentions a concern that all children are valued whatever their faith or none (p. 3). Each Key Stage has a core study which must be taught to fulfil legal requirements but, like Essex, it allows some flexibility so that Humanism can be included as an option at KS1-3.

In the Programme of Study for each of KS1 – 3, Humanism is included in equal detail to the six religions and alongside them in a grid framework format. This would help to make Humanism accessible to teachers and give it some parity and status with the principal religions. However, unlike the six principal religions, Humanism is clearly merely optional throughout and, because it is not included in the Schemes of Work section, it does not receive detailed examination which would make it less accessible to teachers.

Box 2.2: Brent syllabus

The principal religious traditions in Great Britain besides Christianity are generally understood to be Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. All of these religious communities are represented in The London Borough of Brent. In addition there are significant numbers of Rastafarians and there are also Baha'is, Jains and Zoroastrians.

While students are required to study units on Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism at Key Stages 2 and 3, material is included from these and other traditions in the thematic units. At Key Stage 3 students may also be taught systematic units on the Baha'i faith, Buddhism, Humanism or Sikhism. However, it is important that teachers are aware that they may introduce material from other traditions into the thematic units in order to take into account traditions with smaller numbers of adherents but with significant teachings and/or to include the experiences of students in their classroom. There is also the provision for teachers to design their own unit at Key Stage 3, drawing on the requirements specified in the programme of study. They may wish to design a systematic unit on a tradition not already detailed, e.g. Rastafarianism.

In Brent the majority of students are active members of religious communities. There is also a minority of students who do not come from a religious background but who, nevertheless, bring with them developing beliefs, values and ethical frameworks. There are differences in the pupils' range of experience and contact with religious practices. There is diversity within traditions as well as between them. Teachers need to take account of this diversity of beliefs and of students' personal development.

One of the aims of the Brent syllabus is to help students to live peacefully in a pluralist society where there are often conflicting views. There are times when this diversity may produce friction due to conflicting truth claims or different ways of following the same tradition. The presence of debate gives teachers the opportunity to teach students how to manage such disputes constructively and calmly while maintaining the integrity of their own beliefs. Indeed, it is the role of religious education to provide opportunities for structured discussion and for students to learn reasoned argument where they can listen to the views of others and express their own coherently.

In the context of this syllabus the term 'faith' is used to refer to that which motivates people, shapes the way they live, informs their choices and without which it would be difficult to carry on living. Teachers need to

recognise that faith develops and changes through people's lives in response to questions posed and life experiences. For many their faith and beliefs are clearly identified with a named religious or ethical system and they may belong to its community, participating fully or maybe only occasionally. Others may not find it so easy to identify their beliefs and faith with an existing organisation. Some may be on a search for a community of believers with which to identify. The investigation and understanding of this whole range of beliefs, of faith, of ways of belonging and of practice is at the core of this syllabus.

(Brent Syllabus 2002, Introduction pp. 6-7.)

Ealing 2007

The Ealing syllabus, *'Marriage of Heaven and Earth'*, is dated January 2007 and is in draft form. The syllabus is unusual in including pictures, stories and explanations of aspects of worldviews, and is written in an engaging style. It would function well as a teacher friendly resource.

The preamble refers to 'religious and ethical beliefs, world views, and religions and other beliefs' (p. 6). The syllabus also refers to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (p. 7) and to census statistics on non-religious children and families (p. 12). The syllabus demonstrates sensitivity to families with eclectic beliefs and non-theistic life-stances, including references to Buddhism, Humanism, the BHA and the National Secular Society (p. 14). In its section on the statutory requirements for RE it makes the point that, while the law does not require Humanism be included:

[T]he non-statutory National Framework recognises the need for a broad and balanced approach and recommends that, where appropriate, there should be opportunities for all pupils to study secular philosophies such as Humanism.

The syllabus distinguishes thematic and systematic approaches and suggests a mix of these is most appropriate (p. 13). The syllabus includes core and optional units and the non-religious elements are in the optional units. The syllabus also states that Humanism is to be included 'where appropriate' (p. 12) and in reality it appears chiefly at KS3. KS1 and 2 make slight references to Humanism, including the golden rule, but KS3 includes an appendix of excellent exemplar schemes of work which substantially include Humanism (and Baha'i) (p. 25). There is also a set of Key Concepts for Humanism (and Baha'i).

Essex 2003

The Essex syllabus was published for use in September 2003 and, while it was therefore not influenced by the NFRE, it does state that it was influenced by QCA non-statutory guidance on RE (p. 6.16). It does not include non-principal religions.

Humanism is appended to the end of Section 1 where it receives strong support: "There is a strong educational argument ... for enabling pupils to learn about secular Humanism as part of their RE programme" (p. 1.6). This section also refers to the importance of pupils understanding that "beliefs, values and morality do not have to be built upon religious world views" and that it is "acknowledged that the majority of pupils in English schools do not come from overtly religious backgrounds" (p. 1.6).

The syllabus recommends that Humanism is incorporated particularly at KS2 and 3 and it also provides further detail on Humanism in an appendix 'Humanism summary for teachers' (p. 6.4), which is apparently a BHA 2000 document. This is not included with the religious glossaries but in a section contributed by the local Humanist group.

Importantly, the syllabus clearly establishes a degree of flexibility in the programme of study:

This enables schools to 'free up' some of the time allocated for RE in order to explore aspects of religion not prescribed in the programme of study ... It also means that in addition to learning about Christianity and other great world faiths, time can be found to introduce pupils to aspects of secular Humanism. (p. 1.6)

This flexibility in approach may mean Essex is better able to encourage teachers to provide opportunities for Humanism than some other authorities.

KS4 provision refers to a 1996 statutory requirement to follow an accredited course that includes religion as a substantial component. Again this raises the problem of GCSEs and other accredited courses being referred to without specific reference to required content beyond religion.

Hampshire 2004

The syllabus '*Living Difference*' was published in July 2004, simultaneously with the publication of the NFRE (p. 9), and is the shared agreed syllabus for Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton. This syllabus has also been adapted for use in Westminster (see above). The legal basis for the syllabus mentions the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (pp. 7-8). The syllabus takes as its theoretical basis the recognition and response to difference and a conceptual approach to worldviews which includes Humanism in one of its three sets of concepts.

Humanism is included inconsistently and is not explicitly encouraged. Although Section 4 includes Humanist concepts and the syllabus allows considerable flexibility in terms of inclusion of world views, it is difficult to see where Humanism could be included at the key stages because the recommended content refers to the principal religions only, and appears to already be too full to admit Humanism. KS3 does suggest some optional "supplementary units of work": 'Inspirational Figures', which includes non-religious figures; and 'Religion and Change', which refers to "secularisation" (pp. 97-98). KS4 refers to relating work to the 'secular context'. These links are not strong. The way in which Humanism is included in the conceptual framework is unhelpful to the status and parity of Humanism.

Other non-principal religions are not mentioned in the syllabus.

Wandsworth 2006

The Wandsworth syllabus was published in September 2006 and, although the BHA respondent reported that the NFRE was not influential, the preamble makes strong reference to the NFRE and acknowledges its influence.

The syllabus has distinct sections with attractive, glossy dividers decorated with the symbols for the six principal religions, as well as Baha'i and Humanism, and

with a selection of photographs representing each of the religions, though not Humanism. The syllabus is sensitive throughout to non-principal religions and to secular worldviews.

The syllabus contextualises RE within the goals of citizenship which encourages a wider focus on the global and not just local; sensitivity to others and to combating prejudice; and recognition of the need to understand your own and others' experience of religion in the world.

Humanism is encouraged at KS1, 2 and 3 but is not compulsory:

In addition ... schools may also, as appropriate, allow for some study of another religion represented in the school/locality (e.g. Baha'i) and/or a secular world view such as Humanism. (p. 35)

A GCSE RS short or full course including Christianity and at least one other principal religion is recommended for KS4.

There are some weaker aspects to this syllabus. The syllabus includes additional support materials which refer to a naming ceremony and once to atheists but otherwise are chiefly about the six principal religions. Achievement and attainment examples are only given for the six religions. The Humanism glossary and terms are treated differently to the 6 principal religions.

Dorset 2005

Dorset's syllabus refers to the NFRE and to other world views. At KS1 it refers to the need to recognise the world views of pupils and, from KS3, refers more specifically to the option of including, "The world views of pupils, including, where appropriate, secular philosophies." It includes a page of guidance on Humanism and also states "opportunities to consider the insights of secular and other world philosophies to ultimate questions could begin to feature from KS2 onwards and would be more fully developed at KS3 and 14-19" (p. 21). It argues for and thus enables flexibility through teachers/schools being encouraged to design units of study at KS3 (p. 25).

Poole and Bournemouth 2005

Poole and Bournemouth share a similar syllabus. Both refer to the NFRE and include in the Breadth of Study for KS3, along with the study of specific religions:

(b) The world views of pupils, including, where appropriate, secular philosophies. (p. 61)

KS3 is presented thematically: The existence and nature of God; Everybody Hurts; What's Next; Equality; Whose world. Each theme contains specific reference to Humanism and information on what to include (pp. 70, 73, 76, 80, 86).

Reading 2006

Reading is one of 6 Berkshire councils which all use the same syllabus with variations in the foreword or preamble. Humanism is briefly referred to at KS2 and KS4 and ethical themes at KS3 lend themselves to the inclusion of Humanism.

The Reading syllabus foreword acknowledges use of the "excellent" NFRE and states:

For the first time ... the syllabus has the flexibility to include contributions from other faiths and also a Humanist perspective: additional appendices on Baha'i Faith and Humanism are in development and will be a welcome addition to this document when they are produced.

Although the Reading syllabus' foreword states it welcomes the Humanist appendices, local Humanists report they have not yet been able to get these accepted and, apparently, none of the other 5 syllabuses refers to or welcomes these appendices and their forewords make no mention of Humanism or Baha'i.

Sutton 2006.

Sutton's syllabus acknowledges the NFRE and its reference to 'secular philosophies such as Humanism' and states:

This revised Agreed syllabus still continues to offer the planning suggestions on 'Human experience' but also suggests that schools look closely at their current plans for RE based on the syllabus in order to see where opportunities might occur for more in depth study of some secular philosophies/world views. It is understood that the current syllabus approach is through the learning about and from religion and the restraints of this approach means that at this point only links can be made as no specific programmes of study are planned to deal with non-religious life stances. (p. 16)

Guidance for Humanism at KS1-3 is in the form of non-religious views on 'Human Experience' although Humanism is explained in a section called, 'Humanism in a Nutshell'.

3.3. A general approach to secular philosophies

Many of the syllabuses in category 3 make a fairly fleeting reference to secular philosophies or non-religious views which constitutes a gesture of acknowledgement and little more. The following two syllabuses are examples of those which include secular philosophies in general and fairly strongly, but do not refer explicitly to Humanism as a world view.

Hull 2005

Hull's syllabus is unusual and interesting in referring throughout each key stage, including pre-school, to 'other world views'. 'World Views' is included in each of the syllabus' Programme of Study key stage grids, along with a distinctive symbol of the world. However, there is no specific reference to Humanism apart from one mention of the Happy Humanist symbol. In the absence of Humanism, a problem lies in the simplicity of the concepts and ideas included under 'World Views'. The syllabus is inclusive of Humanism but lacks its conceptual depth and substance. The syllabus lifts much of its rubric from the NFRE but follows an unusual – perhaps unique – path in its interpretation, by including what it calls 'World Views' as one of seven principal traditions, alongside the six commonly used religious faiths. It demonstrates that a non-specific approach to secular philosophies can be taken, but raises questions about whether it is possible to achieve depth and rigour, particularly for AT1 (knowledge about 'religions'), without the explicit inclusion of Humanism.

Merton 2002.

The Merton syllabus, published before the NFRE, states teachers are free to explore non-theistic life stances such as Humanism (p. 9) and recognises pupils can be non-religious (p. 10). It makes reference to philosophy and ethics but only has potential for Humanism at KS3, which has optional units of study enabling a teacher to choose more atheistic issues (p. 90), although there is no specific unit on Humanism. The inclusion of ethical issues, more usually at KS3 or KS4, happens in other syllabuses as well and this may be a method for including Humanism in a less obtrusive, implicit way.

Summary

The general impression from this survey is that SACREs are acknowledging the NFRE but they are responding differently both in the extent and manner in which they follow the guidance. The recent Ofsted report, *Making sense of religion*, concludes that Agreed Syllabus Conferences are responding differently and inconsistently to the NFRE, often picking certain elements and ignoring others so that, 'Overall, the picture was one of considerable inconsistency' and also noting that, 'Partial adoption of the Framework often leads to confusion.'⁹

The majority of the syllabuses seen for this survey have included 'secular philosophies such as Humanism'. However, a small number of SACREs have used the NFRE extensively but left out its reference to 'secular philosophies such as Humanism'. The small number of syllabuses which do include Humanism as a compulsory subject demonstrate that this is a realisable goal.

Where Humanism is explicitly included in a syllabus it is more usually as a recommended topic, and therefore depends on teachers choosing to teach it. The phrase 'secular philosophies such as Humanism' has been interpreted across a broad range, from Humanism as the BHA worldview or belief system to a general reference to 'human experience'.

Without looking closely at a syllabus, it is difficult to be precise about what inclusion of Humanism means, and even close examination can still leave some aspects open to interpretation and debate.

A number of the survey responses from local authority representatives referred to their local syllabuses including secular philosophies in a general way, suggesting that in some places Humanism will be tolerated but not given explicit, positive and equal recognition. As two LA respondents stated:

[Humanism is] not included explicitly but not discouraged and certainly done in some secondary schools. [LA respondent]

We have always encouraged inclusion of secular world views but have not made it explicit in the content. [LA respondent]

Several syllabuses are constructed thematically which seems to provide greater opportunity for breadth of views. The thematic approach may be helpful to the inclusion of Humanism in an increasingly cramped syllabus. It may be that

⁹ Ofsted, 2007, *Making sense of religion: A report on religious education in schools and the impact of locally agreed syllabuses*, www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070045.

including Humanism implicitly, as part of a thematic approach could be successful, especially, as the following local authority respondent comments below, if the syllabus is organised along more conceptual rather than worldview lines:

Although Awareness, Mystery and Value (AMV) does not contain explicit references to Humanism, non-religious examples are a fundamental part of every phase of the syllabus, as we have added the crucial words 'and human experience' to Attainment Target 2 (Learning from religion...). In addition, all the programmes of study contain learning opportunity statements which are deliberately phrased to be open to non-religious as well as religious views and examples. ... I'm sure you won't miss the way in which many syllabuses reflect the dimensions of RE that go beyond specific religions. AMV, for example, is built on the six areas of enquiry (also included in the Non-Statutory National Framework for RE, p. 36) that are open to non-religious as well as religious sources and examples. [LA respondent]

However, the thematic route would need to be treated with caution. There is a risk that it could exclude explicit reference to AT1 content on Humanism as a worldview or belief system and, without this, those who are fearful or suspicious of Humanism, would continue to lack knowledge of what it is and of the contribution it can make to religious education. There is a sense across many of the BHA returns that people involved in religious education often simply do not know what Humanism is. Providing content materials for teachers, who may lack confidence in teaching this new topic, may prove as effective to inclusion as making Humanism compulsory.

The need to develop new syllabus constructions and formats is probably one of the most crucial but also one of the most challenging aspects of this discussion. It is not enough to tolerate or even to welcome Humanism: syllabuses need to be constructed in such a way that Humanism as a belief system can be included positively and with parity with other worldviews. A number of existing agreed syllabuses demonstrate ways of achieving this; their approaches should be disseminated and shared as widely as possible.

Section 4: Issues raised by BHA respondents

The survey questionnaire sent to BHA SACRE representatives asked them to write about their perceptions of the barriers and facilitators to inclusion of Humanism in agreed syllabuses. These responses, and some of their additional comments, were collected and analysed to draw out common themes among the issues they raised.

The majority of the BHA respondents' comments are included in an appendix, grouped in boxes linked to the issues described and discussed in this section of the report.

4.1 Circular 1/94

Circular 1/94 was referred to by several respondents as a barrier to inclusion of Humanism in syllabuses. In some cases C1/94 had led to the BHA representative being denied their pre-circular position as a full member of the SACRE. It continues to be used to endorse the view among many (religious) SACRE members (and others) that legislation disallows Humanism in the syllabus, despite the NFRE.

The biggest barrier continues to be the assumption of religious domination of SACRE membership that can refer to the statutory requirements for inclusion of information about major religions whenever other possibilities are suggested.

See Box 3.1.

Greater clarity needs be established at government policy level about the position of the non-statutory NFRE in relation to C1/94 and this legal advice should be disseminated to SACREs and LAs. Better, the circular should be rewritten to make clear that, in accordance with subsequent legislation against religious discrimination (including the Human Rights Act) Humanists should be included in SACRE and ASC membership and Humanism in syllabuses.

The recent Ofsted publication, *Making sense of religion*, although an extremely helpful document, fails to fully recognise the implications of C1/94. This document states that SACREs are valuable in representing the diversity of local communities and notes this may be why very few parents choose to withdraw their children from RE: this 'may reflect the confidence of those of faith *or no faith* [my italics] in a curriculum that has been "agreed" by their representatives.¹⁰ Of course, C1/94 means that those of 'no faith' are *not* specifically represented on the majority of SACREs.

4.2 SACREs and democracy

Not only does Circular 1/94 advise that Humanists should not have full membership, but some SACREs appear to be undemocratic and unrepresentative in additional ways that are not helpful to Humanists. The membership was often described by respondents as elderly, demographically unrepresentative, and non-inclusive.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 36.

Very elderly representatives from some faiths (the oldest member of our SACRE is 96!)

I am the only member who has no vote, but because of the census figures & the national guidelines I get a fair hearing when I speak. Census results (Christianity 76%, "no religion" 13%, all others less than 1% each).

The infrequency of SACRE meetings seems to militate against the democratic inclusion of all voices, and especially the inclusion of innovative voices, particularly when coupled with SACREs' inherent conservatism and inertia.

My main task at the moment [is] to persuade the SACRE to adopt a broader membership by coopting, for example, a Muslim and a Buddhist representative to the SACRE. Its present membership is drawn from a narrow range of faiths and is being perpetuated. For example, the Jewish representative rarely comes to meetings but is still a member. I would support the notion that missing, say, three consecutive meetings constitutes resignation.

The syllabus is sometimes written by a consultant which, again, in some cases was preventing the inclusion of all voices and excluding the Humanist voice.

I have received no information about who is writing the new syllabus.

It was explained at the last meeting that members would have no input into the new syllabus. I am completely in the dark.

One respondent asked, pertinently, whether *any* SACRE permitted voting.

See Box 3.2. This is a particularly interesting area and the boxed comments are all relevant, important and worrying.

4.3 The attitude of SACRE members to Humanism and Humanists

The legal situation encourages a general conservatism, particularly, as two respondents noted, in the face of a tendency to inertia on SACREs. Humanists sometimes encounter open hostility and bigotry from some religious SACRE members and from some members of the local religious communities. Similarly, respondents referred to difficulties with RE advisers and with consultants responsible for writing the syllabus, where consultants were used for this purpose.

One or more ASC members ... believe that it is their moral duty to resist the encroachment of Humanism...

See Box 3.3.

However, it must be made clear that a number of respondents reported they received considerable support from some, including religious, SACRE members. Many respondents also reported receiving valuable support from RE advisers or other education professionals, and occasionally from consultant-authors of syllabuses or, in one case, a syllabus writing group.

An excellent RE advisor for the County. A generally 'open-minded' SACRE with some exceptions.

See Box 3.4.

In summary, and in a sense obviously:

In my experience there always is one key person (possibly RE coordinator) who is overseeing the revision process. If they are not sympathetic to open and objective education and an inclusive agenda it would be very difficult to succeed in having Humanism included.

4.4 The need to compromise

As a consequence perhaps, a large number of BHA SACRE members reported that greater progress can be made if they are known in some alternative capacity (e.g HMI, head teacher, or Union representative), if they are 'helpful', and if they are not strident. BHA representatives often need to compromise or be accommodating to a far greater extent than representatives of other non-Christian worldviews, which may mean they cannot be as strong an advocate for the inclusion of Humanism as they would like. Similarly several respondents referred to the need to take what one called a 'neutral' stance with regard to different faith positions, taking care to be inclusive, and not to cause friction which may potentially lead to complete rejection.

I was coopted to the SACRE not because I am a Humanist but because of my experience as an HMI and as a former district inspector for [the county]. Some of this resistance may go once I become a more familiar face and am seen to be 'reasonable'.

See Box 3.5.

4.5 Personal commitment and challenge for BHA SACRE representatives

Many of the BHA members demonstrate that a considerable commitment and strength of character is demanded. The story below is no doubt a common one.

Following my address to SACRE the members noted:

"Circular 1/94 'Religious Education and Collective Worship' stated that the inclusion of representatives of belief systems such as Humanism, which do not amount to a religion or religious denomination, on Committee A of an Agreed Syllabus Conference or Group 1 of a SACRE would be contrary to legislation."

Members divided into the 4 groups to consider the issue and voted:

Group 1 ... Against (but that a Humanist be invited to attend as an observer and input, through the Chair, if the need arose)

Group 2 ... Against (but as above)

Group 3 ... Against (but as above)

Group 4 ... For

Resolved i) a member of BHA shouldn't be co-opted onto the SACRE

ii) a member of BHA should be invited in capacity of observer.

My sitting in on Group A's discussions has recently been challenged on legal, not personal, grounds. I asked for this to be discussed by full SACRE and found pretty universal support for the regulations being changed because they patently

impeded the functioning of SACRE. My SACRE will probably support the removal of restrictions on the participation of Humanists.

This level of personal commitment is challenging, however. Humanist SACRE representatives need to be emotionally resilient in the face of constant rejection, and highly creative in thinking of ways to engage those involved. They need to have excellent interpersonal skills of persuasion and tolerance, which must be demanding and exhausting.

The syllabus is up for review this year and I hope to have the energy and time to help improve it. I hope that nobody tries to take it in a backwards direction regarding inclusivity, but that is always a risk and we need to remain vigilant.

See Box 3.6.

4.6 The challenge of aligning Humanism with a religious framework

Because Humanism is not a religion, there is a more complex issue around the difficulty of aligning Humanism with the pre-existing religious context, or framework, of Religious Education syllabuses. Humanism, and the constituent features of Humanism such as atheism, need to be aligned with the presumption of religious concepts, beliefs and values statements, and phenomena, such as places of worship, artefacts, festivals and so on. Several respondents referred to the difficulty of presenting Humanism phenomenologically, and the reluctance, in some cases, for non-Humanists to even try.

A teacher member of our SACRE complained that he didn't know how Humanism and secular world views could be included in RE, because we don't have the rituals and festivals to hang lessons on that the religions do. He waved aside the offer of a leaflet about the "Why Atheism?" DVD.

On the other hand, however, Humanism is at least an identifiable worldview, with a set of beliefs and a logo, which, as one or two pointed out, makes Humanism easier to accommodate within the existing framework than general atheism, secular philosophy or human experience.

Humanism is in fact quite easy to fit into at least some of the topics taught in RE, has a distinctive view of some issues commonly studied - and isn't necessarily very time-consuming to teach.

See Box 3.7

4.7 Methods for breaking through the barriers to inclusion

A large number of BHA members referred to a variety of methods for trying to find routes for Humanism into the syllabus, to chip away at the barriers, or to undermine the resistance.

4.7.1 Producing Humanist materials for syllabuses or teacher guides

A frequent and presumably crucial method for raising awareness of Humanism and encouraging its teaching was for the BHA member themselves, or with colleagues, to produce Humanist materials for syllabus appendices or for teaching

resources. There is, no doubt, a genuine lack of knowledge about Humanism on the part of SACRE members, educators, teachers and others involved in Religious Education. A number of respondents reported that the lack of resources for teaching Humanism was a major challenge. Submitting any materials to SACREs, and especially units of work for syllabus appendices, may be especially helpful in raising awareness among SACRE members. Providing resource materials would be extremely helpful to teachers. Consequently, several respondents were actively producing resources for their area, such as appendices to syllabus or material for websites.

KS1 & 2. Major obstacles are time in class and lack of phenomenology in Humanism. Christianity and the other 5 religions are given priority. Am trying to get Humanism included even if it is for only a part 'unit' (unit = at least half term's work). May have to produce our own unit for Humanism.

There is a risk, however, of numerous areas re-inventing the wheel, and it would presumably be helpful for BHA members to find some way of sharing their resources. One respondent suggested the BHA should produce a syllabus of its own. Two respondents referred to the value of the BHA website: it seems surprising more did not refer to this.

See Box 3.8.

4.7.2 Further suggestions for breaking through

Aside from producing Humanist resources, respondents suggested further alternative methods for encouraging Humanism in RE which included:

- working toward a freeing up of the syllabus to make space for a variety of worldviews beyond the 'big six' to be included;
- working toward a thematic approach to the syllabus to allow in Humanism within broader topics;
- giving talks, locally and nationally, about Humanism and education.

See Box 3.9.

4.8 Teachers' attitudes and the relationship with schools

A number of respondents felt that teachers were unhelpful, uninterested, lacked knowledge or were hostile to Humanism.

The impression I get as a Humanist (and as a parent) is Schools RE departments/ teachers don't want to include Humanism and their tactic seems to be to ignore it in the hope that it will go away.

We have a very good set of guidance notes and a well thought out agreed syllabus for Humanism. How it will be dealt with in the classroom by RE teachers - who can say?

Respondents also pointed to difficulties with getting Humanism included in already very full RE schemes of work which must, of course, place greatest emphasis on Christianity and then the five principal religions. It was also felt to be very important to provide teachers with information about Humanism.

A general preference for changing things as little as possible, in view of teachers' busy lives.

I think some RE teachers accept that, since many pupils are non-believers, they should include something secular. BUT Lack of teacher knowledge of Humanism.

A few respondents, as above, pointed out that teachers are often all too familiar with the fact that pupils are not always enthusiastically religious, and it must be emphasised that, although many of the respondents found teachers unhelpful, a similar number had found the opposite and that teachers were helpful in promoting the inclusion of Humanism.

One teacher reported she had done 12 lessons on Humanism and they had gone down very well.

See Box 3.10.

4.9 The relationship between SACRE Humanists and schools

RE needs to wake up to Humanism, but perhaps SACRE Humanists (and SACREs generally) also need to be more responsive to education and educational needs. Only a few respondents seemed to put this view and, as was noted in Section 1 above, it was surprising how many SACRE Humanists did not know whether Humanism was being taught in their local schools. It might be helpful if SACRE Humanists and local Humanist groups could provide informed speakers for ITT, INSET and other teacher events, as well as speaking more with children and young people and their families. If SACREs are out of touch with teachers and professional practitioners, this may also mean that teachers pay little attention to the SACRE/local authority's syllabus.

See Box 3.11.

4.10 The influence of the Non-statutory National Framework for RE

As stated in Section 1 of this report, about a third of the respondents thought the NFRE was a significant factor in the inclusion of Humanism in syllabuses and another third thought it was not. Some SACREs have a long history of inclusion which was almost certainly a major facilitator in increasing Humanism's presence in those syllabuses. However, for those areas which do not have such a history, the NFRE may be more significant as a facilitator in the future.

The National Framework is proving a very useful support and is stimulating increased presentation in KS3. Hitherto Humanism has been included as optional in KS3. It will probably be included on merit in next Syllabus.

However, one respondent pointed out that the NFRE is not specific about the inclusion of Humanism, and some SACREs are clearly choosing to ignore it which, of course, is perfectly possible when the Framework is not statutory.

It is not included, and the references in the QCA document to non religious belief systems were deleted in the [our] Agreed Syllabus. In other respects [our] syllabus follows the QCA document quite closely.

See Box 3.12

4.11 Linking with other government education policies

Linking with the government's Every Child Matters policy agenda

Some respondents cited statistics, both national and local, about the non-religious status of the population, including children and their families. Several respondents referred to the importance of persuading SACRE members and teachers of the importance of including *all* children in RE by providing information about non-religious beliefs and values. This argument is particularly important in the light of the government's *Every Child Matters* policy agenda. *Every Child Matters*¹¹ can be used to argue for the necessity of including *all* children meaningfully in all aspects of the curriculum and the BHA should make more of this in their argument for inclusivity. *Every Child Matters* bases its case on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (enshrined in the 1989 and 2004 Children Acts and the 2002 Education Act), which is cited in some locally agreed syllabuses but, notably, not in the NFRE.

Linking with citizenship and diversity, and philosophy

Similarly, several respondents referred to the potential of citizenship and philosophy as facilitators to including Humanism in schools. This approach should be treated with some caution, however, as it should be recognised that Citizenship Education (CE), like Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Philosophy, are different curriculum subjects to Religious Education. Arguing for Humanism to be included through CE, PSHE or Philosophy is, in a sense, to argue for it *not* being included in RE. However, it would be important to cite the arguments in the recently published *Diversity and Citizenship*¹² for wider inclusion and voice.

See Box 3.13.

4.12 Change and the role of the BHA

Only one respondent pointed to the problem of the costs of changing the syllabus.

In a syllabus with little or no Humanist content the question of the financial cost and effort involved in making major changes is a barrier.

Others recognised the importance of gradual change. It appeared to be helpful to build on a history of inclusion. Change may have to be seen as a gradual process with, perhaps, the inclusion of a general reference to other, non-religious beliefs coming before the full acceptance of Humanism and non-religious worldviews. Only one respondent referred to the need for a greater national steer:

¹¹ Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2005) *Every Child Matters: change for children website*. Available online at: <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/aims/> (accessed 08.05.07).

¹² Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2007) *Curriculum Review: Diversity and Citizenship*, http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/DfES_Diversity&Citizenship_doc.pdf (accessed 03.04.07).

Although I do not feel a lack of support from the BHA; there is too small a National lead. Even our own forums are slow, of poor structure and ineffective in spreading ideas.

However, the BHA will need to consider the cost of supporting change. Resources, support for teachers and support for the BHA members involved in fighting for Humanism on SACREs need to be seriously considered to take full advantage of the opportunity the NFRE offers.

APPENDIX 1: Survey questionnaire to BHA members on SACREs

The introduction of 'secular philosophies such as Humanism' in the 2004 National Framework for Religious Education.

An investigation of take-up of Humanism in Locally Agreed Syllabuses for Religious Education

**British Humanist Association Survey Questionnaire
January 2007**

1	Your name.	
2	Your Local Authority.	
3	Your relationship with the SACRE (e.g. co-optee, observer or full member).	
4	Your telephone number(s) if you are willing for me to interview you (confidentially) as part of this study.	

5	In which year was your most recent locally Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education published?	DATE
6	Does your locally agreed syllabus include Humanism (in some form)?	PLEASE DELETE AS APPROPRIATE YES /NO

If your answer to question 6 is YES, please answer questions 7 - 11 and ignore questions 12 - 18.

If your answer to question 6 is NO, please ignore questions 7 - 11 and go to questions 12 - 18.

7	Was Humanism included in response to the 2004 National Framework for RE?	PLEASE DELETE AS APPROPRIATE YES /NO
8	If not, why were they included?	PLEASE EXPLAIN
9	Was Humanism ever included in your locally Agreed Syllabus in the past?	PLEASE DELETE AS APPROPRIATE YES NO DON'T KNOW

10	At which Key Stages is Humanism included? PLEASE PUT A TICK OR X IN THE RELEVANT BOXES:	KS1	
		KS2	
		KS3	
		14-19	
11	At which Key Stages is Humanism compulsory (rather than optional)? PLEASE PUT A TICK OR X IN THE RELEVANT BOXES:	KS1	
		KS2	
		KS3	
		14-19	

If your answer to question 6 was NO:			
12	Will your locally Agreed Syllabus include Humanism when it is next revised?	PLEASE DELETE AS APPROPRIATE YES NO DON'T KNOW	
13	When is your new, revised syllabus expected to be published?	DATE	
14	If Humanism is to be included in the revised syllabus, is this in response to the 2004 National Framework for RE?	PLEASE DELETE AS APPROPRIATE YES NO NOT APPLICABLE	
15	If not, why are they being included?	PLEASE EXPLAIN	
16	Was Humanism ever included in your locally Agreed Syllabus in the past?	PLEASE DELETE AS APPROPRIATE YES NO DON'T KNOW	
17	At which Key Stages will Humanism be included? PLEASE PUT A TICK OR X IN THE RELEVANT BOXES:	KS1	
		KS2	
		KS3	
		14-19	
18	At which Key Stages will Humanism be compulsory (rather than optional)? PLEASE PUT A TICK OR X IN THE RELEVANT BOXES:	KS1	
		KS2	
		KS3	
		14-19	
19	Have any schools in your local authority area included Humanism in RE lessons?	PLEASE DELETE AS APPROPRIATE YES NO DON'T KNOW	

For questions 20 and 21 below, please feel free to answer as you wish, for instance with lists of key points or as a description of your experience. Please indicate if you feel it would be easier to explain the details in a telephone conversation but, if you do this, please also write a short summary of the key points here. Please continue on extra sheets of paper if necessary.

20	From your experience of the process of including – or trying to include - Humanism in your locally Agreed Syllabus, what are the main barriers and facilitators to achieving this?
----	--

Barriers

Facilitators

21	Please add below any other comments you want to share about how Humanism is treated in your local syllabus.
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22	<p>I want to collect those Agreed Syllabuses which have included secular philosophies such as Humanism in order to compare the ways in which they are doing this. If your local authority has published a syllabus that includes Humanism – or plans to do so in 2007 – please would you let me know how I could obtain a copy.</p> <p>If your Agreed Syllabus is/will be freely available on a website, please would you write the web address here:</p> <p>If your Agreed Syllabus is not freely available on a website, please would you let me know how I can obtain it, including whether it would be possible for you to send me a copy:</p>
----	---

Please return the completed questionnaire directly to me, through my email address, or by post, via the British Humanist Association, by 12th February 2007. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries about this study.

**Thank you very much for your help with this research.
Dr Jacqueline Watson**

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Jacqueline.watson@uea.ac.uk**

APPENDIX 2: Survey questionnaire to LA representatives.

An investigation of take-up of secular philosophies such as Humanism in Agreed Syllabuses for Religious Education in response to the 2004 National Framework for Religious Education

Please answer the questions in the boxes provided.

1	Your name and role.	
2	Your SACRE(s).	

3	In which year was your most recent locally Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education published?	DATE
4	Does your Agreed Syllabus include secular philosophies or worldviews in some form?	PLEASE DELETE AS APPROPRIATE YES /NO
5	Does your Agreed Syllabus explicitly include Humanism?	PLEASE DELETE AS APPROPRIATE YES /NO
<p>If your answer to question 5 is YES, please answer questions 6 - 9 and ignore questions 10 - 16.</p> <p>If your answer to question 5 is NO, please ignore questions 6 – 9 and go straight to questions 10 - 16.</p>		
6	Was Humanism included in response to the 2004 National Framework for RE?	PLEASE DELETE AS APPROPRIATE YES /NO
7	If not, why was Humanism included?	PLEASE EXPLAIN
8	If Humanism is explicitly included, at which Key Stages is it included ? PLEASE PUT A TICK OR X IN THE RELEVANT BOXES:	KS1
		KS2
		KS3
		14-19
9	If Humanism is explicitly included, at which Key Stages is it compulsory (rather than optional)? PLEASE PUT A TICK OR X IN THE RELEVANT BOXES:	KS1
		KS2
		KS3
		14-19

If your answer to questions 5 was NO:			
10	When is your next locally Agreed Syllabus expected to be published?	DATE	
11	Will your next Agreed Syllabus include secular philosophies or worldviews in some form when it is revised?	PLEASE DELETE AS APPROPRIATE YES NO DON'T KNOW	
12	Will your next Agreed Syllabus explicitly include Humanism when it is revised?	PLEASE DELETE AS APPROPRIATE YES NO DON'T KNOW	
13	If Humanism is to be included in the next Agreed Syllabus, will this be in response to the 2004 National Framework for RE?	PLEASE DELETE AS APPROPRIATE YES NO NOT APPLICABLE DON'T KNOW	
14	If not, why will Humanism be included?	PLEASE EXPLAIN	
15	If Humanism is to be explicitly included, at which Key Stages will it be included ? PLEASE PUT A TICK OR X IN THE RELEVANT BOXES:	KS1	
		KS2	
		KS3	
		14-19	
16	If Humanism is to be explicitly included, at which Key Stages will it be compulsory (rather than optional)? PLEASE PUT A TICK OR X IN THE RELEVANT BOXES:	KS1	
		KS2	
		KS3	
		14-19	

Now please complete the questions 17 – 19 on the following page.

17	Have any schools in your local authority area included Humanism in RE lessons?	PLEASE DELETE AS APPROPRIATE YES NO DON'T KNOW
----	--	--

18	<p>I want to collect those Agreed Syllabuses which have included secular philosophies such as Humanism in order to compare the ways in which they are doing this. If your local authority has published a syllabus that includes Humanism – or plans to do so in 2007 – please would you let me know how I could obtain a copy.</p> <p>If your Agreed Syllabus is/will be freely available on a website, please would you write the web address here:</p> <p>If your Agreed Syllabus is not freely available on a website, please would you let me know how I can obtain it, including whether it would be possible for you to send me a copy:</p>
----	---

19	<p>Please add any comments below. Please feel free to expand this section if necessary.</p>

Thank you very much for your help with this research.
Dr Jacqueline Watson

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APPENDIX 3

Boxes 3.1 – 3.14

BHA respondents' comments on barriers and facilitators to the inclusion of Humanism in locally agreed syllabuses

Box 3.1: Circular 1/94

Respondent 1

The biggest barrier continues to be the assumption of religious domination of SACRE membership that can refer to the statutory requirements for inclusion of information about major religions whenever other possibilities are suggested.

Respondent 2

The specification of particular religions (or the requirement for a school so to specify) at particular stages militates heavily against the inclusion of Humanism because teachers will teach what is specified and little else.

Respondent 3

I believe that it will take a shift in legislation for SACRE and A/S to change significantly in [the county].

We are bound by legislation, and SACRE is mindful of the difference between statutory and non-statutory guidance.

Respondent 4

[I am a] co-optee on probation for a year with no voting status. However [I am] included in Group A for discussions.

Respondent 5

After attending several meetings of [the] SACRE as an observer (by right, as they are open to the public) I applied for membership. I was told that, under the Constitution I was ineligible to claim membership of Group A (non CofE 'denominations') but I was accepted as a co-opted member - despite strong opposition from the Islamic representative.

So I am on the SACRE as a co-optee whose presence is subject to the approval (or at least the acquiescence) of the other members and can be dismissed at any time.

Knowing this makes me diffident in putting forward any forceful arguments for Humanism.

Fortunately, with the exception mentioned above, all the members of [the] SACRE are reasonable and tolerant people, including the Chairman, who is the representative of the local CofE diocese.

Respondent 6

[I] was not invited onto the syllabus working group.

Box 3.2: SACREs and democracy

Respondent 2

The fact that [our] Education service is not run accountably by the council but unaccountably by...a private company.

Respondent 7

The "support" offered by the local authority, in the form of an official attending the meetings is far from impartial.

Respondent 8

My main task at the moment to to persuade the SACRE to adopt a broader membership

by coopting, for example, a Muslim and a Buddhist representative to the SACRE. Its present membership is drawn from a narrow range of faiths and is being perpetuated. For example, the Jewish representative rarely comes to meetings but is still a member. I would support the notion that missing, say, three consecutive meetings constitutes resignation.

Respondent 9

SACRE is under the thumb of a powerful & effective RE Advisor who is determined to keep Humanism out & resents my very presence on the Council. I am hoping to get the Council to appoint LEA reps who will take an interest and attend and push for a wider perspective.

[There are problems with] the ... narrow view taken by some very conservative religious reps. They have difficulty in grasping the idea of a non-religious lifestance, but this is perhaps mainly because there is never any opportunity to discuss or explain: meetings are dominated by the RE Advisor and run by the Chair as if the Council were an ordinary Council committee with business to despatch.

Respondent 10

Very elderly representatives from some faiths (the oldest member of our SACRE is 96!) I am the only member who has no vote, but because of the census figures & the national guidelines I get a fair hearing when I speak. Census results (Christianity 76%, "no religion" 13%, all others less than 1% each)

Respondent 11

Lack of opportunity to discuss in SACRE meetings any substantive issues e.g: what and who RE is for, what an ideal RE, within the law, would look like.

Respondent 12

[Our's] is a small borough consequently we have to employ someone from outside to write the syllabus who tends to have their own agenda. I have served on SACRE since 1991 and each time the syllabus has been updated I have provided info on Humanism but the final version has been very silent on ethical teaching, Humanism, life stances etc. The other faiths are also interested in promoting their views, and at the end of the day, time is short and to get the syllabus checked and printed in time means that things are rushed so there is very little time for re-writes.

Respondent 13

I have received no information about who is writing the new syllabus.

It was explained at the last meeting that members would have no input into the new syllabus. I am completely in the dark.

Respondent 14

I have to admit to a lack of expertise in committee work especially when politics is involved. A lack of training in specifically SACRE work. New entrants are now going to National courses.

It does not generally take votes. Might be better if it did. How many SACREs take votes?

Respondent 16

We know (from research done in the county) that most RE is taught by non-specialists and that RE co-ordinators have to deal with frequent staff changes due to timetabling pressures. It isn't possible to arrange in-service training in such a fluid situation. I'm concerned that there is so much ignorance about Humanism/atheism and so few user-friendly teaching resources, that we must provide some before September if possible, to make it as easy as possible for RE teachers to find what they need. [The local] Humanists have agreed, in principal, to provide a new website with Power Point presentations and other teaching resources.

Box 3.3: Hostility from SACRE members**Respondent 17**

One or more ASC members ... believe that it is their moral duty to resist the encroachment of Humanism...

Respondent 3

[Our] SACRE is representative of a fairly traditional belief population. It does include, as per the constitution, a large number of Christians.

Respondent 16

Incomprehension, prejudice and ignorance about an alternative, religion-free approach to life can be a problem. Many of those involved in RE are religious people with a biased view of the subject. Before we can educate the children, we have to educate the educators.

I've come across many examples of prejudice against atheism and Humanism among RE teachers. This is just one: a friend who teaches in a reception class in the west of our county volunteered to take over the role of RE co-ordinator when no one else seemed interested. This offer was greeted with hoots of derision by some other staff, who knew she's an atheist and didn't think an atheist could or should teach RE. The role was given to a fundamentalist Christian who's made it clear that she intends to ignore Humanism and secular world views as far as possible.

Our SACRE has had difficulty attracting and retaining representatives of non-Christian faiths. One or two Muslims (male) had to be told that the purpose of RE isn't to make children religious, but to teach them about religion. They lost interest when they heard this. Similarly, a Sikh woman complained that their young people are less interested in the Temple than their parents are. Such people have a negative attitude towards atheism and Humanism, and will be reluctant to endorse their inclusion in RE.

Respondent 18

The background of SACRE members varies widely. Some are aware of contemporary thinking and practice in RE (as evidenced in the QCA National Framework for RE) and are thus ready to accept the inclusion of the non-theistic position.

Others, such as members of some faith communities, take the narrow ('conventional') view that 'religious' education can only be God-centred. There is also opposition in some places from councillors with Right-wing views who still support the views of the Lords who in 1988 secured the "daily Christian worship" and anti-Humanist amendments to the Education Reform Act.

Respondent 19

Members of Sacre are friendly but safeguard their interests keenly and see Humanism as encroaching on their time and space. But it does seem to be getting easier.

Respondent 20

Entrenched attitudes of traditional faiths

BUT

The SACRE group is so all-inclusive that no one religion's viewpoint gets the opportunity to declare its own pre-eminence. Therefore politeness reins. People acknowledge that disbelief matters even when it doesn't matter to them

Respondent 21

The Church of England reps

The other religion representatives (with one exception).

Conservative councillors (who are on the CofE dioceses committee) claim this is Religious education therefore if you are not a religion you're not included.

Also refers to intolerant attitude of the believers.

Respondent 22

Tradition and certain 'closed-minded' members of SACRE.

Box 3.4: Support from SACRE members

Respondent 22

An excellent RE advisor for the County. A generally 'open-minded' SACRE with some exceptions.

Respondent 23

The RE adviser and the current Chairman of SACRE seem to be more open minded than some other SACRE members with regard to pupils learning about secular belief systems.

Respondent 10

Sympathetic & professional advisor, freshly employed to the job (for our borough & the borough next door)

Respondent 2

Openness of informal writing groups

Support from teacher reps

Respondent 24

Support from more enlightened members of SACRE - in my case the Muslims, Hindus, Buddhist, Quaker, some Anglican ministers.

Respondent 1

[We] produced a joint Agreed Syllabus under the helpful eye of sympathetic RE Inspector

Respondent 3

SACRE members have included me fully in consultations over the new A/S, and the county advisor and the chair of SACRE have been particularly encouraging.

Respondent 25

Atheist LEA SACRE member

Open minded syllabus drafter (CE Diocesan Education officer)

Respondent 21

sympathetic members on SACREs (teachers, councillors).

Good arguments from Humanist Rep.

Respondent 26

Some members of the SACRE have been keen for Humanism to appear on the syllabus, and are supportive when the topic arises.

The RE advisor for the county served on the committee drawing up the National Framework in 2004 and is therefore well informed and generally supportive.

Box 3.5: The need to compromise

Respondent 18

I believe also that my views are listened to seriously because members are aware that I speak with over 30 years' experience of participation in inter-faith affairs as a Humanist representative on SACREs, the Religious Education Council and the Standing

Conference on Inter-Faith Dialogue in Education.

Respondent 8

I was co-opted to the SACRE not because I am a Humanist but because of my experience as an HMI and as a former district inspector for [the county]. Some of this resistance may go once I become a more familiar face and am seen to be "reasonable".

Respondent 11

I have been a reasonably well behaved and helpful member of the SACRE, concerned as much for the proper development of the subject as for the inclusion of Humanism, though have only achieved very minor improvements in the face of considerable inertia.

Respondent 16

It can be tiresome, but it's necessary to challenge biased and lazy thinking at all stages, in a calm, reasonable manner. Provided we do this, we can achieve a more balanced, objective approach to RE.

Respondent 3

SACRE members do not perceive me as a 'radical'. I was only co-opted because I previously was an [teaching union] rep and a known quantity; I am trying to work with the SACRE, respecting their views and decisions as they do mine, rather than acting as a subversive element.

Respondent 17

[It is important to have] a Humanist representative on the ASC and SACRE who is not hostile to Religious Education or those who hold a religious worldview.

Cultivating friends and trying to win over or at least gain respect from the others.

Providing a cogent and persuasive explanation as to why knowledge of Humanism is important for children from families with religious beliefs and why children from Humanist and non-religious backgrounds need to learn objectively about the religious beliefs of others and in particular Christianity.

Respondent 15

During the submission processes a Humanist representative (unnamed) made himself so objectionable that the submission to [the SACRE] was withdrawn and the other SACRES did not pursue. I am determined not to let this happen again.

Box 3.6: Personal commitment demanded of BHA SACRE representatives

Respondent 24

Following my address to SACRE on 12/06/06 the members noted:

"Circular 1/94 'Religious Education and Collective Worship' stated that the inclusion of representatives of belief systems such as Humanism, which do not amount to a religion or religious denomination, on Committee A of an Agreed Syllabus Conference or Group 1 of a SACRE would be contrary to legislation".

Members divided into the 4 groups to consider the issue and voted;

Group 1 ... Against (but that a Humanist be invited to attend as an observer and input, through the Chair, if the need arose)

Group 2 ... Against (but as above)

Group 3 ... Against (but as above)

Group 4 ... For

Resolved i) a member of BHA shouldn't be co-opted onto the SACRE

ii) a member of BHA should invited in capacity of observer

My sitting in on Group A's discussions has recently been challenged on legal, not personal, grounds. I asked for this to be discussed by full SACRE and found pretty universal support for the regulations being changed because they patently impeded the functioning of SACRE. My SACRE will probably support the removal of restrictions on the participation of Humanists.

Respondent 17

The syllabus is up for review this year and I hope to have the energy and time to help improve it. I hope that nobody tries to take it in a backwards direction regarding inclusivity, but that is always a risk and we need to remain vigilant.

Respondent 8

Yet to be determined. I shall be pressing for Humanism to be included in the revised syllabus as soon as I can. My campaign will start at the next meeting but I don't minimize the effort it will take.

Respondent 14

I will commit Hari Kari if it [Humanism] is not [included in the revised syllabus] - but we remain hopeful of this round and without bloodshed.

Box 3.7: The challenge of aligning Humanism with a religious framework

Respondent 11

Lack of colourful Humanist places for pupils to visit, Humanist artefacts, practices and traditions that can be easily described and taught - the fact that Humanism can seem a bit abstract and doesn't naturally fit into the kinds of topics taught, especially in primary RE.

Respondent 14

Humanists have no church or place that we can go to get our ideas across - some imply that we should not even try. I do not agree. The religious have their cake and eat it, over and over.

Respondent 16

A teacher member of our SACRE complained that he didn't know how Humanism and secular world views could be included in RE, because we don't have the rituals and festivals to hang lessons on that the religions do. He waved aside the offer of a leaflet about the "Why Atheism?" DVD.

Respondent 26

At primary level, the absence of relevant rituals and buildings has been referred to as a problem.

Respondent 4

Humanism is not regarded as religion and it is considered more important to make sure that pupils learn about the main religions.

Respondent 21

Lack of Humanism in RE examinations

Respondent 27

Lack of Humanism in target RE exams

Respondent 28

The tradition that RE is about 'religion'. An uncertainty about what Humanism is.

Respondent 11

Humanism is in fact quite easy to fit into at least some of the topics taught in RE, has a distinctive view of some issues commonly studied - and isn't necessarily very time-consuming to teach.

Box 3.8: Producing Humanist materials for syllabuses or teacher guides

Respondent 19

KS1 & 2. Major obstacles are time in class and lack of phenomenology in Humanism. Christianity and the other 5 religions are given priority. Am trying to get Humanism included even if it is for only a part 'unit' (unit = at least half term's work). May have to produce our own unit for Humanism.

Respondent 29

I worked very closely with the RE co-ordinator and others as a member of the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) to try and ensure that the syllabus was neutral in respect to religious and non-religious beliefs. I provided where relevant a Humanist perspective throughout and also a unit on Humanism for KS3. The 1997 syllabus was bought in from [another ASC] and did I think mention Humanism but only in the introduction. A non-religious, non-theistic viewpoint was implicit in parts of the syllabus but Humanism was not explicitly referred to. Humanism is explicitly mentioned throughout the syllabus and the instructions as to the required units were planned so as to ensure that some study of Humanism is inevitable.

Respondent 17

The overwhelming majority of SACRE members were persuaded of the importance of including the Humanist perspective. I worked very closely with the RE co-ordinator as a member of the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) to try and ensure that the syllabus was neutral in respect to religious and non-religious beliefs. I provided where relevant a Humanist perspective throughout and also a unit on Humanism for KS3. The 1997 syllabus did I think mention Humanism but only in the introduction. A non-religious, non-theistic viewpoint was implicit in parts of the syllabus but Humanism was not explicitly referred to.

Respondent 12

It is hoped that the syllabus does not need to be re-written, as once again time is short, but I have suggested that some (all) of the information that I have provided should be included perhaps in an Appendix, as teachers in the schools have complained about the lack of information.

I have provided a considerable amount of material [to teachers] from the BHA website.

Respondent 30

It is not treated as essential teaching. But several teachers have told me how good and helpful they think the BHA web-site is for schools.

Respondent 25

Humanist Group SACRE working party members.

The group has drafted 6 units on Humanism and will be circulated to teachers as additional units for trial and comment during 2007-8.

Box 3.9: Further suggestions for breaking through the barriers to inclusion

Respondent 3

Humanism has most in common with Buddhism, of the recognised religions, and I think it is helpful to emphasise the similarities e.g. the values, rather than dwell too much on our differences. I am working to 'free up' parts of the A/S so that there is the opportunity for 'other world views' to be incorporated, albeit not required.

Respondent 31

It is not on the syllabus, but we are getting requests for speakers in response to a letter sent to all schools in the [region]. I have a very good working relationship with the RE adviser to the county and he has been actively trying to get a day of INSET training which would deal with Humanism for teachers of RE. Unfortunately, there has not as yet been enough demand. Members of the Sacre get [the local Humanist group's] newsletter (following a response from the RE Adviser). The news letter to RE teachers includes the Happy Human logo and has included an article about Linda Smith's funeral.

Respondent 11

The annual SACRE lecture is an opportunity to float new ideas or think around the subject and I was asked to give it in 2006.

Box 3.10: Teachers' attitudes**Respondent 17**

Some ASC members, including teachers, haven't the faintest idea what Humanism is about and are suspicious of it.

Respondent 9

[One barrier is] the narrow view taken of RE by RE teachers.

Respondent 14

The existing RE teachers have a "mental blockage" or simple ignorance over Humanism.

Respondent 2

The impression I get as a Humanist (and as a parent) is school RE departments/ teachers don't want to include Humanism and their tactic seems to be to ignore it in the hope that it will go away.

Respondent 16

Although we've produced a syllabus I'm reasonably happy with and our SACRE is a harmonious one, I'm not convinced that it will make a huge difference to the prevalent attitudes towards Humanism and atheism among RE teachers, particularly in primary schools. The longer I've been involved with education (as a teacher, SACRE member and school speaker) the more it seems to me that RE departments are a haven for irrational, prejudiced thinkers, where the attitude that religion=good, atheism=bad will persist. In an ideal world, I'd scrap the subject altogether, substitute philosophical enquiry, and include religion in other arts syllabi, to be taught objectively and without bias.

Respondent 32

Trying to produce good examples that teachers might understand and use

Respondent 20

We have a very good set of guidance notes and a well thought out agreed syllabus for Humanism. How it will be dealt with in the classroom by RE teachers - who can say?

Respondent 26

A general preference for changing things as little as possible, in view of teachers' busy lives. As it is only now making an appearance in the relevant literature, has a long way to go before teachers integrate it fully into their practice.

Respondent 33

I think some RE teachers accept that, since many pupils are non-believers, they should include something secular. BUT Lack of teacher knowledge of Humanism

Respondent 21

Teachers already stretched in teaching Christianity etc.

Lack of time.

Respondent 25

Teacher representatives

Respondent 6

One teacher reported she had done 12 lessons on Humanism and they had gone down very well.

Respondent 1

Considerable willingness on the part of teachers to explore ways of modernising RE to include the wider issues of personal/social education and also now citizenship.

Respondent 24

Some RE teachers [are] including Humanism.

Box 3.11: The relationship between SACRE Humanists and schools**Respondent 34**

It is recognised in [the borough] that an RE syllabus without Humanism is incomplete to the extent of being educationally flawed. There has been active encouragement in promoting the actual teaching of Humanism in the schools through INSET courses to which I have contributed as it was recognised the lack of training in Humanism in RE teacher training courses prejudiced the balanced teaching of RE in schools

Respondent 11

[There is a] lack of expertise on the SACRE - very little specialist advice, no real expertise in syllabus development, many members (e.g. councillors and faith reps) [are] rather remote from education.

Respondent 14

[There is a] lack of real contact with schools and actual lessons. Lack of opportunity and facility to try out suggestions for new materials. No real contact with parents over these matters. The brave RE teachers who do not have a clue how to deal with it, continue pumping out 're-jigged' ancient materials. We have good contact with one school that knows how to deal with it.

Respondent 16

Our county's advisory teacher (who's since started a new job with the diocese) provided some sample worksheets for primary schools. They contained an implicit assumption that "God" is a fact, for example; among the questions suggested at the end of one exercise, is "I wonder what pleases God?" In my experience, RE teachers, particularly those in primary schools, tend to make such assumptions. I've come across such attitudes personally, through teacher friends, and while contributing to teacher training sessions.

Respondent 18

It is not dealt with satisfactorily in many schools because: (a) of the pressure of time, caused by having to deal with the six main religions (b) RE Co-ordinators /Heads of RE in some schools have a personal prejudice against the inclusion of Humanism.

Support for the concept of RE that is open in approach and inclusive in content comes mainly from Teachers. Lecturers and Advisors who are in tune with the thinking behind the National Framework, together with broad-minded members of faith communities such as the Society of Friends and the Baha'is.

Respondent 22

Some schools are more willing than others to encompass the concept of Humanism. Hopefully this will improve, as I am hopeful that when the Agreed Syllabus is next revised Humanism will play a much greater part.

Box 3.12: The influence of the Non-statutory National Framework for RE

Respondent 19

The National Framework is proving a very useful support and is stimulating increased presentation in KS3. Hitherto Humanism has been included as optional in KS3. It will probably be included on merit in next Syllabus.

Respondent 11

My SACRE does take national guidance seriously, though is not always sure how to integrate it into the existing syllabus / resources.

Respondent 34

In part but also because the SACRE had evolved its policy to the point where Humanism was being accepted - but the NSNF helped.

Respondent 2

The non-statutory framework ... relegates a secular world view to the periphery.

Respondent 23

It is not included, and the references in the QCA document to non religious belief systems were deleted in the [County's] Agreed Syllabus. In other respects the syllabus follows the QCA document quite closely.

Respondent 33

National framework encourages in a loose way without demanding inclusion

BUT

The national framework commends 'inclusion' and I think SACRE wants to be seen to (at least partly) going down this road.

Respondent 36

... the ethnic mix of an area, the philosophy of the school and the personal belief and attitude of the RE teacher had more influence on the inclusion of Humanism than the agreed syllabus.

Box 3.13: Linking with the government's *Every Child Matters* policy agenda

Respondent 23

There is clearly a wide disparity between the aims of SACRE members, and the reality of pupils' beliefs. Some members of SACRE resist the idea that pupils should be made aware that some people are not religious, saying that the pupils might become confused.

Respondent 16

Our previous RE Advisor (deceased) was keen that teachers should include some Humanism, making the point that non-religious parents were the largest group in the county.

Respondent 30

The [borough] invited Humanist representation from the start. Presumably included because it was known (generally and in schools) that [the borough] has a very high percentage of non-believers. (25% in the last census).

Respondent 17

Obtaining agreement on making every child feel included and valued.

Having, as a Humanist member/advisor of the ASC & SACRE the welfare of all the children as one's prime consideration.

Box 3.14: Linking with Citizenship Education and Philosophy

Respondent 7

The LA have recently published a "Cultural Diversity" booklet which includes reference to the BHA.

Respondent 14

I have no knowledge of the Citizenship syllabus and its practice. It must though overlap, and with what we want to do, and the balance between RE and Citizenship different in every school.

Respondent 28

The recognition of 'philosophy' as a suitable subject for schools.
The introduction of 'Citizenship'.