

LONDON BOROUGH OF LEWISHAM

Minutes of the Lewisham Agreed Syllabus Conference

which was held on **Tuesday 27 June 2017 at 6.30pm**
at RCCG Great Beauty Tabernacle, Capital House, 2nd floor, 43 – 47 Rushey Green,
Catford, London SE6 4AS

Approved by the Lewisham ASC on 26 September 2017

Present:

REPRESENTING	NAME	PRESENT
Baha'i	Dr Mehdi Dabestani	
Buddhism	David Hutchens	✓
Free Church A o G	Pastor Nick Hughes	APOLOGIES
Free Church	Jeronne Rudder	
Free Church (Baptist)	Rev Carol Bostridge	✓
Free Churches (URC)	Rev Raymond Singh	Apologies (late)
Hinduism	Vallipuram Bala	
Humanism	James Dobson	✓
Humanism	:Luke Donnellan	✓
Independent Evangelical	Nigel Desborough	
Islam	Mohammed Barrie	
Islam	Sarwoar Ahmed	
Judaism	Gerald Rose	✓
Judaism	Joan Goldberg	✓
Pentecostal	Juliet Campbell	
Pentecostal	Layo Afuape	✓
Pentecostal	Cheryl Abbam	✓
Roman Catholic	Rt. Rev Monsignor Nicholas Rother	APOLOGIES
Sikhism	Gurbakhsh Singh Garcha	APOLOGIES
Diocesan Board	Shaun Burns	APOLOGIES
Secondary Teacher	VACANT	
Primary Teacher	John Goodey	APOLOGIES
Governor	Gail Exon	APOLOGIES
Minister	Revd Juliet Donnelly (VICE CHAIR)	✓
ATL	Kim Knappett	✓
NUT	Karen Hansen	APOLOGIES
Academy/Free school	VACANT	
NUT	Claire Adams	
NAS/UWT	Pamela Phillips	✓
Lewisham headteachers and deputies	Judith Purkiss	
Local Authority members	Councillor Jacq Paschoud	APOLOGIES
	Councillor David Britton (CHAIR)	✓
	Councillor Hilary Moore	APOLOGIES
School Governors - Primary	VACANT	
School Governors – Secondary	VACANT	
Executive Director of Education	Kate Bond	✓
Other and Co-optees	Judith Nweze	✓
Rastafarians		
Young Mayor Team		
RE School Improvement Officer	Denise Chaplin	✓
SACRE clerk	Stephen Sealy	✓

(Boxed sections in these minutes signify actions, and underlines sections decisions)

The meeting began at 6.45pm.

1a Welcome and apologies for absence.

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and asked everyone to introduce themselves for the purpose of the clerk.

Apologies were accepted from the committee members indicated above.

1b Welcome to the Great Beauty Tabernacle

Layo gave an introduction to the church on whose site the meeting was being held. She explained that it was one of 600 parishes of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in the UK, itself one of the fastest growing Christian denominations, having begun in 1952 in Lagos, Nigeria, and then in 1988 in the UK. The Tabernacle opened in 2004 and attracts a largely young and young-adult demographic.

Layo reported that the church is about impacting the community, and works with the local homeless, young offenders and single parent communities. It is also involved in missionary work, and is sending six of its adults abroad in the last week in July where they will teach English and preach the gospel. Youth are also involved with 'Set the pace' whereby they walk to raise funds for homeless people in Lewisham, and this year will be walking 26.5km to Wembley, having walked to the Olympic Park in the previous year.

Denise asked if the church had any links with neighbouring boroughs. Layo replied that it has links with St Barnabas in Greenwich which serves hot meals each Saturday, but also donates to the NSPCC, Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children, and Doctors without Borders.

The Chair asked if the church had links with Church Urban Vision, which Layo affirmed.

2 Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising not on the full agenda

Luke advised that the front page be corrected to reflect that he was present at both meetings.

Kim moved that the minutes be accepted.

Joan seconded this.

There were no objections.

3 Legal advice received on Humanism from Lewisham legal department (summary of main points) as it affects the Agreed Syllabus review

The Chair reported that he and Denise - unwitting of each other - had contacted the legal department within the Council to seek legal advice on the quest by Humanism UK for enhanced status in the syllabus on a par with the five 'main' faiths (after Christianity).

Denise explained that this advice would not be circulated in its entirety to members but that, as she felt it was important for the committee to get a sense of how to move forward, she would summarise the three main points from the guidance.

She added that the legal team had reviewed the evidence Luke had sent them as well as the law underpinning RE, documentation issued by the Department of Education and the framework for delivery of RE in Lewisham Schools.

The three main points were that:

- a) There should be a wide-ranging study of religion and belief across the key stages;

- b) The Fox judgment affirms the position that it is fine for the syllabus to afford more time to teaching about Christianity than other religions; and
- c) There should be no obligation for schools or an ASC to balance out the detailed teaching of a religion/belief by teaching about each in equal depth, or to give equal 'air time' to the teaching of each religion/belief.

Denise reminded the ASC members that it had agreed for the faith-specific content to have parity in the KS1 thematic units where it makes logical sense. This is exemplified by all faiths being referenced in the 'End of life' unit while it would be legitimate for Sikhism, by way of example, not to be mentioned necessarily in the unit about Peace.

She commented that the legal guidance assured her that the committee were moving in the right direction.

Kate re-emphasised that it was legal *advice* and that the onus was for the committee to agree this in line with its determinations.

Luke offered a response to this advice, commenting firstly that he felt there were stronger cases for enhancing the status of Humanism in the syllabus than the legal case.

He agreed with the first point, adding that he could see that some attempt had been made at an inclusive syllabus.

He accepted the second point.

With regard to the third point he contended that while the law doesn't state that there needs to be equal 'airtime' the view of the lawyers who took the Fox case was that non-religious world views should be treated with equal respect and an equal worth of study to teachers.

Luke expressed his view that commitment of the syllabus to diversity, equality and social cohesion were reasons for Humanism's inclusion which were stronger than the legal one.

He offered his concerns that Humanism was only mentioned within the optional parts of the KS1 and 2 syllabus indicating that students could progress through KS1 and 2 without ever being taught about Humanism directly.

He explained that he felt that the current syllabus doesn't fulfil the goal of demonstrating that Humanism is of equal worth for studying. He opined that, as a representative of Humanism UK and a father of a child at a Lewisham school, an ideal solution would be to allow Humanism a systematic unit on the same basis as some of the other beliefs/worldviews.

Kate replied that while a teacher could avoid teaching about Humanism if they were so inclined, it would be impossible not to talk about non-religious world views as these units all start from the place the children are. She added that non-religious world views are dealt with in every unit and felt that these units had been written in an inclusive way.

The Chair suggested the addition of a comment in the introduction that the expression of any views can be discussed in any unit, which he felt would resolve this.

Luke responded that he didn't entirely agree with this. He challenged whether individual members of the committee would be happy if, instead of their religion/world view being systematically taught, its teaching was optional, relying on the teacher to study it or the children sharing their experience of that view.

David replied that he thought the teaching of RE to children was to encourage discussion of views they didn't ordinarily come across in the limited time available and that Humanism was already ubiquitous across the syllabus.

Joan shared her own experience that in her schooling she learnt nothing about other religions. She added that teachers couldn't possibly cover every aspect of every faith/world view and suggested that Luke wasn't respecting teachers' professionalism.

Juliet expressed an understanding for Luke's position but commented that Humanism ran through PHSE and several other subjects. She offered support for the approach the committee had taken with regard to the syllabus, expressing her feeling that *her* faith was crowded out by the prevalence of Humanism in the syllabus.

Layo reiterated the importance of placing faith in teachers to deliver these units well.

Kate added that the written syllabus was only one dimension of the conversation about faith and other world views. She reported that others were the way in which the syllabus was launched, talking about the syllabus (for example in the training sessions) and also making teachers aware of the tension which had underpinned its decisions. She reminded the committee that the syllabus had consciously been called 'Faith and beliefs' and that the debate was kept alive by its discussion around the committee table.

She further added that the agreed syllabus wasn't the end, but rather the beginning, and that there were other ways to ensure equal access to a range of views for children.

The Chair reminded the committee that children and their parents have a right to withdraw from RE and that the work of the committee was trying to avoid this happening.

Luke stated his desire to not appear confrontational but objected to pandering to the desires of the groups who could withdraw, which he asserted would be depriving the other children.

He responded that Humanism wasn't actually taught anywhere else.

Luke added that he had a huge amount of respect for teachers, having been one himself and having friends who were, and that he didn't think that teachers would wilfully refuse to teach Humanism.

He reiterated his view that the curriculum didn't treat his worldview with the same respect as other worldviews and that none of the arguments he'd heard had convinced him otherwise.

He concluded that the inclusion of Humanism as a taught unit in the syllabus would make it a better, fairer syllabus and would be quite easy to carry out.

Denise felt that this action would undermine the syllabus and reiterated the starting from children's experiences to serve as a bridge to learning about other religions. She suggested that this could be enhanced in the introduction and advice on teaching and learning.

She agreed with the point that Juliet had made, adding that the majority of the curriculum appears secular, reflecting an acceptance - and almost encouragement - of non-religiousness, meaning that the RE curriculum was the sole place for religion in the curriculum.

She also remarked that non-religious worldviews do not equate to Humanism, wondering how many bona fide members of Humanism UK there were in the community.

She reminded the committee that KS 3 and 4 would allow an opening of this for children to 'reason out' these views and possibly study a non-religious perspective.

She added that to make space for one non-religious worldview, particularly at the early stage would mean the removal of one of the existing units, which would set the ASC into a long discussion of where this would come from. The ASC can ensure teachers are encouraged to demonstrate respect to other faith and belief perspectives in the Teaching and Learning notes.

She surmised that education about non-religious worldviews would be more explicit in the secondary phase.

The chair made a motion to accept the legal advice.

This was unanimously accepted although Luke stated that his acceptance was qualified by the questions he still had about this.

The Chair made a motion for the committee to accept the agreed units.

Kate suggested that this motion be deferred until after point 4 was discussed, which the Chair accepted.

4 The philosophy behind the syllabus

Kate suggested that it would be useful if the committee agreed on some principles about what they were trying to achieve and referred to the triangular-framed diagram that she had produced, which she envisioned as a glossy poster in each classroom.

She stated that building from the child was developmental, starting in the Early Years as being all about the child but then extending - as the child grew - to discussions about London and the world, much like the committee's conversation about faith in Lewisham.

She explained the diagram, particularly the placement of conversations about faith and belief at the top of the triangle, and the criticality of diversity in the borough, mentioning the value that she placed on experiencing religious activity such as around the Greek Orthodox Church in Crystal Palace. She also referenced Ofsted inspectors asking about how schools cater for transgender children.

She added that the text at the left apex was 'Christianity being the predominant religion' and commented that legally, historically and politically, as well as in the syllabus, it has a special place.

She explained that the syllabus needed to support the requirement to promote fundamental British values.

She felt that the launch of the syllabus could start by referencing this philosophy rather than, say, the unit on Weddings.

Kate also added that the diagram should also serve as a check for what the committee measures the syllabus against.

She commented that, if the committee liked it, it could be 'jazzed' up. She remarked that she wasn't wedded to the diagram, however, and invited the committee to feedback on it.

The Chair suggested that a 'Europe' oblong between the 'Britain' and 'World' oblongs was required.

Denise expressed her preference for concentric circles around the child. She commented that the diagram would become 'three-dimensional' at KS2 where, in addition to the world family of a faith, its historical world family would also come to the fore. She added that, an advanced version of the diagram would reflect that the actions of the past have led to the contemporary situation. She opined that looking at faith and belief in Lewisham was also about looking forward, and about each child and their family being at the centre of the curriculum.

Kim expressed her preference that concentric circles weren't used, reasoning that children needed to realise that everything doesn't revolve around them and supporting this with the fact that they would be looking at worldviews that may be quite remote from their own.

Carol remarked that she didn't see the point of the diagram as teachers know the philosophy of the syllabus, adding that she didn't think it fit on the walls of the classroom.

The Chair suggested that the staffroom may be a better location.

Kate commented that it offered new teachers a good explanation as well as being a useful resource for explaining the curriculum to parents.

Pamela added that children also like to know.

5 The aims of RE in the Agreed Syllabus – related to the diagram

Denise introduced this point by expressing the importance of returning to the aims of RE in Lewisham schools.

She explained that these aims had originated in a non-statutory, national document. She explained that these aims, having been affirmed in the last national conference, would be worthwhile being reviewed by the committee.

(There was a break of a few minutes to allow committee members to read the section.)

Denise invited comments from the committee, remarking herself that she thought it tied in well with the triangle diagram and making reference to the third bulletpoint. She added that these aims were shared with many other agreed syllabuses.

The Chair commented that he was looking for the word 'respect', which is only half-mentioned in the first bullet point. He added that text about respecting the belief should be included.

Luke remarked that he didn't think that beliefs should be necessarily respected, but rather the person's right to adhere to this belief.

Kate concurred with Luke.

Kim advised caution in how that is written, suggesting that adding that one 'doesn't have to respect another's beliefs' opened itself to misinterpretation.

Layo suggested that a date be added.

Luke suggested that the first en dash should include the words 'non-religious teachings and' should come before 'religious teachings', and that for the second en dash, 'practices of religions' should be followed by 'and beliefs'.

He added that he'd prefer a different word to 'multifaith' but couldn't think of one yet.

In response to his first point, Kate suggested 'religious teachings, philosophies and beliefs' was a better replacement.

Gerald stated that the committee needed to be careful about the first bulletpoint seeming to reinforce views that, for example, all Muslims are terrorists.

The Chair suggested that the word 'religious' be inserted between 'different' and 'beliefs', commenting that non-religious beliefs were technically a form of religion.

Luke expressed his wholehearted disagreement with this view, and suggested 'religious and non-religious teachings' replace 'religious teachings' under the first en dash.

Carol commented that she liked this clause as it is. With regard to the insertion of 'religious' after the word 'different' in the first bullet-point, she commented that there were beliefs that one would call religious that are just as abhorrent as non-religious beliefs, so the insertion of this word wouldn't solve the problem.

Denise suggested that the insertion of the phrase 'in relation to the religions and beliefs encountered in the agreed syllabus' at the end of the first paragraph would appropriately contextualise the following text meaning no further clarification would be necessary.

Luke asked for confirmation that this would mean his two amendments weren't carried out. Denise confirmed this, explaining why.

Juliet suggested that Luke's amendments be made as they wouldn't make a significant difference to the text.

The committee agreed.

Denise invited the committee to check the congruence of the aims against the diagram that Kate had produced.

Kim added that the third en dash was a really important point and therefore shouldn't be on the reverse of the sheet.

The Chair asked the committee if they were happy with the fundamental British values text. However, the committee acknowledged that this wording was from the law and therefore not subject to amendment.

6 Early Year Materials

Final version EYFS amended as agreed to compare to syllabus aims and diagram

Denise referred the committee to the 'Religious Education in the Early Years foundation stage' document which she noted had its own diagram on page 6. (This diagram depicted

education starting from children's own experience, through to learning about themselves and then learning about the world.)

The Chair invited questions from the committee.

Luke commented that the words 'and belief' should follow the word 'religion' in the third paragraph on the first page.

The committee accepted this change.

7 Key Stages 1 & 2 – overview

Denise tabled the 'Lewisham Agreed Syllabus KS 1 & 2' document as representing the existing structure. She reminded the committee of its agreement to remove the Transition units, replacing them with 'Understanding Faith and Belief' in Lewisham.

The committee accepted this with the exception of Luke, who expressed his preference that this unit be replaced with a different one.

Kim commented that the document appeared to use the words 'unit' and half-term' interchangeably and suggested that the word 'unit' alone be used, with a qualifying comment that one unit equated to half a term.

She revised this to 'one unit equals six sessions (roughly half a term)'.

Denise suggested the addition of 'and each session is roughly an hour'.

Denise invited committee members to supply information on their respective beliefs/views as a support for teachers.

Kate suggested that a map of committee members' sites would be advantageous.

Carol commented that she would like to get together with other groups and provide a strong body of examples of how faith groups work together.

Kate suggested that she send an email to SACRE members inviting them to meet with her to collaborate for this final unit, commenting the higher the quality of the information, the greater the likelihood of teachers engaging with it.

The Chair suggested that the Council would be good inclusion, to which Carol added other agencies such as the Borough Dean.

The chair asked if Denise wanted the committee to vote on accepting the KS1 and 2 structure. Denise responded that circulating the finished versions should happen first. The chair advised that he would table this at the start of the next agenda.

Referring to the third agenda point, Luke proposed that a unit on Humanism be included in the same manner as the other five main faiths.

Kate asked him to clarify if he was asking for a Humanism unit in KS1 and 2 or elsewhere within the syllabus. She voiced her assumption that this wasn't the direction of travel but that Denise had suggested that this vote be deferred until the final unit documentation had been circulated.

Denise reminded the committee that, were this agreed, an existing unit would have to be removed to accommodate this. If this was a unit from one of the faiths, then which one and would others need to be removed to ensure equal time?

The Chair suggested that tLuke's proposal be put to the vote, subject to the proposal being seconded.

The motion was not seconded.

8 Secondary syllabus

Denise reported that only four schools had responded to the KS3 questionnaire that all Lewisham secondary schools had been asked to respond to and was on Lewisham's website.

She added that teachers were due to meet her later in the term and that she would also meet with the Young Mayors team to provide triangulation, about which she would report back to the committee in the Autumn term.

Judith asked if any action had been taken in relation to information on the Kola ceremony that she had sent Denise. Denise responded that she was working through the information that she had been sent.

9 Date of next meeting

The chair suggested that the committee meet twice in the following two half terms to meet the deadline that the committee had agreed.

Kate asked when the Agreed Syllabus expired, to which Denise responded that it didn't, until a new syllabus replaced it.

The Chair advised that he wanted the syllabus to go to the Mayor and Cabinet to be agreed in the Spring of 2018.

Kate suggested that in the next meeting a timetable be produced working back from the Mayor and Cabinet meeting in March.

Tuesday 26 September was agreed as the date of the next meeting. Denise suggested that Juliet's premises may be the venue but advised the committee that she was still open to offers.

In closing, Denise thanked Layo for her hospitality.