COLLECTIVE WORSHIP REVIEWED

Report of the 1997 Consultation

The RE Council of England and Wales
The National Association of SACREs
The Inter Faith Network for the UK

Sponsored by
The All Saints Trust
The St Gabriel's Trust

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FOREWORD

John D Gay
Culham College Institute
January 1998

On behalf of the funding bodies I should like to thank all those who have given so generously of their time and expertise to make this review such a comprehensive, thoughtful and positive event. The conference delegates have not only contributed at the conferences themselves, but have also carried out consultations within their constituencies which have involved them in considerable work and effort. Steering Group members have spent many hours at planning meetings and in discussions considering the issues surrounding collective worship and the various possible routes into the future.

Special thanks are due to the chairman of the conferences, Desmond Rea, for the expertise and insights he brought to the Steering Group and the conferences; to Eric Lord and Carol Robinson for undertaking the administrative complexities; and finally to Gwen Palmer, Chair of the Steering Group, for all her skill and tack and for her resilience over the long review period – on occasions it became for her virtually a full-time workload.

The fact that so much has been achieved is due to the combined professionalism, understanding and efforts of all who have taken part.

INTRODUCTION

Gwen Palmer
On behalf of the Steering Group

In recent years, collective worship in schools has moved from being an activity taken largely for granted to an issue which is widely discussed. The more formal expectations set out in the Education Reform Act, and in particular the 1994 Circulars, have led to wide variations in practice. Many opinions on the subject have been voiced. In 1995 there were discussions taking place within the RE Council for England and Wales, the National Association of SACREs and the Inter Faith Network for the UK about the possibility of undertaking a national consultative process on collective worship. (1)

The three sponsoring bodies were well placed to consider such consultation. The Religious Education Council for England and Wales is an independent body. Its membership is composed of a wide range of faith communities, and of nationally representative professional RE teacher associations. It provides a national forum for considering and taking action on matters affecting religious education and associated areas in schools.

Historically, Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) are bodies established by Local Education Authorities to provide advice and guidance to the LEA on matters to do with religious education and collective worship in schools. Since 1988, SACREs have also had responsibility for authorising alternative arrangements (known as 'determinations') for collective worship where a 'broadly Christian' act of worship is judged not to be appropriate. A National Association of SACREs was founded in 1993. The great majority of local SACREs are affiliated to the National Association, which assists SACRE members to fulfil their responsibilities with regard to religious education and collective worship in the schools of their area.

The Inter Faith Network for the UK links eighty organisations with an interest in promoting good relations between people of different faiths. Its membership includes national representative bodies from Britain's main faith communities; national and local inter-faith organisations; and educational and academic bodies.

All three bodies were aware of contention over the interpretation of the legislation on collective worship in schools, and the difficulties encountered in implementing it, highlighted, for example, in Ofsted reports. They agreed that the best way forward would be to convene a series of conferences to explore the extent to which there might be a broad consensus on the form of collective worship which is educationally appropriate and practicable for the future. The conferences would also consider what changes, if any, might be required to the present statutory framework.

To aid this process, a research report, *Collective Worship in Schools,* tracing developments in collective worship since 1944, was prepared in 1996 under the editorship of Dr Brian Gates of the University College of St Martin, Lancaster. (2)

Three one day conferences were held in 1997, each chaired by Professor Desmond Rea, Chairman of the Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment and funded by two educational trusts: All Saints and St Gabriel's.

Members of the reviewing conferences included delegates from the churches and other faith communities, the teaching profession and other educational organisations. (3)

This report has been compiled from working documents produced in the course of the review and already circulated in various forms. It sets out the origins and development of the consultation, summarises the views expressed, and concludes with a process recommendation.

(1) *Collective worship in voluntary schools is conducted in accordance with the school's Trust Deed.*

(2) *Copies were provided for conference members. It is also generally available (price £8.50) from CE, Royal Buildings, Victoria Street, Derby DE1 1GW*

(3) *Click for*

List of organisations invited to send delegates
List of individual delegate names

THE 1996 RESEARCH REPORT *Collective Worship in Schools*

<u>The origin of the Research Report</u>
<u>The content of the Research Report</u>

The origin of the Research Report

Over the past few years the Christian churches and other faith communities, as well as a variety of educational organisation, have been considering both the underlying principles and the current practice relating to collective worship. These deliberations have led, in some instances, to the publication of a number of reports, pamphlets and conference resolutions.

In 1995 it was decided to commission a literature survey tracing developments in practice and principle since 1994, the range of current views on this feature of the community life of schools, and some of the key issues which have emerged, particularly since Circular 1/94. The aim was to bring together all the existing published information and research about collective worship in England and to present it in a published document which could be made available widely.

The need for such a survey arose partly out of discussions on collective worship within the Religious Education Council of England and Wales working in partnership with the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education and the Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom, and partly from discussions within the All Saints Trust. The Trust decided to fund the survey, which was to be sponsored by the three organisations concerned and co-ordinated on behalf of the All Saints Trust by Culham College Institute.

A small steering group was established for the survey:
Gwen Palmer (Chairwoman, RE Council and of the Steering Group)
Dilip Kadodwala (Chair, National Association of SACREs)
Brian Pearce (Director, Inter Faith Network)
John Gay (Director, Culham College Institute).

The group was subsequently enlarge to include:
Alan Brown (Church of England Board of Education / National Society)
Sheila Dainton (Association of Teachers and Lecturers)
Brian Gates (University College of St Martin, Lancaster)
Peter Hartley (All Saints Trust)
Mohammad Akran Khan-Cheema (Muslim Education Forum)
Laurie Rosenberg (Board of Deputies of British Jews).

Some initial research was undertaken by Catherine Christie. The work was then taken up by Brian Gates and Peter Gedge at the University College of St Martin, Lancaster. Both brought to bear a long-standing expertise in the subject. The Steering Group played a significant role in suggesting additions and emendations and the final version was the result of an interactive process with all the strands being brought together by the editor Jan Greenough at Culham College Institute.

The report was written from an informational and reference perspective, and so a neutral tone was adopted in relation to the sources quoted. The fact that some faith and educational organisations do not feature in it does not imply their lack of interest in collective worship; it simply means that they had not produced any published documentation on the subject.

Two main roles were envisaged for the report. Firstly, three one-day conferences on collective worship were planned for a widely representative group of some thirty-five delegates. The document aimed to provide delegates with both background information and a starting-point for discussion and consultation.

More generally, the report was designed to be a source of information and ideas for all concerned with the future of collective worship in schools. (1).

The content of the Research Report

Part I: Collective Worship 1944-1996 is in the main historical. It traces half a century's debate about collective worship, including attempts to define its educational justification. It also notes the long-standing preference in many schools for the term 'assembly' rather than that used in the 1944 and subsequent Education Acts, 'collective worship'. This section also records the difficulties experienced in dealing with the conceptual problem of defining collective worship. In addition, the report provides evidence of the debate surrounding collective worship both in relation to the 1988 Education Act and the DfE's Circular 1/94.

It should be noted that references to collective worship in the Welsh Office's Circular 10/94 gave rise to controversies within the Principality similar to those in England (2).

Part I concludes with the following statement:

'*But in the considered view of a wide range of groups concerned with education the government's attempts to preserve the nation's Christian heritage, through tighter definitions of the legislation concerning collective worship, had raised very difficult theological, educational and practical issues.'* (3)

Part II: Key Issues turns to examine some of these issues. It does so under a series of headings:

1. Defining worship
2. Corporate or collective worship
3. Educational school worship
4. 'Wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'
5. '…according a special status to Jesus Christ'
6. How 'religious' are assemblies and 'subjective worship'?
7. Collective worship in Circular 1/94
8. The place of other faiths and world views
9. A 'daily' act of collective worship?
10. Assessing current attitudes (4)

The report was published in 1996, in good time for the first of the conferences; it was widely welcomed as offering an excellent summary of 'the story so far', and provided a good starting point for preliminary thinking and the first stage of the consultative process.

(1) *Collective Worship in Schools, Foreword.*
(2) *Opening address by Professor Rea at Conference 1 on 25th February 1997*
(3) *Collective Worship in Schools, pp 37-8*
(4) *Collective Worship in Schools, Part II*

CONFERENCE 1

The programme
Conclusions

The programme

The programme for the first conference contained two group sessions and two plenaries; delegates were assigned to one of six discussion groups. Each discussion group contained members representing a range of perspectives, and each was chaired by a member of the steering group.

The groups were asked to consider and record their views on issues of substance which had been identified in the survey report, in the pre-conference consultation, and / or in the sharing of views and experience during the day.

In the morning session, two questions in particular were explored:

1. What is the educational value of a community gathering as part of primary / secondary education? If there is value in such a gathering, how frequently should it take place?

2. What is an assemply? In what was is this different from collective worship?

In the afternoon, two further questions were tackled:

3. Schools have a formal responsibility to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development. What elements are necessary in a community gathering if the first three of these responsibilities are to be carried out?

4. Broadly speaking, what do you see as the major problematic aspects of the current legislation?

Following each of the two group discussion sessions, group leaders presented their group's findings.

Conclusions

Following the conference the Steering Group met, assessed the day's discussions, and found that it was possible to identify:

<u>some clear areas of agreement</u>
<u>possible areas of agreement</u>
<u>areas needing further clarification</u>
<u>possible areas of disagreement</u>
<u>clear areas of disagreement</u>

In his closing remarks, Professor Rea noted that the main concern of all the delegates was, essentially, children and young people: children as individuals, in groups, and as members of the community. One group had asked the telling questions, 'What does it mean to be a full human being?' and pointed out that the spiritual dimension was important.

Everyone was aware of the shared responsibility for developing the school community. Someone had asked the question, 'What is the extra dimension that community gathering brings?' Others had offered the suggestions of social and educational dimensions, of promoting the ethos of the school and its values system. Some groups wrestled with what they understood by the 'spiritual' dimension.

There seemed to be a preference for assembly rather than collective worship; this partly had its roots in the widespread antipathy to the requirements of Circular 1/94. Many delegates emphasised that a review of that Circular (particularly the clauses referring to the Christian character of the worship) was essential in order to encourage all schools to participate in collective worship.

Several groups were preoccupied by the issue of frequency; the various suggestions seemed partly to depend upon the maturity of the pupils.

Above all, the consensus was that whatever the form of collective worship, it must be conducted with skill and to the highest standards if it is to retain the respect of the pupils.

This account summarises Professor Rea's closing remarks at Conference 1.

clear areas of agreement

Value of regular ‘gatherings’ of the school community or sections of it.

possible areas of agreement

Gatherings to include focus on spiritual, moral, social, cultural development of pupils, school, society
Frequency and flexibility of such ‘gatherings’

areas needing further clarification

Need for continuance of determinations; of rights of withdrawals of pupils and/or of teachers
Whether or not areas identified as needing further exploration/clarification are common to all types of schools
Justification of any type of gathering larger than of normal class
The role of religions and other belief systems in the context of school gatherings
Problems of definition of: collective worship
Criteria for and evidence of good practice in any/all of the above
Means of promoting and monitoring quality of pupil experience
Means of promoting and monitoring protection of pupil and teacher integrity (personal / group)

possible areas of disagreement

Retention of the term ‘collective worship’
Retention of the present interpretation of legislation on collective worship through the 1994 Circulars
Definition of the aims, content and leadership of collective worship
Definition of the aims, content and leadership of assemblies
The appropriateness of / need for legislation on assemblies and its interpretation through the DfEE and Welsh Office Circulars

clear areas of disagreement

Retention / abolition of the present legislation on collective worship

CONFERENCE 2

The programme
Group discussions
Conclusions

The programme

Five delegates from organisations represented at the conferences each offered a personal contribution about their experience of collective worship in schools. These comments were discussed in an ensuing plenary session.

The conference then discussed the range of options for the future. Five groups were provided with options and subsidiary questions intended to provide a basis for debate. These included the continuation of the present statutory requirement, changes in the statutory requirement and the removal of the statutory requirement.

During the afternoon, reports were received from each group and discussed in a plenary session.

Group discussions

Delegates were asked to focus on what might be seen as the fundamental range of options for the future. Each option inevitably gives rise to subsidiary questions of policy and practice, some examples of which are listed below. The list was not intended to be definitive or exhaustive, but to provide a basis for debate.

Continuation of the present statutory requirements:

With or without interpretation by Circular?
Allowing for flexibility on issues such as frequency?

Changes in the statutory requirements:

With a requirement for regular school assemblies?
Focusing on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and society?
With or without 'opting out'

Removal of the present statutory requirements:

With nothing put in their place?
With national or local guidelines on what schools might choose to do?
With new statutory requirements? (1)

Conclusions

Following the second conference, the Steering Group met and assessed the day's discussions, which indicated that there is widespread unease about and non-compliance with the present requirements for collective worship in schools. Various views were expressed about the most appropriate way forward; in the end it was possible to identify three broad positions:

Some delegates maintained that the difficulties which had been identified could be overcome within the present statutory framework, while recognising that there might be a case for revising the interpretative guidance issued in 1994 by the DfE (Circular 1/94) and Welsh Office (Circular 10/94).

Other delegates took the view that the current requirement should simply be withdrawn, on the basis that it is inappropriate to ask county schools to make provision for any form of religious observance.

A more broadly based consensus seemed to be emerging that a new approach was needed. This would retain a requirement for regular gatherings with a moral and spiritual dimension, but with the withdrawal of the present requirement for collective worship, and permitting a more flexible approach to the content of those gatherings.

Advocates of a new approach pointed to the need to take account of the cultural and religious diversity of contemporary society in England and Wales. Any legal requirements should respect the integrity of both pupils and teaching staff and should not cause justified concern to parents.

The main characteristics of such an approach would be:

The material used in such assemblies might draw upon prayers, readings from scriptures and other material with a spiritual and moral dimension, together with contributions from those taking the assemblies.

The material used would take account of the traditions represented within the school community.

The offering of opportunities for participation would range from personal worship to quiet reflection.

A planned focus on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and of the school.

Opportunities to reflect upon the values of the school and of the community which it serves.

Exploration and appreciation of the beliefs which lie behind the values.

Support for pupils in learning to live with difference while preserving their own integrity and respecting that of others.

More scope for variety and diversity of approach.

More flexible groupings and opportunities for educational experiences that go beyond that which can be offered within the individual classroom. (2)

(1) *Conference 2 Programme*
(2) *'Collective Worship Reviewed – a consultation paper' (paper circulated before Conference 3)*

CONFERENCE 3

The programme
Group discussions

The programme

To open the conference, the results of the pre-conference consultation were presented as outlined above. A Conference Paper (Appendix 3) was then introduced (tabled at the suggestion of the suggestion of the Steering Group), addressing in greater detail the issues raised about the 'new way forward' and exploring the possibilities of new arrangements which might take the place of the present requirements for collective worship.

Delegates were then divided into five groups, each with six or seven members; each group was chaired by a member of the Steering Group (who was not also a delegate). Eight questions were discussed – four in the morning and four in the afternoon – and each discussion period was followed by a plenary session in which the views of each group were reported by the group leaders. These reports were recorded, and this summary is drawn from a transcript of the recordings.

Group discussions

1. *Should the present requirement for collective worship in schools be replaced by one for inclusive assemblies with a spiritual and moral basis to them?*

   Two groups reported a general consensus in favour of replacing the present requirement for collective worship in schools with one for inclusive assemblies with a spiritual and moral basis. In one of these groups, one member strongly disagreed. Another group felt the answer to this question was contingent on the answers to the other questions, and so did not address it directly. In the two remaining groups, no consensus was reached. One of these groups felt further clarification was required.

2. *If so (i.e. if the present requirement were to be replaced), are there ways in which safeguards could be provided against secularisation of the new style assemblies?*

   One group suggested that safeguards could be incorporated into legislation or a Circular, to preserve the distinctive character of assembly alongside the celebration of widely shared personal and community values. Another group strongly opposed secularisation, but did not reach an agreement on any safeguards. One group suggested the wording 'wholly or mainly of a broadly spiritual or moral nature' as a safeguard to be included in legislation or a Circular. Another group produced a similar wording, but felt that if the current situation could not be safeguarded by a legal framework, then neither could this. One group also questioned the possibility of legal safeguards, suggesting the wording 'wholly or mainly of a broadly religious character'. This group wondered how far the teaching profession could be trusted as a safeguard.

3. *Should there be provision for 'faith-specific' (or 'single-faith') worship: (a) as an alternative or (b) as a supplement to these assemblies?*

   All five groups felt that faith-specific worship should be provided for as a supplement. One group suggested that it could be an alternative in some school circumstances, where SACREs should provide advice.

4. *Should the content and source of material used in these assemblies to prescribed? If so, what should the requirement be?*

   One group did not consider this question. The other four groups rejected the term 'prescribed', preferring 'guidance'. One of thse groups suggested this should be both national and local. Another wanted guidance within a broad framework.

5. *What frequency of assemblies would be desirable?*

One group suggested a minimum of three assemblies per week in primary schools and two per week in secondary schools. One group said quality was more important than quantity. They wanted evidence about what happened in practice in Scotland, where the requirement was 'regular and frequent'. Another group wanted to replace 'daily' with 'a regular pattern in the school week'. One group also wanted a frequent, regular pattern, but added 'normally' recognising that other pressures would occasionally cause disruption. One group thought 'daily' was problematic, preferring 'regular'. They added that assemblies should be part of taught time.

6. *Should the present 'right of withdrawal' be retained?*

One group felt that the right of withdrawal would not be needed under the new requirement. Another group thought this was theoretically correct, but felt it would be useful to retain the right of withdrawal. One group wanted it retained for pupils but not for teachers. One group felt that it would not be needed under the new requirement, but felt that it should be retained because a similar right existed in RE. One group thought that it should be retained if the assembly was worship.

7. *What arrangements should be made for local consultation on the implementation of any new requirements?*

One group wanted national guidelines, arguing that if assembly was not religious there was no need for SACREs to be involved. One group thought that SACREs had a useful role in providing guidance. One group mistrusted Circulars, and wanted a new flexible law. One group felt community involvement was important, and that SACREs helped in local debate. One group wanted local consultation involving SACREs but with the DfEE monitoring the national picture.

8. *How far should any new requirements be embodied in statue, how far in a DfEE Circular and how far left to local discretion?*

One group wanted the law changed and a new Circular provided. One group wanted as little legal change as possible. One group suggested that all school seek a determination so that SACREs would have to re-examine their policies. One group said that if the primary legilation was not changes, they would like a new circular. One group wanted the Circular changed, but felt it unlikely that legislation would be changed before the next election.

CONCLUSION

The conferences have been sponsored by three national organisations, funded by two Church College Trusts and have benefited from a specially commissioned survey report, *Collective Worship in Schools*, reviewing half a century's debate about collective worship. The process has been entirely one of voluntary initiative.

The aim of the three conferences and the consultation process has been to explore whether there is a broad consensus on what kind of collective worship (if any) would be educationally appropriate for maintained schools in our present-day society.

The process has been a reviewing rather than a campaigning one, and the document reports both areas of consensus and areas of disagreement. Although generously resourced by two trusts, and also by the organisations themselves, especially in terms of staff time, there has been an inevitable limitation on the scope and scale of the process. This report records considerable achievement but recognises the need for further work.

In terms of achievement, one of the most substantial results has been the process itself. Representatives from a wide range of organisations have spent considerable time and effort in discussing the issues involved both within their organisations and with each other at conferences. This sharing of understandings and clarification of differences is crucial for the future.

From the beginning there has been a widely shared view that 'something' needs to be done about the future of collective worship in schools. By the end of the second conference, what became known as 'a new way forward' seemed to be emerging as the front runner. This was then tested through a consultation process. (for full report, see Consultation section)

The overall conclusion from the consultation process was:

The majority of responses favoured Option 1 for Question A ('a new way forward') and were prepared to support this option if it appeared to have broadly based acceptance. However, many delegates raised questions about the detail of this option and whilst supporting the principle wanted further discussion of how it would operate in practice.

In particular, there was considerable support for a new way forward from the five teacher associations representing those required to organise collective worship in schools (1). The Church of England Board of Education / National Society was unable to declare a preference between the three options as it felt the choice was neither clear nor balanced. The Catholic Education Service supported the status quo, the Evangelical Alliance had strong reservations about the 'new way forward' and there was a variety of opinions within the Muslim Educational Trust.

A detailed explanatory paper was circulated in advance of the third conference (see Appendix 3). At this conference various aspects of 'a new way forward' were explored in more detail in discussion groups, summaries of which appear in Chapter 7. These provide very valuable pointers for future development.

It is felt that the original brief to review collective worship has been thoroughly explored and fully reported in the two associated documents, the one historical and the other current.

A possible route for the future has been indicated as a result of the review, although for such a way to be fully acceptable, especially to some of the faith communities and perhaps also to the general public whose reactions have not been canvassed, further development work needs to be done on it. Such work lies beyond both the resources and the remit of this review. It is therefore recommended that, building upon the substantial results achieved through this review, the DfEE should now take over the baton and establish a governmental review of collective worship.

(1) *Association of Teachers and Lecturers, National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers, National Association of Head Teachers, National Union of Teachers, and Secondary Heads Association.*

APPENDIX 1

CONFERENCE STEERING GROUP

Gwen Palmer	Chair
Desmond Rea	Conference Chair
Ian Wragg	The RE Council of England and Wales
Brian Pearce	The Inter Faith Network for the UK
Dilip Kadodwala	National Association of SACREs
Dennis Doe	National Association of SACREs
Alan Brown	Church of England Board of Education / National Society
M. Akram Khan-Cheema	Muslim Education Forum
Laurie Rosenberg	Board of Deputies of British Jews
Sheila Dainton	Association of Teachers and Lecturers
Brian Gates	University College of St Martin, Lancaster
Peter Hartley	All Saints Trust
John Gay	Culham College Institute / St Gabriel's Trust
Eric Lord	Conference Co-ordinator
Carol Robinson	Assistant Conference Co-ordinator

APPENDIX 2

DELEGATES AND OBSERVERS

AREIAC (Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants)	Graham Langtree
Association of Teachers and Lecturers	Hilary Pollard
Board of Deputies of British Jews	Laurie Rosenberg
British Humanist Association	John White
British Sikh Education Council	Kanwaljit Singh
Buddhist Society	Ron Maddox
Catholic Education Service	John Shoreland
	Louise McKenna
Christian Education Movement	Stephen Orchard
Church of England Board of Education / National Society	Alan Brown
	Alan Nugent
	Shirley Williams
Conference of University Lecturers in Religious Education	Linda Rudge
Evangelical Alliance	Trevor Cooling
	Martin Eden
Free Church Federal Council	Gillian Wood
Inter Faith Network for the UK	Brian Pearce
Local Government Association	Richard Pestell
Methodist Church	Kathleen Wood
Muslim Educational Trust	Muhammad Ibrahim
NASUWT	Amanda Haehner
National Association of Governors and Managers	AJF Lewis
National Association of Head Teachers	Andrew Baker
National Association of SACREs	Dennis Doe
	Dilip Kadodwala
	Geoff Teece
National Council of Hindu Temples	Deepak Naik
NCPTA	Margaret Morrisey
NUT	Samidha Garg
Professional Council for Religious Education	Sue Fitzjohn
Religious Education Council of England and Wales	Ian Wragg
Secondary Heads Association	Colin Broomfield
Society of Education Officers	Michael Nix
Values Education Council	Christine Bondi
WASACRE	JG Harris
DfEE	Tim Dracup
Ofsted	Barbara Wintersgill
TTA	James Rogers
QCA	John Keast
All Saints Trust	Peter Hartley
St Gabriel's Trust	Priscilla Chadwick

APPENDIX 3

PAPER FOR CONFERENCE 3

Introduction
The underlying propositions
The main characteristics of 'a new way forward'
Some important questions
Conclusion

Introduction

The present consultation on collective worship in schools in England and Wales (which is not addressing the position in denominational or independent schools) was launched jointly by the Religious Education Council for England and Wales, the National Association of SACREs and the Inter Faith Network for the UK because of the unease which had been expressed for some time regarding the current requirements set out in the Education Reform Act 1988 and their elaboration in Circular 1/94. The hope has been that it might be possible to find a way forward which would command more general acceptance.

In September 1997 delegates were asked to consult their constituencies on the basis of material circulated to them which was designed to test the level of support for each of three broad options which were summarised as follows:

> Option 1 A 'new way forward' based on a statutory requirement for regular assemblies of a spiritual and moral character, with the present requirement for collective worship being withdrawn.
>
> Option 2 Maintenance of the present requirements either entirely or substantially in their present form.
>
> Option 3 Withdrawal of the present requirements without replacement.

A summary of the responses to this consultation will be tabled at the December conference.

The central purpose of this third and final conference is to establish whether or not a broad measure of agreement can be reached on a new approach which can be commended to the Government. This background paper addresses some of the issues which have been raised about the 'new way forward' and explores in greater depth the form and content that might be given to possible new arrangements in place of the present requirements for collective worship.

The underlying propositions

The 'new way forward' outlined in the consultation document was designed to meet some of the main concerns expressed earlier in the consultation process, including two conferences held in February and May this year (1997) and the initial consultation carried out before the first of them.

The propositions underlying the 'new way forward' are:

> A vitally important contribution is made to school life by regular gatherings with a spiritual as well as a moral dimension, but the arrangements for these must make an effective contribution to the educational development of the school community. There is a clear link here with the general requirement which the 1988 Act places upon schools to promote the spiritual, moral and cultural development of their pupils. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority is currently carrying out consultations of its own on this.

There is a need to encourage the development of the whole school as a moral community. Any requirements therefore need to be based on as inclusive an approach as possible, avoiding the divisive effects of the present requirements. They have to take into account the diversity of contemporary society in England and Wales, in terms both of varieties of religious adherence and of lack of it, while not disregarding the strength of the Christian tradition in helping to shape it for many centuries.

It is most important to ensure that any requirements which schools are to meet (and the way in which they are met in practice) respect the integrity of pupils and teachers. They must respect the faith-based values, and other family values, to which they are committed and must not cause justified concern to parents. The aim would be to hold assemblies in which all teachers and pupils are able to share in good conscience without the need to exercise a right of withdrawal. However, because of the anxieties which have developed around collective worship, it may be desirable for this right of withdrawal to be maintained.

There are substantial doubts about the viability of the concept of 'collective worship'. In most schools it is difficult to fulfil, on a regular basis, a requirement for acts of worship which are also collective in the sense of involving the committed and participative worship of pupils who are likely to come from a wide variety of backgrounds.

The present requirements are seen by many as being prescriptive in too detailed a way, not leaving sufficient discretion to individual schools to take account of the background of their pupils (even thought the present legislation does require them to do so.)

There is a need to ensure that the rights and concerns of minority communities in different school situations are safeguarded, but the arrangements for the granting of 'determinations' are too cumbersome and do not address the situation of most schools. Determinations may ease problems in some schools but can simply create difficulties for a new and different minority of pupils.

There is widespread concern that the present requirement for daily collective worship is excessive.

Any new arrangements need to take account of the practicalities in schools, including for example in large secondary schools, availability of suitable accommodation and the time taken up in gathering pupils and staff together and dispersing them again across a large campus.

Any new arrangements need to take account of the different circumstances in primary schools, secondary schools and sixth form colleges.

The main characteristics of 'a new way forward'

The consultation document circulated in September1997 set out the main characteristics of a 'new way forward' as follows:

The material used in these assemblies might draw upon prayers, readings from scriptures and other material with a spiritual and moral dimension, together with contributions from those taking the assemblies.

The balance of material used would reflect in broad terms the balance of traditions represented within the particular school community.

The offering of opportunities for participation ranging from personal worship to quiet reflection.

A planned focus on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and of the school.

Opportunities to reflect upon the values of the school and of the community which it serves.

Exploration and appreciation of the beliefs which may lie behind the values.

Support for pupils in learning to live with difference and to respect their own integrity and that of others.

More scope for variety and diversity of approach.

More flexibility over grouping for assemblies while providing opportunities for educational experience going beyond that which can be experienced within the individual classroom.

Some important questions

As was noted earlier, a number of questions about the 'new way forward' option and how this would operate in practice have been raised by a number of respondents, including some who nonetheless favour this broad option. It will be important to explore these issues in greater depth at the December conference and also to consider the arguments of those who believe that the present arrangements require little modification. This will help to establish whether or not broad agreement can be reached in these closing stages of the consultation process as a whole.

It will be important in considering these issues to distinguish between the requirements set out in the 1988 and their interpretation in Circular 1/94 on the one hand; and on the other the practice which might be widely followed at present in schools, even though the outside observer may doubt whether, strictly speaking, they meet these requirements as they would be commonly understood. It is clearly undesirable for there to be a significant gap between requirement and practice as this can lead to misunderstanding and concerns which may be groundless. Teachers, parents and pupils need to know where they have to stand.

This paper now turns to a number of key issues which have been raised in relation to the 'new way forward' option as this was set out in the September document.

<u>Collective worship or new-style assemblies?</u>
The consultation document summarised the 'new way forward' on the response form as '*a statutory requirement for regular assemblies of a spiritual and moral character, with the present requirement for collective worship being withdrawn The main focus of these gatherings would be the promotion of reflection on values, beliefs and the spiritual dimension of life.*'

Worship together across different religious traditions and perspectives presents considerable difficulties outside schools and it is arguably not appropriate to require schools to arrange collective, participative worship. It is difficult for those with a commitment to a particular faith tradition to engage in worship with another faith tradition, or within a 'syncretistic' framework. It is also difficult for those without any religious conviction to participate actively in worship, as this is commonly understood, on a regular basis without being compromised or feeling hypocritical. While the term 'worship' can be defined in a number of ways (and stretched in the process), there would be more scope for schools to conduct gatherings with a spiritual and moral basis to them on a more genuinely inclusive basis if the requirement for collective worship were to be withdrawn.

The 'new way forward' is not intended to eliminate worship altogether from these regular school gatherings. The 'new way forward' does involve the removal of a requirement for collective worship. But as the consultation document again suggested, '*the spirit of worship might be evoked*' in the course of these gatherings although they would normally be '*an occasion for personal, rather than collective, response.*'

Some of the difficulties which have arisen over the present requirements for collective worship in schools arise from the anxiety of particular faith communities to ensure that its content is in accordance with their own tradition. This derives from a natural concern that, in the context of a requirement for collective worship, the integrity of children belonging to their community might be undermined if the worship in which they are required to join is that of another tradition. There should be less anxiety if the occasion is one for an option and person, rather than a required and collective, response to what is being offered. There is in any case considerable uncertainty about what a collective response has to involve.

Nonetheless, there may well be occasions when, for example, a school is mourning the death of a pupil or marking some national disaster, when not merely a collective but even a corporate response might be evoked. However, the central question is whether it is appropriate to have a statutory requirement for regular collective worship in schools.

The risk of secularisation?

Concern has been expressed that the abolition of acts of 'collective worship' in favour of 'statutory assemblies of a spiritual and moral character' might lead in practice to a total secularisation of these assemblies. It would be important to guard against this. It is certainly not the intention underlying this option, which refers to assemblies of a spiritual as well as moral character; their main focus would be not simply on values but also on beliefs and the spiritual dimension of life. Nor are values 'source free'! It is to be expected that in these assemblies the sources of these values and the way in which they have been energised by, and expressed in, the lives of individuals and communities would be explored, even if the main focus is likely to be on values which are help in common by a number of different religious traditions and belief systems.

As the consultation document suggested, the content of these new gatherings might in practice not be substantially different from what many schools are already using. But with the removal of a requirement for collective worship, the aim would be primarily to promote reflection on the material used in them and to provide opportunity for a personal response. While no doubt the material used might, as now, draw on some other sources, the assumption is that the majority of the material used would be drawn from the religious traditions to which the majority of children in the school could relate, whether or not on the basis of personal commitment.

A place for 'faith-specific' (or 'single-faith') worship?

Some of those concerned at the prospect that the 'new way forward' could involve the elimination of acts of worship from schools, favour acts of worship according to the faith of the majority of pupils within the school. In some cases they believe that the present legislative requirements do leave the way sufficiently open for this, if necessary through determinations. Their position therefore does not actually represent an endorsement for the concept of inclusive collective worship within a school with pupils from a diversity of backgrounds.

One important issue which needs to be considered in the context of a 'new way forward' is whether provision should be made to permit, with the agreement of the school governors and head teacher, regular acts of worship for those of a particular religious faith within the school community. Some would indeed prefer to see 'faith-specific' (or 'single-faith') worship arrangements rather than either the present statutory requirements for collective worship or inclusive assemblies of a spiritual and moral character as in the 'new way forward' option. While this option might be arguably appropriate in schools where there is not a substantial diversity of background among the pupils, this is not the position in the majority of schools.

Support for a 'faith-specific' (or 'single-faith') worship option was not tested in the recent consultation exercise. It would be helpful to establish at the December conference how much support there might be for it. But an alternative, less drastic, approach would be to provide alongside, and as part of, the 'new way forward' provision under which schools could arrange single-faith worship as a supplement to, rather than instead of, the main requirement for inclusive assemblies of a spiritual and moral character. (There is a provision in the 1944 Education Act which is still in force which provides that a faith group can seek from the head teacher time and space for single-faith worship.)

There is a need to ensure that there remains the opportunity for good practice of this kind to be maintained, for example provision that is made for Muslim pupils in secondary schools to perform their Zuhr (mid-day) prayers on school premises and during school time.

Content of the new assemblies

The 1988 Act requires the majority of acts of collective worship to be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'. Should any new arrangements include a requirement of this kind? Arguably it is more appropriate on educational grounds to give a secured place to Christianity in the curriculum for religious education for all pupils, regardless of their own religious background, than it is to require schools to provide worship within a particular tradition, despite differences in the make-up of schools in terms of the religious background of their pupils.

The consultation document suggested that, under the 'new way forward', as at present,'*the material used in these assemblies might draw upon prayers, readings from scriptures and other material with a spiritual and moral dimension, together with contributions from those taking assemblies'* and that '*the balance of the material used would reflect in broad terms the balance of traditions represented within the particular school community.*'

One particular issue which has been raised is whether the material used in assemblies should be confined to the religious traditions and other belief systems from which the pupils attending them come, or whether there should be some requirement or guidance that schools should ensure that pupils have the opportunity to reflect on material from other traditions and sources as well. There may be a case for a difference on this point between primary and secondary schools. It is worth recalling the requirement in the 1988 Act that the content of religious education syllabuses should take account of the faith traditions represented 'in the country' rather than simply in the local area of the school.

While a shift from the requirement for 'collective worship' might make it easier to move in the direction of a broader content of this kind, there is also a need to bear in mind that a distinction would remain between these gatherings and religious education within the curriculum. Nonetheless, this is a point that needs to be considered. It would certainly seem desirable that schools should make use of these gatherings in part to help promote mutual understanding and appreciation of the different traditions represented within their own school community and for there to be a primary focus on values held in common within it. This is indeed the practice of many schools at the present time.

On the other hand, it would be important for parents to be assured that the strongly held beliefs of their children are not going to be undermined or challenged in a confrontational way.

Frequency of assembly

For some there has been concern over the present requirement for daily acts of collective worship on the grounds that this frequency is excessive and that it is more important to concentrate on quality rather than quantity. It would be helpful to have some more guidance from the December conference on the kind of frequency which delegates consider would be desirable as part of the 'new way forward' arrangements (e.g. weekly? Twice weekly?) and on whether there should simply be a minimum requirement. There may be a case for different requirements for primary and secondary schools.

Rights of withdrawal

Under the 1988 Act parents have the right to withdraw their children from collective worship if they wish. This right applies whether or not a 'determination' has been granted permitting alternative arrangements to be made for collective worship.

The consultation document said that under the 'new way forward' the intention would be '*to hold assemblies in which all teachers and pupils could share in good conscience, without the need for withdrawal*.' While some have suggested that on this basis the right of withdrawal should be removed, more have suggested that it should be maintained under any new arrangements. The latter course would seem to be desirable if only because of the degree of suspicion and concern surrounding collective worship which the present arrangements have helped to create. To retain a right of withdrawal of pupils by their parents, as well as of teachers, would not itself be inconsistent with the aim of ensuring that the arrangements which are made are ones which make withdrawals unnecessary.

Local consultation

It has been suggested that it would be important for any new arrangements to incorporate sufficient flexibility to reflect the balance of backgrounds of pupils in a school community. In addition to a role here for local SACREs (in monitoring the new arrangements and perhaps in providing guidance documents and other forms of advice), there should perhaps be a requirement, or at least an encouragement, for schools to consult parents about the way in which they propose to apply any national requirements which they have to meet.

Method of implementation of changes to the present requirements

The main issues for this conference is whether agreement can be reached on the nature of the arrangements it would like to see in place, rather than on what legislative and administrative action would be needed to give effect to them. There is, however, a question as to how far the framework for any new arrangements should be set out in statute, how far by Circular and how much discretion should

be left to individual schools. Guidance in Circulars can more readily be revised in the light of experience than can statutory provisions. There would be a need to balance public reassurance about the general character of the arrangements which were being introduced (which would point to statutory requirements) with the need to avoid an undesirably detailed prescriptive framework. It would be important, however, for any central guidance, as well as any amending legislation, to be preceded by full consultation with faith communities, LEAs, SACREs, school governing bodies and professional associations.

If new arrangements were to be introduced along the lines that have been suggested for the 'new way forward', there would appear to be a need to amend the 1988 Act as well as DfE Circular 1/94, even if it might be possible, ahead of amending legislation, to issue a new Circular which withdrew some of the requirements in Circular 1/94 which go beyond the statutory requirements.

Other issues

There may be other issues which delegates wish to raise and it will be important to consider these as well at the December conference, if there is time to do so. These may include the lack of adequate training for staff leading collective worship and of appropriate resources for use in them. There is also the fact that teachers' presence at the collective act of worship is not reckoned as 'taught time' (DES Circular 7/90) although attendance at an 'assembly' is. These are important matters which will require attention whether or not a 'new way forward' replaces the present requirements.

There are important issues too about the use of resources from outside the school, including arrangements for drawing on the services of local faith community leaders and members while ensure that the community gathering is appropriate in form and content; the concerns which schools might have about the ability of visitors from outside to lead school gatherings in an appropriate way; and even the possibility that use might be made of them as an opportunity for proselytism. But the questions discussed under separate headings above are perhaps the most significant in considering the character of any new arrangements.

Conclusion

It is hoped that this paper will provide helpful background for the discussion at the December conference which will be seeking to test support for new arrangements developed on the basis of the 'new way forward' included as Option 1 in the recent consultation exercise. It will be important that the content of any new arrangements which present exercise wants to recommend should be as clear as possible to avoid subsequent misunderstanding and disagreement. There is a need now to establish whether there is in practice a sufficient consensus in favour of a new approach to make it possible to commend it to the Government and others as a way of meeting the concerns which have been expressed for some time about the present requirements for collective worship.