

Educating for religious literacy

Report on IFN's 2023 National Meeting



RELIGIOUS LITERACY/EDUCATION/UNDERSTANDING
FAITH/RELIGION/BELIEF/WORLDBIEWS/EXPERIENCE
RESPECT/DIVERSITY/LEARNING/VALUES/KNOWLEDGE
QUESTIONS/CONNECTION/RELIGIOUS LITERACY/EDUCATION
UNDERSTANDING/FAITH/RELIGION/DIVERSITY
WORLDBIEWS/EXPERIENCE/RESPECT/CONNECTION
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Report on the 2023 National Meeting

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Welcome and opening reflections from the Co-Chairs

The Revd Canon Hilary Barber and Narendra Waghela Co-Chairs, Inter Faith Network for the UK

Narendra Waghela: Good morning. May I welcome you all on behalf of both of the Co-Chairs and Trustees of IFN to the 2023 IFN National Meeting. This year, our focus is 'religious literacy'. Why does it matter? What is it? And how can we educate for it? This is a topic which is of greatest importance to our diverse society.

We have an excellent array of contributors and we hope it will be a worthwhile and interesting day, with much opportunity for shared learning. It is great to see participation today from all the categories of IFN membership: National Faith Community Representative Bodies; National and Regional Inter Faith Organisations; Local Inter Faith Organisations; and Educational and Academic Bodies. Each of your organisations makes its own significant contribution to the development of literacy. I hope you will be able to share that through the workshops and in the plenary.

My fellow Co-Chair, Canon Hilary Barber, and I are sharing the chairing of the National Meeting today. Hillary will be chairing the morning session, and I will then be returning to lead on the chairing of the afternoon session.

Before I hand over to Hillary, I would like to share for any of you who don't already know, the very good news that a few days ago the Government let IFN know that, following a review of relevant programmes, it would, after all, be offering some funding towards IFN's work in 2023-24. Thank you to all those who took action on this issue. We shall be saying more about that in the

AGM, but we start with this good news that IFN can carry on its important work, which includes, of course, helping to increase religious literacy. I hand over now to Canon Hilary.

The Revd Canon Hilary Barber: Thank you very much, Narendra, and good morning to everyone joining us from across the UK today. The offer of some funding from Government is, of course, extremely good news. However, I shall not comment further until the AGM so that we can now get underway with our National Meeting. I shall briefly run through some of the housekeeping matters before we get into the main business of the day.

We are using the Zoom 'meeting' format. This means that, unlike in a webinar, you can all see and engage with one another. In your emails with the link to join the meeting, you will have seen a note about the protocols for the meeting today, and I shall just very briefly recap the key points for you. Please may I request that you keep your setting to mute unless you're called on to speak? This helps to reduce background noise during presentations, which of course can be distracting and is a particular challenge for anyone who is hard of hearing.

(A recap of the key points for the meeting protocol followed.)

Please do tweet and post during the day using the hashtag #ReligiousLiteracyIFN and tagging @ifnetuk. If you quote anyone on Twitter or Facebook, please remember to ask their permission.

We have a very full programme, so Narendra and I will be giving a two-minute warning to all speakers. In the same spirit of good timekeeping, I request meeting participants to offer their points succinctly and concisely.

As ever, we aim that all discussions will be carried out in a friendly and constructive spirit, even when, and perhaps especially when there may be points of difference or disagreement.

We hope that Wi-Fi and other technical matters will run smoothly. If for any reason either Co-Chair loses connection, the other will take over. Please bear with us if there are any unexpected technical issues. We hope there will not be, but if we do hit any, we will aim to resolve these as quickly as possible. Now, I think we're ready to move into the heart of today's business.

Religious literacy is, as Narendra has said, a key issue in our society. It is important wherever we live because we all live in an increasingly interconnected world where we need sufficient understanding to engage well with each other and also the skills for interrelating well. Religious literacy helps with that.

Our many excellent contributors will reflect on different aspects of that and ways to educate for religious literacy. The day begins with educating for religious literacy in a schools context and then moves to consider educating for religious literacy in adult life in various different contexts. Contributions to both plenary and workshops vary in length and focus.

Educating for religious literacy – what do we mean by religious literacy and how does RE in schools contribute to this?

Dr Kathryn Wright

Chief Executive Officer, Culham St Gabriel's Trust and Board member, Religious Education Council of England and Wales

A copy of the PowerPoint slides used during this presentation is at the end of this note.

Canon Hilary Barber: I'm delighted to welcome our first speaker, Dr Kathryn Wright, who is the Chief Executive Officer of Culham St Gabriel's Trust and a Board member of the Religious Education Council for England and Wales. Kathryn is going to speak to us about 'Educating for religious literacy'.

Dr Kathryn Wright: Thank you so much for the invitation. It is lovely to be with you all. I'm thrilled to be able to share a few thoughts on educating for religious literacy.

I thought I would begin with the contentious question as to what we mean by 'religious literacy'. [Slide 2]

I'm sure that during the course of today you will have many different definitions of religious literacy thrown at you, but this is one which I've worked with for some time: "The ability to hold balanced and informed conversations about religion and worldviews". I was involved with the development of the Norfolk Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education, and this was a definition which I found really helpful. This definition could apply to other settings beyond schools as well, for

example to workplaces. The definition talks about religion as a concept, ie the nature of religion itself, and then talks about worldviews, meaning, both religious and non-religious.

Implied in this definition is knowledge and understanding of religion and belief, but also the application of this to daily life. Being religiously literate to me means being able to use knowledge and understanding in different contexts. Some might call this wisdom and contributing wisely in public debate or discussion, undertaking wise interpretation of religious and nonreligious worldviews presented, and being able to navigate this complex world of religion and belief wisely. In many ways, I see religious literacy as part of practical wisdom.

Let's just take a step back for a moment and look at what parents think about the value of religious literacy and religious education in schools. [Slide 3] Public perception is actually good. The two Culham St Gabriel commissioned surveys over the last couple of years have demonstrated this. Parents, in particular, are far more positive than we might initially have thought and are, I think, a resource that we need to engage with far more.

One quarter of a million young people have taken, or will have taken this year, a GCSE in Religious Studies. The subject is very much alive. Young people are positive about it and see its value. A couple of competitions that Culham St Gabriel's has run in the last couple of years have shown this as well. You can go onto our website and see the voices of young people and their views on the world.

There are many great projects across the subject community promoting the subject and engaging with a range of audiences. For example, we have been supporting Portsmouth, Barnet and Cumbria SACREs. Parents and the wider community of young people, of faith and belief communities and so on, are really positive about the value of this subject. If I'm being totally honest, we were a little surprised by this when we actually had these surveys undertaken. The examples I've included on the slide are about young people becoming wise interpreters of religion and belief in the public square. They're about religious literacy.

What does this look like in schools at the current time? Well, the religious education community is currently exploring new ways of thinking about the subject in schools. [Slide 4] This follows from the Commission on RE in 2018 and has a focus on what has become known as a 'religion and worldviews' approach to the subject. This slide shows a summary of what this might mean. There is a new pedagogical approach, ie how we teach the subject, but also a new curriculum and a new emphasis on what we teach. Underpinning both of those is what we might call different ways of knowing about religion and belief, or as some have referred to it, 'disciplinary knowledge'. In the next few slides I'm going to unpack some of this a little more and explain why I believe this is one of the best approaches to use in developing religious literacy.

I think we would all agree that there are different ways of knowing about religion and belief. [Slide 5] This is a really important part of religious literacy. We

might ask theological questions or philosophical questions, or more historical ones, but also perhaps sociological or anthropological, or even, dare I say, political questions about religion and belief. These different ways of knowing have different methods that they use to explore religion and belief. There may be some overlap, perhaps in terms of content, but how that content is studied can be quite different. For example, one might use textual criticism, but also perhaps data analysis or interviewing people, or perhaps argumentation and reasoning.

Some Agreed Syllabuses for RE are making this much more explicit. I was at a launch of an Agreed Syllabus for RE very recently, where disciplinary approaches to the subject were being explored much more explicitly. The three publications shown on this slide draw upon that. The first one, 'Knowing Well in Religious Education', a very recent publication through UCL by Jo Fraser-Pearce and Alexis Stones, talks about the importance of epistemic literacy, understanding that there are different ways of knowing about religion and belief in the subject. 'Religion and Worldviews in the Classroom: A Draft Resource', a publication produced through the RE Council based on a commissioned piece of work funded by Templeton World Charity Foundation, draws very heavily on different ways of knowing about the subject. Lastly, the Ofsted Research Review from 2021, talks about the importance of disciplinary knowledge and different ways of knowing in terms of a scholarly approach to the subject.

The Ofsted Research Review talks about 'collectively enough' or 'cumulatively sufficient'. [Slide 6] We can never possibly know everything there is to know about different religious and non-religious worldviews. I know that I certainly don't. How we shape that content must be driven by educational principles, and I've cited some of those in a previous slide.

We are supporting a number of projects which aim to help educators consider what content to include and how to frame it. The

most important thing, I think, is that a religion and worldviews approach starts with people. Therefore, teacher and pupil engagement with religious and non-religious communities, including many of you here now, is vitally important. Where possible, encountering people themselves, but certainly knowing about and understanding the lived experience of believers, engaging with resources which are authentic and which reflect the diversity and divergence within different worldview traditions, is really important. Again, I believe this can be translated into other contexts in terms of that encountering of others.

Alongside curriculum or content choices, there are also pedagogical choices that a teacher can make. [Slide 7] In this reimagined approach, the focus is on pupils becoming wise interpreters of religion and belief, using those different disciplinary lenses. This has an impact on the pedagogical choices teachers make, ie the approach to the subject. Hermeneutical or interpretive approaches come to the fore. Interpretation becomes the key skill alongside what we might call intellectual humility, that is approaching the subject with openness and with dialogue, something I know that those here today take very seriously, and which also, I believe, sit well alongside inter faith principles. There is a sense of creating safe spaces for conversation, approaching study with respect, being willing to learn from traditions other than our own. In my own research, which I undertook a few years ago, I called this idea listening for wisdom, that is listening actively to others, listening to what it is that we're learning about, and thinking about how we make wise choices in our daily life.

Many of you, I'm sure, would have come across this piece of work 'Nobody Stands Nowhere'. [Slide 8] This was the title of a film produced by Theos Think Tank to exemplify the heart of a religion and worldviews approach. Inter faith work, by its nature, takes this seriously. However, in schools this is sometimes not so well understood. The religion and worldviews

approach places each person's position, front and centre. We all bring ourselves to whatever it is we are studying. We bring our own lens, our culture, background, beliefs, and so on, and interpret what we see and study through that lens. Acknowledging this is the first step, followed by spending time considering how one's position has developed, how it might have changed or could change. This is what reflexivity is all about and, again, is at the heart of this religious and worldview literacy approach in schools.

I have talked for a few minutes there about this religion and worldviews approach which I believe is vital for children and young people to be able to navigate the complex world in which we live, but I want to just touch briefly on a couple of other aspects which I think are important in thinking about educating for religious literacy in schools.

FoRB – freedom of religion or belief- seems to be increasingly talked about at the moment. Little work has been done on the importance of education for FoRB. [Slide 9] However, it is an important part of religious literacy. Last year there was an International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief and I was delighted to be able to take part along with one of my colleagues, Josh Cass, who wrote the paper shown on the slide. As a result of that Ministerial Conference, I have become much more involved with thinking about how we can promote freedom of religion or belief in schools. We are currently funding a project to explore how we might engage very young children with the principles of this.

Likewise, positive community relations is another element to which religious education can contribute really positively. There is evidence through a University of Bristol project using contact theory in the classroom that we can all contribute positively to good community relations. This is an important political point to make to future governments. Good religious literacy, which brings understanding,

respect and openness, contributes to social harmony and well-integrated societies.

There is also evidence that young people who study GCSE religious studies in areas of social disadvantage, do better overall in their GCSEs. There are a number of different things to consider here in terms of the importance of the subject, both in terms of freedom of religion or belief, and also in terms of community relations and positive dialogue between different communities.

In this short film, Josh Cass, who works with Culham St Gabriel's as a consultant, talks about the importance of the subject, particularly in relation to parents. I think he sums up really well what it means to educate for religious literacy. [Slide 10]

"My name's Josh. I'm a charity consultant. I'm Jewish and I'm the father of two boys. For a child, a worldview is a way of engaging with questions of religion and belief. That captures more than just the theology. It also speaks to the history and the ideas that may have emerged at different periods of time that have shaped the way that people choose to live their lives, the things that they believe, and the things that they do.

Whether you're Atheist, Humanist, Orthodox Jewish, Christian, whatever it might be, we've all got a way in which we look at the world, and that, for me, is what's captured by the religion and worldviews approach to religious education. I think that the benefits are that it enables children of all ages to engage with really complex ideas that are shaping society, and to try as young people growing into adults, to fit those ideas together in a way that makes sense to them, and in doing so, gives young people an opportunity to engage more fully with the complex ideas that are around them in the world today."

I've given you a little flavour of what I believe educating for religious literacy means in schools today, and to conclude, I have just a few of questions for us perhaps

to think about. [Slide 11] I know we're going to have time for questions, so I thought I would pose my two first. 'How can inter faith groups and individual religion and worldview communities support this new approach to religious literacy in schools? How can we work together as stakeholders to promote the importance of religious literacy, and freedom of religion and belief, and good community relations? I was delighted by the announcement earlier that there is some funding for the great work of IFN, but how can we work together to promote this together in the future? Thank you very much.

Canon Hilary Barber: Thank you very much, Kathryn. We have now just a few minutes for people to ask questions or to make comments about what they've heard.

Rajnish Kashyap (Hindu Council (UK)): This is a very interesting subject and you covered a lot. Religious Education, or Religious Studies, in an education field, is very important. Parents want their children to understand their own religion, but they are not ambassadors. They do not know enough about their own religion or that of others so they rely upon schools to provide that fundamental education. In the report on his Independent Faith Engagement Review, Colin Bloom noted that Religious Education is one of the first lessons to be dropped in schools and in some places its barely on the timetable at all. Also, some faith-based schools do not provide teaching about other religions. I can only speak on behalf of the Hindu community. We have come across many schools which do not touch on these things. For children and young people to be good members of society, good knowledge of religious education and, as you say, freedom of religion and belief, is very important.

Dr Kathryn Wright: You are absolutely right. The Colin Bloom report does highlight some of the challenges that the religious education community faces. One of the biggest challenges is around recruitment. Recruitment for teachers of RE is extremely challenging at the current

time. We, along with a number of different partners, have been lobbying government, for example, to reintroduce a bursary for secondary school teachers of the subject. If there are not enough teachers for the subject, then, as you said, it tends to be dropped. Also, if there are not enough specialist subject teachers, then there is a danger of inaccurate representation or misunderstandings, so there needs to be professional development and support for those that are teaching the subject when they don't have a specialism, as well as more teacher recruitment. I encourage you as a network, where clearly you can see the importance of educating children and young people, to work with us to lobby, particularly for bursaries, but also for funding for professional development for teachers as well.

Mike Stygal (The Pagan Federation): I have been associated with a number of different local authorities in the past, and I've sensed sometimes that there's a little resistance or reluctance from SACREs to link in with local inter faith groups. Some are keen to do so, but others want to keep them at arm's length. I was wondering if the RE Council might be able to encourage SACREs to seek out ways of building relationships with local inter faith groups for a number of reasons, not least being, of course, the opportunity to increase the chances for visiting religious sites and so forth.

Also, I know it works on a local authority basis because of the locally agreed syllabus, but would it be possible for curriculums to draw greater attention to the diversity within religious traditions and worldviews as well, ie intra faith issue? Perhaps that comes down to learning the right questions to ask to try and get a greater understanding of that diversity. I don't know if that is something that the RE Council could pick up on as well?

Dr Kathryn Wright: Let me answer your second question first. Yes, absolutely, I think the diversity within different religious and non-religious traditions is as important to be exploring as diversity and divergence between different groupings. That is

discussed in the Draft Resource, which I showed a picture of earlier. You are right that local authorities, local agreed syllabuses, are exploring that and I know some that look at the difference and divergence within different traditions.

Your first question is a very interesting one around how different groups connect with one another. I'm really delighted that a few months ago, I was appointed to head up a new membership engagement committee with the RE Council. The idea of that committee is to look at different ways in which member organisations can get involved in promoting religious education, working across different networks and different groups. So, encouraging local inter faith groups to work with SACREs and vice versa can certainly be part of the conversations within that membership engagement committee. We all want to work for educating for religious literacy and being able to use that in society. Thank you for the suggestion. We have a slightly different educational system in Scotland, but I wonder if you might be interested in attending a Zoom meeting with the Cross-party group on Freedom of Religion or Belief in the Scottish Parliament to speak about freedom of religion or belief in education? Normally the speakers are those who have suffered because of persecution due to their freedom of religion or belief, but I think it would be wonderful to have an exploration of what would it look like to have freedom of religion or belief taught in schools, and you would be a wonderful opening speaker for that subject.

Dr Kathryn Wright: That sounds very exciting. I would be delighted to do so. We have just revised our own strategy a little, and are thinking much more strategically about how we connect with the different nations. We have been particularly focused around England, and to some degree Wales, but would like to connect more with Scotland as well, so that would be a very good opportunity. I'll put my email in the chat for anyone who wishes to contact me after the meeting.

Canon Hilary Barber: Thank you so much for starting our day, Kathryn. It was a joy for me to be able to attend the RE Council's AGM in Conway Hall a few weeks ago, and particularly good to hear the Children's Commissioner speaking, Rachel de Souza, about how informative it was for her to teach RE and how it has influenced the whole of her life.

verbally. If you'd like to raise something to be considered for use at some future point, it can be put in the Chat with the words 'EXPERIENCE SHARE' noting any factual information about projects relating to religious literacy.

Dr Harriet Crabtree: As was mentioned at the beginning of the meeting, the Zoom Chat function is enabled for people to connect each other, but a reminder that if you have a point to raise, please do so

CULHAM ST GABRIEL'S

Educating for religious literacy

Dr Kathryn Wright
Chief Executive, Culham St Gabriel's Trust

1

CULHAM ST GABRIEL'S

What do we mean by religious literacy?

- A working definition: *The ability to hold balanced and informed conversations about religion and worldviews* (Norfolk Agreed Syllabus, 2019 p.4)
- Knowledge and understanding, but also application in and through daily life.
- Practical wisdom: *Are young people able to contribute wisely to the public sphere in relation to religion and worldviews? Are young people able to make wise decisions about how they engage and interact with those who hold different worldviews to their own?*

2

CULHAM ST GABRIEL'S

Parents value the subject in schools

Religion and Worldviews Parents Survey 2022

- 78% say that it is important for their child to have a good understanding of religion and worldviews in school.
- 86% felt that it is important for their child to have a good understanding of religion and worldviews in school.
- 72% say that it is important for their child to have a good understanding of religion and worldviews in school.

3

CULHAM ST GABRIEL'S

A shifting paradigm in the classroom...

A pedagogical turn: An approach which emphasizes...	A curriculum turn: An approach which takes seriously...
Hermeneutics	Lived, authentic experience
Intellectual humility and dialogue	Diversity of belief and practice
Positionality, personal knowledge and reflexivity	Continuity and Change
Wise (critical) interpretation	Context

Different ways of knowing/disciplinary knowledge

4

CULHAM ST GABRIEL'S

Developing disciplinary knowledge

Knowing Well in Religious Education

Research and practice
Research review series: religious education
Published by Ofsted

5

CULHAM ST GABRIEL'S

Selecting and resourcing substantive content

6

Pedagogical Choices



7

Positionality and reflexivity



8

FoRB and Community Relations

- Promoting and protecting freedom of religion or belief (FoRB)
- Promoting positive community relations
- Importance of religious literacy and interfaith dialogue and initiatives in contributing to both of these



9

A voice from a religious worldview community...



10

Some things to think about...

- How can interfaith groups, and individual religion and worldview communities support this new approach to religious literacy in schools?
- How can we work together as stakeholders to promote the importance of religious literacy, FoRB and good community relations?

11

Faith communities and RE: contributing to religious literacy through SACREs and through educational programmes

Dr Sheila Gewolb DL

Board member, National Association of SACREs, Jewish representative on Cumbria, Rutland and Torbay SACRE, Deputy for Cardiff United Synagogue and Chair, Outreach Education Working Group, Board of Deputies of British Jews

A copy of the PowerPoint slides used during this presentation is at the end of this note.

Canon Hilary Barber: I'm now delighted to welcome Dr Sheila Gewolb. She is a Board member of the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education. She is also a Jewish representative on Cumbria, Rutland and Torbay SACREs and Chair of the Outreach Education Working Group of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Sheila is going to be drawing on her different experiences to talk about how faith communities engage with RE through SACREs and also through their own educational programmes.

Dr Sheila Gewolb: Good morning everyone and thank you for inviting me to be here. Kathryn, thank you also for the wonderful work that you are doing at Culham St Gabriel's.

I'm going to speak a little about Standing Advisory Councils on RE (SACREs), the formation of them and how the National Association of SACREs supports their work.

Faith communities contribute to religious literacy through SACREs and educational

programmes. But what are SACREs? [Slide 2] A SACRE is an independent body that is mandated by government to set the RE syllabus locally. For every other topic, the government sets the syllabus. For now, SACREs set the syllabus for RE (although in the future that may change). This goes back to the 1996 Education Act which mandated SACREs to be legally constituted. Every local educational authority in England and Wales has to have a SACRE. There are 152 altogether. Scotland has its own education system for RE.

I'm sure everybody will have a different experience of being on a SACRE. The Board of Deputies of British Jews has a Jewish representative on most SACREs and the experiences they share of these, including how they are funded and supported, vary enormously.

The composition of SACREs in England and Wales differs slightly. [Slide 3] In England every SACRE has four committees (A, B, C and D as shown on the slide). The Christian denominations, except for the Church of England, and all other faiths, fit into the first group. The Church of England has a group to itself. The next group should

include teachers' associations and the final group should include local authority councillors and officials with a specific interest in RE.

SACREs may co-opt members if they find there is a space. I joined a SACRE because it was suggested that Cumbria SACRE, for example, did not have a Jewish representative and I was recommended to approach the chair. SACREs can recommend that a person be appointed but it is the local education authority that actually appoints them.

Each of the four groups has one vote. If there is a contentious issue, and a split vote, the chair does not have a casting vote, so the status quo before the vote is taken to apply. One of the most topical issues at the moment is Humanist representation on SACREs and, if Humanists are represented, whether they should be full members, co-opted members or observers. We are very supportive of this now because it has been recommended through government that Humanists can be represented.

There is no specific required number of people for each of these groups, but the SACRE is not considered quorate if there is not one member for each of these specific groups.

NASACRE is the National Association for SACREs. [Slide 4] It was launched in the House of Lords, in 1993, in the presence of religious leaders, by Baroness Blatch, who was the Minister of State for Education at that time. NASACRE is the executive body that supports local SACREs. I am the Development Officer on the committee and my work looks at ways of improving what we do. We have a brand new website at <https://nasacre.org.uk/>. One of IFN's Trustees, Jo Backus, has recently been elected to the NASACRE committee.

Every SACRE is automatically a member of NASACRE. There is also a paid membership option, for £110 per year, which provides the extra training that is offered by NASACRE and access to exclusive parts of

the website. Every SACRE can use the website to see the list of all SACREs, their chairs and other members. I encourage everyone to look at the website.

The Wales Association of SACREs (WASACRE) supports SACREs in Wales and has 22 members.

As I mentioned, there is not set number of people required to fill each of the groups on a SACRE. [Slide 5] This means that there might be lots of local authority representatives but not many faith representatives or, conversely, lots of faith representatives but not many local authority representatives. Each SACRE has a different demographic or makeup. Usually, faith representation on a SACRE is related to the demographic of the local community. For instance, if there is a large Muslim population, there may be more Muslim representatives than in other areas. With only half a percent of the population being Jewish, there will not be many Jews living in most places. But I think it is very important for young people to have the wisdom that Kathryn spoke about, being able to have religious literacy across the board in all faiths. If there is no person of a particular faith living in an area, it might be even more important to have a voice from that faith on the SACRE. That is my personal perspective. However, I've been supported in this view, being invited all over the country as a Jewish representative when there are not any Jews living in those areas.

The locally agreed syllabus is reviewed every four years by the SACREs. Cumbria just had its launch last May and Torbay is looking at its new syllabus for next year.

Claire Clinton, who some of you may know, is the RE Adviser for Newham and is also a member of the NASACRE Executive. She is now the Lead Director for a new initiative called RE Hubs. This is a one-stop shop, for example, for people to find faith speakers to visit their schools, or to undertake kite marked training. I encourage you all to look at the RE Hubs website at <https://www.re-hubs.uk/>.

Finally, I would like to speak briefly about the education work of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. [Slide 6] I chair the Board's Education Working Group. We work nationally across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland supporting education from a Jewish perspective as well with our own representatives on SACREs. We also have an interactive touring exhibition.

There is a lot of talk at the moment about racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia and various misunderstandings and myths. People don't know they need RE education. Cumbria SACRE has now introduced an anti-racism element to its locally agreed syllabus. This is really important. The work of this is also being supported by the Board of Deputies which is launching a new digital resource in January next year. The resource is aimed at 11 to 15-year-old secondary school pupils and will be free of charge. We are looking at historical antisemitism, what's going on today in modern Israel with Gaza and Palestinians (and trying to unpick all this from a balanced perspective), the importance of being Jewish in this country and the contribution we have made for hundreds of years. For example, my father was in Montgomery's Eighth Army. I have got his medals. It is not all about Holocaust education. That is really important, but this takes a different approach.

Thank you very much.

Canon Hilary Barber: Thank you very much, Sheila. We now have time for a few questions.

Catherine Davies: In regard to your first question, if you email me afterwards, I would be happy to help you find those local connections and help you to build that relationship. We would be honoured to do so. In regard to your second question, at the Festival of Remembrance last year, we had a big piece reflecting on all those who served in the pandemic to honour that service and sacrifice. I know there are a few plans for Covid-19 specific memorials and woodlands that are in development at the

moment, but they are not completed yet. I am happy to come back to you when we know more.

Canon Hilary Barber: Thank you very much again to Emma, Catherine and Nitin.

Lt Col Jonathan Roberts (The Salvation Army): When it comes to the four-yearly review of the curriculum, how much influence does NASACRE have? Does it try to ensure some consistency nationally? Does it advise the local SACRE group on the input it should have into the curriculum development? What is the approach?

Dr Sheila Gewolb: If NASACRE receives a specific query from a local SACRE it will try to assist. Usually, though, it provides support for SACREs, for example, a self-evaluation tool and website guidance to work through to understand how effective they are and how effective they can be. It also offers a development tool which works hand in hand with the self-evaluation tool. NASACRE does not tell SACREs how to write their own syllabus but it provides training and assistance. Different SACREs take different approaches. In Cumbria, for example, the SACRE writes its own syllabus and then tweaks it every four years. This might be because of new government guidelines, or, for instance, the RE commission on the worldviews approach. There is no need to start from scratch. Some SACREs buy in the locally agreed syllabus from another area. There is quite a lot of collaboration among SACREs.

Canon Hilary Barber: I'd like now to invite someone from the Welwyn Hatfield Inter Faith Group to tell us briefly about its Whisper Project for schools.

Valerie Skottowe (Welwyn Hatfield Inter Faith Group): Thank you. Reynold Rosenberg was due to have been attending today and would have spoken about this, but he is not well. Welwyn Hatfield Inter Faith group was set up in 2003 and has always done a certain amount of work with schools. It often provides speakers for schools from different faiths to explain how they live their faith rather than explaining

about it from a theological point of view. In 2014, the United Reformed Church in Welwyn Hatfield got some funding to appoint a Children Faith and Youth Families Worker. As part of that funding, a percentage was given to the inter faith work in the borough. 'Whisper' stands for Welwyn Hatfield Interfaith Schools Peace Education Resource. We specifically don't use the word faith because we have found that sometimes puts people off. The project has been very successful. The lady who leads the project, Wendy Lidgate, is also on the local SACRE. She has set up a training project to enable people to feel confident in speaking about their faith on schools visits and would be pleased to hear from anyone who would be interested to take part.

Canon Hilary Barber: Thank you, Valerie. We have time for one further question or comment.

Cllr Asha Masih (Coventry Multi Faith Forum): Some SACREs buy in the locally agreed syllabus from another area. There is quite a lot of collaboration among SACREs.

Canon Hilary Barber: Thank you for your comment Cllr Masih.

Thank you again, Sheila, for giving us your time and for your contribution this morning.

**Faith communities and RE:
contributing to religious literacy through
SACREs and through educational programmes**

1

The Board of Deputies of British Jews

- Outreach education work includes supporting Jewish SACRE reps as well as having a touring interactive resource- Jewish Living Experience Exhibition (JLEE).
- New digital resource to help combat antisemitism/anti-Jewish racism to be launched in January 2024. Aimed at 11-15 year olds this will be free of charge.
- Contents include: historical antisemitism and modern-day tropes and stereotypes; contribution of Jews to British history; Israel as Jewish biblical homeland and the importance to Jews today; authentic oral testimonies from Jewish people. Not related to Holocaust teaching.

2

Faith communities on SACREs

- It is important for every SACRE to have representatives from different faiths.
- Locally agreed syllabus conferences (ASCs) are convened every four years to agree a new syllabus.
- Faith speakers' voices are a vital contribution, also to visit schools.
- RE Hubs (www.re-hubs.uk) is a one-stop shop for teachers and professionals of RE/RVE/R&W to find high quality resources locally.
- Claire Clinton and a team of regional leads offer training. There is a kite-mark for attending.

3

NASACRE

- The National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) was launched in 1993 in the House of Lords in the presence of religious leaders and the then Minister of State for Education, Baroness Blatch
- NASACRE works to celebrate, support, strengthen and promote the work of local SACREs in England
- All SACREs in England are automatically members of NASACRE. However, to be eligible for the full range of training and support resources on offer, the annual subscription fee is currently £110
- Website address- <https://nasacre.org.uk>
- WASACRE in Wales has 22 members

4

Composition of a SACRE

In England, a SACRE has 4 committees:

A: Christian denominations (except for Church of England (CE), and all other faiths)

B: Church of England (does not apply to Wales)

C: Teacher Associations

D: Local Authority (LA) council officials and councillors

SACREs may co-opt members who have no voting rights. Each committee has equal voting rights- one per group. If the result of a vote is 2-2, the status quo before the vote stands. The chair does not have a casting vote.

5

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)

- An independent body in England and Wales that considers the provision of religious education in the area under the jurisdiction of its Local Authority.
- The SACRE advises and is empowered to require a review of the locally agreed syllabus for RE. The legal constitution of SACREs is set out in the 1996 Education Act Paragraph 390 subsection (4.)
- Every LEA in England and Wales (152) should have a SACRE to provide a Locally Agreed Syllabus (LAS) for RE for community and voluntary controlled schools, and Collective Worship (CW) in schools which are maintained by the LEA.

6

Religious literacy in a digital age: media and online content as routes of transmission and learning

Dr Jasjit Singh

Associate Professor, School of Philosophy, Religion and the History of Science (PRHS) at the University of Leeds and Adviser to the Religion Media Centre

A copy of the PowerPoint slides used during this presentation is at the end of this note.

Canon Hilary Barber: We now move on to 'Religious literacy in a digital age'. There will be a presentation, followed by a response and, if there is time, we shall take questions after both presenters have spoken.

We are delighted to welcome Dr Jasjit Singh. Jasjit is an Associate Professor in the School of Philosophy, Religion, and the History of Science at the University of Leeds. He is also an Adviser to the Religion Media Centre.

Dr Jasjit Singh: Thank you very much. I am a research fellow and Associate Professor at the University of Leeds and my main interest is in religious transmission, how people learn about religion and culture. I teach about broadcast media and its role in religious transmission. I'm currently looking at the role of social media, which is really interesting. The only downside is that I've had to join all the social media platforms! Today, I'm going to give a quick introduction to religious literacy and the media. [Slide 2] I shall be talking about how media can be an important way for adults to gain greater religious literacy; how media can sometimes feed illiteracy through use of tropes and stereotypes; and

the role that people and organisations can play in helping media portray their traditions and associated cultures with greater accuracy.

What is 'religious literacy'? [Slide 2] It is the knowledge of, and ability to understand, religion and its intersections with social, political, and cultural life. It is learning about history, texts, beliefs, practices, and manifestations of various traditions. And it can be developed through various means, such as formal education, informal learning, inter faith engagement, media consumption, and personal reflection.

My research as a whole looks at different ways in which people learn about religion. [Slide 3] There are various aspects to this: 'nurture', which is the process through which people learn about religion as children; 'transmission', which is the ways through which individuals learn about religion consciously; and 'socialisation', which is the impact of agents of socialisation, including parents, families, congregations, and so forth, throughout the course of a person's life.

There are both formal and informal ways of learning about religion and conscious and unconscious ways of learning about religion. What kinds of influences are you

aware of and what kinds of influences are you unaware of in terms of how the shaping of your ideas about particular religious traditions and their values?

An important question to consider is what happens to representations of religion in media when you live in an increasingly non-religious society? [Slide 4] The England and Wales Census data from earlier this year highlighted a significant increase in the 'No religion' category, a decrease in the Christian category, and a small increase in various other traditions. When the 'No religion' category increases, that means that less and less people are being socialised into a religious household. What is the impact of that on how people learn about religion, where previously they would learn about religion within the family? If that isn't happening anymore, where do people learn about religion?

As you can see from this slide, this relationship between religion and media isn't new. [Slide 5] These pictures show the Ten Commandments, which were a form of media, Buddha expressing his teachings to his followers, and the Guru Granth Sahib using a form of media too.

There have been various ways in which religion has been taught historically through the media of its time. However, when we talk about media now, we are generally talking about 19th century to 21st-century media, which includes broadcast media and, increasingly, social media.

[Slide 6] *Songs of Praise* is the longest-running religious TV programme in the world. *The Jewish Chronicle* is the UK's oldest and most widely read Jewish newspaper, founded in 1841, which again highlights the long history of religion and media. *The Passion of Christ* is the highest-grossing religious film of all time. There have been a whole host of different types of media going all the way back to tracts produced by Christian Mystics in India, for instance, through to a vicar who preaches on TikTok with approximately 50 million followers. Religion and media have a really significant relationship and one question I

ask my students is, 'Is it possible for religion to exist without some media?'.

The speed of technological advance since the 1970s, has challenged the traditional roles of institutions and frameworks of religious life. [Slide 7] Thanks to media there are now lots of ways of 'doing religion' outside customary institutions and frameworks of authority. This also means that authority has been challenged, in that you do not have to go to your local religious authority anymore for advice because you get advice on religion from anywhere now, thanks to globalisation and the internet. That has brought new possibilities for long-distance and more intimate forms of communication too.

One aspect I'm particularly concerned about is 'representation'. [Slide 8] How do media deal with and represent different religious traditions and what is the context and meaning behind this? How do media deal with and present gender, age, ethnicity, religion, identity, and social issues and events to their audiences? This is very, very important in terms of shaping an audience's knowledge and understanding about a tradition, particularly if socialisation is no longer taking place, as media becomes more important.

I'd like now to ask you a question for my own interest, which is, 'Which popular media spokespeople on religion can you name?'. Please could you respond in the chat. I do a lot of assemblies online now, which has become normalised post-COVID and I often ask this question of sixth formers and others. I asked this question of some students on Monday and Richard Dawkins was still the person that lots of students said was the person that they recognised as somebody who spoke about religion in media a lot. [Slide 9] This was quite surprising, given that it is some while since *The God Delusion* came out.

There were several series of *The Big Questions*, hosted by Nicky Campbell, during which people from different religions were asked to partake in vigorous debate on different issues. [Slides 10 and 11]

This was for some while the most popular broadcast programme about religion on mainstream media with millions of viewers. What does it do to a perception of religion if *The Big Questions* is your only way of learning about a religious tradition? It's not as if *The Big Questions* was always the most serious of programmes about religion. Its topics included, for example, whether Jesus and Buddha were aliens!

Nevertheless, the pandemic demonstrated that religion in the media was very important. [Slide 12] Increasing numbers of people tuned into religious services online and there was a big increase in the number of institutions across different traditions using media. One of my PhD students is doing research on Hindu mandirs, many of which broadcast live on YouTube, as did gurdwaras, churches and many other places of worship. That was interesting because it challenged the perception that religious institutions are somehow archaic and not able to switch quickly.

We know that popular rhetoric on religion is mainly negative, primarily because that's what makes the news. [Slide 13] But what does this do to public perception of religion if the socialisation about religion isn't happening in the household? Research has shown that 6 in 10 people believe that religion does more harm or good. [Slide 14]

My PhD supervisor, Professor Kim Knott, did a study on media representations of religion. [Slide 15] She compared how religion was represented in the media in the early 1980s to how it was represented in the media in the early 2000s. You can see from this slide the difference in terms of the ways in which Christianity is represented in conservative media versus more liberal media. On the one hand, Britain is perceived to be a Christian nation first, then secular and plural, whereas on the other hand, it is perceived to be a secular and plural nation first, but only notionally Christian.

Nevertheless, there still is a dominance of Christianity in terms of religion in media. [Slide 16] When I ask my students to think about when they last saw religion in media,

they often given examples of Christianity. TV clergy, such as the Vicar of Dibley, Rev and Father Ted are all representations of Christianity because it's a cultural norm. Because if somebody is presenting a comedy programme and including a Christian figure, less work is needed to explain what the figure represents. This is because Christianity is still the normative religion in this country as compared to Islam, for instance.

Elizabeth Poole did a study on representations of Muslims [Slide 17]. This covered a host of different ways in which Muslims are represented – including being regarded as deviating from the mainstream and as a threat to mainstream values – and the idea of inherent cultural differences. As can be seen from the headlines shown on this slide, different traditions are represented in different ways. [Slide 18]

There was a survey done in 2016 looking at how Europeans perceive the number of Muslims in their countries. [Slide 19] Almost across the board in all European countries, the perception was three times the reality. [Slide 20] This is really interesting and significant in terms of inter faith relations.

During COVID, I did a small study of some of the media stories and the types of images that were being used. [Slides 21 and 22] I often saw media using images of hijab-wearing Muslim women on stories which had literally no relevance to religion at all. What do the headlines have to do with the images? I could, of course, talk about this in a lot more depth, but across the board it was interesting seeing what kinds of images were used in stories that were not specifically about religion.

Lots of studies have highlighted the consequences of politicians' rhetoric and media rhetoric fuelling hate crime in Britain through the constant 'othering' of religious minorities. [Slide 23] This study was actually pre-Brexit, but we have seen how this continues to the modern day. So there is certainly an issue about the way in which different communities are represented in media.

What is being done to challenge this – or at least to provide better resources to the media? I could say a lot about the makeup of the media industry as well and how that perpetuates some of these ideas. I'm a Trustee of the Religion Media Centre (RMC) which looks to provide training to journalists, many of whom have never encountered religion in any of their journalism training. [Slide 24] We provide training to journalists on religion. I've run courses on the Sikh tradition for numerous journalists who have not come across this. The RMC runs discussions on relevant topics very regularly and has lots of videos on its YouTube channel. I highly recommend the RMC to you.

Minority groups themselves are also trying to take charge of the narrative. This shows a maturing of the presence of religious minorities, whereby they think it is important actually to respond to some of the assertions made in media. [Slide 25] The Sikh Press Association was set up about five years ago and regularly challenges discourse in media which is seen as presenting facts about the Sikh

tradition which are incorrect. There is an event taking place on 13 July talking about press complaints. [Slide 26] The Sikh Press Association has complained to the Independent Press Standards Organisation about various issues and the complaints haven't really been addressed. What is interesting is what ends up counting as expertise, but that's a whole other topic.


Some of you may also have heard of the work of Miqdaad Versi. [Slide 27] He spends a lot of his time challenging media representations about Islam and Muslims. However, it shouldn't be for one person to have to keep challenging media discourse. The question is what can institutions do to ensure that the representations of religion are bona fide and accurate? In terms of religious literacy, we need to make sure that the media are presenting accurate information about religious traditions.

Thank you for listening.

Canon Hilary Barber: Thank you very much, Jasjit. We shall return for questions after we have heard Rajnish's response.

School of Philosophy, Religion & History of Science
FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND CULTURES
UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Religious literacy in a digital age: media and online content as routes of transmission and learning



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"You know, it's a lot easier to just follow me on Twitter."

1

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<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/oct/18/miqdaad-versi-very-polite-fight-against-british-media-islamophobia>

One man's (very polite) fight against media Islamophobia

For three years, Miqdaad Versi has waged a quiet and always respectful counter-attack campaign against the media's views

2

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DO YOUR PRESS COMPLAINTS WORK?
UK Press Regulation with Brian Cathcart

Join us on the @SikhPA Twitter page for a Spaces conversation with respected journalist, author and press reform campaigner on how press is regulated in the media.

13TH JULY 2023
8pm BST 12pm PST 3pm EDT
@SikhPA Twitter Spaces

3

Sikh Press Association
UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS


Providing an interface between the mainstream media and the Sikh community

FOR MEDIA FOR SIKHS CAMPAIGNS TRENDING STORIES

<https://www.sikhpa.com/>

4

Religion Media Centre
UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS



11 July 2023

<https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/>

5

Consequences ...
UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

'Politicians and media fuel hate crime in Britain,' say University of Leicester experts

Posted by p91 at Jun 29, 2016 05:19 PM | [Permalink](#)

'Toxic climate' around EU referendum debate highlighted for contributing towards hate incidents


"When ordinary people have a political mandate to blame those who are different for society's ills then the shackles of human decency are stripped away."

- Professor Neil Chakraborti and Dr Stevie-Jade Hardy, University of Leicester

<https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/press/press-releases/2016/june/politicians-and-media-fuel-hate-crime-in-britain-2019-say-university-of-leicester-experts>

6

COVID Representations
UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS




Shoppers in Oldham, which has the highest Covid infection rate in the country

Partygoers put Oldham at risk of further curbs

Charlotte Wiles, Northern Correspondent
Wednesday August 12 2020, 5:00pm, The Times

7

COVID Representations
UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS



Coronavirus pandemic + Add to myFT

Johnson defends new Covid restrictions for England

UK PM says steps needed to keep schools and businesses open as coronavirus cases surge

MINI LOCKDOWN Oldham brings in tougher coronavirus restrictions after more than 100 cases in a WEEK

Holly Christodoulou
14:10, 28 Jul 2020 | Updated: 16:46, 28 Jul 2020

8

Islam in the Media UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

People in many western countries greatly overestimate their current Muslim population ...

Responses to the question: "Out of every 100 people in your country about how many do you think are Muslims?"

Country	Reality (%)	Perception (%)
Australia	~3	~12
Belgium	~5	~18
Britain	~7	~25
Canada	~4	~15
France	~6	~22
Germany	~4	~18
Italy	~3	~15
Netherlands	~5	~18
Russia	~1	~10
Spain	~3	~15
Sweden	~2	~12
US	~3	~15

Guardian graphic | Source: Selected countries, IPSON MORI Peris of Perception 2016, Pew Research/De Standard (Belgium/Netherlands/Canada)

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/datablog/2016/dec/13/europeans-massively-overestimate-muslim-population-poll-shows>

Islam in the Media UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Europeans greatly overestimate Muslim population, poll shows

International survey suggests gap between perception and reality widened in France

Members of the public in European states including France, Belgium, Germany and the UK greatly overestimate their country's Muslim population and the rate at which it is increasing

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/datablog/2016/dec/13/europeans-massively-overestimate-muslim-population-poll-shows>

Islam in the Media UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

<https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/blog/2017/6/20/attacks-by-muslims-receive-4-5-times-more-media-coverage>

Islam in the Media UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Poole (2002) Defining discourses in media coverage (1994-7)

- Muslim involvement in deviant activities threatens security in the UK;
- Muslims are a threat to British 'mainstream' values and thus provoke integrative concerns;
- There are inherent cultural differences between Muslims and the host community which create tensions in interpersonal relations;
- Muslims are increasingly making their presence felt in the public sphere.

Christian continuities in media UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

- Dominance of Christianity, particularly in references to heritage and landscape
- Representations of clergy in fiction and comedy
- Language infused with references to both Christian concepts and practices, and common religion
- Any more?

Media discourse on Christianity (Knott et al 2013) UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Society is losing its moral fabric: Christianity/Christian leaders are flawed moral guides Christianity is a fundamental part of British tradition and identity Christianity is being marginalised/persecuted by the secular state and increasing dominance of Islam and Muslims Britain perceived to be a Christian nation first, then secular and plural 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Religion should be a personal matter, but faith-based organisations may have role to play in public life Christianity is just a minor player in contemporary cultural diversity Christianity is morally and intellectually irrelevant and in decline Christianity is illiberal and an obstacle to the human rights agenda Britain is perceived to be secular and plural first, and only notionally Christian

Popular Rhetoric on Religion UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Global study shows that six in ten Britons – above the global average – believe religion does more harm than good

<https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/global-study-shows-six-ten-britons-above-global-average-believe-religion-does-more-harm-good>

Popular Rhetoric on Religion UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

https://asunow.asu.edu/sites/default/files/article_heroes/religion-media-headlines.jpg (accessed 21.09.2019)

Religion in Media UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

British public turn to prayer as one in four tune in to religious services

Young people lead resurgence of faith, and Vicar of Dibley tops a poll as the best screen priest to lead nation through the crisis

Conversations - Latest updates
See all our coronavirus coverage



Event from the Ben Sira Series on BBC 7 on the eve of Shrove Tuesday 2020
A quarter of adults in the UK have watched or listened to a religious service since the coronavirus lockdown began, and one in 20 have started praying

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/03/british-public-turn-to-prayer-as-one-in-four-tune-in-to-religious-services>

17

Popular Rhetoric on Religion UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

BBC 'The Big Questions' Holds A Serious Debate On Whether Jesus And Buddha Were Aliens

NEWS 10:25 AM GMT+1 10:25 AM GMT+1

Update: While the internet exploded in disbelief today after BBC's *The Big Questions* held a serious occasion on whether Jesus and Buddha were aliens from other planets, the 23-minute segment on the BBC's *The Big Questions* TV show raised the question: "Have beings from other planets guided our religions?"

The discussion on Sunday included the head of the Daughters Society, which believes that Buddha, Jesus and Krishna came from outer space



Presenter Nicky Campbell asks "Have beings from other planets guided our religions?"

https://www.huffingpost.com/uk/2015/02/08/bbcibq-aetherius-society-alien-religions-other-planets_n_6640150.html

18

Popular Rhetoric on Religion UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS



19

Popular Rhetoric on Religion UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

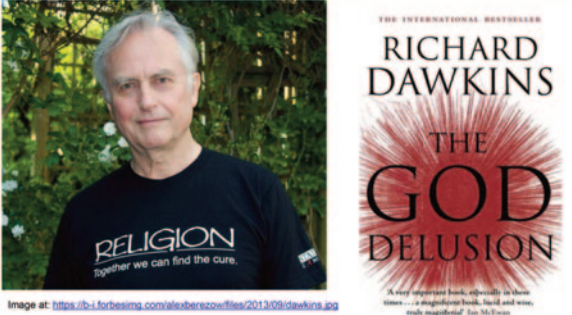


Image at: <https://i.b1.forbesimg.com/alex/berczow/files/2013/09/dawkins.jpg>

20

Questions UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

- Which popular media spokespeople on religion can you name?

21

What is representation? UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

- how media deal with and present gender, age, ethnicity, religion, national and regional identity, social issues and events to their audience
- very powerful in shaping an audience's knowledge and understanding.

22

Religion and media UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

- Technological advances since the 1970s - new institutions and technologies have radically changed the global mediascape
- Significant change to the institutions and frameworks of religious life - linked to technological, symbolic and economic shifts
- Lots of new ways of 'doing religion' outside "customary" institutions and religious authorities.
- New possibilities for both long-distance and more intimate forms of communication

23



24

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zgb42hv/revision/1>

Religion and media

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

25

Religion in Britain

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Almost four in ten have no religion
Religion in England and Wales, 2001 to 2021

Year	Christian	No religion	Muslim	Others
2001	70%	15%	3%	12%
2011	60%	25%	5%	10%
2021	45%	40%	7%	8%

Source: Office for National Statistics

26

Transmission, Nurture and Socialisation

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

- **Nurture** – the range of processes through which children are reared as members of a faith community (Jackson 1987: 202)
- **Religious Transmission** – the methods through which individuals consciously learn about their religious tradition
- **Religious Socialisation** - the impact of the agents of socialisation including parents, the family, congregations, peers and schools throughout the life course (Roberts and Yamane 2011: 95).
- **FORMAL** nurture as “the planned, organised teaching of young people, involving deliberate strategies” and **INFORMAL** nurture as “the many less conscious ways in which adults steep children in aspects of their faith tradition” (Nesbitt 2000: 2).

Formal / Informal
Conscious / Unconscious

27

What is Religious Literacy?

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

- the knowledge of, and ability to understand, religion and its intersections with social, political, and cultural life (Burns, 2020)
- learning about the history, texts, beliefs, practices, and manifestations of various religious traditions
- can be developed through various means, such as formal education, informal learning, interfaith engagement, **media consumption**, personal reflection, and more (Moore)

28

Religion and Media

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

- How media can be an important way for adults to gain greater religious literacy
- How, sometimes, media (or sections of it) can - perhaps unintentionally - feed illiteracy through use of tropes and stereotypes
- The role that people and organisations can play in helping media portray their traditions and associated cultures with greater accuracy

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School of Philosophy, Religion & History of Science
FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND CULTURES

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Religious literacy in a digital age: media and online content as routes of transmission and learning

Dr Jasjit Singh
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30

Response

Rajnish Kashyap

General Secretary, Hindu Council (UK)

Canon Hilary Barber: We are now pleased to have a Response from Rajnish Kashyap who is the General Secretary of the Hindu Council (UK).

Rajnish Kashyap: Jasjit, you have covered very well a number of points on religious literacy in the media.

When you asked people to name religious spokespeople in the Chat, there were quite a few answers, but I did not see any from a Hindu perspective. We are all spokespersons of our own religions (and don't claim to speak on behalf of others). That's what we are taught. It is our way of life. That is perhaps the main reason you might not see so many spokespeople as far as Hinduism is concerned.

Social media plays a significant role in shaping the public's perception and influencing religious literacy. Media organisations, including those operating on social media platforms, include a diverse range of individuals with varying levels of religious literacy. While media platforms can be a valuable source of information and promote understanding, they can also contribute to misinformation and stereotyping and even spread violence. The incidents in Leicester last year were a prime example of that.

Social media platforms present unique challenges when it comes to religious literacy. The decentralised nature of content creation on social media can result in a wide range of perspectives and accuracy levels. These platforms can act as an echo chamber to amplify misinformation and existing beliefs

rather than promoting understanding and diversity.

The spreading of misinformation about COVID vaccinations through social media, including WhatsApp, was a prime example of the problems it can cause. There have to be some challenges to what people are putting on social media side. Social media plays an important role but, at the same time, spreads a huge amount of misinformation.

When you learn from established channels, whether from gurdwaras or mandirs, your understanding is wider, but when you look on a social media, there are influencers, for example on TikTok, with over 50 million people following them. Their views of one particular religion can create an impression on young people's minds. That needs to be challenged.

It is important for media organisations and individual journalists to continuously improve their religious literacy. This can be achieved through ongoing education, engagement with religious communities, consulting experts, and being open to feedback from diverse perspectives.

Canon Hilary Barber: Rajnish, thank you so much for your reflections.

Does anyone have any questions or comments on what Jasjit and Rajnish have said?

Amanda Bowman (Board of Deputies of British Jews): Jasjit, thank you for your presentation and Rajnish, thank you for your response. I would like to place on record that from a Jewish perspective, we

see quite a lot of bias generally across the media. This is an issue for inter faith relations more generally. Whenever there are problems in the Middle East, the Jewish community sees problems here in the UK. That is often fuelled by the media bias that we see, particularly noticeable by the BBC, which we probably hold to a higher standard than any other media outlet. I know that the BBC has a lot of problems going on at the moment. It's not just about the millions of pieces of content every day, it is also about the institution itself in terms of how they recruit, how they train and how they support their people. This is something that the Board of Deputies is paying a lot of attention to. There is a group of Deputies that looks at media bias across social media and mainstream media. If we can have a conversation separately, I would be very happy to do so. And also to speak with anyone else that would like to do so.

Dr Jasjit Singh: It is interesting that you talk about the BBC. I'm currently doing a survey of RE teachers and how they teach the Sikh tradition. This has shown that the BBC is regarded as an expert on Sikhism, which is very interesting. Why should the BBC be regarded as an expert on the Sikh tradition, in advance of Sikhs themselves? It is, of course, because it has this special status.

The other issue is that it is not just the mainstream media broadcasts that become important. Very often, clips are extracted and shared on social media, magnifying them a lot more than they would have been before.

Amanda Bowman (Board of Deputies of British Jews): I agree. A clip from a radio interview can be taken out of context. Often when broadcasters are doing their set-up of any media point, they don't put the context in the right way. There is a lot of work to be done here.

Rajnish Kashyap: I deliberately kept the BBC name out of my Response, but the Hindu community has had a lot of issues with the BBC as well, as far as negativity is concerned. I did not wish to raise it on this

platform but I welcome that you have done so. Thank you.

Canon Hilary Barber: Thank you again, Jasjit and Rajnish, for your contributions

Continued education for religious literacy in adult life

How may special focus programmes in HE help increase religious literacy – the example of Cambridge Interfaith Programme

Dr Iona Hine

Communications and Programme Manager, Cambridge Interfaith Programme, University of Cambridge

A copy of the PowerPoint slides used during this presentation is at the end of this note.

Canon Hilary Barber: Having looked at religious literacy in schools with children, we are now moving on to look at continued education for religious literacy in adult life. We have two speakers in this session and we shall take questions and comments when they have both spoken.

I am delighted to welcome, Dr Iona Hine, who is the Communications Programme Manager for the Cambridge Interfaith Programme at the University of Cambridge. She will be addressing the question, ‘How may special focus programmes in HE help increase religious literacy?’ and drawing on the example of Cambridge Interfaith Programme.

Dr Iona Hine: Thank you. Good morning, everyone. I appreciate the invitation that’s been made to contribute. Formerly, I was an RE teacher, so I confess to having interest in the whole of the day, but it is very good to focus now on adults in relation to religious literacy.

I shall begin with some brief background information about the Cambridge Interfaith Programme (CIP) for those of you who are unfamiliar with it. [Slide 2] CIP was established in 2002. That was a time when there was a lot of global tension, when a lot was being claimed (perhaps especially by

evangelical Christians about Islam) and intelligent responses were wanted. It became possible to set up CIP in the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Cambridge. It did not come out of a vacuum. During the previous decade, there had been some very engaged conversations at the University of Cambridge that were interreligious. I can say that with confidence because, as it happens, I was an undergraduate at the time and was part of some of that.

The University of Cambridge is 800 years old and Divinity is its oldest discipline, since the *raison d’être* of a university 800 years ago was a religious education. Of course, religion in that context is not simply religion in general, but Christianity and, more specifically, Anglican Christianity. There was a question about what ‘inter faith’ should mean in this context. From the beginning, it has been taken in the context of the programme to mean non-exclusive, but with an Abrahamic specialism. ‘Abrahamic’ is a label that serves to reference Christianity, Judaism and Islam. At the same time, there has always been an openness to wider diversity. From the beginning of the programme, people from other religious groups were consulted. People of no religion are as welcome to participate in our activities, including as researchers, as anyone else.

There are all kinds of ways in which our programme introduces diversity into the teaching faculty at the University. It is significant that in the two established posts that have become part of the Faculty of Divinity since our programme was created, one is the Sultan Qaboos Professorship that is currently held by Dr Esra Ozyurek, who is a Muslim woman born in Turkey – 800 years ago you would not have seen a Muslim woman professor at the University of Cambridge – and the other is the Polonsky-Coexist Senior Lecturership in Jewish Studies, currently held by Dr Daniel Weiss from the USA. Of course, CIP would be incomplete without also having significant Christian input. Perhaps one of the most visible team members at the moment is Dr Giles Waller, who has been part of the team since 2014. However, it's equally important to say that being part of CIP is not about personal belief, but I will come back to that a little later.

CIP is a research centre. It used to belong to another centre, but that has since disappeared and CIP itself is now the centre. That means that it starts from a strong commitment to pursuing excellent academic research. It has a growing number of affiliated researchers. It deliberately reaches out beyond the Faculty of Divinity, expanding the kinds of expertise that it can draw on from around the university. It is a research centre with a remit for engagement exchange, that has been there from the beginning. While a part of my colleagues' work is most certainly student-facing, and in that context already addresses religious literacy among adults, CIP's status as a research centre would not automatically, I think, lead it into membership of IFN or make me the person to speak here about religious literacy today.

Let me go on to show you a little bit more of what we do and who my colleagues are. [Slide 3] Anthropology and Theology are the disciplines foremost in the immediate team. More widely, we now draw on expertise from musicology, education, archaeology, creative arts, political psychology, engineering, architecture, land

economy, and so on. That is part of recognising that religion is something that intersects with all of life.

It may be helpful to touch briefly on what 'literacy' might be. [Slide 4] For me, E D Hirsch's work on cultural literacy has been informative in thinking about religious literacy. I feel it is the privilege of academic research that we get the time and space to see what is happening underwater, to go deep beneath the iceberg. Hirsch recognised that when people were struggling in that context with language, learning, literacy, it was often because the cultural issues underneath them were not being taught. That applies also in the domain of religion.

CIP has, over time, had two different taglines. [Slide 5] 'Partnerships of difference' was one that predates my time. It emphasises something that has been important in our work, which is that the interreligious conversations we hold are not about finding similarity or common ground for the sake of it in the way that maybe decades ago inter faith dialogue seemed to gravitate towards, but much more about being able to come alongside one another, acknowledging difference, for common projects. Our second tagline is 'Catalysing inter-religious inquiry'. That recognises that we have the capacity to bring together, to incubate.

I think we have the most motivation to learn something as adults when there is an application for it. One of the ways in which we apply our work is in partnership with faith communities. [Slide 6] Traditionally, one of our strengths at CIP has been in Scriptural Reasoning. However, we have now given a lot of the responsibility for that to the Rose Castle Foundation, created in 2015 and it's not a primary area for us at the moment (though we have work coming out of it).

We have also created a scheme called Faith in Leadership. That still continues with a small amount of input from us when invited, but has matured to take on its own momentum. It is about religious leaders

receiving training in leadership alongside one another. It is not about training in faith matters but about coming into conversation and gaining religious literacy from spending time together and recognising similarities and differences across faiths – and that sometimes you may have more views in common with someone from a different faith community than maybe with some people from within your own community.

Summer Schools have been a long-standing programme for us, and since the pandemic, we have taken that learning online. Our summer schools are academic and for people from different backgrounds.

We have also done other work, including partnerships, in the public and private sector. [Slide 7] For example, some while back we did a very good project on community policing. The main researcher on that project is now at the University of Leeds – they are both an unpaid serving police officer and a theologian! We are currently embarking on a project around water use and faith in diverse communities, as an academic partner with a number of water companies. That is a new piece of work that shows how we bring our academic religious literacy into conversation with various stakeholders and in pursuit of some bigger questions.

The third area of CIP's work I would like to highlight is around heritage and culture. [Slide 8] For example, we were consultants on the British Museum's major exhibition, *Egypt: Faith after the Pharaohs*. We also produce cultural resources of our own, such as *Shared Sacred*, which is a work by one of our anthropologists who engaged others to contribute images that counter the idea that religion is inevitably divisive. That is available online. One of our current pieces of work is around Holocaust memory, specifically how, in the context of Germany, Holocaust memory has become part of citizenship education for people of Muslim background. There have been some very problematic assumptions made and there is something wider to learn from that. We are currently looking at how we

handle that research and make sure that we partner with organisations to think about its implications and address what is identified.

So, why is all this a task for higher education? [Slide 9] More than 80% of the world's population identifies with a religion, even though it's a lower figure in the UK. Therefore, when addressing big problems, it matters to think about them from religious perspectives and with religious communities as an inter faith programme. Many of our researchers are specialists in inter faith matters but we are not concerned solely with inter faith research. We find that in working alongside one another, we enrich our understandings. We are also something of an incubator and always actively looking for partnerships and people who want to pursue questions with us, which allows us to enhance literacy outside of our own spaces.

More information on the work I've spoken about can be found via the links on the slides. [Slides 10 and 11]

Thank you very much.

Canon Hilary Barber: Thank you very much, Iona. We shall now move on to our next speaker and hopefully have some time for questions for you both afterwards.

How may special-focus programmes in HE help religious literacy?

The case of Cambridge Interfaith Programme

Dr Iona Hine
Input to IFN Religious Literacy, 12 July 2023
www.interfaith.cam.ac.uk



1

Background

- Based in the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Cambridge
- Established 2002
- Non-exclusive Abrahamic by foundation
- Research centre
- Remit for engagement and exchange

2

Research domains

- Anthropology of religion
- Theology
- Other specialisms



3

Ethos

- Partnerships of difference
- Catalysing inter-religious inquiry



4

Application: faith communities

Co-study

- Scriptural Reasoning
- Summer Schools



5

Application: public & private sector

Co-research

- Community policing
- Water efficiency



6

Application: heritage and culture

Co-production

- Egypt: Faith after the Pharaohs
- Holocaust memory



7

Why is this a task for Higher Education?

Global challenges (migration, conflict, climate change)

Inter-faith ↔ Intra-faith

Incubator



8

Learn more

www.interfaith.cam.ac.uk
/events
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@CamInterfaith
sharesacred.com
scriptureandviolence.org
scripturalreasoning.org



9

How may special-focus programmes in HE help religious literacy?

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10

Increased religious literacy through opportunities for encounter

The Revd Gavin Wort

Lead Chaplain, Durham University, Vice-Chair, Newcastle Council of Faiths and Chair, County Durham Faith Network

Canon Hilary Barber: I am now very pleased to welcome the Revd Gavin Wort who is Lead Chaplain at Durham University, Vice-Chair of Newcastle Council of Faiths and Chair of County Durham Faith Network.

The Revd Gavin Wort: Thank you very much. I'm grateful for the opportunity to share briefly some of the work we've been doing in the North East of England. In particular, I'd like to focus on two examples from differing contexts. I shall use these examples to highlight informal – or what I like to call 'incidental' – learning. I suggest this incidental learning through inter faith encounter increases religious literacy in significant ways.

My first example is the student-led Interfaith Cafe at Durham University. I believe the contemporary university is a key context for inter faith engagement. This includes both formal opportunities through academic study and research, which Iona has outlined really well, and informal ones where students and others come together to make friends and to learn from each other. Indeed, it's one of the main reasons I'm a university chaplain.

In my first year at Durham, I worked with individual students and faith societies to establish the Durham Interfaith Student Network (DISN). We hold a series of events annually during Inter Faith Week, each

hosted by a different society. In the second academic term we hold an Interfaith Cafe which is hosted by DISN as a whole. This photo was taken at one such Interfaith Cafe.



As you can see, a group of women of different faiths are sitting chatting over tea and cake. I know inter faith dialogue is sometimes referred to dismissively as all tea and samosas. However, it's worth highlighting a couple of points which aren't obvious in the photo. Firstly, students often tell me that through our inter faith events they meet people of other religious traditions for the first time. For example, a student might tell me they have never met a Jewish person before. I think to myself that I'm sure they have, but just without realising it. But I don't say anything! Secondly, these encounters frequently end with students sharing their mobile numbers with each other. In other words, friendships are initiated and individuals of different faiths commit to seeing one another again.

My second example is the Newcastle Council of Faiths Faith Coach. In recent years, Newcastle Council of Faiths has organised a faith coach to visit various places of worship in the city. This initiative is called Friendship Through Faith. It's held annually in Inter Faith Week. I'm sure lots of you hold inter faith or peace walks in your own contexts. We used to do so in Newcastle and pre-COVID the walks were very well attended. However, although we were able to visit a mandir, a church, a mosque and a gurdwara on a walk of about a mile or so, there's no longer a shul in that part of the city in the west end of Newcastle. So we decided to hire a coach and travel together to our places of worship.



In this photo, you can see a no doubt familiar scene of a group being welcomed into a gurdwara, in this case by my friend Jaswinder. As is the nature of these visits, at each place of worship, we are treated to lots of food and lots of speeches, but, again, there are two points that are not visible. Firstly, the faith coach often attracts participants who wouldn't have the confidence to visit, say, a gurdwara or a mosque on their own. They find it more comfortable and safer to travel together. Secondly, as the title of the event suggests, the focus is on friendship through faith. Geordies are down-to-earth, friendly people. You can tell from my accent, perhaps, that I'm not one, but I've lived in the North East for long enough that they let me get away with saying such things! We come together on the same level, piling in and out of the coach, at each destination, at each place of worship and we're made to feel at home by our friends of different faiths.

I'd like to say a little more about what I mean by incidental learning and to highlight the incidental learning I've observed and experienced through my two examples. I'll then explain how these inter faith encounters increase religious literacy.

By incidental learning, I don't mean minor insights or that which simply accompanies formal learning. Instead, I mean the learning that results from inter faith efforts and initiatives, the incidents. In other words, it's the learning that comes when we do what we do together. This is illustrated in my two examples of the Interfaith Cafe and Faith Coach. Through these events, individuals learn about other faiths through meeting people of other faiths, often for the first time, and beginning friendships. We can and should study and research other faiths, but when we meet a person of another faith, it becomes real. And this learning, this understanding, is grounded in friendship. Friends are able to discuss issues, including difficult ones, with openness, goodwill, curiosity and humour.

These inter faith encounters increase religious literacy in two significant ways. Firstly, they help individuals to understand both lived religion and intra-religious diversity. I'm reminded of Philip Lewis's dictum 'No one is a Muslim in general'. When asked 'What do Muslims believe about X?', I can respond, 'Well, my friend Raza believes this...'. Secondly, the friendships established through the two inter faith encounters I've shared mean that participants have individuals to whom they can turn with their questions. To borrow a popular phrase, if they're curious about a religious belief or practice, they can 'phone a friend'.

Thank you very much for listening.

Canon Hilary Barber: Thank you very much, Gavin. We now have a few minutes if anyone has any questions for Iona or Gavin.

Mohinder Singh Chana (Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)): My question is for Dr Hine. Thank you for the excellent presentation. What proportion of CIP's work focuses on non-Abrahamic religions and what are those?

Dr Iona Hine: I will answer with an example. The proportion varies. Next month one of my colleagues, who is the senior lecturer on Hinduism at the University of Cambridge, is working with a partner NGO in India called Project Noon to put on a series of online lectures that are an introduction to Hinduism for Muslim audiences. The longer-term plan is for there to be a reciprocal one that is an introduction to Islam for Hindu audiences. We are open to those who come to us with proposals. The work on the *Shared Sacred* resource started partly from work in Bosnia, and the post-genocide context of acknowledging that when people try to use religion to drive you apart, then you need to reclaim some of the traditions that you shared. You will find examples in that work that represent all manner of interreligious lived relations and coexistences. Foundationally, the dialogues have been around the Abrahamic traditions and that is what our core team is perhaps most involved with, but it has never been an exclusionary dynamic. We are very open in what we are interested in and support.

Mohinder Singh Chana (Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)): On one side, you say you're very open; on the other side, you note your spectrum is very narrow. Besides Hinduism, there are many other non-Abrahamic faiths. To be helpful for religious literacy, I think you have got to bring them on board as well.

Dr Iona Hine: CIP is only 21 years old, within an 800-year-old university, so please give us time. We respond also to who is able to provide funding. Endowing posts is not a small matter and some of our work reflects where we've been able to encourage people to invest in supporting the work. I take your critique. We are working on it.

Mohinder Singh Chana (Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)): Thank you.

Dr Iona Hine: May I just add that I did not focus in my presentation today on how we are involved with education. Within the Faculty of Divinity, we have the Cambridge in Your Classroom series, which is developed with the Faculty of Education, and there are many pieces of work that I could tell you about that we are doing in terms of classrooms and religious education. The aspects of our work that I covered in my presentation are not the sum total of our work.

Canon Hilary Barber: Thank you very much again to both Iona and Gavin for your contributions.

We are now going to move on to our workshops. All the workshops are engaging with significant themes and everyone's participation will be an important part of those. We ask that, where possible, participants keep their videos running during the workshops so that you can all see each other. Everyone who registered for the National Meeting was asked to give a first and second choice of workshop. That is because each year there are always one or two workshops which are oversubscribed. You may find therefore that you've been given your alternative choice.

We are most grateful to all our workshop presenters, facilitators and rapporteurs. Notes of key points will be taken as part of helping IFN record and share the learning from today. We shall be coming back together for some whistle-stop feedback from the workshop. Please use the last couple of minutes of your workshop to agree on the key points that your rapporteur will be feeding back. The Zoom system should automatically return us all to the main plenary session when the workshops come to an end. Please bear with us if there are any technical issues. I wish you all a very good discussion and look forward to seeing you afterwards.

Launch of Inter Faith Week 2023

Minister David Bruton

Spiritualists' National Union and IFN Trustee, on behalf of IFN's Board of Trustees

A copy of the PowerPoint slides used during this presentation is at the end of this note.

Canon Hilary Barber: We now move on to the launch of this year's Inter Faith Week. Supporting Inter Faith Week in England, Northern Ireland and Wales is one of IFN's major programmes of work. In a moment, I am going to welcome Minister David Bruton of the Spiritualists' National Union to launch this year's Week on behalf of the IFN's Board of Trustees. Just before he does, however, we offer IFN's good wishes to Interfaith Scotland for Scottish Interfaith Week, which will be taking place on the same dates as the Week in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, led by Interfaith Scotland. Scottish Interfaith Week was the inspiration for Inter Faith Week.

Minister David Bruton: Good afternoon, everyone. It is very good to part of this very positive day.

Inter Faith Week this year will be held from Sunday 12 to Sunday 19 November. That is only 4 months away! This will be the fifteenth Inter Faith Week and the nineteenth Scottish Interfaith Week.

The Week is something that we can all contribute towards and participate in. [Slide 1]

The Week's aims are:

- to strengthen good inter faith relations at all levels;
- to increase awareness of the different and distinct faith communities in the UK, in particular celebrating and building on

the contribution which their members make to their neighbourhoods and to wider society; and

- to increase understanding between people of religious and non-religious beliefs.

The aims of the Week are all relevant to the topic of today's National Meeting, which is religious literacy, and the Week is widely used to encourage learning about the faiths and beliefs of others. Last year, for example, 39% of all activities that took place had an explicit education or learning theme. This theme was also evident in many of the other activities as well.

Inter Faith Week is the Inter Faith Network for the UK's largest programme. Helping the Week happen is a year-round task: providing resources, running the website and gathering event information, publicising the week, including intensive social media during the actual Week itself, and also reporting and reflecting on the Week and evaluating how it needs to develop to become even stronger. All of this helps the Week deliver – in an accessible and enjoyable way – ever more opportunities for inter faith encounter and learning to contribute to building good inter faith relations.

The Week is for everyone, whatever their beliefs. An increasingly wide range of organisations take part, from local faith communities and places of worship, community and voluntary groups, inter faith groups, local authorities, schools and further and higher education institutions and workplaces, through to sports organisations and many others.

Each year Inter Faith Week activities address a wide range of themes such as: the power of sport to foster inter faith understanding; the environment and climate (with focused activities such as tree planting and rewilding); mental health and faith; and learning about other faiths by visiting places of worship and through inter faith walks and pilgrimage, which we have also mentioned during today's sessions.

In 2022, there were 964 activities held by no less than 906 different organisations. And those are just the ones of which IFN is aware. The slides show images of some of the events that took place. [Slides 2 to 5]

IFN reports on the Week each year and carries out a survey to see what people have found to be helpful from the experience. 95% of 2022 survey respondents said that Inter Faith Week helped participants to learn about different faiths and beliefs. 90% of the survey respondents said that participation in the Week added value to the work which they do. That is amazing.

As part of Inter Faith Week 2022, I attended a quiz night hosted by the Chaplaincy at Birmingham University. Undergraduate students drawn from many different faith communities took part. It was an excellent evening, which I found very encouraging because it demonstrated the importance and the value of Inter Faith Week and inter faith work in engaging with the generations. I know that many faith and inter faith organisations have ongoing conversations about how to engage younger generations. That was very evident in Birmingham last year and created a fun evening, which was a marvellous example of the work of Inter Faith Week.

In 2023 IFN aims to build on the success of the last year's Inter Faith Week and to get as many people involved as possible. [Slide 6] To launch the Week we shall be taking an online photo of us all using the Zoom Photo app. This will only take a photo of those who consent by clicking the relevant button when it appears on the screen.

I wish all of the organisations here success in playing their important part in the Week. Let's see if once more we can together grow



Inter Faith Week, reach more people, create more dialogue and create a stronger, more cohesive society through the power of understanding that the Week helps bring.

Canon Hilary Barber: Thank you very much, David. I hope that all of IFN's member bodies will use Inter Faith Week to help ever more people of different ages and backgrounds to get involved in cooperative projects for the common good and to work for understanding between people of different faiths and beliefs.

Inter Faith Week 2023 12-19 November

The aims of the Week are to:

1. Strengthen good inter faith relations at all levels
2. Increase awareness of the different and distinct faith communities in the UK, in particular celebrating and building on the contribution which their members make to their neighbourhoods and to wider society
3. Increase understanding between people of religious and non-religious beliefs



1

#InterFaithWeek



2

#InterFaithWeek



3

#InterFaithWeek



4

#InterFaithWeek



5

Inter Faith Week 2023 12-19 November

An opportunity to:

- Strengthen good inter faith relations at all levels
- Increase awareness of faith communities in the UK, celebrating and building on the contribution which their members make to their neighbourhoods and to wider society
- Increase understanding between people of religious and non-religious beliefs

#interfaithweek

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RESPECT
APPRECIATE
VOLUNTEER
FRIENDS, CELEBRATE

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At the heart of our mission: to engage and partner with people of all faiths and beliefs.

Inter Faith Week 12-19 November 2023

Join the thousands of people who will be participating in the week-long celebration of interfaith relations in the UK. The week is an opportunity to celebrate the contributions of all faith communities and to build on the positive relationships between them. The week is an opportunity to engage and partner with people of all faiths and beliefs.

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6

There then followed a break for lunch, with the opportunity to chat in small breakout groups for those who had signed up to do so.

Feedback from workshops

Narendra Waghela: Welcome back to the afternoon session of IFN's National Meeting. I hope that those of you who have been part of the lunchtime breakout conversations have enjoyed these. We now move on to the feedback from workshops and I would like to invite each workshop rapporteur, in turn, to let us have their key points.

Workshop A: Local inter faith organisations and working for religious literacy

Judith Baker (Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations): Our one key point is that Religious Literacy can grow from local efforts – so we need to think about how to do this. Smaller groups can feel overwhelmed. Maybe they could access experience from a more religiously diverse neighbour. Online technology can be used. How can we collaborate constructively with each other? We had presentations with examples from Manchester and from Bristol, including some lovely photographs. Spiritual awareness days in a large city can include visits to places of worship for maybe up to eight different faiths but smaller towns may have fewer different faiths to showcase and fewer places of worship to visit. The Black Lives Matter movement, in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, galvanised inter faith action in Manchester. The local inter faith group found itself running online seminars, a conference and a poetry event. The group knew they were not experts. They had a thirst for justice, exploring the issues in a safe space and learning together. One of the focuses was to 'challenge ourselves and deal with our own racism'. Schools often ask for input. Maybe streaming input from people of other faiths, if they are not present in an area, could help. Funding is an issue. Sometimes funds have come from

councils, but mostly the work is organised and run by volunteers who put in enormous efforts. Schools often have a budget for visits, inter faith councils could consider accessing such funds. Religious literacy starts in school but is lifelong learning.

Workshop B: Religious literacy in the workplace

Saleha Islam (Muslim Council of Britain): We agreed that religious literacy in the workplace requires both interaction and information. Information is important. So, too, is the engagement with each other as individuals which enables us not just to understand each other's faith but also to have real conversations with each other. This develops that understanding and gives us a chance to nurture relationships with each other, which can help take care of any misunderstandings or prejudices. This requires the opportunity to form and engage with other faith networks in order to produce better work practices. The effectiveness of networking can further be enhanced by the provision of appropriate support and resources from faith communities. We noted the importance of Inter Faith Week in providing opportunities for religious literacy on a mass scale.

Workshop C: Religious literacy and government

Deepak Naik (United Religions Initiative (UK)): We all agree that it is important that the government is literate about faith communities. Our workshop questioned the word 'literacy' and considered other possible words that we need to think about. 'Curiosity' and 'empathy' were words that were mentioned. We had a few reflections on the report on Faith Engagement by Colin Bloom and its recommendations. We questioned how

some of the recommendations were reached but we agreed that its recommendations about religious literacy should be considered well by government and, even more, acted upon. We also agreed that it is important for government to have meaningful relationships with people with diverse voices from within the different faith communities. This would involve moving away, possibly, from the representative model that has a different energy within it, to possibly look at including other voices, other genders, ages, so that there is a more comprehensive understanding when government develops programmes of work and legislates. We did appreciate that who to engage with and how to engage with faith communities can be an issue and also that people move on. We also noted that faith communities need to have effect mechanisms through which government can engage with them. The Inter Faith Network for the UK is a prime organisation that government should continue to support if it is serious.

Workshop D: Inter Faith Week as a platform for encouraging religious literacy

Cllr Asha Masih (Coventry Multi Faith Forum): One of our speakers talked about the Inter Faith Buddies scheme. We thought that was a great way of reaching out to people from different faith communities because it breaks down stereotypes and prejudice and tackles media propaganda. We also thought that it was important to continue the friendships and relationships between faith communities throughout the year, not just during Inter Faith Week. This involves not just celebrating each other's festivals, but also understanding the difficulties that people face as well and trying to help them through the local body.

Workshop E: Media (including social media) and religious literacy

Neil Pitchford (Druid Network): Our group had a presentation from Dr Maureen Sier. She showed part of a BBC programme that was produced in collaboration with the Jewish community as an example of a very good way of engaging with media. The majority of our discussion was about social media. Everyone is aware that this is a double-edged sword. We agreed that there was a need for social media training. That might help people to amplify positive messages and increase religious literacy. It was tentatively suggested that IFN might be able to offer some training on this, but it was also recognised that IFN has a full work programme.

Workshop F: Religious literacy and skills for inter faith engagement

Satnam Singh Poonian (Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)): Dr Norman Richardson gave a very good presentation in our workshop about the problems faced in Northern Ireland by different religious communities. He spoke about a four-pillar model which included: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be. If we live together, we need time for conversation, maybe to share a meal and work together, just to be together. Building trust is very important, as is active listening, meeting with openness to learn to respect and understand others in society. The lack of knowledge of our own faith and other people's faiths is often the main cause for division. Deep spiritual knowledge of your own faith can be a good nectar for society, but superficial knowledge or lack of understanding of your own faith can be a poison for society. Increasingly schools are encountering people from different backgrounds and that is posing different challenges for the teaching profession as

well. Togetherness must be taught in schools. Together we can achieve everything. We can be together and make a society which is peaceful and worth living for all of us.

Narendra Waghela: Thank you very much. We are a few minutes ahead of schedule, so does anybody have anything they would like to add from their workshop?

Dr Sheila Gewolb (Board of Deputies of British Jews): If there is an issue with funding, we need to think about raising the profile of RE so that people who may have access to funding, such as local councillors and local authorities, know how important it is. If we write to them, and to government, promoting RE, then perhaps we will get some more funding. It was noted in our workshop that many schools can't actually afford to go to some of these amazing inter faith activities because they can't afford the transport costs.

Jo Backus (Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK) and Faiths Together in Lambeth): One of the key points I took from Dr Richardson's excellent presentation was that developing the skills and wisdom for inter faith dialogue is the work of a lifetime: an ongoing process in which both inter faith and intra faith skills can develop mutual benefits in order to deliver the four pillars outlined.

Mike Stygal (Pagan Federation): Another of the points made in our discussion was that it is not reasonable to think that religious literacy means that people who are religiously literate will therefore know all there is to know about all religions that exist or even all religions that are in our society. Rather, it is about developing relevant skills. RE enables, and encourages, people to ask questions and to explore the diversity within society.

David Capey (East of England Faiths Agency): When the East of England Faiths Agency used to provide speakers for schools and visits to schools, it charged a fee for that. The fact that the RE department had to make a request for

funding from the school actually enhanced the view of the department by the school, so it had an interesting knock-on effect. So perhaps schools can provide some funding.

Dr Desmond Biddulph (The Buddhist Society): RE gives you access to a language and that is very important when thinking about other religions. It is absolutely essential to any really civilised culture that we're able to do this. One of the other issues relates to one's own religion. In The Buddhist society, we find that people can know the Buddhist doctrines inside out, but unless they actually practise them – and that requires a bit of effort – they don't really understand what the words mean. Once you really practise a religion, it can help you to understand all other religions, too. It requires you to actually do the work and not just be up in your head, thinking, comparing and judging, and weaving religions altogether in lovely complex carpets of interrelatedness. People can, through practise, gain true understanding of themselves and others. The Buddhist society is essentially a religious educational charity, but the education doesn't make any sense unless the practise is there.

Satnam Singh Poonian (Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)): The education system is tied to league tables. How a school is performing is very much measured by the essential subjects. RE in most schools is a low priority because it does not feature as an essential subject in league tables. The Government and Ofsted have a part to play here because RE is a compulsory subject in all schools, and they need to raise its profile. How can we make society better? Not just by learning maths or chemistry or physics. The building of personalities of our future generation comes from social interactions and that should be encouraged. If there is no funding and no push for it, then schools will ignore it and concentrate on the subjects that are measured. There is still work to do.

Susan Marsh (Faiths United Tameside): Each local authority, education authority, has to have a SACRE which is funded by the local authority. In my local SACRE, we have

spent quite a lot of time looking at what all the schools are doing in relation to RE, particularly the secondary schools. We did manage recently to hold a free conference for RE teachers. There isn't very much funding to spare at the moment to pay for external speakers. All the work done by Faiths United Tameside is done by volunteers and there are no funds to spare. I am also the Chair of Governors of a church school, which receives funding from the local diocese. We do teach about other faiths and are keen to do so throughout the school. It is good to get involved with local SACREs where possible.

Narendra Waghela: Thank you very much everyone for your reflections.

Working effectively for religious literacy in different sectors across society

Professor Adam Dinham

Professor of Faith and Public Policy and Director of the Faiths and Civil Society Unit, Goldsmiths, University of London, Professor of Religion and Belief Literacy, VID University, Oslo, Co-Director of The Religion and Belief Literacy Partnership and author of a number of publications on religious literacy

A copy of the PowerPoint slides used during this presentation is at the end of this note.

Narendra Waghela: We now move to our next session, which is on 'Working effectively for religious literacy in different sectors across the society'. There will be a presentation and then a response. We shall take questions and comments after both presenters have spoken.

We are delighted to welcome Professor Adam Dinham. He is Professor of Faith and Public Policy and Director of the Faiths and Civil Society Unit at Goldsmiths, University of London, Professor of Religion and Belief Literacy at VID University, Oslo, Co-Director of The Religion and Belief Literacy Partnership, and author of a number of publications on religious literacy.

Professor Adam Dinham: Thank you very much for the invitation to contribute today. I'm going to base my comments on two sources. One is a book that I published in 2020 entitled 'Religion and Belief Literacy' and the other is an extensive survey that I did last year on religion and belief in workplaces.

My starting thesis, which is set out in the book, takes the idea from Daniele Hervieu-Leger, who's a sociologist of religion, of a broken chain of memory. [Slide 1] This is the idea that, in Western advanced societies, we have lost connections with our religion and belief legacies. I borrow from that and translate it into a different broken chain – a broken chain of learning. What I mean by this is that everything we know about religion and belief comes from what we learn and how that's socialised in our lives as children, and also throughout the rest of our lives. The problem is that each learning sphere is shaped without reference to the others.

I know you have looked earlier today at schools and universities, which is one of the spheres I have looked at. I have looked at other spheres as well. Each of these spheres has a story of religion and belief, which doesn't really relate to any of the other spheres and isn't ever coherent with that. In addition, each sphere is determined by what policy in that sphere is seeking. I've taken a few examples here: Islam is magnified as an issue of security; inter faith work is magnified as an issue of cohesion or integration and of faith-based social action; Christianity is often magnified in relation to

British values and citizenship; and Judaism has been magnified as an issue of hate crime and antisemitism. But, obviously, in each of those religions, or religion and belief spheres, there is so much more to the story than what is magnified.

The thesis is that, just as public policy is disconnected on other issues, so it is on learning. The way it frames what we learn and how we learn about religion and belief makes for a very muddled public sphere because the story isn't joined up. In institutions, from government to culture, and of course in workplaces, this plays out in all sorts of complicated ways, and especially in legal cases that people will no doubt be familiar with. And publics are left struggling, frankly, to make sense of religion and belief.

As you can see on this slide, in my book I say that *“Each of these framings has its own inner logic...which variously construct religion and belief as both positive (contributing to society) and negative (a threat to it). However, do these ‘logics’ line up? Are they sufficiently in touch with each other to, at least, be capable of coherent disagreement?”* The analysis I have in the book is that they don't. I won't go into this in detail here, as you can look at the book.

[Slides 2 to 4] The book has a pair of chapters on religion and belief treatments in school, both in RE and in the wider life of schools. It also has a pair of chapters on universities, again, both in the curricula and then in the rest of what universities do in relation to religion and belief. Then there is a chapter on communities, in which I look at inter faith and multi faith work, anti-extremism education, antisemitism training and supplementary schools. The latter are widely regarded with suspicion as places of risk in terms of safeguarding and extremism. As they are unregulated it is difficult to challenge that or to see the real picture. Lastly, there is material about the Citizenship Test, which, as I note in the book, has 7 pages on religion out of 180 altogether. The religion section of the Citizenship Test starts with the blithe statement, “The UK is historically a

Christian country,” which is problematic in all sorts of ways.

Last year I did a survey, via online interviews, with 2,000 adults aged 18 plus. [Slide 7] The survey sample was weighted to be representative of British adults in paid employment across every sector and setting, with a particular focus on age, gender, and region. I focused on five themes: attitudes, experiences, religion and belief-related activities (such as putting up Christmas decorations) training and policies. I should note that, although information was collected on the sectoral setting in which respondents work so that I could look at which workplaces were revealing what, the sample was not determined sectorally, it was deliberately random.

The first question that I would like to draw attention to is, ‘Is religion a matter for workplaces?’. [Slide 8] My survey found that Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) people are significantly more likely to say ‘Yes’ than White people. As the slide notes, of the respondents who said ‘Yes’, 61% were Asian, 60% were Black/African/Caribbean, 57% were of Mixed/Multiple race and 40% were White. Essentially there is a 20% difference in the response between BAME and White respondents.

My survey showed, in terms of gender, that women are much more likely, or considerably more likely, than men to take religion and belief seriously in the workplace. [Slide 9] I want to note here that we found quite a ‘stretchy’ idea of religion and belief. The findings here are divided into male and female. I want explicitly to recognise that there are other genders and non-binary perspectives, too, but these are the ones that we took. Approximately 10% more women than men think that the five world religions – I know there are more, you could say nine – should be taken seriously in workplaces. You can see that mindfulness, meditation, yoga and spirituality are also in the mix.

Another key finding was that religious workers are more likely than non-religious workers to say that religion and belief should be taken seriously in workplaces. [Slide 10] As you can see on the slide, 60% of religious people versus 43% of nonreligious, and, on spirituality, 35% versus 27%. It might seem obvious that religious people would think that religion and belief should be taken seriously in workplace, but it hasn't been established in data before. We also found that nonreligious workers are almost twice as likely as those who are religious to say that religion is a private matter and should not be a matter for workplaces at all – 50% versus 26%. That is a very significant difference.

As you can see, there is a series of tensions based on race, gender, and religiousness, on the extent to which religion and belief are regarded as matters for workplaces.

The next slide looks at responses by age. [Slide 11] The table at the top of the slide shows responses from colleagues, people who work together, and the table at the bottom of the slide shows responses from service users. The survey showed that the younger you are, the more likely you are to think that religion is something that should be taken seriously in workplaces. Something very interesting is happening here, because in wider data a growing number of people are reporting nonreligious belief and moving away from institutional forms of religion. That is true in the Census and also in the British Social Attitudes Survey. My survey showed that there is a growing respect and tolerance of religion and belief, even amongst those who are less religious, by age.

Another key finding from the survey is that knowing a diversity of people of faith increases one's sense of whether or not to take it seriously in the workplace. [Slide 12] We found that 45% of people who know people of other faiths think workplaces should take religion and belief seriously. In stark contrast, only 14% of people who do not know people of other faiths say that

workplaces should take it seriously. Again, there is another key tension here.

We also looked at training in workplaces and found that 14% of British workers have participated in training addressing religion and belief. [Slide 13] This surprised me slightly. I thought it would be quite a lot lower, so I was somewhat encouraged. But then I looked at the comparative numbers for other protected characteristics. You can see on the slide that on race and ethnicity, it's 20%; on gender, 17%; sexual orientation, 15%; age, 15%; and gender reassignment (trans), 11%. So, religion and belief training is one of the lowest in relation to the other protected characteristics. Training across all the protected characteristics is, in my view, surprisingly and woefully low.

The next issue we looked at was people's experiences of witnessing or experiencing problems in relation to religion and belief in workplaces. [Slide 14] 41% of our respondents said they had witnessed or experienced problems of this kind and 56% said they had not. We then divided this further across people who had taken religion and belief training in the last 12 months. There was a big difference – with people who had taken training on religion and belief, 62% had witnessed or experienced problems, whereas 30% said that they had not. (Without training, the figures were, respectively, 41% and 56%.) That is an important finding. People are noticing problems around religion and belief in workplaces after training which they might not have noticed before it.

We also looked at the issue across different sectors and this slide shows the 'best' and 'worst' sectors. [Slide 15] Those working in education are most likely to say their organisation is good on religion and belief, 58%. Those working in transport and storage are the most likely to say their organisation is poor at 7%. Just a side note to remind everyone, this is quantitative research, at a high level, across a survey. The intention is that I will follow up on interesting questions raised, such as why education is doing so well and transport

doing so badly. I can speculate that there are reasons of maybe class and inclusion, but it's speculation at this stage. I'm going to come back to that.

Then we looked at experiences of religion and belief-related activities in workplaces. You can see on this slide a range of activities that people were either 'net positive' or 'net negative' about, such as religious decorations, provision of halal and kosher food in workplace canteens and marking of religious festivals. [Slide 17] Some scored very highly on the positivity scale, above 70%, and very low on the negativity scale. But the actual prevalence of the activities themselves is very low, 25% at most. [Slide 18] For example, only 8% of workplaces report having a single staff, group, or network for religions, belief, and spirituality. There is a real gap between what people would like to see and feel positive about and what is actually provided.

Finally, this slide looks at religion and belief policies in workplaces. [Slide 19] You can see the range of policies listed, but the numbers are very low, 22% at most.

To conclude, [Slide 16] what my survey indicates is that:

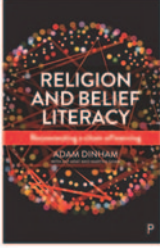
- If you are Black, Asian, minority ethnic, female, religious, and young, you are more likely to say religion and belief are matters for the workplace, but you are

also least likely to be in positions of power to influence the response.

- Conversely, if you are White, male, non-religious, and older, you are more likely to say religion and belief matters have no place in the workplace.
- More training equals more awareness of discrimination and harassment.
- More encounter equals being more positive about religion and belief in the workplace.
- Workplace religion and belief 'activities' are experienced overwhelmingly, positively, but minimally practised. There is real scope for extending religion and belief activities in workplaces in ways which would be widely welcomed.
- Policy on religion and belief in workplaces remains largely absent.

I hope that's a helpful flavour of my research for you. Thank you very much.

Narendra Waghela: Thank you very much, Adam. We shall now hear from our next speaker and then take questions for you both.

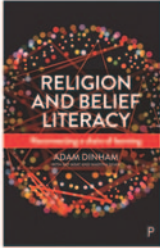


Thesis:

- A broken chain of memory, and a broken chain of learning
- What we know about R&B comes from what we learn and each learning sphere is shaped without reference to the others
- Each sphere determined by what policy in that area is seeking (Islam=security, interfaith=cohesion, and FB&A, Christianity=values and citizenship, Judaism=holocaust crime and antisemitism)
- And that makes for a muddled public sphere, in institutions from government to culture, and of course in workplaces (eg legal cases)
- Leaving publics struggling to make sense of religion and belief

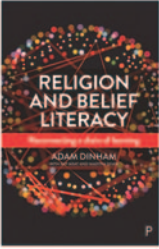
'Each of these framings has its own inner logic... which variously construct religion and belief as both positive (contributing to society) and negative (a threat to it). However, do these 'topics' line up? Are they sufficiently in touch with each other to, at least, be capable of coherent disagreement?' (Dinnham 2020 p2)

1



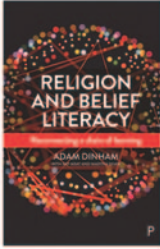
RE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Society is Christian and post-Christian The task is to learn its stories and values, and to develop awareness, tolerance and respect for 'others' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Society is Christian, secular, non-religious and plural all at once Acceptance and understanding that religion and belief are pervasive, lived and ordinary People should be equipped to encounter the fullest range of religion and belief, regardless of their own religion, belief or none
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools are not religious, except the ones that are Religion is private but schools are nevertheless places of learning and spiritual development All share in a Christian country connecting to shared British values Religion and belief is a difficult topic, from which you have the right to withdraw 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RE compulsion removed from the 1944 Act and added to the national curriculum Clarity about the purposes and content of RE as equipping young people for encounter with a diversity of religion and belief Sociological as well as theological terms are applied No right to withdraw, no duty of collective worship and no role for SACRE in curricula

2



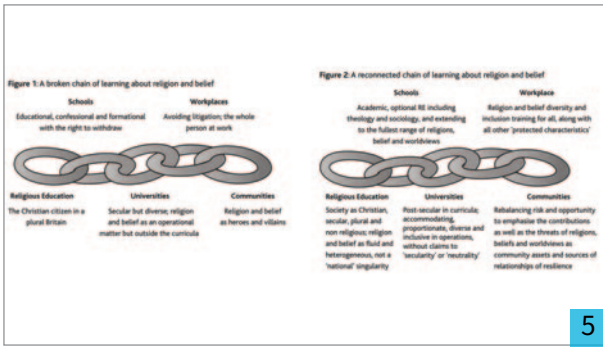
University practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Religion and belief are risks to be managed in relation to equality law Religion and belief are potentially dangerous in terms of extremism and radicalisation Diversity requires that accommodations such as halal food and prayer rooms should be provided Facilities requires that chaplaincy be provided but there is controversy about its purposes and roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Religion and belief diversity audited and responded to in similar ways to race, ethnicity and gender as a matter of social justice and good practice, not law Chaplaincy inclusive of the broadest range of religion, belief and non-belief Engagement with the potentially functional contributions of religion, belief and spirituality
University curricula	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Religion is private, not public Religion is in terminal decline and there is no need to study it Religion is irrational and not a proper subject of study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition of religion and belief diversity as pervasive and engaging, by all, regardless of one's own religion, belief or none Teaching and learning about religion and belief incorporated as a matter of employability readiness for encounter with diversity and citizen and personal formation

3



Workplaces and professions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Religion and belief diversity should be managed in order to avoid litigation Religion and belief are risky in workplaces so it is often easier to do nothing Religion and belief are parts of identity that should be welcomed at work in pursuit of productivity and effectiveness Workplaces faith networks imply that encounter leads to time The language of spirituality and mindfulness is preferred because it is thought to be safe for religion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professions are trained and equipped to encounter with religion and belief diversity The professions engage with their secular and pre-secular roots to understand their stance better and shape and evolve Working in a defined and differentiated from religion and belief
Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Religion and belief are risks in terms of extremism and radicalisation Religion and belief play an important role in social action and community building Communities should be vibrant and equipped to speak meaningfully about religion and belief All Christian values and values are part of citizenship Communities should work together about each other's diversity of religion and belief which will help them live each other better Heavily religious and spiritual are active, teaching someone else to progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The construction of religion and belief communities as both forces and victims is acknowledged across community teaching and learning initiatives, and the vilification role can clearly be corrected as a minority dimension Religion and belief are connected in their bond, fluid complexity in the current era Supplementary schools are subject to critical inspection in order to normalise them and remove ideological suspicion

4



Workplaces

- The evidence in relation to religion and belief in the workplace is very limited.
- However, there is evidence in relation to other 'protected characteristics' that good practice at work ensures diverse recruitment, keeps people from leaving, and enables them to progress
- As well as yielding income, market-reach and reputational benefits

15% more likely to outperform

Gender-diverse companies

35% more likely to outperform

Ethnically diverse companies

6

Survey via online interviews with 2000 British adults in paid employment aged 18+

Five themes: attitudes; experiences; religion and belief related activities; training; and policies

Weighted to be representative of British adults in paid employment by age, gender and region

Though information was collected on the sector or setting in which respondents work, the sample was not determined sector

7

Is religion a matter for workplaces?

BAME people significantly more likely to say yes than white:

Asian 61%
Black/African/ Caribbean 60%
Mixed/Multiple race 57%
White (42%)

8

Is religion a matter for workplaces?

Women are more likely than men to take religion and belief seriously in the workplace (and quite a stretchy idea of R&B)

- 5 'World religions' (M 57% vs. F 50%)
- Mindfulness, meditation and yoga (M 38% vs. F 29%)
- Spirituality (M 36% vs. F 29%)

9

Is religion a matter for workplaces?

Religious workers are more likely than non-religious workers to say that religion and belief should be taken seriously in workplaces

- the 5 'World religions' (60% vs. 43%)
- spirituality (35% vs. 27%)

Non-religious workers are almost twice as likely as those who are religious to say that religion is a private matter, not for workplaces (49% vs. 26%).

10

Is religion a matter for workplaces – by age?

COLLEAGUES

18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
63%	54%	40%	29%	27%

SERVICE USERS

18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
65%	59%	45%	37%	36%

11

Knowing a diversity of people of faith increases the sense of taking it seriously in the workplace

45% of people who know people of other faiths say workplaces should take it seriously

14% who say they do not know people of other faiths say workplaces should take it seriously

12

14% of British workers have participated in training addressing religion and belief

Compared with (Full Time AND Part Time)

- Race or ethnicity (20% vs. 10%);
- Sex (gender) (17% vs. 9%);
- Sexual orientation (15% vs. 11%);
- Age (15% vs. 10%);
- Gender reassignment (trans) (11% vs. 8%).

13

WITNESSED AND/OR EXPERIENCED PROBLEMS IN WORKPLACES?

41% YES
56% NO

Following R&B training in last 12 months:
62% YES
30% NO

14

'Best' and 'worst' sectors

Those working in education are most likely to say their organisation is good on religion and belief (58%)

Those working in transport and storage* are the most likely to say their organisation is poor (7%*)

15

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Conclusions!

If you're Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic, female, religious, and young you are more likely to say religion and belief are matters for the workplace - and least likely to be in positions of power to influence the response

If you're white, male, non-religious and older, you are more likely to say religion and belief have no place in the workplace

More training = more awareness of discrimination and harassment

More encounter = more positive about religion and belief in the workplace

Workplace religion and belief 'activities' are experienced overwhelmingly positively but minimally practiced

Policy on religion and belief in workplaces remains largely absent

16

EXPERIENCE OF R&B RELATED ACTIVITIES IN WORKPLACES

	Net Positive	Net Negative
Religious decorations in the workplace for events/festivals which are not included in the calendar of bank holidays (e.g. Hanukkah candle, Diwali flowers) (n=177)	83%	3%
Food in staff canteen or similar taking account of religious needs (e.g. halal, kosher) (n=281)	60%	4%
Marking religious events and festivals included in the calendar of bank holidays (Christmas, Easter) (n=492)	78%	3%
Religious decorations in the workplace for events/festivals included in the calendar of bank holidays (e.g. Christmas tree) (n=207)	70%	3%
Marking religious events and festivals not included in the calendar of bank holidays (e.g. Eid, Diwali, Hanukkah) (n=353)	78%	6%
Staff groups or networks on diversity issues (e.g. race, disability, sexual orientation) other than religion or faith (n=224)	75%	3%
A single staff group or network for all religions, belief and spirituality (n=243)	72%	7%
A number of staff groups or networks for specific religions or faith (e.g. Christian fellowship, Muslim staff group, Jewish network or similar) (n=192)	71%	7%
A quiet room, prayer room, chapel or other designated space for faith and spirituality (n=419)	70%	4%
Other (n=9)	67%	0%

17

RELIGION AND BELIEF RELATED ACTIVITIES IN WORKPLACES

Religious decorations in the workplace for events/festivals included in the calendar of bank holidays (e.g. Christmas tree)	82%
Marking religious events and festivals included in the calendar of bank holidays (Christmas, Easter)	82%
A quiet room, prayer room, chapel or other designated space for faith and spirituality	81%
Food in staff canteen or similar taking account of religious needs (e.g. halal, kosher)	77%
Staff groups or networks on diversity issues (e.g. race, disability, sexual orientation) other than religion or faith	77%
Marking religious events and festivals not included in the calendar of bank holidays (e.g. Eid, Diwali, Hanukkah)	75%
A number of staff groups or networks for specific religions or faith (e.g. Christian fellowship, Muslim staff group, Jewish network or similar)	74%
Religious decorations in the workplace for events/festivals which are not included in the calendar of bank holidays (e.g. Hanukkah candle, Diwali flowers)	67%
A single staff group or network for all religions, belief and spirituality	67%
Other	67%
None of these	44%

18

DO R&B POLICIES EXIST IN YOUR WORKPLACE?

Flexibility for planning working hours around holy days or religious festivals	61%
Flexible working hours to support people to mark religious traditions (e.g. fasting during Ramadan, Friday night dinner)	52%
Flexibility in working hours for religious observance/prayer/meditation (dress code related to religious clothing, badges or jewellery in workplace (e.g. head covering)	38%
Consideration of different religious beliefs of employees when planning work-related events (e.g. trips, meetings, trainings etc.)	37%
Materials explaining the organisation's approach to religious discrimination	34%
Materials explaining the organisation's approach to religion and belief diversity	32%
Programmes and/or training to teach employees about religious diversity	25%
Other	1%
None of these	47%

19

Response

Dr Abdul-Azim Ahmed

Secretary General, Muslim Council of Wales and Inter Faith Council for Wales

Narendra Waghela: We now are pleased to welcome Dr Abdul-Azim Ahmed, Secretary General of Muslim Council of Wales and Member of the Inter Faith Council for Wales, to offer a response.

Dr Abdul-Azim Ahmed: Thank you very much, Professor Dinham, for your wonderful presentation. I have read many of your books. You are a leading authority in this space, so it has been very good to hear from you directly. I would like to offer some brief reflections on the research you have just presented and some considerations.

I was struck by the positive reception, that you noted towards the end of your presentation, of both religion and belief-related activities and networks for religions, belief, and spirituality. In some workplaces there is a focus on policies and training, but looking at the capacity for employees to be able to organise in staff networks or similar and to be able to come together and have their religious diversity recognised, I think is quite powerful. It speaks to one of your other findings as well, which is the power differential for those who are more likely to have religion as a focus of centrality for themselves, while also not being in position to influence that. That shift towards activities may be one potential remedy there, because it does allow people to organise.

I am aware of a recent situation involving quite a large employer in the transport and storage sector, where employees were very regulated in terms of when and for how long they could take breaks. If, for example, in this case, Muslim employees wanted to pray, there was just no way in which the

company's existing practices would allow that. But before the employees could even start to think about getting the policy changed, they needed to be able to organise themselves as Muslim employees and negotiate rules around unionising and similar. There is a very interesting dynamic there which, I think, is worth investigating further, both in terms of academic research, and also in terms of how we ensure religious literacy in the workplace across different sectors.

I was also struck by your findings on age. We do have this impression that older people are more likely to identify as part of a religious tradition or a community, whereas younger generations are less likely. Certainly, the 2021 Census results indicate that that is the case. But that often doesn't translate in predictable ways. I think your finding that younger people are more likely to recognise the importance of faith in the workplace and religion in the workplace is significant. They are more likely, I think, as well, potentially to have more diverse relationships, which, again, I think is one of those factors you found in your survey to be an indicator of a greater openness and recognition of religion in the workplace.

The generational difference is definitely worth investigating more academically.

For those who are working in the space of trying to increase religious literacy in different industries and workplaces, the biggest challenge we often come across is latent secularism, ie those presumptions in operation around the space of religion, what it looks like and where it should be maintained. This often comes from an

older generation, one that I sometimes jokingly describe as the ‘John Lennon no religion’ generation, whose virtues of openness were often dismissive of religion, seeing it as a problem rather than a place of inclusivity.

Thank you again, Professor. You have given me a lot of food for thought. Thank you also to IFN for the opportunity to take part in this wonderful programme.

Narendra Waghela: Thank you very much. We now have a few minutes for some questions for Adam or Azim.

Mike Stygal (Pagan Federation): You mentioned the difference between older and younger generations in terms of the growth of the non-religious and also in terms of the feeling that religion is an important factor to consider. I wonder if that is a reflection on changes that happened in the way Religious Education was being taught 20 to 30 years ago. There was a shift away from the subject just being about knowledge, and it became more inclusive with a focus on practice and lived experiences as well. That might have led to it being more engaging and raising the profile in young people’s minds of the importance of religion.

Professor Adam Dinham: It is a really interesting thought that perhaps changes in RE are behind younger people’s attitudes to religion and belief. Firstly, I think it is likely, given that there has been a shift to teaching RE which connects with citizenship, British values and so on. In a way that’s a dilution of RE, but on the other hand, it’s also an inclusion of ideas of diversity and cohesion. Secondly, I also think, though, that younger people going through schools, and indeed now universities as well, are much more exposed to a whole educational milieu around relationships and emotional literacy as well, and I think that makes a big difference. Thirdly, as Azim touched on, it was really in the 1960s that classic secularity theory was at its height. There is a real generational drop off. Classic secularity theory projected the end of

religion by the year 2000. That was walked back by Peter Berger and others and became much more nuanced over time, but it’s been proven wrong because actually religion and belief globally is growing and globalisation and migration has brought all of us into encounter with more and more religion and belief diversity. So, I think all three of those points are factors.

Dr Peter Rookes (Birmingham Council of Faiths): Adam, I am interested in whether your results are influenced by whether or not there is a chaplaincy within the organisation – for example, in hospitals and healthcare situations, police forces and, increasingly, airports. I am also interested by whether the results are influenced by whether or not there is a prayer room. As Azim mentioned, the ability to pray at work is very important for Muslims. People of other faiths also welcome use of a prayer room where they are able to sit quietly and be spiritually regenerated. So, are the results that you have influenced in any way by whether or not there is an existing prayer room or chaplaincy? Or did it emerge that there was a need for ones where they didn’t already exist?

Professor Adam Dinham: My survey has not looked at whether chaplaincy and/or prayer rooms make a difference. So, I don’t have any evidence on that. However, I’ve touched on that in past work and I think it probably does make a difference. That is not least because many of the places in which chaplaincies exist, such as in universities, prisons and hospitals, are there because they’re mandated to exist by public policy, which means that government and civil service have to think about it and they have to frame it. Whether that produces an awareness, an encounter, an engagement that’s to the general good or to the general bad is up for debate. My own view is that much of it is framed rather instrumentally and problematically, by which I mean that it is framed in ways which focus on religion and belief as a risk – issues around security, antisemitism, and so on – and not so much around the

enrichments and wisdoms that sit within religion and belief systems.

Margaret Calvert (Faith Network for Manchester): Both presentations were very interesting. My mind was cast back to working within the NHS when smoking in buildings and on sites was banned and smoking areas were introduced within two months. At that point, the NHS Trust that I was part of was in about its fourth year of discussing whether or not it was appropriate to provide prayer spaces that were non-Christian. I wonder if further research would be interesting on what is important to managers and how they facilitate answering what is important to them?

Professor Adam Dinham: It is a very interesting binary, very provocative and tempting. I would quite like to do a piece of research on that. Very often what drives engagement with religion and belief in any space is what is instrumental. For example, I did a survey about 10 years ago with university vice chancellors, and asked them what kept them awake at night about religion and belief. The two main issues were extremism and international students, providing a warm welcome that would bring them and then keep them. They were in some ways quite gloomy responses, not very exciting or enriching focuses, but they were what time and money would be spent on, so that was where the focus went. Although smoking vs non-smoking was controversial in some ways, it isn't as controversial as religion and belief tend to be. I think many workplaces become paralysed in relation to religion and belief because they are terrified that they're going to be sued or at least have lots of problems. Workplace leadership very often underestimate the religion and belief diversity in their workplace, or their service users, but also the significance of that to those people. There is a lot in that that could be unpacked.

Satnam Singh Poonian (Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)): The survey sounds very interesting. It might be that older people do not put as much emphasis on

religion and belief because they already know more about it and have gone through life; whereas younger people feel more need to learn about it.

It was interesting to hear you talk about the magnification of extremism of different communities. A recent example of that is the Bloom Report. In the Report section on extremism there are 1.5 pages on Islam, 1 paragraph on Hinduism and 11 pages on Sikhism. To my knowledge, there are no Sikhs in jail, or waiting, on extremism or terrorism charges. If government policy is built upon that type of magnified risk, then we are all in danger. Why do you think this is happening? Why are the media and some groups actually magnifying the risk, causing problems between different communities?

Dr Abdul-Azim Ahmed: I did speak with Colin Bloom about his Report and I reviewed it for the Religion Media Centre when it was published. The amplification of, in this case, Sikhism, as a terror threat or a security issue ties in with an increasingly particular approach to religion (which can be identified in the UK Government, but also in other governments) which is the idea of 'good religion' and 'bad religion'. 'Good religions' engage in civil society and are often inter faith focused, and 'bad religions' encourage, disintegration, subversiveness, and even certain types of criminal activity. I think having that framework, which is becoming more prevalent, allows a category of 'bad religion' to be expanded. Traditionally it included Muslims and some Catholics too, but I think it is being increasingly motivated by other concerns in terms of hyper-diverse cities and similar. I think that is why we are seeing this shift and why there is now a focus on Sikhism as well, which, I agree, seems to be an emerging policy concern in the Government. Unfortunately, I don't know what the solution is.

Narendra Waghela: Thank you very much again to both Adam and Azim for your contributions.

Closing panel

Ashwin Soni

Crawley Inter Faith Network

Narendra Waghela: Lastly, we shall hear some brief closing reflections from Ashwin Soni, Tracey Prior and Harriet Crabtree.

First, Ashwin Soni. Ashwin is a longstanding member of Crawley Interfaith Network, which runs many events to increase understanding about different faiths.

Ashwin Soni: Good afternoon, everybody. Crawley Inter Faith Network is an intergenerational organisation that welcomes people from all faiths, creeds and traditions. It has been in existence since 2006. It offers the opportunity to share ideas and experiences.

We hold regular events each month, often focusing on a different religion or faith. The Chair (chairmanship rotates monthly) and

Secretary have been the main organisers since the pandemic. There is also a Treasurer. Rather than using meeting rooms, our emphasis has been to reach out and go to individual places of worship to hear, see and experience what exactly happens there. For example, last month we went to a Quaker Friends Meeting House, in the previous month we went to a Sikh temple, and next month we are going to the largest Catholic Church here in Crawley. We have about 20 people attending each time. That is not as many as we would like but we are continuing and we are working as hard as we can.

Thank you.

Narendra Waghela: Thank you very much, Ashwin.

Tracey Prior

Church of Jesus-Christ of Latter-day Saints and a Vice-Moderator of the IFN Faith Communities Forum

Narendra Waghela: Our next speaker is Tracey Prior, who is from the Church of Jesus-Christ of Latter-day Saints and is a Vice-Moderator of the IFN Faith Communities Forum.

Tracey Prior: Thank you to all the presenters for their presentations today. I have been very heartened by the amount of research and exploration that has been shared. The findings are so useful. There are so many initiatives, and there is so much well-rounded, wide-ranging learning. I feel that I have a deeper understanding of the barriers that exist and also a range of

useful ideas now to get through them and make progress.

Religious literacy, as we have heard, is a necessary component to countering and correcting misinformation, misdirection, and inaccurate representation. Today, we have been provided with a lot of information and evidence that will help us to explain the value that religious literacy can bring to any organisation. I will certainly be working on improving my religious literacy and encouraging this wherever I'm able to have an influence.

It is amazing that there is such a broad church here of so many religions, so many external organisations, all working together on this issue. We can make great strides taking this forward individually within our own organisations and also as a collective. There is a lot of work ahead.

I would like to thank the IFN for holding this event on this important topic which has been very inspiring. My takeaways from today are too many to list here, you'll be glad to know! But I consider them to be very valuable to my work in communications, which is focused on inter

faith relations. Today has sparked many ideas and added to my to-do list! I was actually quite surprised, and quite pleased, by some of the findings shared today. I was especially thankful to be reminded of the power of a positive message and the real evidence-based value that religious literacy brings to organisations and also the practical ways to create an inclusive environment. I think that is one of the most personal takeaways to me. Thank you.

Narendra Waghela: Thank you very much, Tracey.

Dr Harriet Crabtree OBE

Executive Director, Inter Faith Network for the UK

Narendra Waghela: We now invite IFN's Executive Director, Harriet Crabtree, to offer some reflections on the day.

Dr Harriet Crabtree: Thank you, Chair. It has been a most interesting day with excellent contributions from a whole range of different sectors.

The term 'religious literacy' is perhaps rather esoteric and also complex in what it is used to denote. The day has been a reminder of how it has a number of different dimensions. These have been encapsulated in different ways by the various contributors. Religious literacy is not just about learning of facts. Information and training are important, but they only have impact if they come with the ability to understand and to engage with people. So providing opportunity for deepening understanding, including through direct experience, and also developing skills for engagement is also important.

Something that struck me during the day was the contested nature of some aspects of providing religious literacy, or seeking to provide it, whether in workplaces or schools. There are questions about how much money there is available to do that, whether for RE teachers, SACREs, or

provision of EDI in particular work contexts. Then there are also interesting questions about who chooses what is learnt and what the religious literacy includes? Is it, for example, dependent on which communities are the largest in one's area in particular contexts? Is it to do with who is in one's workplace? Should one be learning about every different faith or focusing on the faith of the people who one knows best? There are a whole set of practical issues which are not straightforward.

'Religious literacy' has become a term that is used as if it was self-evident. Many of those who have contributed today have unpacked the fact that it isn't. It has also become something that is a political issue because, in some ways, it's seen as a panacea. What do we do in order to engage better with faith communities? We have better religious literacy. And of course, that matters. That matters in media and in government and in a whole range of contexts. But it's not straightforward just to say "We need religious literacy". There has to be thought about who provides it, how one develops it, how it's funded, where non-religious belief fits into the mix, and a whole range of other issues.

I have also been particularly struck today by the role of so many different people in helping provide religious literacy. We've heard about RE and SACREs, we've heard about workplaces, we've heard about national, regional and local inter faith bodies, and very importantly, we've heard from faith community contexts about how faith groups can play their part.

For me, it has been a very packed and wonderful day. I've learned a huge amount and I'm very grateful to all the speakers and contributors.

Narendra Waghela: Thank you very much, Harriet.

Closing reflections from the Co-Chairs

Narendra Waghela: Our Executive Director has covered very well all that I would have said. It is surprising that we are not as familiar with religious literacy as we thought. I have found the day very interesting. Thank you very much to all the contributors and participants who have given their precious time to attend this meeting. I shall now hand you back to Hilary.

Canon Hilary Barber: Thank you. Narendra opened our day and I'm going to bring it to a close. I hope you have all found today to have been interesting and worthwhile.

It's my pleasant task to conclude by thanking warmly all our excellent plenary speakers and workshop presenters, all discussion group facilitators, presenters and rapporteurs, my fellow Trustees and, of course, everyone for attending and participating and for sharing your thoughts. Particular thanks also go to the Executive Director and staff for all the arrangements for the day.

Thank you again to everyone for being with us. We wish you all the best for your continuing work. That work has, of course, never been more important.

Workshop Notes

Note: The discussion points listed in each of these notes are points and suggestions made by individual participants during the sessions rather than conclusions agreed by the workshops as a whole.

Morning Workshops

A: Local inter faith organisations and working for religious literacy

Facilitator: Patricia Stoa, Nottingham Inter Faith Council and IFN Trustee

Presenters: Rabbi Warren Elf MBE and Margaret Calvert, Co-Chair and Secretary, respectively, Faith Network for Manchester (FN4M)

Local inter faith organisations play an important role in helping increase religious literacy within their membership and within their wider communities through a range of routes, from talks and conferences to training sessions and faith trails. Rabbi Elf and Margaret Calvert talk about FN4M's wide-ranging educational programme which offers opportunities for people in its area to learn more about different faiths and beliefs.

Presenter: Tripti Megeri, Secretary, Bristol Multi-Faith Forum

Tripti Megeri talks about how Bristol Multi-Faith Forum's annual Bristol Diverse Doors Open Day, working with a range of different places of worship, helps people learn about their neighbours' faith and communities.

Rapporteur: Judith Baker, Conciliation & Peacebuilding Coordinator and Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer, Quakers in Britain

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Patricia Stoa welcomed participants to the discussion group and those present introduced themselves.

Rabbi Warren Elf MBE and **Margaret Calvert** offered their presentation. A copy of their PowerPoint slides is at the end of this note. A summary of their points is below.

Rabbi Warren Elf offered the following points:

- Faith Network for Manchester (FN4M) works with a number of schools and colleges in an initiative called 'In Your Faith'. This includes Spiritual and Faith Awareness (SFA) Days where representatives from different faiths visit schools and answer any questions that students have.
- FN4M has developed strong relationships with three or four schools in the area and since the pandemic it has returned to physically visiting schools.
- Its most recent event involved representatives from Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Baha'i, Humanist, Sikh and Rastafarian faith and belief backgrounds. On the day, there were four workshops and students were given 45 minutes in each workshop and could ask questions. This was followed by a panel discussion which included each faith and belief representative. These SFA Days provide an opportunity for students to hear from a variety of different perspectives and to see that representatives of different faiths and beliefs can get on together and be friends, even when they disagree about key issues.
- FN4M also occasionally contributes to school discussions on different faith

perspectives on current issues such as the environment and mental health.

- During Inter Faith Week, FN4M also supports a variety of different events and initiatives and often collaborates with other groups in the Manchester area such as Bury Faith Forum and Bolton Interfaith Council.
- In the future, FN4M plans to organise faith awareness courses. It has already been approached by a couple of hospices and other emergency services.

Margaret Calvert offered the following points:

- Members of FN4M felt that they needed to address George Floyd's murder on 25 May 2020, but they didn't know how their response would be received. However, they organised a series of seminars, a conference and a poetry evening and many different groups from across the UK took part.
- Initially, they struggled with holding balanced and informed discussion as there were a variety of difficult issues to unpack.
- However, they became sure that Black Lives Matter (BLM) was an aspect of many faith perspectives, and individuals wanted to know what their religion was doing about these issues.
- They began with a series of seven seminars on black experience in different roles. This eventually evolved into a four-week course on Faith in Black Lives Matter. The last iteration attracted people from France, Italy and Germany. A plethora of resources were used which included books and videos such as the Movement for Justice and Reconciliation's documentary called 'After the Flood'.
- All their efforts stem from a 'thirst for justice' and they learn as they go along. The sessions aim to provide safe spaces

where people can unpack difficult issues and learn together.

Patricia Stoat thanked the presenters and invited questions. Responses from Rabbi Elf are in italics.

- In areas of limited religious diversity, it can be difficult to make visits to a wide range of places of worship. Are there any obvious ways for larger urban groups to make stronger and structured links with neighbouring rural groups?

If there are localities which have greater diversity of faiths, then there is always the possibility of linking up. I hope that this is something that IFN might be able to assist with. FN4M welcomes people into different faith buildings in Manchester, but many schools can't afford the transport costs or don't prioritise those.

- Does FN4M charge for its education courses and outreach, or does it receive funding for its work?

This has changed over the years. Initially, FN4M received funding from the City Council, but this eventually ran out. Since then, it has had to earn the funds to keep going. It has a paid Administrator one-day-a-week, so it mostly relies on volunteers. FN4M has begun charging for its courses and school visits, but is very flexible if schools struggle to pay the costs.

- Bolton is a large area, but has a small diversity of faiths and places of worship. FN4M has supported many of the events in Bolton. Bolton Interfaith Council (BIC) receives some funding from Bolton Council. However, capacity has been diverted and diminished over the past few years and it is finding it difficult to put on the faith trails, despite the clear demand from schools. This needs to be appropriately resourced and it has been suggested that BIC charge schools for this. However, it is not obvious who the schools should be paying: the places of worship; faith groups; or BIC.

A payment could be to BIC in the first instance and BIC could make a

contribution from that to the faith community or place of worship, as appropriate.

Patricia Stoa invited **Tripti Megeri** to make her presentation. A copy of her slides is at the end of this note.

Tripti Megeri offered the following points:

- Bristol Multi Faith Forum (BMFF) is an equality organisation which was instituted by Bristol City Council in 2004 and became independent from the Council in 2007. It is committed to equality and community cohesion. It is the lead partner in its area for the NHSBT's Blood and Organ Donation campaign in the West of England region and for the British Science Association's British Science Week.
- BMFF holds Diverse Open Doors Days annually. The Day typically involves taking people around 8 places of worship across Bristol. These often include: a Hindu Temple; a Synagogue; a Mosque; the Gurdwara; a Greek Orthodox Church; and a Baha'i place of worship. BMFF provides a minibus to transport people, but participants can go to any of these places of worship during the whole day.
- Last year, BMFF collaborated with the Mental Health Trust to organise the Diverse Open Doors Day, as it wanted to focus on the theme of mental health and faith. Participation was widespread and people from outside Bristol, including from Bath and London, took part.
- The event used to be completely free, but there is now a nominal £5 transport fee. This has reduced the number of people who sign up and then don't turn up on the day. Consequently, this has meant that BMFF can plan the day more effectively and efficiently.

- BMFF also organised a Harmony Dinner on the occasion of the 75th Pakistan and Indian Independence Days celebration. People from both the Indian and Pakistani diaspora attended the event.

Patricia Stoa thanked Ms Megeri and invited questions. Responses from Ms Megeri are in italics.

- How does BMFF find participants for the Diverse Doors and how does it encourage people to take part such as through communications and publicity?

BMFF mainly uses social media and distributes publicity materials, which it prints itself, including to libraries and places of worship. BMFF also connects with other organisations to share information and uses MailChimp to circulate information about its events. It also liaises with Bristol University and Bristol City Council which provide publicity for the event.

- Looking at the issue of diversity and inclusivity, what can local inter faith groups who lack religious diversity do, aside from coach trips, to meet people with different religious views?

BMFF is very happy to collaborate with any other groups. Anyone who would like to participate in the Diverse Doors Open Days can contact Ms Megeri by email if they would like to get involved.

Patricia Stoa thanked everyone for attending and for their contributions. She said that one of the most important insights from this discussion was about making the most of the resources that were available to groups and about finding fruitful ways to collaborate effectively with other groups and organisations in the area.



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3 strands of our Education and Training Work:

1. In Your Faith for schools and colleges
2. Faith in Black Lives Matter
3. Faith Awareness Training for statutory organisations, businesses and other groups

2



3



4



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Faith	Leader/Representative	Availability
Christianity	Rev. Dr. David Gifford	Yes
	Rev. Dr. David Gifford	Yes
	Rev. Dr. David Gifford	Yes
Islam		Yes
Judaism		Yes
Sikhism		Yes
Buddhism		Yes
		Yes
Hinduism		N/A
Sufi	Gracie + Yas +4	
Jain		N/A
Paganism		Yes
Humanism		Yes

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B: Religious literacy in the workplace

Facilitator: Amanda Bowman, Vice-President, Board of Deputies of British Jews and IFN Trustee

Presenter: Brad McLaughlin, lead for multi faith work at Aviva, and Faith-Friendly Workplaces, where he also leads the Christian Network

Rapporteur: Saleha Islam, Muslim Council of Britain and Chaplain, Canary Wharf

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Amanda Bowman welcomed participants to the discussion group and those present introduced themselves.

Brad McLaughlin offered his presentation. A summary of his points is below:

- Religion and belief is a protected characteristic, but in the diversity and inclusion space it has been on the ‘back burner’ because it is less clear how to address faith in the workplace than it is to address other protected aspects of identity
- Aviva has a number of groups known as ‘Employee Resource Groups’ which enable individuals in the company to connect, find resources and work better. For example, it has groups on: gender balance; the LGBTQIA+ community; and a group linking people from ethnic minorities, called Origins.
- Up until three years ago, there was no group which focused on faith. I had, until that point, just been leading the small Christian group within Aviva. Members of this group wanted to fill the ‘missing gap’ of faith representation in Aviva and include people from other faiths. However, they didn’t know how to set up a multi faith group.
- The multi faith approach taken by Aviva has been to create an umbrella network

which represents all faiths. Those belonging to each faith can set up a group representing that faith underneath the umbrella network. The umbrella network provides the authority for the faith networks but doesn’t set them up.

- Aviva has networks representing Atheists, Muslims, Christians and Jews. It also has faith representatives from smaller faiths that were keen to be part of the broader network, but didn’t want to set up their own specific group.
- One of the aims of the multi faith network is to enable people of different faith groups to be able to connect for the first time with people who have different beliefs to them. That creates more engaged employees and is an important part of faith literacy.
- Another aim is to build bridges of understanding between people of faith and people within the rest of the organisation. To encourage this, the multi faith network is continually trying to set up events and activities to build understanding of people’s varying faith and beliefs.
- I have also been engaging senior leaders and executives at Aviva in a scheme called ‘My Face, My Faith’. This involves sessions to ask them questions, such as, ‘Tell me about your faith and how does that fit into your workplace?’, ‘What did that look like growing up?’ and ‘How do you engage that in a workplace?’. I recently interviewed Aviva’s Chief Claims Officer – a representative of the Muslim faith – and asked him about the challenges that he experienced in the workplace because of his faith. Everybody has an underlying belief system which they adhere to and it is important to enable people to share that.
- The Faith-Friendly Workplaces initiative was launched as many other companies were having the same experiences as Aviva. They were unsure about the correct processes and the objectives to aim for in setting up a faith-friendly

workplace. There was also a sense that there was an imbalance in terms of the resources, time and attention that were allocated to some of the Employee Resource Groups compared to others.

- Faith-Friendly Workplaces aims to find best practices and share those with other companies. Since launching, at least 40-50 very large organisations have been involved in the initiative.
- It may be helpful in the workshop discussion today to talk a little about what IFN is doing, how it can face into businesses and what support it can provide, thinking in particular about any unique features IFN has.

Amanda Bowman thanked Brad McLaughlin and invited participants to share their experiences of working as people of faith. What activities were taking place in workplaces? Is there already support for faith groups? Was there any way that the Inter Faith Network for the UK could help?

The following points were made. Responses from Brad McLaughlin are in italics.

- A friend who works in the administrative side of the NHS mentioned that they were recently asked about providing a prayer space for Muslims. Are people from other faiths being enabled to practise their faith, for example, to take days off for religious holidays and other significant cultural occasions?

In terms of prayer spaces, I think more and more organisations are setting aside reasonable facilities that can be multi faith and which enable all employees to be able to use a facility well.

- The Board of Deputies has an Employer's guide on Judaism that is on its website. Hard copies are also available. It is based on both custom and law. It's very helpful for companies to have this to understand the legal framework in terms of faith, generally, and then specifically apply this

in terms of Judaism. It has been adapted for some of the public sector agencies, such as the police. The Board of Deputies is also working with the NHS on a number of issues, and also in academia where multi faith prayer spaces are very important for both students and academics. It also has a programme called the 'Board at Work', which looks at this area in different ways. At one level, the programme takes a religious freedom perspective, looking at advocating and talking to government and others around ensuring that the religious freedoms are protected and promoted. At another level, it works with workplaces to support those people who have set up Jewish networks and share good practice. The Board of Deputies has people that can go into workplaces and present on their behalf. They share examples of what they've done to promote events that they've organised.

- My employer, a global biotech company, has policies on gender, LGBTQ+, age, disability, and also on faith. It says quite clearly in the company's discrimination training that if somebody has a religious holiday, then the company can't force them to come into work on that day. When I was involved in the setting up of another building, I mentioned that it needed to have a prayer space and was met with some eye-rolling, but it was helpful to be able to say that we had a policy on it. (Tracey Prior)

You have two ways of achieving Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) from a business standpoint. You can either wait for the Government to pressure you to enforce policy. You hear a lot of people within diversity saying that something 'adds value to the company as you won't get censured', which is a very negative way of approaching things. Or, and this is far better, you can demonstrate the value that diversity and inclusion adds to your company. A recent survey carried out by one of my NHS colleagues, completed by 800,000 staff, showed that 50-60% followed a religion and that it was important to them. Their engagement

levels were significantly higher than the base population as well. When staff have higher levels of engagement, you get better output and better results. There is also better staff retention. If you can show that EDI is going to benefit your company because you're going to save money, have more engaged staff and perform better in surveys, then it is a much more positive and constructive approach.

- In the work that the speaker does professionally, companies often start in terms of compliance, ie ticking the boxes so that there will not be a legal case. They then move on to see it as an opportunity and something that's embedded in the culture and the purpose of the company. Every company will be at a different point in its journey.
- I taught a course for a while at Birkbeck, University of London, on Psychology and Religion. I found that in discussion generally about religious matters, that people had very elementary understanding of what religion was actually about. For instance, they had no understanding of the word 'faith'. Very few people had any real understanding of passions, for example, hatred, envy, greed, avarice, lust, and so on. They could talk about them very easily, but they had very little actual experience of it. However, I found that psychology was a way of opening it up and then showing the way in which socialisation takes place through the efficacy of religion, the capacity to get on, to love other people, to be friendly with them. But it can only take place through the understanding of these emotions. One of the real problems in the teaching of religion in general, is that it can just become an intellectual exercise, whereas religion is really about socialising the human being so you're comfortable living with yourself. Once you become comfortable living with yourself, you can begin to become comfortable living with other people. Being at peace with yourself and others means really coming to terms with these enormously powerful emotions that we all share. One of the big gaps in the

teaching of inter faith is that they don't always deal with the common factors, such as these emotions, which can be so destructive. I also worked in the NHS for a while. It is a fantastic place full of people from all religions, traditions, beliefs and cultures. Because there's a common concern with the welfare of the patient, many of these problems don't really arise. Because if someone is very ill or acutely sick, or you're trying to organise a rota, you just do your best and you fit in and try and make it work. Conflict can arise over resources or pay, but then that might be to do with one's own feelings of paranoia and anxiety about losing resources or access to advancement in one's career. That is where religion can really help and enable us to share vulnerable feelings with others. That becomes really crucial.

One of the things we're trying to do is to do more storytelling. If you think about the education system, it focuses on the basic facts about different religions, but that washes over people. So, instead, we've been trying to pull in more of people's personal stories. If you know someone's story you start to develop a far deeper understanding about that person and their faith which is very important.

- The learning that we have gained through people and through friendship is very powerful at Durham University. The university is a very significant employer with about four and half thousand staff. University chaplains have a particular focus on supporting students, but they are also there for staff. The collaboration and engagement between chaplaincy and EDI, and how we work together is very interesting. There is now a Pro Vice-Chancellor (EDI), which is a good step forward. We have a diverse Chaplaincy Network. We also have Islamic prayer rooms and multi faith spaces, rooms, and bookable spaces. Catering is another big issue, particularly in regard to Halal and Kosher requirements. We have produced a Ramadan guidance document which our Muslim chaplain has led on and I have put together a document called 'Major

Religious Observances likely to Impact on Study and Work.' We have a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic network. We don't have, a religion, belief and worldview network at the moment and that is potentially something that we want to explore in the future.

When I've spoken to a lot of different places, they don't know where to put the religious belief networks. Within Aviva, we have effectively tied it to the ethnic minority network because they class it as ethnicity, which isn't entirely accurate. There is a crossover for some who would take their cultural identity and their religious identity as being one and the same, but for most that's not the case. In the university and workplace context, EDI is also important in order to work out a constructive way for people to disagree together. Because while we are always saying there's more that unites us than divides us, we will inevitably come to points of disagreement. The value-add to a company is diversity of thought and belief. The better we are able to say, "How do we disagree well," the better we can model that. Ultimately, the desired outcome of EDI is better decision making. We don't want a whole group of people who look different but think the same. Creating spaces like Inter Faith Week which allow people to disagree well together is very important.

- In the late 1980s / early 1990s, I was a chair of a Housing Corporation, which had 14,000 units or properties. There were very few Muslim staff at that time and there was demand for a prayer room. We vacated one of the office rooms so that it could be used as a prayer space and within a short while, the number of Muslim staff increased. I look at it as a positive encouragement for people to join places of work if there is a prayer room there.

Some colleagues from America set up a law school specifically focused on defending religious freedom. They were Christians, but they also defended minority faiths. They believe that when they defend and protect more niche and

minority faiths, everyone is protected to a greater extent. The better we are able to articulate that, the more people from the wider group will come on board and say, "Actually, when I protect him, I'm actually creating greater protection for myself." A Muslim prayer room can turn into a quiet space that benefits everyone.

- Isaiah Berlin wrote a very interesting essay on the role of majority religions in society. The thrust of it was that the majority religion should act as an umbrella to protect minority religions. In doing so, it enhances not only the reputation of itself, but also gives room and air to all the other religions to join in and to see that the majority religion is their friend and is helping them in their own faith, facilitating their own faith, their own belief, their own practice. This is a very valuable point.

The major failure that I see with people who get drawn into the EDI focus, is that they become focused on narrower and narrower intersections. But actually, if you want to create change, you also need to consider how to draw in the widest cohort of people who are interested in this and bring them alongside. You're going to see greater positive change by bringing in that larger group, which then, as Isaiah Berlin said, brings those great protections.

Dr Harriet Crabtree said that IFN has in membership lots of different types of organisations such as National Faith Community Representative Bodies, Local Inter Faith Organisations, National and Regional Inter Faith Organisations, and Educational and Academic Bodies. All of them respond in different ways and are helpful in different ways to workplaces when approached. Some offer specialist advice, like the Faith & Belief Forum, and some have people who are helpful to engage with when setting up new staff networks. IFN gets a lot of enquiries about this but IFN does not do ongoing consultancy work. It encourages all its member bodies to take this area of work very seriously. Inter Faith Week, www.interfaithweek.org is also a fantastic opportunity, which hopefully Aviva and

many other companies will take part in this year.

Brad McLaughlin said that during the very initial stages of setting up its faith networks, Aviva leaned very heavily on Inter Faith Week as a launch pad to engage people. In the first year, it used Inter Faith week to set up 'My Faith Story' on its internal boards, asking as many people as possible to share just a brief snippet of their personal faith story. The stories were fantastic because people found out more about their colleagues.

Amanda Bowman said that there was clearly a great deal of interest in this area and the discussion had provided many useful examples of good practice to share. She

thanked everybody for attending and for their contributions.

C: Religious literacy and government

Facilitator: Paul Smalley, Executive Assistant, NASACRE, Board member, REC Board, Edgehill University and IFN Trustee

Opening reflections: Mike Stygal, Inter Faith Officer, Pagan Federation and IFN Trustee

The Colin Bloom report has brought to the fore the topic of Government religious literacy. The report was by a person commissioned as an independent reviewer and so, although developed with support from officials, is not a 'Government report'. A response from the Government may be made in due course to its various recommendations. In that context, this group will explore questions such as:

- Why is religious literacy on the part of elected officials and those who support them important?
- Where do non-religious beliefs sit within a 'religious literacy' framework?

- What does 'religiously literate' Government look like to faith groups?
- There is already a significant level of religious literacy – are there good examples of this already and what might further strengthen levels of literacy?
- What reflections do participants have on the recommendations in the Bloom report which relate to religious literacy?
- Are there ways in which faith groups can contribute to strengthening of Government religious literacy at UK, national and local levels?

The Bloom report can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/independent-faith-engagement-review-call-for-evidence>.

Rapporteur: Deepak Naik MBE, United Religions Initiative (UK)

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Paul Smalley welcomed participants to the discussion group and those present introduced themselves.

Mike Stygal offered the following opening reflections:

- Religious literacy is the knowledge of, and ability to understand, religion. The importance of being religiously literate is increasing as globalisation has created greater links and migration between societies of different faiths and cultures. It has been proposed that including religious literacy as an aspect of public education would improve social cohesion. In addition to being familiar with and comprehending the nature of religious experience, religious literacy is a fundamental understanding of the complexities, contradictions, and difficulties of at least one religious tradition and the capacity to extrapolate that understanding to the potential for the same kind of diversity within other religious groups. It embraces diversity and promotes balanced and wise

- engagement with the religious aspects of human culture.
- We live in a society with diverse worldviews and beliefs. Good governance for society as a whole should be in a position to take those into consideration when devising policy and legislation.
 - My own organisation, the Pagan Federation, came into being as a response to an anti-witchcraft Bill introduced to the Commons by Gwilym Roberts MP around 1970. The bill was withdrawn after a long campaign, and also a meeting between Mr Roberts and a senior figure within the Pagan Federation, during which Mr Roberts' concerns and fears were allayed. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Satanic Ritual Abuse scares that were introduced to the UK from the USA sparked fresh fears in society, and the government of the day commissioned an independent investigation, that, again, allayed fears by discovering no evidence to support the claims made.
 - Smaller, lesser-known religious communities can very easily become the subject of ill-informed government and societal response that can have a significant impact on those communities. The same, sadly, is true even for the more widely known communities. Polarisation of views on extremism, purportedly within religious communities, can misrepresent the entire community in ways that are extremely detrimental.
 - The Police Pagan Association has been actively involved in work with the Home Office, specifically with regard to CONTEST, the government's counter-terrorism strategy, to draw attention to the issue of Far Right extremists who have been appropriating symbols from modern Heathenry, thereby causing suspicion to fall upon Heathens who utterly reject the agenda and messages of the extremists. Thankfully, the relationship with government had already been established, so this work to educate and inform has been possible.
 - The Bloom Report, entitled 'Does Government Do God' is an independent review into how government engages with faith. It was initiated at the request of then Prime Minister Boris Johnson, with Colin Bloom appointed as the Independent Faith Engagement Adviser in October 2019. Colin Bloom's report was published in April of this year. The findings and recommendations within the report have received a mixed reception. Some faith communities and those of no religious tradition have expressed some concern about some of the language within the report, making it an interesting comment in itself on religious literacy for that report. But the fact that such a report was commissioned in the first place and that it is not wholeheartedly complimentary of government suggests that the exercise was carried out in good faith.
 - The report includes 22 recommendations to the Government covering a wide range of topics, including: faith literacy in government; faith in education; faith in prison and probation; faith in the armed forces; faith-based extremism; faith-based exploitation; and religious marriage. Some of those areas have been discussed in ways that have led to the concern within named faith communities and suggestions that the comments within the report are not entirely accurate and could therefore lead to misunderstandings.
 - The report itself illustrates some challenges of religious literacy, and it may be wise to read it with that mind. There has yet to be a formal response to the report from the government. But it would be good to think that our discussion in this group today and the notes that come out of it might become part of an ongoing discussion about religion, religious literacy and government.

- In terms of the questions suggested for this discussion group:

- Why is religious literacy on the part of elected officials and those who support them important?

Religious literacy is important for elected officials and those that support them, as the UK is a diverse society and good governance of diverse societies should include some degree of the different worldviews and traditions that are practised in that country. This is particularly important if officials are going to devise policy and legislation with people of faith.

- Where do nonreligious beliefs sit within a religious literacy framework?

I know a Humanist representative, who wasn't overly impressed with the Bloom report. I know that the IFN has had discussions and worked with Humanists in the past and almost certainly will do so in the future. But as far as religious literacy framework is concerned, if we're looking at a whole variety of different worldviews, it's really important that we hear nonreligious worldviews as well. We heard mentioned earlier the phrase 'cultural literacy'. Nonreligious worldviews can be considered part of cultural literacy and therefore part of religious literacy.

- What does religiously literate government look like to faith groups? *What is understood as a 'religiously literate' government is up to faith groups but is also going to vary from person to person. The Bloom Report suggests that there's quite a high degree of religious literacy within government, although there are a number of religious communities within the country, who would question that. However, a religiously literate government will involve an openness to recognising that you may not be fully informed and finding a route to resolving a shortage in information and understanding.*

- There is already a significant level of religious literacy – are there good

examples of this already and what might further strengthen levels of literacy?

That is a question I think we could all ask ourselves.

- What reflections do participants have on the recommendations in the Bloom Report, which relate to religious literacy? And there are specific things that pick up on the phrase religious literacy? Are there ways in which faith groups can contribute to strengthening of government religious literacy at UK, national, and local levels?

I would note that in the local context, many local authorities have good relationships with their local inter faith groups, but there are also quite a few that have next to no relationship with them.

Paul Smalley thanked Mike Stygal and invited any questions or reflections. The following points were made. Responses from Mike Stygal are in italics.

- I was a civil servant and involved in religious engagement for many years. There is a challenge to improving religious literacy in government that is quite hard to overcome. Historically, there was the obstacle of a secular mindset on the part of a number of civil servants who simply didn't understand how religion and belief – regarded as a private matter for individuals – should have any influence on the formation and implementation of policy. That attitude has disappeared and there is an understanding that faith and belief communities have a role to play in advising on policy. However, there remains a lack of institutional memory. A civil servant will, on the whole, stay in post maybe for two and a half years or three years. In that time, they will come to understand the landscape, but they will eventually move on. That is the main obstacle and an extremely hard one to overcome.

We have a society that isn't as religiously literate as we would like it to be, and, as

civil servants and government are drawn from society, the ultimate solution is to have a more religiously literate society.

- I took over from the founder of the Pagan Federation in 1979 and spent most of the next 10 or 12 years educating the press and government about the organisation. I see the point about their lack of institutional memory which remains a problem and can at times feel like rolling a stone up the hill, only for it to roll back down and having to start all over again. However, every group faces this and the important thing is to know where to direct attention. Another point to think about is what are classed as ‘nonreligious beliefs’ – Paganism is often confused with nonreligious beliefs, although it is a theistic religious cosmology or outlook. Atheism or agnosticism, however, do count as a nonreligious belief. If you talk to an atheist, they take it as self-evident that there is nothing outside the material world. That’s just where they start. These beliefs are also cosmologies. But by contrast a woman recently won her complaint against unfair dismissal for refusing to accept that self-declared transsexual women are women. Her argument was classified as a belief protected under Article 18 of the UDHR. Whether one agrees with her argument or not, this example seems to muddle it with what is understood by a non-religious belief. There’s a confusion between (rational) argument and (religious and non-religious) conviction and convictions by their nature can’t be really argued for. They are just the starting point and premise. In the coming years there is going to be quite a lot of work focusing on unpicking what is a philosophical belief or conviction from what is an argument or the conclusion of an argument. The latter shouldn’t just be respected but needs to be battled for in the public forum with evidence.

That is definitely a challenging consideration, and I’m not sure what the answer is. I’d suggest that it was an attitude of mind that was prepared to hear different perspectives and find a way

to enable the potential platform for those perspectives to be introduced into a wider ongoing conversation. New worldviews will present themselves and there has to be some framework to make sure that those are acknowledged and heard, regardless of whether you believe that they’re 100% accurate and that’s what has to be for the whole of society.

- One of the reasons that I signed up for this workshop is because, here in Worcestershire, we started working with the Council to see if we could establish a faith covenant. We had a really good conversation with a speaker from Birmingham Council of Faiths – as Birmingham already had a covenant – but I just wondered if others had experience with this and could share some wisdom about this.
- We’ve had three years of similar work with the local authority Coventry. We did a pre-launch of the agreement/contract/covenant, a keyword that we haven’t quite settled on yet between the local authority and different diverse faith communities in Coventry. It’s taken a long time to imagine and conceive. We finally launched it in April this year, but it needs to be backed up with a programme of work and engagement in real practical work, otherwise it is just a set of words. To make the covenant meaningful and effectual you have to find the right people in the local authority and some officers who would genuinely like to create a process by which the local authority and the communities can work together. We involved FaithAction who came and talked to us and they have played a very helpful role in the creation of this covenant.

It can be a challenge to find the right officers in the local authority to maintain relationships and build dialogue. In order to create something more established and sustained it is helpful to find something that the local council as a whole agrees to, such as a faith charter.

Paul Smalley asked the group how much religious literacy is it reasonable to expect from ministers and civil servants? A response from IFN Project Director Ashley Beck is in italics.

- Four and a half thousand different religious traditions are practised in the world. They are not all reflected in the religious landscape in the UK but there are certainly a lot here. I wouldn't expect ministers or local authorities to understand all of the different religious traditions that are in British society. Perhaps it's more a case of recognising and understanding the nature of a diverse, religious and non-religious society, and how to ask questions and access sources of information. If we expected all government ministers to know about, and have a good understanding of, the variety of different denominations even within the major religions, it would be overwhelming and unrealistic. There needs to be a way for civil servants, local authority representatives and government ministers to be able to ask questions and to have that mindset that they are serving and governing a diverse society.
- Officials, both at the local and national level, need to have an understanding of the diversity of the communities that they serve; and an understanding of the experience and expertise that is available within faith and belief communities. They shouldn't be expected to know the intricacies of all religions and beliefs, but rather must know who to contact and approach for advice on each religion.
- A number of years ago, Interfaith Scotland produced a booklet called *Faiths in Scotland*, which gave a brief description of each of those faiths. My local hospital did the same. It was something that the staff could refer to and would be expected to refer to. Having such a resource that is easily accessible for government and civil servants would be helpful. Does IFN have something like that on its website?

IFN doesn't currently have a resource like that on its website, but I've noted the idea down. The Religion Media Centre might have and INFORM has for some of the major religions, but not for every religion¹.

- There's an idea in the Religion and Worldviews Education (RWE) world called 'skilled intercultural navigators'. That's one of the purposes of RWE. It is unrealistic to expect anybody to have a knowledge of every single religion and worldview that they might come across. Certainly, it would be good if they had some knowledge of the ones that they're most likely to come across. But more important, is knowing how to encounter somebody who tells you that they're of a faith or belief that you've never heard of. How do you sensitively engage with them? I think that's perhaps more about teaching or learning skills than it is about learning particular chunks of knowledge.
- I don't think it's reasonable to expect that government staff and ministers will be experts on religion. Of course, we want a secular government that serves the whole of society. It would, however, be reasonable to expect that there will be respect for the humanitarian values that religions and philosophies represent, that the government should know about them, should acknowledge them, and should respect and uphold them. For example, social justice, environmental justice, freedom to protest and truth – values that are shared across many religions – should be upheld by the government. The minimum expectation would be for the government to have a sense of what is of deep philosophical importance for people. That should be acknowledged and respected.
- I wonder if 'literacy' is perhaps not quite the correct word. I wish that words like 'empathy' and 'curiosity' were used more and might help us move beyond the idea

¹ Note: IFN worked in partnership with the University of Derby, with advice from the different faith communities, to create the major directory 'Religions in the UK', edited by Paul Weller. This went through four editions, the last of which was produced by the University of Derby and is still available.

of a checklist of religious beliefs that we might have to sign up to on the part of our respective faiths or traditions.

- A few years ago, when I was a university chaplain, there was a project based at Goldsmiths, University of London, called Religious Literacy, and it was excellent. It was aimed at the vice-chancellors and people in universities who were decision-makers because they said that the quality of conversation about religious issues among people who are decision-makers was not very good. We are told when we are young, “Don’t talk about religion. Don’t talk about politics.” It is important to learn to talk about religion without being frightened of asking the wrong questions; and also to accommodate people’s religious needs, for example, by not holding compulsory courses on a Saturday morning during a Jewish festival. People can’t know everything about every faith, but we can do something about teaching people how to talk about religion.

Paul Smalley highlighted the recent King’s coronation as a good example of religious literacy and asked participants for other recent examples. These and other reflections are below:

- The King has a long history of involvement with inter faith dialogue and diverse communities. It was wonderful to see them reflected in the ceremonies for the Coronation. There might be some good examples within the House of Commons perhaps.
- Five years ago, there was a consultation on security at airports and it was realised that because of the headgear that a number of faiths wear that members of faith communities had special needs in terms of airport security. That was a good example of literacy. However, sometimes people are not given long enough to respond to consultations, and there is no appreciation of the fact that the individuals responding may be volunteers who have other jobs; or

consultation events are held on a day that is not possible for a certain faith community.

- Sometimes consultations are not very well-publicised. You have to be part of certain networks, such as IFN, in order to be aware that those consultations are underway. The government needs to consider better ways of disseminating the information about consultations so that more potential stakeholders are aware of them.
- Although there was a Hindu at the King’s Coronation, presenting one of the items to the King, he was a member of the House of Lords. He did not come across as a faith community representative, but rather as a politician. Did the community feel reflected? Did they feel any ownership? Representation can be an issue.
- Over 20 Years ago, the NHS took steps to make its chaplaincy service multi faith. About two to three years of good work went into granular detail on the finance side of it, how people would be served, thinking of numbers and ways and needs. It was a complete package. That was a good exercise.

- I represented the Worcester Inter-Faith Forum and faith communities on one of the COVID-19 planning groups in Worcestershire. Some months later, one of the council members rang me just to ask advice on a matter relating to faith communities. It was not related to COVID-19, but she was able to contact me because she had met me in another context.

Paul Smalley asked if there were any remaining reflections on the Bloom report, including about whether it was itself a good example of religious literacy. Comments are below.

- So much inter faith work across the country is based on people getting to know and get on with one another and

acknowledging differences. In the recommendations of the Bloom report, there isn't very much that I would disagree with. However, some of the remainder of the report, the ways that the recommendations were reached, and the balance, might be debated.

- The Bloom report includes 12 pages looking at potential Sikh extremism, but only 1 or 2 pages looking at the extremism of other groups. I'm wondering what other biases there are behind this report. I heard Colin Bloom speak at an IFN Faith Communities Forum meeting. He seemed genuine, but I have a few reservations about the report itself.
- The weighting of different topics presumably reflected what was going on current affairs wise at the time. However, that weighting comes across as a bit unbalanced and in places even as inaccurate and possibly prejudiced. Perhaps that's something that Colin Bloom himself may want to reflect upon at some point, given the opportunity.
- A recommendation that caused me disquiet was about countering extremism. That is always going to be something that needs to be considered in a balanced and nuanced way. Another was around marriage, which requires some nuanced understanding of issues, such as arranged marriage and how that takes place within different communities. The report itself doesn't necessarily handle them in the best possible way.

Paul Smalley thanked everyone for attending and for their contributions about religious literacy, its nature and its importance.

D: Inter Faith Week as a platform for encouraging religious literacy

Facilitator: Vinay Shah, Institute of Jainology and Vice-Moderator, IFN Faith Communities Forum

Presenter: Jay Anderson, Leeds Faiths Forum and Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship, and IFN Trustee

Sharing learning from two Leeds local inter faith organisations' use of Inter Faith Week each year for a special local exhibition highlighting faith groups and inter faith engagement – Light for Leeds at Kirkstall Abbey – as well as holding other activities in the Week to help increase religious literacy.

Presenter: Es Rosen, Barnet Multi Faith Forum and IFN Trustee

Sharing learning from Barnet Multi Faith Forum about how it uses the Week to spread greater understanding about different communities through many different types of activity.

Both presenters will also speak briefly, later in the discussion, about their experience of pairing up with each other as 'Inter Faith Week Buddies' to learn more about each other's faith and how it shapes their approach to life and why they think the scheme is a helpful way to deepen religious literacy.

Rapporteur: Cllr Asha Masih, Coventry Multi Faith Forum

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Vinay Shah welcomed participants to the discussion group and those present introduced themselves.

Es Rosen offered his presentation. A summary of his points is below.

- May I firstly say that I was delighted to hear that the Government has offered some funding towards IFN's work in 2023-24.
- Thank you to IFN for giving me this opportunity to present about the exciting contribution that Barnet Multi Faith Forum (BMFF) has made in using Inter Faith Week as a platform through which to advance and develop social cohesion in the borough.

- Whilst the phrase ‘religious literacy’ is the theme for today’s meeting, in Barnet we have interpreted these words as applying to an aspect of public education that improves social cohesion.
- According to Diane L. Moore and adopted by the American Academy of Religion:

“Religious literacy entails the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses. Specifically, a religiously literate person will possess:

1. *A basic understanding of the history, central texts (where applicable), beliefs, practices, and contemporary manifestations of several of the world’s religious traditions as they arose out of and continue to be shaped by particular social, historical, and cultural contexts.*
2. *The ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social and cultural expressions across time and place.”*

- This requires education at grassroots level and this is where and when the practical implementation of inter faith events and activities occurs. Inter Faith Week provides a space, time and opportunity for this learning to occur.
- In Barnet we have planned and organised a variety of different enjoyable, entertaining and educational events and activities that engage our audience in a meaningful manner. We have used different formats in which to achieve these aims.
- IFN’s former Assistant Director, Dr David Hampshire, was invited to speak at a BMFF event on the subject of religious literacy and he gave us the theoretical understanding and background to this subject.
- With the initiative of the current King (particularly when Prince of Wales) to

promote environmental projects, and with trees provided for this purpose from the Woodland Trust and Faith Forum for London, we acquired and planted trees outside our centre of learning at Middlesex University, our Fire Brigade headquarters and the Town Hall. We also combined this with planting snowdrop bulbs for Holocaust Memorial Day. By holding this event, we brought together in partnership, students, children, educators, emergency service operatives, Council members and officers, multi faith practitioners, Holocaust survivors, politicians, and the public to practically address environmental concerns and create learning opportunities, through which equality, diversity and inclusion issues could be articulated.

- By organising an event entitled ‘Welcome the Stranger’ at Barnet Town Hall in 2015 we provided an opportunity for people to come together and voice their support, and raise any issues of concern, in respect of the plight of those seeking refuge in our community. Jewish and Muslim representatives of BMFF provided their family histories and experiences of immigration to Great Britain and a Syrian lady gave her own eye witness account of her terrible and heart rending experiences in Syria and the trials and tragedies that have befallen her people since the beginning of the civil war there.
- We also organised, with the organisation René Cassin, a debate to profile the issue of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery in the UK and discuss concerns. We followed up with lobbying, as did other partners. The Prime Minister at that time, Theresa May, subsequently introduced a Bill in Parliament on the issue which, when enacted, provided some legality and security on this matter.
- In Inter Faith Week 2015, together with the Barnet Communities Together Network and Barnet Resilience Forum (a multi-agency group of partners representing Barnet’s statutory, community and faith organisations), we shared the international condemnation

for acts of atrocity committed at the Bataclan theatre in Paris on 13 November that year, stating “We are determined that Barnet will remain a special place where residents get on well together. We are justifiably proud of our diversity and community cohesion. Barnet’s diverse cultural communities will continue to live and work peacefully alongside one another. We will stand united in keeping Barnet safe and a great place to live, challenging all forms of religious and racial hatred.”

- Another Inter Faith Week event that we organised at Middlesex University was a public exhibition of ‘BESA: A code of Honor’, with incredible photographs of Muslims who saved Jewish Lives during the Holocaust and were honoured by Yad Vashem in Israel for their bravery and courage. We also invited Fiyaz Mughal OBE, Founder of Faith Matters and Tell MAMA (an agency that monitors anti-Muslim incidents and supports Muslims who have been attacked) to tell us the context behind the individual stories from the educational booklet *The Role of Righteous Muslims* and why these stories we hope will eventually have a great impact for future inter faith dialogue, especially regarding the Palestinian Israel conflict.
- Inter Faith Week is an excellent opportunity to celebrate the incredible diversity and richness of faith communities in Britain and is all about bringing people together to help improve understanding of different faiths: to learn from one another and to celebrate the tremendous amount we have in common.
- It is also a chance for people of all faiths and none to come together and to highlight the invaluable contribution we collectively make to our neighbourhoods and to wider society. This we achieve through dialogue as without this nothing can be achieved.
- But BMFF goes further than just meeting and talking, it also acts on behalf of the

faith communities of the Borough and provides a strategic voice which is heard in the Borough. It provides a platform to discuss the issues affecting our community, whilst celebrating our diversity and bringing information, knowledge, and inspiration, for future positive action.

- I have provided you with some practical examples of our use of Inter Faith Week in enhancing the cause of social cohesion / religious literacy.
- The religiously literate person resists lumping people together and encourages a mindset that is open and sympathetic to religion without being apologetic or doctrinal. At BMFF we look first at the individual and the community to understand how they experience and express their religion and faith.
- In our work, we have of course also looked at issues such as the current cost of living crisis, higher energy costs and the reliance on food banks. We also had challenging but successful projects to support the victims of the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching out to communities and supporting vaccination programmes.
- The Faith Covenant and partnership created with Barnet Council has placed BMFF at the centre of the strategic response to many programmes and the success of Inter Faith Week has brought about numerous positive contacts. I believe that not only have these contacts enabled BMFF to prosper but, in the latest discussions about IFN funding, brought us friends in Parliament who were able to exert pressure to support this valuable programme of Inter Faith Week and the cause of understanding of religious literacy and advancement of social cohesion.

Jay Anderson offered her presentation. She showed a number of photographs on slides. A copy of these is at the end of this note. A summary of her points is below.

- Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship and Leeds Faiths Forum have been alternating the organising duties for Inter Faith Week events in Leeds for 14 years through the annual Light for Leeds events.
- Each annual Light for Leeds event has an overarching theme and features stalls from each faith, as well as music, dance, crafts and food, and gives opportunities for faith communities to engage with the general public as well as with each other.
- Recently the event has been held in Kirkstall Abbey, as well as there being an 18-month Light of Leeds exhibition in the Abbey House Museum.
- LFF and LCIF are working on developing snapshot/quick-fire presentations of individual faiths which can be used to introduce people to inter faith work.
- Other projects include arranging touring schools and talks on sensitive issues, ranging from Islamophobia to racial justice.
- Both LFF and LCIF have received support from the Museums Department of Leeds City Council, which has also combined Inter Faith Week events with its equalities work.

Es Rosen and Jay Anderson then shared their experiences of being paired together

through the ‘Inter Faith Buddies’ Scheme. This had enabled them to ask open questions, build a real and lasting friendship and find common ground.

Jay Anderson stressed the importance of building a network of individuals from different faiths that one can refer to or ask for advice from when working in the inter faith field.

Mr Shah thanked the presenters and invited any comments or reflections. The following were offered:

- Each year during Inter Faith Week Coventry Multi Faith Forum visits different places of worship, ensuring that all of Coventry’s diverse faith communities are included, and focusing on hearing people’s culture and worship in their own language. All Inter Faith Week events share the same goal of spreading appreciation of diversity, whether through music, culture or food.
- LCIF always holds an annual Walk of Friendship, visiting different places of worship.
- It is very important to continue the work of Inter Faith Week.

Vinay Shah thanked everyone for attending and for their contributions.





Concord Display

3



Buddhist Display

4



Buddhist Display

5



Muslim Display

6



Muslim Display

7



Christianity Display

8



Christianity Display

9



Judaism Display

10



Judaism Display

11



Pagan Display

12



City of Sanctuary Display

13



Theology & Religious Studies Display

14



Community Transport Association Display

15



Sikhism Display

16



Hinduism Display

17



Interfaith Display

18



Bahai'i Display

19



Brahma Kumari Display

20



Talk on Muslim Worship

21



Hindu Dancing

22



Henna Painting

23



Making Paper Cranes

24



Sikh Music

25



Bird's Eye View

26

E: Media (including social media) and religious literacy

Facilitator: Imam Qari Asim MBE, Chairman, Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board

Opening reflections: Dr Maureen Sier, Director, Interfaith Scotland and member, Scottish Advisory Committee on Religion & Ethics (BBC Scotland)

Rapporteur: Neil Pitchford, Druid Network and Vice-Moderator, IFN Faith Communities Forum

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Imam Qari Asim welcomed participants to the discussion group and those present introduced themselves.

Dr Maureen Sier said that she was delighted to be joining the workshop to explore religious literacy and the media. Although she sat on the BBC Scotland Advisory Committee for religion and ethics, she was not an expert on literacy in the media and looked forward to learning from all the participants. She offered the following **opening reflections**:

3. A brief introduction to Interfaith Scotland and our 'media' engagement with some reflections on the media promotion of religious literacy

Interfaith Scotland is the national inter faith organisation for Scotland. We engage on many different media platforms including via our websites (Interfaith Scotland and Scottish Interfaith Wek), Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. We currently have a Communication Officer who works for us just one day per week and she has been fantastic in training the staff team to be aware of how all the diverse media systems operate. We are not short of staff who are fantastic on religious literacy but we have all had to up our game in engagement with

the various media outlets. Our challenge is not just to do the work of inter faith dialogue and action but also to get across the very positive message of societal change that takes place because of the inter faith dialogue and action more widely noticed by the masses. (Although, I will be honest with you – very often via Facebook, Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) we are preaching to the converted.)

I would suggest that all our tweets and Facebook posts are religiously literate – so no challenge there. Our challenge is how do we engage with those whose views are 'religiously illiterate': the many millions who get their views from sensationalist journalism, or from social media platforms and echo chambers where nonsense is spouted about religious communities, often claiming they can and should do this because we honour 'freedom of speech'?

One of the very effective ways to get powerful messages out into the public we have found has been through our YouTube channel and by finding really interesting topics and presenters to appear on our channel. During the pandemic we had Jason Leitch deliver our annual inter faith lecture. He was the Clinical Director during the COVID-19 Pandemic and he is a deeply religious man. His understanding of religion and the role of religion was indeed wonderfully literate and the engagement with the annual lecture was widespread because his message was important. He spoke not only of his religion and his religious upbringing but how that impacted on his work as clinical director. Jason Leitch's presentation was a good example of a religiously literate individual breaking down barriers to show that religion is a 'normal' part of life in Scotland. Similarly, during COP 26 in Glasgow we had a livestreaming of the prayer and meditation vigil by the religious leaders and, as it was carefully crafted by them, it was indeed religiously literate and its impact was widespread, as over 5,000 people watched the vigil from across the world.

Social media platforms are double-edged swords when it comes to the advancement of religious literacy. Platforms like YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook may enhance the discoverability of factual information about religion and promote the formation of online learning communities. However, these same platforms enable the formation of conspiratorial echo chambers and allow disinformation to spread widely and quickly. So the advancement of religious literacy on social media platforms must involve scholars and teachers (and, I would say, inter faith activists) taking on the role of 'strategic amplifiers', that is to say, agents that amplify content that promotes religious literacy while being aware of the challenges these platforms present.

4. A 'story' that highlights the complexity of social and print media and their symbiotic relationship/s

A few weeks ago I had a distressed phone call from my sister saying that the Facebook page of the local newspaper *The Press and Journal* was full of hateful rhetoric on asylum seekers (a local hotel had recently become a centre for asylum seekers). The material on the P & J Facebook page was inaccurate about asylum seekers housed at the hotel and inaccurate about their diverse religions. My sister had responded to the hateful and inaccurate, illiterate information but found that by posting on the Facebook page it somehow stimulated further hateful and illiterate language. So, what to do?

My brother-in-law searched online to see if there were other types of responses to the asylum seekers being housed in a local hotel and found shockingly that a person called Alex Yerbury – an anti asylum seeker, anti Muslim, antisemitic, anti integration individual who styles himself on Hitler – was coming to Elgin to garner support for his hateful campaigns. He used all forms of social media to get his hateful message out there. Next a local Facebook page was created in Elgin to initiate a counter protest to Alex Yerbury's one and this garnered very wide local support. So, on the day that

Yerbury and his supporters appeared in Elgin there was a massive counter rally that drowned out his message of hate. Social media had been used effectively. The local paper then covered this story with the very positive message of 'voices of peace drown out the voice of hate'.

On the morning of the rally I and my whole family gathered to prepare for the counter rally. We went out to the car to find the words 'WE HATE ALL NAZIS AND JEWS' scrawled on the car – illustrating very profoundly the level of religious illiteracy of those who peddle hate! The example demonstrates I think rather well the positive and negative impact of social media.

5. Some insights from engagement with BBC Scotland and a positive example of a documentary that demonstrates real Religious Literacy (via a short video clip)

Finally, I want to mention the power of TV and radio. I am honoured to sit on the BBC Scotland Religion and Ethics Advisory Committee. The existence of this committee demonstrates the will of the BBC to be religiously literate and to garner the views of the diverse committee members in relation to conveying accurate, engaging, challenging and religiously literate content that shows the wonderful and rich diversity of religious life in Scotland. We have been able, as Interfaith Scotland, not only to have inter faith content shared on national TV and radio, but also to dialogue with the BBC about engaging with faith communities to ensure that they capture the true face of faith in Scotland.

I will end with a brief 3 minute video from a BBC programme. It is a superb example of a religiously literate, engaging programme that resonated warmly with the community who it featured – it was called 'Being Jewish In Scotland'.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m001d2w0/being-jewish-in-scotland>

Dr Sier provided the following links in the Chat:

- Religion and Media Centre:
<https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/news/religious-literacy-essential-for-the-media-to-produce-great-journalism/>
- National Secular society:
<https://www.secularism.org.uk/opinion/2021/05/the-drive-for-religious-literacy-in-the-media-would-undermine-press-freedom>

Imam Asim thanked Dr Sier and invited participants to offer any comments and reflections. The following were offered. Responses and comments from Dr Sier are in italics.

- There could be a two-fold approach, with religious organisations developing their own information systems as well as supporting developing organisations such as the Religion Media Centre, as shown in the video clip and presentation by Dr Sier.

The programme on the Jewish community was produced by the BBC. It is good to develop this kind of cooperation.

- It is important to put out the correct information when responding to negative media and also for communities to use their own informed social media.

Social media outputs by religious communities/organisations can be activators. They can be amplifiers, for information to be picked up on other channels.

- There is a lack of expertise in faith communities in dealing with negative/hate media and to be heard requires authority. However, faith communities have a broad common purpose and should support each other. It is also important to know how to disengage when a person does not respond to a calm respectful approach.
- IFN could perhaps offer social media training, as it might have done in the past.

This would be an important service to offer to member bodies, especially those who have not grown up with social media.

- Any social media policy should advise not reacting to negativity, but rather taking the steam out of it.
- Training for member bodies would be helpful. It would also be helpful if faith communities could speak up for communities other than their own.

It is important to engage young people in using social media platforms. They have grown up with this media but, they still need training to put out the right messages in right way. Sometimes the media is not friendly and can be quite destructive in its coverage.

- Religious literacy is very important. We have to do all we can to penetrate the thoughts of those who are not educated on religious media.
- We live in a sound bite media culture where things are done deliberately to provoke reactions. Negative media should be denied the oxygen of publicity. We need to respond by putting out accurate information.

Imam Asim thanked everyone for attending and for their contributions.

F: Religious literacy and skills for inter faith engagement

Facilitator: Jo Backus, Education Officer, Network of Buddhist Organisations UK, member, Swindon Interfaith Group and Faiths Together in Lambeth, Buddhist representative on a number of SACREs and IFN Trustee

Presenter: Dr Norman Richardson MBE, Honorary Fellow, Stranmillis University College and Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum

Dr Richardson draws on his experience as a teacher and educator with a specialism in religious and cultural diversity and as an activist in inter and intra faith issues, including in the context of Northern Ireland to open up a discussion this issue.

Rapporteur: Satnam Singh Poonian, Network of Sikh Organisations (UK) and Vice-Moderator, IFN Faith Communities Forum

Jo Backus welcomed participants to the discussion group and those present introduced themselves.

Dr Norman Richardson offered his presentation. A copy of his PowerPoint slides is at the end of his note. A summary of his points is below.

- It may seem a little bizarre that the person invited to introduce this theme is from Northern Ireland, where the common perception is of Christians of different kinds who are unable to get on with each other, even, at times, to the extent of not recognising the validity of each other's religious identity! It is certainly a situation in which there is a need for intra-faith religious literacy, though Northern Ireland is not unique in that respect. The reality where I come from – but also, I suspect, in many other places – is that religious literacy both within and between faith communities is much needed. Helping people to understand religions and beliefs – their own and other people's – does not seem to have been a prominent feature of how many people live and learn. So, if we want to engage fairly and respectfully with people's beliefs – in line with the stated purposes of IFN and other similar bodies – a greater awareness of some of the processes and skills of developing improved religious literacy would be very helpful. [Slide 2]
- My background is in education – as an RE teacher in schools and as a Religious Studies lecturer in teacher education – but while what takes place in schools is clearly very important (as Kathryn Wright

noted this morning), I want to stress that this issue is much more than just about what is taught and how it is taught in the RE classroom. [Slide 3] This is very much about lifelong learning in the community, about how we work with adults, not just about what we do for the children. In Northern Ireland I've regularly heard young people and adults engaging in religious discussion, and it's clear that many people have a very limited understanding of their own faith, let alone that of others; thus, when they discuss or argue or even just try to share, they all too often miss each other's meaning. If we want to get beyond this 'sharing of mutual ignorance', religious literacy must have both an intra-faith and an inter-faith dimension. [Slide 4]

- It is important to be clear what we mean by religious literacy. Beyond its obvious reference to reading and writing, the term is regularly used to indicate competence or knowledge in a specific area. The American academic, Diane Moore, of the Harvard Divinity School, has defined Religious Literacy more precisely as "*the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses*", and she goes on to indicate that it is about having a basic understanding of the history, beliefs, practices, texts, of some of the world's religions, as well as an awareness of how religion is woven into many aspects of human experience and expression. [Slide 5]
- Very few of us can be experts in the detail of this; it is not about accruing vast amounts of religious knowledge, interesting as that might be. It is about openness, listening, readiness to learn from and with others. [Slide 6] This, I think, is what we try to do at the heart of our encounters in our various inter faith organisations and structures. I want to offer a possible framework for how we can try to develop this further, especially in relation to the functioning of inter faith groups, locally and more broadly.

- At the heart of this, it seems to me, is a mature understanding of the concept of freedom of religion and belief as articulated in Human Rights declarations. [Slide 7] This, taken along with statements on the purposes of education, such as Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, articulates clearly what we are trying to achieve, not just for children but for all ages: preparation for “*responsible life in a free society in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin*”. These are the underpinning principles of our task.
- That, if you like, is the theoretical framework. Let me suggest an approach, in a sense an *aide memoire*, for the kinds of steps we need to be considering in the development of our skills in faith and inter faith bodies. You may be familiar with a report published by UNESCO in the late 1990s, in which they promoted the concept of *The Four Pillars of Education*. [Slide 8] Education, they proposed, must involve:
 - Learning to Know
 - Learning to Do
 - Learning to Live Together
 - Learning to Be

I’ve used this model regularly in my teaching over recent years, and I think it’s a very sound one. Let me apply it specifically to our topic.

- Learning to Know: Religious Literacy must, of course, involve knowledge and understanding. [Slide 9] We need a thoughtful awareness of our own traditions, a readiness to think and talk about what we believe, to share our questions and uncertainties. If we don’t have this, it makes it very hard to engage constructively with others; we need it as a basis for learning together. Many faith communities are good at providing learning opportunities for their children,

but too often this stops well before adulthood and this can result in adults having childish, undeveloped perceptions of aspects of their faith, and that in turn can lead to rejection of belief. We need that learning throughout life, and it is considerably enriched when we can share our ideas, our perceptions, our questions and our knowledge with others from different faith communities.

- Learning to Do: is about developing skills. [Slide 10] Skills in Religious Literacy relate particularly to how we manage our inter faith discussions and how we share ideas that may be theologically, culturally, ethnically and philosophically very different from each other. Do we have strategies for building trust in mixed groups, for active listening, for dialogue, for dealing with sensitive or controversial issues? All of these skills can be learned. Perhaps we need to engage the services of facilitators who are themselves skilled in working with diverse groups and helping to develop trusting relationships.
- Learning to Live Together: is right at the heart of what we are trying to do in inter faith relations. [Slide 11] It is surely the goal of Religious Literacy. It is the peace/shalom/salaam/shanti that we often declare to be at the centre of each of our faiths. It is the essence of the Golden Rule: *Do to others as you would have them do to you*. But in order to work on this key element of the process, we need human encounter. We can know *about* others, but it’s not enough – we need to know them as people, as fellow human beings. This takes time and involves the skills that we’ve just talked about. Random meetings, sitting listening to speakers, polite gatherings are often what we do when we meet on an inter faith basis, but there is a danger that they are only scratching the surface. Encounter – learning to live together – needs time: time taken for informal conversation; time over a shared meal; time for joint activities; working together in the community; sharing each other’s special times and occasions. We really need that human encounter. It’s

particularly important in places where there is tension between communities, not unlike Northern Ireland, but it is absolutely central to this work.

- The sum total of all this is in the final ‘pillar’ – Learning to Be. [Slide 12] It is the holistic purpose of inter faith relations; it suggests to me a shared human and spiritual experience which can grow with deepened knowledge and understanding, with the development of skills in building relationships, with making the most of opportunities for human encounter.
- I think that we could use this model of the four pillars, perhaps as a reminder of some of the steps we might take within our own and our shared communities to build inter faith and inter-belief understanding and engagement. [Slide 13] Perhaps some of these steps are already part of your own experiences. I’ll be interested to hear, in discussion, your own thoughts and your own activities. What has worked for you?
 - Do these steps and skills feature in how we work in our inter faith organisations?
 - Is this a helpful model?
 - What are the challenges to improving inter faith religious literacy in our communities?
 - What are the opportunities that we can work on and develop?
- Thank you very much for the opportunity of sharing these thoughts with you.

Jo Backus thanked Dr Richardson for his presentation and invited any questions or comments. The following were offered. Responses and comments from Dr Richardson are in italics.

- If we want to succeed spiritually and socially, we need to be together. ‘Together’ is a very powerful word. It is important to have an open mind and respect others, even though you may not agree with their

beliefs. We should enter into relationships, not trying to influence others with our own faiths or beliefs, but with the intention of having a dialogue so that both parties can benefit from each other and society can be enhanced. Staying within one’s own box, not letting others know who you are or what you believe, and not waiting to know about other people’s lives, will only create more isolation. We need to be open and willing to accept that we don’t know everything. Sikh means ‘a learner’. We are all lifelong learners.

I think you are right that ‘together’ is the keyword. It can be a problem when we only learn about different faiths, as well-meaning as we might be, in a context where most of the people are from a similar background. This is a particular problem in Northern Ireland, where our school system is fairly separated. Encounter, I think, is key. We have to try to structure our inter faith meetings in a way where we are not just listening. It can be very enriching to listen to people with wisdom, particular knowledge and so forth, but there has to be room for encounter. Otherwise, there is still separation and we are just learning together in parallel.

- I would like to comment on something which I experienced in Northern Ireland quite a few years ago, when I was involved with some consultation work there with the International Interfaith Centre. I was asked to be on the radio and somebody asked me the question, “Who are you and what’s your religion?” I said, “I’m so and so and I’m a Sikh.” The second immediate question was, “Are you a Catholic Sikh or you’re a Protestant Sikh?”! I was thrown by that binary concept, where people are only looking at either/or rather than the different faith communities. Coming from a background where we have different faiths coming together at a local level, it’s very difficult to understand situations where there is not neighbourliness and respect. I think the pillars suggested in your presentation are very helpful.

I apologise for some of our perceptions in Northern Ireland. It is a standard joke that

if someone asks your religion and you say, for example, Jewish, they might say, “Yes, but are you a Catholic, or a Protestant Jew?”. I do know others who have had the same experience as you and it is terribly sad, because it indicates a lack of public awareness of religion. That is partly due to our blinkered experience of life sometimes in Northern Ireland, but we have to move away from that. We need to open people’s perceptions. In the last half century, both during and since the Troubles there has been a growth in the number of people from faith communities other than Christian communities. That is enriching, but people have also been subject to prejudices. Racism has increased more in some cases than the more traditional sectarianism. It does suggest that we have so much more to do, both in schools and in public education generally. The Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum is trying to do that. I don’t think Northern Ireland is entirely unique in this regard. Public understanding of religion, religious literacy, is so important and we all have to do a great deal to contribute to it.

- The last mantra of the *Rig Veda* is ‘Let’s be together, work together, stay together, and in togetherness, we achieve a higher status.’ When people talk about *Sanatana Dharma* – which is Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, all the Indic faiths – the issue of religious literacy is very open in the sense that it is about respect. Some years ago, I spoke about that in a presentation I made at an IFN National Meeting. From a very early age I read the writings of Sri Aurobindo, who was one of the spiritual Gurus living in Pondicherry in India. He wrote over 100 years ago and even then he wrote about the conflict in Northern Ireland and wanting it to be resolved. I was working at Manchester City Council in the 1990s when the Warrington bombing took place. We need to respect one another. I have my faith, you have your faith, and we need to respect that. At the moment, there are quite a lot of anti-India, anti-Hindu narratives in Western media. But if you think about it, 2,000 years ago Christian Syrians were taken in by India as

refugees. The oldest Jewish place is in India. There are a number of Hindu and Sikh people in this workshop. We don’t want people to say that one person is not from one group or another. We want to work together. We need to educate our children as well. When Lord Harris raised the issue of the caste-based discrimination, it felt as though they wanted to brand everyone from Indian religions. We are not inherently caste-ist or racist. We believe everyone to be equal. We need to teach everyone that if someone is not from a particular group it does not mean they are below you. We are all equal. It would be good if schools could be less segregated in Northern Ireland. I was surprised that all the schools were based on faith practices.

- The concept of the four pillars is something I have come across before and find very helpful. When I went to university many years ago I went to the Christian Union and met people from other Christian traditions for the first time. I was a Minister in the Salvation Army in North Wales at the time of the attack on the Twin Towers. It was then that I was introduced to the chair of the local mosque, who was the very first person to send me a card saying, “These are not of my faith. We did not want this to happen.” That built a relationship with him. That was followed by the second Gulf War, which brought many asylum seekers from different faiths, particularly Muslims, to the UK. Faith communities in the area worked together to support them, through providing care, clothes, food, assistance with going to shops and all the basics. Through working together we started to trust each other and, I would say, we even started to love each other too. We may not agree but we can still love each other. Churches Together in England uses the phrase ‘Unity in diversity’. I think that applies also when we are working together as people from different faiths. We can run food banks together or mums and toddlers groups or youth clubs. We can support our communities far more effectively together. When I have been in Ireland my

sense has been that faith is seen in a political sense, and has nothing to do with the depth of understanding of what faith is about. My experience of different faiths, and particularly Sikhs, is of love and hospitality. Do you think that our lack of knowledge of our own faiths and lack of knowledge of other people's faiths is a huge cause for division?

- I have found the various comments made by different people extremely interesting. I think that perhaps we can learn from what happened during the early part of the COVID-19 crisis, when people came together through a desire to help one another. I think that we have to work on the basis that people are fundamentally good and that they care about one another. A starting point for religious literacy might be to have a common aim or goal, such as clearing a local cemetery or making food for the homeless, so that we have an opportunity to get to know each other as individuals on a personal level and not just as people from other religious groups that we don't want to engage with.
- Religious literacy is not something to be taken like a course. It has to be a way of life, repeated over and over again. When the East of England Faiths Agency first started working with local authorities, we were able to support them in achieving a high level of religious literacy. The staff that we supported have now retired, so we are starting again with the next generation of local authority staff. It's a cyclical situation that has to be kept going.

Dr Richardson offered the following reflections in response to the four sets of comments above. The Hindu mantra is interesting as a way of encapsulating this, similar to the four pillars model. I'm very conscious that in our inter faith work in Northern Ireland, we could be more interactive. I suspect that that's probably shared elsewhere. We need to have informal interaction and working together, not just meeting each other in formal ways. The importance of that is

something that I shall take away from this discussion. A number of people have emphasised the importance of education. One of the things that is changing in our schools in Northern Ireland is that even though they are still very largely traditionally segregated in terms of people of Protestant and Catholic backgrounds – which may mean religious or cultural commitment – both communities have experienced increased numbers of people from other backgrounds, other ethnicities, other religions, and that is challenging schools to think about how they educate. We have a long way to go in Northern Ireland in terms of religious education. We are nowhere near the concept that has developed in other parts of the UK and other parts of the world. But one of the things that is challenging us more to do that is the presence of people from different faith backgrounds and indeed people of no faith. That's a learning point that I think we're going to need to develop. As I said earlier, I think that what happens in schools is key, but it is also very important for people to continue to engage with these issues after formal education has finished.

Jo Backus thanked everyone for attending and for their contributions.


Definition by Diane Moore, Harvard Divinity School:

"Religious literacy entails the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses. Specifically, a religiously literate person will possess:

1. A basic understanding of the history, central texts (where applicable), beliefs, practices, and contemporary manifestations of several of the world's religious traditions as they arose out of and continue to be shaped by particular social, historical, and cultural contexts.
2. The ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social and cultural expressions across time and place.

Critical to this definition is the importance of understanding religions and religious influences in context and as inextricably woven into all dimensions of human experience."

UNESCO (1996) *Learning: The Treasure Within – Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century* ('The Delors Report'). Paris: UNESCO Publishing



Religious Literacy and skills for inter faith engagement

Norman Richardson
Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum
Stranmillis University College,
Belfast

1



Religious Literacy

... a means towards engaging fairly and respectfully with people's beliefs

2




Religious Literacy

... not just for RE in schools or only for children and young people

3

Religious Literacy

- ... should have both an inter-faith and an intra-faith dimension



4

Religious Literacy – a definition

– Diane Moore, Harvard Divinity School

Religious literacy entails the ability to discern and analyse the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses. Specifically, a religiously literate person will possess:

- A basic understanding of the history, central texts (where applicable), beliefs, practices, and contemporary manifestations of several of the world's religious traditions as they arose out of and continue to be shaped by particular social, historical, and cultural contexts.
- The ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social and cultural expressions across time and place.

Critical to this definition is the importance of understanding religions and religious influences in context and as inextricably woven into all dimensions of human experience.

5

Key Skills

- More than just 'knowing stuff'!
- Openness
- Listening
- Readiness to learn – from and with others



6

Developing the Skills

- A theoretical framework for what we are trying to do, based on human rights principles
 - Freedom of Religion and Belief
 - The purposes of education
e.g. preparation for "responsible life in a free society in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin"

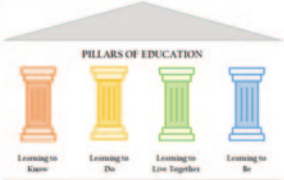
(Article 29 – Rights of the Child)

7

A possible structure: THE FOUR PILLARS OF EDUCATION

UNESCO (1996):


- Learning to Know
- Learning to Do
- Learning to Live Together
- Learning to Be



8

Learning to KNOW

- Knowledge and understanding:
 - Of our own traditions
 - For all ages – not just for children
 - Sharing our knowledge and perceptions with different others



9

Learning to DO

- Developing our skills
 - Building trust
 - Active listening
 - Dealing with sensitive or controversial issues



10


Learning to LIVE TOGETHER



- Right at the heart of interfaith relationships!
- Human encounter is crucial!
 - Time to be together for conversation
 - Time to share a meal
 - Time to talk
 - Time to work together

1

Learning to BE



- The sum total of holistic learning
- Shared humanity
- Shared spirituality

2

Application to our interfaith activities

For Discussion:

- Do these steps and skills feature in how we work in our interfaith organisations?
- Is this a helpful model?
- What are the challenges to improving interfaith religious literacy in our communities?
- What are the opportunities that we can work on and develop?




3




Norman Richardson
 Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum
 Stranmillis University College, Belfast

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4

National Meeting of the Inter Faith Network for the UK: Educating for religious literacy

It is widely agreed that religious literacy is important. Why does religious literacy matter? What is it? And how can we educate for it?

IFN's 2023 National Meeting offers a chance to reflect on these questions and to hear about a number of examples of different initiatives working to increase religious literacy of children and adults.

MORNING PROGRAMME

10.00am **Welcome and opening reflections from IFN Co-Chairs the Revd Canon Hilary Barber and Narendra Waghela**

10.10am **Educating for religious literacy- what do we mean by religious literacy and how does RE in schools contribute to this?**

Dr Kathryn Wright, CEO, Culham St Gabriel's and Board member, Religious Education Council of England and Wales, which supports and advocates for an education in Religion and Worldviews

Q and A and discussion

10.40am **Faith communities and RE: contributing to religious literacy through SACREs and through educational programmes**

Dr Sheila Gewolb DL, Board member, National Association of SACRES (NASACRE), Jewish representative on Cumbria, Rutland and Torbay SACRES, Deputy for Cardiff United Synagogue and Chair of the Outreach Education Working Group, Board of Deputies of British Jews

Q and A and discussion

11.00am **Religious literacy in a digital age: media and online content as routes of transmission and learning**

Dr Jasjit Singh, Associate Professor, School of Philosophy, Religion and the History of Science (PRHS) at the University of Leeds and Adviser to the Religion Media Centre

Response: Rajnish Kashyap, General Secretary, Hindu Council UK

Q and A and discussion

- 11.30am** **Continued education for religious literacy in adult life**
- How may special focus programmes in HE help increase religious literacy – the example of Cambridge Interfaith Programme*
- Dr Iona Hine, Communications and Programme Manager, Cambridge Interfaith Programme, University of Cambridge
- Increased religious literacy through opportunities for encounter*
- The Revd Gavin Wort, Lead Chaplain, Durham University, Vice-Chair Newcastle Council of Faiths and Chair, County Durham Faith Network
- Q and A and discussion**
- 12.00pm** **Workshops**
- 1.00pm** **Launch of Inter Faith Week 2023**
- Minister David Bruton, Spiritualists’ National Union and IFN Trustee, on behalf of IFN’s Board of Trustees
-
- 1.10pm** **LUNCH AND CHAT [The Zoom link will be left open]**
- For delegates who would like to chat with others over lunch, there will be a chance to do so from 1.15pm to 1.35pm. Breakout groups of three or four people will be created, on an *ad hoc* basis, based on advance sign up.
-

AFTERNOON SESSION

- 1.40pm** **Welcome back to plenary**
- 1.45pm** **Feedback from groups**
- Brief feedback of one key point from the rapporteur from each group.
- [A note of key points from groups will be taken.]
- 2.00pm** **Working effectively for religious literacy in different sectors across society**
- Professor Adam Dinham, Professor of Faith and Public Policy and Director of the Faiths and Civil Society Unit, Goldsmiths, University of London, Professor of Religion and Belief Literacy, VID University, Oslo, Co-Director of The Religion and Belief Literacy Partnership and author of a number of publications on religious literacy

Response: Dr Abdul-Azim Ahmed, Secretary General, Muslim Council of Wales and Inter Faith Council for Wales

Q and A and discussion

2.40pm

Closing panel

Four contributors offer brief reflections on the day and the importance of religious literacy:

Ashwin Soni, Crawley Inter Faith Network

Tracey Prior, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Vice-Moderator, IFN Faith Communities Forum

Harriet Crabtree OBE, Executive Director, Inter Faith Network for the UK

(tbc)

3.00pm

Closing reflections from the Co-Chairs

3.10pm

Meeting ends

[Note: the IFN AGM begins at 3.15pm.]

Note: IFN links a wide range of organisations and its membership encapsulates a wide diversity of background and belief as well as experience and expertise. That can never be fully reflected in the pattern of presenters in one meeting. The pattern of speakers varies from meeting to meeting so that the benefit of this for learning and good practice can be gained.

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Tel 020 7730 0410 Email: ifnet@interfaith.org.uk
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WORKSHOPS AND DISCUSSION GROUPS

A Local inter faith organisations and working for religious literacy

Facilitator: Patricia Stoat, Nottingham Inter Faith Council and IFN Trustee

Presenters: Rabbi Warren Elf MBE and Margaret Calvert, Co-Chair and Secretary, respectively, Faith Network for Manchester (FN4M)

Local inter faith organisations play an important role in helping increase religious literacy within their membership and within their wider communities through a range of routes, from talks and conferences to training sessions and faith trails. Rabbi Elf and Margaret Calvert talk about FN4M's wide-ranging educational programme which offers

opportunities for people in its area to learn more about different faiths and beliefs.

Presenter: Ms Tripti Megeri, Secretary, Bristol Multi-Faith Forum

Tripti Megeri talks about how Bristol Multi-Faith Forum's annual Bristol Diverse Doors Open Day, working with a range of different places of worship, helps people learn about their neighbours' faith and communities.

Rapporteur: Judith Baker, Conciliation & Peacebuilding Coordinator and Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer, Quakers in Britain

B Religious literacy in the workplace

Facilitator: Amanda Bowman, Vice-President, Board of Deputies of British Jews and IFN Trustee

Presenter: Brad McLaughlin, lead for multi faith work at Aviva and Faith Friendly Workplaces where he also leads the Christian Network

Faith is often missing from corporate provision of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion frameworks within companies and institutions. Over the past year Transform Work has been pioneering a Faith Friendly Workplaces initiative, setting up a working group in partnership with a network of 40 businesses (including Rolls-Royce plc, Thames Water, OVO Energy). The Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby is a partner. Brad McLaughlin will be talking about this new initiative and why it is vital, viable and also good business sense for corporations to develop positive EDI frameworks which incorporate well the dimension of faith and which, as part of that, boost religious – and belief – literacy in the workplace.

Rapporteur: Saleha Islam, Muslim Council of Britain and Chaplain, Canary Wharf

C Religious literacy and government

Facilitator: Paul Smalley, Executive Assistant, NASACRE, Board member, REC Board, Edgehill University and IFN Trustee

Opening reflections: Mike Stygal, Inter Faith Officer, Pagan Federation and IFN Trustee

The Colin Bloom report has brought to the fore the topic of Government religious literacy. The report was by a person commissioned as an independent reviewer and so, although developed with support from officials, is not a 'Government report'. A response from the Government may be made in due to course to its various recommendations. In that context, this group will explore questions such as:

Why is religious literacy on the part of elected officials and those who support them important?

Where do non-religious beliefs sit within a 'religious literacy' framework?

What does 'religiously literate' Government look like to faith groups?

There is already a significant level of religious literacy – are there good examples of this already and what might further strengthen levels of literacy?

What reflections do participants have on the recommendations in the Bloom report which relate to religious literacy?

Are there ways in which faith groups can contribute to strengthening of Government religious literacy at UK, national and local levels?

The Bloom report can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/independent-faith-engagement-review-call-for-evidence>.

Rapporteur: Deepak Naik MBE, United Religions Initiative (UK)

D Inter Faith Week as a platform for encouraging religious literacy

Facilitator: Vinay Shah, Institute of Jainology and Vice-Moderator, IFN Faith Communities Forum

Presenter: Jay Anderson, Leeds Faiths Forum and Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship, and IFN Trustee

Sharing learning from two Leeds local inter faith organisations use of Inter Faith Week each year for a special local exhibition highlighting faith groups and inter faith engagement – Light for Leeds at Kirkstall Abbey, – as well as holding other activities in the Week to help increase religious literacy.

Presenter: Es Rosen, Barnet Multi Faith Forum and IFN Trustee

Sharing learning from Barnet Multi Faith Forum about how it uses the Week to spread greater understanding about different communities through many different types of activity.

Both presenters will also speak briefly, later in the discussion, about their experience of pairing up with each other as 'Inter Faith Week Buddies' to learn more about each other's faith and how it shapes their approach to life and why they think the scheme is a helpful way to deepen religious literacy.

Rapporteur: Cllr Asha Masih, Coventry Multi Faith Forum

E Media (including social media) and religious literacy

Facilitator: Imam Qari Asim MBE, Chairman, Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board

Opening reflections: Dr Maureen Sier, Director, Interfaith Scotland and member, Scottish Advisory Committee on Religion & Ethics (BBC Scotland)

Rapporteur: Neil Pitchford, Druid Network and Vice-Moderator, IFN Faith Communities Forum

F Religious literacy and skills for inter faith engagement

Facilitator: Jo Backus, Education Officer, Network of Buddhist Organisations UK, member, Swindon Interfaith Group and Faiths Together in Lambeth, Buddhist representative on a number of SACREs and IFN Trustee

Presenter: Dr Norman Richardson MBE, Honorary Fellow, Stranmillis University College and Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum

Dr Richardson draws on his experience as a teacher and educator with a specialism in religious and cultural diversity and as an activist in inter and intra faith issues, including in the context of Northern Ireland to open up a discussion this issue.

Rapporteur: Satnam Singh Poonian, Network of Sikh Organisations (UK) and Vice-Moderator, IFN Faith Communities Forum

Participating organisations

Representatives from the following organisations were present at the meeting:

IFN member bodies

All Faiths Network
Baha'i Community of the UK
BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha
Barnet Multi Faith Forum
Bath Inter Faith Group
Birmingham Council of Faiths
Board of Deputies of British Jews
Bolton Interfaith Council
Bradford Concord Interfaith Society
Bristol Multi Faith Forum
Cambridge Inter-Faith Group
Cambridge Interfaith Programme
Canterbury and District Inter Faith Action
Christians Aware Faith Awareness
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Council of Christians and Jews
Coventry Multi Faith Forum
Crawley Inter Faith Network
Druid Network
Durham University Chaplaincy Network
East of England Faiths Agency CIC
Faith Network for Manchester
Faiths Together in Lambeth
Faiths United Tameside
General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches
Greater Yarmouth Interfaith & Belief Network
Hindu Council UK
Hindu Forum of Britain
Hounslow Friends Of Faith
Institute of Jainology
Inter-faith Council for Wales/Cyngor Rhyngffydd Cymru
Interfaith Scotland
International Association for Religious Freedom (British Chapter)
International Interfaith Centre
Leeds Faiths Forum
Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship
Methodist Church in Britain
Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board
Muslim Council of Britain
National Association of SACREs
Network of Buddhist Organisations
Network of Sikh Organisations UK
North Herts Interfaith Forum
Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum
Norwich Interfaith Link
Nottingham Interfaith Council
Pagan Federation
Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith relations
Religious Education Council of England and Wales
Salvation Army UK and Ireland Territory
South East England Faiths Forum
Spiritualists National Union
Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha
Torbay Faith and Belief Forum
United Religions Initiative UK
University of Salford Faith Centre
Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)
Welwyn Hatfield Interfaith Group
Women's Interfaith Network
Worcestershire Interfaith Forum
World Ahlul-Bayt Islamic League
World Congress of Faiths
Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

The Inter Faith Network for the UK

Inter faith understanding, respect and cooperation is ever more important in the UK today. The Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN) links and works with national faith community representative bodies, inter faith organisations, academic and educational organisations with an interest in inter faith relations, as well as with other organisations including government and other public agencies, to strengthen inter faith understanding and cooperation in the UK.

IFN is unique in its scope and role both within the UK and in Europe. It has been bringing organisations and people together for over 35 years. It carries out its work of strengthening good inter faith relations through:

- providing advice and support to inter faith organisations around the country to add value to their work;
- running a helpline which each year assists hundreds of people with their inter faith projects or issues;
- advocating for support of local inter faith groups and national and regional inter faith initiatives;
- producing resources, in cooperation with its members, on issues of common concern such as faith based dietary practice;
- bringing its member bodies and others together regularly to meet and discuss issues of common concern; and
- other programmes of work including Faith and public life and Inter Faith Week.

For more information about IFN, visit www.interfaith.org.uk.

Member Bodies of the Inter Faith Network for the UK 2023-24

Faith Community Representative Bodies

Baha'i Community of the UK
BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha
Board of Deputies of British Jews
Buddhist Society
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland
Churches Together in England
Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales
Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches (UK)
Druid Network
General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches
Hindu Council (UK)
Hindu Forum of Britain
Inter Faith Working Group of the Baptist Union of Great Britain
Institute of Jainology
Jain Network
Jamiat-e-Ulama Britain (Association of Muslim Scholars)
Methodist Church in Britain
Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board
Muslim Council of Britain
Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)
Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)
Pagan Federation
Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations
Salvation Army United Kingdom and Ireland Territory
Spiritualists' National Union
Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of GB
United Reformed Church in the UK
Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)
World Ahlul-Bayt Islamic League
World Zoroastrian Organisation
Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

Educational and Academic Bodies

The ASHA Foundation
Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme
City, University of London Chaplaincy
Durham University Chaplaincy Network
Faculty of Humanities and Performing Arts at the University of Wales Trinity St David
Islamic Foundation
Middlesex University Inter Faith Network
National Association of SACRES
OneSpirit Interfaith Foundation
Religious Education Council of England and Wales
Sion Centre for Dialogue and Encounter
The University of Lincoln Multi-Faith Chaplaincy
University of Salford Faith Centre
Wales Association of SACRES
Woolf Institute

National and Regional Inter Faith Organisations

Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum
Interfaith Scotland
Inter-faith Council for Wales/Cyngor Rhyngffydd Cymru
Faiths Forum for London
North East Regional Faiths Network
South East England Faith Forum
All Faiths Network for the UK
Children of Abraham (Imams and Rabbis Council of the United Kingdom)
Christian Muslim Forum
Christians Aware Interfaith Programme
Council of Christians and Jews
East of England Faiths Agency
Faith and Belief Forum
Faith for the Climate
Interfaith Alliance UK
International Association for Religious Freedom (British Chapter)
International Interfaith Centre
Khalili Foundation
London Boroughs Faiths Network

Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby
Nisa-Nashim
Religions for Peace (UK)
Scriptural Reasoning
St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace
St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in a Multi Faith Society
United Religions Initiative (UK)
Westminster Interfaith
Women's Interfaith Network
World Congress of Faiths

Local Inter Faith Groups

Altrincham Inter Faith Group
Barking and Dagenham Faith Forum
Barnet Multi Faith Forum
Bath Interfaith Group
Bedford Council of Faiths
Birmingham Council of Faiths
Blackpool Faith Forum
Bolton Interfaith Council
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Interfaith
Bracknell Forest Interfaith Forum
Bradford Concord Interfaith Society
Brent Multi-Faith Forum
Brighton and Hove Inter-Faith Contact Group
Bristol Inter Faith Group
Bristol Multi-Faith Forum
Building Bridges in Burnley
Building Bridges Preston
Calderdale Interfaith Council
Cambridge Inter-Faith Group
Canterbury and District Inter Faith Action
Cheltenham Inter Faith
Cleveland and Tees Valley Inter Faith Group
Cornwall Faiths Forum
Coventry Multi-Faith Forum
Crawley Interfaith Network
Faiths Together in Croydon
Cumbria Interfaith Forum
Devon Faith and Belief Forum
Elmbridge Multi-Faith Forum
Exeter Faith and Belief Group
Gateshead Interfaith Forum
Greater Yarmouth Inter Faith and Belief Network
Harrow Interfaith
Hastings and Rother Interfaith Forum
Hertsmere Forum of Faiths
Hillingdon Inter Faith Network

Hounslow Friends of Faith
Hull and East Riding Interfaith
Inter Faith Isle of Man
Islington Faiths Forum
Keighley Interfaith Group
Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames Inter-Faith Forum
Faiths Together in Lambeth
Lancashire Forum of Faiths
Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship
Leeds Faiths Forum
Leicester Council of Faiths
Interfaith Forum for Leicestershire
Loughborough Council of Faiths
Luton Council of Faiths
Maidstone Inter Faith Network
Faith Network for Manchester
Mansfield Interfaith Group
Medway Inter Faith Action Forum
Interfaith MK (Milton Keynes)
Milton Keynes Council of Faiths
Muslim Jewish Forum of Greater Manchester
Newcastle Council of Faiths
North Herts Faith Forum
North Kent Interfaith
North Kirklees Inter Faith
Northampton Inter Faith Forum
Norwich InterFaith Link
Nottingham Inter Faith Council
Oldham Inter Faith Forum
Building Bridges Pendle – Interfaith Community Project
Peterborough Inter-Faith Council
Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity
Plymouth Council of Faiths
Reading Interfaith Group
Redbridge Faith Forum
Richmond Inter-Faith Forum
Rugby Inter Faith Forum
Salford Interfaith Network
Sheffield Inter Faith
Slough Faith Partnership
Solihull Faiths Forum
South London Inter Faith Group
South Shropshire Interfaith Forum
Southampton Council of Faiths
Southwark Multi Faith Forum
Stafford and District Friends of Faith
Swindon Inter Faith Group
Faiths United (Tameside)
Torbay Faith and Belief Forum
Tower Hamlets Inter Faith Forum

Wakefield Interfaith Network
Warwick District Faiths Forum
Watford Inter Faith Association
Wellingborough Inter Faith Group
Welwyn Hatfield Interfaith Group
Westminster Faith Exchange
William Campbell-Taylor (City of London
Interfaith)
Windsor and Maidenhead Community
Forum
Wisbech Interfaith Forum
Interfaith Wolverhampton
Woking People of Faith
Worcestershire Inter-Faith Forum
York Interfaith Group
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