

Inter Faith Issues and the Religious Education Curriculum

**Report of a seminar held by
The Inter Faith Network for the UK
in association with the National
Association of Standing Advisory
Councils for Religious Education**

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With the support of the Edward Cadbury Trust and
the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education

Published by the Inter Faith Network for the UK in association with the National Association of SACREs, 2001

ISBN number: 1 902906 06 3

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The Inter Faith Network for the UK is a registered charity No. 1068934 and a company limited by guarantee No. 3443823 registered in England.

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Introduction

What school children and students learn shapes in significant ways their outlook on life in later years. Over the last twenty five years or so the content of Religious Education in this country has broadened in ways which match the growth of religious diversity in our society. It teaches about a number of individual religious traditions or about specific topics treated thematically across traditions. There is a growing belief that alongside this teaching it is also important for students – as citizens of a religiously plural society – to learn about the ways different faith communities have related to one another, both historically and today in the UK. That is to say, it is important for them to learn about *inter faith issues*.

Background to the seminar

At this joint seminar the Inter Faith Network for the UK joined with the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (NASACRE) to look at the question of how inter faith issues are, or might be, handled in the school curriculum.

The seminar was held with the generous support of the Edward Cadbury Trust and the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education. It was attended by 80 participants including SACRE members and educationalists. A participant list is at Annex B The morning session was chaired by Brian Pearce, the Network's Director, and the afternoon session by Marian Agombar, Chair of NASACRE.

The Inter Faith Network was founded in 1987 to link the major faith communities of the UK and to promote greater understanding between and about them. It also links local and national inter faith bodies and a number of educational and academic bodies with a concern for inter faith issues (such as the National Association of SACREs, the Shap Working Party on World Religions and the Religious Education Council for England and Wales).

The Network has a particular interest in encouraging school students to reflect on the relations between different faith communities here in Britain and the contribution which they make to our more religiously diverse society. It believes that it is particularly important, however, that any work on inter faith issues within RE takes place in a context where the religious commitments of individual pupils are respected and the distinctness and integrity of different religious traditions is recognised and upheld.

The National Association of SACREs began in 1993 to represent at a national level the interests of all local Standing Advisory Councils of Religious Education (SACRE) in England who have the responsibility of organising and monitoring the Religious Education curriculum in their area¹. Each SACRE is constituted on inter religious lines to

¹In Wales, SACREs are linked by the Welsh Association of SACREs/Cymdeithas CYSAGau Cymru (WASACRE). In Scotland, RE is covered by the national syllabus so there are no SACREs because RE syllabuses are not determined locally. In Northern Ireland too, there are no SACREs because RE syllabuses are not determined locally. There is the Northern Ireland Core Syllabus for Religious Education, presently determined by the Churches, which is part of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. Invitations to the seminar were extended to the relevant bodies in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

work together in the interests of the pupils who will follow their locally Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education. They are therefore naturally concerned to develop understanding of all religions and to enable pupils to relate to each other across the religious communities, as members of SACREs themselves do. NASACRE is pleased therefore to have been associated with this seminar to consider what it sees as an important aspect of Religious Education for all pupils in our schools.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has recently carried out a review of its guidance on RE. As a contribution to this, the Inter Faith Network commissioned a report on *Inter Faith Issues and RE* from Lat Blaylock, Executive Officer of the Professional Council for Religious Education. His report was based on an examination of syllabuses offered in Religious Education and Religious Studies (mainly local authority syllabuses but also those of the examination boards) and postal consultation with RE advisers, professionals and academics.

The Blaylock report emphasised the role which RE can play in helping to fulfil the widely shared aim of enabling children and young people to develop those attitudes which are needed for harmonious living in a religiously plural society. The report was submitted to the QCA in the autumn of 1998 as a contribution to their review¹.

QCA guidance on Religious Education

The QCA published in March 2000 its new non-statutory guidance on RE. This builds on the RE model syllabuses published by the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority in 1994 (which are endorsed once more in the QCA's guidance document). It was prepared by a group of teachers, advisers, inspectors, representatives of faith communities and others working together over the previous two years. Copies of the document have been sent by the QCA to all SACREs and Local Education Authorities.

Some of the comments in the guidance are particularly relevant to work in schools on inter faith issues. The guidance:

- Notes that much curriculum development has taken place since SCAA's model syllabuses were published six years ago. Members of faith communities have contributed to the production of new local syllabuses, which have led to work in classrooms both "on the distinctiveness of the principal religions in the UK and on the ways these religions interact with each other".
- Recognises that RE promotes the social development of pupils through helping them "to develop their sense of identity and belonging, preparing them for life as citizens in a plural society", and promotes their cultural development, enabling them to "explore issues within and between faiths, developing their understanding of the cultural contexts within which they live".

¹Copies are available from the Inter Faith Network.

- Points out that RE promotes the values and attitudes needed for citizenship in a democratic society “by helping pupils to understand and respect different beliefs, practices, races and cultures” and says “Similarities and differences in commitment, self understanding and the search for truth and meaning can be recognised, respected and valued for the common good” and that “RE provides opportunities for pupils to work co-operatively sharing ideas and discussing beliefs, values and practices and learning from each other”.
- States that, in the context of learning *from* religion, “Pupils can understand how believers in different religious traditions may interact with each other, not just historically, but in contemporary ways, nationally and locally” and that “inter faith issues can be explored”.

QCA illustrative schemes of work

The QCA subsequently published illustrative schemes of work, to supplement the 1994 model syllabuses. It has stressed that these are not intended to displace existing local syllabuses but are designed to exemplify work in schools which can fulfil locally determined requirements. These illustrative schemes of work also recognise the importance of inter faith issues. They include in Key Stage 2 a scheme of work encouraging pupils to find out more about the religious communities within their neighbourhood and in Key Stage 3 a unit on Jerusalem as a peg for thinking about inter faith relations more generally, including inter faith issues in the UK today. The unit is described as providing “an explicit focus on inter faith issues” putting “into action the aim that pupils should develop a positive attitude to other people, respecting their right to hold different beliefs, and to living in a society of diverse religions.”

RE, Citizenship education and values education

As has been recognised, there is some overlap between inter faith aspects of RE and aspects of Citizenship Education of the kind advocated by the QCA’s review of the National Curriculum last autumn. Both promote values education within the overall school curriculum the importance of which is emphasised in the National Curriculum handbooks. These links are explicitly recognised in the recent separate guidance prepared by the QCA on Citizenship education and on PSHE.

QCA plans to produce further guidance on the contribution which different curriculum subjects, including RE, can make to Citizenship education.

Next steps

It will be important to carry forward consideration of the issues explored by this seminar. NASACRE plans to produce an occasional paper linked to it, focusing on the issue of inter faith issues and RE. NASACRE and the Inter Faith Network plan, in early 2002, to bring together a range of practitioners in the field of RE to discuss some of the key points that have come out of this seminar and, in particular:

- Encouraging the inclusion of inter faith issues in Agreed Syllabuses
- Inter faith issues at GCSE and A level
- Teacher training for inter faith issues
- Resources for supporting and teaching about inter faith issues
- Time tabling issues
- The relationship between Citizenship education, PHSE and RE in the area of inter faith issues

Inter Faith Network for the UK

National Association of SACREs

November 2001

Key points from the seminar

- a) “Inter faith issues” deal with the attitudes of religions to one another and the encounter between them, historical or contemporary. They may cover areas of agreement and co-operation or times and places where there has been disagreement or conflict. They may also be concerned with the contributions that religions have made, or can make, to reconciliation and the resolution of conflict and to tackling the challenges which face the human race, such as injustice, poverty, and environmental change.
- b) Racial inequality, religious intolerance and social injustice cannot be separated in looking at their effect on pupils and on wider society. It is important that inter faith issues are taught in schools but religious tolerance and mutual respect will not arise unless i) the ethos of the school supports this respect; ii) the way that inter faith issues are handled in the classroom is itself a model of good dialogue; iii) children who are not doing well in our education system are helped to succeed.
- c) QCA's non-statutory guidance on RE includes a number of statements about the importance of learning about inter faith issues.
- d) There is a wide variation between Agreed Syllabuses as a result of local decision making, for example on the number of religions taught in a given key stage; which religions are taught at what key stage; and the adoption of a systematic or a thematic approach. Many of them contain good statements of intent about inter faith issues but few worked units of study are to be found which help to promote this in practical ways.
- e) The criteria and specifications for GCSE provide the possibility for students to study inter faith issues although the model of studying religions in separate boxes still prevails quite largely at GCSE and Advanced level. Ways need to be found to encourage syllabus conferences and examination boards/awarding boards to see the potential of inter faith issues.
- f) Citizenship education has as part of its role to encourage “respect for different national, religious and ethnic identities”. RE has a major contribution to make to Citizenship education. Inter faith issues, explored in an RE context, can make pupils aware of the interaction of religions in the past and present and the importance of understanding and co-operation. The balance between RE, Citizenship and PSHE needs to be carefully worked out. Each school will want to discuss this balance. But it is important that the arrival of Citizenship education does not lead to RE becoming diluted and to a situation where there is not enough time for teachers to teach about the main faiths.
- g) It is very helpful for schools and SACREs to have strong links with local faith communities and with the local inter faith group or council of faiths (if there is one).
- h) The local ownership of the Agreed Syllabus process and the role of SACRE leads to many positive local initiatives and to good interaction with local faith communities. There can, however, be difficulties with variations in entitlement and quality that pupils experience.

- i) More sharing of experience between SACREs could help those authorities where a SACRE is unsure of its role or where there is not much diversity of faith groups. Sharing of resource materials and Agreed Syllabuses is also important.
- j) Negative and patronising stereotypes still hamper good relationships between pupils in many schools and can have profound consequences for a child's level of achievement.
- k) There are significant dangers to self esteem through others trivialising one's own religion. Children need to feel that the religious aspect of their background is included, recognised and respected at school. Sensitive handling of clothing issues related to religious belief is crucial.
- l) Good experiences in multi racial and multi faith communities have resulted in highly confident young people in many places.
- m) Even – and perhaps especially – less religiously diverse schools need to talk about inter faith issues. E mail dialogue with pupils of a different school can help students of single faith schools.
- n) SACRE or LEA twinning arrangements with equivalents in multi faith areas might help relatively mono faith areas.
- o) Teachers are sometimes anxious about helping pupils to explore questions that arise when religious traditions exist alongside each other in the community around the school, or in the school or in the classroom itself. They can be concerned about stirring up tensions that they might not be able to handle. However, in inter faith issues, as in RE more generally, one should never be afraid of finding differences.
- p) There is often quite a lot of disagreement between pupils of the same faith about what it believes. There is a need for dialogue in that context too, not just between different religions. The dialogue between “religious” and “non-religious” is also very important.
- q) If religions are studied simply in terms of their doctrines without an experiential approach this can be divisive in the classroom. Trust can develop from the spirit in which the exploration is made.
- r) It is important to develop techniques which will help pupils to argue their points of view calmly and respectfully.
- s) It is vital to provide and develop the skills to dialogue and not just to provide a body of content knowledge about inter faith issues. It is very important for teachers to listen to pupils as well as vice versa.
- t) Teachers need empowering through ideas, resources and opportunities to develop their own better practice. Training (including both initial and Inset training) and support is crucial.
- u) LEA's need RE advisers – not just part time consultants no matter how good these are – to ensure that schools receive the support they need.

- v) It might be good to promote and encourage best practice with a competition to reward good practice in teaching inter faith issues in RE.
- w) There is presently a shortage of good resources for RE teachers relating to inter faith issues.
- x) Resources for sensitive topics are best produced by / in association with members of the faiths concerned.
- y) It is useful to have local directories of places of worship, speakers and key personnel of the different faiths. *Religions in the UK: A Directory 2001-2001* ed Paul Weller 2001, lists local places of worship around the UK and has a chapter on each major faith, on the religious landscape of the UK and on inter faith issues.
- z) Research is needed into the effects of RE upon relations between communities and members of different religions and into its impact on levels of understanding of Britain's plural society and its riches and needs.

These key points are not exhaustive and do not summarise the detailed information about non-statutory guidance, model syllabuses and other matters provided by the speakers.

Opening Session

Brian Pearce, Director, The Inter Faith Network of the UK

May I welcome you all to this seminar. It is very fitting that we are in a conference centre in a building which was only opened a few weeks ago by Nelson Mandela. The interest that has been shown in this event is very encouraging. It has in fact been over-subscribed: there were more people who wanted to come than we had places for. May I say on behalf of the Inter Faith Network that we are delighted that we have been able to arrange this seminar jointly with the National Association of SACREs because SACREs play a particularly important role in the development of local syllabuses for Religious Education.

It might be helpful at the outset to suggest some distinctions between different aspects of Religious Education, although I offer these with some trepidation, as a “lay” person who does not work in the educational field. Reflecting on the content of RE today, we can first of all identify the fact that syllabuses now deal with more than one religious tradition. We therefore have “multi faith” RE. A good deal of the work that goes on within RE looks at religious traditions individually. Tackling faiths as different and distinct entities in this way is very important. Secondly, this approach may be supplemented by looking at some themes which are common to the different faiths, for example, looking at the place of scriptures, looking at worship, or pilgrimage – taking a particular topic which is then tackled on a “thematic” basis across different faiths. Thirdly, there is the question of addressing rather more directly the relationship between the different faith communities in this country and in the world at large, in other words “inter faith” issues. The history of these relationships, the prospects for them and the attitudes which different faiths have had to one another are what we mean when we talk about “inter faith issues in RE”, which is the primary focus of our discussion today.

Educating our children for a multi faith society: reflections on the importance of educating for mutual respect and social harmony

The Baroness Uddin

I am delighted and grateful to be here – particularly in a place so recently opened by Nelson Mandela – and to be able to speak to you on a subject that is very close to my heart. As a Muslim parent, I am aware of how important it is because of my own background. I arrived in Britain in 1972 and was a community worker in Tower Hamlets for a number of years.

The timing of today's conference is important in more ways than one. As I am sure you know, there is an election this week and on 8 June whoever is the Government should be made aware of the outcome of your conference. These issues need to be placed on the agenda of the Secretary of State for Education.

I am a great admirer of the Inter Faith Network, which is among the vanguard of those organisations that are around today discussing key issues on a multi faith basis. I am also aware of the important and excellent work done by SACREs across the country.

I am not a teacher and would certainly not dare to comment on the content of the Religious Education curriculum! But I do want to say, both as a mother and also as a community activist, that I have had a great interest over the last 20 to 25 years in ensuring that our children have as broad an education as possible.

My mother, my aunt and half of my mother's side of the family devoted their lives to teaching, and in my own experience religion was an absolute focus for everything. Yet I cannot ever remember anyone mentioning that I was taught religion – we simply were. But that has not been the experience of my children with Religious Education in their schools.

I have practised what I say, not simply believed it. I have put my children through the education system in Tower Hamlets and also at a Church school and I had every confidence that neither my children's spirituality nor their education would be denied them.

Both religion and education are about the whole human being. Reflecting on one without reference to the other is impossible and getting right the Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education in any area is very important. In my area, the East End of London, it has been the subject of considerable debate.

Today, I have been invited to reflect on the importance of educating for mutual respect and racial and social harmony and the role in this of Religious Education. I want to say from the

outset that religious tolerance and mutual respect will not arise unless the many children who are apparently being failed within our education system are assisted out of failure.

We live in a society that is still regarded by the outside world as a provider of a world class education system. Yet, in my mature years, I find that what has become very apparent over my own life time is that educational entitlement is at the disposal of very few. If education is the tool – the key tool – in enabling us to achieve harmony and understanding in our multi-faith society, what then are the consequences of having an education system which is seen as failing the vast majority of children from ethnic minority communities?

Most of us believe that educational qualifications should be based on merit, ability and effort and that the brightest should do well regardless of ethnicity, religion and race. Some remarkable results have been achieved in many areas of East London, and throughout various cities in the country. With dedication and unconditional leadership from some head teachers and their teams, a good number of children are achieving well. Yet only about 25% of our inner city children are doing well. So why not the rest?

Much of the failure of the education system to deliver continues to be blamed on economic, political and home environment factors and also on culture, poverty, deprivation and even bi-lingualism. I think we have to be explicit when we search our souls about the reasons for this failure. All the way back in 1985 the Swann Committee found that in the case of a very small number of under-achieving pupils, bi-lingualism and poverty were factors. This could not explain, however, why masses of children who were doing well and who were brilliant on leaving their primary school, were subsequently failing at the secondary level. As you may not be surprised to learn, Bangladeshi and Pakistani Muslims (a large percentage of the Muslim community), are at the bottom of the education attainment league tables.

A comparison between Newham and Tower Hamlets, two of London's inner city boroughs, raises interesting questions about why some of the areas are doing well and others are not. I challenge the assumption that poverty results in poor attainment. I think racism also has to be taken into account.

Schools, of course, reflect the culture and practices of society. But, in general in my experience, both teachers and pupils are horrified to learn that they may be acting in ways which are racist. Yet it has been shown again and again that teachers favour white boys at secondary level and have lower expectations of Afro-Caribbean children and as a result fail to encourage them to achieve as much as they could. Sadly, negative and patronising stereotypes still abound. It is expected that Asian boys will be industrious and courteous, but Asian girls are seen as passive and are often overlooked. Yet, for example, you only have to look at what some young Asian women are achieving in inner city areas like Bradford and Tower Hamlets to get an idea of how very wrong these stereotypes are.

Institutional racism can have a lifetime of impact and be even more detrimental than the one off racist incidents that many black and Asian children experience. The impact of small amounts of a racism, small amounts of discrimination in the course of a child's education, can have profound consequences for their level of achievement. At the same

time, good experiences in multi-racial communities and multi-faith communities have resulted in enormously confident young people. I think we have some lessons to learn from the good effects of these positive experiences.

I was taught in accordance with the national curriculum in Bangladesh and later on in a grammar school in this country. This gave me a balanced view of the world. I believe, however, that our own current national curriculum lacks respect for the global world and fails sufficiently to teach respect for others. History needs a proper world perspective, and geography should foster understanding through the study of diverse communities and cultures. The teaching of literature cannot continue to ignore writers from other parts of the world. Schools in which the majority of people come from ethnic minority communities must support and strengthen their sense of identity. That is what contributes to the development of the whole individual.

In the same way as other European languages are offered to children as young as five, so they should also be offered languages from other parts of the world to which minority communities have links. In my own child's school, which happens to be a Church of England school, pupils are offered French and German, but are not offered any Asian or African languages as a matter of choice. In some parts of the country parents are faced with incredible hardship, seeking to fulfil school uniform requirements. Church schools have been bad examples of insisting on a dress code which often discriminates against Muslim children.

Of course, the requirement remains that school assemblies should have a Christian focus. In many parts of the country there is a lot of good practice. Many schools with pupils of different faiths, including Church schools, have made efforts to ensure that all other religions are included in worship. However, I think that the idea that parents can really have the option of "opting out" has not been discussed adequately enough. As a mother of five children, with three children going to the same school, I was thinking that I could take my child out of going to church every Thursday. I have considered doing this for the past 10 or 15 years but I have not done it because I thought it would impact on the application of my next child going into the school. I continue to do that, not because it is the best school, but because I have a commitment to send my child to the nearest local school, the school in my community. Often parents do not have any real choice. In practice, the issue of choices for parents, whether this is in Religious Education or schooling more generally, needs further debate.

I accept in theory the notion that schools promote equality and religious equality, but in my view they have adopted a very minimalist approach to promoting multi-culturalism and are not yet confronting practices and assumptions that marginalise other faiths. Those of us here have no doubt been converted to the cause of social justice and equality. So you may ask why I am saying this. It is important for us to reinforce and acknowledge the fact that some of us who do good work need also to be acknowledged. But although there may be some good practice, much more needs to be done.

The UK today is a diverse country. The largest minority religion is Islam and I would like to comment particularly on the vilification of Islam. As a Muslim woman in the House of Lords I cannot not make this comment! Mistaken views about Muslim countries and

traditions continue to permeate our culture, classroom and pub conversations. They cannot be corrected in one lesson; careful teaching is needed throughout the education system.

I think it is critical for a healthy society for us to have our children learn about the positive history of world religions as well as the conflict which has arisen as a result of religious intolerances. Even the current conflict in the Middle East has to be taught from the position of not being friends of Palestine or friends of Israel, but simply on the basis of the facts as they are seen through the eyes of international law.

I do not know whether you will be as surprised as I was when another delegate asked me at a large Labour Party gathering recently (and we are doing a number of them now because of the General Election) whether, as a Muslim person I was feeling sorrow for the recent total collapse of the building in Israel at that wedding reception. I was so deeply hurt by that comment, by the idea that was being suggested, that because I am a Muslim I would not, as a mother, be feeling pain at this loss of human life. It is very sad that religious differences have become so significant that it could be thought that our attitude would result simply from being Jewish or Muslim. But that incident did make me think very carefully about this particular talk and I was thinking about it at 3 o'clock in the morning when I was writing these reflections down! Should I mention this or not? It seemed to me to be the right place to share amongst friends, and in this peaceful place, one is able to reflect openly on some of the issues we have to face.

So teaching tolerance and social inclusion does not mean just taking into account poverty and employment, crime, health and so forth. It also means taking into account religion, race and gender. Social inclusion cannot be brought about in a grossly unequal society if we do not take into account all these different dimensions, because racial inequality, religious intolerance and social injustice cannot be separated. All these problems raise very prickly questions about accountability and decision making and many of the best of our institutions cannot stand up to scrutiny on them.

To give children signals about the fundamental importance of equality and mutual respect and integrity means taking account of how important role models are in our system and also giving signals that justice is done. Seven years after the death of Stephen Lawrence, a school child, his suspected murderers, including three school aged boys, remain out of bounds for social and legal justice. This sends the wrong message. That the school curriculum needs to teach tolerance of each other is obvious.

I have tried this morning not only to reflect on my experience, but also, as I hope you will agree, to open my heart a bit, to tell the wider story of the role of education as I see this.

Yes, religious teaching has a critical and key role within the whole educational context, and I hope that you will have understood my own commitment to ensuring, as I never tire of campaigning, that we work together to get it right. I know many of you will feel exactly the same.

Britain's multi-racial inner cities are very vibrant and have many tales to tell of innovative successes. We are all honour bound to achieve equality, but the issue is not just about equality or diversity. It is simply about doing the right thing by our children and creating confidence in the next generation through a sense of citizenship, and not least by ensuring that we provide the very best education for them.

Addressing inter faith issues in the school curriculum

John Keast, Principal Manager for RE, Citizenship and PSHE at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Introduction

My task this morning is to provide a further context for our discussions of inter faith issues following on from the views expressed by Baroness Uddin. I hope to show how Religious Education (RE), may help to make more of a reality of the educational vision that she has outlined for us. I shall try to show also what the implications are of the introduction of Citizenship into the secondary school curriculum. But I begin with RE.

RE overview

Religious Education must be taught to all registered pupils, except those withdrawn by their parents. In county/community/non-faith foundation schools it must be taught according to the locally Agreed Syllabus. In aided/faith foundation schools it must be taught according to the school's trust deed. I wish to concentrate on RE in our common schools.

Agreed Syllabuses must reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Britain are in the main Christian but take account of the teachings and practices of the other principal religions represented in Britain. This local responsibility for RE is very important. Legal responsibility lies with the local authority and decisions on the RE curriculum in the majority of our schools are therefore made locally. This local decision making leads to many positive local initiatives and encourages a sense of ownership and an involvement in the RE curriculum by a large number of people. It can lead to increased links with local communities, and enhances the relevance of RE to pupils in local areas. The local nature of RE can also lead to the variable entitlement and quality that pupils experience as LEAs exercise their roles and responsibilities with varying degrees of effectiveness. You will all know that SACREs are sometimes struggling to be as effective as they would like to be in different local authorities.

The former School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) published two national model syllabuses in 1994 as guidance for Agreed Syllabus conferences. These models have had a substantial influence on Agreed Syllabuses:

- In term of aims, there is much common ground to be observed in local Agreed Syllabuses, although some issues of philosophy, about the nature and purpose of RE still remain.

- There has been some measure of agreement on attainment targets and the use of learning outcomes. Learning about religions and learning from religion. These two targets in the SCAA model syllabuses are commonly used either directly, or in modified forms, in local Agreed Syllabuses, often followed by end of key stage statements;
- The models have impacted through the use of specific content about Christianity and the other principal religions represented in Britain. The generation of Agreed Syllabuses that followed the publication of the models in 1994 have tended to be more detailed than many previous Agreed Syllabuses.

The model syllabuses have led to a more systematic presentation of religions in syllabuses and to more systematic teaching of religions in schools. But they have not produced uniformity. They were not designed to do that. So, while there is more commonality than before 1995, there are still substantial differences between Agreed Syllabuses as a result of local decision making, for example in how many religions are taught in a key stage, which religions are taught in each key stage, and whether schools have a choice of which religions are taught in a key stage. There is also a diversity of approach to organising the content of Agreed Syllabuses, with some being completely “systematic” in their approach and others being completely “thematic” and there are, of course, many syllabuses with a mixture of those two approaches. Much more could be said about the way in which Agreed Syllabuses have developed over the past six or seven years (as an article in the current issue of the British Journal of Religious Education illustrates) but time does not allow me to do so now.

A new generation of Agreed Syllabuses is always coming into being, since there is a requirement for every Agreed Syllabus to be reviewed every five years by an Agreed Syllabus conference. These reviews often provide a focus for the work of SACREs by transmuting themselves into Agreed Syllabus conferences. It is often at these meetings that the contributions of the various faith communities in an area play a vital and important role in RE. My impression of the current reviews is that new syllabuses are not changing their “content” so much as their references to the place that RE has within the school curriculum and their advice on planning, assessment and the use of external examinations. Teachers on the whole dislike major change, especially every five years!

Inter faith issues in RE

Let me be a little more specific about inter faith issues in the context of RE. When the review of the National Curriculum was carried out in 1999-2000, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) produced non-statutory guidance for RE to enable issues arising from the National Curriculum review developments to be reflected in RE (even though this is not part of the National Curriculum) as well. These issues included guidance on learning across the curriculum, learning from religion and national expectations for RE, popularly known as the “8 level scale”.

The monitoring of RE that QCA carried out between 1996 and 1999 to prepare for that review threw up many interesting points about the teaching and learning of RE in schools. Among them was a lack of confidence that some teachers felt in the second attainment target of the model syllabuses: learning from religion. Some teachers were not sure that they knew what this target was about, or what the phrase itself might mean. Among their reservations, some teachers said that they felt that they were sometimes taking a risk in helping pupils to explore the questions that arise when religious traditions exist alongside each other in the community around the school, or in the school, or in the classroom itself. They were afraid of stirring up discussions which they might not be able to handle, or releasing tensions that they would prefer to keep below the surface or outside the classroom. Some teachers had stories to tell of intolerant attitudes by parents or by pupils themselves that could only be kept in check by a tacit agreement to “learn about religion only”. Our monitoring suggested that these issues were serious ones. Indeed they are, and they need to be faced squarely.

But our monitoring also suggested that once teachers, usually non-specialists, worked through those issues they could increase their confidence, and found that RE became more interesting to them and to their pupils and that they actually had the capacity to improve aspects of school life and school ethos. The section in the non-statutory guidance on “learning from religion” to which I referred just now is a direct consequence of wanting to help increase the confidence of teachers by exploring what learning from religion might be about, and how this might be done more effectively.

There are references to inter faith issues in the non-statutory guidance. The statement inside the front cover, for example, on the importance of RE says: “By exploring issues within and across faiths pupils learn to understand and respect different religions.” In signalling developments in RE on page 3, we said “Work in classrooms on the distinctiveness of the principal religions and on the ways religions interact with each other” is important. In our guidance on learning from religion on page 16, we wrote: “Pupils can understand how believers in different religious traditions may interact with each other, not just historically but in contemporary ways, nationally and locally. Inter faith issues can be explored.” Then embedded in the National Expectations for RE in the “8 level scale” itself, there are several references that have an implication for inter faith studies. For example, Level 2 Attainment Target (AT) 1: pupils “know that some are characteristic of more than one religion”. Other levels indicate the importance of looking across the faiths that are studied: Level 3 AT2: “they make links between values and commitments, including religious ones”; Level 4: “making some comparisons... what belonging to religions involves”; Level 5: “showing how individuals and communities use different ways to express their religion”.

Similarly, GCSE specifications have recently been revised, bringing the criteria for GCSE full and short courses together under the single title of Religious Studies. The capacity to study inter faith issues is clear both in the criteria, and in the specifications themselves or syllabuses as we used to call them. Again I will illustrate:

- The criteria require that students acquire knowledge and develop understanding of the beliefs, values and traditions of one or more religions; and consider the influence of the beliefs, values and traditions associated with one or more religions.

- The specifications themselves cover (variously and mentioning no names) the major divisions and interpretations within religions; questions of authority; the attitudes in a religion towards people of other religions, consideration of social and moral issues and practice; awareness of common ground and differences within and between religions, as well as the systematic study of the religions themselves.

Now I believe that all the references to inter faith issues in our non-statutory guidance and in the examination specifications that I have just been quoting, even if they are not numerous, are important. Many of you will know of the implications of the work of Professor Bob Jackson's ethnographical approach at the University of Warwick. This reinforces what I think we all know: that religion and religions are dynamic and changing phenomena. Part of the dynamism is the result of the encounter by one religious tradition with others. And part of the dynamism is the cause of the encounter of one religious tradition with others.

No syllabus therefore, (whether GCSE, national or local), can ever be the last word in describing what should be taught in RE, since what is the case, on the ground, in terms of religious belief, expression, practice and self understanding, is itself always changing. Changes do not only involve long-established and, what some people call, the mainstream religious traditions. They involve other ethical life stances, new movements and patterns of believing that we are witnessing in a rapidly changing society. Such change in society, combined with developments in education itself, to some of which Baroness Uddin alluded, may require new emphases in RE, such as the development of particular skills.

Among these changes on the ground are the issues that we call inter faith. Having mentioned these several times, what might these issues actually be? A general answer would include education about the variety of religious traditions and practices now co-existing in this country and elsewhere, consideration of the interaction these traditions had and have, their attitudes towards each other and their contemporary development and roles in society. In RE I think that might translate along the following lines:

- In terms of the first attainment target, *knowledge and understanding of a plurality of religious traditions*:
 - learning about how such traditions have impacted on each other historically
 - learning about how such traditions encounter each other in contemporary society
 - learning what approaches each may have towards other traditions
- Then in terms of the second attainment target, *learning from religion, skills for responding to a plurality of religious traditions*, such as:
 - learning from each its insights into truth, meaning and living, and bringing our own insights to them
 - learning from each what we may share and on what we may differ, and why
 - learning how and why we need to be able to co-exist in strengthening faith and society.

Now for some people these kinds of issues are suspect. They may be felt to compromise the integrity of a systematic study of religion or religions, and so reduce the value of each religion to a lowest common denominator, being comparative in the worst sense. Or they

may be felt by some to imply a relativist or neutralist position in terms of values, culture, identity and belief, so that teaching about all religions is held to imply that we can learn from none, or valuing all religions is to say that none is of intrinsic value to anyone. I do not myself believe that addressing inter faith issues has to mean any of those things. I do believe that those very things have to be taken seriously, and for those very reasons, and others, we need to address inter faith issues more specifically.

To me, inter faith issues mean learning to respect each other through tolerance, listening, dialogue; realising that there is no alternative for us but to build on our commonality and to face our differences. Separation and distancing are not practical. Worse, they lead to marginalisation, conflict, and ultimately persecution. We need to realise that 'inter faith' does not have to mean the absence of values or to be regarded as value – neutral or relativist. It is not the negation of the value of belief, identity and culture, the things that make us what we are and give our lives meaning. Rather, such an approach to inter faith issues is the precondition of being able to value these things together in a plural society and allowing them to flourish for the good of us all. Now that ideal, I think, offers us a vision and an ambition to strive for in RE.

But I should like to enter a caveat at this point. I do not believe that this kind of RE can be successful unless it is rigorous. Pupils need to know what the commonalities and the differences between the religious traditions are, and why they are. These should not derive from a study based simply on a schema of categories that may apply differently to different traditions but from a study that respects the integrity and history of each religious tradition. I am therefore not advocating what was (and still is, at times,) called a "religious smorgasbord" or a "mishmash", which may be a legitimate criticism of some forms of syncretism. I believe that the supposed debate between systematic and thematic approaches has always been polarised and superficial. We clearly need both approaches at times and both are valuable in serving different teaching and learning objectives. When we were preparing the exemplar schemes of work material for RE we deliberately did not cast every unit in a systematic mould, but included some units that require study across conventional religious boundaries. What is important is clarity of objective and outcome, relevance of activity, rigour of task and suitable material, and the high expectations that are the keys to 'standards' in inter faith issues.

The model syllabuses are often thought to promote only the systematic approach. Perhaps this is not surprising in the light of the spin put on the models both then and now. They certainly do try to steer away from the "mishmash", but when you look at what they actually say, they clearly allow for a diversity of approach. For example, Model 1 emphasises the importance of pupils acquiring a coherent understanding of individual religions, but goes on to say that this does not preclude the possibility of covering issues from the perspectives of the faiths covered across a key stage. To quote: "There will be occasions when it is important to look at an issue in terms of two or more religions in order to explain the relationship between them". Model 2 says: "It is important that teachers present beliefs in ways that make sense to pupils". It goes on to talk of approaches through shared human experience as well as presenting in a way that preserves the integrity of the religions.

I quote these SCAA models because they commanded the assent and support of the six major religious traditions in this country, a fact that is both significant and positive. They need to be used as a foundation for further development. As many of you will know, active consideration is being given to the question of a non-statutory national framework for RE. This could have the potential to highlight the development of important skills in RE, and also to reflect inter faith issues. No formal steps have been taken on how to explore the issue of a national framework, though a feasibility study of it is in the QCA's business plan for this year. It remains to be seen whether, and if so how, this idea will be developed, but I hope that we can, in any case, build on the faith community agreement on the models of 1994 and develop a framework that meets the needs of pupils and schools in a dynamic religious scene.

Citizenship

Let me turn now briefly to Citizenship, although the briefness of my remarks about it is not an indication of its importance. The other significant developments in the curriculum that I wish to consider briefly are the introduction of Citizenship into the National Curriculum in secondary schools from the autumn of 2002, and the implementation, from 2000, of the non-statutory guidelines for Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE). There are significant issues here for us to consider.

First, the rationale and the purpose of Citizenship education. The document on this clearly states that its role is to encourage "respect for different national, religious and ethnic identities." This is reflected in each key stage summary. The purpose of the PSHE guidelines includes, "to show respect for the diversity of, and differences between, people." This is put next to wanting to promote pupils' self esteem. In an inter faith context, I read this as not wanting to diminish any pupils' own sense of culture and identity as they learn to respect those of others. But the rationale goes beyond what is actually stated. Citizenship education exhibits the government's wish to increase participation, inclusion, and decision making in young people's lives.

The content of the Citizenship curriculum includes, at Key Stage 3 (11 to 14 year olds), not just the diversity that I mentioned but also "the need for mutual respect and understanding". At Key Stage 4 (for 14 to 16 year olds), "respect for diversity at school, local, national and global level". Some have argued that there is too much about diversity in the Citizenship curriculum and not enough about commonality. We could continue that argument if we wished, but there are many aspects of it which do address the common issues in our society, including "the importance of resolving conflict fairly". The content of the PSHE guidelines refers, among other things, to the effects of stereotyping, racism and discrimination, empathy, and working co-operatively with people who are different, resolving disagreement peacefully.

Now I hope that these brief references (which I have given you, like a catalogue I fear) to the Citizenship programme of study and to the PSHE framework will indicate the potential importance of both those areas for inter faith work. Much more needs to be done. Yet I hope that schools will also realise that the effectiveness of these parts of the

curriculum is lessened without a major and significant contribution from RE as well. Who we are, and what we do, arise from, and affect, our beliefs. Among these are our religious beliefs and values. Consideration of social and community issues that does not at the very least take note of, or preferably involve, the study of religion and culture is likely to be superficial and unproductive. Here lie the distinctive and complementary roles of Citizenship and RE in the curriculum, which I have mentioned to many of you on previous occasions. I hope that the project taken on by the Professional Council for Religious Education (PCfRE), will be valuable in demonstrating this.

Perhaps an example may illustrate the point. In the material for Key Stage 3 in the Citizenship schemes of work that we hope to make available on our website next month, we are preparing units that show how Citizenship can be taught within existing subjects in the curriculum. We have been considering a unit on RE and Citizenship that deals with conflict resolution. It allows consideration of topical issues and scenarios of conflict. This is clearly a sensitive area, but one which is actually required by the Citizenship programme of study, and one which can be linked with the unit on Jerusalem in the RE schemes of work. This, as you may recall, raises inter faith issues. Religions are often seen as the cause of conflict, but I think we must enable youngsters to see that this is, at the very least, a simplistic view, and that religions have also been the means of resolving conflict. Might not this kind of RE/Citizenship unit be a paradigm for considering such issues, locally as well as elsewhere in the world? If so, there is a potential for real partnership between Citizenship education and RE in this respect.

Now that kind of partnership is not one in which RE loses itself as a subject and abandons its soul. Quite often, RE may have to perform a prophetic or 'conscience' role for Citizenship. Democracy and justice do not always coincide. What citizens want and vote for may not be what is right. RE must always be true to itself, but a partnership with Citizenship of the right kind can be one where the issues with which RE deals get a practical application in active and positive community involvement. How exciting and challenging such a partnership could actually be! In many respects a SACRE embodies that partnership.

I have another caveat to enter here. We must be realistic about the limitations in the capacity of schools, the curriculum and any of the subjects in it to change attitudes and behaviour. The introduction of Citizenship, or the current provision of RE, are not the most important factors in what contributes to harmony in society, although they are factors which need to be got right and to be made as effective as possible. It is what goes on around the school as well as what goes on in the classroom that matters. Of course, it is important that schools, the curriculum and its contents are properly constituted to contribute towards building the kind of society we want for ourselves and our children, but there are very powerful influences on children and young people outside school. These include parents and families, communities themselves and the media. Sometimes the effect of these influences counteracts what teachers and schools are trying to do. We should realise that work in RE, Citizenship and PSHE is set within a much larger context and inter faith issues are affected by a large number of influences.

In conclusion then, I want to suggest that we must not lose the improvements in RE over recent years, including the increase in the number of those taking GCSE Religious Studies.

We should not lose the local dimension in RE, but we must also make RE serve a national need. We need to strengthen RE's role in the curriculum and in curriculum development nationally. We should not abandon the study of religions, respecting their integrity, but we can also study issues that go across religious boundaries. We can learn from those studies to deal with crucial issues of how religious traditions relate to each other in our communities. We can use "citizenship" in its widest sense as a vehicle for the value and application of RE, increasing the knowledge, understanding and skills of pupils, and enabling them to live together, both as members of religious and ethical traditions and as citizens of a modern plural democracy.

Panel responses

Indarjit Singh OBE, Director, the Network of Sikh Organisations, Editor of the Sikh Messenger, and Vice-Chair, The Inter Faith Network and broadcaster.

I welcome the opportunity to talk today on this important topic. For a Sikh to talk about the centrality of religion to life and the importance of inter faith dialogue comes naturally. The founder of our religion, Guru Nanak, said in his very first sermon that “There is neither Hindu nor Muslim”. What he meant by that was not that Hindus and Muslims, or for that matter Sikhs, Christians, Jews and other faiths, do not exist. Rather, he meant that God does not look at religious labels but at how we live and how we act. To follow on from that teaching, Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru, in compiling the Guru Granth Sahib also included verses by Hindu and Muslim mystics in our holy book in order to show respect to other religions. He also asked a Muslim holy man to lay the foundation stone of the Golden Temple to show this respect for other religions. Then the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, gave his life defending the right of those of another religion, not his own, to worship in the manner of their choice.

I suppose that strong teaching of this kind echoes down the generations. My first realisation of that was when I and my brothers at school in Sutton Coldfield found out that Roman Catholics did not have to go into morning assembly or into the RE classes. We thought: “We are Sikhs. We are different too, aren’t we?. This is marvellous. We could get some free time this way!” We did not know much about Sikhism at all, but we knew that we were not C of E! So we went home and put this proposition to our parents, but we got short shrift. Our parents told us to forget it and to go back to school and learn something about other religions.

So that is the attitude that Sikhism takes, but Sikhs, I am sorry to have to say, in pursuing this attitude towards other religions are a bit like the proverbial hare. Although Sikhism is very much about inter faith understanding, we do not do much about it. I think it is time that we did and that we actually emphasised those teachings of tolerance and equality a great deal more.

I very much agree with what John Keast has said. I would like to underline his comments on the dangers that are all too evident in the world about us of not having dialogue: the risks of marginalisation, conflict and persecution. These arise in large part from ignorance. I cannot emphasise sufficiently the dangers to self esteem through other people trivialising one’s religion. To offer a Sikh example: in the 1970s at a school in Birmingham a young Sikh boy came to school wearing a turban for the first time. The head teacher said, “You look ridiculous. It’s grotesque, like something out of a pantomime. Go home”. Sheer ignorance.

Let me underline the point about ignorance leading to conflict. I was once invited to a college in West Berkshire where there was friction between Sikhs and Muslims. People

like myself from other religions had been invited to talk about their religion. As I was speaking, some Muslims in the audience began to shout “Allah-u-Akhbar”. The Sikhs responded by saying their own slogan “Sat Sri Akaal”. But in reality what they did not realise was that those two things mean just about the same thing, that God is supreme. So I do not know what the shouting was all about!

John Keast referred to fear of discussion. I think there is a fear, but that fear arises out of ignorance and the more we learn about different religions the less is the fear. In a fog, everything seems terrible. The same is true of the fog of ignorance. The more we get rid of that fog the better we all will be for it. We need to reflect on the meaning of the words and phrases we use. For example, is the phrase “through Jesus Christ” to be interpreted literally as signifying exclusivity? Or is it to be understood as underlining the importance of Christ’s teachings?

We talk about Islamophobia. What are the causes of this? Is it influenced by events abroad such as those in Afghanistan, or aspects of the penal system in Saudi Arabia? From Muslims, I have learned that the teachings of Islam do not support such extremes. But we need to be able to discuss our questions and concerns openly. In the same way, Sikh practices, Hindu practices, Jewish practices and Christian practices should all be fully discussed. We should have the confidence derived from deeper friendship and respect for others that enables us to do this. John Keast also mentioned the role of the interpretation of religion. Our teachings are there to guide us but life is changing fast all around us. We have to come to terms with new advances in medical techniques, in embryo research, genetic manipulation, organ transplantation and so on.

John Keast also mentioned the saying, that is so common and is repeated so often that it is taken for granted as a truth, that religion is a cause of conflict. We really need to examine that in discussion. To what extent are the teachings of religion really responsible for conflict, and to what extent has religion been manipulated by those seeking power for themselves?

I welcomed John Keast’s comments on Citizenship. This is an area very close to my heart. But citizenship can be very much about conformity, about doing what is expected, what is considered a norm. In learning about citizenship and in doing what is expected of us we can enhance our life chances of employment, our chances of acceptance. I would like to point out that religion, on the other hand, sets its own standards and tries to lift society to higher and more tolerant, peaceful and responsible living. Sikhs very much believe in the lines of the Christian hymn which says “though the course of evil prospers, yet truth alone is strong.” Religion seeks to find out that truth.

I will conclude by saying that if we look to the world about us, we see that we need to live in a more tolerant and responsible way. We have become very much a “clever clogs” society, highly materialistic, extremely successful at producing goods and trying to get happiness in that artificial way. Yet we have polluted our environment, and all the relevant indices show increasing depression, crime and so on. We need those moral values taught by religion, which can provide us with clearly needed guidance.

Kusum Trikha, Ofsted Inspector, teacher and Hindu member of Bracknell Forest SACRE

I work for a multicultural education service in Buckinghamshire and I feel that it is very important that people of different backgrounds should be able to co-operate with each other in pursuing the goals of living harmoniously in a multicultural society. It was heartening this morning to hear from Baroness Uddin about bi-lingualism as an asset, not a problem, and from John Keast about learning both about religion and from religion. It is also good to know that QCA's guidance will give us more ideas on what to do when implementing learning from religion. I would like to respond to this first of all as an OFSTED Inspector.

In looking at Religious Education, one is really looking at learning about and learning from religion. Learning from religion is sometimes less evident when opportunities are not built in for reflection and discussion. We know that through Personal and Social Education, and in various other areas of the curriculum such as Science and English, there can be time for reflection on, and exploration of, the purpose and meaning of life.

So in addition to guidance on RE, we would welcome more guidance on promoting spiritual development. It is good that there are no standards that are assessed in Spiritual Education. What is actually assessed is the provision of it. Does a school provide opportunities for reflection? Are there opportunities to reflect about the meaning of life? Not whether a child has acquired a particular level in spiritual development. Generally speaking the standard of moral education in schools is very good because it is something which is concrete and there are lessons in which children can learn about the difference between right and wrong. Personal and Social Education has a close link to Citizenship when children learn to take responsibility for their actions and co-operate with each other.

I would also like to highlight the importance of RE in the Foundation stage. Again, in certain settings it is regarded as unimportant because children in schools move swiftly to Year 1 where RE starts to be taught. For instance, the early learning goals in the Foundation Stage curriculum, under Personal and Social Development, say that children should be able to respect the cultures and beliefs of others. Similarly, in Knowledge and Understanding of the World, which is another area of learning in the early years, there is reference to the fact that children should be able to understand and know about the cultures and beliefs of others.

Baseline assessment again asks teachers to assess that area of learning when children start Reception. That means that children should have had some exposure at nursery school to respecting cultures and beliefs of others. What is increasingly happening is that teachers, showing their concern about this area of learning, are asking questions about whether you can expect a three year old to respect the cultures and beliefs of others if they do not know what these words mean and do not know anything about these cultures and beliefs. Is too much being expected here? Three year olds are likely to be confused if you talk about celebrations and festivals.

How should we teach the cultures and beliefs of others to the very young? In the Language and Literacy area it is possible to use some very simple stories like *The Hungry*

Caterpillar, for instance, which can actually lead to a sense of wonder and awe when the caterpillar turns into a butterfly. That truly is “wonder and awe” and it is happening in classrooms now, but not with intentional planning and not in any way linked to RE. RE is well established now in primary education but not consistently in Reception. This may be because it is not a legal requirement until a child becomes five, so teaching in Reception comes under less scrutiny. I would agree with John Keast that all registered pupils should have RE. Reception children are registered pupils. Through cross-curricular themes, most of the aspects of RE can be covered in Nursery and Reception classes.

Beth Stockley, Advisory Teacher for Religious Education, London Borough of Brent Education Authority

I would like to pick up on several points made by John Keast and Baroness Uddin, particularly about the issues of self esteem and learning about diversity and also some other issues which are on our agendas at the moment, particularly standards in RE and Citizenship.

Firstly, self esteem. Baroness Uddin made the point that in order for children to learn effectively it is really important that their self esteem is high. For their self esteem to be high each child needs to be recognised as a whole person. They need to feel that the whole of their background is included, recognised and respected in school. Often the religious aspect of their background may be one many teachers would rather was left at home because of their own views about religion. This is something we encounter quite often.

“Inter faith” issues in terms of the whole school context include an aspect we have not touched on so far: the dialogue between the religious and the non religious. I think that is absolutely crucial even if it is very contentious. But then RE is contentious! I think teachers must not be afraid of it being contentious: the better the RE is, the more gritty it is. The more argument there is, the more debate. What they need is help with how to deal with that.

It is important to develop techniques which will specifically help pupils to argue their points of view calmly and respectfully. I am particularly in favour of techniques that Matthew Lipman has developed for teaching philosophy in schools. These help teachers to give children sufficient distance to express their views; to handle dialogue; to listen to each other; to respond specifically to what has been said before, not just with what happens to be in their own heads; to respond to what somebody else has said without interpreting it straight away, but taking it as what they have said and mean. That kind of training is really valuable.

So these are skills on which I think we have to focus. They have a part in raising standards in RE. They put a focus on the “learning from” but also on the “learning about.” The “learning about” becomes more vigorous the more that children contribute to the lesson. Teachers can then relax a little bit about the idea of their being an authority and knowing every last thing about the subject. Questions of diversity, of the spectrum within a tradition and different ways of belonging to a religion (not just in terms of specific

denominations) become very apparent. For every child in a classroom there will be a different way of belonging to the tradition from which they come, whether it is a religious or an ethical one. What is needed is dialogue and patience and an understanding of each other, rather than immediate criticism.

Quite often, what we find is that children are very ready to criticise each other and not to allow themselves to be themselves but to want, as many adults do, to impress on one another their own beliefs, their own values. Brent Inter Faith has a little motto with which Father Fergus Capie, its Chair, came up and which I think is excellent in summing this all up. It is: "True to self and open to others". The importance of this for RE, for Citizenship and for raising standards is that children express themselves and become stronger and clearer and more articulate in terms of their own values and beliefs. From that standpoint they are then able to be open to others and actually to listen to, and to hear, what others are saying, rather than simply responding defensively by wanting to put across their own perspective.

This leads into the areas of conflict resolution and peace. Brent is actually changing quite a bit of the content at Key Stage 3 in the review of its syllabus. In this context, we think it desirable to include a unit on peace and conflict resolution where issues of inter faith dialogue can be addressed explicitly. I think it is also really important to take on board how from the Foundation stage we address these issues in terms of encouraging children, right from the very beginning, to listen to each other and encouraging teachers to listen to them.

It is also important for teachers who do not teach RE, like the senior management, to listen to the RE teachers in a school so that the status of RE is properly recognised and questions of self esteem and religious equality are addressed. Quite often, RE teachers suffer from low self esteem because RE may have low status within their school. But it is really important that this is addressed and that there are enough teachers of quality actually to teach the subject to ensure that it makes a proper contribution to the life of the school.

Zennia Esterson, then Education Officer, Board of Deputies of British Jews

I would like to comment particularly on the inter relationship of Citizenship education and RE. From the time that a small child is taught to share its sweets or toys, or is encouraged to play games together with other children. This seems to me to be the early beginnings of education in Citizenship. As children grow up, it is especially hard in the 'me' society of today for them to keep up these standards. As they get older, the outside influences of modern society impact strongly upon their lives and can bring them into conflict with the teachings of parents or faith.

The Government's good intentions of bringing Citizenship into schools are obviously well meaning. However, teachers appear to be perplexed when faced with integrating this subject into the curriculum. Many are not sure how it should be implemented and some people believe that Religious Education has been overlooked, despite being the most appropriate teaching tool to develop this character forming type of education.

The RE route to Citizenship is ideal to inculcate the necessary aims laid down by the then Department for Education and Employment. It does not only provide the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural elements, but also conveys the attitudes and ethos that are character building. The religious tenets embedded in each faith help lay down the foundations that enable and encourage pupils to evolve into good citizens. Additionally, the inter faith aspects, inherently part of all religions, break down barriers between cultures and ethnicities and help bring about understanding and equality.

Essentially though, the balance between the three subjects, Citizenship, PSHE and RE needs to be carefully worked out. There is concern that RE may become marginalised as a result of the introduction of Citizenship education. We must ensure that this does not happen, by according RE its rightful status within the squeezed school curriculum. Additionally, acknowledgement should be given to the valuable contribution that RE can make.

Obviously, the teaching of Citizenship cannot be carried out in the same way as other national curriculum subjects. Some of our worst fears are that head teachers may be pressured into treating it as a textbook based subject and to provide, in effect, a dedicated classroom, with "Citizenship" emblazoned across the door! Unfortunately, some pupils are already thinking of it in this way, as they do not understand what it is.

More positively, Citizenship, PSHE and RE, if taught in a thoughtful and sensitive way, are complementary to each other. Hence, schools may well find that, by carefully integrating and balancing the Governments' aims in these subjects, the result will be the achievement of the main objective, the pupils' attainment of Key Life Skills. Moreover, the potential of Citizenship education for engaging pupils in lifestyle experiences will be extremely beneficial in developing thinking about inter faith issues.

With vision, we may be able to look forward to the day when each pupil leaves school fully equipped to participate confidently, and responsibly, in society.

Plenary discussion

Saiyed Mahmood, Muslim representative, London Borough of Bromley SACRE

I hope that a high profile will be given to what is being said at this conference today. I am a mathematician by profession. In my view, numeracy has been well taught in schools as has English. Now why should we not emphasize values and morals? These are fundamental. Just like the environmentalists have made their profile so high that every politician talks about the environment, why do we not raise our profile and emphasise values as the key issue, and also make it clear that Religious Education is the best tool for developing those values?

Clive Erricker, University College, Chichester, and Chair, Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education

I think it is fascinating to have heard various speakers come at this issue from different directions. I would like to reflect on the issue of the 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion, as this was addressed earlier, and the problem which teachers have with that. It strikes me that if we go into inter faith issues, whether within Religious Education or within Citizenship, we need to be fully aware of some of the points which Beth Stockley made and with which I very much agree. A problem for some teachers can be that they do not understand the processes by which learning comes about, such as the engagement of the learners, and listening and responsiveness to the learners. We really must think about how teachers are given some sort of support in relation to the process. Otherwise we might be in a situation of introducing a well meant initiative without the help that can make it an effective reality in the classrooms.

Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Scottish Joint Committee on Religious and Moral Education

My main fear is that with the arrival of Citizenship education, RE may be diluted and there will not be enough time for teachers to teach about the main faiths. Quite a lot of schools up and down the country only have pupils from one faith. It is extremely important for those schools to talk about inter faith issues, perhaps even more so than multi-faith schools. Schools say, "We have got nobody from other faiths so we do not need to do anything". This is not true. It is important for all children to be able to resolve conflicts. They need to know about the faiths of people they will come across later in life, even if not at school. I would like to mention the Living Values Education programme, sponsored by UNESCO and UNICEF in 80 countries around the world. It looks at values of respect, peace,

tolerance, and so forth and it goes right the way from nursery to secondary school. It is a very compact pack and it also has units to teach parents to look at the values themselves and to teach them to their children, and lets them know how they can help in schools. I am on the working party for the project and I have got one of the very good packs here.

Beth Stockley

In a classroom where it may seem that there is only one faith represented, it is really important to realise that there is still a lot of room for dialogue. Even within the Christian spectrum there will be people of different beliefs. Similarly, I have heard arguments between Muslim children arguing about how you should be a Muslim. I would be surprised if there is any classroom in the whole of the UK that does not have a spectrum of beliefs and values within it.

Muhammed Ibrahim, Head of RE, Southgate School Enfield and Muslim Educational Trust

From the work that I have done over the years, I believe that schools can become hostile places for ethnic minorities and are not necessarily aware of their needs. For example, I know of one primary school who held a Christmas party, with a disco, raffle and alcohol. The flyer mentioned that halal food would be served! This was held during Ramadan! An effort was made, but lacked even the most basic understanding of the principles of Islam. There was no objection to a Christmas party, but practising Muslims won't attend. If a wider involvement is sought then those obstacles that 'prevent' this need to be removed.

When delivering Inset, I have often been asked about the lack of involvement from ethnic minority communities. I think that when we are aware of this as an issue, we begin to realise that schools are well intentioned, but there are often subliminal prejudices which prevent them from bridging this gap. For example, in one London local authority primary school, Muslim parents were withdrawing their children as the school was not allowing them to wear the head scarf. I would suggest that now is an appropriate time for guidance on such matters. That way, tensions between parents and schools could be avoided and greater involvement can be encouraged. At the end of the day, the truth is, it is the children who suffer and it is they who will form our future society. Are we setting them the right example?

Cathy Michell, Methodist representative Cambridgeshire SACRE/Head of RE, Hills Road 6th Form College

I am rather concerned about Citizenship education and the interface between Citizenship education and Religious Education. Some of the values, teachings and beliefs of the various world religions seem to be at odds with what we might say are the values

appropriate for citizens in Western Europe. My question is: Where is the discussion going to take place about that kind of grittiness? Will it take place within the context of Citizenship Education itself? Or is the discussion already going on while the plans are being laid for how Religious Education and Citizenship education interface? I would like to ask John Keast: Have you come across this and how do you address it?

John Keast

I am not surprised to hear someone asking me about Citizenship, because I am asked about that more often than I am about RE these days! That question was very much to the point. The difficulty I have in answering it, is that I do not think that there is going to be any common blanket approach here. The issues that you raise about what world religions say about citizenship, religious practices and so on, are going to arise in Citizenship education. But the question is one of how thoroughly and how well they will be covered. And that is where I would say that probably the RE people and the Citizenship people within each school need to talk to each other about the implications of this new section of the curriculum and how they are going to deal with these issues.

There are, I think, a large number of teachers who will become involved in teaching of Citizenship. We do not know who they are, but we can guess. They may well be historians, geographers, and so on. These people will have no training in Citizenship and they will encounter values issues because you cannot separate them out from other issues. They will need support and help in dealing with those values issues. I think RE can help to do that. Much will hinge on the practice at local school level and on the relationships which are forged at that level. I do not think we can actually do a great deal to influence that nationally. Although we will be able to exemplify some of that in the units that I mentioned – RE and citizenship and conflict resolution. We hope that we can exemplify in these units the way in which RE and Citizenship education can complement each other within the curriculum, but each have their own distinctive emphases. This may seem an inadequate answer but I think this is essentially going to be a problem with a local solution.

Ms Manjit Kaur, Vice-Chair, Coventry SACRE, NASACRE Executive Committee member, Holbrook Primary School

What role can SACREs play in enabling schools to deal with RE and Citizenship from the perspective of the faith groups? Would this enable the 'wider dialogue' emphasised by Beth Stockley?

John Keast

Yes, I will go along with that certainly.

Ms Shahin Bekhradnia, Zoroastrian representative, Oxfordshire SACRE

I have a lot of sympathy with what Beth Stockley said about the conflict and hostility that sometimes occurs in the classroom when discussing the different religions. Students do sometimes attempt to put forward their particular religion as being a better one and occasionally in a way which causes difficulty for other students. My main question is to do with training. Certainly my experience of not so very long ago was that I was given a very inadequate training in the kind of issues with which I was going to have to deal in the classroom. Training will be crucial for handling discussions on conflict resolution, peace and so on both in Citizenship education and RE where hostility and prejudice may arise. What kind of training has been put in place to give teachers the skills they need to deal with these issues, which are very prevalent in the classroom today?

Kusum Trikha

I would like to comment on what is happening in Buckinghamshire, where I work, about training for subjects like Religious Education and aspects of Social, Moral, Spiritual and Cultural development. As a result of OFSTED reports, the LEA in Buckinghamshire identified training in these areas as a priority in the Education Development Plan that it produced. Last year, the Educational Development Plan has set out training for teachers on Spiritual Development. The actual training includes planning for reflection in all areas of the curriculum and reviewing policies to respect the values of and beliefs of children belonging to various faiths.

Beth Stockley

There are two areas of training that perhaps you have in mind. One is initial teacher training, and the other is support for teachers once they are in school. In terms of the second, obviously it depends on whether an LEA has someone in post to support schools for RE. I find that teachers are extremely appreciative of support they get after they have started teaching in schools and that it is really beneficial to them, because by then they have had a greater chance to experience the issues which the classroom presents. It is sometimes more helpful to them in a way than some of the training may be beforehand.

Charlotte Gringras, Jewish representative, Bolton SACRE

One of the points made by Beth Stockley was of the importance of viewing every child as a whole person, of which a vital part is their faith background. Another point was that we should listen to pupils in multi-faith and inter faith discussions and Citizenship. I think we need to turn teaching on its head, by listening to children and pupils. In terms of multi-faith and inter faith issues what we need to do is to learn from them as much as

teach them. Taking it back to a personal level, had I, as a Jewish child, been able to open up the religious side of me, that important part of what was me, in my school situation, how much happier I would have been. In this context, I would like to comment on a teaching experience I had. I asked my class (in a mixed faith state primary) to create their own 'Ten Commandments' for life at the school. Since there were only going to be ten in the end, we had to have a popular vote! The commandment that these ten year old children voted top of the list and which took pride of place in their ten commandments for their school was a request. It was "Teachers please listen to children".

Brian Pearce

Perhaps each of our panellists and John Keast may wish to offer brief closing thoughts as we wind up this morning's session.

Beth Stockley

The contentious question that I would like to ask is what, from an inter faith point of view, attitudes would be towards including those who do not come from religious backgrounds, so that a dialogue is opened up between the religious and the non religious. As I mentioned earlier, this seems to me actually to be one of the most crucial areas at present. In the past the 'infidel' was the person of another faith tradition, whereas now the 'infidel' may be either somebody who is religious but in a different way or somebody who is not religious. I see that as actually being now the most important area of dialogue that we have.

Kusum Trikha

Listening to the comments made this morning, I feel that a school should exist for the welfare of each and every child and that this aim should be included in the mission statement of each school. There should actually be room for learning from and learning about religions, because we are not just looking at RE, we are looking at a whole school approach. I think that could be the best way to look at inter faith teaching in schools.

Zennia Esterson

I have been very interested to hear the comments that have been made. I feel that there is perhaps one area which has not been covered and which is quite integral to all the issues we have been exploring. This is the role of parents. The position of parents needs to be reflected within our thinking and we should consider how the parent body of the school can be brought into discussion, about Citizenship education, RE, and so on.

Indarjit Singh

I just want to pick up on the comment of Ravinder Kaur Nijjar and to emphasise and underline that the idea that where there is a majority proportion of people from one faith there is not too much need to teach other faiths is a very narrow “tunnel” view of education and religion. In the course of their lives, people may move around this country and indeed the world and it is important for them to understand other religions and other ways of life. In that context I do wonder about the freedom given to local areas in choosing which religions are taught at which key stage. I think that needs rather more thought. All religions should be taught in a sensible and comprehensive way. Lastly, on citizenship and religion – by very definition the word “citizenship” implies a narrower world view. It is a view of what we ought to be doing as particular people and how we ought to be behaving in a particular society. Religion takes us much wider, and I think this difference is extremely important.

John Keast

It seems to me from hearing the discussion that there is a large measure of agreement on the importance of dealing with inter faith issues and on the capacity of different subjects across the curriculum in doing so. There is perhaps, somewhat more uncertainty about the role Citizenship education will play in this, because as yet it is something new and nobody has really tried it. So there is a degree of uncertainty there. But the most striking thing for me this morning has been the way in which we have moved to very important issues of good practice and training and how to help people engage with this topic rather than simply saying that it is a good idea that we should. How to manage that process and make it more inventive is the real item on our agenda and I am sure we will return to that this afternoon.

Inter faith issues in the RE context: the state of play

Lat Blaylock, Executive Officer of the Professional Council for RE

The Professional Council for RE is a small organisation. It is honoured to work alongside you all in promoting excellence in understanding religion for our children in schools.

My job this afternoon is to examine some of the ways in which what John Keast has told us about national policy and guidance works out in practice. First, you might reasonably ask: What are the inter faith issues which should be in RE classrooms? Here is my description of them.

What are the inter faith issues? Questions for the classroom

In the context of RE in school, inter faith issues may be focused around questions and issues which arise in the RE classroom such as:

- What areas of agreement and co-operation are there between religions in the fields of ethics, human rights, social matters and so on?
- Why do religious communities sometimes come into conflict?
- What is the history of the relationship between different faith communities such as Hindus and Sikhs, Christians and Jews?
- What common understandings of theological and philosophical questions are to be found between, for example, Sikhs, Muslims and Christians, or between Buddhists, Hindus and Jains?
- In what ways do different religions approach questions about the truth, the nature of reality, the examination of human knowledge of the ultimate / the absolute / the divine? What conversation occurs between faiths about these questions?
- What relationships are there between religions and non-religious ethical life stances such as Humanism?
- Why does religion often appear to be a factor in political or national conflict?
- What contributions do religions make to reconciliation and the resolution of conflict?
- How do religious believers contribute to peace and harmony, tolerance and respect, between different faith communities?
- What is inter faith dialogue? What attitudes to dialogue can be found? What can be achieved by dialogue?

- For what purposes, and in what ways (including RE itself) do different religious groups co-operate in our local or national community life?
- What can individuals and society learn from addressing inter faith issues in RE?
- What future for religions can be envisaged in the global community? Is the future one of co-operation, conflict or both?
- What contribution can religions make (through co-operation?) to tackling the challenges which face the human race, such as those posed by environmental change, poverty and inequality and international conflict?

These are difficult and demanding questions for teachers and pupils to tackle, but they need to be brought into the RE classroom if RE is to relate effectively to the society and the world in which children and their religious communities find themselves today.

Aims and practice: not sufficiently related at present.

For a long time, RE has been concerned with tolerance, sensitivity and respect. This in fact goes back in RE to well before the development of world religions approaches. More recently, influential work from the former School Curriculum and Assessment Authority in 1994 gave as one of five aims for RE: 'to help pupils develop a positive attitude towards other people, respecting their right to hold different beliefs from their own, and towards living in a society of diverse religions.' Since then, well over half of the local syllabuses have copied this aim verbatim. Another big proportion have adapted the wording but stuck to the spirit and intention of the point.

However, when in 1998 I asked RE advisers what their syllabuses and schools actually do to promote this aim, the answer often came back that they do not do anything very explicit. They teach pupils about religions one by one, and hope that positive attitudes of respect will blossom. We surveyed Agreed Syllabuses extensively, and found twenty good examples of statements of intent, but just four worked units of study which would promote this sort of RE. The Inter Faith Network's further enquiries in the last few months have uncovered some further examples of good practice. But this more recent research reveals a picture which confirms that schools need more support and resourcing for this part of the RE task.

What do we do to bring about our aims of tolerance, sensitivity and respect? Some helpful insights come our way from examples.

Examples

Blackburn

At Dame Evelyn Fox special school, in Blackburn, a sensory garden for children with profound and multiple learning difficulties has been created. There is space in the garden for the local communities of faith, Hindu, Christian and Muslim. There is space too for

each child. A faith symbol, (Om, moon and star, cross) carved in wooden relief so as to be tactile, marks each of the three areas, and plants, wind chimes, flowing water and thoughtfully chosen scented flowers provide a multi sensory experience of the garden and its three distinct and interconnected areas.

I love this example for the way it makes space for special needs pupils to see the distinctiveness and the commonalities in faith traditions, to think about and enter into them for themselves. It surely challenges the unsupported assertion that inter faith issues – or, according to some, just multi faith RE – are inherently confusing, best left for the older, more able pupils. I am a campaigner for clarity and against confusion, and I want to contribute to our symposium today this question: if RE is only about distinct religions, how will it reflect the complex borders of belief and community between religions as they exist in reality?

Gloucestershire

Steve Pett, chair of Gloucestershire SACRE and RE subject leader at Chosen Hill School. Gloucester has taken a lead in developing a Y7 unit for the LEA on issues within and between faiths. This is a high quality example of the ways in which 11 year olds can gain from this sort of focus in RE. Pupils learn about the Paradise Estate, a mixed housing area. They learn about Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities and the needs for places of worship they have. Pupils explore what kind of building could work as a shared sacred space for members of different religions. What problems and possibilities are there in shared use of a building for worship? I have done similar study with older pupils in my time. Asking them to design a chapel space for hospital, airport or prison, for example, is the kind of task that makes young people think and take note of inter faith issues.

Lincolnshire and Herefordshire

Lincolnshire and Herefordshire do not have very religiously plural populations, but my next example comes from these two shire counties. Recent Agreed Syllabuses Conferences there have invited schools and pupils to design, as part of a competition, a cover for the syllabus. The brief is quite specific: to design a cover that will show that six religious communities have co-operated to produce it and that will show that RE can be fun and interesting. Pupils were asked to write a note to the chairperson of the syllabus conference, explaining what was good about their design.

What is in the new QCA schemes of work?

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) published schemes of work for RE in 2000. These new QCA schemes of work are not statutory and are intended only to support a local syllabus. They are, however, already widely used.

The Y4D unit: What religions are represented in our neighbourhood? This unit, for 8 and 9 year olds, might encourage the exploration of some inter faith issues, as they explore the religions in their own, or another neighbourhood. After an information gathering phase,

the children will have opportunities to reflect on what they have learned about the religious communities in their area. They will be able to show their knowledge and understanding of religious groups and identities, and to compare and contrast some key features of the religious traditions in their community. This, I think you will agree, is a lot more than many adults manage in terms of respect and understanding for religions they do not belong to. It augurs well for a future in which citizens of the UK live with a deeper awareness of the place of faith in the commitments of many people from different traditions.

Y9 SOW includes a unit on “holy cities” which is good for the exploration of some inter faith issues.

The Key Stage 3 scheme of work suggests that one of the five aims for RE would be ‘to explore issues within, across and between faiths, and to consider questions of meaning and purpose in life.’

Unit 9D asks why some places are special to religious believers, and is the most explicit example I know of RE which addresses inter faith issues. The fact that QCA commissioned and published it and have sent it to every school is a source of encouragement to those who want RE to take this agenda a bit more seriously. Pupils taking this unit will learn a lot about the Night Journey of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), and the way of the cross in the gospel stories of Jesus, and the wanderings of Abraham, Joshua and the children of Israel in the promised land. They will also be asked to get their heads round the big questions: What do these traditions say about peace making? Why is it hard to live without conflict? What are the prospects for peace in the Middle East, or in any other part of our ‘global village’? The unit finishes with the suggestion that pupils design a work of art called ‘Respect’, bringing their learning to a conclusion in a way that relates to their own situation. I wonder if you would perhaps agree with me that this unit, well taught, would have good potential for putting into practice a key aim of RE: to develop positive attitudes of respect towards other people who hold views and beliefs that are different from their own.

What about examination syllabuses?

Among the examination syllabuses set by the awarding bodies, I am sorry to say that the model of studying religions in separate boxes prevails quite largely both at GCSE and Advanced level. But at a time when the number of students taking these examinations has grown dramatically from around 100,000 to over 250,000 in just five years, it is also notable that many teachers choose courses centred on questions and issues, ethics and philosophy, and get students to draw upon the insights of the religious traditions in responding to the questions. One of the examination awarding bodies has a paper at GCSE called ‘inter faith issues and ethics’ and another on truth and spirituality. From such studies, young people will gain insight into inter faith issues in a plural society.

Influencing practice: four ideas

I would like now to say a word about how this gathering today might take this agenda of exploring inter faith issues in RE forward. There is much that has been done, and done well, already. In some ways, we are not discussing anything new. The Shap Working Party on World Religions has long promoted an RE which takes each religion seriously on its own terms, but is also alert to the borders between them. But we do want to improve the standard and quality of RE generally, to spread islands of excellence across continents, if you will.

Now, some of you in the audience may be thinking that hard pressed teachers with other specialisms in primary and secondary RE are not best equipped to teach your faith, let alone to teach inter faith issues. I sympathise, but limiting what RE can reach for because of our staffing problems would be like refusing to allow football in school because we do not have Sir Alex Ferguson to teach it.

Nevertheless, I do pity the poor teacher here. In our society the media stereotypes of Christianity include vicar as buffoon, sexual predator or wet blanket, but hardly ever as spiritually aware activist for social justice, which I think is more common in reality. The stereotyping of members of other faiths is often even worse. Against this background, RE teachers have 30 children for forty minutes to tackle fifty questions at sixty miles an hour. The RE teacher's task is incredibly difficult. But in general they are among the few thousand people most aware and informed about religion in the whole country, and it is not sympathy they most need, but support. Consequently I have some suggestions about how we might promote the better study of inter faith issues in RE. They fall in four areas.

1. **Research** (like the Byblos project). We need some well conducted research into the effects of RE upon relations between communities, members of different religions, understanding of the plural society, its needs and riches. I have more than a hunch that RE can claim a bit of credit for the emergence of attitudes of tolerance, respect, and a welcome for diversity, which are thankfully more widespread today than 30, or even 15 years ago. Even the politicians (not a class famed for their ethical sensibilities) pay cross party lip service to respect for diversity, and inter-community harmony. But we cannot demonstrate this with much comprehensive data, though I will share a bit with you later. More research is needed. I note here Julia Ipgrave's fascinating work on dialogue between religious pupils, and you may have other examples in mind.
2. **Promoting and encouraging best practice**, for example with competitions such as the Sandford St Martin's Trust for media and RE, or the recent Templeton Award for the teaching of science and religion in schools. These two competitions see the need for RE to move in certain directions, and encourage that movement with a prize. This uncovers some excellent practice and, in turn, generates more interest. Would it be good to run some awards for good practice in teaching inter faith issues in RE? Would that be a stimulus to some of our best schools and teachers? Maybe.
3. **Small 'p' politics** (like the Inter Faith Network's timely and well judged campaigning that has brought us the material we have looked at today). We need to lobby and increase understanding at several levels here. The audience for this is not just

government bodies like QCA. I want to find ways of enabling syllabus conferences and examination boards/awarding bodies to see the potential of the inter faith issues. And I look for some leadership from those involved in initial and continuing teacher training. Those who come new to the profession of RE teaching need to examine exactly how that teaching will promote respect and the well being of all in a spiritually diverse society. I do not think the Teacher Training Agency are very much interested in the religious content of RE teacher training, though they should be. But many who train RE teachers are among the best placed to make some sense of our issues.

4. **Empowering teachers**, for example with ideas, resources, and opportunities to develop their own better practice. Urging good practice to develop definite ideas linking to the aim for tolerance, sensitivity and respect. One of the best things about the Shap mailings is that they inform teachers about perspectives from inside a faith. Another great thing is that they suggest ways of tackling big issues and questions in the classroom. My own organisation, the Christian Education Movement, which is just a tiny publisher, has been providing materials and ideas for secondary RE teachers to tackle inter faith issues through our current series 'RE In Practice' too. We cannot expect commercial publishers to come up with all that might be needed here, but we can perhaps expect that good practical classroom ideas will be their own best recommendation. What could be done to promote the development and dissemination of such ideas? A question to leave you with.

Now I need, as I finish, to say a little about the school age range. Of course I do not expect five year olds to consider inter faith issues like Ninian Smart. And of course some of these issues will be better explored by 15 year olds. But the syllabuses show that we can develop practical RE teaching, even for younger pupils, which makes our aims for respect explicit in the primary school. Here are a couple of examples:

LEA: Ealing Agreed Syllabus**Date: 1995**

Aims: This syllabus offers five main aims, the second of which is the cultivation of understanding and tolerance in a religiously diverse society. The section on philosophy and aims refers to Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which seeks the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of the sexes and friendship among all... religious groups...'

In a comment upon the relative merits of thematic and systematic teaching, the syllabus points out that the vital importance of studying major religious traditions in depth is set alongside the need to explore some of the common ground and some of the differences that exist between religions

Examples: Work which relates to inter faith issues. The syllabus gives attainment statements to guide classroom work. Some of these are relevant to learning about inter faith issues. At key stage one, pupils should show awareness that qualities like love, compassion, honesty, fairness and trust are valued and taught by Christianity and other religions. At key stage two, pupils will have opportunities to explore the values, beliefs and commitments of others. In key stage three, studying significant leaders, pupils might encounter those from different religions who have reached out in peace to those of other faiths, such as Guru Nanak or Vivekananda. In key stage four, there is a particular unit which examines twentieth century developments in religion, including a study of 'attempts to promote dialogue and understanding between different faith traditions' and an examination of the work of inter faith groups and the World Parliament of Religions.

LEA: Tower Hamlets Agreed Syllabus

Date: 1996

Aims: This syllabus drew upon consultation with faith communities. It identified two concerns: that the integrity of each faith should be preserved, and that the individual child, from whatever background or stance they came, should know that this was valued. Thus the aims include: developing a positive attitude to other people, regardless of their gender, race or religion; developing the skills to live harmoniously within a diverse society; and respecting the right of people to hold different beliefs and values.

The syllabus uses five strands, two of which are 'community' and 'shared values', to organise the learning, and suggests key questions to be addressed with reference to each strand, by key stages. These questions are picked up in suggesting what content from each religion should be studied.

Examples: Work which relates to inter faith issues. From key stage one, pupils are encouraged to see diversity as potentially positive rather than necessarily threatening, and simultaneously to develop confidence about their own beliefs, values and identity. By key stage three, pupils will be enabled to explore the importance of different kinds of unity and community, the benefits.....of different perspectives and traditions, and the question of how to disagree without conflict. By the sixth form, the syllabus requires the provision of opportunities to develop an ability to articulate their own beliefs and engage in dialogue with others. The exploration of religion and religious belief is to include the development and evaluation of student's own responses to the fundamental religious questions posed by life.

We need to look at more and better ways of modeling good practice: against the stereotypes which stalk the media in our society of religion as squabbling, dying, obscure and on the continuum to madness, inter faith dialogue in the classroom, the work of SACREs and RE generally are a wonder, a small treasure of great value. We can show pupils that the future of religion worldwide may be a liberating and a spiritually energising one, as well as one where honest conversation about real distinctiveness can be pursued. RE in the UK is the object of fascinated interest around the world, where building plural societies is a shared challenge. There is a steady stream of visitors coming to look at our RE, from Latvia, Taiwan, South Africa, Nigeria, and the USA.

I fully accept that innovation like this begins with the keen, but if it is of high quality, it will spread to the committed, and to the professionally conscientious and eventually even to the uncertain, and the frankly terrified.

Pupils themselves recognise the importance of the contribution which RE can make to preparing them for life in the Britain of today. Here are two quotes from PCfRE's national database of writing by pupils on religious and spiritual topics:

I have learned about other people's beliefs and faiths and how this affects the way they live their lives. I think this is very important especially considering it is a multi-cultural society. Everybody

should have knowledge of other people's faith – otherwise people's ignorance will lead to prejudice and intolerance.

I love the open discussion we have in our RE lessons. Expressing your opinions is a valuable way of communicating and improving your communication skills. Being informed of the different religions and the effects of religion is beneficial to everyone living in a multicultural society...Ignorance causes lots of problems and RE is a brilliant method of overcoming this.

To close, my metaphor for religions is that they are like treasure chests, big wooden boxes full of valuables, passed on down from one generation to the next. Religions are some of the very best boxes the human race has made to pass on the treasures of the spirit, of value, or of truth and meaning, that humans have ever made. When you look in your own treasure chest, you may find the things that matter most to you. When you look in someone else's, you may find some treasure similar to your own, and some different. In RE we open up the treasures of the faiths pupils are close to and those they are distant from. And we also ask the big questions: What is treasure? Shall we share it? What is it for? Why are some treasures the same, in different boxes, and some distinctive? In the decade of Stephen Lawrence, and the week of the disturbances in Oldham, maybe you will agree with me: I think we are now ready for, and in need of, a religious education which is bold enough to move on to explore these big inter faith questions.

Panel session

Introduction

Marian Agombar, Chair of NASACRE

I would like to begin by saying thank you to all of you who have come today and to the Edward Cadbury Trust and the Shap Working Party who helped to meet some of the costs of running the day. I also want to say thank you very much indeed to the Inter Faith Network for the idea that lay behind this seminar and the immense amount of work which has gone into it.

The Working Groups have given us a lot of food for reflection. As Chair of NASACRE, I have noted, in particular, the various comments about the importance of finding ways to share good practice across SACREs and LEAs more effectively. That is an important aspect of NASACRE's work and it is important for SACREs to contribute to this process.

We intend to produce in due course a report of today's proceedings. Also, NASACRE is hoping to produce an occasional paper based on them. We hope, as well, to bring together some of the key people who can take these issues forward to discuss how to do so.

Barbara Wintersgill, Her Majesty's Inspector, Specialist Adviser for RE

I am sure we have all found that this has been a very worthwhile day. Ever since lunch I have been asking myself the question, Where are we going after today? We have been so much in agreement, for example in support of multi-faith RE, that it would be a pity to end with us all just going home. What is going to come next? Where are we going to take this?

I think there are two particular speakers to whose comments I would like to refer. First, Beth Stockley. She reminded us that the real dialogue is not between people like us here. Most of us, I imagine, are in one way or another people of faith. But the real dialogue is between us and the people who have no faith. That is a much greater division than any division or differences that appear between us.

Second, Lat Blaylock. Lat referred to the aim in Agreed Syllabuses that RE should promote tolerance, sensitivity and respect. He did ask, however, why this was one of the last aims. I am not sure that anyone was conscious of making it the last aim but it is perhaps the most difficult to achieve. I think Lat is right that it is the one which may be most overlooked but that is also probably the most important.

Reflecting on that, I thought that, to be realistic, I would probably be content if school leavers understood that religion has a special effect on many people's lives – that they would recognise religion as something to be treated with respect and that people of faith should be treated with respect. Perhaps most of all that they would be open to the

possibility of religion as worthy of further consideration and further thought during their lives. That does not seem very much to ask but I do not think we have achieved that yet.

Now of course respect and tolerance in religion are high on my wish list but one thing of which I am absolutely convinced is that respect and tolerance are not achieved just by teaching RE. We simply cannot believe that just because we teach RE therefore respect and tolerance happen. Sometimes unwittingly we may even have the completely opposite effect.

I have spent most of my life in RE lessons across the country and I have a question relating to what I have just said. It is a question about the RE curriculum. Most RE for 7 to 14 year olds, pre key stage 4, is dominated by aspects of faith that are currently found in the experience of most people here: worship or meditation; places of worship; sacred books (some of us will read from these more often than others) and – perhaps a rather weird thing for people who do not have an affiliation to a faith – a sense of time which is dominated by the religious calendar. That must be something which is very odd to people who do not belong to a faith community. Now all of those things are completely alien to many of the children in our classrooms. They are things that they do not experience at all. Some of them will be on the fringe of some of those activities through family networks and so on. But they will not be very active as participants. So my final question is that, given that we all agree that children should learn about other faiths, about all faiths, during their school career, what understanding about religions is desirable and is most likely to result in tolerance, sensitivity and respect?

Gillian Wood, Free Church Education Officer and member of the Executive of the RE Council for England and Wales

Many of us here today are from SACREs and I would like to offer some reflections from that perspective. I belong to a small but active SACRE where its members are working closely together. We are concerned that pupils, through the Agreed Syllabus, should be able to learn about other faiths and enter into dialogue. We are also, as SACRE members, committed to learning more ourselves about other faiths. We, on our SACRE, belong to a generation which missed out on this! SACREs are a great example of lifelong learning!

I would like to tell a story which reflects very much, I think, what Barbara Wintersgill has been saying. I was talking recently to a Muslim from Bradford who is a colleague of mine on the Inter Faith Network Executive Committee. He said to me that it is a great pity that more children do not go to Sunday school now. I thought that was very interesting and I said, "Why?" He replied that people who have faith understand the importance of faith to all those who have it. Even if the faith is a different one, they can still appreciate the importance it has for the whole living of that person.

I think this brings us to exactly what Barbara Wintersgill was saying, namely, that we need to address a new dialogue. We are, on the whole, in agreement today about the different ways that dialogue can happen between faiths and the importance of this. Perhaps the biggest challenge is to encourage and begin dialogue between people with

faith and people who do not have a faith and who do not see that it has any relevance either to themselves or even to those who have it. Matters of faith look like playthings if they do not mean anything to you and you cannot see why they mean something to someone else. This is a major issue.

I think that we do need to look very seriously at how we deal with this issue which affects a large proportion of the society and of the pupils in our schools. This needs tackling alongside the question of how best to encourage teaching and learning about the relationships between different faiths. I hope that these two strands will both be addressed. They are tremendously important to pupils in our schools and to the society in which they are growing up.

Harun Rashid, Senior Education Manager, Wolverhampton LEA, member of Wolverhampton SACRE and of Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group

Before sharing a few thoughts with you I would like first of all to express my thanks for the opportunity to be here today and for the wonderful experience that I have had. I am most encouraged because, for the first time, we are talking about inter faith relationships in the context of Religious Education and the Agreed Syllabus. We are talking about how we respect people. That is the fundamental issue for me today: human dignity. We are talking about what it means to people to be Muslim, to be Christian, to be Hindu, to be Sikh or to belong to any other faith. If we cannot teach children this, then I think we cannot bring them up properly.

Education, including, very importantly, Religious Education, is a tremendously important part of preparing children for life as independent, responsible citizens. Religious Education will help children to be better citizens. For this reason I do not see its aims as being very different from those of Citizenship education. Both can work together.

Let me give you an anecdote. When I was Inspector of Humanities and part of my responsibility was RE there was a conference that I used to go to every year. One year, in the late 1980s, the conference took place in York and the Archbishop of York was the guest speaker. I stood up at the end of his speech and said, "Archbishop, tell me what you think the difference is between the impact of Religious Education in a church school and its impact in a comprehensive school". He paused for a moment and then paused a bit longer and then said that there should be no difference. I wholeheartedly agreed with him. The basis for the ethos of the school may be different but the impact of RE should be the same.

As an earlier speaker pointed out, RE teachers are well equipped to prepare children for conflict resolution. I agree, but I think that they need more help and more support in their difficult job. Preparing children for life to be better citizens, responsible for the world, is a very important job. It should not just be left to RE teachers. Every single teacher should be teaching about responsibility and also noticing the religious dimension that may be present in the topic they are tackling. I do not see that anything has no religious dimension.

I am not myself an RE specialist. I am a simple person who feels strongly about these issues. Respect between faiths and towards faith is crucially important for pupils to learn about. I would like to draw to a close by saying that I think all local areas should have a living example of positive inter faith relationships. My most important message would be that you should try to create some sort of inter faith group in your area if there is not already one. You will learn to cope with many issues. In Wolverhampton we are very fortunate that we have a very active and thriving inter faith group which gets very much involved with many aspects of life there. This is also happening in other places as well and is an important contribution to our shared lives. We must work together as human beings and respect each other as human beings. Through us our children will also learn to do that. Today exemplifies this working together and this vital principle of respect and I congratulate both NASACRE and the Inter Faith Network on organising this seminar.

Plenary discussion

Sean Barclay, Muslim member, Norfolk SACRE

I am not sure I can put this into words very well. But I would like to indicate an important point which I think has been overlooked. We need to bear in mind the centrality in all this of the role of the child. There is always a danger when people involved in education get together. We tend to get lost in the abstract. The child is central to all we are talking about. Possibly the child can also be a model for precisely what we are trying to find in this conference: the ideal of inter faith. A child comes into the world without prejudice. If we can retain that non-prejudiced view, then we have a role as guides to help a child on its road towards an adulthood which contains all the best elements which people have suggested during the day – all the elements which we are trying to find, discover or instil among ourselves in our own communities, be they separate or be they put together.

Marian Agombar

I very much agree that teachers always need to remember that they are teaching children, not subjects.

Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Scottish Joint Committee on Religious and Moral Education

In schools, children, including Sikh children, encounter difficulties if they wear articles of faith, including clothing, because of their religion. There are many schools where if there is only one Sikh child he is likely to be told, out of ignorance, to take off one of the symbols of his Sikh faith, which he is, of course, not supposed to do. That child's self esteem then automatically goes down, the parents become involved and there is a problem for them in maintaining their confidence in the child's school. In PE in my school Sikhs are allowed, for example, to cover their bangles with a band rather than being made to take them off. Time and time again we have to reinvent the wheel with each particular school or authority to explain about the wearing of particular items of faith. Is there not a need for some kind of national guidelines on issues related to articles of faith of this kind? Guidelines on them could be distributed throughout the UK.

Brian Pearce

This is an important issue for us to pursue. We have to bear in mind that there are now different government structures in different parts of the UK. Also, at the Department for Education and Skills in London, those officials dealing with guidance to schools on these kind of issues are different from those who deal with issues of Religious Education. There is an interesting link between the two, because if a school treats individual pupils from different faiths and backgrounds in ways that do not square with what is being projected within the context of RE, then pupils will get a mixed and negative message. So we do need to make sure there is adequate guidance for schools on good practice on these matters.

Final reflections

Marian Agombar

It has been a fascinating day. Thank you to all who have come and shared their knowledge and their insights. We have heard the theory. We have even heard some prophetic visions. Certainly we have heard some very wise words about the future of RE and the need to look within it at the whole area of inter faith dialogue. In many ways this is probably the most exciting area into which RE could move in the future. It will help ensure that we are not seen as those who describe what other people do in strange places at strange times!

Today has also had a very practical focus. We have tried to root our discussion in the classrooms, in the real world out there in the schools. We have looked at some of the problems that our teachers can face and with which they need help. All sorts of development needs have come up today. There are areas in which we need to develop personally so that we are not telling teachers how to tackle inter faith issues when we are not really capable of doing it ourselves. 'Prejudices' have been referred to. Sometimes we do not even know what prejudices we ourselves have and need to confront before we can take matters forward. So there is probably some personal development that a lot of us need to do. (I smiled when somebody said "Well done to the teachers for taking this on". For many teachers, even the specialists, their qualifications did not always equip them for what they are expected to do. My own A Level is in Scripture Knowledge; it was not even Religious Instruction let alone Religious Education!)

Most people here are involved in SACREs in one way or another. We need to think about how we can develop the work of SACREs and our roles on them. In schools, members of SACREs will have different roles, depending on what their subject area is and what part they play in school life.

The research community has also been mentioned and is very important. Very often it is decried and mocked for living in ivory towers. (The joke in my institution is that "these lecturers" sit in their offices, read the newspapers and eat grapes!) But the work done by the research community is actually very important. You can make all sorts of claims, but if you do not have the evidence to back them up nobody will take you seriously. The effects on young people which teaching multi-faith RE is actually having out there would be fascinating and important to know more about.

We have also talked about training for people who are already at what used to be called the 'chalk face' (but is more likely the "whiteboard face" these days!) and also for those brave souls who are just embarking on a career in teaching RE. We have also highlighted the need for some training for our SACRE members. Very often people are taken away from their usual walks of life, put down in this rather peculiar institution called a SACRE and expected to know at once what to do about it. Fortunately, many people seem to work it out for themselves, but there is at present very little training and help available for

SACRE members. Perhaps we could think about what might be helpful for them, and explore what can be done to encourage the provision of this.

Various organisations shape policy in the field we are considering. Political parties need to be aware of these issues and to wrestle with what it might mean to tackle them in the real world of schools. Then all of the wonderful sentiments that we hear and read in 'green papers' could actually have some substance in reality and we might see ways in which some of these ideas could be put into practice. We have a major role to play in lobbying for this.

In a whole variety of ways, a great deal of support will be needed if we are to move in the direction we have been suggesting. Much of it comes down to finance in the end. Ultimately goodwill alone will not work if there is no money to back up good ideas and take them forward. Of course, we should carry on thinking and planning even if better funding is not immediately in the offing, but we need to sound a note of cautious realism.

I hope that we will all take away from today's seminar a clearer understanding of what kind of Religious Education we want our young people to experience in the future. Once again, thank you all very much for coming. We would be delighted to hear more from you on this important topic. And I am going to take a big risk here and promise that you will hear more from us!

Annex A

Group 1 – Inter faith issues and the curriculum – does SACRE have a special contribution to make?

Facilitator:

Brian Pearce, Director, Inter Faith Network

Resource person:

Patricia Stevens, Associate Adviser and RE Consultant, London Borough of Harrow and Chair, Harrow Inter Faith Council

1) Patricia Stevens

Ayub Laher, Jamiat-e-Ulama Britain (Association of Muslim Scholars) and Bradford SACRE, had been due to be present as a resource person but, at short notice, was unavoidably prevented from attending. He would have reported on a scheme for a 'shadow' SACRE, where pupils provide input drawn from their own experience and make suggestions of their own to their SACRE.

Patricia Stevens of Harrow SACRE kindly stepped into Mr Laher's place and presented an account of activities in her SACRE, including community involvement and ideas for inter faith co-operation. She explained that Harrow's SACRE is regularly in touch with the work of the Harrow Inter Faith Council for exchange of ideas and partnership.

The latest revision of the Harrow Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education was published in 2000, along with a non-statutory scheme of work. In preparing the syllabus, SACRE (acting as the Standing Conference) aimed to relate to, and reflect, the concerns of local faith communities. There are many faith communities within Harrow. One third of the population is from the ethnic minorities. There are significant groups of Baha'is, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims and Zoroastrians and growing numbers of Buddhists and Sikhs. The revised Agreed Syllabus builds upon detailed units covering Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism to include materials reflecting all the main religious groups in Harrow.

The Standing Conference asked two questions: a) What would most support your children, in terms of self esteem and pride in their own faith background? b) What do you want people in Harrow to know about your faith's tradition and community?

SACRE worked closely with teachers, assessing how well the 1995 Agreed Syllabus had worked in practice and exploring what changes might be desirable.

Those present then had a chance to go through copies of the new Agreed Syllabus,

studying the term by term sections, schemes of work with topics, resources and timed units. The Harrow SACRE had checked out useful websites which provided resources that would be valuable for teachers. They also looked at linking themes with other curriculum areas, such as Citizenship. The aim was to provide very clear guidance for teachers, with ideas for objectives, teaching activities, and resources. The SACRE was also keen to look at ideas on methodology and assessment.

Patricia Stevens went on to describe how, even at nursery level, there is a wide conversation about diversity. In Harrow the school subdivisions are: First Schools for Reception to Year 3; Middle Schools for Years 4 to 7; then High Schools for Years 8 to 11.

In addition to work with schools, SACRE and the Harrow Inter Faith Council are involved with voluntary aided, religion and Sunday schools in a variety of ways. This provides a setting in which schools giving the teachings of a particular faith can give positively to their local, wider community. For example, a recent community fair had involved SACRE, pupils, parents and other members of many different faiths and this helped engender a community spirit. Members of different faiths also go as visitors to schools for themed work, for example on birth celebrations or weddings in different religions.

Discussion and visits to local faith buildings build on pupils' own experiences of life and religious traditions.

Harrow Inter Faith Council are building up 'packs' to help teach about the faiths and are involved in creating an inter faith prayer room in a local hospital.

So the SACRE is not only an educational advisory body, but also a tool for the local community for help and advice on faith issues. Its role, in Harrow at least, is becoming more central and more influential. It provides a link not only between faiths, but also between teachers, pupils, parents and local community organisations. It also helps to build valuable links for faith-based schools.

Patricia Stevens then provided copies for the Working Group of the constitution of the Harrow Inter Faith Council. As well as the faiths, its members include the Mayor and educational bodies, including SACRE.

2) Points made in general discussion

- It would be good to have more sharing between SACREs of Agreed Syllabuses and of resource materials. There is no need for people to reinvent the wheel rather than drawing on work which has already been done elsewhere.
- It is important to be clear about the role of SACRE. More sharing of experience between SACREs could help those authorities where a SACRE is unsure of its role, or where there is not much diversity of faith groups.
- Having a link between SACRE and any local inter faith groups can be very valuable.
- In places which do not have an inter faith group SACRE has added importance.

- Redrawing of an Agreed Syllabus throws up many good ideas and issues and also leads to a strengthening of the interaction with the local community.
- Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group is a good example of the enrichment acquired by linking local faith communities. When the Babri mosque at Ayodhya in India was destroyed in 1992, the Group got all faith community leaders together to make a response. This helped prevent repercussions in classrooms in local schools. SACRE could not have played this role but it has a close link with WIFG and benefits from the Group's ability to carry out such initiatives.
- In Kingston, they have produced a database facility to provide resources for schools with details such as local places of worship.
- Small, relatively mono cultural areas lack local resources such as different places of worship and it is not usually possible to fund visits to places very far away. It is of concern that pupils in some areas will be receiving teaching supported by differing qualities of resource because there are only one or two local faith communities in their case. It would therefore be good to look at twinning, SACRE with SACRE or LEA with LEA, or even schools, one with another, to strengthen resources and teaching.
- For those areas where few faiths are represented it would also be particularly valuable to look at the internet for resources.
- The University of Leicester is presently carrying out work investigating 'valuing cultures' which may be of interest to SACREs.

Working group 2 – Inter Faith Issues and Younger Pupils

Facilitator:

Leslie Prior, Advisory Teacher for RE, Hounslow, Member, Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education

Resource people:

Julia Ipgrave, Uplands School, Leicester

Stephen Pett, Chosen Hill School, Gloucester

1) Julia Ipgrave

Inter faith dialogue by email

Julia Ipgrave of Uplands Junior School, Leicester gave a report on a pilot project by staff and pupils of her school and of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School during 2000 to 2001.

Over the last academic year, these two primary schools in Leicester, one a Catholic school, the other an inner city school serving a predominantly Muslim community, have been running a pilot inter faith emailing project between pupils.

Aims:

The aim of the project is to encourage children to recognise and engage positively with difference; it is based on the understanding that 'inter faith' is not only something for children to learn about, but something for them to do. Concerns about the integrity of children's own faith and problems posed by prejudices children may have acquired about religious difference are both addressed by this project. Pupils start from their own faith perspective with opportunities to express their own beliefs and explain their own practices. They also learn that those of other faiths are people very like themselves.

Practice

The project developed through several stages. Nine and ten year old pupils were each paired off with an email partner at the other school and started the exchange with self introductions, setting out their interests and hobbies. Descriptions of their activities around Christmas and Eid formed a natural introduction to the next stage: communication about their own faith traditions.

The dialogue then developed to explore questions emerging from work that the children were doing as part of their class-based RE. Questions about the most precious gift we have been given, the hardest choices we have had to make, about belief in angels and understandings of community, have all been the focus of email exchange. In the process children have had the opportunity to exercise and develop dialogue skills. They have also extended their ICT skills as exchanges of photographs and video clips have supplemented

the email communication. The culmination of the year is to be a picnic and games afternoon in a city park where the children will finally have a chance to meet up with their email pals.

The time devoted to the project is roughly an afternoon every other week.

Future

At the end of this year, staff at the two schools will evaluate the model for inter faith dialogue by email, refine it and use it again with a new group of pupils. It is hoped to extend the dialogue to create a network of partnerships across the country; to involve pupils of little organised religious background as well as those who practise within established traditions; and to explore possibilities of developing county/city partnerships. Those involved in the project would welcome the opportunity to visit other education authorities, SACREs and schools to report on it and promote it.

[If anyone is interested in taking part in the project or has suggestions for its wider promotion please contact: Julia Ipgrave, Uplands Junior School, Melbourne Road, Highfields, Leicester, LE2 ODR, email: mipgrave@leicester.anglican.org]

2) Stephen Pett

Religion today: issues within and between faiths in a plural society

Stephen Pett of Chosen Hill School in Gloucester reported on a project at Key Stage 3 which is being piloted at his school.

Gloucestershire SACRE has produced a scheme of work to support one Key Stage 3 unit in its Agreed Syllabus – *Religion Today: Issues within and between Faiths in a Plural Society*. The scheme of work is intended to allow new Y7 pupils to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do in RE as they arrive in secondary school. It requires pupils to use a range of skills and draw on previous learning relating to Christianity, Islam and Judaism. It provides teachers with information about pupils' abilities and achievements, enabling them to plan more effectively and also give evidence for assessing pupil progress as they move through Key Stage 3. It does this by setting an imaginative, practical task on an inter faith issue, namely, the possibility of people from different faith traditions sharing a common building for worship.

The activity sets up an imaginary but realistic situation where a new local estate has space for a place of worship, but County Planning Officers are unsure as to its nature. They enlist the help of local faith communities, asking them to provide information about their needs, making it clear what are the essential requirements for their faith as well as indicating what areas might be open to compromise in the interests of sharing one building.

The pupils work in groups, with each group taking on the role of a faith community. They investigate their tradition through a variety of tasks, reporting back to their group in order to produce a presentation for the planning committee. After hearing the responses and solutions to the problem, they have to take into account the distinctive nature of the faith

traditions and consider to what extent it is possible – if at all – to provide a building that would genuinely meet the needs of the community. This demanding scheme of work helps develop skills of dialogue and promotes attitudes of fairness and respect – all important when dealing with inter faith issues.

[Anyone interested in receiving more information about getting hold of this scheme of work (comprising lesson plans, assessment criteria, assessment sheets, work cards, literacy and Citizenship links, and some resources) should contact Geraldine Atkins at Gloucestershire Advisory Service, Tel 01452 427209, e-mail: atkins@gloscc.gov.uk.]

3) Points made in the general discussion

- Understanding of both differences and commonality is very important. We should never be afraid of finding difference and should confront it explicitly in planning for teaching about inter faith issues. People should learn from childhood to appreciate differences.
- It is vital to provide/educate/develop the skills to dialogue and not just to provide a body of content knowledge about inter faith issues.
- “Tolerance” is never enough without “respect”.
- Timetabling is crucial – at the moment inter faith issues are a “bolt on”. They need integrating properly into the timetable.
- Creative use of information technology, as in the case of the Leicester project, is tremendously valuable.
- In some LEA’s there are difficulties because there is no longer an RE adviser and schools are reliant on a part time consultant. No matter how good that person is they cannot always provide enough time.
- In primary schools it is not uncommon for teachers to end up being responsible for RE with no training for this. Training is needed.
- Even teachers who have been trained in RE need supporting with in service training for the particular area of inter faith issues.

Group 3 – What does/would good practice look like at key stages 3 and 4, including GCSE short courses?

Facilitator:

Dave Francis, Chair, Association of RE Inspectors and Consultants

Resource people:

Michael Elson, Chief Examiner for RE, Edexcel and RE Consultant

Elicia Lewis, Head of RE Preston Manor High School, Brent

1) Elicia Lewis

There are a growing number of opportunities for dealing with inter faith issues in the RE context at key stage 3. For example, there is a long established unit on pilgrimage and on conflict resolution relating to Jerusalem.

Preston Manor School is very multi-cultural. There are many challenges to the notion that “You can believe what you want – it is all a matter of opinion.” The challenge to the notion that 'everyone's opinion is equal, and it does not matter what one's opinion is' arises from many areas. The multi-faith school body may be more familiar with these problems in RE as members of individual belief systems will often come into conflict with each other in discussions, each believing that they have the claim to truth. To ignore that claim would be to ignore the essence of the belief system.

Challenges to the phenomenological 'world tour of religions' approach arise also from re-examining the aims of RE. In particular, critical realism, one approach to RE, seeks to address the problems and, to use Andrew Wright's phrase, 'to out-liberal liberalism'. This approach to RE is gaining ground where schools recognise the problems of a solely phenomenological or experiential approach. Critical realism seeks to recognise that the truth claims made by religions need to be taken seriously. If we do not acknowledge this, then we can misrepresent the faith. Individual opinions will always be welcomed, but gone are the days where students can be told that all truth claims are equally valid. It is clear that they are not. To pretend otherwise would be wrong and would underestimate our students. Today's RE student is more than capable of holding their own opinion and beliefs while acknowledging where their belief diverges from another's.

The RE teacher therefore walks a very thin line between aiming to represent faiths accurately and not allowing one position to take position as true in the classroom. In the context of multi faith dialogue, this represents a unique opportunity: 'tolerance, respect and understanding must be exhorted, especially in the absence of factual knowledge. However, at the same time' both teachers and students of RE will need to grapple with reconciling conflicting truth claims in the classroom, creating real opportunities for acknowledging potential multi-faith conflicts, solutions and dialogue.

These challenges are recognised and met by the RE department at Preston Manor and many other schools. However, this view is not endorsed by the whole RE body in the UK. Similarly, the problem was borne out and highlighted in the context of the multi cultural school. Nevertheless I do not speak on behalf of the multi-cultural school body.

A few multi faith activities for Key Stages 3 and 4 at Preston Manor

- Jerusalem – a shared place
Conflict resolution role-plays and forums about Jerusalem and Kashmir.
(Students to take on a role – not necessarily representing their own religions).
Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4
- Designing an inter faith centre to be used for worship and activities for the local community.
Key Stage 3
- Designing a programme for the inter faith centre with aims and objectives for inter faith dialogue.
Key Stage 3
- Recreating a SACRE meeting to discuss the implementation of an Agreed Syllabus, with notes on what is to be taught from four religions and an inter faith unit (objective 1), and also what should be learned from these religions (objective 2)
Key Stage 4
- Planning a business meeting for business men and women from six religions. Including guidance on the day/time, food and facilities.
Key Stage 3.
- Values summit – to produce a document on the values that need to be taught to children to send to SCAA (which produced one at great cost). All community religions need to be referred to in the discussion.
- A sixth form conference is planned very soon on the topic of 'Faith in the 21st Century'. This will be hosted at the Inter Faith Centre in Brent and will involve representatives of nine religions.

2) Michael Elson

Awarding bodies have a major responsibility because they set the content of examination courses in religious education at Key Stage 4 which has implications for what is taught at Key Stage 3. Of the Edexcel courses available at GCSE the most popular by far is the Unit called "Religion and Life" based on a study of Christianity and at least one other religion. The unit consists of five sections of which one is about Social Harmony. This section comprises three areas of content of which the third is,

The quality, variety and richness of life in the United Kingdom as a multi-faith society, including considerations of religious freedom and religious pluralism. The attitudes of

Christianity (exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism) and ONE other religion towards other religions, including the reasons for them.

In the sixth form if students choose to follow a course in GCE A level Religious Studies they are required to prepare for a synoptic paper which allows, but does not require, attention to inter faith issues.

3) Points made in general discussion

- Clarity of objectives is very important in the area of inter faith issues in RE.
- Availability of good resources is crucial for teaching about inter faith issues in RE. In particular, it would be useful to have local directories of places of worship, speakers, and key personnel of the different faiths.
- The relationships between inter faith issues, citizenship and human rights needs further development .
- If religions are studied simply from their doctrines without an experiential approach this can be divisive in the classroom. Trust can develop from the spirit in which the exploration is made.
- Who has authority to supply the content of examination syllabuses?
- Much development is through discussion and debate.
- The knowledge base has to be there through primary school and Key Stage 3.
- Diversity in the classroom is an advantage. The mono cultural classroom, even if there is some (limited) diversity, is at a disadvantage.

Group 4 – Resources for teaching inter faith issues

Facilitator:

Hon Barnabas Leith, Secretary General, the Baha’i Community of the UK

Resource people:

Dr Fatma Amer, Head of Education and Inter Faith, Islamic Cultural Centre Regent’s Park, City of Westminster and LB of Brent SACREs

Jane Clements, Education Officer, Council of Christians and Jews

Bhupinder Singh, Information Officer, Inter Faith Network

1) Jane Clements

Education is a key area of work of the Council of Christians and Jews. Some of the areas that it tries to address are very sensitive and so any resources that are used must be well thought out. Where possible, resources that have been produced by people from the communities should be used. However, resources produced from outside a community may sometimes be more “charitable” in their approach than those of insiders! Resources can also be used that have been produced for other subjects. For example, the Holocaust is taught in History at Key Stage 3 and it can also be studied in RE. An important consideration in producing any RE resources is that many pupils will not have a “faith view” of the world.

2) Dr Fatma Amer

There is a distinct lack of quality resources for RE teachers relating to inter faith issues. The problem is compounded when it comes to resources produced by minority faith groups, as in some communities there are very few organisations with the funding and staffing to produce relevant resources. For example, there are now many books on Islam but few specifically addressing inter faith issues. However, many Muslim schools are beginning to address inter faith issues and it may be possible to work with some of them and adapt any resources that may have been produced “in house”.

3) Bhupinder Singh

Judging by the number of calls to the Inter Faith Network from RE teachers, there is a growing demand for RE resources that address inter faith issues. The Network does not produce any specific RE resources, although the Network’s “code”, *Building Good Relations Between People of Different Faiths and Beliefs*, has been used successfully by some teachers to

introduce the concept of dialogue. Another possible resource the Network can provide is the video and transcript of the Shared Act of Reflection and Commitment by the Faith Communities of the UK. This event, which was held on 3 January 2000 in the Houses of Parliament, was part of the Government's official Millennium celebrations and focused on the values held in common by the different faiths.¹ The Network helped organise this.

As the RE curriculum develops to take into account inter faith issues, there is a need for new resource material to be developed. However, those producing these resources will have to take into account the views of the different faith communities and be aware of variations in local Agreed Syllabuses.

4) Points raised in general discussion

- Covering inter faith issues can often mean dealing with sensitive topics, such as Jerusalem or the Holocaust.
- Resources for sensitive topics are best produced by /in association with members of the faiths concerned.
- There is a lack of resources available for teachers tackling inter faith issues and in most cases materials have to be adapted for use in the classroom.
- There is a need for a database of resources and examples of good practice would be very useful.
- It is helpful if resources can be related to the local situation of the school and the community around it.
- It can be difficult to choose the resources to buy for a school. Advice on which resources are best value would be very helpful. Resource centres like that of the National Society are useful.
- Interviews and quotations from people of different faiths grouped by the same topic would be useful.
- Listening to the stories of pupils of diverse backgrounds is particularly valuable in the inter faith context.
- Videos are a very valuable resource.
- Suffolk Inter Faith Resource offer resources which include a board game called "Diversity".

¹The inter faith story of the creation of this event is described in a chapter by Harriet Crabtree in *The Churches' Millennium Experience: Challenging Time*, ed Stephen Lynas, Churches Together in England/Church House Publishing, 2001.

Annex B

Inter faith issues and RE seminar – 4 June 2001 List of Participants

AGOMBAR, Mrs Marian, Chair, NASACRE, RE Centre Field Officer, Honorary Lecturer in RE, School of Education, University of East Anglia

AMER, Dr Fatma, Head of Education and Inter Faith, Islamic Cultural Centre Regent's Park, Westminster and Brent SACREs

ANTLIFF-CLARKE, Mrs Elizabeth, Roman Catholic representative, Somerset SACRE

BANCE, Mr Gurparshad Singh, Sikh representative, London Borough of Tower Hamlets SACRE

BARCLAY, Mr Sean, Muslim member, Norfolk SACRE

BEKHRADNIA, Ms Shahin, Zoroastrian representative, Oxfordshire SACRE

BLAYLOCK, Mr Lat, Executive Officer, PCfRE

BOTELER, Ms Tessa, Co-ordinator, Interfaith Foundation

BROOKE, Revd. Jane, Deputy Chair, NASACRE

BURTON, Ms Linda, Church of England representative, Durham SACRE/RE Lecturer at Durham University

CHANA, Mrs Baldev Kaur, Sikh representative, Kingston upon Thames SACRE

CLEMENTS, Mrs Jane, Education Officer, Council of Christians and Jews

CRABTREE, Dr Harriet, Deputy Director, Inter Faith Network for the UK

DAVIES, Rev Philip, Church of England, Diocese of Peterborough Schools Officer, Rutland SACRE

DONOVAN, Ms Diana, Interfaith Foundation

ELSON, Mr Michael, Chief Examiner for Religious Studies, Edexcel and RE consultant

ERRICKER, Mr Clive, Chair, Shap Working Party on World Religions

ESTERSON, Mrs Zennia, Education Officer, Board of Deputies of British Jews

FAGEANT, Ms Jo, Adviser to Milton Keynes SACRE/Church of England Diocese of Oxford

FORD-HORNE, Mrs Linda, Bournemouth SACRE and Kinson Primary School

FRANCIS, Mr Dave, Associate Adviser to North Somerset SACRE and Chair AREIAC

GAN, Mrs Phiroza, Harrow Inter Faith Council

GENT, Bill, Senior Adviser and Adviser to Redbridge SACRE, Redbridge Advisory and Inspection Service

GOULDEN, Mr Simon, Chief Executive, Agency for Jewish Education

GRADY, Dr Alison, Chair, London Borough of Enfield SACRE

GRAVESTOCK, Mrs Charlotte, RE Adviser, East Sussex SACRE and LEA

GRINGRAS, Mrs Charlotte, Jewish representative, Bolton SACRE

GUILD, Mrs Liz, Schools Standards Officer and Adviser to Leeds SACRE

HAYWARD, Mr John, Chair of SACRE, London Borough of Islington

HUMFREY, Revd Canon Peter, National Adviser for RE, Roman Catholic Conference of Bishops for England and Wales

IBRAHIM, Mr Muhammed, Head of RE Southgate School Enfield and Muslim Educational Trust

IPGRAVE, Mrs Julia, RE Coordinator/Class Teacher, Uplands Junior School, Leicester

JACKSON, Mrs Freda, Primary Adviser, Wakefield LEA,

KAUR, Ms Manjit, Vice-Chair, Coventry SACRE and NASACRE Executive Committee member, Holbrook Primary School

KEAST, Mr John, Principal Manager for RE, Citizenship and PSHE, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

KENDALL, Ms Sue, Secretary, Shap Working Party on World Religions

LEDHAM, Mrs Gillian, SACRE member, Bracknell Forest

LEITH, Hon. Barnabas, Secretary General, Baha'i Community of the UK and member of LB Westminster SACRE

LEWIS, Mrs Elicia, Head of RE Preston Manor High School, Wembley, Middlesex

LOVE, Mr Bob, Vice Chair, London Borough of Greenwich SACRE

MAHMOOD, Mr Saiyed, Muslim representative, London Borough of Bromley SACRE

MARSHALL, Mr Jonathan, Buddhist representative on Plymouth SACRE and Co-ordinator of the Plymouth Religious and Cultural Resource Centre

MEADOWCROFT, Ms Eira, School Improvement Officer, Manchester SACRE

MICHELL, Mrs Cathy, Methodist representative Cambridgeshire SACRE/Head of RE, Hills Road 6th Form College

NANCARROW, Ms Roisin, Barnsley School Effectiveness Team, Advisory Teacher

NIJJAR, Mrs Ravinder Kaur, Scottish Joint Committee on Religious and Moral Education

PATTERSON-JONES, Ms Debbie, Marketing and Development Manager, Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations, Cambridge

PEARCE, Mr Brian, Director, Inter Faith Network for the UK

PENMAN, Revd Heather, R E Adviser to Church of England Diocese of Liverpool Board of Education and SACRE member

PETT, Mr Stephen, Chosen Hill School, Gloucester

PRIOR, Ms Lesley, Advisory Teacher for RE, Hounslow

RASHID, Mr Harun, Senior Education Manager, Wolverhampton and SACRE member

REAR, Ms Sumana, London Buddhist Vihara

RICHARDSON, Mr Norman, Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies, Stranmillis University College, Belfast and Secretary, Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum

SARPAL, Mr Kewal, NASACRE Executive Committee Member Executive and Hindu member of Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead SACRE

SETO, Mr Paul, Co-ordinator, Network of Buddhist Organisations

SHAW, Mr Michael, Chairman, Bedfordshire SACRE

SINGH, Mr Bhupinder, Information Officer, Inter Faith Network for the UK

SINGH, Mr Indarjit, Director, Network of Sikh Organisations

SMITH-ORR, Mrs Penny, RE Consultant, London Borough of Croydon LEA

STEVENS, Miss Patricia, Associate Adviser and RE Consultant, London Borough of Harrow

STOCKLEY, Ms Beth, Advisory Teacher for RE, London Borough of Brent LEA and SACRE

TEECE, Mr Geoff, Director of the RE Centre, University of Birmingham, Westhill and Secretary, NASACRE

THOMPSON, Ms Jan, Assistant Director of Education (Schools)/RE Adviser, Church of England Diocese of Rochester Board of Education/Bromley SACRE

TRIKHA, Mrs Kusum, Ofsted Inspector and Hindu member Bracknell Forest SACRE

UDDIN, Hon. Baroness

WHEELER, Mrs Patricia, RE and Spirituality Schools Adviser, Church of England Diocese of Worcester Board of Education

WILLIAMS, Miss Mary, Religious Education Adviser, Church of England representative on London Boroughs of Kingston and Lewisham SACRE and Church of England Diocese of Southwark Board of Education

WILSON, Mr John, Church of England Diocese of Manchester Board of Education

WINTERSGILL, Ms Barbara, HMI for Religious Education, Ofsted

WOOD, Miss Gillian, Free Churches' Education Officer

Mr Ayub Laher, Ms Rachel Bowerman, Professor Dawud Noibi and Imam Abduljalil Sajid were due to participate but unable to attend on the day.

ANNEX C

National Association of SACREs

In March 1993, representatives of SACREs met to set up and to constitute formally a National Association of SACREs. This followed the implementation of the Education Reform Act (ERA 1988) and the new powers and responsibilities entrusted to local SACREs. The new National Association (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.

At its launch NASACRE provided a mission statement, to which it still adheres.

NASACRE:

- Exists to strengthen local SACREs to support them in carrying out all their responsibilities.
- Considers that the work of SACREs and Agreed Syllabus Conferences should involve genuine consultation at the local level with faith communities and teachers.
- Seeks to maintain and develop lines of communication with the Department for Education and Skills and other relevant bodies.
- Seeks to promote inter faith understanding and sensitivity.
- Seeks to strengthen RE by promoting the key role of well-qualified teachers and advisers in all areas and facets of the subject.
- Seeks to promote professional development in RE through initial teacher training and in-service training.
- Campaigns for adequate levels of resourcing to achieve these aims.
- Intends to play a key role in any future debates about the place of RE and Collective Worship in school.

NASACRE holds an annual general meeting each year to which SACREs are invited to send representatives to discuss issues and concerns, and at which there is usually a guest speaker. There are also occasional forums to explore a topic in more depth. A regular newsletter is sent to the member SACREs informing them of developments, and there are currently a number of projects underway to facilitate the work of both NASACRE and local SACREs.

The Executive, which is elected by the members, meets three times a year, makes reports through the Newsletter, and members of the Executive are able to represent the interests

of SACREs at a number of national events and conferences, and take part in meetings of bodies such as the RE Council. They also welcome comments and contributions from their members which ensure they can make appropriate comments to represent the interests of SACREs around the country.

For more information, contact the Secretary, Geoff Teece, at
Westhill Religious Education Centre,
University of Birmingham
School of Education
Selly Oak Campus
Weoley Park Road
Selly Oak
Birmingham B29 6LL

ANNEX D

The Inter Faith Network for the UK

The Inter Faith Network for the UK was founded in 1987 to link inter faith initiatives and to develop good relations between people of different faiths in this country. Its members include the representative bodies of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian faiths; national and local inter faith organisations; and educational and academic bodies specialising in inter faith relations. It is run by Trustees of all the faiths whose representative bodies it links.

As we enter the 21st century, greater awareness about the faith of others in the UK is crucial. Ignorance can lead to prejudice and even to conflict. With its member bodies, the Network works to “advance public knowledge and mutual understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of the different faith communities in Britain, including an awareness both of their distinctive features and of their common ground” and “to promote good relations between persons of different religious faiths”. It does this by:

- Holding meetings of its member bodies, where social and religious questions of concern to the different faith communities can be examined together
- Setting up multi faith working groups, seminars and conferences to pursue particular issues in greater depth
- Proceeding by consensus wherever possible and not making statements on behalf of member bodies except after full consultation
- Fostering inter faith co-operation on social issues
- Running an information and advice service
- Publishing materials to help people working in the religious and inter faith sectors
- In consultation with member bodies, helping to provide contacts and participants for inter faith events and projects and for television and radio programmes

Further information about the Inter Faith Network, including the text of its code, *Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs*, can be found on its website: www.interfaith.org.uk or obtained by writing to the Network office.

The Inter Faith Network
5-7 Tavistock Place
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**The Inter Faith Network for the UK
in association with the National Association
of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious
Education**

£5.95

ISBN 1 902906 06 3



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