

## THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UK

### MINUTES OF MEETING OF THE FAITH COMMUNITIES FORUM

at 2pm on Wednesday 12 February 2020

at Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BD

**Co-Moderators:** The Rt Revd Jonathan Clark; and Mr Malcolm Deboo.

**Present:** Marigold Bentley (Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations); Ervad Yazad Bhadha (Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe); the Revd Philip Brooks (The United Reformed Church in the UK); Minister David Bruton (Spiritualists' National Union); Mr Mohinder Singh Chana (Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)); Ms Siriol Davies (Churches Together in England); Major David Evans (Salvation Army); Minister David Hopkins (Spiritualists' National Union); Ms Prudence Jones (Pagan Federation); Mr Hassan Joudi (Muslim Council of Britain); Mr Lamine Konate (Muslim Council of Britain); the Revd Dr Reynaldo F Leao-Neto (Methodist Church in Britain); Mr John Marder (Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)); Ms Katie McColgan (Inter Faith Council for Wales); Mr Manhar Mehta (Jain Network); Mr Dapo Ogunrinde (Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches (UK)); Ms Tara Patel (Hindu Forum of Britain); Venerable Bogoda Seelawimala (Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of GB); Dr Natubhai Shah MBE (Jain Network); Mr Vinay Shah (Institute of Jainology); Mr Anthony Silkoff (Board of Deputies of British Jews); Dr Lakshmi Vyas (Hindu Forum of Britain); Professor Dr Paul Weller (Interfaith Working Group of the Baptist Union of Great Britain); Mr Karl Wightman (National Spiritual Assembly of Baha'is); and Lynda Williams (Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations).

**In attendance:**

Mr Ashley Beck (for Agenda Items 4 to 10); Mrs Hannah Cassidy; Dr Harriet Crabtree; and Dr David Hampshire (for Agenda Items 1 to 3) (Inter Faith Network for the UK). Ms Jackie Behan (Government official) (for Agenda Item 3) and Ms Rupali Nahar-Williams (Keep Britain Tidy) (for part of Agenda Item 6).

**Apologies:** BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha; Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Churches Together in Britain and Ireland; Druid Network; General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches; Hindu Council (UK); Islamic Cultural Centre; and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK).

**Moderator apologies:** Mr Neil Pitchford; and Mrs Vinaya Sharma.

#### Note about nature of FCF minutes

The minutes of the main sessions of the meeting of the Faith Communities Forum of IFN (FCF) are made available beyond the FCF on the basis agreed by it in May 2017. The minutes follow FCF's agreed style: namely, points made by individuals are noted in the minutes and have the status of views of the individual who is present on behalf of their member organisation; any points agreed by the meeting are clearly identified as such. Comments are unattributed except where from the Chair or where the Executive Director or another staff member has been asked to give input or to provide a point of information,

or in particular contexts where the contributor has explicitly asked that their identity be noted. Within FCF meetings there is a chance for all bodies to contribute. Contributors carry responsibility for the accuracy of their contributions. Views expressed by contributors are not endorsed by IFN.

A copy of the Terms of Reference of the FCF is at <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/about/governance>. Before each meeting there is usually background material prepared for the items under discussion.

### **Agenda Item 1: Welcome**

1. The meeting began with a brief period of silence, remembering all those around the world working for harmony and cooperation.
2. Bishop Jonathan Clark reminded members that the Faith Communities Forum was a forum for member bodies of IFN in the category of national faith community representative body. It met three to four times a year and provided a chance for discussion of current issues of interest and concern. These issues were particularly, but not exclusively, relevant to inter faith relations and/or to living together in a religiously diverse society. It was a discussion, rather than a decision making, body.
3. Bishop Clark welcomed those present and in particular those who were attending a meeting of the FCF for the first time.
4. Apologies for absence were noted.
5. Bishop Clark reminded members that in, keeping with the FCF's decision about the nature of minutes, the minute covering this section of the meeting would be available to the public (unless the FCF requested a closed session). Minutes would, as usual, summarise points and these would be unattributed except for a general reference to a faith community where the community of the speaker was relevant to understanding the point.

### **Agenda Item 2: Round table introductions**

6. Those present introduced themselves.

### **Agenda Item 3: Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education**

7. Bishop Clark reminded those present, that in the light of members' interest in hearing more about different faith perspectives, IFN had been building into one FCF Agenda Item each meeting a 5 minute reflection. This related to an Agenda theme and was given by a representative of a different faith community member body each time about its bases for engaging with that.
8. He invited the Revd Philip Brooks of the United Reformed Church to offer a short opening reflection on the theme of relationships and education in the Christian tradition. A copy of his reflections, including his PowerPoint slides, is at Annex A to these minutes.

9. Bishop Clark thanked Mr Brooks for his reflections.
8. Bishop Clark then drew attention to the background information in the Background Note to the Agenda. He welcomed an official from the Department for Education (DfE), who offered a PowerPoint presentation. A copy of their presentation is at Annex B.
9. Bishop Clark thanked the official for their presentation and invited questions and comments. The following questions and comments were raised. Responses from the official are in italics.
  - It seems appropriate that sex education is only for secondary schools. The LGBT education could be embarrassing for students and teachers if it is not age-appropriate. Parents must be educated as well as students because children. *DfE wants to help parents engage positively. There seems to be a gap in terms of parental knowledge and confidence. The best schools are engaging with their community and supporting parents, for example through workshops or sharing useful books/leaflets. As well as online training for staff, there is also some face to face work.*
  - Is the position in Wales different? And, if so, why? *Yes, the position is different. Wales has just completed its public consultation and its changes are due to begin in 2022-23. In the guidance that they have published so far, they have changed the decision on the right to withdraw but they are committed to testing that with community groups, parents and schools before they implement it. The reason for the difference might be because they had different responses to their consultation but the group may wish to engage specifically with the Welsh Education department for more detail on the broad consultation. The DfE tried to find a good middle ground in England, to balance the views received, working with a headteacher as education adviser. In Wales they worked with an external academic, whose recommendations informed their thinking. Their evidence pointed to the importance of all young people receiving this education.*
  - Does the guidance give any importance given to community education? It seems as though there is nothing in the guidance about the work of SACREs. Volunteering and teamwork are very important. They help to strengthen communities. Mental health education is also very important and should be included. *Community is referenced in the guidance, and so is the importance of talking to children about the benefits of volunteering and playing a positive role in the community. Mental health is a core part of the subjects. Online safety and mental health were the areas where there were the strongest calls for change to the existing guidance.*
  - Has DfE prepared a package to explain the subjects to parents? A local school had provided some material to parents which was not very good. *The Government has not prepared any specific packages for parents. They are aware that parents would like more help and they have responded to parents request for information, for example they have published leaflets (including in different languages) to explain the changes to both parents of primary children and secondary aged children, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-sex-and-health-education-guides-for-schools>. They have also published a guide for primary schools to show good practice in engaging with parents, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/engaging-parents-with->*

[relationships-education-policy](#). Some of the bigger charities are doing more work in that area for example.

- It would also be helpful for faith communities to have more guidance to pass on.
- There could be some confusion because in point 37 it refers to “pupils being taught about LGBT” and also to “pupils to have been taught LGBT content”. There is a difference between ‘taught about’ and ‘taught content’.  
*This drafting point will be fed back.*
- How wide-ranging will the health advice be? Will it, for example, include information on complementary therapies, traditional Chinese medicine and ayurvedic medicine at secondary school? Surveys suggest 40-50% of people have used complementary therapies. The material could not of course be advocating but could information be included? *The Government sets out in the National Curriculum for science and in the statutory guidance for Relationships, Sex and Health Education what should be taught around health, for example cancer, dental health, and obesity. Schools have autonomy to build on that, but they must use evidence-based, medically-accurate information. Public Health England information is often used as an example. One of the key aims is that young people know where and how to get help outside of the classroom and that it is ok to get help for health issues.*
- The guidance contains material that some within some faith communities find very difficult indeed because there isn’t a consensus, even within individual communities, for example on teaching of LGBT issues or some relationship issues. There has been wide consultation but it is still, in some places, seen as a controversial change. There have been successive incidents where there have been protests at primary schools about addressing relationships or faith-based groupings encouraging parents to withdraw their children before the changes are implemented at secondary level. Given that this is challenging, what is the Department’s broad approach to taking this forward with conversations happening well? How will it be working with these complex issues? *DfE colleagues are working across Government Departments, including MHCLG and the Home Office, and with different faith communities and with local authorities. It is important to note that these events have been limited. It has not been a majority of schools. The issues in the Birmingham area were quite complex. DfE continues to work with those local authorities to support positive engagement. A lot of parents have concerns which they feel were drowned out in the protests and the media environment. Part of DfE’s support package is about enabling schools to have good conversations with parents. Parents aren’t always able to come to open evenings. DfE is trying to find best practice and share it to ensure schools have range of tools and opportunities to consider how best to engage with parents. Most schools note that where they do have the opportunity to talk to parents about what will actually be taught, they are often supportive of the aims of the guidance and understand the wider context it offers to support young people in the transition to adult life. It is important that people see what is in the guidance as there was some misinformation.*
- One way of engaging might be for schools to go to where people are rather than getting people to come to them. *This is happening in some areas and in terms of engagement with community groups. It could happen more.*
- Just as you were finishing your presentation you mentioned the Commission on Challenging Extremism’s report? *The Government will be publishing a response to the report of the Commission on Challenging Extremism.* [Note: At the end of

their presentation the official had said that they were going to mention the Challenging Extremism report. However, time did not permit that.]

- It is understood that each school needs to set its own policies on RSE, in consultation with local parents, in line with the statutory guidance. It seems, however, that some schools are waiting for their local authority to carry out a local consultation rather than doing it themselves. Is the DfE aware of this? Is the DfE supporting this approach? In London one local authority has been bypassing community leaders, holding its own meetings, and cutting across how community leaders are trying to help them. This has caused unnecessary concern. Does DfE have any plans to address these issues? *It is helpful to know where there are specific issues at local level. I'm happy for my email address to be passed on, so that you can send me details. Local authorities are sharing good practice and model policies to help schools, but schools are ultimately responsible for writing their own policies.*
- The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) has tried to be as supportive as possible. It does not want to see a repeat of what happened in Birmingham. DfE is working with the Association of Muslim Schools, but there has not been direct communication with MCB. If that would be helpful, MCB would be open to it. Yes, *that would be helpful.*
- Quakers substantially welcome the guidance. It has been a long time coming. Schools are under enormous pressure and faith communities, as stakeholders in the local communities, need to help them, rather than setting themselves against them. Quakers were very involved in creating the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the UK signed up to 30 years ago. The three primary areas of this are: provision, protection and participation. The participation element is not always obvious. Have young people participated in the consultation on the guidance, rather than them just being told what to do? Yes, *the Call for Evidence had a tailored version for young people. There was also a series of roundtables organised through young people's groups. The guidance notes that the participation of young people can be very helpful. DfE will continue to support good practice on youth engagement.*
- At a recent local inter faith meeting in a London borough issues were being raised about inconsistency around the speed of implementation of the guidance. This was in itself generating uncertainty. *That's helpful to know.*
- Has DfE given any attention in the guidance to mindfulness in schools from primary level? Yes, *it has. This could be taught within Wellbeing but it would be up to schools how they approach this in an evidence based manner and based on pupil needs. Colleagues might know more. This could be followed up.*
- What is the statutory timetable for the guidance? *It was passed into law last year and will be implemented from September 2020.*

10. Bishop Clark thanked the official again for attending and for their presentation.

*The Government official left the meeting.*

*Agenda Item 5 was then, by agreement, taken before Agenda Item 4.*

#### **Agenda Item 5: Speaking together peacefully to counter extremism and hate crime**

11. Bishop Clark reminded members that at its October meeting it had agreed that the present meeting should include discussion about an FCF expression of a 'desire for

talking peacefully together, as a counter to the narrative which attributes to the relationship between the religions violence, divisiveness and anger; and also a skeleton statement for consideration'. This agreement followed on from earlier discussion at its May meeting.

12. He drew attention to the draft Statement annexed to the Background Note, inviting FCF members to discuss this and consider what next steps they might wish to take. He thanked the Executive Director for providing the draft statement.
13. Dr Harriet Crabtree said that there was, of course, much that the FCF could say on this topic, but that the IFN office had had a specific brief in drafting the statement. In its early days IFN had produced a Statement on Inter Religious Relations in Britain (<https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/statement-on-inter-religious-relations-in-britain>) and also had a widely used Code on Building Good Relations With People of Different Faiths and Beliefs (<https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/building-good-relations-with-people-of-different-faiths-and-beliefs>). Both continued to be very relevant.
14. It had been understood that in this instance, the FCF was looking for a statement about how faith communities were working together, and were keen to do so and how they were keen to be in peaceful and productive conversation and not constantly at odds with one another in ways that the media and others sometimes presented them. The draft statement was therefore about the desire for being in positive discussion and the overall good track record. It also lifted up some of the areas where it had been acknowledged across the years that there were challenges. There were times when there were profound disagreements within and between faith communities. The issue of talking about each other's traditions in ways that did not cause division was also picked up. There would always be disagreements and this was not an attempt to suggest that there were no differences between communities. It was about lifting up the desire to talk, to be positive, to engage well, to learn from each other, contributing positively to a shared society, without hiding genuine differences. Towards the end of the statement were reflections on the hateful dividing that was currently happening and the lifting up of standing together. Careful language and terminology had been used throughout. The statement had built on material in past statements made by the Co-Chairs and Moderators and themes addressed in FCF meetings. The seventh paragraph, about scriptural teachings and foundational narratives, was however, a new area.
15. Following discussion, two amendments to the statement were agreed. These were to:
  - use the term 'faiths and beliefs' to replace 'faiths and none' and other similar drafted wording; and
  - find a way to include a reference to 'respectful' agreement or disagreement.
16. On the basis of these amendments, the FCF agreed the statement on 'Cooperation and Positive Coexistence'. A copy of the final version is at Annex C to these minutes.
17. It was agreed that the Executive Director would speak with the Co-Moderators and Co-Chairs to find the right way to launch the statement.



***Action: Executive Director to speak with Co-Moderators and Co-Chairs to find the right way to launch the FCF statement on 'Cooperation and Positive Coexistence'.***

#### **Agenda Item 4: Inter faith engagement and joint work of faith communities**

10. Bishop Clark explained that this was the regular round table sharing of news and reflections on the UK inter faith engagement of national faith communities, including the work that they were carrying out, or supporting, through their programmes and involvement of their members.
11. He drew attention to the information in the Background Note about the planned member national faith community body profiles; and the suggestion that they may wish to add material about their inter faith engagement to their own websites.
12. FCF Members were then invited to share briefly any news of inter faith projects or work of the bodies that they were representing that they thought might be of general interest. The following news was shared:
  - The Board of Deputies of British Jews (the Board) was continuing to work with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland on its series of Invest in Peace events. 21 had taken place so far. The Board held an event in partnership in January with the World Uyghur Congress, to ask how communities could unite to protect the Uyghur Muslim minority from persecution in China. Some of the Board's leadership had visited the central Sikh gurdwara in London and also the Hindu temple in Neasden.
  - The Pagan Federation had just re-appointed to the position of Inter Faith Manager and the appointee would be encouraging local Pagans to get involved in inter faith engagement locally. This role was in addition to existing Interfaith Liaison Officer role.
  - Supported by Religions for Peace (UK) and Faith for the Climate, the Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK) had been pursuing intra-faith activities, addressing the climate emergency. They had set up a group called Eco-Dharma and had recently held a one-day workshop on doctrinal bases for dealing with the climate emergency and actions that could be taken by Buddhists.
  - The Salvation Army had been responding to the United Nations request to provide homes for Syrian refugees and had provided homes for 5 Syrian families, all from Muslim backgrounds. Another 5 homes were planned.
  - The Church of England had published a document called 'God's Unfailing Word' which was an Anglican statement on theological perspectives on Christian-Jewish relations. This was the first time that a document of this nature had been written with this kind of authority. There were some things that were a bit controversial but it had already been very helpful in opening up conversations.
  - Conversations were being started by the Church of England with farming communities, to see whether there were young people from different faith communities interested in careers in farming.
  - The next Visit My Mosque day would be taking place on 21 June. This was a national campaign facilitated by the Muslim Council of Britain that encouraged mosques across the UK to hold an open day to welcome in their neighbours from all faiths and none.
  - This year's annual Whitley Lecture, held by the Baptist Union of Great Britain would be on 'Finding a Friend: A Baptist Encounter with Judaism'. Dates had

already been fixed for Oxford, Manchester, London, Cardiff and Bristol. The topic stemmed from the publication of a book, by the Centre for Baptist Studies in Oxford, called 'Peoples of God: Baptists and Jews over Four Centuries', which brought out some of the history of the re-admission of Jews to England for which Baptists had argued on the basis of religious freedom.

- Quakers were very involved in planning for COP26 in Glasgow. There was lots of information on their website for faith communities about getting involved. Quakers had been very involved with the Prevent strategy and with a number of inter-faith based human rights groups in relation to that. They had also been involved with an upcoming publication of the Council of Christians and Jews with and in revisiting, after 10 years, faith perspectives on equal marriage.
- The World Methodist Council would be honouring the Founder of City of Sanctuary UK movement, the Revd Inderjit Bhogal, former Director of the Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum, with its Peace Award, to be presented at Methodist Central Hall on 27 March.
- The Pagan Federation would be taking part in Celebration-Earth!, an initiative led by the Alliance for Religion and Conservation to mark the 60th anniversary of the Worldwide Fund for Nature. There would be a weekend of activity and a final celebration in September at St Albans Cathedral. Faith groups were invited to share and celebrate their environmental activities

*Ms Rupali Nahar-Williams joined the meeting.*

#### **Agenda Item 6: Current issues of interest or concern to faith communities**

13. Mr Deboo, taking the Chair, said that this Agenda Item offered an opportunity to raise current issues of interest or concern to faith communities in the UK.
14. He reminded members that, in keeping with the FCF's decision about the nature of minutes, this section of the minute would be made public (unless the FCF requested a closed session for all or part of it). Minutes would, as usual, summarise points and these would be unattributed except for a general reference to a faith community where the community of the speaker was relevant to understanding the point.
15. He noted that one topic that had been raised in advance by the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) was the "Keep Britain Tidy" annual spring clean campaign, which this year would run from 20 March to 13 April. Some faith community organisations, such as MCB, and inter faith groups had been involved in past years. Members might be interested to work together on an inter faith spring clean or to encourage their local groups to do so.
16. He welcomed Ms Rupali Nahar-Williams of Keep Britain Tidy (KBT) to offer a short overview of the campaign. A copy of her presentation is at Annex D.
17. He thanked Ms Nahar-Williams and invited any questions.
18. In discussion the following points were made. Responses from Ms Nahar-Williams are in italics.
  - Is KBT active in working for system change around, for example, packaging?  
*Yes. KBT is working hard around the Extended Producer Responsibility*



*scheme and Deposit Return Scheme which hold industry to account, so that the burden is not just on individuals.*

- How does the Spring Clean campaign fit with Earth Day on 22 April when people often do litter picking? Also, the word Tidy in KBT might be misinterpreted, as sometimes there is over-tidying in parks and gardens which can damage the environment. *KBT is about 60 years old so its name has become well-known over the years. Its work is not just at the superficial level of litter-picking, but is about systemic change, about how much we use and how much we produce.*
- Lots of places of worship have been getting involved in climate issues, such as eco-churches and eco-synagogues. These might be a really good way of getting more people involved in the Spring Clean campaign.
- There is often a lot of litter in parks, especially after a weekend of good weather. Is KBT doing any work with local authorities on this? *It depends on the location. KBT works with local authorities across the UK. A different team at KBT works on this and details can be passed on to them.*
- It is very sad that we such campaigns have to exist at all.
- There needs to be more education to stop people dropping litter in the first place. *Prevention is a central part of KBT's work. KBT has an Eco-Schools Network, in which about 20,000 schools are involved in the UK. Children are empowered to take action by contributing to the management of their own programmes and are actively engaged.*

18. Dr Crabtree said that the campaign was a very good opportunity to show faith communities working together. Swindon Inter Faith Group and other local inter faith groups in the North West and in Scotland were examples of places where people from different faith backgrounds had done clean ups together. It sent a very powerful message. Faith communities might want to encourage their community to take part locally, either in a planned event or by setting up an event. It was a way to create new friendships and demonstrate good inter faith engagement.
19. It was agreed that the Executive Director would speak with Ms Nahar-Williams about her producing 2 or 3 paragraphs that could be used by faith communities, including how to get involved in the Spring Clean Campaign and also how KBT's work fitted into the wider environmental issues. It was noted that IFN had been developing a strong relationship with Faith for the Climate, which linked and worked with organisations such as Eco-Church, Eco-Synagogue, the Bhumi Project and Eco-Sikh. The Executive Director would pass details on to Ms Nahar-Williams.
20. Mr Deboo thanked Ms Nahar-Williams again for attending and speaking about KBT's campaign.

**Action: Executive Director to speak with Ms Nahar-Williams about producing a short note for faith communities.**

**Action: Executive Director to pass Faith for the Climate details to Ms Nahar-Williams.**

21. Mr Deboo noted that the 26<sup>th</sup> United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP26, was due to be held in Glasgow from 9 to 19 November 2020 under the presidency of the UK Government. Inter Faith Week would be taking place during that time. It was very sad that there had been such dramatic climate change in the last few

decades that could have been prevented. He invited members to share any information about plans for their faith community involvement in COP26.

22. A participant noted that the Quakers had an office at the United Nations in Geneva and a staff member there had worked with faith communities for the last 4 years at international level, both around practice and political change. Most faith community leadership was represented at that level. Engaging at international level was important to achieve systemic change. Faith communities could participate by going to COP26 and taking part in events and fringe meetings, but, ideally, they would have conversations in their own communities about climate change – looking at how they could implement changes to help and what their scriptures said about the environment. Humanity needed to change dramatically to help future generations. Another participant had been in touch with the Quakers after Paul Parker's presentation at the FCF meeting and had then attended a conference in London.

*Ms Nahar-Williams left the meeting.*

23. In further discussion, the following points were raised. Responses from the Executive Director are in italics.
- Radicalisation is a big subject in the media. Could IFN perhaps take forward a project, which would take 2 to 3 years, creating a consultative document on radicalisation? It would be a great service to the nation. *Dr Crabtree said that it might not be possible for IFN to focus specifically on de-radicalisation, given its charitable aims. She had been corresponding with someone who was leading on the new Counter-Extremism Strategy at the Home Office and had also spoken with someone at the Commission for Countering Extremism. This was part of working towards the planned session on Extremism at a forthcoming FCF meeting. This could include de-radicalisation. She would be happy to speak with anyone who wished to have separate conversations about anything they thought should be included in that session. She had also been in conversation with Ms Rashmi Bhopla, Hate Crime Lead at MHCLG. There was criticism from within the FCF over the lack of prior consultation by Government with non-Abrahamic faith communities on the Government's current 'refreshed' Hate Crime Action Plan (following criticism of the Abrahamic nature of the examples in the first version of that Plan). This would be an opportunity to look at some of those issues.*
  - There was an ongoing concern with the BBC, of which IFN was aware. *Dr Crabtree said that Lord Singh of Wimbledon, of the Network of Sikh Organisations (UK) had asked for an item on the 'Role of the Inter Faith Network in relation to Freedom of religion and belief', which was related to that concern, to be on the Agenda for the present meeting. He had though not been able to attend and so it would be on the Agenda for the FCF meeting on 30 March. The point of principle that he had raised was reflected in the paragraph on scriptural teachings and foundational narratives in the statement that had just been agreed by the FCF.*

## **INTER FAITH NETWORK MATTERS SESSION**

[Paragraphs 24 to 34]

### **Agenda Item 9: Any Other Business**

35. None was notified.

#### **Agenda Item 10: Date of next meeting**

36. Mr Deboo thanked everyone for attending and for their contributions.
37. The next meeting of the FCF would be held from 11am to 4pm on Monday 30 March at the NCVO in London. This would be a longer meeting than usual because it included a session on one of the equality strands.
38. The following meeting would be on Thursday 25 June. The timing and venue for that meeting in central London would be confirmed separately.

18 May 2020

**OPENING REFLECTIONS FROM THE REVD PHILIP BROOKS  
OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH**

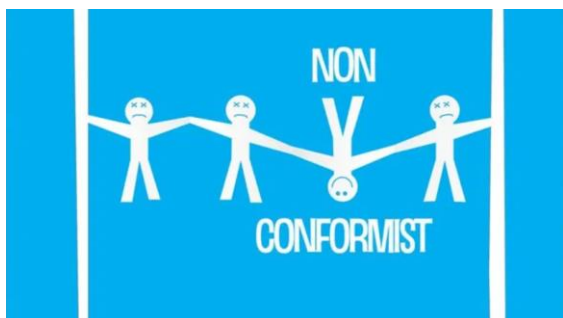
**‘RELATIONSHIPS AND EDUCATION IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION’**



1.

2.

The first thing to say is that the United Reformed Church represents just one part of a very diverse Christian tradition. We have our roots in the Reformation, the movement headed by such reformers as Martin Luther and John Calvin (Slide 2). They protested against Priestly authority in the Roman Catholic Church. So, we are Protestants.



3.



4.

But also non-conformists (Slide 3). My forebears refused to conform to the 1662 act of Uniformity, which compelled clergy to only use the Anglican prayer book (Slide 4). Over 2000 ministers were ejected for refusing. They and their congregations had to worship in secret. Being caught meant imprisonment or worse (Slide 5, a congregation about to be raided).



5.



6.

Happily, we now work very well with our Anglican and Catholic friends today. I'm a living example. My wife is Catholic.

Our history is profoundly linked to education. We weren't allowed to teach. Non-conformists were barred from going to University. Consequently, they were excluded from the professions. So, many became entrepreneurs and philanthropists, putting their riches back into local communities and caring for their workers. (Slide 6: Example of this is Port Sunlight, Liverpool, a village for the workers endowed by the Congregationalist Lord Leverhulme – the company ultimately became Unilever).

Alongside religious instruction, Sunday Schools provided basic education to children of the working class who otherwise would have received no education at all.

At its best, Christian non-conformity brought an understanding of what it meant to be excluded from society. The need to stand up for minority voices, a passion that no-one should be left behind.

And when the state eventually started to provide education for all, non-conformists churches largely gave up their faith schools and endorsed state education instead. We believed this allowed the Christian faith to have its place in the widest sphere of education.

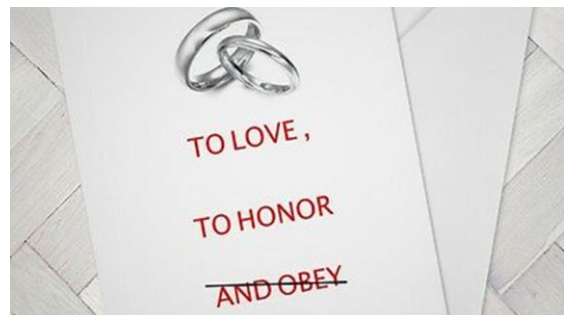
During my ministry in Bolton, I was a community governor for a state primary school. This link to secular education was important for the church, both for what we contributed and for what we learnt.

All churches hold the bible as central. Our emphasis is on discernment. Where is God in each new situation? God is at work in the world, so we need to learn from God's actions. We do this by asking critical questions and then reflecting on scripture and tradition.



We affirm our right and readiness, if the need arises, to make *new statements of faith*, in *ever new* obedience to the Living Christ.

7.



8.

(Slide 7) This sentence is included in every service of ordination: we affirm our right and readiness, if the need arises, to make new statements of faith, in ever new obedience to the Living Christ.

It is in that understanding of education, rooted in community and ongoing discernment of God's will, that changes happen. Marriage is one example of that.

(Slide 8) At our wedding in church my wife did not promise to 'obey' me, as she might have done not many years ago and despite the sections in the bible suggesting obedience of wives to husbands.

(Slide 9) It is possible to be married in church if you have been divorced. And although there are churches outside my tradition which still would not entertain remarriage, this

issue has not split the church. In Bolton one of my Anglican colleagues would not marry divorcees, but he was quite happy to co-exist with his fellow Priest who would.



Of course, the issue of same sex marriage is a more current one. As a community school governor and minister of a church which was very supportive of equal marriage, I could talk inclusively to all the children in my local school, knowing that many of them would have family members in same sex relationships, perhaps even their own parents.

In the United Reformed Church, we leave it to individual churches to decide whether to register for same sex marriage. As a denomination we have some churches who in conscience have registered and some in conscience who have not. (Slide 10) Here is one of our churches in Scotland featured on Songs of Praise last year. The minister received on-line abuse from within the Christian community after the programme was aired. Clearly, the Christian community has not yet reached the settled position achieved with remarriage.

Let me end with a simpler story of education. This weekend I spoke with a minister who had always wanted to crochet. (Slide 11) She asked Ethel, a member of her congregation to teach her. Ethel enthusiastically showed my colleague exactly how to hold the wool and which hand should be used for the crocheting needle.



She became exasperated though, when despite her instructions, her minister swapped the procedure round. You see the minister had been born left-handed. Once upon a time she would have been forced to use her right hand, but not today. This was too much for Ethel, who told her pupil, I can see you're simply not cut out for this.

Where we come from, our traditions, our backgrounds, hugely influence the way we see the world and the way we interact with those around us.



## Presentation by Department for Education official

### The importance of preparing young people for life in modern Britain

#### The introduction of Relationships, Sex and Health Education

It is very good to have the opportunity to speak to the meeting. DfE is very interested to hear the views of faith communities.

#### The Reforms

**The Reforms**

- Sustained calls for changes and updates to current the Sex and Relationships Education Guidance.
- Within Parliament, cross party consensus was building for the development of these subjects.
- Guidance shaped by substantial engagement process.
- Regulations were passed by House of Commons and House of Lords and signed into law.



  
 Department  
for Education

- The statutory guidance coming into effect in September 2020 replaces the previous Sex and Relationships Education guidance which by then will be twenty years old. Sex Education has been compulsory since 1993 in maintained secondary schools and the statutory Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) guidance was published in 2000. Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) is non-statutory but most schools teach it and these subjects usually sit within it.
- There have been some fairly significant changes in society and the lives of young people since then. The new guidance has a range of aims and areas of emphasis, but certainly raises the bar in comparison with the 2000 guidance on issues such as safeguarding, online safety and good practice, and mental health and well-being.
- An Ofsted report in 2013 said that these subjects were often delivered quite poorly in schools. There were calls from 5 different Select Committees, as well as police commissioners, children's commissioners, the Royal Colleges, faith groups, teachers' groups and parents groups, asking DfE to look at how the guidance met the challenges of modern life.
- The new guidance is the result of very widespread engagement with stakeholders, including faith communities. This began with a public call for evidence in December 2017. The call for evidence was split into two groups, adults (including parents; teachers; and other individuals and organisations) and young people and received over 23,000 responses. A public consultation then began in July 2018 on the draft regulations and statutory guidance and over 40,000 responses from individuals and organisations were received.
- Alongside the Call for Evidence, DfE engaged with a number of charities and with faith community groups which are part of its Education Forum. Engagement activities included amongst others the Catholic Education Service, Church of England Education Office, Board of Deputies of British Jews, Association of Muslim Schools, Christian Institute and Humanist and Secular groups.




- The regulations implementing the subjects were approved by both houses last year, and signed into law for implementation from September 2020. The majority of MPs (538) voted in favour of the regulations. There was a wide range of strongly held views on these subjects, which reflects the views of society. That meant a careful process of consensus building. We want to continue to proceed on that basis beyond September 2020 once the changes are implemented.

## The Requirements

**The Requirements**

- From September 2020,
  - **Relationships Education** compulsory for all primary age pupils,
  - **Relationships and Sex Education** compulsory for all secondary age pupils,
  - **Health Education** compulsory in all pupils in state-funded schools in England
- It is important that these subjects are embed as part of a whole school approach and align wider work and duties placed on school.
- Schools shouldn't start from scratch they should reflect on current excellent and evidence-based practice and build from there.


  
 Department  
for Education

- DfE's work just relates to England. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are all devolved in terms of education and each has its own curriculum.
- Health Education will be compulsory in all state-funded schools. PSHE is already compulsory in independent schools.
- The existing legislation and Sex and Relationships Education Guidance (2000) will continue to apply until September 2020, when the new legislation and guidance will take effect.
- The content set out in the guidance is intended to be taught either in specific lessons and at other opportunities in the school day or term, such as through assemblies. However, the subjects will be most effective when the key messages are aligned with other aspects of a school's work and it is important that schools deliver these subjects in a holistic, integrated way.

## Relationships Education (Primary)

**Relationships Education (Primary)**

- Building blocks: friendships, family relationships, and relationships with peers and adults.
- Features of healthy friendships, including online, respectful behaviour and boundaries explored.
- Giving a strong early understanding of the features of relationships that are likely to lead to happiness and security.

  
 Department  
for Education

- In primary there is a particular emphasis on teaching the building blocks of positive relationships, the basics of socialisation and considerate and respectful behaviour towards others.

- This includes the principles and practice of asking for and giving permission in age appropriate contexts, and the concept of rights to personal privacy, and respecting the privacy of others.

## Sex Education (Primary)

### Sex Education (Primary)

- Unlike Relationships Education, Sex education is not compulsory for primary schools but many primary schools may choose to teach some aspects of age-appropriate sex education.
- The Department continues to recommend that all primary schools should have a sex education programme tailored to the age and the physical and emotional maturity of the pupils.
- Where schools choose to teach sex education at primary, schools must consult parents about policy and content in this area. Parents have a right to withdraw their child from sex education at primary (but not from the national curriculum for science)



- On primary sex education, essentially the law has not changed. Sex Education remains optional, not compulsory, for primary school, though DfE continues now as previously to recommend that age-appropriate aspects of sex education are offered, and that support is given to the simple, basic information that pupils might be learning in science.
- If primary schools choose to follow this recommendation and teach aspects of sex education they continue to be required to consult with parents and clearly inform parents of their right to withdraw pupils from sex education.
- There is no legal right of parental withdrawal from the content set out in the statutory guidance for relationships education – this is because this addressed many of the aspects of relationships that all pupils need to know, such as building positive friendships and respect for all.

## Relationships and Sex Education (Secondary)

### Relationships and Sex Education (Secondary)

- Secondary content builds on the teaching at primary, but introduces content which is appropriate as young people mature.
- The emphasis moves from the experience of the child in the context of their family to the young person as a potential partner and parent.
- Effective RSE is set in context of wider personal development and the qualities we need to live fulfilled lives.

By the end of secondary school:  
Schools should continue to develop knowledge on topics in RSE required and in addition cover the following content by the end of secondary school

<b>Families</b>	<p>Pupils should know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• that there are different types of committed, stable relationships</li> <li>• how these relationships might contribute to human happiness and their importance for bringing up children</li> <li>• what marriage is, including their legal status e.g. that marriage carries legal rights and protections not available to couples who are cohabiting or who have married, for example, in an unregulated religious ceremony</li> <li>• why marriage is an important relationship choice for many couples and why it must be freely entered into</li> <li>• the characteristics and legal status of other types of long-term relationships</li> <li>• the roles and responsibilities of parents with respect to raising of children, including the characteristics of successful parenting</li> <li>• how to determine whether other children, adults or sources of information are trustworthy (e.g. when a family friend, intimate or other relationship is unclear) and to recognise this in other relationships and, how to seek help or advice, including reporting concerns about others, if needed</li> </ul>
<b>Respectful relationships, including friendships</b>	<p>Pupils should know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the characteristics of positive and healthy friendships (in all contexts, including online) including: trust, respect, honesty, kindness, generosity, boundaries, privacy, consent and the management of conflict, reconciliation and ending relationships. This includes different (non-romantic) types of relationship</li> </ul>



- RSE in this phase is designed to build on the content set out for primary. As children mature, there is a shift of emphasis towards the young person as a potential partner or parent, and so a consideration of intimate and sexual relationships is part of the content for secondary.
- A good understanding of the risks and benefits of the online world is a continuing priority at secondary as well as an understanding of the law in relation to these subjects. When we engaged with voices from different faith communities, the

common theme was the importance of talking about respect and the importance of talking about this in the context of the law.

### Health Education (Primary and Secondary)

#### Health Education (Primary and Secondary)

- Health Education gives the opportunity to drive up the consistency and quality of pupils' knowledge and understanding of mental wellbeing and physical health.
- Physical health and mental wellbeing are interlinked
- Health Education will include topics such as mental wellbeing, internet safety, healthy eating and basic first aid.



- At primary school, Health Education will focus on understanding and communicating about physical health and mental wellbeing and the characteristics of a healthy lifestyle alongside knowledge about online safety, healthy eating, bullying, basic first aid and self-care.
- There is quite a lot of content in this subject. Much of it is already delivered well.
- Secondary level builds on the knowledge acquired at primary and develops further pupils' understanding of health - such as how to discern whether information online is trustworthy, recognising signs of mental ill health, more complex first aid including CPR and age appropriate content on drugs and alcohol.

### Inclusive

#### Inclusive

- The subjects must be made accessible for all pupils. This is particularly important when planning teaching for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.
- In all schools, when teaching these subjects, the religious background of all pupils must be taken into account when planning teaching.
- Pupils should be taught about the society in which they are growing up and the law on relationships, sex and health. All pupils will be taught to understand, value and respect the diversity they will encounter.



#### Inclusive

##### Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT)

36. In teaching Relationships Education and RSE, schools should ensure that the needs of all pupils are appropriately met, and that all pupils understand the importance of equality and respect. Schools must ensure that they comply with the relevant provisions of the Equality Act 2010, (please see The Equality Act 2010 and schools: Departmental advice), under which sexual orientation and gender reassignment are amongst the protected characteristics.

37. Schools should ensure that all of their teaching is sensitive and age appropriate in approach and content. At the point at which schools consider it appropriate to teach their pupils about LGBT, they should ensure that this content is fully integrated into their programmes of study for this area of the curriculum rather than delivered as a stand-alone unit or lesson. Schools are free to determine how they do this, and we expect all pupils to have been taught LGBT content at a timely point as part of this area of the curriculum.



## Inclusive

### From the statutory guidance (primary)

#### Families and people who care for me

Pupils should know

- that families are important for children growing up because they can give love, security and stability.
- the characteristics of healthy family life, commitment to each other, including in times of difficulty, protection and care for children and other family members, the importance of spending time together and sharing each other's lives.
- that others' families, either in school or in the wider world, sometimes look different from their family, but that they should respect those differences and know that other children's families are also characterised by love and care.



Department  
for Education

## Inclusive

### Religion and belief, including teaching in schools with a religious character

19. A good understanding of pupils' faith backgrounds and positive relationships between the school and local faith communities help to create a constructive context for the teaching of these subjects.

20. In all schools, when teaching these subjects, the religious background of all pupils must be taken into account when planning teaching, so that the topics that are included in the core content in this guidance are appropriately handled. Schools must ensure they comply with the relevant provisions of the Equality Act 2010, under which religion or belief are amongst the protected characteristics.

21. All schools may teach about faith perspectives. In particular, schools with a religious character may teach the distinctive faith perspective on relationships, and balanced debate may take place about issues that are seen as contentious. For example, the school may wish to reflect on faith teachings about certain topics as well as how their faith institutions may support people in matters of relationships and sex.

22. In all schools, teaching should reflect the law (including the Equality Act 2010) as it applies to relationships, so that young people clearly understand what the law allows and does not allow, and the wider legal implications of decisions they may make.



Department  
for Education

- The entitlement to receiving good quality teaching of these subjects extends to all pupils, including those with special educational needs or disabilities, whether in mainstream schools or special provision.
- Although the content in the statutory guidance is organised by primary and secondary, there is a clear recognition that for some pupils with special needs, teachers will want to ensure content meets needs, for example in some cases continuing to focus on primary content beyond age 11.
- Schools are required by law to take the religious background of pupils into account when planning and teaching these subjects. That is very important. There are very good examples of schools delivering faith positive RSHE (which is what we call it in short form).
- It is important to look at the guidance as a whole.
- Schools are expected to introduce their pupils to content about LGBT relationships at an appropriate point, certainly by the end of secondary education. While it is not a requirement for primary schools, the statutory guidance for primary schools notes that pupils should know "that others' families, either in school or in the wider world, sometimes look different from their family, but that they should respect those differences and know that other children's families are also characterised by love and care".

**Faith positive examples**

**THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND EDUCATION OFFICE**

**Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education (RSHE) in Church of England Schools**

The Church of England Education Office faith-sensitive and inclusive approach to Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education (RSHE) is underpinned by two key biblical passages:

*So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them. (Genesis 1:27, NRSV)*  
*I have come in order that you might have life—in all its fullness. (John 10:10, QNB)*

Everyone will be treated with dignity as all people are made in the image of God and loved equally by God.

All pupils have a right to an education which enables them to flourish and is set in a learning community where differences of lifestyle and opinion (within that which is permissible under of UK law) are treated with dignity and respect; bullying of all kinds is eliminated; and where they are free to be themselves and fulfil their potential without fear.

**Some key principles**

The Church of England's Pastoral Advisory Group has set out some principles for living well together, accommodating difference and diversity within churches, especially in relation to LGBT+ people, which provide helpful context and principles for schools.

**Catholic Education Service**  
Supporting Catholic Education Since 1847

Criteria	Minimum Evidence Required
1. The RSE policy is consistent with the Catholic mission and ethos statement of the school/academy and in accordance with Catholic teaching. It includes an outline of provision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RSE policy in place approved by governors. Guidance for developing a policy and an exemplar policy can be found on the CES website.</li> <li>All relevant policies in place and approved by governors.</li> <li>Policies reviewed and signed off by governors every 1-2 years.</li> <li>Minutes of Governing Body meetings where approval has taken place.</li> <li>Statement regarding approach to RSE included in school's prospectus.</li> <li>Details of RSE curriculum are published on the school's/academy's web site.</li> </ul>
2. The school has an up to date RSE policy which takes into consideration appropriate statutory and non-statutory guidance.	
3. The school has the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Safeguarding policy.</li> <li>Confidentiality policy.</li> <li>Equalities policy.</li> <li>E-safety</li> <li>Guidelines for outside visitors.</li> </ul>	

**Department for Education**

- Some faith community bodies have produced resources for schools or for parents in relation to the new guidance, for example the Church of England have produced a charter and materials to use with governors/parents, the Catholic Education Service have a model curriculum and model policies, and the Muslim Council of Britain have produced a supportive statement to help clarify the subjects for parents.

## Parental Engagement

**Parental Engagement**

- Schools will be required to consult with parents when developing and reviewing their policies.
- Schools should listen to parents' views, and then make a reasonable decision as to how they wish to proceed.
- Engagement can help parents to understand how they can support what their child is learning in school with their own teaching at home.

**Understanding Relationships and Health Education in your child's primary school: a guide for parents**

**Relationships Education**

**Health Education**

**Your rights as a parent**

**Department for Education**

- Dialogue with parents enriches these subjects. It is important that schools listen to parents' views so that they can support learning at home as well. Where schools have positive engagement with parents, parents come back to them for support on how to teach the issues themselves and are more open about the issues they face.

## Positive personal attributes

**Positive personal attributes**

- A growing ability to form strong and positive relationships with others depends on the deliberate cultivation of character traits and positive personal attributes, (sometimes referred to as 'virtues') in the individual.
- In a school wide context which encourages the development and practice of resilience and other attributes, this includes character traits such as
  - helping pupils to believe they can achieve,
  - persevere with tasks,
  - work towards long-term rewards and
  - continue despite setbacks.
- Alongside understanding the importance of self-respect and self-worth, pupils should develop personal attributes including
  - honesty,
  - integrity,
  - courage,
  - humility,
  - kindness,
  - generosity,
  - trustworthiness and
  - a sense of justice.
- This can be achieved in a variety of ways including by providing planned opportunities for young people to undertake social action, active citizenship and voluntary service to others locally or more widely.

**Department for Education**

- These were very important to the faith community groups who were consulted.



## Implementation and School Support

### Implementation and School Support

- We are investing in a central support package which will include a new online service, featuring access, innovative training materials, case studies, an implementation guide and resources, available from Spring 2020.
- We are working closely with Early Adopter Schools, expert organisations, and teachers to develop this support.



- DfE is supporting schools in implementing the new guidance and providing online training materials and case studies to share good practice.
- Early Adopter schools are those schools which volunteered to trial the guidance a year early (which may include starting their planning early and for some it included developing some teaching early) and to engage with parents, so that their insight could help to inform the training materials.

## Wider policy

### Wider policy

Schools should ensure that the principles that underpin a “whole school approach” to wellbeing are threaded through wider statutory requirements/ duties already placed on schools for example safeguarding, SEND and behaviour.



- It's important for the subjects to be part of a wider school approach, for instance in relation to safeguarding.

## Useful links

### Useful links

**Statutory Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education guidance** – schools will be required to have regard to this from September 2020.

**Current SRE (2000) guidance** – schools can teach to the new subjects but must continue to have regard to the SRE guidance until September 2020.

**Guides for parents** and **FAQs**

**Teaching online safety in schools** - new non-statutory guidance which aims to support schools in teaching pupils how to stay safe online within new and existing school subjects, such as Relationships and Health Education (Primary), Relationships, Sex and Health Education (Secondary), Citizenship and Computing.

**Advice for primary schools** on engaging parents positively in the development of their Relationships Education policy, produced with support of NAHT, ASCL and NGA.



- There are a number of useful links, including the guides for parents.

- The material for primary schools on engaging parents positively was produced in association with the National Association of Head Teachers, the Association for School Leaders and the National Governance Association.



## **A STATEMENT BY THE FAITH COMMUNITIES FORUM OF THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UK**

The Inter Faith Network for the UK has, since 1987, linked and worked with faith community representative bodies, inter faith organisations and educational and academic bodies with a shared commitment to deepening understanding about and between faith communities and to good inter faith relations.

The national faith community bodies in membership of IFN meet regularly as the Faith Communities Forum. The Forum has become concerned in recent times about the way in which relationships between religions are so frequently described in negative terms and offers the following reflections.

### **COOPERATION AND POSITIVE COEXISTENCE: FAITH COMMUNITIES IN THE UK**

“Our United Kingdom and its individual nations are home to people of many different faiths and beliefs.

As faith communities, each with our own traditions and beliefs, we affirm strongly the value of harmonious coexistence, of values that are shared and of cooperation for the common good.

Through the Inter Faith Network for the UK and through other routes, we work together increasingly closely on social projects and we have a deep commitment to dialogue.

There are some who would spin a narrative about faith communities as in opposition to each other, and as a divided and divisive force. We reject this narrative. Relationships can experience strain, for example due to particular events here or overseas or disagreements over particular issues, but the overall engagement of faith communities at UK, national and local level is positive.

We welcome the chance to be in respectful and positive dialogue with others of different faiths and beliefs as part of developing and strengthening mutual understanding as well as for helping work through difficult aspects of shared past histories or of contemporary events.

There are, of course, within some critiques of faith traditions, charges that we should not lightly dismiss. We acknowledge that there are many instances in history, and in the present time, when religious traditions, or particular groups of their followers, have acted wrongly – through waging war, persecution of those of other faiths and beliefs, or through failures such as to protect victims of abuse. We have sought – and continue to seek – to address these issues and to help our respective communities to do so.

Many religious traditions have, in their scriptures or in their foundational narratives about episodes in their history, references to the beliefs of other religious traditions and actions of some of the members of those. Sometime these are of a difficult nature. While there cannot be an expectation of faith communities that they excise particular scriptural teachings or that they not to mention periods in their history (or histories written by others) where, for example, they resisted persecution of themselves and other groups,

Careful explanation of context is very important. Thus, for example, the Council of Christians and Jews has worked for many decades to help Christians and Jews understand the context of the references to Jews in the Christian New Testament and to seek to ensure that these and non-scriptural historical Christian texts do not feed into a negative view of Jews.

A matter of profound concern to us as well as others is individuals using writings from within their own traditions out of context, twisted and turned to extremist purposes, including terrorist murder, for which there is no justification. As faith communities we must call such people to account. There must also be redoubled efforts to ensure that followers receive teaching that is authentically part of their tradition and understood in its full context – including the bases for positive relations with those of other faiths and beliefs.

We are committed to dialogue and also to encouraging careful exploration of history and exposition of texts as part of mutual learning. We also underline the vital importance of good religious education in schools and of education for inter faith understanding in other contexts such as HE, FE and workplaces. Education is a bulwark against prejudice – as well as the door to a wider understanding of the world around us.

In these reflections, we have focused particularly on perceptions and realities of relationships between faith communities in the UK. These relationships can be affected by many factors. We are particularly concerned at this time about prevalence of divisive rhetoric, hate speech and rising hate crime. There are those who are actively seeking to drive a wedge between communities, to divide and to foment prejudice and hatred.

We stand together in the face of such destructive actions and in support of those affected. We encourage all to join us in working for greater understanding, for cooperation and positive coexistence and, in the words of IFN's vision, "a society where there is understanding of the diversity and richness of the faith communities in the UK and the contribution that they make; and where we live and work together with mutual respect and shared commitment to the common good."

21 February 2020

## **Presentation by Rupali Nahar-Williams of Keep Britain Tidy on the Great British Spring Clean**

- First and foremost, thank you so much for having me here to give you a whistle stop tour of Keep Britain Tidy and the Great British Spring Clean. My own academic background and personal interests lie in religious and societal studies so I'm thrilled to be here.

### Great British Spring Clean

- We are the nation's best loved environmental charity and the foremost organisation working to tackle the litter and resource crisis. The Great British Spring Clean is a campaign we run across the country engaging a real cross section of society to get involved in local environmental issues, that's through removing harmful litter and plastic from their areas. Bodies that take part are everyone from schools to other charities to, of course, faith groups.
- This is the 4<sup>th</sup> year we've run the campaign, and it's already shaping up to be our biggest yet. Last year we had over half a million volunteers take part picking up over 4,300 tonnes of litter. This year we want 600,000 and two weeks in, we've already had 150,000 people pledge their support.
- The Spring Clean is officially the single largest mass-action environmental campaign but apart from that, what makes the Spring Clean special? Well, quite bluntly, we're facing a bit of a crisis. To put this in figures - as a planet, we're consuming 3 earth's worth of resources every year. Environmental issues and in particular local issues have never been higher on the public or political agenda, yet as gleaned from our research, there is a huge disconnect between how concerned people are by plastic pollution, and how many people had acted on this – that's 91% concerned but only 22% of people acting on this – that's quite a profound level of cognitive dissonance.
- Environmental issues, and in particular waste and resources, truly impacts us all. And to achieve real change we all need to work together. It is this sentiment that is at the heart of the campaign – uniting people on a joint mission to tackle something that's as harmful as it is unsightly. Enabling people to take pride in their areas and communities, facilitating the opportunity to act on principles of stewardship to benefit your fellow neighbours. Not least to bring people together to reflect on issues of excessive consumption, waste and community.

### Getting involved

- This year's campaign runs from 20 March to 13 April.
- As an individual, you can pledge to pick up litter for a certain number of hours – that could be as simple as picking up some litter on your route to work.
- You can join a pre-existing clean-up in your area - we've got 5,000 registered already - or host your own via registering through our website. We've partnered with local authorities across the country which means there's no financial cost to hosting a clean-up - local authorities will provide resources such as litter picks
- You can become an official campaign partner and supporter, through which Keep Britain Tidy can support you with social media resources and so forth. That is probably best discussed on a 1-2-1 basis so please do contact me.
- Last but not least, you can show your support on social media. We've found this is a great way to get key stakeholders to engage with our work. This year we've

already had 200 MPs pledge their support to the campaign and 125 join our parliamentary group, so it's always fun to get them involved in local clean-ups should you be interested in hosting one.

- To end, and frame it all from my own Muslim background, it is narrated that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, told us that the best of deeds are ones that are small and consistent, and this really defines our thinking at Keep Britain Tidy. United in a campaign, together these small actions can be momentous.