

# Young People and Inter Faith Engagement: Making a difference together



Report on the 2018 National Meeting







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Report on the 2018 National Meeting

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Pride Park Stadium, Derby

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# Welcome and opening remarks

The Rt Revd Richard Atkinson OBE  
Co-Chair, Inter Faith Network for the UK

*The meeting began with a period of silence, remembering the needs of the world and all who work for inter faith understanding, including the meeting participants and their colleagues.*

**Bishop Richard Atkinson:** Welcome to the 2018 National Meeting of the Inter Faith Network for the UK. It is good to have representatives from around 70 of IFN's member bodies present today.

As we all know, this year's National Meeting focuses on young people's engagement in inter faith activities, promoting understanding and cooperation. It is the culmination of around 8 months' work by IFN on this theme looking at:

- different ways that young people are taking part in inter faith activities;
- what are key questions and challenges in developing this;
- ideas and perspectives of young people about inter faith activity and how this contributes to a more harmonious and just world;
- new approaches that could be valuable; and
- what youth related strand IFN should consider including in its 2019-21 Strategic Plan.

It is, of course, not the end of the process, just an important stage as we go forward.

A special 'call to action' paper emerging from that process has already been sent to you and will be discussed during the day [the paper is at Annex A to this report, on page X]. Many of the young people who have taken part in the project are present and will be playing an active role. Very importantly, the day will be the occasion for the launch of another fruit of this programme: the new expanded and updated edition of IFN's publication *Connect: a youth inter faith action guide*. The meeting is, of course, for IFN members and guests of all ages! Ways of connecting between generations has been a key issue considered.

The meeting is an opportunity for IFN and its member bodies to consider their work in relation to these issues.

IFN is grateful to all the organisations and individuals who have contributed to the process leading up to the National Meeting and to those whose support has helped make it possible: the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government; the Golden Tours Foundation; the Inter Faith Youth Trust and the Mulberry Trust. We are delighted to have with us today: Kesh Morjaria and Nitin Palan from the Golden Tours Foundation; and Bhupinder Singh from the Inter Faith Youth Trust. A staff member from MHCLG had hoped to attend but has been asked to assist with urgent business.

We also have an excellent array of presenters and facilitators and a great deal of knowledge and experience so we hope it

will be an enjoyable and interesting day with much opportunity for shared learning.

It is also very good to be here at the Derby County Football Club. The Club has a long history of community work and its community foundation, the Derby County Community Trust, has a stall here today so that participants can learn more about its work.

As you will have noticed, one key person is missing today. Dr Harriet Crabtree, IFN's Executive Director, is unwell. She has had some hospital treatment and is now recovering. As you can imagine, she is particularly sorry not to be here. We miss her greatly and send her our good wishes for a quick and full recovery.

The theme of today is really important. We need good inter faith activity which is inter-generational, drawing on the insights of all. This is a good opportunity for people of different generations to cherish one another's contribution. Those of us who are a little bit older need to ensure that we are in listening mode and are open to being challenged and changed in the encounter. That should be the quality of our engagement, whoever we are.

As some of you know, earlier this year I had three months' extended study leave. For the first part of this I spent eleven days travelling around India with Nitin Palan, a fellow IFN Trustee. We both survived! We saw a number of areas of India. I took Nitin to church, he took me to temples and together we met His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The highlight for me was, however, the fact of being for an extended time in the company of someone from another faith tradition – one that I value highly. We had the opportunity to sit together, to travel together, to talk together, to pray together, to explore scriptures together – and to listen to one another and engage not just with peripheral matters but also deep issues in our lives and in the world. Thank you again, Nitin. It reminded me that real listening and real engagement and travelling deeply together is something

very special. That is what we seek to do today and I know we will achieve that.

Hearing the voice of the young is vital. I always like the words in the Rule of Saint Benedict which is followed by the Benedictine community. In Chapter 3, which is about taking counsel, it includes these words:

*The reason we have said that all should be called for counsel  
is that the Lord often reveals to the younger what is best.*

Maybe those are words that we can hold before us as we tackle this year's theme.



# A welcome to Derby from the Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby

Qazi Abdul Mateen, a Trustee of the Centre, and  
Kiran Singh, a PhD student at the University of Derby

**Bishop Richard Atkinson:** It is very good to welcome Qazi Abdul Mateen, a Trustee of the Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby and Kiran Singh who is a PhD student at the University. Anisha Johal was due to be with us, but unfortunately is not able to be here, and so we are grateful to Kiran for stepping in to take her place.

**Kiran Singh:** What is 'faith'? It is fair to say, and we can all agree, that there is no one translation, interpretation or definition of 'faith'. On the other hand, 'inter faith' is something that can be better defined. 'Inter faith' is a 'working together', a collaboration, a networking, and a celebration of humanity and community. So, whilst inter faith recognises difference, and we should work hard to understand those differences, it also celebrates our similarities and thus brings us closer together. And that is why we are honoured and really pleased to welcome the Inter Faith Network for the UK's National Meeting here to Derby, because those same values of humanity, community and celebration sit very well with us. So, a very warm welcome from the university, the city of Derby and the community!

In terms of the academic side, we are currently undergoing a period of review. For this review process, we are carrying out some research which evaluates exactly how far we have come in terms of inter faith in the last 10 years, ie since the Multi-Faith Centre first opened. We are doing this for two reasons. Firstly, to identify good practice so we can take this out into the

wider community. Secondly, to understand, if communities are not 'inter faithing', then why not and what we could do to help with our newly acquired knowledge of good practice, which of course would be local and specific. So to have you all here today is wonderful because it adds to and enriches the conversation we are having in Derby currently. I hope you enjoy the rest of the meeting and your time in Derby.

**Qazi Abdul Mateen:** Thank you very much, Kiran. I'm sure if 'inter-faithing' is not a real word, Kiran will get it added into the dictionary as she is doing a PhD on Shakespeare!

I am here to just introduce the Multi-Faith Centre and welcome you all to this beautiful city, especially with today's amazing weather.

As mentioned, I am a Trustee of the Multi-Faith Centre. I am also a Director of Education at Derby Jamia Mosque and an Imam. We are honoured to have you here and thank you for choosing our city. We are proud that the Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby is one of the first such centres in Europe and the second centre in the world that has been purpose built with its own building and team.

Inter faith work is very important and we live in challenging times. Derby is very diverse and there are people from many different communities. There are 72 different languages spoken across the

schools in Derby and there are many faiths. The Multi-Faith Centre is a centre of the community that brings everyone together. It has provided space for people to have dialogue and come to understand each other better which helps tolerance. There is a programme of events throughout the year including multi faith walks and dialogue events, such as Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Young people are often asked about multi faith and inter faith issues. But what about people of no faith? As Kiran said, it is not just about faith. It is about humanity. Every faith definitely understands and believes this. Certainly in Islam we believe that faith or religion comes to protect the values of humanity. So humanity was first and then came religion. If you look at the scriptures, the stories of Adam were there first and then the rules and regulations and faith and belief came later. Our values of humanity bring us together. We might have differences in faith and in what we believe, but, as human beings, we all have the same needs, the same fears, the same desires and we are actually exactly the same. If you strip us down to our souls, our souls are made out of light and light has no colour and therefore no differences.

Again, thank you very much again for coming here today and welcome from the Multi-Faith Centre.

**Bishop Richard Atkinson:** Thank you Qazi Mateen for your welcome and for reminding us of the history and work of the Multi-Faith Centre as well as the tradition of engagement here in Derby.

# The IFN Young People and Inter Faith Engagement programme

**Padideh Sabeti**

IFN Trustee and member of the Baha'i community

**Bishop Richard Atkinson:** We now have an opportunity to catch up with the work that IFN has been doing in relation to the theme of young people. I am delighted to introduce Padideh Sabeti, an IFN Trustee and a member of the Baha'i community. With Jaskiran Kaur Mehmi, she has co-facilitated the Advisory Group which helped to develop the *Connect* guide and the Call to Action paper that you have today [Annex A]. Padideh is going to speak about the project and offer reflections about the importance of faith communities supporting and encouraging youth engagement.

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

**Padideh Sabeti:** Good morning. I have had the good fortune to serve on IFN's Youth Inter Faith Engagement Advisory Group and I've thoroughly enjoyed and learned a lot from serving alongside a group of young people.

Firstly, I will talk about the context of the time that we live in and link it to the importance of IFN's youth initiative; then there will be a brief introduction to the programme itself. I will try and provide you with some key points and an overview of the methodology, which I hope will be of interest to you all.

Afterwards we have a Question and Answer session – but please direct your difficult questions to Ashley, Zac, David,

Mike and, in particular, Jaskiran! Truly, the main work on this initiative has been carried out by young people. The ideas have come from them and I have been grateful to learn from them.

## Context

For the inter faith practitioners and organisations here, who have their finger on the pulse of our society, I am sure that the theme of the youth initiative does not come as a surprise. This is because over recent decades we have seen a drastic shift in the religious landscape. This change has implications for our inter faith activities, which I am sure we have all experienced. This is not the time or the place to go through all the factors but it is fair to point out that societal movement toward a more secular orientation, cases of extremism and terrorism have all influenced public perception of religion. Changes in communications have also had some impact. It is very interesting to observe that, in spite of often negative media coverage of religion, academics have recorded an increase in inter faith activities. For me, and for my tradition, I would like to believe that we can always turn crisis into victory. It is important to reflect, and not just focus on negative aspects.

In 1987 IFN recorded nearly 30 local inter faith organisations in the UK. By 2000, there were over 70. By 2004 this had risen to 180 and by 2011 to around 230. And the numbers have continued to rise. So,

numerically, we are able to quantify the progress of the inter faith movement, which is wonderful. Qualitatively, there has been a shift from a scholarly approach, or dialogue based one to a movement that has engaged people at a grassroots level and in more recent years we have witnessed multi-faith action based activities gathering momentum. Here is an important link with young people because IFN has found through its surveys and studies that young people have expressed a wish for more action-based initiatives.

In terms of communication we have really powerful tools which can contribute to advancing this movement. For young people communicating through social media is second nature. It is bringing fresh ideas, empowering youth and really providing the environment for universal and inter-generational participation.

Historically, IFN has always tried to engage with young people. In 2014 it held an event called *Young Voices, Young Agents for Change* bringing together young people and youth inter faith practitioners. It has worked with bodies such as the Religious Education Council to encourage multi faith religious education which includes teaching skills for inter faith encounter. In the Call to Action paper [Annex A] you will see some examples of advancements that have been made in this area. In 2002 IFN held the first ever national inter faith forum for young people as part of the celebrations for The Queen's Golden Jubilee. In 2004 IFN produced the *Connect* youth inter faith action guide, which was the first of its kind. If you compare the old version of *Connect* with the new edition being launched today you can see how much experience has been accumulated and captured. One of the functions of IFN is to act as a mirror and reflect the progress of the inter faith movement. This will incidentally allow us to become more systematic and apply the learning.

## Current programme

The overarching aim of the current programme on Young People and Inter

Faith Engagement was to engage a greater number of young people in inter faith activities. Two of the tangible outcomes are the *Connect* guide being launched today and also the Call to Action paper [Annex A] which, hopefully, will stimulate a lot of discussions today. The fruit of those discussions will be collated and will help inform IFN's future strategic planning in this area.

## Methodology

In terms of the methodology, the first tool used was a questionnaire that was circulated to over 500 organisations, including IFN's member bodies. The responses provided the bases for many of the case studies in the *Connect* Guide.

Five focus groups for young people were held in Birmingham, Cardiff, Glasgow, Leeds and London. I attended the first of these in Birmingham. I want to say more about how this process of dialogue has moved on and how it has expanded my understanding of having a dialogue. I must also pay tribute to IFN, the young staff who attended provided a safe environment, where we could witness for ourselves how people were comfortable talking about difficult issues and offer their thoughts and suggestions for the way forward.

Another tool used was social media. Three simple polls were posted on Facebook and Twitter asking young people questions about the significance of inter faith activity.

There were also three visits to schools, which I found very fascinating. I encourage you to have a look at the document which includes information about the visits. Mr David Hampshire, who has a great deal of experience working with schools, took the lead on that.

## Key findings

I do not think it will come as a surprise that one of the key findings is that young people are motivated to get involved in inter faith activities in order to tackle wider issues- they have expressed a wish to make a

difference and build a better society. This is an indication of the potential of young people and how far we have come with inter faith as a tool for contributing to the betterment of our society.

There is no time to read out the names of all the wonderful young people who were involved with the Advisory Group. I am

grateful to them and grateful to have been part of this process. Thank you.

**Bishop Richard Atkinson:** Thank you, Padideh, for giving us this overview of the Connect journey. And thank you again to you and Jaskiran for co-facilitating the Advisory Group.





- **RE Council** to encourage multi faith religious education which includes teaching skills for inter faith encounter.
- In 2002 IFN held **the first ever national inter faith forum for young people**, as part of The Queen's Golden Jubilee celebrations.
- In 2004, IFN produced **the Connect youth inter faith action guide**
- Youth participation **in Inter Faith Week**
- In 2014, IFN held an event **Young Voices, Young Agents for Change** which brought together young people and practitioners running inter faith projects with young people.



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## Methodology

IFN's Board established an Advisory Group to help take the project forward.

**Questionnaire**- learning from a wide range of people and bodies running inter faith activities with young people.

## Tools & components

- **5 Focus Group sessions** were held for 16-25 year olds- Birmingham, Cardiff, Glasgow, Leeds and London.



3 simple 'poll' questions posted

Facebook

Twitter,



Why do you think inter faith activity is important?

## Visits to schools



## Key findings

CONNECT

- **young people were more motivated to get involved in inter faith activity by 'big' issues like a desire to make a difference or build a better society**, than personal factors like making friends or developing leadership skills (although these were still important).
- Many of the young people also commented on the value of things like speakers from different faiths visiting their schools, or visiting other places of worship. The 'call to action' paper reflects this.
- Some young people mentioned the important role of their own faith community structures in lifting up their voice, including through structures like 'youth councils'.
- Others mentioned the important role of faith leaders in championing inter faith activity and encouraging participation.



# Young people and bridge builders now and for the future: the importance of opportunities for learning

**Parhin Begum**

Inter Faith Development Officer, Blackburn with Darwen CVS

**Bishop Atkinson:** We are now very pleased to have three young people speaking, each of whom will be talking about the different ways that they have become involved in inter faith activity and the importance of opportunities for this. There will be time for questions and comment after they have all spoken.

Firstly, Parhin Begum will be speaking to us. She is the Inter Faith Development Officer for Blackburn with Darwen CVS.

**Parhin Begum:** Special greetings to everyone here at this gathering. With the time that I have been given, I will try my best to offer an extensive background of my work in inter faith activities.

In the course of secondary school, I attended three different all-girls Islamic schools. The demographic of the school was further narrowed as the pupils were predominantly South-East Asian Muslim girls, so not very diverse in ethnic origins either. So, you can imagine how monolithic this culture and singular this environment was for me. It was only when I progressed to Blackburn College at 17 years old that I first encountered people of diverse faiths, cultures and backgrounds. Don't get me wrong, it was not how you're thinking, like Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz entering an alternative fantasy world. But, it was from

here that I began to get involved with people who come from different walks of life. The experience opened up whole new opportunities for me and it allowed me to make friendships with people who held different beliefs and values to me.

Then an opportunity came up to participate in an inter faith youth project. I was approached by my tutor who encouraged me to get involved, I thought, "Yeah, why not, perhaps I'll use this as an avenue to settle into my new environment". It was the most enriching experience for me at that time. I met young Jewish people for the first time, I shared nights with staunch atheists and I cooked together with different Christians. It was amazing, and we got a free trip to South Africa at the end of it, so I was not complaining!

This experience was an eye-opener for me, I remember returning home and contemplating that whole summer. It made me realise how narrow-minded my community – any community – can be. We are often enclosed in our own little bubble so that it is easy for us to develop assumptions and prejudiced thoughts about other people who believe differently to us, because we do not make enough effort to get to know them. When we live in a multi-cultural or a multi-faith society, we are sometimes just living

alongside the other community but not with them. We have a perception of them, based on what we read or see in the media, and we think we have got them all figured out. Sometimes, we might not understand them, we might fear them, or we might find them strange but we don't make an effort to get to know them. And this is how in most cases animosities or misunderstandings brew in our communities.

With this in mind, I went to proceed with my education by doing a BA Honours degree in Religion, Culture and Society at the University of Central Lancashire. It was important for me to be educated about alternative beliefs because I understood that a lack of this understanding has been a source of conflict in my own hometown alone. Especially, in reflection of many atrocities in the past, there has been a reaction of mistrust, hate and misunderstandings in our communities, which has previously led at times to violence and marginalisation of particular community groups. Therefore, I was determined to teach others what I myself have learnt from my inter faith dialogue experience.

Many of you are perhaps aware of how my hometown, Blackburn with Darwen, has recently been identified as a pilot area for the Government's integration strategy. If Blackburn is not known to you for its famous team Blackburn Rovers, then you have probably watched the recent BBC Panorama show 'White Fright' that highlights the separation of the white communities and the South-East Asian communities living in Blackburn. They just make it seem like there are two ancient tribes living in Blackburn that just hate one another. A lot of grassroots-level organisations' efforts go unnoticed. There are lots of local charities, projects and agencies in Blackburn and Darwen who have, for many years, worked together to build the bridges between people of different faiths and cultures. I am currently working with one of them, Blackburn with Darwen Interfaith Forum. We work together to provide an opportunity for people of

different faiths to discuss issues of shared concern and to promote understanding and co-operation, recognising the common issues facing communities across faith boundaries as well as identifying the problems of marginalised and socially excluded groups. With the Interfaith Forum, I want to encourage effective engagement between people of different backgrounds that contribute to the development of a peaceful and a just society in which people of different faiths and beliefs coexist harmoniously and work together for the common good.

I hope to educate people to understand our differences and to celebrate our similarities.

Our different religious traditions offer us many resources for this and teach us the importance of good relationships characterised by honesty, compassion and generosity of spirit.

As it says in IFN's code, it is important to recognise that "the truest fruits of religion are healing and positive. We have a great deal to learn from one another which can enrich us without undermining our own identities.

Together, listening and responding with openness and respect, we can move forward to work in ways that acknowledge genuine differences but build on shared hopes and values."

And, through the efforts and the initiatives of inter faith dialogue, we hope to achieve a society that is stronger together.

**Bishop Atkinson:** Thank you, Parhin, for that personal journey.

## Antony Hamilton

### Devon Inter Faith Forum for Youth

**Bishop Atkinson:** Now we are going to hear from Antony Hamilton who is a member of the Devon Inter Faith Forum for Youth.

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

**Antony Hamilton:** I am from Torquay, in Devon. The inter faith organisation that I got involved with was called TIFFY (Torbay Inter Faith Forum for Youth). It has in the last few years changed to become the Devon Inter Faith Forum for Youth (DIFFY). The organisation was started by Heather Savini and was later taken on by Marc Frank. It had a lot of help during the founding years from Bev Smerdon, who was formerly part of Plymouth Centre for Faiths & Cultural Diversity (PCFCD). We also had a lot of help from Doug King Smith, who offered his land, called the Hillyfield, for the venue of an event, as well as helping in the few musical workshops in which we participated.

I got involved with DIFFY through my secondary school. Like most students of this day and age, I learned what I knew of religions and cultures through a mandatory class called Religious Education or RE, which is now part of a broader category called 'humanities'. The lessons were great for picking up the bare basics, but obviously as a child you have a certain curiosity about the ins-and-outs of a faith and you start asking questions that even the teacher can't answer. This is a wasted opportunity and it creates what I believe to be a barrier to inter faith. That natural child-like curiosity we have that encourages us to learn and understand about other cultures is cut off by a lack of information, or ease of finding that information. If encouraged, I think that this intuitive thirst for understanding could be a major help in cutting down the creation of prejudice and discrimination in the minds of today's youth.

DIFFY was introduced to me through my RE teacher as a field trip venture. Like most others I loved field trips, and although it wasn't within school hours, I wanted to see what these fun activities were all about. Suddenly, I found myself together with children of a variety of different cultures and faiths. It was intimidating initially, but we introduced ourselves and carried out activities together. We practised team-building exercises like rural skills and singing. As early as the age of 12, I was shown that these other children acted and thought exactly the same as me, and that I could get on with them brilliantly no matter where they came from. That lesson has shaped me throughout my entire life, and it's a lesson that I wish everyone could experience. It's a process that turns a dark world into one where trust in humanity rapidly branches out.

The activities were fun and left me wanting more. From my first event, I always looked forward to the next. The part of the event that is sometimes underestimated – which was simply the time I spent bonding with these people of other faiths – was what I now feel to be the most important part. We didn't need to always be discussing inter faith, just sharing a laugh and some food.

DIFFY's events often gave me the opportunity to talk to religious leaders about their faith and its intricacies. During the Bristol Diverse Doors open day – a day where places of worship of every religion in the city invite in members of the public – I spoke to Muslim, Hindu, and Jewish people about their thoughts on the afterlife, and the basic teachings of their sacred texts. The group was encouraged to find similarities between the faiths' teachings, and we didn't have to look far to see that so many of the teachings agreed on the ways we should behave.

Without the lessons that DIFFY has taught me, I am sure I would not be who I am today. The lack of experience and understanding of other cultures might have led to an ignorance and uncertainty – traits that can very easily be corrupted to fear and hate. I have seen these traits in some others

I have known of my age, and I have always done my best to revert their feelings – not with a strong rebuke, but with gentle persuasion and education. Through this I feel I have changed the minds of many of my peers. Their uncertainty was changed through a few corrections of rumours spread by social media and it was replaced with a healthy curiosity. It might have helped that many of these people were or were soon to be engineers; who have a natural need to learn more!

The number of DIFFY's members has been receding over the last few years, and it has had a lot of trouble finding funding for future developments. Knowing the impact that this organisation has had on my life, and that it would help so many others, has motivated me to help by planning events and spreading the word and lending a hand whenever possible to inter faith organisations like IFN. It's my belief that this is the way forward and that all we need to do is get more involved.

**Bishop Atkinson:** Antony, thank you, for that emphasis on relationship building and the personal ambassador work that you and others are doing.







## Jaspreet Singh

President, Birmingham City University Students' Union,  
Faith and Belief Forum  
ParliaMentors Alumnus  
and British Organisation of Sikh Students

**Bishop Atkinson:** Finally in this section, Jaspreet Singh, President of Birmingham City University Students' Union, alumnus of the Faith & Belief Forum's ParliaMentors Programme and a member of the British Organisation of Sikh Students.

**Jaspreet Singh:** Honourable ladies and gentlemen and siblings please allow me to begin with a Sikh greeting – *'Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh'*.

I was not born and bred in this country. I came here about four and a half years ago. I still remember arriving at Heathrow Airport and lots of people asking me "Are you alright? How are you doing?". I found that strange because I came from a Sikh majority country, Punjab, and I could not understand why they were asking. Day by day, I started to feel that it was because of my style, because of the turban which I wear, that people recognise and respect the being that I am. I think that played a very key role. From the other point of view, I was seeing people from all across the world, from different backgrounds, different races and it was amazing. It was helping me to become closer to my faith.

I got involved in the Sikh Society at my university and then in the British Organisation of Sikh Students. Last year I was elected as the Student Director of the National Union of Students. Faith plays a key role for me and for many of us youngsters. It helps when we are closer to our faith and we know about our faith. There are big dialogues in universities. We students, we open our minds and start asking very hard questions. I think that only when we come closer to our own faith can

we initiate inter faith dialogue. I am going to focus on what different opportunities there are on campuses and, especially as youngsters, what opportunities there are to create a very special society where we want to live in the future. We aspire to have those difficult conversations now rather than having toxic conversations in the future.

I loved the point made earlier regarding crises. I believe there is an academic who says that it is when a crisis happens to a certain community or in a certain part of the world, that we can initiate a change. For example, there may be a disaster and then big capitalist companies go out and initiate a very consumeristic culture. I remember attending a faith event in Birmingham when the Bishop of Birmingham said to the Mayor of Birmingham, "We people of faith, we are very radical". That really struck a chord with me. As young people of faith, we are there to help society and, in spite of issues such as terrorism and extremism, to put our foot down and start initiating positive action. There are many issues to address. For example, what are we, as people of faith, doing to tackle increasing homelessness? There are good food banks being set up by churches, langar meals being served in gurdwaras, mosques stepping up to help, and even people from non-faith backgrounds getting involved. But where are we connecting? Where is the inter faith action?

Media coverage often suggests that people of faith are only involved in bad stuff, we need to reflect the good stuff. At the moment we are missing that opportunity. The media, as you know, is very hostile to every faith community at the moment. We need to understand that the youngsters now in universities come out and say that they don't want to belong to any faith. When I ask them, being a Sikh, why they don't want to, they say there is too much hostility. I ask them, for example if someone is Sikh, have they ever tried to say 'Waheguru, Waheguru'? Or if someone is Muslim have you ever tried to say, 'Allah, Allah'? It really helps. They often say that actually they haven't tried yet. So, as the Guru Granth Sahib ji says, we need to



recognise the atma, the soul, within us and start reciting God's name. That will help us to connect with God and clean our minds which are being overtaken by the media.

Being from Punjab, from so-called India, everything which happened in the Sikh genocide was taught to us back home. It is very important to start de-colonising the faith, the knowledge, which was created. Racism plays a key role in this faith dialogue as well. For example, one of my black friends from Nigeria said to me, "Jaspreet, as a Yoruba person, we used to have our own traditions. Where is that now?" Sometimes he felt disconnected because of that.

We need to initiate a dialogue whereby people from their backgrounds can come forward and say "This is my faith but please don't portray me, for being Sikh, as a martial race or just a security guard, for example". We need to initiate a dialogue and it's very important that we move towards action, towards a society that is very pluralistic and cohesive. Guru Granth Sahib ji said that we need to be as different as possible because only if we are different can we respect each other. This modern push just to 'be one' doesn't work. The world is like a little garden – we've got different flowers and it only looks beautiful if you appreciate the beauty of that garden.

Thank you so much; it was such a blessing and may God bless you all. *Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh.*

**Bishop Richard Atkinson:** Thank you, Jaspreet, for that emphasis on dialogue and understanding each other and also for that call to be radical. I suspect that should wake us all up.

### Dialogue on the Spot

**Bishop Atkinson:** There is now a chance for a few minutes' dialogue with your neighbour. After that, there will be an opportunity to make comments and ask questions to Parhin, Antony and Jaspreet.

*There then followed 5 minutes for 'Dialogue on the Spot.'*

**Bishop Atkinson:** Thank you. There will be opportunities later for further conversation. This is now your chance to reflect on anything that you've heard so far today.

### Question and Answer session

**Dr Peter Rookes (Birmingham Council of Faiths):** I was very interested by the last three presentations by young people and particularly the one from Jaspreet, as he is based in Birmingham. The work that you are all doing is very impressive and action-oriented. Do you engage in any way with local inter faith organisations or have you thought about doing that? Birmingham Council of Faiths is trying to set up some youth activities and it would be good to engage together on that.

**Patricia Stoa (Nottingham Inter-Faith Council):** I was fascinated by the presentation of the research, which I thought was very interesting, particularly on the point made that young people are interested in talking about the big questions. I would love to know what they think the big questions are.

**Canon Bede Gerrard (South East England Faiths Forum):** The confusion between culture and faith was brought out by the three presentations. Jaspreet underlined the need to know one's own faith content before one goes out to meet others. Quite often we are sharing ignorance about people rather than sharing our faith or sharing our culture with each other. Culture and faith are two different things. In Oxford we have a Greek food fair which has food to share from different Greek traditions. This is lovely but it has nothing to do with faith; it is about ethnicity. This is a confusion which I think gets in the way of some faith dialogue.

**Nasr Moussa Emam (National Association of SACRES):** Could Jaspreet elaborate on the work of de-colonisation that he mentioned was needed?

**Mantra Chaitanya Dass (Canterbury & District Inter-faith Action):** I was very touched by what was said about chanting the names of God as a means of spiritual realisation. *Vedic* scriptures, the Bible, the Quran, the Bhagavad Gita, every scripture that you come across, recommends the process of chanting the names of God. I just want to know your thoughts on how we can come together and promote that particular practice.

**Bishop Richard Atkinson:** Thank you all. Jaspreet, Parhin and Antony would you now like to offer any responses and reflections to what we've heard so far.

**Jaspreet Singh:** Regarding local inter faith organisations, as youngsters we need spaces and it is important to be aware of the spaces where we can go and explore. Thank you so much. We will definitely try our best to get involved.

Big questions often arise at university. The first big question I asked a Muslim friend was, 'What do you think about terrorism?' He explained to me that when we are closer to God then everything is beautiful – it's very much action-orientated and we can help one another – but brutality, killing and so forth are not acceptable. When we ask each other these big questions it's a dialogue and we learn from each other and after learning, we go out and help each other as well.

Regarding culture and faith, I feel that most of the cultures around the world, in some sense, do benefit from faith because faith gives essence to everything and it keeps everything going. I do agree, however, that some cultural aspects need to be differentiated from faith.

I will focus more on this question regarding de-colonisation and will give you a very typical example. When the British came to so-called India, they created their own knowledge about the Sikh faith and many other faiths as well. Because of this the perception of me as a young Sikh in the West, is very much based upon those kinds of perceptions which

were created earlier, but the reality is about exerting and being different. We need to have a dialogue about how we can start chanting God's name because that is the most radical action that there is in this world. If we can chant God's name then we can come closer to the Almighty and everything starts coming together.

**Parhin Begum:** In terms of the big questions, we all understand the trend of religion is changing over time and I think that a lot of the big questions relate to how religion is relevant in our modern times. We are living in a very diverse society. Some of the deep questions that I've addressed with young people are, 'What makes you claim the monopoly of the Truth?' or 'What makes you think your religion is more true than mine?' or 'How significant is your religion in our times?' or 'Does God exist?'. It is important to have dialogue within our religious demographic but also dialogue with people of non-belief as well.

I understand the distinction between faith and culture. That is why I mention it as two different concepts and I try to make that clear in a lot of my work. Understandably, sometimes, we blur the two. There should be a clear distinction between faith and cultural practices and perhaps more work needs to be done in that area as well.

**Antony Hamilton:** It was good to hear about the people from Birmingham who reached out. This is a great time to reach out to any organisation that is local to you. I've just had two people reach out to me who are also from Devon. This is the perfect time for that kind of connection and we can absolutely make those bonds here and now. We are all happy to connect, so just let us know.

Also, commenting on the line between faith and culture, I know my presentation did use both of the words so it might have been a little confusing. I particularly mentioned culture because there are atheists who are of a different ethnicity and I do think that it's also important, while we are focusing on inter faith, to start recognising different cultures and trying to

involve them. It is important to embrace those not only of a different faith, but also from a different culture.

**Bishop Richard Atkinson:** Thank you all. Are there any more comments or reflections at this stage?

**Musarrat Tariq (Nottingham InterFaith Council):** Jaspreet Singh mentioned that the media were sometimes hostile. What have we done to challenge this and how, as an inter faith council, how can we challenge that problem?

**Nitin Palan (BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha):** How do we de-colonise our minds and remove preconceptions and replace this with experience of each other? Perhaps as part of Inter Faith Week we should have a day of discovery of each other, meeting our neighbours and saying “Hi, my name is Nitin”. I have never actually not liked somebody because of their faith – either you like somebody or you don’t. It’s important to enjoy being with each other, as I did with Bishop Richard.

**Don de Silva (Faiths Forum for London):** I am a former United Nations Diplomat and I am also an environmental scientist. I currently work as a Buddhist Chaplain in one or two universities. My interest is in discussion and also about ‘inter faith dialogue or what’? When you look at the term ‘inter faith’ it starts with ‘in’; that is, with ‘inner’. If we recognise that it will be interesting; it is about the ‘in-vironment’ in the environment. You cannot deal with sustainability or the environment if you don’t deal with the ‘in-vironment’. That is the importance of faith. What I want to find out, having read the document and heard these excellent presentations this morning, is whether there are any strategic areas of focus that inter faith actions can deal with. Faith is critical to many strategic issues, such as climate change. Climate change does not recognise culture or religion or faith. If the issues are really critical, they make all other issues pale into insignificance. So it is vital to see how inter faith action can catch up with what is going on, both in Britain and around the world.

**Paraskevi Koumi (The Faith & Belief Forum):** Thank you to all the speakers for sharing their experiences. In Antony’s speech he said that he just enjoyed the days out meeting people from other cultures. I work mainly with schoolchildren and I think it’s important to consider whether we put enough emphasis on making sure that the activities are just as enjoyable for children as we would if we were planning any other event. Not everyone has an interest in inter faith. It’s important that the experiences are positive so thank you for reminding me to bear that in mind.

**Bishop Richard Atkinson:** Thank you all. There will be more time for conversations during the day. The discussion has covered a number of issues, particularly with challenges about how we respond to the media. Is there a space for a day of discovery? How do we have strategic actions, not least on issues such as the environment? How do we ensure that there are just good fun activities and days out, particularly for the young?

Thank you again to Parhin, Antony and Jaspreet. Thank you to Padideh and all those who were involved in the various strands of the work on this project that have come together to inform us as we think about the involvement of young people in inter faith activity.

# Supporting and encouraging youth inter faith engagement in different contexts

Frances Hume

Development Officer, Interfaith Scotland

**Bishop Richard Atkinson:** We have two contributors under this theme of supporting and encouraging youth inter faith engagement in different contexts. First of all, it's a great pleasure to introduce Frances Hume, who is the Development Officer at Interfaith Scotland. She is going to speak about Interfaith Scotland's wide-ranging work with young people as well as offering reflections on supporting and encouraging young people's inter faith engagement in a range of different contexts.

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

**Frances Hume:** Thank you very much. It's wonderful to be here this morning and to hear such inspiring talks already, from a range of different young people and different organisations. There is a little bit of trepidation wondering how to distil fourteen years of youth inter faith engagement into ten minutes! But I think we've already heard quite a lot of different examples, some of which I'll also be drawing upon in what I'm talking about.

I want to talk first of all about how I got involved in inter faith. Like some others here today, or people who work with young people, I first got involved because I was invited for a really exciting free weekend on the Holy Isle, off Arran, to meet young people of different faiths and backgrounds to plan a youth conference. Despite the idea of an exciting weekend, I was also a little bit nervous. I had never heard about inter faith

before and had a few questions: What is inter faith? Am I religious enough to go on an inter faith retreat? Is it going to be boring? Will it be very high level theological doctrine, for which I'm not really prepared? Am I a good representative of my own faith? I felt a little bit anxious being selected as a young person of faith, wondering if I would be the perfect representation of my Christian faith on such a retreat.

My own experience made me think about how to encourage young people to get involved. First of all, it is important to create a safe space where people aren't judged and are able to be themselves. When I met these other young people on the Holy Isle, I was worried that we would be spending our time discussing theological doctrine. However, what I found was that the main focus for the young people was on faith as an inspiration for societal change, for example tackling environmental issues and global poverty. We discussed how as young people of faith we could use those common values to really make a difference in our world. That was really what was motivating these young people that I met, who were vibrant, interested and engaged. They also spoke about their personal journeys. It is about making faith real – what is it about for us as an individual on the inside and how does that affect the way we live our lives and change society as well?

It is also important to be able to have a voice and be listened to and, looking further along the line, to be given

responsibility. So part of that weekend away was to plan a national inter faith youth conference in Scotland. As a young person, I was amazed at how we were given all this responsibility to find speakers for the youth conference and to facilitate on the day. I was planning the workshop for the 150 young people coming for this youth conference and I thought it was amazing to have that degree of responsibility and respect that was given to us as young people. The idea of fun activities, not all sitting and discussing, was mentioned earlier. It's good to talk but it's also good to do things together. Often it is through action that we learn from each other in a very natural way. Food is always a good way of bringing people together.

Interfaith Scotland's activities with young people have included: away-days to places of spiritual significance, such as Holy Isle; retreats, such as on the Island of Iona; inter faith picnics and dinners; football matches; hill walks; visits to places of worship; art, music and dance projects; trying on dress from different faiths and cultures; making films (some of which are on our website); and social action projects.

Talking a little bit more about the National Youth Conference, 2018 is the year of Young People in Scotland. That is the theme for the year and Interfaith Scotland has been given funding to hold a youth conference. The theme that the young people in Saint Andrews chose was 'Radicalisation and Reconciliation'. They were very proactive in having the theme, choosing it and bringing the conference together with just some support from staff.

Interfaith Scotland has a programme in schools called 'Face to Faith'. This brings in young people and not so young people, to talk about their faith with young people in schools aged 3–18. We have found that this is a really great way of de-mythologising religion. The response that we often get in the feedback is, "Wow, I didn't know religious people were normal". There's a concept that religious people are a little bit weird until they meet people face-to-face. They have read about it in their text books

and in class but meeting vibrant and engaging young people who are willing to talk on a personal level about the difference that faith makes to their lives, and are able to answer questions, can really break down some barriers.

Last year we had an International Youth Leaders' Learning Exchange to Rwanda with five young Muslims and five young Christians selected from Scotland who showed promise as young leaders in their communities. We worked in partnership with the Church of Scotland and we organised a study tour. The young people learned about faith in a different cultural context in Rwanda and also about the work that faith communities were doing to bring communities together after the genocide. You can read more about that in our 2018 newsletter which is on our website.

Scottish Interfaith Week is being held on the same dates as Inter Faith Week in the rest of the UK. Each year Interfaith Scotland chooses a theme to help local inter faith groups come up with ideas for the week. This year the theme is 'Connecting Generations'. Young people in Scotland identified the need for the generations to connect more with each other, something which has declined in our society. I've spent time in India, living in extended families and seeing how everyone naturally relates to one another. How do we bring people together and understand each other? I think that faith communities have a massive role to play within that; it is something that they do naturally. We would like to encourage local inter faith groups to look into that in more depth during Scottish Interfaith Week.

As part of Scottish Interfaith Week over the past few years we have run an art competition for young people. Last year we asked young people to design an inter faith place of worship for the 21st Century. There was a point raised that this might risk encouraging syncretistic thinking but this was not the aim of the exercise and the topic actually inspired a lot of discussion in RE classes about how the needs of different faith communities could be met



within a worship setting. Often they had different rooms for each faith to worship in and a café in the middle so that everybody could get to know each other as part of their worship experience. The teachers gave very positive feedback about how useful it was as an activity and we had a record number of 150 entries. Some adults mentioned after the competition that they wished that they could have also participated in the art competition. With the theme of 'Connecting Generations' in 2018 we opened the art competition to people of all ages.

In the last year Interfaith Scotland has been offering training to nursery teachers, looking at children's spirituality and how to meet the spiritual needs of young people. We were given Erasmus funding to do training on tackling hate speech in a youth work setting. Five young people were trained to help youth workers in this and they have currently trained 70 youth workers throughout Scotland and are hoping to train 100. This is going on throughout five countries in Europe so there will be about 1,000 young people trained.

We also have Erasmus funding to work on an inclusive youth work project. 25 youth workers from all over Europe were hosted by Interfaith Scotland during Scottish Interfaith Week 2017 to learn about inter faith engagement and meeting the needs of young people from different faiths. The youth workers are also learning about meeting the needs of young people with other protected characteristics, such as disability, LGBT and working with the Roma community.

This year Interfaith Scotland has employed a Youth Project Officer who is going to help us to establish a National Youth Forum. The first step in that is to have a residential weekend in September, bringing together young people of all different faiths who have shown an interest in leadership within their communities and who are also interested in promoting interfaith within their communities.

Interfaith Scotland has a Youth Ambassadors Programme during Scottish Interfaith Week. We ask young people to go to different events around the country, write blogs, take pictures – and they get a free T-shirt – what more could you want!

Finally, one of the Trustees on our Board is a young person. We are going to have a second person co-opted as well, so that we can ensure the views of young people are heard among all the different Board members.

So that's my whistle-stop tour! Thank you.

**Bishop Richard Atkinson:** Frances, thank you. Does anyone have any questions?

**Abid Khan (North Lincolnshire Multi-Faith Partnership):** We are all different. We each need to be connected to our source. There is so much negative stereotyping. We are who we are and we need to understand each other without animosity. There is so much good work going on and I'm very glad to be here today.

**Bishop Richard Atkinson:** Thank you for that comment.

**Sami Bryant (Eco-Islam/Muslim Council of Wales):** Thank you very much for your presentation. I was really interested in your comment about the worry that things would become syncretistic. Please could you expand more on that?

**Frances Hume:** It is really about different concepts of inter faith. Some people have said to me across the years, "Do you have a kind of mix and match religion, taking bits from each religion and creating a new religion of different religions all joined together?". I have always been quite strong in saying that actually people come from different faith backgrounds, or no religious background, but have a belief. Everyone has a belief. Some people use the phrase 'believing but not belonging' because they have a belief in God but they don't go to a place of worship and maybe don't have a doctrinal basis. It is very important that people don't see inter faith as something



that is going to take away from someone's individual faith. Faith is very important to people individually and faith often involves being part of a community of individuals as well. I myself have been inspired and enriched over the years by lots of different aspects of different faiths. For example I've learned a lot from Buddhism about meditation, which I use in my own spiritual practice, and some of the philosophies of different faiths I find very interesting and have inspired me. It is about seeing the

beauty of different wisdom traditions and different faith communities. It is not about mixing them all together into a new faith in a way that means you're watering down people's religions.

**Bishop Richard Atkinson:** Thank you again, Frances. Scotland has often been a pioneer in this field so it has been very good to hear the Scottish record of activity and achievement.



Supporting and encouraging youth interfaith engagement in different contexts

## How I got involved



## Encouraging youth engagement

- A safe space without judgement
- Having a voice, being listened to without having to represent the faith
- Dialogue on personal journeys – faith/life
- Looking at relevant topics – e.g. the environment, poverty
- Fun activities – dialogue in doing!
- An opportunity for social action
- Giving responsibility in running events – organising, speaking, facilitating
- Food is always good!

## Activities

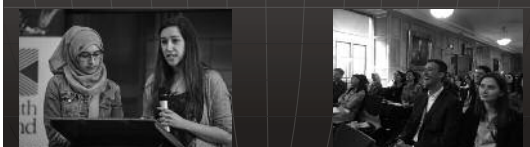
Away days, retreats, picnics, dinners, football matches, hill walks, visits to places of worship, art, music, dance, dress, film making, social action projects



## National Youth Conference

A team of young people from different faiths plan the event. They choose a theme, organise speakers and facilitate the event with the support of Interfaith Scotland staff. Previous themes include:

- Service Above Self
- From Conflict to Co-operation
- Radicalisation and Reconciliation



## 'Face to Faith' and Holocaust Memorial Schools Programme





Using a highly participative, non-formal educational approach, this training aims to equip those working in a youth setting with appropriate tools for tackling hate speech.

Participants will explore different issues relating to cultural and religious diversity.

They will learn how to recognize hate speech, and how to manage the situation when it occurs.

They will also develop tools to support transformation of the beliefs and attitudes that underpin the behaviour.

**Intended Audience:**  
This training is most relevant for those who work regularly with groups of young people, in a professional or voluntary capacity. This includes youth workers, youth leaders in faith communities, teachers and those who work with young offenders.



**Dates of public  
openings:**  
+ Tuesday 27th  
+ Thursday 29th  
+ Tuesday 3rd  
+ Thursday 5th  
+ Tuesday 10th  
+ Thursday 12th  
+ Tuesday 17th  
+ Thursday 19th  
+ Tuesday 24th  
+ Thursday 26th  
+ Tuesday 31st  
+ Thursday 2nd

**Each section will  
be held in  
Scottish Gaelic  
provided, if  
there are enough  
people to fill  
the hall.**

**To book places  
for other  
languages**

Each session will run from 12:30 to 1:30 and could well be held in the Dialogue Room of InlandHealth Southern Offices on the left. Food and coffee will be provided, but delegates will need to arrange their own lunch. There are no smoking options in the area around the office.

To book places, please click on a date above. For further information, or to discuss arranging an in-house session for your staff, please contact Linda Sparrow at [james@inlandhealth.org](mailto:james@inlandhealth.org) or on 01792 430 252.

We would like to thank organisations to cover our travel and other incidental costs.

- Youth Project Officer
- Youth Leadership Residential
- National Youth Forum
- Youth Ambassadors Programme
- Young person on the Board of IFS



# Supporting and encouraging youth inter faith engagement in different contexts

**Chan Parmar**

Strategic Officer, Bolton Inter Faith Council and Sanaa Makkan, Bolton Inter Faith Young Ambassador

**Bishop Richard Atkinson:** It is now good to welcome Chan Parmar, the Strategic Officer at Bolton Inter Faith Council. This has, among other things, a long-standing engagement with young people, particularly through its Young Ambassadors Programme. It is therefore also particularly good to welcome Sanaa Makkan as well, who is one of the Young Ambassadors. They are going to offer us together some reflections on the importance of inter faith bodies working with young people and creating opportunities for civic engagement and schools development.

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

**Chan Parmar:** Good morning everyone. It is clear from all the presentations we have heard so far why inter faith work is so inspiring. I used to work at the Royal Bank of Scotland and about 12 years ago I left and came to work for Bolton Inter Faith Council (BIC). I only came for a year and am still here almost 12 years later! This is purely because I really enjoy it and, when you hear the stories that we come across on a daily basis in our work, it is extremely inspiring.

We are very pleased that today's meeting has a focus on young people and inter faith engagement. I am delighted that Sanaa is able to join me today. She has been part of the BIC Young Ambassadors programme for

about 7 years. At one stage there were 20 Ambassadors, but this year 4 or 5 have moved on to university or moved away. They still keep in touch and do a lot of good work in the community.

Why is it important to engage young people in inter faith projects and activities? We live in a very diverse society with communities of many faiths and of no faith. Different cultures, traditions, heritage – inter faith engagement is a platform for everyone. It is about building relationships, forgetting the outer differences and working together with everybody for peace and harmony, building trust and respect for one another. We believe, and I'm sure everybody here does too – that young people are the future. They are hopefully the good leaders of tomorrow, doing good work in the community and helping others. The contribution of young people is very important.

Whilst our own faiths are very significant to each of us, it is vital that we have awareness of other faiths and no faith. The late Jo Cox MP said, "We have so much in common to share" and that is absolutely true. It is when you come together and talk to one another, have face-to-face dialogue and discussion and meet as friends without any boundaries, that you realise what we share in common and how we could work together to make this world a better place. Hence our work at BIC, which, as well as the Young Ambassadors programme, includes

faith trails; school assemblies; 'Passport to Faith'; Inter Faith Week activities; getting young people involved in Holocaust Memorial Day; Genocide Memorial Day; peace prayers; the Great Get Together; and so many other activities.

We always try to ensure that the young people are engaged and are given ownership. There are no hidden agendas; it's about them taking ownership and making sure that we work together as a team.

Our experience of ambassadors has been a very positive one and we have seen so many excellent members. Aamna Alam was one of the first winners of the Diana Award and has spoken at previous IFN meetings – she now lives in Derby and wanted to come today but couldn't as she has a 3-week old baby! She is often in touch to ask how everything is and whether she can help. Two of our members over the last two years have won inspiring women awards for their volunteering – one was Megan and another one was Meera, who has also been to IFN events on previous occasions. So it is very inspiring and we feel privileged to be able to do the work we have done.

One vital element in all that we have done and try to do is support from parents. It's not a club; it's what we call 'outside the box study' and it's giving young people social skills and engaging them in community work, such as promoting fair trade, or helping people with their shopping. It is for them to know that they are valued and to get skills which will be useful for them in times to come. Sanaa is now going to talk with you about some of the work the youth group has done.

**Sanaa Makkan:** The slides show a few pictures of the activities which we have done as a youth group. For example, we went on residentials, where we did team building exercises, bonding and having fun. We also held meetings and discussed such issues and topics as why a work ethic is important to us; why personal ownership is important to us in our lives; hate crime; the role of the United Nations; and whether

there is justification for food banks. In addition, we have gone out for meals together, prepared shoe box parcels with gifts for refugee children and held sessions with Year 6 pupils at primary school regarding bullying.

We have also been raising funds for charitable causes, for example the floods in Pakistan, the Haiti earthquake, and the Nepal earthquake. A Norwegian lady came to one of our meetings who was a volunteer at the Nepal earthquake and told us what the conditions were like.

We are also involved in public speaking which we have done, for example, at the Mayor's Inauguration.

**Chan Parmar:** That shows that there is so much that we can do. It is endless but it is very rewarding and we feel really inspired by the support we get. Thank you very much for allowing us to do a presentation about Bolton Inter Faith Council's work with young people.

**Bishop Richard Atkinson:** Thank you Chan and Sanaa. Are there any quick questions or comments?

**Patricia Stoaat (Nottingham InterFaith Council):** I was sad to hear that somebody couldn't come to this meeting because she has a baby. It struck me, when you said that, that inter faith work isn't actually very family-friendly, particularly for women with small children. One of the ways we might challenge ourselves is to ask ourselves how we could be more family-friendly and more open to the involvement of women with young children.

**Bishop Richard Atkinson:** Thank you, Patricia. I agree.

*Chan Parmar then showed a t-shirt that the young ambassadors had designed themselves.*



## Interfaith Network - UK National Meeting At Derby



Chan Parmar  
Sanaa Makkan

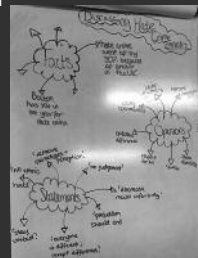


## Benefits of being Interfaith Ambassador

- Youth group like no other.
- Better than learning from a textbook.
- Building confidence and development as a good citizen.
- Gaining experiences working in the community
- Making friends outside our comfort zones.

### Importance of interfaith

- For today's world and the future too.
- Start from Grassroots
- Educating future generations
- Ripple effect across communities



## Thank you

Thank you for giving us the opportunity  
to provide a presentation at this  
National Interfaith Meeting .

"Interfaith is about building trust and  
respect in our communities"



# Launch of the *Connect* Guide

**Bishop Richard Atkinson:** Now we come to the launch of the *Connect* guide. I would like to begin with thanks to those involved for their work, not just on the guide itself, but in the whole programme of work on young people and inter faith engagement.

Our thanks go to: members of the Advisory Group; all the young people who took part in any way, not least in focus groups; all those who responded to the questionnaire; and IFN member bodies for helping to make this happen. Particular thanks go to IFN staff member Ashley Beck, who led on the process, assisted by David Hampshire and Zac Lloyd.

We are now going to have brief contributions from Advisory Group member, fellow IFN Trustee and Vice-President of the Pagan Federation Mike Stygal; Ashley Beck, the Inter Faith Development Officer at IFN; and Jaskiran Kaur Mehmi, a student inter faith practitioner, and a Co-Facilitator of the Advisory Group, who will be launching the *Connect* guide.

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

## Mike Stygal

IFN Trustee and Advisory Group member, and Vice-President, Pagan Federation

**Mike Stygal:** The original edition of the *Connect* guide, since its first publication, has always been a really important document in terms of the way it's been received and how popular it is. When it first came out it was fitting for what was going on in the world at the time and for IFN's structure. However, as Padideh said earlier,

the world has not stayed still and the faith landscape has changed. IFN has also changed to reflect that and the *Connect* guide, in this latest update, is doing likewise. It is moving on, making sure it is current and relevant.

I spent 30 years teaching young people. It was an absolute privilege facilitating opportunities for young people to explore their identity and explore that identity within the framework of the wider world. Youth inter faith opportunities are vitally important and they are something in which young people themselves are deeply interested. So having an updated *Connect* guide as a resource to facilitate those opportunities is really, really useful. I feel very privileged to have been involved in the programme that has led to its production.

## Ashley Beck

Inter Faith Development Officer, Inter Faith Network for the UK

**Ashley Beck:** The original *Connect* guide was published in 2004 and it has been a hard act to follow because lots of people tell me, when I go to IFN events, that this is their favourite IFN publication. Until last year, it was still the most downloaded resource on IFN's website and, over time, by far it is the most downloaded item on IFN's website. The original guide stood out because it is very colourful and it looks very different and was written in a different style to most of IFN's other publications.

It was very good to go out and meet young people and to talk with them about what they liked and didn't like about the original *Connect* guide. Overwhelmingly, they liked it and felt that it contained good material, so we've kept a lot of that. But, as we have been hearing, the world has moved on;



there are far more initiatives working with young people in inter faith activity now than there were in 2004. We have been in the enviable position of hearing large numbers of incredibly articulate, passionate young people talking about why inter faith activity matters and learning about many excellent projects. Indeed we have had the welcome problem of working out what not to include because we couldn't create a guide that went on forever!

I hope that this new version of the guide will continue to enable young people to just pick it up and get enthused. Many of them, of course, are already enthused. The guide contains some pointers on how to get involved and how to set up inter faith activities but, very importantly, it also points young people to other sources of information. We have also included information that clearly says that if people have questions of any kind, they can contact IFN. We may not have the answers but we can probably point you to the people that do. That's fundamental to our work and we hope that more and more young people will avail themselves of that offer.

## Jaskiran Kaur Mehmi

Student and inter faith practitioner and co-facilitator of the Advisory Group that has helped develop the guide

**Jaskiran Kaur Mehmi:** Firstly, I'd like to start by thanking everyone who was involved in creating the *Connect* guide: the Advisory Group, the IFN team, everyone who attended the focus groups and all the other various contributors.

I think the point of the *Connect* guide is that it demonstrates how young people engage in inter faith in different ways. The new guide is a very useful tool because it was made by young people, for young people.

That being said, it is not only for them but also for inter faith practitioners in general. I think one of the important aspects of the guide is that it looks at inter faith at different stages of a young person's life – going from school to university and to young adult life. It also recognises the shift that Padideh mentioned earlier, to more action-based inter faith initiatives such as those focusing on helping the homeless, workshops on mental health and engaging with other big questions which interest young people.

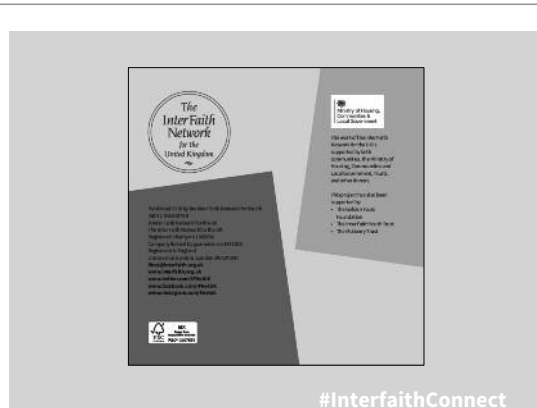
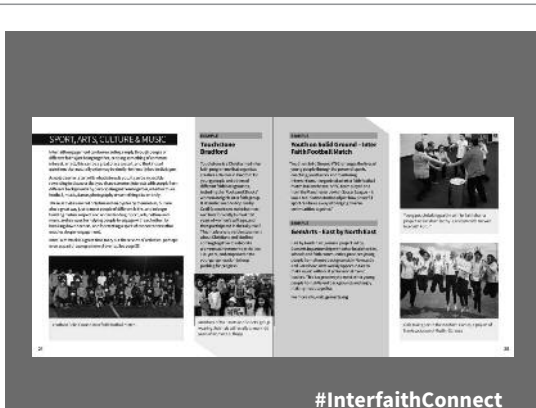
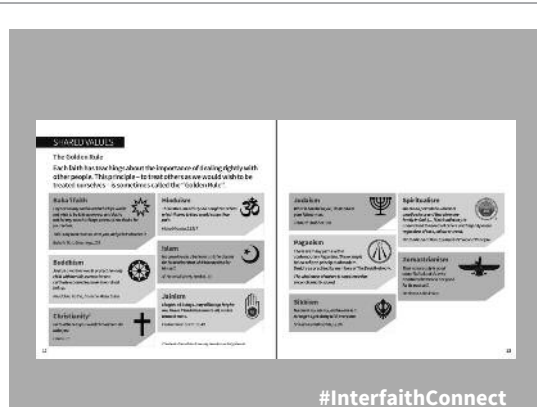
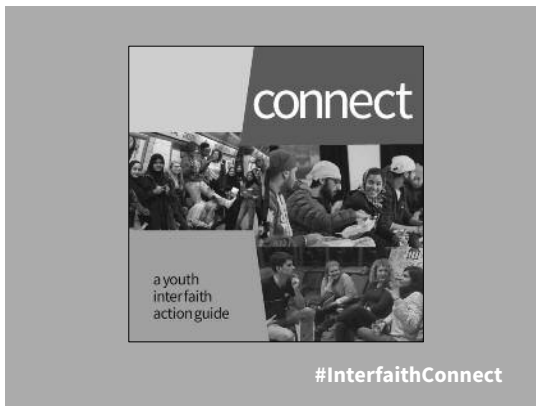
I think that the new guide is also a very useful tool for inter faith practitioners of any kind and local inter faith groups. What is most crucial, in my opinion, is the examples which show young people engaging in inter faith activity already. Some have the misconception that young people don't have an interest in local inter faith engagement. I think that this guide demonstrates that there really is an interest and it shows how we can tap into that. I think that the guide also shows what works, what excites young people and what is fun.

I'd like to take this opportunity to encourage everyone to reflect on the guide and see how aspects of it can be implemented in all the various ways that we engage in inter faith activity. Please ask yourselves how we can use these tools, experiences and case studies to change the way that we do inter faith.

There is a demand, interest and a desire from young people to engage in inter faith activity and I hope that the *Connect* guide allows for more collaboration and more youth engagement. Thank you very much.

**Bishop Richard Atkinson:** Thank you again, Jaskiran.

We will now hand over to our photographer today, Lisa Bedi, to capture the launch!



# The key role of inter faith engagement in places of learning

## The Revd Canon Dr James Walters

Chaplain and Senior Lecturer in Practice, London School of Economics, and Director, LSE Faith Centre

**Jatinder Singh Birdi:** Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen. I hope you have all had an excellent lunch break.

I would now like to welcome the Revd Canon Dr James Walters. He is a Chaplain and Senior Lecturer in Practice, London School of Economics, and also Director of the LSE Faith Centre. He will be speaking about the role that Higher and Further Education Chaplaincies can play in inter faith engagement on campuses and acting as a seed-bed for young inter faith bridge-building and leaders.

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

**Dr James Walters:** Thank you very much.

I want to begin with the question: “Who does inter faith?”

Is it just religious leaders, in conference centres at high level summits? If it is then we are clinging to a fantasy of faith communities as coherent hierarchical pyramids where agreements brokered by clerics at the top will be embraced by followers on the ground. Religious authority is changing. In Egypt, for example, religious authority used to lie with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and the Grand Mufti. Today, more people listen to the sermons of Amr Khaled, who has no mosque but preaches to millions across the

Arab world on television and the internet, even hosting his own religious version of the Apprentice.

Is it just the liberal minded believers of each tradition who are happy to view their religious beliefs as mere cultural expressions of universalist truth? If it is, then we are in real trouble. Because conservative – even fundamentalist – religious outlooks are on the rise across the world faiths. In many sections of all of our communities inter faith has a bad name because of perceptions that it is syncretistic and relativist.

My conviction is that, if we are to stem the tide of religion-related violence and oppression of religious minorities that is increasing on every continent of the planet, then inter faith has to be part of a global citizenship formation that is undertaken by as many young people as possible.

That is the conviction that led me to found the LSE Faith Centre which opened in 2014. In the context of polarising religious differences, we seek to be a leader in inter faith engagement, unafraid to explore the difficult spaces within and between faiths in order to build relationships and transform attitudes.

We are now doing that work with a number of constituencies including diplomats from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and

students in other countries. But obviously our primary focus is the LSE student body and they are young people who are exceptionally placed to effect change. LSE is one of the world's leading social science universities. Two thirds of its students come from overseas, a total of 133 countries, and nearly 70% come from outside of Europe. Many students go on to positions of leadership in business, finance and government, including 37 world leaders since the School's founding a century ago.

Such an international student body of course has a very diverse religious makeup. Nearly half the students self-identify with one of the world religions: 26% Christian, 6% Muslim, 5% Hindu, 4% Buddhist, 2% Jewish, 1% Sikh, 2% other religions. I feel very privileged in that most inter faith initiatives may focus on the relationships between two or three major traditions. But our programmes regularly include Baha'is, Jains, Zoroastrians, Mormons and other minority religions.

We often remind ourselves that no one can know what deeper understanding and friendship between two LSE students of different faiths could yield in the future. And we have recently taken on a new member of staff who is going to be focusing on building our alumni network and connecting people who have taken part in our programmes in the four years since we opened.

Our slogan is 'Interfaith Leadership for the Twenty First Century' and we further this agenda through events, through our research programme, but most of all through extracurricular programmes: Interfaith Buddies which is an informal programme open to all new students to build friendships and understanding across religious divides as soon as students arrive at the School; Faith & Leadership which combines religious literacy across the world faiths with leadership and conflict resolution skills; and Inter faith Encounter Israel and Palestine which takes students of different faiths to the region to learn about the religious dimensions of the conflict and to meet people building peace across religious divides.

I could say a lot more about these individual programmes and you may want to ask more about them in the questions. But in the short time I have I want to share five maxims that I have learned about inter faith engagement with young people at university.

### **1. Religious literacy is key**

Before we talk about religious literacy of other traditions we need to talk about religious learning within our own communities. Religion has become a politicised identity on university campuses. And the problem is that many young people find themselves in the position of having to defend it before they even understand it. Our faith communities have had varying success in educating our young people in religious principles. My tradition has done particularly badly and we're paying the price.

So I'm very keen that university should be a place where young people can have space to explore who they are, the faith they have received and ask questions so they can come to their own conclusions. But while we're addressing that we need to avoid the trap of thinking that we teach young people their own faith today and they learn about that of others tomorrow. It is possible, and indeed healthy, to learn about your own faith in an ongoing dialogue with other religions. As I look back now it seems absurd to me that I was taught the Hebrew Scriptures as a child without any reference at all to Jewish life as it is actually lived by Jews today. And that of course colludes with a lot of anti-Semitic instincts. Young people today need to learn their own traditions in dialogue with others.

The form of religious literacy we have developed at the LSE Faith Centre is what we call Religious Imaginations. We can teach young people basic beliefs and practices of different faiths but the kind of empathy we need in inter faith relations is based on seeing the world through other people's eyes: how do different religious traditions imagine the world and their place and purposes within it. We explored

that theme in the Religious Imaginations and Global Transitions conference we had at LSE last year, from which these pictures are taken.

## **2. Think critically about religion**

Life is complicated when you're 18. You leave the comfort of the home environment and you realise through your studies that the world is a lot more complex than you thought. There has long been a danger that amid all this uncertainty religion becomes the source of unquestioned absolutes. That was true long before current discussion about Prevent and radicalisation. So we are very keen to promote a culture which says that if your faith is the most important thing in your life then submit it to the same degree of critical thinking as you do your studies. We have got to improve people's understanding about the complicated ways in which religion is interacting with multiple other forces in today's world, including nationalism and populism. So as part of our efforts to promote that we have a research project called Religion and Global Society to which many LSE students contribute and, indeed, for which we would welcome contributions from any of you about how faith connects to the big issues in public life.

## **3. Don't assume the old structures are still working**

Patterns of religious organisation are changing. I gave the example of the Egyptian televangelist at the start. It is proving to be the case time and again, in my experience, that those who claim to represent younger believers within their traditions do not want to admit that young people are thinking differently. One of the many mistakes that was made early on in this country's counter extremism strategy was to think that the problem could simply be addressed through the mosques when in fact it was disconnection from the traditional communities and their wisdom that led to the cultivation of extremist views, mostly online or through other networks.

The same is true of the longstanding religious organisations that operate on university campuses. They may still have their constituencies but what we have been realising is that there are many others who have felt alienated and are now seeking to find their voice. We have this new society "LSE Believers" being launched this autumn by mostly black Pentecostal students at LSE who have previously not had structured representation. Diverse student bodies are going to result in diversification of religious organisation with many students maintaining a religious identity but sitting outside of all formal structures. We have moved away entirely from a pyramidal model of working with the presidents of different faith societies and assuming they would disseminate our messages across all the religious groups. We now have to have a direct relationship with as many students as possible.

## **4. Don't assume static religious identities**

The annoying reality is there is no one religious trend among young people. There are those who say young people are becoming more pluralist and spiritually open. There are those who say that religious conservatism is on the rise. Both are happening. And we are seeing the complexity in relation to young people's religious identities that we are seeing with their other identities – gender, racial, sexual and so on. Those identities can change and be very fluid. We've had a Roman Catholic Buddhist. We've had students for whom queer politics is interwoven with their spirituality. We have been trying to build a better picture of the reality of religious identity on campus with our intersectionality project which has been looking at how young people understand their religious identity and how it intersects with other diversity characteristics such as race, gender and sexual orientation.

## **5. Don't shy away from the hard stuff**

Finally, we have learnt that at some point you have to confront the difficult issues in inter faith relations. I define those as the things that make people angry, and that



usually relates to grievances. The story is told of a rabbi whose fervent disciple tells him that he loves him. “Do you know what hurts me?” the rabbi asks. “Because how can you love me if you do not know what hurts me?”.

When I first proposed taking Muslim, Christian, Jewish and other students to Israel and Palestine some people told me that I was straying away from religion into politics and others said I was just completely mad because it would all end in disaster! And they are extremely challenging trips. This photo is from a session our students attended with a Muslim Palestinian and an Israeli settler. It elicits strong reactions from our students. All faith communities have their grievances from the 1984 attack on the Golden Temple for Sikhs to the present day persecution of churches in the Middle East for Christians. And there is a danger that we don't talk about these things in inter faith conversations because we want to be nice and put on our best face. But for young people especially these grievances can fester and then degenerate into competitive narratives of victimhood – a favoured trope of today's identity politics. So we have to create inter faith spaces where these angers can be heard, acknowledged and maybe even healed.

And we hope that our work at the LSE Faith Centre, through the fostering of inter faith among a new global citizenry will be part of that healing and the building of a more peaceful future.

**Jatinder Singh Birdi:** Thank you for that. It is very good to hear of the view of the LSE Faith Centre and the proactive work that it is doing, which is commendable. Does anyone have any questions?

**Es Rosen (Barnet Multi Faith Forum):** I thought that was fantastic. It was the hardest presentation I've heard for some time and I'm delighted to have been able to hear it. It was especially good to hear of the issue which concerns me, as much as anyone else, which is Israel-Palestine. From my perspective there is so much that

divides us. The fact that you've attempted to tackle it fills me with awe, wonder and hope. I would really like you to attend one of the BMFF meetings. We are working with Middlesex University at the moment forging a youth forum and I am sure that those are the issues that will come up. As an anecdote, through my work with BMFF I found myself in what I thought was a safe, comfortable space at one of our meetings. When I raised the issue of the terror attacks across the world, I linked them with the terror in Jerusalem and elsewhere. That had an adverse effect because I was linking politics and inter faith work. I thought in a safe space that would have been acceptable. This leads me on to think about facilitation, which is very important and on which I would like some advice. Where does one go to bring in good facilitators to ensure safe discussions in a safe space?

**Don de Silva (Faiths Forum for London):**

Thank you so much for the presentation. The onus concerning young people and inter faith does is not really on the young people. It is on the older generation as well. Sometimes these issues are historical. The older generation and the older religious leaders of religious establishments need to understand the importance of good governance, openness, transparency and accountability in the work that we do. When you are in a closed situation, when there is no room for democratic accountability in what is being done, that is when there is a shying away of young people from religious establishments. We need to address the whole issue of accountability within our faith communities and where there is transparency in the work that we do. This is really critical for our work because we really need to live what we are talking about.

**Katharine Crew (Council of Christians and Jews):** When students apply for the

programmes that you do, including the Israel-Palestine trips, how do you ensure that you get a diverse range of students involved when you have more of some faith groups on campus than others?

**Dr Peter Rookes (Birmingham Council of Faiths):** That presentation was excellent. I

think you needed three times as long to expand on the points you were making! I do hope you will be invited back again on another occasion so we can hear from you in greater depth. I think what you're doing is excellent, but what you've got to do is uncover some raw nerves and then, having uncovered them, you then have to work with people over a period of time so that you don't leave those who have been exposed vulnerable. How do you do that?

**Cllr Tom Aditya (Bristol Multi Faith Forum):** We have been also doing a series of talks on overcoming prejudice. How do you ensure that different faith groups are coming to these inter faith programmes?

**Dr Walters:** Thank you for your comments and questions.

In regard to facilitation, external facilitation is helpful for some of the difficult questions and, obviously, the building of trust and hospitality before these difficult discussions take place. I'll think about who might be able to do that and any people we have drawn on. I will be happy to help if I can in some way. I agree with what was said about accountability and structures. I think the question of older religious hierarchies are representing where young people are at and the connection between them is one of the difficult things we don't talk about in inter faith relations because we want to present a united front and don't want to acknowledge the difficulties we have within our communities.

In regard to ensuring diversity, it is, to be honest, not a level playing field. If you are the one Zoroastrian applying for 'Faith and leadership' you are probably going to get a place! For the Israel-Palestine trips we get lots of Christians and non-religious students who are keen to attend, but we also need the Jewish and Muslim students and our criteria reflect that. We have very high application rates – 127 students applied for 18 places on Interfaith Encounter last year.

In terms of the rawness that you raised, I try to think about the educational experience

the student is having – in 3 years if they're an undergraduate or 1 year if they're a postgraduate – and where the experience they have sits within their course and what timeframe there is to help them process it. If they are likely then to be going back to a less religiously pluralist country and environment we think particularly about how their learning embeds emotionally and cognitively before they return.

Finally, on the subject of ensuring diversity. We've moved away from allowing the faith societies to be the gatekeepers. We are trying to fish in the whole pond of the LSE student body. Good communications are therefore imperative and during Welcome Week all the staff at the Faith Centre get out and about putting the message across. We are very lucky with how diverse LSE is.

**Jatinder Singh Birdi:** Thank you again for your presentation, Dr Walters, and for responding to those questions.

## Interfaith Engagement in Places of Learning

Revd Canon Dr James Walters  
Director, LSE Faith Centre



## What is the LSE Faith Centre?



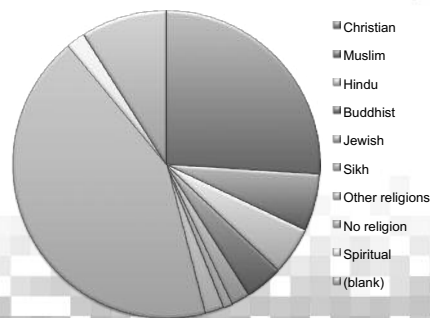
*In a world where religious differences are becoming more extreme, the LSE Faith Centre is a leader in interfaith engagement, unafraid to explore the difficult spaces within and between faiths in order to build relationships and transform attitudes*

## London School of Economics



- Ranked second for social sciences in the world
- 11,885 students
- 133 countries
- 70% non-European
- 100+ languages spoken
- 18 Nobel Prize winners
- 37 world leaders

## Religious identity at LSE



## Interfaith leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> century



## Interfaith Leadership Programmes



## Interfaith Leadership Programmes



## 1. Religious literacy is key



## 2. Think critically about religion



## 3. Don't assume old structures



## 4. Don't assume static identities



## 5. Don't shy away from the hard stuff



# Feedback from discussion groups

**Jatinder Singh Birdi:** I now invite the rapporteurs for each Discussion Group to come forward. Notes of key points from the Discussion Groups will be included in the National Meeting Report. For now each rapporteur will give us just one or two points from their group.

## Discussion Group 1: Young people and dialogue, including about difficult issues

**Jules Irengé (Young Friends General Meeting):** We had a very energetic debate in our group. We concluded that there were two key questions to consider: How can we enable students to create a safe place in which to discuss difficult issues and how can we stop there being prejudice in students.

## Discussion Group 2: Youth inter faith social action

**Neil Pitchford (Druid Network):** We had a very good discussion. As part of this we considered how people with mental difficulties can interact within inter faith engagement. We concluded that social action is the key for interaction and the results from that interaction will create knowledge and behavioural outcomes to alter perceptions around self and culture.

## Discussion Group 3: Youth inter faith engagement through cultural and sporting activity

**Nudrat Mughal (The Action Factory):** We discussed how we can get young people involved and engage them. Creative projects like sports and arts ones can be a very good catalyst for bringing people together. We agreed that it is important to include inter-generational work within the inter faith remit. This means creating

projects and environments where people of different faiths and backgrounds can come together, people of different ages – children, parents and grandparents. We also thought that it is key to empower young people, to give them hope and faith and strength to come forward and take ownership of the inter faith arena and the sustainability of those projects.

## Discussion Group 4: Youth inter faith engagement on campus

**Professor Paul Weller (Inter Faith Working Group of the Baptist Union of Great Britain):** Our group included a number of current students which was good for the discussion and also grounded it. There were three observations that came out of the group in terms of the distinctiveness of what we're dealing with on campus. Firstly, students, of course, are only there for limited periods of time. That brings both challenge and opportunity in trying to bring and build inter faith work. Secondly, not all students are young people because, increasingly, our universities have a mix of 18-21 year olds and mature students and so thinking about work on campus, in a sense, straddles generations. Thirdly, inter faith work should not rely only on faith societies because they are not necessarily representative of the entire faith spectrum, including those who may define themselves as spiritual and not of a particular religious tradition.

Two key points came directly from those observations. Firstly, in relation to students' inter faith initiatives and student faith societies, where is there a point of coordination existing nationally? The National Union of Students used to have an Interfaith Coordinator post which was held by two people, Kat Luckock and also, a former Masters student of mine, Sukhi Kainth. For a period now, they've not had



anybody in post. A suggestion from our group is whether IFN might try to re-open up a dialogue with the NUS and whether that kind of role might be restored again, either on their own as the NUS or collaboratively with IFN and/or with other agencies. We recognise that the NUS doesn't necessarily represent all students, but, nevertheless, it has good connections into student bodies throughout the country.

Secondly, universities themselves, as the bodies in which students are present, tend to react both to religion and belief and to inter faith questions either as something that will help deal with problems perceived to come from religion or with the individual level of problems that students experience. Is there a way in which IFN could, perhaps with the community of Vice-Chancellors, open up a dialogue about how inter faith relations and dialogue could be a positive contribution that universities actively could support at the institutional level, rather than only responding to faith and inter faith from a reactive, negative stance or for servicing the personal needs of individual students?

## Discussion Group 5: Inter faith learning and engagement in schools

**Aparna Ramesh (Hindu Temple of Scotland and Interfaith Scotland):** We had a wonderful session discussing inter faith learning and engagement in schools. The main portion of the discussion was about Student SACRE learning in schools and we had two students, Nawal Rasool and Fatima Khatun from Newham Student SACRE, who spoke very well about their involvement. They said that most of the students feel that it's a very safe place for them to discuss their opinions and their views and it's inspiring that such young children want to come forward and that they're curious about faith. They want to speak about it, they want to be open about it and they want to know about other students as well. It's helped them hone their leadership skills and they have taken part in quite a lot of RE conferences over the years.

In particular, the students mentioned that this year they have a team which is looking at religious bullying which is extremely important to address in schools and we discussed that a little within the group. We noted that this is not just about the students involved but that adults play an extremely important role because you need to have extremely dedicated adults and teachers/RE advisors especially. They have to be extremely dedicated and involved with the students because, obviously, the students' interest can only go so far. It is entirely up to the teachers to bring up and inculcate their interests further.

We asked the students about their activities and how they are supported by other staff and not just the Religious Education staff. As part of the discussion, we addressed the question of why we should do inter faith in schools and why it is important. We came up with quite a few points but the main point is that although we usually assume that a school is a neutral place where different people come together, in fact when students first come to school they often have preconceived notions regarding faith and religion. This is where inter faith engagement plays such an important role, especially when some of the notions are negative in their attitude. So inter faith learning helps students to get the big picture, so that they can find their own positions and get a better understanding of where everybody else is coming from. It helps them with their own identity as well as understanding the identities of others.

## Discussion Group 6: Youth civic engagement with an inter faith dimension

**Usman Ali (Wakefield Interfaith Network and Wakefield City Youth and Community Forum):** Becky Brookman gave us an overview of the National Citizen Service which brings young people, aged 15 to 17 together for adventure and team building activities, a residential week and an opportunity to design and implement a social action project in their communities. Becky talked about Jewish Lads and Girls

Brigade's pioneering faith-sensitive Inter Faith National Citizen Service programme in terms of the work they do in the community. It is a good opportunity for young people to go out and get out of their comfort zone, work together, make new friends and meet people from different faiths and communities. She also talked about accommodating people from different backgrounds and faiths in terms, for example, of providing prayer spaces and looking at different dietary requirements. As a group, we talked about the social action projects in terms of the inter-generational work that takes place as part of the NCS participants going into the community. They are doing some great work involving young people from different backgrounds, including Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh communities.

**Jatinder Singh Birdi:** I know that was just a very short summary of each discussion group but thank you all for your input and for your participation in all the groups.

## Discussion Group 7: Developing a youth dimension to existing inter faith programmes

**The Revd Canon Dr John Hall (Devon Faith and Belief Forum):** We were very lucky – we watched a video! This was about 'Faith, Food and Forces', a project in Leicester, run by the St Philip's Centre during last year's Inter Faith Week, whereby thirty families invited two members of the armed forces to come and eat with them. Also, the local catering college, full of young people, met with people from the army catering team and held events for them. We talked about that experience which was really original, exciting and illuminating. We talked about the amount of preparation that has to go into setting up an interaction of that kind and the challenges involved in it. We also talked about the fact that we have quite a lot of experience in different places when it comes to sharing food together and that we need to learn a lot more about things like dietary considerations and so on. In terms of engaging young people, we agreed that it is important to empower and allow young people to go out and do what they want to do.

# Reflections on the themes of the day

## Marie van der Zyl President, Board of Deputies of British Jews

**Jatinder Singh Birdi:** I would now like to move on to the next item on the agenda which is reflections on the themes of the day. I am delighted to introduce Marie van der Zyl who has joined us this afternoon. Marie is the recently elected President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and also an IFN Trustee.

**Marie van der Zyl:** Thank you. I have just been elected as the second female President in 258 years of the Board of Deputies of British Jews! And I have three female Vice-Presidents, so for the first time the Board has more women than men at the top table. There is now a Board campaign to help get more women into management so there's been a big shift in the Jewish community.

Within the Board of Deputies there are different constituencies and each has a Deputy. I am the Deputy for the Jewish Lads and Girls Brigade (JLGB) that we have just been hearing about. JLGB is an organisation with youth at the centre but it is inter-generational. It has adults and people of all ages to support young people and I'm very proud to be able to represent them.

The Board of Deputies was established in 1760 so it is quite old now. It is the voice of British Jewry. It is the first port of call for Government, the media and others to try and ascertain the views of the Jewish community. It is a cross-communal organisation and represents a vast diversity of Jewish opinion. There are nearly 300,000 Jews in the UK – which means that there are nearly 300,000 opinions on practically

everything in terms of religion, politics, cultural matters and affiliations! But one issue which is very constant for the Board of Deputies, and myself in particular, is championing inter faith work. When I was the Vice-President of the Board of Deputies for three years before being President, the inter faith responsibility was in my portfolio. That is how I came to become, and am very pleased to be here as, an IFN Trustee.

Muslim engagement, in particular, has been a very important part of our work. This month I hosted an iftar with the Chief Rabbi which was very innovative and new. It was also a way to say thank you to the Muslim community for their support because a number of Muslims had got together as a new group called Muslims Against Antisemitism and put an advert in the national newspapers giving their support in the fight against anti-Semitism.

When I was a Vice-President I travelled up and down the country – to Birmingham, Bradford, Glasgow, Leeds, Manchester – to have many conversations in mosques on a wide range of topics including hate crime, religious freedoms and the Middle East. It is very important to remember that, as a minority community, we have much in common with many other minorities. For example, burial is an issue that affects both the Jewish and Muslim communities. I worked very hard on a case against Mary Hassell, the senior coroner for Inner North London, who tried to institute a cab-rank rule for burial which prevented swift burial in the area. That has just been declared by the Courts to be unlawful, discriminatory and incapable of rational justification.

The Board is also organising a social action project with the Sikh community to help with homelessness. We have also had a very active engagement with the Hindu

community and it is good to see Nitin Palan here today.

You may have noticed last year that the Board, Tell MAMA and Faith Matters jointly made a complaint against *The Sun* about an anti-Muslim article and we got over 100 MPs to back us. The Board has also come out against anti-rhetoric from people like Katy Hopkins and Tommy Robinson and we speak up against anti-Muslim hatred in politics. There has been an incident of a Conservative councillor who was expelled from the Conservative Party and we will challenge members of our own community wherever we see anti-Muslim hatred. That is something that can happen. I was also very active when the Islamic Centre in Golders Green opened, when there were quite a lot of concerns about that within the Jewish community in particular.

I also actively support the Council for Christians and Jews and the work that they do. I'm sure that many of you here are also involved in that work.

One of my other priorities is the Invest in Peace Initiative. This is our first initiative at national level. It is taking place across the country and we are trying to export messages of peace and reconciliation and to find ways to actually talk about the Israel/Palestine conflict which we think is very important.

I would like to thank the Revd James Walters, who I see is here, for his work at LSE (the London School of Economics and Political Science) because at LSE faith really matters on campus. He was instrumental in helping me to get LSE to accept the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of Antisemitism, which, although difficult to do, shows that you really can work very hard with other people of faith to give that support. Since LSE adopted it, King's College London, has now also done so. I think that recognition is very important and I hope we can work together.

Thank you.

**Jatinder Singh Birdi:** Thank you, Marie.

## Tarang Shelat

### Hindu Forum of Britain and Birmingham Council of Faiths

**Jatinder Singh Birdi:** Our next speaker was due to be Jaimal Patel of Religions for Peace Youth Inter Faith Network and the National Hindu Students' Forum. He is unfortunately not able to be with us and so we are grateful that Tarang Shelat, here today as a member of the Hindu Forum of Britain and of Birmingham Council of Faiths, is stepping in at short notice to offer a reflection instead. Thank you very much, Tarang.

**Tarang Shelat:** Thank you very much Jatinder and Namaste to all of you. It's my pleasure to come and talk to you today and share some of my experience with both the Birmingham Council of Faiths and the Hindu Forum of Britain. I have enjoyed working through our faith and coming into contact with a number of lovely people. I am truly amazed with how many different organisations and different faiths work together in Birmingham. I am so pleased and heartened to find that with time we as a community are beginning to gel even more, especially considering how diverse this city is. I think it is so important that we become a family of faiths.

I am fairly new to the Inter Faith Network's activities, but I have already met many people I'd call friends. It is very nice to meet like-minded people who want to work together and feel the need for all faiths to have a common voice. It is important that the Inter Faith Network exists and continues to do excellent work, throughout the country. I regret not being involved earlier with the Inter Faith Network but I am glad that I am now. It is great to have heard varying views from people of various organisations and age groups. If we are going to solve problems that we are currently having, we have to engage our children from a young age and ensure that they interact with other children of different faiths. If this issue is not tackled early,

prejudiced views can be set and it can then be difficult to change their minds. I hope you have all enjoyed today and thank you for listening.

## Natasha Raspudic

### King's College London and IFN Volunteer

**Jatinder Singh Birdi:** It is now a pleasure to welcome Natasha Raspudic. She is a student at King's College London and is also a regular volunteer at IFN.

**Natasha Raspudic:** It has been for me a really interesting and productive day. As a young person involved in inter faith work, the topic of youth inter faith engagement is of a great deal of interest to me, and I have heard a lot of positive reflections on this topic throughout the day, so I want to thank you all for that.

It is quite hard to pick out a specific idea when we have talked about so much. But in particular, something that struck me was what Frances Hume and someone in the audience touched on earlier about making inter faith activities fun and appealing. As was stated, not all young people have an inherent interest in inter faith work. For those that do, we need to create spaces for them to engage. But for those that don't, we need to almost market inter faith work in a way that is appealing, because it is this uninterested or unaware segment of young people that is most important for us to engage. Constantly repeating the words 'inter faith' to those who are not interested or are not religious can be intimidating for them, but on the other hand, things like retreats, away days, or active events like walks or sporting activities will appeal to young people as young people, rather than as individuals being invited to inter faith activities. In this way I think that the encounter is perhaps even more meaningful as it is organic and informal. I think that this is crucial to reaching

groups of young people that we otherwise might not.

Speaking from my own experience, I also think that more work needs to go into giving young people the confidence to engage in inter faith activity. Often young people may want to get involved, but do not know how, or are not confident in their own abilities. I have heard mentioned many times today the 'value' of young people, and how so much can be learned from them, and I am convinced that this is true, but I am also aware of the fact that young people often do not feel appreciated or confident enough to voice their opinions.

Breaking this confidence barrier is imperative if we want to engage more young people in inter faith work. This I think can be done through providing leadership roles, and empowering young people in inter-generational settings so that they feel of equal value to the adults in the room. Taking on board their ideas is also important, to show how much we appreciate their value and so they can see that their ideas have an impact.

Another point I want to mention is that the young people of today are a much more globalised generation than we have ever seen before. Through social media, young people engage with people, debates, and movements from across the world, and more and more young people are engaging in inter faith discussions in this way, whether this is about refugee issues, women's rights, or other topics.

In the youth inter faith engagement project that I have been a part of at IFN, a survey we did on social media told us that many young people wanted to engage in inter faith activity to build a better society or make the world a better place – showing very idealistic and far reaching goals. I think that to engage young people we need to take this into account – again, giving them leadership roles so they can feel they are making a real impact in their societies, and giving them the power to create initiatives that matter to them. This might be done perhaps by placing more emphasis on



social action projects, such as with refugees or the homeless, as young people are often very concerned with these issues.

In short, we have to take into account the specific needs, concerns, and interests that young people have, and create spaces in which these can be explored. We need to give young people the confidence and the ability to act on their concerns, so that they can in fact contribute to building better societies. Thank you.

## Sami Bryant

Cardiff University, Youth  
Ambassador Eco-Islam and  
Muslim Council of Wales

**Jatinder Singh Birdi:** I would now like to invite Sami Bryant, who is studying at Cardiff University and is a Youth Ambassador for Eco-Islam and a member of the Muslim Council of Wales, to offer his reflections.

**Sami Bryant:** Firstly, I just wanted to thank everyone for being so welcoming. This is my first time at an IFN National Meeting. The only IFN meeting I have previously taken part in was a focus group to create the new *Connect* guide so thank you very much for being so welcoming.

It is somewhat intimidating to share the podium with so many better-educated people and better orators than me. I began today being intimidated by David Hampshire's eloquent use of Welsh and Arabic when I arrived – two languages which, coming from the Muslim Council of Wales, I should have much more awareness of than I do!

The Muslim Council of Wales began in early 2000. I think the way it was formed will resonate with a lot of the themes that we've talked about today. The Welsh Government was looking for the views of the Muslim community on an issue. So they brought together imams from all the

mosques in Wales and asked the views of their communities. Any of you who have worked with any Muslim communities will be able to understand how that went! So it was decided that a board was needed to try to give some idea of cohesion and unity to the communities. The idea of diversity of opinion and the strength in that diversity I think has come through quite a lot today.

At the beginning of the day I was hoping to become a bit more belligerent and take apart the idea of inter faith dialogue and then I found that everyone's almost done it for me! The problem I'm faced with is that I love inter faith dialogue; it just makes me feel all warm and fuzzy inside. It is lovely talking to people about shared ideas of what it means to interact with the divine and universal teachings and I love it. However, there is always a question in the back of my mind of what it's for. What is the purpose of what we're doing?

One of the points that came from the discussion group I was in today was that inter faith dialogue can be the consequence of social action and the consequence of doing things together. One of the themes I have heard coming through today in general is how important it is not to just sit and speak. Yes, there are important issues we need to speak about and figure out, but sometimes that comes more naturally from people who work together. When you think about it, who are your friends? Are your friends the people who said, 'Oh, I've got this guy I know; you'll really get on well together, you'll love him'? That is not the way you're usually introduced to friends. My truly meaningful friends have been the ones that I have found through working or through sharing passions and sharing experiences. I think that should be the foundation of our inter faith work. Not just finding commonalities by looking for them but finding commonalities in the work that we do. One of these areas where we can work together is environmental activism, which is what I do in my work with Eco-Islam. This is because it is about those issues which don't concern me as a Muslim or as a

British person or a person of a certain ethnicity but as a human being as a part of our planet. Thank you very much.

**Jatinder Singh Birdi:** A big thank you to Tarang, Natasha and Sami for your reflections on today.

# Closing reflections and thanks

**Jatinder Singh Birdi**

Co-Chair, The Inter Faith Network for the UK

**Jatinder Singh Birdi:** I think it has been an excellent day. It has been great to hear so many people and so many views and to see so many young people here as well.

Inter-generational work has been mentioned today. I believe it is so important to remember that it's not just about young people but also about the older community accepting young people and providing them with space for what they want to do. They must support them; they must offer assistance and guidance. A couple of years ago I was asked to speak at a conference on Sikhism and I was told that there were going to be two people – a young person and an old person. When I got into the room I found out that I was the old person!

So, what are the characteristics of youth? I think younger people are more open and acceptable to change. They are growing up with a society where they're studying with people of different faiths and different communities. They often don't see the prejudice that older people see. They see people as human beings and as friends. We don't want to lose that innocence because it's great. We are, in the end, all human beings and we should be treated as human beings.

It's been mentioned today that people have got to have confidence in their own scriptures and their own faith before they can talk about it with others and talk about other's faiths. That space has to be given within all faith communities. The young want to be involved and they care about the future. It's not just us older people that care. When you talk to young people they have their own opinions, so it's important

that those opinions are shared and actually listened to and put into action as well.

It was also mentioned today that inter faith activity should be enjoyable; of course it should! Why shouldn't it be? It's life, it's the way we live. So it's very important that we shouldn't be serious all the time. There are many ways of enjoying inter faith activities and we've heard today how sporting events or events around food can be encouraging. It's no good always inviting people to a conference. It's important to consider what young people want to do and then work out how inter faith elements can be incorporated. We don't need to invent something new, but we do need to engage more creatively.

I'm just amazed at how many new words and phrases I've heard today, such as 'inter-faithing' and 'de-colonisation of the mind'! These are terms that I've not heard before so it's been really enjoyable for me as well, from a personal point of view.

I would like to offer our thanks to all the speakers, presenters and discussion group facilitators who have contributed to today's event. It's been very good and really enlightening to hear so many opinions and views. Thank you also to the IFN staff for the hard work that has gone on behind the scenes in putting together today's event. I would also like to thank my fellow Officers and Trustees for all their support throughout the year and, most importantly, thank all of you for attending and participating today. Everyone has very busy schedules so it is good that you could all make the time to be here. It has been really great to speak to people, listen to people and make new contacts.

Thank you, too, to the staff here at Derby County Football Club and also to Derby Country Community Trust for their support and having a stand here today so that we could learn more about their work.

There are still copies of the *Connect Youth Inter Faith Action Guide* available so please make sure you take some for colleagues and friends or anybody you'd like to share them with. It really is an excellent document and worth sharing.

If you are leaving now, I wish you a very safe journey and I hope it's not going to be a year before we see you all again!

# Discussion group notes

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

## Discussion group 1: Young people and dialogue, including about difficult issues

**Facilitators:** Nahal Namvari, student Cardiff University, and Sister Margaret Shepherd MBE, Sion Centre for Dialogue and Encounter, and Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

**Presenter:** Paraskevi Koumi, Programmes Officer, Schools, The Faith & Belief Forum (F&BF), formerly the Three Faiths Forum

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**Ms Namvari and Sister Margaret** welcomed participants and Ms Koumi.

Ms Koumi gave a brief presentation about F&BF's inter faith dialogue programmes which took place in schools, universities and in other contexts Key points were:

- The organisation had recently changed its name from 3FF to The Faith & Belief Forum (F&BF). This was to reflect inclusivity of people from all faith and belief backgrounds, including those of non-religious beliefs.
- F&BF's main activities were mainly in Greater London and the South East, and the West Midlands.
- F&BF's School Linking programme matched students and classes from different cultural or faith backgrounds to explore issues of identity, community and belief, through inter faith dialogue.

Sometimes at these 'Link' days, sensitive issues were touched upon.

- F&BF also delivered a series of school workshops. From 'Encountering Faiths and Beliefs', which saw trained inter faith panel speakers and facilitators guide students through a Q and A with people of various faith and belief backgrounds, to workshops such as 'Who am I?' which encouraged primary school students to explore and articulate the complexity of their identity, colleagues at F&BF regularly engaged young people in dialogue about sensitive, pertinent and sometimes difficult topics.
- Topics raised and discussed ranged from large international issues by which some students felt personally affected, to individual experiences of everyday negative stereotyping.
- F&BF speakers always stressed the need for ground rules for discussion, striving for nuance, positive framing, and situational contextualisation.

In the discussion that followed a number of questions and issues were raised. These are noted below, together with any responses and suggestions on how to address them:

- How can one tackle misapprehensions and prejudices of a kind which are rooted in broad and inaccurate generalisations.
- Broad prejudices can come from parental attitudes.



- How to overcome any suspicion on the part of some that an inter faith body working with young people is a 'government cover organisation'.  
*Building the trust of children, young people and parents was a fundamental priority in every regard.*
- How can we avoid stereotyping and seeing only one particular version of a faith as being normative?  
*F&BF methodology stressed the importance of encouraging the use of 'I statements' when discussing, and always emphasising individual, lived experience over attempts at generalisations.*
- How can we take account of the fact that the notion of 'faith' is a new concept to an increasing number of children. Under-provision of Religious Education in many schools may be contributing to the problem and so more good RE would be helpful.
- How can we avoid the impression of too much 'stage-management' by government in the inter faith arena where there is over-dependence on government funding.  
*Each organisation in the inter faith field needed to be affirming of its every member, and to be expressly self-governing and wary of the need for 'institutional isomorphism'.*
- How can we create and sustain 'safe space' for addressing difficult issues.  
*Perhaps by the spaces being created and led by young people themselves.*

## Discussion Group 2: Youth inter faith social action

**Facilitator:** Zac Lloyd, Project Assistant, IFN

**Presenter:** Nikhwat Marawat, creator of Delicate Mind, and alumnus of the Faith & Belief Forum's ParliaMentors programme

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**Mr Lloyd** welcomed participants, and explained the background to the theme of the workshop. He noted that in IFN's youth inter faith engagement project the theme of social action had been prominent. He invited Mr Marawat to give his opening presentation.

Mr Marawat gave a presentation. Points from his presentation are below:

The Delicate Mind project is about exploring new ways to combat mental health issues in young people of different faith backgrounds. The project focused on issues of identity among men, particularly young people of South Asian background, and how this related to mental health issues.

### Important issues

- Three factors were identified that have an impact on mental health:
  1. Identity. Identity reflects class, race, gender, faith, sexuality, and so forth; It affects everyone.
  2. The concept of masculinity. This could be a problematic concept when gender roles were imposed on young people. Suicide was one of the biggest killers of young men in the UK. Young men often felt as though they were expected to conform to a standard of masculinity, which could result in suppression of emotions and feelings.

3. Faith – this could be a double edged sword. It can be a tool for healing and dealing with mental health issues. However, it could sometimes also be used to explain away these conditions as cases of 'possession' or 'bad parenting', particularly among the South Asian community.

- Unpicking these concepts was important.

### Aims of Delicate Mind

Delicate Mind was currently involved in lobbying on issues relating to mental health in the South Asian community.

It brought together people from different faith backgrounds and organisations to talk openly about identity and masculinity, and how these concepts had an impact on people and their mental health.

The solution to the mental health crisis was practical action and cohesion. People of all faiths and none needed to understand these issues. It was important to have dialogue about these uncomfortable issues, as this was how they could eventually be made comfortable.

Mr Marawat's own interest in this area stemmed from living with mental health issues of depression and anxiety since the age of 16, and also experiencing the death of a close family member as a result of mental health issues. There was a lot of misunderstanding about these issues.

In discussion on the presentation the following points were made. Responses from the presenter are in italics:

- Often younger people were more ready to admit that they or someone they knew suffered from mental health issues than were older people.  
*Younger generations were more open and comfortable talking about mental health issues. There was a focus on younger people, but older people were equally as affected by mental health issues, and*

*inter-generational cohesion on this topic was important.*

*Was the concept of femininity as potentially harmful? And was the issue of masculinity specific to the South Asian community?*

*Men were often uncomfortable speaking about their emotions. Research showed that men had fewer support groups and outlets for their emotions than women. Men were frequently told to 'man up'. Society defined the labels of masculinity and femininity, and these issues needed to be unpicked.*

The masculinity issue was universal, not cultural. Without taking away from any other issues, there was a need to focus on where the action was needed most, which in this case could be with men.

In general discussion the following points were made:

### **Diversity and integration**

- Druids took their cues from nature. They saw that the healthiest ecosystems, which survived the longest, were the ones that were the most diverse. This was why inter faith work was important. People could either look at difference and decide they did not like it, or could realise that other people just had perspectives that they did not. Diversity improved the community because it gave us a wider set of perspectives.
- Life was constantly evolving. To make human life better and more advanced there was a need to broaden minds. It was important to have diverse people with different views in order to challenge each other and make progress. It was also important to learn to have more diverse thoughts in our own minds.
- There were two different ways of looking at inter faith. One was focusing on the end goal of inter faith cohesion. The other was focusing on the experiences gained while working towards cohesion. In the Muslim

community, there was an emphasis on integration, but this could not be achieved solely by focusing on the end goal. Working with people on the way to integration was the place to make real bonds, and this was the most important part of inter faith

### **Social action**

- Social action was needed to bring people together, and this could then be followed by inter faith dialogue; it need not always be the other way round. Focusing on the inter faith aspect over social action did not always work. For example, litter picking was a great example of a kind of social action that could bring people together in conversation. Social action could be a primary motivator for bringing people together, rather than being a consequence of people coming together.
- One participant's community took young people litter picking. That instilled positive values in young people – so that when they grew up, they would have the awareness that they should not litter. This could be an inter-generational activity. That community also encouraged its young people to go into old people's homes to talk to them in order to combat loneliness.
- More young people could be encouraged into inter faith work through social action. In one participant's vihara they organised charitable events, including for the homeless. These were a lot more popular with young people than religious functions.
- Social action could bring people closer to their faith, but faith could also inspire people to engage in social action.
- Responsibility came with understanding. People who had an understanding of these issues should share this with others, which was why those who lived with these conditions should work in conjunction with religious communities to take part in social action.

- Religious communities should take part in more social action.

### **Involving all ages and backgrounds**

- In one participant's congregation age groups were segregated and taught in language that they could understand. After this, they brought the groups together to work towards common goals.
- Inter-generational cohesion was very important, connecting people across age groups and across different backgrounds.
- Initiatives like the Faith and Belief Forum's ParliaMentors were good for involving young people. But, these were only for university students, and so for people who did not go to university it was hard to find out about any opportunities, and there were not as many for this group. It was important to include everyone.

- Sport was a good way to bring people together. Inviting different organisations to create events together and host them in different communities was a good idea. Whichever community was the host could share the knowledge of their community with the other groups.

### **Other cohesion issues**

- Culture was also important and should not be dismissed, especially in the context of integration. The idea of faith being separate from culture was a Western idea. Cultural awareness and exchange were also very useful, and it was difficult to decide where the distinction was between religion and culture.
- Communication was important.
- Mental health issues sometimes arise out of toxic environments. Religious institutions and communities should be good at understanding themselves as people, but this was not always the case. Faith communities should work on being part of the solution rather than the problem. The language used and the way that people were treated was vital. It was everyone's responsibility to combat these issues.
- Many young people wanted to contribute, and centralised resources needed to be created where young people could engage.

## Discussion Group 3: Youth inter faith engagement through cultural and sporting activity

**Facilitators:** Minister David Hopkins, Spiritualists' National Union, and Nudrat Mughal, the Action Factory in Blackburn

**Presenter:** Afrasiab Anwar MBE, Building Bridges Burnley

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Minister David Hopkins and Ms Nudrat Mughal welcomed participants to the discussion group and introduced themselves. Minister Hopkins explained that Mr Anwar would be talking about Building Bridges in Burnley, an inter faith organisation created after the 2001 'serious disturbances' in Burnley, to enhance awareness and understanding between different faith groups. Since its foundation it has worked to build understanding between young people of different faiths, especially through cultural and sporting activity.

Mr Afrasiab Anwar offered his presentation and a summary of his points is below:

### Background

- He is employed as the Faith Community Coordinator for Lancashire City Council. He also works for Building Bridges Burnley at Burnley Faith Centre. He worked in sports development for about 10 years. When he was working at a Roman Catholic College the headteacher suggested he apply for the role at the Burnley Faith Centre. He had not been sure because he did not think he was a 'faith person'.
- His headteacher said that Afrasiab was a 'person of faith' using sport to bring people together.

- In 2001 there were a number of disturbances between Asian and White young people in the area. Locally they were called riots, but they had been called 'disturbances' by the Government. During the riots a lot of damage was done to buildings and cars. However, not a single place of worship was damaged because the young people thought they were special.
- After the riots the Bishop at the time decided that he wanted to contact local imams but realised he did not have any phone numbers for them. So he went to local mosques and churches and invited imams and clergy to get together. Initially this was a bridge building exercise to enable greater understanding between them. The group then moved on to more formal activities and put trustees in place. After a while the Bishop stepped down and it became an independent organisation called Building Bridges Burnley.

### Schools for the Future

- Several years ago Lancashire County Council was one of the councils to take part in the Government's Building Schools for the Future project. Through this project all the secondary schools in the area were rebuilt and they were reopened as mixed schools rather than ones where there had been segregation. One of the local Catholic 6th form colleges had concerns that it would lose its ethos by being mixed with a local mixed community college. So it was suggested that there be a faith centre or multi faith space in the building because faith is important. Lancashire County Council agreed to this.
- Often young people come from 6th form colleges and do positive inter faith work and then go on to university. This is great but there is also a need to reach the young people who need it the most.



## Football tournament

- When he was a Sports Development Officer for Burnley Borough Council about 15 years ago he met a local Roman Catholic priest, Fr Brian Kealey. The latter approached him and said he'd like to do a football tournament between children from the Asian communities and children from the White communities. The tournament was a great success and involved children from the toughest estates. It also helped their parents who were mixing with people from other communities with which they would not usually mix.
- Mr Anwar has been friends with Fr Kealey ever since. This year they decided to come back to their idea of building bridges through sport. They knew that Burnley Football Club brought all communities together in the area so they approached the Club to support an inter faith tournament. The Club agreed and provided the venue, the refreshments and the medals. The young people involved (from Year 8 and Year 9) would not have been able to afford to watch Burnley so for them to be able to play on their pitch was a dream come true. It was a very successful tournament and it has been agreed that it will become an annual event. The children involved are at an impressionable age. They all arrive from single faith communities and don't know until they get there that they will be put in mixed teams. They are quite happy with that as what matters is the football, not their religion.

## Faith Friends

- Another programme run by Building Bridges Burnley is called Faith Friends. This has been running for 10 years and is currently taking place in 4 colleges across Lancashire. It has not yet been possible to extend it to primary schools. Each college has 'faith friends' from different religious traditions who deliver cultural and faith training as well as offering spiritual and pastoral support to staff and students.

They also act as a contact point between the colleges and local faith communities.

## Evening sports activities

- On Friday evenings Building Bridges Burnley enables young people to meet together to play football at Burnley Football Club. They play from 9pm to 10pm and then walk to the local mosque and have food together. This gives the young people something to do on a Friday night when they've got nothing else to do and also brings Burnley Football Club members and members of the public through the doors of a mosque who would never normally do so. It is never what they are expecting – they are always interested and surprised. It is about young people eating together but it is also about the fact that some of the young people would not get adequate food otherwise and need to be under their care.
- Through work with Burnley Football Club some of the older young people are identified as leaders and they are then put on Level 1 coaching qualification courses. This helps to raise their aspirations and often leads to them wanting to go to college in due course.
- Building Bridges in Burnley is also involved with Burnley Leisure and Burnley Council in the Active Streets programme. This enables young people to use the leisure centre from 8pm to 10pm on Friday nights. Between 8pm and 9pm they have access to the gym for only £1 and from 9pm to 10pm they can use the sports hall for, for example, basketball. Now around 50 to 60 young people come each week. It means that young people have a place to go. They might think that they are just playing sport but actually they are breaking down barriers. It has had a big impact from an inter faith point of view.
- The sporting activities are not badged as 'faith' or 'inter faith' as that seems to put off young people. In fact he would like to change his job title with the council so

that it does not include the word 'faith' any longer.

- Young people do sometimes come to the occasional meeting but they do not stay long. They would rather do hands-on activities, not just attend meetings.

**Minister Hopkins** thanked Mr Anwar for his presentation and invited questions and comments. In discussion the following points were made; a response from the presenter is in italics:

- Sport is a very good way to bring young people together. Scunthorpe is a very small town. The participant used to run sports sessions in the town with about 40 people from different backgrounds. This culminated in organising a mini 'world cup'. Organising activities is not just about funding – it is also about commitment.
- Food is a good way to bring people from different backgrounds together. The Action Factory arranges 'community feasts' where people from different backgrounds come together for food. Many of them are from asylum and refugee backgrounds. It was interesting to think of using sport as a means to creating and improving inter faith relationships.
- The Burnley Faith Centre organises events to bring people in who do not usually attend. Burnley sits in a valley. At the top of the valley, at Crown Point, is the Singing Ringing Tree, a wind powered sound sculpture. During the longest day of the year, which was during Ramadan, people were invited to undertake a sponsored fast. They then broke their fast at the Singing Ringing Tree looking over the town. People were involved who had never been involved before. It's all about being creative.

**Minister Hopkins** and **Ms Mughal** then invited participants to look at the Call to Action paper on Youth Inter Faith Engagement [Annex A], and in particular at Annex 1 on page 22 of this. One of the ideas on the page was about empowering young

people and the sport coaching course mentioned by Mr Anwar was an example of empowering young people and raising their aspirations.

- In discussion, looking at the Annex, the following points were made:

## Perceptions

One participant suggested that people who work for local authorities are looked at differently and perceived wrongly. He had found this when he was a Cohesion Officer for North Yorkshire County Council. Now that he is retired and volunteering, people were more willing to engage.

Mr Anwar noted that he works both for the Council and also for Building Bridges in Burnley. However, the work for each was separate.

Council programmes could be helpful, and not just 'tick box' exercises.

## Project leadership

Projects should be user-led. If they were aimed at young people they should be run by young people.

The initiatives in Burnley encourage young people to be involved. If they are user-led then the young people are inspired by their fellow young people.

Where funding is needed it may be helpful to approach the local authority.

Bolton Inter Faith Young Ambassadors organise events themselves, with the help of Chan Parmar. Sanaa Makkan said that she used to be very shy and only spoke to other Muslims. She and her mother were out in town one day when they saw that BIFYA were fundraising. Her mother spoke to them and found out more. Sanaa then got involved. The Ambassadors meet up every Thursday and have discussions, both about religion and about what's going on in the world.

In response to a question, Miss Makkan said that the BIFYA come willingly to discussions and are not sent by others. They are encouraged by Chan Parmar in his role but they are also encouraged by their places of worship and faith communities.

### **Faith community involvement**

Mosques, other places of worship and faith community leaders need to be involved running programmes, not just local authority workers. If faith community leaders are not willing to be involved, they should be challenged on this.

Clergy and imams have been previously involved in projects in Burnley. There is a need for ensuring that new ones come on board when others step down.

Mosques are different in every area. In Scunthorpe mosques are very active in encouraging young people's involvement. At the moment there is harmony and they are engaging with service providers, other faith communities and people from no faith. However, the environment created in each locality is different and affects everyone differently.

Faith leaders need to be able to let go sometimes and that is very hard.

### **Intergenerational**

Different ages have different perceptions. Intergenerational work is also important.

In Scunthorpe they have events where grandfathers and grandsons come to play together in mixed teams.

Sport empowers all ages and genders. Girls loved kabaddi, a game like tag rugby, as well as boys.

In Burnley mixed ages bowl together at Crown Green.

Intergenerational activities do not just have to be about sport. Arts and food are also good ways to involve different generations. The Action Factory holds events which

involve young people, parents and grandparents. It also provides a safe space for them to talk. Often discussion is more about culture than religion.

### **General**

One participant, currently Chair of North Yorkshire Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE), said that SACREs should introduce more sex and relationship education and also more education around LGBT.

There used to be over 100 community groups in Burnley. Now they can be counted on one hand.

## Discussion group 4: Youth inter faith engagement on campus

**Facilitator:** Ms Katharine Crew, Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ)

**Presenter:** Ayad Marhoon, Leeds University Ahlul Bayt Society and LUU Interfaith Society

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**Ms Crew** welcomed participants and invited introductions from the group.

She read out a presentation written by **Ayad Marhoon**, a student at the University of Leeds, who unfortunately was unexpectedly unable to be present. Points from his presentation are set out below.

- Over the last year, a lot of the inter faith work at the University of Leeds has been about building individual relationships before planning anything rather than approaching societies or organisations. This has been found to be a much better way of getting people working together, not only in the field of inter faith, but almost any field that requires collaboration.
- When it came to Inter Faith Week last November, long before the Week started, the Union inter faith rep put in the work to get to know individuals within the committees of the faith societies on campus. This made setting up planning meetings a lot easier and smoother because people were more willing to cooperate with someone they knew.
- Through the meetings leading up to Inter Faith Week, it was decided that the faith societies themselves would be the ones to organise the events. The Union would also organise a couple. This was to give each society a real sense of ownership of the Week and make it clear that it wasn't particular individuals from each society that came together to do all of the work, but rather each society bringing something forward. The individuals at the meetings would feed back to the rest of their committee and get them all involved. It was also agreed that members of each society would do their best to attend the events of the other societies.
- As is the tradition at the University of Leeds, Inter Faith Week began with 'speed faithing', a spin on speed dating with informal discussions based around who we are and what our faith means to us. This is always the most popular event and probably the one people enjoy the most.
- Some of the events were displays of worship from each faith. It was quickly established that each faith had its own practices of worship and that it would be beneficial to all to experience what it was like to be in each other's settings. This included Muslim Friday prayers being opened up for everyone to watch and also Christian Mass. This was a brilliant experience.
- Other events were more discussion based. The Ahlul Bayt Society (one of the Islamic Societies), held a 'scriptural reasoning' event at which people from the University Chaplaincy (Christian, Muslim and Jewish) spoke about what their scriptures say about unity. Then similarities and differences between each scripture were discussed. Being from Leeds and already being involved in the inter faith work in Leeds, he was also able to invite a vicar and an imam from a local church and Mosque. The university itself was currently working on providing chaplaincy services for faiths other than Abrahamic.
- Inter faith sporting events were held, social events were held, discussion based events were held, all bringing people together and strengthening the relationships between the students of different faiths and of the same faiths with varying schools of thought. It was certain that relationships have

strengthened and genuine friendships had been formed.

Ms Crew then gave an overview of CCJ's work on campuses, which includes training student leaders from different campuses through residential trips, mentoring, and funding provision for student events. She emphasised that CCJ wants events to be organised by students themselves, to meet individual needs. For example, at Bristol University, where there is, sadly, a high rate of student suicide, a discussion on faith and mental health was held.

At the invitation of Ms Crew, Mr Ross Brittain, a former CCJ student leader, who had just joined CCJ as an Intern, explained that CCJ required students on the programme to hold at least one inter faith event per term. He gave an overview of his experience, while a student, as part of the Coexist Society at the University of Sussex. He had worked with the Baha'i, Jewish and Muslim societies and the Christian Union, to hold a number of events. These included a board game night; an introduction to each religion by an external speaker and students themselves; an event on discrimination against different faiths; and a pot luck meal where everyone brought food to share.

In response to a question about how CCJ helped students struggling with mental health issues, Ms Crew explained that student leaders could bring those suffering with mental health problems to faith leaders, to try and help them understand theologically what they are going through and to let students know they are not alone. But they would not want to provide a service they were not qualified for, and would signpost students to appropriate mental health services.

In discussion the following points were made:

### **Mental health and wellbeing**

- A critical issue is the mental health and wellbeing of students.

- A Hindu contributor noted that many students have serious mental health issues, including crippling stress and anxiety, and drug or alcohol addictions and that in their experience. In several cases after engaging seriously with Krishna practice, these problems have completely gone.
- At the University of Westminster, there is a core team of inter faith advisers from different faith communities. They run workshops and training sessions on mindfulness, which are attended by students from different faith groups and non-religious students. The participant was a trained mindfulness practitioner. They also try to make students aware of policies that the university has, and to make lecturers and teachers aware of these areas is often overlooked but was very important in bringing compassion to education.

### **Student societies**

- Student societies on campus can be both a blessing and a curse from the point of view of inter faith activity. They are a blessing because they are ready-made bodies for inter faith work, but they have limitations in that leadership in one year might not be interested in inter faith work, or might have theological objections to it, or might not have time to engage. There is also a broader issue that faith societies on campus might not be representative of the student body – there are many reasons why students do not join faith societies. Many universities focussed inter faith work on societies, but there was a need to think beyond this to see who was not being included or was excluded.
- Linked to this is the question of age – societies tended to be focused on undergraduates. However, at Derby University, for example, there is a higher proportion of mature students, who have limited engagement with university life other than their course, and whose connection with faith groups or traditions is more often based where they live or come from.



- There is a question to think about in terms of how societies represented faith communities.
- The tendency of a faith society to adopt or reflect a certain theological flavour could put some people off. Societies need to ask themselves how they are representing the views of all within their faith community. They also need to consider whether this is possible.
- Inter faith can be tricky at times, but societies are a good first port of call.
- There is also a question of how to engage minority faiths that might be present on campus but that might not meet the Student Union requirements for forming a society.
- A Pagan contributor noted that some chaplaincies are not necessarily as welcoming of minority groups as of bigger faiths.
- It can be hard to engage people in inter faith activity and also to find people to take over an inter faith society. There can be huge variation in numbers of attendees at inter faith events.
- It can also be hard to engage members of faith societies in inter faith projects – often a personal connection is needed.
- The number of people within small faiths who are interested in inter faith work is small – it is a niche market!
- Attending another society's events can build bridges and develop soft skills.
- Often committee members from different faith societies invite each other to events, but rarely attend those of others. If committee members are not willing to engage it is hard to pass it on to members.
- be left to societies. Universities need to take it more seriously and take encourage inter faith engagement. They are starting to do so in the context of concerns about issues such as radicalisation, but they should do so for more positive reasons of good relations on campus.
- A chaplain noted that government initiatives such as Prevent can have both positive and negative reactions; it is important to be able to react appropriately especially as a chaplain.
- Universities are not arms of government. There is a nervousness around religion and a lack of understanding of what inter faith engagement on campus could or should look like. Universities engaging with this needs to be the next step.
- Students need to lobby universities and Students' Unions to get them to be more focused on the importance of religious and inter faith engagement. At the University of Sussex, there seem to be a more students and staff who take religious seriously than before and more societies popping up – which is positive.
- University policies are important. They need to make it easy for students to apply for funding for events, and not put bureaucratic hurdles in the way.
- This is especially true for smaller groups. Bigger faiths have access to bigger representative bodies but it is harder for minority faiths to get funding.
- There used to be an Inter Faith Officer at the University of Leeds – such officers can be a useful point of contact for inter faith work.
- There is an Inter Faith Officer at the University of Aberdeen and it is a positive way of bringing faith societies together. At the University of Dundee students said the most effective way of relationship-building was by students organising events themselves. Interfaith Scotland is doing research to find out what is being done at different universities.

### **Involvement of Government, universities and other bodies**

- It is great when societies do inter faith events, but inter faith is too important to

- At the University of Westminster, the chaplaincy group is led by two independent inter faith practitioners, which is very useful in ensuring a quick response whenever an issue emerges such as regarding access to prayer rooms.

Ms Crew invited the group to consider paragraphs 3.43-3.50 and Annex 1 of the Call to Action Paper [which is at Annex A to this report]. The following points came from discussion of this:

- The paper is missing points regarding convincing universities themselves of the advantages to their core business of inter faith. Many chaplains are called inter faith advisers, but it is unclear what they are advising on – often they advise on the requirements or beliefs of different faiths, but this does not do much to build relationships across faiths and does not have much to do with inter faith. There is a need to impress this fact on universities.
- Chaplaincies sometimes focus on particular faiths to the exclusion of others.
- Where there is no chaplaincy support for students of particular faiths, providing that is often left to societies and more support is needed from universities.
- It can be difficult for certain faiths if there is no representation at the Chaplaincy. For example, at Sussex, Sikhs are not represented and the closest gurdwara is in Crawley.
- It is odd if chaplains are appointed based on internal demand rather than external request. Having chaplains of different faiths available means that questions about different faiths can be asked and advice provided.
- It would be a very daunting prospect for students to ask the university for a new chaplain.
- A gap in the call to action paper might be what happened after the National Meeting – it would be good if there was a focal point for eg reporting events, sharing resources online, coordinating action and so forth.
- There used to be a post at the National Union of Students (NUS) with a faith and belief brief but this no longer exists. Perhaps IFN could try to fill this gap, either alone or in collaboration with the NUS.
- In many cases chaplaincies have become ‘wellbeing spaces’. This may reflect how universities have seen religion as something problematic or a source of struggle rather than something with a positive contribution. There has been less research done on staff and on institutions themselves than on students and institutions. However, such research been done recently at Derby. Staff create an ethos in which it is possible for inter faith engagement to flourish. A key point that has come out of the research is the number of students and staff who might not identify as religious or non-religious, but as ‘spiritual’.
- Many teachers of religion do not actually teach about the practice of religion. In Uganda stocking libraries with religious texts had a huge impact.
- For change to happen, it must be led by student demand – this is how everything happens within universities.
- A lot of inter faith work is now expected of societies. However, it is important to remember they have their own events to organise for their faith and their studies to focus on.
- There is a need to focus on the benefit of inter faith engagement for universities, to counterbalance negative perceptions. It should not just be left to chaplaincies and societies as they have lots of other priorities.

## Discussion Group 5: Inter faith learning and engagement in schools

**Facilitator:** David Hampshire, Assistant Director, IFN

**Presenters:** Nawal Rasool, Chair, Newham Student SACRE, and Fatima Khatun, Executive Member, Newham Student SACRE, supported by Lucy Still, Head of Religious Education and Jennifa Kamal, RE teacher, Plashet School, Newham

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**Mr David Hampshire** welcomed participants to the discussion group. He explained that Nawal Rasool and Fatima Khatun would be providing an insight into the activity of Newham Student SACRE which is made up of a group of young people from different backgrounds and cultures who are interested in moral and religious issues who get together each half term from different secondary schools in the London Borough of Newham. The group is run by Newham's Religious Education Advisor, with help from secondary schools and heads of RE.

**Ms Nawal Rasool and Ms Fatima Khatun** offered their presentation.

*A copy of the PowerPoint slides they used are at the end of this note and summary of their points is below:*

- Newham's Student Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) is linked to Newham's SACRE. The Chair and Vice Chair of the Student SACRE sit on the full SACRE to enable young people's voices to be heard.
- The current Student SACRE draws on six secondary schools across the borough. In previous years more schools have been involved and it is expected that there will be more again in the future.

- Links between primary and secondary schools are important.
- The Student SACRE is a place to discuss a range of RE matters and to meet and learn about young people of different faiths. Students feel glad to have this opportunity to develop ideas and engage in dialogue.
- They have attended RE conferences and had opportunities to interview faith leaders.
- The RE Council of England and Wales initiated, and now facilitates, an RE Ambassadors scheme.
- The Student SACRE has been instrumental in enabling young people to hone their leadership skills and provides a context where it is possible to develop an unbiased and factual understanding of different faiths.
- Every year the Student SACRE adopts a theme and thinks of innovative ways to promote it and prompt discussion in Newham's schools and in the full SACRE.
- The theme for 2017-18 is "Religious Bullying". The topics that are chosen by members of the Student SACRE are relevant to their experience as young people of faith in a diverse society.

As a part of the presentation, two videos were played that were made by students with the support of the RE Adviser for Newham, Claire Clinton, and with backing from The Westhill Foundation and the National Association of SACREs. The first video was of a poem giving students' views on the theme of religiously motivated bullying – <https://vimeo.com/253115572>. The second was a short skit portraying religious bullying in schools <https://vimeo.com/253115810>. Both can be used as classroom resources.

Mr Hampshire thanked Ms Rasool and Ms Khatun for their presentation and invited questions and comments. Responses by the presenters and school staff are in italics.

- How did the Student SACRE start?  
*It had its origins ten years ago in an idea put forward by the RE Adviser. There had been a number of student SACREs in different forms across England at the time and it seemed like a good idea.*
- Is the Student SACRE in Newham also involved in the Agreed Syllabus Conference?  
*The level of its involvement is down to the RE Adviser, especially as the Conference meets only every five years. The Student SACRE, though, has worked on 'transition units' for the syllabus, looking at how secondary schools can build on pupils' learning in the primary school. It has also discussed the role of Philosophy for Children (P4C) in RE in the primary phase.*
- One participant, a former member of Newham SACRE, thanked the presenters and school staff. He had valued the contribution that the Student SACRE makes to the full SACRE. It has informed both the thinking of full SACRE and the development of the Agreed Syllabus.
- How does the Student SACRE sit with the full (or adult) SACRE?  
*Members of the full SACRE really appreciate the work of the Student SACRE and the contribution that its representatives make during the course of their meetings.*
- Has there been much support from teachers and, if so, how important are teachers to the success of the Student SACRE?  
*Nothing would happen if it wasn't for the teachers and school leadership, who have been very supportive. The RE Adviser is really important for making sure that there is continuity year on year. Other teachers are important too as they have to make sure students are able to get to the meetings, have parental consent and encourage us to properly engage.*
- To what extent are Human Rights, especially the right to religious freedom, taught in schools?  
*This is a question beyond the current work of the Student SACRE but Human Rights are covered in Citizenship Education and touched upon in other subjects such as RE, Geography and Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education. This year's theme of 'Religious Bullying' was chosen in part to address the issue of religious freedom.*
- What was the catalyst for the video project?  
*The theme of bullying came up in discussion during one of the termly Student SACRE and RE Matters meetings. RE Matters began 10 years and was set up by Claire Clinton, the RE Advisor for Newham.*
- Does young people being involved in SACREs make a difference to society?  
*RE Matters and the Student SACRE give young people a forum or platform to explore difficult subjects that can be shared with other schools and potentially be expanded into learning resources for use in the school curriculum.*
- Do tensions ever arise between students from different faith traditions in the Student SACRE?  
*Areas of tension have been explored in the past as part of the Student SACRE.*

In general discussion the following points were made:

### Inter faith relations

- There is a concern that RE, especially in secondary academies in England, is increasingly ignored. This means that learning about faith and belief is being marginalized and that learning about inter faith relations was non-existent in some schools. People of faith and inter faith bodies have a clear role to promote RE and support the work of SACREs.

- It is also important to look at intra-faith relationships, which at times are more problematic than inter faith ones.
- There is a growing concern that parents are increasingly using their right to withdraw their child from RE to stop them visiting non-Christian places of worship. Sometimes this is because of terrorism and media reports of terrorist activity. Whereas at one time virtually all pupils went on visits organised by the local inter faith group as part of the participant's faith trail, numbers have started to drop off. Recently only two thirds of a group of pupils turned up as the other third had been withdrawn by their parents.
- This is an area where it is important to create resources for Primary age children in order to counter negative and poorly informed views.
- The forthcoming Commission on RE's report has sought to address this issue.
- There are laws against religious discrimination and those laws need to be enforced, including in school settings where relevant.
- One participant described an inter faith music school experience where the theme was 'We are all family'. There had been some negative reactions from some children with regard to those of some other religions. It was felt that the initiative was an important opportunity to challenge negative reactions to those of other faiths simply rooted in being different.
- It is important to understand others in relation to you and to wider society, and it is good to connect on shared issues.

## Religious Education

In India, where the speaker was from, students are taught religious education in their own traditions but have little opportunity to learn with and from young people of other faiths. The UK has much to offer the world in its provision for RE.

Many young people are often not sure if they want to identify as religious as it can lead to bullying. RE can help young people feel more confident in identifying as religious or non-religious.

The term 'Religious Education' can be off-putting and may be increasingly irrelevant. 'Belief Education' might be a better name.

Schools often do not refer to Religious Education per se and that is their prerogative. Religious education is the subject name in statute but not necessarily that used in schools themselves which can cause confusion.

## Keys to success

The importance of a good RE advisor and dedicated adults with vision are key to success.

Empowering young people's voices is also key.

**Mr Hampshire** then invited participants to look at the IFN Call to Action paper [Annex A to this report] on Youth Inter Faith Engagement, and in particular at sections 3.33 to 3.42 and the penultimate bullet point in Annex 1: 'Engaging with schools and forming partnerships with other organisations'.

The group began by asking why it was a good idea to have inter faith activities in schools. These positive responses were given:

- Schools provide a context in which pupils can explore their own identities and learning about inter faith in RE is one way of doing this.
- Because of negative and false information that is often circulated, children can have a negative attitude towards religion and adopt the view that all religions are competitive and antagonistic with each other. The involvement of local inter faith groups in schools is a good way to provide students with a more balanced picture of the



relationships between people of different faiths and beliefs.

- Schools can provide a more neutral ground for pupils to reflect on their own beliefs, attitudes and values.
- A school can provide a free space to learn about other religions.

The following points were also made:

- When links between local inter faith groups and SACREs are strong this is a benefit to RE in schools.
- SACREs often provide training for visitors to schools and are also able to introduce local inter faith groups to teachers. Local inter faith groups are often able to facilitate visits to places of worship and community centres, as well as helping faith communities to identify who might be best placed to contribute to RE and Collective Worship in the schools and academies in the local authority area.
- In the best case scenario, there will be a symbiotic relationship between the inter faith group, providing their experience and community knowledge, and the SACRE, providing their educational expertise.
- Some SACREs have local inter faith groups as members, where this is appropriate.

## Discussion Group 6: – Youth civic engagement with an inter faith dimension

**Facilitator:** The Revd James Breslin,  
Newcastle Council of Faiths and United  
Reformed Church

**Presenter:** Becky Brookman, National  
Citizen Service (NCS) Programme  
Coordinator, Jewish Lads' and Girls'  
Brigade (JLGB)

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**The Revd James Breslin** welcomed  
participants and introduced Ms Becky  
Brookman.

**Ms Brookman** gave a short presentation  
about the National Citizen Service (NCS)  
programme of JLGB (the Jewish Lads and  
Girls Brigade).

*Key points from her presentation are below.  
Further information can be found at  
[jlgb.org/NCS](http://jlgb.org/NCS) and [jlgb.org/ncsreport](http://jlgb.org/ncsreport)*

- JLGB has been in existence for 125 years and is one of the oldest uniformed youth organisation in the UK. It has been an accredited Duke of Edinburgh Award provider since that award was established, and therefore had significant experience in tailoring and delivering programmes linked to other organisations.
- NCS is a key national initiative, supported by Government, with social action at its core. It was established to give young people opportunities to get more involved in their local communities, and to build relationships and cohesion. It has many different programme providers, of which JLGB is one.
- The NCS programme is residential, and brings together young people of different backgrounds. The programme always involve three phases:
  - The first is fun, and often involves outdoor and team building activities.
  - The second phase involves planning a social action project relevant to the local context, and raising funding for this.
  - The final phase involves carrying out the planned social action project.
- JLGB provides a 'faith-sensitive' NCS provision. This began from a recognition that Jewish young people may have specific needs – such as dietary needs, accommodation of religious festivals and Shabbat – which may be challenging for other providers to meet. JLGB recognised that young people from other backgrounds may also have specific needs and has been able to offer provision which meets these requirements.
- Trust is key – JLGB is well-established and respected within the Jewish community, and parents and community leaders trust it to provide for young people's needs.
- JLGB has a positive relationship with schools of a Jewish character.
- JLGB has found that it is better able to engage with other faith groups and the specific needs of young people from these because of its established position in relation to provision for Jewish young people. Groups trust it to take issues linked to religious observance seriously and to engage with these positively.
- Young people were sometimes referred to JLGB from other NCS providers where they needed a faith-sensitive provision of the NCS programme.
- This kind of provision means that young people are able to share together while still having their needs met. This is a more positive experience than, for example, a young person being provided with a separate, film-wrapped Kosher meal.



## Student RE Matters 2018



- We are a team of young people interested in moral and religious issues from different backgrounds and cultures



## Why did we become a part of Student RE Matters?

It sounded interesting

My core reason I would say was to make a difference



I became part of the student RE Matters because I really like RE and other humanities subjects. I also became part of student RE Matters because I like expressing my points and people listening to me expressing them.

## What have you learnt from being a part of student RE Matters?

Independence and confidence

Contribute ideas and opinions

To talk to others and work as a team

I have also learnt what other religions think

Maturing in my views

How to communicate with others

## What have you enjoyed the most?

Meeting new people from different schools

Learning about other's religions, and what their religion say about certain topics

It allows us to unite and work together as representing Newham rather than just our school.

The refreshments!



## What skills has coming to this group developed in you this year?

- ✓ Learning to communicate
- ✓ Getting better at discussion and listening
- ✓ Being more assertive

- ✓ Greater awareness of opinions from other cultural/religious groups
- ✓ Learning to speak up

- ✓ Able to listen to other opinions and respect them
- ✓ My confidence has been build up
- ✓ Social skills

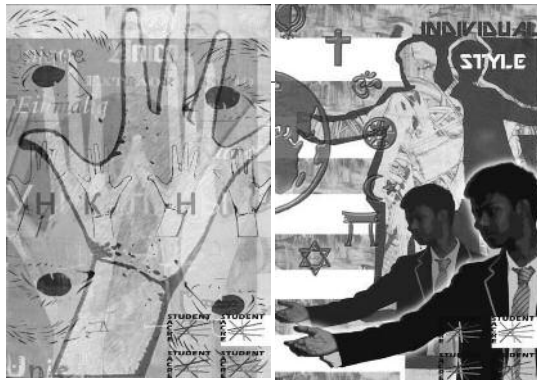


## Why do we need Student RE Matters?

- To give a place and time for young people to think about moral and religious issues;
- To present young people's perspectives on religious and spiritual issues back to schools and faith groups;
- To provide an opportunity for young people to discuss religious and spiritual issues that matter to them; and
- To help young people develop links with local faith communities and initiatives.

## Student SACRE past projects

- Meeting and interviewing faith leaders
- Poetry lessons
- Teaching RE to primary students in the borough
- Preparing short video's on themes such as social cohesion and religious discrimination.
- Art projects on themes such as 'legacy'



## Respect for all Conference



- The programme seeks to manage diversity and encourage structured engagement. Participants are taught skills for having conversations around challenging issues.
- Provision also includes time for guided reflection and space for prayer.
- In planning, JLGB teams seek to identify what problems or barriers might present themselves and to pre-empt these.
- JLGB's approach fundamentally is one which celebrates what could otherwise be seen as a 'problem' or 'challenge' in provision of the programme.
- JLGB has delivered the NCS programme for 6 years, and each year has been different.

In Discussion, the following points were made. Responses from Ms Brookman are in italics:

- Who else runs NCS programmes?  
*This has evolved over time. Originally, NCS worked with very small organisations to deliver the programme, but it has upscaled significantly.*
  - Some have not heard of NCS. Where is it delivered?  
*It is being delivered everywhere in England. The structure varies in different places, as it is delivered by contracted providers. Another large provider is The Challenge.*
  - Do any Hindus or Sikhs take part?  
*Yes, but the mix of participants varies each year. One of the Jewish schools JLGB took referrals from had a large Hindu and Sikh pupil population.*
  - Would the catering be simpler if everyone was provided with vegetarian food?  
*No. Religious dietary laws are complex and are not limited to animal products in all traditions. Food can also be a way to bring people together – discussion of these kinds of issues are interesting.*
- Mr Breslin said that there are also different types of vegetarianism. Mr Beck said that IFN's Catering and Faith-Based Dietary Practice Briefing Note had been developed following in-depth consultation with communities drawn from the 9 religious traditions in IFN membership at the time of its publication and provided detailed information on this topic which could be referred to by those interested in this area.
- There are no Hindu secondary schools in Britain. Could NCS go into Temples to advertise to young people?  
*NCS gets large numbers of Hindu and Sikh pupils. They go into all schools, not just those of a religious character.*
- Young people could also self-refer, including to alternative providers than the one which visited their school.*
- Does NCS also go to Further Education colleges, or only schools?  
*There was currently less universal provision in the FE sector. The Catalyst programme of Near Neighbours, which the speaker had previously led, had also found it harder to reach young people in FE than other contexts.*
  - In many FE colleges, students attend around other life commitments such as work and childcare. This is different from the situation in most schools and universities, where students might be living or spending most of their time on-site and are able to take part in activities between classes. More creativity was therefore required to make activities accessible to FE students.
  - How much of the NCS programme is driven by the young people?  
*Week One is mainly driven by the programme organisers, but the rest is very youth-driven. Young people are given training, then are able to develop and lead their own social action programme.*



- Are local authorities involved with NCS? Councillors play a very important role in their local communities.  
*Levels of involvement vary from authority to authority.*
- Is JLGB's provision inter faith by design or by happy accident?  
*By design. A key aspect of the NCS programme was about teaching young people the skills to navigate difference and diversity well.*

*Overcoming misperceptions and misconceptions is a key skill to learn. Many young people do not have much experience of people of other faiths. Many parts of the UK are still very mono-cultural.*

- Coming from a single-faith school background, the dominant cultural perception was that of one's own tradition. Do the young people continue the friendships they have made through NCS after they have finished? (Very often, yes. NCS programmes usually draw cohorts of young people who live fairly close to one another, which makes it easier for them to sustain friendships once the programme has ended.  
*When JLGB approaches non-Jewish schools, do they tend to respond well to it as a Jewish body? It is important to spend time building relationships with schools and other bodies to ensure this is the case.*
- Two participants said that their first experiences of inter faith activity had been as part of residential programmes they had taken part in as young people, and these had instilled a lifelong commitment to inter faith engagement.
- Opportunities for young people to step outside of their comfort zones could prove to be very formative experiences.
- In residential contexts, young people often felt able to relax and learn in ways which might not happen in other contexts.
- This kind of immersive approach was good at breaking down barriers. It

enabled people to ask difficult questions, because they had spent time intensively getting to know one another and feeling comfortable doing so. It was a shame that it was often less possible to do with older people!

More information on the NCS programme can be found online at [jlgb.org/NCS](http://jlgb.org/NCS) and [jlgb.org/ncsreport](http://jlgb.org/ncsreport).

## Discussion Group 7: Developing a Youth Dimension to Existing Inter Faith Programmes

**Facilitator:** Ervad Yazad Bhadha,  
Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe and  
Youth Representative, Harrow Interfaith

**Presenter:** Riaz Ravat BEM, Deputy Director,  
St Philip's Centre

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**Ervad Yazad Bhadha** welcomed participants to the discussion group and invited Mr Riaz Ravat to talk about the work and programmes of the St Philip's Centre in Leicester and the ways in which it has built into these opportunities for children and young people to engage.

**Mr Riaz Ravat** offered his presentation. A summary of his points is below.

- Before going on to speak about youth engagement he wanted to flag up the 'Faiths, Forces and Food' Project that was part of Leicester's 2017 Inter Faith Week programme and which was featured in the *Connect* guide.
- The project was aimed at creating challenging and creative relationships and was mindful of the fact that Remembrance Sunday fell during Inter Faith Week.
- 30 families of different faiths each invited two members from the armed forces to have a meal with them.
- In the course of the meal families held up a name card as part of the campaign for 'The Unremembered', thus linking the event directly with Remembrance.
- In addition, Leicester College and its Catering Department hosted a lunch which involved a number of young people.

- There was a lot of preparation and thought that went into the project before any interaction happened.
- Learning outcomes from the 'Faiths, Forces and Food' project included that: a) it is sustainable; b) it has given an impetus for something similar to happen again, possibly with police personnel next time.

Mr Ravat then showed a short film highlighting the project. This can be viewed online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITGL3c4vq7o>.

In discussion following Mr Ravat's presentation, the following points were made.

### Food

- Sharing food together offers real inter faith opportunities.
- There are significant facts to learn about religious diets. Food compromises, in terms of choosing not to eat particular things that one might normally have, are sometimes made in inter faith encounter for ease and success of the event.
- Many, if not most, inter faith groups have experience of sharing food. For example, Nottingham's 'Come Dine With Me,' events and Oxford's Inter faith walk which involves eating in different religious settings.
- Members of the Armed Forces can feel on the outskirts of civilian society.
- The concept of inviting strangers to meet and eat can be risky particularly with poor preparation.

### Young people

- Approaching young people in their institutions, for example at Leicester College, is an excellent way to engage with them.

- Scouting's recent growth nationally owes much to giving young people themselves responsibility.

Discussion of IFN's Call to Action Paper [Annex A to this report] on Youth Inter Faith Engagement (from Section 3.6) led participants to reach the conclusion that young people need to be empowered to do what they want to do, perhaps with guidance and expense support only when they feel it is needed.



# Annex A

*This Call to Action paper was agreed by the Youth Inter Faith Engagement Advisory Group and put to IFN's National Meeting for discussion. It is therefore referred to a number of times within the report on the National Meeting. It is included here for reference.*



# Inter Faith Network for the UK National Meeting 2018

## Youth Inter Faith Engagement

### A Call to Action paper

#### CONTENTS

- **Section 1:** Background – The purpose of the programme and how it has been taken forward.
- **Section 2:** The changing context for youth inter faith engagement.
- **Section 3:** Hearing from young people about motivations, challenges and possibilities.
- **Section 4:** Some emerging themes as a basis for discussion ahead of consideration by the Board of next steps when it meets in September.

#### 1. BACKGROUND

##### a) Purpose of the programme

1.1. This special youth-focused Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN) National Meeting marks the near-completion of IFN's programme of work Connect: inter faith engagement of young people. Since October 2017, IFN has been working through the programme toward three main outputs:

- The launch and publication, at the National Meeting, of an updated and expanded edition of IFN's youth inter faith action guide: Connect.
- This 'call to action' paper for discussion at the National Meeting and AGM, leading to the development of a strand of IFN's next Strategic Plan specifically focusing on youth inter faith engagement.

The youth themed National Meeting with significant input from young people.

1.2. Discussion at the National Meeting and the following IFN AGM, together with other learning drawn in through the programme, will inform the development of an appropriate youth related section of IFN's 2019-2021 Strategic Plan. This strand will in turn help to underpin work that supports youth inter faith engagement, stimulates new development and engages more young people.

1.3. The report on the National Meeting will contain key points from the day and also this original paper. That will be widely distributed to prompt thinking by a wide range of organisations.

1.4. The continued popularity of the Connect guide is a testament to both its usefulness and to the appetite of young people for opportunities to engage with people of other backgrounds. Much of the general material in the guide remains useful and has been retained. However, there are now far more inter faith initiatives aimed at young people, and the contacts, resources and

- examples in the guide therefore needed substantial updating. The updated guide also contains new material, such as a new section on social media.
- 1.5. The programme also responds to the expressed desire of many IFN member bodies to engage more young people in their work. Some already run programmes with young people. For a few, this is the main focus of their work; some run sustained programmes of a particular kind – such as work with schools – as part of a wider programme of work; some have run activities or programmes from time to time. There is much to be learned from all of them.
  - 1.6. Youth inter faith engagement is also relevant to many other types of body, for example National Citizen Service, as well as many others such as Scouts and Girlguiding, HE and FE institutions and student faith bodies within these, youth organisations, and educational bodies.
  - 1.7. Finally, Inter Faith Week – which will take place for the tenth time in England and Wales this November<sup>1</sup> - has seen a growth in the number of activities involving young people. In 2017, around 45% of all activities took place in schools, colleges, universities or other youth contexts. Scottish Interfaith Week, which has been led by Interfaith Scotland since 2004, also has a strong youth component, and many of the events which take place to mark this in schools in Scotland are not included in the official listings as they are not open to the public.
- The Interreligious Council of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Scotland encourages Catholic schools to mark Scottish Interfaith Week and has prepared resources to support them in doing this.*
- 1.8. Finding ways to support and encourage this growth of youth participation in the Weeks will be important.
  - 1.9. Underlying all of these, is the recognition of the enormous contribution that young people can make to inter faith cooperation and understanding and their vital role as bridge builders of tomorrow – and today!
  - 1.10. This paper draws on key areas of learning from the programme. It hopes to open up questions about these and spur discussion on possible ways of boosting young people's inter faith engagement, including drawing in those who would not usually be involved.
  - 1.11. The project builds on IFN's long history of engagement both directly with young people and with other organisations and bodies working with them. Further background to this engagement is given in Annex 2. Most recently, it builds on an IFN event held during Inter Faith Week 2014 called Young Voices, Young Agents for Change which brought together a wide variety of bodies that work with young people on inter faith initiatives and a number of young people. That event was particularly focused on organisational sharing of learning, unlike the present programme which has worked directly with young people and to develop, among its outputs, a guide for them. Some of the learning from that event, however, informed the development of this programme – in particular underlining the need to have young people involved in helping to shape it. This was reflected through inclusion of young people within the Advisory Group – including co-facilitating it – and the use of special young people's focus group sessions and school visits to hear from young people first hand.

## b) How the work has been taken forward

### i) Structures

- 1.12. The development of this important programme has been overseen by IFN's Board of Trustees and taken forward by the IFN office, supported by a special Advisory Group.
- 1.13. The Advisory Group has been jointly facilitated by IFN Trustee Ms Padideh Sabeti and LSE student Ms Jaskiran Kaur Mehmi, who was a Committee member of her local inter faith group – Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship – before moving to study. Other members are: Katharine Crew, Campus Leadership Manager at the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ); Jaimal Patel, Religions for Peace UK Youth Interfaith Network; Jasmine Roberts, Methodist Youth Representative and British Youth Council; Hasan Shabir, Peace Matters, Leeds; Ben Shapiro, Programmes Officer, ParliaMentors, Faith and Belief Forum; IFN Trustee Mike Stygal; and Simon Wiegand, until recently International Intern at Interfaith Scotland. The make up of the Advisory Group was designed to reflect a diversity of faiths and ages, and to include those drawn from both IFN member bodies and other relevant bodies. Geographical diversity was also built in, including reflection of the devolved nations through one member.
- 1.14. The Advisory Group has met 4 times and has helped to shape the programme. It has given invaluable advice on how best to gather in information and views through the questionnaire, polls, focus groups and school visits. It also advised on the new Connect guide and the present paper. It is due to meet a final time after this National Meeting to consider the points raised in discussion of this paper, and to advise the Board on next steps
- toward its 2019-21 Strategic Plan, which is due to include a youth strand building on today's discussion. IFN's Board is most grateful to its members for their work.
- 1.15. Throughout the programme, IFN's member bodies have been invited to contribute information and views and also to recommend focus group session participants. Member bodies were sent the questionnaire and there have been special presentations at IFN's Faith Communities Forum and a combined meeting of its National and Regional Inter Faith Organisation and Educational and Academic Body categories and at meeting for local inter faith bodies which took place in Manchester in October.
- 1.16. Input from a wide range of young people has been central to the process, as has that from organisations with experience of work with young people. A questionnaire to organisations and three Twitter and Facebook polls aimed at young people were used at the early stage. There have been three visits to schools to hear from both pupils and staff and five focus group sessions for young people in different parts of the UK.
- 1.17. The decision was taken, in the light of discussion at the Advisory Group, to focus work on the Connect guide primarily on the 16 to 25 age range and input to the programme was sought particularly from this age range through the focus group sessions. Much good inter faith activity of course also takes place among people older and younger than this, and a small number of examples and photographs within the guide reflect that.
- 1.18. This paper considers inter faith activity with a wider youth age range than Connect and includes a

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<sup>1</sup> And the Ninth in Northern Ireland, which joined in 2010.

significant section on the importance of inter faith engagement in schools.

## **ii) Questionnaire**

1.19. A questionnaire was sent to IFN member bodies and around 300 other organisations undertaking relevant work to draw in examples of inter faith work taking place with young people. The questionnaire was sent more than once, and drawn attention to via other routes such as the e-bulletin, IFN website and social media. Interfaith Scotland also circulated it to their member bodies and other relevant bodies within Scotland.

1.20. The questionnaire sought information on:

- the types of inter faith initiatives being run with young people;
- what makes for success;
- whether programmes included pathways to leadership roles for young people; and
- whether potential case study material and photographs might be made available.

1.21. The questionnaire received 55 responses from a wide range of organisations.

1.22. The responses included information about interesting and worthwhile projects and programmes and there has been follow up where respondents said that they had potential case study material.

## **iii) Social media polls**

1.23. Three multiple choice poll questions were published on Twitter and Facebook. These were published fortnightly, and each remained live for 7 days. The questions invited answers from young people within

the age group. The results of these polls alone would not be a sufficient basis upon which to base conclusions. However, on the whole they appeared to be in line with the findings of the other consultations. They are referred to in Section 3.

1.24. The polls were also a helpful way of raising awareness of the programme, and were retweeted widely on Twitter, reaching almost 10,000 users.

## **iv) Focus group sessions**

1.25. Five focus group sessions were held across the UK. These took place in February and March in Birmingham, Leeds, Cardiff, Glasgow and London. They provided an opportunity to hear directly the views of young people on the revision of the Connect Guide, the importance of inter faith activity and motivations for taking part, and what makes for successful and worthwhile initiatives.

1.26. Young people from a wide range of backgrounds took part, and shared valuable insights which have helped to shape the Connect guide, as well as the contents of this paper. Some of the participants are also taking part in today's National Meeting. IFN is grateful to all who took part and to those who encouraged and facilitated their attendance. It is also grateful to Cardiff and Vale College, and Interfaith Scotland both of which made their venues available free of charge.

## **v) School visits**

1.27. RE in schools is at the forefront of educating young people on the importance of inter faith activity. IFN has a long history of engagement with religious education, particularly through its membership connection with the RE Council for England and Wales, NASACRE, WASACRE and the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education.

- 1.28. Three school visits took place in order to hear from young people and staff in schools about inter faith activity in these contexts and its future development and to contribute to the project's understanding of young people's views on inter faith encounter and dialogue.
- 1.29. Two schools were in England and one in Wales. Of the English schools, one was urban and the other suburban, both culturally diverse. One was a Church of England Academy. The school in Wales was a Welsh medium school on the edge of the Brecon Beacons National Park. The focus of the school visits on England and Wales reflected the fact that these two nations have similar education systems, particularly in relation to RE and Collective Worship.
- 1.30. Interviews took place over a period of at least one hour and involved 12 – 20 sixth form students. Each group included both female and male students. In one school the group was both years 12 and 13, in another year 13 only and in the other school year 12 only.
- 1.31. One school in England visited has a young people's SACRE which is linked to the local SACRE through one of the teachers in the school being a member.

**vi) Note on attributions**

- 1.32. Questionnaire responses were requested on an organisational basis, and answers are therefore attributed to organisations except where the question asked for a personal view. Young people who took part in the focus group sessions gave their permission to be quoted in unattributed form as part of this project. Where quotes have been attributed to young people, the quote was cleared with them and permission was given to attribute in this way. A small number of the

quotes in this paper are therefore unattributed.

## 2. THE CHANGING CONTEXT FOR YOUTH INTER FAITH ENGAGEMENT

### a) A changing world

- 2.1. The world has changed in many ways since Connect was first published in 2004. This is not the place for an extended analysis of these. However, a number came to the fore in the course of the project, for example: changes in communication linked to the internet and social media; young people moving to new areas to live when their education is complete; a complex religious landscape; and issues around intolerance and extremism.
- 2.2. First, the internet and social media. In 2004, only 49% of UK households had an internet connection<sup>2</sup>, and access was mainly through desktop computers. By 2017, 90% of UK households had an internet connection<sup>3</sup>, and today a growing number of people access the internet primarily using smartphones and other handheld devices. Facebook was invented in 2004, today it is the most popular (in terms of number of users) social network in the UK across all age groups. Among 16-22 year olds, YouTube comes a close second and Instagram and Snapchat are also very popular<sup>4</sup>. Twitter is also used by a number.
- 2.3. Through these media, young people are now able to be exposed to any and every worldview as soon as they are able to watch and comprehend a YouTube video or read a Facebook post or tweet. There are both challenges and opportunities to this connectedness. At its best, it can

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/275999/household-internet-penetration-in-great-britain/>

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.emarketer.com/Chart/Social-Media-Platforms-Used-by-UK-Internet-Users-by-Age-Sep-2017-of-respondents-each-group/212173>



enable young people in even the most monocultural areas to make connections with and learn about people of other backgrounds. At its worst, it can expose young people to extreme voices and radicalising influences or affect them in other destructive ways.

- 2.4. Many young people leave the communities they grew up in, whether to study, to find work, or to find an affordable place to live. Those who stay may have limited spare time because of the pressures of work or raising families. These things can make it difficult for inter faith initiatives such as local inter faith groups to engage young people on a continuing basis. If one of the motivators for engaging with young people is to motivate and equip a new generation to take on roles within these structures, it might be disheartening to see well-equipped young people leave town. Even where the vision is very much about equipping young people to engage well with others wherever they end up in the world, it can be challenging to sustain programmes which require regular identification and motivation of new cohorts of young people. As will be seen below, however, some of the young people who took part in focus group sessions because of projects they were involved with run by national bodies or at university had benefitted from local activity before this, including within their schools.

#### b) Complexity of the landscape

- 2.5. The religious landscape is also complex. It is beyond the scope of this paper to assess trends in young people's religiosity. Hearing from the young people, it was at least clear that there was a strong assumption of secularity in terms of their peers and society at large.

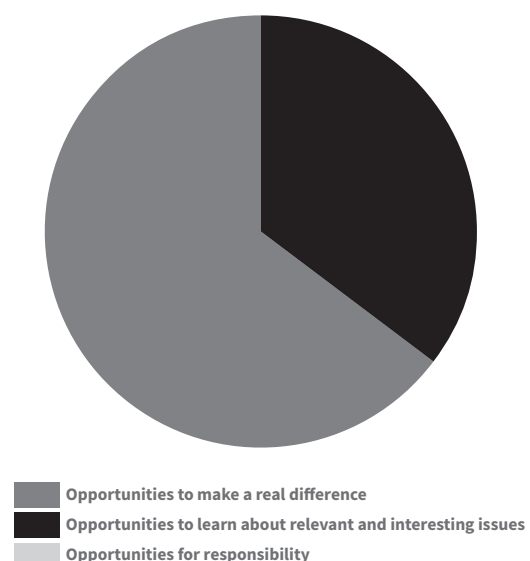
- 2.6. It was also clear that navigating the world as a young person of faith could be challenging. Young people perceived the UK today as experiencing a high level of extreme intolerance such as hate crime aimed at religious people and such as terrorists claiming justification of their acts on the basis of religion, even if day-to-day levels of tolerance were harder to judge. Terrorists claiming a religious justification also created a negative feedback loop, seemingly leading to greater amounts of prejudice and hate crime. This kind of ignorance cried out to be addressed. This was very much part of the public consciousness, and for a number of the young people who took part in focus group sessions, this gave inter faith activity a sense of urgency.

### 3. MOTIVATIONS, CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

#### a) Motivations – Why 'do inter faith'?

- 3.1. The project was particularly interested in what motivates young people to get involved in inter faith activity (and what encourages them to stay involved).
- 3.2. One of our polls on social media asked this question.

**What would make you want to take part in inter faith activity as a young person?**



3.3. Responses indicated that the primary motivators for young people were about making their communities, society and the world a better place.

3.4. The Questionnaire also asked a similar question “In your experience, what do you think are the most important factors for successfully engaging young people in inter faith programmes?” Of the 48 who responded to the multiple answer option question, 33 ticked “Opportunities to make a real difference” and 41 ticked “Opportunities to learn about relevant and interesting issues” and 30 ticked “Opportunities for responsibility eg through shaping programmes”.

*“Young people are very busy and often feeling that they can be part of a programme that can make a difference such as a programme towards charity or social justice can bring them”. – Edinburgh Inter Faith Association*

*“Inter faith is about dialogue and action. From dialogue we can produce action to support our communities and make the world a better place – we can improve human society” Susan, Christian*

*“Social action is so important because other people are able to unite around big ideas that they can all subscribe to and work together on. People of all faiths suffer from things like homelessness.” Jaspreet, Sikh*

*“People of faith want the world to be a better place – this is not just for one segment of society, but for all. This can only happen when we work together” Hana, Baha’i*

3.5. Learning from the focus group sessions reinforced this. Many of those who took part underlined that

their primary motivation for getting involved in inter faith activity was engagement with the ‘big’ issues – making a difference, building a better society, making the world a better place. Issues to do with personal development or opportunities were raised, but as secondary. Some participants thought that opportunities to learn or gain skills were important, but saw these as things that kept them involved longer term, rather than initial motivators to take part.

## **b) Creating effective spaces for youth inter faith engagement**

### **i) Involving young people in design and delivery**

3.6. Focus group session participants also discussed ways that programmes could be shaped to appeal better to young people. Their insights tended to be of two kinds: a) about the importance of young people’s involvement in the design of programmes aimed at them; and b) about the ways that inter faith activity involving young people is framed. The second point will be explored in more depth under ‘types of activity’ below.

3.7. Some young people expressed frustration that projects aimed at their age group appeared designed by others based on assumptions about what was most important to them or how they would most like to engage. While often the effort was appreciated, projects of this kind seemed to fall flat. On the other hand, many focus group participants noted the importance of people who championed youth involvement, and recognised that many projects – particularly those involving the younger end of the age group – were only possible because of support and advice.

- 3.8. Many organisations who responded to the questionnaires had ways of ensuring young voices were heard as part of the management structure of the organisation. Larger organisations such as some faith community bodies had youth councils and young leaders which paralleled the overall governance structure of the body, with some cross-over between them. Other bodies had youth seats on their Board, and some youth organisations had very developed pathways to leadership roles. Young people involved in such structures commented on their value. All of these structures involved some adult servicing and support.
- 3.9. Not all participants felt equipped to set up and run initiatives themselves, but there was near consensus in all of the focus group sessions that youth projects should include young people in design and delivery as well as in participation. This was seen as vital in promoting activities, but also in enabling young people to learn the skills needed to take forward initiatives for themselves in the future.
- “Young people are the leaders of the future! Inter faith knowledge is essential for living in a multi faith society, and young people need to be given opportunities to be inter faith leaders” Tenzin, Buddhist*
- 3.10. One participant drew a parallel between programme development and ownership, on the one hand, and inter faith activity itself. They noted that most people would consider it unhelpful if inter faith initiatives were set up and run by one religious group without consultation. People of other traditions would be unlikely to feel ownership of the process. The same applied to youth initiatives if they were set up without appropriate involvement of young people.
- 3.11. Some questionnaire respondents also offered views on this in response to the question described above:
- “Giving them space to discuss issues which are important to them – with them setting the agenda.” – Islington Faiths Forum*
- “Providing nice cakes certainly helps but giving young people the time and space to make decisions is what really motivates them. Everything we do is driven by the interests and ideas of our students.” – Milton Keynes SACRE*
- “We are at the start of the journey so can't really comment, however, so far it seems that consulting YP as to how they want to engage, as opposed to TELLING them, is a good way forward” – Crawley Interfaith Network*
- 3.12. It is notable that the Inter Faith Youth Trust – the only charitable trust dedicated to funding inter faith activities involving young people – has robust criteria about the kinds of activity that are eligible. These include that young people must be involved in all aspects of design, delivery and evaluation of activities.
- 3.13. CCJ described the approach of its Campus Leadership Programme as one tailored to the needs identified by the participants:
- “[The] Campus Leadership Programme encourages young people to identify the skills they need for leadership. The training content and mentor are chosen accordingly to encourage students to develop these leadership skills. Through running student-led events, participants have the opportunity to practice these skills with support when needed.” – CCJ*
- 3.14. The Faith and Belief Forum’s ParliaMentors programme teams up

groups of students from different faith and belief backgrounds to work together on social change projects while being mentored by an MP and receiving support from FBF staff and other NGOs. The students design and deliver the projects for themselves, and receive support tailored to their plans. An alumnus of the programme who attended one of the focus group sessions noted the value of the programme in equipping him with both the skills and networks needed to continue running social change projects in the community.

- 3.15. Many young people also gave accounts of initiatives with which they had been involved where they had had more involvement in design and delivery. Older people generally played a significant role in helping, facilitating, advising and even championing young people.
- 3.16. In one of the focus group sessions, a small number of young people also offered a word of caution about engaging young people in planning activities – not every young person is ‘representative’ of their age group. Sometimes the person drawn in to help to set up and deliver programmes might have more in common with older people than their own age group, and this could be a challenge when pitching activities well.

## **ii) Not shying away from tough issues**

- 3.17. Several young people described the importance of initiatives which opened up hard-hitting issues that they felt were important to explore but which were often considered ‘unsafe’ for inter faith contexts and/or for youth contexts. Examples offered included issues around extremism and radicalisation and issues around faith and sexuality or gender identity.

*“Interfaith Scotland held a national youth conference on the theme of ‘Radicalisation and Reconciliation’. The conference was planned by a team of young people from different faiths. The young people chose a theme and speakers and met regularly to plan the event with the support of Interfaith Scotland staff. Young people from a wide variety of faiths, beliefs and no religious beliefs came together from across Scotland to attend the conference. There were presentations from expert speakers, and an opportunity to engage in dialogue on the theme.” Interfaith Scotland*

## **iii) Dialogue between people of religious and non-religious beliefs**

- 3.18. Some of the young people also raised the importance of dialogue between those of religious and those of non-religious beliefs. Some described this as best located within inter faith activity, as another perspective to learn about and understand. Others thought that dialogue with those of non-religious beliefs was primarily about challenging misconceptions they might have about people of faith, and so thought this kind of engagement should be done separately.

*“People who are not religious may often feel a disconnect from people of faith, and it is about emphasising that the values that we all share that strengthen our society are applicable to everyone as humans beings, and have benefit for everyone.”*

*“Even if you aren’t religious, it is important to have an appreciation for others, as well as respect. I don’t like the word tolerance, because it is not just about tolerating someone of another faith, but about respecting them.”*

**iv) Types of activity effective for youth inter faith engagement**

- 3.19. A number of questions at each focus group session were aimed at drawing out what kinds of activity young people found appealing, and what they didn't. Thoughts on this varied, as might be expected.
- 3.20. In discussion of the old Connect guide, a number of comments were made about the fact that its main content, excluding the case studies, focused mainly on dialogue. There was a clear wish for a wider pattern of activity to be reflected and encouraged.
- 3.21. The inter faith projects that the young people had experience of varied considerably. Some were traditional dialogue-style activities, with people of different faiths discussing and exploring issues from different perspectives. However, there were also activities which included sport, arts and crafts, culture, social action, shared meals, IT as well as experiential learning (including visits to places of worship) and many other kinds of activity.
- 3.22. Some focus group respondents and organisations that responded to the questionnaire noted the importance of creating opportunities within safe spaces for young people to ask questions and discuss challenging issues:

*"Inter faith activities should create safe spaces where everyone can speak and be listened to." Mary Katherine, Christian*

*"People should not be spoken for but enabled to speak for themselves." Britney, Jewish*

*"We regularly undertake what we call 'encounter work' getting equal number of young people from different faiths and create space for*

*discussion, fun activity, developing friendships and enjoying food together." – The Feast Bradford and Keighley*

*"...just meeting people who are different and celebrating that difference, creating a safe and open space for questions and discussions, also just creating opportunities for interactions with people they wouldn't usually meet on a day to day basis" – Jewish Museum London*

*"Inter faith activity is about understanding one another. It's possible to coexist peacefully by ignoring each other, but there is a difference between coexisting peacefully in that way, and actively living alongside each other" Fatema, Muslim*

*"To agree to disagree with someone is vital. As humans it is extremely easy to feel defensive – some people don't realise it's okay to disagree" Kuldeep, Hindu*

*"It is important to be able to have quality disagreements. We can acknowledge that difference exists without undermining the fact that we also have many shared values" Hamzah, Muslim*

*"Inter faith activity is about respecting everyone's faiths and beliefs. Acknowledging that other people believe different things is really important" Jaimal, Hindu*

- 3.23. Activities which brought people of different backgrounds together to do something were noted a number of times as leading to meaningful inter faith encounter and learning, even where this was not the primary purpose. Often, of course, this was very much intended.

*"Everyone connects with their faith differently. Some people really*



*study it, and enjoy reading, discussing, learning about the theology or philosophy. Many others take their faith seriously and live it out, but who don't spend much time deep in learning, but enjoy the fellowship and community of others. The same is true of inter faith activity. Not everyone will be attracted to scholarly engagement or deep discussion. It is important to find ways to reach that majority of people through what they are interested in."* Lauren, Jewish

- 3.24. National Citizen Service (NCS) is a good example of this in action. Programmes aim to facilitate young people of different backgrounds mixing and building friendships. They do this through running fun outdoor activities with mixed groups of young people, followed by working together to come up with a social action project and delivering it in the community. Through meeting, having fun with, and working with people of different backgrounds, friendships form and participants learn about others. The programme's evaluations show that it results in improved community cohesion, but this aspect of the programme is not at the forefront of how it is framed for participants. The Jewish Lads and Girls Brigade is one of the programme deliverers for NCS, and has developed an approach which both caters to some of the unique needs of people of faith (such as dietary requirements) while ensuring mixing between people of different faiths and backgrounds.
- 3.25. The Government's recently published Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper makes the same point: "Meaningful social mixing is more likely to happen in settings where people from different backgrounds come together for a specific purpose such as work, school, social action or a social or civic event. ... Youth social action is a valuable bridging activity through which young people play an important role in helping to establish the norms of cooperation and reciprocity in their communities and to make positive use of their skills, knowledge and capabilities." NCS is highlighted as a key example of this.
- 3.26. These kinds of approach were also discussed in focus group sessions in relation to questions around 'how to reach people who would not otherwise engage'.
- 3.27. Questionnaire respondents also made similar points:
- "Using concern for the environment as a vehicle" – Footsteps – Faiths for a low carbon future, Birmingham Council of Faiths describing what leads to successful engagement*
- "Help them to meet people, not think about 'issues'. Friendships do a lot more for inter faith work than intellectual debates. There needs to be a good level of trust between people so they have the willingness to find/rely on common ground on which to hold the differences.*
- If there is a real relationship between people who hold different views on faith, then their shared humanity can be the foundation that helps them to engage in that. Start the relationship with a shared interest/purpose first."* – L'Arche London
- "Discreet add-on work during sporting activities – like various stalls during the Peace Cup football tournament – they [young people] love interactive, fun activities – so to learn something whilst having fun"* – Islington FF
- 3.28. At the same time as this project, IFN in partnership with Sporting Equals, held an event on The Power of Sport for Building Inter Faith Relations.

The day contained numerous examples of how sport provides a good context for young people of different faiths talking and learning and developing skills of cooperation. Among these were the Interfaith Games of the Association of Muslim Schools and a number of outreach projects such as the Unity Tournament run by Burnley FC and Building Bridges in Burnley and the inter faith games and learning experiences provided by Arsenal in the Community and Windsor and Maidenhead Community Forum's multi faith all-age cricket, as well as a number of projects run by Sporting Equals.

- 3.29. Two questionnaire respondents described IT based projects being run with young people:

*"The young people [worked with an innovative local IT company] and mapped, visited, photographed and recorded audio interviews with members of a wide range of faith communities across Liverpool, then produced a free, interactive App for residents, school children and visitors to explore Liverpool's diverse faith community centres, including a timeline history of faith in our city going back to the ancient pre-historic Calderstones. We then created and delivered Footsteps of Faith assemblies, delivered in Primary and Secondary schools across the city." – Liverpool Community Spirit*

*"The Ground We Share' is a new website that is being designed to promote religious literacy amongst young people, tackle the misconceptions and prejudices that young people might have. The project is being lead by young people in secondary schools with the support of RME teachers and EIFA staff. Young people are asking faith and secular humanist representatives questions*

*regarding their faith, belief and morality. Answers are recorded in a video format an uploaded to an interactive website. On the website young people can video answering their questions and have the opportunity to interact and ask questions directly of representatives. The website is still in development stage." – Edinburgh Inter Faith Association*

*"The Strengthening Faith Institutions programme is bringing together young women and girls from different faith backgrounds to learn coding skills in partnership with tech companies. The programme aims to empower pupils and to increase gender and faith diversity in the technology industry." – Strengthening Faith Institutions*

- 3.30. These projects provide opportunities for young people to learn both practical IT and media skills while also developing skills for inter faith engagement. The outputs also enable a wider pool of people – of all ages – to learn. Enabling and equipping young people to contribute to development of positive narratives online is a very practical way of responding to one of the challenges noted above.

#### **v) Structuring of activity**

- 3.31. It was interesting that when discussing 'inter faith' issues, school students focused on the importance of common ground and commonality but in particular how the structuring of encounter could affect exploration and discovery of that. They discussed whether they thought it was important to have structured inter faith encounter or whether unstructured encounters were better. It was felt that both were important. Structured encounter and dialogue was seen to bring with it a certain level of equality, especially of respect, so that no one

could dominate a dialogue and everyone was given a chance. Unstructured engagement was also felt to be important but the way it could come about was different. It could be based on chance or on a person finding themselves in a new situation, such as being part of mixed school classes or sports teams. These could be helpful contexts in which to build relationships, but they relied upon already having developed skills for such encounter.

- 3.32. There are tried and tested ways to ensure, within structured inter faith dialogue contexts, that people engage with parity. However, more thought should perhaps be given to working towards that in other types of inter faith engagement, to ensure that particular people or groups did not dominate (unintentionally or otherwise).

### c) RE and inter faith engagement in schools

- 3.33. IFN has always taken the view that good, multi-faith Religious Education is essential in preparing pupils for life in a multi faith society.
- 3.34. Young people's experience of RE and their views of it, however, vary considerably. This was reflected in discussion during the school visits. For some taking part, RE has opened up a fascinating world of enquiry and provided real opportunities to learn about and from different traditions. For others, it has felt like a tack-on subject which was not fully satisfying. Some young people remarked upon the need to correct misinformation about their own faith coming either from other pupils or from teachers. A number of young people noted that their religion was sometimes presented in RE in a way they did not recognise. Wariness was expressed about generalisations such as 'Hindus believe X' or 'Muslims wear Y'.

- 3.35. One striking area of consensus emerged through all of the focus group sessions. Where young people had had opportunities at school to visit different places of worship or to meet visitors from different religious backgrounds, this had made a lasting and usually positive impression. The opportunity to see, experience and ask questions in a safe and controlled context was often recalled as a vital part of a young person's learning, and for some the reason they continued to be involved in inter faith activity. This underlines the importance of encounter alongside classroom learning.

*"In a school I work in we had to give an inter faith assembly, with representative Muslim, Jewish, and Christian speakers. It was interesting to see that when we were asked to present the main ideas of our religions, we found common ground in the principles of kindness and caring for people."*

- 3.36. Students spoken to as part of the school visits also felt that it was important to have some knowledge about other faith and belief traditions, although they did not agree on what the essentials might be. They also recognised that you may meet people of faiths and beliefs that you'd never heard of. In those contexts inter faith skills might then be more important than knowledge about different traditions. Those who were clearer in their ideas about what you should know focussed around key beliefs and how they shaped the lives of those that hold them. When they were asked about meeting people of faiths other than themselves, most wanted the chance to meet them in those people's own places of worship as they felt this would add to the experience.

- 3.37. A number of respondents to the questionnaire described activities with schools, and some of these made use of older young people – for example secondary pupils – to speak in primary schools and university or college students to speak in secondary schools:

*“We established Whisper 2 years ago, a project supplying faith visitors to primary and secondary schools. ... We run the Whisper training sessions at Herts University, which prepare students to act as faith visitors in schools – and in the training meetings they get to know other students from different faiths and talk about their respective religions and schools’ presentations together.” – Welwyn Hatfield Interfaith Group*

*“Primary School Multi faith workshops. Up to 7 leaders/ reps of differing faiths set up tables round the room and the children visit each in turn to listen, discuss and ask questions, making notes in provided booklets. Children then brought together to talk about important of listening and showing respect for difference and celebrate what we share. We then finish with an appropriate story and craft group which the school keep.” – Welwynborough Interfaith Group*

*“Tower Hamlets Ambassadors of Faith and Belief Scheme: Ambassadors of Faith and Belief (AFaB) are 6th form students at secondary schools in Tower Hamlets. They are trained to present to primary classes and talk about how their faith or belief is reflected in their culture and personal life. Their function is to visit primary schools where they work in classes and even help to take assemblies. As visitors to schools, they can give presentations on their faiths and beliefs and try to answer any*

*questions that pupils may have” – Tower Hamlets SACRE*

- 3.38. Interfaith Scotland has for a number of years trained ‘older young people’ to present in school contexts. Two of these took part in the Young Voices, Young Agents for Change event in 2014 mentioned above, and talked extensively about how those experiences taught them new skills and also made them think more deeply about their own faiths. Some of the young people also commented on this kind of approach:

*“Having young people talking to other young people is important – we relate to each other well and can communicate effectively.”*

- 3.39. The Government has also highlighted opportunities for encounter as key within its Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, particularly those which involve longer-term interaction: “Children and young people... should have the opportunity within school, further education, and beyond the school gates to mix and form lasting relationships with others from different ethnic, religious, or socio-economic groups so they are well equipped for adult life.” It highlights as an example school linking, including that led by 3FF in relation to faith school linking, noting that “[the Schools Linking] programme provides sustained opportunities for children and young people from different communities to meet, build new relationships, work together and contribute to the wider community.”

- 3.40. Some young people did not have these opportunities, and their learning in school about other traditions came only from the teacher and the text book. Those who had subsequently become

involved in inter faith activity remarked upon the inadequacy of this experience and how often, when they met people of other faiths, they found out how little they had later understood about those traditions.

*“[one of] the challenge[s] is that staff move on, retire or the institution engages in some form of reorganisation which makes it difficult to know who is the responsible staff member”*

- 3.41. This area opens up real opportunities for inter faith initiatives. Schools, as permanent institutions within communities, offer a stable focus for engagement with young people. The focus of schools is to equip young people to go off into the world to do whatever they do next. Gaining inter faith skills is part of that and inter faith initiatives are well placed to help facilitate engagement between schools, SACREs and faith communities, and therefore to help identify possibilities for visits to places of worship and visitors to schools to speak about different faiths.

*“Working through schools or existing youth groups can help to ensure ‘buy in’ and sustained participation.”*  
– Interfaith Glasgow

*“We encourage & support RE Ambassadors in schools. Redhill Academy has achieved national recognition and other local schools have developed their own ambassadors. One primary school has developed a faith council within it,”* – Nottinghamshire CC SACRE

*“We need to know what are the academic priorities of the institution. Staff appear to be under great pressure to fulfil the demands of the curriculum, If we can tailor our programmes to complement their objectives then we have a chance of grabbing their attention.”* – Wisbech Interfaith

- 3.42. One group did, however, note that there could still be challenges in engaging with schools:

#### **d) Inter faith engagement on campus**

- 3.43. A significant amount of young people’s inter faith engagement in the UK today takes place in higher or further education contexts. Chaplaincies, faith societies and students unions’ are all involved with bringing young people of different faiths, beliefs and backgrounds together for learning, dialogue and shared social action.

- 3.44. A number of focus group participants noted that a key motivation for inter faith activity in campus contexts was a desire to correct misinformation and challenge prejudices. Some observed that at universities, religious students seemed to gravitate toward narrower manifestations of their religion. Students were also more likely to proselytise in ways which people of other traditions experienced as problematic. Inter faith engagement was identified as a helpful way to navigate some of these issues.

*“Inter faith activity helps you learn the skills to differentiate facts from news hype.”* – Aparna, Hindu

*“There is a lot of misunderstanding between faiths, especially among young people who are not exposed to those with different beliefs. We should be trying to overcome assumptions and stereotypes through dialogue.”* Ross, Atheist

- 3.45. A questionnaire respondent described a programme linked to challenging prejudice:

*“More recently [we have been] piloting an inter faith student*



*fellowship training programme. We deliver targeted training in predominately white areas for young people to explore prejudice particularly against Muslims. ... The idea behind the inter faith fellowship is to generate young inter faith champions at the university which will in turn help us deliver future activities.” – MFC at Uni Derby*

- 3.46. Inter Faith Week continues to be a very popular on campus, with students using it in a wide variety of ways. In some places, university chaplaincies play a leading role, either running activities or coordinating and encouraging faith societies to do so. In others, students themselves take this on, either through an ‘inter faith society’, or through the Students’ Union as a whole taking a lead, or through individual faith societies reaching out to one another.

*“For Inter Faith Week, representatives from all the University Faith Societies came together to put together a programme of activities which aimed to appeal to as many different students as possible. Each society hosted an event and they included events to learn about other religions through ‘Speed Faithing’, Scriptural Reasoning and a ‘Faith Trail’ to visit different places of worship. There were social action projects where people came together to visit the elderly, run a food drive and to distribute supplies to the homeless people in Leeds. The week also hosted more social events for people to come together to create new friendships based on shared interests. These events included an open mic night, football match, yoga lesson and a discussion group on feminism and religion!” – Example in the Connect guide from Leeds University Faith Societies*

*“During Inter Faith Week the LSE Faith Centre has a ‘Giving Tree’ where students and staff can pledge items to go into refugee welcome packs. This also helps to highlight the role of the Faith Centre on campus, with volunteers across faiths manning the tree and this brings more students of different faith and belief backgrounds together. Social action is a really unifying force, and is an important part of the development of inter faith activity on the LSE campus” – Example in the Connect guide from London School of Economics Faith Centre*

- 3.47. National student bodies also play a critical role in encouraging inter faith engagement on campus. The National Union of Students actively encourages participation in Inter Faith Week and Scottish Interfaith Week, and produces resources for students’ unions and their affiliated societies. National umbrella bodies for faith-based student societies also increasingly encourage member societies to engage in inter faith activity. The British Organisation of Sikh Students, for example, runs a project called ‘Langar on Campus’, one aim of which is to encourage students of other faiths to attend and learn about this aspect of Sikhism. The National Hindu Students’ Forum encourages multi-faith engagement in campus-based Sewa Day activities, and the Union of Jewish Students encourages JSocs both to take part in Inter Faith Week and to run inter faith Mitzvah Day projects.

*“We help to organise over 15 Langar on Campus events across UK campuses and encourage the Sikh societies to use them to encourage interfaith dialogue.” - BOSS*

- 3.48. The variety of inter faith activity taking place on campus is almost a microcosm for the variety in the world at large. Student groups have

run activities ranging from dialogues and panel discussions through to sports tournaments, board games nights, quizzes and volunteering programmes. Student inter faith activities are also a source of innovation. The idea of 'speed faithing' began on campus and has become popular in other contexts, and one university ran an Inter Faith Week activity some years ago called 'Temple Run', a twist on the 'faith trail' concept.

- 3.49. Some questionnaire respondents also noted the importance of their alumni networks – young people who have gone through their programmes, moved on, but are still committed to raising awareness. CCJ noted this in relation to its Campus Leadership Programme, and 3FF noted it in relation to its ParliaMentors programme (described above). The ParliaMentors Alumni Network were responsible for producing the annual 'Interfaith Summit' for young people, exploring relevant issues and including arts and celebration.
- 3.50. The growth and creativity of inter faith activity taking place on campus also presents many opportunities, both for partnership working and for further learning and good practice sharing. Mechanisms for achieving this may be helpful to consider. Most student societies have elections annually, which can make engagement with other organisations challenging over time.

#### **e) Local authorities and youth services**

- 3.51. Questionnaires were not sent to local authorities. However, a small number of youth programmes which responded were supported in some way by their local authority. Local authorities have a role in providing and supporting youth provision, and in supporting and encouraging community cohesion and integration.

Further exploration of ways to work with local authorities to encourage and support opportunities for young people of different faiths and beliefs to engage with one another would be helpful.

## **4. EMERGING THEMES AND NEXT STEPS**

- 4.1. A number of key themes have emerged throughout this programme and described above: what motivates young people to get and stay involved in inter faith activity; ways of empowering and equipping young people to develop inter faith activities that suit their contexts, skills and interests; finding ways for organisations to adapt to engage with young people where they are; communicating the value of inter faith activity – in particular, appealing to the motivations of young people; engaging with schools; and supporting and encouraging the growth in young people's inter faith activity.
- 4.2. Linked to these themes, and taking into account all the information and views drawn in for the project, some suggestions are offered at Annex 1 as a springboard for discussion at the National Meeting.
- 4.3. Your reflections are very important to this process. National meeting participants are invited to discuss the suggestions – and the paper itself – and to consider how they might be taken up or developed by them or by other organisations to have the greatest possible impact on engaging young people in inter faith action and learning for their own benefit and that of wider society.
- 4.4. IFN will have a new Strategic Plan from 2019 and an important strand of this will be about inter faith engagement of young people. Therefore, in discussion, as well as discussing the issues more generally, the Board would welcome your

thoughts about what this strand of the Strategic Plan might look like, bearing in mind IFN's role as a 'linker', resource developer and 'adder of value' rather than front line or youth specialist body.

- 4.5. How IFN might take these things up will be discussed during the AGM later in the day, by the Advisory Group after the AGM and by the Board in the Autumn.
- 4.6. IFN is grateful to everyone who took the time to respond, take part and contribute to the learning which has informed this programme. The Inter Faith Network for the UK is very grateful for the help of the programme's Advisory Group, as noted above in the paper. Thanks are also extended to all the people and organisations mentioned in this paper and to the many others who offered their support and assistance, including those who completed the questionnaire and attended young people's focus group sessions or

took part through school visits. Particular thanks are owed to Interfaith Scotland, which fielded a member of the Advisory Group, co-hosted a focus group session for young people in Scotland and helped to gather good practice examples from within Scotland; and the Inter-faith Council for Wales, which helped to encourage participation in the project within Wales.

- 4.7. IFN is very grateful to those who have helped to fund the project, in particular to The Golden Tours Foundation, The Interfaith Youth Trust and The Mulberry Trust, as well as to the faith communities, trusts, other donors and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government which support all of IFN's work.

19 June 2018

# Annex 1 to Call to Action paper

## Thinking about future inter faith engagement by young people: some possible ideas emerging

### • Building a better society and a better world

Young people want to contribute to change for the good of society and the world

- Describe inter faith activities in ways which make clear the value to society.
- Where inter faith activity is an exchange of ideas, make clear the importance of that to helping resolve a particular issue or set of issues, such as challenging prejudice or working toward a more equal society.
- Find ways of modelling a better society by ensuring that everyone's voice is treated equally when exchanging ideas.

### • Empowering young people to develop inter faith initiatives

Young people want to be engaged in all aspects of the design and delivery of programmes targeted at them. Most also value the support and guidance of older people and the experience they have to offer.

- Find ways to enable young people to set the agenda.
- Work alongside young people as equal partners. That is important, and may lead to more successful long-term programmes.
- Use alumni networks to keep in touch.

### • Supporting inter faith activity with young people

Inter faith activity involving young people is growing.

- Find ways to support youth inter faith initiatives in a joined-up way, including those which are time-limited such as those led by student societies.
- Make existing inter faith networks accessible to young people – such as being willing to engage and offer advice or contacts.
- Encourage any relevant organisations to build in a youth inter faith dimension.

### • Adapting inter faith structures to engage young people

It is important to make space for young people within the structures of faith and inter faith organisations.

- Include young people in governance structures where possible/appropriate.
- Create pathways to leadership roles.
- Learn from young people.

### • Communicating the value of inter faith engagement to young people

Use ways to communicate that are appropriate and effective.

- Use social media.
- As above, make clear the importance of inter faith activity to helping resolve a particular issue or set of issues, such as challenging prejudice or working toward a more equal society.
- Build opportunities for inter faith encounter and engagement into other kinds of activity, such as sports, arts or social action activity.

### • Engaging with schools and forming partnerships with other organisations

Schools and other educational establishments are key places for youth inter faith learning and engagement

- Build relationships with schools.
- It may be helpful for local inter faith groups and SACREs to work together (where feasible) to offer annual 'community faith orientation' sessions

for school teachers and leaders. These could simply provide teachers with an opportunity to visit local places of worship and learn about the local religious make-up. This offer may have value to schools, and enable local inter faith groups to stay 'on the radar'.

- Further consideration should be given to ways of working with local authorities

## Annex 2 to Call to Action paper

### Key milestones in IFN's work with young people and encouraging youth inter faith engagement

- Throughout the thirty years, engagement with RE bodies over multi faith RE and since 2000 encouragement to develop inter faith strands to curricula.
- Also across the overall period IFN has supported and encouraged the youth initiatives carried out by such bodies as 3FF and, most recently, the new Religions for Peace UK Youth Interfaith Network.
- Building of contributions of young people into the Millennium Act of Reflection and Commitment at the Houses of Parliament which formed part of the official Millennium Celebrations
- 2002 – Golden Jubilee Young People's Faith Forum at St James' Palace as part of the official celebrations (A summary report can be found at <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/the-golden-jubilee-young-persons-faith-forum>) on which IFN worked with the Golden Jubilee Office within the Department for Culture, Media and Sport with involvement from RE teachers in the process.
- 2004 – Publication of Connect: Different faiths shared values, a young people's action guide (<https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/connect-different-faiths-shared-values>)
- 2005 – IFN's National Meeting on the theme "Connecting for the Future: Young People and Inter Faith Relations in Britain" (report at <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/connecting-for-the-future-young-people-and-inter-faith-relations-in-briatin>)
- 2006 – Publication of Good inter faith relations on Campus with the Equality Challenge Unit, which maps ways of encouraging inter faith initiatives in HE campuses (<https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/building-good-relations-on-campus>)
- 2006 - Faith, Identity and Belonging: Educating for Shared Citizenship a seminar held jointly with the Citizenship Foundation (report at <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/fait-identity-and-belonging-educating-for-shared-citizenship>)
- 2009 – IFN's National Meeting held as a day conference entitled "Good inter faith relations: the next generation". One of a series of 'soundings' events looking at issues in contemporary inter faith dialogue and engagement in the UK (report at <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/good-inter-faith-relations-the-next-generation>)
- 2009 – launch event for first national Inter Faith Week in England and Wales features strong involvement of young people and includes resources for use in schools.
- 2010 – as part of a Government reception for Inter Faith Week, IFN develops a series of display panels about young people's engagement in inter faith activity. Later re-set as a printable e-resource (<https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/young-people-and-inter-faith-engagement-e-resource>)
- 2014 – IFN holds a national event bringing together practitioners working with young people from faith-based, inter faith, secular and other organisations on inter faith initiatives. Young people are key contributors to the day. (A report is at <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/young-voices-young-agents-for-change-a-short-report>)
- Since 2014, IFN has focussed in particular on increasing young people's engagement in Inter Faith Week, and sections about this were included within



its recent publications Inter Faith Week Toolkit; Inter faith learning, dialogue and cooperation: Next Steps; and Let's Talk: Practical Pointers for Inter Faith Dialogue.

- At the day event for local inter faith practitioners in London in 2015 there was a workshop entitled Young people and inter faith engagement at local level. This was facilitated by Becky Brookman, then Near Neighbours Coordinator for West London, with a short opening presentation from Daniel Mohammed, then Chair, Doncaster Interfaith (<https://www.interfaith.org.uk/uploads/London%20note%202015%20September%20F%20RFS.pdf#page=32>)
- At the day event for local inter faith practitioners in Coventry in 2016, Jaskiran Kaur Mehmi offered closing reflections on the themes of the day ([https://www.interfaith.org.uk/uploads/IFN\\_Local\\_day\\_event\\_Coventry\\_2016.pdf#page=21](https://www.interfaith.org.uk/uploads/IFN_Local_day_event_Coventry_2016.pdf#page=21))
- At the 2017 IFN National Meeting, Jaskiran Kaur Mehmi, a student at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) where she is involved in inter faith engagement through its multi faith Faith Centre, and a recent Committee member of Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship, spoke in plenary on the importance of getting the chance to develop skills for playing an active role in a multi faith society and why IFN's support for local groups and youth inter faith engagement is important. There was also an input from Rudolf Elliott Lockhart, Chief Executive, RE Council for England and Wales, on the vital importance of RE in 21st Century Britain.

# Participant List

Sheikh Dr Muhammad Al-Hussaini  
Scriptural Reasoning

Mr Usman Ali  
Wakefield Interfaith Network / Wakefield  
City Youth and Community Forum

Miss Jay Anderson  
Leeds Faith Forum

Mr Afrasiab Anwar MBE  
Building Bridges in Burnley

Mr Keith Armstrong  
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Mr George Ballentyne  
Christians Aware Faith Awareness

Miss Parhin Begum  
Blackburn with Darwen Interfaith Forum

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IFN Trustee

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Ms Becky Brookman  
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Devon Faith and Belief Forum / IFN Trustee

Mr Antony Hamilton  
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|   |   |
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| Mr Jules Ireng<br>Young Friends General Meeting   | Miss Nudrat Mughal<br>Action Factory Community Arts   |
| Mrs Ann James<br>Warwick District Faiths Forum  | Miss Nahal Namvari<br>Cardiff University and Baha'i Community   |
| Ms Jennifa Kamal<br>RE Matters  | The Revd Feargus O'Connor<br>General Assembly of Unitarian and Free<br>Christian Churches                             |
| Miss Jaskiran Kaur Mehmi<br>Co-Facilitator, IFN Youth Inter Faith<br>Engagement Advisory Group            | Mr Dapo Ogunrinde<br>Council of African and Afro-Caribbean<br>Churches UK   |
| Mr Abid Khan<br>North Lincolnshire Multi-Faith Partnership  | Mrs Kamu Palan<br>Golden Tours Foundation   |
| Ms Fatima Khatun<br>Newham Student SACRE  | Mr Nitin Palan MBE<br>BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha / Hindu<br>Christian Forum / Golden Tours Foundation<br>/ IFN Trustee |
| Mr Pejman Khojasteh<br>International Association for Religious<br>Freedom (British Chapter) / IFN Trustee | Mr Chan Parmar<br>Bolton Interfaith Council   |
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| Mr Nikhwat Marawat<br>Delicate Mind / Faith and Belief Forum<br>ParliaMentors                             | Mr David Rennie<br>Interfaith MK (Milton Keynes)  |
| Shaykh Qazi Abdul Mateen<br>Multi Faith Centre at the University of Derby                                 | Miss Ruth Richardson<br>Multi Faith Centre at the University of Derby   |
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Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha GB and IFN FCF  
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Mr Narendra Waghela  
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All Faiths Network

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Mrs Lynda Williams  
Quaker Committee for Christian and  
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# The Inter Faith Network for the UK

Inter faith understanding, respect and cooperation is ever more important in the UK today.

The Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN) links and works with national faith community representative bodies, inter faith organisations, academic and educational organisations with an interest in inter faith relations, as well as with other organisations including Government and other public agencies, to strengthen inter faith understanding and cooperation in the UK. IFN is unique in its scope and role both within the UK and in Europe. It has been bringing organisations and people together for over 30 years and its work is always evolving to meet fresh needs.

IFN carries out its work of strengthening good inter faith relations through:

- providing advice and support to inter faith organisations around the country to add value to their work
- running a helpline which each year assists hundreds of people with their inter faith projects or issues
- advocating for support of local inter faith groups and national and regional inter faith initiatives
- producing resources, in cooperation with its members, on issues of common concern such as faith based dietary practice
- bringing its member bodies and others together regularly to meet and discuss issues of common concern
- other programmes of work including Faith and Public Life and Inter Faith Week
- For more information about IFN, visit [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk).
- The work of IFN is supported by faith communities, trusts, other donors, and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

# Member Organisations of the Inter Faith Network for the UK 2018-19

## Faith Community Representative Bodies

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

## Educational and Academic Bodies

Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme  
Community Religions Project, University of Leeds  
Institute of Jainology  
Islamic Foundation  
National Association of SACREs  
Religious Education Council of England and Wales  
Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education  
Sion Centre for Dialogue and Encounter  
Wales Association of SACREs  
Woolf Institute

## National and Regional Inter Faith Organisations

Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum  
Interfaith Scotland  
Inter-faith Council for Wales/Cyngor Cyd-Ffydd Cymru  
Faiths Forum for London  
North East Regional Faiths Network  
South East England Faith Forum  
All Faiths Network for the UK  
Children of Abraham (Imams and Rabbis Council of the United Kingdom)  
Christian Muslim Forum  
Christians Aware Interfaith Programme  
Council of Christians and Jews  
Council of Dharmic Faiths  
East of England Faiths Agency  
The Faith & Belief Forum  
Hindu Christian Forum  
Interfaith Alliance UK  
International Association for Religious Freedom (British Chapter)  
International Interfaith Centre  
Joseph Interfaith Foundation  
London Boroughs Faiths Network  
London Inter Faith Centre  
London Society of Jews and Christians  
Maimonides Interfaith Foundation  
Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby



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

### **Local Inter Faith Groups**

Altrincham Inter Faith Group  
Learning Together, Living in Harmony  
(Aylesbury)  
Barking and Dagenham Faith Forum  
Barnet Multi-Faith Forum  
Bedford Council of Faiths  
Birmingham Council of Faiths  
Blackpool Faith Forum  
Bolton Interfaith Council  
Faith Links (Bournemouth and Poole)  
Bradford Concord Interfaith Society  
Brent Multi-Faith Forum  
Brighton and Hove Inter-Faith Contact  
Group  
Bristol Inter Faith Group  
Bristol Multi-Faith Forum  
Building Bridges in Burnley  
Calderdale Interfaith Council  
Cambridge Inter-Faith Group  
Canterbury and District Inter Faith Action  
Cheltenham Inter Faith  
Cherwell Faith Forum  
Cleveland and Tees Valley Inter Faith Group  
Cornwall Faiths Forum  
Coventry Multi-Faith Forum  
Crawley Interfaith Network  
Faiths Together in Croydon  
Cumbria Interfaith Forum  
Devon Faith and Belief Forum  
Dudley Borough Interfaith Network  
Eastbourne Faiths Forum  
Elmbridge Multi-Faith Forum  
Exeter Faith and Belief Group  
Gateshead Inter Faith Forum  
Greater Yarmouth Inter Faith and Belief  
Network  
Harrow Interfaith  
Hastings and District Interfaith Forum  
Hillingdon Inter Faith Network  
Horsham Interfaith Forum  
Hounslow Friends of Faith  
Hull and East Riding Interfaith

Inter Faith Isle of Man  
Islington Faiths Forum  
Keighley Interfaith Group  
Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames  
Inter-Faith Forum  
Faiths Together in Lambeth  
Lancashire Forum of Faiths  
Faith in Lancaster  
Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship  
Leeds Faiths Forum  
Leicester Council of Faiths  
Interfaith Forum for Leicestershire  
Loughborough Council of Faiths  
Luton Council of Faiths  
Faith Network for Manchester  
Mansfield Interfaith Group  
Medway Inter Faith Action Forum  
Merseyside Council of Faiths  
Interfaith MK (Milton Keynes)  
Milton Keynes Council of Faiths  
Newcastle Council of Faiths  
Newham Association of Faiths  
North Herts Faith Forum  
North Kent Council for Inter Faith Relations  
– Kent Thameside  
North Kirklees Inter-Faith Council  
North Lincolnshire Multi Faith Partnership  
North Staffordshire Forum of Faiths  
Northampton Inter Faith Forum  
Norwich InterFaith Link  
Nottingham Inter Faith Council  
Oldham Inter Faith Forum  
Building Bridges Pendle – Interfaith  
Community Project  
Peterborough Inter-Faith Council  
Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural  
Diversity  
Portsmouth Inter Faith Forum  
Preston Faith Forum  
Redbridge Faith Forum  
Rochdale Multi Faith Partnership  
Rugby Inter Faith Forum  
Salford Interfaith Network  
Sheffield Inter Faith  
Solihull Faiths Forum  
South London Inter Faith Group  
South Shropshire Interfaith Forum  
Southampton Council of Faiths  
Southwark Multi Faith Forum  
Stafford and District Friends of Faith  
Stratford-on-Avon Interfaith Forum  
Swindon Inter Faith Group  
Faiths United (Tameside)  
Torbay Interfaith Forum

Tower Hamlets Inter Faith Forum  
Wakefield Interfaith Network  
Waltham Forest Faith Communities Forum  
Warwick District Faiths Forum  
Watford Inter Faith Association  
Wellingborough Inter Faith Group  
Welwyn Hatfield Interfaith Group  
Westminster Faith Exchange  
William Campbell-Taylor (City of London  
Interfaith)  
Windsor and Maidenhead Community  
Forum  
Wisbech Interfaith Forum  
Interfaith Wolverhampton  
Worcestershire Inter-Faith Forum  
Wycombe Sharing of Faiths  
York Interfaith Group

*As at July 2018*

#### Front cover photographs

**Top left:** Ross Brittain, Council of Christians and Jews, and the Rt Revd Richard Atkinson, IFN Co-Chair

**Top right:** Sister Margaret Shepherd nds, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, and Nahal Namvari, Cardiff University and Baha'i Community

**Middle left:** Participants in National Meeting discussion group

**Middle right:** Antony Hamilton, Devon Inter Faith Forum for Youth, Parhin Begum, Blackburn with Darwen CVS, and Jaspreet Singh, Birmingham City University Students' Union, Faith and Belief Forum ParliaMentors Alumnus and British Organisation of Sikh Students

**Bottom left:** Musarrat Tariq, Nottingham InterFaith Council, and Aparna Ramesh, Hindu Temple of Scotland and Interfaith Scotland

**Bottom right:** Nikhwat Marawat, Delicate Mind and Faith and Belief Forum ParliaMentors Alumnus, and Venerable Bogoda Seelawimala, Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of Great Britain

#### Back cover photograph

Launch of *Connect: a youth inter faith action guide*

*Credit:* All photos were taken by Lisa Bedi for IFN

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