

# **BUILDING GOOD RELATIONS ON CAMPUS**

**Report on a consultation  
held on 30 November 2006**

**by the Inter Faith Network for the UK,  
in association with the Equality Challenge Unit**



Published 2007 by the Inter Faith Network for the UK  
(registered charity no 1068934 and company limited  
by guarantee no 3443823 registered in England)

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ISBN 1 902906 30 6

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## **BUILDING GOOD RELATIONS ON CAMPUS**

Today's university campuses are much more religiously diverse than they were even a decade ago, with students of many faiths living and studying together. This can be a positive and enriching experience and a strong foundation for professional life in a diverse UK – indeed a diverse world. But to ensure that the experience is a positive one, there is a need to ensure that good relations between people of different faiths on campus are developed and strengthened.

This meeting record contains the contributions to a consultation arranged by the Inter Faith Network for the UK, in association with the Equality Challenge Unit, to explore the tasks involved in building good inter faith relations on campus in a way which respects the distinctiveness of each of the faiths involved. Invitees to the event included representatives of faith based student organisations, representatives of Universities UK and GuildHE, and some of the organisations which are involved directly or indirectly in supporting good inter faith relations work on campus: Alif Aleph UK; the Council of Christians and Jews; Diversity and Dialogue; and the Three Faiths Forum.

The aim was to have a discussion and explore issues rather than to reach agreed conclusions. However, it was clear through the various contributions that there was a strong commitment to building good relations on campus and a desire to see much further work in this important area.

The day's proceedings began with a presentation by Dr Harriet Crabtree of the Inter Faith Network for the UK on the broader inter faith context for building inter faith relations on campus. This was followed by a series of perspectives from speakers on behalf of a range of student faith based organisations: Jo Merrygold (Student Christian Movement); Bijal Bhagwan (National Hindu Students Forum); David Myers (Union of Jewish Students); Simrit Sandhu (British Organisation of Sikh Students); and Sabeen Akhund (Federation of Student Islamic Societies). Additional input was offered by Richard Cunningham (UCCF: The Christian Unions); Adam Berry (Catholic Student Forum); Parizad Avari and Tina Mistry (Young Zoroastrians); Alyaa Ebbiary (Federation of Student Islamic Societies); and Nava Hinrichs (Baha'i Youth Committee for England).

Following a period of plenary discussion, Moussa Haddad of the Equality Challenge Unit described its work on the equality and diversity agenda, including the promotion of good relations on campus. The morning session closed with a special contribution from Ronnie Millar, Director of the Corrymeela Centre in Northern Ireland on the experience of the Centre in building bridges between communities.

Following lunch there were presentations on inter faith working on campus by Preet Majithia (Cambridge University Faith Forum) and Sarah Talcott (Inter Faith Education Officer for the University of Surrey). Rev Hugh Shilson-Thomas, (National Adviser for Higher Education and Chaplaincy in the Church of England), then gave a presentation on the relevance of chaplaincy developments to the promotion of good inter faith relations on campus. The meeting closed with a plenary session to round off the consultation.

## **Inter Faith Network for the UK**

[www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk)

The Inter Faith Network was founded in 1987 to promote good relations between people of different faiths in this country and to “advance public knowledge and mutual understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of the different faith communities in Britain, including an awareness both of their distinctive features and of their common ground”. It is funded by Government, faith communities and a range of trusts.

The Network’s member bodies include the representative bodies of the Baha’i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian faiths; national, regional, local and other inter faith bodies; and educational and academic bodies specialising in inter faith relations. With them it works in a range of ways to promote understanding and respect between the faith communities in the UK. Across the last year it has been working with student religious bodies to develop work on building good inter faith relations on campus.

## **Equality Challenge Unit**

[www.ecu.ac.uk](http://www.ecu.ac.uk)

Equality Challenge Unit supports the higher education sector in its mission to realise the potential of all staff and students whatever their race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion or age, to the benefit of those individuals, higher education institutions and society. Equality Challenge Unit was established in 2001 to promote equality for staff employed in the higher education sector. Its role was expanded in 2006 to cover equality and diversity issues for students as well as staff.

The Unit is funded by Universities UK, GuildHE, the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland. The Scottish Funding Council also funds the Unit to collaborate with Equality Forward in Scotland.

# **BUILDING GOOD RELATIONS ON CAMPUS**

## **Welcome**

### **Brian Pearce, Director, The Inter Faith Network for the UK**

May I welcome all present to this consultation which has been arranged by the Inter Faith Network for the UK in association with the higher education Equality Challenge Unit and invite its Chief Executive, Nicola Dandridge, to add her own welcome to mine.

### **Nicola Dandridge, Chief Executive, Equality Challenge Unit**

The Equality Challenge Unit was set up in 2001 to promote equality and diversity in the higher education sector across all the strands covered by discrimination legislation – gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age and religion and belief. Earlier this year our remit was expanded significantly to include students and we are now developing an ambitious programme for 2007 and beyond which puts students at the heart of what the Equality Challenge Unit is doing. My colleague, Moussa Haddad, will be addressing you later this morning and explaining this in more detail. He is standing in for Saheema Rawat, who has been involved in the planning of this event but who unfortunately is not able to be here today.

As part of our programme in relation to students it is obviously critical that we listen to you. We listen to student groups, we listen to student networks and we listen to students themselves, through discussions and joint events of the kind we are having today. As you well know, the issue of religion and belief on campus is critically important at the moment. It is essential that we engage constructively and effectively in building good campus relations, in what are, in large part, essentially secular institutions. There is an urgency here since differences are exploited so much at the moment by the media and others. Yet there are huge areas of common ground here and we in the Equality Challenge Unit want to focus on that and to foster and encourage it.

So, I am delighted that you are all here today. The stakes are certainly high. We see this as a very important event and we hope that it will have good and constructive outcomes during the course of the day. We wish you well in tackling these critically important but difficult issues.

### **Brian Pearce**

Thank you very much Nicola. Your presence here today demonstrates the commitment of the Equality Challenge Unit to tackling our topic of building good relations on campus. My colleague, Dr Harriet Crabtree, the Network's Deputy Director, will now outline the 'landscape' within which we are meeting.

## **Inter faith activity in the UK, the significance of good inter faith relations on campus and some preliminary reflections on taking this agenda forward**

**Dr Harriet Crabtree, Deputy Director, The Inter Faith Network for the UK**

I have been asked to set the scene for today's consultation and to outline the overall context within the UK within which inter faith relations on campus need to be set. I would like to begin by reflecting on the rising attention being given to 'faith' and 'inter faith' issues. Twenty years ago the whole dimension of faith and religious identity was very much ignored. When policy makers talked about relationships between people within society they tended to engage with people's social class or their ethnic background.

During the 90s this changed. There began to be a greater recognition that people's religious identity and their faith shape their lives to a considerable degree. Government, both central and local, became more aware of the degree to which faith communities make a contribution to the social welfare of the areas in which they live. There was a slow but definite increase in Government wanting to engage with people on the basis that their faith was helping to shape their own and other people's lives. Back in 1992 central Government set up an Inner Cities Religious Council to advise Ministers on issues relating to inner city and related issues and now there is a Faith Communities Consultative Council established by the Department for Communities and Local Government and a Cohesion and Faiths Unit within that Department. So there has been a steady development at the heart of Government in recognising the significance of faith identity. This is not surprising. Reports by, for example, the London Churches Group, or by regional faith forums, present a picture of a very large number of projects that are being carried out by faith based organisations around the country for social benefit beyond the boundaries of individual faith communities. They show the contribution that people of faith make.

A question about religious identity was introduced in the 2001 Census. It was quite a sensitive issue because some people think that religion should be a private matter. The question was voluntary but the responses have enabled us to have a more accurate sense of the sheer religious diversity in the UK. The majority of people see themselves as linked to the Christian tradition but there are sizeable communities of others faiths and even in areas that you do not think of as particularly multi faith there are people from different faith backgrounds now.<sup>1</sup> University campuses and other institutions of higher education mirror this diversity. Sometimes, as you know, they are even more diverse, not least because students can come from different backgrounds to those of people living in the area where the campus is. For example, if you go to York University you find people of many different backgrounds even if in terms of its residents the city of York remains relatively mono-cultural and mono-faith.

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<sup>1</sup> Over 75% of people who answered the question about religion in the 2001 Census said they belonged to a particular religious tradition. For example, 152,000 people identified themselves as Buddhist, 267,000 as Jewish, 336,000 as Sikh, 559,000 as Hindu, 1,591,000 as Muslim and 42,079,000 as Christian. 179,000 identified their religion as "other" and wrote in a wide variety of different religions.



Diversity varies from campus to campus and it is important to be aware of the make up of your own campus. The fact that our society is more diverse means that relationships between people matter more. When I grew up in York I did not know anybody who was from a different faith background. And actually in that dim and distant past somebody from a different religion meant somebody of a different Christian denomination. We were never really aware of the fact that our city was notorious because of the murder of many Jews in Clifford's Tower. We did not learn about those aspects of our history as today we might have done in RE and nor did we have much sense of religious diversity. Now diversity is all around us and we all know about it. RE in schools for the most part teaches pupils about this and we are in a different world.

Relationships between people of different faiths are immensely important. If you live in a multi faith society or a society where many areas are multi faith, you have three options. You can either get along and find ways to relate to each other with integrity or you can live in a kind of subdued stand off or, at worst, you can have overt conflict. We have, I think, for the most part, been very fortunate in the UK, and I hope we will continue to be so, in that most people want to operate with goodwill and to develop relationships of trust and friendship.

I would like to emphasise that 'inter faith', a term which we use quite a lot and you may use quite a lot on campus, is not about "mixing faiths up". Sometimes people say to me "Inter faith – what is that? Is that about getting everybody to join up together in some new religion?" and I say "No". Inter faith relations is about relationships between people of distinctive separate historical faith communities which have their own histories. They are not being asked to come together in a way that means that they put aside or lessen the significance of their own tradition. I think that is immensely important on campus and anywhere else.

Inter faith issues have risen up the public agenda in Britain in the years since the Inter Faith Network for the UK was founded in 1987. The Network's role is to link and promote good inter faith relations and it works with the major faith communities, with inter faith organisations and projects around the country. It shares information and encourages the development of good inter faith relations so that people look for what they genuinely share, trying to find common values on the basis of which they can work together, but without being asked to leave aside portions of their histories or to move towards some sort of new form of syncretistic religion.

I would like to mention at this point the Government's Commission on Integration and Cohesion on which I am currently serving as a Commissioner. It is due to report to Ruth Kelly next June with practical proposals on how to increase and deepen good cohesion and integration at local level. A consultation document was released by the Commission a few weeks ago and I hope that you will find the time to respond to this. Inter faith issues and the contribution that faith communities can make to local communities are very important parts of what the Commission is exploring.

The UK today is what you might call an inter faith 'hot spot'. There are now nearly 250 local inter faith bodies. There are approximately 30 national inter faith initiatives and four of these which are doing particularly interesting work with students and other

young people are represented here today.<sup>2</sup> We are providing you with free copies today of the most recent edition of *Inter Faith Organisations in the UK: A Directory*, which I hope will be helpful in your work through giving you a better sense of the kind of inter faith initiatives there are around the country.

I would now like to move from inter faith relations in the UK in general to inter faith relations on campus. Universities and institutions of higher education are immensely important in the whole framework of developing good inter faith relations in the UK. They are places of vigorous debate about life's most important issues – perhaps sometimes rather more vigorous debate than you would wish! Nowhere is debate as vigorous as on a campus, except possibly in the House of Commons. Through the work of faith based student bodies people have the chance of developing their own faith and of deepening their relationship with their own faith tradition. They also get the chance to engage with people of other faith backgrounds, perhaps in many cases for the first time. If you have grown up in an area of the country which is not especially diverse, it may be that it is when you go to university or to a college of higher education that you meet for the first time in any serious way people who come from a quite different faith background to yourself and have deep conversations with them. Campuses are a place where you get a chance to develop your skills for engaging with other people. I know that other speakers today will be covering the different possibilities there are on campus for this.

I want to end with a word about courage and tenacity. I do not think these are very easy times to be working on building good relations on campus. We are in an environment where there is quite loud, and often rough, debate about issues such as whether there are limits on the freedom of speech; whether there are limits on the freedom of association; and whether particular clothes or jewellery can be worn in particular contexts. You will all be familiar with the range of issues that have been coming up across the last 10 to 20 years but they have perhaps become more acute recently. Also very difficult for many students is the fact that some of the global disputes and conflicts - which may not be 'religious' but which have a link to, or involvement of, people with particular faith backgrounds, - have an impact here and are making it hard on campus generally and in inter faith relations in particular for people to feel comfortable sitting down together around the same table. It can be difficult.

But I think we must be very careful not to be put off engaging in an open, honest and courteous way with each other. The old fashioned virtues of courtesy and willingness to listen are very critical in inter faith relations - really to listen as well as put forward one's own view articulately and carefully. You will have also received in your meeting packs a copy of *Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs*. These are the very simple guidelines that the Network developed with different faith communities many years ago on the principles of building good relations. We will be hearing later this morning from Ronnie Millar of Corrymeela about some of the principles which have emerged out of the Northern Ireland context.

I do not think we can afford to be put off by difficulties we face. I would say unashamedly that you are in the front line of a very difficult form of engagement at

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<sup>2</sup> Alife-Aleph UK; Council of Christians and Jews; Diversity and Dialogue; Three Faiths Forum

the moment. Because with you rests a good amount of the responsibility for ensuring that dialogue lines remain open and that people can build positive relationships and develop relationships of trust for the future. We may fear going to certain meetings where we know they are ones where people may well have very difficult conversations. Sometimes I think there can be a temptation to opt out because one feels it is just going to be too painful or difficult. I hope though that this will not happen. But I have seen this happen with adults in different parts of the UK. Violence erupts in Gujarat or in the Middle East or elsewhere, and people just feel so hurt or angry because of what is happening to their co-religionists that they find it hard to come back to the table of dialogue.

Someone once asked me what the most important attribute is if you are working in inter faith relations. I am always cautious about questions like that because I do not think there is only one factor. But if I had to single out one attribute it would be never giving up. It takes time to build up relationships of trust and to do it with integrity and with care, not selling out, truly listening to other people. Keep going. Making progress will always take longer than you think it will take. But actually the slower and the more carefully that an initiative is built, the greater the likelihood that it will last and make an impact. You are building for the future. What you are doing now will develop the skills that you are going to take into your professional and religious lives later and deploy to help your communities and this will make an enormous difference to the world in which we live in ten, twenty, thirty years from now.

## **National perspectives from a range of student organisations on the importance of working for good inter faith relations on campus**

### **Brian Pearce**

It is quite clear that we should hear student voices very early in our proceedings and I am very grateful to those representatives of some of the faith based student organisations present today who have very kindly taken on the challenge of speaking briefly about their organisation and its approach to the work of building good relations on campus. Jo Merrygold of the Student Christian Movement is leading off as the first of our speakers.

### **Jo Merrygold, Student Christian Movement**

The SCM was one of the first student organisations in this country and is now well over 100 years old. It engages with people right across the country to explore Christianity in an open minded and non-judgmental environment. It encourages questioning and all and any questions are welcome to be explored. There are no wrong answers; there are no prescribed answers. It aims to allow anybody to come in and ask and explore what they want to as part of this network. The network itself is made up of individuals, friends, student groups and chaplaincies across the country. SCM has links on approximately 60 campuses or universities, ranging from contacts with individual chaplains to quite large groups of students. Each 'link' in the network is autonomous and can engage with as much or as little of the activities of the national organisation as it likes.

Membership is only available to people who currently are, or have recently been, students in this country. It is the individual members of SCM who take decisions about the network. All decisions are made with very careful thought and consideration of people who are no further than three years out of higher education and its leadership changes too. This means that there have been quite varied approaches throughout SCM's history. Sometimes it has been really quite radical and has received a lot of condemnation, but at the same time it tries to hold true to what it does best, which is allow space for students to explore whatever aspects of Christianity takes their interest at any time. The trustees of SCM, one of whom is here today, are elected from the membership. They hold their position for a year and collectively make up the General Council, which employs the staff of SCM and makes all the decisions. The Council has three meetings a year and one of them took place last weekend.

The work that is done on campus is, as I said, autonomous. SCM's central office provides resources and support to the extent that each link wants. It offers resources and invites them to consider particular issues, one of which is inter faith relations, which is of increasing interest on campus and which we have as a national theme. Many SCM groups have been taking part in inter faith dialogue on campus. Our Southampton group recently submitted to our magazine a report on an exploration

which it had been doing of Islamic prayer. We have also been encouraging more inter faith participation at our events and Louise Mitchell from the Council of Christians and Jews has been to our last two conferences. We have been contributing to some of the projects that she has been doing. We have also had other people that are involved in inter faith dialogue coming along to our weekend events and sharing their insights.

All in all SCM is great, but I'm biased! It really is a place where Christians hope to engage with the rest of the world by addressing issues of social justice and all sorts of concerns that are going on in the wider world. Inter faith relations is an aspect of this that people are being encouraged to explore at present so it is really good to be here with you all this morning.

### **Brian Pearce**

Thank you very much, Jo. And now for the National Hindu Students Forum from Bijal Bhagwan.

### **Bijal Bhagwan, National Hindu Students Forum**

I am the Inter Faith Officer of the National Hindu Students Forum (NHSF). I will give you some background on NHSF, on what our aims are and how we run and then I will go on to describe the kind of inter faith relations we have on campus. We are a student organisation and have very broad aims. Our motto is promoting, preserving and protecting Hindu identity. This is very much about the activities that we do for our own students. In a general sense our aim is to provide a 'home away from home' for Hindu students on campus. Like our name suggests, we are a forum for discussion. It is very much, like Jo said about SCM, about individual branches, or 'chapters' as we call them, at campus level and what these would like to do. So our activities are very diverse. Some groups concentrate more on social activities, or on multicultural activities, whilst others might focus rather more on the religious dimension. There is a very broad range of needs and, therefore of wants, from our student members. NHSF is also a platform for Hindu students on campus. The Forum is not all about the religious side of Hinduism but provides a place where our members can explore all aspects of their life as British students or as international students at a British university.

In terms of structure, we have a National Committee and also a National Council which is made up of student representatives from every single campus chapter. Members of the National Committee serve for two years and we have a cross over period so that the President will serve for two years and the Vice-President will change over half way through, so we have continuity. Members of the Committee are not elected nationally. The current Committee looks at who might serve on the new Committee among those put forward from the National Council and from the different campus branches. So it is people who have had experience of being students and of being on the Committee who decide who might be suitable for the position. If somebody is interested in joining the Committee but has not had any experience they might be invited to join it but not in a major role. So we try to encourage everybody to take on whatever level of responsibility they might be able to handle.

We have a website for our members (and others too) which is a great resource for communicating ideas to all of our student members and also to anybody else who might be interested to learn what is happening in our organisation. We also have a magazine to which our student members contribute and that comes out once a term. So we have different ways to communicate from the national level with our student members.

We have zonal groups – a North Zone, a Central Zone and a South Zone – so that we can have links with all our different student groups. Especially in areas like London where there are a lot of student groups near to each other we encourage them to come to the zonal meetings to meet each other and maybe organise joint events. We have other national events like fundraising and the national conference. These activities are about our National Committee providing resources to our student members and chapters on an individual basis. The majority of our work is done on a local level, where there are regular meetings. Depending on what the chapter members are interested in we might have lectures, debates, discussions, or peer groups. We actively encourage our student groups to join with other groups, whether other religious groups, other cultural groups or social groups, to engage in building good relations on campus. On a local level we have inter faith events, which have been very popular on campuses like Imperial College in London, Leeds University, the London School of Economics and Cambridge University. We have also had people who have been part of NHSF go on to do other work on an inter faith basis. Preet Majithia will be talking to you later about what he has done. We have very close relations at both national and a local level with the Union of Jewish Students and with some Muslim groups. We have also invited them to come and contribute to our national conferences.

On a national level we are raising awareness of all the different avenues that are available for discussion exploring issues of diversity but we are also encouraging our student members to take them on board locally themselves. We have been involved in some national and international events and we have had some members go on to Geneva to the first European inter faith meeting. This year we have taken the big step of having an Inter Faith Officer and I am the first person to hold this position. I will be taking on a lot more responsibility for this area of our work, with the support of our public relations team. Just to summarise, our members definitely want good relations on campus. We want to improve relations on campus and nationally, especially in terms of inter faith relations. That is why I have been elected to this role and I hope to make a lot of contacts with yourselves and keep in contact with you to then pass on to our local students.

### **Brian Pearce**

Bijal, thank you very much indeed. Obviously your appointment is a very significant development in taking forward the inter faith work of NHSF. Next we have David Myers from the Union of Jewish Students.

## **David Myers, Union of Jewish Students**

I will offer you some background about UJS. It was set up in 1973 and has about 8,000 members on over 100 campuses around the country. We are a democratically elected union. Our Chair is elected at our national conference each year and our national officers are held accountable by a National Council. We have 10 full time staff, based in the Midlands, North, North East, South and London. I am the Campaigns Field Worker and inter faith relations is one of the areas on which I work.

We have three main aims. The first one is to defend and protect Jewish students' rights on campus and to represent them within both the Jewish community and the wider student community. We try to represent our members on Judaism, Israel and other Jewish issues. We are a cross-communal organisation which tries to represent the needs of all Jewish students. We are involved at national level with the National Union of Students and also with university authorities. Our second aim is give Jewish students from all backgrounds some form of Jewish identity, whether it be religious, cultural or social. We organise social events, educational events and speaker tours on a national level but also on a local level. We have very close links with between 80 to 100 Jewish societies around the country which have a membership ranging from three or four up to 1,000. So we really try to help our members in any way we can; whether with resources or through events. The third area of our work is training and development. We offer training to Jewish societies to make sure that they are in a position to represent their members on campus as well as possible, from national to local level. We also realise that these people are going to be future communal leaders and so it is important to give them tools to move on to other walks of life. The kind of events we hold are wide-ranging, including educational weekend seminars and social events. We try to attract as many members as we can. It is hard to represent them all because they are so varied in their interests and needs.

In terms of inter faith relations we again engage nationally and locally. I have currently been working on a christmikah event in the last weeks of term, inter faith lunches and discussion groups. We currently have discussion groups all round the country and we try to make sure that we engage with them and make sure that they are progressing. We work with SCM, with NHSF and with BOSS. We make sure that the links are there at a national level as well, to set an example, to show how important inter faith work is and to make sure that there are good relations on campus and that the minority faiths are properly represented there.

## **Brian Pearce**

Thank you very much David. And now Simrit Sandhu from the British Organisation of Sikh Students. I am particularly grateful to Simrit because I know she was going through some agonies as to whether she could be here or not and we are delighted that you have come.

## **Simrit Sandhu, British Organisation of Sikh Students**

I am the London Coordinator for the British Organisation of Sikh Students, commonly known as BOSS. Our main aim is aid, guide and support student Sikh societies up and down the country, from Scotland to London and further south. The role of student Sikh societies is primarily to make Sikh students better aware of Sikhism in terms of its spirituality, way of life and roots and to raise awareness and understanding of our Gurus' teachings. Throughout the year university and college Sikh societies organise all sorts of events, which range from paintballing, spiritual meditation classes, interesting discussions, theme parks trips, feeding the homeless in central London, to charity events and much more.

On a wider scale, we have Sikhi Week which takes place in London, the Midlands and the North. This is basically a week hosted by a different university on each day educating those who are interested in learning more about key elements of the Sikh faith. Usually there are talks given by people who are knowledgeable on specific topics which are then followed by discussion. We also have a week's camp during the summer which is activity packed. It is usually held at an outdoor activity centre or an army base and the mornings are spent in discussing spirituality and the afternoons are left free for socialising. This is a great opportunity to meet people, not only students, but also interacting with professionals, building relationships within our own community and learning how we can build better inter faith relations.

Sikhism is a very tolerant and loving religion. We give respect to everybody. One of its main teachings is "If you don't see God in all, you don't see God at all". This brings out the basic fact that if we cannot love God's creations with whom we are living everyday, then we cannot expect to have God's grace. At university there is a great mix of culture, religion, race and social background and it is really important that we encourage mutual understanding and total respect. We should always be proud of who we are and feel free to practise our faith and traditions without feeling intimidated by others on campus. The annual Sikh community events held up and down the country at various universities are opportunities for Sikh societies to educate others about our faith, breaking down any barriers of ignorance. Sikhs pray twice a day for *sarbat da bhala*, which is basically praying for all of humanity, not saying that we are only going to pray for Sikhs. We pray for everybody because we see everybody as one.

We have a meeting at the beginning of every year where each Sikh society around the country elects its President and we have a brief seminar where we encourage Sikh students to build good relations with other societies, whether it is the netball society, other faith societies or cultural societies, whatever society it may be, in order to have good relations with others on campus. On other occasions we invite the university chaplain and members of other faiths to join with us to have food and drink. Offering hospitality is an essential part of Sikh culture. It is really good that we have this occasion today when we can build bridges with one another. Hopefully this will be a grounding for us all to contribute towards the wider community and to teach our children to help build these bridges and to have respect for each other.



## **Brian Pearce**

Simrit, thank you very much indeed. Others, like myself, will know that Sikh hospitality is very much to be relished and enjoyed.

We are coming to the last of the list of speakers, Sabeen Akhund from the Federation of Student Islamic Societies. Before that, I just want to say we shall have some time for plenary discussion after Sabeen has spoken. The next timed contribution from a speaker after her is Moussa Haddad. We have deliberately left time between the different sections of the programme so that those who are not formally listed on it as speakers can offer their contributions. We have also, as you will have realised, not convened a large seminar or conference, because we think it is very important that all of those invited to it should have the opportunity to contribute to it and to engage in discussion with one another. I am aware that there are a number of faith based student organisations represented here which do not have representatives listed as speakers but we needed to make sure that we had some speakers willing to offer contributions. I hope that people from other faith based student organisations will also share briefly with us at this stage some information about the character of their organisations and their work. We will be moving on to other topics later in the programme and these contributions from student organisations will be important in paving the way for the conversation later in the afternoon. So before Sabeen speaks I wanted to give others an invitation to be thinking about what they might want to contribute after her.

## **Sabeen Akhund, Federation of Student Islamic Societies**

The Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) was set up in 1962. Since then it has been representing Muslim students in the whole of the UK and in Ireland. FOSIS caters for over 92,000 students and over 150 Islamic societies. We try to find ways of supporting these societies in creative ways on any issues that they have and also encourage them to be proactive rather than reactive when they face problems on campus. FOSIS has many national committees:

- The Student Affairs Committee encourages participation in the NUS.
- The Islamic Societies Committee communicates to the Islamic societies on campus the projects that the other committees within FOSIS are undertaking. FOSIS has about seven different regions within the UK and Ireland. Members of the Islamic Societies Committee go to the Islamic societies within these regions to train the Islamic societies on how to build relations or strengthen themselves or even help start one and we provide information about the different projects within FOSIS.

The other national committees within FOSIS have different projects:

- Services Committee and they produce freshers packs for Islamic students at the beginning of the year.
- There is a Welfare Committee that looks at the local issues that students have.
- The Justice Committee looks at international campaign issues like Iraq or Chechnya and spreads awareness of these on campus through the Islamic societies.
- There is an Islamic Awareness Committee, of which I am the Chair, and we have many different projects.

Most of these national committees were set up in the summer of 2005, which is a point to bear in mind, because we are quite new to our work and are learning ourselves as we go and are training ourselves to face as individuals the challenges that our student members are facing. The Islamic Awareness Committee recently organised a one day event during Ramadan in which over 40 Islamic societies took part, encouraging students to build links with different faith groups or non-faith groups by inviting them to the *iftar*, the meal that you have when you break your fast. I have heard some excellent feedback about this and it has been a very creative way of building bridges.

As with all student organisations, some FOSIS groups on campus are more active in the inter faith field than others. Local history sometimes dictates this. For example, Leeds is doing very well and has an inter faith forum. Nottingham, where I was last year, has very good mutual understanding sessions with the Christian Union there. Leicester has built links with groups not only within university but also in the local community, which is definitely a step further. At Lancaster there is a “Faithshare” project where faiths come together. FOSIS has also contributed towards a European inter faith conference. In September we had a conference on inter faith which was attended by over 30 Islamic society representatives. This was a way of opening up dialogue among Muslim students and talking about how we can progress and what are the challenges that Muslims face. I am sure all faith groups have challenges to face. We all need to be honest about our weaknesses and strengths and explore how we can develop and learn from one another. That is why I am here and I am sure you are here for that as well. Some Islamic societies do have reservations about inter faith work due to lack of understanding and knowledge about its benefits. So the aim of FOSIS in the long run is to create an environment where all faiths understand one another and find common ground, not just to dialogue but also to work cooperatively together in a proactive way on inter faith activities that are productive for the future of our society.

### **Brian Pearce**

Sabeen, thank you very much. We owe a particular debt of gratitude to you as you, most helpfully, stood in, I think at 24 hours notice, for your colleague Ali Alhadithi who is unable to be with us. There are patterns emerging from the presentations we have heard in terms of the character of the work of student faith based organisations and of their interaction; and also a number of examples of good practice.

In addition to those who have kindly prepared presentations to set the ball rolling are there others who would be willing to offer a contribution from their faith based student organisations’ perspective?

### **Rev Richard Cunningham, Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship: the Christian Unions**

I am Director of the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship: the Christian Unions. We have been in the newspapers recently and on the radios concerning issues with the Student Unions in Exeter and elsewhere. UCCF has been going for nearly 80 years and there are currently over 20,000 students in 350 Christian Unions. Our

motto is to help Christian students “to live and speak for Jesus”. The campus groups are all student led. Even at Board level, of which luminaries like my colleague Dr Peter May, who is here today, are members, we have students representing a Student Council who advise the UCCF staff who in turn resource students. So it is very much a ‘bottom up’ organisation.

For us, the whole urge for dialogue really comes from two main convictions. Simrit Sandhu mentioned earlier that if you do not see God in all, then you do not see God at all and also mentioned the word ‘grace’. We emphasise very strongly common grace; that all human beings are made in God’s image and therefore deserve dignity, courtesy and respect; and that they will have insights from which we can all learn. You will see that approach emphasised increasingly in UCCF literature. As it happens, in our Annual Review I have already expressed the need to emphasise common grace. The second main conviction is that the Kingdom of God is transpolitical. Therefore, we must have confidence to allow all people of all faiths to speak and to dialogue together because the truth, whatever it is on a given subject, cannot be fudged. We cannot say that opposites are both true. The truth has the ability to vindicate itself. If we promote open and courteous dialogue, such as some of the dialogue Christian Unions have had with Islamic societies on campus, then we are going a long way to show secular society that the way to handle religious groups is not to close down dialogue, thinking mistakenly that this is what tolerance is all about. Tolerance, as I wrote in an article in *The Guardian* this week, presupposes that there is disagreement. I am only called to offer tolerance if I disagree with you. If I do not, then there is nothing to tolerate. So all that is promoted is indifference. It was, I think, the Puritan Government in 1689 which passed the Act of Toleration to allow freedom of religion for Jews and non-conformists. Its members were convinced that all were made in God’s image, that the Kingdom of God is transpolitical and that the truth needs to be let out to vindicate itself and to let people dialogue with each other in courtesy and friendship.

We are delighted to be here and would enjoy the opportunity, if there is an appropriate point to do so, to talk about some of the difficulties UCCF is facing with some of the pressures in terms of how we obey secular rules and yet at the same time are allowed to express our own identity with integrity, based on beliefs which are not negotiable.

### **Nava Hinrichs, Baha'i Youth Committee for England**

I am from the Baha'i Youth Committee for England (BYCE). Like any national faith organisation or committee, BYCE is responsible for encouraging the Baha'is of the United Kingdom in their activities, both local and national, and also in terms of organising national conferences, along the lines that others have already mentioned. As probably most of you know, the Baha'i faith is about what I like to call the three ‘onenesses’ – the oneness of God, the oneness of humanity and, crucially in the context of our debate today, the oneness of religions. Our view is that basically all religions are one. Therefore we are very keen to have ongoing inter faith dialogue. We are involved in it a great deal. One of the mandates of BYCE is helping to set up Baha'i societies at universities with advice on how to write a constitution and on what kind of events to run. We are very pleased to be here to discuss how to increase inter

faith dialogue on university campuses and we are hoping to learn more through the informal network that is developing here.

### **Ruqayyah Collector, National Union of Students**

I and my colleague Sam Lebens are both from the National Union of Students (NUS). We are the Co-Convenors of the Anti-Racism, Anti-Facism Campaign. We wanted to introduce ourselves so that you know who we are. It is very good to look down the list of participants and see lots of familiar names and be able to put names to faces. We recognise that religious societies are some of the most active and vibrant societies that there are on campus. As the Anti-Racism and Anti-Facism Campaigners for NUS we would really like you to be in touch with us to let us know if there is any way in which we can help you at a national level and to make links in terms of any issues that students are facing on campuses. We have to recognise that there has been an increase in racism since Nick Griffin, the BNP leader, was recently found not guilty of inciting racial hatred. I have had lots of emails over the last year or so about students being attacked and feeling very vulnerable. We are people who can help at a national level to build links with faith societies and to run campaigns.

### **Sam Lebens, National Union of Students**

At a previous meeting my predecessor at NUS, Jessica Kosmin, spoke about the policy which the NUS has had for a while to deliver an inter faith conference. Recently I was speaking with staff of the Inter Faith Network about how best to deliver an effective conference. February had been mooted as a date when this would get rolled out and I had become worried about the ambitiousness of the project, which is unlike me because I am quite an ambitious person! What emerged from the discussion as a better and more deliverable model would be for NUS to facilitate training for chairpeople or relevant officers from the various religious and cultural societies engaged in inter faith activity using your expertise to develop some kind of training package. Already each summer we train sabbatical officers from student unions in political activism or in running their union. So this is a model that we could extend and could train the chairpeople of your religious and cultural societies in the handling of inter faith dialogue and building good relations on campus. This is just an idea and we would need you to help us with it.

### **Tina Mistry, Young Zoroastrians Committee of the UK**

My colleague Parizad Avari and I are from the Young Zoroastrians Committee of the UK. The Zoroastrians are a very small community. In England we have up until now mainly been concerned with our internal affairs but we have come to realise that engagement in inter faith work is a way forward for us, as well as everyone else. In response to what the NUS has just said about training, that would be an excellent idea. There are only about 300 or 400 Zoroastrian students in England, and about 10,000 Zoroastrians as a whole in the UK and only 200,000 around the world. But we are a growing community. Recently a small group of us went to Rome for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Prayer for Peace Conference. It was a really inspiring event and

we brought some of the ‘Spirit of Assisi’ back from Rome with us. If we can bring that to the UK it would be a really good idea.

### **Adam Berry, Catholic Youth Services**

I am the Development Officer with the Catholic Youth Services, an agency of the Catholic Bishop’s Conference of England and Wales. We put together quite a broad spectrum of events in collaboration with a number of other agencies, groups and diocese. We cover the age range from about 13 through to 30 which, obviously, has a great number of different needs and challenges within it. One of the projects that we run is for student communities called the Catholic Student Forum which comes together for a weekend in February each year to look at what it means to be a Catholic in our society, to network and to have fun. After the CSF this year we will be organizing breakout group meetings which may facilitate further discussion with some of the students who show themselves interested in inter faith activity. I agree with what has been said about our being compelled (and I as a Roman Catholic and my Church are compelled) to engage in inter faith discussion due to our faith, common reason and common sharing of space within this country. Meaningful interfaith dialogue can only stem from a clear understanding and articulation of ones own faith coupled with listening, conducted in a spirit of fellowship, love and understanding. That is why I am here today to see how this initiative might develop and to hear the ideas of others on this.

### **Harriet Crabtree**

Perhaps I can just mention that we hoped to have a Buddhist student here today. The Network of Buddhist Organisations had arranged for a student to come up from Bristol but he has had problems in getting here. There is no Buddhist structure as yet for students on campus, but the Network of Buddhist Organisations is exploring what might be done in this regard.

### **Brian Pearce**

Similarly, we do not have anyone here from the Young Jains although they have been represented at previous discussions. The Jains are another quite small community.

### **Alyaa Ebbiary, Federation of Student Islamic Societies**

I work with Sabeen on the Islam Awareness Committee of FOSIS and am currently its Resources Officer. I would like to comment on the theme of training which has come up a few times. Last September Sabeen and I organised an inter faith training seminar and invited delegates to it from every Islamic society in the country, because there is a demand for understanding of the nature of inter faith work and a desire for training in how to facilitate inter faith dialogue. We asked delegates what the concerns and issues were among individual Islamic societies in relation to inter faith activity and why some students have objections to it. We will be going through their responses to

see what the key issues are as part of our campaign to promote quality engagement in inter faith work. Some people feel that they want to get involved in this only if this is in a way that is stimulating and beneficial for them and others. We hope that this initiative is going to develop into training resources, including perhaps a guide on inter faith activity.

### **Brian Pearce**

It is interesting to see where overlaps are emerging in terms of what particular groups are pursuing. One of the risks of inter faith activity having moved up the public agenda is that it then does indeed become one of those activities where people are required to 'tick the box' but it is not actually real. The points which have been made about training and developing processes are important. How do we embed processes which there is some chance of carrying forward from year to year? How do we help to overcome some of the issues which arise as a result of the annual turnover of officers within student societies and have some processes in place which can be taken forward with the support of new officers when they come into position.

### **Daniella Shaw, Alif-Aleph UK**

I am from Alif-Aleph UK which is an organisation designed to promote positive contact between Muslims and Jews in Britain. We refer to 'positive contact' rather than dialogue because we have a lot of ways of moving forward which do not involve sitting around a table and talking about our differences and similarities in our faiths. We offer a variety of ways of getting involved, whether based on interest, profession or religiosity. We are very new as an organisation and are in the process of consolidating ourselves. In the coming months we shall be looking at the issue of grassroots leadership. We try to be a grassroots organisation and are hoping to take on a training programme for community leaders, both religious leaders - imams, rabbis and educators - and student leaders working with the leadership of Jewish and Islamic societies at a local level and working with Student Union officers who can identify people who are not necessarily working within the national framework of national Jewish and Islamic student organisations or their local organisations but nonetheless have a desire to engage in inter faith exchange yet feel that there is no context in which they can do that. By providing student training we hope not only to bring together the students on issues other than those which divide them on campus, so that they can impart to each other what they have learnt with regard to leadership within their own organisations and in the hope that they can exercise leadership in inter faith work as well. So if we can work with the NUS and any other organisations which want to feed in the experience they have learnt that would be great.

### **Brian Pearce**

One of the steps that was taken in the early days of setting up Alif-Aleph was to carry out a survey of Jewish-Muslim contacts. We might need to bear in mind the possibility of a comparable survey to get a better overview of what is actually happening in the inter faith field on different campuses.

**Louise Mitchell, Council of Christians and Jews**

I manage the youth programmes of the Council of Christians and Jews. Because I work on a youth level, a lot of my activity involves working with Alif-Aleph, the Three Faiths Forum and the Islamic Foundation and Christian, Jewish and Muslim student groups and young people. First of all I wanted to commend the work that FOSIS are doing with the training of Muslims in inter faith work. One of the really important tasks that people have mentioned is the 'intra faith' task of getting people of your own faith involved in inter faith activity. I shall be running training for chaplains again soon and I would like to work with others who are doing training because it is really important that we do all we can to ensure that what we do fits together instead of being in competition with one another.

## **The role of the Equality Challenge Unit and the work undertaken recently by the ECU on promoting good relations on campus, within the context of its work on equality and diversity on campus**

**Brian Pearce**

We welcome now as our next speaker, Moussa Haddad, of the higher education Equality Challenge Unit and are very grateful to him for having to step in at short notice in place of his colleague, Saheema Rawat, who has been prevented from being here by a family illness. We have been most appreciative of the support and encouragement she has given to the holding of this meeting and are very sorry that she cannot be with us today.

**Moussa Haddad, Equality Challenge Unit**

The Equality Challenge Unit is primarily concerned with issues of discrimination and the promotion of good practice on campus. This is a complex and at times confusing area. For example, in the case of the current issues at Exeter involving the Christian Union, one of the problems is overlapping legislation. In the main, relations on campus are framed by the Race Relations Act and by the Religion and Belief and Sexual Orientation Employment Regulations of 2003 dealing with discrimination in employment. The provisions in the Equality Act on discrimination in the provision of goods and services will come into force next year. But case law is going to shape how it impacts in practice. Relations on campus are important because of the characteristics of higher education institutions (HEIs). In an ideal world academic communities facilitate dialogue and relationships being developed. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are both opinion shapers and shapers of the outside world. They are also informed by what is going on in the outside world. So relations on campus can help relations in society, but relations in society also impact on campuses. HEIs are secular bodies in the main, which gives rise to the issue of how these secular bodies and religious organisations co-exist with each other and hopefully more than that, develop good working relationships. Those we engage with as a Unit, as Nicola Dandridge said at the outset, have for the most part to date been staff, and diversity practitioners in particular. But now we have a student remit so we will be working more directly with students and student organisations, as well as the staff who handle diversity issues.

ECU's approach is centred around the idea of an institutional standard linked to the ethos and mission statement of a university. The point of an institutional standard is that it is something that people are aware of and clearly understand. Everybody should understand what their rights are, and what their responsibilities are, within the campus community. A lot of our work is geared towards helping institutions to develop that approach. The public duty to promote race equality which came into force in 2002 was the first kind of positive duty in terms of equalities legislation. That is now being followed by the coming into force next week of a disability duty and in April 2007 of a gender duty. In our view these positive, pro-active approaches



should be extended to other equalities areas, not only to religion and belief, but also age and sexual orientation. So when we offer guidance, whether on a general or individual basis, we try to make sure people know what their obligations are but also encourage positive promotion, rather than just meeting the legal minimum or leaving issues to be resolved in the court. We are also concerned with promoting good relations. We are not directly involved in any university but we want to help all of them to foster a better understanding of the need for dialogue within the campus community and to help them create and maintain a clear standard of respect on campus.

When the religion and belief regulations came in we produced guidance for the sector on their impact on employment practices in higher education in terms of religion and belief. We have been keeping in contact with HEIs, offering them reviews of their race equality policy, and we have been offering them guidance in relation to issues that come up. This work culminated in the *Promoting Good Campus Relations: Dealing with Hate Crimes and Intolerance*, published last year, and not to be confused with the recent Department for Education and Skills guidance on extremism. As you can see, there was a gap in terms of dealing directly with the concerns of students because our guidance was on employing people. We are currently working to update our guidance on promoting good campus relations and involving various organisations in this work, some of which are represented here today.

Promoting good campus relations is particularly important. It is of the nature of a community that there are relationships between its constituent parts. As Ruqayyah was saying, faith groups are some of the most active organisations on campus. You cannot really have a community based approach without having dialogue between those groups. There are challenges to be faced in promoting good relations which have been touched on already and are related to universities being influenced by, and influencing, the outside world. International events and media debates in the outside world can have a particular impact on campuses. For example, the recent debate about the veil has, I am sure, had a major impact and some universities have been seeking our advice on that issue. The very nature of universities is that they are shared spaces for debate, discussion and understanding. We often hear the argument that universities have a special duty to promote freedom of speech, debate and enquiry and it is sometimes suggested that this means that they should step outside the scope of equalities legislation, being allowed special dispensation. But the view of ECU is that you cannot have proper freedom of enquiry and debate if you do not have a respectful environment in which all people covered by any of the six 'equality strands', and in this case people of any religion or none, are seen as part of the campus community, and that all then should be respected. So inter faith activity is particularly important. The experience of both staff and students will be all the better if there are good relations on campus. I think they are in everyone's interests. Harriet mentioned that universities may be one of the first places that you encounter people from different backgrounds and from different religions. University life involves debating ideas and thoughts from different perspectives. Faith perspectives will play a part in that. It is important therefore that mutual respect and understanding are fostered since people are going to come into contact with one another through the medium of study. If there is a fair institutional standard to which everyone adheres then everyone knows where they are and what they can do. That should pre-empt a lot of confrontation and hopefully help prevent relationships between people and groups breaking down.

The Equality Challenge Unit has been re-formed as an organisation within the last few months. We are very open minded about how we set about our future work. Some of our specific plans include having seminars on the current legislation, including the new Equality Act, and how the different requirements fit with one another. Some might be specific to religion and belief issues and some might be cross-strand. We will also be promoting good campus relations because that is one of the areas that people who have contacted us, both students and staff, have been most concerned about. In the case of the Race Equality duty we held a series of workshops and plan to adopt that approach again. We will be continuing our provision of practical written guidance and are targeting senior staff and Vice-Chancellors and Principals in particular. You cannot really embed respect for, and an understanding of, diversity unless you have genuine support for this from an institution's senior management. We are hoping to contribute to organisational change although this will be the result of the acts of many individuals. Much of what I have heard today underlines that every individual act is contributing towards this process. The role of ECU is to disseminate information and advice to institutions and different groups within institutions and to help people learn from each other. We want to work with as many different individuals and organisations as possible. We try to spread knowledge and understanding of the good practice to be found at a lot of universities, including their work promoting good relations. We would very much welcome information from you all about what you have been doing practically so that we can inform ourselves better and also, as a central resource, inform people more widely about this.

You can contact the Equality Challenge Unit through its website at [www.ecu.ac.uk](http://www.ecu.ac.uk) where you will also find the guidance we have provided.

## Questions and comments

### Brian Pearce

Thank you very much indeed, Moussa. There has, as you said, been a recent change in the constitutional status of ECU which has meant that your relationship with Universities UK and Guild HE has altered. We will be hearing later on about the development of chaplaincy work on behalf of different faiths and the direction in which that is going. The work of student faith based organisations, of academic institutions themselves and the role of chaplaincy within them are three dimensions which feed in to the good relations picture. I would like to underline two points which you made. One is that we have here religiously based student organisations and inter faith organisations. An important issue, particularly on campus but developing more widely in the area of inter faith relations, is the need for respectful dialogue between those who have a formal religious affiliation and those who do not, but who may nonetheless have a recognition of a spiritual dimension to life or may be ardent secularists. There are different kinds of conversations to be had across that boundary and it is obviously part of the landscape within which inter faith dialogue is set on campus. You also touched delicately on the recent document issued by the Department for Education and Skills about tackling extremism on campus. I think we have to recognise the difficult pressures faced in particular in that context by the

Muslim communities in this country and Muslim students on campus. At the Inter Faith Network we have always recognised that, for obvious reasons which we cannot ignore, there has to be an agenda about tackling extremism and that it is a strand which contributes to the overall pattern of good relations work. But it is very important is that good relations is not seen as a strand within tackling extremism, as a kind of instrumentalist piece of work in the context of these particular current issues. Because the whole area of good relations work represents a long term task regardless of the immediate issues being addressed in the tackling extremism agenda.

### **Stephen Shashoua, Three Faiths Forum**

I work for the Three Faiths Forum where we concentrate on Muslim, Christian and Jewish relations. Trialogue is the name that was made up to cover this. We are running a programme called Tools for Trialogue, which is a faith based initiative. I want to put forward the idea of having on campus a council of faiths which could be convened by the chaplaincy with an input from the leaders of faith based student bodies which would help to create an inter faith society. I would like to see a network of such inter faith societies on campus across the UK. Organisations here have their own excellent programmes. We have Tools for Trialogue and you have heard about others run by the CCJ and Alif-Aleph. There are many others. We focus upon the Abrahamic faiths but I know there are students of other faiths as well that would, I know, like to get involved in these. If we can work together in focusing our energies in trialogue and dialogue we can move forward in a stronger way. If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

### **Preet Majithia, Cambridge University Faiths Forum**

I am from Cambridge University Faiths Forum about which I will be speaking later and I will tell you more about the successes and challenges that we face in trying to run an initiative which is very similar to what Stephen Shashoua has just described.

### **Brian Pearce**

Thank you very much. There can, I think, sometimes be a dilemma for organisations engaged with Government when they are uneasy about some new Government initiative, but need to stay involved with the process in the hope of influencing its outcome.

### **Rev Dr Stuart Jennings, Warwick University Chaplaincy and Coventry University Chaplaincy**

I am Chaplain at the University of Warwick and at the University of Coventry. In each case I am involved in trying to create links between the various faith groups on campus and the various multi faith and multi cultural forums that exist in our towns and cities. When a campus has a large proportion of international students there is a risk that this has both the effect of isolating the students and raising the temperature

on campus because of overseas events. We have very good multi faith and inter faith groups in our country. There is a potential link there for universities to use to create channels of communication beyond the higher education institutions into the local community. This would be good for the university, good for the faith communities in the surrounding area and good for the students. Certainly our priority in Coventry and Warwick is to create links with the inter faith groups that exist beyond the university, both for the sake of international students and for the enrichment of our local faith communities.

### **Brian Pearce**

That is a very interesting suggestion. It may be that we are talking about both/and. We need distinctive structures rooted on campus, but at the same time external links are also valuable. I am sure that the availability of young people from different faith traditions to contribute to the work of local inter faith groups in their area would be very much appreciated. Engagement by local inter faith groups with young people is a very important and high priority for them. There may be two overlapping agendas here and we need to think through how they can complement each other. We also have to bear in mind the contribution made to inter faith work at national and at local level by young people who have become involved in that work when they are at university and which they take on with them to where their future career takes them, as has already been mentioned.

### **Harriet Crabtree**

I want to pick up on some points which Moussa made in his presentation. It seems to me, and the day has been structured to reflect this, that there are many different aspects to good relations on campus. Some of them are to do with what you might call a 'skills and knowledge' base for dialogue. Sabeen and others have talked about the training dimension and Stephen picked up the fact that we need to share good practice and work together. We will be returning to chaplaincy issues again this afternoon and this is very important for links universities make. But Moussa's contribution is very important because of the legislative framework within which all this is happening. It is sometimes difficult to keep up with the large number of new pieces of legislation and directives that are affecting our lives across the board and are very much affecting life on campus. There is also the new Commission on Equality and Human Rights due to become operational next year. We do not yet fully understand the implications of all this new legislation but test cases are likely to be brought across the coming years to explore potential conflicts between the rights of the different equality 'strands'. At the same time universities are wrestling with what it means to carry out the Race Relations duty and to work with the framework of that as well as the rest of legislation which has an impact on good relations. I am struck by the complexity of the agenda into which we are dipping today. I welcome the suggestion of Liz Carpenter that there might be some way to take a wider look at all of this, perhaps at a conference in the coming year involving a number of the institutions that have contributions to make on a number of different levels. I hope we can pick up in more depth some of the issues that are being raised today.

### **Brian Pearce**

I hope that today's gathering will help us all to start to develop these links more strongly. Moussa, would you like to comment on what Harriet has just said about the complexity of the thicket within which we are struggling to move!

### **Moussa Haddad**

I think it is unwise for us to focus only on our legal obligations. It is much more useful to think about how to go about creating an environment that is conducive to promoting positive relationships. There are very many different ways in which you can do that. All the ECU can do is try to share with people the different approaches that can be taken and to encourage as much consultation and mutual involvement as possible.

### **Ruqayyah Collector**

I totally agree that these issues are very complex throughout this whole field. At NUS we are sceptical about the guidance from the Government about community cohesion and about the ability of the CEHR to cover all the different strands for which it will be responsible. The Government is unrealistic in expecting one body to tackle effectively all these different forms of discrimination. On relations on campus, the NUS, the ECU and FOSIS put out a statement in response to the recent DfES document saying that we need to make sure that we do not isolate Muslims within our society. There is no clear definition of what young people can legitimately talk about on campus in relation to terrorism and extremism. That may have an impact on inter faith relations. Community cohesion has been pushed by the Government. We are presented with a picture of the Muslims segregating themselves from the rest of society and isolating themselves and the need for these communities to be pushed to make a change. But I think that we should celebrate diversity. When people of different faiths come together we are not trying to convert each other. Campuses are the best places to pursue a more positive agenda of celebrating diversity because we have such a wide range of students coming together and there are campuses where this approach does work and where people are working together.

### **Brian Pearce**

You have underlined that an aspect of good relations in addition to promoting mutual understanding is, of course, is mutual support. It may be easier to recognise that the good relations agenda, as I was saying earlier, is a long term one. It is not just some aspect of what might be a temporary phenomenon in terms of Government policy.

### **Sam Lebens**

You have cohesion by assimilation and you have cohesion by celebrating difference and respecting it. Some people feel that the Government is pushing a cohesion

agenda which is really a cover for assimilation, which is not what we want to support. We should not be scared of the word 'cohesion'; we should be clear what we mean by it.

### **Sabeen Akhund**

I think we need to understand that each age group and community is at a different place on all of this. There is a need for re-education within our communities and at different levels including older people. There is a need for discussion within our communities as well as for us to reach out to others. We need good role models of working with people of other faiths. There is a need for funding to help with training and the production of material offering guidance on inter faith work. The pressure of work within our communities can make it difficult to find adequate time to engage properly with others at this stage of developing our inter faith work.

### **Brian Pearce**

The Government's Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund was introduced following pressure from a number of organisations for funding for inter faith work. The Network does not have direct funding of its own which we can make available to outside organisations. Indeed, we have problems in funding our own activities! But certainly there is an issue over where funding and resources might come from. This is one respect in which the role of the academic institutions could be important as they might be prepared to help resource the promotion and encouragement of good relations on campus. It is difficult for all of us as we become aware of the links with other areas of activity to find time to develop those. Doing so can become over burdensome in terms of what we can manage. But I think it is very important for us to come together from different faiths to explore what needs to be done on an inter faith basis to complement the work within particular student communities and among particular student groups.

## **Creating safe spaces for encounter and dialogue – learning from the experience of the Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland**

**Brian Pearce**

May I now ask Ronnie Millar to speak to us. It was a suggestion of Saheema Rawat's that it would be good to have a contribution not specifically related to our current campus activities but looking more widely at the tackling of issues of conflict and disagreement. It is a sad fact, to which people of Northern Ireland are quite used, that in that context people often think of Northern Ireland. Corrymeela has been a beacon of hope there and beyond and we look forward very much to hearing what you have to share with us. Thank you as well for making the journey here.

**Ronnie Millar, Director Corrymeela Centre, Ballycastle**

I am going to share with you the story and learnings of the Corrymeela community in Northern Ireland, and hopefully some of this will be relevant to your work and interest in building good relations. Corrymeela is both a dispersed community of Christians, and a centre for peace and reconciliation. We are an ecumenical Christian community, a dispersed group of people in Ireland who are working towards peace and reconciliation, working towards the healing of religious, social and political divides and divisions in Ireland and throughout the world.

Corrymeela was founded by a man called Ray Davey and it is important to note some connection with the theme for today. Ray Davey was a Chaplain at Queens University in Belfast. Before that he was a prisoner of war during World War II. He was captured by the Germans in North Africa, spent three and a half years in work camps across Germany and witnessed the bombing of Dresden and the horrors of all of that. That experience of being a prisoner of war, of working alongside other PoWs from different backgrounds, listening to their stories and working together with a real sense of community and fellowship being formed was very important for him. Ray came back to Belfast in 1945 and then became the first Presbyterian Chaplain at Queen's University. Through the 1950s he began to take student groups back to Germany and across Europe, particularly introducing young people from Belfast and across Northern Ireland to different experiences and to different centres, such as Iona in Scotland, Taize in France and Agape in North Italy. It was those experiences that led the students in the early 1960s to say that Ireland needed a community, an ecumenical Christian community and a place to which others could come.

So young students at Queen's encouraged Ray and his wife, Kathleen, to think about finding a place that could be the centre of this community. In 1965 Ray and the students collectively purchased for £7,000 a seven acre site with an old wooden chalet house up a cliff top on the north coast of County Antrim, about 50 miles from Belfast near the Giant's Causeway. The Corrymeela Centre was opened in October 1965 and for the past 41 years has been a safe and open place where people from different backgrounds from all over the world, but mostly Northern Ireland, have come to learn

about themselves, and how to live alongside people who are different from us. It is a safe place where people from different backgrounds can share and hear each other's stories. In this past year we have had 5,000 residential visitors. Our work is mostly with schools, churches, family groups, community based organisations and youth work. While we employ staff who work with these groups, we are a community that was started by volunteers and voluntary service is at the heart of our work. We run a volunteering programme that invites a diverse group of people from Ireland and from all over the world to live on-site and support our day-to-day work.

In the late sixties students and friends came up to the Centre and started working on this old dilapidated chalet. This was before "The Troubles" began in the late 60s. A sense of community and a real sense of fellowship emerged as they worked together. There was a real context for learning and Ray wanted Corrymeela to be a place of learning. Since the early days we reflected on the importance of bringing people together from different backgrounds.

As you may know, Northern Ireland is still a divided society. Nearly 95% of our schools are segregated by religion and much of our housing is segregated. Today, even though we are in a 'post conflict' society in Northern Ireland, we are still a very deeply segregated society and one that has been shaped by conflict and a lack of trust in each other. It is a place where identities really dominate and where common citizenship is generally eroded.

In 1969 when "The Troubles" began Ray and the students immediately responded. By that stage they had a place with accommodation to which they could bring people. There were families and children from Belfast who needed respite from riots and house-burnings. There were massive shifts of populations going on in the cities of Northern Ireland and Corrymeela. Bus loads of children would come up for weeks at a time and the local Ballycastle community would support them with food and clothing.

In the early 1970s we moved to a model of a structured programme of work and having conferences. This model was more like a teaching model where we would bring in experts to talk about reconciliation and peace. While that had its place, we realised that we needed to go beyond it. Our programme of work started to shift to working with the participants, working with people, starting wherever they were at and with them playing a big part themselves when they came up to the Centre in deciding what they would be doing, for example sharing their experiences and their stories. There was a seed group model, where young people from Catholic and Protestant backgrounds would come to Corrymeela over a series of weekends and perhaps take on issues of identity, culture, sexuality, religion or discrimination. These groups would have a strong emphasis on personal development. One of the important lessons that we have learnt through the years is that it is not just about bringing people together. It is really the context where this contact can happen that is very important.

There is a saying that Ireland is a place of 100,000 welcomes – *Cead Mile Failte*. Has anybody heard that? Actually, sometimes it is a bit of a myth to be honest with you! We can be quite unwelcoming to strangers, especially to people who are different to us, especially if you are from a different religious background or have a different colour of skin. We learned about the absolute necessity to create a safe space where



people could share their stories. One of the elements in creating a safe space is that of hospitality. Henri Nouwen defines hospitality thus:

“Hospitality . . . means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them a space where change can take place.”

In the context of reconciliation that is important. This phrase ‘safe space’ rolls off the tongue very easily and sounds very simple. In many ways it can be simple, but it is also very complex. It includes simple steps like offering others a smile. The initial welcome is very important, so that when strangers come to the Centre they immediately feel welcomed. We have learned the importance of giving a very direct welcome. We ensure that the unit in which they are staying is warm and clean and that there is thought given to their environment: how people are seated, whether there is fairness in how people are seated and the space between them. These are critical dimensions to dialogue and meeting and encounter. We are not a hotel, we are not a conference centre. We are a community who welcome people into our community for meeting and for dialogue and encounter. We have learned that rituals are very important in creating this safe space. Around mealtimes there is a shared experience involved in eating together and clearing up together and in carrying out shared tasks around the Centre. So no matter who you are (the Dalai Lama, Prince Charles and Mother Teresa have all visited us), there is an expectation that you will enter into the community alongside us. We have worship twice a day, which is a very ecumenical open worship in the morning and the evening. Even the runs to the pubs at night-time are an important ritual for building up trust and sometimes it is in the informal spaces where the most important dialogues and conversations happen.

Even the smoke breaks are opportunities as very often this is the place that people convene and share stories – it could be a group of young single mothers – Protestants and Catholics coming together over a cigarette and discovering common ground with each other. Informal settings are very important for meeting, dialogue and encounter. People really need a sense of rootedness, a sense of some predictability and structure to the process of coming together. We learned the importance of setting ‘contracts’. When you have a group of perhaps fifty 12 year olds from the Protestant neighbourhood of the Shankill Road coming together for four days with fifty Catholic kids from the Falls Road, it is very important that we ‘contract’ with each other and talk about our hopes and fears and how it is that we want to be with each other through this residential experience. The whole contracting process is a really important one.

Above all, we understand that a safe space is where difficult stories and experiences can be raised and shared. This took our programme work into a new level. Irish people love stories; we are a “storied people.” The value of being able to share our stories, because Corrymeela is a safe place where I can tell my story and be heard and can hear your story, is crucially important. In Northern Ireland this is a hugely challenging process. Seamus Heaney has a poem called “Whatever you say, say nothing” which he wrote when he moved south. He also was a student at Queen’s University and went down to Dublin and when he moved to the south of Ireland it was a whole new experience for him. He wrote:

“Northern reticence, the tight gag of place  
And times: yes, yes. Of the ‘wee six’ I sing  
Where to be saved you only must save face  
And whatever you say, you say nothing.

Smoke-signals are loud-mouthed compared with us:  
Manoeuvrings to find out name and school,  
Subtle discrimination by addresses  
With hardly an exception to the rule

That Norman, Ken and Sidney signalled Prod  
And Seamus (call me Sean) was sure-fire Pape.  
O land of password, handgrip, wink and nod,  
Of open minds as open as a trap,

Where tongues lie coiled, as under flames lie wicks.  
Where half of us, as in a wooden horse  
Were cabin’d and confined like wily Greeks,  
Besieged within the siege, whispering morse.”

Sharing our stories and listening to others is, in our experience, a huge challenge for people, especially people who have been hurt, victimized, or who are being discriminated against. In those circumstances there is definitely a reluctance to share your story. We therefore looked at different ways to encourage people to share their stories – using the arts and experiential learning. We engaged with the arts in a very serious way for people to express themselves and their beliefs and where they are at. When building trust you sometimes have to get beyond the words and be doing things. In the early nineties, we started doing team building and trust building experiential exercises. Volunteers and staff lead exercises where people from different backgrounds engaged with each other. Silences and politeness will not transform divisions and differences.

Donald Shriver talks about being “critical lovers of our traditions”. There is a need for critical, robust dialogue which is not about debating, but about being open to hearing each other. We have learned that ‘the other’ is a gift and not a threat. We need places, safe spaces, where people can experience trust and reconciliation, where we can model reconciliation. What emerges when you hear stories from somebody who is very different from you, whether that is a faith background or class or social background, is that we share each other’s humanity. At Corrymeela we say that we are not doing stuff to other people, we do not programme and try to convert people. We meet people as human beings and encourage them to see ‘the other’ as a gift and not as a threat. We ourselves cannot expect people to cross boundaries if we ourselves have not crossed boundaries. We are a diverse community who experience conflict, and tensions like any other community.

This concept of ‘crossing boundaries’ is very important. When bringing people together for meeting, dialogue and encounter, we as facilitators need to be careful not to get in the way. We try not to present ourselves as ‘experts’ or let ego get in the way. We are aware of our humanity - a shared humanity. Desmond Tutu says “My humanity is bound up in your humanity.” We understand something of how people in

groups rival and scapegoat to make sense of chaos and violence: this concept of putting people down who are different and rising up yourself while you are putting them down. Recognizing the prevalence of scape-goating has been a real part of our learning and working with people and ourselves as a community and society. In all walks of life there is scape-goating.

The “Equity, Diversity and Interdependence” framework has been promoted for years in Northern Ireland in youth work and community relations work. Interdependence is about the fact that I am shaped by my relationships. I am shaped by my relationships with you. You are known by the company that you hang out with. We are dependent with each other. The Northern Ireland Shared Future document says that “relationships matter and are central” and “moving from relationships based on mistrust and defense, to relationships rooted in mutual recognition and trust, is the essence of reconciliation.” There is an old traditional Irish saying that says “It is in the shelter of each other that the people live” (*Is ar scáth a chéile a mhaireann na daoine*)

Another important lesson that we have learned is that reconciliation and peace-building work involves the head, but also, and more importantly, the heart. This idea of tapping into how we are actually feeling. Reconciliation work is not an academic exercise. It is very important to recognize the emotions and the feelings and the hurt that have been going on. If you have family members that have been injured or discriminated against and you are meeting the perpetrators or representatives from the kind of group responsible for this, it is important to be able to have that safe space where you can share your emotions. It is a practice, not a theory.

Ray Davey was a man who enabled young people to take significant responsibility and provided a context for incredible learning. Ray and other individuals in Corrymeela’s history provided key models and conversation partners for learning and reconciliation. They taught the practice and the theory of reconciliation. I am encouraged by the talk we heard earlier today around training. That is a very important part of Corrymeela’s work of conflict management. There have been a number of spin-off organizations and projects that have come out of the Corrymeela community around community relations and conflict management. The TIDES training programme, Dialogue for Peaceful Change, the Future Ways Programme, the Community Relations Council in Northern Ireland, the Mixed Marriage Association and the Council for Integrated Education all have strong connections with Corrymeela.

As we said earlier on, Corrymeela is in this for the long haul. There are no quick fixes here. In Northern Ireland we talk about 40 years of conflict and it is going to take a generation or two generations for this to work out. Even though we are not now shooting and killing each other, as I said earlier we are still in a very deeply segregated society. I encourage you to think in terms of a shared future and how you can contribute to that future. We need new energy around peace building and reconciliation and inter faith dialogue.

In conclusion, Corrymeela has learned about the importance of meeting and encounter; the importance of community building (and residential build community); hospitality, and the creation of a safe space; and the importance of stories. Heart work

needs to be done in the healing of divisions. Our potential is shaped by the quality of our relationships. There is a connection between faith and life and we to our world in the light of God. Sometimes we can see things very academically, but if we open our eyes and see each other in the light of God we can see how we can learn to live with each other.

## **Questions and comments**

### **Brian Pearce**

Thank you very much indeed for that very moving presentation. I think all of us will be sitting here trying to work out how we translate into the context in which we find ourselves some of the key and crucial points that you have made. One point that struck me was that in inter faith work we are also trying to create a “safe space” for dialogue.

### **Alyaa Ebiarry**

I want to say how inspiring that was. It gave me a lot of inspiration. You mentioned that ‘the other’ is a gift. I was taught that ‘the other’ is a blessing and to be able to speak together is a truly valuable opportunity. The reason I am saying this is that recently the Muslim community has become more in demand and been invited to more events. Sometimes I think “Oh no, we are being invited to yet another event to talk about ourselves”. But doing so is a really valuable opportunity. It is such a blessing to get to know ‘the other’. Secondly, you said that reconciliation is not just an academic thing. I think that is right. A speaker I heard recently was saying that one of the problems is that inter faith dialogue is made too academic, too intellectual, when a lot of the discussions are very emotional. We have to realise that people bring all kinds of emotional baggage with them into inter faith dialogue. When I was talking about training earlier this morning I did not mean that there is just one way of doing inter faith work. But we need to understand the basic principles of how to interact with one another. In Islam we call it *adab* which is about the interaction with people. It consists of very simple steps, like you said, like having a smile, being hospitable and welcoming people.

### **Becky Hatch, Diversity and Dialogue**

Can you be more specific about how you use art and storytelling with young people?

### **Ronnie Millar**

In the early 90s we began to realise that people in trauma, and especially young people, were having difficulty sharing their stories and needed to get beyond the words. So we created a programme to help them do this. When a group is going to

come to the Centre we work with that group beforehand and find out what issues they have. We have an arts and crafts centre, which was built by the “Challenge Anneka” TV show. We have an activity where we get people to make clay pizzas and everyone is given clay and there is music playing. You might be asked to share a bit about your vision for your community, say, and through the moulding of the clay, the pizza would come together in the sharing of where we come from. The environment is really important to be able to do this. You get really tough people, people who have been involved in paramilitary activities, getting involved. To see it actually happening is amazing, that they actually enter into these activities. We use face masks a lot, where you pair up in twos – one person would lie down horizontal and somebody else from the other side would come and actually make this image of your face. And the second part of it is then that the person whose face it is would then be asked to draw their identity. Usually the face masks are coloured and you may get flags and emblems and symbols of culture coming out on them. Then they share that with the group. For example, “I am a big Rangers supporter and this is because my dad and my grand-dad supported them”. It is about looking for ways to enable people to tell their stories in a new way. Those are a couple of examples of using the arts. Drama is very important and we have made use of role-playing and poetry also. We work closely with a residential community of international volunteers, which we have had since the 70s. We have 12 residential volunteers from all over the world who come for a year from different backgrounds, from all faith backgrounds and some of no faiths and with different skills.

### **Brian Pearce**

In the context of a lot of inter faith work, and I am sure this is true of inter faith work on campus, one of the issues is how to avoid a situation in which you have a number of people who find that they can come together and establish a way of doing so, but then find it difficult to reach out to those people who do not want to come together and may only be able to brought together in ways that are different to the ways that have worked for the people who have formed the group. So having formed a group itself starts to exclude people rather than it becoming more inclusive.

### **Ronnie Millar**

This is a criticism that we hear often with Corrymeela. We are up on a cliff-top, the most beautiful stunning location in Ireland with a view of the west coast of Scotland and one of the criticisms we hear is that you guys are ‘a holy huddle up on the hill’, not connected to the reality of Belfast, Londonderry or wherever. Ray Davey is still alive at the age of 93. He had a saying that ‘Corrymeela begins when you leave’. So when groups have been at the Centre we hope that they are taking some of that willingness to reach out and to cross boundaries when they go back. We also have an office in Belfast and in recent years and in the future will be working to connect and support the residential experience to what is going with the group in their own communities. I know that wonderful things happen when you cross boundaries, when you become friends with people and when you host people who are different from you. Once you go there it is hard to go back again. As we move forward in the

future, one of those areas to which we are paying most attention is how not to be so inward looking, but to be more outward looking.

### **Brian Pearce**

Thank you very much indeed. I think there is a very clear translation that one can make from what you have just described. You could say that the inter faith task begins when you leave the inter faith meeting and you go back to your own community and you are meeting with people who do not understand why you have been doing what you have been doing; and you wrestle with the task of trying to explain it with integrity to other people within your own community.

### **Break for lunch**

## **Inter faith working on campus**

### **Brian Pearce**

We begin our session after lunch with a presentation from Preet Majithia on the work of the Cambridge University Faith Forum.

### **Preet Majithia**

Around two years ago the Student Union Anti-Racism Officer at Cambridge emailed all the officers of the faith societies that he could find throughout the University and brought them all together. We had three or four meetings which led us to the conclusion that we should formalise a society which would bring together all these different faith groups into a shared body which could organise independent inter faith events, not necessarily directly linked to the member societies, but facilitated by the new organisation.

The Cambridge University Faith Forum has three main aims. We aim to promote awareness and understanding between people from different faith groups within Cambridge University. It is very important in the context of building good inter faith relations to recognise that ignorance is often the greatest source of prejudice and misunderstanding. Giving people the opportunity to learn more about other faith communities is important. At the same time there is a need for engagement with one another, with which obviously the Inter Faith Network is greatly concerned, and at a more intellectual and academic level. How can we engage as different faiths? What common ground do we have? What shared concerns do we have?

The second aim, which is probably the most important in building good relations on campus, is to try to encourage communication and cooperation between these different groups. This is on the basis that they should get to know and understand one another. The people who are involved with all these different faith societies at university are people who will go back to their different faith communities in different parts of the country and may well become in future the leaders of those faith communities. So it is vitally important that while they are at university they themselves experience people of other faiths and understand all that they can about other faith groups and interact with them, not just within their own little corner and their own particular society. Thirdly, we also aim more generally to be a point of contact for faith-related issues in the University community.

The society has arranged various different events. We have had garden parties and quiz nights which are more in the nature of entertainment and social events where people can just meet one another. We have also had "Journey Through the Faiths" which is a series of four events, each one dealing with two different faiths, with an introductory talk from a student on each faith. The last one we had was about Islam and Buddhism. We have a website which sets out our aims and gives people information about the different faith societies and different groups that are involved and also gives information on our forthcoming events and about the faiths themselves.

One of the spin-offs of networking between the faith societies is the growth of bilateral events, which I think is vitally important. A council or society like ours should not just be organising events but should also be encouraging its affiliated groups to arrange events between themselves. Often when we are developing an inter faith dialogue from a broad perspective, we cannot put on an event just talking about Hinduism and Christianity or just about Buddhism and Islam. We have to try to bring all of the faiths into the event, or as many of them as is possible. But the individual faith societies can choose to engage with each other directly and go into more depth about each other's faith and learn more about each other directly. The fact that people have been meeting together in this broader faith forum has led to a number of bilateral events, for example a Hindu-Jewish inter faith dance event where the Hindus went along and learned some Israeli dancing and the Jews came along and learned how to do the Indian *gorba* folk dance. We also have events to share food. Recently there was an event in the University Church held by the Islamic society with presentations about the Islamic conception of Jesus and the Christian conception of Jesus and in what ways they are similar and how they differ.

An important issue with organisations like ours is funding, because you cannot really charge membership for events where people are coming along to learn because it can put people off. But there are a number of funds which we can approach for help. We have heard mentioned several times today the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund which is the Government's grant scheme. (Details can be found at [www.cdf.org.uk](http://www.cdf.org.uk)) I know that applications are closed for this year but hopefully they will carry on with it next year. The Alma Royalton-Kisch Fund is an interesting source of help too ([www.kisch.org.uk](http://www.kisch.org.uk)) as they specifically fund inter faith work for young people. It used to be directed at one or two faiths but over the last few years they have broadened its scope considerably and they are willing to support general inter faith activity for young people and give grants of up to about £1,000.

Our inter faith society has had some really successful events and good quality discussions. But perhaps one area where we have not succeeded so well in achieving our aims is in keeping people involved, because the membership of the committees of faith societies changes every year. New students who are Muslims, Hindus or Christians will not automatically get in touch with us and say "We are interested in your inter faith society". We have to go out there and look for them which is more of a challenge. We did have a stall at the freshers fayre and we had people signing up there, but it is often more difficult to get a good group of people together and then maintain that interest. Because the membership committees are continually changing you have to try to re-engage with faith societies every year to try to get new representatives involved. Last year we had a broad spread of representatives who attended regularly, but this year we have only got three or four out of the ten different groups who attend regularly and two or three more who attend occasionally. That makes it difficult to achieve our aim of networking and bringing people together.

We have also had some difficulty in engaging with particular faith groups. Some are rather more 'fundamentalist' in their beliefs and do not want to engage in inter faith dialogue. That is their right and we should not be trying to impose it on them. But, at the same time, if you are trying to engage with people who do have preconceptions, prejudices and misunderstandings of other faith groups, it is arguably precisely such people that you should be trying to reach. So, in a sense, we are not really achieving



the goal of building good inter faith relations on campus. We are not achieving that goal as well as we would like.

Choosing appropriate issues on which to engage with one another is again an important and difficult issue. What is going to grab people's interest is a controversial topic. But if you want people to come along and truly engage with each other without breaking into a heated argument then you need to choose one which is not likely to generate a heated argument! We have found it quite a challenge to strike the right balance in this.

I mentioned that the origins of this initiative was when a Students Union officer exercised his influence to bring all these people together. I think Students Unions have an important role to play in this. However, I recently went to my Students Union and suggested they appoint a Faith Relations Officer and the idea was greeted with a somewhat lukewarm response on the basis that if you are going to have a liaison officer for faith societies and faith groups, then why not also for political groups, for sports societies, for film societies? After all, there are 20 film societies in Cambridge, which is more than there are faith societies. So it is difficult. But I think it is very important to engage with the Students Union. I am sure there will be Anti-Racism and maybe Black Students or Ethnic Minority Officers who you can approach to help engage with this kind of work. The Students Union does have a lot of influence and a lot of contacts for bringing people together, so I think it is vital that we use them as a means to help do that.

We also need to keep the faith societies engaged with one another. We do have all these national organisations and it would be really great if they could help to encourage their different branches to engage in inter faith activity, to give them some guidance on how to do so and share across the country the experiences of branches.

### **Brian Pearce**

Thank you very much Preet.

Sarah Talcott is Inter Faith Education Officer for the University of Surrey and will give us an overview now of the work there on a multi faith student campus.

### **Sarah Talcott, University of Surrey**

I am the new Inter Faith Education Officer at Surrey University. This is a post that is being funded through a grant from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF). The Chaplaincy Team at the University - which is composed of Anglican, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Sikh, Buddhist and Muslim Chaplains - applied for funding from the FCCBF and that is why I am here. I have been doing inter faith work in the United States, in Cyprus and internationally for about seven years and came here in September to work until the end of March in helping to set up a multi faith student council on campus. My very first day I hit the ground running with a Freshers Fair at which I met with all the different faith community societies on campus, told them

about my new position and started setting up meetings with them. We met informally, going to their places, hearing about their work and what they are trying to do.

In October we had our inaugural inter faith meeting. We brought together representatives from six or seven different student societies on campus including the President of the Islamic Society, representatives from the Indian Students Association, Baha'i students, a Buddhist, an atheist (which was good), an Anglican, a Greek Orthodox, a Buddhist and a Hare Krishna. So it was a diverse mixture of students and that was our initial impetus into campus life. Since then we have set up a range of different activities.

We have had a regular rhythm of inter faith meetings as a result of which there is a core group of young people from different faith communities and different societies on campus who wish to come together, to get to know each other and really build inter faith community on campus, as well as initiating a range of inter faith activity. We have arranged what we call a 'Faith to Faith' programme which is an opportunity to accompany a diverse group of students and staff from campus to various places of worship in the area. We went to the Buddhapadipa Temple in Wimbledon in November and met with the senior monk there. It was really important to meet with a local religious leader and to get to know the environment more. He gave us a tour of the Temple, and told us about the life of Buddha as depicted in paintings in the Temple and we had an interesting conversation and discussion about the principles and cultural practices of Buddhism and on issues with which other faiths have to wrestle, such as how does Buddhism practise love and compassion. We also went to the Guildford Synagogue for a special Shabbat service and were able to engage with the Jewish community there, talk with them and get answers to our questions. Experiencing the Shabbat service was also very important to inter faith and faith engagement. Just a week or so ago, we went to the Shah Jahan Mosque, which is the oldest purpose built mosque in Northern Europe and spoke with the Mufti there who took us on a tour. So those were three highlight events from this semester and we are going to have another series of 'Faith to Faith' visits next semester when we are planning to visit a Hindu temple, Bhaktiviedanta Manor, the Benedictine Christian community in Worth, an Anglican cathedral and a Sikh gurdwara.

Coming out of these visits are the outcomes for which we had hoped: an increase in people's knowledge and understanding of other faiths, the dispelling of misconceptions they might have had, through being able to ask any kind of questions, the strengthening of inter faith relations and the deepening of the resolve of participants to learn more about different religions and traditions. We had very positive scores in the evaluations we carried out after each of the visits, with people responding in the range of 80%-100% agreeing that the visits had achieved their four main objectives. We are also planning next semester to continue with the regular rhythm of inter faith meetings, consolidating the core group we now have. The next step is to move to a formal level, asking each faith community to put forward a representative to serve on a committee which could become formalised as a council of faiths. We also want to raise awareness on the campus overall of the religious and spiritual diversity that is present and make it an easier place to say "Look, I do practise. I am a person of faith."

In February we are going to organise a Festival of Faiths in collaboration with the Students Union. We will have an exhibition held throughout the week in a lecture theatre concourse where all the students will be milling about and passing through. Each faith community can have a table with information about itself to show the campus, all the students, each other and the administration that we do have a strong presence on campus, that these issues are important to us and that we want these needs brought to the attention of everybody. We will also have a series of speakers coming each evening to give presentations on different topics related both to religion and to current events, such as climate change and gender relations and roles. This is a really significant and important step forward.

I have been working with a group in the United States called the Inter Faith Youth Core which has an international initiative called the Days of Inter Faith Youth Service. It is an opportunity over a weekend in April to bring together inter faith groups of young people and to undertake a local volunteering project in the community. This is important in terms of establishing a link between the students in the campus and the wider community and also to show the common ground we all share, which is a commitment to our fellow men, and to help make things better in the community. That is the last initiative which I have planned and will actually take place after I have left my post at the end of March because the funding grant was only for a limited period of time. So I am hoping that what I can do in my remaining time is to set up this core group of young people to take the work forward. It would be great if there can be ongoing institutional support for the inter faith activities and events on campus which hopefully will now be taken forward by the students.

**Brian Pearce**

Thank you very much Sarah.

## Questions and comments

**Brian Pearce**

We have a very few minutes before Hugh Shilson-Thomas speaks and then we shall have a rather longer plenary session. But there may be one or two points or questions that you would like to put to Preet and Sarah before we move on.

**David Myers**

How many people are coming to your events?

### **Sarah Talcott**

We have found that there are between ten and twenty at each event although the numbers have fluctuated in the latter part of the semester due to exams. But there is a core group of six or seven people who come to all the events and are really committed and then there are also new people coming every time as well.

### **Ronnie Millar**

I just wanted to affirm that the Inter Faith Youth Core is a wonderful programme with excellent resources.

### **Brian Pearce**

I expect a number of people will have come across their work and it is interesting to hear of that link. A point that struck me was that Preet gave a presentation on an initiative which in effect came up from within the student framework and Sarah was talking about an initiative which was initiated institutionally. But they may both come to occupy the same role.

### **Rev Jeremy Clines**

I am currently working with Hugh Shilson-Thomas on the Church of England's research project about faith in higher education but I am usually a full time Chaplain at York St John University. There are two questions I want to ask Preet. I was really interested by the name 'faiths forum' and wondered if there was discussion about using that term? The second was that you described three main objectives. I wondered whether the group also campaigns on faith issues as well?

### **Preet Majithia**

In answer to your first question, we actually had a discussion recently about the name because I have been putting it up everywhere (and on the website) as the 'faiths' forum. Other people are arguing that it should be 'faith' forum. So there are two angles on that. We recently received an email from the Atheist and Agnostic Society saying that they did not feel particularly welcome at our events and would we change our name to the World Views Forum instead. So there has been discussion on the name. The context initially was to bring together people of different 'faiths'. It is a 'forum' rather than an inter faith group because we want to bring together the different faith societies so that they work together better and it is a forum for doing that. On the second point, if a society comes to us and says that there is not very good *halal* provision and they need help, I do not know how far we would actually be able to help them. At the same time, with the experience we have collectively then we can say, "Well, the Jewish society had similar issues with *kosher* provision and so they have experience of that and you could talk to X who may be able to share their experience with you." So I guess it is more about sharing the wealth of our

experiences together rather than ourselves initiating action or becoming a pressure group.

### **Brian Pearce**

It can be very difficult when the primary role becomes one of joint campaigning, because then those who do not feel they can be part of a coalition on a particular issue can sense that they are, as a result, being excluded from the group. But the fact that the links are in place can help those who do wish to campaign jointly on some issue to do so because they can then form what is, in effect, a mini-coalition within the broader family.

## **Chaplaincies and good inter faith relations on campus**

**Brian Pearce**

I think we should move on and hear from Hugh Shilson-Thomas, who is the National Adviser for Higher Education and Chaplaincy within the Church of England. He will also mention the current project work to which Jeremy Clines was just referring.

**Rev Hugh Shilson-Thomas, National Adviser for Higher Education and Chaplaincy, Church of England**

First of all, thank you for your invitation. I would like to say how encouraging and inspiring I have found today. I have to go a lot of meetings and this one has been really positive with some very helpful conversations in the margins of it as well. Thank you, too, for the chance to talk about the emerging nature of chaplaincy in the modern university and its role in helping to promote good inter faith relations on campus and off campus as well. I will also describe a project that the Church of England is hosting with this in mind on which my colleague Jeremy Clines is working with me and on which we are committed to working collaboratively

I am here as the National Adviser for Higher Education and Chaplaincy in the Church of England. I do work closely ecumenically with other colleagues engaged in Christian chaplaincy, but what I say today is from my own perspective.

I believe that meetings like this are really important and that we are living at a fascinating and challenging time, as we have heard. On the one hand, issues of faith are being talked about now and are on the public agenda more than at any time in recent memory. We cannot turn on the news without hearing the debate about veils or crosses, the place of symbols, faith schools, questions of rights and freedoms. Did you know that RE is the most popular 'A' Level subject? On the other hand, many people are commenting on the rise of a strongly secularist agenda which should be encouraged or imposed or strongly resisted depending on your viewpoint.

I want to challenge the way we use the term 'secular institution' in higher education. It is true that while a number of institutions do not have secular foundations the majority of them do. But it seems to me universities have never been completely secular. They have always been comprised of people of faith. It is a welcome development that a conversation about faith is now on the agenda of Vice-Chancellors. I was delighted when the legislation on discrimination on grounds of religion and belief came along because this was an opportunity for chaplains to go and talk to their Vice-Chancellors and say 'We need to talk about this now'. There is real debate going on about how concepts of equality and of diversity inter-play with each other. In the university context they are often talked about in the same breath. But there is a risk that if the principles of equality are misapplied they can stifle the very diversity that many of us want to celebrate. So it is difficult to work out what the proper relationship should be between the two and sometimes, as we have heard already today, there can be some real points of tension. My personal reflection on the current debate about the affiliation of religious societies - Christian Unions in

particular – to student unions is that one of the reasons why these exchanges can be a little heated in some places is precisely because both Students Unions and Christian Unions are actually passionate about the same thing, which is how to safeguard our freedom to be who we are. So there are points in common, but there is work to do. The positive thing about a debate, of course, is that it can help to identify what the problem is and enable a process that leads to a way forward and to further clarification.

What seems to me to be vitally important is that we do talk to one another and that, in the world of higher education today, not only (in my context) the different Christian denominations, but all the faith communities are seen to be talking to one another and working hard to understand what it is appropriate for us to do as our separate selves and what we can do - and indeed need to do - together. Let me put it the other way round. If we are not seen to be working together, but to be working in isolation from one another in our institutions, that can reinforce the idea that religion is somehow problematic and needs to be marginalised. So that does not serve the cause of religious freedom. Whereas we can rightly celebrate the fact that religion is very much part of our university life and our communal life in this country. Our working in partnership - and being seen to work in partnership - may well be what allows the proper reappearance of religion on university agendas. Because, as we have already heard, people do not leave their faith at the door when they come to a university.

So, what do chaplaincies do? One aspect of chaplaincy is to provide a location for engagement with faith on campus. Not the location because people of faith will always talk about that with each other: it is part of who they are. But in institutions, whether in universities, schools, hospitals or prisons, chaplaincies have the opportunity to put faith, if you like, on the university map, perhaps literally and physically to put it on the map in the sense that in a university it has a presence embedded within the university's institutional structures. Chaplaincies can play an important role in legitimising the bringing of faith issues into the day to day conversations that go on in higher education institutions in different ways, whether through some of the activities about which we have been hearing - through hospitality or gathering, through sharing of faith, through private encounters or public events like the Festival of Faiths about which Sarah Talcott was just talking, through conversations. In these ways issues of faith are brought to bear on the life of the institution and the experience of life in the institution are brought to bear on the life of faith.

As Ronnie Millar said, wonderful things can happen when you cross boundaries and chaplaincy can help people to do this. I was really interested by the echoes of what I have been planning to say in the conversation about Corrymeela and by the fact that Corrymeela was founded by a chaplain. Corrymeela is both a place and a community and a chaplaincy can also be a physical place. It can be a room, or even a building or a multi faith chaplaincy centre in some places. But where chaplains operate from a physical chaplaincy they do need to beware of this becoming the box where the faith conversation can safely and conveniently be contained. That is the downside of having a building, rather than being out there across the institution. On the other hand, as we have heard, safe spaces can provide exactly the neutral ground which enables really good inter faith work to be done and inter religious dialogue to happen, facilitated by chaplaincies.

Chaplaincy is sometimes described as a service. In terms of fitting into the formal structures of education institutions, it is often part of, or linked to, student services. But again chaplains can sometimes be concerned that describing it as a service implies that it is there just for those who have a particular need for it, whereas historically Christian chaplains have seen their role as being a Christian presence in the whole institution, being there to serve the whole community, people of all faiths and those of no particular affiliation. I say Christian chaplain because historically chaplaincy has been predominantly Christian. But that has been changing over time. There have been Jewish chaplains for a long time. Increasingly, Muslim chaplaincy is being talked about. Many chaplaincies now list a range of chaplains or advisers drawn from various faith communities as part of their extended teams. A range of models and practice is developing. Incidentally, there is a whole conversation which it would be interesting to have about how the language of chaplaincy sits with you. I think this is a key issue as we go forward.

Chaplaincy is often described as being about pastoral care, about caring for people, but it is not just about being nice to people. Chaplains in institutions will at various times be peace-keepers and agents of change. At times their task will be to calm things down and other times to stir things up. Christian chaplains use the language of the pastoral and the prophetic role. During the passage of the recent Higher Education Bill quite a lot of reference was made to a speech given by one of President Clinton's former advisers where he talked about the loss in the United States of the university sector's ability "to speak truth to power". That is part of the role of a university and it may be part of the role of chaplaincy sometimes. I believe the phrase is actually Christian Quaker in its origins. Behind the scenes, or publicly, chaplains can earn the right to say difficult things that need to be said. Their task is to walk slowly and notice things and respond appropriately. We have heard talk of earning the right to speak, to be trusted and to engage. That is absolutely right. It is crucial that chaplains of any faith earn the right to do these things by being present over time in the institution, by being there by invitation; by being accountable; and by working within negotiated boundaries, whilst keeping their integrity (an absolutely crucial point that Harriet Crabtree made earlier) as members of good standing in their own particular faith communities. In a sense chaplains are gifted to the institution from the faith communities. Most are paid by the sponsoring faith community, though increasingly institutions are seeing the value of chaplaincy and offering some support, if not towards salaries, then in terms of resources. There are Christian chaplains in the great majority of institutions and, as I have said, increasingly there are extended chaplaincy or faith teams or faith advisers of the different faiths with representation from various faith traditions. All that I have described in terms of chaplaincy - as a physical place, as an institutional location for the discussion of issues of faith, serving the community, caring pastorally, keeping the peace, challenging structures, being agents of community cohesion - are reasons why chaplaincy can, and should, have a real effect on inter faith relations on campus.

Even where there is not a building or plant to offer, the chaplain can provide the place or the context or the umbrella under which people of faith can gather to meet for dialogue or to pursue a common project. The chaplaincy, we like to say, is in the structures, but not of the structures. So it can be in a position to notice live issues and issues of common cause, issues in the institution or within the faith communities which need to be addressed. Chaplains are able to be available to members of faith



communities and hear their concerns and enable them to work together to address them. Part of our strategy for the next five years for higher education work in the Church of England is that we should encourage chaplains, not to control, but to initiate a conversation about convening a student council of faiths or its equivalent, an idea mentioned earlier today, if there is not one already. Where do the different faith societies within the university come together? Is that a step in which chaplains can help by acting as a catalyst? There are all sort of ways in which chaplains can and do care for students of different faiths in the institution. One way of doing it, as Sarah Talcott was suggesting, is by finding ways in which a university or its Students Union can celebrate the diversity of the campus community and address issues that arise from this. I am sure it is the case that proactive and consultative cooperation is what builds the good relationships which are so vital, not only for their own sake, but also when difficult times come - whether as a result of the impact of world events or from local problems. There really do need to be good structures in place to deal with this.

There is a really important ‘behind the scenes’ mediation role that chaplains can play. I am not thinking so much about issues between the faith communities themselves, as about issues between the faith communities on the one hand and institutional structures on the other. Whether the issues are around provision of prayer rooms, exam timetabling and clashes with religious festivals or the particular needs of a section of the community at any time, the chaplain’s role can be significant. The financial hardship for many Malaysian students when the currency collapsed springs to mind; but so does the current need to ensure that the Muslim community is properly supported and represented at a time when Islam is the focus of a great deal of media attention and specific government guidance has been issued on tackling violent extremism in the name of Islam.<sup>3</sup>

Chaplains can be bridge-builders and educators and there are good examples of work which chaplains have done to create opportunities for students and staff to be exposed to traditions other than their own. We have just heard an example from the Cambridge group and have heard Sarah Talcott talk about the value of visits to places where people can encounter people from different faith communities. I would want to underline the point made by Harriet Crabtree at the beginning of the day that many students who come to university may never have met an official representative of a religious faith. This is why chaplains have a key front line role. More importantly, they may never have actually engaged with their peers from different faith communities and have the first opportunity to do that at university. There are real opportunities here to confront prejudice, and the experiences students have at university are carried by them into later life.

We have built into our Church of England strategy a commitment to promote collaborative work in faith teams and proactively to encourage inter faith dialogue; and, in particular to follow up the outcomes of the research project on which Jeremy Clines is working as Project Officer. We are delighted to have got some money from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund to look at the development of “multi faith” chaplaincies which are now emerging on many campuses. We want to know what people are actually doing, what is really going on, what is working, and what is

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<sup>3</sup> Note This paragraph was omitted in delivery of the text on the day but has been included in this report.

not working so well, where the good practice is that we can share. So we are going to identify the participation of different faith communities in university chaplaincies; we will identify different models that have developed or are developing; and will make recommendations on best practice. We will disseminate the findings widely to promote the most effective inter faith participation and collaborative activity. That work is now underway.

Jeremy has come to us, as he said, from York St John University, where there is a really interesting model of having two people, a man and a woman, from each of seven of the world faiths as part of an extended chaplaincy team. We have started with some simple research. Chaplains are being contacted by telephone to gather information to determine the current participation of faith communities in chaplaincy so that we know what is there at the moment. There has been wide consultation with contacts from across the faith communities who are engaged with chaplaincy at the moment, either as chaplains or as faith advisers, in order that we can get the questions we are asking right and in order that we can shape the project properly from the start. There has been engagement with representatives of the Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh faiths. The next really important stage in the project is to ensure as wide as possible consultation with the different faith communities. We want to make sure that everybody here today is part of that consultation. Jeremy is consulting at present on a programme of visits and focus groups which it is anticipated will be completed by the end of February. All interested parties are being invited to decide how they might want to contribute to our research on models of chaplaincy, on best practice and on inter faith working.

We have already written to faith leaders from the nine world faiths to identify key partners for us in the task of doing this work together. The expectation is that the combination of research on the present situation and the assessment of different approaches will enable us to produce a report setting out good practice, in part telling the stories of some of the good work that is developing, setting out the implications of what we have found, suggesting some routes for possible improved working with higher education institutions in the future and improved working for chaplaincy and effective engagement by faith communities themselves. So there will be points of action suggested for faith communities, as well as for chaplains and Vice-Chancellors. I very much hope that you will feel able to engage with us in this task and to contribute to the discussion. We really do want to hear what you have to say. The opening up of chaplaincy is not just dependent on those who are chaplains now. It is dependent on faith communities wanting to engage in the process. So the project represents a genuine exploration - we want to look at what is good, but also at what could be better.

### **Brian Pearce**

Thank you very much Hugh. Jeremy, do you want to say anything quite briefly about the focus groups and the consultation process?

## **Rev Jeremy Clines**

I was struck by what Ronnie Millar was saying in the Northern Ireland context about leaders sometimes getting in the way of dialogue. I am excited to hear about what students are doing in universities since they – and not chaplains or Vice-Chancellors - make up the majority of the population. I do know that chaplains can get in the way or they can be people who facilitate advocacy between people of faith and that can be vital. Chaplains can also help Vice-Chancellors in their thinking about what their university might look like. The Pro Vice-Chancellor *[at York?]* said to us just last week that if faith is not on the agenda of a university then the university does not have a holistic agenda. It needs to be there. We are planning to have some focus groups in late January/early February which will be looking at the role of student societies in the university, and how faith is dealt with in the university. Students and chaplains, and maybe the registrars as well, will be talking about physical space and timetabling and how these can impact on those of us who have a religious practice to observe. I am hoping there will be representation on every single one of those focus groups from student groups. So this is an initial invitation to all of you here today to come to one of them and to find out more about them from me.

## **Plenary session and closing reflections**

### **Brian Pearce**

We are now moving towards both tea and the parting of the ways because as you know, we have in a sense two parts to today's proceedings. We have had this broader gathering which I think has been extremely helpful in terms of helping to build some of the interconnections between different institutions and groups with a shared interest in this focus on building good inter faith relations on campus. Then after tea the representatives of the faith based student organisations who are here are going to meet by themselves to reflect further on how linkages between those organisations might be developed. So we have got 20 minutes or so for final exchanges before we break for tea.

### **Rev Dr Stuart Jennings**

Leicester has a model Council of Faiths that works extremely well and it has been my privilege to be part of that for nine years. I come back to my desire that part of what we are talking about is actually tied in with these resources. The environment at university is intense and is transitory. In three years most of the students we are talking to now will be gone. We all know exceptions, people who are perpetual students! It is interesting that those of you who have come from student groups have come from communities where there is a willingness to develop inter faith dialogue. We owe it to the groups you represent to link in with that.

### **Harriet Crabtree**

I want to return to the question of training which has come up a number of times. It is quite clear that it is very important. Several of you here are obviously taking forward complex inter faith projects and many people are engaged simultaneously in several inter faith activities. It would be interesting to hear people's reflections at some point on how they are enabled to do their inter faith work, where have they gained their learning and to ask what kind of training people have found useful for themselves. I also want to mention that the Network occasionally has paid student internships for relatively short periods of time. We have a splendid example here of a former intern in the form of Miriam Kaye who was with us at the Network office for a while a couple of summers back and helped promote the *Connect* guide when that came out and is now working for the Three Faiths Forum. If these summer internships would be of interest to you or to someone in your community, or internships for shorter periods if people want to come for a short placement, do let me know.

### **Louise Mitchell**

In the first week of August I am coordinating a building houses project in Kirgizstan with 'Habitat for Humanity'. I hope to get together a group of young people predominantly from the Abrahamic faiths to go out there. We are going to have some

training from Habit for Humanity about fundraising for the trip. We will be working with people from Kirgizstan to help build houses, which they badly need. It is a really good example of a project that gets people working together to build something as opposed to 'only' sitting around a table and talking (of which I myself do quite a lot!).

### **Alyaa Ebiarry**

My point is about funding for chaplains. There are now facilities for training Muslim chaplains through the Islamic Foundation, but they are not finding the funding to go to jobs in educational institutions where there is no funding for full time Muslim chaplains. Do you have any advice for us on this?

### **Rev Hugh Shilson-Thomas**

We went to the Church of England's General Synod last February and made the case that since 43% of young people are in higher education then that is where we need to put our Church's resources. The Synod did pass a motion that in principle we should have a whole time chaplain in every university. In reality what happens is that the majority of our chaplains are funded by the Church itself although some are paid by the institution, particularly in the case of ones which are Church foundations. However, there has been some emergence of university-funded chaplaincy in the new universities, formerly polytechnics. Usually where a university puts in funding this is to enable the work that is not for a Christian chaplain as such, but a coordinator of a multi faith team. Another model is where different denominations come together to fund the chaplaincy. There is no magic wand to produce finance, and Higher Education chaplaincy is not like chaplaincy in the armed forces or in prisons which are Government funded. The funding resource question has to be addressed in terms of what people want. William Morris once said "Have nothing in your house that you neither know to be useful nor believe to be beautiful". It is quite a good rule for housekeeping, but what has been interesting in new universities is that, because of the functions I have described, they have found chaplaincies useful even though there is no statutory requirement for them to have one. Universities need to have a vision of what chaplaincy can be, and we need to work together to see how that vision can be implemented. I do not know of any short term funding solutions. Maintaining funding for Anglican chaplaincy is an on-going task and I know from colleagues in other denominations that the same is true for them.

### **Rev Dr Stuart Jennings**

I have been in higher education for 18 years and this is the first time that I have had a full time chaplaincy appointment, which is because local churches got the funding together. The trouble with the new universities is that where they do fund chaplaincy, they do not necessarily understand the needs of each faith. So you get multi faith chaplains who do not work with specific faith communities but throw the problem back at you and say "If you think it is an issue, then you fund it."

### **Rev Hugh Shilson-Thomas**

Shared stakeholding is the strongest model because it is then harder for any one party simply to cut the funding. Although there are a number of chaplaincies which have lists of faith contacts or faith advisers, this may look better than it actually is. But there are some places where there is really good co-operative sharing of the work, where chaplains cover for each other, do together what they can do together and do separately what they must do separately. There is a real question of what faith communities themselves are prepared to resource. That applies as much to the Christian as to the Muslim and the Jewish communities. So we have to make the case for this being a key part of the work of our faith communities.

### **Brian Pearce**

There is a need for faith communities themselves to look at how they fund and what they fund. I have reflected recently that we have had some wonderful new buildings added to our religious landscape in one way or another – mosques, temples, gurdwaras and so on. It may be that as the infrastructure gets these places of worship put in place, then the philanthropists who have been helping to fund them now need to think about helping to fund the structures which are not made out of bricks and mortar but out of people, processes and frameworks. I hope that one of the advantages of the links that will be strengthened by today's gathering, is an interchange of ideas and also the strengthening of the case for what needs to be done.

### **Sam Lebens**

I am glad that the idea of training has gone down well and I would like to invite you again to get in touch with me to tell me what you would like to see NUS do about this. I would like to see us rolling a programme out this summer. There is a risk of thinking that NUS is in some way part of the 'secular world', of people who conspire against religiosity. But you might have noticed the two national executive members here today are both members of a religious faith. NUS very much wants to encourage religious activities on campus and to defend the rights of religious people and to help lobby institutions to provide prayer rooms and other facilities. It strikes me that chaplaincy is an issue where people of faiths could get together and say "Perhaps we should be lobbying the Government about chaplaincy." Alternatively, perhaps we should be looking for philanthropy within our own communities. NUS is a national campaigning body with contacts in Whitehall. Let us know if you want to take your fight to Whitehall and want NUS to help with this.

### **Rev Hugh Shilson-Thomas**

It could be a mistake to want to be able to go straight to Government for funding, for example. Do not assume that outside funding for chaplaincy would solve all the problems because then the piper will call the tune. And as we are seeing in the NHS, the funding for chaplains can suddenly be cut. The whole conversation about chaplaincy has to be joined up. When a philanthropist from one of the faith

communities other than the Christian Churches, which have traditionally provided chaplaincy at universities, says “Here is the money for a chaplaincy”, it will be really interesting to see how a university reacts and responds to that. Until we have all worked together to determine what works best in practice we will not be in a position to know what exactly we should be seeking funding for.

### **Sabeen Akhund**

Jeremy mentioned the focus groups that would be happening for the Church of England project. If anyone else is looking for Muslim students then do get in touch with FOSIS.

### **David Myers**

In December the European Union of Jewish Students is holding a four day inter faith conference in Brussels. If any members from other student organisations would be interested in coming along to it please let me know.

### **Ronnie Millar**

May I add that anyone is more than welcome to come to Corrymeela as a volunteer. We also host many student groups and there are some brochures by the door there. Please check out our website – [www.corrymeela.org](http://www.corrymeela.org).

I wonder if Hugh has more to say about the ‘prophetic voice’ within the faith communities.

### **Rev Hugh Shilson-Thomas**

This ties in with what has already been mentioned about earning the right to speak. It is all very well speaking the truth but if nobody is listening to what you are saying then that does not achieve very much! If you have earned the trust of another individual then that person will listen to what you have to say. There are issues of responsibility and power here. Speaking the truth is a powerful thing to do, but one needs to know where the boundaries lie. In chaplaincy the idea of being in the institution but not of the institution, being part of the structure but slightly removed from it, has enabled people within the institution to approach the chaplain in a different way than they would if they were going to see someone in line management and sometimes they are able to say things that they would find it difficult to say elsewhere. Chaplains can find themselves in a position where they are able, if you like, to take the temperature of the institution. They may be among those whose perspective enables them to hold the institutional memory. Because of where they stand they are able to see issues in a way that others cannot. Then the judgment is how to say what needs to be said in a way that is pertinent. That is a very important part of the work of the chaplains.

### **Brian Pearce**

I would like to thank Hugh very much for his contribution today and it is very helpful to have had an account of the important project which Hugh and Jeremy are leading. I am very grateful to Hannah and Gaylina for all that they have been doing to facilitate today's meeting and I know that Harriet will have been in touch with you ahead of the meeting and she has played a major part in shaping its programme. I would like to ask her whether she has any closing points to make.

### **Harriet Crabtree**

I just want to repeat a particular thank you to all of you who have fitted this meeting into a very busy period of studying and work because this is a time of year when life is very hectic. I think it has been a very significant gathering today. We are particularly grateful to our speakers and for the fact that we have had such an excellent range of contributions from the floor.

### **Brian Pearce**

I would like to add my own thanks to everyone who has participated in the meeting. I think it has been a genuinely engaging and participatory event. If you have thoughts about what the next stage needs to involve or ideas for taking this agenda forward, do get in touch with us at the Network office. We shall obviously be talking with a variety of people, including people here, about the next steps and will obviously working with the Equality Challenge Unit in this. May I ask Moussa to take our good wishes to Saheema Rawat. We are sorry that she could not be here with us today.

In closing may I respond to Ronnie Millar's point about the 'prophetic voice'. Inter faith work is often looked at as a soft option but I do not think it should be seen that way. That has clearly come through this morning's discussion. There is a 'prophetic voice' in saying that we can work and live together, crossing these boundaries of different faiths, and that in doing so we can contribute to human flourishing. That is a prophetic and challenging statement to be making and I hope we shall make it even louder and more clearly as a result of today.



## PARTICIPANT LIST

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Published by:  
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(registered charity no 1068934 and company limited by guarantee no 3443823  
registered in England)

ISBN 1 902906 30 6