

Good Inter Faith Relations: The Next Generation

Report on the 2009 National Meeting of
the Inter Faith Network for the UK



Good Inter Faith Relations: The Next Generation

Report on the 2009 National Meeting of
the Inter Faith Network for the UK

held on 6 July 2009
at Leicestershire County Cricket Club

Published 2009 by the Inter Faith Network for the UK
(Registered charity no 1068934 and company limited
by guarantee no 3443823 registered in England)

ISBN 1 902906 40 3

The Inter Faith Network for the UK
8A Lower Grosvenor Place
London
SW1W 0EN

Tel: 020 7931 7766

Fax: 020 7931 7722

Email: ifnet@interfaith.org.uk

Web: www.interfaith.org.uk

Good Inter Faith Relations: The Next Generation

Foreword	5
Key Points	6
Welcome	9
Rt Rev Dr Tom Butler and Dr Nawal Prinja, Co-Chairs, Inter Faith Network for the UK	
Youth in community	11
Peter Downey, Maadhav Kothari and Cressida Godding, Liverpool Community Spirit Youth Council	
Youth inter faith – the Scottish experience	15
Haroon Ahmed and Frances Hume, Scottish Inter Faith Council	
Schools and inter faith learning	20
Professor Brian Gates, Chair, Religious Education Council of England and Wales	
Breaking the mould	26
New styles of inter faith work by and with young people Rachel Heilbron, Programme Director, Three Faiths Forum	
Youth organisations and good inter faith relations	33
Denise King, Chief Executive, Girlguiding UK	
Panel reflections	37
Gary Loke, Senior Policy Officer, Equality Challenge Unit Tina Mistry, Chair, Young Zoroastrians Bhupinder Singh, Secretary, Youth Inter Faith Trust Sughra Ahmed, Researcher, Islamic Foundation	
Closing reflections from the Co-Chairs	42
Notes from workshops	
Workshop 1 – Sports and youth inter faith understanding	44
Workshop 2 – Tools for inter faith dialogue with school aged young people	46
Workshop 3 – Inter faith forums, councils and ‘ambassador’ programmes	48
Workshop 4 – Inter faith understanding on HE and FE campuses	50
Workshop 5 – Encouraging faith based bodies to help their young people learn about and become involved in inter faith work	53
Workshop 6 – Religious Education and inter faith understanding	57
Workshop 7 – Inter Faith Week	60
Participant list	63
Member organisations of the Inter Faith Network for the UK	67

Foreword

This report records the proceedings of a day conference looking at the involvement of young people in inter faith relations. The conference was both the annual National Meeting of the Inter Faith Network for the UK and the third in a series of events in the 'Soundings' series which the Inter Faith Network is holding across 2009–11, looking at issues in the field of contemporary inter faith dialogue and engagement in the UK today.

During the last decade the Inter Faith Network for the UK and many of its member bodies have been advocating energetically the increased involvement of young people in inter faith dialogue and in other activity which builds inter faith understanding. There is now a widening pattern of inter faith initiatives led by or involving young people and of opportunities for young people to learn about and become skilled in inter faith dialogue and joint social action. As there was such a high level of interest in this area of inter faith relations it was decided to use IFN's National Meeting to explore this topic rather than a smaller 'by invitation' style of seminar. We were delighted that so many young people were among those who participated in the day

We hope that the day's proceedings will contribute to a greater recognition of the need to involve more young people in inter faith relations.



Dr Harriet Crabtree
Director

Key points from the day

These are not conclusions agreed by the meeting as a whole, but points made by individual participants in the course of the day's wide ranging discussions. The list is not exhaustive but highlights points made which may be helpful in considering developing work to increase inter faith understanding and cooperation among young people – and between the generations.

Youth inter faith initiatives – an important new area and one that is growing

- 1 There are an increasing number of inter faith initiatives involving young people – several led by them.
- 2 Inter faith work with young people is a relatively new area of work which has to be taken forward with care and integrity.
- 3 Youth councils, youth forums and youth ambassador programmes enable young people to make an active and visible contribution to building good inter faith relations and to be 'active citizens'.
- 4 Involvement in youth inter faith initiatives can help encourage friendship and build self-confidence and self-esteem.

Activities which youth inter faith councils/forums undertake

- 5 Some youth inter faith council activities highlighted include: learning opportunities; celebrations; social projects; conferences; meetings with faith leaders; trips; residential; retreats; developing inter faith observances or services; producing resources such as DVDs on topics such as faith and the environment; helping universities establish their own inter faith councils; joint events with older members of inter

faith bodies/faith communities; and visiting places of worship.

- 6 Inter-generational engagement is also important, eg through projects such as Liverpool Community Spirit Youth Council's 'Elder Buddies' project.
- 7 Sport is a key way to involve young people in inter faith encounter. It is important that young women as well as young men can be involved.

Getting young people involved

- 8 Routes to involving young people include: schools (including RE departments); advertisement within faith communities; word of mouth; social networking sites; university workshops; and youth conferences.
- 9 When seeking to engage young people from faith communities it is important to understand that faith community structures differ and so, therefore, do their ways of engaging with youth work. Some have youth workers and some do not.
- 10 Use of 'neutral'/'safe' spaces makes young people more likely to become involved in inter faith activity – especially in the early stages of an initiative.
- 11 Drama projects, such as the Loughborough inter faith pantomime, can attract youth involvement.
- 12 Inter faith dialogue through video conferencing – a method currently being developed by the Tony Blair Faith Foundation - can be a way to involve young people.

School pupils and inter faith issues – RE and the contexts of school and home

- 13 Inter faith understanding should be a fundamental objective for public education and a priority in all parental communities and schools.
- 14 It is important for young people to receive good inter faith education in RE classes.
- 15 RE is about teaching, not preaching. It should be imaginative, engaging, creative and challenging; transformational, motivated and accurate.
- 16 There needs to be adequate time to teach RE.
- 17 If RE is not taught well then it can compound ignorance and lead to stereotyping and even bullying.
- 18 Children's knowledge and understanding are shaped not only by their school and family but also by their playground culture and by the media.
- 19 Children from religious backgrounds need to appreciate how their faith inter-relates with others. Teachers need to be recruited, trained and nurtured and to be backed up by good resource material.
- 20 The role of SACREs is very important, as is encouraging involvement in these of people from faith communities.
- 21 Smaller communities wish to see their traditions reflected better in RE agreed syllabuses and exam board options.
- 22 No analysis has been carried out specifically on how RE lessons benefit children.
- 23 Competitions for schools on topics such as 'an appreciation of different cultures and faiths', such as that run in Watford, can attract interest in inter religious issues.

- 24 Twinning and linking of faith schools and, eg, of Girlguide groups, can help young people meet and get to know young people of different backgrounds.
- 25 It is important for parents to encourage their children to engage with children of other faiths.
- 26 There is an urgent need for richer religious and inter-religious education at all ages.

Faith communities and engagement of young people with inter faith issues

- 27 People of different faiths have to ensure that a strong message is going out into temples, churches, gurdwaras, mosques etc about the importance of inter faith work and that this is not seen as leaving behind one's own faith or mixing up of faiths.
- 28 Faith communities need to help their young people to meet people of other faiths – particularly where this does not happen naturally – and to equip them with skills to handle this encounter.
- 29 The aim in youth inter faith events should be that the young people who take part and are enthused about inter faith work go on to become not just tomorrow's *inter faith leaders* but also tomorrow's faith leaders.
- 30 Engaging with inter faith issues can be challenging for those from traditions with absolute ideas of truth. It is important that this engagement can take place with integrity.
- 31 It is also important to think about how non-religious people are engaged in dialogue.

Dialogue skills, opportunities and issues

- 32 Skills for inter faith engagement are vital for young people.
- 33 Young people need skills to engage with anyone – no matter what their faith or belief.
- 34 Rules/guidelines can help encourage productive dialogue.
- 35 Both differences and commonalities are important to explore. Actual or potential areas of conflict also have to be explored and not avoided.
- 36 Inter faith organisations such as the Three Faiths Forum play an important role in creating space for young people to talk about faiths and beliefs and in supporting dialogue and encouraging training of facilitators.
- 37 Methodologies and tools within RE and such as ‘Tools for Trialogue’ can enable young people to learn about different faiths and skills for engagement and also serve as a springboard for wider discussion.
- 38 Projects such as the Three Faiths Forum’s Parliamentors and Documentors programmes help engage young people of university age and enable them to develop greater inter faith understanding as well as to develop practical skills in particular fields.
- 39 Youth organisations such as the Guides provide valuable opportunities for exploring faith issues and for developing skills for active citizenship in a multi-faith society.

Further and Higher Education contexts

- 40 Faith is becoming a more important aspect of identity in Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) institutions.

- 41 HE and FE contexts provide young people with a chance to meet people from many different backgrounds, including different religious backgrounds. This is a great opportunity to learn and develop new ideas and friendships but there can be challenges in dealing with potential/actual conflicts over differing views or being unable to practise or manifest one’s religion or belief.
- 42 It is unhelpful if Preventing Violent Extremism is seen by FE and HE institutions as the primary reason for engagement with student religious identity.
- 43 It is important to address issues of provision on campus for students of different faiths.
- 44 Chaplaincy needs to be available for students of different faiths.
- 45 Targeted, aggressive proselytism on campus can be a cause for concern.
- 46 Religious literacy of staff in HE and FE institutions is very important.
- 47 Links should be encouraged between inter faith groups and FE and HE institutions.

General

- 48 It is important that helping children and young people develop inter faith understanding comes high on the Inter Faith Network agenda

Welcome

Rt Rev Dr Tom Butler, *Bishop of Southwark* *Co-Chair of the Inter Faith Network for the UK*

Ladies and gentlemen, as is our usual custom, we will start with a brief period of silence, remembering in thanks the work of all those in this country and around the world who work to contribute to greater inter faith understanding.

First of all, I'd better introduce myself. I am Bishop Tom Butler, one of the Co-Chairs of the Inter Faith Network, and I will be chairing the morning session, and Dr Prinja, my colleague, will be chairing the afternoon session. And we would like to start by commenting on the fact that one person who's made an enormous contribution to inter faith relationships over the years is Dr Indarjit Singh, was awarded a CBE in the Honours list earlier this year. I've no doubt we'd all like to congratulate him in the normal way. [Applause]

A word about our venue – we try to alternate between London and the Midlands for AGMs and National Meetings. Last year they were in London, the previous year they were in Coventry, and so it is very appropriate that this year our venue should be in the East

Midlands, here in Leicester. And we know an enormous amount of work goes on in Leicester concerning inter faith relationships. The Leicester Council of Faiths, the St Philip's Centre and Christians Aware, have all been very much involved in this work for many years.

It is appropriate that this very day there is a county-wide cricket youth competition going on, and we can see the range of ethnicities and faiths that are to be found around Leicestershire. And, as listening to youth is part of our programme for the day, it is good that we have that visual aid in front of us. We also have, I am pleased to say, the Bishop of Leicester, who is going to say a word of welcome. There was a rather famous cricket match here a year or two back, and the Bishop, no doubt, will tell us something about it – Imams versus Vicars. I'm not sure whether that helped inter faith relationships or set them back! But it's very kind of you to come and welcome us, we know how very active you are in this world.

Bishop Tim Stevens, *Bishop of Leicester*

Thank you very much, Bishop Tom. Of course, Bishop Tom could really have welcomed you himself, having been the Bishop of Leicester until about ten years ago. But I am very glad to be here to greet you, to welcome you to the Diocese of Leicester and to this cricket ground, where, as Tom said, we have had several inter faith cricket matches between the clergy and the imams of Leicester, all of which left deep scars on the Christians involved! I was bowled out for one run on this very pitch a few years ago. So we decided to change the terms of the engagement and to have a team of Leicester imams and clergy matched against the imams and clergy of Bradford. That resulted in my batting with one of the local imams who called me for a run, and caused me immediately to be run out!

This seems to me to be exactly the right place for us to be gathering, given that the emphasis of your day is on the rising generation, and how we engage young people in this vital inter faith work.

Bishop Tom has already made mention of the St Philip's Centre, which we established here only five years ago. Under Andrew Wingate's leadership, it has established a whole range of initiatives which I think are increasingly important for us in the region, and nationally and internationally. Only two weeks ago, we had a civic deputation here from Sweden with

the Mayor of Gothenberg and people from all faiths in that increasingly multi-faith environment. We find that people are coming here now from France, Germany and Scandinavia and so on to talk to us about inter faith relations in this city. That is a great privilege, and really a signpost for the future.

I am not an expert in inter faith relations, but someone who, as a bishop, has hugely valued the friendships which we have made with our faith leader colleagues in this city and in this county and in this region. The longer I am involved in this, the more I come to see that relationships between faiths are really relationships between people: prayerful, respectful, understanding, loving relationships which are at the heart of everything we do. That is why it is so good for me to see friends gathered here today.

Some of us went just a few months ago with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Chief Rabbi to Auschwitz Birkenau – a day that we will remember for the rest of our lives. It was a common pilgrimage of human beings expressing our friendship with each other as we stood in solidarity in that place. That seems to me to be absolutely the heart of what we do.

Thank you for coming to Leicester. Have a very good day and I look forward to hearing about some of the fruits of it from my colleagues.

Youth in community

Peter Downey, Maadhav Kothari and Cressida Godding, *Liverpool Community Spirit Youth Council*

Bishop Tom Butler: You may remember that at last year's National Meeting a programme called 'Soundings' was launched. This is a series of meetings exploring different aspects of inter faith dialogue and engagement in the UK today.

Today's National Meeting serves also as the third Soundings event, looking at the involvement of young people in inter faith activity, with the theme: 'Good inter faith relations – the next generation.'

We are aware there is a growing number of inter faith initiatives led by or involving young people around the country. Today we hear from some of these, beginning with 'Youth in Community: Liverpool Community Spirit Youth Council'. We are delighted to welcome its young Chair, Peter Downey, together with fellow member of the Senior Youth Council Maadhav Kothari and staff member Cressida Godding.

Cressida Godding: I would like to begin by saying thank you to the Inter Faith Network for this opportunity to come down here to talk about some of the work that we are doing. I am going to talk briefly about the aims of our work and about Liverpool. Then Peter and Maadhav will talk a bit more about the Youth Council's activities. We hope that the presentation will give you a sense of what we do and give you some ideas for your own work.

Liverpool is a big city with a fair amount of diversity, but not on the scale of places like Birmingham or Leicester. At the last Census, just to give you an idea, 79.5% were Christians, while other faiths made up only 8.7% of the population. Liverpool has the oldest black and Chinese communities in the UK. Its first mosque was built there by Yemeni seafarers.

South Liverpool is a very diverse area and it is home to all the non-Christian places of worship. In comparison, North Liverpool has traditionally been a predominantly white area and its dominant religious communities were Catholic and Protestant (between members of which there were some difficulties 30 or so years ago). But there is now an immigration centre in Liverpool and more people of diverse backgrounds are settling in North Liverpool.

Let me give you some key facts about the Youth Council. We have a Senior and Junior Youth Council. The Juniors are 13 to 17 and the Seniors are 18 to 25. All our members come from Liverpool, North Liverpool and South Liverpool. Everyone on our Youth Council is from Liverpool and lives in Liverpool. We have people from very diverse faith, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Some are not from any faith.

The Youth Council brings young people together to learn about their different faith and cultural backgrounds. As much as possible, we encourage them to share their experiences and their faith and their culture with each other, rather than staff acting as leaders in that. But also, obviously, as its name 'Liverpool Community Spirit Youth Council' signals, the Youth Council is also about active citizenship. Being part of it helps young people grow in becoming good members of the community within their area and having a civic role within the city. The Youth Council encourages friendship, self confidence, self esteem and aspiration building.

Peter Downey: I would like to introduce you to the types of activities that we do at the Youth Council.

In order to maintain our ethos at the Youth Council, each activity has elements of faith or culture to it. Meetings are held for both Senior and Junior Youth Council members who come together to discuss a range of topical issues, plan and review projects, and do ice-breakers and team building activities. This provides a chance for younger members to be peer mentors and for senior members to act as good role models. We also have cultural evenings and festivals which gives us a chance to celebrate young people's diverse backgrounds and cultural heritage. We do mini-projects alongside our main projects during the year. We have trips where we do team building activities and as a way of building friendship. Trips are also a bit of a reward for our hard work during the year. One of them is our annual residential.

music and traditional English food. The Youth Council also did 'well dressing' – which is where you decorate and add a message to a well. Wells symbolise the purity and importance of water so messages of hope put on them have a kind of specialness. That was a very interesting one for me because I had never encountered that before and did not know about the tradition.


Peter Downey: Currently the Junior Youth Council are doing a mini project called 'My Place, Our Space'. This is exploring local businesses and places of worship. We hope to investigate to see how they serve their local community and we are going to do this by filming and interviewing service providers and users.

A project that we carried out in 2007 was called 'The Elder Buddies Project'. This is a way of uniting older members of the community with younger members of the community and breaking down generational barriers. The product of this project was a 'This is your Life' book containing reminiscences of the lives of the Elder Buddies, made by Youth Council members as a way to find commonalities between the young and old in Liverpool.

Cultural Evenings

English Cultural Evening

- A quiz about English traditions of May and June
- Dancing a traditional folk dance
- Playing traditional folk music
- Traditional food
- Well dressing with messages of hope



Maadhav Kothari: Let me tell you a bit more about the cultural evenings. The Youth Council has many different ones to help members get an insight into the different backgrounds from which Liverpool youth come. These really do give a sense of identity to the Youth Council members and we all get a really deep insight into the different kind of cultural activities in which each of us participates. We had an evening during the Hindu festival of Navratri, where Youth Council members took part in the dancing during the festival and learnt about its religious relevance to the Hindu community. Another example is an evening we did around English Culture which included a quiz about the English traditions of May and June and a workshop on traditional folk dances and

Trips

- Day trips to North Wales for mountain walking
- Local outdoor pursuits centre
- Manchester Imperial War Museum
- Manchester Jewish Museum
- Penrhyn Castle, Bangor
- Next Wave Ship, L'pool



Maadhav Kothari: I am now going to talk about the trips we make. As Pete said before, trips are a kind of reward for the people who attend LCS for their work. But they are also very important for team building and learning more about each other's lives and backgrounds. They really help strengthen the bonds between the Youth Council members.

Our trips have included day trips to North Wales for mountain walking – this is a great team building exercise. And also visits to local outdoor pursuits centres. The trip to the Imperial War Museum, Manchester was a great one. We looked into different aspects of war and peace. We came out with differing views but a deeper understanding of the ways war affects people's lives. On the same trip we went to the Manchester Jewish Museum. This gave us an insight into Jewish culture, faith and backgrounds. For those of us who are not Jewish we were struck by some similarities but also quite a lot of differences from our own traditions, including particular taboos. We also went to Penrhyn Castle and Bangor. We also visited the Next Wave tall ship in Liverpool which docked for about a week or so –and went on board and did various activities such as climbing the rigging. That was a great team building exercise.

Mini-Projects

- *My Place, Our Space*: exploring local businesses and places of worship and how they serve their community through filming and interviewing service providers and users
- *Elder Buddies*: uniting YC members and older members of the community through oral reminiscence to produce a *This is your Life* book



Peter Downey: This year we have started our most ambitious project to date which is looking at the Government's 'Prevent' agenda. We hope to explore issues around extremism and investigate the fears young people have in their communities and how they react to these fears. Also, we hope to work with young people and explore their views with a view to producing an educational pack for schools and youth groups. This pack will help in work with young people to enable them to avoid radical responses to issues within their community and to build self esteem and confidence in their identity.

Cressida Godding: You can find out more about us on the Youth Council section of the

Liverpool Community Spirit website: www.community-spirit.org.uk. We are on Facebook which we organise quite a lot of our meetings through.

Questions:

Javid Jalili, National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the UK: Thank you for that excellent presentation. Do the young people ever ask for any services that Liverpool Community Spirit cannot provide for them but which you would like to? If so, what would those services be?

Cressida Godding: Liverpool Community Spirit has expanded quite quickly over the last three years, not only with our youth work but also work with adults in the community. There are so many activities that we would like to do, such as art and drama workshops and music workshops. We can do those to some extent, but ultimately we need more space. We could do with a youth centre where we could have activities running as a more regular occurrence. But of course we have funding issues as do so many inter faith organisations which means that capacity cannot be built as fast as we would like.

Dr Phil Henry, Multi Faith Centre at the University of Derby: We are just embarking on a project to help create a youth forum in the city, so what you have said this morning is very interesting and relevant to us. I would like to ask how the young people came to be involved and also about funding. Also, you talked about doing some work around the 'Prevent' agenda. This is something that we are also involved in. How are you being funded through that? Have you got Community Safety Partnership support or have you got local Government support?

Cressida Godding: I will answer the question about the funding first. Liverpool City Council accepted money which was available to local authorities with Muslim populations to work on the 'Prevent' agenda. The City Council decided to spend the money on funding projects throughout the community.

Liverpool Community Spirit applied and received funding across two years for relevant work. I was asked to sit on the Liverpool 'Prevent' (PVE or Preventing Violent Extremism) steering group.

Peter Downey: I will tell you a bit about how I got involved in the Youth Council. I was expelled from school when I was fourteen. Basically I was a loudmouth but I didn't have the right outlet to talk about what mattered to me. Then I met Matthew Thompson, who is the Director of Liverpool Community Spirit and it all took off from there. I got involved and LCS gave me a platform on which I could speak and talk about the issues that are going on in my community.

Maadhav Kothari: I got involved a few years later when LCS Youth Council was forming properly. I got involved through my community, especially through a poster that Matthew put up in the temple which I thought was quite interesting. So I joined through that.

Phil Henry: Thanks very much. Can I just ask, is that indicative of the way that other people come to the group? Is it through word of mouth, or is it through a more structured process of getting them together?

Cressida Godding: We do put out fliers and advertise through the local schools. However our Director Matthew Thompson works for the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) Religious Education department at Liverpool Hope University so information about the Youth Council also finds its way to the RE departments of schools. And Matthew knows a lot of people in the community, so many parents ask if their children can join.

Zafar Khan, Luton Council of Faiths: Thank you very much. It is a very interesting project and perhaps something that could be emulated in other places. How are you dealing with issues of identity and citizenship and a sense of belonging or lack of belonging? Thinking about these issues is very important for young people because youth are the future

in our communities as well as in our nation.

Cressida Godding: A good example is a project that both Pete and Madhaav took part in called 'Altering Liverpool'. We set up a blank 'altar' which was not representative of any faith or background, and we asked the young people to bring in objects that they felt reflected their identity and to place them on their own 'altar' and explain them to their fellow Youth Council members. Then everyone was asked to take one item from their altar and put it towards a collective 'altar' that represented the Youth Council. That was to demonstrate that we appreciated all our identities individually and, at the same time, were drawing these symbolically together as demonstrated in the Youth Council.

Peter Downey: With different young people in Liverpool and different diverse communities, young people can feel quite isolated. What Liverpool Community Spirit has done is bring them together and helped break down the barriers of isolation and fear. It has encouraged understanding and a sense of collective identity and ability to see commonalities.

Bishop Tom Butler: Thank you. That has given us an excellent start.

Youth inter faith – the Scottish experience

Haroon Ahmed and Frances Hume, *Scottish Inter Faith Council*

Bishop Tom Butler: We now move north to Scotland as we hear from Frances Hume, who is the Development and Education Officer for the Scottish Inter Faith Council, and Haroon Ahmed, who is a member its Youth Steering Committee. Haroon came with colleagues to talk to our National Meeting about four years ago when the SIFC youth initiative was very new. Since then he has been busy studying medicine at university. We are delighted to welcome him back and to hear again from the SIFC youth initiative.

Frances Hume: Thank you very much for having us here today. My colleague Dr Maureen Sier came with the Youth Steering Group last time. She is now on secondment working with the Scottish Government looking at a strategy for inter faith work and working with local inter faith groups.

We will start off by telling you a little bit about the Youth Steering Committee and how we originally formed. Our Committee's age range is a little bit older than that of Liverpool's in that we take in young people from the age of 16 to 29. Most are 18 to 29. I actually got involved as a Youth Committee member at the age of 27 – so was quite an elderly youth! I was a youth worker at the time and I'm now working for the Youth Steering Committee. This reflects the fact, I think, that people stay involved for a long time and are really, really enthusiastic about our work.

We have a Council membership of 35 people drawn from the different faith communities in Scotland. We ask the communities to nominate young people to join our membership. Additionally, when we travel

round, to faith communities, to schools, to university groups and to youth groups, we find out through that if anybody would be interested in joining our Steering Committee.

We have been quite Glasgow-based, because that's where the majority of our young people from diverse communities come from but we meet every four to six weeks in different parts of Scotland. We work together to plan lots of different activities such as our Annual Conference. We are often called upon to lead workshops at schools and with youth groups and to speak at events.

Haroon Ahmed: Thank you for that very warm welcome earlier. I was just sitting there hoping Bishop Tom would not mention some of the things I said when I was here last time – I was fifteen, so don't hold it against me if I said some politically incorrect things!

I am going to talk about our two main annual activities: an annual retreat and an annual conference. On the retreat members of the Youth Committee get away together. We discuss and agree the key themes for the next conference, working through lots of different ideas. We try to have most of our retreats in places that have some kind of religious significance. This slide shows our first retreat on Holy Isle, at a Buddhist retreat centre on an island just off the west coast of Scotland.

At that first retreat members of the committee brought a friend or a colleague or somebody who they thought might be interested in joining a committee like this. So the group doubled to fifteen that year. The next retreat was in New Battle Abbey College

in June 2005. We have also been to Iona. That was our first week long retreat and it turned into a bit of a conference itself, because Frances (who was actually working on Iona at the time), arranged for us to stay in the MacLeod Centre for a week and we devised various activities. Whoever stays in the MacLeod Centre runs one of the services which happen throughout the week in the Iona Abbey. We put together an inter faith service. We made this dynamic and fun. We got some really good feedback that it was one of the more fun services they had had in a while.



I will tell you now a bit about the annual Youth Conference. We've been having annual Youth Conferences from 2003. As I mentioned, during our retreats, we choose a theme to focus on. We also work out what workshops to have connected to this theme and what speakers to invite and stalls to have. SIFC helps us put on the conference but we have a great deal of input in nominating speakers, organising the workshops and the timetable for the day, and selecting the venue. We personally go and run the day as well. Our second conference was in 2004. We titled it 'Service above Self'. That was our theme that year because we decided that every religion has a core value of wanting to serve others and serve humanity above itself – something about selflessness.

Our most recent conference was held in March this year. The theme for that one was 'From Conflict to Co-operation', because we decided that we had held five conferences and had talked about some really hard issues in inter faith, but we had not dealt adequately with conflict – whether faith based or not

faith based. This was a very hot topic – particularly as it turned out that the conference took place while there were conflicts with a religious dimension happening abroad and people here were very concerned about these.

We always have good keynote speakers. This slide shows Gargi Saha. She is from India although has been recently in America. She has spent a lot of time recently rescuing young women who have been sold into slavery throughout India and helping them be rehabilitated so they can re-enter society.

She was speaking about 'the courage to change' – which was our theme for that year. We all know that we want to make a difference and to improve our communities but it is not easy to do that. That conference helped us learn how we can have the courage we need to change society.



This slide shows some of the speakers from our last conference, 'From Conflict to Co-operation'. Second from the right is Kate Turner. She is a founder of an organisation called 'Healing through Remembering', which has done a lot of reconciliation work between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.



We always have some good discussion groups. At our first conference, 'Faith Matters', the primary focus was on faith and making sure that people could get past the stereotypes of

different faiths. We also did a meditation workshop at the first conference.

We also try and have some musical interludes within the presentations as well as some good entertainment so we have a bit of fun as well as discussion. At about half of our conferences, we have had a panel of religious leaders who sit at the front and let us grill them with questions. We have given them loads of hard questions about inter faith work and particular topics ranging from homosexuality to terrorism. They are very happy to go up there and talk, which is great.

Frances Hume: We discovered when we joined the Youth Committee how much responsibility we were given, right from the very start, to choose the theme, get speakers, and get the religious leaders together. So we were treated with a lot of respect and this was great for our own personal and social development. We are working together to create something for the common good and that helps us as well to get to know each other better.

We have been invited to do a lot of different things throughout Scotland. For example, quite a few of our members have been invited to do the 'Time for Reflection' at the Scottish Parliament. Twice a year, all the religious leaders in Scotland meet together, which is fantastic, and on one occasion we were invited to talk about our experiences of Religious and Moral Education in schools, and how it was taught. We also often get to speak at schools. We had a challenging task there which was to talk about what our faith means to us – not so much the rituals and the doctrine, but rather how it affects us at a personal level. Each of the young people had to repeat their half hour session eight times throughout the day, so that was a pretty intensive experience but it was very good.

Another quite exciting involvement we have had was helping the Scottish Inter Faith Council to create an inter faith service for the triennial midwives' conference. There were about a thousand midwives at it. This was their first inter faith service. Different



speakers from each faith community talked about new life and birth and how their faith related to that.

Haroon Ahmed: We decided we also wanted to put faith into action and to be able to demonstrate a bunch of young people of a variety of faiths standing out there and doing something. We picked the theme of the environment and have recently worked with a couple of volunteers from the Global Exchange organisation to produce a Handbook called 'Our Sacred Earth'. We distribute this to various places of worship, and other organisations such as community centres. It explains how they can make their sites and buildings more eco-friendly. It also contains material on how each and every religion represented in Scotland understands the importance of preserving the environment.



Frances Hume: Just a couple more examples. A football match between the members of the Scottish Parliament and people of faith, not all 'religious leaders'. Politics won out over religion this time round but the game was very even! The politicians were at least on their best behaviour compared to their recent match against journalists when there was a bit of a brawl!

Last summer, there was a pilgrimage to Israel and Palestine, on which a mixture of members of the Scottish Inter Faith Council, the SIFC Youth Committee, religious leaders and others interested in inter faith dialogue from across Scotland visited sacred sites together. They also met people who were involved in the conflict – both Israeli and Palestinian politicians, settlers in occupied land, Palestinians living in the occupied territories, families of suicide bombing victims, those affected by the water crisis, peace workers, both within peace organisations and individuals, promoters of non-violent resistance, religious leaders from all of the major faiths present in the area as well as some who wish for the war to continue until they achieve their own goals. I think that was quite a life changing experience for a number of people.



Very briefly, a few more activities. Like Liverpool, we have activity days such as going hill walking, visiting places of worship, and attending events. Because we are part of the Scottish Inter Faith Council we are Scotland-wide. We want to establish local groups in different cities for younger people aged about 14 to 18. We get called upon to help universities establish their own inter faith societies. Last year we created a vision statement, which is on our website (www.scottishinterfaithcouncil.org) and we have created a youth booklet as well to advertise what we do. We get invited to do external events, for example, creating a DVD in which Haroon is involved as well, interviewing people about the Health Service; our Values in Harmony project, looking at the 'golden rule' from different faith perspectives; Health Care chaplaincy; – this has been traditionally involved just Christian chaplains and has now become spiritual care teams, so they want

prayers and information about how different faiths relate in times of personal crisis and ill health. One of the members of our Youth Committee became an *ani* (a Tibetan Buddhist nun) and moved to Samye Ling Tibetan Buddhist Centre in Dumfries. She continued to keep in touch with the Youth Committee's work, and asked for members of the Youth Committee to contribute 'graces' (prayers said before meals) from all the different religions to place as a prayer card on each of the tables at the Centre's meal hall. This is typical of the way in which our Youth Committee, both past and present, continue to take the work of inter faith forward in their respective areas. And regularly we get asked to have young people along to do research consultations. We are starting to work more and more in partnership, for example, with the police, with the education authorities, and with different youth-based faith organisations.

Finally, planning for the future. This slide shows us recruiting new people at Strathclyde University. We were introducing them to the concept of inter faith with an evening of workshops and activities, again planned by the Youth Steering Committee.



This slide shows our most recent event where 14 – 17 year olds were invited from all the Glasgow schools to learn more about inter faith dialogue. We are hoping to have another schools' youth conference in partnership with a number of agencies including Strathclyde Police, Education Services and other youth faith based voluntary organisations, but this time folk from the Youth Steering Committee will be peer educators, so they will be introducing the young people to the concept of inter faith.



In conclusion, I have loved working with young people both in the Committee and as the staff worker because of the creativity and dynamism that comes out of working with young people. They are very honest – they say it how it is – and they are very enthusiastic. They are happy to form friendships through their activities, and they are also willing to disagree (sometimes quite heatedly) and still remain friends

One thing that has greatly inspired me is how much these young people really care about things – about the earth, about friendship, about doing projects together to share our common humanity. They like discussion but they like really getting their hands dirty and getting involved in things. Difficulties include how hectic their lives tend to be. Haroon was telling me how he has got his work, he's got his study, he's got his inter faith and faith based activities, so in that way he's constantly busy and on the go. And of course, young people become adults, and move on and so we're always having to replenish our group with more young people.

Peter Downey: How is your organisation funded? And from what sort of background do the majority of the young people on your committee come?

Frances Hume: We are funded almost entirely by the Scottish Government, although we do occasionally get project funding from other sources for specific projects. The background of the young people is very varied. We do not ask them about their background but they are from all different sections of society, and from well to do areas and areas of poverty.

Rev Alan Race: It is often said that young people have an interest more in the 'spirituality' side of things than organised religion. I would be interested in your reflections on this.

Frances Hume: There is a really broad spectrum within the Youth Committee. We have people who are conservative in their faith, and we also have people who come because they're interested in general spirituality and themes which link all the faiths together.

Haroon Ahmed: We have a very strong policy of informing people about different faiths without preaching at them.

Lydia Barlow: What is your relationship with the adult Council if any?

Frances Hume: The adult Council is made up of 39 members from across the seven major faith communities in Scotland. The youth committee reflects this in that it also draws members from across these faith communities. However, in the past it has reflected a wider spectrum of faith including those who are interested in faith and spirituality but do not align themselves to a particular religious tradition. In that sense the Youth Committee has operated on a separate footing within the umbrella of the organisation. However, we do have links with the Council as one of our Youth Committee members sits on the Executive Committee and we are invited to attend the Council's AGM. As the Development and Education Officer I would also feed back important information regarding Council business at the Youth Committee meetings.

Bishop Tom Butler: Thank you, Frances and Haroon. There must be something in the water in Scotland, because we have a lot of good ideas coming out of the adult Faith Council in Scotland, like the Inter Faith Week that we in England are copying at the end of this year, and it was good to hear a multitude of ideas from the Youth Council.

Schools and inter faith learning

Professor Brian Gates, Chair, *Religious Education Council for England and Wales*

Bishop Tom Butler: We are now going to hear from Professor Brian Gates, who is the Chair of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales. He will be talking about the vital area of inter faith learning in schools. The Religious Education Council has reciprocal membership with the Network and this is a key and much valued link.

Professor Brian Gates: I would like to begin by affirming two fundamental principles about helping children and young people develop inter faith understanding:

A. Inter faith understanding should be a fundamental objective for public education. By the time they leave school we must be ambitious for every young person not only to be literate and numerate but also 'religiate'. By that I mean

- understanding religion in human experience both locally and globally – beliefs, identities both individual and communal, and traditions
- reflective on and refining of a faith to live by.

B. Inter faith understanding should also be the parents' ambition from within their own faith tradition. That is to say, if it is at all important to me, I must very much want my children to learn to appreciate my particular family perspective(s) – as Jew or Zoroastrian, Christian or Muslim, Hindu or Jain, Buddhist or Sikh, as Baha'i or Humanist – and how that inter-relates with the faith of others.

Formal and informal education Schools have a central role in this helping process, but so too do families and wider communities of

faith. And these two streams – HOME and SCHOOL – should be complementary.

In this country this partnership is acknowledged in the system of SACREs. From 1944 each Local Authority was encouraged to set up a *Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education* comprised of representatives of faith communities, councillors, and teachers. In 1988 this became a statutory requirement and the category of faith communities was explicitly extended throughout the country to include all the principal religions of the UK as well as the churches. In other words, direct engagement with parental faith communities in public education is written into the provision for RE in all schools, and not only those linked to one specific faith. The National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) reinforces this point in England as does WASACRE in Wales.

Alongside the existence of SACREs, there has more recently emerged an extensive interest in inter faith activity and understanding – locally, regionally and nationally – for which the Inter Faith Network plays a tremendous promotion and support role. They are all fed from within the starting points of parental faith communities. And throughout this expansive network there is new energy for educational activity.

Unfortunately, instead of flowing together these two streams all too often flow separately. Different people are involved. Mutual ignorance is more in evidence than mutual benefit. In consequence, schools miss out on the enrichment available from community roots and faith communities do not pay enough attention to the renewal of faith based education across the lifespan.

Roles get confused. Parents default their educational responsibility to schools. Teachers steer clear of deep beliefs from ignorance or fear of causing offence.

Inter Faith Understanding. Inter Faith

Misunderstanding. I dare to say that each of us has grown up with different degrees of understanding and misunderstanding of other faiths. The same continues to be true for boys and girls generally. Knowledge and understanding are shaped not only by what is learned in school or from family, but also from TV and the other media, and from peers and playground culture.

As examples of what I mean, let me quote the following. Firstly, on Roman Catholics in the eyes of some other Christians: *“They believe in Mary more than Jesus”* (girl aged 9, Methodist background); *“Guy Fawkes was one. Christians are good. Catholics are bad because they fight”* (boy aged 6, Church of England (C of E) background); *“They believe in God more than ordinary Christians, they pray more than we do, they go to church more often, and have more things to do when they get married..it’s a two hour service”* (girl 15, C of E background); in other words, *“they’re the same as Christians, only a bit more flashy”* (girl, 12 United Reformed Church).

And other Christians in the eyes of Catholics: *“Protestants say the Queen is the head of the Church, not God”* (boy, 12); *“I don’t think a Protestant believes in anything. It’s a church in England”* (boy, 13); *“Protestants don’t believe that God (that is Jesus) had a mother on earth”* (girl, 15).

Then there are some examples from Jewish children: *“They didn’t used to like Jews”* (boy, 9); *“the Jews are not liked, they don’t like us”* (girl, 6). But humour comes to the rescue: *“Roses are red, violets are blue, if it wasn’t for Jesus, we’d all be Jews”* (boy, 11), or a sense of theological superiority: *“Jews started the world off”* (girl, 9); *“Jews believe in one God not two like the Christians”* (boy, 11).

Or again examples of Muslim apologetic

against Christian deficiencies: *“Christians believe that God has daughters and sons; he’s got a family. But God is really alone and one.”* (girl, 13). *“Most of the things that have been written in the Bible have been changed over the years, and in the Qur’an not a word has been changed; it is the same as the original”* (girl, 15). And finally a Sikh perception of Muslims: *“A Muslim wants to take over all India – they are just like Indians, but we are trying not to get into trouble. Their colour is the same as ours, and we respect God better than they. They want to spoil everything”* (boy, 10).

These are important starting points for addressing difference, with opportunities to expose distorting caricature for what it is. Too often negative impressions layered in from childhood years linger on longer than ought to be the case in an educated adult.

Mutual challenge from Inter Faith exchanges

Behind the many serious questions which young people ask there often lie more fundamental points of theological contention that deserve to be addressed for the benefit of children and adults alike, if any depth of inter faith understanding is to be achieved.

I’ll give four different examples to illustrate what I mean by this:

1. Picturing We know that Jews and Muslims have strong resistance to any ‘imaging’ of God. We know that in contrast Hindus have an abundance of pictorial representations – dismissed by many non-Hindus as idolatry. The question then arises regarding the motives behind these different beliefs. *“Don’t picture in case you mistake it for God who is always more.”* Or *“Multiply your pictures because though they give pointers, God is always more than any one picture.”* Are these beliefs entirely at odds? Either way, the Godness of God, even if perceived as near to hand, is still affirmed as going beyond all human imagining.

2. Burning/burying In their responses to death, we know that Indian religious

traditions tend to cremate, and that Semitic religious traditions tend to bury. We realise that this relates to beliefs about what is beyond death – reincarnation (no necessary expectation of bodily continuity) or resurrection of the body. In this country many Christians have shifted their attitude on this and now practise cremation. Does that mean they have abandoned their belief in resurrection, or is it rather that they have a different understanding of the meaning of the ritual expression which hopes beyond death? How literal do we want our religious language?

3. Prophet That Jesus is regarded as a prophet is increasingly the case across different religions. He was utterly Jewish, with all the characteristic features of such a figure in the Hebrew Bible. He matters profoundly to Muslims and is Qur’anicly affirmed as in that prophetic line. And this is one of the titles by which he is acknowledged in the Christian New Testament – albeit with the qualification ‘more than a prophet’. The question then arises, and not only from Muslims, can and will Christians ever find the grace to acknowledge Muhammad as a prophet? What limits should be set to the claim that the spirit of God is in the world as well as in the church?

4. Who matters? It is largely taken for granted that family and friends matter. The language of human rights extends this principle to the whole of humankind. But in practice is that really believed and acted on? It’s the principle behind public taxation, but so far as possible taxes are evaded if not avoided. It’s the principle which arises from the affirmation that all humanity comes from one creative source. But when we look to Sri Lanka, the Middle East or the Indian sub-continent, isn’t the overwhelming evidence that people of one faith often think of themselves as more important than those of another? Whether in defence or advancement, do not religions seem to sponsor aggression?

Each of these examples presents a distinctive challenge, maybe disturbing, maybe enlightening, but almost certainly provoking

different responses according to both personal beliefs and the extent of an individual’s understanding of the faith of others. My observation is that the inter faith understanding, which should be a priority in all parental communities and schools, needs to take such challenges seriously along with those arising from the popular kinds of misunderstanding which I instanced previously.

Inter faith understanding as an educational priority area

There is urgent need for richer religious and inter-religious education throughout the lifespan – not just for children and young people, but for adults as well. It’s needed in schools, colleges and universities. It’s also needed in parental faith communities. Teachers need to be recruited, trained and nurtured for this purpose. Classroom and community-based materials and exercises need to be prepared to enrich the process.

Some of the exploration and learning will be on single faith premises, some bi-lateral and some multi-lateral. To genuinely engage the hearts and minds of all involved, it will be important always to hear the questions which are continually arising fresh from living in this continually changing world, and always to try to transcend surface meanings. The challenge to do this well at every level is massive. It deserves attention in the strategic thinking of those who lead from within faith communities and public education.

The RE Council of England & Wales has just been given an opportunity by government (DCSF and CLG) to take a significant initiative on this front. The REC comprises some fifty member organisations – each of the faith communities plus the different professional and academic associations interested in RE – including the Inter Faith Network and the national SACRE associations. Over the next 18 months we are to devise and deliver support for teachers of RE in a fifth of all 11-16 secondary schools which will better equip them to understand and tackle the roots of violent extremism and the religious

connections thereof. Details can be found on the REC website (google 'REC', or type in www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk).

There is a theological component to this REsilience project – as it is called – not least in relation to Islam, but we will avoid any invidious targeting of the Muslim community. There is also a pedagogical component relating to teachers' expertise in dealing effectively with controversial issues in large group settings. We will be both enthusiastic and realistic about what can be achieved. And, wherever appropriate, we will not hesitate to refer to the resources that are there to be tapped in local SACREs and inter faith groups to which young people can be creatively exposed.

In conclusion Helping children and young people develop inter faith understanding must come high on the agenda of the Inter Faith Network. That's certainly because each boy and girl matters in his or her own right. But it's also because they can bring refreshment from themselves to us of older generations. They can help us interpret this wonderful complexifying world, and maybe with us steer it differently and better.

Questions:

Dr Nawal Prinja: Professor Gates, you are a very important link between inter faith work and religious education. For Inter Faith Week we plan to have a balanced approach when talking about religions, but I observe that that balance is in some respects lacking when it comes to academia, or teaching about religions in schools. So can I just seek a comment about what has happened recently where the GCSE Religious Education syllabus has been revised and, while there are modules and option for studying scriptures for Christianity, Islam and Judaism, there are none for Hinduism, Buddhism or Sikhism. Why this imbalance?

Prof Brian Gates: Sadly, I think the fact is that going back over 30 years, when the exam boards first put on the options for the so-

called minority faiths, the take-up has been tiny. Because pupil numbers have been small and because the exam boards operate as commercial entities, they've not been able to sustain these options. It's not good news, but I would want to put this back into the larger priority of having the kind of professional companionship that has religious integrity available to boys and girls right the way through each of the primary years and each of the secondary years. So that, yes, by the time they get to the 16+ end of things, there will be a readier interest and take up of whatever examination options are there. If there is a definite number of students wanting to do this, schools will want to pursue it, then it will happen. So far as I'm aware, there is no closed-mindedness on the part of any academics or any exam boards over it.

Yann Lovelock: Professor, the last time we met was at an IFN special meeting and we heard somebody from Hertfordshire get up and say that it was impossible to get inter faith dialogue emphasised in his local curriculum. I know that it is there in the National Framework for RE and that inter faith dialogue ought to be one of the many matters adopted into a locally agreed syllabus, even taking into account the very limited time given to RE in the school timetable. I wonder whether the RE Council has a policy about encouraging this kind of dialogue and the techniques of dialogue in schools?

Prof Brian Gates: The RE Council has limited resources and limited influence. It operates on the basis of honorary officers; it from time to time gets funding for projects. The project that I mentioned as I was concluding may be one which actually does address this particular point quite directly. We are going to be working with secondary school 11 – 16 age range, and most especially with their teachers. There will be a priority to inform them theologically, particularly about issues relating to violence and non-violence, and including important points of difference as well as important points of complementarity. Included within the well researched resource

packages that will be made available to those teachers - who will also be individually mentored - there will need to be materials which do give a priority to the inter faith dimension. I can see that emphasis coming through there. But the major drag on it happening in schools generally, I think, goes back to the fact that teachers are expected to do the impossible from nowhere. If they haven't had the help in their initial teacher education and in their own school backgrounds, and they come into teaching a bit nervous about what they themselves believe, and a bit confused about what these different faiths amount to, particularly when there are children/young people in the class who are more expert than they are in a particular faith, then the response may well be "I will avoid it" or "I'll do something else" or "I'll fall back on that which I'm most familiar with". And that's what happens, I fear. We've got to do something which addresses competence, theological knowledge and understanding. That's one thing – competence – and the other is confidence. I think that without both, dialogue will drift.

Christine Abbas: Professor Gates, I would like to ask you please, are you available to come to Wales? Would you be able to give this talk to the Welsh Association of SACREs?

Prof Brian Gates: There's a simple answer to that. The RE Council of England and Wales has, we think, been able to persuade Government that if it's investing in this work on REsilience in faith terms within each of the regions in England, then they should be putting money also into a similar development within Wales, and that is almost at the point of the contract being signed on the part of Welsh Assembly and WASACRE, the Welsh Assembly of SACREs, as well as the RE Council. So irrespective of my own personal involvement, I think there's every prospect that, in a modest way, in a realistic way, something will grow there too.

Rev Dr Ted Hale: I spent a lot of time as a member of a SACRE in Northamptonshire and we desperately tried to get people of faiths

other than Christianity to come on to the SACRE. But I believe that the legal framework of the SACRE does not help at all. For those who do not know, a SACRE operates on the basis of one vote from each of four groups. Anytime there is a decision which needs to be voted on there are just four votes. One goes to the local representative of the Local Authority, one goes to teaching representatives, one goes to the Church of England representatives and the other vote goes to everybody else. So anybody who comes into this fourth group does not have a separate vote for their faith or denomination. For example, Roman Catholics are expected to be always able to come to a common mind with Pentecostals, with Hindus, and with representatives from many other different religious groups. This is just a nonsense. It does not promote equality. When people of faiths other than Christian come on to SACREs they usually come on as minorities – not with equal voting rites and not with mutual respect, as far as I can tell. I think the Government needs to take a very serious look at the constitution of the SACREs if we are to move forward from a past age into the twenty-first century.¹

Prof Brian Gates: I think that the legislation that we have in place at the moment for Religious Education is unlikely to be changed in the near future. The good news is that legally every boy and girl throughout the public educational system has a right to good Religious Education provision. That is legally the position. Where we are defaulting nationally is in ensuring that that is actually followed through. Specifically in relation to SACREs, my understanding as to how they operate is that for the most part they are not given to voting, but tend to work from a basis of building mutual understanding between people coming from very different faith, political and professional starting points.

Voting probably comes more into play when local syllabus is being agreed. The syllabus has to be reviewed every five years and has to be formally agreed by all the four groups within it. If it is not, then the Secretary of State has the right to move in and impose a syllabus. At

no point since 1944, when this legislation was introduced, has a local agreed syllabus conference failed to reach agreement. This has been, I think, principally because of the good will and mutual understanding, which has been built.

In years past there has been a major problem getting folk from the faith communities to be fully active within the SACREs but I am happy to report that over the last five years there is an increasing take up throughout the country of places on behalf of all the different faith community backgrounds. The RE Council, through a National Association of SACREs project, has been encouraging the recruitment of folk from across the faith communities to take an active part. The position is still far from perfect but I am not quite as gloomy about the reality as our colleague from Northamptonshire.

1 Note: This question and Professor Gates' answer to it have been transposed from the general session after the presentation by Rachel Heilbron.

Breaking the mould – new styles of inter faith work by and with young people

**Rachel Heilbron, Programme Director,
*Three Faiths Forum***

Bishop Tom Butler: I am now very pleased to introduce Rachel Heilbron who is the Programme Director of Three Faiths Forum with a special responsibility for their youth programme, 3FF. They have been developing across recent years, as she will tell us, a range of programmes specially dedicated to increasing young people's inter faith skills. She will also be facilitating a linked workshop in the afternoon.

Rachel Heilbron: Thank you very much for inviting us here. The Three Faiths Forum enjoys a close relationship with the Inter Faith Network and I am really delighted to talk at its National Meeting today.

My colleague Claire Ellis and I will talk in one of this afternoon's workshops about the work we are doing with young people in a variety of different areas, including the new methodologies and approaches that we are using.

The Three Faiths Forum is one of the leading national inter faith organisations working in the youth area. We are just beginning our fourth year of doing programmatic work with young people and have already reached over 3,000 – probably closer to 3,500 – young people now, through schools, youth groups and other contexts.

Our remit is to carry out projects working with Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities in providing spaces for them to meet each other and learn from each other. We provide

opportunities for people from those communities to engage with wider society and we also see our remit as including creating spaces for young people and adults to talk about faith and beliefs – whatever faith or belief they are within society. We believe we have developed some effective methodologies to help people do that.

Our work falls into three different areas which we describe as Education, Engagement and Action. The education work is increasingly about helping young people gain an understanding of faiths. Some of that is saying "I don't understand what Christianity says about this: give me some more ways to learn about it." The engagement work is about supporting dialogue between different faiths but also creating ways, especially for young people from different faith and belief systems, to meet each other in an exciting and innovative environment. Lastly, action. This is facilitating shared projects between people. In the course of these projects the kinds of questions young people raise are sometimes traditional 'dialogue' type questions about faith issues. But they are often very practical, from basic questions about where to go for a cup of tea to more detailed project focused questions.

I will focus today on two of our projects with young people. One of them is school focused. We work in secondary schools across London and increasingly further afield. On a daily basis we have three education officers who work with a team of about 45 volunteers.

Every day they are in schools doing different programmes. Our newest project is going to be running the 'Shared Futures' programme, the first year of which was under the auspices of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. The programme is about creating links between faith schools and developing guidance for people about what it means to work with faith schools on cohesion issues. We also do projects with youth groups and provide training for inter faith facilitators for young people. And we have projects on Faith and Fashion and on undergraduate mentoring which I will talk about later.

We believe that every young person needs to have better skills and greater confidence to be able to engage with anybody, no matter what their faith or belief. We think that skills based approach can help create the leaders of tomorrow. The different programmes we offer for young people include interactive learning about religious texts and encountering people of different faiths and practising dialogue and communications skills. I am going to talk more about our youth group linking. Unfortunately I could not bring some of the young people here today, involved in this particular programme so I am going to read out some of the things they said:

Helima, Danny and Morgan – who you can see in some of the pictures here – are members of youth groups in Barnet in North London. Helima is from a Somali Muslim background. Danny goes to Edgware District Reform Synagogue and Morgan was part of the youth group at St John's Church. Over the course of the last year they have been meeting with other people from the youth group to learn and create together. This is how they describe the programme they went through.

Helima said, *"In the first three meetings, Three Faiths Forum staff (Debbie and Sana, who are two of our education officers) met us in our own places of worship and we had an opportunity to ask questions about the other faiths."* The activity being referred to here to is our 'Encounter Faiths' activity, which we run

with youth groups and more regularly with schools. We bring presenters in their twenties and thirties into a school environment or a youth group context and they give a narrative introductions to who they are. Then we give students permission to ask any questions they want, with all the support they need (including discussing what questions they would like to ask). If questions come up that are particularly sensitive or difficult we have a specific methodology dealing with these called the 'ASKeR methodology' which, if you come to my workshop late you will be able to hear more about.

Danny goes on to say *"One way in which we got to know each other better and neighbouring faiths better, was to look at our sacred scriptures. We looked at what our scriptures tell us about forgiveness and it became clear that the three Abrahamic faiths have a great deal in common We also spent time looking at where religions had conflicts in the past. We looked at our similarities and where prejudices between the faiths arise."*

THREE FAITHS FORUM

— C — ✡ —

Tools 4 Trialogue





1. Read the text
2. Hear from presenters
3. Discussion and Q&A

The activity to which they are referring is "Tools 4 Trialogue". This arose out of the practice of scriptural reasoning where we give young people texts – verses of scripture – from the three different Abrahamic faiths on particular themes. They read the texts with support from people of those faiths. They hear from presenters who say what those texts mean to them in their lives and then they have discussions and get a chance to ask questions. We use these sessions as springboards for discussion on big issues. We

ask the questions “What does it mean that someone of a particular faith relates to these verses of scripture? What – if anything – does it mean to you?” We build in all those different ideas for the activity. We do this with young people from the Abrahamic faith traditions and also with young people of other faiths and beliefs.

Morgan said *“We were all asked at the beginning of the project why we wanted to get involved? Why did we want to meet once every three weeks with people from different faiths? Some of us wanted to learn more about our own religious traditions and others wanted to see what we had in common with others and what was different. Some of us just enjoyed meeting new friends.”*

Towards the end of their project the young people did creative programmes. Half of the group did photographic work and the other half created a song. This is some of the text of the song. If all works well I will play you a little snippet of the song they put together.

These Hands of Mine

Look at the world and how its burning
Look at the way we’re still not learning
Can’t help the fact we’re just not trying
hard enough

Maybe it’s time to come together
Think of a way to make things better
Look at the facts, I know that we are
good enough

No better time to start than now

I can choose to use these hands of mine
To break down another wall
Or I can choose to use these hands of mine
To do nothing at all
I have been given the freedom to decide
How to use these hands of mine.

If someone’s in trouble, I’ll help them
through it
Whatever you need I’m there I’ll do it
Gimme a call, you know I’m always here
for you

I will move on now to our Undergraduate Parliamentors programme which is the major way we engage young people of university age. The Undergraduate Parliamentors programme has trios of students, Muslim, Jewish and Christian working together over the course of a year on a project of their choosing. They are mentored by an MP. This programme has run for two years with 27 students each year. Next year we will be having 45 students from all across the country working together on programmes. In this slide (below) the woman in the middle is Anna Dyachenko. She worked with Richard Daniels and Adviya Khan and said that the project enriched her knowledge and understanding of the world. She said *“Essentially, due to our differences we’ve enjoyed a multi-perspective interaction which has equally reinforced the ideological basis of the project.”* Their particular project was mentored by Simon Hughes who is one of our Parliamentarians supporting the project. It was called Roots, as in grassroots. They worked with 14 year olds in Southwark in their Citizenship Education lessons, teaching them the relevance of politics to the lives of young people. They got the young people in the school really excited about how they could get their voices heard through political ways. They did workshops in schools and a final event in Parliament which was supported by Simon Hughes.

THREE FAITHS FORUM



Undergraduate ParliaMentors



...due to our differences we have enjoyed a multi-perspective interaction which has equally reinforced the ideological basis of our project...

...the programme has also provided an insight into the mechanisms of politics, we acquired the view of British politics from the inside.

...Previously studied chapters from textbooks on British politics have now come to life ...

Anna said: Ultimately, I believe that one of the most important implications of the programme is the way in which it tackles the popular prejudice about 'them' and 'us'. On top of altering the stereotype of political elitism and public apathy in Britain, the programme has also provided an insight into the mechanisms of politics. We acquired the view of British politics from inside. I think that is quite indicative of the fact that inter faith work should be **useful** for the young people who are involved. How can we make sure the young people who are very 'time poor' with so much pressure on their time, make useful programmes?

This year we had nine groups and they undertook a whole variety of projects which they chose themselves to reflect the issues that they are interested in. This year these included: ID cards; child labour; human rights; an Abraham week of activities ranging from theological discussion to music performances; life saving skills and first aid; and research into the British educational system.

On 11 June this year Anna and the 26 other participants were given their graduation certificates by the Speaker of the House of Lords and were invited to join our mentoring alumni network. As the programme grows – this year there will be 45 students – the network will provide an excellent link between students of different faiths working together in different fields alongside graduates of our other mentoring programmes. We have a sister project called 'Documentors' which works with filmmakers and we hope this year to have Business Management Mentors. With these different disciplines people will be able to mentor and network not only cross-faith but also cross-discipline.

We see our work very much as trying to create a movement and to work with you all in the work that you are doing to create a movement – a movement of young people who are curious about others; feel confident in their communications; have had solid experience

in meeting people who are different to them; think critically about the world; have a vision of what they want their world to be like; have the skills to change what they feel needs changing; and have a passion and impatience to be the catalyst to make the changes happen. We don't see them as the future – we see them as the present. Young people have very different experiences of integration and diversity from those of their parents and also different experiences from those educating them. We feel that we need new methods to work with young people and we need to provide more opportunities for young people to tell us what they want. We also need to hear what they say and to act on what they want.

We cannot create this movement on our own. What we really see of value is people working in this area together. We are members of the Culture, Faith and Youth Connective which is a group of inter faith and intercultural youth organisations which are all working together in a variety of different ways on these areas of identity and diversity of faith or belief focus. If you want your organisation to get involved with this group we would love you to join. Please contact me for information.

As I have said, what we believe we have at Three Faiths Forum are some new methodologies and experience of working with young people on a daily basis whether in schools, colleges, youth groups or universities. And we are really keen to share what we have learnt and to work with you all in the different areas you are working on.

Finally, I would like to say that our office and our work environment and our organisation is an inter faith project in itself. We have people from a variety of different faiths and beliefs working together. So the question of how we lead our daily lives as people of different faiths is important to us within the organisation just as is in the work that we do externally.

Questions:

Rudrajoy Chakraborty, National Hindu Students Forum from University of Birmingham.

I come from a Hindu background and I have attended quite a few meetings where we have all gathered together. How do you tackle politics and current conflicts, as these seem to be a big barrier between people of the Abrahamic faiths when they bring up (I'm sure you can guess what I'm getting at), certain issues which are hard to tackle. Do you just avoid them or do you bring them up? How do you tackle that?

Rachel Heilbron: A lot of it depends on which project it is and who the participants are, how long you have working with the group, what the remit is and why we have been asked to come and run a session. If we have been asked to run a session at a school and we have been given a particular remit then, if difficult questions about politics come up, we may say that it is not appropriate to discuss these at that time. However, with our longer term projects we definitely feel that if people want to talk about particular issues we can create space and facilitate that discussion where it occurs. In fact, in January this year when there were particularly serious events happening in Gaza and Israel we put together some resources because we were quite worried what it would be like going back to schools in January – how were we going to deal with the fact that we had said to the young people that they could ask any questions they wanted? We had a Jewish person and a Muslim person on the panel. So what we did was a lot of thinking and consulting with other people about what it means to talk about conflict. And, as I said, we put together some resources which you are very welcome to download from our website. So we do not shy away from talking about conflict. But, at the same time, we try not to let it overtake the whole discussion.

Javid Jalili, National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the UK: Do you have any links with ex-Prime Minister Tony Blair's Faith

Foundation? And do you think that is proving to be a positive initiative?

Rachel Heilbron: The Tony Blair Faith Foundation is running a variety of different programmes and one of these is Inter Faith Dialogue via video conferencing. Has any one seen how video conferencing works? It means that you are at your computer with a webcam or a much posher video camera and you can talk to people all over the country. What the Foundation wanted from us was support on how to facilitate good dialogue. One of our education officers is supporting them. If any of you want to read about this, one of our Education Officers wrote a very interesting article about the idea of doing video conference dialogue in our last newsletter, which is on our website (<http://www.threefaithsforum.org.uk/FacilitatingInterfaithViaVC.htm>).

Canon Dr Andrew Wingate, St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in a Multi Faith Society here in Leicester: I think that a couple of years ago Hindu Forum UK were involved with a scheme where young people who are interested in politics had the chance to interact on a one-on-one basis with MPs and spend time in the House of Commons. One of the hopes, I think was to get more Hindu members coming up as Members of Parliament in the future. Is that one of the aims of the Parliamentors programme?

Rachel Heilbron: It is more about saying that politics is quite difficult to get into and some people have a lot more opportunity than others to be able to experience politics and support for their career in politics. What we want to do is to make sure that young people of different faiths who would not usually have that experience are given this opportunity to see what it means to be a politician or to be in a politics related field. The primary aim is not to get more people of faith into politics but this may possibly be a by-product of people seeing how it is possible to have that opportunity. Could I add that it is very important to us that we are a **non-religious organisation** working with people who want

to talk about faiths and beliefs, although when we do focus on faith we focus on Islam, Christianity and Judaism. A lot of our work is talking about faiths and beliefs in society as we believe that is as important as traditional inter faith dialogue work.

Bishop Tom Butler: Thank you.

Plenary discussion:

Bishop Tom Butler: We now have ten minutes or so for more general contributions from the floor.

Lateef Hussaini, Watford Inter Faith

Association: I would like to report an activity which was conducted this year. The activity was an 'Inter School Poster Competition' which gathered about 250 entries from six schools in and around Watford. The theme of the Poster Competition was 'Appreciation of Different Cultures and Faiths'. The sponsors were Hertfordshire Constabulary and the Mayor of Watford. They have been a great help and we gave four prizes worth a total of £200. We would like to repeat this sort of competition in future because it has been a very popular activity amongst the schools and students and helps in spreading the message and concepts of inter faith.

Mark Graham, Loughborough Council of

Faiths: I thought I would mention our inter faith pantomime which we performed this year. We believe it to be the first anywhere in the world. It was Dick Whittington. The Mayor of Loughborough attended. It involved 100 people from various different faith communities within the town and they spent months working hard together, creating friendships and relationships across the faith boundaries. These were not people who were normally involved in inter faith activity, but they were predominantly young people and people who were interested because an event was happening that was not just about sitting down talking to one another but was an opportunity to be creative together. We performed in front of a packed audience of 500 at Loughborough Town Hall to great critical acclaim. The pantomime had all the usual ingredients of the villain and the dame and the leading lady. All those traditional pantomime themes were there but the music and the dances were from different faith traditions. It was a really fantastic project. Some of the people involved in performing

the pantomime had never actually seen a pantomime, so we had to take them to a pantomime first so they got the idea. They would say to us, "It says here 'Audience goes 'He's behind you'. Who's going to tell the audience to say that?" If you have grown up in the host culture then you know about pantomimes, but if you have not you do not necessarily know about them. It was a great opportunity to say, look – people of faith do have a sense of humour. People of faith are not all humourless souls. If anybody thinks that their local inter faith group would like to have a go at doing a pantomime we can probably provide you with the script.

Minou Cortazzi, Leicester Council of Faiths:

I am Chair of Leicester Council of Faiths. I just wanted to say that there are some exciting things happening in the Leicester Council of Faiths. We have a new Project Manager called George Ballentyne who has done tremendous work in different communities in Leicester and has produced materials such as leaflets from and about all the faiths. There are also leaflets on activities which were researched by two people in Leicester – Sarah and Tova and considered by the Leicester Council of Faiths. These leaflets are available here if anyone would like to look at them.

Kashmir Singh Rajput, Bradford District

Faiths Forum: In my experience the role of faith organisations is crucial in terms of building a cohesive society. They bring the dimension of the spiritual life as well as international links and interrelationships. Yet a number of organisations across the country are experiencing financial difficulties meaning that it is difficult to sustain their groups or to promote further work. This issue of funding is seriously affecting our performance and our ability to help build a cohesive society.

Youth organisations and good inter faith relations

Denise King, *Chief Executive, Girlguiding UK*

Bishop Tom Butler: Now we come to hear our final speaker this morning, Denise King, who is Chief Executive of Girl Guiding UK. As you probably know Girlguiding – like the Scouts – has been among the pioneers of mainstreaming inter faith activity within youth organisations.

Denise King: Thank you very much and thank you for the invitation to contribute to the conversation this morning. As was said in the introduction many of you will have heard of Guiding and Scouting. But I have brought along a short DVD to refresh your awareness of who we are and what we do. Guiding moves towards celebrating its centenary later this year.

The DVD portrays vibrant images of activities that girls engage in as members of Girlguiding UK aged 5-25 years. It emphasises the girls' view that it is fun to be with your friends, trying new experiences and learning new skills. It also tries to show the opportunity available for adults who help to deliver the programme experiences for girls. (Further information can be found at www.girlguiding.org.uk)

Guiding has almost 600,000 members today across the UK. One in four girls aged 8 is a Brownie.

There are 30,000 local groups meeting in all kinds of communities across the whole of the United Kingdom. It is a safe 'girls only' space

providing a non-formal education programme for girls aged 5 to 25. Like Scouting we have a long tradition. We are part of an international worldwide movement with Guides numbering more than 10 million across 140 countries around the world. We embrace all major world cultures and faith traditions.

Our value base, like that of Scouting, sets us apart from other youth organisations in that all members make a promise. The Guiding promise is:

I promise that I will do my best:

To love my God,

To serve the Queen and my country,

To help other people

and

To keep the Guide Law²

Promoting a sense of faith to live by is an important tenet in our programme. Our aim is to enable girls and young women to fulfil their potential to grow up to be good active citizens and make a difference in the world.

Guiding started 100 years ago on the basis of being an organisation open to girls of all backgrounds and beliefs. This is in stark contrast to how Guiding and Scouting was started in Europe. For example in France there are five associations, one for Jews, one for Protestants, one for Muslims, one for Catholics and so on. They are separate and have to work together at a national level

² The Guide Law:

A Guide is honest, reliable and can be trusted.

A Guide is helpful and uses her time and abilities wisely

A Guide faces challenges and learns from her experience.

A Guide is a good friend and a sister to all Guides.

A Guide is polite and considerate.

A Guide respects all living things and takes care of the world around her.

through a Federation. But for us it was and remains important that we are an open organisation and that girls of different backgrounds, from the beginning and still today, are part of one single movement. For example, there was a strong tradition of Jewish guiding from the early days and that continues today. But Jewish Guides are part of the local districts and divisions, part of our local organisation. In times past we have had particular outreach programmes and developed networks to try to strengthen activity and presence in certain communities. Throughout the 1990s there was a strong Muslim network supporting leaders with girls from that faith within their units. In my home town of Oldham there was a particular response from the Guiding community following the race riots. That led to the establishment of Brownie units in a number of local schools where the population was predominantly Bangladeshi.

In 2004 we had an inter faith celebration “One World, One Love” for 1,000 young people. This was an inter faith service led by and created by young women themselves. But I am not standing here pretending complacently that we have got it all sorted out and we know what we are doing. Clearly we face challenges.

As I said earlier, we have girls and young women from all sorts of backgrounds involved. We are not just white and middle class in membership. But I will say honestly that we do not have enough leaders from different faith backgrounds and different ethnicities to be really representative of the communities that we wish to serve. One example of our efforts to respond to this has been a three year, lottery funded, programme that has just finished this summer called Project Switch. I have brought several copies of the report on the project with me to share. This involved offering girls in particular communities in England a non-formal education programme led by paid development workers and focused on the particular needs in around 15 different locations. This work was not initially advertised as guiding

The projects ranged from a single faith based school extended school project in Leeds through to work with Asian populations in Bradford, Bristol, Middlesbrough and Burnley. There were inner city projects in Washwood Heath in Birmingham and Spinney Hill here in Leicester and rural work in Cornwall and Norfolk. Last week in Folkestone, where we managed to establish a group of young Nepalese girls and women aged 10 to 15 within the Ghurkha barracks, they were very pleased to be invited to a special reception when the Ghurkhas were given the freedom of the City. That was a good opportunity for them. Similarly in projects in Woolwich in London. The lessons of all that work from the last three years have taught us three dimensions which are very important: partnerships, patience and parents.

- **About partnerships** Partnerships with other youth organisations the local neighbourhood and the statutory youth service. Making relationships with people.
- **About patience** It all takes a long time and these were all very small projects with about 20-30 girls involved in each one. Much patience and a willingness to be flexible bore fruit in some of the work in Bradford. The breakthrough came when the timetable was re-organised to have the session after the girls had had their Urdu speaking classes. The time and place were important and getting these right made the difference.
- **About parents** Working more directly with the parents. Being able to reassure them about the safeguards, space and so on.

The bridge building elements in this project came in many of the groups through twinning with an existing Girl Guide group or a residential activity with another group in another part of the country. That, of course, led to some tensions – usually at the start of the event – but great friendships by the time event ended.

One of the participants described the fact that

in her group there were people who were at the same school together but had never really spoken to each other before. But having had the opportunity to do this outside of school in a different kind of environment, supported and facilitated by trained leaders, really took that relationship to another level.

Not all the SWITCH projects have continued on in Guiding. About half of them became part of the mainstream youth service through other routes. All we wanted to offer was the opportunity to use the kind of methodology we have which, as you saw from the DVD, is predominantly about the girls choosing their own activities and working together in small groups from the value base of the Promise.

Within the wider context of our work, we have within our programme quite a lot about discovering about your own faith. We have not moved away in 100 years from the badge syllabuses. Badges are still really important and popular. Discovering faith and discovering world cultures are two of the badges that we use.

In 2008 we embarked on educational programme for our Leaders by publishing in our monthly magazine a series of brochures called *Contemplate*. I have brought a sample of those as well. They look at the different major world faiths and also spirituality and also inter faith. We were working towards enhancing both the competence and confidence of our leaders to engage in this topic. The booklets feature practical things to do with a particular faith which you would need to take into account if you have young people in your unit from that background. Case studies from members who are from those faiths were included so that we were able to share that knowledge.

In April this year, we hosted an international round table for people from 18 different countries and right across the world regions to explore how others in guiding worldwide are trying to address the issue of inclusion in their society and their community. Unsurprisingly, we found we had a lot to learn from each

other. We will take that work forward as we move into our Centenary year, particularly through our international camp which will not be the size of the world Scout Jamboree but a much smaller affair at Harewood House in Leeds, followed by a young women's world forum. We are inviting young women from 140 countries around the world to come together with a common agenda of discussing their points of view to the achievement of the Millennium development goals and what non-formal education organisations can do about that.

So we are doing our bit and have been doing so for a long time. But we always want to do more and we welcome advice and input and contacts and connections to help us respond even better. As we face our future we have more than 45,000 girls waiting to join us and a big challenge is to find more adults to lead girls and young women aged 16 plus. The challenge is recruiting leaders and enabling people to fit that role into their already busy lives.

We provide a safe 'girls only' space, offer a relevant programme to girls and young women, and are open to all. We are trying hard to give girls a voice and have recently published reports not only on girls' views about self-esteem but also on teenage mental health, view and attitudes to risk prevention in society and girls' views about attitudes around active citizenship.

I would welcome questions. And more particularly your advice on how we could be more effective in all our work.

Bishop Tom Butler We have time for two or three questions if anybody would like to ask a question or give any advice.

Mehru Fitter, Coventry Multi-Faith Forum: How do you incorporate into your movement young girls from minority communities of faith traditions that do not believe in God. As far as I know the Guide promise is universal so do you make any special adaptations?

Denise King: The main way that we work with the young people is that they make the promise when they are ready to do that. 'Love my God' is part of that pledge but the interpretation of that and the way that they work with that is very much open to the reality of the various traditions and communities. We have people from the Buddhist tradition involved who would not see themselves as 'theist'. We are more challenged about our position on Humanism and find that quite difficult to engage with for the time being.

Tina Mistry, Young Zoroastrians: Just from my own experience, Girl Guiding is very popular with young girls but if your parents were not born in this country you might not know what Girl Guiding is. My sister and I were very interested in joining but it was not easy for us to make the connection. Do you have any sort of initiative to recruit girls from minority faiths, like going into schools and explaining what it is?

Denise King: It is a real opportunity and challenge for us to reach communities who have never heard of Guiding or know little about it. We are trying hard to prepare the kind of materials we need for this, but our entire organisation is led by volunteers and the time which they have to go into schools and so on is limited. So, as you said, we need to work in a different way to present the opportunity. A particularly important challenge is to present Guiding to young women aged 16+ who could be in a great position not only to take part in a programme of their own, but also to lead programmes for younger girls.

Bishop Tom Butler: Thank you, that was most interesting.

I've been asked to mention that AGM delegates are warmly invited by the Leicester Jain Centre to visit the Centre. It's a remarkable building. If anybody's interested in visiting the Jain temple then speak to Dr Shah or Dr Mehta during lunch and they'll be able to make the arrangements.

Panel discussion

Gary Loke, *Senior Policy Officer, Equality Challenge Unit*

Tina Mistry, *Chair, Young Zoroastrians*

Bhupinder Singh, *Secretary, The Inter Faith Youth Trust*

Sughra Ahmed, *Researcher, Islamic Foundation*

Dr Nawal Prinja: I would like to invite our final panel to share with you their reflections on the way ahead. We will hear first from Tina Mistry. She is the Chair of Young Zoroastrians and has been actively involved for a number of years in encouraging young people in her community to get involved in projects which build understanding and friendship. Next, is Gary Loke, who is Senior Policy Officer at the Equality Challenge Unit which has been doing significant work in recent years helping higher education institutions handle issues relating to religion and belief, including good relations on campus. Then Bhupinder Singh will speak. I think many of us know him through his past role as the Information Officer of the Inter Faith Network or his current work for the Religious Education Council. However, today he is here in his role as the Secretary to the Inter Faith Youth Trust, which is the only Trust in Britain wholly focused on supporting inter faith work among young people. The final panellist is Inter Faith Network Trustee Sughra Ahmed. She is a researcher based at the Islamic Foundation and has worked extensively with women and with young people on faith and inter faith issues. We asked her to visit the different workshops and share with us some reflections on these.

Tina Mistry: To start with, I would just like to say thank you to the Inter Faith Network for enabling such a great day. We have had such an amazing exchange of ideas, beginning with the presentations from which I think we will all take different ideas away.

I was very interested by the work going on in Liverpool such as the cultural evenings

learning about traditions like well dressing. I myself organise days out for our community, so every time I come to an inter faith meeting and meet other youth leaders it is very interesting to hear about the ideas they are using in their work to help bring about solidarity within and between their communities. Also, I liked hearing about the Scottish experience with the many trips the young people have been on there. We also do trips, and it would be great if we could visit those places as well. Creating these kinds of links – providing encounters you cannot get from a book or the internet – you really need to meet people face to face to understand different experiences that we can share in as well.

I think that one of the most important points that I have learned today was from Professor Brian Gates' speech. He talked about SACRES and about the agreed syllabus and exam boards and mentioned that Zoroastrianism, Jainism, even Hinduism and Sikhism get less attention and he really seemed to understand the plight of minority religions – something we feel acutely because Zoroastrianism is such a small religion, but steeped in a long history. It would be great if in the next ten years we could see changes as a result of which Zoroastrianism and Sikhism and Hinduism and Jainism and other minority religions – and even the Humanist view – became part of the syllabus. I have focused on RE a lot today because my workshop, led by Jill Carr, was about that. It was incredibly interesting – so much so that before we had even started we had dialogue going and did not even make it to the end of the workshop!

But what we shared was very interesting.

I would like to add one last reflection and that is that Religious Education and these inter faith links and understanding are valuable in their own right. They also have real commercial value in today's world.

Gary Loke: Thank you very much for inviting me here today and for organising this day. It has been really interesting and thought provoking.

The Equality Challenge Unit supports Higher Education institutions across the country in their work on diversity and equality and I am one of its Senior Policy Advisers with lead responsibility for race, religion and belief.

I was asked to comment on the role of inter faith relations as part of good relations on higher education campuses and what we can do to strengthen good relations. I was also asked to offer some more general reflections on the day.

I will start with the issue of inter faith relations on campus and why that is so important. For a lot of young people going to university or going into higher education is their first opportunity to live away from home and to be in an environment with which they are not familiar. Increasingly, that new environment is likely to be a very diverse one. Not only are there a large number of international students on campus but more and more young people from different backgrounds in the UK are going into higher education. So students will have a chance to meet people from many different backgrounds, including different religions and beliefs. This presents a great opportunity for them to learn and develop new ideas and friendships, but it also may present many challenges.

These challenges include needing to deal with potential or actual conflicts over differing views and how to manage that and also finding oneself uncomfortable or unable to practise or manifest one's religion or belief.

Lack of good inter faith relations and lack of skills for inter faith engagement can lead to conflict and segregation which runs counter to the principles of education. The exchange of knowledge and ideas are really what learning is about and having people from diverse backgrounds and experiences is more likely to promote the exchange of new ideas and learning. There are issues too about the forceful promoting of views without leaving room for sharing ideas or listening to others. This runs counter to the sharing of ideas and diversity and is part of what is being addressed by the 'preventing violent extremism' agenda. Being able to manage relations, including inter faith relations, is really important so that institutions do not have potentially explosive conflict situations.

But let me shift away from the 'preventing violent extremism' agenda because, while that is something that the Government is pursuing at the moment, it is not necessarily the most helpful route to engaging with inter faith relations. Indeed, it carries quite a negative slant on religion. Let me turn to comment on the Equality Bill which is currently before Parliament. It will, if enacted, place new duties on public bodies, including institutions such as universities. One of these new duties would be to foster good relations between people of different religions and beliefs or none. If this Bill is enacted, this duty will come into place in 2011. At the same time, there will be two other duties: to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; and to advance equality of opportunity. What all this means in specific terms is not clear at this stage, but institutions need to start thinking about how to prepare for these new duties.

Being able to practise one's religion or belief, and being comfortable with one's environment will go a long way towards supporting the fostering of good relations, including inter faith relations. If a person cannot practise or manifest his or her own religion, it is unlikely that they are going to be in a position to think about good relations and good inter faith relations.

To strengthen the work of higher education institutions on religion and belief issues we have recently published a briefing on religious observance, institutional timetabling and work patterns. This looks, for example, at the ways institutions manage conflicts such as those between the needs of someone who has a religious observance, say, observing the Sabbath, and lectures on a Friday evening. Later this year we are planning to publish a second briefing looking at services and facilities; examining what universities are doing around prayer space, food, accommodation; and chaplaincies.

In 2010 we intend to undertake a larger project, which will be surveying the experiences of staff and students with a religion or belief in the higher education context. This is because there is a lack of empirical evidence of what these experiences are. If we are thinking about equality and diversity and about the possible disadvantage faced by people of a particular religion or belief we need to understand what this is. We have not identified what this particular disadvantage might be and we want to try and do so before we try to think about solutions. When we have this information we hope to be in a position to plan activities and deliver support to staff and students who have a religion or belief – or none – and this should contribute to the strengthening of inter faith relations.

Now to my more general reflections on the day. The first issue that interested me particularly was the one raised by Rachel Heilbron of the Three Faiths Forum about tackling problematic issues of conflict. I think we have been burying our heads in the sand slightly and not wanting to talk about problematic issues but, especially in a higher education context – which is about academic debate – we really need to tackle these and not shy away from them. If we just talk about good relations without thinking about where the points of conflict are, then we are never going to resolve these.

My second reflection arises from discussions throughout the day. People without a religion sometimes view those with a religion rather suspiciously and think there are special privileges being granted to them. I think it is important for those with a religious faith to think about religious privilege and how people without a religion view that. We should be thinking about how we involve people without a religion in the work that we do. So in your own work I hope you will regularly ask yourselves the question “How do we engage with those without a religious belief and what can we do to try to engage them?”

Bhupinder Singh: Our theme is “Good inter faith relations – the next generation”. It seems only a little while ago that I thought that I was the next generation!

Perhaps I am proof that getting involved with youth inter faith events really does help people become involved with inter faith work for the long term. Over twenty years ago, as a student, I went on a journey on the Peace Bus. When I signed up for this, I did not quite know what I was getting into. It turned out to be a coach organised by the World Conference on Religions for Peace with almost fifty young people from thirteen different religions – or faiths or beliefs – travelling on it. We went on a two week trip into Eastern Europe and Russia and this was before the fall of the Iron Curtain. On that trip I learned a lot about people of different faiths and I have been involved with inter faith work ever since, whether it has been working for the Inter Faith Network itself, on SACREs (I currently sit on two), through my current work for the RE Council, or through a number of other inter faith projects including, very importantly, the Youth Inter Faith Trust of which I am Secretary.

Getting young people involved can be a challenge. Faith communities in general want their young people only or mainly to learn more about their own faith. We have to ensure, as people of different faiths, that a strong message is actually going out into the

temples, churches, *gurdwaras* and mosques about the importance of inter faith work and that this is not seen as leaving behind your own faith or as the mixing up of faiths. It is really important work in which young people (and older people!) of all faiths should get involved. I think our aim in all the youth inter faith events that we organise should be that those young people who come out and that take part and are enthused about inter faith work go on not just to be tomorrow's inter faith leaders, but also to be tomorrow's faith community leaders.

What we do need to do is to mainstream inter faith work – to use one of these buzz words of the moment! We need to ensure that it is seen as more than just a fringe activity, as I think it is still seen by a lot of people today.

Faith communities often struggle to find funding for their own core work but we need them to recognise the importance of inter faith work and to try to commit a little bit more of their own resources. When it comes to Trusts and Government 'religion' has in the past almost been a rude word when it comes to funding and often we find that the funding comes through the guise of community cohesion work and so on. But I think we need to stand up and make the case that inter faith work must be funded – not as community cohesion or whatever the buzz word is of the day – but as inter faith work which needs to be a core part of the funding regime for these major funders.

On the topic of funding, let me say something now about the Inter Faith Youth Trust . It is a very small Trust but it is the only one that gives money solely for youth inter faith activity. We work mostly with the informal youth sector, that is, youth clubs and so forth rather than schools and statutory bodies. The amount of funding we can give for each project is quite small. Our usual grant is just under £1,000. We would be very pleased for you to spread the word about the Inter Faith Youth Trust and to receive applications from you. Our website is www.ifyouthtrust.org.uk and you will find there more information

about the Trust and the application process.

And one last point, if I may. Earlier on, Brian Gates mentioned inter faith misunderstanding. This is actually very widespread and I think it is the duty of all of us to try to tackle misunderstandings. That is the only way that we are going to be able to move forward.

Sughra Ahmed: I visited all the workshops and found vibrant presentations – talks, DVDs, games and discussion taking place throughout them.

In the first workshop, the discussion was about sport and inter faith work. Riaz Ravat talked about the kind of work in which he has been doing in terms of getting young people engaged in inter faith through the vehicle of sport. As Bishop Tim Stevens mentioned earlier today, there have been football and cricket matches in Leicester involving the imams and the clergy. They tend to be co-ordinated by St Philip's Centre but also through the generosity and goodwill of a variety of organisations throughout Leicester and Leicestershire. During the workshop there was a mention of having some kind of women's sports activities during Inter Faith Week. That would be good – women would feel included in inter faith sports should this happen.

In the second workshop, the topic was tools for inter faith dialogue for pupils at school. I walked in on a very interesting group discussion. As I came in I saw on the flip chart a title/question which I could not help but write down. It said "If God loves you, why is He always telling you what to do?" I thought that was particularly interesting. And the immediate point that I heard when the group work was being fed back was the value of modesty. The conversation then went on to explore how very young children often have very little or no inhibitions about their body and about their sense of physical self. Is this then taught by the adults in their life, by parents, their friends, their neighbours? That is very different to a conversation that a group

of teenagers might have, who are very self conscious – in fact the issue of modesty is the primary concern in a young person's life at some points. The question was raised, "Is modesty inherent within us? Is it there when we are born?" The group was looking at scriptures from the three Abrahamic faiths. A text from the *Qu'ran* was mentioned about modesty for both men and women – not just for women – which is what some within the Muslim community and beyond tend to sometimes think it is about. The group were talking about whether modesty is just physical, or is it attitudinal also? Is it just something that you use in relation to others or is it more than that? Which for me, as a Muslim woman, was particularly touching.

Next, on to the inter faith youth forums, councils and ambassador programmes This was where you found young people making their presentations and it was really quite humbling to hear from them. The group that came from Bolton were in the midst of a long list of what that they would either like to do or had already achieved, including visiting the Houses of Parliament and understanding how Parliament and wider politics works. When somebody asked why, they said "Well, it's important, isn't it? It's really important to who we are". And then they talked about making a DVD on the situation in their own community in Bolton – dealing with issues like bullying, drugs, and alcohol. One of them commented "We do all this work, but our parents often do not really know what we do." So they were thinking about holding an 'achievement evening' to bring the parents together, and to present what they have been doing and in that way, get the long term 'buy-in' of the older generation.

The Bolton young ambassadors had a wonderful phrase, "Our hope is to see the world connected in a caring and a considerate way." One question that struck me was from one of the members of the discussion group who said, "How have you as a young person who is a faith ambassador benefited from this?" Often when we talk about inter faith work, we think about how we can benefit the

group or the project or the community or our organisation, but what does it give young people, especially very young people? The young person who answered (who is 14) said, "When I was younger, when I was 11, it gave me peers to look up to. That gave me confidence and that gave me friendship." So there was a connection here. And without that, she said that she did not know where she would be today. So over the past three years, that has been a very strong gain for her.

Then, in the next workshop, inter faith in FE and HE was being talked about. As somebody who formerly trained as a chaplain, I was very interested. It is crucially important to train principals and directors in universities on faith and the importance of faith and non-faith in the university environment, and also to have multi-faith chaplaincies. That is particularly important – especially for international and away students and students who feel they are away in a new place very different from their home.

Issues about encouraging people of faith to be involved in inter faith work also struck me. A safe space is an important factor in this, but often it is something that is neglected. So churches, mosques, temples, places of worship are used as a place of gathering and that may put a lot of young people off, because they feel that by going there, they are going into the space of another community. Having a neutral and safe space is very important. I can resonate with that because when I first became involved with inter faith, it was not in a church, it was not in a mosque and, had it been, perhaps it would have dissuaded me from becoming further involved.

Lastly, Inter Faith Week. Discussion on this was very lively – particularly when it came to matters of funding! But also the discussion was about the kind of projects that have been planned or are being planned at the moment. There was a wide variety of contributions in terms of what could happen and what had already been put in place to happen, such as having a window bay about the different

faiths in The Shires shopping centre in Leicester.

I would like to end on a sentence that particularly struck me in that workshop. It was this “Those who are materially wealthy are not necessarily spiritually poor.” We must not make the judgement, that those who are materially wealthy are spiritually poor, or vice versa. Spiritual riches are to be found in people regardless of their circumstances. And today is a reminder of that too.

Co-Chairs’ closing reflections:

Dr Prinja: I would like to share with you my reflections on the day. In the past I have attended many conferences, meetings and workshops. These tend to be talking shops. But today’s event was different. Here we had people sharing with us their projects, examples and brilliant ideas.

I enjoyed all the presentations. I do not have time to talk about what I enjoyed in each of them so I will just highlight a few points. I was impressed by how the young Scottish team got professional midwives, nearly a thousand of them, to come together, for the inter faith service celebrating new life. I wonder if a similar initiative can be taken with other professions.

I was very interested by the posters from Watford and the pantomime from Loughborough. I remember I saw my first pantomime when I was fifty years old and felt like a five year old child – I lost 45 years of age instantly! And I was inspired by the presentation on Girl Guiding, which involves 600,000 youngsters – brilliant! What inspired me most was their openness, saying, “You come and join us. Break the barriers. We are open to all ethnic minorities, and all faith groups.” I was also very impressed by the account of the youth work of the Three Faiths Forum. I hope this will develop to involve young people of all the faiths.

My work takes me around the world. When I tell people that I am from England, the taxi drivers, in various places, say “Oh, which city?” I say, “Manchester” – they know about Manchester United. But perhaps even more than for our sport, manufacturing or technology, our country is still very well known and respected for education. I hope that status is kept and also that in our schools, further education and higher education institutions, more and equal status is given to learning about the different religions and about the importance of inter faith relations.

I really enjoyed my day here with all of you. I will now invite my Co-Chair, Bishop Tom, to share his views of the day.

Bishop Tom Butler: I remember that when I was Bishop of Leicester, in one magnificent year the county cricket team won the county championship, Leicester City won one of the cups and Leicester Tigers also won the Pilkington Cup. That particular year was fantastic.

It has been a remarkably good day with lots of good ideas, lots of ‘how to’ and we can all take away a portfolio of ideas to try in our own work. But also for me there has been a real sense of new energy, new vision and new people, from all sorts of places. That is great because it shows that this work has energy and will go forward.

We have also had a real master class in how to use PowerPoint. Several presentations have been extremely professional and we have gained from that as well. So not only is there new energy, but there is a new professionalism in what we are doing.

Dr Prinja: I would like to thank all of you for coming here and being with us throughout the day. I want to thank all the speakers, workshop facilitators and presenters, and note takers and our Inter Faith Network office team.

Workshop notes

Note: The discussion points listed in each of these workshop notes are not conclusions agreed by the workshop as a whole, but points and suggestions made by individual participants.

Workshop 1:

Sport and youth inter faith understanding

Facilitator: Paresh Solanki, Inter Faith Network for the UK

Presenter: Riaz Ravat, St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in a Multi Faith Society, Leicester

Riaz Ravat of St Philip's Centre gave a short presentation to begin the workshop.

St Philip's Centre works to: equip the Churches to be more confident in ministry, service and witness in a multi faith world; contribute to a safer and more cohesive world by working alongside people of all faiths and building upon the strong tradition of partnership between the faiths in Leicester; and provide training to key groups in society on the realities and opportunities of living and working in a multi faith society.

The Centre originally started with a Muslim-Christian dialogue group which Canon Dr Andrew Wingate began when he moved to Leicester from Birmingham some years ago. A Muslim-Christian women's group and a Family of Abraham group linked to the Centre, has been running for six years.

The training offered by the Centre includes training in religion and belief, faith tourism, postgraduate degree in Interreligious Relations; fundraising; hosting visitors from overseas and; sports as a route for developing good inter faith relations.

The Centre sees sport as a very positive way to get messages out about inter faith and community relations. Its engagement with sports goes to 2006 with an Imams versus Clergy cricket match at Leicestershire County Cricket Ground. The umpires were Jewish and Hindu. The match was timed to mark the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Recently a mixed team of imams and clergy from Leicester played against a mixed team of imams and clergy from Bradford. The next match – this time between Luton and Bedford – will be taking place on 18 July. The Centre

has never had any difficulty getting people from the communities involved in inter faith cricket matches.

The cricket match idea has gone a stage further now! A mixed faiths football team match was held on 16 June 2009 between Leicester and Gothenburg. The Gothenburg squad included Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Sikh faiths.

St Philip's Centre has good relations with Leicester Tigers Rugby Football Club and are looking forward to organising touch rugby events in the future. As part of Islam Awareness Week in partnership with the Islamic Society of Britain, they were given 200 family tickets to watch a rugby match. This was well received and was also good publicity for the rugby club.

It would be good to see inter faith sports events taking place across cities in the UK. The St Philip's centre works on sports with project both with people of faith who are practising members and those who are non-practising.

The next challenge is to encourage women to participate in inter faith sports. The Centre is hoping to run events for women and has been successful in applying for a 'Faiths in Action' grant for women to promote this as part of national Inter Faith Week in November 2009.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- It is important, when working on inter faith sports, to ensure that there are supportive partners such as local authorities, sports clubs or businesses on board to assist with funding and/ or resources.

- Sport is useful in breaking down barriers among young people. Inter faith dialogue does not necessarily appeal to all young people but once rapport is built through an activity such as sport, real engagement starts.
- Health benefits are an important selling point for inter faith sports.
- It can be helpful to ensure that the inter faith sporting events are family events.
- It can be helpful to include the media, especially local radio, in inter faith sporting events.
- There is a cricket club in Peterborough made up of Hindu and Sikh community members, ranging from 11 to 60 years old. This enables engagement between the two communities as well as individual families. All faiths are welcome to join in and there are now five teams, each one inter faith.
- After the 9/11 terrorist attacks members of a number of Jewish, Christian and Muslim places of worship in Harrow met and discussed their shared commitment to maintaining good relations. Partly as a result of subsequent ongoing engagement – including a programme of sporting activities with young people from diverse backgrounds – when the 7/7 terrorist attacks happened in London these communities had already built resilience and were prepared to deal with and manage the consequences. Given that one of the perpetrators of 7/7's family lived in Harrow, this resilience ensured that it was easy to talk to people in the community and reassure them.
- Liverpool as a city is very keen on sport. Cricket is played in Sefton Park but this is an area where there are hardly any ethnic minority communities. Liverpool Football Club and Sefton Park Cricket Club have training clubs but these could be more effective in terms of bringing together young people of different backgrounds. In Merseyside there are about 700 kids teams that play on fields around the county on Sundays. The Liverpool Youth Council are looking to set up a football team finding players from about 12 years old from different backgrounds.
- The chair of the Perry Barr Multi-Faith Network in Birmingham said that in Birmingham and in the West Midlands they are hoping to start some work on all these fronts. The West Midlands Christian Football league has been running since the 70s. Within his church he had set up a national sports ministry, including annual football and netball tournaments. In his personal capacity, he runs a football team which now has members from the Christian, Sikh and Muslim communities and is becoming more and more inter faith.
- A number of sources of funding were mentioned: Comic Relief (which funds youth projects); the Government's Grassroots grant programme, administered by local Councils for Voluntary Service; and the Council of Europe (this funding is mainly for different ethnic groups across Europe but most of these ethnic groups have faith dimensions too).
- A participant from Harrow noted that they had received £30,000 through a grant scheme but found out later that it was indirectly Lottery funded. This caused difficulties because of the perspective on gambling of some of their members. However, the matter was sorted out eventually so they could use the money.

Workshop 2:

Tools for inter faith dialogue with school aged young people

Facilitator: Venerable Bogoda Seelawimala, Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of Great Britain

Presenters: Rachel Heilbron and Claire Ellis, Three Faiths Forum

Rachel Heilbron and Claire Ellis opened the workshop with a presentation on the methodologies that the Three Faiths Forum uses with young people and on how its staff try them out, test them and develop them further over time.

Rules for Dialogue

The Three Faiths Forum ask young people to come up with their own rules – although they try to guarantee the following are applied in all sessions:

- Respect (ie don't talk over each other).
- Use "I" statements, rather than generalise about other people.
- Follow the "oops/ouch!" rule, which allows questions or statements which may be offensive to be reworded without giving rise to conflict.
- Dialogue, don't 'debate.'

ASKeR

Secure with your agreed rules, what sort of question would you ask a panel of people from the three faiths? For example: "If God loves you, why is he always telling you what to do?"

Three Faiths Forum suggest that this question – and any complex or potentially difficult question – be unpacked using a format called "ASKeR".

- **Assumptions** – what is the person asking this questions assuming? Where do they think these assumptions come from?

- **Statement or Question?** – is this an honest question or are they trying to find a way to share their views?
- **Key words** – which words stand out? Should any be removed or replaced? Are there words that need to be defined?
- **Re-phrase** – how would they rewrite this question?

In the context of the particular question "If God loves you, why is he always telling you what to do?" this might mean:

A: Assumptions. Some assumptions might be:
Faith is a threat to freedom; doubt exists about whether God loves us; the assumption is that God exists, is singular and is male; there is a value judgment that giving rules is a bad thing.

S: Statement or question
What is the intention of the person who said this? What kind of interaction are they seeking?

Ke: Keywords
How can this be talked about in greater detail? Do certain words in this question such as 'loves' have different meanings to the one who frames the question and those who hear it?

R: Rephrase
Can it be turned into an "I" statement?

Part of the purpose of doing this is to prepare students (and their teacher) to consider and discuss religious texts in productive ways. The Three Faiths Forum's Education Officers are

assisted by mentors when choosing texts for these exercises. They use the same format in faith schools and mainstream schools (usually in RE settings, though occasionally in Citizenship lessons) for Year 10 and above. The idea is not to try and find a definitive meaning for any text but to consider and discuss the ways we engage with texts and how the different interpretations we bring to the group may apply. However, the texts are picked to illustrate both the distinctions and similarities between the three faiths.

Small group work

Working group participants then broke into three smaller groups to consider a page of scriptural texts on the theme, “Bling – Beauty, Modesty and Clothing”, with short extracts from the Hebrew Bible, New Testament and *Qur’an* arranged in three differently coloured columns. Each group was asked to discuss texts in one of the columns.

The following comments and question arose:

From the group discussing the *Qur’an* text:

- Is it wrong to show your beauty?
- Is modesty wrong?
- Do children become modest naturally or is it forced upon them by the adults in their lives?

From the group discussing the New Testament text:

- It is not helpful to take advice that we shouldn’t worry about our material condition, especially in these difficult financial times?
- Is such discussion of these texts appropriate for non-specialists or should it be left to ‘wiser heads’?

From the group discussing the Hebrew Bible text:

- There are things in these normally thought to apply more to Islam.
- Since some refer to women in the third person, then who are they addressing?

The workshop then discussed the possible use of these resources with groups other than school students, for example leaders of faith communities.

Each workshop participant was asked to nominate one skill that he or she believed a young person needs to function in our complex multi-faith society. Qualities suggested included: confidence; emotional intelligence; empathy; expressiveness; inner silence; interpreting; listening; mirroring; openness; questioning; respect; seeking; and a sense of humour.

Workshop 3:

Inter faith youth forums, councils and ‘ambassador’ programmes

Facilitator: Dorab Mistry, Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe and Vice-Chair, Inter Faith Network for the UK

Presenters: Anam Ahmed, Aamna Alam and Bethany Brooks of Bolton Inter Faith Council’s Inter Faith Youth Ambassadors Forum and Chan Parmar, Strategic Officer, Bolton Inter Faith Council

The workshop opened with a presentation by the Bolton Inter Faith Youth Ambassadors, with photographs of their activities and an explanation of their approach to being ‘ambassadors’ in their town. There are nine ambassadors altogether. They have engaged in team building activity and learning leadership skills. The group have adopted their own code of conduct.

The ambassadors have given talks to schools and presented on the importance of inter faith cooperation to the local council. They have been involved in a project called ‘The Spirit of Bolton’ through which they have aimed to dispel stereotypes and prejudice through acting as role models in schools and neighbourhoods and promoting peace and harmony through co-operation and understanding. The town’s Mayor invited them to a special reception to honour their achievements in their roles.

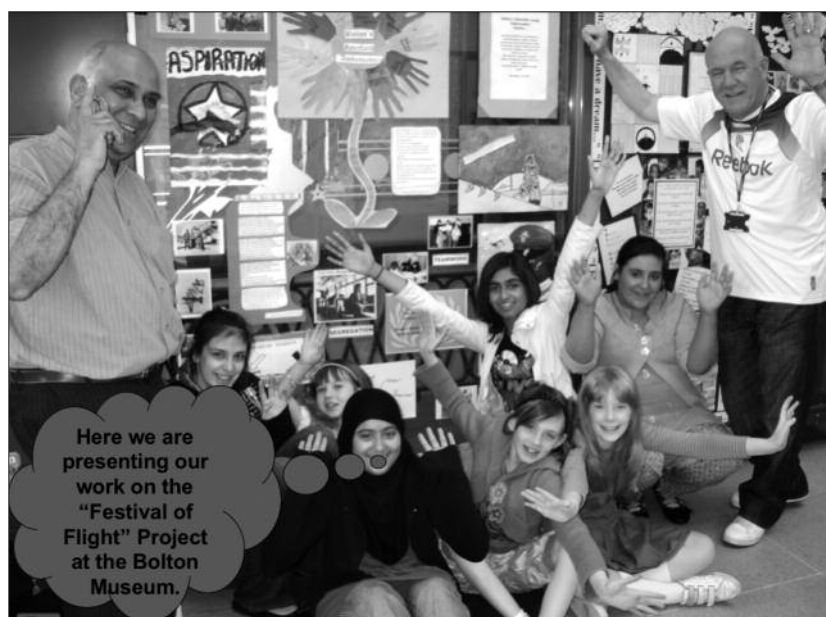
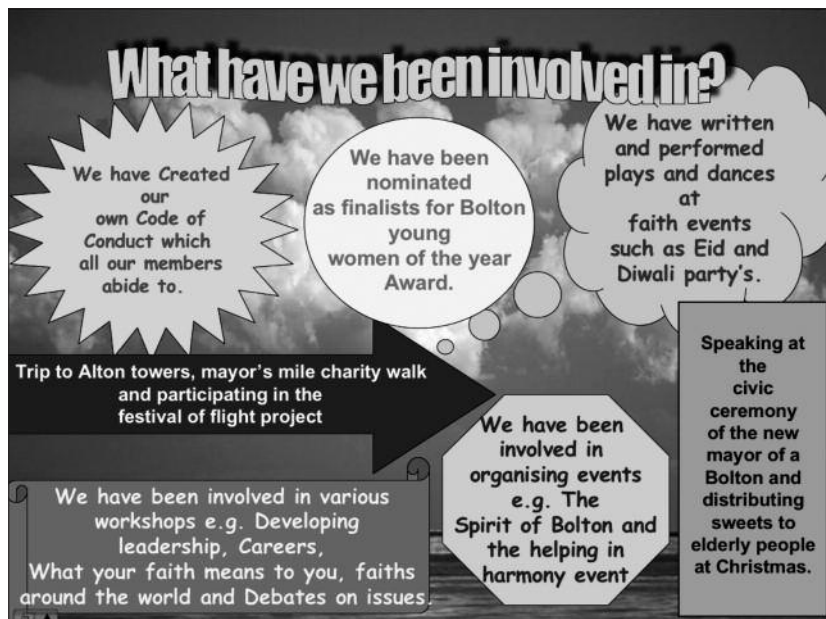
The young ambassadors said that their belief in values of respect and the right to identify themselves and celebrate their difference and similarity was key to their sustainability.

The ambassadors took part in a faith share project and in confidence-building sessions and learning and discovery workshops. Their aim was to understand and present a vision of a world that is interconnected. They hoped in the future to work on a DVD about bullying and alcohol and drug misuse. They wanted to see local authorities doing much more for young people. Bolton Inter Faith Council currently works with refugees and Asylum seekers and the young ambassadors hope to do so in the future as well.

Points made by working group participants

A number of points were made by participants in the workshop. At the end, they decided that the key ones were as follows:

- There is a simple but profound message uniting the ambassadors through ‘a religious spirit’.
- The belief demonstrated through the ambassadors’ passion for their mission is enormously important.
- Young people can have a significant impact on a largely adult inter faith world, even with small resources.



Workshop 4:

Inter faith understanding on FE and HE campuses

Facilitator: Rev Geoff Usher, Sheffield Interfaith

Presenter: Vic Langer, National Union of Students

Rev Geoff Usher said that Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) campuses are important places for engagement between young people of different faiths. He noted that there can sometimes be conflict between different groups, for example at times of international tension. Chaplains and faith advisers have a key role to play in promoting constructive engagement. He invited Vic Langer to introduce a new NUS project focusing on faith and inter faith issues on campus.

Vic Langer said that as Head of Political Strategy for the National Union of Students (NUS) she has responsibility for providing support for student groups on campus, including religious societies. She noted that faith is becoming a more important identifier on campus and that there has been an increase in dissatisfaction expressed by students about the provision made for meeting their faith requirements. There has been some tension at times between student religious groups and student unions and, although students of different religious generally coexist well, there has been some increase in tensions between different groups.

In the spring of 2008, NUS received a small amount of funding from the then Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) to bring together student faith leaders at a meeting to discuss options for student-led inter faith collaboration. The Inter Faith Network office was asked to be present at this meeting because of the role IFN has played in encouraging engagement between the national student religious bodies in recent years.

In the winter of 2009, NUS secured further funding from DIUS (now the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills) for a two year project to develop work to:

- improve the experiences of students with a faith commitment in both FE and HE institutions by increasing awareness of their needs on the part of student unions;
- provide support, training, resources and information for student unions relating to faith requirements;
- provide support, training, resources and information for local student faith leaders to develop strong local inter faith collaboration; and
- create local and national space for inter faith dialogue in order to enhance campus cohesion.

The funding enables a full time staff position at NUS headquarters to which recruitment was at that time in progress.³

Vic Langer said that it will be important for the project not to duplicate work already being taken forward by the National Council of Faiths and Beliefs in Further Education, the higher education Equality Challenge Unit, the Inter Faith Network and others. She noted that there is also a parallel project being carried out at Birkbeck College looking at inter faith relations on campus.

3 A dedicated Co-ordinator was appointed in December on a two year contract, and will be housed in the Political Strategy Unit at NUS. Whilst this is a stand alone project, the Co-ordinator will be able to make use of and get support from teams within NUS such as the Social Policy Team (eg for support with issues, cross departmental working i.e. Hate Crime Reporting and access to student liberation groups), Communications (eg for support with design and production of newsletters and web material), and the Education and Quality Team (eg for support with Further and Higher Education Policy). Additionally the Co-ordinator will work closely with a PhD student researching "Faith Conflict on Campus" to ensure that there are no project overlaps and that the two pieces of work are complimentary. Kat Luckock has been appointed to the role of Student Inter-faith Co-ordinator. Kat.luckock@nus.org.uk 0207 380 6600

In discussion, the following points were made by individual participants:

- Religious identity is now seen as being a more significant factor in campus life than in the past.
- It is unhelpful if the Government's 'preventing violent extremism' agenda is seen by FE and HE institutions as the primary reason for engagement with questions of student religious identity.
- It is important that provision made for students with religious needs is not seen as privileging them but, rather, as making appropriate provision for them alongside meeting the needs of other students.
- There is no reason why a secular FE or HE institution should not ensure that those who practise particular faiths are able to do so in appropriate ways.
- Academic and other staff in FE and HE institutions often need training in 'religious literacy' on such issues as diet, timetable and prayer facilities, which are of concern not only to students but also to staff. The Equality Bill currently before Parliament will, if it is enacted, place a responsibility on public bodies to promote good relations and this will make it a necessity for FE and HE institutions to develop adequate 'religious literacy' – not an 'optional extra'.
- It is important for people of faith to take up opportunities to be on the governing councils of FE and HE institutions as this enables them to raise issues relating to religious literacy and cohesion. (Members of the group described their experiences in this context.)
- Staff need to be given proper support as they work to balance the requirements laid upon them by their institutions and the needs and wishes of students (where practice and observance could vary significantly from individual to individual).
- A case was mentioned of a Hindu student who experienced difficulties because of the lack of understanding of the role of an eldest son in dealing with funeral and mourning rites.
- Claims for special treatment on religion or belief grounds can sometimes be unrealistic.
- Examples were given of various ways in which the issue of 'religious literacy' is being tackled, including at a senior level within FE and HE institutions. There were reports from members of the group on ways in which different institutions now appear to be taking these issues more seriously.
- In a number of cases, local inter faith organisations have engaged with FE and HE institutions in their area and vice versa. These links should be encouraged.
- Increasingly it is recognised that chaplaincy needs to be provided on a multi faith basis.
- There are very few chaplains drawn from the Hindu and Sikh faiths.
- Difficulties can arise on campus over issues such as the sharing, or absence, of appropriate facilities such as prayer rooms.
- Concern was expressed about reports of some aggressive targeted proselytising activity.
- Students on campus collectively form a distinct community made up of different strands. The NUS wants to listen to the voices of different student groups.
- It is important that a student group does not have to present itself as being a problem in order to secure a voice.

Background

- Faith becoming a more important identifier for people – this is demonstrated on campus
- Historical approach 'student societies/groups' not providing representation
- Increase in tensions – between groups and students' unions and inter-faith tension
- At a national level an increase in dissatisfaction of the student experience (i.e. provision for faith on campus)

A little bit more background

- 'Faith conflict on campus' – Birkbeck/NUS PhD Research sponsorship – Verity Clayton
- Spring 2008 – funding to explore issues with national student faith organisations
- Winter 2009 – funding agreed from the then DIUS
- Currently recruiting

Aim and Objectives

Aim

To improve the experiences of students of faith in Further and Higher Education

Aim and Objectives

- To increase students' union awareness of the needs of students of faith
- To provide support, training, resources and information for students' unions with regards to students of faith
- To provide support, training resources and information for local student faith leaders to develop strong local inter-faith collaboration
- To create local and national space for inter-faith dialogue in order to enhance campus cohesion

A bridge between

- Important the project does not duplicate already existing activity i.e. FBFE, Equality Challenge Unit, Inter-faith Network etc
- Has to act as a bridge between students' unions, students of faith and a wide range of other organisations

What the project will look at

- Creating inter-faith dialogue
- Training and Support
- Information and Resources
- Representation
- External Organisation Liaison

And then what?

- Currently two-year project funded
- Different strands of work
 - Creating space for inter-faith dialogue
 - Educating students' unions to be 'faith friendly'
 - Increasing awareness of faith and need for provision on campuses to HEI's and FEI's

Contact Details

- Vic Langer – Head of Political Strategy
- vic.langer@nus.org.uk
- 020 7380 6600
- 07977 980 860

Workshop 5:

Encouraging faith based bodies to help their young people learn about and become involved in inter faith work

Facilitator: Sanjay M Jagatia, Secretary General, National Council of Hindu Temples (UK)

Presenter: Dr Andrew Smith, Director of Youth Encounter, Scripture Union and Christian Youth Specialist, Christian Muslim Forum.

Sanjay Jagatia introduced the workshop with some reflections on his own personal interest in youth work. He had experienced a lack of opportunity for engaging with inter faith issues when he was young but felt that it was vital that young people have a chance to get involved with these. He said that he had a passion for mobilising the young generation within the community to engage in 'shared values' through their churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and other faith-based organisations. It was vital to engage young people in effective faith-learning that increases inter faith cooperation, contributes to healthy development, and enriches community life. He stressed the importance of applying common principles of all faiths and allowing youth-led planning in order to build cooperation and dialogue across UK's diverse faith communities around their 'shared values' thus creating a stronger sense of mutual trust, respect, and understanding.

His community had recently embarked on a project in Coventry with the aim of gaining young people's ideas and opinions about the successful promotion of inter faith work, in particular their:

- knowledge and awareness of different faiths
- knowledge of issues relating to inter faith activities
- views of constraints on inter faith activities
- recommendations about how to promote inter faith activities.

He mentioned an example of an inter faith youth event in which he had been involved where a Hindu group, together with Sikhs and Christians, visited Auschwitz. On their return some of the key findings were that not only did it confirm the importance of the Holocaust remembrance but it highlighted the importance of joining together to stand up against discrimination and injustice in whatever form it may materialise. It was hoped that the interaction between the young people would motivate future generations to speak out; inspire individuals to consider their responsibilities within society; and highlight clearly what can happen if prejudice and racism become acceptable.

Dr Andrew Smith then gave a short presentation. He has worked for Scripture Union for 14 years and, as it is a Christian evangelical organisation, had little involvement in inter faith activities until becoming involved with Christian-Muslim dialogue. His work in Birmingham is in a largely Muslim area where he works in the schools to bring together young Muslims and Christians for mutual understanding. He also serves as a Christian youth specialist for the Christian Muslim Forum.

He said that getting teenagers together is the biggest challenge in youth inter faith work. Often you end up working just with the kids who are not prone to being prejudiced or to discriminate against others. Those kids who are completely convinced that they are right often choose not to participate. A big question is how inter faith interaction can move from being a 'minority sport' to a majority one.

Some schools are mixed and inter faith

dialogue in these contexts is a reality of every RE lesson. But in a number of areas, young people of different faiths often do not meet in the course of everyday life. There is a process of ‘ghettoisation’ going on. Though young people may not encounter people of other faiths extensively while they are young, they need the skills for this kind of engagement for later life – in university or in work life – when they will meet a more diverse set of people.

Faith communities need to help their young people to meet people of other faiths – particularly where this does not happen naturally – and to equip their young people with skills to handle this encounter. Dr Smith illustrated the deficiency in this area with reference to his doctoral thesis in which he found that most Christian books on youth work do not address inter faith relations – or when they do it is to dismiss it as difficult and ambiguous. In fact most Christian resources only help people engage with those that have no faith but not with people of other faiths.

RE lessons can be very challenging because young people are often faced for the first time with competing truth claims. If they have been taught their whole lives that the ultimate truth is only to be found in their faith, to be told in an RE lessons that there are people that believe this truth to be completely different can have quite profound effects on young people and that needs more attention.

Dr Smith distributed a handout entitled *Involving Young People: Some Practical Solutions* containing six important strategies for successful inter faith youth work.

He noted that ‘gatekeepers’ are very important and that one reason that youth work involving young people of different faith backgrounds can be challenging to enable is that the structures within each faith community are very different and the ‘gatekeepers’ differ. On the Christian side, there are a large number of youth workers. Churches have youth groups. Most mosques do not have these kinds of groups and do not


employ youth workers. In terms of faith development, Islam focuses resources on knowledge and Christianity on relationship. All these structural differences mean that the faith communities must be approached in different ways. In Dr Smith’s work, young Muslim people are generally recruited from schools and Christian young people from Church.

Dr Smith distributed another handout entitled *Guidelines for Dialogue* to illustrate the ways that he has worked to establish a safe space for youth inter faith dialogue.

In discussion, the following points were made by individual participants:

- The spiritual impact of RE lessons should not be underestimated. The impact on young people of faith may be different, however, for those who regularly meet people of other faiths than for those do not.
- It is important for parents to encourage their children to engage with children of other faiths and for young people to receive good inter faith education in RE lessons.
- In RE lessons children should never be asked to call their own faith into question but, rather, simply be asked to understand what others believe.
- Different faiths claim truth in different ways. Some are relatively open to diverse truth claims whereas others are not so open and would emphasise the danger of being ‘led astray’. There can be variation in position within, as well as between, traditions.
- We need to focus on helping young people engage with inter faith issues – and recognise that this can be challenging for those from traditions with absolute ideas of truth. It is important that this engagement can happen with integrity.

- One participant had grown up in a Muslim country as the son of Baha'i parents. He had participated with his cousins in all Muslim activities but was simultaneously taught by his parents about all religions. At the age of 15 he was asked to make a decision. He found this to be a beautiful lesson: to be open to all faiths and accept everybody. He has raised his own four children in the same way.
- Sometimes 'open' or 'universalist' religious perspectives are controversial. For example, at an inter faith meeting attended by one participant, there had been a presentation on the Baha'i faith and the discussion afterward was quite heated. Those with 'universalist' and those with non-universalist perspectives can find each others' positions equally puzzling (and even upsetting).
- The very act of seeking to understand another faith is likely to raise questions about your own and young people need help to deal with these questions.
- Inter faith dialogue does not flourish when it focuses on, for example, who is ultimately right or who is better.
- It can be wise to steer away from overseas focused political discussions in inter faith work with young people and instead to focus on the UK.
- A Muslim participant commented that efforts to educate Muslim young people in inter faith relations do not always succeed because some imams/teachers do not believe in it. The current strategy is to focus on imams to encourage them to improve inter faith education for young people.
- Sporting activities are a good way to bring people from different faiths together. One participant had played in a match between imams and Christian clergy.
- In inter faith youth work, young people are often asked to do things that the adults around them have never done and might make adults nervous.
- It is important to cater for everyone's needs and to do good youth work and good inter faith work at the same time. The activities must be tailored to young people.
- This is a relatively new area of work which has to be taken forward with care and integrity.



Cross, Crescent and Cool

Some Practical Solutions

Be very clear about aims before you start
Be able to reassure 'gatekeepers' as to what the young people are being invited to. Different communities will have different concerns. Find these out and address them.

Know where to meet Muslim and Christian young people
We've usually recruited Christians through church groups and Muslims through schools. This reflects different ways the communities operate and structure themselves. Know what everyone means by young people, what ages are you catering for?

Create a 'Safe Space'
Make sure that the venue, the activities and the language you use help all the participants to feel safe throughout the event. This doesn't reduce the 'challenge' but creates a safe environment for the young people to be challenged. Choose a 'neutral' venue especially to start with.

Cater for everyone's needs
Will there be prayer times for both Muslims and Christians? Will there be food everyone can eat, Halal, non-Halal and vegetarian? Will you play music – what sort? What about people with special needs?

Do good youth work
Do good youth work with Muslims and Christians together not a formal dialogue meeting with teenagers present.

Understand the differences between Christian and Muslim expectations for youth work
How formal or educational will your events be? Will they be single sex or mixed?

Guidelines for Dialogue

Here are some guidelines to help you get the most out of today. Everyone here will be asked to follow these guidelines in the discussions. They are not meant to restrict you, but enable you to discuss things that may be very important to you and to others.

We will listen to what everyone has to say

We will be honest in what we say

We will respect other people's views, even if we disagree with them

We will not treat people here as a spokesperson for their faith.

We will not tell other people what they believe, but allow them to tell us

We will acknowledge both similarities and differences between our faiths

We will not judge people here by what some people of their faith do

We will not try and force people to agree with our views

We can ask for a discussion to be stopped if we feel uncomfortable with what is being said

We will make an effort to get along with everyone regardless of their faith, gender, race or age

April 07

**YOUTH
ENCOUNTER**


**Scripture
union**

Workshop 6:

Religious Education and inter faith understanding

Presenter: Jill Carr, Leicester City Council

Facilitator: Dr Harshad Sanghrajka, Institute of Jainology

Dr Sanghrajka welcomed participants.

Jill Carr opened the workshop by showing a DVD which contained images of current affairs events and people from different religions.

The DVD was produced a few years ago and was put together from YouTube footage. Some of the images showed faith in a good light and others did not. The material had been chosen for the DVD because Islamophobia and negative views about some other religions have sometimes been a problem in some Leicester schools and the DVD can be used to open up debate on this. Religions are associated in the minds of pupils with many controversial issues including abortion, climate change and war. Secondary school pupils need to be able to debate these issues.

A debate ensued after the DVD was shown. The negative views about a particular faith sparked some controversy. One felt their inclusion could create further problems whilst others felt they reflected a reality which must be explained. Mrs Carr said that the contents were designed to arouse discussion. She explained that the DVD was always discussed with students after they had watched it.

She then made a short presentation. An indicative selection of her PowerPoint slides from this are attached.

Her presentation included the following points:

- According to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, Religious Education should enable pupils to develop positive attitudes of respect towards other people

who hold views and beliefs different from their own, and towards living in a society of diverse religions and beliefs.

- RE syllabuses are locally agreed using QCA guidelines.
- RE is not compulsory in Further Education colleges.
- If RE is not taught well, then it can compound ignorance and lead to stereotyping and even bullying.
- Some faith related bullying has been reported in Further Education colleges but the situation is improving.
- It is important for teachers to understand the faiths about which they are teaching. This is improving and ways need to be found to improve it further.
- RE is not to do with preaching but with teaching. Teachers do not necessarily have to believe but they need to be able to make sense of morals and world affairs.
- The RE syllabus supports inter faith understanding by encouraging young people to express their feelings and learn from one another.
- Activities in the classroom encourage students to mix – for example, discussing their favourite food or TV programme or the holy book of their tradition.
- Visits to places of worship by school pupils still need to increase and it is helpful that in Leicester increasing numbers of places of worship are signing up to the 'Quality Mark' scheme.

At this point the workshop split into small groups to play a game which involved using a selection of phrases to discover what delegates felt mattered most in Religious Education. The feedback was that RE should:

- enable pupils to spend some time to build up understanding of different world faiths and beliefs
- be imaginative, engaging, creative and challenging, relevant and fun
- be transformational
- be motivational and accurate and there should be quality material available to teachers and time enough to teach it.

In discussion, the following points were made by individual participants:

- Currently only 5% of teaching time per week needs, legally, to be spent on RE.
- No analysis has been carried out specifically on how RE lessons benefit children.
- Year on year results for RE are better than geography and history, and also, year on year, more children are choosing to take RE.
- Morality is often found intertwined with religion but it is not the same thing. There can be equally valid different views on particular moral issues (the contributor gave the example of homosexuality).
- One of the main aims of RE should be to teach young people that they can disagree without violence. There needs to be a framework of mutual respect.
- Children should be taught to think for themselves and have a right to decide on their own religion.
- Children should not be separated from the traditions of their families – alienation

from a family is very serious.

- It is possible to create a balance between keeping the child in a tradition without poisoning it against others.
- Some people can be suspicious of the Government's work on driving forward community cohesion. Faith communities should be able to influence the Government as well as vice versa.



Why bother with RE?

'Religious Education encourages pupils to develop their sense of identity and belonging. It enables them to flourish individually within their communities and as citizens in a pluralistic society and global community.'



Religious Education should enable pupils to:

- 'Develop positive attitudes of respect towards other people who hold views and beliefs different from their own, and towards living in a society of diverse religions and beliefs.'



Ignorance breeds prejudice

- Recent figures from the DCSF show that exclusions from schools due to racist bullying have soared by more than 40% at secondary schools and by 20% at primaries.



The Leicester Agreed Syllabus for RE

- Teachers focus the planned learning around key concepts, processes and themes (page 45 in syllabus)
- Pupils should be offered opportunities that are integral to their learning and enhance their engagement with the concepts, processes and content/themes of the subject.
The curriculum should provide opportunities for pupils to:
- encounter people from different religious, cultural and philosophical groups, who can express a range of convictions on religious and moral issues, where possible
- visit places of major religious significance, where possible
- discuss, question and evaluate important issues in religion and philosophy, including ultimate questions and ethical issues



Community Cohesion

- The *Diversity and Citizenship Curriculum Review* published in February 2007 states that:
- ...we passionately believe that it is the duty of all schools to address issues of 'how we live together' and 'dealing with difference' however controversial and difficult they might sometimes seem.'
- Schools have a duty to promote community cohesion, and from September 2008 Ofsted have been required to inspect and report on the contributions made in this area.



How might RE contribute further to community cohesion and interfaith dialogue?

- To consider:
- How can we enable young people to learn more about the diverse community they live in?
- How can mutually beneficial relationships be developed between schools and faith communities?
- How can we ensure there is meaningful dialogue with different faith communities?

Workshop 7:

Inter Faith Week

Facilitator: Dr Harriet Crabtree, Director, Inter Faith Network

Presenter: Christine Abbas, Secretary and Baha'i representative, Inter Faith Council for Wales

Christine Abbas opened the workshop with a presentation about plans for an 'inter faith eisteddfod' in Wales linked to Inter Faith Week. The full text of her presentation, offered from a Baha'i community as well as Inter Faith Council for Wales perspective, is reproduced below the discussion points.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- The idea for Inter Faith Week was a proposal from the faith communities through the Trustees of the Inter Faith Network for the UK, to the Government during the consultation stage which led to the Government's document *Face to Face and Side by Side: A Framework for Partnership in our Multi Faith Society*. The idea was accepted and became one of the Government's policy commitments in that document.
- The IFN Trustees' proposal was in part inspired by the very successful Scottish Inter Faith Week which has been running for a number of years.
- When organising an event it is always important to consider the legacy of the event and explore ways to continue the work.
- Inter faith events can often be run on a relatively small budget as many faith venues can be used free of charge. But the time and skills involved need also to be kept in mind.
- There are a wide variety of organisations showing an interest in Inter Faith Week and many different approaches and types of events are planned, reflecting the many

different avenues through which people approach inter faith work.

- Liverpool Community Spirit are discussing with their local SACRE and inter faith group a possible joint event during the Week. They are very keen to increase the number of people involved with inter faith work. Part of their work is putting schools in touch with local churches, temples, mosques and synagogues and they hope that many schools will arrange visits during Inter Faith Week. As schools in Liverpool are becoming more diverse they are seeing more interest from schools in their programmes.
- The Shared Futures Programme will be bringing faith schools together to work on projects.
- The Leicester Inter Faith Group has negotiated with the owners of a new shopping mall to use one of the vacant spaces to hold an exhibition during Inter Faith Week on different faiths in Leicester.

Other ideas for events that were discussed were:

- 'Faith-Encounters' based on speed dating where people of different faiths move from table to table having a few minutes to talk to a person of another faith.
- Inter faith tea parties are popular and cheap events to organise. An example of this cited was an event called "More Tea Vicar, Imam, Rabbi, Priest..." held at Goldsmiths College in London. Local religious leaders were invited to the college canteen and students had the opportunity to talk over a cup of tea with them.

Inter Faith Week as an opportunity to increase young peoples' involvement in inter faith dialogue and activities – Christine Abbas

"Since the early twentieth century a materialistic interpretation of reality has been creeping over societies becoming more deeply embedded. Humanity appears to have taken its destiny into its own hands. Values have been accepted as fixed and enduring so that there is no further requirement for 'spiritual' guidance. We have experimented with every kind of 'ism' in the dictionary, science has become the most effective tool for materialism and the emphasis has been on modernisation with a resulting consumer culture which is morally and socially in decline. The age old quest of the human spirit to find something greater, happier and more fulfilling appears all but forgotten.

In general there may be "a reluctant recognition that there is no credible replacement for religious belief as a force capable of generating self discipline and restoring commitment to moral behaviour" But the disillusionment with the failed promises of materialism will create conditions necessary for humanity, especially the youth, to take steps on a path of search of understanding about the purpose of existence.

If Interfaith has any role to play it must surely be in providing signposts for those just embarking on their life of search and service away from a merely materialistic and selfish view of life to paths moving, not only to working side by side, but of building a new civilisation together. For in a world where we see mass migrations of people from one part of the globe to another, global communications and intergovernmental cooperation we begin to see the reality that "all men have been created to carry forward an ever advancing civilisation."

Young people will need to be inspired and empowered to be a source for social cohesion rather than just being another group needing to have things organised for them and the planning has to be focussed on processes rather than just events to enable the next stage of development to occur.

In Wales, shortly after 11 September 2001 it was discernable that there was an increased call for faith communities to be involved together. Albeit focused around the south-east M4 corridor many events called for the presence of faith communities. Although these served to include a more diverse group and bond relations, there was an impression that the faith leaders and representatives were more like trophies to be brought out when appropriate, without any active participation of our own.

Having been asked by the First Minister if Wales was going to do anything for Inter Faith Week an idea formed to hold an Interfaith Arts Eisteddfod: An evening of creative performance bringing together the different faith communities in Wales. Using storytelling, creative dance and other artistic presentations to show how inspiration flows through stories, especially those linked to religion, and that religion does not have to be divisive. A series of creative workshops would take place from September onwards involving young people from faith backgrounds, or no particular faith.

To produce such a performance it will be necessary to commission a project manager who will make the Council's vision reality. Unlike previous activities that have relied on the services of volunteers, in order to have the time, effort and expertise required there will be a cost. For an organisation with no funding this will be the main preoccupation of the steering committee and we have yet to see whether there is sufficient time in which to obtain grant funding.

The event itself will take place on 7 November and will be seen as a portal through which the

4 At the time of Christine Abbas' presentation this was intended to take place in early November. It will now take place in the first week of December.

concept of Inter Faith week could be shared and any activities taking place within the Principality could be advertised. This would give the public and faith communities time to take part in any events. It has the potential to become the 4th national Eisteddfod in Wales, as Wales has a culture of accepting people for who they are through their poetry and other artistic contributions. But it is not merely a response to a request to hold an event but the beginnings of trying to answer the need of people to explore where the yearnings of the spirit are meant to be taking us in this particular phase of human community development.

“Throughout history, the primary agents of spiritual development have been the great religions.” They all have a vast literature which down the centuries has “inspired breathtaking achievements in music, architecture, and the other arts. “No other force in existence has been able to elicit from people comparable qualities of heroism, self-sacrifice and self-discipline.”

References: One Common Faith and Bahá’í Scriptures

The Inter Faith Network for the UK 2009 National Meeting and AGM

Participant list

Mr Rafi Abbas

Inter Faith Council for Wales

Mrs Christine Abbas

Inter Faith Council for Wales

Mr Ziya Adilov

Inter Faith Network for the UK

Dr Ajay Aggarwal

Faiths Forum for the East Midlands

Ms Anam Ahmed

Bolton Interfaith Council

Ms Sughra Ahmed

Islamic Foundation

Mr Haroon Ahmed

Scottish Inter Faith Council

Dr Manazir Ahsan MBE

The Islamic Foundation

Mr Shahid Akmal

Muslim Council of Britain

Ms Aamna Alam

Bolton Interfaith Council

Miss Jennifer Anderson

Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship

Miss Nazreen Avari

Young Zoroastrians

Ms Helen Bailey

South London Inter Faith Group

Mr George Ballentyne

Leicester Council of Faiths

Miss Lydia Barlow

United Faiths Youth Forum (YHFF)

Mr Rauf Bashir

Building Bridges Pendle

Mrs Martha Besser

Harrow Inter Faith Council

Dr Girdari Bhan

Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)

Rev Inderjit Bhogal OBE

Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum

Ms Celia Blackden

Churches Together in England

Mr Julian Bond

Christian Muslim Forum

Ms Bethany Brooks

Bolton Interfaith Council

Mr Robert Brown

Council for Christians and Jews

Mrs Barbara Butler

Christians Aware Interfaith Programme

Rt Rev Dr Tom Butler

Inter Faith Network for the UK

Mrs Jill Carr

Leicester City Council

Mr Rudrajoy Chakraborty

National Hindu Students Forum

Ms Minou Cortazzi

Leicester Council of Faiths

Dr Harriet Crabtree OBE

Inter Faith Network for the UK

Rev Jon Dal Din

Westminster Interfaith

Ms Shahida Ditta

Faiths United (Tameside)

Mr Peter Downey

Liverpool Community Spirit Youth Council

Rev Phil Edwards
Bolton Interfaith Council

Ms Claire Ellis
Three Faiths Forum

Mr Nasar Fiaz
Bradford District Faiths Forum

Ms Mehru Fitter
Coventry Multi-Faith Forum

Mrs Amanda Fitton
Christians Aware Interfaith Programme

Ms Merlynne Francique
National Youth Agency

Professor Brian Gates
Religious Education Council of England and Wales

Miss Atheah Ghani
Faiths Forum for the East Midlands

Mr Mark Gifford
Minorities of Europe Inter Faith Action Programme

Ms Cressida Godding
Liverpool Community Spirit

Mr Abdool Gooljar
Sheffield Interfaith

Mr Mark Graham
Loughborough Council of Faiths

Rev Dr Ted Hale
Northampton Inter Faith Forum

Mr Ken Harris
Interfaith MK

Mr Warwick Hawkins
Department for Communities and Local Government

Ms Rachel Heilbron
Three Faiths Forum

Dr Phil Henry
Multi Faith Centre at the University of Derby

Ms Elin Henrysson
Inter Faith Network for the UK

Miss Sarah Hulme
St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace

Ms Frances Hume
Scottish Inter Faith Council

Mr Lateef Hussaini
Watford Interfaith Association

Miss Fiona Hutchinson
Girlguiding UK

Dr Justine Huxley
St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace

Mr Sanjay Jagatia
National Council of Hindu Temples

Dr Angela Jagger
Leicester Council of Faiths

Mr Javid Jalili
National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the UK

Rev Gareth Jones
West Midlands Faiths Forum

Mr Alf Keeling
Altrincham Interfaith Group

Mr Zafar Khan
Luton Council of Faiths

Mr Ryad Khodabocus
Luton Council of Faiths

Ms Denise King
Girlguiding UK

Mr Maadhav Kothari
Liverpool Community Spirit Youth Council

Miss Vic Langer
National Union of Students

Hon Barnabas Leith
National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the UK

Mr Gary Loke
Equality Challenge Unit

Mrs Ann Lovelock
Birmingham Council of Faiths

Mr Yann Lovelock
Network of Buddhist Organisations

Dr Ikram Malik
Building Bridges Pendle

Dr Ramesh Mehta

Jain Samaj Europe

Miss Hannah Mercer

Inter Faith Network for the UK

Rev Preb Michael Metcalf

National Association of SACREs

Miss Tina Mistry

Young Zoroastrians

Mr Dorab Mistry

Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

Miss Sherie Mistry

Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra

Religions for Peace (UK)

Mrs Kathy MorrisonSt Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in
a Multi Faith Society**Miss Ushna Mughal**

United Faiths Youth Forum (YHFF)

Mr John Murray

Nottingham Inter Faith Council

Mr Deepak Naik MBEMinorities of Europe Inter Faith Action
Programme**Mr Ashok Nair**

Bradford District Faiths Forum

Mr Gerald Nembhard

Birmingham Council of Faiths

Mr Bernard Omar

Bristol Inter Faith Group

Miss Stella Opoku-Owusu

Inter Faith Network for the UK

Mr Chan Parmar

Bolton Interfaith Council

Mrs Varsha Parmar

Loughborough Council of Faiths

David Paterson

Oxford Round Table of Religions

Mr Ramesh Pattni

Hindu Forum of Britain

Mr Brian Pearce OBE

Inter Faith Network for the UK

Dr Nawal Prinja

Inter Faith Network for the UK

Rev Dr Alan Race

World Congress of Faiths

Mr Anil Randev

Nottingham Inter Faith Council

Dr Narayan Rao

Hindu Council (UK)

Mr Louis Rapaport

Altrincham Interfaith Group

Mr Riaz RavatSt Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in
a Multi Faith Society**Moulana M Shahid Raza OBE**

Imams and Mosques Council (UK)

Rt Rev Dr Alastair Redfern

Multi Faith Centre at the University of Derby

Ms Lisa Remmer

Northeast Regional Faiths Network

Miss Leah Rhodes-Valery

United Faiths Youth Forum (YHFF)

Mr Phil Rosenberg

Board of Deputies of British Jews

Ms Denise Roudette

Many Voices

Mr Peter SampsonInternational Association for Religious
Freedom (British Chapter)**Dr Harshad Sanghrajka**

Institute of Jainology

Mr Jehangir Sarosh

Religions for Peace (UK)

Father Steven Saxby

Waltham Forest Faith Communities Forum

Janet Scott

Cambridge Inter-Faith Group

Mr Mohamed Seedat

Faiths United (Tameside)

Venerable Bogoda Seelawimala

Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of GB

Mr Vinay Shah

Institute of Jainology

Dr Natubhai Shah

Jain Samaj Europe

Mr Bhupinder Singh

Inter Faith Youth Trust

Dr Indarjit Singh CBE

Network of Sikh Organisations

Mr Kashmir Singh Rajput

Bradford District Faiths Forum

Mr Resham Singh Sandhu

Leicester Council of Faiths

Dr Andrew Smith

Christian Muslim Forum/Scripture Union

Mr Paresh Solanki

Inter Faith Network for the UK

Bishop Festus Tete Djawu

Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches

Rev Richard Tetlow

Birmingham Council of Faiths

Rev Kevin Tingay

Faithnetsouthwest

Mr Andrew Tinkler

Gateshead Inter Faith Forum

Rev Geoff Usher

Sheffield Interfaith

Ms Rosie Venner

Student Christian Movement

Mrs Anne Vince

United Religions Initiative UK

Mr Christopher Ward

Network of Buddhist Organisations

Canon Guy Wilkinson

Lambeth Palace

Ms Amy Willshire

Waltham Forest Faith Communities Forum

Canon Dr Andrew Wingate

St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in a Multi Faith Society

Rev David Wiseman

Northampton Inter Faith Forum

Member Organisations of the Inter Faith Network for the UK

2009/10

Faith Community Representative Bodies

Baha'i Community of the UK
BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha
Board of Deputies of British Jews
British Muslim Forum
Buddhist Society
Churches' Agency for Inter Faith Relations in Scotland
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland
Churches Together in England
Committee for Relations with Other Religions, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales
Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches (UK)
Friends of the Western Buddhist Order
Hindu Council (UK)
Hindu Forum of Britain
Inter Faith Panel of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches Faith and Public Issues Commission
Islamic Cultural Centre
Jain Samaj Europe
Jamiat-e-Ulama Britain
Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board
Muslim Council of Britain
National Council of Hindu Temples (UK)
Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)
Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)
Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations
Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of GB
Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)
World Ahlul-Bayt Islamic League
World Islamic Mission (UK)
Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

Educational and Academic Bodies

Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme
Centre for Christianity and Interreligious Dialogue, Heythrop College
Centre for the Study of Interreligious Relations, University of Birmingham
Community Religions Project, University of Leeds
Institute of Jainology
National Association of SACREs
Religious Education Council of England and Wales
Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education
Sion Centre for Dialogue and Encounter
The Islamic Foundation
Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths

Inter Faith Organisations

Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum
Scottish Inter Faith Council
Inter Faith Council for Wales/Cyngor Cyd-Ffydd Cymru
East of England Faiths Council
faithnetsouthwest
Faiths Forum for the East Midlands
Northwest Forum of Faiths
South East England Faith Forum
West Midlands Faiths Forum
Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum
Alif Aleph UK
Christian Muslim Forum
Christians Aware Interfaith Programme
Coexist Foundation
Coexistence Trust
Council of Christians and Jews

East of England Faiths Agency
 Interfaith Alliance UK
 International Association for Religious Freedom (British Chapter)
 International Interfaith Centre
 Joseph Interfaith Foundation
 London Society of Jews and Christians
 Minorities of Europe Inter Faith Action Programme
 Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby
 Religions for Peace (UK)
 St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace
 St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in a Multi Faith Society
 Three Faiths Forum
 Tony Blair Faith Foundation
 United Religions Initiative (UK)
 Westminster Interfaith
 World Congress of Faiths

Local Inter Faith Groups

Altrincham Inter Faith Group
 Barking and Dagenham Faith Forum
 Barnet Multi-Faith Forum
 Bedford Council of Faiths
 Birmingham Council of Faiths
 Blackburn with Darwen Interfaith Forum
 Blackpool Faith Forum
 Bolton Interfaith Council
 Bradford Concord Interfaith Society
 Bradford District Faiths Forum
 Brent Interfaith
 Brent Multi-Faith Forum
 Brighton and Hove Inter-Faith Contact Group
 Bristol Inter Faith Group
 Bristol Multi-Faith Forum
 Buckinghamshire Forum of Faiths
 Building Bridges in Burnley
 Muslim-Christian Forum (Bury)
 Calderdale Interfaith Council
 Cambridge Inter-Faith Group

Canterbury and District Inter Faith Action
 Cardiff Interfaith Association
 Cheltenham Inter Faith
 Clapham and Stockwell Faith Forum
 Coventry Multi-Faith Forum
 Crawley Interfaith Network
 Faiths Together in Croydon
 Cumbria Interfaith Forum
 Forum of Faiths for Derby
 Doncaster Interfaith
 Dudley Borough Interfaith Network
 Elmbridge Multi-Faith Forum
 Gateshead Inter Faith Forum
 Greenwich Multi-Faith Forum
 Hampshire Interfaith Network
 Harrow Inter Faith Council
 Hastings and District Interfaith Forum
 Hillingdon Inter Faith Network
 Horsham Interfaith Forum
 Hounslow Friends of Faith
 Huddersfield Inter Faith Council
 Hull and East Riding Interfaith
 Inter Faith Isle of Man
 Interfaith Swansea
 Islington Faiths Forum
 Keighley Interfaith Group
 Kingston Inter Faith Forum
 Lancashire Forum of Faiths
 Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship
 Leeds Faiths Forum
 Leicester Council of Faiths
 Lincoln Inter-Faith Forum
 Liverpool Faith Network
 Loughborough Council of Faiths
 Luton Council of Faiths
 Faith Network for Manchester
 Medway Inter Faith Action Forum
 Merseyside Council of Faiths
 Middlesbrough Council of Faiths
 Interfaith MK (Milton Keynes)
 Milton Keynes Council of Faiths

Moseley Inter Faith Group
Newcastle Council of Faiths
Newham Association of Faiths
Newham Faith Sector Forum
North Kirklees Inter-Faith Council
North Staffordshire Forum of Faiths
Northampton Inter Faith Forum
Norwich InterFaith Link
Nottingham Inter Faith Council
Oldham Inter Faith Forum
Oxford Round Table of Religions
Building Bridges Pendle - Interfaith
Community Project
Peterborough Inter-Faith Council
Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural
Diversity
Portsmouth Inter Faith Forum
Preston Faith Forum
Reading Inter-Faith Group
Redbridge Council of Faiths
Redbridge Faith Forum
Rochdale Multi Faith Partnership
Rossendale Faith Partnership
Rugby Inter Faith Forum
Sandwell Multi-Faith Network
Sheffield Inter Faith
South London Inter Faith Group
Southampton Council of Faiths
Southwark Multi Faith Forum
Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource
Faiths United (Tameside)
Telford and Wrekin Interfaith Group
Tower Hamlets Inter Faith Forum
Valleys Faith Forum
Waltham Forest Faith Communities Forum
Wandsworth Multi-Faith Network
Warrington Council of Faiths
Watford Inter Faith Association
Wellingborough Inter Faith Group
Welwyn Hatfield Interfaith Group
West Wiltshire Interfaith Group

Westminster Faith Exchange
Whalley Range (Manchester) Inter Faith Group
Windsor and Maidenhead Community Forum
Wolverhampton Inter Faith Council
Wycombe Sharing of Faiths

Published 2009 by the Inter Faith Network for the UK
(registered charity no 1068934 and company limited
by guarantee no 3443823 registered in England)

8A Lower Grosvenor Place London SW1W 0EN

ifnet@interfaith.org.uk
www.interfaith.org.uk

ISBN 1 902906 40 3