

Meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education
Inquiry: The contribution of RE to good community relations
Oral Evidence Session (2) 27th January 2014.

Attendees

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| Fiona Bruce MP | Chair (Vice-Chair of APPG on RE) |
| Lord Harries of Pentregarth | |
| Dr Joyce Miller | Inquiry Coordinator, RE Council |
| Dr Sarah Smalley | RE Council |
| John Keast OBE | RE Council |
| Sophie Agrotis | RE Council |
| Ben Waldmann | PB Political Consulting |
| William O'Brien | PB Political Consulting |
| Penny Smith-Orr | Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants |
| Jo Malone | Tony Blair Faith Foundation |
| Maha Ridha | Al Khoei Foundation |
| Hussain Ridha | Al Khoei Foundation |
| Jo Backus | Network of Buddhist Organisations |
| Jennifer Felderhof | |
| Ben Felderhof | |
| Derek J Humphrey | Hockerill Educational Foundation |
| Niamh McGuinness | St Bonaventure's School |
| Nicholas Pauro | St Bonaventure's School |
| Derek Bastide | National Society (Church of England) for Promoting RE |
| Angelika Baxter | Deanery of Great Britain and Ireland |
| Jenny Lockwood | National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United Kingdom |
| Robert Dixon | 3FF (Three Faiths Forum) |
| Dr Hojjat Ramzy | Muslim Council of Britain |
| Abdurrahman Hendek | University of Oxford |
| Guy Hordern | Birmingham SACRE |
| Isabel Smith | The Buddhist Society |
| Mahendra Hirani | Multifaiths |

Speakers

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| Helen Harrison | Independent RE Consultant; RE Adviser to Lanchashire SACRE |
| Aliya Azam | Education & Interfaith Coordinator, Al Khoei Foundation |
| Dr Marius Felderhof | Honorary Senior Research Fellow, University of Birmingham |
| Alastair Ross | Education Consultant, Pennine Learning |
| Patricia Hannam | Education Adviser, Hampshire County Council |
| David Raven-Hill | Independent Education Consultant; Adviser, Schools Linking Network |

Welcome

Fiona Bruce MP

Good evening and thank you to everyone for coming this evening. I'm Fiona Bruce, MP for Congleton and a Vice Chair of the APPG for RE. The purpose of the APPG is to provide a medium through which parliamentarians and organisations with an interest in RE can discuss the current provision of RE, press for continuous improvement, promote public understanding and advocate rigorous education for every young person in religious and non-religious world views.

As a vice-chair of the Group I am very committed to this inquiry, and it is very good to be here today to hear about the way in which RE contributes to good community relations.

Our speakers are: Helen Harrison, who is an independent RE consultant and Adviser to Lancashire SACRE; Dr Marius Felderhof, an Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the Department of Theology and Religion in the University of Birmingham; Patricia Hannam, Education Adviser to Hampshire County Council; Aliya Azam, Head of Science and RE Related Work at Al SAdiq and Al Zahra Schools and Education & Interfaith Coordinator of the Al Khoei Foundation; Alastair Ross, an education consultant at Pennine Learning; and David Raven-Hill, an independent education consultant and advisor with the Schools Linking Network.

The first three speakers will be focusing on local authorities, after which we will have a chance for questions to these speakers. We'll then be hearing from three speakers talking about various projects, in the community, across the nation and in a local authority.

I'd now like to hand over to Joyce Miller, the Inquiry Coordinator to give her introduction. Thank you, Joyce.

Introduction

Joyce Miller

Thank you, Fiona. First I'd like to contextualise this meeting, which is the second oral evidence session in this inquiry. We had our first session in December, which focused on schools and had speakers from primary and secondary school settings, and academics who had done relevant research. It was a very inspiring and interesting event, which raised all sorts of questions about RE and community relations, and it will be my very interesting task to draw together an action plan after these three events have taken place.

This session's focus is communities. The third session in February will focus on cohesion in society as a whole.

Today is of course Holocaust Memorial Day. This is coincidental but it seems to me incredibly important that we consider community relations on a day like today.

On that note I will introduce Helen Harrison, to talk about SACREs and community cohesion.

How can SACREs promote cohesion?

Helen Harrison

Thanks, Joyce. I am the RE consultant to Lancashire SACRE and am also an executive member of the National Association of SACREs, NASACRE – in this capacity I serve on a group that works with Westhill to provide funding for SACREs to bid to pursue projects that young people to promote cohesion, for example through working with religious groups

At a recent Lancashire SACRE conference, 11 and 12 year old pupils were asked their opinion of RE – they explained:

RE teaches respect and tolerance for other faiths and ethnicities, it is essential for working with others, it helps you develop a better understanding of other people and their faiths/we can then understand why people from other religions do certain things

Lancashire's Standing Advisory Council on RE is committed to supporting the authority as it provides a curriculum for RE that upholds attitudes from the national framework that supported its development - Open mindedness, Appreciation and Wonder, Respect for all and Self-awareness. This diverse group works together to ensure their syllabus will help young people be religiously literate, learning about and from the religions in this multi faith and multi-cultural authority, in the belief that greater understanding can be achieved between its citizens. This account focusses on aspects of this SACRE's work that have been proven to promote such cohesion as it reaches out to over 600 schools in Lancashire.

Questions have been raised about the future of SACREs in the light of cuts in local authority budgets. Having been involved with Lancashire SACRE for approximately 20 years, both as a teacher and advisor, I find the existence of this unique model of social cohesion fascinating – and a model of hope for society. Here you see members representing a wide spectrum of local groups all gathered to make RE the best it can be; all unpaid volunteers. And such is the interest in being part of this 'team', in the last year there have had to be written applications for a Free Church and Hindu vacancy. Members voluntarily turn out in high numbers on a Monday morning four times a year, many also supporting subcommittee meetings to work together to ensure that local RE is effective.

One way of doing this is to work with an even wider selection of local communities, groups and stakeholders. One such group are the pupils who come from a variety of social and belief backgrounds. Through its Youth Voice students, annual SACRE Youth conferences and connection with the RE Quality Mark schools the thoughts of young people inform Lancashire SACRE's work – more of this later.

SACRE meetings receive presentations from other bodies committed to cohesion such as the Lancashire Forum of Faiths, the Burnley and Pendle Faith Centre and Building Bridges Pendle. It is important that this involves finding ways of supporting each other's work. One such example was 'Understanding Islam' project supported by the SACRE, EMA and the Lancashire Council of Mosques that arranged schools visits to and from local Muslim communities. The authority also draws in support from members of the SACRE for events such as pan Lancashire Cohesion conferences and training.

I would like at this point to raise a couple of questions: This is not a typical SACRE – many struggle with very limited funds and support – how can other local authorities be encouraged to see the value of this unique body and invest in their SACREs? How can SACREs ensure a diverse group is fully representative of the area?

These lofty aims don't just happen – on the slide is a section of a 3 year rolling development plan. Bullet point one says that: Schools need to access the authentic voice of local faiths – and this is partly addressed in a section of the agreed syllabus (which is available online), but prior to this a dedicated site arose from collaboration from Lancashire Forum of Faith, Blackburn Diocese, Global education and the local authority diversity team. This provides practical guidance and links for visits and visitors both for schools and faith communities and is very much linked to the Learning Outside the Classroom initiative.

Bullet point two: The Burnley and Pendle Faith Centre came about as part of Building Schools for the Future project – all Burnley and Pendle schools have the Faith Centre as a focus for connecting with local faith communities, and each other. The SACRE is currently working with the centre to expand its support across the authority. For example, as a result of a request from the Lancashire Council of Mosques, in mid-January the

Centre and SACRE provided training for 30 Muslims and Christians that focused on the best way for faith groups to support RE in local schools. The seven Imams who came gave particularly positive feedback.

An example of this is Interfaith week, shown in bullet three – SACRE members working with Preston Faith Forum, the Burnley and Pendle Faith Centre, and young people of all ages, to create displays of work and give presentations showing how RE promotes understanding between different groups in various areas of our large County. SACRE meetings have a standing item for members to give news of events that may be of interest to each other and to schools, some being circulated via the Lancashire portal.

But how can SACREs ensure that they reach out to the wide variety of different groups connected with cohesion effectively and ensuring that their work does not overlap?

The SACRE has provided twilight termly network groups, affiliated to NATRE, for teachers to come together and share good practice. These regularly meet at places of worship provided by SACRE members or through contacts known to them. In the photo on this slide, Rabbi Braunold demonstrates the use of a doll to bring Judaism alive to younger pupils. Members also help schools access sacred spaces – in this picture Jasbinder Singh arranged for a Preston Gurdwara to hold an open day to welcome a wide range of schools to encounter living Sikhism.

Lancashire Youth Voice, previously Youth SACRE, exists to support the work of SACRE. This quotation illustrates their determination to make a difference to cohesion in their community:

By being part of the Youth Voice I have experienced different religions. The experience has opened my eyes to how other people in my community live their day to day lives. Overall I have found the experience of being part of the Youth Voice inspiring and motivating.

As well as working with SACRE members, addressing issues from the development plan (such as parental involvement with RE), they are creating RE materials resulting from investigations into living religious tradition, such as the Salvation Army's work with the needy and the ethos of a local Roman Catholic school. Three of the schools involved have achieved the highest award from the RE Quality Mark that requires capacity to embed excellent and innovative RE throughout the school and encourage other schools in the wider community.

SACRE members are passionate about the need for an effective curriculum that will support the individual's quest to understand life through asking questions of others, especially those who find answers through membership of local faiths, so I could not leave out reference to the Lancashire syllabus, 'Searching for Meaning,' as this is such a core part of Lancashire SACRE's work and a key factor in promoting understanding of others. Here is the Lancashire Field of Enquiry that arose from the Westhill model. All planning for learning must have at its heart investigation into questions arising out of the nature of humanity and address these four aspects of RE. This means that students explore different faiths at depth, and no one in the classroom is excluded. All humans ask question, and here is one teacher's planning for her 11 year olds' exploration of the year theme: 'Where do we belong?' She has taken – or possibly her students have chosen or even asked – 'What builds our community?' and she has planned an investigation around the Lancashire Field of Enquiry in reference to Sikhism. Thus this curriculum model addresses all the aspects of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development agenda.

Every 5 years the syllabus is reviewed and religious content is considered by SACRE faith members. Part of this collective and cohesive process entails a conference. The SACRE has been running a Youth Conference for all schools in the authority, including diocesan, for 10 years. This drawing together of students and members of faith communities to work on aspects of RE ensuring the heart of the syllabus, searching for meaning, includes open-minded experience of others' approaches to the questions that challenge us all. Conference titles reflect this intention, such as 'We're all the same – we're all different.' 'Knowing me, Knowing you – searching for the Spiritual' and 'Special Hopes for the Future – Learning About Ourselves Through Learning from Others'. This last

example came about from a conference where the Lancashire Youth SACRE, as it was called then, worked with two EBD schools who in turn worked with other different categories of special schools to create a conference that focused on RE and Special Needs. Again, SACRE members were pivotal in the planning and delivery especially our Hindu representatives who hosted the event. Feedback from pupils included: 'I will remember people meeting, learning, being challenged by other, different faiths - It made me reassess my perceptions of what 'disabled' is.'

And teachers wrote 'Wonderful to see able bodied and SEN kids working together. This enabled students in a safe environment to discover, create, share and grow. This was an unique opportunity to change, make friends, create hope – this was multicultural harmony.'

SACRE members are also generous in supporting the needs of teachers' professional development, whether it is answering questions at a Preston mosque or welcoming teachers and students to learn alongside each other at the Buddhist centre. Teachers are able to ask their questions, growing in confidence to support students' learning about others. Annual RE teacher conferences also have strong SACRE support.

Lancashire SACRE provides an authentic model of cohesion, actively committed to ensuring that through providing an effective, inclusive, well supported syllabus, its young people can explore ways to live in harmony with others.

Fiona Bruce

Thanks very much Helen, for that engaging and interesting presentation. And now I'd like to move on to Marius Felderhof's presentation.

How can an agreed syllabus for RE support cohesion? (1) Case study

Dr Marius Felderhof

First, let me thank you for the opportunity to speak to you on behalf of Birmingham Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education about this important subject. For those who care about religious education in schools we have a positive message to bring. Personally I come with the experience of working in the City of Birmingham where religious education is valued and supported. Our goal is to set out the reason for this.

We shall focus on five basic topics: the statutory framework; the processes of devising an agreed syllabus; the perceived purpose of RE; the content of RE; and the pedagogy of RE. The position we set out is indirectly critical of the stated remit of this inquiry in that you appear to have presumed that the primary means to better community relations is 'through higher levels of knowledge and understanding'. Of course, our position is not to suggest that ignorance is better, but to convey the message that the basis of RE's contribution to good community relations is more complex. Firstly, the RE contribution to community cohesion goes far beyond what happens in the classroom. Secondly, good RE in our judgement is interested in the whole person: in the pupil's mind, will, and affections; in the pupil's relationship to others; and in the skills that a fully human development demands (i.e. it goes beyond 'higher levels of knowledge and understanding'). From this more embracing concept of RE, good community cohesion follows naturally.

The statutory framework: Education law has stated that the broad and balanced curriculum in schools contributes to 'the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils... and of society'. How many schools are actively considering how they fulfil the expectation in law to be contributing to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of society? Perhaps most rely on doing so indirectly through the education of pupils. Religious education as distinct from all other subjects on the school curriculum has a unique advantage.

In the case of faith schools, the faith community is directly involved financially and in governance, determining the ethos of the school and the nature and character of the RE syllabus. This active and local involvement ensures that faith schools are never isolated ivory towers but responsive to local needs, expectations and ambitions.

In the case of community schools, RE once again provides a close link with the local community in that the RE syllabus has to be agreed by councillors, teachers, the Church of England and other Christian denominations and faith communities. There is a communal responsibility and interest in a key area of the school curriculum.

The significance of this statutory basis and its demand for agreement should not be underestimated as a source of interfaith cooperation and social solidarity, and as a means for strengthening the link between schools and society. At this point it is necessary to state our grave concern that the 2010 Academies Act appears to by-pass the need and processes of agreement on a syllabus for RE in Free Schools and Academies. In our judgement, the need for, and the processes of, agreement leads to our diverse faith communities overtly sharing their interest in the education of the young, to collective ownership of what is taught, to the outcomes of moderation and cohesion. The statutory basis for cooperation is extremely valuable. If it has not been exploited in other local authorities, this is largely due to a lack of political will and to educationalists' suspicion about this communal involvement (perhaps some might think of it as interference) in an area of the school curriculum – a reminder to all schools of the opportunities and requirements set out in the law would not go amiss.

The process of devising an agreed syllabus for RE: The law as devised by you or your predecessors, Mme Chair, required all local authorities to maintain a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) to advise it on the RE syllabus, resources and training of teachers, and on all other matters it sees fit. This is an important and ongoing statutory forum comprised of the four groups mentioned, councillors, teachers, Church of England, and other Christian denominations and other faith communities. It is a place where concerns may be shared and addressed, whether these concerns are about schooling or about other issues in society.

One of the tasks of a SACRE includes requiring a local authority to review its RE syllabus, which in any case it must do by law every five years. The legal mechanism for reviewing and, if necessary, devising a new or updated syllabus is through the establishment of an Agreed Syllabus Conference, which shares the same structure as a SACRE. After the publication of the Non-Statutory National Framework for RE by the QCA and DfES in 2004, and with a growing awareness of the opportunities offered by the internet, the Birmingham SACRE required the local authority to review its syllabus.

In 2005, Cllr Les Lawrence as the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families convened the ASC under the chairmanship of Mr Guy Hordern. I was appointed by Cllr Lawrence to act as the drafting secretary to the conference on the basis of being a theologian with an interest in RE, and was duly seconded to the City by the University of Birmingham. Under the instigation of Mr Hordern, our initial step was to visit the then bishop of Birmingham, Rt Rev John Sentamu, the then archbishop of Birmingham, Rt Rev. Vincent Nichols, and the Faith Leaders Group of Birmingham to meet inter alia with the leaders of the Buddhist, Free churches, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh communities. The purpose was to explain our hopes and ambitions for RE and to request the nomination to the ASC of their most able representatives. Teacher unions and professional associations were also asked to make their nominations to the ASC. And throughout the duration of the conference we met regularly with Ms Jackie Hughes in charge of the City's school improvement service and with Cllr Lawrence

The conference met over a period of two years in which drafts of the syllabus were tested and criticised by a scrutiny committee before detailed examination by the conference as a whole. The agreed syllabus was presented to the City Council in June 2008 where it was adopted unanimously with cross party support. The introduction of the syllabus to schools was achieved through briefing meetings with head teacher and RE teachers across the city. The creation and design of a website and a DVD was intended to ensure community and parental

knowledge of the syllabus and give them the opportunity to respond. All these details are set out only to demonstrate how the process itself was designed to ensure the close involvement of the wider community in the collective interest of supporting the education of young people and the cohesion of our society.

For information, the Faith Leaders Group in Birmingham first met as a result of an initiative of the late Rabbi Tann following the outrage of 9/11. The Group has met regularly since 2001 and takes an active interest in Religious Education so that the chairs of SACRE and myself have been invited back frequently to brief them on developments in RE. They have lobbied the government on the 2010 DfE Guidance for RE and have invited, via Bishop David Urquhart, officials from the DfE and schools ministers to Birmingham to ensure that we have the very best of RE.

The perceived purpose of RE: The late Professor John Hick used to say that the essence of all religions is to be de-centred from the self. If this is the case, it cannot be the goal of religions to be interested in themselves i.e. their primary interest cannot be the promotion of the study of religion. Educationally, too, we note that the law expects the broad and balanced curriculum to serve the development of pupils and society. As a consequence we believe that religious education is different from religious studies, though the two are frequently confused. Religious education is essentially forward looking and seeks to develop pupils and the community, using the values, practices and traditions of the various religions that will support and enhance the spiritual and moral development of the young and of society. This demands a degree of courage for it requires us to set out what we believe this spiritual and moral development entails. The inter-religious and educational discussions we have held have led us to set out 24 dispositions that we hope to cultivate in the young with the resources that our religious traditions have given us. There is no moral relativism here. We say this is what we all value. There is no better ground for social cohesion than to state openly our common set of values. In cultivating justice, compassion, hope and so forth, different religious traditions may draw on different narratives or practices and rituals but in our common framework they are now seen as complementing each other.

The content of RE: We have liberated teachers to use their professional judgement to select material according to set principles. The range of potential religious material is vast, but teaching time is finite, teachers' knowledge is finite and pupils' capacity is finite. The selection of material is in part set by law ('in the main Christian' qualitatively speaking), in part by the ages and aptitudes of children, in part by the family background of children, in part by the nature of our community and by the objectives of broadening and deepening the spiritual and moral development of pupils. There can therefore be no one common, or core, set of content for all, though we have provided model schemes of work and lesson plans on our website. We believe community cohesion is best served by real clarity about our shared purpose in teaching RE against which everything is to be judged.

The pedagogy of RE: One distinctive feature of the teaching of RE in Birmingham is that we wish to avoid treating the young as if they were mere observers of religions, like going to the zoo to see the many rare species on show, possibly on the verge of extinction. Rather we wish to see them as agents, or as subjects, challenged to live in a certain way, to become a certain kind of person, to create a certain kind of society in which they are expected to participate for the common good. The methodology best suited for such teaching is participatory, self-involving, inter-active, expressive, and creative; one that values the past while being oriented to the future.

Evidence heard and confirmed by the City's Scrutiny Committee on Social Cohesion and Community Safety confirms the value set by the City's RE curriculum. If I may quote verbatim from paragraphs 5.2.12 and 5.2.13; they observed and stated:

Agreement on the dispositions, which has already drawn the Faith Traditions together, will also draw children and young people together by voluntary association on the basis of the inherent merit of the dispositions rather than by compulsion.

They also stated:

We think this a very positive example of learning which should be encouraged and we look forward to receiving further information demonstrating the success of this approach. We are concerned however, that the implementation of Academies and Free Schools may result in approaches like this being lost, as they do not need to conform to local authority rules and procedures. We would like to see these types of schools actively support and promote the SACRE work and resources.

We ask you to seriously consider whether the course set by the government that sidelines local authorities in education is helpful to RE and to the school cohesion that it can bring when it is embraced so enthusiastically at the local level. We also ask you to consider whether the RE Review of the REC has set the right course if it is used to determine the local provision of RE. Thank you very much for listening.

Fiona Bruce

Thank you Marius for that very thought-provoking and profound insight into your experience of an agreed syllabus for RE. I'd now like to introduce Patricia Hannam to give the second case study.

How can an agreed syllabus for RE support cohesion? (2) Case study

Patricia Hannam

This evidence is based upon my experience as County Inspector Adviser for Religious Education (RE) and History in Hampshire since 2009 during a time of revision of the County Agreed Syllabus, subsequently published as *Living Difference Revised 2011*, building on the work of those who have pursued excellence in RE in Hampshire before me, particularly Clive Erricker and Judith Lowndes, the architects of *Living Difference* in 2004. I have experience as an educator in both informal and formal RE contexts and have a particular interest and expertise in classroom enquiry in RE.

The importance of strong partnership between local authorities and voluntary and faith groups on matters of social cohesion, as evidenced by the existence of these APPG sessions, has been recognised for many years. This has been further emphasised with the inclusion of 'religion and belief' in the Equality Act, where there is an even greater impetus for councils to work in partnership with voluntary/community and faith-based organisations to achieve mutual policy goals, service delivery and other social objectives. Within the field of public education, we hold dear the priority of continuing improvement of educational outcomes for all children. The Hampshire Interfaith Network (HIN) was established within the Culture, Communities and Rural Affairs Department of the Local Authority, and each year promotes an interfaith calendar, with paintings contributed from children and young people undertaken usually as part of RE in Hampshire schools, as well as a high profile interfaith lecture. A successful RE based community cohesion project took place between 2007 -2009 and Youth Voice to SACRE was established in 2012.

Although the links with RE and cohesion are appreciated by those concerned with these and other ventures, the theoretical underpinning and extent of the positive contribution of this is not always made explicit or fully understood. In this paper I explore briefly three key questions first in relation to the concept of 'difference', second into the purpose of education and thirdly problematizing the concept of religion itself. This is in order to make the theoretical connections more explicit and to do this in such a way to enable the appreciation of the practical contribution of RE to cohesion in a plural democracy more fully. I want to highlight how a well-constructed locally agreed syllabus, in being both educational as well as congruent with the several ways of giving account of what it means to be religious, can contribute to the fulfilling key educational purposes for education

in a plural democracy such as ours. I want raise for discussion with you here in my short presentation how a high quality religious education, such as that nurtured by the Hampshire Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education *Living Difference Revised 2011*, can contribute to a good education, which by definition in a democracy will necessarily be interested in inclusion and social cohesion.

A critical question for those of us who live in England today has to do with the fact that we live in a world in which the idea of a universal truth has become problematized. The point is not so much that we live in a plural democracy, for there has of course in reality always been plurality, but what has changed is the way in which this plurality is perceived and approached. What is open for discussion now is whether it is possible to consider plurality in a neutral way and one way to look at this is to say that 'what is at stake is the distinction between diversity and difference'. *Living Difference Revised 2011* has chosen to continue using the term 'difference' in the title of the syllabus. This is because the differences which lie between us as human beings are not merely cultural; we are not merely diverse varieties of the same humanity. If we are to be able instead to take difference seriously, we have to give up the idea that understanding difference has anything primarily to do with knowledge or that it has as its first concern the transmission of information about diverse, and in some ways generalised ways of life. To move to a position educationally where we can take difference seriously is an educational move which is far more of an ethical than epistemological step. However this is not to say that the teaching of some knowledge is unimportant, rather the opposite, but it needs to be contextualised and exposed to enquiry and dialogue.

This is why a religious education syllabus must first have educational purposes. Education is complex and contested; however it is in general agreed that education involves some change, that the teacher is involved to some extent in bringing that change about and that in a democracy this has to be undertaken without coercion. Clarifying educational purpose is likely to be complex, however in brief I highlight what I regard as three very important aspects (see for example Biesta 2009). The first is what can be called 'intellectual purpose', or 'qualification purpose' or the area of education which is concerned to introduce the child into the intellectual history of human kind. In general, this purpose is marked by concern for academic achievement, GCSE, A level and further. A local authority agreed syllabus for RE needs to be congruent with intellectual advancement and one which does so in a way that takes difference seriously. A second purpose for education is in relation to identity and the social and civic life of the nation. The third purpose for education I want to advance here is what Biesta has called 'subjectification'. I understand subjectification here extremely concisely to be the opposite of objectification and my understanding of the term education is that it is something that resists objectification of the child. To put it simply each child, as unique and quite irreplaceable, must lie at the heart of our educational endeavour, something realised as significant since the earliest formulations of *Living Difference*.

The Hampshire Agreed Syllabus *Living Difference Revised 2011* has embedded first a process which is deeply educational. It does not prescribe first the 'stuff' to be taught or learned. It is an educational process, a process which advances intellectual engagement, opening educational environments where children and young people can consider the world in which they live. It is also a process which enables the subjectification of the unique and irreplaceable child and in so doing can also resist the objectification of what it means to be human. The Agreed Syllabus for RE in Hampshire *Living Difference Revised 2011* systematically embeds an enquiry pedagogy as recommended in the most recent Ofsted Report on RE (2013) with the intention of enabling children and young people progress in 'Interpreting religion in relation to Human experience' the attainment target for RE in Hampshire. *Living Difference Revised 2011* focusses on an enquiry into concepts, concepts that are central to all human experience such as Justice or love, and also those more specialist concepts which are considered to be related to religion in general such as worship and prayer, as well as those linked to particular 'religions' such as Ummah, Sangha or Church. In addition to this what is meant by the term enquiry has been spelt out as being open ended and exploratory.

Training is made available for RE teachers in the skills of philosophical enquiry and is seen as one of the factors in raising educational outcomes at in GCSE RS. The SACRE has a Monitoring Sub-Group meeting once each term, some weeks before the full SACRE, to review data and Ofsted reports and such like to keep track of the well-being of RE in the county. In 2013 of the 3,575 candidates who sat full course GCSE, 79.2% achieved A*-C. This is 7 points above the national average with 35.5% of those achieving the elusive A*/A grade. In the same examination period 3,414 students sat GCSE short course achieving 6% above the national average. A teacher survey in 2008 revealed that most primary teachers responding to the survey felt prepared to plan for progression and assessment, we assume that this means they feel confident about what they are doing and why, the purpose of RE is clear. In the 2012/13 survey this figure was maintained for primary schools and also more secondary teachers respond that they are confident in planning and assessing. SACRE is very pleased with these results which are believed at least in part to be because of the pedagogy in the Agreed Syllabus. *Living Difference Revised 2011* it is believed, is contributing to advancing the intellectual achievement of all children since a narrower gap is also observed for children in receipt of free school meals sitting GCSE full course RE as compared to the gap for some other subjects. This is especially marked where teachers are known to be confident with the ethos and practice of our enquiry pedagogy. It is possible to infer from the triangulated evidence consisting of the GCSE results and teacher responses together with the findings of our own reports that, over time, a strong supported pedagogy in RE raises education outcomes for all children. This is important because a positive educational outcome for all children is an element of social cohesion.

Although a locally agreed syllabus for religious education must be educational, that is not sufficient, since we also need to spell that out in what ways it is a *religious* education. In responding to this I first want problematize religion. This is unavoidable, since in a world where many things are essentialised and objectified, religion also risks being objectified. As a nation we are confused by religion and it seems that too often, too narrow assumptions of what counts as religion and what counts as living a religious life prevail. The debate about whether to include 'non-religious' belief and humanism for example is also current. Through discussing the complexity of what religion is and can be and hence what it could mean to be religious, I want to reveal something significant about religious education and the contribution it has to make to social cohesion. I propose therefore that there are at least three ways in which religion itself can be conceptualised.

The first is where religion is conceptualised as propositional belief. Here religion is conceived as a set of propositions and to be religious, is to subscribe to a set of propositional beliefs, here belief is the core concept. The insertion of 'non-religious belief' or even humanism as a set of beliefs perhaps fits here, if humanism is conceived of as a belief set. However not all religions correspond to that account. To only conceive of religion as propositional belief is to miss some important points and risks inserting a particular bias into the discussion in religious education, and possibly inhibiting a more rounded intellectual exploration in the classroom of religion and what it means to live a religious life. For another way in which religion is conceptualised is as tradition. Religion in this way is better explained in terms of what people do; what it means to be religious in this way of conceptualising religion is in terms of every day actions in the world and a religious person so conceived may hold no particular propositional beliefs. Yet a third conceptualisation of religion is as existential. Here religion is neither about sets of propositional beliefs, nor necessarily about day to day actions. Where religion is existential it is about being, about existence. Here to be religious is to live with a kind of awareness, a kind of alertness. It is found in for example in the poetry of Gitanjali and Rumi and in the writings of Thomas Merton. Religion conceived as existential, is a way of being. It impacts on the way a religious person so conceived lives, but is not reducible to a set of propositional beliefs or understood solely as tradition or culture. For some people in some places there are overlaps, but appreciating the distinctions are helpful in appreciating the fullness of what counts as religion and what it means to live a religious life. An enquiry approach such as that in *Living Difference Revised 2011* has the capacity to open up the discussion about the complex nature of religion and the different ways it may be possible to live a religious life.

A religious education determined locally, shared by a wide number of schools, will be able to represent religion in a way that is rooted in real and local examples, and make educational opportunities where all students can respond to the variety of different ways of conceptualising religion opening up a discussion, an enquiry, into the many ways of living a religious life. A locally agreed syllabus, such as *Living Difference Revised 2011* well implemented will be alert to the real life situations of the variety of lived religious lives in the particular community. Evidence for this can be seen in Hampshire by an active and representative SACRE as well as schools' involvement with local faith groups. SACRE has co-opted a humanist member, and includes alongside concepts of the key religious traditions in Hampshire, humanist concepts into the agreed syllabus. We have a protocol for the inclusion of new SACRE members and a constitution that requires us to think about what it means to be religious when receiving applications for SACRE membership. A locally agreed syllabus will be able to take seriously the different manifestations of religion in the particular context of the children and will take for granted the need to be responsive to the particular issues raised by these groups. It will be able to deal with contentious issues through the strength of the teacher's confidence with enquiry.

Regional hubs of SACREs such as the one being established in the south central region in authorities around Hampshire, as well as NASACRE as a national networking organisation, will have the capacity to coordinate and ensure good understanding across a wider locality. There seems to be a danger in the fracturing of an education system into individual schools, or to chains of schools with fragile lines of accountability to the locality as well as to the nation; this danger lies in both the loss of a rootedness in the *shared* locality, and also the *shared* nature of the nation. The fracturing of the teaching of RE risks the spectre of sectarianism; a locally agreed syllabus and network of support and advice (such as through NASACRE and the REC) enables religious education to stay relevant and local as well as at the same time to be aware of the wider national and international picture. A nationally determined religious education risks essentialising religion, reducing religion either to generalised sets of propositional beliefs or otherwise generalised as: 'all xxxs do xxx' or 'xxxs believe xxx'.

In conclusion, a local authority agreed syllabus for religious education needs first to be educational. *Living Difference Revised 2011* aims to open educational spaces where educational purposes can be fulfilled. Importantly for our discussion here it is also by definition able to contribute to social cohesion, and there is evidence that where well implemented it also does this. *Living Difference Revised 2011* does this also by advancing the subjectification of the child, by placing the child at the centre of the enquiry. Erricker has written much in the past about the importance of placing the child in the centre of our religious educational concern. This seeks not to promote individualism but rather by being focussed on the uniqueness and irreplaceability of each child and young person and the classroom and wider community. A locally agreed syllabus for RE, has a special contribution to make to this because it is able to be responsive to the different and unique ways of being religious in the locality. A locally agreed syllabus can contribute to social cohesion and avoid the spectre of sectarianism through taking difference seriously and avoiding the essentialisation and objectification of religion. A locally agreed syllabus, well implemented with a supported pedagogy such as *Living Difference Revised 2011*, will be well placed to represent religion as lived in different ways by religious children and adults in that community and beyond, and better placed to advance dialogue and interested enquiry across and within the community.

Questions

Fiona Bruce

Thank you, Patricia. There is now an opportunity for the audience to ask questions for the first three speakers.

Sarah Smalley

Thank you very much to all the speakers. All three of you have given a very compelling account of working in your SACREs and local conferences. It is clear that you all have strong programmes of training to support teachers, supply materials and so on. What do you think the future holds given the academisation programme? Does it seem to really cut across the possibility of SACREs having a continuing strong impact because schools that do become academies or free schools don't any longer come within the remit of SACREs? And how do you see these things coexisting in the future, and impacting on the work of the SACREs?

Marius Felderhof

This is one of our major concerns: that the 2010 Academies Act is undermining the influence of local authorities, giving them less incentive to fund SACREs and so on. We would be well served if we really focused on the impact of the 2010 Academies Act. I think the Secretary of State should be doing this, looking into perhaps writing into the funding contracts of academies and free schools that they still need to adhere to local authorities. At the moment this is undermining the interest that local authorities have in funding SACREs and conferences. If SACREs have no responsibility for schools, why should money be spent on them? I think the 2010 Academies Act is for me one of the main issues confronting RE.

Patricia Hannam

I agree with much of what Marius has said; the potential for damaging the capacity of a SACRE is high. However, as an education officer I have some responsibility for monitoring all schools and have access to data for all schools in the LA which has very strong children's services. A SACRE monitoring meeting took place this morning – the SACRE has a monitoring subgroup that meets some weeks before the SACRE and we are looking at all schools RS GCSE data. In our local authority, almost no primary schools have become academies, and in the secondary sector, of seventy schools around thirty have become academies so far – some academy converters and some within academy groups. The rest have chosen not to at the moment – the attraction has diminished. SACRE has decided to celebrate GCSE successes of all schools regardless of academy status – however a slightly different letter will be sent if they're an academy rather than a county school. I suspect the picture will be quite different in different parts of the country.

Helen Harrison

I agree with many of the things my colleagues have said. Lancashire is similar to Hampshire, in having an unusually low proportion of schools moving to academy status. This actually has funding implications for the SACRE because the local authority has responsibility for funding local schools and the SACRE. Creating an agreed syllabus is a very expensive business, so if you're a school that has opted out then the local authority thinks why should you benefit? Lancashire does say to academies that they have to buy any resources that the LA produces. NASACRE has also produced a document on how academies and free schools should work with SACREs and *vice versa*, which may be useful for many people here.

Guy Hordern

To augment what my colleague Marius has said, there is general evidence that when Birmingham schools become academies they tend to continue to teach on a voluntary basis the locally agreed syllabus. The scrutiny committee has said that this refers to the inherent merit of the locally agreed syllabus; while an academy might not have to teach it, it might continue to do so voluntarily. It might also be worth adding that a series or cluster of faith schools in the Birmingham area has adopted the locally agreed syllabus philosophy as a philosophy for all of their teaching. This shows that a well-knit group of people operating through academies can bring influence to bear.

Joyce Miller

I'd like to ask a question about the funding of SACREs. Marius has referred to academies, and that they may take on an agreed syllabus but that there is also a lack of input and so on. Those of us in AREIAC know how many people have lost their jobs, and local authorities in many cases don't have the support that they did; there is pressure in terms of their own budgets. I worry how much money and what quality of support will be provided to local authorities and agreed syllabuses. Are there any comments or ideas that the speakers or audience have, which might help with this in the future?

Patricia Hannam

One option is for local authorities to team up. The case that I spoke about is an agreed syllabus not just for Hampshire but also for Portsmouth and Southampton. We are already considering the next review cycle because Portsmouth and Southampton are small Unitary Authorities; they are expected to give contributions to this in terms of time and expertise. Additionally we have been establishing a 'Hub' of SACREs – a joint meeting which brings together twelve different local authorities at the moment. We will be considering at our next meeting in March how we might work together to help each other more.

Marius Felderhof

I'd like to add something about Birmingham. Birmingham has been one of the most generous local authorities in funding its SACRE. Now the problem is that we don't know what the budget is, because of spending cuts on local authorities. We've had a very sympathetic local authority in the past, and we are trying to advise them to maintain that reputation by continuing the funding. But the role this has played in community cohesion is not to be underestimated. RE is fundamental in bringing people together, and this underpins RE in the City.

Joyce Miller

I'd like to ask John Keast to explain the hub concept for us.

John Keast

One of the recommendations of the RE Review carried out by the REC is to look at the viability of setting up regional hubs for the purposes of continuing professional development and the support of teachers of RE in our schools. I think that everyone knows that the initial teacher training system is very much changing and, in addition, the opportunities that exist for serving RE teachers to get professional development have been greatly reduced. There are many reasons why this is the case, and it was the Review's view that we can best make progress in putting this right if there is cooperation between the different bodies which have involvement in that through working as a hub. There was a meeting last week to try and take that recommendation forward.

Joyce Miller

Many thanks, John, and everyone for their thought-provoking questions. I'd now like to hand over to Aliya Azam. Please ensure that you all have a copy of her brochure, which Aliya has arranged and her community has very generously supported. The next three speakers are all going to talk about very specific projects and the work they have done, in Aliya's case in the local community. There will then be talks about a national project funded by the previous government on preventing extremism, and then a local authority initiative. Welcome, Aliya.

How RE in one faith school can improve relations within and beyond its community

Aliya Azam

We are all painfully aware of the reality highlighted by media coverage of “Sunni-Shi’a tensions” in the countries of the Middle East and in Pakistan. Our aim is to educate pupils about both traditions within the family of Islam and highlight the grounds on which both lived predominantly in harmony over the last 1400 years. This is where RE can play an important role in promoting understanding and mutual respect of the Sunni and Shi’a perspectives within the worldwide Islamic community. This element of our work is highlighted on page 4 of the brochure. Note that the red headscarves are Sunni pupils from the Mulberry School and the white headscarves are our own girls. Around the world, there are attacks on Shi’a people.

This tension has the potential to spread. Young people are infected with this mentality through social media; therefore it spreads into incidents such as bullying and aggressive talk in schools. We must re-double our efforts to resist this through education. The Al Khoei Foundation has received reports of an increasing number of sectarian bullying in schools to the extent of one child threatening a Shi’a child that when he grows up he would ‘chop his head off!’ Just a few moments ago a colleague Maha Ridha mentioned how an incident was reported to the Al Khoei Foundation by a nursery teacher, where she had seen one of the pupils in the state-funded nursery drawing a circle, and with the pencil hitting it and saying ‘this is what I will do to the Shi’a.’ There are very dramatic goings on in these settings.

Before we go further let us ask: What kind of a society do we want for 21st century Britain?

None of us has a blueprint; we are all feeling our way in this new developing situation but there are some foundation stones on which to build which are shared by faith communities and of no faith as well:

- Justice
- Equality
- Mutual respect
- Compassion
- Concern for the disadvantaged
- Human dignity from birth to death
- Freedom of conscience and religion
- Openness to listen to and understand one another
- The joy of celebrating our common humanity

There is joy in celebrating our common humanity: by being alongside one another in things that matter to my friends, neighbours and strangers; by struggling together against racism, oppression, poverty, social injustice, fear, ignorance and anything that degrades human beings. All these are powerful themes in Islam and thus in our Religious Education. By exploring them we aim to underpin an Islamic rationale for common action.

The booklet I’ve given out today illustrates in detail Al Sadiq and Al Zahra Schools’ experience of Community Cohesion for the past three years illustrated chronologically.

How do we tackle the following dilemma: preserving identity and joining the wider, stronger community? We must encourage a sense of curiosity in both communities, to ask questions, to overcome prejudices, to learn where the boundaries are that the wider, stronger society accepts.

That there is only one God is a fundamental belief in Islam and other monotheistic religions.

The unity of God is the essential foundation for the unity of humanity and the whole of the created order, thus we aim to promote:

- Empathetic understanding of our own and others' spiritual journeys
- Exploring the variety of ways in which God has guided human communities – both the diversity within our own faith and the riches of other faiths – to learn diversity in unity in the service and worship of God
- Accepting human responsibility as custodians and stewards of the creation; thus ecology and the environment

We all have a duty to increase community cohesion by promoting a greater public understanding of Islam in order to break down the suspicion and misunderstanding that can result from ignorance and also counteract the distortion of the Islamic faith by promoting human rights and challenging extremist narratives in the classroom across the curriculum and particularly in RE.

RE requires and builds knowledge and understanding of these areas of common human experience, and promotes the affective domain both for students personally and empathetically. The Muslim community must try to engage in community cohesion in a transparent manner. That transparency must be understandable to those from other communities. They must feel confident in showing that sense of curiosity, asking questions which might be hard to answer but, in the end, will lead to mutual understanding. The new context in which we live challenges us to find new ways of organising our communities, finding appropriate forms of leadership and empowering a new generation.

RE strengthens and develops the faith identity of students so that they can learn to differentiate between Islam and their inherited family culture. This equips them better to integrate the principles of Islam into our new shared multi-faith British culture. Page 3 illustrates: We encourage and lead by example in the commemoration of national symbolic occasions, e.g. Remembrance Sunday. This year we held an interfaith walk marking Remembrance Sunday

In 2012 Al Sadiq and Al Zahra Schools in Brent were awarded 'Best School' by the Three Faiths Forum for their intercultural initiatives. Please refer to page 10 of the booklet. The Three Faiths Forum works to create understanding between different communities: 'It has been an honour for us to be involved with 3FF whose work is so desperately needed – on the higher levels, and on every level.'

I do not have time to explain all the outreach events that we do however by looking at this slide you can see the variety of organisations with which we work.

In conclusion community cohesion is central to Islamic thinking. We are all members of one human family under God, to whom we pray every day: 'You only do we worship and you only do we ask for help.'

Fiona Bruce

Thank you very much, Aliya. And now we will hear from Alastair Ross.

Can and should RE help tackle extremism? The *REsilience Project*

Alastair Ross

Thank you, Fiona. I'm going to talk today about the REsilience project: REsilience is a self evaluation, planning and training opportunity for teachers of RE. The programme is school based and tailored to individual needs. Its purpose is to help increase teachers' confidence when addressing contentious issues, particularly where such issues are sometimes used to justify extremism and violence.

Firstly I'd like to point out that I do not think that RE is a panacea for community cohesion, but I do think that it has an important role to play, and one that should not be missed. There are three crucial words here: informs; moderates; and integrate.

Firstly, RE informs students about religious beliefs, practices and controversies. In doing so it empowers them to make their own judgments and to reject stereotyping, propaganda and gossip. There is a well-known phrase that 'knowledge is power', but it can also be disempowering. It can neutralise stereotypes.

Secondly, RE moderates. It checks out against a wider reference point the views and assumptions which students come to school with – from local and home cultures. It has a role in exposing students to alternative perspectives. Perhaps that might lead to the more usual meaning of moderation (i.e. toning down), so someone who perceives Islam for instance in a distorted way can have that view tested.

Third, RE also helps to integrate young people. I don't mean integration in the sense of conformity. To me it does not mean making everyone the same, but sharing a sense of common purpose and wellbeing, whereby young people of all cultures, faiths and backgrounds can explore diversity in a 'safe' space. Schools have a role to do this in general, but RE in particular has this role.

That explains briefly by way of an introduction why I think the RE role is critical.

Now let's have a look at REsilience. One of the challenges that we've seen is that teachers of RE, not all of whom are specialists, have the competence and confidence to challenge views that may come from extremism. Those two concepts were behind the initial concept of REsilience – the play between RE and resilience is in its title. This resulted from conversations between the RE community and the previous government, but was picked up again in a slightly different form by the present government. REsilience is a mentor-based CPD programme aimed to help teachers cope with controversy and extremism in the classroom.

Those involved were very keen that it was not labelled as something to tackle Islamism, but rather as something about all kinds of extremism. There was no one-size-fits-all approach, but a general set of tools to confront extremism in whatever form.

REsilience included any religious belief, practice or attitude that encourages, inspires or condones violence. Of course – there is a silly phrase that 'sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me' – we all recognised that violence can be verbal and not just physical.

The aims of the project were to contribute to minimising the development of violent extremism out of religious extremism through: developing the knowledge and skills of teachers of religious education so that they are better able to promote community cohesion and respect for difference, and to confront and address controversial, dangerous and divisive issues that arise, including those related to religion, ethnicity and negative stereotyping.'

The project eventually engaged 112 secondary schools and some 30 others. School mentors would sit down with the head of RE and aid them in conducting a self-evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the department in tackling extremism, after which a strategic plan would be drawn up. The take-up was disappointing for a number of reasons. However the reactions of those who did take part were very good, with reports that the project:

- raised teachers' cultural awareness and knowledge;
- improved their confidence in teaching contentious issues, particularly through managing discussion in the classroom;

- increased their understanding of the nature, causes and consequences of diversity within and between religions;
- helped them identify resources, including speakers;
- increased their confidence in taking pupils to visit places of worship;
- increased their knowledge about extremist views and violent behaviour associated with religions and their confidence to teach these topics;

There were also significant challenges. The first of these was embedding: how do you embed this confidence and competence in the longer term and across the whole school, so that each teacher will challenge attitudes like homophobia? The second was money: some of the pilot projects were successful only because we were able to provide them for free. Ownership was also an issue: REsilience worked best when senior leaders were involved and committed to the project and its aims. Prioritisation: the project was only really successful in schools where these issues were on the agenda, politically and in terms of statements from bodies like Ofsted. Finally practicality: teachers needed schemes of work, resources, and guidance in the classroom, and there was a question of how practical these strategies were in providing these over the long term.

There is a whole area of potential for confident and inspiring work projects. I think REsilience was a great start. It addressed an issue which will not go away, and has been with our country for a long time. There are problems and benefits to the project, and these things we will want to develop in the future.

With regards to what the future holds, there are things which we will need to develop and keep in mind. We have been developing curricular materials – we have developed a ‘Gateway’ which addresses all sorts of issues, but teaching material could be developed further. Secondly we must be aware of Ofsted – when Ofsted speaks, schools jump. There’s no doubt that if this is looked at, how schools respond to community cohesion will depend on Ofsted’s current agenda. It is not focusing on community cohesion currently, but SMSC, but if this is monitored systematically then community cohesion might rise up the agenda.

Finally, how we engage with local and national faith communities and diverse cultures in a sustained way. Real engagement with this will also contribute to how cohesion can be facilitated.

How can learning outside the classroom in RE promote better community relations? A local authority initiative

David Raven-Hill

The purpose of this presentation is:

- to explore the context which led to the setting up of a local authority initiative involving faith communities, to bring Learning Outside the Classroom to RE, with the aim of promoting community relations.
- to outline some of the challenges faced and how these were addressed
- to consider whether elements of such an approach might be transferable.

I’d like to begin with a word of caution: The recent Ofsted Report, ‘RE – Realising the Potential’ (2013), begins by outlining the importance and role of RE, including in the promotion of social cohesion. However, such a task is often complex and multi-faceted, as demonstrated by this quote from Cuban:

Unlike the way things happen in fairy tales, school reform requires more than a kiss to convert a frog into a stunning prince

And yet the context within which a Learning Outside the Classroom initiative was developed is significant. Kirklees is similar to the area Alastair works in, in terms of diversity and so on. It is a Local Authority in West Yorkshire, with Huddersfield, Dewsbury and Batley the main towns, surrounded by the 3 towns and cities that experienced the 'race riots' over a decade ago – Bradford, Oldham and Leeds. There is significant EDL presence. It is a religiously diverse local authority, where all major faiths apart from Judaism are represented, with significant populations and places of worship. How could this rich resource be used to both enhance teaching and learning in RE whilst also promoting community relations? How could we possibly use this resource to develop a project that was RE rich and yet also addressed areas of cohesion?

I came into role as an RE and PSHE adviser at a time when there was unrest in neighbouring cities – when there felt a need to consider cohesion from a pragmatic and philosophical perspective.

As LA RE Officer, I discussed this with our SACRE and a plan was formulated to set up a network of existing places of worship across the borough, each sufficiently large to accommodate a class of pupils with a learning space separate from the sacred space. We would set up these 'Faith Centres' as part of an organisation we named 'Interfaith Kirklees'; we would provide a series of interactive experiences for half-day class visits and train volunteer hosts from each faith community to engage pupils in active learning. To create Interfaith Kirklees with a strong and broad sense of ownership, the strategy and direction of the organisation would be determined by a Steering Committee, comprising representatives of the centres, the hosts, SACRE and officers.

To make this happen, funding was required. As local authority policy at that time (2004) was to refrain from supporting faith-related initiatives, and we were adamant that although there were cultural nuances the project was ostensibly faith-based, the SACRE put together a bid, and successfully submitted it in partnership with Kirklees Racial Equality Council to the Home Office's Positive Images stream. A project manager was appointed to set up the initiative. The work involved close liaison with the faith communities in agreeing which places of worship would be suitable as Faith Centres. Seven such centres were eventually selected - two Christian, two Muslim, one Sikh, one Hindu and one Buddhist to reflect the demographic spread across the borough. Work began to develop learning packages for school visits and to train the faith-member host volunteers.

By 2006 Interfaith Kirklees was ready to invite schools to visit the centres and in that first year 3,500 pupils made a half-day visit. Recognising the potential of the project, the local authority's Schools Forum – who had seen that we were concerned with critical, enquiry-based learning, provided funding to allow replacement of the project manager, whose job had been accomplished, with a teacher whose remit was to work with the centre hosts and lead the learning by developing high quality packages and experiences. Numbers of visits have risen steadily and by the time in 2012 when schools were required to start paying for visits, approximately 6,500 pupils were visiting the centres each year. Positive comments from teachers, hosts and pupils provide qualitative feedback.

Thinking about the kinds of challenges we were faced with, and what we did: we identified three main challenges:

- Reliance on funding. We were very fortunate to have been successful in the original bid, but schools now have to choose whether to opt in and buy one of the local authority packages for a visit. Because the centres value the initiative and because schools value the learning experience, visits are continuing, but time will tell how successful this will be in the long-run.
- Issues of ownership. There was a desire to not only ensure that the Steering Committee made strategic decisions about the leadership of Interfaith Kirklees, but also that the hosts felt integral to the visit and some degree of ownership. Their training was critical, and their ideas were incorporated into packages. As Lao Tsu said: 'When the work of the leader is done the people say "we did it ourselves"'. We tried to capture this.

- Issues of complexity and partiality. This was the most challenging. By choosing particular centres you are by definition leaving some out, and we were concerned about how this would be viewed. The fact that Anglican churches had been chosen to be the Christian Faith Centres or that the Muslim Centres did not represent the full Deobandi, Salafi and spiritual Barelwi denominational range practised in Kirklees? How would it be viewed that the Buddhist Centre, aligned to Britain's fastest growing Buddhist group, the New Kadampa Tradition, had for many years been in serious dispute with the Dalai Lama who has questioned the status of the particular Buddha, known in this tradition, as 'the dharma protector'?

We were also concerned about how the stirring up of undercurrents of prejudice would be viewed and acted upon. On a number of occasions, parents objected to their children visiting a Faith Centre – particularly the Muslim Faith Centre, 'because they might get bombed!'

These were issues that required much discussion.

So to some of the solutions we came up with. It was accepted that the learning would be essentially phenomenological, teachers and pupils encouraged to focus on what they experienced at the particular centre 'here and now'. By acknowledging this and posing critical questions we encouraged guarding against such generalisations as, 'All Muslims are...'

The network worked with the Bishop of Pontefract to help set up Kirklees Faiths Forum – an organisation formed to encourage dialogue between all faiths and denominations, to act as a conduit and on whose Board sat a member of the Interfaith Kirklees Steering Group and *vice versa*. It has also set up parental Faith Centre visits prior to their child's visit, with a view to dispelling myths and challenging stereotypes.

A critical, enquiry-based approach to RE was encouraged in schools and at the Centres. For some of the secondary school visits to the Buddhist Centre, the sensitive Dalai Lama issue was incorporated into the learning package, with students encouraged to engage in critical thinking to explore this. Similarly, training for RE teachers has focused on developing outwardly from a phenomenological approach.

The recent Ofsted RE report states that RE is at its best when an enquiry model is placed at the heart of learning - broadening out from the particular. The encouragement of critical enquiry has been fundamental to the Interfaith Kirklees experience in encouraging a balanced approach and a broadening from the particular experience. If Learning Outside the Classroom provides a relevant context for engaging communities and fostering community relations, this is essential.

It would be arrogant and wrong to suggest that the frog has been turned into a prince, but I do believe our initiative has encouraged something of a paradigm shift amongst faith communities and many parents and has enthused many schools.

My own suggestion is to ask which elements of this initiative could be transferrable to other contexts and areas. Thus we might discuss how to embed a critical-enquiry based approach without compromising community relations or the appropriateness of the promotion of the phenomenological.

I'd like to conclude with an infant child's response following questioning from one of the hosts at the South Kirklees Christian Faith Centre:

Host: *If God was an animal, what might Christians say he might be? Can you explain why?*

Ethan Roy: *I think God is a big blue whale. He is big and a whale is big. And whales have lots of things that love them called barnacles and they cling to them always. That's like God and his people cos they love him too.*

Fiona Bruce

Many thanks, David. And now there is an opportunity in the closing few minutes for any further questions.

Questions

Dr Hojjat Ramzy

I'd like to direct a question to Aliya. Sadly you were talking of sectarian issues in some schools, with bullying and so on. There are solutions which RE and schools cannot solve simply – and I think this is in the hands of Sunni and Shi'a scholars. If scholars can put their differences aside perhaps we can have, within one or two generations, peace. Especially if RE is based on scholarships, such as the teaching that saints, for example, of another denomination are 'evil'. We have been talking to the government about this.

Aliya

I think there are scholars who are working towards this. But if we look at what is happening in Britain today, RE has a very significant role to explain to children that there's no exclusive type. You're talking about 1.5 billion people – they cannot all conform to one single view – and that's the view that has been propagated for example in the Gulf States which have, through funding, created a sort of Frankenstein's Monster of Sunni -Shi'a hate beyond their control... a Shi'a person was attacked on the Edgware Road last summer because of that belief.

Dr Hojjat Ramzy

It is very important that we work together to solve this.

Patricia Hannam

I'd like to offer a very brief response. I think that this is something that concerns all of us in RE no matter what schools or areas we're working in. We need to bring these issues together in a way which can engage all children and young people in a serious discussion about the differences that exist between people.

Guy Hordern

I'd like to congratulate the REC for drawing together three very spectacular initiatives and trying to think of a common denominator. There are individuals here who have confidence that the principles underpinning faith can be applied to all education. My question is why is it that more people of faith don't have that same confidence and how would you encourage people like myself and others to take hold of what we believe in and apply it?

David Raven-Hill

Our initiative was, in part, born out of a feeling of 'there but for the grace of God' – that Kirklees, unlike our very close neighbours, was not caught up in the riots. It was important that our project could further young people's appreciation of diversity and this was felt to be very important if not essential, in contributing to community relations .

Alastair Ross

Religious thought changes not because people tell it to, but in response to crises and often from the bottom up, not the top down. When there's a crisis that has to be interpreted, and there always is in every generation, people think 'how do we make sense of the world today in light of faith?' and this requires a real response. It is

not the powers that be that do this, but the people. This is really important to get hold of; we need to move on from thinking that religious traditions never change – they do and accepting this is important.

Helen Harrison

Listening to this conversation, and having had lots of experience as a teacher, one of the main problems is that being honest with our children about these sorts of conversations is very difficult. Lots of teachers find it difficult to encourage children to speak out about they feel – and if children aren't encouraged to do so whilst trying to be inoffensive and in a safe space, then stereotypes and prejudices will just be perpetuated. If teachers don't do this, then RE becomes quite shallow and trivial. The REC created a document *Everyone matters in the RE classroom* to support teachers to have confidence as they help their students tackle controversial issues in RE. I feel that this is extremely important and applaud the REC for the work they are doing in this vein.

Joyce Miller

In response to David's comments about the race riots in northern towns: In 2000 I was appointed RE inspector to Bradford, and in 2001 there were 'race riots', at a point when I was in charge of RE and citizenship. In continuing to live there, and at the time, I've seen that the whole concept of community cohesion is very, very complex. An immense of work has been written about the race riots, and in fact I feel that it's unhelpful to talk about them as race riots. There were huge issues for example between local Muslim youths, the police and so on. One of the odd things in a sense was the publication of the Ouseley Report on Bradford the following week, and this whole notion that there was a fear that was supposed to have existed in Bradford – of which I was unaware. If this report had not coincided with the riots I think we would have taken a different perspective about what caused them and the complex issues that surrounded them. It is all immensely complex.

David Raven-Hill

I'm sure that's right, and with Kirklees a lot of it was to do with the perceptual rather than the actual.

Summing up

Joyce Miller

Yes, and in the maelstrom of all this, where does RE fit? Lots of schools are very proud about the fact that they were not attacked during those riots, where other institutions and private properties were; this shows schools do have a role in the community, as does RE.

My final closing remarks are firstly about complexity. Complexity is part of the nature of religion, the whole education system, and the changes that have taken place, as well as the complexity of religious representations in groups and SACREs. Perhaps the most important thing that has come through to me this evening is the role of the teacher and their competence and confidence. The teachers have huge tasks and need an immense amount of support from a range of organisations who somehow manage to find the funding to enable them to deal with these immensely complex issues. Teachers can't manage these complex, personal issues without a massive amount of support. How are we going to enable that so that children's experience of RE and education in general are going to foster cohesion as well as their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The huge tasks that face us are vast.

This evening we have had some examples of excellence, and part of the role of the RE Council and other organisations is spreading that good practice and always having that professional reflection and critical inquiry –

not just in the children but in organisations and teachers as well, so that we are aware of the shortcomings of what we're doing.

Most of what I've heard tonight is a huge amount of commitment and enthusiasm for RE, and so many thanks to all of our speakers.

Concluding comments

Fiona Bruce

Many thanks Joyce, and thank you to all of our speakers who have come from all over the country. Thanks for travelling on what has not been one of the best days to travel, and brightening our day with some interesting experiences and thought-provoking evidence.