

## **Living in a Multi-faith London Diversity and Dialogue at the British Museum - A report and evaluation**

### **Participants**

Around 100 participants attended on the day, which was the target number.

However, certain groups were better represented than others:

- Muslims, Christians, Jews, Bahais were well-represented. (Including a wide range of different Christian denominations).
- We had representatives from the Jain, Hindu and Zoroastrian faiths. (We would have liked to have had more Hindus).
- We had no Sikh or Buddhist representatives. (Although we did have speakers from these religions and a young Sikh took part in the summer faith trail project).
- We also had some participants who were atheist or agnostic.

Some of the participants were accompanied by their teachers and in large groups. Others had come on their own out of personal interest. This formed a slight divide.

The majority of participants were female, despite specifically targeting males.

However, we had a wide range of different age ranges and socio-economic backgrounds. It was a very diverse group and all of the participants were challenged to speak to people they may never normally have met.

There was also an interesting range of adult observers, including parents, teachers and faith leaders. We held a separate discussion session for the adults, which again provided opportunities for networking and for diverse individuals to meet. This also worked well as sometimes too many adult observers can inhibit the young people's discussion.

### **Welcome**

The welcome was given by some of the young people involved in the faith trail. Although it would have been good to have a high profile speaker (and this would have helped to attract more media), the young people set the tone that this was a youth event. They helped to make the other participants more at ease. Young people do need to be carefully briefed and supported, but they gave some excellent comments, straight from the heart.

### **Small discussion groups:**

This was a valued part of the day and it was good to give the participants the chance to talk to each other from the beginning of the event. We had an excellent range of facilitators, volunteering from seven different faiths. Generally, the level of discussion was high and participants were very interested in what each other had to say. They were happy to talk about sensitive subjects and were very open and friendly.

Participants were given numbers on arrival and split into eleven different groups of around 7 or 8. They were split to ensure a good gender balance and diversity of religion. However, some of the participants were shy and so at a future event we would allow participants to bring one friend with them and we would also run better ice-breaker activities. Sometimes it was difficult to keep the conversation going and it tended to be dominated by the more confident participants.

Comments back from facilitators include:

- in future include discussion about the content of the different religions – eg. One participant asked "why don't the 5 Muslim 'commandments' include 'though shall

- not kill?' or 'I never understood why would Jesus turn the other cheek?' The participants were interested in finding out about each other's religions.
- Another facilitator reported that her group started to talk about how to prove the existence of God. Participants from different religions were discussing the creation of the world and the existence of miracles and how this could be used to show that God exists. These conversations can be shared between different faiths.
  - The level of ignorance was surprisingly high, even for young people attending very multi-cultural schools. Eg. One girl asked which religion it was who covered their faces.
  - All of these comments demonstrate the value of talking about religion, as well as about the relations between different religions. It is important to be flexible and to allow the participants freedom to discuss the issues that most interest them.
  - The attitudes of the young people were very positive and optimistic. 'Everyone seemed open minded about living in a multi-faith society and were optimistic about the future.'
  - Everyone was in agreement with faith schools and the general feeling was that there would be more integration in years to come. They were also comfortable to celebrate the festivals of different religions. Eg one Christian girl commented that her best friend was Muslim and she had taken part in some Muslim rituals and felt comfortable about following customs such as covering her head.
  - Participants were comfortable discussing topics such as the terrorist attacks and media coverage of religion and in particular, Islam.

In retrospect, it would have been beneficial to have another discussion session later in the day. This was one of the highlights of the event.

### **Muslim-Jewish dialogue in Stamford Hill**

There have been mixed comments about this session. In the evaluation forms many participants listed it as a favourite session. Others felt that it did not focus enough on the detail of what the partnership did.

Generally, the event had too many adult speaker presentations and too much time in the auditorium. This was partly due to the extra resources needed to run another set of workshops, and the logistical problems of dividing participants up. However, another set of workshops or discussions would have improved the event.

### **Faith trail**

The faith trail is excellent but it was difficult to co-ordinate showing a hundred young people around it at the same time. The young people were impressed by the faith trail and by the work that had gone into it. However, many participants did not get to appreciate it fully. Comments from evaluation forms were divided between those who thought that it was brilliant, to those who were confused by the layout of the Museum and what the trail signified.

- We debated asking facilitators to lead their groups but opted for a less formal approach. It would perhaps have been better to have optional tour guides as some of the young people got lost within the Museum or felt scared to go too far into the galleries.
- Two of the galleries were also shut and had to be opened later on, despite us arranging this in advance with curators.
- However, having the young people who made the trail explaining the objects was a great success. This form of peer education is very rarely done in museums and worked well. People who spoke to the faith trail participants all said how

impressed they had been by them and what a good example of interfaith co-operation they were. (Though there weren't quite enough people to man all the objects.) Another time we would select just a few objects from the trail and mark out a clear route.

- The faith trail should have been more clearly explained before hand, as some participants were not really clear what it was about.
- Sample comment: 'I wasn't sure exactly what I was looking for. I found things but wasn't sure why it was chosen.'
- However, other participants listed it as their favourite part of the day.

The faith trail is not ideally suited to such a large group. We are developing a day-long workshop for schools, which can incorporate a different version of the trail.

### **Faith and the wider world**

This session was enjoyed by the most of the participants. Each of the three NGO speakers was mentioned as the favourite by one or more of the participants. They were mostly good at involving the audience and creating a dialogue. The World Parliament of Religions session was also interesting and listed as a highlight and it was also good to have some young speakers.

The session was perhaps a little long, however, and may have worked better as two workshops, so that there could have been more opportunity for questions and interaction.

Throughout the day, particular groups of participants asked lots of questions and it was hard to encourage the shyer members of the audience to speak up. Again, smaller groups would have helped this.

### **Workshops**

The workshops were very successful and many people's highlight of the day. We had a wide range of different activities on offer. People regretted only being able to select one workshop and it would have been great to have run these workshops twice.

We were prevented by the costs of hiring the outside organisations for the extra hour and by time within the day's schedule.

1. Religion and the media – with Simon Cohen and Sandra Herbert. Participants reflected on the role of the media and were taught how to write a press release.
2. South Asian dance – with Akademy. (This took place in Gallery 33 and linked South Asian faiths with their expression through dance.)
3. All you wanted to know about religion but were afraid to ask... Participants were given the opportunity to chat informally with representatives from all nine major religions. (Although the Sikh speaker failed to attend).
4. Keeping the City Safe – a frank debate about the aftermath of the terrorist attacks with Chief Inspector Simon Turner from Camden, Bexley CRE and Muslim representatives.
5. How to disagree without falling out – a practical workshop from in LEAP in conflict resolution skills.

Workshop 3 was very well-attended, even though it was one of the most serious workshops. As a result the quiz was hard to hear, but the informal discussions worked very well. It was good to have young faith representatives as it helped create an informal atmosphere.

Workshop 4 was less well-attended than we had predicted. This backed up suggestions throughout the day that young people are very interested in each other's beliefs and religious customs. We had expected conversations about London's diversity to be more popular.

### **Reflections**

We asked participants to write down a few of their thoughts about the day. This gave us a valuable insight into the level of personal commitment the young people attending had to a successful multi-faith society. We did not have time to run a proper feedback on these reflections. It may have been better to run several different groups of participatory evaluation and then asked different group members to feed back.

### **Final session**

Some of the school groups left just before this session and everyone was feeling very tired. However, most people remained for the final thoughts from Jay Lakhani and Joyce Yarrow. Jay Lakhani made his presentation very humorous, which was great at the end of a long day.

Several participants commented spontaneously on the value of the event and raised their hands to affirm that they would certainly like to attend more events like these in the future.

### **Comments from Evaluation forms**

- Everyone enjoyed the event and found it interesting. Unanimous agreement that events like these help to create a successful multi-faith society.
- Most people gave it 5 out of 5, then 4 out of 5 – no evaluation forms gave it less than 3.
- There were many requests for more events like this.
- Many participants stated that getting to talk to other young people and learn about their religions was the best part of the day.
- They felt that events like these help people to become more open-minded and understanding of one another. 'It breaks down stereotypes and brings together religions in a peaceful setting.'
- They valued 'meeting people who really care'.
- Some valued the chance to talk about their own religion – 'before I felt bad when my friends made fun of my religion (Christianity) but now I know there are other people who have the same problem, Christian or not, I'm more confident in talking about my religion.'
- More discussion and workshops and less speakers would have made the event better.  
Many people said that they would have liked to attend more than one workshop.
- Adults should not have been given so much time to speak at the event and young people should have more chance to ask questions.

We asked participants to list their favourite speakers. There was a huge variety in the responses. Often one person's favourite speaker was another person's low point. Jay Lakhani was popular, as were the Barcelona speakers, Ethiopia presentations and Rabbi Gluck. Many people liked the peace pod and several mentioned this as one of the best things about the day.

## Table of figures

<b>Did you enjoy the event?</b>	Not at all		Definitely		
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
	-	-	3	16	19
<b>What did you think of the multi-faith trail?</b>	Not that great		Really interesting		
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
	2	4	4	10	13
<b>Did you learn anything new today?</b>	Nothing		Loads		
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
	-	2	5	12	18
<b>Do you think events like this help to create a successful multi-faith society?</b>	Not at all		Definitely		
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
	-	-	2	11	26

Below we list a selection of the comments made by the participants.

### **One thing I can do to make London a Successful Multi-faith City:**

“Show people things about my religion and educate them.”

“I can be more open to other religions and more listen to others.”

“Respect other people’s beliefs and make no judgements about them.”

“Never ever discriminate anybody.”

“Teaching others to accept everyone for who they are and making people aware that if some people believes in different God they can still be similar to us.”

“By respecting others, living in harmony amongst different faiths and cultures and helping with educational multi-cultural events we can make London a multi-faith city.”

“To promote understanding between nations and religions.”

### **One thing I have found out or thought about this event:**

“I have gained greater confidence. I used to feel bad when my friends made fun of my religion but now that I know there are other people who have the same problems with other religions I feel more confident in talking about my religion.”

“I have found out about the beliefs of others and how do these differ from mine.”

“This is a really good way to get young people to get to know each other better.”

“I have found out how to talk to people without arguing.”

“It is good to have the opportunity to meet people of other faiths and backgrounds.”

“I have learnt a lot about less known religions. I have learnt what views have the other people around me and found that I’m not alone with some of my opinions.”

“I thought this event was great because it gave an equal say to everyone’s religion and everyone was able to express their own views.”

“I realised that many young people are actually interested in improving London and in spread of understanding.”

**Questions:**

“How can I get more involved with one of the workshops?”

“How can we organise more sessions like this to encourage greater understanding?”

“Can this be repeated but open for a wider range of people?”

**Suggestions for the future:**

- More events like these – with more time for discussion and reaching groups of people who aren’t so open-minded.
- Take these sessions to schools so that more people can get involved.
- We need to reach out beyond those who are already converted.
- Set up regular forums for different areas of London, or Councils with elected representatives.
- Hold a residential weekend to continue the dialogue.
- Events like this help, but they will not solve all problems by themselves. Also need other activities and projects.

**CONCLUSIONS: Lessons learnt**

- More time in workshops and smaller groups. This empowers quieter members of the group. You can also build confidence through activities and moving around, rather than just expecting people to discuss complex issues straight away. We should have paid more attention to ice-breaker activities.
- More of an emphasis on a youth voice. Perhaps letting young people set the agenda more.
- The Museum is an intimidating place and so young people need guidance when going around it.
- Using young people as speakers and trail guides works well. Young people like talking to their peers and respond well to them. However, the trail was not that well-explained or organised on the day.
- Young people are interested in talking about faith and perhaps everyone needed to be given the chance to participate in the equivalent of workshop 3.
- There is a huge commitment to creating a successful society. The young Londoners have a strong commitment to diversity and value it greatly. They are able to discuss controversial topics with great sensitivity.
- Events like this take intense organisation and need a lot of helpers to ensure that the day runs smoothly.

# Agenda

10:00 to 10:20	Registration
10:20 to 10:45	Welcome and Introductions
10:45 to 11:30	Who are We? Small group discussions
11:30 to 12:00	Living together: Muslim-Jewish Co-operation in Stamford Hill
12:00 to 12:15	Introducing the Faith Trail
12.15	LUNCH BREAK
12:50 to 1:50	Take the Multi-faith Trail around the British Museum
1:50 to 3:15	Faith and the Wider World (Back in the lecture theatre)
3:20 to 4:20	Workshops (see the other page)
4:20 to 4:30	Reflections on your role in a Multifaith society

4.30 to 4.45	BREAK
4:45 to 5:00	Feedback
5:00 to 5:30	Closing remarks

## Workshops

### 1. Religion and the media



How does the media represent religion? Does it give us a fair picture? This workshop discusses the issues we should be hearing about and gives participants a few lessons in making their own news stories.

### 2. South Asian Dance



A Kathak dance workshop by Akademy. Think about South Asian faiths and how dance contributes to identity... And, of course, learn some great dance moves! (This workshop takes place in the galleries)

*tins for preventing aggression and solving conflicts peacefully.*

### 3. All you wanted to know about religion, but were afraid to ask

Representatives from nine world faiths are on hand to answer your questions, following a quiz that finds out how good a multi-faith Londoner you really are



### 4. Keeping the City Safe



Chief Inspector Simon Turner, the Muslim Safety Forum and others discuss the best way forward after the London bombings. A chance to add your views to the debate.

## 5. How to Disagree without Falling

Why does conflict happen? How do we stop it escalating? LEAP shares some practical tips for preventing aggression and solving conflicts peacefully.



**Appendix 2 – brief for facilitators ‘Who are we? Session’.**

### Brief for facilitators

Thanks very much for volunteering to act as a facilitator at the Multi-faith conference on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> October. We hope that it is going to be a really interesting day and that you will find the experience valuable.

The group discussion session will run from **10.45-11.30am**. Below we outline the structure for the session and also give some tips on your role as the leader of the discussion.

### Structure

The facilitators will each work with a group of 8-10 participants. (This will vary a little depending on how many people attend the conference).

**When participants arrive at the event, each will be given a number from 1-12. This will be their group number. Each facilitator will also be given a group number and will be allotted a table in the Sackler Rooms or outside space.**

The facilitators will help to guide the discussions with their groups from 10.45-11.30am. Please make sure that you finish your session on time, as the day is on a very tight schedule.

### General tips

The facilitators should aim to:

- Ensure that everyone feels comfortable and create a relaxed atmosphere.
- Encourage less confident participants to join in the discussion, but without forcing anyone to contribute if they don't want to.
- Try to keep any participant from dominating the conversation too much.
- Try not to let more than one conversation happen at the same time.
- Keep participants to the topic, by bringing them back to the questions set out in the programme.
- Keep quiet for most of the time. You should try just to guide the discussion a little but let the conversation flow between the participants. Ideally participants should be talking to each other and not directing all of their comments to you.
- Remain neutral and avoid offering your own opinions or judging the comments of the participants (unless they are aggressive or very offensive).
- Keep the peace - Intervene to stop any aggressive behaviour and to stop any disagreements from becoming personal.

### The discussion

The aims of the session are:

- to introduce participants and to get them talking openly to each other
- to ask them to share their thoughts on their own faith and identity.

- to ask them to share their visions about the future and to think about how we can live together successfully.

The programme below is a guide only. Don't worry if you don't get through all of the questions, as there is a lot to get through. If participants aren't engaged in a particular issue, just move on to the next topic.

The most important thing is to give participants the opportunity to talk openly with other young people from different faith backgrounds and to get them thinking about what it means to live in a multi-faith society. So don't worry too much if you don't stick exactly to the agenda.

We have divided the discussion into three main sections, with suggested questions. Questions in italics are extra ideas, if you have time or need to prompt or redirect the conversation.

## The programme (45 minutes)

**Introduce the session by telling the participants that this will be a 45 minute discussion. Say that they will be talking about how different faiths live alongside each other in London and about how religion impacts on our lives.**

Also confirm that everyone is happy with the ground rules discussed at the start of the conference.

### Ice-breaker (10minutes)

**Ask participants to turn to the person next to them and ask; ‘why did you come to this event today?’**

**They should then find out as much about each other as they can within one minute.**

Then go around the circle and ask participants to introduce each other.

### Quickfire (5 minutes)

Ask each participant to say one thing they like about London (and one thing they don't like about it).

## Part 1 – London as a multi-faith city (15 minutes)

- **How well do different religions live along side each other in London?**

***Prompt:** Are they friends? Do they lead separate lives? Do they understand and respect each other? What are the good and bad things about interfaith relations in the city? Have you or your friends or family ever been treated badly because of your religion.*

- **How do you think things will change in the future?**

***Prompt:** Do you think that people from the same faith and culture will always want to live near other people from the same background? Or will everyone become mixed together in the future? Will cultures change? What is the area where you live like? Are you an optimist or pessimist?*

- **How do you feel about living in a multi-faith society?**

***Prompt:** What are the advantages and disadvantages of a multi-faith society? (eg. meeting lots of interesting people, the exchange of ideas, different foods, cultures, learning to respect each other's way of life.... BUT not having a place of worship nearby, not being able to have a morning call to prayers, prejudice, misunderstanding...)*

*Do you think that people from your religion are able to practise their religion easily in London?*

## Part 2 – Thinking about your own religion and its role in your life (15 minutes)

- **How do you think other people see your religion?**

***Prompt:** eg. people in school, or in the media...Have you ever been discriminated against? Do people know much about your religion? (Give the participants a chance to ask each other questions here).*

- **How does your religion affect the way that you live your life?**
  - **Prompt:** - *does it support you? Does it show you right from wrong? Do you ever find the rules restrictive? Does it make you more or less selfish? Do you find it easier to be friends with people who are from the same faith background as you are? Do you have enough opportunities to make friends with people from other faiths? Do you have enough opportunities to learn about your own faith?*
  - **What do you think people from different religions have in common?**
- Prompt:** – *in contrast to those who don't have a faith. In terms of values and wishes. In terms of the way they live their lives.*

**END**

### **Reporting back**

In the feedback session we will ask participants to feed back on some of the most interesting comments from the sessions, but we will not be asking each group to summarise their discussions.

It is difficult to take notes at the same time as facilitating the discussion. However, it would be great if you could write down any particularly interesting comments or quotes.

### **Common worries**

#### ***What happens if an argument arises and things turn nasty?***

- Before the sessions start we will go through a set of ground rules. You should ensure that your participants are happy with these ground rules at the beginning of the session and then refer back to them if any arguments or problematic behaviour arise.
- If things go really wrong, call 'time out' and ask participants to take a break for two minutes and then start again.
- Come and find Becky Hatch or one of the other conference organisers if you are worried.
- All of this is very unlikely to happen! Everyone coming to the conference is coming because they want to create a peaceful multi-faith society.

#### ***What if there is a big silence and no-one wants to contribute?***

- We hope that the programme has been set up so that this won't happen. However, if there is a lull in conversation, ask questions. Sometimes you can get the conversation going by asking the participants to go around in a circle, with each participant giving an answer to the same question.
- If a particular question isn't engaging the group, then move on to the next issue.
- Or you can ask a particular person to contribute eg. 'can you think of anything similar within the Jewish community?' or 'you have been quiet, would you like to add anything?'
- You could also contribute your own anecdote, or quote something controversial from the media. (Although both of these tactics should be used in moderation.)

#### ***What if some of the participants keep having their own conversation and not listening?***

- Sometimes it can be difficult to keep everyone in the same conversation. Eg. a group at the other side of the table might branch off into their own discussion. If this happens repeatedly, then one solution is to ask the group to divide into two halves for 5 minutes and then to feed back on what they have been discussing.

### Appendix 3 – the Evaluation form

Thank you very much for taking part in the event. We would really appreciate your comments on what you liked and didn't like so that we can make future events like this even better.

Please circle the most appropriate answer and add your own comments.

1. Did you enjoy the event?



Not at all

1

2

3

4

5

Definitely

2. Which were your favourite sessions or speakers? Why?

a

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b

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c

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3. What was the best thing about the day?

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4. What wasn't so good?

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5. What did you think of the multi-faith trail?



Not that great

1

2

3

4

5

really interesting

Why was this?

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6. Did you learn anything new today?



nothing

1

2

3

4

5



loads

If so, what?

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7. Did you talk to people that you wouldn't normally meet?



Not really

1

2

3

4

5

yes, definitely



8. Do most of your friends have the same faith as you?

Mostly --- Some do, some don't ---- I have a real mixture of friends

What's good or bad about this?

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9. Do you think events like this help to create a successful multi-faith society?





Not at all                      1            2            3            4            5            Definitely

Why or why not?

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10. What would you change to make the event better?

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***If you'd like to stay in touch and get involved with other events in the future, then please include your name and contact details below.***

***Name:***

***Email (or home address or phone number):***

***Thank you very much for your help.***