



DIVERSITY AND DIALOGUE.

Building better understanding between
young people living in a multi-faith society

Becky Hatch

Save the Children fights for the rights of children and young people in the UK and around the world who suffer from poverty, disease, injustice and violence. We work with them to find lifelong answers to the problems they face.

Save the Children UK is a member of the International Save the Children Alliance, the world's leading independent children's rights organisation, with members in 27 countries and operational programmes in more than 100.

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Foreword

Every child has the right to live in a society where their views are respected and where they are free to practice their religion, but they must also grow up learning to understand and respect the views and beliefs of others.¹ Education must teach children to respect their own and other cultures.² At present, too many children in Britain are the victims of prejudice and religiously motivated bullying and grow up without opportunities to learn about those from other faiths and backgrounds.

The Diversity and Dialogue project aims to build understanding between young people with different beliefs and to counter the negative impact that global conflicts can have on local community relations in the UK. It has brought more than 300 young people together in interfaith projects and discussions and it has developed educational resources and project frameworks to enable more teachers and youth workers to take this work forward.

Save the Children has been proud to be the lead partner in the coalition of agencies that comprise the Diversity and Dialogue project. Our work is founded on the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), first promulgated by our founder Eglantyne Jebb. In the UK, we work with some of the most vulnerable children and young people, supporting them to grow up in an environment where their rights are protected and where they are able to participate fully in society. Save the Children is committed to ensuring that all children have the right to a relevant education, free from discrimination. This is part of our wider work with children in the UK and worldwide, to create real and lasting change in their lives.

Jasmine Whitbread
Chief Executive, Save the Children UK

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Aik Saath	KAWACC
Al Risaalah School	Lancashire Council of Mosques
Barlow Roman Catholic School	La Retraite RC School
Beardwood School	Levenshulme School
Bradford Community Accord	Liverpool Community Spirit
Bradford Schools Linking Project	Lister Community School
Bradford Vision	London Youth
Bradford Youth Service	Manchester City Academy
the British Museum	MoJoW
Building Bridges Pendle	Multi-faith Media Group Leicester
Burnley Youth Action Project	St Wilfrid's Church of England School
Burntwood School	the Scottish Inter Faith Council
Capital City Academy	Shared Future Project
Children for Peace	Swanshurst School
Chorlton High School	Tide (Teachers in Development Education)
City of Bristol College	Together for Peace Leeds
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More information about the project can be found on the project website: www.diversityanddialogue.org.uk. Our free educational resources can be downloaded and the site includes a searchable online directory of existing youth interfaith projects. More information about all of the case studies mentioned in the following pages can also be found on the website in the Projects and Directory sections.

Becky Hatch
Project Co-ordinator, Diversity and Dialogue

A partnership project



Save the Children



Introduction

A successful multi-faith society is one where people of all faiths and beliefs can live side by side in friendship, understanding and respect.

While interfaith engagement between people of all ages is important, the Diversity and Dialogue project has worked with young people as its specific focus. Young people often have unique opportunities to build friendships across faith boundaries and can offer valuable insights into the complexity of modern identities. They are at the centre of successful community cohesion. The transition to adulthood is a time when many people reflect upon their own beliefs and values and when their attitudes to others are formed. It is crucial that young people learn to understand and respect a range of different beliefs, while becoming confident in their own faith or value base.

Chapter 3 gives an indication of the value young people attach to meeting people with a wide range of beliefs and finding out more about different faiths and cultures. This report investigates the potential for all young people to be given these opportunities.

Both schools and youth services have key roles to play in facilitating open dialogue and co-operation. In Chapter 4, this report examines the opportunities to achieve this within a school setting. However, schools vary and it is not always easy for schools with less religious diversity to bring young people from different religious backgrounds together. Chapter 5 focuses on youth interfaith dialogue outside schools and within the community. These chapters provide an overview of some of the innovative work that is already taking place and suggest potential new spaces and models for dialogue. Chapter 6 highlights some of the barriers to creating a successful multi-faith society and explores ways in which they can be overcome.

This report is informed by the work of the Diversity and Dialogue project, which has worked with over 300 young people and many local partner organisations. It refers particularly to young people from the ages of 14–19.

A note on terms

In this report the term '**multi-faith**' is used to refer to a group or body that happens to contain people from a variety of different religious backgrounds, including the secular. For example, 'London is a multi-faith city'.

The term '**interfaith**' is used to refer to dialogue or groups which consciously bring people from different religions together. These groups have increasing understanding between religions as a primary aim. Some people do not include the non-religious within interfaith groups and dialogue. However, in this report, non-religious people are included in the definition of 'interfaith'.

About the Diversity and Dialogue project

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This report has been informed by the experiences of the Diversity and Dialogue project, which has been working to increase understanding between young people from different faiths and backgrounds since September 2004. The project is funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) and Save the Children's own funds. It is led by Save the Children in partnership with a range of faith-based and secular humanitarian and education organisations:

CAFOD	Muslim Aid
Christian Aid	Oxfam
Citizenship Foundation	Save the Children
Islamic Relief	World Jewish Aid
Jewish Council for Racial Equality	

While these faith-based organisations represent the Abrahamic faith traditions, the projects have involved young people from all the main faith communities. While focusing on relationships between young people within England, the project and the report have also drawn on examples and experiences from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Diversity and Dialogue project has included the following elements:

- An analysis of over 100 existing youth projects in schools and communities, already working to build better understanding between young people with different faiths and backgrounds.
- Work with local schools and partners to run 16 practical youth interfaith projects in London, Yorkshire, the North West and Birmingham. These projects developed models of dialogue that bring young people from different faiths and backgrounds together.
- A consultation with 124 young people living in multi-faith environments in London, Manchester, Blackburn, Birmingham and Slough.
- Advice from a wide range of experts and practitioners, gathered through five regional seminars, regular meetings with the project advisory group and other interviews.

The Diversity and Dialogue website and educational resources

The experiences of the Diversity and Dialogue project are outlined in more detail on the project website www.diversityanddialogue.org.uk, which includes:

- An online directory of existing projects working to bring young people from different faiths and backgrounds together across the UK. This features the case studies mentioned in this report, plus many more innovative projects that could not fit into these pages.
- Detailed descriptions and photos of Diversity and Dialogue's practical work with young people and more information about the project's history and structure.
- Free educational resources, available to download.

The educational resources have been developed from those used successfully during the course of the project. They aim to support teachers, youth workers, young people, faith and interfaith bodies in building understanding between young people with different beliefs. The site suggests four different types of dialogue project that can be used in a variety of situations; from inner-city school citizenship lessons, to inter-school conferences or youth work in a divided community. The resources set out advice on process and supply ideas and lesson plans for activities and discussion topics.

History of the project

In July 2002, representatives from eight British humanitarian organisations – two Christian, two Jewish, two Muslim and two secular – came together to discuss the impact that 11 September 2001, the 'war on terror' and the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East were having on community relations in the UK.

They discussed the ways in which tensions between young people from different religions can often have their roots far away from British streets. The conflict in Israel and the Palestinian territories, for example, has reverberated in Britain triggering increased anti-Semitic attacks and heightened tensions between the British Muslim and Jewish communities. Territorial disputes over Kashmir and other troubles in the sub-continent have been reflected in relations between British Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in some parts of the country. Likewise, terrorist attacks have fuelled or excused a wave of Islamophobia across Europe and the USA.³

This group of organisations made a commitment to work together to help build understanding between young people with different beliefs, as a counter to the negative impacts of global conflict. They also invited the Citizenship Foundation to join the partnership to add educational expertise.

Michal Lyons, World Jewish Aid (WJAIID)

There is no doubt that the Jewish community in the UK, along with other Northern and Western European Jewish communities, has experienced heightened anti-Semitism over the past few years. There have been incidences of violence, vandalism and verbal abuse.

While the response of some Jews has been to retreat from this increasingly hostile environment, many religious and secular community organisations have attempted to build bridges to other faith communities through dialogue, shared activities, and education of our own young people. WJAIID has been active within this broad stream.

In response to the increasingly strained relations between British Muslim and Jewish communities, WJAIID has actively sought to develop partnerships with British Muslim organisations. In Pakistan, we are working primarily with our partner Human Aid Focus, an organisation of Kashmiri Muslims in the UK and Pakistan. In parallel with its development work, WJAIID is engaged in education activities, educating young Jews in taking social responsibility beyond the bounds of the Jewish community.

Against this background, we were delighted to be invited to participate in the Diversity and Dialogue project, which has afforded us the opportunity to support development education and education for tolerance, outside isolated community contexts, in a multi-faith environment.

Muhammad Imran, Islamic Relief

The events of 11 September 2001 sent shockwaves through communities worldwide. For British Muslims, the speed and intensity of the knee-jerk reaction in some sections of society had a sobering effect. Echoes of the difficulties that faced the Irish communities in mainland Britain, in the wake of the IRA terror campaign of the 1970s and 1980s, reverberated. Some Muslims pessimistically questioned their future in these isles while others rose to the challenge of showing that the violent actions of the very few do not represent the views of the overwhelming majority.

It is with this analysis in mind that Islamic Relief has greeted the Diversity and Dialogue project enthusiastically. Increased interaction might lead to a better understanding of the other. A level of trust might build up that will allow people of all backgrounds to work together in partnership for a better society for all. But the promotion of interaction should not be done just as a defensive gesture. It should be pursued because it is right and is natural, and it is what humanity has been commanded to do. In the words of the Qur'an:

“O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other).”

(The Qur'an 49:11-13)

Using local and global issues to unite

Public attitudes towards different religious groups within England can be heavily influenced by media coverage of global conflicts between different faiths and cultures. Religion tends to be presented as a cause of conflict, overlooking the aspects of religion that preach peace and motivate their followers to change the world for the better. This reflects the views of some of the young people in the consultation in Chapter 3.

“The way that the media portray things isn’t necessarily the way that it happens.”

Group 4, female, Christian

The Diversity and Dialogue project has examined the potential for people of all faiths and beliefs to work together for a more just and respectful society and to focus on religion as a constructive and motivational force. Young people can unite for change on some of the biggest global challenges, such as the destruction of the environment and international poverty. People may be motivated by different religious texts or value bases, but can share similar viewpoints on important issues. The Diversity and Dialogue project asked young people to think about common goals – a peaceful society, a world free from poverty – and to discuss the ways in which their religion or value base might influence their views and motivate them to take action. Through these discussions, young people with different beliefs can find shared aspirations.

“My faith... makes me feel much more passionately about the injustice which is so evident in the world. How can it be right if three-quarters of the world population is struggling for a living and dying of hunger while the other countries are living in the lap of luxury?”

Project participant, female, Hindu, aged 17

“If you are religious then you think of yourself as a steward of the earth and so you should try to leave it in a better state than you found it.”

Project participant, female, Muslim, aged 16

At an adult level, co-operation between religious groups in tackling important global issues has been demonstrated at meetings such as the World Parliament of Religions (Barcelona, 2004). More than 8,000 delegates discussed how faith communities could unite to tackle global issues including access to water, international debt and religiously motivated violence. At the Make Poverty History rally (Edinburgh, 2005), Christian, Jewish and Muslim non-governmental organisations (NGOs) shared a ‘faith zone’ highlighting their co-operation in the campaign. Similarly, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) represent a common framework for development agreed by nations representing all the major religions.

There are also many examples of different faith and secular organisations working together at a local level for change in their community. However, for young people, there tend to be fewer opportunities. With this in mind, the Diversity and Dialogue project developed a model of practical youth projects that uses local and global issues

as a means of bringing young people together. Young people from different faiths and backgrounds work together on social action projects and discuss the ways in which they are motivated by their beliefs. This prompts them to think about their beliefs from a different perspective, where religion is now a constructive and motivational force and discussion can be about positive values rather than differences and tensions. As well as building understanding, these projects empower young people and allow them to tackle important issues in a constructive way. Local projects can also help to instil a sense of joint ownership of an area, just as global issues can help reinforce a sense of common global citizenship.

The Diversity and Dialogue project has found that campaigning on global and local issues can be an excellent way to build understanding between young people with different beliefs. The project looked at some of the valuable work that religious organisations are doing independently to encourage young people to put the values of their faith into practice. It has experimented with adapting this work to involve a multi-faith group of young people.

The Jewish Council for Racial Equality (JCORE) was established in 1976 to combat discrimination and promote racial justice in Britain. They work to encourage the Jewish community to play a more active role in building a just and harmonious multi-cultural society. JCORE's work is rooted in Jewish values, experience and history. For example, the Torah says 36 times that Jews should care for the stranger in their community, as it says: *"When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him."* (Leviticus 19:33). JCORE educational programmes help people make the link between the strong emphasis Judaism places on 'helping the stranger' and contemporary issues of combating racism and helping modern 'strangers' – asylum-seekers, refugees and immigrants.

Many young Christians get involved in Christian Aid's Trade Justice campaign and the campaign is strongly connected to Christian beliefs and values. It works towards a fairer system of international trade that accommodates the needs of the world's poorest communities. The Bible is concerned with the unjust distribution of the world's resources and fundamental to Christian values is the belief that God has special concern for the poor and that the poor must be treated with compassion. In this way, faith values are used to motivate the young people to campaign on this global issue.

Although the Diversity and Dialogue project began with an international focus, participants also recognised the importance of social and economic factors on community relations. The disturbances in northern cities of England in 2001, for instance, also helped the project partnership to develop focus.⁴

Social and political context

The Diversity and Dialogue project has taken place within a context of increasing interest in religion and its role in modern multicultural society. In young people this interest is indicated by the rise in the numbers of students taking examinations in Religious Studies. In 2005, Religious Studies was the fastest growing A-level subject, up 16.9 per cent from 2004.⁵

The role that religion plays in education has been a focus of much recent public and media attention. The government is committed to state-funding of faith schools and to expanding the number of both Christian and non-Christian schools. There are also plans to allow religious institutions to fund and help govern many of the new City Academies.⁶

Central government has taken a wider interest in faith communities and interfaith relations. This is reflected in the government's moves to widen patterns of consultation with faith communities.⁷ It is also reflected in such developments as the decision to include, for the first time, a question on religious identity in the 2001 Census. The importance attached to interfaith relationships is also demonstrated both through grant support for bodies such as Inter Faith Network for the UK, and new funding streams to support faith community capacity-building and interfaith work. The grant programme launched in 2005, the Faith Community Capacity Building Fund, made young people a particular priority in last year's funding round.

Much effort is being focused on creating cohesive communities and on co-operation and dialogue between different faith groups. Some excellent progress has been made in the face of continued and even escalating religious tensions at a global level.

The London bombings on 7 July 2005 occurred at the start of the Diversity and Dialogue summer youth projects. They were a stark example of how global tensions have the potential to impact on the UK. It is a huge credit to the strength of existing community relations in England that solidarity largely ensued, rather than blame and reproach. Although many people were afraid, many reacted by reaching out to each other.

For example, in the immediate aftermath of the attacks some Muslim parents were reluctant to let their children take part in an interfaith arts project organised by the Diversity and Dialogue project in the Isle of Dogs, London. They were worried that their children would be blamed for the attacks and criticised for their religion. On the other hand, a young Muslim involved in our project to create a faith trail around the British Museum said that before July he would have been interested in the project but wouldn't have taken part. Since 7/7 he said he had become more aware

of the need to get to know people from other faiths, and thus had jumped at the chance to participate. Several teachers involved in the project remarked that the attacks had shocked them into addressing interfaith and social cohesion issues. They highlighted the vital importance of creating space for young people to come together.

The reprinting of the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad and the wildfire reactions across the globe gave another sharp reminder of the potential impact of events abroad. A drawing in a newspaper in Denmark sparked unrest as far away as Nigeria, where 11 churches were torched, leading to the deaths of 16 people.⁸ The cartoons fuelled protests from Muslim communities across the world.⁹ The strength of reactions on both sides made many young people involved in Diversity and Dialogue workshops feel anxious about the state of the world. They felt that relations in their own local communities were threatened by these global incidents and their media coverage, but that they were powerless to do anything about it. Some could cite examples of verbal abuse or stereotyping from their own experiences.

This implies a twofold challenge. First, promoting a society where people trust and understand each other and where differences of opinion can be discussed calmly and respectfully. Second, empowering young people to play an active role in their communities so that they can help to create and sustain good community relations themselves.

Secular society

In discussions about religion it is easy to forget about those who do not describe themselves as religious. This would not give a true reflection of society and would ignore one of the biggest challenges in interfaith work. Despite the growing numbers and influence of many religious communities in Britain, there is a continuing downward trend in religious observance. In 2003, 65 per cent of 12–19-year-olds stated that they did not have a faith.¹⁰ The divides between those who are and are not religious can be at least as deep as those between different faith communities. This can be seen in the separations between Muslim and white secular communities in some English cities. Within urban multi-faith schools, we found some intolerance of atheism, where religious young people find it hard to accept the lack of faith in others. In reverse, peer pressure to rebel and join a secular youth culture can be powerful.

Some people in Britain have found increasing religious influence problematic, having assumed that religious authority was in decline.¹¹ There were lengthy debates and hesitations over the legislation on incitement to religious hatred and mass media coverage of Shabina Begum's fight for the right to wear a jilbab to her school in Luton.¹² These debates are emblematic of the struggle to define the role and rights of

the religious in a multi-faith modern Britain.¹³ A harder secular line has been taken in much of Western Europe, where for example, all religious symbols have been banned in French state schools since March 2004 and where the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad were widely reprinted in January and February 2006.

The focus on religion and its role in society over the past few years has emphasised the need for more spaces and opportunities to bring young people with different beliefs together.

Good interfaith relations in the UK, as around the world, are of crucial importance. In recent decades there has been a steady development of dialogue and co-operation between the UK's faith communities. Too often, though, young people have not been a full part of this. Initiatives such as Diversity and Dialogue, which are working to increase the informed involvement of young people in both UK and global dialogue, are to be warmly welcomed. They have a vital part to play in bringing about a more harmonious and cohesive society in our United Kingdom where there are strong relationships of trust and friendship between people of different faiths and beliefs.

Harriet Crabtree, Deputy Director, Inter Faith Network

This chapter looks at young people's views about growing up in a multi-faith society. It is based on the findings of a consultation exercise with 124 young people in England.

The discussions probed the young people's own beliefs and values, their experiences of multi-faith schooling and the potential pressures of living in a diverse society. The young people considered relationships between different faith communities at both a local and global level. They then explored potential influences on these relationships at the present and in the future. They were asked to identify both issues and potential solutions.¹⁴

Method

Eleven discussion groups were run in four areas of England – London, Manchester, Birmingham and Slough. The young people were aged 14–15 (school year ten). All of them were growing up in urban, multi-faith and multicultural environments and most attended schools with students from a wide mixture of different faiths and backgrounds. The young people were either put forward by teachers or self-selected.

The consultation findings do not attempt to draw comparisons between different religious or geographical groups, because of the small sample size. Moreover, the young people's views are not intended to be representative of the situation for all young people, many of whom have little interaction with those from other faiths in their everyday lives. Rather, they are intended to illustrate the attitudes of some young people who have opportunities to mix with their counterparts from other faiths and backgrounds.

Comparative research with young people living in more homogenous faith environments would also be welcome, but was beyond the scope of this project.

For more details about the religious make-up of the young people, schools and youth groups, see Appendix I.

A note on racial and ethnic identities

This consultation focused specifically on religion. However, race, ethnicity and culture inevitably came up in discussion and the young people often used religious and racial terminology interchangeably: Muslim and Asian, for example, or white and

Christian. The perceived correlation between ethnicity and religious affiliation was seen as a problem by some of the students who did not fit into these stereotypes.

“People say you can’t be Muslim and be black, you have to be Asian to be Muslim.”

Group 4, female, Muslim

“People think of me as Chinese or Christian and so it is hard to be religious.”

Group 4, female, Muslim (of Chinese origin)

There was also confusion around the influence of Christianity in Britain, particularly in schools with a low proportion of white British students. Many assumed a higher level of religious observance than is actually present among the white population. Their use of the term ‘Christian’ to describe the white community is symbolic of this. Ethnic and cultural similarities appeared to play an important role in friendship groupings. Some students felt that racism was a bigger issue than religious discrimination and seemed to identify more with ethnic rather than religious groupings.

“If anything happens, it comes down to brown versus white. Muslims and Sikhs stick together in our school.”

Group 11, male, Sikh

However, religion was viewed as an important and engaging issue by most of the young people. Many claimed that it was something they discuss in their free time. Most thought it valuable to discuss beliefs and to think about the relationships between different groups in society.

I. Growing up in a multi-faith society

All of the young people attending multi-faith schools were enthusiastic about being educated with people from a wide range of different faiths and backgrounds. They emphasised the opportunities it afforded for learning from each other and increasing understanding about different beliefs. It was seen as a valuable way of equipping them for adult life, where it would be necessary to get on with a wide range of different people. All of the young people seemed to value diversity and were quick to outline the advantages of multi-faith education.

“When you’re mixed you try to live in brotherhood and it makes you better as a person.”

Group 10, male, Muslim

“It [a multi-faith school] gives you a dose of everyone else’s way of life.”

Group 2, female, Jewish

“It’s a privilege to go to a school like this.”

Group 5, female, Christian

The young people saw school as the space in which they were able to meet and build friendships with a wide range of people, helping to counter prejudices and create mutual understanding.

In some of the groups, young people acknowledged that religious tensions did surface in school, although they did not appear wholly comfortable in discussing these. They had a tendency to downplay tensions or pass them off as jokes.

“There is still a problem because of religion, but then again, that is just normal. But it’s not really like a big, big problem.”

Group 6, male, non-religious

“People might say something in the heat of the moment, like ‘are you a terrorist?’ or something, but they don’t really mean it.”

Group 3, female, Muslim

“Some people might take the mickey, not accept you.”

Group 3, male, Hindu

Several students acknowledged the fact that different people could experience the same environment differently.

“As a white girl, I guess you don’t know if there’s racial tensions.”

Group 9, female, non-religious

“It’s different for different people isn’t it – this is mostly Islam[ic students] and there are loads of Asian people. And for the white people, they might not like it because they are in the minority.”

Group 4, female, Muslim

Almost all of the young people at multi-faith schools felt that relationships were much better within school than outside in the wider community. They recognised that the school gave them opportunities to get beyond stereotypes that were not so readily available in the outside world.

“There’s no separation between the different religions in the school... You’re not exactly a Muslim or a Christian or a Sikh child, you’re just a child in the school.”

Group 6, female, Muslim

“We all mix with different races and religions, but when you get out of school that’s a different thing... Outside, people judge you like a book.”

Group 5, female, Christian

The students at multi-faith schools rarely deviated from the view that familiarity breeds acceptance. There was no discernible sense that different religions might be incompatible or that communities would be better off living separately. They believed that if you have the chance to get to know people from all religions then you will build relationships and come to understand and respect other faiths. Conversely, they

thought that if there were no opportunities to build personal relationships, then it would be much more difficult to avoid prejudice. Several students remarked on less tolerant attitudes in less diverse areas of the country or were critical of single-faith schools because they felt that their outlook was too narrow.

“If you had only Christian schools then you wouldn’t know about Muslims, Jewish people or whoever it was. And then you would have to listen just to what the media says and what the media says isn’t true.”

Group 5, female, Christian

“I think if you went to a school where it was just one religion you’d get stuck in your views and when you go out in the real world you won’t understand other people.”

Group 11, female, Sikh

“I don’t really notice segregation until I go on holiday somewhere mainly white, and then I’m shocked by people’s opinions.”

Group 9, male, non-religious

The consultation included one group of students from a single-faith school and although the small sample size makes any formal comparison invalid, it is interesting to note the differences in a minority of these students’ attitudes. Although these young people were also growing up in a multi-faith area, students at their school were almost all from the same religious background and their Religious Education focused on learning about their own religion. This meant that they were not being educated with young people from other religions, nor did they learn about other beliefs. Most of the students expressed similar attitudes to their counterparts at multi-faith schools, while a minority doubted whether different religions could live together peacefully. These attitudes would have been unlikely in the other multi-faith groups, although this may be partly because a strong pro-diversity ethos put students under pressure not to be negative.

“If you got one group from a religion and another group from a different religion you know they should get along but you know they’re not going to.”

Group 8, male, Christian

However, almost all of the students felt that their religion had taught them to treat people equally and not to discriminate. Some were very positive about their experiences of single-faith education. Most wanted to learn more about other faiths and cultures and recognised that a lack of information had the potential to lead to prejudice.

“If you learned about other people’s religions in school then you wouldn’t criticise them.”

Group 8, male, Christian

"[In this school] it is easier for me to practise my faith and to be able to celebrate it with people."

Group 8, female, Christian

"Catholics try to teach not to be racist."

Group 8, male, Christian

These later attitudes are consistent with previous Save the Children research, exploring the views of young people in faith schools towards community cohesion and citizenship.¹⁵

Friendships

The young people were asked whether religion was an issue when forming close friendships. For most, there was a sense of pride in the inclusive nature of friendship groups and some claimed that religion was irrelevant.

"You should like your friends for who they are and not what religion they are."

Group 4, female, Buddhist

"My two best friends – one's Sikh and one's Muslim, but it never really made a difference."

Group 7, female, Hindu

However, when the issue was probed further, the young people commented on a natural connection between those who share a similar faith background. Single-faith groups seemed to form organically, because the young people immediately had more in common and felt at ease with one another. Ethnicity and culture also appeared to influence who the young people felt most comfortable with. Interestingly, segregation in friendship groups did not seem to worry the young people much, as long as they got on at some level.

"A Jew crew just forms in every year ... because we feel a connection."

Group 2, female, Jewish

"In your own culture you have the same morals, the same sayings... You know how to act around them. It's easier."

Group 3, female, Christian

"One group is all Muslims, one is black people and English people, and then one's like a mixture in between... We never ever mix for some reason."

Group 7, female, non-religious

Some students, particularly those who were deeply religious, spoke of challenges in being close friends with someone who feels differently to you on important

issues. Others pointed out that divisions can often be caused by relatively superficial things, such as taste in music or sport.

“If you’re from a different religion you tend not to get on very well because religion tends to come up in talks and stuff because you both have different views.”

Group 10, female, Muslim

“It’s because they like football, we don’t really play football... I suppose it’s not always about religious divisions, it’s about interests.”

Group 11, male, Sikh

Some students acknowledged that it can take more effort to build a friendship with someone who is different to you, but that ultimately these friendships can be more valuable because you can learn a lot from each other. Most felt that it was important to have friends both from within and outside of your own faith and cultural background.

“If you’re different, you can learn more and you can get along with each other, but it takes time.”

Group 6, male, non-religious

“If one of my friends is strongly religious then I will ask them about it because I want to understand that part of their life.”

Group 9, female, non-religious

“Outside of school almost all my friends are Jewish, but in school hardly any of my friends are and so I get both sides and that’s good.”

Group 2, male, Jewish

The students did not generally feel threatened by ‘difference’ and seemed comfortable holding a range of views. There was a strong sense that you should be proud to be who you are and should not bow to peer pressure or change yourself to fit in with other people. While there was awareness that if you have a strong faith you will want to share it, the consensus was that a person should not try to force their religious beliefs onto others.

“It is good to discuss religion, but I don’t believe in trying to convert people, like pressurising them.”

Group 9, male, non-religious

“I know one boy at this school who was Christian and all his friends were Muslim and so he converted because of that... You shouldn’t have friends that say, ‘Come and join my religion’.”

Group 4, female, Muslim

“If religion comes up then we debate it and talk, but then we say ‘Ok, you think that and I think this’ but we still respect each other.”

Group 11, male, Sikh

2. Personal faith and values

The young people were asked to discuss their faith and values and to think about what influences them.

Within the different religions there were young people from different denominations, of varying degrees of religious observance. A significant proportion followed some religious teachings but not others. There were young people who described themselves as Christian, Jewish and Muslim, while qualifying that they were not actually very religious at all. There was also a recognition that wearing an outward symbol of religion, such as the hijab, did not necessarily equate with how religious you felt on the inside.

“Certain people might wear the full niqab.¹⁶ But someone who doesn’t might have a better heart.”

Group 4, female, Muslim

Some students mentioned the different assumptions made about different religions. For example, they felt that Islam was perceived as a ‘stronger’ religion than Christianity, which in turn had a stronger identity than Buddhism.

“If someone says that they are Muslim then everyone automatically thinks they must be religious, but there are people who are less religious or more religious. But if you’re Christian then most people won’t expect you to be that religious.”

Group 4, female, Muslim

“I’m a Buddhist and it doesn’t really affect me because it doesn’t really come up in society...”

Group 4, female, Buddhist

Non-religious young people

The young people without a religion sometimes found it difficult to talk about their beliefs and values. They mentioned their family, the law and their own experiences as influences on their sense of morality, but appeared less used to thinking through the connections between these values and their own decisions than the religious young people.¹⁷ This is perhaps unsurprising, as the religious young people are likely to have examined and learnt about their own beliefs in far more depth. Non-religious young people were confident, however, that this did not mean that their morals were less strong.

“If you have got a religion, you just say, ‘Yeah, I’m this religion’. If you ain’t got a religion, you’ve got to think deeper about what your beliefs are.”

Group 6, male, non-religious

“I don’t think it’s any harder to get morals if you don’t have a religion. It might be harder to piece it all together, but I think there is still an influence on your morals.”

Group 6, female, non-religious

Some of the non-religious young people were able to start thinking about the links between their values, experiences and moral codes.

“[You are influenced by] what you’re shown to be right and wrong through your own experiences which you build on as you go through life.”

Group 9, male, non-religious

“Society is guided by these morals and these morals are made by faith.”

Group 6, female, non-religious

Several of the non-religious (and white British) students expressed anxiety about offending religious students by inadvertently saying the wrong thing. They acknowledged how deeply beliefs run and the potential for offence. A minority saw learning about different religions as valuable primarily because you could learn how to avoid offending people.

“I think about it [religion] a lot, but I don’t really discuss it... because when you say something it might be understood in the wrong way and that’s why I don’t really want to say anything.”

Group 1, female, non-religious

“[Being in a multi-faith school is good because] you get to know better what you can and can’t say to other people.”

Group 3, male, non-religious

Students in several schools mentioned intolerance of atheism. In one school, both the teacher and the students felt that disagreements between believers and non-believers were the main religious tensions in the school. Generally, however, the young people downplayed differences between those who were and were not religious.

“There was a little problem with the existence of God, because we did a little debate... when people were against they wouldn’t let them talk, all shouting boo and everything.”

Group 1, female, Muslim

“There isn’t much difference between people who are religious and people who aren’t religious. There is only a difference if you want there to be.”

Group 1, female, Christian (not very religious)

Religious young people

Many religious students seemed used to discussing religion with their friends as an everyday topic and there was little self-consciousness evident in these discussions. Identifying with a religion was seen as a source of strength, providing a reassuring sense of belonging and purpose and setting out a useful moral framework for everyday living.

“It comes up in a normal conversation because it is what we do in our everyday life.”

Group 7, female, Muslim

“Religion is like a set of rules, it helps you to live your life, to decide what is right and wrong.”

Group 11, female, Sikh

I think you might in yourself feel stronger if you have a religion.

Group 1, female, Muslim

The rules set out by religions were commonly viewed as protective and therefore beneficial. Although recognising the benefits of the rules did not stop some students from dreaming about some of the things that were prohibited. This sense of temptation is perhaps unsurprising in a society where not everyone follows the same rules.

“I think religion can protect you... like if you're a woman from becoming a single mother... It's protecting you more than anything.”

Group 1, female, non-religious

“I think of religion as a colouring book, and it gives you the outline of an animal that you have to colour in... You don't want to go out of the line and religion is protecting you basically.”

Group 1, female, Muslim

“Muslims have rules about what you can do.... If I wasn't Muslim, then I would obviously be doing the stuff that I am not allowed to do!”

Group 4, male, Muslim

Some students recognised and identified competing influences on their behaviour and beliefs.

“I think it is really hard for someone to lead a religious life in this modern society, where everything is going against it.”

Group 1 female, Christian (describing themselves as not very religious)

Youth culture

Some young people felt that a strong secular youth culture pulled them away from religion. Peer pressure to lead a 'normal' teenage life could be strong. However, for both religious and non-religious young people, importance was attached to sticking to your own beliefs and being confident in yourself.

“Youth culture is kind of a religion, in its own kind of way... Young children like that more than their own religion.”

Group 6, female, non-religious

“I have a friend who goes to Mass every week and her friends say ‘why are you going?’... and make her feel guilty.”

Group 8, female, Christian

“If you're a strong character and stick to your beliefs then it's ok.”

Group 3, male, non-religious

Different beliefs

The students discussed whether being surrounded by people with different beliefs makes it more difficult to follow a certain religion. Their discussion probed how they balanced their commitment to diversity with the potential challenges to religious integrity that multi-faith society brings. For example, many students, particularly the non-religious ones, felt that exposure to different points of view would mean that you would be more likely to question the teachings of your religion and family. However, most agreed that finding out about a variety of different viewpoints allowed students to make informed decisions and was therefore a good thing, whatever the outcome.

“Someone might listen to opinions of a group of people all from different religions and say ‘yes, I agree with that’, even if it is against their religion...”

Group 1, female, non-religious

“Religion is an accident of birth, if my parents were Muslim then I would probably be a Muslim. If you go to a multicultural school then you can have a look at all the religions and choose your own one.”

Group 5, female, Christian

“I think there is going to be a loosening of identity and religion’s not going to matter anymore and everyone will live together and be influenced by each other.”

Group 10, female, Muslim

Family

The combination of the draw of secular youth culture and exposure to a huge range of different world-views can lead young people to question or pull away from the beliefs of their parents. Students were aware of potential tensions between the different influences on their lives and recognised that this could cause familial conflicts. However, most understood and sympathised with parents who wanted to keep their children within their religion.

“If anyone in my family decided they don’t want to be Hindu anymore they’d probably be disowned.”

Group 7, female, Hindu

“It’s their duty to tell their children about their religion. Like Christian parents, when their child is baptised they promise to bring it up in a Christian way and in Islam as well...”

Group 4, female, Muslim

“[Parents] are scared that their children will forget the ways of their ancestors and that’s why they’ll send their children to a religious school.”

Group 1, female, Muslim

The future and the wider world

The final part of the discussions with young people opened out to relationships between different religions outside of the school environment. The young people were very aware of tensions and prejudice in wider society and most drew a strong distinction between the state of relationships in and out of school. They explained this disparity by the fact that school often helps people to get beyond initial prejudices. Outside of school, people don't know each other and so they judge each other by stereotypes. Some of the young people had either personally experienced or witnessed religiously motivated abuse (predominantly Muslims and Jews in this consultation). Some Jewish young people reported personal abuse, while Muslim young people reported less direct incidents, but seemed to have a greater sense of fear and discrimination.

"Whenever there was a foul, people watching would shout 'dirty Jew tackle'"

Group 2, male, Jewish

"I know quite a lot of Muslims that are afraid to follow their faith, because right now in society, there are loads of people who are afraid who have a stereotypical view that all Muslims are terrorists."

Group 4, female, Muslim (not very religious)

Many participants also pointed to the more prejudiced attitudes of the older generations as a cause of tensions in the wider community. There was a sense among many of the young people that they themselves represented a new kind of society that understands and accepts a variety of different beliefs and cultures. Many of the young people had parents who were born abroad. This may have intensified their feelings of being the first generation to experience this new, more accepting society.

"The younger generation thinks differently from the older generation. Like older people on the bus – the way they talk, they're less knowledgeable."

Group 1, female, Christian

"The reason that there are different areas with dominant groups is because it is the parents who own the houses and the older generation haven't integrated as well as us."

Group 9, male, non-religious

Some felt that, although much had been done to bring different groups together, prejudices still existed under the surface and could re-emerge.

"In the olden days the whole world was completely segregated. Then laws came in but the ideas are still inside of them, and they will explode and there will be great conflict again."

Group 1, female, Christian (not very religious)

"I think London is a multicultural place, but are people from different religions mixing together? You don't see them walking about, talking to each other, cheering. They're rather separated from each other in a way."

Group 1, female, Christian, (not very religious)

The future

The young people saw themselves as more accepting and integrated than their parents' generation. They intended to pass these values on to their own children. This prompted them to feel that relationships between different groups would continue to improve.

"Everyone's getting mixed now and it's getting better and better."

Group 7, female, Muslim

Some students also felt empowered to play their own part in creating a successful multi-faith society. There was a feeling that the problems caused by issues such as the war in Iraq would spur the new generation on to learn from past mistakes. Interestingly, these comments generally came from students at schools with a more middle-class intake, suggesting that it is particularly important to focus work in areas where young people may have lower aspirations and feel more vulnerable to community tensions.

"Everyone keeps complaining about the media and everything, but maybe the new generation can actually make the media better."

Group 7, female, Muslim

"If it's got to the point where it's so extreme and people realise how escalated it's got... then that might be the kick-start to the revolution of accepting everyone."

Group 9, male, non-religious

However, many young people were not optimistic about the future, or confident that they could change things. When looking forward, there was a feeling that community relations would stay the same or get worse. This seemed to be exacerbated by fear about global events and their potential to impact on local community relationships.

"We're going back to a segregated society."

Group 1, female, Muslim

"Provided there are no momentous events like the American bombings, the 7 July bombings... if that dies down then mixing will increase... but I don't see that happening."

Group 6, female, non-religious

"The world is already getting worse, with all the wars and everything. The Bible says it will happen like this when the world is coming to an end."

Group 5, female, Christian

Global issues

Some of the students had a clear sense of being directly affected by tensions and overseas conflicts. However, they were mostly in agreement that religion was an excuse for rather than a cause of conflict.

“I’m a Sunni Muslim and my friend is a Shia. Yesterday one of the Golden domes of Shias was bombed [in Iraq]... he said his dad was crying and stuff. He got angry with me for talking to him about it because he thought that because I am Sunni I am not allowed to talk about that.”

Group 5, male, Muslim

“The conflict over Kashmir was between India and Pakistan but then it became between Hindus and Muslims... My relatives in India said that they didn’t like Muslims any more, so then my dad would get into an argument with them because he didn’t like them saying that.”

Group 7, female, Hindu

“Religion has become an excuse for people to start wars on each other, but there are other reasons under that.”

Group 1, female, non-religious

For those not directly affected, events elsewhere in the world and their coverage in the media were generally perceived to foster prejudices and lead to increased fear and discrimination.

“After the American bombings, people looked at Muslims in a different way.”

Group 6, female, Muslim

“Even if it’s not in London we see it on the news – the conflict between these religions and these cultures, it affects every person. It does something to your brain.”

Group 1, female, Muslim

Views about the media and the establishment

Most of the young people had very negative views about the media and many felt it stirred up religious tensions. A few students mentioned specific coverage such as a programme about Guantanamo Bay that had challenged stereotypes. However, most did not seem to differentiate between different media.

Islam was perceived to bear the brunt of unfair media coverage, for example, the association with terrorism. This caused anxiety for many of the young people, from all religious backgrounds. There were some feelings of resentment, particularly among a

few of the Muslim students. This was probably emphasised because protests over the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad were in the media spotlight at the time of the consultation.

“The media is only 2 per cent true.”

Group 5, female, Christian

“When you’re a young person you do feel like the world’s against you, so if you’re Muslim and you feel the media is against you too, it just makes you feel angry.”

Group 9, female, non-religious

“If they get over the aspect of mixing Islam with terrorism then in ten years we can live peacefully without fighting.”

Group 10, male, Muslim

Negative impressions of the media commonly extended to politicians and the establishment in general. The Iraq war was a huge issue to students of all beliefs and this appeared to confirm their suspicion of the motives of those in power. Some of the young people doubted the government’s commitment to community cohesion and to protecting those from non-Christian religions.

“This country is a Christian country and they think that they are superior to every other religion.”

Group 4, female, Muslim

“The government is trying to pull people apart. You hear all these things about how they are going to separate whites from blacks. They’re making it all worse.”

Group 5, male, Muslim

The way ahead

At the end of the discussions, the young people were asked to suggest ideas for building better understanding between young people with different beliefs. Almost all of the suggestions focused on educating people and making sure that they have the opportunities to get to know each other better.

“On like BBC1 or one of the main channels, get young people from different religions to talk about their religion.”

Group 11, female, Sikh

“If I had money I would spend it on better education about religion for the next generation. I don’t think conflict will ever stop but that will stop it getting out of control.”

Group 4, female, Muslim

“Spend money where it’s needed and educate people about other religions and help people to understand different people out there.”

Group 9, male, non-religious

The consultation offers insights into the experiences of young people growing up in a multi-faith society. It suggests that these young people value diversity and are building friendships across religious and cultural barriers. Many outlined the benefits and importance of getting to know people from different faiths and backgrounds. They saw personal contact as the most obvious way to break down stereotypes and to build understanding and respect. The following chapters look at the potential to provide these opportunities to all young people.

The consultation findings suggest a range of competing influences on young people’s behaviour and beliefs – family, religion, school life, communities and the wider social and political culture. It is important that young people feel comfortable discussing these complexities and balancing the different parts of their identities.

Most of the young people were interested in political and religious issues. They had a keen awareness of the potential for global events to impact locally. However, some of their comments are disturbing. Many distrusted the media and the establishment, and some were deeply pessimistic about the future. Many did not feel empowered to play an active role in shaping a just and respectful society.

One way to address these feelings of distrust and disempowerment is to provide young people with access to information that they trust. They also need space to discuss and draw out the complexities of global, political and religious issues. This is especially important where an issue may impact on relations between different communities in this country. Young people need support to think through different viewpoints and constructive channels to register opposition or campaign for change.

Schools and youth groups could play a valuable role in providing these spaces and opportunities. The remainder of this publication explores ways to facilitate these types of dialogue.

This section examines the ways in which schools can play a role in promoting better understanding between young people from different faiths and backgrounds. It includes an exploration of the different issues facing schools with different levels of diversity or with a faith-based as opposed to secular ethos. In focusing on practical spaces for dialogue, within and outside the curriculum, it draws on the experience of the Diversity and Dialogue project within schools and on observations of the wider context.¹⁸

The young people in the Diversity and Dialogue consultation highlighted the importance they attach to their school environment and the atmosphere of understanding and respect that schools can help to create. School was viewed as an important space for allowing young people to get to know each other and for breaking down prejudice and fear of the unknown.

“People feel much more at ease with each other....We’ve all grown up together.”

Group 9, male, non-religious

However, not all schools have a diverse make-up. For less diverse schools, creating understanding between those of different faiths and backgrounds can be a more challenging and seemingly less urgent task. While single or majority-faith schools in no way automatically give rise to prejudice, interaction between young people from a variety of religious backgrounds helps to promote understanding and respect.

“The only thing that causes conflict is not knowing.”

Group 1, female, non-religious

Getting to know young people from a variety of religious backgrounds helps to foster the acceptance of difference. However, to develop a more in-depth knowledge of different religious beliefs and practices it is also important to discuss and actively learn about them. Some of the young people in the consultation emphasised the valuable role played by Religious Education (RE).

“In RE you get to understand people more, you listen to people talking about their faith and you get to learn a little bit more about them.”

Group 3, male, non-religious

Schools can help young people develop confidence in discussing beliefs and values. The Diversity and Dialogue project has identified two important strands to help foster good interfaith relationships:

- a) ensuring that young people have opportunities to meet and to form constructive relationships with people from other faiths and backgrounds
- b) developing young people's skills to share their own beliefs and values and to understand and respect those of other people.

This section is divided into two parts, addressing these elements. The first focuses on the ways in which schools can provide students with opportunities to meet and engage with people from other faiths and backgrounds. It examines the challenges and potential solutions, particularly in less diverse schools. The second part looks at the spaces in school for young people to learn about their own and other people's beliefs and to build dialogue skills. It focuses particularly on Religious Education and Citizenship.

a) Ensuring that all young people have the opportunities to meet and form constructive relationships with people from other faiths and backgrounds

These opportunities occur as a matter of course in some schools, but present a real challenge in others.

Multi-faith schools

At many urban secular schools there are students from a wide range of different faiths who learn together every day. A normal school day provides opportunities to meet people from other faiths. However, these schools still need to play an active role in ensuring that the relationships formed are constructive. Young people need to learn about a diversity of faiths and values and be encouraged to share their beliefs with their peers. Schools also need effective strategies to tackle religious prejudice, religiously linked bullying or conflict if this arises. They should also give students the opportunities to discuss controversial issues in an open and safe environment.

Schools in areas with little religious diversity

In white-majority schools, often in rural areas, interfaith relations are unlikely to be seen as a priority issue as most students will not interact with people from different religious backgrounds on a daily basis. Students may not view religion as an important part of their identities and may be unaccustomed to discussing their own beliefs and values. Logistics and resource constraints, can also make it challenging to involve these schools in interfaith projects. However, it is important that these students are also

given opportunities to understand other sets of beliefs and to find out about those from different faiths and backgrounds for themselves. Their perceptions of those with different faiths and beliefs will colour their opinions on a whole range of local and global issues and it is important that these perceptions are informed by accurate knowledge and experiences.

Schools with a homogenous religious make-up are also present in areas where there is a dense concentration of people from one immigrant community. In contrast to white-majority schools, these students often have a very strong sense of their religious or cultural identity but are not always so clear on the more complex issues of identity within broader British society. Teachers in such schools have a different but equally important challenge.

For schools with low levels of representation of different faiths, better understanding and cohesion can be built through school-linking projects. While many schools may link with schools in Africa or Asia, few currently consider partnering a school in this country. If face-to-face exchanges prove logistically problematic, initial steps can be made via an email-based programme, as in the example below.

‘Building E-Bridges’

This project originally linked primary school students at the predominantly Muslim Uplands Junior School in Leicester with pupils at the nearby St Thomas More Catholic Primary School and then expanded to include rural schools from Sussex. Students were encouraged to discuss their own beliefs and values around ethical dilemmas, then to share thoughts with their linking partner via email. The partnership within Leicester was developed through joint sports days, picnics and visits to each other’s schools. There were also shared residential sessions in Sussex and Leicestershire, to bring the email partners together. Julia Ipgrave has written several books about the project and other schools have emulated her work. Ipgrave’s work was at primary level but could be adapted for older students.

The Diversity and Dialogue project has focused its work primarily on urban multi-faith areas. More work is necessary to explore opportunities for building understanding of different beliefs in less diverse areas of the country.

Single or majority-faith schools in multi-faith areas

There are suggestions that segregation in education adds to wider community divisions. Single or majority-faith schools in multi-faith areas perhaps face the most pressing challenges in creating understanding between young people from different faiths and backgrounds.¹⁹

Some critics have condemned faith schools in particular, viewing them as the enemy of community cohesion because they separate students on the grounds of religion and often ethnicity. This view is an over simplification. Many faith schools in fact cater for students from a wide variety of religious backgrounds.²⁰ They often teach their students to value diversity and to understand and respect a range of different religious beliefs. Secular schools, conversely, can be dramatically segregated along faith lines.

The young people involved in the Diversity and Dialogue project expressed a range of views on single faith schools:

“[At a single-faith school] you’ll become more religious and then you might become racist against other people’s religions”.

14-year-old, male, non-religious

“I believe that attending a single faith school has enhanced my understanding dramatically of my faith and without learning and studying it at GCSE I don’t believe that I would fully understand my religion and the importance of it in my life.”

16-year-old, female, Christian (Roman Catholic)

Opposition to faith schools is not limited to issues around the physical separation of young people along faith lines. Critics also question whether students will be taught about a variety of beliefs and perspectives.²¹ The large teaching unions have expressed grave doubts about the increase in state-funded faith schools and about the influence of religious groups in education, predominantly through the new City Academies. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) voted for a motion to ban further government funding of religious schools earlier this year.²² The government, however, is committed to state-funding of faith schools and expanding the number of both Christian and non-Christian schools.²³ Since 1997, the first five Muslim and two Sikh schools have received state funding and the first state-funded Hindu school will open by 2010. Funding has also been given to the Association of Muslim Schools to help private Islamic schools to meet state-funding criteria.

The expansion of non-Christian schooling promotes equity in that it will give parents from other religions the option to educate their children in a religious environment. At present there are 1.7 million Christian state school places for 5.1 million Christian children; 13,000 for 33,000 Jewish children; but only 1,000 for 371,000 Muslims.²⁴

Both faith-based and secular schools can give rise to an education within a single-faith environment. It is likely that students at these schools will have fewer opportunities to gain understanding of other beliefs and therefore it is important that the schools play an active role in facilitating dialogue. Cattle’s landmark review of the 2001 disturbances emphasised the importance of young people in promoting community cohesion. He recommended that all schools be “under a statutory duty to promote respect for, and an understanding of, the cultures in the school and neighbouring areas, through a programme of cross-cultural contact”. Faith institutions are also supportive of such initiatives. For example, Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, stated that faith

schools should “arrange exchanges between schools so pupils can be exposed to the teachings of other religions”.²⁵ The experience of the Diversity and Dialogue project supports recommendations that all single or majority-faith schools should aim to facilitate relationships with schools with different religious make-ups.

Local school partnerships and links

School-linking projects offer important chances for young people from different faith backgrounds to build relationships. Through the formation of a partnership between schools with different ethnic or religious make-ups, students meet for joint activities and have the opportunity to learn about each other’s faiths and cultures. This type of initiative has not yet been widely implemented in England, despite wide-ranging support for the idea.²⁶

School linking is well established in Northern Ireland, where single-faith schools are encouraged to link up, offering their pupils the opportunity to meet young people across the sectarian divide. The Department of Education for Northern Ireland²⁷ makes significant funding available annually and several voluntary organisations offer practical support. The initiatives are underpinned by Education for Mutual Understanding, a cross-curricular theme, which requires all schools to foster self-respect, respect for others and the improvement of relationships between people of differing cultural traditions.²⁸ Linking has had some success, but there have been criticisms that relationships formed are not sustained. Many people in Northern Ireland think that integrated schooling is necessary to genuinely tackle sectarian segregation. A recent poll showed that 81 per cent of people in Northern Ireland believe that integrated education is important to the peace and reconciliation process.²⁹

School-linking projects cannot involve every student for a sustained period of time so relationships formed risk being either fleeting or confined to a small and motivated group of students. While recognising these limitations, the experience of Diversity and Dialogue suggests that, when well managed, school-linking projects can offer unique and valuable opportunities to build understanding and combat division.

In Scotland, on 30 January 2005, First Minister Jack McConnell announced that all Catholic schools would be asked to form links with their secular counterparts in an attempt to put an end to the ‘secret shame’ of sectarian hostilities.³⁰ In England, there is some interesting work going on at primary level, but as yet not so much at secondary.

Holy Trinity and Gatton schools in south London have an established school-linking project. Year five students experience school life and lessons at the neighbouring school. The aim is to ensure that students at these single faith based schools (Roman Catholic and Muslim respectively) are exposed to each other’s religion and cultures and have the opportunities to develop friendships.

Five primary schools in Oldham received lottery funding to link up and provide opportunities for their students to participate in joint activities. All the schools are predominantly mono-cultural and have a high percentage of students from one ethnic and religious group. The Extended Schools team at Oldham Council has built on this relationship and developed stronger links between four of the schools through the delivery of extended services.

Pupils from the schools are brought together after school on a weekly basis to participate in various arts and sports-based activities. For instance, they spent one term learning about the major religious festivals, making cards and sharing their own experiences. Together they have taken part in ballroom dancing lessons and have put on a performance for their parents. Involving parents in extended activities promotes greater community cohesion and is an integral part of the agenda.

School-linking projects are still rare at secondary level, but there is growing interest. Some of the young people in the consultation recognised the need to bring older students together.

“It should be done in secondary schools because that’s when you’re old enough to know what’s going on and that’s when you form your own prejudices and they set in.”

Group 2, female, Jewish

The experience of Diversity and Dialogue indicates teacher support for linking initiatives. However, lack of time and clarity over partnership logistics can prove problematic in translating this support into action. The Schools Linking Project in Bradford is an innovative framework and resource providing support for linking

The **Schools Linking Project** in Bradford has developed a framework for school linking, including professional development for teachers and school support staff and guidelines for school management. It offers a broad menu of tried and tested year-long linking programmes, which work both within the curriculum and in partnership with expressive artists, cultural venues and university departments in the district.

The project began working with pairs of primary schools but has recently developed some exciting new work with older students. In Keighley, every year five pupil is engaged in a district-wide initiative, supported by year twelve students from the local secondary schools. The project supports a group of three sixth-form colleges working together on business plans and a pair of secondary schools working on a World War II archaeology project. The Linking Project is also working on Peacejam, a year-long programme where school students will work with university students to develop and implement a peace plan for the district.

initiatives. It provides a first port of call for teachers who might feel tentative about making the first approach and offers advice and structure to support the time, negotiation and commitment needed from the schools involved. This model could be replicated in other areas of the country.

One of the biggest issues with such projects can be finding the time for dialogue within the curriculum, or in justifying any time that students take off-timetable. The Schools Linking Project aims to work within the curriculum, through history, business studies and other subjects relating real-life situations to school learning. The two examples below also demonstrate innovative ways of bringing dialogue into the normal working day.

Feversham and St Joseph's schools in Bradford link through the students, supporting them to deliver each other's religious studies modules. Muslim students from Feversham teach Islam to the Roman Catholic students at St Joseph's and vice versa.³¹

City of Bristol College teaches students from a wide range of faiths and backgrounds. Many arrive here from their secondary schools with little knowledge of those outside their own immediate community. The college helps to build their understanding of other faiths and cultures through a variety of work placement programmes. They encourage students to experience at least one organisation run by people from a different faith community or in an area dominated by a particular cultural group. This gives students the chance to get to know people from other faiths and cultures and to build working relationships with them. This generates a greater awareness, which they then share with their peers.

Specialist organisations

School-linking projects can unearth difficult issues around religious stereotyping, prejudice and conflict. Teachers may feel nervous tackling these issues and may have had little or no training in managing them. In the longer term, it is important to support teachers to develop confidence in working with these issues. However, for initial sessions it can be useful to bring in a specialist outside agency, particularly in areas where there have been tensions. Using an external agency can also provide a clear focus for school linking. For example, a programme of music or drama workshops can provide a useful framework for joint working. This helps to establish the partnership on an equal footing, preventing one school from having greater ownership and control of the work. Building Bridges Pendle is a good example of external expertise being utilised to support teachers and children.

Building Bridges Pendle is an interfaith organisation with an active education programme. It has developed three interactive learning programmes for pupils in years five, six and seven. These are based on government guidelines for Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Citizenship education and run over a six-week period in local schools. The programmes are delivered by a multi-faith and multi-ethnic team from Building Bridges Pendle and cover topics such as discrimination, bullying and the customs and traditions of world religions.

Building models of dialogue for schools – Diversity and Dialogue’s projects

The Diversity and Dialogue project has worked with eight different schools, experimenting with different ways of bringing schools and students together. Because of short timescales, lasting impact has been limited. However, these initial contacts have established foundations for the development of longer-term relationships. Often a short, self-contained project can be the easiest starting point. A longer-term partnership can then be developed after an initial success.

Races and faces

The Diversity and Dialogue project worked with the Lancashire Council of Mosques to pair up a Church of England and a majority Muslim secular school in Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council. During workshops, students discussed their thoughts and feelings about racially and religiously motivated bullying in their schools and communities. They then worked together with a local community artist to design a banner and mosaic expressing their thoughts. The banner carries a simple yet powerful message from the students – ‘Unity’.

The artwork was shown at Blackburn Museum during February and March 2006. Each school now houses one piece permanently, as a reminder of the experience of working together. Creating a piece of artwork can be a valuable first step in building trust as it leaves a lasting symbol of co-operation for the future.

Student leaders

Dialogue can be particularly successful when students are able to take the lead in developing the framework of a partnership project. They are more likely to feel committed to the partnership if they have played an active part in its conception. They are also best placed to decide upon activities that are engaging for a broad range of students over a sustained period of time.

Let's Talk: the dialogue project

In Birmingham, Teachers in Development Education (Tide) worked in partnership with the Diversity and Dialogue project. The group explored a model that brings teachers and students together to plan and implement 'dialogue opportunities'. Within the model, students take a lead role in uniting different schools.

The core group involved four teachers and nine students. They worked together to plan a day of dialogue for students from the three schools involved. They used a variety of activities to get to know each other and to identify issues they felt were important. They opted to use the film 'Crash' as a stimulus, because of its exploration of a complex set of issues linked to perception and racism. It provided a common reference point that was not personal to the students but prompted frank discussion about their own experiences and contrasting perspectives.

Both the event and the process were engaging for the young people and the teachers. They valued being given space to discuss important issues with a diverse group of new people. To develop the approach, a second group is working on another dialogue project, investigating different faith and secular perspectives on climate change.

Global issues

Campaigns around global development issues can be an empowering way of uniting students from different schools. Following the success of the Make Poverty History campaign, many schools are keen to find ways to continue to engage their students in international development. Many schools have been keen to pilot this model, global issues proving a successful focus for partnership projects.

Millennium Development Goals campaign video

In Manchester, the Diversity and Dialogue project linked three secondary schools to design and produce a campaign video around the Millennium Development Goals. To begin with, participants at each of the schools highlighted that they rarely travelled out of their immediate community and did not mix with young people from nearby schools. However, during the project the students were united in their common purpose. They interacted fully in their efforts to convey their message in an innovative and relevant way.

During the project, the students learnt about the MDGs through interactive workshops on global poverty, empowering women and the environment. They then came together over two and a half days and worked with a community film-maker to create campaigning messages. For more information on the Millennium Development Goals see www.un.org/millenniumgoals/.

The Campaign for Girls' Education

Girls from one Roman Catholic, one Muslim and one secular school were brought together to work on the Save the Children Campaign for Girls' Education. Around 60 million girls are out of primary school worldwide, and more than 70 countries missed the target to remedy this by the end of 2005. Education was a unifying cause for the students.

The Diversity and Dialogue project ran workshops in each school, teaching students about barriers to education in the developing world. The activities prompted comparisons with their own educational experiences and attitudes. Students from each school were brought together at the Labour Party conference to quiz government ministers on girls' access to education in the developing world. On the day of the event, the students took part in role-play activities before the ministers arrived. These explored the issues further and encouraged students from the different schools to get to know each other. Teachers and students were all enthusiastic about getting involved in a similar project next year.

The experience of the Diversity and Dialogue projects indicates that school linking is a good way of promoting interfaith dialogue in schools with low levels of diversity. However, it is important that linking projects are not seen as an end in themselves and that due care is given to fostering genuine understanding and respect on an ongoing basis.

Extended schools

The extended schools programme is part of the government's Every Child Matters agenda. Although still in its early stages, the programme offers valuable opportunities for bringing young people together.

Extended schools are envisaged as community hubs, open from 8am–6pm all year round. All primary and secondary schools will provide a variety of extra-curricular activities for children and young people in the local area by 2010.³² To deliver this vision, schools will be expected to work in partnership with other agencies, including local organisations and businesses, national organisations, the voluntary sector and faith groups. Schools will also be encouraged to build relationships with nearby schools, clustering to deliver extended services in their locality together. The government has committed £680m over the next two years.

This agenda offers opportunities for those working on youth interfaith projects. There are a number of ways in which the extended schools agenda could support this work:

- Schools will be looking outwards to engage with local and community organisations, including faith groups. This creates new opportunities for faith and community groups to work with schools and more space for establishing interfaith dialogue

and social cohesion projects. It also offers opportunities for single faith-based organisations to run activities with young people from a range of different beliefs.

- School premises and facilities offer a venue for new and existing youth interfaith projects. Classrooms, assembly halls and sports grounds are potential spaces for interfaith events, activities or dialogue groups.
- Schools working together in a cluster to provide services to the community offer an opportunity for faith-based and majority-faith schools to link up and deliver extended services jointly. Time and resources have proved significant challenges for school-linking projects. This agenda indicates that schools will be better resourced and enabled to link up and provide joint activities.

Many schools are already providing extended services and linking with neighbouring schools to bring students together. However, cultural and faith practices need to be considered to ensure that certain groups are not excluded from extended provision. For instance, many Muslim students attend *madrasas* (mosque schools) after school. Partnerships with the *madrasas* could be an avenue for exploration.

St Cyprian's Greek Orthodox Primary School in Croydon has opened its doors to the wider community, allowing its facilities to be used for sporting and other events.

Pupils from other local schools join pupils at St Cyprian's in an after-school art club. The school is also leading an initiative to organise a mini Olympic Games within a geographical cluster of schools, bringing together children and adults of all faiths and backgrounds.³³

Simone Spray, Extended Schools Strategy Manager at Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council, emphasises the role of extended schools in building understanding between young people of different faiths:

“Extended schools are a particularly important space for community cohesion. If you can move students around after the school day and get them to mix with different people it can have definite benefits for community relations. The beauty of extended schools is as a local agenda, it responds to what is relevant in the local community.”

There are several other agendas and developments providing opportunities for building understanding between young people from different faiths and backgrounds:

- The Manifesto for Education Outside the Classroom proposes greater support for activities and residential sessions outside the school environment.³⁴
- Education Improvement Partnerships encourage higher quality collaboration between schools and other partners.³⁵
- A general movement towards greater extra-curricular provision and more co-operation between different schools and colleges, through the 14–19 curriculum reforms.

b) Developing young people's skills to share their own beliefs and values and to understand and respect those of other people

As outlined at the beginning of this Chapter, young people need opportunities to meet and form constructive relationships across religious boundaries. To create a successful multi-faith environment, schools also need to equip students with the skills to understand and respect a range of different beliefs. Students need to be encouraged to reflect on how religious identity relates to opinions and actions on a wide spectrum of political and moral issues.

Religious Education

Religious Education (RE) is where discussion over faiths and values fits most neatly into the school day.

“It is too simplistic to see RE as an anti-racism tool, but what RE does is to help children to establish who they are and what they think about things. It’s finding out about who they are and who other people are.”

Lesley Prior, London Borough of Hounslow and Institute of Education

Many young people in the Diversity and Dialogue consultation highlighted the importance of a good religious education and praised the teaching they had received. Good RE promotes mutual understanding. In turn, poor quality RE was seen to create an atmosphere of difference and division.

“We have good RE teachers and good RE lessons so everyone understands each other’s religions.”

Group 1, female, Christian (describing herself as not very religious)

“From early on groups formed. Teachers teach you about each religion but they don’t teach you to respect each other’s religions. So everyone felt as if they were different and should only socialise in their groups.”

Group 2, male, Jewish

In most schools, the RE curriculum is decided at a local authority level. It is the only statutory subject that allows for this local variance in the curriculum. Learning can therefore be responsive to the particular needs and religious make-up of an area. It can also enable meaningful participation from local students and faith organisations. In 2004, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) produced a non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education. This is likely to become the basis for all local curricula over the next few years, as local authorities review their syllabuses and take the new framework into account. The freedom to vary the curriculum locally within this framework will remain, however, and should continue to allow local authorities to tailor the syllabus to local situations.

The new national framework, for the first time, specifically promotes inter-religious dialogue and learning about the relationships between religions. This is in addition to traditional learning about the individual faiths. The framework received a boost when, on 22 February 2006, leaders from the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh faiths signed a joint statement to promote the National Framework for RE and to confirm their commitment to teaching about all religions, even in faith schools.

The framework for 14–19-year-olds requires that pupils learn to:

“understand the importance of dialogue between and among different religions and beliefs. They gain a better understanding of how religion and belief contribute to community cohesion, recognising the various perceptions people have regarding the role of religion in the world.”³⁶

The specific mention in the framework of “the role of religion in the world” encourages schools to address current debates on the relationship between religions and governments and the role that religion plays in various aspects of our society.

The role of SACREs

The religious education syllabus in each area of England and Wales is decided by the local education authority (LEA), advised by local faith leaders, teachers’ representatives and council representatives, who form a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE).

SACREs are ready-made multi-faith groups, already working in the education sector. As such they have great potential to take on a more significant role in promoting constructive relationships between young people from different faiths. Some already advise on more than the syllabus. For example, the Hounslow SACRE has produced guidance on how schools should respond to religious tensions that might arise after a terrorist attack or other emergency related to religious extremism. SACREs are also beginning to promote interfaith discussion among young people through organising forums and events.

In its 2005 report on SACREs, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) recommended broadening their remit, particularly as the National Framework for Religious Education will mean there is less need for local curriculum development.

“Although their statutory activities are limited to matters relating to RE and collective worship, they clearly have the potential to play a unique role in pursuing the government’s social cohesion agenda as well as supporting the ideal of respecting diversity.”³⁷

The local variations in curriculum mean that there is great potential for involving local young people in their own religious education. Bradford, for example, has a youth-shadow SACRE made up of students from different schools and different

Opinion piece by John Keast, RE Advisor to the Department for Education and Skills

In the society of 1944 when RE was made compulsory, the assumptions behind RE (and the rest of the curriculum) were based on traditional explicitly Judaeo-Christian values. The RE syllabus was largely Biblical to avoid privileging any particular Christian denomination. Children were taught the basic stories of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, locating them in a meta-narrative that gave life a shape and purpose. Where this 'lowest common denominator' approach was insufficient, dissent was accommodated by faith schools and withdrawals, but it was small in size and not very problematic.

In what is now regarded as a multicultural society with a plurality of faiths and much non-faith, study confined to only one or two religions or to knowledge of religions only is no longer possible, either in a British or global context. What is our new values base, and how wide should the scope of study in Religious Education be? How do we handle difference and commonality? How are the concepts of diversity and dialogue promoted?

I believe a new common denominator is emerging – but not one I should want to characterise as the 'lowest'. There are a finite number of seminal religious traditions, although many variations of them. These now co-exist in most countries in the world. Based on these, a new understanding of RE is emerging – a rich, deep interfaith study that encompasses the commonality and difference of the main spiritual heritages of most of humankind. Such RE does not break faith with the Christian traditions of Britain. Instead it extends them to include the essentially global human heritage of faith, found in the plural traditions of the world. These different faith traditions are practised, articulated and dynamically developing in diverse ways in the UK and many other places. Such RE serves the needs of a fractured humanity, providing a spiritual basis for a diverse but shared citizenship locally and globally, and a dialogue between people of all faiths and no formal religion.

Although no doubt imperfectly described, it is such a view of RE and its role in promoting understanding of diversity and dialogue that lies behind the non-statutory National Framework for RE, published in 2004. For example:

- “RE encourages pupils to learn from different religions ... while exploring their own beliefs ...” p.7
- “... being ready to value difference and diversity ...” p.13
- “... the importance of dialogue between and among different religions ...” p.30.

RE promotes awareness, knowledge and understanding of religious beliefs, practices and expressions – learning *about* religion. RE also encourages reflection, evaluation and application of what is learned – learning *from* religion.

faith backgrounds. They discuss their own experiences of religious education, make suggestions for improvements and discuss wider topics of interest. Some other SACREs involve students in a similar way, but this has not yet become standard practice. Others have tried to involve local youth but have faced challenges with recruitment and resources. However, the Diversity and Dialogue project recommends that all SACREs involve young people in their work at some level.

The National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) is now funding a limited number of youth projects through a grants scheme (in association with the Westhill Trust). Hounslow, Portsmouth, Solihull, Hull and the East Riding and Bristol have received funding for 2006. An expansion of this funding could give more or all SACREs the chance to run interfaith events for young people and to develop sustained youth forums on issues of faith and cohesion in schools. The Diversity and Dialogue website gives ideas for topics, activities and discussion frameworks, which can be used at interfaith events or forum meetings.

Hounslow

Sixth formers from girls' schools in the London Borough of Hounslow have come together each summer for several years to take part in a conference on the theme of 'women in religion'.

Trainee teachers from the Institute of Education organise their own workshop on the theme and students rotate round them. Previous topics have included Bollywood women and Hindu deities, honour killings and an agony aunt discussion workshop trying to solve imagined problem letters, for example, from a Jewish girl who has fallen in love with a boy who is not Jewish.

NASACRE funding has enabled the summer 2006 event to be extended to involve a greater number of schools and sixth formers. It will be based around the theme 'Faith in the Capital' and will involve students from a wide variety of religious traditions and backgrounds, including those who are motivated to talk about RE and those who are not. The event aims to give as many young people as possible the opportunity to explore their faith, values and beliefs in a stimulating and thought-provoking environment.

Religion as a non-examination subject

RE is a statutory subject for all students at maintained schools, including those in the sixth form.³⁸ However, schools can find it challenging to engage older students not taking it as an examination subject. An increasing number of schools are now addressing the requirement in innovative ways. Day-long conferences and dialogue days, for example, offer students something different from everyday lessons. For teachers there is the added advantage of delivering the required number of hours of tuition in one day.

Swanshurst School in Birmingham holds several conferences for its year eleven students each year. The events encourage students to learn and talk about a variety of ethical and religious topics, from rainforest destruction to abortion. The school invites speakers from a wide range of organisations to challenge the students' views. Their last event, themed on 'The Good in Religion', included representatives from Islamic Relief, Christian Aid, The Salvation Army and Sikh Aid. Students are split into workshops for much of the day, allowing them to interact with speakers and to consider the issues in small groups.

The Diversity and Dialogue project ran sessions at Swanshurst in 2004 and 2005. Students worked in small, mixed-faith groups and were encouraged to think and talk about their own beliefs and values. For example, students considered global issues, including the Middle East conflict, global warming and HIV/AIDS. They shared their own views and reflected on how religion might influence their opinions. They then considered how people from different religions might think similarly and differently and the reasons for this.

Citizenship Education

Citizenship Education aims to enable young people to become effective citizens. An understanding of different religious beliefs and the role of religion in society is central to this.

Citizenship Education offers potential as a forum for students to discuss tensions around religious differences and the complex causes of 'religious' conflicts. This is particularly important where external events and media stories bring about unease between different religious groups in the school or wider community. It is important that young people have a space to explore current affairs, the connections between the global and the local and to develop skills of empathy and debate. The consultation exercise in Chapter 3 indicated that some young people are anxious and concerned about the impacts of political and global events. Citizenship offers some of the only spaces within the curriculum available to discuss these issues.

There are many places within and beyond the curriculum where schools can build understanding between young people with different beliefs. For instance, history lessons offer the chance to reflect on previous conflicts and relationships between religions. Dialogue groups can also be run in extra-curricular time – perhaps in a lunchtime or after-school club – to allow more time and freedom. Extended schools will also provide more scope for activities outside school hours.

The level of emphasis on dialogue remains varied according to the commitment of individual teachers. The Diversity and Dialogue project has worked with skilled, innovative and brave teachers. However, facilitating discussions where there are no easy answers can be daunting. Training, resources and the appropriate use of outside agencies can support schools to address interfaith relations and the wider issues around beliefs and values. Schools are key to promoting a successful multi-faith society and it is vital that they are able to take on a central role.

Opinion piece by Shula Maibaum, Citizenship Foundation

Citizenship was introduced into the national curriculum as a statutory subject in 2002. Citizenship Education aims to provide young people with the knowledge, understanding and skills to play an active and effective role in our society. It promotes and develops skills of debate, discussion and active participation. Concepts of equality, rights, responsibilities, justice, fairness and tolerance are all essential elements of citizenship education and the curriculum requires students to gain an understanding of the “*diversity of national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding*”.

Asking young people to share their beliefs and values, and to think about important and perhaps controversial issues from this perspective, is an excellent way of exploring some of the core elements of Citizenship Education. Not only will it lead to a better understanding of diversity, but when done effectively it will also increase students’ understanding of the importance of respect and acceptance. Citizenship Education helps to equip young people to deal with situations of conflict and controversy knowledgeably and tolerantly and it is important that young people become accustomed to discussing their differences in a rational way. Thinking about beliefs and how they influence opinions and motivate actions will develop skills of enquiry and participation. It will encourage students to think about topical issues and events, justify personal opinions and contribute to class discussion – all important requirements laid down in the citizenship curriculum.

Within a multi-faith school, discussions about issues, be they local, national or international, will inevitably lead to dialogue between students from a range of faiths and backgrounds. In less diverse schools, it may be valuable to link up with another school or to introduce diversity of belief and opinion through outside speakers, videos or other resources. We need to encourage teachers to see interfaith dialogue as an opportunity to build relationships and understanding of common ground.

Research shows that students want to discuss controversial and complex issues, particularly global ones and most notably issues of war and conflict. However, research also shows that teachers find dealing with controversial issues extremely difficult, often because they fear that it might lead to discussions that could cause offence, or raise racial, religious or ethnic tensions in the classroom. It is essential that proper support, training and guidance are provided for teachers of citizenship, to enable them to tackle some of these difficult issues without fear of the repercussions. If embraced and done effectively, interfaith dialogue should promote respect and understanding and foster a shared identity among students – not divide them.

Schools are not the only spaces for promoting good interfaith relations. There are also many opportunities outside in the wider community. This chapter investigates models of dialogue for the youth sector. It gives a brief overview of the current situation and suggests potential for developing this work.

For young people at single or majority-faith schools, out-of-school activities are particularly important in building friendships between young people from different faiths and backgrounds. Many of the young people in the consultation who attended multi-faith schools also spoke about strained relations in the community. They identified a lack of opportunities for people to get to know one another once outside the school gates and suggested ways of building positive relationships in the community.

“I would set up a multi-faith youth club with all different faiths, and it would have a disco once a month and other things that young people want to do. And it would teach about different religions, but not sitting round in a classroom, but in a fun way.”

Group 2, male, Jewish

An overview of the current situation

Youth interfaith work is still at an incipient stage, but it is attracting increasing interest and new initiatives are rapidly gaining momentum. Many new projects are in the planning stages and many existing groups are giving more attention to youth interfaith work. New funding sources such as the Home Office’s Connecting Communities Fund, Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund and Big Lottery priorities are also enabling the expansion of this area of work.

Adult faith and interfaith bodies are currently expanding their work to involve young people:

- The Inter Faith Network for the UK produced guidelines on youth interfaith activity, *Connect, Different Faiths, Shared Values*, in conjunction with the National Youth Agency and Timebank (2004). The network also held its 2005 annual conference on young people and interfaith relations.
- The Institute for Community Cohesion has been commissioned to research models for engaging young people in interfaith issues.³⁹
- NASACRE has begun funding youth interfaith events and forums.
- A number of local interfaith networks are currently starting up youth forums and programmes.

This growth in activity is supported and encouraged by increasing co-operation between faith communities at an adult level. The number of adult local interfaith organisations has doubled from about 100 in 2001 to over 200 in 2006.⁴⁰

From a different angle, youth anti-racist and conflict resolution initiatives appear to be paying more attention to young people's religious identities. They are tackling the growth of religiously motivated divisions and prejudices, particularly Islamophobia.⁴¹ Grassroots youth projects are being encouraged to consider faith groups when planning activities and to think about their impact on social cohesion. For example, the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) has produced a set of guidelines which aim to make organisations working with young people more faith and culturally sensitive.⁴² In emphasising the significance of issues around faith and cultural identity, the guidelines encourage the youth sector to ensure that young people of all faiths and beliefs can access their services. The National Youth Agency (NYA) also produced 'A Sense of Respect', a resource pack containing ideas, activities, advice and background information for people setting up youth interfaith projects.⁴³

The Diversity and Dialogue project has looked into over 100 different initiatives across the UK to bring young people from different faiths together. These are described on the Diversity and Dialogue website in a searchable directory. The shape and substance of the projects is influenced by who runs them, who they involve and the initial level of understanding and respect between the young people. Youth-focused projects run by adult interfaith bodies are often shadows or adaptations of adult meetings and discussions, whereas youth organisations tend to run practical skills-building activities.

The Diversity and Dialogue project has analysed some of the characteristics of current youth interfaith work.

1. Community cohesion projects

- Work in divided communities, often with disadvantaged young people
- Run by specialist youth organisations
- Main aims are usually preventing conflict and building trust
- Rarely discuss religious beliefs and values
- Often run skills-building programmes

These are projects working with groups of young people from different faiths and where **community cohesion is the primary aim**. They are generally run by local youth organisations. They may seek to build bridges between communities living in the same area but with little contact between each other, or where there is significant tension between groups.⁴⁴ Projects bringing together Protestant and Catholic young people in Belfast are typical examples of this work.

Youth Initiatives is a cross-community youth organisation that runs a number of projects bringing together young people from the two divided communities in disadvantaged areas of Belfast. For example, 'Creative Crosslinks' uses arts and drama to bridge the gap between young people in divided areas of the city.

Some areas in mainland Britain where there is a high degree of segregation are interested in learning from the experiences of Northern Ireland. Organisations have taken groups of young people to Belfast so that they can learn from the troubles first hand. Others have replicated similar techniques within their own communities.

The **Tim Parry Leadership Development programme**, run by The Tim Parry Johnathan Ball Trust in Warrington, is a cultural youth exchange which brings together 24 young people from different religious communities in Warrington, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The 17- to 21-year-olds attend three weekend residential sessions where they participate in intercultural activities, and explore differences and similarities between their communities and cultures.

The **Shared Future** project is a programme that brings young people from different communities in Oldham together to learn about each other and build relationships. Established in 2002, it is a partnership initiative between Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council and Northern Ireland's Spirit of Enniskillen Trust. Young people from Oldham visited Northern Ireland to learn from the experiences of young people there in 2004.

The project brings together groups of Oldham secondary school students, aged 15–18, in workshops in which they can explore thoughts and opinions on living in a shared society and contribute to cross-community dialogue and understanding. The project also aims to train a core group of the participants to become facilitators themselves. They will then go back into the community and get involved in projects addressing divisions. By enabling young people to train other young people, the project aims to be youth-driven. It works predominantly with Muslim and Christian students, though young people of all faiths and beliefs are encouraged to participate.

Specialist community cohesion and conflict resolution organisations have been set up in areas where there have been tensions between young people from different backgrounds. These often provide a safe space and skills-building activities for the young people, as well as offering training in conflict resolution or leadership development. Many of these groups aim to create young leaders who will go on to act as peer educators and promote peace in the wider community.

Aik Saath was set up in response to rising tensions between young people from Sikh, Hindu and Muslim communities in Slough, which had led to a period of serious youth violence in 1996–97. Aik Saath works to promote peace and racial harmony between all communities through a programme of conflict resolution training and workshops, which is offered to a variety of groups and organisations including young people at school and community workers.

The number of social cohesion projects working with faith groups appears to be growing and they are doing some excellent work in bridging divided communities. However, it is important that these projects make time to address questions of identity and discuss the beliefs and values that underpin different religions and cultures. These can be difficult topics but are central to the establishment of genuine respect and understanding.

2. Interfaith events and forums

- Mainly work with articulate young people
- Often run by adult interfaith bodies, schools, SACREs or local councils
- Main aim is improving dialogue between people of different religions
- Usually discussion-based
- Often one-off events

Youth interfaith forums are often organised by existing adult interfaith groups, sometimes as consultative bodies. The young people often act as representatives of their faith. These groups are usually discussion-based and participants are expected to share thoughts on their faith and values. They might also discuss broader issues, such as volunteering, religious education or the role of faith in their local area. These discussion forums and events create exciting opportunities for promoting understanding between young people with different beliefs.

There has also been an increasing number of interfaith dialogue groups within universities. These are usually informal discussion groups organised by individuals, or events which bring together different student faith societies. These forums tend to focus dialogue on religious and ethical issues. They meet regularly and enable participants to build relationships over a period of time. There is potential for further exploration of this work with a view to establishing similar groups for younger participants.

The Golden Jubilee Young People's Faith Forum

One of the official events to mark the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 2002 was the Young People's Faith Forum.⁴⁵ This event brought together 80 young men and women from the nine historic faith communities in the UK: the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian faiths.

The young people engaged in a day of discussion and dialogue surrounding the issues of faith and service to the community. The discussions were conducted in small groups made up of young people from different faiths. All were encouraged to contribute their thoughts and opinions. In addition, nine older participants gave presentations about growing up as a religious young person in Britain today. This was the first high-profile interfaith youth event in the country and it has been followed by a series of local events following the same format.

The Scottish Inter Faith Council Youth Conference

The Scottish Inter Faith Council organises an annual Interfaith Youth Conference, planned and facilitated by youth representatives from different faith communities across Scotland. The young people plan the conference at a residential and meet throughout the year. The conferences include workshops, talks, seminars and discussion groups on a range of interfaith issues. They attract hundreds of people each year and provide an excellent forum for young people of faith to meet, share views and exchange ideas.

MoJoW and **MoJoM** are two (female and male) dialogue groups based at Cambridge University for Muslim and Jewish students to engage in religiously orientated dialogue and activities. They were initially created when two friends, one Muslim and one Jewish, felt that other people should have the opportunity to develop friendships. An additional impetus was the mutual feeling that Islamic and Jewish societies on campus did not foster a positive relationship. Both groups debate issues that are relevant to their faith, such as women's modesty, religious dietary requirements and Sharia. They also invite guest speakers and organise parties and cultural festivals.

At present these dialogue groups and events tend to involve young people who are already committed to interfaith dialogue and are confident about sharing their own beliefs. There is a challenge in widening the impact and reach of these initiatives by connecting with young people who are harder to reach. As new events are planned and these initiatives gather momentum, there is an opportunity to develop this work so that it can reach out to young people who may be less engaged and more vulnerable to prejudice.

3. Multi-faith youth groups

The third type of project combines elements of both the previous two. It couples in-depth discussion of faith and values with the activities and skills-building work central to most wider youth projects. By focusing on a specific activity or campaign, these initiatives appeal to a wider range of young people while still discussing complex issues. There are currently only a small number of these initiatives but many more are currently being developed. Their potential for wide reach and appeal is enormously encouraging.

The **Multi-faith Media Group** in Leicester trains young people from different faiths in journalism and media skills. The participants are trained to produce radio, print and web-based features on issues around faith and community cohesion. They are involved in a range of activities including writing regular contributions for the local paper and the faith pages of the BBC Radio Leicester website, and giving presentations to other community organisations in the area. This innovative way of directly engaging young people in discussions on faith and identity generates tangible outcomes and provides useful skills-training. It also builds relationships between the young people of different faiths who participate in the project.

Liverpool Community Spirit (LCS) works to promote social cohesion through active citizenship projects across Liverpool. The LCS Youth Council gives 14- to 19-year-old volunteers the opportunity to plan, deliver and evaluate active citizenship programmes in their local community. Activities include faith and cultural visits, film-making, dialogue groups, drama, working with elders and helping Liverpool primary school children with language skills. LCS also delivers school citizenship workshops in local schools. This well-established interfaith youth group also focuses on intercultural dialogue.

London Youth ran a project called **Interculture**, a volunteer and training programme that brought together young Londoners from different faiths and backgrounds. The young people organised intercultural youth events to celebrate diversity in their communities. The project aimed to unite multi-racial communities and to promote the role of young people in cultural integration. Three events took place during 'Interculture Week' (4–7 April 2006) in Hackney, Holborn and Hounslow and were attended by over 200 people. All included cultural performances by young people, food from around the world, displays by the local youth club groups and stalls giving information on the different faiths and backgrounds of the people in the area. London Youth is seeking to develop their work around faith and to involve more youth clubs in a sustained interfaith and intercultural dialogue in the future.

Where does interfaith begin?

Many youth projects in urban Britain include young people from more than one faith or background. It can therefore be somewhat arbitrary to define when and why a project should be classed as 'interfaith'. A project making a huge impact on local relations between religious groups may have 'cutting youth crime' as its stated aim. Many more general youth projects make an important contribution to relationships between young people of different faiths, despite not being defined as specific 'interfaith' initiatives.

Burnley Youth Action Project brings together young people from different backgrounds in the local area to participate in a range of developmental and issue-based activities. These include workshops on urban art, DJ-ing and video production. The project works with hundreds of 11- to 24-year-olds, deliberately engaging young people from different faiths and backgrounds, including Muslims, Christians and those of no faith.

In Bradford, **Keighley Asian Women and Children's Centre (KAWACC)** runs a number of projects which bring together young people of different faiths and backgrounds. The centre recently piloted a community residential scheme for 12 Bangladeshi, white and Pakistani teenagers with backing from the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. The young people engage in joint projects such as fundraising for international emergencies.

Many more youth projects have the potential to play a more active role in increasing understanding between faiths. The Diversity and Dialogue website contains practical resources and activities for promoting this kind of dialogue in a youth-group setting. Youth groups have great potential to contribute to community cohesion. Leaders need to be aware of issues and the role they can play in promoting positive relationships.

Building models of youth interfaith dialogue – Diversity and Dialogue's own projects

Following analysis of existing youth interfaith initiatives, the Diversity and Dialogue project identified key areas for further work. It developed practical projects which experimented with different models of dialogue and aimed to build on some of the current youth interfaith thinking.

During 2005 and early 2006, the Diversity and Dialogue project worked with young people and partner organisations in the West Midlands, North West, Yorkshire and London. By working with a range of partner organisations, the ten projects were able to experiment with different ways of building understanding between young people

from different faiths. Though faced with limited timescales, partnership working has meant that the project work can be developed and continued following completion of the Diversity and Dialogue project's direct involvement.

1. The multi-faith youth group

The previous section touched upon the difficulties around reaching a wide range of young people and of sustaining a group that is limited to discussing religion. The Diversity and Dialogue project has explored these difficulties.

Bradford interfaith work

The Diversity and Dialogue project is working with Bradford District Faiths Forum to establish a youth interfaith group for the city. The initiative aims to create a sustainable space where young people of different faiths and backgrounds can meet and interact. It is aimed at young people who do not normally access youth provision and is intended to be more than a simple replica of the adult interfaith discussion. The group also seeks to provide a mechanism for the young people to influence local decision-makers on issues that affect their lives.

The process involves bringing young people together at an initial event where they take part in activities around identity and beliefs. They are encouraged to discuss the kinds of activities that they would like to get involved in and develop plans for mini-projects. The young people will then be offered the chance to take part in the projects that they have planned alongside other young people from different backgrounds. They will be funded to do this and trained to use video equipment, so that they can make a film of their work. A second event will celebrate and share the activities. This will provide the first steps to the formation of a group of engaged and committed young people.

2. The partnership approach

Building open and trusting relationships can sometimes be more difficult between adults than between children. Therefore, it can be tempting to work with young people recruited directly through local schools and secular youth organisations. However, in order to achieve long-term impact, understanding needs to be built among the wider community.

It is therefore valuable to build partnerships between adult faith organisations and leaders, as well as between young people. Establishing trust between organisations is time-consuming and can limit freedom. However, in the longer term it is worth building bridges. Youth projects can be a valuable tool to bring faith organisations together and can be a first step towards greater co-operation on other issues. If local faith leaders are aware and engaged, the young people involved have greater support and are less likely to give up on projects. There is also likely to be support for the development of more work in the future.

St Cuthbert's

In the Manningham area of Bradford, there had been anti-social behaviour and tensions between young people from local faith groups. This had received negative coverage in both local and national media. Leaders from two local churches and a mosque wanted to engage their young people in more constructive activities. They decided to do this by developing a programme of half-term activities with young people from all three places of worship. This then went on to inform decisions around the kind of youth provision that would be beneficial to local young people.

They worked in partnership with the Diversity and Dialogue project, Bradford Youth Service, Bradford Vision and Bradford Community Accord. The programme was successful in the short term, providing positive activities for young people and a space in which they could meet. In terms of lasting impact, the young Muslim men became keen to access other youth provision that they had previously not been engaged with. The agencies and places of worship involved have also built links and partnerships, which can be built on to develop further work.

The IF project

Island House is a community centre in the Isle of Dogs, owned and managed by the United Reform Church. It is also used as a temporary mosque by the local Muslim community, as there is currently no mosque on the Island. Island House thus offers great potential for bringing together the Muslim, Christian and non-religious communities. The IF project was the first interfaith project at Island House, so establishing good relationships between the local church, the Bengali Cultural Association and the United Reform Church trustees was a key objective for the work.

The Diversity and Dialogue project brought together a group of Muslim and Christian young people for an arts project in summer 2005. Children from a local Church of England youth group and the Island House Qur'an classes worked together to design and produce a piece of artwork to welcome those from all faiths and backgrounds. They created a stained glass mosaic, incorporating the artistic traditions of both Islam and Christianity.

The project participants thoroughly enjoyed the project, learning new skills and making friends. The welcome sign is testament to the fact that communities are working together and participants were proud of their work on it. The project was also successful in initiating strong interfaith relationships at Island House. The centre has now applied for funding for a whole series of youth and adult interfaith projects, in partnership with the Bengali Cultural Association and the local Church of England church.

3. Involving institutions

Many different organisations and venues can provide opportunities to enhance understanding between young people from different faiths and backgrounds. Public spheres such as museums, galleries, theatres, town halls and parks can all offer spaces for interfaith dialogue. Working within these spaces has the joint advantage of being neutral territory and of forging a sense of joint ownership of local cultural heritage. National and state-funded institutions can also play an invaluable role promoting the acceptance and understanding of different views and beliefs as these establishments help to define British identity.

The British Museum

The Diversity and Dialogue project worked with a group of young people to create a trail around the British Museum made up of objects selected from the collections. The trail was based on the theme 'Living in a Multi-faith Society' and used objects from the past to provoke discussion about how different religions can live together peacefully today. For example, an enamel showing the mocking of Christ was used to prompt reflections on religious persecution. The trail was created by a group of 17 young people from seven different religions, who worked together during a week-long programme of activities and discussions in their summer holidays. An online version is featured on the British Museum website.

The trail was launched at the 'Living in a Multi-faith London' event on 2 October 2005. This event brought together 100 young Londoners of all faiths and beliefs to share ideas on creating a successful multi-faith city. Participants spent the day in the Museum, talking to each other about their own beliefs and views on society. They learnt new skills at workshops and listened to presentations. They also followed the faith trail, guided by the young people who created it. The day was an atmosphere of excitement and co-operation.

The British Museum is currently developing its role in promoting social and interfaith cohesion. They plan to involve young Londoners in planning exhibitions, hold workshops for schools on interfaith issues and hope to run similar projects and events in the future.

Other institutions are also developing work to build religious understanding. The British Library is involving young people from different faiths in a new project on sacred texts. The Tate Liverpool recently put on the 'Seeing is Believing' exhibition, which asked local faith leaders to choose and interpret pieces of art. St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace is a well-established centre for peace-building and dialogue. It has recently constructed a Bedouin tent, as a permanent sacred space where people

from all faiths and beliefs can gather. They are running a series of events sharing thoughts on beliefs and addressing religious conflicts. Their plans also include a specific programme of interfaith activities for young people. These models could be replicated by institutions across the country.

Creating a neutral and shared safe space where different religious groups feel welcome helps to build a natural level of trust and understanding. The space can be anywhere from a local community centre to a world famous museum; a wide range of organisations have the potential to promote positive interfaith relations.

4. Going global

Global tensions and conflicts impact upon communities in Britain, and can affect the stability of our multi-faith society. Yet global issues have the potential to unite those of all faiths and beliefs through common aims and campaigns. For example, during one of the Diversity and Dialogue summer youth projects, Make Poverty History white bands were spotted around the wrists of young people from five different faith backgrounds. Campaigns around global development issues have a significant role to play in promoting interfaith understanding. A group of young people from different faiths can support and drive the same campaign, motivated by different beliefs but working towards the same goal.

Island House Make Poverty History

The Diversity and Dialogue project worked with the Island House Community Centre to engage a group of Muslim and white secular young people in the Make Poverty History campaign. In order to gauge how effective the campaign would be in motivating and uniting the group, six sessions were planned for the young people to learn about the issues and make a video message for the G8 leaders. The young people worked with a performance poet to develop a poem based on what they had learnt about development issues. By the end of the project, the young campaigners were so enthused that they travelled up to Edinburgh to take part in the Make Poverty History rally on 2 July 2005. Their video was screened in the Generation zone at the Edinburgh Meadows.

“I liked the discussion that we had during the evenings on things like colonialism and religion.”

15-year-old, female, Muslim

“The project made me care about things I didn’t even see before like the condition of people in other countries and fair trade.”

14-year-old, female, non-religious

Trading places

As part of the Leeds Together for Peace Festival 2005, Save the Children worked with Oxfam, Christian Aid, Islamic Relief and others to organise a campaigning day for schools on global trade. One hundred young people from seven different schools came together to learn more about trade and campaigning, and to put their questions to Leeds MPs, Colin Challen and Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for International Development. The students were asked to examine their own beliefs and attitudes to the trade system. Prior to the event the young people had played Trade Rules!, a game which simulates world trade and demonstrates how unjust the system can be. Many of the young people pledged to continue campaigning for fair trade once back at their schools.

The Diversity and Dialogue project has pioneered the use of global development issues in bringing young people from different faiths together. The Global Student Forum may be helpful in further developing this concept.

The **Global Student Forum (GSF)** works to help sixth-form students across the UK think about the spiritual and moral aspects of global citizenship and trains them to run discussion activities in their own school. It runs an annual National Sixth Form Conference each summer that invites students to participate in a day of seminars and workshops. The 2005 conference was themed on the Make Poverty History campaign and the 2006 event focuses on HIV/AIDS (see www.damaris.org/gsf/).

A summary of challenges and opportunities in interfaith youth work

Developing interfaith dialogue with young people can be challenging. Below, we summarise some of the key challenges and offer pointers towards solutions for practitioners. The Diversity and Dialogue website also offers more detailed advice on setting up projects and suggests ideas for activities and dialogue sessions.

I. Overcoming nervousness

One of the most daunting aspects of the work is the knowledge that it may lead to controversy. Differences of opinion over political, religious, moral or even local territorial issues could surface and lead to disagreements. Both teachers and youth workers can be understandably nervous about tackling sensitive issues. Many lack training to deal with tensions that may arise and may be reluctant to facilitate sessions around religion and its role in society.

In open discussions, young people may voice opinions that are misinformed, provocative or prejudiced. Schools, in particular, may fear parental complaints and the potentially serious consequences. As a result, senior management may encourage teachers to steer clear of potential controversy.

- Consider using outside specialist organisations, especially for initial sessions. This can help build confidence and skills. Conflict-resolution and community arts organisations can introduce controversial issues and engage young people by providing a change from normal lessons or youth group sessions.
- Investigate training opportunities available for teachers and youth workers. www.conflictresolutionnetwork.org.uk offers a useful starting point.
- Contact local faith-based organisations, which may be able to provide speakers. This can be a useful way of introducing different viewpoints to the group.
- Diversity and Dialogue has produced a range of guidelines and activities to be used in schools and youth projects. The website offers agendas for interfaith dialogue days and activities to prompt discussion about individual beliefs and living in a multi-faith society. Discussion sessions around controversial issues such as faith schooling and legislation on incitement to racial and religious hatred are also provided.

- A range of other organisations produce good resources. See www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk, or Oxfam's free teachers' guide, 'Teaching Controversial Issues' available at www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet. Further useful links are provided on the Diversity and Dialogue website.

2. Finding time in schools

It can be difficult to make space for interfaith dialogue. Teachers are busy and the curriculum is already packed. Teachers may be already delivering a wide range of subjects outside of their specialist subject areas, including Citizenship. In many schools, providing space to share beliefs and to discuss interfaith relations is simply not viewed as a priority issue.

- The existing school curriculum may provide an easy start for discussions about religion and interfaith relations. Religious Education and Citizenship are the most obvious, but History, English Literature, the Sciences, Art and many more subjects can also bring in debate around religion and society.
- Religious Education is a statutory subject, even for those in the sixth form. For those not taking RE as an examination subject, the lessons could provide a forum for interfaith dialogue and discussions.
- Spaces for dialogue can be created in lunch breaks or after school, including after-school clubs. Extended schools and other government initiatives should offer resources for more activities to take place out of school hours.
- Faith-based or voluntary organisations may be keen to get involved in running interfaith dialogue sessions so that teachers do not need to take on sole responsibility.
- Off-timetable enrichment days can also be a valuable space for talking about issues of religion and diversity. There may be possibilities to arrange a joint day between more than one school in an area, particularly towards the end of the autumn and summer terms.

In less diverse schools, it is particularly important to provide students with the opportunities to meet and build friendships with people from different faiths and backgrounds. This is likely to involve bringing students from different schools together. However, this can prove challenging, especially as schools rarely have coinciding timetables. Teachers may also have concerns about initiating out-of-school projects, which could be stressful and time-consuming and add to an already busy workload.

- In some areas there are local school-linking organisations that help to manage sustainable partnerships between different schools. If there is no such organisation in your area, then consider starting from existing relationships formed through clustering or federation programmes.

- If it is logistically difficult for students to meet young people with different beliefs, for instance in rural areas, an email exchange project might be a practical first step. This could build towards an exchange visit with the partner school.
- Think innovatively. Consider potential opportunities for building understanding between young people from different faiths and backgrounds in a variety of situations, for example, when assigning work experience placements or when planning events or school trips. Interfaith understanding need not only be addressed through specific dialogue projects.

Making sure that activities are relevant to young people who do not consider themselves religious can also be a challenge for teachers. However, it is important that these young people are able to take part in interfaith dialogue and that discussing beliefs and values feels relevant to them.

- Consider spending classroom time discussing secular values. This should help students to understand the different ways in which people might form moral judgements and help to include non-religious young people in interfaith dialogue.

3. Building support in the community

Sometimes it can be difficult to build commitment and enthusiasm around interfaith dialogue, particularly in areas where there may be a history of tension. Adults may also be wary of allowing access to young people they work with.

- Make time to build relationships with places of worship and community groups, particularly if these are new working relationships. Projects tend to be more successful when adult faith organisations are committed to working together, particularly in divided communities or when working with younger teenagers. It also makes it easier to build support for extending the work.
- Consider running a small event to build up goodwill and momentum for bigger, more ambitious plans. It may also be helpful to run an initial seminar, bringing together those already working with young people in a local area.
- Remember that many organisations could play a part in building strong relationships between different faiths and involvement shouldn't be limited to those already working on interfaith issues. For example, museums, theatres, faith bodies and town halls can host youth interfaith projects and dialogue programmes.
- These organisations may also be able to provide safe spaces for meetings and events. It is important that all groups feel comfortable coming to the chosen venue.
- Funding opportunities may help persuade local organisations to come on board. It can be worth investigating funding opportunities in advance. Offering a longer-term commitment to the area can help reassure local organisations.

Sometimes young people can seem uninterested in interfaith work. It can be difficult to reach beyond articulate young people already committed to the issues but this is important as the impact of the work will be limited if it does not reach beyond this group.

- Talk to young people to find out what would attract them to take part in a project and to identify their concerns. Combine discussion with activities and ensure that projects have a tangible outcome to help attract a wider range of young people. Young people may be keener to get involved if they can learn useful skills.
- Aim to involve young people at all stages of the project, from development through to evaluation. This creates a sense of shared ownership and maximises the benefits for participants.
- Consider campaigns on global issues or local social action projects. These can be an effective way to get young people working together, engaging them and empowering them to bring about positive change.

This report has shown that some excellent and innovative work is already taking place to build understanding among young people with different beliefs. This is happening both within and between schools, and in the wider community through youth groups, faith and interfaith bodies. It is important to build on the current momentum in this area.

The consultation with young people growing up in multi-faith environments (Chapter 3) should provide inspiration and impetus for anyone considering running a dialogue project. Almost all of the young people who were consulted valued the opportunity to get to know people from other faiths and backgrounds. They wanted more opportunities to build friendships and understanding across faith divides.

Many were interested in talking about religion and its role in society and wanted space to discuss complex and controversial issues. Most had a good awareness of the impact that global conflicts and events can have on relationships between different religions locally. This caused some students to feel pessimistic about the future and lacking in power to change it.

It is hoped that the Diversity and Dialogue project will inspire more youth interfaith work and help to strengthen relations between young people from different faiths and backgrounds. It aims to inspire both individuals and organisations to play an active role in building a successful multi-faith society. Young people need to be empowered to create a society where people of all faiths and beliefs live side by side in friendship, understanding and respect.

Appendix I: Additional information about the consultation with young people

One hundred and twenty four young people were interviewed in total. At the beginning of each discussion we asked the young people to describe their religious identity. We have classified them in accordance with the answers they gave. Some students clarified that they were Christian, but not very religious. This has been acknowledged in the report.

Buddhist		Sikh*		Hindu		Muslim		Christian		Jewish**		Not religious	
M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
–	1	6	4	1	1	9	32	14	23	6	6	9	12

* An extra discussion group was run with a Sikh youth group, as no Sikh young people had been involved in the school-based groups.

** Two discussion groups were run with a Jewish youth organisation, as no Jewish young people had been involved in the school-based groups. There were 25 young people present in these groups, but we have quoted only the views of the 12 young people falling within the 14–15-year-old age range, for consistency.

Schools and youth groups

We are very grateful to the following schools and youth groups for being involved in the consultation.

Barlow Roman Catholic School (Manchester)
 Beardwood School (Blackburn with Darwen, North West)
 Capital City Academy (London, Brent)
 Chorlton High School (Manchester)
 Edgware Reform Synagogue (London, Barnet)
 Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (London, Islington)
 George Green's (London, Tower Hamlets)
 Lister Community School (London, Newham)
 Swanshurst School (Birmingham)
 United Sikh Youth of Slough (Slough, Berkshire)
 Wembley High School (London, Brent)

Endnotes

¹ Article 14, UNCRC

² Article 29, UNCRC

³ As concluded by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia Annual Report, 2002 <http://eumc.eu.int>

⁴ A series of reports were written following the 2001 summer disturbances, including Richie (2001), Clarke (2001), Cante (2001) and Ousley (2001)

⁵ P Curtis, the *Guardian*, 18 August 2005, 'Resulting Arguments'

⁶ The Education and Inspections Bill, before Parliament at the time of writing.

⁷ Home Office (2004c)

⁸ *BBC NEWS Online*, 'Nigeria cartoon protests kill 16', 19 February 2006

⁹ L Smith, the *Guardian*, 'Iranian Minister calls for end to cartoon violence', 20 February 2006

¹⁰ *Young People's Social Attitudes Survey*, DfES 2003

¹¹ See for example, S Katwala (2005), p.247

¹² Incitement to racial hatred has been a crime since the first Race Relations Act (1965). Legal precedent had led to Jews and Sikhs being considered as racial groups and therefore they were protected under this act. The Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 has extended this protection to all religious groups, most notably Muslims.

¹³ Legally, these debates centre around the limits on one's right to practise one's religion, Article 9 of the Human Rights Act.

¹⁴ The topic guide used for these discussions can be found in the Diversity and Dialogue educational resources section: www.diversityanddialogue.org.uk.

¹⁵ Foster (2003)

¹⁶ A niqab is a scarf worn by some Muslim women, which covers the head and face, but leaves the eyes uncovered.

¹⁷ The small number of non-religious students means that it is not practicable to draw definite conclusions.

¹⁸ This report does not investigate the effects that a school's ethos and policies – for example on admissions or bullying – can have on interfaith relations. However, these issues are also important and more research should be done in this area.

¹⁹ Cante (2001), p.33

²⁰ L Tickle, the *Guardian*, 'Faith in their Community', 20 December 2005

²¹ Chief Ofsted Inspector David Bell caused bitter debate with his comments that many independent Muslim schools "must adapt their curriculum to ensure that it ... helps [pupils] to acquire an appreciation of and respect for other cultures in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony". (Speech to the Hansard Society, 17 January 2006)

- ²² Association of Teachers and Lecturers, Annual conference, 12 April 2006
- ²³ The vast majority of faith schools are Christian (6,955), with 36 Jewish, five Muslim and two Sikh schools. Source: M Taylor, the *Guardian*, 'Two thirds oppose state aided faith schools', 23 August 2005
- ²⁴ O Saaed, the *Guardian*, 'What our Children Need', 19 January 2005
- ²⁵ National Church Schools Conference, London, 14 March 2006
- ²⁶ Recommendation 6.37, p.49, Cante (2001)
- ²⁷ Through the Cross Community Contact Scheme
- ²⁸ Introduced by the Education Reform Order, Northern Ireland, 1989
- ²⁹ Omnibus Survey by Millward Brown Ulster. Research cited in Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), press release, 3 April 2006
- ³⁰ G Seenan, the *Guardian*, 'Scotland introduces school twinning plan to beat sectarianism', 31 January 2006
- ³¹ As cited on DfES Teachernet website, www.teachernet.gov.uk
- ³² DfES (2005a)
- ³³ DfES Teachernet website, www.teachernet.gov.uk
- ³⁴ The DfES consultation on 'Education Outside the Classroom' ended in February 2006 and proposals are being considered at the time of writing.
- ³⁵ DfES (2005b), prospectus on Education Improvement Partnerships
- ³⁶ QCA (2004) p.30
- ³⁷ Ofsted (2005) p.26
- ³⁸ QCA (2004) p.10, parents may also withdraw their children from Religious Education without giving a reason.
- ³⁹ This is being carried out for the Institute by the School Development Support Agency, Leicester.
- ⁴⁰ Brian Pearce, Director, Inter Faith Network, 03 March 2006, speaking at the Citizenship Foundation, 'First Friday on Faith' seminar
- ⁴¹ For example, J Freedland, the *Guardian* 'In the Grip of Panic', 22 January 2005
- ⁴² NCVYS (2006)
- ⁴³ National Youth Agency (2005)
- ⁴⁴ See Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council (2005)
- ⁴⁵ This event was arranged by the Golden Jubilee Office of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport with the assistance of the Inter Faith Network. See the summary and full reports on the day at <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/connect/goldenjubilee.htm>

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