

## Good Inter Faith Relations on Campus

**A toolkit for students' unions**



national union of students



<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6. Inter faith activity ideas</b>	<b>30</b>
• The importance of good relations	2	• Organising inter faith activity ideas	30
• NUS' role in supporting good campus relations	2	• Getting to know you	32
• NUS student inter faith project	3	• Faith literacy	34
• About the inter faith toolkit	4	• Approaches to dialogue	38
• The beginning of a journey	6	• Going deeper	42
		• Joint action, civic engagement and community partnerships	46
<b>2. Religion and belief on campus</b>	<b>8</b>		
• The significance of religious belief and practice	8	<b>7. Knowledge and skills helpful for inter faith dialogue</b>	<b>50</b>
• Religious diversity on campus	8	• Active listening	50
		• The role of a facilitator	52
<b>3. What is inter faith engagement?</b>	<b>10</b>	• Creating safe space	53
• Dialogue and joint social action	10		
• Your approach	11	<b>8. Conclusion</b>	<b>56</b>
		<b>Further information</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>4. Inter faith relations on your campus</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>List of activities</b>	<b>60</b>
• Assessing and building on what already exists	12	<b>Additional resources</b>	<b>60</b>
• Activities for understanding where you're starting from	16	<b>Acknowledgments and further contacts</b>	<b>62</b>
		<b>Notes</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>5. Building an inter faith forum</b>	<b>20</b>		
• What type of inter faith forum?	21		
• Who sets up an inter faith forum, and how?	21		
• Additional campus inter faith initiatives	22		
• Key considerations	22		
• Template agenda	24		
• Pattern of involvement in inter faith activities	28		
• Proselytism in inter faith engagement	29		

# 1. Introduction



## The importance of good relations

Diversity of religion and belief is a major aspect of a campus community and good relations on campus are of vital importance. Students' unions are at the forefront of engaging well with this agenda and NUS is working to support you in this. We hope that this toolkit will offer you a key resource for strengthening good relations in your institution.

The importance of developing a society where people of different faiths and beliefs live harmoniously and cooperatively has received increasing recognition. Most national faith communities now have inter faith officers or committees and encourage their followers – while respecting the integrity and distinctness of their own tradition – to take seriously the important

task of building good inter faith relations. The national faith communities also cooperate on inter faith issues, for example through the Inter Faith Network for the UK.<sup>1</sup> There is also engagement with those of non-religious beliefs.

Students are significant contributors to this area of our shared national life. Campuses across the UK are places of inter faith engagement and inter-cultural exchange where the next generation of leaders are developing the skills for joint engagement in our diverse society. Students' unions play a vital role by helping to encourage this and by shaping opportunities for learning and engagement.

## NUS' role in supporting good campus relations

NUS exists to promote, defend and extend the rights of students and to develop and champion strong students' unions. As part of this crucial work, it works with students' unions to respond effectively to the needs of students and to create a campus environment which reflects NUS' strong commitment to equality of opportunity which can enable everyone to participate fully in a just and harmonious society. Helping enable good relations on campus is part of this.

A key aspect of good relations includes those between people of different faiths and beliefs. Engagement between people of religious and non-religious beliefs is an important dimension of this.

However, this toolkit has a particular focus on good relations between faith groups on campus, reflecting the original focus of the project funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (see below).

## NUS student inter faith project and the toolkit

Over the last few years NUS has received an increasing number of requests from students' unions for guidance on how to support students of faith<sup>ii</sup> on issues affecting their life on campus (such as provision for dietary requirements, pastoral support and prayer facilities) and on how to build good relations between students of different faith backgrounds - including resolving tensions which can sometimes arise between different groups.

In this context, NUS has been looking at how it might respond most effectively to such requests from its members.

In spring 2008 NUS received a small amount of funding from the then Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS, now the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills) to bring

together student faith leaders to discuss options for student-led inter faith collaboration. This meeting led to the production of a report which outlined various options for taking forward work in this area. The NUS Student Inter Faith project was initiated with further funding from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in 2009.

**Through this project NUS aims – through sharing resources and good practice and offering training – to increase the capacity of students' unions to:**

1. understand, support and represent the needs of students of faith within their institutions;
2. help build good relations on campus by increasing inter faith dialogue and cooperation through stimulating collaboration between faith societies;
3. alleviate and respond to tensions that may exist between students and groups on campus which are broadly related to religion and belief; and
4. contribute to building stronger inter faith relations among students nationally

Produced as part of the NUS student inter faith project, this toolkit spotlights strengthening good inter faith relations in the campus setting. Reflecting the original commissioning of the project, it has a focus on the major world traditions with communities here in the UK. The precise pattern of engagement with faith groups on different campuses will, of course, vary.

Many students of different religions will wish, while studying, to be able to practise their faith and live in keeping with their beliefs and may seek the support of their union and the wider institution in relation to particular issues such as suitable prayer space, timing of exams (in relation to days of religious obligation) or ensuring availability of food suitable to meet their dietary requirements. Helping to ensure a learning environment where, so far as can be accommodated, such needs are met is part of enabling a positive and integrated campus.

This toolkit does not seek to provide detailed advice on specific matters such as prayer space, timetabling and dietary provision. But, in supporting unions to engage well with faith groups and to bring them together to discuss issues of common concern and interest, NUS hopes that it will help unions to create the conditions in which such issues can be productively raised and discussed.

At the time of writing, a team of researchers at the University of Derby is carrying out a research project for the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU)<sup>iii</sup> which will shed fresh light on students' needs and experiences in relation to student religious identity on campus. NUS is in contact with the ECU on this project. It is hoped that its findings will also enable institutions of higher and further education to engage even more effectively with students of different faith backgrounds.

## About the inter faith toolkit

NUS has worked with students' unions<sup>iv</sup>, faith groups, inter faith organisations and a range of other bodies to help create this toolkit to assist students' unions in their vital work of developing and supporting collaboration between faith societies and promoting good relations between students of different faiths. It is part of the wider work of supporting good relations on campus.<sup>v</sup>

The toolkit has been written with students' unions in mind, with a vision that includes many different groups on your campus. Some of the key activities suggested call for work with others, such as faith societies, students' services and the chaplaincy team at your institution. There may also be students leading existing inter faith initiatives on your campus who it will be important to involve in any students' union planning processes. Building good relations on campus is very much a cooperative task, and unions will be seeking to work with those individuals who have existing skills, knowledge and experience in organising such activities on campus.

You can use the template on page 57 to record the details of the key contacts you will need to be in touch with as you begin to deliver this work.

A series of case studies and exercises are provided to illustrate effective models of engagement with faith groups; provide inspiration for your own events and projects; and to help you organise these. Also provided are ideas for training and workshop activities for students' unions to use with their officers, faith societies, inter faith forums or students generally. These can be useful as you develop your thinking about the role of good relations between students of faith and evolve strategies that work for your campus to improve skills and awareness.

This toolkit has been written as a source of support and guidance, you can use parts or all of it, when you see fit. It will help you to:

- consider the issues in the wider context and the role of the students' union to support the building of good inter faith relations
- assess the state of existing inter faith relations and resources on your campus



- develop a plan for supporting good inter faith relations
- initiate a student inter faith forum
- organise regular student-led inter faith activities

Chapter 2 “**Religion and belief on campus**” sketches out the diversity of religion and belief across the UK, and specifically on campuses at further and higher education institutions.

Chapter 3, “**What is inter faith engagement?**” introduces the term “inter faith” and includes activities to help you explore this and other key terms and meanings with students as you begin. The activities can be particularly useful in ensuring everyone understands the overall purpose for engaging in inter faith activities on your campus.

Chapter 4, “**Inter faith relations on your campus**” helps you undertake a brief review of the pattern of faith groups on your campus and to explore with relevant groups and individuals the possibilities that exist for the development of inter faith activities at your students’ union and institution. This chapter also has tools to help you set an action plan for how you will implement your ideas.

Chapter 5 “**Building an inter faith forum**” helps you support the development of an inter faith forum throughout the process. The establishment of such an inter faith forum can be a particularly helpful step. Traditionally most students’ unions have had an ‘at arms length’ relationship with their faith societies.<sup>vi</sup> An inter faith forum

can be a useful way for a students’ union to regularly engage with faith groups and begin discussing opportunities for inter faith dialogue and action.

Inter faith engagement takes place in a variety of different forms, utilising a range of different activities. To help you begin, a range of approaches and ideas for different activities are included in Chapter 6, “**Inter faith activity ideas**”.

Chapter 7, “**Knowledge and skills**” focuses on the key knowledge and leadership skills needed for facilitating and leading inter faith activities.

## The beginning of a journey

The toolkit offers a collection of pointers to start you, and those engaged in this task with you, on the journey to strengthening good relations on your campus. The ideas will not all be relevant to every situation – what you require will vary depending on the nature and purpose of your group, event or project.

The landscape you are traversing is complex. Students (and staff) of different religions and beliefs are likely to share many key values in common but also to have distinctive perspectives on a number of issues – including reasons for inter faith engagement and cooperation.

It is important to be clear in taking this work forward that people

can legitimately approach the engagement from different points of view. The students' union is playing a supportive and facilitative role to enable productive engagement – it should not try to make light of differences or impose a particular philosophy of inter faith relations.

So there are complexities. And there are also challenges. But working to overcome these: learning to dismantle stereotypes; unlearn and dispel prejudices; find out about what others believe and hold dear; and discover areas of common commitment to the well-being of the campus community and the wider world makes this work both valuable and hugely rewarding.

NUS looks forward to your feedback on this toolkit, as well as news of your campaigns and initiatives.







## 2. Religion and belief on campus



### The significance of religious belief and practice

People's religion or belief are very important in shaping the way they live – although, of course, individuals vary in their practice.

“For some people their religion or belief will be central to their identity, what they think, what they do and what they say. For others their religion or belief will be important, but will share space with other influences such as family, career, social, class, culture or gender. Others may profess to have no religion or belief, but may

be influenced by values they have grown up with or developed; while others may take part regularly in formal worship, but not place as much emphasis on wider social issues in their day to day lives. And of course, each of us gives different emphasis to the different parts of our identity in different situations.”<sup>vii</sup>

### Religious diversity on campus

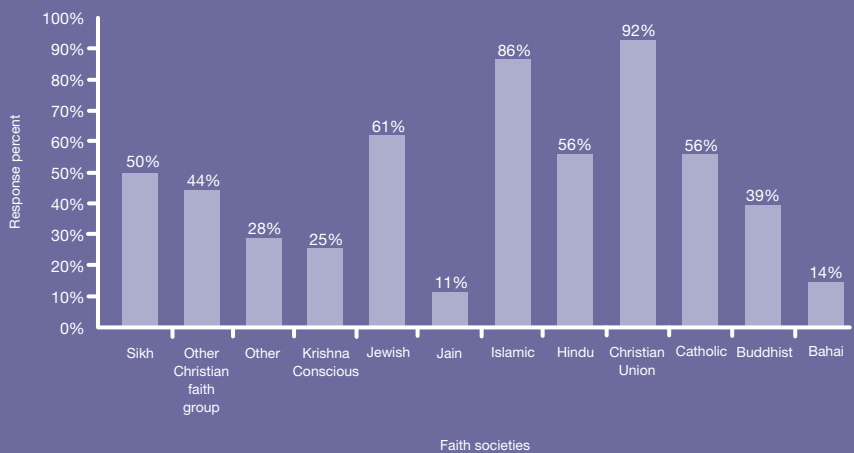
Since the 1950s, the UK has increasingly become a religiously diverse country. Many faith communities – as well as people of non-religious beliefs - now live side by side here.<sup>viii</sup>

Campuses vary considerably in their pattern of diversity, linked to a number of factors including the percentage of overseas students and the diversity of the local community from which a significant percentage may be drawn.

The religion and belief of students is not generally recorded or monitored on admission at colleges or universities in the UK. This means there is no reliable data on the number of students from different religious or belief backgrounds at further or higher education. However, the existence of a diverse range of faith societies at the majority of universities across the UK



Which of the following faith societies are currently active within your institution?



demonstrates the reality of religion as an important aspect of many students' identity and life at university; often, faith societies can be some of the largest and most active societies within a students' union.<sup>ix</sup>

The graph above shows the percentage of students' unions that have particular faith societies. It is taken from a survey of students' unions in higher education carried out by NUS in June 2009 as part of the work supported by DBIS.<sup>x</sup>

28% of the students' unions surveyed that responded also noted that their institution had

'other' active faith societies on campus highlighted groups such as Ahlul Bayt, Earth and Pagan, Christian Medic, and Islamic Medic societies.<sup>xi</sup>

No Zoroastrian societies were reported in the survey, although NUS is aware through other routes that societies representing this group of students do exist at some institutions. NUS is working with national groups such as the Young Zoroastrians to ensure that the needs of small minority faith groups are also taken into account by universities and colleges where appropriate.

It is likely that there are a number

of different types of faith societies at your institution including some which are not affiliated to your students' union, and which you therefore may not be aware of. It is also important to note that even where there are no active faith societies (such as at many FE colleges) there may be students from particular faith groups, and it will still be possible (and important) to engage with them.

It is understood that faith societies are not as established or commonplace in further education colleges as they are in universities. NUS recognise a need for further research across the further education sector in this area.

### 3. What is inter faith engagement?

**Creating positive inter faith engagement is about developing relationships of understanding and cooperation between people of different religious beliefs (and sometime non-religious beliefs). It is about both mutual learning through dialogue and through working together on common projects.**<sup>xii</sup>

Many university campuses are religiously diverse, with students and staff representing a broad spectrum of religions and beliefs from across the world, as well as the diverse denominations that belong to different faith traditions. Although this diversity is welcomed and celebrated at all institutions, diversity in itself does not automatically correlate to positive relations between people or groups who hold different beliefs. Relationships of understanding and respect have to be created and worked at to flourish.

Creating opportunities for meaningful interaction involving people with different religions and beliefs is not about diluting difference. Appreciation of distinctiveness is as important as finding common ground.

Some people can be put off if the term '*interfaith*' is used as a noun, for example "Are you involved in *interfaith*?" because it can make a process of interaction between separate and distinct faiths sound like a new religious movement. Be aware of this potential problem and the fact that use of '*interfaith*' in this way can send an inaccurate and alienating message to some people – especially conservative members of some religious traditions.

#### Dialogue and joint social action

Inter faith engagement can take many forms. It is a creative and constantly developing practice across all sectors of society. Inter faith activity at universities and colleges in the UK includes activities such as dialogue; joint campaigning, activism and fundraising; social events; creative arts projects; academic programmes; as well as off-campus or community based activities and events. Broadly, these fall into two strands: dialogue and cooperative social action - although these are often interwoven.



#### Dialogue

It is essential to get people talking to each other in an open and respectful way - this is often referred to as 'dialogue'. By participating in inter faith dialogue, members of student faith communities are encouraged to undertake positive interaction, learning and exploration of each others' beliefs, with the purpose of developing understanding and respect.

Dialogue can lead to people developing a better understanding of one another;



celebrating the values held in common whilst acknowledging distinctiveness.

There are a range of approaches to inter faith dialogue. For example: a more intellectual (or theological) approach might involve inter-religious study such as mutual textual study. Other approaches might focus more on sharing personal understandings of religion and society or discussing the basis in different religions for social action and doing something together, such as volunteering.

### **Cooperative social action**

Often, coming together to discuss and learn leads seamlessly into choosing to work together for social action for positive change within a campus or local community.<sup>xiii</sup>

Sometimes students of different faith backgrounds working together on a project – for example a fundraiser or an issue such as climate change – become interested in what motivates the others and why they believe and act as they do and decide to have conversations about this as well as working together.

### **Your approach**

Inter faith groups and forums often arrange dialogues and learning events and also engage in a range of social action projects both within their campus and the local community.

Many colleges and universities are already involved in some or all of the above ways. The approach that you take will depend on the people you are trying to engage and involve on your campus.

## 4. Inter faith relations on your campus

### Assessing and building on what already exists

In order to chart a course forward for how your students' union can strengthen or initiate inter faith activities on your campus, we suggest first taking stock of the current situation.

This chapter helps you identify the resources available on your campus and the possibilities that exist for future development of inter faith activities. It will also help identify areas where stronger support and encouragement may be needed.

Many universities and colleges already have some type of inter faith activity taking place. This may be led by individual students, a chaplain, an inter faith society or collaboratively by two or more faith groups. Students' unions at some institutions are playing an important role and others are increasingly seeking to lead and support in this important area of campus life.

Some institutions have developed initiatives themselves for the benefit of staff and students such as the Multi-faith Centre at the University of Derby or discrete programmes led by academics for students and staff.

Many further education colleges have activities incorporated into lesson plans or enrichment activities as part of their 'social, moral, spiritual and cultural (SMSC) education' agenda.<sup>xiv</sup>

You may have a number of ideas for inter faith activities that you would like to support or organise on your campus. However, before you start planning it is recommended that you do some groundwork.

**To get a perspective on the experience and resources present at your institution we suggest you:**

- Undertake some initial fact finding
- Meet with various students, staff and officers (including chaplains) about your ideas
- Analyse the information you have collected
- Create a clear and workable action plan for inter faith activities
- Share your findings with those who will be involved in planning activities

The above suggestions are explored further throughout this chapter, and will help you develop a clear strategy forward.



### Initial fact finding

It is helpful to start by finding out the pattern of religious diversity on your campus and what measures are already being taken to work to ensure good inter faith relations.

You should be able to find this information by talking to other students' union staff or sabbatical officers; the chaplaincy team; staff from the equality and diversity team; and faith societies.

#### The kind of information you may want to find out includes:

- What faith societies exist on campus, including both those that belong to the students' union and those that do not; the level of membership and participation in these societies; and the types of activity they organise.
- What inter faith activities have been organised previously by students, societies, staff and chaplains?
- The policies and procedures the students' union and institution have in place that support good relations with and between students of faith on your campus

It will also be useful at this stage to gauge the types of engagement that exist between students from different groups, including identifying any issues affecting relationships between particular groups.



• If you are meeting with the various faith societies at this stage it will be good to ask them about how they would feel about engaging in various types of inter faith activities. Discuss with them your initial ideas and ask them for what ideas they might have for types of activity.

## Analysis and developing an action plan

Having gathered this initial information, you will be well placed to begin thinking about what you might need to do to build good inter faith relations at your university or college; and what the role of the students' union may be in this process.

It may be useful to do this in conversation with other sabbatical officers, students and representatives from each of the faith societies, possibly as a brainstorming exercise. It is also useful to involve the chaplains in this process, as they often have a lot of experience and resources which they will be happy to share with you.

As students of faith and their related societies take their belief seriously, a mismanaged attempt to set up an inter faith event or forum can accidentally isolate the very people for whom it is intended. Take care to be sensitive to the beliefs and needs of students and all faith groups involved.

The activities on pages 16-19 will be useful in any meetings you have at this stage.

Following these discussions, it may be helpful to synthesize your research and reflections into a comprehensive summary.

Describing current inter faith activities within your institution and setting out suggestions of how your students' union plans to enhance existing inter faith activities. You may want to set out a clear and concise action plan to illustrate this.

### Possible next steps to consider:

- a. If the campus does not already have a student inter faith forum, a key next step which you may wish to take, is helping establish one. This idea is explored further in chapter 5.
- b. Regardless of whether you pursue the idea of a student inter faith forum, you may want to encourage a wide range of opportunities for inter faith dialogue and cooperative social action - you will find ideas for this in chapters 6 and 7.
- c. If your discussions have pointed to a lot of issues of concern over the relations between students of faith and the institution you may want to open up a process of discussion with the institution about this.
- d. If your discussions have pointed to any tensions between particular groups, you may wish to include in your strategy work to help those groups involved deal with these tensions first.

- e. If you encounter those who disincline to engage in any inter faith activities, you may want to include your strategy work to build the students' union relationship with these groups and discuss with them the issues involved.<sup>xv</sup>
- f. Consider how work to support good inter faith relations and respond to needs of students of different faiths fits into your broader 'good relations' work, including consultation with non-religious groups.

Share your summary and action plan with everyone you discussed your ideas with, and others you think may be interested.

It might be appropriate to hold a meeting of relevant staff and officers in the students' union to present your findings and action plan.

Remember that raising awareness about inter faith activities is likely to require persistence and patience. Starting this process early in the academic year is therefore useful so that you can begin implementing activities in the first term.

As part of our Student Inter Faith Project and ongoing development in this area NUS would enjoy reading about your experiences.



## creating a clear and workable action plan for inter faith activities

Use this planning tool to help you create an action plan for your inter faith activities

### Aims

Aims must be driven by students or students' union needs.

- What are the changes you are trying to achieve?
- What are your overall aims and specific aims?

For example, "To improve relations with and between faith societies"

### Objectives

Objectives explain how you will achieve your aims.

- What are the planned activities by which you are going to achieve your aims?

For example, "Run an inter faith week in the students' union"

### Outputs

- What are the detailed activities, services and products your project will provide to achieve its aims? (Make sure you quantify each output)

For example, "Run a faith fair and speaker event during inter

faith week in the students' union, open to all students"

### Outcomes

- What are the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that will occur as a result of your activities?

For example, "Increased understanding of different religions amongst students, and an opportunity for students to share perspectives"

### Evaluation

How will you measure success of this event or project? You will find useful resources on monitoring and evaluating activities at the beginning of chapter 6.

### SMART

The SMART acronym is a useful tool to use when setting aims, objectives, outputs and outcomes:

- **Specific**
- **Measurable**
- **Achievable**
- **Relevant**
- **Time-bound**

The example output demonstrates how SMART can be applied. For example, run a faith fair and speaker event during inter faith week in the students' union.

### This output is:

- **Specific** (it clearly states what activity will take place and where)
- **Measurable** (it states the type of activity taking place, and with who)
- **Achievable** (it is a realistic goal to organise these particular activities)
- **Relevant** (the activity is a relevant way of achieving the overall aim and objectives)
- **Time-bound** (it specifies when the activity will happen)

## Activities for understanding where you're starting from

Often we start out on a journey assuming everybody understands the key terms exactly as we understand them (for example, what we each mean by the term inter faith). This is rarely the case and can often cause problems, notably misunderstandings, confusion and potentially frustration when what people say is “lost in translation”.

It is important at an early stage, with a new group, to have the opportunity to explore different meanings of the same word or clarify the meaning of new words so you can lay good foundations for future dialogue and interaction.

The following two activities can help students appreciate that a single word can have many meanings, and help them explore what different perspectives on, or understandings of people have of particular words. The third activity will help small groups explore what inter faith activities they have been involved in previously and develop ideas for the types of activities students want to see organised in the

future. The fourth activity will help small groups consider what principles underlie positive inter faith engagement, developing a greater understanding of the purpose and meaning behind both dialogue and activity.

### activity ...

#### Understanding key terms

This activity is helpful for any new group of students who are starting to organise or engage in inter faith, by exploring what different people in the group understand by the following key terms: **faith, religion, belief, religious pluralism, diversity, multi-faith, inter faith and inter-religious**.

It can also help new groups, such as your inter faith forum, get to know one another and set the foundations for any future inter faith strategy.

The purpose of this activity is not to reach agreement on a definition – however a group may come to some consensus. Simply to aid discussion we have included a handout for this activity with some definitions other people have developed which you can photocopy and use with this activity (see the appendix).

In small groups of four to five, ask each group to discuss and jot down their thoughts to the following four questions. Give at least 10 minutes for each question.

1. Is there a difference between the terms **faith, religion** and **belief**?
2. What do you understand by the term **religious pluralism**. Is this different from **diversity**?
3. What do you understand by the terms **multi-faith, inter faith** and **inter-religious**?
4. Is there a difference between the terms **inter faith** and **inter communal**?

Depending on how much time you have available, you could ask the group to discuss the key points in a plenary session.



## activity ...

### **Sacred**

Sacred can be used as an ice-breaker or 'getting to know you' activity. In addition to helping students recognise that different communities use different words for similar things, the activity also introduces students to what they hold most sacred to them, within and across traditions.

A group size of 4 to 20 people is recommended for this activity.

In silence and not discussing with others, everyone writes down three things that are 'sacred' to them, each one on a different post-it note. Once everyone has done this ask them to get into small groups of four or five. In these groups they should look at all the post-it notes and identify similarities between the things they each find sacred.

It may be necessary for people to explain some of the things or terms they have used, as well as explain a little about why that thing is sacred to them. Allow up to 30 minutes for this activity.

In plenary ask the groups to highlight what similarities and differences they identified across religious and belief traditions and indeed other areas that are not related but might be described as "sacred" by participants, such as family, friends, silence or a precious heirloom.

## activity ...

### What sort of inter faith activity is helpful?

A useful activity when starting out with a new group is brainstorming the types of activity they would like to see organised. This can also help you understand the types of activity different student groups will be comfortable engaging in (as well as things they wouldn't).

You can also find out what students have been involved in previously and learn from these experiences, ensuring you organise events or activities students want to be involved in and that don't repeat previous mistakes.

#### Ask the group to discuss the following three questions:

- What inter faith activities have you organised or been involved in previously?
- What was good and bad about each of these events?
- What type of activities would you be interested in attending or organising?

This activity will take about 30 minutes depending on the size of your group.





## activity ...

### What makes for good inter faith engagement?

Another useful activity when you are beginning to get involved in inter faith engagement is to think about the principles that lie behind it. This can build understanding of the purpose of inter faith engagement and also highlight the importance of good process during inter faith activities.

It can also help participants to come to an understanding of why they are there, and clarify what kind of engagement they want to have with each other.

#### Possible questions to ask:

- Is there a difference between tolerance and respect?
- What helps ensure productive dialogue?
- What can make dialogue difficult?
- What might be good ground rules or principles of inter faith dialogue?

#### Then, move into a more practical focus:

- How can these principles be put into practice in organising inter faith engagement either in groups or individual events?

This activity will take 30 – 45 minutes depending on the size of your group.

## 5. Building an inter faith forum

An inter faith forum can provide a place for students of different faiths to engage with each other and meet a specific need: for students' unions to increase formal engagement and representation with faith societies and their members.

This chapter helps students' unions support the development of an inter faith forum which can be a place where members of different faith societies can meet regularly and discuss issues of common interest and concern.

It can also be a context for the union to:

- consult regularly with students of faith and identify their needs, discuss issues and find solutions to any problems that may arise;
- engage with faith and inter faith activities on campus

This chapter provides two examples of inter faith forums set up by students' unions in partnership with faith societies. Also provided are some key things for you to consider in setting up your forum and a template agenda for you to use in your first Inter Faith Forum meeting.



## What type of inter faith forum?

Inter faith forums take different forms at different students' unions depending on the specific needs and interests of those involved.

Some 'forums' are relatively informal. Others aim for some degree of representation from different groups. For example, one approach is to have a forum with representatives from each faith society (ideally two from each – one male, one female), and at least one person from the students' union (the societies, activities or welfare officer). It can also be useful to invite participation from the chaplain(s) and someone from the institution.

Whatever the type of forum may be, it should model the relationships the students' unions would like to see amongst students on campus: positive, respectful and mutually engaged.

## Who sets up an inter faith forum, and how?

When an inter faith forum is set up the questions arise of who sets it up, and how it should be run.

The students' union may want to have a direct role in the setting up of an inter faith forum. This could have some benefits in terms of implementation and communication of what the students' union would like to achieve and could add to the standing of a forum in the eyes of the university or college, and give the students' union a more hands on ability to encourage inter faith activities. However, complex and potentially controversial decisions about who is included in the forum then become the direct responsibility of the students' union.

Alternatively, the students' union may want to take on a facilitative role: encouraging the faith societies and individual students to set up their own inter faith forum. The union could promote the inter faith forum, provide it with financial support and recognition. A students' union inter faith officer could attend meetings and get involved in the group providing support when required.

Whether or not the union directly sets up a forum, there is the possibility that the students' union representative may chair the forum. If this is the case then it is worth considering appointing a representative from one of the faith societies to be a co-chair, promoting the good relations between the union and faith societies.

Eventually the model that you choose to employ depends on the circumstances on your campus. It is recommended that you ask this question at your initial meeting to find out what those involved think is the best approach to take.

It is important to understand that, regardless of how an inter faith forum is set up and run, students should play an active role in designing, planning, and running regular inter faith activities for themselves and in partnership with the students' union. Both the students' union and the faith societies should seek to facilitate a certain level of student inter faith activity. The position of your institution's chaplaincy team should also be considered. They can be an invaluable resource in setting up any venture with multiple faiths and may also have access to resources and facilities.

There are many careful balances to be struck in each individual situation with regards to how inter faith functions on campus, we hope the following case studies provide two good examples of how you could create an inter faith forum at your students' union.

## Additional campus inter faith initiatives

Remember that even if a formal inter faith forum is developed, individual student faith societies and individual students may also want to organise inter faith activities and events. They might even want to form an inter faith society or regular dialogue group – probably more informal with individual students from a variety of backgrounds. This is not incompatible with the suggested forum approach above, and should also be supported.

Using a variety of approaches may be the most suitable for your campus, and students' needs. If you do take this approach, it is important to have one person responsible for communicating between the different activities that exist. The union might want to appoint an inter faith officer to take on this role and organise events encouraging inter faith dialogue between students (with

little formal interaction with faith societies). He or she might also service the student inter faith forum. This latter approach can be particularly useful at institutions where there are few or no faith societies.

In most cases it is probably appropriate for the first meeting to be chaired by an officer from the students' union. You will also want to appoint someone to take minutes of the meeting (including names and contact details of everyone who attended). Within agenda item 6 you should discuss how future meetings will be chaired – you may want to consider having a rotating chair, by the forum members.

### **You may want to include some of the following activities in the first few forum meetings as ice-breakers and introductions to one another:**<sup>xvi</sup>

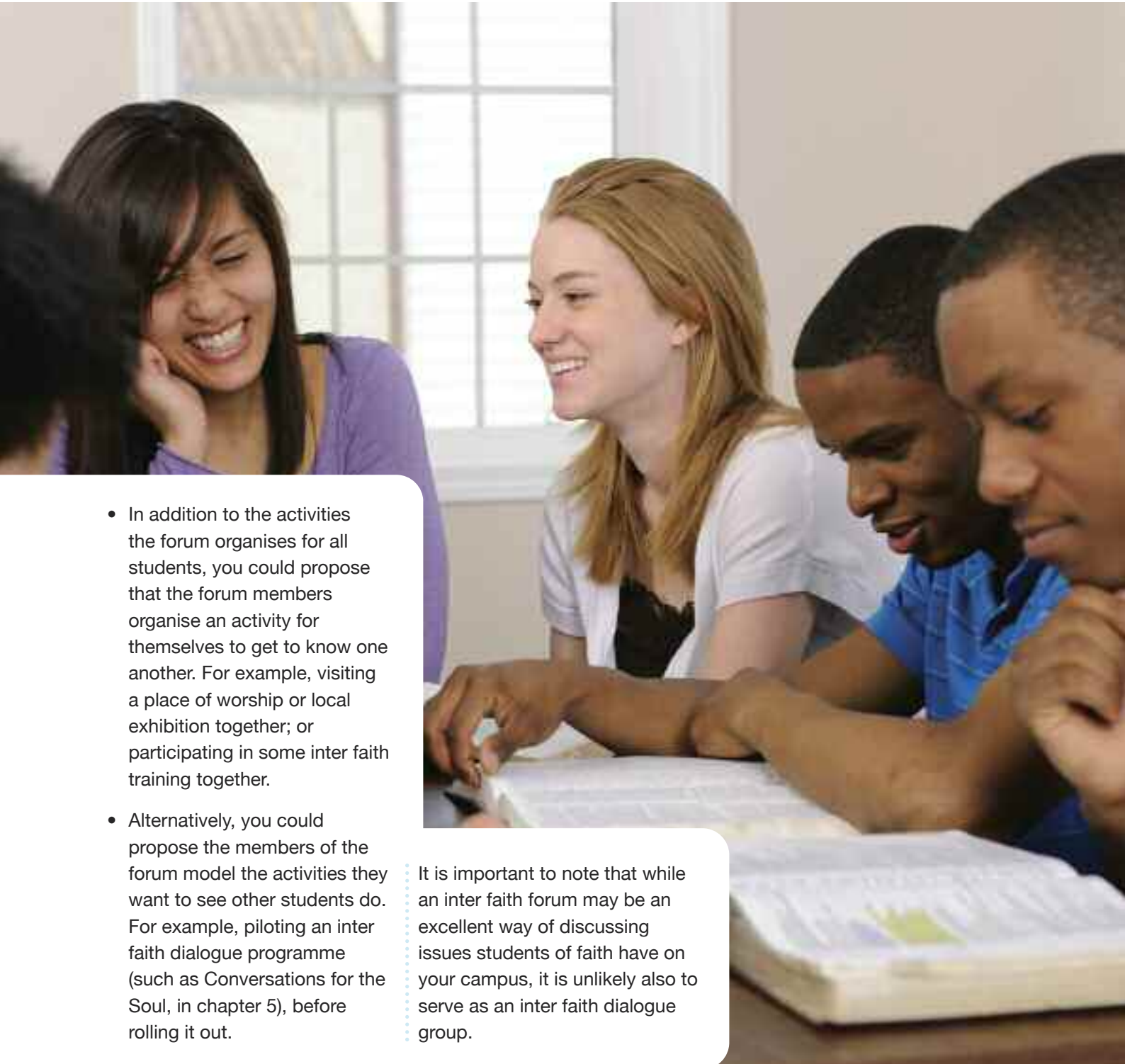
- Understanding Key Terms, page 16
- What makes for good inter faith engagement? page 19
- Fishbowl Dialogue, page 37
- What sort of inter faith activity is helpful? page 16
- Consider activity the forum could organise for national Inter Faith Week in November (see chapter 6 for inter faith activity ideas)

## Key considerations

Below is a list of key things for you to consider when setting up your inter faith forum and organising your first meeting:

- The students' union officer or other person responsible for convening the forum should meet with each of the representative groups before the inaugural meeting to clarify its purpose and agree the aims of the initial meeting. This can help manage each groups' expectations of what will be achieved from the first meeting and the forum generally.
- Manage any existing or arising tensions in the meeting (or where possible beforehand). If tensions are ignored members of the forum are likely to get frustrated and stop participating.
- Communication: decide in the first meeting how members will communicate with one another between forum meetings; how they can add items to the next meeting agenda; and, how often the forum will convene.
- The convenor should follow up with everyone individually after the meeting. This is a good way to keep people engaged, check out any concerns and ask them for their feedback.





- In addition to the activities the forum organises for all students, you could propose that the forum members organise an activity for themselves to get to know one another. For example, visiting a place of worship or local exhibition together; or participating in some inter faith training together.
- Alternatively, you could propose the members of the forum model the activities they want to see other students do. For example, piloting an inter faith dialogue programme (such as Conversations for the Soul, in chapter 5), before rolling it out.

It is important to note that while an inter faith forum may be an excellent way of discussing issues students of faith have on your campus, it is unlikely also to serve as an inter faith dialogue group.

activity ...

## Template agenda

Below is a template agenda for the first meeting of your inter faith forum. This template is for use where a general purpose for the forum has been agreed by all parties before the meeting.

Date: ..... Time: ..... Venue: .....

Attendance: *(Name, society and role/position within society)* .....

### 1. Welcome (by chair)

- Clarify the purpose of the Forum
- Outline the agenda and what you hope will be achieved by the end of the meeting

### 2. Introductions

- Quick round robin of who everyone is
- If representing a faith society allow two minutes for everyone to also introduce their society

### 3. Ground-rules

- Agree the ground rules for the forum

### 4. Issues and opportunities for inter faith engagement on campus

- Identify the opportunities
- Invite students of particular faiths [and beliefs] to raise any faith and inter faith issues that they would like discussed in the future
- Invite faith societies to raise for future exploration any issues concerning being a faith society on your campus.
- Open invitations to all present to raise any faith or inter faith issues that they believe need future discussion

### 5. Ideas for things the forum could deliver (in addition to providing an opportunity to discuss the issues raised above)

The opportunities, issues and ideas raised in the agenda items 4 and 5 should be used to develop a simple terms of reference for the forum, following the first meeting

### 6. Roles and responsibilities within the Forum

- Discuss what responsibilities there are within the forum so that it functions well, and what roles might be created for these responsibilities
- For example: Who will convene the next meeting?

### 7. Summary of any actions agreed

### 8. Agree date for next meeting

example...

### **Birmingham Guild Inter Faith Association**

In the summer term of 2009/2010 the Student Activities Officer at Birmingham Guild set up the Inter Faith Association which seeks to:

- a) Work with the Officer Team, Guild, Guild Faith/Religious Groups, the University and the Chaplaincy to promote the interests and equality of students of all religions and beliefs, and to promote good campus relations.
- b) Work with the Officer Team, Guild, Guild Faith/Religious Groups, the University and the Chaplaincy to organise inter faith activities and campaigns on campus, with the aim to encourage a greater student understanding of different religions and beliefs, to promote good campus relations, and community cohesion on campus.
- c) Advise Guild Council, the Guild, and the University on issues that relate to the social, political and welfare interests of students of religions and beliefs.
- d) Organise social activities and sport events to bring together students of different religions and beliefs to promote respect and good relationships on campus.
- e) Encourage student engagement and awareness of Regional and National events or projects with relevant or affiliated partners, such as the NUS Student Inter Faith Project.
- f) Promote freedom of speech and also the right for students to live and work on campus without fear or intimidation.
- g) Support and encourage groups or individuals who want to organise and promote relevant inter faith activities.
- h) To assist Guild Council and other Guild authorities in their promotion of, and campaigns for the social, political and welfare interests of its members.

**The Inter Faith Association has a number of elected Committee Roles which include:**

- Chair
- Treasurer
- Secretary
- Internal Relations Officer
- External Relations Officer
- Sport and Social Officer
- Marketing Officer
- Events Officer (x2)

See the appendix for further information on what each of the above roles entail.

example...

## Sheffield University Students' Union Faith Forum

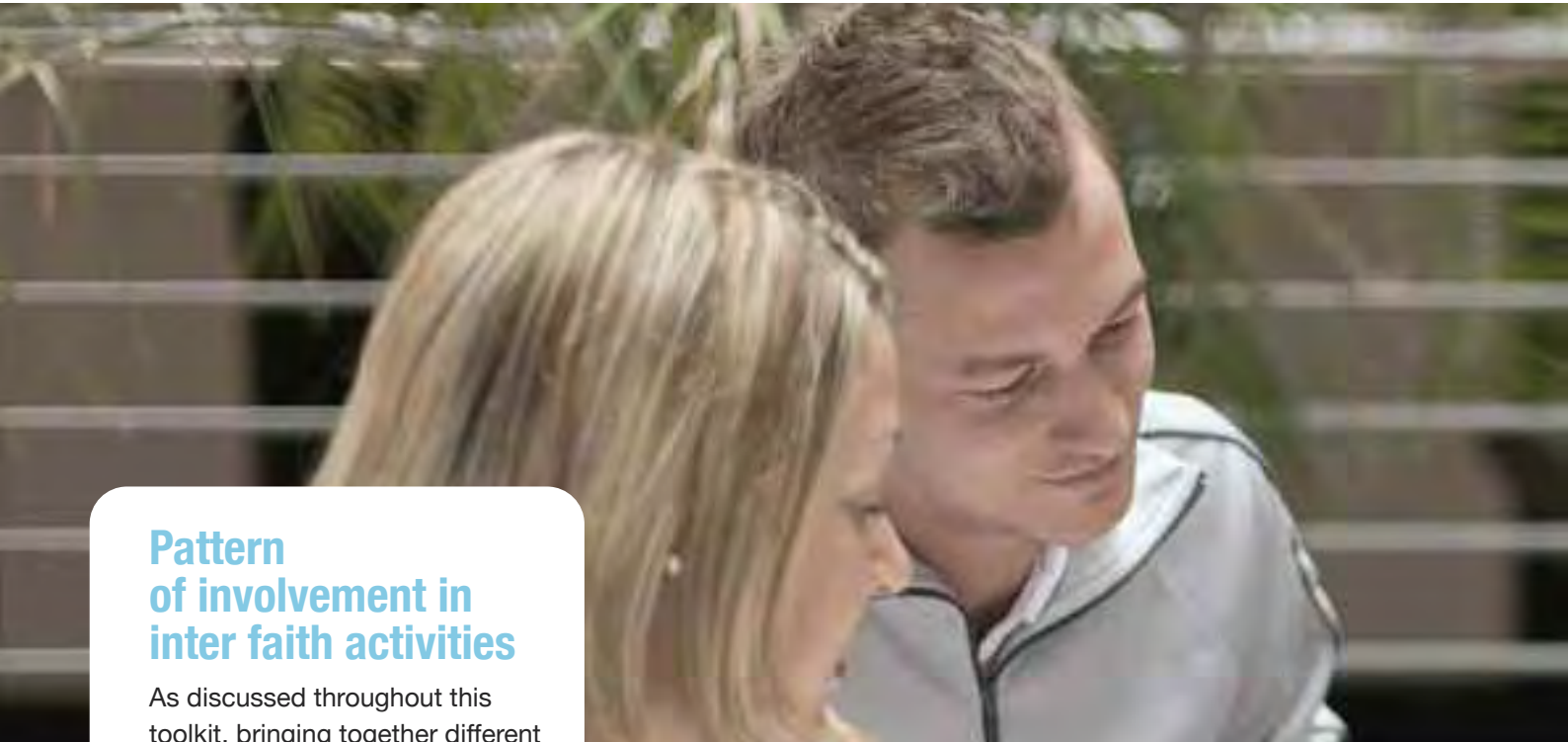
Sheffield University and Sheffield University Students' Union worked in partnership to pilot a Sheffield University 'Faiths Forum' in 2008/09. Due to its success, the forum continues to function with regular meetings and events organised for a wider student audience.

The forum encourages inter faith dialogue and collaborative action within the University and aims to reach students with a faith and those with none. The Forum is composed of two representatives from each society, chaplains from the University's chaplaincy service, and is chaired by the Students' Union Activities Officer.

### This Forum has four key aims:

- **Partnership and cohesion.** The Forum acts to facilitate the forming of friendships between students involved in the different faith societies. To promote understanding of other faiths, promote good campus relations, and allow discussion around issues of student life which is influenced by faith. This is also reinforced through the joint visits to places of worship as places of discovery, and inter faith action on campus.
- **Empowerment.** The students within faith based societies represent a large student body with specific requirements. The Forum provides an opportunity to voice concerns and issues to the Union and University. The employees and students can work together to resolve issues which may not otherwise have been brought to light.
- **Choice.** The University and Union need to know what is best for students of a particular faith. The Forum can be consulted on such issues to ensure that the Union and University operations and facilities are suitable.
- **Awareness and respect.** Sheffield University has an extremely diverse membership; however faith on campus is often not valued. The Forum aims to increase knowledge and understanding of faith in all students, thereby educating the people who will shape our future.





## Pattern of involvement in inter faith activities

As discussed throughout this toolkit, bringing together different student groups is rewarding but has some complex and challenging aspects.

It is important to note that establishing the pattern of involvement in inter faith activities (and in particular your inter faith forum) can be a complex issue in itself. For example the question of who takes part can be a contested matter.

It is possible, for example, to have an inter faith forum that takes representatives from the major faith groups on campus, or to have a forum that takes representatives from every group.

Which option is best to take depends on your situation. However, there may be a danger of some major faith groups choosing not to be involved where what they see as less 'mainstream' religious groups are involved. This is an issue which will need working out through consultation. So too will the question of whether the forum involves non-religious belief groups.

It is important to note that while it may prove difficult to invite all groups to be represented in a forum, this does not mean that all

cannot be invited to attend specific events throughout the year.

What is vital is to be clear about the purpose of each inter faith activity you organise, and communicate this to all students and groups so that they understand the reasons why some groups are sometimes involved in some activities and at other times not.

All faith groups need to be engaged with similar courtesy and respect, no matter their beliefs or influence on campus.



## Proselytism in inter faith engagement

To many people of faith mission is a vital part of their religious expression and making their beliefs known in this way is important to them. Some take proselytism, the active attempt to convert to their own religion [or belief] those of another, as an equally vital part of their religious expression.

While the wish to share one's beliefs and convictions is of course legitimate, within the context of inter faith engagement it should be made clear that the aim is to explore a respectful engagement with other faiths to the mutual benefit of all. Tensions can arise if one person or party is seen to be aggressively advocating their particular belief over and above those of others present. Active proselytism whether intended, or merely perceived to be intended, can cause tensions within a group who have come together in an inter faith dialogue context.

Having a clear idea of the goals and purpose of inter faith engagement will help organisers communicate the nature of inter faith dialogue to those taking part. The presence of a facilitator at activities and dialogues can help to steer both conversations and actions away from causing unnecessary, and often unintentional, offence.

## 6. Inter faith activity ideas

This chapter takes you through planning inter faith activities and gives examples of a variety of activities that you could try on your campus, from starting out with getting to know you activities to organising inter faith volunteering projects which meet local community needs.

### Organising, planning and delivering events

The following planning template will help you to think about and plan each activity.

**1. What** do you want to achieve? What is it and **how** are you going to achieve it?

Summarise the aims and format of your project.

**2. Who** do you want to involve, and how many?

**3. When** will the activity take place? When will you organise the activity?

#### 4. Resources

- What resources are already available? What contacts /networks do you have?
- Who else can help you organise the event?
- How much will the event cost? Where will you get the funding from?

#### 5. Monitoring

How will you measure if your event/project has been a success? What are your criteria? What data do you need to collect? How will you do this?

**You might use:**

- Sign-in sheets/registration
- “Headcounts” at events
- Data from your institution
- Feedback from participants - through surveys, interviews, conversations, and Facebook

#### 6. Evaluation

Evaluation is often one of the most valuable parts of a project. Analysing your experience and identifying learning points ensures that your team and your students’ union will continue to develop. Make sure that you learn from what goes wrong as well as what goes right!

**Questions to ask when evaluating:**

- What’s the mood? How are people feeling about the event/project?
- What went well? What didn’t go so well?
- Think about – **people, logistics, aims**
- In assessing the overall success of the project think about **outcomes** not **outputs** – it’s not how many events you have held that matters; it’s about what impact those events had.
- Is our students’ union stronger as a result of this project? If not why not?
- What have we learnt for the future? How will we improve?
- How can we make the project sustainable?

**7. Reflection** (after the event) -

What have we done? **Why** have we done it? And **what impact** have we made?







## 8. Sustainability

Ensuring that all your hard work isn't lost when you move on from your role at the students' union is really important in sustaining and developing inter faith relations from one year to the next.

All too often an inter faith project or event is organised with a lot of time and resources spent to develop it – with much success – and then there is no follow up or continuation of other activities. At the end of a year (or two) those who have been committed to organising the activities and learnt many lessons and skills leave without passing on what

they have learnt or experienced. So a new cohort of enthusiasts has to start all over again.

It is really important, therefore, as part of your planning to identify when and how you are going to pass on your knowledge and experience to the new team of officers.

By doing this you will ensure the sustainability of any activities or projects you have developed and support others to build on your own success (rather than starting from scratch).

Set up a meeting with incoming officers to pass on your learning to the next year. Or write handover notes on the inter faith activities you have organised, the contacts you've made and the relationships built, as well as the lessons you've learnt along the way.

**Here are some top tips to help you ensure sustainability of your inter faith activities:**

1. After each event or project, write a short summary of the lessons you have learned. You can use these when organising your next event but also pass these on to new officers.
2. Create a contact list of key people on campus and contacts you have made with other organisations, and what meetings or projects you have been involved in with them.
3. Involve permanent staff in inter faith projects to provide continuity of work.

## Getting to know you

When you're starting out and everybody is new to each other and inter faith encounter, it is useful to start off slowly, allowing time for people to get to know one another at their own pace in a safe space. Read more about how to create safe space in chapter 7.

The following activities are useful in setting the foundations for any inter faith project.

## Boundary setting and ground rules

**These ground-rules have been developed for students and officers to use when facilitating (inter faith) dialogue. It is useful to discuss ground-rules before starting any dialogue, and allow the group to add points to this list as they feel necessary.**

- Use 'I' statements, to avoid trying to represent everyone in your faith tradition.
- Respect the right of others to disagree with you.
- Be sensitive.
- Think about the language you use and how you engage in conversation, make sure that everyone understands the terms that you are using – don't be afraid to ask 'do you understand?' every so often in conversation.
- Be straightforward about your intentions for taking part in all inter faith initiatives; including having a shared purpose.
- Say when you feel uncomfortable with something that has been said or done.
- Correct misunderstandings and misrepresentations of your own and other people's faith when you come across them. It is really important that as you learn more about other faith traditions you challenge those who hold incorrect views and stereotypes about others.

### Other things to consider:

- Recognise that all of us at times fall short of the ideals of our own faith tradition and we should not compare our own ideals with other people's practices.
- Take responsibility for preventing disagreement from leading to conflict.
- Listening as well as speaking is necessary for a genuine conversation.
- A sense of humour is good – but take care jokes on religious topics can cause offense.
- Make sure that when it's your time to listen you listen and aren't just waiting to respond.
- Understand that no derogatory comment will go unchallenged.

## Ice-breakers and energisers

Ice-breakers are a great way to start a meeting of any new group or events, to both introduce people and make them feel relaxed. Energisers are good at key points in a meeting or event when you need to re-focus or 'energise' a group.

If you don't have a repertoire of ice-breakers or energisers in your back pocket there are a number of websites with hundreds for you to choose from. Simply do an internet search.

It is important to consider when organising ice-breakers and energisers that some groups/individuals may not be comfortable with physical contact.

## Identifying common ground

All major world faiths share a similar fundamental rule, commonly known as the golden rule:

### Baha'i Faith

Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself.  
*Baha'u'llah, Gleanings*

### Buddhism

Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.  
*The Buddha, Udana-Varga 5.18*

### Christianity

In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.  
*Jesus, Matthew 7:12*

### Hinduism

This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you.  
*Mahabharata 5:1517*

### Islam

Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself  
*The Prophet Muhammad, 13th of the 40 Hadiths of Nawawi*

### Jainism

One should treat all creatures in the world as one would like to be treated.  
*Mahavira, Sukrakritanga*

### Judaism

Love your neighbour as yourself.  
*Leviticus 19:18*

### Sikhi

I am a stranger to no one; and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed I am a friend to all.  
*Guru Granth Sahib, p.1299*

### Zoroastrianism

Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself.  
*Shayast-na-Shayast 13.29*

A good activity is often raising students' awareness to this. You could simply display this on the walls during a workshop; ask students to develop an exhibition or creative project around the theme of the Golden Rule; or use it as a short discussion topic at the start of a first meeting.

### Questions to ask a group:

- Were you familiar with this rule in your religious tradition?
- Were you aware of it in other religious traditions?
- Do you think it is important as a common rule across traditions? Why?

example...

### Southwark College - Multi-faith Cafe

With support from the students' union, the student liaison officer at Southwark College organised a Multi-faith Café for National Inter Faith Week (in 2009).

The event was held in the main hall where a number of tables were arranged (in a café style). At each table was a college chaplain or local religious leader who had been invited to answer questions about their particular religion. Refreshments were provided and students were encouraged to visit each of the tables and ask questions. The Chaplains and faith leaders were also asked to bring items of religious significance which they displayed on the table, as another encouragement for students to ask questions.

## Faith literacy

Faith literacy is about having “the skills and knowledge required to engage in an informed and confident way with...”<sup>xviii</sup> and about faith communities.

This can include reflecting on and learning about your own and others religious or belief identity; identifying and addressing personal stereotypes and prejudices; and understanding how these can be formulated; celebrating religious diversity and encouraging opportunities for people to meet and share their own experiences and learn about others.

Be aware that even after years of study nobody is fully ‘faith literate’, it is a process of gaining understanding of your own and other peoples faith. Inter faith dialogue is an excellent way to build faith literacy by listening to others about their own faith traditions.

## Using Academic Resources

Many universities and colleges have staff and departments with knowledge and resources directly or in-directly related to religion and belief that could be utilised to organise particular events and activities.

This can include organising events involving academics giving lectures and seminars to students on religion or the relationship between religion and other disciplines.





## Celebrating arts and culture

Organising an exhibition or display in a public area of your students' union can be a really creative and non-threatening way to engage students with important aspects of the traditions and history of other people's faith.

Alternatively, ask each faith society (or chaplain) to organise a stall in a public space showcasing various aspects of each faith group on campus (or in the local community).

Ask each faith group to bring objects from their tradition, which will encourage people to ask questions and inspire dialogue. Try to organise light refreshments from different traditions.

You can ask local places of worship to have a stall, if they are not represented on campus by a society. The chaplain should be able to help you with this.

Organising this type of activity as part of, or in collaboration with, another event (e.g. as part of Inter Faith Week) is likely to draw crowds to the exhibition.

### example...

At **Bristol University** the Multi-faith Chaplaincy team organise a multi-faith forum once a term, inviting representatives from each of the faith and belief societies on campus: Islamic Society, Christian Union, Catholic Society, Jewish Society, Atheist Agnostic and Secular Society, Hindu Society, Buddhist Meditation Society, Cross Connections group, Methodist Society and Pagan & Earth Religions Society. Two representatives from the students' union also attend. The forum usually involves a formal dinner, and is simply an opportunity for representatives from the different faith and non-religious belief societies to meet and socialise.

### example...

**Kings College SU Inter Faith Network** organised a **Winter Celebration of Faith** towards the end of the winter term – celebrating Eid, Hanukkah and Christmas. The event focussed around a multi-faith quiz, contributed to by each of the faith societies, and a variety of stalls.

## activity ...

### Hopes and fear

As a facilitator it can be useful at the start of a process (for example setting up an inter faith forum) to ask participants what hopes and fears they have from attending the meeting, event or participating in a project.

A fun and relaxed way to do this can be using a diverse selection of postcards, photographs and images which you lay out on a table and ask participants to pick one postcard or image that represents a fear they have and another of something that represents a hope.

Once everyone has collected two postcards ask them to sit in a circle and ask each person to respond share their hope and fear with the group (explaining each image they picked up).

You can use this activity to extract additional ground-rules to add to the list above, by asking what the group can do to ensure each fear is not realised.

### example...

The Coexist Society serves as the primary leadership for inter faith initiatives at Warwick University, organising a range of events and projects ranging from outreach projects in schools where they have focused primarily on running cultural awareness and community cohesion workshops; to regular Discussion Fora where students discuss broad issues such as 'Women and Religion' and 'Religious Censorship/Portrayal of Religion in the Media'. These serve as platforms for people from all faith backgrounds, including those of non-religious beliefs, to share ideas and experiences, often mixing inter-cultural awareness into the discussion.

Moreover, every year the society organizes a themed week, "Faith 2 Face Week" during which bigger workshops are facilitated, and high profile guests are invited to speak about single-faith as well as multi-faith subjects.

It is important to note that the society carefully divides its attention between scripture based discussions, and those which observe and analyse the role and reality of religion in the UK. However the latter takes more importance as it is much more directly relevant to the aims and objectives of the society which are to facilitate and encourage inter faith discussions as a means to promote tolerance and understanding of different peoples and groups within society.

The society also commits itself to running both alcohol and non-alcohol social events, on an alternating basis.



## Visiting a place of worship

Visiting a place of worship can be a great social activity for your inter faith group, as well as a unique opportunity for students to learn more about a particular faith tradition, their place of worship, and religious observance.

It can also be a great opportunity to begin a long-term link with faith communities in the local area.

It is often best to contact the place(s) of worship in advance to arrange your visit, and ensure someone will be there to welcome you, show you round as well as answer questions the group may have.

A group visit will usually take about an hour (plus travel). It is often good to follow up the visit with an informal meeting in a café or social space on campus where students can discuss the experience of visiting the place of worship together.

## Lectures and Panel discussion

The most common form of inter faith dialogue at many universities to date, is inviting scholars, religious or community leaders, academics and others to give lectures or speak on a panel about a particular theme or issue.

This can often add a valuable contribution of knowledge and understanding, as it often incorporates a question and answer session for the audience.

When organising a speaker event timing can be important. A single speaker should usually be about 40 minutes, with 20 minutes for questions and answers. If you have a panel, allow at least 60 minutes for everyone to give their opinion, and additional time for questions, answers and summary comments (about 30 minutes).

What many students have said is missing from these events is follow up, and an opportunity to ask “okay, so what happens next” or “what can we do about it?” Planning an opportunity into an event for the audience to reflect on what has been discussed, and discuss opportunities for doing something following the discussion can make the impact of the lecture more sustainable.



## Approaches to dialogue

Inter faith dialogue is a special form of communication. It might be a one-time event or a series of conversations. It can span hours, months, years, or a lifetime. It is the fundamental component in the process of forming relationships across lines of religious difference.

Everyday dialogue is where two or more people from different faith backgrounds have a conversation outside of a formalised dialogue setting. It could be specifically about religion or anything else but their interaction constitutes a form of inter faith dialogue. If there are good relations on campus then everyday dialogue should take place in a positive and constructive manner.

Intentional dialogue is where the dialogue is intentionally arranged to allow two or more people of two or more different faith groups to engage with each other. It encompasses the full range of dialogue options, and can be structured or unstructured and involve any number of different faith groups.

### Who takes part?

Dialogue can be two-way, three-way or multi-faith depending on the number of different parties who take part.

On many campuses round the country two-way dialogue is organised between the Christian and Islamic faith societies but any

two groups can come together for it, for example Christian-Jewish, Jewish-Muslim or Sikh-Christian. Bi-lateral dialogue might involve shared events, reciprocal visits to places of worship or just an opportunity to get to talk about faith alongside each other. Two-way discussion can go particularly deeply into issues.

Three-way dialogue is also increasingly common on campus, with members of all three 'Abrahamic' faiths (Christians, Jews and Muslims) coming together for a dialogue meeting, or engaging in mutual textual study.

Multi-faith dialogue has larger numbers of faith groups present and is a chance to engage with and explore many different beliefs.

It is also possible to have selective dialogues which helps specific groups within a variety of faiths discuss issues that are important and particular to them. For example, inter faith dialogue for women to discuss the questions from a uniquely female perspective takes place on some campuses.



## activity ...

### Fishbowl dialogue

This activity is great to use with large or small groups of students who have lots of questions to ask one another. It can also be used as a tool to initiate conversations and dialogue about a particular issue or topic.

Each Fishbowl (group) needs at least 6 people (plus a facilitator). If you have a large group of 12 or more, it's good to split them into two or more groups of six or seven.

#### Set up:

Place three chairs facing each other within a circle of six chairs on the outside.

The outer circle of chairs should be equal to the total number of people in the group. Therefore, if you have 10 students participating in the activity there needs to be 10 chairs in the outer circle. The number of chairs in the inner circle always remains as three.

Before you start, ask everybody to write any

question they want to ask on a piece of paper (or post-it note). Ask participants to fold the paper up and place all questions into a hat, in the centre of the inner circle. In small groups, people can add as many questions as they like, but each question should be on a separate piece of paper.

#### Activity:

To start everybody sits in the outer circle, the facilitator must explain the following rules of the activity, before you begin:

- Only those seated in the inner circle are allowed to speak. After the first question has been asked (by the facilitator), those who want to answer, respond to the question must move to a seat in the inner circle.
- Participants cannot speak when sitting in the outer circle.
- Those in the inner circle must speak in the order that

they sat down, allowing everybody the opportunity to speak equally.

- When there are three people already sitting in the inner circle and someone in the outer circle wants to speak they must stand just to the side of the first person who sat down – so that they know someone is waiting to speak.
- If you are in the inner circle and see someone waiting to take your place, finish your point and move back into the outer circle (you are allowed to move back in at any point, by the same approach).

The facilitator starts the activity by taking a question out of the hat and reading it to the group.

When the question has been answered or the discussion becomes repetitive the facilitator should end discussion on that question and move onto a new one.

## Structured or unstructured?

Inter faith dialogue can either follow a set structure of questions and topics, sometimes with aid from a facilitator, or it can be free-flowing with those taking part setting the course of the discussion.

Both forms of dialogue are appropriate in different situations, regular smaller groups who come

together may prefer to have an unstructured approach, exploring issues over many sessions in the way that they find suits them. However, structured approaches are good with larger groups of people, as well as those new to inter faith dialogue to help those present consider specific questions.

Below are a number of examples of both structured and unstructured dialogue exercises.

## case study

### Campusalam FlashPOD Listen to understand, speak to share

The unique methodology combines the spontaneity of a flash-mob with the critical thinking of a discussion group for students and staff to respond to campus conflicts and challenges using productive discussion and creative action. The main discussion points or conclusions are posted online for others to hear, reflect on, respond to or engage with.

The magic of FlashPODs are they require minimal planning and can be held in a café or other space on campus, often spontaneously – once students understand the model. The ideal number of participants is three to six.



### Roles of the FlashPOD:

- *Facilitator*: keeps the conversation moving, asks thought-provoking questions, ensures people are listening to one another and helps with summarising.
- *Blogger*: reports the main points of discussion and uploads them online.
- *Photographer or videographer*: grabs a picture or 30-second video of the conversation to post online.  
**TIP:** Ideally the facilitator and blogger are not part of the conversation. It is best not to have more than 6 people involved in the dialogue itself to make sure ideas are properly heard.

### Structure of the FlashPOD:

- *Opening (5-10 min.):* Participants introduce themselves. The facilitator opens the FlashPOD by announcing the issue or problem. The facilitator takes questions from the group, to identify two to three questions

that should be discussed (5-10 minutes). The blogger writes these questions down.

- *Pair Discussion (15-20 min.):* Participants get into pairs to share their initial opinions about the topic. One becomes the speaker and one becomes the listener. The speaker gets five minutes to share his/her

opinion on the topic without interruption. The listener then uses active listening and reflective reframing (see *Active Listening*, page 50) to summarise the speaker's main points in 2 minutes. Once the speaker is satisfied that the listener understands the speaker's opinion the roles reverse.

- *Group Discussion (20 min.):* The pairs report back their initial opinions to the POD. The blogger writes these down. The facilitator ensures all talkers have a chance to share their ideas, sometimes pausing the conversation to allow talkers to clarify their ideas or for listeners to summarise.

- *Summarising/Taking Action (10 min.):* For the final 10 minutes of FlashPOD, participants are asked to answer the following questions:
  - How has your opinion changed on this topic?
  - What is one positive action you will take based on our discussion?

If you are interested in running a FlashPOD at your institution please contact Campusalam directly at [campusalam@campusalam.org](mailto:campusalam@campusalam.org) for further information and support. It is important that at least one person is trained by Campusalam or NUS in how to use the methodology and has the skills to facilitate. There are additional resources available from Campusalam to help you organise and facilitate FlashPODs on your campus at [www.campusalam.org](http://www.campusalam.org).

## Storytelling

Sharing our real life experiences, our stories, can make a refreshing change from discussion of ideas and beliefs, and offer a very direct way to encounter the other. This is a particularly good way for students to engage in an informal dialogue setting, and can be set up as part of a simple socialising event between different faith groups on your campus.

In inter faith dialogue it is far too easy to discuss topics that may put us at odds with our conversation partners. If we begin an inter faith dialogue by focussing on political or theological tenants we may find that the conversation does not go very far before we start arguing about who is “right” and who is “wrong”.

If however, we encourage participants to begin with a story from their own lived experience, it is often less threatening for listeners. While they may not have lived the same experience as the storyteller, it is unlikely that they will challenge the veracity of his or her story. Instead, the storyteller is inviting the listeners to share in a piece of his or her experience, even if it is grounded in different beliefs and values.

The dialogue is therefore inclusive rather than exclusive and allows for mutually appreciative encounter. Stories are a crucial tool for enabling people with different identities to interact positively.<sup>xix</sup>

## Going deeper

Some students will want to learn (or study) more about other religious traditions in greater depth. Much traditional inter faith dialogue has been between religious leaders and scholars, exploring what it means from each faith tradition to encounter the ‘other’. This type of inter faith dialogue continues today and can include the study of religious texts and scriptures for shared understanding, discussion of broader theological considerations, and reflections on current issues of importance on a local and national level.

It is possible to learn more about one another’s traditions and beliefs through mutual study of sacred texts. By listening, learning, questioning and understanding one can achieve a greater depth of understanding.

This kind of activity is sometimes organised by university chaplaincy teams or departments

of religious studies. It can be conducted both on an academic and more informal level depending on the organisers and participants. The Three Faith Forum’s Tools 4 Trialogue is a good example of this.<sup>xx</sup>

For further information about facilitating mutual study of sacred texts you can contact your institution’s chaplaincy team.

The following two examples demonstrate two informal approaches to mutual study which have been developed specifically for student groups with chaplaincy teams at two universities. The third example is a programme for tandem dialogue.

There are also bodies with specialist expertise which can be approached to run special sessions. These are listed on pages 62-63.



## activity ...

### Lunchtime dialogues

A simple short-term approach to dialogue used by students, who don't have lots of time to commit.

Students meet once a week during lunchtime (for a minimum of four weeks); in a communal or social space on campus that students pass through but is quiet enough for group discussion. Everybody brings their lunch to eat during the dialogue, and each week participants are encouraged to bring along a friend who is new to the dialogue group (as it often starts out as a very small group).

A topic is chosen for each dialogue (usually the week before, or via email between each meeting), allowing everybody to think about, ask or research their own faith perspective on the particular topic.

Participants are encouraged to bring something from their scripture that informs their values, beliefs or perspective on the topic.

There is no facilitator, and so the conversation is very informal. However, it is still useful for the group to set ground-rules at the start of each dialogue. Groups may also find it useful to have done some active listening and dialogue skill activities or training before hand to understand the dialogue approach of 'speaking to share, listen to understand'.<sup>xxi</sup>

example...

### 3x3x3

Organised by the multi-faith chaplaincy team at Nottingham University, this programme has been running with students very successfully over the last couple of years.

The development of the model was based on mutual textual study, but developed specifically for small groups of students for a fixed period of time (in this case three weeks).

At Nottingham it involved 3 Christian, 3 Jewish and 3 Muslim students, and a chaplain or faith leader from each of these traditions. Notably, it could be run with different faith groups (it just happened that the multi-faith chaplaincy team were from the three Abrahamic faiths).

Each week a different topic is discussed based around a set of texts or *scriptures*.

The dialogues were loosely facilitated by a different chaplain each week. Students' Unions interested in running a similar programme to this should speak to their chaplaincy for support and guidance in choosing texts and facilitating the dialogue(s).





case study ...

## Conversations for the soul

*Conversations for the Soul* is a series of semi-structured one-to-one conversations about faith (also known as tandem dialogue). Usually a group of about 16 participants meet together for an initial meeting and induction, at which everybody finds a partner and form a pair. Over the next four to five weeks, the pairs decide a date and time to meet, once a week for about an hour. Using prompts or resources that are provided in the initial meeting (by the facilitator, and available from NUS or St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace) the pair talk about a variety of topics or themes relating to their religion, beliefs and practices. A final group meeting is usually organised by the project facilitator/coordinator to end the process formally and for participants to share their experiences and feedback.

Usually strong friendships are formed between the pairs, or at least a better understanding and knowledge of another person's faith identity.

This is a useful approach for in-depth discussion and dialogue on topics such as balancing demands; death and immortality; doubt and keeping the faith; why bad things happen to good people; tolerance and limits, and much more.

The programme developed by St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace using materials from Christian Kaestner and Sheffield University. Also known at Sheffield University as Tandem Learning.

St Ethelburga's Centre has been working with NUS to develop these resources for use by students and students' unions.

For more information and resources please contact St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace at [marianne@stethelburgas.org](mailto:marianne@stethelburgas.org) or the Student Inter Faith Coordinator at NUS.

## Joint action, civic engagement and community partnerships

Inter faith social action is growing in popularity, as it provides people the opportunity to act on many of the issues or topics they discuss during dialogue. One of the major frustrations for students and young people, in the past with traditional methods of inter faith has been the lack of action following dialogue.

This section of chapter 5 includes a number of examples and case studies where students from different faith backgrounds have worked together on a project with a common goal.

If a group of students are particularly interested in organising a local community volunteer project a good place to start is by talking to the institution voluntary service and faith societies who may be social action orientated, as it is likely there are already community links in place that could be utilised or where community need easily identified.

example...

### Cambridge University Faith Forum (CUFF)

Cambridge University Faiths Forum (CUFF) was set up by students to address faith related issues of students and to provide a space for dialogue and discussion. Initially, it only organised small talks and social events, because of limited resources. But after strong support from a local Church, it started a range of events with an increasing network of charities and groups in the local community.

They have organised volunteering programmes with local charities such as WinterComfort<sup>xxii</sup>, and its members are working together on workshops and other projects with local groups.

In addition to the volunteering CUFF continues to organise talks, seminars, weekly discussion groups and social events.

example...

Students at **Nottingham University** rallied together a group of students, using the network of friends they had developed from previous inter faith events to raise money for Haiti following the Haiti earthquake in 2010. Just a few students with buckets in the students' union raised almost £6,000 in one week.





## activity ...

### Developing Ideas for social action projects and partnerships

The following activity was designed<sup>xxiii</sup> to help students develop inter faith social action projects on issues that matter to them, both locally and globally.

The activity helps students find common issues of concern, as well as achievable local solutions they can undertake as part of an inter faith group.

A group will need at least an hour to complete the exercise.

1. With the whole group, brainstorm for five minutes:

*What issues do they feel passionate about? These could be global, national or local issues, and could even include issues specific to your university/college campus or students' union.*

The facilitator should write all these on flip chart paper.

2. Ask the students individually to write down

*What issues do they feel passionate about that you want to develop a project about on campus?*

Ask them to prioritise two issues that are important to them, and also think about: Why these two issues are important to them and, why they feel passionate about them.

3. Ask the students to join someone else to become a pair. Allow 15 minutes for each pair to share their two issues with each other, and explain their passion for the issues.

4. In their pairs, ask the students to :

*Think about the solution or ideal outcome to one of their issues? What could they do to contribute to this solution? (This becomes an idea for a project)*

5. Now pair up with someone else and repeat step 3, discussing your second issue

6. Pair up with a third person and repeat step 3, discussing your third issue

7. Feedback one idea you have developed back to your group

## Inter faith challenges

An 'inter faith challenge<sup>xxiv</sup>' is a community volunteer programme that brings students from different faith backgrounds together for cooperative social action. 'Inter faith challenge' is a model developed by Interact. It is a particularly good activity where you have limited resources and availability from students; and as a trial activity for engaging students in collaborative volunteer programmes.

An 'inter faith challenge' is a one-off, high impact group volunteer event, for 10 or more people from different faith backgrounds, who come together to contribute to the local community or environment by volunteering for four to six hours. It provides an opportunity for students to volunteer together on a shared interest or common concern in their local community. During volunteering together opportunities for informal dialogue occur. Organisers can also incorporate an hour for facilitated dialogue, asking participants three questions to start discussion:

- What motivated or inspired you to participate in today's inter faith challenge? What does your religious/belief tradition say about volunteering (or the issue you are responding to e.g. environmental conservation)
- What impact do you feel the group made?
- What have you learnt from this experience?

In a college this part of the activity can be done after the event within the classroom. This can then allow learners the opportunity to research what different faiths say about volunteering or the particular community issue addressed through the volunteering. You could also involve the chaplains or local community leaders to provide these perspectives.

An 'inter faith challenge' demonstrates to the wider community positive working relationships between people and the positive contribution faith communities can and do make to the community together. It can also build and/or deepen partnerships between students' unions, student faith societies, local charities, and voluntary or community groups.

*example...*

Warwick Coexist Society is building partnerships with local schools to deliver community cohesion workshops with students about religion and belief, but also to raise aspirations through mentoring.



# 7. Knowledge and skills helpful for inter faith activities

Developing your knowledge and leadership skills for facilitating and leading inter faith activity is an important aspect of this toolkit. This chapter focuses on the key knowledge and skills you need and also provides activity ideas to help others develop them.

## Active listening

There is a distinction between hearing and listening. Hearing is the capacity to be aware of and receive sound. Listening involves not only receiving sounds but, as much as possible, trying to understand their meaning, seeking clarification, being sensitive to vocal cues, observing movements and taking into account the context of communication.

Active listening is where you make a conscious effort to hear not only the words that another person is saying but, importantly, to try and understand the total message being sent. And then repeat back in your own words what the person said to you.

Active listening is a key skill in effective communication, and crucial to facilitating effective dialogue.

### Three common listening modes, relevant to dialogue situations:

#### 1. Competitive or combative listening

happens when we are more interested in promoting our own point of view than in understanding or exploring someone else's view.

We listen either for openings to take the floor, or for flaws and weak points we can attack.

2. In **passive listening** we are genuinely interested in hearing and understanding the other person's point of view. We are attentive and passively listen. We assume that we heard and understood correctly, but stay passive and do not seek clarification.

3. **Active listening** is where we are genuinely interested in understanding what the other person is thinking, feeling, needs or what the message means and we are actively checking out our understanding before we respond with our own message, by reflecting it back to the sender for clarification. This clarification process is what distinguishes active listening from other modes and makes it effective.





## The process of active listening

**Active Listening is engaging fully in the listening activity. When learning active listening as a new skill, follow our top tips and practice, practice, practice!**

- Use your own words when repeating and clarifying what the speaker has said. Parroting back the words *verbatim* is annoying and does not ensure accurate understanding of the message.
- Don't respond just to the meaning of the words; look for the feelings or intent beyond the words. The dictionary or surface meaning of words is not the message.
- Inhibit your impulse to answer questions immediately. Sometimes people ask questions when they really want to express themselves (or make a statement) and are not open to hearing an answer.
- Know when to stop using active listening. Once you accurately understand the sender's message, it may be appropriate to respond with your own message. Don't use active listening to hide and avoid revealing your own position.
- If you are confused and know that you do not understand, either tell the person you don't understand and ask him/her to say it another way, or use your best guess. If you are incorrect, the person will realize it and will likely attempt to correct your misunderstanding.
- Active listening is a very effective first response when the other person is angry, hurt or expressing difficult feelings toward you, especially in relationships that are important to you.
- Use eye contact and listening body language. Avoid looking at your watch or at other people or activities around the room. Face and learn toward the speaker and nod your head, as it is appropriate. Be careful about crossing your arms and appearing closed or critical.
- Be empathetic and non-judgemental. You can be accepting and respectful of the person and their feelings/beliefs without invalidating or giving up your own position, or without agreeing with the accuracy and validity of their view.

## The role of a facilitator

Dialogues and inter faith activity can benefit from a facilitator who helps ensure that inter faith engagement is rewarding and successful for those taking part.

A facilitator has the authority to change the activity or topic of conversation without taking on the role of a strict authority figure. It is a role which requires a balanced and fair handling of situations; the facilitator cannot fully put aside their personal beliefs but must strive to consider the effects of what is said and done on all those present. He or she can ask questions or stimulate the activity or dialogue at particular points, but their role is predominantly listening to and observing the group, ensuring individuals are comfortable and adhering to the ground-rules.

Learning how to facilitate inter faith activities and dialogue is perhaps one of the most challenging parts of organising inter faith activities. Developing these skills takes time and practice, and cannot be achieved merely by reading this toolkit. Remember NUS is available to provide further support and training as necessary, but the best way to learn is to practice.

A facilitator has an impact on the way the group functions, if the facilitator doesn't feel safe around the topic in question or the combinations of people in the room, the group won't either.

- **Prepare:** The facilitator can improve the sense of safety they convey by preparing adequately. This could involve: getting clear about their own relationship with the issues involved; taking quiet time before the meeting starts; or running through possible scenarios that might arise and possible responses – either with a colleague or in their imagination.
- **Be a non-anxious presence:** As a facilitator, being calm, attentive, and a good listener will increase the group's sense of safety.
- **Be comfortable handling expressions of strong emotions.** Have strategies for holding and responding confidently, so that strong emotions are held and included rather than repressed.
- **Encourage good listening and openness.** Encourage participants to use 'I' statements and avoiding putting forward value judgements between faiths and beliefs of matter of fact rather than personal opinion. In inter faith activity and dialogue it is important to be sensitive to when a participant's description of their religion may move from sharing of what is precious to them towards seeking to convert those present. Even if the intention is not to proselytise the appearance of doing so can make other participants uncomfortable or even upset, undermining the aims of the exercise. It is possible to help avoid situations like this by reminding as a facilitator you can open up discussion to different points of view, or by asking others to comment.
- **Model the behaviour you want to see:** If you want the group to share personal or risky things, make sure you are willing to do the same yourself. Obviously you don't want to tell them your life-story and leave no time for them, but you might need to show that you are willing to go to the place you are inviting them.
- **Flexibility:** The confidence to be spontaneous or to move with the group in unplanned directions will keep the group energy alive. Confidence is also needed to work with whatever issues and topics arise.

- **Facilitating in pairs:** This can increase the sense of holding a group, particularly larger groups. You can divide the roles in various different ways e.g. sharing the leading of different exercises, or having one person attend to process and another to content.

## Creating safe space

For an authentic and meaningful dialogue between diverse groups individuals have to be placed in a welcoming and accepting atmosphere: safe space. This is particularly important when the focus is on conflict and reconciliation, or the theme is a sensitive one such as faith and belief. The perceived safety of an environment will have a direct impact on the ease with which relationships are formed and their sustainability.<sup>xxv</sup>

## activity ...

### What is a facilitator?

This activity is for groups of four to twenty four people.

Split your group into pairs, and give each pair a piece of flip chart and pens.

Ask each pair to draw a person (with a head, two arms and two legs). Now ask each pair to write/draw characteristics that are useful for a facilitator within the picture of the person they have drawn. And around the outside of the person what external factors a facilitator needs to be aware of, when facilitating a multi-faith group (thinking about what skills or characteristics may help them with this – which would go inside the diagram). You should allow up to 20 minutes for each pair to complete this.

In a plenary, ask each pair to contribute their thoughts. Allow discussion to continue about what people have identified, and add anything that is missed.

## What do we need to feel safe?

Some things to remember:

- **Start slowly:** Don't plunge in too deep too soon. Aim to engage participants' attention at the beginning and find creative ways for them to get acquainted and warmed up.
  - **Ice-breakers:** Choose a good, imaginative, and non-threatening icebreaker that is appropriate for the group in question. Good ice-breakers allow for depth of engagement but allow each person to choose their own level.
  - **Roadmaps:** Offer a roadmap for the whole event or workshop so people know what to expect and where they are being taken. Remind people periodically of the process.
  - **Practicalities:** Be clear about practicalities – for example comfort breaks, refreshments, and prayer facilities.
  - **Transparency:** Be transparent - about the motivation for the event, its purpose, and (if appropriate) where you or the students' union stand on the relevant issue.
  - **Set ground rules.** Ask the group what they need to feel safe and then write up the responses and get group agreement. The ground rules are likely to be more authentic once the group is warmed up and knows one another. So it is often useful to come back to the ground rules at the start of a new session, and ask if people feel the need to add anything.  
  
You can refer to the Ground Rules on page 35 and the Fears and Hopes activity on page 36 to help you identify ground-rules that are relevant to your group.
  - **Feedback:** Communicate that you are endeavouring to create safe space and invite feedback about when it isn't working. Offer a clear route for participants to communicate with the facilitator. It may be difficult for participants to voice this in front of the group, so ensure that they feel they can approach you in breaks or how to contact you to voice concerns.
- Ongoing factors:
- **Think it through:** Try to second guess how people might feel about each exercise and offer solutions to potential issues (e.g. translating faith-based language into something that works for those with no faith; reassuring about confidentiality at points where participants need to take risks in what they share; and offering safer alternatives for people who are new or shy).
  - **Make it voluntary:** Always offer people a choice – they can opt out if something feels uncomfortable or they can choose a less risky alternative.
  - **Avoid creating too many expectations:** Ensure participants feel that there are no expectations put on them that they will go to a particular place. Every step of the process is optional. In some exercises it may be important to stress that there are no right or wrong responses or contributions, and that they will not be judged for what they share.
  - **Language:** Pay attention to language. Acknowledge that people have different words for similar things. Invite people to translate (where necessary).





## 8. Conclusion

Diversity of religion and belief is a major aspect of college and university life; and it is of vital importance to maintain good relations between all groups on campus. NUS has developed this toolkit to assist students' unions in their vital role of developing collaboration between faith societies and promoting good relations between students of faith.

Creating positive inter faith engagement is a way to achieve this goal. It works both through mutual learning and through dialogue and through working together on common projects both on and off campus. Student unions that do participate with inter faith engagement actively aid students and student groups in building these relationships to the benefit of all involved.

However, campuses vary considerably in their pattern of faith diversity as outlined in Chapter 2. Similarly there will be different levels of positive and negative interaction between groups at different institutions. That is why this toolkit does not provide a simple, one size fits all model to building good inter faith relations but rather a variety of approaches and examples which you can choose to use and adapt

as appropriate to your situation. But there are some basic points to consider regardless of the specific situation on your campus:

- identifying the different faith groups on your campus, and building relationships with faith societies
- meeting with the chaplaincy team and other staff who may be able to support you through this process
- discussing opportunities to organise inter faith activities and a strategy for building good inter faith relations (including plans to organise an activity during National Inter Faith Week)
- convening an inter faith forum at least once a term if possible
- keeping a record of your experiences and learning to pass on to others when you and your team leave

Through the whole of this toolkit NUS has tried to demonstrate the importance of engaging with different groups and individuals, by utilising knowledge, resources and talking to college or university staff and chaplains. Use copies of the contacts template in the appendix to keep track of key

staff and students involved with inter faith engagement on your campus. Use the templates and resources provided to organise inter faith events and set up inter faith forum meetings. And use the knowledge and experience that you have of your campus to raise the profile of inter faith engagement and activity in both the short and long the term.

NUS wishes you the best of luck and looks forward to your feedback on this toolkit, as well as news of your campaigns and initiatives. Please do get in contact as necessary for more information, support and training.



## Further Information

### National Inter Faith Week

National Inter Faith Week in England, Wales and Northern Ireland takes place in late November (for dates of the next week visit [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk)). Scottish Inter Faith Week usually take place the following week.

#### Its aims are to:

- strengthen good inter-faith relations at all levels in our increasingly diverse society;
- encourage local faith groups and communities to reach out to each other and build stronger bonds of understanding and cooperation;
- increase awareness of the different and distinct faith communities in the UK, with a particular focus on the contribution which their members make to their neighbourhoods and to wider society;
- to gain a positive profile for inter-faith initiatives, locally, regionally and nationally, as well as for the overall work of building good inter-faith relations increase understanding between people of religious and non-religious beliefs, and encourage the development of new partnerships within local communities and by faith communities with statutory and third sector partners.

**US and the Inter Faith Network for the UK are keen that FE and HE institutions are involved in Inter Faith Week and encourage students' union officers, staff, faith societies and student faith leaders to use the week as an opportunity to:**

- strengthen relations between students' unions, faith societies and students of faith
- increase awareness of the different and distinct faith communities on campus and in the local community
- increase understanding between people of religious and non-religious beliefs
- initiate (or build on existing) inter-faith activities to celebrate the diversity of students at your university
- reach out to local faith groups and build stronger bonds of understanding and cooperation with the local community.

### World Inter Faith

#### Harmony Week

There is also a 'World Interfaith Harmony' Week in the first week of February (<http://worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com>) which can be a good time to hold a discussion or event focusing on the issue of global inter religious peace and harmony.

These are two days with a special focus on faith, social action and community. Why not consider marking them on your campus?

**Mitzvah Day:** *'Mitzvah'* is a Hebrew term for a commandment but is often used to mean a good deed. Mitzvah Day is a Jewish-led, but actively welcoming to all, celebratory day of social action. It is concerned with helping to reduce poverty, help the environment and to 'bring a little joy where it is needed'. Its organisers encourage linking with Inter Faith Week. To find out more about Mitzvah Day, or to get involved, visit the Mitzvah Day UK website [www.mitzvahday.org.uk/index.php](http://www.mitzvahday.org.uk/index.php)

**Sewa Day:** 2010 saw the first National Sewa Day. The Sanskrit word 'Sewa' means 'selfless service'. National Sewa Day is a national day of service which seeks particularly, but not exclusively, to engage "the support and talents of the Hindu, Sikh, Jain and Buddhist communities". It provides people a chance to give back to the community through volunteering on a single day to make a difference. For more information, or to get involved, please visit the National Sewa Day website [www.nationalsewaday.org/](http://www.nationalsewaday.org/)



### Funding inter faith activity on campus

There are a limited number of funders in the UK specifically dedicated to supporting inter faith activities. However NUS will post any opportunities that come up online at [www.nusconnect.org.uk](http://www.nusconnect.org.uk)

The Inter Faith Youth Trust ([www.ifyouthtrust.co.uk](http://www.ifyouthtrust.co.uk)) is the only UK charitable trust solely to fund inter faith projects for young people up to 25 years old. It currently has a special focus on supporting events planned for Inter Faith Week.

Your university Chaplaincy team may have a small pot of funding available that they are willing to support inter faith activities with.

If your institution is committed to building good campus relations they may have funds available to support events and projects.

Your local authority or local charitable trusts may also have grants available for community cohesion projects which may be suitable for an inter faith activity you want to run. They will also be able to tell you about local funding sources.

## Additional resources

### List of activities

	Page
1. Understanding key terms	16
2. Sacred	17
3. What sort of inter faith activity is helpful?	18
4. What makes for good inter faith engagement?	19
5. Hopes and fears	36
6. Fishbowl dialogue	39
7. Lunchtime dialogues	43
8. Developing ideas for social action projects	47
9. What is a facilitator?	53

### Additional resources

**The Spectrum**, St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace  
<http://spectrum.stethelburgas.org>

**Bilateral Dialogue in the UK**, Inter Faith Network 2009  
<http://www.interfaith.org.uk/publications/bilateralreport.pdf>

**Connect: Different faiths, shared values** – Inter Faith Network for the UK's action guide for young people  
[www.interfaith.org.uk/publications/connect-web.pdf](http://www.interfaith.org.uk/publications/connect-web.pdf)

**Building good relations with people of different faiths and beliefs**, Inter Faith Network for the UK  
[www.interfaith.org.uk/publications/buildinggoodrelations.pdf](http://www.interfaith.org.uk/publications/buildinggoodrelations.pdf)

**Face to Face and Side by Side: A Framework for partnership in our multi-faith society**, Department for Communities and Local Government, July 2008  
[www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/facetofaceframework](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/facetofaceframework)

**Spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) guidance for the learning and skills sector**, Learning and Skills Improvement Service,  
[www.lsis.org.uk/Documents/Publications/SMSC%20Web.pdf](http://www.lsis.org.uk/Documents/Publications/SMSC%20Web.pdf)

**Interfaith Leader's Toolkit**, Interfaith Youth Core  
This is only available from IFYC,  
[www.ifyc.org](http://www.ifyc.org)

**The Local Inter Faith Guide**, Inter Faith Network for the UK  
<http://www.interfaith.org.uk/publications/lifg2005.pdf>

**Religions in the UK Directory** Paul Weller (ed.) Multi Faith Centre, University of Derby (2007)  
<http://www.multifaithcentre.org/publications>

**BBC Religion**  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/> organising inter faith and facilitating dialogue.



## Acknowledgements and further contacts

**NUS would like to thank the following organisations for sharing their resources and expertise to include in this toolkit:**

### **Cambridge Interfaith Programme**

[www.interfaith.cam.ac.uk/en/academic-work/activities/scriptural-reasoning](http://www.interfaith.cam.ac.uk/en/academic-work/activities/scriptural-reasoning)

### **Campusalam**

[www.campusalam.org.uk](http://www.campusalam.org.uk)  
Campusalam supports UK students of faith and belief and university staff with resources, skills and advice on building bridges and contributing to positive change on campus.

### **Interact**

T: 020 84 824020

E: [Lucy@interact-uk.org](mailto:Lucy@interact-uk.org)

Interact's vision is a cohesive society where all faiths are not only tolerated, but where individuals are respected and diversity is valued and celebrated. Through common action for common good, shared beliefs can be discovered and passions furthered.

We aim to combat issues of isolation, disadvantage and social exclusion amongst young people. Interact works to provide opportunities for young people

from different faith communities and backgrounds to overcome stereotypes and prejudices to allow individual personalities to shine through and strong and secure relationships to develop. By bringing young people together for face-to-face dialogue and side-by-side action, difference can be valued and similarities appreciated. They run a variety of projects, including a magazine, eco-faith programmes and interfaith leadership initiatives, that all aim to: Celebrate Diversity and Share Knowledge; Develop Skills and Creativity; Encourage Common Action for Common Good; Create a Sustainable and Safe World for Future Generations

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

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

The Inter Faith Network for the UK was founded in 1987 to promote good relations between people of different faiths in the UK. Its member organisations include national representative bodies of the Baha'i; Buddhist; Christian; Hindu; Jain; Jewish; Muslim; Sikh; and Zoroastrian communities; national, regional and local inter faith bodies; and academic institutions and educational bodies concerned with inter faith issues.

The IFN website has useful reports on past consultations about inter faith on campus, as well as useful resources on organising inter faith and facilitating dialogue.

NUS is grateful for the assistance of the IFN office on a number of aspects of the tool kit

### **Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC)**

[www.ifyc.org](http://www.ifyc.org)

An American based organisation that builds mutual respect and pluralism among young people from different religious traditions by empowering them to work together to serve others. IFYC have developed their own inter faith leadership model which they have used with students and staff at over 140 universities and colleges in America.

### **St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace**

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

In 1993 St Ethelburga's (a 15th century church, located in Bishopsgate London) was destroyed by an IRA bomb. Now 10,000 people a year from all over the world meet here to share stories, skills and insights about how we can build relationships across divisions of conflict, culture and religion. There website includes a variety of



resources that students' unions will find useful in thinking about facilitating dialogue and resolving conflict. The Spectrum is a guide to building inter-religious relationships and an excellent resource (like Connect above) for anyone new to organizing inter faith activities, as it includes a variety of ideas and case studies: <http://spectrum.stethelburgas.org/index.htm>

### **Three Faiths Forum**

[www.threefaithsforum.org.uk](http://www.threefaithsforum.org.uk)  
Three Faiths Forum's Undergraduate ParliAMentors (UP) programme is an award-winning initiative (winner of a UN Award for Intercultural Innovation) launched in 2007, that equips the next generation of politicians and community leaders with the skills, experiences and networks they need to advance their leadership careers. Trios of students of different faiths and beliefs are mentored by parliamentarians, as well as developing social action and empowerment projects with support from leading NGOs, enabling them to bring about social change today. Participants on the programme receive training and attend events helping them to widen their professional and social networks.

The following organisations and groups have initiatives and programmes that run on campuses across the UK. They are a possible source of support and advice for students' unions.

#### **Campusalam**

<http://www.campusalam.org/>

#### **Christian Muslim Forum (CMF)**

<http://www.christianmuslimforum.org/>

#### **Coexistence Trust**

<http://www.coexistencetrust.org/>

#### **Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ)**

<http://www.ccj.org.uk/>

#### **Interact (Interfaith Action)**

<http://www.interact-uk.org.uk/>

#### **Joseph Interfaith Foundation**

<http://www.josephinterfaithfoundation.org/>

#### **Three Faiths Forum**

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

## Further contacts

### All Faiths and None (AFAN)

[www.afan.uk.net](http://www.afan.uk.net)

This website is full of useful resources to use with students (particularly in FE), and has a section for staff and students. The resources include video, audio and visual posts as well as written materials relating to all religious and non-religious worldviews and perspectives, on contemporary topics that will engage students with the big questions. AFAN are also happy to be contacted to help you with delivering workshops or using the resources at your students' union, please visit the website for more details.

### Faith and Belief in Further Education (FBFE)

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

FBFE is a national independent inter-faith charity working with the learning and skills sector, faith and local communities and national and local faith/belief based groups. FBFE has developed particular expertise in the provision of multi-faith student support in further education, working with colleges and FE providers to help them meet the faith and belief needs of diverse student and staff groups.

Visit their website for a variety of useful resources and policy documents.

### Equality Challenge Unit (ECU)

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

Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) works to further and support equality and diversity for staff and students in higher education across all four nations of the UK. ECU works closely with colleges of higher education and universities to seek to ensure that staff and students are not unfairly excluded, marginalised or disadvantaged because of age, disability, gender identity, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity status, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, or through any combination of these characteristics or other unfair treatment.

Visit their website for useful resources and information specifically about religion and belief.

NUS would also like to thank the following students' unions for sharing their ideas and case studies of their activities:

- Sheffield Students' Union
- Birmingham Guild
- Kings College London Students' Union
- Nottingham Students' Union
- Warwick Coexist Society
- Birmingham City Students' Union
- Leeds Metropolitan Students' Union



## National student faith organisations

The following organisations and groups are the main representative organisations for students from the respective religion or belief backgrounds in the UK.

There is currently no dedicated organisation for Baha'i students. However the **Baha'i Community of the United Kingdom** has contact with some Baha'i student groups: <http://www.bahai.org.uk/>

There is also currently no dedicated organisation for Buddhist students. However the Network of Buddhist Organisations has contacts with some **Buddhist student** groups: <http://www.nbo.org.uk>

### **Student Christian Movement**

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

### **UCCF: The Christian Unions**

[www.uccf.org.uk/about-us/](http://www.uccf.org.uk/about-us/)

### **The National Hindu Student Forum UK (NHSF)**

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

### **Young Jains**

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

### **The Union of Jewish Students (UJS)**

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

### **Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS)**

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

### **The Muslim Student Council (MSC)**

[www.msccouncil.com](http://www.msccouncil.com)

### **The British Organisation of Sikh Students (BOSS)**

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

### **The British Sikh Student Federation**

[www.britishsikhstudentfederation.com/index/?page\\_id=10](http://www.britishsikhstudentfederation.com/index/?page_id=10)

Please contact NUS for further information about **Young Zoroastrians** and how to get in contact with them.



## activity ...

### Understanding key terms

1. Is there a difference between the terms *faith*, *religion* and *belief*?
2. What do you understand by the term *religious pluralism*, and how is this different from diversity?
3. What do you understand by the terms multi-faith, inter faith and inter-religious? What principles make a good inter faith event/activity? What isn't inter faith?

Some thoughts on the difference between the terms above:

(Please note this is not an exhaustive list of definitions but will help as a starting point for you to discuss some of these terms further).

### Faith, religion and belief

In recent years, the Churches, other **faith** communities and the Government have tended to use the term faith rather than **religion**. That is why 'inter faith' is more common than 'inter religious'. To some degree, these terms can be used interchangeably. However, the emergence of the new equalities strand of 'religion and belief' (see, for example the 2010 Equality Act) means that religion may become more prevalent.

Belief is used in the equalities context to signify 'non-religious belief'.

### Religious diversity

Religious **diversity** describes the fact of different individuals living in a community. It does not mean there are positive or negative relationships.

### Multi-faith, inter faith and inter-religious

"When a society or an event ... is described as '**multi-faith**', it usually means that it includes a variety of religious groups. While the use of 'multi-faith' highlights variety, use of the term '**inter faith**' points to the relationships between religions and the people who belong to them... The term '**inter-religious**' is occasionally used interchangeably with 'inter faith' ... 'inter-religious' can sometimes be used in ways that denote the simple state of encounter between different religions in a religiously plural context, whereas 'inter faith' tends to be used in circumstances which involve 'dialogue' between religions and the faiths. [...] '**interfaith**' is found but some prefer to avoid this for fear of giving the impression of a movement that blurs the distinctiveness of the religions involved."

*From 'Faith in Public Realm: Controversies, policies and practices'  
Paul Weller, Professor of Inter-religious Relations at University of Derby*

## Birmingham Guild Inter Faith Association

### Inter Faith Association Committee roles and responsibilities

#### Chair:

- Responsible for motivating, supporting, leading and effectively organising the Inter faith committee, regularly chairing meetings, and ensuring good communication between committee members, and between your group and the Guild.
- Responsible to your members, the Guild, the University and external partners for the activities, conduct and organisation of your group.
- To chair the Annual General Meeting and any other meetings, unless there is a conflict of interest, in which case another committee member shall chair the meeting.
- Jointly responsible for Finances with Treasurer
- To ensure that the group is represented at meetings required by the Guild, and in any dealings with the Guild or other bodies.

#### Treasurer:

- To provide the committee with regular reports on the group's financial status.
- To liaise directly with Student Development so as to maintain and update the group's accounts and inventory of all equipment.
- Responsible for the finances and expenditure of the group, ensuring a robust system is in place to keep track of planned expenditure and income, know how payments are raised and

collected, and submit appropriate paperwork the Guild.

- Responsible for sourcing and monitoring income, such as applying for the Guild grant application and rolling grant, securing money from the University and any relevant external organisations where appropriate, and organising relevant sponsorship from external bodies.
- To advise the committee on the financial implications of all decisions taken.

#### Secretary:

- To maintain and update membership lists for the group, and ensure that Student Development has current records.
- To take minutes of the Annual General Meeting, Extraordinary General Meetings and committee meetings if required, and to submit copies of these to Student Development.
- To ensure that Student Development receives minutes and full details of the group's committee within 10 days of the Annual General Meeting or any Extraordinary General Meeting.
- To deal with correspondence with members and interested students.
- Maintain the Group pigeon hole, email account and website where relevant.

**Internal Relations Officer:**

- Responsible for furthering the interests of members, supported by the Guild and University in working towards the social and academic equality of all students.
- To work with the Guild Officer Team, Guild, other Guild societies (specifically Religious/Faith societies), the University and the Chaplaincy in the interest of students of religions and beliefs.
- To attend Guild Council to represent the interests of Inter faith Association members, and to ensure another representative attends if you are unable.

**External Relations Officer:**

- Responsible for furthering the interests of members, supported by the Guild and University in working towards the social and academic equality of all students.
- To liaise and work with relevant regional and national organizations, including the NUS, on campaigns, events and projects to ensure social and academic quality for students of different religions and beliefs.
- To promote relevant campaigns and projects of external organizations to members.
- To organize visits from relevant external organizations on how the group and the organization can work together, and to share best practice and ideas.
- To ensure Freedom of Speech forms are completed for any external speakers coming to the University.

**Sport and Social Officer:**

- To organise sporting events and tournaments involving groups of students from different religions or beliefs, to enhance relationships and interaction between students in a fun and safe environment.
- To organise social activities for students of different religions and beliefs to enhance relationships and interaction between students in an informal and safe atmosphere.

**Marketing Officer:**

- To work with committee members to create promotional materials for the group and activities, and ensure Guild marketing channels are used.
- To coordinate society fair activities and create innovative ways to reach and recruit new members.
- To ensure the group is visible and well promoted online and on social networking sites.

**Events Officer (x2):**

- To organise inter faith events, campaigns and activities on campus for the purpose of educating and raising the awareness of different religions and beliefs, and to promote good campus relations.
- To work with individuals or groups of students who are organising their own inter faith events and need support.

## Notes

- i Visit [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk) for further information about their member organisations. See Acknowledgements within this document for further information about the Interfaith Network for the UK
- ii In this toolkit the term 'students of faith' is used to refer to students who identify themselves as having religious beliefs.
- iii For further information on the Religion and Belief in Higher Education Project visit <http://www.derby.ac.uk/ehs/research/religion-and-belief-in-HE> or contact the Equality Challenge Unit
- iv Throughout this toolkit the term 'students' union' is used in its generic sense and includes 'guild of students' or 'students' association'.
- v However the approach set out in this document is that of the NUS.
- vi However, at FE colleges it is uncommon for there to be faith societies – therefore there is usually no formal representative structure for students of faith at FE colleges.
- vii *Face to Face and Side by Side: A Framework for Partnership in our Multi Faith Society*, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008
- viii Paul Weller ed, *Religions in the UK: A Directory*, Multi Faith Centre at the University of Derby, 2007
- ix There are also non-religious belief societies. Campus based non-religious belief societies were not included in the survey of faith societies for the reasons set out in Chapter 1 of this document.
- x 38 students' unions in higher education responded to this survey in June 2009
- xi The survey did not ask about non religious belief groups, such as Atheist societies
- xii Sometimes people use 'inter faith' as a synonym for 'multi faith' – i.e. to describe events or projects where people of different faiths are involved but not with any focus on the relationship between them. This usage is more common in the USA. In the UK, 'inter faith' is an adjective usually used to refer to activities where people of different religions and beliefs are either interacting or consciously choosing to work in cooperation.
- xiii DCLG, *Face to Face and Side by Side: A framework for partnership in our multi-faith society*, 2008.



- xiv *Spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) guidance for the learning and skills sector*, Learning and Skills Improvement Service, [www.lsis.org.uk/Documents/Publications/SMSC%20Web.pdf](http://www.lsis.org.uk/Documents/Publications/SMSC%20Web.pdf).
- xv NUS briefing “Dealing with tension and conflict on campus” provides a variety of resources on this issues and can be found on NUS Connect.
- xvi See section on “Understanding where you’re starting from”, page 14.
- xvii These ground-rules have been developed from the Inter Faith Network for the UK.
- xviii *Face to Face and Side by Side: A Framework for Partnership in our Multi Faith Society*, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008.
- xix Interfaith Youth Core, [www.ifyc.org](http://www.ifyc.org).
- xx Visit [www.threefaithsforum.org.uk](http://www.threefaithsforum.org.uk) for more information about the Three Faiths Forum, their Tools 4 Trialogue programme, and how to contact them.
- xxi From Campusalam’s FlashPOD dialogue resources, [www.campusalam.org](http://www.campusalam.org).
- xxii WinterComfort supports those who are homeless or at risk of losing their homes by offering them basic amenities, opportunities for educational development and recreation, and a range of services designed to help them achieve greater autonomy.
- xxiii This activity was designed by Daniella Shaw-Gabay, Parliamentary and Public Affairs Manager at Three Faiths Forum
- xxiv ‘inter faith challenges’ as a model for community volunteering was initially developed by Interact, for more information or support to organise your own student-led inter faith challenge please contact [lucy@interact-uk.org.uk](mailto:lucy@interact-uk.org.uk)
- xxv We would like to thank St Ethelburga’s Centre for Reconciliation and Peace for sharing this resource on *Creating Safe Space*





**National Union of Students**

4th Floor  
184-192 Drummond Street  
London NW1 3HP  
t: 0207 380 6600  
f: 020 7380 6690

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



national union of students