



# Facilitating Dialogue on Faith & Sexuality in Further Education

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**Resource Pack**



national union of students

# Acknowledgements

NUS extends its thanks to the numerous individuals and organisations whose expertise, enthusiasm and feedback helped us to develop this innovative pilot project, and associated resource pack.

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Particular thanks go to the following individuals and organisations that influenced the development of the project;

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- Phil Barnett, Independent consultant specialising in equality and diversity
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Our thanks also go to several people within NUS for their efforts in developing and refining this pilot project and this resultant resource pack.

- Lucy Hawthorne, Faith Project Assistant
- Kathryn Luckock, Interfaith Coordinator
- Vicki Baars, NUS LGBT Officer (Women's Place)
- Alan Bailey, NUS LGBT Officer (Open Place)
- Pete Mercer, NUS Vice President (Welfare)

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# Foreword

*"Through this project NUS has sought to respond to a limited amount of research and engagement in the area of faith and sexuality, an area of territory frequently considered too "controversial" to touch.*

*The relationship between faith and sexuality is often considered taboo; a false dichotomy wherein people's real or perceived attitudes contrive a "choice" of identities or deem them incompatible somehow. In certain cases, it may be that there are live tensions between faith and LGBT communities; indeed in others, these tensions may be rooted in assumptions or prejudices relating to what they think the other believes. As a socially progressive organisation, NUS has a proud history of liberation and so we see it as our role to really push the boundaries of thought and practice on this important subject.*

*We hope this resource pack will support those initiatives that already exist, as well as set a precedent for future projects within the Further Education sector – and beyond - and where the facilitation of dialogue will lead the way to stronger, open and more vibrant communities."*

**Pete Mercer - NUS Vice President (Welfare)**

**Vicki Baars - NUS LGBT Officer (Women's Place)**

**Alan Bailey - NUS LGBT Officer (Open Place)**

*"Fbfe welcomes this toolkit for its practical support for colleges and their learners. It is important that learners are enabled to discuss sensitive issues in a secure and supportive environment, which promotes positive values and approaches. We hope that the toolkit will help both learners and staff in colleges to approach the interface between faith and sexual orientation positively, promote dialogue across these two strands of equalities legislation and challenge the misconceptions and prejudices which are often associated with this topic."*

**Dr John Wise, Chief Executive, Faiths and Beliefs in Further Education (Fbfe)**

*"NUS has provided a valuable addition to the volume of work in developing good relations between the equality areas of faith and sexual orientation. This work builds in a practical way from the Forum research and guidance 'Managing the Interface: Sexual Orientation and Faith' (2010). The Forum looks forward to utilising this toolkit together with other sector organisations toward increased understanding, dialogue and good relations within the post school education sector. The Forum commends the NUS faith and sexuality toolkit for its practical contribution to the equality work of Further Education colleges throughout the UK."*

**Seth Atkin, Chair, The Forum for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Post School Education**

# Introduction

This resource pack has been produced as part of the NUS Dialogue Project on Faith and Sexuality; a six-month pilot project supported by the Equality and Diversity Partnership Project Funding offered by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA).

The aim of the funding was “...to support innovative and sustainable projects which develop the capacity of the further education and skills sector to meet the needs of learners and communities, and to meet the requirements of the Equality Duty”.

Our project developed a two-day training course and resources for staff and learners to use in fostering good relations and build good mutually respectful relationships through dialogue. The pilot project and this resource pack are intended to support colleges think through how dialogue activities might contribute and complement their broader equality and diversity strategies.

The Equality Act 2010 brought together, streamlined and strengthened previous equality legislation and identified nine protected characteristics<sup>1</sup>, including religion/belief and sexual orientation. The Act also introduced a new public sector duty, for colleges (and other public sector bodies), to have due regard to;

- eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- advancing equality of opportunity for people who share a protected characteristic, and
- fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't share that characteristic

This project in particular responds to the recognition that protected characteristics can at times interact or be in conflict with one another and cannot always be addressed in isolation, in this case religion or belief and sexual orientation equalities. Colleges, as well as other public bodies, have identified some challenges

in addressing the requirements of the duty in relation to these two protected characteristics<sup>2</sup>.

A particular challenge, which this project focused on, is fostering good relations between people who share different protected characteristics. This includes increasing opportunities for learners to hear about the experiences of people with different protected characteristics through interaction and dialogue.

The activities suggested in this resource pack take a proactive approach to building understanding, relationships and respect. They are not intended to be used to resolve acute tensions or conflicts that exist in the college. Dialogue is a long term process of fostering good relations and increasing understanding of different experiences within your college.

The approaches here will complement existing activities undertaken by colleges to foster good relations, and should not be used in isolation. They are intended to build on colleges' broader equality and diversity strategies, and should not be used as a replacement for tackling inequalities, discrimination or harassment experienced by learners, based on their religion or belief and/or sexual orientation. Without existing strategies and procedures in place to deal with any inequalities, discrimination and harassment that take place, it will be very difficult to implement the activities we suggest in this resource.

For more information and advice on how to develop effective equality and diversity strategies we recommend contacting the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (or National Union of Students if you are a students' union officer).

We have tried to provide activities that could be picked up by any staff or learner, however if you are completely new to dialogue and facilitation we would recommend seeking further advice or training before 'giving it a go', you're welcome to contact The National Union of Students for more information and advice on this.

1. Age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.  
2. Life Long Learning UK (LLUK) and The Forum, "Managing the Interface: Sexual Orientation and Faith – Research Report (for HE and FE)"

## Fostering good relations – the dialogical approach

The NUS Dialogue Project on Faith and Sexuality was developed from a statement in an LLUK and The Forum research report, that “...good mutually respectful relationships between learners from different backgrounds are more likely to be developed when learners can express and explore their personal experiences, rather than rehearse fixed opposing principles.”<sup>3</sup>

What can often occur in discussions about conflicting identities, opinions and beliefs is a zero-sum debate, where each party is trying to win an argument.

This project has adapted dialogue approaches and training methods to assist colleges in the creation of spaces for learners to express and explore their personal experiences. Dialogue, rather than debate, provides an opportunity for learners to do this.

An ideal dialogue has several key presuppositions that need to be worked at and developed;

- that participants respect one another, take each other seriously and accept each other as equals, in particular in terms of their capability to contribute
- that participants are there because they share common concerns about a particular issue, even if coming from different perspectives
- that each participant brings to the table a distinct perspective, knowledge and experience, which is valued throughout the process even if individuals don't agree with everything that is said
- that there is agreement that everyone is prepared to listen and learn from each other

With this in mind, a dialogical approach offers the following practical outputs;

- Gives learners opportunities to raise issues and discuss real life scenarios with clear boundaries
- Provides opportunities for the diverse experiences of staff and learners to be heard
- Increases learning about different perspectives
- Allows participants to both express themselves without judgement as well as learn to listen to others with patience
- Staff and learners develop key communication skills, in particular active listening

### How to use this resource pack

This resource provides a number of activity ideas and examples for you to use and adapt in your own college context. Each activity can be used in isolation (for example within a tutorial) or as part of a wider programme across the college, over a period of weeks and months.

It is important to think about how each activity will fit into existing college structures, curriculum and priorities. Each activity requires some careful preparation and planning. You will also need to think about which activity will best suit the objectives you are trying to achieve.

As previously noted, dialogue should not be a standalone activity but must interlink with other strategies in the college relating to equality and diversity. For this reason, it is important to question if it is the right activity at this moment in time in your college. You may wish to refer to the Problem Tree activity later in the resource pack that will help you and your learners explore what issues exist in your college, and what strategies would be most useful.

Before starting it is important to understand what your purpose is. As we have said above, if you have serious conflicts within your college, this resource may not be the right place to start. You should seek to respond to these before you attempt to organise a dialogue activity.

We recommend you read through all activities in this document first and then think about how you might use each of them in your college. Consider whether it will just be a one off activity or part of a wider programme.

Organising activities can seem daunting, but you don't have to do it alone! Each activity is likely to be more successful with support from other people in your college. A good place to start is identifying key individuals who may be able to support you.

We have mapped out some of the people who may be able to support and influence the planning and preparation of your activities. The suggestions here are not exhaustive and there may be other people in your college not included. You may wish to prioritise those with the most influence.

### Identifying a team to help you



3. Life Long Learning UK (LLUK) and The Forum, "Managing the Interface: Sexual Orientation and Faith – Research Report (for HE and FE)"



# Facilitating the process

In order for dialogue to be effective, a facilitator is required to set the scene, create safe space, assist with the direction of conversation and generally ensure everyone is able to participate.

The following section outlines the core principles of effective facilitation.

## The role of a facilitator

These materials have been adapted and expanded from St. Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace resources.

Effective facilitation is central to ensuring that dialogue is meaningful and rewarding for those taking part. A key aspect of this is creating a safe space for dialogue, especially when it focuses on a potentially sensitive area such as faith and sexuality. Good facilitation draws on numerous skills and traits, and a facilitator should aim to draw them together and apply them according to the situation.

Learning how to facilitate dialogue is an ongoing learning process. Developing these skills takes time and practice, and cannot be achieved merely by reading this toolkit. NUS is available to provide further support and training, but the best way to learn is by trying it out.

### You don't need to know all the answers

A facilitator is not a teacher. They start from and build upon the knowledge of the group, not their own knowledge. As a facilitator your role is to help a group through a learning process by asking questions that encourage new ways of thinking about and analysing the subject.

### Empower rather than direct the group

Above all, aim to support the group to think critically and make decisions for themselves. Aim for a balance between offering ideas to guide the group and patiently listening and questioning.

The confidence to be spontaneous or to move with the group in unplanned directions will keep the group's energy alive.

### Neutrality / Impartiality

The role of a facilitator requires a balanced and fair handling of situations. A facilitator may not always be able to put aside their personal beliefs, however they must ensure that their own judgements and agenda don't influence the dynamics of the group.

### Model the behaviour you want to see

If you want the group to share personal perspectives, make sure you are willing to do the same and that you are also open to reflection. You don't need to tell them your life-story, but it can be helpful to show that you are willing to go to the place you are inviting them.

### Be non-anxious

Being calm, attentive, and a good listener will increase the group's sense of safety. 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.

### Get comfortable with silence

Being able to sit with moments of silence and empty space between you and the group can help a conversation to deepen naturally in a way that questions and responses cannot always achieve as easily. If participants don't respond to your questions straight away, you don't have to move on immediately.

### Be comfortable handling expressions of strong emotions

Have strategies for responding to strong emotion confidently, so they are included rather than repressed.

### Show respect and sensitivity

A person's faith and/or sexuality are central aspects of their identity, and people can often be wary of being misunderstood or having these aspects challenged in a confrontational way. Try to listen without judgement.

### Use positive reinforcement

Thank participants who demonstrate authenticity, take appropriate risks and who bring something different to the conversation.

### Language

Acknowledge that people have different words for similar things. Invite people to translate. Vary the language you use so it includes as many as possible (particularly with religious issues).

### Expect differing levels and styles of participation

A facilitator should encourage each member of the group to contribute to the best of their ability. Outgoing participants can get the discussion moving, but remember to make space for the quieter voices too.

Give more vocal people responsibilities in the group, or partner them with other confident members or the facilitator. Consider using a range of activities that involve the quieter voices in the group too, such as pair work or activities that include writing as well as speaking.

### Make it voluntary

Encourage participants to share as much as they are comfortable and willing to, but don't require them to speak openly about sensitive subjects, especially in front of the larger group.

### Avoid creating too many expectations

Ensure participants feel that there are no expectations put on them that they will go to a particular place. In some exercises it may be important to stress that there are no right or wrong responses or contributions or that they will not be judged for what they share.

### Self-responsibility

Invite participants to choose their own level and be self-responsible.

## Setting ground rules

This section provides a variety of activities for you to use and adapt within your college context. Ground rules are an agreement on expected behaviours within a group that set the boundaries for effective dialogue and maximum participation. They should build on and reinforce existing codes of behaviour within your college and set a 'micro-culture' within the group for the specific purposes of the activity.

Where possible, ground rules should be developed by the group. By doing this participants take ownership of them and are more likely to put them into practice.

Ground-rules can help keep difference of opinion, hostility and uncertainty from becoming a problem in themselves, and in doing so can help create a supportive, safe climate for communication.

We have provided a set of proposed ground-rules which should be used for each activity.

### Suggested ground rules

1. Be open minded and withhold judgement
2. Agree to disagree
3. Listen and respect others when they are talking – try not to interrupt or talk over people
4. Speak from your own experience and use 'I' statements
5. Constructively challenge other participant's ideas, don't criticise them as a person
6. Join in as much as you feel able
7. Maintain confidentiality
8. Assume good intent
9. Ask clarification if you don't understand something
10. Support and encourage other group members

As a facilitator you should model these ground rules in your own participation and make sure the group also keeps to them. Display the ground rules somewhere visible in the room for ongoing reference.

It's a good idea to revisit the ground rules throughout the session in case the group feels they need revising or adding to. Be aware that it may be difficult for some participants to voice concerns they have about whether a safe space is being created, so ensure that they feel they can approach you, either in breaks during the activity or in the college outside of the activity.

The first time you facilitate a dialogue activity with a group, you will need to explain what ground rules are and what their purpose is. You may need to suggest a couple of things that are required, but also encourage them to think of things that will help maintain a safe and open space for dialogue.

### When you are short on time

Ask the group for their suggestions and write them on the board. You may have to summarise what participants say, but try not to change their meaning or use your own words to describe it. (15 minutes)

If you have very little time, write a pre-prepared list of ground rules on the board beforehand. Ask the group if there is anything they are unsure about or think is missing and adapt the rules appropriately. (10 minutes)

### When you have more time

Before setting ground rules it can be useful to focus on what fears, hopes and expectations individuals in the group may have. This gives participants an opportunity to name anxieties they have and to realise that others in the group may share them.

Scatter a large collection of colourful and varied postcards (with a range of abstract and real life



images) across the floor or table and ask participants to select one or two that relate to any hopes or fears they may have about the group or activity.

Ask participants to share the meaning of the postcard(s) they choose with the rest of the group and write up each point on the board.

You can then create ground rules by converting each concern into a positive statement on how to prevent the concern coming true. The group is empowered by collectively defining strategies to respond to their anxieties.

For example:

- The concern 'I will be judged by others' becomes the ground rule 'Try to understand others opinions even if they are different to yours'
- The concern 'This subject is just too big to deal with' becomes the ground rule 'Be realistic about what we can achieve today'.

Some of the concerns raised won't neatly fit into ground rules. You can still keep them written on the board for reflection throughout the activity.

Prepare some core ground rules yourself. If these are not mentioned by the group, suggest they are added to the list. (30 minutes)

## Active listening

Active listening is a key aspect of dialogue and is important for both facilitators and participants to practice and develop as a skill.

There are five key elements of active listening. They all help ensure that you hear the other person, and that the other person has understood what has been said. You may wish to explore the principles of active listening with your group and practice them through paired discussions.

### 1. Pay attention

Give the speaker your undivided attention, and acknowledge the message. Recognise that non-verbal communication also "speaks" loudly.

- Look at the speaker directly
- Avoid being distracted by other things going on in the room
- "Listen" to the speaker's body language
- Refrain from side conversations when listening in a group setting

### 2. Show that you are listening

Use your own body language and gestures to convey your attention

- Nod occasionally
- Smile and use other facial expressions
- Note your posture and make sure it is open and inviting
- Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like "yes" and "uh huh"

### 3. Provide feedback

Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This may

require you to reflect what is being said and ask questions.

- Reflect what has been said by paraphrasing. "What I'm hearing is..." and "Sounds like you are saying is..." are great ways to reflect back
- Ask questions to clarify certain points. "What do you mean when you say...?" "Is this what you mean...?"

Tip: If you find yourself responding emotionally to what someone said, say so, and ask for more information: "I may not be understanding you correctly, and I find myself taking what you said personally. What I thought you just said is ....., is that what you meant?"

### 4. Defer judgment

Interrupting is a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message.

- Allow the speaker to finish
- Don't interrupt with counter arguments

### 5. Respond Appropriately

Active listening is a model for respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. You add nothing by attacking the speaker or otherwise putting him / her down.

- Be candid, open, and honest in your response
- Assert your opinions respectfully
- Treat the other person as he or she would want to be treated

# Dialogue activities

Each of the activities has been designed so that they can be delivered in isolation within a 50 minute tutorial or lesson. They can however, be extended for longer sessions, and where possible this is recommended.

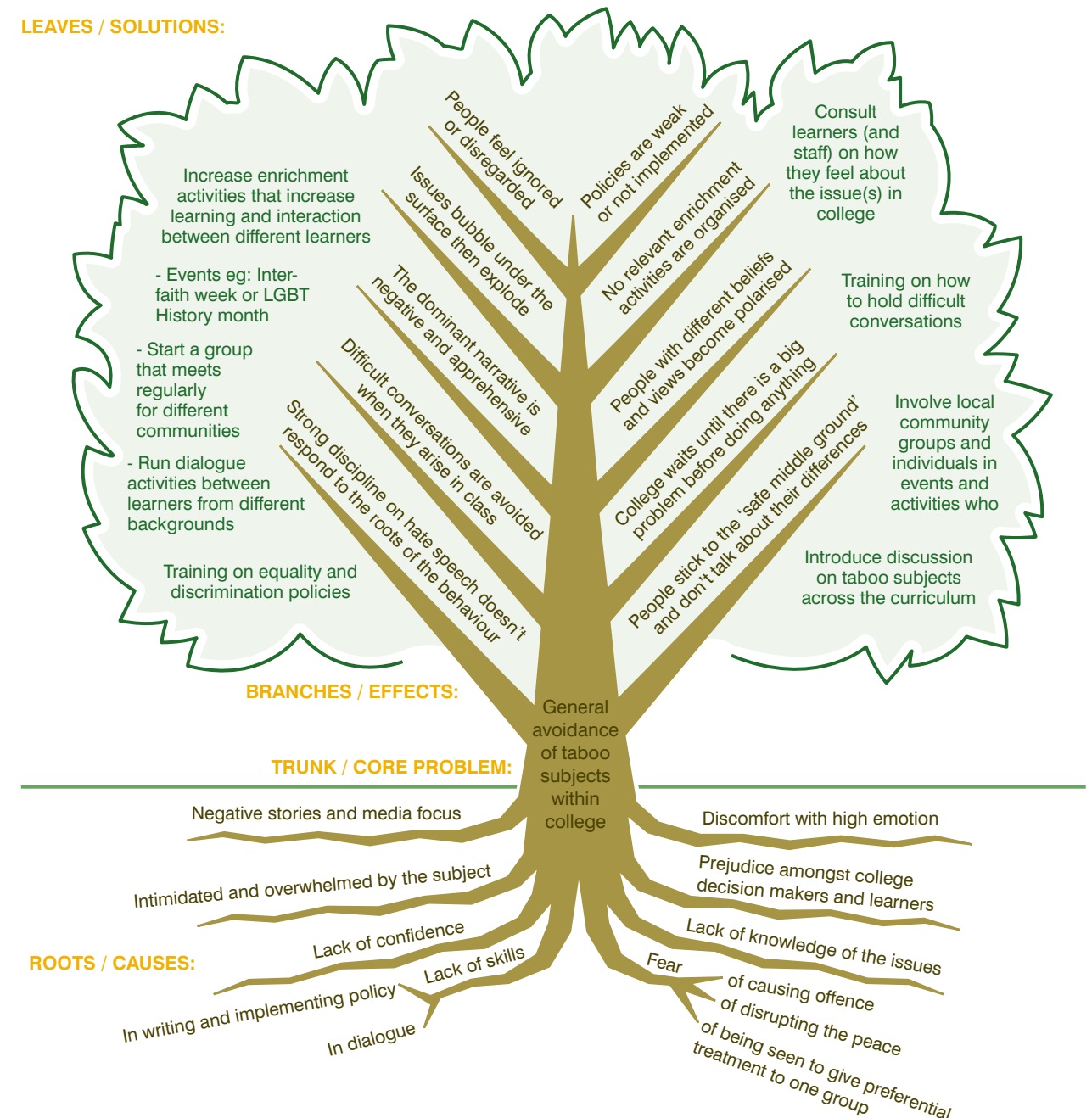
## Problem Tree

Before working out how to respond to any issues or tensions in your college it can be helpful to map out the dynamics of the problem in more detail. Creating a Problem Tree with your learners is one way to do so.

The outline of a Problem Tree is simple. The trunk represents the core problem; the roots represent the causes of the core problem; and the branches represent the effects or consequences of it.

Just like a real tree, the roots are not always obvious to the eye, but unless the causes of the problem are understood there is little that can be done to respond to it. Some causes and effects will be primary, and some secondary. Your tree's shape can reflect this with inter-linked and connected roots and branches.

### LEAVES / SOLUTIONS:



### How to create your tree

- Begin the activity by distributing post-it notes and pens around the group.

Ask each learner to write a different problem relating to faith and sexuality they have observed in their college on each post-it and then stick them on the board. Problems can be large or small and can refer to factors outside of their college as well as inside. (10 minutes)

- Group the statements together that have some similarities in order to identify a core problem(s). If you then have several problems, decide if the group will make several problem trees or will focus on one core problem.

Draw a sample tree diagram and explain it to the group. Divide the learners into groups of approximately five and ask them to draw their tree trunk on sheets of flip chart paper and write the core problem within it. (10 minutes)

- Ask the groups to look at the other negative statements previously made and see if any of them are roots (causes) or branches (effects) of the core problem. If so, they can begin drawing roots and branches and writing the statements in as appropriate.

Groups should then continue to discuss the causes and effects of the core problem, using those already identified as a starting point. Ask them to think about how the causes and effects are related to each other and draw lines between them accordingly. (30 minutes)

- In most cases the trees show how reality is very complicated and the causes and effects are interlinked. Try and strike a balance between analytical detail and keeping to the main points. If the tree becomes too cluttered it will not offer such clarity on the core problem.

### Extending the activity

- Turn the 'Problem Trees' into 'Solution Trees' by converting negative statements into positive ones eg: 'no enrichment activities relating to faith' could become 'a range of enrichment activities relating to faith are provided'. (20 minutes)
- Or add leaves to your trees to represent solutions in response to each of the 'effects' branches. (20 minutes)
- Ask learners to colour code which causes and effects are the most important and which they believe they can most influence. (10 minutes)
- Ask each group to present their tree to the main group (5 minutes each) and facilitate a discussion on if and how learners now understand the subject differently now. (20 minutes)
- This activity can be quite difficult when first discussing the subject. Consider also using other dialogue methods such as 'Silent Discussion' to explore the causes and effects as this may allow more space for learners to think than group discussion.
- Turn your problem tree into a group art project for public display.

## Silent Discussion

Participants discuss their ideas and responses to a given theme by writing instead of speaking. It can be an excellent way to deal with a 'hot topic' by exchanging and reflecting on their different viewpoints, while hopefully clarifying some of the ambiguities around the topic.

Writing, rather than speaking, slows the discussion down thereby allowing participants a chance to organise their thoughts before making their response. This allows all participants to contribute, whether shy or outgoing, without being 'put on the spot' to respond in front of the class.

This activity is good for groups between 10-30 people. If you have 15 or more you may want to create two tables to write on.

### The activity

1. Choose a topic you wish to discuss that is relevant or of interest to the group of learners you are working with. You may want to discuss with them what topics they would like to discuss. They can be strictly related to faith and sexual orientation or explore broader issues related to discrimination, stereotypes, prejudice, and cultural differences.

Identify and introduce a topic that can be explored using the following questions. For example, the Government has recently been considering proposals to enable couples, regardless of their gender, to have a civil marriage ceremony. This has raised significant debate and discussion.

Why do you think this is a sensitive issue? What are your feelings about it? What are the different meanings associated with religion, gender, sexual orientation (and marriage)? What do you think are the reasons for this particular issue to be so provocative / challenging?

2. Create two long pieces of paper by securely sticking large sheets of flip chart paper together. Write one question in the centre of each long sheet and lay them over tables around the room.

You could also include photographs or cartoons to help stimulate discussion.

3. Divide participants equally into two groups and direct each group to one of the question sheets.

Explain that in silence they are to think about their feelings, perceptions and ideas relating to the questions and write their responses on the paper. They should read and respond to other participants' comments as well as continuing to add their own. The group must be silent for this part of the activity.

Learners can draw their response too. This works well for those who lack confidence in their written expression.

Silence can be uncomfortable for some people so you may want to consider playing music during the activity. Even when there is no talking, the ground rules still apply and must be enforced.

Provocative questions can stir rich discussion, but be prepared that strong, polarised and discriminatory opinions could be shared. Any comments of particular concern should be addressed at the start of the spoken discussion. (15 minutes)

4. After about 12 minutes ask the group to stop writing and take a few minutes to read the full written conversation. (5 minutes)
5. Ask participants to swap tables and read what the other group has written. (5 minutes)
6. Stick the paper on the walls, or ensure it is visible to the whole group.

7. Facilitate a large group discussion on their responses to the questions and experience of the process asking the following questions. It is good to re-iterate the ground-rules at this point, and maintain the safe-space for discussion.

- Are there any comments on the paper you would like to clarify?
- Which comments did you find most difficult or challenging?
- Which comments would you like to discuss further?
- What feelings and reactions did they have?
- What did you learn from the discussion?

(30 minutes)

### An alternative approach

Create a 'Graffiti Wall' by putting large sheets of paper up in a communal area and leave it there for a day. Learners can contribute anonymously, which may create a more open and honest discussion. It is not suggested you set such a challenging topic for a graffiti wall discussion, but maybe ask an open question that people can respond to in a sentence.

## Fishbowl Dialogue

Fishbowl dialogue is a group conversation that structures who can speak and when, meaning that a wide range of viewpoints are shared and listened to. This approach stimulates lively debate and is a great way of 'lifting the lid off' any topics or concerns that participants may have.

This approach can be used in two ways;

1. To give learners the opportunity to ask and discuss a range of questions they would like more clarification or reflection on

2. To discuss a single theme in more depth e.g.: equal marriage

The sharing of viewpoints in this activity is very public within the group, so it works best when the group knows each other a little and is comfortable to speak openly and honestly.

It is recommended to run this activity in groups of approx 10. If you have a larger group then split the groups into equal sizes, ideally of no less than 8 participants.

### The outer circle:

Whilst seated in the outer circle learners can listen to the discussion but may not contribute. If they would like to answer or make a comment responding to the question being discussed they must get up and sit in one of the inner circle chairs. Others can join them until the three chairs are occupied.

### The middle circle:

- If another person wants to join the inner circle discussion and the three chairs are occupied, that person must stand behind the first person who entered the inner circle and wait for them to finish their point.

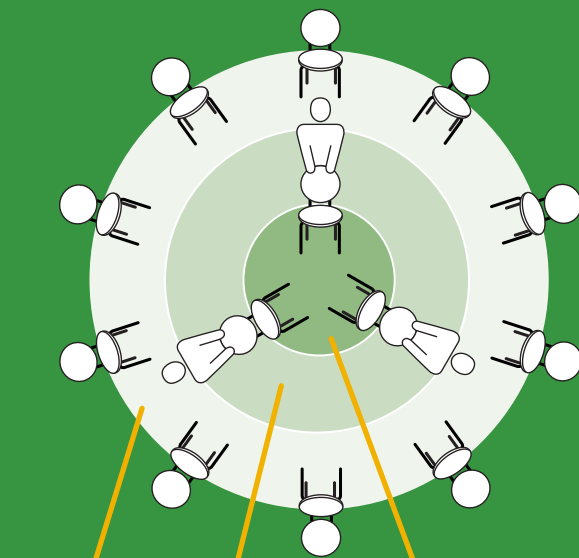
With lively discussions this can create a middle circle of those waiting to speak. Upon recognising there is someone behind them waiting to speak the seated person must finish their point and return to their seat in the outer circle.

- Remember the order by which participants enter the inner circle. Participants from the outer circle who enter the inner circle cannot choose who they replace – they must replace the person who has been there longest. This ensures a better 'flow' and prevents participants from silencing other participant's whose views they don't like.
- If a person who has left the inner circle has something further to say, they can re-enter again through the same procedure.
- Don't worry if conversation goes off on a tangent. The important thing is that issues that participants are concerned about are explored.

- If your group finds it hard not to interrupt, introduce a 'talking stick'. Participants can only speak when they are holding the stick (or any other object).
- It is the facilitator's responsibility to ensure everyone observes the rules. This way the dialogue becomes self-facilitating by the participants once they are familiar with the approach/rules.

### The inner circle:

In the inner circle up to three learners can discuss the question or subject. This is the only place learners can speak in. Speakers should ideally wait for each other to finish speaking before saying their point, but use your discretion on how strictly to police this.





### The rules

The structure of participation is imposed through a particular seating arrangement and order of speech. For a group of ten learners, arrange an outer circle of ten chairs facing inwards and an inner circle with three chairs also facing inwards. All learners start from seated in the outer circle and face inwards from all positions throughout the activity.

### The activity

1. Ask everyone to take their seats in the outer circle. Explain the rules, ensuring that everyone understands. (5 minutes)
2. Option 1: If you are going to discuss a number of questions;

Hand around several post-it notes to each participant and ask them to write any questions they have on the theme of faith and sexuality on them.

Questions can be about anything; a concern they have, something they would like clarification on, or an issue they feel has not yet been addressed. Each different question should be written on a different post-it note.

Ask them to fold the questions up and put them in a box or bowl. (5 minutes)

Anonymity enables learners to ask questions they might not feel comfortable to do otherwise for fear of offending others or being judged themselves.

You may wish to pre-prepare some questions in case participants don't come up with many themselves.

Pull out a question at random from the hat and begin the facilitation. If conversation dries up, read out a new question. (25 minutes)

3. Option 2: If you are going to discuss a single theme in more depth

Briefly introduce the topic you have chosen to discuss and pose an introductory question to get discussion going. You may wish to pre-prepare some prompt questions in case conversation does not flow well.

4. After 25 minutes end the structured dialogue and facilitate a group discussion on the activity.

Some sample questions you could use: (10 minutes)

- What did you find this exercise?
- Do you have any insights or feelings from the discussions that were raised?
- What benefits does the fishbowl have for enabling and encouraging dialogue?

### An alternative approach

Use as an alternative to a traditional panel debate. Rather than a panellist giving a 50 minute presentation with limited time for questions, give them 15 minutes to convey key thoughts then set up a 35 minute fishbowl dialogue with the audience. The panellist can stay in the inner circle permanently or leave and re-enter like other participants.

## Tandem Dialogue

This approach has been adapted from the Conversations for the Soul programme developed by St. Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace.

Tandem Dialogue is an activity that brings people from different beliefs and backgrounds together to meet in pairs and discuss beliefs and practice in depth. Run over a period of weeks, it allows for a different quality of conversation that can be deeper and more satisfying than dialogue in groups. Such rich discussion requires good listening, trust, sensitivity and confidentiality between partners (which develops over time as people participate).

The activity is designed for groups of even numbers, with a balance of participants from a mix of faiths and beliefs, sexualities and gender identities. Although those without a faith should not be excluded, the activity works best in groups where there is religious diversity.

It is an excellent way to engage learner faith societies and involve college Chaplains, and to encourage tutor groups to bond.

### Time required

Over a period of four weeks, meeting once a week. How long they meet for is up to them, but we recommend an hour. Enough discussion prompts have been provided for four weeks, and the project could be meaningfully extended if you create an additional set of questions for each additional week.

### Week 1:

All participants meet informally first as a group as an opportunity to get to know one another, the topic and to set the tone of the activity. Perhaps provide some refreshments to create a light mood.

When introducing the activity it's important to set some ground rules and reinforce the importance of good listening. Most of this activity happens without a facilitator present so learners will be responsible for their own and their partner's conduct.

If you have time for a longer session you could also include an icebreaker to help the group get to know each other and perhaps ask them to share their 'faith journey' in pairs for ten minutes each.

Assign pairs of learners for the following weeks of discussion. Consider their individual needs and ensure that pairs are made up from people who come from different backgrounds, whether faith-based or not. Talking about such meaningful topics with a relative stranger could be liberating or intimidating for different people so consider pairings accordingly.

Staying with the same partner allows greater depth of discussion and increases sustainability of the relationships formed, but you could also arrange for the pairings to change each week.

Think about how the setting of pair's conversations may influence their mood. Try suggesting walking and talking in a local park, a coffee shop or a quiet corner in a common room. As participants feel more comfortable with each other, venues may change e.g. at each other's place of worship.

If you aren't able to run a whole group session in Week 1, you can assign partners beforehand but ensure that they are briefed appropriately before they start dialoguing.

### Weeks 2-4:

The tandem pairs meet a minimum of three times, choosing times and locations to suit them. Make sure participants have a quiet, comfortable place to talk without interruption.

Each week pairs choose a theme from those noted here. They can either answer the questions together systematically or use the theme as a starting point, but allow the conversation to take them in other directions. It is up to the participants how they use the material but it's a good idea to discuss a different theme each week to broaden the scope of their dialogue.

### Final week:

Participants meet again as a group at the end of the process for the opportunity to feedback to the group as a whole, and to hear about the experiences of others.

Consider ways to help the group stay connected, perhaps through arranging group activities such as celebrations at their place of worship, or invitations to interfaith events.

### Suggested discussion prompts

In the full Conversations of the Soul project there are a wide range of subjects for participants to discuss, relating to being a person of faith; living with faith; faith and wider society; spiritual beliefs; violence and suffering, and faith journeys.

### Religious identity

- How central is religion in my life? What does faith mean to me?
- How important is it to belong to my religious community and how do I participate in this?
- How do I express my faith?
- How much does my religion contribute to my outlook on the world?
- Am I 'religious' or 'spiritual'? What is the difference?
- In which areas of my life does faith have the most significance or impact? In what areas does it have the least impact?
- What do I learn from this?

### Gender, sexuality, relationships

- What does your faith teach you about relationships?
- How is sexuality viewed within your tradition?
- What does your faith tell you about masculinity and femininity?

- And about the roles of men and women?
- Do you endeavour to live by the teachings of your faith in respect of sex, relationships, and gender roles? To what degree?
- Do you experience conflict in this area between the teachings of your faith and contemporary values?

### Values and the secular world

- Does faith influence values, ethics and behaviour in society for the better?
- What other factors serve to uphold human values?
- How do your beliefs influence your involvement with civil society?
- Should religion and governance be separate or connected?
- What is the place of faith communities within secular society?
- How might people of faith and people with no faith relate to each other?

### Tolerance and limits

- What examples are there in your tradition of people who set an ideal standard of tolerance?
- How do these examples apply to your own life?
- How do they apply to interaction with people of other faiths?
- Where do you believe tolerance should stop? Can you think of a specific scenario (hypothetical or real)?
- What constitutes blasphemy or insult to God in your tradition?
- How do you respond to this?
- In what ways do you expect people of another faith to show respect to your faith?

## Human Library – Another form of paired discussion

An alternative approach could be to run a Human Library event; a mobile library set up as a space for dialogue and interaction but where the books are not paper, but people.

Visitors to a Human Library are given the opportunity to speak informally with “people on loan”, this latter group being extremely varied in age, sex and cultural background. The Human Library enables groups to break stereotypes by challenging the most common prejudices in a positive and humorous manner. It is a concrete, easily transferable

and affordable way of promoting tolerance and understanding. This could be run with only learners in your college, or could be a great way to involve people from your local community. A Human Library event is a good alternative to Tandem Dialogue if your college isn't particularly diverse.

Book titles could include; Humanist, Orthodox Jew, Transgender, Imam, Bi-curious, Presbyterian, Sunni Muslim, Gay, Agnostic.

For more info on how to run a Human Library see [www.humanlibrary.org](http://www.humanlibrary.org)

## Case Study

### Newham Sixth Form College, East London

Learners at Newham Sixth Form College in East London used Tandem Dialogue as a way to explore issues around religion, violence and conflict over a period of several weeks.

*“What we really explored was the students own perspectives and experiences of being*

*religious in a multi-cultural, multi-religious society. How did they perceive that they were viewed by others and why did they think this was the case? In discussing these issues we learnt a lot more about each other and I believe we created a successful and useful dialogue.”* Oliver Davies, a teacher at the college.

The key to success of the activity was the level of interaction it prompted; the discussing rather than debating enabled a much deeper level of listening and therefore understanding.



## Speakers event

Hearing from a speaker, or panel of speakers, can be an unthreatening way for learners to gain new knowledge or understanding from a range of different perspectives. The panellists' speeches can pave the way for thoughtful group discussions amongst the audience, making use of some of the activities featured in this resource pack.

It is important to be clear about your objectives. For example, is this event a platform for further LGBT and/or faith related enrichment events as part of the college's Equality & Diversity strategy? If so, how might this influence what you are trying to achieve?

This activity could be run with groups of all sizes, even up to 100 with adequate facilitation.

### Time required

A total of 20 minutes for all your speakers combined, with the remaining time for discussion.

### Recruiting and preparing with speakers

Aim to recruit speaker(s) that will discuss a range of experiences and viewpoints. If you only decide on only one speaker, will you need to present alternative points of view? If you decide on two or more speakers, how will you ensure their contributions relate to each other?

Think about if there any suitable speakers from within your college, and do some research into faith and LGBT organisations and spokespeople in your local area that may be willing to speak.

Do you need to discuss ground rules with your speaker? For example reminding them to speak from their own experience and not on behalf of others.

Ask them about what they're willing to speak about. How can the speaker relate to learners' experiences or schemes of work?

Consider if there anything significant in the college that the speaker should know about e.g. a large presence from a particular national, ethnic or faith community, tensions between groups or high-profile bullying. This may help prevent the speaker touching on a sore spot and losing the audience.

### Debate and discussion

1. The Chairperson should introduce each speaker and then allow a maximum of five minutes per speaker at a time.

A strong Chairperson will be able to keep speakers on topic, hold time, ensure questions from the audience are brief and respond to controversy appropriately.

After the speaker(s) have finished ask the audience to get into pairs or small groups to discuss what they thought about what the speaker(s). (10 minutes)

Open the floor for questions, with the Chair taking a few questions at a time before passing them to the speakers to answer.

2. Alternatively, consider using some of the other methods in this toolkit to rework the traditional Question & Answer format. For example;
  - A Silent Discussion on the core theme or question of the speaker(s) speech
  - A Fishbowl that involves the speaker(s). Allow learners a few minutes to come up with questions or responses to the speakers before moving into a group dialogue. This enables learners to ask direct questions of the speakers as well as discuss the broad themes raised
3. Be sure to follow up with the speaker after the session to see how they felt it went, and how it might have been improved. This will help maintain the relationship so you may be able to invite them back at a later date.

## Case Study

### Panel Debate, University of Kent Union LGBT Campaign 2011

This event was organised in response to the recognition amongst Kent's LGBT campaign that "a dialogue needed to be held to address concerns and lack of knowledge between the LGBT community and religious groups on campus, as well as within the LGBT community against LGBT students of faith", says Megan Wells, Kent's LGBT Officer (Women's Place).

Their event discussed questions on same-sex marriage, gay adoption and gender identity issues, with the University's Anglican Chaplain and an NUS LGBT committee member who is also a person of faith on the panel. It was attended by over 80 students expressing a wide spectrum of beliefs, including representatives

from The Islamic society, Sikh Society, African Caribbean Society and LGBT society.

Megan describes how "Some students were really open to the LGBT community and would be allies, where as some had more traditional views on sexuality and gender, but were willing to be respectful of the students from the LGBT community."

This very popular event inspired much learning, with the main thing being that "all opinions in the different religions are very varying, and it is hard to make a general statement for all people of a certain faith. Just as some LGBT students agreed that faith and their sexuality could coincide, others thought the two were not compatible."

For more info see <http://www.kentunion.co.uk/studentvoice/officers/liberation/lgbtcampaign> or contact [lgbt@kent.ac.uk](mailto:lgbt@kent.ac.uk).

## Case Study

### Liverpool Hope University LGBT Campaign

Liverpool Hope is an ecumenical university with a strong religious heritage, meaning the week of faith and sexuality events it organised in 2011 was even more relevant to raise awareness of LGBT Faith and tackle issues and questions around it within the LGBT community.

The aim of the week was to provide a safe environment to talk about being LGBT and having faith, to share positive

stories and provide strength to members who may have felt that those two parts of their lives could not go together.

There was a wide variety of attendees, of course LGBT students of different faiths but also from supportive friends and allies from groups such as the Christian Union. It also linked with a local LGBT Christian service at one of the churches in the city.

The main event was a 'Discussion Night' that intentionally stressed that it was not a debate, but was safe space where stories of reassurance and experiences could be shared, rather than

the possibility of homophobic views being aired in a debate situation about right and wrong. Celebration events such as a Film Night were also run as well as the launch of an 'LGBT Muslim Consultation' to raise awareness of a lack of support outside of London for these students.

Feedback was really positive, with one student summing it up; *"For the first time I felt like I could talk freely about my faith and sexuality together."*

Andi Herring, LGBT Officer at the union says, *"My advice to anyone who wants to run a similar event is don't let the fear of doing something a little controversial stop you, focus on the positives that you can highlight, BUT most of all use the support networks you have to hand - our University Chaplain's were a massive help."*

For more info please contact [lgbt@hope.ac.uk](mailto:lgbt@hope.ac.uk) or visit [www.hopelgbt.org](http://www.hopelgbt.org) or <http://www.hopelgbt.org/campaigns/faith>

## Film Screening

Showing a film is an effective, low pressure way of engaging learners in the subject, and can act as a springboard for reflective discussion on the issues and themes raised.

This is especially the case when participants may not be familiar enough with each other to discuss issues in depth without 'warming up'. Equally, showing a film at the end of a series of activities can help to draw together the various strands of learning from previous discussions.

Make sure you watch the film beforehand to check that the content is appropriate for your group and college, and if there are any key moments or issues to discuss.

For a shorter one hour activity you could show a brief video clip (up to 15 minutes long), perhaps from a topical television programme (current affairs or fictional). After the clip, split the group into smaller groups of four to five learners and ask them to 'self facilitate' a dialogue on the video. You might identify specific questions to frame their discussions. You would need to introduce the idea of dialogue and specify the purpose of the activity beforehand.

Encourage learners to think about the perspective of the filmmaker. How does the story they depict fit into broader narratives relating to faith and sexuality? How do they interpret the film in the context of ground rules they may have set as a group?

A longer 3 hour activity might involve a feature length film followed by similar small group discussion, which could continue beyond a singular event.

Try combining with other dialogue methods in this toolkit eg: a Fishbowl Dialogue based on their responses to the film.

## Some suggested films

Any views expressed in the films suggested here are the views of the filmmaker and not NUS. They have been selected for their ability to prompt discussion, not to make judgement on the issues raised.

### **A Jihad for Love (2007) (Certificate tbc)**

Documentary exploring the complex global intersections between Islam and homosexuality seeks to reclaim the concept of personal struggle.

### **Eyes Wide Open (2009) (Certificate 12)**

A married father of four in Jerusalem's ultra-orthodox Jewish community falls in love with a young, male student.

### **Fish Can't Fly (2005) (Certificate N/A)**

Documentary film from a secular perspective that explores the lives of gays and lesbians who have struggled to put their spirituality and sexuality in harmony.

### **For the Bible Tells Me So (2007) (Certificate E)**

An exploration of the intersection between Christianity and homosexuality in the U.S.

### **Gay Muslims (2006) (Certificate N/A)**

Channel 4 documentary about what it means to be British, Gay and Muslim

### **Trembling before G-D (2001) (Certificate 15)**

Cinematic portrayal about Orthodox Jewish men reconciling their faith and their sexuality.

A more extensive list of films can be found at <http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/news/article/faith/Faith-and-Sexuality-Resources/>

# Additional resources

A more extensive list of resources, can be found here <http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/news/article/faith/Faith-and-Sexuality-Resources/> including the details of numerous faith based organisations who work with sexuality issues, other relevant research reports and inter-faith dialogue resources.

## Life Long Learning UK (LLUK) and The Forum

“Managing the Interface: Sexual Orientation and Faith – Research Report (for HE and FE)”

<http://www.lluklegacy.org/cms/uploads/Managing-the-interface-sexual-orientation-and-faith-Research.pdf>

## Life Long Learning UK (LLUK) and The Forum

“Managing the Interface: Sexual Orientation and Faith – Guidance (for HE and FE)”

[http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/hr/equality/documents/managing\\_the\\_interface.pdf](http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/hr/equality/documents/managing_the_interface.pdf)

## Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)

“Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) Guidance for the Learning and Skills Service”

[www.lsis.org.uk/Documents/Publications/SMSC%20Web.pdf](http://www.lsis.org.uk/Documents/Publications/SMSC%20Web.pdf)

## Stonewall

“Love Thy Neighbour: What People of Faith Really Think of Homosexuality”

[http://www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/love\\_thy\\_neighbour.pdf](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/love_thy_neighbour.pdf)

## University of Nottingham, School of Sociology and Social Policy

“Religion, Youth and Sexuality - Selected Key Findings from a Multi-faith Exploration”

<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/sociology/pdfs/rys-research-report.pdf>

## Faith and Sexuality Project

Practical materials designed to help secondary school students explore what Judaism, Christianity and Islam have to say about lesbian and gay people.

<http://faithandsexuality.co.uk>

## The Forum for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Post-School Education

The Forum brings together partner organisations in order to co-ordinate work which advances sexual orientation and gender identity equality in post-school education.

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

## NUS

LGBT Students Handbook

<http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/lgbtsocieties/LGBT-Students-Handbook/>

## NUS

Putting the LGBT into FE

<http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/lgbt/Putting-the-LGBT-into-FE/>

## The National Council of Faiths and Belief in Further Education (FBFE)

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.

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

## NUS

*Good Inter Faith Relations on Campus:  
A toolkit for Students' Unions*

[http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/asset/News/6105/  
NUS-Inter-Faith-Toolkit\\_Web-Version.pdf](http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/asset/News/6105/NUS-Inter-Faith-Toolkit_Web-Version.pdf)

## Three Faiths Forum (3FF)

3FF builds understanding and lasting relationships between people of all faiths and beliefs. 3FF runs education, engagement and action programmes that bring diverse communities together.

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

## St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace

St Ethelburga's is dedicated to enabling people to build relationships across divisions. An important strand of their work is to find effective ways of helping people from different faith backgrounds come together to increase mutual understanding and build relationships across differences of belief and identity.

<http://stethelburgas.org/themes/multifaith>

"The Spectrum - A Guide to inter-religious dialogue"

<http://spectrum.stethelburgas.org/index.htm>



national union of students