



CONFERENCE REPORT

THE REGIONAL LAUNCH

of

FACE TO FACE & SIDE BY SIDE

A Framework for Partnership

in our Multi-cultural Society

University of Surrey

Wednesday 26 November 2008

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CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

The Management School Building

University of Surrey

Wednesday 26 November 2008

6.00pm	Registration	Refreshments available in The Foyer
6.35pm	Opening Address	Professor Bernard Weiss Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Surrey
	Welcome	Sacha Rose
	Keynote Speaker	Laura Moffat, MP & Parliamentary Assistant to Jonathan Shaw MP, Minister for the South East
		Questions & Answers with Laura Moffat
	Keynote Speaker	Ciara Wells, Deputy Director, Cohesion and Faiths Unit, Dept. for Communities & Local Government
		Questions & Answers with Ciara Wells
	Community Leaders	Community Leaders' responses to the 4 building blocks of the framework.
		1 - Taki Jaffer, Portsmouth Interfaith Forum (Muslim)
		2 - Surindar Tulsi, Sikh Chaplain, University of Surrey (Sikh)
		3 - Alex Goldberg, Jewish Chaplain, University of Surrey
		4 - Dev Sharma M.B.E. Director of North West Kent REC (Hindu)
	SEEFF	Chris Rich – SEEFF Interim Steering Group Regional perspective and Action Plan
	Closing Address	Jonathan Frost
8.35pm - 9.30pm	Networking	Networking / tea/coffee/canapés in foyer area

PARTICIPANTS

Sacha Rose Equality and Diversity Manager, RAISE (Regional Action and Involvement South East)

Professor Bernard Weiss Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Surrey

Laura Moffat Member of Parliament for Surrey & Parliamentary Assistant to Jonathan Shaw MP, Minister for the South East

Ciara Wells Deputy Director, Cohesion and Faiths Unit, Dept. for Communities & Local Government

Taki Jaffer, Portsmouth Interfaith Forum

Surindar Tuls Sikh Chaplain at University of Surrey

Alex Goldberg Jewish Chaplain at University of Surrey

Dev Sharma M.B.E. Director of North West Kent REC

Canon Chris Rich Director for Social Responsibility, Diocese of Guildford & SEEFF Interim Steering Group

Canon Jonathan Frost University of Surrey Chaplain & Canon of Guildford Cathedral

165 people from across the Region registered for the Conference and **over 140 attended**. They were from a diversity of faith backgrounds: Bahai, Brahma Kumaris, Buddhist, Christian (Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Scientist, United Reformed), Hindu, Humanist, Jewish, Muslim, Multi-Denominational, Sikh and Unificationist.

CONFERENCE REPORT

“Turn strangers into partners for the good of the healthy society we all seek” was how Chaplain, **Jonathan Frost**, summed up the evening conference held at the University of Surrey (UniS) on 26th November 2006 for the South East Regional Launch of the Government’s *Face to Face Side by Side Framework for Partnership in a Multi Faith Society*¹.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor of UniS, **Professor Bernard Weiss** welcomed more than 140 people of a diversity of faiths from across the South East, from Kent to Hampshire and the Isle of Wight to Milton Keynes; “so many representing Interfaith work at grassroots level”.

Welcome ... a new era of partnership between government and faith communities...

He also welcomed the encouraging arrival of a “new era of partnership between government and faith communities” and spoke of the University’s sustained, multi-faith commitment. He saw the empowering framework as “a consequence of changed attitudes on both sides” and “a catalyst for learning new skills, openness and strategies for engagement for the good we seek in common”. He saw it all as important for our global future, especially the future for young people.

The conferees heard the two keynote speakers, Laura Moffat MP representing the Minister for the South East, and Ciara Wells, Deputy Director of the Faiths and Social Cohesion Unit of the Department for Communities and Local Government, stress that partnerships

Two keynote speakers...

Laura Moffatt MP

Ciara Wells ...

were not only between faith organisations but also with local authorities and other public bodies. This was re-affirmed in their answers to questions that raised concerns about some authorities’ reluctant nervousness to enter into agreements with faith groups, even when they shared common concerns for their local

populations. Both speakers encouraged strategic partnerships to reflect on how well they worked with local interfaith forums, noting that in the South East a quarter of them have no faith representatives. (A recent Government white paper recommends every local authority to have an interfaith forum linked to its strategic partnership.) Ms. Wells also pointed out “the duty of local authorities to promote good relations between people of different backgrounds”.

... encouraged strategic partnerships to reflect on how well they worked with local interfaith forums ...

... many good examples across the South East that counter adverse publicity ...

Laura Moffat drew from her Crawley constituency experience and enthusiasm for interfaith dialogue and activity. She acknowledged the vital contribution of people of faith in all aspects of life, not least in community cohesion, by sustaining, across centuries and decades, the vital values of peace, altruism, care, respect, justice and compassion.

¹ www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/facetofaceframework

“Faith Groups”, she said, “are a voice for local communities; a force for civil renewal and cohesion; a point of community contact for marginalised people and advocates for social justice; partners in regeneration; sources of volunteers; and managers of projects”. Referring to many good examples across the South East that counter adverse publicity about community tensions, she affirmed that “faith-based communities are often the most trusted and active organisations working among the most excluded and deprived groups”. She recognised that good dialogue and partnership action does not just happen: “Effective community engagement for positive change needs effective structures”.

... good dialogue and partnership action does not just happen ... needs effective structures ...

She congratulated and wished SEEFF well as it engages with the Face to Face and Side by Side Framework to become an effective regional faith forum structure and catalyst to help faith groups and other partners to build their confidence to dialogue and act together. She also noted that the turnout at this conference was the best of all the regions.

Ciara Wells outlined the three Principles and four Building Blocks of the Framework and stressed the need to build on what already exists by increasing the quality and quantity of interfaith relations and activities, so that they may truly be “a framework for daily life”. The 3 principles of partnership, empowerment and choice had developed out of an independent commission’s report on the importance of relations with and between faith communities for integration and cohesion. The Framework that evolved out of this was not a “how-to” blueprint, but a way for appropriate choices to be made locally. There are two aspects – “Face-to-Face” dialogue that will help groups, organisations and individuals to get to know and understand each other, with their differences and similarities; and “Side-by-Side” working together in collaborative social action to achieve common aims.

**... three principles
Partnership
Empowerment
Choice**

The framework has four building blocks to enable the Face-to-Face and Side-by-Side initiatives. In presentations that followed the keynote speeches, three community leaders spoke from their own faith perspectives about the application of the Building Blocks.

Taki Jaffer spoke from a Muslim perspective about Building Block One: “Developing confidence and skills to Bridge and Link”. He stressed how important faith groups were in helping local authorities meet their targets. He showed a variety of activities and events around Portsmouth and the South Coast illustrating the mutual involvements of Muslim people with local leaders, a Cathedral, a synagogue and other religious places; in religious services, seminars, a faith walk and a silent one-hour vigil for peace in a violent world. He explained how people of faith involved in leadership were encouraged to develop their skills and how community capacity was built up by their involvement as school and college governors, magistrates, non-executive members of a health trust and LSP faith reps etc.

**... community leaders spoke from their own faith perspectives about the application of the Building Blocks ...
Confidence to Bridge & Link;
Sharing spaces for inter-action & social action;
Structures & Processes to support dialogue and action;
Opportunities for learning to build understanding.**

All these, as well as encouraging women and young people to be involved in community-based activities, helped to develop confidence and skills.

Surindar Tulsi shared his experiences and examples, as a Sikh man, of Building Block Two: “Shared Spaces for Interaction and Social Action”. He acknowledged the importance of faith in ordinary daily life. He referred to his own experience as a small businessman and industrial chemist. If children learn to respect all people of other faiths and none they are more open to others in their adult lives. He stressed that partnership is good, but it needs effort. He spoke of the UniS multi-faith project which will provide a place and space for all. As a Sikh he knew how a Gurdwara, which is a safe place open to all, is somewhere that understanding and trust can grow.

Dev Sharma MBE, spoke out of his Hindu experience of Building Block Four: “Opportunities for Learning which build understanding”. Referring to how interactions between children of different backgrounds and faiths creates good foundations, he stressed that continuing

... education is also vital to enable people to argue and discuss with respect for each others difference and develop into fully involved citizens ...

education through Further and Higher education is also vital to enable people to argue and discuss with respect for each others difference and develop into fully involved citizens. Faith communities also promote informal learning through art, music and cultural activities, libraries, exhibitions and by providing information about themselves.

Alex Goldberg, would have addressed Building block Three: “Structures and Processes which support dialogue and social action” from a Jewish perspective but unfortunately was unable, at short notice, to attend the conference.

Ms. Wells explained how The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) will support the Building Block initiatives.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) will support the Building Block initiatives ...

DCLG will work with the Local government Association (LGA) to refresh “Faith & Community Guidance” to reflect the new Face to Face and Side by Side agendas.

Through the regional Government Offices they will work with Faith Groups to develop religious literacy training; develop a charter of excellence in providing public service delivery – A Charter Mark for faith communities; and initiate an annual Interfaith Week from autumn 2009.

They will also help to develop the capacity of the Regional Faith Forums (like SEEFF) so that they can be a resource for local groups and projects. £2million will be available, across the country, for this regional-wide work.

Another £4million will be available through a Faith in Action fund, in packets of £12,000 over two years, to help kick-start smaller local actions that will, hopefully, lead to larger programmes. For one year, 2010 to 2011, there will be a second round of smaller grants (£2,000 each).

Sacha Rose, the Conference chair, together with all the conferees, warmly thanked the keynote speakers and the community leaders for their most helpful contributions.

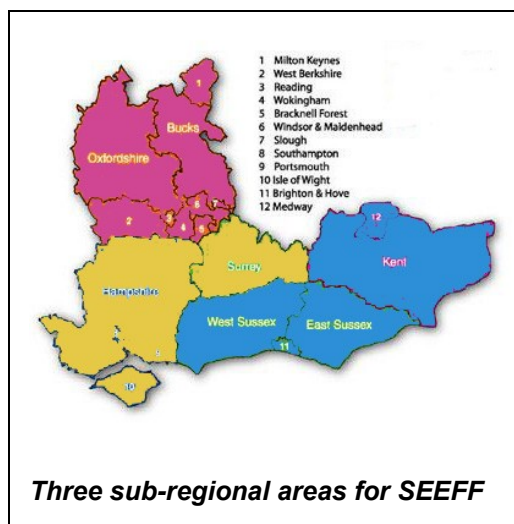
Following each key note address there was 30 minutes of **Questions** raised by people from Southampton, Portsmouth, Brighton & Hove, Elmbridge, Hastings, Surrey, and Kent. They represented Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Buddhist and Humanist points of view. They covered a variety of issues: Muslim concerns about the negative effects of the “Preventing Terrorism” agenda; how people of faith are hurt by media-led belittling attacks on the leaders at the heart of their faiths; the encouragement given to spirituality and religious ways of life now that the government appears to “Do God”; faith communities at large being able to practice faith without having to justify their existence; that faith communities are taken seriously and believed – that they do not support violent acts; that money provided for community and faith groups will be “ring-fenced” and used for its intended purpose rather than being lost in other local budget; local authority reluctance to engage with faith groups; support of Bosnian Aid children to attend the 2012 Olympics; recognising and including “no-faith” and other humanist groups and that concentration on faith may be exclusive; involving young people in the framework; taking seriously, supporting and attending to the declining funding for SACRE’s (Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education); the equitable sharing of funding across the regions and the size of grants – small sums don’t allow larger projects.

Following each key-note address there was 30 minutes of questions ... covered a variety of issues

The second part of the Conference focussed on SEEFF’s achievements and plans.

Chris Rich, a member of the Interim Steering Group, told the conference of the activities of the past seven months and the proposals for the coming three years.

SEEFF had held two conferences: a re-launch day conference in April and tonight’s launch of the Face to Face, Side by Side Framework. It had an interactive website www.se-faithforum.net and a membership list of over one thousand people and organisations. It had produced an Action Plan, some of which had already been achieved and much more that was planned.



A project mapping the faith-links with Strategic Partnership and the Inter-Faith groups across the region, together with a very helpful “religious literacy” paper had been published as “Connecting Faith in the South East” and is available for download on the website.

The next task was to establish SEEFF as the South East Regional Faith Forum with a good governance structure. This will happen early in 2009 with consultations across three sub-regional areas and a full regional conference in April 2009 to adopt the governance proposals leading to elections later in the year. With sponsorship and a grant from DCLG, four people will be engaged to progress and

complete this work starting in January 2009.

Negotiations are also in progress with SEEDA (South East England Development Agency) for a research project to assess the economic impact of faith in the SE Region. This will take forward the work being developed by the Faith-based Regeneration Network (FbRN) and

Goldsmith's College, University of London. An economic impact project was done in the North West Region in 2004.

For the following two years (2010 to 2012) the DCLG sponsorship and grants will be administered by The Community Development Foundation (CDF), and SEEFF is already in discussions with CDF. Chris concluded by saying that "making a difference for the communities in which we live and work" and "keeping the momentum going" was what was important.

He thanked GOSE (Government Office for the South East) for sponsoring this conference and providing extra funding to accommodate the encouraging larger number than planned participants.

Jonathan Frost in bringing the Conference to a close asked everyone to stand up, turn around and introduce themselves to their neighbours. This was greeted with warm-hearted enthusiasm and for a minute the lecture theatre was filled with the lively buzz of human friendship.

See www.se-faithforum.net
Inter-Active Forum
April 2008 Conference Report
SEEFF Action Plan
Connecting Faith in the South East
Scoping, Governance & Consultation work
Economic Impact of Faith work

Jonathan emphasised the need for listening-silence and hoped that we were entering a new listening phase when old assumptions are questioned. He pointed out the following.

Faith communities were not comfortable with being used as means to political ends.

Faith and social action need to go together if a difference is to be made in the lives of communities.

The partnerships between government and faith belong to the continuity and sustained commitment of a cross-party arena so they are not the victim of whimsical funding streams and the cycle of political discontinuity.

In the building of social capital, it is relationships that matter the most: but they take time to develop and build. "Side by side" must not be undermined by short time-scales.

Research by The Joseph Rowntree Trust has shown that some interfaith activity can be the hobby of the few, but faith is good news for all people of all generations, women, men, children and young people.

So, Faith Forums need to be self-critical listen to people in their own languages and recognise their challenges, concerns and interests and help to **turn strangers into partners for the good of the healthy society we all seek**"

FEEDBACK

Conferees were invited to complete a feedback questionnaire and there were 41 responses which expressed the following. Many comments were also received; the vast majority were encouraging and positive. Some specific comments, with responses, are noted below.

The Conference:

How useful did you find the overall event?

Very useful	18	Quite useful	21	Not useful	0
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What aspects of the Conference did you find the most useful? *(Please tick all that apply)*

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----|
| • Key speaker presentations | 26 |
| • Presentations generally | 22 |
| • Being updated on SEEFF | 32 |
| • Networking opportunities | 15 |

Venue and Hospitality:

Did you find the venue easily accessible and suitable?

No	0	Yes	37
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How would you rate the refreshments?

Very good	20	Fairly good	9	Fair	4	Poor	0
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Administration and organisation:

How did you find out about the event?

On the SEEFF web site:	1	From a direct email:	21	From a Friend/Colleague	11
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How satisfied were you with the general administration of the Conference?

- | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|----|--------|---|------------|---|
| • Leading up to the event? | | | | | |
| Very | 29 | Fairly | 4 | Not at all | 0 |
| • During the event? | | | | | |
| Very | 31 | Fairly | 2 | Not at all | 0 |

Do you think you will attend future SEEFF events?

Yes	22	Possibly	11	No	1
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SEEFF Website:

How useful did you find the website – www.se-faithforum.net?

The site is updated regularly with news of Inter-Faith related grants, courses and events

Very 4 Fairly 8 Not at all 0 Have not visited 19

SOME SPECIFIC COMMENTS WITH RESPONSES

The Conference:

- Would have liked a copy of the strategy in advance.
The strategy was placed on the website, and emailed out to the majority of attendees before the conference. It can be downloaded from the website www.se-faithforum.net
- Too much, needed tighter focus: do not invent & portray a religious Quango!
This is noted for future conferences and as SEEFF moves ahead with its organisation and governance.

Do you have any comments for the SEEFF Interim Steering Group?

- It's good that faith groups are seen as partners in social action, inclusion etc. But faith groups also have a prophetic role in social/ethical/moral issues from wars to poverty, to criminal justice etc. Does the government want a critical friend in the faith community, raising uncomfortable criticism? Or just a partner in doing good things?
Keeping the prophetic voice alive and active is vital. Hopefully SEEFF members, individuals and organisations, will keep this at the top of the agenda. SEEFF will encourage this.
- Does Kingston Upon Thames come in the SEEFF area?
Kingston on Thames is, of course, in The London Region and just outside the South East. However, there is surely no reason why Kingston "Interfaith", if it so wishes, could not be part of SEEFF.
- Need clarification of how local groups are to be linked and pulled together.
This will be a major question and area for consultation and decision in the scoping, governance and consultation work which will be undertaken between January and March 2009.
- Please don't miss SACRES out of the loop. SACRES have a statutory responsibility and every local authority must have one SACRES are at the sharp end of community cohesion, being engaged with schools. They are also an important Inter-Faith forum. Kent SACRE is very active in promoting Inter-faith engagement both among its members and among the schools we serve (Kent SACRE)
In the recent mapping work of faith-links in strategic partnerships and the interfaith network it was noted how many other "faith" bodies and organisations there are, including SACRES. In future they will be included.
- Consider how inter-faith groups relate to support SACRES in local authorities. Encourage interfaith groups to find out about RE in schools (legal/educational basis) so that they can better support young people in their understanding of religion. Develop education packs for visits to places of worship etc.
See previous comment. The forthcoming scoping work will note this.

- Small faith groups do not have the resources to apply for or do the amount of monitoring needed to obtain grants.
Being part of a local interfaith network, as well as SEEFF would help them to explore capacity building possibilities.
- No Christian speakers.
Presumably this comment applies to the Community Leaders' presentations. The conference organisers attempted to keep a balance of people from a variety of faith backgrounds. The other speakers belonged to the Christian "stable".
- Importance of making sure that ALL beliefs are included i.e. those who have beliefs which aren't religions.
This has been noted and is referred to in the main body of the conference report.

Venue and Hospitality:

- Prof Bernard Weiss declined to use microphone so marginalising anybody reliant on a hearing aid.
This has been noted and will be actioned for future events. The organisers of the conference were thorough in making sure that all "access" requirements were met, but a specific request for speakers to use the sound system needs to be emphasised.
- Suspect people with mobility problems would find steps tricky.
The organisers asked on their registration form for people to declare any special requirement, anyone completing this section would have been shown alternative routes. The conference organisers were also "on the look out" for people who may have needed an alternative route.
- Lovely venue but if this is SE could the meetings rotate to different areas.
Noted

SEEFF Website:

- Would be good to have discussion forums.
Noted. The SEEFF website already has a "blog" facility.

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