



“Face-to-Face and Side-by-Side”: A framework for inter faith dialogue and social action

Consultation



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inter faith dialogue and social action

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December 2007

Product Code: 07CFU04974

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Foreword

The Government's vision for Britain is one of strong, confident communities where people of all different backgrounds get on well together. That is why building cohesion is a priority for my Department.



We have in recent years seen an increase in dialogue between different faith communities which is breaking down barriers, building understanding and strengthening relationships. We have also seen the positive changes that collaborative social action has brought about within our local communities. This growth in 'active faith' has seen faith communities putting into practice their values and teachings to enrich and benefit wider society.

In its report *Our Shared Future* the independent Commission on Integration and Cohesion set out a number of practical recommendations on how to build cohesion and a shared sense of belonging. In my initial response to the report in October I set out a ten point action plan – one of these commitments is to develop a new inter faith strategy.

In developing this strategy we are not seeking to reinvent "inter faith". We are building on a long history of people from different faith communities in the UK working together to build mutual understanding and respect and develop strong and positive relationships with one another and with wider civil society. This consultation provides us with an opportunity to reflect on how Government should support inter faith activity and the circumstances in which inter faith activity is helping to make a positive difference within local communities. Our vision is that inter faith activity will build good relations and break down barriers between people from different backgrounds through "face-to-face" interactions and "side-by-side" collaboration in shared activities, with a common purpose and a concrete outcome.

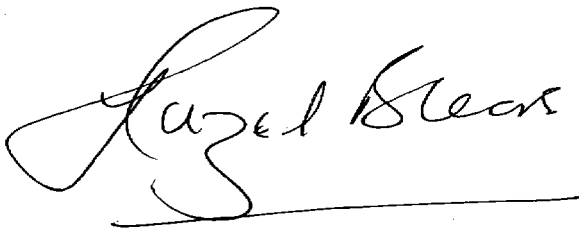
Our communities can face complex challenges and it is clear that faith communities and faith based organisations must be a part of any response that public authorities and the voluntary and community sector develop to tackle these. Public authorities are increasingly recognising the role that faith communities and faith based organisations can play in delivering on their agenda and the opportunities for developing innovative community led solutions through partnership working. But there is still work to be done to build confidence in the benefits of partnership and develop a greater understanding of the contribution faith communities can make.

There are other strong contexts for developing an inter faith strategy. The Prime Minister has stated he wants to see stronger inter faith dialogue where people find the common ground that exists between different religions and communities in the UK and the creation of local inter faith councils in every community. The Local Government White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* also makes it clear that we want to see more local inter faith work and suggests that every local authority should have an inter faith forum, and that they should be linked closely into Local Strategic Partnerships.

My vision in developing a framework for inter faith dialogue and social action is that these partnerships and opportunities will become an intrinsic part of the way in which public authorities work with communities. As we devolve more power to local communities it is important that local authorities ensure that their democratic structures and processes support this.

In Spring 2008 we aim to publish a strategy that will clearly set out steps for delivering this vision. This consultation is the first step to achieving this.

Through this consultation we aim to find out how we can all best work in partnership with each other to increase inter faith dialogue and social action and ensure that this activity results in tangible and positive change within local communities in terms of increased cohesion, greater community empowerment and resilience to extremism in all its forms.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Hazel Blears". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the bottom of the name.

Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Introduction

1. Britain today is a multi faith society with people of many different faiths and beliefs and none living, working, and learning together. Faith is important to the social identity of many UK citizens, with over three-quarters of respondents to the 2001 census identifying themselves as having a religious faith.¹

Table 1: Population of Great Britain: by religion, April 2001

	Total population		Non-Christian religious population
	(Numbers)	(Percentages)	(Percentages)
Christian	41,014,811	71.8	
Muslim	1,588,890	2.8	51.9
Hindu	558,342	1.0	18.3
Sikh	336,179	0.6	11.0
Jewish	267,373	0.5	8.7
Buddhist	149,157	0.3	4.9
Any other religion	159,167	0.3	5.2
All non-Christian religious population	3,059,108	5.4	100.0
No religion	8,596,488	15.1	
Religion not stated	4,433,520	7.8	
All population	57,103,927	100.0	

2. At all levels of government – local, regional and national – the contributions faith communities make to community life are increasingly being recognised. The values and behaviours they demonstrate, such as altruism, respect for others, ethical behaviour and community solidarity which underpin good citizenship. Faith communities are also involved in developing and delivering a range of government policies and initiatives. The substantial number of responses made by faith communities, faith-based and inter faith organisations to the independent Commission on Integration and Cohesion revealed a broad range of work underway including projects to improve community relations, conflict resolution and mediation, family and parenting skills, health work, improving language skills and support networks. In its report – *Our Shared Future* – the Commission recognised that the support shown by faith communities for projects and networks, their community buildings and leaders on the ground, and the promotion of shared values makes an important contribution to building integration and cohesion.

¹ Census, Office of National Statistics, April 2001.

3. The Commission asserted that the way in which relations between people of different faiths and beliefs develop in the coming years will be very important to integration and cohesion and saw inter faith activity as having an important role to play in strengthening these relationships. They recognised that much effective work was already being taken forward by a number of partners to develop relationships between people of different faiths but more needed to be done – not only to enhance the positive contribution that faith communities were already making to integration and cohesion but also to address those instances where religious identity had been advanced in divisive ways or had become a factor that had the potential to separate people from the wider community. The Commission also stated that there was a need for more constructive conversations between those who are religious and those who are not. In their responses to the Commission's interim report, faith communities and faith-based organisations said that inter faith activity should be a priority in terms of Government support for the sector.²
4. In October 2007 the Government announced, in its initial response to the report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, a ten point plan to build cohesion and tackle community tensions. This included the specific commitment to develop an inter faith strategy. This consultation is a first step towards this. In developing this consultation paper we have drawn upon the large number of responses made to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion in respect of faith and belief.

What is inter faith activity?

5. We understand the term inter faith activity to express meaningful interactions between people from different faith communities and between faith communities and wider civil society. The Chief Rabbi, Sir Jonathan Sacks, has distinguished between "face-to-face" and "side-by-side" relationships. We think that this is a helpful way of articulating two of the main components of inter faith activity, and use this throughout this consultation paper in the following way:
 - "face-to-face": relates to dialogue which leads to faith communities having a better understanding of one another, including celebrating the values held in common as well as acknowledging distinctiveness
 - "side-by-side": relates to collaborative social action (including participation in local democracy) involving different faith communities and wider civil society, which brings about positive and concrete change within local communities

² *Response to the Interim Statement of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion*, Community Development Foundation, 2007. This report summarises feedback received by the Community Development Foundation from organisations in receipt of grants from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF) and Connecting Communities Plus

6. As inter faith dialogue and social action can help to build positive relations and break down barriers between people from different backgrounds, they clearly have a valuable role to play as part of wider efforts to build cohesion and resilience within communities to extremism in all its forms.
7. Inter faith activity can also lead to greater community empowerment and civic engagement, as well as improvements in well-being and the creation of opportunities for people to realise their full potential through specific activities to tackle inequality and deprivation. The Government believes that inter faith social action has a particularly valuable role to play. It provides practical opportunities for people from different backgrounds to work together side-by-side with a sense of shared endeavour to address issues of common concern and improve their local neighbourhood.

Levels of activity

8. The UK has been a pioneer in inter faith activity compared to many countries in modern times – an achievement of which all our communities can be proud. There have been significant increases in the level of inter faith activity at both local and national level in recent years and this momentum very much builds upon the decades of work undertaken by faith communities and by faith leaders. In 1942 the Council of Christians and Jews, Britain's oldest national inter faith organisation, was established against the background of the Holocaust and a determination amongst communities to combat prejudice, intolerance and antisemitism. Today there are 45 branches in existence. Other national inter faith organisations include the Three Faiths Forum, established in 1997; Alif-Aleph UK, founded in 2003; and the Christian Muslim Forum, established in 2005.
9. In 1987 the Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom was founded. Government has been a key supporter of the Inter Faith Network in recent years and the Network is the only broad national inter faith linking structure of its kind in the European Union. The Network links representative bodies of the faith communities, national, regional and local inter faith organisations, and educational and academic bodies with a focus on inter faith and multi faith issues. It works with its member bodies to contribute to community cohesion through deepening inter faith understanding and cooperation at all levels.³ The directory of inter faith organisations produced by the Network lists 263 organisations, including 25 national, 14 regional and 217 local inter faith bodies as well as 7 educational and academic institutions with a particular focus on inter faith issues.⁴ Since 2000, 183 new inter faith groups have been established with 52 of these coming into existence since 2005.

³ www.interfaith.org.uk

⁴ *Inter Faith Organisations in the UK: A Directory*, Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom, 2007.

10. We acknowledge and welcome these achievements and the work of national and local inter faith organisations whose aim is to build understanding and respect across a range of faiths. National faith community bodies and organisations are making an important contribution to cohesion by resourcing and supporting inter faith dialogue and social action and encouraging members of their communities to participate. Together they continue to make a real difference in helping to defuse inter-community tensions and build community cohesion by providing advice and information on issues of faith, fostering co-operation on local issues, working jointly on social and educational projects, and informing policy development at the national level.
11. There has been a marked increase in the number of inter faith groups at the local level in particular. Government has contributed to this growth through targeted funding of inter faith activity delivered by faith based organisations and by organisations working with faith communities. Since 2006, the Government has invested £13.8m to enhance the capacity of faith communities to play a full part in civil society and build community cohesion through the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF). This funding has also supported inter faith activities which create trust between different groups as well as joint practical activities that bring faith communities and others together to achieve a shared goal through social action. There is evidence that faith communities are reaching out to people from a range of different faith and ethnic backgrounds: 73 per cent of Christian organisations awarded a large FCCBF grant are engaging with Muslims and 60 per cent with Hindus. 95 per cent of Hindu organisations awarded a small FCCBF grant are engaging with Christians.⁵ The emphasis on integration and cohesion activities has meant that funded organisations are supported in continuing to reach beyond their own faith group.
12. The discussion paper issued in relation to the Third Sector Strategy for Communities and Local Government made clear the priority afforded to supporting the voluntary and community sector to become more sustainable and enterprising. The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom is carrying out research into inter faith activity led by Regional Faith Forums and we have commissioned the Faith Based Regeneration Network to carry out complementary research into Regional Faiths Forums and inter faith social action. The Local Government Association, in partnership with the Inter Faith Network, is also planning research into the involvement of local authorities in local inter faith activity.
13. The Commission on Integration and Cohesion confirmed that inter faith activity has an important role to play as part of work to build integration and cohesion within local communities, and we encourage local authorities and their partners to consider the role that inter faith activity can play as part of wider efforts to build cohesion

⁵ *Response to the Interim Statement of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion*, Community Development Foundation, 2007. This report summarises feedback received by the Community Development Foundation from organisations in receipt of grants from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF) and Connecting Communities Plus

in their local area. In October, Government announced a significant increase in investment from £2m (in 2007/08) to £50m (over the next three years) for the purpose of building cohesion in local areas.

14. Over the winter we intend to review the findings from these pieces of research and have a detailed discussion with the Community Development Foundation about the learning from their evaluation of the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund. We also intend to explore the role that different Government funding programmes might play in supporting increased inter faith activity.
15. Taken together, this research and responses to this consultation will inform our thinking about whether any additional investment might be needed to help secure a more sustainable footing for inter faith activity and how this might be deployed in the most effective way.

Developing a framework for partnership

16. Inter faith activity is dependent upon strong networks and partnerships. We would like to build a framework for partnership within and across faith communities, government, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society which will facilitate and strengthen partnership working. This will consolidate and build upon existing achievements at national, regional and local level. As noted above, we expect the framework to be shaped in particular by the achievements and priorities of the individuals, communities and organisations working to promote inter faith dialogue and social action.
17. This consultation presents us all with a valuable opportunity to reflect on and develop our collective understanding of:
 - our respective roles, networks and relationships and the linkages between these
 - the building blocks which support effective inter faith dialogue and social action
 - the structures and activities already in existence at national, regional and local levels
 - what more is needed to widen and deepen inter faith dialogue and social action.
18. We would also like to use this as an opportunity to learn more about some of the barriers to inter faith activity – with a particular focus on those issues which currently limit the full participation of women and young people – and to hear your ideas about how we might best work together to overcome these.
19. Responses to this consultation will be used by Government and key partners to develop the final strategy and to inform plans for implementation.

Section 1

Building cohesive communities: the role of inter faith dialogue and social action

1.1 A cohesive community is currently defined as a place where there is a sense of belonging for all communities, diversity is appreciated and valued, people from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities and strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds. In its report – *Our Shared Future* – the Commission on Integration and Cohesion proposed that we should adopt a new definition of an integrated and cohesive community as a place where there is:

- a shared contribution to a future vision
- a recognition of the contribution of settled and new communities
- a strong sense of individual rights and responsibilities
- trust in institutions locally to act fairly.

and where

- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities
- there are strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds.

1.2 The principles introduced within the Commission’s proposed new definition are an important step forward. We are currently working with key stakeholders to agree the new definition and expect to publish this in January.

How cohesive are we?

1.3 We currently measure perceptions of cohesion through the Citizenship Survey by asking people “to what extent do you agree or disagree that this local area (within 15/20 minutes walk) is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together?”⁶

⁶ Formerly the Home Office Citizenship Survey, now the responsibility of Communities and Local Government

- 1.4 The national picture is a positive one: in both the 2003 and 2005 surveys 80 per cent of people in England and Wales agreed that their local area was cohesive. This positive trend has continued: early findings from the Citizenship Survey 2007 show that 81 per cent of people feel that individuals from different backgrounds get on well in their area, 85 per cent of people feel they belong strongly to Britain and 77 per cent feel they belong strongly to their neighbourhood.⁷
- 1.5 While there is a lot to be positive about, there is no room for complacency. The Government made clear the priority it affords to building more cohesive, active and empowered communities within the recent Comprehensive Spending Review.⁸ The Government's progress towards achieving this will be measured through the following six indicators:
- the percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area
 - the percentage of people who have meaningful interactions with people from different backgrounds
 - the percentage of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood
 - the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality
 - a thriving third sector
 - the percentage of people who participate in culture or sport.⁹

What factors influence people's perceptions of cohesion?

- 1.6 Analysis of the Communities and Local Government Citizenship Survey 2005 revealed that perceptions of cohesion depend upon a combination of individual characteristics and community-level factors.
- 1.7 Having friends from different ethnic groups is a strong predictor for positive perceptions of cohesion, as is feeling able to influence local decisions. Individuals who engage in formal volunteering are more positive about cohesion, and are likely to feel more empowered, form networks and have more interaction with individuals in their communities that they may not be in contact with otherwise. Disadvantage (whether experienced at an individual or community level, or both) undermines cohesion, but there is evidence that local activity can build resilience to its effects.

⁷ Quarter 1 (April-June 2007) findings from the 2007 Citizenship Survey, Communities and Local Government, October 2007

⁸ PSA Delivery Agreement 21: Build more cohesive, active and empowered communities
www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/E/9/pbr_csr07_psa21.pdf

⁹ Research shows that people taking part in cultural activities were 20 per cent more likely to know 'many people' in their neighbourhood, and 60 per cent more likely to believe that 'many of their neighbours can be trusted'. Taking Part Survey, Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), 2006

Feeling that you would be treated differently because of your ethnicity – particularly when coupled with feelings of racial prejudice has a strong negative influence on perceptions of cohesion.¹⁰

1.8 We also know that meaningful interaction between people from different backgrounds can help address negative attitudes, not only in terms of how they feel towards the specific member of the group that they come into contact with, but towards the group as a whole.¹¹ Contact is meaningful when:

- conversations go beyond surface friendliness; in which people exchange personal information or talk about each other's differences and identities
- people share a common goal or share an interest
- contact is sustained long-term.

1.9 The Commission on Integration and Cohesion highlighted the importance of meaningful interaction, and this is supported by analysis showing that 'bridging' social capital can have a direct and positive impact on cohesion.¹²

What is social capital?

Social capital is the 'social glue' between people, organisations and communities that enable them to work together to pursue shared objectives.

There are three categories of social capital:¹³

- **Bonding** – based upon enduring, multi-faceted relationships between similar people with strong mutual commitments such as among friends, family and other close knit groups
- **Bridging** – formed from the connections between people who have less in common, but may have overlapping interest, for example, between neighbours, colleagues, or between different groups within a community
- **Linking** – derived from links between people or organisations beyond peer boundaries, cutting across status and similarity and enabling people to exert influence and reach outside their normal circles

¹⁰ *Predictors of community cohesion: multi-level modelling of the 2005 Citizenship Survey*, James Laurence and Anthony Heath, 2007

¹¹ *Inter-group contact and integration: When, how, and why?* Professor Miles Hewstone, University of Oxford, Presentation to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, December 13, 2006

¹² *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Robert Putnam, 2000

¹³ *The well-connected community: A networking approach to community development*, Alison Gilchrist, 2004

- 1.10 There is evidence which suggests that the majority of people feel that there is a need for people from different religious and ethnic groups in their local area to mix more. Early findings from the Citizenship Survey 2007 show that 32 per cent think that people mix enough, 65 per cent think they should mix more and 3 per cent think they should mix less.¹⁴ The Government recognises that it cannot force people to interact with others, and would not want to do this. But meaningful interaction doesn't just happen and together we all need to help create the right conditions and opportunities which support people in developing relationships or 'bridging' with people from different backgrounds.
- 1.11 Cohesion can be undermined if communities bond, bridge and link together in an unbalanced way – for example where there is strong 'bonding' social capital within different communities but little 'bridging' social capital to bring them together. The Commission on Integration and Cohesion acknowledged that in some circumstances there is a need to develop bonding capital in the first instance as this can help people to develop the confidence they need to then go on and bridge with people from different backgrounds. In determining the balance between bonding and bridging activity the needs and make up of local communities need to be taken into account.

The role of inter faith dialogue and social action in building 'bridging' and 'linking' social capital

- 1.12 Research carried out for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2006 revealed that:

'Faith communities contribute substantial and distinctive bridging and linking social capital through their co-presence in urban areas, their connecting frameworks, the use of their buildings, the spaces that their associational networks open up, their engagement in governance, and their work across boundaries with others in the public domain'¹⁵.

- 1.13 The rapid increase in the number of local inter faith groups in recent years provides evidence of a clear appetite amongst faith communities to develop strong and sustainable relationships with each other and with wider civil society. The Government is keen to capture and build upon the momentum generated by partners and to use the learning from existing approaches to build a framework for partnership which will increase inter faith dialogue and social action.
- 1.14 The values recognised across a range of traditions, both religious and secular, provide a firm foundation from which bridging social capital can grow and flourish. Significantly, some of these shared values were expressed in the Shared Act of Reflection developed by faith communities for the millennium.

¹⁴ Quarter 1 (April-June 2007) findings from the 2007 Citizenship Survey, Communities and Local Government, October 2007

¹⁵ *Faith as social capital: connecting or dividing?*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2006

Shared Act of Commitment and Reflection by the faith communities of the UK

Faith community representatives:

In a world scarred by the evils of war, racism, injustice and poverty, we offer this joint Act of Commitment as we look to our shared future.

All:

We commit ourselves
as people of many faiths,
to work together
for the common good,
uniting to build a better society,
grounded in values and ideals we share:

community,
personal integrity,
a sense of right and wrong,
learning, wisdom and love of truth,
care and compassion,
justice and peace,
respect for one another,
for the earth and its creatures.

We commit ourselves,
in a spirit of friendship and co-operation,
to work together
alongside all who share our values and ideals,
to help bring about a better world
now and for generations to come.

- 1.15 Shared values such as these can provide a useful platform from which to encourage constructive inter faith dialogue and open debate on the issues where there may be differences. They can also help inform the development of inter faith social action. This might typically involve people of different faiths and none coming together to tackle an issue of shared concern – such as a lack of play opportunities for children – and working together to achieve a positive outcome which benefits the wider local community – such as running an after school club.

- 1.16 Linking social capital enables people to have the confidence and ability to influence the agencies and partnerships responsible for agreeing local and regional priorities and the allocation of resources – such as Local Strategic Partnerships, Urban Regeneration Companies, and Regional Development Agencies. The Government is keen to do what it can to strengthen linking social capital within faith communities in order to help ensure that inter faith social action is as effective as possible in terms of impact, reach and sustainability.
- 1.17 In developing Government policies which encourage inter faith activity, inclusiveness and integration we are in no way attempting to ignore or conceal the distinctiveness of different faiths and beliefs. Integration is not the same as assimilation, and it is important that we work together to tackle such misperceptions.

Section 2

Developing a framework for partnership

- 2.1 There is already a wide range of work being taken forward which directly supports, or is complementary to, inter faith activity. This involves contributions made by many different partners – faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and government – at national, regional and local levels.
- 2.2 This consultation seeks to find out how these partners can best work together to increase inter faith dialogue and social action and ensure that this activity results in tangible and positive change within local communities in terms of increased cohesion, greater community empowerment and resilience to extremism in all its forms.
- 2.3 This will involve understanding what we all can contribute and how we can maximise our collective input. To do this, we need to be clear about what the ‘building blocks’ or factors which enable successful inter faith activity are and what more we might need to do to develop these.
- 2.4 The Government has drawn upon observations made by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion in relation to meaningful contact as well as research carried out for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation into social capital within faith communities¹⁶ and have identified a number of factors which might be seen as building blocks or enabling factors which support effective inter faith activity. These are briefly explored below, and your views are welcome.

1. Structures which facilitate interaction and social action

- 2.5 Research has found that ‘one of the strongest indicators of increasing bridging and linking social capital has been the rapid growth of formal and informal associational structures within and between faith communities and the increasing connections with wider civil society’.¹⁷

¹⁶ *Faith as social capital: connecting or dividing?*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2006

¹⁷ *Ibid*

- 2.6 At national level the Government is currently the main financial sponsor of the Inter Faith Network for the UK which, with its member bodies, promotes, links and supports inter faith work in local communities as well as at regional and national level. The Inter Faith Network: provides information and advice on building good inter faith relations; publishes resources to help people working to promote good inter faith relations and works to strengthen best practice. In addition there are over twenty national inter faith organisations now in existence including Alif-Aleph UK, the Three Faiths Forum and the Christian Muslim Forum.
- 2.7 With the Faiths Forum for London in the process of developing a permanent constitution and structure there will soon be eight Regional Faith Forums in existence. The North East is actively exploring how to set one up. The Regional Faith Forums have created different links and working relationships with regional institutions according to the varying regional needs, circumstances and the resources available. All of the forums aim to provide different faith communities with the opportunity to contribute to decision making at the regional level. Some have specified multi or inter faith dialogue as part of their range of activities. We are currently undertaking research to allow us to have a better understanding of the relationship between the Regional Faith Forums and other regional bodies, and how these relationships might be strengthened.
- 2.8 Locally there are now over 200 inter faith organisations. As with the regional forums, these have different histories, structures and aims, and the resources available to them vary considerably. In some cases, their development has been driven by the local authority – perhaps to support its work on cohesion or regeneration – in others, the impetus and resources have come from faith communities. Many local bodies are affiliated to the Inter Faith Network for the UK. The research we are undertaking as part of the strategy will also enable us to understand the extent to which local authorities are working with local faith communities.

Case Study 1: Structures which facilitate interaction

The Culture, Faith, and Youth Collective is a network of organisations delivering inter faith and cross-cultural programmes with young people in schools, colleges, universities, and youth groups. Their goal is to encourage young people to engage with each other through dialogue and community service projects, in a process that allows them to explore their own and each other's identity.

The collective serves as a vehicle to enable the member organisations to organise work more cohesively. By sharing resources and best practice they will ensure that the programmes and message reach the widest possible audience, whilst avoiding any unnecessary replication of work. Organisations within the collective use a variety of methods to break down barriers and facilitate greater interaction, such as organising cultural events, social action projects, creative arts programmes, and using other non-formal educational tools. By offering a "menu" of programmes, the collective aims to enable young people and those working with young people to choose the programmes that best suit their needs. Inter faith and intercultural work is becoming increasingly important and this is demonstrated by the vast increase in community engagement along these lines over the past few years.

Question 1: Is the balance of structures to facilitate inter faith dialogue and social action at national, regional and local level right?

Question 2: What more is needed at national, regional and local levels to facilitate inter faith interaction and social action?

Question 3: Are different approaches required at national, regional and local levels? What might these consist of? What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society playing?

2. Opportunities for learning which build understanding

- 2.9 Learning about different faiths and beliefs is important as it can help people from different backgrounds to identify the values they hold in common and to have the confidence to engage with others. It can also help to tackle myths and misconceptions which can fuel suspicion, fear and mistrust, and enable people to develop an understanding of the distinctive elements of different beliefs and practices.

- 2.10 Schools have a key role to play in supporting their pupils to develop an understanding of different faiths, including the relationships between faiths and also the relationship between faiths and wider society. Religious education provides an opportunity to learn, not only about religions, but from religions and this is indicated explicitly in the non statutory Religious Education programme of study.
- 2.11 The importance of developing understanding within and between communities is highlighted by the new duty on schools to promote community cohesion and inter faith work is one area through which schools can contribute to this duty. Opportunities for inter faith engagement exist through the curriculum, extra curricula activities and collective worship. School linking is another excellent way in which schools can develop their pupils' understanding of different faiths. The recently launched School Linking Network is bringing together schools of different faiths, settings and ethnic mixes, so that young people from different backgrounds can learn from one other.
- 2.12 Local authorities have a significant role to play in supporting inter faith work in schools. One important way in which this can be achieved is through the support they give for their Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). A SACRE is a locally representative inter faith body whose broad role is to support the effective provision of RE and collective worship in local schools. Examples of good practice by SACREs include facilitating inter faith activities in and between schools.
- 2.13 We have also seen a greater emphasis on inter faith activity in further and higher education, with regional development officers providing support for multi faith student activities and multi faith chaplains encouraging dialogue between students from different backgrounds.
- 2.14 It is important to acknowledge that different beliefs, cultural backgrounds and perspectives can lead to disagreement, tension and even conflict. However it is equally important to recognise that distinctiveness does not automatically mean division and that opportunities to express shared concerns, shared values and to carry out shared activities can bridge potential divides. The Commission on Integration and Cohesion recommended that a programme should be developed to increase religious literacy on the part of public agencies and we are currently considering our response to this.

Case Study 2: Opportunities for learning which build understanding

Building Bridges Pendle has developed an innovative approach to promoting Integration and Cohesion through Inter Faith Education in Primary and Secondary Schools.

Their education programmes are delivered on the ethos of asking pupils to reflect on their 'Faith or human values', which can either be based on Religious teachings or, if pupils do not follow any Religion, they can be based on teachings from their parents or guardians. On the basis of common values which are shared as human beings, the programme brings into the classroom an agenda of real world issues which children can analyse and discuss. Pupils are invited to reflect and assess their personal attitudes towards diversity, regardless of the level of ethnic and faith mix in their school. Are these attitudes amongst those which will lead to positive behaviour promoting respect and tolerance, peace and love? Or are they going to encourage behaviour which will lead to division and conflict? Questions are asked and a space requested where pupils can reflect for themselves on the consequences of not getting on with each other.

Building Bridges Pendle aims through the delivery of these programmes to reinforce a concept to young people that their actions and attitudes will impact on the future of community relations in their school, in their neighbourhood and in the wider society. They present a vision of what the probable outcomes of their attitudes towards diversity will be – either they will grow up into a community where there is integration and cohesion, or they will grow up into a community where there is conflict, hatred, misunderstanding and division. The choice is theirs.

Question 4: Are there appropriate opportunities in your community and your local area to learn about different faiths and beliefs?

Question 5: How do we improve opportunities for learning about different religions and beliefs and build on existing best practice?

Question 6: How best can different faith communities work together whilst retaining their distinctiveness?

Question 7: How can the lessons learned and experiences gained from inter faith dialogue and social action help to build relationships with people from different communities more widely?

Question 8: What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society playing in building understanding about different beliefs and practices?

3. Shared spaces for interaction and social action

- 2.15 The Commission on Integration and Cohesion identified that shared spaces – including parks, leisure centres, and shops, as well as transport networks – that are safe and well managed are important in encouraging interaction and in creating opportunities for people to pursue shared activities.
- 2.16 There are approximately 54,000 places of worship in the UK and they are found in all parts of all our communities from large cities to small rural villages. These spaces are used by many communities, not just faith communities, and often function as the primary resources and buildings for community spaces and essential meeting places.
- 2.17 Evaluation of the first round of the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF) carried out by the Community Development Foundation found that many of the organisations funded created ‘everyday, often unintentional, spaces that promote integration, create safe, free and active spaces, and provide opportunities for expression, empowerment and support.’¹⁸ The evaluation also found that there was also a need for women only spaces and provision of safe spaces for young people.

Case Study 3: Shared spaces for interaction and social action

Stranton Church, Hartlepool, Church of England (North East). The grant from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund supported work on the Burbank Estate, which is one of the most deprived areas of the country. The grant was used to:

- Create a new residents’ group to represent the 1,500 people who live on the estate. The Burbank Uniting Residents Together group represents and serves the whole population of the estate and plays a key role in fostering better community relations.
- Support a community garden initiative. A new community garden was created and is now maintained by residents, with support from the local authority.
- Organise a new ‘reclaim the back lane’ initiative to establish safe areas for residents and their children. This initiative was carried out by community volunteers and the local authority.
- Set up an after school club to support school children and a new project for young people to foster their input into the local community.

This work helped to establish good working relationships with local agencies, including the local authority, housing associations, the police and local schools.

¹⁸ *Faith based organisations and the hidden power of local community spaces*, Malcolm James, Community Development Foundation, July 2007

- 2.18 The Local Government White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* recognised that when given the right opportunities more and more people proactively help to make their neighbourhood a better place to live. One of the ways this is being done is through communities taking over the ownership or management of a public asset such as a community centre, redundant school building, swimming pool or green space, to ensure that it is used in a way that best serves the needs and interests of the local community.
- 2.19 The Government asked Barry Quirk, Chief Executive of the London Borough of Lewisham, to lead a review to help ensure that existing powers and policies that support community ownership or management of assets are effective and that practical ways are found to overcome any remaining unnecessary barriers. *Making Assets Work: the Quirk Review of community management and ownership of public assets* was presented to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in May 2007.¹⁹ The Review recognised the contribution that shared use of public assets or spaces can make to cohesion by creating opportunities for people from different backgrounds to come together, and that asset ownership can have a major effect in building community confidence and a sense of worth. The Government has accepted the recommendations of the review, and implementation is now underway.²⁰

Question 9: What spaces are being used by faith communities for inter faith dialogue and social action?

Question 10: What barriers are there to sharing spaces?

Question 11: What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society playing to create shared spaces?

4. Confidence and skills to bridge and link

- 2.20 Moving from 'bonding' social capital to 'bridging' and 'linking' requires confidence and knowledge both to reach out beyond the familiar in the first place, and then establish and sustain a meaningful and purposeful relationship with others.
- 2.21 There are some measures being undertaken to develop leadership within faith communities. For example the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and Communities and Local Government are currently working with the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) to deliver a fully-accredited

¹⁹ *Making assets work: The Quirk Review of community management and ownership of public assets* www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/makingassetswork

²⁰ *Opening the transfer window: The government's response to the Quirk Review of Community management and ownership of public assets* www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/322579

Continuous Professional Development Programme for Faith Leaders. This course will help faith leaders and workers understand their responsibilities relating to a number of areas including developing the skills to engage with communities more effectively.

- 2.22 However there is also a need to develop confidence in communities as a whole and there may be a need for communities and Government to challenge the perspective that distinctiveness will be lost or assimilated through interactions with other strong identities.
- 2.23 We know that faith is an important driver behind volunteering and civil renewal activities. The 2005 Citizenship Survey found that 52 per cent of people who actively practised a religion participated in civic activism and civic consultation compared to 45 per cent of people who did not.²¹ There are over 23,000 religious charities working in England and Wales and many faith-based organisations play an important and distinctive role in the voluntary and community sector providing essential services to local communities. Research has shown that the faith based and inter faith organisations rely heavily upon volunteers and that there is a need to support and develop access to existing voluntary and community sector/third sector networks. However there is some anecdotal evidence that working in partnership with these networks can at times be difficult.
- 2.24 We have been working with the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action and the Church Urban Fund on producing a short leaflet of case studies and good practice guidance for partnership working between voluntary and community sector and other third sector infrastructure bodies and local faith communities.
- 2.25 The recent consultation on the future role of the third sector in social and economic regeneration highlighted that faith based organisations (amongst others) felt that they are disadvantaged, particularly in relation to accessing mainstream grant funding.²² The Commission on Integration and Cohesion also recognised this as an issue and recommended that a set of clear guidelines be developed to enable Local Authorities and others to award public service contracts to faith based bodies. The Commission identified that the Faithworks Charter²³ illustrates some of the ground it would be useful to explore. The Government hopes to make a response to this recommendation in January 2008.
- 2.26 In October 2007, Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Association published *An Action Plan for Community Empowerment: Building on success*. This sets out a joint action plan for widening and deepening empowerment

²¹ Citizenship Survey, Home Office/Communities and Local Government, 2005. Civil renewal activities include: civic activism (involvement in decision making about local issues or services, or the actual provision of these services); civic consultation (active engagement in a consultation about local services); and civic participation (wider forms of engagement in democratic processes, eg contacting an elected representative or signing a petition)

²² www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/third_sector_review/Third_sector_review_final_report.aspx

²³ www.faithworks.info/Standard.asp?id=7432

opportunities locally; supporting and enabling people to take up empowerment opportunities; and strengthening local representative democracy. It contains over 20 actions towards giving citizens and communities a greater say in the policies and services that affect them and their local areas, and feedback will be used to shape the ongoing cross-government programme. Comments and views are requested by 19 January 2008. You can find out more about the Action Plan and details of how to feed in your views here:

www.communities.gov.uk/communities/communityempowerment/actionplan/

2.27 We will be exploring how the actions set out in the Action Plan can help support increased inter faith activity at the local level, and encourage you to contribute your views.

2.28 The Local Government White Paper: *Strong and Prosperous Communities* included a commitment to ensure the sound involvement of the third sector in local strategic partnerships (LSPs). To help fulfil this commitment, Communities and Local Government has recently opened consultation on a draft document entitled *Principles of representation: A framework for effective third sector participation in Local Strategic Partnerships*. This makes reference to two key reports into the involvement of faith communities in LSPs.²⁴ Faith communities are encouraged to contribute to that consultation which is open until 12 February 2008. Further details about the consultation can be found here:

www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/principlesofrepresentation

Case Study 4: Developing the skills and confidence to bridge and link

The Churches' Regional Commission in the North East (FINER Project)

helped faith communities in the North East have a better understanding of how they can engage effectively with local authorities and public services. The project organised a number of events and workshops for faith communities, local authorities, public and voluntary sector organisations. The main aim of these events was to engage faith communities in strategic planning and to develop a coherent strategy of engagement for the North East faith sector. Through participating in these events many faith communities developed a better understanding of how they could contribute to local strategic agendas; the events also helped to increase the 'religious literacy' in civic structures. The workshops fostered discussion and dialogue and enabled the faith and the public sector representatives to meet and explore opportunities for their future work together.

²⁴ The two reports referenced are: *Faith in LSPs?*, Churches Regional Network, December 2006 (this relates to faith involvement in LSPs in the North West, London, East of England and North East); and, *Faithful Representation: faith representatives on local public partnerships*, Church Urban Fund, September 2006

Question 12: Access to funding, leadership skills, and misconceptions about the role of faith in public life have all been recognised as issues which can limit the ability of faith communities to bridge and link. Are there other barriers in your community or local area which need to be overcome? Who needs to take action, and what do they need to do?

Question 13: To what extent does inter faith social action in your local area enable you to work side by side with people who have no religious belief? How might social action involving faith communities and wider civil society be increased and strengthened?

Question 14: What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society playing to increase the level and scope of inter faith social action?

Question 15: How are you promoting and encouraging inter faith activity and sharing best practice? What are the best ways of encouraging more people to take part? What role might Government play to champion this?

The challenges and barriers to inter faith activity experienced by women and young people

Specific barriers experienced by women

- 2.29 Research carried out by the Inter Faith Network has revealed that women who seek to play a full role in inter faith activity often face a number of barriers including lack of time, lack of support from their family and the wider community, and the ways and attitudes of some men.²⁵ Other issues identified include the small number of female faith leaders, cultural and language barriers, lack of knowledge or misinformation about other faith groups and lack of leadership skills.
- 2.30 The barriers experienced by some women in participating in inter faith activity has led to suggestions that there is a need for them to create their own spaces for inter faith activity with minimal involvement from men. The provision of some 'women only' inter faith activities may also help to engage a greater number of women, particularly those who may find it difficult to access activities where men are present. At the same time, communities and public bodies need to identify ways in which women can be empowered to participate in general inter faith activity.

²⁵ *Women's Inter Faith Initiatives in the UK: A Survey*, A report by Fatheena Mubarak for the Inter Faith Network for the UK, 2006

- 2.31 There are inter faith initiatives which aim to empower women, and as a result of the support received from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF), more projects are supporting women in learning new skills, building networks, increasing their social capital, taking on leadership roles and influencing decision making²⁶. This has led to women feeling better able to effect change in their local area. Organisations supported by the FCCBF have also demonstrated they can act as spaces of active engagement for women –within both their own communities and their wider local community.

Case study 5: Women taking part in inter faith activity

Fusion Youth Project, West Midlands

Fusion Youth Project, West Midlands has developed services that enable young women of different faiths to access information and develop skills so that they are empowered to help themselves. It also helps young people to become aware of their role and contribution within their local areas, which will help support community cohesion. Jane Andrews, Senior Youth Worker explained: *‘Fusion Youth Project works with young women from many faith traditions. The project helps the teenage young women to develop their self-esteem and establish their identity both as an individual and as part of the communities they belong to. The provision of self-help groups aids them through this period of their lives and equips them to deal with conflict and tensions which they might face in the future.’*

Question 16: How might the barriers experienced by women be overcome?

Question 17: What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society playing in overcoming these?

Specific barriers experienced by young people

- 2.32 Inter faith activity can offer young people ‘vehicles’ to deliver outcomes such as regeneration projects and community based initiatives. It can also be an effective way of giving leadership skills and opportunities to young people, delivering services which benefit the wider community, promoting cohesion and breaking down barriers. It is therefore vital that opportunities are available for young people to take part in inter faith dialogue and social action.
- 2.33 Research carried out by the Community Development Foundation into the impact of FCCBF funded projects revealed that young people often feel that they are not listened to, that their views do not count, and that they lack the experience to get involved. Organisations supported by FCCBF have acted as focal points of

²⁶ www.cdf.org.uk/SITE/UPLOAD/DOCUMENT/Research%20and%20Evaluation/report_surveys_of_women_final_version.pdf

active engagement and participation both within faith groups and with the wider community - leading to feelings of empowerment and a better perception of the ability of young people to effect change.

Case Study 6: Young people taking part in inter faith activity

Youth Association South Yorkshire (YASY) has been awarded a grant from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund to work with young people in the multi-cultural community of Darnall in East Sheffield. Through a range of events, workshops and activities, young people have been able to find creative ways of working together to benefit the communities in which they live. The young people have produced their own DVD and have learned to communicate their ideas through different media. The project has helped many young participants to gain confidence, develop skills and value their achievements. One of the young women who has now been awarded a Community Champions grant to develop a city-wide young people's inter-faith group commented: *'Young people are in the heart of our project; they are involved in planning and running of the project's activities and their views are valued. We focus our work on creating shared experiences for them.'*

- 2.34 The Government believes it is important to address the barriers to full participation experienced by young people and empower them to play a positive role in the design and delivery of inter faith activity. Attention should be given to the provision of appropriately signposted spaces that young people deem to be safe and engaging - and that capitalise on their potential to participate in civil renewal and empowerment activities.
- 2.35 In July 2007, the Government published *Aiming high for young people: a ten year strategy for positive activities*. This aims to ensure that all young people have access to the support and opportunities they want and need to make a positive contribution to society. The strategy identified that positive activities, particularly volunteering and inter-generational activities, can help to build better relations across the generations and between different groups of young people. Over the winter we will be exploring how the strategy might support the greater involvement of young people in inter faith activities.

Question 18: How might the barriers experienced by young people be overcome?

Question 19: What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society playing in overcoming these?

Developing the evidence base for inter faith activity

- 2.36 In order to develop our understanding of how we can all better support inter faith social action, we have commissioned the Faith Based Regeneration Network to carry out a short piece of research to explore the contribution that faith based social action makes to bridging and linking social capital.
- 2.37 The Inter Faith Network is working with the Faith Based Regeneration Network on two inter related pieces of research exploring the role of Regional Faith Forums in relation to inter faith dialogue and social action, and the relationships between Regional Faith Forums and other regional bodies.
- 2.38 The Local Government Association, in partnership with the Inter Faith Network, is also planning research to explore the involvement of local authorities in local inter faith activity.
- 2.39 We will use the findings from these pieces of research and your responses to this consultation paper to inform the framework for partnership.

Question 20: What can successful existing approaches tell us about the key building blocks needed for inter faith dialogue and social action?

Section 3

Next steps

We are working to publish a final strategy in late Spring 2008 as follows:

17th December 2007	Consultation opens
February 2008	Findings from research into Regional Faith Forums and Inter faith social action expected
7th March 2008	Consultation closes
Late Spring 2008	Publish final strategy and summary of consultation responses
By end 2008	Detailed implementation underway

Section 4

Your views

The consultation period runs from 17th December 2007 to 7th March 2008.

Responses to this consultation will be used by Government and key partners to develop the final strategy and to inform plans for implementation. If you do not wish your response to be shared with non-Government partners in this way please make this clear in your response.

You can read this discussion paper and download a consultation response form through the Communities and Local Government web site:

www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/publications/consultations

Please send your comments by email to:

interfaith@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Or by post to:

Towards a framework for inter faith dialogue and social action
Department for Communities and Local Government
7th Floor
Zone H9
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU

Any queries about this discussion paper should be sent to this address, or, preferably, to the email address above.

Hard copies are available from Communities and Local Government Publications PO Box 236, Wetherby, West Yorkshire LS23 7NB. Tel: 08701 226 236. Fax: 08701 226 237.

Email: communities@twoten.com

A summary of responses to this consultation will be published by 1 June 2008 on the Communities and Local Government website: www.communities.gov.uk

Section 5

The consultation criteria

- 5.1 The Government has adopted a code of practice on consultations.
- 5.2 The criteria below apply to all UK national public consultations on the basis of a document in electronic or printed form. They will often be relevant to other sorts of consultation. Though they have no legal force, and cannot prevail over statutory or other mandatory external requirements (eg, under European Community Law), they should otherwise generally be regarded as binding on UK departments and their agencies, unless ministers conclude that exceptional circumstances require a departure.
1. Consult widely throughout the process, allowing a minimum of 12 weeks for written consultation at least once during the development of the policy.
 2. Be clear about what your proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses.
 3. Ensure that your consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible.
 4. Give feedback regarding the responses received and how the consultation process influenced the policy.
 5. Monitor your department's effectiveness at consultation, including through the use of a designated consultation co-ordinator.
 6. Ensure your consultation follows better regulation best practice, including carrying out an Impact Assessment if appropriate.
- 5.3 The full consultation code may be viewed at:
www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/Consultation/Introduction.htm

- 5.4 Are you satisfied that this consultation has followed these criteria? If not, or you have any other observations about ways of improving the consultation process please contact:

Albert Joyce
Communities and Local Government Consultation Co-ordinator
Zone 6/H10
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

or by e-mail to:
albert.joyce@communities.gsi.gov.uk

- 5.5 Please note that responses to the consultation itself should be sent to the addresses shown in Section 4.