

The  
Faith  
& Belief  
Forum



# Bursting the Bubble

Recommendations for enhancing  
Inter Faith Week in England

# Contents

5	Foreword
6	Executive Summary
8	Background
10	Methodology
12	Engagement Statistics
16	Research Findings
43	Distinct Voices
48	Key Themes
50	Conclusion
51	Recommendations
54	Thanks and Credits
55	Bibliography and Further Reading

# Foreword

**Over 50% of people in the UK identify as having some sort of faith or belief.<sup>1</sup> There is no doubt that the diversity of faiths and beliefs represented in this country, and the values that they have instilled, contribute significantly to private and public life.**

Within this context, one of the features of modern British society of which we can be justly proud is the breadth and strength of the interfaith movement. There is a rich history of organisations and programmes working to improve understanding between people of different faiths and beliefs. There are now some 200 active groups at local, regional and national level, working in a variety of different contexts and settings, including in local communities, schools and universities. These groups provide countless opportunities to get to know our neighbour, in a spirit of friendly and respectful inquiry. This work plays a key role in promoting social cohesion and belonging in the UK.

The interfaith movement has faced several challenges over the last few years. The ongoing conflict in the Middle East and disturbances in some British cities have left interfaith practitioners, activists and enthusiasts feeling disheartened, unsupported, fearful for the future, and in some cases reluctant to continue their work. Reflecting on the disturbances of Summer 2024, one interfaith practitioner remarked, "Some who have spent years working in interfaith have stepped away. It's too fraught, the fault lines are too volatile, and the danger of personal blowback is too great." Spring 2024 also saw the closure of Inter Faith Network for the UK, which since its establishment in 1987 had worked tirelessly to encourage, resource and link interfaith activity across the UK.

Since 2009, one of the key fixtures of the interfaith calendar in England has been Inter Faith Week every November. Coordinated by the Inter Faith Network, the Week has served remarkably well as a showcase and stimulus for interfaith encounter, dialogue and social action. Following the closure of the Inter Faith Network, it is encouraging that an ad hoc group of national interfaith organisations was able to work collectively to ensure that Inter Faith Week 2024 could take place. It is welcomed that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government supported the delivery of Inter Faith Week 2024 through a grant, and has further supported the joint working that has led to the following report.

This report has made clear that an annual Inter Faith Week should remain a viable and important focus for interfaith activity in the UK. Through patient, inclusive and sensitive outreach, the interfaith movement can not only recover following the challenges described above, but can continue to play a central role in the wellbeing of society. I commend the following report to policy-makers, faith and belief leaders, and to all interfaith practitioners, activists and enthusiasts who are committed to achieving these outcomes.



**Rt Revd Dr Michael Igrave,  
Bishop of Lichfield**

*Michael Igrave*

<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics, statistical bulletin, Religion, England and Wales: Census 2021 (29 November 2022)  
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021>

# Executive Summary

## Background

Since 2009, one of the key fixtures of the calendar for interfaith practitioners in the UK has been Inter Faith Week. Held every November, the Week was established by the Inter Faith Network for the UK, and provides an opportunity to showcase the diverse interfaith and multifaith work that happens around the UK through the rest of the year, and to get people involved in such activities for the first time. It is celebrated by faith and belief communities, interfaith bodies, schools and universities, local authorities, community and voluntary groups, workplaces, and many others. Over the last five years, the number of events held every year has grown, reaching over 1,100 in 2023.

Following the closure of the Inter Faith Network in Spring 2024, several national interfaith organisations came together in Summer 2024 to form an ad hoc steering group to help ensure that Inter Faith Week could take place in November 2024. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) facilitated this process with a grant. After Inter Faith Week 2024, MHCLG provided another grant to enable research to be conducted on Inter Faith Week, the findings of which are summarised in this report.

The consultation was led by the Faith & Belief Forum, in partnership with the ad hoc steering group, with the primary aim to enable a creative, inclusive dialogue amongst key UK-wide stakeholders to shape the future of Inter Faith Week 2025 and beyond. The specific objectives are set out in the background section.

The following report presents the research findings and several case studies. It also contains recommendations: to national, regional and local interfaith bodies; to central government and local authorities; and to national faith and belief organisations.

## Key themes

Several key themes have emerged from the research findings, including:

- The **positive impact and importance** of interfaith work and Inter Faith Week.
- There is a **huge variety of interfaith work** across the country with widely **differing approaches and motivations**, both during Inter Faith Week and through the rest of the year.
- The biggest **factors limiting the impact and reach** of Inter Faith Week are:
  - Negative public perception of religion, faith and belief, partially caused by negative and sensational media coverage and the rise of faith based hate.
  - The 'interfaith bubble', caused by the fact that many of the people involved in Inter Faith Week are already involved in and committed to interfaith work.
  - Limited funding and resources, including for staffing, running events and promotion.
  - Limited institutional support, including from national and local government, national faith and belief organisations, schools and the media.
- There is disagreement in the interfaith movement about **terminology and the November timing** of Inter Faith Week.

- Inter Faith Week could be **improved by**:
  - Expanding the scope to better include smaller faith and belief communities and non-religious worldviews, whilst protecting the distinct space for people of different faiths and beliefs coming together.
  - Expanding the reach to individuals and local faith and belief communities beyond those who are in the 'interfaith bubble' and already involved in and committed to interfaith work.
  - Integrating existing work in schools and universities with work in local communities and vice versa, to broaden engagement with children and young people.
  - Extending the impact of the Week throughout the year, through continuing engagement and programmes.
  - Establishing a national coordination mechanism to support local grassroots work through resource creation and distribution, funding, expertise, training, and the sharing of best practice and positive stories.
  - Generating buy-in and support from outside the interfaith movement, for example national and local government, national faith and belief organisations, schools and educational bodies, and the media.

## Recommendations

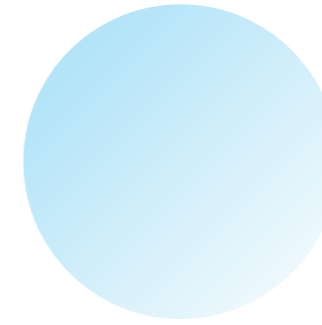
The report concludes with a set of recommendations, based on the key themes, which are addressed to three audiences: to national, regional and local interfaith bodies; to central government and local authorities; and to national faith and belief organisations.

Recommendations focus on expanding and extending the reach and impact of Inter Faith Week, and subsequently the broader interfaith movement, through funding and resourcing, and wider institutional support and buy-in.

Collaboration, creativity and courage are the principles underlying the recommendations. We hope that these principles will be shared by all who engage in interfaith work and activity.

**The recommendations are featured at the end of this report, on pages 51-53**

# Background



**For the purposes of this report, the term “interfaith” (sometimes referred to as “inter faith” or “inter-faith”) refers to all intentional engagement between people of different faiths, beliefs and non-religious worldviews, incorporating a variety of different events, programmes and methodologies, including encounter, dialogue and social action.**

Since 2009, one of the key fixtures of the interfaith calendar has been Inter Faith Week every November. Inspired by Scottish Interfaith Week that was founded in 2004 by Interfaith Scotland, and following the 2008 Department for Communities and Local Government report (now MHCLG), *Face to Face and Side by Side: A framework for partnership in our multi-faith society*, Inter Faith Week was established with the following aims:

- Strengthening good inter faith relations at all levels
- Increasing awareness of the different and distinct faith communities in the UK, in particular celebrating and building on the contribution which their members make to their neighbourhoods and to wider society
- Increasing understanding between people of religious and non-religious beliefs

Inter Faith Week sits within a rich and evolving history of interfaith activity in the UK, from early efforts to foster mutual understanding to today’s wider, more grassroots approaches that reflect the diversity and complexity of modern society. Inter Faith Week creates the opportunity to showcase the diverse work that happens through the rest of the year, to get people involved in interfaith activity for the first time, and to build momentum for the interfaith movement.

Inter Faith Week is celebrated in and by a variety of different contexts, including faith and belief communities, interfaith bodies, schools, universities, local authorities, community and voluntary groups, businesses and workplaces, and many others. Over the last five years, the number of events every year has grown, reaching over 1,100 in 2023.<sup>2</sup>

Following the closure of the Inter Faith Network in Spring 2024, several national interfaith organisations came together in Summer 2024 to form an ad hoc steering group to help ensure that Inter Faith Week could take place in November 2024. Further meetings followed and those participating became known as the ad hoc steering group for Inter Faith Week. Those involved were the Faith & Belief Forum (F&BF), United Religions Initiative UK (URI UK), the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ), Religions for Peace UK, Mitzvah Day, the All Faiths Network and the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (NASACRE). Individual organisations took responsibility for specific tasks: URI UK updated the Inter Faith Week website, uploaded new resources and created a tailored resource pack for local interfaith bodies; F&BF and NASACRE jointly developed a website of resources to be used in schools and encouraged activities in educational settings; and the All Faiths Network took charge of mailings to the Inter Faith Week contact database and responding to queries. MHCLG facilitated this process with a grant to cover staff time, website costs and travel expenses.

After Inter Faith Week 2024, MHCLG provided another grant to enable research to be conducted on Inter Faith Week, to understand perspectives on and experiences of Inter Faith Week and to help determine the government’s role in supporting it. The findings of this research are summarised in this report.

The consultation was led by the Faith & Belief Forum, in partnership with the ad hoc steering group, with the primary aim to enable a creative, inclusive dialogue amongst key UK-wide stakeholders to shape the future of Inter Faith Week 2025 and beyond. The specific objectives were:

- To understand the engagement with Inter Faith Week 2024
- To understand what lessons were learned from undertaking Inter Faith Week 2024 in the new post-Inter Faith Network context
- To learn and share what the barriers are to effective interfaith engagement across the UK
- To identify ways that the interfaith movement needs to strengthen
- To consult on and clarify what the government’s role should be in the interfaith movement, alongside the role of other major actors
- To build commitment and coalition around Inter Faith Week 2025 and future Weeks

The consultation and this report reflect a co-production approach between the F&BF, the ad hoc steering group, regional partners and various key stakeholders in the interfaith movement. Whilst commissioned by MHCLG, its provenance lies within the interfaith movement itself and it should not be read as a neutral third-party assessment.

As well as presenting the research findings and a series of case studies, the report proposes a series of recommendations: to national, regional and local interfaith bodies; to central government and local authorities; and to national faith and belief organisations.

If these recommendations can be channelled into a practical and resourced plan, then a secure future can be achieved for Inter Faith Week as part of the landscape of developing interfaith understanding in the UK.

<sup>2</sup> The Inter Faith Network for the UK, *2021 / 2024 : A Closing Review* [interfaith.org.uk/uploads/IFN\\_Review\\_2021-24.pdf](https://interfaith.org.uk/uploads/IFN_Review_2021-24.pdf)

# Methodology

The primary aim of the research was to enable a creative, inclusive dialogue amongst key UK-wide stakeholders to shape the future of Inter Faith Week 2025 and beyond.

To achieve this, qualitative data was gathered through workshops and an online questionnaire. Data collection happened across four weeks between 20 January and 14 February 2025. The **online questionnaire** was open for the entire four weeks, and a total of **15 workshops** took place in person across the country and online.

Due to 'faith and belief' being a devolved issue, the focus of the consultation was on the future of Inter Faith Week in England specifically. **Six of the workshops were held in person**, in different regions around the country: London, Cambridge (for the East of England), Bristol (for the South West), Sandwell (for the West and East Midlands), Manchester (for the North West) and Durham (for the North East). For these workshops, we partnered with local, regional or national interfaith organisations to organise the logistics, promote the workshop to local stakeholders and co-deliver the workshop on the day. This model of working with regional partners was a resounding success, allowing us to harness rich local knowledge and relationships built over many years of diligent interfaith work. We would not have been able to engage as meaningfully at the local level without the support of the regional partners.

**Three online workshops** were conducted that were open to all. **A further six workshops** were conducted for specific stakeholder groups: those working or volunteering at interfaith organisations, those working in schools and education, young people aged 18 to 35, the Faith & Belief Policy Collective,<sup>3</sup> interfaith practitioners in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and MHCLG.

The combination of the questionnaire and workshops allowed a variety of stakeholders across the interfaith movement to participate, ensuring that a broad range of perspectives and experiences were captured. The sole criterion for participation was involvement in the interfaith movement. Promotion was mostly done through the personal and professional networks of the ad hoc steering group, as well as through the Inter Faith Week mailing list. Most sign-ups came through personal email invitations and direct messages on LinkedIn and WhatsApp, highlighting the importance of personal relationships in the interfaith movement.

To simplify data analysis, the questionnaire and workshops used the same eight questions, which were designed in collaboration with MHCLG and the ad hoc steering group. The questions were tested with MHCLG data analysts to ensure they would reap fruitful and diverse responses.

Once data collection was complete, responses from the questionnaire and workshops were inputted into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package, for thematic analysis. Our thanks go to the officials at MHCLG who processed the data for us, and generated initial emerging findings.

Following this, the ad hoc steering group (along with several additional attendees to ensure a diverse range of perspectives and experiences of the interfaith movement), gathered on 26 February to reflect on and fine-tune the key themes emerging from the research. Together with fuller analysis of the responses to the eight individual questions, these key themes make up the body of this report.

A set of recommendations was also discussed and drafted based on the key themes, which are addressed to three audiences: to national, regional and local interfaith bodies; to central government and local authorities; and to national faith and belief organisations. The recommendations are featured at the end of this report.

Since the movement is incredibly diverse, the key themes and recommendations will not represent all experiences, but broadly reflect the movement as a whole.

Whilst the questionnaire and online workshops attempted to capture the views of as many people as possible, the tight project timeline and budget of this consultation meant that some voices were missed. We very much regret that some important interfaith practitioners were unaware of the consultation until mid-way through, and that we were not able to conduct workshops in all geographical areas with significant levels of interfaith activity, in particular in Yorkshire and the Humber, and the South Coast.

Despite this, we are proud of the consultation that was conducted. We believe that the workshops and questionnaire captured a variety of different perspectives, and that the findings reflect the current state and demographics of the movement. There is little research to show the reach and impact of Inter Faith Week and the interfaith movement more broadly, and we hope that this report will contribute to filling that research gap.

This consultation has been an example of action research, in two main ways: firstly, by working in collaboration with those actively involved in the interfaith movement, through the ad hoc steering group and regional partners; and secondly, by using the opportunity of the workshops to inspire participants to increase their involvement in interfaith activity.



<sup>3</sup>The Faith & Belief Policy Collective is an emerging group of diverse faith and belief voices interested in contributing to the policy debate on how to build a resilient, inclusive and flourishing Britain. It was initially convened by the Faith & Belief Forum (F&BF) and the Faiths and Civil Society Unit (FCSU), Goldsmiths, University of London. Administrative capacity is provided by F&BF.

# Engagement Statistics

## Basic Engagement Statistics:

Questionnaire entries:

164

Total workshops:

15

Total workshop sign-ups:

365

Total workshop attendees:

298

(80% of sign-ups)

Post-workshop Equality, Diversity & Inclusion form entries:

212

(75% of attendees)

Total participants (questionnaire and workshops):

462

Facilitators:

18

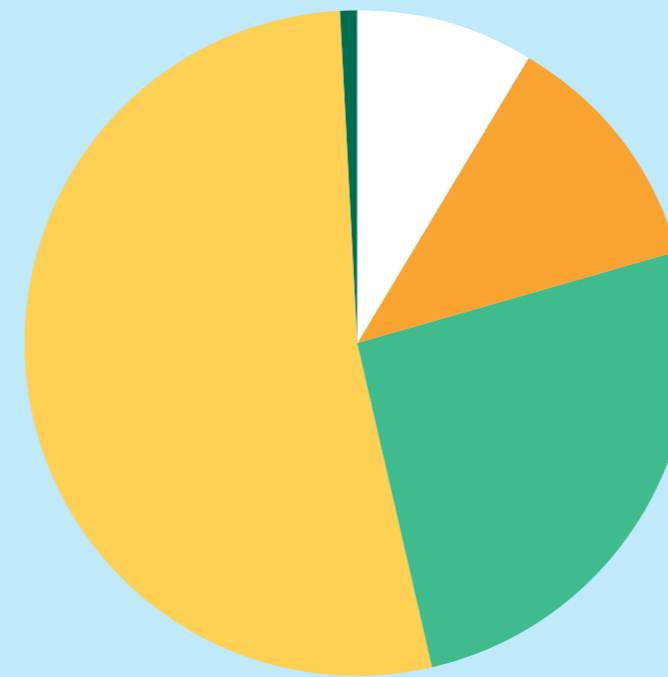
(12 Faith & Belief Forum staff and 6 regional partners)

The data below is taken from the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion form completed by participants after the workshops and at the end of the questionnaire. Not all participants completed this, but it broadly reflects the participation in the consultation.

## UK Region:

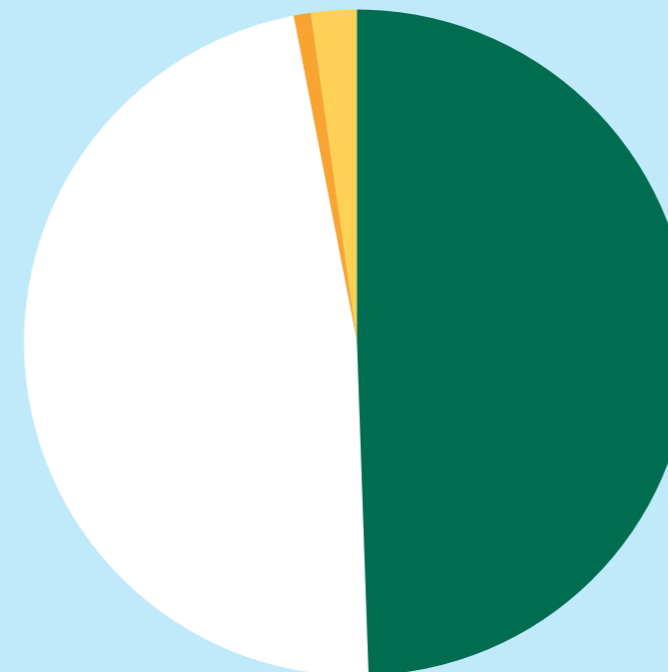
Options	Count	Percent
East Midlands	13	3.46%
East of England	43	11.44%
London	97	25.80%
North East	32	8.51%
North West	29	7.71%
Northern Ireland	0	0.00%
Scotland	11	2.93%
South East	49	13.03%
South West	35	9.31%
Wales	7	1.86%
West Midlands	34	9.04%
Yorkshire and The Humber	26	6.91%

## Age:



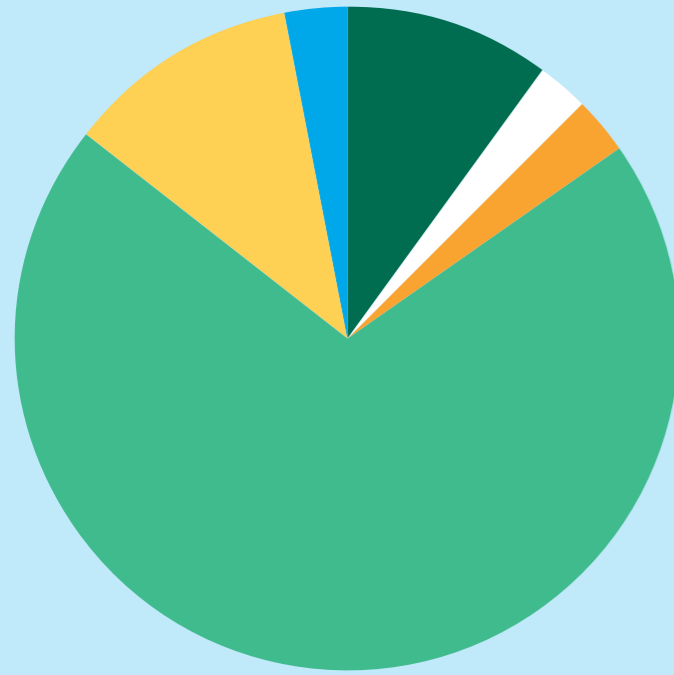
Options	Count	Percent
Under 18	0	0.00%
18 - 30	33	8.78%
31 - 45	45	11.97%
46 - 60	97	25.80%
Over 60	198	52.66%
Prefer not to say	3	0.80%

## Gender:



Options	Count	Percent
Female / woman	200	53.19%
Male / man	191	50.80%
Other / prefer to self-describe	4	1.06%
Prefer not to say	8	0.80%

## Ethnicity:



Options	Count	Percent
Asian, Asian British or Asian Other	39	10.37%
Black, Black British, Black Other, Caribbean or African	10	2.66%
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	11	2.93%
White, White British, or White Other	271	72.07%
Other / prefer to self-describe	44	11.70%
Prefer not to say	11	2.93%

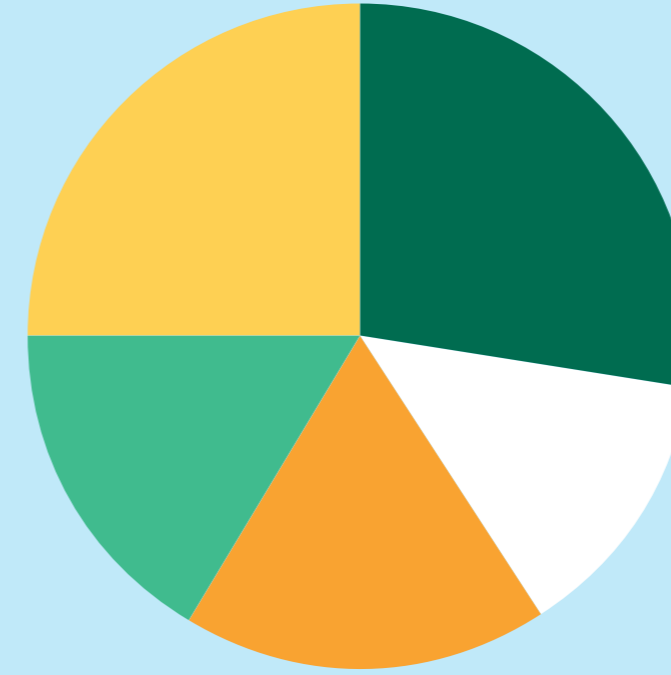
'Self-describe' included a variety of ethnicities and nationalities as well as mixed backgrounds.

## Faith and belief:

Options	Count	Percent
Agnostic	6	1.60%
Atheist	6	1.60%
Baha'i	23	6.12%
Buddhist	9	2.39%
Christian	161	42.82%
Hindu	11	2.93%
Humanist	13	3.46%
Jain	2	0.53%
Jewish	35	9.31%
Muslim	41	10.90%
Non-religious	4	1.06%
Sikh	8	2.13%
Spiritual	8	2.13%
Undefined	5	1.33%
Zoroastrian	1	0.27%
Mixed / Other / prefer to self-describe	51	13.56%
Prefer not to say	3	0.80%

'Self-describe' included: a variety of specific denominations and sects (including Protestant, Catholic, Progressive Christian, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Quaker, Unitarian, Nichiren Buddhist, Seventh Day Adventist); a variety of minority religions, faiths, beliefs and non-religious worldviews (including Pagan, Sentientism, Church of Scientology); as well as a variety of mixed faith and belief backgrounds (including 'Muslim Christian background', 'Christian Humanist', 'Practicing Buddhist Culturally Jewish').

## Role in the interfaith movement:



Options	Count	Percent
Interfaith enthusiast	165	43.88%
Paid staff or trustee at interfaith organisation or charity	79	21.01%
Volunteer at interfaith organisation or charity	106	28.19%
Participant in interfaith organisation or charity	97	25.80%
Member of local interfaith forum/network/council	149	39.63%

Respondents were encouraged to tick multiple boxes. Nearly 40% said they held multiple roles in the interfaith movement. In the 'self-describe' box, some respondents shared personal data, which we have anonymised for confidentiality reasons.

The responses given included:

- Academic
- SACRE member
- Community and bridge-building focused charity
- Youth focused charity
- RE teacher (primary and secondary)
- Interfaith chaplain (schools, hospitals, universities)
- Interfaith rep in church
- Interfaith advisor at university
- Local authority (inclusion officer, faith and belief officer)
- Local Councillor
- Community Organiser
- Religious, faith or belief leader (Imam, Priest, Minister, Rabbi)
- Student interested in interfaith
- NHS Trust Faiths and Beliefs Staff Network members
- Trade Unionist

# Research Findings

## Research question 1:

## What impact does interfaith work have in the UK?

**There were many reflections on the positive impact that interfaith work has on those who engage in it. These may be grouped into the categories: social and community cohesion, interfaith dialogue and mediation, and challenges.**

### Social and Community Cohesion

#### Exploring Similarities and Differences

It was universally felt that interfaith activities allow people of different faiths and beliefs to come together to explore their beliefs and celebrate shared values such as love, respect, justice, hospitality and the importance of learning. Whether through interfaith meals, panel discussions or multifaith social action, commonalities can be celebrated and differences explored. Areas of common concern can also be pinpointed and discussed, and common approaches agreed upon. This might apply, for instance, to freedom of religious expression, faith based hate, or the perceived lack of 'religious literacy' among public policymakers.

*"A small but vital meeting of people from varied faith and belief backgrounds, helps understanding and respect of similarities and differences, on a personal and local level."*

#### Strengthening Intercommunity Relations

It was agreed that interfaith activities have the potential to achieve a powerful effect in promoting social and community cohesion in the wider community, including and beyond those not directly engaged in it. Through a 'ripple effect', the improved understanding and mutual respect achieved through interfaith practice can promote better mutual understanding, greater respect, and a shared sense of community belonging. Interfaith practitioners, activists and enthusiasts play a key role in encouraging an accepting and diverse society by highlighting the shared humanity between people of different faiths and beliefs.

*"Interfaith work is a critical part of social cohesion - which cannot meaningfully exist without it - as well as building grassroots coalitions that can provide a key voice and mutual support on a variety of issues. Interfaith work strengthens the capacity of a community by connecting the dots between people with shared values who can then support each other and pool their resources."*

#### Building Solidarity and Resilience

It was also agreed that interfaith activities build relationships of trust across faith and belief boundaries, which can in turn build resilience. This resilience is key during times of crisis. It was noted that those localities where interfaith relationships were strong, especially between religious leaders, escaped the worst of the occasional episodes of intercommunal unrest in recent years. In some areas, adherents of one faith or belief community took it upon themselves to defend places of worship of a different faith or belief from potential assault, and in some areas, people from different faith and belief communities came together to condemn those adopting extremist narratives that inflame tensions.

*"Interfaith work often shows its value in hindsight. For instance, areas which had high interfaith engagement were the most resilient to the riots in 2024. I feel that it brings people together from communities who wouldn't otherwise meet to build strong relationships, trust and friendship."*

### Interfaith Dialogue and Mediation

#### Reducing Prejudice and Intolerance

It was widely agreed that sensitively convened and moderated interfaith dialogue facilitates understanding and empathy between different faith and belief communities. Dialogue, as a specific form of interfaith activity, promotes increased awareness of beliefs and practices that exist among the participants, and of the attitudes and behavioural norms that stem from religious (and humanistic) beliefs. Dialogue thus reduces ignorance and intolerance, helping to break down stereotypes and misconceptions that lead to prejudice.

*"Interfaith work is very important for challenging existing narratives and stereotypes, particularly within education, where having a positive encounter with someone from a different faith or belief background can have a lasting impact."*

#### Effective Mediation

It was felt that interfaith activities can achieve effective mediation between different (and sometimes mutually exclusive) faith and belief standpoints. With an experienced and skilful facilitator, interfaith activities can provide a platform for open and honest discussion: a forum for 'brave' conversations that could not happen elsewhere in civic society. If such spaces are well facilitated, challenging topics and questions can be aired candidly, with respect and empathy. Such discussions can often lead to such areas of disagreement being 'parked', by mutual agreement and in a way that allows further dialogue or joint action to be pursued without acrimony.

*"It is vital to have open discussion and exchange of dialogue bringing people of different faiths and no faith together to promote harmony and understanding, enriching all lives."*

### Challenges

#### Greater Potential

It was widely felt by those who participated in the consultation that whilst there was potential for interfaith activities to have a broader and more significant influence in the future, there were challenges to reaching wider audiences. The reasons preventing this further potential are explored in the next section.

*"Interfaith work has an immense potential to be a driving force for social transformation and united vision. It anchors the vision of the way society can and should work."*

#### Measuring Impact

Another factor which, it was felt, prevents wider engagement in interfaith activity is the fact that measuring the positive impact of such activity is very difficult. Its influence is apparent more in the relative absence of prejudice and division, and the hate crimes that they can cause, than in any measurable effect. However, it was noted that multifaith social action to address issues within communities (for example litter-picking, running a food bank) can have a much more visible and immediate impact on local communities than the practice of interfaith dialogue.

*"It is hard to measure impact because we are not target driven or bound."*

## Research question 2:

# What prevents interfaith work in the UK from being impactful?

**The research identified four distinct sets of barriers that prevent interfaith work from being as impactful as its practitioners might hope: negative perceptions, reaching wider audiences, practical limitations, and community and institutional barriers.**

## Negative Perceptions

### Perceptions of Faith and Belief, and Interfaith

Many in the UK hold a negative perception of religion, faith and belief. The rise of faith based hate is attributed by many to religion itself (as opposed to the misinterpretation of religion), leading to a tendency to regard all people of faith and belief as adherents of harmful ideologies. In addition, there is poor visibility and little public knowledge of the interfaith work being done by individuals within faith and belief communities and its positive impacts.

Participants also described that, in some contexts, there was institutional resistance to any discussion of religion and belief. Some schools restricted these conversations to prevent contentious political debate, while some workplaces avoided them, on the grounds that faith and belief should be treated as strictly private matters. As a result, valuable opportunities for interfaith work are sometimes missed.

*“Interfaith work is becoming more and more important in a diverse multicultural society, as faith/belief plays a big part in millions of peoples lives. However, with the growing race issues it often turns into a religious debate, particularly the Muslim community have been targeted by the extreme right wing and we have seen unprecedented numbers of hate crime / Islamophobic attacks. Similarly the Jewish community have seen rise in anti-Semitic hate crime especially since the 7th October Israel Hamas conflict.”*

### Negative and Sensationalist Media Coverage and Social Media Content

Negative and sensationalist media coverage is an ever-present factor, especially on some broadcast channels and the tabloid press: there is over-reporting of religious division and little reporting of religion as a public good, leading to prejudice and stereotypes. Inter Faith Week in particular was noted as receiving close to zero media coverage. On social media, the rapid spread of misinformation and extreme opinions leads to polarisation, particularly in relation to global conflicts.

*“Many challenges are due to the reporting in the media. The Internet and social media often portray misconceptions and untruths which people pick up and believe without facts being checked. Social media allows people to disseminate false information which people take as fact.”*

## Reaching Wider Audiences

### The Interfaith Bubble

One of the heavily emphasised points mentioned in the consultation was that it was a continual struggle to widen the ‘interfaith bubble’ beyond those already engaged in interfaith work, to engage congregation members and national faith and belief organisations who do not presently get involved. It is recognised that some interfaith bodies are making concerted efforts to address this issue. Still, common perceptions that were believed to deter wider participation were: the feeling that interfaith work is largely the preserve of often elderly ‘enthusiasts’; that it involves joint religious worship; and that it is well-meaning but irrelevant to the needs and concerns of most people.

*“Interfaith has a huge impact on those involved in the work. I personally have made so many friendships with people from different faith backgrounds, through which I have learnt about their beliefs and overcome by own prejudices about them. Interfaith also makes a huge difference on local communities when people of different faith backgrounds come together to work on a social action project. The interfaith methodology also had a huge impact on building a more inclusive and self-aware society. However, the impact of interfaith outside the bubble and on a national level is minimal.”*

*“There are so many events happening, all aiming the same target audience. This means that the burden to attend events falls on a small group of people. More events should be targeted at those outside the interfaith bubble.”*

### Children and Young People

In particular, it was reported that few young people are involved in local initiatives, despite the many interfaith engagement programmes taking place in schools and universities. It appears that it is rare for individuals to progress from interfaith participation in educational contexts into interfaith involvement in the community.

*“Many of the gatherings are organised and run by volunteers from well-meaning community or established religious groups, so are inaccessible to a vast array of individuals, young and old.”*

## Practical Limitations

### Voluntary Nature

The first practical limitation is the voluntary nature of interfaith activity. In a modest number of local authorities, it is part of the role of a paid official or officials to facilitate such activity; some national faith and belief organisations have paid interfaith engagement staff; some (but not all) national and regional interfaith organisations have paid staff; and at the local level interfaith groups are often convened by paid Christian clergy as part of their general public engagement remit. Otherwise, interfaith initiatives, particularly at local level, rely entirely on the voluntary participation of their members, which can limit their capacity, scope and sustainability. The other commitments of volunteers limit the time they can offer, and it can be difficult to recruit additional volunteers.

It was noted that whilst enthusiastic volunteers are good and valued for the continuance of interfaith endeavours, they can also reinforce the 'interfaith bubble', since only some types of people may have the capacity to participate.

*“Interfaith work tends to rely on volunteers and those people are usually busy people because they are also committed to other organisations within the local community, not just Interfaith.”*

### Funding

The second practical limitation is scarcity of funding and other resources. The National Lottery Community Fund's Awards for All programme has a good record of supporting inter- and multi-faith projects, but is heavily subscribed. There are currently no Government grant programmes to support interfaith activity, and few private trusts and foundations offer small, easily accessed grants that can make the difference between an interfaith activity happening or not. Application procedures are complicated and often require match funding, and it can take many months for a decision to be made. It is therefore hard for interfaith practitioners to access the funds they need for staffing, activity costs or communications. This especially affects small local projects, perpetuating the over-reliance on volunteers.

*“I think one of the main barriers is funding, and even when there is funding available it often has conditions which don't always make for the biggest impact, which is frustrating. Sometimes there is a prioritisation of numbers and targets over lasting and measurable impact on communities, which should always be the most important thing in interfaith work.”*

### Non-Financial Resourcing

There is also limited access to non-financial resources, i.e. guidance, expertise and training, to strengthen practitioners in the interfaith movement. Where such resources do exist – for instance on the continuing Inter Faith Network and Inter Faith Week websites, or through national education organisations – few practitioners who took part in the research were aware of their existence.

*“Those who are active in their faith communities are less well resourced these days so perhaps don't feel they can afford the time for gatherings, meetings, planning events and activities.”*

## Community and Institutional Barriers

### Resistance to Interfaith

In some faith and belief communities, there is resistance to engaging in interfaith activity and work. Within the hierarchies and policies of some faith and belief community representative organisations, interfaith engagement is often overlooked to the point of invisibility, due to perceiving it as irrelevant or a low priority. Some faith and belief communities have negative impressions of interfaith, as noted in the previous chapter, as well as concerns about perceived 'interfaith theology' or syncretistic worship, reservations about entering spaces belonging to other faith and belief communities, the timing of interfaith events clashing with religious observances, or tensions between different faith communities and within faith and belief communities.

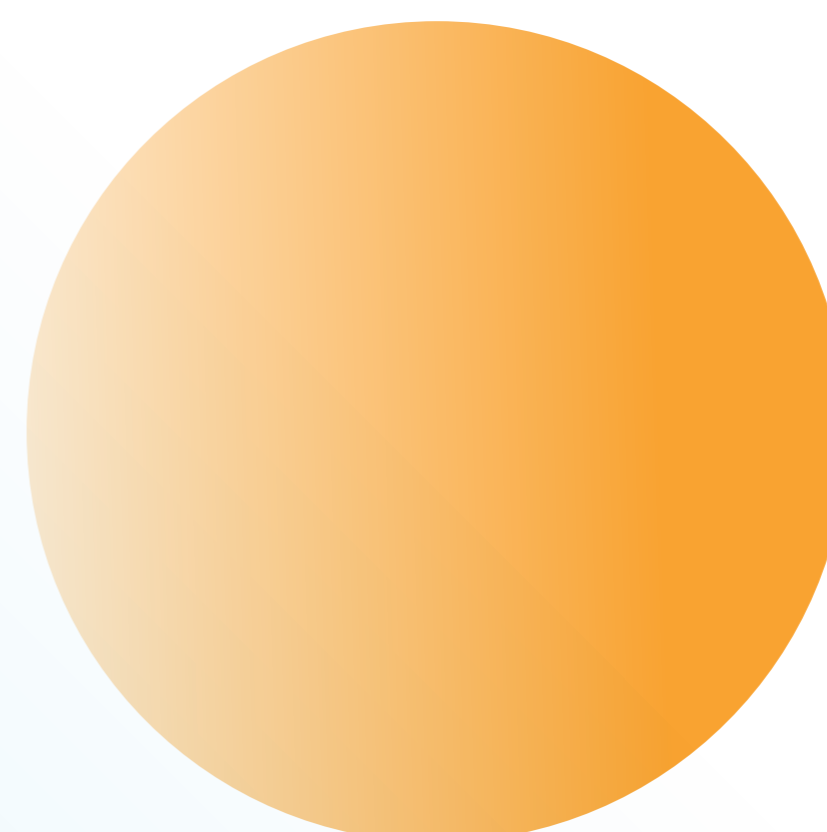
*“Resistance and apathy by faith leaders who are over worked or consider interfaith to be peripheral to key concerns. Interfaith and evangelisation do not sit well together in the minds of many & fear that interfaith will water down their religion.”*

### Global Politics

Finally, the international context can serve as a deterrent to engagement in interfaith activity. Throughout history and in recent years, global conflicts and controversies have negatively affected intercommunal relations in the UK.

Many participants in the consultation described how the conflict in the Middle East specifically had directly impacted their interfaith work in the UK since 7 October 2023. Some described struggles in bringing people together and having to cancel or postpone events and programmes. Reasons for not engaging are complex, but may be due to some being unwilling to work with those who hold different perspectives on the conflict, and others wishing to dedicate all their energy to supporting their affected community, in the UK or the region.

*“Some who've spent years working in interfaith have stepped away. It's too fraught, the fault lines are too volatile, and the danger of personal blowback is too great.”*



### Research question 3:

## What did you do in Inter Faith Week 2024?

Inter Faith Week 2024 appears to have been a success, despite the closure of the Inter Faith Network meaning that local interfaith bodies were not able to receive the hands-on advice and encouragement that Network staff traditionally provided in the lead-up to the Week. The Inter Faith Week website, with its wealth of resources for event organisers, continued to exist and was indeed updated. It seems likely that some event organisers referred to it. In any case, the success of Inter Faith Week 2024 is testimony to the resilience and commitment of local interfaith practitioners.

To the best of our knowledge, some 900 activities took place to mark Inter Faith Week 2024, representing only a modest decline on the 1,155 activities that were recorded as being held for Inter Faith Week 2023. The figure is based largely on anecdotal evidence gained through the workshop sessions and wider sectoral knowledge within the ad hoc steering group. Before and after Inter Faith Week, interfaith bodies were invited by email to post details of their events on the Inter Faith Week website, but only some 80 did so. The exact number of activities is therefore unknown, and many events will have taken place that we are not aware of. This is one of the many major impacts of the closure of the Inter Faith Network, which gathered and shared data from Inter Faith Week every year.

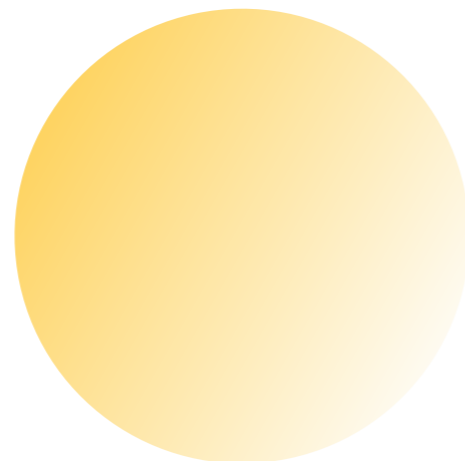
**Activities during Inter Faith Week 2024 fell into three categories.**

### 1. Public and Community Events

The first category of activity in Inter Faith Week 2024 was public events in the community, including speaker panels, question and answer sessions, and roundtable discussions involving different faith and belief communities, often focused on specific issues, such as peace-building, the environment or the role of women in society. Events tended to be held in places of worship or community centres, and often featured a shared meal as part of the programme. In some cases, local mayors or other political leaders were present.

Many local interfaith groups organised 'Peace Walks' linking local places of worship and usually designed to promoting peace and unity.

Just as common were multi-faith social action projects, including food collections to support food banks, and organised community clean-ups.



### ..... CASE STUDY

## Midlands+ Interfaith Conference

The Midlands+ Interfaith Conference was arranged by national interfaith charity the United Religions Initiative UK to re-energise interfaith and multifaith activities across the Midlands, through a series of speakers and table discussions. It sought to provide both a networking opportunity and a seedbed for new collaborations and projects. 100 people attended the conference, including Lord Khan of Burnley and Pru Porretta, Coventry's official Lady Godiva and Chair of Coventry Multifaith Forum.

In his speech, Lord Khan noted that Inter Faith Week offered "opportunities to deepen understanding, learn about each other's beliefs, and find common ground through shared values". He suggested that Interfaith needs to grow in three dimensions: to be longer, deeper and wider.

*"Amongst the many significant moments of the day, two will remain in my heart. A presentation by two young students to Lord Khan made me smile and feel quietly confident of the future, they were confident, smart and present - much more capable than I at their age. The second was to witness an exchange of words of change, hope and regret between two women from opposite sides of the conflict in the Middle East. Their courage, passion and acceptance of one another's challenging situations was an inspirational climax to the day's activities. Our collective effort as organisers, attendees and enablers was rewarded many times over."*  
**Deepak Naik, Chair of URI UK**

As part of the conference, a youth workshop called "How Can We Work Better Together?" was hosted during the afternoon. This was introduced and facilitated by Manjit Kaur of the Coventry and Warwickshire Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education, and brought together 36 students (aged 14–18) from schools in the West Midlands. The students took part in sessions led by different speakers, broke up into discussion groups over lunch, and participated in a plenary session.

*"The conference I attended at Coventry University as part of our Interfaith celebrations was an incredible educational and emotionally stimulating experience. By attending this event, alongside other sixth form students, we left this event, feeling invigorated, with a multitude of ideas and questions as to how we can continue to develop of these key ideas of interfaith in action, whereby we collaborate, share good practice and develop new projects. The conference covered real life issues, for example the current context of Coventry and the diversity of beliefs within the area, which makes me feel proud to be part of such a vibrant community!"*

**Student from Blue Coat School**

[uriuk.org](http://uriuk.org)



.....  
**CASE STUDY**

## Sunderland Interfaith Walk of Friendship

Hosted by Sunderland Inter Faith Forum, the Interfaith Walk of Friendship happens on the last Sunday of Inter Faith Week, and has always been an important and successful event during its 12-year history.

Every year the route and stops vary, but there is always a visit to a church (of different denominations), a mosque and the local Sikh Temple, who kindly host a lovely Langar meal for all who come. This year's walk was particularly significant, happening a few months after the riots in our city in Summer 2024. 120 participants joined the walk, including newly elected local MP Lewis Atkinson, allowing him to meet some of the faith communities in his constituency.

As with the aims of Inter Faith Week nationally, the hope of the walk is to break down barriers and encourage people to visit different worship spaces. The walk fosters collaboration and communication between members of different faiths, as well as demonstrating to the wider community the bond of common love and trust that different faith communities can share together.

*"It's a great way to meet new people, experience different cultures and share our collective desire for peace in our community and world."*

**Chris Howson, Sunderland Inter Faith Forum**

[facebook.com/sunderlandinterfaithforum](https://facebook.com/sunderlandinterfaithforum)



.....  
**CASE STUDY**

## Bristol Diverse Open Doors Day

Organised by Bristol Multi Faith Forum, Bristol Diverse Doors Open Day celebrates the religious diversity of Bristol City and the West of England region, giving communities the chance to experience and learn each other's cultures and beliefs; and offering the opportunity to visit a range of places of worship and discover many faith communities that exist in the West of England region.

This year's Bristol Diverse Doors Open Day event was held on Sunday 17 November. On the day, many places of worship opened their doors for the general public to visit. Diverse Doors Multi-Faith Trail was organised on the day to help people visit the different sites. Travelling around by minibus, the Diverse Doors Multi-Faith Trail started at the Bristol Multi Faith Forum office, and visited a Buddhist shrine, a Greek Orthodox Christian Church, a Muslim Mosque, a Sikh Gurudwara, a Jewish Synagogue and a Hindu Temple.

All places of worship in Bristol are invited to participate, and over the years, many have opened their doors to the general public and members of other faith communities as part of this event. Over the years, His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant, the High Sheriff, the Lord Mayor, the Police Commissioner, Councillors, civic dignitaries, various community leaders, and people from different walks of life have all participated in the Diverse Doors Open Day programmes at different venues.

*"We received excellent feedback from the attendees, guests, and faith venues."*

**Tripti Megeri, Secretary of Bristol Multi Faith Forum**

[bristolmultifaithforum.org.uk](https://bristolmultifaithforum.org.uk)

.....  
**CASE STUDY**

## Mitzvah Day

In 2024 on or around Mitzvah Day, which takes place every November during Inter Faith Week, 35,000 people across the UK, from over 462 organisations, took part in almost 2,000 projects. These ranged from food bank collections and care home visits to cooking for people in need, litter picks, card-making, and much more. The theme this year was Stronger Together which, after the challenging year following on from October 7th felt appropriate and true to collective values.

On Mitzvah Day, Jewish communities and individuals are encouraged to engage in a wide variety of social action projects celebrating the work that goes on all year round. Specifically, communities reach out to their non-Jewish neighbours to share the projects and to non-Jewish charities – with the aim of building sustainable, powerful bridges within local neighbourhoods.

*“A particularly powerful event for me this year was at Hammerson House care home. A bishop, an imam and a rabbi all visited the home along with young people from different faiths and backgrounds. Together and with the residents, they packed food parcels for a local charity, sang some songs and even had a little dance. To me, this encapsulated Stronger Together – different faiths and generations working together building relationships which will endure moving forward.”*

**Laura Marks, Founder of Mitzvah Day**

[mitzvahday.org.uk](http://mitzvahday.org.uk)



## 2. Youth and Schools Engagement

The second category of activity in Inter Faith Week 2024 was interfaith activities involving young people; such projects were reported at many of the regional consultation workshops. Some of the activities took place in a university context, and featured debates, lectures or workshops for students.

Other activities happened in schools, such as presentations and special interfaith assemblies. The Faith & Belief Forum and National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education led an initiative to aid both primary and secondary schools in marking Inter Faith Week. With several other RE partner organisations, a theme was selected – “Sharing My Story, Building Our Future” – and resources, assemblies, events and trainings were curated. Resources covered a variety of topics, including creating safe spaces in schools, understanding identity and sharing personal stories of faith, and provided practical examples of how to engage with local diverse faith and belief communities. Resources were contributed by several organisations, including the Religious Education Council, Culham St Gabriel's, Facing History and Ourselves UK, RE Today, F&BF, RE Hubs, the National Association of Teachers of RE and the Feast.

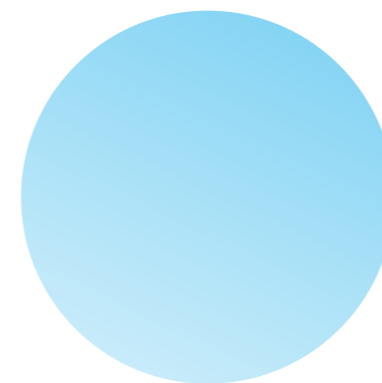
In the consultation questionnaire, several respondents said they used these resources during Inter Faith Week 2024, both directly in their classrooms, and by sending out bulletins to local schools and teachers.

*“We promoted resources to support schools in visiting different places of worship in their areas, through the F&BF IFW website.”*

*“We used IFWEEK in school to give KS3 pupils the chance to explore artefacts (something that they hadn't done before...) and used the ifweek4schools presentation to talk with young people about the importance of cohesion.”*

Alongside the resources, a series of webinars were hosted for education professionals, and those passionate about the role of education in social cohesion. The webinars included guest speakers from across the education sector. Resources, recordings and case studies are stored on the dedicated website, which since its launch in October 2024 has been accessed 3,669 times.

[ifw4schools.co.uk](http://ifw4schools.co.uk)



.....  
**CASE STUDY**

## People of Faith: A Young Adult Dialogue

During Inter Faith Week 2024, Westminster Interfaith (an Agency of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster) organised "People of Faith: A Young Adult Dialogue". The event, hosted at St Mary's University, Twickenham, gave young adults the opportunity to dialogue with one another and listen to the experiences of three young adults of faith from the Christian, Muslim and Jewish religions. Panelists and attendees responded to questions such as "How does your religion bring you joy?" and 'What role can young people of faith play in today's society?'.

One of our panellists expressed their desire that young adults might use their voices not only to advocate for change, but to come into dialogue with one another. They told those gathered that balancing dialogue and advocacy could be a profound way to build community and stamp out religious hatred. Another expressed their concern that interfaith relations are strained at the moment, and it must become a focus of ours to rekindle dialogue, to form understanding, to let community spirit thrive and to bring the compassion found in our own faith communities to the wider world.

*"There is often great care taken by older generations, who have shaped and advocated for interreligious dialogue over many years, to include younger people in their events. What was different about our event, was that its primary focus was to listen to the voices of young adults in an environment where those below 35 were in the majority, not the minority. It was an inspiring event to be a part of, and a testament to the will of young people of faith, those who are not content with being defined in opposition to one another, but desire to cultivate a community where we can all flourish."*

**James Holland, Coordinator of Westminster Interfaith**

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



.....  
**CASE STUDY**

## My Community, My Newham

As part of the Interfaith Week for Schools campaign, the RE Matters Interfaith Group in Newham delivered an event which was the culmination of a remarkable year-long project called My Community, My Newham. This student-led initiative used photography to explore the diverse faiths, cultures, and shared spaces within the local community, culminating in a powerful display of creativity and interfaith understanding. My Community, My Newham invited secondary school students to reflect on what matters most to them in their community. With guidance from their teachers and mentors, students developed skills in photography, such as framing shots and using filters on their phone cameras, and then visited a variety of local sites, including places of worship and a local park. Through these visits, students met with faith leaders, explored spaces that are meaningful to the community, and captured images that expressed their learning and discoveries.

This project exemplifies the innovative and inspiring initiatives delivered as part of the Inter Faith Week for Schools campaign. Under the theme Telling My Story, Building Our Future, the campaign supported schools to celebrate diversity, build connections, and amplify young voices in interfaith dialogue.

*"My Community, My Newham highlights how youth-led initiatives can foster creativity, understanding, and collaboration. It stands as a testament to the impact of Inter Faith Week for Schools, encouraging schools and communities to celebrate their shared stories while building a more connected future."*

**Claire Clinton, RE Matters**

[rematters.co.uk](http://rematters.co.uk)

### 3. Online Events

The final category of activity in Inter Faith Week 2024 the Week was online events, including hosted webinars, online presentations on interfaith topics, and social media posts and blogs containing insights and experiences related to interfaith work. These projects were often designed to reach those within faith and belief communities who might be diffident about attending live events.

#### ..... CASE STUDY

## Interfaith Futures Series

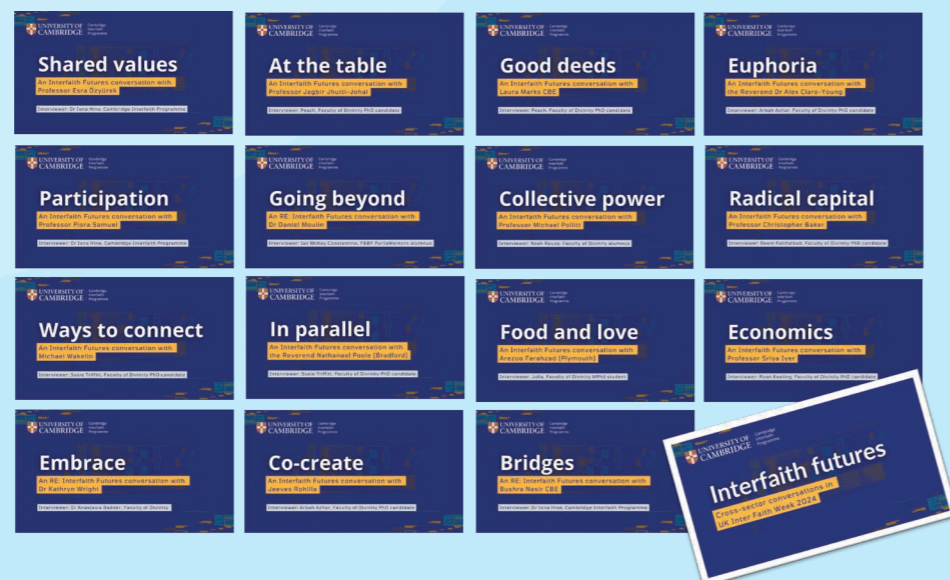
During Inter Faith Week 2024, the Cambridge Interfaith Programme coordinated a series of cross-sector interviews to explore the future of interfaith relations. Motivated in part by the closure of the Inter Faith Network for the UK in Spring 2024, the series looked to involve a range of voices for an exercise in looking forward, asking what researchers, practitioners and policymakers need to know.

The 15 interviews were carried out by a mix of presenters, with a prominent role given to the next generation, predominantly postgraduate students from the University of Cambridge's Faculty of Divinity. A trio of interviews focused on Religious Education was organised jointly with the Faith & Belief Forum. Education interviewees spoke of the innate value of religious learning, the significance of understanding diversity in a globally-connected world, and the capacity of RE to help children positively embrace "otherness".

In other episodes, guests included Michael Wakelin, former Head of Religion and Ethics at the BBC and Chair of the Religion Media Centre, sharing good practice including the RMC's Connecting Communities scheme (Ways to Connect); Professor Sriya Iyer, the lead investigator of an international enquiry exploring the economic impact of faith communities (Economics of Religion); and Jeeves Rohilla, founder and CEO of the National Multifaith Youth Centre, who advocated for co-creation as a key step in involving more and younger people in interfaith futures (Co-Create).

Episodes were released on the Faculty of Divinity's YouTube channel and later re-released in an audio version for the Religion & Global Challenges podcast.

[interfaith.cam.ac.uk/IFFutures24](https://interfaith.cam.ac.uk/IFFutures24)



### Research question 4:

## What were the learnings from Inter Faith Week 2024?

### Positive Sentiment

Research participants who had run Inter Faith Week activities in 2024 generally gave positive feedback on Inter Faith Week 2024. It was appreciated as an opportunity for encounter, dialogue and promoting greater understanding. Some participants commented that it allowed a focus on the shared humanity of those involved. Others highlighted the success of community-building activities during the week, and the positive engagements that had been achieved across faith and belief boundaries.

*"It was valuable to share cultures and mix with a lot of different people."*

*"I hear from the Interfaith enthusiasts and group leaders in the Zoom meetings that school and community based initiatives created many opportunities for connection between different churches, mosques, synagogues, and suchlike."*

### Logistical Challenges

Set against these generally favourable remarks about the Week itself, many respondents spoke about the logistical challenges that they had faced in running activities. Some mentioned that the closure of the Inter Faith Network significantly contributed to the challenges of this year, due to the lack of central support and coordination.

Limited capacity was also cited by many: organising Inter Faith Week events requires significant coordination and forward planning, and busy schedules and higher priority tasks make it difficult for some (especially teachers in school contexts) to plan and run events.

Other respondents mentioned limited access to funding, saying that this impacted the scale and reach of their events. Yet others referred to challenges they had experienced in attracting a broad audience and diverse participation.

*"The main challenge was attracting a wider audience. Many people in our area were not particularly interested in religion, which made it difficult to engage a broader group for these activities."*

*"Our biggest challenge in the work that I support is in engaging with schools: teachers are under too much pressure to add in what they perceive to be 'extra' initiatives."*

## Future Direction

In relation to the future direction of Inter Faith Week, many respondents felt that a greater degree of central direction is needed to integrate events across the country, and perhaps to give them a common theme which would assist with promotion. It was also widely felt that better and earlier planning would allow more time for promoting activities, thus increasing participation and impact.

Some participants felt that strategies to improve Inter Faith Week branding and promotion would help to attract a broader audience, particularly among young people.

Finally, it was felt by some that ready-to-use materials would be helpful for those unable to plan interfaith activities from scratch due to time constraints, such as teachers. In this context, there was notably little awareness among research participants of the resources for Inter Faith Week event organisers that already exist on the Inter Faith Network and Inter Faith Week websites, both of which remain live.

*"It would be great to have more capacity and perhaps cross-organisational partnerships to be able to engage a larger number of schools, especially those who are in areas of need and who might be new to engaging with interfaith."*

*"Planning and timing were the biggest lessons. Inter Faith Week for schools in 2024 was planned very last minute, and it meant I didn't have the time I would have needed to properly encourage schools to engage."*



## ..... CASE STUDY

### York Interfaith Group

During Inter Faith Week 2024, the York Interfaith Group ran a series of events, focusing on the theme, 'Unity – we are all on a journey'. Throughout the week, over 500 people participated in events.

The week opened with an Interfaith Unity Breakfast, hosted at the Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints church. With a wonderful breakfast spread and the opportunity to all come together for the first time in a while, it was a lovely way to start the week. Throughout the week, events were hosted in various places of worship and public spaces, including the Friargate Quaker Meeting House, York Mosque, York Unitarians and local community centres and libraries. Events included an environmental tree care session, an Interfaith Service of Unity, talks at the University of York, craft sessions,

and a storytelling session, during which volunteers from various faiths read or told their different stories. On the final day of Inter Faith Week, we held a celebration event to mark the 35th anniversary of York Interfaith Group. Friends and supporters from the past, the present and hopefully even the future joined together in celebrating all that has been achieved.

*"Inter Faith Week this year was a joint success of so many different faith communities coming together. The theme of unity was continued with everyone helping each other out and supporting the different events."*

**Dee Boyle, York Interfaith Group**

[yorkinterfaith.org](http://yorkinterfaith.org)



.....  
**CASE STUDY**

## Durham Interfaith Student Network

At Durham University, Inter Faith Week 2024 consisted of three main events organised by the Durham Interfaith Student Network, bringing together diverse religious societies to foster dialogue and collaboration on campus.

A highlight of the week was the Interfaith Quiz, co-hosted by the Islamic Society and myself the CCJ Campus Leader, which was attended by around 12 people. Students from different faith backgrounds were placed in mixed teams, so everyone could get to know each other on a personal level. The questions spanned 5 rounds, and not only tested knowledge, but sparked meaningful conversations, offering insights into the role of faith in everyone's life.

The final event of the week was attended by 50 people! Co-hosted by the Buddhist and Jewish societies, the event began with a meditation and was followed by a traditional Jewish Friday Night Dinner. It was a chance for everyone to experience other people's faiths in action, and it was an incredible way to end Interfaith Week. These events also marked the start of ongoing interfaith engagement on campus.

*"For me, these events highlighted the importance of interfaith engagement on campus. I realised that what I had assumed about another student's belief, based on what a textbook or the internet might say about a particular religion, does not always reflect individual faith experiences. Inter Faith Week has reshaped my perspective, showing me that faith is deeply personal rather than just a fixed set of doctrines. As university students, we need opportunities like this to move beyond a theoretical understanding of religion and instead connect on a personal level to one another, discovering the shared values that unite us across all faiths."*

**Catherine Herring, Durham Interfaith Student Network**

[facebook.com/InterfaithDurham](https://facebook.com/InterfaithDurham)

### Research question 5:

## Why do or don't you take part in Inter Faith Week?

**Several reasons were cited by participants for why they and/or their respective interfaith bodies had, or had not, participated in Inter Faith Week 2024.**

### Reasons for Participation

Many said they had participated because of a desire to learn about different faith and belief traditions, connect with new people, encounter difference, and/or create new friendships. Others went further and said that they had been attracted to participate by a wish to contribute to cross-cultural understanding in their local community. Some said that they had hoped to highlight shared values and common humanity among different faith and belief groups.

Some research participants with long experience of interfaith activity said that they had engaged in Inter Faith Week 2024 in order to raise awareness and visibility of existing interfaith efforts, and/or to grow interfaith work that happened through the rest of the year by promoting current projects and building networks.

*"I take part in Inter Faith Week because it creates opportunities for open dialogue, mutual learning, and building trust across diverse communities. It also helps to support understanding and collaboration, which are key to strengthening social cohesion."*

*"It provides opportunities for me to connect with people of faith or none who I may not otherwise have done."*

*"It's an important week in our school calendar. An opportunity to celebrate the diversity of worldviews that makes up our society but also realise the common values shared by people from different belief stances."*

### Reasons for Non-Participation

Many respondents who indicated that they had not been involved in Inter Faith Week 2024 explained that this has been because of a lack of awareness that the Week was taking place, or because of other personal commitments.

Some cited clashes with other events, including religious festivals, Remembrance Day, and Anti-Bullying Week in schools. A minority of respondents stated that November was a dark, cold time of year during which some did not feel safe or able to attend events – whilst others expressed the view that November was an ideal time of year for the Week to fall, because of the preponderance of religious festivals.

Some respondents expressed reservations about what they saw as a new 'interfaith theology', or about entering spaces belonging to other faith and belief communities. Others referred to international conflicts which had created tensions between different faith and belief communities; and some (particularly in the Muslim community) described the scepticism they had felt toward participating, due to fears of surveillance by the authorities.

Finally, some respondents coming from an atheistic or Humanist perspective reported that they had felt excluded from Inter Faith Week activities owing to their lack of religious beliefs.

*"I didn't know about it."*

*"Nothing that I knew about was organised in my local area."*

*"I wasn't aware I could."*

## Research question 6:

# How does Inter Faith Week contribute to your interfaith work through the rest of the year?

Responses to this question fell into three categories (with some participants holding more than one perspective): respondents who felt that Inter Faith Week offered a good opportunity for momentum building; those who felt that it offered opportunities for building relationships and networking; and those who felt that Inter Faith Week had limited impact on their interfaith work throughout the year.

## 1. Momentum Building

Some participants said that Inter Faith Week was a focal point for their organisations' year: something which they often planned for several months beforehand. It was a chance to take stock of progress and plan for the rest of the year.

Many felt that the Week presented a good opportunity for them to showcase the interfaith work that their organisations were engaged in throughout the year. It allowed them to build momentum for ongoing interfaith activities by raising awareness and visibility, making it easier to gain support for and participation in future events.

Some respondents felt that the Week was a convenient, time-limited period which enabled them to engage new delivery partners who were less likely to be involved in interfaith work throughout the rest of the year, such as schools and workplaces. Others added that during the Week, they could engage categories of participants in interfaith activity who would not engage in it through the rest of the year, like politicians and the media.

*"It is our focal point, where we include the widest possible 'audience'. This is where we introduce our programme for the coming year."*

*"As an interfaith organisation, this is one of the focal points of our year and a chance to get more people talking about interfaith dialogue."*

*"IFW is really important, particularly work going on in schools, because a lot of the work that I do is connected to the advancement and enhancement of RE as a curriculum subject. Strong engagement by schools nationally with IFW is important for because IFW becomes a focal point around which it is possible to advocate for more and better RE teaching in schools."*

## 2. Relationship Building and Networking

Some participants noted that Inter Faith Week allowed individuals and organisations engaged in interfaith projects to connect, thus fostering positive working relationships that continued beyond the Week and were crucial to interfaith work. The Week also encouraged the sharing of resources, ideas and best practice that can be utilised throughout the year.

*"Organising and attending events during inter faith week provides an opportunity to meet new people and make new connections, which can then be built on over the year."*

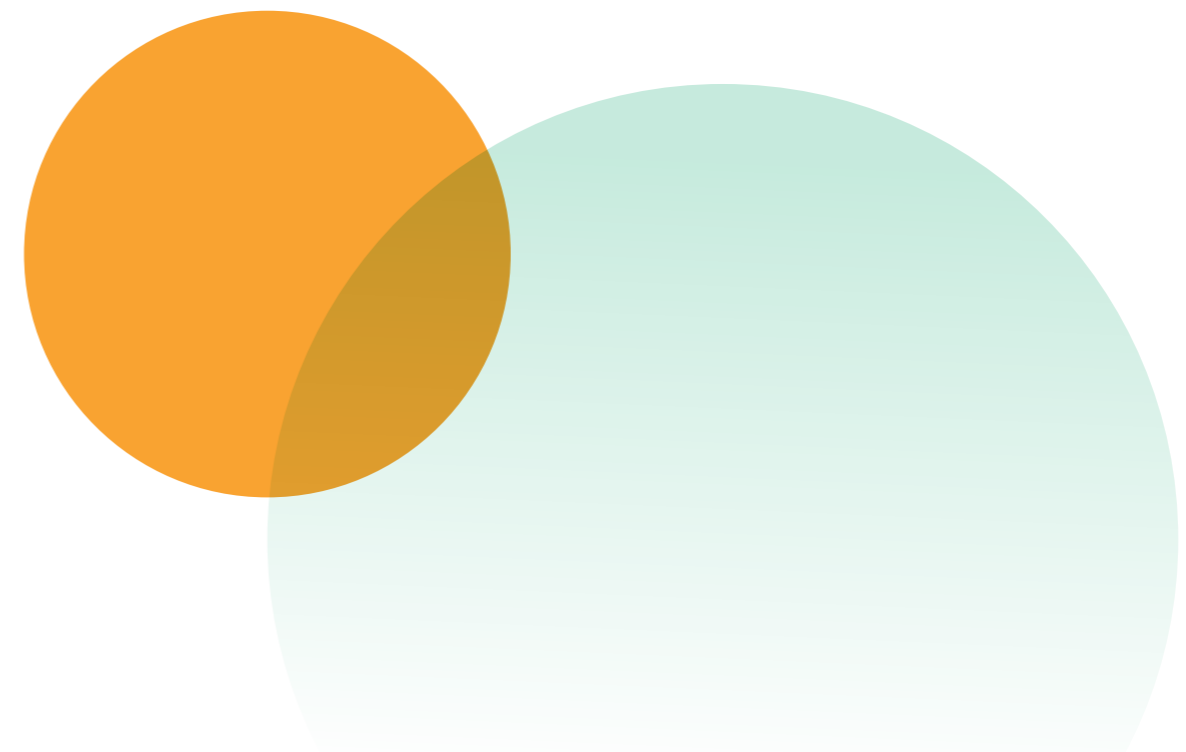
*"It strengthens links between the faith and interfaith groups and networks."*

## 3. Limited Impact

Some participants said that Inter Faith Week did not really impact on their organisations' work throughout the year, though some added that they wanted to reflect more on how it could do so. Others felt that some institutions participated in the Week as a 'tick box exercise', but then failed to follow through with further work. These respondents felt strongly about the importance of work spanning the whole year, and focusing on longer-term impacts.

*"I do not feel that it impacts on me throughout the year, I would like to be more involved but it's difficult to find out what is happening in my area."*

*"It has very limited impact on our work as an organisation aside from being a focus for events and a time where we are sometimes invited by external organisations to talk more widely about interfaith work."*



## Research question 7:

# In five years' time, what do you want Inter Faith Week to look like?

The great majority of those who responded to this question said they would like Inter Faith Week to be **bigger and better in five years' time, with a much wider reach and impact. It was felt that this could be achieved only if three positive developments took place: 'bursting the bubble', greater visibility, and a new national strategy and branding.**

## 1. Bursting the Bubble

Firstly, the 'interfaith bubble' referred to in above sections has to be broken through: there needs to be more involvement by those not currently involved in interfaith and multifaith activity. Secondly, there has to be greater participation by those with non-religious worldviews, with the distinct space for people of different faiths and beliefs coming together being protected and broadened.

Interfaith education should be strengthened in curricula, through presentations and resource sharing, so as to embed interfaith values from an early age. Existing interfaith programmes in schools and universities should be better integrated into interfaith activity in local communities and vice versa, to broaden local interfaith engagement with children and young people. In effect, there should be a 'pipeline' from interfaith activity in educational contexts into interfaith activity in the wider local community.

*"In 5 years time I envision Inter Faith Week becoming an event that attracts broader public participation, with more partnerships between faith groups, civil society, and the private sector and public sector."*

*"Greater involvement of young people could ensure that future generations continue to promote and practice interfaith dialogue and cooperation."*

## 2. Greater Visibility

Most respondents felt that for wider impact, there has to be much greater visibility of Inter Faith Week as a national institution in the calendar. Far greater numbers of the public have to know about and celebrate the Week. This may require increased positive media attention both locally and nationally, and wider endorsement in the form of messages of support by the Royal Family, national and local politicians, and religious and community leaders.

*"I would like it to be something which whole communities embrace all over the UK. I would like young people to be instrumental in leading it."*

*"Increased awareness of the amazing work different faith groups do to support everyone in their communities not just those of their faith."*

## 3. National Strategy and Branding

For wider impact to be possible, many research respondents felt strongly that a national strategy and branding for Inter Faith Week is needed. Some felt that every successive Week should have its own unique theme or focus: a topic (such as the environment or addressing faith based hate) that can unite grassroots and regional work, but without being too specific or prescriptive – it was felt vital that local interfaith groups should continue to have autonomy to run events that are specific to their local context. It was noted that it will be important to make any national Inter Faith Week branding sufficiently inclusive to participants of faith and belief communities, including those with non-religious worldviews, that do not currently engage widely with the Week.

One notable idea was for a ceremonial opening for Inter Faith Week: an event to launch the Week in a different city every year, involving political and faith and belief leaders.

*"I think it should be a default week in the calendar that gets a lot of attention in the same way that something like a pride month does. This means that there are no obligations to do any specific thing, but a couple of central events which are like a hub, with many different offshoots that individuals groups take responsibility for."*

*"It would be higher profile in general, and be part of the rhythm of the year in more communities and places of worship - particularly those who don't do much/ anything in the way of interfaith year round."*

## Research question 8:

# From the highest level to the most local, what support is needed for your ideal Inter Faith Week to happen?

A wide variety of responses were received to this question, falling into four broad categories: national coordination; funding and resources; branding and communications; and institutional support.

## 1. National Coordination

It was widely felt that there should be a National Steering Group comprising practitioners from across the interfaith movement, including grassroots, regional, national and educational, to oversee and manage Inter Faith Week. This group might be based on the ad hoc steering group that was formed to take forward the 2024 Week, with appropriate additions, or it might be a wholly new group. It was felt important that the group's terms of reference should include co-production with young people.

The National Steering Group's roles could include: supporting grassroots work and advocating for interfaith activity on a national level; distributing funding to local and regional interfaith bodies and projects; producing and sharing resources, expertise and best practice; garnering support from religious and secular institutions; and modelling effective collaboration between interfaith organisations.

*“At the highest level, we need new leadership platform to create partnership among representatives of different sectors along with government recognition and funding for structural support.”*

*“There needs to be a national body that has the role of ensuring that it happens and happens well that is well connected at national level to all the different faiths including the Humanist organisations. By taking on this role the national organisation would have the motivation to encourage regional similar coordinating bodies to ensure the Faith Week is covered all over the country.”*

## 2. Funding and Resources

Some respondents felt that there is a need for permanent paid staff to manage Inter Faith Week at the national level. Some said that there is a need for paid regional coordinators who know their local context and can promote interfaith activity among local faith and belief communities and other local stakeholders. A tailored engagement strategy for each region, utilising local expertise and effective consultation, could address specific local challenges and concerns and thus encourage participation. Some also said that there is a need for paid young interfaith outreach workers, since young people are unlikely to engage if other young people are not already involved.

As well as staff, some respondents highlighted the need for training resources to guide interfaith events and increase their reach and impact. This could cover, for instance, guidance on setting up events, managing local media, capacity building for volunteers, or storytelling. A specific resource that was mentioned as being helpful was ready-to-go, tested activity resources that are appropriate for different settings, such as for those who lack the capacity to organise events due to time constraints.

There seemed little awareness of the resources which the Inter Faith Network had already created covering many of these areas, and which remain accessible on the Inter Faith Network and Inter Faith Week websites, as well as by national education bodies. Several participants suggested that it would be good to test the suitability and relevance of these resources, and that they should be publicised more widely.

Access to finance was cited by the majority of those who participated in the research as a desirable resource for interfaith groups and initiatives. Small seed-funding grants for local projects were felt to be particularly valuable. It was noted that there is a need to diversify funding sources so that the interfaith movement is not reliant on one source. Some said that donations in kind, such as the provision of buildings as safe spaces for hosting events, are a vital part of the picture.

*“Paid community coordinators at every level: lots at a local level, in cities and regions and a few at a national level. Community coordinators role is to help groups in their community to be able to fulfil their dreams around interfaith and celebrating interfaith week. These coordinators role would be to practically help these faith and community groups apply for funding who have never applied for funding before. Funding at different levels with grants from £500 up to £10,000 for their interfaith initiatives. Localised projects that have at least 2 faith groups working together in specific wards that encourage listening and learning but also social action.”*

*“A repository of resources for how to hold interfaith events/gatherings, how to produce effective interfaith resources on various issues, and a publicly accessible database of local/national faith/interfaith networks.”*

*“Like MHCLG offers a grant for Windrush, it would be great if the money that was spent on the Interfaith network could be spent on administering a grants scheme to help local people run meaningful interfaith events in their locality with the support of community coordinators.”*

*“To support local grass roots organisations with small amounts of seed funding to support basic administration and network building.”*

### 3. Branding and Communications

Some respondents mentioned the need for a dedicated website, where positive stories of grassroots work around the country could be shared. Others felt that improved marketing strategies were needed to raise awareness about interfaith initiatives; and that this should include better relationships with the media, so as to achieve fuller media coverage during Inter Faith Week and throughout the year, thus keeping interfaith work in the public eye.

*“Increased media coverage that promotes unity, understanding, and shared values is crucial.”*

*“I feel that the media need to be involved in raising the profile of Interfaith work in a more positive way. They are often quick to report on negative events that happen between people from different faith groups i.e. riots, fights or other conflicts but they rarely seem to report on all the positive aspects of Interfaith work that are taking place around our country.”*

### 4. Institutional Support

Finally, it was widely felt among respondents that greater non-financial support by faith and belief, and secular institutions would be valuable. This could include high-level endorsements for activities in Inter Faith Week, for example messages of support from members of the Royal Family, national and local politicians, religious and community leaders, and celebrities.

There should be more awareness within central government that the interfaith movement holds some of the solutions to society’s problems; and recognition of this through practical, financial and communications support. It was also felt that there could be more active participation by local council members and officials in interfaith activities, with local grants and communication support being offered.

Other secular institutions that were cited by respondents as needing to offer greater support for interfaith activity included schools (ideally with encouragement and guidance from the Department for Education and NASACRE), businesses, philanthropists, trade unions and the creative sector.

*“Willingness of the whole faith community and not just a few leaders to be engaged, I think that engaging other community leaders, particularly our elected representatives helps with this.”*

*“All of the above but definitely needs to be seen as a high profile ministerial responsibility.”*

*“Our Monarch has shown great leadership in these values and his patronage of this work is greatly appreciated. His encouragement to obtain people to support these activities would be greatly appreciated.”*

# Distinct Voices

A further six workshops were conducted for specific stakeholder groups. The reflections from these workshops have been included in the report. Some distinct perspectives are set out below.

## Interview with Lord Khan of Burnley, Minister for Faith, Communities and Resettlement

Lord Khan of Burnley is Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, with a focus on faith, belief and communities. We conducted a one-on-one interview with Lord Khan to gain his understanding of the current state of Inter Faith Week and the interfaith movement more broadly.

Lord Khan highlighted the significant contributions of faith and belief communities to public life in the UK. He emphasised that faith and belief communities not only support those who share their beliefs but also extend their services to people of all faiths and none. Faith and belief communities are deeply embedded in the fabric of society and play a vital role in shaping public life.

The minister remarked that faith and belief communities are currently facing several challenges. Financial pressures, including difficulties in sustaining places of worship and community services, are a growing concern. Intra-faith divisions within faith and belief communities also pose obstacles to unity and progress. Religious hate crime also remains a serious issue, affecting individuals and communities across the UK. Addressing these challenges requires collaboration between faith and belief communities, civil society, and government.

Lord Khan noted that there is a desire among some faith and belief communities for more meaningful and inclusive engagement with public institutions. He expressed the view that ongoing dialogue and consistent engagement, involving both single-faith and interfaith representatives, are key to fostering mutual understanding and trust.

Lord Khan described Inter Faith Week as an opportunity to recognise and celebrate the contributions of faith and belief communities throughout the year. He spoke of the value of the Week in encouraging reflection, learning, and participation in local communities, schools and organisations. He noted its potential to support wider social aims such as inclusion, understanding, and engagement, particularly among young people and underrepresented communities.

He also noted the importance of sustaining and raising awareness of Inter Faith Week. Encouraging wider participation, sharing of positive stories, and local engagement are seen as ways to support the Week’s growth and impact.

## Workshop with Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

The Faith, Belief and Community Insights Team at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is the team responsible for overseeing much of the government's engagement in interfaith work. Following the one-on-one interview with Lord Khan of Burnley, we conducted a workshop with members of this team.

Similarly to Lord Khan, participants highlighted the significant contribution that faith and belief communities play to national life. Despite the underrepresentation of faith and belief in media and public consciousness, they identified that faith and belief remains central to British society, with over half of the population identifying as people of faith. Faith and belief communities act as pillars of local life, offering support during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. Participants identified the increasing willingness of different faith and belief communities to collaborate on common issues, which has strengthened interfaith relationships in recent years.

However, they also identified how faith and belief communities face several challenges, including poor religious literacy in wider society leading to misconceptions and stereotypes; global conflicts affecting local relationships; and internal struggles, such as intergenerational divides and lack of trust in leadership, further complicating engagement.

The relationship between faith and belief communities and government was recognised as multifaceted. Participants observed that some communities may face barriers to engagement given the complexity of navigating governmental structures. Participants expressed an aspiration for greater visibility, legitimacy, and consistent opportunities for engagement across the breadth of faith and belief communities.

Looking ahead, participants saw Inter Faith Week as a valuable opportunity to broaden public understanding of faith and belief. Echoing sentiments expressed by Lord Khan in the one-on-one interview, they hoped that Inter Faith Week might grow into a widely recognised event across schools and communities and become a key tool for strengthening community cohesion in local areas.

## Workshop with Practitioners in the Schools and Education Sector

The closing report for the Inter Faith Network revealed that a substantial proportion of activity that takes place during Inter Faith Week happens in schools.<sup>4</sup> In 2023, 20.17% (233 out of 1,155) of events were organised by schools, making schools the largest contributor of events that year. As such, during the planning process of the consultation, it was deemed important to run a specific workshop for those working in the schools and education sector. The workshop was attended by teachers and RE professionals across the country, and highlighted the specific successes, challenges and opportunities for running Inter Faith Network events in schools.

For all participants, interfaith work in schools contributes significantly to the RE curriculum and has a significant impact on pupils. When done well, it creates opportunities for learning about other faiths and beliefs, and for personal growth, helping students develop confidence in discussing their own beliefs and asking questions about others. Participants mentioned how visiting places of worship, meeting people from different faith and belief backgrounds and participating in shared discussions deepens pupils understanding and shifts their perspectives from "us and them" to a shared sense of humanity.

The main challenge described for interfaith activity in schools is capacity. Many participants described capacity issues related to fitting interfaith activity into the curriculum, alongside competing priorities. They also described capacity issues relating to planning sessions, and described how ready-to-go resources would significantly help this. Beyond capacity issues, participants described how the effectiveness of interfaith activity in schools depends on relationships with local faith and belief communities; teacher enthusiasm and expertise; and school and SACRE engagement. When properly supported, participants described how interfaith work has the potential to encourage pupils to be inquisitive and open to faith and belief.

During Inter Faith Week 2024, a wide range of activities took place in schools around the county, including inter-school meetings, faith and belief trails, and interfaith presentations with guest speakers from local faith and belief communities. Schools made use of Inter Faith Week for Schools resources to enhance lessons. Participants described how Inter Faith Week is a key moment in the school year in bringing RE into the forefront and opening up new conversations and relationships that can be continued throughout the rest of the year.

Looking ahead, participants wished for Inter Faith Week to be included in RE curricula and part of the school calendar across subjects, to ensure that it is celebrated by all schools and educational institutions around the country. They described wanting more support from local faith and belief communities, local authorities and SACRE's. They also described how their vision of Inter Faith Week is student-led, with pupil voice being central to how it is shaped and run.

<sup>4</sup>The Inter Faith Network for the UK, 2021 / 2024 : A Closing Review [interfaith.org.uk/uploads/IFN\\_Review\\_2021-24.pdf](https://interfaith.org.uk/uploads/IFN_Review_2021-24.pdf)

## Workshop with Young People

Since young people are the future of the interfaith movement, it was deemed important during the planning process of the consultation to run a specific workshop for those aged 18-35 working or volunteering in the interfaith movement, and those involved in youth interfaith programmes.

A key theme that emerged was the impact of interfaith work. Participants reflected on how interfaith activity can be transformative, breaking down prejudices, building friendships and even improving mental health and well-being. However, early in the workshop, participants described how interfaith activity is quite traditional and has not adapted to what young people now want. Social action projects and storytelling opportunities were described as key activities for engaging young people now, but as activities to be run alongside, not instead of, other types of events such as interfaith dialogue and panel discussions. This was reflected in the description of events run and participated in during Inter Faith Week 2024.

For participants, Inter Faith Week is the moment in the year when interfaith activity is most visible and easy to do. It was seen as an opportunity to raise awareness, increase engagement, and start new initiatives. During Inter Faith Week 2024, participants were mostly involved in events on their university campuses, organised by the student interfaith forum, chaplaincy and Students Union. Events brought together different faith and belief societies through panel discussions, socials, and social action projects run in partnership with local charities. Little mention was made of Inter Faith Week events run by the local or regional interfaith body. Whilst participants did not directly explain why they were not involved in the local or regional interfaith body, they elsewhere described not wanting to be the only young person at an event. This is a frequent cry of young interfaith practitioners. Participants in the workshop described wanting to be actively involved in the planning and running of interfaith events, as key partners.

These issues resonate with the intergenerational divide that some have identified as a key challenge for the interfaith movement.<sup>5</sup> Addressing this divide is key to the future success of Inter Faith Week, and the movement more broadly.

<sup>5</sup> LSE Religion and Global Society, *Interfaith Beyond the Pandemic: from London Communities to Global Identities* (2021) [lse.ac.uk/rgs/assets/RGS-Interfaith-Beyond-the-Pandemic-Public.pdf](https://www.lse.ac.uk/rgs/assets/RGS-Interfaith-Beyond-the-Pandemic-Public.pdf)

## Workshop with Interfaith Practitioners in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

As mentioned in the methodology section, the focus of the consultation is the future of Inter Faith Week in England specifically. However, we were keen to highlight the success of Inter Faith Week and interfaith activity in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Established by Interfaith Scotland in 2004, Scottish Interfaith Week provides an opportunity for interfaith groups, faith and belief communities, schools, organisations and local communities across the country to celebrate Scotland's religious diversity by planning events that bring people together to promote dialogue, understanding and cooperation between diverse religious communities and cultures. Scottish Interfaith Week continues to be managed by Interfaith Scotland and has grown from strength to strength with around 100 events now being held each year across the whole of Scotland.

The Interfaith Council for Wales was established in 2003. It aims to facilitate dialogue between the Welsh Government and the major faith and belief communities on any matters affecting the economic, social and cultural life in Wales, as well as to advance public knowledge and mutual understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of the different faith and belief communities in Wales, to promote good relations, and to be of service to the people of Wales.

The Northern Ireland Interfaith Forum is a voluntary organisation that promotes understanding and cooperation among different religious and ethnic groups in Northern Ireland. It was founded in 1993, and brings together people from all the main faith and belief communities in Northern Ireland. It aims to foster dialogue and respect between people of different faiths and to raise awareness about the diversity of religious and ethnic communities in Northern Ireland.

To ensure that interfaith practitioners in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland fed into the consultation, we ran a specific workshop to explore two main questions:

- What can Inter Faith Week in England learn from the successes and challenges of similar initiatives in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland?
- How can Inter Faith Week in England work in partnership with similar initiatives in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland? How can we support each other?

One of the strengths of interfaith work in Scotland and Wales is political involvement in it. Every year during Scottish Interfaith Week, the First Minister shares a video message on social media to highlight that the Week is happening and show their support for it. Throughout the week, MPs regularly attend events around the country. Similarly in Wales, MPs and Members of the Senedd regularly attend events during Inter Faith Week, which can be attributed to the pre-existing close relationship that these politicians have with faith and belief communities.

For Scottish Interfaith Week, a unique theme is set every year, to help connect the week to the key issues and methodologies of the moment, for example climate, or storytelling. Doing so creates opportunities to engage people and organisations who do not normally get involved in interfaith activities, but may have an interest in the specific theme or methodology, thus broadening engagement. For Scottish Interfaith Week, an event is hosted at the start of the week to launch the week ahead. The event is hosted in a different city every year, in partnership with the local interfaith group in that city. Doing this provides an opportunity to spotlight a different city every year and highlight the interfaith work that happens there around the year.

For all participants, inclusion was a key challenge. Several participants described the importance of reaching beyond those regularly involved in interfaith activity. Some described opening up Inter Faith Week to those with non-religious worldviews, especially as these become more common. It was discussed how 'interfaith' can be an exclusionary term due to its focus on faith over belief and non-belief, and there was some discussion about whether a rebranding is needed. This reflects the feedback from the main workshops, with some pushing a rebrand to 'Inter Faith and Belief Week', and others pushing to keep 'Inter Faith Week.'

Beyond widening participation, the challenges raised mirrored those in England, including lack of buy in from faith and belief leaders and national faith and belief organisations, challenges with engaging young people in schools and universities, responding to the rise of extremism, and competition with other festivals and celebrations, including World Interfaith Harmony Week and World Religions Day. Several suggestions were made for addressing these challenges, including prioritising events that focus on positive encounter and strengthening authentic interfaith relationships.

Participants described the need to strengthen the partnership between interfaith work in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, by promoting solidarity and effective communication. Before its closure, the Inter Faith Network hosted meetings for the four nations to come together. Participants expressed a desire to reinstate the four nations meetings, highlighting the need for fostering collaboration and a shared vision across the four nations.

For all participants, it was crucial that the timing of Inter Faith Week across the nations was aligned. When Inter Faith Week in England was founded in 2009, it took place two weeks before Scottish Interfaith Week. Interfaith Scotland subsequently moved Scottish Interfaith Week to align with Inter Faith Week in England. Whilst there was some acknowledgement that there are pros and cons to the November timing, participants agreed that the date should stay the same, to ensure it is aligned across the UK.

Participants also suggested that collaborative efforts could extend to sharing best practice and positive impact stories, attending interfaith events across the UK, co-promotion, and jointly developing resources, such as school materials that can be used by all four nations. At the same time, work should be encouraged to reflect the local faith and belief context of each specific nation. By working together, the four nations can create a more unified and dynamic interfaith landscape, fostering understanding and cooperation across the UK.

# Key Themes

We suggest that some key themes have emerged from the responses to individual questions, as summarised in the preceding chapters. These are set out below.

## Positive Impact and Importance of Interfaith Work and Inter Faith Week

The first major theme to emerge from the research findings was the positive impact and importance of interfaith work in general and Inter Faith Week in particular. This impact and importance were felt to be inherent in interfaith as a distinct practice, and were separate from questions of the role of faith and belief in public life or the contribution that faith and belief communities are seen to make to society.

The question 'Why Inter Faith Week?' was an important part of this theme. At the heart of Inter Faith Week, and interfaith work more broadly, is the connecting of people of different faith and belief identities to build and strengthen trust and resilience and to help reduce prejudice and faith based hate. Without this work there is a danger that the positive role that faith and belief plays in society will be overshadowed by polarised debate around societal issues, such as immigration and poverty, which can lead to division along faith, racial and ethnic lines. The distinct practice of interfaith work, as well as Inter Faith Week specifically, brings communities together to celebrate diversity, deepen understanding, and build alliances for tackling social issues.

## Huge Variety of Interfaith Work Across the Country

Secondly, it was very clear throughout the research that a huge variety of interfaith work happens across the country throughout the year, in grassroots, regional, national and indeed international contexts, engaged in by dedicated interfaith organisations, faith and belief communities, schools and universities, workplaces, trade unions and others. These have a wide variety of approaches and motivations. For a great many, Inter Faith Week offers a useful opportunity to focus, galvanise or promote these activities.

## Key Factors Limiting the Impact and Reach of Inter Faith Week

Next, there are some notable factors limiting the impact and reach of Inter Faith Week. These are as follows.

- First, the **negative public perception of religion and belief** in society, exacerbated by negative and sensationalist media coverage and the rise of faith based hate, which the interfaith movement seeks to address.
- Second, the **'interfaith bubble'**, caused by the fact that many of the people involved in Inter Faith Week are already involved in and committed to interfaith work, and there is a perpetual challenge in involving others.
- Third, **funding and resources** for staffing, running events and promotion are limited.
- Fourth, there is **little institutional support**, including from national and local government, national faith and belief organisations, schools and the media.

## Terminology

Fourthly, there was some disagreement between research respondents over appropriate terminology. Whilst most felt that 'interfaith' accurately summarises the work that practitioners do, there were some passionate voices arguing that the term was outdated, in that it excluded atheists and others with non-theistic worldviews. Others felt that it had connotations that might deter newcomers to dialogue between different religion and belief traditions, such as well-intentioned but irrelevant 'worthiness'; expectations on participants that they should water down their own beliefs; or even that syncretistic worship might be involved. We have chosen in this report to retain the term 'interfaith' as the one which, though imperfect, is mostly widely used and understood among those engaged in our research.

Whatever terminology might be preferred, interfaith practitioners in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland felt that it is important to keep it aligned across the UK.

## November Timing

The fifth theme to have emerged is ongoing disagreement among practitioners about the timing of Inter Faith Week during the year. Whilst most people participating in the workshops or completing the online questionnaire did not mention timing (implying that this is not a key issue for most), some felt strongly that the choice of November for the Week is problematic. People representing schools and universities felt that the month is difficult because of the need to commence planning at the beginning of the academic year; others felt that November is cold and dark, so people were reluctant to leave their houses, making outdoor events impossible. Yet others felt that November is too busy with religious festivals, Remembrance Day, and Anti-Bullying Week in schools. A minority of respondents reported that their organisations chose to ignore the Week altogether, and focus activities during UN World Interfaith Harmony Week in February.

On the other hand, many respondents felt that November is ideal for the Week because there are few other national commemorations at that time, and people need an opportunity to engage in their local communities and meet new people. Others feel that the timing marks a convenient start to the following year's activities. Some noted that the decision of the

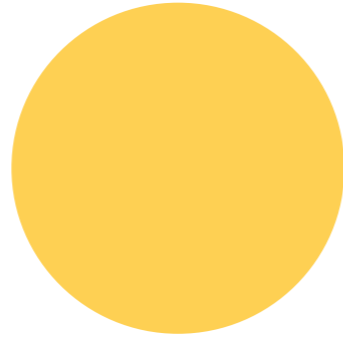
Inter Faith Network to coincide Inter Faith Week with Remembrance-tide is helpful, in that it provides event organisers with a ready-made theme around peace-making and reconciliation. Interfaith practitioners in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland felt that it is important to keep the timings of Inter Faith Week aligned across the UK.

## Key Suggestions for Improving Inter Faith Week

The final theme that emerged from the research was the readiness of respondents to put forward suggestions for how Inter Faith Week could be improved. The six most frequently expressed ideas were as follows.

- First, **the scope of the Week should be expanded** to better include smaller faith and belief communities and non-religious worldviews, whilst protecting the distinct interfaith space for people of different faiths and beliefs to come together.
- Second, those running the Week should make **further efforts to expand its reach** to individuals and local faith and belief communities outside the 'interfaith bubble' of those already involved in and committed to interfaith work.
- Third, existing interfaith work in schools and universities should be **better integrated** with interfaith initiatives in local communities and vice versa, so as to broaden the engagement of the local interfaith movement with children and young people.
- Fourth, ways should be found to **extend the impact** of the Week throughout the year, through continuing engagement and programmes.
- Fifth, a **national coordinating mechanism** needs to be established, to support local grassroots work through resource creation and distribution, funding, expertise, training, and the sharing of best practice and positive stories.
- Sixth and finally, **buy-in and support** is needed from outside the interfaith movement, including national and local government, national faith and belief organisations, schools and educational bodies, and the media. Funding, assistance with marketing and communications and endorsement from leaders were given as examples of the kind of support that is required.

# Conclusion



The central aim of the consultation was to enable a creative, inclusive dialogue amongst key UK-wide stakeholders to shape the future of Inter Faith Week 2025 and beyond. We believe that this report shows that this aim has been achieved. Beyond that, the consultation has also generated broader ideas and questions relating to the interfaith movement, in the wake of the closure of the Inter Faith Network for the UK.

We see this consultation as a key moment for the interfaith movement, a coming together and uniting after a tough few years. In the workshops themselves, we saw new connections being made and even new projects and events being planned. As well as being the mechanism for the research, the workshops have been key in bringing people together and strengthening the movement itself.

*“I think it’s been a rough few years for interfaith practitioners and the damage done during this time is going to have a long legacy. We need space to support each other and bolster our relationships as a sector if we’re going to make this work.”*

We want this report to help grow Inter Faith Week, and the movement more broadly. The report highlights the positive impact and importance of Inter Faith Week and interfaith work more broadly, alongside the challenges that currently limit their impact and reach.

One of our central recommendations is that the growth of Inter Faith Week should be supported through the establishment of a National Steering Group. The National Steering Group would not seek to replace the Inter Faith Network for the UK, but would take on the responsibility for co-ordinating Inter Faith Week. A critical part of its function would be to support grassroots interfaith work during the Week, for instance through resource creation and distribution, funding, expertise, training, and sharing best practice and positive stories. The National Steering Group should be funded by a variety of sources to ensure sustainability.

The National Steering Group could be comprised of members of the ad hoc steering group for Inter Faith Week 2024, augmented by additional voices that were not represented in the original group, including young people and representatives of smaller faith and belief communities and non-religious worldviews. Membership should be formalised, and Terms of Reference agreed.

We call upon all readers of this report to play an active role in the growth of Inter Faith Week. We encourage them to reflect upon these findings, to consider in what ways they reflect their own experiences in their specific contexts, and in what ways they do not. We call upon readers to share this report with the faith and belief communities and interfaith bodies that they are part of, and with their political and faith and belief leaders, encouraging them to adopt the recommendations that apply to them.

With the commitment of all practitioners, activists and enthusiasts in the interfaith movement, this report has the potential to strengthen Inter Faith Week, and increase its reach and impact.

# Recommendations

On the basis of the consultation process, the findings and key themes of which are summarised in the preceding chapters, we are pleased to offer the following recommendations. These are addressed to three key audiences: to national, regional and local interfaith bodies; to central government and local authorities and; to national faith and belief organisations.

Collaboration, creativity and courage are the principles underlying the recommendations. We hope that these principles will be shared by all who engage in interfaith work and activity.

## Recommendations to National, Regional and Local Interfaith Bodies.

1. Commit to the stated aims of Inter Faith Week as previously articulated by the Inter Faith Network for the UK: strengthening good interfaith relations at all levels; increasing awareness of the different and distinct faith and belief communities in the UK, in particular celebrating and building on the contribution which their members make to their neighbourhoods and to wider society; and increasing understanding between people of religious and non-religious beliefs.
2. Participate in the establishment of the National Steering Group, to oversee and manage Inter Faith Week. The Steering Group should be committed to working inclusively and collaboratively; recognising, harnessing and celebrating the power of regional and local grassroots work, whilst furthering the national strategy and vision; and prioritising the voices of young people.
3. Fund outreach and communications to help increase the impact and reach of Inter Faith Week.
4. Work collaboratively, pooling knowledge, resources, training and impact data.
5. Commit to being courageous, seeking to expand (or burst) the ‘interfaith bubble’, addressing difficult or controversial topics, and trialling new ways of working.
6. Create a tailored engagement strategy for each faith and belief community, using inside expertise and good consultation, in order to address specific challenges and fears, thus encouraging participation.
7. Prioritise intergenerational work, engaging young people across schools, universities and local communities to get involved in interfaith activity. This means listening to young people, meeting them where they are, and giving them the power and tools to move Inter Faith Week and the interfaith movement more broadly into the next phase.
8. Produce and provide training for religious leaders to start conversations about interfaith within their communities and to promote participation in Inter Faith Week.

# Recommendations to Central Government and Local Authorities

## Both central government and local authorities

1. Go beyond acknowledging the positive role that faith and belief play in society, to learning from and deploying the experiences and expertise of the interfaith movement to help address society's problems, such as inequality and polarisation. Primarily, this can be done by meaningfully engaging interfaith bodies in policymaking.
2. Commit to understanding the experiences of, and sensitivities within, faith and belief communities, which can prevent them from engaging in interfaith work and with the authorities.
3. Embed the principles of this consultation process in engagement with the interfaith movement and faith and belief communities, including by adopting a co-production approach, involving younger interfaith practitioners, and building local partnerships to work at the grassroots level.
4. Create a list of free or affordable venues that can be used for national, regional or grassroots projects during Inter Faith Week.
5. Provide communications support in the lead-up to Inter Faith Week, to build momentum and encourage participation.
6. Encourage participation in Inter Faith Week by political leaders, the Royal Family, Lord-Lieutenants, MPs and local Councillors.

## Central government only

7. Declare Inter Faith Week a public celebration that is fixed in the calendar, marked in Parliament and celebrated by all public bodies.
8. Commit to multi-year financial support to the National Steering Group, enabling it to oversee and manage Inter Faith Week and its sustained future, including by employing a full-time staff member.
9. Provide funding for a ceremonial launch event at the start of Inter Faith Week every year.
10. Offer annual small grant funding for local and regional projects, to be distributed by the National Steering Group.
11. Promote cross-Departmental engagement and support for Inter Faith Week, including within the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Department of Education, the Home Office and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, as well as cross-Party support.

## Local authorities only

12. Address the disparities around resourcing for interfaith activity, by creating a funding stream for local Inter Faith Week projects and by recruiting permanent faith and belief engagement officers.

# Recommendations to National Faith and Belief Organisations

1. Set aside a funding stream to support national independent interfaith bodies and local interfaith groups to run or participate in activities during Inter Faith Week and the rest of the year.
2. Appoint interfaith officers, where these do not already exist.
3. Provide communications support to national interfaith bodies and local interfaith groups in the lead-up to Inter Faith Week, to build momentum and encourage participation.
4. Encourage places of worship to open their doors to people of other faiths and beliefs during Inter Faith Week.
5. Encourage faith and belief leaders to become 'ambassadors for interfaith', linking religious teachings to interfaith principles, clarifying misconceptions and fears about interfaith, and encouraging and supporting congregations to participate in Inter Faith Week.

# Thanks and Credits

## Many people have contributed to this consultation, and we are very grateful to all of them:

Those who completed the questionnaire and attended workshops;

Lord Khan of Burnley, Minister for Faith, Communities and Resettlement, for commissioning this research and committing to supporting the future of Inter Faith Week;

The Faith, Belief and Community Insights Team at Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for supporting us through the process;

## The ad hoc steering group and attendees of the review meeting:

Phil Champain, Faith & Belief Forum  
Carrie Alderton, Faith & Belief Forum  
Sophie Mitchell, Faith & Belief Forum  
Warwick Hawkins, United Religions Initiative UK and Faith in Society  
Deepak Naik, United Religions Initiative UK  
Georgina Bye, Council of Christians and Jews  
Nathan Eddy, Council of Christians and Jews  
Denise Chaplin, NASACRE  
Stuart Diamond, Mitzvah Day and Brighton and Hove Faith in Action  
Cinde Lee, Religions for Peace UK  
Martin Weightman, All Faiths Network  
Jeremy Rodell, Humanists UK  
Mike Stygal, CANDIFA and The Pagan Federation  
Kathryn Wright, Culham St Gabriel's Trust  
Julie Childs, RE Today  
Tara Corry, Women's Interfaith Network  
Esmond Rosen, Barnet Multi Faith Forum  
Sheida Tanhai, UK Baha'i Office of Public Affairs  
Ibrahim Mogra, Christian Muslim Forum and European Council of Religious Leaders

## Regional Partners:

Stewart Yarlett and Mustafa Field, Faiths Forum for London  
Iona Hine, Cambridge Interfaith Programme  
Warwick Hawkins and Shahin Akhtar, United Religions Initiative UK  
Tripti Megeri, Bristol Multi Faith Forum  
Warren Elf, Faith Network 4 Manchester  
Gavin Wort, County Durham Faiths Network

## Report Authors:

Warwick Hawkins, United Religions Initiative UK and Faith in Society  
Sophie Mitchell, Faith & Belief Forum

## Designer:

Alex Tucker

# Bibliography and Further Reading

Inter Faith Week website (including resources for running Inter Faith Week events and programmes in a variety of contexts and to a variety of audiences)  
[interfaithweek.org/about](https://interfaithweek.org/about)

Inter Faith Week for Schools website (including resources for running Inter Faith Week events and programmes in educational contexts)  
[ifw4schools.co.uk](https://ifw4schools.co.uk)

The Inter Faith Network for the UK, *Inter Faith Week 2009: A Report and Evaluation*  
[interfaith.org.uk/uploads/ifweek2009report.pdf](https://interfaith.org.uk/uploads/ifweek2009report.pdf)

The Inter Faith Network for the UK, *2021 / 2024: A Closing Review*  
[interfaith.org.uk/uploads/IFN\\_Review\\_2021-24.pdf](https://interfaith.org.uk/uploads/IFN_Review_2021-24.pdf)

Communities and Local Government, *Face to face, side by side: A framework for partnership in our multi-faith society* (London: CLG, 2008)  
[webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20120920014517mp\\_/http://communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/898668.pdf](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20120920014517mp_/http://communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/898668.pdf)

Office for National Statistics, statistical bulletin, *Religion, England and Wales: Census 2021* (29 November 2022)  
[ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021](https://ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021)

Theos, *The Nones: Who are they and what do they believe?* (2022)  
[theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/The-Nones---Who-are-they-and-what-do-they-believe.pdf](https://theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/The-Nones---Who-are-they-and-what-do-they-believe.pdf)

LSE Religion and Global Society, *Interfaith Beyond the Pandemic: from London Communitiesto Global Identities* (2021)  
[lse.ac.uk/rgs/assets/RGS-Interfaith-Beyond-the-Pandemic-Public.pdf](https://lse.ac.uk/rgs/assets/RGS-Interfaith-Beyond-the-Pandemic-Public.pdf)

*“Interfaith work is a critical part of social cohesion – which cannot meaningfully exist without it – as well as building grassroots coalitions that can provide a key voice and mutual support on a variety of issues. Interfaith work strengthens the capacity of a community by connecting the dots between people with shared values who can then support each other and pool their resources.”*

With thanks to the ad hoc steering group:

The  
Faith  
& Belief  
Forum



nasacre  
National Association of  
Standing Advisory Councils  
on Religious Education



Mitzvah  
Day

Religions for Peace  
UNITED KINGDOM