

Living Together in Liverpool Conference



On 26th June 2008, Liverpool Youth SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education) held a conference called Living Together in Liverpool, at Hope University, Liverpool. The conference was for year 12 pupils from schools across Merseyside.

Over 130 delegates attended the conference, including students and teachers from 10 schools across Merseyside, Lancashire Youth SACRE, and PGCE RE students.

Following registration, the day began with a welcome from the Chair of Liverpool Youth SACRE, Adam Fineburg and Director of Liverpool Community Spirit (facilitating body of the Liverpool Youth SACRE), Matthew Thompson. Clive Lawton gave a thought-provoking, stimulating key note speech before the morning workshops began.

The workshops were based on different aspects of faith such as food or fashion and delivered from different faith perspectives e.g. Faith and Dance was delivered from a Hindu perspective. Students were able to attend two workshops of their choice, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The workshops were as follows:

Workshop	Faith
Faith and Food	Muslim, Sikh, Jewish
Faith and Fashion	Muslim, Christian, Jewish
Faith and Dance	Hindu
Faith and Football	Christian
Faith and Art	Buddhist
Faith and Music	Christian
Philosophy workshop	Non-denominational

Following the first set of morning workshops, a 'Question Time' session was held. Students had been asked, as a school group, to submit a question they wanted to ask the panel. The panel was made up of faith representatives from Liverpool's six major faith communities and a representative from the Baha'i faith. Clive Lawton chaired the panel and discussion.

As part of the conference, a competition was held which asked delegates to bring a piece of headwear reflecting their identity, the term 'identity' was open to individual interpretation. During the lunch break, delegates were invited to have their photos taken in their headwear and prizes were offered for the best 'reflection of identity'.

Following the lunch break, workshops were repeated for delegates to attend their next session.

The day culminated in a lively plenary session where products of the workshops were displayed. Food from the Faith and Food workshops was laid out for the delegates, a Buddhist wheel of life and prayer wheel were on display from the Faith and Art workshop and the leader of the Faith and Dance workshop did a Hindu dance display. The highlight of the session was the Faith and Music workshop delegates, who sang the gospel song Oh Happy Day which all the delegates joined in with. Prizes were handed out to the bearers of the three best piece of 'identity headwear' and finally Clive Lawton gave a summary speech of the day.

The conference was a huge success for the Youth SACRE members who organised and ran the day, the delegates, Hope University's RE Services Department and Merseyside's schools. The day was a brilliant opportunity for the Youth SACRE members to demonstrate their communication and organisational skills and excellent initiative. It offered an opportunity for students to explore the RE syllabus they had studied in secondary school in a practical and varied way and to interact with members of communities they may normally not have the occasion to meet.

Delegates who attended experienced a flavour of Liverpool's faith communities from grass-roots members of each community and an opportunity to contemplate and discuss community cohesion in their school and area. The success of the conference has led Liverpool Youth SACRE to apply for funding to hold another conference in 2009/10, increase delegate numbers and diversity of workshops and the programme.

Evaluation forms were given to all delegates at the conference, the following comments were received:

This is my first conference and has set a high bench mark so no improvement needed.

I wouldn't improve the conference at all – it seemed to have a good impact on so many people and gave younger people a better sense of community and equality. Workshop on football was fantastic!

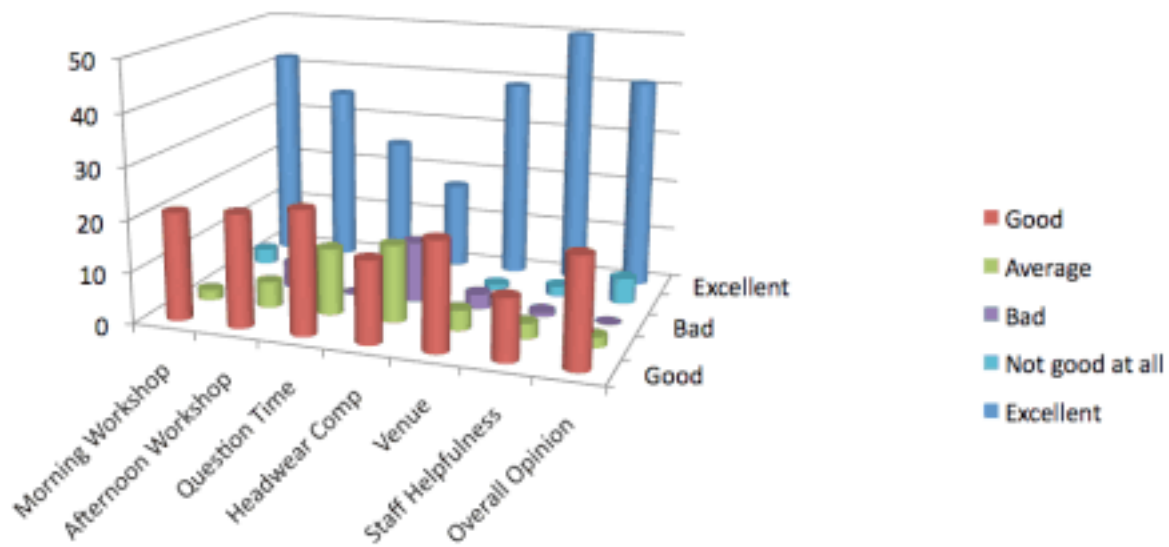
Can't be improved – it was brilliant!

Nothing to improve on! Learnt so much. Thank you.

There were also comments regarding a desire to be able to do more than two workshops and consider issues within faith communities: -Had three workshops instead of two and thus make them shorter.

Include workshops on "issues" – moral, ethical e.g. war, natural world, poverty from religious perspectives.

The following bar chart describes delegates' responses to various aspects of the conference:



Based on these evaluations, and the success of the next funding bid, we hope to be able to hold an improved conference in the future that responds to the needs of Liverpool and Merseyside's communities, accommodates more students, creates more opportunities to take part in different workshops and explores more issues around community cohesion.