

# **Project Report Bridge Builders Preston**

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These are based on the additional outputs specified in the original proposal

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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A report on good practice and learning from an innovative project from which other districts can learn, and which might form the basis for a more extensive continuation project.</li> </ul> | <p>Paper of reflections on the process and how it might be taken up by others</p>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working papers offering sociological and theological reflection on what has been learned., disseminated via a web page.</li> </ul>   | <p>Paper 1::: Reflections on Policy Issues for local authorities and others in the Statutory sector.</p> <p>Paper 2 Theological reflections for Christians working in Partnership</p> <p>Linked paper.. to Preston section of CULF Communities in transition project</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brief introductory guidelines for developing "quick win" training sessions and programmes which practitioners can use for themselves.</li> </ul>   | <p>Outline of a learning process with some resource points..</p> <p>Collection of stories...for reflection</p>   |

## Why this Project?

For about a decade now the UK Government has been urging local authorities and strategic partnerships to develop engagement with faith communities for the sake of urban regeneration, neighbourhood renewal, more effective delivery of local services, increased and more diverse civic participation and improved social cohesion. In the second half of 2005 the Home Office Launched a new £5m Faith Based Capacity Building Fund administered by the Community Development Foundation offering both small and larger grants to Faith Based organizations for capacity building, and to any organization for inter faith social cohesion projects. The recognition of the role of faith in public policy signals a highly significant change in the environment, which in the view of many knowledgeable practitioners is only gradually being appreciated in local government.

There would appear to be lack of understanding on both sides and because of the gulf in assumptions, language, culture and values between the world of local government and the world(s) of faith(s) communication often fails, and partnership often travels along a bumpy road. It is from the identification of this problem that the Bridge Builders Preston project starts and the process was designed to address the issue by consulting across the sectors and faiths, to bring people from the different perspectives together to reflect on issues arising in their work and to seek improved policy solution.

## ***Existing knowledge***

At the national level in recent years there has been much research, writing and policy development through the Inner Cities Religious Council at the ODPM and the Faith Communities Unit within the Home Office. Research such as Farnell et al. (2003) in which Greg Smith was a partner has identified the issue of the limited "faith literacy" and lack of empathy of much of the Statutory sector, which has been taken up in campaigning terms by such organisations as Faithworks. Greg Smith's research and writing (see CV and web site), and that of colleagues at UEL on faith and volunteering as

identified many of the issues, and theological themes emerging within the faith sector.

Central policy has, to an extent, filtered through to the level of the regional development agencies, such as the NWDA, and Yorkshire Forward, the RDA for East Anglia and in London through the London Civic Forum and the broad based organising of TELCO. Between them various seconded posts for faith related programmes, policy reports and campaigns have been produced. At the local district level many areas (including Preston) have established Faith Forums or networks within their local strategic Partnership Structures. However, in many cases these appear as yet to be little more than a formal structure for "representing" the faith sector. Also at the local level many areas have inter faith networks or Councils of faith that seem to be mainly concerned with promoting inter-religious dialogue rather than social action.

As far as we know there is little happening yet in the field of faith literacy development in local authorities with the result that practice in the area ranges from good to appalling, and clear to confusing (sometimes in the same authority). Nor is there much research, and still less action / reflection, involving participants in faith based social action from across the religious spectrum. Thus we believe this project fits in a unique way into what we understand to be the priorities of the MB Reckitt Trust.

This project builds on work carried out a few years ago under the Building Bridges of Hope Value Sharing project. This process, co-ordinated by Dr. Ron Ram through the Churches Commission on Mission, part of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, and funded partially through the EU's Soul for Europe Programme, drew together participants from faith based projects in London, Belfast, Antwerp, Dortmund, Rotterdam, Alsace-Lorraine and Motherwell in Scotland. Three institutional bodies were also involved - The Inner Cities Religious Council in England, The European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society, and the Forward Studies Unit of the European Commission. There were also sociological and theological consultants. (Reports and publications are available on the CWM website Together they developed a process of reflection and enabling based on sharing stories, and the identification of shared and sometimes conflicting values which underlie partnership work in areas such as community cohesion, urban regeneration, social welfare and community development.

## ***Our location in national networks***

Because of a range of involvements with other agencies and activities in this field the Preston Bridge Builders project was well located both to pick up contextual information from across the country and to maximize interest in our work at the national level. We mention only the most significant connections we had during the 12 months of the project in the section which follows.

- ABBC the Association of Building Bridges Churches was involved in the early days of designing the Preston Project and has accompanied the work in the person of their General Secretary Dr Ron Ram, a committee member Ian Cloke who travelled from Sheffield to take part in the local Preston Steering group meetings, and Linda Sloss one of ABBCs team of volunteer accompaniers who lives in Preston and helped with interviewing and transcription and with organising the two workshops. ABBC has developed a proposal for a wider rolling out of the process piloted in Preston and for testing the process of accompaniment in projects around the country. This proposal has been submitted to several potential funding bodies and the outcome of these bids is awaited.
- FBRN The Faith Based Regeneration Network has received government funding and has sought to build bridges between faith communities and extend their capacity to engage in regeneration partnerships and service delivery funded by the state. From an early stage their CEO Doreen Finneron has shown interest and been kept in contact with the Preston work, and was able to attend the second of our workshops. FBRN has asked for permission to share and use some of our materials. Furthermore in November 2005 Greg Smith worked on a freelance basis for FBRN in their contract with the Community Development Foundation offering advice to religious groups preparing bids for the new Home Office Faith Based Capacity Building Fund.
- Communities in transition / CULF: A third overlapping stream from other national projects was Greg Smith's work on the Communities in Transition Project for the Anglican Commission on Urban life and Faith which was supported by the Church Urban Fund and directed by

Prof. Elaine Graham of the University of Manchester. This sought to investigate how churches and communities had responded to 20 years of rapid economic and social change since the Faith in the City Report of 1985. Preston was used, alongside East London, Manchester and the Black Country as a case study city, and there has been much synergy between this and the Preston Bridge Builders work. A web site and CD rom materials are being developed aiming for publication along with the CULF report in spring 2006. There will be a number of links helping the dissemination of our findings.

- JRF census mapping: The Bridge Builders Preston work took place at a time when Greg Smith's main research project with UEL was a JRF funded analysis of Religion and Ethnicity in the 2001 Census. One specific part of the study which is scheduled for publication in 2006 concentrated on the implications for social cohesion of religious and ethnic segregation in Lancashire. Some of the background statistics in this report have been carried across from the JRF project.
- CCWA reflective practice conference: In November the Churches Community Work Alliance held its biennial conference at Swanwick and Greg attended with the costs covered out of the project budget. He was invited by CCWA to co-lead a group of workshops on the theoretical underpinnings of reflective practice in community work. The two days were very worthwhile, both for sharing ideas and information about the Preston project and for comparative learning from others who were there.

### ***The local context***

Local Partnerships and networks in Preston were essential in setting up the local steering group, recruiting people for interviews and the workshops and potentially for disseminating the project findings. The key groups in which we were involved and to whom we owe many thanks for their contribution to the project are:

- The Preston Faith Forum and the partially overlapping Lancashire Forum of Faiths:

Both of these bodies have been set up and are serviced by the local statutory sector, to enable consultation and participation of the faith sector in strategic partnerships and community cohesion issues. Greg Smith attended at least three significant meetings of these forums and Vijayanti Chauhan who chairs both of them played a key role in the steering group and promoting the project. Through her "day job" as an officer in Lancashire County Council, working in the section responsible for funding the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector she also opened up networks within relevant departments in Country Hall. Her personal involvement in the local Hindu community was also extremely valuable to the project.

- Preston City Council and the Avencentral SRB6 Partnership.

Greg Smith's voluntary role as a community board member of the Avencentral partnership opened access to key players in the regeneration of the city. The Regeneration, Community and Leisure Services department were particularly helpful in the persons of Cabinet member Cllr. Afrin, Director Steve Jones and assistant director Derek Whyte. Their principle community regeneration officer Yousuf Motala, was nominated as their representative on the steering group and made a strong contribution, which also drew on his long experience as a member of the local Muslim community.

The Avencentral Partnership executive team also offered generously of their time to support the project. Richard Jones the chief officer helped in setting up the project, and his replacement from March 2005, Michelle Arthur also played a part. Evaluation Officer David Gordon served on the steering group, and Project Co-ordinator Tracey Masheter attended one of the workshops.

- Christian Networks

Greg Smith's involvement with church networks in the city enabled him to draw many people into the project's work. As convenor of the Preston Christian Action Network which seeks to build capacity and ecumenical collaboration in social action he was already in touch with many key players who could be drawn in. Overlapping networks whose members showed



interest and took part included Preston Evangelical Network and Impact Preston.

- NWDA.

Finally we need to mention the role of the Northwest Development Agency and in particular their faiths officer Msgr. John Devine whose work in recent years in researching and promoting the work of the faith sector in the region has done much to establish a climate where partnership between the statutory sector has risen up the agenda. His continuing interest in the projects work should be helpful to dissemination of our reports.

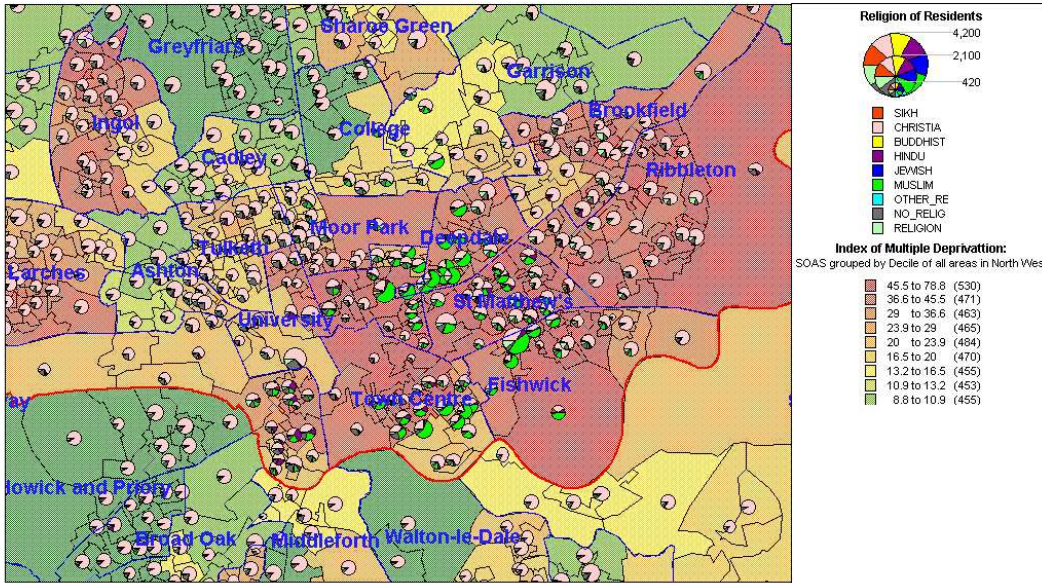
## **PRESTON IN FIGURES 2001**

Preston is England's newest city, and remains the seat of local government of the county of Lancashire, as well as having a city council with powers and responsibilities at the district level. The population of the district in 2001 was 129633 although it is important to stress that the urban area relating to the City is much larger, in particular including South Ribble District. Overall Preston is prospering in comparison with many other parts of the North West. None the less there are many neighbourhoods of multiple urban deprivation as can be seen from the map of the IMD.

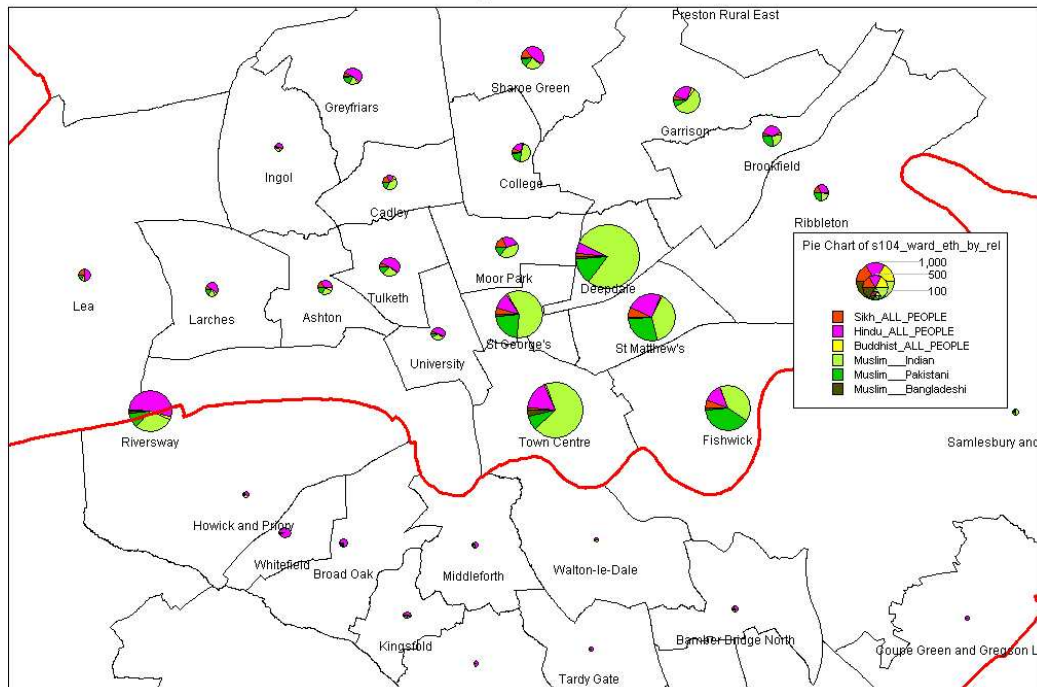
It is in these inner areas that the majority of the ethnic and religious minorities reside. Preston is more diverse than most Lancashire towns with a well established Caribbean community (of around 1000), growing numbers of Chinese and a large South Asian population which includes about 10,000 Muslims, 3200 Hindus and 700 Sikhs (and Christians). Among the Muslims the majority (about 7000) are from Indian (Gujerati speaking backgrounds) with a smaller number of (about 2500) Pakistanis. Most Hindus are also Gujerati speaking but many families moved to the UK after living in East Africa. The central area for Hindu Settlement is on the South West side of the city, while Muslims tend to live in the North and East.

The maps show clearly the areas favoured by particular minority groups who for the most part live in neighbourhoods ranked among the 10% most deprived by the government's 2004 index of multiple deprivation. However it is possible to see that at least a minority of the Hindu population are living in less deprived suburban neighbourhoods. However multi-faith areas are not the only highly deprived parts of Preston. The map shows up some highly deprived social housing estates in the outer East and outer west of the city. Across the river in South Ribble deprivation is hardly noticeable.

## Central Preston 2001 Census Religions Shading shows scores on Index of Multiple deprivation; 2004



## Preston Wards Ethno Religious Minorities in 2001 Census



Preston has a long Christian tradition in which the Roman Catholic church was particularly strong until late in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. There are a dozen mosques and three Hindu temples (including one which has recently developed a substantial and well used community centre), a couple of Sikh Gurdwaras and a Buddhist centre, all located in inner city areas.

While the city has a positive reputation for good community cohesion and celebrating its cultural diversity, and there are a number of good examples of events and projects on an interfaith basis, there remain some tensions between the white and Asian (particularly Muslim) populations and occasional disputes between Hindus and Muslims also arise.

Cross sector partnerships for urban regeneration, neighbourhood renewal and community cohesion are well established. Churches (e.g. the Minster, St Augustine's, Salvation Army), Islamic Groups (e.g. Preston Muslim Forum, Clarendon Centre), and Hindu organisations (e.g. GHS in Broadgate) play a significant part in some of these initiatives.

What we did

- Setting up the steering group

The initial stage of the project involved recruiting suitable members for a local project steering group. An exploratory meeting of interested parties was held in December 2004 and formal steering group meetings took place in January, May, July 2005 and in January 2006. Although attendance was never higher than half a dozen we were able to draw in people from Christian, Hindu and Muslim backgrounds working in both the faith and the statutory sector. A rather wider group who had asked to be kept informed were regularly updated on steering group decisions and other plans by means of an email circulation list.

- Interviews

During April, May and June 2005 about 20 taped interviews were carried out with people in Preston who were involved as statutory or faith communities

players in the world of regeneration and community action. Each lasted between 45t minutes and just over an hour. Linda Sloss was responsible for conducting and transcribing tapes from 3 interviews, Greg Smith for the rest. They yielded a wide range of interesting and significant material which we reflect on in the findings section of the report, and additional working papers.

- Workshop 1

Was held on September 15<sup>th</sup> as a half day workshop, starting with a tour of the St. Augustines New Avenham Centre and Lunch. 32 people from a wide range of backgrounds attended. We heard two presentations about local projects and spent an hour in two workshops reflecting on these and our own experience. A summary report of the proceedings was produced and circulated within a few weeks (and is appended to this report).

- Workshop 2

Was held at Preston Town hall on November 23<sup>rd</sup> starting at 4pm. Turnout was lower than at the first workshop, particularly from the statutory people, perhaps on account of the evening timing. A powerpoint presentation based on issues identified so far was followed by two workshops focusing on improving policy, and funding arrangements. A report of this workshop is appended and the powerpoint is also available.

## **Summary of Key Issues Raised in the Preston Bridge Builders Process**

In the following section we present in summary form the key issues that seemed to emerge from the two workshops and the interviews with individuals. The section is also available as a powerpoint presentation the majority of which was used to feed back initial findings to the second workshop. A more extensive reflective commentary on some of the key theological and policy issues is offered in the project working papers.

### **ISSUES FROM WORKSHOP 1**

#### **1. The Policy Context : Positive signs that were recognised by participants**

- **Central government is looking for engagement with faith communities**
- **Government has set up a faith communities Capacity Building Fund**
- **Regional Interest: NWDA has produced two major reports on Faith Sector contribution in the region**
- **Lancashire County Council has recognised the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector in consultation and grant giving, and service purchasing processes**
- **Preston City Council is working with faith groups through the Faith Forum as part of the strategic forum.**
- **Regeneration Partnerships have supported projects in several local faith based organisations.**

#### **2. Problems recognised as being shared across the Voluntary Community and Faith Sector**

- **Funding Dominates: Paymasters hold the power**
- **Funding regimes are short term, always changing, time consuming, have tight deadlines, and difficult to understand**
- **Establishing partnerships is just another box to tick; one large player usually takes over**

- Fears about privatization of services on the cheap and being bought off to silence critical "voice"
- Pushed to become more business like, (output driven) despite being reluctant to lose charitable voluntary ethos
- Lack of capacity (information, knowledge, skills, staff time, volunteers, resources, "leaders" without followers ) especially when compared with statutory sector.

### 3. Specific issues identified around partnership involving faith groups

#### a). The Power of Faith : Is God at Work?

- Most faith groups have a strong belief in a higher power and the role of prayer which gives an extra dynamic
- They often want to talk about this to outsiders, and persuade them to draw on this power, or even to convert and recruit them
- Beliefs, theologies, cultures and value systems often make it impossible to separate the social from the spiritual
- But this is what statutory funding regimes demand, though it is not always very clear or consistent

#### b) Are All Religions The Same?

- Government seems to prefer multi-faith or inter-faith work. It feels like they want to make us all the same in what we believe and do.
- Some faith groups see their beliefs as contrary to those of other groups.. e.g. some Christians won't allow yoga classes.
- Even within a single faith there are often different cherished identities and long established divisions which can be very "raw" in places

#### c) Low Religious Literacy And Understanding From The Statutory Sector:

- Statutory organizations don't fully understand the diverse needs of different faiths, therefore are often insensitive e.g.  
about food,

or festivals,  
or restrictions on funding from lottery etc.

- Many officers are not aware of the variation within the main faith communities and tend to stereotype and make assumptions

#### 4. Crossing the Bridges?

- There needs to be honest discussion with everything on the table from the start
- Disagreement can lead to dialogue which then brings greater understanding, so don't be afraid of robust but respectful disagreements.
- Set up clear agreed protocols in advance of setting up a partnership
- Co-operation always requires "love" ... willingness to relate and be engaged with other people and groups

### ISSUES FROM INTERVIEWS

#### 1. From the Faith Sector

- A faith based definition of community may include people who are excluded from official or popular definitions of the local community.. Eg. excluded groups like homeless, ex-offenders, sex workers, addicts, students or be based more on communities of interest from a wider catchment area.
- We make agreements but using language differently . Some of the output definitions and calculations are unclear and can be spun in various ways.. Is Christian worship a cultural event?



- Would we get on better if we disguised the faith element.. Eg. Take the C out of the YMCA (Young Mens Christian Association) or the M out of PMF (Preston Muslim Forum)?
- Should a church (or mosque or temple) be expected to make rooms available for another faith to worship in..?
- Christians may not like the competitive spirit behind bidding for funds..

## 2. From The statutory sector

### a) Equalities and diversity policies

- Despite training and policies, some staff from the majority community remain ignorant, prejudiced and make stereotyped assumptions about faith groups.
- Some feel unable to talk openly about the issues for fear of being called not PC
- Officers who are enthusiastic about, or have responsibilities for, equal opportunities sometimes have difficulties with faith and cultural groups who they perceive as (or may actually be) sexist or homophobic, or exclusive to their own faith.
- In the real world everyone knows that a strict equal opps policy (with no "wriggle room") cannot be imposed on faith based groups. Service users tend to vote with their feet to take up service based in their own faith community.

### b) Statutory sector workers (and Councillors) are also community members, many with an active faith

- Most understand and make efforts to ensure that such commitments do not bias their professional judgements, and separate the personal faith from the professional and political

- Yet at the same time many fundamental values and commitments to particular areas of work arise from, or are shaped by, their religious beliefs and cultures.
- In areas of work such as liaising with the Voluntary, Community and Faith sector an insider knowledge of or community connections with one or more local faith community is an asset to the council, though rarely formally recognised
- At the same time some officers from minority faith communities feel they are seen as experts on all things to do with their faith, but that this is mere tokenism

### 3. Signs of progress

- There does appear to be a growing commitment from the statutory sector (PCC, LCC, PCT and the Lancashire Constabulary) to build better relationships and partnerships with faith groups.
- There is an awareness at senior level of the need to learn and listen more to faith groups, and some good models of engagement,
- but some frustration about how hard it is to get feedback and participation and about the perceived lack of understanding of statutory roles and funding on the part of faith groups
- There are mechanisms of support, funding and purchase of services in which faith based groups are seen as a significant part of the voluntary sector. However all funding is constrained by funding limits and the regulations set up for each scheme (which is often beyond local councils' control).
- There is growing awareness of the potential of the faith sector to be useful partners in serving the community, and gradual learning about how best to improve its capacity to deliver.

- There is an understanding of the importance of faith groups for community cohesion, and a relatively optimistic view of the current situation in Preston.

## ISSUES FROM WORKSHOP 2

1. Can we develop a better set of policy and good practice guidelines for the benefit of both sectors and the community as a whole? Our second workshop concluded a policy framework needs to take note of the following

- Any policy must be a live policy, used in every department and by all staff (not sit on a shelf)
- Take account of the sensitivities of the diverse Faith communities
- Build active and ongoing engagement from strategic to operational level with local faith forums
- As well as blanket policies, equal opps policy needs to recognise differences between/ within different groups and on different issues, respecting individuals.
- Must overcome the tick box / tokenism that still exists in the statutory sector
- Include "spirituality" within the policy document and cascade this down to delivery .. with evidence
- Offer long term strategic funding for the core activities of faith related organisations (which run projects or services) not just short term funding
- Recognise that FBOs do need to have professional management structures in place, (though many need help to get there)
- Ask for monitoring of delivery related to interfaith activities

- Ensure an appropriate environment and services are available (to members of faith communities) which are responsive to the choice of individuals
- Ensure that both common values and distinctive traits of various faith groups are recognised.. eg. Around dietary provision
- Policy should be consistent, timely and accountable with a long term time frame
- Faith communities should be involved in making decisions when policy is constructed e.g. about tick box categories.
- It's reasonable to expect (Funded organisations) should meet quality standards
- All departments should be aware of and use "Compact" documents in service delivery plans

## 2. Funding for local faith groups with specific reference to Faith Based Capacity Building Fund

### a) Questions of clarification

- What is Capacity building?
- Are umbrella bodies eligible?
- How much religious teaching can be part of projects.. e.g. if a church or mosque wants to run a play scheme for children can they use any of the stories of their faith?
- Is there core funding, or funding for training
- The form is very complex. Does it need to be like that?

### b) More general comments

- It looks a genuine attempt by government to support and build up faith communities
- You need a fair level of capacity already to be able to access this support. Some groups simply miss out
- What about smaller organisations.. all the policies and quality standards required are not realistic. There are many differences between them and large well constituted bodies
- You always have to do something "new" to get funding.. How can you fund your existing, tried and tested programmes, which remain necessary
- There are good possibilities for interfaith awareness in this, but do we need money to do our local interfaith work?
- Community Cohesion is a new buzz word (flavour of the month) only a year old.
- The fund talks of partnership but is structured for competitiveness.
- There is not enough time to "work together"
- £5m is not a lot to go round the country
- The funding process seems not a very efficient way to give away five million with all the time needed to process complex applications both by applicants and funders .
- It suggests groups in the sector are not trusted... It's a product of our society today.
- There is research and the sector has been saying this sort of thing to government for years, but government is not yet listening.

## ***Brief Self Evaluation of the Project***

There is reason to believe the Preston Bridge Builders Project has been successful in meeting most of its objectives. It has certainly enabled people from different faiths and from the various sectors to engage in a range of useful conversations about important issues. For the most part these conversations have been constructive and carried out in a spirit of goodwill. One trusts that they have been honest and open, and that there has been genuine learning on all sides. The networking opportunities were clearly valued and can be built on as time goes on.

It is to be hoped that the reflections and recommendations in the additional working papers will open the way for improved policy and practice in Preston and beyond. We hope it will give some impetus to more and better relevant religious literacy training for the statutory sector and to theological reflection and appropriate capacity building in the faith sector.

If there is a cause for concern in terms of the effectiveness of the project it is whether we managed to reach the people who had potentially the greatest need for it. The dialogue that has taken place through the project has largely been among professionals, and indeed a self selecting group who some might see as the "usual suspects" in community regeneration and faith based social action. Hardly any ordinary local residents, or lay members of faith communities, or users of services were involved in the process. Although all of the main faith communities in Preston were represented, there were many local clergy, imams etc who although invited did not seem very interested in taking part, including some who are involved in significant pieces of community work and regeneration projects. On the statutory side participation was also patchy and conversations suggested that a combination of work pressures, ignorance about religion and its relevance, and even prejudice against minorities and resistance to involvement with the faith sector may have played a part. Clearly if this type of work is to progress we need to find ways of doing more than "preaching to the converted".

Finally it is important to express thanks to everyone who did take part in the project and to offer this report and the associated papers back to them, in the hope that further reflection on the issues raised will enable their valuable work to make progress.