

**Brunel University**

**Youth on Religion project**

**Meeting between the University and representatives from  
Harrow and Hillingdon**

Hillingdon Learning and Development Centre, Queen's Walk  
03 November 2009  
10am – 11.30am

**MINUTES**

Present: Eric Blaire (EB), Rachel Bowerman (RB), Fiona Gibbs (FG), Peter Hemming (PH), Nicola Madge (NM), Duncan Struthers (DS)

Apologies: Gori Olusina Daniel (GD), Anjana Patel (AP)

**Minutes from last meeting**

The minutes were confirmed as an accurate record of the last meeting.

**Research aims and questionnaire development**

A brief document outlining the key research themes was presented to the meeting (and later circulated electronically). It was explained that this related to the overarching research questions to be addressed in both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study and did not represent the precise questions to be asked.

Representatives said they would discuss these themes further with colleagues in their boroughs as appropriate. SACRE in Harrow was particularly concerned to see what we would be asking young people before pledging their support for the study.

Some suggestions for thinking about precise questions were whether we might ask (although not necessarily in the quantitative survey) about:

- What difference do your beliefs (eg. in life after death) make to your quality of life?
- Does believing in God make a difference to your life?
- Episodes of awe and wonder in young people's lives.

The important issue of ensuring that the questionnaire is suitable for young people with no religious faith was discussed. Providing questions for those with a non-faith stance is a separate issue from providing questions for young people from different faith backgrounds. DS made the suggestion that we might want to run our pilot questionnaire past somebody (he had somebody in mind) from the British Humanist Society. RB questioned whether this implied we should also run it past somebody representing each faith. It was concluded that this would, generally speaking, be done through SACRE committees and other stakeholders in the research areas.

FG mentioned that we might be able to get some useful additional information on local areas (eg. where participants lived and where their schools were located) based on postcode data. Hillingdon is working with CACI in identifying social cohesion factors within specific localities across the borough.

### **Letters to schools**

FG will send suggestions for modifications to the letter to schools by the end of the week. The research team will then make further amendments informed by minor changes to the research methodology.

It was clarified that Heather Clements remains in post in Harrow (there had been some confusion on the part of the research team due to the current advertisement for a Corporate Director for Children's Services in the borough). RB said that members of SACRE were awaiting further information on the content of the questionnaire before responding in relation to the letters. It was suggested that it might be possible for NM and PH to join a meeting with Harrow representatives next week to clarify matters: she will follow-up to check feasibility. DS asked if he could attend any such meeting as an observer to be aware of any concerns and avoid any difficulties in Hillingdon.

### **Piloting questionnaires**

It was reported that the research team plans to be in a position to pilot the questionnaire during (mainly) December. It was suggested that it could be a good idea to do this with Year 9 pupils as these would not be included in the main survey. DS asked the research team to send more details on what was required as soon as possible so that he could help to set this up. It was suggested that we should arrange for an activity lasting a total of around an hour. It was agreed that it would probably be most feasible to use paper versions of the questionnaire for this exercise.

### **Questionnaire administration**

The research team updated the meeting on the revised plan to survey only Years 8, 10 and 12 to reduce the burden on schools whilst maintaining the full age spread. This revised plan changes the age distribution of sampled pupils by one year in each direction, but avoids planning the survey for the school years in which it might be most difficult to find pupil time to complete the questionnaire.

The point was raised that, even in computer rooms, pupils may often have only one computer between two. Schools differ in their resources and this potential difficulty underlined the importance of early discussion and negotiation with schools to implement the most feasible plan for administering the questionnaire.

### **Qualitative study**

There was a brief discussion on the qualitative part of the research that would follow on from the school survey. Pupil participants would volunteer themselves for this aspect of the study whilst completing the questionnaire. It was agreed that it would be best if pupils wishing to take part identified

themselves by name and that the research team then contacted them through their schools. There was some consideration of the year group of pupils to participate, and whether it would be better to include those in Year 8 or Year 10 at the time of the survey. A final decision on this matter has not yet been taken.

It was agreed that further discussion of the qualitative study could take place at a later date.

### **End-of-project event**

NM reported a meeting between members of Brunel University and the following representatives from LB Hillingdon:

Cllr Ray Puddifoot, Leader of the Council

Hugh Dunnachie, Chief Executive

Fran Beasley, Deputy Chief Executive

Jean Palmer, Director of Planning and Community Services

Kevin Byrne, Head of Policy

NM spoke at this meeting about the University's links with the borough through the Youth on Religion project, and mentioned plans to hold a youth event at the end of the research period. The minutes from this meeting noted that 'LBH happy to support proposed Youth Event'.

### **Next meeting**

Monday 25 January was proposed as the date for a next meeting. It would be held at a venue in Harrow (to be confirmed) from 10am until 11.30am.

NM/4 November 2009