



Case Study

Bradford College Students' Union



national union of students

What was your interfaith project?

In November 2012 the Students' Union was granted £250 from NUS to create an Interfaith Forum that would meet 8 times. The bid was written in partnership with Rolf the College Chaplain, Mobeen Hussain Vice President Education and Welfare and Neil Mackenzie SU Manager. We also consulted with two students who wanted to be involved in the project, Alex an HE student and Oliver an FE student.

The student body of Bradford College is made up of a wide mix of diverse groups who often argue and cause tensions in the College. The bid was written in an attempt to start a project that would start a dialogue between all the different groups in the College. This is viewed as essential by the College Chaplain and also the Students' Union if we ever expect to have a vaguely united student body that will happily integrate in the classroom, around the College, on the streets and in extra-curricular activities.

How did you ensure students were involved in the development of your project?

We had students input into the bid process and also attend the first and second NUS Interfaith Forum. Students also helped to organise and arrange the Forums that we had.

What impact did this project have on students you work with and within your students' union or college?

- How did it deliver one of the following outcomes:
 - o Encourage engagement between faith societies
 - o Increase understanding amongst students about different religions and beliefs
 - o Increase dialogue and collaborative action
- Were there any other outcomes from the project?

Two different meetings were arranged for this project, one in December and one in February. Both meetings were well advertised on a large scale and by telling individual students. They were also different from each other in an attempt to attract different students. However, on both occasions the only students to attend the meetings were Oliver, Alex, I and Rolf the college chaplain.

Because these events were not as successful as wanted it was decided not to continue trying to organize events and spend the money on them.

What lessons did you learn in delivering the project that might be useful to other students' unions?

The events organised for this project were not as successful as we hoped. However, we engaged 2 students who enjoyed planning and attending NUS events and we attempted to do something that had never been tried before. If we were to attempt this project again, I think we need to look at the following:

1. Of the students who were 'engaged' in faith based activities, how active are they actually being and do they have an interest in being part of the project. We were relying on these students to be doing lots of things already before we approached them and to be representative student leaders. However, it quickly became apparent that this wasn't the case; therefore we struggled to engage the students we thought would be easy to reach.

2. When looking at the behaviours we want to change we have to be mindful that these are not just student's opinions but entrenched behaviours of a City that has a lot of cultural tension. Therefore very soft approaches are needed to start a shift in culture rather than big hard events straight away, as they are likely to fail, as experienced.
3. We must not under-estimate the power of student leaders in this project. Only peers can educate peers when it comes to change in cultures and opinions. A top down approach will not work.
4. This project must be a partnership between the SU and the College. Although the SU can help with running campaigns and highlighting the importance of cultural cohesion, it is the College that can put in place policies and procedures regarding cultural tensions. The College also has the tutorial system in place to start tackling some of the opinions with students as is currently happening with attitudes to sexual harassment.

Do you have any feedback from participants at your event?

“My experience of the interfaith work done at Bradford College was a positive one, all be it not in the way I expected. Although there wasn't interest shown from the student body to the events organised, I feel this is more a reflection of the general climate of the college as a mainly FE institution and the process of the organisers of the events in learning how best to facilitate the needs of the students at this stage of their personal development. It seems interfaith dialogue, even with the offer of tea and biscuits, is not high the students agenda at the moment. Maybe it is a case of making it more digestible for them? Creating a realisation that it affects all our lives and community's? Yet it looks like this will be an on going experiment, and one I look forward to.”

Alex Radford, Student.

Photo/Video evidence of your event:

Insert here.