



*17 Royal York Terrace, Bristol, visited by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1911 and 1913*

# ANNUAL REPORT 2014-2015

## 171 BE

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY  
OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

How joyfully surprised the Bahá'ís of the world were to receive the letter dated 10 July 2014 from the Universal House of Justice which announced the following:

**The setting of the sun on 20 March 2015 will signalize the end of the year 171, the close of the ninth Vahid of the first Kull-i-Shay' of the Bahá'í Era. We call upon the Bahá'ís of the East and West to adopt, on that auspicious occasion, the provisions that will unite them in the common implementation of the Badi' calendar.**

The significance of this announcement, which the House of Justice explains in that same letter, is a cause for much rejoicing:

**The adoption of a new calendar in each dispensation is a symbol of the power of Divine Revelation to reshape human perception of material, social, and spiritual reality. Through it, sacred moments are distinguished, humanity's place in time and space reimagined, and the rhythm of life recast. Next Naw-Rúz will mark yet another historic step in the manifestation of the unity of the people of Bahá and the unfoldment of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order.**



*View from the apartment at 17 Royal York Terrace*

This past year also saw the acquisition of an apartment at 17 Royal York Terrace which is associated with the visit of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Bristol. He blessed and dedicated each room to the service of Bahá'u'lláh in what was then a guest house, and promised that the house would become a centre of peace and rest for pilgrims from East and West. The National Spiritual Assembly joins with all the believers in the United Kingdom in thanking the Blessed Beauty for enabling us to see the

beginning of the realisation of this vision of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and looks forward to the day when the apartment is restored and renovated in a manner that will facilitate a flow of visitors to this sacred spot.

As the report below highlights, another significant development this year was the guidance received from the Universal House of Justice in two significant letters dated 1 August 2014 to the Bahá'ís of the World and 18 December 2014 to the believers in Iran. These letters have enriched our understanding of the concept of the Mashriq'l-Adhkár and are of such significance that they will profoundly influence the creation of a devotional atmosphere in the pattern of our individual and collective lives in every sphere of endeavour.

The primary focus of the Bahá'í community was, of course, its efforts to advance the process of entry by troops and much of the report that follows focuses on this. The Ridván 2014 message of the House of Justice set the scene for the year as each cluster strove to understand the reality of its environment and opportunities and, in light of this, advance the process of growth:

**The most dynamic clusters are those in which, irrespective of the resources the community possesses or the number of activities being undertaken, the friends appreciate that their task is to identify what is required for progress to occur--the nascent capacity that must be nurtured, the new skill that must be acquired, the initiators of a fledgling effort who must be accompanied, the space for reflection that must be cultivated, the collective endeavour that must be coordinated--and then find creative ways in which the necessary time and resources can be made available to achieve it.**

This report highlights the efforts of thousands of souls striving to learn, in many ways and settings, how to apply the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, within the framework set out so clearly by the House of Justice, so that His Healing Message may reach the spiritually hungry masses of these islands, spiritually enrich their lives and begin the process of creating prosperous, peaceful and joyous communities.

This report highlights the efforts of thousands ... to apply the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh...

These efforts have been valiantly supported by the members of the many agencies of the National Assembly who are listed at the end of this report, as well as those friends serving on Local Spiritual Assemblies and cluster agencies, and we know that the whole community will join in expressing its deep appreciation to these friends for the services they have and continue to render. But a special thanks should go to the members of the Institution of Counsellors, which includes Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi, the members of the Auxiliary Board, together with their assistants, whose love, encouragement, guidance and accompaniment supported and enabled all our efforts.

We also offer our gratitude to the International Teaching Centre for the visit of two of its members, Mr. Andrej Donoval and Mrs. Alison Milston, in February, whose loving and encouraging presence deeply enriched and inspired the various gatherings where they were present, including in particular the national Institutional meeting.

Finally, words always seem inadequate to convey love and gratitude to the House of Justice for its constant, loving, *“world-shaking, world-embracing, world-directing”*<sup>1</sup> guidance without which we would be bereft!

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<sup>1</sup> Shoghi Effendi, Messages to America, p. 32

## 2. ADVANCING THE PROCESS OF ENTRY BY TROOPS

### A. FRONTIERS OF LEARNING IN THE UK

The House of Justice described, in its Riḍvān 2014 message, how “communities that have progressed furthest are tracing an inviting path for others to follow”. Within the UK, there are now three clusters—Greater London, Greater Manchester and West Midlands—where over 200 individuals are taking part in devotional meetings, children’s classes, junior youth groups and study circles. In such clusters, as well as others at a similar stage in their development, including Thames Valley, many questions are arising, such as:

- How are we able to work with increasingly large numbers?
- How can we strengthen the pattern of working in 3-month cycles, with distinct expansion, consolidation and planning phases?
- How do we ensure that more and more friends and contacts “feel welcome to join the community in contributing to the betterment of society” in such a way “that at the outset or further along formal enrolment can occur”?
- How are we learning to advance the work of community building intensely in small settings while at the same time encouraging and eliciting the participation of all of the friends in a cluster?

Within the UK, there are now three clusters ...where over 200 individuals are taking part in devotional meetings, children’s classes, junior youth groups and study circles.

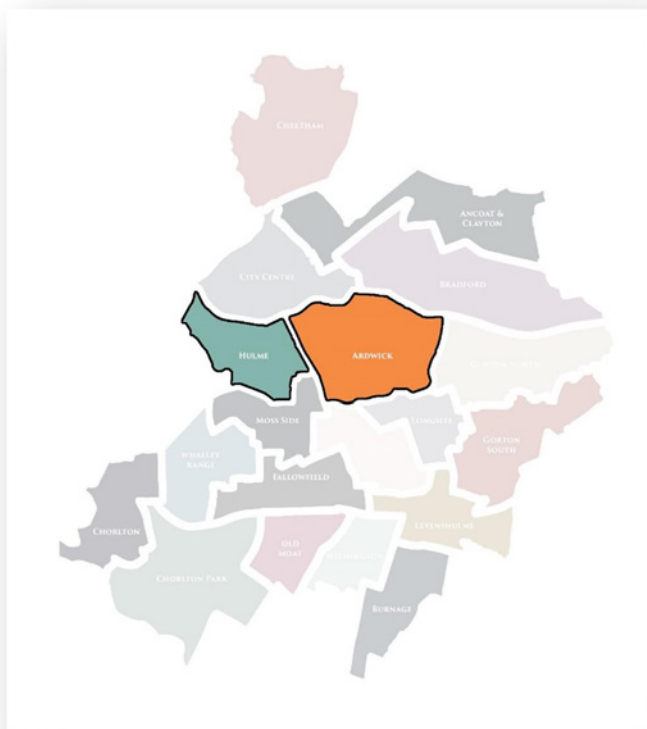
As the strongest clusters in the UK continue to learn about these and other questions, insights that emerge can serve to illuminate the way forward in clusters at earlier stages of development.

The following are reports on the progress of the work in two of the clusters at the frontiers of learning in the UK: Manchester and Thames Valley. The first illustrates how the community building work in a neighbourhood in Manchester is advancing. The second describes some of the insights that are emerging from the work of the Area Teaching Committee of Thames Valley.

#### **Greater Manchester: Advancing the Work in Neighbourhoods**

There are two neighborhoods in Manchester where friends are currently engaged in focused work: Ardwick and Hulme. As this map shows, they are next to each other, however for the purposes of this report, we focus on Hulme:

The neighbourhood of Hulme has seen steady progress over the past year, progress which finds its expression in the gradual multiplication of core activities, advances in a common understanding, as well as a heightened collective organization.



*Greater Manchester; Hulme (green) & Ardwick (orange)*

Particular focus has been paid to the area of 'teams'. Having clear teams in place helps to foster dynamic, consistent support and encouragement. The animators, for example, now have a renewed understanding of their role; they see themselves as part of a team contributing to the advancement of a programme, rather than their single junior youth group. By working in this way the process of initiating becomes a task all feel able to contribute to, easing the load of the single animator. Two new junior youth groups were formed with participants local to the area through the collective efforts of the neighbourhood's animators. A similar approach was taken by the children's class teachers; by appreciating the common purpose among their

endeavours, stronger networks of

accompaniment helped to initiate two new classes for children in the neighbourhood. Integral to the growth and success of these classes has been the role of the parents, who are local to the area and have actively assisted in the process of reaching out to friends to increase the number of participants.

Essential to the vitality of the institute process is the movement through the courses. Five circles of study are currently taking place, engaging a large number in the study of the Writings and their application to community life. Cognizant that Book 1s in particular hold a special significance as the entranceway into the sequence, the neighbourhood plans to initiate new book 1s every cycle.



Collective worship continues its indispensable role as a source of divine assistance as well as a space to unite in a common desire to worship. Four regular gatherings within the neighbourhood currently offer these spaces. Developing the environment within these spaces continues to be a point of constant reflection.

With twelve actively engaged resources in the neighbourhood organization becomes critical. Roles were assigned to oversee the progress of various aspects of the neighbourhood work. The establishment of weekly reflection meetings was an initial step: this provided a space to look back over the week and reflect on progress made, as well as to look forward and make plans. Over the past year this space itself has changed, becoming less frequent as the friends learnt to work in smaller teams. The reflections became a monthly gathering, giving enough time to have experience to reflect.



*Junior youth in Manchester*

### **Thames Valley: Reflections from the Area Teaching Committee**

#### *Areas of learning:*

The principal areas of learning in the past year were about:

- Working in cycles
- Teaching teams
- Accompaniment
- Planning as cluster agencies
- Receptive populations
- Mobilising the whole community

#### *Working in Cycles*

The Area Teaching Committee in collaboration with the cluster agencies has been learning how to work in cycles and to help the friends follow the rhythm of the cycle. The expansion phase has been prepared in advance and attention has also been given to planning the consolidation phase. Preparation for planning includes gathering statistics in good time.

#### *Teaching Teams*

The Area Teaching Committee, in close consultation with the Auxiliary Board member, advanced in its understanding of its relationship with the cluster through the teaching teams. Following a reflection on how the Committee should design teaching campaigns and firesides during the expansion phase,

The Area Teaching Committee ... has been learning how to work in cycles



plans have been made to consult with potential, emerging and established teaching teams in the cluster. For each team the Committee encourages them to consult regularly, raise their capacity to work in cycles, engage in direct teaching and establish devotionals either through members of the team or by someone that they would accompany in this act of service.

### *Planning as Cluster Agencies*

Great advances have been made in learning about planning. Whereas before each cluster agency made their own individual plans, now all the cluster agencies are engaged in making and realising a plan that is not just the plan of the Area Teaching Committee or of the coordinator, but rather a complex, practical plan involving the interwoven imperatives, objectives and needs of the whole cluster, its agencies and the educational process. The challenge now is to translate this plan into action with concrete steps.

### *Receptive Populations*

The question of working with receptive populations is at the forefront of the plans of the Area Teaching Committee. The secretary of the Area Teaching Committee and the junior youth coordinator work closely to identify potential. The results of these efforts have been encouraging. The local authorities and active individuals are more than ready to help and have already provided useful information and guidance regarding how to reach the African & Afro-Caribbean populations and form a junior youth group.

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### *Mobilising the Whole Community*

More recently, the study of a letter from the House of Justice addressed to the National Assembly of the United States dated 5 January 2015, helped us reflect on the importance of not just working with pockets of populations or friends who have shown a desire to serve but to *reawaken this enthusiastic eagerness for service throughout your community in order to raise expansion and consolidation to unprecedented levels*. Efforts are being made to involve the whole cluster in some way in a process of reflection before the expansion phase.

### *A Process of Learning*

What is evident from reports such as the above, is that the more advanced clusters in the UK are engaged in a process of systematic learning – planning, action and reflection. Reports from London, including neighbourhoods such as Camberwell and Hackney, show that this cluster too is similarly engaged in such a process. The link of these clusters with the Northern European Learning Site for Junior Youth and the insights they gain from this enables these clusters to advance more swiftly and, indeed, offer experience and insights that are shared with clusters beyond the UK. This is most encouraging as the House of Justice states in its Riḍván 2014 message that *“it is the capacity for learning among the local friends, within a common framework, that fosters progress along the path of development”*. This growing capacity is evident in these and other accounts.

The National Assembly is also delighted to see in these more advanced clusters that their “programme of growth is increasing in scope and complexity, commensurate with the rising capacity of the Plan’s three protagonists – the individual, the community and the institutions of the Faith – to create a mutually supportive environment.”

...growing complexity presents many challenges...

(Ridván 2014) This growing complexity presents many challenges and London is one example of this, where the Area Teaching Committee is working with five Sector Teaching Committees and these, in turn, are learning to collaborate with cluster and sector coordinators, the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants as well as 30 Local Spiritual Assemblies. This complexity has presented many challenges in recent years, but this year we are seeing a greater coherence in the scheme of coordination and thus in the

ability of these institutions to facilitate the process of growth in the cluster and to plan more effective cycles of expansion and consolidation. This is an ongoing area of learning.

### **The Expansion Phase**

Many clusters, being concerned at the fall in number of enrolments, have had reason this year to go back to the guidance of the Supreme Body to the Conference of the Counsellors dated 27 December 2005 which sets out the purpose and nature of the expansion phase:

**The expansion phase, often a period of two weeks, demands the highest level of intensity. Its objective is to widen the circle of those interested in the Faith, to find receptive souls and to teach them ... Experience suggests that the more closely teaching approaches and methods are aligned with the capacity acquired from the study of the institute courses the more rewarding the results.**

**Plans being devised for this phase invariably involve the implementation of carefully designed teaching projects and campaigns of home visits and firesides, often through the mobilization of teaching teams.**

In a desire to focus on increasing the number of a particular core activity—which in itself is a laudable aim—the objective of widening the circle of those interested in the Faith, finding receptive souls and teaching them has, to some extent been lost sight of in recent years. The National Assembly is pleased to note from the above accounts that teaching is now being given due focus in these advanced clusters, and the Assembly is confident that this aspect will be given appropriate attention in all clusters.

## **B. EMERGING PROGRAMMES OF GROWTH**

In the document *Insights from the Frontiers of Learning*, the establishment of a programme of growth is helpfully summarised in terms of the emergence of two nascent capacities:

- **First one or more friends in a cluster must be able to help individuals study the institute’s sequence of courses and accompany them as they initiate core activities.**
- **Then these individuals must be able to attract others to participate in the core activities.**

As you will read in the sections of this report on the *Educational Process* and *Enhancing Institutional Capacity*, considerable focus has been given this past year to supporting more and more friends to develop these two capacities which are essential prerequisites for growth in any context.

Programmes of growth have been established in more than 3,000 clusters across the globe. The UK community has acquired its fair share of experience and learning in this vital area, having established programmes of growth in no less than 32 clusters. These 32 programmes have begun in a wide array of contexts and so our experience is rich indeed, and the capacities that have been built through this process are positioning the UK community to take unprecedented strides forward over the next 12 months. We thus have every reason to be confident that we will initiate further programmes of growth in the remaining 18 ‘goal clusters’, and thereby fulfil the community’s pledge to have a programme of growth in each of its 50 clusters by the close of the Plan.

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Just in recent weeks, and with hearts replete with gratitude to Bahá’u’lláh, it was recognised that a programme of growth is underway in the North & East Yorkshire cluster, and we offer our congratulations to the dear friends there! An account of this will follow later in the report.

The remaining goal clusters are:

Cumbria	Cornwall & Isles of Scilly	North Highland
Isle of Man	Channel Islands	Western Isles
Lincolnshire	Hainsworth	West Highland
Suffolk	(north west of N Ireland)	Borders
Solent	Stars of the West (south west	Mid Wales
Dorset	of N Ireland)	South West Wales
Devon	Orkney	

...work has begun in nearly every one of these 18 goal clusters

It is tremendously encouraging to note that the work has begun in nearly every one of these 18 goal clusters. The fact that work has started in nearly all our clusters is in fact very rare among the countries of the world. And we can share with joy and confidence that, of these 18 clusters, some are already close (and even very close!) to establishing programmes of growth.

### Key strategies for growth

Three key strategies were outlined in the document *Insights from the Frontiers of Learning* to help clusters reach the first milestone in the continuum of growth: **institutional support**, **pioneering** and **visiting teams**. The community and the institutions have continued to apply these strategies judiciously over the last year. Without doubt, they will be pivotal to our efforts in the remaining four cycles of the Plan, particularly in relation to the 18 goal clusters.

#### *Institutional Support*

Across the country, Local Spiritual Assemblies, Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, Area Teaching Committees, coordinators, Regional Bahá'í Councils, the Training Institute Board, Statistics Officers, the UK Pioneering and Travel Teaching Committee, and many others besides, are continuing to learn about how best to nurture capacity and help growing numbers to arise in service to humanity. Indeed, the National Assembly itself is also striving to learn about this process!

It is a true joy to receive account after account where the input of institution members has helped unlock the capacity of friends at the grassroots. Timely encouragement; the right question; participation in activities; assisting the friends to recognise the strengths on which to build; helping them turn “stumbling blocks” into “stepping stones for progress”: these are among the many ways in which members of institutions have been endeavouring to assist.

...the input of institution members has helped unlock the capacity of friends

The following is a recently documented account of how the South-West cluster in Scotland established its programme of growth, which demonstrates well the role that institutional support can play in such processes.

The South-West cluster is large and rural. Dumfries is one of the larger towns where several Bahá'í families have lived for a long time and made firm friendships with neighbours, colleagues and others. They have sustained devotionals over a long period of time and have a good community of interest. There are around 20 Bahá'ís in the whole cluster with about 10 in the Dumfries area. At the start of the process there were 2 Bahá'ís who had completed the sequence of Ruhi courses, one of whom tells the story:

**About three years ago, a friend (B) and I started a book 3 study circle facilitated by a visiting tutor. We plodded on, enjoying book 3 lessons, songs and games. Some weeks later we had a mini reflection meeting with the Auxiliary Board member and**

the institute coordinator for children's classes. It was a small informal meeting with only a handful of local friends. We prayed, shared news, studied the recent guidance from the Universal House of Justice and heard stories from around the world and also nearer to home.

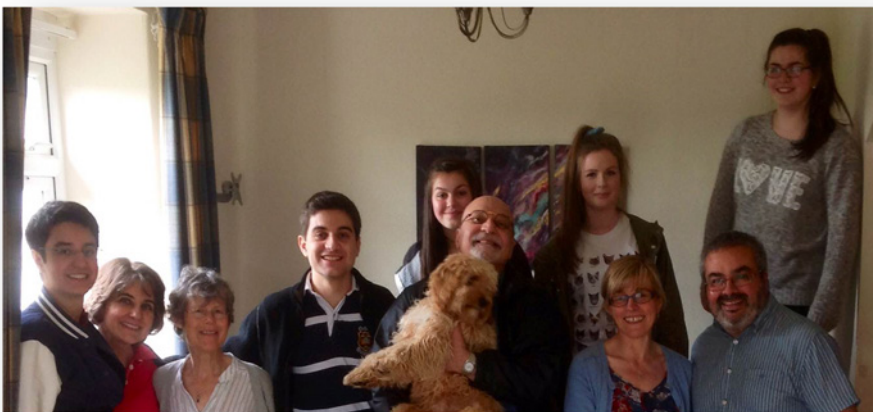
B and I feel it was a simple loving question from the Board member which really convinced us to give it a go: "How about starting a neighbourhood children's class in your home, maybe starting with a taster session before making a long term plan?" We could not give a good reason not to and so my friend and I thought 'why not?' – it was a natural outcome of the training.

About that time it became apparent that we actually knew a number of families with young children... an amazing vista was beginning to unfold with little effort on our part! We prayed, reflected ... [and] continued to study educational concepts, principles and the three types of education (from Books 2 and 3). So having got really excited about what we were learning, the next natural step was to share these ideas with our friends who had primary school age children, and invited them to a taster session: first time one came, next time two and finally three children came to the 3<sup>rd</sup> one!

And then it was the summer holidays. This was a great opportunity for more reflection, expanding our circle of friends, visits and consultation with the Board member and institute coordinator. Studying the Riḍvān Message 2010 enhanced our understanding of the spiritual nature of the neighbourhood children's classes and its impact on the whole community. A plan was made to increase our invitation effort and begin the new term with a regular children's class held in the local library once a fortnight.

So we invited, and parents came with their children... [with] B's expertise, genuine

interest in the spiritual wellbeing of the children, and the parents' observation of the beneficial impact that the classes were having on their children, they began to invite others to the children's class. B is now fully committed to completing the sequence and has enrolled in the Faith.



*During Summer 2014 a visiting team from Manchester supported the efforts of pioneers in Cumbria*

During all this time we held events and participated in community events together so that the class and children are part of the wider community.

Throughout this time there was also consultation between the local friends, the regional institutions and the institution of the Counsellors resulting in a strategy for other friends to support the efforts here. A few youth from other clusters (1-2

hours travel away) committed to visits to support the children's class, visit parents and friends with the teachers, meet older siblings of the children attending and contribute to some small reflection gatherings.

Two years on we now have a steady attendance of about 10 children, the majority from friends of the Faith. As a sequel, one of the mothers was inspired to initiate a children's class in her own village and is now studying book 3 so she could help with the classes. And another mother is starting a grade 2 children's class in her village and has already started to invite the parents and children to a taster session.

The following reflection, offered by the Bahá'í Council for Wales, exemplifies the conscious efforts of the institutions to make their support ever-more meaningful and effective:

**As in teaching, the approach with each individual must be suited to their level of capacity. Some need to feel love and fellowship not conditioned on their willingness to talk about the Plan. Others need nurturing support and encouragement to overcome misgivings and misunderstandings about what the Plan asks of us. But others need a direct approach, to be prompted to recognise and assisted to seize the greater opportunities that are around them.**

#### *Visiting Teams*

The Universal House of Justice tells us that "Visiting teams may be called upon to provide impetus to the fledgling set of activities" in a cluster working to establish a programme of growth. In several parts of the United Kingdom, visiting teams have certainly been deployed to good effect. We have seen above how it was supportive to the effort in the South-West cluster in Scotland. The Suffolk cluster provides another example:

**In the summer of 2014, the Bahá'í Council for England approached several individuals to request their support for two areas in Suffolk. In one part of Suffolk, Beccles, a visiting team began assisting the friends there. One local Bahá'í commented: *A book 5 training has got us off the ground with the Junior Youth. It is lovely to have the visiting teams to boost our spirit and help us have the courage to knock on neighbours' doors in [the] neighbourhood and talk to them about the JY programme and children's classes with the visiting team's voice of experience.***

**Then, in another part of Suffolk, a second visiting team helped the local friends share the purpose of the children's classes and invite neighbours to participate. A children's class was soon formed. Later, a junior youth group with some of the children's older siblings also began. The same visiting team is now also supporting one of the friends in Ipswich with her monthly devotionals. They are planning to accompany her in home visits to contacts in her area.**

**Through these processes, much has been learnt about befriending and assisting the local friends in their own endeavours, and in accompanying, empowering, and raising their confidence to reach out to others. Helping the local friends reflect on their achievements and plan next steps has also been invaluable.**

The Regional Councils have recounted many instances where visiting teams are supporting efforts in clusters striving towards the first milestone. No doubt many more believers will



arise to serve in this vital capacity over the coming year, and the National Assembly eagerly looks forward to seeing the fruits of their endeavours.

### *Pioneering*

In its 23 May 2011 message, the House of Justice wrote:

**In the next five years, the successful prosecution of the Plan will require the services of several thousand consecrated souls who, spurred on by their love for the Blessed Beauty, will forsake their homes to settle in villages, towns, and cities in order to raise to 5,000 the number of clusters with programmes of growth.**

A beautiful, inspiring video shown at Feasts and summer schools was prepared by the UK Pioneering and Travel Teaching Committee last summer to encourage the friends to consider pioneering, and to give a flavour of the blessings that accrue through this most meritorious of actions. In addition, the Committee organised four ‘pioneer reflection gatherings’ in London, Solihull, Omagh and Edinburgh which many dozens of Bahá’ís attended.

Some 20 pioneers have settled in goal clusters since the beginning of the Plan.

We are aware of one individual who pioneered internationally, and a further 12 who pioneered on the homefront. Some 20 pioneers have settled in goal clusters since the beginning of the Plan. There are in fact more pioneers than this, not least because many university students and others choose where to live in a cluster based on needs and opportunities in the community-building work. This growing movement of pioneers is reminiscent of the early days of the UK community when it was renowned for its pioneering spirit, both on the homefront and overseas.

Pioneers are already contributing significantly to the processes of growth in several goal clusters, and it is hoped that more will soon arise to help meet the goals of the Plan. For example, in Hainsworth and Stars of the West clusters in Northern Ireland, a couple have pioneered into one of the clusters and are striving to support both clusters. The couple actually commute to work to a third cluster! In one of these clusters a book 1 recently started with three contacts, and there is already a vision of the participants starting their own devotionals and inviting others to join. The activities in both of these clusters receive support from visiting teams, which includes members of the Regional Council.

In Cumbria, pioneers are also helping to move the cluster towards establishing a programme of growth. One reported:

**... of course the Bahá’ís in your new local area will be delighted to welcome you and your involvement will make a tremendous difference. There are so many opportunities open to you when you are new in an area; chances that don’t exist or are difficult to realise when you have lived and worked somewhere for a long time. It’s so refreshing and exciting. Pioneering is not without its challenges – how else do we grow other than through tests? But it’s not the things you think will challenge you that actually do, it’s one of the ways you gain—developing an insight into your true self, discovering strengths and abilities you never imagined you had.**

As you can imagine there are many more inspiring stories that could be shared here and there will be many more next year, but space is limited!

#### *North & East Yorkshire – Passing the First Milestone*

The journey of the North and East Yorkshire illustrates beautifully how visiting teams, pioneers and institutional support can all play their part in advancing a cluster passed the first milestone (i.e. establishing a programme of growth). Some highlights may be summarised as follow:

**In September 2013, two youth, who had each completed a year of service and had experience of the core activities and collective teaching, moved to York and Hull to study and help the friends there in two neighbourhoods. Both were accompanied by the Auxiliary Board members to meet with Local Spiritual Assemblies and develop a unity of vision.**

**A youth aged 17 was assisted to enter the training institute process and begin teaching an existing children's class in Hull. A second youth was also accompanied to teach lessons and engage in regular outreach. Home visits to the parents of the children has increased their sense of ownership.**

**In the summer of 2014, visiting youth, particularly from Manchester came to support the emerging process in the neighbourhood and develop contacts. A junior youth taster session took place, though it was not possible to continue due to lack of resources.**

**A book 1 started in October 2014 with three local parents around the children's class. The tutors had the aim of helping the participants study the institute's courses and to then accompany them as they initiated their own activities. Local reflection meetings were organised in the neighbourhood, and a devotional meeting takes place nearby. After prayers, the friends that attend study the guidance and the youth conference material. The Local Spiritual Assembly is supporting this as well as the children's class.**

**A youth moved into York and was supported by members of the Local Assembly and visiting travel teachers to do outreach on a weekly basis. An intensive project in the summer of 2014 resulted in conversations with many youth and junior youth, and a junior youth taster session took place.**

**In October a youth year of service moved in, and working alongside members of the community, and, after facing some challenges in starting a book 1, eventually a junior youth group with over 10 participants was started after a 2-week intensive phase of home visits, and has continued on a weekly basis since.**

**Reflection meetings over the past 18 months have seen a growing community spirit and awareness that the cluster was approaching the first milestone, having studied relevant guidance. At the reflection meeting in December the friends collectively felt that they had reached the milestone along the continuum of growth, i.e. that tutoring and the accompaniment of participants to initiate their own core activities had begun in the cluster.**

### C. INCREASING INTENSITY

In the words of the House of Justice, the second milestone along the journey of a cluster's growth may be described in the following terms:

**... a steady stream of friends is proceeding through the courses of the training institute and engaging in the corresponding activities, which serves, in turn, to increase the number of fresh recruits into the Faith, a significant percentage of whom invariably enters the institute process, guaranteeing the expansion of the system.**

29 clusters in the UK have passed the second milestone, thus providing the UK community with a robust platform for further growth. In many of these clusters, the work is forging ahead: we are learning how to overcome new challenges; new ways of systematising the work are being implemented; our planning, actions and reflections are being refined through greater capacity to read our reality; structures are evolving in response to heightened complexity; and the quality of activities is being carefully nurtured.

Some wonderful work has been taking place in the Northern Lights cluster around Belfast, which we offer here as an example.

**Over the past year the Northern Lights cluster has increased learning and action in the area of intensity. There has been a more sustained rhythm of expansion and consolidation in the community and neighbourhood reflection meetings are creating space to reflect more regularly where it is needed. The review of statistics is beginning to be incorporated into reflection and planning in a more tangible way.**



*Junior Youth in Belfast!*

**A youth intensive project during the summertime had 25 participants over a 4-day period of deepening, training and outreach with evening gatherings. Following the success of this project, those engaged in the teaching efforts were heartened to see the transformative impact of incorporating the life of Bahá'u'lláh and history of the**

**faith into youth activities ... Subsequent to this a further youth intensive project occurred during school holidays in October which had smaller numbers involved. The Area Teaching Committee has now incorporated these projects into the expansion phase where space is created to involve more people in the expansion efforts and give them confidence in outreach.**

**The pattern of interaction between participants engaged in various stages of the Ruhi sequence is getting stronger, whilst some are entering the field of action. The**

core activities which happen on one evening in a community centre have expanded to include a book 1, a second children's class and a second junior youth group. The devotional character is increasing with prayer being incorporated more regularly in all the activities. Home visits for deepening and developing strong bonds of friendship are happening regularly thanks to a year of service volunteer and several friends. The challenge now with more people arising to serve in this capacity is the systematic organisation and coordination of home visits—especially in encouraging others to become more involved in the process.

Junior youth group numbers have increased over the year from 4 to 7 with participants increasing from 23 to 37. Children's classes have increased from 5 to 6 with number of participants going from 24 to 37. Whilst study circles have reduced in number, the actual number of participants has increased from 16 to 27 indicating that study circles are larger than before.

Regional junior youth animator gatherings have been organised twice during the year to allow sharing of learning amongst animators across the cluster. The junior youth in one area also arranged a regional gathering for junior youth at which there were 30 junior youth - 27 from the wider community.

Yet for many of the 29 clusters in the UK that have passed the second milestone, the challenge over the last year has been—and remains—to rekindle previous levels of intensity and to sustain growth. Bountifully, the House of Justice, in its *Riḍvān* 2014 message, provided essential guidance on how to overcome this situation:

**From time to time, there may be a lull in activity or an obstacle to the way forward; searching consultation on the reasons for the impasse, combined with patience, courage, and perseverance, enables momentum to be regained.**

And in *Insights from the Frontiers of Learning* we read the following helpful analysis of some to the obstacles that clusters might face:

**In some cases, challenges arose as a result of an inability to establish one or another vital aspect of the framework for action. For example, in certain clusters the institute process had not taken root so the relationship between study and service intrinsic to the institute courses was not realized. Thus, rather than bringing about an organic process in which more and more individuals carry out more and more activities, a small number of believers became overwhelmed by increasing responsibilities. Only when the challenge of human resource development was resolved could the scope of endeavours expand. In other clusters, the friends readily enrolled new believers but struggled to help a significant number of them advance through the sequence of courses and enter a path of service. There were also those instances when the friends initiated many core activities among themselves, without giving due attention to teaching and inviting participants from the wider community. Reflection meetings sometimes centred too much on planning or instruction rather than the opportunity to learn from experience and revise action accordingly.**

Northern Lights cluster, above, is an example of one cluster that has emerged from this plateau of growth in recent years, but below too is an account from the South Wales cluster which indicate the kinds of reflections and shifts in approach that might help a cluster restore the dynamics of growth:

**There is one striking insight that needs to be shared. In working with the goal clusters we are now well used to thinking about the “two nascent capacities”. However, even in South Wales Cluster ... most of the friends do not demonstrate these capacities. Therefore, the work of the Area Teaching Committee has to address this reality. Cluster reflection meetings that are planned as if the friends have a level of capacity that we might expect within a cluster that previously “launched” an intensive programme of growth, will not match the reality of most of the friends in that cluster. Finding the focus inaccessible and challenging, they retreat.**

**The Area Teaching Committee has increased engagement precisely by starting with the reality of the friends. This, for example, means that the focus is usually on opportunities for meaningful and distinctive conversation, rather than initiating core activities, while at all times being mindful that initiating these are the direction of travel, and separately encouraging those who are in position to do so.**

The Area Teaching Committee has increased engagement by starting with the reality of the friends.

#### **D. YOUTH**

The convocation of 114 youth conferences by the House of Justice in 2013 was a distinguishing feature of the current Plan. It required new levels of collaboration among the institutions and, to a degree greater than ever experienced before in the UK, helped the community itself find a more outward-looking orientation. Indeed, the community rose as one to “support, encourage and champion this phenomenon”.

The London youth conference should not of course be thought of merely as a one off event, but as a special moment in an overall movement of youth which is continuing to unfold. Reflecting on the conferences, the House of Justice itself stated, in a letter dated 8 February 2014 written on its behalf to all National Spiritual Assemblies:

**One year ago, the Universal House of Justice called for the convening of conferences across the globe to give an opportunity to Bahá’í youth and their friends “to reflect, to commit, to steel themselves for a life of service”. The effect of the deliberations of the over 80,000 young people participating in those auspicious gatherings was profound and far-reaching. The impressive scope and depth of the conversations greatly enhanced the commitment of these youth to bearing the responsibility of contributing to the betterment of the world and led them to identify specific ways in which they would lend their share. If the participants in the conferences are to continue to feel the impact of “earnest discussions that lift the heart and awaken the mind to the possibilities of what**

could be” and extend their dynamic influence to others, they must sustain their “inclusive and ever-expanding” conversations within the particular contexts of their own communities, concurrent with their continued endeavours to serve society.

## Movement of Youth Population

Region	Total youth in process	Follow up of the youth movement between July 2014-Jan 2015				Summary of institute courses completed							
		Conversation or gatherings	Entered sequence	Facilitating core activities	Accompanying others in core activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Total England	668	138	530	253	132	454	303	246	220	226	168	171	73
Total Nireland	43	6	37	20	9	37	28	21	17	17	16	12	0
Total Scotland	167	81	86	46	23	39	5	9	4	4	3	3	0
Total Wales	43	16	27	11	7	24	22	16	14	12	10	10	2
Total UK	921	241	680	330	171	554	358	292	255	259	197	196	75
% of youth involved		26%	74%	36%	19%	60%	39%	32%	28%	28%	21%	21%	8%

It is important, then, to take stock of the community’s efforts to sustain the work with youth, and to widen and deepen their participation. Around 1,000 youth participated in the London youth conference, some of whom came from Ireland, Iceland and elsewhere. Efforts were made to monitor the participation of youth in an effort to help as many as possible engage with the activities of the Plan. The data we have (see table below) indicates that over 900 youth are currently engaged in the process in some form, around 680 of whom have entered the sequence of courses. While some of these may be new to the process and not have attended the conference, and some of those who attended the conference may no longer be involved, this is still a remarkable achievement for the community, and shows that the momentum of the conference has generally been sustained well!

The National Assembly takes great delight in the great many accounts it sees of youth contributing significantly to the processes of growth, including as part of visiting teams, pioneers, and also as members of institutions. Notably, growing numbers of youth are offering a year of service in neighbourhoods, often in cities where they will then begin university in order to sustain their contribution.

### Local Youth Conferences

Since the London youth conference, several smaller youth conferences have taken place in different parts of the UK, including in East of England, Sussex and Bristol. The following reflections on the East of England conference from one youth participant indicate how such gatherings can help spur on the movement of youth:

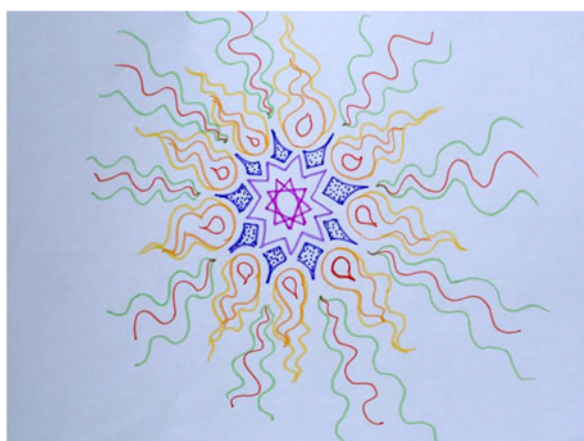


On the weekend of the 21-22 June 2014, approximately 60 youth travelled to Cambridge to attend the first local youth conference since the National Conference in London nearly a year before.



We took part in many meaningful discussions around community-building activities in England and the wider world; the importance and effects of the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme and the importance of mutual support and true friendship.

We also reviewed the progress we had made, the challenges we had faced and the learning we had drawn subsequent to the London Conference. We considered the work undertaken in our localities to form firmer connections, and more concrete plans for the furthering of the betterment of society.



The use of the last conference material was extremely powerful, as we were able to draw new insights and gain a more complete understanding of the concepts of both mutual support and civilisation building. It enabled us to appreciate still more the importance of this age and the latent capacities of the junior youth.

The Saturday night consisted of artistic presentations, which were extremely light hearted, but still deeply powerful. The use of

arts to portray the themes served to deepen our understanding still more.

Another key aspect of the conference was making connections and bonds between youth, both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í, from the different clusters in order to enable regional-wide activities, which will in turn allow for increased mutual support and encourage the strengthening of the core activities.

**It was a thoroughly joyous and invigorating weekend which will, I trust, lead to added impetus to the progress of the Plan in our locality, and will provide increased vitality for all the youth who attended either this or similar regional conferences.**

## **E. SCHOOLS**

The National Assembly is continually endeavouring to organise summer schools in ways that will be as uplifting, inspiring, unifying, informative and transformative as possible, but above all in such a way that schools may be seen as places to bring friends and family - our community of interest - into the warm embrace of Bahá'í community life. The National Assembly is pleased to note that there is a greater awareness in the community that summer schools are places which are open to all, and the Assembly will continue to address some of the barriers that might prevent this, such as cost, the content and focus of the programme and our own understanding of the purpose of the event.

...schools may be seen as places to bring friends and family - our community of interest

Many of the UK's summer schools this year will be focused on the theme 'making sense of the world's crisis', and will include courses on Century of Light, the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh letters, Islam, the role of religion in society, amongst many other topics. We are excited by the prospect of these summer schools, which we are sure will fortify our capacity to understand and converse with others on these important subjects, and thus fulfil the vision of Shoghi Effendi for these events to be centres *"for the preparation and training of prospective teachers and pioneers"*.

### **Cluster Based Schools**

Cluster based schools also hold great promise, and the community is at an early stage of learning how these can best support the work of the Cause. In Cambridgeshire, for example, a cluster school took place last year with three main aims:

- **To build capacity within the cluster to conceive, organise and run a cluster school**
- **To foster collaboration between the Area Teaching Committee, the Local Spiritual Assembly of Cambridge, and a number of individuals**
- **To use the school as part of a teaching campaign**

Cluster based schools hold great promise

It was wonderful to see the strong support of the local friends, who contributed financially and also through serving in many capacities—from workshop facilitation to cleaning—and who generously offered their talents and time to ensure the success of the school. The programme had very practical outcomes, and the service activities (e.g. tree planting) and creative components (e.g. making videos) proved popular.



Cambridgeshire cluster school

Participants made a systematic effort over several weekends to speak with local residents about the Forum, and the friendly response of the neighbourhood was a tremendous source of joy and encouragement.

Through this overall experience, many capacities have been built in many individuals and we are delighted to say that another school is being organised this summer in Cambridgeshire.

#### ***F. EMERGENCE OF A WELL-GROUNDED EDUCATIONAL PROCESS***

The training institute—an “instrument of limitless potentialities”—is vital to our community’s efforts to spiritually enlighten and empower multitudes to “throw in their lot” in service to humanity. The educational process which it fosters is one of two perspectives from which we can view the pattern of action in our clusters. This process has three distinct phases, “the first for the youngest members of the community, the second for those in the challenging transitional years, and the third for youth and adults”<sup>2</sup>

#### **Study Circles and Building the Capacity to Serve**

Through engagement in the institute courses, individuals learn how to develop their capacity to serve their communities, and we can see from the following table that over the past two decades, thousands of individuals have shown their willingness to give of their time to engage in this process of learning.

The training institute—an “instrument of limitless potentialities”

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<sup>2</sup> Message dated 12 December 2011 from the Universal House of Justice

		Sequence of courses									
		Youth & adult who have completed courses									
		Bk 1	Bk 2	Bk 3	G2	G3	Bk 4	Bk 5	Bk 6	Bk 7	Bk 8
<b>UK TOTAL</b>	<b>Apr-11</b>	3664	2577	2180	112	0	1847	628	1511	1230	201
<b>IPG/PG only</b>	<b>Oct-14</b>	3789	2703	2276	98	13	1942	917	1540	1344	437
	<b>% + or -</b>	3%	5%	4%	-13%		5%	46%	2%	9%	117%

If the institute courses are intended to raise capacity to carry out acts of service which include teaching the Faith and commencing and sustaining one or more core activity, we can gain some idea of the effectiveness of this process by examining the number of core activities.

		Devotionals			Children Classes			Junior Youth			Study Circles		
		Number of a given activity being held on a regular basis											
		No	Total	COI	No	Total	COI	No	Total	COI	No	Total	COI
<b>UK TOTAL</b>	<b>Apr-11</b>	294	1708	631	106	393	200	66	322	232	320	993	318
Clusters passed the 1 <sup>st</sup> milestone	<b>Oct-14</b>	234	1387	597	104	449	264	67	356	278	220	707	261
	<b>% + or -</b>	-	-19%	-5%	-2%	14%	32%	2%	11%	20%	-31%	-29%	-18%

What is most encouraging from these figures is that it shows that the community has the capacity to sustain a certain level of activity over a period of years. This is a great strength. We understand too from an analysis of these figures that:

- **1 devotional is run for every 15 trained individuals**
- **1 in 5 tutors are actively tutoring**
- **1 in 21 trained teachers are running children's classes**
- **1 in 13 trained animators are animating junior youth groups**

Connected with this analysis, the institutions concerned with the processes of growth have been reflecting on the fall in the number of enrolments in recent years:

Period to end	Period covered	ENROLMENTS
Oct-11	12 mths	147
Oct-12	12 mths	148
Oct-13	12 mths	72
Oct-14	12 mths	78

...the community has the capacity to sustain a certain level of activity over a period of years.



In considering this analysis, it is beneficial to reflect back to the very beginning of the 5 Year Plan where, in its Riḍvān 2010 message, the House of Justice counselled us as follows:

**What is imperative is that the quality of the educational process fostered at the level of the study circle rise markedly ... so that the potential of local populations to create such dynamics is realized. Much will fall on those who serve as tutors in this respect. Theirs will be the challenge to provide the environment that is envisioned in the institute courses, an environment conducive to the spiritual empowerment of individuals, who will come to see themselves as active agents of their own learning, as protagonists of a constant effort to apply knowledge to effect individual and collective transformation. Failing this, no matter how many study circles are formed in a cluster, the force necessary to propel change will not be generated.**

It was the above analyses and guidance, combined with the understanding that “*sustained quantitative gains will be contingent on qualitative progress*” that inspired the Training Institute Board for the UK, in close collaboration with Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi, to organise two week-long seminars on tutoring in July and September 2014 for a total of 140 participants at Keele University. This is the first time tutor gatherings of such length have been held in the UK. These seminars for tutors, which drew heavily from book 7, gave participants a rich experience that heightened their:



- Understanding of the purpose of the institute process
- Ability to have an effective conversation that invites a soul to walk a path of service, and thus to enter the sequence of courses
- Perspective on Ruhi Book 1, *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*, and the nature of the conversation that can arise through the study of the course
- Awareness of the accompaniment that is needed from a tutor to support collaborators in a study circle to enable them to walk a path of service and to start their own activities



*Participants at the Keele seminar*

These seminars thus focused on the two nascent capacities that are essential if a programme of growth is to emerge and intensify in any cluster: inviting and helping individuals study the sequence of courses and accompany them as they initiate core activities. The tutors attending also gained insight into how Book 1 should be seen as an effective means of introducing the Faith – a means for participants to learn about how Bahá'ís strive to be, and what Bahá'ís do. It is thus a wonderful instrument for teaching the Faith! The learning from these seminars is being disseminated to the cluster level via coordinators.

A participant at one of the seminars commented:

**I feel that the event has increased my understanding of the process we are engaged in so much, to the extent that I feel I am a different person. I have been busy consolidating my learning and putting it into action since my return. I have visited some of my friends in the last week and have had meaningful and spiritual conversations and tried to share the vision with them. One of the visits has resulted in forming a study circle with one of them and her daughter doing Book 1. I am so excited and am seeing glimpses of what can happen when we arise to serve, while constantly praying and studying the guidance.**

Other spaces have also been created for tutors to reflect and learn together. In Edinburgh, for example, around 60 tutors gathered together from across Scotland at a recent seminar which had the same purpose and focus as the seminars at Keele.

#### *Intensive Training*

Intensive, centralised training events continue to provide an important tool to help large numbers, and especially youth, move through the sequence of courses. Around 100 participants took part in a range of study circles at Keele University last summer.

Winter training was decentralised to the cluster level, and a taskforce was put in place to stimulate intensity. As a result, seven clusters, from each of the four regions, were able to organise their own intensive study of one or more courses and 50 souls benefitted from this.

One participant in book 1 shared the following after an intensive training experiences:

**I really enjoyed training, partly due to not only meeting lots of new people, but also their friendliness towards me, even if I didn't know them that well. I enjoyed the book a lot as well, I feel a lot more enlightened to Bahá'í teachings and actually feel like a much better person because of it.**



## Children's Classes

Date	Number of children's classes	Total number of participants	Estimated number of friends of the Faith
<i>Apr-11</i>	106	418	229
<i>Oct-13</i>	111	526	347
<i>Oct-14</i>	108	476	299
<b>% Change since start of the Plan</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>31%</b>

Among the range of questions now before every training institute one stands out as particularly pressing: how to mobilize sufficient numbers of children's class teachers for successive grades and, by extension, tutors who can form groups to study the requisite courses.

*12 December 2011, The Universal House of Justice*

As the above table indicates, overall numbers of children's classes has remained reasonably stable, and the capacity to sustain this number is a great achievement. Significantly, training for children's class teachers is being offered more widely to enable teachers to teach Grade 2, initially in clusters served by children's class coordinators. This training also serves as a space for teachers to reflect and study together with a view to increase the quality of classes.

The Training Institute Board reported that the *"increase in the number of participants of the children's classes, particularly those belonging to families of friends of the Faith suggests that the friends are gaining confidence in having meaningful conversations on the subject of education, and extending invitations to others to participate."*

The challenge remains, however, to increase the number of children's class teachers. In some clusters, for example, we are unable to meet the demands of parents and children to conduct classes due to a lack of trained resources.

## Junior Youth

Date	Number of junior youth groups	Total number of participants	Estimated number of friends of the Faith
<i>Apr-11</i>	67	340	231
<i>Oct-13</i>	58	305	224
<i>Oct-14</i>	71	374	289
<b>% Change since start of the Plan</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>25%</b>

It is encouraging to note that the community has developed the capacity to sustain 13 additional junior youth groups from October 2013 to October 2014. The Training Institute Board reports that *“Many more have formed but there have been challenges sustaining them. The number of participants has increased commensurate to the number of groups, and an increasing number belong to families of friends of the Faith.”* The Board notes too that a *“number of junior youth camps have taken place for some of the groups, and this has provided an opportunity to study the junior youth texts with more intensity, strengthen relationships with parents and increase bonds of fellowship.”* At the time of writing this report (early April 2015), the largest junior youth camp organised in this country to date is taking place with some 100 participants. Although initially organised for junior youth in London, it was opened up to others and thus provides an opportunity for learning from this experience to be shared more widely. The hope is that those attending this event will be able to share the experience with others in their own localities and clusters. An animators’ seminar is also being planned for this summer, for both current animators and those wishing to form groups.



*Materials prepared by a junior youth group*

To understand better how to implement the junior youth programme, the Training Institute Board is working closely with the Northern Europe Learning Site and its resource persons, who operate under the guidance and direction of the Office of Social and Economic Development in Haifa. The Board is striving to understand the capacities of each animator and to identify steps to strengthen them. There are five individuals who are serving full-time and dedicating a period of their life to the development of the junior youth programme in the three clusters associated with the learning site – London, Manchester and Thames Valley. This close collaboration with the resource persons is providing the opportunity to draw upon the learning garnered from across the network of clusters associated with the Learning Site. An interesting development in the last year is that the resource persons have understood that in order to effectively advance the junior youth programme, it was necessary not only to develop the capacity of animators and junior youth coordinators, but also the other cluster agencies. One could not advance fully without the other. The resource persons, accompanied by Counsellors Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi and Firouzeh Moghbel-Naderi, held a meeting to learn how to foster unity of purpose, vision, thought, and action within the cluster agencies of those associated with the network. The resource persons have also shared a document which analyses the experiences from forming a few hundred junior youth groups in a neighbourhood setting. The Board is now considering how best to utilise this.

The National Assembly is thrilled to see the continuing relationship between the Learning Site and its resource persons, and to witness how the learning is flowing from the network

of clusters associated with the site to all clusters within it. As far as the United Kingdom is concerned, the Assembly sees clearly that not only is this benefitting London, Manchester and Thames Valley, but it is also impacting advances in learning in many other clusters across the UK.



*Junior youth group and its animator in Westminster, London*

There are many wonderful stories to recount of how junior youth groups have formed and been sustained by the heroic efforts of animators and their supporters, but sadly it is beyond the scope of this report to include them here.

## **Devotional Meetings**

We have been especially blessed this year to receive profound guidance from the House of Justice on the nature of the relationship between service and worship. Its letters of 1 August 2014 to the Bahá'ís of the World and 18 December 2014 to the believers in Iran have deepened our understanding of the concept of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* and the pattern of life it promulgates, and offered new vistas from which we can see, to an even greater degree, the power of prayer to transform our individual and collective lives.

In some clusters, a focus is given to learning about how to improve the quality of devotional meetings.

The Counsellors who visited from the International Teaching Centre in February 2015 shared one significant observation that underscores the critical role that strengthening of a devotional character has in advancing the processes of growth: in many of the world's most advanced clusters, around half of the core activities underway are devotional meetings. And an example they shared does much to expand our understanding of the possibilities that lie before us: in a cluster on Tanna, one of the islands of Vanuatu, where a large percentage of the population are members of the Bahá'í community, devotional meetings take place in around 80% of the Bahá'í homes!

It is in this light that we can look with optimism and excitement towards efforts in the UK to strengthen the devotional character of the community. The National Assembly feels that this is an area of focus that Local Assemblies could give special attention to at this time, in collaboration with their Area/Sector Teaching Committees.

In some clusters, a particular focus is being given to learning about how to improve the quality of devotional meetings. Notably, encounters dedicated to the quality of devotional meetings, and to build capacities needed to initiate further devotional meetings and speak of prayer, have taken place in some clusters.

### **Strengthening the scheme of coordination**

The Training Institute Board have shared the following report in this connection:

... The Board has consciously made efforts to raise its own capacity and that of the 17 area coordinators. An area consists of 3-5 clusters and an area coordinator is appointed to accompany the whole educational process for children, junior youth and adults through cluster level coordinators, or when these have yet to emerge, to strengthen the training institute with other individuals in the cluster.

The Board is advancing its capacity to accompany this scheme of coordination and members of the Board liaise with the area coordinators about the visits they make in the clusters and at times accompanies them, and in the course of this reflection, a plan emerges for the next few months.

<b>CURRENT SCHEME OF COORDINATORS</b>		
<i>Type of institute coordinator</i>		<i>Number of Coordinators</i>
<i>Area coordinators</i>		<b>17</b>
<i>Cluster study circle coordinators</i>		<b>19</b>
<i>Cluster junior youth group coordinators</i>		<b>6</b>
<i>Cluster children's class coordinators</i>		<b>9</b>
<i>Sector coordinators for London</i>	<i>Study circle</i>	<b>5</b>
	<i>Junior Yth Groups</i>	<b>2</b>
	<i>Children's classes</i>	<b>2</b>
<i>Clusters with no coordinators</i>		<b>24</b>

## **G. ENHANCING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY TO SUPPORT THE MOVEMENT OF CLUSTERS**

### **Regional Councils**

The Institutional gathering in February 2014 had a significant impact on the work at a regional level in the months that followed. The focus of this gathering was twofold – firstly on learning to read the reality of a cluster and secondly on the nature of accompaniment. Around this time, Regional Councils, together with the regional/area coordinators and Auxiliary Board members, were striving to learn how to plan more systematically and effectively to support the advancement of clusters. During the year, much was learnt about this process with Councils or their representatives, regional/area Coordinators and Board members coming together regularly, following a process of careful and detailed preparation in which a

description of the reality of the cluster was documented, statistics for each cluster updated, and the movement of youth tracked. Clear plans were then made and, following a period of implementation, these teams met again to review progress, reflect and make plans again for the advancement of the cluster. In this connection the Council for England report:

**The Council has ... gained significant insights into the functioning of area teams over the course of this year. It has learnt the value of rigorous preparation for area team meetings and the importance of drawing on both qualitative and quantitative information in making plans to progress the work of the clusters.**

A description of a cluster would reflect one's perception of the nature of the general population, the social and economic circumstances, the positive and negative forces influencing the cluster, the cultural factors that make people particularly receptive to the Teachings, the current capacity of the Bahá'í communities within it, and the strength of the institutions.

The Council for Wales has made some interesting observations in relation to this process:

**... this year has seen the emergence of a clear pattern to the work of the institutions at the regional level in pursuing and reviewing these strategies.**

**The Council meets quarterly with the Auxiliary Board members and Area Coordinator. For each cluster, the activity and progress since the last meeting is reviewed, noting both actions arising from institutional support, and those that have emerged from the grass-roots. From what is usually a rich and detailed consultation, a picture of the current reality of the cluster emerges, and any new insights into that reality are noted. In this context the relevance of the agreed strategies is reviewed, and then relevant actions agreed. Two benefits of this process particularly stand out:**

- 1. Frequently, the new insights into the reality of the cluster –a more accurate perception of the level of capacity, or of how the relationship dynamics among the Bahá'ís impact the process of growth –have led to the conclusion that a cluster is not as advanced along the continuum as we had believed. However, this need not be a source of discouragement: armed with these new insights, the institutions plan accordingly. To have gained new insight into reality is itself a victory of the Plan.**
- 2. These new insights have enabled us to plan more effective interventions. While this is seemingly obvious, there is an important point that if we are committed to reading reality accurately, we can expect to see our interventions become increasingly effective, and if we do not see this it may indicate that we are missing something in our reading of the reality of the cluster.**



In this scheme we can see emerging a new level of collaboration between the Regional Councils, the Institution of the Counsellors, and the Training Institute. This collaboration, as well as the development of the capacity to act, reflect and consult, augurs well for the future as the learning gained from this experience is shared with those institutions serving at a cluster level – the Area Teaching Committees, Auxiliary Board members & their assistants and cluster coordinators – for it is here where ownership of the Plan must lie and where the most



*Friends gathered at the Institutional meeting in February 2015 with Counsellor members of the International Teaching Centre Andrej Donoval (centre extreme left behind Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi), and Mrs. Alison Milston (front second from right)*

effective planning and implementation will take place. The National Spiritual Assembly was pleased to learn that, through the Counsellors, tools for planning at a cluster level are being introduced by Auxiliary Board members in certain clusters, which will facilitate systematic and effective planning and implementation.

A further Institutional gathering took place in Rugby over the weekend of 14/15 February 2015. This time the gathering was profoundly enriched and infused with a special spirit by the participation of two Counsellors from the International Teaching Centre, Mr. Andrej Donoval and Mrs. Alison Milston, as well as Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi. Present were members of the Auxiliary Board, Regional Bahá'í Councils, Training Institute Board, representatives from clusters that are striving to establish their first programme of growth, and many others serving in various capacities at the national, area, cluster and local levels.

In this scheme  
we can see  
emerging a  
new level of  
collaboration

On this occasion, the consultations focused principally on two themes: the ways and means by which the UK community can fulfil its goal of establishing



programmes of growth in every one of its clusters before Riḍván 2016, and the further intensification of efforts in those clusters that already have a programme of growth. The National Assembly reported to the community following the meeting:

**Encouragement was an abiding theme that suffused the consultations...**

**Much was shared, reflected upon and learnt during the institutional meeting ... it was clear that two particular capacities need to be further developed in every cluster. Firstly, the ability to touch hearts with the love of Bahá'u'lláh through a meaningful and distinctive conversation, such that souls are moved to join the institute process because of their desire to learn how to be of service to their communities. And then, when these souls are engaged in this training process, to accompany them to start their own core activity, whatever that may be. When these capacities emerge—the capacity to invite and accompany—then we can say that a nascent programme of growth has commenced in clusters yet to establish one, and in a cluster where one is already established the strengthening of these capacities will propel forward the processes of growth.**

Indeed, it was understood that the development of these two capacities, in a setting of friendship and love, was essential in every situation if a sustainable process of growth and community building is to emerge.

It was evident that the capacity to describe a cluster, its activities and its progress, has strengthened this year. This is an important feature of progress, for we know that when the capacity to reflect on experience, to describe what has been learnt, and to share that learning, has developed, progress occurs. For this is the capacity to learn! Our approach to learning must be scientific and flexible, and must be consonant with the principles and

...the capacity to describe a cluster has strengthened this year.

evolving framework for action that the House of Justice gradually unfolds for us in its messages. Every institution has to develop the capacity to generate, capture and crystallise learning for sharing with others.

As noted above, the capacity to describe our current reality, and to be aware of one's resources and possibilities, enables us to plan strategically in an effective and efficient manner. We learnt at the Institutional meeting that in reading our reality and setting out our plans, we should not reduce our

analysis to what is 'good' or what is 'bad', but rather focus on our strengths and ask ourselves what capacities need to be developed and take steps to enable individuals or institutions to



*"Living Nation", the newsletter of the Council for England, was relaunched during 2014*

acquire these. For example: Does the capacity to converse, to invite, to teach, to describe, to plan, to reflect need to be built? If the answer is “yes”, then the courses of the Ruhi Institute are the first place to turn to in order to acquire these.

Consultations at the Institutional gathering heightened awareness and understanding of the relationship which members of institutions should strive to have with the community and the institutions upon which they serve. This is something that the National Assembly has been striving to learn about in recent years (see below). Recognising that an Assembly or a Council is a corporate or collective body, and acts in a corporate manner, profoundly influences the relationship of the individual members to that body and to the community they serve, as well as the manner in which the body itself relates to the community:

**A new chapter in the evolution of the Administrative Order in ... is now opening, endowed with immense promise. As those dedicated believers called to serve on Regional Councils now take up their responsibilities, no doubt they will be conscious that they function as members of corporate bodies and not, of course, as individual leaders. Indeed, it will be essential for them to remain mindful of the admonitions in the Bahá'í writings that apply to all those charged with the administration of the affairs of the Faith—that they are to approach their work in the spirit of “humble fellowship” and that they must not allow themselves to be considered the “central ornaments of the body of the Cause”. So promising a process of growth unfolding in your country at the level of the cluster should not come to revolve around their expectations or to rely on their personal presence. Guarding against the least trace of any such tendency will greatly redound to their effectiveness.**

(From a letter dated 9 August 2012 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

In light of this understanding, the Regional Council for England has, as an example, understood to a greater extent the importance of developing its Secretariat as the instrument through which it interacts with the individual, the community and other agencies. To this end, it has engaged additional resources to reinforce and strengthen the capacity of that office. The role of individual members of these bodies within the community, as distinct from the institution's relationship, is also being carefully considered. For example, the Council for Scotland report that *“Council members have increased their capacity to work shoulder to shoulder with the friends. They have been involved in home front pioneering and visiting teams. This has led to an increased understanding at the Institutional level.”*

### **Training Institute**

For a number of years now the community has been well served by a National Training Institute Board. The existence of a national body in a country which has Regional Councils is somewhat unusual, as in other countries where there are Councils, each appoints a Training Institute Board which they work alongside, thus ensuring that the two complementary movements that are central to the progress of the Plan steadily unfold. However, with limited resources at the regional level, the National Assembly in consultation with the Counsellors was of the view that a national Board was adequate. In recent years, however, we have seen

a strengthening of the institute process in all regions and an increase in the capacity of individuals such that it is now felt to be timely for each Regional Council to appoint a Regional Training Institute Board, thus obviating the need for a national one. Consultations are currently taking place on how to make this transition, which will occur in the coming months.

...it is now timely for each Regional Council to appoint a Regional Training Institute Board,

This change has highlighted the need for a mechanism to share learning across the regions of the United Kingdom as, other than the National Assembly itself, there will be no institution that concerns itself primarily with the process of growth that will have a national perspective. Of course the Institution of the Counsellors plays a crucial role in the sharing of learning not only across the regions but also from across the world, and spaces such as national Institutional meetings and national training events are also helpful in this regard. But in light of these pending changes, further consideration needs to be given to creating other spaces where learning can be

shared and the National Assembly will be considering this in due course.

### **Local Spiritual Assemblies**

One of the features of recent years is the growing awareness of Local Spiritual Assemblies of their role in drawing upon and channelling the capacities of the friends, developed through their participation in the institute courses, in service to the Faith. We see an increasing number of Local Assemblies turning to their Auxiliary Board members or assistants and to their Area/Sector Teaching Committee or cluster coordinators, to reflect with them on how they can best contribute to the advancement of their cluster. This is very much in keeping with the following guidance of the Universal House of Justice in its 28 December 2010 message to the Conference of Counsellors referring to the obligations of a Local Assembly:

... Without doubt, some attention will have to be given to certain basic administrative functions--for example, meeting with a degree of regularity, conducting the Nineteen Day Feast and planning Holy Day observances, establishing a local fund, and holding annual elections in accordance with Bahá'í principle. However, it should not prove difficult for the Local Assembly to begin, concomitant with such efforts and with encouragement from an assistant to an Auxiliary Board member, to consult as a body on one or two specific issues with immediate relevance to the life of the community: how the devotional character of the village is being enhanced through the efforts of individuals who have completed the first institute course; how the spiritual education of the children is being addressed by teachers raised up by the institute; how the potential of junior youth is being realized by the programme for their spiritual empowerment; how the spiritual and social fabric of the community is being strengthened as the friends visit one another in their homes. As the Assembly consults on such tangible matters and learns to nurture the process of growth lovingly and patiently, its relationship with the Area Teaching Committee and the training institute gradually becomes cemented in a common purpose. But, of still greater importance, it will

**begin to lay the foundations on which can be built that uniquely affectionate and genuinely supportive relationship, described by the beloved Guardian in many of his messages, which Local Spiritual Assemblies should establish with the individual believer.**

...the National Assembly has prepared a training programme for Local Assemblies

Conscious that Local Assemblies are increasingly striving to play their part in the progress of the Plan, the National Assembly has prepared a training programme for Local Assemblies that is currently being piloted, which it hopes will assist them in their efforts to engage in consultation, action and reflection on themes outlined in passages such as the above. It is intended that it will be available to all Local Assemblies later in the year.

This Riḍván a change will take place in the Local Assembly boundaries in Northern Ireland. At the time of writing, it is not known how many Assemblies will form, but it is not anticipated that any will be lost as, in general, the boundaries of Assembly areas have increased in size.

### **National Spiritual Assembly**

National Spiritual Assembly meetings are imbued with a spirit of joyful prayer and much of the inspiration for its consultations is derived from its study of the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, often in consultation with Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi. The Assembly enjoys a close, collaborative, open and loving relationship with the Counsellor and, for important matters—particularly those concerning the propagation and protection of the Faith—it would be reluctant to make a decision without drawing upon the views of the Counsellor, which are given due weight in the consultative process.

The National Assembly sees its role in supporting the work of the Regional Councils as central to its effort to advance the work of the Plan, as it is these bodies that are primarily responsible for the Plan's progress. Principally through its Secretary, it meets from time to time with the Councils, often with the Counsellor present, and follows their progress closely.

During the course of this year, the Assembly has further deepened its understanding of its relationship with the wider community. It explored the question of what the role of its members might be in the community and understood that outside of Assembly meetings, except if given a specific mission by the National Assembly, its members have no function other than as believers serving the Faith, walking shoulder to shoulder with their fellow-workers in His Cause. This led the Assembly to reflect more deeply on the Assembly's relationship with the community, considering passages such as the following from Shoghi Effendi:

The National Assembly sees its role in supporting the work of the Regional Councils as central to its effort to advance the work of the Plan

Among the most outstanding and sacred duties incumbent upon those who have been called upon to initiate, direct and coordinate the affairs of the Cause are those that require them to win by every means in their power the confidence and affection of those whom it is their privilege to serve. Theirs is the duty to investigate and acquaint themselves with the considered views, the prevailing sentiments and the personal convictions of those whose welfare it is their solemn obligation to promote. Theirs is the duty to purge once and for all their deliberations and the general conduct of their affairs from that air of self-contained aloofness, from the suspicion of secrecy, the stifling atmosphere of dictatorial assertiveness, in short, from every word and deed that may savor of partiality, self-centeredness and prejudice. Theirs is the duty while retaining the sacred and exclusive right of final decision in their hands, to invite discussion, provide information, ventilate grievances, welcome advice, ... foster the sense of interdependence and co-partnership, of understanding and mutual confidence between them on one hand and all local Assemblies and individual believers on the other.

(Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration, pp. 143-44)

It is the hope of the National Assembly that the insights gained during its consultation on this subject will enable it to exercise its sacred duty with greater care through its communications with the community, its ability to *“investigate and acquaint”* itself, deliberate on, and respond to *“the considered views, the prevailing sentiments and the personal convictions”* of individuals in the community, and in spaces such as National Convention and at national gatherings such as institutional meetings where its members are present as a body.

## H. STATISTICS

The following extracts from a report of the National Statistics Officer is helpful in understanding progress made during the year:

**The focus of the National Statistics Office has remained on increasing the usage of the statistical tools devised by the Bahá'í World Centre – SRP and SRPi3 – in the UK clusters, with the objective of assisting the work of the cluster agencies and other institutions involved in the Plan. The Office has also endeavoured to raise capacity in a growing number of individuals to assist in the area of statistics.**

**This past year new strategies have evolved to accelerate the pace and effectiveness of the training sessions facilitated by the Statistics Officers. In England, the Regional Statistics Officers [Note: this is a recent appointment by the Council for England] have been working closely with area teams to arrange joint training sessions that introduce the software and provide an opportunity to analyse the**

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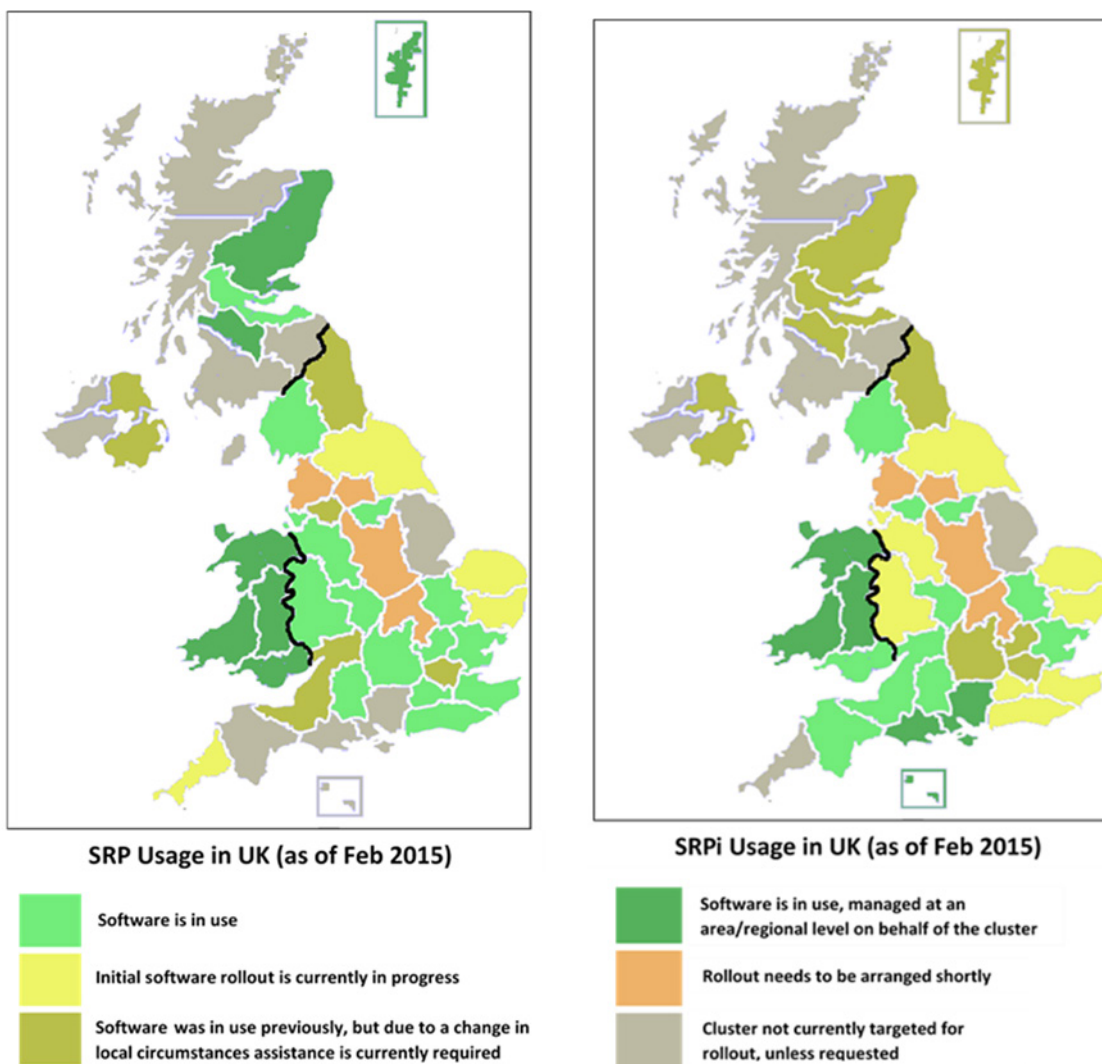
<sup>3</sup> SRP [Statistical Report Program] and SRPi [Statistical Report Program for the Training Institute]



Cluster Growth Profiles. ... The aim is that this approach will help address a major challenge that arises when membership changes and the cluster agency often loses valuable knowledge and experience.

As a result of continued conversation with the Council for Scotland, the need for a Statistics Officer in Scotland has become apparent ... Much of the collection and review of statistics in Wales is done at a regional level ... the newly appointed assistant to the Council for Northern Ireland is being met to see how the software can be reintroduced in the region.

A simple, maintainable private website has been created to assist with the usage of the statistics tools and to serve as a platform for knowledge transfer. This has been made available to individuals using the software and so far feedback has been positive.



The National Assembly was delighted to see these developments at a national and regional level. At a cluster level it is confident that as agencies in the more advanced clusters strive to plan and reflect more systematically from cycle to cycle, they will naturally turn to these statistical tools that are gradually becoming available everywhere, and will find that the data and information contained in them is essential for understanding the development of their



cluster from the two perspectives from which we are encouraged to view the advance of our clusters—the educational process with its three distinct phases and the three-month cycle of activity through which the community grows.

### **I. DISTRIBUTION OF LITERATURE**

The new arrangement for literature distribution, which was set up about 3 years ago, grows from strength to strength. The team of volunteers report that they *“have gained more experience and knowledge in knowing which titles to order and how many. The stocks of older books have almost come to an end, through a series of discounting and donating the books to other communities around the world. Wherever possible costs have been reduced, for storage, manpower and delivery, and the savings have helped to further reduce the price of books and make them available to a larger group of the friends.”*

Perhaps because of the very significant reduction in prices resulting from the restructuring of the distribution process, sales are back to the level they were at some years ago. In addition, BBUK are showing a small profit for the second year in row, compared to previous years when a subsidy was required from the National Fund. The Committee reports that the *“BBUK website is being used more and more to place orders (26%), followed by sales at events, Persian Arts and Letters Conference (21%), Rutland Gate Book shop (11%), National Convention (8%) and then there are sales to European customers (13%) and others through individual agents who take the time and make the effort to take books to the local events for the friends to see and purchase.”*

The new arrangement for literature distribution ... grows from strength to strength.

The Ruhi Institute books continue to be subsidised by the National Assembly and are available at £2.00 each or less. BBUK is also printing some of the more popular Ruhi books.

### 3. EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

The Office of Public Affairs (OPA) works under the direction and guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly which appoints a coordinating team to guide and direct its work. The team has a convenor, Mrs. Padideh Sabeti, who, external to the Bahá'í community serves as the National Assembly's Director of External Affairs. The work of the Office involves the areas outlined below.

#### A. PARTICIPATION IN THE DISCOURSES OF SOCIETY ON THE NATIONAL STAGE

The Universal House of Justice has described participation in the prevalent discourses of society on the national stage as the Bahá'í community's efforts to be present and participate in discussions in a variety of spaces at the national level where different aspects of social progress are addressed. Over time the Offices of Public Affairs in each country are learning to share the wisdom enshrined in the teachings in such spaces in order to contribute to the betterment of society.



The co-ordinating team of the Office of Public Affairs has begun an on-going series of regular consultations with the recently established Office of Public Discourse (OPD) at the Bahá'í World Centre. These consultations have helped the OPA to hone its methodology in formally participating in the key

...what is required is a pool of committed individuals who can systematically and efficiently focus

prevalent discourses on gender equality, social cohesion, and on the role religion plays in the life of society. With the support of the OPD, the office has identified systematic lines of action to raise the capacity of collaborators to identify relevant spaces, read the reality of the current discourses and contribute to the generation of content.

The process of building collaborators' capacity has revealed that what is required is a pool of committed individuals who can systematically and efficiently focus their time and efforts in identifying the spaces in which key discourses are occurring, and in collectively reflecting on reading the reality of these

spaces. The aim in the coming months is to increase the number of people with whom the Office can collaborate.

A growing pool of collaborators meets regularly to study key texts and these sessions include a period of reflection to identify common themes and questions that arise in the discourses as well as the underlying concepts and assumptions underpinning them. The office has learnt that this process is absolutely necessary in our reading of reality and in generating content.

Developing the capacity to generate content includes learning to contribute in a manner that may have an influence at the level of thought. This begins with articulating concepts in conversations and subsequently in talks, seminars, and written papers. In the Office's recent experience of contributing to the discourse on the role of religion in public life, it became apparent that not only do we need to deepen our understanding of the reality of British public life, but we must also refine our use of language to reflect the Faith's spirit of oneness and inclusivity. The Office is learning that the capacity to generate meaningful content will develop through continued study, presence in numerous spaces and reflection.



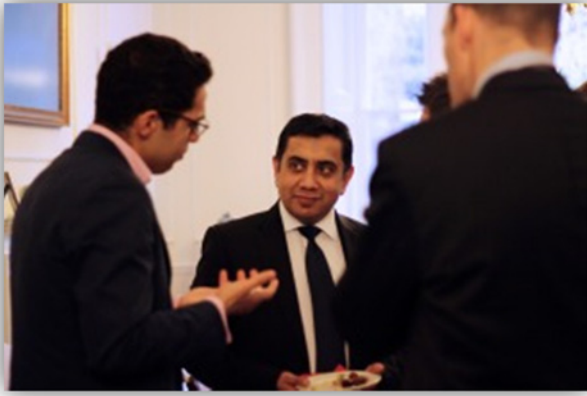
*Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP addresses Ridván celebration 2014*

The Office is also learning to collaborate with friends along similar lines of action in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

### ***B. RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY, INCLUDING EFFORTS TO DEFEND THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY FROM PERSECUTION***

The ultimate purpose of building relationships with UK government and civil society

The ultimate purpose of building relationships with UK government and civil society is to strengthen the presence of the Bahá'í community on the national stage and to enhance its capacity to shed the light of the Faith's teachings on discussions concerned with social progress. Unfortunately, because Bahá'ís continue to face serious opposition in a few countries around the world, the work of the defending the Bahá'í community from persecution is, for now, a necessary adjunct or secondary purpose of this relationship building work. Our efforts have been directed towards reflecting on how these two purposes could be mutually reinforcing and coherent.



*Lord Ahmad at UK Bahá'í Centre*

During the past year OPA has had numerous opportunities to strengthen bonds of friendship and cooperation between the UK Bahá'í community and the UK Government. We have continued to build on our relationship with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). Secretary of State Eric Pickles MP was Guest of Honour at the Ridván Reception held in the Houses of Parliament by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Bahá'í Faith and we have subsequently met

with him in recent months. Hilary Patel, Head of the Faith and Engagement Team at DCLG has visited the Bahá'í Centre, and members of her team have attended a number of our events. And Lord Ahmad, Minister for Communities, visited the Haziratu'l Quds in December as part of his work to engage with faith communities in the UK. Through these formal engagements and attendance by DCLG staff at a number of our events, the Department is increasingly aware of the work of the Bahá'í community at the grassroots level and our wish to engage in discourses at the national level.

In Parliament, we have been learning how to share principles and concepts related to the Faith in our conversations as part of our defence work and at other events and occasions.

We have continued to maintain relationships with a number of faith advocacy groups. Participation in these spaces allows us to gain a better understanding of the role of religion in society and, as the experience is shared and reflected upon, it contributes toward our collective practice of reading the reality in UK society. Through these interactions we have learned that the government recognises that faith and religion have a very important role to play at so many levels in social cohesion and is actively looking for faith groups and communities to support community service. For this reason the government gives great encouragement to service at the grass-roots level.

Under the guidance of the Bahá'í World Centre and Bahá'í International Community, our ongoing efforts to defend the Bahá'í community from persecution in Iran during the year have included concentrated efforts to promote awareness of Ayatollah Masoumi Tehrani's gift to the Bahá'ís of the world, which resulted in statements and responses by senior Anglican, Coptic and Catholic leaders as well as prominent UK Muslim leaders and thinkers.

A concerted effort was made over a number of months to raise awareness of the desecration of the Bahá'í cemetery in Shiraz. This is shared in more detail in the media section below.

The anniversary of the incarceration of the seven former members of the Yárán, 'the Friends in Iran' was commemorated in the Jerusalem Chamber in Westminster Abbey with a special programme of prayers offered by senior faith leaders from the UK. Support for the Yárán by prominent UK Muslim leaders such as Sheikh Ibrahim Mogra and Imam Hafez was notable. On 14th May 2015, the then Minister for the Middle East, Hugh Robertson MP, issued a

statement calling for their release which was tweeted by the Minister and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, and received some attention from UK media.

Maziar Bahari's film *To Light A Candle* received its UK premiere in London in September 2014. More recently it was screened in Parliament on 16th of March by a longstanding supporter of the Bahá'í community, Neil Parish MP, at an event which featured commentary on Iran's Universal Periodic Review Process (UPR).

Indeed, pressing for action by the UK government and raising awareness of Iran's UPR have

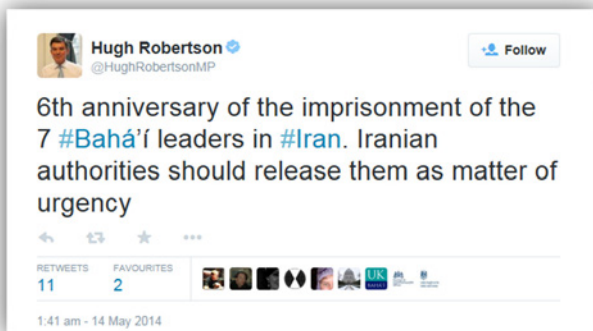
been core goals throughout much of OPA's defence work in the past year. In November 2014 a seminar was held in the House of Commons to reflect on freedom of religion and belief in Iran after Iran's second UPR in October 2014, with a discussion panel including representatives from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on International Freedom of Religion and Belief and from Small Media. More recently, a legal seminar co-hosted by the UK Bar Human Rights Committee took

place in collaboration with Shadi Sadr of Justice for Iran. In the process of organising these events the Office has been learning to establish a closer working relationship with various civil rights organisations and to collaborate with various individual Bahá'ís.

### Strengthening the Bahá'í presence on the World Wide Web

Strengthening the Bahá'í presence on the Web can be seen as a great opportunity to present the community's history, activities, hopes and beliefs to a wide public. Efforts are being made to reinvigorate the community's national website (<http://www.bahai.org.uk>). It is hoped that

through attempting to articulate who the UK Bahá'í community is and what we do, a greater insight into our identity as part of British society and a richer vocabulary to express this to others will emerge. The website will draw upon the approach and concepts of the recently refreshed international bahai.org site, which serves as the authoritative repository of information about the Faith, history, teachings and of electronic copies of the Bahá'í writings.





The Office will seek to use the UK website in creative ways to support other areas of the Office's work such as the participation in the discourses of society on the national stage or the defence of the Bahá'ís in Iran.

Members and collaborators of the Office in this field attended a seminar in February 2015, at the invitation of the Office of Public Discourse, to reflect on the strategy for rebuilding the national website. Themes explored at the seminar included:

- The importance of the coherence of the language, tone, imagery and overall message of the website.
- How to present the site in a way so as to invite visitors to explore concepts related to the advancement of their society and communities as well as the teachings of the Faith.
- The importance of understanding and reflecting the culture of the nation so that a visitor will gain an understanding of British society when visiting the site; an understanding that will allow them to comprehend the forces operating in our society in the context of an ever advancing civilisation.

...the aim is to have the updated site ready later in the year.

Subject to the approval of the National Spiritual Assembly, the aim is to have the updated site ready later in the year.

### ***C. RELATIONS WITH THE MEDIA***

The ability of the UK Bahá'í community to engage with UK media is linked to progress made by OPA in raising capacity in a pool of people to acquire the skills to read the reality of UK society and adopt a language that conveys how Bahá'í principles can be applied to the challenges faced by society. The overall objective of the Office in this area is to identify journalists and sections of the media who share a concern for the well-being of humanity and to engage with them in spaces where evolving conversations will build mutual trust and respect and open the way to the exchange of thoughts and ideas. During the past year the Office has kept in touch and met with a small number of journalists and has identified others that it plans to reach out to in the coming year.

...it continues to be challenging to engage the interest of the media

Much of the office's engagement with national media has been as a result of the escalation in the persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran over the past year and of the Bahá'í International Community's calls for greater attention to be drawn to both the bold gesture of support by Ayatollah Masoumi Tehrani and the destruction of the Bahá'í Cemetery in Shiraz. As a result, in the period between May and August these issues have received coverage in the Times, the Guardian, the Independent and the Huffington Post UK, in addition to two



interviews carried out on the BBC Radio 4 Sunday programme with members of the UK Bahá'í community who have family members buried in the Shiraz cemetery. OPA aims to increase its collaboration with individuals who are willing to share their personal stories of persecution and to learn how to accompany them to present these stories to the media.

Despite the coverage achieved above, it continues to be challenging to engage the interest of the media in the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran in the face of dramatic scenes unfolding across the Middle East. In all of our attempts to engage media, the building of trust and friendship between the Office and media professionals is key. For example, it can be more productive to share news and information with journalists as a matter of good will, simply to inform them and to seek their views, rather than directly requesting them to cover a particular issue facing the Bahá'í community. In this respect the Office has also been learning to convey the underlying principles that shape the constructive and resilient posture adopted by the Bahá'ís in Iran.

...media organisations are increasingly recognising the official Bahá'í institutions as a source of credible information

The Office continues to receive occasional invitations from the BBC Radio2 programme *Good Morning Sunday* with Claire Balding to speak about Bahá'í teachings and holy days.

The Persian media have, over the years, become increasingly keen to cover news related to the Bahá'ís in Iran. In 2014 most cases of arrests, harassments, etc., have been reported in one or more Persian-language media outlets in London. In total, there were in excess of seven reports, including interviews, special programmes and articles, published by the Persian-language media in the UK in the past year. However, although the Persian media are keen to report news of any persecution, they are reluctant to provide a platform for Bahá'í principles to be shared, so the challenge remains to find language which does not portray the Bahá'ís in Iran as victims and which can convey their achievements.



Notably, these media organisations are increasingly recognising the official Bahá'í institutions as a source of credible information and have begun to contact the

Office to seek confirmation of reports. The Office continues to learn about how to collaborate with individual Bahá'ís to enhance and strengthen our relationship with the media.

#### ***D. WORK OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TASKFORCE***

The Religious Education Task Force continued to represent the Faith in the wider RE and Religious Studies world and to support SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education) members and Bahá'í communities. During the past year, a commercial education site decided to include quizzes on the Bahá'í Faith. Unfortunately the quizzes were based on inaccurate information, but the company concerned was willing to replace the quizzes. The RE Task Force drafted new quizzes for the approval of the National Spiritual Assembly and these are now available online.

The Department for Education decided to revise the syllabuses for the GCSE, A and AS level examinations for Religious Studies. Structured comments on the proposed exams and the relevance of the Faith within these exams were submitted to the Department of Education by the National Spiritual Assembly, following input from the RE Task Force.

One of the needs expressed by schools, communities and Bahá'í representatives on SACREs was for an organised collection of books, worksheets, photographs, and pamphlets aimed at different age groups. In response, a pack of materials for young people aged 7 to 11 (Key Stage 2) was prepared and may be ordered through Warwick Bahá'í Bookshop. A similar collection for ages 11 to 14 (Key Stage 3) is being developed. The Task Force's next foci will be the development of electronic materials and helping SACREs meet the RE needs of other parts of the UK.

#### ***E. INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES IN GLOBAL PROSPERITY UNDERGRADUATE SEMINARS 2014***

The Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP) is dedicated to building capacity in individuals, groups and institutions to contribute to prevalent discourses concerned with the betterment of society. One of the ways it strives to learn to do this is by offering a series of seminars for undergraduate students.

The seminars' aim is to help raise the capacity of youth to participate in the prevalent discourses of society by providing spaces for them to come together annually over the course of four years to study a set of materials that helps them build an evolving conceptual framework which, informed by the teachings of the Faith and the accumulated knowledge of humanity in different fields, can guide their thought and action during their formative years as university students.

The purpose of the seminars is to assist the students to assume ownership of their education and to think critically about the ideas to which they are exposed in society. It is hoped that they will leave these gatherings with a heightened consciousness of the conceptual framework governing the different areas of activity in which the Bahá'í community is already engaged and an enhanced ability to contribute effectively to the advancement of civilization.



This was the seventh year in which the Institute offered its seminars for undergraduate students in the UK. 90 participants attended the seminars which were held in Wellington College over 10 days in August. All four years of the seminar were offered for the first time in the UK this year.

## 4. FINANCIAL REPORT

**Each and every believer, undaunted by the uncertainties, the perils and the financial stringency afflicting the nation, must arise and insure, to the full measure of his or her capacity, that continuous and abundant flow of funds into the national Treasury, on which the successful prosecution of the Plan must chiefly depend.**

Shoghi Effendi, postscript to a letter dated 30 January 1938

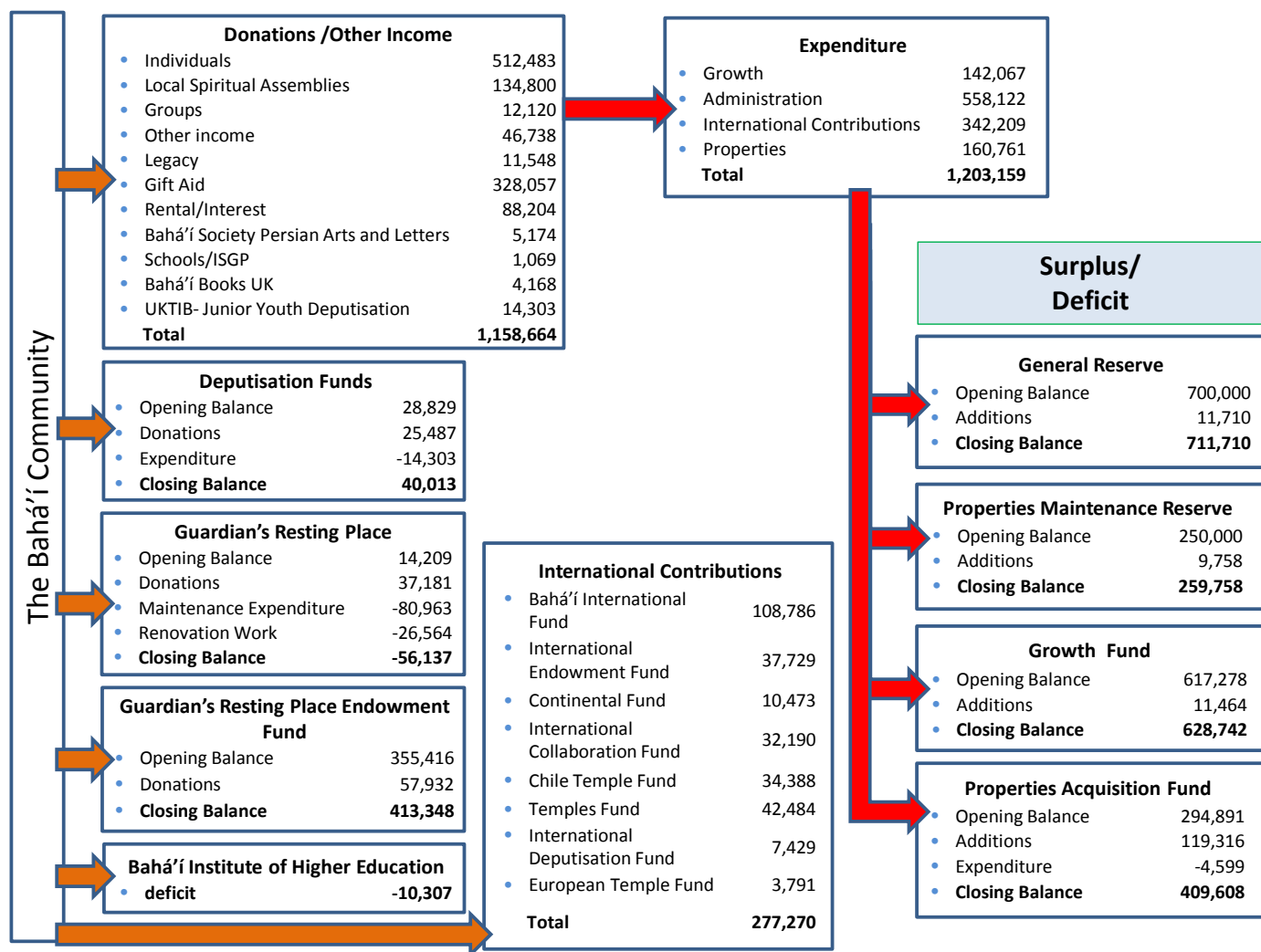
During 2014, many friends in the United Kingdom made sacrificial contributions. The National Assembly is most grateful to the friends, as the lifeblood of the Cause has been enabled to flow without interruption in response to the needs of a community, which is working day and night to further the aims of the Five Year Plan.

The National Fund is the core fund where the main income and expenditure of the National Spiritual Assembly are recorded and tracked (Figure 1). The friends are generally encouraged to contribute to the National Fund to allow the National Assembly the freedom to spend according to the changing requirements of the Faith at any one time.

However, there are also other funds to which the community can directly contribute such as:

- Deputation Funds (such as for the Training Institute) are earmarked, specifically designated funds for a particular purpose.
- Guardian's Resting Place upkeep is the yearly operational cost and the National Assembly asks the friends to directly contribute to this fund.
- Guardian's Resting Place Endowment Fund, which will provide the necessary funding for the upkeep of the Resting Place in the future. However, for now, we are blessed to have the opportunity to pay for current upkeep as well as contributing to future maintenance in the years and decades to come.
- Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education Fund is a fund for paying of tuition fees for BIHE students in the UK. Currently it has a deficit of £10,307.
- International Contributions to various funds are open for the friends to contribute to directly through the National Assembly.

The National Spiritual Assembly is pleased to present its financial report for the year ending 31 December 2014.



Overview of various Bahá'í funds in the UK

### A. NATIONAL FUND

The National Fund had a deficit of £44,496 in 2014, which increased the outstanding deficit to date to £126,281.

**Income** for the 12 Months to 31 December 2014 was £1,158,664 of which the friends in the UK directly contributed £717,689. Included in the total income is the £14,303 from the Junior Youth Coordinators Fund for expenses of Junior Youth Coordinators (Figure 2 and 3). The budget for 2015 is also included. Please note that all the figures for 2013 have been annualised from 11 months to 12 months.

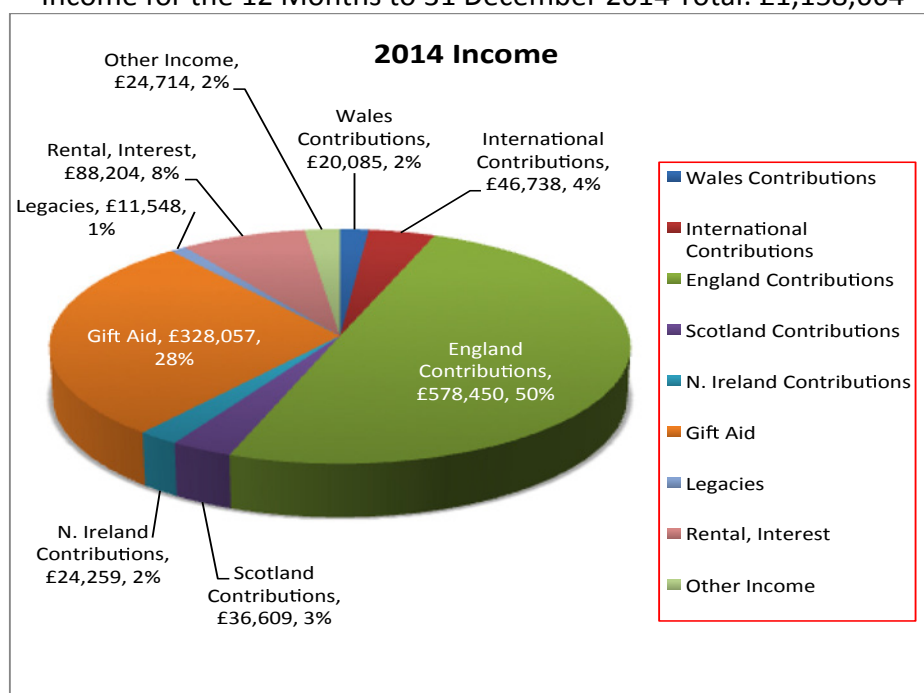
As reported in the Annual report above, in 2013 the National Assembly changed the structure of BBUK (Baha'i Books UK). We are happy to report that in its second year a profit of £4,168 was reported. This has been possible only through sacrificial contribution of time and resources by a small band of individuals. The National Assembly is grateful to each of them who are providing an invaluable service to the community.



**National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of The United Kingdom  
FINANCIAL YEAR 2014**

<b>Contributions / Income</b>	<b>Actuals 2012</b>	<b>Actuals 2013</b>	<b>Actual 2014</b>	<b>Budget 2015</b>
England Contributions	658,146	570,072	578,450	577,557
N. Ireland Contributions	26,958	22,048	24,259	27,920
Scotland Contributions	42,410	32,055	36,609	39,503
Wales Contributions	22,212	22,257	20,085	24,566
Legacies	7,000	17,066	11,548	-
Other Contributions (International)	45,254	45,986	46,738	25,500
<b>Total Direct Contributions</b>	<b>801,980</b>	<b>709,485</b>	<b>717,689</b>	<b>695,046</b>
Gift Aid	381,232	399,467	328,057	327,478
Rental, Interest	68,538	75,830	88,204	106,680
Bahá'í Society of Persian Arts and Letters	0	4,387	5,174	-
UKTIB - Deputation Jnr Youth Coordinators		16,605	14,303	0
NSA Youth Conference Subsidy		88,245		-
ISGP			411	0
Schools			658	0
Bahá'í Books		1,673	4,168	0
<b>Total Indirect Income</b>	<b>449,770</b>	<b>586,207</b>	<b>440,975</b>	<b>434,158</b>
<b>TOTAL Contributions / Income</b>	<b>£1,251,750</b>	<b>£1,295,692</b>	<b>£1,158,664</b>	<b>£1,129,204</b>

Income for the 12 Months to 31 December 2014 Total: £1,158,664

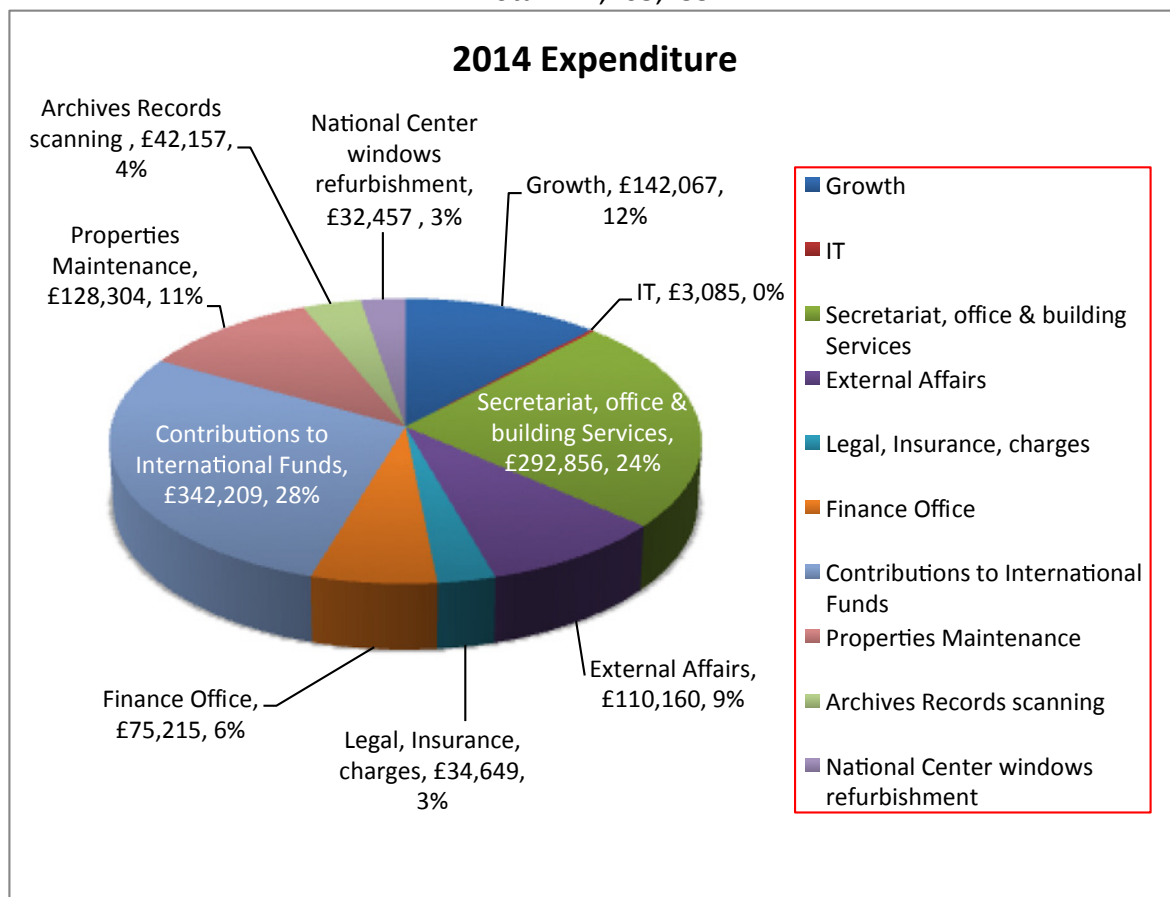


**Figure 3: Income Graph for the 12 Months 31 December 2014**

Expenditure for the 12 months to 31 December 2014 was £1,203,159. The budget for 2015 is also included. The expenditure is broken into broad categories (Figure 4 and 5).

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of The United Kingdom FINANCIAL YEAR 2014				
EXPENDITURE	Actuals 2012	Actual 2013	Actual 2014	Budget 2015
Growth	204,334	163,612	142,067	184,256
IT	31,027	8,500	3,085	5,250
Secretariat, office & building Services	299,782	296,853	292,856	336,637
External Affairs	142,686	121,525	110,160	134,210
Legal, Insurance, charges	27,837	37,013	34,649	33,600
Finance Office	83,468	80,940	75,215	76,280
Contributions to International Funds	401,202	364,940	342,209	315,747
Properties Maintenance	85,684	92,439	128,304	116,457
Archives Records scanning			42,157	
National Center windows refurbishment			32,457	
Schools		5,709	-	-
ISGP		4,670	-	-
National Youth Conference		81,787	-	-
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>£1,276,020</b>	<b>£1,257,989</b>	<b>1,203,159</b>	<b>£1,202,437</b>

**Figure 4:** Expenditure for the 12 months to 31 December 2014  
Total: £1,203,159



**Figure 5:** Expenditure Graph for 12 Months to 31 December 2014

One of the difficulties in 2014 was the £44,495 deficit in the National Fund. This was partially due to a few relatively large projects. One was the two-year scanning project, which, as reported above, has the purpose of scanning all the paper archives of the National Assembly digitally. Although within budget, it has impacted the expenditure by about £20,000. Overall the cost of the project is budgeted for £68,000 and is more likely to be closer to £62,000. Another project was the contribution of £19,000 that the National Assembly made on behalf of the community to the Temples Fund as a result of reading the joyful message of the House of Justice dated 1 August 2014 to the Bahá'ís of the world. This, of course, was not a budgeted item, and hence contributed to our 2014 deficit. Yet another important project was attending to the much needed renovation and insulation of the windows at the National Haziratu'l-Quds to save the high cost of heating and preserving the windows. In any case the National Assembly is very happy to have been able to contribute to the above three important projects and feels confident that the friends will continue to give sacrificially.

### *A summary of the year*

The primary source of the National Assembly's income is the donations of the believers in the United Kingdom (Figure 6). For the 12 months to 31 December 2014 this represented 62% (£717,689) of all the total income (£659,403 of which is from the friends in the region). A further 28% (£328,057) of income was from the tax refund received on all donations to or through the National Assembly under the Gift Aid scheme. The following shows the amount donated in each region with the average amount contributed per person:

Total contributions	2011		2012		2013		2014	
	Actual £	% Per Region	Actual £	% Per Region	Actual £	% Per Region	Actual £	% Per Region
England	548,622	86%	658,146	88%	570,072	88%	578,450	88%
Northern Ireland	35,056	5%	26,958	4%	22,048	3%	24,259	4%
Scotland	35,209	6%	42,410	6%	32,055	5%	36,609	6%
Wales	20,382	3%	22,212	3%	22,257	3%	20,085	3%
Total contributions	639,269	100%	749,726	100%	646,432	100%	659,403	100%
Average per person	£131		£129		£109		£112	

**Figure 6:** Regional contributions to the National Fund, including contributions directly to the Bahá'í Councils and the average donation per adult, youth and child in the community (this is an approximation based on the community database).

After publicizing the advantages of contributing by standing order and Gift Aid, the National Assembly is delighted to report an increase in both contributions. Although the number of Gift Aiders has increased, the total amount of Gift Aid has decreased from £399,467 in 2013 to £328,057 in 2014.

Number of contributors	2012	2013	2014
Individuals contributing by standing orders	648	636	651
Assemblies and Groups contributing by standing orders	52	43	71
Gift Aid Contributors to all Funds & Huqúqu'lláh	707	698	708

**Figure 7:** Donations to the National Fund by standing order and the number of Gift Aid contributors to all funds, as well as Huqúqu'lláh.

In 2014 total expenditure was £1,203,159, which is a decrease of £54,830 compared to 2013; this is due to the National Assembly's ongoing efforts to reduce expenditure. This is the third consecutive year that the National Assembly is reducing its costs but this trend is not sustainable as the work of the Faith is on the increase and available resources are few. In 2014 there was also a decrease in growth related expenditure (by £21,545), because the expenses of the Training Institute Board and the Baha'i Councils were lower than in 2013.

Below is the individual year performance since 2010 in terms of income versus expenditure.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Surplus/ Deficit	(15,636)	(43,287)	(17,369)	34,739	(44,496)

In 2014 practically every line of expenditure decreased compared to 2013, apart from properties maintenance and those additional three extra expenditures of scanning, contribution to the Temples Fund, and refurbishment of the windows at the National Centre.

In 2014, for every £1 (excluding Gift Aid and other incomes) donated to the National Fund by the believers in the UK, 52 pence was forwarded to international Funds, including, among others, the International Fund, the World Centre Endowment Fund, and the European and Chile Temple Funds. Furthermore, in August 2014, the National Spiritual Assembly was greatly moved by the news of the progress on the two national Houses of Worship and five local Houses of Worship and hence £19,000 was contributed to the Temples Fund. It is a source of blessing and confirmation to the work of the Cause in the United Kingdom to be able to contribute to these international funds and projects.

## **B. DEPUTISATION FUNDS**

At the end of December 2014, there were four deputisation funds in the UK.

Deputisation Funds	Deputisation UKTIB	Deputisation General	Deputisation Faroes	Deputisation China	Total
Opening Balance 1 Jan 2014	0	11,019	4,449	13,361	28,829
Contributions	14,303	9,804	0	1,380	25,487
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,303</b>	<b>20,823</b>	<b>4,449</b>	<b>14,741</b>	<b>54,316</b>
Expenditure	-14,303	0	0	0	-14,303
<b>Balance as at 31 Dec 14</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>20,823</b>	<b>4,449</b>	<b>14,741</b>	<b>40,013</b>

**Figure 8:** Deputisation funds during the year and balances as at 31 December 2014

It is hoped that the friends who may need assistance in their efforts to serve the Cause both here and abroad will discuss their situation with the relevant body and that the other friends will remember these funds both in their prayers and their contributions.

The National Assembly has decided to forward the balance left in the China deputization fund to the World Centre and close this fund. Thanks for the generous contribution of £14,303 to the Training Institute Board deputization fund which helped to fund fulltime junior youth coordinators.

### **C. GUARDIAN’S RESTING PLACE OPERATIONAL FUND**

The annual expenditure for the maintenance of the Guardian’s Resting Place was estimated to be £46,000 plus £50,000 for the renovation work. The final income and expenditure for 2014 is:

<b>Guardian's Resting Place</b>	<b>Annual Expenditure</b>
	<b>£</b>
Opening Balance	14,209
Contributions	37,181
Maintenance Expenditure	-59,274
Renovations Expenditure	-26,564
Contributions to the Guardian's Resting Place Endowment Fund	-21,689
<b>Deficit</b>	<b>- 56,137</b>

**Figure 9:** Guardian’s Resting Place income and expenditure during 2014

In December 2012, the National Assembly shared with the friends some plans “for serious attention to be paid to the site’s maintenance and renovation”. This included replacement of aspects of this site, such as renovation of the entrance gate, restoration of the balustrade, special cleaning of the eagle, the column, and the marble and restoration work, new vases and installation of new walls.

In a recent communication, the National Assembly outlined a new stage of development of the Guardian’s Resting Place, which has been approved by the Universal House of Justice. The latest approved plans are outlined in section 5B below of this report. It is estimated that apart from the Guardian’s Resting Place Endowment Fund, the total cost relating to upkeep and beautification of this blessed spot will be about £250,000 for the next two years. The Finance Office will endeavour to keep the friends updated, as the projects are unfolded.



#### **D. GUARDIAN'S RESTING PLACE ENDOWMENT FUND**

In a letter of May 2008 the Universal House of Justice suggested to the National Assembly that "in view of the need to establish a more stable means of income in future for the upkeep of this most important holy place" the National Assembly should "consider the feasibility of establishing an endowment fund for this purpose." In response to this guidance, the National Spiritual Assembly established an endowment fund for the maintenance of the Resting Place of the beloved Guardian, with a goal of £1.3M over 10 years starting from 2011 with its completion in 2021. It is sad to report that the endowment fund currently has a shortage of £106,652 at the end of 2014. So by the end of 2015, this fund needs generous contributions of the friends for £236,652 to bring it back to target.

Guardian 's Resting Place Endowment Fund Summary		
Year	Target	Contributed
	£	£
2011	130,000	130,000
2012	130,000	55,416
2013	130,000	170,000
2014	130,000	57,932
<b>Total</b>	<b>520,000</b>	<b>413,348</b>
<b>Deficit</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>106,652</b>

**Figure 10:** Guardian's Resting Place Endowment Fund during the 12 Month period with balance as at 31 December 2014

#### **E. THE INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION FUND**

The International Financial Collaboration programme, which was established by the Universal House of Justice, allows those national communities, which are materially blessed, to assist other communities. In a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly dated 17 July 2011, the Supreme Body describes how this programme is "... used to meet a variety of needs: the acquisition of land and buildings for national and local Bahá'í Centres and for future Temple sites; the construction and renovation of Bahá'í properties, including the repair of buildings that suffered storm or earthquake damage; and the purchase of such items as an electricity generator, an office computer, and a motorcycle." Further: "beyond that, the bonds of unity between geographically distant national communities have been strengthened and the worldwide solidarity of the believers enhanced."

The UK Bahá'í community has been blessed to be engaged in this programme for a number of years. The Universal House of Justice has again invited the UK Bahá'í community to participate in the programme and the National Assembly has decided (17 July 2011) that this

community will commit to donating £160,000 toward the goal of £1.5 million, which is more than 10% of the total! Some £125,000 has already been raised, leaving a balance of £35,000 to be contributed between now and Ridván 2016.

<b>International Collaboration Goal 2011 to 2016</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Current Plan Goal	160,000
1 January 2014 Balance b/wd	- 86,000
Contributions during the year	- 39,000
<b>31 December Balance to be raised</b>	<b>£ 35,000</b>

During the year the UK Community was also blessed to contribute from this fund £42,164 (\$70,000) for the purchase of a property to serve as the National Haziratu'l-Quds in the Philippines

<b>Contributions to Projects to date</b>	<b>Amount</b>
July 2011 Teacher Training Centre in Nepal (\$13,500)	8,622
November 2011 Baha'i Centre in Astana, Kazakhstan (\$30,000)	18,405
National Haziratu'l-Quds in the Philippines (\$70,000)	42,164
<b>Total</b>	<b>£ 69,191</b>

## ***F. INTERNATIONAL FUNDS***

The people of Bahá in the UK now regularly contribute to the following International Funds:

- 1. Bahá'í International Fund**
- 2. International Collaboration Fund**
- 3. International Endowment Fund**
- 4. International Deputisation Fund**
- 5. Temples Fund**
- 6. Chile Temple Fund**
- 7. European Temple Fund**
- 8. Continental Board of Counsellors Fund**
- 9. Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE)**

## ***G. THE YEAR AHEAD***

The budget for the year ahead is available from the Finance Office as a separate document. There are a few highlights that deserve some reflection.

Managing the 2015 budget with a deficit forecast of £73,234 is challenging. Furthermore, the National Assembly has prepared this budget anticipating that the friends would increase their contributions by 5%. Thus with a forecast further increase in income due to investment and rental income (please see below) the total increase should be around 7%. The budget also

sees a 28% increase in growth related activities, 8% increase on the functioning of the National Assembly and a 24% decrease in the cost of properties.

However, apart from the budget, we also have other responsibilities for this year to think about, including the funding for the Guardian's Resting Place beautification and its Endowment Fund.

In the coming months one area of increased activity, which may impact the funds, is that of Junior Youth both in terms of having fulltime coordinators and also holding appropriate Junior Youth camps around the country. It appears that the junior youth and their families are prepared to fund their own participation in these camps, nevertheless, the funds of the Faith must stand ready to pay any shortfall that may appear.

The National Assembly is very pleased to announce that after the finance and the records offices vacated Bridge House in Kent, for the first time, all units in the building are now leased out and it is expected to reduce our property costs and increase our income significantly.

The National Assembly also has appointed a six-member investment committee with wide-ranging financial expertise and skills to guide the investments of the Faith in the UK. They began their work by reviewing and restructuring the National Fund cash deposits and they are planning on finding ethical and secure areas of investments in 2015.

After the good news given by the National Assembly about the purchase of the apartment in Bristol where the Master stayed on two occasions during His visit to these shores, we now need to be financially prepared to renovate it back to what it was like at the time of the Master as much as is practical.

We are all aware of the great sacrifices being borne by the friends in the Cradle of the Faith. Especially in recent months there has been a worldwide focus on the Baha'i youth of that country who are deprived of a university education. The BIHE (Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education) has done so much, including facilitating the opportunity for some of these young people to continue their postgraduate education at universities in different countries. The National Assembly has decided to pay the tuition fees for those students who have come to the United Kingdom. To date the shortfall is approximately £10,000 and by the end of the year it could rise to about £40,000.

The budget for donations to International Funds for 2015 is set at £315,747. This represents 28% of expenditure and, when realised, will mean that for every £1 (excluding Gift Aid) donated by a believer to the National Fund, 47 pence will be forwarded to the International Funds.

The National Assembly always tries to reduce administration expenditure (not growth related) to reduce the deficit (for example savings by utilising more volunteers than paid members of staff, and ask the community to receive materials such as UK Bahá'í electronically rather than in print by post), but as we know, the funds are the lifeblood of the Cause and any expenditure for the plan and for the growth is prioritised by the National Assembly. The

National Assembly remains committed to placing an ever-greater portion of its resources at the grassroots level for the growth of the Faith as guided by the Five Year Plan.

The Finance Office enjoys the services of three employees (equivalent to 2 fulltime) and also benefits from nine valiant volunteers without whose support the National Assembly could not run its Finance Office efficiently. Our great thanks to them all!

#### ***H. SUMMARY OF KEY OPPORTUNITIES FOR 2015***

Some challenges continue to be foreseen for 2015:

- **Only 16% of the individuals (including children) in the community are directly contributing to the National Fund on at least an annual basis (an approximation) - no universal participation yet.**
- **We have about half a million pounds of commitment to the Endowment Fund for the Guardian's Resting Place and its refurbishment and operation in 2015.**
- **Combatting an expected deficit of about £70,000.**
- **The number of Gift Aid is up but the total amount of Gift Aid contributions is down.**
- **We now are likely to have more junior youth camps with possible subsidies.**
- **The Master's house in Bristol will need to be renovated.**
- **We need about £40,000 for BIHE in 2015.**

**We must be like the fountain or spring that is continually emptying itself of all that it has and is continually being refilled from an invisible source. To be continually giving out for the good of our fellows undeterred by fear of poverty and reliant on the unfailing bounty of the Source of all wealth and all good—this is the secret of right living.**

**Shoghi Effendi, Directives from the Guardian, India/Hawaii, 1973 edition, page 87**

## 5. OTHER MATTERS

### A. CLIFTON GUEST HOUSE, 17 ROYAL YORK CRESENT, BRISTOL

On 5 November 2014 the National Spiritual Assembly announced the following exciting news to the community:



17 Royal York Terrace. The second floor apartment, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá stands in this photograph, was recently acquired.

On two occasions 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited the City of Bristol: once for three days in September 1911 and again for one day in January 1913. On both occasions he stayed at the Clifton Guest House on Royal York Terrace where he was hosted by Mr. and Mrs. Tudor-Pole. Built on elevated ground, the guest house overlooks a valley in which the early city of Bristol was built. Although visiting on the first occasion to gain some rest from His arduous travels and extensive engagements in London, whilst in the guest house 'Abdu'l-Bahá took the time to address large gatherings, meet individuals and groups of friends, shower His tender love upon children, dine with close companions, cheer and advise the staff, give interviews to newspaper reporters and devote time to His extensive daily correspondence. In an account written by Mr. Tudor-Pole we read that the "Master went all over Guest House blessing and dedicating each room to the service of Bahá'u'lláh and promising that the house would become a centre of peace and rest for pilgrims from East and West." The property is now entirely residential and has been divided into a number of apartments.

How extraordinary it is to consider that the Master—He whom Shoghi Effendi reminds us as being "the Centre and Pivot of Bahá'u'lláh's peerless and all-enfolding Covenant, His most exalted handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the embodiment of every Bahá'í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá'í virtue, the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root, the Limb of the Law of God, the Being "round Whom all names revolve," the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity, the Ensign of the Most Great Peace, the Moon of the Central Orb of this most holy Dispensation" – twice visited and stayed in this blessed and sacred place. It is thus with untold joy and excitement that the National Spiritual Assembly is pleased to inform you that on behalf of the Bahá'í community it has purchased one of the apartments within the former Clifton Guest House.



It is the intention of the National Assembly to work towards opening the property for visitors. On hearing the news of the final purchase, the Universal House of Justice, in a letter dated 31 October 2014, conveyed that it was pleased to learn of the purchase of the property and that the National Assembly’s “intention to carry out renovation work, so that the former guest house can be brought closer in appearance to its condition at the time when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited it, is entirely appropriate”. This will require historical records to be researched and, in light of the information gleaned, the property will be restored to its former condition to the extent possible.



Front windows of the apartment acquired

Since this announcement the National Assembly has

appointed a team of friends, to research how the property might have been at the time of the Master and to prepare a plan for its befitting restoration to its condition at that time. The National Assembly will keep the community informed as matters progress. In the meantime it is possible to arrange for small parties of friends to visit the premises from time to time.

## **B. GUARDIAN’S RESTING PLACE**

Efforts to enhance the splendour of the Guardian’s Resting Place and the surrounding area continued this year, including the following:

- A new planting arrangement for flowers, shrubs and trees within the enclosure of the Resting Place, which saw a blaze of colour that delighted the eyes and soul alike.
- New railings along the edge of the cemetery at the entry to the Bahá’í section, making a more dignified and fitting entranceway.
- Repairing and painting the two security cameras and rustproofing of the new gate to the enclosure.
- Obtaining a detailed report of the trees on the grounds. After obtaining



The new gate and red brick wall at the Resting Place



permission from the local Council, a programme to remove trees which were dangerous, damaged, unsightly or seedlings that had grown out of control was carried out. This is in preparation for a project later in 2015 which will see the planting of some 60 or more trees as well as an abundance of spring bulbs.

- Obtaining a Health and Safety report.
- Introducing new guidelines, rules and regulations for grave-owners which are intended to bring greater order to the cemetery and thus contribute to its overall beautification.
- The commissioning of an assessment of all graves, headstones, memorials and the surrounding terrain, with the aim of maintaining the grounds so that they do not pose a safety risk to visitors.

With all of these new works and plantings, an additional full-time grounds man was employed to ensure the continuing upkeep of the site, particularly the enclosure to the Resting Place itself which needs daily care and attention.

On 2 April 2015, the National Assembly wrote to the community as follows:



*Summer flowers at the Resting Place*

**With the renovation and beautification of the most important and central aspect of this precious site now completed, a new and important stage of development will begin in the coming months. The National Spiritual Assembly is delighted to inform you that the Universal House of Justice has approved of plans for the development of certain land and facilities at the Guardian's Resting Place. These include a purpose-built structure for the custodian's office and security facilities, the extension**

**of the paving along the main radial route from the Resting Place, gates at either end of this radial path that will curtail the flow of traffic past the Resting Place, and the regeneration, confined to what is essential, of the grounds adjacent to New Brunswick Woods access path. In addition to this, much needed refurbishment to the residence of the custodians is to be undertaken. These important developments will reinforce the security arrangements at the Resting Place and bring greater dignity to the facilities associated with it.**

**The implementation of these plans together with a shortfall of funds for the day to day maintenance and running costs of the Resting Place and surrounding cemetery require the raising of around £250,000. In this connection, the Universal House of Justice has assured the National Spiritual Assembly of the readiness of the Bahá'í**

International Fund to support this requirement, if necessary. However, the National Spiritual Assembly is confident that the believers of the UK Bahá'í community will not wish to pass up the unique and priceless opportunity of rising to this challenge and fully providing the funds through their generous and sacrificial contributions, as they have done for the earlier refurbishments of the Resting Place.

The execution of these plans and the raising of these funds is a significant task that is before our community this coming year.

### **Custodians at the Resting Place**

After 25 years of distinguished service as Custodians at the Resting Place of Shoghi Effendi, dearly loved Mr. Hassan Alaei and Mrs. Jaleh Alaei will be retiring during this year. The National Assembly extends its deepest appreciation to Mr. and Mrs. Alaei for all their endeavours in caring for the Resting Place and the Bahá'í cemetery, as well as welcoming and hosting visitors in their heart-warming manner. They will be greatly missed.

We are delighted that Mrs. Roya Azordegan and Mr. Soheyl Azordegan will be taking up this role, following their appointment by the Universal House of Justice.



### **C. INSTITUTION OF HUQÚQU'LLÁH**

The National Spiritual Assembly was delighted to meet with the newly appointed Regional Board of Huqúqu'lláh for the United Kingdom and Ireland during the year and was pleased to know that the Board will be arranging for a presentation on Huqúqu'lláh to be given at Summer Schools and National Convention. After Riḍván this year, the National Assembly will be writing to encourage Local Spiritual Assemblies to meet with their Representative with a view to consulting on the deepening of their communities on the subject of this Great Law.

### **D. NATIONAL ARCHIVES**

The National Archives Task Force continued this year with the work of accessioning and scanning the letters of Shoghi Effendi and the many photographs in the collections. Items received by the National Assembly and passed to the team are also accessioned in a timely manner. This year the Task Force worked with the team scanning the many papers belonging to the National Assembly and received a number of items to be stored in the vault. A great deal of detailed cataloguing work still remains to be done, the Task Force continues to search for volunteers to regularly assist with this work.

In the spirit of making the Archives more accessible to the friends, a junior youth group was offered a visit to a small selection of items, but efforts to interest Assemblies in hosting a display locally have so far not been fruitful. As has been the practice for a number of years

now, an Open Day was held in November at which a selection of items not previously shown was included. This attracted some from as far as the Orkneys and Cornwall, but overall was not as well attended as in previous years.

### **General Archives**

Over the past 90 years, a vast quantity of paper archives has accumulated, which until recently was housed in a special property in Oakham. It consisted of some 600 archive boxes of paper and numerous other materials. This year saw the commencement of a major project to scan these materials, thereby reducing the need to store a large part of this archive. The project will take some 2-3 years to complete. Phase one has already concluded, with the materials being sorted and sent for professional scanning. The property where the papers were housed has since been sold. The next phase is the scanning and the third phase is checking the documents and then filing them for future archival use.

### ***E. NATIONAL LIBRARY***

Consisting of a few thousand books and leaflets, the National Library contains many precious books of historical significance, including some associated with the early believers on these islands. We are delighted to say that it has now been re-established in the National Haziratu'l-Quds. A process of cataloguing is about to commence, although the Library is not currently open to the public.

### ***F. BAHÁ'Í HISTORIES PROJECT***

This project aims to collect the stories, in relation to the Faith, of individual 'native' UK Bahá'ís and also Iranian-born Bahá'ís. These are then stored and catalogued in such a way that they can be easily referenced and form part of the UK Bahá'í archive.

In the year to 31 January 2015, approximately 50 stories have been added to the archive, and others brought up to date, making a total of around 450 stories. The website continues to attract 40-50 visitors a day and has a worldwide following. 44 more stories were published on it in the past year, and there are now 183 stories on the website: <http://bahaihistoryuk.wordpress.com/>

The team commented that whilst it is inspiring to read about Bahá'ís who have lived a full and rich life, they are keen to collect more stories from younger and 'newer' Bahá'ís, including how they found the Faith. More stories from Iranian-born Bahá'ís would also be very welcome. In response to a request from the National Assembly, the team hopes to encourage Bahá'ís resident in the Faroe Islands to write their stories too.

### ***G. BAHÁ'Í SOCIETY FOR PERSIAN ARTS AND LETTERS***

The 18th Annual Conference of the Society for Persian Arts and Letters took place over 26-30 December 2014 at the Hilton Hotel, Terminal 5, Heathrow, London. Seven hundred and fifty

four adults, children and junior youth from 35 countries attended the conference, of which at least 50 were friends of the Faith. The theme of the conference, “Foundation of the Future Civilisation - Persian Culture and the Baha'i Faith” was based on the message of the Universal House of Justice dated 2 March 2013.

## **H. PASTORAL AGENCIES & CHAPLAINCY**

### **Pastoral agencies**

Pastoral care is of course a central role of Local Spiritual Assemblies, and a concern of every individual Bahá'í. Through a rich variety of community activities and individual interactions, many of the spiritual and personal needs of individuals are naturally taken care of at a local level. Where communities are relatively strong, any isolated, sick or elderly friends receive visits for fellowship and prayer, and the community calendar can take into account the social and spiritual needs of its members, so that everyone feels included and spiritual friendships are nurtured. The National Assembly's pastoral care agencies exist to give extra advice or support in situations where individuals face particular difficulties that cannot be dealt with by the local community alone. One of the aims of this service is to raise capacity within our Bahá'í communities to deal with pastoral care matters. There are two committees attending to this: the Pastoral Care Committee, which mainly assists with mental health or marital issues, and the Special Care Committee which gives support in situations where there are special risks or complex problems. Referrals to these committees are made only via the National Assembly. At the time of writing these two committees are assisting with around 45 situations. In addition, the Office for Safeguarding Children is vigilant in ensuring that our child protection measures are effective. Increasingly, the approach taken by the pastoral agencies is to work with local civil agencies and health service practitioners, where this is appropriate.

### **Chaplaincy**

The National Assembly's Chaplaincy Team is responsible for recruiting, training and supervising Bahá'ís who serve as chaplaincy volunteers in the National Health Service and other healthcare settings. It should be noted that these volunteers are not 'chaplains' within the Bahá'í community, since pastoral care is the responsibility of the institutions. We currently have 13 trained, authorised and active chaplaincy volunteers. Five more volunteers began their training in February 2015.

## **I. AFNAN LIBRARY TRUST**

In a codicil to his will, Hand of the Cause of God, Hasan M. Balyuzi, indicated that he wished his vast and unique collection of precious papers, letters, notebooks (many in his own hand), manuscripts, rare books, photographs and newspaper cuttings to form the basis of a research library for the benefit of all who seek knowledge. To fulfil this wish, the Afnan Library Trust was established as an



*Newly acquired Afnan Library building in Sandy, Bedfordshire*



independent charity in 1985. The Trustees nominated by Mr Balyzui are the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom, Mr. Robert Balyuzi and Dr. Moojan Momen.

From the beginning the Library has been actively acquiring material and has received donated books and other items from a number of sources. The National Assembly was delighted in early 2014 to facilitate the acquisition of a magnificent property at Sandy, Bedfordshire, made possible by a generous donation to the Trust, to house the some 10,000 books and other materials contained in the Library. The Universal House of Justice indicated in a letter dated 6 June 1985 that it “views the final accomplishment of the wishes of the late Hand of the Cause as of the very greatest importance”. It is wonderful to know, therefore, that after 30 years of repeated movements from place to place in boxes, the Library has finally found a permanent home, and that the wishes of both the Hand of the Cause and the House of Justice have been brought closer to realisation by this acquisition!



*Newly built shelving in the Afnan Library*

## **J. FAROE ISLANDS**

*30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, Eskil Ljungberg*

It was a joy for the National Spiritual Assembly to appoint a member of the Bahá'í Council for Scotland to represent it at the commemoration to mark the 30th anniversary of the passing of Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, Eskil Ljungberg, which was organised by the friends in the Faroe Islands. The gathering was a fitting and inspiring celebration of his life of service. The National Assembly's representative shared the following report:



*Newly refurbished grave of Knight of Bahá'u'lláh to the Faroes, Eskil Lungberg*

**I have just returned from the Faroes, having attended a most dignified and beautiful commemoration of the passing of Knight of Baha'u'llah, Eskil Ljungberg, which included prayers, music played by the children and messages read by the representatives of the National Assemblies. It was held in the chapel in the cemetery. Afterwards a prayer was read in a sudden shower of icy rain by Eskil's resting place, and stories were shared of his life while we warmed up and had refreshments in a nearby hotel. The prayers of the National Assembly must have helped to move the storm away from the Faroes which had been predicted for that day!**

**It was also wonderful to have had a good amount of time with the children and junior youth who are full of energy, keen to serve and having conversations at school with friends about spiritual concepts.**

During the course of the year the friends had arranged for his grave to be refurbished with the assistance of the National Assembly and this had been completed just prior to commemoration, which has added much grace and dignity to the site where his earthly remains are interred.

### K. NATIONAL HAZIRATU'L-QUDS

**The operation of your National Haziratu'l-Quds has the means by which to shine as an example of Bahá'í principles in the workplace... To empower and encourage the staff... to consider work as worship, to care for their surroundings, to uphold the dignity of the Seat of the National Spiritual Assembly through cleanliness and orderliness will in no doubt draw further confirmations and bounties upon your endeavours.**

*(From a letter 20 March 2002 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)*

The community is truly blessed with a company of some 30 full-time, part-time, voluntary and paid dedicated wonderful souls who serve at the National Haziratu'l-Quds or with the offices and departments associated with it. The National Spiritual Assembly expresses its profound appreciation for the devoted and dedicated services of each and every one of these dear friends.

A special mention should be made this year of Ms Hilary Freeman, who retired in March 2015 after an exceptional 34 years of service to the National Spiritual Assembly. Her loving care and kindness, together with her many skills and abilities, enabled her to give outstanding support to the work of the National Assembly throughout this period. We are truly grateful to her.

### L. BAHÁ'Í POPULATION STATISTICS

BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY POPULATION AT NAW-RUZ 2015, AS RECORDED						
Region	Adults (no DOB/30+)	Youth (15-30)	Children (5-10)	Junior Youth (11-14)	Babies (1-4)	Total
ENGLAND	3,588	877	141	181	80	4,867
SCOTLAND	352	108	9	16	5	490
WALES	228	51	7	7	2	295
NORTHERN IRELAND	189	43	9	5	3	249
FAROE ISLANDS	12	1	3	5	0	21
GIBRALTAR	9	4	1	2	2	16
ISLE OF MAN	6	1	0	0	0	7
CHANNEL ISLANDS	4	2	0	0	0	6
ADDRESS NOT KNOWN	377	185	8	3	1	574
Total	4,765	1,272	178	219	91	6,525



BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY – CHANGES ADVISED											
	170				170 Total	171					171 Total
	EN	NI	SC	WA		EN	NI	SC	WA	Unk	
DECEASED	39		3	3	45	31	1	3	2	4	41
MARRIAGE	33	2	1		36	60	1	1	12	6	80
NEW ADULT ENROLMENT (OVER 21)	52	3	3	6	64	49	4	2	3		58
NEW YOUTH ENROLMENT (UNDER 21)			1		1	4			1		5
REGISTRATION OF BABY/CHILD	28		2	8	38	21		1			22
TRANSFER IN	135	2	10	4	151	138	7	18	6	29	198
TRANSFER OUT	115	9	9	8	141	143	3	9	3	7	165
WITHDRAWN	20	2	3		25	21	6	2	1		30

Unk = Address unknown

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

*Blessed are the people of Bahá! God beareth Me witness! They are the solace of the eye of creation. Through them the universes have been adorned, and the Preserved Tablet embellished...*

*Bahá'u'lláh*

The community of the Greatest Name in the UK is continuing on its journey towards attaining the overarching goal of the Plan—to advance the process of entry by troops—and we are humbled to witness how the friends across the land are working with such vigour to release the God-given potential of both themselves and a widening circle of others. Indeed, the friends' valiant services to humanity, as surveyed however inadequately in this and previous years' reports, bespeak of a community growing in confidence, strength and capacity to administer the spiritual cure that can alone rescue an ailing society. To be sure, the work ahead is pressing and considerable. Yet, through the culmination of its endeavours to date, the community is undoubtedly well placed to make further significant advances in the closing chapter of the current Plan. And as we work towards building the civilisation envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh, let us take heart from the knowledge that spiritual forces of untold power are ready to rush to the aid of every faithful labourer in the celestial vineyard, and let us be emboldened by the Blessed Beauty's own assurance that *"He, verily, will aid everyone that aideth Him"*.

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom  
April 2015

## 7. MEMBERS OF INSTITUTIONS, COMMITTEES AND AGENCIES

### MEMBERS OF THE INSTITUTION OF THE COUNSELLORS SERVING IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AT NAW-RUZ 172 BE (not including assistants to the Auxiliary Board member)

#### CONTINENTAL BOARD OF COUNSELLORS

Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi

#### AREA OF SERVICE

Europe, including the UK

#### AUXILIARY BOARD MEMBER - PROPAGATION

Sarah Sabour- Pickett

Northern Ireland

Howard Moshtael

Scotland & Faroe Isles

Omid Behi

Wales & Central England

Rouhiya Sweet

East of England

Sara Agahi

N England, Gtr Manchester, Lancs & IOM

Sean Afnan Morrissey

S & S W England & Channel Islands.

Tara Shahbahrami

London & SE England

Amanecer Olivares Rider

Gibraltar

#### AUXILIARY BOARD MEMBER -PROTECTION

Farahnaz Khavari

N Ireland, Gt Manchester, Lancs, IOM

Rachel Murray

Wales & Central England.

Talieh Mann

S&SW England/Channel Islands

Varqa Khadem

London/E&SE England

Steven Cleasby

N England (excl. Gt Manchester/Lancs)

Caroline Varjavandi

Scotland & Faroe Islands

Ignacio Blanco

Gibraltar

### REGIONAL BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF ҲУҚУҚУ'ЛЛАҲ FOR IRELAND AND THE UNITED KINGDOM AT NAW-RUZ 172 BE

Kathryn Delpak (United Kingdom)

John McGill (Republic of Ireland)

Parvin Morrissey (United Kingdom) – Secretary

Paymen Sabeti (United Kingdom) – Treasurer

Farshid Taleb (United Kingdom) – Chairman

### RESOURCE PERSONS FOR NORTHERN EUROPE

Clare Stephens

Keri Schewel

## COMMITTEES, AGENCIES & TASK FORCES OF THE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY AT NAW-RUZ 172 BE

### **Bahá'í Councils, Training Institute, Statistics, Pioneering**

**England:** Naghme Fozdar, Ronnie Yousefzadeh Bindra, Homa Saadat, Ramez Salmanpour, Farhad Shahbahrami, Olinga Tahzib, Stephen Vickers, Rob Weinberg, Natasha S. Wilkinson.

**Northern Ireland:** Orang Agahi, Jamie Anderson, Soha Graham-Anderson, Claire Parris, Maria Ward

**Scotland:** Venus Alae-Carew, Wendy Borrill, Allan Forsyth, Ian Fozdar, Andrew Goodwin, Parvin Morrissey, Hannah Moshtael-Oskui, John Parris, Mina Sheppard

**Wales:** Tessa Abbas, Louise Doughty, Mahmoud Foroughi, William Jenkins, Azar Melville

**Training Institute Board for the United Kingdom:** Carmel Khavari, Howard Moshtael, Chris Lee, Bayan Smith, Rachel Murray

**National Statistics Officer:** Eric Harshfield and May Naimi

**UK Pioneering & Travel Teaching Cttee:** Manijeh Smith, Arjang Agahi, Anne Wong, Jane Pearce

### **Communications and publications**

**UK Bahá'í Editorial Team:** Carmel Momen, Lesley Taherzadeh O'Mara, Sahba Saberian, Bonnie Smith

**UK Bahá'í Persian Translation Team:** Mojdeh Mohtadi-Haghighi, Soraya Nasirzadeh Raiyat

**Dayspring:** Jackie Mehrabi, Maggie Manvell

**In Memoriam publication:** Iain Macdonald (editor), Foad Saberian (publisher), Erica Leith

**Bahá'í Books UK:** Paymen Sabeti (Coordinator), Richard Jones, Fareba Jones

### **Marriage Officers**

**N Ireland:** Pat Irvine, Kiyán Khosravi-Scott, Butch Elliot, Soha Graham Anderson, Claire Parris

**Scotland:** Andrew Goodwin, Rickey Pooran, Mhairi Schmidt, Anwen Shahim, Kenneth Alae-Carew

### **National Office**

**Information Technology Steering Group:** Mike Gammage, Kamyar Missaghi, Vincent Afnan-Murray

**National Archives Task Force:** Manijeh Afnán-Murray, Irène Momtaz, Lesley Taherzadeh-O'Mara, Janet Fleming Rose

**National Convention Arrangements Committee:** Christopher Oak, Sam Goodwin, Bahiyyih Wain, Marjohn Pourtabib, Laura Sanchez-Behar, Michael Morgan

**Volunteers Coordinator:** John Sampson

**Correspondents for Enquiries Panel:** Eleanor Mazidian, Sarah Perceval, Angela Batchelor, Susan Koucheckzadeh

**Purchase Reviewer:** Rozita Pourtaheri, Saeed Shahim, Mariam Partovi-Fallah

### **Personal Affairs**

**Special Care Committee** Mike Hainsworth (Coordinator), Brigitte Beales, Darren Howell, Mehran Nassiri, Bridie Dixon, Sandra Ballester, Jessica Tahghighi, Dr. Nirvana Habibi, Barbara Gilbert

**Legal and Business disputes:** Parya Arnold, Danielle Pillai

**Office for Safeguarding Children:** Sue Cave (Coordinator), Diane Cleasby, Elizabeth Jenkerson, Michael Melville

**Pastoral Care Committee:** Laili Cleasby (Coordinator), Andisha Croft, Shailesh Shah, Mehrdad Moghaddas, Rita Green, Manijeh Afnan-Murray, Helen Hellaby, May Badee-Arani

**Assistant to the Pastoral Affairs sub-Committee:** Timothy and Rebecca Maude

### **Office of Public Affairs**

**Coordinating Team:** Annabel Knight, Padideh Sabeti (Convenor), Rosie Smith, Shirin Taherzadeh, Saba Tahzib

**RE Task Force:** Jenny Lockwood, Stephen Vickers & Elizabeth Jenkerson

**Arab Affairs Task Force:** Sawsan El-Hady, Abdel Aziz El-Hady, Nabil Mustapha, Neda Salmanpour, Graham Walker, Guilda Walker

### Properties

**Committee for the Care of the Guardian's Resting Place:** Farid Afnan, Jaleh Alaei, Hassan Alaei, Patrick O'Mara, Mahnoush Wain, Nick Wain, Saman Ziaie

**Care of Bahá'í Graves in the UK:** Shidan Koucheckzadeh, Susan Koucheckzadeh

**Bahá'í Cemetery documentation task force:** Janet Rose, Andrew Rose

**Bahá'í Properties Working Group:** Farid Afnán, Ron BArea Teaching Committeehelor, Sean Fehilly, Tony Sherwani, Homan Varghaei, Tamineh Payman, Saeed Shahim (Coordinator)

### Review Panels

**Academic Review Coordinator:** Nazila Ghanea-Hercock, Hugh McNamara

**Audio-Visual Review Panel Coordinator:** Margaret Appa (Coordinator), Mahsa Firoozmand, Carolyn Fox, Jeremy Fox, Hilary Freeman, Meenou Jones, Ahlam Mirzai, Sarah Perceval, Tish Roskams, Christine Wagg, Margaret Love, Simin Liggitt, Andrew Wilkinson, Tom Fox, Thelma BArea Teaching Committeehelor, Catherine Watson, Inder Manocha

**Literature Review Panel:** Rob Weinberg (Coordinator), Christine Beer, Joan Birch, Viv Craig, Andrew Gash, Muna Golmohamad, Beverley Matthews, Jason Maude, Anne Maund, Arthur Weinberg, Iain Macdonald, Carolyn Fox, Michael Melville, Nahal Mavaddat, Amy Behi, Catherine Watson, Dan Wheatley, Nigel Moody, Kathleen Murray, Janet Fleming Rose

**Radio and TV scripts and articles in the press or news magazines:** Office of Public Affairs

**Task Force for the Sale of Merchandise for National Events:** Margaret Appa, Erica Leith

### Schools, scholarship and education

**Association for Bahá'í Studies UK Executive Committee:** Carlo Schroder, Olinga Tahzib, Saba Tahzib

**Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education Working Party:** Nazila Ghanea-Hercock, Faraneh Khadem, Kyan Pucks

**Residential Schools Committee for England (RSCE):** Darren Smith, Jason Maude, Na'im Payman, Isabella Djalili, Sue Finn

**Bahá'í Society for Persian Arts and Letters Committee:** Tahirih Danesh, Minou Foadi, Farahmand Jahanpour, Vida Nezamabad, Homeyra Smith, Manouchehr Yazhari, Abbas Youssefian

**Legal Panel:** Claire Dawson, Matthew Feather, Sid Jiwnani (contracts), Nabil Khabirpour, Tahmineh Payman, Danielle Pillai, Maryam Samimi (asylum and refugee matters), Shayda Youssefian-Kaul

### Others

**Asylum Seekers Enrolment Task Force:** Azar Melville, Farshid Taleb, Nadia Taleb (Coordinator)

**Bahá'í Histories Project:** Thelma Batchelor, Jenny Lockwood (Coordinator)

**Service for the Visually Impaired:** Judith Christopherson, Robin Christopherson

**Choir Coordinating Committee:** Stephanie Greis (Coordinator), Tracey Roberts Jones, Duncan Thomas, Shirin Abdullaeva (Treasurer)

**Investment Committee:** Hootan Yazhari, Paymen Sabeti, Darren Smith, Paul Caprez, Rama Ayman, Shiva Dustdar-Ayman, Simon Birch

**Local Spiritual Assembly Guidance Notes Task Force:** Erica Leith, Sarah Mar

**Events and Logistics Coordinator:** Foad Rahimi

**Sales of Merchandise at National Convention & Other National Events:** Margaret Appa, Erica Leith