



Postcard stamped 30 April 1916 and addressed to Helen Goodall in the United States. The postcard shows part of one of the Tablets of the Divine Plan and is signed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá

# ANNUAL REPORT 2015-2016

## 172 BE

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

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

It is only with the passage of time that we can truly appreciate how the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, whose mission is nothing less than the spiritual, material and social transformation of every aspect of human existence, advances towards its destiny. The manner in which the Hand of the Omnipotent unfolds His Divine Civilisation may not be as we would anticipate, for “He doeth as He pleaseth by virtue of His sovereign might.”<sup>1</sup> Its emergence will come about through His Divine Providence, the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, as well as the efforts of the instruments He is honing for His purpose – instruments that include the Bahá'í community, the individuals that compose it, and the institutions that guide it. An important measure of our progress, therefore, is the extent to which the capacity of these three protagonists is raised so that they can play their part. This report and each of the annual reports since 1996 – the year when the Bahá'í world community set out to systematically learn how to advance the process of entry by troops – provides ample evidence that each of the three protagonists in the UK has made remarkable progress. Some fruits were harvested in this Plan, such as the establishment of programmes of growth in 9 clusters to date and a considerable increase this year in the number of core activities; but in citing these achievements we should not lose sight of the community's many other significant accomplishments. Having witnessed its capacities develop over the past 20 years, the National Spiritual Assembly knows well that the community has acquired the understanding, the experience, the insights and the skills to enable it to arise to the herculean task to which it has been called by the Universal House of Justice in the next five years: the task of harvesting the fruits of the past two decades. As you read this report, we hope this will be evident to you.

This year saw the Bahá'í world community completing its first year under the common calendar, the Badí' calendar. And surely the highlight of the year was the celebration of the Twin Holy Birthdays of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb on 13 and 14 November 2015. On this particular occasion, the House of Justice released three special Tablets of the Supreme Pen that commemorated these days. The Tablets were presented to every believer by the National Spiritual Assembly in a booklet entitled “Blessed Days”. During these auspicious days we all truly felt the implications of these words of the House of Justice:



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 reimaged, and the rhythm of life recast.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kitab-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh, verse 20

<sup>2</sup> Universal House of Justice, letter dated 10 July 2014 to the Bahá'ís of the World

This year also marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the revelation of the Tablets of the Divine Plan by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In its beautiful letter dated 26 March 2016, the House of Justice describe these Tablets in these words: “The Divine Plan, that sublime series of letters addressed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to the Bahá’ís of North America between 26 March 1916 and 8 March 1917, constitutes one of the mighty Charters of His Father’s Faith.” The timing of this anniversary cannot go unnoticed as the Bahá’í world community brings to a close one phase in the unfoldment of the Divine Plan and embarks upon another. In its letter dated 29 December 2015 to the Conference of the Counsellors in the Holy Land, the House of Justice set out the provisions of the Five Year Plan commencing at Riḍván 2016, and in doing so, highlighted the extent of the task ahead:



*Martha Root, Hand of the Cause of God, described by Shoghi Effendi as “that star-servant of Bahá’u’lláh ... designated by her Master “herald of the Kingdom” and “harbinger of the Covenant”” who immediately responded to summons made in the Tablets of the Divine Plan*

The colossal effort that will be asked from the loved ones of the Lord was clearly recognized by the Counsellors, but they also voiced their confidence in the capacity of the Bahá’í world to face this challenge. At no earlier time could such an undertaking have been seriously contemplated, but given what is being achieved in the present Plan, the realms of possibility are wider than ever before.<sup>3</sup>

It is deeply gratifying to see how this community has responded to the call for a “colossal effort”. Within four weeks of the message of the House of Justice being read to the Conference of Counsellors in Haifa, the national and regional institutions across the UK, joined by International Counsellor Alison Milston and four European Counsellors, as well as representatives from 7 other countries, convened at an institutional gathering to consult on how to bring the House of Justice’s message to the community at the grass-roots so that the work of the new Plan could commence immediately at Riḍván. Since then, regional and area gatherings have taken place across the country to begin the planning process. That the work will continue apace after Riḍván, that the momentum achieved this year will be built upon, and that the victories which the community will lay before the Threshold of Bahá’u’lláh this Riḍván will form a solid foundation for the coming Plan, seems assured.

The National Assembly wishes to record its profound appreciation to the House of Justice for unfolding Bahá’u’lláh’s Divine Order before our eyes in so many ways, for its constant guidance and encouragement, for the joy we feel in our hearts when we read its messages and, “in a world writhing with pain and declining into chaos” for being that “last refuge of a tottering civilisation”<sup>4</sup>. As each year passes, the spiritual potency of that Divine Institution becomes more palpable. We also wish to express gratitude to the International Teaching Centre and to Counsellor Milston, a member of that body. Her invaluable insights and

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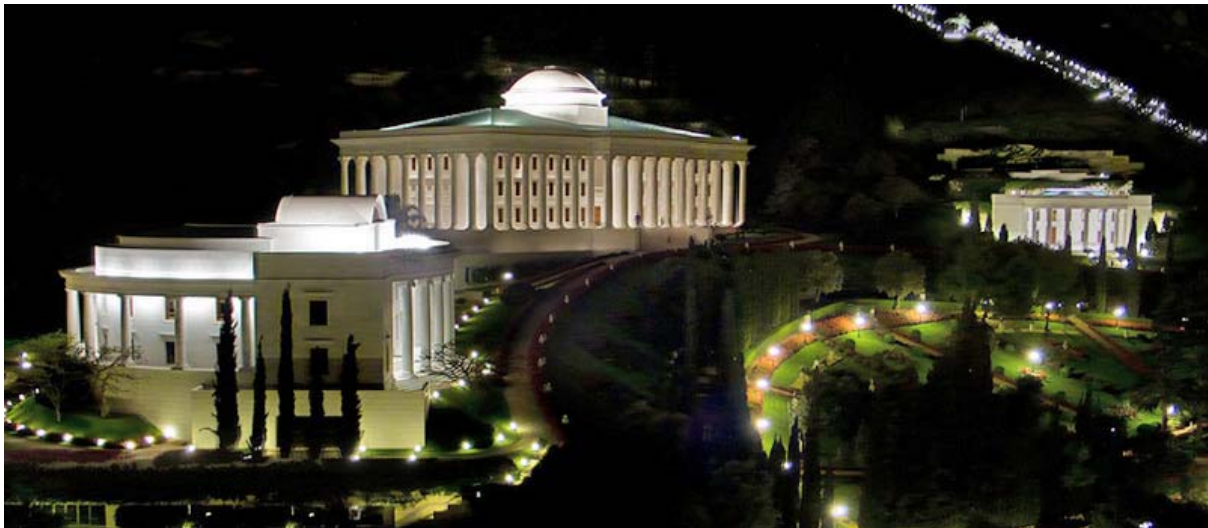
3 Universal House of Justice, letter dated 2 January 2016 to the Bahá’ís of the World

4 Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 89

guidance brought light to the institutional gathering mentioned above. And finally, we take this moment to convey our thanks to Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi and her Auxiliary Board members, for their tireless efforts to promote and protect the affairs of the Cause on these islands. Their loving guidance, conveyed with wisdom and kindness, their accompaniment of us all in everything that we strive to do to advance the Plans of the House of Justice, has brought this indispensable Institution of the Counsellors even closer to our hearts. For all your noble and sacrificial efforts, we are truly grateful.

We recall too with gratitude and appreciation the services of our dear colleague, Dr. John Parris, who was a member of the National Assembly from 1992 to 2006 and who sadly passed away this year. Our love and prayers are with him and his dear family.

However inadequate this report might be, it stands as a testimony to the services rendered to humanity and to Bahá'u'lláh by every believer in the United Kingdom.



## 2. ADVANCING THE PROCESS OF ENTRY BY TROOPS

### a. *Emerging programmes of growth: the first milestone*

In its 29 December 2015 message, the Universal House of Justice described a programme of growth as:

... a process for building capacity within the cluster through which its inhabitants, prompted by a wish to contribute to the spiritual and material well-being of their communities, are enabled to begin offering acts of service.



*The friends in Solent celebrate passing the first milestone*

We know that a programme of growth, which is signified by reaching the ‘first milestone’ in a cluster’s development, emerges when two nascent capacities are present:<sup>5</sup>

1. 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.
2. Then, these individuals must be able to attract others to participate in the core activities.

In the Five Year Plan that is now drawing to a close, the Bahá’í world has been working to meet the challenge set by the Supreme Body to increase “the total number of clusters in which a programme of growth is under way, at whatever level of intensity, to 5,000...”<sup>6</sup> Rallying to this call, the UK community set itself a formidable task – to establish programmes of growth in every one of its 50 clusters.<sup>7</sup>

How marvellously the friends have arisen in an effort to fulfil this pledge! By Rīḍván 2015, 32 programmes of growth were established, setting a firm foundation for the

**UK community set itself a formidable task – to establish programmes of growth in every one of its 50 clusters**

<sup>5</sup> From the document *Insights from the Frontiers of Learning*, prepared by the International Teaching Centre

<sup>6</sup> 28 December 2010 message from the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors

<sup>7</sup> There were 49 clusters at the outset of the Plan, but in 2012 the Forth and Clyde cluster split into two to give the total of 50 clusters.



work in the closing year of the Plan. Major steps were then taken in the last twelve months to initiate new programmes. We now rejoice to see that, through a mighty effort, **Suffolk, Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly, Solent, Lincolnshire, Cumbria** and the **Western Isles** clusters have all joined the ranks of those clusters that have passed the first milestone along the continuum of growth, and we congratulate and offer our sincere gratitude to the friends in all those clusters on their achievement. What is more, further clusters are poised to reach the first milestone, notably **the Isle of Man** and **Devon**.

It thus gives us great pleasure to be able to presently contribute 38 programmes of growth to the global goal of 5,000, with more expected in the weeks leading up to Riðván. This means that at the time of writing 12 clusters are still striving to establish a programme of growth:

Dorset	Orkney
Devon	North Highland
Channel Islands	West Highland
Isle of Man	Borders
Hainsworth (N. Ireland)	Mid Wales
Stars of the West (N. Ireland)	South West Wales

Although it did not quite prove possible to meet the objective of establishing 50 programmes of growth, there is no doubt that in striving to do so the community has vastly grown in its capacities. Moreover, of the 12 remaining priority clusters, the community-building work is well advanced in all but one of them; indeed, many of them have definite strategies in place, and some are very near to passing the first milestone. By the time of the National Convention, some may even have done so and more will surely follow in the months after Riðván. Naturally, the work of establishing programmes of growth in these clusters will remain vitally important as we move into the next Plan, not least because this sets the foundation for the work ahead.

...of the 12 remaining priority clusters, the community-building work is well advanced in all but one of them...

But let us not lose sight of the striking advances that have been made over the last year, which are the fruit of consecrated endeavours by the friends, sometimes over a period of years. Three key strategies have continued to be indispensable in supporting the friends in these clusters to initiate programmes of growth, and these will remain crucial for those clusters still striving to establish a programme of growth:<sup>8</sup>

- 1. Institutional support**
- 2. Visiting teams**
- 3. Pioneering**

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<sup>8</sup> These strategies are described in detail in *Insights from the Frontiers of Learning*, a document prepared by the International Teaching Centre.

While any one of these strategies might prove to be a stimulus for growth, it has often been found that they work well together. In the Cumbria cluster, for example, a combination of all three strategies helped establish a programme of growth.

**Key strategy 1 - institutional support**

Support from institutions can take many forms. In countless cases, members of institutions are working side-by-side with those keen to arise, accompanying “tentative venturers” to step forward into the arena of service. Special mention must be made in this respect of the Auxiliary Board members, who continue to support, encourage, inspire and accompany so many individuals and agencies of the Faith across the country. The time and effort they devote to the Cause is extraordinary, and we know a great many of the friends would wish to join us in expressing gratitude to these luminous souls.

Likewise, area and regional coordinators, members of the Regional Bahá’í Councils and those serving on a range of institutions at the cluster level, have also played a vital role through empowering individuals to serve, helping overcome obstacles, building capacity, and coordinating efforts to best effect. In short, they have assisted in unlocking the potential of communities, and their devoted efforts have earned our heartfelt appreciation.

Another way in which institutions have provided support is by opening spaces for friends to come together to reflect and plan. For example, in both Harrogate and Southampton, ‘first milestone’ gatherings were organised by the Bahá’í Council for England for friends – including Local Spiritual Assembly members and protagonists at the grassroots – to analyse their reality and consider how to move their clusters forward. In conjunction with their supporting Bahá’í institutions, they reflected on guidance, considered the methods that would best help in each cluster, and made plans to implement them. Both

Progress of Clusters Towards the First and Second Milestones in the United Kingdom

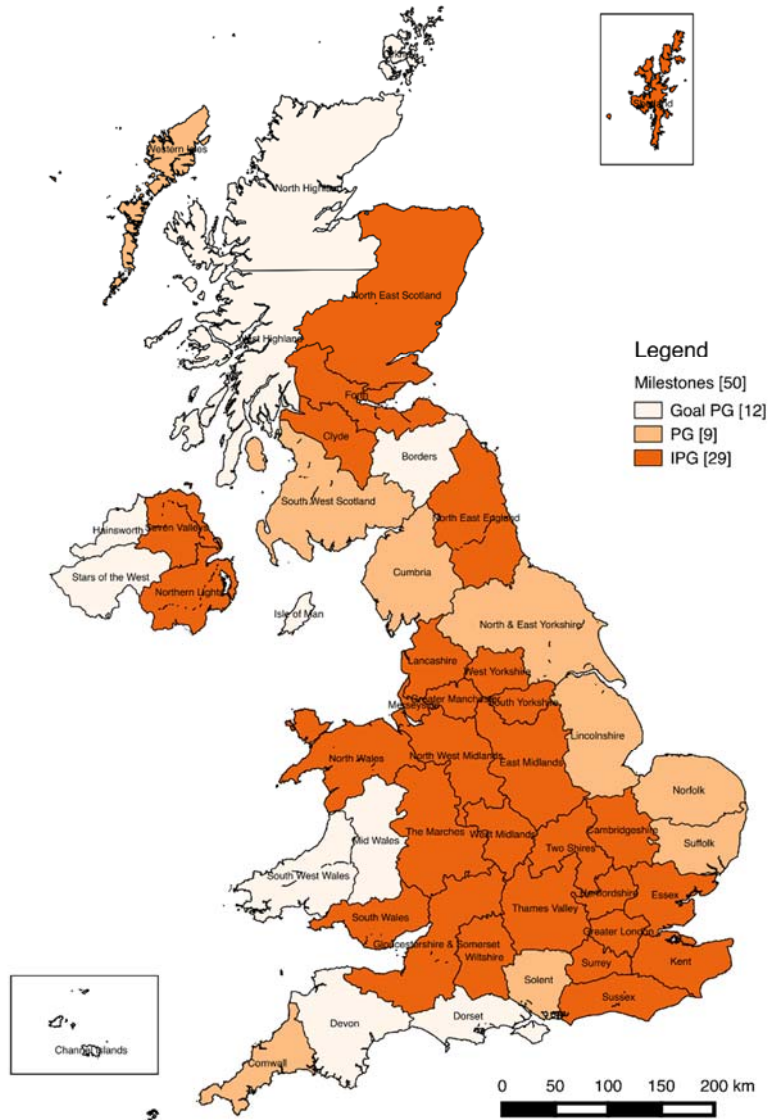


Figure 1: Map of cluster progress

of these meetings made a direct and significant contribution to advancing the work in those clusters that were striving to pass the first milestone.

In the following section on visiting teams, we will see an example of the role that institutional support can play.

### **Key strategy 2 - visiting teams**

We are told by the House of Justice 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. The community’s experience of mobilising and deploying visiting teams continued to grow over the past year. In Scotland, for instance, the North East, Forth, and Clyde clusters continued serving as pools of resources, sending out mobile tutors and visiting teams to other clusters and lending a significant impetus to the work there. Visiting teams have also been deployed in many other cases, including from Thames Valley to Solent; from Manchester to Cumbria; and from the Northern Lights cluster in Northern Ireland to two goal clusters.



*Milestone gathering in Harrogate, England*

The following timeline account from Lincolnshire, when the cluster was on the cusp of passing the first milestone, provides an inspiring account of both the role that institutional support can play, and of the impact of visiting teams:

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**February 2015** at an Institutional meeting the Area Team consulted on steps to develop Lincolnshire. A team was chosen, comprising friends in the neighbouring clusters of South Yorkshire and East Midlands.

**March 2015:** A series of initial visits were organised, with the goal of a member of the visiting team going to the cluster weekly. A number of the Bahá’ís in Lincolnshire had finished the sequence of courses previously and had a desire to begin hosting core activities. However, confidence needed to be built in running activities and inviting friends to attend.

Throughout **April 2015** initial activities were set up and accompanied weekly, developing the capacity to initiate and sustain a core activity. These were:

- i) Devotional meeting in Lincoln, rotated among local homes but with support from Sorosh Zahedi<sup>9</sup>. In preparation to invite non-Bahá’ís,

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<sup>9</sup> Note: Unlike previous annual reports and with the encouragement of the Universal House of Justice, names of individuals, where known, have been included in this report in connection with certain stories and accounts. Regrettably, in many cases we

personal teaching plans were developed, drawing on the material in Ruhi Book 6.

- ii) Children's class in Lincoln, hosted by Maya and Jamie Straw. Initially just Bahá'í children attended, and the teachers were closely accompanied by Auxiliary Board member, Sara Agahi-Murphy and Area Coordinator, Andisha Croft.
- iii) Children's class in Bracebridge Heath, hosted by Kertu Kalem, with efforts to reach out – again supported by an individual from outside, Bernie Kerr.
- iv) Devotional meeting in Grantham, hosted by Margaret and Gordon Grant.

After further efforts to study guidance and learn about initiating conversations, the capacity to invite friends significantly increased. By **June 2015** each core activity had members of the community of interest attending.

Meanwhile, support was still being supplied from outside to help run activities. A Book 1 began, and with support from a travel teacher from Sheffield, by September a junior youth group came into being with 5 participants, which received support from Mojdeh and Sima Siddiqui. A goal was set to increase the number of new friends at the devotional meetings to 9, and this goal was achieved in November.

Following the priority cluster gathering in Harrogate, the friends were galvanised to start a new Book 1 with some participants of the existing core activities, and to invite others too. With accompaniment from the Area Coordinator, friends started attending tutor and children's class encounters outside of the cluster too.

At present, 6 core activities are being run with 32 participants; a healthy nucleus of friends in shouldering responsibility inside the cluster with substantial support being provided by at least 5 friends from outside; parents of the young participants are being engaged ongoing conversations; and further plans are in place to extend the pattern of growth.

We gratefully acknowledge too the excellent contribution that the UK Pioneering and Travel Teaching Committee has made to the work of mobilising and deploying travel teachers, having helped facilitate the movement of five such individuals (four from the UK and one overseas), for periods from a few days up to two months. These friends were deployed to the clusters of North East Scotland, Dorset, Orkney, and in two cases the Isle of Man. It is not an exaggeration to say however, that throughout the UK, dozens of friends have arisen to travel teach in support of efforts to establish programmes of growth in nearby clusters, a level of movement not seen in

...a level of movement not seen in the UK for many years

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were not able to name all those involved with a particular story, both for brevity and because identities were not always known. We should stress too that for every story included a great many wonderful accounts were not included; and for every story known to us, we are sure that a great many wonderful services took place! Thus the stories in this report, and the individuals identified, should be regarded merely as examples of the outstanding work rendered by thousands of believers in the UK.

the UK for many years. It is reminiscent of this condition for success in teaching which the beloved Master highlighted in His Tablets of the Divine Plan:

The third condition: Teachers must continually travel to all parts of the continent, nay, rather, to all parts of the world, but they must travel like ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who journeyed throughout the cities of America. He was sanctified and free from every attachment and in the utmost severance. Just as His Holiness Christ says: Shake off the very dust from your feet.

**Key strategy 3 - pioneering**

In describing the first stirrings of a programme of growth in its 28 December 2010 message, the Universal House of Justice drew attention to the significant role pioneers might have:

Invariably, opportunities afforded by the personal circumstances of the believers initially involved—or perhaps a single homefront pioneer—to enter into meaningful and distinctive conversation with local residents dictate how the process of growth begins in a cluster.

This year, we are aware of at least five pioneers who arose on the homefront:

<b>Homefront Pioneers</b>	<b>Serving in</b>
Arlette, Phineas & Fabienne Manasseh	West Highlands cluster
Maria Ward	Hainsworth cluster
Rachel Murray	West Midlands cluster

In addition, 6 youth from the UK and a further two from overseas have been assisted to begin periods of dedicated service by the UK Pioneering and Travel Teaching Committee:

		<b>Serving in</b>	<b>Period of Service</b>
Aoife	Crolly	Greater Manchester	9 months
Navid	Salmanzadeh	Cumbria	6 months
Thomas	Lee	Belfast	12 months
Sophia	Foroughi	West Midlands	7-8 months
Lian	Foroudi	Belfast	12 months
Sophia	Fozdar	S Yorkshire	10 months
Houman	Charkhi	London, Hackney	6 - 10 months
Rosa	Vojdani	House of Worship India	1 month

However, the actual figure of homefront pioneers is in fact far higher, not least because individuals, especially university students and other youth, often choose to live based on where they feel they can best support the work of the Faith.

Many inspiring accounts have been received of souls, motivated by their love for Bahá’u’lláh, leaving their homes to sow heavenly seeds in new localities. For instance, Arjang and Edwina Agahi-Esfahani, who had pioneered to the Hainsworth cluster in Northern Ireland, recently started two Book 1 study circles – one in Hainsworth and one in a neighbouring priority

cluster, Stars of the West – with a total of four seekers. It is delightful to hear that some of the participants are already inspired by the vision of starting their own devotionals and inviting others to join.

Another story, which was also recently shared by the National Assembly with the friends via NEWS, relates to Simin Rahmanian, who pioneered to the Isle of Man. This not only illustrates the role of pioneers and the divine confirmations that their efforts can attract, but also gives a flavour of the promising work underway even in clusters that have not yet established a programme of growth:

...individuals, especially university students and other youth, often choose to live based on where they feel they can best support the work of the Faith.

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Despite being afflicted with blindness, Simin arose to pioneer to one of the priority clusters, the Isle of Man. Yet apparent obstacles can open unexpected opportunities:

Every day I would walk to the seafront and pray to Bahá'u'lláh to send receptive souls to me. On one such trip I was looking for the traffic lights with my cane but had to ask for directions from a woman I could hear speaking to her children. She said I was only a few steps away but that she couldn't help me cross the road because her children were in the car. I thanked her and continued looking for the crossing, but before I got far I could hear her telling me that she couldn't bear to just leave me like that and she helped me find my way. Fifteen minutes later I was enjoying a nearby park when suddenly I heard her voice again, but this time she was free for a longer conversation. We sat down and I soon introduced myself and the reason I was on the island, telling her a little about the Bahá'í Faith. After that first encounter she would regularly take me grocery shopping and we got to know each other more.

Several months passed and then Simin had the misfortune to lose her internet access. As a vital link to the wider world, her family and her friends this was a severe trial.

It was a very painful experience and I looked for other means to connect with my friends and family. I started seeing my friend from the park even more often, as she would regularly take me to her own home to use the internet. Gradually our bond grew stronger and our friendship became deeper. We would pray together and talk about all sorts of subjects.

I began to see that Bahá'u'lláh was giving me an opportunity of huge value: by taking away my internet I had been given the chance to develop my relationship with my friend! Soon I offered to give children's classes for her son and daughter and she enthusiastically accepted. The classes now take place every Wednesday and we also meet together every Monday to pray and share our thoughts.

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We are delighted to also share that at least five individuals arose to pioneer internationally to Zambia and Montenegro:

<b>International Pioneers</b>	<b>Serving in</b>
Manijeh & David Smith	Zambia
Alex Afnan	Montenegro
Eamon Fehilly	Montenegro
Andisheh Namvari	Montenegro

This is a wonderful accomplishment, and no doubt many others who have left the UK are also serving devotedly wherever they are. We are sure the friends will wish to keep all these dear pioneers in their prayers.

The UK community was also called upon to send pioneers to the Falkland Islands, a goal which has yet to be fulfilled.

The National Spiritual Assembly deeply appreciates the number of dedicated souls from United Kingdom who are currently undertaking a period of full-time service at the Bahá'í World Centre. The giving of one's time and energy at the spiritual and administrative Centre of our Faith is most meritorious, as the Universal House of Justice relies on volunteers from around the Bahá'í World to serve in the various departments and offices in Haifa and Akká. It is the wish of the National Spiritual Assembly to raise awareness of the needs of the World Centre and this year at summer schools efforts were made to highlight these. It also announces staffing needs regularly through NEWS.

### **The work ahead**

With 38 or more programmes of growth already underway, and more coming to fruition, the community of the Greatest Name in the United Kingdom can rightly feel that it is becoming proficient in initiating these programmes. We are becoming more experienced and adept at utilising the three strategies above, as shown by the jump of six new programmes compared to previous years. What is being learnt in this respect is not just relevant to the remaining goal clusters, but also any other smaller locality, such as a neighbourhood and village, where new programmes of growth can be set in motion, even in clusters that have already passed the first milestone.

... the  
community ... is  
becoming  
proficient in  
initiating these  
programmes

And let us not forget that each of these 38 programmes is the start of a wondrous process, in which the revitalising waters of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation are being carried to thirsty souls, and in which we are taking intrepid steps on a path leading to that glorious civilization He has envisioned. Each of these 38 is, in a sense, an expression of love for Bahá'u'lláh, and in the words of the House of Justice, it is this "simple strand of love" that then weaves the "pattern of patient and concentrated effort"<sup>10</sup> that follows, as capacity is built in a population to walk a path of service to humanity.

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<sup>10</sup> Ridván 2015 message

## ***b. Intensive programmes of growth: the second milestone***

The second milestone along the continuum of growth is described by the House of Justice, in its 28 December 2010 message, as occurring when:

... 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.

### **Clusters working towards the second milestone**

For a number of clusters in the UK that passed the first milestone in the last year or two – including **Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly, Cumbria, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, North and East Yorkshire, South West Scotland and the Western Isles** – moving from the first to the second milestone is the immediate task at hand. What is required in this regard, including the organic emergence of those elements required for a programme of growth to become intensive, is vividly narrated by the House of Justice in its 29 December 2015 message. Theirs is the challenge to transition from having, perhaps, “a handful of individuals who are involved” in promoting growth, where “those participating might come from only several households”, to a position where “these figures ... have grown: perhaps tens of individuals active in the work of expansion and consolidation, while those participating might well surpass a hundred.”

The institutions that support them are learning how best to assist in this process, including the timely creation of structures to sustain growth. Responsive to the reality at the grassroots, in some clusters, such as Norfolk, it was decided that a ‘cluster growth facilitator’ would best accompany the nucleus of friends working there over the coming cycles, until the demands of growth necessitate the appointment of an Area Teaching Committee. Elsewhere, clusters recently passed the first milestone have, for example, been helped to adopt the three-monthly cycle of activity.

### **Clusters that have passed the second milestone**

While fulfilling the goal of establishing programmes of growth was a particular feature of the last year, the work has continued apace in those 29 clusters that have passed the second milestone. Many are forging ahead, growing in their capacity to harness the potential of the believers and friends of the Faith; learning about those key elements that are so essential for growth, such as collective teaching campaigns, accompaniment, home visits and the mobilisation of growing numbers to shoulder the work; and sharpening the capacity to read reality and overcome challenges. The following account from the South Wales cluster provides a lovely, encouraging insight into the manner in which some clusters have been progressing:

... [Clusters] growing in their capacity to harness the potential of the believers and friends of the Faith...

Through patiently nurturing capacities in the cluster, informed by a detailed understanding of “where the friends are at”, achieved by nothing less than patient, frequent and regular accompaniment and home visits, the South Wales Area Teaching



Committee (ATC) has been able to systematically add to the process of growth many of the capacities that are now described in the 29 December message, and was instantly able to identify those that were not present when it studied that message.

It is this way of working that nurtured the environment in which the friends responded to the new goal of the National Assembly for the final year of the plan, to double the number of core activities, to an extent that surprised both the ATC and the regional institutions. The statistics below show how the growth in the final year of the plan was driven by other advances in previous years:

1. Increase in average attendance at cluster reflection meetings, 2012-2015: from 20 to 35
2. Friends with a teaching plan in the expansion phase, 2012-15: less than 10 to more than 30
3. Core activities, 2015-2016: 17 to 33

Of course detailed knowledge of the guidance of the Universal House of Justice is required, but if we do not also have detailed insight into the reality of the cluster, how do we “identify what is required for progress to occur”, and then achieve that progress by applying “judiciously the methods and instruments of the Five Year Plan”. Such insight comes from loving and attentive accompaniment of the friends. It is noteworthy that the first question the South Wales Area Teaching Committee asks itself when planning a cluster meeting is, “how do we ensure the friends feel loved?”.

Another major concern for clusters passed the second milestone was to try to meet the goal set for the community to double the number of core activities over the year. This will be discussed in a later section. In addition, a number of clusters that had passed the second milestone channelled some of their efforts into helping nearby priority clusters.

We should recognise too, however, that for a number of clusters that had established an intensive programmes of growth in the past, the challenge remains to revivify the efforts of the friends and find, once more, the levels of intensity that they had previously experienced. Such clusters would have obtained much inspiration from the following extract from the Riḍván 2014 message:

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.

### **Collective teaching and the expansion phase**

Efforts continued over the last year to learn about the intensity called for in the expansion phase. The following summary of a summer project in a neighbourhood in the Greater Manchester cluster offers helpful insights into how groups of friends can learn about this

... the challenge remains to revivify the efforts of the friends and find, once more, the levels of intensity that they had previously experienced

process. This particular account is of interest in that the participants set out to systematically learn how to how to converse with youth such that they would be interested to join the movement of youth and train to become animators of junior youth groups:

- Encouraged by one of the resource persons for Northern Europe, Clare Stephens, and applying insights from the learning site (Utrecht cluster), a goal was set to have 200 meaningful and distinctive conversations, with the aim of 20 youth entering the training institute and 2 junior youth groups forming.

- Deepening materials were prepared and the structure of teaching projects as described in Ruhi Book 6 were adopted. Areas for outreach were identified; youth tracker tools were prepared; and visitors were invited from surrounding clusters to join the learning process.



*Collective teaching in Manchester*

- The various institutions, including Auxiliary Board members, cluster agencies and Local Spiritual Assemblies all contributed in various ways to facilitate the project.

- Through systematic consultation, study, action and reflection, capacity was built in the participants to hold conversations with youth.

- o In the first three days, the focus was on entering into conversation on material and spiritual progress.

- o By the third day participants felt more able to do this, and Bahá'í beliefs, particularly as set out in Unit 3 of Ruhi Book 2, were more consciously introduced.

- o Attention was also given to learning to describe the institute process

- o As progress occurred, further needs for capacity building came into focus: how to listen and allow space during the initial conversation; how to explore multiple related themes; how to directly teach the Faith and naturally introduce the Word of God into conversation; how to arrange to meet someone a second time and study materials together; how to develop spiritual perception to see what is needed and to navigate the obstacles that are encountered in inviting people to serve.

- By the final day, participants felt they had reached a much deeper understanding of the conversations that can be had, and efforts were confirmed with many more individuals committing to entering Book 1 on that day!

- Overall, 26 individuals were involved in the project; 237 meaningful conversations took place; 146 expressed interest; appointments were made to meet again with 40 individuals.

- Youth gatherings were held each evening to which new friends could be invited. A total of 14 youth attended. Each gathering followed the same pattern; getting to know one another, music, study of the Youth Declaration and creatively expressing thoughts on the theme of progress before being invited to enter the training institute. In some gatherings the environment was especially joyful, vibrant and creative, with singing a strong feature.
- By the end of the project, 31 individuals had committed to or expressed interest to do Ruhi Book 1.
- Building on this work in the summer, more projects took place in Manchester, including one in January 2016, in which another 264 youth in a neighbourhood were engaged in meaningful and distinctive conversation; 7 entered the training institute and a children's class formed
- With a continued emphasis on learning, more insights were gained in such areas as coordination, statistics and the quality of conversations, including:
  - o How to see every soul as a protagonist. When visiting a parent, for instance, experience suggests it is tempting to walk away as soon as a parent gives permission for their child to participate in training. However, through having a full conversation with parents on concepts such as progress, the training institute and the Faith, the parents can be enabled to become protagonists in the process.

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### **Centres of intense activity**

While the value of attracting participation in the activities of the Faith from the broader network of contacts is unquestioned, the recent guidance of the House of Justice places a special emphasis on learning to work intensively in neighbourhoods and villages.

In the 29 December 2015 message, we read:

The pattern of community life has to be developed in places where receptivity wells up, those small centres of population where intense activity can be sustained. It is here, when carrying out the work of community building within such a narrow compass, that the interlocking dimensions of community life are most coherently expressed, here that the process of collective transformation is most keenly felt—here that, in time, the society-building power inherent in the Faith becomes most visible.

**It is here ...that, in time, the society-building power inherent in the Faith becomes most visible**

The House of Justice continues by stating that,

... for existing programmes of growth to continue to gain strength, the strategy of initiating community-building activities in neighbourhoods and villages that show promise must be widely adopted and systematically followed.

It is therefore a source of great joy to the National Assembly, and no doubt to all the friends, to reflect on the outstanding efforts that have been made in a number of areas to learn about working in small community settings in the UK. The village of Cumnor in the Thames Valley cluster provides just one example:

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Two families in the small village of Cumnor, on the outskirts of Oxford, have been trying to learn about reaching out to their neighbours to share with them the vision of community building inspired by the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Through direct outreach, they met two families, one of which has three children, who quickly became inspired to engage in these processes and who, part way through Book 1, declared as Bahá'ís. Since then, the mother of these three children has arisen to serve and, with the accompaniment of the original Bahá'í families, has invited her neighbours to begin a children's class.

Within a few months, more than fifteen children had joined this class, which has since been split into three different classes stratified by age. Each of these three classes is now being hosted at the home of neighbours who, though they do not identify themselves as Bahá'ís, are excited by the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and by the impact of the



*Neighbourhood project in Cumnor*

children's class on their children. Indeed, they are now spreading the Message to others! This new contingent of parents has also begun to enter the institute process, by starting Book 1, while the original two families are continuing into the later books of the sequence. Meanwhile, there are two junior youth groups in Cumnor – one that was formed at the start of the process and one that has more recently begun – who have also been trying to contribute their lot to the community-building processes, for instance by taking cake to the neighbours; by visiting Cumnor's old people's home; and by planting trees in the local park. Slowly, then, the culture of Cumnor is changing, with bonds of friendship, rooted in service and conversations about Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, being created and strengthened.

Much is being learned, including the importance of carrying out acts of service early on in the study of the Ruhi books, and the need to work to continually expand the core nucleus of friends who are assuming responsibility for the process of growth. Since all of those involved in this process live within a stone's throw from each other, visiting friends in their homes becomes an easy and natural part of community life. The nature

of true friendship is another theme the friends in Cumnor have been learning about: true friendships blossom in the field of service, with all its joys and challenges, and making time for people is the practical expression of love for humanity.

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**c. *New areas of learning: towards the third milestone***

The House of Justice, in its 29 December 2015 message, offered an enthralling description of the next stage – a third milestone – in the development of a cluster. While there are many elements of this phase in the progress of a cluster, the quantitative aspect is worth considering in relation to the clusters in the UK. As indicated by the House of Justice, the third milestone entails, amongst other things, “... being able to reach out to large numbers— mobilizing a hundred people or more, whose service connects them with many hundreds or even thousands,” a transition that will require “the capacity to adapt to a substantial increase in complexity”.

At the time of writing, the Greater London cluster already has nearly 200 core activities with close to 800 participants, and many more activities are planned to start in the near future. Moreover, for some years now, relatively complex arrangements have been put in place in terms of the schemes of coordination and the existence of five Sector Teaching Committees, all operating under the Area Teaching Committee. Thus, while many more capacities need to be built in London, it is clear that the cluster already has elements of the third milestone. No doubt the ongoing work in London, not least in understanding how to manage growing scale and complexity, will make an invaluable contribution to the UK community’s overall learning process.

...while many more capacities need to be built in London, it is clear that the cluster already has elements of the third milestone

**Learning from an advanced cluster**

The following account from Wales shows how clusters at a less advanced stage can learn from those who are at the forefront of learning in the UK. In the coming Five Year Plan, we know that groups of adjoining clusters will be working together, so this experience is worthy of noting and emulating:

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In June 2015, two members of the training institute board in Wales and a youth attended a teaching project in Manchester. The 7 days was a rich learning experience for all three, and a lot was learned from the resource person.

After that the teaching team felt very strongly that they needed to immediately implement what they had learned in the field in Wales. So they set out to meet youth in a neighbourhood which was hosting a small number of core activities in an effort to

multiply activities and stimulate more growth. They did 4 days of expansion on 3 consecutive months.

In October the team experimented in another small town in the North of Wales, Bangor. Many youth were attracted, and a number entered the training institute. A local youth was able to support them, along with the institute coordinator to begin their study of Book 1.

In November, the team visited the capital of Wales, Cardiff, to support a local youth who had the desire to start a study circle with youth she knew. In order to expand the study circle they sought to meet youth, and again share with them the vision of the Faith and the institute process. In the same month, the team visited Bangor again, and again more youth were attracted, began their study of Book 1, and by the second unit, with close assistance from the coordinator, had the first session of their junior youth group. The initial core team of 4 was expanded over each successive project by inviting one or two new people each time to experience action based on the insights gained from years of systematic work in the learning site.

Efforts to meet youth and assist them as they begin their training have now begun in three out of the four clusters in Wales and have helped the friends in those clusters, particularly the priority one, visualise the different ways by which they might move towards and beyond the first milestone on their path of progress.

Having originally intended to begin and support this process in three locations across Wales, it was found that the level of consolidation required meant that one full-time team was needed in one place to sustain the process sufficiently. Presently home front pioneers are preparing to move into the town to grow the fledgling process.

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#### ***d. Doubling the number of core activities***

The Universal House of Justice said, in its Riḍván 2015 message:

In the twelve months that remain of the Plan, let every community advance from its present position to a stronger one.

Responding to this call, and in consultation with Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi, the National Assembly set an ambitious goal for the community: to double the number of core activities in the United Kingdom in the last year of the Plan. This goal very much complemented the community's efforts to begin new programmes of growth and to advance all clusters, and was given in light of the great and growing potential of the friends.



*Study Circle in Horsham, West Sussex*

The National Assembly has been truly humbled to witness the community's devoted efforts... By February 2016, 855 core activities were running in the UK

The National Assembly has been truly humbled to witness the community's devoted efforts to reach this difficult goal. While the overall target – to grow from 690 core activities to 1380 – may not be reached, a great many victories have been accrued through striving to do so. By February 2016, 855 core activities were running in the UK with many more planned to begin before Riḍvān – an increase of 165 activities. It should be appreciated, in this connection, that overall numbers of activities in recent years had been relatively stagnant and had even declined. Moreover, the increase of 165 activities would not take account of the numbers of study circles that started and finished within the year, including in intensive training. We can rejoice then in this clear step forward, which testifies to the community's growing capacity to intensify the work.

Let us pause to celebrate the many victories achieved, of which these are just a sample:

- In Wales, the friends are on course to double the number of core activities by Riḍvān.
- 56 core activities were recorded in Scotland in April 2015. By January 2016, this figure had increased to 67, with a further 30 activities planned. The number of devotional meetings in Scotland has risen from 26 to 38 with an increase of 50% in the number of participants.
- The number of study circles in Northern Ireland nearly tripled since last Riḍvān.
- Between April 2015 and March 2016, the number of core activities in England had increased by more than 100, with many more planned.
- The Marches and Lincolnshire clusters both doubled their number of core activities.
- After many years with activities hovering around the same level, the London cluster managed to rise from 138 activities in April 2015 to over 180 activities, with scores more activities planned. Within the Greater London cluster, the North & East Sector alone increased from 23 activities to 55 activities across the year.
- In Greater Manchester, the number of devotional meetings doubled. Numbers of participants followed suit, rising from 107 to 215.
- Thames Valley cluster almost tripled the number of participants in children's classes, from 16 to 45.

...the goal of doubling the number of activities lent shape to efforts across the UK...

- And in a number of clusters, certain activities were doubled or more than doubled. The East Midlands cluster, for example, increased the number of study circles from 4 to 10.

We were delighted to see how the goal of doubling the number of activities lent shape to efforts across the UK, prompting earnest consideration in reflection meetings, Local Assembly meetings, Feasts, in gatherings of institutions and in many other settings. Encouraging stories about local efforts were shared nationally and within regions, and it is evident that the advances made fostered renewed enthusiasm and a heightened sense of purpose. Here is one of the accounts that was shared during the year:

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***How devotionals multiplied to reach many of the believers and an increasing number of friends:***

At our cluster meeting we discussed how we could increase our activities in the areas where we live and how we could offer support to each other. Like most people our “free” time is very limited as we have children, jobs, commitments in the community, elderly relatives etc. so we thought rather than add on to these events in our lives we would integrate them as much as possible so that our spiritual life and food for the soul was as important as the trip to Tesco and being at work on time! So we all looked frankly at ourselves and what we do to bring more devotion into our personal lives.

- One family began dawn prayers, this set the spiritual pattern for the day ahead.
  - Another began saying 500 remover of difficulties on a regular basis and opened their home to anyone who would like to join her.
  - Another family arranged devotional gatherings for themselves and to create a space for them to consult about their teaching efforts.
  - An individual felt Sunday was a good day for spiritual contemplation and began a sacred space. The people who came were particularly musical and they now alternate weekly between singing and devotionals.
  - Another family regularly opens their home and provides wonderful food, hospitality and a themed soul time.
- 

We are grateful to Bahá'u'lláh for showering His confirmations on all these endeavours!

***e. Youth***

With each passing year, the community is coming to appreciate the vital importance of working with youth, who represent, as affirmed by the House of Justice, “a most responsive element of every receptive population”. As further observed by the House of Justice in its 29 December 2015 message:

The marvellous exploits of the youth in the field of service are one of the finest fruits of the present Plan. If any proof were needed of the extraordinary potential that the



youth possess, it has been incontrovertibly delivered. In the wake of the youth conferences convened in 2013, the surge of energy which was imparted to the work being carried out in clusters demonstrates clearly how the community of the Greatest Name is able to give shape to the highest aspirations of young people.

“...a most responsive element of every receptive population”

The movement of youth involves nothing less than helping “young people become aware of the contribution they can make to the improvement of society”; then, “as consciousness is raised”, helping them “identify with the aims of the Bahá’í community”, kindling “interest in how the physical and spiritual powers available to them at this time of life can be channelled towards providing for the needs of others, particularly for younger generations”. In addition to helping youth lend their unique share to the work of the Cause, these efforts help set the foundation for a life of service.

Our work with youth therefore demands our careful consideration, and as we approach this subject, we should be mindful of the essential contribution that older generations can make in supporting youth, in addition of course to their own crucial endeavours for the advancement of the Cause.



*Youth conference*

We are delighted to share that since the London Youth Conference in August 2013, there have been numerous regional, sub-regional, and cluster-wide youth conferences throughout the United Kingdom to carry forward the momentum generated by the movement of youth. Meanwhile, efforts to track and understand the movement of youth are

becoming more systematised, and we can gain insights into this process from viewing the information in Table 1 below.

From this information, a number of observations can be made:

- The total number of youth engaged in the movement has increased by 40% in the last year (from 921 to 1,293)
- The numbers entering into conversations in the past year has increase from 241 to 524.
- The number of youth who have entered the training institute process in the past year has risen by 13% (from 680 to 769)

Youth gatherings have become a distinctive feature of the youth movement, with at least one occurring in each of the following areas: South East England, Greater London, Greater Manchester, East of England, Central England & Wales and Northern Ireland. These special gatherings are “ideal occasions for bringing an intensity to this ongoing conversation, and

they are an increasingly common feature of cycles of activity in many clusters.”<sup>11</sup> Materials from the 2013 Youth Conference have often been used, as they continue to provide a rich basis for meaningful discussion.



*South of England Youth gathering*

In its message of 1 July 2013 to the 114 Youth Conferences around the world, the Universal House of Justice highlighted the vital role that youth play in the moral and spiritual development of junior youth and children. Speaking of

youth, the House of Justice refers to them as being “the age group that is gaining the most experience at aiding junior youth, and children too, with their moral and spiritual development, fostering in them capacity for collective service and true friendship ... to refine their characters and prepare to assume responsibility for the well-being of their communities ... helping them to enhance their power of expression, as well as enabling a strong moral sensibility to take root within them”. Thus, it is heartening to see is that the movement of youth has greatly helped in raising the vision of participants, encouraging them to build their capacity through the institute process to serve as animators of junior-youth groups and as teachers of children’s classes. What a wonderful asset the community is developing!

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<sup>11</sup> 29 December 2015 message

**Table 1: Progress of the youth movement and scheme of coordination in the United Kingdom**

Region	Date	Progress of the Youth Movement						Scheme of Coordination
		No. of Youth in Process	Entered into Conversation	Studying Institute Courses	Facilitating Core Activities	Accompanying Others in Core Activities	No. of Groups of Youth	Members of Agencies
England	As of Dec 2014	668	138	530	253	132	N/A	157
	As of Jul 2015	842	395	447	173	124	56	98
	<b>As of Dec 2015</b>	<b>1,018</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>624</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>89</b>
	<i>Difference Jul-Dec 15</i>	176	-1	177	6	-18	23	-9
Northern Ireland	As of Dec 2014	43	6	37	20	9	N/A	9
	As of Jul 2015	70	33	37	20	9	3	4
	<b>As of Dec 2015</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>
	<i>Difference Jul-Dec 15</i>	-2	6	-8	-5	1	0	2
Scotland	As of Dec 2014	167	81	86	46	23	N/A	23
	As of Jul 2015	163	99	64	38	24	9	21
	<b>As of Dec 2015</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>
	<i>Difference Jul-Dec 15</i>	18	-22	40	-20	-11	-3	-10
Wales	As of Dec 2014	43	16	27	11	7	N/A	7
	As of Jul 2015	42	17	25	10	7	4	2
	<b>As of Dec 2015</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
	<i>Difference Jul-Dec 15</i>	-16	-3	-13	-7	-7	-1	2
<b>TOTAL United Kingdom</b>	As of Dec 2014	921	241	680	330	171	N/A	196
	As of Jul 2015	1,117	544	573	241	164	72	125
	<b>As of Dec 2015</b>	<b>1,293</b>	<b>524</b>	<b>769</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>110</b>
	<i>Difference Jul-Dec 15</i>	176	-20	196	-26	-35	19	-15

The number of youth in the process is the total of the youth who have entered into conversation plus the youth who are studying the institute courses. The number of youth facilitating core activities and accompanying others in core activities is out of those youth who are studying the institute courses.

The following account from Northern Ireland illustrates some of the fruits of the youth movement:

47 youth and junior youth attended a two-and-a-half day youth conference in Derry/Londonderry, that had been organised by the Bahá'í Council for Northern Ireland. The conference offered an opportunity to consider the contribution young people can make to the betterment of society. Following a welcome from the Deputy Mayor of Derry/Londonderry, youth studied sections from the materials used at the 114 youth conferences in 2013.



*Regional Youth gathering in Northern Ireland*

The impact of the youth conference could be seen in the many new activities that subsequently began. North of the province, a fledgling group of youth started coming together and began to study the remaining workshops of the youth conference materials with a view to beginning Ruhi Book 1. Some youth from Belfast are began to walk their path of service through animating youth groups and

teaching children's classes, after beginning the study of the sequence of courses in their community. Two new junior youth groups have started in addition to a children's class, and one conference participant has since declared their Faith in Bahá'u'lláh!

### **Youth Year of Service Programme**

Much of the work of the UK Pioneering & Travel Teaching Committee has been in facilitating youth who have arisen to offer a year of service. Inspired by a youth year of service programme that is in place in the Canary Islands, the National Assembly has asked the Committee to develop and implement a similar systematic programme for youth for their year of service in the UK. The programme has many elements, including a clear application process; guidelines to prepare the youth before the year commences; guidelines for institutions such as Local Assemblies who are receiving the youth; and guidelines for parents. The programme not only includes a structured service element, but also has within it a defined period of daily study and reflection to deepen the youth in various aspects of the Faith. In addition, the aim is for a mentor to be assigned to accompany and

...the aim is for a mentor to be assigned to accompany and befriend the youth throughout their period of service...

befriend the youth throughout their period of service to support, encourage and regularly consult and reflect with them. It is hoped that this programme will be further rolled out in the coming year as more experience is gained.

### **Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity undergraduate seminars 2015**

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.

...study a set of materials that helps them build an evolving conceptual framework ...

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 eighth year in which the Institute offered its seminars for undergraduate students in the UK. All four years of the seminar were offered and held in Wellington College over 10 days in August, with a total of 79 participants attending, primarily from the UK and Republic of Ireland with a small number from Iceland, Norway and Kosovo.



*ISGP gatherings*

## **f. Summer Schools**

Five summer schools took place this year across the United Kingdom. All of them focused on the pertinent theme of ‘making sense of the world’s crisis’, exploring the ways in which we can most constructively respond to the deepening troubles that have assailed the world.



*Regional Summer School in Wales*

As the National Assembly wrote to all summer school participants in a letter dated 1 August 2015, “summer schools hold a special place in the rhythm of community life.” Quoting from the beloved Guardian, the National Assembly observed that “the purpose of summer schools ‘is to deepen the knowledge of the friends’, ‘so that they may in turn become useful channels for the diffusion of the Divine fragrances’.” Schools thus complement the work of the Plan and indeed all our efforts to serve, and it was heartening to see that once again a number of participants hailed from the community of interest. Our hope is that an expanding pool of friends, family and contacts – as well as the believers – will be able to take advantage of the spiritually enriching experience at schools this coming summer.

The National Assembly is grateful to the Regional Councils for Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland, and also those who served on the Residential Schools Committee for England, for organising the schools with such love and efficiency. In keeping with the growing capacity of the Bahá’í Council for England, the National Assembly decided to ask that Council to now also take the lead in organising the schools that take place in England for next year and thereafter.

...spiritually  
enriching  
experience at  
schools ...

## **g. Strengthening the educational process**

Foremost among the conditions required for growth, the House of Justice tells us, “is an institute process gaining in strength, given its centrality to fostering the movement of populations”.<sup>12</sup> As explained below, it is the institute process that develops the capacity within individuals to carry out acts of service. When effectively carried out, it propels growth

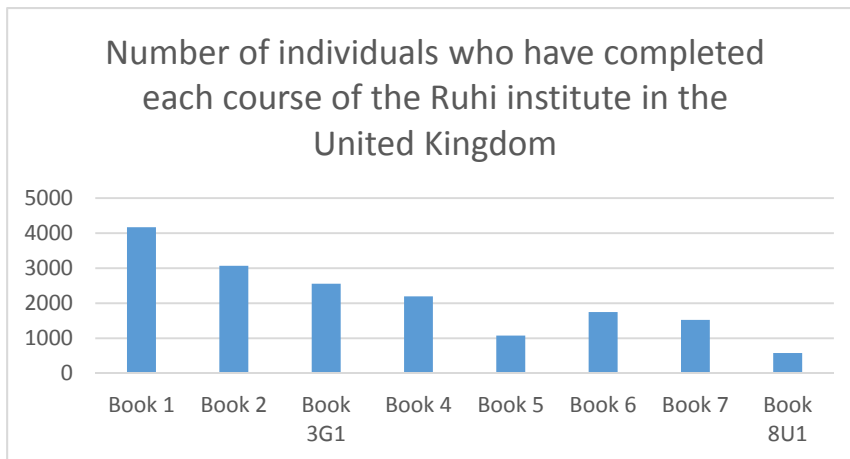
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<sup>12</sup> 29 December 2015 message

in activity, enabling growing contingents of Bahá'ís and seekers alike to walk a path of service, contributing in turn to the advancement of a community as a whole. Three distinct educational imperatives arise from the institute process: children's classes, the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme, and study circles, which we will consider separately.

**Study circles and building capacity for service**

The following table indicates the numbers of individuals – both Bahá'ís and those from the community of interest – who have completed courses of the Ruhi Institute.



**Table 2: Numbers who have completed studying courses of the Ruhi institute**

Behind each number is an effort to build capacity for service to our fellow-man, and it is gratifying to see the steady growth in the UK's 'pyramid of resources',

and to consider the extensive efforts that have been rendered to make this possible. It is wonderful to see, for example, that over 4,100 people have completed Ruhi Book 1, with around 220 having done so between November 2014 and October 2015 alone.

The training undertaken in study circles helps participants to enter distinctive paths of service, including running devotional meetings, children's classes, junior youth groups, and study circles themselves. Thus we can view the fruits of this training process in the overall numbers of core activities that are now running (see Table 3).

While the proportions of trained resources running children's classes, junior youth groups and study circles has remained fairly constant compared to previous years, it is pleasing to note that a greater proportion of those who have completed Book 1 are now hosting devotional meetings. The figure is now approximately 1 in 11, up from 1 in 15 last year.

Another figure that stands out in the above table is the number of participants who are friends of the Faith. These 1,644 souls in fact represent 42% of the total participants, and it is wonderful to see this figure continue to grow from year to year, an achievement that was unimaginable 10 years or so ago.



**...a greater proportion of those who have completed Book 1 are now hosting devotional meetings**

**Table 3: Core activities in progress in the United Kingdom**

Region	Date	Devotional Meetings			Children's Classes			Junior Youth Groups			Study Circles			Total Core Activities		
		No.	Att	FoF	No.	Att	FoF	No.	Att	FoF	No.	Att	FoF	No.	Att	FoF
England	As of Apr 2015	237	1,314	570	101	465	273	58	335	241	178	592	176	574	2,706	1,260
	<b>As of Feb 2016</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>1,731</b>	<b>646</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>484</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>686</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>688</b>	<b>3,191</b>	<b>1,325</b>
	<i>Difference Apr 15-Feb 16</i>	81	417	76	11	19	-5	2	-45	-35	20	94	29	114	485	65
Northern Ireland	As of Apr 2015	12	87	12	5	29	27	7	40	33	7	32	14	31	188	86
	<b>As of Feb 2016</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>114</b>
	<i>Difference Apr 15-Feb 16</i>	6	-8	3	3	17	16	0	-1	-1	12	37	10	21	45	28
Scotland	As of Apr 2015	26	131	53	11	52	32	5	17	15	18	54	19	60	254	119
	<b>As of Feb 2016</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>137</b>
	<i>Difference Apr 15-Feb 16</i>	12	64	18	-1	-12	-9	0	-3	-5	3	16	14	14	65	18
Wales	As of Apr 2015	12	90	41	3	11	4	2	17	10	7	22	7	24	140	62
	<b>As of Feb 2016</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>68</b>
	<i>Difference Apr 15-Feb 16</i>	3	1	-7	0	10	4	1	-6	-2	13	10	11	17	15	6
<b>TOTAL United Kingdom</b>	As of Apr 2015	287	1,622	676	120	557	336	72	409	299	210	700	216	689	3,288	1,527
	<b>As of Feb 2016</b>	<b>389</b>	<b>2,096</b>	<b>766</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>591</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>857</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>855</b>	<b>3,898</b>	<b>1,644</b>
	<i>Difference Apr 15-Feb 16</i>	102	474	90	13	34	6	3	-55	-43	48	157	64	166	610	117

**Abbreviations:** **No.** = Number of core activities taking place, **Att** = Number of participants attending core activities, **FoF** = Number of participants attending core activities who are friends of the Faith.



### Quality of tutoring

How can the community attract ever more participants into the sequence of courses? How can we increase our capacity to translate the training into a multiplication of activities? How can we help participants become more actively engaged in their own learning, and help them commit to a path of service to humanity, addressing both its material and spiritual dimensions? One key component in any answer to these questions is the quality of tutoring. In the words of the House of Justice, “progress relies to a large extent on the quality of the efforts of those serving as tutors.”<sup>13</sup>



*Study Circle in North East cluster Scotland*

Raising the quality of tutoring has been an area of focus over the last year. The Bahá'í Council for Scotland, for example, described the following:

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In February last year, a regional tutor gathering took place to increase the quality of tutoring. The effect has been very positive and through the constant support of the area coordinators a

marked increase in the number of those tutoring a book and those walking a path of service has been observed. While in October 2015 only 3 regular study circles were running in the North East, by February this had increased to 8. With increases of this nature and the number of those serving as tutors increasing as well, the necessity for tutor gatherings for sharing experience and consulting on various other related matters had by now emerged.

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Developing the capacity of tutors will be a particular focus of the coming Five Year Plan, as will the question of how to raise up a “cadre of tutors”.

### Intensive training

The community has also continued to learn about intensive training over the past year. England’s intensive training courses in the summer saw two significant changes compared to previous years:

- I) An existing study circle attended with their tutor to study the next book in the sequence together, a possibility that is being encouraged in forthcoming intensive training gatherings.
- II) Numbers of adults participating increased compared to previous years, particularly to study book 8.

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<sup>13</sup> 29 December 2015 message

Over winter, intensive training shifted to the sub-regional level in England, with a number of cluster based intensive events taking place.

In Scotland, meanwhile, smaller intensive events were organised during the winter including in some of its more remote communities, allowing a local group of people to continue through the sequence, often with the help of an outside tutor. At the same time, one main



*Tutor gathering in Kent*

hub of activity was organised for study circles to run alongside each other, and even to work alongside each other – the book 5 and 6 participants, for instance, were able to join together for an outreach project as part of the training. Interestingly, some of the intensive training gatherings catered for all three educational imperatives at the same time, as this account from the Western Isles cluster illustrates:

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About 40 friends of diverse ages and backgrounds came together for a weekend to pray, learn and serve together. There was a wonderful spiritual atmosphere created by prayers, singing and artistic devotionals.

There were many different opportunities to study and learn together:

- Book 1 'Reflections on the life of spirit' and book 2 'Arising to serve' from the Ruhi Institute series were offered
  - Junior youth were able to study 'learning about excellence' from the junior youth series
  - The children had lovely sessions, learning about virtues
  - The letter of the Universal House of Justice, 21<sup>st</sup> April 2015 was studied.
- 

Indicative of the growing need to meet the demands of the institute, a task force was also appointed in Scotland to help the work of the coordinators in preparation for intensive training.

### Ruhi Book 8

Ruhi book 8, on the subject of “The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh”, includes invaluable exploration of the series of global Plans of the Universal House of Justice that guide our endeavours. A great many friends have benefitted from this study in recent years, including some who did not continue with earlier books in the sequence of courses but may now be inspired to do so, and this will no doubt help them in their efforts to serve the Cause. While we do not yet have figures for last year, we know that between November 2014 and October 2015, well over 100 people completed at least the first Unit of book 8, which we are delighted to see.



*Summer intensive training in Grittleton House*

### Ruhi Book 9

Another significant development this year was the introduction of the first unit of Ruhi Book 9, which is gradually being rolled out across the UK. The overall subject is “Gaining an Historical Perspective”. The first unit focuses on the Eternal Covenant, and helps participants explore such weighty themes as the attributes of God and the implications these hold for our lives. The National Assembly hopes more and more of the friends will be able to complete this Unit over the coming year.

...Book 9...is  
gradually being  
rolled out across  
the UK

### Children’s classes

**Table 4: Number of Children’s classes and participants in the UK**

Date	Number of Children’s classes	Total number of Participants	Estimated friends of the Faith
As of Apr 2011	106	418	229
As of Apr 2015	120	557	336
<b>As of Feb 2016</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>591</b>	<b>342</b>
<i>Difference Apr 15-Feb 16</i>	<b>13</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>6</b>

As indicated in the table above, the number of children’s classes, total participants and the numbers of friends of the Faith who attend, all gradually rose again this year.

Similar to recent years, the proportion of non-Bahá’í children who attend these classes is high – nearly 58%. This underscores the community’s burgeoning capacity to speak with others,

especially parents, on the importance of educating children in spiritual matters, and to invite participants. This is a vital capacity on which to build!

Indeed, in some clusters, tremendous progress has been made in this respect. The Northern Lights cluster in Northern Ireland, to take one example, has expanded the number of children’s classes to 8, with 46 children of whom 43 are from the community of interest.



*Children's class in Dumfries, Galloway.*

Training in grades 2 and 3 of the children’s class materials also continued apace over the last year. Joyfully, there are now a small number of classes that have progressed through the first 3 grades, signalling a rise in the capacity of teachers to sustain children’s classes and to impart, even more fully, the education that is so vital for the tender hearts and minds of children.

### **Junior youth spiritual empowerment programme**

As we review progress in the past year with the rolling out of the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme, it is worth keeping in mind the particular place that it has in the process of growth. In its 29 December 2015 message, the Universal House of Justice refer to “its particular value at this time” of “enervating materialism and splintering societies” and the roll youth particularly have in assisting “those younger than themselves to withstand the corrosive forces that especially target them.” During the coming Plan we will see the programme emerge as an important feature in the development of clusters.

**Table 5: Number of Junior Youth groups and participants in the UK**

Date	Number of JY groups	Total number of participants	Estimated number of friends of the Faith
As of Apr 2011	67	340	231
As of Apr 2015	72	409	299
<b>As of Feb 2016</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>256</b>
<i>Difference Apr 15-Feb 16</i>	3	-55	-43

Overall numbers of junior groups remained broadly similar to previous years, as indicated in the table above. Yet significant strides were taken this year in relation to the quality of animating. In July 2015, a first national animator seminar was held, with 102 participants from across the UK and some neighbouring countries. This gathering provided an opportunity

In July 2015, a first national animator seminar was held...

to study some of the junior youth texts together, to reflect on guidance and share insights gained in the field, all with a view to strengthening existing junior youth groups and starting new ones.

Indeed, it is pleasing to see that in some clusters a pattern is emerging of animators coming together regularly for seminars, perhaps over a full weekend, to reflect and study some of the higher-level junior youth materials.

Among many of those animating junior youth groups, further attention was given this year to the value of studying at least one complete text of the junior youth materials within a three-month cycle. To help achieve this, a number of junior youth camps took place, of varying size and duration, in different clusters. One of the London junior youth camp organisers commented:



South/South East England youth gathering in Nuthurst

“The junior youth camps were part of an ongoing implementation of the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme in the cluster. With a joyful atmosphere they provided a useful space to build the capacity of the animators and to deepen the sense of commitment in the junior youth.”

*Raising animators*

One significant question that the community is trying to learn about is how to raise up animators from

youth in wider society. In this connection, we are blessed to have a number of clusters associated with the Learning Site for Northern Europe, which at this time is Utrecht in the Netherlands. One particular capacity the friends there have been developing is to speak to youth about the role they can play in spiritually empowering young adolescents and to train them to animate their own junior youth groups. Drawing on this learning, we have already seen some wonderful cases in the UK of youth, hitherto strangers, who rapidly train and arise to lend their share to the work of the Plan. The following is one example from Hackney in Central London:

...we have already seen some wonderful cases in the UK of youth, hitherto strangers, who rapidly train and arise...

Friends in Hackney have been making efforts over an extended period to engage youth in conversations that inspire them to enter the institute process and begin serving the community. Over several cycles of focused effort and outreach, much is being learnt. In particular, the friends involved are learning how to work with large numbers

of youth who are at various stages on a path towards Bahá'u'lláh, and seeing how to help those at each stage move forward with each passing cycle.

Recently there has been some new experience with youth who are ready to advance through the courses of the institute in a short period of time. On two separate occasions since the end of summer 2015, a youth with a particular keenness and purity of heart, was met during an outreach, completed books 1 and 5 intensively and not only declared their Faith in Bahá'u'lláh but within a few months (in one case just 1 month) of the initial meeting began to reach out in order to start their own junior youth group. While there is plenty still to learn, it is encouraging to see that no matter how many people we have to meet first, no matter how many dead-ends we encounter, it is all worth it to find that one soul.

While these successes and newly developing capacities are important, it is also clear from the data above that the community has been struggling in relation to participation levels, especially from the wider community. This leads us to ask:



*Collective project, Manchester*

- How can we increase our capacity to have conversations of substance with junior youth and youth about the programme and the way in which they can contribute to the betterment of society through engaging with the programme?
- How can a growing contingent of animators be cultivated, and how can more of the friends, and especially youth, be enabled and accompanied to enter this significant arena of service?

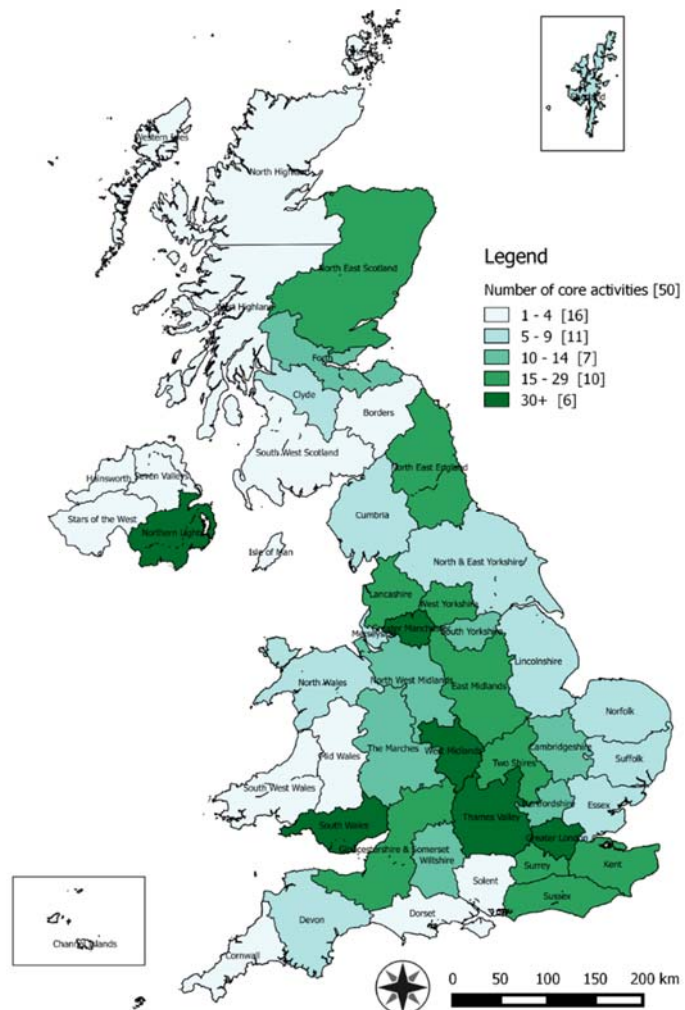
### **The training institute and schemes of coordination**

As will be discussed below, the work of the training institute is now overseen by four regional training institute boards. The boards have endeavoured to strengthen the scheme of coordination through, for example, periodic weekend-long seminars with area coordinators, and three-monthly reporting systems for area coordinators to share plans for the accompaniment of cluster coordinators.

The work of 'coordination' is not, however, necessarily limited to the coordinators. In some clusters, attention has been given in the past year to raising up **teams of collaborators** (sometimes called 'helpers') to assist in the work for children's classes, junior youth groups and study circle in those settings where it is required. As the House of Justice explained in its 12 December 2011 message to all National Spiritual Assemblies:

... where the demands of large-scale growth are asserting themselves, each stage of the educational process promoted by the training institute must receive added support. The work of the coordinator should be reinforced by assistance from a growing number of experienced individuals, and meetings for the exchange of information and insights become regular and more systematic in approach.

**Figure 2: Map of total number of core activities taking place in each cluster in the United Kingdom**



**Nurturing a devotional character**

In 2014, the Bahá'í world was blessed to receive two powerful letters from the Universal House of Justice, dated 1 August and 18 December, on the subject of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár and prayer. These letters unveiled glorious insights into the “dynamic interaction between worship and endeavours to uplift the spiritual, social and material conditions of society”, and helped us understand the essential role that devotional meetings play in the “new pattern of how society can be” that the Bahá'ís are called upon to create.

With hearts stirred by this outpouring of guidance, we learnt too of experience from around the world demonstrating the impact that devotional meetings can have in community-building endeavours. We heard, for instance, that in many of the most advanced clusters, more than half of the core activities are devotional meetings, and in some of these clusters the vast majority of Bahá'í homes hold a regular devotional.

In this light, it has been a great source of joy to witness a redoubling of efforts to run devotional meetings in the UK, as summarised in the table below.

From April 2015 to February 2016, the number of devotional meetings rose by more than 100 across the UK – an outstanding achievement! Numbers of participants, including seekers, also rose appreciably, altogether indicating a growth in our capacity to speak of prayer and to invite thirsting souls to join these

From April 2015 to February 2016, the number of devotional meetings rose by more than 100 across the UK

meetings. These efforts are undoubtedly sowing seeds and exerting influence in communities across the land, and we urge the friends everywhere to build on this strength; to partake of the sweetness of the devotional gathering if they are not already doing so; and to help others, including those studying or having completed Book 1, to also arise in this fashion.

**Table 6: Number of devotional meetings and participants in the UK**

Date	Total number of devotional meetings	Total number of participants	Estimated number of friends of the Faith
As of Apr 2015	287	1,622	676
<b>As of Feb 2016</b>	<b>389</b>	<b>2,096</b>	<b>766</b>
<i>Difference Apr 15- Feb 16</i>	102	474	90

The following summary from the North and East Sector in the Greater London Cluster offers an example of the proliferation of devotional meetings over the last year.

Through focusing on devotional meetings to enhance the growth process and assist in achieving the goal of doubling the number of core activities, several new initiatives were put in motion:

- In the Barnet community, a Sector Teaching Committee (STC) member presented the goal from the National Assembly at the Nineteen-Day Feast, sharing a quick review of statistics and some paragraphs from the 18 December 2014 message. Friends were inspired to think of their efforts as “countless beacons of light”, reassured that the size of a devotional was unimportant compared to its spirit and consistency and that devotionals need not be elaborate – often simple devotionals have a powerful effect. The concept of family devotionals was also introduced. Subsequently the Spiritual Assembly of Barnet set a goal of 10 devotionals by Rīḍván 2016, a goal which has been achieved and will hopefully be surpassed by the end of the Plan.
- In Enfield, a group of 3 ladies completing a book 6 were helped to initiate a series of firesides based upon the themes in ‘Anna’s presentation’. Over time, aided by participation in sector-level outreach activity over the summer and their progression to book 7, their confidence grew. Sometimes using the time before and after their book 7 to make plans, they have since collaborated to start 3 different monthly devotional meetings – one at a social housing home



*Devotional Singing at Intensive Training in Aberdeenshire*



with elderly participants, one at a family home and one at a public hall – attended by approximately 20 people in total.

- New Bahá'ís participating in Books 1 and 2 of the Ruhi books have been helped to co-organise and select readings for some of the devotional meetings.

Through these efforts, the number of devotionals rose from 8 in April 2015 to 27 in March 2016. Across the same period, total numbers of participants increased from 56 to 139, and those from the community of interest rose from 17 to 49.

And as the below account highlights, one aspect of the devotional meeting that makes them easy to initiate is their simplicity.

Devotionals come in all shapes and sizes and are a great way of putting spirituality at the heart of a neighbourhood. In its simplest form, a devotional can simply be two individuals sharing a prayer together. The most elaborate devotionals may be themed and involve music and printed programmes. Some friends have devotionals in their own homes, others use a public venue. The Bahá'ís on Shetland recently met and consulted about holding devotionals in the Islands. They quickly discovered that many of the Bahá'í families on the islands were happy to host devotionals, and plans were made to start these. This resulted in a tripling of the number of devotionals in a very short space of time!

Meanwhile, devotional meeting 'encounters' have been held in some clusters, to both encourage more friends to begin them and to reflect on the quality of our devotional meetings.

#### ***h. Faroe Islands***

The National Assembly has been delighted to note the efforts that are being made to develop the community-building work in the Faroe Islands. The maintenance of a junior youth programme for the Bahá'í junior youth and their friends continues to be an important area of learning there. Those from last year's group have grown beyond the junior youth age, and the friends are exploring ways for their training to continue. Promisingly, it is hoped that one or more of these youth can be trained to animate a subsequent group. A new group has started this year with a Bahá'í junior youth and 2/3 friends, which is no doubt benefitting greatly from the experience of the group that preceded it. In addition, the regular children's class continues unabated and is providing an important educational foundation.



*A group of junior youth participated in a weekend camp with their friends, aided by a long-standing pioneer to the Faroes (Lynn Reveal) and a Faroese Baha'i (Morag Donald), currently living in Scotland.*

### ***i. Distribution of Literature***

The flow of literature is a vital resource that is needed for both the expansion and consolidation of the Faith. The availability at a reasonable price of the Word of God, prayer books, introductory literature on the Faith, as well as Ruhi books, is a task that is done admirably by the team of friends at Bahá'í Books UK (BBUK). Previous years' reports explained how the National Assembly was guiding the efforts of BBUK to restructure in a manner that reduced costs and thus kept the price of books as low as possible. This year the Committee managed to reduce the costs of running BBUK to less than £3,000 per annum, primarily by eliminating the cost of storage thanks to the kind offer of a believer to house the books in a warehouse with no charge. Sales continued to be at around £52,000 per annum. The team is looking into further plans to streamline its operations. It would particularly value engaging additional agents around the country who would stock books and sell them at local events and thus increase the availability of literature to the community.

### ***j. Developing institutional capacity***

#### **Regional Bahá'í Councils**

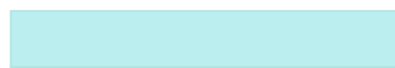
The Regional Bahá'í Councils play a pivotal role in the work of the Plan. Their many tasks include providing a strategic overview to the efforts in each region based on an analysis of statistics and information; developing the capacities of Area Teaching Committees and strengthening Local Spiritual Assemblies; channelling resources and funds; providing spaces for reflection and planning; organising summer schools and other gatherings; and many other things besides.

We have been gladdened to witness the continued development of the Councils over the last year. As part of this:

- The Councils are learning the art of working as a corporate body. This is especially the case for the Bahá'í Council for England, which is learning to handle the volume and complexity of the issues they are charged with overseeing.
- The councils for England, Northern Ireland and Scotland now have secretariat aides in place to support them administratively.
- The councils for England and Scotland also have statistics officers, while the council for Northern Ireland also benefits from the assistance of an individual in the area of statistics.

Various gatherings have been organised by the Councils, sometimes for institutions and sometimes open to all the friends. These have proved to be an invaluable space in which to refine collective vision and make plans for the work ahead.

The work of Area Teaching Committees has also continued to develop. For example, 'cycle planner tools' have been adopted by a number of Committees, and are already proving their value in helping to systematise process of accompaniment, both in strengthening existing activities and starting new ones. In Scotland, a productive gathering took place for the three Area Teaching Committees, which has not only helped in matters such as preparing for



**The Councils are  
learning the art of  
working as a  
corporate body**

reflection meetings, but has also led to collaboration between the Committees, who are now regularly sharing ideas and questions with each other.


### **The training institute**

In a letter of 14 May 2015, the National Assembly announced to the community that it was timely to re-establish separate training institute boards to operate in each of the four regions: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. This significant step was taken in consultation with Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi, and in recognition of the development of the community as a whole, the individuals within it, and the emerging strength to be found in the institutions. The Training Institute Board for the United Kingdom was therefore disbanded. The regional training institute boards work under their corresponding Regional Bahá'í Council – signifying an expansion of the role of the Councils – and at the same they collaborate closely with the Institution of the Counsellors.

The National Assembly has been delighted to see the share that each of these regional training institute boards has already lent to the work of the Cause in the UK, and can already witness that this new arrangement will serve to accelerate both the flow of individuals through the sequence of courses and the movement of clusters from one stage of growth to the next, as the number of activities and those engaged in them multiply. We note too with joy that the boards are already implementing systematic schemes, such as periodic seminars, to accompany 'area coordinators', who are tasked in turn with accompanying cluster coordinators. We are sure that focused efforts in this direction will greatly help the overall work of the training institute.

### **National Spiritual Assembly**

One of the key features of the functioning of the National Spiritual Assembly this year was the deepening of its relationship with the Institution of the Counsellors. This was particularly expressed through its regular consultations with Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi, who joined almost every meeting, including a special retreat weekend mentioned below. The learning and insights offered by the Counsellor were essential to the functioning of the National Assembly. In relation to key aspects of the Five Year Plan, the National Assembly would not take a decision without seeking the views of the Counsellor. During this year, as explained below, a number of elements of Bahá'í community life such as its spiritual health and protection, the development of the capacity of Local Spiritual Assemblies, and the intellectual life of the community, were explored in depth, in light of guidance, with the Counsellor. Again, the wisdom, vision and insights shared by the Counsellor were and will continue to be indispensable in exploring these and other themes.



...this new arrangement will serve to accelerate both the flow of individuals through the sequence of courses and the movement of clusters from one stage of growth to the next...

With the expansion of the activities of the community, the increasing complexity of the work, and the need to address some longstanding administrative challenges, it became clear to the National Assembly that it was necessary to buttress the human resources in the National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds with additional staff. One full-time person was added to the staff in the Department of the Secretariat and a further two-and-a-half persons were added to the Services Department – a Department which provides all the necessary infrastructure and logistics to support the Department of the Secretariat, Office of Public Affairs and Finance Office. This increase in staff also provided the resources to be able to more effectively manage a larger group of volunteers that are engaged in numerous tasks. Among the projects being attended to are: production of an office manual; reviewing

...increase in staff also provided the resources to be able to more effectively manage a larger group of volunteers ...



London Junior Youth camp

the database of believers in preparation for the eventual introduction of a new database system; developing a new finance system for issuing receipts and verifying the Bahá'í status of donors; quality checking tens of thousands of pages of recently scanned archive materials; and so forth.

The following graphics give an indication of the extent of the day-to-day work of staff in the National Office. However, this represents only a fraction of the flow of work. For example, one key member of the Secretariat staff alone received more than 32,000 emails and sent in excess of 15,000 emails in 2015.



The National Spiritual Assembly wishes to express its special thanks to Elaine Yourtchi who retires this year after 26 years of notable service in the Finance Office. We wish her every happiness and joy as she moves into a new phase in her exemplary services to the Cause.

### **Local Spiritual Assemblies**

One of the achievements of this Five Year Plan is the evident increase in the capacity of Local Spiritual Assemblies to contribute towards the advancement of entry by troops in their cluster. This is shown by their increased ability to read their reality of their community and to plan accordingly in order to contribute to the goals of their cluster, especially through their heightened ability to create an environment of support and to accompany friends who have trained in the institute to carry out acts of service, as well as in their endeavours to foster the pattern of Bahá'í life in their communities.

The National Spiritual Assembly has developed two deepening programmes for Local Spiritual Assemblies which will be made available in the coming months. The first is intended to strengthen and develop the capacity of Local Assemblies to contribute to the process of growth, and the second concerns their role in fostering the spiritual health of their communities. The National Assembly is confident that both of these extensive deepening programmes will greatly assist Local Assemblies in carrying out their most important duties.

### **The collection and use of statistics**

The National Statistics Officer, Eric Harshfield, reports that in relation to the two software packages from the Bahá'í World Centre – the Statistical Report Program (SRP) and the Statistical Report Program for the training institute (SRPi) – training sessions are held in a cluster to introduce the software soon after it launches a programme of growth, as well as whenever the need arises, such as when roles change for individuals who are responsible for maintaining the software. These sessions provide an opportunity to reflect on the collection of statistics in a cluster and the use of the Cluster Growth Profile as a tool to aid analysis and planning. A significant focus over the past year has been to encourage the rollout of both software packages to all clusters in the United Kingdom, and substantial progress has been made in this regard.

...these sessions provide an opportunity to reflect on the collection of statistics in a cluster...

The past year has also seen encouraging developments in accompanying and supporting the work at the regional level. A Regional Statistics Officer, Carmelia Carew, was recently appointed by the Bahá'í Council for Scotland; following accompaniment and training in her role, there have been notably enhanced levels of collaboration in the collection of statistics between regional agencies in Scotland. Likewise, the assistant to the Bahá'í Council for Northern Ireland, Arian Keogan-Nooshabadi, has been instrumental in facilitating the collection of statistics in that region. In Wales, the Council Secretary has primarily been responsible for gathering statistics at the regional level, but recent efforts have now made it possible to begin encouraging the cluster agencies themselves to take ownership of this task. Finally, in England efforts are being made to enhance levels of collaboration between

the Council Secretary, Secretariat Aide, and Regional Statistics Officer, Naim Peyman, so that joint plans can be made for accompanying and supporting cluster agencies in the use of statistics for analysis and planning. One outcome of this is an increase in the proportion of clusters in England that regularly prepare a cluster growth profiles at the end of each cycle.

Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi shared a method of tracking the progress of the youth movement that was introduced by the International Teaching Centre. Reports are now prepared every six months on the progress of the youth movement in the United Kingdom.

An exciting recent development has been the introduction of the Statistical Report Program version 3.0 (SRP 3) by the World Centre, which brings together the previous version of the SRP, the SRPi, and the cluster growth profile. This new programme, which will be introduced to the community in the early months of the coming Plan, not only allows for the recording of basic information on believers and the locations where they reside but also on the activities of the training institute and its participants, whether registered as Bahá'ís or not, and on the quarterly cycles of activity through which a community grows. This will be an even more effective and useful planning tool to assist cluster, area and regional agencies in their planning efforts.

#### **Management of cluster, inter-cluster, regional and national events**

As the momentum and complexity of the Plan increases, an area of growing importance to support the efforts of institutions has been the ability to manage events such as intensive training occasions; coordinator, tutor, animator and children's class teacher gatherings; cluster and regional summer schools; Area Teaching Committee training events; cluster institutional events; inter-cluster gatherings; and national events, which are becoming a growing feature of Bahá'í community life. Administratively, this entails finding and booking suitable venues that are reasonably priced and in suitable locations, organising the registration of participants, and managing the logistics of the event itself. The National Assembly is in the process of putting together a team of individuals who can take up this challenge, and a corps of registrars is being trained. This process is ongoing.

#### **UK Bahá'í magazine and communications**

The National Spiritual Assembly has been concerned this year about its manner of communication with the community. Of course the National Assembly's email service NEWS, and its download website, bahadata.com, are the prime vehicles for sharing communications, but not all of the members of the community are using the internet and electronic mail.

For about five years now its main hard copy communications media has been the magazine, *UK Bahá'í*. When this current style of magazine was brought into being, it was designed to provide both current news and communications, as well as more in depth articles. However, with the increasing cost of producing and distributing the magazine resulting in a reduction in the number of editions annually from 6 to 4, and the lead time taken to produce, print and distribute the magazine, news and communications items were not being received in a timely manner by the community.

To begin to redress this, *UK Bahá'í* will shortly become a magazine containing articles and other information about the Faith and its progress, which will be presented in such a way that it accessible to both to the Bahá'ís and those who have an interest in the Faith and its work. The Assembly has yet to decide how to resolve the challenge of getting hard copy news and communications to the community swiftly, without incurring excessive cost. This will be the subject of ongoing consultation.

In addition, the download website has been redesigned and relaunched this year thanks to the kind assistance of Mr. Farris Massoudi. The new site, updated to be more accessible and easier to use, contains a wealth of resources including:

- letters from the Universal House of Justice
- Messages from the National Spiritual Assembly.
- The National Spiritual Assembly's guidance for Local Spiritual Assemblies and Groups
- Downloadable versions of *UKBahá'í* and regional newsletters in PDF format.



*Wales: It looks like a study circle that has broken into groups!*

### 3. THE PLAN AHEAD

In its 2 January 2016 message to the Bahá'ís of the World, the House of Justice expressed the hope that “study of the [29 December 2015] message will spread rapidly throughout the community”. It also drew attention to the importance of putting “whatever administrative and organizational arrangements are necessary to ensure the most auspicious start to the Plan at Riḍván.” With the forces of disintegration becoming ever-more pronounced, there is no moment to lose, and the National Assembly has been delighted to witness the many efforts that have been made to ensure that the work of the next Plan, which seamlessly builds on the achievements of previous Plans, can begin promptly at Riḍván 2016.

Over 22-24 January, members of UK institutions – including the National Assembly, Auxiliary Board members, Regional Councils and training institute boards – gathered together to study the 29 December 2015 message and to begin building a unity of vision for the work in the five years ahead. We were blessed to be joined a member of the International Teaching Centre, Counsellor Alison Milston, and four members



*International Counsellor, Alison Milston (left) at the Institutional gathering*

of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Europe – Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi, Bernard Lo Cascio, Sabà Mazza and Paul Verheij. Observers from a number of nearby countries also came and enriched the consultations.

...many efforts...have been made to ensure that the work of the next Plan...can begin promptly at Riḍván 2016

The UK institutions thus began to appreciate the “truly formidable” nature of the objectives of the Plan ahead, and the “herculean labour” and “sacrifice” required to accomplish them. Much of the work will be directed towards accomplishing the global goals set forth by the House of Justice in this passage:

In the last five years, the path that leads to the emergence of an intensive programme of growth has become more readily discernible. It must be earnestly pursued. In the Plan that will commence this Riḍván, we are calling for growth to be accelerated in all clusters where it has begun. Notwithstanding the natural ebb and flow characteristic of an organic process, there should appear a clear arc of progress over the course of twenty cycles. This combined effort should seek to raise the number of clusters where a programme of growth has become intensive to 5,000 by Riḍván 2021.



Following the UK institutional gathering, a series of gatherings were organised across the UK for members of agencies and Local Assemblies in groups of clusters to come together and



*National Institutional gathering, January 2016*

plan for the work ahead. At the time of writing, these have already taken place in the North of England, London and Northern Ireland, with more planned to take place in Wales, Southeast, Southwest and Central England, and for the northern and southern parts of Scotland. The alacrity and sense of mission with which the friends have approached

these meetings, and the heightened desire to collaborate, especially between cluster agencies and Local Assemblies, augurs well for meeting the challenges ahead in the next Plan.

With the process of consultation and planning well underway, the House of Justice tells us that “action must then ensue.” As the friends arise to fulfil the goals of the next chapter in the unfoldment of the Divine Plan, they may be assured of the fervent prayers of the National Assembly, that their devoted labours may be a lodestone for heavenly blessings and confirmations.

...the heightened desire to collaborate, especially between cluster agencies and Local Assemblies

#### **4. INTELLECTUAL LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY**

In its 27 December 2005 message to the Conference of Counsellors, the House of Justice wrote: “There are a host of elements that comprise Bahá’í community life, shaped over the decades, which must be further refined and developed.” The intellectual life of the community is one of those elements.

Commenting on the efforts of the Association for Bahá’í Studies which has played a leading role in promoting the intellectual life of the community in recent decades, the Supreme Body in a message addressed to a National Assembly dated 24 July 2013 stated: “It is timely, then, to reflect upon the many years of experience of the Association, the coherence of its undertakings with the major areas of action in which Bahá’ís are engaged...” It is envisaged that this will contribute to the evolution of a framework through which the intellectual life of society can become the concern of the entire Bahá’í community. This therefore is the subject of ongoing consultations between the Counsellor and the National Assembly, in light of the guidance of the House of Justice and the contributions of those engaged in this field.

To draw upon the insights of these individuals, the National Assembly, in collaboration with the Institution of the Counsellors, arranged two gatherings to study the above letter concerning the intellectual life of the community and its greater involvement in the life of society. These gatherings, which took place in November 2015 in Edinburgh and London, were open to all, but with limited spaces, marked the beginning of a process of consultation and learning. The aim of the gatherings was to open up a space where individuals could come together with members of the institutions to reflect on the new guidance that had come from the House of Justice. The National Assembly was delighted at the enthusiastic response from the community, but more particularly to the positive contributions that were made at each of the gatherings. This has already informed an initial consultation between Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi and the National Assembly, but further reflection and consultation is required so that clarity emerges as to how to move this area of learning forward.

These gatherings...marked the beginning of a process of consultation and learning.

## 5. SPIRITUAL HEALTH & PROTECTION OF THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY

For an entire weekend in September 2015, the National Spiritual Assembly, together with Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi, studied and consulted upon guidance relating to the spiritual health of the community, including protection matters. It was a rich and varied consultation covering a range of subjects under this important theme. A number of areas of learning for the National Assembly were identified and two of these it described as being of overarching importance; namely how to bring the community closer to the Universal House of Justice and how to facilitate a greater flow of love to the community. The consultation outlined some initial ways the National Assembly would approach learning about these. Other important areas of learning also emerged:

[learning]...how to bring the community closer to the Universal House of Justice and how to facilitate a greater flow of love to the community

In relation to the expansion and consolidation work:

- Learn how to articulate universal participation towards a common goal in a way that embraces the entire community
- Learn how to be more encouraging of the achievements of the believers, the community and institutions.
- Learn how to support the efforts of the community to engage in collective endeavours towards a common goal at a cluster level
- Learn how to work in a few clusters to enable all those on our list of believers to engage in the work of the Plan and to measure this

In relation to the protection of the individual, the community and its institutions:

- Learn how to develop the capacity of Local Spiritual Assembly in their efforts to foster the spiritual health of their communities.
- Learn how to widen the vision of the Pastoral Care agencies of the National Spiritual Assembly in the context of the spiritual health of the community
- Learn how to better deepen believers who are challenged by the laws to overcome their difficulties by raising their awareness of the significance of the Revelation and empowering them to engage in acts of service. This would include learning to work with Local Assemblies and Auxiliary Board members.
- Learn how to increase the believers' (and particularly the youths') understanding of and devotion to the laws and principles of the Faith. This would include learning to work with Local Assemblies and Auxiliary Board members.

In relation to the use of social media:

- Learn how to take advantage of social media and the internet, including official Bahá'í resources, for the advancement of the Faith and to promote a greater expression of Bahá'í spirit and etiquette in these spaces.

Of course each of these is an area of endeavour in itself, but already the National Assembly has embarked upon some initial efforts to learn about these aspects of a healthy community. This includes preparing and conducting a deepening on the spiritual health of the community for the pastoral affairs agencies; engaging more directly in supporting individuals and institutions as they face challenging issues so that the Assembly itself can learn from the experience; consideration of plans to revise the approach to community care work such that the capacities of Local Assemblies are developed to take this on; preparing a deepening for Local Assemblies on the care and spiritual health of their communities (the deepening is to be rolled out in the coming months by the Regional Councils); piloting deepening on two challenging themes – the engagement of Bahá'ís with society & non-involvement in politics, and homosexuality; and consciously trying to be more encouraging and loving in its communications with the community. These are among a few of the approaches being taken in these early stages of the National Assembly's effort to learn about fostering the spiritual health of the Bahá'í community. It is grateful to Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi for her guidance and support in this.

...the National Assembly has embarked upon some initial efforts to learn about these aspects of a healthy community

## 6. 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 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 contribute to discussions in a variety of spaces at the national level where thinking and policy evolve. The OPA is learning how to share the wisdom enshrined in the teachings in such spaces in order to contribute to the betterment of society.

Through regular consultations and close collaboration with the Office of Public Discourse at the Bahá'í World Centre, the OPA has been refining its methodology in participating in the key prevalent discourses of gender equality, the role of religion in society and social cohesion. The OPA has been striving to systematically learn about key areas of focus in this work, including gaining a deeper understanding of the reality of each discourse, identifying the social spaces where these discourses are being examined, building the capacity of Bahá'í collaborators in these spaces, contributing to meaningful content through various means including presentations and written articles, and building relationships with key players engaged in the discourse.

As part of the raising of capacity of collaborators, monthly study sessions are held to study key texts pertaining to the discourse. 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 OPA has learnt that this process is absolutely necessary in our reading of reality and in generating content.

The OPA has participated in some 30 social spaces, hosted by parliament, government, civil society, academia or interfaith networks

The OPA has participated in some 30 social spaces, hosted by parliament, government, civil society, academia or interfaith networks. Engagement in these spaces has included attendance at seminars, conferences, round table discussions, as well as sharing of presentations and talks, as well as writing of short articles and blog pieces. Relationships have been built with different organisations, as well as individuals who are actively engaged in the discourses.

In addition to these spaces, the OPA has hosted various events for the different discourses. In November 2015, during National Interfaith Week (Figure 1), the OPA invited a range of faith leaders and young believers from the different world religions to the Bahá'í National Centre to share thoughts on the question *“What is the role of religion in building social cohesion?”*

Rich and meaningful insights were shared which contributed to the building of a shared vision of the role of religion in building social cohesion. The creation of this space also afforded OPA the opportunity to strengthen bonds of friendship, especially with key faith leaders.

Another significant social space was created in the form of a seminar on “Freedom of Religion and Belief, and Economic Prosperity”, which was held on 2 March 2016 in parliament. This seminar, hosted by the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Bahá’ís, included presentations by a Minister, members of parliament and academics. The seminar examined assumptions underpinning the concept of freedom of religion or belief and identified barriers to the full acceptance of this right at the level of a universal value. Members of parliament, faith leaders, business leaders and academics attended the seminar. Throughout the event, innovative ideas that equipped business communities with tools, which have the potential to enhance awareness and to support religious freedom, were shared- <http://news.bahai.org.uk/>.

As part of the OPA’s engagement in various spaces, Bahá’í representatives serve on the following institutions: Interfaith Network UK Executive Committee, Faiths Forum for London, Community Faiths’ Forum, Religious Education Council of England and Wales and the newly launched UK Women of Faith Network.



Space created by OPA on the role of religion in building social cohesion held at National Baha'i Centre during the Inter faith week.

The capacity to create meaningful content develops concomitant with continuous study of Bahá’í and other material, engagement in numerous spaces and regular reflection

The OPA Collaborators in Wales have also been actively attending and contributing to various interfaith events and spaces within Wales, sharing the Bahá’í teachings on the various discourses. The Bahá’í representatives have contributed to panel discussions and offered presentations at events organised by the First Minister’s Forum, the Church of Latter Day Saints, the Muslim community, the Pears Foundation and, amongst others, the BAWSO (Black African Women Speak Out) event commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. In addition to sharing presentations and insights, the OPA Collaborators participated in the International World Interfaith Harmony Week, working together with other faith groups in support of women’s refuges around the country.

Developing the capacity to generate content includes learning to contribute in a manner that may have an influence at the

level of thought. The OPA's experience of participation in the various discourses over this past year has afforded the OPA opportunities to contribute insights through various means, including presentations, short talks, articles and concept papers for the various discourses. The OPA is learning that the capacity to generate meaningful content develops concomitant with continuous study of Bahá'í and other material, engagement in numerous spaces and regular reflection.

## **b. Religious Education Task Force**

### **Promoting inclusion of Bahá'í Faith on syllabuses/membership of SACREs**

The Religious Education Task Force continues to support Bahá'ís who are working with schools or serving on SACREs (Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education) in England and Wales, offering advice and guidance, as well as encouraging further participation in local SACREs. Some SACREs have redefined their constitution so that Bahá'í members no longer enjoy the full voting status that they may have had in the past. In all cases, Bahá'ís can make a valuable contribution to their SACRE, and they should continue to serve in whatever capacity is available to them. It is intended that a regular newsletter communication will be developed in the coming year, to keep existing Bahá'í members of SACREs better informed, and to share success stories in the field of Religious Education and collaboration with local schools.

### **Ensuring good quality teaching about the Bahá'í Faith through the preparation of effective teaching materials**

An "RE Resource file", an organised selection of books, worksheets, photographs, and pamphlets designed to help teachers of young people aged 7 to 11 (Key Stage 2), prepared last year, was further promoted and piloted by a small number of schools during the course of this year. A similar resource pack for ages 11 to 14 (Key Stage 3) has been developed, and both packs may be ordered through Warwick Bahá'í Bookshop. A key area of focus for the Task Force in the coming year is the development of electronic materials and a suitable website where teachers can access these materials.

...the  
development of  
electronic  
materials and a  
suitable website  
where teachers  
can access these  
materials

*The Task Force wishes to express its deep appreciation of the service of Elizabeth Jenkerson over the past several years. Elizabeth continues to provide valuable support and advice to the Task Force, and is actively involved in RE work as a Bahá'í representative on several SACREs and as a member of the NASACRE executive committee.*

### **Discourse and national level engagement**

The Faith is regularly represented at meetings of the REC (Religious Education Council of England and Wales). Here and in other key spaces they participate in deliberations regarding how best to advise the government and decision-makers on any potential changes to how RE is taught in schools in England and Wales. Three major non-statutory reports have been

published within the last year, calling for significant changes to legislation relating to RE and collective worship in schools. Members of the Task Force actively take part in these deliberations and humbly contribute a perspective based on the wisdom of the Writings and the shared experience of the Bahá'í community. Through these conversations the OPA and RE Task Force are developing and refining formal written contributions, articulating in more depth one or two key concepts which may shed light on the discourse at the national level.

Bahá'ís regularly attend local, regional and national RE conferences and, where possible, use these opportunities to promote the materials available on the Faith to teachers and other RE professionals, as well as contributing to the discourse at these events. The Task Force is actively seeking to become increasingly coherent, in terms of approaches and methods, with the work of the 5 Year Plan, particularly operating in a mode of learning through the rhythm of action, reflection and consultation.

***c. Relationships with government and civil society, including efforts to defend the Bahá'í community from persecution***

**Defence of the Faith**

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 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.

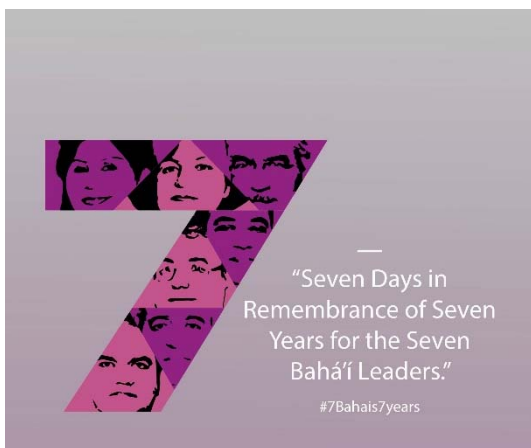
During the past year, the OPA has had numerous opportunities to strengthen the bonds of cooperation between the UK Bahá'í community and members of parliament and government. As per the UK Parliament's Committee on Standards' new regulations, [the All-Parliamentary Group \(APPG\) on the Bahá'í Faith](#) had to be re-registered following the 2015 general elections. Hence, the OPA worked to re-establish the APPG on the Bahá'í Faith immediately after the elections. On 1 July 2015, the group was reformed with 23 members. The aim of this APPG is "to raise awareness on the Bahá'í Faith and the efforts of the Bahá'í community to contribute to British society, and to seek action in respect of the persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran and other instances where Bahá'ís are subject to discrimination on the grounds of their faith".



Three Bahá'í representatives (Shabnam Moinipour, Nadia Elads, Dan Wheatley) meeting with a member of Parliament, Jim Shannon.

As part of a systematic and routine outreach effort, the OPA representatives are meeting with a growing number of MPs, both old and newly elected. Within the past year, and in each

cycle the OPA has aimed to reach out to 60 MPs including those serving on relevant select committees and front benchers. Meetings have been held with 12 MPs. These MPs were briefed on the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran and were requested to take action on behalf of the UK Bahá'í Community. As a result of such efforts the Bahá'ís of Iran have been mentioned in three debates ([16 July 2015](#), [24 November 2015](#) & [10 December 2015](#)); three Questions have been raised by these MPs to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on the human rights situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran in the form of Written Questions ([16 March 2015](#), [15 June 2015](#) & [4 January 2016](#)); one Oral Questions has been posed to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs ([12 January 2016](#)); and one Early Day Motion has been tabled expressing concern over the Bahá'ís of Iran, especially the Friends in Iran, and calling for Iran to be obliged to adhere to Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees freedom of religion and belief for everyone ([13 October 2015](#)).



The OPA maintains a strong relationship with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). The Bahá'í representatives met for the second time with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister for the Middle East along with delegation of representatives from Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Open Doors and Article 18, organisations who are committed to raising concerns regarding the plight of Bahá'ís, Christians and Darvish Muslims in Iran. The Bahá'í representatives offered the Minister a summary of the human rights situation in Iran for religious

minorities and their lack of improvement in light of the recent bilateral relations with Iran and requested for the government to support the sponsorship of a resolution against Islamic Republic of Iran's human rights violations every year.

The members of the FCO, including the staff at the Iran Coordination Group, are also frequently briefed on the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran. On 28 January 2016, the Bahá'í representatives met with the recent replacements of the Iran Coordination Group to introduce the OPA, the Bahá'í Faith, and to brief them on the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran. Bahá'í representatives also attended a Pre-Human Rights Council NGO meeting hosted by the FCO, ahead of the upcoming session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, which was held in Geneva from 29 February to 24 March 2016. Once again, the UK government was requested to take action in support of the Bahá'ís of Iran.

The OPA's work with government continues to focus on influencing FCO policy on human rights, to support and encourage UK engagement with international human rights mechanisms of the United Nations system and its policies on FoRB. The OPA remains focused



The OPA remains focused on ensuring that human rights remain a priority for UK policy in its interactions with Iran...



on ensuring that human rights remain a priority for UK policy in its interactions with Iran, in both bilateral and multilateral spaces.

The OPA held the Parliamentary Annual Reception in November 2015 to mark the Twin Holy Days. Guests attending the event included both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í contacts, some of whom were from parliament and government. While Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon was unable



to attend the event in person, he shared a statement with the attendees noting the importance of this occasion.

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 numerous outreach and social media campaigns which sought to raise awareness of the illegal closures of shops and businesses of Bahá'í owners,

the plight of the BIHE students and professors, and recent arrests. One of these campaigns included a week-long social media campaign to commemorate the 7<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the incarceration of the Yaran.

#### **d. 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 OPA 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.

...build and strengthen relations with journalists...

Within the past year, through collaboration with various individuals, the OPA has been focusing on developing its capacity to build and strengthen relations with journalists and sections of the media, through various forms of media.

In May of 2015, an article entitled "[Iran Religious Persecution: Bahá'í Faith Leaders Remain Imprisoned After Seven Years](#)" was published by the *International Business Times*, highlighting the plight of the Yaran, through the efforts of this Office and its collaborators.

In January of 2016, Fidelma Meehan was invited to talk on the BBC1 debate programme, *The Big Questions*, looking at the question "Can all religions be right?"

In Wales, an hour interview, spaced between music, was given by Christine Abbas and Vivian Bartlett on Radio Cardiff covering a wide range of themes relating to the Faith.

The OPA continues to receive occasional invitations from the BBC Radio 2 programme *Good Morning Sunday* with Claire Balding to speak about Bahá'í teachings and Holy Days, in which

Sam Roskams participated on 15 May 2015. Contacts with a number of journalists working for the BBC, *The Times* and Channel Four have been made and we anticipate a few more meetings in the next coming months.



An article published by International Business Times on the persecution of the Bahá'ís.

The Persian language media remains interested in covering news related to the arrests and violation of human rights of the Bahá'ís in Iran. In this past year, relationships have been consolidated with a number of contacts. Since April 2015, 12 interviews have been conducted with the Persian language spokesperson related to the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran by various media outlets in the UK.

### e. **Web presence**

Strengthening the Bahá'í presence on the Web is a wonderful opportunity to present the UK community's history, activities, hopes and beliefs to the public. Over the past year, the OPA has been working closely with the Office of Public Discourse and a team of UK collaborators in designing and developing a new UK Bahá'í website. The new website will draw on the approach and concepts of the international bahai.org site, as well as highlight the nature and work of the UK Bahá'í community and detail insights into our British spiritual heritage. The website is in the final stages of drafting.

## 7. FUNDS OF THE FAITH – THE LIFEBLOOD OF THE CAUSE

*“The supply of funds, in support of the National Treasury, constitutes, at the present time, the lifeblood of those nascent institutions which you are labouring to erect. Its importance cannot, surely, be overestimated. Untold blessings shall no doubt crown every effort directed to that end.”*

Shoghi Effendi - 29 July, 1935 “Messages to America”, page 5

As has been the pattern in the UK for many years, there were sacrificial contributions by many of the friends. The National Assembly would like to express its gratitude for the selfless donations of a community striving to support the last year of the Five Year Plan. In addition to these generous contributions, all the floors in Bridge House have been completely let, thus increasing our income. In fact, there is a surplus of approximately £15,800.

The National Fund is the core fund where the main income and expenditure of the National Spiritual Assembly are recorded and tracked (Figure 1). Within this structure there are other funds that reflect specific aspects of the work of the National Assembly and are important for the friends to be conscious of and contribute to. For example, as with other aspects of the work of the Cause, the process of decentralisation has enabled the establishment of a Regional Branch of the National Fund for each of the four Regional Councils.

As shown in Figure 1 there are numerous funds to which the friends can contribute. Among them is the core National Fund. Most of the income of the National Assembly goes into this fund, allowing the National Assembly to apportion its resources to meet the ongoing, but sometimes changing, needs of the Faith.

Among the other funds to which the community can directly contribute are:

- Deputation Funds (such as for the Training Institute) which are earmarked, specifically designated funds where the friends can subsidize others in service to the Cause.
- Guardian's Resting Place Maintenance Fund which meets the annual operational costs for the Guardians Resting Place. The National Assembly encourages the friends to contribute directly to this fund. The Guardian's Resting Place Endowment Fund is the 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 which is the fund for paying the tuition fees for those BIHE students who study in the UK. At the end of 2015 it had a deficit of £33,836.
- International Contributions to various funds are open for the friends to make contributions directly through the National Assembly.

The National Spiritual Assembly is pleased to present its financial report for the year ending 31 December 2015:

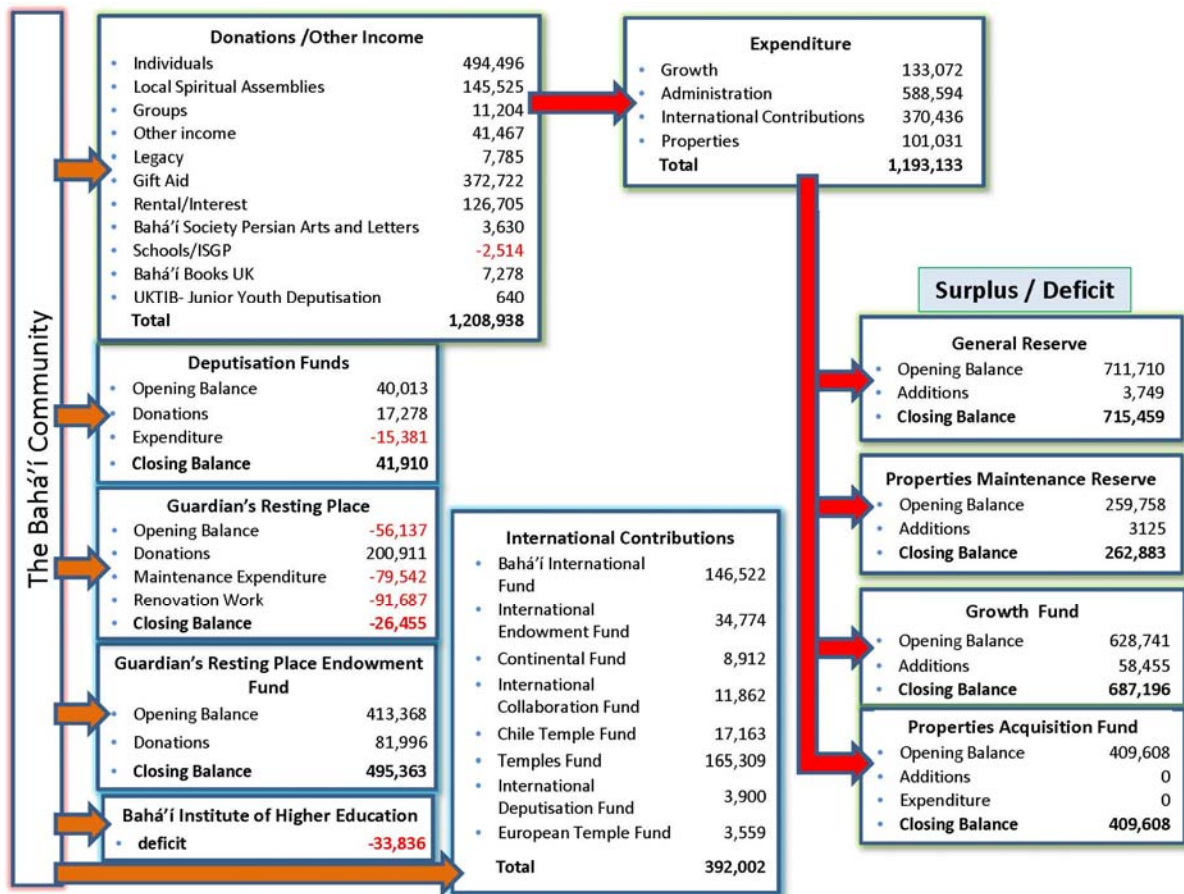


Figure 1: Overview of various Bahá'í funds in the UK

a. **National Fund**

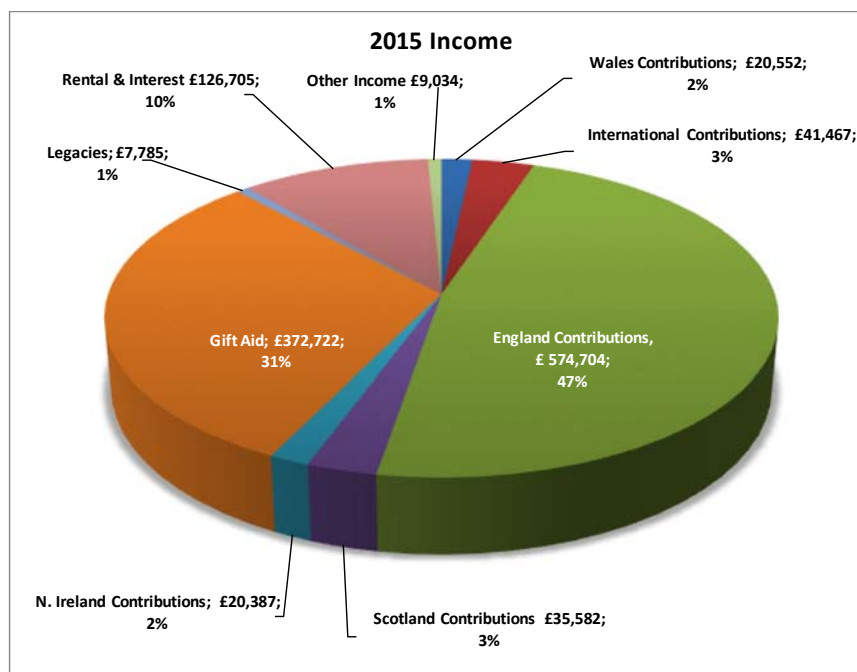
In 2015, the National Fund had a surplus of £15,805, which helped to decrease the outstanding rolling deficit (since 2005) to £110,475.71.

**Income** for the 12 Months to 31 December 2015 was £1,208,938 of which the friends in the UK directly contributed £700,476. (Figures 2 and 3). The budget for 2016 is also included.

In 2013 the National Assembly changed the structure of Baha'i Books UK (BBUK). In its third year an unexpected profit of £7,278 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. The aim of the BBUK is mainly to make the Sacred Writings more affordable and available to the friends and the general public.

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of The United Kingdom FINANCIAL YEAR 2015				
Contributions / Income	Actual 2013	Actual 2014	Actual 2015	Budget 2016
England Contributions	570,072	578,450	574,704	603,105
N. Ireland Contributions	22,048	24,259	20,387	21,681
Scotland Contributions	32,055	36,609	35,582	37,231
Wales Contributions	22,257	20,085	20,552	22,344
Legacies	17,066	11,548	7,785	-
Other Contributions (International)	45,986	46,738	41,467	25,500
<b>Total Direct Contributions</b>	<b>709,485</b>	<b>717,689</b>	<b>700,476</b>	<b>709,860</b>
Gift Aid	399,467	328,057	372,722	350,000
Rental and Interest	75,830	88,204	126,705	134,361
Bahá'í Society of Persian Arts and Letters	4,387	5,174	3,630	-
UKTIB - Deputisation Jnr Youth Coordinators	16,605	14,303	640	0
NSA Youth Conference Subsidy	88,245			-
ISGP		411	81	0
Schools		658	-2,595	0
Bahá'í Books	1,673	4,168	7,278	0
<b>Total Indirect Income</b>	<b>586,207</b>	<b>440,975</b>	<b>508,462</b>	<b>484,361</b>
<b>TOTAL Contributions / Income</b>	<b>£1,295,692</b>	<b>£1,158,664</b>	<b>£1,208,938</b>	<b>£1,194,222</b>

**Figure 2: Income for the 12 Months to 31 December 2015**  
Total: £1,208,938



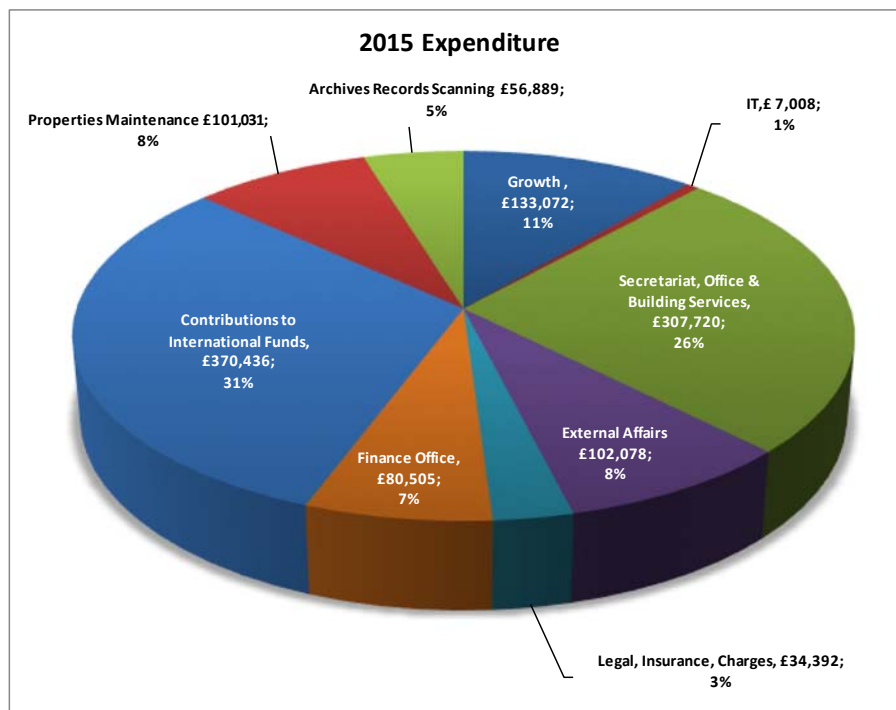
**Figure 3: Income Graph for the 12 Months 31 December 2015**

To put the above pie chart into perspective, regional contributions in Wales are calculated to be £73 per adult, youth, and junior youth, in Scotland £77, in Northern Ireland £83, and in England £124.

**Expenditure** for the 12 months to 31 December 2015 was £1,193,133. The budget for 2016 is also included. The expenditure is broken into broad categories (Figures 4 and 5).

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of The United Kingdom FINANCIAL YEAR 2015				
EXPENDITURE	Actual 2013	Actual 2014	Actual 2015	Budget 2016
Growth	163,612	142,067	133,072	215,752
IT	8,500	3,085	7,008	21,500
Secretariat, office & building Services	296,853	292,856	307,720	372,339
External Affairs	121,525	110,160	102,078	158,280
Legal, Insurance, charges	37,013	34,649	34,392	44,060
Finance Office	80,940	75,215	80,505	76,372
Contributions to International Funds	364,940	342,209	370,436	325,586
Properties Maintenance	92,439	128,304	101,031	119,435
Archives Records scanning		42,157	56,889	
National Centre windows refurbishment		32,457		
Schools	5,709	-		-
ISGP	4,670	-		-
National Youth Conference	81,787	-		
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>£1,257,989</b>	<b>£1,203,159</b>	<b>£1,193,133</b>	<b>£1,333,322</b>

**Figure 4:** Expenditure for the 12 months to 31 December 2015: Total: £1,193,133



**Figure 5:** Expenditure Graph for 12 Months to 31 December 2015

In 2015 there was a surplus in the National Fund of more than £15,000. Though a part of this surplus was due to a small reduction in administrative costs, another reason was that not as much money was spent for the growth areas as had been anticipated in the 2015 budget. Next year it is expected that there will be a greater focus in this area.

### **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 2015, the amount contributed directly by the friends represented 55% of the total income to the fund. A further 31% (£372,722) of income was from the tax refund received on all donations to or through the National Assembly under the Gift Aid scheme. Hence the remaining 14% income is from rental, interest and overseas donations, etc.

Figure 6 below shows the amount donated in each region with the average amount contributed per person:

Total contribution	2012		2013		2014		2015	
	Actual £	% Per Region	Actual £	% Per Region	Actual £	% Per Region	Actual £	% Per Region
England	658,146	88%	570,072	88%	578,450	88%	574,704	88%
Northern Ireland	26,958	4%	22,048	3%	24,259	4%	20,387	3%
Scotland	42,410	6%	32,055	5%	36,609	6%	35,582	5%
Wales	22,212	3%	22,257	3%	20,085	3%	20,552	3%
Total contributions	749,726	100%	646,432	100%	659,403	100%	651,224	100%
Average per person	£129		£109		£112		£110	

**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 publicising its advantages, the National Assembly is delighted to report an increase in contributions by standing order. The total amount of Gift Aid has also increased from £328,057 in 2014 to £372,722 in 2015.

Number of contributors	2013	2014	2015
Individuals contributing by standing orders	636	651	669
Assemblies and Groups contributing by standing orders	43	71	78
Gift Aid Contributors to all Funds & Huqúqu'lláh	698	708	709

**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 2015 total expenditure was £1,193,133, which is a decrease of £10,026 compared to 2014; this is partly due to the National Assembly's ongoing efforts to reduce administration

expenditure. This is the fifth consecutive year that the National Assembly is reducing expenditure, however, it is hoped that expenditure on growth will be increased next year.

Below is the individual year performance since 2009 in terms of income versus expenditure.

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Surplus/ Deficit	-66,714	-15,636	-43,287	-17,369	34,739	-44,496	15,805

In 2015 for every £1 (excluding Gift Aid and other incomes) donated to the National Fund by the believers in the UK, 57 pence was forwarded to international Funds, including, among others, the International Fund, the World Centre Endowment Fund, and the European and Chile Temple Funds.

### **b. Deputisation Funds**

At the end of December 2015, there were four deputisation funds in the UK.

Deputisation Funds	Deputisation UKTIB	Deputisation General	Deputisation Faroes	Deputisation China	Total
Opening Balance 1 Jan 2015	-	20,823	4,449	14,741	40,013
Contributions	640	15,678	-	960	17,278
<b>Total</b>	<b>640</b>	<b>36,501</b>	<b>4,449</b>	<b>15,701</b>	<b>57,291</b>
Expenditure	-640	-	-	-14,741	-15,381
<b>Balance as at 31 Dec 15</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>36,501</b>	<b>4,449</b>	<b>960</b>	<b>41,910</b>

**Figure 8:** Deputisation funds during the year and balances as at 31 December 2015

As the friends are called upon to serve in particular capacities they should feel able to consult the relevant institutions about their personal circumstances, including their financial needs, if this might be a barrier to their service, as support might be offered.

### **c. Guardian's Resting Place Maintenance Fund**

The Guardian's Resting Place is the most holy spot in the UK and our community is charged with its maintenance and upkeep on behalf of the Universal House of Justice. For 2015 the annual expenditure for its maintenance was estimated to be £75,000 plus £125,000 for the renovation work. The final income and expenditure are:



<b>Guardian's Resting Place Maintenance Fund</b>	<b>Annual Expenditure £</b>
Opening Balance	-56,137
Contributions	200,911
Maintenance Expenditure	-79,541
Renovations Expenditure	-91,687
<b>Deficit</b>	<b>-26,455</b>

**Figure 9:** Guardian's Resting Place income and expenditure during 2015

In December 2012, the National Assembly shared plans “for serious attention to be paid to the site’s maintenance and renovation”. Among other projects these included the replacement of objects which were too badly damaged to be repaired, such as the entrance gate, restoration of the balustrade, special cleaning of the eagle, the column, the marble and the new vases and the installation of new walls.

The National Assembly has outlined a new stage of development at the Guardian’s Resting Place, which has been approved by the Universal House of Justice. There will be a purpose-built structure for the custodian’s office and security facilities, paving will be extended along the main radial route from the Resting Place, gates at either end of this radial path that will deter the flow of traffic past the Resting Place, and the essential regeneration of the grounds adjacent to the New Brunswick Woods access path. The residence of the custodians is to have much needed refurbishment as little has been done for the past 20 years. These important developments will reinforce the security arrangements at the Resting Place and bring greater dignity to the facilities associated with it. It is estimated that apart from the Guardian’s Resting Place Endowment Fund, the total cost relating to the upkeep and beautification of this blessed spot will be about £250,000 over the two years 2015 and 2016- . The National Assembly will update the friends as the projects continue.

**d. Guardian’s Resting Place Endowment Fund**

It was in May 2008 that 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 a goal of £1,300,000 over 10 years starting from 2011to be completed in 2021. Unfortunately, the Guardian’s Resting Place Endowment Fund had a shortage of £154,656 at the end of 2015. So by the end of 2016, this fund needs even more generous contributions from the friends. £284,656 will be needed to bring it back on 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
2015	130,000	81,996
<b>Total</b>	<b>650,000</b>	<b>495,344</b>
<b>Deficit</b>		<b>-154,656</b>

**Figure 10:** Guardian’s Resting Place Endowment Fund as at 31 December 2015

**e. The International Collaboration Fund**

Those national communities which are more materially blessed are able to assist other communities through the International Collaboration Fund, which was established by the Universal House of Justice. The Supreme Body has described how this programme is " ... used to meet a variety of needs: the acquisition of land and buildings for national and local Baha'i Centres and for future Temple sites; the construction and renovation of Baha'i 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."



*Training Institute Building in Kadugannawa, Sri Lanka to which the UK Community donated through the International Collaboration Fund in August 2013*

At the beginning of this Plan in 2011, the Universal House of Justice invited the UK Bahá'í community to be a part of this programme and the National Assembly decided (17 July 2011) that this community would pledge £160,000 for the Five Year Plan. Some £125,000 has already been raised, leaving a balance of £6,673 to be contributed. It is hoped that the remaining £6,673 will have been contributed by Ridván 2016.

International Collaboration Goal 2011 to 2016	Amount
Current Plan Goal	160,000
Contribution upto 2014	-125,000
Contributions 2015	-28,327
<b>Goal to Ridvan 2016</b>	<b>£ 6,673</b>

**Figure 11:** International Collaboration – Total Contributions

During 2015 the UK Community was also blessed to contribute £16,232 (\$25,000) for the purchase of two vehicles for the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Contributions to Projects since 2011	Amount
July 2011 Teacher Training Centre in Nepal (\$13,500)	8,622
November 2011 Baha'i Centre in Astana, Kazakhstan (\$30,000)	18,405
October 2012 National Hazíratu'l-Quds in Nigeria (\$55,000)	34,310
August 2013 Baha'i Training Institute building in Kadugannawa Sri Lanka (\$26,000)	16,763
May 2014 National Hazíratu'l-Quds in the Philippines (\$70,000)	42,164
November 2015 Two vehicles for the National Assembly of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (\$25,000)	16,232
<b>Total</b>	<b>£ 136,496</b>

**Figure 12:** List of International Collaboration Projects

#### ***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***

A set of audited accounts for 2015 is available. Also the budget for the year ahead is available as a separate document. There are a few highlights that deserve some reflection.

Managing the 2016 budget with a deficit forecast of £139,101 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 5%. The budget

also sees a 62% increase in Growth related activities, 14% increase in the functioning of the National Assembly, and an 18% increase in the cost of properties.

Other financial responsibilities which are not reflected in the budget are requirements for the Guardian's Resting Place Endowment Fund (£290K) and refurbishment (£230K), BIHE (£80K), and the needs of the new Five Year Plan.

More animators are being trained and accompanied to learn about the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Programme. In the new plan it is hoped that each cluster will involve at least 50 – 100 junior youth in the programme. Some clusters may involve 300 or more!

Thus far young people and their families have paid for junior youth camps, but we cannot expect that this will always be possible. In the next Five Year Plan it is hoped that even more



Junior Youth group- York

young people will participate and funds must be available to subsidise those junior youth whose families will not be able to meet their expenses.

The Investment Committee has been monitoring the markets and the financial situation to

help the National Assembly to keep its reserves safe and also to find appropriate investment opportunities. In 2015 the financial markets have been too volatile for any new long term commitments and the Investment Committee has advised on the best institutions where excess funds can be deposited

The friends in the Cradle of the Faith have suffered so much and in so many ways. We think of the Baha'i youth of that country who are deprived of a university education. The BIHE (Baha'i Institute for Higher Education) is facilitating the opportunity for some of these young people to continue their postgraduate education through universities in different countries. The National Assembly has decided to pay the tuition fees for those students who are studying at universities in the United Kingdom. To date the shortfall is approximately £33,836 and by the end of the year it is expected that an extra £45,000 will be needed.

The budget for donations to the International Funds for 2016 is set at £325,586. This represents 24% of expenditure and, when realised, will mean that for every £1 (excluding Gift Aid) donated by a believer to the National Fund, 46 pence will be forwarded for the International Funds.

Reducing administrative expenditure which is not growth related to reduce the deficit is a priority for the National Assembly. Utilising more volunteers, and asking the community to receive materials such as UK Bahá'í electronically rather than by post are examples of potential savings. However, the real priority must be to focus on the new plan, to concentrate on growth, and this focus will undoubtedly include the spending of the funds, the lifeblood of the Cause, to facilitate this growth, and in turn and over time grow the community of the Greatest Name, the sole contributors to the Bahá'í Fund. 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, for example by enabling the appointment of full-time junior youth coordinators, Regional coordinators, or year of service youth who may require stipends to undertake their periods of service.

The Finance Office is currently deeply blessed by the sacrificial and devoted services of its two staff members and is looking for another full time staff member but, meanwhile, 12 dearly loved volunteers are supporting the day to day work of the office.

All of us in the Finance Office would like to say how much we will miss our dear co-worker, Mrs Elaine Yourtchi, who, after 26 years of service, has retired.

#### ***h. Summary of key opportunities for 2016***

Some challenges continue to be foreseen for 2016:

- Only 15% of the individuals (including children) in the community are directly contributing to the National Fund on at least an annual basis (an approximation) – far from universal participation.
- We have over half a million pounds of commitment to the Guardian's Resting Place endowment fund and its refurbishment and maintenance in 2016.
- Combatting an expected deficit of about £139,101 in the 2016 budget.
- We need about £80,000 for BIHE in 2016.
- And last, but not least, we are starting a new Five Year Plan. ☺

*"... the Guardian would advise your Assembly to continue impressing upon the believers the necessity of their contributing regularly to the national fund, irrespective of whether there is an emergency to be met or not. Nothing short of a continuous flow of contributions to that fund can, indeed, ensure the financial stability upon which so much of the progress of the institutions of the Faith must now inevitably depend."*

In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 29 July 1935 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in "Bahá'í News" 95 (October 1935), p. 1

*"... I have urged them to support consistently and whole-heartedly the very essential and vital institutions of the National Fund and the National Assembly. It must be made clear to them all that continuous support to these twin institutions is the corner-stone of all future achievements, the mainspring from which all future blessings will flow."*

In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter of 7 September 1926 to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma

## 8. OTHER AREAS OF SERVICE

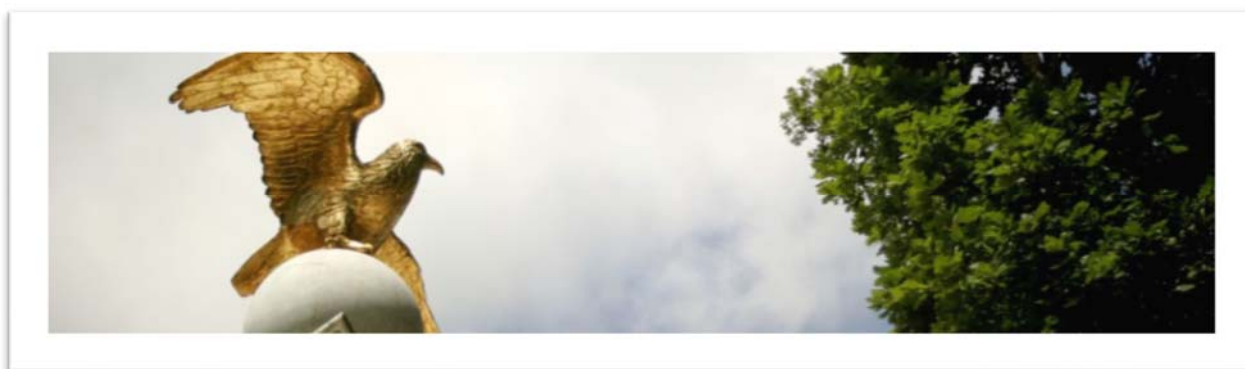
### *a. Apartment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá at 17 Royal York Crescent, Bristol.*

The aim of the National Spiritual Assembly with respect to this precious gift that the community has received in recent years, is to restore it as best as possible to the condition it was in at the time of the Master's visit. Hence, before any work can commence on restoration, research needs to be undertaken. Since 1911, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá first visited the property at 16-17 Royal York Crescent (which at the time was called the Clifton Guest House, owned by the Tudor-Pole family), many changes have taken place as a result of events such as war damage, its conversion into a hotel, and then its subsequent division into apartments. Libraries and archives have been explored and specialists in Bristol architecture have been consulted by the Committee appointed by the National Assembly and much valuable information has been gathered and documented. But to be sure of our findings consideration is now being given to engaging an expert to undertake further research, following which a final report will be prepared for the National Assembly's consideration. At that stage the work required will be determined, as well as the cost.



*The beloved Master gathers with the friends outside 17 Royal York Crescent, Bristol*

### *b. Guardian's Resting Place*



With many of last year's developments to enhance the beauty and splendour of the Resting Place being completed, the next phase of these developments is currently underway, including:

- The replacement of the custodians' office with a larger, more suitable one, for housing various services required at the site.
- The extension of the paved path around the resting place, and the erection of gates at either side of this path in order to stop the flow of traffic in the immediate vicinity, enhancing the serenity of the resting place.
- The development and beautification of the grounds adjacent to the new brunswick woods access path, next to the newly located office.
- The planting of a large number of trees throughout the bahá'í section of the cemetery.

### **Custodians**

Mrs. Jaleh Alaei and Mr. Hassan Alaei, after more than 26 years of devoted and tireless service as Custodians at the Resting Place of Shoghi Effendi, retired in early January 2016. No doubt all the friends join with the National Spiritual Assembly in expressing deepest love and appreciation for their consecrated services, and their warmth and kindness will be fondly remembered by all who visited the Resting Place. While Mr. and Mrs. Alaei will be greatly missed, the National Assembly was delighted to welcome Mrs. Roya Azordegan and Mr. Soheyl Azordegan as the new custodians.

...their warmth  
and kindness will  
be fondly  
remembered...

### **Maintenance and gardening**

The National Spiritual Assembly expresses its warm gratitude to Mr. Hubert St. Clair and Mr. Houman Charkhi for their services as volunteers. Mr. St Clair will be leaving this summer after giving two years of service as gardener. Mr. Charkhi, a youth from Germany, is currently undertaking a year of service and will be spending part of his time assisting at the Resting Place.

### ***c. Bahá'í Properties***

The care and maintenance of Bahá'í properties and lands across the United Kingdom requires constant attention. To support the National Assembly in managing the many tasks required, we have a team called the Bahá'í Properties Working Group. To give a flavour of the extent of the work in this connection, the following is a list of some of the completed or ongoing tasks this year:

- Renovation of the Bahá'í Centre in the Orkney Isles
- Putting in place a proper lease with the tenant using Bahá'í lands in the Orkney Isles



*Temple Land at Wideford Hill, Orkney*

- Obtaining planning permission for a housing development for lands owned in Belfast in preparation for its eventual sale
- Arranging for the sale of the Bahá'í Centre in Newcastle
- Attending to numerous repairs and replacement requirements at the National Hazíratu'l-Quds
- Attending to various repairs to the old Bahá'í Centre in Manchester so that it is in a condition to rent it out
- Seeking tenants for the Assembly's investment property in Tonbridge, which is now fully let for the first time in many years, giving an annual rental of £148,000
- Attending to a serious structural problem at the Liverpool Bahá'í Centre

#### **d. Bahá'í Society for Persian Arts and Literature**

This year's annual Bahá'í Society for Persian Arts and Literature took place over December 2015, and was focused on the theme of "Service, Spirituality and Justice and the Modernisation of Iran". A total of 18 lectures were presented by 13 speakers on diverse topics as the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* for Latin America, spirituality and family, dynamic interpretation of ethics and spirituality, and worship and prayers in Persian Culture and the Bahá'í Faith. The conference was attended by a total of 660 participants, including 516 adults, 104 youth and 40 children. This event was also covered by various media outlets including TV Pars, and Aeen-e-Bahá'í and Kayhan London.

#### **e. Bahá'í Histories Project**

This project aims to collect, store and catalogue stories from Bahá'ís, related to their Faith, in order to form part of the UK Bahá'í archive. All stories are published on the website <http://bahaihistoryuk.wordpress.com/>. From 1 February 2015 – Riqdván 2016 there were 42 stories published or scheduled to be published, making a total of 217 stories. On average the website attracts 40 visitors every day. Any Bahá'í can submit a story, and the committee would love for more authors to come forward.

*Welcome to the UK Baha'i Histories Project*

POSTED BY JENNY IN UNCATEGORIZED      ≈ 10 COMMENTS

The UK Baha'i Histories Project is collecting the stories of individual Baha'is who currently live in the UK, or have lived here in the past. The project is sponsored by the [National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahai's of the UK](#).

These stories are personal recollections by the individuals concerned. They will inevitably contain omissions and they reflect the views of the individual author in each case. We cannot vouch for the authenticity or completeness of any of the 'histories', although all stories are subjected to an editorial review. We urge readers who may have additional information that is pertinent to any story to post a comment, which may be viewed by all visitors to the site.

SEARCH...    GO

◆ ARCHIVES

- March 2016
- February 2016
- January 2016
- October 2015
- September 2015
- August 2015
- July 2015
- June 2015
- April 2015
- March 2015

*UK Baha'i Histories Project website*

This year the team has begun to collect 'mini-biographies' of Bahá'ís who have played a significant role in the history of UK community. Five mini-biographies have been prepared to date, and there are some eight further stories in the process of being written.



### ***f. Regional Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh for Ireland and the United Kingdom***

The Board of Trustees is continuing to focus its efforts on educating the believers regarding the spiritual aspects of the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, and has been given 3 strategies for this term of service:

- Reaching out to young adults who are near the start of their working lives.
- Collaborating with other institutions, such as Local Spiritual Assemblies and Auxiliary Board members.
- Reaching the generality of the believers to ensure that everyone can avail themselves of the blessings associated with the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh.



*Huququ'llah Representatives meeting in January 2016*

The Board has also appointed a number of new Representatives this year. In particular, the number in the London area has been increased to provide more resources for areas with larger Bahá'í populations.

### ***g. And many other areas...***

There are many other committees and agencies that render outstanding and constant service to the National Assembly and the community. Among these are the various review panels that ensure the accuracy and dignity of written and audio-visual publications by Bahá'ís; the service for the visually impaired, which, at the time of printing, is working on an audio version of the 29 December 2015 message; and the burials project which is diligently gathering information on where deceased Bahá'ís are buried. Others volunteer their services to attend to logistics, legal matters, the enrolment of asylum seekers, the annual production of the *In Memoriam* volume, the regular publication of the children's magazine *Dayspring*, answering correspondence from enquirers, advising on IT issues, attending to marriages as Marriage Officers in Scotland and Northern Ireland, arranging National Convention and many other practical concerns that are vital to the functioning of the National Assembly. For all their sacrificial services we are truly grateful.

## 9. BAHÁ'Í POPULATION STATISTICS

Table 7: Bahá'í Population at Naw-Ruz 2016

Region	Adults (DOB/30+)	Youth (15-30)	Children (5-10)	Junior Youth (11-14)	Babies (1-4)	Row Total
ENGLAND	3,628	882	184	138	74	4,906
SCOTLAND	355	99	17	9	3	483
WALES	230	43	7	9	4	293
NORTHERN IRELAND	188	50	3	8	5	254
FAROE ISLANDS	12	1	3	4	0	20
GIBRALTAR	9	5	2	0	0	16
CHANNEL ISLANDS	7	1	0	0	0	8
ISLE OF MAN	6	1	0	0	0	7
ADDRESS NOT KNOWN	392	166	3	4	1	567
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,827</b>	<b>1,248</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>6,554</b>

Table 8: Changes

in the Bahá'í community between 171-172 B.E.

BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY – CHANGES ADVISED COMPARITIVE TABLE 171-172 B.E RESPECTIVELY											
	171				171 Total	172					172 Total
	EN	NI	SC	WA		EN	NI	SC	WA	Unk	
DECEASED	35	1	3	2	41	36	2	9	4	1	48
MARRIAGE	66	1	1	12	80	20	2	5	2	1	30
NEW ADULT ENROLMENT (OVER 21)	49	4	2	3	58	43	5		3		51
NEW YOUTH ENROLMENT (UNDER 21)	4			1	5	7	1		2		10
REGISTRATION OF BABY/CHILD	21		1		22	34	3	1	2		40
TRANSFER IN FROM ABROAD	167	7	18	6	198	110		9	5	16	140
TRANSFER OUT TO ABROAD	150	3	9	3	165	112	2	6	3	5	128
WITHDRAWN	21	6	2	1	30	42	2	8	6		54

## 10. INSTITUTIONS, AGENCIES AND COMMITTEES OF THE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

The following is a list of UK Bahá'í institutions, including committees, agencies & task forces of the National Spiritual Assembly who served during the year 172 B.E.

### Continental Board of Counsellors

Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi

### National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom

Barney Leith, Fidelma Meehan, Wendi Momen, Patrick O'Mara, Vafa Ram, Darren Smith, Shirin Tahzib, Sara Talai, Robert Weinberg

### **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 Huququ'llah for Ireland and the United Kingdom**

**Deputies:** Farshid Taleb, Parvin Morrissey, Paymen Sabeti, John McGill, Monica Ghaem-Maghani

**Representatives:** Pat Carri, Sahar Rahmani, Declan Devine, Erfan Fadaei, Rachel Burnett, Lona Sabeti, Helen Hellaby, Riaz Teimoori, Anne Maund, Munirih Mali, Bruce Liggitt, Karmel Helmy, Anis Zeighamnia, Nava Ashraf, Adib Farid, Audrius Simaitis, Paul Bellamy, Saleem Vaillancourt, Shahryar Beheshti

### **Resource Persons for Northern Europe (not appointed by the National Assembly)**

Clare Stephens, Keri Schewel, Anisa Mazidian and Claudia Peralta-De Jong

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

**England:** Naghme Adab-Fozdar, Marco Milone Homa Saadat-Fehilly, Ramez Salmanpour, Olinga Tahzib Stephen Vickers, Natasha Wilkinson Ronnie Yousefzadeh Bindra Vivien Craig

**Aide:** Alessia Freddo

**Regional Statistics Officer:** Naim Peyman

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

**Regional Statistics Officer:** Arian Keogan-Nooshabadi

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

**Aide:** Rachel Burnett

**Regional Statistics Officer:** Carmelia Alae-Carew

**Wales:** Tessa Abbas, Louise Doughty, William Jenkins, Azar Melville, Daniel Stollar

#### **Training Institute Board for the United Kingdom:**

**England:** Christine Boyett Steven Cleasby Adel Hinrichs Carmel Khavari, Christopher Lee

**Northern Ireland:** Susie Agahi, Darragh Graham Farah Khavari

**Scotland:** Maria Patricia Jansson, Howard Moshtael Andrea Reischl

**Wales:** Amy Behi Rachel Murray Jo Pearce

**National Statistics Officer:** Eric Harshfield

**UK Pioneering and Travel Teaching Committee:** Arjang Agahi Anne Wong Anisa Fadaei, Shadeh Rahimi

## 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, Coorous Mohtadi

**Dayspring:** Jackie Mehrabi, Maggie Manvell, Iman Fadaei, Chris Abbas, Midge Ault, Joe Cleasby, Anisa Fadaei, Iman Fadaei, Neysan Foroudi, Ian Fozdar, Lorrie Fozdar, Helena Hastie, Erin Keenan, Sarah Perceval, Holly Smith, Sally Spear, Lizbeth Thomson, Tim Thorne, Lesley Taherzadeh O'Mara, Sara Talai

**In Memoriam publication:** Iain Macdonald, Foad Saberian, Erica Leith

**Bahá'í Books UK:** Paymen Sabeti Richard Jones, Fareba Jones, Burhan Hayati, Luisa Hayati, Nicholas Ward

## Marriage Officers

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

**Scotland:** Andrew Goodwin, Rickey Pooran, Mhairi Schmidt, Anwen Shahim, Jeremy Fox

## National Office

**Information Technology Advisory Panel:** Mike Gammage, Kamyar Missaghi, Vincent Afnan-Murray

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

**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 Darren Howell, Mehran Nassiri, Bridie Dixon Sandra Ballester, Nirvana Habibi, Barbara Gilbert

**Office for Safeguarding Children:** Sue Cave Diane Cleasby, Elizabeth Jenkerson, Michael Melville, Geoff Ault, June Gumsley

**Pastoral Affairs Coordinating Team:** Peter Hulme, Darren Howell, Nirvana Habibi, Vivien Craig

**Pastoral Care Committee:** David Cleasby, Laili Cleasby, Shailesh Shah, Mehrdad Moghaddas, Rita Green, Helen Hellaby, May Badee-Arani, Katherine Lee

**Chaplaincy Coordination Team:** Sandra Ballester, Gerald Williams, Elizabeth Jenkerson, Kaykhosrov Manuchehri, Elizabeth Coleman, Zehra Balman

## Properties

**Committee for the Care of the Guardian's Resting Place:** Mahnoush Wain, Soheyl Azordegan, Roya Azordegan, Faraneh Khadem Sahba Saberian, Diana Rameshni, Shahab Meshki, Farid Afnan, Jaleh Alaei, Hasan Alaei

**Custodians:** Roya Azordegan & Soheyl Azordegan (from January 2016), Hasan Alaei & Jaleh Alaei (to January 2016)

**Grounds keeper:** Hubert St. Clair

**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:** Saeed Shahim, Farid Afnán Sean Fehilly Tony Sherwani, Homan Varghaei, Tamineh Payman, Ron Batchelor

**Committee for the Refurbishment of 17 Royal York Crescent, Bristol:** Lesley Taherzadeh O'Mara, Allen Duncan, William Harvey, Eleanor Mazidian, Robert Weinberg

### **Review Panels**

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

**Audio-Visual Review Panel:** Margaret Appa Tish Roskams, Margaret Love, Christine Wagg, Mahsa Firoozmand, Simin Liggitt, Ahlam Mirzai, Thelma Batchelor, Meenou Jones

**Literature Review Panel:** Peter Hulme, Iain Macdonald, Viv Craig, Andrew Gash, Muna Golmohamad, Anne Maund, Beverley Matthews, Janet Fleming Rose, Carolyn Fox, Arthur Weinberg, Daniel Wheatley, Amy Behi, Margaret Appa, Viv Bartlett, Christine Eyton, Michael Gammage, Sandra Jenkins, Paul Mahony, Coorous Mohtadi-Haghighi, Pat Morrissey, Sohan Sorourian, Collis Tahzib, Ismael Velasco, Graham Walker

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

### **Schools, scholarship and education**

**Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education:** Nazila Ghanea-Hercock

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

### **Legal matters**

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

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

### **Others**

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

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

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

**Choir Coordinating Committee:** Tracey Roberts Jones, Duncan Thomas, Shirin Abdullaeva, Paul Phillips, Stephanie Greis

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

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

**Events and Logistics Coordinator:** Foad Rahimi

**Events and Logistics Registration Team:** Shailesh Shah, Darren Smith

**Trained Registrars for Events:** Adel Hinrichs, Nadine Sayir, Bahiyyih Wain, John Bullivent, Cameron Yazdi, Mehran Golestani, Anne Wong, Sophie Attwood, Amanda Topson, Shahram Ziaie, Shailesh Shah, Mehrdad Kalani, Na'im Peyman, Andre Contente Trancoso, Arman Mohajeri, Bonnie Smith, Foujan Jenner, Babak Foroughi, Alessia Freddo

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

**National Convention Arrangements Committee** - Christopher Oak Sam Goodwin, Laura Sanchez-Behar, Karen O'Donoghue, Danesch Missaghian-Shirazi, Sam Davies, Bahiyyih Wain

**BASED Trustees:** Helena Hastie, (NSA Secretary), Saba Tahzib, Arezoo Farahzad, Rosanna Smith, Erfan Fadaei

**ISGP Team [not appointed by the National Assembly]:** Saba Tahzib Holly Smith, Olinga Tahzib, Katherine Murray [Appointed by ISGP]

## 11. STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS AT THE NATIONAL HAZIRATU’L-QUDS

The following are the friends who serve or have served this year in the departments and offices associated with the National Haziratu’l-Quds:

### Finance Office

**Staff:** Dumazi Volontiya, Arhinful Ansah, Elaine Yourtchi (Retired this year)

**Regular volunteer staff for finance:** Paige Thakkar, Rozita Pourtaheri, Ardisher Laloui, Hoshi Kalami, Shailesh Shah, Elizabeth Jenkerson, Natalia Mann, Fareba Jones, John Lester, Barbara Stanley-Hunt, Yasmiena Jones, Bayan Smith, Shida Rahmani, Diane Howlett

### Office of Public Affairs:

**Coordinating team:** Padideh Sabeti, Shirin Taherzadeh

**Staff:** Daniel Wheatley, Nadia Elads, Karl Wightman, Shabnam Monipour

**Collaborators:** Dr Nazila Ghanea-Hercock, Annabel Djalili, Rayyan Sabet-Parry, Dylane Ho, Noor Shaheed, Peter McGuire, Ferishteh Mazkouri, Shafa Youssefian, Amy Behi, Katie McSherry, Anousha Vahdati, Rosanna Smith

**Membership of RE Task Force:** Amy Behi, Jenny Lockwood, Katie McSherry, Stephen Vickers and Karl Wightman.

**Collaborators in Wales:** Christine Abbas and Viv Bartlett

**OPA Scotland:-** Maureen Sier and Allan Forsyth,

### Services Office

**Staff:** Michael Gammage, Patria Aquino, Barry Steer, Claudius Brasil, Fu’ad Fananapazir, Sumathi Dilling, Jhiovanna Vasquez

**Custodian:** John Sampson, Susanne Raum and John Dilling – Have all served as Custodians during this year.

**Volunteers:** Romina Fallah, Adel Payman, Diba Rahmani, Faranak Majidi, Houman Chakri

**Regular Hospitality Volunteers:** Karen Mulhern, Loga Juggapah, Malihe Sanatian, Sheerin Hurkoo, Shirin Jisha, Ziba Norman, Shahla Rouhani, Annie Danka, Betty Chang, Soheila Moridian, Adib Aminpour

**Data Protection Officer:** Natalie Brouwer

**Gillian Berg** – Incorporations Officer (Retired)

### Secretariat

**Staff:** Sam Roskams, Matthew Morrissey, Mary Watson, Gita Meshki, Mala Nagaratnam and Angela Tidswell