



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

Annual Report

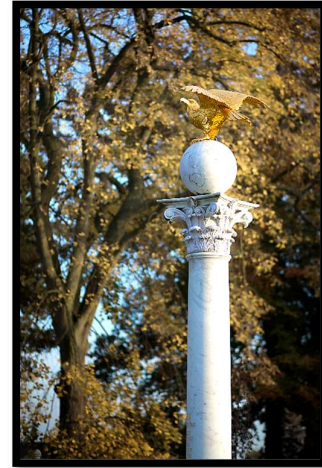
174 BE
2017-2018

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Introduction

We now stand between the bicentenaries of the Births of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb, those two Great Luminaries whose light is shining with ever greater clarity in every corner of the globe. The endeavours of the Bahá'í community – as it strives to bring into being a just, united and prosperous world based upon Bahá'u'lláh's teachings – are being propelled by this “period of special potency”¹. In the United Kingdom, the year under review saw the friends having an unprecedented number of conversations about Bahá'u'lláh and His Mission. Never before on these islands have so many attended gatherings at which Bahá'u'lláh, and His gift to mankind, were spoken about and celebrated. Individuals, communities and institutions are, as a result, more aware of the receptivity of all peoples to His message, and are more confident and adept at reaching out to friends, family, neighbours and colleagues to speak to them about His life and His purpose.



As this report shows, advances are being made in moving clusters along the continuum of their development. Groups of friends in clusters – and in neighbourhoods and villages within clusters – are actively learning to work as an expanding nuclei, with the institute process at its heart. Such efforts are promising indeed. The report also highlights that much is being systematically learnt about making meaningful contributions in various spaces at the national and regional level where discourses are taking place. It is evident that these contributions, while offered humbly, are becoming increasingly valued.

But the United Kingdom Bahá'í community has now reached a critical point, and the National Spiritual Assembly hopes that this report – particularly the section on “Advancing the process of entry by troops” – will enable the reader to appreciate the challenge we are facing to achieve the goals set before us. The scale of this challenge cannot be overestimated and brings to mind the words of the Universal House of Justice when it launched this Plan:

We set this objective before the Bahá'í world conscious that it is truly formidable; that a herculean labour will be required; that many sacrifices will have to be made. But faced with the plight of a world that suffers more each day bereft of Bahá'u'lláh's elixir, we cannot, in conscience, ask anything less of His devoted followers. God willing, their exertions will prove worthy to crown a hundred years of toil and set the stage for exploits as yet unimagined that must adorn the second century of the Formative Age.²

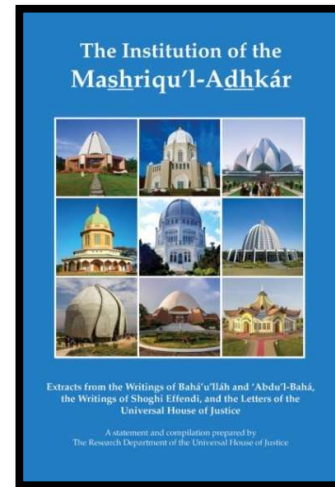
It is the hope of the National Spiritual Assembly that those reading this report will reflect deeply on the challenge and how they – as individuals, as members of the community, and perhaps also members of institutions – will respond in the spirit of the above guidance of the Universal House of Justice. It is time to bring to bear upon our endeavours the “fearlessness,

¹ Universal House of Justice, To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 29 December 2015, pars. 49-54

² *ibid.* par. 20

consecration and detachment” of the lives of our spiritual forebears – those “lionhearts” the Dawnbreakers – and make our “indelible mark on history”.³

The National Assembly takes this opportunity to express its profound gratitude to the House of Justice for its continuous flow of guidance and encouragement. Among the communications that stand out this year are: the Riḍván messages of 2017 and 2018; guidance about changes to pilgrimage; the communication introducing the film, *Light to the World*; the October 2017 message “To All who Celebrate the Glory of God”; the 31 October 2017 message reflecting upon the bicentenary; the announcement of the inauguration of the first local House of Worship in Battambang, Cambodia; the release of the book, *The Five Year Plan 2011-2016 - Summary of Achievements*; updated footnotes in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas; and the new statement and compilation, *The Institution of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár*, prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice.



The members of the outgoing National Assembly had the inestimable privilege to take part in the Twelfth International Bahá'í Convention held at the Bahá'í World Centre from the Ninth to the Twelfth Days of Riḍván, 175 BE. With awe and joy, members witnessed, and participated in, the election of the Supreme Body – a process that was discharged “in a manner far, far removed from the prevailing standards in the world”.⁴ Witnessing this, it was evident why the Universal House of Justice is “the last refuge of a tottering civilisation.”⁵



The National Assembly extends its deep appreciation to former members of the Universal House of Justice, Mr. Gustavo Correa and Dr. Firaydoun Javaheri, on relinquishing their membership of that body. The passing of Hartmut Grossmann (pictured left) – a much-loved former House member – was also noted with sadness. National memorial gatherings were held for Mr. Grossmann in three locations.

Without the constant, tireless and indeed herculean labours of the members of the Continental Board of Counsellors in Europe, and in particular our own Dr. Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi, we would surely not have witnessed the advances this community has made. The same is true of our 14 Auxiliary Board members whose outpouring of love and sacrificial endeavour is an inspiration and source of guidance to all. The National Assembly thanks them all deeply.

³ Universal House of Justice, To the Bahá'ís of the World, Riḍván 2018, par. 11

⁴ Universal House of Justice, To the Delegates to the Twelfth International Bahá'í Convention, 25 April 2018, par. 2

⁵ Shoghi Effendi, “America and the Most Great Peace” in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*

1. Advancing the Process of Entry by Troops

1.1 GOALS OF THE FIVE YEAR PLAN

1.1.1 Goals of the Plan – The movement of clusters

At the outset of the current Five Year Plan, the Universal House of Justice called for “growth to be accelerated in all clusters where it has begun,” stating that there should appear “a clear arc of progress” until the end of the Plan. The Supreme Body then set a formidable task for the Bahá’í world: “to raise the number of clusters where a programme of growth has become intensive to 5,000 by Ridván 2021”.⁶

Looking more closely at the expected development of activities in a cluster gives a fuller picture of what must be accomplished in the coming months. The Universal House of Justice wrote:

Whereas, when a programme of growth is nascent in a cluster, there might be a handful of individuals who are involved in its promotion and those who are participating might come from only several households, by the time a programme has become intensive, these figures, as one would expect, have grown: perhaps tens of individuals active in the work of expansion and consolidation, while those participating might well surpass a hundred. But being able to reach out to large numbers—mobilizing a hundred people or more, whose service connects them with many hundreds or even thousands—requires the capacity to adapt to a substantial increase in complexity.⁷

Although by no means definitive, it is now understood that a cluster with about five or more activities can be seen to have established a programme of growth and passed the first milestone. Clusters with 20 or more activities are usually working at a level of intensity that they can be considered to have passed the second milestone and thus have an intensive programme of growth. Those with a hundred or more activities normally have sufficient elements in place to have passed the third milestone. In the United Kingdom, clusters can thus be categorised as shown in the table, which includes our expectations for the end of the Five Year Plan (in green).

United Kingdom	Grouping of clusters by the number of activities			
	0-4	5-19	20-99	100+
Activities				
No. of clusters at April-16	12	23	14	1
No. of clusters at April-18	13	21	14	2
Goal by Ridván 2021	0	9	29	Up to 12

⁶ Universal House of Justice, To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 29 December 2015, par. 19

⁷ *ibid.*

Since the beginning of the Plan, some clusters have advanced past their next milestone, such as **Greater Manchester, Essex and Forth**. Many of those that passed the first milestone in the last Plan are making strides to pass the next. Others, which may have reached a level of intensity in the past – such that they were considered to have an intensive programme of growth – have slipped back and now need to increase the intensity of their efforts, so that they can truly be regarded as having passed the second milestone that they earlier reached.

In light of the goals set by the Universal House of Justice, the task before the UK community may then be summarised as follows:

- **Thirteen clusters need to establish or strengthen their programme of growth, aiming for five or more activities:**

England: Dorset, *Cornwall & Isles of Scilly*, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man.

Northern Ireland: *Hainsworth, Stars of the West*

Scotland: Orkney, North Highlands, West Highlands, Borders, *Shetland*

Wales: South West Wales, Mid Wales.

(Those written in italics previously had passed the first milestone and the aim is for them to strengthen their programme of growth and, indeed, to reach a level of intensity that they pass the second milestone also.)

- **The programmes of growth in 21 clusters needs to become intensive with 20 or more activities and thus pass the second milestone:**

England: Lincolnshire, North & East Yorkshire, Cumbria, Solent, Devon, Norfolk, Suffolk, *West Yorkshire, Lancashire, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, North West Midlands, The Marches, Two Shires, Cambridgeshire, Wiltshire*

Northern Ireland: Seven Valleys

Scotland: Clyde, South West Scotland, Western Isles

Wales: *North Wales*

(Those written in italics previously had an intensive programme of growth and thus passed the second milestone. Their focus now must be to rekindle a level of intensity previously enjoyed and thus to be truly past the second milestone.)

- For the 16 more advanced clusters, the task is to **increase intensity, manage the growing complexity this entails, and to develop their capacities as ‘reservoirs’, supporting nearby clusters**. These include:

England: Greater Manchester, North East England, West Midlands, East Midlands, Thames Valley, Gloucestershire Avon & Somerset, Greater London, Surrey, Kent, Sussex, Hertfordshire, and Essex

Northern Ireland: Northern Lights

Scotland: Forth, North East Scotland

Wales: South Wales

Of these, a number of clusters are striving to pass the third milestone, potentially before the current Plan comes to an end in 2021.

The two clusters already past the third milestone – Greater London and Greater Manchester – are in many areas striving to advance the frontiers of learning in the UK, including developing the capacity to **embrace large numbers**. Being linked to

the learning site for Northern Europe, and with the able support of its Resource Persons, Ms. Anisa Mazidian and Mrs. Jenna Tahzib, these two clusters are sources of learning and insights which the entire United Kingdom community benefits from.

1.1.2 Progress made

Growth occurred in many clusters over the last year, in some cases substantially so. A few of the achievements are highlighted below, with each increase in numbers denoting not only a rise in participation and the building of capacity, but an outpouring of devoted effort from the friends, the drawing of souls towards Bahá'u'lláh, and a step towards building the civilization that He envisioned.

- **Greater Manchester** advanced past the third milestone – a wonderful achievement! After plateauing at around 50 core activities for a number of years, the friends there more than doubled the number in ten months, passing 100 activities in October 2017. The account in the panel overleaf shares some insights into how this was accomplished.
- In nine months since Riḍván 2017, core activities in **Forth** cluster have risen from 19 to 26, with a near doubling of the participants from the community of interest, now numbering 80.
- Core activities in **Lincolnshire** rose to 12 in the six months leading to March 2018, increasing participants from 17 to 49.
- **Essex** has steadily increased its activities, from 17 in April 2016 to 33 in March 2018, with participation more than doubling. The number of friends of the Faith involved rose over the same period from 35 to 131.
- Driven largely by an increase in devotional meetings, **Thames Valley** cluster increased its core activities from 46 to 61 over the last year, with a corresponding increase in participants.
- Building on a substantial rise in activity in the first year of the Plan, this year **Greater London** cluster passed 300 core activities.
- In the Windsor neighbourhood, Belfast – in the **Northern Lights** cluster – those involved in community building activities have learnt much about the systematisation of efforts from cycle to cycle, following a series of intensive projects during the summer of 2017 and beyond.
- Core activities in **Clyde** increased from 8 to 13 in the nine months from last Riḍván.
- A systematic and concerted effort is in hand in **South Wales** to multiply and strengthen expanding nuclei of friends, who are learning to reach out to others. (See page 11 for more about nuclei.)

Overall numbers of core activities across the United Kingdom, as well as participation, has gradually risen since the beginning of the Five Year Plan, peaking around the time of the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh.

Moving past the third milestone: Greater Manchester

In the last year, the number of core activities in the Greater Manchester cluster grew from 46 to more than 100. Over the course of three cycles, the cluster saw a doubling in the number of junior youth groups (nine) and study circles (27) and a tripling in the number of devotional gatherings (59).

Devotional character of the community

A growing consciousness of the importance of collective worship was developed and emphasised by the cluster agencies through multiple cluster and neighbourhood reflection meetings where local goals were made and stories shared. This, together with a lack of pressure from agencies about ensuring the devotionals were a specific size or form, empowered the friends to open gatherings, including many family devotionals.

Prior to the reflection meeting, experienced hosts of devotionals gathered and identified those they would accompany in this service during the expansion phase. This provided a great impetus to the planning process at the reflection meeting. In one cycle, devotionals increased from 42 to 59. A large pool of engaged youth in the Hulme neighbourhood was drawn upon to host, participate and support devotionals.

Main sequence of courses

In two consecutive summers, agencies and neighbourhood teams planned multiple teaching campaigns in the Hulme neighbourhood with different objectives at different points in the cycle.

The objectives included: (1) a small team focusing daily and drawing on the concentric circles to work with new and existing networks of friends and responding swiftly to opportunities for youth to enter the institute process; (2) tutors learning to work with Iranian and youth populations (these form the bulk of the study circles); (3) with a full time institute coordinator, institute campaigns started and regular tutor gatherings are now a feature of each cycle, (4) as the cluster hosts a number of gathering as a reservoir cluster, many of these seminar participants have assisted in inviting people to attend the campaigns and to mobilise tutors, (5) in order to start the Book 1s quickly and regularly, there was no pressure to have a large number of participants from the outset. With this focus, 14 out of 27 study circles were Book 1s.

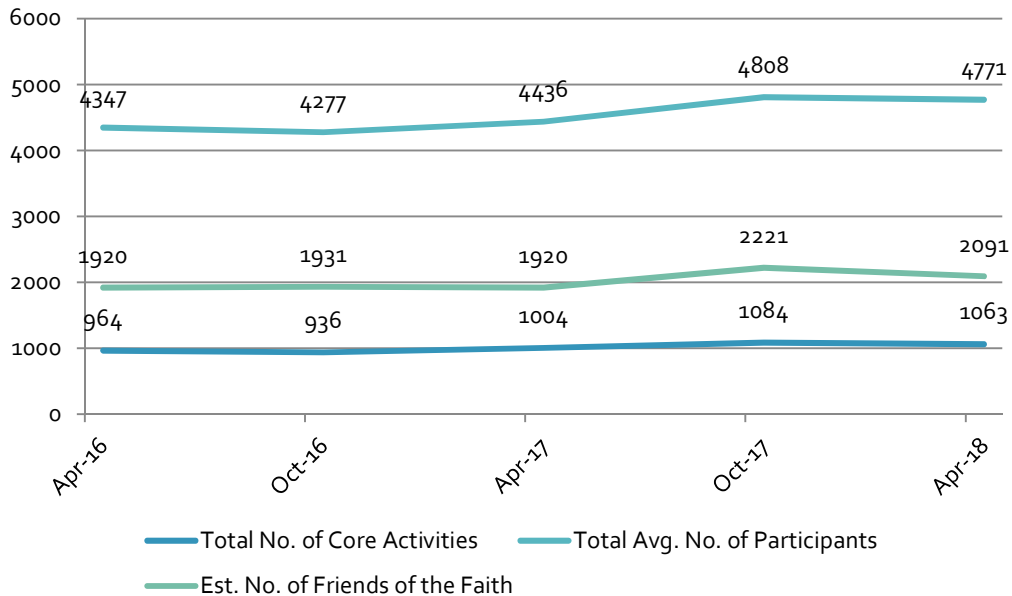
Junior youth spiritual empowerment programme

Initially the junior youth coordinators time was mostly spent in Hulme neighbourhood, focusing on the youth movement and opening junior youth groups. However, the junior youth coordinator is also now gradually supporting the formation and sustaining of groups in other parts of the cluster. To achieve this, the number of experienced animators accompanying new animators to form and consolidate groups has increased. For the programme to grow, a number of teaching projects for the cluster focused specifically on home visits campaigns and concerted periods of mobilisation to open new groups. Regular local festivals and sub-regional camps helped consolidate and sustain junior youth groups formed. Animator gatherings (and weekly neighbourhood animator gatherings) have taken place each cycle, which have assisted with the quality of the programme through efforts to visit families systematically. The junior youth coordinator has been meeting and consulting with Book 5 graduates and Local Spiritual Assemblies to build a vision around opening groups.

Support in the cluster

The scheme of coordination currently has a full-time junior youth coordinator and study circle coordinator and also two Auxiliary Board members (one serving full-time and residing in the cluster). In the absence of an Area Teaching Committee, growth has been possible due to the focused efforts of the coordinators and the Auxiliary Board members forming a united vision on increasing the number of devotionals and advancing these goals while trying to strengthen their own educational imperative with the assistance of collaborators. Most importantly, a sense of joy, enthusiasm, focus on the goals of the cluster and the desire to draw on the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh have animated the interactions of the friends in the cluster as the Bahá'í community labours during this period of special potency.

Total number of core activities in progress during each six-month period since the beginning of the current Five Year Plan:



More than 2,000 individuals from the community of interest are now involved in core activities – a slight increase since the beginning of the Plan. No doubt many thousands more – including the parents, children and siblings of those involved – are touched by these activities and, through home visits and other interactions, are coming to learn of the promise they hold.

Notable qualitative developments have taken place in the last year, including: the fostering of **nuclei** of friends at the cluster and neighbourhood levels, operating with the institute process at their heart; the development of **cadres of tutors**; the organisation of **cluster institute campaigns** and **family festivals**; and substantial improvements in the effectiveness with which the **institutions** make plans to support growth. These will be explored below.

Another significant development is the strengthening of **‘reservoir’ clusters**, which are learning how to support surrounding clusters. Already, this support can be seen to be taking a number of forms: travel teachers and pioneers are being deployed to clusters to help initiate growth; teaching projects and seminars within reservoir clusters are serving as an important space for friends from elsewhere to develop certain capacities that they can then take back to their own clusters; and “collaborative groups” – made up of Auxiliary Board members, institute coordinators and, from time to time, the Regional Council secretary – are becoming more systematic in overseeing the development of groups of clusters. Indeed, the capacity to identify and plan how to assist neighbouring clusters has developed significantly.⁸

1.1.3 Challenges and the herculean labour required

Encouraging though these advances are, the National Spiritual Assembly is conscious that enormous challenges remain, for the goals outlined above will not be met if we continue with the current rate of progress. We are thus at a critical point in the fortunes of the Plan. Some

⁸ Guidance concerning collaborative groups is included in the 29 December 2015 message, par. 44

clusters are struggling to sustain growth, and few have advanced from one milestone to the next. Greater effort is now needed to raise the level of intensity in those clusters that are striving to pass the second milestone. Tapping into receptivity and embracing large numbers remains elusive and needs more focused attention. Far greater community participation remains possible. Last, but by no means least, the training institute process needs to be both strengthened and placed much more centrally in all our efforts, including teaching the Cause.

The Universal House of Justice states that “immense exertion”, “herculean labour” and “many sacrifices” will be needed in this Plan, and it is the conviction of the National Assembly that it is in a new level of sacrificial effort and intensity, that the community can find much of the solution to the challenges outlined above. Indeed, the capacity to call the friends to “arise to the station of sacrifice” – to invite them to dedicate time and energy, to forego personal plans, to organise their lives around service, to pioneer, to consecrate themselves to the accompaniment of others – is itself an object of learning, and was earnestly considered at the national institutional meeting held in February 2018.

The summons to heroic, sacrificial endeavours was also the central theme of three youth gatherings that took place in Manchester, Oxford and London (pictured below) as recently as 5 May 2018. They will also be the theme of upcoming youth gatherings in Edinburgh and Northern Ireland. The National Assembly wished to create a space for youth – who, as history has shown, play so critical a role in advancing the work of the Cause – to consider what extraordinary deeds they can offer, coherently placing service at the centre of their lives and following heroically in the footsteps of their spiritual forebears. Some 300 youth have thus far participated, scores of whom made offers to serve in various capacities to advance their own cluster or neighbouring or more distant clusters, including those overseas. It is the hope of the National Assembly that their leadership will inspire others into greater heights of heroism and sacrificial service.

However, more is urgently needed, and the National Assembly urges the delegates at National Convention to reflect on this matter and to offer their recommendations.



1.2 GROWTH AND THE TRAINING INSTITUTE

Capacity building lies at the heart of this Plan and it is the training institute – an “instrument of limitless potentialities”⁹ – that has been gifted to us in order to extend the capacity building process to multitudes of people, thereby developing the human resources needed to achieve a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. From the earliest stages of growth in any locality, therefore, the training institute is central to efforts to grow, bringing to mind Bahá’u’lláh’s own call to the people of Bahá: “*Bend your minds and wills to the education of the peoples and kindreds of the earth...*”¹⁰

1.2.1 Nuclei of friends and training

To begin this capacity building process, the first step in so many settings is the formation of nuclei of friends. These nuclei may be working together across the broader network of contacts and in areas of intense activity, and can be seen as the bedrock of progress in any cluster or neighbourhood. As described by the Universal House of Justice, a nucleus might initially consist of just a few friends “who are working and consulting together and arranging activities”¹¹. The nucleus must then grow, enabling more to shoulder responsibility for the work – a process made possible when human resources are raised up through the training institute.

Over the last year, a number of efforts have been made to learn about forming and strengthening nuclei. For example, in some areas, such as **South Wales** and **Central England**, nuclei of friends have been brought together to reflect on their development, the training needed to raise fresh resources and, how this in turn requires the development of a cadre of tutors. Institutional support has been important – in the **Northern Lights** cluster in Northern Ireland, for instance, nuclei have been reflecting regularly with an Auxiliary Board member and the Regional Council. It is noteworthy that some nuclei, such as the Kilburn neighbourhood in **Greater London**, have striven to start a new Ruhi Book 1 every cycle – a pattern that they have now managed to sustain and strengthen over several cycles.

There are many examples upon which to draw, from across the UK, but here is one account from Leith, in **Forth** cluster, which offers a flavour of the sacrificial efforts being made by friends to form nuclei together, with the institute at its heart, in order to open a new centre of intense activity:

Three friends earnestly desired to learn about community building in a neighbourhood setting, and so, after research and exploration, they identified Leith (pictured) as a suitable place for a neighbourhood focus and pioneered there. They planned two projects – one before moving there and one soon after – in which they invited others to learn about connecting the hearts to Bahá’u’lláh. The focus of these projects was to learn about



⁹ 28 December 2010 message, par. 3

¹⁰ *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, CLVI

¹¹ 29 December 2015 message, par. 7

conversations in which from the outset, instead of focusing on a particular community-building activity, they tried to learn to speak about Bahá'u'lláh and His Mission and invited their neighbours to learn how to apply His teachings through engaging in the core activities. This naturally led the conversation to the institute courses that aim to develop the capacity of participants to engage in community building endeavours. As a result, from these projects, a Ruhi Book 1 and children's class started. Eight months later, there are now six core activities with another three opening in the next week or two. They are trying to occupy multiple social spaces in the neighbourhood in an effort to constantly meet new friends who are eager to lend their efforts to the betterment of the community. They recognize there is still so much to learn.

1.2.2 Cadres of tutors

Foremost among the conditions of growth, the Universal House of Justice tells us, “is an institute process gaining in strength, given its centrality to fostering the movement of populations.”¹² Developing a **cadre of tutors** to carry forward the training thus becomes a central concern for these nuclei. Whilst much still needs to be learnt about what it means to develop a cadre of tutors who are able to drive forward the training process in a given area, some nascent efforts have been made over the last year. For instance:

- In several neighbourhood settings across the UK, experience has been gained in accompanying individuals, who have only recently completed Ruhi Book 1, to immediately tutor it with their friends, thereby rapidly expanding the reach of the institute process – at times across language barriers.
- Where focused attention has been given to mobilising tutors and helping people enter the institute process, significant steps forward have been seen, as indicated in the account (right) from **Greater Manchester**.
- Other efforts have proceeded to develop cadres of tutors in larger areas. In **Greater London**, for example, gatherings of tutors have

In the efforts to open study circles in the Hulme neighbourhood in the summer of 2017, a small team of people – two of whom were full-time tutors – gave a daily focus to assisting individuals to enter the institute, using the tool of concentric circles, working with both newly-met friends and existing networks, and acting and reflecting quickly to respond to opportunities for youth to enter the institute. Aided by the cluster institute coordinator's full time services, institute campaigns and regular tutor gatherings became a feature of every cycle. An emphasis was placed on opening Ruhi Book 1 study circles and mobilising tutors, leading to a point where 14 of the 27 study circles in the cluster were Book 1s.

¹² 29 December 2015 message, par.8.

been held specifically to consult on how the tutors can function as a team, supporting each other and mobilising others, and collaborators are being identified to help raise up new tutors.

1.2.3 Institute campaigns

A further important development in the institute process has been the use of **institute campaigns**, involving the intensive study of two or more institute courses over a relatively short time. The January 2017 document from the International Teaching Centre – titled *Training Institutes: Attaining a Higher Level of Functioning* – described the significance of such campaigns as a means to help “accelerate the flow of large numbers of friends along the sequence of courses”. The intensity generated not only expedites the development of resources, but is conducive to the quality of the training, focusing participants on the capacity building process underway and helping ensure that the process is not “robbed of the dynamism essential to its advancement”.

It is pleasing to see that a number of clusters have been trying to learn about this over the last year, and it is hoped that such intensive training will become more of a feature of the pattern of community life. For example:

- In **Forth**, Scotland, an effort is underway to have a weekend each cycle in which different books are offered for friends in the cluster and neighbouring clusters – the first weekend alone had 25 participants.



Participants in Books 6 and 10 study circles at a summer intensive in Fyvie.

- A number of institute campaigns have been held in the Hulme neighbourhood, **Greater Manchester**, and in **Thames Valley** cluster.
- The Training Institute Board for Scotland has organised intensive courses in **Fyvie** during the holidays.
- Intensive training for youth and others is being organised by the Training Institute Board for England for June and July.

Creating the space for collective study can be a spur to progress, and need not be complicated to arrange, as suggested in the following account from **South Yorkshire** cluster:

In Sheffield there is a large extended family from Congo who have been living here for five or six years. Five youth from this family, two of whom are Bahá'ís, had recently completed three years of the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme together and become youth. Attending the youth conference was a natural next step. These five youth had also attended three junior youth camps over the past year in the North and Central England.

During the conference the youth made plans to start a Book 1 together as well as a service project. Since the conference a space has been created in a home of one Bahá'í family every Friday evening for different study circles to come together, have dinner and study their Ruhi Books in different rooms in the house. This offered the opportunity for the participants from each book to socialise, pray, eat and make art together each week. So far, a Book 1, Book 2, Book 3 and Book 5 (including junior youth group planning) have taken place on the Friday evenings. The Congolese youth have greatly benefited from this space in which they can socialise with other older youth. This has helped them build their Bahá'í identity, as well as progress through Ruhi Book 1 at a sprightly pace. The collective spirit built during these weekly gatherings has served to increase their desire to walk a path of service and has helped them think more concretely about their lives in light of the Revelation. Since the start of the Book 1, one of their friends – also from Congo – was invited and has recently begun participating.

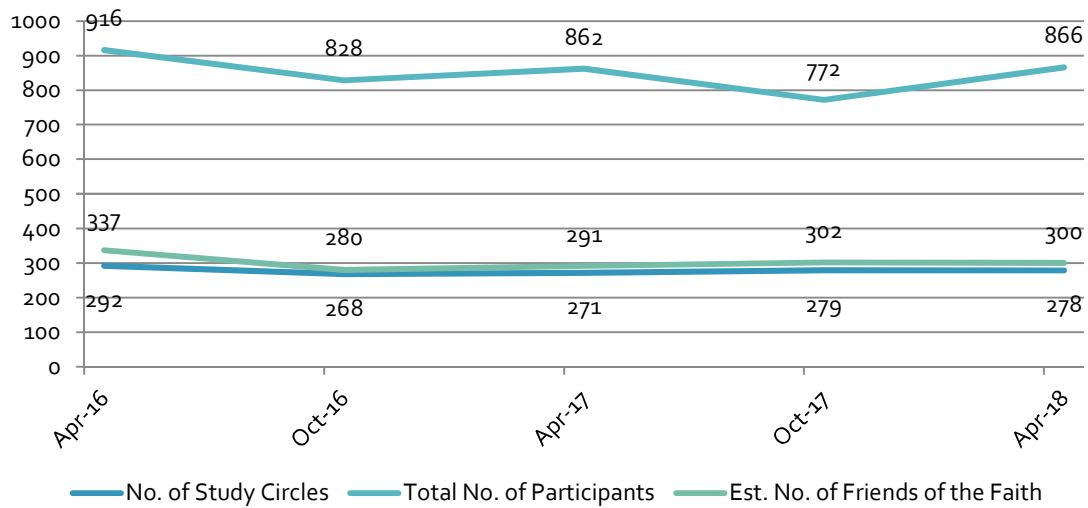
Experience has already shown that institute campaigns are a joyous way to intensify study and for participants to feel part of the movement of a population, and the strengthening of this capacity over the last year has been a significant achievement in the UK. It will be important to further strengthen this capacity in the cycles ahead, including enabling more clusters to arrange regular institute campaigns.

1.2.4 Strengthening progress along the main sequence of courses

Institute Courses - the number of individuals who have completed each book in the previous 6 month period												
	Book 1	Book 2	Book 3: G1	Book 3: G2	Book 3: G3	Book 4	Book 5	Book 6	Book 7	Book 8	Book 9 U1	Book 10 U1
Apr-16	127	31	39	3	0	30	32	25	10	66	17	0
Apr-17	136	26	28	3	3	43	22	10	13	79	23	92
Apr-18	112	25	17	5	0	30	24	7	20	59	15	31

Study Circles in progress			
	No. of Study Circles	Total No. of Participants	Est. No. of Friends of the Faith
Apr-16	292	916	337
Apr-17	271	862	291
Apr-18	278	866	300

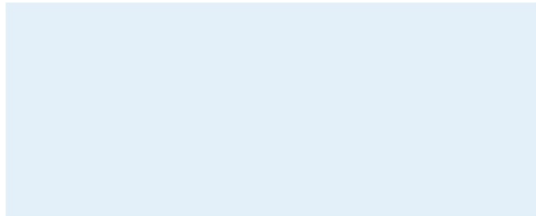
Number of study circles in progress during each six-month period since the beginning of the current Five Year Plan



While learning about developing cadres of tutors and institute campaigns holds great promise, the overall level of training in the UK has fallen a little since the beginning of the Plan, with around 270-300 study circles in progress at any one time, as indicated in this graph.

One observation to make in relation to the above table is the relatively low numbers completing the higher books in the main sequence. Among the actions taken to address this, the National Assembly recently asked the four regional training institute boards to apply greater focus to Book 8, *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*.

The rate of completion is also noteworthy. With more than 850 individuals participating in study circles at any one time, and an average of 400 individual completing courses in any six-month period, this suggests that many books are either taking a very long time to complete, or that they are not being completed at all. Moreover, study circles in the UK presently have an average of a little over three participants per book, suggesting that more still needs to be learnt about embracing large numbers into the training institute process.

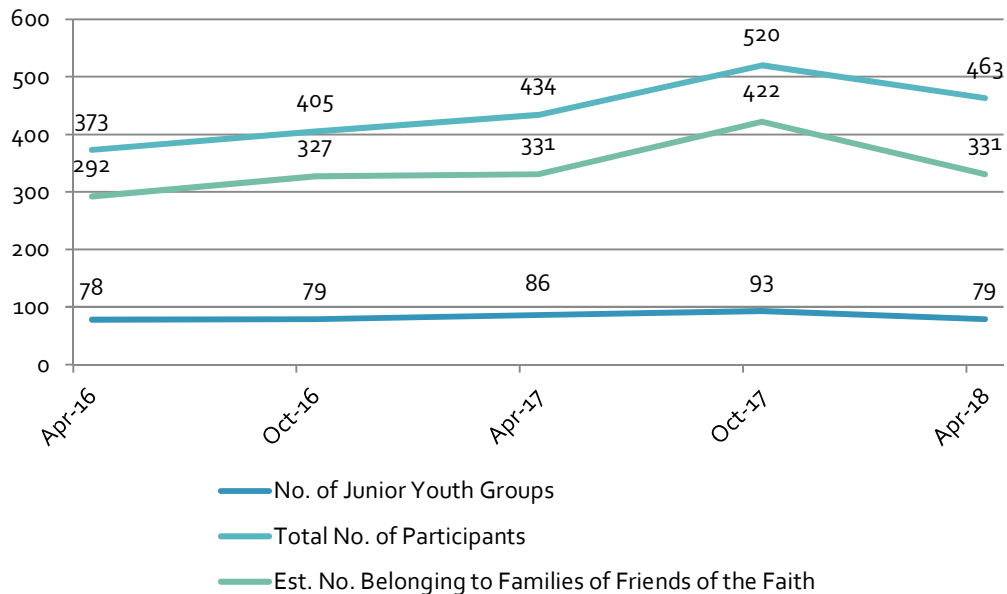


Study circles in the UK presently have an average of a little over three participants per book, suggesting that more needs to be learnt about embracing large numbers into the training institute process.

It would be helpful for the delegates at National Convention to reflect on these matters.

1.2.5 Developing the programme for the spiritual empowerment of junior youth

The number of junior youth groups in the UK rose significantly in the first six months of the year before receding, as indicated in this graph.



Many dedicated efforts are being made to expand the junior youth programme. As an example, the Training Institute Board for England reported:

Reflecting on the experience gained during the first year of the Plan revealed that in order to see growth we need to go beyond imposing a blanket approach to building capacity in the region, towards learning about building the capacity of each nucleus of friends learning about the development of the programme in a cluster, and channelling the necessary support to assist them to progress.



Junior youth group in the Little London neighbourhood in Leeds

Through a pattern of visiting clusters, identifying concrete opportunities for forming groups, drawing on a large pool of collaborators with more time, experience and willingness to serve the scheme formally or informally, facilitating the flow of resources to clusters when required, and maintaining an ongoing conversation with

collaborators and junior youth coordinators, the programme grew from 62 groups to 78 groups in the four cycles from October 2016 to October 2017.

Moreover, new and exciting areas of learning are being encountered in our efforts to extend the junior youth programme. Approaches to schools, in particular, have yielded insights and success, as the following account from Burnham in **Thames Valley** cluster illustrates.

For nearly a year now, a team of four friends in Thames Valley have been meeting and speaking with Burnham Park Academy, in an effort to implement the junior youth spiritual programme in this school. We are now at the stage of training some of the older pupils (Year 10s) so that they will be able to run groups for the younger students in Year 7. Excitingly, the school agreed both for the programme to be integrated into the school day and for us to train the older pupils so that they can deliver the programme to their younger peers.

In the initial few meetings with the Head of Year 11 teacher, we explained the nature and purpose of the programme and showed him *Breezes of Confirmation*, *Glimmerings of Hope* and *Walking the Straight Path*. We shared some heart-warming stories of transformation from other groups that take place in neighbourhoods in other parts of the cluster, and we mentioned some of the service projects that groups typically do. We talked about the Bahá'í Faith as the source of the programme. We were then able to meet the headmaster – this was crucial in enabling us to proceed. At first the headmaster indicated that the programme could not be used owing to its religious content. Yet this gave us the opportunity to explain the spiritual nature of the programme and the key concepts that underpin it, such as the importance of the junior youth age group and the role of true friendship and selfless service. We said that the programme rests on the conviction that human existence has both material and spiritual dimensions, and in particular that young people require both intellectual and spiritual education. We then reminded them of the recent OFSTED report which includes a requirement for all schools in England to promote the “spiritual, moral, social and cultural development” of their pupils. We then posed, through conversation, the following questions: But what does it actually mean to promote the spiritual development of an individual? What does it look like to create spaces where youth come together in groups to discuss elevated themes and to develop spiritual qualities like kindness, patience, generosity, love? When it comes to acquiring knowledge of science and history and literature, we acknowledge that this takes time, effort, carefully designed curricula, and all sorts of spaces and support structures; why should it be any different when it comes to acquiring moral and spiritual qualities? The junior youth groups, we said, are one such space to support youth as they explore questions about their life and aspirations, about what they want to do and what kind of person they want to be. And, given that religions have historically represented some of the most robust and transformative systems of moral wisdom, is it not natural to turn to religion to see what insights it contains regarding spiritual development?

After exploring further concepts and looking at examples of lessons in the junior youth texts, the headmaster became very excited about the programme. He wanted us not just to have a group once a week but to have it twice a day, every day, during the morning and afternoon. The headmaster suggested ‘piloting’ the programme by training five Year 10 students, each of whom would be then assigned five Year 7 students to animate, with a view to then expanding further.

We then drafted an email which one of the teachers sent out to the parents of the five Year 10 students, to get their permission. Those five Year 10 students then spoke about being an animator to their friends, who also want to be trained; so we now have around ten Year 10 students who will begin the training.

In Newport, **South Wales** too, positive experience is being gained in offering the programme to schools:

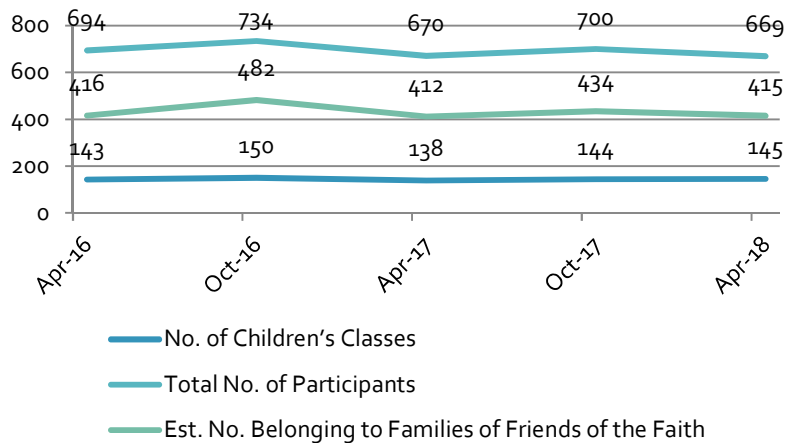
Two friends offered a programme in a junior school to raise the capacity of the older pupils to deliver workshops on diversity to their younger peers. Trust was gained with the school management team, affording the opportunity to introduce the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme. After overcoming some setbacks, a junior youth group formed in October with a schoolteacher co-animating, and meetings have continued during term time with around 10 participants. Parents were engaged and a service project was implemented to clean a footpath next to the school, not just as a one-off but as an endeavour aimed at lasting change. Wonderful confirmations followed: the local council itself then provided the most thorough cleaning of the footpath that the school staff had ever seen, prompted by the group’s appearance in a local newspaper. Efforts are being made to train the teacher and some older youth with a view to forming additional groups.

How to introduce the junior youth programme, and the training with which it is associated, into spaces where it will reach large numbers will be an important question to consider and explore in the cycles ahead. Experience to date – from both within and outside the UK – suggests that achieving this may involve **increasing the level of formality** with which the programme is organised and presented in areas that can sustain large numbers. The same is true for the children’s class programme. This is an exciting area of learning which could enable the junior youth programme and children’s classes to expand considerably, and has been made possible through the foundation of capacity that has been built as a result of the community’s efforts over many years.

1.2.6 Spiritual education of children

After rising appreciably in the previous Plan, the number of children’s classes and levels of participation thereafter has remained steady since 2016, as shown in this graph:

Number of children’s classes in progress during each six-month period since the beginning of the current Five Year Plan



Many positive developments occurred over the last year with children’s classes - highlights include:

- At the frontier, **Greater London** now has 43 classes – a fantastic achievement – and it is one of a few clusters in the UK that has been able to teach Grades 1, 2 and 3 of the materials.

Apr-16
Apr-17
Apr-18

Children's Classes in progress		
No. of Children's Classes	Total No. of Participants	Est. No. Belonging to Families of Friends of the Faith
143	694	416
138	670	412
145	669	415

- Three or four children’s classes have been sustained in two localities – Deepcut, **Surrey**, and Horsham, **Sussex** – as a collective effort of the friends and with close accompaniment for new teachers.

- In **North East England** and **Thames Valley**, experience is being gained of holding children’s classes with larger numbers of participants from neighbourhood settings and receptive populations.

- Training in the higher grades was offered at some summer schools, including both north and south England.

- In **South Wales** cluster, a collaborative group mapped out where Bahá’í families live, where there are existing classes, and identified active teachers as part of an effort to initiate children’s classes in new neighbourhoods, teaming up mothers with youth.

Stirrings of activity in a rural setting in **Northern Lights** offer a wonderful example of how a community-building process can take root in different social realities. In a small village in County Armagh, a children’s class began after a local outreach. The Bahá’í family who began the work are longstanding residents of the area. In collaboration with the Auxiliary Board member, they decided that it would be nice to converse with some neighbours about the possibility of a class for children. This has developed into a regular class with seven children, involving two newly met families who live close by. A Book 1 was able to start shortly afterwards which involved the mother and eldest daughter of one of the families.

In Deepcut, **Surrey**, the children’s classes take place at an army-based community centre and have been going on now for five years. The transformation these classes inspire is profound. In a Grade 2 children’s class, the teacher tried to explain God to the children, giving many examples of His greatness and mercy, and one of the children who has no religious education at home expressed her happiness and acknowledgment about God being with her always and everywhere. The same child was inspired that day to put a quotation – “The source of courage and power is the promotion of the word of God” – into a melody, which some children sang at the bicentenary event.

1.2.7 Family camps

Family camps and children’s festivals continued to develop over the last year, becoming a feature of community life at regional, sub-regional, cluster and neighbourhood levels. These festivals raise consciousness and attract participation in the community-building processes

underway, and are an excellent strength on which to build.

In the north of England, for instance, a weekend residential family camp was held, providing the opportunity for parents to study the significance of the spiritual education of children.

And the following account from **Greater Manchester** gives an indication of the ways in which such family gatherings contribute to the community-building process.

On the weekend of the 28 and 29 October, a family festival was held for the Greater Manchester cluster in a local community centre in Trafford, where families across the different communities came together to learn about how to build vibrant and united communities.

“The idea came from an animator gathering and children’s class teacher gathering, where teachers and animators felt that one gift we can give to Bahá’u’lláh would be to bring children and junior youth together to create a collective celebration. This idea then evolved and became an occasion for families, both already or not yet engaged in the community building process, to come together to reflect on the vision of Bahá’u’lláh for humanity, and on how we can build vibrant and united communities.

Different teams of teachers, animators, and collaborators prepared and facilitated the programme for the children and junior youth, and a beautiful adults’ programme prepared for another family festival was used. On both days at the family festival we prayed together, split into our respective programmes and workshops, ate together, and then presented what we had learnt in our workshops to the big group. There was a crèche for toddlers, and there was also an opportunity on both days for junior youth and older children to do a service project of litter picking in the local area.

Across both days, 99 people participated in this festival. 49 of them were youth and adults, 20 were junior youth, another 20 were children and 10 were toddlers. 46 of this 99 were from the wider community. It was such a joyful occasion that provided a space for many parents and their children to come together, and it created opportunities for parents to reflect on their role in building united communities. The programme allowed time to socialise and build stronger friendships, and was not too intensive. A united vision was definitely built across the weekend.

A lot of learning took place across the weekend. One wonderful fruit of this weekend was that many youth were facilitating both the children’s programme and the programme for junior youth, and they developed their capacity to create a programme and to work with the respective age groups for longer periods. This cluster-wide family festival also marked the beginning of many more spaces for families to come together on a more local level within their neighbourhoods or with their network of friends in order to learn about how parents can be protagonists; some local family gatherings are being planned already! The festival also gave an opportunity to learn about universal participation in putting the festival together, be it through offering lifts, preparing food, setting up the venue, preparing materials and the programme, or facilitating the different programmes. This allowed many to be of service.



Stories about Children's Classes
From the Greater London Cluster
Bicentenary Edition - October 2017



Hammersmith & Fulham: Including Children in the Bicentenary Programme
"In our community we are looking to integrate the children as much as possible into our public bicentenary event. In our children's class we will be rehearsing a shadow puppet play on the dream of the fishes which will be performed as part of the programme of this event. Alongside this, the children will be learning some new songs to sing in the community choir and they will also be contributing to the storytelling. Our community has chosen a special prayer for the bicentenary and each child has been given a specially decorated prayer card so that they can memorise the prayer in their children's class this term. We hope that the bicentenary will be a happy and memorable occasion for them all."

Hampstead: Helping Children and Parents to learn about Bahá'u'lláh
"Our Grade 3 class consists of 8 children, the majority of whom come from the wider community. We are studying the lives of the Messengers of God and are currently learning about Buddha. Despite the fact that the children would only begin to study the life of Bahá'u'lláh in several months' time, we decided to have a special lesson about Bahá'u'lláh just before the bicentenary weekend. We have also invited all the parents and children to a musical event where stories from the life of Bahá'u'lláh will be told. Finally, we plan to home visit the parents to speak more about the significance of this year. During these visits, we plan to explain why the community will be holding a special bicentenary festival for families later in December to which the children's classes are invited and are asked to perform."

Richmond: Speaking more directly about the Person of Bahá'u'lláh
"We have a couple of weekly neighbourhood children's classes, a Grade I and a Grade 3. Alongside our main community bicentenary activity, which all the families are being invited to, we are planning to focus entirely on Bahá'u'lláh for one of our lessons. We have a family gathering soon which will take the shape of a devotional and a space to share with the parents what the children have been learning in their classes. This gathering has been planned prior to the bicentenary so that opportunities can be created for conversations around the subject of the life and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.
This period has made me reflect on how little I connect teaching with mentioning the name of Bahá'u'lláh; it seems so strange as it is His Faith and revelation! I feel that the bicentenary has been a real wake up call and an incredible opportunity for us to remind ourselves of what the main focus of our conversations should be with others; especially as we are told that every soul has the capacity to recognise the Manifestation of God in their day."

Bermondsey: Raising Awareness of the Bicentenary in a Neighbourhood
"Our teaching team has been reflecting on how to raise awareness among the children in our class and their parents about the significance of this year. Our Grade I children's class consists of 7 children mostly from the wider community. We decided to listen to stories of Bahá'u'lláh in the class and to explain the importance of His station. We also shared prayers on home visits with the parents and spoke about the bicentenary. We are planning follow up visits to share more about the life of Bahá'u'lláh with all the families in their homes."

London newsletter, highlighting some of the ways in which children's classes contributed to the celebrations of the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh

1.2.8 Accompaniment

"Efforts to build capacity fall short if arrangements are not swiftly made to accompany individuals into the arena of service", and "an adequate level of support extends far beyond encouraging words".¹³ How to meaningfully accompany others remains a key object of learning for the community, and the roll out of Ruhi Book 10, *Building Vibrant Communities*, is expanding our vision of what this entails. The following report from the **Northern Lights** cluster in Northern Ireland exemplifies the learning underway.

At the close of last summer there were two new youth who began their own class accompanied by a children's class teacher, who was in turn assisted to serve in the role of accompanying others for the first time. Additionally, two new souls were being assisted to facilitate study circles with friends before completion of the sequence of courses. This is a new frontier for the region and the ability to reach larger numbers depends on the ability to continue to extend the process of learning in this regard. Some elements that have allowed the progress thus far include:

- A strong desire to see others find joy in shouldering the work
- Belief in the capacity of others
- An ability to encourage activities to be organised by friends, even if the approach might differ from what is normally expected
- An ability to assist people to take simple steps and not to deliberate too much over the details

¹³ 29 December 2015 message, par. 9

1.2.9 Additional efforts to strengthen the training institute process

Various strategies have been employed in an effort to strengthen the overall institute process in the UK. Across the UK, there is a focus on strengthening the pattern of action in the more advanced clusters, so that they can then better support growth in nearby clusters. Efforts to develop institutional capacity have included:

- Working with groups of “collaborators” – teams of friends who are helping to increase and strengthen children’s classes, the junior youth programme and study circles in a cluster
- Study of Book 10, *Building Vibrant Communities*
- Accompaniment in the field
- Learning how to encourage the sharing of stories
- The documentation of experience

1.2.10 Further comments on development of the three educational imperatives

While such efforts hold great promise, the overall level of activity across the UK in the three educational imperatives – study circles, junior youth groups and children’s classes – has remained broadly static in the last year. Learning how to sustain growth through teaching the Faith and inviting and helping large numbers to enter the institute process and thereby arise as protagonists is a theme that deserves focussed attention across the country in the cycles ahead. In this connection, the International Teaching Centre’s document, titled *Training Institutes: Attaining a Higher Level of Functioning*, must become a working living document that all engaged in the institute process draw upon, as it contains essential and invaluable insights. The National Assembly hopes that this theme will be given due attention by delegates at National Convention.

1.2.11 Teaching campaigns and cycles of activity

Complementing the effort to strengthen the training institute process have been the community’s endeavours to share the Faith with family, friends, neighbours and chance acquaintances; to systematically reach out to new contacts; to hold teaching campaigns; to introduce waiting souls to the Faith through youth gatherings, discussions of the Writings and firesides; and to hold conversations of significance, speaking directly of the Person of Bahá’u’lláh, His Message, and His vision for the world. Personal and collective teaching efforts, many of which were associated with the expansion phase in the cycle of activity, and some of which were naturally tied to the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá’u’lláh, continued apace. And it has been especially pleasing to see the way in which so many of these endeavours have been characterised by a humble posture of learning, and a concerted desire to develop the capacity to hold conversations of significance.

Many collective teaching efforts are taking place through the nuclei of friends, as has already been discussed. We offer just a few further examples of the great many teaching efforts underway:

- Windsor neighbourhood in **Northern Lights** cluster hosted three week-long projects in close succession, providing a dynamic space in which capacity and love for teaching could be rapidly built. Scores of participants joined, including from other parts of the cluster, from adjoining clusters in Northern Ireland and also from Ireland – a wonderful expression of the cluster’s roles as a ‘reservoir’ of learning for others. Capacity to teach was greatly developed, and indeed the Council reported a marked transformation in individuals who were able to participate in the whole project.

Thought is now being given to how to enable many more friends to attend such projects, given their empowering and transformative effect.

- The friends in **Clyde** cluster have been learning about working in three-monthly cycles even in the absence of formal cluster agencies. In September, five youth moved into a neighbourhood, Maryhill, and have since been trying to reach out to the people in the area. Two nine-day outreaches were carried out, leading to a children's class and participation by local youth in study circles.
- In **Greater Manchester**, a regional seminar was held in the summer to build capacity for accompaniment. Visiting participants teamed up with local residents for a series of home visits and collaborative action, which took place over several days so that those involved could experience an unfolding process. In addition, through participation in expansion phases in the Hulme neighbourhood, the friends have greatly strengthened the expansion phase in other parts of the cluster.
- In several clusters, including **North-East England** and **North and East Yorkshire**, the friends have been learning about holding short intensive periods of teaching – perhaps a weekend or a week – as a step to holding intensive two-week expansion phases.
- A seminar took place in the summer in **Greater London** focusing on home visits and the accompaniment of nuclei of friends, using the tool of ‘concentric circles’, as described in the third unit of Ruhi Book 10 to help identify next steps in drawing all those connected to the pattern of activity in each area closer to Bahá'u'lláh.

Of course much was achieved and learnt in teaching the Cause in the efforts of the community to celebrate the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, which is commented on below under the section, *Period of Special Potency*. Not only was the entire community engaged in this celebration, but in doing so we came to a deeper understanding that souls are receptive to hearing about Bahá'u'lláh, we discovered anew the joy of sharing the message with others and, indeed, learnt to speak more confidently about Bahá'u'lláh and His Teachings and how we are learning to apply them.



Friends gathered at the Northern Lights teaching project, July 2017

While it is gratifying to take stock of the teaching efforts that have been offered by the friends, it is also clear that more needs to be learnt about mobilising participation and strengthening the rhythm of **expansion, consolidation and reflection** associated with the cycles of activity. Conscious that our community alone cannot achieve all that is needed, more also needs to be learnt about identifying and nurturing those who, alive to the vision of Bahá'u'lláh, will arise shoulder the responsibility of working towards a better world – a task

assuming greater urgency as the forces of disintegration grow more virulent with each passing year.

1.2.12 Pioneering

At least 33 pioneers arose to serve last year – seven internationally and 26 on the homefront. This a fantastic response to the call for pioneers from the Universal House of Justice, as raised in its 23 May 2016 letter to the Bahá'ís of the world, and a major increase compared to recent years.

International Pioneers	Serving or served in
Tom and Victoria Leith and family	Special country
Hatem and Erica El-Hady and family	Special country
Amelia Sabeti	Zambia
Sama Tanhai	Zambia
Shria Suchak	India

Homefront pioneers	Serving in or served in
Noura and Saman Ziaie	London, Kilburn
Hoda and Matthew Evans	London, Kilburn
Tim and Gowri Anglin	Isle of Man
Ashkaan Golestani	Thames Valley (Rose Hill)
Max Afnan	Thames Valley (Rose Hill)
Felipe Medina Gutiérrez (Chile)	Thames Valley (Rose Hill)
Noura Motahedi	Thames Valley (Cumnor)
Thenna and Tessa Abbas and family	South Wales, Pengam Green
Hannah Abbas	South Wales, Pengam Green
Rachel Murray	South Wales, Pengam Green
Na'im Anís Peymán	Cambridge, East Chesterton
Siria Rutstein and Ashkan Ziaie	Leith, Forth cluster
Emily Megan Foster	Leith, Forth cluster
Amelia Eshraghi-Yazdi	Leith, Forth cluster
Eleanor Mazidian	Jersey, Channel Islands
Sophia Fozdar	Glasgow, Maryhill
Layli Semple	Glasgow, Maryhill
Ken and Sue Finn	Fenham, NE cluster
Amarr Wright	Hulme, Manchester
Iko Congo	Hulme, Manchester

Of equal significance are the many other friends who have arisen but whose names have not been specifically recorded, including those students who become pioneers by choosing to live where they best support the processes of growth. A great many friends have also assisted in **travel teaching**, visiting clusters once or more to help in starting core activities and supporting local friends in their efforts to share the Faith with others, and it is not possible to mention them all by name. The National Assembly is sure that the community will wish to remember all who have arisen as pioneers and travel teachers in their prayers.

The **UK Pioneering and Travel Teaching Committee** has been ably supporting these efforts, including through presentations at summer school and arranging discussion gatherings to raise awareness about pioneering.

Notably, two of the Committee members, Iman Fadaei and Kim Kontos, have been appointed as **Youth Points of Contact**, with the specific task of consulting with youth about pioneering, or indeed other avenues of service such as serving at the Bahá'í World Centre. By consulting with youth about how such service can cohere with other aspects of life, such as studies, career and family, and by exploring the practical implications and the support available, the Committee is endeavouring to enable a growing number of young friends to offer a period of service.

The following account is from a travel teacher who visited Eleanor Mazidian, a new pioneer to Jersey. Jersey is part of the **Channel Islands** cluster, which is endeavouring to establish a programme of growth.

It was a blessing to have the opportunity to visit a pioneer – a pioneer on an island no less, and only a 45-minute flight from Bristol airport. Arriving in Jersey there was a joyful meeting with Eleanor, a short bus ride to St Helier, and a walk through the Christmas-lit town to our accommodation. It is a bright and comfortable flat rented by the Council for England to support the work of pioneers and travelling teachers in the Channel Islands. We prayed together, asking for God's blessings and guidance.

Next morning we were joined by Mary and Marlene, two stalwart believers and Jersey residents, and after an uplifting devotional we shared news. A dignified gentleman joined us, who wanted to learn something about the Faith. The conversation was deep and touched on oneness, community life, the giving up of self, and destiny. Later we walked along the narrow pavements of St Helier to visit a young lady who works nearby, and who has been introduced to Bahá'u'lláh through seeing the film *Light to the World*. She agreed to visit and eat with us the following day. Her visit became a beautiful little fireside with just the three of us, the great difference in our ages did not signify and we learned about her hopes, dreams and challenges, and her desire to help those younger than herself to break free of the negative forces of society that entrap them. A bus, passing fields of pretty Jersey cows, took us to St John on the other side of this little island. We had been invited to visit a Polish mother. Eating home-baked apple cake, playing with the children, learning about her family and about the life of the sizeable Polish community in Jersey we felt blessed to spend time with our unworldly, warm and capable new friend.

Shoghi Effendi, when writing to the believers, often urged them never to feel disheartened. After preparing ourselves for a children's class we momentarily felt disappointed when it was cancelled. Which of us hasn't had that feeling when our carefully made plans don't materialise? Yet we remembered that God often has different plans from our own, and later a different opportunity for teaching arose. Very little ever goes quite as we envision it, and yet surely our earnest prayers to be led by God's guiding hand are always answered. People from outside Jersey who have arrived and made this island their home say that they treasure the sense of community, the quiet and peaceful life, the lovely countryside and coast, and the safe and friendly environment for their children. The Channel Islands are welcoming and charming. Devoted pioneers have laid the groundwork here. Through our sustained efforts may the precious seeds they have sown bear their destined fruit.

1.3 A PERIOD OF SPECIAL POTENCY

In its Riḍván 2017 message, the Universal House of Justice summoned the Bahá'ís of the world to invite friends, from every walk of life and every strata of society, to join in celebrating the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, stating that the year presented “the single greatest worldwide opportunity there has ever been for connecting hearts to Bahá'u'lláh”.

It was a source of immense joy for the National Spiritual Assembly to see the mighty effort made by the friends in the United Kingdom to respond to this call. Reports indicate that more than 13,000 people in some 275 localities took part in events over the bicentenary weekend, over half of whom were friends of the Bahá'ís. Tens of thousands of conversations of significance took place on the implications of Bahá'u'lláh's Message for our lives today, and consciousness of His purpose for humanity was raised in countless others – not least among those who had the bounty of watching and reflecting on the film *Light to the World*, commissioned by the Universal House of Justice. Some 10,000 people clicked on the British Museum website page about a special exhibit of Bahá'í archives, loaned by the Universal House of Justice. Estimates suggest that media coverage – in *The Times*, on BBC Radio 4, and elsewhere – may have reached hundreds of thousands.



Scores of accounts were received from across the country of initiatives connected to the bicentenary – from musical performances in shopping centres to individuals' conversations with colleagues; from firesides in homes to displays in libraries and museums. From village halls to seats of government and royal palaces, these efforts were a testament to the community's desire to share the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, to the wider community's burgeoning readiness to receive it, and to a collective offering of love to the Best-Beloved of the worlds.

Of enduring value, many capacities were strengthened through these endeavours, including:

- A new courage was found in speaking about the Person of Bahá'u'lláh and of the particular role we can all play today in the story of humanity's encounter with God. The 1 October 2017 message from the Universal House of Justice and the film *Light to the World* in particular formed the basis of many profound discussions.
- Many thousands of pupils were able to learn of Bahá'u'lláh through direct approaches to schools, many of which included showing the film *Bahá'u'lláh: The Divine Physician*, commissioned by the National Assembly.
- A whole range of arts were employed to celebrate and proclaim the Cause, including dramas, paintings, puppet shows, choral music, publications and videos.
- Collective acts of service were offered in many communities, from planting flowers in parkland to giving time in supporting the work of local charities.
- An outpouring of creativity, openness and inclusivity distinguished the Twin Holy Days – a strength on which to build for all future Holy Days.



Wonderful, widespread, audacious, and in many respects unprecedented as these efforts were, more needs to be learnt about how to build on this success.

“We urge you to see in each person who responded to your invitation a potential protagonist in the community-building process,”¹⁴ wrote the Universal House of Justice. This implies that the training institute needs to be at the heart of the ongoing effort to nurture and release the potential of all those now awakened to Bahá'u'lláh's Message. In some settings, this was indeed a feature of the friends' efforts. For example, in the **Forth** cluster, families and children were met over the preceding week and a children's class was swiftly started with 10 children. The class had its own celebration for the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, to which mothers, siblings, youth and others were invited.

¹⁴ Universal House of Justice, To the Bahá'is of the World, 31 October 2017

Given the thousands of people with whom the community of the Greatest Name engaged during the course of the bicentenary celebrations, how can the capacity to invite large numbers to contribute towards building the world envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh be further developed? In particular, how can we invite many of the neighbours, colleagues, friends and other contacts who responded positively to the conversations surrounding the bicentenary period to join Ruhi Book 1 study circles as a step on the path of service to humanity?

These are questions worthy of addressing in every space where we are striving to advance the community-building processes, as we work towards the next bicentenary celebration for the Birth of the Báb in October 2019.



1.4 STRENGTHENING THE PATTERN OF ACTION

1.4.1 Centres of intense activity

Learning about community-building in small settings is a major objective of the Plan. The importance of this work needs emphasis in the UK. The Universal House of Justice explained, "... that a pattern of action that is able to embrace large numbers comes chiefly from working to bring more neighbourhoods and villages—places where the convergence of spiritual forces is effecting rapid change within a body of people—to the point where they can sustain intense activity."¹⁵ At present more than 25 neighbourhoods and villages are being followed systematically by the Bahá'í Councils and training institute boards. Momentum is building gradually, as indicated in these statistics for the England neighbourhoods:

¹⁵ 29 December 2015 message, par. 9

Month	Core Activities	No. of Participants	Friends of the Faith
January 2017	98	539	385
January 2018	118	634	430
<i>Increase</i>	+20	+95	+45

In addition to the quantitative progress, new insights are being gained, for example:

- Efforts made in two focus neighbourhoods in **Thames Valley** have described the process as one of prayer, constant action, and the ability to perceive opportunities with faith in the power of divine confirmation. By this means, false dichotomies between community-building and the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh have been overcome. The transformation envisioned by His Revelation has formed the basis of building a new community that tends to the needs of children, junior youth and adults. It has been noted by the friends that those who have committed to long-term action are the ones who have continued to advance towards Bahá'u'lláh and His Revelation.
- In the focus neighbourhood of Hutton, **Essex**, where around 80 participants are engaged in core activities, the friends noted that going beyond logistical concerns and touching on the deeper vision of the community-building process has heightened the eagerness of local organisations and institutions to collaborate, opening up new opportunities to engage with youth.
- The training institute process must be central to these efforts, building capacity in the residents themselves so that they can take ownership of their own spiritual and material growth. Where possible, needs should be filled from the neighbourhoods themselves rather than looking for outside help. Through this approach, six of the 14 souls now shouldering responsibility for activities in the Windsor neighbourhood, **Northern Lights** cluster, were met locally, two of whom have registered as believers. Commitment to action must also be long term, with mutual support vital in order to maintain the intensity; through efforts over several years, 49 people are now participating in core activities in Windsor, with three children's classes, three junior youth groups, a devotional meeting and four study circles.
- There are many example where those working intensively in neighbourhoods in the more advanced clusters are welcoming visitors to specific projects, such as outreach and home visit campaigns as part of the expansion phase. In this way, they are helping build capacity in friends throughout the cluster and from further afield, thereby helping to strengthen the broader pattern of action.

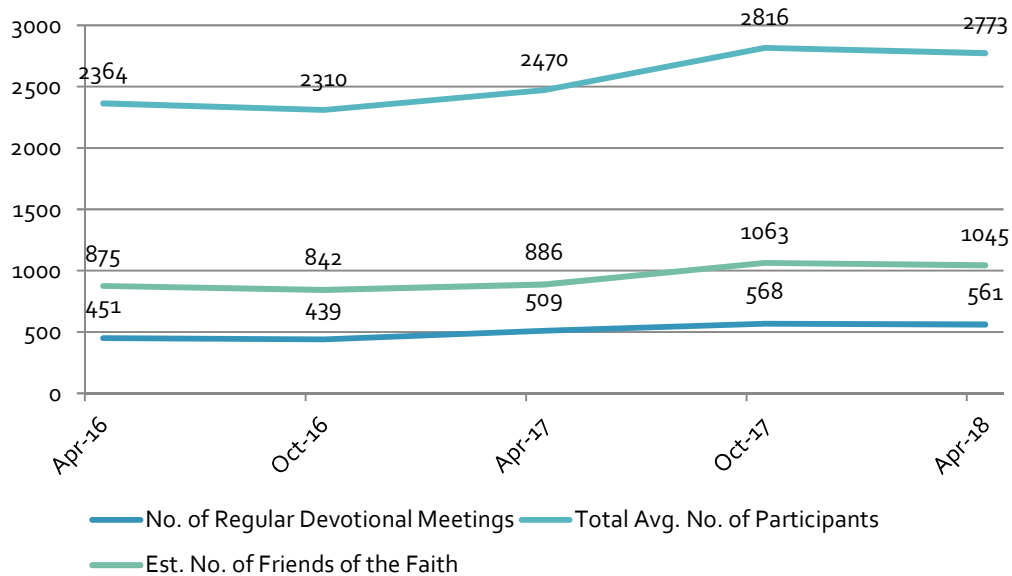
1.4.2 Strengthening the devotional character

Recent messages from the Universal House of Justice have shed light on the intimate connection between worship and service, and underscored the need to strengthen the devotional character as a vital aspect of growth. While this may manifest itself in many ways – including the quality of Feasts, Holy Days and a reliance on prayer in so many individual and collective settings – the level of participation in devotional meetings gives a quantitative insight into this area. It is good to see the overall growth that has occurred in the United Kingdom since the beginning of the Plan.



As local and national Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs emerge around the world, the Universal House of Justice has affirmed that the “spirit” of that divine institution “is evoked in any locality” where people of any background are welcomed to worship

Number of devotional meetings in progress during each six-month period since the beginning of the current Five Year Plan



Strikingly and appropriately, devotional meetings constitute over half of all the core activities in the UK, with regular gatherings now numbering 561 and engaging the participation of 2,773 souls, 1,045 of whom are friends of the Faith. Approaches used over the last year to help establish more devotionals include campaigns to accompany the believers to invite families, friends and co-workers to devotional gatherings. In **Greater London** and **Greater Manchester**, for example, multiple cluster and neighbourhood reflection meetings, home visits, and close accompaniment of friends has led to significant growth in devotional meetings.

Accompanying new Ruhi Book 1 participants to host devotional gatherings is beautifully illustrated in the following account.

In one neighbourhood in **North & East Yorkshire** cluster, a couple of youth were invited to a series of firesides in the home of a young Bahá'í family and they were encouraged to bring their friends and housemates. Soon enough, six of them committed to studying *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*. At the very first session, the institute process was explained in its relation to community-building and the concept of 'being and doing'. This group of youth, passionate about social action outside of work, quickly warmed to the idea of spiritual and material development in their community and understood that they can quickly (and simply) become protagonists, before the very end of the book. It was explained that by learning to read the Bahá'í Writings and then studying them with another Bahá'í, they would build the skills and capacities to host a devotional gathering. The tutor closely accompanied all of them and in pairs they visited selected Bahá'ís in the community pre-arranged by their tutor. At the start of every study session of the first course of the Ruhi Institute, each participant was encouraged and accompanied to prepare a short devotional and then the quotes were discussed. By the end of the Book, nearly every participant had hosted their own devotional gathering and invited new participants to attend, widening the circle of friends interested to come to more activities.

As a result of this Book 1, four devotional gatherings emerged, doubling the number in the neighbourhood and providing a third of the devotionals in the cluster. The accompaniment continued with the tutor striving to attend all the participants' devotional gatherings or ensuring another tutor could in another part of the cluster. The accompaniment was not just limited to attending and encouraging but reflecting before and after with the participants to invite their friends and explore what the invitation might look like. This process has continued now through to Book 2, on their journey to become animators. Some of the participants have also experienced a large monthly junior youth devotional and soon a devotional for the parents of the junior youth group. By being closely accompanied and thinking about service and worship as inseparable in every endeavour, the devotional character of the neighbourhood and cluster is organically growing.

As exciting news is received of local and national *Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs* being dedicated around the world, it is deeply inspiring to know – as the Universal House of Justice has affirmed – that the “spirit” of that divine institution “is evoked in any locality”¹⁶ where people of any background are welcomed to worship together. It is the hope of the National Assembly that the compilation, titled *The Institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*, issued in September 2017 will become more familiar to friends, communities and institutions in their efforts to promote the devotional life of the community.

With nearly 3,000 individuals participating in devotional gatherings the community has a great opportunity to further learn how to inspire participants to serve their communities. How, for example, can community-building and the institute process become part of the conversations at these gatherings, so that the desire to serve is raised and the opportunity to develop one's capacity for service is presented?

1.4.3 The movement of youth

“Youth ... represent a most responsive element of every receptive population to which the friends have sought to reach out.”¹⁷

More than 350 youth gathered in December 2017 for a national youth conference in Milton Keynes, a space in which young souls could connect their thoughts and actions to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and reflect on the services they can render for the betterment of humanity. The fruits of this national conference – the first since the 114 conferences called by the Universal House of Justice in 2013 – were numerous, not least in the renewal of collective purpose and the crystallisation of plans, which are being systematically followed

¹⁶ 29 December 2015 message, par. 49

¹⁷ *ibid.*, par. 35

and supported by the institutions. From **Sussex to North East England**, joyful reports of the ways in which the conference supported the planning and action of youth upon their return home have been received.

Yet this conference was but one of a number of efforts to foster and support the movement of youth, with regular youth gatherings already taking place in numerous areas. Many are at a neighbourhood level, providing a space in which to nurture friendships and discuss such profound themes as our “two-fold moral purpose” and the role youth can play in creating a better community, while others involve young people from across a wider area. One example comes from a group of clusters in the East of England:

In the East of England, the friends have been learning about creating a pattern of action in which youth gatherings are a regular feature of the work of these clusters. In response to the fact that a number of youth are isolated, the Auxiliary Board members have been working closely with these clusters to ensure a collective spirit is felt across the sub-region, where youth have the opportunity to study guidance, and make plans to return to their clusters.

In addition to supporting these youth to feel connected to each other, the youth gatherings have developed the capacity of youth to have conversations with their friends and to increase the intensity with which youth collaborate. By having regular gatherings at the cluster level, the opportunity for multiple clusters to come together annually has enabled them to move past an event-oriented approach and to appreciate the process of capacity building underway.

As a result, the number of youth participating in the annual conference has risen from approximately 20 to 70 in this subregion, serving as an opportunity to create collective purpose, engage new souls and to learn about nurturing a Bahá'í identity within the youth.

Promising as these developments are, more needs to be learnt about how to release the capacity of youth. In this connection, it is important to note that in its 29 December 2015 message, the Universal House of Justice warns us “against adopting a narrow outlook on what maturity entails”;¹⁸ the support for youth cannot be limited to encouraging service activities, but must enable youth to give expression to Bahá'u'lláh's teachings in all aspects of their lives, from work and study to family life, and to cohere this with service such that they can help carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.

To this end, some nascent efforts have been made to attend to the wider implications of fostering a movement of youth. In **Greater London**, for example, one youth has been hosting a series of gatherings for friends to come together to build bonds of friendship and to reflect on matters that are of particular concern to that period of life, including consultation, marriage and family life, service and study.

How can the community learn about supporting and releasing the potential of youth in the year ahead?

1.4.4 Receptive populations

Much also still needs to be learnt about identifying and tapping into receptive populations in the UK. Experiences elsewhere in Europe – in some cases involving the rapid engagement of hundreds of individuals from a receptive population within a single community, sometimes

¹⁸ 29 December 2015 message, par. 39

vastly outnumbering the local Bahá'í population – offer an enthralling vision for what can be achieved, and this area of learning must be vigorously pursued in the cycles ahead.

Glimpses of distinctive receptivity have however been seen. The Persian population has shown a particular willingness to learn about the Faith – a high proportion of newly registered individuals hail from Persian backgrounds, and particular efforts have been made to build capacity among tutors of Persian study circles. In **Thames Valley**, efforts are underway to work with both the East Timorese and Nepalese populations, while in **North East England** promising work is taking place engaging the Roma population. The account from **South Yorkshire**, on page 13-14, also hints at the receptivity that can be found among particular populations.

1.4.5 Institutional capacity

Significant efforts continued to be made over the year to develop institutional capacity at a number of levels.

In February 2018, the National Spiritual Assembly hosted an **institutional meeting** of the Regional Bahá'í Councils, regional training institute boards, as well as various other agencies focused in particular on the work of the Plan. We were blessed to be joined by three Counsellors, as well as the Auxiliary Board members. Rich learning was shared on such matters as the development of centres of intensive activity and the strengthening of the training institute. Not only did this help foster a unity of vision for the cycles ahead, but consciousness of the sacrifice required became a theme of earnest discussion, and indeed became recognised as an object of learning in its own right.

With the help of Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, Local Spiritual Assemblies have been reflecting on the deepening materials prepared by the National Assembly on “Teaching” and “Care & Protection”. It has been observed that the impact of these materials becomes palpable when all the members of a Local Assembly have been able to study it together, and where the Assembly has conscientiously followed through in implementing the suggestions made.

Experience and insight is continuing to be gained in relation to the timely establishment of **cluster agencies**. The numbers serving as members of Area Teaching Committees and as institute coordinators has in fact declined compared to previous years, with a newfound emphasis being placed on raising capacity through accompaniment, often with teams of collaborators, before formal appointments are made. Thus, those to be appointed will bring much first-hand experience, often having already served within a nuclei of friends, as part of the cadre of those advancing one or more of the core activities, or otherwise in teams dedicated to the community building process.

The systematisation of the secretarial work of the **Regional Councils** and **regional training institute boards** has been another major area of endeavour. The National Assembly is, through its Secretary and the National Office, sharing many of its own systems and methods with the regional institutions in order to rapidly raise their administrative capacity so as to meet the demands of growth.

The Council for England is learning how its newsletter, *Rose of Love*, can become a more effective instrument for sharing insights and news of progress with the community. For

example, it is looking to see how it can be used in home visits where stories or articles are shared together.

One immediate consequence of the increased administrative capacity of the regional agencies is a need for space. At the National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds, the Office of the Treasurer was moved to nearby rented accommodation in order to create a space for both the Regional Council and Training Institute Board for England's secretariats and the London cluster agencies. This latter move is seen as a temporary arrangement as, in due course, the Regional Council will acquire its own seat and the cluster agencies their own offices as the size and complexity of the work expands.

Meanwhile, the National Assembly is itself endeavouring to develop its capacity to offer strategic oversight of the development of the Cause in the UK. As part of this effort, it has begun a series of "retreat weekends", often with the assistance of Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi, to explore in depth such weighty matters as **strengthening the capacity to oversee the process of human resource development for expansion and consolidation and the spiritual health of the community.**

Specific efforts are being pursued to improve the National Assembly's **communications** with the community, and especially the youth, who may not always readily engage with traditional methods of communication. In the past year, the National Assembly's NEWS email service as well as the *UK Bahá'í* magazine underwent significant changes in approach to content and design.

Moreover, steps are being taken to establish a **learning desk** at the National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds. Once functioning, it is envisaged that the Desk will help in providing information and analysis on the progress of the Plan to the National Assembly, as well as documenting and sharing experience among many institutions, and creating additional spaces for reflection extending across the four regions of the UK.

The need for suitable premises for many purposes is ever increasing and includes the need for venues and/or accommodation for core activities, intensive residential training, teaching projects, institutional gatherings, working spaces for regional and cluster agencies and other requirements. The Events and Logistics Committee of the National Assembly carry out a supportive service in identifying venues, but its reach does not extend to the cluster level. The use of properties is thus an aspect of growth that the community needs to learn about. The National Assembly is renting a property for neighbourhood activities and accommodation in Manchester and is purchasing a property for similar purposes in Belfast. Accommodation is rented to support short and long-term pioneers and travelling teachers who are supporting the advance of clusters at various stages of development.



1.5 FUNDS OF THE FAITH—THE LIFEblood OF THE CAUSE

“We must be like the fountain or spring that is continually emptying itself of all that it has and is continually being refilled from an invisible source. To be continually giving out for the good of our fellows undeterred by fear of poverty and reliant on the unfailing bounty of the Source of all wealth and all good—this is the secret of right living.”¹⁹

As has been the pattern for many years, numerous souls in the United Kingdom make sacrificial contributions to the funds of the Faith. The National Spiritual Assembly is profoundly grateful for the selfless donations made by individuals, institutions and the community, as we strive to support the various initiatives promoting growth during the current Five Year Plan.

In addition to these generous contributions, the income has been augmented by rental income and Gift Aid tax refunds.

In 2017 total income into the National Fund exceeded the budget by £18,719.

The National Fund is the core fund, where income and expenditure of the National Assembly is recorded and tracked (Figure 1). The National Fund also embraces the Regional Branches which are operated by Regional Bahá'í Councils; it is important for the friends to be conscious of and contribute to these as part of their support of the work of the Five Year Plan.

As shown in Figure 1, there are a number of other funds in addition to the National Fund to which the friends can contribute. Most of the income and contributions received go to the National Fund, allowing the National Assembly to apportion its resources to meet the ongoing, but sometimes changing, needs of the Faith.

Other funds to which the community can directly contribute, include:

- **Deputisation funds:** Earmarked, specifically designated funds for pioneers, travel teaching and training institute coordinators.
- **Maintenance of the Guardian's Resting Place:** Covers the day-to-day operational costs at the Resting Place.
- **Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE) Fund:** A fund for paying tuition fees for BIHE students in the UK.
- **International contributions:** The friends can contribute to the various international funds of the Faith directly through the National Assembly.
- **Guardian's Resting Place Endowment Fund:** The income generated from the capital in this fund will provide the necessary funds for the upkeep of the Resting Place in the future.

¹⁹ *Directives from the Guardian*, p.87

The National Spiritual Assembly is pleased to present its financial report for the year ending 31 December 2017.

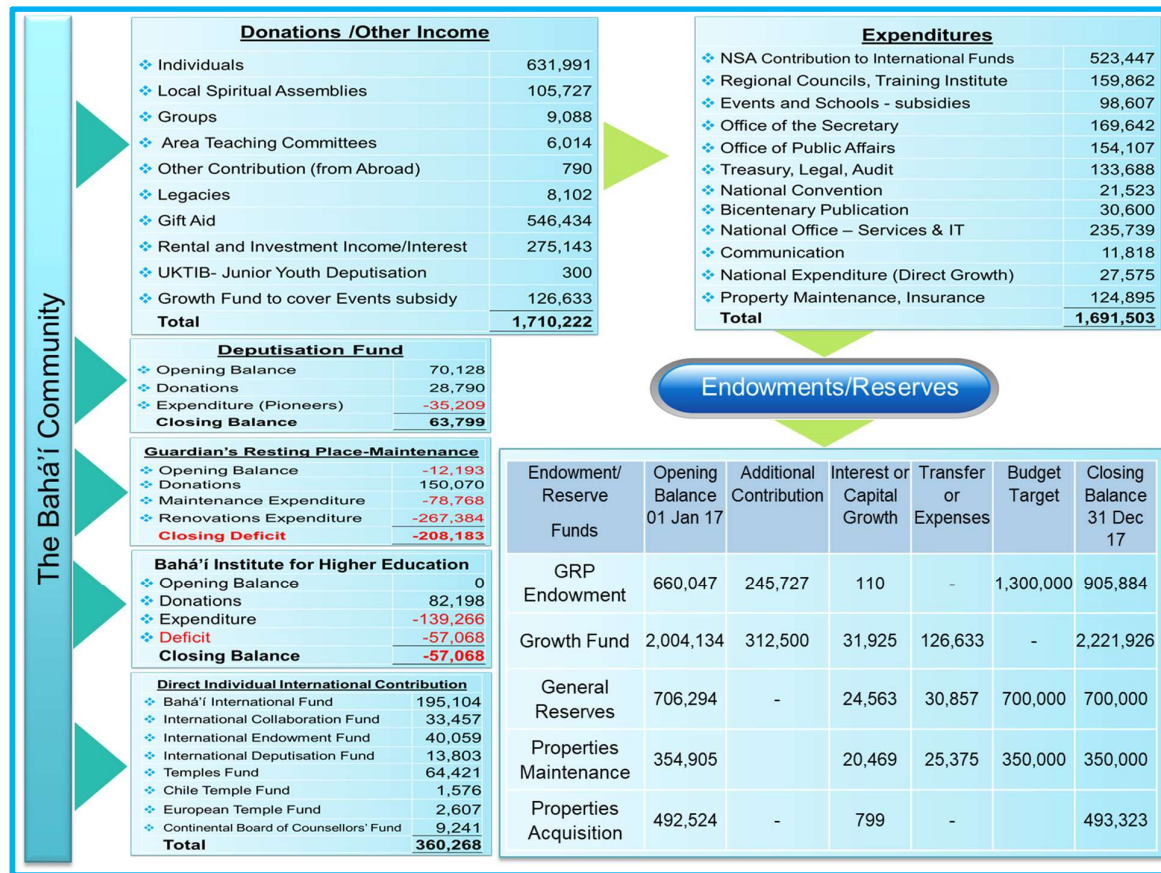


Figure 1: Overview of the financial report and various Bahá'í funds in the UK at 31 December 2017

In 2017, the National Fund had a surplus of £18,719 which was made possible by supporting the National Fund with £126,000 of income from the Growth Fund. The National Assembly decided to write off all of the accumulated previous deficit in the National Fund using its reserves.

1.5.1 Income

The primary source of the National Assembly's income is the donations of the believers in the United Kingdom. For the 12 months to 31 December 2017 the income was £1,710,222 of which friends in the UK directly, or through their Local Spiritual Assembly, contributed £747,076. This covers about a half of the National Fund's expenditure. A further 32%, £546,434, of income is from the tax refund received under the Gift Aid scheme.

The National Fund also continued to benefit from the rental income from Bridge House in Tonbridge of about £151,926 and another £43,000 from properties that were bequeathed to the National Assembly.

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of The United Kingdom FINANCIAL YEAR 2017				
Contributions / Income	Actual 2015	Actual 2016	Actual 2017	Budget 2018
England Contributions	574,704	567,992	681,494	598,525
N. Ireland Contributions	20,387	24,038	22,234	23,378
Scotland Contributions	35,582	34,913	28,280	34,017
Wales Contributions	20,552	18,102	20,811	24,048
Legacies	7,785	10,209	8,102	-
Other Contributions (International)	41,467	37,586	790	1,500
Total Direct Contributions	700,476	692,840	761,712	681,468
Gift Aid	372,722	415,330	546,434	470,000
Rental and Investments Income, Interest	126,705	129,129	275,143	236,675
Bahá'í Society of Persian Arts and Letters	3,630	-	-	-
UKTIB-Deputisation Junior Youth Coordinators	640	520	300	-
Transfer from Growth Fund to cover Events Subsidy		49,771	126,633	-
ISGP	81	-	-	-
Schools	(2,595)	-	-	-
Bahá'í Books	7,278	4,372	-	-
Total Indirect Income	508,462	599,122	948,510	706,675
TOTAL Contributions / Income	£1,208,938	£1,291,962	£1,710,222	£1,388,143

Figure 2: Income for the 12 Months to 31 December 2017

The Investment Committee has been monitoring the investment markets to help the National Assembly keep its reserves safe and also to find appropriate investment opportunities. In 2017 the financial markets were too volatile for any new long term commitments and the Investment Committee has advised on the best places where excess funds can be deposited.

- Contributions

During the course of 2017, the National Assembly undertook some detailed analysis regarding contributions from the believers and this analysis will be reviewed by the National Assembly in the coming months.

International Contributions

In 2017 for every £1 donated to the National Fund by the believers in the United Kingdom plus Gift Aid income, 40 pence was forwarded to international Funds, including, among others, the International Fund, the World Centre Endowment Fund, and the European and Chile Temple Funds.

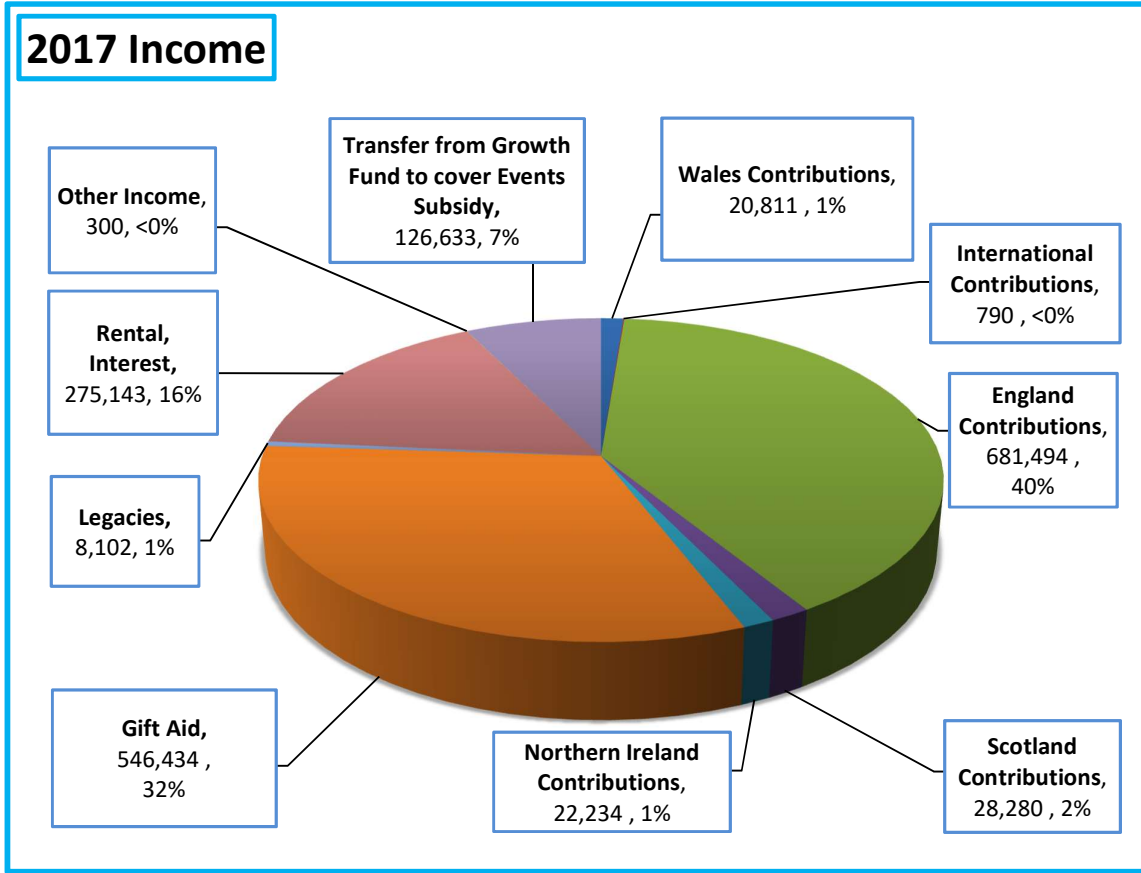


Figure 3: Income pie chart for the 12 Months 31 December 2017

Standing order and gift aid

The advantages of contributing by standing order and Gift Aid, are becoming apparent to the friends and the National Assembly is delighted to report an increase in both methods of contributions. Also, as the number of Gift Aiders has increased, the total amount of Gift Aid has increased from £415,330 in 2016 to £546,434 in 2017. Gift Aid contributions are also received from contributions made to the International Funds, which is recorded as Income for the year.

1.5.2 Expenditure

Expenditure for the year to 31 December 2017 is £1,691,503. In Figures 4 and 5, the expenditure is broken into broad categories. Also for comparison, a similar breakdown is given for expenditures in 2015 and 2016.

The percentage variance in the right column of the table below shows the difference between the actual expenditure and budget. The biggest jump in the expenditure was for the bicentenary publication. The budget for publications was only £2,500; however, the National Assembly decided to publish several items for this special celebration.

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of The United Kingdom FINANCIAL YEAR 2017					
EXPENDITURE	Actual 2015	Actual 2016	Actual 2017	Budget 2017	% Variance
Regional Councils, Training Institute	124,385	89,354	159,862	246,045	35%
Direct Growth Expenditure/Events/School	8,687	81,389	126,181	203,456	38%
National Convention	18,541	13,955	21,523	15,450	-39%
Bicentenary Publication	18,541	13,955	30,600	2,500	-1124%
Office of the Secretary	110,801	122,609	169,641	159,835	-6%
National Office - Services and IT	222,943	214,702	235,739	216,885	-9%
Communications	19,333	12,354	11,818	22,550	48%
Treasury, Legal, Audit	110,514	109,626	133,688	146,889	9%
Office of Public Affairs	102,078	120,827	154,107	168,652	9%
NSA Contribution to International Funds	370,436	386,894	523,447	352,662	-48%
Property, Insurance	105,415	82,034	124,895	105,989	-18%
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	£1,211,674	£1,247,699	£1,691,503	£1,640,913	

Figure 4: Expenditure for the 12 months to 31 December 2017

As noted within the income section, a significant amount of Gift Aid is received through contributions to the International Funds and the National Assembly has a policy to forward these directly to the Bahá'í World Centre, hence the increase in expenditure to International Funds.

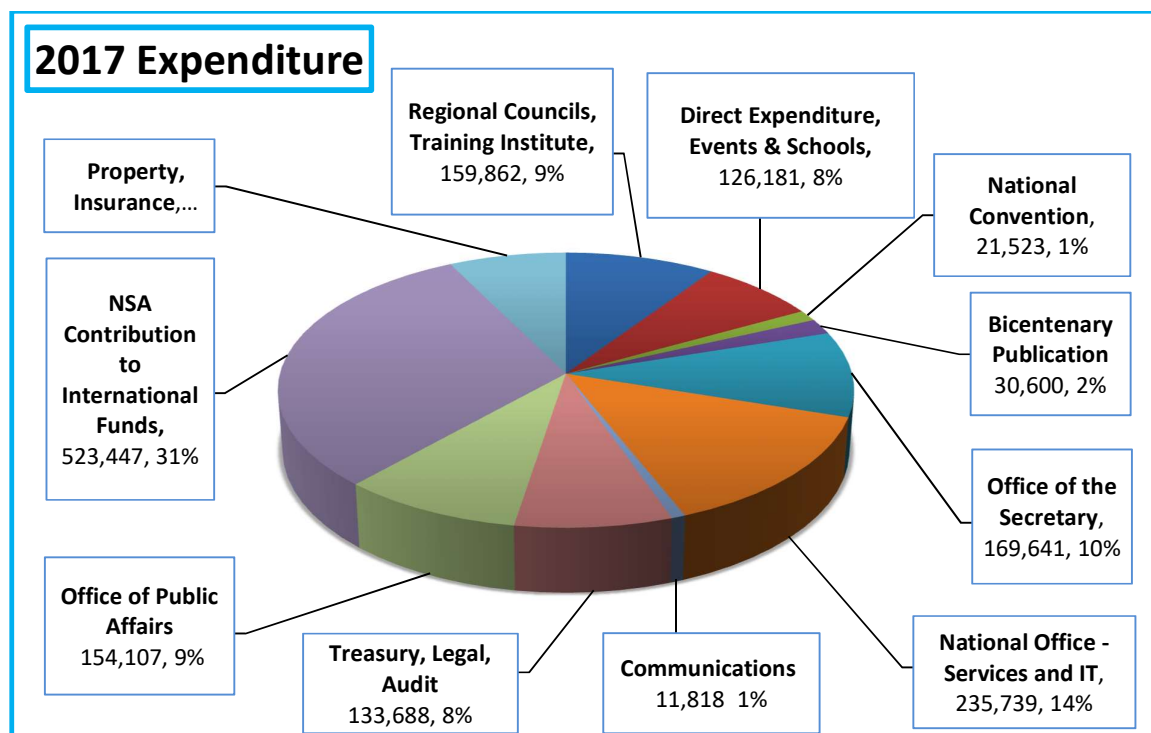


Figure 5: Expenditure Graph for 12 Months to 31 December 2017

The year ended with £18,719 surplus, which was mainly due to additional income from the Growth Fund. The Properties Working Group of the National Assembly was also able to renegotiate lower utility bills, and arrange council tax reclassification for some Bahá'í properties in the UK, resulting in considerable savings.

Growth Fund

In the past, legacies received by the National Assembly on the passing of a believer – unless earmarked for a specific purpose – had generally been used for day-to-day expenditures of the Assembly. The National Assembly wished to see legacies used for more permanent purposes and, in January 2007, decided that where there is no specific wish expressed in the Will of a deceased Bahá'í, any legacy to the National Assembly of £10,000 and above would be allocated to the Growth Fund. Income generated by this fund is used to promote the growth of the Faith. For example, in 2017, through the legacies they left behind, the friends in the Abhá Kingdom paid for growth related events.

This is not a new fund, but rather an allocation of the National Assembly's resources for the growth of the Faith. Thus, the Assembly will not be inviting direct contributions from the friends for this purpose.

Growth Fund				
	2014	2015	2016	2017
Opening Balance 1 Jan 2017	617,278	628,741	687,196	2,004,134
Additions (Legacies)	1,373	53,987	1,316,938	30,000
Trans re Property Acquisition	-	-	-	282,500
Income (Interest)	10,090	4,468	49,771	31,925
Expenditure	-	-	(49,771)	(126,633)
Total	628,741	687,196	2,004,134	2,221,926

Figure 6: Growth Fund during the year and balances as at 31 December 2017

The total event subsidies for 2017 were:

United Kingdom 2017 Events			
Events	Venue Incl other costs	Income from fees	Surplus / Deficit
Events	78,909	52,800	(26,109)
ISGP	24,124	14,423	(9,701)
BSPAL	39,275	41,588	2,313
School	151,658	86,549	(65,109)
			(98,606)

Figure 7: Growth-related events in 2017

Other funds overseen by the National Spiritual Assembly:

Deputisation Funds					
	UKTIB	General	Faroës	China	Total
Opening Balance 1 Jan 2017	-	70,218	4,449	960	75,628
Contributions	300	28,790	-	-	29,090
Total	300	99,008	4,449	960	104,718
Expenditure	(300)	(35,209)	-	-	(35,509)
Balance as at 31 Dec 17	-	63,799	4,449	960	69,208

Guardian's Resting Place Endowment Fund				
	2014	2015	2016	2017
Opening Balance	355,416	413,347	495,363	658,107
Contributions	57,931	82,016	162,744	247,776
Balance as at 31 December 2017	413,347	495,363	658,107	907,900

Guardian's Resting Place				Expenditure
	2014	2015	2016	2017
Opening Balance	14,208	(56,137)	(26,424)	(12,101)
Contributions	37,182	200,910	108,080	150,070
Maintenance Expenditure	(107,527)	(171,197)	(93,757)	(78,768)
Renovations Expenditure	-	-	-	(267,384)
Deficit	(56,137)	(26,424)	(12,101)	(208,183)

Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education				
	2014	2015	2016	2017
Opening Balance	1,392	(10,307)	(33,836)	-
Contributions	11,310	15,598	24,118	82,198
Expenditures	23,009	39,126	64,232	(139,266)
Deficit	(10,307)	(33,835)	(73,950)	(57,068)
Balance as at 31 Dec 17	(10,307)	(33,835)	-	(57,068)

Figure 8: Deputisation funds, Guardian's Resting Place Endowment and Maintenance Fund and BIHE during the year and balances as at 31 December 2017

Deputisation Funds

There are four deputisation funds in the UK as indicated in the table above. Contributions to the General Deputisation Fund were £28,790. This fund has been used to provide financial support of £35,209 for UK pioneers in Europe.

As the friends are called upon to serve in particular capacities, it is the National Assembly's hope that they feel comfortable to consult the relevant institutions about their personal circumstances, including their financial needs. If the need for financial support is a barrier to serving as a pioneer or travelling teacher, financial support can always be considered and, as necessary, is offered with joy by the National Assembly.

Guardian's Resting Place Endowment Fund

In May 2008, the Universal House of Justice suggested to the National Assembly that "in view of the need to establish a more stable means of income in future for the upkeep of this most important holy place" the National Assembly should "consider the feasibility of establishing an endowment fund for this purpose." In response to this guidance, the National Assembly set a goal of establishing an endowment fund of £1,300,000 over 10 years from 2011 to 2021.

The Guardian's Resting Place Endowment Fund is growing in four different ways:

- direct contributions by the friends;

- following a decision of the National Assembly, 25% of all contributions to the maintenance fund are channelled into this Fund;
- 100% of all overseas contributions to the Guardian’s Resting Place Fund;
- income from the sale of burial plots.

At the end of 2017, there was a shortage of £2,229 in the Guardian’s Resting Place Endowment Fund, and it is hoped that the friends will be even more generous in their contributions to this Fund to reach the goal of £1.3 million by the end of the current Plan.

Guardian’s Resting Place Maintenance Fund

The Guardian’s Resting Place is the most holy spot in the United Kingdom and our community is honoured to be charged with its maintenance on behalf of the Universal House of Justice. In 2017, the expenditure for the maintenance and beautification of the environs of the Resting Place amounted to £267,384.

Bahá’í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE)

The Universal House of Justice has described BIHE as “a self-sufficient and positive initiative of the Bahá’í community.” The media has recognised it as the “most peaceful method of fighting discrimination in education.” In another message, the Supreme Body told the believers in the Cradle of the Faith that, “countless oppressed people around the world will also find inspiration in your constructive and peaceful approach to opposing injustice and iniquity.” For 2017, although contributions amounted to £82,198, there was an expenditure of £139,266, which resulted in a total deficit of £57,068.

In order to help BIHE students to study at British universities, the National Assembly has designated a budget of approximately £200,000 for 2017 and has invited a team of believers to propose various fund-raising initiatives.

Individual contributions to international funds

There are a number of international funds that the friends can contribute to through the National Assembly, of which the following is a record. Naturally, many friends also directly contribute to these funds and their contributions are not recorded here.

Guardian’s Resting Place Endowment Fund		
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
2016	130,000	164,651
2017	130,000	247,776
Total	910,000	907,771
Deficit		-2,229

Figure 9: Guardian’s Resting Place Endowment Fund during the 12-month period with balance as at 31 December 2017

Direct Individual International Contributions				
Contributions / Income	2014	2015	2016	2017
Bahá'í International Fund	108,786	146,522	179,781	195,104
International Collaboration Fund	32,190	11,862	28,123	33,457
International Endowment Fund	37,729	34,774	41,956	40,059
International Deputisation Fund	7,429	3,900	12,336	13,803
Temples Fund	42,484	165,309	28,007	64,421
Chile Temple Fund	34,388	17,163	14,546	1,576
European Temple Fund	3,791	3,559	3,075	2,607
Continental Board of Counsellors' Fund	10,473	8,912	13,399	9,241
TOTAL Contributions / Income	£277,270	£392,001	£321,223	£360,268

Figure 10: Direct Individual International Contributions in 2017

The International Collaboration Fund

At the beginning of this Plan in 2016, the Universal House of Justice invited the UK Bahá'í community to be a part of this programme whereby communities of greater means support projects in sister communities around the world. When requested by the Universal House of Justice to consider how much the UK community could contribute towards this Fund during the current Five Year Plan, the National Assembly decided to pledge £270,000. The amount raised so far is £150,339, leaving a balance of £119,661 to be contributed by 2021.

International Collaboration Goal 2016 to 2021	Amount
01 January 2017 Balance Brought forward	71,400
Contributions during the year	78,939
Total in the fund	150,339
International Collaboration Fund's goal	270,000
31 December Balance to be raised	£119,661

Figure 11: Movements in International Collaboration Goal up to 31 December 2017

During 2017, the UK community was blessed to be able to contribute £18,722 (\$24,000) to the National Spiritual Assembly of Liberia to cover expenses related to various renovation and construction projects in that country.

Reserve funds

The National Assembly has two reserve funds: a General Reserve and a Property Maintenance Reserve. Based on a message, dated 29 July 2002, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Assembly, a decision was made to allocate six months' worth of expenditures to the General Reserve (proportionate to the level of the national annual budget), and £350,000 to the Property Maintenance Reserves. The purpose of the General Reserve is to enable the activities of the Faith to continue in the event of donations to the National Fund declining significantly as a result of, for example, adverse economic conditions. The Property Reserve Fund is to provide for the ongoing care and

maintenance of the many properties for which the National Assembly is responsible. Both funds are fully up-to-date. However the National Assembly is increasing the General Reserve to £1 million to reflect the anticipated increase in expenditure for the coming year.

1.5.3 The Year Ahead

The audited accounts for the year ended 31 December 2017 are being completed. The National Assembly has also prepared a budget for the year 2018. A few highlights deserve some reflection.

During the first two years of the current Five Year Plan, the National Assembly has taken a number of audacious decisions to assist the individual, the community and the institutions to be more focused on the growth of the Faith. These are explained earlier in this report; however, they have significant financial implications. These decisions include: funding youth summer projects; assisting more friends to attend growth-related and other events; financing youth gatherings and conferences, and an increasing number of junior youth camps; supporting Regional Bahá'í Councils to further build their secretariats, including having fulltime or part-time secretaries and secretary-aides as needed. To this end, the National Assembly has approved a budget for 2018, anticipating an increase of 197% in growth-related activities.

Although the budget set by the National Assembly included an exceptional deficit forecast of £648,705 at the beginning of 2018, the National Assembly is confident that the friends will respond to the challenge through an increase in the level of their contributions. The National Assembly is in the process of consulting on plans to put in place a programme that will promote the significance of giving to the Fund and will also raise the consciousness of the friends about this privilege. Conscious of this proposed budget deficit, the Assembly is aware, based on past experience, that not all planned budgeted expenditures are used. Each cycle a review of the budgets will take place; this will encourage plans to be more audacious and realistic. Ultimately, there is a very healthy Growth Fund available to meet any final deficit that should arise.

As alluded to above, a number of advances, guided by the Office for Development of Administrative Systems at the World Centre, have been made during the year to develop the Financial Administrative processes. The National Assembly has approved a plan of action which will be progressed over the coming months, with the following concepts, principles and elements at its heart:

➤ THE FLOW OF FUNDS

- Funds must flow freely, effectively and efficiently to and from the cluster level. Whilst there must be a timely and unimpeded flow of funds reaching the friends at the grassroots who are implementing the Plan, this flow must be governed by the principles of wise and judicious use.

➤ FLOW OF RESOURCES IMBUED WITH THE SPIRIT AND STANDARDS OF THE FAITH

- The systems, processes and mechanisms put in place to ensure the flow of material resources must be imbued with the spirit and standards of the Faith. A belief in the nobility and trustworthiness of man would thus guide their creation and implementation. In this respect, regard must be had for the

methods and instruments that we employ from the world at large, which often come with values and attitudes that are at variance with Bahá'í beliefs or attitudes.

➤ **THE USE AND MANAGEMENT OF FUNDS**

- Safeguards and procedures will naturally be put in place to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the financial system and reports therefrom. Given the sacredness of the funds of the Faith, this will ensure that they are judiciously and carefully managed.

➤ **CONSCIOUS LEARNING**

- Whatever new arrangements are put in place, this must be done in a mode of conscious and systematic learning, having regard to the capacity of the individual, community or institution concerned. The system should be people-centred.
- We should not be afraid to challenge assumptions through a process of consultation, action and reflection. A conscious learning process will enable us to define lines of inquiry and systematize our efforts.

➤ **CAPACITY BUILDING**

- Capacity building at all levels will be pivotal in the development of financial and administrative systems. The introduction of systems across the UK should have regard for the range of capacities that exist in different clusters and regions.

➤ **SERVING THE NEEDS OF THE PLAN**

- Any changes in administrative arrangements must have regard for the reality at the level of the cluster and neighbourhood, such that they serve the needs of growth.
- Policies and procedures should be developed in order to facilitate the efficient and effective flow of funds, and applied in a flexible manner bearing in mind the evolving needs of the Plan. A policy should be seen as a framework in which to think and act – it is not a principle.

➤ **BUDGETING AND PLANNING**

- Budgeting and planning are at the heart of financial system. The capacity to budget needs to be developed to work in parallel with the planning process at the cluster and regional level. Budgets and plans need to be owned by the community which they serve. Given their centrality, the planning and budgeting process should become an object of learning.

➤ **REGIONAL BRANCHES OF THE NATIONAL FUND**

- Regional branches of the National Fund should be self-sufficient. Contributions should, in the main, flow from individual believers and Local Assemblies to regional branches of the National Fund, with any surplus flowing to the National Fund. This will require a fundamental change in attitude towards regional branches of the National Fund. For Regional branches of the National Fund to become autonomous, the capacity to plan, budget and administer funds needs to be strengthened, and this will include the

development of regional treasury offices and perhaps the appointment of assistants to the regional treasurer.

The Office of the Treasurer is currently deeply blessed by the sacrificial and devoted services of its three staff members, and 10 dearly loved volunteers who are supporting the day-to-day work of the Office.

In addition to the increased needs in the National Fund outlined above, other exceptional needs which have been explained above, are as follows:

Project Targets	Budget 2018	Budget YTD 2018	Actual YTD 2018	Current Annual Deficit
GRP Endowment	£ 168,000	£ 56,000	£ 34,822	-£133,178
GRP Maintenance	£ 308,000	£ 102,667	£ 86,904	-£221,096
Clifton Guest House	£ 170,000	£ 56,667	£ 24,300	-£145,700
BIHE	£ 200,000	£ 66,667	£ 28,477	-£171,523
Total	£ 846,000	£ 282,000	£ 174,503	-£ 671,497

Figure 12: Project Targets for 2018 showing the current annual deficit

- Guardian’s Resting Place Endowment Fund - £168,000 in order to bring this fund up to the target set by the National Assembly
- Guardian’s Resting Place Maintenance Fund, including the new office and further beautification - £308,000
- 17 Royal York Crescent, Bristol - £170,000
- Bahá’í Institute for Higher Education - £200,000

To assist the friends in having a deeper understanding of the needs of the Funds of the Faith a series of deepening will be taking place throughout 2018 which will also focus on the sacred spaces that we are blessed to have in the United Kingdom. Any friends wishing to host such a gathering with support from the Office of the Treasurer can request further details from the Office.

“Essential to this posture of giving is the appreciation of the fact that God’s mercy and His bounties are the ultimate source of wealth. He provides the means of existence and progress for us all, and then, out of His bounty, He bestows upon us the privilege of contributing to His Cause—the only effective instrument that can bring about the wellbeing of humanity. Giving to the Funds of the Faith, therefore, is not only a matter of generosity, but also a spiritual bounty and a grave responsibility.”²⁰

²⁰ Universal House of Justice, To all Counsellors, 5 October 1992

2 The Regional Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh for Ireland and the United Kingdom

The Regional Board of Trustees for Ḥuqúqu'lláh for Ireland and the United Kingdom was appointed for a three-year term in December 2017. Its members are Monica Eghrari-Maghani (Treasurer), John McGill (Chair), Parvin Morrissey (Secretary), Paymen Sabeti and Farshid Taleb.

Adding to the special spirit surrounding the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, this year also saw the 25th anniversary of the universal application of the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. Seven special festivals took place – in Bury St Edmonds, Dublin, Galway, Glasgow, London (pictured right), Manchester and York. These joyful occasions made extensive use of prayers and the Writings, and artistic presentations.



In parallel with an increase in the scope and tempo of the work, the year saw more responsibility devolved from the International to the Regional Board. The Deputies continue to learn how to accompany the Representatives through monthly Skype meetings, the formation of three-monthly plans, and providing feedback on reports. The Representatives, in turn, have been actively inviting friends to participate in study classes and discussions, bringing heightened spiritual awareness to learning about this mighty law. This has required a shift from a 'transactional' to a 'learning' mode, moving from presentations to conversations where mutual learning occurs. The Board has also facilitated courses and individual sessions on the 1 March 2017 letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world on economic life.

Collaboration with the National Spiritual Assemblies of Ireland and the United Kingdom has continued to be close this year, resulting in: opportunities to address the delegates at National Convention; face-to-face meetings; support for the Festivals; invitations to run courses at residential summer schools; and a joint working party to look at the guidance on wills and estates.

Supportive letters sent out to the believers by both National Assemblies have facilitated collaboration with Local Spiritual Assemblies. This has led to visits to Feasts, study

The Representatives have...been actively inviting friends to participate in educational study classes and discussions, learning to bring heightened spiritual awareness to conversations about this mighty law.

gatherings and conversations with individuals. The Regional Board wishes to express its heartfelt thanks for the loving support of both National Assemblies.

The 11th annual regional conference of the Board was held in London from 30 September to 1 October. For the first time in its history, the Deputies and Representatives of the Board were joined by representatives of the International Board for Huququ'lláh, the Continental Board of Counsellors for Europe and both National Assemblies. This raised the event to a new level and created a wonderful environment of learning among all the institutions.



3 Office of Public Affairs

The Office of Public Affairs (OPA) works under the direction of the National Spiritual Assembly, which appoints a team to coordinate OPA's work. The work of OPA includes 1) participation in the discourses of society; 2) relations with government and defence of the Faith; 3) media; 4) the web; and 5) in 2017, activities for the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh.

3.1 Participation in the discourses of society

OPA participates in spaces – this year, more than 20 – where thought, policy and opinion evolve. Here, Bahá'í perspectives, and the experience of applying them, are offered generously, humbly and unconditionally. OPA also seeks to read the reality of the UK today, in relation to the discourse areas of social cohesion, the role of religion in society and the media. To generate engaging, meaningful content that might influence public opinion, OPA is also learning how to create and distribute a wide range of materials, including videos, reflection pieces and blog articles.

There is a growing awareness nationally of the importance that religion can play in the wellbeing of individuals and in promoting a cohesive society. OPA is striving to articulate insights that are relevant to – among other subjects – religious education, social integration, diversity, and mental health. It is learning to describe how the community-building processes might address particular social needs. For example, a culture of home visiting may help address the increasing challenges of isolation and loneliness. Empowering youth to become protagonists of social change can assist in tackling marginalisation and disenfranchisement.

OPA continues to represent the Bahá'í community on various national interfaith bodies. The excellent contribution of local Bahá'í communities to Interfaith Week is noted and appreciated by the government and the Inter Faith Network.

Highlights

- A bicentenary statement – *200 years on from the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh - Is humanity maturing?* – linked the current stage in humankind's maturation to how the principle of its oneness is unfolding in society.
- A response was offered to the interim report of the Commission on Religious Education, which addresses, among other matters, changes to how the R.E. syllabus is developed.
- Lord Bourne – Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (formerly the DCLG) – invited a Bahá'í perspective on the Integrated Communities Green Paper, which aims to reduce segregation between communities and improve equality.



- OPA took part in consultations reviewing the DCLG’s integration strategy, centring on shared social values, the role faiths can play in promoting equality and tolerance, and ways to include isolated individuals and communities.
- Relationships are being strengthened with organisations that are significant to OPA’s discourse areas, including the Three Faiths Forum, Humanists UK and Thrive UK.
- Participation has begun in a consultation initiated by the Minister for Civil Society, Tracey Crouch MP, about how people can be empowered to take action to improve where they live and work, and to create a fairer society and better future for all.

3.2 Relations with government and defence of the Faith

Building our relationship with the government aims to strengthen our ability to contribute to social progress on the national stage. However, as Bahá’ís continue to face persecution in certain places, defending those believers is a necessary adjunct of this relationship-building work.

This year the list of parliamentary supporters has increased, with a record

number of MPs and peers among the 170 guests attending the reception of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on the Bahá’í Faith, marking the bicentenary. The anniversary provided a timely opportunity for OPA to converse with government and parliamentary contacts in more detail about the Personage of Bahá’u’lláh and the work of the Faith. This has resulted in an increased appreciation on their part.

Membership of the APPG is increased through regular cycles of outreach, during which OPA staff brief MPs on the situation in Iran and Yemen, and then seek their support. More than 35 MPs and peers were engaged with this year. The OPA also worked with other relevant APPGs, including the APPG for International Religious Freedom.

Bahá’ís all over the country must be thanked for greatly assisting OPA’s outreach efforts, particularly with MPs. Local bicentenary activities played a significant role in encouraging some MPs to accept OPA’s requests to meet, especially those who had not been met with previously. Furthermore, in recent meetings with MPs, OPA has been touched to learn that the kindness of friends who met with their MP – sometimes years ago in an informal setting – had left a lasting, positive impression of the Faith.



Local bicentenary activities played a significant role in encouraging some MPs to accept OPA’s requests to meet, especially those who had not been met with previously.

Highlights

- The Office has had more than 50 meetings with government and parliament this year, including meetings at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the DCLG, and the Prime Minister's Office.
- Two Maidenhead Bahá'ís met with their MP, the Rt Hon Theresa May, the Prime Minister, to speak about the bicentenary, the activities of the UK Bahá'í community, and to present her with a gift of a framed prayer.
- OPA met with **Jonathan Hellewell** – the Prime Minister's faith advisor – to share with him our contribution to local communities, as well as our participation in national discourses.
- OPA met twice with the Minister of State for the Middle East, the Rt Hon **Alistair Burt** MP. Following the first meeting, Mr. Burt raised the matter of the situation of the Bahá'ís whilst on a visit to Tehran.
- The Minister for Human Rights, **Lord Ahmad**, was visited ahead of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. He reaffirmed the priority for the government of the freedom of religion or belief, and provided useful feedback on the efforts of the government in relation to Bahá'ís in Iran and Yemen.
- Supporting MPs have tabled 24 Parliamentary Questions; an Urgent Notice Question (UNQ) and an Early Day Motion (EDM) on the death sentence faced by Mr. Hamed bin Haydara in Yemen; and a Backbench Business Committee Debate. The Bahá'ís have been mentioned in 28 Parliamentary Debates.
- OPA attended the Pre-General Assembly and the Pre-Human Rights Council meetings at the Foreign Office, to gain support for the Resolution on Human Rights in Iran and the Resolution for the Special Rapporteur on Iran respectively.
- A chapter was contributed to the Faith and a Future Report, organised by Christian Solidarity Worldwide.
- OPA launched its e-newsletter in May. It was shared with a wide range of contacts, highlighting Bahá'í activity at the national level.



Alistair Burt MP (second from left) is visited by members of the Office of Public Affairs (from left) – Padideh Sabeti, Daniel Wheatley and James Mohajer.



Foreign Office Minister Sir Alan Duncan responded to the Urgent Notice Question on Yemeni Bahá'í sentenced to death, Mr. bin Haydara.

3.3 Media

OPA seeks to identify sections of the media that share a concern for the well-being of humanity, to cultivate relations with media professionals, build trust and respect, and exchange ideas as part of an evolving conversation. There are three distinct subjects about which OPA interacts with the media: discourses, defence, and raising the profile of the Faith. With regards to Persian media, OPA has learnt that interest peaks with extreme events in relations to the persecutions of the Bahá'ís in Iran (e.g. the murder of Mr Farhang Amiri). However, highlighting the economic strangulation of Iranian Bahá'ís and their barring from higher education remain major concerns.

The bicentenary was also a very significant period in terms of media. A number of journalists, previously unknown to OPA, made approaches asking to either participate in events or conduct interviews. The bicentenary enabled OPA to deepen its relationships with contacts, and provided a welcome opportunity to familiarise them with the Personage of Bahá'u'lláh, His life and Teachings.

Highlights

- Eight articles appeared in print/online news, including in *The Times*, *The Telegraph* and *The Guardian*. There were 29 radio interviews, including on BBC Radio 2, BBC Radio 4 and the BBC World Service.
- There have been 16 interviews with the Persian media, including BBC Persian, Manoto TV, Iran International, Radio Farda and *Keyhan London*.
- OPA was invited to consultations with the BBC to share its reflections on the topic of religious coverage in UK media.
- *The Times* ran an article on the day of the bicentenary. It quoted extensively from a Tablet that Bahá'u'lláh wrote to *The Times* and which had never before been published in the newspaper.
- OPA continued to serve on the advisory board of the Religion Media Centre (RMC), which brings together many of the key figures in media/religion.
- The film, *Bahá'u'lláh – The Divine Physician* - was viewed 17,000 times on YouTube, with the trailer being viewed 27,000 times.
- A series of videos was launched in which individuals recited the “prison poems” of Mrs. Mahvash Sabet. These were viewed 11,500 times on YouTube.
- In collaboration with Bahá'í students and professors, the film *Cost of Discrimination* was screened at Oxford University.
- The film, *Changing the World, One Wall at a Time* had three successful public screenings.



Coverage in *The Times* on the day of Bahá'u'lláh's bicentenary

3.4 The Web

OPA maintains the web presence for the national Bahá'í community, its own activities and for R.E. teachers. These sites are www.bahai.org.uk, www.publicaffairs.bahai.org.uk and <http://re.bahai.org.uk/> respectively.

In collaboration with several local communities, a community website project is now under way which aims to strengthen the Bahá'í presence on the web at the local level and to

articulate in an accessible language the activities of local communities to the populations they serve.

3.5 Bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh

The Office sought to use the occasion of the bicentenary to build on its relationships with contacts in all areas of its work, to highlight the positive influence and impact which the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh have had, not only on British society, but on the world.

On 24 October 2017, more than 170 guests celebrated the bicentenary at a reception in Westminster, hosted by the APPG. Of the event, Lord Bourne, who gave the keynote address, said, the “deeply-held beliefs of the Bahá'í community on integration and on bringing communities together are an example for us all.”



For the bicentenary, the prayer Bahá'u'lláh revealed for parliamentarians was presented on a special wooden mount and offered as a gift.

In **Edinburgh**, on 25 October 2017, more than 100 guests attended a parliamentary reception honouring Bahá'u'lláh, hosted by the Rt Hon Ken Macintosh MSP, the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament. Mr. Macintosh said that Bahá'u'lláh's “message of peace, unity and the well-being of mankind is one that will resonate with all of our guests from across Scotland's faiths and communities.”

In **Cardiff**, some 50 people attended a reception at the Welsh Assembly (Senedd) on 9 January 2018. The celebration featured prayers, readings and music.



On 24 October 2017, more than 170 guests celebrated the bicentenary of the birth of Bahá'u'lláh at a reception in Westminster, hosted by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Bahá'í Faith.

4 Other arenas of activity

4.1 The Spiritual Health of the Community

As it increasingly operates at a strategic level – and in a learning mode – the National Spiritual Assembly has devoted a considerable amount of consultation during the course of the year to assessing, and promoting, the spiritual health of the community. A new rhythm of meetings has been put in place so that one whole weekend every three months is set aside to consult with Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi, with one day devoted to expansion and consolidation, the other to spiritual health.

In its consultations with Dr. Fozdar-Foroudi, the National Assembly has reflected upon those characteristics that constitute a spiritually healthy community. By understanding more deeply the analogy that individuals can be likened to the cells of one human body, the National Assembly has considered how the strength and health of that body can be cultivated and sustained.

To do this, the Assembly has consulted upon guidance of the Supreme Body – applying it to some of the specific challenges faced by individuals, institutions and communities – and identified what measures can be put in place to strengthen the potential of those protagonists for transformation. In this way, the Assembly is striving to develop its capacity to foster the spiritual health of the community. All of the practices that redound to the spiritual health of the individual and the community, the Assembly has observed, are to be found systematically set out in the sequence of courses of the training institute, “an instrument of limitless potentialities”.²¹

All of the practices that redound to the spiritual health of the individual and the community... are to be found systematically set out in the sequence of courses of the training institute, “an instrument of limitless potentialities.”

Strengthening our relationship with the Universal House of Justice

Reinforcing the believers’ relationship with the Universal House of Justice is key, so that all come to see its guidance as the fountain of wellbeing and progress. The National Assembly is actively promoting the study of Ruhi Book 8, which strengthens the believers’ relationship with the covenant and the head of the Faith. The habit of studying the messages from the Supreme Body needs to become deeply rooted at every level, to guide our lives and facilitate a greater clarity of vision about our spiritual mission.

Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage is another key element that strengthens the believers’ bond with the Central Figures of the Faith, and with the Universal House of Justice. With various changes to pilgrimage announced – including shorter waiting times, the possibility of going with

²¹ Universal House of Justice, To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 28 December 2010, par. 3

community of interest members, and in groups from neighbourhoods, communities or clusters – the National Assembly has established a Pilgrimage Desk. Staffed by Paul and Farahnaz Mahony, the Desk will learn about encouraging more believers, their friends and family members to go on pilgrimage, and to offer practical advice on arranging and preparing for the trip, and sharing the experience with other friends on return.

Local Spiritual Assemblies

The Local Spiritual Assembly plays a critical role in maintaining the spiritual health of individuals and communities. A deepening programme on the subject has been conducted by Auxiliary Board members with a number of Assemblies and will continue to be rolled out in the months ahead.

The National Assembly’s community care team is also learning how to work more effectively with individuals with personal challenges, by accompanying Local Spiritual Assemblies that have the capacity to administer pastoral care. The National Office, in its turn, is striving to be conscious of the speed and manner in which friends facing challenges are responded to and offered appropriate resources to manage their difficulties.

4.2 Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity



INSTITUTE
FOR
STUDIES IN
GLOBAL PROSPERITY



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.

A space is provided for these students to meet annually over the course of four years to study a set of materials that helps them build an evolving conceptual framework. Informed by the teachings of the Faith and the accumulated knowledge of humanity in different fields, this framework can guide their thought and action during their formative years as university students.

Students are thus encouraged 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 seminars 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.

The year under review was the tenth year which ISGP offered its seminars for undergraduate students in the United Kingdom. All four years of the seminar were offered at Wellington College over 10 days in August 2017, with 80 participants attending, primarily from the UK and Republic of Ireland.

As the seminars are increasingly becoming an established feature of the rhythm of community life, our understanding of their role as an integral part of the broader educational process in which the community is engaged is becoming clearer. In particular, early experiences illustrate the growing role of the seminars in developing capacities that strengthen each participant's contribution to the community building process. In addition, by raising consciousness of Bahá'í youth about who they are, what they do, and the significance of their engagement in action and discourse directed towards social change, the seminars are helping to equip participants with the requisite tools to navigate the particular forces prevalent in a university context, to contribute effectively to that environment, and ultimately strengthen the vitality of their Bahá'í identity.

In reflecting on these themes, as well as learning about increasing participation in the seminars and accompanying participants throughout the years, the coordinating team continued to work with various institutions at the national, regional and cluster levels. A four-day training seminar was also held for the facilitators, which aimed to continue to improve the overall quality of the seminars.

Students are thus encouraged to assume ownership of their education and to think critically about the ideas to which they are exposed in society.

4.3 Properties

Apartment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá at 17 Royal York Crescent, Bristol

The committee appointed to plan and oversee the restoration and refurbishment work on this precious apartment has continued this year to collaborate with Jonathan Lees Architects, a Bristol-based firm with extensive experience of restoring historic buildings.



Having studied more closely the image (right) of the drawing room in a brochure promoting 17 Royal York Crescent when it opened as a guest house in 1911, the National Assembly took the decision to use the photograph as a template to bring the appearance of the flat closer to its appearance at the time of the Master, but not as an exact replica at the expense of the light, airy feel the room presently has. Thus, a few fittings and items of furniture will be copied as closely as possible, and a section of one or two of the walls may be covered with a similar wallpaper.

An expert historical paint researcher has carried out analysis of the paintwork around the apartment to ascertain the colour schemes during the Master's visit. One scheme from that time employed gilding on the cornices, indicating that unusual expense and attention was lavished on the interior.

In the near future, works will commence to begin the process of removing the more recently added walls, in order to restore the room to its original dimensions, and provide kitchen and bathroom facilities for visitors in an ancillary room downstairs.



Restoration and new construction work at the Guardian's Resting Place is now almost complete.

The Resting Place of Shoghi Effendi

In the year under review, further development work at the Resting Place of the beloved Guardian has included the construction of a new building containing an office for the custodian, facilities for the grounds man and a base for the security equipment. All of the red-brick paving paths in the Bahá'í section of the cemetery are in the process of being replaced, and gates have been installed at both ends of the path each side of the enclosure, to limit the traffic that goes past the Resting Place.

Other areas that are under discussion are the landscaping of the grounds along the cemetery's perimeter fence, now that the two previous custodian's huts have been removed, and further enhancement of landscaping within the immediate enclosure of the Resting Place.

To launch the bicentenary celebrations, representatives of institutions serving the United Kingdom, Ireland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands gathered at the Resting Place on Sunday 8 October 2017 to offer prayers. Following an inspiring devotional programme at the graveside of Shoghi Effendi (right), the members of the National Assembly joined with Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi and members of the Auxiliary Board to plant two trees, echoing a description of Shoghi Effendi – who was descended from both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh – as “the blest and sacred bough that has branched out from the Twin Holy Trees.” A rowan tree, which symbolises sacrifice in ancient British tradition, was dedicated to the Báb, while a wild cherry tree – a reminder of springtime – was planted in honour of Bahá'u'lláh.



National Hazíratu'l-Quds

The National Hazíratu'l-Quds at 27 Rutland Gate, London, is a building of great historic and spiritual significance, fulfilling many functions. It is at once the warm and welcoming “home” of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom, a meeting place for high-level contacts, an information centre for enquirers, a rest stop for Bahá'í visitors to London, the National Office, a home for the National Bahá'í Archives and Library, and the meeting place of the National Assembly and many other institutions and agencies of the Faith. During the course of the year, the National Assembly has begun a process with a team of professional architects and interior designers, looking closely at the uses of the building, and the space available to fulfil all the demands placed upon it. A first step has been to move the Office of the Treasurer to rented accommodation close by, in order to free up office space for the Bahá'í Council for England secretariat.

4.4 National Bahá'í Archives and Library

Over the past few years, a project has been progressing to scan digitally every document held in the National Bahá'í Archives, dating back to the earliest days of the Faith in the British Isles. Scanning of the large majority of items has now been completed and all original items from before 1963 are now stored securely in the Afnan Library building in Sandy, Bedfordshire. The most precious items in the National Assembly's archives are now being

prepared for scanning. The National Assembly has contracted Bespoke Archive Digitisation to carry out the work and the Task Force has been sorting and readying the documents for scanning to begin.

The Task Force created a display of sacred artefacts at National Convention. One of its members was also involved in transporting the archival items loaned by the Universal House of Justice for the special bicentenary display at the British Museum. These precious items were shown, before their return to the World Centre and with the permission of the Supreme Body, at an open day at the National Bahá'í Centre in April.



Reading glasses given by Bahá'u'lláh to Professor E.G. Browne are among the precious items in the National Bahá'í Archives.

The National Assembly has been exploring with the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Ireland the joint ownership of those archives that were the property of the National Assembly of the British Isles (which included Ireland), before the formation of the Irish National Assembly in 1972. Having confirmed the appropriateness of such a discussion with the Universal House of Justice, consultation has assisted in clarifying an understanding of the shared, common heritage of the two Assemblies and the historic artefacts that are a physical expression of our closely connected history and destiny. The Assemblies decided to think in terms of having joint custodianship of these archival items. For the moment, the items will remain safely stored in the United Kingdom but specific artefacts may be transported to Ireland for display on special occasions and, in time, when facilities are available in Ireland, stored there also.

A project to sort and catalogue all of the books in the National Bahá'í Library has continued throughout the year. The most precious of these – many of which are signed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, Hands of the Cause and other prominent early believers – have been catalogued and are now kept in a secure location. Among them is an edition of *The Kitáb-i-Iqán* containing a long, hand-written inscription by the Master addressed to Lady Blomfield and her daughters.

4.5 Bahá'í Society for Persian Arts and Letters

The 21st annual conference of the Bahá'í Society for Persian Arts and Letters took place from 26-30 December in London. The focus of the programme for the bicentenary year was the Personage and Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. More than 570 participants enjoyed 19 talks and three panel discussions, featuring 22 well-respected speakers and moderators, of whom half were Iranian friends of the Bahá'ís. Evening programmes consisted of performances by renowned musicians, poetry readings, dance and film screenings. Coverage was given to the conference by such media outlets as *Kayhan London*, Iran International and Ain-i-Bahá'í TV.

4.6 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; friends who pursue academic study of the Faith and related subjects, and those who are beginning to learn about cultivating the intellectual life of the community by forming special thematic interest groups; the service for the visually impaired; those who serve as healthcare chaplains; and the burials project which is diligently gathering information on the graves of believers.

Others volunteer their services to provide hospitality and service to the visitors to 27 Rutland Gate; attend to the organisation of conferences and events; legal matters; the enrolment of asylum seekers; the annual production of the *In Memoriam* volume; the publication of the *UK Bahá'í* magazine and the children's journal *Dayspring*; answering correspondence from enquirers; serving as Marriage Officers in Scotland and Northern Ireland; arranging National Convention; and many other practical concerns that are vital to the functioning of our community.

*To all of the much loved friends in the
United Kingdom Bahá'í community,
for all of their sacrificial services,
the National Spiritual Assembly is
profoundly grateful.*

5 BAHÁ'Í POPULATION STATISTICS

A database project began in 2016 to ascertain the status of more than 2,500 individuals for whom the National Office had no address or other key information. As an outcome, many more individuals have been added to an 'address not known' status, increasing the number of such individuals to 1,914. These are all declared believers but as their address is not known their names will not, for example, appear on voting lists produced at the National Office. On this basis, the number of believers listed in the community now stands at **7,976**.

Membership Snapshot Riḍván 174 BE						
Region	Adults (no DOB/30+)	Youth (15-30)	Junior Youth (11-14)	Children (5-10)	Babies (1-4)	Row Total
ENGLAND	3,701	870	138	184	75	4,968
SCOTLAND	367	99	12	16	8	502
WALES	227	43	6	7	6	289
NORTHERN IRELAND	189	49	4	5	9	256
FAROE ISLANDS	11	3	4	2	0	20
GIBRALTAR	9	2	1	1	0	13
CHANNEL ISLANDS	7	0	0	0	0	7
ISLE OF MAN	7	0	0	0	0	7
Sub-Total	4,518	1,066	165	215	98	6,062
ADDRESS NOT KNOWN	1,734	161	11	7	1	1,914
Grand Total	6,252	1,227	176	222	99	7,976

Status Changes between Riḍván 173 and Riḍván 174 BE								
Change	EN	SC	WA	NI	CI, IM, GIB	ANK	DATABASE PROJECT	Row Total
DECEASED	-45	-1	-3	-3		-14	-5	-71
NEW ADULT ENROLMENT (OVER 21)	52	4	5					61
NEW YOUTH ENROLMENT (UNDER 21)	9	1	1					11
REGISTRATION OF BABY/CHILD	44	6						50
TRANSFER IN FROM ABROAD	128	24	4					156
TRANSFER OUT TO ABROAD	-99	-10	-2	-3	-1	-5	-8	-128
WITHDRAWN	-19	-6		-2	-3	-6	-21	-57
Column Total	70	18	5	-8	-4	-25	-34	22

Legend

CI, IM, GIB Channel Islands, Isle of Man and Gibraltar • ANK Address Not Known • Database project The result of a specific effort to update the membership register, often with historic data not recorded.

6 INSTITUTIONS, AGENCIES AND COMMITTEES OF THE UK BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY

The following is a list of institutions serving the UK Bahá'í community. This includes committees, agencies and task forces of the National Spiritual Assembly who served during the year 174 B.E.

Continental Board of Counsellors

Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi

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

Vivien Craig (Vice-Chair), Barney Leith, Fidelma Meehan, Wendi Momen, Patrick O'Mara (Secretary), Vafa Ram (Treasurer), Darren Smith, Olinga Tahzib, Robert Weinberg (Chair/Assistant Secretary)

Auxiliary Board Members – Propagation

Soha Graham-Anderson	Northern Ireland
Ashkan Ziaie	Scotland & Faroe Isles
Sara Agahi-Murphy	Wales & Central England
Amanecer Rider	Gibraltar
Steven Cleasby	North England, Isle of Man and Malta
Astrid Bunne	South and South West England and the Channel Islands
Rouhiya Sweet	East England
Nourah Said Fikri-Ziaie	London and South East England

Auxiliary Board Members – Protection

David Foley	Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland
Caroline Varjavandi	Scotland & Faroe Islands
Rachel Murray	Wales & Central England
Rafael Beberide	Gibraltar
Farahnaz Khavari	North England, Isle of Man and Malta
Shirin Tahzib	South and South West England and the Channel Islands
Noor Bell	East England
Varqa Khadem	London and South East England

Regional Board of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

Deputies: Monica Maghami (Treasurer), John McGill (Chair), Parvin Morrissey (Secretary), Paymen Sabeti, Farshid Taleb

Representatives: Daniel Alai, Hooshmand Badee, Sarah Broun, Pat Carri, Declan Devine, Erfan Fadaei, Adib Farid, Judy Finlay, Helen Hellaby, Myra Khorassani, Rob Lawton, Munirih Mali, Anne Maund, Mojdeh Mohtadi, Diane Profaska, Sahar Rahmani, Nadim Rohani, Saghar Saberian, Samira Saberian, Lona Sabeti, Sahar Tahzib, Riaz Teimoori, Neysan Vahdat, Anis Zeighamnia

Resource Persons for Northern Europe

Anisa Mazidian, Jenna Tahzib

Regional Bahá'í Councils

England: Naghme Adab-Fozdar, Stephen Agahi-Murphy (Secretary, after November 2017), Christopher Lee (Vice-Chair), Talieh Mann-Kapoor, Marco Milone (Treasurer), Farshid Taleb, Stephen Vickers, Natasha Wilkinson (Chair), Ronnie Yousefzadeh Bindra (Secretary, until November 2017)
Ramez Salmanpour served until October 2017

Aides: Nirmala Cann (part-year), Alessia Kurinczuk, Howard Moshtael (part-year)
Regional Statistics Officer: Na'im Peyman

Northern Ireland: Jamie Anderson (Chair), Rhianna Giffin, Maria Graham (Secretary), Patricia Irvine (Vice-Chair), Patricia Jamshidi (Treasurer)
Edwina Agahi-Esfahani [part-year].
Orang Agahi and Claire Parris served until November 2016

Regional Statistics Officer: Arian Keogan-Nooshabadi

Scotland: Venus Alae-Carew, Wendy Borrill, Diane Edwards, Allan Forsyth (Chair), Ian Fozdar (Treasurer), Lorraine Fozdar (Vice-Chair), Andrew Goodwin (Secretary), Mina Sheppard, Farhad Varjavandi

Aide: Siria Rutstein

Wales: Tessa Abbas (Vice-Chair), Omid Behi (Chair), Fleur Missaghian (Secretary), Munyaradzi Mumvuma (Treasurer), Tristan O'Neill

Aide: Hana Abbas

Training Institute Boards

England: Christine Boyett (Secretary), Steven Cleasby (Chairman), Adel Hinrichs (Treasurer), Carmel Khavari, Jenna Tahzib

Aide: Bernardo Kerr

Northern Ireland: Arjang Agahi (Chair), Darragh Graham (Secretary), Soha Graham-Anderson

Scotland: Riaz Agahi (Secretary), Lorraine Fozdar [part-year], Maria Patricia Jansson [part-year], Ashkan Ziaie

Wales: Sara Agahi-Murphy, Amy Behi, Rachel Murray, Josef Pearce

National Statistics

Officer: Eric Harshfield

Assistant to the National Statistics Officer: Iko Congo

Communications and publications

UK Bahá'í Editorial Team: Sophie Gregory, Alexander Murray

UK Bahá'í Persian Translation Team: Coorous Mohtadi-Haghighi, Mojdeh Mohtadi-Haghighi, Soraya Hamed Nasirzadeh

Dayspring: Maggie Manvell, Jackie Mehrabi

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

Literature

Bahá'í Books UK: Burhan Hayati, Richard Jones, Fareba Jones, Kaykhosrov Manuchehri, Shahab Meshki, Paymen Sabeti (Coordinator), Nicholas Ward

Marriage Officers

Northern Ireland: Robert Elliot, Patricia Irvine, Luke Kingham, Kiyan Khosravi-Scott, Claire Parris

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

National Office

National Archives Task Force: Manijeh Afnán-Murray, Hilary Freeman, Irène Momtaz, Lesley Taherzadeh O'Mara, Mehri Yazhari

Correspondents for Enquiries Panel: Vivian Bartlett, Angela Batchelor, Eleanor Mazidian, Sarah Perceval

Personal Affairs

Community Care Coordinating Team: Barbara Gilbert, Rita Green, Nirvana Habibi, Peter Hulme

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

Chaplaincy Coordination Team: Elizabeth Coleman, Elizabeth Jenkerson, Kaykhosrov Manuchehri, Gerald Williams

Legal and Business disputes: Parya Arnold, Danielle Pillai

Pioneering

UK Pioneering and Travel Teaching Committee: Alexander Afnan [part-year], Iman Fadaei (youth contact), Kim Kontos (youth contact), Tebogo Khutsoane-Hinton, Lua Rohani [part-year], Andrew Wilkinson, Anne Wong (Secretary)

Properties

Committee for the Care of the Guardian's Resting Place: Roya Azordegan, Soheyl Azordegan (Chair), Gita Meshki, Shahab Meshki (Treasurer), Mojdeh Mohtadi, Foad Rahimi

Faraneh Khadem, Diana Rameshni and Mahnoush Wain served until March 2018

Custodians: Roya Azordegan, Soheyl Azordegan

Grounds keeper: Iman Bahrani

Care of Bahá'í Graves in the UK: Ian Macdonald, Elaine Yourtchi

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

Bahá'í Properties Working Group: Farid Afnán, Ron Batchelor, Nooshafarin Birch, Sean Fehilly, Sohrab Samari, Gopi Ramanan Shanmuganathan, Saeed Shahim-Aeen, Anthony Sherwani, Homan Varghaei

Committee for the Refurbishment of 17 Royal York Crescent, Bristol: Soroush Fadaei, Nourah Said Fikri-Ziaie, Daniel Stollar, Lesley Taherzadeh O'Mara, Nahid Donald, Ross Donald (caretakers)

Allen Duncan served on the committee until March 2018.

Eleanor Mazidian served as caretaker until November 2017.

Review Panels

Academic Review Panel: Nazila Ghanea-Hercock, Hugh McNamara, Saba Tahzib

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

Literature Review Panel: Daniel Alai, Margaret Appa, Vivian Bartlett, Janet Fleming Rose, Jeremy Fox, Helen Hellaby, Peter Hulme (coordinator), Sandra Jenkins, John Lester, Paul Mahony, Beverley Matthews, David Merrick, Coorous Mohtadi-Haghighi, Shabnam Moinipour, Iain Palin, Richard Poole, Rosanna Smith, Carolyn Sparey-Fox, Jessica Tahghighi, Collis Tahzib, Ismail Velasco, Graham Walker, Arthur Weinberg, Daniel Wheatley.

Christine Eyton, Muna Golmohamad, Pat Morrissey and Sobhan Sorourian served until March 2018

Schools, scholarship and education

Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education: Nazila Ghanea

BIHE student care: Alhan Tayefi Nasrabadi, Bahar Rowshanabady

Fundraising for BIHE: Ramin Khadem

Bahá'í Studies Review editors: Barney Leith, Brendan McNamara

Bahá'í Society for Persian Arts and Letters Committee:

Logistics Committee: Mehrafagh Kalani, Mehrdad Kalani, Faranak Majidi, Shida Rahmani

Farahmand Jahanpour, Ardeshir Lalou'i, Abbas Youssefian served until February 2017

Programme Committee: Homeyra Doostdar-Smith, Minou Foadi, Nazila Ghanea, Ramin Khadem [part-year], Vida Nezamabad, Manouchehr Yazhari
Tahirih Danesh served until March 2017

Legal matters

Legal Panel: Claire Dawson, Matthew Feather, Sid Jiwnani, Nabil Khabirpour, Danielle Pillai, Maryam Samimi, Shayda Youssefian-Kaul

Incorporations Officer: Declan Howlett

Others

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

Bahá'í Histories Project: Thelma Batchelor, Kevin Beint, Jenny Lockwood

Birth Certificates: Carolyn Moss-Williams

Service for the Visually Impaired: Robin Christopherson

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

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

Events and Logistics Committee: Shahram Eshraghi-Yazdi, Shohreh Fleming, Foujan Jenner, Rozita Sohrabian, Robert Spaul, Hassan Peter Sweet, Stephen Thompson, Amanda Topson [part-year], Shahram Ziaie

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

National Convention 2017 Arrangements Committee:

Danesch Missaghian-Shirazi (Coordinator), Shahab Meshki, Faye Murray, Tony Ridler, Shailesh Shah, Steven Thompson

Afnan Library Trustees: Robert Balyuzi, Payam Foroudi, Moojan Momen, Erica Leith, National Spiritual Assembly Secretary

BASED-UK Trustees: Erfan Fadaei, Arezoo Farahzad, Helena Hastie, National Spiritual Assembly Secretary, Rosanna Smith, Saba Tahzib

ISGP Coordinating Team [not appointed by the National Assembly]: Shirin Beheshti, Samim Loftus, Saba Tahzib (Coordinator)



7. 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:

Office of the Secretary

Staff: Matthew Morrissey [until July 2017], Clive Polden [from September 2017], Sam Roskams (Coordinator), Mary Watson

Office of the Treasurer

Staff: Arhinful Ansah, Arnel Lejano, Dumazi Volontiya (Coordinator)

Regular volunteer staff for the Office of the Treasurer: Diana Howlett, Elizabeth Jenkerson, Fareba Jones, Yasmiena Jones, Hooshi Kalami, Ardeshir Laloui, John Lester, Rozita Pourtaheri, Shida Rahmani, Shailesh Shah, Barbara Stanley-Hunt, Paige Thakkar



Office of Public Affairs

Coordinating team: Annabel Djalili, Padideh Sabeti (Convenor), Shirin Taherzadeh [until March 2018], Karl Wightman.

Staff: Roozbeh Misaghi [until March 2018], James Mohajer, Yas Taherzadeh, Daniel Wheatley, Karl Wightman

Collaborators: Alex Afnan, Payvand Agahi, Angela Batchelor, Jeremy Fox, Mike Gammage, Jila Ghiami, Arta Golestani, Kian Golestani, Sophie Gregory, Sina Hakiman, Sholeh Hakiman, Sara Hosney, Elizabeth Jenkerson, Ilona Kater, Jenny Lockwood, Peter Maguire, Isadora Quay, Shadeh Rahimi, Lina Mar, Sam Mazloum, Nika Missaghi, Sean Morrissey, Carlo Schroder, Collis Tahzib, Lindsay Thorne, Debby Tibbey, Natalie Varghai, Anousha Vahdaty, Stephen Vickers, Laura Westring.

Membership of RE Task Force: Jenny Lockwood, Stephen Vickers and Karl Wightman

Core Team Scotland: Allan Forsyth, Maureen Sier

Wales: Christine Abbas, Viv Bartlett

Northern Ireland: Edwin Graham, Hazel Holmlund

Information Services Department

Staff: Claudius Brasil, Louis Hayati [from February 2018], Tony Ridler (Coordinator), Barry Steer

Department of Services

Staff: Patria Aquino, Sumathi Dilling, [until October 2017], Shirin Jisha, Shahab Meshki (Coordinator/Data Protection), Jhiovanna Vasquez [until February 2018]

Custodian: Farzaneh Seegoolam

Regular Volunteers: Soltan Azizi, John Cooper, Sheerin Hurkoo, Pari Kataria, Faranak Majidi, Mina Mahmoudian, Karen Mulhern, Farnaz Rastani, Mercedes Teresa-Ferreira

